



MASTER THESIS

# #InstaFamous: The Effect of Influencer Type and Brand Familiarity on Brand attitude and Corporate Reputation

Jantien Wijnen

February, 2019

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The moderating roles of influencer fit and brand experience

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JANTIEN WIJNEN - S2030845

GRADUATION COMMITTEE:  
DR. J. F. GOSSELT  
DR. A. J. A. M. VAN DEURSEN

UNIVERSITY OF TWENTE  
FACULTY OF BEHAVIOURAL, MANAGEMENT & SOCIAL SCIENCES  
MASTER COMMUNICATION STUDIES – CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

## **ABSTRACT**

**Introduction** – Nowadays, social media replaces traditional media as being the most prominent media platform. Along with this change come new opportunities and challenges for, among others, the field of brand management. Increasingly, consumers tend to find information about products and services no longer from offline sources, but from digital word-of-mouth sources like social media and review websites. Third parties are increasingly used to promote a company on social media. This is a new type of independent providers of social media posts, who shape the attitudes of a company's audience, called 'social media influencers'.

**Purpose** – Since the use of influencers is currently increasing, while the field of research is still predominantly unexplored, the purpose of this research is to give advise to companies about the effect and the use of influencers for business purposes. This research examines the effect of influencer type on brand attitude and corporate reputation and the interaction effect of influencer type and brand familiarity. Which type of influencer fits best with a familiar brand and which type fits best with an unfamiliar brand? Do the effects limit to marketing communication strategies or should influencers be involved in corporate communication strategies as well? Companies can adjust their influencer strategies to these outcomes.

**Method** – This research was conducted with a 3x2 experiment through an online survey. Each respondent was exposed to one of the six conditions. The stimulus material consisted of one picture, including an influencer type (celebrity, social media influencer or unknown) and a brand (Nike or YS). After exposure of the picture, the respondents were asked to answer questions about brand attitude and corporate reputation, and additionally about brand familiarity, brand experience and influencer fit.

**Results** – There was no interaction effect between influencer type and brand familiarity. This means that the type of influencer that is used by a company does not have to depend on the familiarity of the brand. Furthermore, there were no significant effects found between influencer type and brand attitude and corporate reputation. Both dependent variables could be seen as one variable for influencer type. Influencer fit had a direct positive effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation, instead of a moderating role on the effect of influencer type on the dependent variables.

**Conclusion** – From the findings we can conclude that influencer type does not play a significant role in consumers' brand attitude and corporate reputation. This does not say that influencers are not useful for businesses, because there are many other business evaluations that could be affected positively by influencers but were not included within this research. However, influencer fit has a significant effect on both brand attitude and corporate reputation. This means that before choosing an influencer, companies have to determine or investigate whether the influencer fits with their brand according to consumers.

**KEY WORDS** Social media influencers, celebrity influencers, brand attitude, corporate reputation, brand familiarity, brand experience, influencer fit

## **PREFACE**

This research was conducted with the intention to graduate on my master Communication Studies at University of Twente. Writing a master thesis is not a piece of cake, it takes a lot of effort, dedication and time. But once you are finished you can be proud of the work you delivered. You worked hard and now you can reap the benefits. I would like to take this opportunity to thank people who helped me during my thesis period.

First of all, I would like to thank my boyfriend, friends and family for supporting me during the writing process and giving me time to focus on my thesis. Furthermore, I would like to thank the methodology shop at University of Twente for helping me getting started with the analyses, and my supervisors Dr. J. F. Gosselt and Dr. A. J. A. M. Van Deursen for giving me feedback when needed. Last but not least, I would like to thank the respondents of the research, who filled in the survey, for their participation. Thank you all!

Jantien Wijnen  
February, 2019

# Inhoudsopgave

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, social media replaces traditional media as being the most prominent media platform (Abidin & Ots, 2015). Along with this change come new opportunities and challenges for, among others, the field of brand management. Marketers not solely form markets anymore, but consumers have an increasing influence in shaping and forming various fields of marketing and brand management as well (Abidin & Ots, 2015; Booth & Matic, 2010). At present, norms and logics are created together with consumers, which was previously restricted to professionals only (Abidin & Ots, 2015). As a result, companies are getting rid of top-down communication strategies and are trying to make more and more people loyal to the brand through communities and social media (Booth and Matic, 2010). By using social media, companies tend to increase their trustworthiness (Becker, Nobre & Kanabar, 2013), brand attitude, and customer commitment (Dijkmans, Kerkhof & Beukeboom, 2014), which are considered to be important measures in the competition with other companies.

A similar change applies to consumers: increasingly, they tend to find information about products and services from digital word-of-mouth sources like social media and review websites, instead of from offline sources (Dijkmans et al., 2014). They rely on other consumers' opinions and perceive messages from reviews, friends or family more positively than those from companies (Booth & Matic, 2010; Dijkmans et al., 2014; IZEA, 2017; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Woods, 2016). For this reason, companies increasingly use third parties that are comparable with consumers' friends and family (consumers feel a certain level of closeness and identification with these individuals) to promote their company on social media (Dijkmans et al., 2014; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2010). Thus, everyone could be a potential content generator and has the potential to have meaningful influential power (Booth & Matic, 2010). This is enabled through the increased use of social media and the current general focus of companies on consumers (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2016). This new type of independent providers of social media posts shape the attitudes of a company's audience, and is called 'social media influencers' (Freberg et al., 2010; Khamis et al., 2016).

User-generated content, such as influencer posts on social media and consumer reviews, have a positive influence on the brand attitude of other consumers (Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014). Also, content on social media concerning organizations increasingly influences their corporate reputation (Becker, Nobre & Kanabar, 2013), and thus, recognizing who the company's storytellers are and engage them in the brand's discussion could shape or protect a brand's reputation (Booth and Matic, 2010). Despite this, little research has yet been conducted on the direct effect of social media influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation in specific (Van Norel, Kommers, Van Hoof and Verhoeven, 2014). There could be a difference in both outcomes because a brand attitude can be formed at one moment of time (one look at a picture) and includes attitudes about only one product, whereas a corporate reputation is built overtime (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004; Fombrun, 1996; Jie et al., 2016) and includes the

reputation of the entire company. This could cause that the effect of influencers through content on social media is weaker on corporate reputation than on brand attitude. This difference will be further elaborated in the theoretical framework (paragraph 2.3). Both outcomes (influencer effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation) will be compared to each other in this research to determine whether the effect of influencers restricts to marketing outcomes, or it has effect on corporate outcomes as well.

Influencers can be grouped into celebrities and social media influencers (Khamis et al., 2016). Celebrities have a great identity and the requirements to be a target for marketing purposes. The increased ease of communicating someone's image with use of social media and the upcoming popularity of individualism made it easier to become a 'celebrity' for 'normal' people (Khamis et al., 2016), resulting in the existence of social media influencers. It has already been investigated that celebrity endorsers influence brand attitude and corporate reputation (Van Norel et al., 2014; Zhou & Whitla, 2013). When it comes to social media influencers, some researches suggest that they have effect on brand evaluations. However, the specific influence of social media influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation, apart from each other, is under investigated. To determine whether social media influencers and celebrities have the same effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation and to give advise to companies about the type of influencer they should use for marketing or corporate purposes, celebrities and social media influencers will be compared with each other in this research.

Especially for small brands with a limited advertising budget, it is interesting to be aware of the effect of (the type of) influencer(s) on the brand attitude and corporate reputation among consumers. They can effectively use their budget by choosing the right type of influencer to achieve a higher brand attitude or corporate reputation among consumers. Namely, most studies on influencers mainly focus on large brands that are in possession of budgets that can provide them with an extended board of influencers (Woods, 2016). Their advise will not do for small brands. Besides that, knowing that advertisement effects, marketing strategies and brand management differ for familiar and unfamiliar brands makes it reasonable to take the influence of brand familiarity into account as well in this research (Berthon, Ewing & Napoli, 2008; Jarvis & Goodman, 2005; Kent & Allen, 1994). Does it make a difference for the effect of influencer type (celebrity and social media influencers) if consumers are familiar to the brand? Which type of influencer fits with either a familiar or an unfamiliar brand in terms of brand attitude and corporate reputation? These questions will be examined within this research.

Ha and Perks (2005) found that brand familiarity and brand experience strengthen each other in brand satisfaction. Is brand familiarity a direct predictor of brand attitude and corporate reputation or does brand experience have a role as well? For companies, this would make the difference between consumers that are just aware of the existence of their brand and loyal consumers. They could use influencers as a means to attract consumers that are aware of them to become loyal customers or as a

means to retain loyal customers, depending on what the effect of brand experience on the effect of influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation is.

