

Parasocial Relationship Influence on CoverGirl Buying Intentions:  
Trust and Loyalty from SMI and Celebrity Endorsements

by  
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Abstract

Advancements in technology have shifted the ways in which advertisers communicate with consumers. Social media has gained a large presence in the marketing strategies of many companies, especially makeup brands. Makeup and beauty companies have realized that the most effective way to sell their product is to show consumers how it fits into the lives of real people. So, these brands have turned to celebrities and social media influencers (SMI) to show off the actual use of the products through social media and content creation. It is hypothesized that consumers are likely to trust promotions by SMI and celebrities because of the parasocial relationships they might have with them. The purpose of this study would be to compare the intention of the participants to buy the particular makeup product after viewing each type of advertisement: traditional print, social media influencer produced content, or celebrity endorsed advertisements.

## **Introduction**

New technologies and media channels are changing the way consumers receive advertising content. According to Batra and Keller (2016), “consumers are dramatically shifting both their media usage patterns and how they utilize different media sources to get the information they seek, which thus influences when, where, and how they choose brands,” (p. 1). It is interesting to look at makeup through this lens as social media and the internet has opened up as space for these products to be discussed and reviewed. It is important for advertising and marketing professionals to understand this new dynamic in order to decide which technologies and channels will be most effective in reaching their changing target audiences. In this current social age, traditional media is no longer covering all audiences that brands want to communicate with (Batra & Keller, 2016). Social media platforms have become increasingly popular in advertising and marketing toward newer generations, such as millennials (Agozzino, 2012).

Advancements in communication technology have brought advertisements closer to the general public, where they have made a place in the consumer’s everyday life. Because of social media and smartphones, communication between company and consumer has become more personal. The world is in a new era of word of mouth communication, using media to directly interact with their audiences through parasocial relationships. Company’s have taken advantage of this organic communication by using social media to promote their content themselves, as well as partner with celebrities and social media influencers.

Social media has gained a large presence in the marketing strategies of many companies, especially makeup brands. Makeup and beauty companies have realized that the

most effective way to sell their product is to show consumers how it fits into the lives of real people. So, these brands have turned to celebrities and social media influencers (SMI) to show off the actual use of the products through social media and content creation. It is hypothesized that consumers are likely to trust promotions by SMI and celebrities because of the parasocial relationships they might have with them. The purpose of this study would be to compare the intention of the participants to buy the particular makeup product after viewing each type of advertisement: traditional print, social media influencer produced content, or celebrity endorsed advertisements. Uncovering why certain methods lead to different outcomes is also an important goal of this study.

The makeup and cosmetic industry is especially interesting to look at through the lense of social advertising. This industry has been constantly growing alongside advancements in advertising communication. Revenue for the industry has increased from \$30.79 billion in 2003 to \$62.46 billion reported in 2018 (Statista). The industry is projected to grow annually by 2.5% (Statista). In an age of sharing on social media, it is no surprise that cosmetic purchases have increased to match the demand for the most Instagram-worthy look. Brands have noticed this correlation and have integrated social media marketing into their communication strategies. The goal of this study is to uncover the true effect that influencer and celebrity endorsements via social media have on consumers.

## **Literature Review**

Advancements in communication technology have brought advertisements closer to the general public, where they have made a place in the consumer's everyday life. Because of social media and smartphones, communication between company and consumer has become more personal. The world is in a new era of word of mouth communication, using media to directly interact with their audiences. Company's have taken advantage of this organic communication by using social media to promote their content themselves, as well as partner with celebrities and social media influencers.

### **Celebrity Endorsements**

Celebrity endorsements have been long-used in the advertising world, but are being reinvented with the new potential reach social media brings into the equation. One-sixth of all advertising features celebrity endorsements of a certain product or service (Journal of Developing Areas, 2016). It is no secret that brands are associating themselves with these public figures in the hopes that the fans will transfer their positive opinions to the brand.

Social media and the internet have brought fans closer to their favorite celebrities than ever, increasing the strength of the relationship they feel for them. This can only increase a company's desire to utilize celebrity endorsements in their marketing strategies, as these perceived relationships lead consumers to trust the celebrity in a new way. It is known that there is a positive correlations between celebrity source credibility and the effectiveness of the endorsement (Rowley, Gilman, & Sherman, 2018). Source credibility comes from the interactions via social media between fans and celebrity.

