

**INFLUENCE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT/ENDORSERS ON CONSUMER
BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY THEORY AND CONSUMER
DECISIONS THROUGH INSTAGRAM (THE CASE OF BEAUTY PRODUCTS)**

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Abstract

Brand promotion using celebrities (media, entertainment, and sports stars) and micro-celebrities (popular social media users or vloggers) has increased over recent years due to the popularity of social media platforms. The beauty industry has utilised both types of celebrities as influencers to endorse their brands. Despite extensive financial expenditure on using social media influencers by the beauty industry, there is still much to understand about celebrities and micro-celebrities and their effect on consumers' propensity to buy brands based on perceptions formed through celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements. The leading paradigm in influencer studies is that micro-celebrities are progressively more likely to be met with a positive response to their brand endorsements than celebrities.

The purpose of this research is to explore Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements, and their influence on consumers' purchasing behaviours. The Source Credibility model was used in this study to identify themes when analysing user comments. The study included five celebrity and five micro-celebrity influencers as case studies. Instagram is used as the data collection platform from which 1200 comments for each influencer were extracted. After clean-up, the first 1000 user comments for each influencer were transported into NVivo 12, the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), for an analysis of the thematic comments, theme frequency counting, and word cloud building. The themes created and analysed from the research were Attractiveness, Brand Bashing, Electronic Word-of-mouth (E-WOM), Pre-purchase Search, and Authentic Engagement.

The findings indicated that Instagram users generally found both celebrities and micro-celebrities as effective endorsers of beauty products when referring to content and endorser attractiveness. Instagram users also appeared to have the same perceptions regarding the ineffectiveness of both celebrities and micro-celebrities as endorsers of beauty products when the brand being endorsed is known to conduct animal testing. The Instagram users' intention when spreading electronic word-of-mouth about the endorsed product remains vague, as comments were generally neutral tags of another user's account. Nonetheless, micro-celebrities appeared to be more effective endorsers than celebrities when the endorsement post is examined through the attributes of authentic engagement and pre-purchase searching behaviours.

Keywords: Authentic engagement; Source Credibility theory; celebrities; micro-celebrities, Instagram, influencers

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Declaration(s) by candidate

This thesis contains no material that has been accepted for the award to the candidate of any other degree or diploma, except where prior permission to do so has been received by the HDR, and with due reference made about this in the text of the examinable outcome; to the best of the candidate's knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person.

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Date:04/06/2022.....

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 Introduction

Various social media retailers and marketing managers in the beauty industry still apportion large percentages of their budgets to brand promotion through celebrity endorsements without fully understanding how the celebrities' credibility might influence consumer behaviour (Nyamakanga et al., 2019). Celebrities who endorse products, also known as 'traditional' celebrities because of their movie, sports, singing or modelling status, have triggered various talent agencies to create entire divisions to manage their brand endorsements (Abidin, 2016). This study analyses endorsements by celebrities Elle Fanning, Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner, Bella Hadid, and Justin Bieber's wife Hailey Bieber. They have escalated their income through brand endorsements on social media platforms because they are typically regarded as people who can be trusted and acknowledged for their judgment on what is admirable or fashionable by their enormous fan networks (De Veirman et al., 2016). Their followers admire and respect these movie stars and fashion models for their physical attractiveness and luxurious lifestyles. They are considered trustworthy and authentic regarding their endorsements on social media, especially when they exhibit aspects of the real self (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016).

Celebrities have influenced followers' buying behaviours through pictures, images and videos of their lifestyles while endorsing specific brands. These celebrities have, through the years, become essential for the majority of the foremost brands (Liu & Liu, 2019). Consumers enjoy using social media to engage with celebrities, and many feel emotionally attached to them (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Lotonina's (2019) study of Russian women between the ages of 25 and 28 indicated that many of these women's parasocial or one-sided relationships with their favourite celebrities had led to a high level of trust in them, with the result that the followers also adopted the celebrities' lifestyles and habits. By watching these celebrities, their emotional need for belonging could be fulfilled. The young women further believed that they could actively pursue a higher level of attractiveness by imitating their particular celebrity's lifestyle displayed on one or several social media platforms (Lotonina, 2019).

Concurrently there has been a rise in popularity for a select group of Instagram users, the 'Instafamous' (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019), with no previous fame unless perhaps obtained via another social media platform. These once ordinary users have been transformed into social

media celebrities because of their social media presence and numerous followers they create, while simultaneously having become prominent influencers or micro-celebrities through posting text, pictures, and videos (vlogs) of themselves on several social media platforms (Yin et al., 2019). They have attracted other ordinary social media users to regularly follow their accounts (Djafarova, & Trofimenko, 2019). These micro-celebrities engage with their followers concerning their personal lives, activities, and the products that they endorse via text, images, and visual blog stories (vlogs) on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, Tik Tok, and many other platforms. The micro-celebrities influence their followers through their credibility based on their perceived knowledge, trustworthiness, and authenticity (Djafarova, & Trofimenko, 2019; Jin et al., 2019). As these micro-celebrities grow their visibility and engagement, their followers become more attached to them, increasing the belief that they are honest and easy to relate with (Balaban & Mustăţea, 2019).

The difference between traditional and micro-celebrities is the media format in which they appear to audiences globally (Jin et al., 2016). Jin et al. (2016) indicated that *traditional celebrities* differ from *micro-celebrities* in how corresponding fame is accumulated between each individual. For example, traditional celebrities are more likely to gain fame through music, TV shows, and film appearances. However, in comparison, Jin et al. (2016) noted that micro-celebrities are individuals who accumulate fame and wealth through exposure on blogs, social media, and other digital spaces that cater to an audience that values micro-celebrities' opinions and aesthetic values. In tandem, Abidin (2016) argued that micro-celebrities often gain notoriety through channels such as Tik Tok, YouTube, or Instagram. Micro-celebrities, as opposed to traditional celebrities, are more likely to gain a sense of popularity amongst a younger audience that desires individuals that are more likely to connect with their demographic characteristics. Conversely, traditional celebrities are more likely to be considered *highbrow* or individuals who have gained formal education within entertainment-based fields (Abidin, 2016). De Veriman et al. (2016) concurred that micro-celebrities are more likely to be considered influential based on a specific number of followers viewed on their social media platform. However, a traditional celebrity can be considered famous or influential based upon their entertainment value from films or TV exposure rather than the number represented on a social media account. In summary, traditional celebrities differ from micro-celebrities in that their fame is often garnered through social media and blogs rather than through appearances on music, TV shows, or film. The

following is a definition of how these two definitions vary as defined for the purpose of this study based on the work of Abidin (2016), De Veriman et al. (2016) and Jin et al. (2016)

Micro-celebrity

The micro-celebrity gains influence through follower count on popularity through social media (Abidin, 2016; De Veriman et al., 2016; Jin et al., 2016).

Celebrity

A celebrity gains influence through appearances in TV, film, music, or other entertainment-based mediums (Abidin, 2016; De Veriman et al., 2016; Jin et al., 2016).

In section 1.3, the researcher provides a further definition regarding the variation between these two terms and the dynamic relationship created between micro-celebrities and celebrities in popular media and empirical literature.

Micro-celebrities are increasing in status and numbers, and, as influencer marketing is becoming a more relevant component of global advertising campaigns, these micro-celebrities are progressively becoming more credible to imitate (Balaban & Mustătea, 2019; Jin et al., 2019). Many brands have also started favouring these *self-made* micro-celebrities' authenticity and their numerous followers as an alternative to dealing with the (traditional) celebrities and their much broader field of admirers (Liu & Liu, 2019; Jin et al., 2019). The five micro-celebrities selected for this study have added millions of followers to their social media accounts on which they endorse particular beauty products. The micro-celebrities include Shayla Mitchell, Nickie Tutorials, Jeffree Star, Laura Gurrola, and Manny Gutierrez.

However, there is still ambiguity in the industry and scholarly research findings on how the different celebrities influence their followers' behaviour. Furthermore, it came into question whether there is a difference between celebrities and micro-celebrities and their influence on customers' propensity to purchase their products. Therefore, this study intends to explore Instagram users' perceptions of celebrities and micro-celebrities and establish whether there is a difference in influence to be considered when beauty brands employ these methods to promote their products.

Since its commencement, the research had to be adapted to consider COVID-19 and its influence on the purchasing patterns of beauty products. Before the last quarter of 2019, the question was whether the beauty industry needs celebrities and micro-celebrities to endorse their products on social media, especially skincare and makeup brands where users typically want to test a sample in a retail store before deciding to purchase the product. As such a question could have consequences for the research outcome, it seemed necessary to first focus

on the beauty industry to consider where and how beauty products had been sold since introducing celebrities and micro-celebrities in social media marketing and how circumstances have changed after the COVID-19 outbreak.

1.2 The Beauty Industry

The global beauty industry comprising skincare, cosmetics, personal care, and hair-care products generated US \$500 billion in sales in 2019 (Euromonitor, 2020) and accounted for millions of direct and indirect jobs (McKinsey, 2020). In most major beauty-industry markets, in-store shopping accounted for around 85% of all beauty-product purchases, though these products were promoted on online social media platforms. Even the online-expert Millennial (see 2.5.3) and Centennial (see 2.5.4) age groups, with their strong reliance on social media, made close to 60% of their purchases in retail stores (McKinsey, 2020). Then came 2020 and COVID-19 caused various economies to dive into a downward spiral (Influencer, 2020), while the closure of premium beauty-product outlets caused approximately 30% of the walk-in beauty industry market to shut down (McKinsey, 2020).

However, beauty product manufacturers responded quickly, with some of the most well-known brands switching their manufacturing to hand sanitisers and cleaning agents to keep them in business until they could reorganise (McKinsey, 2020). Unfortunately, numerous beauty brand outlets were forced to close their doors during the months of lockdown, with manufacturers having no indication when or whether the over-the-counter marketing of brands would return to previous record levels. It became evident that retail and marketing strategies would need to adjust and innovate as more people turned to online purchasing and many smaller businesses quickly had to change the way they operate (Influencer, 2020).

Though known brands had used e-commerce for many years, suddenly there was a significant turn to online promotions and digital channels to capture consumer awareness and engagement (McKinsey, 2020). Those beauty product brands and retailers with inventory and shipment operations in place reported an increase in online revenues of between 20% and 30% during the pandemic, while the sales of beauty products at well-known retail shops were understandably down (McKinsey, 2020).

Several micro-celebrity postings reported their social media accounts being affected, with many fewer sponsorships from the industry during the first stage of the pandemic.

Consequently, COVID-19 forced many social media influencers to focus on surviving the 2020 economic downturn rather than venturing into growing their online businesses (Bishop, 2020; Choi, 2020). It has become clear during the past few years that additional and enhanced visual social media content needs to be created constantly to highlight the effect and application of makeup, provide valuable information about a brand, and improve user propensity to buy the product (Highfield & Leaver, 2016).

Since 2015, Instagram has grown the fastest in user adoption, investment, and business application considering the many new and constantly changing social media platforms on the market (Leaver et al., 2020). Researchers indicate that micro-celebrities are most likely to use Instagram to gather followers, fame, and repertoire as a means of potentially engaging with clientele that would use their services for marketing purposes (Shrivastava et al., 2020; Rahmawati, 2021).

Instagram is considered critical for micro-celebrities' growth and the ability to meet new followers and potential endorsers (Shrivastava et al., 2020; Rahmawati, 2021). The primary objective of online businesses and influencers within a social media presence is to get users to follow their accounts by posting news feeds that deliver relevant content (BigCommerce, 2020). Therefore, both micro-celebrities and celebrities grow follower numbers via their Instagram accounts and encourage consumers to follow them regularly with the view for them to purchase products from their sites. Concurrently, the Instagram algorithm picks up what people like, and more of the same things will then appear in their feeds (Bishop, 2018b). Thus, examining Instagram in the current study provides a unique focus that will specifically target micro-celebrities who are most likely to engage with Instagram as a viable strategy. Therefore, it was decided to focus on Instagram as the selected platform for collecting data from celebrities and micro-celebrities in beauty-brand social media marketing to explore their followers' tendency to buy the endorsed products on their sites. Before discussing the background to the research problem, it seems essential first to highlight the most important and often-used terms in social media marketing.

1.3 Celebrity, Micro-Celebrity, and Relevant Social Media Terms

The terms micro-celebrity and celebrity are dynamic regarding application and influence as perceived by researchers and the general public. Micro-celebrities have often been traditionally referred to as influences, which relates to anyone who leverages social media to grow followers and influence these followers' purchasing behaviour to gain money through

sponsorships (Wellman et al., 2020). Many self-defined influencers show a profit through sponsorship deals rather than direct selling, which traditionally was available on YouTube only (Lorenz, 2019). Influencer marketing is defined as employing different social media celebrities to drive brand awareness by applying innovative influencer marketing strategies to sell products, stimulate buyer attitudes, and change purchase patterns (Brown, 2019; Jin et al., 2019). Other applicable terms include the use of influencers, mega-influencers, micro-influencers, and content-creators (Lorenz, 2019). A micro-celebrity can self-identify dependent upon the content, the researcher, and the media that they produce on social media. However, the definition remains the same regarding the definition of micro-celebrities, in which fame is solely gained through social media outlets (Jin et al., 2019).

Research from Jian et al. (2016) provides further information regarding the differences between traditional celebrities and micro-celebrities. Jian et al. (2016) noted that influencers are often considered “people who built a large network of followers and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches” (pg. 569). In this regard, micro-celebrities and influencers often share three important characteristics in discussing the definition of these differential forms of celebrities. The first includes many followers, which is often gained within social media. The second is active engagement. Active engagement is important as it demonstrates that micro-celebrities are engaging with demographics that are consistently viewing and engaging with content, ideally leading to increased profitability for associated brands and micro-celebrities (Jian et al., 2016). The third is the promotion of products or brands. In this setting, the micro-celebrity will promote specific products based on their demographic and niche. In discussing mega-celebrities as influencers, it is important to note that these individuals may have gained popularity in film, movies, or TV but may later promote specific brands or products on social media while also using their traditionally developed celebrity status. In this sense, mega-influencers differ from traditional celebrities, who develop fame through film rather than social media alone.

Celebrities, such as Kendall Jenner, with around 138 million followers on Instagram, are alleged to charge brands up to \$1 million and more per sponsored post or product endorsement (Brown, 2019). Celebrities and their promoting agencies would argue that their posts’ reach is worth the return on investment (ROI) for those in the industry that use them in their promotions. For instance, one celebrity post can reach an audience of more than a few million people at a time. Beauty product firms typically use celebrities in awareness campaigns where their brands

need to reach a broad audience to expose their products or services to as many consumers as possible (@Kendalljenner, 2016; Brown, 2019).

Micro-celebrity often amasses followers in the many millions. It has been found that as soon as brands move their influencer marketing campaigns from product awareness to a more defined approach, they seem to prefer a more personal and dedicated tactic of communication and promotion (Brown, 2019). Micro-celebrity targeted audiences can range from a few thousand to millions of followers. A micro-celebrity who has achieved major success and grown her audiences on various social media platforms since she started sharing makeup tutorials in 2008 is Nikkie Tutorials, with more than 14 million followers on Instagram (Krause, 2020). Although some micro-influencers' audiences are much smaller, brands are interested in capitalising on their product endorsements because of their dedicated niches. Most micro-influencers typically stick to one discussion topic and leverage their knowledge to build leadership (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Brown, 2019).

Celebrities and micro-celebrities may also serve as electronic referrer or e-referrer and is someone who drives people to a specific website (Köster et al., 2020). E-referrers are loyal to the brand, even when comparing it with that of a competitor and are essential in influencer marketing because they forward business and mega- or micro-influencer posts and activate leads to their followers or potential followers on different social media platforms (Brown, 2019). E-referrers and e-referrals are also closely linked to electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM; discussed at 1.3.5). The key difference between e-referrers, micro-celebrities and traditional celebrities is that e-referrers do not create new content. On the other hand, traditional celebrities and micro-celebrities often create specific content that would refer consumers directly to a specific website or place of business (Köster et al., 2020).

Celebrity culture has become a common part of society as a sphere in which celebrities' personal lives are regularly broadcasted and is described by Turner (2020) as a culture encouraging superficial and narcissistic performances. It is inherently tied to consumer interests where celebrities convert their fame to become product brands. Celebrity culture is a dialogue between the celebrity and a real or imagined audience and is focused on uniqueness, identity, and public persuasion (Abidin, 2015; Nathanson, 2019). Grol-Prokopczyk (2018) hypothesised that celebrities in many ways function as social network members where fans can 'friend' and 'follow' them and where celebrities can exert either a positive or negative influence on their followers.

Furthermore, celebrity culture is a social media structure that accommodates certain individuals' elevation to celebrity status above others while it is shaped by and concurrently influences media entertainment and promotional business (Randell-Moon, 2019). Celebrity culture exists exclusively to satisfy social media followers' needs and to increase their viewing. However, celebrities do not function as an organised and identifiable group or form a group to identify with. The 'culture' is created when followers are constantly interested in certain celebrities' whereabouts and are willing to modify their lives to watch and participate in the celebrities' lives. These people check the sites, friends, trends within celebrity culture, and the public lives of celebrities via social media platforms.

1.3.1 Demographics of social-media-influencing Celebrities and Micro-Celebrities

Demographics refers to social media statistics about particular groups of the population and the terms allocated to these particular groups according to their birth dates. Social media uses statistics to inform brands about strategies to apply in social media marketing to engage audiences of different ages, such as the millennials (Gen Y) born between 1980 and 1995 and centennials born from 1996 onwards. Although demographic statistics are different for different social media platforms, about 63% of adult Instagram users log in once a day, while 74% of Facebook users log in daily (Chen, 2020; Hudders & Lou, 2022). The majority of global Instagram users fall in the age ranges of 18–24 and 25–34, comprising 29.9% and 32.1% of all users respectively (Statista Researcher Department, 2021a). Only 16.3% of Instagram users are aged 35–44, 8.1% are 45–54, 7.5% are 13–17, 3.8% are 55–64, and 2.3% are over 65 (Statista Researcher Department, 2021a). Females comprise 51.4% of Instagram users, while males are at 48.6% (Statista Researcher Department, 2021b).

These figures change as the users age, and some platforms become more or perhaps less appealing to older or younger users. User demographics have relevance for this study when celebrities and micro-celebrities are brought into the equation to endorse beauty brands. The demographics and meanings of the different age groups will be explained in section 2.5, and the use of Millennials and Centennials in brand endorsements will be discussed in Chapter 5.

1.4 Background to the Research Problem

Social media marketing research about product promotion and the application of different celebrities to endorse brands has spanned years since social media platforms have gained popularity and influencers started playing a role in brand endorsements and consumer purchase

behaviour (Nyamakanga et al., 2019). The reigning paradigm in influencer studies is that micro-celebrities are progressively more likely to be met with a positive response to their brand endorsements than celebrities (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). Micro-influencers have emerged in almost every major industry, including fashion and make-up, as ‘experts’, with many Instagram users following every piece of advice they offer (Daniel, 2020). However, though micro-influencers certainly add another facet to the world of social media advertising, their emergence does not mean that ‘traditional’ celebrity influencers have lost their niche in the beauty industry (Daniel, 2020).

Research literature has mainly focused on cosmetic brand influencers (Saeed, AlDhaen & Saeed, 2019), user opinions about influencers (Forbes 2016; Lew et al., 2019), consumer gender differences (Lokithasan et al., 2019), and followers’ intention to purchase products (Ananda & Wandebori, 2016). Results from the study by Ananda and Wandebori (2016) suggest that beauty influencers (micro-celebrities), also discussed as content creators, have a considerable influence on consumer purchase intentions and positive user perceptions. The relevance of Ananda and Wandebori’s (2016) research for the study at hand lies in the fact that they used Source Credibility as a research framework and applied the Source Credibility model, including its three dimensions of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness to rate influencer appeal.

Source Credibility has regularly been applied as a framework for social media research on different platforms (Jin et al., 2019; Phung & Qin, 2018). For instance, Lee (2018) used Source Credibility with YouTube as the data collection platform in his research on vloggers as influencers in the beauty industry. His research findings indicated that if influencers message less about the brand and post more photos and videos that include themselves with the brand, their followers’ perceptions of their credibility would increase (Lee, 2019).

Previous research focused on the trustworthiness of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements in which influencer marketing was revealed as an effective brand strategy (Jin et al., 2019). Other studies indicated that micro-celebrities are perceived to have more positive personality traits and provide more useful information than celebrities whose lived experiences do not translate to a typical social media user (Almeida, 2020; Baker, 2018; Boerman & Müller, 2021). Chang & Woo, 2019; Ki et al. 2020). Influencer marketing has been discussed as an important issue to prevent social media marketing from becoming a one-size-fits-all process (Lord, Petrevu & Collins, 2019; Schoppe, 2016). Brands and marketing

firms invest large amounts of capital in influencers to endorse their brands while facing the possibility of their expected ROI not being met if the most suitable celebrity or micro-celebrity was not selected (Brown, 2019).

Hudders et al. (2021) provide key oversight regarding the importance of the power of influencer marketing. According to Hudders et al.'s (2021) review of how followers of an influencer influence the persuasiveness of influencer-sponsored content, the lack of trustworthiness (as exhibited by the influencer) can increase the followers' negative perception of product and brand quality. As a result, the persuasiveness of power and influencer marketing is evident due to the ability of an influencer's trustworthiness (as evidenced by their behaviours, actions, and characteristics in the online and social setting) to detract from a brand's quality or content attractiveness. Hudders et al. (2021) also argued that the trustworthiness of social media influencers is damaged if a brand relationship or collaboration is not transparently disclosed to the viewer audience, which can lead to poor perceptions of brand quality by the consumer basis as a result of the influencer's power in the marketing context. In this context, the consumer basis is the marketing demographic, and a reduction of trustworthiness can damage purchasing likelihood of this market (Hudders et al., 2013; Lee & Johnson, 2021). The work of Hudders et al. (2021, & 2013) demonstrates the importance of considering the role of influencers in terms of marketing capabilities amongst online networks and investment return capabilities.

Instagram has significantly changed traditional communication dynamics, indicating a move away from celebrities being the most credible source of endorsement to micro-celebrities trusted for their opinions about particular brands (Rahmi et al., 2016). At the time of research, Instagram dominated the social media world as the fastest growing platform since the standardisation of technology and hand-held devices in the mid-2000s (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Pitman & Reich, 2016). However, a gap was detected in research and knowledge about how well celebrities versus micro-celebrities fit into the Instagram beauty influencer market scale and sphere. This study aims to explore celebrities and micro-celebrities and their influence on consumers' propensity to buy the beauty products they endorse. The findings will be compared with other research findings to offer knowledge-based recommendations on using a particular influencer (celebrity or micro-celebrity) during the social media marketing campaign. Scholarly literature has indicated that there is still a gap in understanding and research on the use of Source Credibility and Instagram as a platform to analyse user comments and perceptions of celebrities and micro-celebrities and the influence

these celebrities have on users' propensity to buy the beauty products. Source Credibility will be discussed in section 1.8 as the theoretical framework for this study. Chapter 2 will extend the discussion of the Source Credibility model in detail.

1.5 Problem Statement

A lack of scholarly knowledge and understanding of consumer psychology and influencer marketing created concern that several beauty firms might still be unaware of positioning themselves on Instagram as a platform for beauty product exposure and social media marketing leadership. They might also not be aware of what celebrity age group to target as endorsers of their brands on Instagram. The intent is to address the gap in knowledge by performing a study on Instagram as the research platform for user comments, source demographics, the influence of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements, and user propensity to purchase the endorsed brands.

The research problem is formulated as follows:

Despite extensive financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements.

1.6 Purpose of the Study

The research purpose is to explore Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and propensity to purchase products. The following objectives are identified to reach the overall purpose of the research:

- Explore Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products.
- Understand Instagram users' propensity to purchase products based on perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity.

1.7 Research Questions

This multiple case study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?
- How do Instagram users' propensity to purchase products vary based on their perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence?

This research adopted a subjective philosophical approach to creating knowledge, with the view that user perceptions of celebrities and micro-celebrities are subjective, relative, and constantly changing. Furthermore, the opinion is that data on influencer credibility and user behaviour needs to be interpreted to allow for the emergence of themes for developing new knowledge (O'Gorman & Mackintosh, 2015). The philosophical approach to knowledge creation will influence the research design and epistemology to collect data, the thematic analysis and interpretation of the data, and the discussion of findings.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that guides this study is the Source Credibility theory. The Source Credibility theory containing a model for the content analysis of follower comments on celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements was selected. The theoretical framework refers to the logical structure of meaning that directs the study's literature review and links the secondary findings to a body of existing knowledge based on the current research problem and philosophical approach. For this study, the theoretical framework will also influence the study's research design and analysis (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). The theoretical framework and literature review in Chapter 2 will focus on theories and concepts covering source credibility, influencer marketing, and Instagram consumer behaviour.

The principles of Source Credibility theory developed by Hovland and Weiss (1951) date back to the great philosophers of Ancient Greece. Furthermore, the Source Credibility model has typically been applied in studies relating to online marketing and celebrity brand endorsements (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). One of social media marketing's objectives is to grab and hold a follower's attention as long as possible to transfer information about a brand or service and positively influence consumer behaviour and purchasing decisions (Lin et al., 2019). Consequently, it is vital for the individual posting the message, photo, or video to appear as credible as possible (Seiler & Kucza, 2017). The original scope of Source Credibility theory was enhanced by Hovland, Janis and Kelly (1953). The authors argued that an individual's

perceptions and opinions are more likely to be influenced when the source of information presents itself as a credible entity on the subject matter.

Source Credibility theory applies three overarching dimensions when focusing on a source's credibility: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness (Li & Yin, 2018). These dimensions were added to the Source Credibility theory by Ohanian (1990) and are particularly useful for studying the impact of celebrity and micro-celebrity brand endorsements on user propensity to purchase the product. The Source Credibility model can be used in research to establish the endorser's degree of credibility when endorsing a product, an idea, or a service by combining the three different dimensions (Ohanian, 1990). Another benefit of the Source Credibility theory is that it can be adapted to fit a specific research project.

Granjon and Benedict (2017) investigated audience attitudes concerning social media influencer credibility across three popularity levels using Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility model. They adapted the model to use 'Attitude' as the central theme in an online survey to determine the relationship between social media influencer credibility and its mediating effect on brand attitude. The research findings revealed that the more popular social media influencers are, the more they are perceived as a credible brand endorser. Social media influencers' credibility positively and directly influences their followers' attitudes toward the brand. Qualitative semi-structured interviews further strengthened the results from Granjon and Benedict's (2017) quantitative survey. As the Source Credibility model has been applied in different studies on celebrity endorsement, it was decided that this model would be suitable to guide the collection and analysis of Instagram user comments on the celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements. The Source Credibility theory aids researchers in understanding how individual status, interactions, and behaviours influence purchasing, action, or differing behaviour. The dimensions of the Source Credibility theory provide a specific conceptual framework for understanding factors that guide individual influence. In Chapter Two, the researcher further discusses the source credibility model as well as provides an understanding of the application to the current study.

The current study adds to research regarding the Source Credibility model by providing an understanding of Instagram users' perception of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsement as well as understanding how Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity may influence their propensity to purchase products. The application of the Source Credibility theory in the current study provides an understanding of how the source, which in

this case includes celebrities and micro-celebrities, may increase their propensity for purchasing products as well as perceptions towards specific beauty products. In this setting, the current study extends the understanding of the Source Credibility theory by providing a specific focus on credibility as a mediating effect, which has yet to be examined within the current literature.

A secondary theory that will frame this study is the Parasocial Interaction theory created by Yuan and Lou (2020) and Wellman (2020). This theory argues that individuals will create parasocial relationships between the influencer and the follower. In the setting, the characteristics, behaviour, and common actions of the influencer may serve to lead the individual to feel as if they have a relationship with one that they have never met in real life. As a result, parasocial relationships serve to increase credibility, as perceived by the follower, and potentially lead to an increased likelihood of buying a product or perception of positive thoughts towards a specific brand. In Chapter 2, the research will further engage in a discussion regarding the parasocial relationship theory and the implications for the current study.

1.9 Research Design

The research design offers an outline or framework for the collection and analysis of data. A detailed description of the process ensures reliability, trustworthiness, and replicability of the research and its process (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The resultant data was analysed following a content analysis approach.

1.9.1 Research methods

The first step in the qualitative research comprised data collection of comment data for the five celebrities and five micro-celebrities endorsing ten relatively similar beauty products on Instagram as the social media platform. Secondly, the content of Instagram users' perceptions of the different celebrities and their endorsed products were analysed. A thorough account of the data collection process will clarify the systematic gathering and assessment of data through multiple sources in Chapter 3. While the research methods may differ according to each researcher's approach and strategy, the emphasis on confirming accurate and authentic data gathering and analysis of the content remains the same for all methods (Saunders et al., 2015).

1.9.2 Content analysis of user comments

The primary research involved a critical inquiry into user perceptions of the five celebrities and five micro-celebrities' beauty brand endorsements on Instagram by extracting follower comments from the Instagram platform on each celebrity profile, the brand, and the published content. Customer comments were then coded and interpreted using content analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), qualitative research is appropriate for expanding scholarly knowledge of a less investigative nature because the analysis of participants' perceptions and comments allows unforeseen themes and ideas to emerge from the inquiry.

1.9.3 Sample and sampling techniques

The number of Instagram user accounts in 2020 totalled around 854.5 million, including those of celebrities and micro-celebrities (Statista, 2020). Five celebrities and five micro-celebrities were selected from the target group by using purposive random sampling. *Purposive* or *purposeful* sampling is a non-probability selection procedure, which implies that celebrities were purposefully selected from many social media influencers for a multiple case study research according to specific prerequisites for their inclusion in the research (Saunders et al., 2015). The celebrities and micro-celebrities selected for this study each had more than 1000 comments pointing to the particular beauty brand endorsed on their accounts. The sampling, requirements for selection, research design, and methods will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

1.9.4 Data collection and analysis

What made the research substantial is that no data was directly collected from specific research participants. No questionnaires were completed by either the celebrities or their followers, and no specific answers were anticipated beforehand. The Instagram users acted in response to the endorsements on the celebrity and micro-celebrity accounts for any other followers to read and download in the public domain. The first step in the data collection and analysis process was to manually extract the data from Instagram user comments on the specific brands endorsed by each of the ten celebrities and micro-celebrities. The comments were downloaded in verbatim or raw format into ten Excel data sheets for screening and clean-up and identifying tentative themes that emerged from the data in line with the Source Credibility model (Trustworthiness, Expertise, and Attractiveness). However, two other themes appeared from the verbatim comments during this initial coding process: Brand bashing appeared in user comments about

the endorsed products being tested on animals. E-referrals were distinguished in the number of messages forwarded to other followers and activated by the special button on the Instagram comment platform as @ or e-referrals, labelled as electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) for the study at hand.

The tentative themes (codes) and their attributes were loaded into the NVivo 12 software. Campbell (2020) defines coding as the process of ‘mining’ the dataset to extract value (meanings) and clustering the codes in distinct piles (nodes) in which all share a common meaning. Nodes can also be regarded as ‘containers’ for the different themes emerging from the data. Coding enables researchers to identify what they consider meaningful and set the stage for interpreting the meaning and drawing conclusions (Malhotra et al., 2017). Large chunks of data from the comments of each celebrity’s post were uploaded into NVivo 12 to compare the themes against the comments, count the number and frequency of themes appearing in the comments, and build a word cloud for each celebrity from the coded data. Chapter 4 presents the word clouds and interpretation of the findings.

1.9.5 Instagram as the research platform

User comments were extracted via Instagram’s ‘Comments’ function which could be used as an open-ended data collection tool. The comments feature allows followers to express their perceptions and emotions about the endorser, media content, and the brand in their own words (text) or by using emojis (emoticons) to show their feelings (Cooper, 2020). Because users enter their comments into an open field on the app, no requirements were imposed while the length, style, and content of the comments varied extensively.

1.9.6 Excel as the cleaning instrument

One thousand two hundred (1200) follower comments from each of the ten celebrities’ accounts were extracted from Instagram and downloaded into ten separate Excel sheets to clean the content from inconsistencies. After the clean-up process, tentative themes were identified and extracted according to the Source Credibility model. The themes were loaded as nodes into NVivo 12 for automatic coding of user comments against the themes. The frequency of themes in each case study was presented in word cloud format for further interpretation by the researcher. After the clean-up process, only the first thousand comments from each case study were uploaded from Excel into NVivo12. This was to ensure that all cases were treated equally

during the automatic analysis of the comments, comparison of emerging themes in the coupling of cases, and in the NVivo word-frequency count process.

1.9.7 NVivo 12 as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software

NVivo 12 is a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). It was used to compare all user comments exported from the celebrity accounts against the tentatively recognised themes: Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, and Customer Experience as directed by the Source Credibility model. In addition, E-WOM and Brand Bashing were identified as additional themes during the data screening and clean-up process. The data collection and analysis process containing images and tables of the CAQDAS process will be presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

1.9.8 Content analysis of data by each “Case”

The coupling or pairing of one celebrity case with one micro-celebrity case was planned from the initial stage of the multiple comparative case study. Comparative research aims to reach conclusions beyond single cases. It explains the differences and similarities between objects of analysis, and relations between the objects against the backdrop of their contextual conditions (Esser & Vliegenthart, 2017). The couplings were made to explore Instagram users’ perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and propensity to purchase products.

Analysis of the couplings compared user responses, emotions, and expressions on the brand endorsements between the two cases in each coupling and then across the five coupled cases. The aim was to detect where the tentative Source Credibility themes differ between cases in each couple and whether new themes could be identified to validate or reject the tentative themes. This step was necessary to discover how users responded to the brand endorsements and verify similarities and differences between celebrities and micro-celebrities for later discussion of their applicability at certain stages of beauty brand campaigns. The comparisons are presented in Chapter 4 and discussed in Chapter 5.

1.9.9 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to comparing and verifying the findings from multiple sources of data found within one research design. Methodological triangulation prevents research biases,

flaws, and other deficiencies (Denzin, 2009). Data from different sources and the findings from different collection and analysis methods can be triangulated (Fuchs et al., 2018). In this case, the data from multiple cases, within couples, and across cases on user comments were verified to ensure trustworthiness. Triangulation was also performed between the empirical research findings and the literature review and will be discussed in Chapter 5.

1.10 Scope and Delimitations

As a relativist, the researcher applied a subjective approach to Instagram users' opinions of celebrities' and micro-celebrities' beauty brand endorsements and customers' propensity to purchase the products. Social phenomena are typically created from people's perceptions and actions that differ widely and regularly (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). The belief is that people have different ideas about what is right or wrong and acceptable; each person creates his or her reality and responds differently to different stimuli (O'Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015). Therefore, the epistemology followed during the thematic analysis of user comments depended on a subjective interpretation of the data. Trustworthiness could be ensured by triangulating data between cases and across cases and comparing the primary research findings with the literature review findings.

The research scope required a pragmatic, critical inquiry into the content extracted from the Instagram accounts of five celebrities and five micro-celebrities, coupled according to comparatively similar beauty products endorsed on their accounts. The selection of celebrities was made using purposive sampling and focused on celebrities from the USA to expand on the findings from many publications from Eastern countries and north-eastern Europe. Although the celebrities were selected according to several selection criteria, they might still not be the most relevant research cases. The possibility is there that other celebrities might have returned different outcomes to the research. However, great care was taken to describe the research process in detail for trustworthiness and for other researchers to repeat the research as closely as possible and attain relatively similar findings.

Instagram and most other social media platform algorithms have changed during 2020 for optimised visibility and social media marketing (Hashtags, 2020). Even though Instagram algorithms were discussed as part of its features, they did not serve as a functional variable for collecting data. Other than in Bishop's (2018a; 2018c) research, where YouTube algorithms had a visible effect on feminism, gender, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender aspects,

Instagram was not used to advocate women's rights or gender differences. Two of the micro-celebrities are known to be males and one came out as transgender during the research but after the data was collected.

