Whose Idea was that?
A Study Investigating the Effect of the Source of Inspiring Content on Purchase Intentions

by

Mikaela Levasseur

A Thesis
Presented to
The University of Guelph

In partial fulfilment of requirements
for the degree of
Master of Science
in
Marketing and Consumer Studies

Guelph, Ontario, Canada

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ABSTRACT

WHOSE IDEA WAS THAT?

A STUDY INVESTIGATING THE EFFECT OF THE SOURCE OF INSPIRING CONTENT ON PURCHASE INTENTIONS

Mikaela Levasseur
University of Guelph, 2018

Advisors:
Dr. Tanya Mark
Dr. Juan Wang

The overall objective of this research project was to determine whether inspiring content from an external source has a significantly higher impact on purchase intentions for less involved participants because it is perceived as more credible. Specifically, this thesis investigated the moderating role of involvement on purchase intentions when inspiring content came from an external (i.e. consumer-generated) source. This thesis also examined whether the moderating effect of involvement was transmitted through source credibility (the mediator). Involvement was found to have an impact on purchase intentions when inspiring content came from an external source, and purchase intention scores were higher among low-involvement participants (vs. high-involvement participants). The results also demonstrated that purchase intention scores were higher among low-involvement participants who saw an external source instead of an internal source. These findings have important implications for marketing managers because they suggest the conditions under which marketers should rely on consumer-generated content to persuade consumers.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take a moment to express my heartfelt thanks to every person who has supported me throughout my master’s degree.

None of this would have been possible without the guidance and encouragement from my co-advisors, Dr. Tanya Mark & Dr. Juan Wang. Juan, I am extremely grateful for the amount of support that you provided throughout my thesis. You guided me through this process and pushed me to excel. I am indebted to you and your unwavering patience in the face of my many questions. Tanya, you have been a tremendous mentor and champion for my cause. I am acutely aware of how large a part you have played in my academic success, and words cannot express how invaluable your input and support have ben during my entire career at the University of Guelph, both academically and personally.

I would also like to show appreciation for all of the faculty and staff in the Department of Marketing and Consumer Studies. I credit the wonderful experience I have had at the University of Guelph to the unfailing support, advocacy and kindness you all showed me.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, family and friends who not only showed me love, but also acted as loyal allies and moral boosters throughout the challenges of this degree. You sat through my presentations and proofread my assignments and for that I will always be thankful. And finally, to my fiancé, Mathew McGuire, thank you for always believing in me.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Exposing customers to new ideas is a key component in marketing, and firms have developed innovative strategies in response to consumer demand for inspiration. *Pinterest*, which is described as “visual bookmarking tool”, allows consumers to discover creative ideas, browse products online, pin them to their digital boards, and share them with their peers. By showing products “in use” through do-it-yourself instructions, recipes, or fashionable outfits, *Pinterest* exposes users to new consumption ideas that stimulates their imagination. On *Facebook*, inspiring content can come from recipe videos and many clips garner hundreds of thousands of likes and comments. Therefore, it is no surprise that marketing managers are now creating branded content videos to drive sales. For example, RITZ crackers recently partnered with BuzzFeed’s Tasty food channel to create a branded recipe video. Sales increased by 2.1%, household penetration increased by 1.4% and return on ad spend increased by 1.2 times (BuzzFeed Tasty, n.d.). In addition, *Instagram*, a social networking app made for sharing photos and videos, has been described as “a network based on visual entertainment” (York, 2017). Marketers engage with consumers on *Instagram* through brand-owned pages or sponsored posts. The most iconic brands on *Instagram* are described as having interesting, relevant and useful content that engages and inspires consumers in an authentic way (Kimuyu, 2015). The common thread that ties these three social media examples together is the presence of inspiration, and the success of these social media sites is a direct result of an insight which proposes that consumers are no longer simply looking for products: they are looking for solutions and useful information (Marketing Science Institute, 2016).

The idea of inspiring customers is not new to the practice of marketing, but customer inspiration is a novel construct introduced by Böttger, Rudolph, Evanschitzky and Pfrang in
2017. Their seminal paper provided the conceptualization, scale development and validation of the construct through a series of empirical studies. Böttger et al. (2017) demonstrated the positive effect of customer inspiration on demand, customer exploration behaviour and customer loyalty. In these studies, the inspiring content took the form of recipe suggestions and visual imagery that were clearly affiliated with a brand. The results demonstrated that customer inspiration leads to increases in purchase intentions and positive attitudes towards the advertisement (Böttger et al., 2017). Although the authors acknowledge that inspiration can come from a multitude of sources that are not marketer generated, such as the external content on social media sites discussed above, researchers have not yet investigated how sources of inspiration affect consumer behaviour.

Communication literature comparing the effectiveness of internal (i.e. marketer-generated content) versus external (i.e. consumer-generated content) communications has established that external sources, such as word-of-mouth (WOM), are a powerful tool of persuasion. Unlike traditional marketing, where the source of information has commercial interest, the source of WOM is independent (Arndt, 1967). Studies have shown that WOM significantly impacts consumer behaviour because it is perceived as more credible, relevant and trustworthy (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, Bickart & Schindler, 2001). However, studies have also established that a person’s level of involvement influences the effect of persuasion attempts because of the unique processing routes utilized (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Extant research suggests that under low-levels of involvement, consumers rely on peripheral cues, such as source credibility, when making a purchase decision (Petty et al., 1983, Petty & Wegener, 1999; Sussman & Siegal, 2003; Park et al., 2007). Therefore, this thesis aimed to demonstrate that there is an interaction between the level of involvement and the source of inspiring content, which influences the
perceived credibility of that source. The overall objective of this research project was to determine whether, and if so, why the pervasiveness of inspiring content from an external source on purchase intentions varies depending on the level of consumer involvement.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to investigate the body of literature on customer experience, with a focus on a related construct called customer inspiration. Therefore, this section will begin with an introduction on customer inspiration as it relates to the customer experience, followed by an overview of the effect of different communication sources and, finally, a discussion on the persuasion mechanisms used to predict the hypotheses in this research.

2.1 Customer Experience

Creating a positive customer experience is now a leading management objective (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). Research investigating the customer experience is increasingly important as academics strive to understand how customers interact with firms through numerous touchpoints across multiple channels (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). From a business perspective, customer experience has been defined as “the internal and subjective response customers have to any direct or indirect contact with a company” (Meyer & Schwager, 2007, p.2). Lemon and Verhoef (2016) define customer experience as “a multidimensional construct focusing on a customer’s cognitive, emotional, behavioral, sensorial, and social responses to a firm’s offering during the customer’s entire purchase journey” (p. 71). They conceptualized the customer experience as
having three distinct stages in the customer’s journey: pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). During these stages, customers can interact with four categories of touch points: brand-owned, partner-owned, customer-owned and social/external/independent (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

The level of control maintained by the firm varies according to the type of touch point. Brand-owned touch points and partner-owned touch points rest within the firm’s control, and customer-owned touch points and social/external touch points live outside the firm’s control. Examples of customer-owned touch points include “www.ikeahackers.net”, a website with consumer generated content related to innovative ways to repurpose IKEA furniture (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The nature of these touch points demonstrate that consumers are not only looking for products, they are looking for solutions. Firms striving for success must respond to these consumer demands by providing them with useful information that they want to receive (Marketing Science Institute, 2016). In response to this trend, marketers have been leveraging social media sites such as Pinterest, Facebook and Instagram to promote their products, inspire customers, and strengthen customer relationships. These activities are closely related to a new construct in marketing called customer inspiration.

2.2 Customer Inspiration

2.2.1 Definition

Böttger et al. (2017) introduced the concept of customer inspiration to the field of marketing by leveraging existing research on inspiration across streams of social psychology literature. Customer inspiration is defined as “a customer’s temporary motivational state that facilitates the transition from the reception of a marketing-induced idea to the intrinsic pursuit of
a consumption related goal” (Böttger et al., 2017 p. 6). This definition aligns with general conceptualizations of inspiration in psychology and is based on the transmission model of general inspiration, proposed by Thrash et al. (2010). However, unlike conceptualizations of inspiration in social psychology, customer inspiration is situated in a marketing context for three reasons: (1) the recipient of the inspiration is a customer, (2) the stimulation of ideas is prompted by a conscious marketing effort, and (3) the focus is on consumption-related goals such as purchasing, donating, or engaging with a brand (Böttger et al., 2017).

2.2.2 Theoretical Background

Psychologists Todd M. Thrash and Andrew J. Elliot are recognized for having greatly contributed to the field of research on inspiration. According to them, inspiration involves three main qualities: (1) evocation, which refers to the fact that inspiration is induced spontaneously without intention, (2) transcendence, because inspiration involves surpassing limitations in a moment of clarity, and (3) approach motivation, because inspiration involves striving to express or actualize a new idea (Thrash & Elliot, 2003).

Thrash and Elliot also contributed to theories of inspiration by developing the “Inspiration Scale”, which measures the frequency with which a person experiences inspiration in their daily lives (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The customer inspiration scale provides a measure of inspiration as a trait and assumes that people differ from one another in the frequency with which they experience inspiration in their daily lives. In the field of psychology, Milyavskaya, Ianakieva, Foxen-Craft, Colantuoni and Koestner (2011) conducted a study investigating the effects of inspiration on goal pursuit and found that trait inspiration had a positive effect on goal progress. Participants who scored higher in trait inspiration set more inspired goals than less
inspired participants. Inspired participants also reported higher levels of goal progress compared to the non-inspired participants. The results also indicated that the relationship between inspiration and goal progress was reciprocal. Achieving important goals made the participants feel more inspired to set and achieve future goals (Milyavskaya et al., 2011). Studies have also shown trait inspiration is correlated with higher levels of important psychological resources such as belief in one’s own abilities, self-esteem, and optimism (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

Given the positive outcomes associated with trait inspiration, recent research has focused on understanding the ways in which inspiration can be activated and manipulated. Studies have shown that openness to experience, positive affect, work mastery and exposure to inspiring role models are key ingredients that generate inspiration (Kauffman, 2011). Studies have also shown that state inspiration can be activated in a laboratory setting. By asking participants to “recall a time when you were inspired or experienced inspiration”, Thrash and Elliot (2004) induced states of inspiration among participants, which was measured using the general state inspiration scale. Participants in the recall condition reported elevated levels of self-reported positive affect and task involvement, and lower levels of negative affect compared to the control condition (Thrash & Elliot, 2004).

In the field of marketing, the customer inspiration construct was developed by leveraging three complementary frameworks of inspiration from social psychology literature: (1) tripartite framework, (2) component process conceptualization, and (3) transmission model. These three frameworks form the basis of the conceptualization of customer inspiration proposed by Böttger et al. (2017). Thrash and Elliot’s (2003) tripartite framework defines inspiration as “both a trait and a state” because it can vary among individuals (p. 873). The authors proposed that their portrait of inspiration involves three main characteristics: motivation (e.g. activation, energy),
evocation (e.g. feeling overtaken, uncontrolled, attraction from the object) and transcendence (e.g. positivity, enhancement, clarity) (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). The component process conceptualization focuses on the components that form an episode of inspiration and defines inspiration as “a hybrid construct that emerges from the juxtaposition of two component processes” (Thrash & Elliot, 2004, p. 958). The first component is to be “inspired by” something, which refers to an activation state and is directly related to evocation and transcendence in the tripartite framework (Böttger et al., 2017). The second component is to be “inspired to” act or do something, which refers to an intention state and relates to the motivation component in the tripartite framework. The transmission model of inspiration serves as the basis for Böttger et al.’s (2017) conceptualization of customer inspiration. The transmission model of inspiration focuses on the role of inspiration in the creative process and defines customer inspiration as “a motivational state that is evoked in response to getting a creative idea that compels the individual to transform the creative idea into a creative product” (Thrash, Maruskin et al., 2010, p. 470). The framework contains three key parts: (1) antecedents, which are defined as sources of inspiration (i.e. the creative idea), (2) inspiration as a mediating state, and (3) consequences, which refer to the actualization of the idea. In applying this framework to customer inspiration, Böttger et al. (2017) proposed that a marketing-elicited idea (i.e. the antecedent) facilitates the transition from a state of being “inspired by” to a state of being “inspired to” realize a consumption related goal (i.e. consequence).

