Generational Consumer Perceptions of Social Media Influencer Weight Loss Product Advertising (SMIWPA) Disclosure on Instagram

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University of Colorado Boulder

Undergraduate Honors Thesis

2022

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This study examined the generational consumer perceptions of social media influencer weight loss product advertising (SMIWPA) disclosure on Instagram. This is an important and prevalent topic given that social media advertising is still new and weight loss products are the leading form of consumer fraud in the United States (Anderson, 2019). Oftentimes, the weight loss products being advertised as "healthy" or "all natural" contain synthetic compounds that are not safe and can make you sick (Schein, M., et, al., 2017). The current FTC regulations require influencers to disclose when they post about a brand that they have any type of relationship with (FTC, 2019). This means influencers need to disclose when they are monetarily paid and when they receive items for free as a "gift." Despite these regulations, the FTC relies on self-reporting which is not successful in monitoring and reviewing all the social media advertisements posted every day, leaving many influencers to not disclose their sponsorships with little or no consequences (Roberts, A. J., 2020).

Despite there being extensive existing research for advertising disclosure on social media and/or of weight loss products, there is no found research looking into the difference in generational consumer perceptions for SMIWPA disclosure. Although there is previous research on the consumer perception of SMIWPA type marketing for women, it did not research the generational differences that are present due to different exposure levels to influencer advertising or by lifespan changes. An example of one of these possible lifespan changes would be that college-aged women are more likely to develop eating disorders, leading them to be more likely influenced by weight loss product advertising (Taylor, C Barr et al., 2006). Because college-aged women are found to be more susceptible to taking weight loss supplements (Taylor, C Barr et al., 2006) and are more comfortable with social media advertising, (van der Goot, et al., 2016) this study will explore whether they have fewer negative perceptions about disclosure than older

generations. Because the older women participants in this study will be mothers, I will also be able to study the parental attitudes towards influencers targeting their children.

This research will seek to further understand women's perceptions of SMIWPA disclosure and will be important in the discussion of FTC regulation. Furthermore, this research will be important for brands that are advertising weight loss and diet products as they discuss the practical implications of targeting young women and as they decide the level in which they will disclose their SMIWPA. The findings of this research will ultimately help ensure the prevention of deception and negative influence within the advertising industry. The FTC defines deceptive advertising as, "representation, omission or practice that is likely to mislead the consumer acting reasonably in the circumstances, to the consumer's detriment" (FTC, 1983).

Literature Review

Social Media Influencer Advertising Growing Rapidly

With the global Instagram influencer marketing size reaching $2.3 billion in 2020, it is no wonder that brands are rushing to join the newest advertising trend. The number of brand-sponsored posts on the platform was expected to double, surpassing six billion in 2020 (Mediakix, 2019). The overall social media influencer marketing size worldwide reached $13.8 billion in 2021 (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). Social media influencer advertising includes brands/companies monetarily paying or sending gifts to social media influencers with a high number of followers to promote a product. The leading benefits to the brand of social media advertising are increased exposure and traffic, allowing brands to easily reach their target audience by partnering with influencers that are popular within their brand or product category (Social Media Examiner, 2021). A survey conducted by Mediakix in 2019 found that 17% of

companies use over half their budget on social media influencer advertising and 89% of marketers claim that the ROI is comparable to or better than other marketing channels.

Brands and companies largely benefit from social media influencer advertising as it is an easy way for them to deliver their messages to their target audiences that trust the source (Brown, 2008). These brands can identify an influencer that is popular in their product industry and who has followers that fit the demographic of the company's target audience. The brands will oftentimes make a "discount code" for these influencers that the customer will enter during the time of purchase. These discount codes allow for the brand to easily track how many customers the influencers are bringing in and how many purchases have been made (Perry, 2020). This is usually very successful as studies have shown that consumers trust influencers and feel as though they have friendships with them (Steffi De Jans, 2018). Despite this, there are oftentimes deception used in social media influencer advertising that largely goes unmonitored (Roberts, A. J., 2020).

Disclosure and FTC Regulation

To prevent deceptive advertising, the FTC requires disclosure messages either verbally or visually in order to inform the consumer that what they are seeing/listening to is an advertisement. Sometimes social media influencer advertisements are clearly stated as paid sponsorships, while other times influencers claim to use certain products without disclosing that they are being paid (Roberts, A. J., 2020). A study researching the impact of influencer marketing disclosure on YouTube to children found that the influencer's use of disclosure, and the children's understanding of selling intent by the influencer video, lowered the advertised product desire. This means that a higher advertising literacy and understanding of selling intent will negatively impact an audience's want for that product (Boerman, S. C., 2002). This could

lead brands to deceptively advertise their products through social media influencers because they do not want consumers to recognize the disclosure and deter from purchasing. Although disclosure may lower product desire, a 2020 study investigating types of advertising disclosure on Instagram and corresponding consumer responses found that consumers consider influencers that disclose their ads as more trustworthy (Abdullahi, 2020).

With the rise in social media influencer advertising and deceptive/unsubstantiated claims on social media, the FTC has a difficult time monitoring and regulating it. The FTC relies on self-regulation meaning that a company will not usually get in trouble for their advertisements unless another company or consumer reports it (Schein, M., et, al., 2021). With social media influencer advertising still being somewhat new, there is limited regulation and enforcement for the rules of disclosure on these posts. Current FTC regulation requires influencers to disclose when they have "any financial, employment, personal, or family relationship with a brand" (FTC, 2019). The FTC states that these disclosure statements must be "hard to miss" on the social media posts. The use of disclosure terms like "advertisement," "ad," and "sponsored" as hashtags are accepted but vague terms like "partner" should be avoided. Influencers are also not allowed to talk about their experience using a product that they have not tried, cannot positively endorse a brand they found terrible, and are unable to make claims about a product that cannot be proven (FTC, 2019). Despite this, many influencers continue to endorse certain brands or products they have not even tried before or that dot even work because they are rarely held accountable for it (Roberts, 2020). Popular brands must disclose their social media influencer advertisements because studies show that increased compliance with the FTC guidelines by high-traffic sites can stimulate industry-wide self-regulation (An, et, al., 2021).

As this study aims to aid in the discussion of expanding or limiting SMIWPA disclosure regulation, it is important to understand consumers' awareness and attitudes towards the current practices. This leads to the first research question posed in this study asking: 1) to the extent they are aware of them, what are consumers' perceptions of current FTC disclosure regulation?