Furthermore, this study is not about establishing whether celebrities are better influencers than micro-celebrities and *vice versa* for endorsing brands. The focus is on what stage of the beauty industry's marketing campaign it should be more functional to use either a celebrity or a micro-celebrity to optimise brand promotion and improve investment returns. The attractiveness of the different celebrities, user envy, and follower bias might have influenced the comments on their endorsements. This issue could partly be addressed by comparing data between couples and across couples in an iterative reflexive analysis process. Although caution was taken to reduce research bias, it could not be eliminated when embracing a subjective ontology and interpretivist epistemology. Other researchers might focus on Source Credibility themes and attributes with different themes and interpretations created from the data. The comparison of chunks of data with the tentative Source Credibility themes occurred automatically through NVivo 12.

The coding and interpretation of the data took considerable time. No personal contact was required with either the celebrities or their millions of followers as the research was internet-based. Care was taken to select a comparable beauty brand for each couple for cross-verification and to ensure transparency and trustworthiness. Instagram user comments were checked for clarity, and some inappropriate responses were removed to minimise potential discrepancies during the data coding and interpretation process.

Lastly, a more formal description of the primary and secondary research was preferred instead of a narrative writing style. The researcher was not intricately involved with any celebrity and micro-celebrity or their followers during data extraction from the Instagram platform or during the comments analysis and interpretation process. The argument might be that this is a more positivist and objective stance to collecting and analysing data, which is correct. However, the analysis of the comments and interpretation of the research findings required subjective ontology and interpretive epistemology combined with the thematic analysis of data.

Data concerning the celebrities and micro-celebrities and follower comments on their posts was freely available on Instagram during the time of extraction. In this case, no user permission was required before extracting the data – either from the different celebrities or the users who commented on the Instagram post – which would have been an impossible task. Furthermore,

the follower names with their comments could not be traced as only comments were extracted and anonymised during the data clean-up processes.

1.11 Significance

The research focused on the knowledge that could be added to the social media industry by successfully applying different celebrities during their brand marketing campaigns. This study contributes to the awareness and body of knowledge regarding social media marketing and celebrities and micro-celebrities as social media influencers, specifically their influence on Instagram consumer behaviour. A significant contribution could inform the beauty industry of what type of celebrity to approach for the most effective allocation of their marketing expenditure. Furthermore, the findings could add commercial value to celebrities, micro-celebrities, and other social media influencers concerning the best brands to endorse on their user accounts. The research results might also be significant for individuals looking to become social media influencers or wanting to realise a more substantial financial return in their effort to enlarge their number of followers.

A preliminary literature review indicated that both celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsers could benefit social media marketers and help them achieve their long-term goals, ROI, brand recognition, and customer engagement. The study's importance lies in the fact that it could contribute to marketers becoming more aware of when to use celebrities versus micro-celebrities for consumer influence and their propensity to buy beauty brands. The study also addresses celebrity age groups to target particular consumer demographics to ensure a cost-effective marketing campaign.

1.12 Chapter Overview

Chapter 1, Introduction to the Study, gave an overview of the research phenomenon, research problem, purpose and objectives of the research, and the research questions. The theoretical and philosophical frameworks were discussed, and the research design was clarified. The limitations and scope, as well as the significance of the study, were highlighted.

Chapter 2, Literature Review, continues with a comprehensive discussion of aspects of the research phenomenon. The discussion covers related literature on social media, social media marketing, and Instagram as the preferred platform for this study. Source Credibility is

discussed as the theoretical framework to guide the literature review and primary research. A summary of the literature review findings concludes the discussion.

Chapter 3, Research Design, provides a detailed discussion of the research methodology and design applied to select specific celebrities and micro-celebrities as case studies, the coupling of the celebrities, and the collection and analysis of the data. The sample size and selection techniques are discussed, and brief detail of each celebrity and micro-celebrity is given as part of the multiple case study research. NVivo 12 as computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) for the input, coding, and comparison of data according to the Source Credibility model is detailed. A debate on the ethical considerations for the research concludes this chapter.

Chapter 4, Findings, presents the primary research findings according to the automatic analysis and comparison of codes via NVivo 12. The Source Credibility model is used as the basis for the identification of codes and their attributes. Each celebrity's word cloud is discussed according to the high-frequency words created by NVivo from the follower comments extracted from Instagram. The celebrity couples are compared according to the comments on their Instagram brand posts and their credibility and influence on customer propensity to buy the endorsed products. Comparisons are made across all celebrity and micro-celebrity findings.

Chapter 5, Discussion of Findings, provides the conversation, comparison, and combining the literature review and empirical research findings. New information in the form of an analytical narrative or storyline is built from the emerging themes. The new knowledge is applied to the current knowledge about celebrities and micro-celebrities in social media marketing and their influence on user purchase behaviour. The primary research findings are triangulated with the literature review findings to ensure validity and trustworthiness.

Chapter 6, Summary and Recommendations, summarises and determines the outcomes from the literature review and primary research findings to confirm that the research problem, objectives, and hypotheses have been adequately addressed and resolved. In addition, any limitations of the current research are highlighted before the conclusion of the research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Social media replaces nothing, but compliments everything” – Anon.

2.1 Introduction

Customer–brand engagement and retail marketing are increasingly dependent on social media and investments in partnerships with social media influencers, including brand endorsements with celebrities and micro-celebrities. Organisations rely on the positive emotions that these influencers create in shaping customers’ decisions to buy products (Ki et al., 2020; Udovita & Hilal, 2018; Zhu et al., 2020). Figures have indicated that, globally, brands expended around \$90 million on social marketing and that influencer marketing reached more than 184 million users in 2019 (Ki et al., 2020; Statista, 2020). Total social media advertising spending was forecast to reach \$138 million in 2021 (Statista Research Department, 2021c).

One of the social media benefits is that it allows users to share their thoughts and feelings and create online content. The consequences are that social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Snapchat, TikTok, Twitter and YouTube, harvest new micro-celebrity influencers with no previous standing to become famous on these platforms (Jin et al., 2019; Ruiz-Gómez, 2019). In contrast with celebrities, the primary advantage of micro-celebrities as content creators is that they mostly produce their content and audiences while simultaneously becoming highly favoured and gathering millions of followers and dollars (Ki et al., 2020; Ruiz-Gómez, 2019).

When micro-celebrities become famous, they also have the potential to exert a strong influence on their followers’ buying behaviour in this relatively new form of influencer marketing (Ki et al., 2020; Ki & Kim, 2019). Retailers approach particular micro-influencers to create content in which they endorse the retail brands by posting comments, images, and videos of themselves with the products and, consequently, increase their followers’ awareness and purchase propensity for products. In turn, these influencers either receive free products, access to exclusive events and product trials, or financial compensation for their effort (De Jans et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Simultaneously, these micro-celebrities as influencers need to turn into self-brands (see 2.7.3) by offering a unique selling pitch to keep their prominence in the attention economy and distinguish themselves from the mass of fame-seekers (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017; Welch, 2019).

The *attention economy* refers to the total human capacity of individuals (such as followers) that engage in the social media environment. The attention economy can include followers and individuals who comment, like, share, or simply view social media content (Santander et al., 2020). The amount of information in the marketplace can easily cause consumer distraction. Followers respond less to product endorsements and the influencers themselves if they do not frequently add value to their profiles, brands, and account content (Santander et al., 2020).

As a brand engagement tool, *Instagram* has transformed into one of the most suitable sites, particularly for endorsing beauty brands (Almeida, 2019; Schmidt, 2018). The growth in Instagram use by all ages is one of the main reasons why this social network was selected as the research platform for the study at hand. The development of Instagram into a commerce-friendly platform and application has facilitated consumer-mediated purchasing, also known as social commerce, e-commerce, or e-tailing (Hu, Chen & Davison, 2019; Zhu et al., 2020). Instagram was predominantly developed for photo-viewing and sharing of text messages by ordinary users. However, the platform became a social media phenomenon when it allowed people to transform ordinary photos into magazine-style, high-quality shoot images using colour and imagery filters (Cohen et al., 2019). These photos can be shared with other users, either publicly or privately, and have transformed online self-effects, standard nomenclature, and user behaviours in many ways. *Self-effects* are the influences, perceptions, emotions, attitudes, and behaviours individuals create within their online platform messages (Valkenburg, 2017).

However, it has been found that social media marketing managers still waver between celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements when it comes to advertising their brands on social media. Despite extensive financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, the research problem was developed as there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements and the effect these influencers have on consumer purchase behaviour. The purpose is to explore Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and the effect these celebrities have on users' propensity to purchase the products.

This chapter aims to debate the research topic within a broader theoretical framework of social media marketing and Instagram as the platform for research. The research strategy focuses on Source Credibility as the theoretical framework for discussing key concepts, such as social

media, social media platforms, social media marketing, Instagram, celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements, and consumer behaviour. The literature review highlights consistencies and discrepancies in research findings regarding celebrities versus micro-celebrities' influence on Instagram users and social media platforms in general. Micro-celebrity consumerism is still an emerging industry, and it might need continuous research for consumer behaviour trends to be established. The following section outlines the literature review strategy followed to collect data on the research phenomenon.

2.2 Literature review strategy

Research literature in the field of social media and marketing covers a wide range of topics and a plethora of scholarly research, mostly from North America and Europe over the past decade and longer (Jarrar et al., 2020). Therefore, the literature review will, to some degree, collect works on the phenomenon published since 2015 to demonstrate a thorough review of literature that represents contemporary phenomena and modern social media concepts. The only exception will be seminal works published on the theory of Source Credibility, the internet, and the history of social media and marketing where necessary. A preliminary search of current literature along the research themes indicated inconsistencies in research findings. Although there were several empirical research studies on lifestyle, authenticity, and the preference for micro-celebrities over celebrities, not enough data could be retrieved to establish a definite trend in social media marketing and consumer behaviour when applying influencers in the social media consumer market. The intent is that this study would fill some research gaps by applying Source Credibility theory in exploring social media marketing, influencer credibility, and consumer behaviour.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Source Credibility theory is often used as a framework for research on brands and celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements on social media. The Source Credibility model's components are trustworthiness, experience, or knowledge of the endorsed product and attractiveness of the influencer or the product (Ohanian, 1990; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As discussed in Chapter 1, Source Credibility demonstrates the importance ascribed to the source of information and verifies its trustworthiness concerning the subject matter (Giffin, 1967). The underlying argument of the Source Credibility theory is that an individual's knowledge, understanding, and authority on the subject matter led to the degree of influence on other users' thoughts and behaviours (Giffin, 1967; Umeogu, 2012).

It is a complex process to evaluate data credibility and source credibility when producing information on and off the internet. Previously, timely, accurate, and comprehensive information was typically based on sources that demonstrated their credibility in the physical world (Borchers, 2019). However, in the past couple of years, social media and online marketing progress have shifted perceptions of credibility and reshaped how entire generations view social capital offered by celebrities and micro-celebrities (Bishop, 2018; Chang, 2018; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Since 2015, the amount of research focusing on source credibility and online information has received substantial attention. However, research gaps continue to persist in understanding how different online actors are received and how different celebrities' status influences social media consumer behaviour.

2.3.1 Source Credibility theory

In line with Source Credibility (SC) theory, consumers typically perceive a persona with many followers as much more attractive and trustworthy (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The positive qualities perceived by the followers in recognition of the communicated content are, firstly, competency-based, which means that the source's expertise or ability to provide the right information is respected. For example, in online shopping, expertise refers to influencers with abundant knowledge and specific skills and experience in e-commerce. Secondly, trustworthiness reflects the source's ethical behaviour, ensuring that the person provides up-to-date and valid information via all the different social media platforms (Hu et al., 2019).

Researchers indicate that purchase intention for social media consumers is influenced by source attractiveness (Anam et al., 2015; Busler, 1988; Lim et al., 2017). Lim et al. (2017) indicated that source attractiveness failed to influence social media consumers' purchase intentions. Their findings were consistent with Ohanian's study in 1991 and that of Till and Busler (1998), indicating that source attractiveness did not influence consumers' purchase intention. Furthermore, Gräve (2017) found that the more females get familiar with celebrities and micro-celebrities, the less physical attractiveness made a difference. Gräve's study also indicated that source attractiveness had little influence on male participants' purchase behaviour. On the other hand, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) specified that first impression and the source's attractiveness affect how social media audiences observe the influencer and whether they want to purchase the product and follow the source in future. These findings indicate that source attractiveness is an important consideration in terms of

understanding how social media audiences are likely to perceive influencers, as well as future purchasing decisions.

Researchers also illustrate that celebrity endorsements are important in terms of considering consumers' perceptions of brands, attractiveness, and impulse to purchase products. In the same vein, Zhu et al. (2020) performed an online survey among 204 participants from Indonesia to explore social media commerce, celebrity endorsement, and impulsive buying intentions based on the Source Credibility model. Zhu et al. (2020) found that the celebrities' attractiveness and trustworthiness positively influenced consumer attitudes toward the brand. In addition, product attractiveness was positively related to the expertise and trustworthiness of the endorser. Also, brand attitude and product attractiveness were positively associated with the impulse to buy (Zhu et al., 2020). Jin et al. (2019) also employed the Source Credibility theory to investigate the influence of 104 females on Instagram who were exposed to photos of Eva Longoria (celebrity) and Olivia Palermo (micro-celebrity) on source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy, and social presence. According to Jin et al. (2019) consumers exposed to the Instagram celebrities' (micro-celebrity) posts perceived the source as more trustworthy, showed a more positive attitude toward the endorsed brand, sensed a more robust presence and showed more envy than those exposed to the (traditional) celebrities' brand posts. The findings have implications for social media marketing and Instagram influencer-based branding because they speak to the power of Instagram influencer marketing as an effective branding strategy (Jin et al., 2019), while Zhu et al.'s research has relevance because they used Source Credibility as the framework and Instagram as the social media platform for collecting data.

Research has indicated that Source Credibility is a major influential factor in electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) among social media users when they tag or forward other users about the post. This action progressively creates a more significant number of reviews on products and services (Teng et al., 2016). Thus, online customer ratings help other consumers to decide who to trust in their online shopping and e-commerce, and whether to buy the product. At the same time, brands apply online reputational software to collect statistics, distribute their products, and aggregate feedback on social media marketing sources, influence, and behaviour (Abubakar, Ilkan & Sahin, 2016).

An additional theory that provides credence to the current studies is the parasocial interaction theory. The parasocial interaction theory was created by Yuan and Lou (2020), Lou (2021) and Wellman (2020) to provide an understanding of the relationship created between influencer followers and the contemporary social media age. According to Yuan and Lou (2020), a parasocial relationship is when an individual develops a perceived relationship or perception of an online persona such as an influencer, micro-celebrity, or celebrity. The relationship created may be lasting or short-term dependent upon the actions of the influencer. As a result, many individuals in a long-term parasocial relationship with online or celebrity figures may find themselves deeply immersed within the content that is created as well as the characteristics and behaviour the individual exhibits in the online setting. Yuan and Lou (2020) argued that the parasocial relationship can explain, partially, source credibility and the overall influence among individuals to purchase specific products based on their parasocial relationship with an influencer, celebrity or micro-celebrity. Wellman (2020) additionally provides the context in terms of parasocial relationships theory through a review of private Facebook groups that discuss influencer-end follower connections. For the review, Wellman (2020) identified that influencers were more likely to develop brand alignment as well as engagement based upon the pair of social relationships perceived between the follower and the influencer. Thus, the relationship created can foster brand commitment, product purchasing, as well as engagement with the influencer based upon the parasocial relationship.

The parasocial interaction theory also has alignment with the work of Audrezet et al. (2020), who noted that authenticity is a crucial aspect in terms of creating affective relationships between followers and influencers. According to Audrezet et al. (2020), the relationship that is created is dependent upon the authenticity that is portrayed by the influencer or public figure. Thus, for parasocial relationships to advance significantly, a public figure needs to manage their authenticity effectively. As a result, when authenticity is effectively managed, the followers may be more likely to buy a product or be influenced toward a specific brand (Audrezet et al., 2020). The parasocial interaction theory is an important theory addition to the current study as it provides context for the interactions that occur as well as the potential engagement experience by the celebrities and micro-celebrities examined within this study.

2.4 Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) and e-referral

Throughout history, word-of-mouth (WOM) communication has been a non-commercial and interpersonal exchange of ideas about a product, brand, or service between relatives, friends, or third parties through mutual messaging and consent (Rahim et al., 2016). However, since the introduction of the internet in 1974 and the world-wide-web (WWW) on the open internet in 1991, electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) became a powerful marketing tool for online sharing and transactions (Rahim et al., 2016). E-WOM consists of positive or negative statements made to many people via social media by potential, actual, and former customers about a source, product, or company (Gvili & Levy, 2018). Consequently, E-WOM substantially influences consumers' product evaluation and purchase decision-making because of the internet's unprecedented scalability for exchanging information between consumers (Rahim et al., 2016). In general, E-WOM is considered a useful marketing method for consumers to trust and accept the opinion of sources as credible and trustworthy (Teng et al., 2016).

E-WOM is also used by marketing teams to influence consumers' attitudes toward a brand and their final decision to purchase (Rahim et al., 2016; Teng et al., 2016). Abubakar et al. (2016) applied a structural equation modelling design to collect and analyse data in their research. They used a random sample of 308 male and female participants from Cyprus to investigate the influence of electronic referral (e-Referral) marketing and E-WOM and the moderating effect of gender on brand image and purchase intention. e-Referral marketing, similar to E-WOM, is an effective method of promoting products or services to new customers through referrals (see 1.1.2.3), which can be influenced by marketing strategies. The research findings indicated that e-Referral had a substantial influence on females only. E-WOM of the brand had a more significant effect on women than men, while E-WOM influenced purchase intention to the same degree in both genders. Brand and personal image influenced women's purchase intentions more substantially than men (Abubakar et al., 2016).

The discussion on Source Credibility theory, E-WOM and e-referral created the context in which literature on social media, social media platforms, social media marketing, and consumer behaviour was debated. E-WOM also forms part of the discussion on the primary research findings in the following chapters.

2.4.1 Comment culture

A comment culture is a social space in which users view themselves as experts and believe that they deserve to respond and share their opinions on all matters, whether genuine or not (Wang, 2019). With billions of web pages available, the modern internet has created a massive social phenomenon called the ‘comment culture’ or participatory fan culture (Wang, 2019). The Social Web 2.0 and social media invite users to respond to issues at all times, where people comment before they think and where expertise is relatively devalued (Price, 2019). Social media sites are engineered to create an illusion of urgency, while the internet has democratised communication and the art of messaging. Web 2.0 has provided more interactive space and content sharing, and social networking makes people feel more connected and engaged. Another reason why comment culture has prospered in the past few years is that engagement has become profitable for the content creator. It is difficult to profit when a firm or a social media influencer has to publish content alone; thus, the user becomes the co-producer and consumer (Price, 2019). Many consumers started calling themselves fans to demonstrate their affiliation with a product or the product endorser.

With the launch of Twitter in 2007, almost none of its current functionalities were available. Therefore, Twitter’s owners invited users to answer the question “What are you doing?” in less than 140 characters. It substantiated the idea of a comment culture where user-led innovation initially directed the technical affordances and cultural applications offered by Twitter (Bruns & Burgess, 2011). Comment culture has grown from absorbing international fandom or follower concepts to the stage where users develop their discourse and response to posts of other popular users and celebrities (Wang, 2019). The internet has become louder, more reactive, and a place where social media platforms can drive user behaviour and influence intimacy, sentiment, and anger through using the application features. Follower comments can often be viewed as self-centred and narcissistic and cannot always be trusted. Therefore, people need to know that any comments extracted from social media platforms need to be checked and analysed for authenticity (Wang, 2019).

2.4.2 Hashtags and tagging

In 2007 Chris Messina launched the pound symbol #, also called an octothorpe, to tag messages and searches by categorising or sorting the words used on social media. The tagging of phrases and words with the prefix # has changed how social media users engage (Chu, 2017; Hashtags, 2020). Social tagging or *folksonomies* are user-defined metadata or groups of identifiers

instinctively generated when several users informally store social media content using tags or labels to specify what they think the content should be about (Gartner, 2020). *Tag clouds* can pinpoint these identifiers and illustrate frequently used tags on such a folksonomy site (Gartner, 2020). Tag clouds will later be discussed when presenting the research findings through the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). Tags are also viewed as optional labels that indicate where or from whom social media posts originate, and in some instances relay directly to a particular location. Apart from tags adding context to individual posts, it empowers different influencers to play an increasing role in research, policymaking, and social media marketing (Maurer, 2020).

Although #Twitter initially offered the hashtag facility to its users, hashtag searches and tagging can now be performed on Facebook, Instagram, and other popular websites and search engines (Chu, 2017; Digital Hikes, 2020). One of the main tagging incentives of social media sites is to allow users to share their emotions, images, or videos and tag their friends and family in their posts. Users create these tags themselves, and the posts or messages containing these tags are arranged according to the subject category. People search for a specific hashtag and retrieve messages that include the same text by merely typing the word (Dorsch, 2018).

Instagram research has shown that a post with at least one hashtag averages 12.6% more engagement than a post without a hashtag (Later, 2020). Social media tagging also implies that someone can refer to another user in a post by name and use the @ symbol to find their profile. The users' names are linked with tags to other users' profiles, and those users are notified when they are tagged (Chu, 2017). For example, when a friend tags other friends' faces in photos on Facebook, the other friends are notified that they were tagged. Sites use hashtags to ensure that users have easy access to their particular interests. All the users have to do is click on the tag to see the content containing the tag. People can join the online conversation even when browsing other websites where hashtags are available (Hashtags, 2020). Chu (2017) warned businesses that using their competitors' hashtags could lead to trademark infringement. Hashtags can also make or break a business's marketing strategy when the firm either annoys current or potential followers or gets penalised for slow engagement by the platform's algorithm that continually changes according to the frequency and number of posts (Hashtags, 2020).

Each social media platform has unique goals and extensively dynamic demographics. Demographics or customer data refer to characteristics such as gender, age, religion, race,

education, and income, of which most data are available on social media (An et al., 2018). Demographic information is vital to marketers for market segmentation of the target audience and for influencers to know what platforms their potential target audiences use. Instagram then also provides statistics about the gender, age, and location of a person's followers. Most users are linked to more than one or two social media platforms depending on where they feel most comfortable. Each platform informs social media marketers on how to approach their social media campaigns according to their purpose and marketing intent (Brown, 2019).

2.5 Social Media Marketing

Social media and the implementation of information technologies have become an active part of most firms' marketing activities regarding their existing and potential customers and organisational capabilities. Therefore, information technology should be conceptualised in its overall marketing strategy (Venciūtė, 2018). Organisational capabilities refer to the firm's marketing competency by creating and disseminating information and responding to customers' information through social media networks. It also enhances customer engagement, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention (Venciūtė, 2018). However, social media can also oppose social media marketing efforts when used by communities to change consumer trends when confronting a particular firm.

2.5.1 Millennials

Literature has indicated that consumers use social media presence as a measure to evaluate the quality and popularity of brands (Hudson et al., 2016; Nadeem et al., 2015), with Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram being among the most popular platforms used for marketing research. However, although online shopping has taken over the marketplace, research is still rare about the way social media marketing influences Millennials' level of trust, attitude, and online shopping behaviour (Nadeem et al., 2015). Accordingly, Nadeem et al. (2015) conducted an online survey with Italian Generation Y or Millennial consumers to investigate how online shopping via Facebook, peer recommendations (E-WOM), and website service quality affect consumer trust, attitude, and loyalty toward e-tailing.

Many Millennials are offspring of Generation X and Baby Boomers' grandchildren (Nadeem et al., 2015). A quantitative confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the research concepts, while the hypotheses were tested through structural equation modelling (SEM) (Nadeem et al., 2015). The research findings indicated that website service quality and

consumer tendency to use Facebook for online shopping directly influence consumer trust in an e-tailer. They also found that peer recommendations directly influence user attitudes rather than indirectly if trust is considered a factor (Nadeem et al., 2015). The results further indicated that peer recommendations have a noticeably stronger influence on female attitudes than males.

These research findings are important for retailers because Millennials are known not to use Facebook that frequently and much less than their parents and grandparents do. Social marketing research via Facebook as a research platform and focusing on people under 50 is limited (Zhu, Amelina, & Yen, 2020). It was also found that a change in the use of a particular social media platform can occur in less than five years, which suggests that social media marketing platforms depend on the same type of consumer motivation and behaviour as product-based companies (Duffett, 2017).

McCormick (2016) attempted to fill the research gap by arguing that Millennials' buying power is growing, and they are inherently social network consumers. The purpose of McCormick's study was to investigate whether the presence of micro-celebrities could influence Millennial purchase intent and would create a more positive attitude toward the endorsed product. Millennials are known for sharing most of their social media experiences, mainly via Instagram (McCormick, 2016). Therefore, he argued that an advertising technique to attract Millennials as potential buyers was to use Instagram for product endorsements. The research findings indicated that Millennials showed no higher intent of purchasing a product endorsed by an unfamiliar social media (micro-) celebrity. Typically, micro-celebrity endorsements seemed to lead to a more favourable customer evaluation of the product. The suggestion was that authenticity and inconsistency of behaviour are the two dominant trends identified in Millennials when researching their opinions of Instagram micro-celebrity endorsements (McCormick, 2016).

Social media marketing campaigns are predominantly performed via social media platforms, television, and digital billboards, whether for promoting a brand or by specific consumer groups for their political 'campaigns' to target particular businesses and their products (Appel et al., 2020; Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). It was found that the rate at which people view social media marketing content is ten times higher than any of the other sources (Jin & Muqaddam, 2019). In general, personal marketing on social media seemed to be more self-led and inspired by narcissism, much more than what was found by (traditional) celebrities when promoting a firm's products (Murray, 2020).

McGorry and McGorry (2017) argued that too much focus is placed on Millennials during social media marketing research. According to them, most other demographics and age-related segments had been ignored in the studies and output of advertising and marketing companies. On the contrary, while marketers have chosen to continue emphasising Millennials' buying power and understanding their behaviours and competencies, a new demographic segment, Centennials, surfaced to significantly impact how organisations communicate and sell to young individuals (McGorry & McGorry, 2017).

2.5.2 Centennials

Centennials are demarcated as the generation born at the turn of the century (McGorry & McGorry, 2017; Rakuten Advertising, 2020). Generation Z accounts for almost 26% of the US population and is referred to as Gen Z, iGen, and Founders (McGorry & McGorry, 2017). Extensive interest has grown in how young people engage with digital media as a pervasive, integral, and immersive part of their everyday lives (Driver & Coulter, 2018). Young people are positioned as compliant and competent users of adult-driven media systems, or much worse, as victims of corporate technologies that shape their identities and limit their social relations within narrow and normative boundaries (Driver & Coulter, 2018). Although Centennials' demographic information is beginning to emerge, research on young persons of this generation and their social media use is still limited. The reason is that the protection of youngsters of this age has, to an extent, restricted research on Centennials, which caused a significant lack of understanding of their buying power and behaviour (McGorry & McGorry, 2017). However, Centennials are growing older, and social media marketing research is becoming more available in this large marketing and buying power segment.

The lack of information on this age group has had consequences for the marketing and advertising industry. They were forecast to contribute around \$4 billion in discretionary spending during 2020 in the USA alone (Ramos & Rodrigues, 2020). However, unlike Millennials, research has found that Centennials have frivolous spending habits similar to the Baby Boomer generation. The conclusion is that Centennial spending behaviour has additional implications for social media marketing and use and how marketers apply social marketing tools to communicate information to this generation (McGorry & McGorry, 2017; Ramos & Rodrigues, 2020).

The Centennial generation is hyper-connected on social media and sacrifices in-person social settings for online communication with friends while always searching for product and brand information (Liu & Suh, 2019; Ramos & Rodrigues, 2020). More than the Millennials, these individuals are used to all marketing and advertising forms via their smartphones. Therefore, Centennials are considered one of the most complicated yet most extensive demographic groups for social media marketers to consider (Phua et al., 2018). US research has indicated that Centennials mainly focus on using Snapchat and Instagram as social media platforms and usually ignore the rest unless required for some other reason (McGorry & McGorry, 2017). Younger teens within this generation were found to prefer Instagram, while older teens were more likely to use YouTube and Snapchat (McGorry & McGorry, 2017). These figures are dynamic and change as the demographics adjust. Centennials are influenced by individuals that reflect their background, passions, and interests. They expect authentic communication, and therefore Centennial influencers are key to being viewed as authentic and credible (Willems, n.d.).

Age demographics progressively impact how companies operate on different social media marketing platforms. Consequently, Duffett (2017) did an investigation into the influence of interactive social media marketing on teenagers' attitudes and behaviours. A South African cohort of more than 10,000 young people (Generation Z) was included in a quantitative survey through Instagram. The results revealed that participants with the highest use of social media (most time spent), who updated their profiles frequently and were of African origin (non-white), displayed the most positive attitudes toward social media marketing engagement (Duffett, 2017). This study has relevance as the core age group (Centennials) included those who follow brands and regularly engage with brands on Instagram. Social media marketing was shown as having a positive effect on the attitudes of adolescents. Though active consumer engagement differed, students' ages and experience correlated with the purchasing trend observed by most social media marketing practices (Duffett, 2017).

2.5.3 Purchasing funnel

The six stages in the purchasing funnel represent a prospective customer's mindset: awareness of the product, interest to buy, considering buying, the decision to buy, evaluation, and purchasing the product. Each behaviour becomes increasingly demanding, with the number of potential consumers decreasing as they progress down the funnel until reaching the primary marketing communication objective, namely, the purchase. Furthermore, because each stage

of the purchasing funnel impacts consumer behaviour differently, they each require a different approach from marketers to not send the wrong message at the wrong time (Dierks, 2017).

Duffett's (2017) research was limited to analysing the use of Instagram by a specific group of youngsters. It did not consider different social media types for different ages, which, it was argued, should be examined individually. Furthermore, Duffett's (2017) research only considered a Generation Z demographic cohort in a single international location instead of performing research on a more international level. Nevertheless, Duffett's (2017) argument made sense, namely that brands should consider adjusting their strategies based on opinions about the funnelling impact of social media communication and age on young consumers' attitudes and buying behaviour. Influences based on the usage of social media platforms and demographic variables must also be considered when, for example, targeting the more lucrative and technologically advanced Centennials (Duffett, 2017).

It becomes clear that social media marketing has revolutionised many people's lives and has become a significant research niche in the retail world (Ngai et al., 2015). Following this, Ismail (2017) argues that brands that employ positive marketing strategies and applications are more likely to inspire loyalty and influence consumerism on social media platforms. Unfortunately, social media marketing typically does not immediately realise consumer interest and purchasing of products (Varkaris & Neuhofer, 2017). However, the long-term impact of a positive, stylish, purposeful, and ethical presence on social media platforms has inspired sales, customer loyalty, and long-term growth for brands (Lopez, 2019). The following section reviews literature explicitly related to Instagram as the data collection platform for this study.

2.6 Instagram

With around one billion active users, the majority from the USA and India, Instagram has become one of the world's largest social media networks (Tankovska, 2021). As of January 2021, 33% of Instagram audiences are between 25 and 34 years old. These Millennials or Generation Y users are from the texting and social media boom and are digital natives. Thirty per cent of global Instagram audiences are Centennials aged between 18 and 24 years. They were raised with face-time video chats, streaming and social media and are intuitive digitals, making the Instagram platform particularly attractive for social media marketing and influencers (Tankovska, 2021).

Instagram has been known as a social networking platform for sharing photos and videos. Users edit and share images, post short videos, connect with people, communicate with friends about their personal and professional lives, influence marketing, and perform online business. Like Facebook, Instagram is still a free social media application launched in 2010 in San Francisco by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger and bought by Facebook's Mark Zuckerberg in 2012. The word Instagram is a combination of 'Instant Camera' and 'Telegram' (Blight et al., 2017).

Since Instagram is folksonomy-oriented (see 2.4.2), it provides the functionality for image indexing and knowledge presentation by assigning hashtags to content posted on the app (Dorsch, 2018; Jin et al., 2019). However, Instagram has also evolved into a more comprehensive platform described by Leaver et al. (2020, online) as:

“Instagram is more than one thing: it is an app; it is a series of programs and algorithms; it is a gigantic database of images, video, captions, comments, geolocative tags, location tags, likes, emoji and more and more items over time; it is a collection of personal data (connected with similar sets of personal data after the purchase by Facebook); it is an application program interface (API), which enacts rules to allow different apps, platforms and partners to access, add or remove data from the Instagram database; it is a series of decisions and developments over time that created different versions of each of these things, and encapsulates various popular understandings of what Instagram ‘is’ to the more than a billion people who use it.”

The Instagram platform is based on visual aesthetics and filtered images, making it a suitable ecosystem for promoting beauty products, popularising specific body images, and advocating comfortable living and luxury brands (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The images and videos are displayed as if the followers share the photographers' subjective experiences activated by particular user feeds (Zappavigna, 2016). Micro-celebrities have gained popularity and achieved remarkable success through Instagram due to the visual appeal presented by the Instagram filters and the platform's ability to reach large audiences. Based on their high degree of influence, micro-celebrities are labelled as Instafamous (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019; Jin et al., 2019; Luvaas, 2017). Instafamous is an idea explicitly focused on Instagram's unique features for social interaction and aesthetic presentation that allow users to build personal storylines (storytelling) while displaying pictures and videos of themselves, their lifestyles, and brands to attract followers (Abidin, 2016).

2.6.1 Instagram Influencers

Instagram influencers often share brand-related images and video feeds to demonstrate their product experiences to their followers or prospective followers (Klostermann et al., 2018). Brand-related image sharing is essential when marketers and influencers build personal connections and relationships with their customers (Hudson et al., 2016). As part of their social media marketing tactics on Instagram, firms often sponsor their brands posted by influencers on their social media accounts (Jin, Muqaddam & Rye, 2019). The following types of posts are available:

- Brand posts refer to brands paying the social media networking site to promote their brands to specific ages and other target groups. In response, the social networking site ensures that a post appears on the feeds of individuals who belong to the target group, such as working mothers, men involved in sports, or young teenagers (Mayrhofer et al., 2019).
- Sponsored influencer posts signify explicit profitable deals made by brands with influential Instagrammers, such as sending them free products, invitations to events, or lucrative compensation. In return, these influencers post short videos or pictures with their stories or feeds in which they showcase, endorse, or review the brand to convince their followers to like and purchase the brand or product (De Jans et al., 2020). Various strategies have been applied for endorsing a brand via influencer posts. More recently, Instagram has offered users the option to immediately purchase the brand by adding a shopping button to an influencer's post. In addition, Instagram is also experimenting with displaying sponsored posts on user feeds who do not follow an influencer (De Jans et al., 2020).

An Instagram influencer is defined as an individual with either pre-existing celebrity status from another social network or an individual with a high engagement rate on Instagram (Luvaas, 2017). The term was initially developed by public relations (PR) firms to leverage micro-celebrities' high followings (Luvaas, 2017). However, research into (traditional) celebrities' impact versus micro-celebrities (influencers) is growing, with most recent studies providing unpredictable and inconsistent results. Some of the studies and their findings will be discussed in the sections below.

2.6.2 Influencer language

Consumer endorsements on social media, including Instagram, are typically conducted via brand or influencer pages containing self-mediated performances (such as follower count and engagement) and iterative emoji speechmaking (Duffy & Kang, 2019; Ge & Gretzel, 2018). Emojis help make the message more noticeable, entertain followers, and shape the influencer's or brand's image. In addition, influencers and consumers use emojis to help them more accurately express their thoughts and feelings (Ryhänen, 2019).

According to Ge and Gretzel (2018), social media marketing requires using a rhetoric media communication language to shift communication norms to engage users and persuade them to buy a product. Therefore, the authors analysed, portrayed, and labelled the emoji-based verbal interchanges in 600 posts by the 200 top influencers to collect and develop a taxonomy of emojis used by these social media influencers in communication with their followers. The research findings were that emoji language is complex and applied very strategically to serve multiple persuasive communication purposes (Ge & Gretzel, 2018).