Another important factor in the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements by brands is the endorser-product fit. Endorser-product fit refers to the strength of which the product being advertised fits into the lifestyle or current content promoted by the celebrity (The Journal of Developing Areas, 2016). Companies are aligning themselves with the brand of the celebrity through these endorsements, so it is important that the brands compliment each other. Celebrity endorsements can help organizations further brand themselves in a way consumers will receive because of the connection to what the celebrity represents. It was found that consumers had a preference for celebrity affiliated brands over those without celebrity associations (Rowley, Gilman, & Sherman, 2018).

### **Social Media Influencers**

There are new ‘celebrities’ that exist thanks to the rise of social media and internet communication: social media influencers. These individuals are different from traditional celebrities in that they are “normal people” who have cultivated a following in a very niche community online (Mathew, 2018). Social media influencers cultivate their own content, while integrated brand sponsored posts. They are in charge of how they promote the brands they partner with, creating a sense of honesty and credibility amongst the followers.

Authenticity of a brand is created through use of influencer promotion and demonstration of a makeup product (Gannon & Prothero, 2016). Their article, “Beauty blogger selfies as authenticating practices” explains how the act of influencers posing for pictures or videos using certain products give a “natural testimony” to the brand’s authenticity (2016). Gannon and Prothero state that “as social media and peer endorsement become ever

more important, brands are seeking to leverage bloggers as brand ambassadors” because of the authenticity they convey to their communities (Gannon & Prothero, 2016).

The issue of transparency and honesty is especially relevant in the realm of makeup and beauty products. Beauty bloggers are in the interest of transparency and honesty when it comes to the products they show on their social media. One participant in the Gannon and Prothero study, Amy, said that her goal is to “keep it real” with her followers by showing before and after shots, and giving her honest opinion about each product. This honesty from media influencers gives viewers the sense that they are being looked out for, and the blogger has their best interest at heart (Gannon & Prothero, 2016). Authenticity and trust prove vital in influence consumer behavior through the relationships built between influencer and consumer.

### **Parasocial Relationships**

Horton and Wohl coined the term parasocial interaction in 1956 to describe the “psychological relationship experienced by an audience in their mediated encounters” with personalities in the media (Horton & Wohl, 1956). This refers to a single instance of interaction between consumer and a social media influencer, celebrity, or other individuals through mediated channels.

Parasocial relationships consist of a sense of a sustained connection to a media personality due to repeated interaction (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016). This long-term social involvement between viewer and media personality has a great power of influence when it comes to the perceptions of the viewers (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016.)

Parasocial relationships allow consumers to identify with the influencers and their attitudes and behaviors, which presents an opportunity for influence (Chung & Cho, 2017).

If viewers feel as if they are being talked to directly, through this perceived relationship they have with the speaker, they are more likely to trust what they are conveying (Hartmann and Goldhoorn, 2011). In this case, it is important that the parasocial relationship be a positive and engaging one in order to have a true impact on the consumer. The results of this study are vital in the exploration of the above research question because they clarify the value of a perceived relationship that the viewer holds. It is important to know that messages' power can depend on the strength of the speaker's ability to relate with the individual viewer.

Through parasocial relationships with these beauty influencers, this social messaging builds trust between consumers and the brand which can lead to purchasing behavior and brand loyalty (Booth & Matic, 2011). This relationship between beauty influencer and make-up consumer gives an authenticity to the brand. There is a positive correlation between a consumer's social media interaction with a personality and the strength of parasocial relationship (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Chung and Cho (2017) suggest that the "meaning transfer model" explains the reasoning behind communication strategies including social media influencers and celebrities. Using these personalities associates the brand with certain qualities, attitudes, and beliefs that are given meaning by the public figure. This idea is closely related to the "signaling theory," which suggests that these associations serve to complete the branding of the organization (Chung & Cho, 2017). Modern communication professionals have

recognized the power that social media influencer and celebrity associations can have on their target audiences, and have incorporated them into their strategies.

After reviewing the literature, the following research questions were chosen to guide the study in order to uncover the influence of social media strategies and parasocial relationships and interactions.

**Q1:** How does social media influencer created content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to Covergirl Products?

**Q2:** How does celebrity endorsed content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to makeup and beauty products?

