

The Search for Authenticity:  
Influencer Advertising on Instagram  
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Influencer Advertising on Instagram  
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## **Abstract**

Instagram advertising is a common form of advertising that has permeated the lives of consumers on Instagram. This thesis explores the emotional relationship that is built between Instagram Influencers, advertisements, and consumers. The case study in this thesis identifies some specific advertising strategies that build the Influencer and consumer relationship. It was found that the inclusion of personal, unsponsored content on the Influencer's platform was critical in generating a sense of authenticity towards the Influencer's sponsored content. Consumers were then more likely to trust that the Influencer's product recommendations were authentic, and identify a desire to liken themselves to the Influencer by purchasing the product. Although there is not a single strategy for Influencer success, the sense of authenticity generated by successful strategies effectively engages consumers.

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## **Introduction**

Social media sharing applications, such as Instagram, are platforms for social connection. This platform rapidly evolved into a business opportunity for companies and users to collaborate. Users that advertise products and experiences on behalf of companies, and receive compensation in return, have been labelled “Influencers.” The business opportunity offered by Instagram has grown rapidly: as of 2017, 37% of companies dedicate a portion of their budget to Social Media Influencer marketing alone, and the number of Influencers seeking work has skyrocketed (Influencer Marketing Hub). Business opportunities are sought out by both Influencers and companies; however, it is critical that the Influencer and the product are a good fit on both sides. This thesis explores how Instagram Influencers market products in a manner that is perceived as authentic and the ways in which followers interpret and respond to these advertisements.

## **Literature Review**

The rapid rise of social media platforms resulted in the emergence of a new attention economy. Marwick (2015) describes this attention economy as “a marketing perspective assigning value according to something’s capacity to attract ‘eyeballs’ in a media-saturated, information rich world” (p. 138). Social media users experience a high degree of exposure to the attention economy on social media sites such as Instagram, a photo and video-sharing app. Instagram users exist in a cycle of viewing the photos and videos of others and posting creative content to cultivate their own public platform. Users

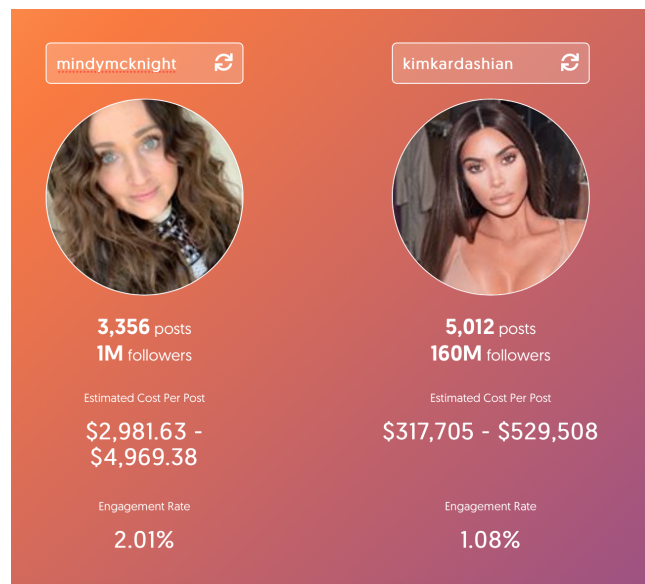
may interact with each other through likes, comments, and a direct-messaging system built into the app.

The attention directed and received through these interactions can be viewed as a commodity for which users have an appetite. User behavior is driven toward actions that yield attention; the greater the attention received, the greater perceived success and social appeal (Hawk, Eijnden, van Lissa & Bogt, 2018, p. 66). Users may translate the way they believe others perceive them through social media interactions to how they perceive themselves. Social media platforms allow the “everyday” person to receive the attention of companies and other users, and transform into a Social Media Influencer. To illustrate and define some core differences between traditional celebrities and internet-turned-celebrities, or Social Media Influencers, let’s compare Kim Kardashian and Mindy McKnight.

Kim Kardashian is a well-known and highly-followed celebrity, with a reputation that existed prior to her presence on social media. Celebrity social media accounts, such as Kim’s, build on the existing fame and reputation of the user to gain widespread attention. Unlike Kim, Mindy McKnight did not have a highly-followed reputation or identity prior to her presence on social media. Mindy, a mother of six from Utah, began posting hair tutorial videos on YouTube in 2009. Mindy has since grown a devoted fan base and is well-known across her social media accounts on YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. With this growing fanbase came the increasing presence of sponsored posts on Mindy’s Instagram feed, partnering with small and large brands alike, such as Walmart and Disney (Hale, 2019). Most recently, Mindy partnered again with Walmart and launched her own hair care line. To date, Mindy has amassed 1.4 million followers on her

Instagram account, in combination with 192k Twitter followers and 2.5 million likes on her Facebook page. Mindy's followers were all drawn from content creation on Mindy's social media accounts. The way in which Mindy built a widely-known internet reputation and a career collaborating with third-party companies classifies her as a Social Media Influencer - a social media user, turned into a celebrity. Figure 1, below, demonstrates a quantifiable comparison between a traditional celebrity, such as Kim Kardashian, to a Social Media Influencer, such as Mindy McKnight. Interestingly, although Kim has a much larger number of followers, Mindy's sponsored posts have nearly double the consumer engagement rate.

**Figure 1.**



*Influencer Marketing Hub. Retrieved from <https://influencemarketinghub.com/micro-influencers-vs-celebrities/#>.*

Having earned widespread internet attention, while at the same time appearing more relatable than traditional celebrity counterparts that boast millions of followers,

Social Media Influencers present an excellent business opportunity for collaboration with companies.

## **Marketing Strategy**

Business advertising opportunities have changed for both companies and content creators with the advancement of social media and technology. Traditional advertising strategies were outbound, meaning that the company initiated the conversation and sent the desired message to the consumer. Outbound marketing is a one-way form of communication, from the company to the consumer, without expectation of a response from the consumer. Examples of outbound marketing include television commercials, paper advertisements in magazines and newspapers and radio advertisements (Hawlk, 2018, p. 30).