2.8 Disclosure language

A discussion on disclosure language (see also 2.8.10 and 2.10) refers to disclosing brand compensation for influencer endorsements and its effect on consumer recognition, attitude, and behavioural intent. Prompted by the influx of influencer brand promotions, Evans, Phua, and Jun (2017) made an investigation into the existence of, and variation in, disclosure language on Instagram influencer posts and how it affects consumers' ability to distinguish the content as a brand endorsement or advertising. They also examined advertising recognition and disclosure memory on consumer attitude toward the brand, purchase intention, and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM). The use of disclosure language on posts has been found to mitigate influencers' social capital and source credibility on Instagram (Evans et al., 2017). It is now legally required for influencers to disclose the commercial nature of their posts; for example, by adding sponsorship disclosure with the product endorsement (Boerman, 2020).

On the other hand, Rautio (2018) indicated that the number of likes and positive comments toward influencer posts showed far greater trust in the source's credibility, which directly led to positive consumer behaviour toward the endorser, far more than toward the content. These findings have a meaningful influence on current social media marketing strategies. For instance, Instagram users have shown resistance toward marketing strategies that have been

argued as cynicism and scepticism toward celebrity and micro-celebrity leverage to encourage consumerism (Torres et al., 2019).

2.9 Source attractiveness

Source attractiveness and credibility on Instagram are often mediated by consumer lifestyle achievement rather than product consumerism. Consumer lifestyle attainment relates to individuals who buy products based on their looks and how they think they will look after using the products. Studies into source attractiveness on Instagram have identified the subtle, guerrilla marketing strategy followed by companies to inspire sales. These companies use influencers to promote body-positive lifestyle trends that, according to them, can be attained by purchasing their beauty products (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Women who claim to have ‘non-normative bodies or figures that do not conform to typical female ratios (Cwynar-Horta, 2016) use Instagram to post selfies challenging girlish beauty and figures (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As the body-positive movement and advocates’ influence have grown, brands started commoditising these body-positive advocates (Casalo et al., 2017) to promote their products as credible sources supporting customers to achieve the same goals (Cwynar-Horta, 2016).

Research findings have indicated that Instagram serves as a means for users to validate their sexuality, self-image and worth as determined by the number of likes their posts receive. The impact of Instagram on self-image inspired a study by Al-Eisa et al. (2016) on physical images on Instagram that encourage women to keep fit, which could be related to the ‘perfect body image’ portrayed on the app deliberately or unintentionally to promote brands. In another study, Park, and Lee (2017) researched the relationship between Instagram images and the importance of sexuality, especially as measured by likes on the postings on Instagram. Their research findings indicated an affirmative relationship between the number of likes and the degree of sexuality displayed in images. Some users believe that the more they upload images, such as selfies while wearing bikinis, the more likes they receive (Park & Lee, 2017). The results showed no difference between the responses of men and women on these uploads.

Furthermore, Instagram’s aesthetic image filters help users to enhance their photos to look flawless. Consequently, users often create a false identity, which they have to maintain to validate their social media status. False identity and the use of aesthetically improved photos create a vicious cycle of self-misrepresentation, especially among young adults who represent

the significant majority of Instagram users (Anderson, 2016; Pittman & Reich, 2016). In a study by MacMillan (2017), Instagram was ranked the worst social media platform for mental health as it was linked to user anxiety and depression. In addition, the research findings indicated that Instagram often causes girls and women to feel inferior because vloggers typically add filters and edit their photos to look perfect.

Research on source attractiveness indicated that physical appeal focuses on the desirability element in influencer posts, reinforcing the idea that images still represent the most attractive media postings. The photos attracting the most attention and highest engagement were those where bodies were shown in small bikinis and tight clothing – especially those influencers with feminine bodies or those who adopted a fitness lifestyle. In addition, ongoing Instagram engagement and postings often cause severe and negative emotional and behavioural conditions in followers and influencers (Park & Lee, 2017).

Overall, source attractiveness is an important consideration when examining how consumers engage with content and social media. The specific aesthetic, stylish approach and a focus on more feminine bodies are key themes identified amongst modern social media approaches (Park & Lee, 2017; Pittman & Reich, 2016).

2.10 Envy

The purpose of discussing envy as a concept under Source Credibility theory is to conclude whether it could impact customer behaviour or the propensity to buy items endorsed by celebrities and micro-celebrities on Instagram. The built-in photo-sharing function of Instagram serves as a core influencer of consumerism and envious behaviour in humans. Envy is a feeling or mixture of unpleasant and painful feelings characterised by inferiority and resentment caused by comparing oneself with others who possess something the envier desires (Wu & Srite, 2021). Envy is created when social media users observe more famous users or the Instafamous, such as micro-celebrities, consistently posting content, which heightens the user's desire to do or have the same (Gunaseran & Khalid, 2017, Jin et al., 2019). Therefore, observing only the positive aspects of others' lives on Instagram can negatively influence user behaviour and bring out envy. The two types of envy defined in the literature are benign and malicious envy (Jin et al., 2019; Wu & Srite, 2021).

Benign envy refers to the follower's desire to purchase the influencer's brand to obtain the same status but with no hostile feelings. Because users perceive influencers as real people based

on their consumption of the very personal social media, envy immediately drives them to post content, forward the message to their followers, or buy the product (Gunaseran & Khalid, 2017; Wu & Srite, 2021). Thus, desire intensifies the consumer's attitude toward obtaining the brand.

On the other hand, malicious envy contains a pattern of thoughts, hostility, and emotions resulting from the perceived loss of social standing. It is provoked when the envier becomes depressed and wants to take the envied person down for enjoying an ideal lifestyle or position ((Jin et al., 2019; Wu & Srite, 2021).

Jin et al. (2019) explored celebrities' influence on buying behaviour versus micro-celebrities using Source Credibility theory with source trustworthiness, brand attitude, envy, and social presence as attributes. The study was built on the assumption that malicious envy causes a person to pay more for an equivalent product, for example, the same product category but a different brand. The research purpose was to analyse envy when systematically induced to determine how it impacts customer buying behaviour or willingness to pay for items endorsed on Instagram.

A total of 104 females were selected in a randomised two-group comparison in which Eva Longoria was used as a celebrity and Olivia Palermo as a micro-celebrity. The results indicated that people connect stronger with micro-celebrities (Instagram celebrities) than with celebrities (traditional celebrities) (Jin et al., 2019). In addition, the research showed that when brands post content, envy was not realised to the same extent as when celebrities or micro-celebrities post about expensive products. Consumers exposed to the micro-celebrity posts perceived them as more trustworthy, showed a more positive attitude toward the brand, experienced a more robust social presence and felt more envious of the micro-celebrity than those exposed to celebrities' posts (Jin et al., 2019).

If the exact influencers are allowed to provoke envious consumer behaviour, brands could invent new marketing strategies. Benign envy poses a more positive and proactive response than malicious envy, making it the ideal social media marketing tool (Wu & Srite, 2021). Compared with malicious envy, benign envy is beneficial for an individual's wellbeing. The similarity between malicious envy and benign envy is that both can activate a desire to avoid the envied person and motivate the user to enhance the self (Gunaseran & Khalid; Wu & Srite, 2021).

2.10.1 Brand Bashing

Brand bashing emerged as a theme during the initial user comments analysis process. The social media marketing explosion has generated a platform for the communication of environmental and lifestyle issues. Similar to other social media networks, Instagram, with its many beauty-product influencers, opened the door for social activism against excess consumption (Wutzler, 2019) and, more important for this study, the testing of beauty products on animals (Meigs et al., 2018), while online activists are raising their voice on how products must be tested and manufactured.

The European Union banned the testing of cosmetics such as shampoo, makeup, and toothpaste on animals in 2004 (Thew, 2017). Five years later, it also ended the testing of ingredients, following it up in 2013 with a ban on importing and selling new cosmetics tested on animals. However, requirements are controversial because the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), an EU chemical safety regulation, requires all chemicals used in Europe to be tested for safety (Thew, 2017). In China, cosmetic products or their ingredients are still tested on animals (White, 2020).

To further clarify, the cosmetic industry stays fragmented – not European versus the rest but the large global companies versus the many small ones. Small companies mainly reformulate substances without additional testing requirements (Meigs et al., 2018). However, big companies must comply with the different regulatory pressures and maintain an innovation pipeline. Until now, the testing ban did not significantly impact the cosmetic industry. However, the testing ban is now a driving force for alternative approaches (White, 2020). Various cosmetic brands, such as Estee Lauder, MAC, and L'Oréal, have turned away from animal testing because consumers' purchasing decisions can be heavily influenced by ethically produced goods (White, 2020). Many cosmetic brands cover themselves with comments like Estee Lauder's website stating, "Animal testing on cosmetics products exists if a regulatory body demands it for its safety or regulatory assessment" (Estee Lauder website, 2021).

Social activism is closely related to boycotts (see also 2.5.1). While consumer activism and boycotts have been a well-established practice for developed economies in traditional and social media, the extensiveness of online platforms has offered unparalleled intensity and visibility to various activist movements (Commetric, 2019). Boycotts stem from anger that spreads much faster and further on social media and, as such, is linked to brand bashing, especially if coupled with consumer envy. There appears to be a lack of robust research related

to consumer activism and the endorsement of cosmetic products on social media. However, during data analysis, followers complained about celebrity-endorsed brands being tested on animals without knowing the real facts, while also urging other Instagram users to do the same.

2.10.2 Paid influencer content and dishonesty

Recent years have been marked by businesses leveraging social media celebrities' (micro-celebrities') power and large followings to market their products and services through paid content, which also brought new issues, such as influencer–product congruence and sponsorship disclosure, to the fore (Kim & Kim, 2020) (see also 2.10). Social media influencer marketing has shown eleven times higher ROI than the more traditional digital marketing forms (Bragg, 2018). The success of influencer marketing can be ascribed to consumers' needs for authenticity. In a world overcome by social media advertisements, micro-celebrity profile content can provide consumers with a way to identify products and services that suit their lifestyles. However, evidence indicates that some influencers are paid to post unscrupulous reviews on specific brands and products (Bragg, 2018). In an Instagram post, makeup artist Kevin James Bennett exposed dishonesty in the beauty industry by accusing some brands of offering micro-celebrities money in return for their negative reviews on a competitor's product. Bennett reported in his Instagram post of having been offered US \$75,000 to US \$85,000 for a negative review on a competitor's brand. It has been demonstrated that brands offer influencers remuneration to bash another brand and damage the competitor's business while, on the other hand, top-level influencers fail to disclose the dishonesty (Bruculieri, 2018).

Wellman et al. (2020) underlined the importance of authenticity for celebrities and micro-celebrities to alleviate the tensions resulting from integrating brand messages into their media content. In addition, Al-Emadi and Ben Yahia (2020) highlighted the significance of credibility, storytelling and content quality, fit with the platform, actual and aspired-to image homophily, and consistency for micro-celebrities to attain credibility, fame and opinion leadership on social media (Ye et al., 2021). This is known as self-branding.

2.10.3 Self-branding

The concept of self-branding is exceptionally prevalent in a modern social media society due to the appearance and growth of social media platforms, such as Instagram (Liu & Suh, 2017). Self-branding, also identified as personal or human branding, is a distinctive public image

developed by individuals for commercial gain. The word 'brand' refers to an old practice whereby livestock owners have burnt a unique and distinguishing symbol into their animals' skins. A brand denotes a certain quality and message associated with a robust and favourable idea about the product that could simplify consumers' decision to purchase a product or brand (Kamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). On the other hand, human branding is a concept where individuals, such as celebrities and micro-celebrities, are acknowledged as brands in their own right and not tools for marketing purposes. It is the process of focusing on marketing activities around an individual to either promote themselves in their relevant fields or business purposes and not to endorse and sell traditional brands and services (Lawal, 2020).

Online platforms as digital media environments allow individuals from several demographic groups, especially women, to grow, empower, and market themselves as brands. However, despite scholarly research on the influence of social media on influencer self-branding practices, little empirical research could be found on how influencers use Instagram as a tool to establish themselves and what users' perceptions have been of these self-branded micro-celebrities (Liu & Suh, 2017). In a study by Liu and Suh (2017), the content of 243 posts from the top ten Instagram style blogger accounts was selected and analysed using a systematic coding scheme. After analysing the data, research findings indicated that most leading style bloggers or micro-celebrities still adhere to traditional beauty and hierarchical criteria initially applied to traditional celebrities. Nevertheless, social media provides excellent opportunities for women to establish their branded selves and market themselves in line with an increasing awareness of women's rights.

Further results have shown that many style blogger followers are influenced by how the micro-celebrities use their technical skills and other modes to present themselves. Many social media users become emotionally attached to the influencers they follow (Liu & Suh, 2017). Some studies have indicated that Instagram influencer branding has become the core strategy because micro-celebrity endorsements directly realise purchase results and consumerism in general (Luvaas, 2017).

2.10.4 Instagram Marketing

The rapid development of technology and the evolution of Instagram have been supported by the growth and popularity of social commerce, which, in turn, has created opportunities for increased interaction between sellers and buyers across the world (De Kerviler et al., 2017;

Pookulangara et al., 2017). As a result, Instagram obtained one of the highest engagement rates within the social media marketing industry and is considered an important application to influence consumer behaviour and inspiration much differently from other social networking sites. The engagement rate of Instagram is relevant for the purpose of understanding how consumer marketing research by firms, advertising agents, and scholars can benefit from this social media platform engagement (Pookulangara et al., 2017).

2.10.5 Consumer perceptions

A study by Pookulangara et al. (2017) explored consumer perceptions on shopping via Instagram by tags (which link one photo to another account) on photos and users' ensuing intention to purchase the product without leaving Instagram. The study was directed by the theory of Reasoned Action which states that a person's intent to act out a certain behaviour is the main predictor of whether they implement that behaviour. Data was collected via an online survey resulting in a sample of 342 university students representing the Millennial consumer group. The research purpose was to examine consumers' purchase intentions on Instagram and the impact of interpersonal influence on buying behaviour (Pookulangara et al., 2017).

Descriptive statistics and factor analysis combined with the Structural Equation Model (a multivariate analysis technique used to analyse structural relationships) were used to analyse the research data (Pookulangara et al., 2017). The research findings indicated that Instagram usage is influenced by personal reasons specific to the individual and that normative beliefs impact interpersonal and personal activities on Instagram. Furthermore, it was found that a positive attitude toward direct Instagram shopping was positively influenced by purchase intentions and electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM). It showed that communication and engagement increasingly influence purchase decisions via social media (Astuti, 2018) as users rely on their social networks before making purchase decisions. As shown in the review and recommendations, consumers' interconnectedness via social media builds trust in e-commerce (Astuti, 2018).

2.10.6 Consumer engagement and ROI

Consumer engagement quantitatively rates followers' loyalty levels (Montells, 2020) and has become an extensive feature on Instagram (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Instagram's latest technology, digital omnipresence (Poyry et al., 2019), and influencer marketing have revealed it to be the most rapidly growing tool for influencing consumer behaviour (Schmidt, 2018). Consumer

engagement is not focused on the number of followers a post has but on the degree of involvement, interest, and interaction users display toward influencers' photos, Instagram stories, post content, and videos (Montells, 2020).

Instagram analytics tools provide a way to observe whether the time, energy, and budget that firms spend on this platform are worth their return on investment (ROI). However, Instagram does not contain a complete engagement analysis tool apart from the Instagram Insights for business accounts containing analytics and metrics tracking (Cooper, 2020). The consumer engagement formula used for personal accounts and content creators considers the number of comments and likes on the post divided by the number of followers x 100 (Montells, 2020). Even if brands and influencers have many followers, consumers' engagement on posts might still be trivial. Thus, it is essential to regularly calculate the engagement numbers to ensure that the post content stays current and exciting (Ryhänen, 2019).

The purpose of Ryhänen's (2019) research was to determine what kind of posts an international hair-care brand was posting on Instagram and what type of posts created consumer engagement. OGX was selected as the hair care brand because of its high social media presence. Content analysis was applied through an automatic coding scheme for the collection of data via Instagram. Based on the research findings, the recommendation was that brands need consumer engagement to be successful. The brand posts that received the highest engagement levels were those with pictures of the products (Ryhänen, 2019). The picture posts contained no text or some motivating text to provide additional information about the brand promoted in the picture. Ryhänen (2019) also found that new product launches and giveaways create better consumer engagement.

2.11 Brand endorsement and mentioning

De Veirman et al. (2017) performed a study on the effect of social media influencer postings. They indicated that Instagram influencers with high numbers of followers seemed more amiable because they were considered more accessible. On the other hand, influencers viewed their opinion leadership as only influential when their followers prompted their popularity. De Veirman et al. (2017) opined that popular influencers' likeability might be negatively influenced if they do not follow other influencers' accounts. Simultaneously, the notion of the industry always cooperating with influencers with the highest number of followers was not regarded as the best marketing choice for promoting different products. The authors argued

that such arrangements might decrease the brand's perceived uniqueness and, consequently, users' attitudes toward the brand (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Brand mentioning is a word-of-mouth influencer technique where social media influencers disclose a brand on their social media account. The brand mentioning then has a viral effect on their massive number of followers. Wang, Kim and Sung (2019) analysed 804,397 Instagram brand-mentioning posts by 18,523 Instagram influencers. Their research findings indicated that a) most influencers talk about only a few brands in their posts, b) celebrities endorse popular brands only, while micro-celebrities have little preference when endorsing brands, c) audiences have similar reactions to sponsored and non-sponsored posts, and d) compared to non-sponsored posts, sponsored brand endorsements use fewer user tags and more hashtags with lengthy captions to promote the particular brand's exclusivity. Although the research findings did not indicate whether celebrities or micro-celebrities were preferred, the study demonstrated to marketing managers how the different influencers endorse brands.

Similarly, Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2020) investigated the impact of celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements on advertising effectiveness (user attitudes toward the endorsement and their purchase intention), identification (perceived similarity and wishful identification), and credibility (trustworthiness and expertise). The overall results indicated that participants identified easier with micro-celebrities than celebrities, felt more akin to micro-celebrity influencers than celebrities, and trusted micro-celebrities more than celebrities regarding endorsement effectiveness, similarity, wishful identification, and trust.

The studies above focused on brand endorsements and the mention of celebrities and micro-celebrities. Both celebrities and micro-celebrities have been regarded as strong influencers in social media marketing literature. Several studies also distinguished micro-celebrities from (traditional) celebrities by identifying them as Instagram influencers or social media influencers.

2.12 Instagram and political marketing

The discussion on Instagram and political marketing has been included to highlight the tactics these influencers used during their campaigns. It was found that mass media, including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and Instagram, influence the public agenda, communication, and decision-making, particularly during self-promotions (Munoz & Towner, 2017). An example and one of the most popular and well-researched marketing ventures on Instagram was the

2016 United States Presidential Election. The primary presidential candidates expanded their social media marketing campaigns to increase social capital and potential group via Instagram (Munoz & Towner, 2017). Their research aimed to explore the role images play in framing individual development and identifying what images received a higher engagement level. The authors performed an in-depth content analysis of information on the top seven primary candidates for Democratic and Republican presidential nominees.

What is interesting about the study at hand is that candidates who frequently displayed the supreme candidate frame (posting photos with family members, informative infographics, graphics of the latest polling figures, pictures of events and rallies, and videos about debates and interviews) garnered the highest number of users likes and comments (Munoz & Towner, 2017). Research results also revealed that candidates frequently used text with their images and that image filters were applied across some of the different candidates' posts. The significance is that their study (a) revealed how individuals could leverage Instagram marketing to inspire loyal followers and direct action in the form of voting (and for that matter, boycotts), and (b) that a content or comments analysis methodology was appropriate to draw results from the Instagram data extraction (Munoz & Towner, 2017).

2.12.1 Sharing emotions on Instagram

As shown above, emotions play a role in Instagram users' decision-making. Many Instagram users spend considerable time on social media platforms for the sake of passing the time, social engagement, and expressing themselves (Ferguson & Greer, 2018). Instagram allows people to share their most intimate moments by applying specific hashtags when announcing a birth and mourning death through the app's analytical lens (Leaver & Highfield, 2018). It also offers scholars the opportunity to collect information regarding human emotions and characteristics by viewing users' posts and stories. The #mourning hashtag on Instagram provides a distinctly different space for particular users and specific cultures to express their emotions (Leaver & Highfield, 2018). Research findings have indicated that it is less acceptable to share negative emotions and experiences on mainstream simple notification services (SNSs), such as Facebook. However, many users have adopted Instagram to seek support, find similar others, and disclose stigmatised experiences (Andalibi, Ozturk & Forte, 2017). Importantly, the responses to these users' posts regularly provide positive support.

Influencer marketing has mainly been adopted through a process of trial and error with little insight into how social media influencers should be applied as a tool in the marketing mix.

However, influencer marketing has proven itself as an effective and cost-effective tool in such a way that consumers often do not perceive it as advertising and it guarantees a wide reach to dedicated and engaged audiences (Ye, Hudders, De Jans & De Veirman, 2021).

The most current literature has been reviewed to ensure that the study covers the latest opinions and academic research findings on influencers, influencer marketing, influencer sponsorship disclosure, and the preference for celebrities versus micro-celebrities in the social media marketing world. In addition, some of the literature reviewed for this section will be used to confirm and complement earlier discussions.

2.12.2 Marketing strategy hotspot

Businesses create hotspots by adding geotags, creating interactive advertisements, and posting promotions to their customers to either like, tag, or interact with their Instagram business accounts. These businesses no longer hire talent but partner with influencers on Instagram (MarketingTech, 2020). Chen (2018) applied a qualitative research methodology to explore whether Instagram could be used as a hotspot for particular marketing strategies. The study explored college-aged consumers' interpretations of social media marketing via Instagram with the intent to determine their perceptions of the marketing strategies.

The themes used by Chen (2018) for the understanding of young consumer Instagram photo-sharing were defined as (a) picture me, (b) tech-a-break, and (c) mirroring a celebrity. The themes that emerged from the participant's interpretation of the marketing information on Instagram included (a) subtleness (experience), (b) privileged, (c) new information, and (d) social and celebrity endorsement (Chen, 2018). Further research was required to support the scope, suggesting that, in this case, a qualitative research methodology was not appropriate and that the research design was not well planned.

2.12.3 Marketing techniques

A study was conducted by Ha (2015) into Instagram marketing techniques to identify what techniques would be the most successful when trying to (a) gain more followers, (b) receive a broader brand acknowledgement, and (c) increase sales. The marketing techniques chosen were Instagram posts including celebrity endorsements, customers wearing the company's brand, and hosting an Instagram contest where consumers who responded stood the chance of receiving a giveaway, which was considered the primary method of marketing according to Ha

(2015). In addition, the author analysed and interpreted results from three questionnaires distributed to college students at California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo (Ha, 2015). Ha's research findings indicated that users were not more likely to follow celebrities after viewing their product endorsements on Instagram. However, despite his research findings, the literature review has indicated that influencer marketing is one of the most widespread marketing forms on Instagram and other social media platforms (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016; Kolarova, 2018).

2.12.4 Online purchasing platform

Different social media platforms have gained popularity due to the marketing abilities built into their software. It seems reasonable to say that these platforms occupy an essential space in the marketing world (Chen, 2018) as people increasingly depend on social media for their communication and purchasing information. The majority of people use social networking platforms for various purposes, of which consumption is a significant example (Kolarova, 2018). Social marketing has stretched beyond the traditional methods and practices of buying and selling since these platforms also allow for interaction and feedback between users. People do their shopping online, be it from the store close to home or in another part of the world. Marketing companies benefit from sharing their brands on Instagram and inviting Instagram users to purchase their products. They also use consumers' ability to spread the word about the product among their groups and communities (E-WOM) (Gvili & Levy, 2018; Kudesha & Kumar, 2017).

Yahia, Al-Neama and Kerbache (2018) launched an investigation into commerce on social media platforms by performing an online survey with Instagram users in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. The study first explored users' perceptions of the firms' characteristics and their influence on user trust. Secondly, they tested the influence of trust and platform usage through the theory of Unified Technology Acceptance and Use of Technology Model 2 (Yahia et al., 2018). Research findings indicated that a firm's reputation and price advantage significantly influence user trust, although users' habits weaken the influence. Contrary to expectations, social interaction with the online vendor decreased user trust and product diversity. The apparent ease of use of the platform, support, hedonic motives, and user habits increased online purchasing intent. The research findings could help businesses improve their understanding of the social commerce landscape and enhance their marketing strategies (Yahia et al., 2018).

2.12.5 Information platform

Instagram plays a significant role in informing people about the latest news, entertainment and keeping them connected. In addition, smartphones receive credit for social media communication, as many people have been enabled to use social media platforms where and when they want. The result is that consumers and influencers are increasingly adopting active roles in co-creating marketing content with brands (Ramos & Rodrigues, 2020).

To confirm the sharing of information between firms and their customers, Virtanen et al. (2017) did an investigation into the use of Instagram in small start-up businesses and the social media marketing practices adopted by the companies. The study focused on Instagram as a marketing tool to explore the influence of social media practices on organisations' productivity. The practices under review included creating and increasing awareness of the company's business and gaining more followers on its Instagram business account (Virtanen et al., 2017). It was found that Instagram enables companies to interact with their customers by endorsing consumers, following customers' profiles, liking followers' account content, and interacting with their followers through the Instagram Comments section (Virtanen et al., 2017).

These practices allowed companies to enlarge their customer circles to include people of all ages and professions. In return, the companies were endorsed by customers who share their business and brand awareness through Instagram (Virtanen et al., 2017). The study's value lies in the fact that it highlights the effect of product endorsement and interaction with customers through marketing information. Product endorsement acts as an intermediary between organisations and customers, which, in turn, increases not only productivity but also knowledge about different brands (Virtanen et al., 2017).

2.12.6 Brand development

Companies are gradually allocating a more significant part of their marketing capital and spending on social media sites to support their sales and brand development (Hudson et al., 2016). To study the impact that these practices have on social marketing, Hudson et al. (2016) performed three studies on how individual and national differences influence social media use and customer-brand relations. The first of these studies was survey-based and collected data from France, the UK, and the USA. A comparison was made between those consumers who engaged with their favourite brands via social media and users with little commitment to the brand and social media. The first survey indicated that social media use was positively related to brand relationship quality. A positive brand relationship became more noticeable where high

anthropomorphism existed, also known as the attribution of human traits, emotions, and mental qualities to non-human entities (Servais, 2018), in this case, the brands. Two subsequent studies substantiated the findings and confirmed that cultural differences exist in users' social media marketing responses to brands (Hudson et al., 2016). However, researchers also recommended further research on brand development, as the results of the surveys appeared to depend on culture (Hudson et al., 2016; Servais, 2018).

2.13 Brand positioning and disclosure language

Literature has indicated that brand positioning can be discussed in many ways, depending on whether it is used for market orientation, positioning strategy, or brand performance. Product placement or brand positioning refers to a kind of embedded marketing. It is a marketing technique in which products or brands are incorporated into other media, such as films, television, and other social media networks, to promote the sponsored brand or product (Górska-Warsewicz & Kulykovets, 2017).

Schmidt (2018) investigated Instagram's brand positioning and its influence on consumer engagement with the intent to sell products. The aim was to highlight best practices for product placement on Instagram to promote consumerism and, at the same time, also focus on disclosure language. The three types of disclosure languages included in Schmidt's research were:

- #Sponsored – to show when brands and influencers are paid to promote content
- Ambiguous hashtags, such as #ad hashtags, show whether the post is genuine or subsidised
- No disclosure language – no hashtags to define the purpose of the content

In his research, Schmidt (2018) analysed 60 Instagram posts in a quantitative survey of Swiss French-speaking females selected for their posts containing one of the three types of disclosure languages. Comments were analysed and classified into a series of categories to assess the general reaction and customer engagement levels on the sponsored posts. Schmidt (2018) also analysed five different communication and influencer agencies' views on the impact of Instagram on consumer behaviour. The research findings indicated that consumers are reluctant to respond to sponsored posts, although sponsorships can enhance customer engagement on Instagram. Furthermore, research findings could not confirm that Instagram influencers revealed credibility and impacted positive consumer behaviour toward their posts. Finally,

Schmidt (2018) argued that the trust-relationship between the influencer and community has not yet been established sufficiently enough to inspire consumerism, even though it is one of the primary elements in sponsored posts.

Schmidt's study created interest because Source Credibility theory and Instagram as a platform directed the research and appeal for companies to contemplate the source of information when promoting consumerism. Stephen et al. (2019) built their research on the work of Schmidt (2018). They argued that embedded sources render different responses on Instagram and that this core area demands further investigation.

The following sections will focus on a discussion of source credibility on Instagram. The words 'sponsored', and 'disclosure' are popular words and ethical issues in influencer marketing (Ye, Hudders, De Jans & De Veirman, 2021) which will be discussed under the most recent research in 2.10.

2.14 Source Credibility on Instagram

According to Ohanian's (1990) Source Credibility model, the degree of persuasion inherent to the transmitted message plays a vital role in the communication with the target segment. The influence or persuasiveness of a message depends on the reflected characteristics of the source. Credibility embraces various concepts that impact consumer attitude, intention, and behaviour. Also, credibility is strongly linked to information and forms part of communication (Ohanian, 1990).

The source is the core of credibility and defines the positive influence that the communicated message has on the receiver or transmitter. The degree of persuasiveness of a message depends on the source's credibility (Hovland, 1953). As discussed, Ohanian (1990) put forward three aspects that contribute to the credibility of the source:

- *Trust or trustworthiness of the source* – the extent to which the audience perceives communication as valid, with the attributes being honesty, dependability, sincerity, and reliability.
- *Expertise* – the source's ability to be perceived as qualified, knowledgeable, professional, experienced, skilled, and expert.
- *Source attractiveness* – the sent message is amplified by physical appeal and features such as beauty, elegance, and style, with dependent variables being:

- Similitude – similarity between source and receiver of the message
- Familiarity – the closeness of the receiver and the source
- Sympathy – the affection shown to the receptor.

This study uses the Source Credibility theory and its different aspects to explore the influence of celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements on Instagram consumer behaviour. The following literature discussions will be based on the credibility of Instagram sources, considering various messages that influence consumer attitude, intention, and behaviour. In consideration of this literature, it is important to provide an extension of this assessment to understand how these studies may vary when specifically considering micro-celebrities. In the following section, the researcher will consider micro-celebrities within the reviewed literature and understand specific variables such as endorsements purchases and option purchases of micro-celebrities.

2.15 Celebrities

Research on celebrities' influence on Instagram as a platform has indicated that they impact consumers' motivation to purchase and social media marketing in general (Chung & Cho, 2017). For example, a study performed in South Korea on consumers' parasocial interactions with celebrities while endorsing brands via Instagram positively impacted their followers' buying behaviour. The research established that (a) celebrities' parasocial relationships with followers mediated the relationship between social media interaction and source trustworthiness, (b) social media interactions influenced the parasocial relationships via self-disclosure, and (c) celebrity or source trustworthiness had a positive influence on brand credibility, which, in turn, led to purchase intentions (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Various celebrities have become brand ambassadors and interact with fans via their social media platforms to generate a passive but lucrative income (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2016). Users follow celebrities on Instagram because they are interested in their lifestyles and careers and want to collect more personal information aspects of their lives (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). The following sections continue with a discussion of the way celebrities encourage endorsements.

2.15.1 Celebrity endorsements and purchases

Celebrities are usually highly paid for brand endorsements via their Instagram accounts (Pelkonen, 2017). For many years, celebrities were the only influencers of social media brands until online social media platforms were established. Since then, literature has identified various themes, such as celebrity trustworthiness, authenticity, and positive language, to encourage consumer feedback and higher product sales. The suggestion was that brands should follow these themes when using celebrities to ensure successful sales (Pelkonen, 2017; Toffetti & Thorpe, 2018).

It has also been found that celebrities will have different engagement levels with those who follow them (Ford, 2018). These engagements can affect consumers' reactions to the endorsement relationship, depending on the celebrity's profession. In their study on the role of celebrity worship and profession, Roy, and Mishra (2018) indicated that in India and the UK, celebrities from more glamorous professions, for example, film actors, are perceived differently than celebrities from more performance-oriented professions, such as sports. They revealed humorous motives are more relevant for celebrities from a glamorous profession, whereas aspirational motives became more relevant for a performance-related profession. Thus, the effect of celebrity endorsements on consumers could be universal, whereas the outcome (e.g., brand attitude) might depend on the celebrity's profession and brand novelty (Roy & Mishra, 2018). Apart from offering several benefits for the endorsed brands, celebrity endorsements may also have a negative impact. This fact became apparent in personal scandals involving famous influencers such as Tiger Woods, Lance Armstrong, Martha Stewart, and O.J. Simpson. Counterbalancing negativity with a more positive sponsor attitude may enhance its personal image (Ford, 2018).

Accordingly, Carrillat and Ilicic (2019) opined in their study that celebrities' wealthy lifestyles serve as a core for powerful brand endorsement via Instagram. The authors' research framework comprised four stages of consumer response to celebrity endorsements, namely (a) procurement, (b) consolidation, (c) abrupt downfall or slow decline of sales after endorsement, and (d) recovery and resurgence of interest. However, evidence to support their research was limited, and no follow-up research confirmed their findings.

In general, sports celebrities are a group of people who have received the significant academic analysis for their influence on followers and the endorsement of brands. However, as a whole there is no consistency in research results concerning celebrity endorsements via Instagram,

suggesting that it continues to stay an active topic for research and further understanding. The research is limited, not by the frequency of publications but by the inconsistency of findings and follow-up studies (Poyry et al., 2019). Therefore, it seemed essential to further research users' perceptions of celebrities that they follow on Instagram. The research outcome will support previous research findings and contribute to the reliability of research findings on the phenomenon.

2.15.2 Effect of celebrity's attitude and credibility on user perceptions

Researchers have consistently sought to identify users' perceptions of celebrities on Instagram (Phua, Lin & Lim, 2018). A group of Australian researchers, including Ilicic, Kulczynski and Baxter (2018), studied the impact of a celebrity's smile perceived by users to be genuine (the Duchenne smile) on enhancing their persuasive appeal. Responses from 340 users were studied, and findings indicated that altering a celebrity's appearance in an advertisement can influence consumers' perceptions of the celebrity's authenticity. For example, consumers may perceive a celebrity as less genuine when they negatively think of the celebrity displaying a non-Duchenne (fake) smile (Ilicic et al., 2018). Conversely, when a celebrity appears in an endorsement with a Duchenne smile (an expression signifying real enjoyment), consumers may perceive the celebrity as more genuine, show an improved attitude toward the brand, and buy the brand.

The researchers proposed that even if a celebrity falls from grace, careful execution of the advertising campaign could counteract users' negative opinions toward the celebrity, thereby signifying that premature dumping and replacement of celebrity endorsers can be avoided (Ilicic et al., 2018; Ford, 2018). Although extensive studies have been trying to identify celebrities' successful influence on user purchase behaviours on Instagram, the topic continues as an area of investigation for a concrete understanding of the phenomenon (Zhu, Amelina & Yen, 2020).

Further, it is important to provide an extension of this assessment to understand how these studies may vary when specifically considering micro-celebrities. In the following section, the researcher will consider micro-celebrities within the reviewed literature and understand specific variables such as endorsements purchases and option purchases of micro-celebrities.

2.15.3 Micro-celebrity Perceptions, Endorsements and Purchases

The growing popularity of Instagram influencers or micro-celebrities has enabled these individuals to build large audiences of up to several million followers despite having no prior celebrity status (Gräve, 2017). Private sector corporations have caught onto the potential, especially for younger target groups, and are hiring these so-called ‘influencers’ as endorsers of their brands (Nouri, 2018). Micro-celebrities often replace celebrities in business advertising as social media marketers perceive them as more affordable when having to endorse a specific brand (Gräve, 2017). In his research, Gräve (2017) explored consumers’ general perceptions of social media influencers (micro-celebrities) compared to (traditional) celebrities to fill a gap in understanding the phenomenon. The study was conducted in Hamburg, Germany, via an online survey through which 590 comments were collected (Gräve, 2017). The participants were requested to rate 14 influencers (micro-celebrities) and (traditional) celebrities in pairwise comparisons (couplings) on their similarities. Gräve applied multidimensional scaling (MDS) as a method of analysis and discovered a significant difference in user perceptions of celebrities versus micro-celebrities.