2.2.3 Motivation

Motivation is central to the discussion on customer inspiration because it is a motivational state with two key components: (1) activation, which refers to the state of being
“inspired by” a conscious marketing effort and (2) intention, which refers to state of being “inspired to” pursue a consumption-related goal (Böttger et al., 2017). The two components to customer inspiration are in line with existing theories of motivation, such as Ryan and Deci’s (2000) view that motivation consists of activation and intention.

Inspiration is also considered to be a type of intrinsic motivational state because it concentrates on incentives that are inherent to the task and results in autonomous behaviours (Böttger et al., 2017). This theory aligns with Ryan and Deci’s (2000) description of intrinsic motivation as being “the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one’s capacities to explore, and to learn” (p. 70). In study 3A, Böttger et al. (2017) showed that customer inspiration leads to the intrinsic pursuit of consumption related goals in an online shopping context. When consumers were exposed to two antecedents of inspiration, idea shopping and inspirational content in the form of recipes, they were motivated to purchase a product, thereby providing support for the hypothesis that inspiration is a type of intrinsic motivation.

Customer inspiration also requires approach motivation as opposed to avoidance motivation, a factor that aligns with prior conceptualizations of general inspiration. Furthermore, Thrash and Elliot (2003) demonstrated that general inspiration correlates with measures of the behavioral activation system, as opposed to the inhibition system. These findings were further supported in a study by Thrash et al., (2010) who found that people with weak approach motivation reported lower levels of inspiration as opposed to people with strong approach temperaments who were easily inspired. In study 4, Böttger et al. (2017) found support for the approach-motivation hypothesis by directly appealing to participants’ imagination. The authors
found that approach motivation and high imagery appeals generated higher levels of customer inspiration than avoidance motivation and low imagery appeals (Böttger et al., 2017).

2.2.4 Customer Inspiration as a touch-point

Inspiring content influences the customer experience because it is a touch point in the early part of the customer’s journey. Print ads, novel assortments, in-store presentations, personalized messages and online images are examples of touch points that can serve as sources of inspiration. The conceptualization of customer inspiration is also aligned with the mindset theory of action phases by Peter Gollwitzer. According to this theory, the principles guiding goal selection and goal achievement are different, and the customer journey is divided into distinct phases that distinguish between deliberation during the pre-purchase phase and implementation during the post-purchase phase (Gollwitzer & Oettingen, 1998). When consumers are “inspired by” something, they fall into the deliberation (pre-purchase) stage of the customer journey. When consumers transition into the “inspired to” stage, they proceed to the implementation stage (i.e. purchase phase) of the journey (Böttger et al., 2017). Empirical findings from Böttger et al. (2017) supported this two-component model given that elements in the “inspired-by” stage improved the prediction of shopping duration (i.e. pre-purchase) and elements in the “inspired-to” stage predicted product-specific behaviour, such as products viewed (i.e. purchase stage).

2.2.5 Antecedents of Customer Inspiration

Stimulating customer inspiration is a function of the inspirational object and the person being targeted. As a result, two key antecedents are required: (1) the inspiring source must contain three key characteristics and (2) the customer must be open to inspiration (Böttger et al.,
To qualify as inspiring, the three characteristics that a source must include are (a) the delivery of inspirational content (i.e. a new idea), (b) calls to use one’s imagination, and (c) the elicitation of an approach rather than avoidance motivation (Böttger et al., 2017). Studies have shown that recipes are a source of inspiration because they provide new ideas about possible product combinations. Imagery appeals are a source of inspiration because they stimulate consumers to imagine the product experience (Böttger et al., 2017).

Openness to inspiration is relevant to theories of inspiration because it predicts the frequency and intensity of inspirational experiences (Thrash & Elliot, 2003). In a consumption context, the idea shopping construct is used to measure the extent to which consumers will be influenced by inspiring content (Böttger et al., 2017). According to Arnold and Reynolds (2003), idea shopping refers to the act of “shopping to keep up with trends and new fashions, and to see new products and innovations” (p. 80). Idea shopping qualifies as a hedonic, product-oriented motivation and suggests that consumption is driven by the fun that a person has when searching for or using a product. These activities include shopping for the perfect gift, finding new fashions, and keeping up new products or innovations (Arnold & Reynolds, 2003). Böttger et al. (2017) found that when idea shopping was high, and participants were highly involved in their search for an idea, the motivation to look for inspiration was higher as well.

2.3 Word-of-Mouth

The evolution of social media has drastically changed the way that marketers interact with consumers. Gone are the days of one-way communication that allowed marketers to maintain complete control of their brand’s image. Technology has bestowed power on today’s consumers and allowed them to create content, influence peers, and engage with brands. These
informal communications have also generated positive results for marketers. According to a study published by the London School of Economics, strong customer advocacy on behalf of a brand or company is one of the best predictors of top-line growth (Marsden, Samson & Upton, 2005).

2.3.1 Definitions

WOM & eWOM

Interest in the impact of word-of-mouth (WOM) on consumers began with Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) two-step model of communication, which proposed that ideas flow from mass media to opinion leaders who then influence the wider population. Westbrook (1987) is recognized for having provided the earliest definition of word-of-mouth in a post purchase context. He described WOM as “informal communication directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers” (Westbrook, 1987, p. 261). Today, the American Marketing Association defines WOM from a consumer behaviour perspective and proposes that it “occurs when people share information about products or promotions with friends” (“Dictionary A”, n.d.). When such information is communicated via the Internet, through reviews, tweets, blog posts, “likes”, “pins”, or images, it is called electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck & Bijmolt, 2016). eWOM is defined as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet” (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39).
Endogenous WOM

The American Marketing Association’s definition of WOM is line with endogenous WOM, which refers to conversations that naturally occur among consumers as a function of their experiences with a product. Exogenous WOM refers to WOM communications created by a firm’s actions (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Even though scholars distinguish between the two types of WOM, studies have predominantly focused on endogenous WOM. This research project will also focus on endogenous WOM as a form of earned media because there does not appear to be any existing research investigating inspiring content that is generated from an external source.

Earned Media

Marketers differentiate between different types of media because of the diverse strategies involved with each. Paid media refers to advertising and sponsorships. Earned media includes public relations and word-of-mouth. Owned media is anything under the company’s direct control, such as websites, newsletters, catalogues and blogs (Bonchek, 2014). Existing research on customer inspiration has investigated inspiring content from paid and owned media (i.e. recipes on company website, advertisements for luxury vacations), but the effects of earned media in the form of word-of-mouth communications have yet to be investigated. From the consumer’s perspective, the separation between owned, paid and earned media is sometimes unclear because digital sources can deliver different forms of information (Powers et al., 2012). Despite this, research investigating the effects of consumer generated information (i.e. earned media) on consumer behaviour and attitudes has been an area of interest among scholars.
2.3.2 WOM vs. Traditional Marketing

Researchers have compared the effectiveness of WOM communications to traditional marketing, and findings consistently support the superiority of endogenous WOM. For instance, Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) found that WOM was two times more effective than radio advertisements, four times more effective than personal selling, and seven times more effective than print advertisements. In a more recent study, Villanueva, Yoo, and Hanssens (2008) found that customers acquired via WOM added two times the lifetime value of customers acquired through traditional marketing. Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels (2009) found that WOM referrals to a social networking site generated significantly better results compared to referrals via traditional marketing techniques. With WOM generating more than twice the sales of paid advertising (Bughin, Doogan & Vetvik, 2010), it is clear why marketers have invested time and money into understanding this source of communication.

Existing research has also demonstrated that WOM affects consumer awareness and preference for products. For example, Leskovec, Adamic, and Huberman (2007) found that consumers are more likely to buy DVDs that their friends recommend. Iyengar, Van den Bulte, and Valente (2011) found that doctors are more likely to prescribe prescription drugs when they know other doctors who have done the same. In the online environment, studies have shown that WOM and online reviews increase sales of online books (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006), boost new customer acquisitions (Schmitt, Skiera & Van den Bulte 2011) and foster the spread of information (Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller 2001). The medium of communication has also been shown to shape the influence of WOM communications, with written communications often leading people to mention more interesting products and brands compared to oral communication (Berger & Iyengar, 2013).
2.3.3 WOM Communicator Characteristics

Several studies have also pointed to the role of communicator characteristics when predicting the influence of WOM communications on consumers. By leveraging past research by Reingen et al. (1984), which showed that consumers’ brand choices within a social group are often similar, Cialdini and Sagarin (2005) found that the persuasiveness of the communications increased when the sender and recipient were similar. However, conflicting results were produced by Goldenberg, Libai and Muller (2001), who found that information communicated via strangers or acquaintances with low levels of similarity led to greater levels of awareness and reach compared to well-known information sources. By distinguishing between personal communications between an individual’s own personal group (i.e. strong ties) and less personal communications with acquaintances (i.e. weak ties), Goldenberg et al. (2001) demonstrated that information communicated via weak ties leads to an increase in the number of new people who are informed. This effect is attributed to the fact that new information is more likely to be shared when consumers interact with people in different social networks (i.e. via weak ties). Conversely, when information is shared among consumers in the same personal group (i.e. strong ties), new information is less likely to be shared because the individuals have a higher probability of already having similar information (Goldenberg et al., 2001).

When consumers evaluate the source of an influence attempt, they rely on prior persuasion knowledge (e.g. past knowledge of sales-persons) or their perceptions of the content of the message (e.g. perceived message quality) (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Studies have found that when consumers interpret WOM in online environments (i.e. eWOM), they consider the skepticism and ulterior motives of the persuasion agent. Sher and Lee (2009) referred to theories of persuasion when studying the effects of consumer skepticism of online reviews. The authors found that highly skeptical consumers are biased against certain types of information and
indifferent to message quality. Conversely, consumers with low levels of skepticism adopted a peripheral route to message processing and allowed the quantity of reviews to sway their attitudes (Sher & Lee, 2009). Verlegh et al. (2004) studied the role of ulterior motives in a WOM context and discovered that the effectiveness of WOM communications decreases when consumers perceive ulterior motives. In this study, participants perceived the WOM stimuli as exogenous (i.e. resulting from a firm’s actions). As a result, participants relied on prior persuasion knowledge when reacting to the influence attempt (Verlegh et al., 2004). When participants perceived the agent as less pressuring and less threatening, they lowered their defence mechanisms and became more susceptible to persuasion. This outcome supports the argument that inspiring content from an endogenous source is more likely to be persuasive.

