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A Community of Consumers

A qualitative discourse study on the use of persuasive language
in social media profiles of celebrity-owned wellness brands.

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Abstract

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht den Einsatz persuasiver Sprache im Instagram-Marketing von Wellnessmarken im Besitz von Prominenten anhand von Cialdinis (1984) sechs Prinzipien der Persuasion. Aufbauend auf der Forschung von Morady Moghaddam und Esmaeilpour (2023) analysiert die Arbeit 134 Instagram-Posts der Wellnessmarken Lemme, WelleCo und Sourse. Die Beiträge werden systematisch nach den sechs Prinzipien - 'reciprocity', 'scarcity', 'authority', 'commitment and consistency', 'liking' sowie 'consensus and social proof' - kategorisiert und zusätzlich anhand rhetorischer und sprachlicher Mikrostrategien untersucht. Die Arbeit verbindet Ansätze aus der Persuasionsforschung, Rhetorik, Diskursanalyse und dem Social-Media-Marketing, um zu untersuchen, wie Sprache zur persuasiven Kommunikation in der digitalen Wellnessbranche beiträgt.

Die Ergebnisse der Arbeit zeigen, dass das Prinzip des „liking“ das dominierende persuasive Prinzip im untersuchten Datensatz darstellt und häufig andere Prinzipien unterstützt. Die Marken verwenden überwiegend emotional ansprechende, humorvolle und ästhetisch positive Sprache, um angenehme Assoziationen mit ihren Produkten und Markenidentitäten hervorzurufen. Autorität wird häufig durch Verweise auf Wellness-Expertise, wissenschaftliche Begriffe und gesundheitsbezogene Aussagen konstruiert. Die Arbeit argumentiert zudem, dass Instagram als Plattform persuasive Kommunikation begünstigt, die besonders auf Nahbarkeit, Unterhaltung und emotionale Bindung ausgerichtet ist.

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List of abbreviations

ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
ELT	English Language Teaching
HSM	Heuristic Systematic Model

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1. Introduction

Persuasion in the context of digital marketing is continuously becoming a more present concern considering that the average internet user spends over two hours on social media daily (GWI 2024). While digital ads can appear in various forms, the language they use is indisputably an important factor of their persuasibility. Language is present in video, audio and text-only ads and helps to shape consumers' perception of a brand. A helpful tool in discussing the language used in advertising are Cialdini's (1984) six principles of persuasion, which, despite their presence in much current advertising, remain underexplored in this field.

The six principles (reciprocity; scarcity; authority; commitment and consistency; liking; consensus and social proof) facilitate the process of identifying and coding the language used in advertising, as was done by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), whose study on English Language Teaching (ELT)-related ads builds the framework for this thesis. Thus, the aim of this thesis is to not only utilise Cialdini's (1984) principles and the model elaborated by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), but to also explore a niche topic that has not been given much attention in the literature: celebrity-owned wellness brands' advertising, specifically their Instagram posts. These will be systematically coded and categorised to identify trends and patterns in relation to Cialdini's (1984) principles. This approach combines psycholinguistic theory and rhetoric with practical discourse analysis, offering insights into the role of language in shaping consumer behavior online.

The author's personal interest in this topic stems from previous work experience in marketing medical technology products. Having experienced the regulations, both on an EU-wide and company-specific-level, that inform what language may be used to advertise such products, it appeared interesting to explore how celebrity-owned brands might differ in their approaches to online marketing. Considering Cialdini's (1984) principles, it should also be worth exploring whether the owners' celebrity status would be utilised, for example, to establish themselves, and their brand as an extension of themselves, as an authority, despite their lack of expertise in the industry, or whether they would more often take advantage of one of the other principles.

Further, by investigating how language functions in this space, the author hopes to contribute to a better understanding of how persuasion operates in the digital marketplace and its implications for both consumers and brands.

As a result of these interests, the following research questions have emerged:

1. *Which rhetorical features can be identified in persuasive tactics in social media advertising on Instagram for celebrity-owned wellness brands?*
2. *How do celebrity-owned wellness brands apply Cialdini's (1984) six principles of persuasion on social media, specifically Instagram?*
3. *How do celebrity-owned wellness brands present their owner as an authority figure, despite their lack of credentials in a given field, or use the expertise of others?*

Though a major concern of this thesis are celebrity-owned businesses, which heavily feature these celebrities in their social media marketing campaigns, it should be noted that the primary message source is the company behind the product, not the celebrities themselves. In a critical analysis of social media advertising by these companies, one should keep in mind that while their celebrity owners and (co-)founders may appear frequently, they are merely representative of a larger institution and that they as individuals are unlikely to make all marketing decisions, such as photography, graphic design or copywriting for Instagram posts, on their own.

As the first part of this thesis' literature research, some groundwork in the field of persuasion research will be presented by examining some of the most commonly used theories on this issue. First, Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals will be briefly reviewed, given that they have significantly influenced how modern researchers think about communication and persuasion.

Then, the thesis will address two models that are commonly referenced when it comes to psychological research into persuasion: the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) and the heuristic-systematic model (HSM). Both models have been used widely in persuasion research in advertising and should be included to give an insight into the current state of persuasion research. However, more attention will be paid to Cialdini's (1984) principles due to the research interest of this thesis. While ELM and HSM are useful models for researching how persuasion works in the mind of an audience, may assist in the research of persuadability, and may inform some persuaders' strategies, they often describe psychological processes that can differ from one individual to another. As this thesis is more concerned with the practical use of persuasion tactics and its rhetorical features, Cialdini's (1984) principles make for a better tool in terms of coding, analysis and discussion of such features from the perspective of the persuader.

Then, this thesis will establish a connection between common persuasive linguistic tools, such as various rhetorical devices, and the persuasion theory covered thus far, including references to Aristotle, ELM and HSM, and Cialdini's (1984) principles. Some research into the field of social media advertising and celebrity endorsements will be briefly noted as well.

After the theory section, this thesis will present a layout of the research design and explain how it was adapted from Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) to complement research in wellness marketing. The methods for the coding and categorisation processes will be explained and subcategories, here referred to as 'micro-strategies', based on Cialdini's (1984) principles will be defined as per their application in the data analysis.

Following the research design, this thesis will delve into the analysis of the data, 134 Instagram posts by three separate company accounts, and present the findings, sorted by least to most used principle and micro-strategy. The data will then be discussed in more detail and possible explanations behind the findings will be explored.

Finally, this thesis will summarise the findings, present challenges and difficulties that occurred during the research process and discuss how the present data can be utilised for future research.

2. Theory

2.1. Aristotle's rhetorical appeals

Aristotle's *The Rhetoric* is an influential and widely studied text, which many rhetoricians regard as “the most important single work on persuasion ever written” (Golden et al. 2011: 62). Jamar (2002: 7) summarises Aristotle's definition of persuasion as the connection of “the substance of your arguments and the style of their presentation to the audience”, meaning that both content and form of persuasive arguments ought to be considered.

Aristotle divides the means of persuasion into the non-artistic, i.e., outside factors the speaker cannot influence, and the artistic, which the speaker has control over; the artistic means are further divided into ethos, logos and pathos (Jamar 2002: 8-9). Ethos refers to the character of the speaker and their credibility, pathos to the emotion evoked by a speaker and logos to the use of logical arguments, including facts and evidence. These means, as well as Aristotle's entire rhetoric, provide a number of tools which can be used to critically analyse and evaluate advertising claims (Jalilifar et al. 2021: 568).

Though multiple means can be used within the same persuasion attempt, such as supporting facts with an emotional appeal, they may also work against one another. Marlin (1989: 98), for example, states that “one use of emotion is to distract people from evaluating evidence”. Therefore, the right appliance of pathos may be used to distract an audience from investigating the logos of an argument.

While all three artistic means may be applied in advertising, pathos appears to be the most frequent, as advertisers aim to evoke certain emotions in their customers regarding their products, rather than presenting them with hard facts (Jalilifar et al. 2021: 569). Jalilifar et al. note that the emotional appeal expressed through pathos includes “the audience's values, beliefs and their ability to experience what the addresser experiences” (2021: 569). Thus, advertisers would not only appeal to their audience's own emotions, but also their empathy.

In analysing infomercials by the technology company Apple, Jalilifar et al. found an uneven distribution of Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals, pathos being the most dominant one (2021: 578), concluding that “the appeal to emotion is the most widely used rhetorical technique in different contexts, especially in advertisements” (2021: 579). Their research was supported by similar results found in studies on political speeches (Widyawardani 2016), beauty product

advertisements (Nielsen 2013), the effectiveness of balancing logos and pathos in church sermons (Houston 2014), and on the balanced exploitation of all three rhetorical appeals in the courtroom (McCormack 2014).

This claim is further supported by a survey by Nyilasy and Reid (2009), who interviewed senior-level agency practitioners, using their expertise to determine effective advertising strategies. In the participants' experiences, cognitive attitudes, i.e. logos, served to rationalise emotionally formed attitudes, i.e. pathos, including brand choice (86); they also argued that some products were more emotional than others, depending on whether they were bought impulsively or after long consideration, and the visibility of brands to others, e.g. brand names and logos on clothing or cars (90). This could mean that some products would benefit more from the use of pathos in their advertising than others.

In the context of celebrity-owned brands, it should be noted that rhetoricians after Aristotle would distinguish between intrinsic or performed ethos, which the speaker establishes within the text itself, from extrinsic ethos, which is based on the reputation of the speaker (Harris and Fahnestock 2022: 11). While considering the celebrities' extrinsic ethos would be interesting to examine, it would likely not be perceived by the consumer through messages involved in a small number of social media posts but rather based on preconceived knowledge or ideas of the person and therefore beyond the scope of this thesis. It is rather the intrinsic ethos that will be examined through the course of this research.

In conclusion, from research into Aristotle's rhetorical appeals in advertising, a trend towards advertisers using pathos over ethos and logos can be noted. While an interplay of these appeals may be at work in different types of persuasion attempts, emotional appeals appear to be the driving force behind much contemporary advertising.

2.2. Elaboration Likelihood Model and Heuristic Systematic Model

One theory that is frequently applied in contemporary persuasion research is the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) by Cacioppo and Petty (1984). They argue that recipients of persuasive appeals are neither "invariantly cogitative nor universally mindless" (1984: 673), but that a variety of factors influence persuasiveness. Generally, the model differentiates between high and low elaboration likelihood. In instances of high elaboration likelihood,

recipients engage in issue-relevant thinking, critically assess a persuasive message and access prior knowledge and memories to evaluate its meaning; in instances of low elaboration likelihood, recipients engage with a persuasive message only on a superficial level and use only cues available to them in the moment (673). Consequently, Cacioppo and Petty (1984) suggest that there are two routes to persuasion, one being the central route, which represents high elaboration likelihood, and the other being the peripheral route, which represents low elaboration likelihood, though they state that the two routes “represent positions on a continuous dimension ranging from high to low” (673), rather than being mutually exclusive.

As Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006: 808) point out, recipients influenced via either the central or the peripheral route do not necessarily experience different outcomes but they “may arrive at the same conclusion [...] even if such decision resulted from two entirely different (argument-based or cue-based) influence routes”. They also note that high and low elaboration likelihood are not personality traits, but temporal states that “may fluctuate with situational contexts and time, even for the same individual” (809), pointing out that a recipient may employ high elaboration for messages in a field that they are experts in, while employing low elaboration for fields they are novices in and thus may rely on someone else’s expertise.

Since its conception, the ELM has been widely used in the advertising and marketing literature (Kitchen et al. 2014). Many studies have employed ELM in an online marketing context, as some researchers consider it the most comprehensive model for measuring online advertising in regard to involvement and information processing (Spilker-Attig and Brettel 2010; Cho 1999).

One example of such research involves the use of influencers or micro-celebrities, whose large numbers of online followers make them attractive to advertisers. In the field of online and social media marketing, influencer marketing as a type of endorsement has become a common practice, which Farivar et al. refer to as “essentially a persuasion process” (2023: 131). They used the ELM as a framework to compare the impact of influencer and post features on followers’ purchase intention. They claim that central factors for a follower’s evaluation of a post include “the true value of post messages, including post originality, uniqueness, and informativeness” (128), whereas peripheral factors include “influencers’ perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and self-presence in posts” (128). Cho (1999: 34) also lists source attractiveness among other peripheral persuasion cues such as music,

humour, and visuals. In a survey with 487 Instagram users, Farivar et al. (2023) found that all three central factors had a direct impact on the followers' purchase intention, post uniqueness having the greatest effect. Peripheral factors, with the exception of perceived physical attractiveness of influencers, did not directly affect purchase intention, meaning they did not drive purchase decisions without central factors (138).

The central and peripheral routes have been associated with Chaiken's (1980) heuristic-systematic model (HSM), the central route encompassing her systematic view of persuasion and the peripheral route encompassing her heuristic view of persuasion (Cacioppo and Petty 1984: 673). Areni et al. (2000: 857) describe both models as identifying "the *amount of thought* an audience devotes to a communication" [original emphasis]. Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991) describe systematic processing as "an analytic orientation in which people take all (or most) relevant information into account in forming their attitudinal judgments" (53); heuristic processing, in contrast, requires "less cognitive effort and fewer cognitive resources" (53).

According to Sundar et al. (2019: 71), peripheral cues in the context of advertising "lead us to apply judgemental rules to make quick decisions or "heuristics"" based on previous learning experiences. An example they give for heuristics as a quick judgement is the 'bandwagon heuristic', which is applied, for instance, when a consumer sees a product with many positive reviews leading to the assumption that they too will like it (2019: 74). Another example they give is the 'identity heuristic', which may be triggered if consumers use products that highlight their own uniqueness to each other (2019: 77).

HSM may also be connected to a consumer's trust in an advertiser's expertise, e.g. when seeing a doctor in white lab coat promoting a product in an ad, the consumer is more likely to trust the claim made about the product than if the claim were made by another everyday consumer (Sundar et al. 2019: 71). However, if consumers recognise these context cues, they might process them systematically as just one piece of evidence that influences their decision (2019: 72). It is significant to notice that "heuristic processing typically occurs if message receivers are not consciously aware of the cues and/or their role in influencing a judgement based on a mental shortcut" (2019: 72).

Despite the continued use of both models in more contemporary studies, Kitchen et al. (2014: 2034) argue that, given that ELM was designed for a 1980's market, it may not be suitable for today's digital landscape as the way consumers process advertising may have changed

dramatically since the mass-media marketing strategies that were active during the model's conception. Further, the literature on ELM and HSM has been primarily focussed on the persuadability of the audience, whereas the focus of this thesis are the persuasive strategies employed by brands. In this respect, Cialdini's (1984) principles, as explained in detail below, should offer a better understanding of persuasion from the perspective of the advertiser – whereas ELM and HSM may offer a better insight into persuasion from the audience's perspective.

2.3. Cialdini's Principles of Persuasion

Cialdini (1984) describes six principles of persuasion – reciprocity; scarcity; authority; commitment and consistency; liking; consensus and social proof – which can be employed by persuaders. These principles have been used, for instance, to establish which persuasion tactics are most common in ELT-related advertising on social media (Morady Moghaddam and Esmailpour 2023) and in digital media strategies for sport properties (Goss et al. 2021), as well as exploring results in gender differences and persuadability in a digital space (Guadagno and Cialdini 2002). For the purposes of this thesis, each principle will be examined in more detail, including overlaps with Aristotle's rhetorical appeals and the ELM and HSM. Connections to common techniques in persuasive linguistics will also be elaborated on.

2.3.1. Scarcity

The principle of scarcity relies on the belief that things which are rare or in short supply are more valuable. Hobfoll (2001: 343) suggests that loss of something has a significantly bigger impact on an individual than the gain of something equally valuable. In marketing, this could be used to suggest to consumers that rather than saving money by purchasing a product or service, they would lose the same amount if they chose not to make said purchase. Scarcity is also often applied in advertising in the form of limited-time offers or vouchers as well as promoting limited availability of a certain line of products to increase interest.

Scarcity is connected to Aristotle's pathos as it evokes the emotion of fear in the audience, in particular the fear of missing out on or lacking something. Because of this fear, consumers will pay higher prices for scarce offers, motivated by the threat of them becoming unavailable. Though researchers of persuasion have examined the effects of so-called 'fear

appeals', the fears addressed in much of the research are often quite explicit, such as threats to a person's health, e.g., in anti-smoking ads (Mongeau 2013: 186), whereas the appeal to consumers' fear of missing out is more implicit. Fear appeals can be challenging to use effectively as the threat to the audience needs to be balanced, as to not be too severe or too low have been found to be equally as ineffective (Mattson 1999).

2.3.2. Reciprocity

Reciprocity describes the feeling of obligation to return a favour, thus "when a persuasive request is made by a person the receiver feels indebted to, the receiver is more inclined to adhere to the request" (Orji et al. 2015: 148). Research has shown that when people receive a favour, expected or unexpected, they feel compelled to reciprocate that favour in some form (Regan 1971; Strohmetz et al. 2002). In the context of digital marketing, examples of reciprocity include giving consumers early access to new features or products in exchange for subscriptions, for instance.

Some research has also connected this principle to Aristotle's ethos. Jalilifar et al. (2021: 582), for example, have suggested that when the technology brand Apple offered its customers to try out their new product for free at an event, they suggested that this emphasised the company's trustworthiness and honesty. Trustworthiness, in turn, has also been associated with the principle of authority.

Reciprocity may also be used in connection with the liking principle, considering that a favour "might cause the recipient to like or be attracted to the favor-doer, and this attraction could make him more compliant with the favor-doer's request" (Regan 1971: 628) and receivers of a favour might interpret this gesture as a sign of affection. Further, as one possible strategy of the liking principle is to compliment someone, the complimented person may feel inclined to reciprocate a positive feeling in some way (O'Keefe 1990).

2.3.3. Consensus and Social Proof

Much research in social psychology has shown that group opinion can have a significant impact on an individual's opinions and choices, to the point that they may give answers in experimental studies which are "obviously incorrect" (Venkatesan 1966: 384) due to being exposed to majority opinions. Chaiken et al. (1989) suggest that one of the heuristics learned by audiences leads them to believe that consensus implies correctness. Research has shown

group opinions, under certain conditions, to influence audiences such that their thinking is consistent with the position of the majority; individuals exposed to group opinions may even generate their own explanations for the expressed opinions, resulting in self-generated persuasion (Areni et al. 2000: 859). The desire to fit in with a group majority has also shown to influence purchasing behaviour (Venkatesan 1966). Cialdini et al. (1990: 1015) distinguish between injunctive and descriptive norms, explaining that “in contrast to descriptive norms, which specify what is done, injunctive norms specify what ought to be done.” Though both can act simultaneously, one should be aware that they are separate.

Hovland et al. (1982 [1953]: 134) stress the value of group membership as “community leaders frequently assert that group approval will follow upon the adoption of their recommendation or that disapproval will be the consequence of failure to accept it”. It should be noted that groups upon which group opinions are based can vary in sizes and depend on certain demographics. Sunstein (2009: 83) notices a “strong human tendency to self-segregate along the kinds of lines that promote polarization”. This self-segregation can be noticed within demographic groups categorised by age, education, race, religion, but also more abstract similarities such as aspirations, attitudes and intelligence (2009: 83). As Goss et al. (2021: 250) point out about the principle of consensus, it “logically operates more powerfully when observing similar individuals more so than when observing dissimilar ones”. Thus, people of a certain demographic background may look to or be influenced by others within their given community for a majority opinion, rather than outside that community.

The principle of consensus applies to digital spaces as well, as Gangadharbatla (2019) notices a rise of connected experiences on the internet, including “the proliferation of services, websites, and apps that stress on a community-based approach to [...] shopping”, (376) alongside gaming and entertainment. Arguably, the internet, and especially social media, facilitates access to like-minded individuals to form a consensus.

2.3.4. Commitment and Consistency

The principle of commitment and consistency is related to cognitive consistency theory from the field of sociology and supports the idea that “people by their nature strive to be consistent with previous or reported behavior to avoid cognitive dissonance” (Orji et al. 2015: 148).