Zietek (2016) argues that marketing managers tend to select their influencers on their fit with the brand. Did they already buy the products before they got paid to show them (do they seem to naturally fit with the brand)? A perceived fit must match with the associations towards the brand, including advertisements with influencers. Otherwise, consumers could become confused and surprised, which could negatively influence believability (Doss, 2011). Is the perceived fit of the influencer also important for brand evaluations like brand attitude and corporate reputation? To answer this question, influencer fit is examined as a moderator for the effect of influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation. Out of the previous information, the following research question is formulated:

“What is the effect of (different types of) influencers and brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation, which influencer type fits best with a(n) (un)familiar brand, and what are the roles of influencer fit and brand experience?”

In the second chapter, the theoretical background of the research will be described. In the third chapter, the method will be elaborated. The fourth chapter will consist of the results, followed by the discussion, limitations and implications for future research (chapter 5 through 7). The final chapter will be the conclusion (chapter 8).

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, the theoretical framework will be elaborated. Distracted from the introduction, several topics can be distinguished. The topics are brand attitude (2.1), corporate reputation (2.2), brand attitude versus corporate reputation (2.3), influencer marketing (2.4), brand familiarity (2.5), influencers versus brand familiarity (2.6) and the moderating roles of influencer fit with the brand (2.7) and brand experience (2.8).

### **2.1 Brand attitude**

Brands represent the advantages provided by a product or service and are distinguishable by their competitive position, in terms of price and product usage, and their personality (Hankinson & Cowking, 1993, as cited by Cambridge, 2002). The latter consists of functional attributes such as durability or ease of use, symbolic values such as the degree of fun or care, and emotional appeal caused by for example the product design, name or advertising. Each brand consists of a unique combination of functional features, symbolic values and emotional appeal, with which they deliver and communicate the product or service experience (Cambridge, 2002). Because doing research on products to collect attributes is time consuming and takes effort, many consumers rely on the product brand as an important source of information (Cambridge, 2002; Ward & Lee, 2000). This causes that the overall consumer experience could be mainly shaped by the brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014).

According to Munch, Boller and Swasy (1993) the first step towards a positive brand attitude is to make sure that consumers believe the features and user effects that are being communicated about the product. But it does not restrict to these functional features only; word-of-mouth communication influences both short-term and long-term brand attitudes as well (Bone, 1995; Hatch, Schultz & Williamson, 2001). Furthermore, inappropriate use of word-of-mouth communication can have an unintended effect on attitude creation of consumers towards a brand (Lee, Park & Han, 2007; Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). Once a positive brand attitude is achieved, it can lead to attraction of potential customers and thereby to a higher purchase intention (Aghekyan-Simonian, et al., 2012; Hatch, Schultz & Williamson, 2001; Kudeshia & Kumas, 2016). Another factor that has a severe positive effect on purchase intention is corporate reputation (Keh & Xie, 2009), which will be explained in the following paragraph.

### **2.2 Corporate reputation**

Corporate reputation consists of the perceptions and evaluations about a company held by stakeholders (Meadows & Meadows, 2016). Corporate reputation can be defined as the representation of the overall appeal or collective images of all stakeholders towards the organization, built over time, compared to competitors (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004; Fombrun, 1996; Jie et al., 2016). There are several reasons why reputation is important to organizations. The perception of the public predicts the companies' success (Fombrun, 1996). For example, a company with a strong positive reputation attracts good employees, is perceived to have more value, is enabled to charge more, their customers are more loyal and the purchase intention of consumers is higher (Keh & Xie,

2009). According to Eccles, Newquist and Schatz (2007), 70 to 80 per cent of market value comes from intangible assets (brand equity, intellectual capital and goodwill), which are hard to assess. Given this, anything that harms their reputation is a threat to a company. Consumers often rely on brands that have a good reputation as risk reliever to lessen their uncertainty (Aghekyan-Simonian et al., 2012)

Fombrun, Ponzi and Newburry (2005) developed the RepTrak® system for measuring corporate reputation. The RepTrak® System is elaborated from various studies from The Reputation Institute since 2000 and has seven dimensions, namely: product and services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership and performance (Frombrun, Ponzi & Newburry, 2005). An overview of the RepTrak® model and an explanation of its variables is depicted in figure 1.

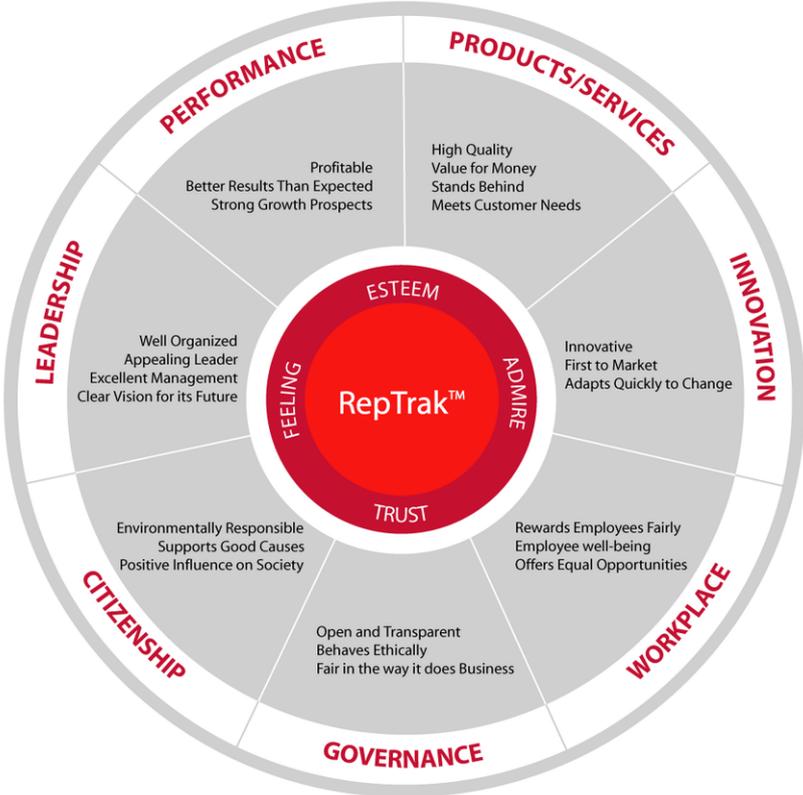


Figure 1 RepTrak™ Reputation Model (Reputation Institute, 2014)

**2.3 Brand attitude versus corporate reputation**

The main difference between brand attitude and corporate reputation is that brand attitude focuses on the product itself, whereas corporate reputation focuses on the company behind the product. The main components of corporate reputation are the image and identity of the company (Chun, 2005), whereas brand attitude limits to evaluations about a certain product or service of the brand. It is basically the difference between making offerings stand out and attracting and retaining customers, and also a difference between marketing and corporate communication.

Positive evaluations by consumers about a certain product do not directly affect the overall reputation evaluations (Wang, Kandampully, Lo & Shi, 2006). For example, it

is possible that a customer really likes a garment of Primark, but still has negative associations with the company because of their alleged contribution to child labor. Corporate reputation is an intangible equity of a company for the long term, whereas positive brand attitudes give temporarily positive effects (for example one single purchase). In this research the goal is to investigate whether influencers have a limited effect on the particular 'offer' that is showed, or that it has more profound effects on the overall corporate reputation. For this reason, brand attitude and corporate reputation are seen as two separate dependent variables when it comes to research on the effect of influencers. In this way, the two variables can be compared with each other. The effect of influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation will be further elaborated in paragraph 2.4.

## **2.4 Influencer marketing**

In this paragraph the influencer types 'social media influencers' and 'celebrity influencers' will be described. As stated before, influencers are third parties that are increasingly used to promote a company on social media (Dijkmans et al., 2014; Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2010) and they are becoming a part of a companies' social media strategy (Booth & Matic, 2010). Companies choose social media influencers based on the extensiveness of their social network, the frequency of using their social network, the relevance or visibility of their content and their suitability (fit) with the brand (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Social influencers as a marketing tool seems to be similar to the traditional marketing tool word-of-mouth (IZEA, 2017; Woods, 2016). However, there is an essential difference; word-of-mouth depends on current customers who are telling their acquaintances naturally about a product or brand they like, whereas influencers are asked specifically to promote a product or brand (IZEA, 2017). Companies use influencers because social media content generated by themselves is expected to be less successful, in terms of trustworthiness and credibility (Pornpitakpan, 2004), than user-generated social media content about the company posted by the user from the user's account (Allsop, Bassett & Hoskins, 2007; Booth & Matic, 2010; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014).