2.3.4 Persuasive Impact of WOM

The defining characteristic of WOM is that the source is independent. Therefore, WOM is perceived as more credible than firm-generated information because the source has no commercial interest in providing the WOM (Arndt, 1967). Researchers also point to the fact that consumer-created information tends to be more consumer-oriented than seller-created information, thereby making WOM more relevant than marketer-generated information (Bickart & Schindler, 2003). In a study investigating the credibility of eWOM, Cheung et al. (2009) demonstrated that consumers view online reviews as more trustworthy than information provided by the retailer because it is more likely to be objective. According to the results of a global survey by Nielsen, 92% of consumers around the world trust earned media (i.e. WOM) above all other forms of advertising, which represents an 18% increase since 2007 (Grimes, 2012). Furthermore, online consumer reviews are now the second most trusted form of advertising, and
70% of global consumers indicate that they trust this platform (Grimes, 2012). When evaluating
the persuasive impact of eWOM, these findings are important because studies have shown that
when the source of information is perceived as more trustworthy, the information is more
persuasive (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). This research also supports the
notion that inspiring content from an external source will be more effective at persuading
consumers. Studies investigating the variables that influence attitude change have also shown
that involvement plays an important role in predicting the impact of persuasion, a topic that will
be discussed in a later section.

2.3.5. Motivations to Blog

eWOM has a powerful effect on consumer purchasing decisions. Therefore, it is
important to consider the factors that influence a person’s motivation to share information online.
As previously mentioned, eWOM includes reviews, tweets and blog posts (Rosario et al., 2016).
Bloggers represent a subset of Internet users who write their own online journals and research
shows that 110 million blogs currently exist, and approximately 175,000 new blogs are launched
every day (Chu & Kamal, 2008). Bloggers have complete autonomy in terms of the content they
post, and scholars suggest several potential reasons for blogging. Blogs allow a person to build
chronicles of their daily lives, update others, express opinions and seek other’s feedback (Nardi,
Schiano & Gumbrecht, 2004). However, research also shows that bloggers include brand-related
information at least once a week (Armstrong, 2006). When brand-related information appears, it
is often in the form of descriptions of their personal experiences with the product (Chu & Kamal,
2008). However, there are also instances where a marketer can sponsor the blogger. This
involves either utilizing the blog as a platform for advertising or enticing the blogger to
incorporate brand information in the blog post (Chu & Kamal, 2008). In 2005, the ad spending for blogs totalled $20.4 million and increased by 145% in 2006 (Jarvis, 2006). This evidence suggests that a significant portion of the content posted on blogs is affiliated with a marketer or brand.

These trends have important implications for this research because literature defines WOM as a form of earned media (Bonchek, 2014). However, when marketers use eWOM communications as a form of ad spending, WOM qualifies as a form of owned media. As discussed, consumers do not clearly distinguish between different forms of media online because of the various sources of communications. Therefore, in instances when bloggers are being compensated by a brand, it is unclear whether consumers will perceive the content as authentic and genuine if they are uncertain of the existence of fiscal motivations. In response to this issue, Advertising Standards Canada has implemented guidelines that require the full disclosure of any paid endorsements or mentions of products and services on social media (Nowak, 2016). Therefore, Canadian consumers can safely assume that the blogger’s opinions are truthful and in no way connected to the brand in question when there is no disclosure of a connection.

2.4 Involvement

2.4.1 Definition

Involvement is considered a key moderator variable that influences the impact of any advertising stimulus on consumers (MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Zaichkowsky (1985) defined involvement as “a person's perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests” (p. 342). Zaichkowsky (1985) also contributed to literature by developing an inventory for measuring personal involvement. Studies investigating the role of involvement have
predominantly focused on involvement as a dichotomy, where consumers can either have low levels of involvement or high levels of involvement. When evaluating attitudes towards an ad, involvement is often manipulated by making the ad more relevant. This manipulation is done by causing the receiver to be personally affected by the ad, thereby leading them to be more motivated to respond to the ad (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981). Research by Petty and Cacioppo is recognized for having greatly contributed to the body of literature on involvement because of their development of the elaboration likelihood model, which will be discussed in the next section.

2.4.2 Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model (ELM) acts as a general framework for organizing and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communications. The ELM depicts persuasion as a process where the success of influence is contingent on the way the receivers process the message, and personal relevance is thought to be the only determinant of the route of persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). When a person partakes in diligent consideration of information, attitude change is said to be occurring via the central route. Conversely, attitude change occurs via the peripheral route when the individual has not deliberately considered the issue and instead relies on either positive or negative cues to make automatic inferences (Petty et al., 1983). Communicator characteristics, such as the attractiveness, credibility or prestige of a product’s endorser are examples of peripheral cues (Petty et al., 1983). According to the ELM, attitude change can occur via one of two routes of influence and the likelihood of thoughtful information processing (i.e. elaboration) depends on the level of involvement with the product. Therefore, consumers who are highly involved with a
product are expected to adopt a central processing route, and consumers who have low levels of involvement are expected to use the peripheral processing route when evaluating an advertisement.

2.4.3 Manipulating Involvement

Studies investigating role of involvement have created high (low) involvement conditions by manipulating personal relevance. High (low) involvement messages are described as having greater (less) personal relevance or as eliciting more (fewer) personal connections (Petty et al., 1983). Petty et al. (1983) created a high-involvement condition by exposing participants to ads for razors and then telling them that they would be eligible to choose a brand of razor at the end of the study. The effect of the involvement manipulation was later confirmed by measuring participants’ level of motivation for selecting the ideal razor. Böttger et al. (2017) created a high-involvement condition by telling participants to imagine that they were planning a dinner party and that they should browse the online store to look for meal ideas. The effect of the involvement manipulation was confirmed by measuring participants’ level of idea shopping, which was used as an operationalization of involvement because it reflects a motivation to search for new ideas. In both studies, participants read scenarios that increased (decreased) the personal relevance of the marketing communication, thereby leading to high (low) levels of involvement.

2.4.4 Effects of Involvement

In Petty et al. (1983), the role of involvement was studied by testing the interaction effect between involvement, quality of claims in the ad, and the type of product endorser. When participants were in a low-involvement condition and led to believe that the persuasive proposal
did not have personal implications for them, the celebrity status of the product endorser had a greater impact on product attitudes. Conversely, when participants were in a high-involvement condition, and the ad had personal implications, the cogency of the information about the product contained in the ad determined the product’s evaluation (Petty et al., 1983). Petty and Wegener (1999) supported these findings and found that elaboration likelihood moderates the effects of argument quality on attitude change. Individuals in a high elaboration likelihood state are more likely to engage in thoughtful information processing and are more likely to be persuaded by argument quality. Individuals in a low elaboration state tend to change their attitudes based on peripheral cues (Petty & Wegener, 1999). These findings support the importance of considering a person’s level of involvement when investigating the influence of the source of customer inspiration on consumer behaviour.

In the online environment, WOM communications can come from both familiar and unknown sources; a key factor that differentiates traditional WOM and eWOM. When the author is unknown, studies have shown that consumers react to differently depending on their level of involvement. For instance, in a study by Park, Lee and Han (2007), the effects of review quality, review quantity, and involvement were investigated in an online consumer review context. The results indicated that the quality and quantity of online reviews were positively correlated with purchase intentions. However, findings differed according to the level of involvement. Highly involved participants were more affected by review quality, which reflects their use of a central-processing route because the participants carefully evaluated the content in the message. Low-involvement participants were more affected by review quantity, which reflects their use of a peripheral processing route because the participants simply relied on the number of reviews when making a decision (Park et al., 2007).
Gupta and Harris (2009) also found that eWOM has different impacts on consumers depending on their level of involvement. Instead of manipulating involvement, the researchers measured participants’ need for cognition, a tool that is often used as a proxy for motivation to process information (Gupta & Harris, 2009). The results showed clear differences in the effects of eWOM depending on the level of motivation. Participants with low levels of motivation to process information allowed eWOM recommendations to influence their decisions, whereas the highly motivated participants used eWOM communications as an additional piece of information (Gupta & Harris, 2009). The results indicated that participants with low-levels of motivation were more likely to choose a suboptimal product with an eWOM recommendation whereas the highly motivated participants did not make suboptimal choices based on eWOM (Gupta & Harris, 2009). Therefore, when involvement is high, eWOM is likely to serve as an additional piece of information that is carefully considered with the rest of the available information. Conversely, when involvement is low, the same eWOM communication can serve as a simple decision-making cue impacting the motivation to purchase the product. Given that researchers have found that participants react to eWOM communications differently based on their level of involvement, this thesis will investigate whether involvement interacts with the source of customer inspiration (Gap #1).

2.5 Source Credibility

2.5.1. Determinants of eWOM influence

Extant research also discusses the role of eWOM attributes as being important determinants of eWOM influence. For example, studies have shown that valence, which captures the nature of the information (i.e. whether it is positive or negative) and volume, which refers to
the number of posted messages, affects product sales (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Liu, 2006). Receiver characteristics, such as a consumer’s Internet experience, is also considered a relevant determinant of eWOM influence (Zhu & Zhang, 2010). Researchers have also studied the differences between WOM and eWOM because of the enhanced role of source credibility. Unlike traditional WOM, the information source in the eWOM communication process is anonymous (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014); thereby making it important to consider the role of source credibility in this research.

2.5.2. Effects of Source Credibility

Source credibility is an important determinant of the influence of eWOM (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). The American Marketing Association defines source credibility as “the believability or veracity of the communication or source of a communication or advertising message” (“Dictionary B”, n.d.). In a review of extant literature on source effects on persuasion, Wilson and Sherrell (1993) defined credibility as a type of “source effects manipulation” and referred to it as “a global evaluation of the believability of the message source” (p. 102). Studies have shown that highly credible sources are more influential than less credible sources because they are more trustworthy and have higher levels of expertise (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Expertise and trustworthiness are therefore treated as two additional dimensions of source effects that should be considered when evaluating credibility (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993). Studies investigating the effect of source have used similarity, expertise and attractiveness as types of source manipulation; however, credibility is most often used (Chaiken, 1980; Petty et al., 1983; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993).
In a marketing context, Lafferty and Goldsmith (1999) examined two types of source credibility (endorser credibility and corporate credibility) and assessed the impact of each on attitudes and purchase intention. Results demonstrated that endorser credibility and corporate credibility both influence attitudes towards the ad and brand attitudes, but corporate credibility had a more significant impact on purchase intentions (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999). In a study by Pornpitakpan (2004), the effect of three credibility dimensions (attractiveness, trustworthiness and expertise) were studied and the results demonstrated that all three credibility dimensions are positively related to purchase intentions.

Research on the role of the source of communications has also established that a person’s attribution of a source’s intention influences perceptions of trustworthiness (Eagly, Wood & Chaiken, 1978). A study by Eagly et al. (1978) demonstrated that when a person considers the potential biases of a source, they may infer that the communicator is facing situational pressures, or holds certain attitudes, beliefs or attributes. These interpretations led participants to question the truthfulness of the message (Eagly et al., 1978). Research has shown that when consumers consciously evaluate the source of a message, they use their cognitive skills to calculate the sender’s motives and credibility, and this subsequently influences their decisions to purchase a good or service (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). These findings support the notion that when consumers engage in thoughtful information processing, a source’s intentions come under consideration and subsequently influence the effectiveness of a persuasion attempt.

2.5.3. Source Credibility and Involvement

Research on the effects of source credibility in an online environment also suggests that involvement plays an important role in terms of influencing behaviours. Authors studying
theories of persuasion have established that source credibility can either act as a heuristic or systematic processing cue depending on the likelihood that the person scrutinizes the persuasive argument (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). When elaboration likelihood is low, source credibility is expected to act as a peripheral cue and when elaboration likelihood is high, credibility is capable of biasing argument processing (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). As discussed earlier, highly-involved participants carefully consider the information they are presented with, which can lead them to activate past persuasion knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994) and subsequently consider the source’s ulterior motives (Verlegh et al., 2004) or be biased by their own level of skepticism (Sher & Lee, 2009). Conversely, studies have consistently shown that under conditions of low-involvement, participants are usually influenced by peripheral cues (Petty et al., 1981). Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman’s (1981) seminal paper demonstrated that the quality of arguments in a message influenced the high-involvement participants, but the expertise of the source influenced the low-involvement participants. In this instance, the participants with low levels of involvement allowed the source to influence their decision, whereas the highly involved participants carefully considered all of the information they were presented with.

