

UNMASKING THE POWER OF NARRATIVE: REVEALING CONSUMER BLIND SPOTS  
IN MISLEADING ECO-LABEL PERCEPTIONS AND ADVERTISING EVALUATIONS  
THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER MARKETING TACTICS

by

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ABSTRACT

Influencer marketing is now integral to business marketing strategies. Despite extensive research into its benefits, little attention has been paid to potential adverse effects on consumers. This study explores how influencer marketing strategies might hinder consumers' critical thinking about misleading eco-labels while enhancing marketing effectiveness through reduced persuasion knowledge. The present study delves into narrative persuasion as a central influencer marketing strategy. Previous studies suggest that narrative ads by influencers are more persuasive than non-narrative ads. Narrative ads, often presented as personal stories, tend to diminish consumers' persuasion knowledge compared to non-narrative ads. Grounded in the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) and narrative persuasion, this research aims to understand how narratives amplify advertising effectiveness by limiting consumers' critical thinking. It also focuses on challenges when influencers endorse products with misleading eco-friendly labels, evaluating the reduction in critical thinking using eco-label skepticism. The current research includes two online experimental studies. The first experiment, exploring the impact of narrative and hashtags, revealed narrative's favorable effect on advertising effectiveness by reducing

persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism with fewer hashtags. Exposure to narratives decreased awareness of advertising and critical attitudes toward misleading eco-labels, leading to positive advertising outcomes, particularly when ads featured fewer hashtags. The second experiment, featuring narrative and social commerce, did not demonstrate narrative's effect on advertising outcomes through persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. This research scrutinizes the influence of influencer marketing strategies on consumers' perceptions of misleading eco-labels and advertising, with a specific focus on eco-label skepticism and persuasion knowledge. The examination of narrative strategies in conjunction with other influencer advertising tactics (i.e., hashtags, social commerce) holds particular significance. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of consumer protection and education concerning influencer advertising, particularly in the context of misleading eco-labeled product promotions. Advancing beyond existing research on influencer marketing, which typically focuses on its effectiveness, this research introduces a perspective on potential negative impacts on consumers, providing insights with both theoretical and practical implications. It contributes to shaping the future landscape of influencer marketing and the promotion of eco-labeled products for consumers, advertisers, marketers, and policymakers.

**INDEX WORDS:** Influencer marketing, narrative persuasion, persuasion knowledge model, green influencers, misleading eco-label, eco-labeled products, eco-label skepticism, consumer protection, consumer well-being

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## DEDICATION

To my parents and sister, for their love and support.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern digital era, influencer marketing has become integral to brand promotion (De Veirman et al., 2017). This contemporary approach offers an affordable alternative to traditional celebrity endorsements (Hung, 2021), making it increasingly popular among marketers. While influencer marketing proves effective in conveying brands' messages and objectives, it can pose challenges to consumers. The allure of influencer marketing, particularly through persuasive tactics such as narrative storytelling, can create what we refer to as "blind spots" in consumer perception. This phenomenon occurs when key message elements escape the scrutiny of consumers, potentially leading to suboptimal decision-making.

It is important to note that the current research investigates narrative ads within influencer posts to uncover consumers' blind spots. The use of persuasive narratives in influencer posts tends to blur the line between commercial content and personal stories, diminishing consumers' awareness of persuasive intent and their capacity to evaluate the message and the product critically. This effect can be especially concerning when it comes to the promotion of products carrying misleading eco-labels, such as claims of being "100% natural." Such labels, often seen as endorsements of environmental and health consciousness, can mislead consumers when presented within influencer posts. As consumers' persuasion knowledge diminishes in the face of compelling storytelling, their skepticism towards potentially deceptive

eco-labels may also wane, resulting in decisions that lack the critical thinking needed to navigate the marketplace effectively.

Conversely, other influential tactics commonly used in influencer marketing, such as strategically deploying hashtags and integrating social commerce, can enhance consumers' persuasion knowledge. This knowledge refers to consumers' understanding and awareness of the tactics and techniques used by advertisers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). This, in turn, may foster greater eco-label skepticism, helping consumers to approach such claims with a discerning eye. As these dynamics unfold, the interplay of narrative persuasion and other influencer marketing techniques takes center stage, raising questions about their collective impact on consumers' susceptibility to misleading eco-labels.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to investigate how narrative storytelling within influencer posts may inadvertently suppress consumers' persuasion knowledge, diminishing their capacity to critically evaluate misleading eco-labels that warrant skepticism. In contrast to previous studies that have often compared eco-labels based on attributes such as color or characteristics of the labels (e.g., Pancer et al., 2017; Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014), this research takes a distinct approach by focusing specifically on the observation of misleading eco-labels. While valuable insights have been gained from comparing different labels (e.g., Amos et al., 2019), the central emphasis of our study is to examine the impact of eco-labels that have the potential to mislead consumers. This unique focus arises from the recognition of the prevalence of vague eco-labels in the market and the overarching need to understand how such labels, devoid of substantial meaning, might compromise consumers' informed decision-making processes. At the same time, this research will examine how popular influencer marketing

tactics, including hashtags and social commerce, may enhance persuasion knowledge and, consequently, encourage more critical appraisal of misleading eco-labels. These investigations will provide essential insights into the potential risks and benefits associated with common influencer marketing strategies, particularly in the context of misleading eco-labels and consumer trust issues.

While the existing literature on influencer marketing has largely focused on its effectiveness in achieving brand objectives (Vrontis et al., 2021), limited attention has been given to its implications for consumer education and protection. Also, previous research on eco-labels has been limited in considering the specific media environment in which eco-label processing and perceptions take shape. This environment has the potential to influence various attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Thus, this study seeks to fill the research gap by shedding light on the intricate relationship between influencer marketing tactics, such as storytelling, and the critical processing of eco-labels—a product information domain that demands consumer skepticism. This research will also contribute to developing a theoretical framework connecting persuasion knowledge and the discerning evaluation of eco-labels in influencer marketing.

The implications of our findings extend beyond the realms of academia. The findings would also reveal the importance of consumer education in helping them avoid the pitfalls of influencer marketing. Previous findings suggest that regulations (e.g., FTC’s Endorsement Guides) might help protect consumers. However, external efforts to regulate and monitor are ineffective and unfeasible due to the massive number of branded posts that emerge daily (Klein & Schweikart, 2022). Alternatively, education can equip consumers to protect themselves from the potential harm of influencer marketing. In this way, the findings should help consumer

protection agencies and policymakers educate consumers about misleading influencer marketing tactics that make persuasive intent less salient, preparing them to make better-informed decisions.

The structure of this dissertation can be outlined as follows: Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review that delves into essential concepts related to eco-labeling, influencer marketing, and marketing tactics commonly employed in influencer marketing, with a specific focus on narrative persuasion, hashtags, and social commerce. Additionally, this literature review contributes to the theoretical framework for understanding persuasion knowledge. Chapter 3 formulates the hypotheses that guide this dissertation's research. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology employed in two experimental studies and includes the pretests for stimuli used in both experiments. Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 present the details of each experiment, providing participant information, methods, procedures, and the results obtained. Chapter 7 summarizes the findings, discusses their theoretical and practical implications, and addresses the study's limitations while also exploring potential directions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a literature review that delves into scholarly discussions regarding influencer marketing and its strategies. Since this research specifically investigates how these strategies shape how people perceive and evaluate eco-labeled products in advertising, the literature review introduces and elucidates concepts related to eco-labels and eco-label skepticism. It highlights narrative advertising as a prominent influencer marketing tactic, along with other tactics such as hashtags and social commerce. Additionally, this chapter introduces and examines narrative persuasion and the persuasion knowledge model as theoretical frameworks that guide the current research. As this chapter provides a general literature review of the current research topic, the next chapter establishes more specific connections between these important concepts that are discussed in this chapter for developing hypotheses.

#### **Eco-labeling and the Significance of Consumer Eco-label Skepticism**

Sustainable products have garnered global consumer attention, leading brands and marketers to adopt green marketing strategies. Eco-labels, a relatively simple and effective tool of green marketing, have emerged as a means to signal a brand's or product's commitment to environmental responsibility, differentiating them from conventional alternatives (Rahbar & Wahid, 2011; Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014). While there is no universal definition, eco-labels

typically refer to manufacturers' distinctive marks or symbols to signify their dedication or commitment to environmentally friendly practices, contributing to environmental improvement (Shahrin et al., 2017). Currently, there are 202 eco-labels in circulation in the United States, originating from diverse sources such as nonprofit organizations (e.g., Fair Trade Certified), government bodies (e.g., the U.S. Department of Agriculture), and for-profit businesses (e.g., Naturally Sephora) (Ecolabel Index, n.d.). The abundance of eco-labels has rendered it convenient for consumers to encounter products bearing these labels. Nguyen-Viet (2022) demonstrated the significant impact of eco-labels on green purchase intentions through their influence on brand image, trust, and perceived quality.

While eco-labels apply to various product categories, this research focuses on food products due to the strong correlation between health-consciousness and green consumption. Health concerns about food are closely tied to green consumption, as eco-friendly products are often perceived as more nutritious and freer from harmful chemicals like pesticides (Sörqvist et al., 2015). Additionally, food products are one of the categories that are most influenced by eco-labeling in purchase decisions (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014).

However, challenges and concerns persist amidst the proliferation and positive consumer perceptions of eco-labels. One key challenge is the knowledge gap from the consumer's perspective. The abundance of online and offline eco-labels on products has led to information overload and confusion for consumers (Moon et al., 2017). This confusion is further compounded by vague and uncertain claims associated with many labels (Galarraga Gallastegui, 2002). Inconsistencies in eco-label regulations also complicate matters, with some labels adhering to strict criteria, such as the USDA Organic seal. In contrast, others, like 'natural,' need

more standardized definitions and oversight, potentially misleading consumers. Many eco-labels remain unregulated, leading to misuse and exaggerated claims by manufacturers (Amos et al., 2019; Shahrin et al., 2017). Opportunistic companies use this vagueness to convey a green image without necessarily implementing environmentally friendly practices, thereby damaging consumers' informed decision-making.

Previous research on eco-labels has demonstrated their potentially misleading effects on individual product quality evaluations, such as perceptions of healthfulness and calorie estimation (e.g., Lee et al., 2013; Schuldt & Schwarz, 2010). Especially in food products, studies have shown that labeling can lead to overestimating a product's healthiness or quality simply because it bears a particular label associated with health-related imagery. Illustrating the health halo effect, which is a cognitive bias that occurs when consumers evaluate a product or brand as healthier based on a single attribute, Lee et al. (2013) found that foods with an eco-label, such as "organic," were perceived as lower in calories, better in nutrition, and associated with a higher willingness to pay compared to food without the label.

Furthermore, Amos et al. (2019) investigated eco-label effects with various health and safety-related attributes (e.g., health, calories, gluten-free) across three product categories, including food, personal hygiene, and household cleaning. They found that both "organic" and "all-natural" labels were perceived as healthier and safer than products without any eco-label. However, there were no significant differences in these health halo effects between the "organic" and "all-natural" labels. These findings indicate that, in general, consumers do not differentiate between different eco-labels; the mere presence of a label can increase perceptions of product

quality, regardless of whether such quality claims are necessarily substantiated or verified, potentially leading to misconceptions.

To overcome these issues, consumers must develop an awareness of potentially misleading aspects of eco-labels and educate themselves about eco-labeled products. This research explores the concept of eco-label skepticism, which represents a critical attitude towards eco-labels. In consumer behavior, skepticism implies a reluctance to accept claims without conclusive evidence and a willingness to question claims made by others (Mohr et al., 1998; Ryu & Jun, 2019). Skeptical consumers can adjust their attitudes when presented with tangible evidence (Mohr et al., 1998), making skepticism valuable when evaluating products with vague or ambiguous claims. In the context of this study, eco-label skepticism is defined as a meaningful counter-argument to label information. It is proposed that a skeptical attitude towards eco-labeled products can protect consumers from greenwashing, providing a favorable framework for informed decision-making.

While previous research has emphasized the potential risks and misleading effects of eco-labels on consumer decisions, there has been limited exploration of the influence of eco-labels in specific media environments, especially on social media. Understanding the role of social media in eco-label evaluation and consumer perceptions is crucial, considering the preference of younger adults for eco-labeled products. With eco-labeled products increasingly being promoted by influencers on social media and eco-label skepticism being context-dependent, examining the impact of eco-labels within the social media context can offer valuable insights into the decision-making process from consumers' perspectives. The following sections will begin with a general

discussion of social media influencer marketing and then explore how influencers' marketing strategies can be pertinent to consumers' assessments of eco-labeled product advertisements.

## **Social Media Influencer Marketing**

### *Influencer Marketing: Characteristics and Effectiveness*

The social media influencer marketing industry has consistently grown over the past decade (Lee & Eastin, 2020; Vrontis et al., 2021), reaching \$21.1 billion in 2023, a noteworthy rise from \$16.4 billion the preceding year (Geyser, 2022). Social media influencers are integrated into one of the essential marketing tactics (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2017).

Freberg et al. (2011) defined these Social Media Influencers (SMIs) as “a new type of independent third-party endorser who shapes audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and other social media.” (p. 90) Lou and Yuan (2019) added more specificity by indicating that a social media influencer refers to “a content generator: one who has a status of expertise in a specific area and has cultivated a sizable number of dedicated followers, which are of marketing value to brands, by consistently producing valuable content via social media” (p. 59). In short, social media influencers are individuals with a substantial following and recognized as authorities in specific niches (DeVeirman et al., 2017; Breves et al., 2019). Consequently, influencer marketing is a marketing approach that leverages the audience and influence of these social media influencers or opinion leaders to attain marketing goals (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ye et al., 2021).

Social media influencers come in a variety of categories, typically determined by their follower count. According to Campbell and Farrell (2020), these categories include celebrity

influencers (one million or more followers), mega-influencers (one million or more followers), macro-influencers (100,000 to one million followers), micro-influencers (10,000 to 100,000 followers), and nano-influencers (10,000 followers or less). The distinctions between celebrity and mega influencers stem from the origins of their fame (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). Simply put, celebrity influencers are individuals who independently earned and established their popularity and renown without relying on the evolution of social media. On the other hand, mega influencers are usually described as those who did not have celebrity status before amassing a substantial following and fanbase. Therefore, mega influencers tend to be “relatively unknown” beyond their specific follower base (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, p. 492). In contrast, celebrity influencers enjoy a more widespread popularity that extends across various media channels. In general, influencers with a high number of followers are more effective for increasing brand awareness but tend to be more costly and have lower engagement rates (e.g., mega-influencers). On the other hand, influencers with moderate to lower numbers of followers are perceived as more intimate and authentic, making them effective for niche audiences, although they may have limited overall impact (e.g., micro-influencers) (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

To grasp the concept of influencer marketing, it's beneficial to compare it to traditional celebrity endorsement. Researchers examining both influencers and traditional celebrities (e.g., actors, athletes, models) often employ similar theories and conceptual frameworks. This is in part due to some influencers, particularly macro and mega influencers, possessing celebrity-like status in terms of their reach and impact on social media (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). However, a clear distinction exists between influencers and traditional celebrities, as suggested by various scholars (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020; Lee & Eastin, 2020; Wang &

Scheinbaum, 2018; Kim et al., 2021). One key difference lies in how traditional celebrity influencers gained their popularity through exposure in traditional media like television, while non-celebrity influencers primarily build their online presence through self-branding and the creation of visual content on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Moreover, consumers perceive influencers as more trustworthy and familiar compared to celebrities, which results in more favorable advertising outcomes, including attitude toward ads and products, and purchase intentions (Schouten et al., 2020). This perception is largely due to influencers' ability to share personal stories and engage with their followers intimately, making them appear more authentic, accessible, and relatable (De Veirman et al., 2017).

Furthermore, the emotional bond between influencers and their followers, often referred to as parasocial interaction, is a unique feature of influencer marketing (Lou, 2022; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This bond plays a pivotal role in the success of influencer marketing (Yuan & Lou, 2020; Hudders et al., 2021) and differentiates it from traditional celebrity endorsements, which often lack this intimate connection (Kim et al., 2021). Additionally, traditional celebrity endorsers may not necessarily possess expertise in the specific areas they endorse. In contrast, influencer endorsers typically have knowledge and expertise in the brands they promote. This distinction leads to different goals and outcomes for these two types of endorsers, with celebrities helping brands reach broader audiences and influencers connecting with niche audiences (Breves et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021).

A substantial number of findings suggest the favorable effect of influencer marketing on advertising-related outcomes (Hudders et al., 2021; Hughes et al., 2019; De Veirman et al., 2017). Research on social media influencers have consistently suggested that influencer

marketing leads to increased consumer engagement (Vrontis et al., 2021). Lou et al. (2019) found that influencer-promoted ads had higher consumer engagement in terms of both liking and consumer commenting than brand-promoted ads. From sentiment analysis of comments, Lou and associates (2019) also found that more positive responses and less negative sentiment in their comments on influencer-promoted ads than on brand-promoted ads. Argyris et al. (2020) suggested that visual congruence (i.e., match between influencers and followers' posts) enhanced followers' engagement (i.e., likes and comments).

Similarly, influencer marketing has proven effective in shaping attitudes toward ads and behavioral intention (Schouten et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Lee & Eastin, 2020). This is due to influencers being perceived as more credible, accessible, and relatable, all of which contribute to favorable advertising outcomes (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020). Schouten et al. (2020) indicated that influencers are perceived as more trustworthy than traditional celebrities, which leads to more favorable attitudes toward advertisements, products, and purchase intentions. Breves et al. (2019) demonstrated that a high fit (i.e., match) between influencers and brands was perceived as more credible than low fit, subsequently having a positive impact on behavioral intentions (e.g., recommending products to friends). With social media marketing facilitating the development of electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) (Chu & Kim, 2011), research on social media influencers has consistently shown that they are effective tools for increasing eWOM (e.g., Shen et al., 2021). Ki and Kim (2019) identified five key aspects of influencer posts, arguing that if a post is visually appealing, prestigious, perceived to have expertise, informative, and interactive, consumers tend to form positive attitudes toward the

influencer, viewing them as opinion leaders. This, in turn, influences behavioral outcomes, such as increased eWOM.

The effectiveness of influencer marketing varies among diverse audience segments. For instance, previous findings indicate that children and young adults find social media influencers likable and credible spokespersons and aspire to their lifestyles (Folkvord et al., 2019; De Jans et al., 2018). Given the significant amount of time children and teenagers spend viewing social media posts, toy companies actively use young influencers as brand and product endorsers (De Veirman et al., 2019; Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2020). For example, the YouTube channel 'Ryan's World' features a young boy named Ryan Kaji, who primarily posts content related to toy reviews and unboxing videos. As of October 2023, this channel has 35.7 million subscribers. In 2022, Ryan Kaji was ranked as the 7th highest-paid YouTube star, and in 2023, he was listed as the 17th highest-earning creator by Forbes (Bertoni, n.d.). Influencer marketing has proven more effective in reaching and attracting niche audiences than traditional marketing. For instance, brands have used LGBTQ influencers to enhance persuasive messages targeting LGBTQ audiences. Li (2022) examined the effects of congruence between influencer identity and social cause on perceived influencer credibility and evaluation of ads and brands in the context of LGBTQ corporate social responsibility advertising. The findings suggest that using an LGBTQ influencer was more effective than a non-LGBTQ influencer in inducing the perceived credibility of LGBTQ-centric ads, especially for LGBTQ audiences. Influencer marketing, in general, has become a valuable tool for reaching diverse audiences and eliciting favorable attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. In conclusion, influencer marketing has become a valuable tool for reaching diverse audiences and eliciting favorable attitudinal and behavioral outcomes.

### *Influencer Marketing and Potential Harmful Effects on Consumers*

Given the burgeoning phenomenon of influencer marketing and its positive marketing outcomes and opportunities, most scholars have focused on the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Some scholars have explored various challenges or pitfalls associated with influencer marketing to provide a more comprehensive picture (Hudders & Lou, 2023). Despite its favorable effects on advertising outcomes, influencer marketing also carries potential risks. For advertisers and marketers, identifying the right influencer to endorse particular brands and products is not easy (von Mettenheim & Wiedmann, 2021). Choosing the influencer that best fits a marketing purpose or goal is taxing due to the sheer number of influencers available (DeVeirman et al., 2017; Breves et al., 2019). Previous findings suggest that mismatch or poor fit between brands and influencers can lower advertising effectiveness. Brand partnerships with influencers have backfired when a mismatch exists (e.g., Volvo and Listerine's partnerships with beauty and lifestyle influencers). Thus, congruence with consumers, products, and brands is an important factor in the success of influencer endorsements (Breves et al., 2019; Schouten et al., 2020; Janssen et al., 2022), and to determine that congruence, advertisers depend on numerous resources. Another challenge influencer marketing presents involves managing the reputation and risks associated with influencers. Occasionally, influencers make ill-advised choices that give rise to controversy and scandal, directly damaging brand reputation and compromising advertising outcomes (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; McMullan, 2023).

Though previous findings point to both benefits and risks of influencer marketing (Ye et al., 2021; Hudders et al., 2021), the impact of influencer marketing on the consumer deserves

more attention. By examining how poorly executed influencer marketing can hurt advertising or marketing outcomes, scholars have focused on the business side of the problem. However, considering the widespread popularity of influencer marketing and its influence on consumers (Vrontis et al., 2021), scholars need to examine the potential adverse impact of influencers on consumer decision making and well-being. In line with this argument, the few scholars who have delved into the potential negative effects of influencer marketing on consumer well-being have called for further research on these effects (Hudders et al., 2021; Hudders & Lou, 2023).

