

“It was super easy and quick to do”: Comparing the Use of Evaluative Language in Life-Style
and Fashion Influencers’ Sponsored and Non-Sponsored Instagram Content

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March 2020

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School of Language and Translation Studies/ Faculty of Humanities

RIIKONEN, ALISA: "It was super easy and quick to do": Comparing the Use of Evaluative
Language in Life-Style and Fashion Influencers' Sponsored and Non-
Sponsored Instagram Content

MA Thesis 66pp., appendices 11pp.

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Abstract

Social media platforms have created a new profession, a social media influencer. Influencers earn their income by working together with brands or companies and advertising products to their followers. It is argued that influencers can manipulate the followers' impression of the advertised item, and thus affect their purchase intention. When influencers evaluate products on their content, they can "impose" their ideas and opinions to their followers, who value and trust the influencer and what they say. The purpose of this thesis is to examine and compare the use of evaluative language in Instagram influencers' content. The research questions are as follows: How does the evaluative use of attitude differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts, if any? What kinds of engagement resources are used, and how do they differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts? How are graduation values applied in the content, and how does the use differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts? If there are notable differences in the use of the three domains of the framework between the three types of posts, where do they stem from?

Martin and White's appraisal framework is used as a base for the analysis. Each domain of the framework, attitude, engagement and graduation, are considered, in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the language on this type of content. Furthermore, the targets of attitude and graduation are analyzed. The material is collected from four individual English-speaking influencers, who focus on fashion, beauty and life-style content. The material is divided into three even groups, sponsored, non-sponsored and ambiguous content, to provide an impartial comparison of the language used in the content groups.

I hypothesized that sponsored content would involve more positive attitude, expansive engagement and up-scaling graduation than the other two content groups. While for the most part the language in all three content groups is similar, the results show the hypothesis to be partially correct, as sponsored content is found to involve more persuasive language in comparison to the other groups. However, it is impossible to know if the differences found are intentional, but they may influence the readers differently regardless of intention. In addition, more studies are required to see how the readers recognize or interpret such language in the content.

Keywords: social media, influencer, Instagram, social media marketing, appraisal framework, attitude, engagement, graduation

Table of Contents

1 Introduction.....	1
2 Social Media, Influencers and Advertisement Recognition	4
2.1 Social media platforms	4
2.2 Influencers and influencer marketing	5
3 Theoretical Background.....	10
3.1 Appraisal Framework.....	10
3.1.1 Attitude	10
3.1.2 Engagement.....	14
3.1.3 Graduation.....	17
3.2 Past Research	19
4 Material	22
4.1 The structure of an Instagram post.....	22
4.2 The influencers.....	23
4.3 The data.....	25
5 Methods.....	27
5.1 Multimodality in the present study	29
6 Results.....	31
6.1 Attitude	31
6.2 Engagement.....	41
6.3 Graduation.....	44
7 Analysis of the Results.....	49
7.1 Attitude	49
7.2 Engagement.....	52
7.3 Graduation.....	55
8 Discussion	58
9 Conclusion	61
List of References	64

Appendices

Appendix 1: Number of Attitude Values

Appendix 2: Number of Graduation Values

Appendix 3: Sample of the Data

Appendix 4: Finnish summary

List of Figures

Figure 1. The Engagement System (Martin and White 2005, 134).....	16
Figure 2. The layout of an Instagram post (Wood 2019e).....	22
Figure 3. Example of the analysis of an Instagram post.....	28
Figure 4. Percentages of Affect Values	32
Figure 5. Percentages of Judgement Values	35
Figure 6. Percentages of Appreciation Values.....	38
Figure 7. The Percentages of Graduation Values	45

1 Introduction

Advertising is increasingly embedded into our lives and daily media consumption. In addition to billboards, internet advertisements and television commercials, brands have found other, more covert ways to promote their products, for example advertising through social media. Social media is a significant part of today's culture, especially among the younger generations. The emergence of social media platforms has given rise to online celebrities, or *social media influencers*. These influencers have often managed to gather a large enough following for brands to offer sponsorships, which allow them to earn their livelihoods by creating content. In short, content creation involves taking photos or videos of different areas of interests (e.g. fashion, travel, video games) and uploading them on various social media platforms. Via sponsored content, companies and brands can reach consumers without them necessarily noticing, as they are actively engaged with the entertainment value of the content.

While there are guidelines for disclosures of sponsored content, I believe it is important to further study the content and language in it. Especially as the followers often value the influencers' opinions and trust that they would not take sponsorships with products they do not 'believe' in. In this study, I set to explore how and what influencers evaluate in their sponsored and non-sponsored content. Evaluation is an important part of discourse, as it is difficult or even impossible to communicate without evaluations or judgement (Bednarek 2006, 4-5). As the base for this study, I apply the appraisal framework by Martin and White (2005). This framework was chosen as it has been previously successfully applied in advertisement language analysis (cf. eg. Križan 2016, Ho and Suen 2017). I will compare the use of attitude, engagement and graduation between sponsored and non-sponsored posts, as well as those posts, in which the content is ambiguous. I aim to find out whether sponsored content is distinguishable from the other content by the above-mentioned values or if the influencers are successful in creating advertisements which offer the viewer a similar experience as the rest of the content. In addition, analyzing the evaluative language in social media content may reveal attempts to influence consumer behavior.

I hypothesize that sponsored content includes more positive evaluations, and that the positive evaluations are up-scaled more in comparison to the other two groups of content. In addition, I hypothesize that influencers use expansive engagement resources on sponsored posts more than non-sponsored, to make the opinions and evaluations presented more personal and

‘authentic’. To find out if these hypotheses hold true, I have generated the following research question for the study.

R1: How does the evaluative use of attitude differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts, if any?

R2: What kinds of engagement resources are used, and how do they differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts?

R3: How are graduation values applied in the content, and how does the use differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts?

R4: If there are notable differences in the use of the three domains of the framework between the three types of posts, where do they stem from?

In addition, I will look into how the targets of attitudinal assessment and the targets of graduation differ across the material. It is of interest to see what the targets of the evaluative language are, as these are what the audience will form their opinion on as well. For example, if sponsored and non-sponsored content have the same amount of positive and negative evaluation, in sponsored posts the positive evaluation might be reserved for the advertised item, while products in non-sponsored ones have both negative and positive evaluations. This difference may not be noticeable to the audience, but it might affect their impressions nonetheless.

The material used in the analysis is collected from four female beauty and fashion influencers’ Instagram accounts, and formed into a micro corpus. The chosen influencers are at varying stages of their career, some having just started, while others have a decade of experience. In addition, the number of followers, which in a way works as a measure of success, varies among the influencers. These influencers were chosen in order to achieve a comprehensive and reliable results and analysis, which within the scope of this thesis could otherwise be challenging to achieve.

This thesis will begin with a brief overview of social media, influencers, and influencer marketing. I will discuss the origins of social media influencers and how the attitudes towards influencer marketing may affect the content produced. Then, I will present Martin and White’s appraisal framework and explain why this approach was chosen for the present study (section 3). Instagram posts were chosen as the main material in this study, as Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms. The textual content on the platform tends to be relatively short, which allowed a larger data sample than other social media platforms. In addition, the content is available for anyone, and sponsorships are relatively common on the platform. The

material section provides an in-depth description of one Instagram post, as well as a short introduction of each of the four influencers whose posts were analyzed.

The material was analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. A more detailed description of the methods is provided in section 5. The results are presented in section 6, with an explanation of the analysis and examples of the material. Sections 7 and 8 consists of a more in-depth analysis and discussion of the results. Finally, the limitations of the current study are described, and suggestions for future research will be given in the concluding section 9.

2 Social Media, Influencers and Advertisement Recognition

In order to understand the material and the results of this study, it is important to know the culture and history behind influencers and their content. In the following sections, I will briefly introduce those social media platforms that are relevant to this study. Then, I will explain how influencers advertise products, followed by reflections on how this advertising is received by the audience. Prior to this, however, I offer a few philosophical ideas on social media and advertising, which provide more depth to the topic at hand.

In his audio essay, Stephen West discusses Jean Baudrillard's views in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994) and how they reflect in today's society. West especially emphasizes how, according to Baudrillard, the media works as a simulation. "A simulation is an imitation of how a real world process or system operates over time" (West 2018). Baudrillard theorizes, that the media presents consumers the symbols and ideals, which they use to identify themselves with (ibid.). In other words, meaning and identity are linked to media. How does this then relate to social media? Social media makes it difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between real and ideal (or simulated) moments or experiences shared by others. Social media allows people to represent themselves and their image as they desire. Thus, I suggest that the life presented online is often an ideal version, or in Baudrillard's words, *a sign* or a symbol of the reality (ibid.). I argue that consumers of social media see these signs, these ideal 'realities,' and wish to attain them themselves (ibid.). They may believe that having the item corresponds with the happiness portrayed in the advert or post (Moser 2015, 106). Thus, advertising takes advantage of the signs, and offers the means to achieve the ideal. As technological media expands, advertising becomes more and more sociologically influential (Collins 2017, 392). Social media makes it easy for influencers, who are seen as relatable 'normal' people, to promote life-style 'goals' and, consequently, products. In sponsored content, the sign value is discreetly attached to the advertised product. Križan (2016, 200) suggests that in addition to what to buy, advertisements tell consumers how to behave and fit into society. Thus, sponsored content on social media can have a powerful effect on consumer behavior. This understanding gives the present study a critical point of view. Being aware of the power of social media advertising provides more insight to the following sections.

2.1 Social media platforms

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram, Youtube, and Twitter, are considered a prominent part of everyday media consumption, especially among the younger generations.

Undoubtedly the most known and used social media platform is Facebook. Despite its relatively late release in 2006, Facebook has been an influential contributor to the rise and expansion of social media, as it has introduced the masses to online content sharing. Currently, Facebook is the most popular social media platform in the world (Statista 2020).

The video sharing website Youtube has become one of the largest websites in the world after its emergence in 2005, with over 2 billion monthly visits by logged-in users (youtube.com/about/press 2019). Registered users can upload their own videos and watch, comment and follow the content of others. Youtube has been a key component in the emergence of a popular phenomenon called video blogs, or *vlogs*. Like written blogs, vlogs can consist of anything, from reviewing and testing new products, or discussing current issues, to short snippets of the user's own daily life. This new form of media entertainment quickly became monetized and consecutively created a new line of work, professional online *content creator*.

Creators and "casual users" alike rarely stick to just one social media platform. The photo-sharing mobile application Instagram, now owned by Facebook, was launched in 2010 and it quickly became a popular platform, gaining over 14 million registered users during its first year (instagram-press.com 2011). Today, the application has over 1 billion monthly active users (instagram-press.com 2019). The main content on Instagram consists of photos and snapshots, while the application supports uploading short video clips as well. Users are able to edit their pictures with colored filters and add written captions below the images. While the main form of the content differs from that on Youtube, the subject is often similar, with photos and captions about the creator's life, recent new products they have liked, or issues they are passionate about. Instagram provides the creators an additional, comparatively low-bar channel to connect with their followers, while the followers get access to more content and insight into their idols' lives. To follow and interact with an account, one has to register as a user. However, most influencers' pages are public, which means the content can be viewed by anyone. The material used in this study is collected from Instagram rather than Youtube. Instagram posts are more concise and do not require transcribing which, in the scope of this study, allows a more diverse data and thus more reliable results. It should be noted that, due to the scope of the study, the visual aspects of the posts could not be included in the analysis.

2.2 Influencers and influencer marketing

Online content creators can have influence over certain communities who share common interests (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014, 592). Creators can be considered as *opinion leaders*, who

“interpret media information they receive and then pass it to others, thus increasing its influence” (ibid.). These creators, often referred to as internet celebrities or social media influencers, can have millions of followers across various social media sites, and thus have power to affect their consumer behavior. All influencers are content creators, but not all content creators are influencers. However, in this paper the term *influencer* will henceforth be applied to refer to individuals who create online content. While this definition does not necessarily align with the commonplace definition, it is an essential adjustment for the sake of clarity. Using a single term enhances uniformity and clearly differentiates influencers from those who consume the created content, i.e. followers or consumers.

As social media platforms and their user-bases have grown, so has the popularity of professional online influencers. This has not gone unnoticed by different companies and brands, which constantly seek new avenues to reach potential customers. For years, Youtube has displayed advertisements on videos, from which the uploaders have received a certain percentage of revenue. Following this, personal brand collaborations and sponsors have helped many individuals to turn their hobby of content creation into a profitable career on other social media platforms as well. Many influencers, especially in the fashion and beauty ‘genre’, have based their content around product reviews and opinions. This presents brands an ‘organic template’, as it were, for product placement. Influencers create appealing content that can appear spontaneous and natural to the readers, which benefits the brands (Nur Leila et al. 2018, 6). In addition, influencers have often already established a niche target audience, which makes it easy for brands to find and have contact with their desired demographic. Advertising through sponsored content and collaborations is called *influencer marketing*. It is defined “as a process of identifying and activating individuals, who have an influence over a specific target audience or medium, in order to be part of a brand's campaign towards increased reach, sales, or engagement” (Sudha and Sheena 2017, 16). Multiple studies have shown that influencer marketing is beneficial and worthwhile. One study showed that 25% of its participants had purchased products which their favorite influencers had recommended (Gümüş 2018). Another study found that online content has a significant effect on consumers’ behavior (Sudha and Sheena 2017). Finally, according to the influencer marketing platform Linqia (2016, 2), 94% of the marketers who applied influencer marketing found it effective. The success of influencer marketing may be due to the fact that advertising from companies or brands is more easily recognizable and thus easier to resist. This again, gives more power to the influencer. It should be noted, that often influencers have started making content prior to receiving sponsorships, and thus begun building a trustworthy relationship with their audience by presenting genuine

opinions and experiences, without receiving monetary compensation. Influencers can also receive gifted products from brands. These are sent with no expectations or requirements, as the brands simply hope that the influencer will test, enjoy and mention the product in their content. In addition, most influencers create non-sponsored content along sponsored content, and often explicitly state when a product they are talking about is not paid for.

Online influencers' popularity may be due to the fact that they are seen as ordinary, relatable individuals. This increases the trust between the influencer and the follower, and the influencer's opinions are considered honest, trustworthy and genuine (Dhanesh and Duthler 2019, 3). The audience might be more eager to follow the example or listen to and act on the recommendations of an influencer, rather than that of a more traditional celebrity (ibid.). Successful advertisements use language to manipulate consumers' behavior, thoughts and emotions (Križan 2016, 200). Thus, sponsored content poses a problem, as it can be seen as manipulative. While celebrity endorsements are not a new phenomenon, sponsored content from influencers has been received with mixed responses, and it can hold a certain stigma in the audience's eyes. When the content has been paid for by a certain brand, the sincerity of the influencer's actions and opinions is challenged. Because social media is widely popular with the youth, concerns have emerged for whether or not the young audience can distinguish genuine opinions from those that include sponsorships.

It is not uncommon for brands to require certain scripted phrases to be included in the sponsored content. Depending on the content and the audience, distinguishing between scripted and genuine opinions can be impossible. To protect consumers from deceptive advertising, and to improve transparency, the International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network (ICPEN) and the American Federal Trade Commission (FTC) have created guidelines for sponsored online content. Influencers must visibly state if they have received any compensation for the post or if an item presented is gifted (FTC 2017, n.p.). Failure to follow the set guidelines may have legal consequences. Social media as an industry is constantly evolving, which leads to quickly changing guidelines as well. For example, in 2019, the FTC required Google and Youtube to pay \$170 million as a settlement for violating the COPPA Rule (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act) (FTC 2019, n.p.). As a result, creators are required to label their content as child-friendly or not and collecting data on content that is aimed at children will be withheld (ibid.), which may result in lower revenues. Similar changes could happen on any platform in the future. It remains to be seen how this will affect the created content.

Stubb and Colliander (2019, 218) found that consumers were more likely to perceive a product placement as advertising when an explicit disclosure of sponsorship was included, than

when the disclosure was impartial. This shows that the set guidelines are effective. When consumers recognize content as advertisements, they are able to apply *coping strategies* which help to resist the persuasive nature of the advert (Dhanesh and Duthler 2019, 4). Influencer marketing can be considered a type of *native advertising* (ibid.). “Native advertising is broadly defined as branded content that is assimilated into or integrated with the design of the platform” (ibid.). According to Evans et al. (2017, 8), “the covert nature of native advertising might prevent consumers from recognizing it as advertising and applying subsequent coping mechanisms.” Thus, it is in the interest of the brands to have the sponsored content be authentic and similar to the non-sponsored content. The aim of social media advertising is to construct positive opinions on companies and brands with the help of entertainment (Shröder 2017, 122). Brands turn to influencers to get their products promoted seemingly fairly and honestly. Influencers use personality, playful language and humor to promote brands in a way that the advert feels entertaining to followers (Nur Leila et al. 2018, 10).

Evans et al. (2017) studied how consumers’ recognition of advertising content, and thus willingness to spread electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), varies according to the disclosure of the possible sponsorship. Word-of-mouth refers to “consumer communications about existing products” (Richins 1983, 69), or in this case, about brands or influencers. Evans et al. (2017, 22) found that recognizing an Instagram post as advertising resulted in negative attitudes and decrease in eWOM. In Stubb and Colliander (2019, 218), consumers viewed both the product review and the influencer as less trustworthy when the post included an explicit mention or no mention of a sponsorship, and more trustworthy when a disclosure of impartiality was included. The way the influencer is perceived by their audience is crucial for their success. As stated above, product reviews make up a big part of the content, especially in the fashion and beauty genre. From the audience’s point of view, suddenly being paid to talk about certain brands can diminish the influencer’s authenticity, and thus make them less relatable and likable. If the influencer is seen in a negative light, the audience can dwindle or disappear altogether. For example, in 2017, Zoë ‘Zoella’ Sugg released an advent calendar, which many deemed overpriced. This started a plethora of negative articles and other media content about the product and Sugg herself (Eordogh, 2017). While Sugg does still have a large following, the scandal continues to have an effect, especially on potential new followers. Blatant or frequent sponsored content can cause the audience to see the influencer as insincere, or “money-hungry” for exploiting their followers as a means to earn more, and thus fend off viewers. At the same time, influencers need sponsorships to gain their livelihood and to be able to continue providing content for the audience. Thus, the influencer faces a dilemma: How to find the balance between

keeping the audience happy with an appropriate amount of sponsored content, while earning enough to be able to continue creating more content? Hence, I believe that in order to keep this balance, the influencers modify their sponsored content so that it seems less like an advert, and blends in with the non-sponsored content.

Section 2 provided an overview of social media, influencers and influencer marketing. It is important to understand the reasons behind the structure and content of the material used in the present study, in order to accurately analyse the material and interpret the results. The next section will introduce the theoretical background of the study.

3 Theoretical Background

In this section, I will introduce the main theoretical background for the present study: the appraisal framework. The framework offers a comprehensive method for analyzing and exploring different methods the influencers may use in sponsored content. For example, to make the product seem more appealing, they may emphasize positive features, or to hide the advertisement aspect and make the post more similar to non-sponsored content, they might explicitly state a feature as their own opinion. I will briefly introduce the framework's origins before explaining the main features of the framework in more detail. Following the appraisal framework -section, I will present past studies that have applied the framework or dealt with social media advertising.