Weight Loss Product Advertising and Deception

The weight loss product industry has a vast history of deception, as its sales have been identified as the leading form of consumer fraud in the United States (Anderson, 2019). In 2017, 6.5 million US consumer reported purchasing fraudulent weight loss products (Anderson, 2019). This is because diet supplement companies often use deceptive or unsubstantiated claims (Anderson, 2019). For example, products claiming to be "all natural" contain synthetic compounds (Schein, M., et, al., 2017). According to the FTC, "In recent years, the FDA has discovered hundreds of dietary supplements that contain potentially harmful drugs or other chemicals not listed on the product label," (FTC, 2021).

Research has found that women are overconfident in their ability to sense deceptive online advertising of weight loss products (Lim, J. S., et al., 2020). This study found that most women believe that these deceptive advertising techniques may easily influence other women, while they would not be influenced. The study's results suggest that increased consumer literacy regarding deceptive advertising techniques may increase their support for further FTC regulation. These findings do not stand alone, as research from 2016 found a similar conclusion that consumers assess advertisements as more deceptive to others than to themselves (Guang-Xin Xie, 2016). As this prior research has found that women often use Third-Person Effect (TPE) when evaluating weight loss advertisements, it will used in this study as a key theory to be applied. It will also be important to assess whether these previous findings are consistent with the

participants attitudes and beliefs that will be researched in this study. The second research question posed asks: 2) what are consumers' perceptions of social media influencers promoting weight loss products (SMIWPA), especially those targeted toward young women?

Generational Differences

Studies have shown perceptions about social media influencer advertising differ across generations (van der Goot, et al., 2016). This may be because of generational differences growing up with social media/advanced technology or because of different life stages. A study conducted by van der Goot (2016) found that the youngest generation, which grew up with social media, were usually unbothered by social media advertising and they do not find it unpleasant. Because this generation grew up in such a saturated advertising environment, they oftentimes go unnoticed because they are used to them. This study also found that the Gen X took a pretty middle ground on their opinions of social media advertising in comparison to Millennials' positive views, while the Baby Boomer generation had the most negative perception about it. It was also found that older generations do not see the purpose of interacting with social media advertisements and have suspicions about the safety of it (van der Goot, et al., 2016; Childers, Et, al., 2020).

Studies researching college-aged women also found that they are more susceptible to eating disorders, leading them to be more susceptible to weight loss product advertising than other generations (Taylor, C Barr et al., 2006). These women may see social media influencer weight loss product advertising (SMIWPA) as helpful or trustworthy because of the familiar influencers promoting them (McCormick, K., 2016) and because they are more likely to try out a new diet product (Taylor, C Barr et al., 2006). The generational differences in behavior and beliefs for social media influencer advertising beg the question of who these social media

influencer weight loss product advertisements are targeting and whether it is ethical to do so. In order to further understand generational differences in terms of SMIWPA, the third research question of this study asks: 3) How do consumers' perceptions of social media influencers promoting weight loss products, and their disclosure practices, compare generationally?

    a)   How do consumers' perceptions of SMIWPA targeted toward young women compare generationally?

Advertising Ethics

Advertising ethics is defined as "what is right or wrong in the conduct of the advertising function, and concerns questions of what ought to be done, not just what legally must be done" (Cunningham, 1999). A study researching the ethical implications of disclosure practices found that disclosure aided in user's ability to recognize when a post is an advertisement (van der Goot, 2021). The findings call on the need for increased education for influencers/content creators. It is the influencer's moral responsibility to properly disclose their sponsorships. Because influencers are primarily concerned about their number of followers, likes, and reputation, it would be beneficial to educate them on the positive effects of disclosure practice and how it can improve their credibility (van der Goot, 2021).

According to Bivins (2018), it is critical that advertisers tell the truth and follow the laws that are in place as they represent society's values and ideals. In order to follow legal and ethical guidelines, advertisers must consider the importance of providing accurate information about the product and in a appropriate/realistic context to the audience. The fourth research question posed in this study aims to understand what consumers view as morally correct, asking: 4) What are consumers' perceptions of the ethical nature of SMIWPA?

<div align="center">Theoretical Background and Concepts</div>

Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM)

The theory that will be applied to this study is the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) to better understand how the participants use their knowledge of disclosure to interpret and perceive SMIWPA. Persuasion Knowledge Model is "focused on how people use their knowledge of persuasion motives and tactics to interpret, evaluate and respond to influence attempts from marketers and others," (Williams, 2002). When gathering perceptions of SMIWPA disclosure, PKM will help to understand how women "cope" with the persuasion tactics, both cognitively and physically (Friestad & Wright, 1994). When examining the perceptions collected in this study, we utilize the three key knowledge structures of PKM including persuasion knowledge, topic knowledge, and agent knowledge (Friestad & Wright, 1994). Persuasion knowledge defines a person's ability to recognize, interpret, and understand how and why they are being influenced. For this study, the participant's persuasion knowledge is their ability to tell whether a social media post is an advertisement. Topic knowledge describes the target's perception and beliefs about the influential message's topic. The participant's topic knowledge in this study would be their preconceived notions and attitudes toward weight loss products. Lastly, agent knowledge is explained by Friestad & Wright (1994) as "beliefs about the traits, competencies, and goals of the persuasion agent (e.g., an advertiser, a salesperson)." For this study, the participant's agent knowledge would be their awareness of advertisers, weight loss brands, and influencer's goals.

One study from 2018 created the Persuasion Knowledge Scales of Sponsored Content which includes nine key components to measure (Boerman, et al., 2018). These components measure the participant's 1) ability to recognize sponsored content, 2) understanding of persuasive intent by the advertiser, 3) awareness of who is paying for the sponsored content, 4)

understanding of how and why the content is persuasive, 5) awareness of the economic model that allows social media platforms to be free, 6) ability to reflect on the influential impact of sponsored content, 7) skepticism of sponsored content, 8) opinion on the appropriateness of the content, and 9) their general attitude or dislike of the sponsored content. These nine scales will be used in this study to further understand how students that are advertising majors may have different knowledge and beliefs about SMIWPA disclosure than students who are not. This leads to the fifth research question asking: 5) How, if at all, do consumers' perceptions of SMIWPA and disclosure practices differ depending on the consumer's level of advertising knowledge?

Parasocial Relationships (PSR) & Interactions (PSI)

This research will also use the concepts of parasocial relationships (PSRs) and parasocial interactions (PSIs) to further grasp follower-influencer relationships and how some women may consider influencers more or less credible. PSIs describes a media user's interaction and sense of mutual awareness with an influencer during the media exposure while PSRs expand this relationship outside the specific media interaction (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2018). In this study, PSIs will represent the feeling of friendship and trust between the user and influencer at the time of media interaction. PSRs will explain how those feelings are extended beyond the bounds of the user's social media interaction.