In order to use this principle as a means of persuasion, one strategy may involve generating smaller commitments, then building up to larger ones (Goss et al. 2021: 247). People are also

likely to be driven by commitments when agreeing to them publicly, and especially in written form. The most important factor, however, is making a commitment appear “self-initiated and free from strong, external pressures, thereby creating a feeling of responsibility” (Goss et al. 2021: 248).

This principle can be compared to a foot-in-the-door technique common in both advertising and propaganda, which presumes that “once a person has been induced to comply with a small request he is more likely to comply with a larger demand” (Freedman and Fraser 1966: 195). In the context of social media advertising, Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) found examples of ELT practitioners using this principle by encouraging their students to stay consistent and finish their general English courses, as well staying committed to then participate in specialised IELTS courses. The researchers also found practitioners encouraging learners to discuss objectives and future plans to be another use of this principle.

2.3.5. Authority

Research on message sources strongly supports the idea that (perceived) expertise has a great effect on persuasion (Sternthal et al. 1978; O’Keefe 1990; Wilson and Sherrell 1993). In their research, Wilson and Sherrell (1993: 102) found that “generally, when a source is perceived as an expert (versus nonexpert) or trustworthy (versus non-trustworthy), there is a positive effect on attitude change”. They argue that expertise is “often established on some objective basis (college degree, years of experience, etc.)” (109) and could thus be easier to assess than other source characteristics.

Hovland et al. (1982 [1953]: 22) also mention age as one of multiple factors that may influence perceived expertise and claim that both ‘expertness’ and ‘trustworthiness’ influence the credibility of a source message (21). Trustworthiness is often defined as “the perceived willingness of the source to make valid assertions” (McCracken 1989: 311). Authority and trustworthiness have also been associated with both Aristotle’s ethos and low elaboration in the ELM (Farivar et al. 2023).

Some research (O’Keefe 1990: 136) has also shown that the use of evidence can enhance the persuader’s perceived competence and trustworthiness, regardless of whether the person was an expert themselves or simply referenced expert sources.

Chaiken et al. (1989) have also suggested that highly credible sources may activate the heuristics that lead audiences to trust experts' statements and thereby persuade them. In a study on comprehension and persuasion, Ratneshwar and Chaiken (1991: 56) found subjects with "relatively poor comprehension of [a product's] information" would experience more positive attitudes towards an expert presenter than those who had a better understanding of that product. When it comes to the use of evidence, some research (McCroskey 1969) has shown that evidence used by a highly credible source did not enhance their persuasiveness. When a low credibility source used evidence, however, provided the evidence was unfamiliar to their audience, their influence was enhanced significantly.

As mentioned above, given that a persuader's authority is connected to their credibility, it is possible to draw a connection to Aristotle's idea of *ethos*. Kennedy (2007: 22), however, criticises that Aristotle limits *ethos* "to the effect of the character conveyed by the words of a speaker and he fails to recognize the great role of authority of a speaker already perceived by an audience". While this thesis will continue in Aristotle's footsteps to inspect a persuader's authority only through their use of language, future research could assist in contrasting celebrities' authority that is actually perceived by their audience, and the authority they aim to present in a digital space.

2.3.6. Liking

One of the most common methods to achieve persuasion is for a persuader to be liked by their audience. As this principle strongly ties into the audience's emotions, in particular their feelings towards the persuader, it can be directly connected to Aristotle's *pathos*.

Research has found many motives for an audience to like a source message, among them similarity, praise, and attractiveness (Orji et al. 2015: 148). Given that attractiveness as well as humour, which has also been connected to likability (Yelkur et al. 2013), have been named peripheral factors for persuasion processing (Farivar et al. 2023; Cho 1999), liking may be associated with low elaboration likelihood. Goss et al. (2021) also list conditioning and association as a form of inducing liking, i.e. forming connections between "people, places, things, and circumstances" (2021: 242) with positively connoted ideas.

Heider (1958: 200) argues that people tend to like those who have previously shown to like them, which connects this principle to reciprocity. He also states that if a person's actions could be interpreted in two different ways, either harmful or beneficial, audiences are more

likely to interpret them positively if they already like the person (1958: 258). In the context of celebrity endorsements, one could then make the argument that if an audience feels positive about a celebrity, they have no reason to mistrust them in an advertisement. Thus, using liking as a persuasive method for social media marketing may be a salient strategy, given how much social media activity is centered around interaction based on mutual affection by its nature (Geng et al. 2021).

Some research (O’Keefe 1990: 146) has shown, however, that credibility can be a more influencing factor than liking, i.e. when a disliked person makes a more compelling argument than a liked person. If credibility is to be equated, at least in part, to Cialdini’s (1984) principle of authority, that would mean that authority would be a more effective tool than liking. However, O’Keefe (1990: 155) also argues that all methods of persuasion are related either to liking or the persuader’s credibility and that any additional influences should be considered as to how they relate to either method, making a strong case for both principles. Thus, there is reason to believe that both authority and liking have a strong presence in the digital marketing space as well.

2.3.7. Notes on Gender

While much of the literature on persuasion theories discussed in this thesis has made little to no mention of gender, it should be noted that in advertising, different strategies are often applied when advertising to either men or women. Though these different strategies may be rooted in the same principles, some research (Orji et al. 2015) has found that men and women react differently to the use of Cialdini’s (1984) principles.

At this point, it should also be noted that the advertising discussed in this thesis is largely targeted towards a female audience. Besides choices in visual presentation, the discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this thesis’ topic, this can be noticed through two characteristics. First, many of the discussed posts from the chosen time period advertise feminine health products. And second, though male consumers might also benefit from some of the other products presented, posts that feature images or videos of people using the various products, e.g. models, actors, and influencers, only show women, indicating the target group for the advertised product.

In a survey on the effectiveness of Cialdini’s (1984) principles, Orji et al. (2015: 155) found that women were more likely to feel an obligation to reciprocate a favor. Women also had a

higher response to the principle of commitment and consistency, suggesting that encouragement of setting goals and comparing achievements with set goals would be particularly attractive to a female target audience (156). Women were also more likely to be persuaded by consensus, suggesting that they are “more receptive to social influence [and] more responsive to socially-driven strategies” (156).

Though some research has also found that women were more likely to be influenced than men in general, this idea has also been criticised and reviewed as possibly resulting from male researchers’ bias, which may have led to experimental set-ups which rendered male participants more confident than female ones (Eagly and Carli 1981: 17). Some researchers argue that these are the results of men being oriented toward agency and independence, whereas women are “more communally oriented, which often manifests in activities designed to foster interpersonal cooperation and relationship formation and maintenance” (Guadagno and Cialdini 2002: 40). However, due to a lack of conclusive data on this topic, as well as a lack of advertisements targeting men in this thesis’ data set, differences in persuadability in men and women will not be discussed in a significant manner.

2.4. Persuasive linguistics

In order to succeed in persuading someone, the ability to use language in a variety of ways, for a variety of purposes, is a crucial skill to possess. As Jalilifar et al. (2021: 568) point out, persuaders “employ meticulously chosen lexical, grammatical and textual forms and [...] prepare professionally written and organized speeches with a specific goal in mind”. They go on to suggest that the language used by reputable companies contributes to their success (573). Schmidt and Kess (1986) also consider language the primary source of persuasion, noting that this was not to deny the persuasive appeal of other elements such as gestures, art or music, “but rather to indicate that these channels are typically employed to a much lesser degree and that their role is generally secondary to the verbal component which carries the message” (1986: 2).

Blankenship and Craig refer to language as “the most common medium for persuasion” (2011: 194) and define linguistic styles as “a set of pragmatic features that can modify the intended assertion in a message [...] Linguistic styles may not necessarily change the content of information but can influence perceptions of the communicator and message” (2011: 195).

They further argue that linguistic style is closely tied to the speaker's social status, including power and expertise.

Overall, much of the literature on the language of persuasion so far has been concerned with either the perception of the speaker in a position of authority, a speaker's likability, language processing – in particular the effects of different linguistic style on low and high effort processing, similar to low and high elaboration likelihood – and the structure in which persuasive texts are presented.

2.4.1. Linguistic style and authority

Much research on persuasive linguistics is concerned with powerful and powerless language, which can be connected to Cialdini's (1984) principle of authority. Cargile et al. (1994: 223), for example, point out that "if hearers have prior knowledge that a speaker is high in status or power, they may well expect fluent, direct, and forceful discourse-use of a 'high-power style'". Powerless language, on the other hand, refers to markers such as tag questions, hesitations and hedges and can have negative effects on the perception of speaker intelligence, competence, sociability, and credibility (Cargile et al. 1994: 223; Blankenship and Craig 2011: 195). However, research has shown that tag questions in particular can have two different effects on an audience, depending on perceived speaker credibility; while in low credibility sources tag questions lead to increased message processing but decreased persuasiveness, in high credibility sources they can result in both increased message processing and persuasiveness (Blankenship and Craig 2007). In short, tag questions have a more positive effect when applied by speakers who are perceived as credible.

While Jalilifar et al. (2021) focussed on the way language was used in Apple infomercials by utilising Aristotle's rhetorical appeals, as has already been noted above, their study also found much overlap between Aristotle's teachings and the principles established by Cialdini (1984). For example, one of the features of ethos they examined was 'goodwill', to which they included greeting and thanking audience members in order to establish "a good rapport with the audience [...] This, in turn, helps to build trust and to facilitate the persuasion process" (2021: 581). As mentioned earlier, building trust is related to the principle of authority. Thanking partners and coworkers was also associated with a positive and trustworthy company image (582).

Another element of persuasive language Jalilifar et al. (2021: 583) found were attributive adjectives, such as ‘great’ or ‘incredible’, which were used to describe the company’s products, as well as comparative and superlative adjectives, which were used to present the company as superior to their competition. Another linguistic marker that has been researched in connection to persuasion is linguistic intensity, referring to intensifiers such as ‘very’ or ‘extremely’ (Blankenship and Craig 2011: 195). Toolan (1988) notes comparisons, when using superlatives and hyperbole to describe a product and the use of negative evaluations and comparatives in indirect reference to competitors, as one of two major characteristics often found in advertising. Some research suggests that hyperboles break the norms of conventional language use and add to the likability of an ad (Stern and Callister 2021). However, comparing oneself to others with the intention of presenting your own superiority may also function to imply authority on the subject. More on the subject of hyperbole will be discussed in the section on linguistic style and liking below.

2.4.2. Linguistic style and liking

While the use of certain linguistic features, as discussed above, can enhance a speaker’s authority, much research on the language of advertising has been dedicated to rhetoric and the kind of linguistic style which enhances likeability.

For instance, Stern and Callister (2021) found that the use of hyperbole had a positive effect on the likeability of an ad. As mentioned above, certain rhetorical devices, such as hyperbole, as well as metaphors and puns, are considered unconventional language that “are figurative expressions involving intentional, exaggerated statements that are not meant for literal interpretation, but provide emphasis, heighten effects, or elicit strong impressions or responses” (Stern and Callister 2021: 72).

Shen and Bigsby (2013: 27) note the persuasive effects of metaphors as well as other meaning-transferring devices, such as simile, analogy, and personification, have been shown to have. They found a variety of different explanations for the persuasiveness of metaphors. While some have to do with the amount of elaboration involved in processing metaphors, the explanations regarding likeability and authority should be highlighted here. First, it has been suggested that there is pleasure or relief in comprehending semantic anomalies such as metaphors. The second explanation suggests that speakers who use metaphors are considered more credible as they may point out something previously not realised by the audience. However, Shen and Bigsby (2013) then also note that this realisation is pleasurable to the

audience, reiterating the pleasurable experience of being presented with a well-thought out metaphor. Arguably, this pleasurable experience could be associated with other unconventional language such as hyperbole as mentioned above.

Reinsch's (1977: 145) research suggests that metaphor has a greater impact on message persuasiveness than simile, though no significant change in perceived credibility could be found. Howard (1997) found that using familiar, metaphorical phrases such as 'burying your head in the sand', was more persuasive than using non-metaphorical phrases which conveyed the same meaning, such as 'pretending a problem does not exist'; he argues this could be the result of a heuristic response and a familiarity with certain metaphors, thereby requiring low elaboration.

Puns, beyond their effect as exaggerated statements, can also add humour to a text, which can be a valuable element in advertising as, in the context of Super Bowl advertisements, Yelkur et al. suggested a strong relationship between humour and ad likability (2013: 61). Myers (1994: 75) notes that puns, given their humorous nature, "signal a non-serious kind of discourse". He also points out that some audiences may find them annoying. However, as part of humorous speech, the intention behind their use is definitely to be likable. Myers also adds that the "extra work to process them" (1994: 76) is part of what makes them appealing, suggesting that language that involves higher elaboration likelihood is more likable to audiences.

One characteristic highlighted by Toolan (1988: 54) is the use of interrogatives and imperatives with the purpose of engaging the reader rather than "simply convey[ing] information". Zjakic et al. (2017) argue that, although imperatives may appear rude and face-threatening on the surface, they can be used strategically in advertising to create a sense of familiarity. Rather than requests, imperatives in advertising often are used to keep the audience's focus and are registered as friendly advice (Zjakic et al. 2017: 14).

Interrogatives, specifically rhetorical questions, have also been shown to enhance persuasion (Howard 1991). They have been investigated in relation to elaboration likelihood, and while audiences with high elaboration likelihood were recorded to find them distracting, those with low elaboration "showed greater sensitivity to the quality of argumentation when the message contained rhetorical questions" (Schmidt and Kess 1986: 19) as a result of the question leading them to consider the topic more closely. While this research into interrogatives and the ELM is interesting for persuasion research as a whole, no clear connection could be made

to one of Cialdini's (1984) principles. One could attempt to argue that, as rhetorical questions heighten the audience's attention, perhaps this would connect them to authority. However, as several other rhetorical devices were connected to liking due to the audience's appreciation of the message source's linguistic prowess, this is a doubtful claim to make. As the current state of research on interrogatives and persuasiveness is as of yet indecisive, this thesis will take the use of interrogatives into account during analysis and attempt to establish a connection to Cialdini's (1984) principles, if appropriate.

The use of personal pronouns has been addressed in advertising research as well. Kaur et al. (2013: 65), for instance, found that first and second person pronouns created a friendly atmosphere that brought the reader closer to the advertiser. In reference to this atmosphere, they highlight advertisements directed at women, stating that "women will easily accept a product if a good friend recommended them" (65). Though the reference to female audience may be overgeneralised, there is further research to support the persuasive effect of pronouns. Labrador et al. (2014: 45) argue that the use of second person pronouns makes audiences "feel the message is directed at them individually", thus building familiarity.

On pronouns, Kaur et al. (2013) also argue that the use of 'we' was authoritative and that 'our' reflected an us-versus-them mentality. However, this might depend on the context, as Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023: 1276) argue that inclusive pronouns such as 'we' make audiences "feel comfortable and give them a sense of being liked and valued". Myers (1994: 80) also refers to the inclusive 'we' as "a sense of solidarity with the customer", and to the exclusive 'we' as personalising impersonal corporations. Whereas research seems to agree on the persuasive effect of second person pronouns in terms of likeability, the research on first-person pronouns in advertising is inconclusive. Thus, while their use will be addressed, they will not take a central role in the analysis of this thesis' data.

In conclusion, research has shown that a linguistic style that varies in rhetoric elements and directly addresses the reader through second person pronouns, as well as imperatives, can be connected to the principle of liking, and thus used by message sources to enhance their persuasiveness in advertising.

2.4.3. Linguistic style and elaboration likelihood

A variety of linguistic devices have also been associated with ELM. Blankenship and Craig (2011: 197) describe the relationship between language and ELM as follows:

When elaboration (i.e., motivation and ability) is low, linguistic style can serve as a simple cue in the persuasion setting. When elaboration is moderate, linguistic style can influence the extent of elaboration by either increasing or decreasing amount of thinking. Finally, when elaboration is high, linguistic style can act as a persuasive argument, bias attitude-relevant processing, and can influence the perceived validity of thoughts produced by the individual.

Other research (McQuarrie and Mick 1996) has also suggested that rhetorical figures, as more complex language, may trigger higher elaboration likelihood, as readers need to process it more so than less ambiguous phrases. This processing of “a clever arrangement of signs” (1996: 427) can be satisfying to audiences and may lead to more positive attitudes towards the text and thus activate the liking principle. Others have suggested that, in an advertising context, audiences find pleasure in “the artfulness of the ad” (Konrod and Danziger 2013: 727) which uses figurative language. Rhyming, for instance, has been suggested to have a pleasurable effect on an audience, either due to correctly guessing the final word or as a pleasant surprise (Filuková and Klempe 2013).

This emotional impact connects figurative language back to Aristotle’s pathos, as Konrod and Danziger (2013: 278) have pointed out that audiences have come to expect such language from emotional experiences. This further illustrates the interconnectivity of modern persuasion theories, such as ELM, with Aristotle’s well-known rhetoric as well as Cialdini’s (1984) principles, particularly liking.

2.5. Social media

Social media is part of the larger Web 2.0, defined by social interactions and user-generated content – text, audio, video, and static images – in an online context (Herring 2013: 1). Since social media has become a part of many people’s daily lives, a large number of companies have begun using them to advertise their products and services (Geng et al. 2021: 1).

Online advertising, particularly social media advertising, is often seen as separate from advertising in ‘traditional media’, such as radio, TV, and newspapers. This is largely due to the possible interactivity of online media. Page et al. (2022: 5) add that traditional mass media are seen as part of a “one-to-many broadcasting mechanism”, whereas social media includes a network of participants, in which anyone can share content. Gangadharbatla (2019: 370) adds that “social media offer unique advantages by erasing the boundaries created by

time and distance, thereby making it easier for individuals to form and maintain relationships online with others in and out of their networks”.

Whereas advertising exposure in traditional media is described as an involuntary process because “individuals involuntarily just happen to come across an ad” (Cho 1999: 34), exposure in an online context may be involuntary or voluntary. Cho (1999: 34) claims that voluntary actions, such as clicking on a banner ad, draws the consumer’s intentions more intensely to the ad’s message. Thus, one could argue that visiting and following a social media page, which may include advertisements, may have a stronger effect on users than being exposed to an ad by chance in a traditional media format.

Multiple of Cialdini’s (1984) principles can be easily spotted on social media platforms such as Instagram, where users are encouraged to ‘like’ posts and establish their position in the same community as all others who have liked the same post (Goss et al. 2021). The reciprocity principle can often be observed in raffles, where brands and other entities reward users, for example, for commenting or sharing their posts, thus increasing their visibility, for the chance to win a prize. Another requirement for taking part in a raffle may be to tag other users in the comments of a post, which will alert those users to the post, and therefore both assist in building a community and publicly put the original commenter in a position of commitment.

Though this thesis is concerned with the verbal aspects of social media marketing and will largely leave out visual forms of persuasion attempts, in the context of social media, the use of emojis should be addressed. They often appear alongside written text and serve a communicative function, and are considered a form of paralanguage, “used for consumer engagement because of their ability to reduce impersonality” (Ge and Gretzel 2018: 1273). Ge and Gretzel (2018: 1286) observe three common uses of emojis: reiteration, replacement, and emphasis. Therefore, they are often used to present the same information in both textual and visual form, to replace parts of text entirely, or, in the case of emotion-related emojis, to emphasise a sentiment (2018: 1286).

In order to be effectively persuasive, it is important that emojis are used in a manner that will lead to intended interpretation. As some texts might be tonally ambiguous, there are many instances in which an emoji can clarify the meaning of a message, e.g. by making it more playful (Ge and Gretzel 2018: 1281). Smiling emojis, especially, are useful to communicate warmth, making them easy to associate with the principle of liking. Ads containing emojis

have also been said to be more relatable to an audience (Lee et al. 2021), thus being related to similarity and liking.

