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Influencer co-design strategies – Is the hype real?

A quantitative investigation of the communication of
influencer co-designs to consumers in fashion brands' social
media marketing

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Abstract

In the social media age, many fashion brands are collaborating with influencers to design and market joint fashion collections. Even though the academic research fields of influencer marketing and co-creation are growing, little research has been conducted around the phenomenon of influencer co-design strategies and specifically, the impact of their communication to consumers by brands. The purpose of this paper was to investigate the effectiveness of such influencer co-design strategies in marketing communication by merging the two fields of influencer marketing and co-creation. A quantitative experimental study was conducted, exposing respondents (n=364) to a stimulus, i.e. a sponsored Instagram post, depicting either a brand design, an influencer design, an influencer and head designer design or an influencer and follower design for either a luxury or a mainstream fashion brand. First, the findings indicate that labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer (vs. designed by a brand) does not result in a different attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention by consumers for luxury and mainstream brands. Second, no effect could be found when labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the head designer or the influencer's followers (vs. designed by an influencer) for consumers' attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention in the context of luxury and mainstream brands. These findings contribute with insights for both the theoretical research community and brand marketers.

Keywords: fashion, social media marketing, Instagram, influencer marketing, co-creation

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1. INTRODUCTION

“Hey Fashionista! ❤️ We’re sorry – the item you’ve selected is sold out!”

Many fashion lovers know this message only too well, especially in times when they are trying to get their hands on a fashion piece designed by one of their most admired fashion influencers on social media (SM). Nowadays, influencer fashion collections cause numerous e-commerce sites to crash. Gigi Hadid x Tommy Hilfiger and Olivia Palermo x Karl Lagerfeld are only a few examples of well-known fashion brands’ collections that have been co-designed with an influencer. An increasing number of fashion brands is turning to influencers not only to endorse but also to design their fashion pieces. And so far, almost all of these turned into a great success (Chitrakorn, 2019).

In 2015, it was the first time that Tommy Hilfiger shared its label with a co-designing partner when the founder and designer Tommy Hilfiger asked Gigi Hadid, one of the world’s top models and most-followed fashion influencers, to design a collaborative collection (Lockwood, 2017; Hellomagazine, 2019). This collection called Gigi x Tommy had its premiere on the runway at the New York Fashion Week on September 9th, 2016 (Grazia, 2016). The design collaboration continued and in February 2018 the fourth and final collection was launched during the Milan Fashion Week (Jedrzejczak, 2019). All four collections created a buzz of interest on the brand’s website and SM platforms and most of the co-designed fashion pieces were sold out within a couple of hours (ibid.). According to the chief executive officer of Tommy Hilfiger, the results of the collaborative collections designed with the influencer exceeded the brand’s expectations in every area of the business from higher engagement with new audiences, up to 900 percent increased traffic to the brand’s website, greater press and SM visibility to, most importantly, double-digit sales growth (Lockwood, 2017; Hellomagazine, 2019).

NA-KD, a Swedish fashion retailer founded in 2015, has built its entire business model around and is pioneering in influencer marketing and more specifically, in co-designing collections with influencers (NA-KD, 2019). With a 95 percent year-on-year growth rate in sales at more than 70 million U.S. dollars in 2018, the fashion brand is one of Europe’s top 20 fastest growing companies in fashion and e-commerce (Octoly, 2018; Partech 2019). The company collaborates with influencers and celebrities globally and follows a carefully planned, always-

on and aggressively executed influencer marketing strategy, being number four among the most mentioned fashion brands by influencers on Instagram (Octoly, 2018). However, NA-KD stands out from other fashion retailers due to its effort to invite selected influencers to design their own fashion collections in collaboration with NA-KD (ibid.). NA-KD's co-founder, Ivana Vrbenski, recently stated that the company is overwhelmed by the amount of sales generated through the co-designing influencer's channels within the first 24 hours after the collection's launch (ibid). According to Vrbenski, high engagement and trust by followers are the key factors of NA-KD's influencers' success (ibid.).

In fact, as the influencer marketing industry matures, brands need to rethink their strategies to drive sales and keep up in the competitive fashion market. While this 8 billion U.S. dollars industry is continuously growing, it becomes increasingly difficult for fashion brands to stand out and sell their fashion collections on Instagram, their predominant influencer marketing channel. As SM platforms are increasingly saturated by sponsored content, sophisticated consumers are more sceptical of influencers, often perceiving branded content as inauthentic. New forms of influencer collaborations of fashion brands such as including influencers in the design process, are not only necessary but also proof successful. As the examples above have shown, such strategies allow fashion brands to experience high engagement and trust from consumers. In particular, past co-design strategies in the fashion sector have demonstrated that sponsored Instagram posts of influencers in which they promote their co-designed collection with the brand generated a 30 percent higher engagement rate among their followers than a simple sponsored post. Industry experts believe that the true potential of influencer collaborations and branded content is realised when influencers are integrated as creative directors and true partners. (Chitrakorn, 2019)

1.1 Problematisation

The fashion sector has been significantly transformed through the introduction of new consumption patterns that are manifested in the new generation of millennials, sometimes also referred to as Generation Y or Generation Z (Bolton et al., 2013; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019). Technological advances and the fast rise of SM have dramatically changed the way the greater mass of consumers thinks and shops (Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019).

Fashion marketers face an increasing need to develop innovative forms of marketing strategies to meet the ever-growing demands by digital-led fashion consumers (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019). Thus, fashion brands are responding to these new consumer behaviours by embracing digital SM platforms that allow for new forms of interpersonal communication between brands and consumers (Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019).

These changing dynamics in the fashion sector are accompanied by the emergence of fast fashion, a phenomenon characterised by immediate consumption and a fast pace of shopping of consumers (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). By integrating a fast fashion strategy, fashion brands ensure that designs are transferred quickly from the catwalk to the point of purchase, thereby addressing the changes in the lifestyle of fashion consumers to constantly discover the latest fashion trends (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018; Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019).

Further, in order to stay up to date, millennials commonly follow fashion influencers on SM because they treat them as experts in fashion and rely on their honest recommendations (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). These fashion influencers allow for a quick diffusion of trends, which becomes inevitable for brands in the light of fast fashion and the increasing demands of consumers (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Many fashion marketers have already recognised this potential of fashion influencers to shape consumers' decisions and thus, use them to endorse their products on SM as part of their online advertisements (ibid.). Such forms of influencer marketing are mainly exerted on Instagram as sponsored posts by fashion brands (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014). Prior literature has extensively explored influencer marketing and has revealed various advantages of influencer endorsements for brands such as consumers' higher attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014; De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Nash, 2019).

Influencer marketing further encompasses new forms of collaborations. As described in the introduction, fashion brands increasingly involve influencers not only in the mere endorsement but also in the design of fashion pieces. However, there has been little to no research on the actual effectiveness of a co-designing strategy with influencers. This effectiveness depends on consumers' attitude toward the co-designing strategy, which is

formed, amongst other things, by consumers' identification of who designed the product (Fuchs et al., 2013). In fact, the source of design, which is, for example, depicted on the label inside the product or communicated in advertisements has the potential to influence consumers' purchase decision even though the aesthetic appeal of a fashion piece can be readily observed and assessed by fashion consumers (Fuchs et al., 2013). In the context of user-designed products (i.e. brands integrating users' designs for new products), prior literature has shown that the identification of who designed a product indeed affects consumers' attitudes and behaviours (Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl, 2012; Fuchs et al., 2013). For example, Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl (2012) found that consumers evaluate the same product differently depending on whether it is labelled as designed by users versus the firm's internal designers. Furthermore, this has even been investigated explicitly in the fashion context, and for different brand tiers (Fuchs et al., 2013). Whereas mainstream fashion brands experience a higher demand for products labelled as designed by users (vs. the brand), a user co-design strategy harms luxury fashion brands (ibid.). Given these findings and the high relevance of influencer marketing for brands in times of fast fashion and new consumer demands, it is of great interest for academics and marketers whether the same is true for influencer-designed products.

1.2 Purpose, aim and expected contribution

The overarching purpose of this research is to proceed from previous literature in influencer marketing and co-creation and combine both fields in the context of fashion. In particular, this research aims at investigating the effectiveness of different marketing communication strategies on SM by fashion brands. In a first step, this study inspects how labelling a fashion piece depicted in a sponsored Instagram post as designed by an influencer (vs. designed by a brand) affects consumers in terms of their attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention, and whether the outcomes differ between brand tiers, i.e. mainstream and luxury fashion brands. Second, this study explores whether a collaboration between either an influencer and a fashion brand's head designer or an influencer and his or her followers as more nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies (vs. designed by an influencer) leads to different outcomes. Overall, this paper aims at answering the following research question:

RQ: *How do various forms of influencer co-design strategies communicated on social media affect consumer behaviour in the context of luxury and mainstream fashion brands?*

The study aims at contributing with further knowledge to the theoretical research community and brand marketers. Theoretically, this research aims at closing the knowledge gap between existing literature of influencer marketing and co-creation by studying the labelling of influencer co-designs on SM from a marketing communication perspective. This is expected to contribute with further insights about consumer attitudes and behaviours in the digital age. Moreover, the findings are expected to contribute with useful knowledge for brands not only in the fashion sector but also in other consumer businesses. By anticipating the effectiveness of labelling different forms of influencer co-designs, brands are able to develop a suitable communication strategy on SM depending on their respective brand tier, i.e. luxury or mainstream. This becomes increasingly relevant in consideration of fast fashion and the changing consumption behaviour of millennials.

1.3 Delimitations

Given the underlying time and resource constraints, this study carries some delimitations. These delimitations mainly concern three aspects, which will be outlined below.

First, the research investigates consumers' behaviour in the SM context. In this study, SM is delimited to Instagram. However, the choice to focus on Instagram is deemed to be appropriate not only since it is one of the major and fastest-growing SM platforms worldwide with more than one billion monthly active users (Clement, 2019), but also since Instagram is the predominant influencer marketing channel for fashion brands (Statista, 2016).

Second, this research is delimited to German females due to the chosen fashion influencer for this study. Since this influencer is a female fashion influencer based in Germany, it is reasonable to only consider respondents that have the same cultural background, understand the influencer's native language, which is often used in her communication on Instagram, and are of the same gender. Especially the gender aspect is of importance to this study since the influencer promotes a fashion piece of female design in the Instagram post used as stimulus.

Further, for the purpose of the research, it is of high importance that respondents can identify with the fashion influencer.

Third, the number of variables included in this study was consciously delimited. The effectiveness of different marketing communication strategies on SM related to which source of design of a fashion piece is labelled in a sponsored Instagram post could potentially be evaluated through other measures than attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention. However, these three variables represent some of the most widely used and compared measures in marketing communication and consumer behaviour.

1.4 Thesis outline

The paper is divided into seven sections: (i) Introduction, (ii) Theory, (iii) Methodology, (iv) Results & Analysis, (v) Discussion, (vi) Conclusion, and (vii) Limitations & Future Research. The *Introduction* has presented the empirical observations and problematisation of the topic studied and summarised the study's purpose, aim and expected contributions as well as its delimitations. Second, *Theory* will review relevant academic literature and research, show the theoretical research gap and formulate the theoretical model and hypotheses for the study. The third section, *Methodology* will outline the scientific research approach, the preparatory work, the design of the main study and its quality criteria. The fourth section, *Results & Analysis* will present the statistical findings of the hypotheses testing. The fifth section, *Discussion* will discuss the findings, while the sixth section, *Conclusion*, will summarise the theoretical implications and practical contributions of the study. The final section, *Limitations & Future Research* will reveal the study's limitations and give suggestions for future research. Finally, references and appendices will be displayed.

2. THEORY

This section is divided into two parts. First, the literature review will present relevant findings of academic literature establishing the underlying theoretical gap of this study. Second, the theoretical framework and hypotheses generation will be outlined.

2.1 Literature review

The literature review is structured around the following themes: (i) background, to introduce fashion and SM, (ii) influencer marketing, to summarise and review the main findings of past research, (iii) co-creation, to present the academic literature in this field, and (iv) theoretical research gap, to further motivate the focus of this paper.

2.1.1 Background to the study

The following section will give a brief background of the fashion industry, its trends and challenges. Further, it will revise the existing SM literature focusing mainly on the fashion sector.

Fashion

By representing one of the largest consumption industries with a market value of 1.3 trillion U.S. dollars, the fashion sector is a significant driver of the global economy (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; O'Connell, 2019). Fashion refers to the styles of clothing and accessories that are adopted by larger groups of people at a given time (Sapir, 1937; Cho and Fiore, 2015; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Merriam-Webster, 2019a). Typical goods of the fashion industry are clothes, footwear and related accessories such as handbags, jewellery and scarves (Sproles, 1981; Cho and Fiore, 2015; Business Dictionary, 2019). Particularly, the style, design and aesthetics of fashion products are important drivers of consumers' purchase decision (Fuchs et al., 2013; Cho and Fiore, 2015; Business Dictionary, 2019). Fashion designs and styles, such as prints, fabrics and patterns, are mainly influenced by different cultures and societies and are continually changing and developing over time and space (Sapir, 1937; Robinson, 1961; Sproles, 1981; Cho and Fiore, 2015; Bujor and Avasilcai, 2016).