One study researching the advertising of young kids found that a strong PSI positively influenced purchase intention (Steffi De Jans, et al, 2018). In addition to this, when the kids had an enhanced understanding of advertising, the use of disclosure strengthened their PSI with the influencer. Results of the study showed that when the intention of the influencer's post is transparent, the kids may see them as more honest and trustworthy. Research shows that PSIs can impact the user's brand perception of the product being advertised and in turn, the

consumer's perception of the brand/product being advertised can also impact that user's PSI with the influencer (Lin, et al., 2021). This means that a user's preexisting feelings towards a brand may influence the trust that they felt with the influencer sponsoring the advertisement. Because this prior research suggests that influencers have the power to shape and form their follower's attitudes, the sixth and final research question asks: 6) How, if at all, do consumers' perceptions of SMIWPA and disclosure practices differ depending on their trust of influencers?

Third-Person Effect (TPE)

Lastly, this study will apply the Third-Person Effect (TPE) to analyze findings and better understand persuasion knowledge such as how some women may think that they are less susceptible to being deceived than others (Lim, et al., 2020). According to Davidson (1983), TPE occurs when "a person exposed to a persuasive communication in the mass media sees this as having a greater effect on others than on himself or herself" (p.1). One study researching the role of TPE in deceptive ads found that people who have a low skepticism towards deceptive advertising tend to apply TPE while highly skeptical people do not (Guang-Xin Xie, 2016). This explains how users who are not suspicious of deceptive advertising tend to trust ad claims more frequently. These findings will aid in this study by explaining why the advertising majors may utilize TPE more or less than their peers due to their heightened education of deceptive advertising.

Method

Research Design

In order to address the research questions and better understand consumer perceptions, focus groups were used for data collection. Focus groups were chosen because of the qualitative research ability to uncover attitudes, behaviors, and the social phenomena that occur within

groups (Holloway & Galvin, 2016.) Advertising researchers have long used focus groups as a way to discover insights into the motivations and behaviors of consumers using certain products or services (David W. Stewart & Prem Shamdasani, 2017).

To begin, the PI was granted IRB approval for the protocol, recruitment scrips, consent forms, and focus groups. Three Focus groups were conducted: two with female students at the University of Colorado Boulder that belong to Gen Z (born 1997-2012), and one with mothers that have daughters. These two different age groups were used in order to analyze the generational differences and mothers were used to further understand parental perceptions of SMIWPA targeting their daughters. Each focus group was comprised of 6-7 participants, a satisfactory sample size for group discussion (Kitzinger, 1995). The Gen Z participants and the mothers were separated for the focus group sessions in order for the participants to feel comfortable, confident, and open to sharing their experiences (Lunt & Livingstone, 1996.) Focus groups allow for the ability to share ideas, stories, and for the participants to draw an overall consensus for their generation (Kitzinger, 1995.)

The two focus groups with student participants were held in person in a private room on the CU Boulder campus and the focus group with mothers as participants was conducted on Zoom. Each focus group was a one-time event and all participants signed consent forms prior to beginning. All student participants were asked to write their age and major on the back of their participant ID place cards. Focus groups were audio recorded and then transcribed. Once transcribed, common points of discussion and reoccurring themes were analyzed for results. Given the participant's discussions, attitudes, and experiences, the two generations were thematically analyzed, and conclusions were drawn about how their consumer perceptions differ. When analyzing results, Persuasion Knowledge Model, Third-Person Effect, and Parasocial

Relationships/Interaction (PSR/PSI) theories help to better understand their perceptions and feelings on disclosure.

Recruitment Methods

College-age women represented Gen Z participants, characterized by media use during the rise of social media and as more comfortable with social media advertising than other generations (van der Goot, et al., 2016). Female CU students were recruited through their classes and a CU Boulder sorority by the primary investigator (PI). The PI reached out to numerous professors on the CU Boulder campus to ask if they would be willing to allow the PI to share the study with their classes and offer extra credit as an incentive. Two professors agreed to offer small amount of extra credit points. The PI attended these classes in person and read off a recruitment script. The PI also reached out to one sorority. The chapter president agreed to let the PI recruit participants at their weekly chapter meetings and offered their sorority members one sorority "house point" for their participation. Sorority house points are earned and used by chapter members to decide who gets to live in each room in the house. The PI attended this sorority chapter meeting in-person and read off a recruitment script. The PI's contact information was given to all potential participants and was encouraged to reach out by email if interested. After these recruitment efforts, 12 students agreed to participate.

Mother participants were recruited through a referral procedure. At the end of each student participant focus group, the generational component of this study was explained, and participants were asked to write down their mother's email if they thought they would also be willing to participate. These mothers were emailed using an IRB-approved recruitment script. Starting with a list of professors in the PI's personal network and a review of online bios, a list of CU Boulder faculty who are mothers were also recruited by email. Participants in this group did

not receive any compensation or incentive. Women who have daughters were used as a representative sample for the focus groups as they may have different social media experiences than younger generations and they can express their feelings about SMIWPA brands/influencers targeting their daughters.

Focus Group Procedures

Student/Gen Z Focus Groups:

The two focus groups with CU Boulder student participants were held on-campus. Both sessions were carried out for one hour and the PI took the role of moderator. Each group included 6 and 7 participants respectively. Participants were informed by the moderator of the basic aims of the study before signing a consent form. A hard copy of the informed consent document was signed by each participant at the onset of the focus group before the in-person session formally began. Each participant was given a name card with their participation ID number and was addressed by their ID number for the duration of the session. No names were attached to data collection. The participants were asked to each put their age and major on the back of their ID cards in order to use Persuasion Knowledge Model for analysis. To begin the focus group, the moderator read from an introductory script stating the purpose of the study, the rules of the focus group, and a short explanation to why the topic is of importance. Participants then had the opportunity to ask any questions before beginning. In order to transition into the questions, the groups were asked an icebreaker to put them at ease and to get everyone talking (Krueger, 1998.) The discussion then centered around 6 main questions (see Appendix A) with possible probes for the moderator to ask if necessary. Both focus group sessions were audio-recorded.