The primary influencer platforms, that is to say the most established and the platforms that can be expected to give good results to marketers, are Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and blogs (Sammis, Lincoln and Pomponi, 2016). The share rate, the number of views, or the number of followers can be starting points when looking for the right influencers (Freberg et al., 2010; Neystadt et al., 2011). Furthermore, influencers can be classified into various influencer types for different purposes, for example providing content promotion, promoting product launches, or creating content, by analyzing their online activities and particular usage (Woods, 2016). Also, among social media influencers, a distinction can be made between micro-influencers and macro-influencers. Macro-influencers are famous through social media but have characteristics and an amount of followers that are comparable with a celebrity. Micro-influencers are regular people who became popular online by the attention of a specific (smaller) group of followers, by showing their use of goods and

services or lifestyles. They have a small niche of followers (Coursaris, Van Osch & Kourganoff, 2018). In this research social media influencers can be defined in the same way as micro-influencers, to make a clear distinction between celebrities and social media influencers, and because they are accessible for small brands as well in terms of resources. The distinction between social media influencers and celebrity influencers will be explained in the next paragraph (2.4.1).

It is assumed that the use of influencers will lead to a more positive brand attitude and corporate reputation. The fact that large brands already make extensive use of influencers reveals that they behold positive results from it (Woods, 2016). Also, since people perceive messages from reviews, family and friends and user-generated content on social media more positive than those of companies (Booth & Matic, 2010; Dijkmans, Kerkhof & Beukeboom, 2014; IZEA, 2017; Schivinski & Dabrowski, 2014; Woods, 2016), their brand attitude and corporate reputation are expected to be positive as well when influencers are used.

The strength of the effect of influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation could differ between the two variables because brand attitude could be formed at one moment of time (one look at a picture), while reputation is built overtime (Argenti & Druckenmiller, 2004; Fombrun, 1996; Jie et al., 2016) and consists of accumulated attitudes from the past (Woods, 2016). Besides that, influencers are often used to promote products and not directly to promote a brand, this could cause that influencers have a greater direct effect on brand attitude than on corporate reputation. The following hypothesis is formulated:

**H1:** “(Social media) Influencers have a stronger positive effect on brand attitude than on corporate reputation.”

#### *2.4.1 Social media influencers versus celebrity influencers*

Hearn and Schoenhoff (2017) define social media influencers as individuals who work to develop some kind of “celebrity” status and a genuine “personal brand”, by trying to get as much attention as possible via social networks. Marwick (2016) and Raun (2018) consider them to be online niche personalities who are not known by everyone (unlike celebrities) but have their own specific public. They are individual social media opinion leaders (Abidin & Ots, 2015; Freberg et al., 2010) with a valuable reputation and influence (Neystadt et al., 2011), who are being ‘used’ by organizations for consumer purposes (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Companies sponsor the social media influencers or they give them perks in order to get valuable word-of-mouth in return. They have a new kind of job that arose from the data flow (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Celebrities seem to be similar to social media influencers as well, as they have a great influence on individuals (Van Norel et al., 2014), but the difference is that social media influencers do not need television networks to stand out (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Unlike celebrities, social media influencers are in principle solely known from their activities on social networks.

Celebrities are individuals who are famous on certain level, making them well known in society (Young & Pinsky, 2006, as cited by Kim, Lee & Prideaux, 2014). An individual becomes a celebrity due to their image or trademark (Boorstin, 1961, as cited by Fraser & Brown, 2002), and are known because of a certain talent or job. In the past years, the influence of celebrities has increased through mass media (Fraser & Brown, 2002). People create mental bonds with celebrities and try to pursue their lives, which is also the case with social media influencers. People follow their values and behaviors as they have a great interest in their lives and they are attracted to and have respect for them in a certain way. Celebrities are, as well as social media influencers, seen as opinion leaders: “people who influence the opinions, attitudes, beliefs, motivations, and behaviors of others” (Valente & Pumpuang, 2007, p. 881, as cited by Van Norel et al., 2014). This causes that people are being influenced by celebrity endorsements (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

The pages of celebrities on Instagram (for example) are the most-followed pages of all. For that reason, many organizations use celebrity endorsement as a marketing tool to positively influence their brand awareness, brand image and brand attitude, or in order to increase their customers’ intention to purchase their products or services (Van Norel et al., 2014). Celebrities are considered to be credible sources in generating a positive word-of-mouth regarding particular products and services (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). At the same time, research shows that consumers are more likely to believe the authenticity of an opinion of a personal acquaintance than of a rich celebrity (Schaefer, 2012, as cited by Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Even though a celebrity reaches a larger audience compared to social media influencers (Pedroni, 2016), this statement caused that organizations started to move away from celebrity influencers towards social media influencers. Celebrities answered this by making their posts more personal and started to interact with their fans. They show more about their personal lives, including brands, rather than posing in glamorous magazine advertisements. This makes them more similar to social media influencers, causing that brands will still be interested in sponsoring celebrities (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017).

This raises the question whether celebrities have the strongest influence on either brand attitude or corporate reputation, or if social media influencers took their place. Because consumers seem to be more inclined to identify with social media influencers than with celebrities (they feel a certain distance) (Pedroni, 2016), it is assumed that social media influencers have more effect on brand attitude than celebrities. Consumers want to have the same products as their ‘friends’ and thereby it is expected that social media influencers are more effective for marketing purposes (rather than corporate purposes) than celebrity influencers. The following hypothesis is formulated:

**H2:** “Social media influencers have a stronger effect on brand attitude than celebrity influencers have.”

According to Knittel and Stango (2012) celebrity endorsements consist of reputation risks, because they reach a large audience and thereby could affect the overall reputation of an organization. When they damage their own reputation, they damage the reputation of the company as well. They consider the effect of social media influencers on reputation smaller than celebrity influencers, because social media influencers reach a smaller public. For this reason, it is expected that celebrity influencers will have a greater influence on corporate purposes than social media influencers. The following hypothesis is proposed:

**H3:** “Celebrity influencers have a stronger effect on corporate reputation than social media influencers have.”

### **2.5 Brand familiarity**

Kent and Allen (1994) define brand familiarity as a variable that indicates the level of direct and indirect experiences of a consumer with a certain product. They state that brands that are being advertised in national media are highly familiar. Also, they say that advertising for familiar brands may not work in the same way as advertising for unfamiliar brands.

Consumers often use the brand name and related signals as a basis for the choice of product. Familiar brands entail various positive associations that cause consumers to trust the product or organization. For example, when it is not possible to judge a product immediately, the brand familiarity serves as cue for quality (Benedicktus, Brady, Darke & Voorhees, 2010).

Heath (1990) found that the more familiar people are to certain stimuli, the more they perceive to like it (as cited by Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996). Generally, it has been recognized that the exposure effect is a basic process in preference and attitude formation and change (Zajonc & Markus, 1982, as cited by Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996). This leads to the following hypothesis:

**H4:** “A familiar brand has a more positive influence on brand attitude than an unfamiliar brand has.”

People process an advertisement of a familiar brand easier than one of an unfamiliar brand. This causes that the brand-related message of an unfamiliar brand is less likely to be processed (Lange & Dahlén, 2003). Further, if a consumer has a positive perception about a certain brand, normally a high level of brand familiarity causes a greater brand attitude and brand trust (Perera & Chaminda, 2013). Lewis (1999) states that the better known a company is, the better their reputation. The following hypothesis is formulated:

**H5:** “A familiar brand has a more positive influence on corporate reputation than an unfamiliar brand has.”

## **2.6 Influencers versus brand familiarity**

As it is expected that celebrity influencers have more impact on brand evaluations than social media influencers, it is assumed in this research that celebrity influencers will be more effective for unfamiliar brands in terms of brand attitude and corporate reputation, and social media influencers will be more effective for familiar brands, so people can identify with the social media influencer (Freberg et al., 2010). The following hypothesis is formulated:

**H6:** “Celebrity influencers have a greater positive influence on brand attitude and corporate reputation for unfamiliar brands, compared to social media influencers”.

The research of Kolarova (2018) proved that social media influencers combined with a familiar brand has a more positive effect on brand evaluations than celebrity influencers. To find out whether this applies to brand attitude and corporate reputation in specific, the following hypothesis arose:

**H7:** “Social media influencers have a greater positive influence on brand attitude and corporate reputation for familiar brands, compared to celebrity influencers”.

## **2.7 Moderating role of influencer fit with brand**

As stated before, marketers select influencers according to their fit with the brand (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). There should be a fit between the influencer and the brand, because consumers could become confused and surprised when there is no perceived fit (Doss, 2011). The question for this research is whether the influencer directly influences brand attitude and corporate reputation, or fit is an important condition, which makes the effect of influencers on brand attitude and corporate reputation indirect. The following hypothesis is formulated:

**H8:** “The effect of influencer type on brand attitude and corporate reputation is moderated by influencer fit with the brand”.