**Q3:** How does traditional brand sponsored content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to makeup and beauty products?

**Q4:** How do parasocial relationships interact with consumer buying intentions of makeup and beauty products?

The following hypothesis was made based on the literature review of previously conducted studies, specifically Gannon and Prothero, and Lueck. Gannon and Prothero reported that the honesty from media influencers gives viewers the sense that they are being looked out for, and the blogger has their best interest at heart, which I believe will lead to positive buying intentions (Gannon & Prothero, 2016). Research from Lueck explains parasocial relationships as an advertising vehicle, and suggests a direct link to advertising success (Lueck, 2015.) These two findings informed the following hypothesis.

**H1:** Participants' buying intentions will be the highest when they view content from social media influencers they like and trust.

## Methods

### Instrument

This study is centered around an online survey comparing the impact of CoverGirl makeup advertisements by celebrity endorsers, social media influencers, and traditional media. The survey begins with demographic questions in order to get a basic understanding of the participants (age, gender, and occupational status). These questions are followed by likert scale questions concerning the participant's experience with social media, advertising, and makeup products overall. Then, the participants are presented with messages from each condition (social media influencer, celebrity, and traditional) and asked questions concerning their impressions of the messages.

The first condition is brand promoted from CoverGirl. Participants are presented with a short description of the brand, which is followed by a 45 second advertisement from their "I Am What I Make Up" campaign. This is then followed by likert scale agree-disagree questions regarding brand perception, attitudes, values, and purchasing intentions of the participant. The purpose of these questions is to understand the participant's opinion of the brand without the influence of social media or celebrity influences.

In order to evaluate the impact of the SMI and celebrity content, the Parasocial-Interaction-Scale (Rubin et al., 1985) was used. This seven point likert type scale ( $\alpha = .93$ ) was developed in order to gauge viewer interaction with the persona based on "interaction, identification, and long-term identification" (Rubin et al., 1985). Rubin stated that this interaction would include "seeking guidance from a media persona, seeing media personalities as friends, imagining being part of a favorite program's social world," and more

(pg. 185). Implementing this scale in the research will help answer the research questions by uncovering specifics regarding the participant's parasocial relationship experience.

The second condition presented in the survey is social media influencer content from YouTube personality Ashley Marie. Ashley's Instagram and YouTube content is focused on makeup tutorials and reviews. In the Instagram photos shared, she tags CoverGirl in her look. The YouTube video linked is of her demonstrating and reviewing a full-face look using only CoverGirl products. It was suggested that participants watch from 13:00-15:00, which is the part of this video when she is applying foundation and talking openly about her opinions. It was important to suggest a small clip of the video in order to avoid participants leaving at the sight of a 20 minute video, and it needed to be comparable to the other 45 second spots. Viewers see Ashley talk candidly about the CoverGirl foundation, and know the entire video discusses her honest opinion of the CoverGirl products she used to complete her look. Seven questions from the PSI Scale are used following Ashley's content in order to evaluate the relationship participants experienced.

The final condition presented features singer and actress Zendaya in CoverGirl content from YouTube. Zendaya was a CoverGirl spokesperson and used in their print, digital, and television advertisements. She also shares her own glam shots and tags CoverGirl on her Instagram. This condition shows a 45 second CoverGirl video ad featuring Zendaya. Questions following this condition use seven questions from the PSI Scale to gauge the participant's perceived relationship with Zendaya. This will help later evaluation of the reasoning behind the participant's intention to buy CoverGirl in the future.

The survey continues to use likert scale type questions in order to evaluate the participant's purchasing intentions following what they saw. After the three conditions have been evaluated, the participant is asked a few closing questions regarding their perception of trust related to this study and encourages overall reflection.

### **Participants**

The target demographic for this study was females 18-34 who use social media as well as make up products. This demographic is important as it covers both Millennials and Generation Z. Compared to 17% of Baby Boomers, 27% of millennials reported that they discover brands through recommendations on social media (Statista, 2017). The younger generations' consumer behavior is shifting and the internet is having an increased impact on brand awareness. They spend over 14 hours a week on smartphone apps or on the internet (Statista). This information is vital for brands to recognize as they try to communicate with these different groups. As they grow up, the Millennial generation is becoming the world's most active consumers (Statista, 2018). As a group, millennials also pride themselves on being brand conscious and loyal, which has developed as a result of their access to information about certain brands.

