The Impact of Influencer Motives and Commonness Perceptions on Follower Reactions Toward Incentivized Reviews

Abstract

Brands often incentivize influencers to review their products. However, such incentivized product reviews may reflect negatively on the influencers' credibility and authenticity, especially if the reviews are positive. Given the more personal nature of influencer-crafted reviews than other product review formats, we posit that the motives to accept incentives—disclosed by the influencer—determine followers' reactions to incentivized reviews. In one survey, three experiments, and one field study, we contribute to prior research by showing that intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives can mitigate the negative effects of positive incentivized reviews on credibility and, ultimately, revisit intention and behavior. Moreover, we extend past work by demonstrating that influencer type (review vs. lifestyle) determines followers' perceptions of influencer authenticity, feelings of betrayal, word of mouth, and revisit intention in reaction to an incentivized review. Specifically, we find that review influencer followers' reactions are determined by their perceptions of incentivized review commonness, such that motives matter more if incentivization is less common, while motives matter less if incentivized review are perceived to be more common. By contrast, we show that lifestyle influencer followers' reactions are driven by the communicated incentivization acceptance motives, regardless of the perceived commonness of incentivized reviews.

Keywords: Influencer marketing, Incentivized reviews, Sponsorship disclosure, Motives, Incentivization commonness, Influencer type

1. Introduction

The use of influencers to promote products and brands on social media has increased both in popularity and importance, as consumers often use such content as a basis for purchase decisions. Indeed, prior research has shown that influencers can be more effective at recommending products or brands than traditional advertising formats, due in part to their perceived credibility (Audrezet, De Kerviler, & Moulard, 2020; Hughes, Swaminathan, & Brooks, 2019; Kannan & Li, 2017). Thus, brands are working to strengthen their ties with key influencers to spread word of mouth (WOM) on social media platforms, as part of an increasingly important component of a digital marketing strategy that may see spending increase to more than $15 billion by 2022 (Schomer, 2019).

A significant portion of influencer marketing relates to incentivized reviews, in which brands incentivize influencers to post reviews about their products (e.g., Carr & Hayes, 2014; Uribe, Buzeta, & Velásquez, 2016). However, anecdotal evidence suggests that, despite the ubiquity of sponsorship, and the legal requirement to disclose sponsored content (Federal Trade Commission, 2020), incentivized reviews may still cause consumer backlash. For example, when Dyson incentivized technology influencers to review its latest product, it sparked a negative consumer reaction (Medley, 2018). Indeed, a recent meta-analysis indicates that sponsorship disclosure negatively influences both content perceptions and consumer reactions (Eisend, van Reijmersdal, Boerman, & Tarrahi, 2020).

Thus, scholars have attempted to examine various strategies that can overcome the negatives associated with incentivization. For example, Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, and Wilner (2010) found that bloggers who receive a product from a brand can use varying narrative styles within the content to alter reader perceptions of the blog and brand involvement, while other researchers have found that the characteristics of a disclosure statement, such as emphasizing “honest opinions,” can affect both persuasiveness and

effectiveness, especially in cases of positive review valence (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Kim, Maslowska, & Tamaddoni, 2019). However, despite this research, influencers still face challenges when developing disclosure statements. In a recent discussion, Marques Brownlee (also known as MKBHD) and Michael Fisher (also known as MrMobile), two of the most popular tech review influencers, noted that they are wary of negative reactions by their followers to incentivized reviews and that they often struggle to disclose sponsorship in a way that is both ethical and helpful to reduce followers' negative response (Brownlee, 2020). Thus, we extend the literature by examining influencer-based incentivized product reviews and, in doing so, make three contributions.

First, although influencers often disclose personal information, attitudes, and experiences to their audience, the effects of incentivization acceptance motives are not yet fully understood. In particular, we aim to build on prior research on attribution theory (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Jin & Huang, 2014; Klein & Dawar, 2004) by examining whether intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) incentivization acceptance motives, in which influencers justify their acceptance of incentives with personal (vs. non-personal) motives (Audrezet et al., 2020), can mitigate the negative effect of incentivization on both credibility and revisit intentions. Incentivization acceptance motives are particularly important for influencers, who usually interact with their followers and disclose personal information on a regular basis (Audrezet et al., 2020; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). In addition, we explore the impact of review valence and how it interacts with incentivization acceptance motives. While prior research often highlights the negative reaction to positively valanced information in both advertising and online review contexts (e.g., Purnawirawan, Eisend, De Pelsmacker, & Dens, 2015), we find that influencers can post positive reviews if paired with intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives. By doing so, they may mitigate the negative effect of a positive valence on revisit

intentions, appear more authentic and less betraying, and generate more WOM for their content.

Second, while the majority of research focuses on one-off cases of incentivization (e.g., Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Stubb & Colliander, 2019; Stubb, Nyström, & Colliander, 2019), few studies have taken a long-term perspective (e.g., Kozinets et al., 2010). Thus, we aim to build on the work of Kozinets et al. (2010) by examining the long-term impact of incentivization. In doing so, we examine the role of incentivization commonness, or the extent to which followers perceive incentivization to be common. We posit and find that for followers of review influencers, if they perceive incentivization as less common, they may focus on the influencer's communicated acceptance motives as a heuristic cue to determine whether incentivization had an impact on the independence of the influencer. However, if they perceive incentivization as more common, the impact may wear-out, and the audience may become accustomed to such content and thus may not be as reliant on the motives presented in the disclosure statement.

Third, we aim to show that influencer types can determine how consumers react to the motives presented in the incentivization disclosure statement. While followers of review influencers may become familiar with incentivization when it is perceived to be more common, reducing the impact of incentivization motives, we posit that such motives will remain vital for followers of lifestyle influencers. This is due to the personal-experience architype of lifestyle influencers, as they often share personal opinions, ideas, and experiences. Such an architype may be at odds with an extrinsically motivated acceptance of incentives and may lead to negative consumer reactions, even if incentivization is perceived to be common. Moreover, the communication of intrinsic motives in the disclosure statement will be of vital importance for lifestyle influencers, regardless of commonness perceptions, because such statement aligns with the personal architype of the influencer.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. Research related to incentivized reviews

An increasingly popular way for brands to generate WOM for their products and services is to collaborate with social media influencers (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019; Stephen & Galak, 2012). As part of such collaborations, influencers create sponsored content for the brand, often in the form of an incentivized review (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Stubb, 2018). As the term suggests, incentivized reviews are product reviews that reviewers craft in return for direct monetary (e.g., cash) or indirect (e.g., free products, invitations to events) compensation (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014; Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015; Stephen, Bart, Du Plessis, & Goncalves, 2012; Uribe et al., 2016). While brands may incentivize regular consumers to write reviews about their products and services (Du Plessis, Stephen, Bart, & Gonçalves, 2016; Pongjit & Beise-Zee, 2015), incentivized product reviews are particularly popular in the blogosphere. In Table 1, we present an overview of relevant literature related to incentivized reviews and influencer marketing. The majority of scholars have found that the use of a disclosure statement, as opposed to non-disclosure (or no sponsorship), can have negative effects on message persuasiveness, brand attitudes, and content credibility (Eisend et al., 2020). As such, researchers have attempted to understand the impact of different disclosure strategies on consumer reactions to incentivization (e.g., Carr & Hayes, 2014; Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Kozinets et al., 2010; Stubb et al., 2019). However, the impact of influencers' motives to accept incentives on followers' reactions to incentivized reviews (e.g., in terms of authenticity, WOM, and revisit intention) remains little understood. We extend prior research by taking a more long-term approach and examining the impact of incentivization acceptance motives and perceived commonness on followers' reactions across two types of influencers (review and lifestyle).