The most prominent and critical issues relate to transparency and disclosure and how the deceptive tactics of influencers can mislead consumers (Ye et al., 2021; Hudders & Lou, 2023; Aw & Agnihotri, 2023). Due to the covert nature of influencer marketing, in which branded or endorsed posts are seamlessly integrated with other organic posts, distinguishing commercial messages from non-commercial ones can be challenging, especially when sponsorship disclosure is not explicit (Campbell & Grimm 2019; Ye et al., 2021; Evans et al., 2017; Hudders & Lou, 2022). Due to the subtle and covert nature of influencer marketing tactics, followers might not realize the commercial nature of the posts shared by influencers, limiting the activation of their advertising literacy (Hudders et al., 2021). As such, followers might purchase a product or at least consider a recommendation because they mistake a branded post for a genuine review; in other words, knowing the post is sponsored might have steered them away. In this way, influencer marketing can use misleading cues that deceive followers.

Protecting consumers from potentially misleading marketing practices is imperative. To address potentially misleading or deceptive advertising practices on social media influencers, researchers have called for regulatory measures to protect consumers from potential harm

(Campbell & Grimm, 2019). In response to this urgent need, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has issued advertising disclosure guidelines for online influencers (Disclosures 101 for social media influencers) (FTC, 2019). According to the guidelines, influencers must disclose their relationship to the brand using simple and clean language, placing it where it is hard to miss (e.g., “Thanks to Acme brand for the free product!”), so that consumers stay informed about the commercial nature of the post. Scholars have investigated whether consumers are more likely to recognize the commercial nature of the branded posts shared by influencers when exposed to sponsorship disclosure (Evans et al., 2017; De Jans et al., 2018; Boerman, 2020). Previous findings suggest that disclosure increases ad recognition, which results in adverse advertising outcomes: negative attitude toward the product and brand, low engagement with posts, and decreased eWOM (Kim & Kim, 2021; Evans et al., 2017; Lou et al., 2020). In addition to confirming the disclosure effects on ad recognition, Evans et al. (2017) explored how different types of disclosure language (i.e., Sponsored/PaidAd vs. SP: sponsored post) in sponsored Instagram posts affected advertising recognition. Results indicate that more explicit disclosure language (PaidAd) generated more advertising recognition and disclosure memory than less explicit disclosure (SP), increasing the negative impact on attitude toward the brand and intention to engage in eWOM. Because explicit disclosure tends to increase consumers’ persuasion knowledge, which refers to consumers’ general recognition and understanding of persuasive attempts in persuasive messages, which subsequently influence adverse advertising outcomes (e.g., Evans et al., 2017), research in influencer marketing explores the relationship between influencer marketing and persuasion knowledge.

### *Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) and Influencer Marketing*

Numerous scholars have used the persuasion knowledge model (PKM) as a theoretical framework for understanding sponsorship disclosure effects on consumer attitudes and behavioral intention (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Evans et al., 2017; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020).

Proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994), PKM has garnered significant scholarly interest from various persuasion contexts (Ham et al., 2015), primarily for its capacity to offer a valuable conceptual framework for understanding how people understand, interpret, and respond to persuasion. The central tenet of PKM suggests that people develop knowledge about persuasion and cope with persuasive attempts using this knowledge. According to Friestad and Wright (1994), PKM posits three different knowledge structures: persuasion knowledge, agent knowledge (i.e., beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent), and topic knowledge (i.e., beliefs about the topic of the message, such as a product, service, social cause, or candidate) (p. 3). Thus, persuasion knowledge “enables them (consumers) to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasion attempts and to select and execute coping tactics believed to be effective and appropriate” (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 3).

Due to the covert nature of influencer marketing, FTC mandates disclosure for branded or sponsored posts shared by influencers (FTC, 2019). As noted, social media users generally recognize that influencer posts are advertising due to persuasion knowledge, especially with proper disclosure. The concerning part is poor compliance with disclosure mandates, as shown by warning letters sent by FTC to these non-complaint influencers (Campbell & Grimm, 2019). Although disclosure does activate persuasion knowledge (e.g., Evans et al., 2017), some findings indicate that this effect can be minimal (Boerman et al., 2017). Adding to this problem, most

scholars have investigated only a simple disclosure effect (e.g., presence or absence of disclosure), not considering other tactics or cues in a branded post that might mask its commercial nature despite a disclosure statement. In everyday settings, social media users will likely encounter influencer-branded posts that provide disclosure but contain other persuasive tactics, potentially increasing persuasion without consumer knowledge. Influencer marketing has continued to evolve by including multiple persuasive tactics, which warrant further examination due to their potential to circumvent persuasion knowledge activation. The following section will discuss several persuasive tactics employed in influencer marketing. These tactics encompass message format (i.e., narrative vs. non-narrative ads) for more persuasion and social media channel-specific features, such as utilizing hashtags and social commerce. By scrutinizing these tactics, which span both influencer marketing's content variations and the utilization of social media tools, the current research aims to investigate how these approaches can impact the augmentation or reduction of consumers' persuasion knowledge, subsequently influencing their assessments of advertising.

## **Social Media Influencer Tactics**

### *Narrative Persuasion*

Given prevailing consumer skepticism and avoidance of traditional brand-oriented advertising, marketers and advertisers are turning to influencer marketing (Leung et al., 2022; De Veirman et al., 2017). Influencer marketing, since its inception, has emerged as a potent marketing communication strategy due to its potential to establish more authentic and intimate relationships with a larger number of followers, an outcome less attainable through traditional

media and celebrity endorsement (De Veirman et al., 2017; Schouten et al., 2020). Not only do influencers have greater perceived credibility, but consumers also perceive them as more relatable and more similar to everyday social media users than traditional celebrities (Schouten et al., 2020; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Influencer marketing often makes the best use of this perceived intimacy, leading to greater persuasion (Berryman & Kavka, 2017). Influencers share their personal lives, embedding sponsored posts within personal narratives (De Veirman et al., 2017). This method of sharing stories with followers helps form connections with consumers and harnesses the persuasive potential of narrative content.

Narrative has emerged as an effective communication tool in various persuasive contexts, including health communication (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Shen et al., 2015) and advertising messages (Escalas, 1998). While some scholars have suggested that the effectiveness of narrative content (i.e., personal stories) is not certain (Allen & Preiss, 1997), many findings indicate its potential to influence persuasion (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013). Narratives are particularly useful in shaping attitudes and behavior (Braddock & Dillard, 2016).

Broadly speaking, a narrative is a representation of events or a portrayal of a character's inner world (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013). One formal definition of narrative is “a story or series of events that has an identifiable beginning, middle, and end, during which characters might encounter and then resolve a crisis or crises” (Fitzgerald & Green, 2017, p. 50). While no universally accepted definition of narrative exists (Hinyard & Kreuter, 2007; Fitzgerald & Green, 2017), scholars have suggested several elements that narratives tend to share: characters, chronology, and causality (Dahlstrom, 2014; Escalas, 1998). A narrative involves depicting the

inner experience of a character, including their thoughts, viewpoints, emotions, drive, and objectives (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013). Furthermore, narratives contain a sequence of events that unfold over time (chronology), arranged to establish a causal relationship among them (causality) (Escalas, 1998; Fitzgerald & Green, 2017).

In the field of advertising, narratives are integral components of ads with storylines. These “narrative ads” feature stories as a fundamental communication method (Escalas, 1998; Kim et al., 2017). Narrative advertising, within the domain of advertising research, is advertising with narrative messaging (Chang, 2009) or a story-like communication format (Escalas, 1998). A more colloquial term for this type of advertising is “story ad” (Padgett & Allen, 1997). Building on previous research, Kim et al. (2017) provided the following comprehensive definition: “an ad that tells a story with the following necessary elements: who, what, when, where, why, how, and chronology” (Kim et al., 2017, p. 284). According to Kim et al. (2017), a narrative ad includes characters (who), actions undertaken by these characters (what), the specific context or setting in which these actions occur (when & where), the motivations or objectives underlying these actions (why), and the portrayal of the actions carried out by the central characters (how). The events are typically presented sequentially, thereby incorporating a sense of chronological time.

While narrative ads tell a structured story (i.e., causality and chronology), non-narrative ads are ones without narrative elements. While narrative ads have the format of a story, non-narrative ads typically feature argumentation and explanation (Kim et al., 2017; Escalas, 1998), fulfilling their purpose as “argument advertising” (Chang, 2009). The distinctions between narrative and non-narrative ads lie in how they deliver messages about products. Non-narrative advertising delivers information about product features through argument, logical claims, and

lectures, devoid of narrative elements such as plot or characters (Deighton et al., 1989; Wells, 1989). In contrast, narrative advertising falls into two subcategories: drama advertising and story advertising (Escalas, 2004a). Drama advertising features characters and product-related events unfolding before the audience, while story advertising features a narrator who tells a story about product-related events or features, often involving characters and a plot (Wells, 1989; Deighton et al., 1989).

In advertising, narratives show “the experiences or consequences of product use” (Chang, 2009, p. 22). Based on previous findings, the definition of “narrative ad” in the current study is one that tells a story about the experiences or consequences of product use or consumption, incorporating structural elements such as who, what, when, where, why, how, and chronology. It has a storytelling message format, conveying personal experiences related to product features and/or product use. A narrative ad communicates through storytelling, employing personal stories, testimonials, and anecdotes about products (Braverman, 2008; Kim et al., 2017). On the other hand, the definition of “non-narrative ad” in the current study is one that is devoid of plot or characters, an argument ad that directly conveys information about product features and/or product use to the audience, primarily relying on argument, facts, lectures, explanations, and logical reasoning (Wells, 1989; Chang, 2009; Kim et al., 2017).

### *Narrative Processing*

Social media influencers have effectively employed storytelling tactics to persuade audiences through brand and product endorsements. As discussed in the previous chapter, personal stories possess a significant persuasive power (e.g., Shen et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017).

Stories have been used to influence people's attitudes and behaviors in many different settings, such as when communicating about health or in advertising (Shen et al., 2015; Escalas, 1998). While some researchers have argued that stories are not always effective (Allen & Preiss, 1997), most agree that they can be a powerful tool for persuasion. The persuasive power of narrative results mainly from its structural characteristics (Escalas, 2004a; Chang, 2019). The structural elements of a narrative, such as the main characters, the setting, and the chronological unfolding of events, contribute to the ease with which individuals are transported or immersed in the story (e.g., Kim et al., 2017). In advertising, narrative ads generally outperform non-narrative forms of advertisements in terms of persuasion (Kim et al., 2017). Reading a narrative often leads to a sense of immersion, impacting both emotional and cognitive experiences. To understand the advantages of narrative persuasion, understanding how narrative is processed is essential.

When people encounter narrative ads, consumers can experience unique cognitive processes that significantly impact their perception and engagement with the content (Chang, 2019). One of these processes is mental simulation, where individuals visualize and simulate the events and scenarios described in the narrative. Mental stimulation is “a constructive cognitive act, involving imitative mental representations of the events in the original stimulus ad as well as the generation of hypothetical scenarios that resemble those events” (Kim et al., 2017; p. 284). In other words, mental simulation is a way of thinking about an ad by imagining ourselves in it and what might happen if we interacted with the advertised product or service (Chang, 2019; Kim et al., 2017). This imaginative engagement allows consumers to form a deeper connection with the story, making the advertisement more memorable and persuasive, which leads to more favorable advertising and brand attitudes (Phillips et al., 1995; Chang, 2019). Also, mental

simulation can render us more susceptible to advertising claims since it consumes a significant portion of our cognitive resources, leaving us with fewer mental reserves for counterarguments (Escalas, 2004b; Kim et al., 2017). This means mental simulation requires people to use their imaginations to create a mental image of themselves using the product or service. This can be a very engaging process, but it can also be mentally demanding. Thus, people may not be less likely to critically evaluate ads or claims of ads while consumers are in the mental simulation process, making them more susceptible or receptive to narrative ads.

Additionally, narrative ads can transport individuals into specific cognitive states, immersing them in the storyline and enabling them to emotionally resonate with the message, called “transportation” into a narrative world (Green & Brock, 2000). According to Transportation Theory (Green & Brock, 2000), transportation is conceptualized as an experience of cognitive, emotional, and imagery involvement in a narrative and being “fully engaged into a narrative world.” Often called “being book” (Chang, 2009), transportation can lead to more persuasion as it produces fewer negative cognitions and more positive affective responses (Green & Brock, 2000; Chang, 2019). Being transported into a narrative, as narrative processing, requires cognitive resources (e.g., Chang, 2009). Therefore, when engaging in narrative messages, people do not have enough cognitive resources to form meaningful counter-arguments or critical thinking due to our limited cognitive resources. According to Escalas (2004b), the process of narrative transportation reduces the occurrence of critical thoughts, enhancing overall advertising effectiveness.

Narrative processing tends to elicit more favorable emotional responses (e.g., Muralidharan & Kim, 2019; Chang, 2012). Narrative persuasion can produce a wide range of

emotions (Muralidharan and Kim, 2019). Scholars have recognized that emotional reactions are powerful mechanisms for processing a persuasive message presented in a narrative format. Narrative, in particular, is recognized for its ability to evoke positive affective responses due to its structural elements (e.g., characters and plots) (Deighton et al., 1989). Chang (2013) has proposed that the structural elements of narratives enhance the ease of narrative processing, resulting in what is referred to as “fluency effects.” People find it easier to relate to stories because of the characters and plots, which, in turn, foster a smoother narrative processing experience, leading to more positive emotional responses and favorable evaluations of advertisements (Chang, 2013; Escalas, 2004b). More specifically, Kim and Muralidharan (2020) found that narrative PSAs (vs. non-narrative PSAs) elicited more empathy, which led to greater reporting intention of domestic violence. Ko et al. (2023) further illustrated that in comparison to non-narrative PSAs, narrative PSAs generated increased empathy and reduced reactance, ultimately resulting in a stronger intention to engage in COVID-19 vaccination. Also, narrative ads are likely to foster upbeat and warm affective responses (Escalas, 2004b).

In essence, narratives possess mechanisms that transport or immerse individuals into the messages, thereby reducing the likelihood of their engaging in critical or counter-argumentative thinking concerning the intended message, and they also foster more positive emotions (Green & Brock, 2000; Green, 2006, Kim et al., 2017). As a result, businesses and advertisers recognize the potency of storytelling in capturing the attention and hearts of their audience, employing narratives to evoke powerful cognitive and emotional responses that drive more favorable advertising outcomes.

## *Hashtags*

Influencer marketing relies on the simultaneous use of multiple tactics, making them all equally significant for examination. In addition to message format (i.e., personal stories), influencers have employed social media-specific tools to increase engagement from their followers. Among the influencer marketing tactics affecting product evaluation, hashtags represent an innovative way to enhance searchability and visibility (Kostygina et al., 2021). Hashtags, denoted by the "#" symbol, are voluntarily chosen keywords used to tag, sort, and provide context to social media posts (Kowald et al., 2017). The primary functions of hashtags include classifying tweets thematically and sharing tweets with a wide array of audiences interested in similar topics (Pérez-Hernández, 2018).

The concept of using the "#" symbol as a tagging system (i.e., hashtags) was first proposed by Chris Messina, an expert in social technology and product design, in 2007. He sent out a tweet suggesting the use of the “#” symbol to categorize or group related tweets together: “How do you feel about using #(pound) for groups, as in #barcamp[msg]?” (Chris Messina, n.d.; Macready, 2022). Twitter (now known as X) was the first social media platform to adopt this concept and introduce this feature for public use. After its introduction on Twitter in 2007, other social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and even platforms abroad (such as Kakao in Korea and Weibo in China), also adopted and supported hashtags. Hashtags offer the advantage of tracking and searching for topics of interest beyond one's network connections (Kowald et al., 2017). For example, if someone wishes to learn more about recent college football games, they can use #collegefootball2023 to access numerous posts containing the hashtag, even without being connected to the individual posters.

This functionality can be hugely advantageous for brands to expand their influence and reach across diverse social media users. Brands have quickly recognized hashtags' potential in their marketing endeavors. The use of hashtags in the branded posts can signal consumers to encourage to share the advertisements on social media (Stathopoulou et al., 2017). They regularly incorporate hashtags into their posts to broaden their audience, engage with potential customers, and stimulate electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Shin et al., 2018; Kim & Phua, 2020). In the context of promotions of fast-fashion brands, Shin et al. (2018) found that ads with hashtags were evaluated more positively in terms of informativeness, enjoyment, and interactivity compared to ads without hashtags. Also, these increased aspects led to a more favorable attitude toward ads and eWOM.

Social media hashtags serve as bridges to specific topics, making it effortless for users to locate content that aligns with their interests (Fox et al., 2015). Consequently, when brands and influencers aim to promote their products, including relevant hashtags in their posts can significantly boost their visibility. However, including hashtags does not automatically lead to positive advertising outcomes; poorly crafted hashtags might not be as effective in eliciting positive advertising outcomes. Hashtags need to be strategic in terms of which ones to use and how many to use. To create effective hashtags that increase brand and product awareness, it is usually recommended to keep them short, easy to remember, and understandable. Also, it is imperative to ensure that the hashtags being used are relevant to the posts and to include hashtags that are unique to the brand (Knapp & Baum, 2015). Additionally, when it comes to including hashtags, the number of hashtags matters (Macready, 2022). Instagram recommends using only 3-5 hashtags per post because using too many hashtags can hurt the reach of the post (Instagram,

2021; Macready, 2022). Previous research has explored the inclusion of hashtags (Shin et al., 2018) and types of hashtags (Kim et al., 2019; Kim & Phua, 2020). However, few empirical studies have been conducted to investigate the effect of the number of hashtags (few vs. many) on advertising effectiveness in the context of influencer marketing. The first experiment in this research will examine social media influencer tactics involving narrative persuasion and the number of hashtags, and their impacts on eco-labeled product evaluations.

### *Social Commerce*

In addition to hashtags, influencers employ a distinct marketing strategy known as social commerce, specifically designed to facilitate the buying and selling products or services on social media (Liang & Turban, 2011). Social commerce is a relatively new and emerging business model that leverages online social relationships and social networks within the social media environment for e-commerce activities and transactions (Laudon & Traver, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011). In its simplest terms, social commerce refers to buying and selling products or services directly through social media platforms. Worldwide, social commerce recorded an impressive revenue of about 728 billion U.S. dollars in 2022, and the growth is predicted to culminate in staggering revenues of about 6.2 trillion dollars by 2030 (Statista, 2022b).

Social commerce represents a unique merging of e-commerce and social media, offering consumers a seamless shopping experience directly within their social platforms. The emergence of social commerce is closely related to the development of e-commerce in the late 20th century and the subsequent rise of social media platforms (Wang & Zhang, 2012). While e-commerce serves as a broad term encompassing various online buying and selling methods via platforms

such as apps or websites, social commerce is a more specialized concept; it pertains to a specific type of e-commerce that transpires exclusively within social media platforms (Wang & Zhang, 2012). In this scenario, the entire shopping process, from product discovery to payment, unfolds seamlessly within these social media platforms. Thus, social commerce is an extremely attractive tool for both consumers and marketers. Consumers find it convenient and easy to shop within social media platforms without hassles, and marketers benefit from the fact that consumers are less likely to stop or abandon their shopping process due to its convenience (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2022).

Over the past few years, social media platforms based in the U.S., such as Instagram and Facebook, have integrated social commerce functions. For instance, Instagram offers its unique social commerce feature called 'Instagram Shopping.' To utilize Instagram's social commerce features, individuals or brands (sellers) need to create a business account where they can list their products for sale, and consumers can make purchases with just a few taps. The specific checkout process involves tapping on a photo or video, looking for a distinct icon indicating the product is available for purchase within the platform, tapping a product tag to view the product page, and then completing the purchase on Instagram. Moreover, Instagram Shopping offers the convenience of shipping and delivery notifications directly through the platform, along with reminders for product launches (Instagram, n.d.). This enhances the ease and convenience of the consumer's shopping journey.

As social media platforms (e.g., Instagram) began to integrate e-commerce functionalities, influencer marketing, which is considered to have opinion leadership on social media, can rise to be a prominent tool for the success of social commerce. Indeed, social media

commerce has been successful by partnering with social influencers to boost sales in China, showing that influencer marketing as an important element for social commerce success (McKinsey, 2022). According to recent studies (Kim & Chan-Olmsted, 2022), the effective deployment of influencers has the potential to amplify the success of social commerce by elevating social commerce intention because influencers are particularly skilled at engaging consumers and fostering their willingness to take part in social commerce activities. Due to its relatively recent emergence, research in the field of social commerce is still in its early stages. Therefore, investigating the synergy between influencer marketing and social commerce features, and their collective impact on advertising effectiveness in the context of eco-labeled products promises to provide a unique and nuanced perspective within the realm of influencer marketing in conjunction with eco-labeling.

The following chapter presents the hypotheses developed for two experimental studies. With narrative persuasion as the focal factor, the first experiment is designed to investigate the potential effects of narrative and another media-specific marketing tactic, namely hashtags, on advertising outcomes by examining the role of persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. The second experiment explores the same mechanisms while investigating the effects of narrative and social commerce on advertising outcomes.

## CHAPTER 3

### HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

This dissertation explores how narrative ads by influencers can bypass eco-label skepticism and its subsequent effects on advertising outcomes. Building on narrative effects, the research delves into other influencer marketing strategies that can impact the strength of narrative effects on eco-label skepticism and related advertising outcomes. By concentrating on narrative effects, this study investigates how marketing tactics specific to social media channels interact with narrative effects to influence less critical attitudes toward green labels and advertising outcomes, ultimately affecting informed decision-making. To achieve this, the first experiment examines the effects of narrative and hashtags on eco-label skepticism and advertising outcomes. The second experiment focuses on the effects of narrative and social commerce on the same outcome variables. This chapter revisits the concept of narrative persuasion in influencer marketing and its influence on persuasion knowledge and advertising outcomes. Additionally, it introduces two other influencer marketing tactics, namely hashtags and social commerce, which interact with narrative effects to influence persuasion knowledge and advertising outcomes. The following sections introduce hypotheses for this dissertation.