There is a vast amount of research supporting the persuasiveness of consumer-generated information because it is more credible (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bickart & Schindler, 2003; Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, it is plausible to expect low-involvement consumers to be easily persuaded by information presented by a fellow consumer. However, in instances when involvement levels are high, and the consumer feels motivated to process information carefully, the persuasiveness of consumer-generated content may not be as effective. This may be especially true in an online environment, which has an abundance of information available and
the possibility of fraudulent or misleading eWOM does exist. Furthermore, given the lack of dissemination costs associated with posting information online (Gupta & Harris, 2012), there is even more reason to question the credibility of eWOM when you take the time to really think about it. **Therefore, this thesis will also aim to understand how credibility mediates the joint effect of involvement and source (Gap #2).**

### 2.6 Summary of Gaps in Literature

As previously mentioned, Böttger et al. (2017) established the main effects of customer inspiration on purchase intentions by using inspiring content in the form of recipes and imagery appeals. In these studies, the source of the inspiring content was perceived as internal (i.e. marketing communications from the associated firm). The effects of inspiring content from an external source, such as a consumer, have not been investigated. This suggests an interesting research opportunity given that 92% of consumers trust earned media, such as WOM, above all forms of traditional advertising (Grimes, 2012) and information is more persuasive when it’s trustworthy (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993)

Studies have also established that involvement influences persuasion because it affects the likelihood of thoughtful information processing (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Wegener, 1999; Park et al., 2007). Highly involved consumers are more likely to exert the cognitive effort required to evaluate an object, which leads them to consider the true merit of an issue or product. Conversely, participants with low levels of involvement are less likely to exert cognitive effort and rely on peripheral cues that do not elicit the thoughtful evaluation of the source. Studies have also shown that under low levels of involvement, a source’s credibility acts as a peripheral cue and influences the effectiveness of a persuasion attempt (Petty &
Cacioppo, 1984; Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Given that credible sources are more persuasive (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999), and consumer-generated information are often perceived as more credible (Bickart & Schindler, 2003; Cheung et al., 2009), there is an opportunity to investigate the moderating role of involvement on source of inspiring content and purchase intentions (Gap #1). Furthermore, the review of extant literature suggests that credibility perceptions explain how involvement moderates the relationship between the source of inspiring content and purchase intentions. Therefore, there is an opportunity to investigate whether credibility mediates the joint effect of involvement and source (Gap #2).

CHAPTER 3. CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Research Questions

Through a series of empirical studies, Böttger et al. (2017) demonstrated that inspiring content from brand-owned touch points generates customer inspiration, which has a positive influence on purchase intentions. However, the authors acknowledged that inspiration can originate from non-marketer generated sources. Research has also established that involvement influences the persuasiveness of communication appeals because it affects the information processing route adopted by the consumer (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Wegener, 1999; Park et al., 2007). Less-involved consumers are more likely to adopt a peripheral information processing route that relies on heuristics (i.e. the simple acceptance or rejection of a cue) (Petty et al., 1981, Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Sussman & Siegal, 2003). Highly involved consumers are more likely to adopt a thoughtful information processing route that elicits the careful evaluation of the message and its source, which could lead to doubts regarding the
sender’s motives. Given that research has established that consumer-generated content is more persuasive than marketer-generated communications (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Bickart & Schindler, 2003; Cheung et al., 2009), the first question that this thesis aims to answer is:

**Research Question 1: How will involvement moderate the relationship between the source of inspiring content and purchase intentions?**

Studies have also shown that when a source is perceived as credible, it is more persuasive, which leads to higher levels of purchase intentions (Lafferty & Goldsmith, 1999; Pornpitakpan, 2004). Similarly, recent studies have established that consumer-generated content is more persuasive than marketer-generated content because it is perceived as more credible (Bickart & Schindler, 2003; Cheung et al., 2009). Given that consumers with low-levels of involvement rely on peripheral cues, such as source credibility, when evaluating messages, the second question that this thesis aims to answer is:

**Research Question 2: Is the moderating effect of involvement transmitted through credibility (the mediator)?**

Therefore, the overall objective of this research project is to determine whether inspiring content from an external source has a significantly higher impact on purchase intentions for less involved participants because it is perceived as more credible.
3.2 Hypotheses

Communication literature has established that consumer-generated information (i.e. external source) is more persuasive than marketer-generated information (i.e. internal source) because consumers perceive user-generated content as more credible, relevant and trustworthy (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bickart & Schindler, 2001, Cheung et al., 2009). Therefore, there is an opportunity to investigate the effect of the source of inspiring content on purchase intentions.

Research has also established that involvement predicts the level of thoughtful information processing and the persuasiveness of a piece of information is contingent on the person’s level of involvement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Petty et al., 1981, Petty et al., 1983; Petty & Wegener, 1999; Park et al., 2007). Therefore, despite the evidence supporting the superiority of consumer-generated content, level of involvement is expected to influence the effectiveness of consumer-generated information. Specifically, when inspiring content comes from an external source, participants with low levels of involvement are expected to display higher levels of purchase intentions compared to those who have high levels of involvement. The reason for this is because literature suggests that low-involvement consumers rely on heuristics, such as source credibility, when processing information (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984; Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Given that 92% of consumers trust earned media above all other forms of traditional advertising (Grimes, 2012) and trusted information is more persuasive (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993), the credibility of an external source is expected to act as a salient cue that leads to heuristic processing and higher levels of purchase intentions. Conversely, when participants have high levels of involvement, they are expected to consider all of the information they have been given, and the source of the inspiring content is expected to be more carefully evaluated. This thorough evaluation will lead to lower levels of purchase
intentions among the high-involvement participants who saw inspiring content from an external source because they will become suspicious and question the source’s credibility. These results are expected to occur because the dissemination of misleading information online occurs despite the fact that Advertising Standards Canada requires the full disclosure of paid endorsements online (Nowak, 2016; Gupta & Harris, 2012). Unlike the low-involvement participants who will safely assume that the source is credible because there is no mention of a paid endorsement (such as “#ad” or “#sponsored”), the high-involvement participants will question the truthfulness of the message because their high level of involvement will motivate them to do so.

When the inspiring content comes from an internal source (i.e. marketer-generated), the interaction between source and involvement is not expected to occur because the inspiring content will be perceived as traditional advertising. The route to persuasion is expected to differ according to the participants’ level of involvement; however, their purchase intentions are expected to be similar. The reason for this is because research suggests that consumers question the truthfulness of a message when they begin to evaluate the source’s intentions (Eagly et al., 1978). This evaluation is unnecessary when a message is clearly generated by a marketer because their intentions are evident. Consumers know that the $4.1 billion-dollar advertising industry in Canada exists because marketers use advertising to influence consumer behaviour (Rody-Mantha, 2017). Therefore, participants’ perceptions of the source’s credibility and the subsequent effect on purchase intentions is not expected to generate statistically significant results amongst high involvement and low-involvement participants. While it is important to note that involvement will influence the way in which the participants are influenced by the inspiring content, investigating these details is beyond the scope of this thesis.
A summary of the hypotheses discussed above is provided below:

**Hypothesis 1**: Consumer involvement will moderate the relationship between the source of inspiring content and purchase intentions, such that,

- \( H_{1A} \): Participants exposed to inspiring content from an external source will have higher (lower) levels of purchase intentions when involvement levels are low (high)
- \( H_{1B} \): Participants exposed to inspiring content from an internal source will have similar levels of purchase intentions regardless of involvement level

*Figure 1: Moderation*

**Hypothesis 2**: Credibility will mediate the moderating effect of involvement on source and purchase intentions, such that,

- \( H_{2A} \): Participants exposed to inspiring content from an external source will show higher (lower) purchase intentions when involvement is low (high) because they will perceive the source as more (less) credible
- \( H_{2B} \): Participants exposed to inspiring content from an internal source will show similar purchase intentions regardless of involvement level because they will perceive the source as credible
CHAPTER 4. STUDY 1 (PRE-TEST)

4.1 Objective

A pre-test was conducted to determine the ideal set of images for use in the main study (Study 2). The three key objectives during the pre-test (Study 1) were: (1) identify the pair of images with the most observable difference in source, (2) ensure participants perceived the pair of images as similar in terms of their level of clarity, information, authenticity, interest and aesthetic appeal, and (3) ensure that the pairs of images elicited similar levels of inspiration. The results of Study 1 were used in Study 2.

4.2. Methodology

4.2.1 Participants

All participants were drawn from the student research pool (SONA-Marketing & Consumer Studies) at the University of Guelph. The research pool consisted of students registered in the following Marketing and Consumer Studies (MCS) courses: MCS*1000 Introductory Marketing, MCS*2020 Information Management, MCS*2600 Fundamentals of Consumer Behaviour. Students who wished to participate in the study could do so by visiting the SONA website at a time that was convenient for them. Advertisements for the study appeared on
SONA and the respective course website. Students were offered a course credit worth 2% in exchange for their participation. There were no restrictions in terms of gender or age. Participants conducted the survey online through Qualtrics.

A total of 36 participants signed up for the study and 31 participants successfully completed the entire survey. Five participants were dismissed from the study because they indicated that their likelihood of purchasing a beer was “extremely unlikely”. This screening question was important because the inspiring content under investigation contained beer products. Inspiring content featuring beer products were chosen as the stimuli given that university students are likely to consumer beer (when over the legal drinking age of 19 years old) or be familiar with it.

Of the 31 participants who completed the survey, 28% (10 out of 31) identified themselves as male and 58% (21 out of 31) identified themselves as female. 53% (19 out of 31) of participants identified themselves as White / European, 14% as Southeast Asian, 8% as Black/African/Caribbean, 5.6% as Other (“Persian”), 3% as Latin American and 3% as Arab. The participants’ ages ranged between 18 and 22 years old, and the average participant age was 19 years old.

4.2.2 Design

Study 1 consisted of a 2 (source of inspiring content: internal vs. external) x 5 (images: 5 inspiring images with beer) mixed design. The source of the inspiring content was a between-subject factor, and the images were a within-subject factor.

The source was manipulated by changing the name of the Instagram account. In the internal condition, the Instagram account credited with posting the image was “@stellaartois”,

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and in the external condition, the account was called “@trendyshopper”. The source information appeared above and below the image. The profile picture for each source was also manipulated. The profile picture for the external source consisted of an image of wine and cheese, and the profile picture for the internal source was the Stella Artois brand label. These images were selected in order to enhance the observable differences between the two sources.

A total of 10 images were used in this study (see Appendix 1 for images). Each participant viewed 5 images presented in random order. For each inspiring image, participants either saw it posted by the internal or the external source.

There were three dependent variables in this study: (1) the source of the inspiring content, (2) the level of similarity between the pair of images and (3) the level of inspiration generated by the pair of images. Demographics such as age, gender and ethnicity were also collected.