3.1 Appraisal Framework

Language is used to evaluate, take a stance, create textual personas, and maintain interpersonal positions and relationships (White 2015, n.p.). J. R. Martin and P. R. R. White (2005) have developed the appraisal framework as a tool for analyzing this type of language use. The framework's roots are in Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to SFL, all utterances have three meanings – interpersonal, ideational, and textual (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2014). Ideational meaning deals with how the experience is represented, interpersonal meaning refers to the meaning as an exchange, and textual meaning deals with how the utterance is organized (ibid.). The appraisal framework further develops the concept of interpersonal meanings by focusing on three features: attitudinal evaluations, engagement, and graduation (Martin and White 2005). The framework “is concerned with the resources, or alternative options, by which producers of texts create and negotiate intersubjective positions for themselves and their audiences” (Tan 2010, 92). In the following subsections, I will explain the three domains of the appraisal framework in more detail.

3.1.1 Attitude

The first domain, attitude focuses on utterances which can be understood to include positive or negative assessment of a person, object, situation, or action (White 2015, n.p.). It is further divided into three sub-types of feeling, *affect*, *judgement*, and *appreciation* (Martin and White 2005, 35). These three sub-types represent semantic regions referred to as emotion, ethics, and aesthetics (Martin and White 2005, 42). According to Martin and White, “attitudinal meanings tend to spread out and colour a phase of discourse as speakers and writers take up a stance

oriented to **affect, judgement or appreciation**” (2005, 43; emphasis as in the original). In addition, these meanings are gradable, in that they can be intensified or compared (Martin and White 2005, 44).

3.1.1.1 Affect

The first sub-type, *affect*, involves positive and negative emotional reactions (Martin and White 2005, 42). Realizations of attitude can occur in many different grammatical structures. Affect can be realized as qualities (“a *sad* boy”), processes (“he *cried*”) or comments (“*sadly*, he left”) (Martin and White 2005, 46). In addition, usual grammatical metaphors, nominalized realizations of qualities (*happiness, sorrow*) and processes (*grief, sobs*) are recognized as instances of affect (ibid.). Martin and White (2005, 48-52) identify four sub-types of affect: *Un/happiness* deals with emotions “of the heart” such as sadness, love, and hate. *In/security* involves emotions that deal with peace and anxiety. It can be realized with words like *confident* or *shaking*. *Dis/satisfaction* involves “feelings of achievement and frustration in relation to the activities in which we are engaged” (Martin and White 2005, 50). It can be expressed with phrases such as *pleased* or *sick of*. Finally, *dis/inclination* refers to the feelings of intention, for example, *I fear* and *I wish*.

Texts indicate these positive or negative stances either through the writer’s own emotional responses, or how the emotions of a third party actor are described (White 2002, n.p.). Usually phenomena that create positive emotions are seen as positive, and those that cause negative emotion are seen as negative (White 2015, n.p.). However, the reactions depend on the reader’s experience (ibid).

In addition, the writer can choose between *authorial affect* and *non-authorial affect*. With authorial affect the writer shows their own emotional reaction, and thus takes responsibility for the attitudinal value assessment (White 2015, n.p.). With non-authorial affect, the writer does not take that responsibility, and connects the assessment to an outside actor (ibid.). For example, “I love this time of year” (Sugg 2019i) is authorial, while “your favourite song” (Sugg 2019i) is non-authorial. In order for the affectual evaluation to have any weight, the reader must feel that the writer’s assessment is somehow important, valid, or understandable (ibid.). The writer attempts to create a relationship with the reader, so that the reader agrees with or at least sympathizes with them (ibid.). Using authorial affect, the influencer can affect the reader’s interpretation of the text, and consequential feelings towards the subject more effectively than with non-authorial affect.

3.1.1.2 Judgement

The second sub-type, *judgement*, involves language use which criticizes or praises the behavior - actions, utterances, beliefs, motivations - of individuals or groups (Martin and White 2005, 42). Realizations of judgement are further divided into judgements of *social esteem* and judgements of *social sanction* (Martin and White 2005, 52). Social esteem involves an individual's *normality* (how un/usual one is), *capacity* (how capable one is) and *tenacity* (how determined one is), while social sanction deals with *veracity* (how truthful one is) and *propriety* (how ethical one is) (ibid.).

Judgment of social esteem either lowers or elevates an individual's worth or respect in the community (White 2002, n.p.). It can be expressed with phrases such as *skilled*, *lazy* or *traditional*. Instances of social sanction involve language use which expresses the writer's view on the dis/approval of the behavior of some human actor, based on, for example, legal, religious, or moral norms (ibid.). Judgement of social sanction can be expressed with phrases like *immoral*, *caring* and *honest* (White 2015, n.p.).

Similarly to affect, there are positive judgements (admiration) and negative judgements (criticism) (Martin and White 2005, 52). White (2015, n.p.) notes that people judge others' morality, legality, abilities and normality in reference to their own experiences, expectations, beliefs, and the culture they live in. Thus, a single trait is never inherently negative or positive. For example, the word *slow* can be considered either positive or negative, depending on the context and the reader.

3.1.1.3 Appreciation

The third and final sub-type of attitude, *appreciation*, deals with the evaluations of aesthetic features of people, objects and states of affairs in reference to the social values in a given environment (Martin and White 2005, 43). Common examples of appreciation involve phrases such as *beautiful*, *striking* and *flawed*. Unlike judgement, it does not involve assessment of behaviour, yet a person can be 'appreciated' in situations where the assessment does not directly focus on in/correctness (White 2015, n.p.). Like the previous two sub-types of attitude, appreciation can be further divided into *reaction* (does it catch attention or please), *composition* (how balanced and complex it is), and *valuation* (how innovative, authentic etc. it is) (Martin and White 2005, 56). In addition, evaluations of appreciation too can be either positive or negative (ibid.). Reaction can be realized with words such as *fine*, *boring*, or *interesting*; composition can be expressed with words like *balanced*, *elegant* or *plain*; and valuation can be indicated with words like *innovative*, *dated* or *worthless* (ibid.) Reaction and affect are strongly

linked, and thus “it is important to distinguish between construing the emotions someone feels (**affect**) and ascribing the power to trigger such feelings to things” (Martin and White 2005, 57; emphasis as in the original). Valuations have a similar connection to judgements, and thus it is also important to differentiate between evaluations of objects and the judgement of behaviour (Martin and White 2005, 58). In addition, Martin and White suggest that judgement and appreciation could be considered as institutionalized feelings, “which take us out of our everyday common sense world into the uncommon sense worlds of shared community values” (2005, 45). Thus, judgement modifies our feelings of how we should or should not behave, and appreciation modifies our feelings about how valuable things are (ibid.).

Appreciation and judgement are related in that both are presented as part of the assessed target (White 2015, n.p.). In comparison, affect values are more explicitly subjective as the writer takes on responsibility for the assessment (ibid.). Affect values are oriented more towards the appraiser, and judgement and appreciation values are oriented more towards the appraised (ibid.). As such, the appreciation and judgement values are more objectified and less personalising than affect (ibid.). Thus, when influencers use affect, they connect themselves personally to the evaluated object, more so than when using judgement or appreciation.

3.1.1.4 Inscribed and invoked attitude

The examples in the previous sections have mostly consisted of individual lexical items, such as *skillfully*. These explicit realizations are called *inscribed* attitude (Martin and White 2005, 61). However, it is possible to indicate attitudinal meanings more implicitly as well. For example, the word *achievement* could be considered a non-attitudinal description of an act of completion, but it does in fact include positive appreciation (Martin and White 2005, 64). These *invoked* instances of attitude can be seemingly factual descriptions which, depending on the reader’s cultural, social and ideological background, can trigger attitudinal values (White 2015, n.p.). Thus, they are sensitive to reader interpretation (ibid.). Martin and White suggest that instances of inscribed attitude act as “sign-posts” which tell the reader how to interpret the surrounding invoked attitude (2005, 63). Especially in short passages of text, such as the material of the present study, inscribed attitude may be usual, and heavily affect the reader’s attitude and interpretation. Therefore, both inscribed and invoked attitude will be analysed in the present study. However, due to the limitations of the scope, the possible differences in inscribed and invoked attitude between content groups cannot be closely examined.

3.1.2 Engagement

I now turn to the second domain of the framework, engagement. The appraisal framework follows Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's notions of dialogism and heteroglossia, which propose that all verbal communication is 'dialogic,' as the speaker or writer is always influenced by, refers to, or takes up something that has been said or written before, while anticipating possible or actual readers' or hearers' responses (Martin and White 2005, 92). Thus, the writer assumes a dialogistic position. There are two broad categories for analyzing dialogistic position: *intra-vocalization* and *extra-vocalization* (White 2015, n.p.). Presenting the writer's own voice involves intra-vocalization, while extra-vocalization refers to the process of including some outside voice in the text (ibid). The framework is concerned with the degree to which writers take into account the prior verbal material and how they *engage* with it (Martin and White 2005, 93). This includes whether the writer positions themselves against or for the prior utterance, or as being neutral (ibid.). In other words, does the writer align or disalign themselves with the prior utterance. By applying different engagement resources, influencers can align themselves and the reader more or less strongly with the proposition presented. In addition, it is of interest to see how the writer indicates what they expect the future readers' possible reactions and responses to be (ibid.).

To take a dialogistic position, the writer can utilize *engagement resources*. These include phrases which give the present text "a heteroglossic backdrop of prior utterances, alternative viewpoints and anticipated responses." (Martin and White 2005, 97). There are two broad categories for these resources: *Dialogic contractions* challenge or restrict alternative positions and voices, while *dialogic expansions* allow alternative positions and voices (Martin and White 2005, 102). Martin and White (2005, 97-98) offer a taxonomy for identifying various dialogistic positions with four key engagement resources: *disclaim*, *proclaim*, *entertain*, and *attribute*. I will first discuss in more detail those resources which are dialogistically contractive, and then those that are dialogistically expansive. Figure 1 shows the full engagement system.

3.1.2.1 Dialogistically contractive resources

There are two categories for dialogistically contractive resources: *disclaim* and *proclaim*. Disclaiming deals with directly rejecting or replacing some prior utterance (Martin and White 2005, 97). Thus, it is dialogically contractive. Disclaiming is further divided into *denial* and *counter-expectance*. With denial, also called negation, the writer presents others' positive positions, acknowledges them, and rejects them (Martin and White 2005, 118). Denial is simply expressed with negative phrases like *no*, *never* or *did not* (ibid.). For example, the utterance

“there is nothing wrong with meat, bread and potatoes” rejects the prior positive claim that there *is* something wrong with them (ibid.). Counter-expectance means presenting statements as replacing some expected prior utterance (Martin and White 2005, 120). It can be expressed via phrases such as *however*, *still*, *but*, and *surprisingly* (ibid.). Similarly to denials, they present a contrary position, which is then rejected (ibid.).

Proclaiming involves phrases which limit the alternative possibilities, rather than directly reject them (Martin and White 2005, 121). These resources represent some prior utterance as valid, and thus dismiss or weaken possible alternative positions (White 2002, n.p.). Proclaim resources are dialogistically contractive. There are three sub-types for proclaim: *concur*, *pronounce*, and *endorse* (Martin and White 2005, 98). Concur involves phrases “which overtly announce the addresser as agreeing with, or having the same knowledge as, some projected dialogic partner” (Martin and White 2005, 122). For example, *of course*, *not surprisingly* and *naturally* express concur (ibid.). Endorsement deals with phrases that present the prior information as correct, valid or undeniable (Martin and White 2005, 126). Verbal processes, such as *show*, *demonstrate* and *point out* are used to express endorsement. Finally, pronounce refers to phrases that include explicit authorial interventions or emphases (Martin and White 2005, 127). For example, *the truth is...* or *you must agree* are phrases which express pronouncement (ibid.). In addition, intensifying phrases like *really* or *indeed* have the same effect (ibid.).

3.1.2.2 Dialogistically expansive resources

There are two categories for dialogistically expansive resources: *entertaining* and *attribution*. Entertaining refers to phrases used by the writer to indicate that there are other possible positions, and thus they create space for other possibilities (Martin and White 2005, 104). Therefore, entertaining is dialogically expansive. It includes evidence, likelihood, and hearsay, which are all formulations that present the current proposal as one of many possibilities (White 2015, n.p.). Evidence can be presented with phrases such as *it seems* or *apparently*, likelihood with phrases like *I suppose*, and hearsay with phrases like *it's said* (ibid.). Often these phrases are interpreted to suggest that the writer is uncertain (ibid.).

Similarly, attribution represents the prior utterance as one of many possibilities (Martin and White 2005, 98). However, the difference lies in how this representation is construed. As mentioned earlier, dialogic positions can be divided into intra-vocalization and extra-vocalization. While the previous three engagement resources involve intra-vocalization, attribution involves extra-vocalizations (White 2015, n.p.). It involves phrases which, instead

of presenting the utterances as the thoughts of the authorial voice, associates them to an outside voice, expanding the dialogical position (Martin and White 2005, 111). Attribution has two subcategories. *Acknowledge* involves no covert indication of the authorial voice's stance (Martin and White 2005, 112). It is usually expressed with reporting verbs, like *report*, *say*, or *believe* (ibid.). The other sub-category is *distancing*, which involves phrases that explicitly distance the authorial voice from the utterance (Martin and White 2005, 113). It is mostly expressed with the verb *claim* (ibid.).

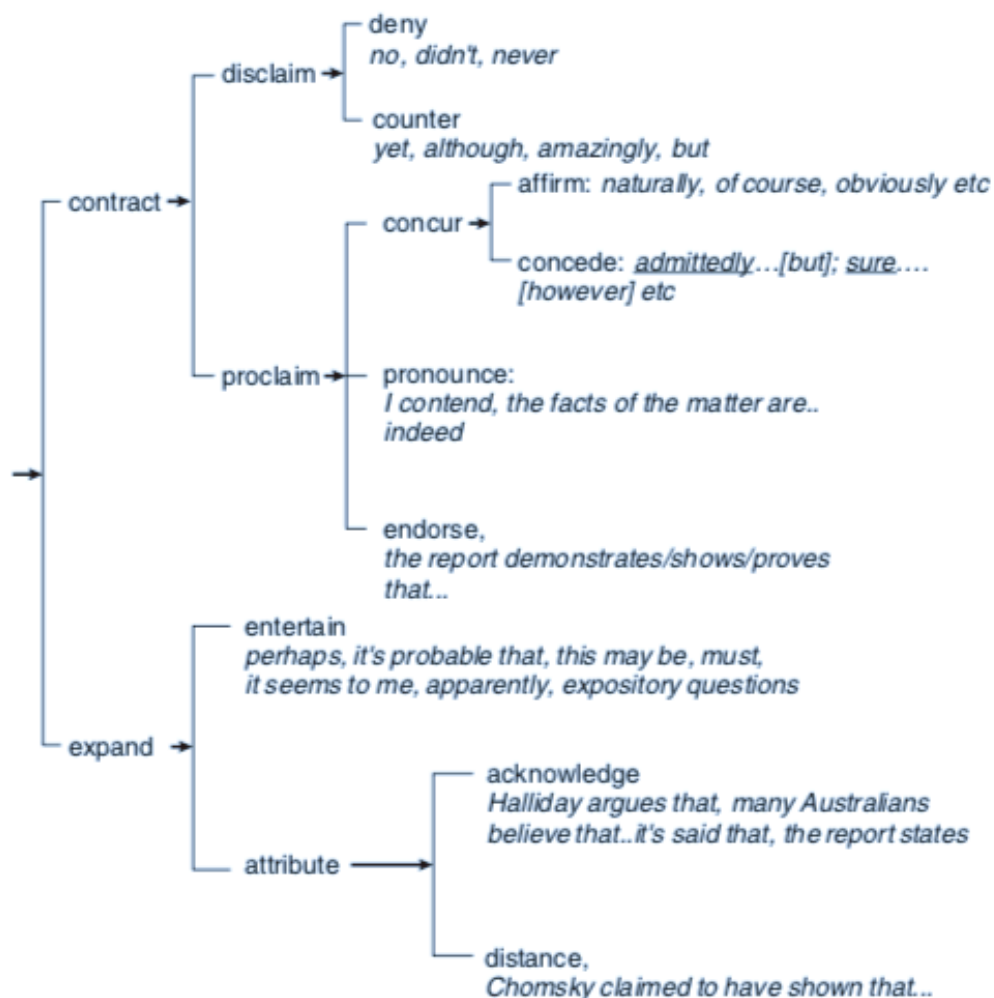


Figure 1. The Engagement System (Martin and White 2005, 134).

3.1.2.3 Bare assertions

As mentioned above, Martin and White build on Bakhtin's idea that all communication exists in a heteroglossic backdrop. They are interested in "whether the value position is presented as one which can be taken for granted for this particular audience, as one which is in some way novel, problematic or contentious, or as one which is likely to be questioned, resisted or rejected"

(2005, 93). The engagement resources above work to show how the writer acknowledges the existence of other viewpoints. Utterances without any explicit reference to other viewpoints are monoglossic *bare assertions*, which obviously contrast with heteroglossic (Martin and White 2005, 99). With bare assertions, the writer presents the utterances without having any alternative viewpoints which would be worth acknowledging or engaging with (Martin and White 2005, 99). For example, the monoglossic “It really works” does not leave room for alternatives, while the heteroglossic “I think it really works” does. Bare assertions have often been described as neutral or factual. However, within the view that all verbal communication exists in a heteroglossic background, Martin and White suggest that they are “just as intersubjectively loaded and hence ‘stanced’ as utterances including more overt markers of point of view or attitude” (2005, 94).

The dialogic positioning of a bare assertion can be construed as *taken-for-granted* (Martin and White 2005, 100). Using a bare assertion, the writer construes a reader, who shares the presented proposition with the writer, and thus does not see it as an issue (ibid). In turn, those readers who do not share the view are excluded from any solidarity and the discursive community created by the text (Martin and White 2005, 157). When a monoglossic utterance is not taken for granted, it is often followed by arguments that support the view point presented (Martin and White 2005, 101-102). Thus, the writer construes the bare assertion as a focal point for discussion or argumentation (ibid.)

Bare assertions are not collected for the analysis in the present study, but it is important to be aware of their existence and effect on the text and the reader. Influencers’ use of heteroglossia and bare assertions may differ between the groups of content. If so, these will be considered in the qualitative part of the analysis and in the discussion.

3.1.3 Graduation

The third and final domain of the appraisal theory is *graduation*. Under this header, the appraisal framework groups together phrases that emphasize or understate the utterance, such as *somewhat, slightly, very* and *kind of* (Martin and White 2005, 94). Like engagement, graduation resources derive from heteroglossia and dialogism, and they contribute to how the writer positions themselves and the given utterances (Martin and White 2005). Martin and White note that all attitudinal meanings can be graded in greater or lesser degrees of positivity or negativity (2005, 135). In addition, engagement values are gradable by the degree of the writer’s intensity or investment in the utterance (Martin and White 2005, 135-136). Therefore, “[i]t might be said that **attitude** and **engagement** are domains of **graduation** which differ

according to the nature of the meanings being scaled” (Martin and White 2005, 136; emphasis as in the original). Influencers can utilize graduation to give explicit and implicit emphasis on some phrases which they want the reader to deem more important or better, or to understate less desirable features or to appear more relatable. Graduation deals with the *force* and *focus* of the utterance (Martin and White 2005, 94).