## **Experiment 1: The Effects of Narrative and Hashtags**

### *Narrative Ad and Its Impact on Persuasion Knowledge*

Social media influencers have adeptly harnessed the power of storytelling to influence their audiences while endorsing various brands and products. Personal stories have demonstrated substantial persuasive power, with research indicating their influence on attitudes and behaviors across various contexts (e.g., Shen et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2017; Kim, 2022). The structural elements of narratives, such as characters, settings, and chronological storytelling, contribute to the immersive experience and ease with which individuals engage with a narrative (e.g., Escalas, 2004a). In general, narrative ads tend to be more effective in persuasion than non-narrative ads (e.g., Kim et al., 2017). In the current study, building upon the discussion on narrative persuasion in the previous chapter, narrative advertising is characterized by a storytelling message format that communicates personal experiences associated with product attributes or uses. In contrast, non-narrative advertising directly conveys information to the audience regarding product attributes or uses through argumentation and factual details. Essentially, narrative ads feature an influencer's personal experience, employing core structural elements of narratives such as characters, events linked to product usage, chronology (i.e., the sequence of events), and causality (i.e., the outcomes of product use) (Kim et al., 2017). On the other hand, non-narrative ads primarily emphasize factual information and arguments related to product use, lacking the structural elements found in narratives. Commonly referred to as informational advertising or argument advertising (Chang, 2009), non-narrative ads focus on conveying objective utility rather than personal experiences.

Influencer marketing can benefit from using narratives in their branded messages. Because people feel they can relate to influencers, compared to traditional celebrity endorsers (Djafarova & Rushworth 2017), narrative messaging could be an effective strategy in influencer marketing. Furthermore, the setting of influencer marketing, where branded posts seamlessly integrate with personal and organic content, has the potential to amplify the persuasive influence of narratives. Also, consumers are more receptive to narrative messages than direct persuasive appeals (Moyer-Guse et al., 2012), they are less likely to perceive a story as a direct persuasive attempt, possibly reducing activation of persuasion knowledge (Dal Cin et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2021). In contrast to the sales-oriented nature of most social media ads and branded posts, which tend to bolster ad recognition, narrative ads tend to be more effective due to their subtle and less assertive approach (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). In influencer marketing, scholars have acknowledged the compelling nature of narratives, specifically personal stories. For example, Kim (2022) discovered that patient influencer's illness disclosure in branded posts, which featured a personal story, resulted in reduced attitudinal persuasion knowledge due to heightened transportation into the message and enhanced parasocial interaction with the influencer. Furthermore, Kim et al. (2021) observed that a narrative (versus non-narrative) style influencer introduction led to more positive message attitudes, less persuasion knowledge, and more favorable corporate reputation. In addition, Kim and associates (2021) also found that the mediating role of persuasion knowledge between narrative (versus non-narrative) introduction on message attitudes and corporate reputation. In other words, a narrative style introduction resulted in a more positive attitude toward the message and a higher perception of corporate reputation, achieved by reducing persuasion knowledge.

Taken together, influencer ads with narrative form are likely to engender less persuasion knowledge. According to the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM; Friestad & Wright, 1994), persuasion knowledge is the collective understanding that individuals possess, developed over their lifetime. This knowledge empowers consumers to recognize, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and remember persuasive efforts, enabling them to choose and employ coping strategies they believe to be effective and suitable (Friestad & Wright, 1994, p. 3). The PKM has garnered substantial scholarly attention in the field of advertising and marketing due to its theoretical capacity to elucidate how consumers perceive and comprehend persuasion attempts, as well as how they respond to various persuasive strategies (Ham et al., 2015). Despite its widespread use, there is no universally accepted consensus on the definition or operationalizations of the concept of persuasion knowledge (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012). Indeed, previous research measures persuasion knowledge in a various way, including measuring persuasion knowledge as ad recognition, understanding of persuasive intent, and ad skepticism, respectively (Rozendaal et al., 2010; Lawlor & Prothero, 2008; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). Rozendaal et al. (2010) underscored the significance of incorporating both recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent within the framework of persuasion knowledge. They contended that these competences, encompassing the ability to distinguish advertising from editorial content and understand advertising's intent, are the “two most basic and first-developed advertising competences” (p. 79). Extending this insight, the cognitive dimension of persuasion knowledge, referred to as conceptual persuasion knowledge, comprises two interrelated components: recognition of advertising and understanding of its persuasive intent (Rozendaal et al., 2011; Kunkel, 2010; Boerman et al., 2012).

Prior research, exemplified by the inclusion of a single item for ad recognition in measuring persuasion knowledge (e.g., Lim et al., 2021), often treated recognition of advertising as a standalone construct. This approach is limited in capturing the conceptual persuasion knowledge, originally proposed by Friestad and Wright (1994). PKM originally enables consumers not only to recognize persuasion attempts but also to interpret, evaluate, and finally devise coping tactics against these attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The multi-dimensional nature of PKM, as emphasized by Ham et al. (2015), encompasses a spectrum of cognitive processes. Measuring this intricate and multifaceted nature of PKM solely through a single construct of recognition of advertising significantly obscures its nuanced dimensions. This one-dimensional approach hinders a comprehensive understanding of the concept of PKM, overlooking the intricacies involved in consumers' cognitive responses to persuasive stimuli.

Furthermore, Boerman et al. (2017) advocated for a sequential perspective, asserting that recognition of advertising serves as the initial step in developing persuasion knowledge, followed by understanding of persuasive intent, which together constitute conceptual persuasion knowledge. Given the original model of PKM and its multidimensional aspects, the current study contends that maintaining a clear distinction between recognition and understanding is paramount. Recognizing advertising, as the first step, establishes a baseline competence, while understanding persuasive intent represents a more advanced and nuanced level of conceptual persuasion knowledge. By keeping these components separate, this research aims to unravel the nuanced dynamics of consumers' cognitive responses to advertising. By disentangling the recognition and understanding of persuasive intent as distinct components within the framework of conceptual persuasion knowledge, this study aims to capture the richness and complexity of

consumers' cognitive processes when confronted with advertising stimuli, ensuring a more thorough and comprehensive nature of PKM. To give a more comprehensive understanding of the conceptual persuasion knowledge, in this study, conceptual persuasion knowledge is operationalized as consumers' recognition of advertising and understanding of advertising's persuasive intent. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Influencer ads with narrative style (i.e., narrative ads) will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent), compared to influencer ads with non-narrative style (i.e., non-narrative ads).

### *The Effects of Hashtags on Persuasion Knowledge*

Another aim of the current study is to explore the technical features of social media. While the primary focus of this study is on the impact of narrative (vs. non-narrative) messaging and its potential to mislead consumers in processing eco-labeled products, it is important to consider other influencer tactics. Influencer marketing relies on the simultaneous use of multiple tactics, making them equally significant for examination. Among other influencer marketing tactics that affect product evaluation, hashtags are an innovative way to increase searchability and visibility (Kostygina et al., 2021). Hashtags, denoted by the "#" symbol, are voluntarily chosen keywords employed to tag, sort, and give context to social media posts (Kowald et al., 2017). Hashtags offer the advantage of tracking and searching for topics of interest beyond one's network connection (Kowald et al., 2017). For example, suppose someone wishes to learn more about recent college football games. In that case, they can use #collegefootball2023 to access

numerous posts containing the hashtag, even without being connected to the individual posters. This functionality can be hugely advantageous for brands to leverage in order to enhance their connections and reach with individual social media users. Brands frequently use hashtags to reach more people, engage with them, and generate electronic word of mouth (eWOM) (Kim & Phua, 2020). Social media hashtags establish topical links and make it easier for users to find posts of interest (Fox et al., 2015). Thus, if brands and influencers want to publicize their products, a post with relevant hashtags will likely achieve higher exposure. Hashtags have been widely used across various social media platforms, such as Instagram and Facebook, since their introduction by Twitter in 2007. Influencers are highly involved in using and disseminating hashtags because of their efficiency in reaching and exposing users who are interested in their posts.

Some branded posts by influencers feature a relatively long string of hashtags, while others contain relatively few hashtags if any. When considering the function and potential for extended reach and exposure through hashtags, it is advantageous for content creators to incorporate a variety of relevant hashtags associated with their posts. This strategy holds the potential to capture a wider audience than the use of a limited number of hashtags alone. However, many branded posts have adopted a strategic approach to their hashtag usage (Kim & Phua, 2020). For instance, on Instagram, some brands prefer to restrict their posts to just one or two hashtags (Gotter, 2023). While Instagram's policy permits up to 30 hashtags in a single post, the platform advises users to maintain the number of hashtags between 3-5. Using an excessive number of hashtags, such as 10-20, is unlikely to yield additional distribution benefits (Instagram, 2021). Moreover, a report reveals that Instagram posts containing 2-4 hashtags

achieve an average engagement rate of 3.41%, the highest engagement rate among the posts analyzed at that time (Statista, 2022a). Thus, this suggests that using a small or modest number of well-chosen hashtags, typically ranging from 2 to 5, can result in enhanced user engagement. Furthermore, this recommendation aligns with the potential of longer lists of hashtags to activate and heighten persuasion knowledge. Persuasion knowledge encompasses individuals' general understanding of persuasion attempts and tactics (Friestad & Wright, 1994). As hashtags are widely recognized as marketing tools by both marketers and audiences, increasing the number of hashtags in a post can enhance its visibility (Hays et al., 2013), potentially heightening consumers' awareness of persuasive tactics. Park et al. (2016) suggested that posts containing 10 or more hashtags are often perceived as commercial in nature. The more hashtags that users encounter, the more likely they are to recognize the posts as having persuasive messages, purposefully designed to influence their behaviors. Thus, the use of hashtags should be carefully balanced between visibility and avoiding excessive hashtags. Also, it is argued that a greater number of hashtags can potentially decrease consumers' interest due to information overload (Sthapit, 2019). Information overload occurs when information exceeds the limited human processing capacity, decreasing consumers' decision efficiency (Jacoby et al., 1974). Consistent with this argument, too many hashtags in a single post can make it difficult for consumers to process the content while revealing a stronger persuasive intent. The abundance of hashtags can imply that the post is attempting to reach a broader audience for its persuasive purpose or intention. Furthermore, an excessive inclusion of hashtags may be perceived as annoying or misleading to the audience (LinkedIn, n.d.), potentially prompting a greater recognition of persuasive strategies. The recognition of overt attempts at persuasion can trigger consumers'

persuasion knowledge, making them more critical and discerning in their responses to such posts. Additionally, Celuch (2021) revealed that the length of hashtags had a negative impact on engagement rates. As hashtags grew longer, engagement rates tended to decline. Collectively, it is evident that both the number and length of hashtags included in social media influencer posts can significantly influence consumers' perceptions of persuasive tactics. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Influencer ads featuring a lower number of hashtags will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent), compared to influencer ads with a higher number of hashtags.

### *The Interaction Between Narrative and Hashtags*

Influencer posts appeal to users due to their content and media-specific features. In terms of content, influencers can create either personal stories or informational messages without a personal narrative. One of the key distinctions of influencer marketing is its ability to leverage social media-specific cues and tools to enhance the attractiveness and accessibility of branded posts. One of the most frequently used social media platform-specific tools is hashtags. Hashtags are widely incorporated into branded posts, advertising campaigns, and even social and political movements (Lin et al., 2013) because they enhance audience reach and engagement. Previous research has primarily examined the effects of narratives (i.e., content characteristics) on overall advertising outcomes (e.g., Kim et al., 2021) and the effects of hashtags (media-specific characteristics) (Kim & Phua, 2020) separately. As influencer marketing tactics have evolved, multiple tactics related to both content and tools are used to create more effective influencer

advertisements. Given this, this study explores the interplay between narrative and hashtags. The primary goal of this study is to understand if and how influencer marketing tactics can lead to the bypassing of critical thinking regarding eco-labeled products, with a focus on the persuasive power of narratives (related to message content, narrative vs. non-narrative). While the narrative component serves as a core tactic in influencer marketing, this study also considers using hashtags as a more social media-specific tactic frequently employed in influencer marketing. Specifically, this study examines how a narrative ad by an influencer interacts with the effects of hashtags (in higher versus lower numbers) to impact the level of persuasion knowledge.

In line with the persuasive power of narratives, influencer posts featuring only a few hashtags can effectively reduce the activation of persuasion knowledge that an extensive list of hashtags might otherwise trigger. The theoretical support for this argument stems from understanding how narrative messages and persuasion knowledge interact. Previous research indicates that narrative messages tend to limit persuasion knowledge activation (e.g., Kim et al., 2021). This is because when individuals become absorbed in a compelling narrative, their cognitive defenses are often lowered, making them less critical of the underlying persuasive intent. This alignment with narrative theory suggests that the storytelling aspect of influencer posts is already predisposed to reduce the audience's level of persuasion knowledge activation. However, the inclusion of hashtags, especially when in higher numbers, might influence the extent of persuasion knowledge activation.

In the case of a lower number of hashtags in influencer posts, we observe a distinct set of outcomes. Fewer hashtags indicate a concise and relevant selection, enhancing the authenticity and perceived integrity of the content. This authenticity is pivotal in strengthening

the impact of the narrative. With a narrative-driven approach, the audience becomes more immersed in the story, effectively lowering their guard against persuasive attempts. The narrative gains prominence and, as a result, triggers a more profound emotional response in the audience. Consumers are less likely to perceive such content as overtly commercial, reducing their tendency to activate persuasion knowledge. Instead, the audience is more receptive to the narrative, enabling a smoother engagement with the influencer's message. In essence, when hashtags are kept to a minimum, the narrative effects are amplified, while persuasion knowledge remains dormant.

On the other hand, when influencer posts are inundated with an excessive number of hashtags, a different set of dynamics comes into play. Excessive use of hashtags can increase overall persuasion knowledge as the audience becomes more aware of the promotional or persuasive intent behind the content. A high number of hashtags tends to draw more attention to the underlying marketing tactics. This heightened awareness of persuasive strategies triggers a sense of skepticism and critical thinking within the audience. With persuasion knowledge activated, individuals become more discerning and analytical, which can limit the effectiveness of the narrative. The narrative, although still present, now competes with the audience's raised skepticism. The audience is more likely to perceive the content as promotional and may resist the persuasive elements embedded in the narrative. This heightened persuasion knowledge can reduce the narrative's impact, creating a cognitive barrier to the intended message. In this case of a higher number of hashtags, the narrative becomes less prominent, while persuasion knowledge takes center stage in shaping the audience's response. Thus, the current study hypothesizes:

H3: Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge when the number of hashtags is lower. With a higher number of hashtags, the narrative effect on lowering conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent) will be attenuated.

### *Persuasion Knowledge and Eco-label Skepticism*

As discussed above, consumers tend to be more receptive to narrative stories, producing fewer counter-arguments or lower reactance (Green & Brock, 2002; Slater & Rouner, 2002). On the other hand, in non-narrative advertising, viewers may have more room to engage in critical examination since the content lacks the engaging elements of a narrative. It allows for a different mode of engagement, with viewers potentially paying closer attention to explicit selling appeals when they choose to scrutinize the message. This is in contrast to narrative ads, where the story may engage viewers differently. Exposed to non-narrative messages, consumers might more easily feel that the influencer's intent is to sell the product. According to the persuasion knowledge model, once they detect persuasive attempts, consumers generate defensive responses to those attempts (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

Previous findings about persuasion knowledge indicate that its activation can generate doubt about hidden marketing intentions and foster skepticism toward advertising claims (e.g., Hibbert et al. 2007; Wei et al., 2008). When people have their persuasion knowledge activated, they are more likely to process message content in a critical or analytical way (e.g., Wentzel et al., 2010). This heightened cognition produces coping mechanisms,

potentially leading to skepticism and negative attitudes (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The connection between the activation of persuasion knowledge and skepticism has been widely acknowledged and well-received (e.g., Russell et al., 2019). In other words, individuals with higher persuasion knowledge tend to be skeptical of persuasive communication and resistant to persuasive messages. Relevant to this argument, if consumers experience a higher level of persuasion knowledge activation after being exposed to an influencer's post about an eco-labeled product, they might scrutinize the truthfulness of the message, leading to more skeptical attitudes toward the messages.

While some studies in green label research explore and measure various characteristics of eco-labels and their persuasive impacts on consumer behavior (e.g., Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014), previous research on labels, especially eco-friendly labels, has suggested that placing an eco-friendly label on products can create a cognitive bias. This cognitive bias, often called the 'halo effect,' occurs when a single attribution, in this case, the eco-label, influences overall product quality evaluations and subsequent behavioral intentions (Amos et al., 2019; Lee et al., 2013). However, these studies often do not consider the media environment in which eco-label processing and perceptions are formed, which may have an influence on various attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. While extensive research has explored eco-labels and their persuasive impacts on consumer behavior, a notable gap exists in examining the implications of eco-labels within the contemporary media and marketing environment, especially concerning the younger generation. The social media context is highly relevant, especially when considering the segment of eco-friendly product consumers, primarily younger generations, who are active users of social media. Influencer marketing, in particular, with its widespread popularity and

employment of powerful tactics, presents a unique context that warrants a critical examination from the consumer's decision-making perspective. Therefore, the current study focuses on exploring how consumers perceive eco-labels when encountering them on social media, particularly within branded posts by influencers.

Given the proliferation of green labels by private businesses and the issues of trust and authenticity associated with these labels, which can potentially confuse eco-friendly consumers rather than aiding their purchase decisions (Ihemezie et al., 2018), it is imperative to investigate the extent to which consumers can scrutinize the validity of green labels when exposed to influencers' branded posts. These posts are likely to make consumers bypass the critical evaluation of the label, which is often generic and lacks substantial information regarding its validity. In this study, eco-label skepticism is defined as a meaningful counter-argument to label information. In the context of eco-labeled product endorsement, the validity and veracity of an eco-label could be the target of critical examination. Based on this argument, activation of persuasion knowledge should positively relate to eco-label skepticism. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4: Conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent) will be positively associated with eco-label skepticism.

In research about green labels and sustainability, scholars define sustainability skepticism as the inclination to doubt and scrutinize information about the sustainability of a product (e.g., Cho et al., 2018). While many of the findings in this area address general skepticism toward green or sustainable products (e.g., Do Paço & Reis, 2016; Nyilasy et al., 2014), the current

study aims to examine consumer skepticism of the eco-label itself. As discussed earlier, many green-related labels exist, and people generally do not have sufficient information about eco-label claim validity or what differently framed labels stand for due to vagueness in label content and loose regulation. Previous findings suggest that skepticism, or the act of thinking critically and questioning claims presented in advertising, is a crucial element in determining the effectiveness of advertising (e.g., Joireman et al., 2018; Chang & Cheng, 2015). This indicates that skepticism directly or indirectly influences advertising effectiveness and product evaluation (e.g., Obermiller et al., 2005; Joireman et al., 2018). This skepticism, in turn, can compromise persuasion effects, as indicated by less favorable attitudes toward brands and products (e.g., Campbell, 1995). Moreover, skepticism toward the brand or product is more likely to damage product evaluation (Obermiller et al., 2005). Therefore, eco-label skepticism is likely to lower perceived product quality. Based on previous findings, skepticism toward eco-labels should have a negative impact on perceived product quality and, therefore, advertising effectiveness (i.e., attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention). Thus, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H5: Eco-label skepticism will be negatively associated with (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention.

One of the significant benefits of an influencer's narrative is to reduce the prominence of the selling intent (Kim et al., 2021). However, the effectiveness of this subtle message impact achieved through storytelling may be diminished when the post contains certain features that activate persuasion knowledge. Therefore, the present study proposes that the impact of narrative on advertising effectiveness and product evaluation is more likely to be prominent when only a

few hashtags are presented. However, this effect is expected to be attenuated when the post includes a high number of hashtags, as this is more likely to trigger the activation of persuasion knowledge. Furthermore, the current study explores the mechanism under which the narrative effects would be more or less persuasive when combined with the hashtag feature. The present study posits that influencer's narrative advertising will have a positive impact on advertising effectiveness and product quality through a decrease in persuasion knowledge, and this effect will be more salient with a lower number of hashtags. Additionally, given that persuasion knowledge can be associated with skeptical thinking of eco-labels, the present study proposes that the indirect impacts of narratives on advertising-related outcomes will be mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism in a serial manner.

H6: The indirect positive effect of narrative ads on (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention through decreased conceptual PK and eco-label skepticism will more likely occur when the number of hashtags is lower than when the number of hashtags is higher.

## **Study 2: The Effects of Narrative and Social Commerce**

The main goal of Study 2 is to replicate the narrative effects on advertising outcomes through conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism when narratives are combined with another social media-related tactic that influencers can employ to enhance their promotional outcomes, in addition to hashtags. Study 2 incorporated relatively recent and more interactive commerce features specific to social media, known as social commerce.

### *Social Commerce and Persuasion Knowledge*

In addition to hashtags, influencers employ a distinct marketing strategy known as social commerce, specifically designed to facilitate the buying and selling products or services on social media (Liang & Turban, 2011). Social commerce is a relatively new and emerging business model that leverages online social relationships and social networks within the social media environment for e-commerce activities and transactions (Laudon & Traver, 2016; Liang & Turban, 2011). In its simplest terms, social commerce refers to the practice of buying and selling products or services directly through social media platforms. According to a recent report by McKinsey (2022), retail social commerce sales in the US are projected to reach nearly \$80 billion, and the global social commerce market is expected to surpass \$2 trillion by 2025.