4.2.3 Materials

The 5 images used as stimuli were obtained from Instagram, a social networking site used for photo sharing. The images were selected based on the definition of inspiring content prescribed by Böttger et al. (2017). To generate customer inspiration, an image must (1) deliver inspiring content in the form of a new idea, (2) generate the need to use one’s imagination and (3) elicit approach rather than avoidance motivation (Böttger et al., 2017). These criteria were used to select the images, and a summary of how the images qualify as inspiring content is provided in Table 1.
Table 1: Summary of Inspiring Stimuli

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New idea</td>
<td>“Imagine that you are considering buying a holiday gift for someone and you see this image”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use one’s imagination</td>
<td>Delivers a new idea in the form of an image featuring a potential holiday gift.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach motivation</td>
<td>Entices the use of one’s imagination by showing the product paired with premium glassware and holiday inspired decor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Caption under image encourages approach goals: “A welcome holiday guest”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2.4. Dependent Measures

Perceived Source

In order to identify the set of images with the most observable difference in source, participants were asked to indicate who posted the image. Participants were given the option between selecting (1) A marketer from the company, (2) A consumer, (3) It’s unclear or (4) I don’t know.

Level of Inspiration

The level of inspiration was measured by leveraging the General Inspiration Scale developed by Thrash and Elliot (2004) (see Appendix 2 for questions used in the instrument). To ensure that the questions were measuring the same latent variable, inspiration, a reliability analysis for each set of image options was conducted using SPSS software. A summary of those results can be found in Table 2. A Cronbach’s alpha score of 0.70 or greater is considered to be acceptable and a reflection of good internal consistency reliability in a scale (Nunnaly & Bernstein, 1994). Cronbach’s alpha is high ($\alpha > 0.80$) in each set of image options, indicating a
high level of internal consistency. Therefore, the questions measuring the level of inspiration were acceptable.

Table 2: Inspiration Scale Reliability Results Across Each Option

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 4</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 5</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Image Similarity*

To ensure that the participants perceived the internal and external versions of the images in a similar way, participants were given a series of questions related to the image and the person who posted the image (see Appendix 2 for full questionnaire). The level of similarity between the pairs of images was collected by asking participants if they agree that the image is informative, clear, authentic, interesting and aesthetically appealing. Participants were also asked to indicate whether they thought that the person who posted the image was trustworthy.

4.2.4 Procedure

Before beginning the study, participants were asked to read a consent form and agree to participate in the study. Consenting participants were then asked to indicate their likelihood of purchasing a beer using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from extremely unlikely to extremely likely. Participants who indicated that their likelihood of purchasing a beer was “extremely unlikely” were eliminated from the study.
Next, participants were asked to read a paragraph with instructions on how to complete the study (see Appendix 3 for full instructions). The instructions also asked participants to imagine that they were buying a gift for someone while completing the study. Participants were required to stay on the page with the instructions for 20 seconds to ensure attentive reading.

Next, participants were presented with either an internal or external version for each of the five different images (see Appendix 1). The order in which the five images were presented to each participant was randomized. After observing each image for 15 seconds, the participants completed a series of multiple choice questions measuring the observed source, image similarity and level of inspiration regarding the seen image. This process was repeated for the five images. At the end of the survey, participants were asked to answer a series of demographic questions (see Appendix 4 for demographic questionnaire) and thanked for their time.

4.3. Results

Perceived Source

Using the cross-tabulations function in SPSS, a chi-square test for association was conducted between the source condition that participants were assigned to and the source identified by participants. Specifically, each set of images were analyzed by comparing the participants’ answers to the question “who posted this image” with the image that they saw. Their responses were coded as either right or wrong. For example, if a participant was assigned to the internal source condition and indicated that the person who posted the picture was a marketer, their response was marked as correct.

Pearson’s chi-square value was consulted in order to determine whether the chi-square test for association was statistically significant (p < 0.05). The results are summarized in Table 3.
Table 3: Percentage of participants who correctly identified the source in each condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% of participants who correctly identified the source</th>
<th>Pearson’s chi-square</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Source</td>
<td>External Source</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 1</strong></td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 2</strong></td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 3</strong></td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 4</strong></td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Option 5</strong></td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a statistically significant association between the source condition and source identified in each option (p < 0.05 in all options).

*Image Similarity*

Using SPSS software, the mean values for each factor were calculated in the two source conditions (internal and external). Then, one-way ANOVAs were performed to test whether the differences in the mean values between the two conditions were significant. The results from this analysis can be found in Table 4, Table 5, Table 6, Table 7 and Table 8 below. Given that each set of images contained identical elements except for the source, the mean score for each factor was not expected to change in the internal and external conditions. The pair of images were accepted as being similar if the results for each factor were not significant (p > 0.05).
### Table 4: Mean Scores for Option 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.70</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.19</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.83</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.02</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.14</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.73</td>
<td>1.44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.92</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is trustworthy</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.56</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.68</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.67</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 5: Mean Scores for Option 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.63</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.01</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.76</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.87</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.20</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.26</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.01</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.31</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.48</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.67</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.41</td>
<td>0.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.07</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is trustworthy</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.75</td>
<td>1.57</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.15</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6: Mean Scores for Option 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.27</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.27</td>
<td>0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.27</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.36</td>
<td>0.253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.94</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.93</td>
<td>0.176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.93</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.06</td>
<td>0.810</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.20</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.12</td>
<td>0.732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.33</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.02</td>
<td>0.881</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.37</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is trustworthy</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5.53</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.24</td>
<td>0.145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>1.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7: Mean Scores for Option 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.53</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.38</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.77</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 4.22</td>
<td>0.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.50</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>1.88</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.16</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>1.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>1.72</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 3.13</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.91</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.31</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 2.12</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is trustworthy</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.73</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 5.52</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.81</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8: Mean Scores for Option 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>F-Value</th>
<th>P-Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.30</td>
<td>0.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4.19</td>
<td>1.47</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.43</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>1.54</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.66</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.59</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.91</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.67</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.36</td>
<td>0.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.49</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 5.24</td>
<td>0.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>1.64</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.01</td>
<td>0.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trustworthy</td>
<td>External</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The internal and external versions of the images used in options 1, 2, and 3 were not statistically significantly different, thereby indicating that participants perceived the internal and external versions as being similar. The significant p-values starred (*) in Table 7 and 8 demonstrate that the internal and external versions of the images in option 4 and 5 were not perceived as identical by participants. Specifically, the internal version of option 4 was perceived as less clear (M = 4.53, SD = 1.77) than the external version (M = 5.50, SD = 0.63), F (1,29) = 4.22, p = 0.049. The internal version of option 4 was also perceived as less trustworthy (M = 3.73, SD = 1.33) than the external version (M = 4.81, SD = 1.22), F (1,29) = 5.520, p = 0.03. As a result, the images from options 4 and 5 were considered inappropriate for use in Study 2.
Level of Inspiration

The level of inspiration generated by the images was analyzed by calculating the mean inspiration score for each set of images (internal version and external version). The four questions on inspiration were measured using a 7-point Likert-scale ($\alpha > 0.80$ in each set of images). A summary of the mean level of inspiration generated by each set of images is provided below in Table 9.

Table 9: Mean Inspiration Score

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Mean Inspiration Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Option 1</td>
<td>15.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 2</td>
<td>16.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 3</td>
<td>17.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 4</td>
<td>12.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option 5</td>
<td>11.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results in Table 9 demonstrate that the images used in option 1, 2 and 3 generated the highest levels of inspiration among participants, and the images used in options 4 and 5 did not generate high levels of inspiration.

Next, a one-way ANOVA analysis was conducted using SPSS software in order to ensure that the internal and external versions of each image elicited similar levels of inspiration. The results of the one-way ANOVA analysis are summarized in Table 10.
Table 10: Mean Inspiration Score by Condition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>Option 1</th>
<th></th>
<th>Option 2</th>
<th></th>
<th>Option 3</th>
<th></th>
<th>Option 4</th>
<th></th>
<th>Option 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.08</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.42</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F-Value</td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.207</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.051</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.104</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (1,29) = 1.423</td>
<td></td>
<td>F (1,29) = 0.150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P-Value</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Given that each set of images contained identical elements except for the source, the average level of inspiration generated by each was not expected to change in the internal and external conditions. Therefore, non-significant p-values (p > 0.05) indicate that there is no statistically significant difference between the internal and external version of the image, thereby indicating that the internal and external version of each image generate similar levels of inspiration. The results demonstrate that the internal and external version of each image generate similar levels of inspiration (p > 0.05 in all instances).

4.4 Discussion

The purpose of Study 1 was to determine which set of images would generate significant results in Study 2. The main objective focused on identifying which set of images were perceived as the most internal and the most external. Participants were expected to notice that the @stellaartois Instagram account posted the internal versions of each image, and the @trendyshopper Instagram account posted the external version of each image. However, the
results of demonstrated that participants were not perceiving the source of the image. In order to address this, modifications were made to Study 2. First, participants were given a brief description of the source (@stellaartois or @trendyshopper), depending on the condition which they were randomly assigned to. The descriptions clearly explained that the @stellaartois account was a marketer and the @trendyshopper account was a consumer (see Appendix 5 for descriptions of source). Second, in order to ensure that the participants noticed the source, two sets of images from Study 1 were selected. By using two images, participants were exposed to the account name four times because the account name appears in each image twice. This modification enhanced the probability of the participant noticing the source. Furthermore, given that Instagram allows users to post multiple images in a single post, the use of two images was reflective of what a consumer might see in real life. The two images used in Study 2 were selected based on the results in Study 1. Given that the images used in option 4 and 5 were not similar on all factors, they were not considered for use in Study 2. The images in options 1, 2 and 3 generated the highest levels of inspiration; however, given that the images in options 1 and 3 feature similar types of products (a large bottle of Stella Artois beer and two glasses), they were selected for use in Study 2 because it is reasonable to believe that these two images would appear in the same post on Instagram.

CHAPTER 5. STUDY 2

5.1 Objective

The purpose of Study 2 was to determine whether the interaction between the level of involvement and source of inspiring content influences purchase intentions. Study 2 also aimed
to establish whether the interaction effect between involvement and source influences the perceived credibility of that source.

5.2. Methodology

5.2.1 Participants

Participants were drawn from the student research pool (SONA-Marketing & Consumer Studies), as discussed in section 5.2.1. A total of 194 undergraduate students from the University of Guelph were recruited to participate in this study. The number of participants required was calculated by conducting a priori power analysis using G*Power software. Input parameters are as followed: effect size = 0.4, alpha = 0.05, power = 0.95, numerator df = 10, number of groups = 4, number of covariates=1).

Of the 194 participants, 35% (68 out of 194) identified themselves as male and 64% (125 out of 194) identified themselves as female. One participant chose to not provide their gender. 70% (137 out of 194) of participants identified themselves as White / European, 14% as Southeast Asian, 6% as South Asian, 3% as Black/African/Caribbean, 3% as Arab, 3% as Other, and 1% as Latin America. The participants’ ages ranged between 18 and 24 years old and the average age of participants was 19 years old.

5.2.2 Design

This study consisted of a 2 (source of inspiring content: internal vs. external) x 2 (involvement: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design resulting in 4 conditions, summarized in Table 11: Study 2 Experimental Conditions. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions through the “Randomizer” feature provided on
Qualtrics, the software used for creating and distributing this survey. The number of participants (n) randomly assigned to each condition is also included in Table 11.

Table 11: Study 2 Experimental Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>Level of Involvement</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal (@stellaartois)</td>
<td>High Involvement</td>
<td>Condition 1</td>
<td>n = 47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Involvement</td>
<td>Condition 3</td>
<td>n = 49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External (@trendyshopper)</td>
<td>High Involvement</td>
<td>Condition 2</td>
<td>n = 48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low Involvement</td>
<td>Condition 4</td>
<td>n = 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Independent Variables**

The two independent variables were the source of the inspiring content and the level of involvement. Inspiring content took the form of two images from Instagram, which were selected during the pre-test. The two levels of source were internal (@stellaartois) and external (@trendyshopper). To ensure that participants were aware of the source, additional information was provided for each condition (see Appendix 6). This information also ensured that the participants were aware the external source was an authentic consumer with no affiliations with the brand in question. As mentioned in the literature review, Advertising Standards Canada requires bloggers and individuals who discuss products on social media to disclose any material connection with the product endorser (Nowak, 2016). Therefore, the absence of such disclosure demonstrates that the external source is authentic.