In the fashion business, it is common to market the source of design, for example not only on the tag inside the product but also in advertisements (Fuchs et al., 2013). Therefore, the source of design is directly observable for consumers and represents a relevant factor in influencing their purchase decision (Parkvithee and Miranda, 2012; Fuchs et al., 2013). Fashion brands usually employ internal design experts for the development of new product designs. In the case of luxury fashion brands, the founder, who is typically highly renowned among fashion consumers, is often also the head designer and thus, an important element of the brand image, e.g. Giorgio Armani for Armani (Fuchs et al., 2013). For mainstream fashion brands, the head designer is often not known by consumers and consequently, they perceive the respective brand as the source of design.

For the purpose of the following study, this paper will continue to distinguish between these two different fashion brand tiers: luxury and mainstream. The word luxury is derived from the Latin word *luxus*, i.e. “excess”, implicitly meaning that luxury products are not absolutely necessary but provide pleasure and comfort (Merriam-Webster, 2019b). Luxury fashion brands can typically be defined from a consumption or a product perspective (Fionda and Moore, 2009). From a consumption perspective, luxury brands have a symbolic function, i.e. luxury brands function as a status symbol that has a psychological value by affecting a person's self-concept (ibid.). Literature focusing on the product perspective particularly stresses characteristics such as excellent quality, premium prices, exclusivity and craftsmanship (Fionda and Moore, 2009; Amatulli et al., 2016; Mrad, Farah and Haddad, 2019). In contrast, mainstream fashion brands sell products at significantly lower prices and quality (Fuchs et al., 2013; Amatulli et al., 2016; Mrad, Farah and Haddad, 2019).

As mentioned before, the various trends and challenges currently faced by fashion brands are mainly caused by a new type of fashion consumer who is fully transforming the fashion sector through behaviours shaped by new technologies (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). Consumers are no longer mere passive recipients but rather active actors in the value creation process by engaging and interacting with brands online (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). These new consumers are commonly called millennials and aged 20 to 38 in 2019 (Bolton et al., 2013; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). This rather young generation is active on countless interactive digital platforms to communicate with other consumers and brands and to ensure to be continuously up to date about the latest fashion trends

(Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Further, their purchase preferences are influenced by fashion influencers promoting fashion brands' products on SM platforms (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). In the digital age, fashion trends spread instantly and globally via SM and consumers are exposed to fashion information and influence at their fingertips everyday (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). Millennials expect fashion pieces to be immediately available in store after they have seen it by an influencer on SM (ibid). They are highly demanding consumers who aim for instant gratification and desire to wear the latest fashion trends every day (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018).

Fashion players are expected to fulfil these consumption needs of millennials whenever they arise at a faster way than ever before (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). This represents a huge challenge for many brands in the fashion sector. As a response many fashion brands have implemented a new type of business model that focuses on a fast fashion strategy (Amatulli et al., 2016; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). By pursuing this strategy, fashion retailers create a new fast and frequent pace of consumption and ensure that designs move quickly from the catwalk to the point of purchase (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019). Products have increasingly shorter life cycles due to trends that quickly vanish and the increasing number of fashion seasons throughout one year (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). Both luxury and mainstream fashion brands are likewise pressured to adopt the fast fashion strategy (Amatulli et al., 2016; Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019; Nash, 2019).

This fast fashion phenomenon together with the new type of fashion consumer transforms the traditional way of marketing for fashion brands (Nash, 2019). Fashion marketers need to follow a different approach in meeting the changes in consumers' behaviour by expanding their brand presence online and adapt innovative forms of interpersonal communication (Del Rocío Bonilla, del Olmo Arriaga and Andreu, 2019).

Social media

The Internet and the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies have caused a rapid proliferation of SM platforms in the past decade (Nash, 2019). SM comprises a collection of software-based digital applications and websites that people use to create, access and spread information via

electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Appel et al., 2019). These platforms allow interconnected actors to freely interact with each other and share aspects of their lives, such as opinions and experiences, with people from all over the world (Appel et al., 2019). Some of the major SM platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Instagram and Twitter (We Are Social, 2019a).

These social platforms offer brands innovative ways to reach and engage with consumers (Appel et al., 2019). A key benefit of SM is the possibility to instantly communicate and interact with consumers at lower costs and with less effort as compared to traditional marketing practices (Kim, A. J. and Ko, 2010). This, together with the high number of SM users has prompted many marketers to include SM platforms in their marketing communication strategies (Appel et al., 2019). Especially among fashion brands a fast diffusion of SM channels can be observed (Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018). Given the fast fashion phenomenon, SM is a suitable tool to capture the latest and ever-changing fashion trends and to flexibly communicate with demanding consumers online (ibid.).

Prior research on SM marketing in the fashion industry is limited despite its increasing relevance for brand marketers (ibid.). Moreover, the few studies that exist focus mainly on large luxury fashion brands (e.g. Kim and Ko, 2010; Phan, Thomas and Heine, 2011; Kim, A. J. and Ko, 2012; Nash, 2019; Chu, Kamal and Kim, 2019). Previous literature has demonstrated different benefits of SM in marketing communication strategies of fashion brands, for example improved brand awareness and image (Kim and Ko, 2012; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018; Nash, 2019), positive eWOM (Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018; Appel et al., 2019), higher customer engagement (Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018), stronger customer relationships (Kim and Ko, 2010; Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018), and as a result, new customer acquisition (Appel et al., 2019), higher purchase intention (Kim and Ko, 2010) and increased sales (Ananda, Hernández-García and Lamberti, 2018; Appel et al., 2019). In terms of consumer behaviour, prior research found that fashion consumers use SM to communicate with fashion brands, to search for information that decrease the risk of purchase and optimise choices, and to make use of online customer services of fashion brands (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018). Further, fashion consumers indicated that the key reason to follow fashion brands and observe their activities on SM is to stay up to date about the brand, its products and promotional activities such as

discounts (ibid.). Consumers even admitted that their attitude towards a fashion brand is affected by the brands' SM presence (ibid.).

In 2016, it was recorded that 98 percent of all fashion brands had an own Instagram account representing the relevance of this SM platform for their marketing communication strategies (Statista, 2016). Instagram is a photo- and video-sharing SM application that enables users to take, edit and post pictures and videos. With more than 500 million daily active users as of June 2018, Instagram is one of the major SM platforms worldwide (Clement, 2019). Due to Instagram's focus on visual aesthetics of pictures and videos, the platform generates higher user reactions and emotions that allow fashion brands to foster their brand image and engage with their consumers, thus being a highly valuable marketing tool for fashion brands (Nash, 2019; Satria et al., 2019; Appel et al., 2019). Prior research has shown that Instagram is also the primary platform for consumers to follow fashion brands (Kaczorowska-Spychalska, 2018; Nash, 2019).

2.1.2 Influencer marketing

The emergence of SM and especially the online platform Instagram have enabled fashion brands to use new marketing strategies such as influencer marketing. The new phenomenon of influencers and the related new marketing strategies will be presented in the following section.

Influencers

In the beginning of the 21st century, the daily sharing of opinions and experiences on personal websites, specifically for the evaluation of products and services, by bloggers became widespread (Ariela and Geraldina, 2016). Over time and with the introduction of new SM platforms such as Instagram, influencers emerged from these bloggers as a new type of online content creators. In this paper, influencers are defined as content creators, who provide their followers with insights into their personal lives and views through textual and visual narration (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). While bloggers typically evaluate products and services, influencers aim at also presenting how such products and services fit into their lifestyle (Lopez, 2017).

Influencers are prosumers since they not only produce, but also consume content within a particular field such as fashion, food or fitness (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Further, their consumption is usually characterised by large purchase volumes and high usage rates so that influencers can be seen as heavy users within their respective field (Twedt, 1964).

By creating content on SM platforms, influencers often have built a sizable social network of followers, who usually share similar interests (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Satria et al., 2019). Due to their large follower bases and the associated high public recognition, influencers can also be described as Internet celebrities according to the traditional definition of celebrities as "someone who is famous" (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019; Satria et al., 2019). In contrast to traditional celebrities who have typically achieved their celebrity status through a career in acting, singing or sports, influencers derive their celebrity status from their activity of sharing content online (Gräve, 2017; Satria et al., 2019).

The follower base of influencers mainly consists of millennials, which is the generation that is most interested in SM influencers in the fashion industry (Satria et al., 2019). These millennials rely on and are socially influenced by peer recommendations from friends and thus, social networks form a central channel in their decision-making process to purchase new products and services (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). This new form of consumption behaviour highlights the power of eWOM, which is defined as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). Given their large follower bases, influencers appear to be a suitable actor for engaging in eWOM since their messages are likely to reach a multitude of followers quickly. Moreover, and most importantly, influencers are often viewed as friends by their followers. In fact, since influencers share content with their followers on a daily basis and provide them with insights into their personal life, they are usually perceived as being accessible, believable and intimate by their followers (Abidin, 2016). This perception may create para-social interaction (PSI), which is described as an illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the influencer so that followers perceive him or her as a friend (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011). Given this unique relationship, influencers have the ability to impact the attitudes, decisions and behaviours of their network of followers through their SM activities (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017).

Overall, all of these characteristics allow influencers to be perceived as a trusted tastemaker and credible expert in their field and thus, exhibit significant social influence on their followers' purchase decision (ibid.).

Influencer endorsements as new marketing tool

Given the new consumer demand environment, fashion brands are increasingly turning to influencer marketing to endorse their products among the influencer's followers and their respective social network (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). In general, endorsements are a well-established marketing communication tool to influence consumers through the utilisation of an endorser, who is often well-known and has high social value (Knoll and Matthes, 2017; Satria et al., 2019). In particular, celebrities have commonly been used as endorsers, who are then defined as "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (McCracken's, 1989, p. 310). Still today, new and established brands invest millions into celebrity endorsements to build brand credibility by transferring the celebrity's values to the brand and to differentiate the company's products from competitors' (Erdogan, 1999; Satria et al., 2019). Scholars have shown that celebrity endorsements can generate and retain attention, lead to a positive attitude towards the advertisement and brand, strengthen product recall rates in consumers' minds and increase their purchase intention (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). For ensuring the effectiveness of such endorsements, academic literature has highlighted the managerial importance of selecting celebrities according to their attractiveness and credibility (Erdogan, 1999; De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017).

As mentioned before, influencers are Internet celebrities and thus, influencer endorsements are likely to show similar benefits as traditional celebrity endorsements. In fact, given the power of eWOM and the influencer's ability to shape consumers' purchase decisions, brands have started to widely employ influencers via sponsored posts on influencers' SM channels (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Appel et al., 2019). For example, in 2018 there were 3.7 million brand sponsored influencer posts on Instagram, of which 25 percent belonged to the fashion sector (InfluencerDB, 2018a; Mediakix, 2019). Thus, influencers are a new type of endorsers for fashion brands analogue to a celebrity endorser in the digital age (Scott, 2019). Similar to celebrity endorsements, scholars have shown that influencer

endorsements increase the attitude towards the advertisement and brand as well as the purchase intention of millennials (Nash, 2019; Satria et al., 2019). The effectiveness of such endorsements significantly depends on the credibility of the influencer, which consists of trustworthiness and expertise (Erdogan, 1999; Silvera and Austad, 2004; Amos, Holmes and Strutton, 2008). Prior literature has shown that a high credibility of the endorser leads to a lower resistance to the brand's message (De Vries, Gensler and Leeflang, 2012). Being seen as a trusted tastemaker and credible expert, influencers are likely to possess a high level of credibility and therefore, represent a new type of effective endorser.

2.1.3 Co-creation

User co-creation in new product development

Traditionally, companies were exclusively responsible for developing and selecting new product ideas and customers were relatively passive buyers and users (Fuchs and Schreier, 2011; O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010). However, this internal and firm-specific new product development process has been challenged by innovation management academics and practitioners that aim at empowering and thereby, getting closer to customers (Fuchs and Schreier, 2011). Today, talented users outside of the boundaries of the company participate in the new product development process by taking on the role of co-creators (Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl, 2012). This has been enabled primarily through the Internet and SM, which allow companies to build strong online communities and platforms to integrate numerous customers from all around the world (Fuchs and Schreier, 2011). In this paper, co-creation is defined as a collaborative activity of new product development in which consumers actively contribute and select the content of a new product offering (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010). In particular, co-design is an emerging type of co-creation "in which a relatively small group of customers provides a firm with most of its new product content or designs, while a larger group of customers helps select which content or designs should be adopted by the firm" (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010, p. 95).

Initial evidence on co-creation in general points to increased perceived new product creativity, higher levels of perceived customer orientation and innovativeness, a higher brand attitude and purchase intention of consumers as well as an improved success rate of new products, decreased time to market and reduced development costs for the company (Von

Hippel, 2005; Grewal, Lilien and Mallapragada, 2006; Shah, 2006; Fuchs and Schreier, 2011; Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl, 2012; O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010; Liljedal and Dahlén, 2018). These outcomes are mainly driven by the particular characteristics of co-creation such as the high level of involvement of co-creating users, access to diverse knowledge bases and replacement of salaried employees with unpaid customers (O'Hern and Rindfleisch, 2010).

