

Spring 5-1-2021

Using Native Ads in Public Relations Campaigns: A Study of Instagram Influencers in Kuwait

Ahmad Alhaidar

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USING NATIVE ADS IN PUBLIC RELATIONS CAMPAIGNS:
A STUDY OF INSTAGRAM INFLUENCERS IN KUWAIT

by

Ahmad Alhaidar

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate School,
the College of Arts and Sciences
and the School of Communication
at The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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May 2021

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2021

Published by the Graduate School



ABSTRACT

Native advertising through online influencers is one of the fastest-growing online advertising formats that public relations practitioners use worldwide. However, there is a lack of research about how public relations practitioners utilize native advertising in social media in the Middle East. The current study focused on Kuwait, one of the areas with the most notable growth in Instagram usage in recent years.

This study examines the effects of persuasion knowledge, the congruence between influencer and product, and parasocial relationships on ad credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, brand interest, and purchase intention. The scholar utilized a 2 (persuasion knowledge: active vs. not active) $\times 2$ (influencer-product congruence: high vs. low) $\times 2$ (parasocial relationships: high vs. low) factorial design to explore correlations among dependent and independent variables.

Three hundred and eight college students at Kuwait University participated in this experiment. The results supported the hypotheses partially and answered the research questions. Significant results were found related to the effects of influencer-product congruence on sharing intention, brand interest, and purchase intention, as well as the effects of parasocial relationships on ad credibility, influencer credibility, brand interest, and purchase intention. Furthermore, significant interaction effects were found between the influencer-product congruence and persuasion knowledge and between the parasocial relationships and persuasion knowledge.

The findings were presented with in-depth discussion and implications that public relations practitioners, marketers, and advertisers can use. The study also recommended directions for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, I would like to acknowledge my family members who had stood my fickle mood while earning this doctoral degree. Second, I would like to acknowledge every single member at the University of Southern Mississippi who played a role in my academic accomplishments, starting with my committee chair and members who never left any of my questions behind and provided me with full and detailed answers every

DEDICATION

To my lovely mother: your prayers helped more than you imagined. Thanks a lot.

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CHAPTER I - INTRODUCTION

The majority of public relations practitioners work on developing their organizations' ability to enhance their relations with their public (Derville Gallicano, 2009). The more complexity of human relations, the more need for public relations (Al-Rujaib, 2006). Today, social media have become a big part of public relations practice. The influence of social media on people's lives today is readily apparent. It is rare to find somebody that does not use social media in some way. As social media are used worldwide, most companies rely on them when promoting their products or services. Social media has affected how consumers purchase and evaluate products and services (Van Norel, Kommers, Van Hoof, Verhoeven, 2014). Social Networking Sites (SNS) have been considered a primary digital marketing tool (Lin, Atkin & Kim, 2016). An increasing body of evidence indicates that online advertisements are often perceived as more accurate and trustworthy than ads disseminated through other media types (Wood & Burkhalter, 2014). Therefore, owing to SNS's economic and marketing effectiveness, social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, have become a vital advertising medium (Dehghani & Tumer, 2015).

One of the fastest-growing online advertising formats is native advertising. Knoll (2015) identified native advertising as a paid message embedded in editorial content that fits or matches the host mediums' style and layout. Tomazic (2016) explained that native advertising indicates the texts paid for in journalistic texts for a commercial benefit. Although traditional advertising—aimed at audiences that are fully aware of the fact that they are being exposed to paid content—could yield positive results, native advertising paid content that is not perceived as such by the intended audience, can achieve better

results by lowering the cognitive resistance (Bither & Wright, 1973). Consumers use knowledge about whether to be persuaded or not to resist the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thus, using celebrities is one of the most effective methods of endorsing products and services that public relations practitioners utilize (Van Norel et al., 2014; Sweetser, 2010). Many scholars studied social media outlets' influence on public relations strategies and tactics (Gesualdi, 2019; Kent & Li, 2020; Lee, Sha, Dozier, & Sargent, 2015; Valentini, 2015; Wang & Yang, 2020). The relationship between native advertising and consumers' purchase intention has been demonstrated in prior studies (Cole & Greer, 2013; Darke & Ritchie, 2007).

With more than 700 million users (Instagram, 2017), Instagram is one of the most influential social media platforms, prompting companies and mega corporates to use it when advertising their products and services. In 2017, the revenue generated from advertising on Instagram was expected to be higher than that achieved by both Google and Twitter, reaching \$2.81 billion (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Many companies pay "Instafamous" users, people with a high number of followers, to advertise and strengthen their brands. These popular users promote, review, or advertise companies' products or services. For example, Jin and Phua (2014) found that users trust the reviews and promotions of Instafamous users more than official business accounts. Instafamous users advertise products and services for brands in most countries around the world. By getting cash compensation, or even some products, many social media influencers wrote about brands through product reviews or sponsored posts (Archer and Harrigan, 2016).

According to Salem (2017), social media in the Arab world mirrors global trends. It is continually growing, thus affecting almost every aspect of the daily lives of millions

of users. Social media plays a significant role in how Arabs interact with each other, do business, deal with government and politicians, or even engage in civil movements. According to Salem (2017), since 2016, the Arab world's Instagram penetration has increased by 1.8% annually, with 7.1 million people actively using Instagram in 2016. Kuwait is an Arab country with immense growth in Instagram usage in recent years, occupying fifth place in Instagram penetration and the number of users per country in the Arab world (Salem, 2017). In Kuwait, a third of the small- and medium-sized enterprises used YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter (Alzougool, 2019), and Instafamous users in Kuwait frequently advertise for brands, and some of them earn up to \$40,000 monthly (Alsharekh, 2016), which makes Kuwait suitable example for studying the native advertising in the region. There is a pressing need to study advertising strategies on Instagram. However, studies focusing on Instagram and its users are presently limited (Djafarova & Rusworth, 2017). There is even less research focusing on areas outside North America.

This study investigates the correlation among different variables on Instagram influencers' advertisements in Kuwait by public relations practitioners because of the lack of studies about native advertising in social media in the Middle East. An experiment was designed to test the effects of persuasion knowledge condition, Influencer-product congruence (match-up), and parasocial factor on advertising credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, brand interest, and sharing intention.

CHAPTER II - LITERATURE REVIEW

Native advertising and social media influencers

Tomazic (2016) wrote that “the first term relating to native advertising was ‘advertainment.’ The word advertorial is made up of parts of the English words for advertising and editorial work, i.e., journalistic-editorial content (advert [isement] + [edit] orial)” (p. 3). The author, however, noted that different scholars had proposed many synonyms. For example, Petty and Andrews (2008) posited that advertorials are advertisements that “appear to be information from an independent source such as prepared television news stories; infomercials that appear as consumer television shows; and print advertisements that appear to be editorial content” (p. 5). Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (2019) identified three core native ad types: In-Feed/In-Content, Content Recommendation Ads, and Branded/Native Content. Balasubramanian (1994) described mixed messages, which contain both paid and unpaid content, as covert advertising, which is another name of native advertising. The author considered all paid attempts to make commercial benefits of the audience using non-commercial character as part of native advertising, combining critical elements from the definitions of advertising and publicity creatively. Besides, Tomazic (2016) said that “covert advertising messages are those messages where advertising is declared as journalism and. thus, to the readers, viewers or listeners are unclearly identifiable as advertisements” (p.5). Public relations news is considered a type of native advertising because it promotes public relations information without mentioning its source and attempts to promote specific ideas, products, services, organizations, etc. (Erjavec, 2005). That act is not far from what Choi and Lee (2013) called unobjective journalism, which is a presence of scene order effects,

suggests that striking a proportional balance in news stories does not necessarily eliminate news bias. It is also essential to mention that about 53% of all display advertising spending in the United States in 2017 accounted for native advertisements (eMarketer, 2017). However, the term "native" was adopted for the present study to refer to any native, undisclosed, or indirect advertising, especially on Instagram.

The effectiveness of native advertisements publicity relies on consumers' lack of awareness that they are exposed to paid content (Carlson, 2015). As Bither and Wright (1973) pointed out, native advertising lowers cognitive resistance; therefore, the advertiser can block consumers from recognizing the true nature of advertising, in turn, increases consumers' trust toward non-advertising and editorial content (The Nielsen Company, 2013).

Once the consumer realizes that content contains an advertisement, this negatively affects both the advertiser and the message (Cole & Greer, 2013; Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Austin and Newman (2015) surveyed UK and American readers to explore their native advertising attitudes. The participants confirmed that they felt deceived once they were informed that the article was sponsored. However, sponsored content had neither a positive nor a negative effect on the brand or the news organization. Similarly, Lazauskas (2014) measured readers' attitudes toward native advertising in news sites. He found that readers considered that they had been tricked once they learned that the articles were sponsored without informing them.

Influencer marketing is a common tactic today among brands, agencies, and publishers who works with famous individuals or celebrities to deliver their messages and achieve their strategic goals (IAB, 2018). It is proved that celebrities can attract people's

attention toward what they are endorsing and create an immediate persona for the product (Cooper, 1984). McCracken (1989) added that celebrities more influential than unknown actors in product endorsement because they have active personas and images in people's minds. Advertisers use celebrities to endorse their products to make them more believable and their advertisements more effective (Biswas, Biswas & Das, 2006). “Celebrities” is a standard reference group, in the sense that they serve as a barometer for consumers, informing them of acceptable values, attitudes, or acts, thus affecting their purchasing decisions (Schiffman, Hansen, & Kanuk, 2012). Thus, it is not surprising that celebrities exert a significant influence on consumers (Van Norel et al., 2014). Digital celebrities, such as bloggers and Instagram models, are an emerging and rapidly growing celebrity subgroup (Chahal, 2016). Their popularity is associated with the cultivation of parasocial relationships with their followers through SNS (Jin & Phua, 2014). Xiao and Zhang (2016) have demonstrated that the digital celebrity phenomenon is directly connected to certain SNS services' popularity.

Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are useful tools for creating bonds between users and Internet celebrities (Wilcox & Stephen, 2014). Because most digital celebrity content requires minimal production cost, SNS has become a cost-efficient advertising model with a secure and direct link to its target audience (Cai, 2009). Many corporations pay Instagram influencers, people with a high number of followers, to advertise and strengthen their brands. These popular users promote, review, or advertise companies' products or services. New types of "digital" celebrity groups, such as Instagram influencers, have emerged (Chahal, 2016). Companies of various sizes increasingly rely on celebrity endorsement as a credible source in generating positive Electronic Word of

Mouth (eWOM) (Spry, Pappu, & Cornwell, 2011). Most social media users are influenced by celebrity reviews on Instagram, depending on individual interests and the type of celebrities and accounts they follow (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). In that sense, celebrities operate as a sub-brand for companies, as consumers associate certain brands with certain celebrities, helping a brand build credibility (Seno & Lukas, 2007).

Many countries' governments have enacted laws and legislation to regulate social media advertising, including native advertisements. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) in the United Kingdom cautioned more than 40 influencers after promoting products using social media accounts without notifying the viewers that the content is a paid advertisement, which is considered a misleading online practice (Thomas, 2016). In the United States, Truth in Advertising (TINA) (2016) sent a letter to the Kardashians requesting them to take down Instagram posts containing sponsored advertisements, or TINA would file a complaint with the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC requires that social media influencers include clear disclosures such as “paid,” “advertising,” or “sponsored” in their advertisements. To post a native advertising post, the micro-influencers in the United States might get compensated with free products or up to \$150, while a macro influencer that more than 1 million followers follow him/her can command up to \$15,000 per post (Crain, 2018).

Similarly, Social media advertising is one of the most rapidly increasing social media marketing methods in the Middle East, including Kuwait, and influencers rely on techniques of micro/macro-influencer and the tacit labor of their followers that are mirrored elsewhere (Hurley, 2019). Many social media influencers charge between 800 and 1,000 KD (2,800–3,500 USD) per post, earning, on average, 12,000 KD (40,000

USD) per month (Alsharekh, 2016). However, there are no regulations in Kuwait regarding native advertising on social media.

Public relations and native ad

New digital media technologies are extremely beneficial in the practice of public relations (Briones, Kuch, Liu, Jin, 2011; Hussain, 2011; Alikilic & Atabek, 2012; Moya, 2014). Many public relations practitioners noted the decreased effects of traditional communication tools, such as press releases, compared with what they used to do (Hill, 2019). Public relations practitioners can use social networks to target non-interacted clients by using social media influencers in their campaigns (Davies & Hobbs, 2020). The advantage of the strong credibility of social media influencers and the loss of the traditional media's influence required public relations practitioners to adopt the new digital environment to communicate with their organizations' stakeholders (Gillin, 2008). Research (Gardner, 2005; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014) has shown that organizations utilize social media influencers to generate interest, create goodwill, establish expertise, drive action, and foster dialogue with their stakeholders.

Social media influencers' powers came from their strong connections with followers, due to similar social demographics, values, and lifestyles. Therefore, social media influencers are valued "social proof" used by public relations and marketing professions when they need to persuade the audience about any idea, product, or service (Cialdini, 1984). Abidin (2016) and Hou (2018) agreed that audiences tend to believe in social media influencers because they consider them a trusted cultural intermediary. In other words, social media influencers perceived authenticity and credibility for strategic

publics, which made them a sought-after commodity for public relations practitioners (De Vries, Gensler, & Leeftang, 2012). Marwick and Boyd (2010) stated that "microcelebrities have an audience that they can strategically maintain through ongoing communication and interaction" (p. 121), which qualifies them to support both client's goals and organizational objectives (Freberga, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011).

The ease of use and the visual features are main reasons that public relations practitioners prefer Instagram over other digital media tools, considering it the best tool to serve their publicity communication (Ebrahim, 2017). Publicity is defined by Grunig (1991) as a condition that a public relations practitioner custom a one-way communication to publish information, distribute news regarding their organization or announce events. Over the years, social media influencers have built intimate relationships (Abidin & Thompson, 2012) that made them valuable "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdieu, 1984; Hutchinson, 2017) and forced public relations practitioners to use them as message endorsers (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2016; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Kozinets, de Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010).

How to use native tactics in public relations has been studied frequently during the last decades (Cameron, 1994; Kim, Pasadeos, & Barban, 2001). The function of public relations practitioners has been redefined in the modern mass communication ecology based on various media platforms, such as paid, earned, shared, and owned. (Verčič & Verčič, 2015). Wright and Hinson (2012) explained that public relations practitioners believe that social media influencers are more independent and powerful than traditional mainstream media. Hill (2019) confirmed that the balance of power

between clients and brands has enormously changed because of social media, which gave the influencers the ability to affect the brands. As Grunig (2009), father of two-way communication theory in public relations, stated, “the new digital media have dialogical, interactive, relational, and global properties that make them perfectly suited for a strategic management paradigm of public relations (p. 6).”

eWOM and source credibility

Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) is a manner of sharing opinions about goods and services among users, preceding official marketing channels (Park & Kim, 2008). Due to personal affiliation, the experiences and opinions relayed through word of mouth are perceived to be more reliable and relevant than other marketing types (Park & Kim, 2008). Word-of-mouth is identified as any positive or negative perception of a product conveyed by an individual who has had personal experience with the said product, made available for viewing to many potential customers via the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). SNS fit well into the WOM framework, as they provide a means of communication to millions of people worldwide. This has given rise to the electronic Word-Of-Mouth (eWOM) phenomenon that, as Kim, Sohn and Choi (2011) argue, is comprised of three critical components:

- Opinion leaders, who form or create popular opinions about services or products
- Opinion followers, as they listen to and rely upon popular opinions in their purchasing behaviors.
- Opinion pass-along generated by individuals who not only listen to popular opinions but actively spread them to their friends and followers

WOM is a powerful tool for influencing people's purchasing behaviors (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). Similar to eWOM, Hennin-Thurau, et al. (2004) defined Online Word of Mouth as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about the product or company which is provided to a multitude of people and institutions via the internet" (p. 39). Thoumrungroje (2014) suggested that Instagram eWOM has become a potent and influential information source due to the ease of using smartphones equipped with social media platforms. Based on an earlier study, Cheung, Luo, Sia, & Chen (2009) reported that the effect of eWOM is so powerful because it allows consumers to know what other people think about the product or service while also making it easy to share their opinions and experiences.

While the effect of WOM is indisputable, identifying and selecting suitable influencers to endorse their products in their posts in order to positively affect their followers or targeted audience is one of the significant challenges for brands aiming to apply this type of WOM-marketing (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017). The importance of managing eWOM content has overgrown because of the impact of eWOM on consumers' choices (Ye, Law, & Gu, 2009) and on the company's revenue (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Luca & Zervas, 2016). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) found that awareness of paid endorsement relates to advertisement recognition, which is correlated with the purchase and eWOM intentions. When followers recognize the endorsements as advertisements, they are more likely to share the influencers' messages or even buy the products/services (Dhanesh and Duthler, 2019).

Source credibility refers to customer perception of an information source's attractiveness, trustworthiness, and knowledge or experience or the communicator of an

endorsed product or service (Ohanian, 1990; Teng, Wei Khong, Wei Goh, & Yee-Loong Chong, 2014). Source credibility also relies on the quality of the argument and the endorser's strength (Kutthakaphan & Chokesamritpol, 2013). Evaluation of products by Instagram influencers as reliable fosters a positive consumer attitude toward the brand (Spry et al., 2011). However, consumers tend to develop a negative attitude towards both brand and the celebrity endorser if the product or service is proven unreliable (Cheung, et al., 2009).

Brands and companies depend on the perceived level of trustworthiness of influencers by their followers on social media to promote their products (Dholakia, Sternthal, & Ohanian, 1991; Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1963; Hovland & Weiss, 1953). Recognizing that the content is sponsored or has an advertising objective adversely affects the message's source's credibility (Boerman, Van Reijmersdal, & Neijens, 2012; Reijmersdal, Neijens, & Smit, 2005; Wei, Fischer, & Main, 2008). Based on a survey finding, Lazauskas (2014) reported that readers deem news sites less credible if they publish sponsored content. Moreover, disguising advertisements as the publication's original content jeopardizes the perceived source credibility (Carlson, 2015) and diminishes consumers' trust (Iversen & Knudsen, 2017). Therefore, consumers' ability to identify native advertisements with sponsored labels declines their trust in the message source credibility (Iversen & Knudsen, 2017). The familiarity generated by the amount of exposure and the alignment between a blogger's opinions and those of the users makes the latter group regard the former as a trustworthy source of information (Lee & Watkins, 2016). As a result, fans tend to view the celebrity's opinion as credible even on matters where the said person does not have relevant experience or competence, such as

purchases (Kim, Ko, & Kim, 2015). This can be explained with the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), which will be discussed in the next section.