Mother/Gen X Focus Group:

The one focus group with mothers was held over Zoom in order to feasibly bring busy mothers living in various states together (Kitzinger, 1995.) The session was carried out for one hour and the PI took the role of moderator. Only one focus group was conducted as there was no need for comparison relative to PKM. The group included 6 participants. The consent forms were emailed to participants prior to the focus group and there was time allotted for participants to read it over at the start of the focus group session. Participants were informed by the moderator of the basic aims of the study before signing. Consent was collected verbally, and audio recorded. Upon arrival to the Zoom, participants were asked to change their Zoom name to their participation ID number told to them by the moderator and were addressed by their ID number for the duration of the session. To begin the focus group, the moderator read from an introductory script stating the purpose of the study, the rules of the focus group, and a short explanation to why the topic is of importance. Participants then had the opportunity to ask any questions before beginning. In order to transition into the questions, the group was asked an icebreaker (Krueger, 1998.) The discussion then centered around 6 main questions (see Appendix B) with possible probes for the moderator to ask if necessary. The focus group session was audio recorded.

Data and Analyzation

All three focus group audio recordings were transcribed into three typed documents. Thematic Analysis was used to categorize and describe meaningful discussion points and patterns within the data. Six key analysis phases were then used to code, theme, and analyze the transcribed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These six phases created by Braun & Clarke for thematic analysis include: 1) Familiarizing yourself with your data, 2) Generating initial codes,

3) Searching for themes, 4) Reviewing themes, 5) Defining and naming themes, and 6) Producing the report.

To begin the analysis procedure, all three of the focus group transcriptions were read and re-read three times in order to acquaint the PI with the data constituting phase one. Next, the PI made general notes about prominent discussion topics, opinions, and ideas. In the third phase, each piece of data from the transcription was then coded based on topic, meaning, and patterns with consideration of the six research questions posed in this study. Interesting features within the data were coded and labeled with a name and designated highlight color. Once initial codes were formed, each was collated and categorized into potential themes relevant to the study's research questions. This was done by sorting through every initial code to find reoccurring ideas that could possibly provide answers to this study's research questions. Potential themes were then combined to create overarching themes for the research. For phase four, the themes were reviewed and narrowed down based on relevance to the each of the research questions. Once themes were reviewed, they were each titled and defined using language from participant responses, constituting phase five. In the final phase, these themes were applied to their corresponding research questions with definitions, summaries of discussions, and direct participant quotes that describe the many consumer perceptions and experiences of SMIWPA and disclosure.

Findings

With six main research questions posed, 16 themes were found. Themes were derived from prominent and reoccurring consumer perceptions and each corresponds with one of the six posed research questions. Each theme is defined and summarized with focus group discussions and direct quotes.

Disclosure and FTC regulation:

Research Question 1) To the extent they are aware of them, what are consumers' perceptions of current FTC disclosure regulation?

Confusion about current regulations

When discussing their thoughts and experiences seeing SMIWPA, multiple participants from each focus group expressed confusion with current FTC disclosure regulations. A major point of uncertainty that arose was not knowing when exactly influencers need to disclose advertisements on social media, specifically with PR gifts. PR, or Public Relations, gifts are products given to influencers by the brand for free with the hopes that the influencer will share about it on their social media. While a participant Student Participant #5 stressed the importance of recognizing PR gifts posted by influencers are transactional promotions, Student Participant #11 shared that she did not think posting about PR gifts required disclosure. Student Participant #11 explained her confusion saying that she thought influencers could post reviews for free products they received without disclosing it as an advertisement so long as the influencer is not being paid monetarily in addition to the gift.

The other area of confusion participants noted is the conflicting disclosure phrases used on each platform. Although all participants were familiar with disclosure phrases such as "#ad" or "partner," they agreed that the inconsistency of disclosure language across platforms makes it more difficult for them to identify social media advertisements. One mother specifically stated that "it would be so nice if it was the same language" used across social media platforms. Student Participant #4 explained that when influencers use different disclosure phrases, it gives off the impression that not all of the phrases mean that the post is a paid advertisement.

Disclosure needs to be obvious

In addition to participants wishing for consistent disclosure language, they also feel that the disclosure phrases should use clearer words/terms to inform the audience that the influencer is getting paid to promote the product. This notion of needing clearer advertising disclosure was prominent for both the students and mothers. One mother said that the disclosure phrase "#partner" would go right over her head and another participant agreed saying, "it should be very, very obvious that something is an advertisement." Participants in both student focus groups thought that using a term/word like "paid" would better convey the point that the influencer is receiving something in return for the post. A participant in Student Participant #10 shared her thoughts as follows:

> I think the word 'paid' definitely has more of a negative connotation to it than advertisement, ad, or partnership. I think if that was included, somehow with just a hashtag even, it could probably send the message across a little stronger that this [advertisement] is a transactional message like something or someone's earning money for this.

Participants in all three focus groups also shared similar experiences of seeing influencers hide or strategically place their advertising disclosure phrases in hopes of them going unnoticed by their followers. Student participants in both groups specifically discussed seeing influencers on Instagram place their advertising disclosure hashtags at the very bottom of lengthy captions so that they are easily missed. Student Participant #6 described how users have to tap "see more" in order to read the full caption of a post if it is too lengthy. She explains the following:

> I think on like Instagram they have that thing where the caption like cuts off or something and then you can press like, "see more". And I think under there they put when it's an ad so then if you're just like scrolling and not really paying attention, you could like, get things misconstrued that way.

These discussions of hidden disclosure hashtags drew a general consensus in every group that influencers must make their advertising disclosure very apparent at the user's first glance.

Participants felt that influencers have the responsibility of being honest to their large followings, brands have the responsibility to ensure the influencers they hire properly disclose their ads, and social media platforms have the responsibility to monitor and review influencer content that may include a promotion.

<u>Increase regulations</u>

A reoccurring concept that was mentioned by both mothers and students is the transformation that influencers have made from creating content as a fun hobby to creating it for a living. One mother stressed the importance of recognizing that it is the influencers' job to create a flawless perception of reality. Participants in Student Focus Group 1 discussed the implications of social media influencing becoming an occupation, as they grew up watching YouTubers who created content for fun rather than money. These participants all agreed that if being an influencer is an occupation, there should be rules implemented like there are in any other career. Student Participant #5 explained the need for further regulation with influencing becoming a career:

> I think especially now, because being an influencer is a job rather than before, like we talked about with YouTube. Like, it was just for fun but now they're making a living off of it and there needs to be a lot more rules and regulations for it.