The two levels of involvement were manipulated through the use of written scenarios, which is a technique utilized by Petty et al. (1983) (see Appendix 6 for scenario descriptions). Participants in the high-involvement condition were led to believe that the image was very personally relevant to them and participants in the low-involvement condition were not.
Stimuli

A total of four images were used in this study (see Appendix 7 for images). The four images feature a large bottle of Stella Artois beer (750 ml) and two glass chalices with Stella Artois branding. Each image had “904 likes” and the caption “a welcome #holiday guest #stellaartois #specialedition”. The caption and number of likes was kept constant among the two images to create the impression that they originated from the same post on Instagram. To ensure that participants understood the content in the images, they were also informed that the bottle of beer and two glasses were available for purchase as a gift set.

5.2.3 Dependent Measures

Purchase Intentions

In line with Böttger et al.’s (2017) existing research investigating the impact of customer inspiration, the dependent variable was a measure of the participant’s purchase intentions. Purchase intentions were measured by asking participants “in your own real life, what is your likelihood of purchasing Stella Artois products the next time you need a gift?”, and responses were collected on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from “extremely unlikely” to “extremely likely”.

Credibility

Data measuring perceived credibility was collected by asking participants whether they agree that the images are credible and whether the person who posted the images is credible. Responses were collected on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “extremely agree” (α = 0.614).
Manipulation Checks

Data was collected in order to facilitate manipulation checks for involvement and source of inspiring content (see Appendix 8 for questions). The questions used to measure the involvement manipulation check leverage the Personal Inventory developed by Zaichkowsky (1985). Specifically, participants were asked to remember who they were asked to buy a birthday gift for and were given the option of selecting “Uncle”, “Boss” or “I don’t know”. Participants were also asked whether they felt motivated to select a great gift, and how important it was for them to select a great gift. These responses were collected on a 5-point Likert scale (α = 0.72). To ensure that the source condition was correctly manipulated, participants were asked to indicate who posted the images that they saw at the start of the study, and were asked to select either “Stella Artois”, “Trendy Shopper” or “I don’t know.

5.2.4 Procedure

Participants who consented to participate in the study did so through an online survey using Qualtrics software. The survey randomly assigned participants to one of the four conditions. Each participant was required to read a scenario that manipulated the task as either being highly or lowly involving (see Appendix 7 for scenario descriptions). Next, participants were exposed to two images with inspiring content. The images were the same in each condition except for the source. In the internal condition, the source was “@stellaartois” and in the external condition, the source was “@trendyshopper”. A timer was built into Qualtrics, which forced participants to stay on the page with the images for 20 seconds before being able to proceed to the next page to ensure participants spent adequate time reviewing all the information included in the images. Afterwards, participants were asked to answer a series of multiple choice questions,
which measured purchase intentions and perceived credibility. Participants assigned to the external source condition were also asked open-ended questions regarding their perceptions of the Trendy Shopper Instagram account (see Appendix 9 for questions). The survey concluded with a series of demographic questions (see Appendix 4).

5.3. Results

5.3.1. Manipulation Check Results

Prior to hypothesis testing, the results of the manipulation check for involvement, the source, and the external source conditions were analyzed to confirm the successful manipulation of the conditions. The results of these three tests are discussed below.

Involvement

A manipulation check was conducted to confirm that the scenarios read by participants at the start of the study effectively influenced the level of involvement among participants. The manipulation check was performed by asking participants to respond to three questions. First, they were asked to recall who they were asked to buy a birthday gift for. Participants in the high-involvement condition were asked to imagine buying a gift for their boss and the low-involvement group was asked to buy a gift for their uncle. The results were analyzed in SPSS and 95% of participants correctly recalled the person who they were asked to buy a gift for, suggesting a successful manipulation of involvement. Specifically, 95% of participants in the high-involvement condition remembered that the gift was for their boss (Pearson Chi Square = 95.00, p < 0.00) and 96% of participants in the low-involvement condition remembered that the gift was for their uncle (Pearson Chi Square = 99.00, p < 0.000).
Next, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they felt motivated to buy a great gift and how important it was for them to select a gift, using a 5-point Likert scale. These results were analyzed using the one-way ANOVA function in SPSS. The mean scores for the two questions were combined and used as the dependent variable (α = 0.72), and the involvement condition acted as the independent variable. Participants in the high-involvement condition demonstrated a higher level of involvement (M = 4.01, SD = 0.75) than participants in the low-involvement condition (M = 3.55, SD = 0.73), F (1,192) = 18.72, p < 0.00, partial η² = 0.09. Therefore, the results indicate a successful manipulation of involvement. A visual representation of the differences in mean involvement scores between the high-involvement and low-involvement groups are presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Involvement Manipulation Check

Source

A second manipulation check was conducted to confirm that the source was effectively manipulated. This was done by asking participants to recall the person who posted the images on Instagram. The results were analyzed in SPSS and 84% of participants correctly recalled the source of the images that they saw. Specifically, 80% of participants who were assigned to the
internal source condition correctly remembered that “Stella Artois” posted the images and 88% of participants who were assigned to the external source condition correctly remembered that “Trendy Shopper” posted the images. These results suggest that the manipulation of source was successful (Pearson’s Chi square = 1.50, p = 0.221).

5.3.2. Main Results

A two-way ANOVA was conducted to examine the effects of involvement and source on purchase intentions. However, before the analysis, ANOVA assumptions were checked and discussed below.

ANOVA Assumptions

Several assumptions need to be met in order for ANOVA tests to be considered reliable. These assumptions include (1) a continuous dependent variable, (2) two categorical independent variables with two or more groups in each, (3) independent observations, (4) no significant outliers, (5) normal distribution of the dependent variable residuals, and (6) equal variance of the dependent variables in each cell. The first two assumptions are satisfied, and the randomization of participants in each group ensured that the third assumption, independent observations, was met. Residual analysis was conducted to tests for the remainder of the ANOVA assumptions. There were no outliers, as assessed by inspection of the boxplot, thereby satisfying the fourth assumption (see Appendix 10 for boxplots). Shapiro-Wilk’s test of normality was used to check the assumption of normal distribution of the dependent variable residuals, and a nonsignificant result indicates normality of within group distributions. Shapiro-Wilk’s test was significant on source and involvement (p < 0.001), indicating normality of within group distributions. Despite
the violation of the normality assumption, the analysis was completed because ANOVA tests are considered to be robust to deviations in normality when the group sizes are relatively equal, and the degrees of freedom are greater than 20, (Maxwell & Delaney, 2004). In this case, the experimental groups had between 95 and 99 participants each, and there were 190 degrees of freedom in each ANOVA test; thereby making it feasible to continue with the analysis and assume that the F-tests would generate reliable results despite the normality violation. Levene’s test for equality of variances was used to check the assumption of equal variance of the dependent variables in each cell and the nonsignificant results (p > 0.05) confirm that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was not violated.

Hypothesis #1 - Interaction Effect

The first hypothesis predicted that involvement would moderate the relationship between source and purchase intentions; and participants exposed to inspiring content from an external source were expected to have higher (lower) levels of purchase intentions when involvement levels were low (high). Purchase intentions were expected to be similar among participants who saw inspiring content from an internal source, regardless of level of involvement. The two-way ANOVA results indicate that there was a statistically significant interaction between involvement and source of inspiring content on purchase intentions, $F (1,190) = 5.19, p = 0.02$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.03$, thereby demonstrating that involvement is a moderator. Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the differences in mean purchase intention scores among the four conditions.
The results also demonstrated that low involvement participants ($M_{low-external} = 2.90$, $SD = 1.18$) indicated greater brand purchase intentions towards inspiring content from an external source than high involvement participants ($M_{high-external} = 2.23$, $SD = 1.08$; $p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.04$). However, high and low involvement participants indicated similar level of brand purchase intentions towards inspiring content from an internal source ($M_{low/internal} = 2.45$, $SD = 1.23$; $M_{high/internal} = 2.55$, $SD = 1.25$; $p = .67$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.001$). These results confirm that Hypothesis #1 was supported. A visual representation of the results can be seen in Figure 5.
In addition, low involvement participants showed higher brand purchase intentions when they were exposed to inspiring content from an external source ($M_{\text{low-external}} = 2.90, SD = 1.18$) rather than an internal source ($M_{\text{low-internal}} = 2.45, SD = 1.23; p = .06, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.02$). However, brand purchase intentions did not differ between external source ($M_{\text{high-external}} = 2.23, SD = 1.01$) and internal source ($M_{\text{high-internal}} = 2.55, SD = 1.25$) for high involvement participants ($p = .18$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$). A visual representation of the results can be seen in Figure 6.
Hypothesis #2 – Mediated Moderation

The second hypothesis predicted that credibility would mediate the moderating effect of involvement on source and purchase intentions, such that, participants exposed to inspiring content from an external source would perceive the source as more (less) credible when involvement levels were low (high). Conversely, participants were expected to perceive an internal source as credible, regardless of their level of involvement. To test this hypothesis,
model 8 (mediated moderation) from the Hayes PROCESS tool was executed in SPSS (see Appendix 12 for syntax code).

As mentioned, data measuring perceived credibility was collected by asking participants whether they agree that the image are credible and that the person who posted the images is credible. Participants’ responses to these two questions were combined and the mean credibility score in each of the four conditions was calculated using the descriptive statistics function ($\alpha = 0.614$). A summary of the results can be found in Table 12: Mean credibility scores for each of the four conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Inspiring Content</th>
<th>Level of Involvement</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal Source</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5.05</td>
<td>1.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>5.33</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>5.19</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Source</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4.76</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4.71</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results from Table 12 show that participants perceived the internal source as more credible than the external source ($M_{\text{External}} = 4.73$, $M_{\text{Internal}} = 5.19$); but, these differences were not statistically significant ($F(1,190) = 1.20$, $p = 0.27$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$).

To test the potential mediating effect of credibility, the bootstrapping method was followed (with 1000 iterations), which tested the null hypothesis that the indirect path from the interaction term (source * involvement) to the dependent variable (purchase intentions) via the mediator does not significantly differ from zero. When zero is not contained within the
confidence intervals (CI) computed by the bootstrapping procedure, then one can conclude that the indirect effect is significantly different from zero at $p < 0.05$ (Garcia et al., 2010). The results of the mediated moderation analysis are summarized in Table 13: PROCESS model results for mediated moderation and Table 14: Conditional effect and indirect effect of source through credibility.

Table 13: PROCESS model results for mediated moderation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV = Credibility</th>
<th>Intercept</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.73</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>6.29</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source*Involvement</td>
<td>-0.33</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>-1.09</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DV = Purchase Intentions</th>
<th>Intercept</th>
<th>SE</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>2.37</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involvement</td>
<td>-0.18</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>-0.40</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source*Involvement</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14: Conditional effect and indirect effect of source through credibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditional Effect of Source on Purchase Intentions for High and Low Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Involvement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indirect Effect of Source on Purchase Intentions for High and Low Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results showed that the interaction of involvement and source does not influence brand purchase intention through credibility ($B_{\text{indirect}} = -0.08$, SE = 0.07, CI = [-0.25, 0.05]). These results confirm that Hypothesis #2 was not supported.