Social commerce blends commercial activities, social media technologies, and community interactions (Hajli, 2015). Social media influencers can enhance their marketing efforts by embracing social commerce, as they are typically tech-savvy individuals engaged in commercial activities who continue to interact with their followers and other users. The burgeoning practice of social commerce is significantly facilitated by influencers garnering substantial attention from industry practitioners (Wang et al., 2021). The effectiveness of social commerce hinges on the ability to engage consumers actively (Zhang et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Social media influencers are well-suited for this role due to their significant influence on consumers as opinion leaders (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2017; Casaló et al., 2020). Many scholars have suggested that influencers and opinion leaders can directly influence consumers, shaping the outcomes of advertising efforts (e.g., Casaló et al., 2020; Farivar et al., 2021). Given the potential facilitating impact of influencers on social commerce success, brands have begun

partnering with them. For example, in China, which is currently one of the top markets for social commerce, brands achieved conversion rates of approximately 30% on social platforms by leveraging influencers (McKinsey, 2022). Given this reciprocal relationship between influencers and brands, the former are increasingly using social commerce features in their branded posts.

Influencers have skillfully incorporated social commerce attributes into their content, primarily using photos and videos. These features allow social media users to easily identify embedded brand or service information through interactions with commercial cues, often indicated by options like 'view product' or 'buy now' within visual content. This integration unmistakably signals the endorsement of products by influencers. Individuals are more likely to recognize whether content is advertising or non-commercial organic messages when there is a proper disclosure that enables users to identify the commercial nature of the messages (e.g., Wojdyski & Evans, 2016; De Jans et al., 2018).

Concerning social media influencers, studies suggest that sponsorship disclosure is likely to activate individuals' persuasion knowledge (Evans et al., 2017; De Jans et al., 2020). More specifically, Evans et al. (2017) indicates that more explicit disclosure language (i.e., "PaidAd") generated greater advertising recognition and disclosure memory than less explicit disclosure (i.e., "SP"). Research shows that effective advertising disclosure can enhance the identification of content as advertising, prompting consumers to activate their persuasion knowledge (Boerman et al., 2012; van Reijmersdal et al., 2015; Evans et al., 2017).

Based on these previous studies, it is expected that consumers, in general, can distinguish advertising from non-commercial editorial content when proper disclosure is given, thereby increasing their persuasion knowledge. This tendency can be more pronounced in the context of

influencer marketing with social commerce, as social commerce functions explicitly inform the audience that the content is to directly lead to sales. Influencer posts with social commerce features like 'view product' or verbal cues such as 'buy now on app,' which direct consumers to the shopping cart and checkout with a few taps, are likely to increase advertising recognition and boost persuasion knowledge.

Consequently, this study predicts that participants will recognize the content as advertising if the post includes social commerce features and verbal cues such as 'view product' and 'buy now on app,' and they will understand that these posts are intended for selling. As a result, social media users are more likely to discern the commercial nature of influencer posts, particularly in the presence of such commercial cues. Much like the extensive use of hashtags, social commerce attributes exert a direct influence on individuals' advertising recognition levels and enhance their comprehension of the promotional intent behind these posts. Therefore, this study hypothesizes that exposure to influencer ads containing social commerce features will lead to better recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent.

H7: Influencer ads without social commerce will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent), compared to influencer ads with social commerce.

The first fold of the current study's focus is to examine whether storytelling posts (vs. non-narrative) lead to a lower level of persuasion knowledge, resulting in less careful examination of eco-label information processing, as measured by eco-label skepticism, as in Study 1. Since influencers often use multiple tactics for their endorsement, Study 2 incorporated the social commerce factor as an additional influencer tactic and explored how narrative effects

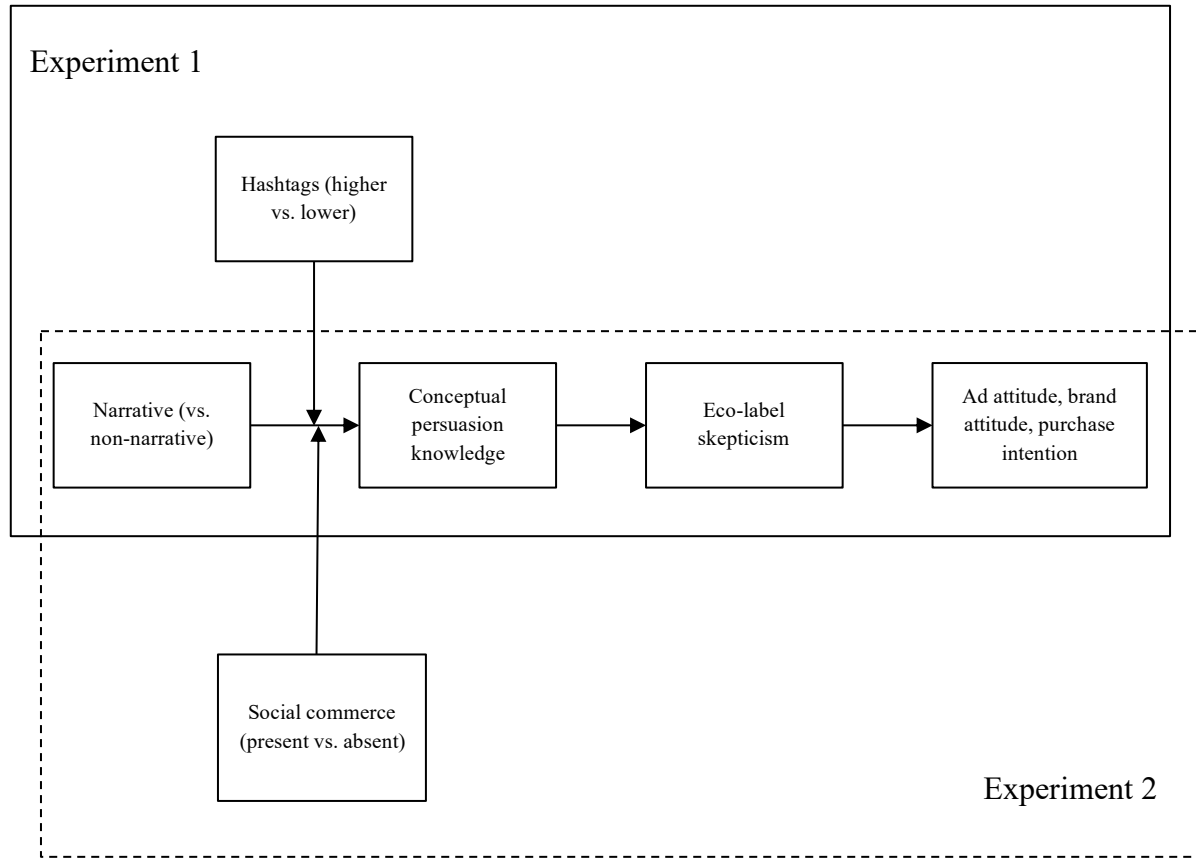
interact with social commerce features to influence persuasion knowledge, eco-label skepticism, and advertising outcomes. Similar to Study 1, the current study proposes that a narrative ad will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge due to narrative's effects on reducing persuasion knowledge (e.g., Kim et al., 2021) However, this effect will be more likely observed when influencer ads are presented without social commerce features. Narrative effects on the conceptual persuasion knowledge will be attenuated if influencer ads incorporate social commerce features in the posts, which is likely to increase ad recognition and the audience's understanding of the selling intent of the ads. Additionally, to replicate the results of Study 1, Study 2 also proposes the conditional narrative effects on advertising outcomes will be evident with the exclusion of social commerce features, mediated by reduced persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed.

H8: Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lower conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent) when influencer ads do not incorporate social commerce. When influencer ads incorporate social commerce, the narrative effect will be attenuated.

H9: The indirect positive effect of narrative ads on (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention through decreased conceptual PK and eco-label skepticism will more likely occur when influencer ads do not use social commerce (vs. use social commerce).

Figure 1

*Conceptual Model of Research*



## CHAPTER 4

### METHOD

This chapter provides an overview of two main experiments and the stimuli development for each experiment.

#### **Overview of Experiments**

This research examines the effectiveness of narrative ads as persuasive marketing tactics, specifically in their ability to influence consumers' attitudes towards green-labeled products and their decision-making processes. The research also explores the impact of various influencer marketing strategies specific to social media channels, including frequently used tactics like hashtags and more recent, interactive approaches such as social commerce.

Two main experiments were conducted to investigate (a) the effects of narrative ads on advertising outcomes and (b) the mechanisms through which narrative effects on advertising outcomes might be mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. Each experiment considered two different social media marketing tactics: hashtags and social commerce. Experiment 1 investigated the combined effects of narrative content and hashtags, while Experiment 2 explored how narrative content interacted with social commerce.

Experiment 1 examined the impact of ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and the number of hashtags (higher vs. lower) on advertising outcomes, considering the underlying

mechanisms of persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. This experiment employed a 2 (ad type: narrative vs. non-narrative) x 2 (number of hashtags: higher vs. lower) between-subjects online design. Persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism served as serial mediators that explained the effects of narrative content and hashtags on ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention.

Experiment 2 aimed to determine whether the indirect effects of narrative content on advertising outcomes through persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism persisted when narrative ads did not feature social commerce, as opposed to featuring social commerce. Similar to Experiment 1, Experiment 2 employed a 2 (ad type: narrative vs. non-narrative) x 2 (social commerce: present vs. absent) between-subjects online design. Persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism served as serial mediators, with the dependent variables being ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. To enhance internal validity, a fictitious brand (Nature Lab) was consistently employed to eliminate any potential confounding effects of brand familiarity across both experiments. Both experiments were administered using an online panel, Prolific. They followed similar procedures in which participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. Each condition included an influencer profile page and an advertisement post. The influencer profile remained the same across all conditions. At the same time, the advertising posts differed based on the manipulations of ad type and the number of hashtags (Experiment 1) or ad type and the presence of social commerce elements (Experiment 2).

## Stimuli Development

### *Pretest 1: Influencer and Product Category*

To ensure that the pre-existing attitudes of the influencers did not influence the hypothesized relationships, the current study carried out a pretest using six influencers who promote environmentally conscious and sustainable lifestyles. The six influencers were selected based on several online reports about green influencers (Thredup, 2019; Feedspot, 2023).

Another part of the pretest was designed to select the most appropriate product category relevant to consumers' consumption of eco-labeled products. Informed by previous research (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Amos et al., 2019), four product categories - food, hygiene, skin, and household cleaners - were selected because they were considered the primary products for which green labels would influence purchase decisions and where such labeling is prominent.

A total of 98 participants were recruited from Prolific. Participants ranged from 18 to 76 ( $M = 36.56$ ,  $SD = 13.34$ ). Females constituted 51% of the sample. The majority were non-Hispanic White (68.4%). Of the participants, 13.3% self-identified as Asian or Asian American, 9.2% as Black or African American, 4.1% as Hispanic or Latino, and 5% as belonging to more than one race. Participants were asked to answer questions gauging the likability of each influencer using four 7-point semantic differential scales (cold/warm, unlikable/likable, insincere/sincere, unfriendly/friendly). An additional component of the pretest asked participants to indicate their likelihood of buying each product category for which eco-labels would influence their purchase decisions. The likelihood of purchase was measured using a 7-point semantic differential scale anchored at unlikely = 1 and very likely = 7. Of the six influencers, the influencer who received the middle evaluation in terms of likability ( $M = 4.75$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ) was

chosen to be used in the main study. With respect to product category, the food product was selected as it was rated with the most positive evaluation on the likelihood of purchase ( $M = 5.22$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ).

### *Pretest 2: Narrative (ad type) Manipulation*

Based on the results of Pretest 1, the current study created four different social media branded content promoting an eco-labeled food product (granola bar) endorsed by the influencer. A fictitious brand name (i.e., Nature Lab) was used to avoid potential or possible bias due to brand familiarity. The primary aim of Experiment 1 was to examine the relative power of narrative (versus non-narrative) ads on eco-label perceptions and subsequent ad-related evaluations. Thus, two different types of messages (i.e., narrative, non-narrative) were created, following prior research incorporating narrative components into the message (Kim et al., 2017; Chang, 2009). According to previous research, a narrative ad refers to an ad that conveys a message through storytelling or a story-like structure (Escalas, 1998). In essence, a narrative consists of essential elements (such as characters, goals, and consequences) that revolve around a specific sequence of events (chronology) and the relationship between different aspects of the story, which clarifies why events take place (causality) (Escalas, 1998; Kim et al., 2017). In the advertising literature, while a narrative ad is associated with product consumption, encompassing the experiences or outcomes of using the product, a non-narrative ad features with no characters or plots, communicating via arguments, factual information, or logical explanations (Wells, 1989; Chang, 2009; Kim et al., 2017).

Guided by these previous studies, a narrative ad is operationalized to convey personal stories of experiences about product usage, incorporating narrative elements such as characters (those who use the product), plot (a personal story related to product use and the reasons for using the product), and time shifts in the ad (showing changes before and after product use). On the other hand, a non-narrative ad conveys its messages primarily through objective facts and arguments about the product or product use without including narrative structural elements. Based on these definitions, influencer ads were created in both narrative and non-narrative styles, respectively. The main idea of the two types of ads was to suggest that a 100% natural granola bar could be a good option for a busy morning to provide essential nutrition and energy.

The narrative ad presented a story about how the influencer herself (Daisy) transformed her busy morning and skipped breakfast habits after trying a granola bar as her breakfast. In the ad, Daisy talked about her difficulty in finding the right nutrition bar for her breakfast due to the numerous options in the market, many of which contained high sugar and calories. The influencer discussed how she came across this particular granola bar and shared her thoughts on it after eating it for several months. Her story detailed how she discovered this granola bar and the changes she experienced before and after consuming it. Essentially, the narrative ad revolved around Daisy's story regarding the granola bar, the benefits this product provided her, and the transformation it brought about in her life. The non-narrative ad, despite having similar content, presented the message in a different manner. This type of ad emphasized the importance of choosing the right granola bar by highlighting the product's features and benefits without incorporating storytelling elements (no plots, characters, or time shifts). Instead, it primarily conveyed arguments and factual information. In the non-narrative ad, product attributes and

benefits such as good nutrition, freshness, 100% natural ingredients, and energy were highlighted and conveyed primarily through persuasive arguments and logical explanations. In short, the narrative ad featured an influencer sharing her story and experiences regarding the use of the product, which encompassed her initial issues, goals, and the results of using the product. The narrative ad aimed to immerse the audience in the influencer's story. Conversely, a non-narrative ad created by an influencer primarily presented factual information and arguments without incorporating any personal story involved. Both messages conveyed equivalent information, with the only distinction being the presence or absence of narrative elements. All other aspects, including appearance, format, and social media engagement metrics (such as the number of likes), remained consistent.

An additional pretest was conducted to see if this narrative manipulation would be perceived as intended. Ninety-five participants were recruited via Prolific. Participants were between 19 and 71 years old, with a mean age of 35.37 years ( $SD = 11.89$ ). Among the 95 participants, 65.3% were non-Hispanic Whites, 11.6% Black, 10.5% Asian, and 10.5% Hispanic, while 2.1% identified as belonging to more than one race. Participants were randomly assigned to either narrative ads or non-narrative ads. As expected, an independent samples  $t$ -test confirmed that participants assigned to the narrative ad ( $M = 4.92, SD = 1.13$ ) rated the message as more like a story than participants assigned to the non-narrative ad ( $M = 2.57, SD = 1.53$ ),  $t(93) = 8.55, p < .001$ . Following Chang (2009), additional independent samples  $t$ -tests were performed to check for any confounding effects due to message length differences in the conditions (i.e., 159 words for the narrative and 132 words for the non-narrative). Results revealed that there were no significant differences between the narrative ad and non-narrative ad

in terms of readability ( $M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.56$ ,  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = 1.37$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 5.53$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = 1.44$ ,  $t(93) = .47$ ,  $p = .64$ ) and comprehensibility ( $M_{\text{narrative}} = 6.08$ ;  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = .99$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 5.91$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = 1.08$ ,  $t(93) = .79$ ,  $p = .43$ ).

### *Pretest 3: Social Commerce*

Experiment 2 employed the same influencer, product, and brand used in Experiment 1. Additionally, the narrative (vs. non-narrative) components remained consistent. The key difference between Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 was the introduction of social commerce. In Experiment 1, a basic social media feature commonly used by influencers was utilized (i.e., hashtags). In contrast, Experiment 2 focused on aspects that enhance interactivity in influencer marketing (i.e., social commerce).

To harness the potential of social commerce features on Instagram, influencers created "Reels," which are short videos created by any Instagram user, characterized by their entertaining and fun nature (Instagram, 2023). They can be 15-90 seconds long, although the default duration is 15 seconds (Instagram, 2023). These Reels can feature multi-clip videos with audio, diverse visual effects, and creative tools such as text overlay, filters, and timers. What's especially compelling is that Reels are an attractive marketing tool for influencers due to their capacity to reach a broader audience (Instagram, 2023). Capitalizing on these advantages, influencers frequently employ Reels for social commerce. Furthermore, what makes Reels more appealing and vital for influencers as marketers is their ability to incorporate commerce features directly within the Reels. Specifically, influencers can tag sponsored products or brands within the Reels. Consumers can seamlessly purchase tagged products while watching the videos without leaving

the social media platform. Videos, known for their higher vividness and richness compared to pictures, directly impact consumers' attitudes (e.g., Ge et al., 2021), motivating influencers to create Reels with social commerce elements.

Guided by a recent version of Instagram Reels, two conditions featuring 20-second reels were created. In each condition, participants watched a sequence of three influencer images with a branded granola bar featuring an eco-label. It's important to note that these videos were for viewing, and participants could not click on any elements. The first set of reels included a social commerce function (i.e., “View product”) and a text overlay indicating that the product was available for purchase with a single click from the Reels (i.e., “Click view product” and “Buy Now”). The “View product” function enables consumers to view products by clicking on them within the Reels, allowing for direct purchases from the social media platform. The other condition excluded social commerce features without the “View product” function and no text overlay. Consumers were presented with product-related videos without specific social commerce features in this condition. Experiment 2 employed the same text for narrative manipulation as in Experiment 1. During a 20-second duration, narrative or non-narrative messages were included in each reel. Thus, four influencer Reels were created: narrative ads with social commerce features, narrative ads without social commerce features, non-narrative ads with social commerce features, and non-narrative ads without social commerce features. Prior to the main test, a pretest was conducted to ensure that narrative and social commerce manipulations were successfully implemented as intended. One hundred participants were recruited from Prolific. Participants' ages ranged from 18 to 74 ( $M = 40.55$ ,  $SD = 14.59$ ), with 61% being females. In terms of racial identity, the majority were non-Hispanic White (68%).

Most of the participants had at least one social media account, and approximately 82% of them were currently following an influencer on social media platforms. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four conditions: narrative with social commerce, narrative with no social commerce, non-narrative with social commerce, and non-narrative with no social commerce. To assess the manipulation of narrative and social commerce, two-way ANOVAs were performed. Results revealed that participants assigned to the narrative ad ( $M = 4.22$ ,  $SD = 1.39$ ) evaluated the message as more story-like than those assigned to the non-narrative ad ( $M = 2.70$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ),  $F(1, 96) = 29.04$ ,  $p < .001$ . As for social commerce manipulation, participants were asked if the reels they just watched had the social commerce feature that enables or facilitates users to make purchases over or within social media on a 7-point Likert scale item (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). As expected, participants in social commerce conditions ( $M = 5.40$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ) were more likely to perceive the presence of social commerce features than those exposed to no social commerce conditions ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 1.85$ ),  $F(1, 96) = 11.93$ ,  $p < .001$ . These two tests confirmed that participants perceived the intended differences in ad format (narrative vs. non-narrative) and the presence or absence of social commerce.

## CHAPTER 5

### EXPERIMENT 1: THE EFFECTS OF NARRATIVE AND HASHTAGS

Chapter 5 offers an overview of the examination of the research design, participants, procedure, methods, and the subsequent results stemming from assessing the proposed hypotheses. Experiment 1 delved into uncovering the indirect effects of narratives and hashtags on advertising outcomes by examining their impact on conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism.

#### **Research Design**

An online experiment with a 2 (ad type: narrative vs. non-narrative) x 2 (number of hashtags: high vs. low) between-subjects factorial design was used to test the proposed hypotheses. The participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. After being exposed to each condition, participants answered a series of questions about the influencer advertisement, followed by demographic questions.

#### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 420 participants were recruited from the Prolific, and each participant was compensated \$2. The collected data underwent screening to identify any instances of attention check question failures. The attention checks asked participants to select a specific response to

ensure they paid attention to the study. Throughout the survey, three additional items specifically required participants to choose a particular answer, regardless of the question's content. For instance, participants were instructed to select "strongly agree." Those who selected the incorrect answer for at least one of the three times were considered "inattentive" and were subsequently excluded from the final analysis. After excluding participants who failed to pass the attention checks ( $n = 19$ ), the final sample had a size of  $N = 401$ . An a priori power analysis was conducted to determine the sample size necessary for detecting a medium effect size ( $f^2 = .15$ ) at an alpha of .05 and a power of .80 (Faul et al., 2007). The analysis revealed that a sample size 92 was needed, demonstrating that the current sample size was well beyond the required threshold. Participants' age ranged from 18 to 83 ( $M = 39.09$ ,  $SD = 13.63$ ). Of these participants, 57.4% were female, and 75.6% were non-Hispanic White. About thirty-six percent had a college degree, 26.4% attended some college, 13.2% had a graduate or professional degree, 11.7% had a high school diploma, 11.2% had associates or technical degrees, and 1% attended some high school or less. Regarding household income, the most frequent response (i.e., mode) was between \$25,000 and \$ 49,999 ( $n = 107$ ). Descriptive statistics of the sample are provided in Table 1.

The participants took part in the study online. After agreeing to participate, they were directed to a page asking them to provide information about their age and social media usage. Next, they were shown an influencer profile promoting a green and eco-friendly lifestyle, which was located on the first page of an Instagram account. Following this, participants were randomly assigned to view one of four branded ads created by the same influencer endorsing an eco-labeled granola bar. Each ad featured a different type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and a

different number of hashtags (higher vs. lower). After viewing the ad, participants completed a questionnaire assessing their responses to the eco-label and its effectiveness. This assessment included measuring ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. The questionnaire also asked for demographic information, such as age, gender, education, and ethnicity. The study protocol was IRB-approved, and participants received monetary compensation for participation.