User co-creation strategies in the fashion industry

In the fashion industry, user co-creation has been evidenced to foster stronger emotional bonds of co-creating users with fashion pieces by engaging them in the design or production process (Cramer, 2011). However, the communication of user co-creation to non-participating consumers leads to different effects depending on the brand's tier, i.e. luxury or mainstream. Fuchs et al. (2013) have shown that user co-creation leads to a different purchase intention of consumers depending on the brand's tier. In particular, a positive effect on product demand of consumers can be observed for communicating user co-designs in the context of mainstream brands. Thus, user co-design is a suitable strategy for marketing communication of mainstream brands. In contrast, for luxury brands, consumers' purchase intention for user-designed products is reduced due to their negatively perceived design quality and failure to signal high status. In fact, the authors state a clear warning that luxury fashion brands should not communicate their products to consumers as user-designed, especially if the product is signalling high status. However, the authors also acknowledge that luxury brands in practice are likely to include some form of user co-design in their new product development process due to other positive outcomes such as generating innovative and valuable products and achieving higher brand involvement with the co-designers. The negative effect of communicating user-designed products can be partly mitigated by labelling the product as designed by users who are celebrities, have received approval for the design from the head designer or are described as artists. Therefore, luxury fashion brands should carefully select its co-designing users.

In order to overcome this challenge of user co-design, companies have started to integrate and actively market celebrities as co-designers (Zimmerman and Ayoob, 2004). For example, the luxury brand Samantha Thavasa has worked in collaboration with Nicky Hilton in designing bags or Giorgio Armani worked together with Rihanna in the design of jeans (Okonkwo, 2019).

However, despite its practical appearance and evidence, research on the effectiveness of co-designs of fashion pieces with celebrities is rather limited.

2.1.4 Theoretical research gap

The above review of past research within the theoretical fields of influencer marketing and co-creation arguably points to a gap of knowledge with regards to the new phenomenon of influencer co-design marketing strategies. Even though this topic has been widely discussed by contemporary media, neither the field of influencer marketing nor the field of co-creation has shown the effectiveness of influencer co-design strategies in general and specifically, in marketing communication. Firstly, influencer marketing research has mainly centred around the study of endorsements of products and services by influencers on behalf of brands. Secondly, co-creation research has primarily focused on the effectiveness of user co-creation strategies. Overall, literature on influencer marketing has neglected co-creation as an influencer marketing strategy, while literature on co-creation has neglected influencers as co-creators in new product development strategies. Together, these limitations in the theoretical fields pose an intriguing gap for further research. By merging the two fields of influencer marketing and co-creation, this study aims at investigating the effectiveness of influencer co-design strategies in marketing communication.

2.2 Theoretical framework and hypotheses generation

In the next section, the theoretical framework will be introduced followed by the generation of hypotheses. In the hypotheses generation not only hypotheses will be presented but also an open research question to investigate the expected ambiguous outcomes.

2.2.1 Theoretical framework

This study draws on the inference theory, which states that consumers draw inferences based on limited information, i.e. they combine the information available with their beliefs in order to make judgements and decisions (Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl, 2012). In the context of this study, this implies that consumers form their attitudes and purchase decision of a fashion piece depicted in an Instagram post only from the information given in the post. Thus, it is

assumed that the source of design labelled in the Instagram post causes consumers to draw inferences, for example, about the perceived quality of the fashion piece.

The theoretical framework of this study comprises an independent variable, i.e. labelling of the source of design by different brand tiers, and three dependent variables, i.e. (i) attitude towards the post, (ii) brand attitude, and (iii) purchase intention (see Figure I). The latter three constructs are central to the Hierarchy of Effects model, a well-known marketing model that shows the relationship between relevant measures of marketing communication strategies and demonstrates how communication in an advertisement influences consumers' attitudes and purchase intention (MacKenzie and Lutz, 1989; Homer, 1990). Since this study focuses on advertisements in the SM context, i.e. sponsored Instagram posts, the dependent variable attitude towards the post in the framework of this study corresponds to attitude towards the advertisement in the Hierarchy of Effects model (Lu, Chang and Chang, 2014).

The following hypotheses generation is based on a synthesis of the findings in the literature review and additionally, draws on the psychological literature of social distance and comparison (e.g. Locke, 2003).

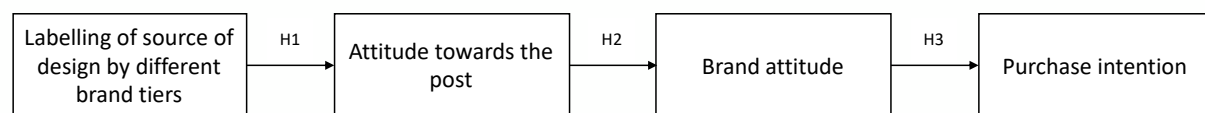


Figure I: Theoretical framework

2.2.2 Hypotheses generation

In the following hypotheses generation, the authors distinguish for the brand tier between luxury and mainstream fashion brands and for the source of design between brand design, influencer design, influencer and head designer design, and influencer and follower design. This also represents the manipulation of the independent variable, i.e. labelling of source of design by different brand tiers, resulting in eight different groups (see Figure II).

		Source of design			
Brand tier		Brand design	Influencer design	Influencer and head designer design	Influencer and follower design
	Luxury	Luxury brand design	Luxury influencer design	Luxury influencer and head designer design	Luxury influencer and follower design
	Mainstream	Mainstream brand design	Mainstream influencer design	Mainstream influencer and head designer design	Mainstream influencer and follower design

Figure II: Independent variable

Attitude towards the post

In the context of mainstream fashion brands, it is assumed that the positive effect on consumers' purchase intention for fashion pieces labelled as user-designed found in previous literature is even greater for fashion pieces labelled as influencer-designed due to the following reasons.

Influencers are both producers and consumers and thus, not only represent a valuable marketing tool for brands, but also are perceived to belong to the same population as ordinary users, namely the population of consumers (Gräve, 2017; Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Moreover, influencers are heavy users due to their extensive consumption habits (Twedt, 1964). Given the former two characteristics of influencers as a special type of consumer, at least the same effect on purchase intention should be found for a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed as for the same fashion piece labelled as user-designed.

Further, it is expected that an influencer co-design strategy will outperform a user co-design strategy due to the following two additional characteristics of influencers. First, because of influencers' closeness to and frequent interaction with up to millions of followers, they can presumably draw on more customer insights as compared to a single co-designing user and consequently, can directly incorporate the needs of their followers into the product's design. Second, since being perceived as a trusted tastemaker and credible expert in their respective field as compared to ordinary users, influencers are likely to be able to shape new trends and thus, increase the likelihood of new products' adoption by consumers (De Veirman,

Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Satria et al., 2019). Given that a user co-design strategy has been shown to be more effective in marketing communication than a brand design strategy for mainstream brands, it is assumed that an influencer co-design strategy is even more effective than both of the former strategies.

In contrast, for luxury fashion brands, previous literature has expressed a strong warning against labelling a fashion piece as user-designed due to its (i) failure to signal high status and (ii) perceived lower design quality (Fuchs et al., 2013). However, this study proposes that labelling a fashion piece as influencer-designed could enable luxury fashion brands to overcome such negative outcomes and take advantage of an influencer co-design strategy with even more positive outcomes as compared to a brand design strategy. In particular, it is proposed that fashion pieces labelled as influencer-designed signal high status and are perceived as high in design quality by consumers, as further explained below.

First, the need for co-designers of luxury products to signal high status derives from the fact that luxury fashion consumption builds on the signalling motivation of consumers, which draws on the psychological literature of social distance and comparison (Giordano, Wood and Michela, 2000; Locke, 2003). In fact, consumers purchase fashion pieces not only due to their functional and aesthetic design features (Fuchs et al., 2013), but also due to the "symbolic significance for the expressiveness of the ego" (Sapir, 1937, p. 144). Thus, fashion pieces play an important role for consumers in shaping their identity and self-concept as well as for communicating it to others (e.g. Robinson, 1961; Richins, 1994; Fournier, 1998; Goffman, 2002; Escalas, 2004). The underlying theory of social comparison is defined as the "process of thinking about information about one or more other people in relation to the self" (Locke, 2003, p. 619). Commonly, people conduct vertical comparisons related to the status of others, which are "above the self (an upward comparison) or below the self (a downward comparison)" (Locke, 2003, p. 619). The latter has been shown to result in better feelings since people perceive themselves to be advantaged and superior to others (Wheeler and Miyake, 1992; Olson and Evans, 1999; Giordano, Wood and Michela, 2000; Locke and Nekich, 2000). Therefore, such vertical comparisons are predictive of agentic feelings, defined as feelings of status (Locke, 2003). Since luxury fashion brands are associated with an upper-class customer segment, they create social distance by facilitating downward comparisons resulting in heightened agentic feelings of customers (Belk, Bahn and Mayer, 1982; Silverstein

and Fiske, 2003; Berger and Ward, 2010; Han, Nunes and Drèze, 2010). The luxury brand as the source of design influences the signalling qualities of a fashion piece and enables customers to signal a high rank in society, i.e. leading to high agentic feelings of consumers. In the same line, prior research has shown that while labelling products as user-designed leads to negative agentic feelings of consumers, such negative outcomes can be mitigated by elevating the status of the co-designing user above the consumer (Fuchs et al., 2013). In particular, Fuchs et al. (2013) found that employing users who are celebrities as co-designers can prove a fruitful marketing communication strategy for luxury fashion brands due to the celebrity's high status in society. In particular, celebrities are expected to be closer to luxury fashion brands in terms of social distance as compared to ordinary users. The same should be true for influencers, known as Internet celebrities, since they commonly share relevant characteristics with celebrities related to high status. Even though it cannot be readily argued that the social distance between an influencer and a luxury brand is equal to zero based on the findings of this prior research, the authors assume that the social distance is sufficiently small. Thus, influencers are likely to be perceived on the same level of status as luxury fashion brands given that brands carefully select the influencers they collaborate with, for example, based on the match between visual appearance and luxurious lifestyle of the influencer and the symbolic value of the luxury brand (Lee and Watkins, 2016). Overall, it is assumed that labelling a luxury fashion piece as influencer-designed or brand-designed leads to the same level of high agentic feelings.

Second, Fuchs et al. (2013) found that labelling a fashion piece as user-designed leads to lower design quality perceptions by consumers in the luxury fashion brand context. This is particularly relevant for luxury fashion brands given their reputation for design quality at the highest level (Dubois, Laurent and Czellar, 2001; Okonkwo, 2007; Bruce and Kratz, 2007). It should be noted that the term design quality is often used inconsistently in common speech. In this research, design quality relates to designers' ability to identify and interpret fashion trends for their consumers and does not equate to the final product quality, for example, materials and fabrics used and manufactured (Hebrero, 2015). While ordinary users are usually perceived by consumers to lack the expertise to create high-quality designs, it is expected that influencers are perceived by consumers to have the same level of design expertise as luxury fashion brands for the following reasons. First, influencers are seen as

credible experts in their field so that a fashion influencer should be seen as an expert in fashion design similar to luxury brands (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Second, due to influencers' knowledge and experience from their daily involvement in the fashion business, they are seen to have the high ability to anticipate upcoming trends. Since followers observe and imitate influencers to stay on top of new fashion trends, influencers cannot only diffuse but also shape new trends. The former two characteristics of influencers are expected to result in high design quality perceptions of luxury fashion pieces labelled as influencer-designed similar to luxury fashion pieces labelled as brand-designed.

However, up to this point it cannot readily be concluded that in the context of luxury fashion brands a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed outperforms not only a fashion piece labelled as user-designed, but also a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed, which will be elaborated in the following section. According to prior literature, source credibility represents an important factor in forming consumers' attitudes and purchase intention (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Thus, in this paper, it is assumed that the credibility of the source of design of a fashion piece needs to be taken into consideration when investigating the effectiveness of labelling a fashion piece as designed by a luxury fashion brand versus designed by an influencer. According to the source credibility model, the credibility of the source depends on its expertise and trustworthiness (Erdogan, 1999). As mentioned before, it is expected that the design expertise of the influencer is of the same level as the design expertise of the luxury fashion brand. However, influencers possess an additional kind of expertise that brands lack to this extent. Through daily interactions with and high engagement of their followers, influencers get direct customer insights and feedback that can be incorporated in the product design. Influencers might have a deeper understanding of their followers' interests and needs resulting in a valuable and new type of customer expertise as compared to the expertise of fashion brands' internal designers. Furthermore, the unique PSI in the relationship between influencers and their followers has been shown to result in high trust of followers into the influencer (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011; Baek, Bae and Jang, 2013). Since followers perceive influencers as friends, they might trust influencers to design the right fashion piece that meets their demands and displays the latest fashion trend. Additionally, influencers are seen as trusted tastemakers since they design products that they are themselves passionate about, fit into their lifestyle and they wear themselves with confidence. Followers probably expect

that influencers would never design a good-for-nothing fashion piece to just maximise sales. Even though brands increasingly try to create strong relationships with consumers characterised by PSI, these are not as strong, close and deep as the relationships between influencers and followers due to the way how the latter emerges into a perceived friendship (Colliander and Dahlén, 2011; Baek, Bae and Jang, 2013). Overall, it is expected that even though an influencer shows the same level of design expertise, he or she possesses an additional, highly valuable and unique customer expertise that brands lack as well as higher levels of trustworthiness. Therefore, influencers are characterised by a higher source credibility as compared to luxury fashion brands. Due to the importance of the credibility of the source of design in forming consumers' attitudes and purchase intention it is assumed that a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed leads to more positive outcomes in consumer behaviour as compared to the same fashion piece labelled as brand-designed in the context of luxury fashion brands.