5.3.3. Additional Analysis

Given that the interaction between the source of inspiring content and involvement was driven by participants who saw inspiring content from an external source and given that the mediated moderation analysis did not yield significant results, additional analysis of the participants’ thoughts and opinions regarding Trendy Shopper was conducted. The analysis leveraged an open-ended question in the survey, which asked participants to explain why they believed or did not believe that the Trendy Shopper Instagram account was an independent consumer. This analysis was conducted to understand why participants thought Trendy Shopper might be disseminating misleading information.

The open-ended responses were analyzed in attempt to identify a potential explanation for the different purchase intention results among high and low involvement participants who saw inspiring content from an external source. Participants who incorrectly recalled the source of inspiring content that they were exposed to or failed to provide an explanation were excluded from the analysis. Therefore, a total of 77 responses were analyzed.

Participants’ responses were coded according to whether they suggested a high or low level of suspicion. Specifically, participants whose comments suggested a lack of confidence in the fact that Trendy Shopper was an independent consumer were coded as “Suspicious”, and comments that suggested a belief that Trendy Shopper was an independent consumer were coded as “Not Suspicious”. Then, the cross-tabs function in SPSS was used in order to compare the
responses of participants in the high involvement and low involvement conditions. A summary of the results can be found in Table 15: Cross tabulation for open-ended responses.

Table 15: Cross tabulation for open-ended responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involvement Condition</th>
<th>Not Suspicious</th>
<th>Suspicious</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Involvement</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Involvement</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results reveal that 80% (31/39) of the high-involvement participants expressed high levels of suspicion regarding the source of the inspiring content, whereas only 65% (25/38) of the low-involvement participants were suspicious (Pearson Chi-Square = 0.182, p = 0.18). Therefore, the majority of highly involved participants were suspicious, whereas the less involved participants varied in terms of level of suspicion. This analysis suggests that further research on the role of source credibility as a heuristic under high and low levels of involvement is required, a topic that is further considered in the discussion below.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

In the following section, the results from the moderation analysis will be discussed, followed by an analysis of the mediated moderation results.

6.1. Moderation Discussion

In this study, inspiring content took the form of images posted on a social media site Instagram, and the first goal was to understand whether involvement moderated the effect of
source on purchase intentions. The moderation analysis revealed two key findings discussed below.

First, the results demonstrated that when participants saw inspiring content from an external source, mean-purchase intention scores were higher among participants who were in a low-involvement condition as opposed to a high-involvement condition. Purchase intention scores among the high-involvement and low-involvement participants were not statistically significantly different when the inspiring content came from an internal source. Considering the results among participants who saw the external source, it is possible that low-involvement participants quickly processed the external source as more trustworthy; a belief that appears to exist among many consumers given that 92% of consumers trust earned media above traditional advertising (Grimes, 2012). Conversely, given that the highly-involved participants were more likely to carefully consider the information they were presented with, they were expected to allow other factors to sway their decision. For instance, research has shown that cognitive skills are required to carefully evaluate the source of a message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Therefore, when consumers are motivated to engage with the processing of information, they are more likely to become suspicious and question the source’s credibility. Furthermore, research suggests that consumers do not know how to distinguish between paid and earned media in an online environment, and they might be unaware of the laws that require the disclosure of paid endorsements online (Powers et al., 2012). Therefore, it is possible that the high-involvement participants were skeptical or unsure of the external source because they assumed it could be a form of paid advertisement. As a result, their purchase intention scores were lower. When the inspiring content came from an internal source, it is possible that the level of involvement did not influence purchase intentions because it was
perceived as traditional advertising, a plausible explanation given that participants were told that
the internal source was a marketer-sponsored Instagram account. Therefore, there was no need
for either groups of participants to rely on peripheral cues or actively engage in a cognitive
evaluation of the message because they knew it was a form of advertising when the source of
inspiring content was internal.

Second, the results showed that mean purchase intention scores were higher among low-
involvement participants who saw an external source as opposed to an internal source. These
results support the notion that external sources are more persuasive than internal sources, which
is in line with existing research. Specifically, experts suggest that earned media is more effective
than paid media, and WOM is more persuasive than traditional advertising (Arndt, 1967; Katz &
Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Cheung et al., 2009, Grimes, 2012). There was no
statistically significant difference between participants who saw an internal source or an external
source while in the high involvement condition, and research suggests that the medium of
communication could also explain this result (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). Electronic commerce
researchers suggest that the medium of communication influences the effect of eWOM. Unlike
traditional WOM, where the source of information is known to the recipient, eWOM can be
perceived as suspect because of the lack of personal knowledge about the motivations of unseen
strangers offering recommendations (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). However, studies have shown that
this effect can be attenuated when the medium of communication is reputable. In this study, the
participants were told that the images came from an Instagram account. In Canada, there are 9
million Instagram users and 31% of users are between the ages of 18 and 24 years old
(Kowalczyk, 2017). Based on the popularity of the platform, it was assumed that the participants
perceived the website as a reputable source of information. However, given that this information
was not specifically collected, it is recommended that future research endeavours of this nature collect this information and control for it in the analysis. By doing so, there is an opportunity to further understand why the purchase intention scores did not differ among the high-involvement participants.

6.2 Mediated Moderation Discussion

The overall objective of this thesis was to determine whether inspiring content from an external source had a significantly higher impact on purchase intentions for low-involvement participants because it was perceived as more credible. The results revealed that the interaction effect was significant; however, the mediated moderation analysis revealed that credibility did not explain this interaction. Therefore, this research endeavor failed to identify why low-involvement participants were more willing to purchase the gift from an external source, and the highly-involved participants were not; a question that will be explored in the following section.

In general, researchers have established that people with low levels of involvement are less motivated to engage with a topic, and as result, they rely on peripheral cues when evaluating information and making a decision (Petty et al., 1983). Similarly, researchers have described consumers as “cognitive misers” who gravitate towards reducing cognitive complexity in decision-making whenever they can (Lynch, Marmorstein, & Weigold, 1988; Liu & Goodhue, 2012). In the current study, the salient cue under investigation was source credibility; however, researchers have identified other peripheral cues that influence behaviour, such as likability or perceptions of source attractiveness (Petty et al., 1983). Source credibility was determined to be the ideal cue to investigate in this study because the content came from an online environment (Instagram), which does not allow for a face-to-face interaction between the sender and the
recipient. As a result, the source credibility might have been unclear to the participants. In response to this limitation, future studies should present information that contributes to the perceived credibility by providing the source’s profile information. In the context of Instagram, this would involve showing the source’s Instagram page, number of posts, content from previous posts, number of followers, and biography. By doing so, there is the potential to see a stronger influence on credibility perceptions. Future studies should also consider examining the effect of alternative peripheral cues such as likability or perceptions of source attractiveness (Petty et al., 1983).

It is also important to consider the possibility that the lack of statistically significant results occurred because the scale used to measure source credibility was invalid. The credibility scale had a low level of reliability (α = 0.62), which is considered questionable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The questions used to measure source credibility were developed by the researcher, and in the future, scales developed by experts in the field should be used. Specifically, instead of simply asking the participants whether they thought the image was credible and whether the person who posted the image was credible, future studies measuring perceived credibility should leverage different extant research. For example, MacKenzie & Lutz (1989) measured advertiser credibility by asking subjects how convincing/unconvincing, believable/unbelievable/ and bias/unbiased they thought a source was. Survey questions using this language might yield more significant results in future studies. Future studies should also consider developing instruments that measure different dimensions of source credibility. In this particular study, participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they found the images credible, and whether the person who posted the image was credible. Conversely, future studies should develop a source credibility score by asking participants to indicate whether the source is
reputable, highly rated, good and trustworthy; questions that were used in a study on eWOM by Cheung et al (2009).

The lack of statistically significant results in the mediated moderation analysis could also be a reflection of participants not perceiving source credibility as a salient cue. Experts suggest that there can be an infinite number of heuristics in an interpersonal communication (Sussman & Siegal, 2003). However, others suggest that there are less peripheral cues in an online environment as opposed to a face-to-face context (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). Liu and Goodhue (2012) suggest that in an online environment, consumers focus on aspects that are most relevant to their immediate concern rather than engaging in an exhaustive processing of all potentially salient characteristics of a website. In a study examining the effect of informational influence in organizations, Sussman and Siegal (2003) suggested that cues related to the relationship of the source and the recipient, or characteristics of the information itself, might be fruitful as the basis for further investigation. Given the vast array of possible heuristics that could have been used by the participants in this study, the results of the additional qualitative analysis were considered in an effort to determine a potential direction for future research.

As mentioned, participants assigned to the external source condition were told that Trendy Shopper was an independent consumer who liked to post photos and share information. Therefore, participants should have understood that Trendy Shopper was not at all affiliated with the brand in question. However, the cross-tab results revealed the 73% of participants were suspicious, and 40% of them were from the high-involvement condition. This suggests that the source’s credibility negatively influenced the participants’ assessment of the message. This is an interesting finding because persuasion literature typically suggests that source credibility is a peripheral cue that influences people with low levels of involvement, and systematic cue such as
the quality of the message influences people with high levels of involvement (Petty et al., 1983). However, there are some researchers who argue that source credibility plays a more complex role in the elaboration likelihood model (Heesacker, Petty & Cacioppo, 1983). For example, previous research has found that source credibility can function as an additional argument factor for those following the central route to persuasion, which can lead to biased perceptions of argument quality (Chaiken & Maheswaran, 1994). Another study found that highly involved consumers use eWOM as an additional piece of information (Gupta & Harris, 2009). Therefore, is it possible that source credibility negatively influenced those in the high-involvement condition. The negative influence of source credibility was ascertained by reading the valence of the participant’s comments, which were predominantly negative and suspicious.

It is also important to acknowledge that these findings are not surprising given the prevalence of misleading information online. The quantity of discredited and false information disseminated by news media outlets has become widespread, leading to the coining of the term “fake news” (The Canadian Press, 2017). In response, consumers are being encouraged to adopt a critical lens and to enhance their news literacy in order to readily identify false information (The Canadian Press, 2017). Misleading information regarding goods and services is also prevalent online, despite the stipulations from Advertising Standards Canada, which require the disclosure of commercial interests. Consumers are aware of the fact that there are a number of people, known as social media influencers, who post commercially-sponsored content on Instagram, which does not qualify as earned media (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). Therefore, despite the fact participants were explicitly told that Trendy Shopper was an independent consumer, it is possible that the highly involved participants used their own knowledge and past experiences with unknown sources online to develop their suspicious perceptions.
CHAPTER 7. CONTRIBUTIONS

7.1. Theoretical Contributions

Customer inspiration is a new construct in the field of marketing, and by investigating the impact of the source of inspiring content, this thesis has contributed to the body of literature of customer experience by highlighting the role of source. This thesis also contributed to the body of literature on customer inspiration by empirically testing inspiring visual imagery appeals in a different context, thereby contributing to the establishment of generalizability.

By establishing the role of involvement as a moderator, a deeper understanding of the conditions under which an external source of inspiring content influences purchase intentions was established. Therefore, this research also contributed to marketers’ understanding of the impact of an external touch point during the pre-purchase stage of the customer experience; an increasingly important construct for both academics and practitioners.

