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Master Thesis

Does the Perception between Premium and Non-Premium Social Media Platforms Impact Brand Image in the Digital Era?

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Acknowledgements

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Abstract

The increasing relevance of social media (SoMe) for brand success has led marketers to focus on selecting appropriate social media platforms (SMPs) for their brand. Academic research, on the other hand, has studied SMPs separately rather than as a brand with its own associations that can play a role in fitness when a brand decides to advertise on them. The main purpose of the thesis is to investigate how consumers' associations and expectations of different SMPs affect brand perception and whether congruence between the brand and SMP plays a role in this process. The findings of this study support the hypotheses that a premium brand advertised on Instagram (premium SMP) elicits a higher level of brand perception compared to when advertised on TikTok (non-premium SMP), and that non-premium brands elicit the same results. The study also reveals that the effect of platform premiumness and brand premiumness on brand perception varies depending on the level of product involvement, with only SMP perception having a direct effect on brand perception for high involvement products. This research contributes to the understanding of the complex interplay between brand image, SMPs and consumer associations by providing practical insights for marketers looking to better target their intended customers via SMPs while avoiding potential brand image dilution.

Keywords: social media, brand perception, brand image, brand success, SMP, marketing, premium brand, non-premium brand, Instagram, TikTok, product involvement, congruence.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Challenge of Advertising on Emerging Platforms: Lessons from TikTok

TikTok has not only grown enormously in the five years since its global debut, but it has also evolved from a music video-focused app to one that offers a diverse range of content, including jokes, pets, challenges, cooking recipes, and recreations of amusing viral videos, among many other offerings (Geyser, 2022). As expected, we can assume that it is difficult for brands to understand the personality of the platform or that the complex algorithm can make the "for you" page so different for people in the same demographics. As a result, some high-end brands have opted to test the waters by advertising on this platform.

For example, premium brands, such as BMW, which place themselves above non-premium brands, such as Hyundai or Kia, in the automobile industry, have launched advertisement campaigns on the TikTok platform (Guitart et al., 2018). In compliance with the TikTok for Business website (2022), the campaign is considered a success due to reaching 42 million impressions and 390K likes, whereas the Kia campaign in the same SMP raised 8.3 million impressions and an estimated 17% engagement rate. This leads us to believe that the platform engages more when a premium brand is advertised. Additionally, the BMW TikTok advertisement was met with criticism on a Reddit blog community, where multiple comments regarded it as an erroneous marketing decision due to the perceived mismatch between a premium brand like BMW and the platform's content, even when trying to employ humor (Reddit.com, 2022). In contrast, the Kia advertisement received high levels of engagement, to the extent that some individuals attempted to steal Kia and Hyundai vehicles (CNBC, 2022).

Furthermore, a noteworthy instance involves the airing of a Gucci TikTok advertisement showcasing their runway collection, which generated controversy. One blogger remarked, "It makes the aspirational brand so much more accessible" (Chen, 2020). On a positive note, the blogger also expressed that the ad appeared to be fun, considering Gucci's usual reputation for seriousness. Similarly, in comparison to the previous years when TikTok influencers attended the Met Gala event and faced substantial criticism for diluting the event's image, it was observed

that in 2023, influencers from this social media platform were not extended invitations (Time, 2023).

The preceding examples demonstrate that many brands are only concerned with the number of impressions and clicks an ad can generate, but are unaware of how and to what extent brand equity is potentially diluted as a result of inconsistency in advertising on platforms such as TikTok. It has been studied that when non-premium brands advertise as premium, they only gain short-term effects on brand equity, as in the long term they decrease equity due to the self-contradiction of the brand itself (Guitart et al., 2018). A similar phenomenon may occur when premium brands advertise on a non-premium media channel. Given these findings, it raises the question of why premium brands would choose to promote themselves on a platform like TikTok, which is often seen as frivolous and silly. Could this approach lead to a major inconsistency in the brand's image?