While the millennial generation is important to consider when viewing advertising through the lense of social media, Gen Z cannot be overlooked. Gen Z is the first generation to grow up with the internet and smartphones as a part of their everyday life (Pruett, 2018). The youngest of this generation are in their early teens, and have not known a world without social media. It was reported that 45% percent of teens say they use the internet "almost constantly," which is a number that has doubled since 2014-2015 (Anderson & Jiang, 2018).

Another 44% of teens say they go online several times per day. Overall, this means that at least nine-in-ten teens go online at least multiple times in one day (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). This information is important to note while acknowledging the constant access advertisers have to this audience, as they are always looking at one screen or another.

In order to capture data from both of these groups, the study targeted individuals by using a snowball sample of ages 18-34. This will allow an evaluation and comparison of both groups habits as a result of the pattern of technological advancements in the media. During the course of the three weeks in which the online survey was live, 125 responses were collected. Unfortunately, the following analysis will only cover 57 (n= 57) of those responses, as the rest of them were unfinished and excluded from the results. The responses that were excluded were not completed by the participant, making their answers void. Of the 57 valid responses, 53 were female, 3 male, and 1 reported as non-binary. The ages of participants ranged from 18-53, with a mean age of 25. This successfully captured the target audience of female millennials and gen-z, which is reflected in their responses.

Of these 57 participants, a mean of 4.92 agreed that they use makeup regularly, while 91% reported that they see advertisements for makeup or other cosmetic items every day. This confirmed that the target audience would be a good measure of the population's opinion when it came to makeup advertising. Social media use is also a defining factor in this study. Fifty-nine percent of the sample reported that they check Instagram every day, while 79% disagreed that they visit YouTube daily.

## **The Brand**

While many cosmetic brands choose to work with celebrities and social media influencers, CoverGirl seemed to be the best fit for this project. CoverGirl is known for partnering with celebrities and personalities, naming someone new as their “Cover Girl” routinely. The brand has a history of working with public figures in traditional advertising, so it will be interesting to look at the comparison with social media.

CoverGirl is known for partnerships with Taylor Swift, Ellen DeGeneres, Katy Perry, Selena Gomez, Rihanna, and many more. These partnerships have existed mostly in the form of print advertising or television commercials. Now, CoverGirl has expanded their practice into the realm of social media. Not only are they integrating these celebrity personalities into their social media strategies, but they are working with social media influencers as well.

Not only is CoverGirl relevant in their use of parasocial relationship creation in order to sell their product, they are also leaders in the cosmetic industry in the traditional sense. The brand is the second leader in foundation sales for 2018 (Statista). The company enlisted agency Droga5 in 2017 to rebrand the messaging CoverGirl promotes. Research revealed that consumers view makeup as more than just a cosmetic product, but as a “tool for self-expression and transformation,” inspiring the new campaign, “I Am What I Make Up” (Schiffer, 2017).

## **Recruitment**

Participants were recruited via social media and email through snowball sampling. Instagram and Facebook were used to reach relevant demographics. Snowball sampling was

chosen in an attempt to mimic the way content is shared via social media (i.e. some of the content shown in the survey as distributed on YouTube and Instagram).

### **Data Storage and Analysis**

The survey (Appendix A) was completed through Appalachian State University login protected Qualtrics account. All data is stored in Qualtrics and is password protected. All data is anonymous and all uses of data are unidentifiable. Data may be stored in Excel document for analysis. Data was exported to an Excel file and coded using Coding Sheet 1 (Appendix B) to allow for analysis testing. After held for two years for analysis, the data collected will be destroyed physically in Communication Department and deleted electronically off of the password protected University computer.

### **Results**

Q1: How does social media influencer created content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to Covergirl Products?

In order to answer RQ1, correlations tests were conducted to see if there was a relationship between SMI trust and consumer buying intentions. The correlation test reported no significance between these two variables  $r = -.003, p = .981$ .

Q2: How does celebrity endorsed content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to makeup and beauty products?

In order to answer RQ2, correlations tests were conducted to see if there was a relationship between celebrity endorsements and consumer buying intentions. The correlation test reported significance between these two variables with a negative correlation,  $r = -.51, p < .001$ .

Q3: How does traditional brand sponsored content impact buying intentions of individuals 18-34 when it comes to makeup and beauty products?