Table 1

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample for Experiment 1*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age, <i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i> *	39.09 ± 13.63	
Gender		
Female	230	57.4
Male	171	42.6
Ethnicity		
Caucasian/White	303	75.6
African American/Black	46	11.5
Latino/Hispanic	19	4.7
Asian American/Asian	17	4.2
Other (mixed)	12	3.0
American Indian or Alaska Native	3	0.7
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1	0.2
Education		
Bachelor's degree	146	36.4

Some college, but no degree	106	26.5
Graduate or professional degree	53	13.2
High school diploma or GED	47	11.7
Associates or technical degree	45	11.2
Some high school or less	4	1.0
Annual Income of Household		
Less than \$25,000	65	16.2
\$25,000 - \$49,999	107	26.7
\$50,000 - \$74,999	94	23.4
\$75,000 - \$99,999	67	16.7
\$100,000 - \$149,000	45	11.2
\$150,000 or more	20	5.0
Prefer not to say	3	0.7

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*Note.*  $N = 401$ . \* $SD$  = standard deviation.

## Measures

*Ad type: Narrative vs. Non-narrative.* To assess the success of the narrative manipulation, a five-item, 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) was employed to measure the degree to which participants perceived the influencer ad as more likely to be a story ( $M = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ;  $\alpha = .96$ ), using items from Kim et al. (2017).

*Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge.* Conceptual Persuasion knowledge was measured with two aspects: advertising recognition and understanding of persuasive intent. *Advertising recognition* was measured by asking participants to answer a single 7-point Likert scale item ( $M = 6.17$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ) (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to indicate the extent to which they believed the influencer video contained advertising (Boerman et al., 2012). Understanding of the persuasive intent was measured by asking participants' level of understanding of the advertisement's persuasive and selling intent with four 7-point Likert scale items ( $M = 6.04$ ,  $SD = .91$ ;  $\alpha = .84$ ) (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) adopted from Tutaj and van Reijmersdal (2012) and Rozendaal et al. (2010).

*Eco-label skepticism.* Eco-label skepticism is based on four 7-point Likert scale items ( $M = 3.93$ ,  $SD = 1.23$ ;  $\alpha = .84$ ) adopted from Mohr et al. (1998).

*Ad attitude.* Ad attitude was measured by a 4-item seven-point semantic differential scale ( $M = 4.40$ ,  $SD = 1.60$ ;  $\alpha = .96$ ) based on Mackenzie and Lutz (1989).

*Brand attitude.* The measure of attitude toward the brand consisted of five 7-point semantic differential scales ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 1.42$ ;  $\alpha = .97$ ) from Schmuck et al. (2018).

*Purchase intention.* Purchase intention was measured using a 3-item seven-point semantic differential scale ( $M = 3.70$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ;  $\alpha = .98$ ) from Baek and Yoon (2017).

*Covariates.* Previous research suggests that the intensity of social media usage can influence consumers' attitudes and behavioral patterns (e.g., Stojanovic et al., 2018; Thourunroje, 2018). Also, pre-existing knowledge about label and environmental concerns can affect the consumers' processing of eco-related claims and advertising outcomes (e.g., Schmuck et al., 2018). Thus, social media usage intensity, green label knowledge, and pre-

existing environmental concerns were included in the study as covariates. All measurement items, along with their respective reliabilities for each construct, are reported in Table 2.

Table 2

*Measurement Items and Reliability*

Items	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )
<b>Ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) (Kim et al., 2017)</b>	$\alpha = .96$
This post tells a story.	
The post tells the main character in a story.	
The post tells how a series of events unfolded in a story format.	
The post tells when things happened in a story.	
The post tells why things happened in a story.	
<b>Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge (Tutaj &amp; van Reijmersdal, 2012; Rozendaal et al., 2010)</b>	$\alpha = .84$
The purpose of the post is to sell products or services.	
The purpose of the post is to stimulate the sales of products or services.	
The purpose of the post is to influence opinions.	
The purpose of the post is to make people like products or services.	
<b>Eco-label Skepticism (Mohr et al., 1998)</b>	$\alpha = .84$
The eco-friendly label on the product (i.e., 100% natural) that I saw in the post is true (Reserved)	
Eliminating exaggerated eco-friendly claims on package labels or in advertising would benefit consumers, as the 100% natural label on the product I just saw may be misleading.	
The eco-friendly label on the product I just saw in the post (i.e., 100% natural) is intended to mislead consumers rather than inform them.	
I do not believe the eco-friendly label on the product I just saw in the post (i.e., 100% natural) is accurate.	
<b>Ad Attitude (Mackenzie &amp; Lutz, 1989)</b>	$\alpha = .96$
I consider this ad to be:	
Bad - good	
Unpleasant - pleasant	
Unfavorable - favorable	

Unconvincing - convincing	
<b>Brand Attitude (Schmuck et al., 2018)</b>	$\alpha = .97$
I consider the advertised brand to be:	
Bad - good	
Unattractive - attractive	
Negative - positive	
Not likable - likable	
Not recommendable - recommendable	
<b>Purchase Intention (Baek &amp; Yoon, 2017)</b>	$\alpha = .98$
How likely is it that you would purchase this product?	
Very unlikely - very likely	
Definitely would not - definitely would	
Improbable - probable	
<b>Social Media Usage Intensity (Boer et al., 2020, 2021)</b>	$\alpha = .81$
How many times <i>per day</i> do you check social media?	
How many times <i>per day</i> do you 'like' messages, photos, or videos of others on social media?	
How many times <i>per day</i> do you respond to messages, photos, or videos via social media?	
How many times <i>per day</i> do you send a message, photo, or video via social media?	
<b>Environmental concerns (Schmuck et al., 2018)</b>	$\alpha = .88$
I am concerned about the environment.	
The condition of the environment affects the quality of my life.	
I am willing to make sacrifices to protect the environment.	

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## Results

### *Manipulation Checks*

Manipulation checks were conducted for ad type (i.e., narrative vs. non-narrative) and the number of hashtags. A two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to evaluate the successful manipulation of ad type. Results indicated that participants assigned to the narrative influencer ad ( $M = 5.24$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ) rated the influencer ad as more like a story than those

assigned to the non-narrative influencer ad ( $M = 3.10$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ),  $F(1, 394) = 292.01$ ,  $p < .001$ . Another two-way ANOVA was conducted with the number of hashtags scale as the dependent variable to check the effectiveness of the number of hashtags manipulation. The analysis revealed a significant main effect of the number of hashtags ( $F(1, 394) = 550.85$ ,  $p < .001$ ). As expected, participants exposed to the high number of hashtags perceived the ad to have more hashtags ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) than those exposed to the low number of hashtags ( $M = 2.88$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ). In short, manipulations for both message type and the number of hashtags were successful.

## **Hypotheses Testing**

### *Effects of Narrative and Hashtags on Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge*

To test H1-H3, a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to assess how narrative format and hashtags influence conceptual persuasion knowledge: recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent. In all analyses concerning conceptual persuasion knowledge, the current study separately reported its impact on the recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent, following the method used in previous studies (van Reijmersdal et al., 2017; van der Bend et al., 2023). The independent variables were ad format (narrative vs. non-narrative), and the number of hashtags (higher vs. lower), and the dependent variables were advertising recognition and understanding of persuasive intent. Social media usage intensity, eco-label knowledge, and environmental concerns were included as covariates.

H1 predicted that an influencer ad with a personal story (i.e., narrative) would lead to lower conceptual knowledge (i.e., recognition of advertising and the understanding of the persuasive intent) than a non-narrative influencer ad. Results of MANCOVA revealed a significant difference between narrative and non-narrative influencer ads,  $F(2, 393) = 6.56, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Further univariable analyses were conducted to examine the effects of ad type on advertising recognition and understanding of persuasive intent. Results indicated that participants in the narrative influencer ad ( $M = 5.98, SD = 1.17$ ) showed lower recognition of advertising than those in the non-narrative influencer ad ( $M = 6.35, SD = .93$ ),  $F(1, 394) = 13.14, p < .001$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ . Also, results showed that ad type significantly influenced understanding of persuasive intent,  $F(1, 394) = 5.51, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ . Participants in the narrative ad ( $M = 5.93, SD = .97$ ) reported lower understanding of persuasive intent than those in the non-narrative ad ( $M = 6.14, SD = .84$ ). Thus, H1 was supported.

H2 posited that an influencer ad with a low number of hashtags would lead to lower conceptual knowledge than a non-narrative ad. Results of the MANOVA indicated no significant difference between a lower and a higher number of hashtags,  $F(2, 393) = 1.72, p = .18$ . There were no significant differences between the ad with higher and lower number of hashtags in terms of recognition of advertising ( $F(1, 394) = 2.04, p = .15$ ) and understanding of persuasive intent ( $F(1, 394) = 3.32, p = .07$ ). Thus, H2 was not supported.

#### *Interaction Effects Between Narrative and Hashtags on Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge*

H3 posited interaction effects between ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and the number of hashtags (lower vs. higher) (see Table 3 for cell means and standard deviations for

Experiment 1). More specifically, narrative (vs. non-narrative) ads were expected to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge when influencers' ads feature a lower number of hashtags. Also, the hypothesis predicted that the narrative effect on lowering conceptual persuasion knowledge would be attenuated when influencers' ads featured a higher number of hashtags. From the results of the two-way MANCOVA, a significant interaction of ad type and the number of hashtags was found,  $F(2, 393) = 3.12, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .02$  (see Figure 2). Given the significant main effects of MANCOVA, further univariate analyses were conducted to examine the effects of ad type and hashtags on advertising recognition and understanding of persuasive intent. The results of two-way ANOVAs revealed a significant interaction between ad type and the number of hashtags for understanding of persuasive intent ( $F(1, 394) = 4.77, p < .05$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .01$ ), but not for advertising recognition ( $F(1, 394) = .17, p = .68$ ). A simple effects analysis showed that narrative ads ( $M = 5.76, SD = 1.05$ ) had lower understanding of persuasive intent when the ads had a low number of hashtags than non-narrative ads ( $M = 6.14, SD = .89; F(1, 394) = 10.21, p < .01$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .03$ ). When the ads had a high number of hashtags, no difference in ad type (i.e., narrative vs. non-narrative) was detected,  $F(1, 394) = .01, p = .91$ . Thus, H3b was supported, while H3a was not supported (see Figure 2).

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for Experiment 1 (Cell Means and Standard Deviations)*

Ad Type	Number of Hashtags	Recognition of advertising	Understanding of persuasive intent	Eco-label Skepticism	Ad Attitude	Brand Attitude	Purchase Intention
		<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Narrative	High ( <i>n</i> = 99)	6.09 (1.03)	6.11 (.85)	3.96 (1.30)	4.24 (1.67)	4.56 (1.48)	3.46 (1.94)
	low ( <i>n</i> = 98)	5.87 (1.30)	5.76 (1.05)	3.96 (1.13)	4.42 (1.50)	4.61 (1.32)	3.65 (1.92)
Non-narrative	High ( <i>n</i> = 102)	6.43 (.74)	6.13 (.78)	3.93 (1.19)	4.35 (1.59)	4.68 (1.49)	3.79 (1.94)
	Low ( <i>n</i> = 102)	6.27 (1.09)	6.14 (.89)	3.88 (1.30)	4.60 (1.61)	4.95 (1.38)	3.91 (1.95)

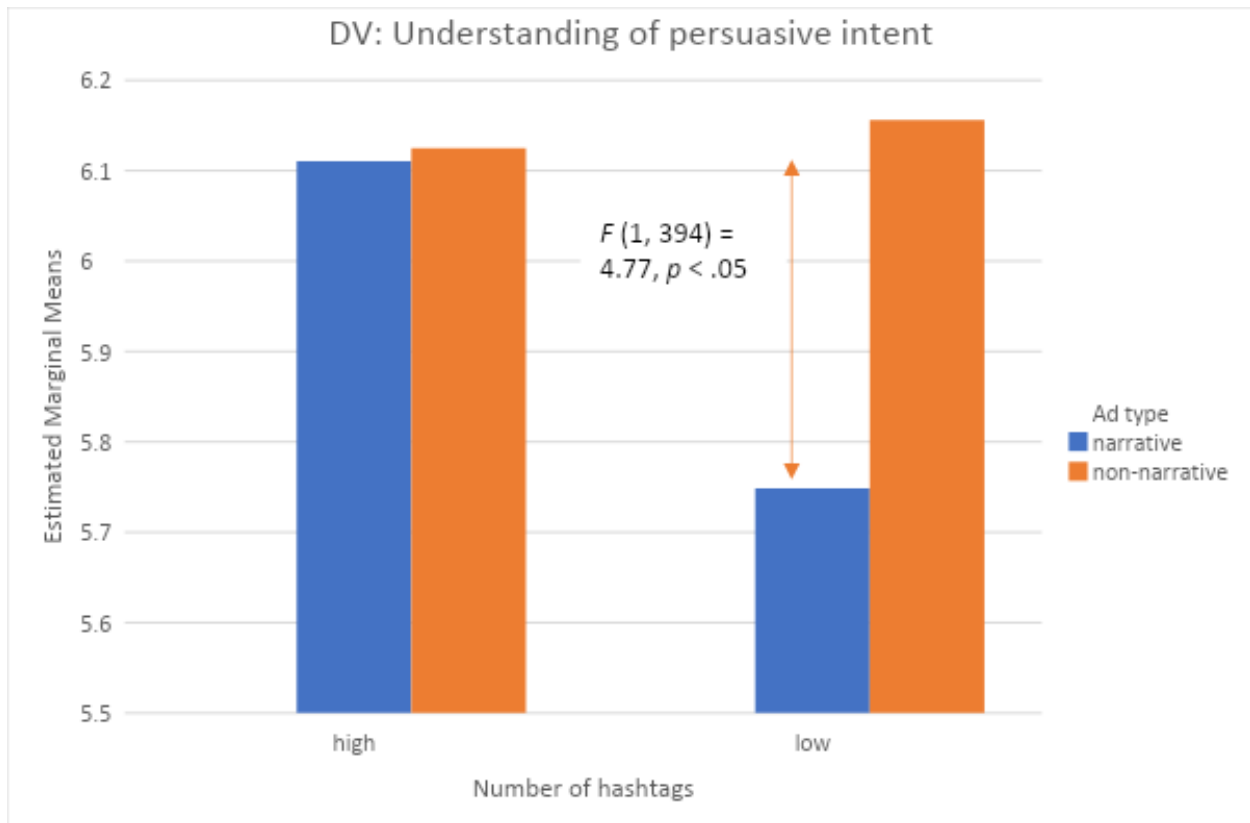
Table 4

*Multivariate and Univariate F-Values of Experiment 1*

Source of Variation	MANCOVA	Recognition of Advertising	Understanding of Persuasive Intent
Ad Type (A)	6.56**	13.14***	5.51*
Hashtags (H)	1.72	2.04	3.32
A X H	3.12*	.17	4.77*
Media intensity	1.48	2.96	1.16
EC	2.21	1.55	.30
Label Knowledge	2.64	.55	1.52

Figure 2

*Interaction Between Ad Type and Hashtags on Understanding of Persuasive Intent*



*The Effects of Moderated Serial Mediations on Advertising Outcome*

The moderated serial mediation analysis using model 83 of Hayes' Process Macro for SPSS (v.4.2) with 5,000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected 95% confidential intervals (CIs) was used to test H4-H6 (Hayes, 2018). Dummy-coded ad type (1 = narrative, 0 = non-narrative) was entered as an independent variable (X), and ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention as dependent variables (Y). Conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism served as serial mediators. The number of hashtags was dummy-coded (1 = high number of hashtags, 0 = low number of hashtags) and used as a moderator (W). H4 predicted a

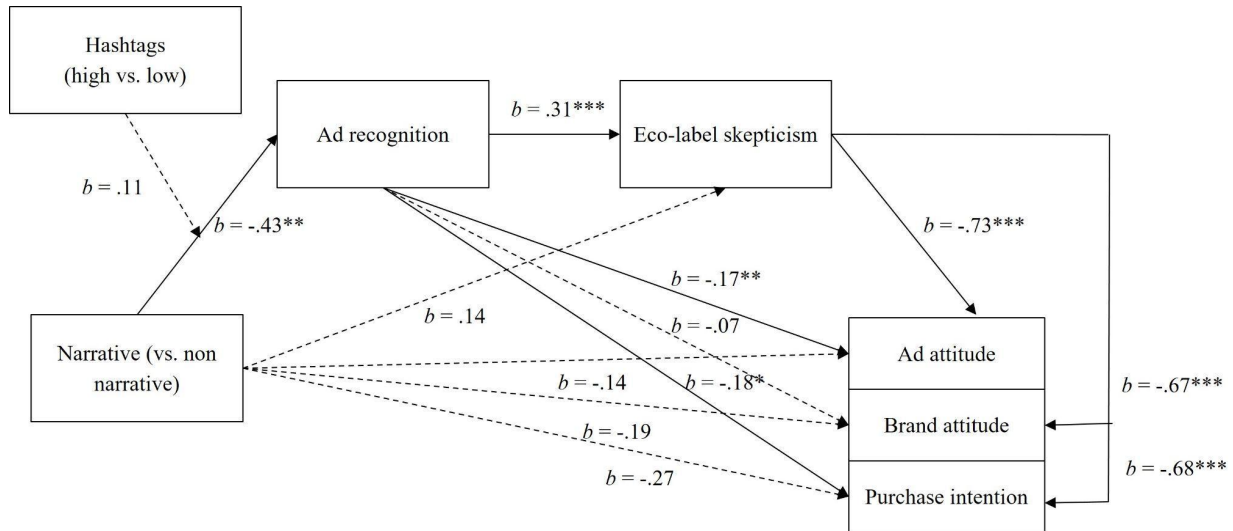
positive relationship between conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., recognition of advertising, understanding of persuasive intent) and eco-label skepticism. The results revealed that conceptual persuasion knowledge was positively associated with eco-label skepticism (advertising recognition:  $b = .31$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = 5.77$ ,  $p < .001$ ; understanding of persuasive intent:  $b = .37$ ,  $SE = .06$ ,  $t = 5.88$ ,  $p < .001$ ), supporting H4. Also, consistent with the prediction, eco-label skepticism was negatively associated with (a) ad attitude,  $b = -.73$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = -13.78$ ,  $p < .001$  (b) brand attitude,  $b = -.67$ ,  $SE = .05$ ,  $t = -13.74$ ,  $p < .001$  and (c) purchase intention,  $b = -.68$ ,  $SE = .07$ ,  $t = -9.43$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, H5 was supported.

H6 predicted that the positive effect of the narrative influencer ad on the dependent variables would be more likely to occur when the number of hashtags is limited than when the number is higher through reduced conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. When the first mediator was recognition of advertising, the overall moderated mediation index was not significant for attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $-.02$ , 95% CI  $[-.1240, .0676]$ ), brand attitude (index of moderated mediation  $-.02$ , 95% CI  $[-.1152, .0603]$ ), and purchase intention (index of moderated mediation:  $-.02$ , 95% CI  $[-.1180, .0666]$ ). However, when the first mediator was understanding of persuasive intent, the results indicated the overall moderated mediation index was significant for ad attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $-.11$ , 95% CI  $[-.2370, -.0114]$ ), brand attitude (index of moderated mediation  $-.10$ , 95% CI  $[-.2109, -.0093]$ ), and purchase intention (index of moderated mediation:  $-.10$ , 95% CI  $[-.2065, -.0096]$ ). The indirect effect of the narrative ad on each dependent variable through understanding of persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism was significant when the ad featured a lower number of hashtags (indirect effect  $_{ad\ attitude} = .11$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI  $[.0321, .2158]$ ; indirect effect  $_{brand\ attitude} = .10$ ,  $SE$

= .04, 95% CI [ .0278, .2003]; indirect effect  $\text{purchase intention} = .10$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI [ .0291, .1949]). On the other hand, the indirect effect was insignificant when the number of hashtags was higher (indirect effect  $\text{ad attitude} = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [ -.0601, .0717]; indirect effect  $\text{brand attitude} = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [ -.0533, .0646]; indirect effect  $\text{purchase intention} = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI [ -.0509, .0614]). Thus, H6 was partially supported (see Figure 3 & 4).