1.2 Social Media Platforms

Nowadays, we cannot deny the importance of social media (hereby referred to as "SoMe") in different aspects of our lives: private, social and business. SoMe, being an inalienable part of digitalization, has been perceived as an effective tool that contributes to the company's marketing aims and strategy, like creating awareness or purchase intent; customers' engagement, customer relationship management, and communication are especially important (Filo et al., 2015; Saxena and Khanna, 2013). Broadly speaking, SoMe encompasses a range of digital tools and applications that enable people and organizations to connect and share content with each other, facilitating the perception of interactions and information exchange between them (Wright and Hinson, 2009). Moreover, SoMe provides new opportunities to develop relationships and enhances people's social connections with each other through the sharing of information (Cho et al., 2013).

Up to the present moment, firms have been looking forward to using social media platforms (SMP) in many ways, such as for information search, interaction with their customers, promotion, enhancing customer buying behavior and broadening brand awareness (Zeng and Gerritsen, 2014). SoMe can be utilized in plenty of ways, but the main ones for marketing purposes are: advertising, electronic word of mouth (e-WOM), customer relationship management (CRM), brand focus, customer behavior and perception (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Bolton et al. (2013) argued that companies and their executives should pay attention to customer behavior and attitude toward SoMe applications and how customers use such systems. This aspect is of particular importance because a deeper understanding of the usage patterns of SMPs can help firms distinguish their brand from their competitors, establish their position in their niche among their target customers and formulate a clear idea about the future and current customers' perception and behavior towards these companies and their brand identity (Alalwan et al., 2017). From customers' perspectives, users' preferences on SMP depend on multiple factors: gender, age (generation), economic, cultural and technical aspects (Alalwan et al., 2017).

Moore et al. (2013), for example, concluded that the nature of the SMP's technicalities could shape a customer relationship differently when comparing Facebook and Twitter. According to Bolton et al. (2013), culture changes the reason for use, as he discovered that Koreans use it to obtain social support from existing social relationships, whereas Americans focus more on seeking entertainment. Furthermore, the attitude towards SoMe can also be explained by Bannister et al. (2013), who discovered that women tend to have more favorable attitudes toward Facebook, while Taylor et al. (2011) found out that people aged 19 to 24 years old have more positive attitudes in general toward SoMe.

According to Keller (2013), choosing the right SMP can lead to improved brand performance, which in turn affects brand value, improves brand perception and increases profit. The effectiveness of SoMe advertising is currently measured using quantitative statistics provided by digital platforms, such as the number of likes, shares, comments, views, follows, and clicks, as indicators of customer involvement. Soft digital metrics, such as brand impact, perception, and loyalty, are more difficult to measure and should not be solely attributed to paid media in order to achieve the best ROI (McCann & Barlow, 2015).

As digital marketing gains popularity, there are concerns about its effects due to an increase in ad blocking and ad fraud, making it difficult to trust these statistics (Gordon et al., 2021). One thing is certain: when someone sees an advertisement, they form an opinion about the brand that cannot be measured, as previously only attitudes toward an ad have been studied. There must be a congruence between an ad and a platform; for example, ensuring the compatibility between the ad and the digital space it is being promoted in can affect attitudes (Hsieh et al., 2016).

Marketers are advised by Voorveld et al. (2018) to thoroughly evaluate the perceived fitness between their brand and SMP in order to be able to choose the most suitable strategy to achieve their business objectives. Failure to do this may result in a contradiction between consumers' perceptions of the premium/non-premium SMP and the premium/non-premium brand, which can eventually lead to a shift in people's brand perception. Hsieh et al. (2016) demonstrated a similar mechanism that takes place depending on the quality of the website, whether it is premium or non-premium. According to their findings, brand advertising (premium vs. non-premium) leads to an attitude change, especially for premium brands on non-premium websites, resulting in a deteriorated and negative attitude towards the brand. When this mechanism is applied to SoMe, the brand's perception may suffer, negatively impacting its equity in the consumer's mind.