Persuasion Knowledge Model

Persuasion knowledge can be defined as “consumers’ knowledge and beliefs of various advertising-related issues, such as the goals and tactics marketers use to persuade them, the extent to which consumers find these techniques effective and appropriate, but also personal beliefs about how to cope with these persuasion tactics and goals” (Boerman, Willemsen, & Van der Aa, 2017, p. 83). Friestad and Wright (1994) developed the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), arguing that consumers’ persuasion knowledge “enables them to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember” (p. 3) persuasion messages and behaviors, and to select and use coping tactics to resist persuasion attempts. Boerman et al. (2012) divided the persuasion knowledge model into two parts, (1) conceptual: includes (a) recognizing a persuasion attempt, (b) understanding that it comes from a particular source, and (c) uses specific tactics to target an audience, and (2) attitudinal: describes (a) how people react to the persuasion attempt, (b) ranging from skepticism or disliking of the message to other critical attitudes like assessing the message as less trustworthy and honest.

As persuasion knowledge promotes consumers' resistance to persuasion (Wood & Quinn, 2003), it reduces persuasion messages' effectiveness (Dekker & Van Reijmersdal, 2013). More recently, Shin and Cho (2014) reported that persuasion knowledge negatively affects purchase and Word-Of-Mouth (WOM) intentions, while Boerman et al. (2017) found that consumers' persuasion knowledge activated by advertising disclosure decreases their WOM intentions. Thus, consumers who have high levels of persuasive

knowledge are able to recognize persuasion agents' intentions easily and tactics and, thus, tend to buy less (Lee & Faber, 2007).

PKM is based on the premise that consumers' persuasion knowledge is catalyzed when they recognize that they are behind. Friestad and Wright (1994) explained that consumers' persuasion coping experience enables them to “understand, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasion attempts and to select and execute coping tactics believed to be adequate and appropriate” (p. 3). The authors further noted that consumers use this knowledge to decide whether to be persuaded or resist the message, and they adopt various strategies to defend against persuasive messages. Evans and Park (2015) have shown that consumers process strong messages based on their previous experience with advertisements. The authors further noted that the more apparent the message's persuasive intent, the easier it is for users to detect and recognize its persuasive intent.

Consequently, consumers will develop a skeptical attitude toward the message (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012), the advertiser (Shrum, Liu, Nespoli, & Lowrey, 2012), and the sponsor (Wojdyski, 2016). Moreover, consumers employ a combination of persuasion knowledge, strategies, and tactics to respond to persuasive messages (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Lee et al., 2016). Empirical evidence further demonstrates that working persuasion knowledge decreases commendation and heightens criticism (Cole & Greer, 2013; Friestad & Wright, 1994; Tutaj & Van Reijmersdal, 2012). Wojdyski and Evans (2016) found that the disclosure of advertising or sponsorship within or under an online posting strengthens consumers' recognition of advertising and persuasion knowledge.

The disclosure of native advertising, in which advertisements with forms and functions of

non-advertising content are created on blogs, stimulates consumers' persuasion knowledge, which reduces persuasive effects (Van Reijmersdal et al., 2016).

Although persuasion is less effective when consumers recognize marketers' persuasion intentions (Gillespie & Joireman, 2016), this does not undermine the consumers' purchasing intention if persuasion agents are viewed as trustworthy and have persuasion skills (Isaac & Grayson, 2017). As advertisements that use creative or non-traditional methods tend to mitigate consumers' persuasion knowledge (Dahlen & Edenius, 2007), social media advertisements as novel advertising methods reduce consumers' persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2017). In their study, Minton, Taillard, and Williamson (2010) found that social media platforms, such as Facebook, tend to distribute sponsored content intermingled with other regular posts, making it less evident than mass media advertisements. Boerman et al. (2017) argued that, as celebrities' commercial content on their SNS is usually mixed with posts about their daily lives, consumers cannot easily recognize their commercial content, which blocks the activation of consumers' persuasion knowledge. This is particularly the case for digital celebrities, which may be more familiar to their followers regarding assimilation and friendship. Followers may think that digital celebrities are authentic consumers of the advertised products, are genuinely satisfied with the products, and share their evaluations and information on quality products with their followers. However, there is a paucity of research on consumers' persuasion knowledge of digital celebrities' advertisements on SNS.

Persuasion knowledge mitigates the persuasion effects, and disclosure of advertising reduces the degree to which persuasion leads to positive consumer attitudes

(Wood & Quinn, 2003). When digital celebrities must disclose that brands sponsor them to advertise products in their SNS posts (Boerman et al., 2017), their persuasion power might be reduced. Credibility has a positive but problematic (Sternthal, Dholakia, Leavitt, 1978) effect on a message's persuasiveness (Harmon & Kenneth, 1982). According to the Source Credibility Model (Hovland and Weiss, 1951), source credibility positively affects the message's effectiveness. Besides, credibility has a positive effect on attitudes and behavior (Sternthal et al., 1978). De Veirman & Hudders (2020) found that including a sponsorship disclosure (compared to no disclosure) negatively affects brand interest through enhanced advertisement recognition, which activates advertisement skepticism, which, in turn, negatively affects the influencer's credibility.

Many studies used PKM to find the relationship among influencers' native advertising and their followers, product placement, the credibility of the source, product, and brand loyalty. Carr and Hayes (2014) found that the relationship between participants' attitudes and influencers can change relying on the sponsoring disclosure level and a tacit disclosure leading to the influencer's lower perceived credibility. Also, Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016) had almost the same results on the effect of sponsorship disclosure in the context of blogging, where persuasion knowledge mediating the effect of disclosure on brand interest. Moreover, Müller, Christandl (2019) focused on conceptual persuasion knowledge and compared sponsored content and user-generated content. The authors found that sponsored content leads to a higher level of conceptual persuasion knowledge and higher activation of attitudinal persuasion knowledge, leading to a more negative brand interest than user-generated content.

Further, consumers might suspect sponsorship when social media Influencers recommend products or services without disclosing sponsorship. (Bhatnagar, Aksoy & Malkoc, 2004; Liljander, Gummerus, Söderlund, 2015). Also, Lee & Ahn (2013) found that when followers recognize that a product review is sponsored, they may raise suspicion towards the source's credibility. Same manner when no disclosure information is provided concerning a social media influencer product review (Kozinets et al., 2010). Also, more suspicion of sponsorship may occur when the review contains only strengths of an advocated position, which may negatively affect source credibility (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Moreover, Stubb, Nyström and Colliander (2019) confirmed that persuasion knowledge activation would be lower after a social media influencer impartiality disclosure than after either an explicit sponsorship disclosure or when no disclosure is made, and consequently, product-review credibility will be higher. Also, they found that Source credibility will be higher in the same case.

Based on findings from previous research, the current study hypothesizes that:

H1: Lower level of persuasion knowledge will lead to higher ad credibility, higher influencer credibility, and higher sharing intention.

Match-up theory

Consumers' persuasion knowledge is the focal point in the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994). However, the model also addressed issues related to the topic (product or service) and agent (source). Therefore, additional theoretical perspectives were considered in the current research to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of persuasion knowledge. One of them is the match-up theory.

According to the match-up theory developed by Rossitier and Percy (1980), the visual imagery or information conveyed in an advertisement reflects the information contained in the verbal arguments. In the last four decades, scholars have used match-up theory to describe the relationship between the celebrity and the product that he/she advertises or endorses. For the theory to hold in this context, the celebrity should fit the associations between the product and the brand (Thwaites, Lowe, Monkhouse, & Barnes, 2012). Historically, the match-up hypothesis was born from the associative learning theory, which indicates the relationship between two concepts learned and stored in memory: when one concept is recalled, it invites the other concept in the association set (McCraken, 1989). However, Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955) were the first who proposed the principle of congruity in their study of attitude change when they noted (p. 43) that "changes in the evaluation are always in the direction of increased congruity with the external frame of reference." Moreover, this principle applies today to a celebrity endorsement.

More than three decades ago, Kahle and Homer (1985) posited that celebrity attractiveness leads to a positive advertisement evaluation. Conversely, Kamins and Gupta (1994) found that the misalignment between the product and the endorser reduces advertising effectiveness and endorser believability. Empirical evidence also indicates that advertisements featuring attractive celebrities are more productive in promoting attractiveness-related products (Kamins, 1990). More recently, Choi and Rifon (2012) reported that a high degree of the match-up between celebrity and product has a positive and direct effect on consumer attitudes toward the advertisement. Moreover, the congruence between brand personality and celebrity personality was shown to

significantly impact consumers' attitudes toward a brand and their purchase intentions (Pradhan, Duraipandian, & Sethi, 2015). The advertisement's success depends on the celebrity's match-up with the product or service "because consumers live in a media-saturated and product-cluttered environment" (McCormick, 2016, P44). The greater the congruence between the Instafamous user and the products or services that he/she endorses, the stronger the public perception and trust. For example, promotion of a diet product or gym by an Instafamous user that has recently lost much weight would be deemed highly credible, due to which the public would be more likely to trust the program or facility (Teng et al., 2014). Hawkins, Best, and Coney (1983) measured advertisement effectiveness and found that a good match-up between celebrity images and the product receives high effectiveness scores.

Although it is crucial to ensure that the celebrity is well-known enough to get attention, it is more important to ensure he/she does not upstage the product (Cooper, 1984). McCormick (2016) indicated the importance of selecting the proper celebrity to endorse the product or service related to him/her. Possibility, a celebrity may be so appropriate for a brand but entirely inappropriate for another based on peoples' perception of the celebrity's distinctive image (McCraken, 1989). Understanding the product's target market and which celebrities represent that core audience can help ensure a favorable relationship between those celebrities and products and create a long-lasting, effective advertising campaign (McCormick, 2016). Oppositely, the incongruent product-endorser match reduces both advertising effectiveness and endorser believability (Kamins and Gupta, 1994). Further, Duthie, Ver'issimo, Keane, and Knight (2018) provided evidence that celebrity endorsement can produce both positive and negative effects and should be

used carefully. Also, if a celebrity becomes part of a scandal or some other adverse event, negative publicity could arise (Till & Shimp, 1998).