Of the multiple social media influencer studies reviewed to date for this research, a lack of data still exists on how users perceive micro-celebrities – specifically when ordinary Instagram users leap to micro-celebrity status and gain the ability to influence customer purchase intentions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). As Instagram influencer marketing is one of the fastest-growing advertising and marketing trends, Sokolova and Kefi’s (2019) research findings indicate that micro-celebrities could suffer personally and financially when posting inauthentic and sponsored brands on their user accounts. The authors advocate that parasocial aspects, including authenticity and communication, are critical mediating factors for endorsement success.

Many micro-celebrities use Instagram to inspire users' responses to their endorsements (Baulch & Pramiyanta, 2018). Changing perceptions and challenging norms are noteworthy aspects of micro-celebrity output on social media. Hackley, Hackley and Bassiouni (2018) studied the use of Instagram by members of the Indonesian hijab-wearing community but did not specifically focus on user perceptions of Instagram micro-celebrities. However, the impact of Instagram on practices, and the fact that it was used for macro-social engagement, meaning that micro-celebrities and users discussed their perceptions of different social phenomena together, seemed important. In a study by Nouri (2018), the influence of Instagram micro-celebrities on

pop-culture fashion and beauty trends was investigated under the assumption that micro-celebrity's impact positive user perceptions more significantly than celebrities. The research findings also indicated that the ability of micro-celebrities to create communities where users feel more connected to the influencer through higher levels of authenticity, engagement, and reliability was much higher than celebrities' ability to do the same. Nouri (2018) concluded that social media marketing efforts should prioritise micro-celebrities as they have a significantly more efficient audience penetration and influence on users to buy their endorsements than celebrities (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

In contrast to Nouri's (2018) findings, Gräve's (2017) research findings indicated that celebrities were evaluated more favourably than micro-celebrities. However, differences diminished the higher the level of user familiarity with the celebrities became. Findings were even reversed when perceived trustworthiness and the celebrity's resemblance to the user's self were considered (Gräve, 2017).

Azzman and Manaf (2019) postulated that Instagram micro-celebrities influence female followers' perceptions of their body image, help them adopt healthier eating lifestyles, and persuade them to purchase the endorsed products on their sites. Consequently, their research aim was to examine the influence of celebrity–fan engagement on Instagram and whether it impacted hijab culture among Muslim women in Malaysia (Azzman & Manaf, 2019). A cross-sectional online survey was conducted among 630 female university students from the International Islamic University of Malaysia. Participants were asked to think of a favourite female Muslim celebrity they follow on Instagram while completing the survey.

Research results showed that about a third of the most famous female Muslim influencers on Instagram were micro-celebrities (bloggers, vloggers, YouTube personalities, and social media influencers), debunking a portion of the research hypothesis (Azzman & Manaf, 2019). Research findings further indicated that consumer attitude, homophily (love of the same), and parasocial interaction with social media users influence follower numbers. The number of likes on celebrities' photos was used as a measure of success and trustworthiness. After removing social and contextual factors, such as the respondents' religious and educational backgrounds, research findings indicated that users who had a positive attitude toward the hijab and experienced a higher parasocial bond with the Muslim micro-celebrity had a more positive perception of the hijab culture. Azzman and Manaf's (2019) research has significance as it shed light on the importance of micro-celebrities and their influence via Instagram.

2.16 Micro-celebrities and influencer marketing

Influencer marketing has mainly been adopted through trial and error without in-depth insight into how social media influencers or micro-celebrities should strategically be incorporated as a tool in the marketing mix (Ye, Hudders, De Jans & De Veirman, 2021). Nevertheless, many businesses engage with micro-celebrities to promote their brands and target their large audiences. Rich interactions between influencers and followers quickly increase the scale of their networks and strengthen their relations (Wang et al. 2020). Furthermore, influencer marketing has proven itself an effective and cost-effective tool in that consumers often do not perceive it as advertising, which guarantees businesses a wider reach of their products to large audiences and beyond (Hudders, De Jans & De Veirman, 2021). The authors applied bibliometric and thematic content analysis to summarise current academic influencer marketing literature and identify the main themes in the domain.

Micro-celebrities' potential to reach large audiences has motivated companies to include them as a relatively new marketing communication tool known as influencer marketing (Ye et al., 2020). The clout of influencer marketing classically stems from the micro-celebrities' expertise, popularity and reputation (Ladhari, Massa & Skandrani, 2020). Ye et al. (2021) included Sundermann and Raabe's (2019) publication on influencer marketing written from a strategic communication perspective. The authors identified influencer marketing communication, influencer type, source credibility, and advertising content as important characteristics in the social media marketing domain. Their publication was recently extended through a systematic review of the literature by Hudders et al. (2020) who synthesised the results of 154 academic publications on influencer marketing to develop a conceptual framework and review.

2.17 Ethical issues and disclosure in influencer marketing

A subtheme in the publication of Hudders et al. (2020) is the effectiveness of sponsorship disclosures to mitigate ethical concerns. In their publications, Boerman (2020) and Kay, Mulcahy and Parkinson (2020) made it clear that it was legally required for all influencers (celebrities and micro-celebrities) to disclose the commercial nature of their product endorsements to avoid the covert and deceptive nature of influencer marketing and guarantee fair and ethical communication (Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020). Some studies established sponsorship disclosure in consumer advertising and brand recognition leads to negative consumer perceptions of influencer credibility, negative brand attitudes, and decreased

purchase intention (Boerman, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2020). However, Kay et al. (2020) confirmed the opposite, indicating that when consumers were exposed to influencer disclosures, the products were viewed as more attractive, and higher levels of purchase intention were observed than those exposed to non-disclosed influencers' marketing of beauty products. Other factors affecting disclosure in the influencer marketing context were disclosure language and timing (van Reijmersdal et al., 2020), disclosure type (De Jans et al., 2020), and disclosure content (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). Thus, practitioners and micro-celebrities should be guided to implement disclosures, and scholarly research should pay further attention to disclosure effects within the influencer marketing domain.

2.17.1 Strategic use of micro-celebrities

As mentioned in the paragraphs above, Hudders et al. (2021) published a literature review and conceptual framework about the strategic use of social media influencers or micro-celebrities (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020) and who they refer to as influencers (also called social media stars by Gaenssle & Budzinski). Hudders et al. confirmed that many social media users have gained online fame, indicated by their large number of followers, by creating attractive and interesting content on their social media profiles. Furthermore, they established a strong online identity through initially sharing their interests and opinions in personal blogs and then swiftly turning to social media with the emergence of social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and the most recent rising star, TikTok (Hudders et al., 2021). Hence, micro-celebrities can correctly be referred to as 'being famous to a niche group of people' (Raun, 2018, p. 104).

The consequences are that advertisers approach them frequently to endorse products, brands, organisations, or models on their social media profiles, a marketing tactic described above as influencer marketing and on which research has flourished since 2016. Interestingly, Navarro et al. (2020) performed a survey among 2710 marketing practitioners in Europe and 914 in Latin America to establish how they regarded and applied micro-celebrities in public relations promotion. While the professionals highly admired micro-celebrities for PR purposes, especially in Latin America, the strategic use of these micro-celebrities was still limited. Most professionals had not devised specific strategies to share with micro-celebrities or identified relevant micro-celebrities for their promotions, though qualitative aspects, such as brand fit and content creation, seemed to gain prominence.

2.17.2 The efficacy of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements

The literature review for the study at hand could not reach a definite conclusion on the preference of celebrities versus micro-celebrities, and therefore the latest publications were consulted for discussion in this section. According to the literature review by Hudders et al. (2021), studies on the efficacy of micro-celebrity content and product endorsements compared to those of celebrities (Schouten, Janssen, & Verspaget 2020) or with sponsored brand posts (Jin & Muqaddam 2019) consistently showed micro-celebrity endorsements being more effective than celebrity endorsements; however, they differed in the underlying mechanisms explaining the effects. Schouten et al. (2020) indicated that participants experienced a similarity with and identified more with micro-celebrities than with celebrities and that they trusted micro-celebrities more, while Jin et al. (2019) ascribed the higher trust in micro-celebrities to their social presence.

2.17.3 Building micro-celebrity credibility on Instagram

Collaborations between influencers and brands have become increasingly popular in recent years to promote products to the influencers' target audiences (Belanche et al., 2021) while influencer marketing has emerged as an effective way for brands to connect with their customers (Tafesse & Wood, 2021). According to Belanche et al. (2021), previous research has mainly focused on influencer marketing as a commercial action considered to enhance followers' perceptions and persuade them toward promoted brands (Djafarova & Bowes, 2020; Ki et al., 2020) overlooking the consequences of marketing actions on influencers' credibility and their relationships with their followers.

Belanche et al. (2021) explored how micro-celebrities' promotional actions affect their credibility, follower attitudes and responses, such as following, imitating, and referring them to other users. Their research was performed via a social media platform on followers of a popular influencer to test their structural equation model. The results showed that influencer-product congruence positively affected followers' perceptions of the micro-celebrities' credibility and their attitude toward the influencer while paid communication negatively influenced their perceptions. Followers' perceptions that influencers were paid to take part in promotional activities harmed their credibility. Credibility seems essential for generating positive attitudes toward the influencer. Finally, both perceived that credibility and attitude foster positive behavioural responses toward the micro-celebrity, and they must enhance these factors to retain their influencing capacity. Their research implied that it provided positive

managerial guidelines for micro-celebrities and brands to enhance followers' experiences when exposed to promotions on social media (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020).

2.18 Summary and Conclusion

Source Credibility was discussed as the theoretical framework within which literature on social media, social media marketing, and social media platforms was reviewed to address the research problem. Despite extensive financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements and the effect these influencers have on consumer purchase behaviour.

The literature review focused on consumer marketing, market segmentation, and Instagram as the social media platform of choice for this study. It included, among others, celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements and their influence on consumer behaviour with the intent to answer the research questions:

- What are Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?
- How do Instagram users' propensity to purchase products vary based on their perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence?

The literature review covered a large area of scholarly research to provide a background for discussions on source credibility, trustworthiness, endorser and product experience, Instagram, celebrities versus micro-celebrities, and the influence these celebrities have on consumer behaviour. In addition, the literature was structured to support the research design, data analysis, interpretation, and discussion of the empirical research findings to follow in the subsequent chapters.

The reviewed literature indicated the importance of understanding factors related to Instagram as a research tool, source credibility, as well as understanding differentiation between Instagram influencer's approaches, marketing brand methodologies to using celebrities, and micro-celebrities (Liu & Suh, 2017; Udovita & Hilal, 2018). Research indicates a significant amount of research outside of the United States, with this specific focus predominantly on Asia and Australia (Azzman & Manaf, 2019; Hackley et al., 2018). Findings also demonstrated the frequency of research based on micro-celebrities rather than

celebrities as a tool used for marketing approaches (Abidin, 2016; Highfield & Abdin, 2020). However, there was a gap in the literature regarding how Instagram users respond to liberty and micro-celebrity endorsement civility products and how these celebrities influence consumer behaviour

Inconsistencies and a lack of concrete research findings were found when addressing the research question concerning celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence on users' purchasing behaviours. Although several researchers were not explicit in reporting their research findings, the tendency appeared toward selecting micro-celebrities as brand influencers. This study focused on research literature in which Instagram was used to collect and extract data. The general outcome of the literature review is that consumers relate to and engage better with micro-celebrities than celebrities because they view them as more credible.

In conclusion, research studies that applied Source Credibility as a framework for research on celebrity versus micro-celebrity influences are listed in Table 2.1 to ensure validity and trustworthiness. Those studies that used Instagram as the data collection platform appear as an additional column in the list. Another two columns were added to list the preferences of celebrities or micro-celebrities in the research findings. An important factor was to confirm from which country the research was initiated. Most publications have been either from Eastern countries or north-eastern Europe.

Table 2.1 Summary of literature review findings

Source Credibility as a framework	Instagram as a research tool	Origin of publication	User preference – celebrities	User preference – micro-celebrities	Authors
		Asia		X	Liu & Suh, 2017; Udovita & Hilal, 2018; Fatmasari et al., 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Ki et al., 2020; Liu & Liu, 2019.
X	X	Asia		X	Chang & Woo, 2019; Jin et al., 2019; Zhu et al., 2020.
X		Asia		X	Ananda & Wandebori, 2016; Rahmi et al., 2016.
		Asia	X		Chung & Cho, 2017.
	X	Asia		X	Azzman & Manaf, 2019; Hackley, Hackley & Bassiouni, 2018.

	X	Australia		X	Abidin, 2016; Leaver, Highfield & Abidin, 2020.
	X	Australia		X	Khamis et al., 2017.
	X	Australia	X		Carrillat & Ilicic, 2019.
X		UK		X	Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019.
		UK		X	Bishop, 2020
X		Europe	X		De Veirman et al., 2017; Ruiz-Gómez, 2019; Schouten et al., 2019; Almeida, 2020.
		Ireland		X	Baker, 2018.
		USA		X	Nouri, 2018.
	X	USA		X	Jin & Muqaddam, 2019.
		Europe		X	Daniel, 2020.

Table 2.1 summarises the literature reviewed for the discussion of this chapter. The table and contents do not denote all research literature reviewed on the research phenomenon and questions but only those publications contributing at least two concepts to the list of findings. Table 2.1 indicates that Source Credibility has been used in several studies on celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements and their trustworthiness, attractiveness, and experience. Unfortunately, few concrete research findings could be retrieved on the influence of the different celebrities on users' purchase behaviours. Nonetheless, most literature findings indicated that micro-celebrities receive a more positive response to their brand endorsements than celebrities. With the existing inconsistencies in research findings, it became clear that the research gap needed to be addressed to verify the research problem. Instagram has been used as a research tool in various social media marketing and influencer studies. The study also focused on market segmentation and consumer behaviour, including brand bashing, and sharing emotions in user comments on Instagram. However, research has indicated that there is still no clarity on Instagram influencer demographics, influence, and trustworthiness relating to younger user engagement and purchase intentions.

Furthermore, a lack of research was found on American celebrities versus micro-celebrities and their influence on consumer behaviour. Therefore, current research findings could not be extrapolated to include US celebrities and social media influencers and their demographics. It

became clear that there was a noticeable gap in understanding how Instagram users respond to celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products and how these celebrities influence consumer behaviour. The study intends to narrow the research gap, address the research problem, and contribute to the body of knowledge on social media influencer marketing and Instagram user behaviour. Therefore, Chapter 3 will describe the research methodology applied to the empirical study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

“Size doesn’t always matter... studies have shown that for Instagram audiences, the percentage of likes as a percentage of follower’s peak at around 1,000 followers with 8% engagement” – Neal Schaffer, 2020.

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 detailed social media marketing, Instagram, consumer behaviour, celebrities versus micro-celebrities as social media influencers, and Source Credibility as the theoretical framework. Various literature findings were highlighted when it became evident that no conclusion could be reached on whether celebrities or micro-celebrities show the most credibility and influence and engagement during brand endorsements.

This study was prompted by the gap in research evidence on celebrity versus micro-celebrity Instagram endorsements of beauty and their influence on consumer purchase behaviour. The idea was to conclude how knowledge could benefit the beauty industry and social media marketing. As was highlighted in the previous chapters, the beauty industry has become severely dependent on social media marketing and, more so, on social media influencers to endorse their brands. The research problem was formulated as follows. Despite extensive financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements. This chapter describes the research design and philosophical approach, research methods, and the sampling techniques followed to perform the primary research and address the research questions:

3.2 Research Questions

This multiple case study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are Instagram users’ perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?
- How do Instagram users’ propensity to purchase products vary based on their perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence?

Bryman and Bell (2015) argue that a detailed description of the research process increases its reliability and trustworthiness. Thus, the research approach, research problem, and research questions discussed in Chapter 1 drove the research methodology and design.

3.3 Research Design and Strategy

The research followed an interpretive epistemology where data extracted from the user comments was coded into themes and verified against the Source Credibility model's predefined themes (Ohanian, 1990) to answer the research questions. Different research methodologies apply different research strategies, of which the most relevant are quantitative and qualitative research. A qualitative methodology was most appropriate for this study as it provided an opportunity to robustly analyze the perceptions of users. Additionally, a quantitative approach, which relies on statistical methodologies and hypotheses was not appropriate for this study as the aim was not to gather numerical data (as demonstrated by Saunders et al., 2015). Having had a subjective ontology and an interpretive epistemology toward knowledge, the researcher addressed a unique influencer–consumer niche in the social media marketing context. Consequently, a qualitative research strategy was appropriate for exploring the textual information associated with the social media data. In qualitative research, the comparison and interpretation of data are linked to the researcher's knowledge of the research topic and research methods (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, a qualitative case study was employed as the most effective means for considering social media comment data through a qualitative approach.

3.3.1 Research methods

The researcher applied qualitative multiple case studies to collect relevant data to address the research questions. *Case study* research comprises an in-depth study of a particular case, whether it is a phenomenon within its environmental setting, a person, company, work of art, element, or an idea of complex and confined nature (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ridder, 2017). Yin (2014) refers to a case study as an empirical inquiry to investigate a current phenomenon within a real-life situation, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are unclear. *Multiple or collective* case studies comprise the simultaneous investigation of several cases comprising different phenomena, people, populations, or situations (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Yin, 2014). Finally, *comparative* case study research includes matching and interpreting different settings to emphasise contrasting behaviours and observations and

developing new information or theories from the research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Saunders et al., 2015).

The study at hand comprised a qualitative case study design and methodology. First, ten celebrities and micro-celebrities were selected in the multiple case study method as cases around which the research centred. Second, 1000 user comments from each of the cases' accounts were manually extracted from Instagram into ten Excel sheets for clean-up and identification of tentative themes (according to the Source Credibility model).

The selection of 10 celebrities and micro-celebrities was based upon purposeful selection from the Instagram application according to predefined selection criteria. The defined selection criteria were based upon the number of followers in which each case should have more than 1,000,000 followers. The next criteria was country, in which celebrities and micro-celebrities within the United States were chosen and analyzed for the purpose of the study. Added inclusion criteria comprised demographics and beauty products, which were specifically endorsed by celebrities and micro-celebrities on their Instagram accounts.

Additional themes were identified during the scanning of the data and added to the tentative Source Credibility themes. Clusters of data were loaded into the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) system to automatically analyse and thematise data into high-frequency word clouds and count the themes. The data were manually interpreted while themes were compared within the couples and across the couplings. The couplings were to view differences and similarities in the data to address the research questions and provide recommendations for applying the research findings. Therefore, it was important to establish the credibility of the beauty brand endorsers and whether celebrities or micro-celebrities should be engaged during certain stages of the beauty brand campaign.

3.3.2 Sample size and selection techniques

The selection of celebrities and micro-celebrities depended on the sample size and the amount of data managed comfortably during the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). As mentioned previously, qualitative research usually requires a smaller sample size than quantitative research but large enough to address the research questions and reach a convincing and reliable conclusion (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Qualitative research aims to reach theoretical saturation, which occurs when the researcher is convinced that any new data

would not influence the research findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015). The saturation stage is reached when adding more codes or themes does not create new data (Charmaz, 2017; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The sampling technique that seemed most appropriate for selecting five celebrities and five micro-celebrities as units of analysis is explained below.

The two most general types of sampling techniques include *probability* sampling and *non-probability* sampling. Probability sampling is a technique in which a ‘random sample’ is selected from a list of units representing the entire target population. In this case, probability sampling would mean that any social media influencer stood a chance of being selected as one of the cases, which was not the situation. The non-probability sampling technique defines several units or cases purposefully selected to focus on a specific research phenomenon (Babbie, 2015). For this study, a list of celebrities and micro-celebrities were purposefully selected from the Instagram app according to the following selection criteria.

- Number of followers. All the cases selected for the study had to have more than one million followers.
- Country. The literature review has indicated that most research publications on social media marketing and influencers were from Eastern and northeastern European countries. Therefore, it was decided that the research will focus on celebrities and micro-celebrities from the USA.
- Demographics. A discussion in Chapter 2 and statistics indicated that the highest number of followers on Instagram were Millennials born between 1980 and 1995 (26–40 years), and secondly, Centennials born between 1996 and 2012 (25 years and younger). All celebrities and micro-celebrities were within these two age groups on the date of selection in May 2020.
- Beauty products. All celebrities and micro-celebrities endorsed comparable beauty brands on their Instagram accounts. These brands were identified beforehand for the coupling and comparing of five celebrities with five micro-celebrities to establish their credibility and when best to apply them in beauty brand campaigns.
- Post Selection. For the purpose of the study, the researcher selected randomly a single post for review. The purpose of selecting a singular post was due to the overwhelming amount of data that would be available if the researcher selected, conversely, all or several posts from each of the individuals. The selection of a single post was considered appropriate, due to the qualitative and case study approach used for this study. Additionally, due to the follower range and size of each of the micro-celebrities and

celebrities, a single post was considered appropriate due to the substantial amount of data that can be gained from a single post (Liu & Suh, 2017; Ki & Kim, 2019; Ki et al., 2020; Liu & Liu, 2019).

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Multiple Case Studies Celebrities

Five celebrities were selected on the Instagram app according to the sampling criteria discussed above. Table 3.1 presents a list of the celebrities, the beauty products they endorsed, and additional information on their number of followers and net worth as of May 2020. The table is followed by a description of each celebrity’s case extracted from social media sites. The data on the celebrities was compiled from the websites and reworked from May 2020 to July 2020.

Table 3. 1 Celebrities selected

Name	Product	Number of Followers	Net Worth
Elle Fanning	L’Oréal Mascara	4.5 million	\$6 million
Gigi Hadid	Maybelline Mascara	54.6 million	\$29 million
Kendall Jenner	Estee Lauder Double Wear Makeup	138 million	\$45 million
Bella Hadid	Dior Rouge	31.2 million	\$29million
Hailey Bieber	Bare Minerals Foundation	27.5 million	\$20 million

(Net worth source: <https://www.celebritynetworth.com>)

3.3.1.1 Elle Fanning – L’Oréal Lash Paradise Mascara

Born: 9 April 1998 (age 23) – American actress. Centennial.

Mary Elle Fanning made her first-ever appearance in the film *I am Sam*. She was 2 years old in *I Am Sam* when she played the character Lucy. That was over 20 years ago in 2001. Today she is 23 and has acted in 48 movies since *I Am Sam* was released.

However, she made her first significant breakthrough by starring in the J.J. Abrams' film *Super 8* in 2011, a role that gained her a much broader fan base and critical acclaim, including a Spotlight Award at the Hollywood film festival in the same year.

Since gaining international popularity, Elle has starred in over 48 feature films and has received over ten nominations for various awards. In addition, she has been an ambassador for L'Oréal Paris since 2017. This role has provided her and L'Oréal with a broader appeal among younger audiences. In early 2019, the brand boasted an 11.4% increase in sales, mainly due to Elle's popularity in China and India (Miller, 2019).

L'Oréal's 'Voluminous Lash Paradise Washable Mascara' increased sales (one in every eight seconds in 2017) when she first started promoting the item. The brand recognised a need to appeal to a younger audience and invested in Fanning as a practical model in today's market (De Jans *et al.*, 2020). While Fanning appeals to a fan base of all ages, most followers are in the teen to young adult bracket.

In May 2020, Fanning boasted 4.5 million followers on her official Instagram account and had close to 60 different fan accounts. Elle does not have an official Facebook or Twitter account but has numerous fans from both platforms. Her first Instagram post announcing her selection as L'Oréal ambassador (@ellefanning, 2020) received a positive response with over 7000 comments. In October 2018, Fanning posted her tribute to the women of L'Oréal Paris, walking along the Seine River for 'Le Défilé L'Oréal Paris'. After that, she received thousands of responses and over 3000 comments, which showed how responsive her fan base is to her engagements with them (@ellefanning, 2020).

3.4.2 Gigi Hadid – Maybelline Mascara

Born: 23 April 1995 (age 26) – American fashion model. Centennial.

Jelena Noura 'Gigi' Hadid started modelling when she was two years old. In 2011, Gigi was awarded the face of the 2012 Guess campaign. After moving to New York in 2013, she signed with IMG Models and debuted on the New York Fashion Week stage in February 2014. She became a household name in New York's fashion scene and was featured on the CR Fashion Book magazine cover. In January 2015, Hadid was named 'Model of the Year' and brand ambassador for Maybelline New York.

Gigi Hadid has walked the runway for almost every well-known fashion house, including Chanel, Versace, Valentino, Max Mara, Fendi, and Anna Sui. She appeared several times on

the cover of *Vogue* magazine and in Victoria's Secret fashion shows. Hadid lately collaborated with Maybelline launching her line of make-up named 'Gigi Hadid X Maybelline'. The merger has proved highly profitable for both the brand and the supermodel (Kirst, 2015; Jossel, 2017)

Hadid has close to 60 million followers on Instagram, 4.3 million on Facebook and 9.3 million on Twitter. In addition, she often appears on Instagram live for Maybelline, promoting the brand and collaborating with Erin Parsons, Maybelline's New York-based global makeup artist. Along with Hadid's followers, Maybelline boasts 10.3 million followers (Kirst, 2015; Jossel, 2017).

In June 2018, Hadid and 'GigiXMaybelline' won the Vogue Beauty Award for 'Most Memorable Ad Campaign' – her post on Instagram received thousands of responses and over 2800 comments (@gigihadid, Instagram, 2018). In addition, the 2018 advertisement for Maybelline's iconic 'Hyper Curl' mascara received thousands of responses and over 7800 comments (@gigihadid, 2020).

3.4.3 Kendall Jenner – Estee Lauder Double Wear Makeup

Born: 3 November 1995 (age 25) – American model. Centennial.

Kendall Nicole Jenner rose to fame on *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, a reality show run from 2007 until the present. Jenner began modelling for Wilhelmina Models at the age of 14, with breakout seasons in 2014 and 2015. After walking the runway for high fashion designers at New York, Milan, and Paris fashion weeks, Jenner has appeared on numerous magazine covers, including teen magazines *American Cheerleader*, *Teen Prom*, *Looks*, and *Flavour*. Kendall Jenner is considered a traditional celebrity due to the fame that she gained from ATV parents rather than purely a social media presence. As noted in chapter one, traditional celebrities are differentiated from micro-celebrities concerning how their fame was gained initially. Thus, traditional celebrities gain fame through film, TV, or music rather than micro-celebrities who gained fame through social media (see Jian et al., 2016).

Jenner had more than 131 million fans on Instagram, 29.5 million on Twitter, and 16 million on Facebook in May 2020. The Jenner/Kardashian business model has launched many products and campaigns for all its members, and Kendall has personally created two signature nail lacquers for the OPI brand. She is also the brand ambassador for Estee Lauder. In addition, a 2016 advertisement for Maybelline Double Wear Foundation received many thousands of responses and over 13,600 comments (@kendalljenner, 2016).

The launch announcement of her exclusive Estee Lauder lipstick shade ‘Restless’ received several thousand responses and over 23,000 comments (@kendalljenner, 2016; Instagram, 2015). In addition, Estee Lauder reported an 18% increase in sales in 2017 due to their collaboration with Jenner and other young celebrities in the brand’s campaign to appeal to a younger audience (Reuters, 2017).

3.3.1.4 Bella Hadid – Dior Rouge

Born: 9 October 1996 (age 24) – American model. Centennial.

Isabella ‘Bella’ Khair Hadid began modelling at age 16 and signed up with IMG Models in 2014. She has walked the runway for Chanel, Hilfiger, Diane von Furstenberg, and Marc Jacobs and has appeared on the magazine covers of *Vogue*, *Elle*, and *Seventeen*. In addition, Bella has won the coveted ‘Model of the Year’ title on three separate occasions and has starred in several television shows, short films, commercials, and music videos.

Bella Hadid has been the brand ambassador for Dior make-up since 2016. This role has earned her international acclaim and has fuelled controversy in the Arab community due to her apparent disrespectful remarks concerning the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia in 2019. She boasted around 31.2 million followers on Instagram and 1.2 million on Twitter in May 2020. Bella does not keep an official Facebook account, and Dior specifically chose Hadid as an ambassador to leverage her fame on Instagram (Silver, 2016; Bella Hadid, 2018).

3.4.5 Hailey Bieber – Bare Minerals Foundation

Born: 22 November 1996 (age 24) – American model. Centennial.

Hailey Bieber (nee Baldwin) is the daughter of actor Stephen Baldwin. She has modelled since 2014 and signed up with IMG Models in 2016. She married Canadian singer Justin Bieber in 2018. She has been photographed for magazines, including *Vogue*, *Teen Vogue*, *W*, and *Marie Claire*, and has featured in several advertising campaigns, including Ralph Lauren and H&M. Hailey Bieber is considered a traditional celebrity due to her career outside of social media within TV and other popular media programs (see Jian et al., 2016).

She had more than 27.5 million fans on Instagram, 817,000 on Facebook and 1.4 million on Twitter as of May 2020. Bieber has been the face of Bare Minerals makeup since early 2018. She is known for her barely-there looks, with a minimal show of makeup, and therefore pulling off a natural look in line with the brand’s image (Hailey Bieber, 2020). Bare Minerals chose to

partner with Bieber due to her social media reach, her international modelling career, and her values and personality that align with the brand (Miles, 2019). In addition, Bieber makes a concerted effort to use her social media platforms and collaboration with Bare Minerals to advocate her stance on bullying and mental health awareness (Baird-Murray, 2020).

3.5 Micro-celebrities

Five micro-celebrities were selected on the Instagram app according to the sampling criteria discussed in 3.2.2. Table 3.2 presents a list of micro-celebrities, the beauty product they endorsed on their profiles, and information extracted from the web on their number of followers and net worth as of May 2020. The summary table is followed by case study research on each of the micro-celebrities extracted from websites. The data was compiled during May and June 2020. The selection of micro-celebrities was considered appropriate for this study due to their following and alignment with the pre-identified selection criteria. Notably, many of the micro-celebrities identified are also found on the YouTube platform and share content frequently through this medium. However, Instagram is considered a significant platform for gaining followers within a specified age range and enables influencers to specifically target products for their followers on this platform. Additionally, micro-celebrities are often found on multiple platforms as a means of gaining additional profit, followers, and engagement (Baird-Murray, 2020). The selection of micro-celebrities, though their presence is also notable on YouTube, was appropriate due to their alignment with the pre-identified inclusion criteria for this study.

Table 3. 2 Micro-celebrities selected

Name	Product	Number of Followers	Net Worth
Shayla Mitchell	Maybelline Palette	2.7 million	\$1.5–\$2 million
Nikkie Tutorials	Fenty Beauty Concealer	14.1 million	\$6 million
Jeffree Starr	L’Oréal Infallible Concealer	15.9 million	\$200 million
Laurag_143	Gerard Cosmetics (GC) Lipstick	1.9 million	\$1–\$5 million
Manny Gutierrez	Hourglass Vanish Foundation	4.2 million	\$1.3 million

(Net worth source: <https://www.celebritynetworth.com>)

3.5.1 Shayla Mitchell – Maybelline Palette

Born: 14 September 1987 (age 33) – Make-up artist. Millennial.

Beauty vlogger Shayla Mitchell is best known as Makeup Shayla on her successful YouTube channel and Instagram account. Shayla, who started her career as a professional ‘make-up’ artist, promoted her freelance business on her YouTube channel in 2012 and had more than 2.7 million followers on Instagram, over 135,000 on Twitter and 744,000 subscribers on YouTube in May 2020.

Mitchell’s beauty vlogs gained the interest of make-up house Maybelline, landing her a lucrative contract and a collaborative beauty range known as ‘Maybelline X Shayla’, including an eye-shadow palette and three mascaras. Maybelline is known for its driving social engagement between social media influencers and the beauty brand. The social media campaign that launched Mitchell’s ‘City Mini Palette’ has been one of the most successful to date, with products sold out within days of the launch. In addition, Shayla has collaborated with MAC, Secret, Estee Lauder, Buxom, and Laura Mercier on sponsored content (Schiffer, 2017).

Shayla’s use of YouTube and Instagram as platforms for her make-up tutorials allows her to charge up to about \$6000 per post on her Instagram account. Additionally, Shayla has successfully implemented a financially lucrative business model using self-promotion with social media brands (Makeupshayla, 2020).

3.5.2 Nikkie de Jager – Fenty Beauty Concealer

Born 2 March 1994 (age 27) – Make-up artist. Millennial.

Nikkie de Jager is best known for her YouTube channel ‘NikkieTutorials’, on which she posts videos of her before-and-after make-up looks and promotes different brands. Nikkie is a professional make-up artist with a qualification from the B Academy in Amsterdam. Through simple yet effective self-marketing, she has achieved fame across Europe and other countries, landing a host spot at the online Eurovision Song Contest in 2020. In a video posted in February 2020, Nikkie Tutorials came out as transgender, gaining a considerably larger following added by her LGBTQI fan base (BBC, 2020).

De Jager has worked together with beauty brands Ofra and Maybelline. She was named as one of Forbes' best ten beauty make-up influencers in 2017. The singer Rihanna approached Nikkie Tutorials to endorse her 'Fenty Beauty' make-up palettes on Nikkie's YouTube channel. Such an action is unprecedented as, usually, Rihanna's make-up artists would showcase her new products.

De Jager had more than 2.1 million followers on Twitter, 1.1 million on Facebook, 14.1 million on Instagram and 13.4 million subscribers on YouTube in May 2020 (Krause, 2020; NikkieTutorials, 2020).

3.5.3 Jeffree Star – L'Oréal Infallible Foundation

Born: 15 November 1985 (age 35) – American entrepreneur and singer. Millennial.

Jeffree Star is a singer and entrepreneur, and the founder of Jeffree Star Cosmetics. In 2018, Forbes titled him one of the highest-paid YouTube micro-celebrities, earning \$18 million from his videos and endorsements alone.

Star began his social media career on Myspace long before the rise of Instagram and Facebook. He started blogging (vlogging) about his life, music career, and fashion design and later moved to promote his 'Jeffree Star Cosmetics' range, first on YouTube and later on Instagram. Jeffree enhanced his YouTube channel appearance to promote and review new products from various make-up lines. The video products include the new 'Infallible' foundation from L'Oréal, which he stated is "good value for money and lives up to the name 'Glow'". His video review received 2.9 million views (JeffreeStar, 2020).

Jeffree Star had around 15.9 million followers on Instagram, 3 million on Facebook, 7.7 million on Twitter, and 18.2 million subscribers on YouTube in May 2020. In addition, his YouTube review of 'Maybelline 24 Hour Super Stay Foundation' received over 6.9 million views (JeffreeStar, 2020).

3.5.4 Laura Gurrola – Laurag_143 – Gerard Cosmetics (GC) Lipstick

Born: 2 November 1986 (age 34) – American social media beauty micro-celebrity. Millennial.

Laura Gurrola is a social media micro-celebrity who has gained widespread popularity for her Instagram account, short makeup tutorials, lifestyle and fashion-related posts, and time as a

LiveGlam ambassador. She already started posting to Instagram in the late 2010s and has her own Laura G makeup line that she promotes through LiveGlam on Instagram. She also posts regular videos and cosmetic tutorials to promote her brand (Mann, 2019).

Gurrola is engaged to Dhar Man. Their social media partnership ‘Dhar and Laura’ has gained them more than 1.9 million fans on Instagram, 335,000 subscribers on YouTube, 120,000 followers on Facebook, and 6000 followers on Twitter as of May 2020 (Mann, 2019). Each of Laura’s four most recent Instagram posts about Gerard Cosmetics had over 9000 likes. In June 2016, Laura Gurrola worked with her fellow social media celebrity and beauty vlogger, Manny Gutierrez, on the highlighter challenge.

3.5.6 Manny Gutierrez – Hourglass Vanish Foundation

Born 4 April 1991 (age 30) – Make-up artist. Millennial.

Manny Gutierrez, professionally addressed as Manny MUA, is a makeup artist, a YouTube beauty blogger, and the Maybelline beauty brand's first male ambassador. Gutierrez had more than 4.2 million fans on Instagram, 4.8 million subscribers on YouTube, and 1.5 million on Twitter in May 2020. Manny does not have an official Facebook account.