1.3 The research gap

The selection of a suitable digital SMP for a brand is becoming an increasingly pertinent issue, particularly as the use of SoMe continues to rise among younger generations and across various sectors, notably on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram (Stelzner, 2021). Moreover, marketers are keen to exploit these platforms to enhance their business success. Academic research has proven that the type of media can change a person's perception of a brand (Alimova, 2015). So far, the academic study of this topic has solely focused on traditional media such as television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and the Internet (Alimova, 2015). When it comes to differences between SoMe and traditional media, SoMe has been characterized as having a more dialogic, interactive, and rapid approach to developing connections when compared to conventional media, according to Seltzer and Mitrook (2007). Moreover, unlike traditional media, SMPs offer a two-way communication mechanism that allows users to interactively share, spread, and comment on the content of other users or companies. As a result, just as there are numerous brands in websites, SoMe, and elements inside digital media, the prospect of a diverse perception mechanism arises.

Additionally, brands affect consumers' perceptions of their brands via their SoMe narrative (Avery & Teixeira, 2016). Furthermore, websites that are now regarded as brands have developed their own brand personalities and serve different purposes, indicating SMPs can do the same (Chung, 2013). Hence, SoMe

encompasses a diverse range of factors that offer distinct justifications for the necessity of studying SMPs beyond conventional media alone. Consequently, it is imperative to undertake a thorough exploration of a brand's perceived compatibility with SoMe channels. To address this research gap, the present study aims to investigate the effect of SMPs on brand image. This research paper explores how consumers' perception of different SMPs influences their perception of a brand and if a correlation between the brand and platform congruence in this process creates causation. To acquire a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon, we utilized a mixed-methods approach, by combining qualitative and quantitative studies. The first study in this paper involves face-to-face interviews to obtain general insights, while the remaining studies use surveys to collect data from a larger sample of SoMe users.

The study aims to contribute to the existing literature on the impact of SoMe on brand image, also known as brand perception in this paper, and offer practical insights for marketers aiming to target their desired customers through SMPs. The research seeks to improve our understanding of the intricate relationship between brand image and SMPs and provide valuable insights for developing more effective marketing strategies in the digital age by filling the knowledge gap on how SM selection affects brand perception. This study will contribute to the academic literature by establishing a foundational understanding of SMP perception, specifically focusing on the incorporation of fitness elements. It will be a pioneering research endeavor to examine the perception of premiumness among Generation Z users on SoMe. Additionally, the outcomes of this research hold the potential to serve as a historical reference for future studies examining SM trends and behaviors. Hence, the main question through this paper is "Can the Perception between Premium and Non-Premium Social Media Platforms Impact Brand Image in the Digital Era?".

2. Literature Review

A thorough investigation of the notion of a brand and its constituents is required to enhance research in this field. Several academics have provided definitions of the term brand. According to the American Marketing Association (AMA), a brand is a "name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods and services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of the competition (Keller, 2013). Mishra & Maurya (2012) state

that "brands are conditional, intangible and legal assets for a firm. They act like a signal of perceived value to all the stakeholders. The concept of brand is also dynamic and changes along with the change in social (cultural), economic, political, technological, legal and geographical systems." (p.128).

Brand image is an inalienable part of a brand and as defined by Keller (1993), it is the observations surrounding a brand as reflected by the brand association held in the consumer's memory. The strength of a brand's image can ultimately impact its success, with a stronger brand image leading to greater brand equity, according to Lee et al. (2011). Furthermore, brand image is considered a fundamental element in Keller's brand equity pyramid (Bivainiene & Sliburyte, 2008). Following this, brand and product choices are mostly influenced by the consumer's perspective, feeling, or attitude toward the brand, which is heavily dependent on the brand's image in their minds (Cho, 2011).

As stated by Wallace et al. (2012), SMPs are considered distinct brand entities with their own brand associations. Respectively, SMPs, like brands, elicit certain associations in the minds of consumers, which may or may not correspond to the brand image the latter is attempting to develop (Keller, 2013). As a result, the medium via which the brand advertises can indirectly trigger brand impressions and associations, implicitly communicating them (Dahlén, 2005).