"Fit" is another word used to describe the best significant relationship between brand and celebrity image (Erdogan, 1999). The greater the fit between the celebrity and the brand image, the more influential the endorsement would be (Till & Busler, 1998). Misra and Beatty (1990) confirmed that brand recall and effect are increased when there is a perceived fit between the brand and the endorser. For example, Stafford, Stafford & Day (2002) found that Harrison Ford achieves higher expertise and trustworthiness (in general: better results) if he endorses a restaurant, compared with a bank. Attractiveness, honesty, age-group association, popularity, recognizability, and likability are the marketing criteria that determine a celebrity's appropriateness (Slinker, 1984). Levi, Varnali, and Tosun (2017) found that highly attractive female models perform better in the ads of attractiveness-related products, while moderately attractive female models work better in the ads of non- attractiveness-related products.

Santos, Barros, and Azevedo (2019) concluded that the celebrity's motives must be perceived as altruistic, credible, and trustworthy and has enough relevance to support the cause. Blasche and Ketelaar (2015) studied the effect of endorser-brand congruence in green advertising on advertisement effectiveness. They found that pro-environmental celebrity endorsers yield more favorable attitudes toward the purchase intention, the brand, and the advertisement compared to non-green celebrity endorsers. Chaiken (1979) also said that an attractive communicator's messages are shown to be more persuasive. Seiler and Kucza (2017) confirmed that models such as the source credibility model and source attractiveness support the match-up-hypothesis. Their study also found that

attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise positively affect credibility, and credibility positively affects the advertisement, brand, and purchase intention. Stubb, Nyström & Colliander (2019) found that impartiality product posts are less likely to be perceived as advertising than sponsored product posts or posts without sponsorship information, generating higher source and message credibility. Therefore, it is predicted that:

H2a: A higher level of influencer-product congruence (match-up) will lead to higher ad credibility, higher influencer credibility, and higher sharing intention.

In the context of the persuasion knowledge model, topic (product or service) knowledge and agent (source) knowledge, together with persuasion knowledge, determine persuasion outcomes (Friestad & Wright, 1994). It is reasonable to assume that influencer-product congruence would interact with persuasion knowledge in affecting consumer responses.

H2b: Influencer-product congruence (match-up) moderates the effects of persuasion knowledge.

Parasocial Relationships

Another theoretical concept that may help understand the impact of persuasion knowledge is parasocial relationships. Several researchers identify parasocial relationships as unilateral relationships between the celebrity and the audience (Giles, 2002; Hartmann, Stuke & Daschmann, 2008; Sanderson, 2009). Although these relationships are perceived as equivalent to real-world interpersonal or group relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1982; Perse & Rubin, 1989), they do not have the same depth or strength of emotional connection as real ones, resulting in pseudo-intimate or a pseudo-friendship emotional attachment (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016; Hartmann

et al., 2008). Some individuals create these relationships with their favorite bloggers or Youtube content creators, while others choose to do so with mass media figures or TV characters (Livingstone, 1988).

Kim (2005) considers the concept of parasocial relationships to be crucial in understanding user behaviors concerning digital celebrities. Because of the potential for bilateral communication between bloggers and users, parasocial relationships formed through SNS are considered more effective in terms of behavior modulation when compared to unilateral social relationships (Lee & Watkins, 2016). This relationship was demonstrated in the research conducted by Colliander and Dahlen (2011), who found that the depth of relationships between bloggers and users is much greater than that formed between online magazine writers and their audiences. This phenomenon can be explained by forming interest-based communities, something that traditional media does not facilitate (Bane, Cornish, Erspamer, & Kampman, 2010). Thus, the connection between SNS and parasocial relationships is credible and is supported by empirical evidence (Kim et al., 2015).

Due to their propensity for forming parasocial relationships, media users associate themselves with digital celebrities, which affects their purchasing habits (Dibble et al., 2016; Rubin & Step, 2000). The increased dependence on online relationships and interactions tends to increase parasocial connections between Internet users (Shin, 2016). According to Lee and Watkins (2016), these relationships serve to reduce isolation and anxiety through the formation of pseudo-friendships. Xiao and Zhang (2016) support this notion, claiming that users may form intimate internalized relationships with individuals of interest. Because of these connections, vloggers and YouTubers' perceptions are

improved, as they are viewed as a more reliable source of information compared to depersonalized radio and TV personalities (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985).

According to Labrecque (2014), parasocial relations in marketing generate an illusionary interaction between media users and public personas, often perceived as engaged and reciprocal relationships. This relationship of trust is extended from celebrities to their friends and is often endorsed and vouched for, creating a network of trustworthy content creators for the users to rely upon in purchasing decisions (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). parasocial relationships between digital celebrities and their followers may fortify followers' assumption of digital celebrities' authenticity as it pertains to their positive attitudes and evaluations of advertised products. It is noteworthy that 60% of respondents that took part in the survey conducted by Lueck (2015) perceived celebrity advertisements as non-commercial due to the parasocial relationship. This finding suggests that parasocial relationships will mitigate followers' persuasion knowledge.

The ultimate goal of all social media advertising is to affect users' purchasing intent. This concept is defined as the intention of a customer to acquire a product or a service based on his/her research, evaluation, and subjective opinions about the physical and emotional values of the purchase (Blackwell, 2001; Dodds et al., 1991). Empirical evidence indicates that SNS and parasocial relationships can affect factors influencing purchasing intent, such as consumer satisfaction, quality, and homogeneity (Shin, Oh, Hwang, Seo, & Kim, 2012). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) found that awareness of paid endorsement is correlated with the influencer-follower relationship associated with the purchase and eWOM intentions. However, recognition of the advertisement nature of the content does not affect the influencer-follower relationship.

Moreover, Social media influencers and public relations practitioners face a tricky situation when trying to balance credibility and commerce (Abidin & Ots, 2015). A significant adverse effect on credibility perceptions occurs when the influencer reveals the nature of the native advertising content (Wojdynski & Evans, 2016). Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) found that awareness of paid endorsement was positively correlated with all four dimensions of the influencer-follower relationship: commitment, control mutuality, trust, and satisfaction. Moreover, the parasocial relationship moderates the paths between followers' persuasion knowledge and purchase intentions and between followers' persuasion knowledge and eWOM intentions (Hwang & Qi Zhang, 2018). Phua, Jim & Kim (2017) found that high product-celebrity image congruence, and high consumer-celebrity risk-seeking image congruence, led to significantly more positive ad attitude and greater intention to spread eWOM and use e-cigarettes. Barcelos, Danilo, Dantas, and Sénécal (2017) confirmed that a human tone of voice is not always the firm's best option to increase purchase intentions on social media. However, celebrities' activities related to social network sites decrease users' life satisfaction by increasing relative deprivation that results from celebrities' comparison.

Also, parasocial identification moderated the effects of celebrity-product image congruence, and consumer-celebrity risk-oriented image congruence, on key engagement measures (Phua et al., 2017). Further, Carr and Hayes (2014) found that explicit disclosure and no mention of sponsorship led to the most credibility in the opinion leader, whereas an implicit disclosure triggered the least credibility perceptions. However, followers are aware that influencers are paid for their endorsement, regardless of whether the influencers disclose it or not (Dhanesh & Duthler, 2019). Although simple

sponsorship disclosure may positively affect consumers' attitudes toward influencer messages, sponsorship compensation justifies more positive perceptions of consumer attitudes and increases source and message credibility (Stubb, Nyström, Colliander, 2019). Hwang and Qi Zhang (2018) also found that Parasocial relationships positively affected followers' purchase and eWOM in consumers' previous literature influencers that parasocial relationships positively impact consumer behavior and it also moderates the effects of persuasion knowledge. Therefore, the third set of hypotheses in the current study is:

H3a: A higher level of parasocial relationship will lead to higher ad credibility, higher influencer credibility, and higher sharing intention.

H3b: Parasocial relationship moderates the effects of persuasion knowledge.

The Case of Kuwait

According to Salem (2017), social media in the Arab world reflects global trends, as it is continually growing and is already affecting almost every aspect of the daily lives of millions of Arabs. Kuwait is an Arab country that has displayed notable growth in Instagram usage in recent years. Although Kuwait has one of the smallest populations (1.5 million citizens) in the Arab world, it already has 360,000 active Instagram users, ranking fifth in the region, behind Lebanon, Egypt, UAE, and Saudi Arabia, each with 10–92 million citizens (Salem, 2017). In 2016, Kuwait also occupied fifth place in the region regarding Instagram penetration rates (Salem, 2017).

Given its growing popularity in the region, it is not surprising that Instagram has been the subject of several recent research studies in Kuwait. For example, Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan, and Al-Hajri (2016) investigated the influence of gender on Kuwaiti

Instagram usage. Their findings indicate that males are more likely than females to post personal pictures, have public accounts, and reveal personal information. Moreover, while females use Instagram to socialize and provide opinions, males rely on it to collect information and pass the time. Still, users of both genders will use Instagram to present their daily life to others. The authors, however, highlighted that Instagram use by males and females would not eschew from their use of other social media.

In another study, Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait, and Al-Hunaiyyan (2017) found that entertainment was the primary motive for using Instagram by both genders in Kuwait, followed by information seeking for females' social connection for males. The authors also noted that self-presentation was the least essential motive for males and the second least important for female participants in their study. Moreover, Instagram is the most favored digital media application used in Kuwait; consequently, Kuwait's favorite digital media technology adopted by public relations practitioners is Instagram (Ebrahim, 2017). Also, there was a noticeable difference in education level between public relations practitioners in Kuwait's private and public sectors. Public relations practitioners in the private sector have higher education levels than those in the public sector (Al-Shohaib, Frederick, Al-Kandari, Dorsher, 2010; Sharif, 2003). Therefore, the private sector adopts new policies faster, has higher quality, more efficiency, and makes more profits than the public sector (Al-Shohaib et al., 2010; Moya, 2014; Sharif, 2003). As a result, utilizing new digital media technologies and their equipment appears more in the private sector (Sharif, 2003).

