

**THE INFLUENCE OF PRIMING ON PERCEIVED  
AUTHENTICITY, CREDIBILITY AND EMOTIONS IN  
SPONSORED CONTENT**

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**Tuisku Pirttimäki  
Corporate Communication  
Vilma Luoma-aho**



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<p>Sponsoroitu sisältö on kasvattanut suosiotaan digitaalisen median markkinointikeinona. Yhteistyössä niin sanottujen digitaalisen median vaikuttajien kanssa brändit luovat sisältöjä, joilla tavoitellaan sekä haluttuja kohderyhmiä että autenttisuutta. Yleisöjen odotukset autenttisuudesta ja sponsoroidun sisällön kaupalliset tavoitteet luovat kuitenkin ristiriidan, joka voi olla monimutkainen ja hämmentävä. Näin ollen tarvitaan lisää tietoa siitä, miten kuluttajat suhtautuvat sponsoroituun sisältöön.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen tavoitteena on selvittää, kuinka pohjustus (priming) vaikuttaa videoblogiyleisön autenttisuus- ja uskottavuustulkintoihin sekä tunteisiin. Vähemmän tutkittuna käsitteenä autenttisuutta on painotettu enemmän. Pohjustusvaikutusten tutkimiseksi neljällä manipulaatioasetelmalla on pyritty vaikuttamaan siihen, miten videoblogin katsojat suhtautuvat sisältöön.</p> <p>213 avoimen vastauksen teoriaohjaavalla sisällönanalyysillä vertailtiin eroja autenttisuus- ja uskottavuustulkintoissa sekä tunteissa manipulaatioryhmien välillä. Analyysin tuloksena muodostettiin myös lähteen autenttisuus -käsite.</p> <p>Tulosten perusteella pohjustus muovaa yleisön autenttisuuden ja uskottavuuden tulkintoja, mikä todennetaan myös Khiin neliö -testeillä. Tunneanalyysin perusteella ristiriitainen manipulaatio tuottaa ristiriitaisia tunteita ja negatiiviset tunteet kohdistuvat ennen kaikkea videolla esiintyvään suosittelijaan ja vähiten esiteltyihin tuotteisiin. Autenttinen lähde on määritelty vilpittömäksi, puolueettomaksi, samastuttavaksi ja intohimoiseksi. Lisäksi määritelmään esitettiin lisättäväksi hauskuutta ja karsimaa yhdistettynä luotettavuuteen.</p> <p>Tässä tutkimuksessa muodostettu autenttisen lähteen käsite laajentaa käsitystä siitä, mihin katsojat kiinnittävät huomiota arvioidessaan lähteen autenttisuutta. Tulokset tarjoavat käytännön näkökulmia viestinnän ja markkinoinnin ammattilaisille etenkin vaikuttajamarkkinoinnin johtamiseen. Lisää tutkimusta kuitenkin tarvitaan autenttisen lähteen käsitteen kehittämiseksi ja sen vaikutusten selvittämiseksi.</p>	
Asiasanat Autenttisuus, lähteen uskottavuus, sisältömarkkinointi, tunteet	
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## ABSTRACT

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<p>Sponsored content has gained popularity as a digital media marketing tactic. Brands collaborate to create sponsored content with the so-called new-media influencers who are able to gather significant audiences and are claimed to offer a new form of authenticity. The paradox between the audiences' expectations of authenticity and the commercial intentions of marketers is potentially complex and confusing. Hence, more insight is needed of how consumers react to sponsored content.</p> <p>The objective of this thesis is to explore how priming influences the authenticity and source credibility perceptions of vlog-viewers along with their emotions. Particular attention is paid on authenticity as a less studied concept. To study the effects of priming, this study uses four different manipulation conditions to influence a vlog-viewing experience and therefore the responses of the viewers to the content.</p> <p>A theory-guided content analysis of 213 open responses was conducted to compare the differences of authenticity and credibility perceptions as well as emotions between the manipulation groups. As another outcome of the analysis, a concept of source authenticity was formed. Also, a separate emotions analysis was conducted.</p> <p>The results suggest that priming shapes the authenticity and source credibility perceptions of the vlog-viewers, which is verified by chi square tests. The emotion analysis suggest that mixed manipulation conditions lead to more mixed emotions and that negative emotions are mainly directed at the endorser and least at the products. An authentic source was defined as genuine, unbiased, relatable, and passionate. In addition, charisma and funniness were suggested to be included in the definition together with trustworthiness.</p> <p>The conceptualization of source authenticity formed in this study gives insight on what viewers pay attention to when evaluating the authenticity of a source. The results of this study offer practical viewpoints to communication and marketing professionals especially for managing collaborations with new-media influencers. However, more research is needed to further develop the concept of source authenticity and to study its effects.</p>	
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the media game and brought new players to the arenas of public discourse. It is no more only the journalists, movie makers, and other media professionals that practice mediated communication but also amateurs, such as social media users and bloggers (Enli, 2015, 131).

The user-generated online content provided by amateurs has been claimed to offer a new form of authenticity by its 'freshness' and 'spontaneity' (Tolson, 2010). Ordinary people are perceived more authentic compared to faceless institutions or political elite (Coleman & Moss, 2008; Montgomery, 2001).

As so-called traditional media is no more the most efficient channel to reach all stakeholders or target groups, and as consumers are spending more and more time in social media, traditional advertising is not functioning as it used to (Liljander, Gummerus & Söderlund, 2015). Hence, communication and marketing professionals are forced to look for new ways and channels to reach the desired audiences for spreading their promotional messages and creating brand awareness and engagement through content. One strategy is to create sponsored content in collaboration with the so-called new-media influencers and through them reach the desired target groups. Blogs and video blogs (vlogs) are gaining popularity as brand communication channels for their ability to effectively reach audiences gathered around similar interests. (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014.)

Commercial collaboration with new-media influencers can be very lucrative for marketers in targeting especially younger age groups. Finnish YouTube video network Töttöröö together with Annalect and OMD (2016) studied the effectiveness of content and advertising in partnerships with vloggers among 15 to 35-year olds. The results indicate that Finnish consumers from 15 to 25 years are better reached through YouTube than traditional media, and 99 percent of 15–35-year olds watch YouTube at least sometimes.

One of the main reasons brands collaborate with new-media influencers is that they are perceived by audiences as trustworthy and authentic (Linqia, 2017, 2; Audrezet, Kerviler & Moulard, 2017; Scott 2015, 295). Authenticity is said to promote audience engagement and trust (TapInfluence, 2016, 7) and it is claimed to be important in sponsored endorsements (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). What marketers are looking for in collaboration with new-media influencers is authentic storytelling about their brand. Authenticity is equally important for the influencers. (TapInfluence, 2016, 7.) However, there is little research on what authenticity

means in the context of sponsored content, how it is constructed, and how it can be cherished or, on the contrary, broken.

However, commercial use of social media is less straightforward compared to traditional media, since there lies a paradox between the non-commercial reasons of consumers to interact with the content and the commercial objectives of marketers (Liljander et al., 2015). The new forms of commercial content can be confusing to consumers, since it might be unclear for them when a certain piece of content is designed to persuade or sell. The confusion and lack of transparency of sponsorship may lead to mistrust among the audiences (Hallahan, 2014; Howe & Teufel, 2014).

Presumptions or expectations about the commerciality of content may alter the interpretation of the content or how its message is processed. According to the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), awareness of a persuasion attempt activates a coping mechanism to process and resist the attempt by criticism, skepticism, counterarguing, and negative emotions towards the persuasive message (Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012; Petty & Cacioppo, 1977; van Reijmersdal, Franssen, van Noort, Oprea, Vanderberg, Reusch, van Lieshout & Boerman, 2016). This thesis explores the significance of presumptions and expectations on the content by using priming as means to manipulate the interpretation of the content.

It is a problem for the industry and marketers if vlogs gain a reputation of being paid advertisements, because it may reduce their credibility and appeal. Hence, both vloggers and marketers need deeper understanding of how consumers react to sponsoring.

## 1.1 Purpose of the study and research questions

In this study, a test setting with four manipulation conditions is used to produce a priming effect that further influences viewers' perceptions of a vlog entry. Through the effects of persuasion resistance, expectation violation and cognitive dissonance the priming is assumed to influence the viewers' perception of authenticity and emotions. To support the detection of authenticity in the data, source credibility is considered. Hence, the aim of this thesis is to explore how priming shapes the perception of authenticity and source credibility, as well as emotions of sponsored vlog viewers. Further interest is placed on authenticity as a less studied concept, and therefore a conceptualization of source authenticity in vlog context is produced.

To achieve the objective of this study, the following research questions are formed:

1. How priming shapes the perception of authenticity and source credibility as well as emotions of vlog-viewers?
2. How vlog-viewers evaluate source authenticity?



## 1.2 Structure

First, the theoretical framework to which this study is based on is presented. Then, the research data and methodology are explained as well as the implementation of the study. Next, the research findings are presented. Finally, the study is summed up as conclusions and discussed and evaluated in the last chapter.

## 2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the main theoretical concepts concerning this thesis are presented, including sponsored content, priming and framing, persuasion knowledge, expectations, cognitive dissonance, concepts of authenticity and source credibility, and emotions. First presented is sponsored content which provides the context for this study. Next, the processes of framing and priming are introduced as they represent the manipulation treatment of the research data.

The effects of priming are contemplated through the concepts of persuasion knowledge, expectations and cognitive dissonance. These concepts offer viewpoints to how priming influences the viewers' perceptions of authenticity and credibility as well as emotions analyzed in this study. Therefore, the concepts of authenticity, source credibility, and emotions are included in the framework of this study. As a complex and less studied concept, authenticity is given more weight in the theoretical framework.

### 2.1 Sponsored content

Complex branding and advertising strategies in the digital media environment including, for example, viral advertisement, guerilla marketing, online competitions, and user feedback mechanisms aim to smooth out the commercial feel of marketing messages, and therefore make them seem authentic (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 11). This is why sponsored content is gaining popularity.

Sponsored content, or native advertising, is an embedded form of advertising that appears in the shape of non-advertising content. Sponsored content looks like authentic opinions or experiences of the sender, even though the content is commercial. (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016.) Behind the popularity of sponsored content is availability of direct brand-to-consumer communication channels, for instance YouTube. Sponsored content can be paid, such as advertorials or sponsored word-of-mouth, or unpaid, as editorial content or viral brand videos. (Ikonen, Luoma-aho & Bowen, 2016, 167.)

One example of sponsored content is paid brand posts on blogs. Sponsoring blog content is gaining popularity because many bloggers gather significant numbers of readers and they assumingly have strong influence on their audience (van Reijmersdal et al. 2016; Kapitan & Silvera, 2016). At the same time, blogs are becoming popular sources for product information and suggestions for consumers (Ho, Chiu, Chen & Papazafeiropoulou, 2015). Recommendations or endorsements of products, brands, or services in blogs can be genuine and non-commercial or they can be financially compensated marketing messages. In the latter case, the sponsorship is either transparent and revealed to the audience or hidden. (Liljander et al., 2015). What applies for blogs, can be said about video-blogs (vlogs) as well. The most popular vloggers have millions of subscribers, which makes their vlogs very interesting platforms for advertisers and offers the vloggers a way to make money with their creative work (Conway, 2014). Vlogging offers ordinary people the possibility to directly reach audiences and speak to them in their own, authentic voices, and even become online celebrities (Tolson, 2010; Morris & Anderson, 2015).

Liljander et al. (2015) studied young consumers' responses to suspected covert (concealed) and overt (transparent) blog marketing and found out that neither covert or overt marketing affected the credibility of the blogger. However, in another study by Colliander and Erlandsson (2015) it was found that the blogger's credibility was harmed when the disclosure of the blog being sponsored came from a third party, but brand attitude towards the sponsoring brand was not affected.

Sponsored content can be confusing for consumers, especially if it is not disclosed as advertisement (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016). Being embedded in noncommercial media, the persuasive objective of sponsored content is not evident (Boerman, van Reijmersdal & Neijens, 2012, 1078). There is a lack of comprehension on how well audiences distinguish sponsored content from journalism. This raises ethical questions concerning this new media form. (Ikonen et al., 2016, 168.) According to Ikonen et al. (2016, 168), there are two main reasons for these ethical concerns: changing media landscape lacking standards and sponsored content lacking transparency or disclosure. This kind of confusion or lack of transparency may lead to mistrust among the audiences (Hallahan, 2014; Howe & Teufel, 2014).

One thing that creates confusion among audiences, is the similar appearance of sponsored content in comparison to user generated content. User generated content (UGC) is defined as "media content created by users to share information and/or opinions with other users" (Tang, Fang & Wang, 2014, 41). UGC is produced rather by the general public instead of professionals and it is primarily distributed online supported by Web 2.0-based sites, such as Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). UGC is often brand-related, when it overlaps with a concept known as electronic word-of-mouth, eWOM (Smith, Fischer & Yongjian, 2012), which is defined by Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004, 39) as "any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet."

Regardless of the content being sponsored, user-generated, or considered as eWOM, it may appear the same to the audience. The difference lies in who produces the content and with which motives. Sponsored content is designed to influence consumers but also brand-related UGC has the potential to impact consumers' opinions on brands (Smith et al., 2012). Brand-related UGC may have even greater influence when it is transmitted via social media by a trustworthy source belonging to a consumer's personal network (Chu & Kim, 2011, 50).

It is presumed that the negative manipulation will function as a third-party revelation of the video's commercial nature and therefore harm the credibility of the vlogger but not necessary the attitude towards the products.

## 2.2 Framing and priming

This study uses four manipulation conditions to compare the authenticity and source credibility perceptions as well as the emotions of the viewers between the four respondent groups. Concepts of priming and framing can explain how manipulation works and how it may result in biased information processing.

From the perspective of psychology, framing can activate certain schemas in the brain through cues, meaning that frames offer contextual cues for information processing, which leads to biased cognitive processing and decision making. Messages that include cues offered by frames activate particular schemas, and this process is called "priming". Priming can have influence on how people think about a topic or it can direct them to use only a part of their knowledge when evaluating a topic. (Carroll, 2016.) Whereas priming activates awareness of an issue, framing directs judgments by attributing meanings to the issue (Wang, 2007, 140). In other words, certain sights, words, or sensations include sub-conscious cues that influence people's subsequent behavior. Though priming seems to act sub-consciously, the primes themselves do not need to be subliminal to have an effect. For example, words can act as primes. (Institute for Government, 2010, 24.) Celse and Chang (2017) manage to summarize the concept well: "Priming is a non-conscious memory effect, in which exposure to one stimulus affects the response to another."

As an experimental framework, priming is implemented by showing an initial stimulus in order to influence a response to a subsequent stimulus. This launches a process where the prime stimulus makes content, and the cognitive operations used to comprehend or manipulate it, more accessible, which may influence judgements, decisions, and behavior as results of information processing. Priming requires a prime stimulus and a target stimulus, and the former must alter the judgement about or response to the latter. (Janiszewski & Wyer, 2014, 97.)

Context can influence perception especially when the processed information is ambiguous, meaning that the information can be interpreted in several ways. The perception will likely depend on which attributes are activated by the context. For example, the interpretation of an ambiguous product advertisement in a magazine might be influenced by the articles or competing advertisement in

the magazine. By directing a person's attention to selective features of information given in the advertisement, the context may guide the interpretation of product information and further influence brand evaluations. (Yi, 1990, 216.)

The manipulation by priming is assumed to cause biased information processing which can be detected as differences in responses between the manipulation groups.