Companies pushed to get more creative, and began implementing inbound marketing, a marketing strategy designed to attract and engage consumers in the product without the company sending a message directly to any given consumer. Inbound marketing focuses on creating content that will naturally attract and build a relationship with the target consumer (Patruti-Baltes, 2016, p. 61). Because of its reliance on the internet, inbound marketing enables companies to spread information quickly and globally, at a low cost, unlike the relatively costly nature of outbound marketing (Hawlk, 2018, p. 30). Inbound marketing is so integrated into consumers' lives that consumers may initially be unaware that the content they are viewing is even a marketing strategy.

Inbound marketing calls into question the right of consumers to have sponsored content clearly identified. The legalities and protocols of advertising on Instagram are



complicated due to the newness of Instagram as an advertising platform, combined with a global presence and differing laws between countries. The consequences of a breach in protocol are equally complicated, as the lines between free speech and commercial speech are somewhat intertwined (Myers, 2017, p. 1385).

The Federal Trade Commission, or FTC, revised policy procedures in 2009 for the first time in 30 years to reflect the developments in advertising and technology, by requiring that all material connection endorsements be disclosed (Myers, 2017, p. 1373). Therefore, users who partner with companies must signal this partnership to their followers, typically by a hashtag such as ‘#ad’ placed at the end of their post. The FTC outlines a material connection as a “relationship between the endorser and the seller of an advertised product that might materially affect the weight or credibility of the endorsement” (Myers, 2017, p. 1380). Increasing popularity of sponsored advertisements pushed the FTC to update and publish an agency stance on advertising regulations in 2015 (p. 1373), reinforcing that consumers do have the right to have endorsed versus natural content clearly identified. However, if these required identifications, such as #ad, are hidden among other tags at the end of a post, do consumers even see and comprehend the tag? Effective disclosure would result in the consumer reading and comprehending the endorsed nature of the post without question (AdAge, 2016).

With these regulations in mind, effective Social Media Influencers must produce content that is interpreted as credible by their audience, while also informing consumers of these material connections. The intent of third-party endorsements is to draw attention to the quality or value of the product, while enhancing the credibility of the ad by including an endorsement from an independent source (Hal Dean & Biswas, 2001, p. 41).

Third-party endorsements are a powerful tool in advertising and public relations, as these ads are presented as a form of peer recommendation from a “real” and credible source.

### **Endorser Credibility**

Many studies have explored the factors that contribute to source credibility. The original source-credibility theory (Hovland, 1953) included only the factors of expertise and trustworthiness. Years of studies have determined a positive relationship between perceived expertise and trustworthiness on consumer attitude and purchase intention (Ohanian, 1990, p. 41). This really is no surprise. Consumers are more likely to purchase a product recommended by an expert than from someone unfamiliar with the product.

The dimension of attractiveness was added to credibility studies years later, with studies concluding that physically attractive sources were intrinsically more persuasive across all product categories. However, Ohanian found that the “construct of attractiveness” (p. 41) is not uniform, and that there are many different characteristics to attraction, including perceived “model attractiveness, chicness, sexiness, or sexualness and likability” (p. 41). Therefore, companies must select an Influencer with the type of attractiveness they believe will be attractive to the target consumer.

Kapitan & Silvera’s (2016) research found physical attractiveness had a positive effect on attitude and purchase intention due to a general belief that “what is beautiful is good” (p. 558). However, attractiveness extends past physical looks, and can include additional factors such as familiarity and perceived similarity that make a source likeable (p. 558).

From his research, Ohanian (1990) created the source credibility scale as a way to quantify credibility across celebrity endorsers. Ohanian's study included an evaluation of selected celebrities against an exhaustive list of characteristics such as intelligence, skill, dependability, honesty, sophistication and glamour (p. 44). The source credibility scale that was created from the study affords the opportunity to measure the impact of this "tri-component construct" (p. 49), resulting in a correlation coefficient that can be ranked against other sources. To date, the source credibility scale acts as a relevant measurement construct not only in the advertising world but across other platforms (p. 49).

From a corporate standpoint, the credibility of any chosen Influencer is critical for both sales conversion and brand reputation. Even a single third-party endorsement from an Influencer ties the Influencer and the corporation together in the minds of consumers. Each Influencer is "invested with social and cultural meaning and transfers their image to products" (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016, p. 558). When consumers purchase the product advertised by an Influencer, the identity of the consumer is typically tied to both the Influencer and the corporation (p. 558).

The credibility of any given Influencer is also affected by the relevant "fit" of a product (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016, p. 559). Fit is the "degree in which the image, personality, or expertise of the endorser fits the advertised product" (Schouten, Janssen & Verspaget, 2019, p. 263). A strong sense of fit with the Influencer is positively correlated with product evaluation and purchase intention (p. 263). If the fit between a product and an Influencer is lacking, the Influencer is deemed less credible (p. 263).

Chriselle Lim is a beauty Influencer who is active on many social media sites, including Instagram. Chriselle partnered with Volvo to promote a new range of eco-

friendly vehicles. As one example, Chriselle posted a photo of her young family posed around a Volvo vehicle, with a caption promoting an eco-friendly lifestyle enhanced by Volvo's new "*Consciously Clean*" carwash program (see Figure 2). Chriselle received a lot of negative feedback on the post, her followers arguing that a beauty guru, with a career involving the constant purchasing of clothes, makeup and skincare products, does not fit with the "eco-friendly" lifestyle Volvo was promoting (Barker, 2018). This endorsement tainted both the image of Chriselle, as a relatable and authentic peer to her followers, and the Volvo corporation, for "selling out" or throwing advertisements around carelessly.

**Figure 2.**



On the other hand, if consumers perceive the Influencer to be making a recommendation about a product that they use and value, the knowledge of Influencer compensation may be less important or even disregarded by the consumer. A positively

received example of Instagram marketing is the Instagram user @thebucketlistfamily. This family of five travel the world full-time, while making a full-time salary from Instagram and media-sponsored content. The way that sponsored products or experiences are integrated into sponsored posts is a logical extension of the family's lifestyle. Figure 3 demonstrates one such post, where the couple posed for a photo in Panama, with the caption, 'FALLING in love with my man. Falling in love ON my man...'. Only one of the last tags on the post reveal that the post is actually an advertisement for *Albion Fit* swimwear.