For the aim of this study to investigate the effectiveness of different marketing communication strategies of fashion brands through sponsored posts on SM, attitude towards the post is a relevant measure that has been widely used in prior research (e.g. Lu, Chang and Chang 2014). Given the reasoning above, the authors of this study hypothesise as follows:

H1a: *For luxury brands, attitude towards the post will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

H1b: *For mainstream brands, attitude towards the post will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

Brand attitude

Since previous research has shown that attitude towards the post affects brand attitude, (Khong, 2010) the authors of this study hypothesise:

H2a: *For luxury brands, brand attitude will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

H2b: *For mainstream brands, brand attitude will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

Purchase intention

The Theory of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1977) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 2011) both suggest that consumers' attitudes directly affect their behavioural intention, which in turn influences their purchase behaviour. In addition, prior studies have confirmed the strong relationship between consumers' brand attitude and their purchase intention (e.g. Kim and Ko, 2010). Therefore, the authors of this study hypothesise:

H3a: *For luxury brands, purchase intention will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

H3b: *For mainstream brands, purchase intention will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

Research question

In the following, two nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies will be presented. In particular, the effectiveness in terms of consumers' attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention of labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the brand's head designer or his or her followers as compared to the same fashion piece labelled as designed by an influencer will be discussed. The authors recognise that these influencer co-design strategies could lead to ambiguous outcomes and thus, formulate a research question instead of a hypothesis.

Influencer and head designer design

As mentioned before, labelling fashion pieces as user-designed has negative implications for luxury fashion brands because of lower design quality perceptions and the failure to signal high status. As prior literature has further shown, the negative effect can be mitigated by heightening the status of the involved users by not only utilising celebrities as co-designers but also through the approval of the user design by the head designer of the luxury fashion brand (Fuchs et al., 2013). From this, it is evident that the head designer has some kind of effect on consumers' attitudes and decisions and thus, it is assumed that mentioning the head designer as part of the source of design in the label of a fashion piece also impacts consumers' attitudes and decisions. The authors of this paper want to investigate whether and how this effect is present in the context of influencer co-design strategies for both brand tiers.

First, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with the head designer could lead to positive effects in the dependent variables given the expertise of the head designer for both luxury and mainstream fashion brands. In fact, the expertise of the head designer mainly originates from the apprenticeship in design and subsequent years of experience by applying this trained knowledge (Moreau and Herd, 2010). In contrast, the influencer does not derive his or her expertise from formal training, but from the consumption of and daily interactions with products and services within a particular field. Thus, while the influencer is seen as a credible expert, who is perceived to have the capability to design fashion pieces in line with the latest fashion trends, the head designer may add a dimension of perceived technical expertise to the design and thereby, increase the design quality perceptions by consumers of the fashion piece.

Second, it could also be argued that labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with the head designer does not lead to any difference in outcome for both luxury and mainstream fashion brands. In the context of luxury fashion brands, given the high status of the influencer, the need to elevate the status of the co-designing user is redundant for fashion pieces labelled as influencer-designed. Thus, it could also be expected that there is no impact on the status of the influencer so that the status of the influencer remains high in the case of mentioning the head designer in the label of a luxury fashion piece. In this case, no difference in outcome is expected for a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed with or without mentioning the head designer in the label in the context of luxury fashion brands.

In the context of mainstream fashion brands, it could also be assumed that there is no difference in outcome for labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with the head designer. Since mainstream fashion brands are not characterised by high design equity, they do not face the need to elevate the status of their co-designers. Consequently, it is even more likely that there is no difference in outcomes for a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed with or without mentioning the head designer in the context of mainstream fashion brands.

Influencer and follower design

While the communication of co-designing users as the source of design has been shown to produce positive outcomes in consumer behaviour for mainstream fashion brands, it leads to negative outcomes for luxury fashion brands (Fuchs et al., 2013). Since influencers have a large follower base, similar to a mass of users participating in user co-creation, it is relevant to investigate whether mentioning the influencer's followers in the label of a fashion piece may strengthen or weaken the expected positive outcomes of an influencer co-design strategy for both luxury and mainstream fashion brands. In particular, it is of interest whether a label mentioning a collaboration between an influencer and his or her followers to design a fashion piece leads to positive outcomes in consumers' attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention.

For luxury fashion brands, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with his or her followers is expected to result in either a negative or no effect on these dependent variables for two main reasons. First, since consumers might be sceptical about the ability of the influencer's followers, who are classified as ordinary users, to design a fashion piece of high design quality, they are likely to form less favourable attitudes (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013). Nevertheless, it could also be anticipated that consumers do not even recognise the integration of followers since their attention is directed only at the influencer. Thus, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with his or her followers might result in no difference in outcome as compared to a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed. Second, due to the lower status of ordinary users as compared to the luxury brand and the influencer, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with his or her followers is likely to result in lower agentic feelings

of consumers as compared to the same fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed. However, it could also be assumed that the status of the followers is irrelevant to consumers given the presence of the influencer. In this case, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with his or her followers might lead to the same outcome in consumer behaviour as for the fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed.

In the context of mainstream fashion brands, labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with his or her followers is expected to result in either a positive or no effect on the dependent variables. In fact, labelling a fashion piece as user-designed has been shown to be an effective marketing communication strategy since it has been discovered that consumers perceive such fashion pieces as more innovative. This perceived innovativeness is closely related to trends in the fashion industry and thus, of high importance for fashion brands. The higher perceived innovativeness results from the perception that a large number of diverse users involved leads to a larger number of more diverse ideas as well as that ordinary users are likely to develop more applicable ideas, while being less constrained in idea generation as compared to traditional design modes (Schreier, Fuchs and Dahl, 2012). Thus, including a mass of followers as co-designers in addition to the influencer could represent an effective marketing communication strategy for mainstream fashion brands. Moreover, consumers are more likely to adapt the attitudes and opinions of others if they identify with them (Thompson and Malaviya, 2013). In particular, high similarity of the consumers and the source of design increases identification and thus, leads to higher attitudes (*ibid.*). Therefore, the inclusion of followers in the label of the source of design could offer an additional point for identification for consumers. Specifically, consumers could identify not only with the influencer, but also with the co-designing followers. Nevertheless, it could also be assumed that the benefits of mentioning followers in the label of a mainstream fashion piece are not realised by consumers due to the distinctive effect of the influencer on consumers. In fact, given the power of recommendations from friends to impact the purchase intention of consumers, the influencer may uniquely influence consumers through PSI. In this case, no difference in outcome on the dependent variables can be expected for a fashion piece labelled as designed by the influencer in collaboration with his or her followers as compared to the same fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed.

Given the expected ambiguity in outcomes on attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the head designer or the influencer's followers as compared to labelling the same fashion piece as designed by an influencer in the context of luxury and mainstream fashion brands, the authors investigate the relationship to the dependent variables through the following research question:

RQ1: *How does exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the head designer or the influencer's followers as compared to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed affect attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for luxury and mainstream brands?*

3. METHODOLOGY

The following section will explore the paper's methodological approach. Subsequent to the presentation of the scientific approach, the research method is thematised into preparatory work and the main study conducted. Additionally, the quality of data will be discussed.

3.1 Scientific research approach

With this study, the authors aim to explore whether there exists a causal relationship between labelling of source of design by different brand tiers and attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for luxury and mainstream fashion brands and if so, propose theoretical explanations for it (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Even though the phenomenon of influencer co-creation is insufficiently researched in existing literature, the authors decided against an exploratory, qualitative approach. Instead, a quantitative approach was deemed as appropriate due to the following reasons. First, the authors did not intend to create understanding regarding the meaning of individuals and the context, which Weber denotes as *Verstehen*, but aim at *Erklären* (ibid.). Second, the above-mentioned hypotheses were derived from existing theories in marketing related to the influencer and co-creation phenomena. Such closely connected theories allow for a deductive approach based on hypotheses (ibid.). Third, while qualitative research is appropriate upon condition that outcome variables are unknown, this paper studies outcome variables that have been frequently used in research of similar phenomena (ibid.). This also makes the results of this study comparable to prior research of the aforementioned adjacent fields (e.g. Fuchs et al., 2013).

The study of this paper stems from the ontology of naturalism and epistemology of positivism. Therefore, all observations are considered independent of the authors and can be described objectively (Bryman and Bell, 2015). With regards to the research design, a between-subject experimental design was employed in order to test the cause-and-effect relationship by manipulating the independent variable and studying its impact on the dependent variables (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017). Moreover, since the proposed theoretical model is based on measurable outcome variables, predetermined questions were suitable instruments for data collection. The resulting numbered data was analysed through statistical procedures.

In practice, a web-based self-completion questionnaire was utilised in order to test the generated hypotheses and research question within the quantitative approach (Bryman and Bell, 2015). While a self-completion questionnaire encompasses some disadvantages such as missing data or the difficulty to ask a lot of questions, Bryman and Bell (2015) have recognised that it is one of the most common methods employed within quantitative research. In addition, questionnaires allow for the collection of data from a larger number of respondents as compared to qualitative approaches (*ibid.*). Further, the web-based questionnaire enabled the exposure to a more realistic setting of respondents' daily life (see section 3.4.2 on validity). Thus, the use of a web-based self-completion questionnaire allowed for a higher generalisability, which proved fruitful for the purpose of this paper to provide practical implications related to how various types of fashion brands could employ influencers as co-designers in their marketing communication strategies.

3.2 Preparatory work

The preparatory work of this study consisted of two main areas described below, namely (i) the choice of components of the stimuli, and (ii) two prestudies that established the elements of the main study.

3.2.1 Choice of components of the stimuli

In the following section, the choice of components of the stimuli will be outlined with regards to the (i) fashion influencer, (ii) fashion brands, (iii) Instagram post, and (iv) formulation of post captions and design of the Instagram post.

Choice of fashion influencer

Since this study is conducted in the fashion context, an influencer with a main focus on fashion was deemed appropriate. In order to create a more realistic setting of the experiment, a real fashion influencer was utilised in the stimuli. Furthermore, the realism of the stimuli was increased by choosing an influencer with previous collaborations with both luxury and mainstream fashion brands and who frequently publishes sponsored Instagram posts. In addition, an influencer with a high number of followers was selected to increase the likelihood

of the respondents knowing the influencer and thus, finding significant results. Finally, based on the aforementioned criteria, Caro Daur was chosen as fashion influencer for the experiment. Caro Daur is 24 years old, from Hamburg and one of the most influential fashion Instagrammers in Germany. With more than 2 million followers on Instagram she is one of the top fashion influencers worldwide (Instagram, 2019).

Choice of fashion brands

Given the formulated hypotheses, one brand was selected for each tier, i.e. luxury and mainstream. This selection was based on a pilot study conducted by Fuchs et al. (2013), which yielded five brands for each tier. In addition, it was ensured that the brands are regularly worn by the chosen fashion influencer, Caro Daur. Further, a luxury brand with one well-known head designer was selected to increase the likelihood of respondents knowing the head designer. After filtering the pilot study results based on the aforementioned criteria, Emporio Armani and Zara were chosen as luxury and mainstream fashion brands for the experiment.

Choice of Instagram post

Given the SM context of this study, the choice of using Instagram was straightforward since influencer marketing of fashion brands mainly takes place on this SM platform and is widely used by the target population. Considering extensive prior research on sponsored posts in influencer marketing and the need for influencers to disclose sponsorships by fashion brands (Scott, 2019), the Instagram post in this study likewise displayed a sponsored collaboration. Furthermore, the picture shown in the Instagram post was taken from Caro Daur's Instagram account. In selecting this picture, it was ensured that the timing was sufficiently in the past, i.e. at least one year ago, to reduce the likelihood of respondents knowing the post, which could have influenced their responses. In addition, the choice of the picture was driven by the fashion piece depicted in it. For the aim of this study, it was important that the fashion piece is a generic product that appeals to respondents of different ages and fashion preferences in terms of design, for example, colour, fabric and pattern. These prerequisites led to the choice of a picture depicting a basic sweater of neutral blue-and-white colours. It was also confirmed that this sweater could be associated with both brands, Emporio Armani and Zara, through a prestudy (see Prestudy 2). Moreover, when selecting the picture, its quality was considered

to ensure that the Instagram post looks like a realistic sponsored post by a fashion brand. Lastly, the background setting of the picture was taken into account to create a relatively neutral and realistic Instagram post with the fashion piece being in the central focus. All the aforementioned considerations aimed at creating a realistic Instagram post, which respondents would typically encounter in their daily lives.

Formulation of post captions and design of Instagram post

As indicated in the hypotheses generation, this study distinguishes between two brand tiers (i.e. luxury and mainstream) and four sources of design (i.e. brand design, influencer design, influencer and head designer design, influencer and follower design). Consequently, eight treatment groups were required to test the hypotheses and research question and each of them was shown a different stimulus, respectively. Groups one to four were assigned to the luxury brand tier and differed in terms of source of design, while groups five to eight were assigned to the mainstream brand tier and likewise differed in terms of source of design resulting in the following eight treatment groups: (1) Luxury brand design, (2) Luxury influencer design, (3) Luxury influencer and head designer design, (4) Luxury influencer and follower design, (5) Mainstream brand design, (6) Mainstream influencer design, (7) Mainstream influencer and head designer design, and (8) Mainstream influencer and follower design.