2.6. Celebrity

In marketing, celebrities are often used to endorse brands, being able to “draw more attention to the advertisements, break through the clutter of competing brands and [...] exert greater influence on consumers’ attitudes and purchase intentions” (McCormick 2016: 39) as compared to those advertisements that do not employ celebrities. Symbolic properties of the celebrity, i.e. the properties of their stage persona, play a fundamental part in the endorsement process. From the perspective of meaning transfer, McCracken (1989: 310) argues that “these properties are shown to reside in the celebrity and to move from celebrity to consumer good and from good to consumer.” Moreover, he argues that, to consumers, “they are exemplary figures because they are seen to have created the clear, coherent, and powerful selves that everyone seeks” (318).

Based on Hovland’s research on credibility and the McGuire model (1985), which claims that effectiveness of a message relies on the familiarity, likeability and/or similarity of the source (McCracken 1989: 311), McCracken concludes that it should be “safe to say that celebrities owe some of their effectiveness as marketing devices to their credibility and attractiveness” (311). In fact, much of the literature on celebrity endorsers has been concerned with either the effects of their credibility or attractiveness on the consumer (Amos et al. 2008). As is established above, credibility is connected to Cialdini’s (1984) principle of authority, while attractiveness has been identified as an influencing factor for liking, suggesting that these principles should have a strong presence in social media advertising featuring celebrities.

McCracken (1989: 311) goes so far as to claim that while these conditions are satisfied, “*any* celebrity should serve as a persuasive source for *any* advertising message [...] The persuasiveness of the celebrity has everything to do with the celebrity and nothing to do with the product” [original emphasis]. However, McCracken goes on to criticize that this does not account for instances in which campaigns using celebrity endorsers have been unsuccessful, nor how the audience associates certain characteristics with specific celebrities and makes them attractive as a result (1989: 312).

The majority of the literature on celebrities in advertising is concerned with their role as temporary endorsers for specific products or campaigns. Not much research could be found on celebrity owners or founders, acting as the ‘face’ of the company. At the same time, Hovland et al. (1982 [1953]) state that even though there may be differences in effectiveness, depending on whether a message source is “perceived as a speaker who originates the message, an endorser who is cited in the message, or the channel through which the message is transmitted [...] the same basic factors and principles probably underlie the operation of each of the many types of sources” (19). This would suggest that whether a celebrity is perceived as the owner, founder or simply an endorser of a product or brand, their presence should have the same effect on the consumer.

In the context of this thesis it should be stated that several celebrity-owned brands use social media posts that feature images of their famous owners or founders. However, not all of these posts refer to the celebrity by name. Therefore, in the analysis of the data, two different categories will be established for either implicit celebrity endorsement, when their celebrity status is not explicitly stated or they appear unnamed, and explicit celebrity endorsement, in which they are clearly named.

It should also be reiterated that the effectiveness of a celebrity endorsement relies on the audience’s perception of the celebrity, which can be highly subjective. However, since the aim of this thesis is not to measure the effectiveness of persuasive attempts but rather their intentions, how audiences perceive individual celebrities should not play a larger role in the analysis of the data.

3. Research Design

3.1. Data

The data for this thesis was collected from the popular social media platform Instagram. All data is thus publically available as by Elm’s (2009: 75) categorisation it can be accessed by “anyone with an internet connection”. The data does not include online text written by individuals, such as user comments, but only the text used by brands, including texts within images and post captions.

For the purpose of narrowing down the number of posts, the time frame was limited to posts from the first quarter of 2024, from January 1st to March 31st. The data includes 33 posts by the company Sourse, 52 posts by Lemme, and 49 posts by WelleCo. All three companies have verified Instagram accounts, signalling to other users that these are the official company accounts and not impersonators.

Sourse is a producer of vitamin supplements co-founded by American actress Sarah Hyland, claiming to support users in their “wellness journey” (Sourse 2025). Likewise, Lemme is a line of vitamin and botanical supplements created by American socialite and reality star Kourtney Kardashian Barker, inspired by her own experiences in wellness and motherhood (Lemme 2025). Finally, WelleCo was founded by Australian actress and model Elle Macpherson and offers customers wellness and beauty supplements in the form of powders, teas, and capsules. According to the company website, it was “founded in 2014 by Macpherson as a result of her own personal wellness journey and discoveries” (WelleCo 2025: “About Us”). What can be noted is that all three brands appear to offer a product that allows consumers to become more like the celebrity founders in terms of achieving the same level of wellness. All three brands sell wellness products in some kind of consumable form, which puts them in similar categories and thus makes it possible to more easily contrast them.

The data set only includes posts that reference the company’s products in some form. This is relevant as particularly WelleCo has produced a number of posts in the given time frame that are concerned either with wellness in other forms, such as through healthy recipes, which do not include WelleCo products in their ingredients, or exercise, as well as some of Macpherson’s other endeavors, such as fashion events. While these posts may also contribute in portraying WelleCo as an authority on the subject of wellness, and are certainly a thought-out part of the company’s marketing strategy, this thesis is mainly concerned with persuasive techniques in the context of product advertising.

The data includes static posts, such as photographs and graphics, as well as videos, which were collected and transcribed for the purpose of analysis. Using a spreadsheet, the posts were sorted first by brand, starting with the brand with the least amount of posts for the selected time frame. The posts were then sorted by the date on which they were posted, and then numbered #1-134. Thus, posts #1-33 were published by Sourse, posts #34-85 were published by Lemme, and posts #86-134 were published by WelleCo. This process was followed by a manual analysis.

While the data only includes Instagram posts, the three brands' websites were also reviewed to assess the overall presentation of the celebrity owners. Particular attention was paid to the celebrities' relationship to the brand and whether they would be presented as authority figures.

3.2. Coding

Based on the study by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), a set of codes was developed with which to analyse and categorise the data. This set includes Cialdini's (1984) six principles as umbrella terms, with several "micro-strategies" (Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour 2023: 1269), falling under them. If the same code appeared in more than one form within the same post, it was counted as one appearance, as it framed within the same attempt at persuasion.

While Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) provide a number of micro-strategies, some adaptations had to be made for the purpose of this thesis. As their work focussed on the social media advertising for ELT-classes for Persian-speakers, different persuasion strategies could be found in the context of wellness products. The principles and micro-strategies applied to the data analysis are thus as presented in Table 1. Those that were added in this thesis are marked with an asterisk.

For instance, Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) list 'uniqueness' as a micro-strategy of scarcity. Though one instance of this micro-strategy could be found in the present data set, this thesis argues that uniqueness is more likely connected to authority rather than scarcity. One of the examples used by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) to showcase uniqueness in their data set is an instance of an advertiser comparing their service to that of others, highlighting a unique feature. As established in the theory section, comparison used in this way can serve to present the message source as an authority. Even if the feature is rare or unique, possessing a rare quality is not the same as a product being rare and therefore of greater perceived value; unique features may still be applicable to a large number of items or stock by the same company. Since scarcity is closely connected to the fear of missing out, rather than the fear of having a worse product, this thesis has created 'comparison' as a new micro-strategy for authority, absorbing the micro-strategy of uniqueness.

For the scarcity principle, this thesis takes over Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour's (2023) micro-strategy of 'limited time', while also adding 'limited availability'. While 'limited time' refers to a product either being on sale or only available for a specific time frame, 'limited availability' refers to a limited stock or offer. The two micro-strategies are closely related, relying on the audience's fear of missing out, but are different in their specifications.

Table 1. Principles and micro-strategies

<i>Principles</i>	<i>Micro-strategies</i>
Scarcity	Limited time Limited availability*
Reciprocity	Story feature* Safety from missing out* Gifts Discount Early access* Exclusive features and products*
Consensus (social proof)	Reviews Referencing community*
Commitment and consistency	Results Schedule*
Authority	Gratitude* Greeting* Comparison to competitors* Expert sources* Detailed explanations*
Liking	Celebrity endorsement (implicit)* Celebrity endorsement (explicit)* Celebrity endorsement (influencer)* Pun* Metaphor and simile* Hyperbole* Self-care* Imperatives* Second person* Emojis*

For the principle of reciprocity, this thesis takes over the micro-strategies of ‘gifts’ and ‘discounts’ from Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) while removing the feature ‘24h support’ and adding several others. Although there is one instance of WelleCo offering support, the inclusion of the ‘24h support’ micro-strategy is debatable.

(1) Do you have any questions about our iconic Super Greens? Let us know in the comments below [Post #93]

While this post may suggest support, it is only implied. When examining the comment section of this post, it could be observed that three users asked a question, only one of which was answered by WelleCo in responding comments. Though it is possible that the company reached out to the other users via direct messages, it does not prove their support in a public or comprehensive way and begs to question the intention behind offering support.

During the analysis process, this thesis added the micro-strategies ‘safety from missing out’ – which is also connected to scarcity –, ‘early access’, and ‘exclusive features and products’ to the reciprocity principle. These micro-strategies could be observed as possible enticements for consumers in exchange for their commitment to a brand.

For the principle of consensus and social proof, this thesis took over the micro-strategy of ‘reviews’, while adding references to community. This was only perceived in posts by WelleCo, often referring to their ‘WelleCommunity’, likely aiming to establish a feeling of belonging in the audience. As established in the theory section, in order to be persuaded by consensus, an audience should perceive themselves as part of the same group as the persuader, thus being part of the ‘WelleCommunity’ may invoke this principle.

As for commitment and consistency, this thesis adapted the micro-strategy of ‘commitment leads to consistency’, though rephrasing it to ‘results’ in order to highlight how many posts emphasise the result of regular use of a certain product. In order to assist with commitment and consistency, many posts suggest a precise schedule, such as daily or nightly use, rather than leaving it up to the audience to interpret the meaning of ‘regular use’ or similarly vague phrases.

Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) list ‘experience’ as one of two micro-strategies for authority. This thesis adapted this into ‘expert sources’, applied whenever a post would refer to an expert, such as scientists, nutritionists or studies which support the claims that are made about a product.

The second micro-strategy listed by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) are social media influencers. However, this thesis suggests that, since some posts refer specifically to experts, social media influencers should not be viewed as authorities, unless specifically referred to as such via speciality or reputation, but rather as a form of micro-celebrity, used for their likability rather than authority.

As mentioned above, comparison is also introduced as a micro-strategy for authority in this thesis, alongside ‘gratitude’ and ‘greeting’, which are said to establish trustworthiness. Finally, this thesis adds ‘detailed explanations’ in reference to product descriptions in the posts. Most often this micro-strategy occurs in instances of explaining the effects of specific ingredients. Some posts simply state a list of ingredients without any explanation, leaving the audience to make either their own assumptions or do their own research. A simple explanation, however, this thesis argues, could be used to educate the audience about the science behind the product, going beyond simply selling it. Framing the brand as an educator would thus also frame them as an authority figure and enhance their trustworthiness.

Finally, for the principle of liking, the largest number of micro-strategies were identified based on both the literature research and a variety of findings in the data set. While Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) only identified ‘motivational quote’ and ‘compliment’ as micro-strategies, neither one of which was overtly present in this thesis’ data set, a number of rhetorical devices and other textual elements were included in this thesis’ analysis. First, three distinct micro-strategies were established for explicit celebrity endorsement, implicit celebrity endorsement, and celebrity endorsement through social media influencers, who function as micro-celebrities. In order to distinguish the first two of these micro-strategies, it was simply examined whether a celebrity was named in a post. If they were named, for example by introducing themselves to the audience, one could assume that the intention behind the post is to utilise their celebrity status, intending for audiences to recognise them. This would be an explicit celebrity endorsement. If they appeared without their name mentioned in any capacity, however, an audience ignorant of their celebrity status might be left to wonder about their role in the post and could see them the same way as they would see any other unnamed model or actor in an advertisement. This would thus be an implicit celebrity endorsement.

The rhetorical devices and linguistic elements, based on the literature research on rhetorics and likability, included as micro-strategies are ‘pun’, ‘metaphor and simile’, ‘hyperbole’,

‘imperatives’, and use of ‘second person’ pronouns. Imperatives that appear in songs used in the posts will not be considered unless they directly refer to the message of the text. For instance, one post by WelleCo uses the song *Water* by Marshmello and Tyla, which contains the imperative ‘make’ several times in the lines ‘make me sweat’ and ‘make me lose my breath’. However, these lyrics do not reflect the message of the post, which shares a recipe. The intention behind the song choices is, arguably, related to the song’s popularity more so than its content.

Additionally, the use of ‘emojis’ is included as a micro-strategy for liking, as this paralinguistic element is both common in social media texts and frequently used to lighten the tone of a text to appear friendlier.

Finally, references to ‘self-care’ are included as a micro-strategy for liking. Given the nature of these products, many posts frame the message sources as helpful and beneficial to the audience, as if trading their products was a selfless act, only meant to enhance their consumers’ well-being. References to self-care include words such as ‘self-care’ itself, as well as ‘treat’, ‘wellness’, ‘well-being’, ‘unwind’ and ‘wind down’, ‘beauty’ and related terms such as ‘beauty sleep’, ‘rejuvenation’, and ‘calm’.

4. Results and Analysis

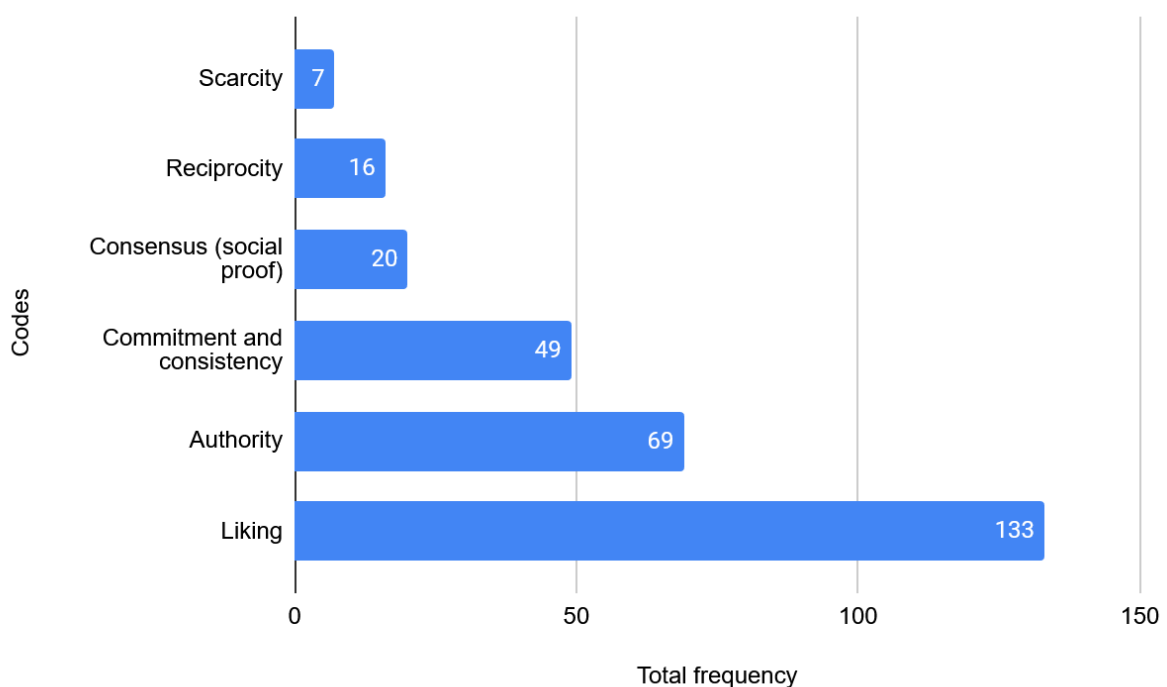
While the results of the analysis are discussed in more detail in the individual sections dedicated to the six principles and their micro-strategies, a number of trends can be observed when examining the data in its entirety. As can be seen in Table 2, liking emerged as the most frequent principle, appearing in all but one of the posts analysed. Authority was the second most frequent with 69 posts making use of it, more than half the posts analysed. This is followed by commitment and consistency, which was observed in 49 posts, more than a third of the data set. Next, consensus (social proof) appeared in 20 posts, less than one sixth of the posts analysed. Reciprocity could be observed in 16 posts, or less than an eighth of the data set. Finally, scarcity appeared in only seven of the posts, or about 5.22% of the data.

These results are in stark contrast with those found by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023). In their data set, reciprocity and scarcity were the most frequently appearing principles, appearing in 35% and 30% of the data, respectively. These were followed by

liking and authority, which were observed in 14% and 13% of their data set, and consensus (social proof) and commitment and consistency being observed only in 5% and 3% of the data, respectively.

Possible reasons for this divergence between the model study and this thesis could be the more expansive literature research into the psychology of language and rhetoric connected to the liking principle. This resulted in this thesis counting ten different micro-strategies for this principle, whereas Morady Moghaddam and Esmailpour (2023) only accounted for two.

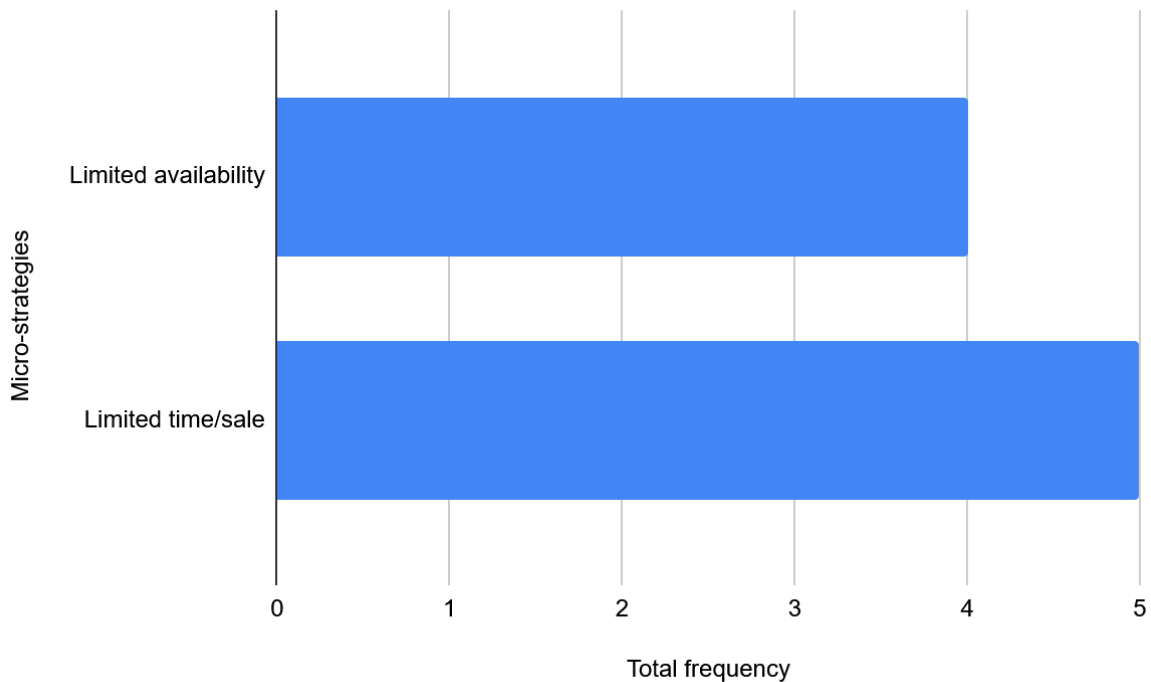
Table 2. Total frequency of principles



In order to examine the data more closely, this thesis will discuss each principle and micro-strategy as they occurred in the data set, from least to most frequent. Special attention to the appearances of celebrities will be paid throughout the analysis.

4.1. Scarcity

The principle of scarcity is least common in the data set, appearing only in seven of the 134 examined posts, or about 5.22%. Five of these posts exhibit the ‘limited time’ micro-strategy, whereas four posts apply the ‘limited availability’ micro-strategy. Two posts feature the use of both micro-strategies.