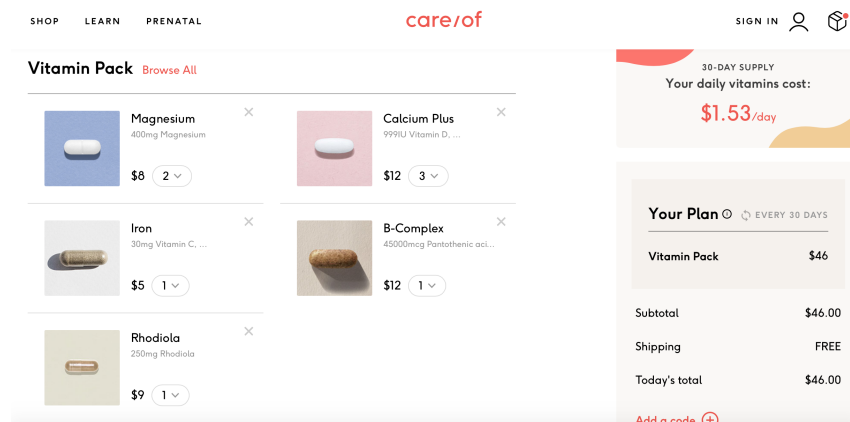
**Figure 3.**



Consequently, companies must select the Influencers they use for product advertisement carefully. To understand the Influencer selection process further, the researcher reached out to *Care Of*, a subscription company that creates custom vitamin packs. Prospective *Care Of* customers simply fill out a quiz detailing their lifestyle, goals and demographic information, and the system generates a combination of vitamins

specific to their needs. Customers receive a refill package each month. Figure 4 is an example of what a vitamin combination could look like in the customer checkout process.

**Figure 4.**



When asked about how *Care Of* selects their influencers, they responded that they:

Do this in a number of ways: 1) We work with agencies whose job it is to find, vet, and coordinate with influencers on our behalf. In this case, we still approve all partnerships and content but the agencies save us a lot of time in background research and logistical coordination (emails, etc.). 2) We receive a huge amount of "inbound" partnership requests (i.e. the influencers reach out to us directly asking if we'd like to work with them). 3) We do also "prospect" our own talent (reach out to work with influencers directly) if there are individuals we feel particularly passionate about or have connections with. Regardless of the method, our aim is always to work with influencers who align to our company's values of authenticity and trustworthiness - they need to be a brand fit and they need to genuinely use and love our products!" (A. Hillsbery, Personal correspondence, January 23, 2020).

When asked about the flexibility and creativity Influencers are given when posting sponsored *Care Of* content, they responded that:

“We know from our side that there are certain days and times of day that tend to perform better for us so we will always advise in that direction. However, the influencers really know their audience best so we trust them to post in a way that they think will be the most beneficial to their followers. Similarly, we have content guidelines for posts that typically perform better than others but the influencers ultimately have creative license. We review all content for legal and regulatory compliance (it's really important to us that those representing our brand only make accurate claims about our products).” (A. Hillsbery, Personal correspondence, January 23, 2020).

This exchange shows that the credibility of a corporation is highly influenced by the relevant “fit” of chosen Influencers. Both the corporation and the Influencer are typically received with a greater degree of favor when a product appears to be a logical extension of an Influencer’s lifestyle.

### **Identification Process**

In the “attention economy” (Marwick, 2015), the positive attention a user receives is interpreted as a social reward, and the most popular and well-known users receive the greatest attention. In this way, social media is married to “social-relational goals” (Hawk, Eijnden, Lissa and Bogt, 2018, p. 65) as attention received on social media is perceived as an individual’s standing on the social hierarchy in the real-world.

The feedback a user receives on posted content drives patterns of future behavior, ultimately creating a “behavior-reward feedback loop” (Hawk, Eijnden, Lissa and Bogt, 2018, p. 66). Many users will manipulate given environments to warrant positive feedback, which reinforces a view of self as being “interesting, unique and popular” (p. 66).

A participant in Djafarova & Rushworth’s 2016 study reasoned that “using a product which a celebrity also used made [the participant] feel good about herself as she then had common ground with her idols and others on the platform” (p. 4). The study also found that females, in particular, are prone to imitating those whom they admire (p. 5), whether that be adopting the opinion of an Influencer, imitating a lifestyle, or using the same product. Influencer advertising affords the consumer an opportunity to adopt a characteristic of an Influencer that may be physically or culturally attractive to that consumer. The emotional connection created between the Influencer and the consumer acts as the fundamental motivation behind the sale.

## **Thesis**

This thesis explores the relationship that exists between Instagram Influencers and consumers and the way that different advertising strategies impact perceived authenticity. Influencer success rates vary greatly, as do consumer opinions on Influencer marketing in general.

The overarching research question for this study is:



RQ1: How does an Instagram Influencer use his/her platform to promote products in a manner that is perceived as genuine?

SQ1: How do Instagram Influencers connect products to his/her life in their sponsored posts?

The researcher predicted that the key factor to Influencer success, or sponsored advertising to sales conversion, lies in the perceived authenticity of any given Influencer. Challenges arise when a product does not appear to fit logically with the Influencer's lifestyle, or if a product is mass advertised by Influencers across the platform – at which point, the consumer questions the motive of the Influencer, which generates a distrust in the platform as an advertising mechanism. Authenticity exists when an Influencer has produced advertising content that is congruent with their lifestyle and identity, and is marketed with a sense of originality. If sponsored advertising is perceived by consumers as authentic, then consumers purchase a product with intentions of becoming like the Influencer by using or wearing the same product as the admired Instagram Influencer.

## **Methods**

To contrast the way in which influencers use their platform to promote sponsored products and connect the product to their lives, the researcher performed a content analysis between celebrity Influencers Kylie Jenner and Scott Disick. From this analysis, both quantitative and qualitative results were found and discussed.