The post captions represented the stimuli of the experiment and consisted of manipulated text information related to the respective source of design and brand tier. The captions were designed to appear realistic, for example, through the inclusion of hashtags, tagging of the brand, emojis, wording in first person narration, naming of the influencer collection and addressing the followers analogue to posts of Caro Daur and other influencers in real life.

The final Instagram posts were created with the aim of replicating a realistic situation using the logo, icons and interface associated with Instagram for each of the eight treatment groups (see Appendix I).

3.2.2 Prestudies

As part of the preparatory work for the main study, two prestudies were conducted to (i) ensure correct understanding of the stimuli by respondents, and (ii) verify the selection of components of the stimuli.

Prestudy 1: Ensuring correct understanding of the stimuli

The main objective of this prestudy was to ensure the comprehensibility and clarity of the manipulated post captions used in the final questionnaire. This prestudy was tested on a convenience sample of 10 respondents that were chosen based on their similarity to the main sample in gender, country of origin and Instagram usage (Bryman and Bell, 2015). All of the respondents in this prestudy were non-native English speakers similar to the majority of sample of the main study to ensure that the wording could be understood by this group. The reason behind this prestudy was to verify wordings to avoid any misunderstandings that could affect the results. Since the questionnaire of the main study was to be answered online through a self-completion questionnaire with no possibilities to clarify questions or discuss the phrasings, it was very important that the questionnaire presented few opportunities for misinterpretation (*ibid.*). After the convenience sample of the prestudy was provided with the captions via email, it was asked if any element was ambiguous or difficult to understand. The respondents of the prestudy did not have any difficulties comprehending or interpreting the information, and thus the captions were deemed suitable. Overall, no changes to the main study were made following prestudy one.

Prestudy 2: Verification of components of the stimuli

In order to ensure high quality and precision as well as to check the selection of components of the Instagram post, a second prestudy was conducted. This prestudy was administered as a web-based self-completion questionnaire through the online survey tool Qualtrics. Again, English was used as language. To verify the stimuli components for each brand tier, two versions of the questionnaire were created for each brand. In particular, the two versions encompassed the stimulus of groups (1) and (5) depicting an Instagram post with a luxury and mainstream brand design, respectively.

First, it was asked whether the respondents have a personal Instagram account to ensure that they are familiar with the Instagram interface and use the platform regularly. Second, it was confirmed that the chosen fashion brands were associated with their intended brand tier, i.e. that respondents associate Emporio Armani with a luxury and Zara with a mainstream fashion brand. Thus, brand perception was measured on a five-point Likert scale with the following question: „To what extent do you perceive the brand to be a luxury (vs. mainstream) fashion brand?“. The endpoints of this question were defined as follows: “very low extent/very high extent”. Third, to ensure that the chosen fashion piece could be designed by both brands according to respondents’ view, respondents were asked to indicate the fit between the fashion piece and the brand as follows: „How likely do you think is it that the sweater in the picture below is from the brand Emporio Armani/Zara?“. This item was measured on a five-point Likert scale with the endpoints: “not at all likely/very likely”. Fourth, to verify whether the created Instagram post was perceived as realistic by respondents, the realism of post was measured through three questions on Instagram, Caro Daur and the sponsorship by the brand, with each response measured on a five-point Likert scale with the endpoints: “not at all likely/very likely”. These questions were phrased as follows: „How likely do you think is it that the post below is a real post on Instagram?“, „How likely do you think is it that the post below is a real post from the German influencer Caro Daur on Instagram?“ and „How likely do you think is it that the post below is a real sponsored post from the brand Emporio Armani/Zara?“. The fifth section included demographics on age, gender and country of origin. This prestudy was distributed to a convenience sample via Facebook and email between the 26th and 30th of September 2019 (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The respondents were randomly assigned to the two versions of the questionnaire. In total, 74 responses were collected, of which all respondents who did not have an Instagram account were omitted from the final data set, resulting in 69 responses. These responses were distributed as follows: 33 respondents were assigned to the Instagram post depicting the luxury fashion brand, and the remaining 36 respondents were assigned to the Instagram post depicting the mainstream fashion brand.

To test the three constructs (i.e. brand perception, fashion-piece-brand-fit, realism of post), t-tests were conducted (see Appendix II for results). All scales were interval variables and a normal distribution was ensured according to the central limit theorem (ibid.).

An independent sample t-test was employed to compare the means related to brand perception between the two groups of respondents and test the hypothesis that the chosen brands are perceived to belong to their intended brand tier (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017). Given that Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = .078$, $p = .781$), the results showed a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(67) = 16.375$, $p = .000$) in the means of respondents assigned to either the luxury brand ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .72$) or the mainstream brand ($M = 1.36$, $SD = .59$). These results suggest that the chosen brands were associated with their intended brand tier correctly.

Two one-sample t-tests were used to test whether the means related to fashion-piece-brand-fit were significantly different from the chosen cut-off point of three on the five-point scale for the two groups, respectively (ibid.). The results were significant on the five percent significance level for the luxury brand ($t(32) = 5.108$, $p = .000$) and for the mainstream brand ($t(35) = 14.407$, $p = .000$) with means above the cut-off point for the luxury brand ($M = 4.03$, $SD = 1.16$) and the mainstream brand ($M = 4.64$, $SD = .68$). These results suggest that according to respondents' view, the chosen fashion piece could be designed by both brands.

Since the construct realism of post was measured through three questions, three one-sample t-tests were conducted for each brand tier. For the luxury brand, the results for all three questions were significant on the five percent significance level: realism of Instagram ($t(32) = 11.973$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.48$ and $SD = .71$, realism of influencer ($t(32) = 7.509$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.21$ and $SD = .93$, realism of brand ($t(32) = 4.993$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.03$ and $SD = 1.19$. For the mainstream brand, the results of all three questions were likewise significant on the five percent significance level: realism of Instagram ($t(35) = 13.733$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.58$ and $SD = .69$, realism of influencer ($t(35) = 11.998$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.47$ and $SD = .74$, realism of brand ($t(35) = 9.661$, $p = .000$) with $M = 4.33$ and $SD = .83$. These results suggest that the Instagram posts were realistic with regards to Instagram, the influencer and the brand according to respondents' view for both brand tiers.

Questionnaire pilot test

Before collecting the data of the main study, a pilot test of the questionnaire was conducted to facilitate the experience of future respondents. The main objective of this test was to ensure the comprehensibility and clarity of scales and measures used in the final

questionnaire design. The pilot test was distributed to a convenience sample of 5 non-native English-speaking respondents. To ensure that the wording could be understood by this group, the respondents were subsequently asked to give verbal feedback on their experience of answering the questionnaire. The pilot test respondents were further asked to note the time needed for completing the questionnaire. Their feedback resulted in minor changes to one of the instruction texts for the final version of the questionnaire, but overall respondents did not show any difficulties comprehending or interpreting instructions and scales.

3.3 Main study

The design of the main study resulted from the preparatory efforts, methodologically consisting of (i) questionnaire design, and (ii) sampling and data collection.

3.3.1 Questionnaire design

For the purpose of this study, a web-based self-completion questionnaire, which is a suitable instrument for collecting quantitative data, was created and distributed via the online questionnaire tool Qualtrics (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The questionnaire consisted of several blocks including 30 questions in total. All participants were confronted with identical information about the study to guarantee comparability. Further, anonymity was warranted to maximise respondents' honesty and willingness to complete the questionnaire. For the aim of this study, it was imperative to measure respondents' initial thought and avoid incomplete responses to questions. Consequently, the back button was deactivated and forced answers were set as standard for every question. As indicated by the pilot test, the questionnaire took approximately eight minutes to complete, thereby following the advice of Bryman and Bell (2015) to keep the response time as short as possible without compromising the study.

The questionnaire started with an introduction followed by control questions ensuring that the final sample included only respondents that met certain qualification criteria (see "Sample and data collection" for a detailed description of the criteria). Next, a short description of the fashion influencer, Caro Daur, followed together with instructions for responding to the subsequent questions. Then, the stimulus was shown. Since it was important that respondents took time studying the stimulus to remember the source of design and the brand when answering the following questions, a timer was set on the stimulus to 10 seconds to

prime respondents as much as possible. The questions for the dependent variables of this study, corresponding to the variables outlined in the theoretical model plus a few more that could have potentially been relevant for explaining the cause-and-effect relationship, were directly placed after the stimulus. Again, this was based on the intention to maximise the priming effect and ensure that the observed variations could be reliably attributed to the stimulus (see below for a detailed description of the dependent variables). The subsequent section featured additional questions on Instagram, the influencer and the fashion brand to investigate potential factors that could explain participants' responses to the dependent variables. The Instagram questions covered respondents' usage of the platform, their engagement, preferred fields of interest on Instagram as well as the number of influencers and fashion brands they follow. The influencer questions encompassed whether respondents know and follow Caro Daur and if so, what they think about her. In addition, one question addressed the frequency of respondents trying or ordering fashion pieces seen by a fashion influencer on Instagram. The fashion questions comprised respondents' interest in fashion and their willingness to pay for a sweater. Then, manipulation questions were included to guarantee that the observed effect of the dependent variables could be traced back to the manipulation depicted in the stimulus, i.e. source of design and brand tier. Finally, the end of the questionnaire included one demographic question on age (see Appendix III for the full questionnaire).

Dependent variables

The questionnaire encompassed eight dependent variables, namely brand attitude, purchase intention, influencer attitude, attitude towards the post, engagement with the post, credibility of influencer, design quality perception and agentic feelings. Every variable was addressed by one question. For the measurement of these variables, the questionnaire comprised only well-established and scientifically recognised measures that have been used by multiple authors within the field of marketing (e.g. Fuchs et al., 2013; Colliander and Marder, 2018; Colliander, 2019). The original language of the measures was kept to minimise the risk of hampering measurement validity. Consequently, English was chosen as the preferred language for the entire questionnaire. Although German was the native language of almost all respondents, all were expected to possess a high proficiency in English. Further,

by choosing English as language, it was ensured that females, who live in Germany but do not speak German, were able to participate. In addition, the language was short and comprehensible decreasing the risk of misunderstandings.

All but one of the measures of the dependent variables included multi-item scales to maximise internal reliability (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Before analysing the data, indexes for all multi-item measures were created. Further, to ensure internal reliability, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for all multi-item measures and Pearson's r for the two-item scale. A Cronbach's Alpha over $\alpha = .8$ indicates high internal reliability and was thus used as threshold to evaluate the scales' internal reliability (ibid.). In the following, merely the three dependent variables of the theoretical framework will be presented.

Brand attitude

Brand attitude was measured using a three-item measure, including the items "*My impression of the fashion brand is good/pleasant/favourable.*" adapted from Colliander and Marder (2018). The items were presented on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "*completely disagree*" to "*completely agree*". Given a Cronbach's Alpha of .878, the scale achieved sufficient internal reliability.

Purchase intention

To measure purchase intention, a seven-point Likert scale from Colliander and Marder (2018) was adapted with the three items "*My impression of the brand is good/pleasant/favourable.*" The scale ranged from "*completely disagree*" to "*completely agree*" and the indexed items resulted in a Cronbach's Alpha of .923 indicating satisfactory internal reliability.

Attitude towards the post

Respondents' attitude towards the post was assessed using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "*completely disagree*" to "*completely agree*" adapted from Colliander and Marder (2018). Two items "*I like the post in Caro Daur's Instagram feed.*" and "*I associate positive things with the post in Caro Daur's Instagram feed.*" were utilised. To measure the internal reliability of the two-item scale, a Pearson r correlation test was conducted revealing a

Pearson's r of .850 which indicates a strong positive relationship between the items (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

3.3.2 Sampling and data collection

The procedure resulting in the final sample for the subsequent statistical analysis included (i) sampling process, (ii) data collection, and (iii) data cleaning and manipulation check.

Sampling process

According to Bryman and Bell (2015) the sampling process consists of two stages, namely establishing the research setting and choosing the respondents.

The research setting was framed by three criteria, i.e. respondents had to be (i) female, (ii) of German origin, and (iii) Instagram users. The reason for these criteria resulted from the choice of the fashion influencer Caro Daur and the SM platform Instagram. Since Caro Daur is a German woman and promotes a female sweater in the Instagram post used as stimulus, only German females were considered appropriate for this study. Further, it was necessary that respondents were familiar with the interface of the chosen SM platform, resulting in the third criteria of possessing an account on Instagram. The control questions in the beginning of the questionnaire ensured that only respondents who matched these three criteria were qualified to further participate in the questionnaire.

Given this setting, a snowball sampling process was utilised to reach appropriate respondents (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017). This sampling type allowed the authors to make initial contact with a small group of people, who in turn reached out to more respondents for participating in the study (ibid.). Since there was no accessible sampling frame for the relevant population of this study, snowball sampling was the only feasible sampling approach (ibid.). It needs to be acknowledged that it is impossible for the snowball sampling method to estimate the sample error resulting from a sample bias, which diminishes the study's generalisability. However, snowball sampling can be considered as appropriate for the aim of this study considering the rather small expected variance within the population. In fact, it can be reasonably assumed that the population of female, German Instagram users has similar preferences and attitudes in the fashion and SM context. Further, the snowball sampling process is a common method used in studies of fashion consumers due to the difficulty of

gaining access to the whole population as well as existing resource and time constraints (Kamenidou, Mylonakis and Nikolouli, 2007; Ritch and Schröder, 2012; Kim and Martinez, 2013; Blázquez, 2014).