Manny MUA uses YouTube to review and ‘myth bust’ beauty hacks, drugstore cosmetic brands, and mystery boxes from various sources. His videos receive thousands of views, and there have been many copycat videos posted using his handle as a promotion tactic by different brands and influencers. Since Gutierrez uses multiple brands in his review videos, there are thousands of responses to each post. Each beauty brand is showcased without any affiliation.

With Manny having no affiliation, his sponsored brand content differs from the other micro-celebrities above. Typically, ‘sponsored’ posts are paid for by the brands, whereas Gutierrez’s ‘real’ posts offer brand ‘free’ advertising without the apparent marketing ploy (De Jans *et al.*, 2020). This way, he can appeal to those fans who are not looking for the most expensive or exclusive items but rather the off-the-shelf, available items that fit their budget (Manny MUA 2020).

3.6 Case Coupling

During the research’s conceptual planning, it was decided that each celebrity would be coupled with a micro-celebrity according to the selected brands they endorsed on their Instagram accounts. This way, the research purpose and objectives could be addressed namely, to explore

Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and the effect these influencers have on consumers' propensity to purchase the products. The couplings would compare the users' responses, emotions, and expressions on the endorsers and brands between the two coupled cases and across all cases to identify similarities and differences in their credibility as influencers. The information is used to discuss the findings to establish whether celebrities or micro-celebrities have greater credibility at certain stages of brand beauty campaigns.

Table 3.5 shows the five coupled celebrities and micro-celebrities, the range between their followers (millions), the range between the comments on their brand posts (thousands), and what products they endorsed on their accounts. As illustrated in this table, four celebrities were fashion models, while one was an actress. The micro-celebrities, however, were renowned as Instagram beauty vloggers. All the micro-celebrities had between two million and 20 million followers. In comparison, the celebrities had around 20 million and more followers, with Elle Fanning being the only exception with around 4.5 million followers.

Table 3.4 Coupling of celebrities and micro-celebrities for comparison of comments

Names	Celebrity type	Number of followers	Total number of comments on each brand post	Known as (profession)	Brands endorsed
Elle Fanning	Celebrity	4 million–10 million	1000–2000	Actress	L’Oréal – Mascara
Nikkie Tutorials	Micro-celebrity	14 million–16 million	2000–3000	Beauty influencer	Fenty Beauty – Concealer
Gigi Hadid	Celebrity	55 million+	5000+	Model	Maybelline – Mascara
Shayla Mitchell	Micro-celebrity	3 million–6 million	1000–2000	Beauty influencer	Maybelline – Palette
Kendall Jenner	Celebrity	138 million+	5000+	Model	Estee Lauder – Makeup foundation
Jeffree Star	Micro-celebrity	16 million–20 million	3000–4000	Beauty influencer	L’Oréal infallible – Makeup foundation
Bella Hadid	Celebrity	32 million–35 million	1000–2000	Model	Dior – Rouge
Laura Gurrola	Micro-celebrity	2 million–5 million	1000–2000	Beauty influencer	Gerard Cosmetics – Lipstick
Hailey Bieber	Celebrity	28 million–30 million	4000–5000	Model	Bare Minerals – Makeup foundation
Manny Gutierrez	Micro-celebrity	5 million–8 million	1000–2000	Beauty influencer	Hourglass – Vanish foundation

3.7 Collecting Instagram user comments

When collecting Instagram comments the posting information was delineated based upon the inclusion criteria, which would comprise collecting information based on the celebrity type, number of followers, total number of comments on each brand post, the profession with which they identify, as well as brands endorsed. The data collection procedure enabled identifying user comments on five celebrity and five micro-celebrity beauty products that were endorsed on Instagram. For this phase of data collection, each of the posts was identified as branded content and included hashtags related to the endorsed product as well as the content of the post.

The second phase in the data collection process was to collect user comments on the five celebrity and five micro-celebrity beauty products endorsed on Instagram. The comments were extracted from each account to include opinions about the endorser, brand, and the content published on the celebrities' sites. In addition, the same comments were also examined for consumers' propensity to buy the endorsed products. Although the comments were extracted without the celebrities' or followers' involvement in the data collection process, the analysis and interpretation of the comments were managed according to qualitative research processes. Qualitative research is suitable for expanding scholarly knowledge of a less investigative nature. Moreover, the analysis of the comments allows for unforeseen themes and ideas to emerge from the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

The Instagram app was used to manually extract 1200 comments from each of the five celebrities' and micro-celebrities' Instagram accounts, as indicated in Table 3.4 above. The number of comments on the celebrity and micro-celebrity accounts differed vastly. Therefore, it seemed fair to extract the first 1200 comments from each of the accounts for clean-up of irregularities and still be left with 1000 comments each. Instagram users applied the Instagram *Comments* function to express their opinions on the celebrities and their products in text, emoji, and tag format. These comments helped the study to discover meaningful ideas, insights, and themes during the data collection and analysis process.

3.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of user comments involved taking a chunk of text, whether it was a sentence, a comment, or different emoji on which a ‘score’ could be returned to illustrate how positive or negative the comment was. Dumbleton (2020, online) discusses comments or ‘sentiment analyses’ in their debate on firms needing insights to inform their decision making. According to Dumbleton, these firms often find themselves in an insights vacuum while comments analysis could answer the most critical issues. Comments analysis was used by Donchenco *et al.* (2018) to explore social dissatisfaction as the dominant factor in determining the level of social tension. In their research, social tension was determined by evaluating the respondents’ satisfaction with various aspects of their lifestyles and the current social environment. Research hypotheses and findings were based on the theory of deprivation. The increase in dissatisfaction (the subjectively estimated individual gap between the actual and desired life circumstances) is accompanied by increased preparedness for including a devastating result. Interestingly, a few similar elements were identified in this study, although Source Credibility was used as the theoretical framework.

User envy and brand bashing were discussed in the literature review as social media concepts. Simultaneously, brand bashing was also identified as a theme that emerged during the screening of raw data extracted from the Instagram accounts. Based on the literature review and the decision to use NVivo 12 as the data analysis tool, it was decided to apply thematic analysis to code and interpret pre-determined themes. Comments analysis and thematic analysis seemed close enough to be used interchangeably during the data analysis process.

3.8.1 Cleaning of comments in Excel

The next step in the data collection and analysis process was to extract 1200 comments for each case and download these comments from Instagram into ten Microsoft Excel sheets, one for each celebrity, from where they were screened to discard comments not related to the posts. The cleaning process involved translating some comments from other languages into English using Google translate. Some followers typically used the comments facility as a marketplace to recommend themselves and their products and services. Any of these comments were discarded as not relevant to the research. Examples of these comments in verbatim format are:

‘I’m a singer/songwriter from Norway 🎤 NOIt would be the greatest helping hand and mean the world to me if you’d take 60 seconds to check out my page!

Everything, from a view to a follow is super appreciated!! I hope to see you!

💖 🦋. (Taken from Gigi Hadid's post).

Moreover, several other comments unrelated to the endorsements were also removed. These included comments regarding religion, threats, users requesting others to follow their pages, and those who were searching for information not related to the endorsed products. Some examples of these comments in verbatim format include:

'Follow Jesus first! You and Justin are set! You need to take time off together and thank your God for providing. To serve him would uplift you both. You got to get out of the spotlight, and you let your light shine on Jesus, not you guys! It's impossible to serve God and money unless you get your head in order. Love and blessings from NY.'

'If you stop reading this, you will die tonight. My name is Teresa Fidalgo. Post this on 29 videos, or I will kill you tonight. One girl ignored, and her mother died 29 days later. Don't believe me google it.'

'What is the song can someone tell me PLEASE?'

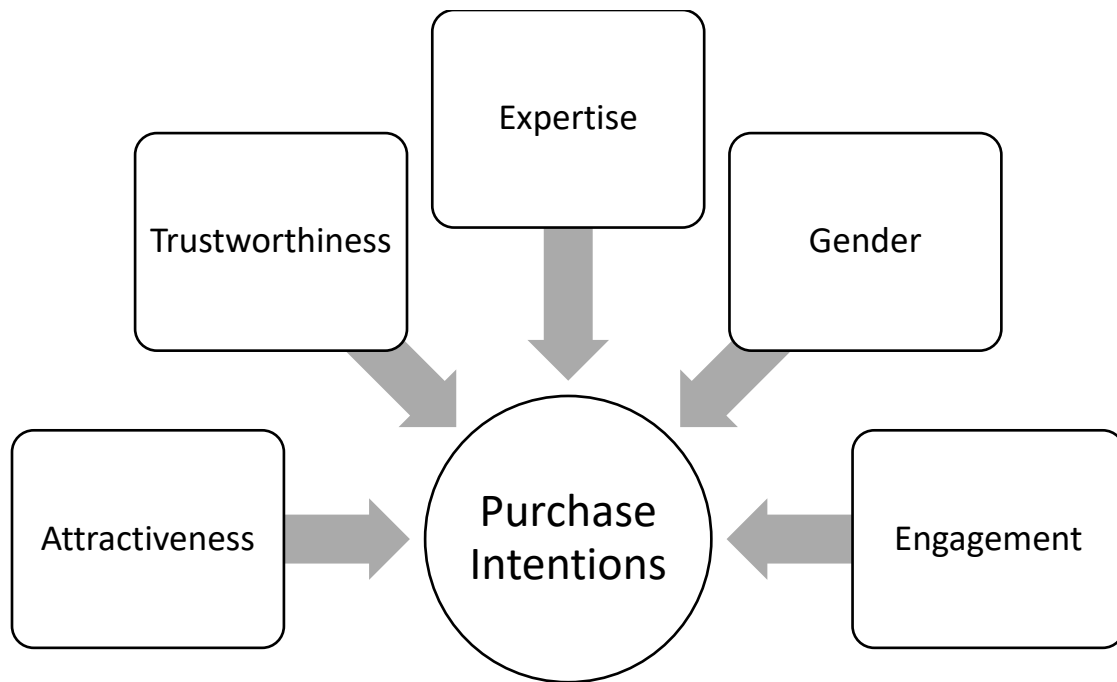
'If anybody has an extra minute I'd appreciate if you'd take a look at my account. Just posted some new photography and would love some feedback. Thank you :).'

After a slow and systematic clean-up of the comments on the Excel sheets, the first 1000 comments for each celebrity were imported into NVivo 12 to compare the data with the pre-determined themes adopted from the Source Credibility model.

3.8.2 Source Credibility model

The comments analysis procedure was guided by the Source Credibility model and the concepts discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Ohanian (1990) presented three aspects that contribute to a source's credibility: trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the key constructs of the source credibility model as it pertains to this study. Figure 3.1 further details the definition of each construct.

Figure 3.1. Source Credibility Model



During the clean-up process in Excel, concepts from the Source Credibility model were first adopted as tentative themes and then expanded by adding E-WOM and Brand Bashing to the three themes. As a result, E-WOM and Brand Bashing emerged during the screening of raw data from the Excel sheets. Table 3.5 presents the Source Credibility themes adopted as pre-determined themes during the initial coding of data and the user comments analysis.

Table 3.5 Tentative themes selected for the analysis of user comments

Themes	- Descriptions
Trustworthiness (ability to be perceived as believable, dependable, or someone who can be trusted)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Credible (people are convinced of the information provided to them). - Trustable (people perceive the information as something they can rely on). - Believable (people believe that the product works). - Knowledgeable (people believe the endorser knows the product and everything about it).

Attractiveness (physical attractiveness, respect, and similarity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical appeal (people love the endorser, beauty product and appearance). - Content appeal (people love the post and everything about it). - Product appeal (people love the product, appreciate the product).
Brand Bashing	People have negative comments about the brand.
Electronic Word-of-mouth (e-Referrals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Negative (comments that discourage people from getting the product followed by a tag). - Neutral (comments containing the tag only). - Positive (comments encourage people to follow the tagged brand or buy the product; positive comments toward the product).
Customer Experience	<p>Pre-purchase stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need acknowledgement (the first step in buying behaviour; problem identification). - Consideration (people consider buying or using the product). - Search (looking for information before purchasing the product). <p>Purchase stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice (evaluating the available options). - Ordering (post an order to acquire the product). - Payment (actual purchase of the product). <p>Post-purchase stage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Consumption <ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Customer satisfaction *Customers dissatisfaction *Usage

The asterisks * point to the customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the purchased product, whether the customers would keep using the brand, and if the customer would mention the brand to others (E-WOM). Each endorser or influencer post counted as a unit of analysis.

3.9 Computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS)

NVivo 12, the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), was applied to compare the themes identified in 3.4.2 by searching for high-frequency words among the user comments. The first phase of the analysis process was thus to assign initial codes to the data. The process started with getting to know and understand the data using the word frequency query feature of NVivo 12 for each case. Although NVivo generates word count, the software cannot automatically analyse context and add meaning to data. Therefore, each comment was read line-by-line to identify small units of meaning in each comment and assign these meanings or themes to nodes in NVivo 12 based on the initial concepts from the Source Credibility model.

There has been considerable ignorance and debate surrounding NVivo CAQDAS and making sense of its framework and processes in the past. Some researchers hailed it as an invaluable data analysis system for managing and organising data, querying data, modelling ideas built from its graphical functions, and reporting on data (Bazeley, 2007). Others critiqued NVivo for its separation, distancing, and mechanisation of the data analysis process (Jackson, Paulus & Woolf, 2018). Bonello and Meehan (2019) aimed for a more profound creative and reflective analysis linked with rigour and transparency of the entire research process. Because of earlier critiques, Bonello and Meehan (2019) targeted an extensive audit trail grounded in raw data to ensure that thematic data analysis through NVivo would be trustworthy and dependable.

Rossolates (2019), using a mixed-methods research design to explore the negative brand meaning and co-creation in social media brand communities (SMBC), applied NVivo 12 CAQDAS for coding, analysing, and iteratively synthesising the data. He regarded NVivo as beneficial at the initial stage of an exploratory or confirmatory research design and a qualitative inquiry into a data set to produce preliminary insights. Rossolates further valued NVivo 12 for allowing content analysis of data based on both *a priori* and emergent codes. Another benefit was that the software allowed the deletion, merging, and creation of new codes as the analysis progressed (Rossolates, 2019).

In line with the literature findings, the early stage of the NVivo coding process helped the researcher determine high-frequency words to confirm or negate themes consistent with the Source Credibility model. Data orientation took place using the NVivo 12-word frequency query feature for each case in line with Yin's (2014) replication strategy for multiple case studies. Additional concepts were added to each case depending on their frequency of

appearance in the comments. The purpose of the first phase of coding was to assign chunks of data to be broken down into the smallest units of meaning in NVivo’s node hierarchy feature. Then, codes with similar meanings were assigned to the same hierarchy to represent each theme. The coding process will be presented in Chapter 4.

3.10 Identifying themes

The entire coding process was guided by the research questions and objectives of the study. During the first stage of the process, tentative themes were identified manually for input into NVivo 12 in line with the Source Credibility model, as discussed in Chapter 2 and illustrated in Table 3.6 The table provides an example of the coding process, emphasising how the codes and themes were created. Based on the extracted comments, two codes – ‘product appeal’ and ‘physical appeal’ – were assigned to give meaning to the responses or comments of Instagram users on the endorsed brands. Therefore, ‘Attractiveness’ was the final theme generated through the grouping of the codes.

Table 3.6 Coding example

Comments from the endorsers’ posts	Codes	Theme
😊, Wow ❤️, 🤩, ✓, Lovely, 💕💕💕💕, Omg 😊	Product Appeal	Attractiveness
Her Eyes!! 😊 🤩 😊, LOVE YOUUUUUU 💕	Physical Appeal	

After searching through the comments for tentative codes in line with the Source Credibility themes, the number of contributions from each celebrity’s case study to building themes was counted via the NVivo 12 *counting* function. Table 3.7 lists the celebrity's name, the number of codes that emerged from the comments on each celebrity’s post, and the number of user comments or referrals to each celebrity's codes. The same information is presented in chart format in Figure 3.2.

Table 3.7 Contribution from each celebrity in building codes or themes

Celebrity	Number of codes	Number of referrals to each code
Elle Fanning	19	1571
Nikkie de Jager	19	2069
Gigi Hadid	27	2638
Shayla Mitchell	22	2437
Kendall Jenner	23	1825
Bella Hadid	26	1866
Jeffree Star	28	2477
Laura Gurrola	20	1883
Hailey Bieber	18	2019
Manny Gutierrez	20	2004

(Source: Own compilation)

The examples from the table and chart presented above show that Gigi Hadid (celebrity) and Jeffree Star (micro-celebrity) had the largest number of referrals or references to the tentative Source Credibility themes extracted from their post comments. The implication is that these two celebrities' endorsements motivated followers to comment on their posts according to which the emerging themes were built. On the other hand, the table and chart clearly show that Elle Fanning (celebrity) had the least number of referrals according to the Source Credibility model and additional themes that emerged during the initial comments analysis process, which implies that Elle Fanning's endorsement post was not as influential as the posts of other influencers investigated in this study in terms of the generated codes.

3.10.1 Main themes for comments analysis

Table 3.7 and Figure 3.2 below present the main themes that emerged from the initial comments analysis process. The number of referrals to each theme is important for the interpretation of the research findings. The heading 'Sources' refers to the number of celebrities who were responsible for generating themes. 'Referrals' denotes the number of comments or referrals to

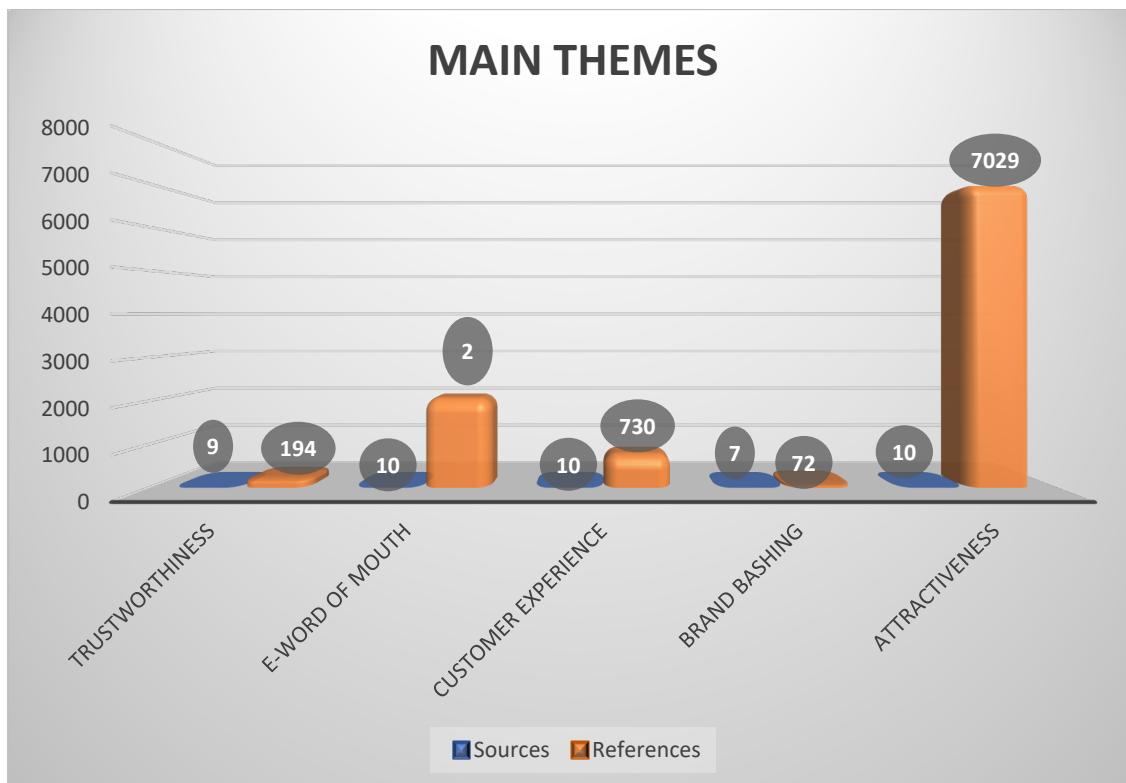
each theme extracted from all celebrities' posts. As illustrated in Table 3.8 and Figure 3.2, 'Attractiveness' is the most discussed theme with 7029 referrals. 'E-Word-of-mouth' is the second theme with the most referrals (2043), followed by 'Customer Experience' (730) and 'Trustworthiness' with 194 referrals (references), respectively. 'Brand Bashing' appears to be the least debated theme with 72 referrals but emerged from seven of the ten cases, which indicated a prominence of brand bashing in the promotion of products.

Table 3.8 Themes generated from Instagram comments

Themes	Sources	Referrals
Trustworthiness	9	192
E-Word of mouth	10	2043
Customer Experience	10	730
Brand Bashing	7	72
Attractiveness	10	7029

(Source: Own compilation)

Figure 3.2 Themes generated from Instagram comments



(Source: Own compilation)

3.11 Description of Themes

Although the tentative themes were explained in Chapter 2, described in Table 2.1 and illustrated above, these themes emerged during the content analysis of user comments in NVivo 12. The descriptions helped to search and identify themes for input with large chunks of raw data from the user comments and again during the interpretation of the word clouds produced through NVivo. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to explain the themes at the end of the data collection and analysis process.

3.11.1 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness refers to the source's reliability and can be seen as an element of reputation expected from the endorsers (in this case, celebrities, and micro-celebrities). When social media users believe that they share specific interests or values with the endorser, they are more likely to adopt their behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes. As a result, they are likely to trust the endorsed product much more. Trustworthiness included *Credible* and *Trustable* when followers have faith in and find the influencer truthful when posting information about the brand.

3.11.2 Electronic Word-of-mouth

Electronic Word-of-mouth (E-WOM) provides a wide range of information created, initiated, circulated, and used among consumers on social media. With this information, consumers can educate each other about different products and brands. In this instance, E-WOM consisted of positive, negative, and neutral consumer referrals about the product on Instagram. E-WOM implies that followers refer to or tag people they know to the celebrity's post, encouraging them to buy the product (positive) or not buy the product (negative). In some instances, Instagram users merely tagged other people without writing positive or negative messages. These actions were regarded as neutral E-WOM. Social media users often consider communications and information shared to be more valuable and credible than simple endorsement messages. The reason is that the information is generated by someone they can rely on for information about the product.

3.11.3 Attractiveness

Attractiveness as a theme includes physical, product and content appeal, which were the different appeals or attributes that emerged from the comments. *Physical appeal* refers to complimentary posts based on the physical appearance of the endorser. *Product appeal* encompassed followers' comments appreciating the product by posting a smiley, in love, and hand-clapping emoji. Finally, *content appeal* denoted comments showing appreciation of the post through a laughter emoji relating to messages on the post.

3.11.4 Brand Bashing

Brand bashing (see 2.9.5) signifies negative comments about the endorsed brand. Comments included statements, such as "this brand is not cruel free; it tests its products on animals". Some of the followers were copying other followers' reactions without knowing whether the brand was tested on animals or not.

3.11.5 Customer Experience

Customer experience explained the purchasing behaviours and engagement of Instagram users with the brand endorsers. For example, after seeing the endorsed brand, customers opined that they needed to test the product because of the particular celebrity's usage and validation, and, as a result, purchased the product. Afterwards, the customer might not be satisfied with the

brand. In this context, customer experience could refer to the interactions between the target audience and brand endorsers, resulting in different activities, such as searching for information about the brand and purchasing the endorsed product on the celebrities' Instagram accounts.

3.12 Comparing the Research Findings

The final step in the research process was comparing or triangulating the research findings. Methodological data comparison or triangulation of research data relates to using more than one method to collect data on the same topic and compare or validate the research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2015; Creswell, 2014). The research involved different techniques to collect and analyse research data, and each method had particular strengths and weaknesses and, therefore, had to be verified (Babbie, 2013). The primary research findings, which included comparing the within case couplings and across case couplings, were triangulated with the literature review findings to ensure research rigour, congruence, and trustworthiness (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The process will be discussed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Research ethics govern how the researcher formulates and clarifies the research topic, designs the research strategy, gains access to the collected data, and reports on the research process and outcomes. It further comprises how the data was processed and stored, analysed, interpreted and whether the researcher reports the research findings accurately and responsibly (Saunders *et al.*, 2015). The research design must be methodologically sound and morally defensible under all circumstances.

Social qualitative research typically involves humans. The most direct ethical concern, in this case, was the possibility that people would be harmed during the collection and publication of the research data. Therefore, ethical clearance for the performance of this study was sought (See Appendix 1). No ethical agreements and consent were necessary from the research cases because all data could be retrieved from their web profiles and public social media domain. Nevertheless, ethical research requires a true reflection of the research process and reporting on each case study. This study intends to benefit influencer marketing and report on the research phenomenon and research findings, for which all data were collected from the internet.

Similarly, no consent was required from the Instagram users who commented on the endorsers' posts. The reason is that the internet, including the World-Wide-Web, exists as a massive

catalogue of content being tagged, saved and consumed for users to interact with on social media (Stasik, 2018). Therefore, comments were extracted en masse from the celebrities' accounts on the specific brand endorsements, and the online comments were not saved under usernames.

The intent was to deliver research of the highest ethical standard within the social media marketing environment. Comments analysis using NVivo 12 software was performed according to academic guidelines. Support was requested and received from experts in multiple case study research initiatives and the NVivo 12 computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The multiple case studies were introduced and discussed under 3.3.1. Chapter 4 will present the analysis and interpretation of each case, the coupled cases, and across cases.

3.14 Conclusion

A qualitative research design, including multiple case study research and user comments analysis, was applied to explore Instagram user perceptions of celebrity and micro-celebrity beauty brand endorsements. The sample consisted of five celebrities and five micro-celebrities selected through purposive sampling. Each celebrity was coupled with a micro-celebrity to establish the difference in user comments on their brand endorsements and their influence on Instagram customers' propensity to buy the endorsed brands. The Source Credibility model was used to guide the research process in identifying themes according to which the celebrities could be compared to establish their credibility in being engaged in beauty brand campaigns. The tentative themes identified for input as nodes into NVivo 12 were Trustworthiness, E-WOM, Attractiveness, Brand Bashing, and Customer Experience. Thematic analysis of the comments was performed via NVivo and produced in the form of word clouds. The most frequent words or core themes and their meanings will be presented in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Findings

"We get to live in a time that we get to use social media as a tool. It's not just a face on a piece of paper, and that's what makes you someone's favourite model. We can have a very similar sense of humour as someone, and that's why we're their favourite model, or our personal style, off the runway, is why we're their favourite."

– Gigi Hadid, Fashion Model

4.1 Introduction

The research findings presented in this chapter are from the primary research, of which the research methodology and design to collect and analyse the required data were explained in Chapter 3. The desire was to address a research problem perceived in the social media marketing sphere, namely that despite a great deal of financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements and the effect these influencers have on user behaviour.

Qualitative methods to collect data comprised multiple case studies and the comparison of user comments between case couplings. In addition, a cross-case analysis of the endorsements was made to verify current research findings on celebrities' engagement and preference versus micro-celebrities in brand campaigns. The objective was to establish whether it was more beneficial to invite a celebrity or a micro-celebrity to endorse the brand or a product during certain brand promotions.

The multiple-case studies were selected through purposive sampling according to specific criteria. Features included the number of followers (more than 1 million Instagram followers per celebrity and micro-celebrity), language used in the Instagram endorsement post (English), demographics (Millennials born between 1980 and 1994 and Centennials born after 1995), and brands (comparable brands endorsed on each of the couple's Instagram accounts). Based on these criteria, five celebrities (Elle Fanning, Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner, Bella Hadid, and Hailey Bieber) and five micro-celebrities (Shayla Mitchell, Nikkie Tutorials, Jeffree Star, Laura Gurrola, and Manny Gutierrez) were selected.

NVivo 12, the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) (QSR International, 2020), was used for the thematic analysis process to break up the data into the smallest units of meaning (codes) and find collective meanings for the codes (themes)

(Campbell, 2020). Each of the celebrity and micro-celebrity cases was first analysed and coded separately. Then, themes emerging from each case were synthesised following Yin's (2014) replication strategy for multiple case studies. A replication strategy aims to conduct a study on other cases to assess whether the research findings from the first case can be confirmed or extended or whether new information or a theory can be developed (Ridder, 2017).

The core themes created from the primary research were *Attractiveness* (endorser post versus product post), *Brand Bashing* (mostly because of animal testing, which appeared during the scanning of the comments), *Electronic Word-of-mouth* (E-WOM), which also appeared during the scanning of the comments), *Customer Experience* (pre-purchase propensity, purchasing, and post-purchase experience), and *Authentic Engagement* (genuine, honest engagement). The first four themes emerged as core codes after the automatic data analysis through NVivo. Although included in the Source Credibility model as Trustworthiness, the fifth core code, namely Authentic Engagement, emerged from the coded data in a different connotation. Instagram users expressed their direct support of the brand or endorser or posted comments relevant to the photo and caption of the post rather than expressing their trust in the influencer. The research findings are presented in the order of the two research questions.

- What are Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?
- How do Instagram users' propensity to purchase products vary based on their perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence?

4.2 Primary Research Findings

Chapter 3 explained the coupling of cases as pairing a celebrity with a micro-celebrity based on a similar beauty brand or product that they endorse on their Instagram profiles. Before coupling, it was ensured that both cases were heterogeneous so that the comparison of results could be worthwhile and valid (Yin, 2014). The first coupling was made between Elle Fanning (L'Oréal Mascara) and Nikkie Tutorials (Fenty Beauty Concealer). While comparing the themes that emerged between the couple, literal replication was applied in that the researcher looked for similar properties between the celebrity case and micro-celebrity case. The research then proceeded to the theoretical replication stage to generate multiple case study findings. It implies that similar searches and constant comparisons were made between the first couple and

the other couples (Ridder, 2017; Yin, 2014) to validate the findings and establish whether the themes related to the concepts adopted from the Source Credibility model.

The section below presents each research case and user comments analysis to confirm the coding process and demonstrate how the themes that emerged from the data were linked. The discussion depicts the endorser's description, the NVivo word cloud presentation of the most frequently mentioned terms, and an analysis of each case built on the user comments' initial and focused coding.

An overview of each of the word clouds to present a generalised idea of the findings in relation to each other is presented in Figure 4.1.



Figure 4.1 Word cloud – All Participants

The findings depicted in Figure 4.1, which are individually discussed below for each micro-celebrity and celebrity, depict the most common words associated with each post examined. In section 4.5, the cases are coupled together for triangulation to facilitate discussion on the differences and similarities between micro-celebrities and celebrities. The core themes identified throughout this revealed the following information (Figure 4.3)

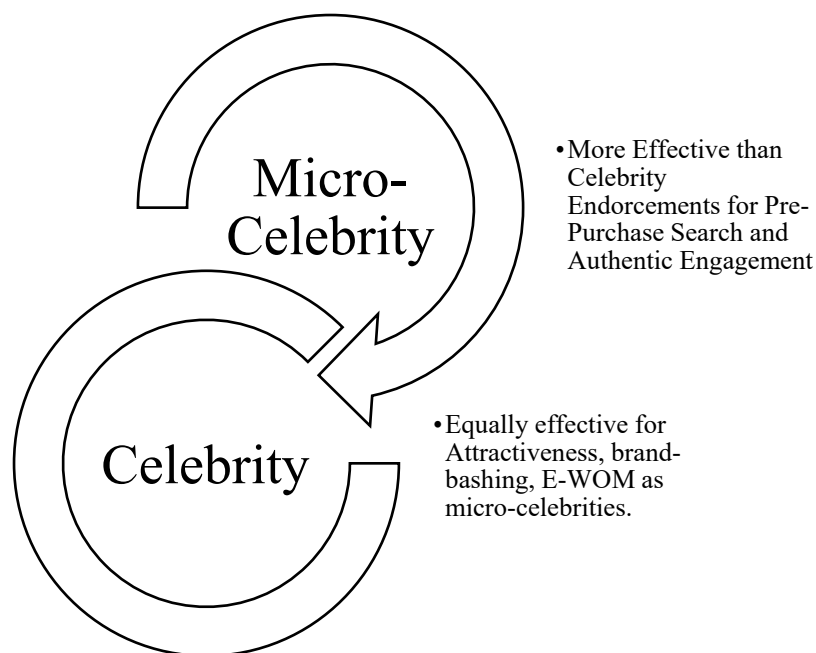


Figure 4.3 General Overview of Findings

The reviewed findings indicated that micro-celebrities are more effective than celebrities regarding pre-purchase search and authentic engagement. However, celebrities are equally as effective as micro-celebrities in terms of attractiveness, brand-bashing and E-WOM. The following sections detail these findings.

4.2.1 Elle Fanning

Elle Fanning, born in 1998, is an American actress aged 22 (Centennial) at the time of data collection in May 2020. She had approximately 4.5 million Instagram followers exposed to her L’Oréal Lash Paradise Mascara endorsement. Among the 1000 comments analysed, the word

cloud below (Figure 4.4) shows the most frequent words that emerged from Elle’s brand endorsement.



Figure 4.4. Word cloud – Elle Fanning.

The cloud figure was created through the NVivo electronic coding system based on Elle Fanning’s follower comments and showed that the top five high-frequency terms that emerged from the data were “love”, “beautiful”, “look”, “makeup”, and “eyes”. Table 4.1 below shows a sample of the quotes extracted from the data to demonstrate how they were established. With the Source Credibility model in mind, the researcher used the concepts of Trustworthiness, Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM), Customer Experience, Brand bashing, and Attractiveness to search for meaning among data clusters.

During the initial coding process, the words that appeared most frequently helped determine what data seemed to confirm or discard concepts extracted according to the themes adopted from the Source Credibility model. The coding was conducted in line with Yin’s (2014) replication strategy for multiple case studies, of which Elle Fanning’s was the first study. The sample of user comments in Table 4.1 indicates how the data were coded and the number of user comments linked to each frequent word or term. The quotes are verbatim as extracted from Elle Fanning’s Instagram account. The Source Credibility themes under which the word and chunk of data were sorted appear in brackets behind the quotes.

Table 4.1 High-Frequency Word Counts – Elle Fanning

Word	Count	Sample quotes
Love	90	<p>“OMG, I love her” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Wow! So creative to apply colour mascara on your eye brown. I love it ❤️ 😊 🍷 ” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love this and how you’re so creative with these looks! extra inspiring! ✨” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Your Make up is terrible. But I LOVE you anyway” (Endorser Attractiveness – Endorser support)</p> <p>“Hi @ellefanning I loved you on Galveston! Awesome performance!” (Endorser Attractiveness – unrelated)</p> <p>“😬😬😬😬😬😬” (Attractiveness – general)</p>
Beautiful	81	<p>“why so beautiful? 😊❤️” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“That make-up is so bad but you look so beautiful anyways” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Too beautiful ✨ 😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊😊❤️ Wow que Hermosa” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“This look in your eyes is one of the most beautiful things I remember from seeing neon demon. Especially with your eyes closed. My first Refn and first time I saw you. Keep going gurl” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p>
Look	60	<p>“Is purple your favorite colour? That’s my favorite colour too and I think it looks fantastic on you” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“u look good in "rainy day in nyc" (Endorser Attractiveness)</p>

- “👉 You look soooo beautiful here 😊😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “I love this look omg” (Content Attractiveness)
- “U look more beautiful without this” (Content Attractiveness – negative)
- “That looks stupid” (Content Attractiveness – negative)
- “I don't know about this look I don't think it's a good look for you” (Content Attractiveness – negative)
- Make-up 38 “You are so creative 😊 do my make-up pls 🙏🙏” (Trustworthiness)
- “The best make-up artist 😊😊😊😊” (Trustworthiness – credible)
- “@makeup.flow @queli _____ moura” (E-WOM)
- “Of course it looks amazing on your gorgeous face, but if I wore my make-up like that I'd be put into care 😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “Beautiful baby nice make-up 📌” (Content Attractiveness)
- Eyes 36 “Beautiful eyes 🤩” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “Those eyes 😊❤️” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “Omg these eyes 😊😊😊🤩🤩😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “those green eyes tho” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “@yarennlls her eyes are so beautiful + I would be the clown if I do the same make-up” (E-WOM)
- “I cried my eyes out watching All the bright places yesterday. Thank you so much for your work ❤️ It was truly moving to my core” (Trustworthiness)

Among the comments, “mascara” was mentioned once by one user: “Wow! So creative to apply colour mascara on your eye brow. I love it ❤️ 😊 🌸 .” Despite mentioning “mascara”, the comment was directed towards the content (Content Attractiveness) rather than the product, brand, or endorser. The brand L’Oréal and the Instagram handle @lorealparis were not referenced in the comments, and the product “Lash Paradise Mascara” was referenced only once in the quote, “Yes, I used lash paradise for my eye brows as well 😊” (Customer Experience – post-purchase usage).