Alsharekh (2016) observed that Kuwait had become a natural breeding ground for Instagram and Snapchat stars because of its relaxed social nature compared to the rest of the Arab world. The popularity of these platforms is also boosted by the country's open public spaces where nationals and residents of both sexes meet to mingle, shop, have dinner, and post their activities and opinions on social media. In an earlier study, Dashti, Al-Abdullah, and Johar (2015) found that 85% of the female students in Kuwait (21–26 years old) had used the Internet for more than five years.

Alghaith (2016) focused specifically on Kuwaiti women entrepreneurs, noting that three specific attributes made Instagram appealing as a marketing tool to this subgroup: (1) the emphasis on photo-sharing, (2) the ease of use, and (3) the popularity, which leads to the observability. Some popular social media influencers in Kuwait can charge upwards of \$7,000 per appearance. On average, social media influencers charge between 800 and 1,000 KD (2800–3500 USD) per post, generating a mean monthly income of 12,000 KD (40,000 USD). Owing to their growing popularity, they are likely to demand a retinue of agents, bodyguards, and assistants (Alsharekh, 2016). Because of the wide usage of social media tools in Kuwait, particularly Instagram, which reaches the third of social media users' daily (Alzougool, 2019), it is essential to find the relationship among persuasion knowledge condition, Influencer-product congruence (match-up), and parasocial factor and find their effects on the advertising credibility, influencer credibility and sharing intention. This study's results should help scholars and corporates understand the current situation and future expectations about advertising in social media tools.

This study is also interested in learning the influence of personal variables on native advertising effectiveness. A general research question is developed:

RQ: What is the role of personal variables, such as gender and social media usage frequency?

CHAPTER III – METHODOLOGY

A 2 (Persuasion Knowledge: active vs. not active) \times 2 (congruence: yes vs. no) \times 2 (Parasocial: yes vs. no) between groups factorial design was adopted to explore the effects of persuasion knowledge, influencer-product congruence, and parasocial relationships on advertising credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, learning about brand and purchase intention. Persuasion knowledge was identified as the consumers' knowledge about the advertising nature of the media content they are exposed to or the marketers' persuasion attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Boerman, Willemsen & Van der Aa, 2017). Congruence refers to a relationship between the celebrity, the Instagram influencer in our case, and the product or service that he/she endorses (Thwaites et al., 2012). Parasocial is the unilateral relationship between the celebrity and the audience (Giles, 2002; Hartmann et al., 2008; Sanderson, 2009).

Stimulus development

Undergraduate students at Kuwait University were recruited as a research sample for this study. This segment was chosen because 55% of Instagram users are aged 18–29 (Duggan, 2015). Also, college students use Instagram nearly 32% more than less-educated individuals do (Duggan, 2013). Two pilot studies were conducted to test experimental manipulation and measurement scales.

Thirty-nine students participated in the first pilot study; 66% reported following at least one Instagram influencer. Also, 87% of the participants confirmed that they had experiences with sponsored posts previously. The questionnaire began with a question about the definition of Instagram influencer to ensure that participants would understand what they saw in the questionnaire. Two open questions were included to measure how

they recognize the sponsored post and their attitude towards sponsored content on Instagram. Then, the students were showed an experimental scenario with the post (picture) of the main study and asked to indicate if it was easy for them to understand the information and imagine themselves in the scenario. However, only 57% and 63% of them said yes. Besides, they were asked if the influencer in the post, based on the text's description, is a good fit to promote the product, and 57% said yes. Those three low percentages indicated the need to conduct another pilot study. However, 81% of the participants believed that it was not essential that influencers had the expertise and credibility in the sponsored post. Additional questions were asked to explore their definition of a "strong relationship" between the influencer and the followers and its importance. The answers were used to develop measurements for parasocial relationships.

The second pilot study, conducted with 28 students, focused on three questions after making some modifications in the post description and the scenario. Students were asked if instructions were easy to be understood (Yes=78.5%), easy to imagine themselves in the scenario (Yes=89%), and, based on the description, if they thought the influencer was a good fit for the promoted product (Yes=78.5%). The findings were used to finalize the design for experiment stimuli.

The product selected for the pilot and main study was an anonymous unisex perfume. Although the scenario stated clearly that an influencer posted the post, the picture itself looked like an Instagram post with 5000+ likes and a blurred name. The description of the post was manipulated according to the groups' conditions. Half of the groups were informed that the influencer was paid to promote the product (active

persuasion knowledge), while the other four groups were not informed (active persuasion knowledge). Also, half of the groups were told that the influencer has been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts (influencer-product congruence), while the other half told that he is (no influencer-product congruence). Also, four groups were told that this influencer is one of the influencers they like and trust, and you regularly check his/her posts (Parasocial relationship). In comparison, the other four groups were told that he/she is just one of the many influencers they follow but do not have a deep connection with this person, and they do not regularly check his/her posts (no parasocial relationship). Students were randomly assigned to one of the eight experimental groups (see Appendix A).

Participants and procedure

To test the mentioned hypotheses, a convenience sample comprising of 308 students at Kuwait University (females = $n_1 = 202$, males = $n_2 = 106$) was recruited. To gather the data pertinent to this investigation, electronic online questionnaires probing into Instagram use practices were designed and distributed to students in different years of study, majoring in different subjects, to ensure sample diversity. The scholar obtained the Institutional Research Board (IRB) approval at the University of Southern Mississippi before commencing data collection. As expected, the questionnaire took about 10 minutes to complete. The researcher distributed the questionnaire to 308 students ($N=308$) between May 11th, 2020, and May 26th, 2020. University professors in Kuwait supported the study by connecting the scholar to the research participants. The 308 participants were assigned into eight groups, whereby a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ fractional design experiment was conducted (see Table I).

Table I

Description of the Eight Experimental Conditions

Group #	Persuasion knowledge	Congruence	Parasocial
1	Active	Yes	Yes
2	Active	Yes	No
3	Active	No	Yes
4	Active	No	No
5	Nonactive	Yes	Yes
6	Nonactive	Yes	No
7	Nonactive	No	Yes
8	Nonactive	No	No

Questionnaires were created on Qualtrics, and participants were provided with a link to a specific experimental condition. Participants used their own smart devices (cell phones and tablets) to access the online questionnaire. Students who did not have such a device or Internet access were provided all the scholar's relevant resources. To avoid potential intervening effects of other factors, only the post (photo) was included in the questionnaire without mentioning the influencer's name or account. Respondents were informed that their participation is voluntary and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without incurring any penalties.

All groups saw the same post containing a photo that includes a sponsored content from an Instagram influencer. The author selected a specific photo from an influencer for a product that can be used and advertised by both males and females (perfume). However, no sign or text on the photo reveals that it is paid content, except for the activated persuasion knowledge condition groups as explained (see Appendix A). Manipulation on independent variables guided by the following three factors:

1. Participants' persuasion knowledge condition: activated or non-activated condition. Thus, four groups (active persuasion knowledge) comprise individuals aware (informed) that they are being exposed to native advertising. In comparison, the remaining four groups (nonactive persuasion knowledge) were unaware that they are being exposed to native advertising. A text description was provided on top of each post, indicating the post as sponsored content for the four activated conditions.
2. Congruence between the influencer and the product: The influencers in four groups were matched with the products, while those in the remaining four groups were not matched. In a text description on top of each post, participants were informed of the influencer's expertise, showing congruence with the product or noncongruence with the product.
3. The parasocial relationship between influencers and participants: In this condition, participants in four groups were told that they trusted and frequently interacted with the influencers in the post, while those in the remaining four groups did not have such a relationship.

Measures

Measurement scales from previous studies were adopted to measure significant variables, including message credibility, messenger credibility, and sharing intention.

Message (Ad) credibility. Message credibility was measured with the following five-items, 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”): (1) unbelievable or believable, (2) inaccurate or accurate, (3) not trustworthy or

trustworthy, (4) biased or not biased, and (5) incomplete or complete (Roberts, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha was .70.

Messenger (Influencer) credibility. Messenger credibility was measured with the following five-items, 5-point Likert scale (ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"): (1) is fair or unfair, (2) is unbiased or biased, (3) tells the whole story or does not tell the whole story, (4) is accurate or inaccurate, and (5) can be trusted or cannot be trusted (Roberts, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha was .72.

Sharing intention. Sharing intention measured with the scale created by Gobel, Meyer, Ramaseshan, and Bartsch (2017), which consists of three items: (1) "I would personally show the post to other people"; (2) "I would talk positively to other people about this post"; and (3) "I would send the link to this post to other people or share the link otherwise." Once again, these items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree." The Cronbach's alpha was .87.

Brand interest. A question was include asking how likely participants would want to learn more about this brand. The question was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."

Purchase intention. A question was include asking how likely participants would consider purchasing the promoted product. The question was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree."

The questionnaire also included a demographic section, probing into respondents' age, sex, place of residence, year of study, major, etc., as well as a section inquiring into their Instagram use and general attitude toward native advertising on social media. The researcher used Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) to run descriptive and

inferential statistical tests. Descriptive statistics implemented to describe the demographic characteristics of the study sample. Inferential statistical tests were adopted in order to test the research questions. The scholar chose the MANCOVA test with the significance level of $p < .05$ because the three independent variables are categorical, and the dependent variables are continuous.