## **2.8 Moderating role of brand experience**

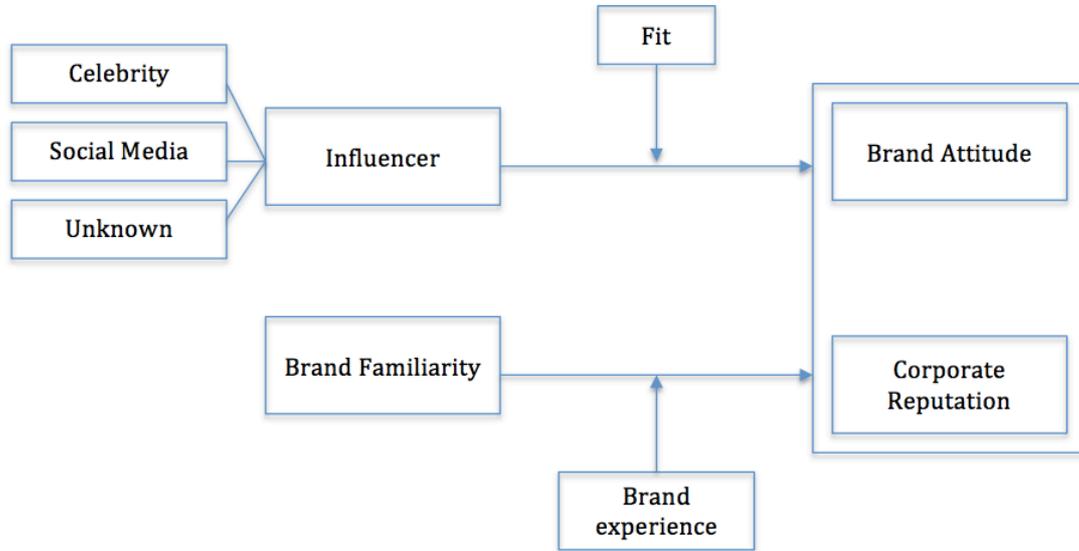
A consumer who has gone through the process of information search, decision-making and/or product usage is considered to be experienced. Experience with a brand could cause a deeper meaning and could be less forgettable, which can allow for greater customer trust. Familiarity and brand experience are important ingredients for consumer knowledge and could have great influence on consumer cognitive patterns (Ha & Perks, 2005). This is why it is taken into account within this research.

The distinction between the two terms is that people who do not have experience with a brand are more likely to use extrinsic instead of intrinsic hints in brand evaluations, because relatively they have less intrinsic brand information in reminiscence and a less developed outline, which makes intrinsic information more difficult to process. Thus, people could be familiar with a certain brand, but when they

do not have experience, their evaluations are likely to be different (Ha & Perks, 2005). The last hypothesis is formulated:

**H9:** “The effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation is moderated by brand experience.”

Distracted from this, the following conceptual model can be drawn (figure 2):



**Figure 2** Conceptual model

### **3. METHOD**

In this chapter the method of the research will be described. This consists of the research design (3.1), the stimulus material (3.2), the measures (3.3), the procedure and participants (3.4), validity (3.5) and respondents (3.6).

#### **3.1 Design**

This research was conducted through an online experiment. This method directly measures causality (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). The respondents received an introduction text in which the brand they were exposed to in the stimulus material was described and were exposed to stimulus material (described in paragraph 3.2). After that, they answered multiple questions about brand familiarity, brand experience, influencer fit, corporate reputation and brand attitude of the brand mentioned in the stimulus material. An experimental 3x2 design was used. The questionnaire ended with some general questions about demographics.

#### **3.2 Stimulus material**

The respondents of the first group (celebrity influencer x familiar brand) were exposed to a post with a celebrity, a well-known product brand and a well-known corporate brand. The respondents of the second group (social media influencer x familiar brand) were exposed to a post including a social media influencer, a well known product brand and a well-known corporate brand, whereas the third group (unknown x familiar brand) received a post with an unknown person, a well-known product brand and a well-known corporate brand. The fourth group (celebrity x unfamiliar brand) got a post including a celebrity, an unfamiliar product brand and an unfamiliar corporate brand. The fifth group (social media x unfamiliar brand) received a post with a social media influencer, an unfamiliar product brand and an unfamiliar corporate brand. The last group (unkown x unfamiliar brand) received a post with an unkown person, an unfamiliar product brand and an unfamiliar corporate brand. The six conditions were labeled from A to F. The stimulus material can be found in appendix A.

##### *3.2.1 Stimulus material and manipulation checks*

The independent variables, influencer type and brand familiarity, were used to make the stimulus material. There are six conditions which all include a combination of the two variables (as explained in section 3.2). As an overall theme of the stimulus materials, sports was chosen to make the stimulus material differ as less as possible. The results of the recognition of the influencer are depicted in table 1.

For type of influencer, there are three categories: celebrity, (social media) influencer and an unknown person. For the celebrity Doutzen Kroes was selected, because the survey was held in the Netherlands and she is a model, which could be associated with a sportive lifestyle. For the (social media) influencer Marit Kloosterboer (@fitwithmarit) was selected, because the survey was held in the Netherlands and she is an influencer in sports. For the unknown person, a random sportive looking woman (with sportive clothes and physique) was selected.

For brand familiarity, the well-known brand Nike was selected as a familiar brand, because it was expected that most of the respondents would know this brand. For the unfamiliar brand, a brand called YS was made up. The reason why a fictive brand was used is because it enables to check whether respondents answered veraciously on the question of brand familiarity, and thereby the stimulus material could be checked.

For groups A to C, who were exposed to the well-known brand, all filled in that they were familiar with the brand. The groups D to F, who are exposed to a fictive brand, only one respondent filled in that he/she knew the brand. Group A & D are expected to know the influencer, only one for group A and two for group D do not know Doutzen Kroes. Most people do not know Marit Kloosterboer (group B & E). It is expected that no one knows the person that is exposed to group C & F, but 9 people say they do. From this table it can be concluded that most of the stimulus material was perceived as it should.

**Table 1** Frequencies stimulus material

Group	Brand familiarity	Influencer recognition		
		Unknown	Known	Neutral
A	Familiar 27/27	1	26	0
B	Familiar 35/35	29	3	3
C	Familiar 22/22	13	8	1
D	Unfamiliar 24/25	2	23	0
E	Unfamiliar 33/33	27	3	3
F	Unfamiliar 29/29	26	1	2

### 3.3 Measures

The variables that were measured in this research are brand attitude, corporate reputation, brand familiarity, brand experience and influencer fit. Six items measured brand attitude on a 5-point Likert-scale from agree to disagree: this is a good product, this product is satisfactory, this product is pleasant, this product is valuable, I would prefer this product above others and this product is sensible (Kardes & Herr, 1992; Kudeshia and Kumas, 2016; Low & Jr, 2000).

Corporate reputation was measured with the RepTrak® Model (Reputation Institute, 2014), as depicted in figure 1. The variables were: product/services, innovation, workplace, governance, citizenship, leadership and performance. The four overall themes of these variables are esteem, admire, trust and feeling. One item measured each theme: I esteem this brand (Nike/YS), I admire this brand (Nike/YS), I trust this brand (Nike/YS) and I have a good feeling when I think of this brand (Nike/YS). In order to maintain consistency, the items were measured on a 5-point Likert-scale.

Brand familiarity was measured with one item (are you familiar with the brand Nike/YS?) answered with either yes or no. If yes, the respondents were exposed to the item that measured brand experience, on a 5-point Likert-scale from disagree to agree: I buy a product of this brand on a regular basis.

The influencer fit with the brand was measured with the following question answered on a 5-point Likert-scale from disagree to agree: do you think that the person on the picture fits with the brand?

### 3.4 Procedure

The research was spread through a survey with use of the survey tool Qualtrics, to acquaintances of the researcher and through Facebook. Thus, participants were gained through Snowball sampling. The survey started with a short introduction of the brand and influencer concerned. Then, the stimulus material was exposed to the participant followed by the questions about brand familiarity and influencer fit. After that, they were asked about their brand attitude and corporate reputation through the previously mentioned measures. The survey ended with demographic questions such as age and gender. The participants were thanked afterwards. When all data was gathered, the data was analyzed through SPSS.

### 3.5 Validity

In order to measure the validity of the dataset, the sensibleness was tested through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure. The KMO value for the dataset is 0.824, which is above 0.5 and thereby considered to be enough for factor analysis (Williams, Onsmann & Brown, 2010). The SPSS output for KMO can be found in appendix C.

