

Navigating the creator economy:
An investigation of content design strategies to enhance
consumer engagement on social media

Jasper David Brüns

Vollständiger Abdruck der von der TUM School of Management der Technischen Universität München zur Erlangung eines

Doktors der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften (Dr. rer. pol.)

genehmigten Dissertation.

Vorsitz: Prof. Dr. Sebastian Müller

Prüfende der Dissertation:

1. Prof. Dr. Martin Meißner
2. Prof. Dr. Harmen Oppewal

Die Dissertation wurde am 09.10.2024 bei der Technischen Universität München eingereicht und durch die TUM School of Management am 15.11.2024 angenommen.

Acknowledgements

As I complete my doctorate, I reach the end of a journey. To all those who have said it is a marathon, not a sprint – you were indeed right. Throughout this journey, I have gained rich experiences and learned important lessons about academia, social relations, and the value of effective communication. I also learned a lot about leadership, teamwork, and friendship. Above all, I believe I learned a great deal about myself and self-management. I will treasure these lessons and carry them forward into my next adventure, feeling well-prepared to make the most of whatever awaits me. I would like to thank those who accompanied me on my way.

First and foremost, I express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Martin Meißner. At this point, I barely remember a time not working together with you. Your mentorship throughout the years has been excellent. It has endowed me with the right balance of freedom and guidance to thrive holistically as an academic, and I could count on your thorough and honest advice in every situation. Particularly, your curiosity and passion have been a consistent source of inspiration, and I hope to embody these qualities in my future endeavors as well. I would also like to thank Prof. Dr. Harmen Oppewal for being the second examiner of my dissertation, and for kindly inviting me to Monash University as a visiting researcher. My time in Melbourne was transformative, and I truly enjoyed your dedication and the spirit of our collaboration. Thank you to Prof. Dr. Sebastian Müller for chairing the examining commission and to Prof. Dr. Jochen Hartmann for serving as a mentor in my doctoral studies. I appreciate your support a lot.

A wholehearted thank you to the Center for Digital Transformation at TUM School of Management, which provided me with a fantastic work environment and supportive colleagues who were always easy and pleasant to work with. I am specifically thankful to the team of the

Professorship of Digital Marketing, particularly my co-author and office mate from day one, Sara Alida Volkmer. I could not have wished for a nicer research group, and I will cherish the many lunches and discussions we shared. Thank you also to the Department of Marketing at Monash Business School. During my research stay, I felt welcome at every point in time, and I got to meet heaps of outstanding people who inspired me professionally and personally. This period, along with the relationships it fostered, holds a special place in my heart.

Finally, I am profoundly grateful to my family for their unwavering support throughout my journey. Eva, Knut, and Viktor, thank you for always being there for me, patiently listening to my stories time and again. By now, you have surely heard enough to become promising consumer researchers yourselves. I love you all.

Thank you to everyone involved. Your contributions have shaped who I am today.

Jasper

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to advance the literature on how social media creators can refine their content strategies to cultivate authentic consumer relationships and generate sustainable income streams. It is motivated by the growing importance of social media in shaping digital consumer engagement and the rise of the creator economy, where ordinary yet impactful users produce content to build and monetize their social influence. In this dynamic landscape, interactions between creators and consumers are increasingly affected by technological advances, evolving disclosure regulations, brand partnerships, alternative monetization models, and the prevalence of visual content formats. Against this backdrop, this dissertation contributes to four key research gaps: 1) consumer reactance to the adoption of generative AI for social media content creation and the implications of human-AI collaboration, 2) consumer perceptions of posts identified as sponsored content and the influence of salient product presentation, 3) the design of social media content to convert followers into paying subscribers on crowd-patronage platforms, and 4) the impact of visual design consistency in product ensembles on consumers' processing fluency and evaluations. Collectively, this dissertation emphasizes the importance of maintaining an authentic image, leveraging visual cues, and effectively navigating emerging technologies, platforms, and regulations that shape content creation and monetization. A diverse set of research methods—including experimental studies, surveys, eye-tracking, and field studies—provides rigorous insights into consumer behavior. This approach, which integrates self-reported, physiological, and archival data, investigates the mechanisms of consumer engagement and underscores the findings' real-world relevance. Creators and brands can utilize the insights from this dissertation to optimize editorial and commercial content to achieve their marketing goals while adhering to platform regulations.

Abstract in German

Diese Dissertation zielt darauf ab, die Literatur darüber zu erweitern, wie Creator ihre Strategien zur Gestaltung von Inhalten in sozialen Medien verfeinern können, um authentische Konsumentenbeziehungen aufzubauen und nachhaltige Einkommensströme zu generieren. Sie wird durch die wachsende Bedeutung von sozialen Medien für das Verbraucherengagement und den Aufstieg der Creator-Ökonomie motiviert, in der gewöhnliche, aber einflussreiche Nutzer:innen Inhalte erstellen, um ihren sozialen Einfluss auszubauen und zu monetarisieren. In diesem dynamischen Umfeld werden die Interaktionen mit Konsument:innen zunehmend durch technologische Fortschritte, neue Offenlegungsvorschriften, Markenpartnerschaften, alternative Modelle der Monetarisierung und die Verbreitung visueller Inhaltsformate beeinflusst. Vor diesem Hintergrund adressiert diese Dissertation vier zentrale Forschungslücken: 1) die Reaktanz der Konsument:innen gegenüber dem Einsatz generativer künstlicher Intelligenz zur Erstellung von Inhalten in sozialen Medien und die Auswirkungen der Zusammenarbeit von Mensch und künstlicher Intelligenz, 2) die Wahrnehmung von Beiträgen, die als gesponserte Inhalte identifiziert werden, sowie der Einfluss prominenter Produktpräsentationen, 3) die Gestaltung von Inhalten in sozialen Medien, um Follower in zahlende Abonnent:innen auf Crowd-Patronage-Plattformen zu konvertieren, und 4) die Auswirkung der Konsistenz des visuellen Designs von Produktkonstellationen auf die Verarbeitungsflüssigkeit und die Bewertung durch Konsument:innen. Insgesamt unterstreicht diese Dissertation die Bedeutung der Aufrechterhaltung einer authentischen Markenwahrnehmung, der gezielten Nutzung visueller Hinweise und der effektiven Navigation durch neue Technologien, Plattformen und Vorschriften, die sowohl die Inhaltserstellung als auch die Monetarisierung prägen. Eine Vielzahl von Forschungsmethoden—einschließlich

experimenteller Studien, Umfragen, Eye-Tracking und Feldstudien—bietet fundierte Einblicke in das Verbraucherverhalten. Dieser Ansatz, der selbstberichtete, physiologische und archivierte Daten integriert, untersucht die Mechanismen des Verbraucherengagements und unterstreicht die Relevanz der Ergebnisse für reale Kontexte. Creator und Marken können die Erkenntnisse dieser Dissertation nutzen, um redaktionelle und kommerzielle Inhalte zu optimieren, ihre Marketingziele zu erreichen und gleichzeitig die Vorschriften der Plattformen einzuhalten.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements I

Abstract III

Abstract in German IV

Table of contents VI

List of figures VIII

List of abbreviations IX

Publication and submission record X

1 Introduction 1

2 Background 8

 2.1 Overview of the creator economy 8

 2.1.1 The creator-brand-consumer triangle 9

 2.1.2 Disclosure regulations on social media platforms 11

 2.1.3 Crowd-patronage monetization 13

 2.2 Research areas, gaps, and paper contributions 14

 2.2.1 Research area 1: Consumer responses to AI-generated content 16

 2.2.2 Research area 2: Consumer responses to sponsored content 18

 2.2.3 Research area 3: Alternative monetization models 20

 2.2.4 Research area 4: Visual product presentations 22

3 Summary of papers 24

 3.1 Paper 1 24

 3.1.1 Methodology 24

 3.1.2 Results 25

 3.1.3 Contribution statement 26

3.2 Paper 2	27
3.2.1 Methodology	27
3.2.2 Results.....	28
3.2.3 Contribution statement.....	28
3.3 Paper 3	29
3.3.1 Methodology	29
3.3.2 Results.....	30
3.3.3 Contribution statement.....	30
3.4 Paper 4	31
3.4.1 Methodology	31
3.4.2 Results.....	32
3.4.3 Contribution statement.....	32
4 Discussion	33
4.1 Summary.....	33
4.2 Outlook for future research.....	35
References	39
Appendices	52
Appendix 1 (Paper 1).....	55
Appendix 2 (Paper 2).....	72
Appendix 3 (Paper 3).....	89
Appendix 4 (Paper 4).....	132

List of figures

Figure 1. The creator economy framework.	8
Figure 2. Mapping papers within the creator economy framework.	15

List of abbreviations

AI	Artificial intelligence
EU	European Union
GenAI	Generative artificial intelligence
US	United States of America

Publication and submission record

The present paper-based dissertation is based on the following four papers, the first two of which have been published, whereas the remaining two are in the working paper stage:

1. **Brüns, J. D.**, & Meißner, M. (2024). Do you create your content yourself? Using generative artificial intelligence for social media content creation diminishes perceived brand authenticity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 79, Article 103790. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103790>
2. **Brüns, J. D.**, & Meißner, M. (2023). Show me that you are advertising: Visual salience of products attenuates detrimental effects of persuasion knowledge activation in influencer advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 148, Article 107891. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107891>
3. Volkmer[†], S. A, **Brüns[†], J. D.**, & Meißner, M. (2024). “If you like my social media content, support me on Patreon”: Investigating the effects of social media content design on creator crowd-patronage success. Working paper. [†] = shared first-authorship.
4. **Brüns, J. D.**, Meißner, M., Walz, S., & Talke, K. (2024). *Is consistency key? How stylistic consistency shapes product ensemble liking.* Working paper.

1 Introduction

In an era in which one-third of US teenagers use social media *almost constantly* (Pew Research Center, 2023), the power of platforms like Instagram and YouTube to shape consumer behavior¹ is both unprecedented and ever-growing. Modern social media have evolved into culturally, politically, and economically significant digital ecosystems where users gather information from diverse sources, connect with individuals and organizations, and distribute content to others (Appel et al., 2020). In 2024, the number of registered social media accounts exceeded five billion, and the average daily usage reached about two-and-a-half hours (DataReportal, 2024). Social media permeates virtually every aspect of consumers' lives, and marketers can influence consumer behavior in real-time and at scale, from activating need recognition to facilitating sales and building loyal brand communities (Appel et al., 2020). However, to succeed on social media, a major challenge emerges. As the availability of information increases, consumers' attention spans are shrinking (Lorenz-Spreen et al., 2019). Practitioners must cut through the clutter and find ways to effectively engage consumers and build genuine relationships (Lim & Rasul, 2022). This dissertation sheds light on various social media content strategies to enhance consumer engagement.