The analysis was conducted by analyzing the most recent 50 posts for both Scott and Kylie as of February 27, 2020. The researcher defined 2 categories and 2 sub-

categories in which to place each post. A sponsored post was defined as any post affiliated with either the Influencer's own brand or a third party brand. A natural post was defined as any post not affiliated with any brand, for which the Influencer receives no known compensation. The sponsored category was further defined into internal sponsorship, by advertising the Influencer's own product, or external sponsorship, by advertising a third party product. The natural category was further defined into self-focused, with the Influencer's appearance as the central feature of the post, or others/material-focused, with other people or material items as the central feature of the post. As could be expected, not every post could be categorized clearly and easily, so some subjective judgment calls were made in the process of categorization. A possible drawback of this type of analysis is that categories are not mutually exclusive. A specific challenge in categorizing posts was the hybrid type between self-focused and others-focused posts, where the Influencer is pictured with someone else who is co-dominant in the post. The researcher chose to categorize the self/other hybrid type photo into the natural, others-focused category, though the Influencer was also a central component of the post.

The researcher began by taking screen captures of the most recent 50 posts on both Kylie and Scott's Instagram accounts. Next, the quantitative section of the analysis began by categorizing the total of 100 posts captured into the 2 categories and 2 sub-categories as objectively as possible. The researcher then identified the most-liked and least-liked photos of Kylie's photo range and Scott's photo range. Next, the researcher began to look for patterns in each of the Influencer's posts. The patterns were analyzed

for possible advertising strategies that each Influencer employs and how these strategies contrast the strategies that the other Influencer analyzed employs.

A weakness in this methodology is potentially the scope of the analysis. The results of this analysis could be extrapolated past the most recent 50 post range, as the range of posts that were analyzed spanned several months, however, results may differ if a wider range of posts were analyzed. For example, depending on the date that the analysis was conducted, the Influencer might have had more or less internal advertising if a new product line was launching (e.g. the *Kylie Cosmetics "Stormi" Collection*). The quantitative analysis was a baseline for beginning qualitative analysis, but does not present the same level of accuracy that a longer and deeper analysis of the social media accounts would present.

The second part of the analysis analyzed follower reception to each Influencer by categorizing the top 12 comments, visible via Instagram's algorithms, on the range of the 25 most recent posts for both Influencers into either positive or negative feedback. A third category was defined as neutral after the researcher found some comments that did not lean one way or the other, for example, a hashtag of a brand name or tagging another Instagram user. When analyzing comments, it was much easier to categorize positive or neutral comments versus negative comments, as the negative comments were more rare and would stand out as personal offenses to the Influencer. The difference between a positive comment and a neutral comment was more subtle, and would typically be either direct support towards the Influencer (positive) or use of the comments section as a platform for self-promotion and/or communication with other users, centered around the user making the comment (neutral).

## **Analysis**

Kylie Jenner and Scott Disick are each widely-known celebrities who took advantage of their existing media attention and followership to launch their own successful companies. In addition, Kylie and Scott both work with third parties to advertise products on social media platforms. Successful brand collaborations grant companies exposure to a wide followership and the Influencer gains a hefty compensation rate in return.

The following tables demonstrate the quantitative results from the analysis. Table 1 is resultant data from the categorization of each of Kylie and Scott's most recent 50 posts. From this data, the Influencers were found to have a similar distribution of natural versus sponsored posts. However, there was a greater disparity within sub-categories, of which will be discussed further. Table 2 is the resultant data from the categorization of the top 12 comments on each Influencer's most recent 25 posts. The results from both of these data sets helped the researcher determine patterns in advertising strategies for each Influencer and analyze the resulting feedback from their followers.

**Table 1.***Categorization of Posts - Most Recent 50 Posts*

Category	Sub-Category	Scott		Kylie	
Natural	Self-focused	8		17	
Natural	Others/ material-focused	21		15	
		Children	16	Children	8
		Other	5	Other	7
Total natural posts		29		32	
Sponsored	Internal	4		15	
Sponsored	External	17		3	
Total sponsored posts		21		18	

**Table 2.***Categorization of Comments - Top 12 Comments on Most Recent 25 Posts*

Type of Feedback	Scott	Kylie
Positive	176	142
Neutral	102	140
Negative	22	18

Kylie Jenner has been named “Instagram’s Most Valuable Influencer,” with each third-party sponsored post valued at more than \$1M in advertising spending (Rohwedder, 2018). Kylie maintains a high level of influence across all of her social media platforms. For example, Kylie tweeted about her dislike of a Snapchat update, which resulted in a

6% fall in Snapchat stock and a \$1.3 billion dip in the market value of the company that same week (Yurieff, 2019). This example illustrates the high degree of influence that Kylie maintains over her followers and the resulting impact of her words and opinions. This degree of influence is a commodity that is highly valued by companies who know that one occurrence of product exposure by a celebrity could provide exponential company growth.

In 2015, Kylie started her own cosmetics brand, *Kylie Cosmetics*. The company grew rapidly, boasting a net worth of \$900 million in 2018. Forbes named Kylie the youngest self-made billionaire in July of 2018 (Robehmed, 2019), largely due to her cosmetics line. Kylie utilizes her Instagram to advertise her own products and the products of other companies and when she launched *Kylie Cosmetics*, it was an instant success, due, in part, to an existing followership that quickly latched on to the company. *Kylie Cosmetics* functions with a minimal overhead cost budget, free self-marketing on social media, few employees, and manufacturing and packaging outsourced to a private-label producer (Robehmed, 2019).

Figure 5.



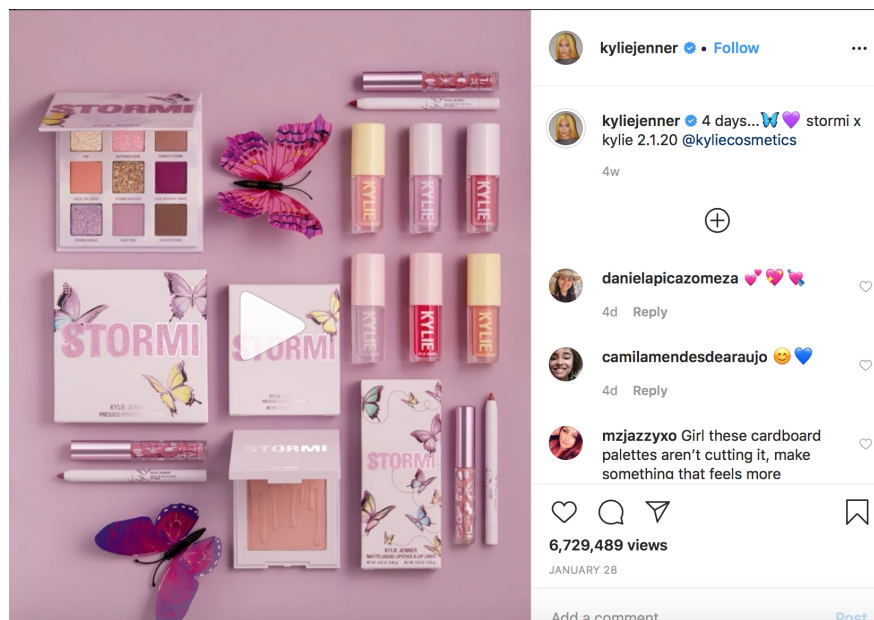
Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.