In order to answer RQ3, correlations tests were conducted to see if there was a relationship between traditional brand content and consumer buying intentions. The correlation test reported significance between these two variables with a negative correlation,  $r = -.447, p < .000$ .

Q4: How do parasocial relationships differ between social media influencers and celebrity endorsers?

Parasocial relationships were evaluated based on the participant's degree of: familiarity, reminder of self, identification with qualities, identification with attitudes and values, imagining self as personality, desire for personality to succeed, and want to be more like personality. In order to answer RQ4, we compared the means of the seven variables.

All of the values reported for each variable concerning SMI Ashley Marie were low. The reported familiarity with Ashley Marie had the lowest value,  $M = (1.98)$ , while the participants' degree of 'reminder of self' was reported at  $M = (2.61)$ . It was also found that participants moderately identified with Ashley Marie's qualities,  $M = (2.95)$ , and wanted to be more like her,  $M = (3.05)$ . While the participants' reported identification with Ashley's attitudes and values were moderate at  $M = (3.32)$ , the reported mean was slightly lower when participants' were asked if they could imagine themselves as Ashley,  $M = (2.28)$ . When participants' were asked to what degree they wished Ashley success the value was higher and reported at  $M = (5.46)$ , which goes against the trend of indifference in responses toward the SMI at this point in the study.

Participant's in this study were slightly less familiar with celebrity personality Zendaya than the social media influencer with a reported mean of  $M = (1.07)$ . Means were overall reported higher on the PSI Scale for Zendaya than Ashley Marie. Respondents identified with Zendaya's qualities with a mean of  $M = (3.82)$  as well as her attitudes and values, with a mean of  $M = (4.53)$ . Results showed a mean of  $M = (3.53)$  when survey respondents rated the degree to which Zendaya reminded them of themselves. Similarly, the mean of responses regarding the participants imagining themselves as Zendaya were  $M = (3.18)$ . While participants reported highly that they wanted to be more like Zendaya,  $M = (3.79)$ , the mean when asked the degree to which they wished Zendaya success was at  $M = (6.04)$ .

Other notable findings help put the answers to our research questions into context. 81% of respondents agreed that they have a positive opinion of CoverGirl as a brand. After viewing the video commercial by CoverGirl, 35% of participants agreed that it may positively influence their purchasing intentions of the product, while 32% remained neutral. Brand sponsored content was the second most chosen response (26%) when respondents were asked which method was most likely to influence their purchasing decisions of makeup and beauty products.

When asked which method of advertising they trusted more, 59% of responses showed that SMI content is the most trusted by the target audience when it comes to makeup and other beauty products. Forty-nine percent also believe that SMI content is most likely to tell the truth about these types of products compared to other types of advertising. It was also

reported that 32% of the audience feels that SMI content is more likely to sway their opinions about makeup and beauty products compared to traditional and celebrity endorsed.

H1: Participants' buying intentions will be the highest when they view content from social media influencers they like and trust.

In order to evaluate H1, a one way ANOVA was conducted to determine buying intentions between social media influencers, traditional celebrities, and overall brand advertising. The question, *which type of ad would most likely influence your purchase intention?* was used as the dependent variable. This study reported higher values for SMI's  $F(5, 57) = 5.19, p = .001$ , and traditional celebrities  $F(5, 57) = 4.82, p = .001$ , and significance over brand related advertisements  $F(5, 57) = 3.36, p = .011$ .

## **Discussion**

Results from the conducted survey of 57 participants reveal that social media use and exposure to makeup advertisements are relevant, everyday occurrences in the lives of consumers. According to data, Instagram is the most used social media platform by the demographic, and is important to analyze when considering SMI, celebrity, and traditional content. Participants reported that they check Instagram many times a day, suggesting this is an optimal platform for makeup brands to use in order to communicate with consumers. Although data showed no direct link between specific content and increased buying intentions, participants reported they had the most trust for SMI content when it came to promoting makeup. This suggests a sense of honesty and transparency that SMI can offer that traditional advertising does not.

The correlation test reported no significance between viewing SMI content and consumer buying intention at  $r = -.003, p = .981$ . While there might not be a direct relationships between the two, we can conclude the SMI content still has the potential to influence consumer behavior. Being exposed to this type of content might not result in immediate sales, but has the opportunity to foster strong parasocial relationships over time. This would lead to greater levels of awareness of the personality, which would result in the opportunity for a stronger relationship. Exposure to this type of messaging can build trust between SMI and consumer overtime, which can create interest in the associated products and brands (Daniel, Crawford-Jackson & Westerman, 2018).