The factor analysis for this research is depicted in table 2. The items for influencer fit and brand familiarity were not taken into account for the factor analysis, because they consist of only one item. For the 'brand experience' scale three out of five items were deleted in order to get a Cronbach's alpha score close to 0,7. Unfortunately, it could not get any higher than 0.6. The items did not have a corrected item-total correlation score above 0,3, so the items were deleted. The items that were deleted are 'I have once bought a product of this brand', 'I know the brand but I have not bought any products yet' and 'I would evaluate my experience with the brand positively'. It is decided to take the item 'I buy a product of this brand on a regular basis' into account, because it has more significant correlations with the other variables than the other item that was left and has the highest score in the factor analysis (0.83). The Cronbach's alpha scores for the other scales were above 0,7 and thereby reliable enough. The Cronbach's alpha scores are depicted in table 2, as well as the factor analysis.

**Table 2** Factor analysis and Cronbach's alpha

Items	Components		
	Reputation	Brand attitude	Brand experience
I esteem this brand (Nike/YS).	,87		
I admire this brand (Nike/YS).	,81		
I trust this brand (Nike/YS).	,76		
I have a good feeling when I think of this brand (Nike/YS).	,84		

This is a good product.					,58
This product is satisfactory.					,69
This product is pleasant.					,60
This product is valuable.					,68
I would prefer this product above others.					,72
This product is sensible					,78
I buy a product of this brand on a regular basis.					,83
I have consciously visited a store of this brand					,76
	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0,88</b>	<b>0,80</b>	<b>0,6</b>	

### 3.6 Respondents

The number of respondents in this research ( $N$ ) is 183. The survey was targeted at people aged between 18 and 30 years old and the respondents were exposed to one of the six stimulus materials. In table 3, the respondent characteristics are shown. The number of respondents per group was supposed to be 30, but for some of the groups the number of respondents is beneath 30 (C and F). It could be the case that the tool which was used to collect the responses did not spread the survey as it should have, but it could also be the case that a lot of respondents who had to fill in the survey for C and F stopped before they finished. Maybe it is not a coincidence that C and F both include the unknown person and both have fewer responses. The next section provides the results of the research.

**Table 3** Respondent/sample characteristics

		N	%	Total	Missing values
Age	18 t/m 30	178	97,3	183	5
Gender	Male	80	43,7	183	9
	Female	94	51,4		
	Total	174	95,1		
Stimulus material group	A	34	18,6	183	0
	B	35	19,1		
	C	22	12,0		
	D	30	16,4		
	E	33	18,0		
	F	29	15,8		
	Total	183	100		

## 4. RESULTS

This section consists of the results of the research. In paragraph 4.1 the correlations of the constructs are given. In section 4.2 the results of a multivariate regression are given, in section 4.3 the results of the moderation analyses are provided, in section 4.4 an overview of the rejected or supported hypotheses is given and in section 4.5 additional analyses are elaborated.

In order to be able to categorize the cases in groups according to the influencer type they were exposed to, a dummy variable has been computed which allocates the cases to the six groups (A through F). Also, there have been computed three variables for the groups ‘celebrity’ (group A & D), ‘social media influencer’ (group B & E) and ‘unknown person’ (group C & F), to be able to analyze the groups separately. By doing this, there is no distinction between known or unknown brand anymore between the groups and the only difference is influencer type.

### 4.1 Correlations

A Pearson correlation test was conducted to find out which constructs correlate with each another (table 4). There are eight significant correlations in the table, displayed in bold. One of the correlations (brand familiarity x brand experience) could not be computed because only if brand familiarity was answered with ‘yes’, the question for brand experience was showed to the respondent. This means that for respondents that filled in the brand experience question, their answer for brand familiarity was always ‘yes’. When measuring the correlation between brand familiarity and brand experience, there is a constant value for brand familiarity. Thus, there is no correlation possible between these two variables.

**Table 4** Mean, standard deviations and Pearson’s correlations

Variables	N	M	SD	Brand Attitude	Brand Experience	Corporate Reputation	Brand Familiarity	Influencer Fit	Influencer type
Brand Attitude	182	3.12	0.67	1					
Brand Experience	93	2.94	1.49	<b>0.23*</b>	1				
Corporate Reputation	183	3.55	0.83	<b>0.50**</b>	<b>0.28**</b>	1			
Brand Familiarity	183	0.51	0.50	<b>0.21**</b>	-	<b>0.37**</b>	1		
Influencer fit	183	3.61	0.99	<b>0.20**</b>	-0.02	<b>0.19**</b>	-0.03	1	
Influencer type	183	1.93	0.79	0.09	0.14	0.04	-0.10	<b>-0.18*</b>	1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

## 4.2 Multivariate regression

The regression analysis for this research has to be conducted for two independent variables (brand familiarity and influencer type) and two dependent variables (brand attitude and corporate reputation), so it has to be conducted by using a MANOVA test for multivariate regression.

To prepare for the MANOVA test, several tests were done to see if the data met the conditions for a MANOVA test. First a check on multivariate normality of the dependent variables has been done. Both of the variables show a significant p-value (corporate reputation  $p=0,000$  and brand attitude  $p=0,003$ ) for the Shapiro-Wilk test, thus normality is not assumed. The Mahalanobis distance was checked and had a score of  $MD(N=182, df=2, MD<13.82, p>0.001)$ , in this case we can assume multivariate normality.

Also, it has been checked whether the two independent variables were linear related to each other. In appendix C the matrix plots are depicted, that indicate linear relationships between both variables. Last, the correlation between the dependent variables was checked (depicted in table 5), which is 0.5 and  $r=(0.2 < 0.5 < 0.9)$ . Therefore, it is assumed that the variables are related but not multicollinear. Which is good enough for MANOVA.

The multivariate test was done and since the Shapiro-Wilk test did not show normality, we take the Pillai's Trace into account. The Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices gives a value of  $p > 0.05$ , so it is assumed that the groups do not have different covariance matrices, which is desirable. In table 5 the results of the MANOVA test can be found. The significant results can be distinguished because they are depicted in bold.

**Table 5** Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA)

	F	p-value
Influencer type	0.702	0.591
Brand familiarity	13.860	<b>0.000</b>
Influencer type * brand familiarity	0.402	0.808

Dependent variables: brand attitude and corporate reputation

The null hypothesis for brand familiarity was rejected ( $F=13,86, p<0.001$ ), because the p-value is significant; there is a main-effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation. The groups within the variable (familiar or unfamiliar) differ on the combination of brand attitude and corporate reputation. This means that both of the dependent variables should continue to be analyzed separately for brand familiarity. Also, the p-values for both of the dependent variables are significant for brand familiarity, thus there is a difference between the two groups (familiar and unfamiliar) for both brand attitude and corporate reputation. In order to specify the difference between the groups (familiar and unfamiliar) on the two dependent variables, the tests

of Between-Subjects Effects has been taken into account. In table 6 the results are depicted.

**Table 6** Means and standard deviations for the independent variables for each group

	Brand familiarity		Influencer type		
	Familiar	Unfamiliar	Celebrity	Influencer	Unknown
Brand attitude	3.25(0.67)**	2.97(0.63)**	3.03(0.67)	3.15(0.65)	3.17(0.69)
Corporate reputation	3.84(0.88)**	3.24(0.64)**	3.51(0.71)	3.56(0.88)	3.58(0.91)

Note. M(SD)

\*\* Significant at  $p < 0.01$

For both familiar and unfamiliar brands, the corporate reputation is significantly higher than the brand attitude. Also, familiar brands score significantly higher on brand attitude than unfamiliar brands, as well as familiar brands score significantly higher on corporate reputation than unfamiliar brands.

Rejection of the null hypothesis failed for influencer type ( $F=0,702$ ,  $p>0.05$ ), this means that the three groups within the variable influencer type do not differ significantly on the combination of brand attitude and corporate reputation, which means that both dependent variables could be further analyzed as one dependent variable. Also, there is no significant difference between the groups and their effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation.

The interaction effect between both of the variables (brand familiarity and influencer type) is neither significant. In table 7, the means and standard deviations of the interaction are given.

**Table 7** Means and standard deviations for the interaction brand familiarity \* influencer type

	Familiar brand			Unfamiliar brand		
	Celebrity	Influencer	Unknown	Celebrity	Influencer	Unknown
Brand attitude	3.22(0.63)	3.28(0.64)	3.27(0.80)	2.78(0.63)	3.02(0.65)	3.10(0.59)
Corporate reputation	3.81(0.73)	3.81(0.93)	3.93(1.06)	3.11(0.47)	3.29(0.75)	3.31(0.67)

In the Bonferroni tests for brand attitude and corporate reputation the results of the MANOVA are visually revealed. Figure 3 shows the results for brand attitude (left) and corporate reputation (right).