Data collection

The web-based self-completion questionnaire was distributed online via an URL link between the 10th and 18th of October 2019. The respondents were randomly assigned to one of the eight treatment groups. In total, 891 responses were collected. However, this number includes respondents that were directly eliminated from the study through the three control questions. After further excluding incomplete responses, 484 responses remained.

Data cleaning and manipulation check

In a next step, data cleaning was performed on the remaining 484 responses. Respondents that answered the questionnaire below a time threshold of three minutes or answered the questions measured on a seven-point Likert scale with a standard deviation equal to 0 were eliminated in order to avoid having respondents in the final sample that rushed through the questions without paying great attention. At this stage, only 2 respondents were excluded.

Moreover, the manipulation questions at the end of the questionnaire were included to ensure high internal validity, i.e. the respondents' correct understanding of the stimulus regarding the respective source of design and brand tier. By conducting manipulation checks on both, the source of design and brand tier, additional responses were excluded from the sample.

First, it was guaranteed that the brand tier was identified correctly, i.e. respondents that saw the post sponsored by Emporio Armani and Zara, respectively, remembered the correct brand when answering the questions on the dependent variables. All wrong responses on the brand tier were eliminated, resulting in 434 remaining responses.

Second, it was ensured that the respondents recalled the correct design (i.e. brand design, influencer design, influencer and head designer design, influencer and follower design) when answering the eight questions. The initial purpose was to exclude likewise all wrong responses for the source of design. However, a relatively large number of wrong responses from

participants that were exposed to the influencer design (i.e. 56 percent incorrect responses) could be observed. This indicated a high probability of respondents having misunderstood who actually designed the fashion piece. Respondents might have assumed that the sweater was designed by the brand or the brand's head designer and the influencer only played a minor role in the design process, thus choosing either the brand design or the influencer and head designer design as response instead of the influencer design. None of these respondents chose the fourth option, the influencer and follower design, which reinforces the authors' assumption of incorrect understanding of the other three options by respondents. Therefore, the brand design and influencer and head designer design were also regarded as correct responses for the manipulation check of the two influencer design treatment groups. Thus, all wrong responses from respondents exposed to the brand design, influencer and head designer design and influencer and follower design were excluded and from respondents exposed to the influencer design only the influencer and follower design was regarded as wrong answer and thus, excluded. After conducting the manipulation checks, the final sample size for the subsequent statistical analysis included 364 responses.

In this final sample 96.2 percent of respondents ranged in age from 16 to 36 years and were split among the eight treatment groups as follows (see Figure III):

Treatment group	Number of respondents
(1) Luxury brand design	48
(2) Luxury influencer design	48
(3) Luxury influencer and head designer design	41
(4) Luxury influencer and follower design	42
(5) Mainstream brand design	42
(6) Mainstream influencer design	61
(7) Mainstream influencer and head designer design	44
(8) Mainstream influencer and follower design	38

Figure III: Respondents per treatment group

3.4 Data quality

The quality of data related to reliability, validity and replicability is a common concern of quantitative studies (Bryman & Bell, 2015). In particular, it is important to ensure a high quality of data to derive significant conclusions (ibid.).

3.4.1 Reliability

Reliability is a criterion of quality that identifies whether the measures used are stable and consistent, hence greatly affecting the study's replicability (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Two crucial prerequisites for reliability are stability and internal reliability (ibid.).

Stability

To ensure the measures' stability and avoid fluctuation within the time frame and contextual conditions, well-established measures of prior research were used (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Internal reliability

To establish internal reliability of this study, i.e. determine whether the multi-item scales used were consistent in measuring the same intended variable, the three-item measures were validated using Cronbach's Alpha and the two-item measures were assessed using the Pearson r correlation test (Bryman and Bell, 2015). As mentioned above (see section 3.1 questionnaire design) all multi-item measures yielded satisfactory internal reliability.

3.4.2 Validity

Reliability is a prerequisite of validity, which can be evaluated through four main constructs: (i) measurement validity, (ii) internal validity, (iii) external validity, and (iv) ecological validity (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Validity is a criterion of quality that identifies whether the measures used are accurate (ibid.).

Measurement validity

To verify whether the measures capture the concept that is intended to be captured, only well-established items and scales, which have been utilised successfully in prior research, were included (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Internal validity

Internal validity focuses on the cause-and-effect relationship between variables, questioning whether the independent variable is truly responsible for the change in the dependent variable (Bryman and Bell, 2015). First, the chosen between-subject experimental design is suitable for determining causality (Malhotra, Nunan and Birks, 2017). Second, a random assignment of respondents to the treatment groups allowed the achievement of a pre-experimental equation of the groups (*ibid.*). Third, the timer set on the stimulus ensured that the changes in the dependent variables could accurately be attributed to the manipulations in the independent variable, which was further verified through the manipulation checks. To maximise this desired priming effect, the dependent variables were immediately shown after the stimuli. In addition, internal validity was increased by conducting two prestudies confirming respondents' correct understanding of the stimuli and association of the chosen brands with their respective brand tier.

External validity

External validity is concerned with the question of whether the results of the study can be generalised to the larger population (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Although the chosen snowball sampling process resulted in a non-probability sample that might not accurately represent the relevant population of female, German Instagram users, members of this population were expected to be relatively homogeneous with respect to fashion consumption. Further, the potential sampling error was decreased through the means available to the authors by distributing the questionnaire to a variety of people that met the qualification criteria via several channels such as SM, direct e-mail and forums of universities across Germany.

Ecological validity

Ecological validity is concerned with the question of whether the findings are applicable to people's everyday life (Bryman & Bell, 2015). The aim of the authors was to develop an experiment that is as realistic as possible to achieve higher generalisability. This was ensured through various actions taken in the stimuli design. First, it was intended to expose respondents to a more realistic setting by including an Instagram post in the questionnaire that replicates the interface of the Instagram application. Instagram is typically accessed through the smartphone and the majority of respondents answered the questionnaire with their smartphone. Second, the realism of the stimuli was further ensured by carefully selecting its components including a real, well-known fashion influencer, the post's sponsorship by the brand, real brands and head designers and the wording of the post captions. Third, a generic fashion piece was selected to reduce the risk of brand-specific effects, i.e. ensure that the fashion piece could be designed by both brands. Both, the realism of the Instagram post and the fashion-piece-brand-fit was supported by prestudy 2.

3.4.3 Replicability

Replicability is concerned with the question whether the results of a study can be reproduced (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The replicability of this study was ensured through a detailed documentation of the research method and analysis of data as well as the utilisation of well-established measures previously tested for the three quality criteria.

4. RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Returning to the purpose of this study to investigate the effects of labelling different sources of design in a sponsored Instagram post on consumers' attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for different brand tiers, this section will analyse the empirically collected data in order to support or disprove the formulated hypotheses and investigate the research question. The data was processed and analysed using the statistical analysis software IBM SPSS Statistics. The hypotheses and the research question were analysed with mean comparisons, in particular independent t-tests and one-way ANOVAs were used, respectively, which will be displayed in tables throughout the chapter (see Figures IV-XV). Further, all scales were interval variables and a normal distribution was ensured according to the central limit theorem (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Overall, no significant effect could be found for neither any of the formulated hypotheses nor the research question (see Appendix IV for raw data).

4.1 Hypotheses tests

In order to investigate the relationship between labelling of source of design by different brand tiers and attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention, the hypotheses were formulated in a way that they exhibit a difference between the two relevant groups, namely brand design and influencer design. Malhotra, Nunan and Birks (2017) advocate the use of an independent sample t-test when the same variables are compared between two groups of respondents. All hypotheses aim to investigate the differences between a brand design and a source of design including an influencer as co-designer. Hence, the influencer design, the influencer and head designer design and the influencer and follower design were combined to form only one group of influencer designs for the analysis. For all tests conducted, a five percent significance level was chosen.

Attitude towards the post

To test the hypotheses that attitude towards the post will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed

for luxury and mainstream fashion brands, respectively, two independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the means between the groups.

For luxury brands, Levene's test did not indicate equal variances ($F = 5.187, p = .024$), so that adjusted test values were considered. The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(70.372) = -.602, p = .549$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 4.26, SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.65$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.42, SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.32$) with regards to attitude towards the post. These results suggest that for luxury brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on attitude towards the post. Thus, H1a cannot be accepted.

H1a: *For luxury brands, attitude towards the post will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	48	4.26	1.65	-.602	.549
Influencer design	131	4.42	1.32		

Figure IV: Independent sample t-test on attitude towards the post for luxury brands

For mainstream brands, Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 1.253, p = .264$). The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(183) = -1.590, p = .114$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 3.87, SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.65$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.29, SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.48$) with regards to attitude towards the post. These results suggest that for mainstream brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on attitude towards the post. Thus, H1b cannot be accepted.

H1b: *For mainstream brands, attitude towards the post will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	42	3.87	1.65	-1.590	.114
Influencer design	143	4.29	1.48		

Figure V: Independent sample t-test on attitude towards the for mainstream brands

Brand attitude

To test the hypotheses that brand attitude will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed for luxury and mainstream fashion brands, respectively, two independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the means between the groups.

For luxury brands, Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = .009$, $p = .925$). The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(177) = .570$, $p = .569$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 4.72$, $SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.16$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.60$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.20$) with regards to brand attitude. These results suggest that for luxury brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on brand attitude. Thus, H2a cannot be accepted.

H2a: *For luxury brands, brand attitude will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	48	4.72	1.16	.570	.569
Influencer design	131	4.60	1.20		

Figure VI: Independent sample t-test on brand attitude for luxury brands

For mainstream brands, Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 1.552$, $p = .214$). The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(183) = -1.458$, $p = .147$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 4.57$, $SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.40$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.90$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.24$) with regards to brand attitude. These results suggest that for mainstream brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on brand attitude. Thus, H2b cannot be accepted.

H2b: *For mainstream brands, brand attitude will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	42	4.57	1.40	-1.458	.147
Influencer design	143	4.90	1.24		

Figure VII: Independent sample t-test on brand attitude for mainstream brands

Purchase intention

To test the hypotheses that purchase intention will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed for luxury

and mainstream fashion brands, respectively, two independent sample t-tests were conducted to compare the means between the groups.

For luxury brands, Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = 2.327$, $p = .129$). The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(177) = .195$, $p = .846$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 2.72$, $SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.66$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 2.67$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.41$) with regards to purchase intention. These results suggest that for luxury brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on purchase intention. Thus, H3a cannot be accepted.

H3a: *For luxury brands, purchase intention will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	48	2.72	1.66	.195	.846
Influencer design	131	2.67	1.41		

Figure VIII: Independent sample t-test on purchase intention for luxury brands

For mainstream brands, Levene's test indicated equal variances ($F = .160$, $p = .690$). The independent sample t-test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level ($t(183) = .163$, $p = .871$) in the means for brand design ($M_{\text{brand design}} = 3.28$, $SD_{\text{brand design}} = 1.58$) and influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 3.23$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.56$) with regards to purchase intention. These results suggest that for mainstream brands mentioning the influencer as co-designer versus mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the fashion piece does not lead to a statistically significant effect on purchase intention. Thus, H3b cannot be accepted.

H3b: *For mainstream brands, purchase intention will be higher after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed than after exposure to a sponsored Instagram post depicting a fashion piece labelled as brand-designed.*

REJECTED

	N	Mean	Std. deviation	t	p
Brand design	42	3.28	1.58	.163	.871
Influencer design	143	3.23	1.56		

Figure IX: Independent sample t-test on purchase intention for mainstream brands

4.2 Research question investigation

To investigate the research question with regards to the relationship between labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the head designer or the influencer's followers as compared to a fashion piece labelled as influencer-designed and attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention, three one-way analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to compare the means between the groups. Levene's test indicated that the assumption of homogeneity of variance was met for all groups. Further, although the purpose of this research was to investigate differences between the brand tiers, for all three dependent variables only post-hoc comparisons between the different forms of labelling of the source of design within one brand tier will be analysed, i.e. not between luxury and mainstream brands. This is due to the fact that no significant effects could be found between any of the six different groups.

Attitude towards the post

An ANOVA on attitude towards the post did not reveal a significant main effect of the labelling of the source of design on the five percent significance level for the six different groups ($F(5, 268) = .421, p = .834$).

For luxury brands, post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level in the means of influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer}}$

design = 4.51, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.11$) and influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 4.38$, $SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.40$). Further, the mean value of the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 4.36$, $SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.49$) was not significantly different either from the influencer design.

For mainstream brands, the same is true. Post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level in the means of influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.43$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.43$) and influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 4.11$, $SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.43$). Further, the mean value of the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 4.29$, $SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.64$) was not significantly different either from the influencer design.

Thus, these results suggest that for both luxury and mainstream brands, the labelling of the two nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies, i.e. influencer and head designer design and influencer and follower design, does not result in a statistically significant effect as compared to the labelling of an influencer design with regards to attitude towards the post.