Figure 3

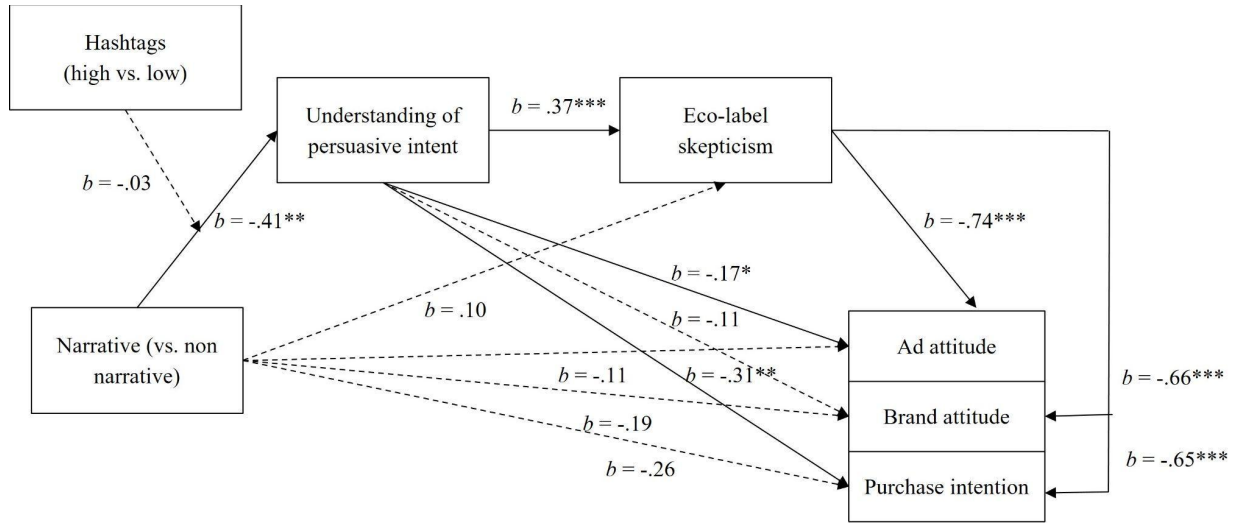
*Path Coefficients for Moderated Serial Mediation of Narrative Ad on Advertising Outcomes through Recognition of Advertising and Eco-Label Skepticism*



Note. All coefficients are unstandardized. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 4

*Path Coefficients for Moderated Serial Mediation of Narrative Ad on Advertising Outcomes through Understanding of Persuasive Intent and Eco-Label Skepticism*



**Conditional indirect effects of narrative on ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention**

**Low hashtags:** ad attitude ( $b = .11$ ,  $SE = .05$ , 95% CI = [.0321, .2158]), brand attitude ( $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI = [.0278, .2003]), purchase intention ( $b = .10$ ,  $SE = .04$ , 95% CI = [.0291, .1949])

**High hashtags:** ad attitude ( $b = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI = [-.0601, .0717]), brand attitude ( $b = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI = [-.0533, .0646]), and purchase intention ( $b = .004$ ,  $SE = .03$ , 95% CI = [-.0509, .0614])

*Note.* All coefficients are unstandardized. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

## CHAPTER 6

### EXPERIMENT 2: THE EFFECTS OF NARRATIVE AND SOCIAL COMMERCE

The main goal of Experiment 2 was to replicate the narrative effects on advertising outcomes by investigating the activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism when narratives are combined with marketing tactics (other than hashtags) that influencers use to enhance promotional outcomes. Experiment 2 incorporated more contemporary and interactive commerce features specific to social media (i.e., “social commerce”). The burgeoning practice of social commerce is significantly facilitated by influencers, who are garnering substantial attention from industry practitioners (Wang et al., 2021). The effectiveness of social commerce hinges on the ability to engage consumers actively (Zhang et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2021). Social media influencers are well-suited for this role due to their significant influence on consumers as opinion leaders (e.g., De Veirman et al., 2017; Casaló et al., 2020). Many scholars have suggested that influencers and opinion leaders can directly influence consumers, shaping the outcomes of advertising efforts (e.g., Casaló et al., 2020; Farivar et al., 2021).

Given the potential facilitating impact of influencers on social commerce success, brands have begun partnering with them. For example, in China, which is currently one of the top markets for social commerce, brands achieved conversion rates of approximately 30% on social platforms by leveraging influencers (McKinsey, 2022). Given this reciprocal relationship

between influencers and brands, the former increasingly use social commerce features in their branded posts. Building upon the findings of Experiment 1, Experiment 2 explored the impact of narratives and another promotional feature used by influencers. The objective Experiment 2 was to examine the interaction between narrative and social commerce within the same context in Experiment 1. Additionally, like Experiment 1, Experiment 2 explored the mechanism of the indirect effects of narrative on advertising outcomes. The objective was to investigate how the narrative effects on advertising outcomes, mediated by conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism, varied depending on the presence or absence of social commerce features. Chapter 6 introduces the research design, participants, procedure, and results for Experiment 2.

### **Research Design**

The second experiment was a 2 (ad type: narrative vs. non-narrative)  $\times$  2 (social commerce: present vs. absent) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions. After exposure to each condition, participants responded to a series of items about the influencer ad on social media, followed by demographic questions.

### **Participants and Procedure**

A total of 205 participants were recruited through Prolific. Monetary compensation (\$2) was provided to participants for their involvement in the study. During the survey, three extra items necessitated participants to choose a predetermined response, irrespective of the question's content. For example, participants were directed to choose "strongly disagree." Those who chose the wrong answer in at least one of these instances were classified as "inattentive" and

subsequently omitted from the final analysis. Those who failed to pass the attention checks ( $n = 3$ ) were excluded, making the final sample size 202. An a priori power analysis was performed using G\*Power 3.1 to estimate a sample size required for a medium effect size ( $f^2 = .15$ ) with an alpha of .05 and a power of .80 (Faul et al., 2007). The power analysis revealed a sample size of 92, suggesting that the current sample size was more than sufficient. The age ranged from 19 to 75 ( $M = 41.05$ ,  $SD = 14.46$ ). Among these participants, about 55.4% were female, and 74.3% identified as non-Hispanic Whites. About 30.7% held a Bachelor's degree (see Table 5 for the sample's descriptive statistics for Experiment 2).

After consenting to participate in the study, participants were initially directed to a page where they were asked to provide information about social media usage, eco-label knowledge, and pre-existing environmental concerns. Following this, participants were exposed to an influencer profile page where they could see the influencer promoting a green and eco-friendly product, as they had in Experiment 1. After this exposure, participants were randomly assigned to one of four conditions, all featuring the same influencer endorsing an eco-labeled granola bar. Each ad featured a different format (ad type: narrative vs. non-narrative) and a different feature (Social commerce: present vs. absent). Similar to Experiment 1, upon seeing the advertisement, participants also filled out a survey to gauge their reactions to the eco-label and the overall effectiveness of the ad. Additionally, participants were asked to provide demographic information.

Table 5

*Descriptive Statistics of the Sample for Experiment 2*

Variable	<i>n</i>	%
Age, <i>M</i> ± <i>SD</i> *	41.05 ± 14.46	
Gender		
Female	112	55.4
Male	86	42.6
Other	4	2.0
Ethnicity		
Caucasian/White	150	74.3
Latino/Hispanic	19	9.4
African American/Black	15	7.4
Asian American/Asian	12	5.9
Other (mixed)	4	2.0
American Indian or Alaska Native	2	1.0
Education		
Bachelor's degree	62	30.7
Some college, but no degree	51	25.2
High school diploma or GED	30	14.9
Graduate or professional degree	29	14.4
Associates or technical degree	27	13.4
Some high school or less	3	1.5

Annual Income of Household		
Less than \$25,000	38	18.8
\$25,000 - \$49,999	58	28.7
\$50,000 - \$74,999	38	18.8
\$75,000 - \$99,999	23	11.4
\$100,000 - \$149,000	22	10.9
\$150,000 or more	17	8.4
Prefer not to say	6	3.0

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*Note.*  $N = 202$ . \* $SD$  = standard deviation.

## Measures

The primary variables for Experiment 2 were identical to those in Experiment 1: conceptual persuasion knowledge, eco-label skepticism, ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. As in Experiment 1, conceptual persuasion knowledge was measured using two variables: advertising recognition (Boermen et al., 2012) and understanding of persuasive intent (Tutaj & van Reijmersdal, 2012; Rozendaal et al., 2010;  $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = .78$ ;  $\alpha = .72$ ). Eco-label skepticism was measured using Mohr et al. (1998) ( $M = 4.24$ ,  $SD = 1.08$ ;  $\alpha = .81$ ). Ad attitude (Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989;  $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ;  $\alpha = .95$ ), brand attitude (Schmuck et al., 2018;  $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ;  $\alpha = .96$ ), and purchase intention (Baek & Yoon, 2017;  $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.84$ ;  $\alpha = .97$ ) were measured to evaluate advertising-related outcomes. As in Experiment 1, social media usage intensity, eco-label knowledge, and environmental concerns were included as covariates.

## Results

### *Manipulation Checks*

Manipulation checks were conducted for ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and social commerce (present vs. absent). For these checks, two-way ANOVAs were performed for each variable, respectively. The results revealed that participants exposed to the narrative ad condition ( $M = 4.65$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ) perceived the influencer ad as more like a story than those in the non-narrative ad condition ( $M = 2.77$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 94.21$ ,  $p < .001$ . Participants assigned to the social commerce reels ( $M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) rated the influencer ad as enabling or facilitating users to buy over or within social media more than those assigned to the reels without social commerce features ( $M = 4.12$ ,  $SD = 1.81$ ),  $F(1, 198) = 60.28$ ,  $p < .001$ . Thus, both the ad type and social commerce manipulations were successful.

## Hypotheses Testing

### *Effects of Narrative and Social Commerce on Conceptual Persuasion Knowledge*

To test H7–H8, a two-way multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was performed to examine the effects of ad type and social commerce on recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent, respectively. The independent variables were ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and social commerce (present vs. absent), with the dependent variables being recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent. The covariates included social media usage intensity, environmental concerns, and eco-label knowledge. As in Experiment 1, all the analyses related to conceptual persuasion knowledge, this study followed the approach employed in previous research (van Reijmersdal et al., 2017; van der Bend et al.,

2023) by separately presenting its effects on the recognition of advertising and comprehension of persuasive intent.

H7 predicted that influencer ads without social commerce (vs. with social commerce) would lead to lower (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent. H8 posited that there would be an interaction between ad type and social commerce (see Table 6 for cell means and standard deviations for Experiment 2). Specifically, it postulated that when influencer ads do not incorporate social commerce features, influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style would result in lower persuasion knowledge: (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent. However, this effect would be attenuated when influencer ads utilize social commerce. Results of the MANOVA revealed significant main effects of social commerce ( $F(2, 194) = 3.23, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$ ), but there was no significant difference in ad type ( $F(2, 194) = 1.90, p = .15$ ). Also, no interaction effects between ad type and social commerce was found ( $F(2, 194) = 1.14, p = .32$ ). Given the significant main effects revealed by MANCOVA for social commerce, further univariate analyses were conducted to examine the effects of social commerce on advertising recognition and understanding of persuasive intent.

The results of two-way ANOVAs revealed that social commerce significantly influenced ad recognition ( $F(1, 195) = 6.35, p < .05, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .03$ ) but did not influence understanding of persuasive intent ( $F(1, 195) = 1.31, p = .25$ ). Participants in the social commerce condition ( $M = 6.48, SD = .92$ ) showed higher advertising recognition than those in non-social commerce condition ( $M = 6.12, SD = 1.13$ ). Thus, H7a was supported, while H7b was not supported. No significant interaction effects between ad type and social commerce on conceptual persuasion

knowledge emerged, that is, neither on ad recognition,  $F(1, 195) = 1.68, p = .20$ ) nor on understanding of persuasive intent,  $F(1, 195) = .12, p = .73$ ). Thus, H8 was not supported. The multivariate and univariate analyses were summarized in Table 7.

Table 6

*Descriptive Statistics for Experiment 2 (Cell Means and Standard Deviations)*

Ad Type	Social commerce	Recognition of advertising	Understanding of persuasive intent	Eco-label Skepticism	Ad Attitude	Brand Attitude	Purchase Intention
		<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>M</i> ( <i>SD</i> )
Narrative	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 51)	6.45 (.90)	6.16 (.77)	4.12 (1.16)	4.44 (1.49)	4.72 (1.34)	3.82 (1.65)
	No ( <i>n</i> = 51)	5.88 (1.37)	6.08 (.82)	4.23 (1.09)	3.92 (1.53)	4.41 (1.28)	3.31 (1.72)
Non-narrative	Yes ( <i>n</i> = 49)	6.51 (.94)	6.18 (.73)	4.37 (.89)	3.96 (1.48)	4.29 (1.39)	3.08 (1.73)
	No ( <i>n</i> = 51)	6.35 (.77)	6.05 (.80)	4.25 (1.16)	4.14 (1.80)	4.35 (1.58)	3.41 (2.18)

Table 7

*Multivariate and Univariate F-Values of Experiment 2*

Source of Variation	MANCOVA	Recognition of Advertising	Understanding of Persuasive Intent
Ad Type (A)	1.90	3.44	.00
Social Commerce (H)	3.23*	6.35*	1.31
A X S	1.14	1.68	.12
Media intensity	1.80	3.57	.60
EC	.82	1.55	.01
Label Knowledge	.61	.01	1.06

Note. *N* = 202, \**p* < .05.

### *The Effects of Moderated Serial Mediations on Advertising Outcome*

To test H9, moderated serial mediation analyses using Hayes (2018) PROCESS Macro for SPSS (v.4.2) model 83 with 5,000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals (CIs) were used. Dummy-coded message type (1 = narrative vs. 0 = non-narrative) was entered as the independent variable (X), with ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention as the dependent variables (Y). Conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., ad recognition, understanding of persuasive intent) and eco-label skepticism served as serial mediators. Social commerce was dummy-coded (1 = present, 0 = absent) and entered as a moderator (W).

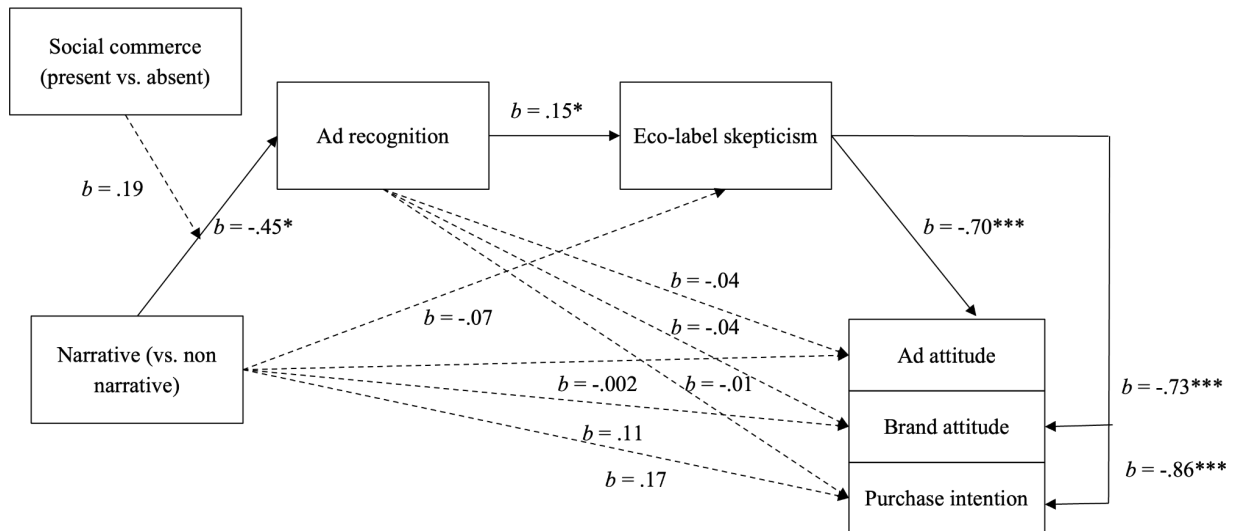
As in Experiment 1, the relationship between conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism was examined. The results revealed a significant positive association between recognition of advertising and eco-label skepticism ( $b = .15, SE = .07, p < .05$ ). However, the relationship between understanding of persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism was not significant ( $b = .19, SE = .10, p = .06$ ). Also, similar to Experiment 1, the results showed that eco-label skepticism negatively influenced (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and purchase intention. Specifically, when recognition of advertising was entered in the moderated mediation model, eco-label skepticism negatively influenced (a) ad attitude ( $b = -.70, SE = .09, p < .001$ ), (b) brand attitude ( $b = -.73, SE = .08, p < .001$ ), and (c) purchase intention ( $b = -.86, SE = .11, p < .001$ ). The same pattern emerged for understanding of persuasive intent; eco-label skepticism was negatively associated with (a) ad attitude ( $b = -.69, SE = .09, p < .001$ ), (b) brand attitude ( $b = -.73, SE = .08, p < .001$ ), and (c) purchase intention ( $b = -.83, SE = .11, p < .001$ ).

H9 posited that the positive indirect effect of the narrative ad on the dependent variables through reduced conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism would be more

likely to occur when social commerce was absent (vs. present) in the influencer ad. A moderated mediation analysis involving recognition of advertising and eco-label skepticism as serial mediators revealed that the overall moderated mediation index was not significant for ad attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $-.04$ , 95% CI  $[-.1225, .0247]$ ), brand attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $-.04$ , 95% CI  $[-.1293, .0221]$ ), and purchase intention (index of moderated mediation:  $-.05$ , 95% CI  $[-.1515, .0275]$ ). Another moderated mediation analysis involving understanding of persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism as serial mediators showed that the overall moderated mediation index was not significant for ad attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $.01$ , 95% CI  $[-.0577, .0826]$ ), brand attitude (index of moderated mediation:  $.01$ , 95% CI  $[-.0606, .0868]$ ), and purchase intention (index of moderated mediation:  $.01$ , 95% CI  $[-.0653, .0965]$ ). Overall, the indirect positive effects of the narrative on the dependent variables were observed through the activation of conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism when social commerce was absent from the influencer reels. However, these indirect effects did not reach statistical significance, resulting in the non-support of H9 (see Figure 5 & 6).

Figure 5

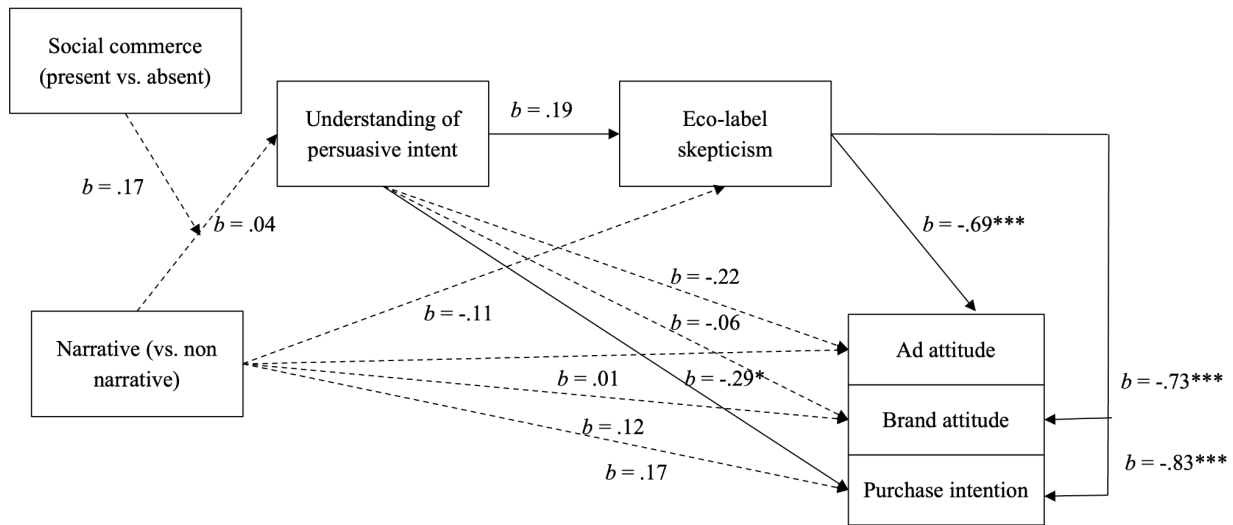
*Path Coefficients for Moderated Serial Mediation of Narrative Ad on Advertising Outcomes through Recognition of Advertising and Eco-Label Skepticism*



Note. All coefficients are unstandardized. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Figure 6

*Path Coefficients for Moderated Serial Mediation of Narrative Ad on Advertising Outcomes  
Through Understanding of Persuasive Intent and Eco-Label Skepticism*



Note. All coefficients are unstandardized. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 8

*Summary of Hypotheses and Results*

Hypotheses		Results	
		Study 1	Study 2
H1a	Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lead to lower advertising recognition.	Supported.	Not supported.
H1b	Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lead to lower understanding of the persuasive intent.	Supported.	Not supported.
H2a	Influencer ads with a lower (vs. higher) number of hashtags will lead to lower advertising recognition.	Not supported.	X
H2b	Influencer ads with a lower (vs. higher) number of hashtags will lead to lower understanding of the persuasive intent.	Not supported.	X
H3	Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge when the number of hashtags is lower. With a higher number of hashtags, the narrative effect on lowering conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent) will be attenuated.	H3a: Not supported. H3b: Supported.	X
H4	Conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) advertising recognition, (b) understanding of persuasive intent) will be positively associated with eco-label skepticism.	Supported.	H4a: Supported. H4b: Not supported
H5	Eco-label skepticism will be negatively associated with (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention.	Supported.	Supported.
H6	The indirect positive effect of narrative ads on (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention through decreased conceptual PK and eco-label skepticism will more likely occur when the number of hashtags is lower (vs. higher).	Partially Supported.	X

H7	Influencer ads without social commerce will lead to lower conceptual persuasion knowledge (i.e., (a) advertising recognition, (b) understanding of the persuasive intent) than influencer ads with social commerce.	X	H7a: Supported. H7b: Not supported.
H8	Influencer ads with narrative (vs. non-narrative) style will lower conceptual PK (i.e., (a) recognition of advertising and (b) understanding of persuasive intent) when influencer ads do not use social commerce. When influencer ads use social commerce, the narrative effect will be attenuated.	X	Not supported.
H9	The indirect positive effect of narrative ads on (a) ad attitude, (b) brand attitude, and (c) purchase intention through decreased conceptual PK and eco-label skepticism will more likely occur when influencer ads do not use social commerce (vs. use social commerce)	X	Not supported.

## CHAPTER 7

### DISCUSSION

Chapter 7 summarizes the findings from two experiments, followed by a discussion. Implications for theory and practice are explored, and the chapter also addresses limitations and offers suggestions for future research.

#### **Summary of Findings**

The primary objective of the current research was to investigate how influencer marketing tactics influence the evaluation of misleading eco-labels, thereby affecting the subsequent advertising outcomes of eco-labeled products. In examining influencer marketing tactics, this study specifically focused on the content created by influencers and the specific features of social media channels that may interact to shape perceptions of eco-labels and, in turn, influence advertising outcomes. Notably, this research highlighted how narrative advertising, such as personal stories, might diminish conceptual persuasion knowledge, reducing the ability to critically evaluate misleading eco-labels in advertisements and ultimately increasing advertising effectiveness. In essence, this research aimed to explore the potentially misleading aspects of narrative advertising by influencers in fostering a less skeptical attitude toward less-verified eco-labels. To achieve these overarching research goals, two experiments were conducted to assess the effects of narrative advertising when combined with other marketing tactics, including hashtags and social commerce.