Figures 5 through 8 are self-sponsored posts, highlighting the new *Kylie Cosmetics* “Stormi” Collection. Stormi is Kylie’s 2-year-old daughter, and the inspiration for the collection. Of Kylie’s most recent 50 posts, 11 posts (including Figures 5 through



8) are Stormi Collection specific advertisements, 4 posts are general *Kylie Cosmetics* advertisements and 3 posts are labeled external advertisements. 8 of the 50 recent posts are natural posts of Kylie's daughter, Stormi, such as Figure 9, a post captioned "storm's first disney trip." 17 of the 50 recent posts are natural, self-focused posts of Kylie, typically with minimal captions such as an emoji or 1-2 words. The remaining 7 posts are natural, others or material item focused posts.

**Figure 9.**

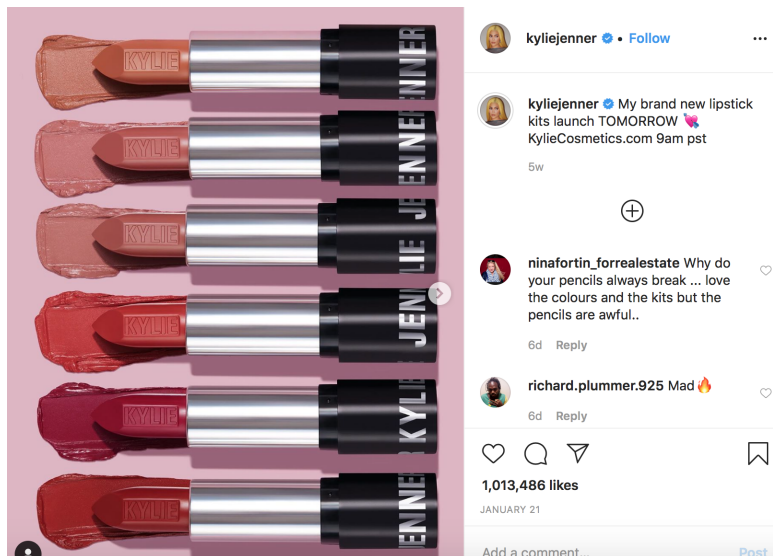


Of Kylie's 50 most recent posts, Figure 10 is the most-liked photo, receiving 12.1 million likes. Figure 11 is the least-liked photo, receiving only 1.0 million likes. Figure 10 is an unsponsored, self-focused post, while figure 11 is an internally sponsored post.

Figure 10.



Figure 11.



19 of the 50 most recent posts are focused on Kylie's daughter, Stormi, with a breakdown of 11 sponsored posts and 8 natural posts. With sponsored versus natural posts featuring Stormi dispersed throughout Kylie's account, followers may not even consciously differentiate which posts are advertisements. At first glance, many of the

sponsored Stormi collection posts appear to be natural posts (e.g. Figure 12). The photo itself does not showcase any product, and instead portrays Kylie spending time with her daughter. The focus of the caption is Kylie’s love for Stormi, “thank you God for these moments,” portraying Kylie as a loving and attentive mother. The only indicator of *Kylie Cosmetics* branding on this post is the inclusion of the @kyliecosmetics tag and Stormi-collection launch date at the end of the post. In this way, Kylie has successfully merged her personal and corporate lives together, to where the content of a sponsored post appears unaltered by its affiliation with a brand.

**Figure 12.**



In contrast, Figure 11, the least liked photo of Kylie’s most recent 50 posts, is a sponsored post with complete focus on the product. Figure 11 is a stock photo that is not integrated into Kylie’s personal life or appearance and focused entirely on the product. Only 4 of Kylie’s most recent 50 posts are these types of stock photo advertisements, ranging between 1.0 to 1.6 million likes -- receiving little attention in comparison to the

rest of her posts. In the minds of consumers, “liking” a stock photo may not feel like an interaction with Kylie herself, but rather the brand.

Figure 7 is a type of hybrid photo between a product stock photo and a natural photo, and received a corresponding 5.7 million likes. The photo, a simple portrait of Kylie, does not showcase any of the products from the Stormi collection (the focus of the ad). However, the photo is from the collection of corporate photos for the Stormi collection. Using the source credibility model, Kylie uses the dimension of attractiveness to engage with potential consumers. Kylie receives global attention for her beauty and attractiveness and in this post, utilizes her own beauty to draw consumers to her products. Followers scrolling through Kylie’s feed may view the photo of Kylie and read the accompanying caption advertising her products. Followers may then identify a desire to be like Kylie, and decide to purchase Kylie’s products, and therefore also a piece of Kylie’s identity. This strategy of advertising acts to brand the Kylie Cosmetics product with Kylie’s attractive identity. When consumers purchase products from the collection, they are purchasing a material product blended with pieces of Kylie’s brand and identity.

Kylie’s individual identity is known globally; however, the Kardashian/Jenner sisters are even more widely known as a family unit and more specifically, a sister unit. Kylie is one of 5 sisters to whom she is portrayed as being extremely close. For example, the sisters comment and interact consistently on each other’s posts, and with Instagram’s comment algorithms, these comments show up at the top of the feed. With these comments at the forefront for followers to see, it is clear that the sisters are involved with each other on a daily basis. The Kardashian/Jenner sisters partake in a variety of

collaborations with each other, including products, photoshoots and social media content  
- working to build both on their individual brands and a combined sister brand.

Kylie builds upon the sister brand on her Instagram platform by featuring both sponsored and natural posts with her sisters.