Table 3. Total frequency of scarcity micro-strategies

4.1.1. Limited Time

The first occurrence of the ‘limited time’ micro-strategy appears in a post by Lemme:

(2) Pro-Tip: Subscribe for guaranteed delivery during sell-outs! 💖 [Post #56]

Here, the principle of scarcity co-occurs with reciprocity. Audience members who sign up for a Lemme subscription service are guaranteed safety from missing out during a sell-out. This not only frees them of the fear of missing out, but also gives them a special status, as they are exempt from the sell-out while other consumers will be affected by it.

Interestingly, this post does not refer to a specific time during which a sell-out has already occurred or is currently occurring and thus is not urging the audience to make a purchase before it is too late. Rather, this post creates fear about the possibility of sell-outs in the future, and suggests, via a ‘pro-tip’, to invest in a subscription to be safe from this possibility. In this way, this post also utilises an imperative in the form of a friendly suggestion, as well as an emoji to give the message a tone of friendliness, rather than of authority.

Four other occurrences of ‘limited time’ can be observed in posts by WelleCo. Two of these co-occur with the ‘limited availability’ micro-strategy and will be discussed in the next section.

- (3) Today, March 15th [...] we are offering 30% off your first month's subscription to our latest hot-choc innovation, The Evening Elixir and our iconic, Sleep Welle Calming Tea. [...] *T&Cs apply. 30% applies to your first order, then 20% off ongoing. Pause, skip or cancel anytime. Ends 11:59pm March 15 2024. [Post #125]

Here, the audience is given a specific time frame in which to subscribe to one of WelleCo’s services for a reduced price. At the end of the post’s text, the audience is reminded of the company’s terms and conditions (‘T&Cs’), which specify the offer. Despite the short time frame of less than 24 hours, one could argue that, even though this post utilises the scarcity principle, the fear of missing out is not applied very strongly. Since the deadline for the offer is only given rather late in the text and the possibility to pause, skip or cancel a subscription anytime is highlighted, scarcity is not applied with a strong sense of urgency. Rather, the friendly tone used, including second person pronouns to create a sense of familiarity, as well as the imperative which directs the audience to cancel the subscription whenever they wish, applies the liking principle with more effort. The image used for this post displays a white sleeping mask on a pillow, likewise not implying a sense of urgency but of the calmness associated with the advertised product.

- (4) WIN ONE OF TEN:

1 x WelleCo Silver Caddy signed by [@ElleMacpherson](#)

3 x months supply of The Super Elixir™

[...]

This competition is open from 28 March 2024 and ends 11.59PM AEDT 4 April 2024. [...] The prizes are a gift from WelleCo. The Silver Caddy is valued at \$80 AUD, and 3x months supply of The Super Elixir™ is valued at \$264 AUD. [Post #133]

Example (4) makes use of the ‘limited time’ micro-strategy in the terms and conditions section as well. In this case, the conditions apply to a raffle, rather than a special offer. Again, the fear of missing out is not applied very strongly as the post mentions the deadline for the raffle late in the text and in a factual manner, rather than urging the audience to sign up quickly. This post makes more use of the reciprocity principle through a raffle, including the micro-strategy of ‘exclusive features and products’. It should be pointed out that while this

post highlights the monetary value of the prizes, a high value, if taken as a unique feature, is not equal to the value created by scarcity. There are many items by WelleCo available in this price range, though only a limited number of them are available as a prize in this raffle. Additional value is implied in this raffle due to the products being signed by Macpherson, who is also seen in a video posing and smiling with the signed product.

4.1.2. Limited Availability

There are four posts in the data set which apply the ‘limited availability’ micro-strategy. The first two posts were made by Lemme, and the others by WelleCo.

(5) PSA: Lemme Sleep is back in stock! [Post #72]

(6) Today's juicy scoop is that you absolutely can't miss out on tasting the Lemme Juice before it sells out! [Post #81]

Example (5) is the most subtle use of ‘limited availability’ in the data set. The phrase ‘back in stock’ implies that the product was previously unavailable. Thus, audiences who experienced the fear of missing out during this time could, as a result of reading this post, preempt a recurrence of that fear. At the same time, those who were unaware of the previous sell-out are presented with that fear for the first time, and both kinds of audience are intended to purchase the product to avoid this fear.

In contrast, example (6) is much more explicit in its intent, arguably the most explicit example in the data set, directly urging the audience to not miss out on the product while it is still available.

Unlike Lemme, the posts by WelleCo featuring ‘limited availability’ refer not to the company’s usual products, but a special offer, the ‘Welle Hotel package’, which was offered in collaboration with the company’s partners, W Hotels Melbourne and Brisbane. Both posts also feature the ‘limited time’ micro-strategy and refer to the same limited offer and time frame.

(7) The first 10 reservations will also receive a private session with WelleCo formulator and naturopath, @simonelaubscherphd. The Welle Hotel package will be available to book at @w_melbourne and @w_brisbane from 29th January 2024, with guest stays available until 2nd March 2024. [Post #101]

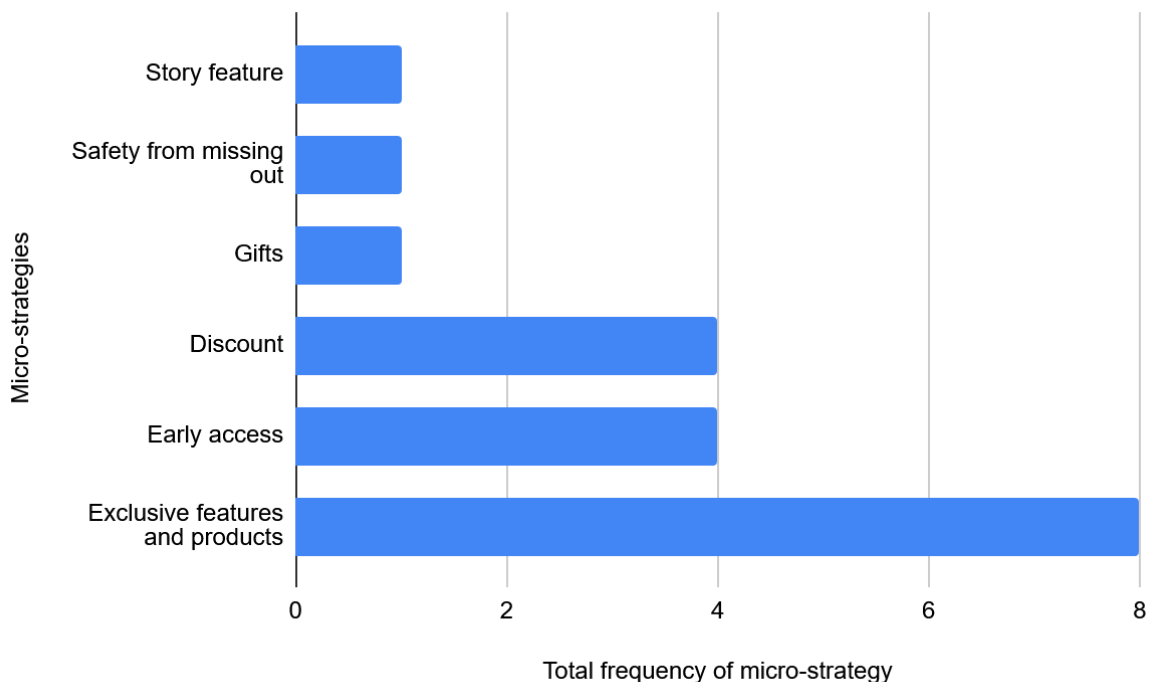
While the limited time frame is stated factually with no sense of urgency to make a reservation, it is rather the limited availability of private sessions with the company’s

naturopath that is, by nature of its short supply, implied to be highly valuable. Interestingly, however, no further information on what this session entails is provided in the post, thus it is only implied to be valuable due to its rarity and no other qualities. By offering this highly exclusive experience, example (7) also contains the reciprocity principle through the micro-strategy of ‘exclusive features and products’.

4.2. Reciprocity

With 16 total occurrences in the data set, or about 11.94% of the posts, reciprocity appears in more than twice as many posts as scarcity. Audiences are offered a variety of different benefits for their support, including one occurrence each of ‘story feature’, ‘gifts’ and ‘safety from missing out’, the latter discussed in the scarcity section above, as well as four instances each of ‘discounts’ and ‘early access’, and, with eight instances the most common micro-strategy, ‘exclusive features and products.’

Table 4. Total frequency of reciprocity micro-strategies



4.2.1. Story Feature

This singularly occurring micro-strategy is an interesting persuasion method, as much could be read into its use.

(8) Share your Lemme haul and tag us – you might just steal the spotlight on our story 😊
[Post #43]

This post references two separate features available to users on Instagram that should be briefly addressed here. First, when sharing a post, it is possible to ‘tag’ one or more other users, which creates a link to the tagged user’s profile. Instagram users receive a notification when they are tagged, so in the case of example (8), the audience is urged to post about their Lemme purchases or ‘haul’ and tag the company so they can see the post. To return the favour, these users have a chance to be featured in the company’s ‘stories’, a type of post that is only visible for 24 hours before disappearing from the platform.

This post is a great example of reciprocity which benefits the message source significantly more than the audience. For every user who participates in sharing their purchases, the company’s online visibility increases, but not every one of these users is guaranteed to be featured in the company’s stories, as the modal verb ‘might’ hedges any promise. It remains the company’s prerogative to choose only the posts which present them in the best light. The additional use of a winking emoji adds a level of playfulness, which might suggest to not take the chance too seriously.

Whichever posts the company chooses to share could be framed or interpreted as positive reviews of the brand. This would, as a result, apply the principle of consensus and social proof, as it allows the company to present customers not only purchasing their products, but also volunteering to post about them favourably.

Perhaps the desire that is meant to be evoked in the participating users is to receive attention. By ‘stealing the spotlight’ of an account with a large number of followers, even if just for 24 hours, they may benefit by increasing their own visibility. This wish for attention could be connected to the principle of liking. However, since the posts which ultimately were shared by the company are not part of the data set, as they have disappeared since, it is difficult to establish these connections with certainty.

4.2.2. Discounts

The only company in the data set observed to make use of this micro-strategy is Lemme. Multiple posts urge the audience to use the company’s subscription service, rather than purchasing products individually, in order to save money. While this is framed in such a way

as to benefit the audience, the larger benefit still remains with the company as they are being paid, albeit a marginally smaller amount.

(9) \$40 for a 30 day supply, \$35 with subscription. [Post #53]

(10) Energy? Beauty Rest? Metabolism? You can do it all - build your own custom bundle & save 🧡💫 [Post #75]

Two separate posts use the same text as in example (9), which is rather factual than creating any sense of urgency. However, in both instances, the majority of each post is concerned with delivering detailed explanations about one of the company's products, an element which will be covered in the authority section. Thus, a more factual statement regarding the subscription service may be a suitable fit alongside the rest of the text.

In contrast, in example (10), reciprocity works alongside the liking principle, as the audience is addressed directly with second person pronouns and is given friendly advice through an imperative while emojis add a playful tone.

Example (11) also features a stronger focus on advertising the company's subscription service.

(11) Pro-Tip: Subscribe for guaranteed delivery during sell-outs! 💖💫

Subscription perks also include:

💫VIP access to exclusive drops

💫Option to gift or swap items

💫Earn loyalty points for free products & discounts

💫Pause, update frequency or cancel anytime

[Post #56]

While beginning the post with a 'pro-tip' may be argued as an attempt to frame the company as an authority, it is done so in a rather playful way and should thus not be considered a serious attempt at that principle. The imperative use of 'subscribe' here also has the tone of a friendly suggestion and the use of emojis adds a warm and playful tone, both elements which make use of the liking principle.

Rather than addressing of the possibility to save money, as was done in previous posts, example (11) presents a variety of benefits in return for a subscription, including the

micro-strategies of ‘discount’, the singular appearance of ‘safety from missing out’ and a variety of ‘exclusive features and products’.

4.2.3. Early Access

Out of the four instances of this micro-strategy, two are in posts by Lemme, and two in posts by WelleCo. In both posts by Lemme, the micro-strategy is preceded by detailed explanations regarding one of the company’s products, as well as elements of the liking principle. Both posts by WelleCo also apply the liking principle, while one additionally makes use of the commitment and consistency principle, highlighting routine.

(12) Sign up for the waitlist in our bio for early access. 💖 [Post #51]

(13) Download our WelleCo app and sign up to our waitlist to be the first to shop The Evening Elixir ✨ [Post #92]

In the post by Lemme in example (12) and the post by WelleCo in example (13), imperatives as friendly advice, ‘sign up’ and ‘download’, as well as emojis are used to create a warm atmosphere. In all instances, this micro-strategy is framed as purely benefitting the audience. However, as signing up for waitlists not only, with some likelihood, involves giving the company personal information and driving interest in the product, it also is intended to involve the participants making purchases. Both the reception of customer information and product sales can be argued to be significantly more beneficial to the company than early access to products is to the customer.

4.2.4. Exclusive Features and Products

Two of the eight instances of this micro-strategy occur in posts by Lemme, whereas the other six appear in posts by WelleCo. As part of a Valentine’s Day campaign, Lemme collaborated with the meditation and sleep app Calm, offering a special sleep guide called the ‘Calma Sutra’.

(14) The Calma Sutra is available now exclusively on the @calm app 🌫 [Post #59]

Similarly to example (13), here the audience is encouraged to download an app for exclusive content. While most examples of this micro-strategy are rather clear in what they offer in return to their audience, example (15) is more cryptic:

(15) At the link in bio, take our one-minute quiz to receive a personalised product recommendation and achieve the life you dream of living. [Post #89]

As this statement is clearly an example of hyperbole, which will be more closely discussed in the section on liking, it is almost entirely unclear what the company is promising the audience. While it is implied that the personalised product recommendation will lead to the quiz taker receiving a beneficial product, the intention behind the post is to make a sale. Though WelleCo may offer to improve their users' lives, the monetary motivation should not be ignored.

- (16) Guests were treated to wellness goodies and beverages while Elle, @paulajoye and @simonelaubscherphd took us through the masterclass and Q&A session. [Post #107]

Example (16) offers another interesting use of this micro-strategy. This is a co-authored post with retailer Myer and written from their perspective. However, as it is shared on WelleCo's page, it should be considered one of their posts just like all others. While it presents exclusive products, wellness goodies and beverages, it is the only time this is used to refer to a past event, praising its success, rather than advertising something upcoming that the audience could be interested to participate in.

Finally, example (17) presents a variety of benefits for WelleCo users who join the company's Facebook group.

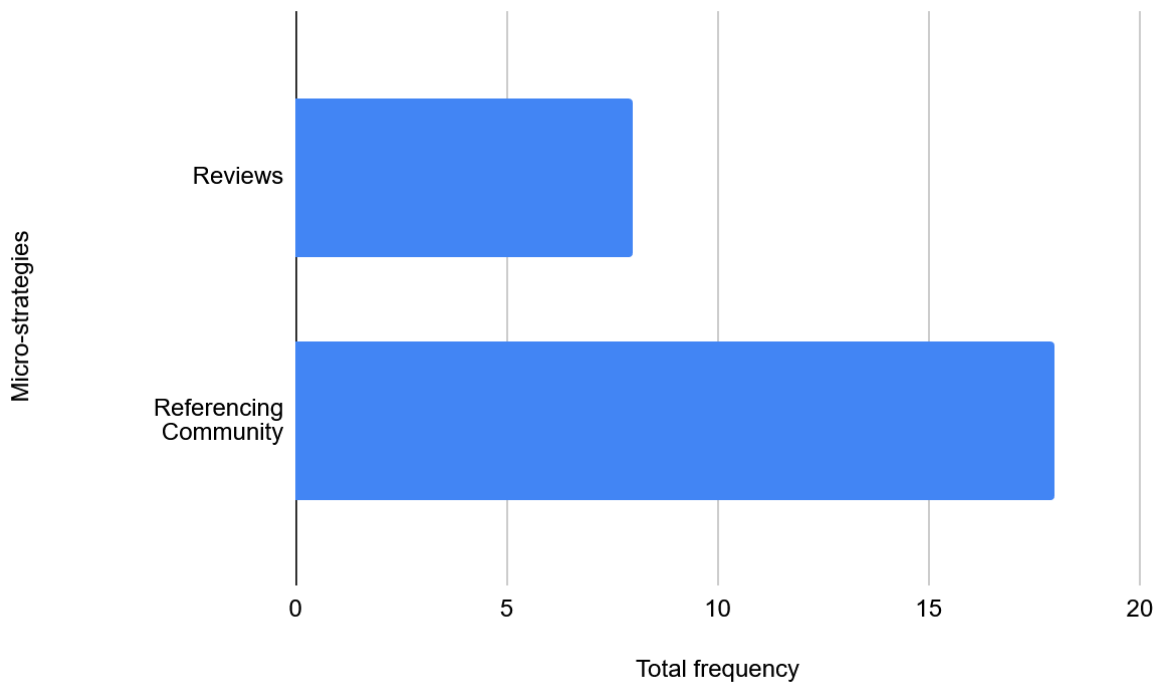
- (17) Stay connected with us for your daily dose of beauty-through-wellness inspiration in our WelleCommunity Facebook Group. Share and discuss your wellness journey, Welle routines and tips, delicious recipes and community questions. You'll also be kept up to date with all things Elle, exclusive offerings and exciting announcements. [Post #116]

This example shows an interesting dynamic between the principles of reciprocity and commitment and social proof, as the audience, in return for joining the company's group on Facebook and enhancing its online visibility, are rewarded with community. Not only are they able to interact with like-minded individuals, but are also given the opportunity for exclusive updates, offers, and announcements. Additionally, through the imperative forms of 'stay', 'share' and 'discuss', the audience is given friendly advice employed by the liking principle. The image for this post shows two women sunbathing side by side on a sandy beach, possibly also evoking an image of communal activities.

4.3. Consensus and Social Proof

The principle of consensus and social proof can be observed in the data set in 20 posts, or about 14.93% of the data. In 18 of these posts, the micro-strategy of ‘community’ is present, while eight of them feature reviews.

Table 5. Total frequency of reciprocity micro-strategies



4.3.1. Reviews

For the purpose of this thesis, a review needs to be recognisable as such. For instance, when influencers show or use a product, either through photography or by creating a recipe that involves it, they are not explicitly saying anything about the product itself, how it tastes, or what its effects are. This is why most posts including social media influencers fit better into the category of endorsement, rather than review, as the likability of the influencer appears to be the deciding factor, rather than their experience with the product.

Out of the eight reviews present in the data set, two come from posts by Sourse, whereas the other six appear in posts by WelleCo.

- (18) ★★★★★ Highly recommend! I've been taking these bites for over a year now, and I can say that my nails are stronger, my skin hasn't had any issues, and my

hair feels thicker. Plus they taste great! I haven't had any GI issues or other discomfort from the collagen, and from what I can tell, they are effective. Highly recommend these bites!" - Melissa V  Verified Purchaser [Post #3]

Example (18) is a written review shared by Sourse, featuring an explanation about the product's effects, a mention of possible side effects – even if the reviewer did not experience any –, and a clear recommendation. The origin of this review is not cited in the post, thus it is unclear whether the original review included a system involving a star-rating or whether the five stars were added by Sourse. Despite the lacking citation, the use of a checkmark in the post is meant to highlight its veracity. Additionally to the consensus and social proof principle, commitment and consistency is applied here as well, as the user explains her regular consumption of the product and describes the desired results of her commitment.

(19) So to help with the strength in my nails, I've been eating these. Two of these every single day. They're the Hair Grow Bites from Sourse. They're delicious and they're infused with biotin. [Post #24]

In example (19), Sourse shared a video review. By mentioning the regular consumption of the product, twice daily, this post also utilises the micro-strategy 'schedule' that is part of the commitment and consistency principle. In contrast to example (18), this user is neither named nor given a checkmark as a 'verified purchaser'. Interestingly, the same person speaking in this video can be seen in two other posts by Sourse from the same time span examined in this thesis, thus it is possible that she could actually be a Sourse employee or otherwise paid to appear in these posts. However, the intention behind the post is to frame the video as a customer review and therefore should be counted as such.