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Our study presents a conceptual model (Figure 1) that illustrates the proposed relationships among the independent variables: SMP perception (premium vs. non-premium), brand (premium vs. non-premium), and the dependent variable of brand perception. The effectiveness of this model is expected to depend on whether the advertised brand has low or high involvement. This model serves as a framework for examining the relationships under investigation and the concept of fitness, as it relates to SoMe's perception will be further explained. Furthermore, the italicized terms will be defined in the section of the literature review that follows to help understand the underlying mechanism.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model

2.3 Concept of premium and non-premium

Low involvment vs. High involvement

Brand (premium vs. non-premium)

2.2 Brand Fitness

SoMe Platform perception (premium vs. non-premium)

Brand perception

2.4 SoMe Formation:

- *True self and Ideal self*
- *Purpose of usage*
- *Quality of content and algorithm*
- *Country of origin*
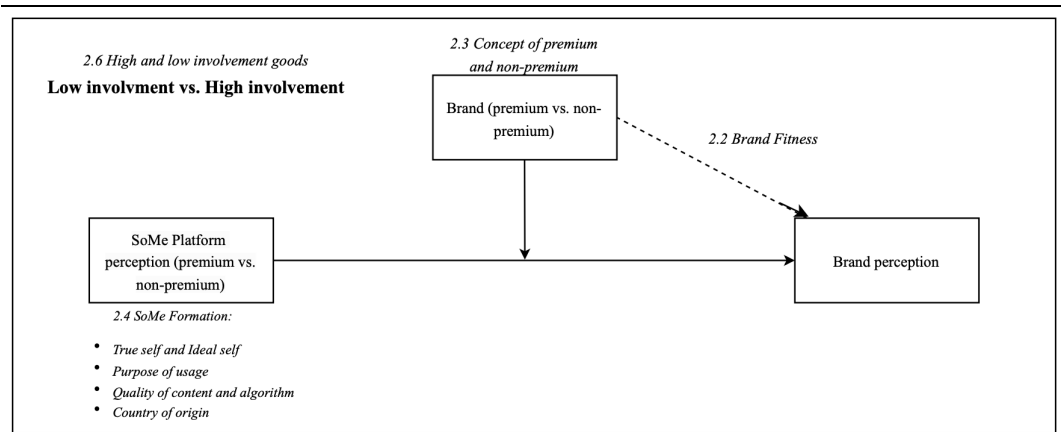
2.2 Brand Fitness

Brand fitness is the next issue to consider as a crucial aspect of our study because the correct combination of SMP and the brand can significantly improve or diminish the brand's perception. The subject of brand fitness has long been examined in scenarios such as brand extensions, brand alliances, and sponsorships. This fitness dilemma taught us about the qualities that customers consider when predicting a brand's fitness, which can be utilized in our research.

In numerous fitness scenarios, there are components that define prior brand attitudes that can actually predict brand impressions for well-known brands. Academics agree that the majority of the success of brand extensions can be ascribed to the parent brand's associations (Völckner and Henrik Sattler, 2006). Furthermore, Aaker and Keller (1990) proposed that attributes can be transmitted from the parent brand that, if bad, such as quality or perceived cheapness, will harm the success of the new brand.

A similar tendency may be seen in brand alliances, where people extend the features of the known brand to the unknown brand (Simonin and Ruth, 1998). According to Washburn et al. (2004), customer experience is what molds brand attitude, making it the best predictor of brand perception. Likewise, this "spillover" effect, as Simonin and Ruth (1998) refer to it, is higher when there is a favorable level of involvement, familiarity, and experience with the brand. This leads to a higher perception of fit and, as a result, a successful brand partnership.

According to Gwinner (1997), when it comes to brand sponsorships, the benefits of sponsoring events in terms of image transfer are heavily determined by the degree of similarity between the event and the sponsoring brand. Sponsorships help known brands more than new ones (Olson & Thjømøe, 2009). Overall, a high degree of match between sponsoring companies and entertainment-based entities or activities

makes logical links in consumers' brains, anticipating their views toward sponsoring businesses.