Not only do participants think there needs to be an increase of rules and regulations for the influencers, but they believe that platforms should also be accountable for ensuring that all posts that may include promotions are clearly disclosed as advertisements. Participants felt that with current technology, the platforms have no excuse for letting sponsored content through without disclosure. One student participant explained her reasoning saying:

> Obviously, these apps have, like, they [can] see everything that everybody posts. Obviously, they have the ability to do that because they'll take down posts that promote bullying or promote like misinformation or whatever. They'll put up a 'COVID' like little

tag that says, like, "this is about COVID." They obviously understand what that post is about. So, they can do something to disclaim it or to hold those influencers accountable. Like, obviously, they can take down a post. They're Instagram. It's on Instagram, so Instagram can take down that post if that influencer is not following rules.

Putting the responsibility of disclosure on the platform was suggested in every focus group. They felt that putting the platforms in charge of disclosing ads would limit the influencers and brand's ability to post deceitful advertising, even if they wanted to. They said that they've seen platforms like Instagram disclose ads with "Paid Partner" or "Sponsored" bars on the headline of the post but that it is not always used. They felt that the platforms should take it further and make it more obvious to better ensure that users are aware that the influencer is being paid. Participants also discussed the importance of advertising education on the platform and the opportunity there is to add it to the disclaimer. One participant's suggestion was as follows:

I feel like it would be almost beneficial if Instagram, Tik Tok, like all the actual social media platforms, put a disclaimer on all posts that have #ad and then like 'this user used this hashtag, this is what it means.'

This discussion also sparked suggestions for social media platforms to put a certain colored frame around promotional posts and to possibly blur the advertising content until the user interacts with it. Participants in Student Focus Group 2 thought that blurring advertising content and requiring user interaction would help prevent the possibility of certain products or sensitive advertising content triggering the user.

Along with the implementation of new regulations, participants from all three focus groups agreed that there needs to be better enforcement of the current rules and consequences set for those who do not follow them. Participants decided that legal action would be the best consequence. Student Participant #5 explained that the threat of "canceling" influencers is not enough and Student Participant #3 suggested the influencer's content and/or account be

removed. In the Mother Focus Group, one participant thought that legal is necessary because expensive fines alone are not significant enough to deter large corporations. In all three groups, there was a general consensus that influencers should receive legal consequences for intentionally not disclosing their promotional content, brands should receive legal consequences for not ensuring their influencer used proper disclosure and social media platforms should receive legal consequences for not closely regulating advertisements on their app.

Most participants from the Mother Focus Group expressed optimism toward increased regulation in the future, but one mom said she does not think it will happen anytime soon. Mother Participant #6 explained her reasoning as follows:

> I would just say, I think it [increased disclosure regulation] is important but I that think this country is trying to regulate so much that they will put this on the least important in terms of all the other things that they're trying to regulate. Sadly.

While this mom does not think that disclosure regulation is considered a priority to the US, another mother expressed hope that people can come together to make change. Mother Participant #5 recalled the advertising policy changes for alcohol and tobacco as follows:

> It seems like as the alcohol and cigarettes, the people lobbied those kinds of policies with the FTC types of institutions back in the day so that they would make it known how dangerous they were. It sounds like that might be what has to happen or something similar. I don't think it's going to come from the other side. It's not going to come from the influencers, it's not going to come from the advertisers, and it's not going come from the people who create the product. And in social media, the advertisements have been hot and heavy for what, three or four years, maybe five? So, we're really in its infancy. So, there's precedent out there that I hope others will see and use the same means that we had to change how things were done to change this particular situation.

Weight Loss Product Advertising and Deception:
Research Question 2) What are consumers' perceptions of social media influencers promoting weight loss products (SMIWPA), especially those targeted toward young women?

Toxic reinforcement of beauty standards

When asked about their attitudes toward SMIWPA and the target audiences that brands are trying to reach, primarily concerns were brought up. Three of the most common adjectives used to describe SMIWPA were toxic, suspicious, and fake. Participants from both the student and mother focus groups stated how SMIWPA reinforces society's definition of beauty standards and promotes a toxic diet culture that encourages women to lose weight. Mother Participant #5 explained society's beauty standards saying: "Pretty, or looking good, means that you are supposed to be thin. I mean, that is just a stereotype and that has not changed since I was my daughter's age."

Participants also shared how the pressure to conform to society's definition of pretty has them constantly comparing themselves to others, even beyond social media. Student Participant #1 shared the mentality of college students by explaining the following:

> It almost programs our minds to compare. And now when you walk on campus and you see someone you don't even know, not even an influencer, just another student who might have the body that you want or wearing the clothes that you want. Like then it's like your mindset is so programmed to compare, you're going to do that to just people in your daily day-to-day lives, rather than just on social media. Now, it's like everywhere.

Participants expressed that constant exposure to this diet culture and the habit of comparison often leads to questioning oneself about whether you need to try the product. They feel that SMIWPA has the power to cause consumers to reevaluate natural body conditions, like bloating, as unhealthy.

Promoting the opposite of healthy

 In addition to causing an unhealthy body image, participants discussed how using weight loss products such as detox teas, diet suppressants, and anti-bloating greens are not healthy ways to lose weight and everyone's bodies are built and work in different ways. The following

interaction between three participants in Student Focus Group 2 highlights Gen Z's personal experience, as well as the perception that weight loss products are generally not safe.

> Student Participant #2: "Everything is about bloating now, like 'drink this tea so you don't look bloated.' That is like, completely normal. Like, that is so human. Everyone gets bloated. And like, when I get bloated, I just feel so awful and that's because I've just been pushed over and over again, even hardwired, to be like this even though I know it's like normal and I don't eat horribly. I'm still just like, "I'm so unhealthy. I need a detox tea." See, it can like push people to be unhealthy. That's the opposite of promoting being healthy."

> Student Participant #6: "Yeah, the supplements and teas are just a quick fix, they're not even promoting a healthy lifestyle with like diet and exercise. It's like 'take this, and you'll be skinny,' but it's not changing anything about your lifestyle. So, I think it's definitely negative. I think, in addition to like a healthy lifestyle, sometimes that could be like a good supplement."

> Student Participant #3: "Yeah, I also never like tried them before so I can not really speak from experience, but I feel like they definitely can cause like eating disorders and even like stomach problems. Like some of that stuff I do not think you are supposed to be consuming and then you can definitely really mess up your body."