Interestingly, all reviewers in the data set appear to be female, with some addressing women's health issues in regard to the reviewed product:

(20) As a mum of two young boys who bring a new cold back every few weeks these have been a welcome addition to my daily vitamin intake and have also given me a boost in energy. [Post #115]

(21) I'm using [it] in combination with Super Elixir and Goddess Elixir (am moving from peri-menopause to full on menopause). [Post #128]

While example (20) addresses frequent colds which mothers of young children may face, example (21) briefly mentions the reviewer's move into menopause. This is done in reference to WelleCo's 'Goddess Elixir', which, as the company claims, supports consumers through every stage of menopause (WelleCo 2025: "The Goddess Elixir").

- (22) I do still have a small occasional breakout due to hormones, but it is manageable and I do not have painful acne anymore. I cannot recommend this product enough to anyone who like me was sceptical at first. [Post #132]

Example (22) is the only review which addresses any negative feelings after consuming the product, albeit still in a manner that is favourable to the company. Even though the reviewer complains about occasional breakout, she blames her own hormones rather than criticising the effectiveness of the product she is reviewing. She also mentions initial skepticism, though this is heavily undermined by the preceding recommendation of the product. The post is accompanied by a before-after image of the reviewer as well, showing her smiling in the ‘after’ image, reinforcing positive connotations with the product for the audience.

4.3.2. Community

All 18 references to the concept of community come from posts by WelleCo. Some of these only appear in a post’s hashtags as #WelleCommunity, and may not constitute the main persuasive strategy of a post. Regardless, it should be assumed that they have been placed there on purpose, at the least as a reminder to view WelleCo not as a company, but rather an instigator of community.

- (23) WELLE ROUTINE | WelleCommunity member @tessshanahan shows us her Welle Routine from AM to PM ❤️ Which WelleCo products are part of your current routine? Let us know in the comments below ✨ [Post #91]

There are several interesting elements about example (23) to notice. First, it begins with the phrase ‘WELLE ROUTINE’ in capital letters, making the phrase stand out from the rest of the text. While this is not an established phrase in the English language, WelleCo attempts to create an association of the term ‘routine’ with their brand, thus linking it to the principle of commitment and consistency.

Then, the post references the influencer Tess Shanahan, who can be seen in a video preparing two beverages with WelleCo products. While she is referred to as a WelleCommunity member, thus applying the community micro-strategy, her profile is also linked in the post, where she posts about her career as a model and podcast host. Therefore, Shanahan should not only be regarded as a member of the community, but also an influencer endorsing the product, activating the liking principle. The endorsement micro-strategy works here in an interesting way with the community micro-strategy, as the audience is supposed to see a

successful model not only as someone to aspire to, but also on equal terms with them as part of the same group, as their consumption of the same products unites them.

Finally, the post asks the audience a direct question, again in reference to routine, using second person pronouns as well as emojis, which are meant to give this post a light-hearted tone. The imperative ‘let us know’ encourages the audience to engage with the post, not simply just to boost the company’s visibility, but in order to participate and become part of the community.

In a total of five posts, the community micro-strategy is also combined with a review.

- (24) "Having had it a few times over consecutive days, I can say it [tastes] great (mmm cocoa) and it's easy to prepare and enjoy at night before bed. I feel really relaxed and ready to get a good night's rest and in the morning my skin is glowing." - Jen Z, WelleCommunity Member [Post #95]

In example (24), the reviewer and community member is not an influencer, but, presumably, an average user of WelleCo products. However, just like with the influencer endorsement in example (23), the audience is meant to relate to the community member referenced, even though the lack of celebrity status appears less aspirational in comparison.

- (25) #WelleCommunity share with us in the comments, which WelleCo supplement would you pair with this rejuvenating setting? [Post #96]

In example (25), the audience is addressed as community members directly, in contrast to previous posts which highlighted other members of the community. This direct approach, paired with second person pronouns and the imperative ‘share with us’, creates a friendly atmosphere, utilising the liking principle. The reference to a ‘rejuvenating setting’, as pictured in the post via a swimming pool surrounded by green flora, suggests that WelleCo products likewise would aptly be described as having a rejuvenating effect. The post also lists four WelleCo products, each preceded by a heart emoji in a different colour, which presumes the audience’s familiarity with the products and how well they would match with the pictured setting.

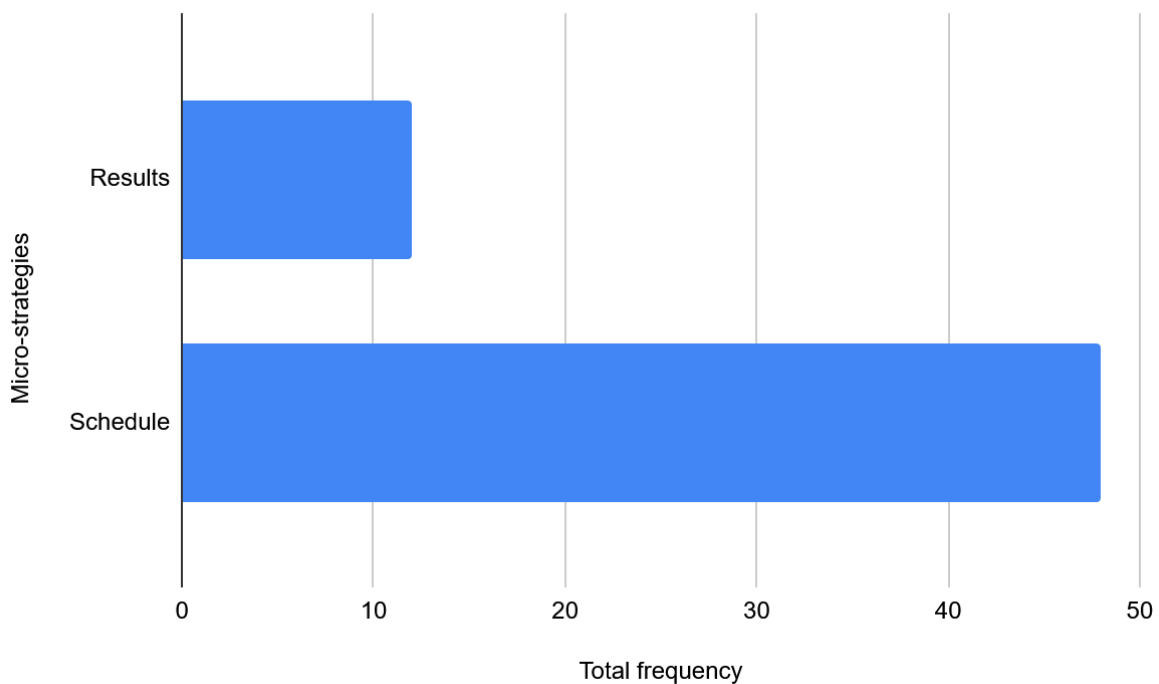
- (26) WELLE CONNECTED | Stay connected with us for your daily dose of beauty-through-wellness inspiration in our WelleCommunity Facebook Group. Share and discuss your wellness journey, Welle routines and tips, delicious recipes and community questions. You'll also be kept up to date with all things Elle, exclusive offerings and exciting announcements. Join now via the link in bio. Comment with a  below if you're already a member! #WelleCo #WelleCommunity [Post #116]

Example (26) lists a variety of benefits of joining the WelleCommunity, thus applying the reciprocity principle in tandem with consensus and social proof. While members may share their own journeys and engage in discussion among one another, they are also promised exclusive content and updates. Additionally, a friendly tone applies the liking principle. This includes using the pun ‘WELLE CONNECTED’, which is one of many examples of WelleCo and other brands using their own brand name as a play on words. The imperatives ‘stay connected’, ‘share and discuss’, ‘join now’ and ‘comment’ are also presented as friendly suggestions. Finally, similarly to example (25), the audience is encouraged to engage with the post and publicly identify themselves as community members, therefore strengthening their relationship to the brand.

4.4. Commitment and Consistency

The principle of commitment and consistency was observed 49 times in the data set, making up 36.57% of the posts. It was represented by the micro-strategies ‘schedule’ and ‘results’, with many co-occurrences of both micro-strategies within the same posts. Only one post featured ‘results’ without the use of ‘schedule’.

Table 6. Total frequency of commitment and consistency micro-strategies



4.4.1. Results

While a number of posts explain the effects of a product, this micro-strategy is focussed on the results of continuous use. Thus, some explanatory posts, which lay out the possible effects of various ingredients, fit more appropriately into the ‘detailed explanations’ micro-strategy within the authority principle. Other posts, which emphasise regular use, usually in tandem with the ‘schedule’ micro-strategy, should be considered as examples of the commitment and consistency principle.

Twelve posts in total could be found which feature ‘results’, five of which were produced by Source, four by WelleCo, and three by Lemme. The use of this micro-strategy can be very straightforward, as in this example by Source:

(27) If you want the best sleep ever, you need to eat chocolate every day 🍫 [Post #4]

Before presenting the company’s product, chocolate-covered vitamins, example (27) intentionally uses hyperbole to explain the result of regular consumption: ‘the best sleep ever’. In this case, like most others, ‘results’ is used in combination with ‘schedule’, as the audience is given the clear instruction to consume the product on a daily basis.

Example (27) thus presents how hyperbole, as a micro-strategy of liking, can interact with other principles. The use of second person pronouns and the chocolate emoji further add to a friendly tone.

What is interesting to note about this post more particularly, is that it is framed as a review, as a woman is seen using the product in a video as she describes its effects. However, the context is somewhat ambiguous, as she is never named, nor does the post describe its content clearly as a review. As the person in the video can therefore neither be identified as an influencer endorsing the product, nor as an average consumer, this is categorised as an attempt at the principle of authority, as she goes on to give a detailed explanation about the product’s ingredients and their effects.

(28) How to use it:

1. Take 2 capsules, with or without food.
2. For best results, take daily. [Post #38]

In example (28), the principle of commitment and consistency is represented both by the micro-strategy ‘schedule’ through the recommendation of daily use and the micro-strategy of

‘results’, which is overtly stated. Both are presented in the form of clear instructions. This, alongside detailed explanations that make up for most of the rest of this post, adds to this example the principle of authority, which has been observed to work well in combination with commitment and consistency. One could argue that in order to believe in the promised effects of committed use, one must first have trust in the message source as a truthful and authoritative figure.

- (29) Make the new year a new start to a new you, by committing to two teaspoons of The Super Elixir™ daily. Through this one small daily ritual comes big, life-enriching changes including enhanced energy levels, clearer skin, stronger skin and nails, and a healthy immune system. "By committing to a simple routine, you will feel grounded, strong and. vital, allowing your year to continue in the same empowering way it starts" - @ElleMacpherson, WelleCo Founder [Post #86]

In example (29) WelleCo makes use of the liking principle, rather than authority. Besides the use of second person pronouns, this post also utilises hyperbolic language such as ‘life-enriching changes’, which is meant to evoke awe in the audience with unclear actual meaning being communicated. While referencing physical effects of consuming the product, such as clearer skin, more abstract ideas such as feeling grounded and vital are also highlighted. Throughout the data, Macpherson could be observed using more abstract concepts such as beauty to establish herself as an authority, which will be more closely discussed in the section on the authority principle.

- (30) I’ve found I sleep more deeply and then wake up to unrivalled gorgeous glowy skin. [Post #92]

In an arguably more exaggerated fashion, in example (30), Macpherson endorses her own product by focussing even more on abstract ideas as results of regular use. Whereas example (29) describes somewhat clearer effects of skin becoming clearer or stronger, the idea of ‘glowy’ skin should be considered metaphorical for healthy skin, as it should not actually emit light. Further, the use of ‘gorgeous’ should be considered subjective, whereas skin health should be considered objectively good or bad. Similarly, describing her own skin as ‘unrivalled’ should be considered hyperbolic, as it infers superiority to all other skins, an exaggerated statement impossible to prove.

4.4.2. Schedule

The micro-strategy ‘schedule’ was observed a total of 48 times in the data set, making up about 35.82% of the posts. Five of these posts were created by Sourse, eight of them by

Lemme, and 35 by WelleCo. It should be noted that a number of WelleCo posts only utilise this micro-strategy through a hashtag, such as #WelleEveryday. However, despite taking up little space in these posts, the micro-strategy should be considered to have been employed with intention, even if just to serve as a quick reminder to the audience to commit to the product use on a regular basis.

(31) Your delicious daily ritual 🍫✨[Post #23]

Example (31) shows how ‘schedule’, and the principle of commitment and consistency as a whole work in combination with liking. Through the use of a second person pronoun the post creates immediacy and through the use of emojis as well as playful language such as the alliteration ‘delicious daily’ it creates a lighthearted tone. It could be argued that in order for the commitment and consistency principle to be effective, or perhaps more effective than through other means, the audience has to be convinced that the routine they are committing to entails joyful experiences, such as consuming a delicious product. By employing language that enhances the audience’s liking of the brand and the product, they may associate the routine with the same positive traits as the brand and product.

(32) Whether you prefer a delicious gummy or a sugar-free capsule, we’ve got you covered. The same clinically-studied bloating, digestion, and gut health benefits, formulated two ways—depending on your routine! ✨[Post #68]

In example (32), the micro-strategy of ‘schedule’ is combined with both the principles of liking and authority. Akin to example (31), this post uses second person pronouns and emojis to create a friendly tone. In addition, the phrase ‘we’ve got you covered’ implies that the company only has the audience’s best interests in mind. By referencing their ‘clinically-studied’ formulation and listing its multiple benefits, the post also appears to frame itself as an expert source, a micro-strategy of the authority principle. While establishing the message source as an authority in a friendly tone, the products advertised are presented to be adaptable to the audience’s routine, subtly stressing regular consumption.

(33) WelleCommunity member, @irisfithess supercharges her morning smoothie with The Super Elixir™. [Post #93]

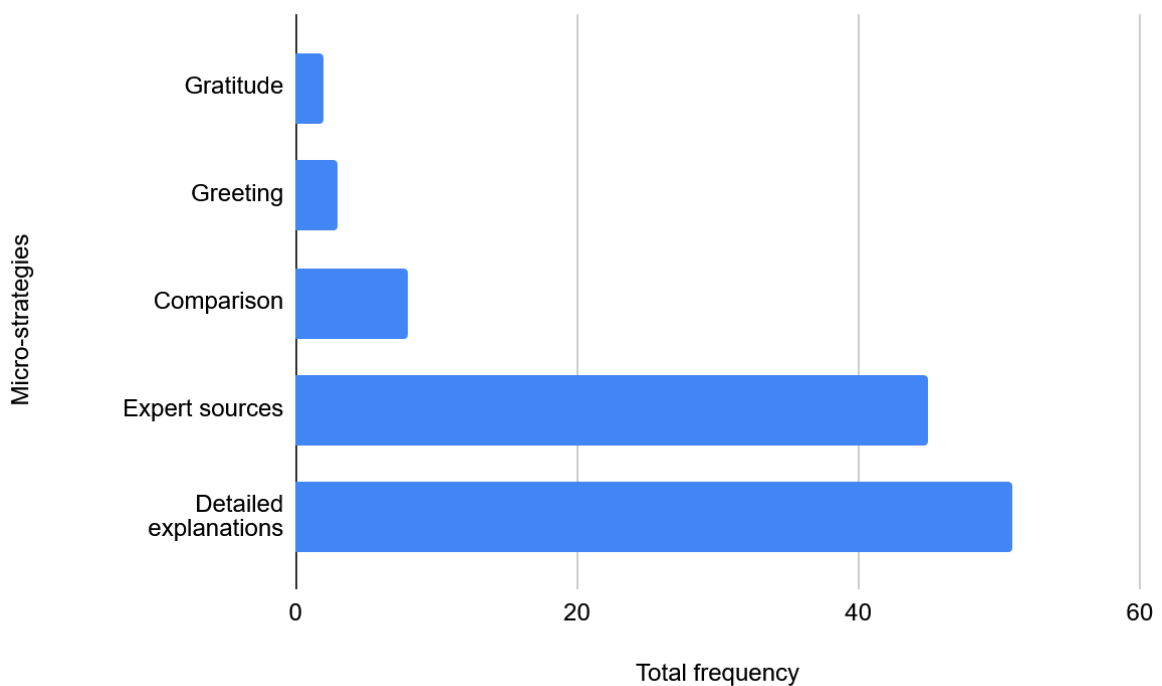
Another more subtle way to integrate the ‘schedule’ micro-strategy can be found in example (33), which utilises an influencer for celebrity endorsement, who is also framed as a community member. This combines both the liking and the consensus and social proof principles. In addition, the phrase ‘morning smoothie’ implies that it is prepared every

morning, connoting an aspirational figure with regular consumption of the advertised product.

4.5. Authority

Authority is the second most observed of the principles in the data set after liking. A total of 69 posts were found to use at least one of the micro-strategies associated with authority, making up 51.49% of the posts observed. The five micro-strategies that were identified for this principle include, from least to most observances, gratitude, greeting, comparison, expert sources, and detailed explanations.

Table 7. Total frequency of authority micro-strategies



4.5.1. Gratitude

Only two posts in the data set were observed to utilise the micro-strategy of gratitude, accounting for just 1.49% of the posts. In order for a text to be counted towards this micro-strategy, a third party had to be thanked explicitly. While there are a small number of posts in which collaborators are mentioned by name or otherwise given credit, such as

influencers who photographed products for a company, acknowledging someone's work is not the same as expressing gratitude towards them.

- (34) We're so grateful to the @target team for helping us celebrate our launch in-store [Post #80]

In example (34), Lemme expresses gratitude to the company's retailer, Target, establishing a good bond and a trustworthy image on a public platform. It should be noted that gratitude could always be expressed in private, thus the choice to do so publically is a deliberate choice to improve company image. The post also features several images of the company's celebrity owner, Kourtney Kardashian Barker, posing in a Target store, though without explicitly naming or tagging her. Regardless, one could argue that presenting her in this post creates an association with gratitude and therefore trustworthiness, which is in turn associated with authority.

- (35) "[...] We were grateful to be styled by the Ralph Lauren team, wearing none other than classic tennis white. WelleCo's super greens were also essential, pre-match!" - @ellemacpherson, WelleCo Founder [Post #117]

In contrast to the previous post, WelleCo, in example (35), draws a much more direct connection between gratitude and the company's celebrity owner. Here, Elle Macpherson is quoted directly as thanking fashion label Ralph Lauren and is explicitly named and credited as the WelleCo's founder. The post also features a video of Macpherson explaining her look in more detail and stating that both Ralph Lauren and Vogue Australia were 'kind', associating her partners with a positive attribute while presenting herself as a trustworthy figure.

4.5.2. Greeting

The micro-strategy of 'greeting' could be observed three times in the data set, about 2.24% of the posts. Including this micro-strategy in the list of codes is based on the research by Jalilifar et al. (2021). However, as their research was focused on infomercials, rather than social media posts, one could argue that the medium of persuasion might affect the frequency of certain micro-strategies. Whereas during infomercials, audiences may expect to be greeted, social media posts often try to establish a feeling of immediacy, which may not be achieved by prefacing a message with a greeting. Likewise, other strategies, such as the use of emojis, would be less expected in a video format such as an infomercial.

- (36) Hi, I'm Sarah Hyland and I am one of the founders of Sourse. Our vitamin-infused dark chocolate bites were designed to make caring for yourself a treat. [Post #6]
- (37) Welcome, I'm Kourtney Kardashian Barker. Tonight we're gonna learn about some new positions as we drift slowly to sleep. [Post #59]
- (38) There hasn't been a major innovation in women's health supplements until now. [...] Hi, I'm Leona West Fox. I'm a functional nutritionist and I'm on Lemme's medical advisory board. [Post #40]

Out of the three observed instances of greetings, example (36) is the only one which uses this micro-strategy at the immediate beginning of a post, as Hyland introduces herself in a video to the audience. In contrast, in example (38), the speaker begins a video with a statement about women's health before introducing herself, and example (37), which features several slides, begins with an introductory slide announcing the collaboration of Lemme and Calm before Kardashian Barker can be heard speaking on the second slide.