### **2.2.1 Audience participation as a prime**

This research implements priming by using four different manipulation combinations to influence viewers responses to a video blog post. The test design includes an introduction text (positive vs. negative) and an encouragement or discouragement for audience participation. In this study, audience participation is defined as various reactions to content, such as likes, dislikes, comments, shares, and subscriptions. From the brand point of view, audience participation is seen as positive and beneficial as itself, since it promotes positive brand attitude and customer engagement (Kujur & Singh, 2017). However, this research focuses on the effects of encouraging and discouraging to participate.

The possibility to comment a blog or a vlog post enables two-way communication and therefore supports interactivity of the content (Hayes & Carr, 2015). Being allowed to directly contact the blogger, consumers may express their suspicion over the possible commercial claims of the blogger. The negative consequences of suspected deception might even be diminished by the possibility of interaction (Liljander et al., 2015, 625). According to Yang and Lim (2009), interactivity of a blog increases relational trust and mediates blogger credibility. According to Tolson (2010), the dialogic nature of vlogs, as they provide the possibility to comment the content, supports their authenticity.

Utilizing source credibility and warranting theory, Hayes and Carr (2015) studied the connection between enabled comments (in a blog) and brand attitudes. Warranting theory (Walther & Parks, 2002) addresses how in online encounters we use cues to validate the self-presentation of others. The cues, or "warrants", provided by sources other than the target have a higher warranting value (Walther & Parks, 2002). A blog enabling comments therefore provides more warrants to its readers as the information it provides is possible to be confirmed or questioned through interaction (Hayes & Carr, 2015, 375). Hayes and Carr (2015) demonstrated that allowing blog readers to respond to the blogger and other readers by commenting increases the perceptions of blogger expertise, brand attitudes and purchase intention, but not credibility.

Drawing from the above-mentioned theory, encouraging the audience to participate is assumed to increase the perceptions of authenticity and credibility among the viewers. However, the presumed positive effect to credibility is uncertain referring to the results of Hayes and Carr (2015).

## 2.3 Priming effects

As in in this study the priming effect is expected to influence the viewers' perceptions of the content in question, the concepts of persuasion knowledge, expectations and cognitive dissonance offer viewpoints to how priming influences information processing and judgement.

### 2.3.1 Resistance towards persuasion

According to the persuasion knowledge model (Friestad & Wright, 1994), when aware of a persuasion attempt, the persuasion target (e.g. consumer or member of audience) uses persuasion knowledge as a coping mechanism to process or control the attempt. Persuasion knowledge develops over time, consisting of accumulating experiences of the tactics used by marketers in their persuasion attempts. Persuasion knowledge helps consumers to recognize, understand and assess persuasion attempts and select the appropriate coping tactics or response options in each persuasion situation. (Friestad & Wright, 1994, 1, 3.)

In the case of sponsored content, when persuasion knowledge is activated by a disclosure of sponsorship, it may cause criticism, skepticism and disliking towards the persuasion attempt, involving critical feelings about honesty, trustworthiness, and credibility (Boerman et al., 2012, 1049-1050). Research has demonstrated that warning recipients about an upcoming persuasive message generates resistance and counterarguing towards the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1977; Wood & Quinn, 2003). Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016) studied the effects of disclosure of sponsorship in blog content. Their results showed that the negative effect on persuasion was explained by persuasion knowledge and affective resistance as well as cognitive resistance.

Awareness of the commercial nature of the content may make the viewers contest the claims made about the brand or product. When the viewers are aware of intentional persuasion, their motivation to resist the persuasion is likely to cause negative emotions. These negative emotions, such as anger or irritation, function as a resistance towards the persuasive message. (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016, 1461-1462.) The persuasion knowledge may also change the meaning of the content (Friestad & Wright, 1994) for the viewer from fun pass-time entertainment to a persuasive attempt. This may make them feel misled which further provokes negative emotions. (van Reijmersdal et al. 2016, 1463.)

It is presumed that the negative manipulation activates the persuasion knowledge of the viewers. Therefore, it is proposed that as a consequence the viewers react to the persuasion attempt by counterarguing, criticism, negative emotions, questioning its credibility, and contesting the claims about the products involved. However, the positive manipulation may also cause a counter reaction by setting the expectations about the content too high. Expectations are discussed next.

### 2.3.2 Expectations

Expectations are ever-present, and they play an important part in everyday reasoning, decision making, and behavior as predictions of future. However, expectations are rarely explicitly expressed or actively thought of. (Gärdenfors, 1993; Roese & Sherman, 2007.)

Olkkonen and Luoma-aho (2011, 14) define expectations as “mental standards on what is considered important or as heavily invested beliefs and anticipations about what will occur in the future, or how others behave.” Additionally, expectations are prone to change, and they are affected by emotions (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2011, 14). According to Spreng, Page and Thomas (2001, 1188) uncertainty is intrinsic to expectations, since they are beliefs about the future.

Expectations function as perceptual filters that influence how social information is processed. A prior expectation about an interaction partner has been found to persist through the interaction to its conclusion affecting the evaluations of the person in question regardless of their actual behavior. (Burgoon, 1993, 32-33.) Same applies to information processing. Expectations may directly influence judgements especially when a person is unmotivated or unable to process the information carefully. Expectations may influence interpretation to the extent that people see what they expect to see. (Roese & Sherman, 2007, 101-102.)

Expectancy violation theory states that expectations can be either confirmed or violated, in positive or in negative means. Confirmation of expectations means that the outcome is what was expected, whereas violation of expectations stands for an unexpected outcome. (Olkkonen & Luoma-aho, 2015, 89.) In a positive violation the outcome is more positive than expected, and in a negative violation the outcome is even worse than anticipated. Violation of expectations may direct attention from the original matter to emotional responses, characteristics of the violator, rationalization of the violation, or the consequences of the violation (Burgoon, 1993, 36).

Expectations have large effects on emotional arousal, since met or unmet expectations may provoke intense positive or negative emotions, such as satisfaction, appreciation, shame, disappointment, and anger. The higher the expectations met, the more intensive the feelings of satisfaction are likely to be. And on the contrary, when expectations are not met or when outcomes violate norms of fairness and justice, negative emotions are provoked. (Turner, 2009, 348, 352).

As per processing fluency, expected or unexpected information or stimuli causes immediate psychological responses. Expected stimuli brings about feelings of fluency and comfort, while unexpected stimuli create feelings of dysfluency and surprise. Exposure to unexpected information may provoke more careful attention to it compared to expected information. (Roese & Sherman, 2007, 101.)

Expectations are linked to authenticity perception. Hede, Garma, Josiassen & Thyne (2014) found that consumer expectations among consumer skepticism function as an antecedent to perceived authenticity in the context of visitor experience in museums. In the case of mediated authenticity, audience’s genre expectations guide interpretation and therefore perception of authenticity (Enli, 2015, 17). However, what can be seen as a paradox in the relation of expectations

and authenticity is that spontaneity (Enli, 2015; Tolson, 2010) and self-determining behavior (agency) (Kernis & Goldman, 2006) are seen to indicate authenticity, whereas scripted (Tolson, 2010) or externally motivated (Moulard, Garrity & Rice, 2015; Kernis & Goldman, 2006) are seen as inauthentic. Therefore, living up to social, and possibly normative, expectations could be perceived as inauthentic.

Expectation theories offer one perspective to assess the results of this study, since especially negatively valenced priming manipulation may result in expectation violation. However, the positively valenced manipulation may set the expectations high, which can end up in disappointment. It is therefore proposed that as a consequence of priming the violation of expectations causes positive or negative emotions and distraction. The consequences of the possible expectation violation may particularly be seen in the results of the emotion analysis. Yet, the manipulation may affect the viewers' interpretation so that the created expectation persists through the information processing producing responses that are in line with the expectation.

### 2.3.3 Cognitive dissonance

Another expected phenomenon to happen as a result of priming is cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is a psychological discomfort that results from nonfitting relations among cognitions (e.g. knowledge, opinion, belief). Cognitive dissonance may occur, for example, when a person encounters new information that is inconsistent with their existing knowledge or opinion, and when dissonance occurs, being psychologically uncomfortable, it is followed by motivation to reduce it. (Festinger, 1957, 3-5)

To reduce cognitive dissonance, individuals may use behavioral or cognitive strategies. One example of behavioral strategy is to avoid information that enhances cognitive dissonance. Cognitive strategies are psychological changes related to the cognitive elements, such as changing or removing the cognitive elements in question or changing their importance. (Liang, 2016, 465.) This could manifest, for example, as justifying one's chosen attitudes by coming up with supporting reasons (Zuwerink Jacks & Cameron, 2003, 157). Dissonance may be a result of warning of subsequent persuasion, when rejection of the persuasion has been thought to be the easiest and most direct strategy to reduce the dissonance (Wood & Quinn, 2003, 120).

The motivation to reduce dissonance may also appear as avoiding information that is expected to increase dissonance. In situations when dissonance occurs in result of being involuntarily or forcibly exposed to new information, the dissonance may be reduced by various ways, such as misperception or denying the validity of the information. (Festinger, 1957, 30, 176.)

In this study, cognitive dissonance is expected to occur when respondents are primed with negative introduction text which may also be considered as a warning of an upcoming persuasion attempt. Therefore, the strategies for reducing dissonance are expected to appear as sticking to the negative attitude induced by the introduction text or as rejecting the persuasion. However, as in relation to expectations, the positive manipulation may set expectations unreasonably high and therefore cause dissonance.



## 2.4 Authenticity

*“Within contemporary consumer culture we take for granted that authenticity, like anything else, can be branded” (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 13).*

It has been claimed that authenticity is the new business imperative as people increasingly comprehend the world in terms of real and fake. Behind the increasing desire of authenticity is the rise of experience economy with its intentionally staged experiences that construct a world more and more unreal. (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, 1.) More or less in tandem with the rise of experience economy we have seen the arrival and development of social media and reality TV. Social media offers a medium through which people may show off themselves by performing their self-constructions. (Gilmore & Pine 2007; De Zengotita, 2007.) De Zengotita (2007, 18) suggests that the real and the representational are merging in every aspect of our lives as the digital and the biogenetic are converging. All this indicates that we live in a world where our lives and real selves are intertwined with the mediated and the commercial.

Authenticity is a complex, continually adapting concept, impossible to capture in a single definition. Some scholars have even refused to define authenticity and simply agreed to accept its complex nature. Commonly, however, authenticity is positioned in opposition to fake, unreal and false. (Enli, 2015, 2–3.) The definition of authenticity can be focused, depending on the context, on objects, ideas, a brand, a person, or the self, as summarized in Table 1. Scholars in diverse fields, such as marketing (Moulard, Raggio & Garretson Folse, 2016; Moulard et al., 2015; Hede et al., 2014; Stern, 1994), social psychology (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), and communication (Gilpin, Palazzolo & Brody 2010; Molleda, 2010), have approached authenticity from their own viewpoints.

Tolson (2010) discusses authenticity in the contexts of a celebrity persona and a type of media (vlog): The celebrity persona’s authenticity lies in the presence of “the real” person, whereas authenticity of vlogs is constructed by their directness, transparent amateurishness and conversational nature. Moulard et al. (2015) define the authenticity of a celebrity persona to depend on the perception if the celebrity behaves according to her or his true self. Also, Kernis and Goldman (2006) conceptualize the authenticity of the self as “the unobstructed operation of one’s true- or core-self in one’s daily enterprise”. Moulard et al. (2016) focus on brand authenticity stating that for a brand to be authentic the managers behind the brand have to be perceived by consumers as intrinsically motivated and passionate. Passion is also mentioned by Audrezet et al. (2017) who suggest that social media influencers manage authenticity through expressing their passion and giving truthful, transparent information and not lying.

Some of the definitions of authenticity are lists of attributes or dimensions that construct the main concept. According to Molleda (2010), authenticity refers to the perceived uniqueness, originality, or genuineness of an object, a person, an organization, or an idea. Gilpin et al. (2010, 261) state that authenticity consists of four central dimensions: authority, identity, transparency, and engagement.

They introduce a model of authenticity in online communication including the aforementioned dimensions which may be assessed according to the degree of legitimacy (authority), genuineness (identity), openness (transparency), and interactivity (engagement). (Gilpin et al, 2010, 262.)

**Table 1. Definitions of authenticity**

Definition of authenticity	Related concepts / specifications / dimensions	Opposite	Context / focus
"Brand authenticity is defined as the extent to which consumers perceive that a brand's managers are intrinsically motivated in that they are passionate about and devoted to providing their products." (Moulard, Raggio & Garretson Folse, 2016, 421, 422, 424.)	Uniqueness and scarcity are suggested to manifest rare brand behavior, and longevity and longitudinal consistency are suggested to manifest stable brand behavior.	Brand inauthenticity is analogous to the consumer perception that an organization (or brand) is customer oriented: when the brand is perceived to be directed by individuals who are externally or customer driven, overly commercial and profit focused.	Brand
Defined through a communicative process where the degree of authenticity depends on symbolic negotiations between the main participants in the communication, negotiations concerning aspects of trustworthiness, originality, and spontaneity (Enli, 2015, 2-3).		Fake, unreal and false.	Media
"Celebrity authenticity" refers to the perception that a celebrity behaves according to his or her true self. (Moulard, Garrity & Rice, 2015, 173, 175, 179.)	Rarity and stability as antecedents	Externally motivated behavior. "Following the crowd." Being inconsistent.	Human brand, celebrities
Perceived authenticity of the museum visitor experience is "the overall perceptions that museum visitors have of the integrity and trustworthiness of their experience" (Hede, Garma, Josiassen & Thyne, 2014, 1396, 1399).	Perceptions of authenticity originate from perceptions of the credibility of the museum, perceptions of their own integrity as a visitor, and perceptions of the genuineness of the materials (objects/artefacts) on display.	Not mentioned	Museums
Authenticity consists of four central dimensions: authority, identity, transparency, and engagement (Gilpin, Palazzolo & Brody, 2010, 261-262).	Dimensions may be assessed according to the degree of: legitimacy (authority), genuineness (identity), openness (transparency), and interactivity (engagement).	Not mentioned	Public affairs of institutions, online
Authenticity refers to the perceived uniqueness, originality, or genuineness of an object, a person, an organization, or an idea (Molleda, 2010).		Not mentioned	PR and communication

Not one clearly formed definition. Presence of "the real" person in celebrity persona; "--the authenticity of vlogging, --, is located in its excessive direct address, in its transparent amateurishness and in the sheer volume and immediacy of 'conversational' responses--" (Tolson, 2010, 277, 286.)		"Reciting a script"	UGC, YouTube
"1. Being true to your own self" and "2. Being who you say you are to others." (Gilmore & Pine, 2007, 96.)	"-- being earnest, consistent, and self-directed center one on one's perception of one's self -- being trustworthy, honest, and compassionate focuses one on one's behavior toward others."	Fake	Business, consumers
"The unobstructed operation of one's true- or core-self in one's daily enterprise." (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, 284, 294, 298, 300.)	Authenticity can be broken down into four separate, but interrelated, components: awareness, unbiased processing, behavior, and relational orientation.	Inauthentic living, false-self behaviors, or self-deception." -- acting 'falsely' merely to please others or to attain rewards or avoid punishments." Being fake in close relationships.	Psychology, self
"-- an authentic advertisement is one that conveys the illusion of the reality of ordinary life in reference to a consumption situation." (Stern, 1994, 388, 397.)	Four key elements: rhetorical purpose, fictive status, narrative structure, and use of a persona.	Does not mention one opposite but: "-- the paradoxes of fictionality / reality, originality / reproducibility, and concealment / revelation underlie advertising authenticity."	Advertisement

As mentioned earlier, authenticity is often also described by its opposite. Gathered in the Table 1 are the opposites of authenticity mentioned in the literature in question. Fake seems to be the most commonly recognized opposite of authenticity, mentioned by Enli (2015), Gilmore and Pine (2007), and Kernis and Goldman (2006), though the latter attach fakeness to close relationships. Moulard et al. (2015) describe inauthenticity as externally motivated behavior and being inconsistent, whereas Tolson (2010) refers to "reciting a script" as the opposite of authentic.