Table II

List of measures for the dependent variables

Ad credibility	(1) the post is believable (2) the post is accurate (3) the post is trustworthy (4) the post is biased (5) the post is complete
Influencer credibility	(1) the Instagram influencer is fair (2) the Instagram influencer is biased (3) the Instagram influencer told the whole story (4) the Instagram influencer is accurate (5) the Instagram influencer can be trusted
Sharing intention	(1) I would personally show the post to others (2) I would talk positively to other people about this post. (3) I would send the link to this post to other people or share the link otherwise.
Sharing intention	(1) I would personally show the post to others (2) I would talk positively to other people about this post. (3) I would send the link to this post to other people or share the link otherwise.
Brand interest	(1) How likely would you want to learn more about this brand?
Purchase intention	(1) How likely would you consider purchasing this product?

All the items have a five-point Likert-type scale between 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

CHAPTER IV - RESULTS

A multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed using three between-group factors; namely, persuasion knowledge (active vs. not active), parasocial relationships (yes vs. no), and congruence (yes vs. no), to investigate their impact on ad credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, brand interest, and purchase intention.

Participants profile

This study's sample contained 308 participants, including 106 males (%34.4) and 208 females (65.6%). Most participants' (n=166; 53.9%) age ranged between 18 to 22 years. While about a quarter of them (n=78; 25.4%) age 23 to 26 years. The rest of the participants (n=64; 20.8%) are above 27 years old.

Also, most participants (n=134; 43.5%) were using their Instagram more than six times per day, while 83 participants (26.9%) used Instagram 4-5 times daily. Almost the same percentage, 28.6% of the participants (n=88), used Instagram 1-3 times daily. Only three participants (1%) said they do not use Instagram daily.

All 308 participants lived in Kuwait. However, they lived in the six governments area with different percentages: 24.7% in Alasimah, 20.1% in Hawally, 16.6% in Alahmadi, 14.3% in Mubarak Alkabeer, 14% in Farwaneyya, and 10.4% In Jahra.

Most participants (79.5%) follow at least one Instagram influencer, while 20.5% said they do not follow any Instagram influencer. Also, the majority of the participants (94.2%) said they had been exposed, at least one time, to an advertisement on an influencer's account.

Also, most participants (76.3%) believed that Instagram influencers must disclose that their post was advertising whenever they were paid to post. In comparison, 27.3% said that they did not have to disclose that their post was advertising.

Persuasion Knowledge

The first hypothesis (*H1*), pertaining to the influence of persuasion knowledge on the dependent variables, was not supported, as the results failed to reveal a significant link between persuasion knowledge and the dependent variables, whereby $F(1, 300) = .36, p = .54$ was obtained for ad credibility; $F(1,300) = .98, p = .32$, for influencer credibility; $F(1, 300) = 1.51, p = .21$. for sharing intention; $F(1,300) = .24, p = .62$ for brand interest; and $F(1,300) = .24, p = .61$ was obtained for purchase intention (see Table III). This means, there was no significant difference between groups with active persuasion knowledge and groups that persuasion knowledge was not activated.

Influencer–Product Congruence

The second set of hypotheses (*H2a, H2b*) postulated that influencer–product congruence affects the dependent variables and the persuasion knowledge effects. Specifically, *H2a* stated that a "higher level of influencer–product congruence (match-up) would lead to higher ad credibility, higher influencer credibility, and higher sharing intention," whereas *H2b* stated that "influencer–product congruence (match-up) moderates the effects of persuasion knowledge." Both hypotheses were partially supported (see Table III).

Analysis results showed significant effects of congruence on sharing intention, $F(1,300) = 8.85, p = .003$; brand interest, $F(1,300) = 7.4, p = .007$; and purchase intention, $F(1,300) = 4.39, p = .037$. Specifically, higher level of congruence generated higher level

of sharing intentions ($M = 2.62$, $SD = 1.03$) than lower congruence level ($M = 2.27$, $SD = .94$). Similarly, higher level of congruence generated a higher level of brand interest ($M = 3.55$, $SD = 1.11$) than lower level of congruence ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.22$). It also led to a higher level of purchase intention ($M = 2.83$, $SD = 1.06$) relative to a lower congruence level ($M = 2.57$, $SD = 1.13$). However, it did not exert significant effects on Ad credibility and influencer credibility.

The interaction between persuasion knowledge and congruence showed a significant effect on influencer credibility only, $F = 4.38$, $p = .037$. When persuasion knowledge was not activated, high congruence level exerted stronger influence on influencer credibility ($M = 2.74$, $SD = .74$) than did low congruence level ($M = 2.51$, $SD = .61$). However, when persuasion knowledge was activated, there was no difference between high ($M = 2.77$, $SD = .85$) and low ($M = 2.68$, $SD = .75$) congruence level (see Table IV).

Parasocial Relationships

The third set of hypotheses ($H3a$, $H3b$) pertained to parasocial relationships' effects on the dependent variables and the persuasion knowledge effects. Specifically, $H3a$ postulated that a "higher level of parasocial relationships would lead to higher Ad credibility, higher influencer credibility, and higher sharing intention," whereas $H3b$ stated that "parasocial relationships moderate the effects of persuasion knowledge." Both hypotheses were partially supported (see Table III).

The results showed that parasocial relationships significantly affect Ad credibility, $F = 9.12$, $p = .003$; influencer credibility, $F = 6.88$, $p = .009$; brand interest, $F = 4.46$, $p = .036$; and purchase intention, $F = 7.73$, $p = .006$, but not sharing intention ($F = .51$, $p =$

.47). Moreover, higher levels of parasocial relationships generated higher levels of ad credibility ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .68$) compared to lower levels of parasocial relationships ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .67$). Similarly, higher levels of parasocial relationships led to higher levels of influencer credibility ($M = 2.77$, $SD = .75$) than did lower levels parasocial relationships ($M = 2.55$, $SD = .73$). In addition, brand interest was strengthened in the presence of parasocial relationships ($M = 3.51$, $SD = 1.10$) compared to the levels noted in their absence ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 1.24$). Purchase intention was also strengthened by parasocial relationships ($M = 2.87$, $SD = 1.08$) relative to the levels measured in their absence ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.09$).

Concerning H3b, only the interaction between persuasion knowledge and parasocial relationship showed a significant effect on brand interest ($F = 6.30$, $p = .003$). When persuasion knowledge was not activated, high parasocial relationships generated higher level of brand interest ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 1.08$) than low parasocial relationships ($M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.21$). When persuasion knowledge was activated, however, there was no difference between higher parasocial relationship groups ($M = 3.37$, $SD = 1.18$) and low parasocial relationship groups ($M = 3.43$, $SD = 1.25$; (see Table IV).

In addition, as a significant three-way interaction was found for influencer credibility, $F(1, 300) = 4.58$, $p = .033$, planned comparison was conducted. The findings revealed that when persuasion knowledge is not activated and influencer–product congruence level is high, higher levels of parasocial relationships ($M = 2.97$, $SD = .71$) exerted a greater effect on influencer credibility than did lower levels of parasocial relationships ($M = 2.49$, $SD = .71$).

Table III

Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (All cases; N = 308)

Source	Dependent Variable	F	p	n ²
Persuasion (Pe)	Ad credibility	.363	.547	.001
	Influencer credibility	.986	.322	.003
	Sharing intention	1.518	.219	.005
	Brand interest	.244	.622	.001
	Purchase intention	.248	.619	.001
Parasocial (Pa)	Ad credibility	9.128	.003**	.030
	Influencer credibility	6.880	.009**	.022
	Sharing intention	.519	.472	.002
	Brand interest	4.460	.036*	.015
	Purchase intention	7.733	.006**	.025
Congruence (Co)	Ad credibility	1.888	.170	.006
	Influencer credibility	.220	.640	.001
	Sharing intention	8.851	.003**	.029
	Brand interest	7.401	.007**	.024
	Purchase intention	4.399	.037*	.014
Pe × Pa	Ad credibility	.612	.434	.002
	Influencer credibility	.577	.448	.002
	Sharing intention	.446	.505	.001
	Brand interest	6.300	.013*	.021
	Purchase intention	.009	.926	.000

Table III (continued).

Pe × Co	Ad credibility	.585	.445	.002
	Influencer credibility	4.383	.037*	.014
	Sharing intention	3.001	.084	.010
	Brand interest	.443	.506	.001
	Purchase intention	.096	.757	.000
Pa × Co	Ad credibility	.618	.432	.002
	Influencer credibility	.042	.838	.000
	Sharing intention	4.860	.028*	.016
	Brand interest	.110	.740	.000
	Purchase intention	.004	.947	.000
Pe × Pa × Co	Ad credibility	2.755	.098	.009
	Influencer credibility	4.584	.033*	.015
	Sharing intention	.996	.319	.003
	Brand interest	1.050	.306	.003
	Purchase intention	3.724	.055	.012
Error	Ad credibility	(.051)		
	Influencer credibility	(.056)		
	Sharing intention	(.065)		
	Brand interest	(.063)		
	Purchase intention	(.051)		

Notes: Values enclosed in parentheses represent mean square errors; Non-significant interaction effects were not reported. * $p < .05$,