Unlike traditional one-directional media, consumers play an interactive and multiplying role on social media (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010). They consume, contribute, and create brand-related content (Muntinga et al., 2011), effectively becoming the authors of brand stories that spread across platforms (Gensler et al., 2013). Consumer brand engagement refers to “a consumer's positively valenced brand-related cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity during or related to focal consumer/brand interactions” (Hollebeek et al., 2014, p. 154). For instance, a consumer may actively follow a brand and reflect on its messages, develop favorable

¹ Throughout this dissertation, the term ‘consumer’ will be used to describe individual users on social media who interact with marketing-related content.

attitudes about a presented ad, or tag a brand in a post and share product experiences with friends and strangers. Notably, the same holds for human brands, too. On social media, consumer engagement benefits commercial actors, among others, by enhancing awareness, brand image, and financial performance (Lim & Rasul, 2022). Moreover, marketers can employ analytics to derive consumer preferences from digital engagement traces, such as likes, shares, or comments, to guide their decision-making. Similarly, platform algorithms increasingly build on engagement to present content to other likely interested users (Berger et al., 2023), which can lead to a reinforcement effect and virality.

In response to the pursuit of consumer engagement on social media, influencer marketing has emerged as a new type of brand endorsement by content creators who have cultivated strong para-social relationships with followers and possess significant social influence. These so-called influencers have typically built their reach and impact from scratch as ordinary social media users, which distinguishes them from celebrity endorsers (Hudders et al., 2021). While traditional marketing tactics often struggle to achieve engagement, influencers are powerful catalysts by leveraging their connections with consumers through a bundle of unique resources, including targeting, positioning, creativity, and trust benefits (Leung et al., 2022b). Besides social ads (Huang et al., 2020), brand-generated content (Liadeli et al., 2023), and user-generated content (Stephen & Galak, 2012), influencer marketing has taken center stage in brands' social media engagement strategies (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024).

Beyond their role as influencers who endorse brands, creators increasingly explore independent ways of monetization, like selling exclusive content and marketing their own products, thereby catalyzing another trend rooted in social media: the *creator economy*. This global phenomenon spans all activities through which content creators—individuals who use digital platforms to create content and reach followers—build and monetize their personal

brands (Peres et al., 2024). While all influencers represent content creators who pursue brand deals, not all content creators are influencers, as they can pursue alternative monetization models. MrBeast, a 26-year-old YouTuber from Kansas, exemplifies an eminent creator. Starting with gaming videos twelve years ago, MrBeast's main YouTube channel has amassed over 300 million subscribers and shows, among others, how he watches paint dry, runs a marathon in extremely oversized shoes, and gifts private islands to followers (YouTube, n.d.). While his content may seem unconventional, MrBeast expanded his influence far beyond YouTube, owning several businesses in the food industry and generating estimated annual revenues exceeding 600 million US dollars (Business Insider, 2024). Remarkably, one in three young adults in the US nowadays dreams about making a living as a creator (Adobe Express, 2024), a distinct career path focused on entrepreneurship and revenue generation from relationship building, community engagement, and creative collaborations (Edeling & Wies, 2024). Estimated to reach about half a trillion US dollars by 2027 (Goldman Sachs, 2023), the creator economy is an economically crucial ecosystem with millions of creators at the core surrounded by consumers they engage, brands they endorse, and platforms like social media that facilitate connection and monetization (Bleier et al., 2024; Peres et al., 2024).

Given the rapid growth of the creator economy and its significant impact on consumer behavior, gaining a better understanding of how creators effectively engage their audiences is paramount for a range of stakeholders. This knowledge can inform creators' strategies for building strong online communities, improve brands' seeding strategies in influencer marketing, aid platforms in driving traffic while ensuring consumer protection, and enhance consumers' social media literacy and usage behaviors. Expert scholars highlighted the need to investigate the impact of creator content design characteristics (Appel et al., 2020; Leung et al., 2022b; Peres et al., 2024). This dissertation aims to respond to these calls and provide comprehensive insights into consumer engagement strategies in the evolving social media

landscape that advance the extant body of literature and present impactful practical implications. Reflecting on recent developments in the creator economy, it addresses these calls by focusing on three central factors that are shaping how content is presented to consumers: 1) novel disclosure regulations aimed at transparency, 2) the growing importance of alternative monetization models, and 3) the prevalence of visual content.

Aligning with regulations by policymakers to protect consumers, social media platforms have implemented disclosure guidelines that creators must abide by. Two recent disclosure types have disrupted how content is presented: AI and advertising disclosure. First, advancements in generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) enable the creation of sophisticated synthetic content at scale (Feuerriegel et al., 2023). Therefore, regulations across the globe (European Council, 2024; The White House, 2023) call for AI disclosures, and social media platforms have started to implement them (TikTok, 2023). GenAI can unlock attractive automation potentials and streamline the content production process for incumbent creators while lowering entry barriers for aspirants and new creator types like virtual influencers (Peres et al., 2024). However, previous research demonstrated that consumers often react negatively to automation (Mahmud et al., 2022), which may apply to content creators as well. Consumer perceptions of GenAI content creation and AI disclosure on social media represent a critical research area in the creator economy (Bleier et al., 2024). Second, as demanded by the Federal Trade Commission (2019), advertising disclosures aim to enhance transparency when creators engage in paid partnerships. Creators who maintain a good balance of editorial and sponsored content are likely to become more popular on social media (Klostermann et al., 2023). Their brand endorsements gain effectiveness by adapting personal narratives and styles that mimic editorial content (Leung et al., 2022b). Advertising disclosure distinguishes the two content types and allows consumers to activate their persuasion defense mechanisms (Eisend et al.,

2020). How creators can design sponsored content while preserving their authenticity poses a key issue in the creator economy (Audrezet et al., 2020; Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024).

Paid partnerships with brands currently represent the primary source of income for creators (Goldman Sachs, 2023), but pose a threat to their authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020). To navigate this tension, creators increasingly seek alternative ways of monetization (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). Examples include marketing own products, sharing revenue with platforms, or gaining money through paid subscriptions. The latter has seen strong popularity given the rise of crowd-patronage platforms like Patreon that allow creators to sell access to an exclusive community and gain a recurring income (Lin et al., 2022). How creators can benefit from subscriptions on these platforms is a topic that requires investigation (Bleier et al., 2024; Edeling & Wies, 2024). Particularly, the conversion of followers into paying subscribers poses a critical issue (Volkmer & Meißner, 2024), as crowd-patronage platforms lack discovery features (Hair et al., 2022).

Factors like the omni-presence of modern smartphones and high-resolution cameras, increasing bandwidth and computational resources, and consumer preferences for quickly digestible information have propelled the rise of visual content formats. On social media, images and videos are particularly in demand as shown by the popularity of primarily visual platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube. Advertising research has demonstrated that image elements are superior in capturing scarce attention (Pieters & Wedel, 2004) and that controllable design features can influence attention and attitudes toward ads (Pieters et al., 2010). More recently, social media research found that the mere presence of images in posts can greatly increase user engagement (Li & Xie, 2020). Furthermore, visual content design—such as product depiction (Hartmann et al., 2021), visual alignment between creator and follower posts (Argyris et al., 2020), and image features like color complexity (Kanuri et al.,

2024)—drives consumer engagement. However, related academic research in the social media sphere is sparse (Kanuri et al., 2024; Li & Xie, 2020), and further insights are particularly needed into the mental processes of consumer engagement (Rietveld et al., 2020).

Against this background, the present dissertation addresses four research gaps related to key interdependencies in the creator economy and focuses on how to design content that enhances consumer engagement. The first gap covers how followers respond to GenAI content creation, emphasizing the mediating role of source authenticity and the importance of human-AI collaboration. The second gap explores how consumers perceive creator posts recognized as sponsored content and how this relationship is affected by salient visual product presentation. The third gap addresses how creators can design valuable social media content to convert followers into paying subscribers on crowd-patronage platforms. The fourth gap examines the effects of visual design consistency in the presentation of multiple products, concentrating on consumers' processing fluency and evaluations. In addressing these research gaps, the dissertation contributes to the digital marketing and consumer behavior literature. It paints a comprehensive picture of the creator economy by demonstrating how to post engaging editorial and commercial content that builds, preserves, and capitalizes on social influence. Specifically, the dissertation underscores the importance of maintaining an authentic image, leveraging the power of visual cues, and effectively navigating emerging technologies, platforms, and regulations that influence both content generation and monetization. The findings boast theoretical, managerial, and cultural significance, extending the existing knowledge base on social media as one of the most prominent and influential marketing channels of modern times.

The remainder of this dissertation is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides the background. To begin, it gives an overview of key interdependencies in the creator economy and how these influence the interactions between creators and consumers. It then integrates four

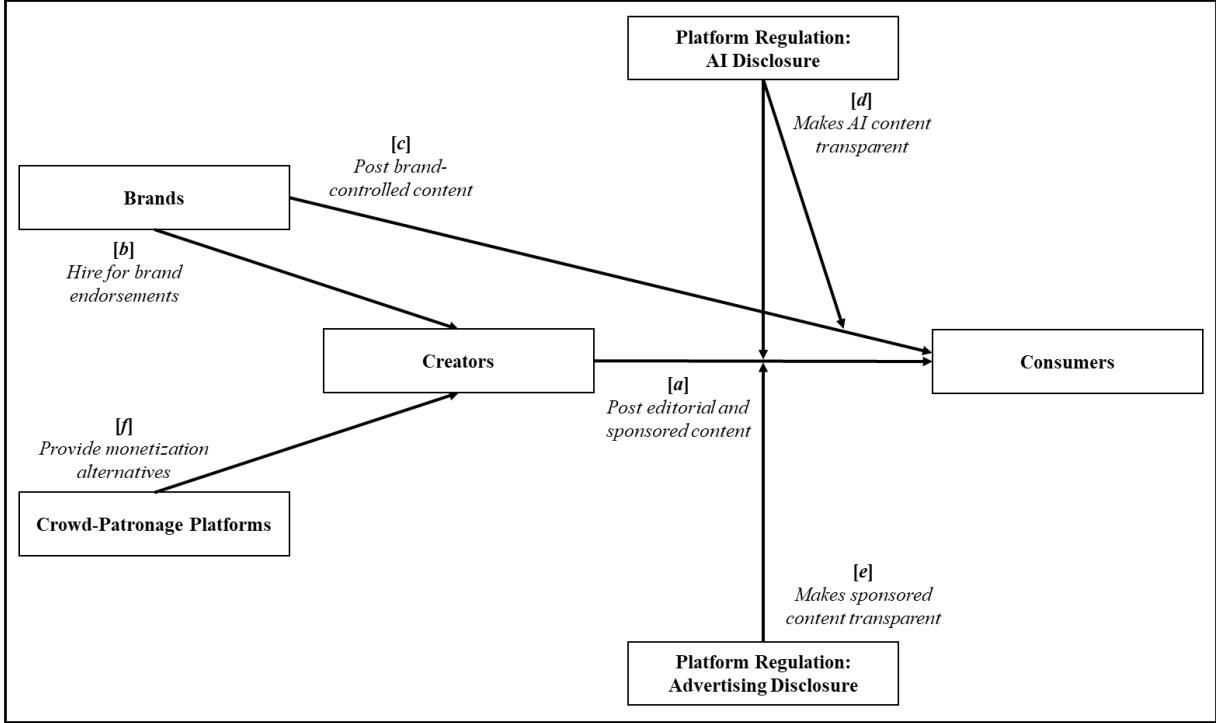
research areas and findings from relevant research streams before addressing how the papers included in this dissertation address the distinct research gaps. Chapter 3 summarizes the four papers, which are included in the appendix. Each paper section is separated into the methodological approach, key results, and a contribution statement. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary and an outlook for future research in the dynamic sphere of the creator economy.