In example (36), after introducing herself, Hyland briefly describes her company's product, using friendly language, including a second person pronoun and a pun, using 'treat' to refer both to the product and the act of treating oneself as a form of self-care. Thus, example (36) blends both authority and trustworthiness with micro-strategies from the liking principle.

In example (37), Kardashian Barker and, by extension, Lemme are framed as an authority on sleep. The post goes on to list several tips on sleeping positions and habits, offering an educational service to the audience. It should be noted that, in the observed time frame, this is the only one of Lemme's posts to explicitly name Kardashian Barker. Whereas she appears modelling in other posts, at no other point is she named or ever verbally acknowledged as the company's owner.

While both examples (36) and (37) use their celebrity owners in a form of explicit celebrity endorsements, example (38) is the only one of the three posts to not feature a celebrity. Instead, this post introduces one of the members of Lemme's medical advisory board, which the audience is meant to perceive as an authority figure. In the post, she goes on to present one of the company's new products in a factual manner, framing herself as more of an authority than attempting to be liked by the audience.

4.5.3. Comparison

The micro-strategy of ‘comparison’ was observed in the data set eight times, accounting for about 5.97% of the posts. One post each came from Sourse and WelleCo, whereas the other six posts were created by Lemme.

- (39) What is really in your vitamins? [...] Unfortunately, there is not a lot of regulation around testing the levels of active ingredients in supplements. [...] We prioritize clean ingredients and transparency because we set out to make a better vitamin for everyone. [Post #32]

Without explicitly naming any of its competitors, in example (39), Sourse describes how many other suppliers of vitamin supplements give inaccurate information regarding the nutrients of their products. By stating their own priority to create a ‘better’ vitamin, it becomes clear that Sourse presents its own standards as above those of its competitors, establishing itself as an authority. In addition, emphasising transparency and speaking directly to the audience using second-person pronouns is intended to frame the company as both trustworthy and likeable.

- (40) Lemme Purr capsules redefine the standards of vaginal health. [Post #36]

- (41) Meet Lemme Purr Capsules – revolutionizing women's health with targeted probiotic strains for total well-being 🍷 [Post #38]

In a series of posts relating to Lemme’s new product, ‘Lemme Purr’, the company establishes itself as an authority through the use of comparison. Both by claiming to redefine standards in example (40) and to revolutionise women’s health in example (41), the company is framed as ahead of its competitors, not just in the market of supplements, but in the world of women’s health as a whole. While these attempts are intended to employ the authority principle, it could be argued that it is done so in a playful way, using hyperbolic language, emojis, as well as puns. Notably, all of the company’s products which are advertised in the data set are some kind of pun, as they include the company name, Lemme, which is itself a reduction of the phrase ‘let me’, followed by a verb, such as ‘purr’ in this instance. Thus, while making claims to authority, the company is careful to remain likable to its audience.

4.5.4. Expert Sources

Of all the micro-strategies linked to authority, ‘expert sources’ is the second most frequent, as it was observed in 45 posts, accounting for 33.58% of the data set. Three of the posts using ‘expert sources’ come from Sourse, twelve from WelleCo and 30 from Lemme.

In order for a post to include this micro-strategy, some level of expertise needs to be referenced, either through naming an expert in a field, such as scientists, nutritionists or other related professions, or through referring to expertly done processes, such as studies, clinical trials or certain claims of proven effects. Additionally, companies framing themselves as experts, for example by announcing accolades they have received, by giving tips on certain subjects, or by company heads appearing in interviews, which frame them as authorities, are counted towards the use of the ‘expert source’ micro-strategy.

- (42) Learn more about our star ingredient, saffron 🌟👉 [...] Now backed by over 10 studies, Saffron Extract is clinically proven to reduce anxiety. [Post #27]

In example (42), Source frames itself as an expert by offering its audience to find out more about their product’s ingredients, using the imperative ‘learn’ as well as emojis to create a friendly tone. As support, the company refers to ‘over 10 studies’, though their titles or contributors are not named and their exact number is left ambiguous. It should be noted that a number of other posts make references to studies in order to support their own claims, though the studies are never explicitly referenced or cited in such a way that would give the audience the chance to research the claims themselves.

- (43) Always consult with your healthcare practitioner if you have medical concerns, bodily discomfort or questions about your feminine health. [Post #42]

Interestingly, in example (43), Lemme highlights the importance of consulting with your own healthcare practitioner, rather than solely relying on the company’s claims. Though the same post also gives detailed explanations about a product’s ingredients in order to establish the company’s authority, it additionally acknowledges trust in other professionals. Similarly to the ‘gratitude’ micro-strategy, this public acknowledgement could function to enhance trustworthiness in the message source as well.

- (44) Lemme Chill is powered by the most extensively researched Ashwagandha, KSM-66®. Its clinical studies have proven its ability to reduce stress and support healthy cortisol levels.* [Post #45]

One textual element that can be observed in example (44), as well as a number of other posts which present scientific data and describe the effects of ingredients, is an asterisk with no clear reference point. This could refer to information available outside of the post, such as on the company's website or on the packaging of its products. It could also be read as a caution and a hint to read more closely about the product before consuming it, thus being informative and framing the company as an expert on the use of their products as well as healthy

behaviour. However, this requires a level of processing that may not be obvious to all audiences, and is therefore a very vague attempt at authority at best, leaving the audience with most of the work. Due to the nature of this element's vagueness, and as no literature could be found discussing this phenomenon, it will thus not be considered further in the analysis.

- (45) A supermodel, an actress, a TV host and an accomplished businesswoman. Now the woman nicknamed 'The Body' is back home and Elle Macpherson has plenty to celebrate. [Post #97]

In example (45), WelleCo has shared an interview clip with founder Elle Macpherson, in which she is praised for her accomplishments in the entertainment industry as well as a businesswoman. This celebration portrays Macpherson as an authority. Interestingly, in this case it is an external figure that presents Macpherson, and by extension WelleCo, as an authority, rather than the company doing it itself. However, sharing this particular clip on social media should be seen as an intentional use of the authority principle by the brand as well.

- (46) WelleCo [...] is a result of my own wellness journey. [...] I realised that I couldn't rely on genetics anymore and so I went to see a doctor [...] She completely changed my life [...] and I thought to myself, you know, there must be other women, there must be other people that are feeling this way. I wanted to share with them the things that I had learned. [Post #104]

In example (46), while Macpherson mentions a doctor who helped her, she also presents herself as an authority, claiming that she is helping others achieve the same goals as her. Notably, in these interviews, reporters continuously compliment Macpherson's beauty. By doing so in a public, televised environment and giving Macpherson the platform to give advice, she is further framed as an expert on both wellness and beauty.

- (47) Being awarded ten coveted accolades in The Beauty Shortlist Wellbeing Awards 2024 [...] is an extraordinary achievement, particularly in light of the high standards demanded in ethical beauty and wellness. [Post #124]

In example (47), WelleCo shares a number of accolades the company had recently won. Publicly sharing their success supports the company's standing as an authority on the subjects of beauty and wellbeing. WelleCo emphasises the impressiveness of these achievements with the background of particularly high standards. Winning these awards implies that other companies have either lost to WelleCo or not been nominated at all, ergo this kind of post could also be read as an attempt at comparison. However, it is rather subtle and would leave

the audience with drawing this conclusion, compared to other posts which draw comparisons much more directly.

4.5.5. Detailed Explanations

The most common micro-strategy for the principle of authority, with 51 observed instances in the data set, is ‘detailed explanations’, accounting for 38.06% of the posts. Five of the posts using this micro-strategy come from Sourse, 14 from WelleCo, and 32 from Lemme. As mentioned in the Coding section, in order for a text to be categorised as a detailed explanation, it must go beyond simply listing ingredients, as the company should be aware of the contents of their products. Thus, they must in some capacity explain to the audience the effects or purposes of the ingredients in order to be an attempt at using authority.

- (48) Chamomile Extract has been used for centuries as a calming herbal remedy. It contains the antioxidant, apigenin, which helps prepare the brain and body for restful sleep. [Post #28]

In example (48), Sourse explains the use and effect of one of its ingredients, chamomile extract. By referencing the ingredient’s century-long history, it is suggested that it must be effective, thus the company should appear trustworthy by using it as well. In this, as well as in many other posts which use the ‘detailed explanations’ micro-strategy, there is also an emphasis on self-care. In the case of example (48), a calming effect and restful sleep are highlighted, giving the impression that the company is concerned about the audience’s well-being.

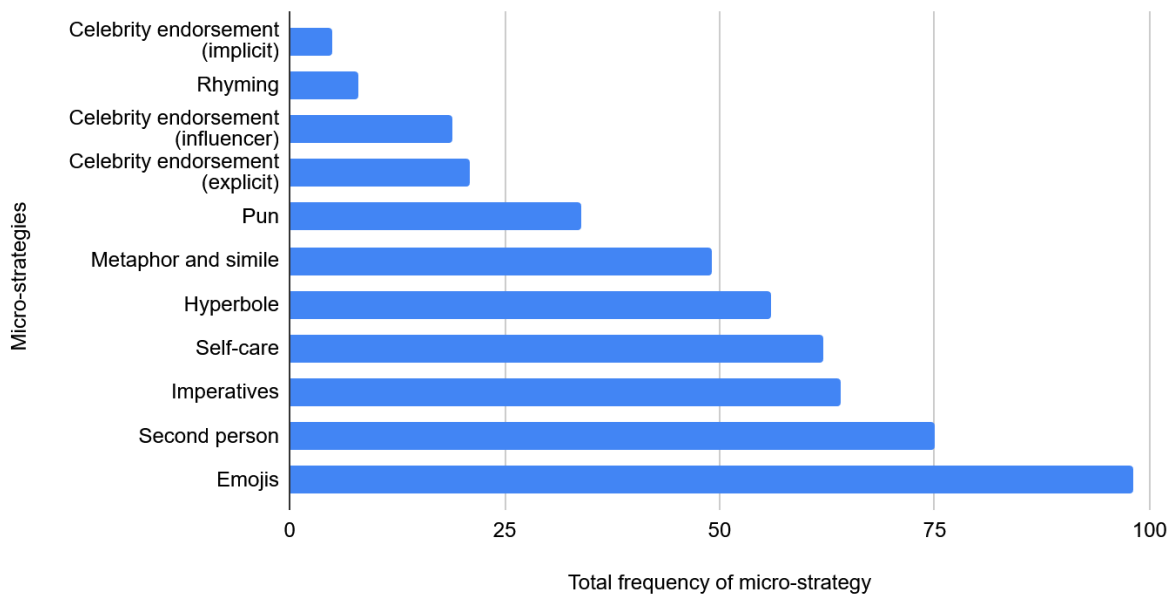
- (49) The sweetest time of the day...starts with a probiotic 😊 Lemme Debloat is formulated with two clinically-studied probiotics, LactoSpore® and DE 111®, to support bloating relief, digestive health, and immune support, and also with XOS, a novel prebiotic that supports healthy gut bacteria. [Post #49]

Many posts, such as in example (49), use micro-strategies of the liking principle, such as emojis or puns, or by speaking directly to the audience using second person pronouns, before applying the ‘detailed explanation’ micro-strategy. In the case of this post, the phrase ‘sweetest time’ references the image used in the post, which shows a knife cutting into a cake. In the background, a fork is visible on which one of Lemme’s products has been placed. In many cases, it could be argued that brands use this strategy to ease audiences into an authoritative statement, establishing their own likeability before their trustworthiness.

4.6. Liking

In the data set, all but one post contained some element of the liking principle, thus appearing in 99.25% of the posts. The use of emojis, with appearances in 98 of the observed posts, is the most frequent of the micro-strategies for this principle, whereas implicit celebrity endorsements were least frequent with only five occurrences.

Table 8. Total frequency of liking micro-strategies



4.6.1. Celebrity endorsements

This thesis differentiates between three different types of celebrity endorsement, including endorsements made by influencers, who are categorised as micro-celebrities, as well as implicit endorsements, which only show a celebrity, and explicit endorsements, which show and name a celebrity within the post. All celebrities that are not influencers present in the data set are the owners and co-founders of the three brands being researched.

Using influencers could have various effects, either as micro-celebrities who endorse the product to activate the liking principle, as reviewers to use consensus and social proof, or even as expert sources to use authority.

- (50) Enjoy this delicious Chia Pudding dessert with a dose of daily Super Elixir greens from WelleCommunity member, @choosingchia. [Post #103]

In example (50), WelleCo presents a recipe brought to them by an influencer, their own product included in the ingredients. There are a number of recipes posted by WelleCo in the observed time frame and, typical for this text type, these also include imperatives in the instructions, which add another micro-strategy of the liking principle.

- (51) The Evening Elixir is beauty while you sleep and it's packed with all the good stuff: magnesium, a botanical calming blend of passionflower, chamomile, lemon balm and lavender, natural vitamin C and niacin. And the best part is it tastes just like a decadent cup of hot chocolate. [Post #106]

In example (51), the influencer Sarita Holland reviews one of WelleCo's products, describing its ingredients and taste. In the video, she poses and smiles with the product's packaging before she is seen sitting in bed preparing the product as a hot drink. This method of presenting the product can be seen as an attempt at associating it with a positive attitude, while also visualising instructions on how to use it.

Reviews such as this often contain metaphorical and hyperbolic language, such as 'beauty while you sleep' and 'all the good stuff', which are too vague to carry meaningful information, but are intended to praise the product.

- (52) You can do it all - build your own custom bundle & save   via @kocomichelle [Post #75]

In example (52), Lemme tags a user, while the visual element of the post features only a picture of the product and no people, nor any text attributed to the tagged user. Due to the preposition 'via', it could be assumed that the user provided the photo used in the post. Thus, while she is tagged and named, there is no evidence of the user reviewing the product or speaking on it, though her endorsement is implied. A number of similar uses of influencers were observed in the data set. Providing photographs without a review leaves their endorsement of the product implicit.

- (53) You'll also be kept up to date with all things Elle, exclusive offerings and exciting announcements. [Post #116]

Four of the posts which use implicit celebrity endorsements come from Lemme and simply feature an image of their famous founder without naming her, expecting the audience to understand who they are seeing. The fifth occurrence of this micro-strategy comes from WelleCo, where, as seen in example (53), Elle Macpherson is referenced by name, but unlike several other posts by WelleCo, there is no quote or picture of her, nor does she speak directly

to the audience. Therefore, while updates on her are presented as a desirable offer, her endorsement is only implied.

- (54) Like all good habits, my evening routine evolves with me. The latest addition to it is WelleCo's The Evening Elixir, which has transformed my evenings in the most profound ways. It is the perfect wind-down companion, whether it's by my side in my sauna or while reading a book before bed. [Post #92]

Finally, explicit celebrity endorsements, such as in example (54) often feature similar elements. These include the celebrity founder mentioning a specific product and its effects, as well as naming some kind of routine that the product is suitable for, such as consuming it before going to bed or combining it with other forms of self-care, such as using a sauna. Presenting the product in a routine puts it in a somewhat relatable context to the audience, while mentioning different forms of self-care within the same text forms an association with the product to the idea of well-being.

4.6.2. Rhyming

Eight posts, about 5.22% of the data set, were found that included some kind of rhyming text. One of those posts comes from Lemme, two from Sourse, and five from WelleCo. While some instances could be argued to be unintentional, all text produced in the data set is considered to have been crafted with the intent of persuasion. Thus, some rhymes could be accidental, though persuasive tactics will be considered intentional nonetheless.

- (55) Roses are red, violets are blue, Lemme and Calm have a special Valentine's treat for you...[Post #59]

In example (55), Lemme uses a commonly known rhyme, often associated with Valentine's Day, beginning with the phrase 'roses are red, violets are blue'. Arguably, this is an attempt to evoke positive connotations in the audience that they have previously drawn from other instances of encountering this rhyme. This, in addition to being offered a 'special treat' is intended to make the audience feel valued and liked by the message source. Being offered a treat then comes with the expectation of the audience returning the favour in some way, utilising the reciprocity principle in combination with liking.

- (56) SLEEP WELLE LIKE ELLE [Post #111]

In addition to using a rhyme, example (56) uses a pun, based on the company's name. Several other posts by WelleCo also use the word 'welle', which is itself a play on words with 'well' and Macpherson's first name, Elle. This is the only post in the data set, however, to use both a

pun and a rhyme within the same text, while also referencing their celebrity founder as an aspirational figure, suggesting to the audience that they could have the same quality of sleep as Macpherson by using her products.

4.6.3. Puns

Puns add an element of humour and levity to a text that supports the liking principle. There were 34 posts observed containing puns in the data set, making up for 25.37% of the data. Three of those posts came from Sourse, 14 from WelleCo and 17 from Lemme.

(57) Just two Bites a day for stronger, healthier hair and nails 🧑💅✨ [Post #12]

(58) Lemme know your wellness goals! [Post #75]

(59) WIND DOWN WELLE [Post #120]

While there are a variety of puns to be found in the data set, the majority of instances include a reference to either the name of the company or one of their products. This can be observed in example (57), in which Sourse uses ‘Bites’ with a capital ‘B’ to indicate their own product, called ‘Sourse Bites’, while also referring to the act of consuming the product.

Lemme, as discussed in previous sections, frequently uses its name as a play on words. Example (58), for instance, shows how easily the word ‘Lemme’, as a shortening of the phrase ‘let me’ can be integrated into a text, both as a pun and an imperative directed at the audience.

A number of puns using WelleCo’s name could also be found in the data set, though usually shortened to ‘Welle’, as seen in example (59), which is itself a combination of the words ‘well’ and ‘Elle’, in reference to founder Elle Macpherson. While, as a pun, ‘Welle’ is often used as an adverb, describing a variety of actions to be done both well and in a similar manner to Macpherson, as part of the company name ‘WelleCo’, it also functions as a reference to the concept of wellness. Therefore, the company creates a connotation between themselves and their products to the idea of self-care, another micro-strategy of liking that can be found in the data set as well.

Overall, it can be argued that puns, especially in reference to company names and products, function to create a likable image of the company. Thus, the audience is meant to associate values of humour and positivity with these brands, making them more persuasive.

4.6.4. Metaphor and Simile

There are 49 observed instances of metaphors and similes in the data set, appearing in about 36.57% of the data set. 13 of these instances appear in posts by Lemme, 16 by Sourse, and 20 by WelleCo. In the context of this thesis, the micro-strategy of ‘metaphor and simile’ also includes personifications, especially in regard to products and ingredients. Additionally to textual metaphors, the posts in the data set often include visual metaphors, for instance placing products where you expect to find people, thus also using personification. However, as this thesis focuses on textual elements, visual metaphors will not be included in the discussion unless they directly support or reference textual metaphors present in the post.

(60) At last, meet the companion your gut has been waiting for. [Post #52]

Many posts in the data set, such as example (60), personify products by replacing the product name with a noun such as ‘companion’, which denotes a close relationship built on mutual trust and liking. The use of an imperative and in the phrase ‘meet the companion’ is also reminiscent of an introduction. This frames the company as someone already close to the audience, who, just like the message source, can be trusted. This strategy can be argued to apply the liking principle first to the brand, and then transfer the gained likability to their product.

(61) Pour yourself a hot cup of beauty [Post #94]

Besides personifications, another common use of metaphors is to associate consumption with various abstract ideas. In example (61), for example, WelleCo refers to one of its products as ‘a hot cup of beauty’. The phrase ‘hot cup’ is associated with comfort and could be argued to make use of the ‘self-care’ micro-strategy, while the abstract idea of beauty is presented as something not only tangible, but consumable, particularly by consuming WelleCo’s product.