2.2. Review valence

Prior research on non-incentivized product reviews has extensively investigated the effects of review valence on persuasion, usefulness, and sales (e.g., Babić Rosario, Sotgiu, De Valck, & Bijmolt, 2016; Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006; Mudambi & Schuff, 2010; Purnawirawan et al., 2015; Schlosser, 2011). For example, Chevalier and Mayzlin (2006) found that a positive valence often increases product sales, whereas Babić Rosario et al. (2016) showed that high review variability harms product sales.

Given their promotional nature, consumers perceive review valence differently in the case of incentivized product reviews. Scholars have found that balanced, influencer-based incentivized product reviews generate higher levels of brand attitudes, credibility, trustworthiness, persuasiveness, and behavioral intentions (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015; Hwang & Jeong, 2016) because they contradict the interest of the advertising brand (e.g., Eisend, 2006). Building on this, we posit that review valence may also affect followers' reactions to an incentivized product review (e.g., WOM, revisit intentions). Specifically, if the incentivized review is positive, revisit intentions may decrease, because followers may perceive the influencer as less credible. However, by posting a balanced or even a negative review, the harmful effect of incentivization is mitigated, because the presentation of negative information by the influencer works against the interest of the incentivizing brand (Schlosser, 2011; Uribe et al., 2016) and is viewed as being counter-normative (Sen & Lerman, 2007). Moreover, we posit that a completely negative review boosts this effect, because it contradicts potential expectations of bias due to incentivization even more.

2.3. Incentivization acceptance motives

Research in the field of incentivized reviews has widely explored the impact of sponsorship disclosure. For example, Van Reijmersdal et al. (2016) found that disclosure of

sponsorships may activate persuasion knowledge, thus decreasing their influential ability, and Uribe et al. (2016) showed that the use of an explicit "advertorial" label on a blog post reduced the post's credibility while a balanced review mitigated this effect. In their meta-analysis, Eisend et al. (2020) demonstrated that sponsorship disclosure has a negative impact on credibility and consumer perceptions.

Examining different approaches of sponsorship disclosure, Hwang and Jeong (2016) found that simple sponsorship disclosure (i.e., "This post is sponsored") led to a reduction in source credibility and message attitudes, compared with when a blogger stated that the opinions were honest. Carr and Hayes (2014) examined the impact of explicit and implied disclosure and found that such approaches can affect credibility and influential ability. Recently, Stubb et al. (2019) found that providing justifications for accepting incentives generated greater attitudes toward influencers than simple disclosure. Moreover, Kozinets et al. (2010) found that the way bloggers construct the content can have an impact on how it is perceived. In their netnographic approach, they showed that bloggers use various narrative techniques to communicate, disclose, and justify their acceptance of incentives in return for product reviews.

Building on Kozinets et al.'s (2010) study, as well as the work of Audrezet et al. (2020), we examine the impact of incentivization acceptance motives and how their communication via a disclosure statement can affect how followers react to such content. On the one hand, influencers may simply state that the product review has been incentivized by a brand and that they received compensation for posting the product review. Such compensation is external to the actor; thus, we refer to this as an extrinsic incentivization acceptance motive. On the other hand, influencers may craft the disclosure statement to highlight their own internal motives, such as product interest, or even a long-held desire to

work with a given brand. We refer to this disclosure approach as an intrinsic incentivization acceptance motive.

The impact of such motives can be further explained with attribution theory (Weiner, 1980), which is based on the belief that individuals perceive others around them and make causal inferences about the events they observe and experience (Kelley, 1967, 1973; Kim & Gupta, 2012). This theory allows us to distinguish between intrinsic and extrinsic motives. As extrinsic motives are often ascribed to external influences, noting extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives may lead to attributions that the posting of the content was due to the mere fact that the influencer received incentives from the brand. However, intrinsic motives stem from the dispositions of the actor (Weiner, 1980), and thus followers may attribute an incentivized product review to the personal preferences of the influencer, such as his or her interest in or admiration for a given brand (Folkes, 1988). In line with this, Audrezet et al. (2020, p. 565) states that authentic social media influencers "are those that are intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated," as "they are driven by their inner desires and passions more so than by commercial goals."

Thus, we suggest that a positive incentivized review, paired with extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives, will cause more negative follower reactions (e.g., lower credibility, authenticity, and revisit intention). However, a balanced or negative review may overcome this negative effect because of the inclusion of negative information. With communication of intrinsic motives, however, followers may believe that the influencers have accepted incentivization out of their internal desire to partner with a brand, which may mitigate the negative effect of a positively valanced review. Thus:

H1. As the level of review valence positivity increases, revisit intentions decrease.

H2. Intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) incentivization acceptance motives mitigate the impact of (positive) review valence on revisit intentions.

In addition, we posit that credibility will act as a mediating variable. Research has shown that a positive valence degrades credibility of an incentivized review (Uribe et al., 2016), as opposed to posting balanced content. Moreover, Audrezet et al. (2020) found that influencers try to downplay their commercial interests by communicating intrinsic motives. Thus, we posit that the negative effect of positive valence on credibility will hold if influencers communicate extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives (i.e., doing so because the brand approached them). However, if influencers state intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives, followers may attribute the review to an internal motive (e.g., doing so out of interest in the product), leading to a mitigation of the negative impact of the positive review on credibility. In contrast with a positive review, a balanced or negative review will enhance credibility, regardless of the influencer's incentivization acceptance motives, as the influencer is openly acknowledging the product's faults and works against the commercial interest of the brand (e.g., Eisend, 2006).

H3. Credibility mediates the influence of review valence and incentivization acceptance motives on revisit intentions.

2.4. Role of influencer type and commonness

In this research, we refer to commonness as one's perception of how common incentivized product reviews are on a given influencer's medium (e.g., blog). While most research has examined cases of single exposure to (or one-off cases of) sponsored posts (e.g., Stubb & Colliander, 2019; Uribe et al., 2016), only a few studies have attempted to understand the impact of incentivization from a long-term perspective (e.g., Kozinets et al., 2010). Thus, we aim to build on this research by employing a long-term focus, to gain a better understanding of the relationship between commonness perceptions and how consumers react to incentivized reviews.