7.2. Managerial Contributions

As social media sites continue to grow in popularity, the quantity of information available online continues to develop. Today’s online environment is an outlet for brands and consumers to communicate with each other and themselves, and the content found online often originates from two distinct sources. As a result, marketers must be aware of the impact that consumer-generated content has because it has the potential to influence their own communications. The ease with which consumers can share information about a brand or brand-experience online creates an environment that is difficult for marketers to control; thereby diminishing their ability to autonomously manage a brand. This may lead to higher levels of skepticism among target consumers because they may feel uncertain about who to believe (a fellow consumer or a
marketer). Furthermore, the quantity of consumer-generated information online has the potential to interfere with marketer-generated content. Specifically, consumers are at risk of experiencing information-overload, and consumers may choose to ignore marketing messages if they have already been influenced by consumer messaged. Considering this, it is important to understand the influence of each source on consumer behaviour. As discussed, consumer-generated information is perceived as more credible, relevant, and trustworthy (Arndt, 1967; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Bickart & Schindler, 2001; Cheung et al., 2009, Grimes, 2012); but marketers continue to generate their own content online. Given the novelty of the inspiration construct and the limited empirical studies investigating the conditions under which it operates, this thesis investigated whether marketers should inspire consumers themselves or through other consumers. The results revealed that when a consumer is exposed to inspiring content from an external source, the content is more persuasive when involvement levels are low; a finding that impacts marketing managers, which is discussed below.

The results impact marketing managers who work in the consumer packaged goods (CPG) industry. Given the frequency of CPG purchases, consumers will likely rely on salient cues when purchasing goods because low-levels of involvement are often associated with these types of purchases (Zaichkowsky, 1985). In those contexts, managers should consider leveraging consumer-generated eWOM because the findings support the notion that it is more effective than traditional advertising. Managers can accomplish this through a social-media coordinator, whose responsibilities include monitoring conversations among consumers online, and responding accordingly. For example, negative comments from consumers can be addressed by offering an explanation, giving details on how the negativity has been addressed by the company, or compensating the consumer in the form of a discount or coupon. These responses have the
potential to not only reduce the negative perceptions of the consumer, but they also have the potential to positively impact other consumers who are observing the conversation. Some brands have gone as far as to leverage this type of feedback in an advertisement. For example, in 2017, Tim Hortons created an ad that responds to consumers’ feedback on their dark road coffee. The ad features negative tweets from consumers, such as “my dark roast isn’t strong enough” or “please tell me you’re changing the dark roast”, followed by a message from the brand promising that their new blend would be better (@TimHortons, 2017). In response to positive comments, the social-media coordinator should respond by praising the consumer for sharing positive thoughts; thereby showing that they recognize the importance of consumer-generated content and consider the information credible and important.

CHAPTER 8. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

One limitation of this research is the fact that the external source was a fictional consumer created for the purpose of this research. In real life, consumers can evaluate an online source by exploring their profile, and as such, it is possible that the participants perceived lower levels of source credibility because they had nothing to base their credibility perceptions on. Future research should investigate whether an external source of inspiring content has a stronger impact on purchase intentions when participants have more information on the source.

A second limitation is the failure to investigate the participants’ level of internet experience. Studies have shown that a person’s internet experience impacts the influence of eWOM because less experienced consumers are less critical of information found online (Lopez & Sicilia, 2014). In this study, the participant pool consisted of students at the University of
Guelph, and as a result, their level of internet experience was not considered important. However, future research should consider collecting this data.

A third limitation is related to the manipulation of involvement. In this study, involvement levels were controlled by changing the level of personal relevance. However, some authors suggest that involvement reflects motivation and ability (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, Bickart & Schindler, 2001). Therefore, future research should consider manipulating the cognitive capacity and level of motivation when creating high-involvement and low-involvement conditions.

A fourth limitation is related to the scale used to measure perceived credibility. As discussed, the scale had a low level of reliability ($\alpha = 0.614$). Future research should leverage published scales, such as those used by MacKenzie & Lutz (1989) in order to increase the potential for statistically significant results.

There is also an opportunity to conduct future research which uses traditional WOM. In an online environment, it is easy for consumers to be misled by sources of information who inaccurately present information or themselves. However, in a real-life setting, this is less likely to occur because consumers can interact with the source in person, and thereby evaluate the information and the sender themselves.

Finally, the results suggest that this study should be extended such that three levels of the independent variable (source) are included. Instead of studying the effects of two sources (internal, external), future research should consider a third type of source: a social media influencer. This recommendation is a reflection of the fact that participants did not believe that Trendy Shopper was a truly independent consumer, and they questioned Trendy Shopper’s motives for posting the branded content. The results could be a reflection of participants feeling
as though they were being misled. However, if participants are clearly informed that the source is a social media influencer, it is possible that their levels of suspicious would decrease.

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION

Inspiration lies at the heart of marketing because exposing consumers to new ideas is a key component in marketing. However, consumers are exposed to a multitude of messages each day, some of which come from marketers, and some of which come from consumers. Information posted online can come from a variety of sources, and the potential impact of others’ opinions has dramatically increased with the development of the internet. As such, it is important to consider the effect of inspiring content that comes from a marketer (i.e. internal source) and a consumer (i.e. external source). This research has demonstrated that under conditions of low-involvement, an external source of inspiring content generates higher levels of purchase intentions. However, there are still a number of unanswered questions regarding the influence of source of inspiring content on highly involved consumers; a question that I hope to see answered by future marketing research.
REFERENCES


Petty, R. E. & Wegener, D. T. (1999). The elaboration likelihood mode: Current status and


TimHortons. (2017, March 8). “We heard you, Canada! Dark Roast coffee is now darker and richer because of you. Try a fresh cup and tell us how we did using #TimsDark”. [Twitter Post]. Retrieved from https://twitter.com/timhortons/status/839430544710578176?lang=en


Villanueva, J., Yoo, S. & Hanssens, D.M. (2008). The impact of marketing-induced versus word-


APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Inspiring Content Stimuli for Study 1

Participants saw either the internal version or external version of the five images.

**Option 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 1, Internal Version</th>
<th>Image 1, External Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1_internal.jpg" alt="Image 1, Internal Version" /></td>
<td><img src="image1_external.jpg" alt="Image 1, External Version" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Option 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Image 2, Internal Version</th>
<th>Image 2, External Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2_internal.jpg" alt="Image 2, Internal Version" /></td>
<td><img src="image2_external.jpg" alt="Image 2, External Version" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Option 3

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<th>Image 3, External Version</th>
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<td><img src="image3_external.jpg" alt="Image 3, External Version" /></td>
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</table>

### Option 4

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<th>Image 4, External Version</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
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<td><img src="image4_external.jpg" alt="Image 4, External Version" /></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Option 5

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<th>Image 5, Internal Version</th>
<th>Image 5, External Version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image5_internal.jpg" alt="Image 5, Internal Version" /></td>
<td><img src="image5_external.jpg" alt="Image 5, External Version" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: Dependent Measures for Study 1

Image Similarity

On each of the scales below, please select the option which best describes your feelings towards the image you just saw

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The image is informative (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is clear (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is authentic (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is interesting (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image captured my attention (5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image is aesthetically pleasing (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person who posted the image is trustworthy (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Level of Inspiration**

On the scales below, please select the option which best describes your feelings towards the image

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree (1)</th>
<th>Disagree (2)</th>
<th>Somewhat disagree (3)</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree (4)</th>
<th>Somewhat agree (5)</th>
<th>Agree (6)</th>
<th>Strongly agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I experienced inspiration (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The image inspired me (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel inspired to do something (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel inspired (4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3: Instructions for Study 1

In this survey, you will see five different images. After looking at each image, you will answer a series of multiple-choice questions that relate to the image.

For the remainder of the study, please imagine that you are considering buying a holiday gift for someone. When observing the image, please pay attention to all the details on the screen because the multiple-choice questions that follow are based on all the elements in the image.

Please ensure that you answer the multiple-choice questions based on the most recent image that you have seen.
Appendix 4: Demographic Questions in Study 1 & Study 2

How old are you?
______________

What is your gender?
Male
Female
Other
Prefer not to answer

3. Which of the following best describes your ethnicity?
Indigenous
White/European
Black/Africa/Caribbean
Southeast Asian (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Filipino, etc)
Arab (Saudi Arabian, Palestinian, Iraqi, etc)
South Asian (East Indian, Sri Lankan, etc)
Latin American (Costa Rican, Guatemalan, Brazilian, Columbian, etc)
West Asian (Iranian, Afghani, etc)
Other (please specify) _________________________________
Appendix 5: Description of Source in Study 2

Participants who were randomly assigned to the internal condition were asked to read this description before viewing the two images:

While looking through pictures on Instagram, you come across the following images from the official Stella Artois Instagram account. The post features two pictures with a bottle of Stella Artois beer and two glasses, which are available for purchase as a gift set.

Participants who were randomly assigned to the external condition were asked to read this description before viewing the two images:

While looking through pictures on Instagram, you come across the following images from the Trendy Shopper Instagram account, an independent consumer who likes to try different products and post pictures of their favourite purchases on Instagram. The post features two pictures with a bottle of Stella Artois beer and two glasses, which are available for purchase as a gift set.
Appendix 6: Manipulation of Involvement in Study 2

High Involvement Scenario:
Imagine that you are headed to your boss’ house for a team dinner to celebrate his birthday. You need to bring a gift, but you don’t have any ideas. Your boss is a great mentor who shows you support, encouragement and direction, so you really want to find a great gift. You decide to look through pictures on Instagram for some ideas on what to buy.

Low Involvement Scenario
Imagine that you and your parents are going to your uncle’s house for a dinner to celebrate his birthday. Your parents ask you to pick up a birthday gift, which they will be paying for. You decide to look through pictures on Instagram for some ideas on what to buy.
Appendix 7: Inspiring Content Stimuli in Study 2

**Internal Condition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image1.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image2.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**External Condition**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Photo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image3.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><img src="image4.jpg" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 8: Manipulation Checks in Study 2

Involvement

For the next set of questions, please think back to the scenario you read at the start of the study.

1. Who were you asked to buy a birthday gift for?
   - Uncle
   - Boss
   - I don’t know

2. Did you feel motivated to select a great gift?
   - Definitely not
   - Probably not
   - Might or might not
   - Probably yes
   - Definitely yes

3. How important was it for you to select a great gift?
   - Not important at all
   - Slightly important
   - Moderately important
   - Very important
   - Extremely important

Source

Who posted the image that you saw at the start of the study?

- Stella Artois
- Trendy Shopper
- I don’t know
Appendix 9: Survey Questions on External Source in Study 2

External Source

Do you believe that the Trendy Shopper Instagram account is an independent consumer?

○ Definitely not
○ Probably not
○ Might or might not
○ Probably yes
○ Definitely yes

Please explain why (open-ended response)
Appendix 10: Boxplots Analysis for ANOVA Assumptions
Appendix 11: Syntax for Simple Main Effects

UNIANOVA Purch4 BY SourceC InvC
/METHOD=SSTYPE(3)
/INTERCEPT=INCLUDE
/PLOT=PROFILE(SourceC*InvC InvC*SourceC)
/EMMEANS=TABLES(SourceC*InvC) COMPARE(SourceC) ADJ(BONFERRONI)
  /EMMEANS=TABLES(SourceC*InvC) COMPARE(InvC) ADJ(BONFERRONI)
/PRINT ETASQ DESCRIPTIVE HOMOGENEITY
/CRITERIA=ALPHA(.05)
/DESIGN=SourceC InvC SourceC*InvC.
Appendix 12: Syntax for Mediated Moderation

PROCESS vars = InvC SourceC Purch4 Att
   /y=Purch4/x=SourceC/m=Att/w=InvC/z=/v=/q=/
   model =8/boot=1000/center=0/hc3=0/effsize=0/
   normal=0/coeffci=1/conf=95/percent=0/total=0/
   covmy=0/jn=0/quantile =0/plot=0/contrast=0/
   decimals=F10.4/covcoeff=0/center=0/jn=0/plot=1/.