The correlation test reported low significance between viewing celebrity endorsed content and consumer buying intention at  $r = -.51, p < .001$ . In comparison to SMI, according to this data, celebrity content is a stronger impact on consumer buying intentions. It is important to notice that the correlation is not overwhelmingly strong. This slightly greater influence over SMI content might be a result of the familiarity of the celebrity (Lueck, 2015). Celebrities might be seen as having more credibility as their image has already been established. It has been reported that source credibility in this case refers to the positive aspects of the personality that persuades consumers to trust the honesty of their content (Chung & Cho, 2017).

The correlation test reported significance and a negative correlation between viewing traditional branded content and consumer buying intention at  $r = -.447, p < .000$ . This result confirms the notion that traditional advertising cannot stand alone in the modern, digital age.

The traditional ads displayed in this study did not do enough to convince participant's buying decisions.

Parasocial relationships were evaluated in relation to SMI, Ashley Marie and celebrity, Zendaya. The goal was to evaluate if consumers had stronger relationships with SMI personalities or traditional celebrities. Parasocial relationships were scored based on the participant's degree of: familiarity, reminder of self, identification with qualities, identification with attitudes and values, imagining self as personality, desire for personality to succeed, and want to be more like personality. Means in all reported categories for Zendaya were slightly higher than SMI Ashley Marie, suggesting participants had a stronger parasocial relationship with her. Low means across the board suggest low familiarity and affinity for both personalities used.

Overall, the hypothesis that SMI content would be the most influential in persuading buying intentions was confirmed. Participant's self-selected social media influencer content as the messages most likely to influence their buying behavior when it came to beauty and makeup products.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

It is important to acknowledge the limitations. The sampling method selected, snowball sampling, also impacted the response number. Sampling was limited to the researcher's social media and email reach, which lead to low participation. Out of the 125 participants that did access the survey, only 57 of the responses were completed. This low response rate is another clear limitation of this research. Most dropouts occurred when the participant was asked to watch the first video. The length of the survey, as well as subject

matter, might have been factors contributing to the incomplete responses. Since the survey was distributed via social media, it is likely that a majority of respondents opened the questionnaire on their mobile devices. This could also be a reason why some participants closed out the survey before finishing.

It is also important to consider the participant's familiarity with each personality. Overall, participants were not familiar with the social media influencer Ashley Marie, but they knew more about Zendaya. This reveals the importance of parasocial relationships that might have already existed between the participants and the celebrity before the study began, influencing results. All things considered, the familiarity with both personalities were relatively low, still providing the chance for a fair evaluation. This is why more popular celebrities like Taylor Swift or Selena Gomez were not used in this study.

CoverGirl is a very popular brand that is well known in the industry, as well as amongst consumers. It is important to note the opinions that participants might have had about the brand before entering the survey. These biases, negative or positive, in regards to CoverGirl as a brand had the potential to sway survey responses. Priming is also important to keep in mind alongside preconceived notions participants brought to the survey experience. Recruitment called for participants familiar with makeup and in the target demographic, which leaves room for selection bias when it comes to voluntary response.

This study sets up future explorations of the topic to dig deeper into the overall process of forming parasocial relationships with social media influencers and celebrities. While this study found no direct correlation between viewing these messages and increased purchase intention, results suggested parasocial relationships are likely to have impact over

longer periods of time. Considering the short amount of time participants spent with these personalities in this study, it makes sense that responses were not heavily swayed. Parasocial relationships develop and strengthen over time, and so does their potential influence when it comes to advertising. For any future research concerning this topic, a longitudinal study would be recommended in order to truly understand the impact parasocial relationships with personalities in the media can have on buying intentions. It is hypothesized that evaluating these relationships over a longer period of time will reveal an increased sense of trust; and therefore, a greater impact on purchase intention of the product.