Authenticity has been seen as an antithesis of commercial. In the 1930s and 1940s, Frankfurt School's critical theory suggested that authenticity is unaffected by the logic and constraints of commercialism, which was seen to produce standardized art and products instead of genuine and original. The Frankfurt School was critical towards mass media as a capitalist instrument for manipulating masses. (Enli, 2015, 7.) Now, the dichotomy that commercial is linked to inauthentic and non-commercial is linked to authentic has been demonstrated to be false. Instead, commercial brand culture has become a ubiquitous, embedded part of our everyday life to the extent that brands structure, rationalize, and cultivate our lives, identities, and culture. (Banet-Weiser, 2012, 3-5, 10.)

Gunn Enli (2015) explores authenticity from the mass media point of view. Enli suggests that authenticity is defined through a communicative process in which “the degree of authenticity depends on the symbolic negotiations between the main participants in the communication”. These negotiations are further specified to concern aspects of trustworthiness, originality, and spontaneity. (Enli, 2015, 3.)

According to Enli (2015, 1-2), mediated authenticity is constructed by “authenticity illusions” which we all are aware of but which we accept thanks to the “authenticity contract”. The main stakeholders in this contract are the producers, the audiences and the authorities that regulate media. In this context, the producer can be anything between a professional film director and a “prosumer” or “produser” of digital media. (Enli, 2015, 16.) The concept of “prosumer” refers to a combination of producer and consumers and the term was created by futurist Alvin Toffler in 1980 (Ritzer, Dean & Jurgenson, 2012, 379). “Prosumer” refers to “produsage”, a concept describing user-led content creation environments (Bruns, 2007, 99). It can be interpreted as an equivalent concept to user generated content.

The authenticity contract is built on genre conventions, established practices, and expectations (Enli, 2015, 2). Genre system plays an essential role in mediated authenticity. Genre conventions are used by producers to avoid misunderstanding. These conventions shape the genre expectations that guide how the audience interprets the media. (Enli, 2015, 17.) According to Montgomery (2001, 448), genre is not just defined by formal features but by the expectations about what will happen in discourse within a particular genre.

The authenticity contract is also based on a certain irrationality, meaning that audiences choose to believe in the authenticity illusions created by producers. Therefore, the authenticity contract requires a “suspension of disbelief”, concept by Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1817) that refers to the audience’s tendency to believe even when knowing it is an illusion. (Enli, 2015, 17.) As representation of reality, mediated communication is based on illusions of authenticity. These illusions range from minor adjustments to extreme manipulations, they can be textual, such as descriptions of real life objects or milieu that link the text to the real world, or audiovisual, such as lightning and sound effects, or including real brands’ products in TV series to make a connection to reality. (Enli, 2015, 1, 14–15.) Also, Stern (1994) includes “the illusion of the reality of ordinary life” in the definition of an authentic advertisement.

Sometimes the authenticity contract fails. Enli (2015, 18) describes these situations with the terms “authenticity scandal” and “authenticity puzzle”. The former refers to a situation in which the audience is deliberately deceived by the producer. The latter form of miscommunication refers to a setting in which the audience is introduced an authenticity puzzle. This puzzle can be playful and complex, combining elements of trustworthy, original material with inauthentic, simulated material inviting the audience to distinguish the fake from authentic. (Enli, 2015, 18.)

In this study, authenticity is defined based on the analysis of the data. As a result, the researcher suggests a definition of source authenticity in the context of sponsored vlog content. The aforementioned definitions will guide the

analysis by facilitating the recognition of the references to authenticity. To be able to separate authenticity from credibility, the concept of source credibility is added to the theoretical framework and discussed in the next sub chapter.

## 2.5 Source credibility

Credibility and more specifically source credibility, also called endorser- or spokesperson credibility, has been widely studied in literature. The tradition of the concept of source credibility lies in Aristotle's *ethos* which referred to the intelligence, character, and goodwill of the communicator (McCroskey & Teven, 1999, 90).

In Table 2 are collected some of the many definitions of source credibility. Common for them all are the dimensions of trustworthiness and expertise or competence. Many definitions add also the dimension of attractiveness to the construct (Munnukka, Uusitalo & Toivonen, 2016; Chu & Kamal, 2008; Goldsmith, Laffety & Newell, 2000; Ohanian, 1990). Vendemia (2017) includes goodwill to the construct instead of attractiveness, while Munnukka et al. (2016) add similarity to the construct, making it four-dimensional.

**Table 2. Definitions of source credibility**

Definition	Opposite	Context / focus
Source credibility is constructed of goodwill, trustworthiness, and competence (Vendemia, 2017, 232 according to McCroskey & Teven, 1999).	Not mentioned	Online reviews
"The credibility of a peer endorser is constructed from trustworthiness, expertise, similarity, and attractiveness" (Munnukka, Uusitalo & Toivonen, 2016, 182).	Not mentioned	Advertising
Source credibility consists of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness (Chu & Kamal, 2008, 27).	Opposite of trustworthiness is described as untrustworthiness and dishonesty (28). Opposites for expertise and attractiveness are not mentioned.	Blogs
"Endorser credibility describes the believability of a spokesperson or endorser in an ad, their attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness" (Goldsmith, Lafferty & Newell, 2000, 304).	Opposite of attractiveness measured as unattractive and not classy, opposite of expertise measured as not an expert and inexperienced, and opposite of trustworthiness measured as insincere and untrustworthy (309).	Advertisement
Spokesperson credibility consists of source expertise and trustworthiness (Bower & Landreth, 2001, 3).	Opposite of trustworthiness measured as dishonest and untrustworthy and opposite of expertise measured as unknowledgeable and not an expert (5, according to Ohanian, 1990).	Advertising, models

The dimensions of source-credibility are attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness (Ohanian, 1990).	Opposites mentioned in the source-credibility scale (50). Opposite of attractiveness: unattractive, not classy, ugly, and not sexy. Opposite of trustworthiness: undependable, dishonest, unreliable, insincere, and untrustworthy. Opposite of expertise: not an expert, inexperienced, unknowledgeable, unqualified, and unskilled.	Celebrity endorsers, advertisement
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Expertise refers to the qualification, intelligence, knowledge, experience, and authoritativeness of the source. Trustworthiness refers to honesty, reliability, safety, honor, and moral of the source forming the listener's degree of confidence in the source. Attractiveness refers to the physical attractiveness, familiarity, likability, beauty, charm, and similarity of the source. (McCroskey & Teven, 1999, 90, 95; Ohanian, 1990, 41-42, 44.)

The three-dimensional model of source credibility including the dimensions of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness provides a good theoretical framework in those cases where the information source is visually seen, like in advertisement (Chu & Kamal, 2008, 27). This is also the case with sponsored content in video blogs where the vlogger can be seen speaking in front of camera.

In this study, the role of source credibility is mainly to distinguish the concept of authenticity from it. In other words, source credibility is a supporting concept that aids to better distinguish authenticity in the data analysis. Based on theory, the overlapping dimension of these two concepts is trustworthiness which in this study is considered a part of source credibility. However, it is reasonable to take credibility into account as such, since the perceived trustworthiness of the blogger may influence the effectiveness of persuasion (Chu & Kamal, 2008, 28).

Chu and Kamal (2008) studied how perceived blogger trustworthiness affects the elaboration of brand-related messages. The results suggest that the degree of perceived blogger trustworthiness affects the extent of message elaboration by the readers. Uncertainty of the trustworthiness of the blogger promotes more careful elaboration of the message, meaning that a reader may doubt the validity of the message. On the contrary, perceived trustworthiness may encourage the reader to accept the message as valid without carefully scrutinizing it. (Chu & Kamal, 2008, 32-33.)

## 2.6 Emotions

Including emotions in the framework of this study is relevant because, as mentioned earlier, violated or met expectations may evoke negative or positive emotions depending on the situational outcome. Also, the knowledge of a persuasion attempt may cause negative emotions. However, emotions have further significance in marketing context because they can influence for example decision-

making (Bagozzi, Gopinath & Nyer, 1999), purchase intention (Kim & Johnson, 2016), information processing (Tiedens & Linton, 2001), as well as judgement and behavior (Institute for Government, 2010).

Definitions of emotion vary by the viewpoint and the field of each researcher. For example, the most extreme social constructivists claim that emotions are socially constructed and as such learned in society ignoring the biological basis and the bodily connection of emotions (Turner, 2009, 341). Evolutionary approaches, such as Nesse's (1990) and Plutchik's (1982), rationalize that emotions have been formed as a result of natural selection as they have supported reproductive success and survival.

Generally, emotions are referred to with words like "feelings" and "affect" that themselves point to each other. What causes confusion in defining emotion is that they operate at many levels of reality, for example neurological, behavioral and cultural. (Turner, 2009, 341.) Affect refers generally to all mental feeling processes, specific mental states that we call emotions, moods and attitudes (Bagozzi et al., 1999, 184). With the term feelings, Plutchik (2003, 107) refers to a subjective, reportable state, such as joy, sadness, or anger. Emotion, on the other hand, is a broader concept referring to the chain of events including feelings, cognitions, impulses to action, and display behaviors (Plutchik, 2003, 107). According to Bagozzi et al. (1999, 184) emotion is "a mental state of readiness that arises from cognitive appraisals of events or thoughts". They continue that an emotion has "a phenomenological tone; is often expressed physically (e.g., in gestures, posture, facial features); and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion, depending on its nature and meaning for the person having it". Cohen, Pham and Andrade (2008) define affect as an internal feeling state, which they differentiate from an evaluative statement described as implicit or explicit "liking" for an object, person or position. These internal feeling states include moods and emotions. Moods are described as low intensity affective states that lack a clear source, whereas emotions are more differentiated providing more attitude- and behavior-specific information. (Cohen et al. 2008, 298-299.)

Besides being defined in various ways, emotions have also been categorized and structured in different ways by scholars from several disciplines. The simplest and the most abstract way of classifying emotions is to divide them into positive and negative emotion categories, but this generalization loses important nuances of emotions (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005, 1438, 1444). In one of the emotion structures the two primary components of affect are pleasantness and arousal/activation. This structure suggest that emotions can be arranged in scales of pleasant to unpleasant and activation to deactivation. (Cohen et al., 2008, 304.) According to Plutchik (2003, 103), emotions vary in intensity and in degree of similarity to one another, and they express opposite feelings. This is illustrated in the multi-dimensional model of emotions (Figure 3). This structural model is derived from the emotion lexicon, where, for example, rage, fury, annoyance, and irritation represent different intensities of anger. In their study, Laros and Steenkamp (2005) formed a hierarchical model of consumer emotions where emotions are considered at three levels of abstractness. In their model, positive and negative affect form the superordinate level, intermediate level consists of four positive and four negative basic emotions, and the subordinate level

includes the specific emotions. Theorists have been interested in defining basic emotions because they are believed to be inborn and universal (Laros & Steenkamp, 2005, 1440). Plutchik's (1982) framework of eight basic emotions (sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation, joy, acceptance, fear, and surprise) is applied in the emotion analysis of this thesis for its simplicity and feasibility for recognizing emotions also in their less intensive forms.

In the life of an individual, emotions serve a purpose of reducing disequilibrium and providing feedback about one's own behavior (Plutchik, 2003, 106-107). According to Nesse (1990), emotions do not only motivate action but they themselves are goals to achieve, since most human thinking and behavior aims at producing positive emotions or to avoid negative emotions. In the consumption context, disequilibrium or imbalance of emotions can be the result of a dissatisfying or a strongly positive consumption experience. To restore the balance, consumers may be motivated to express their positive emotions or to vent their negative feelings by engaging in word-of-mouth. (Hennig-Thurau et al. 2004, 44.)

Emotions can influence our cognitive processing and judgements and shape our actions (Institute for Government, 2010, 25, 45). According to Kim and Johnson (2016), brand-related user generated content stimulates consumers' emotional and cognitive responses that further influence behavioral responses. In their study, positively influenced behavioral responses included purchase intention, word-of-mouth engagement and brand engagement. Brand engagement itself is a concept that has a strong emotional base. Goldsmith (2012) defines brand engagement as the emotional connection that bonds a customer to a brand referring to how a customer feels about a brand. It is proposed that brand engagement can be supported by advertising or other promotional activities that evoke emotional responses to the brand leading to loyalty (Goldsmith, 2012, 127).

According to Cohen et al. (2008), positive mood usually promotes more positive judgements and vice versa. The level of arousal regulates affective and evaluative responses to a target as higher arousal produces more extreme and polarized responses or judgements. Emotions also regulate information processing. Positive emotions have been suggested to lead to less thorough processing while promoting greater flexibility and creativity in problem solving. Negative emotions, instead, seem to produce a more systematic and analytical form of reasoning. (Cohen et al., 2008, 320-322.) Although, it has been suggested by Tiedens and Linton (2001) that it is actually the associated certainty of emotions that regulates information processing. Emotions associated with certainty, such as disgust or happiness, lead to less thorough processing, and emotions associated with uncertainty, such as fear and hope, lead to more systematic processing. Therefore, negative emotions of anger and disgust seem to decrease the depth of processing and increase the reliance on stereotypes while sadness promotes more systematic processing. (Tiedens & Linton, 2001, 978, 981.)



### 3 DATA AND RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, the research data and research methods are described. First, the data and the manipulation conditions are presented. Then, the research methods and how they were used in this study are explained.

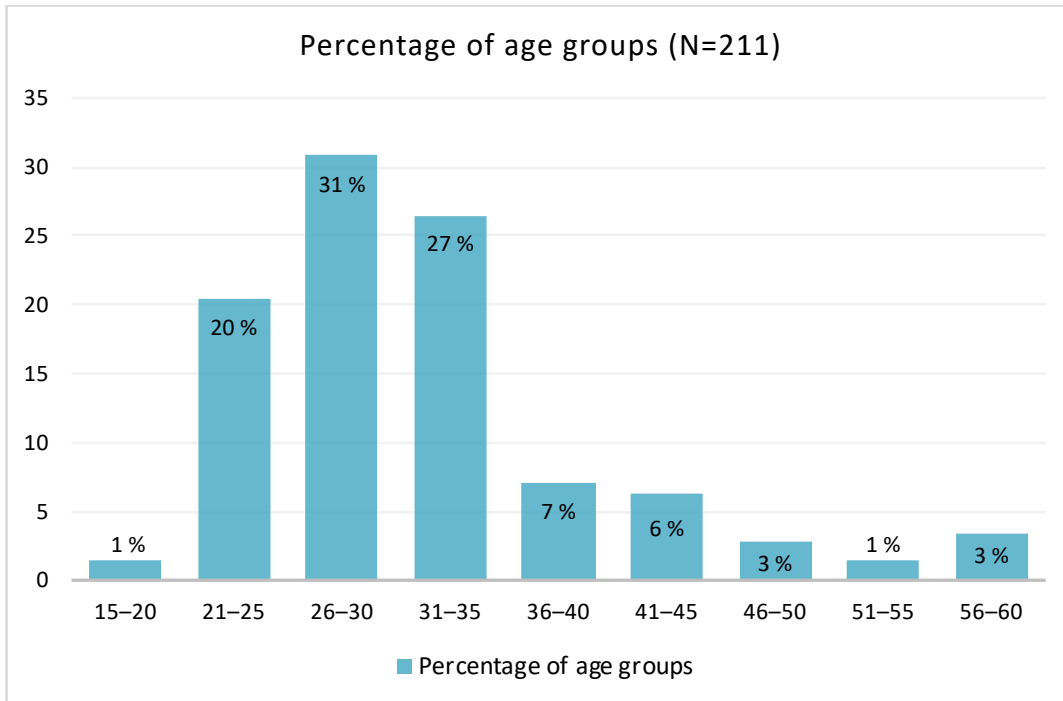
#### 3.1 Data

The data was gathered through a web survey and it included 214 open responses. The length of each response was approximately 150 words in English. The survey was about product endorsement videos on YouTube and it included a video from an English-speaking female YouTube vlogger whose channel concerns travelling. In the 3:35 minute video, the vlogger presents three travel related products: a lock, soap sheets, and travel containers. All the questions in the survey, except the background questions, concerned the video and the products endorsed in it. All the respondents watched the same video.