Concluding, while reviewing scenarios like brand extensions, brand alliances, and sponsorships, we see that brand fitness can be formed in various ways and in the majority of cases, represents a certain pattern; people's perception of a brand is also formed by external factors: the parent brand's associations, previous experience with a similar brand and sponsorship of events. As such, there must be a fit between the SMP as a brand and the advertised brand because people will take their experiences and overall evaluations of the SMP into account, which will have a negative or positive spillover depending on how they perceive the SMP.

2.3 Concept of Premium and Non-premium

To proceed with our further study, it is crucially important to highlight the difference between premium and non-premium brands. The differentiation of premium vs. non-premium has implications for various aspects of marketing strategy, including pricing, distribution channels, and product design. According to Guitart et al. (2018), premium brands typically charge higher prices, are distributed through more exclusive channels, and feature superior design compared to non-premium brands. Premium brand advertisements frequently incorporate aspects like exclusivity, exceptional design, and superior quality. BMW, for instance, regularly emphasizes the performance and exclusivity of its cars in its ad campaigns, using the tagline "The Ultimate Driving Machine." Conversely, non-premium brands tend to focus on other elements, such as reliability and price discounts, which are typically more significant for cost-conscious consumers (Guitart et al., 2018).

Alverönn (2021) states that consumers possess preconceived notions regarding the quality distinction between premium and non-premium brands. This could explain why premium brands differentiate themselves in digital marketing and advertising from non-premium brands. According to Quelch (1987), they are those that are frequently connected to a certain level of exclusivity and have superior product attributes, such as great quality or a high-tech component. Even websites can be mentally categorized as premium and non-premium, depending on the website name familiarity, aesthetics or industry category (Shehu et al., 2021).

In the electronic realm, the fitness between brand and advertisement channel has been partially studied. For instance, a user is more likely to reply to a smartphone-related advertisement when they are on an electronic retailer's website than when

they are on a fashion retailer's website (Shamdasani et al., 2001). This can be understood as consumers must find congruence between the ad and the digital space it is being promoted in. A study by Hsieh et al. (2016) examined the compatibility of a commercial (noncommercial) website and a commercial (noncommercial) brand, in which it was discovered that contextual fit in the digital realm determines whether there is a favorable attitude when commercial (noncommercial) brands advertise on commercial (noncommercial) websites. Shehu et al. (2021) recently conducted a study where it was revealed that the display of branding advertisements on non-premium websites elicited a negative impact on the sentiments associated with both the advertisement and the brand, albeit solely in the context of premium products.

We believe this contextual fitness can be extended to SMP, in which brand advertisement spending and effectiveness have dramatically increased. For known brands, it can be easier and more clear to establish these connections, especially by associating quality with price (Wolinsky 1983). For example, in the study by Shehu et al. (2021), a BMW being advertised on an automobile website was more congruent than on a recipe website. The impact of the alignment between the brand and the SMP is of significant importance as it directly influences brand perception, particularly when considering the premiumness level of the brand (premium or non-premium).

The premiumness of a brand can also be explained from a psychological perspective based on the environment or emotions that are associated with it. According to research by Zhu et al. (2022) and Olk et al. (2021), non-premium brands usually display positive emotions as it increases consumer preference for a product and encourages greater purchase intent and customer loyalty. Additionally, a study by Park et al. (2016) suggests that consumers find pictures of smiling models more appealing and joyful compared to neutral faces, resulting in more positive brand evaluations, as noted by Berg et al. (2015). However, premium brand advertisements tend to be more effective when they evoke neutral emotions rather than positive ones (Zhu et al., 2022). This occurs given that Dubois and Paternault (1995) posit that the essence of luxury lies in the symbolic aspiration to be part of an elite social class and to distance oneself from those of lower social status.

Given the environment that an SMP provides, we could potentially classify it as premium or non-premium. Instagram, for example, offers aspirational posts that evoke premiumness, whereas platforms like TikTok offer a more joyful and happy

environment. As a result, when a person sees an advertisement, they will classify the brand using the SMP's environment as a reference.