In particular, we explore the impact of commonness perceptions for two influencer types. While many different influencers focus on a variety of topics, in this research we focus on review and lifestyle influencers in the context of blogs. Review influencers routinely post product review content and are expected to develop and post honest and independent reviews. Indeed, one of the central characteristics driving the growth of product review influencers is perceived independence, in that influencers (e.g., bloggers) are separate from the interest of a given brand (Audrezet et al., 2020; Colliander & Dahlén, 2011). However, incentivization may challenge this notion, and if perceived as a less common practice by an influencer, followers may be uncertain about the independence of the presented information. Indeed, according to the two-factor theory of repetition (Berlyne, 1970), consumers may be uncertain when a given message is unfamiliar and may even experience a level of hostility toward the content. To determine the nature of review incentivization, followers may be forced to rely on the disclosure statement to obtain an explanation. When intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) motives for accepting incentives are presented, followers may attribute the acceptance of such incentives to the influencer's own internal motivations. If they perceive incentivization as more common, the possible negative effect of incentivization may decrease. In the two-factor theory, such a phenomenon is called "wear-out," whereby continued repetition results in reduced message effectiveness (Berlyne, 1970; Blair & Rabuck, 1998) such that one's level of uncertainty about an incentivized review decreases as commonness perceptions increase. Moreover, the possible negative effect of incentivization may decrease, as consumers may view such cues as signals of popularity or opinion leadership (De Veirman, Cauberghe, & Hudders, 2017).

Conversely, lifestyle influencers often post subjective personal content, sharing opinions, interests, issues, and experiences. This architype can help shape what consumers may expect from the influencers' content. Given their personal nature, the motives presented

in a disclosure statement may have a more dramatic impact on how consumers react to incentivization. Indeed, Audrezet et al. (2020) found that intrinsic motives are an essential determinant of authenticity for lifestyle influencers. Thus, we posit that the posting of an intrinsically motived disclosure statement may match with a lifestyle influencer's architype, thus affecting how followers react to incentivization, even when they perceive it as common. Such a presumption is in line with the findings of Kozinets et al. (2010) and Audrezet et al. (2020), who highlighted the importance of the connection between the disclosure statement and the influencers' architype and argued that alignment can lead to positive or neutral responses. However, the communication of extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives may have the opposite effect, as such statements do not inherently reflect the architype of lifestyle influencers and may not be accepted by followers regardless of commonness perceptions.

H4a. For review influencers who post positive incentivized reviews, incentivization commonness moderates the effect of intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) incentivization motives on revisit intentions (i.e., high perceived commonness mitigates the effect of incentivization acceptance motives on revisit intentions).

H4b. For lifestyle influencers who post positive incentivized reviews, the effect of intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) incentivization motives on revisit intentions holds regardless of incentivization commonness.

3. Overview of studies

We conducted one survey study, three experimental studies, and one field study. In the exploratory survey study, we ask review influencers about their followers' reactions to incentivized reviews. In Study 1, we examine followers' reactions by manipulating review valence (i.e., positive vs. balanced vs. negative) and incentivization acceptance motives (i.e., intrinsic vs. extrinsic) to examine their impact on perceived credibility and, ultimately, revisit intention (testing H1, H2, and H3). Study 2 tests the robustness of the effects with behavioral

field data from actual blogs (testing H1 and H2). In Study 3, we examine the effect of the commonness of incentivized reviews on perceived authenticity, feelings of betrayal, WOM, and revisit intention, while testing its interaction with incentivization acceptance motives (testing H1, H2, and H4a). Finally, we add to the results in Study 4 by controlling for alternative explanations, such as parasocial relationships and incentive type, and explore whether the effect holds for the two types of influencers (testing H4a and H4b). We report two additional experiments (Studies A1 and A2) in the Appendix and present our conceptual model in Fig. 1.

3.1. Exploratory survey study

To capture the perceptions of influencers regarding incentivized reviews, we conduct a survey-based exploratory study. On the one hand, this study provides insights into the perceived impact of incentivized reviews on followers' reactions. On the other hand, it uncovers how influencers assess the communication of incentivization acceptance motives to their followers.

3.1.1. Method

We collected data from 108 influencers (i.e., review bloggers) recruited with the help of two marketing agencies. We restricted the sample to influencers who had published at least one product review in the past. Given the sensitivity of the data, we made it optional for influencers to disclose their blog's name and URL in the beginning of the survey. We then asked the influencers to report their average visitor count per day, number of product reviews, and incentivized reviews posted. The sample included review blogs with an average count of 2663.16 visitors per day. The participating influencers reported having posted an average of 112.28 reviews and 59.40 incentivized reviews. Moreover, we included questions about the perceived impact of accepting incentives in return for writing product reviews and whether

the way such incentives are disclosed mattered. Finally, we gave the influencers the option to read two examples of the disclosure of acceptance incentives (intrinsic or extrinsic acceptance motives), before asking them to indicate how those approaches may affect blogs (N = 96; attrition rate = 11.11%). We presented the examples and related questions in random order to rule out order effects. We report a full list of survey items in the Appendix.

3.1.2. Results and discussion

While we found a large range of opinions about the impact of incentivized reviews, in general, influencers perceived the impact of incentivized reviews on their blogs to be slightly positive ($M_{PerceivedImpact}$ = 4.53). We report an overview of the frequencies related to each of the three items of the scale in the Appendix.

To explore the relationship between incentivization commonness and the perceived impact of incentivization among the influencers, we calculated the percentage of incentivized reviews in relation to the overall number of reviews posted on a blog. We found a positive and significant relationship between the commonness (no. of incentivized reviews divided by no. of all reviews) and the perceived impact of incentivized reviews (β = .281, t = 3.02, p < .01). This suggests that review bloggers who are more experienced in posting incentivized product reviews evaluate their impact on their blogs as more positive. Thus, our survey results lend support to the notion that incentivized reviews generate less negative reactions by followers the more common they are.

Moreover, most of the surveyed influencers agreed that the manner in which sponsorship is disclosed affects how their followers react to incentivized reviews ($M_{DisclosureMatters}$ = 5.31). Again, we report the frequencies of the answers in the Appendix. Finally, a paired sample t-test revealed that bloggers indeed perceived the communication of intrinsic motives as having a more positive impact on blogs than the statement of extrinsic

incentivization acceptance motives ($M_{Intrinsic}$ = 4.93 vs. $M_{Extrinsic}$ = 4.31; $t(95) = 5.567$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.57$).

3.2. Study 1

In Study 1, we examine how review valence and incentivization acceptance motives influence followers' revisit intention. We predict that the use of intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives in a disclosure statement will mitigate the negative effect of incentivized product reviews with positive valence on revisit intention. To gain a deeper understanding of the processes underlying the variance in revisit intentions, we measure the perceived credibility of the blog's reviews as a potential mediating mechanism.