(62) Last week, we celebrated the launch of our latest-glow giving formula [Post #101]

A common metaphor that should be noted is that of ‘glowing’ skin, suggesting that healthy skin has a shine or glow to it. It is a common idea that, in the data set, was used by all three companies and not only equates health and wellness to beauty but also implies that said beauty is standing out and visibly changes the consumer of their products.

4.6.5. Hyperbole

There are 56 observed instances of the micro-strategy ‘hyperbole’ in the data set. Six of these come from posts by Lemme, 14 by Sourse, and 36 by WelleCo. Many of these include references to perfection in regard to a product or effect, including the use of the words such as ‘best’ or ‘ultimate’, as well as many oversimplifications of various processes. A lack of specificity has also been noted to lead to hyperbolic statements, such as vagueness in terms of numbers, e.g. certain products being ‘packed’ with specific ingredients without giving away exact numbers.

Some product names also contain hyperbole, such as WelleCo’s ‘Super Elixir’, which, compared to other, more descriptive product names in the data set, does not tell the audience anything about its ingredients or effects.

- (63) If you want the best sleep ever, you need to eat chocolate every day 🍫 Okay, maybe not just any chocolate [Post #4]

In example (63), Sourse uses hyperbolic language, instructing their audience to “eat chocolate every day”. It is done so in a purposely exaggerated and oversimplified way, indicated by the sentence that follows the instruction, admitting that the audience should not eat “just any chocolate”, but rather Sourse’s chocolate-covered vitamins. This example shows how hyperbole can be used to add humour to a text. The brand essentially admits that their initial statement is too broad to be accurate, but since it was useful in gaining the audience’s attention, they are willing to give more precise instructions on which product to consume. In addition, the use of second person pronouns establishes a close relationship to the audience, while the use of an emoji supports the humorous tone of the text, showing how multiple micro-strategies of the liking principle can work together.

- (64) The Evening Elixir achieves beauty while you sleep [...] Awaken renewed with a bright, youthful, glowing complexion. [Post #94]

In example (64), WelleCo promises ‘beauty while you sleep’, giving their product almost a fantastical nature. While the post later on describes some of the effects of the product’s ingredients, such as collagen formation, the initial message of the post is centered around beauty achieved by very little effort, simply consuming the product. This example and a number of other posts thus connect hyperbole to self-care, yet another micro-strategy of the liking principle.

4.6.6. Self-care

There are 62 observed instances of the ‘self-care’ micro-strategy, appearing in about 46.27% of the data set. 13 of these are in posts by Lemme, 20 by Sourse, and 29 by WelleCo. As mentioned in the section on coding, there are a number of words that were associated with this micro-strategy, such as references to wellness, beauty, calmness or relaxation. This extends to the names of certain products, such as the ‘Calm Elixir’ by WelleCo, as its name alone already promises effects of self-care. Many posts describe the beneficial effects of a product or ingredient, however, some do so in a more likeable, others in a more authoritative tone. Therefore, not every mention of health benefits should be counted as a mention of self-care. Rather than physical wellbeing, self-care should be considered a more emotional act, like allowing yourself to relax and reduce stress.

- (65) Our vitamin-infused dark chocolate bites were designed to make caring for yourself a treat. [Post #6]

In example (65), Sourse presents one of its products as a ‘treat’ in a play on words. In this statement, the company not only assures that consuming the product is a form of self-care, but also that the act of consumption itself is already beneficial, as the product is not only marketed as healthy, but also as pleasantly tasting, offering the audience two separate forms of self-care in one product.

- (66) Enjoy your own daily celebration of self, nightly with The Evening Elixir. [Post #95]

In example (66), WelleCo uses an imperative to direct the audience to participate in self-care, naturally by using their product. In this case, self-care is referred to as a ‘daily celebration’, indicating that it should occur regularly, applying the commitment and consistency principle. It could also be argued that the term ‘celebration’ is used hyperbolically here, given that consuming this product is supposed to be a calming experience, to be consumed before bed-time. Further, by referring to it as a celebration, rather than care, the company adds a more positive connotation to the concept of self-care. Arguably, ‘care’ could be thought of as a type of work and connected to exhaustion, whereas a celebration is a more joyful concept. Thus, here, the act of self-care itself is given a positive connotation, similar to its reference as a ‘treat’ in example (65).

- (67) I think my vision of health has evolved over time, so it's become more natural. It's part of my lifestyle and, you know, love, laughter, water, sunshine, the things that are

so important that we forget. When you really take time to, you know, surround yourself with that, it's much easier. [Post #97]

In a TV interview, Macpherson spoke about the story behind her company and refers to ideas such as love and laughter, which are arguably more closely related to wellness and self-care than health concerns, with the same regard as for her personal health. While this list of ‘things that are so important’ include commonly accessible resources such as sunshine, in a later interview Macpherson explains her change in diet on a superficial level and how the development of her own product has helped her achieve a better life. Thus, while Macpherson, and WelleCo by extension, endorses naturally available forms of self-care such as love and laughter, the audience is meant to understand that in order to achieve the same level of wellness and beauty as her, her product line should also be integrated into their wellness routine.

4.6.7. Imperatives

In the data set, 64 posts, about 47.76% of the total, were found that used at least one imperative, many of which used more than one. Six of these posts came from Source, 19 from Lemme, and 39 from WelleCo. Some of these include instructions from recipe posts, such as ‘add’, ‘mix’ or ‘enjoy’.

While for the purpose of this thesis, imperatives are categorised as friendly instructions or advice rather than commands, and thus fall under the liking principle, there are a small number of instructions in the data set that could be argued to have a more authoritative nature. Specifically, this pertains to warnings such as ‘read the label and follow the directions for use’, which was included in four of WelleCo’s posts. These imperatives, ‘read’ and ‘follow’, are intended to ensure safe use of the product for the benefit of the customer and the liability of the company. Therefore, they are more instructive than persuasive. However, the majority of imperatives used in the data set can be argued to be used in a persuasive manner, and will thus remain a part of the analysis.

(68) Head to @erewhon and lemme know what you think 😊✨ [Post #81]

There are several posts by Lemme in which the company uses its own name to replace the phrase ‘let me’. While technically, the company name itself contains an imperative, due to it being a shortening of that phrase, it is only categorised as an imperative when it is used as such in the text. When used as a proper noun, it no longer functions as an imperative.

Using the company name as both a pun and an imperative, such as in example (68), followed by two emojis to display a humorous tone, supports the idea that imperatives are used in a friendly manner that is intended to apply the liking principle, rather than authority. Similarly, WelleCo uses the phrase ‘make welle’ several times in recipe posts, both as an instruction and as a pun in a light-hearted fashion.

(69) Let’s talk about how sleep debt affects your well-being and productivity. [Post #74]

In example (69), Lemme uses the imperative phrase ‘let’s talk’ to introduce a series of explanations on sleep and sleep debt. While this applies an imperative to introduce authoritative statements, the use of the first person plural – with ‘let’s’ being shortened from ‘let us’ – invites the reader to participate in the discussion around the subject. Thus, even without the use of second person pronouns, the audience is meant to feel directly addressed. This example shows how the liking principle can be applied to approach the audience in a friendly manner before applying authority.

4.6.8. Emojis

The final micro-strategy of the liking principle is ‘emojis’. There were 98 posts, about 73.13% of the total, in the data set which used at least one emoji, though many of them used more than one. For the analysis of emojis, this thesis refers to them by the titles given to them by the Unicode standard (Unicode 2025), which standardises the use of electronic writing, including emojis.

A variety of 66 different emojis could be found in the data set, 40 of which were only used once each. A full list of the emojis used can be found in the appendix of this thesis. They could be roughly put into seven distinct categories in terms of content: bodies, which show human figures in different positions and activities; faces, showing a variety of facial expressions; hands, showing hands and arms in different positions; hearts, which show heart symbols in a variety of colours; food, which shows edible items; objects, which shows tangible, yet inedible objects; and abstracts, which portrays abstract ideas.

Emojis in the data set have been observed to perform four different purposes: emphasis and reiteration, replacement, formatting, and emoting.

(70) Everything you need for a great night's rest 🛌💤🌙 [Post #7]

(71) The key to stronger nails? Chocolate! 🍫 [Post #24]

In example (70), Source uses three emojis to visually emphasise the idea of sleep, while in (71), it does the same with chocolate and the ‘Chocolate Bar’ emoji. Noticeably, these emojis are not used to replace the words ‘rest’ or ‘chocolate’, but rather to reiterate them. This could be intended to give users an idea of what the post is about even when they are only scrolling past the post without reading the text, giving the message source another chance to be noticed. Additionally, in both examples hyperbolic language is used to introduce the topic, thus the emojis could be intended to support the use of hyperbole, exaggerating the textual message even further with visual input.

(72) 📷 @saritaholland [Post #106]

The most common way to use emojis as replacements found in the data set was in order to give credit to photographers. As was already touched upon in the section on influencer endorsements, there are a small number of posts which tag influencers, such as in example (72), without showing them in the post, rather showing only a photo of the product. Here, the ‘Camera’ emoji is used as a simple way to express that the person tagged after this emoji was the one to take the photo.

(73) Key ingredients include 👉 [Post #2]

In terms of formatting, there were two main functions that emojis were used for. The first, as in example (73), is to use either arrows or index fingers pointing the reader to further text either within the caption or in the posted images. This can be read as a direction or a form of hypertext, utilising an emoji as an unspoken command. While this may serve the same function as an imperative, giving the audience friendly advice, it is unclear whether this non-verbal command would have the same persuasive effect.

(74) ✨ Thicker, Fuller Hair*
 ✨ Clear Skin*
 ✨ Strong Nails*
 ✨ Collagen Production* [Post #48]

The other formatting function emojis fulfil in the data set is to act as bullet points in a list, as seen in example (74). The intent behind this application could be to make an otherwise dry text, such as a list of ingredients or their effects, more visually interesting in order to retain the audience’s attention. Additionally, the emoji chosen could be used to signal a specific mood.

(75) And yes, it's vegan!  [Post #79]

When heart-emojis appear in the data set, they do so usually after a text and either set or enhance the mood of the message. In example (75), for instance, Lemme communicates that one of their products is vegan, framing it as a positive message with the support of a ‘White Heart’ emoji.

Interestingly, in the observed time span, each company appears to have chosen a differently coloured heart to use in their posts, which the other two companies did not utilise. It is possible that this deviation from the more commonly known red heart-symbol is a strategy to make the brand stand out in the audience’s feed, yet still communicate the same positive feeling associated with heart-symbols.

Sourse used ‘Blue Heart’ emojis, likely to match the colour of one of their products and its packaging. Products of other colours were also featured in their posts, though there could be a variety of reasons why Sourse may have favoured using the colour blue in the posts observed. WelleCo used the ‘Orange Heart’, ‘Green Heart’, and ‘Brown Heart’ emojis, usually in reference to one of the products or foods featured in their posts, such as spinach smoothies, carrot-orange juice, or chocolate-flavoured powders. It is unclear, however, why Lemme chose to use ‘White Heart’ emojis ten times in the observed posts, as the majority of their posts heavily feature different shades of pink and red. While the ‘White Heart’ emoji does frequently co-occur with the micro-strategy ‘detailed explanations’ from the authority principle, it is difficult to draw a definitive conclusion from the available data about that correlation.

(76) Lemme Purr is formulated with clinically-studied SNZ-1969™ probiotics (1 Billion CFUs per serving), 100 mg of real Pineapple, and antioxidant Vitamin C to support the vaginal microbiome and healthy pH levels.*  [Post #61]

Similarly to examples on commands, emojis are also often used after a dry statement on the effects of ingredients to give the text a more visually stimulating and likable tone, as well as to add a positive mood. It should be noted that the ‘Sparkles’ emoji, shown in example (76), has the highest frequency in the data set, with 99 occurrences. In contrast, the second most frequent emoji, the ‘Winking Face’, only has 16 occurrences. Part of this due to the ‘Sparkles’ emoji often being used to replace bullet points, especially by Lemme, causing it to occur several times within the same post. It is difficult to say what emotion the ‘Sparkles’

emoji is precisely intended to communicate to the audience, though it may simply serve to be visually pleasing.

However, it should also be noted that emojis are rarely used as the only liking micro-strategy, but are usually accompanied by rhetorical devices or playful language. Thus, while they contribute to the activation of the liking principle, it is often in support of other micro-strategies.

4.7. Interrogatives

One of the rhetorical elements whose use in persuasive strategies was unclear at the outset of this thesis' research was interrogatives. As the literature research could not produce a clear connection between interrogatives and any one particular of Cialdini's (1984) principles, their use was examined more closely during the analysis process.

A total of 37 posts in the data set used one or more questions. Two of these stem from TV clips, in which Macpherson is interviewed by journalists. Thus, these questions are not directly posed by WelleCo and cannot be clearly identified as part of the brand's persuasive strategy.

Another post included a question in the form of a song being played as part of the post. As the choice in song was likely deliberate, the question included in this case is considered to be intentional. The remaining posts all presented questions posed by the brands, a number of which were rhetorical. 14 of these posts could be argued to include a question connected to the authority principle, as they either included more information about the brands' products within the question itself or were immediately followed by detailed explanations in response to their own question such as in the examples below.

(77) Did you know you can track your daily greens intake and energy levels in our WelleCo App? [Post #127]

(78) Does Sleep Affect My Skin? Studies have linked poor sleep to faster aging skin, and diminished skin barrier function. [Post #30]

Out of the posts, 25 contained questions that could be connected to the liking principle, especially through the use of the second person. This way, the brand would not only address the audience directly, but establish a conversation with them in which they appear to expect an answer from the reader.

In conclusion, interrogatives could be observed functioning to support either micro-strategies of the authority principle (detailed explanations) or of the liking principle (second person). However, based on the data collected for this thesis, interrogatives appear not to be a strong enough rhetorical device to be clearly defined as part of a single of Cialdini's (1984) principles.

4.8. Inclusive and Exclusive 'we'

Another textual feature that lacked a clear connection to just one of Cialdini's (1984) principles was the use of the inclusive and exclusive 'we' – as well as other first person plural pronouns such as 'us' and 'our'. A total of 74 posts could be observed containing at least one of these pronouns. Eight of these made use of an inclusive 'we' or 'us', whereas 69 of them used the exclusive version of these pronouns.

Most uses of the inclusive 'we' could be connected to another micro-strategy of either the authority or the liking principle, either using detailed explanations to make an observation about the human body and its needs, such as in example (79) below, or to emphasise self-care, such as an influencer did in example (80). Two posts used an inclusive 'us' to introduce a review, one of which concerned a user's frequent use of a product, thus activating both the consensus and social proof principle as well as the commitment and consistency principle through the micro-strategies of 'reviews' and 'results', as seen in example (81).

(79) As we age, our body produces less of an enzyme called AMPK, which helps convert sugar and fat into energy. [Post #65]

(80) This is the year where we find things that are good for us and we stick with them. [Post #119]

(81) WelleCommunity member, Lucy shares with us her results after using The Skin Elixir for 30 days. [Post #132]

The use of the exclusive 'we' functions in similar ways. It can also be observed supporting the authority principle by introducing detailed explanations about a brand's products or processes as well as presenting expert sources. It is also used in the only two posts which apply the 'gratitude' micro-strategy.

The exclusive 'we' was also observed in support of the liking principle, frequently used to highlight self-care. It was also noticed in combination with more playful language, such as metaphors, puns and emojis. Furthermore, similar to interrogatives described in the section above, the use of the exclusive 'we' co-occurred with the use of second person pronouns,

such as in example (82). This combination of first and second person pronouns gives the impression of a dialogue being opened up between the persuader and the audience, thus establishing a more personal relationship.

(82) If you need us, we'll be at checkout 😊 [Post #45]

One post also utilised an exclusive 'we' to introduce a raffle with a limited time frame, thus applying the scarcity principle.

In conclusion, the uses of exclusive and inclusive 'we' take similar forms, both frequently seen supporting, rather than establishing, the use of either the liking or authority principles. While this feature does thus not appear significant or clear enough to exist as a micro-strategy on its own, one could argue that, in combination with second person pronouns to create a dialogue, it could be used more effectively in support of the liking principle.

4.9. Celebrities and Authority

One of the research questions guiding this thesis concerns whether or not celebrity-owned brands would frame their celebrity owner as an authority or if they would apply a different principle, based on a lack of expertise in the health and wellness sector. In order to further assess the brands' relationships to their celebrity owners and founders in a digital space, the websites of each company were briefly reviewed.

Notably, Sourse makes the least use of its celebrity co-founder, both on Instagram and on the company's website. While Hyland appears in four of the 33 posts observed by Sourse, where is named either by introducing herself or her name being displayed elsewhere in the post, she is not mentioned once by name on the company's website and is only shown on one image on the blog page (Sourse 2025). Beyond that, her work outside of being a founder of Sourse is never brought up in the data. Thus, an audience unfamiliar with Hyland's acting career might not recognise her as a celebrity.

Two of the posts presenting Hyland include her stating puns, which should be considered an attempt at the liking principle. Another post includes instructions on daily use of the product, utilizing the 'schedule' and 'results' micro-strategies of the commitment and consistency principle. Yet another post emphasises her personal experience consuming the product, without referring to specific functions of the product or to expert work behind its conception. Therefore, her statement could be interpreted as a review or a celebrity endorsement,

depending on whether or not an audience perceives her as a celebrity, but makes no use of the authority principle.

Thus, while Hyland displays multiple attempts at activating various principles, her attempt at authority is overshadowed by other principles. Hyland, while implicitly acting as a celebrity endorser, never makes a statement that would let the audience believe she is an expert on the topic of health or wellness. Overall, there is not enough data including Hyland to make a definitive statement about her utilization as an authority figure, though her absence on the company's website would speak against it.

Kardashian Barker is present in about 9.62% of the Instagram posts reviewed by Lemme, the least frequent of the three celebrity owners. However, she is broadly featured on the company's 'About Us' page, relating her own personal wellness experiences to her products, closely tying her own identity to that of the brand (Lemme 2025). She is also used as a model, posing with several products in the online shop.

Similar to Hyland, Kardashian Barker occasionally appears in posts as a model, but is only explicitly named once. Arguably, her appearance as a model in both the posts and on the website are intended to apply the liking principle through the micro-strategy of celebrity endorsements. Rather than framing Kardashian Barker as an authority, Lemme frequently refers to the clinical studies involved in its products' conceptions or references the proven effects of certain ingredients. While no specific study or source is named explicitly, there is a clear intent to apply authority. One post specifically presents a nutritionist, Leona West Fox, who is on the company's medical advisory board and speaks about the ingredients and effects of one of Lemme's products. As this can be seen as an attempt at authority, Lemme effectively uses its celebrity owner to present its likeability, while presenting an expert to present authority.

WelleCo features its celebrity founder the most frequently, with Macpherson appearing in about 34.69% of the company's Instagram posts from the observed time period. Images of her are also abundant on the company's website, appearing on the home page, pop-ups, and the online shop, modeling with various products (WelleCo 2025: "About Us"). Macpherson's identity is also closely tied to that of the company. For one, the company's name is a play on words, combining the word 'well' and Macpherson's first name, Elle, into 'WelleCo'. The 'About Us' section on the website also shares Macpherson's personal experiences with wellness from the moment she turned 50 onwards, leading her to seek medical advice and

founding WelleCo as a result (WelleCo 2025: “About Us”). In the observed Instagram posts, WelleCo is also the only brand which uses posts co-authored by their celebrity founder, written from her point of view.

Macpherson, like Hyland, appears in posts to give the audience instructions regarding routine, and using various micro-strategies of the liking principle, such as imperatives, hyperboles and puns. However, in contrast to Sourse and Lemme, WelleCo also presents its celebrity founder as an authority figure, especially by posting interview clips. In these clips, she is praised as an accomplished businesswoman, presenting her as an authority on the business side of her enterprise. Additionally, interviewers have commented on Macpherson’s outstanding appearance and emphasise her career as a supermodel, framing her as an expert on beauty as well. Though she has also credited a doctor with helping to develop one of her products, the history of WelleCo is closely tied to Macpherson’s personal experiences with wellness and beauty, which she aims to share with her audience. Thus, by sharing these interviews, WelleCo presents Macpherson as an authority on the subject of her products, both by sharing her aspiration of teaching others what she has learned, but also by including compliments from third parties.