It could be that there was an overlap of codes appearing in the sample comments above. At this stage of the analysis, the researcher stayed close to the data and carefully read each comment. She used NVivo 12 to assign each comment to a node based on the meaning of the data. Thematic analysis within NVivo 12 was used to develop the themes. For instance, the quote “make-up is so bad, but you look so beautiful anyways” could be interpreted as Endorser Attractiveness due to the user’s reference to Elle Fanning’s appearance. By closely reading the comment, the researcher identified that the user expressed support for the endorser, not the content or the product (Endorser support). Thus, the follower base could be posting comments supporting Elle Fanning as a celebrity and endorser of L’Oréal.

Analysis of all thousand comments in Elle Fanning’s case resulted in the development of the themes “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Endorser support”, “Endorser – negative comment”, “Content Attractiveness”, “Content – Unrelated to the endorsement”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “Content Attractiveness – negative comment”, “Trustworthiness”, “E-WOM neutral”, “E-WOM positive”, “Brand bashing”, and “Brand bashing – animal testing”.

4.2.2 Gigi Hadid

Born in 1995 (Millennial), Gigi Hadid is an American fashion model and endorsed Maybelline Mascara on her Instagram profile. The model was 25 years old and had approximately 54.6 million followers in May 2020. The 1000 comments from Gigi Hadid’s endorsement post generated high-frequency words, including “beautiful/amazing/gorgeous/pretty”, “love”, “gigi/@gigihadid”, “Maybelline”, and “mascara”. The high-frequency words are shown in Figure 4.5.

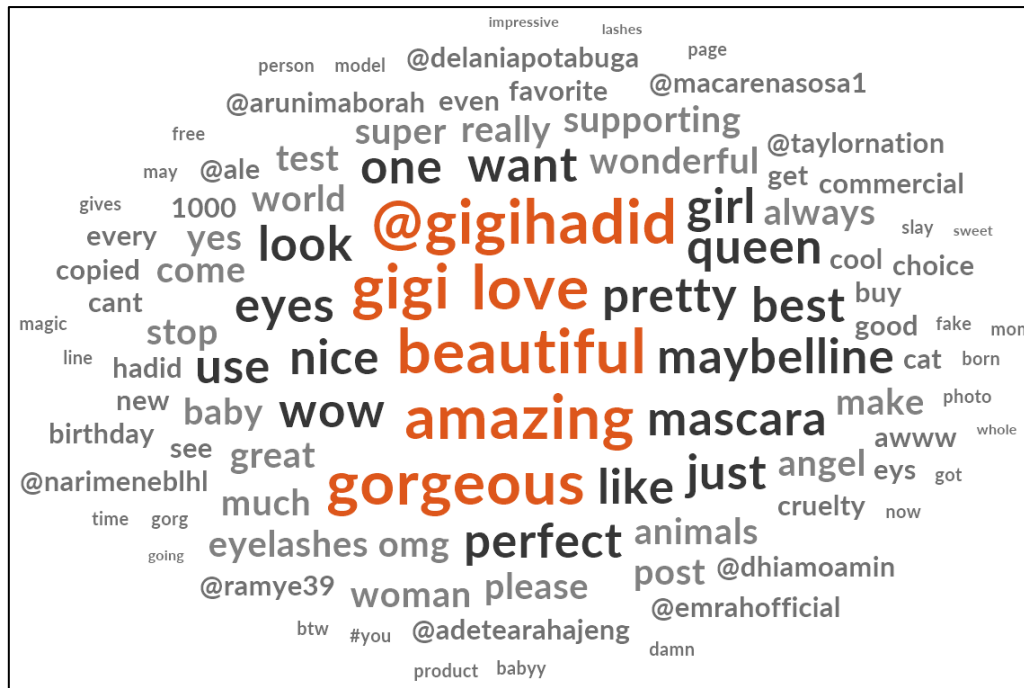


Figure 4.5 Word cloud – Gigi Hadid

The figure shows the most frequent words among the data collected from Gigi Hadid’s followers. The researcher could theorise and develop a general picture of the data by looking at these terms. Each comment was read line-by-line to identify small units of meaning to narrow down the big picture. The sample of quotes in Table 4.2 shows the initial codes derived from the follower comments.

Table 4.2 High-Frequency Words – Gigi Hadid

Word	Count	Sample quotes
beautiful/amazing/	218	“Aaaa you're so beautiful!” (Endorser Attractiveness)
gorgeous/pretty		<p>“Gorgeous 😊 @gigihadid” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“@n_cherry she’s so pretty 💖” (Endorser Attractiveness; E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“OMG Gigi those eyelashes on fleek!!! Need them rn! BTW you look beautiful and amazing” (Pre-purchase Need Recognition; Endorser Attractiveness)</p>

love	83	<p>“I love you so much honey 🍯” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love ❤️ u” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love their make-up!! :)” (Product Attractiveness)</p> <p>“@nurmete love!” (E-WOM)</p>
gigi/@gigihadid	79	<p>“Hi gigi 😘 😘 😘” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Guess who got your mascara for their birthday! @gigihadid 😁❤️” (Post-purchase)</p> <p>“Very beautiful sis@gigihadid 😁😁😁😁” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p>
Maybelline	25	<p>“Gigi please stop supporting Maybelline, they test on animals and it's terrible! Please Gigi do the right thing and stop supporting them. Be a good person in this cruel world.” (Brand Bashing – Animal testing)</p> <p>“I love maybelline x” (Brand Support)</p> <p>“❤️ Maybelline” (Brand Support)</p> <p>“Wqwq use maybelline guarantee to be similar to hadid? 😁😁😁😁 @wildaarg” (E-WOM – positive)</p> <p>“@anagguell Maybelline” (E-WOM – neutral)</p>
mascara	20	<p>“Good quality mascara 🙌 Im so in love with it 🙌 Love Gigi love Maybelline 😁😁” (Post-purchase satisfaction)</p> <p>“Where can this mascara be found????” (Pre-purchase – Search)</p> <p>“@flawlessmakeup_by_donique new mascara we must get it and test it out” (E-WOM positive)</p>

Apart from expressing endorser attractiveness, many comments also contained references to the brand (Maybelline) and the endorsed product (mascara). While the inference was that Gigi Hadid, a celebrity, could be an effective influencer concerning increasing Instagram users' propensity to purchase Maybelline mascara, a closer investigation of the comments revealed that a significant portion (10 of 25 references to Maybelline) could be attributed to Brand bashing. For instance, a quote containing "Maybelline" was, "Maybelline tests with animals @gigihadid 😞😞💔."

A focused analysis of the data revealed the themes "Endorser Attractiveness", "Product Attractiveness", "Attractiveness – general comment", "Trustworthiness", "E-WOM neutral", "E-WOM positive", "Pre-purchase Need Recognition", "Pre-purchase – Search", "Purchase", "Post-Purchase usage", "Post-purchase satisfaction", "Brand bashing – Animal testing", and "Brand support".

4.2.3 Kendall Jenner

Kendall Jenner, an American model, born in 1995 (Millennial), had approximately 138 million followers on Instagram in May 2020. Kendall used the platform to endorse Estee Lauder Double Wear Makeup. The selected 1000 follower comments on her endorsement post yielded high-frequency words, including "make", "like", "love", "getting", and "video". The most frequent words are shown in Figure 4.6.



Figure 4.6. Word cloud – Kendall Jenner

The figure shows all the most frequent words among the data collected from Kendall Jenner’s followers. The researcher theorised on the comments to become more accustomed to the data and construct focused themes. With the Source Credibility model in mind, the researcher again analysed the data line-by-line to determine units of meaning. Sample codes and quotes are presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 High-Frequency Words – Kendall Jenner

Word	Count	Sample quotes
make	80	<p>“@stefanizoey @mishka_ral0n def can make that happen. So much fun” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“@kireinaf @belinda_daniella make this video later” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“@fromthehart825@redheadchillin it has a heavy texture which is not for everyday make-up, but if you use when you have a certain ceremony once a week you will definitely like it 😊 !” (Post-purchase – Experience)</p> <p>“You are the spokesperson for a make-up brand that supports animal testing, hope that makes you feel good about yourself” (Brand bashing)</p>
like	67	<p>“@yessmatoes one like that” (E-WOM)</p> <p>“I really really really like this video. @kamrinjiskra better?” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“@schmira_ semoga like all of your estee 🤩💖” (E-WOM)</p> <p>“The make-up literally smelled like lead paint. 🤢” (Post-purchase – dissatisfaction)</p> <p>“Your face looks like @victoriajustice a little bit” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p>

love	64	<p>“I LOVE YOU @kendalljenner” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Omg I love this @ninap_” (E-WOM)</p> <p>“We need to use this!! It's sosososososo good! I love Kendall!! @ashleywellss” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love these videos @sienawu” (Content Attractiveness)</p>
getting	34	<p>“@mnhalk @renad_qutub us getting ready loool” (E-WOM)</p> <p>“We should make a video like this when we're getting ready for the dance 🤩 @abbi.ritchie” (Content Attractiveness)</p>
video	33	<p>“@linamarsuarez videos like that!” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Video inspiration @nataliemxi” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Like this video for the brand! Me and you 🤝 @ghenwaballout” (Brand Support)</p>

The brand Estee Lauder or Estee with Instagram handle @esteelauder was mentioned ten times in the comments. One sample quote was, “Ever since you partnered with @esteelauder, I moved on to Lancôme” (Endorser dissatisfaction). Another sample quote was, “And Esteeee @lau_rabago” (E-WOM). The product term “foundation” was referenced six times. For instance, one comment was, “@liam.jay it's my foundation :)” (E-WOM positive; Post-purchase). Another comment was, “@shap92x not gonna lie, makes me wanna buy their foundation...” (Pre-purchase propensity).

A thematic analysis of the comments from Kendall’s Instagram endorsement revealed the following themes: “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Content Attractiveness”, “Brand attractiveness”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “E-WOM neutral”, “E-WOM positive”, “Post-purchase – satisfaction”, “Brand bashing – animal testing”, and “Brand Support”.

4.2.4 Bella Hadid

Bella Hadid, a 23-year-old American fashion model born in 1996 (Centennial), had approximately 31.2 million followers on Instagram in May 2020. She endorsed Dior Rouge on her Instagram profile, to which a thousand comments on her post generated high-frequency

words, such as “beautiful/wow/gorgeous/perfect”, “love”, “look”, “bella/@bellahadid”, and “queen”.



Figure 4.7 Word cloud – Bella Hadid

The word cloud demonstrates all the high-frequency words among the data collected from Bella Hadid’s followers. These frequent words and the terms adopted from the Source Credibility model helped the researcher identify codes relevant to the research and determine the main terms emerging from the user comments. After that, each comment was read closely to identify the most focused codes among the data. The researcher then applied thematic analysis and NVivo 12 to develop themes from the coded data. Table 4.4 presented below gives a few examples of how the meanings were extracted from the data.

Table 4.4 High-Frequency Words – Bella Hadid

Word	Count	Sample quotes
beautiful/wow/	127	“Beauty 🧡💧” (Attractiveness – general)
gorgeous/perfect		“😍😍” (Attractiveness – general) “wow” (Attractiveness – general)

		“Wooooooooooooow, gorgeous 💎 😊 🤍 🤍 🤍 🤍 🤍” (Attractiveness – general)
		“Gorgeous model 😊 😊 😊 😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)
love	50	“I love u ✨ 🖤” (Endorser Attractiveness) “I love this red colour!” (Product Attractiveness) “I Love this picture 🤍” (Content Attractiveness) “Suddenly I love red lipstick” (Product Attractiveness)
look	30	“@stefan_nuvo my code 11 look” (E-WOM) “You look high asf” (Endorser – negative comment) “Awesome sharp make-up look! @bellahadid 😊 😊” (Content Attractiveness) “Ya look so blazed 🖤” (Endorser Attractiveness)
bella/@bellahadid	30	“Can't take it baby 😞 @bellahadid” (Endorser – negative comment) “@bellahadid 👑 👑 🌸 🌸 🌸 🌸 🌸 🌸 🤍 🤍 love you bella” (Endorser Attractiveness) “@bellahadid what is the name of the pearl colour under your waterline? I desperately need it!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” (Other product Attractiveness – not endorsed)
queen	26	“Queen 👑 👑” (Endorser Attractiveness) “@queenshaoling” (E-WOM) “Yass queen” (Endorser Attractiveness)

“Dior” was mentioned once in a comment, “@sibiyis @adriennetp93 J’adore Dior” (E-WOM). The Instagram handle “@dior” was not mentioned in the comments. “Rouge” was mentioned once in a comment, and “Rouge @madichia” and “lipstick” were referenced three times. A

thematic analysis of the comments generated the following themes “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Endorser – negative comment”, “Content Attractiveness”, “Product Attractiveness”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “E-WOM neutral”, and “E-WOM positive”.

4.2.5 Hailey Bieber

Hailey Bieber is an American fashion model born in 1996 (Centennial). She endorsed the brand Bare Minerals Foundation on her Instagram profile which had about 27.5 million followers in May 2020. Figure 4.8 demonstrates the high-frequency words collected among the 1000 follower comments on Hailey Bieber’s profile.



Figure 4.8 Word cloud – Hailey Bieber

The word cloud shows that the top five high-frequency words were “loving”, “look”, “like”, “beauty”, and “eyes”. These frequent terms were compared with the pre-determined themes adopted from the Source Credibility model. Once the researcher was familiar with the dataset, the comments were re-read line-by-line to theorise and identify focused codes emerging from the data. Table 4.5 lists a few samples of the comments with the number of words attached to each theme.

Table 4.5 High-Frequency Words – Hailey Bieber

Word	Count	Sample quotes
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loving	229	<p>“Looking good 😊 I’m loving it!” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Cant stop loving u 😊” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“❤️ ❤️ ❤️” (Attractiveness – General Comment)</p>
look	151	<p>Nice look (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Look at this fdp 🐱 🐱 🐱 🐱 @bettinalemos because I wasn't born like that” (E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“Looks like a beauty @ anisaturan” (E-WOM positive)</p>
like	104	<p>“Like it@b_jiaozi” (E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“#100000000000000000000000likes 🙌” (Attractiveness – General Comment)</p> <p>“You look like you kissed your toilet paper after a dump 🤢 🤢 🤢 🤢) (Endorser – negative comment, envy)</p>
beauty	89	<p>“Queen of Beauty ❤️” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“That's the beauty of it 😬 😬 @korallachowski” (E-WOM)</p> <p>“If we took 10% of this beauty, it would be enough @matematicscininguncesi” (E-WOM positive)</p>
eyes	85	<p>“Your Eyes!!!! AWESOME ✨” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“nice cat eyes!!!” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I feel like this chick has similar eyes to you @laiyn.kero” (E-WOM positive)</p>

By closely reading each comment, the researcher discovered that the brand Bare Minerals and its Instagram handle @bareMinerals were not mentioned once by any Instagram user. However, several comments were made about Hailey Bieber’s skin, such as “u do have perfect skin hails” (Endorser Attractiveness) and “the most perfect skin, I’m jealous” (Endorser Attractiveness – Envy). In addition, one comment was directed to Pre-purchase Need, “Girl you read my mind!!! I need something for my dry skin STAT”.

The overall number of comments in Hailey Bieber’s case generated the following themes: “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Endorser – negative comment”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “E-WOM neutral”, and “E-WOM positive”.

4.2.6 Shayla Mitchell

Shayla Mitchell was born in 1987 in California (Millennial). She is a make-up artist who has gained popularity on YouTube. In May 2020, Shayla had about 2.7 million followers on Instagram. Following her social media success, she launched her collection ‘Maybelline X Shayla’ in collaboration with Maybelline. One of the products in the collection endorsed on her Instagram profile was the Maybelline Palette. One thousand comments from her followers regarding the product generated the high-frequency words shown in Figure 4.9.



Figure 4.9. Word cloud – Shayla Mitchell

The word cloud shows the most frequent words among the comments collected from Shayla Mitchell’s followers, of which the top five were “congrats” or “congratulations”, shayla/@makeupbyshayla”, “get”, “love”, and “wait”.

With the Source Credibility model in mind, the researcher used the concepts of Trustworthiness, E-word-of-mouth (E-WOM), Customer Experience, Brand bashing, and Attractiveness to search for meaning among the high-frequency words. The high-frequency words helped determine what data seemed to confirm or discard the extracted themes during

the coding process (Table 4.6). The repetitive process was again conducted in line with Yin’s (2014) replication strategy for multiple case studies and constant data comparison during the collection and analysis process (Charmaz, 2017).

Table 4.6 High-Frequency Words – Shayla Mitchell

Word	Count	Sample quotes
congrats/congratulations	365	<p>“Congratulations! What an affordable and pretty collaboration. 🤍🤍🤍” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)</p> <p>“Congrats @makeupshayla I am gutted it’s sold out” (Purchase intention)</p> <p>“Congrats Shayla you deserve it girl @makeupshayla so happy for you!” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)</p> <p>“It’s sold out at Ulta – congratulations 💧” (Purchase intention)</p>
shayla/@makeupbyshayla	215	<p>“Congratulation @makeupshayla 🎉🎉🎉 saw the celebration on Snapchat, I realised that black beauty bloggers didn’t came out to help you celebrate. I was confused and still confused. What’s going on with our people? Anyway, I’m proud of you, will definitely purchase all of them 🤝” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support, Purchase intention)</p> <p>“I’m in NY and nothing I can’t add to my cart 🛒 @makeupshayla @maybelline” (Purchase intention)</p> <p>“Now it makes sense 😂😂😂 *Shayla on snap: “what you guys think of this bleu mascara? Hmmm I think it’s pretty pretty pretty good.” 😂😂😂😂 but gone ahead sis 🙌🙌🙌 🙌🙌 @makeupshayla” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)</p>

get/got	146	<p>“I just got my palette! I’m excited to start playing with it!!!” (Post-purchase Usage)</p> <p>“Congratulations!!! And I really like these colors (similar complexion) soo I gotta get it 🙌🙌🙌” (Product Attractiveness)</p>
love	95	<p>“❤️❤️❤️ breaking glass ceilings and making history! Keep inspiring and winning! Love it! @makeupshayla” (Authentic Engagement – Support for Endorser)</p> <p>“Congratulations love. It’s a beautiful thing, you’ve come a long way. Seeing your success and greatness inspires me. Thank you for being a role model in my life. I love you Slayla. Xoxo” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)</p> <p>“Yes @makeupshayla I love the representation!!!” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Yes! I’n love with these colors!” (Product Attractiveness)</p>
wait	99	<p>“I just placed my order...I can’t wait for them to arrive so that I can do a make-up look 🙌🙌” (Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)</p> <p>“You gone have me up at midnight punching numbers lol! I can’t wait until September for stores!!!” (Purchase intention)</p> <p>“Congrats!!! That mascara is my favorite can’t wait to try other colors especially the blackest one 😁” (Product Attractiveness)</p>

The focused theme “Authentic Engagement” emerged through thematic analysis and inductive reasoning. According to Source Credibility theory, authentic engagement typically refers to

followers' genuine interest in the celebrity, brand, and the celebrity's niche. In this case, Shayla Mitchell became popular because of her make-up tutorials. Thus, her fan base was also interested in her makeup products, makeup applications, and other related content.

“Endorser support”, in this case, was set apart from “Trustworthiness” in that the Instagram users expressed their support for Shayla Mitchell not just as an endorser of Maybelline Palette but as an individual influencer. Several comments referenced her posts on other platforms, such as Snapchat, where she likewise posted content related to her Instagram endorsement. A sample quote was, “Was that the blue mascara u showed us on snap the other day? Lol sneaky! Congrats! @makeupshayla”. “Endorser support” is also different from “Endorser Attractiveness”, which is limited to the endorser's physical appearance. The brand name “Maybelline” was mentioned 20 times in the comments concerning inquiries about product availability, support for Shayla Mitchell, or brand support. The product term “palette” was referenced 37 times, with all the comments referring to Product Attractiveness, Pre-purchase, Purchase, and Post-purchase.

The themes that emerged from Shayla Mitchell's case were “Endorser attractiveness”, “Content attractiveness”, “Product attractiveness”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “E-WOM – neutral”, “E-WOM positive”, “Pre-purchase – search”, “Purchase”, “Brand bashing – animal testing”, “Authentic engagement – interest in Niche”, and “Authentic engagement – Endorser support”.

4.2.7 Nikkie Tutorials

Nikkie de Jager, known as Nikkie Tutorials, was born in 1994 (Millennial) and gained popularity through her YouTube before-and-after make-up videos. She was 26 years old, with an estimated 14.1 million followers on Instagram in May 2020. Nikkie posted an endorsement of Fenty Beauty Concealer on her Instagram profile, from which 1000 comments on her post yielded the most frequent words shown in Figure 4.10.

		<p>“Brand new self-taught mua since October but you are My Queen. Thanks for helping me fix my hooded eyes! And you are so gorgeous and Stunning just naturally. I just love your vibe 🍷” (Authentic engagement – Interest in Niche)</p>
love	123	<p>“Amazing! I love your work. 😄😄 😐😐 😐😐” (Authentic engagement – Endorser support)</p> <p>“I know you usually do make up tutorials, but I think a great video would be a hair tutorial!! You have iconic hair styles, and not many I see in America. I would love to see how you do you hair and get it looking so perfect! You are so amazing, and thanks for changing my make-up routine forever!” (Authentic engagement – Interest in Niche)</p> <p>“Loved the tutorial, very understated and soft 🤩🤩🤩🤩” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love watching your videos!! I glad you enjoyed your vacation 🤩🍷 I hope to one day see my YouTube grow! Stay amazing “Godin” (Authentic Engagement – Support for Endorser)</p>
look	119	<p>“Nikki, when I look at your videos you help me love myself. I've been going through some hard times and to see the beauty you have helps me see the beauty in me. Thank you. 🍷” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)</p> <p>“@theoddpineapple this look. Tamed down a bit.” (E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“Woop. I like this make-up look, it looks magniiiiifiiicccceennnttt on you 🌸 By the way I do steps in make-up too 🌸” (Content Attractiveness; Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)</p>

nikkie/ @nikkietutorials	56	<p>“You look stunning Nikkie! 🥰” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“Beautiful Nikkie as always” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p> <p>“😁😁😁 @nikkietutorials can you do a video on your jewelry. It’s like the third reason I love you. Lol❤️💎” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser Support; Content attractiveness)</p> <p>“These coloursssssss Nikkie 🙌😁” (Product Attractiveness – not endorsed)</p>
lip/lips	33	<p>“love the lip colour on u 🙌🙌” (Product Attractiveness – not endorsed)</p> <p>“Anyone knows that lip colour” (Product Attractiveness – not endorsed)</p> <p>“Eyes, nose and lips stand out in this beautiful face” (Endorser Attractiveness)</p>

While some comments regarding lipstick and jewellery may overlap with the code “Content Attractiveness”, a close reading of the data revealed that Nikkie’s followers were generally interested in other products rather than being attracted by the product in her post. Hence, the theme “Product Attractiveness – not endorsed” emerged from the data. On the other hand, the actual product endorsed, “foundation”, was mentioned only once, but referring to another brand and directed to Nikkie Tutorial’s niche – makeup content. The quote was, “please review the hourglass foundations!!!” Furthermore, Fenty Beauty, the endorsed brand, was referenced once using the Instagram handle @fentybeauty with the quote, “Honestly, I watched the video this morning, and I wanted to buy @fentybeauty for the first time 😁” (Authentic Engagement – Pre-purchase propensity).

The themes that emerged from all comments in Nikkie Tutorial’s case were “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Content Attractiveness”, “Product Attractiveness”, “Product Attractiveness

– not endorsed”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “E-WOM neutral”, “E-WOM positive”, “Authentic engagement – interest in Niche”, and “Authentic Engagement – Endorser support”.

4.2.8 Jeffree Star

Born in 1985 (Millennial), Jeffree Star is an American entrepreneur, the founder of Jeffree Star Cosmetics, and a singer. He started in the social media platform Myspace but later gained popularity on YouTube. At the time of data collection in May 2020, Jeffree Star was 34 years old, with 15.9 million Instagram followers. His Instagram profile contained an endorsement for L’Oréal Infallible Foundation, of which 1000 comments on the post generated the high-frequency words demonstrated in Figure 4.11.



Figure 4.11 Word cloud – Jeffree Star

The word cloud highlights the most frequent words from the data collected from Jeffree Star’s followers. The top five terms were “love”, “foundation”, “try”, “get”, and “use”. While the researcher became familiar with the data using these high-frequency words, it allowed her to theorise and use inductive reasoning to compare the focused themes with those adopted from the Source Credibility model. The comments were analysed line-by-line to categorise the essence of the data and generate focused themes. Table 4.8 contains a sample of the coding and thematizing process using sample quotes.

Table 4.8 High-Frequency Words – Jeffree Star

Word	Count	Sample quotes
love	244	<p>“Dude I love it, deffs would recommend it to everyone 10/10 😊 @fillyy_” (E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“You are my idol 🍷 your make-up is my goals I love you” (Endorser – Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I love this foundation” (Product Attractiveness)</p> <p>“I bought it when I saw it in one of your videos and I loved it! 😊😊😊” (Post-purchase Satisfaction)</p> <p>“@lydialooooo not sure if it's oil based but I will say it leaves me VERY oily! I do love it I just ha every oily skin and in the summer it's not good for me. Very lightweight and good coverage tho” (Post-purchase Dissatisfaction)</p>
foundation	163	<p>“Does this foundation apply smoothly?” (Pre-purchase Search)</p> <p>“It's the best drugstore foundation I've ever tried love it 😊” (Post-purchase Satisfaction)</p> <p>“@ana_milenabp look! This is the foundation I was telling you about !!!” (E-WOM positive)</p> <p>“I love this foundation 🍷🍷🍷 I'm just like jeffree. I'm all high-end baby!! But when I tried this oml it has great coverage, dewy & glowy, didn't crease on me *shocker* & I have rosacea, acne, acne scars, etc a lot going on with my skin lol and this is just amazing.” (Post-purchase Satisfaction)</p> <p>“You should try this foundation @caitlinliston18” (E-WOM positive)</p>

- “Bought this foundation because of you. The power you have. Lol. 😏😏😏” (Trustworthiness; Authentic engagement – Endorser)
- try 141 “@avie_babey we must try” (E-WOM positive)
- “@bellajacqueline28 I want to try this” (E-WOM positive)
- “But it's not cruelty free so I won't try it sad face” (Brand bashing – Animal cruelty)
- “I definitely need to try it!” (Pre-purchase – propensity)
- “I was so excited to try this foundation and it does nothing for me 😞” (Post-purchase Dissatisfaction)
- get 122 “😞 I loved this foundation but it broke me out. I have very dry skin and by the end of a 8 hr workday I would get oily.” (Post-purchase Dissatisfaction)
- “started getting it because of you and it's amazing lol” (Trustworthiness; Post-purchase Satisfaction)
- “@s. ezzz get this one!!!” (E-WOM positive)
- “Just bought this and tried it and I love it! It is definitely going in my make-up collection. I never buy drugstore make-up because I am obsessed with getting make-up at Sephora, but I will be buying this when I run out again!!! Great foundation!!!” (Post-purchase Satisfaction)
- “👀👀👀 where can I get this plz?” (Pre-purchase Search)
- use 80 “this is what i use!! @lydiapetersen” (Post-purchase Usage)
- “It's weird that someone who's own make-up line is cruelty free still promotes so many brands that test on animals? Basically, buying your brand supports your personal use of testing on animals?” (Brand bashing – animal cruelty)

“@spalalaboutique make sure you use a good moisturiser beforehand, then use a primer and it'll help immensely.”
(Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)

“Your products are cruelty free, but do you use loreal ???
xD what a more inconsistent person” (Untrustworthy)

L'Oréal as a brand was not referenced once. However, most user comments indicated whether they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the brand on Jeffree's profile. The themes that emerged from analysing Jeffree Star's endorsement were “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Content – Unrelated to the endorsement”, “Product Attractiveness”, “Product Attractiveness – not endorsed”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “Trustworthiness”, “Untrustworthy”, “E-WOM neutral”, “E-WOM positive”, “Pre-purchase - Need Recognition”, “Pre-purchase – Search”, “Post-purchase -Usage”, “Post-purchase - Satisfaction”, “Post-purchase – dissatisfaction”, “Brand bashing – animal testing”, “Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche”, and “Authentic Engagement – Endorser support”.

4.2.9 Laura Gurrola

Laura Gurrola, or Laurag_143, born in 1986 (Millennial), is a 32-year-old micro-influencer who gained popularity through vlogging on YouTube. She had approximately 1.9 million followers on Instagram as of May 2020. Laura has developed her own cosmetic brand LiveGlam while, at the same time, she was endorsing Gerard Cosmetics lipsticks on her Instagram profile. The selected 1000 comments on her Instagram endorsement generated the high-frequency words demonstrated in Figure 4.12.



Figure 4.12 Word cloud – Laura Gurrola

The word cloud shows the most frequent words that emerged from among the comments collected from Laura Gurrola’s followers were “nail/polish”, “get”, “just”, “herpes”, and “sore”.

While becoming familiar with the data using the high-frequency words above, the process allowed the researcher once more to develop initial codes from the data. The comments were then analysed line-by-line to identify the essence of the data and generate focused themes while keeping the Source Credibility model in mind. Table 4.9 contains a sample of the coding and thematising process using sample quotes.

Table 4.9 High-Frequency Words – Laura Gurrola

Word	Count	Sample quotes
nail/polish	178	<p>“Nice lip colour, the nail polish is gross though!” (Content - Negative attention)</p> <p>“@loribcooke68 she put clear nail polish on her cold sore. What the heck?!!!!” (E-WOM – negative)</p> <p>“yall chill, it's not nail polish 😊😊 that's vitamin e oil, it heals scars & helps keeps them healthy, trust me, I've used it for scars</p>

		from surgeries 😬 100% safe 😬 🙏 🙏 ” (Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)
		“@yeeahrosie i would never put nail polish on my lips and especially not if i had a cold sore lmao this is gross” (Untrustworthy)
get	98	“When your lip injections get infected, clever!!” (Content – Negative attention)
		“Girl get this @m.yusufi” (E-WOM positive)
just	67	“Tried this and the lipstick. Just flakes off after 3 hours.” (Post-purchase Dissatisfaction)
		“she's just a dumb ass & she's just gonna end up really hurting herself 😬 😬 oh” (Endorser – negative comment)
		“Wtf did I just watch...” (Content – negative comment)
		“SHE JUST PUT NAIL POLISH ON HER LIP KAYLA @kaylamartin” (E-WOM Negative)
herpes	50	“@analprincess HSV 1 is herpes. If you get a cold sore, you technically have herpes. You don't automatically get 1 in your life. Some people never get one, which means they don't carry HSV1. A lot of people do have HSV1 though. The CDC suggests that 80% of adults have it, even if they don't know. But @cnatiffany is right.” (Content – Unrelated to endorsement)
sore	46	“That's what a cold sore is @mzliljohn94” (E-WOM Negative)
		“that ain't no cold sore 😬 @niniwesson” (E-WOM Negative)
		“If I had a cold sore I wouldn't be applying the applicator of my lipgloss to it.... So it doesn't spread” (Untrustworthy)

The lipstick endorsement post generally received negative attention from the followers. The brand Gerard Cosmetics and the handle @gerardcosmetics were not mentioned once in the

The word cloud developed by NVivo 12 demonstrates all the high-frequency words among the comments collected from Manny Gutierrez’s followers. These words were used to theorise on the initial themes in the data using the Source Credibility model as a guideline. The top five words were “love”, “look”, “@mannymua733/many”, “eyes”, and “beauty”. More focused themes and concepts adopted from the Source Credibility model were used in the coding process illustrated in Table 4.10 below

Table 4.10 High-Frequency Words – Manny Gutierrez

Word	Count	Sample quotes
love	217	<p>“Love this pic” (Content Attractiveness)</p> <p>“♥♥I love your one brand tutorials/reviews!” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser Support)</p> <p>“Ok, so I’m seriously in-love with you! But can I ask you do like an updated video on what full coverage foundations you recommend to cover blemishes (I have little freckles all over that I hate), that definitely don’t look cakey & can you pretty please include contouring, baking & highlighting! Thank you thank you thank you ♥♥♥” (Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)</p> <p>“realistic! I love who you are, @mannymua733 ♥M” (Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche)</p> <p>“What eye shadow? I love it! ♥) (Product Attractiveness – not endorsed)</p>
look	215	<p>“@2ouk_e this look ♥♥♥” (E-WOM positive)</p>

- “looking good
Manny!!!!!!! 😊😊😊💧💧💧💧” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “Lookin fierce” (Endorser Attractiveness)
- “@mannymua733 this is such a good look for u. I love love the red wish I could pull it off, maybe I can. But I don't have your skills!! 😊💧💧💧” (Trustworthiness)
- @mannymua733/manny 146 “You are about the fiercest thing I've seen on Instagram today! @mannymua733” (Endorser – Attractiveness)
- “When's the launch Manny enough waiting for us!! 😞 @mannymua733” (Pre-purchase Need Recognition)
- “@mannymua733 jelly at how good u are 📺📺👉👉💕💕💕💕💕 love your work 💕💕💕” (Trustworthiness)
- “@mannymua733 when is your eyeshadow palette going to come out!!!! 😞😞” (Pre-purchase Searching)
- eyes 88 “@mannymua733 I never noticed you would make your backgrounds B&W until today's video, I guess my eyes ignored the back and white and decided to tell me there's colour when there's not 😊 love all your videos 💕💕💕💕” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)
- “Oh wow the eyeshadow makes your eyes POP 🙄” (Product Attractiveness – not endorsed)

beauty

30

“If @lunarbeauty doesn’t launch with a “Copper Eye-Nude Lip™” duo kit I’m gonna scream and put my wig BACK ON 😂😂😂jkjkjk ily can’t wait” (Content – Unrelated to endorsement)

“i want to cry because of your beauty. angels weep tears of envy upon your presence. im insulted.” (Endorser Attractiveness)

“MANNY SLAYING THE GAME! So stunning! Love you manny! Hoping your at vidcon or Beautycon! ❤️” (Authentic Engagement – Endorser support)

The majority of the comments were directed to the Lunar Beauty eyeshadow palette launch rather than Hourglass Vanish Foundation. “Hourglass Vanish” was referenced in one quote, “@jaaala - hourglass vanish stick x.” “Foundation” was mentioned twice, both quotes referring to the usual content in Manny Gutierrez's posts. Therefore, it could be interpreted that the followers showed their Authentic Engagement through Interest in the Niche: (“But can I ask you do like an updated video on what full coverage foundations you recommend to cover blemishes”, and another “@mannymua733 which are the best brushes for eyes and foundation from Morphe Thanks for the help”).

The focused themes from Manny Gutierrez’s case were “Endorser Attractiveness”, “Content Attractiveness”, “Content – Unrelated to the endorsement”, “Product Attractiveness – not endorsed”, “Attractiveness – general comment”, “Trustworthiness”, “E-WOM - neutral”, “E-WOM - positive”, “Pre-purchase - Need Recognition”, “Pre-purchase – Search”, “Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche”, and “Authentic Engagement – Endorser support”.