Force refers to the scaling of intensity and amount (Martin and White 2005, 137). The assessment of qualities and processes is referred to as *intensification*, and the assessment of entities as *quantification* (Martin and White 2005, 140-141). Intensification is further divided into isolating and infusing. Isolating intensification is realized by an explicit individual word that either up- or downscales the main item (Martin and White 2005, 141). It can be used to scale qualities, verbal processes, and modalities, with phrases like *fairly quickly*, *really cute* and *very often*. In addition to the previous examples, isolating intensification can be realized with comparatives and superlatives, for example, *less miserable* (Martin and White 2005, 141-142). In infusing intensification, the intensity of up- or downscaling is merged with some item serving another semantic function (ibid.). The scaling of quality can be expressed with words like *warm*, *hot* or *scalding*; the scaling of process can be expressed with phrases like *it startled me*, *it frightened me*, or *it terrified me*; and the scaling of modality can be expressed with words such as *possible*, *certain*, *sometimes* or *often*. (Martin and White 2005, 144). In addition to isolating and infusing, intensification can also be expressed via repetition (ibid.). In the present study, it is relevant to consider yet another expression of intensity: words typed in full capital letters. Such typeface variation is a common feature in online written language. It is often used to either emphasize a certain word or a phrase, or to raise the volume of the writer. Thus, capitalization adds force to the phrase, and it is considered a form of infusing intensity.

The second type, quantification, deals with scaling according to amount, and according to extent and proximity of time and space (Martin and White 2005, 148-149). The object of quantification can be concrete or abstract (ibid.). Quantifications express imprecise accounts of number, mass or presence, for example, *few*, *small*, and *bright*. They can also convey extent in time and space, for example, *near*, *recent* or *long-lasting* (Martin and White 2005, 150-151). Like intensification, it is also possible to express quantification via isolation and infusion. (Martin and White 2005, 151). This is seen in phrases such as “he’s a *mountain* of a man”, in comparison to “he’s a *large* man” (Martin and White 2005, 152). Finally, metaphors can express quantification, as seen in the example above (ibid.).

In general, force either increases or decreases the volume of the attitude it interacts with (Martin and White 2005, 152). This has an effect on the writer’s alignment and solidarity (ibid.).

Hence, the writer can appear to be more committed to the value position when attitude has been up-scaled, and thus to strongly align the reader to that same position as well (ibid.) Down-scaling, in turn, can have the opposite effect and make the writer appear as less committed to the value position at hand (Martin and White 2005, 153).

The second type of graduation, focus, deals with graduation according to prototypicality (Martin and White 2005, 137). Focus concerns categories that are not scalable by intensity or amount, and thus graduation reconstructs these categories so that they can be scaled according to prototypicality (ibid.). For example, “they don’t play *real jazz*” (ibid.). Focus allows to either sharpen (up-scale) or soften (down-scale) the grading (Martin and White 2005, 138). In the utterance “a true friend” *friend* is up-scaled, while in the utterance “it was an apology of sorts” *apology* is down-scaled (ibid.). Some categories are scalable according to intensity and to their prototypicality (ibid.). This is seen in utterances “a *very red carpet*” and “a *genuinely red carpet*” (ibid.).

When prototypically gradable terms are non-attitudinal (for example *jazz*), the grading item itself often holds attitudinal values (Martin and White 2005, 139). In these situations, sharpening can often carry positive attitudinal assessment, while softening carries negative attitudinal assessment (ibid.). In contrast, if the term graded according to prototypicality is explicitly attitudinal, its meaning varies according to whether the grading is up- or down-scaling (ibid.). I have now explained the features of the appraisal framework relevant to the present study. Next, I will go over past research conducted on social media advertising, or that have applied the appraisal framework.

3.2 Past Research

As social media influencers and their content are a relatively recent phenomenon, research regarding them is not extensive. As was shown above, research on influencers and their content has mostly focused on the social effects or marketing, rather than linguistic aspects (cf. Gümüş 2018; Evans et al. 2017; Linqia, 2016; Sudha and Sheena, 2017). According to Schröder, linguistic studies on social media marketing have so far focused on corporate blogs or social media profiles (2017, 122) rather than individual influencers’ content. He points out that further studies are required to better understand these online advertising genres, especially emphasising research on social media advertising (Schröder 2017, 125). The present study provides to fill this gap.

White (2002, n.p.) notes, that the appraisal framework is relatively new in the linguistic mainstream, and the development is yet to be complete. He acknowledges that some proposals and hypotheses call for more research and testing (ibid.). The framework has also been criticized for being complicated, as well as having problematic division to and unclear lines between categories (cf. Bednarek 2006). The appraisal framework is not the only theory for studying evaluation. Monica Bednarek (2006) has proposed a parameter-based framework for the same purpose. However, Martin and White's framework is comprehensive and popular, as it has been applied to numerous and diverse studies, and was thus chosen for the present study. The framework has been applied, for example, to study the objectivity of news media (Thomson, White, and Kitley 2008). McKinley (2018) adapted and applied it together with Clark and Ivanic's *possibilities of selfhood* to study identity in university EFL writing. In addition, it has been utilized in research on voice and identity construction in academic writing (cf. Chang and Schleppegrell 2011; Weiyu and Ling 2018).

The most relevant to the present study is past research on advertisement language. Sabine Tan studied how "multimodal elements in a web-based advertising campaign function to construct preferred dialogic positions for its readers" in order to influence or convince them (2010, 91). She applied the subcategory of engagement, and concluded that the framework was suitable for this type of study. Feng and Wignell (2011) added to the engagement category by studying multimodal strategies in Chinese TV advertisements. They concluded that *dialogic* and *character voices* were employed to create more compelling advertisements. Beangstrom and Adendorff (2013) studied values of attitude, graduation and engagement in the advertisements of two South African real estate agencies, and added the values of *exclusivity* and *convenience* as categories of affect. They discovered how the agencies used similar strategies in their marketing, but differ in what needs they appeal to. Agata Križan (2016) studied the frequency of attitudinal judgement values in British advertisements, and found how the attitudinal values of capability and propriety were the most common out of the five categories of judgement. She noticed how sometimes the consumer was targeted with negative capability and propriety, when referring to the problem the consumer most likely has. Ho and Suen (2017) applied the framework to understand the linguistics of promotional discourse. They explored the evaluative language used by the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government, and how it achieves a promotional effect. They found that the most commonly used evaluation was appreciation, and the targets were often phenomena and objects.

As the previous examples show, the appraisal framework has been successfully applied to studying advertising language. Thus, it provides tools for studying social media marketing,

and how influencers use language to evaluate the content in their posts. The framework makes it possible to recognize and identify features in the written captions that can be seen as manipulative, or can affect the readers' understanding and ideas of the product without necessarily recognizing or realizing that themselves. I have now gone over past research with similar topics or analysis. Next, I will move on to discussing the present study, first introducing the material.

4 Material

In this section I will introduce the source material analyzed in the study. I will explain the basic structure of a common Instagram post, followed by an introduction of the influencers whose posts were used, to give a bit more background information.

4.1 The structure of an Instagram post

The primary source of this study consists of four individual influencers' Instagram content. Instagram posts as a material were chosen due to the availability and structure of the material. In comparison to Youtube content, on Instagram the sponsored content is easily recognizable and distinguishable from non-sponsored content, and it does not require transcribing. While Instagram is supported on web browsers as well, it is originally designed and more commonly used as a mobile application. The layout and use described here conform with the mobile application. Instagram posts generally consist of at least one picture or video clip with a written caption underneath it, followed by possible comments from other users. Users can browse through an account's content by scrolling down and revealing the next post. Figure 2 presents an example of what a post looks like on a mobile device.



Figure 2. The layout of an Instagram post (Wood 2019e)

As Figure 2 shows, it is possible for users to *tag* others on the image or caption (“@asos” in Figure 2), or to mention a location above the picture (“ExCel London” in Figure 2). In addition, in case of certain sponsorships, influencers can indicate the sponsor in place of the location, or tag the products or online stores directly to the image. The small symbol on the lower left corner of the photo in Figure 2 indicates that something is tagged on the image as well. Hashtags (#) and emoticons are supported in the captions and comments. Hashtags allow users to find related images by conducting a search with said hashtag. They are also often used to indicate a sponsorship, for example #ad or #spon. If a single post includes more than one picture or video, a user can see these by swiping the prior image to the left. Therefore, only one item is visible at a time, while the caption stays the same.

While the main form of media on Instagram is photos, in this study the focus will be on the written caption. The written part of a post tells the viewer more than the (potentially) advertising image. The caption can take the viewer beyond the advertising, so to speak, to give the viewer more content and more to experience. In this way, it gives the influencer a chance to better blend the advertisement into their regular content. Unlike the image, the written caption may thus include elements used to divert the viewer from the advert. At the same time, the written caption may include more visible requirements from the brand, like hashtags, slogans, or other phrases the brand wishes to be associated with.

4.2 The influencers

It is possible that all influencers have their personal distinct style of writing captions. Thus, I tried to select influencers who all may bring something different to the material while not being too different, so that it is possible to get conclusive results. The chosen influencers are all English speaking Youtube creators, who focus on beauty and fashion related content. The reason for using Youtube-based influencers is to ensure that their success and fame has started on social media and not in more traditional routes to fame, such as acting, modelling, or the music industry. The roots of an influencer’s career might have an effect on how they are perceived and what behavior is expected from them, thus affecting how they compose their content. Using influencers from one ‘genre’ allows for more straightforward comparison. In addition, I am personally familiar with this genre and the users themselves, and thus I can better understand the context and possible references while conducting the analysis.

The first influencer chosen for this study is Zoë Sugg. She is a 29-year-old UK based influencer, who began her online-career in 2005 by starting a written blog. Later she branched

out to Youtube, where her career took off. Currently, she has over 9 million followers on her Instagram account @zoesugg. In addition to online content creation, Sugg is the author of multiple books and has her own range of beauty and life-style items. While recently her presence on Youtube has decreased, she posts multiple times a week on her Instagram account. Her content revolves around fashion, cosmetics and lifestyle items. Sugg has also been open and vocal about her issues with anxiety, and often discusses mental health issues on her account. She is one of the most successful influencers and content creators to date. Due to her long career and multiple ‘scandals’, Sugg has a lot of experience in working with brand deals and an audience that does not always agree with her. Thus, her content provides a good base for what is expected from or approved as quality content, both sponsored and non-sponsored.

The second influencer, whose content is analyzed in this study, is Lucy Wood. Wood is a 28-year-old from the UK, who has worked as a freelance journalist while establishing an online presence. Previously Wood focused on more artistic content, but as of now, the majority of her content is based around *body positivity*, and “mid-size friendly” fashion brands. She currently has over 60 000 followers on her Instagram account @lucyjanewood. While Wood’s online presence began in 2011, she has only recently gained enough popularity to receive brand deals and sponsorships. Thus, her content may differ from that of Sugg’s, as her experience with conducting sponsored content is not as extensive.

The third influencer who is part of this study is a 32-year-old, UK based content creator Patricia Bright. Bright has published a book and collaborated with cosmetic brands, such as MAC cosmetics and Revolution. She currently has over a million followers on her Instagram @thepatriciabright. Bright started her online career in 2010. Her Youtube content includes fashion advice and reviews of new products and items, and she tends to be honest and have straightforward opinions in her content. Thus, it may slightly differ from the other influencers’ content, and facilitate the representativeness and reliability of the data.

The fourth and final influencer chosen is Hannah Elise Maute. Unlike the other three influencers, she is based in the USA, and has a relatively new career as an influencer. The 20-year-old college student began her Youtube career in 2018, and currently has over 33 000 followers on her Instagram account @hannahemaute. Similarly to others, her content involves fashion, often showcasing secondhand and thrifted items. Maute was chosen for this study due to her significantly shorter career and lower follower number. She represents a newer, younger “generation” of influencers, and thus her content may provide indication as to what sponsored content is evolving to, if it is changing.

4.3 The data

To find out whether the sponsored content has features which distinguish it from non-sponsored content, both sponsored and non-sponsored posts were collected, creating two categories. As mentioned before, Instagram has implemented rules for explicit disclosures of advertisements, making it relatively easy to find and collect the sponsored material. However, some posts included references to products and/or tags or links to brands' websites or social media accounts without a clear mention of a sponsor deal. While the influencer may not have received any monetary compensation from the posts themselves, it is possible that they receive a percentage of the sales made through the provided links. To avoid harsh division and possible misidentification, I decided to create a third category – ambiguous content. It could be argued that the posts, which contain links or tags to brands without explicit mention of partnership, are providing viewers information they would want to know, and thus do exactly what the audience asks for without direct monetary benefits. However, including a tag is always a conscious decision, and it is impossible to know how curated the posts are.

The material for this study was collected manually into a micro corpus, named *Instagram Influencer Micro Corpus*. The full data can be consulted upon request. The written captions, tags, and locations were all taken into account when determining whether the content was sponsored, non-sponsored, or ambiguous. To achieve a balanced comparison, for each category, five posts were collected from each influencer, making the total number of collected posts 60. The posts were collected from the influencers' user pages, starting from the most recent (on November 6th 2019). The first posts that fit the set requirements were chosen. The frequency of each type of content varied a lot depending on the influencer, and thus for some influencers, all samples of a certain content group have been posted within the same month, while others' stretch over a period of half a year.

Instagram does not limit the length of a caption, so these can vary from a single emote or a symbol to hundreds of words. While there is no clear distinction between the lengths of sponsored and non-sponsored posts, some non-sponsored posts are so short, that they do not include material that could be analyzed applying the appraisal framework. Therefore, for this study I chose posts which have at least five words, not including Emoji. When collecting the data, the images of the posts were considered to a degree as well. If the post included a video, it was not used, since the video could include additional verbal content. The scope of this study did not allow for transcribing and analyzing audio. Another requirement for the posts chosen was that they were created during the past year from starting this study (September of 2019).

This ensures that the study and its results are as up-to-date as possible, as the norms of internet language and culture can change rapidly.

5 Methods

In this section, the methods of the analysis are explained. In the present study, the material is analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. It consists of three different groups of content, which are each analyzed from three different points of view: attitude, engagement and graduation. Thus, Baker's (2006) triangulation is applied on two levels: material and methodology (cf. Malamatidou 2018). Triangulation allows the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods (Baker 2006). In the present study, this is seen in how the targets and common realizations of domains of the appraisal framework are contrasted with the quantitative results. This leads to a more reliable overall picture and conclusions of the language in influencers content. The research questions of this study are as follows:

R1: How does the evaluative language differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts, if any?

R2: What kinds of engagement resources are used, and how do they differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts?

R3: How are graduation values applied in the content, and how does the use differ between sponsored, non-sponsored, and ambiguous posts?

R4: If there are notable differences in the use of the three domains of the framework between the three types of posts, where do they stem from?

To answer these questions, the data was annotated for attitude, engagement and graduation, according to the subcategories presented in section 3.1. Following Martin and White (2005, 71) a bottom-up method was applied in the analysis, so each instance of attitude, engagement and graduation were identified and coded according to the framework. The analysis was done manually. It is of interest to see if the types of posts differ in overall use of evaluative language, as the overall attitude of the post might affect the readers' stance. Thus, not only those referring to an item or a product, but all instances of attitude, engagement, and graduation were taken into account. It should be noted that with attitude and graduation, each individual word holding the value was identified separately. Throughout the content it is common to have multiple items of graduation used to up- or downscale a single target. Counting them as separate makes it possible to recognize the quantity and "strength" of evaluation in the posts more accurately, which may show differences between the groups of content. Following is an example from a non-sponsored post.

- (1) [...] tired of hating this body which has done so much magic for me.
(Wood 2019f)

Wood up-scales her body's capability with three different items of graduation. First, she uses the intensifying *so*, followed by a quantifying *much*. Finally, the word *magic* refers to her bodies abilities, but instead of a more neutral word like *good*, Wood has chosen to up-scale the word. Figure 3 shows an example of the analysis of one post.

Post	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation
(a)Just a (b)big (1)floating head stoppin' by to (2)say thanks for (c) so (d) many (e)amazingly (3)kind messages after yesterday's video. (4)(f)Im good, I'm good, I promise! (g)Just (5)going through all the feelings that come with (h)finally trying to sort your head out (i)after years of (6)neglecting it, and YouTube makes that an (j)extra (7)weird challenge. (8)Appreciate you (k)THE MOST [a*]❤	1 app -comp 2aff +sat auth (pleasure of nice messages) 3jud +prop 4aff +hap auth 5aff -sec auth i 6 judg -cap 7 app -com 8 aff +hap(affection) auth [a*] heart= aff +hap	<i>I promise</i> contract: proclaim: pronounce <i>Just going through</i> Contract: disclaim: counter	a) force: int down b) force: quant up c) force: int up d) force: quant up e) force: int up f) force: int up (repetition) g) force: int down h) force: quant up i) force: quant up j) force: int up k) force: quant up (+extra emphasis with capitals) [a*] emphasizes appreciating = force int up

Figure 3. Example of the analysis of an Instagram post.

Instances of attitude are marked with a number + boldface, instances of engagement are marked with italics, and instances of graduation are marked with a letter + underline. Emoji are marked with square brackets around a letter, which is then marked with the appropriate typeface modification. The identification of the instance is then coded in the corresponding column. After identifying each instance of attitude, engagement and graduation as shown in Figure 3, the coded instances were collected and divided into tables according to the content groups and the domain of the framework for a clearer presentation (i.e. the instances of attitude in sponsored posts in one table etc.). The number of instances of each sub-category was calculated, to see if there are any significant differences between the content groups. As the total word count, and consequently the number of recognized instances, varied a lot between the groups of content, percentages of each sub-category were calculated to achieve an even comparison.

To answer the additional question of how the targets of attitudinal assessment and graduation differ across the material, the targets of attitude and graduation values were identified. The attitudinal values and their targets were collected to a table, and labeled according to whether the target is a *product* of any brand; *the writer*, a quality, family member, or a friend of hers; or *the reader* or their quality. A fourth target category, *neutral participant* was created to refer to those targets which have no connection to any brand, the writer or the reader, such as *this time of year*. The focus is on which targets are positively evaluated and which are negatively evaluated. For example, are the negative evaluations mainly towards the writer, while the positive ones refer to certain items or products. For graduation, I am interested in how often the positive and negative attitudinal values are up- or downscaled. The targets of graduation were identified to hold positive or negative attitudes. Some targets, for example *questions* or *hill* did not alone hold any attitudinal values, and thus were not considered in this part of the analysis.

The analysis was not always clear cut. Martin and White (2005, 62) point out how it is sometimes necessary to *double-code*, when an item holds to possible interpretation. Double-coding ensures a better subjectivity. Example 2 shows an instance like this in the material.

- (2) Look how smart she looks [...]
(Wood 2019l)

Here *smart* is recognized to be an instance of positive judgement: capability and positive appreciation: valuation, as the phrase could be interpreted to evaluate ‘her’ level of intelligence or appearance. In addition, there were a few phrases which at first could be considered to hold attitudinal values, but with further inspection were deemed not to, as in example 3.

- (3) We went for hardback books with a glossy finish on the pages, [...]
(Wood, 2019g)

Here the word *glossy* could be appreciation: composition, but instead it refers to the type of paper used in the books, and therefore it is not considered to hold attitudinal meaning, and it is not included in the analysis.

5.1 Multimodality in the present study

As explained above, even though the main form of media on Instagram are photos, these are not included in the analysis of this study. The appraisal framework alone offers a detailed

analysis of the evaluative (and possibly manipulative) language, and the scope does not allow for analyzing images. In addition, images are more open to interpretation, while the meanings of a text are more clear. However, on some posts, certain brands' Instagram accounts were tagged on the photo itself. Thus, the photos were considered to this extent, when collecting and categorizing the material. In addition, while analyzing the material, the photos were utilized for interpreting the context if needed. That is, the photos worked as *contextualization cues*, defined by Gumperz as “(verbal and non-verbal signs) that relate what is said to the contextual knowledge” (Schiffrin 1994, 99 punctuation as in the original).