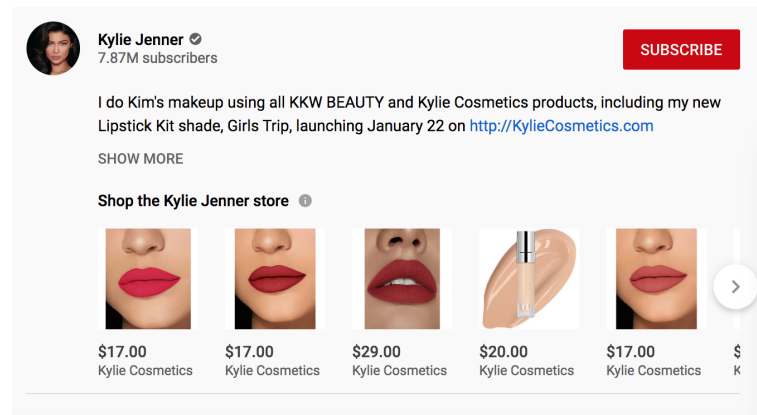
**Figure 13.**



**Figure 14.**



**Figure 15.**



In her most recent 50 posts, the 2 posts featuring her sisters appeared, at first, to be natural content. However, upon following Kylie’s caption in Figure 14 to her YouTube channel, the video is based around *Kylie Cosmetics* products, with each product linked in the description (Figure 15). What appears to be a “natural” video of Kylie doing sister Kim Kardashian’s makeup is simultaneously an advertisement for her cosmetics line. The way that Kylie incorporates advertisements into content with her sisters is similar to how Kylie incorporates advertisements into content with her daughter, Stormi. The content of the post is focused on Kylie’s relationships, with advertisement cleverly incorporated in a way which appears as a genuine extension of her life. Followers could assume that Kylie would have been doing Kim’s makeup regardless, but she just happens to have her own product line to use in place of other brands. Kylie’s followers can relate to normal sister activities, such as doing one another’s makeup, working to paint Kylie’s identity as a genuine, relatable peer, instead of an untouchable celebrity.

As with earlier analysis, the line between sponsored and natural content is not necessarily clear cut. In fact, the grey area between sponsored and natural posts is what

allows Kylie's posts to be interpreted as genuine by her followers. Followers are clearly informed of the endorsed nature of the content, however, because the content is so integrated into Kylie's daily life, the product advertisement is just an extra way that followers can connect to Kylie and purchase products that could fit into their own lives.

As a secondary level of analysis, the researcher analyzed the comments section to evaluate follower reception to Kylie's posts. Due to the volume of comments, the researcher examined the most recent 25 posts from the original range, and broke down the comments into positive, negative or neutral categories. Of the 300 comments analyzed, 142 (47.3%) of comments were positive, 140 (46.6%) of comments were neutral, and 18 (6%) of comments were negative. Interestingly, 5 of the 18 total negative comments were from a singular post (Figure 16), criticizing Kylie's decision as a mother to put hoop earrings on her daughter. The negative comments condemned Kylie for this decision, voicing either concerns for Stormi's safety or for her lack of a normal childhood. In general, the top comments on Kylie's photos were typically fans complimenting Kylie or commenting simple emojis. Many of the neutral comments were not relevant to Kylie or the content of her posts.



**Figure 16.**



The second Instagram Influencer Celebrity analyzed was Scott Disick. Although not biologically related, Scott is also an integral part of the Kardashian family, being Kourtney Kardashian's longtime (ex)boyfriend and the father of her three children.

Scott Disick also has experience with sponsored advertising; however, the reception to Scott's posts has been polarized. Scott has made severe advertising blunders, such as including the advertising instructions sent to him by the company in his caption (Beale, 2016). A mistake such as this reveals that the entire caption was formulated by the company and lacked any originality or personal connection from Scott towards the advertised brand. The researcher made the assumption that this advertising blunder was, indeed, a mistake, and not a deliberate act or statement.

Scott was historically portrayed as a binge drinking, party-loving and negligent father during his time on the reality television show, *Keeping Up with the Kardashians*, for which he received much public criticism. Scott was dubbed a "professional famous person" (Lincoln, 2019), who had no realistic aspirations and received much flack from



the public for living a self-indulgent lifestyle with 3 children and a long-term girlfriend. However, Scott recently launched a men's clothing business, which he named *Talentless* to spite those who were adamant that Scott possessed no talent or potential for success. The *Talentless* slogan is, "Authentic Apparel For Self-Made Outsiders" (Talentless.com), further defining the specific target customer for the brand. The clothing line is designed and marketed by Scott himself, and is not simply a brand collaboration that has slapped his name on their label for greater exposure. Scott also donates 3% of each *Talentless* sale to the nonprofit foundation, *Fuck Cancer* (Lincoln, 2019), an additional factor that shapes Scott's image to be that of a compassionate and successful businessman who would like to give back to the world. In addition to the *Talentless* launch, Scott signed a television contract with *E!* for a house-flipping show, *Flip It Like Disick*, which premiered in August of 2019 (Lincoln, 2019) and reached a success level sufficient for contract renewal in 2020. These business ventures have created a new image of Scott as an individual that differs from how he was portrayed on *Keeping Up With the Kardashians*.

Of the range of 50 posts analyzed from Scott's Instagram, 16 posts are of his children (natural, others-focused). Unlike Kylie's range of posts, there are no sponsored posts in Scott's range of posts that involve his children. Every child-focused post portrays Scott as an involved, loving father, with captions such as "it's just me and my best friend. 10 years of the best love ever" (Figure 17), referring to Scott's 10-year-old son, Mason.

**Figure 17.**



Five more of the most recent 50 posts are others-focused/material-focused, e.g. a photo of his new lake house, for a total of 21 natural, others/material-focused posts. The remaining 8 of the natural posts are self-focused; interestingly, almost half of these photos show Scott inside private planes. These posts do not contain any notice of affiliation, although Scott has made other posts inside private planes that do contain affiliation tags. These shots portray Scott to be a wealthy celebrity who can afford to travel consistently on private planes. This is an interesting strategy for Scott to employ deliberately, as most of his followers would likely not find these posts relatable. Repetitive exposure of Scott in private planes acts to build an image of Scott as an untouchable and “luxury” celebrity.