** $p < .01$

Table IV

Descriptive statistics

Treatment			<i>M (SD)</i>				
Persu- asion	Para- social	Congruence	<i>Ad credibility</i>	<i>Influencer credibility</i>	<i>Sharing intention</i>	<i>Brand interest</i>	<i>Purchase intention</i>
Active	Yes	Yes	2.98 (0.67)	2.63 (0.75)	2.66 (1.07)	3.46 (1.05)	2.90 (1.12)
		No	3.00 (0.77)	2.93 (0.88)	2.38 (0.95)	3.28 (1.19)	2.92 (1.24)
	No	Yes	2.75 (0.73)	2.64 (0.77)	2.52 (1.05)	3.61 (1.24)	2.79 (1.02)
		No	2.64 (0.71)	2.61 (0.79)	2.51 (1.15)	3.24 (1.26)	2.32 (1.23)
	Total	Yes	2.87 (0.71)	2.63 (0.75)	2.59 (1.06)	3.53 (1.14)	2.84 (1.06)
		No	2.82 (0.76)	2.77 (0.85)	2.45 (1.04)	3.26 (1.22)	2.63 (1.26)
Inactive	Yes	Yes	3.06 (0.62)	2.97 (0.71)	2.90 (1.06)	3.95 (0.96)	3.10 (1.08)
		No	2.71 (0.64)	2.56 (0.58)	2.02 (0.69)	3.33 (1.12)	2.58 (0.78)
	No	Yes	2.70 (0.62)	2.49 (0.71)	2.39 (0.90)	3.16 (1.07)	2.54 (0.99)
		No	2.72 (0.66)	2.47 (0.64)	2.22 (0.90)	2.89 (1.33)	2.47 (1.11)
	Total	Yes	2.89 (0.64)	2.74 (0.74)	2.65 (1.02)	3.57 (1.08)	2.83 (1.07)
		No	2.71 (0.64)	2.51 (0.61)	2.12 (0.80)	3.12 (1.24)	2.53 (0.95)
Total	Yes	Yes	3.02 (0.64)	2.80 (0.74)	2.78 (1.07)	3.71 (1.03)	3.00 (1.10)
		No	2.85 (0.76)	2.74 (0.76)	2.20 (0.84)	3.30 (1.15)	2.75 (1.04)
	No	Yes	2.73 (0.68)	2.56 (0.74)	2.45 (0.98)	3.39 (1.17)	2.67 (1.00)
		No	2.68 (0.68)	2.54 (0.72)	2.36 (1.03)	3.07 (1.30)	2.40 (1.16)
	Total	Yes	2.88 (0.67)	2.68 (0.75)	2.62 (1.03)	3.55 (1.11)	2.84 (1.06)
		No	2.77 (0.70)	2.64 (0.75)	2.28 (0.94)	3.19 (1.22)	2.58 (1.11)

Personal variables

The research question (RQ) explored the role of personal variables. The analysis results indicate that gender does not affect any of the dependent variables, as shown in Table V. There were no significant gender differences in ad credibility, $F(1, 306) = .68$, $p = .41$; influencer credibility, $F(1, 306) = .16$, $p = .69$; share intention, $F(1, 306) = 3.28$, $p = .07$; brand interest, $F(1, 306) = 1.08$, $p = .30$; or purchase intention, $F(1, 306) = .43$, $p = .51$. It was also found that Instagram usage was not significantly related to ad credibility, influencer credibility, share intention, brand interest, or purchase intention.

Table V

The Role of personal variables

DV	Sex	M	SD	<u>95% Confidence Interval</u>	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Ad cred.	Male	2.77	.80	2.62	2.93
	Female	2.85	.62	2.76	2.93
Infl. Cred.	Male	2.64	.82	2.48	2.80
	Female	2.68	.70	2.58	2.77
Sharing In.	Male	2.31	.98	2.12	2.50
	Female	2.52	1.00	2.39	2.66
Brand	Male	3.27	1.25	3.03	3.52
	Female	3.42	1.14	3.26	3.58
Purchase	Male	2.76	1.15	2.54	2.99
	Female	2.68	1.07	2.53	2.83

CHAPTER V – DISCUSSION

This study sought to discover whether the disclosure of the native advertising nature of the content had an impact on the perceived relationship with the audience responses toward the product. However, on a larger scale, the data told a bigger picture story about using native advertising in social media by public relations practitioners as a whole. Consequently, the findings yield important theoretical and practical implications in many disciplines, including public relations, advertising, and marketing.

Using the persuasion knowledge model (PKM) as a conceptual framework, this dissertation examined the effects of persuasion knowledge condition, influencer-product congruence, and the parasocial relationship on ad credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, brand interest, and purchase intention. This experiment found both main and interaction effects on the dependent variables discussed.

Persuasion Knowledge

Navarro, Moreno, Molleda, Khalil, and Verhoeven (2020) divided professionals according to their hierarchical levels and found that professionals working in excellent departments, which means high level, significantly utilize specific strategies to identify and communicate with social media influencers compared with other professionals. According to Macnamara (2010), Zerfass, Sandhu, and Young (2007), the unprepared professionals for the upcoming digital challenges will face numerous barriers and difficulties in their jobs.

Although persuasion knowledge is the main factor that enables people to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember (Friestad & Wright, 1994), no significant main effects were found for the current study's persuasion knowledge condition. There was no difference between two persuasion knowledge conditions (active vs. not active) in ad credibility, influencer credibility, sharing intention, brand interest, or purchase intention. Previous research spotted a significant adverse effect on credibility perceptions when the influencer reveals the nature of the native advertising content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Further, Carr and Hayes (2014) found that not mentioning the sponsorship leads to high credibility in the opinion leader, whereas an implicit disclosure triggers low credibility. However, simple sponsorship disclosure may positively affect consumers' attitudes toward influencers' messages, whereas sponsorship compensation justification generates increases ad and influencer credibility (Stubb, Nyström, Colliander, 2019).

Moreover, the organizations' public relations may be affected negatively by the lack of disclosure, as previous studies have discussed (Sweetser, 2010). However, some scholars found that viewers sometimes do not notice that the native advertisement is a sponsored content (Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). Also, some viewers aware of the sponsorship nature of the content and the persuading intentions of the content creators and their desire to sell products; however, that awareness did not have a significant influence on their credibility; thus, these findings suggest that public relations practitioners shall not reliably count on native advertising as a tactic when they seek for improving relationships with public (Sweetser, Ahn, and Hochman, 2016).

Hence, persuasion knowledge cannot be studied isolated from other factors. The influence of two other variables, influencer-product congruence and parasocial relationship, will be discussed in the following sections.

Influencer-Product Congruence

The fast and recent rise of social media influencers' effects on the public relations field raised the ethical dialogue about their "fitness" with the field's dominants (Taylor & Kent, 2014) and responsible advocacy (Heath, 2006a, 2006b). As the 2019 Influencer Marketing Report (SocialPubli, 2019) confirmed, public relations practitioners' most significant challenge is to find the influencer that matches organizations correctly.

In this study, Influencer-product congruence was found to impact three of the five dependent variables significantly. A high influencer-product congruence level generated stronger sharing intention, brand interest, and purchase intention than a low influencer-product congruence level. This is consistent with previous research claiming a positive relationship between change in the evaluation and the external frame of reference (Osgood & Tannenbaum, 1955). Furthermore, a high degree of the match-up between celebrity and product and congruence between brand personality and celebrity personality positively affect consumers' attitudes toward the advertisement and the brand and their purchase intentions (Cooper, 1984; Till & Busler, 1998; Erdogan, 1999; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Pradhan et al., 2016). Santos, Barros, and Azevedo (2019) confirmed that endorsers' motives should appear selfless, credible, and trustworthy, relevant to supporting the cause. Conversely, Kamins and Gupta (1994) found that advertising

effectiveness is reduced in misalignment between the product and the endorser. However, no significant results were found on ad credibility and influencer credibility.

A significant interaction effect was found between the influencer-product congruence and persuasion knowledge, but only in influencer credibility, not the other dependent variables. The results that partially supported the second set of hypotheses indicate that participants change their attitudes toward the dependent variables according to (a) their knowledge about being persuaded and (b) how they see the influencer's relationship and what they endorse. Even though the influencer-product congruence itself did not significantly affect ad credibility, the effects became stronger when coupled with persuasion knowledge.

The effects of influencer-product congruence varied by persuasion knowledge condition; When persuasion knowledge was activated, there was no difference between high and low congruence groups. However, when persuasion knowledge was not activated, the high congruence group reported a higher ad credibility score. Hence, people tend to think more rationally about the relationship between the endorser and the product when they do not know that the endorser is trying to persuade them. Conversely, an influencer revealing their persuasive intentions may negatively impact their credibility regardless of their relation to the product. Previous study findings indicated the prominent role of individuals' favorable preexisting attitudes toward products, encouraging public relations practitioners to utilize native advertising tactics in their campaigns (Sweetser et al. 2016). De Veirman, et al. (2017) agrees that selecting the right social media influencers remains a major challenge for organizations. However, it is

crucial for the corporates who utilize social media influencer to aware that associating their corporation with those Internet-based creators may lead to a severe image-related crisis (Hill, 2019).

Parasocial Relationships

Partially confirming the third set of hypotheses, the present analysis indicated that parasocial relationships significantly affected ad credibility, influencer credibility, brand interest, and purchase intention. These findings confirm that the concept of parasocial relationships is crucial in understanding user behaviors concerning digital celebrities (Kim, 2005). Media users, including Instagram users, often associate themselves with digital celebrities, which affects their purchasing habits (Dibble et al., 2016; Rubin & Step, 2000) and purchasing decisions (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011). The perception of Instagram influencers has improved, as they are viewed as a more reliable source of information than radio and TV personalities (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), which explains the significant effect on influencer credibility this study. The results also support parasocial relationships' ability to influence factors that determine purchasing intent, such as consumer satisfaction, quality, and homogeneity (Goh et al., 2017; Shin, Oh, Hwang, Seo, & Kim, 2012). Accordingly, most participants in Lueck's study (2015) perceived celebrity advertisements as non-commercial because of parasocial relationships mitigating followers' persuasion knowledge. Dhanesh and Duthler (2019) found that awareness of paid endorsement is correlated with influencer-follower relationships associated with purchase and eWOM (sharing) intentions. However, parasocial relationships are not affected by the recognition of the advertisement nature of the

content. Furthermore, Hwang and Qi Zhang (2018) confirmed that parasocial relationships moderate the paths between (a) followers' persuasion knowledge and purchase intentions and (b) followers' persuasion knowledge and eWOM (sharing) intentions.