Responses for the survey were gathered in July 2017 through Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk), a crowdsourcing platform that recruits respondents by internet to complete "Human Intelligence Tasks", so called HITs (Amazon Mechanical Turk 2018). In the case of this study the task of the qualified and paid respondents was to complete the research survey. The data gathering was limited to United States only.

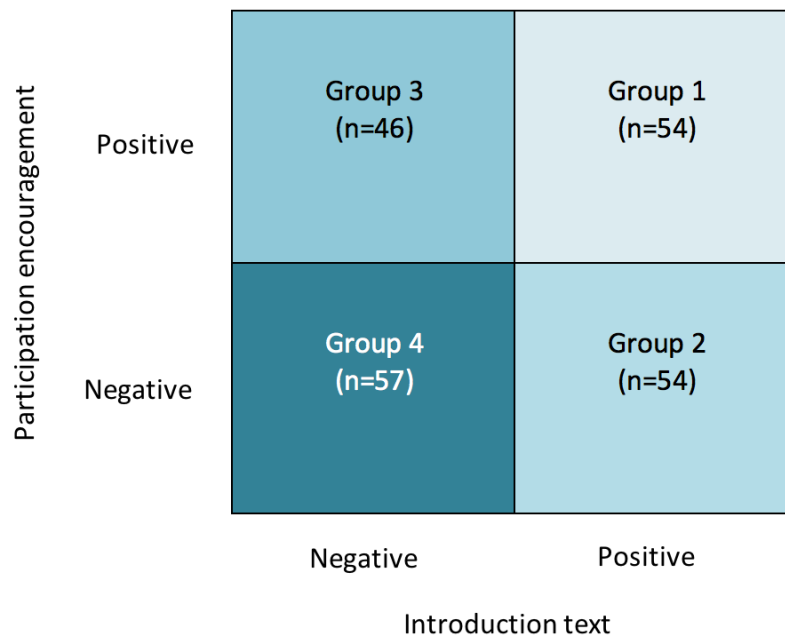
From the 214 responses, three were discarded due to irrelevance. The discarded responses missed the focus of the survey by discussing something else than the video, the endorser or the products. Of the 211 respondents, majority, 59 percent, were male and 41 percent were female.

The age of the respondents ranged from 15- to 60-year-old. As presented in Figure 1, a vast majority of respondents (79 %) were 35-year-old or younger. Over half (52 %) of the respondents were 30-year-old or younger.



**Figure 1. Respondents by age group**

The responses were divided into four groups along four different manipulation conditions, as represented in Figure 2. The respondents were randomly appointed to one of four conditions which were combinations of a negative or positive introduction text and an encouragement or discouragement for participation. The introduction text and the encouragement were both shown before the respondents watched the video (see Appendices 1 and 2). The groups are named group 1, group 2, group 3, and group 4 in order starting from the most positive manipulation condition (positive introduction text and an encouragement for participation, group 1) ending to the most negative manipulation condition (negative introduction text and a discouragement for participation, group 4).



**Figure 2. Groups and manipulation conditions**

In the survey, the respondents read either a positive or a negative introduction text (see Appendix 1) to the subsequent video. This introduction text was meant to work as a prime for the video watching experience and perception. The negative introduction text for example claimed that the following video is “overly sponsored” and “the endorsement is done mainly for money” calling the video a “paid advertisement”. The awareness of the commercial nature of the content may make the viewers contest the claims made about the brand or product.

As a prime, the negative introduction text was expected to trigger persuasion knowledge of the respondents and therefore provoke coping strategies, such as counterarguing or negative emotions. Negative emotions, such as anger or irritation, function as a resistance towards the persuasive message (van Reijmersdal et al., 2016).

To manipulate participation, respondents were either “strongly” encouraged or discouraged to share, comment, like, dislike and subscribe the video (see Appendix 2).

To ensure the eligibility of the participants to complete the survey, they were asked to go through a short qualifying test that included three questions about the content of the video: the vlogger, the endorsed items, and the endorsed brands. This was done to ensure the participants had paid attention to the video and were therefore engaged in the task.

After passing the qualifying test, the respondents were asked to give an open response on their thoughts about the video. More specifically, the respondents were asked to describe their feelings about the endorser, the video itself, the products and brands presented, and their thoughts or concerns about the overall viewing experience (for details, see Appendix 2). The participants were asked to write a response of approximately 150 words. The survey was built so that the

respondent could not get further to the next question before writing the minimum of 150 words. The responses to this open question form the data of this study.

## 3.2 Methods

This study aims to find out if and how priming shapes the perception of authenticity and source credibility as well as emotions of the viewers. It also aims to form a conceptualization of source authenticity. The open responses gathered in the web survey described in the previous chapter were analyzed using the method of theory-guided content analysis. The responses were as well analyzed from the perspective of emotions.

### 3.2.1 Content analysis

Theory-guided content analysis means that the content is analyzed with the help of theory but not so that the analysis would be directly based on theory. In theory-guided analysis the units of analysis are selected from the content guided by previous knowledge of theory. Therefore, previous knowledge influences the analysis but the role of it is not to test any theory. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 150-151).

The content analysis in this study has the characteristic of traditional content analysis which Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016, 119) claim to aim for transforming qualitative data into variables to be analyzed with quantitative methods. This is possible through systematic coding that aims for quantification of the data (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, 120).

The research data, in the case of this study the open responses, are coded, meaning that parts of the data are tagged or labeled with descriptive names. By this procedure, parts of the data are classified into categories. (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, 120.) The purpose of coding is to reduce and simplify the data by focusing on the meaningful characteristics of the data. Only the material relevant to the research is coded. (Hair et al., 2015, 302.) When performing the coding process, the researcher tries to do it as objectively as possible, to the extent that another researcher could repeat the process and reach the same results (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2016, 120).

In qualitative content analysis, the data is asked questions related to the research problem (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 157). The aim is to recognize, assess, compare, and interpret patterns and themes from the data (Hair et al., 2015, 301). Firstly, the issues of interest in this study are identified. The phrases that express these issues are then reduced to categories and every category is given a name that describes the content. The formation of categories is a critical phase in the analysis because it is then when the researcher decides on which basis different phrases belong to the same or different category. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 157.) Categories are developed while working through the data allowing them to emerge from the data (Hair et al, 2015, 302). The analysis continues by combining

subcategories to form upper categories and further main categories. The research assignment is answered with the help of subcategories, upper categories, main categories, and combined categories. The data is described by structuring meanings by reduction and grouping. This is already preliminary interpretation. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 157-158, 160.)

The responses were coded using the coding scheme presented in Table 3. The responses were coded one group at a time, response by response. The coding scheme was first drafted on the grounds of the theory. The scheme was further improved by testing it on the data. The aim was, guided by the theory, to extract the perceptions of authenticity and credibility of the endorser, and on the contrary, the perceptions of inauthenticity and uncredibility of the endorser. In addition, the mentions of the video and the products as well as the respondents' attitudes (negative, positive, or neutral) towards them were coded. This was done to find out whether the perceptions of authenticity and credibility of the endorser are reflected in the viewing experience or the products. For the coding of credibility, cues of two different dimensions of source credibility were required. Whereas, for the coding of uncredibility, a mention of untrustworthiness, explicit mention of not being credible or another wording that expressed lack of trust, was enough.

**Table 3. The coding scheme**

Code	Triggers
<b>Video</b>	
Video	Mention of video
Video positive	Done well / Clear / Persuasive / Liked the video / Was worth the time
Video negative	Annoying / Boring / Waste of time
Video neutral	Okay / Did not enjoy but did not worsen the mood / Not much to say / Did not have strong feeling
<b>Products</b>	
Products	Mention of product or products
Products positive	Helpful / Useful / Good / Interesting / Would try or buy / High quality
Products negative	Not interested / Not excited / Plain / Overpriced / Unnecessary / Worthless
Products neutral	Seem fine but not sure / Not relevant / No feelings to the brands
<b>Endorser</b>	
Endorser	Mention of endorser
Endorser authentic	Genuine / Authentic / True to herself / Unbiased / Has personality or charisma / Sincere / Down to earth
Endorser inauthentic	Artificial / Fake / Not genuine / Trying too hard / Putting on an act / Overly enthusiastic / Overly dramatic / Pushy / Phony
Endorser credible	Cues to at least two of the three dimensions of endorser credibility: Trustworthiness: Trustworthy / Convincing / Honest / Giving own opinion / Sais also what is not good about products / Not positive about everything Expertise: Worthy to judge / Pragmatic review / Knows what she is talking about / Knows her stuff

	Attractiveness: Cute / Approachable / Pleasant / Polite / Personable / Friendly
Endorser uncredible	Unreliable / Not believable / Not credible / Lied / Untrustworthy/ No trust
Endorser neutral	Generic / Nothing interesting about her / Likes the products / Personable / Friendly

None of the codes, except the opposite pairs *Endorser authentic/inauthentic* and *Endorser credible/uncredible*, were excluding, meaning that one response could get any combination of codes. In practice, the code for perceiving the endorser as neutral (*Endorser neutral*) excluded all the other quality-specific codes for the endorser (*Endorser authentic*, *Endorser credible*, *Endorser inauthentic*, *Endorser uncredible*). This is because the *Endorser neutral* -code was used in those cases when the endorser was described in some way beyond only mentioning her, but the description did not qualify to be coded as authentic/inauthentic or credible/uncredible. Therefore, a response could get, for example, the combination of codes *Endorser inauthentic* + *Endorser credible* but not *Endorser uncredible* + *Endorser neutral* nor *Endorser authentic* + *Endorser inauthentic*. The codes for video and products could appear in any combination, for example *Video negative* + *Video neutral* and *Products positive* + *Products negative*.

Table 4 presents examples of open responses and their codes as well as the verbatim that correspond to the codes.

**Table 4. Examples of coding**

Full open response	Verbatim	Codes
<p>"I liked the video. I wasn't sure whether or not she was being paid for the products in the video, but it was convincing for me. I would "like" the video. I might subscribe, but I'd have to watch more and a wider variety of the videos on her channel, just to be sure. I travel a lot so it is relevant to me. I like the presenter of the video. She was genuine and charismatic. Her accent was kind of intriguing. I think that the products in the video all seem high quality. They seem like they would be great to have while travelling. I probably couldn't afford most of them right now, or wouldn't need to buy them, but it would be good to know in the future. It left me wondering whether or not the presenter has other types of travel videos, or just product reviews." (Group 3)</p>	"I liked the video."	Video. Video positive.
	"I wasn't sure whether or not she was being paid for the products in the video, but it was convincing for me." "I like the presenter of the video."	Endorser. Endorser credible.
	"She was genuine and charismatic."	Endorser. Endorser authentic.
	"I think that the products in the video all seem high quality. They seem like they would be great to have while travelling. I probably couldn't afford most of them right now, or wouldn't need to buy them, but it would be good to know in the future."	Products. Products positive.
<p>"It was clearly an advertisement disguised as a video. I think the products were rather worthless. The locks seemed fine, but you could get one of</p>	"It was clearly an advertisement disguised as a video." "It was a complete waste of time."	Video. Video negative.

those anywhere I believe. It was intentionally persuasive but I'm able to see beyond that. Her upbeat optimism seems fake and unreal. It was a complete waste of time. It may fool some people though. The endorser was fantastic if her intentions are advertising. If she's trying to make a unique video not just as an endorser, it's terrible. Honestly the whole time, I felt awful watching her. I felt like it was a sales pitch and she would do anything to get me to buy those products. It was presented in a quirky way that insults the viewer as well. I don't think many of the products are useful either to the average person. She is absolutely untrustworthy as well. She doesn't come across as entirely authentic." (Group 2)	"I think the products were rather worthless. The locks seemed fine, but you could get one of those anywhere I believe." "I don't think many of the products are useful either to the average person."	Products. Products negative.
	"Her upbeat optimism seems fake and unreal." "She doesn't come across as entirely authentic."	Endorser. Endorser inauthentic.
	"She is absolutely untrustworthy as well."	Endorser. Endorser uncredible.
"The video itself was fairly boring. Production value was on the lower side. None of products really caught my eye. The best one was the lock because maybe it could be useful. I don't feel like I would use any of the containers or the soaps. But they might be nice for others. The [vlogger's name] girl seemed like she really enjoyed herself in the videos and was fairly friendly and trustworthy. She knew enough about the products to put on a good presentation. And was very informative with features and uses." (Group 4)	"The video itself was fairly boring. Production value was on the lower side."	Video. Video negative.
	"None of products really caught my eye. The best one was the lock because maybe it could be useful. I don't feel like I would use any of the containers or the soaps. But they might be nice for others."	Products. Products neutral.
	"The [vlogger's name] girl seemed like she really enjoyed herself in the videos and was fairly friendly and trustworthy. She knew enough about the products to put on a good presentation. And was very informative with features and uses."	Endorser. Endorser credible.

After coding, the verbal codes were transformed into variables and organized in a data matrix to enable cross tabulation and chi square analysis in SPSS software. The formed variables corresponded to the manipulation group, the authenticity perception, the credibility perception, the attitudes toward the video, and the attitude toward the products. Cross tabulation is a simple method for describing sets of relationships. One of its benefits is to illustrate the possible relationships between two variables. In this study cross tabulation was used to describe the differences between the four manipulation groups in how endorser authenticity, endorser credibility, the video, and the products were perceived in them. (Hair et al., 2015, 352; Metsämuuronen 2011, 357.)

To find out if the differences between the manipulation groups were real or merely the result of coincidence, the chi square test was used. It measures the independence between two variables. (Metsämuuronen, 2011, 358.) The Pearson chi square statistical test enables to analyze whether the frequencies of two nominally scaled variables are related by comparing the observed frequencies with the expected frequencies. An accurate chi square test requires each expected cell frequency to have a sample size of at least five. Chi square test was employed to test whether the four manipulation groups are statistically different in their perception. The null hypothesis in the test was that there are no differences between

the groups. (Hair et al., 2015, 352-353.) Cross tabulations and Pearson chi square tests were executed with SPSS software.