From the figures it becomes clear that there is a difference between familiar and unfamiliar brands and there is a small difference between the groups of influencer type. The biggest difference between the groups is for brand attitude: the mean for celebrities is much lower than those of influencers and unknown persons. Apparently, these results

were not significant. Last, it is clear that there is no interaction effect; the lines do not cross each other.

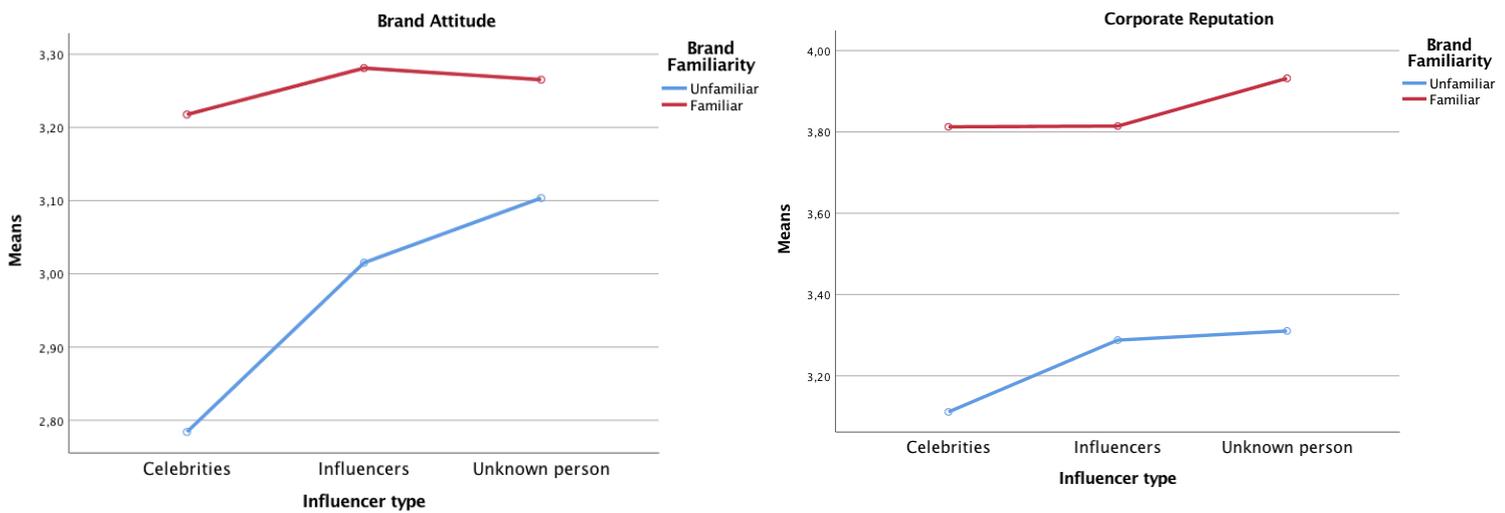


Figure 3 Bonferroni plots for brand attitude and corporate reputation

### 4.3 Moderation analyses

In order to find out whether there is a moderating effect of influencer fit on the interaction between influencer type and brand attitude/corporate reputation and of brand experience on the interaction between brand familiarity and brand attitude/corporate reputation, moderation analysis has been conducted through linear regression analysis.

To prepare for the analysis of the moderator influencer fit, several steps had to be taken. First, the variables brand attitude and corporate reputation were merged, because out of the multivariate regression analysis it was learned that for the variable influencer type these dependent variables could be seen as one dependent variable (the items were summed up and divided by the number of items, which resulted in a new variable: brand attitude/corporate reputation). Second, the independent variables influencer type and influencer fit were standardized by using the standardize option in SPSS (descriptive statistics → save standardized values as variables), after that another variable was computed which multiplies the two standardized variables with each other. At last, a linear regression analysis has been conducted, with the combination of corporate reputation and brand attitude as dependent variable and the standardized variables of influencer fit and influencer type and the combined variable for influencer type x influencer fit as independent variables. In table 8 the results of the linear regression analysis are depicted, in the appendix C the SPSS output can be found.

**Table 8** Moderator influencer fit on the effect of influencer type on brand attitude/corporate reputation

Dependent variable	Independent variable(s)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	t	p-value
Brand attitude/ corporate reputation	Moderator influencer fit * influencer type	0.056	0.129	1.776	0.077

The moderator influencer fit x influencer type has a positive regression, the better the person fits, the higher the coherence between influencer type and brand attitude/corporate reputation. However, the result is not significant. It is a bit higher than 0.05 so the result could be a coincidence.

Also for the moderator brand experience on the interaction between brand familiarity and corporate reputation/brand attitude, several variables had to be computed. First, the independent variables brand familiarity and brand experience had to be standardized. Second, a new variable was computed which multiplies the two standardized variables with each other. At last, two linear regression analyses were conducted, with the dependent variables brand attitude and corporate reputation separately. To wit, for brand familiarity, brand attitude and corporate reputation cannot be analyzed as one dependent variable (according to the multivariate regression analysis). In table 9 the results of the linear regression analyses are depicted, in appendix C the SPSS output can be found.

**Table 9** Moderator brand experience on the effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation

Dependent variable	Independent variable(s)	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Beta	t	p-value
Brand attitude	Moderator brand experience * brand familiarity	0.041	0.154	2.23	0.028
Corporate reputation	Moderator brand experience * brand familiarity	0.067	0.235	2.76	0.007

For brand attitude, there is a positive regression with the moderator brand experience x brand familiarity: the more experience with the brand, the higher the coherence between brand familiarity and brand attitude. The result is significant and not a coincidence. For corporate reputation there is a positive regression as well, with the moderator brand experience \* brand familiarity: the more experience with the brand, the higher the coherence between brand familiarity and corporate reputation. In this case, the result is significant ( $p < 0.05$ ); the result is not a coincidence.

#### 4.4 Results of the hypotheses

The analyses can be used to test the formulated hypotheses (nine in total). An overview of the supported and rejected hypotheses is given in table 10. Only hypotheses 4, 5 and 9 were supported. Many of the rejected hypotheses tended to be supported, but when it comes to significance they were not.

**Table 10** Overview of tested hypotheses

H	Formulation	Supported	Rejected
1	“(Social media) Influencers have a stronger positive effect on brand attitude than on corporate reputation”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2	“Social media influencers have a stronger effect on brand attitude than celebrity influencers”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3	“Celebrities have a stronger effect on corporate reputation than social media influencers”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4	“Brand familiarity has a positive influence on brand attitude”	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	“Brand familiarity has a positive influence on corporate reputation”	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6	“Celebrities have a greater positive influence on brand attitude and corporate reputation for unfamiliar brands, compared to social media influencers”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
7	“Social media influencers have a stronger positive influence on brand attitude and corporate reputation for familiar brands, compared to celebrity influencers”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
8	“The effect of influencer type on brand attitude and corporate reputation is moderated by influencer fit with the brand”	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
9	“The effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation is moderated by brand experience”	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

#### 4.5 Additional analyses

In the correlations table (4) there are several significant correlations, which were not analyzed yet because they were not expected in the hypotheses. In this section, the remaining significant correlations will be analyzed with use of linear regression (table 11). In figure 4, the initial research model was shown, including the supported

hypotheses and significant results. In figure 5 a new research model is depicted, excluding the rejected hypotheses and including the additional analyses.

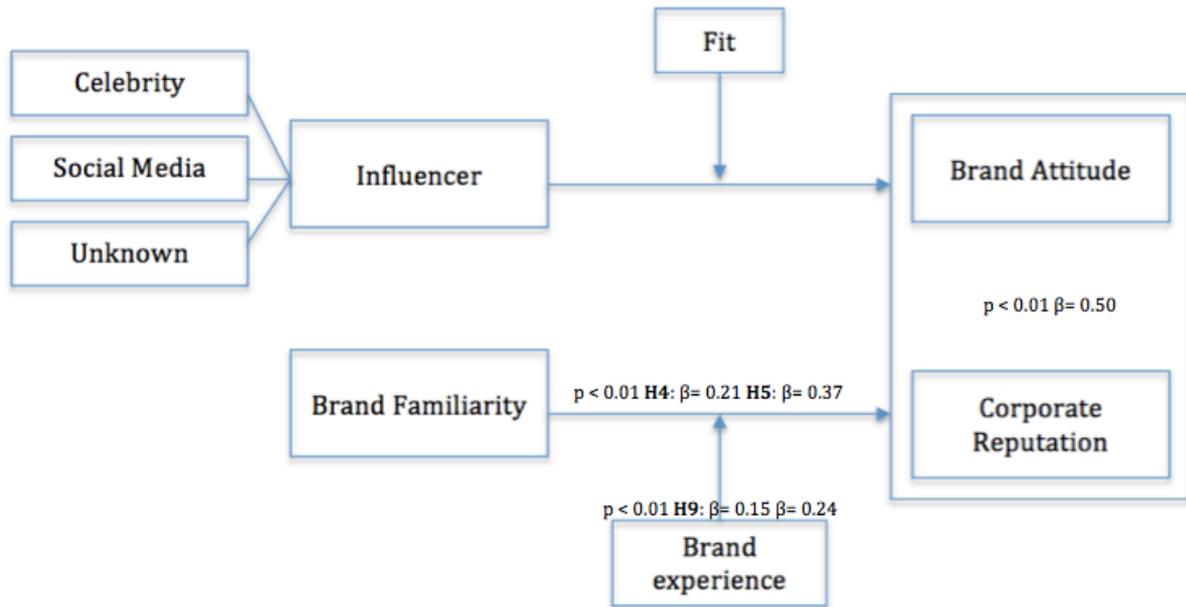
**Table 11** Overview of additional regression analyses