Increase SMIWPA regulations

One of the biggest issues that participants said they had with SMIWPA is not knowing whether or not the influencer has actually used and been successful with the product. One mom explained that it is hard to trust that influencers use the products, especially if it is someone who is already known for having a fit body. She used Kim Kardashian as an example, as she is known for achieving her body through plastic surgery yet still advertised a weight loss tea. Participants again really stressed the importance of increased regulation, suggesting that influencers should have to somehow prove or demonstrate that they have used the advertised product over a certain duration in time. They also recommended that the FTC requires SMIWPA to list all the possible side effects of the product so that consumers are aware of the risks before purchasing. Mother Participant #5 suggested that because weight loss products can drastically affect a person's

health, it should be classified and regulated to the same as extent as alcohol and tobacco advertising. Participants agreed that these changes would help consumers make more informed decisions and to prevent deceitful advertising tactics.

Generational Differences:

Research Question 3) How do consumers' perceptions of social media influencers promoting weight loss products, and their disclosure practices, compare generationally?

Mother's lack of Instagram Use

One of the most significant points of differentiation between the college students and mothers was the older generation's lack of Instagram use. Of the six participants in the Mother Focus Group, four said they have an account but only two said they use it frequently. The two frequent users shared that the only types of accounts they follow post content of cute animals, cooking videos, and clothing. Only one mother was able to name an influencer and it was a YouTuber she subscribes to for workout routines. When the group discussed examples they have seen of SMIWPA, participants could only recall advertisements posted by TV celebrities like Dr. Oz and Randy Jackson. This was in stark contrast with the Gen Z participants who were able to name influencers that they follow on every platform. Most mothers said that the only time they see or watch influencers is when their children send it to them and the only influencer purchases, they have made were for their daughters.

Because these mothers do not follow any influencers, they cannot relate to the feelings of mutual connection and friendship with them. These participants did not express any desire to look or be like an influencer and noted that they have stopped caring about their looks less and less as they have gotten older. These participants of older generations do not experience feelings

of trust with influencers and in turn, do not experience the feeling of betrayal when seeing sponsored posts.

Gen Z perceives SMIWPA more negatively

College students seemed to have more negative perceptions about SMIWPA than the mothers, assumingly because they have witnessed the transformation and impact of it firsthand as they were raised during the conception of social media influencing. In a discussion about growing up during the rise of social media influencers, participants shared how the influencers used to only promote and recommend products that they actually used and were passionate about. Now that being an influencer has become an occupation, participants feel that they will advertise for any brand that will give them a paycheck. Student Participant #1 describes her thoughts on the transformation as follows:

> I feel like there's a clear difference between like old YouTubers that's been in the game for a while and like new Tik Tok influencers. Like I noticed with a lot of people I still follow on YouTube a lot of them are like, they'll talk about brands that they love without being sponsored or they'll be like "this is a sponsored ship but I don't take sponsorships from brands I don't actually like" like they've kind of made that shift or now it's just like "I'll take any sponsorship like I'm offered because I just want money and I want more followers or whatever.

Student Participant #3 agreed that her experience growing up with social media influencers was similar, saying:

> Yeah, we were definitely in the prime age range where we could absorb information that wasn't necessarily infiltrated with all of this advertisement making money, capitalism, all of it and we were able to grow up and see how it started to change.

The Gen Z college students expressed annoyance with social media influencer advertising in general, but Student Participant #9 explained why she thinks that the topic of weight should be avoided on social media entirely. She shared that she believes weight is an extremely personal and sensitive subject. This participant said:

"I feel like people's weight is just like a personal like thing that shouldn't really be posted about like on Instagram and social media but that's just like my opinion. I don't know, I just like find the whole thing kind of weird."

Meanwhile, a mother participant in the other focus group shared that she thinks influencers have the right to post anything they want as long as it is legal. Although she agrees that SMIWPA definitely has a negative influence, she said, "a commercial is a commercial" and they do not need to be banned. Mother Participant #6 explains her reasoning saying:

I don't think it necessarily needs to be banned for people. If they want to go on and say that this product works really, really well, even if they have never tried it, it shouldn't be banned because I think they're just doing an ad. Sadly.

Gen Z has better social media advertisement recognition

Both Gen Z participants and mothers agree that college-aged students were raised at the prime time to learn and understand how social media advertising works. Because older generations did not grow up following influencers and did not see the transformation of social media influencer advertising, they don not have as strong of an ability to recognize influencer promotions and to realize the intent behind it. Multiple Gen Z participants were able to recall times when their parents were fooled by social media advertisements. Student Participant #10 shared that her mom and grandma have purchased weight loss products promoted by influencers. She described their experience with the product as follows:

My grandma just bought like a green thing, but I don't even know what it was. I think I sent it to her probably on Tik Tok too. And she like she threw it away because it was awful, and she spent all this money on it. And same with my mom. She said the skinny bunny tea she purchased like doesn't do anything. So, I think that they can for sure be fooled from that stuff."

Even the mothers admitted that they think their daughter's ad recognition would be better than theirs. Despite this, mothers still all agreed that their daughters are more vulnerable to

weight loss product advertising because of their young age. Multiple moms explained seeing their children insecure and too embarrassed to leave the house at times. These mothers said that they think their daughter's insecurities have improved a lot with age but that they still care what others think and may feel obligated to purchase products from influencers they aspire to look like.

Advertising Ethics

Research Question 4) What are consumers' perceptions of the ethical nature of SMIWPA?

Unethical to target young and vulnerable people

Although the college students consider influencer advertising drastically different from when they were younger, they all agreed that they would probably fall victim to the advertising if they were young today. Student Participant #3 said that although she now is able to recognize "#ad" as a form of disclosure, 10 years ago she would not have thought twice about it. These Gen Z participants all felt strongly that their ad recognition improved with age and that younger kids probably do not have the ability to tell.

Student Participant #1 shared her experience watching her younger sisters grow up in the height of SMIWPA. She explained how the things her sisters are doing on social media are way different than what she did at her age, and they are being constantly exposed to potentially sensitive content. The participant talked about how she thinks social media has programmed her sisters to compare themselves to others and that it has made them extremely critical of their own appearances. She explained her thoughts about her little sister's social media usage saying:

> My little sisters are 8 and 11. And when I was that age, like Snapchat, and Instagram really just developed, like just a thing. And I see like my little sister on Tik Tok, and I see like her like wearing makeup and like doing all this stuff. And I just like, I'm like, that's not like, that's what I was doing, but like, it's coming from a different place, a different motivation, and like how critical she has of herself as an 11-year-old. Like, it's crazy. And it's so, so sad.