2 Background

2.1 Overview of the creator economy

The current chapter section overviews the creator economy as depicted in Figure 1. Specifically, it elaborates on the interactions between creators and consumers through the creation, dissemination, and perception of content, constituting fundamental dynamics investigated in the four papers. Moreover, it outlines the role of disclosure regulations on platforms, including AI and advertising disclosure, and how brands and crowd-patronage platforms influence creators' monetization pursuits. In the following, the different paths in Figure 1 will be described alphabetically from [a] to [f].

Figure 1. The creator economy framework.



2.1.1 The creator-brand-consumer triangle

Path [a] represents the connection between creators and consumers. In the creator economy, both groups represent ordinary users who differ in their extent of social influence. As described by Peres et al. (2024), creators upload creative content to cultivate an authentic human brand, grow a followership, and monetize their influence. Hence, creators' content strategies follow two key objectives: 1) building a personal brand and strong relationships with followers, and 2) generating revenue by leveraging these resources.

First, creators need to grow social influence. They gain it by posting editorial content to form communal relationships with an initially small audience. The specific types of content and platforms used are less important, as the variety of successful creators demonstrates. For instance, creators can upload photos and stories on Instagram, long-form videos on YouTube, or brief text-based updates on Twitter/X. Similarly, content categories may range from fashion advice over comedy podcasts to gaming. Irrespectively, creators try to engage followers by posting original content and frequently seeking interactions (Hofstetter & Gollnhofer, 2024). For human brands like creators, being authentic means expressing their true selves and being genuine and caring in how they approach relationships with others (Ilicic & Webster, 2016). Furthermore, creators should demonstrate passionate commitment about their craft (Moulard et al., 2014). Consumers will then self-select to follow creators they identify with and build trustworthy relationships over time (Leung et al., 2022b).

Once creators have developed content-audience fit and grown an authentic image, they can monetize their social influence. Most frequently, they pursue brand deals as influencers, which accounts for about 70 percent of their income (Goldman Sachs, 2023). While editorial content is suitable for relationship building, creators upload sponsored content to present and promote a brand in return for an incentive. The nature of brand deals can be diverse. For

instance, creators post product reviews, share experience reports, arrange giveaways, or simply endorse a brand. Furthermore, they increasingly serve as consumption advisers who recommend combinations of multiple products (D'Angelo & Valsesia, 2023). Incentives include free products, one-off payments, or sales commissions, and partnerships vary from one-time deals to recurring sponsorships to long-term brand ambassadorships. While brands could dictate the appearance of sponsored posts, creators often possess creative freedom due to their expertise in engaging followers (Leung et al., 2022b). Unlike editorial content, sponsored content is persuasive as it aims to change consumers' attitudes and behaviors to make them consider adopting the endorsed brand. Upon recognizing a persuasion attempt, consumers can activate coping mechanisms (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and often respond less favorably from a marketer perspective (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). Creators thus integrate sponsored content into their distinct narratives and styles, which can make the content appear less persuasive (Leung et al., 2022b). Eventually, creators must balance how much sponsored content to post. While monetization is essential, sponsored content can impair creator authenticity and thus dilute the value of the creator brand nurtured through editorial content (Hudders et al., 2021).

Brands collaborate with creators (path [b]) as a cost-effective strategy to leverage the persuasive power of user-generated content and bypass the growing mistrust of traditional marketing tactics (Hudders et al., 2021). Similar to celebrity endorsements, creator endorsements represent a form of mediated persuasive communication that facilitates a transfer of meaning, as described by McCracken (1989). Specifically, authenticity associated with creators may be instilled into endorsed brands. In their pursuit of identity benefits, consumers seek out objects that carry authenticity (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010), making the meaning transfer induced by authentic creators particularly appealing. Leung et al. (2022b) characterize influencer marketing as brands' efforts to leverage the unique social capital built by creators. The authors argue that creators can be used to effectively target homogenous follower segments

which, due to self-selection, exhibit high acceptance of the distinct creator. Additionally, creators possess significant creative expertise and consumers often trust their recommendations. Leung et al. (2022b) also acknowledge the risks associated with influencer marketing, such as giving up creative control and retaining customers acquired through creator endorsements.

Aside from influencer marketing, brands can engage consumers directly on social media (path [c]) through two main channels: owned accounts and platform-administered ads. On Instagram, for instance, brand accounts can post pictures, exchange messages with followers, and utilize shopping features like dedicated storefronts and virtual try-ons (Instagram, n.d.). These owned media can enhance consumer engagement and sales (Liadeli et al., 2023). Particularly, their direct control and constant availability enable brands to build a strong virtual presence. On the other hand, brands utilize social media advertising to leverage the extensive data collected by platforms, allowing them to reach audiences most likely interested in promoted content. Facebook, for instance, offers targeting based on location, demographics, devices, interests, and past engagement with the brand (Facebook, n.d.).

2.1.2 Disclosure regulations on social media platforms

Irrespective of whether creators or brands post marketing messages, AI disclosure regulations on social media platforms (path [d]) affect how content is presented to consumers. The emergence of tools like ChatGPT in late 2022 has put GenAI into the spotlight of public attention. Generative AI differs from analytical AI, such as facial recognition or recommender systems, and can create multimodal content indistinguishable from human craft (Feuerriegel et al., 2023). McKinsey (2024) characterizes 2024 as the year of rapid GenAI adoption and states that marketing and sales are the business functions most affected, offering significant revenue and cost-saving potentials. Gartner (n.d.) predicts that by 2025 about every third marketing

message by large brands will be AI-generated. Meta is enabling creators to scale their influence by launching personalized AI clones, trained on previous content, that can autonomously interact with followers (Forbes, 2024a).

While GenAI promises significant upsides related to creativity (Zhou & Lee, 2024), efficiency (Noy & Zhang, 2023), and effectiveness of marketing communications (Matz et al., 2024), it also poses substantial risks. Feuerriegel et al. (2023) outline, among others, that GenAI content can mirror harmful human biases, violate copyright laws, or present hardly verifiable and incorrect model outputs. To protect users from being misled or confused, social media platforms enforce AI disclosures that mark content generated or significantly altered by AI (TikTok, 2023). Disclosure labels typically appear as text badges attached to posts (e.g., “AI-generated”), but their layout and content lack standardization. However, policymakers will likely allocate increasing attention to this issue in the context of larger AI regulations, such as the EU Artificial Intelligence Act (European Council, 2024). It is essential for marketers to assess the impact of GenAI adoption and disclosure on consumer behavior, along with the underlying mechanisms and potential mitigation strategies (Cillo & Rubera, 2024), especially as previous research shows that consumers tend to distrust algorithms (Mahmud et al., 2022).

Advertising disclosure represents another key regulation that affects how creator content is presented to consumers (path [e]). It aims to distinguish between sponsored and editorial content. Influencer marketing resembles native advertising because, without disclosure, the association between creators and sponsoring brands can be blurred, potentially misleading consumers to believe that brand endorsements represent independent opinions (Evans et al., 2017). To prevent deceptive practices and ensure that creators’ brand endorsements comply with the law, regulatory bodies have published guidelines² on advertising disclosure. The

² Karagür et al. (2022) provide an overview of disclosure regulations

Federal Trade Commission (2019), for instance, requires any material connection between creators and sponsoring brands to be disclosed in a way that is hard to miss and easy to understand for consumers. Depending on the modality, creators should include text labels or verbal disclaimers. In addition, platforms like Instagram (“Paid partnership with [brand]”) have developed standardized disclosures. Despite these regulations, sponsored content often still is not properly disclosed, leading to penalties by the Federal Trade Commission (2017). A reason for the resistance to advertising disclosure could be creators fearing that followers will perceive them as compromising their authenticity by being commercially motivated. To mitigate this threat and preserve their long-term relationships with followers, creators may employ various authenticity management strategies (Audrezet et al., 2020).

2.1.3 Crowd-patronage monetization

Creators can also explore alternative monetization models on crowd-patronage platforms (path [f]) to safeguard their authenticity from brand deals. Platforms like Patreon have gained popularity by providing subscription-based financial support for creators (Lin et al., 2022). Like traditional social media, creators curate a presence by sharing content and providing a space for interaction. The key difference, however, is that on crowd-patronage platforms one must become a paying subscriber to access the creator community. This way, creators can earn a recurring revenue stream that may reach thousands of US dollars monthly. Patreon (n.d.) describes its mission as providing creators with an environment to develop a sustainable business and gain creative autonomy by leveraging direct connection with subscribers and ensuring independence from brands as well as social media algorithms. In return, they take a small percentage of each transaction.

Crowd-patronage models allow creators to focus on their personal brands and intimate community relationships. Subscribers should be more satisfied with the content they receive, for instance, by feeling a stronger sense of community (Volkmer & Meißner, 2024). In a recent interview study by Bleier et al. (2024), a creator underlined this perspective, explaining that he offers his community more relevant and valuable content, which they are willing to pay for and appreciate more than brand endorsements. The attractiveness for creators and consumers is evident in the numbers: Over 250,000 creators and 15,000,000 memberships are currently active on Patreon, with a rising trend (Graphtheon, n.d.). However, the distribution of subscription revenues is skewed, and creators often fail to earn substantial incomes (Regner, 2021). How creators can secure subscription funding as a viable monetization strategy requires more research (Bleier et al., 2024; Edeling & Wies, 2024).