Similarly to congruence level, interaction effects were found between persuasion knowledge and parasocial relationships in brand interest. Specifically, strong parasocial relationships generate a higher level of brand interest than weak parasocial relationships when persuasion is not activated. On the other hand, there is no difference in brand interest levels between strong and weak parasocial relationships when persuasion knowledge is activated. This confirms that people's effects are less significant when they know they are being persuaded than when they do not, regardless of the level of parasocial relationships.

Breves, Amrehn, Heidenreich, Liebers, and Schramm (2021) found that the stronger parasocial relationship with social media influencers reported lower evaluative persuasion knowledge. Besides, the advertising disclosure of the post enhanced purchase intentions and brand evaluations. Yılmazdogan, Dogan, and Altıntas (2021) also found a positive relationship between parasocial interaction and travel intention.

A three-way interaction effect further supported this statement. When persuasion knowledge is not activated, and the influencer–product congruence level is high, higher levels of parasocial relationships significantly affect influencer credibility than lower levels of parasocial relationships. The results of this study are compatible with the previous study said that people trust social media influencers' messages more than the

corporate messages (Chu & Kamal, 2008); And because of their great perceived credibility (Schmallegger & Carson, 2008) and expertise (Droge, Stanko, & Pollitte, 2010), public relations practitioners seek to benefit from characteristics of social media influencers.

Personal variables

Although there are differences in the motives for using Instagram (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait, & Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017), this study found no significant effects between males and females' responses to the dependent variables. University students who formed the sample belong to the same social group and share a similar way of thinking. These results may be different if another group was used as a sample, such as different ages or cultural backgrounds.

Overall, this study contributed to research in persuasion knowledge by studying how moderating variables such as influencer-product congruence and parasocial can affect persuasion knowledge. The study also focuses on how native advertising in social media works in the Middle East, which helps professionals use it effectively. Today, social media influencers can shape others' opinions, by accelerating, controlling, and disseminating information (Bamakan, Nurgaliev & Qu, 2018). Unlike previous studies, which usually focus on traditional advertising and public relations tactics, this research examined the use of native advertising by Instagram influencers in a region that lacks rules and regulations related to social media advertisements. In this study, the persuasion knowledge condition did not affect people's attitudes toward the dependent variables.

This might be because people in Kuwait do not understand or do not care about the differences between traditional and native advertising.

Practical Implications

This study's results can help public relations practitioners, advertisers, and marketers effectively use one of the most current marketing tools in the Middle East. Native advertising that comes in not activated persuasion knowledge has a higher impact than the traditional advertising that comes in activated persuasion knowledge, which may encourage professionals to hire social media influencers, including Instafamous users, to promote their products services. However, professionals need to remember that the match-up between the influencer and a product or service can play a significant role in enabling them to achieve their advertisings or campaigns' goals. As indicated in this study, selecting the proper people to endorse products and services can positively impact peoples' behaviors, such as sharing and purchase intentions. This kind of impact has always been a target for every marketer.

Furthermore, professionals should be aware of the role of parasocial relationships when selecting their celebrity or influencer. Parasocial relationships attract people toward products and services because they increase the credibility of both the message and the messenger, which are ad and influencer credibility in our study, besides adding more brand interest and purchase intention to the audience. Hence, selecting an influencer with high congruence to the product or service and parasocial relationships with the audience while not telling it that it is a paid content may be the secret toward a successful advertising or marketing campaign. Scholars found differences in the motive of using

Instagram in Kuwait (Al-Kandari, Al-Sumait, and Al-Hunaiyyan, 2017) and gender on the usage (Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan, and Al-Hajri, 2016). However, this study found no difference between males and females in the effects of the native advertising side.

Limitations and directions for future research

Data collection was conducted in Kuwait during the peak of the global COVID-19 wave. Due to the schools' mandatory closure, the researcher changed the collection method from distributing the survey in classrooms to distributing it online, which may have affected data accuracy.

Furthermore, the sample included university students only, in a specific geographical region, which could have limited the generalizability of results. A more diverse sample from different countries and social groups could help. Only one type of post (pictures) was used in the study, whereas videos and captioned pictures are also used on Instagram and could have different impact. Also, only one specific product was used in this study. Testing other products may change the results. A study about the different effects across local and international brands' ads may be conducted. Future research also needs to examine media platforms other than Instagram, to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of social media influencers.

Finally, the manipulation of independent variables was done using a scenario, not real-world experiences. Different research methods could be used in future studies to explore different aspects of this topic. For example, in-depth interviews may be conducted with some influencers to assess their awareness of the factors that they consider while selecting products and services to advertise.

APPENDIX A – SCREENSHOTS OF EXPERIMENTAL CONDITIONS

 Look & Feel  Survey Flow  Survey Options  Tools ▾

Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. He/she has Not been known for his/her fashion sense and never offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. He/she is just one of the many influencers you follow but you don't really have a deep connection with this person, and you do not regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. He/she has NOT been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. Personally, you really like and trust this person, and you regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. He/she has been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. He/she is just one of the many influencers you follow but you don't really have a deep connection with this person, and you do not regularly check his/her post. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. He/she has been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. Personally, you really like and trust this person, and you regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. Based on the information in the post, you realized he/she was paid to help promote a product (perfume). He/she has NOT been known for his/her fashion sense and never offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. He/she is just one of the many influencers you follow but you don't really have a deep connection with this person, and you do not regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. Based on the information in the post, you realized he/she was paid to help promote a product (perfume). He/she has NOT been known for his/her fashion sense and never offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. Personally, you really like and trust this person, and you regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. Based on the information in the post, you realized he/she was paid to help promote a product (perfume). He/she has been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. He/she is just one of the many influencers you follow but you don't really have a deep connection with this person, and you do not regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



Imagine you were browsing through your Instagram feed and saw a picture posted by an influencer you follow. Based on the information in the post, you realized he/she was paid to help promote a product (perfume). He/she has been known for his/her fashion sense and regularly offers fashion tips in his/her Instagram posts. Personally, you really like and trust this person, and you regularly check his/her posts. Please answer the following questions:



APPENDIX B - QUESTIONNIRE

Part 1: About the message.

1) The message of the post is believable.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

2) The message of the post is accurate.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

3) The message of the post is trustworthy.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

4) The message of the post is biased.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

5) The message of the post is complete.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

Part 2: About the Instagram influencer

6) The Instagram influencer is fair.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

7) The Instagram influencer is biased.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

8) The Instagram influencer told the whole story.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

9) The Instagram influencer is accurate.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

10) The Instagram influencer can be trusted.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

Part 3: Sharing intention, brand interest, purchase intention:

11) I would personally show the post to other people.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

12) I would talk positively to other people about this post.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

13) I would send the link to this post to other people or share the link otherwise.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

14) I would like to learn more about this brand.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

15) I would consider purchasing this product.

Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

Part 4: Demographic questions:

Age:

Sex:

How many times you access Instagram per day?

- Never -1-3 -3-5 -more than 5.

Where do you live?

-Alahmadi -Aljahra -Hawalli -Alfrwaniya -Mubarak Alkaber -

Alasimah

Do you follow at least one Instagram influencer?

- Yes - No

Have you exposed, at least one time, to an advertisement on an influencer's account?

- Yes - No

Do you believe that Instagram influencers must disclose that their post is advertising whenever they are paid to post?

- Yes - No

APPENDIX C – IRB APPROVAL LETTER

IRB-19-571 - Initial: Sacco Committee Letter - Expedited and Full

irb@usm.edu <irb@usm.edu>

Wed 2/12/2020 12:54 PM

To: Ahmad Alhaidar <Ahmad.Alhaidar@usm.edu>; Fei Xue <Fei.Xue@usm.edu>; Michael Howell <Michael.Howell@usm.edu>; Michaela Donohue <Michaela.Donohue@usm.edu>

**Office of
Research Integrity**



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NOTICE OF INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD ACTION

The project below has been reviewed by The University of Southern Mississippi Institutional Review Board in accordance with Federal Drug Administration regulations (21 CFR 26, 111), Department of Health and Human Services regulations (45 CFR Part 46), and University Policy to ensure:

- The risks to subjects are minimized and reasonable in relation to the anticipated benefits.
- The selection of subjects is equitable.
- Informed consent is adequate and appropriately documented.
- Where appropriate, the research plan makes adequate provisions for monitoring the data collected to ensure the safety of the subjects.
- Where appropriate, there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of all data.
- Appropriate additional safeguards have been included to protect vulnerable subjects.
- Any unanticipated, serious, or continuing problems encountered involving risks to subjects must be reported immediately. Problems should be reported to ORI via the Incident template on Cayuse IRB.
- The period of approval is twelve months. An application for renewal must be submitted for projects exceeding twelve months.

PROTOCOL NUMBER: IRB-19-571

PROJECT TITLE: Native advertising on Instagram in Kuwait: Effects of persuasion knowledge, influencer-product congruence, and parasocial relationships

SCHOOL/PROGRAM: School of COMM, Journalism, Public Relations,

RESEARCHER(S): Ahmad Alhaidar, Fei Xue

IRB COMMITTEE ACTION: Approved

CATEGORY: Expedited

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

PERIOD OF APPROVAL: February 12, 2020

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Donald Sacco".

Donald Sacco, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

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