Of the remaining posts, 29 posts are natural, leaving a total of 21 posts in the sponsored category. Scott and Kylie have a similar distribution between sponsored and natural posts; Kylie had 18 posts in the sponsored category, leaving Scott with only a slightly higher margin of sponsored posts.

Of Scott's sponsored posts, only 4 are internal, self-sponsored advertising for *Talentless*. In comparison to Kylie's self-sponsored posts, which was almost the entirety of her sponsored posts category, this ratio seems very low. This could be for many reasons - the first, being the size of the companies (*Kylie Cosmetics* versus *Talentless*). *Kylie Cosmetics* is a billion dollar company that has been around for several years (est. 2015), while *Talentless* had a more recent launch (est. 2018). Though it has gained success, *Talentless* has nowhere near the reach that *Kylie Cosmetics* does, due in part to Kylie's following on Instagram (164 million), versus Scott's following (23 million). Though Scott is widely known, his reach is only a fraction of Kylie's.

**Figure 18.**



Scott's advertising posts differ from Kylie's in that the captions are written as more conspicuous advertising. Scott's posts are presented without a lot of creativity and follow a consistent format: a photo of Scott wearing the merchandise, the caption thanking followers for supporting the business, and directing followers to go to the

website/sponsor account to purchase the product (Figures 18). While Kylie works to integrate her products into her daily life, Scott's advertisements come across more obviously. Scott did not involve his children or friends/personal life into his sponsored posts which made categorizing Scott's posts into sponsored and natural, personal life posts much clearer in comparison to the range of Kylie's posts.

In the selected range of 50 posts, Scott collaborated with 10 different brands. This high rate of brand diversity is a sign to companies that Scott is willing to take on brand deals and represent a wide variety of products. The revolving door of brand diversity could also be a negative signal to customers that Scott accepts many or all opportunities offered to him regardless of genuine interest or commitment in representing a brand. The variety of products Scott endorsed in the short period of time analyzed could generate consumer distrust towards future endorsements.

Figure 19 is an example of a more detailed caption, however, the caption lacks just as much in originality as the short caption advertisements (Figure 18). A follower would assume that the company had sent Scott detailed caption instructions and that Scott had acted as a puppet in posting the advertisement.

Figure 19.



Figure 20.



Figure 20 is a natural, self and others-focused post and is Scott's most-liked photo. The photo is a selfie with his girlfriend, Sofia Richie, and received 668k likes. Scott's relationship with Sofia is controversial due to a 15 year age gap: Scott is 36, while

Sofia is only 21. One of the top comments reads, “Just wait till your daughter dates someone 15 yrs older than her.” Of this range of Scott’s posts, this photo is his only photo with Sofia. This comment may be an example of the negative feedback that leads Scott to hold back in posting this kind of personal content. However, this post is also the most liked photo of any post in this range of 50 posts. The polarized feedback on this post aligns with feedback to Scott’s identity in general: while Scott receives significant negative feedback, he continues to receive positive attention and love from the public of his controversial identity to match. The runners-up for most-liked photos were all of Scott’s children or nieces and nephews, so this particular photo is somewhat of an outlier.

**Figure 21.**



Scott’s least-liked photo, by a relatively wide margin, is a stock photo for *Talentless* merchandise (Figure 21). The stock photo is categorized as an internally sponsored post. Scott’s least-liked photo is the equivalent of Kylie’s least-liked photo, a stock photo for *Kylie Cosmetics* products. These stock photos are interpreted by followers

as a direct advertisement, without any involvement of the celebrity's appearance or personal life. This is the only stock photo in Scott's range of 50 posts, however.

The comments section of Scott's posts was an interesting place to explore. Of the 300 comments analyzed, 176 (58.7%) of the comments were positive, 102 (34.0%) of the comments were neutral and 22 (7.3%) of the comments were negative. In comparison to the comments on Kylie's posts, Scott's feedback was more polarized. Kylie had fewer negative comments than Scott, but due to a high percentage of neutral comments, also had fewer positive comments than Scott.

Scott typically received more personally offensive comments. For example, Figure 22, a post of a designer Birkin bag was met with a lot of opposition, specifically making reference to the femininity of the bag. 7 of the 12 visible comments were negative or demeaning towards Scott, a majority that tops the most negative post in Kylie's analyzed range.

**Figure 22.**



However, many of Scott's posts contained nearly no negative or even neutral feedback in the comments, which cannot be said of any of Kylie's analyzed posts.



**Figure 23.**



100% of the comments on Figure 23, a humorous meme, were categorized as positive. This post demonstrates Scott's sense of humor and develops a sense of relatability towards his followers. From reviewing 300 comments each from both Kylie and Scott, the feedback Scott received was in line with the feedback to Figure 23 and generally more personal. Kylie may not have had such blatant negative comments here and there; however, Kylie's posts were also full of users who simply tagged another user or made pleas for others to follow their accounts. These comments were ultimately irrelevant to Kylie's content.

After reviewing and analyzing the range of selected posts, it became clear that Kylie integrated her personal and business lives together, and sponsored content was an extension of Kylie's personal life. The emphasis of the sponsored advertisements was not on the product, but instead on Kylie's appearance and identity. Kylie's roles as an attractive fashion and beauty Influencer, mother, sister and friend were enhanced by the products she chose to advertise and the way that the products were advertised. In contrast



to Kylie, Scott chose to separate his personal life from that of his business life. In general, Scott's sponsored posts focused heavily on displaying the product itself and directed followers where to purchase the product. However, Scott's sponsored content was offset by natural, candid photos that portrayed Scott in his roles as a father, friend and businessman.

## **Discussion**

Entering this analysis, the researcher assumed that Kylie would have more positive follower feedback to advertising, due to stronger self-branding and advertising that blended with her personal life. Scott had received so much negative attention from his past, and made several widely-published advertising blunders, that it was assumed that his brand endorsements would be poorly received and that he would be accused of "selling out" in order to generate compensation. Overall, the researcher imagined that Kylie's posts would be received with favor relative to Scott's posts, due to higher levels of relatability and authenticity.