2.4 SoMe Perception Formation

After discussing the categorization of brands as premium or non-premium, it becomes crucial to examine the factors that shape individuals' perceptions of a SMP as either premium or non-premium. This perception significantly impacts the fit between the brand and the platform, thereby influencing brand perception. The platform's perception determines whether or not a brand advertised on it is consistent with the platform and has a positive or negative impact on the brand. Therefore, it is important to analyze the critical factors contributing to the formation of platform perception, including the formation of a genuine and ideal identity, usage intent, content quality, algorithm, and country of origin.

2.4.1 True Self and Ideal Self

The discussion of self-image and brand-image fit is a well-known topic initiated long ago by Levy (1959) and Gardner and Levy (1955). Malär et al. (2011) also described this as an emotional attachment by reviewing consumers' identification with a brand. In other words, the compatibility or incompatibility of brand characteristics with those of consumers (Sihvonen, 2019). A key moment to consider from that perspective is the match between a brand's personality and either the consumer's "actual self" or the consumer's "ideal self". Malär et al. (2011) point out that ideal selves are portrayed by brands, which communicate the creation of more attractive and beautiful pictures of consumers that are using their products, which eventually bring them closer to an ideal vision of themselves. On the contrary, the actual self-corresponds more closely to how the majority of consumers actually see themselves.

Furthermore, the concept of ideal and actual self resonates with the SMP's image in consumers' minds. Different SMPs show different images to their audiences. Instagram, for example, typically shows polished "ideal" content from users and brands (Ross, 2019). Lee et al. (2015) have reported that Instagram users tend to have explicit self-presentation motives and Zhao et al. (2008) state that Instagram users have an intention to establish a fantasized ideal self-image with attributes like popularity and versatility. Consequently, a significant majority of Instagram content is filtered and polished to achieve the best result in terms of self-image (Arpan et al., 2017). Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) also believe that such impression

management on Instagram is related to users' desire to follow celebrities and SoMe influencers who are known to have an aspirational high-quality life and good physical appearance. Following, being exposed to others' desirable possessions may, therefore, extend to Instagram users' intention to stage their ideal self (Arpan et al., 2017).

On the other hand, SMPs like TikTok present more realistic "true" content (Xin et al., 2021). Andalibi and Barta (2021) argue that consumers perceive TikTok as a fun space for sharing goofy, joyful experiences. Moreover, the affordances of platform features, and policies contribute to perceptions of authentic or real content. TikTok promotes social acceptance and the adoption of a "just be you" attitude that supports authenticity as a self-presentation norm (Andalibi and Barta, 2021).

Similarly, it was initially hypothesized that Facebook profiles were created to reflect people's idealized virtual personalities (Back et al. 2010). Back et al. (2010), on the other hand, tested this by aggregating personality ratings among Facebook users, and the results revealed that there were no ideal-self ratings found, but rather actual personality was found to be significant. This reveals that this medium is used to reveal one's true self.

Following the above-mentioned reasoning, we believe that SMPs such as Instagram or LinkedIn are likely to be perceived as ideal-self brands due to the type of content they promote. As a result, consumers may perceive these brands as more expensive, high-quality and premium. On the other hand, SMPs such as Facebook, TikTok, or YouTube may be associated with a true self-brand personality and consequently perceived as less premium, ordinary, and inexpensive. The concepts of true self and ideal self are employed to explain why people are inclined to categorize premium platforms as ideal self and non-premium platforms as true self. While this mechanism is not the focus of our study, it supports the logic of our model.

2.4.2 Purpose of usage

Another milestone in SoMe perception formation in the minds of consumers is the SoMe usage purpose. It has been observed that the majority of users utilize social platforms to form social connections or meaningful relationships, such as LinkedIn for professional connections or Instagram for staying connected with friends and family (Cho et al., 2013). In their study on customer acquisitions in social networks, Du et al. (2021) found that Instagram users view the platform as valuable for identifying prospects with similar socioeconomic backgrounds. Consequently, platforms such as TikTok and Youtube, where the primary purpose is to watch

videos rather than establish real connections, can be considered non-premium by individuals.