### 3.2.2 Emotion analysis

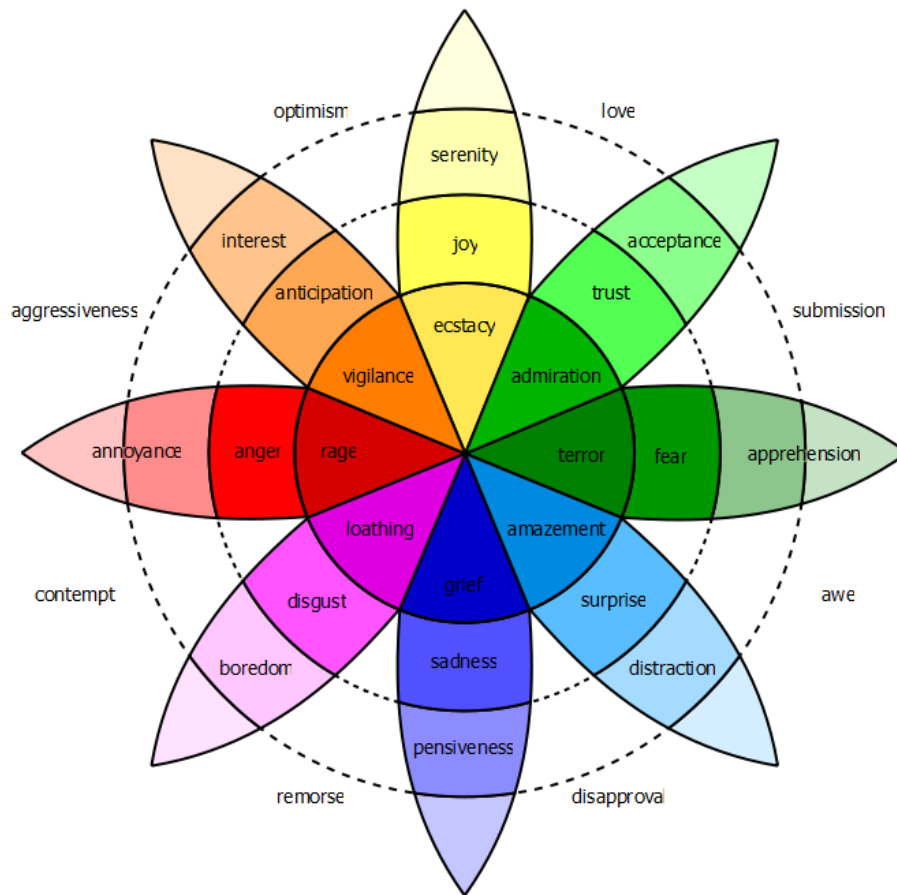
The emotion analysis was done based on the fundamental emotions defined by Plutchik (1982). These eight basic emotions are sadness, disgust, anger, anticipation, joy, acceptance, fear, and surprise, listed in Table 5. Since the emotions in the open responses of the survey were not expected to be very strong, the multi-dimensional model of emotions (Figure 3) was used as a tool to recognize the emotions by their different intensities.

**Table 5. Fundamental emotions (Plutchik, 1982)**

<b>Sadness:</b> Gloomy, sad, depressed	<b>Joy:</b> Happy, cheerful, delighted
<b>Disgust:</b> Disgusted, offended, unpleasant, bored	<b>Acceptance:</b> Helped, accepted, trusting
<b>Anger:</b> Hostile, annoyed, irritated	<b>Fear:</b> Threatened, frightened, intimidated
<b>Anticipation:</b> Alert, attentive, curious	<b>Surprise:</b> Puzzled, confused, startled

Plutchik's (2003) so called wheel of emotions (Figure 3) illustrates the basic emotions, their intensities, their combinations, and their opposites.





**Figure 3. Multi-dimensional model of emotions (Plutchik, 2003).**

The emotions in the responses were coded group by group, response by response using Plutchik's framework as guidance. Also, the object of each emotion (endorser, video or products) was coded.

## 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings of this study are presented. First, the cross tabulations and chi square analysis of authenticity and source credibility perceptions in the four manipulation groups are presented followed by the analysis of attitudes towards the video and the endorsed products. The results suggest that priming does shape the authenticity and source credibility perceptions, whereas encouragement for audience participation seems to promote positive attitudes towards the content and the products.

Then, the concept of source authenticity is defined as genuineness, unbiasedness, relatability, and passion of the source. As the opposite, source inauthenticity is conceptualized as fakeness, forcedness and bias of the source.

Lastly, the findings of the emotion analysis are presented. The results of the analysis indicate for instance that mixed manipulation brought about mixed emotions and that the negative emotions were targeted mainly at the endorser.

### 4.1 Authenticity and credibility perceptions

The Pearson chi square test showed statistically significant differences of both endorser authenticity (p-value = 0.002) and endorser credibility (p-value = 0.033) perceptions between the manipulation groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the perception of endorser authenticity or credibility between the manipulation groups is rejected.

Looking at the shares of authenticity perception in the four manipulation groups presented in the Table 6, the endorser was perceived most authentic in group 3 with a share of 28 percent. The second highest share of authenticity perception (27 %) was found in group 1, the second lowest in group 2 (22 %), and the lowest in group 4 (7 %). Based on these results, the manipulation of participation had a stronger effect on the perception of authenticity than the valence of the introduction text. However, this was not the case with the perception of inauthenticity which was highest in the most negatively manipulated group 4 (45

%) and lowest in the most positively manipulated group 1 (17 %), groups 2 and 3 falling in between.

**Table 6. Perceptions of endorser authenticity**

AP = audience participation		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
N=207*		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
<b>Authentic</b>	Count	14	12	13	4	43
	% within group	27 %	22 %	28 %	7 %	21 %
<b>Inauthentic</b>	Count	9	11	18	25	63
	% within group	17 %	20 %	39 %	45 %	30 %
<b>No mention</b>	Count	29	31	15	26	101
	% within group	56 %	57 %	33 %	47 %	49 %
<b>Total</b>	Count	52	54	46	55	207

$\chi^2 = 20.865$  p-value 0.002

\*Responses mentioning the endorser

The highest share of credibility perception (65 %) was in the positively manipulated group that was discouraged to participate (group 2), presented in Table 7, followed by group 1 (63 %). Negatively manipulated group 4 had a share of perceived credibility of 42 percent and the other negatively manipulated group 3 a share of 46 percent. In the case of credibility, the valence of the introduction text resulted in a clear difference between groups but the encouragement or discouragement for participation had little effect. As with inauthenticity, uncredibility perception followed the assumed manipulation effect, as the lowest share of uncredibility perception was in the most positively manipulated group 1 (8 %) and highest share in the most negatively manipulated group 4 (25 %).

**Table 7. Perceptions of endorser credibility**

AP = audience participation		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
N=207*		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
<b>Credible</b>	Count	33	35	21	23	112
	% within group	63 %	65 %	46 %	42 %	54 %
<b>Uncredible</b>	Count	4	5	6	14	29
	% within group	8 %	9 %	13 %	25 %	14 %
<b>No mention</b>	Count	15	14	19	18	66
	% within group	29 %	26 %	41 %	33 %	32 %
<b>Total</b>	Count	52	54	46	55	207

$\chi^2 = 13.697$  p-value 0.033

\*Responses mentioning the endorser

In the case of endorser neutrality, the requirements of the Pearson chi square test were not met, since four cells (50,0 %) had expected count less than five, while the test would require each expected cell frequency to have a sample size of at least five. The observed frequencies of endorser neutrality are presented in Table 8. The endorser was most often perceived neutral in group 1 with a share of 13 percent. The counts are so low that it is not relevant to make any assumptions based on them. However, it can be speculated that the manipulation triggered the respondents to form and express their opinion about the authenticity and/or credibility of the endorser.

**Table 8. Perception of endorser neutrality**

AP = audience participation		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
N=207*		<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>	<b>Group 3</b>	<b>Group 4</b>	
Neutral	Count	7	2	4	0	13
	% within group	13 %	4 %	9 %	0 %	6 %
No mention	Count	45	52	42	55	194
	% within group	87 %	96 %	91 %	100 %	94 %
Total	Count	52	54	46	55	207

\*Responses mentioning the endorser

## 4.2 Attitudes towards video and products

The Pearson chi square test showed statistically significant differences in both positive (p-value < 0.001) and negative (p-value = 0.002) attitudes towards the video between the manipulation groups. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in the positive or negative attitudes towards the video between the manipulation groups is rejected. The chi square test results concerning the attitudes towards the video are presented in Table 10. The chi square test requirements were not met in the case of neutral attitudes towards the video.

Table 9 summarizes the attitudes towards the video among the responses mentioning the video. Results are visualized in Figure 4. The attitudes are the most positive in group 1 with a share of 87 percent, followed by group 2 with a share of 81 percent. The lowest share of positive attitude towards the video was in group 4 (48 %), and the second lowest in group 3 (65 %). The share of negative attitudes towards the video is highest in group 4 (40 %) and lowest in group 1 (12 %) with the shares of group 2 (17 %) and group 3 (35 %) falling in between.

Table 9. Attitudes towards the video

AP = audience participation		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
N=197*		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
<b>Video positive</b>	Count	45	42	28	24	139
	% within group	87 %	81 %	65 %	48 %	71 %
<b>Video negative</b>	Count	6	9	15	20	50
	% within group	12 %	17 %	35 %	40 %	25 %
<b>Video neutral</b>	Count	2	3	2	6	13
	% within group	4 %	6 %	5 %	12 %	7 %
<b>Total</b>	Count	52	52	43	50	197

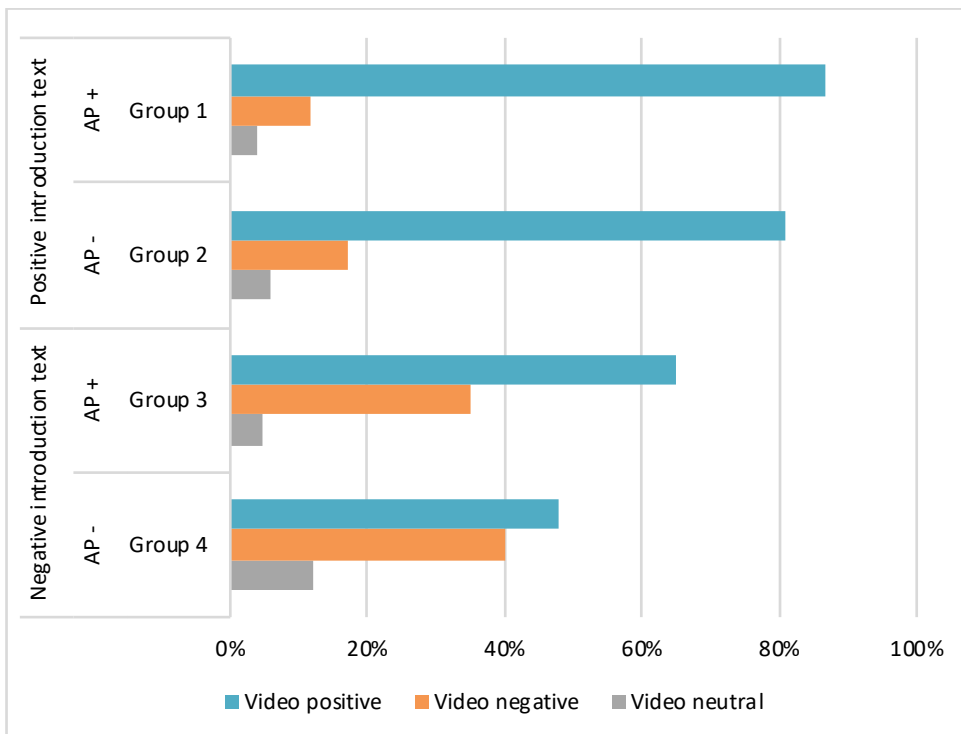
\*Responses mentioning the video.

Table 10. Chi square test results for video cross tabulations

Pearson chi square	$\chi^2$	p-value	Test requirements	Statistical significance
<b>Video positive</b>	21.863	0.000	Met	Yes
<b>Video negative</b>	14.743	0.002	Met	Yes
<b>Video neutral</b>	3.329	0.344	Not met	n.a.

Based on the results concerning the video, the manipulation effect worked as predicted, as the combination of positive introduction text and an encouragement for participation produced the most positive results and the combinations of negative introduction text and discouragement for participation produced the most negative results, while the mixed conditions (positive + discouragement and negative + encouragement) produced the results in between, the valence of the introduction text being the dominating factor.

In the case of neutral attitudes towards the video, the requirements of the Pearson chi square test were not met, since four cells (50,0 %) had an expected count less than five. The video was most often found neutral in group 4 with a share of 12 percent. In total, there was neutral attitude towards the video in 7 percent of all the responses mentioning the video. The counts are so low that it is not relevant to make any assumptions based on them. However, it can be suggested that the manipulation encouraged the respondents to form an opinion on the video.



**Figure 4. Attitudes towards the video per group**

The Pearson chi square test showed statistically significant differences in positive attitudes ( $p$ -value = 0.002) towards the products between the manipulation groups, as presented in Table 12. Therefore, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in positive attitudes towards the products between the manipulation groups is rejected. However, in the case of negative attitudes toward the products, the chi square test result suggests no statistical significance ( $p$ -value > 0.050). Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no difference in negative attitudes towards the products between the manipulation groups is accepted. The chi square test requirements were not met in the case of neutral attitudes towards the products.

The share of positive attitudes towards the products is highest in group 1 (89 %), as presented in Table 11. The second highest share of positive attitudes was found in group 2 (81 %). The groups primed with negative introduction text had the lowest shares of positive attitudes towards the products, group 3 with a share of 69 percent and group 4 with a share of 57 percent. These results, visualized in Figure 5, suggest that manipulation operated as assumed, since positive introduction text produced the most positive results and negative introduction text the most negative results, while encouragement for participation increased positivity towards the products. But as the results on positive attitude towards the products were statistically significant, it can be stated that the negative manipulation resulted in less positive attitudes towards the products.

**Table 11. Attitudes towards the products**

AP = audience participation		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
N=182*		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
<b>Products positive</b>	Count	40	42	27	26	135
	% within group	89 %	81 %	69 %	57 %	74 %
<b>Products negative</b>	Count	4	8	5	12	29
	% within group	9 %	15 %	13 %	26 %	16 %
<b>Products neutral</b>	Count	1	3	6	7	17
	% within group	2 %	6 %	15 %	15 %	9 %
<b>Total</b>	Count	45	52	39	46	182

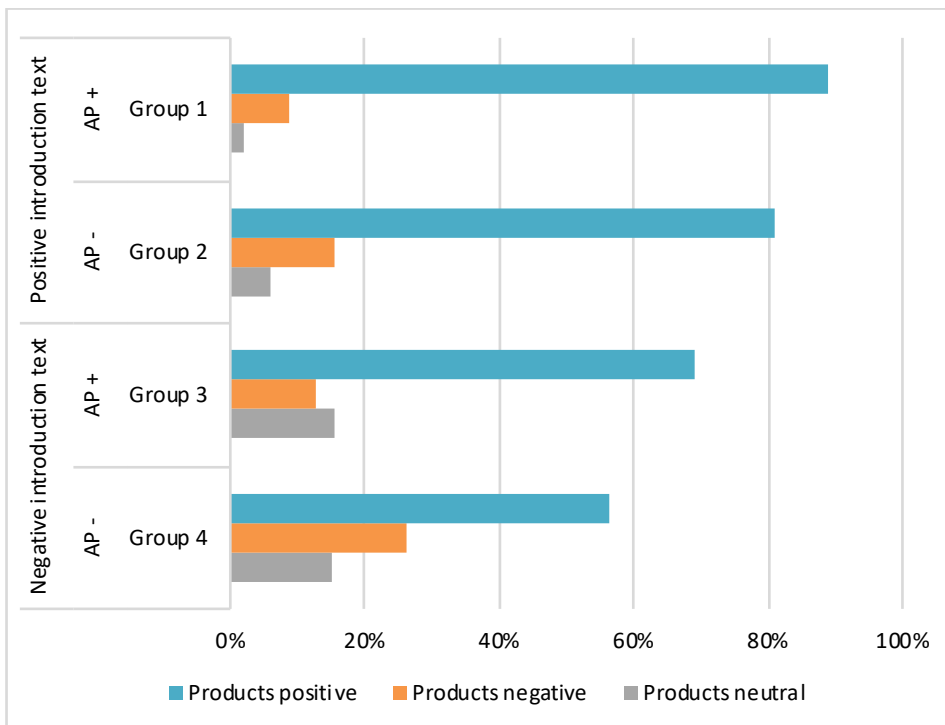
\*Responses mentioning products.