Experiment 1 investigated the impact of narrative advertising while varying the number of hashtags on advertising outcomes, assessing their influence on persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. The results of the first experiment indicated that narrative ads by influencers significantly affected the recognition of advertising (H1a) and understanding of persuasive intent (H1b), collectively referred to as conceptual persuasion knowledge, compared to non-narrative ads. However, the number of hashtags (higher vs. lower) did not impact the recognition of advertising (H1a) or understanding of persuasive intent (H2b). When these two marketing tactics were examined separately, only narrative advertising was found to influence individuals' conceptual persuasion knowledge. In other words, narrative advertising reduced advertising recognition and diminished comprehension of persuasive intent in the ads presented to the participants. The findings also revealed interaction effects between ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and the number of hashtags (higher vs. lower). Narrative ads led to reduced conceptual persuasion knowledge when influencer ads had fewer hashtags. This effect on persuasion knowledge was less pronounced when ads had a higher number of hashtags (H3).

To assess the indirect effects of narrative advertising and the number of hashtags on advertising outcomes through conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism, moderated mediation analyses were conducted in Experiment 1. A positive association was observed between conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. Consequently, when individuals recognized influencer content as advertising or understood the nature of persuasive intent in influencer content, they were more likely to exhibit increased eco-label skepticism (H4). Subsequently, this heightened eco-label skepticism negatively affected ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention (H5). The findings from the moderated mediation analysis demonstrated the positive indirect effects of narrative advertising by influencers on ad

attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. These effects were achieved through a reduced understanding of persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism when only a small number of hashtags were featured. However, the indirect effect was insignificant when ad recognition was included as the first mediator in the moderated mediation model (H6). In summary, narrative advertising by influencers positively impacted the advertising outcomes of eco-labeled products by diminishing the understanding of persuasive intent in influencer ads, resulting in a less skeptical attitude toward eco-labels only when featuring a low number of hashtags.

Experiment 2 aimed to replicate the indirect positive narrative effects observed in the first experiment when the narrative ads by influencers did not use social commerce, compared to using social commerce. The findings indicated that influencer ads without social commerce features decreased advertising recognition compared to influencer ads with social commerce features (H7a). However, there was no significant difference in understanding persuasive intent between ads with social commerce and those without it (H7b). Additionally, the interaction effects of ad type (narrative vs. non-narrative) and social commerce were not significant (H8). In other words, the narrative effects on persuasion knowledge were not significantly different when the ad featured social commerce compared to when it did not. The results from the moderated mediation analysis suggested that no indirect narrative effects on advertising outcomes were observed through conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The present research aimed to investigate whether influencer marketing tactics, specifically influencer narrative ads with fewer hashtag uses or the exclusion of social commerce, negatively influence consumers' conceptual persuasion knowledge. This potential reduction in persuasion knowledge might lead to consumers bypassing critical attitudes toward misleading eco-labels, resulting in more positive advertising outcomes but potentially interfering with consumers' informed decision-making.

Experiment 1 explored the effects of narrative content moderated by the number of hashtags on advertising outcomes through conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism. The results showed that the type of ad (narrative vs. non-narrative) significantly influenced conceptual persuasion knowledge, encompassing recognition of advertising and understanding of persuasive intent. These results aligned with previous research on narrative ads, which suggests that narrative ads are likely to reduce consumers' persuasion knowledge (Kim et al., 2017; Kim, 2022). When exposed to influencer ads with narrative style, people perceive the posts as less focused on advertising and are less likely to understand the posts' persuasive intent. This can be attributed to narrative processing, which consumes cognitive resources, leaving less room for critical thinking about the message's advertising nature. In the context of influencer ads in narrative form, individuals are more likely to become engaged due to heightened transportation into the message and increased fluency (Chang, 2013). These results specifically resonated with previous findings on the persuasive effects of narrative ads, indicating that narrative elements, such as character and specific events unfolding over time, can enhance narrative processing due to fluency effects (Chang, 2013).

On the other hand, the number of hashtags did not influence conceptual persuasion knowledge. That is, a higher number of hashtags did not necessarily increase either the recognition of advertising or the understanding of persuasive intent. When compared to the impact of narrative effects, hashtags alone were insufficient to significantly influence consumers' recognition and understanding of the advertising nature of the posts. This might be because hashtags are such a commonplace tactic (Celuch, 2021) in everyday influencer posts that people may not necessarily perceive the mere presence of hashtags as indicative of advertising per se.

Furthermore, the findings revealed that two influencer marketing tactics, narrative and hashtags, had interaction effects on understanding persuasive intent. As predicted, narrative ads, compared to non-narrative ads, effectively reduced conceptual persuasion knowledge only when the number of hashtags was lower. Therefore, without overt advertising tactics, narrative advertising has a negative impact on individuals' persuasion knowledge. However, when overt tactics are employed, the power of narrative advertising diminishes. In cases where the number of hashtags is higher, the narrative's impact on reducing individuals' persuasion knowledge was not detected, possibly because a higher number of hashtags is more conspicuous than lower ones, thus signaling their persuasion knowledge. Also, this interaction effect was significant for understanding persuasive intent but not for recognition of advertising. Results show that individuals' overall ad recognition scores were higher than their scores for understanding persuasive intents across conditions. Considering this, people generally recognize social media influencers' posts as advertisements. Understanding persuasive intent comes after ad recognition (Boerman et al., 2017), representing a more nuanced level of conceptual knowledge. This may require people to think more about the tactics and persuasive attempts, rather than simply recognizing the message as commercial in nature. Therefore, in comparison to the recognition of

advertising, the understanding of persuasive intent can be more influenced by the subtleties of marketing tactics (i.e., a lower number of hashtags and using personal story). Therefore, the interaction of marketing tactics might be more effective in reducing people's understanding of persuasive intent but not in the recognition of advertising.

As anticipated, conceptual persuasion knowledge was positively associated with eco-label skepticism. When people recognized the post as advertising and understood its persuasive intent, they were more likely to have higher eco-label skepticism. In other words, higher persuasion knowledge led to greater skepticism regarding the credibility of the eco-label. These findings align with previous research showing that activated persuasion knowledge leads to more critical or negative attitudes toward content (e.g., van Reijmersdal et al., 2015; Boerman et al., 2014, 2018). Experiment 1 confirmed that heightened eco-label skepticism negatively influenced ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention. Critical or skeptical attitudes significantly affect adverse advertising outcomes, including brand attitude (Obermiller et al., 2005; Raziq et al., 2018; Callister & Stern, 2007). In line with this, increased skepticism could negatively influence advertising outcomes, and Experiment 1 demonstrated this general tendency in skepticism can be applied to a more specific construct, eco-label skepticism. Experiment 1 introduced the concept of eco-label skepticism and explored how more specific skepticism regarding eco-labels can impact overall advertising outcomes.

Importantly, the results highlighted positive indirect narrative effects on advertising outcomes through persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism, particularly in conditions with a lower number of hashtags. However, in ads with a higher number of hashtags, these positive indirect narrative effects were not found. This suggests that narrative tactics intended to increase persuasion inadvertently make consumers less critical about the content's advertising

nature, resulting in reduced general persuasion knowledge and a decreased tendency to scrutinize eco-labels skeptically particularly in cases with fewer (higher) hashtags. Also, it is interesting to note that the indirect narrative effects on advertising outcomes were mediated by understanding persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism, rather than by recognition of advertising and eco-label skepticism. Understanding persuasive intent significantly influenced eco-label skepticism, explaining the mechanism of indirect positive narrative effects on advertising outcomes. The mere recognition of content as advertising did not significantly impact eco-label skepticism. In other words, people may not feel skeptical about eco-labels solely because they recognize influencer posts as advertising. These findings align with van Reijmersdal et al. (2017), where among two aspects of conceptual persuasion knowledge, only understanding of persuasive intent was significantly affected by disclosure. Ad recognition was generally higher across conditions compared to understanding persuasive intent, suggesting that people are more aware of influencer's branded posts as advertisements. Understanding the content's persuasive intent beyond recognition can lead to an increase in eco-label skepticism.

In contrast to Experiment 1, Experiment 2 found that people did not significantly differ regarding (a) recognizing advertising and (b) understanding persuasive intent when exposed to narrative and non-narrative ads. This contrasted with previous literature suggesting the relative efficacy of narrative (vs. non-narrative) formats in suppressing persuasion knowledge (e.g., Kim et al., 2021), which Experiment 1 had confirmed. The seemingly counterintuitive result in Experiment 2 can be partly attributed to the different modality of influencer advertisements. Experiment 1 featured single static images for influencer's branded posts, enabling a clear demarcation between narrative and non-narrative content. In contrast, Experiment 2 employed Instagram Reels, a video format with three different influencer images delivered in 20-second

videos. In this context, the nature of content delivery in the video format may have reduced the distinctiveness between narrative and non-narrative elements, which were originally manipulated in text form. The differences between narrative and non-narrative conditions in Experiment 2 (recognition of advertising:  $M_{\text{narrative}} = 6.17$ ,  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = 1.19$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 6.43$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = .86$ ; understanding of persuasive intent:  $M_{\text{narrative}} = 6.12$ ,  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = .79$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 6.11$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = .76$ ) were not as significant as in Experiment 1 (recognition of advertising:  $M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.98$ ,  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = 1.17$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 6.35$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = .93$ ; understanding of persuasive intent:  $M_{\text{narrative}} = 5.93$ ,  $SD_{\text{narrative}} = .97$ ;  $M_{\text{non-narrative}} = 6.14$ ,  $SD_{\text{non-narrative}} = .89$ ), potentially diluting the effects observed in Experiment 1 and rendering their main effects on persuasion knowledge non-significant.

As predicted, social commerce features significantly impacted conceptual persuasion knowledge. Specifically, participants exposed to social commerce conditions showed increased ad recognition compared to those in non-social commerce conditions. However, these features did not significantly influence the understanding of persuasive intent. People easily recognized social commerce features as advertising, but the inclusion of these features did not necessarily help people better understand the ad's persuasive intent. Social commerce features have explicit icons and are more recognizable, but they do not appear to significantly enhance understanding of the persuasive intent of the ad. It appears that people may already have a good understanding of the influencer's reels as a persuasive tool, given the high levels of understanding of persuasive intent in the reels across conditions.

Experiment 2 disclosed the absence of interaction effects between narrative and social commerce, along with the finding that there were no significant indirect narrative effects on advertising outcomes through reduced conceptual persuasion knowledge. The non-significant

indirect effects observed can be attributed to various factors observed in Experiment 2. Notably, the lack of interaction effects between narrative and social commerce suggests that the combined impact of these elements did not result in a noticeable indirect effect on advertising outcomes. Additionally, the absence of main effects of narratives in Experiment 2 indicate that participants were less inclined to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative ads. Another factor to consider is the potential influence of video stimuli in Experiment 2, differing from Experiment 1 where image stimuli were used. Video stimuli can enhance fluency for both narrative and non-narrative conditions, making it more challenging for participants to discern subtle distinctions between narrative and non-narrative ads. Consequently, the non-significant indirect effects observed in the relationship between narratives with social commerce and advertising outcomes in Experiment 2 may be attributed to the absence of interaction and main effects, coupled with the potential impact of video stimuli on participants' perception and differentiation of narrative and non-narrative content. Further examining these factors may yield additional insights into the intricate relationship between narrative elements, social commerce, and advertising outcomes.

Even though not hypothesized in Experiments 1 and 2, in Experiment 1, narrative ads (vs. non-narrative) had higher scores for advertising outcome-related variables (i.e., ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention), though the differences were not significant for all outcome variables. The opposite was true for Experiment 2, where narrative ads (vs. non-narrative) had higher scores for ad attitude, brand attitude, and purchase intention, while the differences again were not significant for all these outcome variables. These somewhat contradictory results were not too surprising, given that previous research is not always consistent about the relative advantages of narratives over non-narrative formats (e.g., Allen & Preiss, 1997; Dunlop et al., 2010). Scholars in narrative persuasion recognize that narrative formats are not always better

than non-narratives because, like many other communication issues, the effectiveness of message format depends on many situational and individual factors, including ideology, involvement, and pre-existing attitudes (Bilandzic & Busselle, 2013). In this research, it can be different modalities (image stimuli for Experiment 1 vs. video stimuli for Experiment 2) that play a role in making the differences between narrative and non-narrative conditions. Or it can be individual differences in terms of familiarity with social media tactics or personal engagement in influencer posts. In light of this, moving forward, future directions for narrative persuasion are not simply about comparing the relative efficacy of narrative vs. non-narratives but about understanding boundary conditions—when and under what conditions narrative ads are more persuasive and effective. Thus, the current study followed this call and the need for current narrative persuasion research. The future study will also look into investigating when and how narrative can be more effective or persuasive.

In summary, this research investigates the potential negative influence of influencer marketing tactics on consumers' conceptual persuasion knowledge and eco-label skepticism, subsequently affecting advertising outcomes. The two experiments provide nuanced insights into the interplay of narrative content, hashtags, and social commerce features within influencer marketing. These findings contribute to understanding how influencer marketing can impact consumers' informed decision-making and emphasize the importance of considering modality and specific features in influencer marketing campaigns.

### **Theoretical Implications**

*Potentially Misleading Effects of Influencer Marketing.* Influencer marketing has garnered significant attention in the advertising and marketing due to its documented positive

outcomes (Ye et al., 2021). While its effectiveness for brands and marketers has been explored, the potential misleading aspects of influencer marketing and its impact on consumer decision-making remain under-researched, creating an imbalance in the existing literature (Hudders & Lou, 2023). This study contributes to addressing this gap by empirically investigating the potentially misleading effects of influencer marketing. The findings highlight how influencer marketing tactics occasionally mislead consumers, reducing their persuasion knowledge and making them less skeptical about eco-labels. This, in turn, affects advertising outcomes positively.

*Narrative's Utility and Its Impact on Informed Decision Making.* The present study adds to the literature on narrative persuasion in advertising by elucidating the theoretical relationship between narrative effects and persuasion knowledge within influencer marketing (Kim et al., 2021; Kim, 2022). Specifically, this research focused on examining personal narratives, often called "narrative ads," by influencers and their influence on consumer attitudes towards eco-labels. The findings reveal that narrative ads reduce consumers' persuasion knowledge, resulting in a less critical examination of misleading eco-labels. Ads featuring eco-labeled products receive more positive advertising outcomes when consumers scrutinize eco-labels less rigorously. While prior literature has primarily explored the effectiveness of narrative persuasion as a strategy for brands and marketers (Kim et al., 2017), this study broadens the perspective by empirically examining the impact of narrative-style advertising within the influencer marketing context. It explores how narratives can influence the extent of scrutiny applied to eco-labels' validity, ultimately leading to increased ad attitudes, brand attitudes, and purchase intentions. To the best of my knowledge, this research is the first to explore narrative persuasion and its boundary effects when combined with other influencer tactics from the consumer's perspective.

*Role of Persuasion Knowledge.* This study contributes to a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of persuasion knowledge. Theoretically, conceptual persuasion knowledge has been defined and operationalized to measure how consumers recognize the message or content as advertising and understand the persuasive intent. While the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) originally encompassed a broader range of consumer knowledge, including the recognition and understanding of persuasive intent, most advertising literature primarily relies on ad recognition as a single indicator of persuasion knowledge activation (e.g., Lim et al., 2021).

The PKM initially recognized individuals' persuasion knowledge as a product of their lifespan, encompassing more intricate persuasion tactics and knowledge involving both agents and consumers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Thus, relying solely on a single measurement of ad recognition may limit our understanding of persuasion knowledge. Particularly with the increasing sophistication and subtlety of social media influencer marketing tactics compared to traditional brand-oriented advertisements, it's essential to comprehensively grasp persuasion knowledge and apply it in different contexts to expand the existing literature. To this end, the current research fills this gap by measuring both components that constitute conceptual persuasion knowledge, aiming to provide a more nuanced and precise measurement of persuasion knowledge and consumers' understanding of persuasion knowledge, especially in social media influencer marketing.

*Eco-Label Skepticism: A Valuable Tool for Mindful Consumption of Eco-Labeled Products.* Furthermore, this research contributes to eco-label study by empirically examining eco-label skepticism as a mediating factor between persuasion knowledge and advertising outcomes. Previous research on green or eco-related claims has predominantly focused on the

positive and negative spill-over effects of eco-labels, such as the health halo effect (Lee et al., 2013; Amos et al., 2019). However, these studies often overlook the specific contexts in which eco-labels are presented. This study addresses this gap by examining how the perception of eco-labels is influenced, particularly by influencer marketing tactics.

Additionally, this research directly measures eco-label skepticism, providing a more accurate evaluation of consumer skepticism and scrutiny. While skepticism is generally considered a challenge for advertisers and marketers, this study reevaluates skepticism, emphasizing its importance for consumers in the face of the proliferation of unverified and unsubstantiated eco-labels. Skepticism is seen as a healthy doubt, given the confusion and ambiguity surrounding eco-labels. Therefore, fostering a healthy and reasonable level of critical attitudes toward eco-labels is crucial to guiding informed consumer decisions and preventing potential greenwashing. Influencer posts can also contribute to reduced eco-label skepticism, as influencer storytelling significantly impacts consumers' persuasion knowledge, leading to lower eco-label skepticism and influencing overall advertising evaluations. This research is the first to empirically examine how combined influencer marketing tactics affect persuasion knowledge, potentially hindering critical thinking about eco-labels and enhancing advertising evaluations.

### **Practical Implications**

In the dynamic landscape of influencer marketing and eco-labeling, this research provides practical implications for various stakeholders. The findings of the present research shed light on the boundary effects of narrative ads by influencers in promoting eco-labeled products. Through two experiments, the boundary effects of narrative ads were examined. In the first experiment, we examined the impact of incorporating personal stories into an influencer's branded posts,

especially when these posts were accompanied by hashtags. The findings suggested that the effects of narrative ads were only evident when the posts featured fewer hashtags. Similarly, the second experiment explored the boundaries of narrative effects by investigating whether the presence or absence of social commerce features influenced the effectiveness of narrative ads. The results of the second experiment revealed that the presence or absence of social commerce features did not alter the impact of narrative ads. Collectively, the findings from both experiments indicate that narrative ads do not consistently make the nature of advertising less explicit. The indirect impact of narrative ads on advertising outcomes can vary, primarily depending on the usage of longer or shorter hashtags rather than the presence or absence of social commerce features. For consumers, this study suggests that when storytelling is used alongside subtler tactics, like employing a lower number of hashtags, consumers should exercise greater caution to prevent potential greenwashing effects stemming from unverified eco-labels, in contrast to cases where posts feature a higher number of hashtags. Additionally, consumers are encouraged to cultivate a critical attitude towards misleading eco-labels and products with such labels to facilitate informed decision-making.

The current study highlights the critical importance of consumer awareness and education in the context of eco-labeled product advertisements. The findings of this study indicate that influencer ads featuring personal stories, also known as narrative ads, indirectly enhance advertising outcomes by diminishing consumers' understanding of persuasive intent and eco-label skepticism, particularly when influencer marketing is associated with a lower presence of explicit informational cues, such as hashtags. When consumers are exposed to an influencer's narrative, they are less likely to perceive it as a direct persuasion attempt, reducing eco-label skepticism. This mechanism leads to more favorable attitudes towards the advertisement, the

brand, and an increased intention to purchase. As a result, individuals are less inclined to rigorously evaluate the eco-label's validity and credibility. While previous research on eco-labels and the bias effects of green claims on consumer product and advertisement evaluations emphasizes the importance of consumer general knowledge and awareness about eco-labels (e.g., Ithemezie et al., 2018), there is relatively limited knowledge about which specific marketing tactics might enhance this tendency. The empirical investigation of the influencer's use of narrative persuasion in conjunction with other social media-specific tactics, such as hashtags, as demonstrated in the current study, provides evidence of consumers' vulnerabilities to influencer marketing and underscores the importance of raising awareness among consumers regarding potentially misleading eco-labels and their impact on their decision-making and evaluations of advertisements, brands, and products.

Consumer awareness about eco-labels is vital, given the numerous unverified eco-labels that can influence consumers' decision-making processes. However, there is a lack of formal educational materials or methods available to consumers. While the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) offers extensive guidance for preventing deceptive advertising, including green guidelines issued in 1992 and revised in 1996, 1998, and 2012 (FTC, 2018), these guidelines primarily aim to educate marketers rather than consumers. The current research suggests that consumer education should be a focal point to protect consumers from potentially misleading eco-labels, particularly in the context of social media environments. This study offers guidance to practitioners in consumer protection, such as policymakers and consumer empowerment groups, to emphasize the importance of developing consumer education programs and regulations regarding the advertising of eco-labeled products through influencer marketing. Policymakers are pivotal in shaping a regulatory environment that ensures consumer protection in the realm of

eco-labeling. The paper advocates for cohesive and unified regulations governing eco-labeling, emphasizing the need for transparency and reliability in how products are represented.

Furthermore, policymakers are urged to invest in consumer education initiatives, such as educational materials or short video clips, to highlight potentially misleading aspects of eco-labeled products in influencer marketing.