### **Conclusion**

While the hypothesis was not confirmed, key insights were revealed about SMI, celebrity, and traditional makeup advertising methods. Although data showed no direct link between specific content and increased buying intentions, participants reported they had the most trust for SMI content when it came to promoting makeup. This suggests a sense of honesty and transparency that SMI can offer that traditional advertising does not. Being exposed to this type of content might not result in immediate sales, but has the opportunity to foster strong parasocial relationships over time. Exposure to this type of messaging can build trust between SMI and consumer overtime, which can create interest in the associated products and brands. Results of this study confirm that the SMI and celebrity content that exists on social media, especially Instagram, has the potential to influence audiences overtime. Building trust through the development of parasocial relationships with media personalities should be strongly considered when advertising in the cosmetics industry.

Appendix

**A. The Survey**

**Honors Thesis: Lydia Shoffner**

1. What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to understand the media consumption patterns of the target demographic in today's society in relation to advertising via social media influencers, celebrities, and brands.

2. What we ask you to do

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer questions in order to understand your patterns of media consumption in today's society relevant to advertising. This survey includes demographic questions, social media usage questions, as well as comparing three different methods of advertising a makeup product. The survey will take less than 15 minutes for you to complete.

3. Are there any risks?

This study is for research purposes only. There are no foreseeable risks associated with this study. With your permission, we would like to keep a record of your response.

4. Confidentiality

This survey is for a class project, and the results will be stored on a password protected server at Appalachian State University. Results will be private, information made public will not be linked to you.

5. Participation

Participation in this survey is voluntary. Please feel free to exit at any time.

6. Questions?

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Emory Stephen Daniel at [danieles@appstate.edu](mailto:danieles@appstate.edu) or the Institutional Review Board at 828-262-2696.

Do you accept these terms?

- Yes
- If no, please close this page

How old are you?

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What is your gender?

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What is your occupational status?

- Unemployed
- Full-time
- Part-time
- Student
- Student and part-time
- Student and full-time

I use makeup or other beauty products regularly.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

I see advertisements for makeup and other beauty products every day.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Does not apply

I check Instagram every day.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Does not apply

I follow people on Instagram that post content related to makeup or other beauty products.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I check YouTube every day.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree
- Does not apply

I watch videos on YouTube with content related to makeup or other beauty products.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Page Break

What is this all about?

The drastic increase of access to technology is changing the ways in which brands are communicating with their audiences. Companies have realized that traditional advertising (print, television, and radio) alone is not competitive enough in this new age of technology and internet communication. Certain brands have expanded their strategies to include celebrity endorsements as well as social media influencer created content in order to integrate the brand into their target audiences' social platforms.

A celebrity endorsement is when a well-known celebrity (actress, musician, etc.) is featured in a brand's ad promoting the product. This brings a certain credibility to the brand and product simply because the celebrity is associated with it. Social media influencers are individuals who have large followings on different social media platforms (such as Instagram or YouTube) and promote different brands as well. This has become increasingly popular with "beauty gurus" showing off certain makeup products and giving their honest opinion to their followers. The goal of this study is to understand the difference in influence between celebrity endorsements and social media influencers on our participant's buying potential of a certain product.

The goal of this study is to understand the influence that these personalities have on certain buying intentions. This study will use makeup and beauty products in order to understand this relationship.

The following questions will help us gauge the influence different methods of advertising have on your intention to buy the featured product.

Page Break

"Meet COVERGIRL, top-selling global beauty brand giving you the makeup products you love. Born in 1961, COVERGIRL started in Maryland, U.S. and now offers makeup to people all over the world. Our makeup is accessible, affordable, and inclusive to all styles and skin types. One look at our COVERGIRL faces shows the diverse nature of the strong, beautiful individuals we represent. Our goal is to help every person look and feel their best as they create personalized looks with the products we offer.

Recently, COVERGIRL became the largest makeup brand to be Leaping Bunny Certified by Cruelty-Free International. We are cruelty free across all of our products, everywhere we're sold. As we take the leap towards cruelty free, we hope to continue giving our fans the quality makeup they expect and deserve from COVERGIRL. COVERGIRL also just opened our first-ever flagship store in Times Square, New York City. We couldn't be more excited to sell our foundations, mascaras, blushes, lips kits, and more in The City That Never Sleeps. One small step for makeup, one big step for COVERGIRL! #IAmWhatIMakeup" CoverGirl 2019

Please watch the following video advertisement produced by CoverGirl.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvhR9uaOCIU>

Please proceed to the next page to answer a few questions.