<b>Independent variable</b>	<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Adjusted R<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>p-value</b>
Influencer fit	Brand attitude	4.43	0.09	0.002
	Corporate reputation	2.51	0.05	0.043
	Influencer type	6.12	0.03	0.014
Influencer type	Influencer fit	6.12	0.03	0.014
Brand experience	Brand attitude	4.96	0.04	0.028
	Corporate reputation	7.61	0.07	0.007

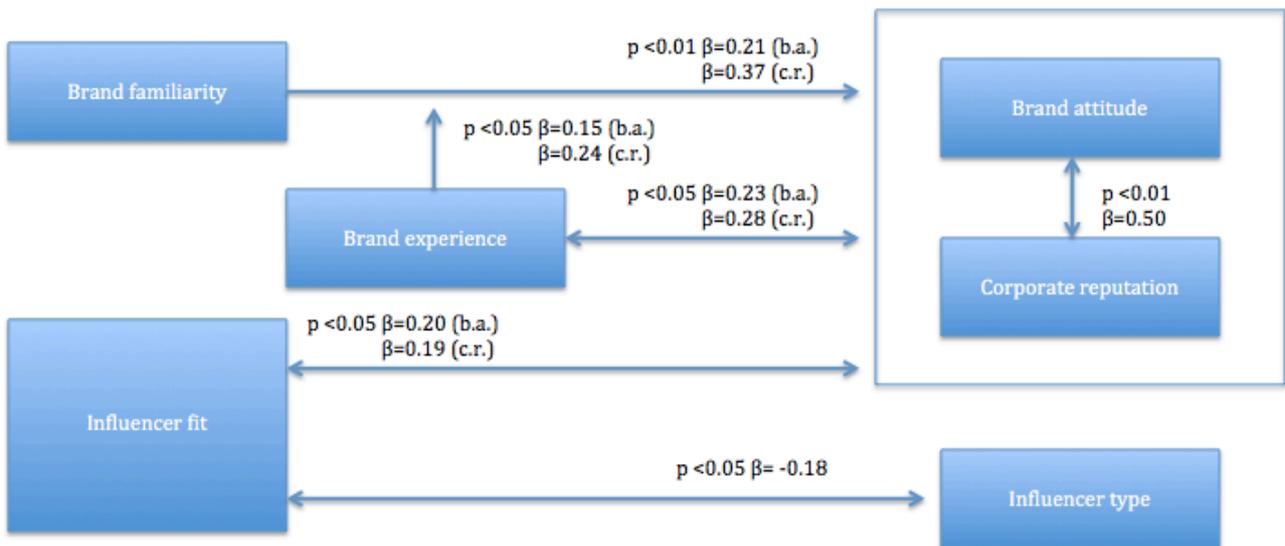
In addition, there were a few questions asked about the type of influencer that respondents were exposed to. They were not necessary in this research but it gives insight in the respondents' views and starting points. The means and standard deviations are depicted in table 12.

**Table 12** Means, standard deviations, *N* of influencer questions

		<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>N</b>
'I identify with Doutzen Kroes/Marit Kloosterboer/Anna'	Celebrity	1.45	0.82	64
	Influencer	1.71	0.98	68
	Unknown person	1.88	1.05	51
'I follow Doutzen Kroes/Marit Kloosterboer/Anna on social media'	Celebrity	2.39	1.63	64
	Influencer	1.18	0.76	67
	Unknown person	1.37	0.98	51



**Figure 4** Initial research model, including supported hypotheses



**Figure 5** Adjusted research model (b.a. = brand attitude, c.r.= corporate reputation)

## 5. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to answer the following research question: “What is the effect of influencer type and brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation, which influencer type fits best with a(n) (un)familiar brand, and what are the roles of influencer fit and brand experience?”

It was expected that social media influencers have a stronger positive effect on brand attitude than on corporate reputation. This was not supported; brand attitude and corporate reputation could be seen as one variable for influencer type. The differences between brand attitude and corporate reputation do not play a role in the effect of influencers. It seems that composing the business’ influencer strategy does not depend on the difference between these two purposes (brand attitude or corporate reputation). The fact that many researches state that influencers have a positive effect on consumers’ evaluations (IZEA, 2017; Woods, 2016) and this is not proved significantly within this study could be a result of the focus of the researches. This research was focused on the differences between brand attitude and corporate reputation when it comes to influencers, whereas these researches focus on product or brand attitude. Apparently, studies focused on marketing purposes show more positive results of influencers than when marketing and corporate evaluations are combined.

Pedroni (2016) stated that social media influencers become more and more equal to celebrities. In this research, when focusing on brand attitude and corporate reputation, we could state that this is true. However, the use of an unknown person was not significantly different to the use of social media influencers and celebrities. Thus, we can say that social media influencers and celebrities both have the same effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation, but their effect is not significantly different to the effect of an unknown person. Namely, there is no significant effect found in this research between influencer type and brand attitude or corporate reputation. There was no significant difference among the groups.

There was a significant positive effect found of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation. Heath (1990) was right when he stated that the more familiar people are to certain stimuli, the more they perceive to like it (as cited by Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996). Apparently, in this research, brand familiarity serves as cue for quality (Benedicktus, Brady, Darke & Voorhees, 2010) and as a main part of the preference and attitude formation of respondents (Zajonc & Markus, 1982, as cited by Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996). Perera and Chaminda (2013) stated that a high level of brand familiarity causes a greater brand attitude; this is confirmed within this research. This is also the case for corporate reputation; Lewis (1999) stated that the better known a company is, the better the reputation of the company. Besides that, the difference in the effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation was significant as well. This means that brand familiarity had a significant stronger positive effect on corporate reputation than on brand attitude, regardless of the type of influencer. The variables are seen as two separates. It is assumed that this could be due to the

previously build up reputation that respondents had about the brand Nike, and they just did not like the product they were exposed to.

In case of an unfamiliar brand, it was expected that celebrities have a greater effect than social media influencers. This turned out to be false; influencers scored higher on both brand attitude and corporate reputation than celebrities for an unfamiliar brand, and besides that an unknown person gives even better results for both brand attitude and corporate reputation. In case of a familiar brand, it was expected that influencers have a greater effect than celebrities. For brand attitude, this is true. For corporate reputation it is not true, celebrities score higher than influencers, but unknown persons score even higher. The statement of Kolarova (2018) which claims that social media influencers combined with a familiar brand has a more positive effect on brand evaluations than celebrity influencers, does apply to brand attitude but not to corporate reputation, for this research. For unfamiliar brands, it was expected that celebrities have more impact on brand evaluations than influencers (Freberg et al., 2010), which is not the case in this research. Influencers score higher on brand attitude and corporate reputation and unknown persons even higher. Unfortunately, the results were not significant, and so they could be a coincidence.

Although it was expected that there was an interaction effect between influencer type and brand familiarity, this was not the case. It was expected that celebrity influencers have a greater effect on corporate reputation and social media influencers have a greater effect on brand attitude. However, it seems that there is no difference in the use of influencers for familiar or unfamiliar brands when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation. A familiar brand has more effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation, and it seems that the use of influencers does not help unfamiliar brands to achieve a higher brand attitude or corporate reputation. It could also be the case that social media influencers and celebrities are more and more difficult to distinguish, as was stated by Pedroni (2016).

Influencer fit does not play a moderating role on the effect of influencer type on brand attitude and corporate reputation, but it turns out to have a positive direct effect on brand attitude, corporate reputation and influencer type. When the influencer is perceived to fit with the brand, the brand attitude and corporate reputation are higher. Thus, also in this case it becomes clear that there should be a fit between the influencer and the brand, as stated by Doss (2011). In this research, the influencer fit with the brand seems to be more important than the type of influencer when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation. For companies this would mean that it is more important to focus on influencer fit than on influencer type when composing influencer strategies, since influencer type does not have a significant effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation. Also, the significant negative effect of influencer fit on influencer type, shows that respondents perceive that celebrities fit more with a brand than unknown persons or influencers.