3.2.1. Method

In Study 1, we collected data from 199 participants (54.8% female, 45.2% male; M_{age} = 41) on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to run a 3 (negative vs. balanced vs. positive review) × 2 (intrinsic vs. extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives) between-subjects experiment. The participants first agreed to take part in the experiment and performed an attention check (Oppenheimer, Meyvis, & Davidenko, 2009) before reading a scenario about revisiting a tech review blog they were familiar with to gather information about smart speakers. Afterward, we randomly assigned the participants to one of the six conditions. We asked them to read a disclosure statement, which manipulated incentivization acceptance motives, before reading an incentivized product review.

For this purpose, we used disclosure statements that stated either intrinsic or extrinsic motives to accept incentivization. We manipulated review valence by asking the participants to read one of three versions of a "final verdict" of a product review of the smart speaker on the WordPress.com blog platform.

After the reading tasks, the participants completed a questionnaire. First, we adapted Dutta, Biswas, and Grewal's (2011) scale to measure revisit intentions on a one-item scale

(Drolet & Morrison, 2001). Second, we measured perceived credibility on a 7-point Likert scale (α = .89) with four items adapted from Weathers, Sharma, and Wood (2007), Sen and Lerman (2007), and Wilder (1990) (α = .89). Third, to ensure that our manipulations had the desired effect, we included two manipulation checks at the end of the questionnaire. Fourth, we also measured participants' attitudes toward smart speakers and online reviews (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Finally, we captured participants' demographic data. All manipulations and measures appear in the Appendix.

3.2.2. Results and discussion

The manipulation check for review valence indicated that it had the desired effect (F(2, 196) = 175.370, p < .01, η^2 = .64); a post hoc Tukey honest significant difference (HSD) test revealed a significant difference among the positive (M = 7.86), balanced (M = 5.41), and negative (M = 2.72) conditions. Furthermore, checks for the incentivization acceptance motives manipulations showed higher levels of personal motives (M = 6.83) in the intrinsic motives conditions than in the extrinsic conditions (M = 5.95; F(1, 197) = 4.515, p < .05, η^2 = .02). The effect sizes for incentivization acceptance motives were smaller than those for review valence; however, this is in line with prior research (Kim et al., 2019). Moreover, when benchmarking the effect sizes against those of research with similar characteristics (Bakker et al., 2019; Lakens, 2013), the observed effect sizes of incentivization acceptance motives are comparable, especially with the effect sizes stemming from disclosure-type comparisons, excluding cases of "no sponsorship disclosure" (Carr & Hayes, 2014; Evans, Phua, Lim, & Jun, 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

Consistent with H1, a two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) found a significant main effect of review valence on revisit intention; the intention to revisit decreased as the positivity of the review increased ($M_{negative}$ = 5.49, $M_{balanced}$ = 4.64, $M_{positive}$ = 3.64; F(2, 193) = 19.903, p < .01, η_p^2 = .17). Moreover, we found a marginally significant main effect of

incentivization acceptance motives on revisit intention ($M_{intrinsic}$ = 4.82, $M_{extrinsic}$ = 4.46; F(1, 193) = 2.997, p = .09, η_p^2 = .02). This result may be explained by the non-significant comparisons of intrinsic and extrinsic motives in the balanced and negative conditions (we report the contrast for this subsequently). In the positive and balanced conditions (in line with Study A1 in the Appendix), we observed a significant main effect of incentivization acceptance motives on revisit intention ($M_{intrinsic}$ = 4.59, $M_{extrinsic}$ = 3.82; F(1, 128) = 6.400, p < .05, η_p^2 = .05).

Furthermore, the two-way ANOVA revealed a significant interaction effect of review valence and incentivization acceptance motives on revisit intention (F(2, 193) = 4.097, p < .05, η_p^2 = .04; see Fig. 2). Specifically, we found that when the disclosure statement presented extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives, revisit intention decreased as the positivity of the review valence increased ($M_{negative}$ = 5.69, $M_{balanced}$ = 4.46, $M_{positive}$ = 3.06). A post hoc Tukey HSD comparison revealed that all mean differences across the three review valence levels were significant. However, in line with our predictions in H2, the effect was mitigated when intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives were presented to participants ($M_{negative}$ = 5.28, $M_{balanced}$ = 4.81, $M_{positive}$ = 4.30). The post hoc Tukey HSD comparison revealed no significant mean differences between the balanced and negative conditions or between the balanced and positive conditions; only the negative and positive conditions showed a significant difference.

Following this, we compared the mean differences for intrinsic and extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives across the three review valence conditions. The analysis revealed that in the positive valence condition, revisit intention differed significantly between the intrinsic ($M_{positive}$ = 4.30) and extrinsic ($M_{positive}$ = 3.06) incentivization acceptance motives conditions (t(56) = 2.923, p < .01, d = 0.78). However, we found no significant mean differences of revisit intention between intrinsic and extrinsic motives in the cases of

balanced ($t(72) = 0.791$, $p = .43$, $d = 0.18$) and negative ($t(65) = –1.472$, $p = .15$, $d = 0.37$) valence. Thus, incentivization acceptance motives communicated in disclosure statements matter especially if the blogger posts an incentivized review with positive valence.

Next, we ran a moderated mediation model with the multicategorical predictor variable, review valence, represented by two sequentially coded dummies ($D_1 = 0$, $D_2 = 0$ for negative review; $D_1 = 1$, $D_2 = 0$ for balanced review; $D_1 = 1$, $D_2 = 1$ for positive review; Hayes & Montoya, 2017). The model also included incentivization acceptance motives as a dichotomous moderator (0 = intrinsic, 1 = extrinsic motives), credibility as the mediator, and revisit intention as the dependent variable (PROCESS Model 7 with 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% confidence intervals [CIs]; Hayes, 2015; see Fig. 3).

First, a model ($F(5, 193) = 15.29$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 28.4\%$) regressed both sequential variables D_1 (–.40, $t(193) = –1.36$, $p = .18$; representing the difference between the balanced and negative review conditions) and D_2 (–.49, $t(193) = –1.59$, $p = .11$; representing the difference between the positive and balanced review condition), the moderator (.42, $t(193) = –1.43$, $p = .15$; i.e., incentivization acceptance motives), the first interaction term ($D_1 \times$ moderator; –.51, $t(193) = –1.26$, $p = .21$), and the second interaction term ($D_2 \times$ moderator; –1.02, $t(193) = –2.41$, $p < .05$) on the mediator (credibility). This result lends support to the prediction that intrinsic incentivized acceptance motives mitigate the negative relationship between valence and credibility, especially when comparing positive and balanced reviews. In line with this, we found significant conditional effects of D_1 and D_2 on credibility in the extrinsic motives condition ($D_{1(ext)}$: –.91, $t(193) = –3.19$, $p < .001$; $D_{2(ext)}$: –1.51, $t(193) = –5.14$, $p < .001$), while credibility did not differ between the levels of review valence (D_1 and D_2) in the case of intrinsic motives ($D_{1(int)}$: –.40, $t(193) = –1.36$, $p = .18$; $D_{2(int)}$: –.49, $t(193) = –1.59$, $p = .11$).