2.2 Research areas, gaps, and paper contributions

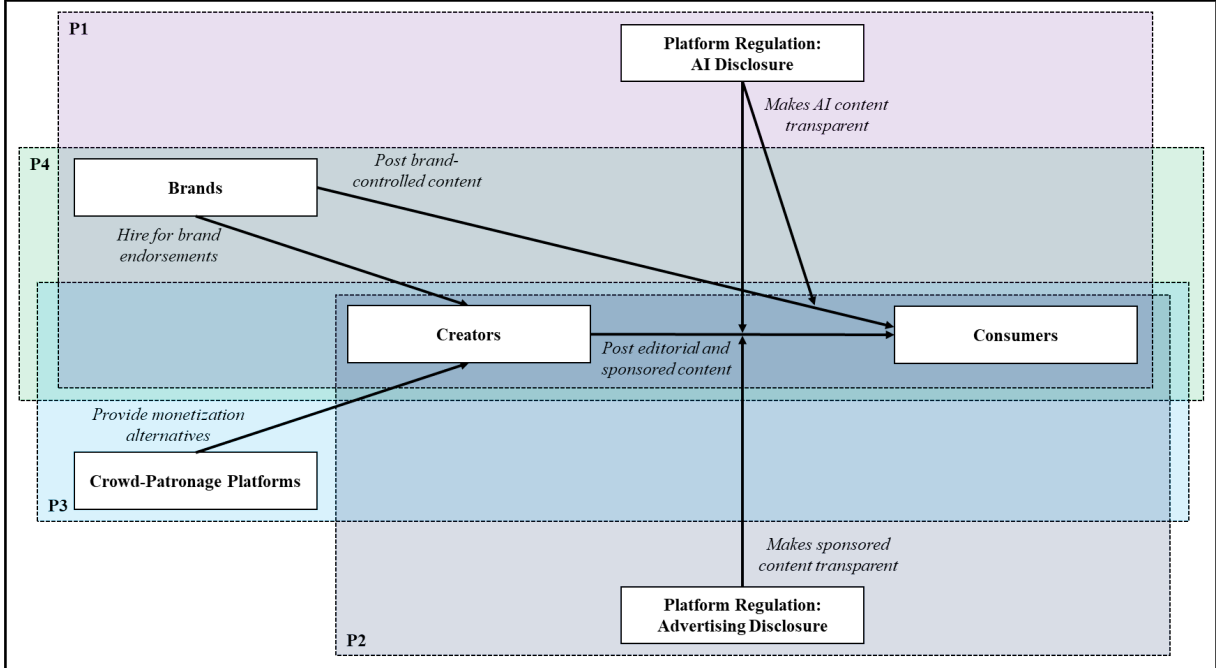
Building on the interdependencies in the creator economy discussed in section 2.1, we³ identify four main research areas that will be reviewed in the remainder of this chapter section:

- Area 1: How do consumers respond to the adoption of GenAI for content marketing and how can creators manage potential pitfalls
- Area 2: How do consumers cope with sponsored content and how can creators enhance the effectiveness of brand endorsements
- Area 3: How can creators successfully tap into crowd-patronage platforms
- Area 4: How can creators visually design appealing product presentations

³ In the context of the four papers included in this dissertation, first-person plural pronouns, such as ‘us’, refer to the team of authors.

The four papers included in this dissertation address distinct gaps within each of these research areas. Figure 2 displays how the papers cover the different components of the creator economy framework outlined in Figure 1. While paper 1 (purple) emphasizes consumer responses to creators and brands adopting GenAI for content creation, paper 2 (dark blue) investigates consumer reactions to visual product placement cues in sponsored content. Paper 3 (light blue) explores factors in creators’ social media content associated with consumer conversion toward crowd-patronage platforms, and paper 4 (green) assesses the impact of content design consistency in visual product ensemble presentations on consumers’ information processing and evaluations. The papers offer comprehensive and cohesive insights into the creator economy by informing creators how to post editorial and brand-related sponsored content to successfully grow and monetize their social influence while considering key regulations and alternative monetization strategies.

Figure 2. Mapping papers within the creator economy framework.



2.2.1 Research area 1: Consumer responses to AI-generated content

The literature on GenAI marketing is still young but rapidly growing. Discussing research opportunities on GenAI marketing communications, Cillo and Rubera (2024) outlined two important directions: How can GenAI be utilized to engage consumers, and how do consumers react to GenAI adoption and disclosure? Focusing on the first direction, extant research has covered a range of GenAI use cases and modalities, including textual, visual, and auditory. Noy and Zhang (2023) showed that text-generating AI can significantly improve worker productivity and output quality across diverse writing tasks relevant to marketing. A study by Reisenbichler et al. (2022) demonstrated that GenAI can effectively draft landing pages that, with human editing, can yield superior search engine optimization performance. Furthermore, GenAI can write expert product reviews indistinguishable from human craft (Carlson et al., 2023) and effectively adjust ad messages to match consumers' personality traits (Matz et al., 2024). In investigating image-generating AI, Zhou and Lee (2024) examined artwork communities and found that GenAI enhances artist productivity but dilutes the novelty of output. Nevertheless, AI-generated marketing images can outperform human work regarding perceived quality and ad effectiveness (Hartmann et al., 2024), and they may be tailored to convey specific brand personality attributes (Jansen et al., 2024). Some studies have also investigated voice-generating AI. Zhang et al. (2024) showed that TikTok creators produce novel videos more frequently when adopting AI-generated voices. In a field experiment by Luo et al. (2019), AI-voiced chatbots matched experienced professionals in generating sales if their identity was not disclosed. GenAI's multimodal content creation capabilities also hold great potential for virtual influencers, enabling them to autonomously build strong connections in the creator economy through personalized interactions (Sorosrungruang et al., 2024).

The second research direction on consumer reactions to GenAI adoption has been explored less extensively. The study by Luo et al. (2019) showed that purchase rates dropped by almost 80 percent when the AI-voiced chatbot was disclosed. Matz et al. (2024), however, did not find differences in ad persuasiveness when revealing GenAI. In the field of analytical AI, research indicates that consumers tend to distrust and reject algorithms despite superior performance, a phenomenon referred to as algorithm aversion (Mahmud et al., 2022), although some cases of algorithm appreciation do exist (Logg et al., 2019). However, exploring follower responses to GenAI adoption in the interactive and relationship-driven creator economy, where authenticity is a critical resource, poses a key research gap.

Paper 1 contributes to this research gap by investigating how social media followers respond to their favorite creators and brands adopting GenAI for content creation. Following creators and becoming part of their social media communities represents a deeply personal choice that is driven by identity motives (Muntinga et al., 2011). When automating content creation, creators partially relinquish their interactions with followers to AI. As suggested by Ilicic and Webster (2016), inferences on how creators and brands approach communal relationships could have ramifications for their perceived authenticity, a conclusion supported by this paper. The paper also explores the impact of disclosure and how expressing human-AI collaboration may moderate detrimental consequences for consumer engagement. Hence, the paper addresses key research opportunities highlighted by Cillo and Rubera (2024), including consumer responses to GenAI adoption in content marketing, the role of disclosing GenAI, (human) brand associations propelling reactance, and potential mitigation strategies.

2.2.2 Research area 2: Consumer responses to sponsored content

Advertising disclosure raises consumers' recognition that content is advertising with persuasive intent, which can trigger coping mechanisms related to persuasion knowledge (Eisend et al., 2020). When consumers identify an interaction as a persuasion attempt, a change in meaning occurs, leading them to evaluate it within this context (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Researchers assume that consumers are skeptical of persuasion attempts like advertising, which can include critical dispositions toward the accuracy of the content, intentions of the sender, or appropriateness of the context (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Meta-analytic evidence by Eisend and Tarrahi (2022) supports this assumption by showing that ad recognition triggers marketer-unintended evaluations and behavioral responses. However, recent influencer marketing studies have disagreed regarding the favorability of consumer responses. Investigating Instagram creators, Karagür et al. (2022) found that advertising disclosure reduces the number of likes for respective posts. In contrast, Chen report positive effects of disclosure on consumer engagement on video-sharing platforms. Given such discrepancies, academics have focused on examining what drives sponsored content effectiveness, particularly regarding the mechanisms and moderating factors of influencer persuasiveness (Ye et al., 2021).

Extant field studies emphasized the importance of creator characteristics for influencer marketing effectiveness, particularly focusing on followership size to inform seeding decisions, but the results are mixed. Beichert et al. (2024) report that micro-influencers create a higher return on investment than macro-influencers due to stronger tie strength and engagement in smaller creator communities. In contrast, Leung et al. (2022a) argued that creator size enhances consumer engagement through higher creator credibility. Several studies explored the influence of receiver characteristics and content matching. Argyris et al. (2020) showed a positive effect of visual congruence between sponsored content and follower posts on follower engagement

with sponsored content and endorsed brands. Results by Leung et al. (2022a) demonstrated an inverted U-shaped relationship between follower-brand fit and engagement, suggesting an optimal balance of increasing content relevance and avoiding saturation. Some studies also revealed insights on content characteristics, primarily verbal rather than visual cues. Cascio Rizzo et al. (2023) found that sensory language in brand endorsements enhances perceived creator authenticity and consumer engagement. Cascio Rizzo et al. (2024) investigated high-arousal language, revealing that it affects creator trustworthiness such that it increases engagement for micro-influencers but reduces it for macro-influencers unless balanced in valence. Gerrath and Usrey (2021) showed that creators remain credible in positive product reviews by highlighting intrinsic motivation, and Leung et al. (2022a) demonstrated a positive effect of brand salience in terms of textual brand mentions and links on consumer engagement. However, studying consumer responses to the visual salience of products—how prominently a brand is displayed—in perceived sponsored content, along with inferences about creator authenticity, represents an important research gap.

Paper 2 contributes to this research gap by investigating the nuanced impact of ad recognition on consumer responses to creator content. It explores the mechanisms of persuasion by highlighting the roles of persuasion knowledge and perceived creator authenticity, as suggested by Ye et al. (2021). Importantly, the paper examines the moderating influence of visual product salience on the effectiveness of creators' sponsored content. It thereby addresses calls by Argyris et al. (2020) and Leung et al. (2022a) to move beyond text-based research and shed light on visual cues that drive engagement with sponsored content on image-rich social media platforms.

2.2.3 Research area 3: Alternative monetization models

Few studies have explored how creators can successfully achieve subscription-based funding on crowd-patronage platforms. Recently, Lin et al. (2022) investigated whether Patreon creators should conceal or disclose their subscription income and the percentage of posts on Patreon they should place behind a paywall. The authors found that concealed earnings and a high percentage of private posts increase subscriber count, arguing these strategies help foster creator authenticity and brand differentiation. Regner (2021) identified measures of communication quality, such as the use of images and length of creator profile descriptions, that can affect funding success. Both articles investigated content strategies within crowd-patronage platforms. Although these studies found a positive relationship between funding success and tagging social media accounts on crowd-patronage profiles, they overlooked the influence of content on social media, where creators tend to grow their community and gain visibility.

A related body of research found that entrepreneurs can leverage rhetorical signals in crowdfunding campaigns to attract financial support from individuals. Tajvarpour and Pujari (2022) showed that signaling positive psychological capital, such as hope, optimism, resilience, and confidence, can increase the likelihood of reaching funding goals as much as traditional quality signals like prior campaign success. Emotional and cognitive tone have also been found to positively affect campaign funding with diminishing impact over the campaign lifecycle, whereas the use of communal language and linguistic style match can increase in effectiveness over time (Moradi et al., 2024). Furthermore, rhetorical signals can complement substantive signals to improve funding outcomes (Steigenberger & Wilhelm, 2018).

How creators display content on live-streaming social media has also been linked to consumers' intentions to support creators through one-off payments on these platforms. For

example, streamers who can invoke feelings of social presence may benefit from viewers feeling closer connections to the streamers and their communities, thereby enhancing viewers' willingness to purchase virtual gifts (Guan et al., 2022). Lin et al. (2021) found that an effective strategy to stimulate viewers' tipping behavior is through emotional contagion by displaying happiness, for instance, via facial expressions. Furthermore, streamers who emphasize interaction and provide sources of identification and informational value can increase viewers' emotional attachment, triggering higher donation success (Wan et al., 2017). However, identifying which social media content design strategies can help creators to enhance crowd-patronage success through follower conversion remains an impactful research gap.