Page Break

Have you heard of CoverGirl before taking this survey?

- Yes
- No

I have a positive impression of CoverGirl as a brand.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I seem to have the same attitudes and values as CoverGirl.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I identify with the overall theme and message portrayed in this advertisement.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

This advertisement has positively influenced my perception of the brand.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I intend to purchase CoverGirl products in the future after viewing their brand sponsored content.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Page Break

The following section will contain questions regarding a social media influencer.

Page Break

Ashley Marie is a popular make up artist posting content on Instagram and YouTube as @makeupbyamarie. Ashley has 70.9k followers on Instagram and 605k subscribers on YouTube. Ashley posts make up tutorials and new looks for her followers daily. Ashley is from Tampa, FL and has recently gotten engaged to her long-time boyfriend. Ashley has been sharing her experience with makeup on social media since 2013. She shows her fans makeup products of all price ranges, including drugstore brands.

Ashley occasionally tags CoverGirl in her looks on Instagram, and has done a "full-face" routine using only the brand's products.

Please view the following content from Ashley pertaining to her use of CoverGirl products

Please watch the following video on YouTube of Ashley reviewing CoverGirl products.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vB4IZ2ytMvs&t=811s>  
Watch 13:35 until 15:00

Please proceed to the next page to answer a few questions.

Page Break

I have heard of Ashley Marie before this survey.

- Yes
- No

Ashley Marie reminds me of myself.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I have the same qualities as Ashley Marie.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I seem to have the same attitudes or values as Ashley Marie.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I can imagine myself as Ashley Marie.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I hope Ashley Marie is successful.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I want to be more like Ashley Marie.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Page Break

Zendaya is a 22 year-old American actress and singer. She got her start on Disney Channel's hit Shake It Up, and then pursued a music career before starring in movies such as The Greatest Showman. Zendaya was announced as the new face of CoverGirl in 2016, and continues to support the brand.

Please view that content from Zendaya x CoverGirl and then answer the following questions.

Watch her campaign for CoverGirl below.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoXYkeHrfv0>

Please continue to the next page to answer the following questions.

I have heard of Zendaya before this survey.

- Yes
- No

Zendaya reminds me of myself.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I have the same qualities as Zendaya.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I seem to have the same attitudes or values as Zendaya.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I can imagine myself as Zendaya.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I hope Zendaya is successful.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I want to be more like Zendaya.

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

I intend to purchase CoverGirl products in the future after viewing Zendaya's content.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Page Break

The following questions will help evaluate your overall experiences with the different messages you have seen.

Page Break

Overall, I trust social media influencer's opinions about makeup and beauty products.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Overall, I trust celebrity opinions about makeup and beauty products.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Overall, I trust traditional advertising about makeup and beauty products.

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

Page Break

Which type of advertisement do you think would be more likely to influence your purchasing behavior of certain products?

- Celebrity endorsement on social media
- Celebrity endorsement via traditional media
- Traditional media sponsored by the brand
- Social media influencer on Instagram
- Social media influencer on YouTube
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Which type of advertisement do you think is more likely to tell the truth about the brand?

- Celebrity endorsement on social media
- Celebrity endorsement via traditional media
- Traditional media sponsored by the brand
- Social media influencer on Instagram
- Social media influencer on YouTube
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

I am more likely to trust the opinion of a social media influencer when it comes to these types of products.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am more likely to trust the opinion of a celebrity when it comes to these types of products.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I am more likely to trust the brand sponsored content when it comes to these types of products.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

End of Block: Default Question Block

End of Survey

## B. Coding Sheet 1

### Coding Sheet

#### Gender

Male 1

Female 2

Other 3

#### Occupational Status

Unemployed 1

Full time 2

Part time 3

Student 4

Student and part time 5

Student and full time 6

#### Likert scales strongly disagree-strongly agree

Strongly disagree 1

Disagree 2

Somewhat disagree 3

Neither agree nor disagree 4

Somewhat agree 5

Agree 6

Strongly agree 7

#### Have you heard of \_\_\_\_?

Yes 1

No 2

#### Which type of ad do you think would be more likely to influence your purchasing behavior?

Celeb endorsement on social media 1

Celeb endorsement via traditional media 2

Traditional media sponsored by brand 3

Social media influencer on Instagram 4

Social media influencer on YouTube 5

Other 6

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