Student Participant #8, who is currently studying business analytics, criticized SMIWPAs that target young girls, explaining that influencers have the ability to see their audience demographic. She said she does not think it is right for influencers to promote SMIWPA when they know that they have young followers. She explained her reasoning as follows:

> They're starting to target younger Gen Z too, like people that are in high school or even like, unfortunately, middle school. Because they know these accounts, and they have analytics for each social media platform. They can see the age range of like, what's super concentrated in each age range, so they could know the influencers demographic is 14-year-old girls, and they'll still like hire this influencer to promote weight loss. And that's again another criticism, but yeah.

It's manipulative to create and target insecurities

When asked about who these brands and influencers are targeting with SMIWPA, both Gen Z and mothers pointed out concerns with vulnerable people with insecurities getting taken advantage of. Mother Participant #5 opened up about her son's struggles with body image and the negative influence that she thinks SMIWPA had on him. She shared her family's experience as follows:

> So, we did have a situation in our house where my son was impacted by eating and body image severely. I think they [SMIWPA] create vulnerabilities in the audience, as they take them into a journey of their advertising. So, if you're sitting there and not even thinking about your body, they somehow lure you into, 'oh, my gosh, I should really think about it, oh wait a minute, I don't fit whatever they perceive is correct. Therefore, I need their product.' So, I think it hits people who are watching. I think they're very right to call themselves 'influential' because they're successful at manipulating their audience.

This mom went on to explain how her family has had to put in extensive time and energy into combatting this negative influence. She stressed the importance of parents having conversations with their kids about this topic and other mothers agreed that it has been critical to them as well.

Participants from all three groups also brought up that the current trend of gut health and ant-bloating has caused women to question and feel insecure about their natural body functions.

The importance of honesty

One of the biggest issues that participants expressed with SMIWPA is the inability to know if the influencer promoting the product has actually used it. Participants from every group stressed how important honesty is when promoting a product to such a large audience, especially when that product has the ability to affect your health. Participants shared similar experiences of questioning whether an influencer is being authentic or if they are lying for the advertisement in order to make money. Participants communicated that it is the responsibility of the influencer to conduct research and to use discretion before recommending weight loss products to their followers that look up to them.

Persuasion Knowledge Model

Research Question 5) How, if at all, do consumers' perceptions of SMIWPA and disclosure practices differ depending on the consumer's level of advertising knowledge?

Ad majors did not demonstrate significant PKM

Surprisingly, there was no indication that advertising majors' prior knowledge of advertising persuasion played any major role in their perceptions of SMIWPA. Advertising major participants did not exhibit much differentiation from others in the groups and in some cases, advertising majors had conflicting attitudes and behaviors. Student Participant #6, an advertising major, was the only participant in her focus group that said she thinks that disclosure hashtags like #ad or #partner are clear enough for social media users to tell that the post is a paid advertisement. This thought implied that the participant assumes other people have the same level of persuasion knowledge to be able to recognize paid promotions.

In contradiction to this, Student Participant #7, an advertising major in the other student focus group, shared that she has purchased hair growth products from three different influencer advertisements. She admits that she is very insecure about her hair that recently began to fall out and that she was hoping that one of the products would help like the influencers stated it did for them. She confessed that she fell for these ads despite her prior knowledge of these advertising strategies.

Participants majoring in a variety of subjects utilized PKM

Although advertising majors' persuasion knowledge did not significantly contribute to differing perceptions, other participants majoring in various disciplines presented their own persuasion knowledge in various ways. Student Participant #4, a psychology major, explained that she has learned in class about the influence of social media and shared her knowledge with the group:

> We actually learn about it a lot, because I'm a psych major. We learn a lot about it when we talk about depression and how much social media in general plays a role in that. And I think like on the top of that is body image. And if you see somebody on your Instagram, or like even walking around campus, you're going to compare yourself, like that is just something that is going to naturally happen. And I think when a bunch of influencers are like promoting weight loss, it's just going be in the back of their [the consumer's] head. Even if they're not like directly thinking it, they're always subconsciously thinking about it. And so yeah, I think it plays a huge toll, especially in girls and even men too.

In addition to the psych major, Student Participant #3, a communications major, shared theories she learned in class about the way a person's social circle, and what they surround themselves with, strongly influence their thoughts and behavior. Student Participant #8, a business analytics major, also demonstrated her persuasion knowledge by sharing with the group how influencers and brands can use the platform's data and algorithms to better target the audience they wish to reach.

Student Participant #5 also utilized Third Person Effect in response to a group discussion about social media advertising recognition. She suggested that other people who do not have the same educational opportunities as the group, may be more likely to fall for influencer advertising:

> We can all like sit here and say that we can see through it, like all of their false reality when they're advertising stuff but like, there is like a large portion of people who like will fall for it.

She went on to suggest that other people may be more likely to fall for influencer advertising if they have not received the same level of education and opportunities like the focus group to discuss topics like these.

Parasocial Relationships & Interactions

Research Question 6) How, if at all, do consumers' perceptions of SMIWPA and disclosure practices differ depending on their trust of influencers?

<u>Feelings of friendship</u>

When discussing the difference between social media influencers advertising weight loss products versus celebrities, one participant suggested that the messages that influencers send are a lot more meaningful to them because they feel as though they know them personally. This concept of parasocial interactions and relationships was prominent in both student focus groups, and all participants agreed that followers often feel a sense of friendship with influencers. The college students suggested that this feeling of trust, friendship, and desire to look/be like influencers are even stronger for younger Gen Z. Student Participant #2 joked that 12-year-olds probably flock towards any product that Addison Rae, a popular Tik Tok influencer, promotes in her posts.

<u>Disingenuous content and loss of credibility</u>

Because of these parasocial interactions and relationships, participants said they can easily spot when an influencer they follow posts disingenuous sponsorships. Participants explained that she finds it pretty obvious when an influencer strays from their usual content and clearly reads off a script. Student Participant #1 said she can tell when an influencer is reading off a script that they did not write because they will speak to the camera and use their "customer service voice."

Participants shared that when they notice these disingenuous ads, they automatically lose respect and trust in that influencer. Student Participant #12 said she feels "betrayed" when influencers she follows post advertisements and that she does not hesitate to unfollow them. Other participants agreed that when an influencer posts an ad, it feels like a friend turning on you. There was a general consensus among the college students that there are not many influencers you can really trust. When describing their favorite influencers, participants made it clear that the person must be "real," meaning that they are authentic and honest with their followers.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand the generational consumer perceptions of social media influencer weight loss product advertising disclosure on Instagram. The research design aimed to apply the theories of Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM), Parasocial Interactions & Relationships (PSI, PSR), and Third-Person Effect (TPE) to analyze and interpret consumer perceptions. All three theories were utilized and demonstrated by participants but not necessarily all to the extent to which it influenced their perceptions.