4.3 Coding Process

The coding process was undertaken using NVivo 12. The qualitative data analysis application was used for organising, analysing, and visualising unstructured raw data into themes or topics discovered in the research data. NVivo coding was used as part of the entire analytical process of categorising or clustering the related user comments into containers or nodes. The nodes

represented the pre-determined themes adopted from the Source Credibility model, plus two themes realised through the literature review and scanning of the raw data. Thus, NVivo supported two approaches during the coding process. First, it supported deductive coding, which included the pre-determined codes or themes adopted from the Source Credibility model and literature review (E-WOM and Brand bashing) and inductive coding, a process of generating themes while examining the collected data.

Each case was coded and thematised separately, and then cases were analysed and compared as a whole using Yin's (2014) replication strategy for multiple case studies. The first phase of the analysis process included the initial coding of the data by allocating chunks of data to be broken down into the smallest units of meaning, namely codes, and then theorised and clustered into categories. After that, it required an iterative process of going back and forth through the data to search for new meanings (Charmaz, 2017). NVivo also contains a frequency query feature that could count the number of times a certain code appeared in the data. The query function was used to obtain a general idea of data patterns running throughout each dataset.

The high-frequency words allowed the verification of the pre-determined themes (see Table 3.3). At this point, new patterns and themes could be recognised in addition to the pre-determined themes. While NVivo could generate word count and code large chunks of data according to pre-determined codes, the software could not automatically analyse the context and allocate meaning to the data. Therefore, interpretation of the context and allocation of meaning to the codes had to be made manually. Codes with similar meanings were assigned to the same hierarchy or category for further theorising and the building of new information.

An iterative validation of the themes in the celebrity and micro-celebrity case couplings was needed to address the research questions. In Chapter 3, the coupling of cases was based on the brand and product each influencer endorsed on their profile. Comparisons guided by Yin's (1994) literal replication strategy for multiple case studies helped the researcher search and identify similar themes between the heterogeneous cases, which would then be discussed after presenting the findings.

Each case and coupling report was generated through NVivo 12 to compare the themes, codes, and coded texts. Next, a theoretical replication strategy was applied to the analysed data to reflect the meanings. In theoretical replication, themes from each case, coupling, and across cases were compared to find similarities in the building of new information. The reports

extracted from NVivo 12 helped to compare the celebrity and micro-celebrity themes and demonstrated similarities and differences for further interpretation.

4.4 Core Themes

Core themes refer to the main or focused themes that emerged from the data based on the similarity of meanings. Themes were considered core themes when substantial support was evident from each of the cases. The themes that emerged from each case coupling were compared with those in the other couplings for cross-case analysis. The comparison resulted in common and contrasting themes between each case couple, which allowed the researcher to categorise common and exclusive themes for all celebrity and micro-celebrity cases.

Overall, five core themes emerged from the data, of which Attractiveness and E-WOM appeared the most recurrent. These themes encompassed general, endorser, product, and content attractiveness, and neutral, positive and negative E-WOM. One core theme that emerged exclusively from the celebrities' endorsement accounts was Brand Bashing – Animal Testing. Two core themes emerged only from the micro-celebrity cases, namely Pre-purchase Searching and Authentic Engagement. The following section contains the description of each theme as it emerged from the coupled cases. In addition, tables and verbatim quotes from the comments are presented to support the findings.

4.5 Coupled Cases

The findings are presented according to the themes that emerged from the case couplings. At the end of this section, a synthesis of the core themes will show the multiple case study research findings and the analysis of comments on their Instagram accounts. Finally, the tables and graphs will be discussed in the order of appearance in NVivo 12, containing the focused themes from the final coding.

4.5.1 Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials

The case coupling between celebrity Elle Fanning and micro-celebrity Nikkie Tutorials generated five common themes with adequate evidence from the analysed data. These themes were Endorser Attractiveness, Content Attractiveness, Attractiveness – General Comment, E-WOM neutral, and E-WOM positive. The common and discrepant themes that emerged from comparing the comments on the couple's Instagram accounts are listed in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials

Elle Fanning Themes	Nikkie Tutorials Themes
Endorser Attractiveness	Endorser Attractiveness
Content Attractiveness	Content Attractiveness
Content – Unrelated to endorsement	
	Product Attractiveness – not endorsed
Attractiveness – general comment	Attractiveness – general comment
Content Attractiveness – negative comment	
Trustworthy – credible	
E-WOM neutral	E-WOM neutral
E-WOM positive	E-WOM positive
Brand Bashing	
Brand Bashing – animal testing	
	Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche
	Authentic Engagement – Support for Endorser

As an actress, several comments on Elle Fanning’s post were about her performance in films, such as, “@ellefanning watched “All the Bright Places” with my 16yo daughter and all I have to say is powerful” and “Reminds me of Neon Demon. 🙌💧.” These comments were coded under Content – Unrelated to Endorsement. In Nikkie Tutorials’ case, several comments were made about Product Attractiveness; however, the engrossing product was not endorsed. For instance, “That lipstick is amazing!” The majority of the comments in Nikkie Tutorials’ post were about Content Attractiveness (e.g., “You looks like @perrieedwards ‘s new photo’s make-up 😊😊😊😊😊😊. I love thiss 💕💕💕 @nikkietutorials”).

While Elle Fanning had significantly more comments concerning Endorser Attractiveness than micro-celebrity case Nikkie Tutorials, Elle Fanning also received more negative comments on

her post (e.g., “ppl actually like this make-up? looks like a three-year-old drew on her face with crayola markers”). In Elle Fanning’s case, the brand name L’Oréal, and the Instagram handle @lorealparis were not mentioned in the comments. However, comments criticising animal testing by the brand were made by two users: “They test on animals though 😞🐜 their products are sold in stores within mainland China, where animal testing can be performed on any product sold in its markets”). In Nikkie Tutorials’ case, Fenty Beauty’s Instagram handle was mentioned once and coded in Pre-purchase Consideration. The comment was: “Honestly I watched the video this morning and I wanted to buy @fentybeauty for the first time 😊.”

A theme that emerged in Nikkie Tutorials’ case but not in Elle Fanning’s case was Authentic Engagement. As a make-up artist using social media as a platform to show her work, Nikkie Tutorials’ followers appeared to be genuinely interested in her niche – cosmetics (e.g., “I wish you would do a tutorial of the other make up you wore on this video!! So GORGEOUS”). Unlike the comments on Elle Fanning’s post referring to physical attractiveness, the comments on Nikkie Tutorials’ posts also included users’ admiration of her “personality” and other personal traits (e.g., “Always loving the make-up 😊, but it's your personality, your upbeat nature, positivity, sense of humour, honesty and kindness that makes you stand-out and such a beautiful person. 🐜 😊 🐜”).

Hence, the theme of Authentic Engagement emerged outside the pre-determined set of themes of the Source Credibility model.

4.5.1.1 Endorser Attractiveness

The theme Endorser Attractiveness was one of the pre-determined themes from the Source Credibility model. This theme emerged as a common comment in the cases of Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials. The inference can be made that Instagram users perceived Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials as both having physical appeal, and their followers generally expressed their admiration for their appearance. Comments on Attractiveness included the endorsed product and the content of the post itself. Sample quotes to support the theme are presented in Table 4.12.

Table 4.12 Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials: Endorser Attractiveness

Elle Fanning	Nikkie Tutorials
--------------	------------------

you are beautiful even without make-up!	You look like a dream
👉👉	
You're beautiful, you're beautiful, it's true	You look amazing 🤩 ❤️ ❤️ ❤️ ❤️
🎵 🎵 😊	
Sun must be happy to have someone like u	Amazing idol 😊 😊 😊 🤩 🤩 🤩 🤩
to be taught to shine	
you're lovely	U are a SLAYER 🤩

4.5.1.2 Content Attractiveness

Content Attractiveness was included as a sub-theme in the pre-determined ‘Attractiveness’ theme from the Source Credibility model. It refers to comments specific to liking the composition of the post, as illustrated in Table 4.13 below.

Table 4.13 Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials: Content Attractiveness

Elle Fanning	Nikkie Tutorials
The 1st picture reminds me of a viking woman 😊💧	Love this look 😊🤩 just seen the video 😊
I am happy with ur pic 🤩👉 keep going baby 🤩	Nikkie, I fell in love with this look ❤️
I love this and how you’re so creative with these looks! extra inspiring! 😊👉	the pop of yellow 🐱
So artistically aesthetic 👉👉👉	Love all the warm colors 😊

4.5.1.3 Attractiveness – General Comment

The theme Attractiveness – General Comment refers to vague expressions of approval in that the endorser or the content, not the product, was mentioned. Comments such as “love!” or “😊😊😊😊😊😊” were common between the coupled cases of Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials.

4.5.1.4 E-WOM Neutral

E-WOM neutral was a pre-determined theme that appeared during the scanning of the raw user comments. The theme is defined as comments in which an Instagram user tags another user without commenting on anything else. Users who commented with a tag did not encourage or discourage the tagged user but directed them to the post. E-WOM neutral was a common theme between Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials.

4.5.1.5 E-WOM Positive

E-WOM positive emerged as a common theme between Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials. However, Instagram users, in the case of Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials, not only tagged other users to encourage them to follow or buy the product but also to encourage other users to view the contents of the post. Excerpts from the comments that support this theme are found in Table 4.14.

Table 4.14 Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials: E-WOM Positive

Elle Fanning	Nikkie Tutorials
@makeupgirllzzz your 🐱 girls	@acaa.h you should try something like this 😊
Some peak me in high school vibes here @laurencurtain 😂	@_tabes_ ich so: omg so beautiful
@k4rinac I love this actress ❤️	@sigrid_medusa 🐱💧
@nathrossettoI remembered you 😊	@__alexoconnor make-up like this would look bomb on you!

4.6 Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell

Both Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell posted endorsements of the brand Maybelline on their Instagram profiles. Additionally, Gigi Hadid endorsed Maybelline Mascara, while Shayla Mitchell endorsed her product in collaboration with the brand “Maybelline X Shayla Palette”. Seven common themes emerged in the case coupling of Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell. The themes were Endorser Attractiveness, Attractiveness – General Comment, E-WOM Neutral,

E-WOM Positive, Pre-purchase Searching, and Brand Bashing – Animal Testing. The themes for both cases are presented in Table 4.15.

Gigi Hadid	Shayla Mitchell
Endorser Attractiveness	Endorser Attractiveness
	Content Attractiveness
Product Attractiveness	Product Attractiveness
Attractiveness – general comment	Attractiveness – general comment
Trustworthiness – believable	
E-WOM neutral	E-WOM neutral
E-WOM positive	E-WOM positive
Pre-purchase Need Recognition	
Pre-purchase – Search	Pre-purchase – Search
	Purchase
Post-purchase Usage	
Post-purchase satisfaction	
Brand Bashing – animal testing	Brand Bashing – animal testing
Brand Support	
	Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche
	Authentic Engagement – Endorser support

4.6.1 Endorser Attractiveness

Instagram users generally commented on their attraction for both Gigi Hadid’s and Shayla Mitchell’s physical appearance. Thus, Endorser Attractiveness emerged as a theme from both these celebrity and micro-celebrity cases. Furthermore, this theme was one of the pre-determined themes from the Source Credibility model.

4.6.2 Product Attractiveness

Unlike in Elle Fanning and Nikkie Tutorials’ coupling, Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell’s cases included the theme of Product Attractiveness. This theme was one of the pre-determined ‘Attractiveness’ sub-themes from the Source Credibility model. Instagram users generally remarked on and showed their appreciation of the product endorsed by Gigi Hadid’s and Shayla Mitchell’s posts. Excerpts from the verbatim data supporting this theme are indicated in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16 Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell: Product Attractiveness

Gigi Hadid	Shayla Mitchell
This mascara is the best ever	My favorite palette right now.
My favorite affordable mascara everrr	I love this palette the colors are really great
Good quality mascara 🙌 Im so in love with it 🙌	That's awesome. I buy tons of expensive make up on a regular basis, but I have always liked Maybelline's eyeshadow palettes.
Super Mascara! 🙌 👩 🙌	This palette looks gorgeous 🐱 🤩

4.6.3 Attractiveness – General Comment

Instagram users largely left comments on Gigi Hadid’s and Shayla Mitchell’s posts expressing their appreciation. However, it was unclear whether the comments were directed at the influencer, the product, or the content. The comments consisted of either emojis (i.e., “👏👏👏 🙌 🙌 🙌 🙌 🙌 🙌”), one-word expressions (e.g., “Wonderful” and “Super”, or a combination of texts and emoji (e.g., “Wow 🤩”).

4.6.4 E-WOM Neutral

E-WOM Neutral is, in this case, also described as comments by Instagram users containing tagging at least one other user without mentioning anything else. As indicated before, E-WOM is another concept adopted from the Source Credibility model. Instagram users largely supplied neutral referrals to the product endorsements on Gigi Hadid’s and Shayla Mitchell’s posts.

4.6.5 E-WOM Positive

In discussing the adopted Source Credibility model, E-WOM Positive refers to comments in which a user tags at least one other person, encouraging them to follow the brand or purchase the specific product. In the cases of Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell, E-WOM Positive denotes user referrals indicating their positive thoughts not just about the brand or the product but also about the endorser and the content of the post. Some verbatim quotes from the data are shown in Table 4.17.

Table 4.17 Gigi Hadid vs. Shayla Mitchell: E-WOM Positive

Gigi Hadid	Shayla Mitchell
It's great, but it's a new ad @delaniapotabuga @ayputri.s	@Ninoshka_j here for it 😊
@n_cherryry she's so pretty ❤️	Make my eyes look like this @kcatastrophic
@ammara_malik_ @saraf_njh @1d_taharatk we should all use this mascara before we get our final grades so that even if we cry it won't smudge.	@erycacane was JUST about to tag you asking if you peeped this. I should have known you would be on point.
😊😭👍	
😊😊😊😊😊😊 @varsha.nayak	@twostepsylvia buy this

4.6.6 Pre-purchase Search

Comments directed to inquiries or searching for information on the product were coded under the sub-theme Pre-purchase Searching. The sub-theme was also one of the pre-determined concepts from the Source Credibility model. Instagram users generally inquired about the availability of the products endorsed by Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell. There were also inquiries on Shayla's post about the product and/or purchasing the product (“@makeupshayla & @maybelline will the products be available in France?”), which falls under the theme of Pre-purchase Search. Some excerpts from the data are shown in Table 4.18.

4.18 Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell: Pre-purchase Search

Gigi Hadid	Shayla Mitchell
When is this out??	When does the collection come out.
Where can this mascara be found????	Will this be a global release or just in the US?
Why this mascara is unavailable everywhere?!	@makeupshayla what time central time???
When will it come in Turkey acaba ??	I love the colors but fellow MUA (who only buys pro high end) said lots of fallout. I am drugstore brand ambassador, any reviews from MUA who work with drugstore brands?

4.6.7 Brand Bashing – Animal Testing

Although both influencers endorsed the brand Maybelline, the comments in Gigi Hadid’s profile containing the term “Maybelline” or the Instagram handle “@maybelline” largely highlighted animal testing and animal cruelty. In Shayla Mitchell’s profile, some comments also contained brand bashing due to animal testing. However, the comments were generally associated with users’ expressions of support for Shayla Mitchell’s collaboration with Maybelline: (“Lol why do I feel like my sister just created something with Maybelline? I’m all emotional and shit 😂😭😭 congrats Shayla. So proud of you”).

4.6.8 Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star

Celebrity Kendall Jenner posted a product endorsement of Estee Lauder Double Wear Makeup on her Instagram profile, while micro-celebrity Jeffree Star endorsed L’Oréal Infallible Concealer. Five common themes emerged from the coupling of the Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star cases. The themes were Endorser Attractiveness, Attractiveness – General Comment, E-WOM Neutral, E-WOM Positive, and Brand Bashing – Animal Testing. The themes from both cases are presented in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19 Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star

Kendall Jenner Themes	Jeffree Star Themes
Endorser Attractiveness	Endorser Attractiveness
Content Attractiveness	Content – Unrelated to endorsement
	Product Attractiveness
	Product Attractiveness – not endorsed
Attractiveness – general comment	Attractiveness – general comment
	Trustworthiness
	Untrustworthy
E-WOM neutral	E-WOM neutral
E-WOM positive	E-WOM positive
	Pre-purchase Need Recognition
	Pre-purchase – Search
	Post-purchase – Usage
	Post-purchase – Satisfaction
Post-purchase – dissatisfaction	Post-purchase – Dissatisfaction
Brand Bashing – animal testing	Brand Bashing – Animal testing
Brand Support	
	Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche
	Authentic Engagement – Endorser support

4.6.9 Endorser Attractiveness

The theme Endorser Attractiveness was one of the pre-determined themes derived from the Source Credibility model. This theme also emerged frequently from the cases of Kendall Jenner

and Jeffree Star. Data coded under this theme consisted of comments praising Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star’s physical appearance.

4.6.10 Attractiveness – General Comments

Although not accounted for in pre-determined themes adopted from the Source Credibility model, the sub-theme Attractiveness – General Comments emerged from the data in Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star’s cases. The sub-theme was extracted from Instagram users’ comments expressing attraction or admiration but not specifically directed to the endorser, the product, or the content. Texts, emoji, and a combination of texts and emoji were coded for this theme to emerge from the data.

4.6.11 E-WOM Neutral

Like the other cases, E-WOM Neutral is defined as the comments made by an Instagram user containing only a tag to at least one other Instagram user. The comments did not contain positive or negative remarks about the post or the endorser. This sub-theme was pre-defined from the raw data and literature review and emerged from the coded data in both the Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star cases.

4.6.12 E-WOM Positive

The theme E-WOM Positive was one of the pre-determined sub-themes as described above. Positive electronic referrals emerged commonly in the Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star cases. The sub-theme encompassed positive statements about the brand and the product, the content, and the endorser, as presented in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20 Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star: E-WOM Positive

Kendall Jenner	Jeffree Star
@juliaclaire11 my obsession	@stephbabyy_cd I wanna try!
@chenan_ Kendal Jenner presenting Estée Lauder 😊😊😊😊😊	this is what i use!! @lydiapetersen
We should make a video like this when we're getting ready for the dance 😊	@nomiguardian ayyye! I love this foundation and its thanks to YOU! 🙌
@abbi.ritchie	

4.6.13 Brand Bashing – Animal Testing

Despite endorsing different brands, both cases involved Instagram user comments in which they criticised Estee Lauder and L’Oréal for animal testing. Brand Bashing is a concept that appeared from the scanning of the raw user comments and is defined as negative comments about the brand and the product. Several negative comments were made about the brands’ animal testing in both Kendall Jenner and Jeffree Star’s cases. For example, “This brand tests on animals. Maybe you could demand them to stop @kendalljenner”, and “@idfkash stooopid if I had a vegan brand I wouldn't promote anything to do with animal cruelty”).

4.7 Bella Hadid versus Laura Gurrola

Celebrity case Bella Hadid was involved in the Instagram endorsement of Dior Rouge. Her case was coupled with the micro-celebrity case of Laura Gurrola, which involved an Instagram endorsement of Gerard Cosmetics (GC) Lipstick. Among all the cases, only Laura Gurrola did not generate the theme Endorser Attractiveness as supporting evidence was insufficient to highlight the theme. Furthermore, only the coupling between Bella Hadid and Laura Gurrola generated the theme Endorser – Negative Comment across all the case couplings. Three other common sub-themes emerged from these cases: Attractiveness – General Comment, E-WOM Neutral, and E-WOM Positive.

Table 4.21 Bella Hadid versus Laura Gurrola

Bella Hadid Themes	Laura Gurrola Themes
Endorser Attractiveness	
Endorser – negative comment	Endorser – negative comment
Content Attractiveness	
	Content – Negative attention
	Content – Unrelated to endorsement
Product Attractiveness	
Attractiveness – general comment	Attractiveness – general comment

	Untrustworthy
E-WOM neutral	E-WOM neutral
E-WOM positive	E-WOM positive
	E-WOM – negative
	Post-purchase – dissatisfaction
	Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche
	Authentic Engagement – Endorser support

4.7.1 Endorser – Negative Comment

Instagram users, in general, commented with negative remarks on the endorsers Bella Hadid and Laura Gurrola. Hence, the theme Endorser – Negative Comment emerged from the data. However, in Bella Hadid’s case, several comments were also about her Instagram followers expressing physical attraction to Bella. Thus, contradictory themes emerged in the case of Bella Hadid. Some quotes from the comments to support this finding are shown in Table 4.22.

4.22 Bella Hadid versus Laura Gurrola: Endorser – Negative Comment

Bella Hadid	Laura Gurrola
It looks like she is fried, or she was crying really hard	basically, she’s dumb 🤡
i see red eyes	Beauty with no brains, I tell yah!
You look high asf	not pleased Barbie
You look high lol	Dam lip is gonna fall off

4.7.2 Attractiveness – General Comment

Despite the negative comments, several comments also consisted of expressions of admiration. However, the comments on attractiveness were not specifically focused on the endorsers, the

products, the brands, or the content. Some of these comments consisted of only texts or only a heart (❤️) or heart eyes (🥰) emoji.

4.7.3 E-WOM Neutral

Referrals to the posts, products, brands, and content without promoting or bashing the components were coded under E-WOM Neutral. This theme was one of the pre-determined sub-themes emerging from the scanned raw data. E-WOM Neutral developed from the comments on both Bella Hadid and Laura Gurrola’s cases.

4.7.4 E-WOM Positive

The theme E-WOM Positive emerged from the data in the case of Bella Hadid and Laura Gurrola. The theme involved comments by Instagram users tagging at least one other Instagram user to promote the post, product, brand, and content. The sub-theme was also one of the pre-defined themes discovered from the scanned data.

4.8 Hailey Bieber versus Manny Gutierrez

Both Hailey Bieber and Manny Gutierrez endorsed beauty foundations on their Instagram profiles. Hailey Bieber endorsed Bare Minerals Foundation, while Manny Gutierrez endorsed Hourglass Vanish Foundation. Furthermore, the couple revealed four common themes: Endorser Attractiveness, Attractiveness – General Comment, E-WOM Neutral, and E-WOM Positive. An outline of the themes from the two cases is displayed in Table 4.23.

4.23 Hailey Bieber versus Manny Gutierrez

Hailey Bieber Themes	Manny Gutierrez Themes
Endorser Attractiveness	Endorser Attractiveness
Negative Comment	Content Attractiveness
	Content – Unrelated to endorsement
	Product Attractiveness – not endorsed
Attractiveness – general comment	Attractiveness – general comment

	Trustworthiness
E-WOM neutral	E-WOM neutral
E-WOM positive	E-WOM positive
	Pre-purchase Need Recognition
	Pre-purchase – Search
	Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche
	Authentic Engagement – Support for Endorser

Among all the case couplings, Hailey Bieber and Manny Gutierrez appeared to have the most discrepant themes. Data from Hailey Bieber’s case were generally comments limited to Attractiveness and E-WOM. On the contrary, data from Manny Gutierrez’s case appeared to be diverse. Like in other micro-celebrity cases, Manny Gutierrez’s case also generated the themes Pre-purchase Search, Authentic Engagement – Interest in Niche, and Authentic Engagement – Support for Endorser.

4.8.1 Endorser Attractiveness

This theme was one of the pre-determined themes from the Source Credibility model. In addition, Instagram users’ general comments included expressions of physical attraction for both Hailey Bieber and Manny Gutierrez. Therefore, Endorser Attractiveness emerged as a theme in both celebrity and micro-celebrity cases.

4.8.2 Attractiveness – General Comment

Attractiveness – General Comment was not one of the pre-determined themes from the Source Credibility model. Instead, the theme emerged inductively from the analysis of texts and emojis from the Instagram users’ comments. This theme refers to universal comments of appeal that were unclear if the remarks were specific to the endorser, the brand, the product, or the post. Attractiveness – General Comment emerged from both Hailey Bieber’s and Manny Gutierrez’s cases.

4.8.3 E-WOM Neutral

E-WOM Neutral was a pre-determined theme discovered from scanning the raw data. In this study, E-WOM neutral was developed from an Instagram user tagging at least one other Instagram user without saying anything else. The comment's purpose is unclear, but the other user is neither encouraged nor discouraged, simply referring the tagged user to the post. E-WOM Neutral emerged as a common theme between Hailey Bieber and Manny Gutierrez.

4.8.4 E-WOM Positive

E-WOM Positive was a pre-determined sub-theme recognised during the scanning of user comments. The theme emerged as a common theme between Hailey Bieber and Manny Gutierrez. However, the theme was not limited to referrals to the product and encouraged at least one other Instagram user to view the post's content.

4.9 Core Themes from the Couplings

This section contains the core or focused codes developed from the theoretical replication analysis of the five case couplings described in the previous sections. The most frequent themes were categorised under Attractiveness, Brand Bashing, E-WOM, Pre-purchase Search, and Authentic Engagement. The themes were developed through inductive reasoning throughout a constant comparative process of analysing single cases and within couplings to identify Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and the effect that these influencers have on users' propensity to purchase the products. The sections below will present the core themes and their appearance during the comparison of the coupled cases.

4.9.1 Attractiveness

Attractiveness refers to comments about the endorser's physical appeal, content appeal, and product appeal as adopted from the Source Credibility model, which means that most of the comments demonstrated amazement and appreciation. *Endorser Attractiveness* and *Content Attractiveness* were prominent in the comments from both celebrity and micro-celebrity cases, except in Laura Gurrola's case. *Product Attractiveness* emerged as a theme in two celebrity cases (Gigi Hadid and Bella Hadid) and two micro-celebrity cases (Nikkie Tutorials and Shayla Mitchell). Interestingly enough, only the coupling between Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell

had *Product Attractiveness* in common. *Attractiveness – General Comment* emerged from all cases. The theme refers to users displaying admiration but not for the endorser, the content, or the product. However, among the micro-celebrity cases, it happened that *Attractiveness of a Non-endorsed Product* emerged from the analysis of Nikkie Tutorials', Jeffree Star's, and Manny Gutierrez's cases. Instagram users showed a noticeable interest in other products included but not endorsed on the micro-celebrities' posts, their cosmetic niches, and their lifestyles other than celebrities' posts.

4.9.2 Brand Bashing

Brand Bashing refers to negative comments about the brand or the product. In the theoretical replication analysis of the case couplings, Brand Bashing referred specifically to criticising the brand because of animal testing. The theme *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing* emerged from celebrity cases Elle Fanning (L'Oréal), Gigi Hadid (Maybelline) and Kendall Jenner (Estee Lauder), and from micro-celebrity cases Shayla Mitchell (Maybelline) and Jeffree Star (L'Oréal). Among all the case couplings, the theme emerged commonly for Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell and Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star.

4.9.3 Electronic Word-of-mouth (E-WOM)

The core theme of E-WOM was one of the pre-defined themes identified from the literature review and initial scanning of user comments. E-WOM is described as a referral containing negative, neutral, and positive comments while referring to the source. In this study, E-WOM was generally positive and neutral, except in the case of Laura Gurrola. Therefore, *Negative E-WOM* did not emerge as a prominent theme because negative comments with tags to other users were minimal and mostly directed at the content (i.e. “Ewww lol 😂😂😂😂😂😂@irrevocably_me0214 when it goes too far lol”).

The majority of the E-WOM comments, however, were neutral. Instagram users generally did not comment anything positive or negative about the product, the brand, the endorser, or the content, but simply tagged at least one other user to link them to the post. Again, Laura Gurrola was the exception as she also received negative E-WOM on the product that she endorsed. With the neutral E-WOM, the users' intention of referring another user may be unclear. Conversely, *Positive E-WOM* comments were made to praise the endorser, brand, product, and

content. Positive comments were expressed either through text or emoji and a combination of text and emoji.

4.9.4 Customer Experience: Pre-purchase Searching

Customer Experience comprises comments about the pre-purchase, purchasing, and post-purchase stages adopted from the Source Credibility model. However, in this study, only micro-celebrity cases generated a core theme related to *Customer Experience: Pre-purchase Searching*. The theme emerged from Shayla Mitchell's, Jeffree Star's, and Manny Gutierrez's cases. Instagram users generally inquired about the product being endorsed and its availability. Some inquiries included one user asking another user for recommendations (i.e., "I love the colors but fellow MUA (who only buys pro high end) said lots of fallout. I am drugstore brand ambassador, any reviews from MUA who work with drugstore brands?"), while some questions were about when and where to purchase the product. In the celebrity cases, this theme only emerged from Gigi Hadid's endorsement.

4.9.5 Authentic Engagement

Authentic Engagement was a core theme that emerged inductively from the data to arrive at new information. Authentic Engagement as a core theme only emerged in the case of micro-celebrities. The new theme appeared through theorising on comments about following the endorsers on other social media platforms (e.g., YouTube and Snapchat) for extended periods (e.g., "I've been following your career for a long time!") and the endorser's niche, which commonly related to the cosmetic product and its application.

Authentic Engagement in the data analysis process was interpreted as different from Trustworthiness from the Source Credibility model. Trustworthiness refers to the influencer's credibility, reliability, believability, and knowledgeability when endorsing a product. In this multiple case study, Authentic Engagement encompassed Instagram users' support for the endorser as a social media influencer in the case of beauty brands. Some comments involved users' purchase intent because of their support for the influencer and not because of the brand. For example, one comment in Jeffree Star's post was: "Just bought this and tried it and I love it...I never buy drugstore make-up because I am obsessed with getting make-up at Sephora but I will buy this when I run out again!!!"

4.10 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter were developed to address the research objectives, namely to explore Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products and investigate the effects that celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements have on Instagram users' propensity to purchase the products. Five celebrity cases and five micro-celebrity cases were coupled, namely Elle Fanning versus Nikkie Tutorials; Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell; Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star; Bella Hadid versus Laura Gurrola; and Hailey Bieber versus Manny Gutierrez. Pre-determined themes identified during the scanning of the initial user comments and adopted from the Source Credibility model guided the thematic analysis process performed through NVivo 12. The first couple's common and discrepant themes were noted and used to compare themes emerging from the other four case couplings. The process included a constant comparison of pre-determined themes with the data and an iterative going back and forth to validate the themes in each coupling and across couples. Finally, each theme was compared to the other to reach an appropriate conclusion for further discussion and application in the social media marketing environment.

The themes created from the analysing and theorising process were *Attractiveness*, *Brand Bashing*, *E-WOM*, *Pre-purchase Searching*, and *Authentic Engagement*. To answer the research questions, Instagram users generally perceived micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products to be more effective than celebrity endorsements in terms of Pre-purchase Search and Authentic Engagement. Instagram users' comments generally revealed an interest in Pre-purchase Search and Authentic Engagement in terms of inquiries about the products and their availability, giving and receiving product recommendations from other Instagram users, commenting on the micro-celebrities' niche, and expressing their support for the micro-celebrities' content in another social media platform. Instagram users also appeared to be more interested in micro-celebrities' product choices than celebrities' product choices, as indicated in the findings on Attractiveness. Instagram users have similar perceptions of the Endorser Attractiveness and Content Attractiveness of both celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products. Instagram users rarely expressed Product Attractiveness for the products investigated in this study. However, Instagram users were more inclined to express their attractiveness for products outside the scope of this study that was posted by micro-celebrities than celebrities. This finding on Product Attractiveness may indicate Instagram users' tendency to be more interested in micro-celebrities' lifestyles through their product choices than

celebrities' lifestyles. Brand Bashing particularly emerged in Instagram users' comments when the brand was known to conduct animal testing.

The theme of Brand Bashing due to animal testing emerged in the couplings between Maybelline celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsers (Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell) and L'Oreal celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsers (Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star), and Estee Lauder celebrity endorser Kendall Jenner. Nonetheless, Instagram users' comments containing Negative E-WOM were minimal and directed to the content rather than the endorser, brand, or product. On the contrary, Positive E-WOM comments were directed to the endorser, the brand, the product, and the content. However, the majority of E-WOM comments were neutral. The intentions of Instagram users who left Neutral E-WOM comments were unclear in this study.

A discussion of these themes will be combined with findings from the literature review to build new information about the influence of celebrities versus micro-celebrities and their leverage in brand marketing campaigns. The interpretation and discussion of the findings will be undertaken in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

“The overarching problem is that everyone sees and uses social media from a different perspective... If today’s brands want to succeed, they have to be in the conversation, and influencers make that happen.” – Neal Schaffer, 2020

5.1 Introduction

Like most things, influencer marketing has been impacted significantly by COVID-19, with important implications for social media influencers and audiences. Influencers are creators of content in which they endorse brands and are often committed to a niche market with a loyal following (Choi, 2020). These influencers, consisting of celebrities and micro-celebrities, and their content, boost brand awareness, improve brand reputation, and reach new audiences. According to Schaffer (2020), content is a key to helping build relationships on social media.

Furthermore, social media users need a sense of stability as the pandemic has caused concern about the present and the future and more consumers are going online. People want to engage with influencers and their content, which they require to be authentic, trustworthy, and cognisant of challenging circumstances (Choi, 2020). Moreover, influencers are typically compensated by brands to create and deliver content through monetary gain and gifts. It is also vital for brands to be aware of how and when to apply different influencers to leverage their new product marketing campaigns.

This chapter discusses and interprets the research findings presented in Chapter 4. The discussion will combine and triangulate the primary research findings with the literature review in Chapter 2. Discussions started with the research problem: despite extreme financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements and the effect these influencers have on user behaviour. The aim is to discuss the research findings on Instagram users’ perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty brand endorsements and the effect these celebrities have on users’ propensity to purchase the products. The findings based on the two research questions are summarised below.

- What are Instagram users’ perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?

- How do Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence the propensity to purchase products?

Contrary to the assumption in Chapter 1, Instagram users may not necessarily perceive micro-celebrities as superior influencers and perceive their endorsement of beauty products as more trustworthy. Instagram users generally expressed their attractiveness to the content and the endorser rather than the brand and the product. According to the findings of the study, Instagram users appeared to engage better with micro-celebrities when referring to the endorsed product, as was represented in the core themes Pre-purchase Search and Authentic Engagement.

However, in terms of E-WOM, both celebrities and micro-celebrities were generally effective in gathering positive and neutral referrals. Some comments were about Brand Bashing, particularly in criticisms of animal testing. However, some users express support or plan to buy the endorsed product despite known "animal testing" and "animal cruelty". Some users also commented that they did not often use make-up but would purchase the product endorsed by the influencer.

Instagram users often express their support for the micro-celebrity due to their media content from other platforms such as YouTube, and that they have been supporting the micro-celebrity for an extended period. Support for the micro-celebrity was not necessarily limited to the post and the product endorsement. Instagram users who commented on micro-celebrities' posts often also expressed their interest in the beauty and cosmetics niche. While not considered the Trustworthiness concept from the Source Credibility model, Authentic Engagement emerged as a core theme in the micro-celebrity cases, as Instagram users generally expressed their genuine support and interest in the micro-celebrities and their lifestyles.

The themes created from the multiple case study research were *Attractiveness*, *Brand Bashing*, *Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)*, *Pre-purchase Search*, and *Authentic Engagement*. *Attractiveness* and *E-WOM* were the two most frequently appearing themes emerging from the data. *Pre-purchase Searching* and *Authentic Engagement* were two themes emerging from the analysis of three micro-celebrity cases. Finally, a theme emerging from the endorsements of four celebrities and one micro-celebrity was *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing*.

The five themes will be interpreted and discussed in the sections below and verified by Source Credibility theory and the literature review findings. The triangulation of the primary findings with the literature review or secondary findings will broaden the research lens on the observed

phenomenon, namely whether celebrities or micro-celebrities should be leveraged and applied during brand awareness and brand marketing campaigns. The discussion below will follow an analytical narrative including Source Credibility theory against which *Attractiveness*, *Brand Bashing*, *Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)*, *Pre-purchase Search*, and *Authentic Engagement* will be verified.

5.2 Influencer Marketing and Source Credibility

The influencer's persuasiveness, the brand, and the message content are inherent to the influential role that the transmitted message plays in influencer communication and engagement with the target audience (Choi, 2020). Influencers are people who leverage social media to grow followers and influence their (purchasing) behaviour to gain money from the process (Lorenz, 2019). Influencer marketing comprises firms employing different celebrities and micro-celebrities to drive brand awareness, stimulate consumer attitudes, and change purchase patterns (Brown, 2019; Fiorella, 2018; Jin *et al.*, 2019). Cosmetic firms pay these celebrities vast sums of money to post brand endorsements on their Instagram accounts (Lord, Petrevu & Collins, 2019; Schoppe, 2016).