The share of negative attitudes towards the products is highest in group 4 (26 %) and second highest in group 2 (15 %). The share of negative attitudes towards the products was lowest in group 1 (9 %) and second lowest in group 3 (13 %). As aforesaid, the differences between the group regarding the negative attitudes towards the products were not statistically significant. Therefore, assumptions on the effects of different manipulation conditions cannot be made. However, it could be concluded that manipulation did not have effect on the perception of the endorsed products in negative means. In other words, negativity was not so much projected to the products.

**Table 12. Chi square test results for product cross tabulations**

Pearson chi square	$\chi^2$	p-value	Test requirements	Statistical significance
<b>Products positive</b>	14.354	0.002	Met	Yes
<b>Products negative</b>	5.412	0.144	Met	No
<b>Products neutral</b>	6.255	0.100	Not met	n.a.

In the case of neutral attitudes towards the products, the requirements of the Pearson chi square test were not met, since four cells (50,0 %) had expected count less than five. The products were most often found neutral in the groups manipulated with the negative introduction text, with a share of 15 percent in group 3 and with the same share, 15 percent, in group 4. In total, there was neutral attitude towards the products in 9 percent of all the responses mentioning products.



**Figure 5. Attitudes towards the products per group**

In the light of these quantitative results, group 4 is the most distrustful and negative group of all the four groups, considering the authenticity and credibility perceptions as well as attitudes towards the video and the products. It scores the highest shares in all the negative aspects and lowest shares in all the positive aspects. However, this was expected, since group 4 was primed by the most negative manipulation condition, negative introduction text and a discouragement for participation.

Most positively manipulated group 1 was the most positive and least negative concerning the video and the products. However, regarding endorser authenticity and credibility, group 1 scored only the second highest shares. Yet, group 1 scored the lowest shares in inauthenticity and uncredibility.

### 4.3 What is source authenticity?

Derived from the content analysis of the data that aimed to answer the research question “How vlog-viewers evaluate source authenticity?”, an authentic vlogger (endorser/source) is described as genuine, unbiased, relatable, and passionate (see Table 13). Despite primarily belonging to the coding of source credibility, trustworthiness contributed to the coding of authenticity when it appeared with the perceptions of charisma or funniness.

The content analysis was conducted by looking at all the responses that evaluated the endorser as either authentic or inauthentic regardless of manipulation group. Authenticity and inauthenticity were analyzed as separate concepts



and only the verbatims that appeared to refer to authenticity or inauthenticity were included in the analysis. In total, there were 43 respondents that evaluated the endorser as authentic and 63 respondents that evaluated the endorser as inauthentic. The following conceptualizations of source authenticity and source inauthenticity were formed by joining together subcategories to form the main categories of each concept.

**Table 13. Source authenticity categories**

Mentions*	Category	Subcategory	Includes
22	<b>Genuine</b>	genuine	sincere
		real	natural, down to earth, not fake
		spontaneity	not from script, not acting
		true self	as with friends, like my sister, true to themselves
13	<b>Unbiased</b>	unbiased	not sponsored, not paid, mentions products because believes in them, not a shill, impartial
		not pushing	not selling, not forcing
11	<b>Charismatic (+ trustworthy)</b>	charismatic	personality, character
8	<b>Relatable</b>	engaging	Engaging, relatable
		regular person	everyday consumer, ordinary person
7	<b>Passionate</b>	enjoying	enjoys her job, had fun
		passion	enthusiastic, caring
6	<b>Funny (+ trustworthy)</b>	funny	upbeat, has good humor

\* Number of responses that mention the category

The defining categories presented in Table 13 are not unexpected when compared to definitions of authenticity in the literature, elaborated in chapter 2.4. Genuine, real, true self, and spontaneity can all be found in earlier definitions, and they formed also the most mentioned category in the data. Being unbiased is related to internally motivated behavior, as opposed to externally motivated (biased) behavior mentioned by Moulard et al. (2015) and described by Kernis and Goldman (2006) as false-self behavior motivated by pleasing others or attaining rewards. The subcategory of relatability, engagement, is mentioned by Glipin et al. (2010) as a dimension of authenticity. Though, relatability could be actually connected to source credibility, since the descriptions of the dimension *attractiveness* include familiarity and similarity.

*“She seemed genuine with her experience with the products because she didn't make every product seem amazing. She seemingly gave her actual opinion on things.”*

Passion refers to enjoying one's job, being committed to it and caring about it. Moulard et al. (2016) connect passionate brand managers to brand authenticity. Also, Audrezet et al. (2017) mention passion as a manner for social media influencers to manage authenticity. Being passionate, or following one's passion, is close to internally motivated behavior described by Moulard et al. (2015) and Kernis and Goldman (2006) as opposed to external motivation.

Charisma that was mentioned together with trustworthiness emerged from the data as one category of authenticity of the endorser. The category of charisma includes the subcategory *personality* which stands for viewers' positive remarks about the personality of the endorser. Charisma and personality seemed to refer to the unique character of the endorser, that there is something special about her personality and that she is expressing her character on the video. Uniqueness as a dimension of authenticity is mentioned by Moulard et al. (2016), Moulard et al. (2015) and Molleda (2010).

Like charisma, funniness (humor) mentioned together with trustworthiness also emerged from the data as one category of authenticity. However, it was the least mentioned category and therefore it can be questioned if humor or funniness really is part of authenticity. Yet, Sullivan and Deane (1988, 21) have suggested that humor as a form of communication projects authenticity and lack of pretention in the context of gerontological nursing. Barnett and Deutsch (2016) studied the relationship between authenticity and humor styles and found out that authenticity was connected to benign humor which refers to an affiliative and self-enhancing style of humor. Benign humor enhances relationships by putting others at ease and by communicating appreciation of self and the surroundings (Barnett & Deutsch, 2016, 108). Considering these remarks, it can be suggested that the humor of the endorser perceived good by the viewers enhances a feeling of connection to the endorser which further promotes authenticity.

As in literature, authenticity was often expressed in the responses through its opposite, for example not fake, not forced, or not getting paid:

*"She is not getting paid as an endorser and is mentioning the products because she believes in them."*

*"She did not come off as fake like a lot of people do and the products she endorsed seemed legitimate and not false."*

Compared to inauthenticity, authenticity was harder to detect in the responses. Therefore, the coding of authenticity is possibly more interpretative than the coding of inauthenticity. However, inauthenticity gives cues about what authenticity is. Inauthenticity, as it was observed in the data, is defined next.

Table 14 summarizes the categories of source inauthenticity as the result of content analysis. Inauthentic vlogger (endorser/source) is described as fake, forced and biased. These categories reflect some of the categories of authenticity presented in Table 13.

Table 14. Source inauthenticity categories

Mentions*	Category	Includes
38	<b>Fake</b>	phony, not natural, artificial, not genuine, putting on an act, not true self, cheesy, corny, unreal, polished, corporate, quoting a script
32	<b>Forced</b>	trying too hard, overly enthusiastic or excited etc., over the top, pushy, calculated, not spontaneous, didn't want to do the video
30	<b>Biased</b>	biased, selling out, making for money, disguised ad, manipulator, paid review, shilling, ulterior motives, not giving her personal opinion

\* Number of responses that mention the category

Fake is the most often mentioned opposite of authentic in literature (see Table 1). It was also the most mentioned category in the data where there were numerous descriptions of fake. Phony, artificial, not true self, cheesy, and even corporate were all ways of describing the perceived fakeness of the endorser.

*"She looked too polished and corporate for it to be a spontaneous youtube review or whatever, for like your bros."*

The category of forced behavior is very close to the categories of fake and biased, because it describes behavior that is perceived externally motivated as being calculated and as behavior that comes off as trying too hard. The category of *forced* can be interpreted as the opposite to the category of *passion* because it refers to the assumption that the endorser does not really want to do what she is doing and therefore is forcing herself to appear enthusiastic or passionate.

*"The girl was a little over the top with trying to be excited which was not her usual self I wouldn't think."*

*"I feel like the endorser was a bit to[o] friendly and looked and acted too much like a pro. It feels like she is trying to force something genuine on her viewers."*

Biased, as opposed to unbiased, stands for externally motivated behavior. A commonly mentioned ulterior motive is money, but perceived bias was also disclosed as not giving a personal opinion and judging the video as an advertisement. A biased endorser is not giving her own honest opinion on the products but is instead selling them in exchange for a reward.

*"The video itself was very hard to watch, her transparent commercial behavior was so apparent. She was nice, but you could tell she was sponsored and needed to sell her product."*

#### 4.4 Emotion analysis

The emotions in the data were coded according to the basic emotions (see Table 5) defined by Plutchik (1982). However, the emotions in the data were generally not very strong. Therefore, the noticeable emotions in the open responses were

typically the less intense counterparts of the basic emotions. For example, anger was typically represented as irritation and disgust as boredom or unpleasantness.

The most common emotions in all four groups were acceptance and disgust. This is mainly because they represent the axis of like-dislike in the analysis. Acceptance includes also the feelings of trust and being helped that were common in the responses. Whereas disgust was mainly expressed as disinterest or boredom but rarely mere disgust or feeling offended.

Anticipation in this analysis represents alert in the sense of suspicion. Therefore, it was interpreted as a negative emotion of being leery or on guard. Hence, curiosity and interest towards the products, for example, were coded as acceptance instead of anticipation.

Fear and surprise were missing completely in the data. Fear is absent because it was not observed in the responses. There was a certain extend of confusion to be noticed in the responses, which could have been coded as surprise. The confusion was extremely rarely expressed with words in a straightforward way, which could have left too much freedom for interpretation. Consequently, it was decided that the confusion or puzzlement appears in the analysis as responses that contain positive and negative emotions mixed.

The group manipulated by positive introduction text and an encouragement for participation (group 1) had the highest share of responses containing only positive emotions (75 %), as presented in Table 15. The lowest share of positive emotions was found in group 4 (36 %). The shares of positive emotions in group 2 (65 %) and group 3 (48 %) fell in between. Therefore, it appears that the encouragement for participation contributes to positive emotions.

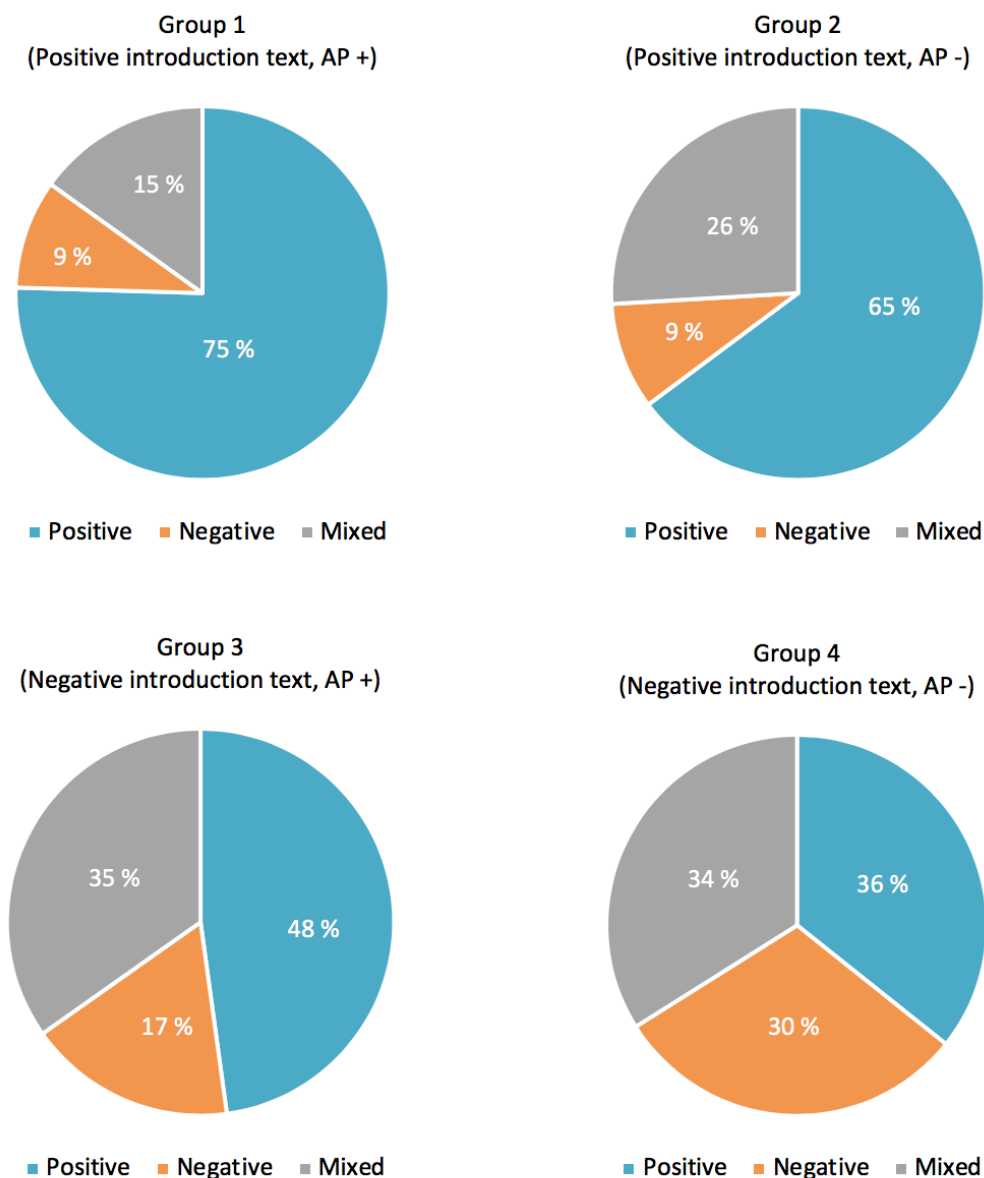
Group 4 had the highest share of responses with only negative emotions, 30 percent. The share of negative emotions in group 3 was 17 percent. The lowest shares of only negative emotion responses were in groups 2 and 3 with the same share of 9 percent.