Second, we found a significant, positive relationship between the mediator (credibility) and the outcome variable (revisit intention) in an additional regression model (b = 1.06, $t(195) = 19.12$, $p < .001$; $F(3, 195) = 160.70$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 71.2\%$). Moreover, we found that both direct effects for D_1 and D_2 were non-significant in this model ($D_{1(\text{direct})}$: –.16, $t(195) = –.96$, $p = .34$; $D_{2(\text{direct})}$: .10, $t(195) = .54$, $p = .59$).

Finally, we found a significant indirect effect for the difference between the balanced and negative review conditions (D_1) in the case of extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives (–.96, 95% CI = –1.52 to –.39), while the indirect effect in the intrinsic motives condition did not reach statistical significance (–.42, 95% CI = –.99 to .16). Moreover, we found no significant index of moderated mediation for the pairwise comparison of the balanced and negative review conditions (–.54, 95% CI = –1.32 to .28). However, when comparing the positive and balanced review conditions (D_2), we found a significant index of moderated mediation (–1.08, 95% CI = –2.04 to –.15) and a significant indirect effect for the case of extrinsic incentivization motives (–1.59, 95% CI = –2.28 to –.90). As expected, we found no significant indirect effect in the intrinsic motives condition (–.51, 95% CI = –1.16 to .15). Overall, these results lend support to the claim that credibility is a mediator in the relationship between the review valence × incentivization acceptance motives interaction and revisit intentions, particularly when comparing positive with balanced or negative reviews. Thus, for these cases, we find support for H3.

In summary, we demonstrate that intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives mitigate the negative impact of positive review valence on revisit intention. We also find that perceived credibility mediates this effect, particularly when the disclosure statement presents extrinsic motives for accepting incentives. This finding indicates that positive incentivized reviews decrease the intention to revisit a blog through perceived credibility, especially when extrinsic incentivization acceptance motivates are provided.

3.3. Study 2

In Study 2, we set out to gather field data that would provide insights into how blog followers react to incentivized product reviews in real life. For this purpose, we received permission to access the Google Analytics data of two small UK-based blogs ("mommy blogs" with approximately 400k users per year) that mainly review family-related products and services.

3.3.1. Method

To answer our research question, we analyzed the Google Analytics data related to 304 incentivized product reviews posted on the two blogs. For this purpose, and in line with our definitions of incentivized reviews, we included only reviews in which the bloggers explicitly stated that they were directly or indirectly compensated for reviewing a product.

Google Analytics provides data on blog visitors' revisit behavior in the form of bounce rates that are calculated for each blog page. Google (2020) defines a "bounce" as "a session that triggers only a single request to the Analytics server […] and then exits without triggering any other requests to the Analytics server during that session" (e.g., a visitor lands directly on the blog page containing an incentivized product review from, for example, a web search and exits immediately rather than continuing to browse other pages of the blog). Thus, the *bounce rate* is the percentage of all single-page sessions.

Given these definitions, bounce rates have the advantage in that their calculation is based solely on the exposure to one focal page (e.g., an incentivized product review). This is comparable to an analysis under controlled conditions—and thus maximizes the internal validity of the analysis—as it is the exposure to the focal review post, not other posts on this blog, that influences the bounce rate. Overall, bounce rates capture reactions to the content of the focal blog posts (i.e., incentivized product reviews); thus, we believe that bounce rates are suitable proxies to measure revisit behavior (i.e., the higher the bounce rate, the lower is the

number of revisits). As bounce rates for blogs are generally higher (Google, 2020), and not normally distributed (Range .43 to .99; Shapiro-Wilk's $p < .05$), we normalized the scores using the two-step approach of Templeton (2011). The method improves the reliability of measures (Van Albada & Robinson, 2007) by mapping ranks into uniform distribution, and then transforming them into a variable with normally distributed z-scores.

To capture the remaining variables, we used a manual text-coding approach. For this purpose, we employed three research assistants to code the blog posts' text. To minimize the workload per coder, however, each blog post was randomly allocated to and coded by the standard number of two independent coders. We briefed all coders on the task and provided them with a code book. The instructions included, among other things, the definition of incentivization acceptance motives, the definitions of intrinsic and extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives, and sample examples (see the Appendix).

We used a two-item 11-point ordinal rating scale to code review valence ("very negative/very positive" and "only mentioning negative aspects of the product/only mentioning positive aspects of the product"; $\alpha = .90$). Moreover, we provided a one-item 11-point ordinal scale to code incentivization acceptance motives communicated in a blog post ("extrinsic motives/intrinsic motives"). Overall, the inter-rater reliability for review valence and incentivization acceptance motives was satisfactory ($K\text{-}alpha_{\text{valence}} = 0.88$, $K\text{-}alpha_{\text{motives}} = 0.81$; Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). The coders resolved all disagreements on coding through discussion.

3.3.2. Results and discussion

We ran a regression-based moderation analysis with PROCESS model 1 (Hayes, 2015) to analyze the effect of review valence (X) on bounce rates (Y), while accounting for levels of extrinsic versus intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives (W; $F(3, 300) = 25.10$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 20.1\%$). In support of H1, we found a significant, positive relationship between

review valence and the bounce rate of incentivized reviews (0.01, $t(300) = 3.07$, $p < .01$). In addition, we found a significant, negative relationship between incentivization acceptance motives and the bounce rate (–0.01, $t(300) = –7.25$, $p < .01$). Moreover, we found that incentivization acceptance motives moderated the relationship between valence and bounce rate, in support of H2 (–0.002, $t(300) = –2.06$, $p < .05$). An additional floodlight analysis (Spiller, Fitzsimons, Lynch, & McClelland, 2013) revealed that valence is significantly related to bounce rates up to a Johnson–Neyman (J-N) point of 1.345 on the incentivization acceptance motives coding scale (centered at $M = 5.08$; $\beta_{JN} = .01$, SE = .003; 37.83% of the moderator's values lie above the J-N point). This finding lends support to the notion that intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives mitigate the negative effect of an increasingly positive valence of incentivized reviews. We plot the bounce rate results in Fig. 4.

Overall, Study 2 provides further evidence that influencers (i.e., review bloggers) should disclose the acceptance of incentivization by stating their intrinsic motives, especially if the review is positive. As care must be taken when generalizing these findings to all types of reviews on blogs, we aim to add to these findings in Studies 3 and 4 by widening the breadth of product categories considered.