Paper 3 contributes to this research gap by investigating how creators who offer crowd-patronage models can design their social media content to convert followers across platforms into paying subscribers. Specifically, it examines different rhetorical signals and posting behaviors that creators can utilize to induce social, emotional, and functional consumption values, stimulating consumers to commit financially and become part of the exclusive creator communities. It also demonstrates how consumption values are interconnected, pointing to the central role of social value in increasing subscription funding. The paper thus integrates insights from crowd-patronage, project-based crowdfunding, and live-streaming research to inform creators how to strategically design content to foster long-term connections with followers and convert social media engagement into subscription-based funding. It thereby addresses the call by Volkmer and Meißner (2024) to study content-related determinants of cross-platform conversion for crowd-patronage success. This issue is crucial as crowd-patronage platforms lack discoverability and depend on traffic from social media (Hair et al., 2022).

2.2.4 Research area 4: Visual product presentations

Research in visual marketing communications mainly revolves around semantic content and visual design. While semantic content has received significant scholarly attention over the years, visual design remains comparatively underexplored (Affonso & Janiszewski, 2023). One prominent stream of visual design research on social media has examined how image features affect consumer engagement, yielding partially mixed results. Kanuri et al. (2024) combined field and eye-tracking data to show that color complexity enhances consumers' elaborative processing and engagement. Overgoor et al. (2022) also investigated how image complexity dimensions, including pixel-level feature complexity and object-level design complexity, affect firm-generated content liking. Their study yielded nuanced findings, as feature complexity followed an inverted U-shaped relationship with liking, while design complexity exhibited a U-shaped relationship. Image symmetry and contrast positively influenced liking (Kostyk & Huhmann, 2021). Notably, these low-level image characteristics can drive perceptual processing fluency (Mayer & Landwehr, 2018), which comprises the ease of perceiving a physical stimulus (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009) and may account for the reported findings. Berger et al. (2023) also highlighted the relationship between content design, processing fluency, and consumer attention. However, their study focused on textual rather than visual content features.

Product design literature has investigated how consumers evaluate visual typicality, which is another antecedent of processing fluency (Mayer & Landwehr, 2018). Veryzer and Hutchinson (1998) showed that products with typical designs induce more positive aesthetic responses than atypical products. Furthermore, unity in design elements, such as shape and texture, positively influenced aesthetic responses both directly and indirectly through typicality. Heitmann et al. (2020) argued that the influence of product design typicality and processing

fluency depends on brand characteristics. Analyzing car sales data, they demonstrated that high-equity brands, compared to low-equity brands, achieve higher market share by designing cars that align with typical brand features but deviate from features typical within their segment.

While research has explored fluency-related design features for single products, the impact of visual design for product ensembles received little attention. This poses an important issue for creators who increasingly present several products together. Combinatory recommendations were found to signal creator expertise and drive ad performance (D'Angelo & Valsesia, 2023). Bell et al. (1991) showed that design complementarity of furniture items can enhance aesthetic responses via perceived unity. On the other hand, Lam and Mukherjee (2005) suggest that displaying two poorly coordinated products next to each other can reduce evaluations and purchase intentions of a target product, but that good coordination provides no benefits despite increasing perceived unity. In retail stores, Keh et al. (2021) showed that multiple units of the same product can be arranged in an atypical and aesthetically appealing way to enhance sales. However, investigating how stylistic consistency—the unity in design styles among ensemble products—influences consumers' processing fluency and evaluations, particularly in relation to different style connotations, represents a research gap.

Paper 4 contributes to this research gap by exploring how creators and brands can design visual ensembles of multiple products to appeal to consumers. It builds on Gestalt literature to examine how ensemble liking is influenced by stylistic consistency. Importantly, the paper emphasizes the mediating role of processing fluency in the ensemble context and shows that conceptual fluency, referring to the ease of processing the meaning of a stimulus (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009), rather than perceptual fluency explains changes in liking. Moreover, it stresses that the impact of stylistic consistency, specifically that of induced conceptual fluency, is contingent on the dominant design style, which may vary regarding consumers' connotations.

3 Summary of papers

Having outlined the relevance of the four individual papers and their contributions to the research areas, this chapter will briefly summarize the papers. The methodological approach and key results will be emphasized, and a contribution statement will be given.

3.1 Paper 1

Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2024).

Do you create your content yourself? Using generative artificial intelligence for social media content creation diminishes perceived brand authenticity.

Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 79, Article 103790.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103790>

3.1.1 Methodology

This paper utilized two types of online experimental studies to examine consumer responses to GenAI adoption on social media. We employed two scenario-based experiments in which followers were asked to envision their favorite creators and brands deciding to adopt or not adopt GenAI technology for content creation. Moreover, in another experiment, we tested how consumers respond to a specific social media post, created either by GenAI or humans, without being informed of its origin, and whether their reactions change when GenAI is disclosed as the source. This set-up of experimental studies had several benefits for investigating our research question: 1) Collecting self-reported response data allowed us to inquire about followers' perceptions of sender authenticity, which represented the hypothesized

mechanism of GenAI adoption effects. 2) While experimental social media research commonly records participants' reactions to senders they have not encountered before, scenario-based designs allowed us to gather insights about real followers. Investigating established relationships was paramount in our context of identity-driven consumption. 3) The online set-up of our experiments provided a resource-efficient means to swiftly react to the growing awareness of GenAI, capturing timely insights into consumer responses. At the time of our investigation, AI disclosures were not rolled out on social media yet. However, they may facilitate the investigation of GenAI adoption based on field data in the future to bolster our findings' ecological validity.

3.1.2 Results

The results show that consumers react negatively in terms of attitudes and behaviors if their favorite creators and brands followed on social media decide to adopt GenAI for automated content creation, compared to when they choose not to use the technology. This finding aligns with previous reports of consumers' algorithm aversion in the context of automated decision-making. It extends the literature to creative endeavors, which are increasingly exposed to novel GenAI technologies. Perceived authenticity is highlighted as the underlying mechanism, thus pointing to the impairment of brand value and consumer relationships, which are critical resources in the creator economy. Disclosing the adoption of GenAI can affect consumer perceptions of messages and senders, triggering the outlined effects, even when GenAI content is indistinguishable from human content. To mitigate detrimental consumer responses, creators can emphasize that GenAI is used to assist rather than automate content creation. This finding underscores the importance of highlighting human elements and promoting a human-AI collaborative approach.

3.1.3 Contribution statement

CRedit authorship contribution statement (from publication):

Jasper David Brüns: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Validation, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization

Martin Meißner: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Validation, Supervision, Resources, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization

3.2 Paper 2

Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2023).

Show me that you are advertising: Visual salience of products attenuates detrimental effects of persuasion knowledge activation in influencer advertising.

Computers in Human Behavior, 148, Article 107891.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107891>

3.2.1 Methodology

This paper adopted an experimental methodology, manipulating visual product salience in creator content to investigate its moderating impact on consumers' reactance to perceived ads. Experimental research is widely used in studies on reactance to sponsored content and the influence of message characteristics (Hudders et al., 2021). For our research, this approach, involving three studies⁴, was well-suited for several reasons: It facilitated a controlled and precise manipulation of visual salience through brightness and color contrast. Measuring these traits at scale in field data would have been challenging, as it requires accurate detection and parsing of product depictions in complex visual environments, despite advances in image analytics. Employing eye-tracking technology in a lab provided an opportunity to test if visual salience captures bottom-up attention to products. Furthermore, the study design allowed us to measure self-reported responses, such as ad recognition, creator integrity, and post skepticism, providing comprehensive insights into how consumers perceive the content and the creator.

⁴ The first of the three studies draws on data also used by Brüns (2020), an unpublished undergraduate thesis supervised by Prof. Dr. Martin Meißner. This thesis focused on precursors to persuasion knowledge activation and the impact of disclosure. Paper 2 emphasizes the downstream consequences of persuasion knowledge usage and further introduces the mediating role of creator integrity while discussing how it is shaped by visual salience.

3.2.2 Results

The results demonstrate that consumers' recognition of advertising raises skepticism toward creator content. This skepticism, in turn, harms creators by attenuating consumers' evaluations and purchase intentions of presented brands and the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth. The findings corroborate prior studies on consumer reactance to sponsored content in the creator economy. They extend the literature by introducing creator integrity, a facet of authenticity, as a mediating factor of ad recognition effects. Importantly, building on congruence literature, the paper shows that creators can utilize visual product salience by increasing relative brightness or color contrast to attract brand attention and mitigate the negative consequences of consumers' ad recognition. The paper thereby highlights the modification of visual product salience as a novel content design strategy for creators to enhance the persuasiveness of sponsored content.

3.2.3 Contribution statement

CRedit authorship contribution statement (from publication):

Jasper David Brüns: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Project administration

Martin Meißner: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Resources, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision

3.3 Paper 3

Volkmer[†], S. A, Brüns[†], J. D., & Meißner, M. (2024). † = shared first-authorship.

“If you like my social media content, support me on Patreon”:

Investigating the effects of social media content design on creator crowd-patronage success.

Working paper.

3.3.1 Methodology

This paper employed a multi-method approach with field and survey data to investigate the relationship between social media content design and follower conversion into paying subscribers. This approach was particularly suitable as it enabled the analysis of both actual content characteristics and consumers’ perceived value driving conversion. For the field data, we identified a list of creators who were active on the crowd-patronage platform Patreon and used YouTube but no other traditional social media platform. We derived content design factors related to social, emotional, and functional consumption values by harnessing YouTube video metadata and text mining techniques applied to transcripts. As creators grow their following on social media and transfer it to crowd-patronage platforms, this data presented a real-world setting to connect creators’ YouTube content decisions with the proportion of followers converted into Patreon subscribers. In the survey study, we sampled followers of YouTube creators and asked them to envision their favorite creator offering a Patreon subscription. This method enabled us to capture follower perceptions of the different consumption values provided by creators and relate them to conversion intentions. Furthermore, the survey complemented the field study by identifying a structure in the impact of perceived consumption values.

3.3.2 Results

The results present distinct social media content strategies associated with creators' success in converting followers into paying subscribers on crowd-patronage platforms. Contextualizing consumption value theory to the creator economy, the findings of the field study suggest that creators may enhance conversion by increasing follower-directed speech (social value), minimizing negative emotional tone (emotional value), and uploading a higher volume of content while placing a greater share of it behind the paywall (functional value). In contrast, self-disclosure and positive emotional tone do not significantly affect conversion. The survey study shows that the consumption values are interconnected in the context of crowd-patronage. Followers' subscription behavior is primarily driven by social value, which is enhanced by emotional and functional values. These findings underline the vital role of social bonds and relationship building to maximize monetization success in the creator economy.