Brand experience has a significant moderating role on the effect of brand familiarity on brand attitude and corporate reputation. The more experience with the brand, the higher the coherence between brand familiarity and brand attitude or

corporate reputation. Brand experience moderates the interaction between brand familiarity and brand attitude, as well as the interaction between brand familiarity and corporate reputation. The statement of Ha and Perks (2005) is confirmed; familiarity and brand experience have great influence on consumers' outcomes. When the respondent buys products of the brand on a regular basis, familiarity with the brand leads to a higher brand attitude and corporate reputation, than when they just know the brand but do not frequently buy anything. There was a significant direct effect of brand experience on brand attitude and corporate reputation found as well.

The next section will elaborate on the limitations of the research.

## 6. LIMITATIONS

As a reflection on the research, the limitations should be elaborated. The limitations have to be taken into account when considering recommendations that are derived from the research.

The survey was spread through Snowball sampling. This means that the researcher shared the survey (in this case through social media) and respondents shared it further and further. For this reason, all respondents were in (the extension of) the researchers' network, which could cause bias. Also, since the survey was in Dutch and the survey was spread in the Netherlands, the results cannot be generalized.

Besides that, there was only one celebrity, influencer and an unknown person used as stimulus material. When other people were used, the results might have been different than they are now. This also applies to the brands that were used in the stimulus materials; the results might have been different when other brands were used. The unknown brand was fictive in order to make sure that no one could actually recognize it, but maybe it could influence the results when an existing less known brand is used.

As stated by Pedroni (2016), consumers tend to identify more with influencers than celebrities. In this research this is true, strictly taken. The mean for influencers was higher than the mean of celebrities, but they do not identify with both of them. It was also asked whether they followed the celebrity/influencer, they followed the celebrity more often than the influencer but also in this case, the means were both on the negative side (totally disagree and disagree). This makes it plausible that the respondents did not identify with the celebrity, influencer and unknown person that were used in the stimulus materials. Many respondents did not know the social media influencer, so the influencer that was used was not close to a celebrity just like some influencers are, which was done on purpose to make a clear distinction between celebrity influencers and social media influencers. Maybe the results would have been different if one of the more famous social media influencers was used. The social media influencer could have the same effect of an unknown person within this research, for people who did not know the social media influencer. Furthermore, the absence of an influencer (a person) and a brand on a picture was not measured within this research; this made it impossible to derive statements about the effect of influencers (in terms of an individual on a picture).

Also, the fact that there were no significant differences between celebrities and influencers could be due to the fact that celebrities tend to act more like influencers by getting more personal with 'normal' people (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017). Of course, the lack of differences could be caused by the dependent variables that were used (brand attitude and corporate reputation). There might be significant differences that could be detected by other variables. Also, the variables influencer fit, brand familiarity and brand experience could have been more extendedly measured, for example on multiple items.

Looking back on selecting and testing the stimulus material, this could have been done more extendedly. It was decided to use sportive influencer types and all female, to

minimalize differences between them, but this was not based on any literature. For the unknown person, a female with a black skin color was used whereas the celebrity and influencer had a white skin color, causing that some respondents who were exposed to the unknown person thought that the research had anything to do with skin color (they mentioned it in the open question 'why do you think the influencer fits with the brand?'). The person was only chosen because the image was the most suitable for the Photoshop adjustments. It might have had an influence on the results, because some people could have answered extra positive to show that they were not influenced by ethnicity, or something like that. But this was not a variable at all, the answer was not expected on beforehand.

Another limitation is that the stimulus material only consisted of a picture, without any cues of the social media platform it was posted on. The results might have been different when this was included, just like the number of likes or followers and whether the post was sponsored or not. It was chosen not to do so to minimalize the differences between the stimulus material and the lack of research on how many likes or followers would indicate an influencer or a celebrity.

The testing of the stimulus material has been done with use of the question whether the respondents knew the person, but the question that should have been asked is whether they thought they were looking at a celebrity, an influencer or an unknown person. The confusion about whether they were looking at a celebrity, influencer or unknown person could have influenced the results. Respondents were not clearly enough informed that there were six categories, and that they were exposed to only one of them. The reason why this was done is to prevent bias and measure primary reactions to the stimulus material, but in some cases it raised up questions.

A last limitation is that through a survey, respondents fill in what they think and not what they actually will do. Influencing people through images is most of the time an unconscious process. People think that something does not influence them, but in fact, sometimes it will influence them without their awareness. In this research it has been tried to reduce the effect of this, by using a control group with an unknown person.

## **7. IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

In this section, the theoretical and future research (7.1) and practical implications and future research (7.2) will be discussed.

### **7.1 Theoretical implications and future research**

This research shows that when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation, brand familiarity and experience is of great importance. This is a confirmation of many researches that have been conducted so far (Lange & Dahlén, 2003); Laroche, Kim & Zhou, 1996; Lewis, 1999). Out of this research, it becomes clear that there is no interaction effect between influencer type and brand familiarity. So it does not matter which type of influencer is used for a familiar brand or an unfamiliar brand when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation. Brand experience should be taken into account when comparing brands.

Furthermore, influencer type does not have a significant effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation. Quite a lot (of the few) researches on influencers are focused on influencer type and include comparisons of various levels of influencers: celebrity vs. social media influencer, micro- vs. meso-influencer, and so on (Hearn & Schoenhoff, 2017; Knittel & Stango, 2012, Pedroni, 2016; Schaefer, 2012). However, it turns out to be more important to focus on influencer fit when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation, because it has a direct effect on both of them. More research could be conducted on influencer fit with the product, the brand or the social media platform, for example. There might be an interaction effect between influencer fit and brand familiarity. Besides that, more research should be conducted on the effect between influencer type and influencer fit.

Also, because there is not that much research conducted on influencers yet, there should be conducted research on influencers from many different angles and disciplines, for example psychology or neuroscience (in order to find out the unconsciousness). It is recommended to use another research method than a survey, to collect data that is more reliable and to measure respondents' physical reactions and emotions.

For future research it is also recommended to conduct scales to classify influencers unambiguously, including categories for number of followers, likes, etcetera. If this turns out to be impossible, influencers should be seen as one group (influencers are celebrities and celebrities are influencers).

### **7.2 Practical implications and future research**

A practical implication of this research is that for business owners or marketing officers, it is recommended to take the influencer fit with the brand into account rather than the influencer type, when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation. Out of this research, we cannot conclude that influencer marketing has a significant effect, but we can say that the type of influencer does not matter for both familiar and unfamiliar brands, when it comes to brand attitude and corporate reputation. Since brand familiarity has a positive influence on brand attitude and corporate reputation, it is recommended to make sure that people recognize and are familiar with your brand.

Also, the fact that influencer type does not affect brand attitude and corporate reputation, it does not mean that advertising through blogs or Instagram for example is not effective.

Besides that, for practice, it is necessary to keep track of the popularity of influencers and social media platforms. It could be that with the disappearance or reduced popularity of for example Instagram, just like what is happening to Facebook nowadays, influencers will not be an interesting research topic anymore in the future.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Nowadays influencer marketing is a hot topic. However, relatively little research has been conducted on it. In this research, the goal was to find out what influencer type should be used when regarding brand attitude and corporate reputation and which influencer type fits best with familiar and unfamiliar brands in terms of brand attitude and corporate reputation. Influencer fit and brand experience were taken into account as moderators.

The research was conducted with use of an online survey in which respondents were exposed to stimulus material. There were six conditions, which were derived from the 3x2 experiment: celebrity, influencer or unknown person x familiar brand or unfamiliar brand. The independent variables influencer type and brand familiarity were tested on the dependent variables brand attitude and corporate reputation.

From the results it can be concluded that influencer type does not have a significant effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation and influencer fit does not have a moderating role on the effect of influencer type on brand attitude and corporate reputation. On the other hand, brand familiarity does have a positive significant effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation, as well as brand experience has a direct positive effect on the dependent variables and a moderating effect on the effect of brand familiarity on the dependent variables. There was no interaction effect between influencer type and brand familiarity, so we cannot say that for an unfamiliar or familiar brand a particular influencer type is more efficient to use. However, influencer fit turned out to have a positive significant effect on brand attitude and corporate reputation. So, if an influencer has a perceived fit with a brand, the brand attitude and corporate reputation are more positive.

The research shows that brand attitude and corporate reputation are not affected by influencer type, but since there is a huge area still uncultivated and regarding the limitations of this research, it is advised to test multiple other variables on influencer type and besides that, investigate more on the effect of influencer fit on brand attitude and corporate reputation.

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