3.4. Study 3

In Study 3, we build on the previous studies in several ways. First, we examine whether perceptions of the commonness of incentivized reviews posted by influencers affect followers' reactions. Second, we broaden the scope of this analysis to the outcomes authenticity, perceived betrayal, and WOM. Third, rather than asking participants to imagine that they are a regular reader of a fictitious review blog, we ask them to indicate the review blog they read most. Finally, use of real blogs instead of fictitious blogs in this study allows us to test the robustness of our findings with a more diverse set of product categories.

3.4.1. Method

We collected data from 567 participants (46.4% female, 53.3% male, 0.4% other; M_{age} = 38) on MTurk to run a 3 (negative vs. balanced vs. positive review) × 2 (intrinsic vs. extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives) between-subjects factor × 1 (commonness) measured factor experiment including the usual attention checks (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). We restricted participation to people who read product review blogs. To ensure participants really followed these types of blogs, we provided our definitions of the terms "blog" and "product review blogs" as well as a list of example review blogs (see the Appendix). We then asked the participants to specify the name and URL of the blog they visit most, as well as the most reviewed product category on the blog. We list the shares of reported product categories in the Appendix. Moreover, we asked the participants to indicate how many days per month they visit the blog.

Afterward, we randomly assigned the participants to one of the six between-subjects conditions. In this study, we used scenarios to manipulate both review valence and incentivization acceptance motives (see the Appendix). The scenarios asked participants to imagine that the blog they indicated previously announced a sponsorship deal and then to review a product of the sponsoring brand. In the scenario for the intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives condition, the blogger stated that "(s)he's very excited about this sponsorship deal, as (s)he's always been a big fan of that brand." In the scenario for the extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives condition, the blogger stated that "(s)he agreed to review the brand's new products in return for the sponsoring brand's support." Furthermore, this scenario manipulated review valence by asking participants to "imagine that the review discussed the quality, value, and price of the product." The positive review condition stated that "the review mentioned a lot of positive aspects related to the product's quality, while listing only a few negative aspects of the product," that the review "could be

described as favorable," and that the final rating was 10 out of 10 stars. The balanced review condition stated that "the review mentioned a number of positive aspects related to the product's quality, while also listing a number of negative aspects of the product" and that the review was "balanced" with a 7.5 out of 10 rating. Finally, the negative review condition stated that "the review mentioned a lot of negative aspects related to the product's quality, while listing only a few positive aspects of the product," that it "could be described as unfavorable," and that the product scored 5 out of 10 stars. We include all six conditions in the Appendix.

After providing the scenarios, first we measured revisit intention with a six-item 7-point Likert scale, which we adapted from the loyalty scales of Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantonello (2009), Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001), and Hsu, Huang, Ko, and Wang (2014) to the context of our study (α = .94). Second, to enhance the generalizability of our findings to blog-related outcomes other than revisit intention, we also measured the willingness to recommend the blog (WOM) on a three-item 7-point Likert-type scale (α = .96; Eisingerich, Chun, Liu, Jia, & Bell, 2015; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), feelings of betrayal on a three-item 7-point Likert scale (α = .98; Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), and perceived authenticity on an eight-item 7-point Likert scale (α = .97; Bruhn, Schoenmüller, Schäfer, & Heinrich, 2012; Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015; Napoli, Dickinson, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2014). Third, we measured the commonness of incentivized reviews on the blog that participants indicated with a two-item 7-point scale (α = .84). Fourth, we measured attitude toward online reviews (Reimer & Benkenstein, 2016). Fifth, we included manipulation checks regarding review valence and incentivization acceptance motives. Finally, we captured participants' demographic data. We report all measures in the Appendix.

3.4.2. Results and discussion

As intended, the participants perceived the manipulated reviews as significantly different in terms of valence ($F(2, 564) = 197.433$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .41$). The Tukey HSD revealed significant differences between all conditions ($M_{positive} = 8.70$, $M_{balanced} = 7.29$, $M_{negative} = 5.26$). Furthermore, the manipulation check—related to the incentivization acceptance motives—showed that participants perceived the reviews in the intrinsic conditions ($M = 6.09$) as driven more by personal motives, while they perceived the reviews in the extrinsic conditions ($M = 5.56$) as driven more by external motives ($F(1, 565) = 4.959$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .01$).

A base model ($F(4, 562) = 28.65$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 16.9\%$), including the two sequentially coded variables D_1 (representing the difference between the balanced and negative review) and D_2 (representing the difference between the positive and balanced review; Hayes & Montoya, 2017), the *Z* moderator (intrinsic vs. extrinsic motives), and the *W* moderator (commonness of incentivized reviews), revealed significant relationships of D_1 (–.130, $t(562) = –2.96$, $p < .01$), D_2 (–.134, $t(562) = –3.05$, $p < .01$), and commonness (.327, $t(562) = 8.46$, $p < .01$) to revisit intentions. We ran a moderated moderation analysis (PROCESS model 3; 10,000 bootstrap samples and 95% CIs; Hayes, 2015; Hayes & Montoya, 2017) including D_1, D_2, *Z, W,* and seven interaction terms to predict revisit intention ($F(11, 555) = 14.78$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 22.7\%$). We found that the difference between the balanced and negative reviews was significantly related to revisit intention (–1.01, $t(555) = –2.13$, $p < .05$) while the difference between the positive and balanced reviews only reached marginal significance (–0.71, $t(555) = –1.69$, $p = .09$). The effect of review valence may have been less strong in this study (H1) because we also included both its moderators, incentivization acceptance motives and commonness, in the same model simultaneously. Indeed, we found that the two moderators, incentivization acceptance motives (–0.04, $t(555)$

= –0.08, $p = .94$) and commonness (0.06, $t(555) = 0.79$, $p = .43$), had no direct relationship to revisit intention when we accounted for the seven interactions. However, in line with the findings of the previous studies and H2, the interaction between D_2 (positive vs. balanced) and W (incentivization acceptance motives) significantly predicted revisit intention (–1.40, $t(555) = –2.14$, $p < .05$). Moreover, the model generated a significant three-way interaction of D_2, W, and Z (commonness; 0.30, $t(555) = 2.02$, $p < .05$). Specifically, a conditional test of the interaction between review valence and incentivization acceptance motives at three levels of commonness (–1 *SD* vs. *Mean* vs. +1 *SD*) revealed that the interaction was significant for blogs in which incentivized reviews were perceived to be less common ($F(2, 555) = 3.21$, $p < .05$). This result provides support for H4a. We report a full results table of the regression model in the Appendix and provide a graphical depiction of the results in Fig. 5. In addition to the revisit-related results, we found significant three-way interactions ($D_2 \times W \times Z$) with similar patterns for the dependent variables authenticity (0.37, $t(555) = 2.30$, $p < .05$), perceived betrayal (–0.56, $t(555) = –2.76$, $p < .01$), and WOM (0.36, $t(555) = 2.05$, $p < .05$). We report these results also in the Appendix.