3.3.3 Contribution statement

As a co-author, my responsibilities were as follows: I conceived the project idea, research question, and conceptual design. Moreover, I collected the data for the field and survey studies and analyzed it in agreement with the team. I was strongly involved in the writing process of the working paper, particularly the sections on Study 1, Study 2, and the introduction. To discuss the project with the academic community, I presented the working paper at the Asia-Pacific Marketing Academy (APMA) Annual Conference 2023 in Guangzhou, China. I also wrote the submission which was accepted to the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) Annual Conference 2024 in Paris, France.

3.4 Paper 4

Brüns, J. D., Meißner, M., Walz, S., & Talke, K. (2024).

Is consistency key? How stylistic consistency shapes product ensemble liking.

Working paper.

3.4.1 Methodology

This project utilized a multi-method approach, including field data and three experimental studies conducted both online and in the lab with eye-tracking technology. In the experimental studies, participants evaluated images of product ensembles in the fashion context, which we manipulated based on stylistic consistency and design styles. The experimental settings enabled us to employ controlled manipulations. Moreover, they allowed us to collect self-reported data about participants' information processing, thus providing insights into conceptual and perceptual processing fluency as potential mediators of consistency effects. Eye-tracking data complemented participants' self-reported data, yielding further evidence of the respective processing fluency mechanisms through physiological data. Archival field data from Instagram bolstered the external validity of our findings by replicating the joint influence of stylistic consistency and design styles on ensemble liking in the unique environment of so-called virtual stylists, which is both realistic and yet highly controlled. In sum, the methodological approach provided a rich variety of self-reported, physiological, and archival data, offering comprehensive insights into consumer reactions to visual product ensemble design and the underlying mechanism of processing fluency.

3.4.2 Results

The results show that stylistic consistency in product ensembles can positively affect consumers' liking of the ensemble, aligning with Gestalt theory. Testing the underlying mechanism, both conceptual and perceptual fluency are increased by stylistic consistency, but only conceptual fluency mediates the effect on ensemble liking. This suggests that the influence of stylistic consistency can be attributed to the fluent processing of an ensemble's meaning rather than its physical characteristics. The eye-tracking study supports this conclusion, showing that variations in information processing related to perceptual fluency do not account for changes in ensemble evaluations. Additionally, the paper shows that the ensemble's design style moderates the impact of stylistic consistency on ensemble liking, such that a positive effect only occurs when the design style is positively, rather than negatively, connotated. The field study further validates this relationship using creators' Instagram posts.

3.4.3 Contribution statement

As a co-author, my responsibilities were as follows: I played a key role in refining the original project conceptualization and framework developed by my co-authors. Moreover, I collected the experimental data for Study 2a/b and the Instagram data for Study 3, and I executed the analyses for all four studies in agreement with the team. I was substantially involved in the writing process of the working paper, particularly the sections on Study 1, Study 2a/b, and Study 3. To discuss the project with the academic community, I presented the working paper at the NeuroPsychoEconomics Conference 2023 in Granada, Spain. I also wrote the submission which was accepted to the Association for Consumer Research (ACR) Annual Conference 2024 in Paris, France.

4 Discussion

4.1 Summary

This dissertation provided insights into content design strategies to enhance consumer engagement on social media. It started by highlighting the relevance of social media and consumer engagement for digital marketing success. Subsequently, it introduced the creator economy as a rising phenomenon in which individuals create social media content to grow and monetize social influence—a development traditionally dominated by influencer marketing through brands. In the current creator economy, beyond brand partnerships, content-driven interactions between creators and consumers are shaped by technological advances, disclosure regulations to protect consumers, and crowd-patronage models. In a detailed background section, the dissertation mapped key interdependencies in the creator economy, outlining the tensions in which creators find themselves. It then integrated four relevant research areas and explained how the individual papers contribute before summarizing their approaches and results.

Four research gaps were addressed in this dissertation to enhance extant knowledge about how creators can optimize their content strategies to foster authentic relationships and sustainable monetization. The first paper showed that creators must be mindful when adopting GenAI technology for content creation as this decision affects consumers' authenticity perceptions, though this effect can be mitigated when framing GenAI as an assistant. In the second paper, modifying visual product salience crystallized as an effective strategy to alleviate consumer reactance to sponsored content by bolstering perceived creator integrity. The third paper presented distinct design factors in creators' social media content—follower-directed speech, negative emotional tone, upload volume, and exclusive content share—related to follower conversion into paying subscribers on crowd-patronage platforms. The fourth paper

underscored the impact of design style consistency in visual product ensembles on consumers' processing fluency, which may enhance ensemble evaluations but depends on the design style connotations. Addressing these four research gaps provides a comprehensive understanding of how content creators can engage consumers in the evolving social media landscape, emphasizing authentic expression and visual content design cues.

By employing a rich set of methods to investigate consumer behavior, this dissertation responded to the call by Lim and Rasul (2022) for more rigorous research on social media engagement through mixed-method approaches. Each paper adopted a quantitative empirical approach with multiple studies to robustly test theoretically derived hypotheses about consumer reactions toward content design. Through experiments or surveys in every project, primary data collection enabled us to explore the mechanisms of consumer engagement. The respective self-reported measures by participants represented an effective method to understand their perceptions of the content and inferences about the senders. Additionally, eye-tracking data in paper 2 and paper 4 enriched the self-reported data by offering insights into consumers' attention allocation and information processing. In paper 3 and paper 4, we utilized archival data from social media and crowd-patronage platforms to enhance the ecological validity of our studies, demonstrating the real-world relevance of our findings.

Aside from advancing the scholarly literature, the findings from this dissertation have tangible implications for content creators and brands aiming to achieve consumer engagement and for policymakers concerned with consumer protection. First, it informs creators and brands about the impact of disclosure regulations related to GenAI adoption and sponsored content. These regulations involve significant pitfalls concerning negative shifts in consumer perceptions of creator authenticity. However, this dissertation identifies content design strategies to help maintain favorable attitudinal and behavioral consumer responses in both

editorial and sponsored content, such as emphasizing human-AI collaboration or visually highlighting products. These insights into regulatory efforts are also beneficial for policymakers and social media platforms, as they indicate the effectiveness of such measures in informing consumers. Second, this dissertation provides valuable advice for creators on designing content to gain independence from brand deals through crowd-patronage. It underscores the importance of delivering social value and presents a list of concrete rhetorical signals and posting behaviors that may support creators in converting their followership into paying subscribers. It, therefore, helps solve a fundamental dilemma of the creator business (Audrezet et al., 2020) and better use the value inherent in a carefully nurtured creator brand. Third, this dissertation can guide creators and brands aiming to visually present multiple products together, a task increasingly requested in the creator economy (D'Angelo & Valsesia, 2023). It outlines conditions under which consistent ensemble designs can positively affect consumer attitudes, providing highly relevant knowledge in today's visually driven social media landscape.

4.2 Outlook for future research

Beyond the scope of work covered in this dissertation, several areas for future research could provide valuable insights into consumer engagement in the creator economy. Multiple promising research questions are related to consumer responses to GenAI technology, which will most likely continue to develop and shape how content is created and distributed on social media. Selected potential venues will be outlined below, with a focus on connecting the various research streams explored in the papers of this dissertation.

As demonstrated in paper 1, the adoption of GenAI by creators can have substantial detrimental effects on consumer reactions, not because of differences in perceptual evaluations but rather due to changes in perceived sender authenticity. It was also shown that message

framing can mitigate this impact. As AI disclosure becomes more prevalent, some parallels to advertising regulations can be drawn as both may trigger inferences about the sender. Paper 2 suggested that proactively enhancing the salience of commercial elements in sponsored content can help preserve creator integrity and persuasiveness, aligning with the strategy of transparent authenticity management (Audrezet et al., 2020). Similarly, a seemingly aggressive emphasis on what GenAI has been used for in content creation and the reasons behind it might give creators a transparency bonus that offsets detrimental consumer reactance. For instance, creators can publish statements on how they integrate GenAI into content creation practices or describe specific use cases of GenAI adoption in individual posts. Future research should investigate the impact of such actions on follower perceptions of creator integrity. On a related note, researchers could study consumer responses to sponsored content crafted with GenAI. The literature on creator authenticity stressed the importance of exuding passion for content generation (Moulard et al., 2014) and endorsed brands in influencer marketing (Audrezet et al., 2020). Automating content creation using GenAI could prompt consumers to infer a lack of passion for the content, as shown in paper 1. It is reasonable to believe that these inferences also spill over onto creators' passion for endorsed brands in sponsored content as GenAI can modify and prevent creators' expression of authentic opinions. How creators should design and communicate AI-generated sponsored content poses an important question against the background of passionate authenticity management, as described by Audrezet et al. (2020).

Another interesting research venue is connected to virtual influencers—digital personas engaging in the creator business—that are increasingly powered by GenAI to engage consumers autonomously (Sorosrungruang et al., 2024). Paper 3 has shown that human creators can attract more followers to their subscription-exclusive communities by providing distinct social, emotional, and functional consumption values. However, it is not clear whether virtual influencers can also tap into crowd-patronage. Consumption values have not been

contextualized to virtual influencers yet, and the associated content design cues may differ. For instance, uploading a higher content volume may be perceived differently for humans and virtual AI-empowered agents as the latter are not restricted to natural output limits. Similarly, displaying emotions is regarded as a human-nature attribute (Haslam et al., 2008), and virtual influencers may not be able to generate emotional value for consumers.

GenAI is also increasingly adopted to provide consumers with appealing product ensembles. The company Stitch Fix, for instance, uses GenAI trained on human professionals' styling advice to recommend fashion outfits while accounting for current inventory and consumers' previous purchasing behavior (Forbes, 2024b). Some research considered AI-based recommendations for individual products (Longoni & Cian, 2022), but perceptions of AI-generated recommendations for product combinations have remained unexplored. Paper 4 examined responses to stylistic consistency in ensembles created by humans. How consumers evaluate ensembles created by GenAI and, particularly, if inferences about designer expertise also transfer to GenAI, warrants further research (D'Angelo & Valsesia, 2023).

Unrelated to GenAI technology, three further overarching trends shall be mentioned that may pose fruitful venues for future research on consumer engagement in the creator economy. First, while creators use digital platforms to scale their reach (Peres et al., 2024), they increasingly extend their digital personas to physical spaces, offering fans live experiences, tangible products, or participation in real-world events. Consider, for instance, the podcast host Andrew Huberman offering live shows in the Sydney Opera House, video blogger David Dobrik entering the restaurant business, or the brothers Logan and Jake Paul attracting global attention to their emerging boxing careers. Future research could investigate how these offline formats can best be integrated into creators' content strategies to foster an authentic brand and monetization success.