5. Discussion

In the discussion, observed patterns of rhetorical devices and other linguistic features in the data set are discussed in more detail based on the findings presented in the segment on results above. Particular attention is paid to the co-occurrence of different principles and how they are balanced to complement each other. Further, this thesis considers how its findings compare to previous research, what challenges arose during its execution, and how future research could expand on the findings presented.

5.1. Cialdini’s Principles and Rhetorical Features

Two of the research questions posed at the outset of this thesis regarded the application of Cialdini’s (1984) principles of persuasion in a social media context, in particular on Instagram, as well as the use of rhetorical features in persuasion methods by celebrity-owned wellness brands. This thesis argues that the observations presented here add valuable insights

into these questions and to the researched topic overall. One of the arguably most interesting points was the interplay of the six principles.

As observed in the analysis section, scarcity was the least used principle in the data set. This is in stark contrast to the findings of Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), in whose research scarcity was the second-most frequent principle. This discrepancy could be explained by the recategorisation of the ‘uniqueness’ micro-strategy. While Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023) presented uniqueness as a feature of scarcity, this thesis reframes it in the ‘comparison’ micro-strategy under the authority principle, thus notably lowering the frequency of the scarcity principle in the current findings.

However, another reason may lie with the nature of the scarcity principle. Scarcity, as discussed in the theory section, relies on fear appeals, which are frequent in health-related campaigns such as anti-smoking campaigns (Mongeau 2013: 186). As observed in the analysis, the brands reviewed in this thesis heavily rely on appearing likable to their audiences, and thus connoting their brand with any feelings of fear, even if only the fear of missing out on their product, could go against their strategy. The small number of posts in the data that did apply the scarcity principle still used an overall friendly tone, using micro-strategies of the liking principle, such as imperatives in the form of friendly advice and emojis, which give texts a friendly and light-hearted tone, omitting any sense of urgency.

As noted by Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), scarcity can co-occur with reciprocity, or rather, the other way around. Reciprocity, as defined for the purposes of this thesis, entails some kind of special offer, which may be rare or come with limited availability. However, in the present data set, there are several instances of special offers with no implicit time limit, such as signing up for newsletters of Facebook groups for exclusive content and products. Therefore, scarcity and reciprocity may act in support of one another, but can occur independently of each other.

More commonly, reciprocity is accompanied by the liking principle. This finding is unsurprising, as a reciprocal relationship can be the result of mutual liking. Further, prior research has already shown that doing someone a favour, as with the example of special offers mentioned above, can lead to the favour-doer being liked and making the recipient more compliant (Regan 1971: 628).

What is interesting to notice about the micro-strategies for reciprocity is that, though it may be presently unclear how successful this strategy is, they reveal what the brands believe is attractive to their audiences. Discounts suggest that audiences want to save money, whereas early access and exclusive features and contents establish that they already have an interest in the brands' products and not only want more of the same, but also want access to what other people cannot have unless they enter the same reciprocal relationship – possibly applying the scarcity principle as well. The 'story feature' micro-strategy implies that audiences also want to be seen and liked by others, as is in the nature of social media platforms. However, as this micro-strategy appears only once in the data, it could be considered an outlier.

When it comes to reciprocity, it should also be considered what it is that the audience has to offer to the company in return. For instance, when signing up for wait-lists or subscriptions, one generally is giving away personal information, such as addresses and demographic information. This alleviates the process of getting into direct contact with customers as well as researching the company's target audience. Subscriptions are also beneficial for the company as the audience automatically pays them every month, even if at a discount.

The principle of consensus and social proof was observed through two micro-strategies: reviews and references to community. Notably, all reviewers in the data set speak only positively about the products in question. In all likelihood, each of the brands must have received negative or mixed reviews as well, even if less frequent. Thus, choosing only positive reviews to share on social media is likely a strategic move to present the company and its products in the most favourable position. Considering a HSM framework, this could be a sign that these brands rely more on a heuristic kind of processing in their audiences, depending on them not to consider ulterior intentions behind the surface of these messages. This would be aligned with the suggestion by Chaiken et al. (1989) that audiences use heuristics to believe that consensus implies correctness.

Community, as applied by WelleCo, can also be connected to the liking principle, often through the use of celebrity endorsements either through Macpherson herself or through influencers who show how to incorporate the products into their daily lives. While these are framed as community members in the same way that the audience is often addressed as 'WelleCommunity', it should be noted that, most likely, influencers were paid to work together with the brand. Thus, whether they are genuine users of the product outside of advertising is questionable.

Similarly to scarcity and consensus and social proof, the principle of commitment and consistency also rarely occurs on its own. Given that, in the data found, this principle is activated through the micro-strategies of ‘schedule’ and ‘results’, commitment and consistency is arguably closely tied to authority. In order for an audience to believe in the recommended dosage and the advertised effects, it must perceive the message source as trustworthy enough to follow its advice.

However, brands, such as WelleCo, also apply the liking principle in combination with commitment and consistency, specifically through the use of hyperbole and offering more vague effects, such as “big, life-enriching changes”, as discussed in example (29), rather than concrete results such as thick hair and nails. Additionally, brands continuously address the positive effects of regular consumption, taking care to frame routine as a joyful experience, rather than focussing on the mundanity or repetitiveness of the same daily process.

For the principle of authority, it could be observed that some micro-strategies that were found in the literature, such as greetings and gratitude (Jalilifar et al. 2021), were rare in the current data set. Arguably, this is linked to the medium that is being researched. While certain media formats, such as infomercials, would be expected to more frequently contain greetings, social media posts often lack context, presuming the audience is somewhat familiar with the poster, thus no introduction is needed.

When it comes to expert sources and scientific claims which are referenced by the brands to frame them as authorities, such as supposed studies in support of the products’ effects, the audience is never given specific sources or citations to refer to. While more information on these claims can be found on the companies’ websites, it is notably absent on their social media. Possible motives for this may include wanting to keep posts brief or to not deviate from the friendly tone used in most posts by referring to more dry scientific texts. This could be seen as another sign that audiences are meant to rely on heuristic processing without interrogating these messages beyond a surface level.

To establish authority, WelleCo often takes a more esoteric approach, intending to evoke certain feelings of health and empowerment, rather than pointing out any specific nutrient or biological process related to their products. However, while this, and several other posts by WelleCo, do not refer to scientific information, it is nevertheless presented as a matter of fact and in a manner of authority.

While the principle of liking is present in almost every post in the data set, its frequently combined use with authority is particularly interesting. Often, authoritative statements on the science behind a product, which could stand alone, are preceded by more light-hearted sentences, often containing humorous elements – which have been closely tied to likability (Yelkur et al. 2013) – such as puns or emojis. This may be intended to strengthen the emotional impact of a message, such as connecting the science of a product to the concept of self-care.

However, it is also possible that intending to be liked is simply in the nature of social media and thus becomes part of these posts by default. The language used for many activities available on social media is strongly tied to liking and being liked, such as the act of ‘liking’ a post, which shows the poster and other users that one enjoyed the post, or adding ‘friends’ on platforms such as Facebook, rather than simply adding a ‘contact’. As a result, the need to be liked extends from the private to the professional accounts, which, beyond the need to be liked, also need to make a profit of that liking. Therefore, the data examined here may differ from other media and may also divert from the kind of persuasion attempts observed by Cialdini (1984) before the age of social media.

Another possible reason for the high frequency of the liking principle is that it is possibly the most complex of Cialdini’s (1984) principles. Whereas a principle such as scarcity is fairly simple to detect, as in this thesis it is only recognisable through mentions of limited time or availability, there is a much larger variety of rhetorical and linguistic elements which can be determined as indicators of the liking principle. Celebrity endorsements, emotional appeals such as references to self-care, and a large number of common rhetorical devices can be observed to have a pleasing effect on an audience. This complexity also makes liking a more versatile element. As has been observed in the analysis of the other principles, many posts in the data set begin with a text that includes, for instance, a pun, metaphor or emoji for the post to be likeable, before continuing with a statement that is either authoritative or applies one of the other principles.

In regard to other theories on persuasion, connections to Aristotle’s persuasive appeals have already been made. Given that liking can be connected to emotional appeals, it is easy to see that the Aristotelian concept of pathos is the most prominent in the current data set. While ethos is also apparent through the principle of authority, often in combination with pathos

applied through liking, it could be argued that ethos was not considered a strong enough appeal to work without the support of pathos.

While HSM is not the main focus of this thesis, many posts could be observed which aimed to remind the audience of knowledge outside the post, possibly activating certain heuristics. This could especially be argued in regard to posts containing metaphors and references to self-care, as these texts refer to familiar concepts such as comfort without explicitly stating them. Therefore, the audience is meant to associate the product with self-care and as beneficial for them. The same could be argued for relating products to certain routines such as recommending daily consumption before bed time, associating the product with a specific time of day. Likewise, emojis could quickly activate a certain response in the audience, such as connoting heart symbols with love and thus positive feelings towards the message source.

Overall, it could be observed that persuasive communication by celebrity-owned wellness brands on Instagram rarely relies on a single principle in isolation. Instead, the analysed posts frequently combine multiple persuasive strategies, with the liking principle functioning as the central connective element across the data set. Humorous and emotionally appealing rhetorical devices such as puns, metaphors, emojis, and references to self-care were repeatedly used to soften more commercial or authoritative messages, creating a tone that appears friendly, relatable, and socially engaging. At the same time, authority was commonly established through references to science, wellness expertise, or health-related terminology, even when detailed evidence or sources were omitted.

5.2. Challenges

The two biggest challenges of this thesis included the selection and development of micro-strategies as well as narrowing down the posts and which elements to consider.

Though this thesis was largely inspired by the work of Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023), some changes were made as the result of extensive literature research on the topic of persuasion theory. Influential sources on theories other than Cialdini's (1984) principles included the works of Cacioppo and Petty (1984) and Chaiken (1980) regarding HSM and ELM, respectively. Likewise, Jalilifar et al. (2021) offered a greater insight into various rhetorical elements of persuasive language, especially relevant for the liking and authority principles, while Ge and Gretzel (2018) presented valuable research into the application of emojis. As a result of this research, the micro-strategies that were established during the

coding process, especially those for the liking and authority principles, diverged from those of Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023).

As one of the research questions guiding this thesis concerned whether the presence of celebrities would employ the authority principle, the relevant data needed to be critically observed to properly code the posts in question. As discussed above, the majority of celebrity endorsements, explicit as well as implicit, fall into the liking principle, as audiences are expected to be familiar with the celebrities and be pleased to see them. Only in certain instances, in which Macpherson is used both as a celebrity to endorse her products and simultaneously framed as an expert on wellness, is the authority principle active in combination with liking.

Overall, the co-occurrence of multiple principles and their micro-strategies made it initially difficult to categorise certain posts. However, during the analysis process, it became clear that a large number of posts would use liking to support other principles, rather than attempting to overshadow them. Thus, light-hearted or humorous elements such as puns, hyperbole or emojis could be used to create a friendly atmosphere in posts that applied principles such as reciprocity, commitment and consistency or consensus and social proof.

As several micro-strategies of the liking principle include rhetorical devices, such as rhymes, puns, or metaphors, narrowing down relevant rhetorical devices to include in the analysis presented a challenge as well. Ultimately, the micro-strategies chosen were the ones most present in the literature available on persuasion and contemporary marketing, which were directly linked to being pleasing or humorous to an audience by the authors. One device that was left out, for instance, was alliteration. While alliterations have been associated with being both frequent and memorable, most alliterations lack ambiguity, which was a deciding factor in categorising other devices such as metaphors as pleasing to decipher. Thus, it stands to reason that alliterations may not trigger a strong enough emotional response in audiences, especially compared to other rhetorical devices, to consider them a functioning micro-strategy of the liking principle.

Another challenge was presented in the data selection as well. A fourth brand, Goop by Gwyneth Paltrow, had been considered in addition to Sourse, Lemme, and WelleCo. However, as a brand Goop appeared to be more broadly concerned with lifestyle, advertising a large variety of products including toiletries and apparel. As the other three brands were more chiefly concerned with consumable wellness products in the form of vitamins or

powders, a closer connection could be established that appeared more apt for comparisons. Still, a number of WelleCo posts that were present in the observed time frame were excluded from analysis as they also diverged too much from the topic of consumable wellness products, as the brand occasionally posted about Macpherson's continuous work as a model.

Finally, while the aim of this thesis is to focus primarily on textual elements of the posts, occasionally, to understand the context of the text, it was necessary to include visual elements in the analysis, especially when text was describing or directly referencing the visuals. This is usually in the context of specific actions or movements, not in relation to design or colour choices.

5.3. Future Research

The research performed in this thesis could be used in a variety of ways to inspire further research around celebrity-owned brands and persuasion. As has already been put into question by this thesis, there is no clear answer to the question whether celebrities could or should be utilised as figures of authority when marketing their own brands. This could be further examined by researching the perception of celebrities in advertising as compared to their intended effect, for instance by surveying an audience on advertising which depicts celebrities as authority figures or by contrasting the present analysis with a study focusing on similar products without celebrities present.

Given that the liking principle appeared in the vast majority of posts, future research could move beyond comparing liking to less frequent principles and instead focus on differentiating between its various micro-strategies. For example, studies could compare the persuasive effectiveness of different rhetorical devices, such as puns and metaphors, with product-specific strategies such as 'self-care' in the wellness industry. This would enable a more nuanced understanding of which liking-based techniques resonate most strongly with audiences.

A related and somewhat surprising observation was the comparatively low frequency of explicit celebrity endorsements in the sample, despite the brands being celebrity-owned. This raises the question of whether such absences are due to practical constraints, such as the celebrity's involvement in other projects, or a deliberate marketing strategy designed to prevent overexposure. The latter possibility could align with the scarcity principle, where limited appearances heighten the perceived value of each celebrity feature. Future work could

examine whether infrequent but well-timed celebrity involvement is more effective than consistent, visible endorsement.

Another promising direction would be to extend the present methodology to explore gendered marketing strategies. Specifically, researchers could compare how persuasive linguistic and rhetorical techniques in wellness and supplement marketing differ when targeting primarily female versus primarily male audiences. This would reveal whether the same principles are applied similarly or if gender-specific approaches emerge, particularly in industries that rely heavily on lifestyle branding.

The scope of research could also broaden to examine further industries where celebrities have diversified their careers. A variety of Hollywood actors, for example, have founded beverage brands. Thus, consumers can find tequila by George Clooney, gin by Ryan Reynolds, or non-alcoholic beer by Tom Holland, to name just a few. These brands could be examined to see whether the same persuasive strategies are used across industries and how celebrity ownership plays into the presentation of these brands on social media platforms.

Additionally, comparative media analysis could yield valuable insights. A single brand could be examined across its Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and website, as well as in live events or advertisements, to assess how tone, professionalism, and entertainment value shift according to platform and audience expectations.

6. Conclusion

In addressing the research questions set out in the introduction, this thesis has demonstrated how celebrity-owned wellness brands strategically employ linguistic features and Cialdini's (1984) six principles of persuasion in their Instagram marketing. The analysis revealed that, while all six principles are present in the data set, their application varies significantly in scope and frequency. Most strikingly, the principle of liking permeated nearly every post, functioning not only as an independent strategy but also as a supportive device to reinforce other principles. Its micro-strategies, ranging from rhetorical devices such as puns, metaphors, and emojis to broader appeals to self-care and lifestyle aspirations, suggest that liking constitutes the most versatile and adaptable principle for the social media context.

Scarcity, in contrast, was the least observed principle, diverging from the findings of Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour (2023). Rather than evoking urgency or fear of missing out, the brands often softened scarcity with a friendly and light-hearted tone, frequently supported by liking-based strategies. Reciprocity, too, was generally framed in positive, community-oriented ways, such as offering exclusive content, discounts, or early access, further underlining the interdependence between liking and other principles.

The treatment of celebrity figures across the three brands varied considerably. Two of the celebrities—Hyland and Kardashian Barker—were primarily employed to activate liking through endorsements, relatability, and personal branding, while authority was delegated to third-party experts or references to clinical research. In contrast, Macpherson was not only more prominently featured but also framed as an authority in her own right, often presented as an expert on beauty and wellness through personal experience, age, and her status as a successful businesswoman. These findings highlight how celebrity-owned brands balance the appeal of fame with the need for credibility, depending on the brand's positioning and the celebrity's public persona.

By reframing and expanding the micro-strategies of persuasion, this thesis has offered a more detailed account of how rhetorical devices shape consumer perception in wellness marketing. It has also accounted for overlaps between principles, demonstrating that persuasion on social media is rarely achieved through isolated strategies but rather through carefully layered combinations, with liking often serving as the foundation. Furthermore, connections to Aristotle's persuasive appeals and as well as the Elaboration Likelihood Model and Heuristic Systematic Model have expanded the analysis beyond Cialdini's (1984) framework.

Overall, this study has shown that the success of celebrity-owned wellness brands on social media is not built on singular acts of persuasion but on a continuous interplay of liking, authority, and community-building. It also suggests that social media, with its inherently relational and interactive nature, may naturally privilege liking as the most powerful principle. Future research could build on these insights by examining cross-platform strategies, audience perception, and industry comparisons, thereby further contextualising the evolving role of celebrity figures and persuasive linguistics in digital marketing.

7. References

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8. Appendix

Table 9. List and categorisation of emojis

Emoji	Title	Category
✨	Sparkles	Abstract
💤	Sleeping Symbol	Abstract
💋	Kiss Mark	Abstract
➡	Black Rightwards Arrow	Abstract
💇‍♀️	Woman Getting Haircut	Bodies
🛌	Sleeping Accommodation	Bodies
🧘‍♀️	Woman in Lotus Position	Bodies
🏃‍♀️	Woman Running	Bodies
🏃‍♂️	Man Running	Bodies
😉	Winking Face	Faces
😴	Sleeping Face	Faces
😲	Face with Open Mouth	Faces
😍	Smiling Face with Smiling Eyes and Three Hearts	Faces
🤔	Drooling Face	Faces
🍫	Chocolate Bar	Food
🍎	Red Apple	Food
🍏	Green Apple	Food
🍍	Pineapple	Food
🥦	Broccoli	Food
🍠	Roasted Sweet Potato	Food
🍓	Strawberry	Food
🍋	Lemon	Food
🥭	Mango	Food
🍵	Teacup Without Handle	Food
🥛	Glass of Milk	Food
🍦	Soft Ice Cream	Food
👇	White Down Pointing	Hands

	Backhand Index	
	White Right Pointing Backhand Index	Hands
	Person Raising Both Hands in Celebration	Hands
	Victory Hand	Hands
	Nail Polish	Hands
	Heart Hands	Hands
	Handshake	Hands
	Clapping Hands Sign	Hands
	Flexed Biceps	Hands
	Brown Heart	Hearts
	White Heart	Hearts
	Green Heart	Hearts
	Orange Heart	Hearts
	Sparkling Heart	Hearts
	Heart with Ribbon	Hearts
	Blue Heart	Hearts
	Growing Heart	Hearts
	Heavy Black Heart	Hearts
	Heart Decoration	Hearts
	Purple Heart	Hearts
	Yellow Heart	Hearts
	Two Hearts	Hearts
	Cloud	Objects
	Direct Hit	Objects
	Camera	Objects
	White Medium Star	Objects
	Shopping Trolley	Objects
	Black Sun with Rays	Objects
	Bubbles	Objects
	Glowing Star	Objects
	Crescent Moon	Objects

	Last Quarter Moon with Face	Objects
	High Voltage Sign	Objects
	First Place Medal	Objects
	Wrapped Present	Objects
	Camera with Flash	Objects
	American Football	Objects
	Blossom	Objects
	Herb	Objects