Source Credibility theory encompasses various concepts influencing consumer attitude, intent, and behaviour (Hovland, 1953; Ohanian, 1990). The theory puts forward three aspects: firstly, *Trust or Trustworthiness* – the extent to which the audience perceives communication as valid and trustworthy. The factors of honesty, dependability, sincerity, and reliability. Secondly, *Expertise* – the source is perceived as qualified, knowledgeable, professional, experienced, and skilled. Thirdly, *Attractiveness* – the message is amplified by physical appeal and features, such as beauty, elegance, and style of the endorser, the brand, and the content. Finally, the components influenced by the three aspects are *Similitude* – similarity between source and receiver of the message; *Familiarity* – the receiver's closeness to the source; and *Sympathy* – the source's affection shown to the receiver. These concepts will be considered throughout the interpretation and discussion of the multiple case studies of five celebrities and five micro-celebrities and the thematic analysis of user comments on their beauty brand endorsements. The five most frequent themes defined during the primary research and verified against the secondary research are discussed and interpreted below.

5.3 Attractiveness

Many followers admire celebrities and micro-celebrities for their attractiveness. Because they are usually admired for their physical appearance, they are also believed to be trustworthy and authentic in their product endorsements, especially when they exhibit aspects of their real self (De Veirman *et al.*, 2016; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Lotonina, 2019). Companies apply these influencers to promote body-positive lifestyle trends to sell their beauty products (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). The physical appeal focuses on the desirability element of the product in the post (Park & Lee, 2017).

Ohanian (1990) suggested that the source's attractiveness is a vital aspect of credibility when following Source Credibility as a guideline. The multiple case studies revealed that Instagram user comments on attractiveness were generally directed to the endorser's physical appeal or users' admiration of the post content. Users seldom mentioned the attractiveness of the product being endorsed. On the other hand, Instagram users generally expressed endorser and content attractiveness. Researchers suggested that Instagram users might have similar perceptions regarding the attractiveness of the endorser and the content (Cwynar-Horta, 2016; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; Punnahitanond, 2018). Punnahitanond (2018) reported that Instagram users were inclined to be attracted to the endorser's lifestyle rather than the product endorsed, in that Instagram users wanted to achieve the "look" or replicate the influencer's photo or video. Instagram users tend to express their attraction to endorsers and content due to consumer lifestyle achievement. Additionally, Instagram users were not inclined to express Product Attractiveness due to their lack of interest in product consumerism (Punnahitanond, 2018).

Attractiveness was one of the most frequently appearing themes in the data, including its attributes of *endorser attractiveness*, *content attractiveness*, and *product attractiveness*. Research has indicated that attractiveness is an important social media marketing concept involving the influencer, brand, content, and persuasiveness when engaging with the target audience during brand endorsements. These different attributes were prominent in user comments across all cases. However, although attractiveness is important in social media advertising and influencer endorsements, it did not indicate any difference in celebrities' and micro-celebrities' influence on Instagram users' behaviour.

An interesting aspect that did come to the fore was that *Non-endorsed Product Attractiveness* emerged as a theme in three micro-celebrity cases. Instagram followers were interested in other products and asked questions about the influencers' cosmetic niches. Interests comprised

cosmetics that they applied other than the endorsed brands and unrelated products in the background of the micro-celebrities' posts.

The inference is that Instagram users are more comfortable with micro-celebrities and have a sharper awareness of the content posted on their profiles, their cosmetic niches, and their lifestyle.

5.4 Brand Bashing

As a major social media platform, Instagram has opened the door for social activism against the testing of products on animals. Activists share their negative emotions on celebrity and micro-celebrity accounts to influence how products should be manufactured (White, 2020). Although *in vitro* and *in silico* testing methods are gaining ground and large cosmetic brands distance themselves from testing beauty products on animals (Meigs *et al.*, 2018), China has not banned the testing yet (White, 2020). *Brand Bashing* unexpectedly appeared as a theme when screening user comments in the early stages of the analysis process. The concept had to be verified across cases and between case couplings. Brand Bashing, in this instance, referred to criticising the brand because of it being tested on animals (Thew, 2017). *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing* emerged from three celebrity and two micro-celebrity brand endorsements containing L'Oréal, Maybelline and Estee Lauder. The theme regularly emerged from two case couplings that endorsed the brands.

Gigi Hadid and Shayla Mitchell's coupling, both endorsing the brand Maybelline, yielded varying comments about patronising the brand. In Gigi Hadid's posts, comments about animal testing and animal cruelty were prominent in criticising the brand. However, in Shayla Mitchell's case, the brand Maybelline was generally attributed to the micro-celebrity's collaboration line "Maybelline x Shayla". As a result, the users generally expressed their support for her and the product. Similar to Shayla Mitchell's case, micro-celebrity Jeffree Star, who endorsed L'Oréal's products, received supportive comments about the endorsement despite the emergence of the Brand Bashing – Animal Testing theme.

Brand Bashing as a core theme only emerged clearly from the three celebrity cases, as insufficient evidence was available from the two micro-celebrities' posts on the same brands. However, Instagram users showed bias in their bashing of brands depending on who the endorser was and who their followers were. In this case, micro-celebrities were shown to be more influential in creating a positive brand image than celebrities.

If dovetailed with the theme of *Trustworthiness* from the Source Credibility model, the inference can be made that influencers endorsing the above products could not be trusted as honest, sincere, and reliable by sensitive Instagram users who are against the testing of cosmetic products on animals. Thus, no difference in trustworthiness and the lack thereof could be perceived when celebrity and micro-celebrity cases were compared for *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing*.

5.5 Electronic Word-of-mouth (E-WOM)

E-WOM is regularly discussed in social media literature as one user referring another user to an influencers' post with a negative, neutral, or positive comment. Most receivers of the message immediately trust an E-WOM recommendation (Chu & Kim, 2018; Knoll & Matthes, 2017). E-WOM emerged from the initial screening of the raw data extracted from the follower comments. E-WOM is trusted because it is typically generated by someone whom the consumer perceives as reliable when presenting product information. Interestingly, E-WOM as a theme can be related to Trustworthiness. Thus, e-referrals in influencer marketing can profit the beauty industry by growing brand recognition, brand recall, and brand awareness (Bergkvist & Zhou 2016; Knoll & Matthes, 2017).

In most research cases, e-referrals were prompted through the special feature on the Instagram app. All referrals to influencer endorsements were positive or neutral, apart from negative messages and referrals on one celebrity's post. Positive E-WOM comments were made to praise the endorser, brand, product, and content. In most cases, the users' positive comments were expressed through text and emoji. The inference is that influencers as content creators can heighten their influence on Instagram consumers' propensity to purchase products through E-WOM, trustworthiness, and building large audiences.

5.6 Pre-purchase Searching (Customer Experience)

The more social media networks and influencers help create a good customer experience and meet customer needs, the higher user engagement and involvement becomes on the site (Di Gangi & Wasko, 2016; Carlson & Lee, 2015). Influencers connect with their social media audiences through shared ideas and experiences (WIX, 2020) and attempt to build up a large subscriber base to earn a lucrative income. These influencers create content and upload videos while filming their lives with the endorsed products (Influencer, 2020). Furthermore, consumers use social media to evaluate the brands' quality and marketing possibilities (Hudson

et al., 2016). It also happens that consumers can quickly switch to other social media marketing platforms, which leaves social media networks and influencers vulnerable and dependent on the same type of consumer behaviour as product-based companies (Duffet, 2017).

The primary research findings were that *Customer Experience* emerged as a core theme, encompassing attributes such as *Pre-purchase*, *Purchasing*, and *Post-purchase experience*. The theme and its attributes were created through Instagram users inquiring about when and where the product would be available and requesting other users' recommendations before purchasing a product. However, in the cross-case analysis, three micro-celebrities generated the theme *Customer- Experience Pre-purchase Searching*. The theme emerged from Shayla Mitchell's, Jeffree Star's and Manny Gutierrez's cases. In the case of celebrities, this theme only emerged from Gigi Hadid's endorsement. If linked to Trustworthiness and Expertise guided by the Source Credibility model, the attributes attached to this concept are honesty, dependability, sincerity, reliability, knowledgeability, and skillfulness (Ohanian, 1990).

A potential customer's mindset progresses through five stages in the purchasing funnel: awareness of the product, interest to buy, considering buying, decision to buy, evaluation, and purchasing the product. Each behaviour becomes increasingly demanding, with the number of potential consumers decreasing as they progress down the funnel until reaching the primary marketing communication objective – the purchase. Because each purchasing funnel stage impacts consumer behaviour differently, influencers require different approaches to keep customers engaged and not send the wrong message (Dierks, 2017).

The inference is that Instagram users tend to inquire more about the product and demonstrate a higher propensity to purchase the beauty product when endorsed by micro-celebrities. Furthermore, when viewing the research findings and literature review, the inference is that Instagram users perceive micro-celebrities as more relatable than celebrities (Jin *et al.*, 2019). Instagram users may also find micro-celebrities' lifestyles more achievable than celebrities' lifestyles (Cwynar-Horta, 2016). Therefore, Instagram users may be more inclined to express their curiosity and intent to buy the products based on micro-celebrities' brand endorsements.

5.7 Authentic Engagement

Authentic Engagement is a core theme created only across micro-celebrity cases to grow new insight and information from the data. The new theme emerged from theorising on user

comments about following the endorser on other social media platforms and inquiring about their niche, including cosmetic products and applications.

In theory, the influencer's persuasiveness and trustworthiness play a significant role in transmitting the message and engaging with the receiver, particularly the target audience (Choi, 2020). Thus, trustworthiness and persuasion influence consumer attitude, purchase intention, and behaviour (Hovland, 1953; Ohanian, 1990). However, in this case, Authentic Engagement turned the communication process around, with Instagram users engaging with the micro-celebrities about the brands and other products endorsed on their profiles. As a result, some comments concerned users' purchase intent in support of the influencer, not because of the brand.

Two other Attractiveness variables could be linked, namely *Similitude* or the similarity of the source and receiver of the message, and *Familiarity* or the receiver's closeness to the source. Authentic Engagement from the users with the endorser had a positive influence on brand credibility, which, in turn, could lead to purchasing the brand (Chung & Cho, 2017).

5.8 Consumer Age and Influencer Engagement

An interesting concept and focus of the research and literature review were Millennials' buying power which was growing because they are inherently social network consumers. Millennials or Generation Y are people born between 1980 and 1995. They are from the texting and social media boom and are digital natives known for sharing most of their social media experiences via Instagram (Tankovska, 2021). A social media marketing technique believed to sway these consumers' purchasing intent is to use influencers of the same age to endorse a beauty brand on Instagram. It was found that authenticity and the inconsistent customer behaviour of Millennials are two dominant trends to consider in consumption (McCormick, 2016).

Centennials are the generation born near the turn of the century from 1996 onwards. They grew up with face-time video chats, streaming and social media and are intuitive digitals, making the Instagram platform particularly attractive for social media and influencer marketing (Tankovska, 2021). Centennials are believed to often have frivolous spending habits and are hyper-connected on social media, sacrificing in-person social settings for online communication with friends while often searching for product and brand information (Liu & Suh, 2019; Ramos & Rodrigues, 2020) via their smartphones. These consumers are considered one of the most complicated yet largest demographic groups to consider (Phua *et al.*, 2018).

Centennials are influenced by individuals who reflect their backgrounds, passions, and interests. They expect authentic communication, and therefore Centennials as social media influencers are key to being viewed as authentic and credible (Willems, n.d.).

The ten celebrities and micro-celebrities selected as case studies were all Millennials or Centennials. All celebrities were Centennials born in 1996 or after. They were all active brand endorsers with millions of followers on their accounts. There was an age difference of 13 years, with the eldest Millennial born in 1985 and the youngest Centennial born in 1998. Although user comments were carefully scanned to verify bias or age preference, no indication could be found. Therefore, the interpretation was that influencer age was not a mediating factor in the research – which showed research consistency because these two generations were a prerequisite for the research. Furthermore, literature has indicated that the largest group of consumers falls between these ages.

There are additional limitations to consider when discussing the case coupling procedures in which the researcher examined similarities between constructs of micro-celebrities and celebrities. To address the guiding research questions, it was necessary to understand how different sentence similarities between propensity and influence upon followers were constructed based on the constructs of the source credibility model. However, it is important to note that there are difficulties understanding source construct similarities when exploring differences between micro-celebrities and celebrities. For example, while operating within the Instagram platform, there are similarities in how engagers are influenced to purchase a product or perceive a brand between celebrities and micro-celebrities. In essence, the sole purpose of influencers for marketing is to engage potential consumers and followers to buy a product or feel more positive about potentially buying a product in the future. Thus, the researcher attempted to understand if differences were identifiable between these two categories of influencers for these characteristics to be studied. However, as will be discussed in the limitations in Chapter 6, it is important to note that the qualitative matter of gathering participants' reflections rather than understanding content analysis as depicted by textual information on a post performed by a celebrity or micro-celebrity limits the ability of the researcher to understand if honesty or dishonesty is reflected by the participant commenting. Thus, the categories and differences identified between micro-celebrities and celebrities are tentative and require further understanding by potentially even gathering information that is specific to participants' experiences as well as their perceptions of honesty, dishonesty, and

propensity to be influenced to purchase or brand perception based upon their relationship as perceived with a micro-celebrity and celebrity in the Instagram context.

5.9 Conclusion

The conclusion is organised according to the following research questions:

- What are Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?
- How do Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence the propensity to purchase products?

The findings of the current study expand on previous literature by providing a renewed understanding of Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products as well as the influence of celebrity versus micro-celebrities upon the propensity to purchase a product. Previous literature has significantly focused on the importance of influencing, definitions between micro-celebrities and celebrities, as well as providing a renewed understanding regarding the influence upon other individuals based on their public figure status (Ridder, 2017). This study expands upon these assessments providing an understanding regarding how these relationships between influencers and followers are created and as well as result in potential attractiveness to purchase and perceive a brand in a positive light, based on Instagram users' responses. The findings indicate that Instagram users are more inclined to express attractiveness for products based on the differentiation between micro-celebrities and celebrities. The influencing market, identified throughout the study, has become a significant topic of the empirical literature and a strategy employed by brands for marketing (Schaffer, 2020). The findings from this study expand previous literature by discussing the use of Instagram as a specific strategy for influencing the perception of products as well as purchasing propensity. In particular, the five themes identified (*Attractiveness*, *Brand Bashing*, *Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)*, *Pre-purchase Search (Customer Experience)*, and *Authentic Engagement*) within the study provide an understanding of how celebrities and micro-celebrities employ attractiveness, use authentic engagement to potentially influence their Instagram followers regarding purchasing endorsement and perception of beauty products. Further, the findings of this study expand upon previous literature (such as Fatmasari et al. 2019), in terms of understanding source credibility as a framework with an Instagram focus, which was not accomplished in previous assessments. Further, these findings provide an

emphasis on the application of Instagram more specific for the United States, which as noted by previous researchers is a particular interest when understanding influence, influencing, and purchasing intention and propensity based upon platform utilisation (Liu & Suh, 2017; Udovita & Hilal, 2018; Fatmasari et al., 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Ki et al., 2020; Liu & Liu, 2019).

The consolidated findings indicated that although, in theory, source attractiveness plays an important role in social media marketing and brand endorsements, it did not serve as a mediating factor in Instagram users' perceptions of celebrities and micro-celebrities. Regardless of celebrity or micro-celebrity status, Instagram users appeared to be generally attracted to the post content and the product endorser rather than the brand and the product itself. Nonetheless, Instagram users appeared to have a more effective and authentic engagement with micro-celebrities, so much that Non-endorsed Product Attractiveness emerged in cases where users were interested in micro-celebrities, cosmetic niches and lifestyles.

Instagram users typically expressed brand bashing due to animal testing when commenting on celebrity endorsements of beauty brands like Estee Lauder, L'Oréal and Maybelline rather than micro-celebrity accounts on which similar brands were endorsed. It could indicate that Instagram users are biased in their opinions of the brand depending on the endorser. E-WOM (neutral and positive) emerged from both celebrity and micro-celebrity cases with no specific indication of preference between brands endorsed by either influencer. The inference is that celebrities and micro-celebrities are considered equal in expanding brand exposure on Instagram. Instagram users showed more propensity to purchase a product endorsed by a micro-celebrity, as the theme Pre-purchase Search (Customer Experience) emerged only from micro-celebrity cases. Users seemed to express their curiosity about the post content much easier because they perceive micro-celebrities as more relatable and their lifestyles more achievable than celebrities. Lastly, Authentic Engagement emerged as a theme in the micro-celebrity cases, as Instagram users often commented about the endorser's niche and activity on other social media platforms. Authentic Engagement showed user trust, and regular communication with micro-celebrities positively influenced user propensity to purchase the brand.

This chapter discussed the primary research findings and triangulated them against the literature review findings to test validity and congruency by combining information from different sources. Source Credibility theory comprising Attractiveness, Trustworthiness, and

Expertise was used to build new insights and information around the emerging themes of *Attractiveness*, *Brand Bashing*, *Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)*, *Pre-purchase Search (Customer Experience)*, and *Authentic Engagement*. Chapter 6 will present a summary of the findings and conclusion.

Chapter 6: Summary and Conclusion

“We all have a picture of our future. It’s made up of the frivolous and fantastic plans that we construct. We all look forward to specific events in the future, safe in the assumption that they will happen. Yet, this new world we are moving into is incredibly scary because nobody has been here before. Everything we know and understand – from education and banking to retail and relationships – has been rocked to its foundation.

It’s tempting to think that our lives are only on hold, that the virus will fade, and things will go back to the way they were. But that’s simply not true. Everything will be different, so I urge you to prepare for a new normal – a future that’s digital” – Sanei (2020).

6.1 Topic Summary

As discussed in the introductory chapter, Instagram has grown into one of the largest social media and influential networks globally, with the largest percentage of its users below 35 years old. Many social media influencers with large numbers of followers belong to this age group and are using Instagram as one of their self-promotional and brand endorsement platforms by utilising face-time video chats, streaming, and social media marketing features on the platform.

Social media influencers, known as micro-celebrities, have emerged in the beauty and makeup industry as ‘experts’, with many Instagram users following their endorsements. This study, therefore, focuses on Instagram as the selected platform to analyse the celebrity and micro-celebrity follower comments regarding beauty brand endorsements. It analysed whether there was a difference between celebrities and micro-celebrities regarding their ability to influence consumers’ propensity to purchase certain products set in the time of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic is believed to have an impact on the finances, employment, physical health, and mental health of the general adult population (Kampfen et al., 2020), which could also impact Instagram users’ purchasing behaviours.

This final chapter concludes whether Instagram users’ perceptions regarding celebrity versus micro-celebrity beauty product endorsements and the effect these celebrities have on users’ propensity to purchase the products, were markedly different. Ambiguity in previous marketing reports and studies concerning the social media industry and the influence of celebrities versus micro-celebrities informed the research problem:

Despite extensive financial expenditure by the beauty industry on social media influencers, there is still little understanding of the inherent value gained by considering Instagram user perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity brand endorsements and the effect these influencers have on consumer purchase behaviour.

The researcher, from a social media marketing background and adopting a subjective relativist and an interpretivist philosophy, performed the research with the following underlying propositions in mind:

- Instagram users perceive micro-celebrities as superior influencers and their endorsements of beauty products as more trustworthy.
- Instagram users are more inclined to buy beauty products endorsed by micro-celebrities than those endorsed by celebrities.
- Instagram user responses are honest and without significant bias toward the influencer or the endorsed product.
- The selected celebrities' and micro-celebrities' engagement and endorsements are authentic and consumers were not rewarded for responding to their brand endorsements.

6.2 Summary of the Findings

The research findings are summarised in the following sections to ensure that each research question is resolved and all hypotheses addressed. The summary includes both the literature research findings and the primary research findings.

As previously stated, the underlying concept of Source Credibility theory is that people's knowledge, understanding, and expertise on a topic have a direct influence on the opinions and behaviours of others. Social media progress has shifted perceptions of credibility and reshaped how entire generations view social capital offered by celebrities and micro-celebrities in their specific niches, as evidenced by the findings of the study described below.

Attractiveness, with its attributes of endorser attractiveness, content attractiveness, and product attractiveness, is perceived as important, especially where consumer behaviour and influencer brand endorsements in social media marketing are concerned. Attractiveness was recognised as the most frequent theme emerging from user comments on celebrity and micro-celebrity cases. It indicated that neither celebrities nor micro-celebrities were necessarily

superior in users' perceptions of their beauty product endorsements. However, users seemed to be more comfortable engaging with micro-celebrities about non-endorsed products appearing in their posts, their cosmetic niches, and their lifestyles – more so than engaging with celebrities.

Brand Bashing in recent years has generally occurred because beauty brands, although distancing themselves from the practice, have failed to completely ban the testing of cosmetics or their ingredients on animals. *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing* directly referred to animal testing. These brand posts received comments about discouraging readers from patronising the brand or influencers engaging with such brands. Brands included in the study were L'Oréal, Maybelline, and Estee Lauder. Brand Bashing emerged from user comments on celebrity cases, as insufficient evidence was available on micro-celebrity posts regarding the same brands. Although three celebrities and two micro-celebrities endorsed these brands, brand bashing only appeared on the celebrity endorsements. Two micro-celebrities were also endorsing the same brands. *Brand Bashing – Animal Testing* indicates that Instagram users could be biased in their opinions of a brand depending on the endorser. Micro-celebrities seemed to be more influential in creating a positive brand image than celebrities.

Electronic Word-of-mouth (E-WOM) is considered an essential tool for consumers to trust information about a brand. E-WOM emerged as a core theme, referring to comments guiding tagged users to view other posts, not necessarily the product. E-WOM (neutral and positive referrals) emerged from both celebrity and micro-celebrity cases with no specific indication of preference between brands endorsed by either influencer. Because these celebrities are content creators, the inference is that they are considered valuable in expanding brand exposure on Instagram. They can leverage their influence on Instagram consumers' purchases through E-WOM, trustworthiness, and building large audiences.

Customer Experience – Pre-purchase Searching. The ongoing evolution of technology and dynamic innovation in the social media industry has caused customer experience expectations to rise. The purchasing funnel includes product awareness, interest, considering, decision making, evaluation, and purchasing the product. Because each stage impacts consumer behaviour differently, influencers require a different approach for each to keep customers engaged and not send the wrong message. For example, if customers had a bad experience, they posted a negative review and vice versa. Influencers work the same way: they endorse (praise) a business or product they have launched by posting a video review on Instagram.

Customer Experience – Pre-purchase Searching frequently emerged from three micro-celebrity and one celebrity post. Research findings indicate that Instagram users tend to inquire more about the product and demonstrate a higher propensity to purchase the beauty product when endorsed by micro-celebrities. Users seem to communicate easier and express their curiosity about the post content with micro-celebrities because they perceive micro-celebrities to be more relatable and their lifestyles more achievable than celebrities.

Authentic Engagement materialised through inductive reasoning on themes that emerged only from the five micro-celebrity cases. Authentic Engagement emerged from comments containing support for the micro-celebrity in their careers as influencers or user interest in their beauty and cosmetic niche. Authentic Engagement is interpreted differently from Trustworthiness because Trustworthiness refers to source credibility, reliability, believability, and knowledgeableability. On the other hand, Authentic Engagement refers to engagement from the users' side to support the micro-celebrities and their niches. Thus, Authentic Engagement improves purchase intent because of user support of the influencer and not because of the brand.

In consideration of the findings, it is important to note that there are limitations of this research that allow for a reduced understanding of how endorsement for products varies by micro-celebrity and celebrity status. In particular, it may be difficult to understand as well as interpret the comments that are left by followers, as well as interpret these meanings, regarding a follower's propensity for purchasing a product or regarding how they perceive a specific brand. In this setting, it is important for future researchers to consider the methodological limitations of this study as well as to understand that interpretation of potential implications based upon participants' reflections is not exhaustively assessed through a qualitative interpretive approach. For example, though it is possible to review and understand the comments left by participants, it is not always possible to fully understand the context in which the follower perceives the product, the brand, and the micro-celebrity or celebrity. Additionally, individuals may be influenced by internal or external factors. Such factors could include friends, perceptions as perceived by other social media influencers, and things such as social media gossip (which includes differing perceptions of influencers based upon how they act, behave, and interact with other followers). There are also some challenges in understanding how participants are reflecting online regarding honesty or dishonesty. Based on the qualitative methodology of the study, it is not possible to understand if a person's intention was honest or dishonest when commenting on a micro-celebrity or celebrity profile. Such assessments may be best suited to future explorations that would consider the participant's reflections and lived

experiences in terms of commenting and their honesty and dishonesty when engaging with influencers, micro-celebrities, and celebrities. Thus, there is ample opportunity for future researchers to consider these factors and expand upon the current understanding of the literature expanded in this study.

6.3 Conclusions

The research aim was to explore the influence of celebrity endorsements on consumer behaviour. The research findings allowed the researcher to draw conclusions and recommendations for application in the social media marketing environment. Each of the objectives was addressed by first consulting literature on the topic and then performing a multiple case study regarding the influence of celebrity endorsement on consumer behaviour. The primary research findings were triangulated with the literature findings to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. It was discovered that the same themes emerged throughout the analysis and discussion of the findings. The conclusions to the research questions and hypotheses are represented below.

The research findings indicated that:

- Instagram users were generally attracted to the lifestyle of the endorsers rather than the products endorsed. Users directed their comments on Endorser Attractiveness and Content Attractiveness rather than Product Attractiveness.
- Based on the users' comments, they were more inclined to support the micro-celebrities than celebrities, not because of the product endorsements but because of their support for the micro-celebrities and their niche.
- Instagram users were more inclined to engage with micro-celebrities about non-endorsed products appearing in their posts, their cosmetic niches, and their lifestyles than with celebrities.
- Where Brand Bashing due to animal testing emerged from the findings, Instagram users seemed to be biased in their opinions and comments on the brand, based on who the endorser is. Celebrities are more inclined to be criticised for their engagement with brands tested on animals than micro-celebrities.
- Authentic engagement between Instagram users and micro-celebrities creates a propensity to purchase the brands because micro-celebrities seem relatable, and their

lifestyles more achievable compared to those of celebrities. Thus, purchase intent from interactions is because of users' support for the influencer and not because of the brand.

- The research indicated that it has become common practice for celebrities and micro-celebrities to be lucratively rewarded for their endorsements. However, no indication could be found in the user comments that their followers were rewarded for responding to their specific product endorsements. All endorsers had had more than 2000 comments on their posts and were purposely selected to show the authenticity of the comments.
- Celebrities and micro-celebrities analysed for this research were from the Millennial and Centennial age groups. The majority of Instagram users are also from these two age groups. No indication could be found that age mediated the preference for either Millennial or Centennial brand endorsements.

The conclusion is that authentic engagement between Instagram users and micro-celebrities causes curiosity about the endorsers' posts, cosmetic niches, and lifestyles. As a result, users communicate more easily with micro-celebrities and find them more relatable and their lifestyles easier to achieve. Therefore, the conclusion based on authentic engagement is that Instagram users buy micro-celebrities' products to support the endorser and not because of the brand. The Instagram users' general behaviours concerning celebrities' and micro-celebrities' product endorsements were examined during the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The future direction of social media marketing may need to change to adapt to the potential buyers' purchasing power (Kampfen et al., 2020; Sanei, 2020). Sanei (2020) stated that "We are working in an ever-changing world where social media marketing will never be the same. The only way forward is the presentation of online solutions to dynamic issues" (p. 12).

6.4 Summary of Contributions

This study has implications for the theory and practice of social media marketing, influencer marketing, brand endorsement, and the understanding of Instagram user behaviour. Influencer–consumer engagement in the endorsement of brands is still very much limited. Authentic Engagement emerged from the research as the central theme and an important aspect of influencer marketing. Therefore, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by analysing user comments on beauty product endorsements in multiple case studies of USA celebrities and micro-celebrities.

The contribution to the community lies in the fact that celebrities and micro-celebrities are in practice presented by high-profile social media marketing agencies in the influencer industry in which talent agents and managers, brands, marketing agents, and marketing event organisers are stakeholders. Brand bashing due to animal testing and animal cruelty emerged as the only negative attribute associated with celebrities' and micro-celebrities' Instagram endorsement of a beauty product. Young social media influencers should be made aware of the consequences of brand bashing when engaging with the industry to endorse beauty brands as they need to create stability in their cosmetic niche to face unstable times. Celebrities with millions of followers could survive brand bashing by a few followers; however, it could be detrimental in the case of emerging or new social media influencers, especially if envious followers respond to their postings with negative reviews and referrals.

6.5 Limitations

Limitations refer to methodological characteristics of the research that are out of the researcher's control but could influence the internal and external validity of the study and indicate potential weaknesses (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018). Although the research was conducted within a rigorous design to achieve reliability for the research aims and objectives and adhere to ethical requirements for qualitative research, certain limitations could not be avoided. The data collection and analysis required a large amount of data extracted from Instagram ($n=10 \times 1200 = 12,000$) and loaded into ten Excel sheets for data clean-up. The verbatim data was then transferred to NVivo ($n=10 \times 1000 = 10,000$) for thematic analysis of the content according to preliminary and adapted themes from the Source Credibility model. Therefore, large amounts of data had to be collected, cleaned and coded, requiring repetitive interpretation and comparison which was a time-consuming process.

A qualitative, subjective interpretation and abductive reasoning (inductive and deductive) may shape the findings differently had another researcher performed the research because people appraise and interpret information in their way based on their perspectives (Scholtz et al., 2020). For that reason, the researcher provided a detailed account of the data collection and analysis process throughout the research. Moreover, having applied a subjective ontology, the researcher remained aware of limiting personal bias influencing the data analysis process. Consequently, the NVivo computer-assisted data analysis software guided the coding process and reduced the potential of importing preconceived assumptions and ideas for attaching different meanings to the findings. The researcher constantly needed to reflect on the

‘verbatim comments’ during the interpretation and comparison of the findings to ensure user comments were voiced.

Ten celebrities and micro-celebrities were purposely selected according to certain prerequisites for this multiple case study research. However, it could also happen that different findings would have been achieved had other celebrities been selected for the qualitative research, or other beauty products had been endorsed on their accounts. However, social media marketing occurs in a dynamic digital world, and a researcher would rarely obtain similar results, especially where data is extracted in a cross-sectional data extraction process.

6.6 Final Summary

The final summary provides answers to the research questions:

- What are Instagram users’ perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products?

The majority of Instagram users perceived micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products to be more effective than celebrity endorsements. In terms of Pre-purchase Search and Authentic Engagement, Instagram users’ comments generally revealed an interest in Pre-purchase Search and Authentic Engagement for inquiries about the products and their availability, giving and receiving product recommendations from other Instagram users, commenting on the micro-celebrities’ niche, and expressing their support for the micro-celebrities’ content in another social media platform. Instagram users were more interested in micro-celebrities’ product choices than celebrities’ product choices, as indicated in the findings on Attractiveness. Instagram users have similar perceptions of the Endorser Attractiveness and Content Attractiveness of both celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsements of beauty products. Instagram users rarely expressed Product Attractiveness for the products investigated in this study.

Instagram users also were more inclined to express their attractiveness for products outside the scope of this study that were posted by micro-celebrities than celebrities. This finding on Product Attractiveness may indicate Instagram users’ tendency to be more interested in micro-celebrities’ lifestyles through their product choices than celebrities’ lifestyles. Brand Bashing particularly emerged in Instagram users’ comments when the brand was known to conduct animal testing. The theme of Brand Bashing due to animal testing emerged in the couplings

between Maybelline celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsers (Gigi Hadid versus Shayla Mitchell) and L'Oreal celebrity and micro-celebrity endorsers (Kendall Jenner versus Jeffree Star), and Estee Lauder celebrity endorser Kendall Jenner. Nonetheless, Instagram users' comments containing Negative E-WOM were minimal and directed to the content rather than the endorser, brand, or product. On the contrary, Positive E-WOM comments were directed to the endorser, the brand, the product, and the content. However, the majority of E-WOM comments were neutral. The intentions of Instagram users who left neutral E-WOM comments were unclear in this study.

- How do Instagram users' perceptions of celebrity versus micro-celebrity influence the propensity to purchase products?

This research has demonstrated that micro-celebrity endorsements can potentially influence users' propensity to purchase beauty products as opposed to the influence of celebrities based on the Instagram analysis of the posts by followers of the selected influencers.

The final key conclusions of this research are matched against the original questions:

- The question of whether Instagram users perceive micro-celebrities as superior influencers has been demonstrated in the use and purchase of beauty products.
- The question of whether Instagram users perceive micro-celebrities' endorsement of beauty products are more trustworthy than celebrities' endorsements has been demonstrated.
- The question of whether Instagram users are more inclined to buy beauty products endorsed by micro-celebrities than those endorsed by celebrities has been demonstrated.

From the results of this research, it can be concluded that micro-celebrities have more influence over Instagram followers using the platform as a means to decide on the purchase and ultimately the use of beauty products.

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Appendix A

Definitions

1.3.5 Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM)

Closely linked to e-referrals is the concept of electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM). It is the *action* through which e-referrers guide other social media users (friends, family, and other followers) to a website, place of business, or an online profile with or without a product or service reference (Chu & Kim, 2018). Most receivers immediately trust an E-WOM recommendation (Köster, Matt & Hess, 2020) and many social media consumers consult e-referrals and online reviews before making a purchasing decision. Instagram, like most other social media platforms, has an automatic function where followers can refer endorsed brands with or without a positive or negative comment to other followers in their network (Knoll & Matthes, 2017). Research findings further indicated that consumers referred through E-WOM spend more time on the website, view more pages, and watch more videos than those who respond to social media infomercials. The results further indicated that consumers attracted to a website through social referrals are more likely to refer content to others than those who performed an organic search or responded to social media advertisements (Köster *et al.*, 2020, online).

1.3.9 Followers and following

A *follow* signifies the action by a user who selects another user's posts to see all of the user's social media feeds (BigCommerce, 2020). When Instagram users come upon a celebrity or micro-celebrity's profile that they like, they will literally 'follow' the profile via the Instagram *Follow* button. The content posted by the followed celebrities will automatically appear in their followers' Instagram feeds. Thus, social media followers get exposed to all engagements, brands, and products on celebrity, micro-celebrity, and vlogger accounts (Bishop, 2018b).

1.3.10 Postings

A post or posting is a message, image, or video that users or creators upload to their Instagram page and stays a fixture on the creator's page (Cooper, 2020).

1.3.11 Selfie marketing

Selfie marketing is closely related to the celebrity culture where social media users, celebrities, and vloggers post endorsing images and videos as if posting a standard photograph (Hackley, Hackley & Bassiouni, 2018). While selfies are viewed as self-promotional, they are simultaneously strong social media tools to improve self-branding and marketing (Monaghan, 2021).



Appendix 1

Swinburne University of Technology Human Research Ethics Committee Approval certificate

The ethics application for your project 'INFLUENCE OF CELEBRITY ENDORSEMENT/ ENDORSERS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A STUDY OF SOURCE CREDIBILITY THOERY ON CONSUMER DECISIONS THROUGH INSTAGRAM (A CASE OF BEAUTY PRODUCTS)' has been approved.

Chief Investigator: Associate Professor Robert Gill

Ref: 20191363-2993

Approved Duration: 26 November 2019 to 20 February 2021

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) or its sub-committees.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may proceed in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions outlined below.

- The approved duration is as shown above unless an extension request is subsequently approved.
- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2018)* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.
- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in Chief Investigator/Supervisor, and addition or removal of other personnel/students from the project, requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.
- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/clearance from SUHREC for approval. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project. A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time. Please forward this approval certificate to relevant members of the project team.

The following investigators have been approved to work on the project:

Chief Investigator

Robert Gill

Associate Investigators

Catherine Farrell

Student Investigators

Oluwakemi Shobowale

Please contact the Swinburne [Research Ethics Office](#) if you have any queries.

Regards, Ms

Sally Fried

on behalf of SHESC3

Research Ethics Office

Swinburne University of Technology

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