Second, while visual content continues to dominate the social media landscape, audio is gaining popularity with the rise of mediums like podcasts, livestreams, and short-form videos. Vocal features can be linked to states and traits of speakers, such as emotions, stress, and confidence (Hildebrand et al., 2020). Prior research has explored how vocal features affect persuasion success in the context of crowdfunding pitches (Wang et al., 2021), but editorial content generation in the creator economy has been overlooked. Akin to paper 3, which focuses on creators' rhetorical signals, future research may theorize and examine vocal cues associated with consumer engagement and their willingness to provide monetary support to creators.

Third, social media platforms have been associated with negative effects on consumers' well-being (Allcott et al., 2020) and some viral trends even caused the death of young kids who mimicked behavior observed online (Bloomberg, 2022). Since a large portion of the young population looks up to creators and aspires to be like them, promoting safety and well-being represents a critical research area in the creator economy (Peres et al., 2024). Future work could investigate the roles of creators in promoting healthy behaviors and self-perceptions, the influence of algorithms on content consumption patterns, and the potential for platforms to offer educational campaigns on digital safety. As the creator economy continues to grow, it is paramount to deepen our understanding how to maximize the economic and social benefits for all stakeholders.

References

- Adobe Express. (2024, September 12). *How the influencer dream is shaping young people's goals*. <https://www.adobe.com/express/learn/blog/wanting-to-be-influencer>
- Affonso, F. M., & Janiszewski, C. (2023). Marketing by design: The influence of perceptual structure on brand performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(5), 736–754. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221142281>
- Allcott, H., Braghieri, L., Eichmeyer, S., & Gentzkow, M. (2020). The welfare effects of social media. *American Economic Review*, 110(3), 629–676. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20190658>
- Alter, A. L., & Oppenheimer, D. M. (2009). Uniting the tribes of fluency to form a metacognitive nation. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 13(3), 219–235. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1088868309341564>
- Appel, G., Grewal, L., Hadi, R., & Stephen, A. T. (2020). The future of social media in marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 48(1), 79–95. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-019-00695-1>
- Argyris, Y. A., Wang, Z., Kim, Y., & Yin, Z. (2020). The effects of visual congruence on increasing consumers' brand engagement: An empirical investigation of influencer marketing on instagram using deep-learning algorithms for automatic image classification. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 112(December 2019), 106443. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106443>
- Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Guidry Moulard, J. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. *Journal of Business Research*, 117, 557–569. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2018.07.008>
- Beichert, M., Bayerl, A., Goldenberg, J., & Lanz, A. (2024). Revenue generation through

- influencer marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 88(4), 40–63.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231217471>
- Bell, S. S., Holbrook, M. B., & Solomon, M. R. (1991). Combining esthetic and social value to explain preferences for product styles with the incorporation of personality and ensemble effects. *Journal of Social Behavior & Personality*, 6(6), 243–274.
- Berger, J., Moe, W. W., & Schweidel, D. A. (2023). What holds attention? Linguistic drivers of engagement. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(5), 793–809.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231152880>
- Beverland, M. B., & Farrelly, F. J. (2010). The quest for authenticity in consumption: Consumers' purposive choice of authentic cues to shape experienced outcomes. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 36(5), 838–856. <https://doi.org/10.1086/615047>
- Bleier, A., Fossen, B. L., & Shapira, M. (2024). On the role of social media platforms in the creator economy. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(3), 411–426.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.06.006>
- Bloomberg. (2022, November 30). *TikTok's viral challenges keep luring young kids to their deaths*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-11-30/is-tiktok-responsible-if-kids-die-doing-dangerous-viral-challenges>
- Brüns, J. D. (2020). *#sponsored – so what? Investigating boundary conditions of sponsorship disclosure effects on persuasion knowledge activation: The moderating roles of ego depletion and product placement saliency in the context of social media influencer marketing*. [Unpublished undergraduate thesis, supervised by Prof. Dr. Martin Meißner]. Zeppelin University.
- Business Insider. (2024, February 18). *Who is MrBeast? Meet the 25-year-old YouTube star who's famous for giving away millions of dollars to strangers and says he's not rich*. <https://www.businessinsider.com/mrbeast-youtube-jimmy-donaldson-net-worth-life->

career-challenges-teamtrees-2019-11

- Carlson, K., Kopalle, P. K., Riddell, A., Rockmore, D., & Vana, P. (2023). Complementing human effort in online reviews: A deep learning approach to automatic content generation and review synthesis. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 40(1), 54–74. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2022.02.004>
- Cascio Rizzo, G. L., Villarroel Ordenes, F., Pozharliev, R., De Angelis, M., & Costabile, M. (2024). How high-arousal language shapes micro- versus macro-influencers' impact. *Journal of Marketing*, 88(4), 107–128. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429231207636>
- Cillo, P., & Rubera, G. (2024). Generative AI in innovation and marketing processes: A roadmap of research opportunities. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-024-01044-7>
- D'Angelo, J. K., & Valsesia, F. (2023). You should try these together: Combinatory recommendations signal expertise and improve product attitudes. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 60(1), 155–169. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437221111344>
- DataReportal. (2024, January 31). *Digital 2024: Global overview report*. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2024-global-overview-report>
- Edeling, A., & Wies, S. (2024). Embracing entrepreneurship in the creator economy: The rise of creatpreneurs. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(3), 436–454. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.07.003>
- Eisend, M., & Tarrahi, F. (2022). Persuasion knowledge in the marketplace: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 32(1), 3–22. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jcpy.1258>
- Eisend, M., Van Reijmersdal, E. A., Boerman, S. C., & Tarrahi, F. (2020). A meta-analysis of the effects of disclosing sponsored content. *Journal of Advertising*, 49(3), 344–366. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1765909>
- European Council. (2024, May 21). *Artificial intelligence (AI) act: Council gives final green*

light to the first worldwide rules on AI. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2024/05/21/artificial-intelligence-ai-act-council-gives-final-green-light-to-the-first-worldwide-rules-on-ai/>

Evans, N. J., Phua, J., Lim, J., & Jun, H. (2017). Disclosing instagram influencer advertising: The effects of disclosure language on advertising recognition, attitudes, and behavioral intent. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 17(2), 138–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15252019.2017.1366885>

Facebook. (n.d.). *Audience ad targeting*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://www.facebook.com/business/ads/ad-targeting>

Federal Trade Commission. (2017, April 19). *FTC staff reminds influencers and brands to clearly disclose relationship: Commission aims to improve disclosures in social media endorsements.* <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/press-releases/2017/04/ftc-staff-reminds-influencers-brands-clearly-disclose>

Federal Trade Commission. (2019, November). *Disclosures 101 for social media influencers.* https://www.ftc.gov/system/files/documents/plain-language/1001a-influencer-guide-508_1.pdf

Feuerriegel, S., Hartmann, J., Janiesch, C., & Zschech, P. (2023). Generative AI. *Business & Information Systems Engineering*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12599-023-00834-7>

Forbes. (2024a, July 8). *Digital doppelgangers: Instagram tests creator-made AI clones.* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ianshepherd/2024/07/08/digital-doppelgangers-instagram-tests-creator-made-ai-clones/>

Forbes. (2024b, March 8). *How Stitch Fix is using generative AI to help us dress better.* <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bernardmarr/2024/03/08/how-stitch-fix-is-using-generative-ai-to-help-us-dress-better/>

Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with

- persuasion attempts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(1), 1–31.
<https://doi.org/10.1086/209380>
- Gartner. (n.d.). *Gartner experts answer the top generative AI questions for your enterprise*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://www.gartner.com/en/topics/generative-ai>
- Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y., & Wiertz, C. (2013). Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 27(4), 242–256.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.09.004>
- Gerrath, M. H. E. E., & Usrey, B. (2021). The impact of influencer motives and commonness perceptions on follower reactions toward incentivized reviews. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 38(3), 531–548. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2020.09.010>
- Goldman Sachs. (2023, April 19). *The creator economy could approach half-a-trillion dollars by 2027*. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/the-creator-economy-could-approach-half-a-trillion-dollars-by-2027.html>
- Graphtron. (n.d.). *Patreon creators statistics*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://graphtron.com/patreon-stats>
- Guan, Z., Hou, F., Li, B., Phang, C. W., & Chong, A. Y. L. (2022). What influences the purchase of virtual gifts in live streaming in China? A cultural context-sensitive model. *Information Systems Journal*, 32(3), 653–689. <https://doi.org/10.1111/isj.12367>
- Hair, L., Bonifacio, R., & Wohn, D. Y. (2022). Multi-platform practices among digital patronage creators. *Convergence*, 28(5), 1438–1456.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221104990>
- Hartmann, J., Exner, Y., & Domdey, S. (2024). The power of generative marketing: Can generative AI create superhuman visual marketing content? *International Journal of Research in Marketing*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.09.002>.
- Hartmann, J., Heitmann, M., Schamp, C., & Netzer, O. (2021). The power of brand selfies.

- Journal of Marketing Research*, 58(6), 1159–1177.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243721103725>
- Haslam, N., Kashima, Y., Loughnan, S., Shi, J., & Suitner, C. (2008). Subhuman, inhuman, and superhuman: Contrasting humans with nonhumans in three cultures. *Social Cognition*, 26(2), 248–258. <https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2008.26.2.248>
- Heitmann, M., Landwehr, J. R., Schreiner, T. F., & van Heerde, H. J. (2020). Leveraging brand equity for effective visual product design. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(2), 257–277. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243720904004>
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Malthouse, E. C., Friege, C., Gensler, S., Lobschat, L., Rangaswamy, A., & Skiera, B. (2010). The impact of new media on customer relationships. *Journal of Service Research*, 13(3), 311–330. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1094670510375460>
- Hildebrand, C., Efthymiou, F., Busquet, F., Hampton, W. H., Hoffman, D. L., & Novak, T. P. (2020). Voice analytics in business research: Conceptual foundations, acoustic feature extraction, and applications. *Journal of Business Research*, 121, 364–374.
- Hofstetter, R., & Gollnhofer, J. F. (2024). The creator's dilemma: Resolving tensions between authenticity and monetization in social media. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(3), 427–435. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.07.001>
- Hollebeek, L. D., Glynn, M. S., & Brodie, R. J. (2014). Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 28(2), 149–165. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2013.12.002>
- Huang, S., Aral, S., Hu, Y. J., & Brynjolfsson, E. (2020). Social advertising effectiveness across products: A large-scale field experiment. *Marketing Science*, 39(6), 1142–1165. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2020.1240>
- Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The commercialization of social media stars: a literature review and conceptual framework on the strategic use of social media

- influencers. *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(3), 327–375.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2020.1836925>
- Ilicic, J., & Webster, C. M. (2016). Being true to oneself: Investigating celebrity brand authenticity. *Psychology & Marketing*, 33(6), 410–420.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20887>
- Influencer Marketing Hub. (2024, September 16). *The state of influencer marketing 2024: Benchmark report*. <https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/#toc-2>
- Instagram. (n.d.). *Instagram for Business*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://business.instagram.com/>
- Jansen, T., Heitmann, M., Reisenbichler, M., & Schweidel, D. A. (2024). Automated alignment: Guiding visual generative AI for brand building and customer engagement. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4656622>
- Kanuri, V. K., Hughes, C., & Hodges, B. T. (2024). Standing out from the crowd: When and why color complexity in social media images increases user engagement. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(2), 174–193.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2023.08.007>
- Karagür, Z., Becker, J. M., Klein, K., & Edeling, A. (2022). How, why, and when disclosure type matters for influencer marketing. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 39(2), 313–335. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.09.006>
- Keh, H. T., Wang, D., & Yan, L. (2021). Gimmicky or effective? The effects of imaginative displays on customers' purchase behavior. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(5), 109–127.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921997359>
- Klostermann, J., Meißner, M., Max, A., & Decker, R. (2023). Presentation of celebrities' private life through visual social media. *Journal of Business Research*, 156(November