Overall, the results of Study 3 corroborate those of our previous studies by replicating the mitigating effect of intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives on the negative relationship between review valence and revisit intention. Study 3 expands on this by showing that intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives are a useful tool to generate more positive responses by followers of review influencers, especially if they perceive incentivized reviews as less common. We also show that review influencers are perceived as more authentic and less betraying and generate higher levels of WOM if they justify the acceptance of incentives in return for positive reviews with intrinsic motives.

3.5. Study 4

In Study 4, we aim to check the robustness of the previous studies by ruling out confounding variables and testing additional boundary conditions of the effect. First, we measure parasocial relationship strength to control for strong ties with the influencer as an alternative explanation for the effects of commonness. Second, we further attempt to reduce the possibility of selection bias by asking participants to report a blog that is not their most-read blog. Third, we attempt to rule out the association of incentivization acceptance motives with incentive types as a potential explanation for the effects, by testing whether the effect still holds if both disclosure statements explicitly state direct (financial) incentives, while providing further converging evidence for the effect through the use of new manipulations. Finally, Study 4 tests the effects of valence, incentivization motives, and the perceived commonness of incentivized reviews on authenticity, betrayal, WOM, and revisit intentions for the two types of influencers (review and lifestyle).

3.5.1. Method

We collected data from 832 participants on MTurk (49.8% female, 50.1% male, 0.1% other; M_{age} = 36) to run a 2 (intrinsic vs. extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives) × 2 (review vs. lifestyle blog) between-subject factors × 1 (commonness) measured factor experiment, including the recommended attention checks (Oppenheimer et al., 2009). We restricted participation to people who either read product review or lifestyle blogs, while providing definitions for both terms and a list of example blogs (see the Appendix). After randomly allocating participants to either the product review or lifestyle blog condition, and in contrast with Study 3, Study 4's instructions asked them to indicate one of the blogs they read, excluding their most-read blog. As in Study 3 (and Study A2 in the Appendix), we collected the blog's name, URL, most-reviewed product category, and visits per month. Indeed, we find that participants reported a lower count of visits per month due to the new

instructions (M_{Study3} = 8.14; $M_{StudyA2}$ = 7.17; $M_{Study4,\ review}$ = 6.67; $M_{Study4,\ lifestyle}$ = 8.00). We also measured commonness (α = .77), authenticity (α = .98), betrayal (α = .97), revisit intentions (α = .95) and WOM (α = .96). In addition, we measured parasocial relationship strength on a six-item 7-point Likert scale (α = .88; Labrecque, 2014) and included a manipulation check regarding the incentive type. We report all measures and manipulations of Study 4 in the Appendix.

As in the previous studies, we then randomly assigned participants to read scenarios that manipulated incentivization acceptance motives and review valence. While keeping the same valence manipulation as in Study 3, we focused on cases of positive reviews, as the previous studies showed that the influence of incentivization acceptance motives is particularly pronounced if review valence is positive. Moreover, we enhanced the manipulations of incentivization acceptance motives in Study 4. In conjunction with the added incentive type manipulation check, the new manipulation aimed to rule out inferences regarding the incentive type as a potential alternative explanation of the effect of incentivization acceptance motives. For this purpose, both conditions of the new manipulation explicitly stated that the product review was part of a sponsorship deal to cover some of the expenses related to the blog. We provide the full manipulations in the Appendix.

3.5.2. Results and discussion

In terms of manipulation checks, as intended, participants perceived the reviews described in the scenarios as positive (M = 9.10). Moreover, participants in the intrinsic condition (M = 5.65) perceived the review as driven more by personal motives than those in the extrinsic condition (M = 4.84; $F(1, 830) = 14.010$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .02$). Finally, participants in both conditions did not differ in perceived incentive type, thus ensuring that the observed effects are driven by incentivization acceptance motives rather than incentive types ($M_{Intrinsic}$ = 7.73 vs. $M_{Extrinsic}$ = 7.94; $F(1, 830) = 1.244$, $p = .27$, $\eta^2 = .001$).

To test our predictions, we performed a moderated moderation analysis using PROCESS model 3 (Hayes, 2015; 10,000 bootstrap samples; 95% CIs), which regressed incentivization acceptance motives (*X*), commonness (*W*), influencer type (*Z*), four interaction terms, and parasocial relationship strength (as a covariate) on the outcome variable revisit intention ($F(8, 823) = 37.44$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = 26.7\%$). The regression revealed a significant, negative relationship between incentivization acceptance motives and revisit intention, confirming the finding that intrinsic motives generate higher levels of revisit intention than extrinsic motives (–0.23, $t(823) = –2.15$, $p < .05$). Moreover, we found significant, positive relationships between commonness and revisit intention (0.11, $t(823) = 2.01$, $p < .05$), influencer type, and revisit intention (–0.33, $t(823) = –2.99$, $p < .01$) and between parasocial relationship strength and revisit intention (0.49, $t(823) = 12.03$, $p < .01$). In line with our predictions, we observed a significant three-way interaction of incentivization acceptance motives, commonness, and influencer type (0.30, $t(823) = 2.83$, $p < .01$). In accordance with the findings of Studies 3 and A2, as well as H4a, we also found a conditional significant interaction between incentivization acceptance motives and commonness for review blogs (0.24, $F(1, 823) = 10.31$, $p < .01$); however, we found no significant interaction for lifestyle blogs (–0.06, $F(1, 823) = 0.60$, $p = .44$), as predicted in H4b. Fig. 6 graphically depicts the results. The results remained significant after we excluded parasocial relationship strength as a covariate. As in Studies 3 and A2, we also ran the model with additional dependent variables and found that the three-way interaction of incentivization acceptance motives, commonness, and influencer type was also associated with authenticity (0.38, $t(823) = 2.94$, $p < .01$) and WOM (0.30, $t(823) = 2.38$, $p < .05$) and marginally associated with perceived betrayal (–.26, $t(823) = –1.71$, $p = .08$). Similar to the results for revisit intentions, we found significant conditional effects of the incentivization

acceptance motives × commonness interaction on authenticity, betrayal, and WOM in the review blog condition. We report the results in the Appendix.

The results of Study 4 confirm our prior findings that using intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) motives to communicate the acceptance of incentives is particularly beneficial if followers of product review influencers perceive incentivized reviews as less common. Study 4 also adds to those findings by demonstrating that the moderating effect of perceived commonness applies to review influencers, but not lifestyle influencers. In the case of lifestyle influencers, given their subjective nature, communicating intrinsic motives for accepting incentives is beneficial regardless of the commonness perceptions of followers. Finally, Study 4 demonstrates the robustness of the observed effects while controlling for parasocial relationship strength, self-selection, and incentive type as possible alternative explanations.