The textual material includes multimodal aspects as well. As explained in section 1.3.1, capitalization of words will be considered as a type of infusing intensification. In addition, the captions include *Emoji*, which are a collection of emoticons and other icons frequently used in online and especially mobile communication. As such, Emoji are a distinct part of internet language, and offer more clues to the interpretation of the writer's ideas and thoughts. In a sense, they also contribute to the evaluative aspect of language, as they can reinforce an emotion or a phrase that has been expressed. Depending on the context, Emoji may be interpreted and analyzed as a type of affect or graduation. It should be noted, that Emoji are sometimes used as a decorative feature in the captions, and thus hold no attitudinal values.

While conducting the research, I considered applying Feng and Wignell's (2011) multimodal engagement resources in addition to the ones Martin and White have named. My main point of interest was endorsement via character voice. However, Feng and Wignell's study focused solely on advertisements, and the additional engagement resources they identified would have been applicable only for the sponsored posts. This would have led to swayed results, and thus the idea was dismissed. Feng and Wignell's additional engagement resources could be applied in the future in studies focusing solely on sponsored content. I have now explained the methods used in the present study, so that it is possible to understand the results and analysis presented in the following section.

6 Results

In this section, the results are presented. The order will follow that of the theoretical section. First, I will present the results of attitude, then engagement, and finally graduation. For an easier comparison, the results from each group of content will be presented together. A more in-depth discussion on the results can be found in section 7.

6.1 Attitude

For attitude, I was interested to see if there exists a difference in how much positive and negative attitudinal evaluations are used in sponsored, non-sponsored and ambiguous posts. Hence, in this section, the results are presented in three figures, which make it possible to see percentages of the subcategories and the proportions of positive and negative instances in each group of content. A table showing the exact number of each value of attitude in the data can be found in Appendix 1.

I hypothesized that there would be more positive evaluations in sponsored content than in non-sponsored or ambiguous content. This hypothesis turned out to be correct, as there are significantly more positive evaluations in sponsored content than in the other two groups. The total number of attitudinal evaluations are as follows: In non-sponsored content, there are 108 instances of attitude, of which 62.9% are positive and 37.1% are negative. In sponsored content, there are 217 instances, of which 87.6% are positive and only 12.4% negative. Ambiguous content includes 91 instances, of which 80.2% are positive and 19.7% are negative. Thus, non-sponsored content has significantly less positive evaluations than sponsored or ambiguous content. While not as prominent, the difference between sponsored and ambiguous is still clear. Another clear difference is that the most common sub-category of attitude in non-sponsored content is affect, while in sponsored and ambiguous content appreciation occurs most often. All groups of content include mostly authorial affect, but non-sponsored content has even less non-authorial affect than the other groups.

While these results confirm the hypothesis, they do not tell enough about the use of attitudinal evaluations in influencers' content. Next, more detailed results of affect, judgement, and appreciation will be given, to get a better understanding of the language used in the material. For each sub-category, I will first present the quantitative results, and then move on to a more qualitative analysis, with attention to the targets of the evaluations as well. Due to the length limitations of this thesis, only the most meaningful results are presented here.

6.1.1 Affect

I begin with the first sub-category of attitude, affect. Figure 4 shows the percentages of un/happiness, dis/satisfaction, in/security and dis/inclination in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous content. In addition, it shows the proportions of positive and negative evaluations.

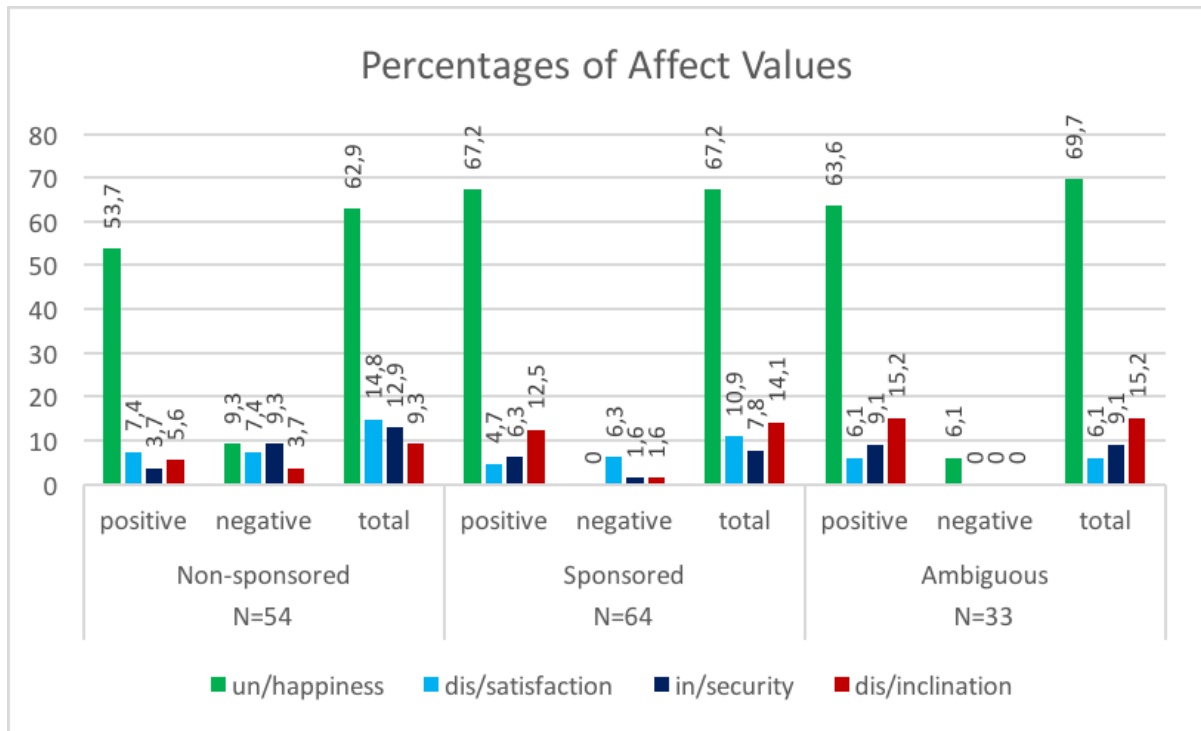


Figure 4. Percentages of Affect Values

The percentages of affect values in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous content. The sum of positive and negative values' percentages is shown in the 'total' bars. The sum of values shown in the 'total' bars is 100 (%). N = total case number of affect.

In non-sponsored content, the total number of instances of affect is 54, which means that 50% of all attitude in non-sponsored content is affect. Total of 70.4% (38) of the instances are positive and 29.6% (16) are negative. Overall, the most common sub-category is un/happiness, with 62.9% (34) of the instances. The proportion of dis/satisfaction is 14.8% (8), in/security 12.9% (7), and dis/inclination 9.3% (5). Un/happiness is mostly positive, dis/satisfaction and dis/inclination are almost equally positive and negative, while in/security is mostly negative.

Out of all the attitude in sponsored content, 29.5% (64) are instances of affect. Altogether, 90.6% (58) are positive and only 9.4% (6) are negative. Un/happiness is the most common sub-category, with 67.2% (43) of the instances. Proportion of dis/satisfaction is 10.9% (7), in/security 7.8% (5), and dis/inclination 14.1% (9). It is worth noting that there are no negative instances of un/happiness, and only one instance of negative in/security and

dis/inclination each. Only dis/satisfaction has more negative than positive instances, although the difference is not significant.

Out of all the attitude in ambiguous content, 36.3% (33) instances are affect. In total, 93.9% (31) are positive and only 6.1% (2) are negative. Un/happiness occurs most often with 69.7% (23) of the instances, while the percentage of dis/satisfaction is 6.1%(2), of in/security 9.1% (3), and of dis/inclination 15.2% (5). Both two negative instances of affect are un/happiness.

Comparing the content groups, ambiguous has the lowest proportion of negative affect, with only 6.1%. Sponsored content is relatively similar with 9.4%, while the affect used in non-sponsored content is nearly 30% negative. This implies that influencers tend to include more negativity in non-sponsored posts. Overall, un/happiness is the most common type of affect. It is mostly realized with phrases which express liking something or with Emoji expressing positive emotions, as in example 4.

- (4) ❤️ love this photo!
 (Sugg 2019i)

Un/happiness is mostly expressed as positive, but the targets vary between the groups of content. In example 4, Sugg has used a heart-Emoji and the word *love* to show her happiness with her photo presented in the post, thus the target of the positive evaluation is something of the writer. In non-sponsored and ambiguous content, positive and negative evaluations are mostly aimed at the writer or her belongings, as in example 4. In sponsored content, however, products are the most common target of positive evaluations, as shown in example 5, where Sugg expresses her happiness with the product with the word *thrilled*.

- (5) I'm so thrilled with them!
 (Sugg 2019f)

Dis/satisfaction is expressed more often in non-sponsored content than in other content. In non-sponsored and sponsored content, there are nearly equal numbers of negative and positive uses, while ambiguous content only contains positive evaluations. The negative evaluations are mostly towards the writer, as in example 6.

- (6) Tired of sadness and shame and comparison and inferiority, [...]
 (Wood 2019f)

Here Wood uses the word *tired* to express her dissatisfaction with her body-image issues. In non-sponsored and ambiguous content, the writer is the most common target of positive evaluations also, but in sponsored content, products are a more common target.

- (7) My room is so cozy for fall thanks to @jcpenney.
(Maute 2019f)

In example 7, Maute expresses her satisfaction towards her room and the items in it by thanking the brand who provided them. It is interesting how in sponsored content the positivity is mostly towards products and negativity is towards only the writer, while in non-sponsored and ambiguous content, neither positive nor negative dis/satisfaction is aimed at products, yet there are instances of both towards the writer. It should be noted, however, that as dis/satisfaction occurs quite rarely, this difference is not very significant.

Both in/security and dis/inclination occur rarely in all content groups, so there are no significant differences in the numbers. However, in non-sponsored content both values are more often negative than in the other two content groups. The target of in/security in all content is most often the writer. In example 6, Wood expresses her insecurity about herself with the word *shame*. In contrast, in sponsored and ambiguous content the writer is evaluated more often with positive in/security, suggesting that influencers try to seem more confident in sponsored content. Surprisingly, the only negative instance of in/security in sponsored content is towards a product.

- (8) No mess and none of the stress that comes with trying to put the drops on 😬
(Wood 2019h)

However, as can be seen in example 8, the realization *stress* is preceded by a negation. In addition, the product which would cause the stress is not the one advertised.

- (9) I also really want to see more musicals [...]
(Sugg 2019i)

Example 9 shows how dis/inclination is usually realized with words like *want*. Dis/inclination is expressed rarely in the material, and the use is similar between the content groups, so there are no significant differences found.

The fact that there is clearly more positivity in sponsored than in non-sponsored content, suggests that influencers avoid mentioning being unhappy or displeased in sponsored posts,

unlike in the other two groups of content. Next, I will continue to the next category of attitude, judgement.

6.1.2 Judgment

I now move on to the second sub-category of attitude, judgement. Figure 5 shows the proportions of normality, capability, tenacity, veracity and propriety in the studied material.

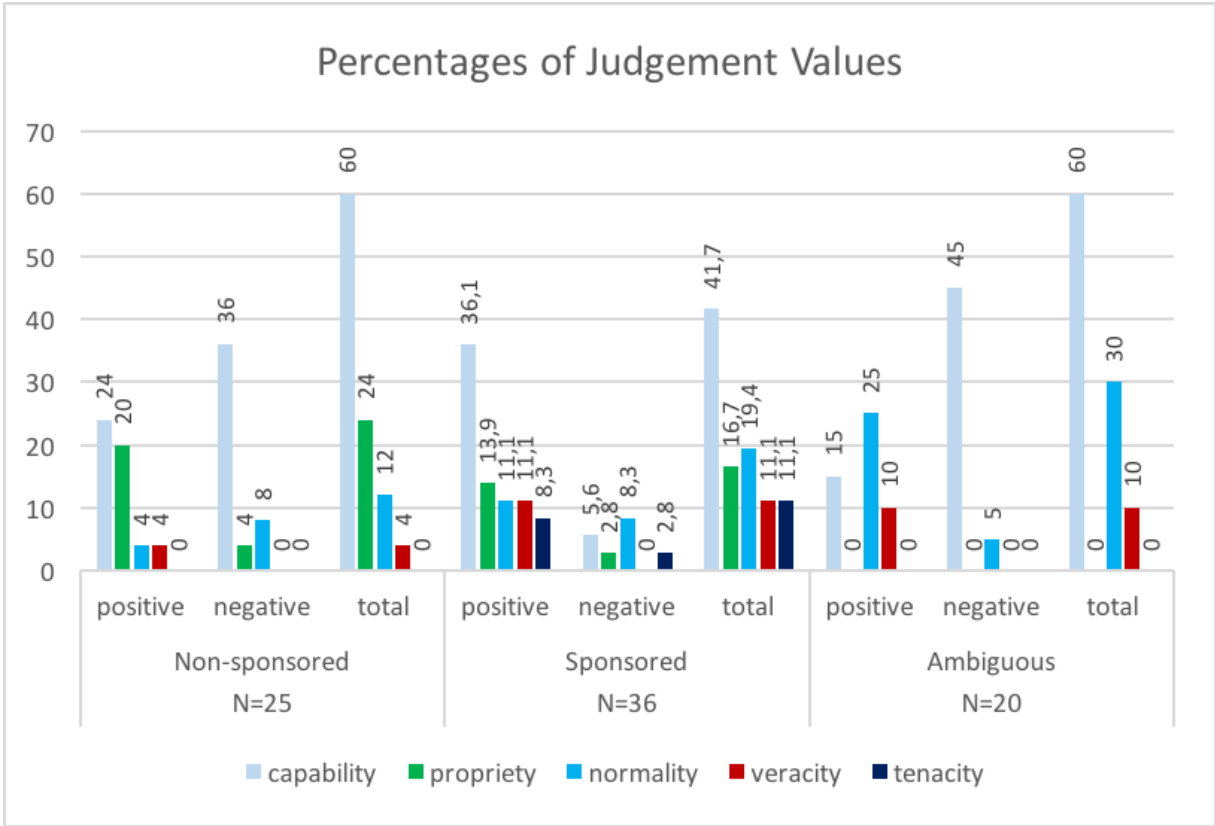


Figure 5. Percentages of Judgement Values

Percentages of judgement values in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous content. The sum of positive and negative values’ percentages is shown in ‘total’. The sum of values shown in the ‘total’ bars is 100 (%). N = total case number of judgement.

Similarly to Figure 4, the division to positive and negative instances is shown as well. Non-sponsored content includes 25 instances of judgement, which is 23.1% of all attitude in non-sponsored content. Altogether, 52% (13) of the instances are positive and 48% (12) are negative. The most common sub-category is capability, with 60% (15) of the instances, and these are more often negative. 12% (3) of the instances are normality, which also are more often negative. There are no instances of tenacity, and only 4% (1) are (positive) veracity. 24% (6) are propriety.

In sponsored content, values of judgement appear 36 times, which is 17.5% of all attitude in this group of content. Total of 80.6% (29) of the instances are positive and 19.4%

(7) are negative. Of the collected instances, capability is 41.7% (15), normality is 19.4% (7), and both tenacity and veracity are 11.1% (4) each. Judgements of propriety are 16.7% (6). Each sub-category has more positive instances than negative.

Ambiguous content has 20 instances of judgement in total, which is 21.9% of all attitude in this group of content. Overall, positive and negative judgements occur equally (50%). However, capability, which is 60% (12) of all judgement, is mostly negative. 30% (6) are normality, and 10% (2) are veracity, both of which are more often positive. There are no instances of tenacity or propriety.

Overall, judgements of capability were the most common. Sponsored content included less instances than non-sponsored or ambiguous. Furthermore, in sponsored content these were mostly positive, while both non-sponsored and ambiguous included more negative instances, suggesting that influencers avoid mentioning incapability in sponsored content. The target of negative judgement of capability is usually the writer, as is shown in example 10.

- (10) Just a quick note to say sorry for being a crap internet person [...]
(Wood 2019c)

Wood describes herself as incapable of doing her job properly by using the word *crap*. In non-sponsored content, the target of positive capability is usually the reader (example 11), while in sponsored content it is the writer or a product (example 12).

- (11) If SAD affects you this time of year, how do you combat it?
(Sugg 2019k)
- (12) - deciding that my body is fine, good, and worthy of love - has literally changed my life. [...] I highly recommend the new Fashion Fix podcast with @charlihoward over on the @bbcsounds app, for chilled out chat about all things body confidence that'll get the conversation going in your own brain too.
(Wood 2019o)

In example 11, the word *combat* refers to the readers' capability to overcome the seasonal affective disorder's (SAD) negative effects. In example 12, Wood shows she is capable of *deciding* to see herself differently. She also uses the phrase "get the conversation going" to describe the capability of the podcast, or the hosts of the podcast, to help the reader/listener to achieve this change too.

Normality is the second most common value of judgement in the material. It appears in ambiguous content more often than in non-sponsored or sponsored content. Non-sponsored

content has more negative judgments of normality than the other two groups. Overall, the target of negative normality is usually the writer, as in example 13.

- (13) Still missing the pool beers, inflatable unicorns and madness of cooking dinner for 16 [...]
(Wood 2019g)

Wood describes cooking for her friends as *madness*, which negatively judges the normality of her action. Surprisingly in sponsored content the reader is another target of negative judgement of normality, unlike in the other two groups.

- (14) [...] getting to meet and hang out with some AWESOME women [...]
(Wood 2019i)

Example 14 shows an instance of positive judgement of normality. The word *awesome* positively judges the normality of these women, making them exceptional in some way. The targets of positive judgement of normality differ between the content groups. However, the number of total instances of judgement of normality is so low that these differences cannot be viewed significant.

Propriety is relatively common in sponsored and non-sponsored content, while it is completely missing from the ambiguous content. In both non-sponsored and sponsored content it is mostly positive, but the targets differ. In non-sponsored content, the positive judgements are aimed at the reader or neutral participants, while in sponsored content they are aimed at the reader or a product. Example 15 shows a positive judgement of the reader, and example 16 that of a product.

- (15) There are levels to growth, darling you've got this ♥
(Bright 2019b)
- (16) If you're looking for some new, positive influences, I highly recommend the new Fashion Fix podcast with @charlihoward over on the @bbcsounds app [...]
(Wood 2019o)

In example 15, Bright refers to the reader as *darling*. In example 16, Wood describes the advertised podcast or its hosts as *positive influences*. The few negative judgements found are aimed at the writer in both content groups.

The use of veracity and tenacity is low in all three groups of content; thus, these values are not very significant, and will not be discussed further. Next, I will present the results of the third and final category of attitude, appreciation.

6.1.3 Appreciation

This section presents the results of appreciation. Figure 6 shows the use of positive and negative appreciation in the material of this study.