**Table 15. Positive and negative and mixed emotions per group**

		Positive introduction text		Negative introduction text		Total
		AP +	AP-	AP+	AP-	
AP = audience participation		Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	
<b>Positive</b>	Count	40	35	22	20	117
	% within group	75 %	65 %	48 %	36 %	56 %
<b>Negative</b>	Count	5	5	8	17	35
	% within group	9 %	9 %	17 %	30 %	17 %
<b>Mixed</b>	Count	8	14	16	19	57
	% within group	15 %	26 %	35 %	34 %	27 %
<b>Total</b>	Count	53	54	46	56	209
	%	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %	100 %

The share of mixed-emotions responses was the highest in group 3 (35 %) followed by group 4 (34 %). The lowest share of mixed-emotion responses was observed in group 1 (15 %). The mixed manipulation seems to appear in the results

as mixed emotions. The share in group 2 (26 %) manipulated with the positive introduction text and a discouragement for participation is relatively high compared to group 1 (15 %), also manipulated with positive introduction text but an encouragement for participation. This can be interpreted also from the group 3 having the highest share of mixed-emotion responses (35 %), as it was manipulated with the negative introduction text and an encouragement for participation. The shares of positive, negative and mixed emotions in the four manipulation groups are visualized in Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Positive, negative and mixed emotions by group**

Taking a closer look at the basic emotions on the level of single emotions and where those emotions were directed, some interesting remarks can be made. Tables 17, 18, 19, and 20 in appendix 3 present the detailed results of the emotion analysis. Each table represents one group showing the share of each detected

basic emotion in the group but also how the emotions in the responses were scattered between the endorser, the video and the products.

The differences of shares of emotions directed to the endorser, the video and the products reveal that the negative emotions (anticipation, disgust, and anger) were mostly directed to the endorser. Particularly, this was the case with anticipation and anger as in all groups the highest shares of these two emotions were directed to the endorser. In three out of four groups the highest share of disgust was directed to the video. The shares of negative emotions directed to the products were notably lower in all the groups. Only in group 2, manipulated with the positive introduction text and a discouragement for participation, the share of disgust directed to the products was higher (64 %) than to the endorser (55 %) while disgust directed to the video had the highest share (82 %), as can be seen in Table 18 in appendix 3. Therefore, it can be concluded that most of the negative emotions were directed to the endorser while the products were the least touched by negative emotions.

In three out of four groups the endorser amassed also most of the positive emotions. Only in group 1 the share of positive emotions directed to the video was slightly higher than to the endorser. In general, the positive emotions were more evenly scattered between the endorser, the video and the products in all four groups. Therefore, it can be concluded that the endorser evoked more emotions in positive and in negative means than the video or the products.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

In this final, chapter the results of the study are concluded and discussed from the perspective of the literature reviewed earlier, the credibility of the study is assessed and suggestions for further study are proposed.

### 5.1 Conclusions

The aim of this study was to assess how priming shapes the perception of authenticity and source credibility, as well as emotions of sponsored vlog viewers. The second objective of this study was to form a conceptualization of source authenticity. In the theoretical framework the concept of priming was discussed as the influential process explaining the manipulation effect applied in this study. Sponsored content was presented as the context of the study. Persuasion knowledge model, expectations and cognitive dissonance offered deeper insight on how priming may have affected the perception of authenticity and source credibility and the emotions of the viewers. The concepts of authenticity, source credibility and emotions were in the focus of this research, and they offered the guiding frame for the data analysis. Mainly peer-reviewed scientific sources on the aforementioned concepts were reviewed before the data analysis. Through the theory review it became clear that authenticity is a complex concept that has been studied in numerous fields, but it has received little attention in the fields on communication and marketing especially in the context of sponsored content.

**RQ 1: How priming shapes the perception of authenticity and source credibility as well as emotions of vlog-viewers?**

The priming was executed by four manipulation conditions that each were a combination of a negative or positive introduction text and an encouragement or a discouragement for participation. The results suggest that priming shapes the authenticity perception and source credibility perception of the vlog viewers, which was verified by chi square tests that showed statistically significant

differences between the manipulation groups concerning these two variables. The separate emotion analysis suggested that the mixed manipulation conditions lead to more mixed emotions and that the negative emotions were mainly directed at the endorser and least at the products.

Surprisingly, the endorser was perceived most often authentic in the group that was manipulated with a negative introduction text and an encouragement for participation (group 3). Falling slightly behind, the second highest share of authenticity perception was found in the most positively manipulated group (group 1). However, group 3 that had the highest share of authenticity perception had also the second highest inauthenticity perception. The results suggest that the manipulation of participation had stronger effect on authenticity perception than the valence of the introduction text. It can also be contemplated that the negative introduction text included more cues about authenticity, and therefore resulted in higher shares of authenticity as well as inauthenticity in negatively manipulated groups, as they also had lower shares of "no mention" compared to positively manipulated groups. The encouragement to participate may have triggered a more careful information processing resulting in a much higher authenticity perception in group 3 compared to group 4.

The endorser was most often perceived credible in the positively manipulated groups and even slightly more in the group that was discouraged to participate. In the case of source credibility perception, the valence of the introduction text was the dominant factor explaining differences between groups while the encouragement or discouragement for participation had little effect.

The results on inauthenticity and uncredibility followed the presumed manipulation effect, as the inauthenticity and uncredibility perceptions were highest in the most negatively manipulated group and lowest in the most positively manipulated group while the mixed manipulations produced the shares in between, in the expected order.

The results of the emotion analysis showed, presumably, that the positive manipulation resulted in more positive emotions and negative manipulation in more negative emotions in the responses. The encouragement for participation contributed to more positive emotions. Maybe the most interesting result is the difference of the share of mixed emotions between groups. The positively manipulated groups 1 and 2 had almost the same share of negative emotions but the share of mixed emotions is substantially higher in group 2 which was discouraged to participate. The highest share of mixed emotions was in group 3, manipulated with a negative introduction text but encouraged to participate. This indicates that mixed manipulation resulted in more mixed emotions.

Another interesting result concerning the emotions was that especially the negative emotions, and particularly anger and anticipation, were mostly directed to the endorser while the negative emotions were notably less directed to the products throughout the groups. The positive emotions were more evenly scattered between the endorser, the video and the products in all four manipulation groups, though the endorser amassed the biggest shares of positive emotions in three out of four groups. This indicates that the endorser evoked more emotions in positive and negative means than the video or the products.



Additionally, it was analyzed how the respondents regarded the video and the products that were introduced in the video. Statistically significant differences between the manipulation groups were found in positive and negative attitudes towards the video as well as positive attitudes towards the products. Regarding the negative attitudes towards the products there were no statistical differences between the four groups. In the case of neutral attitudes towards the video and the products the Pearson chi test requirements were not met.

The results concerning the video show that the manipulation worked as predicted, as the valence of the introduction text was the dominating factor behind the differences and the encouragement for participation contributed to positive attitudes and the discouragement for participation reduced the positive attitudes.

The manipulation worked as predicted regarding the results on the positive attitudes towards the products. The chi square test suggested no statistically significant differences concerning the negative attitudes towards the products. Therefore, it was concluded that the manipulation did not have effect on the perception of the reviewed products in negative means. That is, negative attitudes were not so much projected to the products. However, the positive attitudes towards the products were lower in the two negatively manipulated groups than in the two positively manipulated groups.

As mentioned, in the case of neutral attitudes towards the video and the products, the requirements of the Pearson chi square test were not met. The counts of neutral attitudes are so low that it is not relevant to make any assumptions based on them. However, it was suggested that the manipulation encouraged the respondents to form an opinion on the video and the products.

Looking at these results, it can be noticed that the most negatively manipulated group (group 4) was the most distrustful and negative group of all four groups, considering the credibility and the authenticity perceptions, emotions, as well as the attitudes towards the video and the products. It scored the highest shares in all the negative aspects and lowest shares in all the positive aspects. By contrast, the most positively manipulated group (group 1) was the most positive and least negative concerning the video and the products. However, regarding endorser authenticity and credibility, group 1 scored only the second highest shares. Yet, group 1 scored the lowest shares in inauthenticity and uncredibility. This group also had the highest share of positive emotions and the lowest share of mixed emotion. The share of negative emotions was the lowest along with group 2.

## **RQ 2: How vlog viewers evaluate source authenticity?**

Derived from the data, an authentic source was defined as genuine, unbiased, relatable, and passionate. In addition, charisma and funniness were suggested to be included in the definition together with trustworthiness. On the contrary, inauthentic source was defined as fake, forced and biased.

Genuineness is mentioned by Gilpin et al. (2010) and Molleda (2010) as one dimension of authenticity. Hede et al. (2014) link genuineness to objects and artifacts displayed in a museum. In addition, the sub categories behind the

category of genuineness in this study, real, spontaneity and true self, are supported in earlier literature. Tolson (2010) refers to the presence of “the real” person in a celebrity persona as authenticity. Spontaneity is mentioned by Enli (2015) as a part of mediated authenticity. True self is mentioned by Moulard et al. (2015), Gilmore and Pine (2007) and Kernis and Goldman (2006) as the definition of authenticity.

Unbiased refers to internally motivated behavior, mentioned by Moulard et al. (2016) and Kernis and Goldman (2006). Moulard et al. (2015) mention externally motivated behavior as the opposite of authenticity. Gilpin et al. (2010) refer to relatability as they mention engagement as a dimension of authenticity. Also passion is mentioned in earlier literature as a component of authenticity referring to commitment and caring (Moulard et al. 2016) and as a way of managing authenticity for a social media influencer (Audrezet et al. 2017).

Charisma and funniness were categories of endorser authenticity that arose from the data when they appeared together with trustworthiness. However, charisma could be interpreted to refer to the unique personality of the endorser. Uniqueness or originality was mentioned by Moulard et al. (2016), Moulard et al. (2015) and Molleda (2010), also Enli (2015) links originality to her definition of mediated authenticity. Funniness (humor), on the other hand, was not mentioned in the literature referred to in the theory chapter. Yet, Sullivan and Deane (1988, 21) have suggested that humor as a form of communication projects authenticity and lack of pretention in the context of gerontological nursing. Barnett and Deutsch (2016) link authenticity to benign humor which refers to an affiliative and self-enhancing style of humor.

Fake was the most often mentioned category of endorser inauthenticity. This is supported by earlier literature which usually mentions fake as the opposite of authenticity (see Table 1). Forced refers to externally motivated behavior that is calculated and “tries too hard” to appear genuine. It can be interpreted as the opposite of passion. Biased, as the opposite to unbiased, also refers to externally motivated behavior but implicates primary a commercial motivation behind the content.

## 5.2 Discussion

Social media has brought amateurs in the media game as equal participants of public discourse and as practitioners of mediated communication (Enli, 2015, 131). User-generated online content has been claimed to offer a new form of authenticity that ordinary people are able to offer better than institutions or political elite (Tolson, 2010; Coleman & Moss, 2008; Montgomery, 2001). As audiences are spending more and more time in social media, advertisers have turned to seek collaboration with so called new-media influencers like bloggers (Liljander et al., 2015; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). But what happens to authenticity when user-generated gets mixed with sponsored?

While reaching the aim of this study, more information was gained on authenticity in the context of sponsored content, more specifically sponsored vlog-

content. By manipulating a positive or negative presumption and the possibility to participate on the content, differences in the perception of authenticity and credibility as well as the attitudes towards the endorser, the video and the products were uncovered between the manipulation groups. This allowed to compare the effects of the four different manipulation conditions. The negative manipulation could be interpreted to simulate a situation where video blogs are generally considered as commercial content.

In the theory chapter, a few presumptions were made in relation to the results of this study. Firstly, it was presumed that the negative introduction text would work as a third-party revelation of the video's commercial nature and therefore harm the credibility of the vlogger but not necessary the attitude towards the products. This presumption was based on the article by Colliander and Erlandsson (2015). The results of this study were in line with this presumption, as the source credibility perception was significantly lower in the negatively manipulated groups and there were no significant differences in the negative attitudes toward the products between the manipulation groups.

Second presumption dealt with priming, as priming was assumed to cause biased information processing which could be detected as differences in responses between the manipulation groups. This presumption was confirmed by finding statistical differences between the manipulation groups in the main concepts covered in this study. Additionally, in the subchapter about priming audience participation, it was presumed that encouraging the audience to participate would increase the perceptions of authenticity and credibility among the viewers. However, there was a doubt if the encouragement would increase the source credibility perception based on the results of Hayes and Carr (2015). As was presumed, the encouragement for participation mainly promoted more positive and less negative attitudes. On authenticity perception the encouragement had a stronger effect than the valence of the introduction text. That was not the case with credibility perception, to which the encouragement to participate had a marginal effect. However, the encouragement did mitigate the perceptions of inauthenticity and uncredibility. The presumption was confirmed except for credibility perception which followed the results of Hayes and Carr (2015) who found that socialness of a blog increases the perception of blogger expertise but not blog credibility. It should be nevertheless noted that the measures of Hayes and Carr (2015) are not completely comparable to the concept of source credibility used in this study.

To reflect upon the positive effect of encouragement to participate on authenticity perception, it could be suggested that on some respondents, the encouragement for participation may have triggered a more thorough information processing which led to more elaboration on the actual content and therefore mitigated the effect of the introduction text. Being encouraged to participate the viewers may have been focused to think whether to like or dislike the video and what to comment. The possibility to interact may also have been seen as a sign of more open or transparent communication, as it gives a chance to express the suspicion or critique towards the possible marketing activities. According to Tolson (2010), the conversational nature of vlogs as content and as giving the chance to

comment on the content supports their authenticity. This statement is in line with the results of this study.

Third presumption anticipated that the negative manipulation would activate the persuasion knowledge of the viewers. As a consequence, the viewers would react to the persuasion attempt by counterarguing, criticism, negative emotions, questioning its credibility, and contesting the claims about the products involved (see e.g. Boerman et al., 2012; Wood & Quinn, 2003). In addition, it was suspected that the positive manipulation might cause a counter reaction by setting the expectations about the content too high. The viewers did find the endorser less credible in the negatively manipulated groups. The results on authenticity of the endorser were more complex, as the highest share of authenticity was found in the other negatively manipulated group. Yet, the inauthenticity perception was significantly higher in the negatively manipulated groups. The negative manipulation did not significantly increase the negative attitudes towards the products, but it did decrease the positive attitudes. The attitudes towards the video were more critical in the negatively manipulated groups. The possible effects of persuasion knowledge activation can be seen also in the results of the emotion analysis, as negative and mixed-emotion responses were more common in the negatively manipulated groups. However, the speculated counter reaction in the positively manipulated groups could not be found.

The fourth presumption dealt with expectations and anticipated that a possible expectation violation caused by the manipulation could cause positive or negative emotions and distraction, along Turner (2009) and Burgoon (1993). Yet, the manipulation may have affected the viewers' interpretation so that the created expectation persists through the information processing producing responses that are in line with the expectation (Roese & Sherman, 2007). The results of the study were more in line with the presumption that the created expectation persists across the information processing, since the manipulation worked as expected in most of the cases, creating more positive responses in the positive manipulation conditions and more negative responses in the negative manipulation conditions. The emotion analysis showed neither any sign of expectation violations. The significant exception was the finding that the endorser was found most authentic in group 3, manipulated with a negative introduction text and encouraged to participate. Conversely, in the same group the endorser was found second most often inauthentic.