- 2022). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.113524>
- Kostyk, A., & Huhmann, B. A. (2021). Perfect social media image posts: symmetry and contrast influence consumer response. *European Journal of Marketing*, 55(6), 1747–1779. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-09-2018-0629>
- Lam, S. Y., & Mukherjee, A. (2005). The effects of merchandise coordination and juxtaposition on consumers' product evaluation and purchase intention in store-based retailing. *Journal of Retailing*, 81(3), 231–250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretai.2005.07.006>
- Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., Li, Y., Zhang, J. Z., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022a). Influencer marketing effectiveness. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(6), 93–115. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221102889>
- Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., & Palmatier, R. W. (2022b). Online influencer marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 50(2), 226–251. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00829-4>
- Li, Y., & Xie, Y. (2020). Is a picture worth a thousand words? An empirical study of image content and social media engagement. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 57(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022243719881113>
- Liadeli, G., Sotgiu, F., & Verlegh, P. W. J. (2023). A meta-analysis of the effects of brands' owned social media on social media engagement and sales. *Journal of Marketing*, 87(3), 406–427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222429221123250>
- Lim, W. M., & Rasul, T. (2022). Customer engagement and social media: Revisiting the past to inform the future. *Journal of Business Research*, 148(April), 325–342. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2022.04.068>
- Lin, Y. K., Rai, A., & Yang, Y. (2022). Information control for creator brand management in subscription-based crowdfunding. *Information Systems Research*, 33(3), 846–866. <https://doi.org/10.1287/isre.2021.1085>

- Lin, Y., Yao, D., & Chen, X. (2021). Happiness begets money: Emotion and engagement in live streaming. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 58(3), 417–438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00222437211002477>
- Logg, J. M., Minson, J. A., & Moore, D. A. (2019). Algorithm appreciation: People prefer algorithmic to human judgment. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 151, 90–103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2018.12.005>
- Longoni, C., & Cian, L. (2022). Artificial intelligence in utilitarian vs. hedonic contexts: The “word-of-machine” effect. *Journal of Marketing*, 86(1), 91–108.
- Lorenz-Spreen, P., Mønsted, B. M., Hövel, P., & Lehmann, S. (2019). Accelerating dynamics of collective attention. *Nature Communications*, 10(1), 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-09311-w>
- Luo, X., Tong, S., Fang, Z., & Qu, Z. (2019). Frontiers: Machines vs. humans: The impact of artificial intelligence chatbot disclosure on customer purchases. *Marketing Science*, 38(6), 937–947. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2019.1192>
- Mahmud, H., Islam, A. K. M. N., Ahmed, S. I., & Smolander, K. (2022). What influences algorithmic decision-making? A systematic literature review on algorithm aversion. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 175, 121390. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2021.121390>
- Matz, S. C., Teeny, J. D., Vaid, S. S., Peters, H., Harari, G. M., & Cerf, M. (2024). The potential of generative AI for personalized persuasion at scale. *Scientific Reports*, 14(Article 4692). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-53755-0>
- Mayer, S., & Landwehr, J. R. (2018). Quantifying visual aesthetics based on processing fluency theory: Four algorithmic measures for antecedents of aesthetic preferences. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 12(4), 399–431. <https://doi.org/10.1037/aca0000187>
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement

- process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310–321. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209217>
- McKinsey. (2024, May 30). *The state of AI in early 2024: Gen AI adoption spikes and starts to generate value*. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/quantumblack/our-insights/the-state-of-ai>
- Moradi, M., Dass, M., Arnett, D., & Badrinarayanan, V. (2024). The time-varying effects of rhetorical signals in crowdfunding campaigns. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 52(2), 370–398. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-023-00943-5>
- Moulard, J. G., Rice, D. H., Garrity, C. P., & Mangus, S. M. (2014). Artist Authenticity: How Artists' Passion and Commitment Shape Consumers' Perceptions and Behavioral Intentions across Genders. *Psychology & Marketing*, 31(8), 576–590. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.20719>
- Muntinga, D. G., Moorman, M., & Smit, E. G. (2011). Introducing COBRAs. *International Journal of Advertising*, 30(1), 13–46. <https://doi.org/10.2501/ija-30-1-013-046>
- Noy, S., & Zhang, W. (2023). Experimental evidence on the productivity effects of generative artificial intelligence. *Science*, 381(Issue 6654), 187–192. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adh2586>
- Obermiller, C., & Spangenberg, E. R. (1998). Development of a scale to measure consumer skepticism toward advertising. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 7(2), 159–186. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327663jcp0702_03
- Overgoor, G., Rand, W., van Dolen, W., & Mazloom, M. (2022). Simplicity is not key: Understanding firm-generated social media images and consumer liking. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 39(3), 639–655. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2021.12.005>
- Patreon. (n.d.). *The story of Patreon*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://www.patreon.com/about>

- Peres, R., Schreier, M., Schweidel, D. A., & Sorescu, A. (2024). The creator economy: An introduction and a call for scholarly research. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 41(3), 403–410. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijresmar.2024.07.005>
- Pew Research Center. (2023, December 11). *Teens, social media and technology 2023*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2023/12/11/teens-social-media-and-technology-2023/>
- Pieters, R., & Wedel, M. (2004). Attention capture and transfer in advertising: Brand, pictorial, and text-size effects. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(2), 36–50. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.68.2.36.27794>
- Pieters, R., Wedel, M., & Batra, R. (2010). The stopping power of advertising: Measures and effects of visual complexity. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(5), 48–60. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkg.74.5.48>
- Regner, T. (2021). Crowdfunding a monthly income: an analysis of the membership platform Patreon. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 45(1), 133–142. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10824-020-09381-5>
- Reisenbichler, M., Reutterer, T., Schweidel, D., & Dan, D. (2022). Frontiers: Supporting content marketing with natural language generation. *Marketing Science*, 41(3), 441–452. <https://doi.org/10.1287/mksc.2022.1354>
- Rietveld, R., van Dolen, W., Mazloom, M., & Worrying, M. (2020). What you feel, is what you like influence of message appeals on customer engagement on Instagram. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 49, 20–53. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intmar.2019.06.003>
- Sorosrungruang, T., Ameen, N., & Hackley, C. (2024). How real is real enough? Unveiling the diverse power of generative AI-enabled virtual influencers and the dynamics of human responses. *Psychology and Marketing*, August. <https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.22105>
- Steigenberger, N., & Wilhelm, H. (2018). Extending signaling theory to rhetorical signals:

- Evidence from crowdfunding. *Organization Science*, 29(3), 529–546.
<https://doi.org/10.1287/orsc.2017.1195>
- Stephen, A. T., & Galak, J. (2012). The effects of traditional and social earned media on sales: A study of a microlending marketplace. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 49(5), 624–639.
<https://doi.org/10.1509/jmr.09.0401>
- Tajvarpour, M. H., & Pujari, D. (2022). Bigger from a distance: The moderating role of spatial distance on the importance of traditional and rhetorical quality signals for transactions in crowdfunding. *Decision Support Systems*, 156(May 2021), 113742.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dss.2022.113742>
- The White House. (2023, October 30). *FACT SHEET: President Biden issues executive order on safe, secure, and trustworthy artificial intelligence*.
<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/10/30/fact-sheet-president-biden-issues-executive-order-on-safe-secure-and-trustworthy-artificial-intelligence/>
- TikTok. (2023, September 19). *New labels for disclosing AI-generated content*.
<https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/new-labels-for-disclosing-ai-generated-content>
- Veryzer, R. W., & Hutchinson, J. W. (1998). The influence of unity and prototypicality on aesthetic responses to new product designs. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 374–394. <https://doi.org/10.1086/209516>
- Volkmer, S. A., & Meißner, M. (2024). Beyond livestreaming: The rise of social media gifting and paid memberships – A systematic literature review and future research agenda. *Journal of Business Research*, 185(August).
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2024.114915>
- Wan, J., Lu, Y., Wang, B., & Zhao, L. (2017). How attachment influences users' willingness to donate to content creators in social media: A socio-technical systems perspective.

- Information and Management*, 54(7), 837–850. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.im.2016.12.007>
- Wang, X., Lu, S., Li, X., Khamitov, M., & Bendle, N. (2021). Audio mining: The role of vocal tone in persuasion. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 48(2), 189–211. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jcr/ucab012>
- Ye, G., Hudders, L., De Jans, S., & De Veirman, M. (2021). The value of influencer marketing for business: A bibliometric analysis and managerial implications. *Journal of Advertising*, 50(2), 160–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2020.1857888>
- YouTube. (n.d.). *MrBeast*. Retrieved September 29, 2024, from <https://www.youtube.com/@MrBeast/featured>
- Zhang, X., Zhou, M., & Lee, G. M. (2024). How does AI-generated voice affect online video creation? Evidence from TikTok. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4676705>
- Zhou, E., & Lee, D. (2024). Generative artificial intelligence, human creativity, and art. *PNAS Nexus*, 3(3), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pnasnexus/pgae052>

Appendices

Appendix 1 (Paper 1)

Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2024). Do you create your content yourself? Using generative artificial intelligence for social media content creation diminishes perceived brand authenticity. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 79, Article 103790. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2024.103790>

Appendix 2 (Paper 2)

Brüns, J. D., & Meißner, M. (2023). Show me that you are advertising: Visual salience of products attenuates detrimental effects of persuasion knowledge activation in influencer advertising. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 148, Article 107891. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2023.107891>

Note:

The full versions of these published papers were included in the examiner copies of this dissertation. To avoid plagiarism, dual publication, or copyright infringement, these papers are not included in the freely accessible version of this dissertation but can be retrieved from the publishers' websites.

Appendix 3 (Paper 3)

Volkmer[†], S. A, Brüns[†], J. D., & Meißner, M. (2024). *“If you like my social media content, support me on Patreon”*: Investigating the effects of social media content design on creator crowd-patronage success. Working paper. † = shared first-authorship.

Appendix 4 (Paper 4)

Brüns, J. D., Meißner, M., Walz, S., & Talke, K. (2024). *Is consistency key? How stylistic consistency shapes product ensemble liking*. Working paper.

Note:

The full versions of these working papers were included in the examiner copies of this dissertation. To protect the integrity of the ongoing review process and to avoid plagiarism, dual publication, or copyright infringement, these papers are not included in the freely accessible version of this dissertation but can be requested from the author.