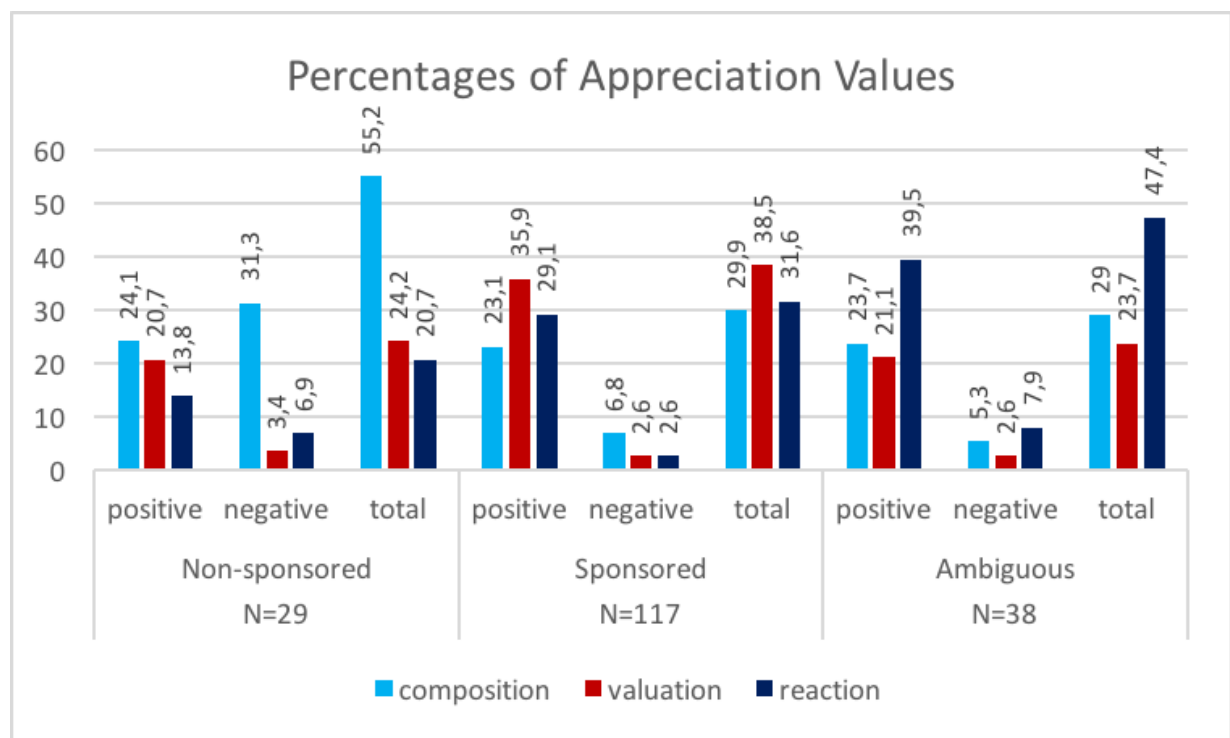


Figure 6. Percentages of Appreciation Values

The percentages of appreciation values in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous content. The sum of positive and negative values' percentages is shown in the total. The sum of values shown in the 'total' bars is 100 (%). N = total case number of appreciation.

In non-sponsored content, there are 29 instances of appreciation, which means 26.9% of all attitude is appreciation. In total, 58.6% (17) are positive and 41.4% (12) are negative. Composition is the most common sub-category, with 55.2% (16), and it is more often negative. Valuation is 24.2% (7), and reaction is 20.7% (6) of the instances of appreciation, and both are mostly positive.

In sponsored content, appreciation occurs 117 times. This makes up 53.9% of all attitude in sponsored content. Overall, 88% (103) of the instances are positive, while only 12% (14) are negative. The most common sub-category is valuation, with 38.5% (45), of which majority is

positive. Reaction and composition occur relatively similarly, with 31.6% (37) and 29.9% (35) respectively. Both are more often positive.

Finally, in ambiguous posts there are 38 instances of appreciation, which is 41.8% of all attitude in this group of content. Therefore, appreciation is the most common type of attitude in ambiguous posts. Altogether, 84.2% (32) of the instances of appreciation are positive, while 15.8% (6) are negative. The most commonly used sub-category is reaction, with (47.4%) 18 of the instances. The proportion of composition is 29% (11) times, and of valuation 23.7% (9). All three subcategories have substantially more positive than negative uses.

When comparing the three groups of content, it is clear that appreciation is used significantly more in sponsored and ambiguous content than in non-sponsored. After all, appreciation was the most common sub-category of attitude in both sponsored and ambiguous content. Each sub-category of appreciation is more common in one group of content than the others. Non-sponsored content includes mostly composition, sponsored has mostly valuation, and ambiguous has mostly reaction.

Reaction occurs more often in ambiguous and sponsored content than in non-sponsored. While the instances of reaction are usually positive, ambiguous and sponsored content include significantly more positivity than non-sponsored. In addition, the targets differ across content groups. Examples 17, 18 and 19 show common realizations of reaction in ambiguous, non-sponsored and sponsored content, respectively.

- (17) It's so therapeutic to get rid of things and create nice cosy corners that you can't wait to be in.
(Sugg 2019d)
- (18) Hope your day is spooktacular 🎃
(Sugg 2019l)
- (19) It's very raw and real and tackles some really hard hitting but important scenarios and scenes.
(Sugg 2019b)

As can be seen in examples 17 and 18, positive reactions in non-sponsored and ambiguous content are targeted nearly equally at everything. Sugg uses *therapeutic*, *nice*, *cozy* and *that you can't wait to be in* to appraise a neutral or her own action and a room. In the next example, posted near Halloween, she appraises the reader's day as (hopefully) *spooktacular*. In comparison, in sponsored content positivity is mostly aimed at products, then the writer, with

minimal references to reader or neutral participants. In example 19, Sugg uses *raw* and *hard hitting* to describe a TV-show she is advertising.

Composition is most common in non-sponsored content. In addition, in non-sponsored content it is more often expressed as negative, while in the other content groups it is mostly positive. Overall, the target of negative composition is often the writer, as shown in example 20.

- (20) We have our disheveled, bleary eyed headless chicken pose on most of the time [...] (Bright 2019a)

Bright describes her and her husband with *disheveled*, and *bleary eyed headless chicken*. The target of positive composition in non-sponsored content is usually the writer, in sponsored content products or neutral participants, and in ambiguous content the usual targets are neutral participants.

Valuation is the most common sub-category in sponsored content. Throughout the material, valuation is mostly used as positive and aimed at products, as shown in example 21.

- (21) It's so quick, easy and effortless to use, and ideal for if you're like me [...] (Wood 2019j)

Wood evaluates the products as helpful with the words *quick*, *easy*, *effortless* and *ideal*. The use of negative valuation in all content groups is similar as well, while the proportion of negative evaluations is much larger in the non-sponsored content. However, the total amount of valuation is small in non-sponsored content, and thus this difference cannot be considered very significant.

As a summary, the results show that in all three sub-categories of attitude sponsored content includes more positive evaluations. In addition, the targets of these evaluations are most often products. In contrast, in ambiguous and non-sponsored content, the targets of positive evaluations are more evenly distributed. Negative attitude appears most often in non-sponsored content, but the target is usually the writer in all three content groups. Products are evaluated positively throughout the material. The reader and neutral participants receive relatively little attitudinal evaluations, which are mostly positive. Only in non-sponsored content the reader receives more attitudinal evaluations than products do. More speculative discussion on the

possible reason behind these results and the use of attitude can be found in section 7. Next, I will move on to the domain of engagement.

6.2 Engagement

I now turn to the use of engagement strategies in the material. I hypothesized that there would be more expansive than contractive engagement resources used in sponsored content. In addition, I expected the number of expansive resources to be lower in non-sponsored and ambiguous content. However, the results show the opposite to be true. When compared to the total word counts of each type of content, non-sponsored content has the most engagement strategies overall, ambiguous content has the second most, while sponsored content has the least. First I will present the quantitative results in the following order: non-sponsored content, sponsored content and finally ambiguous content, followed by a comparison between the content groups. After this, I will present some more qualitative findings, which are supported by examples. In the examples, instances of engagement resources are italicized.

Table 1 shows the number of each engagement resource in each type of content, as well as the percentage of that resource in that content group. As there are only two instances of attribution, further division into sub-categories was deemed unnecessary.

Table 1. Engagement resources in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous posts. Parentheses show the percentages of the sub-category of the total in each category.

Engagement resource	Non-Sponsored	Sponsored	Ambiguous
Contractive	33 (91.7%)	24 (88.9%)	13 (59.1%)
Disclaim: counter	20 (55.6%)	9 (33.3%)	6 (27.3%)
Disclaim: deny	7 (19.4%)	11 (40.7%)	6 (27.3%)
Proclaim: concur	1 (2.8%)	1 (3.7%)	0
Proclaim: endorse	0	0	1 (4.5%)
Proclaim: pronounce	5 (13.9%)	3 (11.1%)	0
Expansive	3 (8.3%)	3 (11.1%)	9 (40.9%)
Entertain	2 (5.6%)	3 (11.1%)	8 (36.4%)
Attribute	1 (2.8%)	0	1 (4.5%)
Total	36	27	22

As can be seen in Table 1, non-sponsored content has the most engagement altogether, with 36 instances. Of these 91.7% (33) are contractive and 8.3% (3) are expansive. The most common resource is counter with 55.6% (20). Other contractive resources occur as follows: 19.4% (7) are denial, 2.8% (1) are concur, and 13.9% (5) are pronounce, while there are no instances of endorse. Regarding expansive resources, 5.6% (2) are entertainment and 2.8% (1) are attribution.

Sponsored content includes 27 instances of engagement, of which 88.9% (24) are contractive and 11.1% (3) are expansive. The most commonly used resource is denial with 40.7% (11). Counter is the second most common, with 33.3% (9), while concur appears only 3.7% (1), and pronounce 11.1% (3). Similarly to non-sponsored content, there are no instances of endorse. All 11.1% (3) of expansive resources are entertainment, so there are no instances of attribute in sponsored content.

In ambiguous content, engagement resources are applied 22 times, which are 59% (13) contractive and 40.9% (9) expansive. Even though contractive resources are more common than expansive, the most commonly used resource is entertain with 36.4% (8). However, it should be noted, that five out of the eight instances of entertain are found in one single post, and thus this result should be taken with a grain of salt. Only 4.5% (1) is attribution. For contractive resources, counter and deny both are used as often with 27.3% (6) each. In addition, 4.5% (1) is endorse. There are no instances of concur or pronounce.

Comparing the results of each group of content, there are both similarities and differences. Surprisingly, sponsored and non-sponsored content do not differ significantly. Both groups have a high proportion of contractive resources, which could indicate that influencers do not generally use expansive resources in their language. The most obvious difference between sponsored and non-sponsored content is in the most commonly used resources. In non-sponsored content, there are mostly instances of counter, while in sponsored content deny is most common. This suggests that in sponsored content, instead of countering an expected proposition, influencers more often simply deny the possibility for some other proposition. Both groups have only one instance of concur, and no instances of endorse, which could mean that in general these influencers rather directly reject than just limit other possibilities. The relatively decent amount of pronounce in both groups could be due to the realizations having emphasizing meanings as well, thus the influencers can boost the message they are trying to convey with the post.

The engagement used in the ambiguous content differs the most from the other two groups. This is unexpected, as I assumed that, due to the ambiguity, this group of content would

lie somewhere in between non-sponsored and sponsored content. Compared to the two other groups of content, the proportion of expansive resources is significantly higher. This suggests that the influencers present outside voices and/or allow alternative propositions more in ambiguous content. However, keeping in mind that most expansive resources are from a single post, this is not very likely. Furthermore, ambiguous content includes no concur or pronounce, while there are few instances of endorse and attribute. Even though this is contrary to non-sponsored and sponsored content, none of these four resources are particularly common throughout the data.

Looking at the found contractive resources more qualitatively, in all three content groups, a common realization of counter involves the word *but*. There seems to be no pattern or consistency in terms of the context it appears in. Other common phrases used for counter include *just*, *even*, *still* and *only*. As expected, deny is realized with negations. It was found that in sponsored content the use of pronounce is mostly directed at the influencer, as shown in italics in examples 22 and 23. In the non-sponsored posts, there is only one similar realization, while the rest are as shown in example 24.

(22) *I knew* that I wanted to get some pics printed [...] (Wood 2019g, emphasis added)

(23) *Trust me*, you will want to watch this, [...] (Sugg 2019b, emphasis added)

(24) [...] because *in reality*... my feet and back hurt, but *you know* keep it cute. (Bright 2019c, punctuation as in original, emphasis added)

It seems that influencers are more eager to show their expertise or authority in sponsored content than in non-sponsored content. In addition, it is possible that the influencer expects the reader to not believe her, so she takes extra care to convince them.

Moving on to the expansive resources, there are only two instances of attribute in total. Example 25 shows the instance in non-sponsored posts.

(25) *Repost* from @morganharpernichols. (Maute 2019l)

The utterance presented in example 25 is the first sentence in a post which image is a quote. By mentioning that the post is a *repost* and tagging the user she copied the image from, Maute

acknowledges that someone else has said the quote presented in the image (or published the same post) prior to this. The only other use of attribute in the data is presented in example 26.

- (26) This was me stocking up on pumpkins for the porch (of which *my Ocado man just complimented* [...])
(Sugg 2019m)

Sugg introduces another voice in the post, attributes the compliment to the delivery man, and thus expands the chance for alternative propositions.

While the number of use of entertainment is the same between non-sponsored and sponsored content, the realizations are different. In non-sponsored and ambiguous content, entertain is often realized with mental verbs as shown in example 27. However, in sponsored content two out of three of the instances of entertainment include the modal verb *can*, as seen in example 28.

- (27) *I think* it would be super useful to leave suggestions below for others too!
(Sugg 2019k)

- (28) College textbooks *can* be expensive, but they don't have to be.
(Maute 2019e)

In example 27, Sugg refers to the thought as hers, while in example 28, Maute implies that it is possible for books to be expensive, but she might not personally think so. This suggests that influencers use more passive forms of entertainment in their sponsored content, while non-sponsored stays more personal.

In this section I have presented and compared the numbers and use of each entertainment resource used in the data. Discussion on the possible reasons behind the use of engagement can be found in section 7.2. Next, I will present the results of the analysis of graduation.

6.3 Graduation

I now turn to the results of the third and final domain of the appraisal framework, graduation. I hypothesized that sponsored content would have more upscaling use of graduation than the other two content groups. In addition, I hoped to find out if there are any trends in what is graduated and how. Therefore, I was interested in the targets of the graduation as well. Unlike with attitude, where I created categories for the targets, I solely focused on the graduation of

those items that held positive or negative attitudes in order to see what types of attitudes are emphasized in the material. Like above, I will first present the quantitative results of each group of content, and then compare them. In addition, I will present some more qualitative findings of the graduation values and their targets, supported by examples.

The hypothesis regarding graduation turned out partially correct. Instead of sponsored content, non-sponsored included the largest proportion of upscaling graduation. However, ambiguous content has less upscaling than sponsored content has. Figure 7 shows the number of each graduation value (intensity, quantity, sharpen and soften) in all three groups of content. As the values of focus: sharpen and focus: soften are inherently upscaling and downscaling respectively, they are presented only in the corresponding sections.

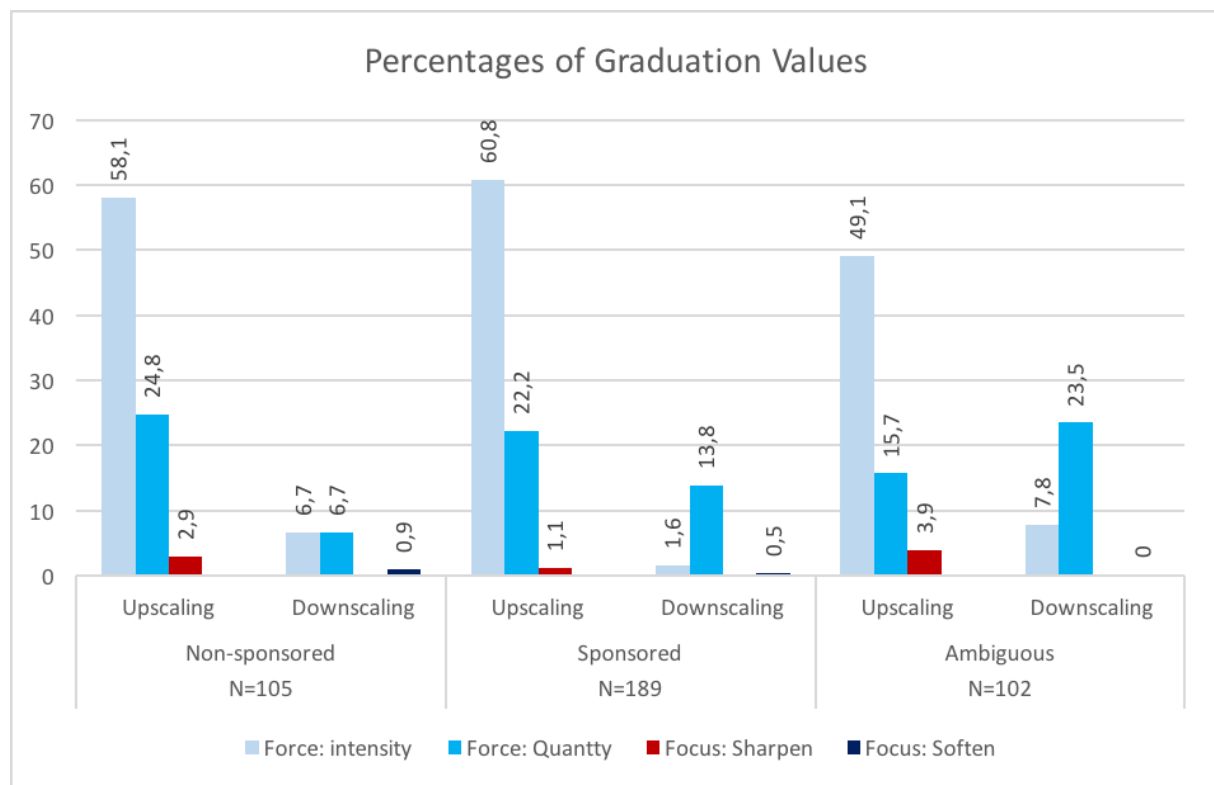


Figure 7. The Percentages of Graduation Values

The percentages of graduation values in non-sponsored, sponsored and ambiguous content. The sum of values in each group of content is 100 (%). N = total case number of graduation.

As can be seen in Figure 7, all groups of content include more upscaling than downscaling graduation values. In addition, values of focus are very small in comparison to force.

In non-sponsored content, there are 105 instances of graduation, of which 85.7% (90) are upscaling and 14.3% (15) are downscaling. Only 3.8% of all of the graduation is focus, as there are 2.9% (3) sharpening and 0.9% (1) softening in non-sponsored content. There are 101

instances of force, of which 67.3% (68) are intensification and 32.7% (33) are quantification. Up-scaling intensification occurs 58.1% (61), and upscaling quantification 24.8% (26). There are only 6.7% (7) of downscaling intensification and quantification each.

Sponsored content has a total of 189 instances of graduation. 83.6% (158) of these are upscaling, and 15.9% (30) are downscaling. Again, focus is rare, with only 1.1% (2) sharpening and 0.9% (1) softening. Values of force occur 186 times. Of this 63.4% (118) are intensification, and 36.6% (68) are quantification. 60.8% (115) are up-scaling intensification, but only 1.6% (3) are downscaling. 22.2% (42) are upscaling quantification, while 13.8% (26) are downscaling.

Ambiguous content has a total of 102 instances of graduation. 68.6% (70) of the instances are upscaling, and 31.4% (32) are downscaling. Focus only occurs as sharpening, with 3.9% (4) of all instances of graduation. There are 98 instances of force, of which 59.2% (58) are intensifying, and 40.8% (40) are quantifying. 49.1% (50) are instances of upscaling intensification, but only 7.8% (8) are instances of downscaling. Interestingly, upscaling quantification is 15.7% (16) of all graduation, while downscaling quantification is 23.5% (24) which is over half of all quantification.