While this research focuses more on consumer perspectives, the present study provides marketers with insights into sustainable practices that contribute to long-term brand success and trust. Utilizing eco-labels from credible sources can be a good strategy to enhance a brand's environmental credibility while aiding consumers' informed decisions. Rather than solely exploiting the current state of the eco-label system, where regulations are loose and inconsistent, public understanding of labels is limited, and consumer educational resources are scarce—potentially compromising informed decision-making—marketers are advised to provide comprehensive information. This approach not only helps consumers make informed choices but also contributes to building trust and loyalty for brands.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

In future research, it is crucial to address some of the limitations of the current study. First, the current study assessed overall eco-label skepticism as a means to evaluate consumers' comprehensive examination of eco-labels and their credibility within the social media environment. While this study represents one of the pioneering efforts to directly measure eco-label skepticism in the context of green consumption and sustainability research, future studies could delve deeper into the examination of more specific attributes or characteristics of eco-labels and their influence on consumers' interpretation of eco-labels within the social media

environment. For instance, previous research (Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014; Schmuck et al., 2018) investigated the source of the eco-label and its visual elements (e.g., the use of green colors or nature-evoking images), which can occasionally be perplexing for consumers to understand. Future research can expand this discussion by exploring how people might perceive eco-labels and their credibility through different communicative media channels. Such an investigation may help pinpoint the specific aspects of eco-labels and media characteristics that can lead to consumer misperceptions or confusion.

Second, while the current study centered on narrative ads and addressed their boundary effects by considering other social influencer marketing tactics, such as hashtags and social commerce, future research might explore additional influencer-related tactics that can either increase or decrease consumers' levels of persuasion knowledge and their tendency to process eco-labels. For example, future research could investigate influencers' use of high-quality and aesthetically pleasing visuals, product placement prominence, engagement with followers, and social proof metrics (e.g., the number of likes, comments, and followers) and their interactive and combined effects on eco-label processing.

While the current research employed quantitative methods (i.e., experiments), future studies could adopt qualitative approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of consumers' eco-label attitudes and skepticism in the context of influencer marketing. Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide a deeper and more nuanced understanding of participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes concerning influencer marketing tactics and their relationship with the processing of eco-labeled product advertisements.

Also, the current study did not measure transportation, a frequent construct often used to explain the narrative persuasion mechanism, because it was not the focus of the current research.

However, future studies could measure different levels of transportation in messages to examine how varying degrees of transportation might influence individuals' activation of persuasion knowledge and its subsequent effects on the critical evaluation of misleading eco-labels.

Additionally, since transportation can vary depending on modality (i.e., text vs. video), it would be beneficial for narrative literature to conduct studies on how different levels of transportation, using the same messages but with different modalities, might interact with other social media tactics to influence persuasion knowledge and subsequent advertising outcomes.

Next, this research focused on one specific product category. While the choice of the product category was guided by previous research indicating that food products are one of the primary categories where eco-labeling is prominent and influential (Amos et al., 2019; Atkinson & Rosenthal, 2014), it may be beneficial to explore eco-labeling for other product types, such as personal hygiene, detergent, or even technology products (e.g., smartphones). This broader exploration can provide insights into eco-labeling perceptions among consumers across various product categories.

Additionally, the current study used a fictitious brand. While this choice was made to enhance internal validity, it would also be worthwhile to replicate this study's findings with well-known, existing brands. Established green brand images, particularly in the realms of green advertising and consumption, may influence consumer behavior (e.g., Chen, 2010). Therefore, using well-established brands might yield different results, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of eco-labeling and advertising within the context of influencer marketing.

Furthermore, the stimuli in the experiments consisted of edited pictures (Experiment 1) and edited videos (Experiment 2). Experiment 2 employed social commerce features within

Instagram Reels format, which typically allows consumers to explore product details by clicking "view product." In our study, participants were unable to access these specific features. Future research should explore how real interactions between consumers and posts can yield new insights through laboratory studies. Additionally, while the current study exclusively used Instagram, there are many other social media platforms to consider. Influencers often utilize multiple platforms to broaden their reach and impact. Therefore, investigating whether findings persist across diverse social media platforms like YouTube and Facebook can provide valuable platform-specific insights within influencer marketing literature.

Lastly, to explore the impact of narrative (versus non-narrative) ads with hashtags and social commerce, this study intentionally omitted an investigation into the influence of ad disclosure on the activation of persuasion knowledge. Prior literature on disclosure effects generally suggests that proper ad disclosure is likely to enhance persuasion knowledge, resulting in unfavorable advertising outcomes (Evans et al., 2017). To emphasize the influence of narrative ads on the activation of persuasion knowledge, the current study did not include ad disclosure in social media posts, such as #ad. Despite the requirement for ad disclosure on social media, numerous posts continue to be created and uploaded without proper disclosure daily. A report indicates that about 76% of Instagram influencers do not provide explicit advertisement disclosure (MacRae, 2021). Given the impracticality of inspecting every single social media post for adherence to disclosure requirements, consumers frequently encounter influencers' ad posts without appropriate disclosure. This research, focused on potentially misleading social media influencers' tactics, deliberately excluded ad disclosure to shed light on situations where consumers unintentionally engage with posts lacking explicit commercial indications. Future studies could delve into how adding ad disclosure affects outcomes in this context.

Despite these limitations, the present research underscores the importance of consumers' blind spots in influencer marketing, particularly in eco-label processing and its implications for advertising outcomes. By demonstrating influencer marketing's potentially misleading impact on eco-labeled product advertisements, this research contributes to consumer protection, marketing, and public policy considerations, areas that have received relatively little empirical examination and scholarly attention. By emphasizing the need for consumer education and public policy, especially within the realm of green advertising, and by equipping consumers with a critical lens, the present research offers valuable insights into both eco-labeling in advertising and the potentially harmful impacts of influencer marketing on informed consumer decision-making.

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## APPENDIX A

### Stimuli Materials for Experiment 1

Conditions for narrative ads with a higher number of hashtags

**\_\_daily\_daisy** • Follow

Liked by **john** and 78 others

**\_\_daily\_daisy** I am Daisy. I was struggling to find something to eat for my busy morning. There were many nutrition bars I could choose from. But I needed to find out which was good for me since many contain high amounts of sugar and calories. A few months ago, in January, a friend gave me this 100% natural granola bar.

I did not know if this would give me enough nutrition in one package. This product has low sugar and calories. I am impressed that all ingredients are 100% natural. Now Nature Lab granola has become my go-to snack. Nature Lab helped me reset and achieve my wellness goals for this year: stay green & healthy.


What excites me the most is that it is GMO-free! All ingredients are fresh and naturally inspired. Now it is April, and I don't skip my breakfast anymore. My mornings have become more energetic than before. To learn more about this product, follow @naturelab.


[#granola\\_bar](#) [#100%natural](#) [#natural](#)  
[#natural\\_ingredients](#) [#eco-friendly](#) [#gmofree](#) [#green](#)  
[#energybar](#) [#breakfast](#) [#naturelab](#) [#honey\\_oats](#)  
[#energetic](#) [#naturally\\_inspired](#) [#newproduct](#)  
[#naturalgranola](#) [#fresh](#) [#simple](#) [#grab&go](#) [#simplesnack](#)  
[#goodforyourmorning](#) [#lowsugar](#) [#lowcalories](#) [#granola](#)

View all 20 comments

5 MINS

Conditions for narrative ads with a lower number of hashtags

 [\\_\\_daily\\_daisy](#) • Follow



♥ 💬 📌

Liked by [john](#) and 78 others

[\\_\\_daily\\_daisy](#) I am Daisy. I was struggling to find something to eat for my busy morning. There were many nutrition bars I could choose from. But I needed to find out which was good for me since many contain high amounts of sugar and calories. A few months ago, in January, a friend gave me this 100% natural granola bar.

I did not know if this would give me enough nutrition in one package. This product has low sugar and calories. I am impressed that all ingredients are 100% natural. Now Nature Lab granola has become my go-to snack. Nature Lab helped me reset and achieve my wellness goals for this year: stay green & healthy.


What excites me the most is that it is GMO-free! All ingredients are fresh and naturally inspired. Now it is April, and I don't skip my breakfast anymore. My mornings have become more energetic than before. To learn more about this product, follow [@naturelab](#).


[#granola\\_bar](#) [#100%natural](#)

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## Conditions for non-narrative ads with a higher number of hashtags

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[\\_\\_daily\\_daisy](#) Finding the right thing to eat for a busy morning can be difficult. The market has so many options for you to choose from, many of which contain high amounts of sugar and calories. Try considering this 100% natural granola bar.

Surprisingly, this product gives you enough nutrition in one package. This product has low sugar and calories. All ingredients are 100% natural. From now on, make this Nature Lab's granola bar your go-to snack. Nature Lab's product will help people to achieve their wellness goal: stay green & healthy.

Furthermore, there is another exciting element. This product is GMO-free. All ingredients are fresh and naturally inspired. Try this product today and don't skip breakfast anymore. Let every morning be more energetic than before. To learn more about this product, follow [@naturelab](#).


[#granola\\_bar](#) [#100%natural](#) [#natural](#)  
[#natural\\_ingredients](#) [#eco-friendly](#) [#gmofree](#) [#green](#)  
[#energybar](#) [#breakfast](#) [#naturelab](#) [#honey\\_oats](#)  
[#energetic](#) [#naturally\\_inspired](#) [#newproduct](#)  
[#naturalgranola](#) [#fresh](#) [#simple](#) [#grab&go](#) [#simplesnack](#)  
[#goodforyourmorning](#) [#lowsugar](#) [#lowcalories](#) [#granola](#)

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Conditions for non-narrative ads with a lower number of hashtags

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Surprisingly, this product gives you enough nutrition in one package. This product has low sugar and calories. All ingredients are 100% natural. From now on, make this Nature Lab's granola bar your go-to snack. Nature Lab's product will help people to achieve their wellness goal: stay green & healthy.

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[#granola\\_bar](#) [#100%natural](#)

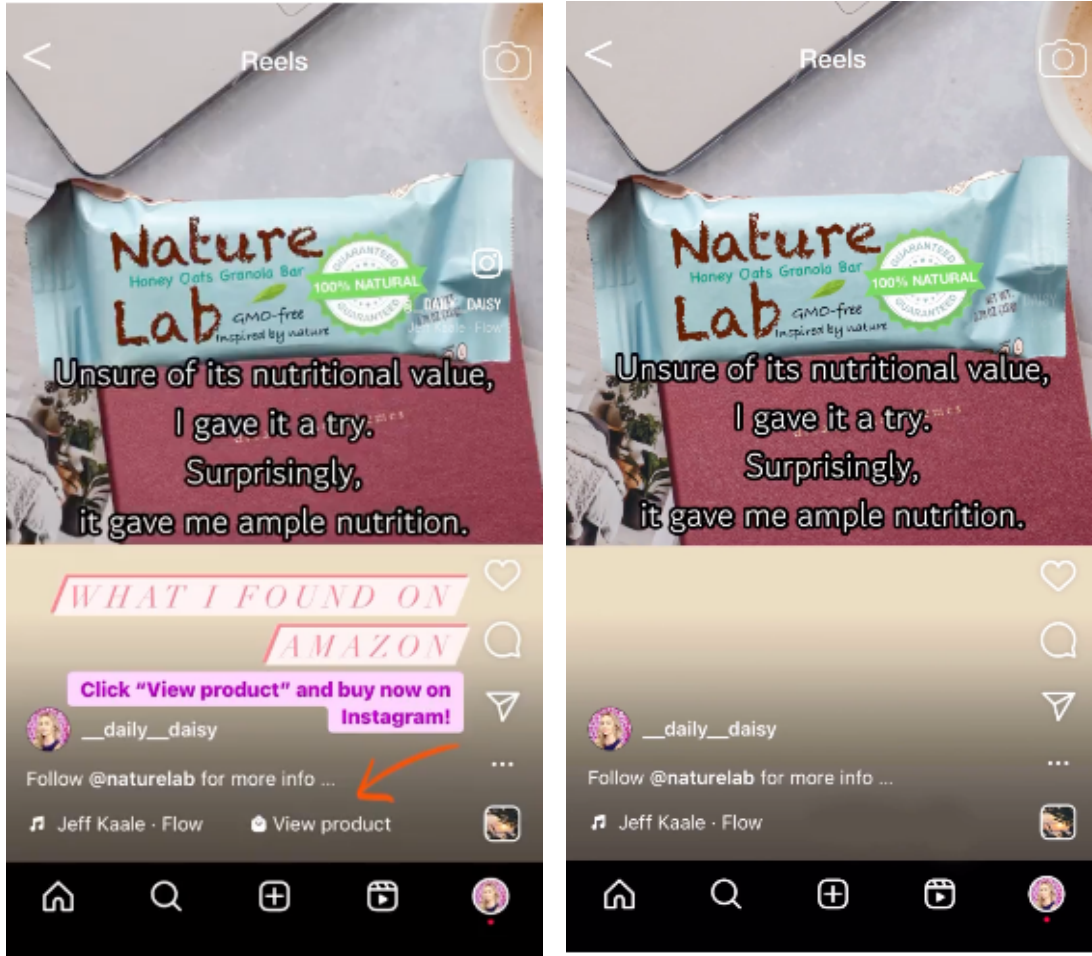
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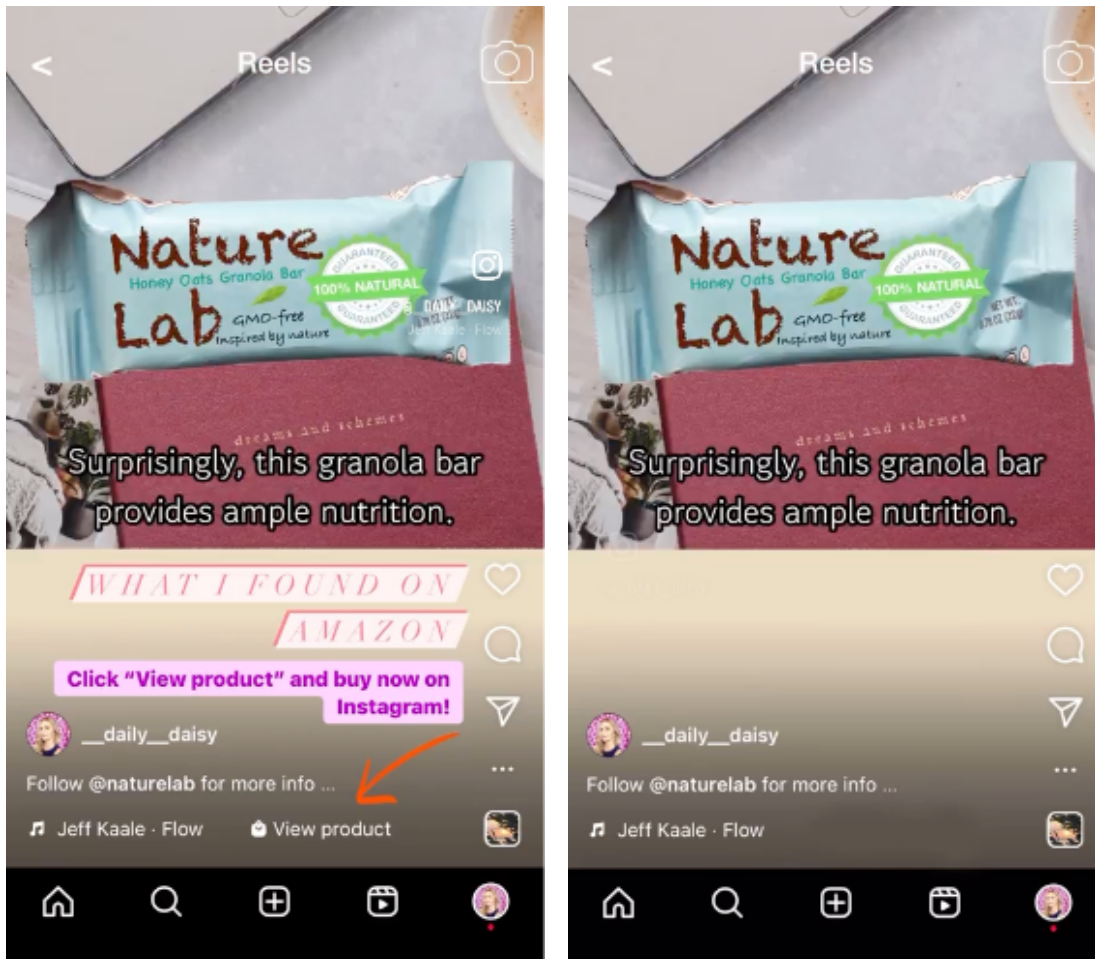
APPENDIX B

Stimuli Materials for Experiment 2

Reels for narrative ads with social commerce (left) and without social commerce (right)



Reels for non-narrative ads with social commerce (left) and without social commerce (right)



## APPENDIX C

### Questionnaire for Experiment 1

#### Social Media Usage Intensity

How many times *per day* do you check social media?



How many times *per day* do you 'like' messages, photos, or videos of others on social media?



How many times *per day* do you respond to messages, photos, or videos via social media?



How many times *per day* do you send a message, photo, or video via social media?



#### Eco-label knowledge

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I know the meaning of the term 'natural.'

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly agree

#### Environmental Concerns

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) I am concerned about the environment.
- 2) The condition of the environment affects the quality of my life.
- 3) I am willing to make sacrifices to protect the environment.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

[Stimuli]

### Ad Type

After seeing the influencer's post...

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) The post tells a story.
- 2) The post tells the main character in a story.
- 3) The post tells how a series of events unfolded in a story format.
- 4) The post tells when things happened in a story.
- 5) The post tells why things happened in a story.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	Somewhat agree 5	Agree 6	Strongly agree 7
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

### The number of Hashtags

The influencer's post you just saw has a \_\_\_\_\_ number of hashtags.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
very low								very high

### Recognition of Advertising

After seeing the influencers' post...

The post I just saw contained advertising.

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly agree

### Understanding of Persuasive intent

After seeing the influencer's post...

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) The purpose of the post is to sell products or services.
- 2) The purpose of the post is to stimulate the sales of products or services.
- 3) The purpose of the post is to influence opinions.
- 4) The purpose of the post is to make people like products or services.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	Somewhat agree 5	Agree 6	Strongly agree 7
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

### Eco-label Skepticism

After seeing the eco-friendly label (i.e., 100% natural) in the post...

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) The eco-friendly label on the product (i.e., 100% natural) that I saw in the post is true.
- 2) Eliminating exaggerated eco-friendly claims on package labels or in advertising would benefit consumers, as the 100% natural label on the product I just saw may be misleading.
- 3) The eco-friendly label on the product I just saw in the post (i.e., 100% natural) is intended to mislead consumers rather than inform them.
- 4) I do not believe the eco-friendly label on the product I just saw in the post (i.e., 100% natural) is accurate.

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly agree

### Ad Attitude

I consider this ad to be:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad								Good
Unpleasant								Pleasant
Unfavorable								Favorable
Unconvincing								Convincing

### Brand Attitude

I consider the advertised brand to be:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Bad		Good
Unattractive		Attractive
Negative		Positive
Not likable		Likable
Not recommendable		Recommendable

**Purchase Intention**

How likely is it that you would purchase this product?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very unlikely								Very likely
Definitely would not								Definitely would
Improbable								Probable

**Gender**

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female

**Race/Ethnicity**

Which of the following categories do you identify with?

- White or Caucasian
- Black or African American
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
- Hispanic/ Latino
- Other (specify):

**Education**

What is the highest level of education you have completed?

- Some high school or less
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, but no degree

- Associates or technical degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc.)
- Prefer not to say

**Household income**

What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$49,999
- \$50,000-\$74,999
- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to say

## APPENDIX D

### Questionnaire for Experiment 2

#### Social Media Usage Intensity

How many times *per day* do you check social media?



How many times *per day* do you 'like' messages, photos, or videos of others on social media?



How many times *per day* do you respond to messages, photos, or videos via social media?



How many times *per day* do you send a message, photo, or video via social media?



#### Eco-label knowledge

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

I know the meaning of the term 'natural.'

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- 7 Strongly agree

#### Environmental Concerns

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) I am concerned about the environment.
- 2) The condition of the environment affects the quality of my life.
- 3) I am willing to make sacrifices to protect the environment.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

[Stimuli]

### Ad Type

The video post shows...

To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

- 1) The video post tells a story.
- 2) The video post tells the main character in a story.
- 3) The video post tells how a series of events unfolded in a story format.
- 4) The video post tells when things happened in a story.
- 5) The video post tells why things happened in a story.

Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Somewhat disagree 3	Neither agree nor disagree 4	Somewhat agree 5	Agree 6	Strongly agree 7
------------------------	---------------	------------------------	---------------------------------	---------------------	------------	---------------------

### Social Commerce

**Social commerce** involves buying and selling products over social media. In social commerce, users can discover, share, and **purchase products directly within the social media environment.**

After watching the influencer's video, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

**The video I just watched had the social commerce feature that enables or facilitates users to buy over or within social media.**

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly agree

### Recognition of Advertising

After seeing the influencers' post...

The post I just saw contained advertising.

- 1 Strongly disagree
- 2 Disagree
- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree

7 Strongly agree

**Understanding of Persuasive intent**

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To what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

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- 4) The purpose of the post is to make people like products or services.

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- 3 Somewhat disagree
- 4 Neither agree nor disagree
- 5 Somewhat agree
- 6 Agree
- 7 Strongly agree

**Ad Attitude**

I consider this ad to be:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad Unpleasant							Good Pleasant	

Unfavorable  
Unconvincing

Favorable  
Convincing

### Brand Attitude

I consider the advertised brand to be:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Bad								Good
Unattractive								Attractive
Negative								Positive
Not likable								Likable
Not recommendable								Recommendable

### Purchase Intention

How likely is it that you would purchase this product?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Very unlikely								Very likely
Definitely would not								Definitely would
Improbable								Probable

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- Female
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Which of the following categories do you identify with?

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- High school diploma or GED
- Some college, but no degree
- Associates or technical degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate or professional degree (MA, MS, MBA, PhD, JD, MD, DDS etc.)
- Prefer not to say

**Household income**

What was your total household income before taxes during the past 12 months?

- Less than \$25,000
- \$25,000-\$49,999
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- \$75,000-\$99,999
- \$100,000-\$149,999
- \$150,000 or more
- Prefer not to say