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	4.51	.13	1.11	.999
	Influencer and head designer design	41	4.38		1.40	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	4.43	.32	1.43	.940
	Influencer and head designer design	44	4.11		1.43	

Figure X: ANOVA on attitude towards the post for influencer and head designer design

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	4.51	.15	1.11	.998
	Influencer and follower design	42	4.36		1.49	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	4.43	.14	1.43	.999
	Influencer and follower design	38	4.29		1.64	

Figure XI: ANOVA on attitude towards the post for influencer and follower design

Brand attitude

An ANOVA on brand attitude revealed a similar pattern of results. No significant main effect of the labelling of the source of design on the five percent significance level for the six different groups could be found ($F(5, 268) = 1.353$, $p = .243$).

For luxury brands, post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not indicate that the mean value of the influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 4.71$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.10$) was significantly different from the influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 4.55$, $SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.19$) or the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 4.52$, $SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.34$) on the five percent significance level.

For mainstream brands, the same is true. Post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not indicate that, on the five percent significance level, the mean value of the influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 5.01$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.16$) was significantly different from the influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 4.67$, $SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.37$) or the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 4.97$, $SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.20$) on the five percent significance level.

Thus, these results suggest that for both luxury and mainstream brands, the labelling of the two nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies, i.e. influencer and head designer design and influencer and follower design, does not result in a statistically significant effect as compared to the labelling of an influencer design with regards to brand attitude.

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	4.71	.16	1.10	.996
	Influencer and head designer design	41	4.55		1.19	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	5.01	.34	1.16	.857
	Influencer and head designer design	44	4.67		1.37	

Figure XII: ANOVA on brand attitude for influencer and head designer design

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	4.71	.19	1.10	.992
	Influencer and follower design	42	4.52		1.34	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	5.01	.04	1.16	1.000
	Influencer and follower design	38	4.97		1.20	

Figure XIII: ANOVA on brand attitude for influencer and follower design

Purchase intention

Similar to the ANOVAs on attitude towards the post and brand attitude, an ANOVA on purchase intention did not reveal a statistically significant difference on the five percent significance level for the six different groups ($F(5, 268) = 2.159, p = .059$).

For luxury brands, post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level in the means of influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 2.53, SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.38$) and influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 2.80, SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.33$). Further, the mean value of the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 2.68, SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.54$) was not significantly different either from the influencer design.

For mainstream brands, the same is true. Post-hoc comparison using a Scheffe test did not show a significant difference on the five percent significance level in the means of influencer design ($M_{\text{influencer design}} = 3.28$, $SD_{\text{influencer design}} = 1.58$) and influencer and head designer design ($M_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 3.27$, $SD_{\text{influencer and head designer design}} = 1.66$). Further, the mean value of the influencer and follower design ($M_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 3.12$, $SD_{\text{influencer and follower design}} = 1.44$) was not significantly different either from the influencer design.

Thus, these results suggest that for both luxury and mainstream brands, the labelling of the two nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies, i.e. influencer and head designer design and influencer and follower design, does not result in a statistically significant effect as compared to the labelling of an influencer design with regards to purchase intention.

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	2.53	-.27	1.38	.982
	Influencer and head designer design	41	2.80		1.33	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	3.28	.01	1.58	1.000
	Influencer and head designer design	44	3.27		1.66	

Figure XIV: ANOVA on purchase intention for influencer and head designer design

		N	Mean	Mean difference	Std. deviation	p
Luxury	Influencer design	48	2.53	-.15	1.38	.999
	Influencer and follower design	42	2.68		1.54	
Mainstream	Influencer design	61	3.28	.16	1.58	.998
	Influencer and follower design	38	3.12		1.44	

Figure XV: ANOVA on purchase intention for influencer and follower design

5. DISCUSSION

This section comprises a further discussion of the results presented above with regards to the aim of this study to explore the effectiveness of different marketing communication strategies on SM by fashion brands. Since no significant effect could be found, the findings open possibilities to discuss other aspects of the influencer co-design phenomenon to provide possible explanations for why the results turned out as they did. Due to the relationship of the dependent variables as explained in the Hierarchy of Effects model, and the fact that no significant effect could be found for any of the three dependent variables attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention, the authors will discuss and refer to one combined outcome that corresponds to all three dependent variables in the following two sections.

5.1 Discussion of findings from the hypotheses testing

For luxury fashion brands, the results indicate that mentioning the influencer as co-designer in the label of a fashion piece in a sponsored Instagram post leads to no difference in outcome as compared to mentioning only the brand as designer in the label of the same fashion piece. Since the brand design and the influencer design appear to be of similar effectiveness, the prior argumentation regarding the equal status and equal level of design expertise might be true. However, the findings give no indication that an influencer design outperforms a brand design as proposed in the hypotheses. Still, the presented unique characteristics of the influencer described when arguing for why an influencer design should outperform a brand design in marketing communication cannot be neglected given that in practice, an influencer collection regularly proves to be more successful than a collection designed by the brand. Thus, there needs to be something else in play that could account for the similar effectiveness and has not been considered in this study so far. An alternative explanation for the similar effectiveness may relate to an element of the marketing communication in the sponsored Instagram post. In general, the effectiveness of a marketing communication depends on three factors, i.e. source credibility, message credibility and site credibility (Esteban-Santos et al., 2018). Source credibility refers to the source of the message and has been shown to impact consumers' behaviours and decisions (ibid.). Thus, in this study, source credibility relates to the credibility of the influencer as endorser in the marketing communication. In fact, the

influencer is the endorser in both cases, i.e. brand design and influencer design. While in the case of the brand design the influencer is endorsing a fashion piece labelled as designed by the brand, in the case of the influencer design the influencer is endorsing the same fashion piece but labelled as designed by herself. Previous literature has extensively highlighted the effectiveness of such influencer endorsements for brands in marketing communication (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017). Generally, endorsements underly the principles of the source credibility model that draws attention to the importance of the endorser's expertise and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990). As mentioned before, influencers show unique characteristics related to expertise and trustworthiness being perceived as credible experts and trusted tastemakers in their field. In this study, these characteristics were also assumed to play an important role in consumers' evaluation of the influencer's credibility to design a fashion piece impacting their attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention. However, the findings show that there is no difference between an influencer endorsing a fashion piece designed by the brand and an influencer endorsing a fashion piece designed by herself, indicating that the actual endorsement could have overshadowed the impact of the source of design on consumers' attitudes and decisions. Therefore, as long as an influencer with high credibility is endorsing a product, it becomes irrelevant who is mentioned as the designer in a sponsored Instagram post, i.e. the brand or the influencer.

This explanation is independent of the brand tier and thus, can also serve to explain why no difference in outcomes between a brand design and an influencer design could be found for mainstream fashion brands either. Even though for mainstream fashion brands only positive effects related to user co-creation have been observed so far and therefore, were also expected for influencer co-design, it is now evident that these positive effects could not have been uncovered in this study. Again, since the influencer is present as an endorser in both cases, this study does not compare a brand design and an influencer design in isolation, but only a scenario including the influencer as an endorser. Therefore, a clear effect of the influencer versus the brand design cannot be separated nor studied. Finally, it is expected that this endorsement overshadows the positive effects of an influencer co-design so that even for mainstream brands no positive effects could be observed.

5.2 Discussion of findings from the research question investigation

For the more nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies, it was argued that there could be no effect for both luxury and mainstream fashion brands, which could explain the findings of having no significant effect between influencer design and either influencer and head designer design or influencer and follower design. However, following the reasoning above, it is reasonable to assume that this explanation applies for the nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies as well. Therefore, the discussion will not centre around the previously presented arguments for having no effect. Instead, the overshadowing effect of the endorsement by the influencer is assumed to explain the results in the same way as argued above. In fact, since the influencer is endorsing the fashion piece in all nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies, this again, strengthens the alternative explanation of the overshadowing effect of the endorsement.

6. CONCLUSION

The fundamental motivation of this study was derived from the apparent success of influencer co-design strategies pursued by fashion brands. Based on this empirical observation, the aim of this study was to investigate how labelling a fashion piece depicted in a sponsored Instagram post as designed by an influencer (vs. designed by a brand) affects consumers in terms of their attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention, and whether these outcomes differ between brand tiers, i.e. luxury and mainstream fashion brands. Further, this study explored whether a collaboration between either an influencer and a fashion brand's head designer or an influencer and his and her followers as more nuanced forms of influencer co-design strategies (vs. designed by an influencer) leads to different outcomes. This allows to provide explanations regarding the effectiveness of different marketing communication strategies on SM by fashion brands.

First, the results show that labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer as compared to labelling the same fashion piece as designed by the brand in a sponsored Instagram post has no significant effect on attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for neither a luxury nor a mainstream brand. Second and similarly, the results indicate that labelling a fashion piece as designed by an influencer in collaboration with either the head designer or the influencer's followers as compared to the same fashion piece as designed by the influencer in a sponsored Instagram post has no significant effect on attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention for neither a luxury nor a mainstream brand either. In short, this implies that, for fashion brands' marketing, it is irrelevant whether the influencer is communicated as co-designer for a fashion piece in a sponsored Instagram post. However, these results should be interpreted tentatively, and it should not readily be concluded that influencer co-design strategies in general do not lead to higher attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention. The fact that the influencer is the central element of the sponsored post endorsing the fashion piece in all cases studied might have skewed the results as discussed above.

6.1 Theoretical contribution and practical implications

The theoretical interest of this study was grounded in the literature review and the identified research gap, in which it was established that the influencer phenomenon has not been studied in the context of co-creation, i.e. influencers as co-designers of new products. This study is only partially closing this gap. Even though this study contributes with findings related to the so far unstudied marketing communication effectiveness of influencer co-design strategies, thereby merging the two literature fields influencer marketing and co-creation, this contribution is limited to the case when the co-designing influencer is also endorsing the product. The main theoretical contribution of this study is the finding that consumers' attitude toward the post, brand attitude and purchase intention does not differ for communicating various forms of influencer co-designs as compared to a brand design of an endorsed product on SM. Thus, this study contributes with an initial explanation of how brands' communication of influencer co-design strategies affects consumer behaviour in the presence of an endorsement by the influencer but not how brand's communication of influencer co-design strategies affects consumer behaviour per se, i.e. absence of endorsement.

In terms of practical implications, given the relevance for fashion brands to employ new forms of influencer marketing strategies, it is of interest to brand marketers to better understand consumers' behaviour when they communicate to consumers that influencers were co-designers. These findings provide direct counsel to fashion brands regarding whether to communicate influencer co-design strategies to the broader mass of consumers. In practice it can be observed that the co-designing influencer is most of the time also used extensively to endorse the co-designed collection. For brands it is important to understand how consumers react to such communication to decide whether mentioning the influencer as co-designer in the label of a product is effective. This study contributes with new implications for luxury and mainstream fashion brands. In contrast to prior research that found negative implications for luxury fashion brands when mentioning users as co-designers (Fuchs et al., 2013), this study reveals that such negative effects do not exist in the context of mentioning influencers as co-designers. In particular, either influencers can be mentioned as co-designers, or a mass of followers can be mentioned together with the influencer as co-designers. Most interestingly, the presence of influencers seems to mitigate the negative

effects of communicating user co-creation of luxury fashion products to consumers found in prior literature (Fuchs et al., 2013). Other than that, for both luxury and mainstream fashion brands it can be concluded that it makes no difference whether the influencer as co-designer or the brand itself as sole designer is mentioned in the label of a fashion piece in a sponsored Instagram post in which the influencer is endorsing the fashion piece.

7. LIMITATIONS & FUTURE RESEARCH

The final section of this paper will account for possible limitations of the study and directly present suggestions for future research based on the findings and limitations discussed.

The first limitation concerns the generalisability of the findings. The context of this study was the fashion industry and the research setting was consciously restricted to female, German respondents with an Instagram account. This implies limits to the generalisability in terms of gender, geography and product category. First, even though the research focused solely on females the findings might also apply to male consumers as it is assumed by the authors that both genders show similar consumption behaviour when seeing a product recommendation by an influencer on SM. Second, given that the study focused exclusively on Germans, the findings cannot readily be generalised beyond a similar geographic sample. However, since citizens of Western European countries do not significantly differ in their consumption behaviour the findings can be generalised to the Western culture but not cross-culturally due to cultural differences between Western and Eastern countries (Wallace and Kovacheva, 1996). Third, despite the fact that the research only studied a fashion piece the findings are also relevant to marketing managers outside the fashion industry. Since consumers' decision to purchase a fashion piece is driven by aesthetics and trends it might be argued that the findings apply to products from other industries for which the design and style is relevant such as interior design, beauty and automobiles (Sproles, 1981). Thus, in order to increase generalisability, it could be interesting to study other geographies, i.e. Eastern countries, and industries, in which consumer behaviour is not primarily driven by aesthetics and trends, in future research.

A second limitation that directly points to a new area for future research stems from the underlying endorsement condition in the study conducted. Since in this study the influencer was the endorser of the fashion piece in all cases, it would be interesting to study the communication of the influencer co-design in the absence of such an endorsement. In this case, only the fashion piece would be visible without the influencer as endorser. This would be even more interesting to academics and less to practitioners since fashion brands commonly use the influencer as endorser.

A third limitation relates to the communication channel used in the study. The study employed a sponsored Instagram post posted by the influencer as communication channel of

the advertisement. For future research it could be worthwhile to investigate a communication from the brand's channels with the influencer still being the endorser.