Comparing the groups of content, the only difference in values of focus is that ambiguous content does not include any softening use. However, as the use of focus is scarce overall, this is not very notable. Therefore, values of focus will not be given any further attention.

As was mentioned, non-sponsored content has the most upscaling graduation, with 85.7%. In sponsored content, 83.6% is upscaling, which is not a considerable difference. Ambiguous content on the other hand has much less upscaling, with only 68.6%. Non-sponsored and sponsored content have more intensifying graduation (67.3% and 63.4% respectively), while in ambiguous content the use of intensification (59.2%) and quantification is more even. In all three content groups, intensification is mostly up-scaled. Example 29 shows common realizations of this.

(29) I LOVE this time of year, but it's such a double edged sword [sic]
(Sugg 2019k)

Sugg up-scales both *love* and *double-edged sword* in various ways. *Love* is an up-scaled expression of *like*. In addition, Sugg has used full capitalization to add more emphasis, thus even further up-scaling the phrase. *Double-edged sword* is intensified with the phrase *such a*.

The realizations of graduation do not significantly differ between the content groups. Other common realizations of up-scaling intensification in the material are words like *really*, *very*, and *so*.

Quantification, in contrast, is mostly up-scaled in non-sponsored and sponsored content but more often down-scaled in ambiguous content. Example 30 shows instances of both up- and downscaling quantification in a sponsored post.

- (30) It's so great knowing she's sorted for months on end in one application 🙌
(Wood 2019h)

In Wood's post, *months on end* up-scales the length of time, and *one* downscales the number of applications needed. Common realizations of quantification in the material include *much*, *just*, *all*, and *little*.

While non-sponsored content has the least amount of downscaling out of all content groups, both down-scaling intensification and down-scaling quantification occur equally. In contrast, in sponsored and ambiguous content, downscaling graduation is mostly quantification. Overall, the most common realizations of down-scaled quantifying graduation are *some*, *little* and *just*. Non-sponsored content simply includes less of these. This suggests that in sponsored and ambiguous content, influencers mostly downplay volume or time.

The hypothesis posits that sponsored content would have more up-scaling of positive attitudes. Looking at the targets of graduation, both positive and negative attitudinal values are more often up-scaled than downscaled throughout the material. Upscaling of both negative and positive attitudinal values can be seen in example 29, where the phrase holding positive attitude is *love*, and the phrase holding negative attitude is *double-edged sword*. Nonetheless, there are differences between the three groups of content. Ambiguous content has the most down-scaling of positive attitude as well as the most up-scaling of negative attitude. Example 31 shows instances of both.

- (31) send mike [sic] some love and sunscreen because for some reason he doesn't think he needs it and he's currently burnt 😂
(Bright 2019f)

Positive attitudinal value *love*, is down-scaled with the word *some*, and negative attitudinal value *burnt* includes up-scaling intensification, as it is an intensified variation of the phrase "has a sunburn." Non-sponsored content has the most up-scaling of positive attitudes, although

the difference to sponsored content is not considerable. Unsurprisingly, sponsored content has more down-scaling of negative attitudes than the other two content groups. This means that in sponsored content, positive attitudes are more often up-scaled and negative attitudes more often downscaled. In addition, the results of attitudinal values in section 6.1 show that in sponsored content positive evaluations are mostly aimed at products, as shown in example 32, while in non-sponsored they are mostly towards the writer or the reader as in example 33.

- (32) It's such a super easy and reliable way to keep your pet protected from fleas and ticks
(Wood 2019l)
- (33) [...]to say thanks for so many amazingly kind messages after yesterday's video.
(Wood 2019a)

In example 32, Wood uses phrases *such a* and *super* to up-scale the product's ease and reliability. In example 33, she up-scales the readers' "kind messages" with the words *so*, *many* and *amazingly*. The results of attitudinal values imply that in sponsored content influencers mainly up-scale the positive qualities of products, while in non-sponsored content attitudinal values of products, the writer, the reader, and neutral participants are more equally up- and down-scaled.

The results of the analysis of each domain of appraisal framework have now been presented. In the next section, I will expand the analysis and discuss the possible reasons and meanings behind these results.

7 Analysis of the Results

In this section I will expand the analysis and go over the most surprising and meaningful findings. In the following sub-sections I will address the use of attitude, engagement and graduation in more detail. I will present additional examples to support my speculations.

7.1 Attitude

The hypothesis regarding attitude was correct, as influencers do use more positive evaluations in their sponsored content, than in the other content groups. It is not surprising, as the point of advertising is to make a product seem good and desirable. By applying positive evaluations to the sponsored content, the influencer can make the readers see the product in a good light. While positive evaluations of the sponsored product are a given, or at least expected, it is not enough to explain why sponsored content has more positive attitude than the others.

Authorial affect is more common than non-authorial in all content groups, but especially in non-sponsored content. With authorial affect, the influencers connect the attitudinal evaluation to themselves, making them more personal. This helps to create a closer relationship with the readers. Consequently, the readers will trust the influencer more.

It turns out that all content groups had differences in the evaluated targets. Unsurprisingly, the most common targets in sponsored content are products. An obvious reason is the fact that each post included at least one product, which is evaluated multiple times. In non-sponsored content, the most common target is the writer. This is partly explained with how the data was collected, because in order to be recognized as non-sponsored, the post could not include any mentions to brands or companies. Thus, it is understandable that non-sponsored content involves less mentions of products in general, and focuses more on the influencer herself. In respect to what the main focus of the content usually is, ambiguous content lays somewhere between non-sponsored and sponsored, as the posts can include mentions of products, but not always. Thus, it is not surprising that the most common target is the writer.

Overall, the writer was found to be the most common target of negative attitude. The influencers often make fun of themselves, or otherwise point out their flaws, as in example 34.

- (34) [...] but there was a teeny hill that I always struggled to get up...probably because I SUCK at riding bikes, I have zero leg power 😂
(Sugg 2019o, punctuation as in original)

With the phrases *teeny hill*, *struggled*, *suck* and *zero leg power*, Sugg highlights her lack of skill in riding a bike. In sponsored content, the writer is the second most common target, and the attitudinal evaluations are significantly more positive than in non-sponsored, or even ambiguous content. Influencers may want to seem more confident, happy or capable in sponsored content, so that the reader connects the positivity with the product, even if it does not explicitly refer to the advertised product. It is also possible that the brand offering the sponsorship requires or prefers that there are no negative or undesirable features mentioned in the post, even if these do not specifically deal with the product. Two of Wood's posts offer a good example of this difference in attitude. Examples 35 and 36 present the beginnings of Wood's non-sponsored and sponsored posts respectively.

(35) Tired of sadness and shame and comparison and inferiority, tired of hiding on holiday, tired of fears of food and weight and tired of hating this body which has done so much magic for me.

(Wood 2019f)

(36) Getting on board with a neutral/positive body image and being open to the idea of body acceptance - deciding that my body is fine, good, and worthy of love - has literally changed my life.

(Wood 2019o)

Both examples involve Wood's issues with body-confidence and how she is improving, but are completely different in their attitudinal values. The non-sponsored example includes a lot of negative phrases, even as they show that Wood will not continue to have this negative view of herself. On the other hand, the sponsored content displays the same issues, but with a more positive approach. Thus, the difference in the number of negative and positive evaluations is not only due to difference in what the posts are about, but more how the issues are presented. This supports the idea that brands hope the sponsored content to be generally positive, so that readers may associate the positivity with the brand or product.

Non-sponsored content mostly includes affect, while sponsored and ambiguous content mostly have appreciation. The reason why attitudinal evaluations concern emotions more in non-sponsored content is possibly due to the content being more personal. Targets evaluated with affect deal with the writer's wellbeing and emotions, her life or friends. More personal and negative utterances in non-sponsored and ambiguous content may show that the writer is more honest than in sponsored content. However, it is likely that with affect and negative evaluations of herself, the influencer seems more relatable and can build a closer relationship with the reader. Thus, they can gain more audience and advance their career.

Values of appreciation differ significantly between the content groups. As mentioned in the results section, non-sponsored has the least appreciation, and it is mostly negative composition. This is explained by the above-mentioned negativity towards self and the consecutive relatability. Attitudinal evaluation in sponsored content often targets products, and thus it is natural that the evaluations concern appreciation. In addition, the values are often positive, as the focus is on advertising the products as useful and as good as possible. As the ‘genre’ of the material is fashion and lifestyle, one could expect there to be more values of composition involved. However, the influencers often use valuation as a way to make the advertised product seem more than just a pretty object, as shown in example 37.

- (37) The second light is a super fun pair of boobs to serve as a reminder to check them regularly!
(Sugg 2019f)

The advertised neon lights are described not only as looking *fun* but also as a useful *reminder* for checking signs of breast cancer. Thus, Sugg implies the lights are not just a decorative item, but serve a more important purpose, and buying them is more justified. While the ambiguous content contains a lot of appreciation and mentions of products as well, there is no similar strong valuation of products as in sponsored content. In addition, there are more negative values of appreciation than in sponsored content. Influencers show their or other’s reactions to things, instead of promoting the value of the item, as they do not need to persuade the reader to buy it.

The differences in the targets and values of judgements between the groups of content are quite surprising. In non-sponsored and ambiguous content, negative judgement is mostly towards the writer, and there is only positive judgement towards the reader. In contrast, in sponsored content, the writer is mostly targeted with positive judgement. It is possible that influencers make themselves seem more capable in sponsored posts, so that the reader will associate it with the product advertised. Similarly, the only negative judgement towards a reader is found in a sponsored post, as shown in example 38.

- (38) No mess and none of the stress that comes with trying to put the drops on 🙄
(Wood 2019h)

Here the negative judgement of capability is expressed with *trying*. The judgement can be considered to target the writer and the reader at the same time. The post advertises a tick collar for a pet, which is, according to Wood, a better alternative to the aforementioned drops.

Negative judgement is applied, to make it seem as both the influencer and the reader need the collar. Most instances of negative judgement towards the writer are constructed in a similar way in sponsored content. This shows how influencers use and adapt attitudinal values to affect the reader and their perception of the product. If the influencer is successful, in example 38's case, the reader will think that they lack the capability and thus need the collar. Alternatively, by making herself look better than usual, the influencer may affect the reader so that they feel they need the advertised product in order to be like the influencer.

7.2 Engagement

As mentioned in the previous section, the results for engagement are almost completely opposite to what was hypothesized. I expected influencers to use expansive engagement resources (such as *I think*) to show that the descriptions and opinions presented about the sponsor's product are really theirs and not just prewritten slogans, thus making themselves and the post seem more genuine. Surprisingly, only ambiguous content has more expansive than contrastive resources. While in numbers the difference is significant, one should bear in mind the fact that over half of the resources were used in one single post. Therefore, the difference is not as meaningful. Sponsored content included the same number of expansive resources in comparison to non-sponsored. However, the reason for a sparse use of expansive resources may not be that different from the reasoning behind the hypothesis, which was to aim for genuineness. It is possible that the influencers purposefully leave out expansive resources to try to decrease ambiguity, a characteristic that was recognized in this study as well. As a result, they create a contrast between something that is truly their own opinion and something that is part of or required in the sponsorship. Thus, they do not only seem, but are more genuine, as they do not explicitly claim the utterances as their opinions. As the guidelines for social media advertising require an explicit disclosure of an advert, the influencers do not try to "fight back", but instead try to stay honest and transparent. In contrast, the ambiguous posts include more expansive resources, as there exists a need to explicitly differentiate between the influencer's and others' ideas. Example 39 and 40 show this difference.

(39) 🍷 AD [...] which I steamed to crease-free perfection with my @tefal.uk garment steamer before heading out the door. It's so quick, easy and effortless to use [...]
(Wood 2019j)

(40) I also feel like it's given me a little confidence boost too [...]

(Sugg 2019m)

Example 39 is from a sponsored post by Wood. She describes the garment steamer she has used, without using any engagement resources with her evaluations. With the disclosure “AD” at the beginning of the post, readers are aware that this content has been paid for and treat it as such. By not including engagement resources in the second sentence, Wood is not emphasizing her own voice in any way. Example 40 is from the ambiguous post which includes the majority of entertainment values. In it, Sugg talks about her hair extensions, which she has previously received as a gifted service. By using expansive engagement *I also feel like*, she clearly states her own opinions, and thus tries to convince the reader that this is not an advert, and she has not been paid to say these things. Such convincing-tactics are redundant in sponsored content, as the guideline’s required disclosure already shows that the post is an advert. Readers may automatically assume that everything said in the sponsored post is required by the brand, and not the influencer’s real opinions.

This may also explain the difference in the use of entertainment between sponsored, non-sponsored and ambiguous posts, mentioned in the results section. In the results section, examples 26 and 27 showed how engagement in sponsored posts was more often realized with the word *can*, while the other two groups showed more instances of mental verbs such as *I think*. Mental verbs tie the writer more personally to the proposition, while modal verbs have a more passive way of allowing other possibilities. However, it cannot be concluded that non-sponsored content is more personal in terms of engagement, as the use of pronoun contradicts this. As shown in examples 22-24 in the results section, influencers use more personal phrases such as *I know* and *trust me* in sponsored posts than in non-sponsored.

In general, I expected more engagement resources altogether in the data. It is possible that the use of engagement is not very common in Instagram posts due to the nature of the content. Online language tends to be more concise, but Instagram does not have a word or character limit for the captions, and engagement resources are not completely left out. It can be presumed that the content on an influencer’s account is generated by one person. Therefore, it is possible that the content is expected to inherently include only the influencers own voice and thoughts, hence it is not necessary to explicitly mention, and engagement resources are not needed. This, of course, strongly contradicts the previous idea, that engagement is left out in sponsored content to be more transparent, as here the influencer assumes that the reader interprets everything as her propositions. From this point of view, the lack of expansive

resources has a very different motivation. By stating the features and attitudinal assessments as bare assertions, the influencer posits them as facts, such as in example 41.

- (41) [...] @serestouk Flea and Tick Control collar which keeps her protected from fleas and ticks for up to 8 months.
(Wood 2019l)

Wood describes what her cat's collar is capable of, without leaving room for questioning or considering other ideas or opinions. At the same time, she excludes those readers who may disagree. The absence of engagement strategies may be interpreted as the writer considering the utterance as an absolute truth. This may lead to the reader accepting the propositions more easily, as they are not given a chance to question it. Thus, they may accept the evaluation as a fact. However, the reader is not compelled to believe it as the only option either, since there are no contractive resources at play. Without engagement strategies, such evaluations may "stick" to the reader more effectively, and thus increase purchase intention. Yet, as was shown by Stubb and Colliander (2019), the inclusion of the disclosure "AD" enhances advertisement recognition, and the bare assertions may be recognized as part of the advert. It is also possible that advertisement recognition lowers the chance of purchase, therefore bare assertions are used to make the advert more effective.

This view is supported by the use of pronounce, which differs between sponsored and non-sponsored posts. In sponsored posts, pronounce refers mostly to the writer and her knowledge or trustworthiness. The influencer uses pronounce to show her expertise and authority, and gives more weight to the evaluation. This may make all of the evaluations and descriptions of the product seem more factual, and thus convince the reader and increase purchase intention. As the use of pronounce is scarce throughout the data, the lack of pronounce in ambiguous content may be due to chance, and thus not to hold any deeper meanings.

Finally, yet another surprising result was that denial was the most common strategy in sponsored posts, as it was expected that negativity in general would be lower in the sponsored material. However, using denial instead of contract, the influencers leave even less room for other opinions, again excluding possible readers who disagree. Furthermore, many usages of denial precede other negative phrases, as shown in example 42.

- (42) No mess and none of the stress that comes with trying to put the drops on
(Wood 2019h)

In example 42, Wood describes the previously mentioned collar for her cat. She compares the collar's qualities to another, possibly more common method for repelling fleas: medicinal drops. She appeals to other pet owners, who are the main target group of the advert and who know how difficult it can be to give any type of medicine to pets, by denying the expected inconvenience. This makes the collar seem like the better product. While similar instances can be found in non-sponsored and ambiguous content as well, in these content groups it is more common to use deny for positive things, as shown in italics in example 43.

- (43) [...] I'm certainly *not saying* that getting extensions has changed my life in some drastic way, as they *haven't*, [...]
(Sugg 2019m, emphasis added)

For the better half of the post, Sugg praises her hair extensions. Thus, she expects that the reader may interpret her to mean the hair extensions are life-changing, and deems necessary to explicitly state that she does not believe so. Such instances are not found in sponsored content.

The differences in the use of engagement between the groups of content are too small to make any definitive conclusions. The only significant difference appeared in the use of entertainment in ambiguous content, which was due to a single post, and thus cannot be considered a meaningful result. It is possible that the use of engagement simply does not largely differ in influencer content. However, the abundant use of bare assertions with positive evaluations in sponsored content suggests that influencers do manipulate the readers' perception of a product and thus affect their purchase intention, by stating evaluations as taken for granted. Those readers who do not agree with the evaluations may feel excluded.

7.3 Graduation

Finally, I turn to graduation, and the possible reasons behind its use. With the hypothesis, I expected there to be more upscaling graduation in sponsored content than in the other content groups. It was expected that influencers would be motivated to further emphasize the good qualities the product has, to make the advertisement more effective and satisfy the brand's requirements. Non-sponsored and ambiguous content would therefore have no need for as much graduation. As it turns out, the amount of graduation is similar in all three content groups. Nevertheless, there are more detailed differences, which show that influencers in fact do apply more emphasis on positive values of the sponsored products.

Values of focus are rare, above all in sponsored content. This is surprising, as especially sharpening focus could be useful in graduating and positively promoting a product. However, the language in influencers' content tends to be casual and similar to oral communication, and it is possible that this style of writing supports more the use of force.

The results show unexpected variation in the use of force between the groups of content. It was expected that graduation, especially up-scaling, would occur more in sponsored content in comparison to the other two groups. While this was not exactly the case, it was concluded in the results section that influencers tend to up-scale positive utterances and down-scale negative ones more in sponsored content than in non-sponsored or ambiguous content. The reason behind this is similar to why there are more positive attitudinal evaluations in sponsored content: When both the influencer and the mentioned product are evaluated more positively in a sponsored post in comparison to others, the advertised product seems better and the advertisement is more likely successful. By up-scaling positive qualities and down-scaling negative ones, the influencer emphasizes the value of the product. As was mentioned before, it is also possible that brands require there to be less negativity in the sponsored post in general. With down-scaling, the influencer can include some negativity in the post so that she may seem more impartial or relatable, without the risk of the negativity affecting the readers' perception of the product. In contrast, in non-sponsored and ambiguous content influencers do up-scale negative values and down-scale positive ones, as there is no such risk. The following example is from a sponsored post by Sugg, in which she advertises an online clothing store, especially the summer dresses.

- (44) Even though I love a summer dress, I'm also naturally a cold person (and lets [sic] be honest, British summertime is a little unpredictable) so I like pairing my floaty dresses with jumpers, cardigans and little shackets [...]
(Sugg 2019a)

In example 44, Sugg down-scales the negative value of British summer (*unpredictable*) with a *little*. She tells the reader that despite the mildly inconvenient weather, wearing or getting a dress is a good idea. She then supports this possible purchase decision even further, by offering advice on how to stay warm in the weather-inappropriate dress, simultaneously answering to the expected criticism or questioning.