Of the entire analysis, the most surprising finding was that although Scott's posts were received with controversy, most negative feedback was matched with a lot of positive attention. Kylie and Scott's advertising strategies are entirely different, however, they each have strong followings. Kylie's posts certainly blended sponsored posts and her personal life together more smoothly, while Scott's posts could be more easily identified as sponsored or natural. The extent to which Kylie has blended her professional life into her personal life on her Instagram account was unexpected, however. Categorizing

Kylie's posts was surprising, as some posts that appeared, at first, to be natural posts were actually sponsored posts once uncovered. Most normal consumers would probably not be aware of the underlying sponsorship in these types of posts, however, if pointed out, might be taken aback by the inconspicuous nature of the advertisements. Hidden sponsorships may generate a distrust in consumers towards an Influencer, especially if consumers had initially felt a level of trust towards the Influencer.

Interestingly, there is more than one side to this coin. The fine line that Kylie walks between sponsored and natural posts *does* make sponsored posts appear as a logical extension of her personal life. However, Kylie is generating compensation from exploiting areas of her personal life, for example, a makeup collection named after her daughter. *Is* posting "good mom" photos (such as Figure 12, depicting a happy mother and baby) disguised as an advertisement, upon reading the caption, "genuine"? Consumers may decide for themselves if this type of advertising is deceptive, or rather, an advertising mechanism that helps consumers connect to the Influencer through a product.

Scott's posts are more clear-cut: either the post is sponsored or it is not. All of Scott's sponsored posts feature himself, while none of the posts of his children cross any advertising line. Due to the level of criticism Scott has received in the past regarding his negligence in parenting, perhaps Scott is unwilling to risk the same type of negative reaction towards advertisements involving his children. Scott's efforts in posting content portraying himself as a loving, attentive father could be an attempt to counter the historical image of himself as a bad parent.

Though Kylie's sponsored posts might appear a better fit with her personal life, there is some level of authenticity in Scott's black and white approach, leaving personal posts as they are with no apparent underlying motive. Though Scott's sponsored posts do not blend as smoothly with his personal life as Kylie's, the natural category photos Scott posts do appear authentic. For example, the many "real-life" posts of his children with loving captions make Scott appear as a normal dad having fun with his kids. Because of an even blend of authentic, everyday photos and sponsored posts, Scott's feed does not come across as advertising heavy. Although Scott's sponsored posts are obvious as such, consumers are also exposed to some of Scott's personal life, his personality and his sense of humor, void of sponsorship, which generates a sense of authenticity.

Also of interest was the subject matter of Kylie and Scott's natural, self-focused posts. Of all the categories, these are the posts that are an opportunity for a user to portray their own identity. Almost half of Scott's natural, self-focused posts from the range of posts analyzed, were of himself in a private plane. This is a very deliberate attempt to portray himself as a luxury, untouchable celebrity. The specific experience of flying in a private plane is one that most Americans will never experience in their lifetimes, so as a result, does not act to build any sense of relatability with followers. Scott has built up a controversial identity, centered around behavior that does not care about the opinions of others. Scott's advertising blunder, posting the entire message sent to him by a company (instead of just the caption) would feel like a doomsday mistake to the majority of celebrities and Instagram Influencers. However, Scott quickly moved past the incident and continued posting sponsored content. Followers might suspect that sometimes Influencers are instructed with exact captions to post, but they never see the actual

instructions. Scott's spread of posts between sweet captions/photos of and with his children, contrasted to luxury cars/houses/experiences is probably an accurate depiction of his real life.

Another difference between Kylie and Scott is the identification processes that their followers go through in deciding to purchase sponsored products. Kylie's followers are focused on the Ohanian dimension of attractiveness (1990, p. 41) in a physical sense. Kylie markets herself as an attractive female and receives widespread attention regarding her appearance and the attention she receives from both men and women: women desire to be like her, while men desire women that look like her. As a follower with this knowledge in mind, women purchase Kylie's products to embody a part of Kylie's identity, and therefore hope to receive a piece of the positive attention from others that Kylie receives.

Scott's followers are also focused on the Ohanian dimension of attractiveness (1990, p. 41), however, in a different way. What is attractive to followers about Scott is his luxury life, blunt personality and lack of care for the opinions of other people. Scott's *Talentless* brand backs this up, marketed to people that identify themselves as a social outsider. Scott has crafted a company that appeals to those who feel "different," a marketing strategy, as just about anyone could identify with feeling this way at some point in their life. In this way, the customer relates with this feeling of being an outsider, feels special identifying themselves as such, and purchases the product to belong in this category. What feels like a very targeted customer niche may be wider than the customers realize.

A factor not included in the analysis would be the obvious difference in gender and the mother/father role difference. This could be an area for future scholars to consider when looking at the influence of Influencers on Instagram.

From this analysis, we see that there is not a single strategy that Influencers must use to portray themselves in a genuine way. Although the researcher did expect that Kylie and Scott used different advertising strategies, the fact that both were successful with sponsored posts was unexpected. An underlying pattern shared by both successful Influencers is bringing their personal lives into their Instagram posts. Kylie takes the opportunity to advertise and incorporates this into her personal life. Scott advertises apart from aspects of his personal life; however, he incorporates himself and his personality into all of his posts, both natural and sponsored. Both Influencers consistently post content from their personal lives including their children, friends and experiences to share with their followers. This willingness to share pieces of their personal lives, in an original, unique manner, is what allows these Influencers to advertise and be perceived with authenticity and credibility by their followers.

A successful Instagram advertisement engages the consumer into the life of the Influencer. The consumer is able to relate to the Influencer and/or recognize a desire to be like the Influencer, at which point the advertised product becomes attractive to the consumer. However, this study develops the idea that just as no two people have the same personality and ideas, Influencers may have different strategies in engaging customers through sponsored advertisements. The study also finds that Instagram advertising strategies not only involve sponsored posts, but also the natural posts in an Influencer's feed. If anything, natural posts may be even more critical to building the Influencer's

relationship with his/her followers. Natural posts act to build the credibility and relatability of the Influencer, which primes consumers to be more receptive to Influencer recommendations and endorsements. The emotional connection between the Influencer and consumer drives the consumer to purchase a physical product which includes a piece of the Influencer's identity.

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