The three key knowledge structures of PKM were applied to Gen Z students' responses in order to determine if it contributes to advertising major's perceptions of SMIWPA and

disclosure. The results of the application of this theory do not suggest that prior advertising knowledge played a significant role in these participants' perceptions. However, PKM was still utilized in various ways. The college student participants are majoring in various subjects and yet they all shared components of persuasion knowledge. For example, a student participant majoring in Psychology was knowledgeable about how and why SMIWPA is persuasive, and the dangerous impact that it could have on her mental health. These two components of persuasion knowledge demonstrate the participant's level of PKM as they fall under two of nine measurements established in Boerman's (2018) Persuasion Knowledge Scales of Sponsored Content. The two components demonstrated were Component 2) understanding of selling and persuasive intent, and Component (6) self-reflective awareness of the effectiveness of sponsored content.

Gen Z participants' feelings of trust with influencers are in alignment with the findings of Steffi De Jans (2018). These findings conclude that an influencer's use of disclosure and honesty is essential for maintaining PSRs and the feelings of trust and respect that come with it. These PSRs provide influencers with credibility and influence over their followers. The prominence of PSRs was only found among the college student's responses as the parents do not follow any influencers and can not relate to that level of trust.

The consumer perceptions of SMIWPA's ethical nature are also in agreement with previous research stating that disclosure aids in advertisement recognition and that it is the influencer's responsibility to ensure they disclose their ads correctly (van der Goot, 2021). Participants in every focus group agreed that it is the influencer's moral responsibility to disclose ads correctly and This study's findings also confirm what participant's shared about disclosure

increasing the influencer's credibility. Participants felt like influencers have an obligation to be fully educated on and to provide accurate information about the products they are advertising.

Although prior research suggests that participants in this study would demonstrate TPE (Guang-Xin Xie, 2016; Lim, J.S et al., 2020), there was no significant usage throughout the focus group discussion. One student participant utilized Third Person Effect in response to group discussion about social media advertising recognition when she suggested that other people who are younger or have less educational opportunities may be more likely to be persuaded by influencer advertising. The mothers did not utilize TPE in terms of advertising literacy but did make comments about their daughters being more likely to purchase diet products because of their age and insecurities.

Although this study intended to focus on Instagram specifically, focus group discussions and findings were not exclusive to the platform. The most significant consumer perceptions that this research found were the belief that SMIWPA has a negative influence on society, the desire to see the implementation of increased disclosure regulations, and the importance of influencers they follow are honest and authentic. There are a series of ways the influencers, brands, social media platforms, and the FTC can fix these perceptions and to make SMIWPA less dangerous. Participants in all three focus groups provided a range of suggestions for improving SMIWPA and disclosure that should be considered. These findings contribute and offer valuable insights into how the FTC could increase regulations and ensure that SMIWPA is safer. These consumer perceptions may also inform influencers and brands on the importance of transparency as findings show that social media users will lose respect and trust for those that they suspect are being deceitful. Participants feel strongly that it is the influencer's moral responsibility to use discretion and to consider possible harmful implications before posting a paid advertisement.

       As this study only researched the perceptions of females within two age demographics, future generational SMIWPA research should include participants of all ages and it could also include male perceptions as mother participants shared that their sons have also struggled with body image. Going forward, research should be conducted to see which specific regulations would be beneficial in preventing the negative influence of SMIWPA. As these regulations were suggested by participants, it would be valuable to find out what kind of regulations would be most effective.

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Staff, the P. N. O., & This blog is a collaboration between CTO and DPIP staff and the AI

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Appendices

Appendix A:

Student/Gen Z Focus Group Questions:

- As an ice breaker, who is your favorite social media influencer or what is your favorite social media page that you follow?

- Are you all familiar with SMIWPA?

    o What are your experiences?

    o Have you ever purchased a weight loss or diet supplement?

    o Have you ever purchased a product advertised by an influencer?

- Who do you think these SMIWPA brands are targeting?

    o How do you feel about SMIWPA brands targeting you?

- How well do you think your ability is to tell whether an Instagram post is an advertisement? Have you ever been fooled by a social media advertisement?

    o As a college student who grew up using social media, do you feel that you or others have ever been deceived by a social media advertisement or endorsement?

- What are your feelings on social media influencers promoting weight loss products? Do you think it could be harmful to young women?

    o Do you follow any social media influencers and if so, do you trust what they post?

    o Do you feel as though SMIWPA has an influence on society? Positive or negative?

- How do you feel advertisements should be disclosed by influencers on Instagram?

    o Do you feel like the use of #ad or #partner in an Instagram caption is enough to inform followers that the influencer is being paid to endorse the company?

- o Would you unfollow someone if they posted an advertisement for money without disclosing it?

- o Do you think it's right for social media influencers to endorse weight loss products that they don't use themselves? Should they be allowed to do it?

- Do you feel that further regulation disclosure by the FTC should be implemented? Should it be lessened?

    - o Do you feel that influencers and companies should receive consequences for not disclosing SMIWPA?

- Does anyone have a question or comment before we wrap up?

Appendix B:

Mother Focus Group Questions:

- Have you ever purchased a product advertised by an influencer?

- Are you all familiar with SMIWPA?

    - o Have you ever purchased a weight loss or diet supplement?

    - o If so, what were your experiences?

- Who do you think these SMIWPA brands are targeting?

    - o How do you feel about these brands targeting your daughter(s)?

- What are your feelings on social media influencers that promote weight loss products? Do you think it could be harmful to young women?

    - o Do you follow any influencers and if so, do you trust what they post?

    - o Do you feel as though SMIWPA has an influence on society? Positive or negative?

- How well do you think your ability is to tell whether an Instagram post is an advertisement?

  o How well do you think your daughter's ability is to tell whether an Instagram post is an advertisement? Do you think she could be deceived?

- How do you feel advertisements should be disclosed by influencers on Instagram?

  o Do you feel like the use of #ad or #partner in an Instagram caption is enough to inform followers that the influencer is being paid to endorse the company?

  o Would you unfollow someone if they posted an advertisement for money without disclosing it?

  o Do you think it's right for social media influencers to endorse weight loss products that they don't use themselves? Should they be allowed to do it?

- Do you feel that further regulation disclosure by the FTC should be implemented? Should it be lessened?

  o Do you feel that influencers and companies should get in trouble for not disclosing SMIWPA?