Non-sponsored content includes the most up-scaling graduation. However, a considerable portion targets phrases holding negative attitude. This obviously connects with the use of negative attitudinal values discussed in section 7.1, where it was mentioned that

influencers use negativity to make themselves seem more relatable. By up-scaling the negative values and down-scaling the positive values, influencers give more emphasis to their relatability. Even though there is more up-scaling of positive attitude in non-sponsored than sponsored content, positive attitudinal evaluations in non-sponsored content are so uncommon in comparison, that sponsored content can be regarded to have the most up-scaled positive evaluation. Ambiguous content was found to have the most down-scaling of positive attitudinal values and up-scaling of negative attitudinal values. This in a way balances out the high number of positive attitude in ambiguous content, and supports the conclusion that sponsored content is more positive than the others.

It was shown that influencers use more downscaling of quantity in sponsored and ambiguous content than in non-sponsored content. In sponsored and ambiguous content, the number of products or the effort of the action described in the post is often down-scaled. By doing this, influencers can make the advertised items seem as though they are less of an investment, and increase purchase intention. At the same time, they make the items they own or received seem ‘less’, and hence likely stay more relatable to their less wealthy followers. By down-scaling the effort required to use the product, influencers make it seem helpful or simple to use, and thus worth getting. Furthermore, in sponsored content, down-scaled quantifying graduation is used as shown in example 45.

- (45) They kindly sent me an early viewing of the show as it’s currently only available to watch in the US (not for much longer, WOO) [...]
(Sugg 2019b)

The example above is part of a sponsored post, in which Sugg advertises both a TV-show and a competition that the network is organizing. Sugg down-scales the time it will take for the advertised TV-show to be available in the UK with the phrase *not for much longer*. In addition, she makes the prize of the competition (an early showing) seem more exclusive and desirable with the word *only*. Thus, readers may be more eager to take part in the competition. I have now gone through the full analysis of the material and speculated the reasons behind the use of evaluative language in influencers’ content. In the next section, I will discuss these results and their meaning.

8 Discussion

Having now analyzed the use of attitude, engagement and graduation in the Instagram content of four influencers, it is safe to say that sponsored content tends to be more persuasive than non-sponsored or ambiguous content. In this section, I will further discuss the results of this study, and offer ideas on the meaning and relevance of these findings.

In general, while there are significant differences in the use of attitude, engagement and graduation, the content does not drastically differ between the groups. Readers may not recognize the differences discovered in this study, which means that the influencers are successful in creating sponsored content that blends into their other content and satisfies the readers' 'needs'. This may also contribute to the effectiveness of the advertisement. The language on the influencers' content does not include a lot of negative evaluations, which implies that influencers mostly talk about things they enjoy. This is especially true when comparing sponsored and ambiguous content. This uniformity may lead the readers to interpret that the influencer's opinions are always genuine, even on sponsored content, as influencers only ever mention good items. When the sponsored content does not obviously differ from the other content, it may be difficult for consumers to distinguish advertisements, even with the explicit disclosures. While it has been proven that the disclosures positively affect advertisement recognition, it is possible that the disclosure is sometimes left unnoticed. In addition, as sponsored content becomes more common, it is possible that consumers of the content become accustomed to the signs of disclosure, which then lose their effectiveness.

Despite the similarities, it was found that sponsored content does involve more persuasive language especially in the use of attitude and graduation, as was shown in the previous section. While the differences are not obvious to the reader, they are significant enough to influence how the reader interprets the meanings in the content. It is likely that because the content groups are not completely dissimilar, the differences that exist are more effective, than if the posts differed more noticeably. In sponsored content, influencers present themselves as more capable and happy, and use their authority, bare assertions and various reasoning to subtly convince the reader that the product in question is worth getting.

Relatability and closeness between the influencer and the reader are important parts of the relationship. Thus, these are actively constructed and developed in the non-sponsored and ambiguous content. By being relatable with negative evaluations of herself and using more personal language, the influencer builds trust between her and the reader. In sponsored content, this trust is then exploited. Influencers do not use many engagement strategies but rather present

the positive qualities of products as bare assertions. By presenting the evaluations as taken for granted, the influencer excludes those readers who do not agree with her. Being excluded by someone you look up to, or feel close to is not desirable, and thus may lead to the readers wanting to believe the evaluations even more. In addition, bare assertions make it more difficult to distinguish scripted and genuine opinions. Feng and Wignell (2011, 583) suggest that character voice manipulates the advert's viewer's attitude by creating relatable identity and situations. In influencer marketing, the established relatability makes it possible for influencers to manipulate readers.

Going back to the notions of signs and ideal realities discussed in section 2, the exaggerated positivity on sponsored content may hold even more significance. As influencers are individuals who are looked up to and trusted, they hold certain power over their followers. The followers have some level of admiration and aspiration towards the influencer and her lifestyle. As the results show, influencer content is overall very positive, and thus their life can seem very desirable. The emphasized positivity combined with bare assertions in sponsored content may increase the understanding that having a certain item or product will bring the reader closer to the presented ideal life. It is likely that readers unconsciously connect the good feelings presented in the post with the product, even if the explicit disclosure is present.

The evaluative language on sponsored content tends to be more "intense" as values of attitude are usually positive, and up-scaling graduation is mostly used to emphasize the positive evaluations. The influencers may purposefully aim for a stronger message, as readers will adopt this interpretation, which in turn may increase purchase intention. In a way, influencers then are, if not exploiting, at least utilizing the relatability, authority, and trust they have. I am not claiming that influencers do this consciously or that they calculate each utterance they post. Rather, the results show what the influencers prioritize in each group of content, and how they consequently affect and manipulate the reader's interpretation, whether they intended to do so or not. With the explicit advertisement disclosures, readers may interpret the non-sponsored and ambiguous material as the norm and the base to which they compare the sponsored content. Therefore, it is likely that the readers strongly associate the seemingly more positive and confident influencer of the sponsored content with the advertised product, which makes it more desirable.

All advertising tends to exaggerate the positive features of a product, so the results of this study are not groundbreaking in that sense. However, there is reason for concern as these depictions are increasingly integrated into entertainment media. Influencer content is first and foremost a form of entertainment. With more traditional media, like TV or magazines, the line

between entertainment and advertisement is often clear with commercial breaks or separate pages. With sponsored Instagram content, the advertisements become the entertainment, no matter how well camouflaged as the original medium. Advertisements are becoming part of the enjoyment, and this may lead to lower advertisement recognition overall.

The analysis shows that influencers' sponsored content does involve manipulative language. This means that while readers may not recognize sponsored content from non-sponsored without the explicit disclosure, there are underlying differences which likely affect how they interpret the content. Readers may take the information presented in sponsored content as an absolute truth. It is not always clear if a post involves advertisements or not, as was shown in the material with the need for the ambiguous content group. As new social media platforms are developed, the role of such content increases in our society. The findings suggest that more drastic measures for regulating sponsored content may be required. In addition, consumers need to become more conscious of sponsored content and its effects. Studies similar to the current one may be useful for raising awareness.

I have now gone through the most important findings of the study, and discussed the meanings behind them. However, without interviews from the influencers themselves, it is impossible to know for sure the motivations and purposes behind the language use. In the next section, I will give a summary of the thesis, discuss the caveats of this study, and offer ideas for future research.

9 Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out if the use of evaluative language in influencers' Instagram content varies depending on whether the post is sponsored or not. The material is a self-collected micro corpus of four influencers' Instagram posts. It was divided into three different categories, sponsored, non-sponsored and ambiguous, to avoid harsh division and to keep the study unbiased. Martin and White's appraisal framework was used as a base for the analysis. Hypotheses expected that sponsored content would have more positive attitude, more expansive engagement, and more up-scaling graduation than the other two content groups. The results showed that, for the most part, the groups of content are similar, but significant differences exist nonetheless. The set hypotheses had various success. As expected, sponsored content did include more positive attitude, than the other two content groups. Non-sponsored content has a lower percentage of positive affect, which suggests that influencers include more positivity in their content when they receive monetary compensation for it. The results show that in sponsored content, influencers avoid mentioning being unhappy, displeased or incapable. Thus, readers may be manipulated into believing that the product in sponsored content positively affects the influencer and her life, as she seems happier or healthier in the sponsored post than in non-sponsored posts. In addition, the results show how in sponsored content the target of positive attitudinal evaluation is often the advertised product, while in non-sponsored, these evaluations target the writer, the reader, products and other more evenly. This may lead to the reader interpreting the advertised item as better than others.

The second hypothesis dealt with engagement resources. I expected sponsored content to include more expansive engagement resources than contractive, as the influencers would try to make the advertised content come across as their genuine opinions. This hypothesis turned out to be false, as all groups of content included more contractive resources. While the use of engagement is similar in non-sponsored and sponsored content, the former included mostly counter, while latter included mostly denials. In addition, in sponsored content evaluations of advertised products are often presented as bare assertions. These findings suggest that influencers leave less room for alternative viewpoints in sponsored content, and thus attempt to make the advertisements more convincing.

Finally, the hypothesis that sponsored content would have more up-scaling graduation of positive aspects turned out partially correct. The results show that non-sponsored content has slightly more up-scaling than sponsored content. However, it is worth noting that sponsored content involves significantly more down-scaling of negative attitudes than the other two

content groups. In addition, it is important to remember, that even though positive attitudinal evaluations are more often up-scaled in non-sponsored content than in sponsored content, the number of positive evaluations in non-sponsored content is very low. This means, that the proportion of up-scaled positive attitudes is much higher in sponsored content than the other content groups, and can thus be regarded as having the most up-scaled positive evaluations. In addition, the target of positive attitudinal evaluation in sponsored content is often the advertised product, which further shows how the advertised items are made more desirable in comparison to other content. Therefore, sponsored content is deemed to be more positive and persuasive than the other content groups.

The differences discovered in this study may be such that readers cannot notice, but which still affect what they internalize. Therefore, influencers do manipulate the readers' perception and thus may affect their purchase intention. However, without interviews with said influencers, it is impossible to know what the real motivations behind the evaluative language are, and if the differences are intentional or not. The results of this study suggest that new regulations or efforts to raise awareness of this type of content and its effects may be needed, to protect consumers.

Limitations of the study mostly hail from the scope. As came apparent in the results, one post could have a great effect on how much certain attitude was found in a content group. In addition, influencers may have distinct personal ways of writing or creating content. Thus, collecting data from different individuals may provide contrasting results. That said, it could be interesting to compare the language on different 'genres' of influencer content, for example travel or gaming focused creators. A larger sample would allow more variation and give more reliable results. Furthermore, the present study focused on the textual part of influencer content. Applying multimodal analysis could bring better insight to how influencer's content is set up and what it includes. Other forms of social media advertising, such as videos or tweets, could bring out other features of influencer marketing.

Previously, influencers' content, especially sponsored content, has not been studied in a great deal. In addition, many studies on advertisement language have only focused on one aspect of the framework, thus the present study works as an experimental study. Focusing on only one domain of the framework would have allowed a larger sample, however, it was impossible to know beforehand which domain would be the most meaningful subject.

It is in the nature of appraisal framework to be open for interpretation. As mentioned, interpreting evaluative language is very dependent on context and the reader. It is likely that the content does not have the same effect on every reader. The same is true when analyzing the

content. Manual analysis will always be subjective to some extent. Furthermore, in the current data, certain words may have completely different roles and meanings than in other types of texts. Thus, the results of the current study cannot necessarily be applied and compared with other appraisal framework studies. The framework is also somewhat limiting in how the material can be studied. The focus is on more detailed aspects, while using another method could give more insight to other features used in the content. For example, while analyzing the material, it was found to include a lot of phrases directly addressing the reader. There is a possibility, that the more *likes*, comments and shares, i.e. engagement the content has, the more money the influencer receives from the sponsor. At the very least, the more engagement there is, the more people will likely see the post. Thus, the phrases addressing the reader could be monetarily motivated. This type of addressing could be further studied in the future. Alternatively, the relationship between the influencer and the reader could be an interesting subject. Influencers are seen as celebrities, experts, or otherwise exceptional for users to follow them. This suggests that there may be some type of power-relationship between the influencer and the follower.

Finally, the scope of the current study did not allow for further exploration of how readers interpret the evaluations. It would be interesting to see how readers interpret different uses of engagement, and what they recognize or consider as the influencer's own opinion and what as a part of the advertisement.

Despite the limitations, the current study provides to fill a gap in linguistic studies on social media advertising. Online media develops and changes rapidly, and new platforms which have their own style of content rise to popularity at an even pace. Brands are quick to employ the new possibilities for promoting their products. Studying the current state of social media advertising provides a good base for understanding, creating, and dealing with possible future forms of advertising. To fully understand the scale of influencer marketing and its effects, more studies are required.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Number of Attitude Values

	Non-sponsored			Sponsored			Ambiguous		
	Total	Positive	Negative	Total	Positive	Negative	Total	Positive	Negative
	108	68	40	217	190	27	91	73	18
Affect	54	38	16	64	58	6	33	31	2
Un/happiness	34	29	5	43	43	0	23	21	2
Dis/satisfaction	8	4	4	7	3	4	2	2	0
In/security	7	2	5	5	4	1	3	3	0
Dis/Inclination	5	3	2	9	8	1	5	5	0
Judgement	25	13	12	36	29	7	20	10	10
Normality	3	1	2	7	4	3	6	5	1
Capability	15	6	9	15	13	2	12	3	9
Tenacity	0	0	0	4	3	1	0	0	0
Veracity	1	1	0	4	4	0	2	2	0
Propriety	6	5	1	6	5	1	0	0	0
Appreciation	29	17	12	117	103	14	38	32	6
Reaction	6	4	2	37	34	3	18	15	3
Composition	16	7	9	35	27	8	11	9	2
Valuation	7	6	1	45	42	3	9	8	1

Appendix 2: Number of Graduation Values

	Non-sponsored			Sponsored			Ambiguous		
	Total	Upscale	Downscale	Total	Upscale	Downscale	Total	Upscale	Downscale
	105	90	15	189	158	30	102	70	32
Force	101	87	14	186	157	29	98	66	32
Intensification	68	61	7	118	115	3	58	50	8
Quantification	33	26	7	68	42	26	40	16	24
Focus	4	3	1	3	2	1	4	4	0
Soften	1	-	1	1	-	1	0	-	0
Sharpen	3	3	-	2	2	-	4	4	-

Appendix 3: Sample of the Data

Key

(letter) + boldface	attitude	Judgement	
italics	engagement	nor	normality
(number) + underline	graduation	cap	capability
[]	emoji	ten	tenacity
		ver	veracity
<u>Attitude:</u>		prop	propriety
+	positive	Appreciation	
-	negative	react	reaction
Affect		comp	composition
hap	un/happiness	val	valuation
sec	in/security		
sat	dis/satisfaction	<u>Graduation</u>	
inc	dis/inclination	int	intensity
auth	authoritative affect	quant	quantity
non	non-authoritative	up	up-scaling
	affect	down	down-scaling

Non-Sponsored Content

Post	Attitude	Engagement	Graduation
Well, <i>I wasn't expecting this either, but</i> here we are. (1) Tired of (2) sadness and (3) shame and (4) comparison and (5) inferiority , (6) tired of (7) hiding on holiday , (8) tired of (9) fears of food and weight and (10) tired of (11)(a) hating this body which has done (b) <u>so much</u> (12)(c) magic for me. So let's try the alternative (<i>because yes, there is an alternative</i>) [a*] ♥ Working on (13) making peace with my body has (d) <u>truly</u> changed my life in (e) <u>many, many</u> ways. (14) Here comes the sun [b*]:☀️#averagegirlsize	1 aff -sat auth 2 aff -hap auth 3aff -sec auth 4judg -cap 5judg -cap 6 aff -sat auth 7aff -sec auth 8 aff -sat auth 9aff -inc auth 10 aff -sat auth 11 aff -hap auth 12 judg +cap 13 aff +hap auth 14 aff +hap auth (metaphor)	<i>I wasn't expecting this either</i> -> unexpected -> contract: disclaim: counter <i>But</i> contract: disclaim: counter <i>because yes, there is an alternative</i> (prior idea that there wasn't) -> contract: disclaim: counter	a) force: int, up (strong dislike) b) force: int up +quant up c) force: int up d) force: int up (maximizer) e) force: quant up + int up (repetition) [b*] sun = force int up

(Wood 2019f)	[a*] heart aff +hap		
An (a) <u>accurate</u> snapshot of my (b) <u>daily</u> (1) existential crisis face while the caffeine works it's (2) (c) magic [a*]🌟 ([b*]📷: @amifordphoto) (Wood 2019d)	1aff -sec auth 2app +val auth	[b*] camera showing who took the picture = nothing	a) focus: sharp b) force: quant up c) force: int up [a*] star after 'magic' = force int up
Hello, it me - looking like I'm (a) <u>truly</u> (1) buzzing about life. (b) <i>Just</i> a (c) <u>quick</u> note to say (2) sorry for being a (3)(d) crap internet person for two weeks, I have entered my (e) <u>annual</u> (4) existential crisis and have reached the (f) <u>always</u> (5) enjoyable 'But what am I really DOING?' milestone [a*]💜 Anyone else here with me? (6) Enjoy your stay! I will snap out of it soon and get something filmed when I've stopped overthinking my existence, so see ya (g) <u>real</u> soon [b*]😄 (Wood 2019c)	1aff +sat auth 2judg -prop 3jud -cap 4aff -sec auth 5app -reac auth 6aff +sat non [a*] crystal ball = nothing [b*] sunglasses emoji = 'cool, confident' = aff +sec	<i>Just a quick note</i> contract: disclaim: counter <i>But</i> contract: disclaim: counter	a) force: int up b) force: int;down c) force: quan;down d) force: int up e)force: quant;up f) force: quant;up g) force: int;up
[a*tent b*]🌴🌞 Five days of (1) sunshine , my (a)(2) favourite people, eating chips for breakfast to the soundtracks of (b)(3) great bands and being (c) <u>so</u> (4) happy (d) that it felt like my face was gonna fall off (<i>although</i> turns out that was <i>just</i> the sunburn) [c*]💕 Glastonbury was (e)(5) the best of times , and now (6) I don't want to see another tinny for (f) <u>at least</u> twelve months [d* beers]🍺 I also took five days (g) <u>completely</u> off without a phone which was (h)(7) the best decision (i) <u>ever</u> , and it (8) felt (j)so good to (k) <i>just</i> (9) enjoy myself without sharing it online . Here's (l) <u>some</u> (m)very (10) unpolished memories as a result [e*]🍷	1aff +hap auth 2 app +hap auth 3app +react 4aff +hap auth 5app +val auth 6aff -inc auth 7 aff +hap auth 8aff +sat auth 9 aff +hap auth 10 app -com [c*] heart = aff +hap [e*] starry eyed= aff +hap	<i>Although</i> contract: disclaim: counter <i>just the sunburn</i> contract: disclaim: counter <i>I don't want to see another tinny...</i> contract: disclaim: deny <i>just enjoy myself</i> contract: disclaim: counter	a) force: int up (most liked) b) force: int up c) force:int;up d) force:int up e) force:int;up f) force: quant up g) force: int up h) force: int;up i) force: quant up j) force: int up k) force: int down l) force: quant down m) force: int up

<p>(Wood 2019b)</p>			<p>[a*] tent = decoration [b*] sun = decoration [c*] emphasizing described happiness = force int up [d*] beers = force int up</p>
<p>(a)Just a (b)big (1)floating head stoppin' by to (2)say thanks for (c) so (d) many (e)amazingly (3)kind messages after yesterday's video. (4)(f)Im good, I'm good, I promise! (g)Just (5)going through all the feelings that come with (h)finally trying to sort your head out (i)after years of (6)neglecting it, and YouTube makes that an (j)extra (7)weird challenge. (8)Appreciate you (k)THE MOST [a*]💜</p> <p>(Wood 2019a)</p>	<p>1 app -comp 2aff +sat auth (pleasure of nice messages) 3jud +prop 4aff +hap auth 5aff -sec auth 6 judg -cap 7 app -com 8 aff +hap (affection) auth</p> <p>[a*] heart= aff +hap</p>	<p><i>I promise</i> contract: proclaim: pronounce</p> <p><i>Just going through</i> Contract: disclaim: counter</p>	<p>a) force: int down b) force: quant up c) force: int up d) force: quant up e) force: int up f) force: int up (repetition) g) force: int down h) force: quant up i) force: quant up j) force: int up k) force:quant up (+extra emphasis with capitals)</p> <p>[a*] emphasizes appreciating = force int up</p>