4. General discussion

Brands incentivize influencers to review their products and services. Despite their reputation as credible review sources (Johnson & Kaye, 2004, 2009; Uribe et al., 2016) and the increasing ubiquity of sponsored content, accepting incentives in return for posting product reviews may cause negative follower reactions (Eisend et al., 2020; Medley, 2018). In one survey study, three experiments, and one field study, we set out to build on the current literature by exploring when and how incentivized reviews drive negative reactions of influencer followers. Specifically, we show that as the positivity of an incentivized review increases, revisit intention and behavior do not suffer if intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) incentivization acceptance motives are communicated by a product review–focused influencer (Studies 1–4). We support these findings with analytics data collected from real blogs (Study 2). In Study 1, we find support for our proposed mediating mechanisms, by testing the role of credibility. In addition, we find that stating intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives increases followers' willingness to recommend the influencer (WOM) and their perceived authenticity of the

influencer, while reducing feelings of betrayal by the influencer (Studies 3–4). We also find that stating intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives is particularly beneficial if followers perceive incentivized reviews posted by a review influencer as less common (Studies 3–4). Finally, we show that followers of lifestyle influencers prefer the acceptance of incentives to be intrinsically motivated, regardless of their perceptions of commonness of incentivized reviews (Study 4).

4.1. Theoretical contributions

First, we contribute to prior research by combining two streams of literature. Prior research focuses either on examining simple disclosure strategies (e.g., "This review is sponsored"; Carr & Hayes, 2014; Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Uribe et al., 2016) or on describing how social media influencers manage their impressions through self-presentation and narratives (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020; Kozinets et al., 2010). However, the former stream of literature does not examine the effect of personal motives for accepting incentives and focuses heavily on persuasion and purchase intention as outcomes of disclosure, while the latter stream does not focus on incentivized reviews or experimentally test the effects of motives on credibility, revisit intentions, or other influencer-related outcomes (e.g., authenticity, WOM). Thus, we contribute to extant literature on incentivized reviews and influencer marketing (e.g., Hughes et al., 2019; Stubb et al., 2019), as well as attribution theory (Weiner, 1980), by examining boundary conditions under which incentivization acceptance motives help influencers elicit more positive follower reactions. For example, we find that the negative effect of positive incentivized reviews may be mitigated by stating intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives.

Second, we expand current literature on influencer marketing by exploring more long-term effects of posting incentivized reviews. In doing so, we answer Stubb and Colliander's (2019) call to investigate the effects of disclosure for cases of multiple exposure. With our

studies, we add to this research gap by examining the role of incentivization commonness. While most prior research has focused on one-off scenarios of incentivization—and its disclosure—and found that incentivization decreases review credibility (Ballantine & Au Yeung, 2015; Eisend et al., 2020; Uribe et al., 2016), we find that the negative effect of incentivization decreases the more common it is perceived to be on a review influencer's blog. Moreover, we extend literature that follows a more long-term focus (e.g., Kozinets et al., 2010) by showing that intrinsic incentivization acceptance motives are particularly beneficial for review influencers who are perceived as posting incentivized reviews less commonly.

Finally, we build on the emerging body of influencer marketing literature (Audrezet et al., 2020; Eisend et al., 2020; Hughes et al., 2019; Stubb et al., 2019) by testing the effects of incentivization acceptance motives and perceived incentivization commonness in two influencer contexts—product review and lifestyle blogs. In contrast with the findings related to product review influencers, we show that the reactions of followers to incentivized reviews posted by lifestyle influencers mostly depend on the communicated motives, regardless of the perceived commonness. Specifically, followers perceive lifestyle influencers who communicate intrinsic (vs. extrinsic) motives for writing a product review in return for incentives as more authentic and less betraying. This may be because the architype of a lifestyle influencer is to share subjective opinions driven by personal interests, issues, and experiences. Thus, we add to existing theory (e.g., Audrezet et al., 2020) by demonstrating that influencer types are an important determinant of how followers react to sponsored content.

4.2. Managerial implications

Our studies provide relevant insights for influencers (e.g., bloggers) and marketing professionals wanting to engage in incentivization opportunities. Influencers often fear that

incentivized reviews might cause negative reactions in their followers, especially if the reviews are positive. While influencers want to maintain a positive relationship with sponsoring brands and are reliant on their revenue, they also want to maintain a positive image in the eyes of their followers. Therefore, influencers often choose not to be too negative in their incentivized reviews, though this may enhance their credibility. However, our studies show that negative effects of incentivized reviews can be mitigated even if they are overly positive. For influencers, we find that stating personal reasons for accepting a deal with a brand (e.g., an interest in the reviewed product) may often be beneficial, while external motives for accepting incentives (e.g., because the brand approached them) are often negatively received. Justifying the acceptance of incentives may also benefit the sponsoring brand, as followers perceive the influencer as more credible and authentic and less betraying. Influencers also often worry about posting too many incentivized reviews. We find that followers of review influencers who perceive incentivized reviews as more common generally respond more favorably to them. Thus, we advise influencers who mostly review products to be transparent about sponsored content and to educate their followers that incentivized reviews are a common practice in their profession. Finally, such open and self-disclosing interactions between influencers and followers may also help strengthen parasocial relationships, which are a valuable asset for the influencer.

4.3. Limitations and future research directions

Our results suggest that influencers should communicate their intrinsic motives for accepting incentives, as this form of (self-)disclosure makes them appear more credible and authentic. Future research might examine whether these effects still hold if a reviewed product does not fit the review influencer. That is, the posting of an incentivized review without a clear fit (i.e., unrelated product category) might harm the influencer and reduce his or her credibility and authenticity. Indeed, in their qualitative analysis of social media

influencer posts, Audrezet et al. (2020) found that influencers choose to feature products that fit their style to manage their authenticity. Moreover, the communication of intrinsic versus extrinsic incentivization acceptance motives may be more or less efficient, depending on the influencer–product fit. Thus, fit may be an important element to examine in future research.

Moreover, while our research focused on examining followers' reactions to positive incentivized reviews, we also found that a more balanced or even negative review valence can enhance influencers' credibility, as this may signal to their audiences that their opinions were not influenced by an incentivizing brand. While an overly negative incentivized review may seem relatively unrealistic, it may be useful to examine the real-world consequences of such incentivized reviews. Anecdotal evidence suggests that, while influencers often worry about their working relationship with a brand breaking down after a negative review, brands may also use this feedback to improve their products (Brownlee, 2020). Thus, future research might examine influencer marketing from a co-creation and innovation management perspective.

Finally, we show that followers' reactions to incentivization are determined by influencers' incentivization acceptance motives. However, we do not compare the different approaches to incentivization. Therefore, future research might more deeply explore the effects of incentive types on follower reactions. For example, whether financial incentives are more negatively received than indirect incentives (e.g., free products, flights, accommodation, exclusive rights to review new products) remains to be explored.

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