The last presumption anticipated that the negative introduction text would cause cognitive dissonance among the respondents as it could be considered as a warning of an upcoming persuasion attempt. The strategies to reduce dissonance were presumed to appear as sticking to the negative attitude induced by the introduction text or as rejecting the persuasion. (Wood & Quinn, 2003; Zuwerink Jacks & Cameron, 2003.) Like with expectations, the positive manipulation may have set expectations unreasonably high which would have caused dissonance. This presumption is similar to the ones made about persuasion knowledge and expectations. Therefore, as said, the results were more in line with sticking to attitudes invoked by the manipulation, which could be interpreted as a strategy to reduce dissonance. The low shares of credibility perception and high shares of inauthenticity perception in the negatively manipulated

groups could be understood as a sign of persuasion rejection. However, the products shown in the video were not negatively affected by the negative manipulation. As already mentioned, there was no sign of counter reaction caused by too high expectations in the results.

An interesting finding that rose from the emotion analysis was that the mixed manipulation conditions seemed to result in more mixed emotions. This could be interpreted as a sign of confusion and maybe even cognitive dissonance. According to Plutchik (2003) emotions serve to reduce disequilibrium, which according to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) can be balanced by expressing positive emotions or venting the negative emotions. The notable differences in positive and negative emotions between the positively and negatively manipulated groups could be a sign of equilibrium restoration.

The conceptualization of source authenticity (see Table 16) formed in this study gives insight on what viewers pay attention to when evaluating the authenticity of the source. Earlier definitions of authenticity have defined the concept in numerous contexts focusing on, for example, objects, ideas, brands, a person, or the self. The definitions concerning the authenticity of a person usually refer to “the true” or “the real” self that is present in a person (e.g. Moulard et al., 2015; Tolson, 2010). Moulard et al. (2015) specify their definition by mentioning rarity and stability as antecedents of authenticity of a celebrity persona, but the definition still stays in quite abstract level. The definition formed in this study also refers to a person, a source, in this case the endorser, but takes a more detailed view on the concept.

**Table 16. Source authenticity**

<b>Genuine</b>
<b>Unbiased</b>
<b>Relatable</b>
<b>Passionate</b>
<b>Charismatic (+ trustworthy)</b>
<b>Funny (+ trustworthy)</b>

### **Academic and practical implications**

This study has several inputs from the theoretical as well practical point of view. It contributes to a better understanding of how consumers react to sponsored content. The concept of source authenticity that was formed in this study further elaborates the understanding of authenticity in communication and marketing research. As a new suggested conceptualization for an authentic source it may draw deserved attention to the research of this complex concept. This thesis can function as an inspiration and a starting point for future research on authenticity in the contexts of communication and marketing.

This work also contributes to the research on vlog marketing by exploring a situation where it is ambiguous if the vlog content is sponsored or not and how this ambiguity affects the attitudes towards the recommended brands. Regarding

the research on social media, this thesis adds knowledge about the effect of audience participation, more specifically the encouragement for participation.

One contribution of this thesis to marketing and communication research is how it includes emotions in the theoretical framework and applies them in the analysis. This can be considered as a methodological contribution, as it provides an example of how to execute an emotion analysis on textual data. However, this thesis also shows that an emotion analysis gives depth to the results by offering another viewpoint to the data and particularly to the effects of priming.

The results of this study may also offer some practical viewpoints to communication and marketing professionals especially for managing collaborations with new-media influencers.

The endorser is important. Vast majority of the viewers' evaluations of authenticity and credibility focused on the endorser. Also, the emotions, in positive and negative means, were mostly directed to the endorser. This means that the brands should choose carefully who they collaborate with, but maybe even more importantly that the influencers should choose their collaborations carefully, since their personal brand and trustworthiness are more at stake. It neither serves the sponsoring brands if the influencers lose their credibility as authentic sources of product information.

Giving a voice to the audience is important. Encouragement for participation increased positivity with almost no exception, whereas discouragement for participation increased negativity in the responses. The chance to comment or express one's opinion on a piece of content may be interpreted as sign of more interactive and therefore more transparent communication situation, which may reduce skeptical thoughts before the possible criticism would even be expressed in the comment field. Commenting or otherwise expressing one's thoughts or emotions may also work as an act of restoring equilibrium (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004), when the final judgment of the content might turn out to be more balanced rather than extreme.

The products or brands shown in the video were less harmed by the negative manipulation than the endorser or the video. This means that brands should not be unnecessarily afraid of collaborating with influencers in fear of hurting the brand. Drawing from the results of this study, negative attitudes or emotions towards an influencer are not straight projected to the brand. If something goes wrong, the endorser seems to be held responsible.

Transparency of sponsorship is important. Sponsored content should be clearly disclosed, since confusion about the commercial nature of content seems to decrease credibility and authenticity perceptions and produce negative emotions.

### **5.3 Evaluation of the study and propositions for future research**

As all studies, this thesis has also its limitations. Despite the quantitative part of data analysis, all the analyses were based on qualitative methods. In qualitative research, credibility refers to how well the drawn conclusions are justified by the

data and to what extent they are logical and believable (Hair et al., 2015, 308). Credibility in qualitative research is also connected to how detailed is the report on the actions taken by the researcher (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 232).

The author of this study has attempted to describe and justify in detail all the actions and decisions taken across the research process. However, it could be that some of the decisions have not been argued as well as others, which may diminish the credibility of this study.

Qualitative researchers must be critical towards their findings while conducting the data analysis (Hair et al., 2015, 311). The analyses were done in a systematic way so that the responses of each manipulation group were coded in one session. The coding between groups was later compared to verify consistency in coding across the whole data. However, the analyses were conducted by a single researcher, and therefore there could be a subjectivity bias in the results. However, what can be counted as supporting the credibility of this study, is the theory guided content analysis used as a method, because it gives a certain theoretical framework to the analysis.

The research results cannot be separated from the used research methods nor their user. Therefore, pure, objective knowledge does not exist, since the researcher subjectively decides on the research frame. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018, 28.) This applies for this study as well, since the methods and theory chosen by the researcher as well as the subjective interpretations in the analysis have surely influenced the results.

To build the theoretical framework of this study, mainly peer-reviewed and recent articles were employed. Some less recent sources were used when they were very central to a certain concept or considered as relevant to this study.

The sample was large enough to conduct reliable chi square tests on the main concepts, authenticity and inauthenticity as well as credibility and uncredibility. The sample was relatively balanced considering the sex of the respondents, with almost a ten percent stronger representation of males. However, considering the age of the respondents, the sample was skewed, as 79 percent of the respondents were 35-year old or younger. The conceptualizations of source authenticity and source inauthenticity were based on smaller samples, since not all respondents expressed their evaluations on these two concepts. The definition of source authenticity is based on a sample of 43 responses, which may be considered too small for a reliable definition.

The respondents were not asked straight about their authenticity or credibility perceptions. Therefore, their descriptions of authenticity and credibility may have been directed by the introduction text which included words like unbiased and credible (positive text) and biased and scripted (negative text). It has been stated that words can act as primes (Institute for Government, 2010, 24). Also, the instructions to answer to the open question included the words credible, relatable, personable, friendly, and trustworthy, which may have influenced the wordings the respondents used in their responses. Also, the word endorser may have directed thoughts to a more commercial setting. On the other hand, this was the meaning of the survey, to direct the respondents' thought to the concepts in question, but it is impossible to know how much it biased the responses.

This brings about the main methodological shortcoming of this study, the lack of a control group. In this study, all the respondents were manipulated in a way or another. Therefore, it is impossible to fully interpret the effects of the manipulation, since there was no neutral baseline for comparison.

The survey created an artificial setting for the vlog-watching with mock-up interaction features, such as like-buttons and a comment field. This means that the respondents did not watch the video in its original platform and context, YouTube. Therefore, they did not see others' comments on the video, likes, dislikes or views of the video, nor the profile of the YouTube channel. This leaves out the influence of the community around the YouTube channel which may have an effect on the perceived credibility and authenticity of the vlogger.

The respondents' possible relationship with the vlogger was not controlled in this study. The perceptions of credibility and authenticity might have varied along how familiar the viewers were with the vlogger.

Regarding the ethical aspect of this research, before starting responding to the survey, the informants were told that the participation is voluntary, responses are anonymous, and the gathered data will be securely stored and used only for research purposes and finally destroyed three years after the study is completed. As a disclaimer, the informants were also let know that the introduction text shown before the video is a hypothetical one and does not endorse or oppose the video, the products or the endorser shown in the video.

### **Suggestions for further study**

This study focused only on the effects of priming and how it affected perceptions of authenticity and source credibility and interpreted emotions of the viewers. The consequences of these perceptions were not part of the study. Therefore, a more thorough study on the consequences and importance of source authenticity is called for. How the perceived authenticity of the source affects, for example, brand engagement, brand attitude and purchase intention?

As the concept of source authenticity that was formed in this study is based on rather small amount of responses, it should be tested and further developed with other data and different research methods. The respondents of this study were not asked straight about authenticity. Therefore, a focus group interview might give deeper insight on the concept of source authenticity.

A measure of source authenticity should be created to reliably measure the concept in quantitative studies and test if authenticity is mediated by other concepts, such as source credibility.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1

Please read the following carefully:

The video that you are about to see is an example of an overly sponsored YouTube video, where the endorsement is done mainly for money. You will see that the paid advertisement is trying to push the products to its viewers. You may come to understand that this is what companies do nowadays to make you purchase things you absolutely do not need. The video is biased, scripted and is of poor quality. You may even find it annoying and may end up disliking it. You may feel like that there are millions of videos just like this one that you could have watched instead, and you may even regret wasting your time watching it.

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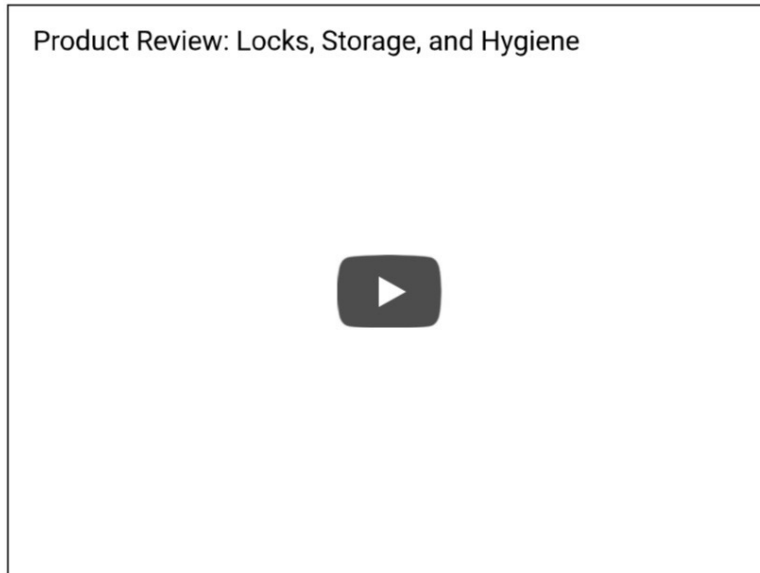
Please read the following carefully:

The video that you are about to see is an example of an unsponsored, credible YouTube video containing unbiased reviews on innovative products. You will see that the reviews are very thorough, and detailed. You may come to understand about the useful tips that the video contains along with important information that is pretty much on point. You may find the video to be entertaining, enjoyable and of great quality. You may even land up liking it. You may feel like that there are very few videos like this and may find worthy of your time watching it.

## Appendix 2

Please watch the video **carefully** at a comfortable pace (ignore the embedded ads, if any).

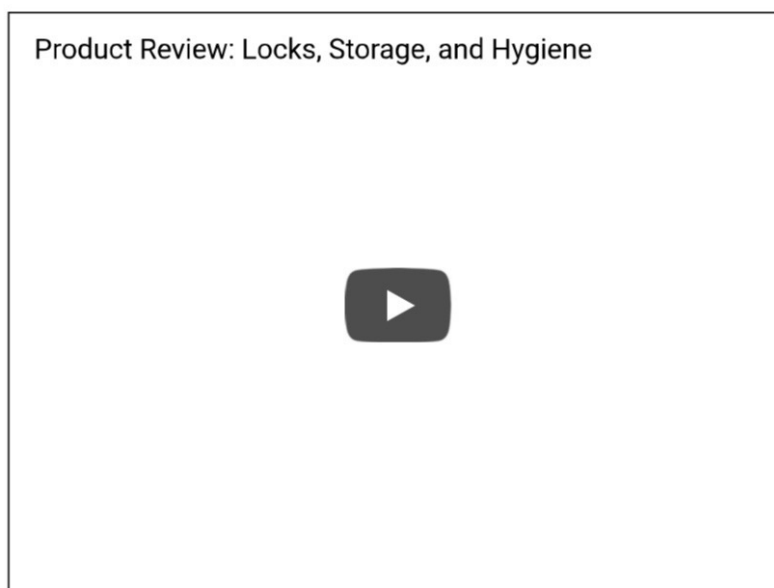
You are **strogly discouraged** to participate in the video such as **sharing, commenting, liking, disliking, subscribing** the video.



---

Please watch the video **carefully** at a comfortable pace (ignore the embedded ads, if any).

You are **strogly encouraged** to participate in the video such as **sharing, commenting, liking, disliking, subscribing** the video by using the options as shown below (We have replicated the like, dislike, share, subscribe buttons as well as the comment section within the survey as shown below).



[Qualifying test]

**Great job! Looks like you have watched the video carefully!**

Now, let's focus on your own thoughts about the video you watched. In the space below, try to describe the following:

- **Your feelings about the endorser** such as the endorser is (or is not) credible, relatable, personable, friendly, trustworthy etc. In other words, the impression of the endorser in your mind.
- **Your feelings about the video itself** such as the video is (or is not) nice, persuasive etc.
- **Your feelings about the products and brands** shown in the video
- **An assessment of your own participation in relation to the video such as viewing, liking or disliking, sharing, interacting, commenting about the video etc.**
- **Your thoughts or concerns about the overall viewing experience** (for example, if you thought it was worth your time to watch the video, or if you got to know about the products or brands, or if you thought that something about it felt wrong (or right), the video was or was not persuasive and so on)

**Please write** (150 words approx.) as much as you can about these feelings and about anything else you can think of that is related to the video viewing experience. **Don't worry about spelling, grammar, and punctuation.** Please be completely honest!



## Appendix 3

Table 17. Emotions in group 1

High AP X Positive	n=53											
	Acceptance		Joy		Anticipation		Disgust		Anger		Sadness	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>n</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Endorser	43	90	4	80	6	100	8	80	2	67	0	0
Video	46	96	2	40	2	33	6	60	0	0	0	0
Products	40	83	1	20	0	0	3	30	1	33	0	0

Table 18. Emotions in group 2

Low AP X Positive	n=54											
	Acceptance		Joy		Anticipation		Disgust		Anger		Sadness	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>n</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Endorser	45	90	7	100	9	100	6	55	6	100	0	0
Video	45	90	2	29	0	0	9	82	0	0	0	0
Products	42	84	1	14	0	0	7	64	0	0	0	0

Table 19. Emotions in group 3

High AP X Negative	n=46											
	Acceptance		Joy		Anticipation		Disgust		Anger		Sadness	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>n</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
Endorser	32	84	0	0	11	100	11	69	11	100	0	0
Video	31	82	0	0	0	0	13	81	3	27	1	100
Products	30	79	0	0	1	9	6	38	0	0	0	0

Table 20. Emotions in group 4

Low AP X Negative	n=56											
	Acceptance		Joy		Anticipation		Disgust		Anger		Sadness	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
<b>n</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Endorser	32	80	2	100	10	77	19	73	10	100	0	0
Video	30	75	0	0	2	15	20	77	2	20	0	0
Products	24	60	0	0	3	23	11	42	0	0	0	0