Appendix 4 Finnish Summary

Sosiaalinen media on oleellinen osa erityisesti nuoremman sukupolven jokapäiväistä elämää. Monet yritykset ja brändit ovat ryhtyneet hyödyntämään sosiaalista mediaa myös mainonnassa ja markkinoinnissa. Tunnettujen sosiaalisen median käyttäjien tai *vaikuttajien* avulla brändit voivat saavuttaa laajan yleisön. Vaikuttajilla on usein olemassa oleva kohderyhmä, joka luottaa vaikuttajan sanaan tai ainakin arvostaa tämän mielipidettä. Julkaisuissa esitetyt mielipiteet ja arvioit saattavat vaikuttaa lukijaan ja tämän ostopäätökseen. Tässä tutkimuksessa selvitin, miten vaikuttajat käyttävät arvioivaa tai evaluoivaa kieltä Instagramissa. Vertailen tätä kielenkäyttöä neljän vaikuttajan sponsoroiduissa, ei-sponsoroiduissa, sekä mainonnan näkökulmasta epäselvissä julkaisuissa. Analyysini perustuu J. R. Martinin ja P. R. R. Whiten (2005) *suhtautumisen teoriaan* (Appraisal Framework). Teoria keskittyy *evaluoivan* kielenkäytön analysointiin. Tätä teoriaa on aikaisemmin sovellettu muun muassa mainonnan tutkimuksissa (ks. Križan 2016, Ho ja Suen 2017), ja siksi valitsin sen myös tämän tutkimuksen pohjaksi. Martin ja White nimeävät suhtautumisen teorialle kolme alasysteemiä: *asennoituminen* (attitude), *sitoutuminen* (engagement), sekä *asteittaisuus* (graduation). Oletan, että vaikuttajat käyttävät positiivista asennoitumista enemmän sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa kuin kahdessa muussa julkaisutyypissä. Lisäksi oletan, että positiivisesti asennoituneiden ilmausten asteittaisuus on vahvistettu useammin sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa kuin muissa julkaisuissa. Viimeinen hypoteesini tälle tutkimukselle on, että vaikuttajat käyttävät laajentavaa (*expansive*) sitoutumista enemmän sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa kuin muissa. Tässä tutkimuksessa vastaan seuraaviin kysymyksiin:

- 1) Kuinka vaikuttajat käyttävät evaluoivaa asennoitumista sponsoroiduissa, ei-sponsoroiduissa, sekä epäselvissä julkaisuissaan, ja miten tämä kielenkäyttö eroaa eri julkaisu-tyyppien välillä?
- 2) Minkälaista sitoutumista julkaisut sisältävät, ja miten tämä eroaa sponsoroitujen, ei-sponsoroitujen, sekä epäselvien julkaisuiden välillä?
- 3) Miten asteittaisuus esiintyy julkaisuissa, ja mitä eroa on sponsoroitujen, ei-sponsoroitujen, sekä epäselvien julkaisuiden välillä?
- 4) Jos julkaisutyypeissä esiintyy selkeitä eroja, mistä nämä erot johtuvat?

Lisäksi kiinnitän huomiota siihen, mihin asennoitumista tai asteittaisuutta kuvaavat sanat viittaavat, eli mitä näiden evaluoivien merkitysten kohteet ovat. Kohteiden tunnistaminen on

tärkeää, sillä ne saattavat havainnollistaa eroja, joita analyysillä ei muuten välttämättä löytäisi. Lisäksi erot saattavat vaikuttaa lukijan ymmärrykseen hänen huomaamattaan.

Moni vaikuttaja tienaa elantonsa tekemällä yhteistyötä eri brändien kanssa. Vaikuttajilla on vaikutusvaltaa lukijoihinsa (Uzunoğlu ja Kip 2014, 592). Lisäksi useat tutkimukset ovat osoittaneet, että yhteistyö brändien ja vaikuttajien välillä eli *vaikuttajamarkkinointi* on tehokasta (ks. Gümüş 2018, Sudha ja Sheena 2017, Linqia 2016). Tämä saattaa johtua siitä, että lukijat kokevat sosiaalisessa mediassa uransa luoneiden vaikuttajien olevan ”tavallisia” ja aitoja sekä samaistuttavia. Tämä lisää luottamusta vaikuttajan ja lukijan välillä (Danesh ja Duthler 2019, 3). On kuitenkin mahdollista, että yhteistyönä luotujen sponsoroitujen julkaisuiden sisältö tulkitaan epärehelliseksi tai manipuloivaksi. Vaikuttajien saatetaan olettaa tekevän maksullisia julkaisuja vain rahan vuoksi, ja näin hyväksikäyttävän lukijoitaan ja heidän luottamustaan. Lukijoiden ja kuluttajien suojaksi on kehitetty ohjesääntöjä, joita vaikuttajien tulee noudattaa (ks. International Consumer Protection and Enforcement Network 2016, The American Federal Trade Commission 2017). Ohjesäännöt vaativat, että sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa on mainittava eksplisiittisesti siitä, että vaikuttaja on vastaanottanut rahaa tai palveluita julkaisua vastaan. Usein tämä ilmoitetaan avainsanoilla, kuten #ad (#mainos). Vaikuttajat, jotka tuottavat usein sponsoroituja julkaisuja, saatetaan nähdä ahneina. Negatiivinen kuva voi johtaa lukijoiden vähenemiseen tai jopa uran päättymiseen. Siksi uskon, että vaikuttajat pyrkivät luomaan sponsoroidut julkaisut niin, ettei julkaisun mainoksellisuus ole ilmiselvää.

Kuten mainitsin aiemmin, suhtautumisen teoria toimii pohjana tämän tutkimuksen analyysille. Teoria jaetaan asennoitumiseen, sitoutumiseen ja asteittaisuuteen. Ensimmäinen alatyyppejä, asennoituminen, keskittyy tunteiden, käytöksen, esineiden sekä asioiden positiiviseen ja negatiiviseen arviointiin (Martin ja White 2005, 46). Se jaetaan edelleen kolmeen ryhmään. Ensimmäinen ryhmä (*affect*) liittyy tunteisiin ja affektiin (esim. poika on *surullinen*) (ibid.). Se sisältää neljä alaryhmää, jotka keskittyvät onnellisuuteen (*un/happiness*), varmuuteen (*in/security*), tyytyväisyyteen (*dis/satisfaction*), sekä taipumukseen (*dis/inclination*) (Martin ja White 2005, 48-50). Toinen asennoitumisen ryhmä liittyy ihmisen toiminnan moraaliseen arviointiin (*judgement*) (esim. poika on *viisas*) (Martin ja White 2005, 42). Moraalinen arviointi jaetaan viiteen alaryhmään. On mahdollista arvioida miten epätavallinen tai tavallinen joku on (*normality*), miten kykenevä joku on (*capacity*), miten määrätietoinen joku on (*tenacity*), miten rehellinen joku on (*veracity*) sekä miten eettinen joku on (*propriety*) (Martin ja White 2005, 52). Kolmas asennoitumisen ryhmä liittyy asioiden ja esineiden arvioimiseen (*appreciation*) (Martin ja White 43). Vaikka se ei arvioi ihmisen

toimintaa, voi ihminen silti olla tämän arvioinnin kohteena (esim. poika on *komea*). Se jaetaan kolmeen alaryhmään, riippuen siitä keskittyykö arvio siihen miten miellyttävä tai huomattava jokin on (*reaction*), miten tasapainoinen tai monimutkainen jokin on (*complexity*), tai miten innovatiivinen tai autenttinen jokin on (*valuation*) (Martin ja White 2005, 56).

Suhtautumisen teoria seuraa Bakhtinin ja Voloshinovin ajatuksia, joiden mukaan kaikki kielenkäyttö on *dialogista*, eli aikaisemmat ilmaisut vaikuttavat aina siihen mitä kirjoittaja kirjoittaa (Martin ja White 2005, 92). Kirjoittaja siis hyödyntää dialogista asemaa (*dialogic position*). Niitä on kaksi: kirjoittaja voi käyttää omaa ääntään (*intra-vocalization*) tai jonkun toisen ääntä (*extra-vocalization*) (White 2015, ei sivunumeroita). Hyödyntääkseen dialogista asemaa kirjoittaja käyttää sitoutumista, eli toista suhtautumisen teorian alasyhteimiä. Sitoutumista on sekä supistavaa (*contractive*) (esim. *tietysti*) ja laajentavaa (*expansive*) (esim. *ehkä*) (Martin ja White 2005, 102). Supistamalla kirjoittaja vähentää mahdollisuuksia muihin mielipiteisiin tai ajatuksiin, kun taas laajentamalla kirjoittaja lisää näitä mahdollisuuksia (Martin ja White 2005, 97-104). Supistavaa sitoutumista ovat kieltäminen (*denial*), aikaisempien ilmaisuiden korvaaminen (*counter-expectance*), aikaisemman väitteen vahvistaminen (*concur*), aikaisemman informaation tukeminen (*endorse*), sekä auktoriteettia eksplisiittisesti korostavat ilmaisut (*pronounce*) (Martin ja White 2005, 118-127). Laajentavaa sitoutumista ovat ilmaisut, jotka esittävät kyseisen väitteen yhtenä monesta mahdollisesta (*entertain*) ja ne, jotka yhdistävät ilmaisun johonkin ulkopuoliseen tekijään (*attribute*) (Martin ja White 2005, 104-111). Jos kirjoittaja ei käytä sitoutumista, hän esittää väitteen ainoana mahdollisena vaihtoehtona (*bare assertion*) (Martin ja White 2005, 99). Tällöin ilmaisu saatetaan tulkita faktana.

Kolmas ja viimeinen alasyhteimi, asteittaisuus, käsittelee ilmaisuiden vahvistamista (*up-scale*) ja pehmentämistä (*down-scale*) (Martin ja White 2005, 94). Lisäksi se käsittelee sitä, miten intensiivisenä (*force*) tai tarkkana (*focus*) arvio esitetään (ibid.). Intensiivisyys jaetaan kahteen ryhmään, ominaisuuksien ja prosessien arviointiin (*intensification*) (esim. *todella kaunis*, *melko kaunis*) sekä määrän tai ajan ja tilavuuden pituuden tai laajuuden arviointiin (*quantification*) (esim. *monta ihmistä*, *muutama ihminen*) (Martin ja White 2005, 137-149). Tarkkuus liittyy prototyypillisyyden arviointiin (esim. *aito ranskalainen viini*) (Martin ja White 2005, 139).

Tämän tutkimuksen materiaali on kerätty neljän englanninkielisen naispuolisen vaikuttajan Instagram käyttäjätileiltä. Valitut vaikuttajat ovat Zoë Sugg, Lucy Wood, Patricia Bright, sekä Hannah Maute. Näiden vaikuttajien julkaisut keskittyvät usein muotiin, kauneuteen tai muihin life-style aiheisiin. Jokainen vaikuttajista on noussut suuren yleisön

tietoisuuteen Youtube-kanavansa avulla. Koin urakehityksen tärkeäksi muuttujaksi, sillä lukijoilla saattaa olla erilaiset odotukset sosiaalisen median avulla kuuluisuuteen nousseista henkilöistä kuin perinteisemmistä kuuluisuuksista, kuten malleista tai näyttelijöistä, ja tämä saattaa vaikuttaa siihen millaista kieltä julkaisuissa käytetään. Materiaaliksi valittiin Instagram julkaisut, sillä tutkimuksen laajuus ei mahdollistanut videoiden transkribointia. Lisäksi tutkimukseen ei sisällytetty multimodaalista kuva-analyysiä. Näin saatiin kerättyä monipuolisempi ja laajempi otos, josta seuraa tarkempi tutkimustulos. Sponsoroidut julkaisut oli helppo tunnistaa edellä mainittujen ohjesääntöjen vuoksi. Ei-sponsoroiduiksi julkaisuiksi tunnistettiin ne, joissa ei ollut mitään mainintaa yrityksistä tai brändeistä tai niiden tuotteista. Käyttäjätilit sisälsivät myös julkaisuja, joissa ei ollut selkeää mainoksen merkintää, mutta jotka kuitenkin sisälsivät linkkejä tuotteisiin. Näille julkaisuille päätettiin luoda oma kolmas kategoria, epäselvät julkaisut (engl. ambiguous posts), jotta voitiin välttyä virheilä ja liian tarkalta jaolta. Jokaiselta vaikuttajalta kerättiin 5 julkaisua jokaisesta julkaisutyypistä. Koko materiaali koostuu siis 60 julkaisusta. Julkaisut kerättiin käyttäjätileiltä aikajärjestyksessä uusimmasta myöhempään. Vaatimuksena oli, että julkaisun kuvateksti sisältää vähintään viisi sanaa, lukuun ottamatta *Emoji*-hymiöitä. Jos julkaisu sisälsi videon, se jätettiin otannan ulkopuolelle, sillä video saattaisi sisältää muutakin kielellistä materiaalia kuvatekstin lisäksi. Materiaali analysoitiin edellä kuvatun Martinin ja Whiten suhtautumisen teorian mukaan. Analyysi suoritettiin manuaalisesti. Kaikki instanssit asennoitumisesta, sitoutumisesta sekä asteittaisuudesta otettiin huomioon, sillä on mielenkiintoista nähdä, eroavatko julkaisut kokonaisuudessaan toisistaan, eivätkä vain tuotteiden kuvausten perusteella. Löydetyt instanssit laskettiin, ja niiden lukumääristä tehtiin prosentuaaliset helpomman vertailun mahdollistamiseksi.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että suurimmilta osin sponsoroidut, ei-sponsoroidut, sekä epäselvät julkaisut ovat samankaltaisia. Tämä viittaa siihen, että vaikuttajat onnistuvat pitämään sponsoroidut julkaisut samankaltaisina kuin muut julkaisut, ja näin saattavat välttää negatiivisen kuvan syntymisen. Lisäksi, tulokset viittaavat siihen, että vaikuttajat usein keskittyvät positiivisiin asioihin, eivätkä jaa informaatiota asioista tai tuotteista joista eivät pidä. Kuitenkin, selkeitä ja merkittäviä eroja löytyy. Sponsoroidut julkaisut sisältävät selkeästi enemmän positiivista asennoitumista, erityisesti tuotteita kohtaan. Ei-sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa on huomattavasti enemmän negatiivista asennoitumista kuin muissa julkaisutyypeissä. Lisäksi sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa positiivisia asioita on vahvistettu ja negatiivisia asioita pehmennetty. Tähän verrattuna, epäselvissä julkaisuissa negatiivisia arvioita on vahvistettu ja positiivisia pehmennetty paljon useammin. Tulokset vihjaavat, että

sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa vaikuttajat keuhvat asioita enemmän ja ovat itsevarmempia. Tämä saattaa johtua siitä, että lukijat yhdistävät nämä positiiviset arviot mainostettuun tuotteeseen, ja sen seurauksena todennäköisemmin ostavat tuotteen itse. Positiivisen kielen käyttö sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa saa aikaan sen, että ne ovat suostuttelevampia ja vakuuttavampia. Ei-sponsoroiduissa ja epäselvissä julkaisuissa, vaikuttajat ovat negatiivisempia ja samaistuttavampia, ja näin he ylläpitävät läheistä suhdettaan lukijoihin, mikä puolestaan lisää luotettavuutta. Sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa vuorostaan tätä luottoa käytetään hyväksi.

Yllättävin tulos liittyi sitoutumiseen. Hypoteesi siitä, että sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa olisi enemmän laajentavaa sitoutumista osoittautui vääräksi, sillä sekä sponsoroidut että ei-sponsoroidut julkaisut sisälsivät sitä vähemmän kuin supistavaa sitoutumista. Epäselvissä julkaisuissa oli eniten laajentavaa sitoutumista, mutta yleisesti sitoutumista oli materiaalisia vähän. Sitoutumisen vähyys saattaa johtua siitä, että kuvateksti tulkitaan automaattisesti vaikuttajan omaksi mielipiteeksi. On myös mahdollista, että välttämällä sitoutumista, ja esittämällä arviot ”faktallisina” vaikuttajat pyrkivät vakuuttamaan lukijan tuotteesta, erityisesti sponsoroiduissa julkaisuissa. Tämä saa myös aikaan sen, että lukijat jotka eivät ole samaa mieltä vaikuttajan kanssa, tuntevat olonsa ulkopuolisiksi. Tästä seurauksena lukijat saattavat mieluummin uskoa vaikuttajaa, kuin jäädä yhteisön ulkopuolelle.

Tutkimuksen heikkoudet liittyvät sen laajuuteen. Suuremmalla otannalla olisi mahdollistettu luotettavimmat tulokset. On mahdollista, että vaikuttajilla on omat persoonalliset tapansa kirjoittaa ja luoda julkaisuja. Siksi tässä tutkimuksessa saadut tulokset saattavat erota vastaavista, eri vaikuttajien julkaisuita käyttävistä tutkimuksista. Lisäksi tämä tutkimus keskittyi vain julkaisuiden kuvatekstiin. Multimodaalilla analyysillä voisi saada lisää tietoa siitä, miten vaikuttajien julkaisut rakentuvat, ja mitä ne sisältävät. Tutkimalla muiden sosiaalisten medioiden sisältöjä, kuten Youtube-videoita tai *tweettejä*, voisi löytää muita vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin piirteitä.

Suhtautumisen teoria on laaja ja tulkinnanvarainen. Alatyypien instanssien tulkinta ja ymmärrys riippuvat lukijasta ja hänen aikaisemmista tiedoistaan ja kokemuksistaan. Manuaalinen analyysi on aina jossain määrin subjektiivista. Keskittymällä vai yhteen teorian alatyyppeihin, olisi ollut mahdollista kerätä laajempi otos materiaalia. Oli kuitenkin mahdotonta tietää etukäteen, mihin alatyyppeihin olisi mielekkäintä keskittyä. Lisäksi suhtautumisen teoria keskittyy melko yksityiskohtaisiin piirteisiin. On mahdollista, että käyttämällä toista pohjaa analyysille, vaikuttajien julkaisuista voisi löytyä uusia piirteitä. Esimerkiksi tämän tutkimuksen materiaalista kävi ilmi, että vaikuttajat usein puhuttelevat lukijaa suoraan, ja muun muassa pyytävät tätä jättämään kommentteja. Kommenteilla vaikuttajat saavat enemmän näkyvyyttä,

ja näin edistävät uraansa. Vaikuttajien ja lukijoiden kanssakäyminen ja heidän välinen suhteensa voisivat tarjota mielenkiintoisen näkökulman tutkimuksille tulevaisuudessa. Vaikka tutkimuksella olikin heikkouksia, täyttää se aukkoa lingvistiikan tutkimusalalla. Sosiaalinen media ja sen normit muuttuvat nopeasti, ja yritykset ja brändit ovat nopeita tarttumaan uusiin mainonnan keinoihin. Tämänhetkisen sosiaalisen median mainonnan tutkiminen tarjoaa hyvän pohjan mahdollisten tulevien mainonnan muotojen tulkinnalle.