Another aspect that would be interesting for future research relates to whether consumers are followers of the influencer on Instagram. This study targeted consumers in general, however almost 70 percent of respondents indicated that they know the influencer. Such awareness of the endorser is crucial for the endorsement's effectiveness, which has also been shown for celebrity endorsements in prior literature (Erdogan, 1999). In the context of influencers, i.e. Internet celebrities, following on Instagram goes beyond simply being aware of or knowing the influencer. The authors could indeed observe indicative findings¹ for respondents that follow the influencer on Instagram in terms of different outcomes in the dependent variables between a brand design and an influencer design. Given the small number of respondents actually following the influencer within the sample of this study, it would be interesting to investigate whether a significant effect exists for actual followers. Even though the authors argued that the underlying endorsement had an overshadowing effect, it could be expected that actual followers react differently to a communication of an influencer co-design. In fact, since followers are confronted with sponsored content by the same influencer on a daily basis, a sponsored post by the influencer in which he or she endorses a fashion piece designed by him- or herself could differentiate the post from other traditional endorsements. This is in line with the empirical observation that fashion brands are looking for new ways to differentiate their sponsored content from competitors', as described in the introduction. For future research it is relevant to investigate first, whether and second, why sponsored Instagram posts communicating the influencer as co-designers to followers lead to different effects.

¹ An ANOVA on attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention yielded differences in the means between brand design and influencer design in the condition of respondents following the influencer. However, the sample was too small to draw significant conclusions.

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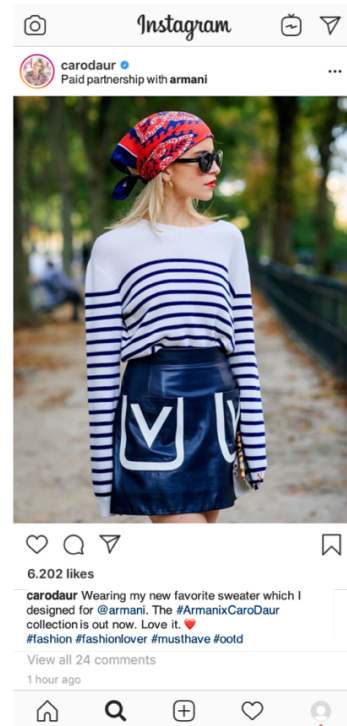
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APPENDIX

Appendix I – Instagram posts



Armani brand design



Armani influencer design



Armani influencer and head designer design



Armani influencer and follower design



Zara brand design



Zara influencer design



Zara influencer and head designer design



Zara influencer and follower design

Appendix II – Hypotheses testing data pretest

Independent sample t-test for brand perception

		Group statistics			Levene's test		t-test for equality of means				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p	t(67)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Brand perception	Luxury	33	3.97	.72	.078	.781	16.375	.000*	2.61	2.29	2.93
	Mainstream	36	1.36	.59							

*significant on the five percent significance level

One-sample t-tests for fashion-piece-brand-fit (Test value = 3)

Luxury brand

	Group statistics			t-test for equality of means				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t(32)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Fashion-piece-brand-fit	33	4.03	1.16	5.108	.000*	1.03	.62	1.44

*significant on the five percent significance level

Mainstream brand

	Group statistics			t-test for equality of means				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t(35)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Fashion-piece-brand-fit	36	4.64	.68	14.407	.000*	1.64	1.41	1.87

*significant on the five percent significance level

One-sample t-tests for realism of post (Test value = 3)

Luxury brand

	Group statistics			t-test for equality of means				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t(32)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Realism of Instagram	33	4.48	.71	11.973	.000*	1.48	1.23	1.74
Realism of influencer	33	4.21	.93	7.509	.000*	1.21	.88	1.54
Realism of brand	33	4.03	1.19	4.993	.000*	1.03	.61	1.45

*significant on the five percent significance level

Mainstream brand

	Group statistics			t-test for equality of means				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t(35)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Realism of Instagram	36	4.58	.69	13.733	.000*	1.58	1.35	1.82
Realism of influencer	36	4.47	.74	11.998	.000*	1.47	1.22	1.72
Realism of brand	36	4.33	.83	9.661	.000*	1.33	1.05	1.61

*significant on the five percent significance level

Appendix III – Questionnaire

Introduction

Hi,

we are two Master students from the Stockholm School of Economics and currently writing our Master thesis in Business & Management. The thesis centers around social media. Since we are both from Germany, we conduct our study only on the German market.

The survey should not take longer than 8 minutes and your responses are completely anonymous. At the end of the survey you have the chance to win a voucher from the fashion brand ZARA.

Please note that the study is **only** addressed to females living in or coming from Germany that have an Instagram account.

If you have any questions about the survey, please email us: 41401@student.hhs.se (Carlotta) or 41397@student.hhs.se (Tabea).

Thank you very much for your participation. We really appreciate your input!

Carlotta & Tabea

Target group

Do you have an Instagram account?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Are you female?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Do you live in Germany and/or are of German origin?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

Post

On the next page you will see a sponsored Instagram post from the German fashion influencer **Caro Daur**.

Caro Daur, 24 years old and from Hamburg, is one of the most influential fashion Instagrammers in Germany. With more than 2 million followers on Instagram she is even one of the top fashion influencers worldwide.

Please imagine seeing the following post in the Instagram app on your smartphone.

Note: You will only see the post once and you are not allowed to go back. You won't be able to click through the next page before 10 seconds have passed. Please study the post in detail, i.e. read the caption (text) carefully and have a close look at the image.

For each of the eight following questions please assess to what extent you agree with the statements.

Group 1: Simple sponsored post Armani



Dependent Variables

What is your impression of the fashion **brand** in the Instagram post?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
My impression of the fashion brand is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My impression of the fashion brand is pleasant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My impression of the fashion brand is favourable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What is the likelihood that you would buy the sweater in the Instagram post?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
It is likely that I would buy the sweater.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is possible that I would buy the sweater.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is probable that I would buy the sweater.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What is your impression of the **influencer** Caro Daur?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
My impression of the influencer Caro Daur is good.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My impression of the influencer Caro Daur is pleasant.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My impression of the influencer Caro Daur is favourable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What do you think about the post in Caro Daur's Instagram feed?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
I like the post in Caro Daur's Instagram feed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I associate positive things with the post in Caro Daur's Instagram feed.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What is the likelihood that you would engage with this post on Instagram?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
It is likely that I would like and/or comment and/or share this post on Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is possible that I would like and/or comment and/or share this post on Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
It is probable that I would like and/or comment and/or share this post on Instagram.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How credible is the influencer Caro Daur to you?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
The influencer Caro Daur is credible.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer Caro Daur is believable.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The influencer Caro Daur is honest.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What do you think about the quality of the sweater in the Instagram post?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
The sweater is of high quality.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How would you feel about owning and wearing the sweater in the Instagram post?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
I would feel better off than others.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I would feel I had high status.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I could signal more prestige.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Instagram

How often do you use Instagram?

- ☐ More than 10 times per day
- ☐ 6-10 times per day
- ☐ 2-5 times per day
- ☐ 1 time per day
- ☐ A few times per week
- ☐ 1 time per week
- ☐ A few times per month
- ☐ 1 time per month
- ☐ Other

Do you sometimes press the **like**-button for posts on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you sometimes **comment** on posts on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you sometimes **share** posts on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

To which categories do most of the profiles you follow on Instagram belong? Please choose up to three categories.

- ☐ Food
- ☐ Fitness
- ☐ Fashion
- ☐ Beauty
- ☐ Travel
- ☐ Interior
- ☐ Art
- ☐ Animals
- ☐ TV/movie
- ☐ Memes
- ☐ Leisure activities
- ☐ News
- ☐ Politics
- ☐ Business
- ☐ Other

How many **influencers** do you approximately follow on Instagram?

- ☐ More than 100
- ☐ 51-100
- ☐ 26-50
- ☐ 11-25
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 0

How many **fashion brands** do you approximately follow on Instagram?

- ☐ More than 100
- ☐ 51-100
- ☐ 26-50
- ☐ 11-25
- ☐ 6-10
- ☐ 1-5
- ☐ 0

Influencer

Have you heard of Caro Daur before the study?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you follow Caro Daur on Instagram?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

What is your opinion about Caro Daur?

- ☐ One of my favorites
- ☐ Very Good
- ☐ Good
- ☐ Fair
- ☐ Indifferent
- ☐ Poor
- ☐ I don't know her enough in order to have an opinion about her.

How often do you try/order clothes because you have seen them at a fashion influencer on Instagram?

- ☐ A few times per week
- ☐ 1 time per week
- ☐ A few times per month
- ☐ 1 time per month
- ☐ A few times per year
- ☐ 1-2 times per year
- ☐ More rarely
- ☐ Never

Fashion

To what extent do you agree with the following statement?

	Completely disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Completely agree
I am interested in fashion.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

When you buy a sweater, about how much does it typically cost?

- ☐ More than 150€
- ☐ 101€-150€
- ☐ 76€-100€
- ☐ 51€-75€
- ☐ 25€-50€
- ☐ Less than 25€

Manipulation Check

From which brand was the sweater depicted in the post?

- ☐ Armani
- ☐ Zara
- ☐ Gucci
- ☐ H&M

Who designed the sweater depicted in the post?

- ☐ The fashion brand
- ☐ Caro Daur
- ☐ Caro Daur together with the head designer of the fashion brand
- ☐ Caro Daur together with her followers

Have you seen this post on Instagram before the survey?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Demographics

How old are you? Please state using only numbers.

Lottery

The survey is almost done. Among all participants that took part in our study, we will raffle a voucher from ZARA as soon as the survey is closed. In order to participate, you just need to enter your e-mail address below.

If you are the lucky winner, we will contact you via your e-mail address.

Good luck!

Do you want to participate in the lottery?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please enter your e-mail address below.

Appendix IV – Hypotheses testing data main study

Independent sample t- tests for attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention (brand design vs. influencer design)

Luxury brand

		Group statistics			Levene's test		t-test for equality of means					
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p	t	df	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Brand design	48	4.26	1.65	5.187	.024	-.602	70.372	.549	-.16	-.69	.37
	Influencer design	131	4.42	1.32								
Brand attitude	Brand design	48	4.72	1.16	.009	.925	.570	177	.569	.12	-.28	.51
	Influencer design	131	4.60	1.20								
Purchase intention	Brand design	48	2.72	1.66	2.327	.129	.195	177	.846	.05	-.44	.54
	Influencer design	131	2.67	1.41								

Mainstream brand

		Group statistics			Levene's test		t-test for equality of means				
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	p	t(183)	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Brand design	42	3.87	1.65	1.253	.264	-1.590	.114	-.42	-.95	.10
	Influencer design	143	4.29	1.48							
Brand attitude	Brand design	42	4.57	1.40	1.552	.214	-1.458	.147	-.33	-.77	.12
	Influencer design	143	4.90	1.24							
Purchase intention	Brand design	42	3.28	1.58	.160	.690	.163	.871	0.5	-.50	.59
	Influencer design	143	3.23	1.56							

ANOVA on attitude towards the post, brand attitude and purchase intention

		ANOVA		
		df	F	p
Attitude towards the post	Between groups	5	.421	.834
	Within groups	268		
Brand attitude	Between groups	5	1.353	.243
	Within groups	268		
Purchase intention	Between groups	5	2.159	.059
	Within groups	268		

Post-hoc Scheffe tests for influencer design vs. influencer and head designer design

Luxury brand

		Group statistics			Post-hoc Scheffe test			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Influencer design	48	4.51	1.11	.999	.13	-.88	1.14
	Influencer and head designer design	41	4.38	1.40				
Brand attitude	Influencer design	48	4.71	1.10	.996	.16	-.72	1.03
	Influencer and head designer design	41	4.55	1.19				
Purchase intention	Influencer design	48	2.53	1.38	.982	-.27	-1.34	.80
	Influencer and head designer design	41	2.80	1.33				

Mainstream brand

		Group statistics			Post-hoc Scheffe test			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Influencer design	61	4.43	1.43	.940	.32	-.63	1.25
	Influencer and head designer design	44	4.11	1.43				
Brand attitude	Influencer design	61	5.01	1.16	.857	.34	-.47	1.15
	Influencer and head designer design	44	4.67	1.37				
Purchase intention	Influencer design	61	3.28	1.58	1.000	.01	-.98	1.00
	Influencer and head designer design	44	3.27	1.66				

Post-hoc Scheffe tests for influencer design vs. follower design

Luxury brand

		Group statistics			Post-hoc Scheffe test			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Influencer design	48	4.51	1.11	.998	.15	-.85	1.16
	Influencer and follower design	42	4.36	1.49				
Brand attitude	Influencer design	48	4.71	1.10	.992	.19	-.68	1.05
	Influencer and follower design	42	4.52	1.34				
Purchase intention	Influencer design	48	2.53	1.38	.999	-.15	-1.21	.91
	Influencer and follower design	42	2.68	1.54				

Mainstream brand

		Group statistics			Post-hoc Scheffe test			
		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	p	Mean diff.	LLCI	ULCI
Attitude towards the post	Influencer design	61	4.43	1.43	.999	.14	-.84	1.11
	Influencer and follower design	38	4.29	1.64				
Brand attitude	Influencer design	61	5.01	1.16	1.000	.04	-.81	.88
	Influencer and follower design	38	4.97	1.20				
Purchase intention	Influencer design	61	3.28	1.58	.998	.16	-.88	1.19
	Influencer and follower design	38	3.12	1.44				