The suitability of video-sharing platforms for educational purposes may vary depending on the type of knowledge sought. In the realm of medical information, for instance, both YouTube and TikTok have been deemed unreliable; however, relative to TikTok, YouTube boasts a stronger influencer base and is associated with higher quality and reliability (Kılınç, 2022; Al-Maroof et al., 2021). It is important to note that while perceptions may vary depending on the intended purpose, the aforementioned structural distinctions between SMP remain widely recognized and accepted in the literature.

While SoMe implies that all platforms are designed to foster social connections, empirical evidence suggests that not all SMPs are. Except for YouTube and Pinterest, Voorveld et al. (2018) discovered that the most popular SMPs (Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat) are used to stay up-to-date and for social interactions. Furthermore, Facebook and Instagram are used to fill an empty moment; others, to a lesser extent, are used in this manner. As a result, the study concluded that engagement and advertising evaluations on SMPs are highly context-specific, as the relationship is highly dependent on the platform's usage (Voorveld et al., 2018). To summarize, people tend to associate premiumness with the "high-quality" purpose of using the SMP, such as establishing professionally valuable connections (LinkedIn) or social connections (Instagram). In contrast, using the SMP for "low-quality" purposes such as watching videos (YouTube) or following mainstream challenges (TikTok) is frequently associated with non-premiumness. Indeed, the reason for using an SMP can influence whether the platform is perceived as premium or non-premium. As a result, it is crucial to the formation of SoMe's perception.

2.4.3 Quality of content and algorithm

The perception of the SMP can also be linked to consumers' ability to evaluate the quality of the content on it, which to some extent depends on the algorithm. Algorithmic systems refer to embedded software programs that leverage user data, search history, and additional data from fellow users to generate digital outcomes, anticipate potential recommendations, and deliver feeds that mirror each user's unique immersive media environment (Cohen, 2018). In a sense, each SMP has its own unique algorithm that shapes the quality of the content by recommending posts

on Instagram, pushing popular posts on Facebook, suggesting videos on Youtube and providing customized clips on TikTok.

Despite the intention of SoMe algorithms to improve consumers' experiences, they have to be constantly updated to avoid diminishing their credibility and quality. Facebook's involvement in fake news and privacy scandals has resulted in both legal challenges and the loss of consumer confidence (Kollewe, 2019); however, new algorithms employing machine learning techniques have emerged as a promising solution to prevent such occurrences (Collins et al., 2021). In 2019, one of Instagram's primary challenges involved the proliferation of fake accounts aimed at inflating user follower counts. In response, the platform has implemented the Smotenc algorithm, which has been shown to reduce the incidence of such accounts by nearly 96% (Akyon et al., 2019). The ongoing efforts of SMPs to address these and other issues are integral to preserving the quality of their offerings. TikTok's platform, on the other hand, has been heavily criticized for the algorithm's content freedom. According to Shutsko's (2020) study on TikTok content, cases of potential copyright and personal rights violations such as violence, sexual activity, or drug and alcohol consumption were discovered due to the less rigorous algorithm compared to Youtube. As of March 2023, the issue persists, as evidenced by TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew being compelled to provide testimony regarding illicit content, privacy concerns, and other related matters (The Guardian, 2023). As a result, we can conclude that some people's quality perceptions of a SMP may be linked to the algorithm.

People's perceptions of SoMe can also be shaped by the quality of the algorithm and its privacy limitations. As a result, platforms such as Instagram and LinkedIn are perceived as "premium" due to the quality of their content and properly working algorithms, while platforms like TikTok and YouTube might be considered "non-premium" for the same reasons. This will contribute to a critical factor in the construction of SoMe's perception.

2.3.4 Country of origin

Since users' perceptions and evaluations of the quality of a SMP can be influenced by its country of origin, it is reasonable to assume that the fact that all of the top eight widely adopted international SMPs, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, Telegram, Twitter, and Pinterest, are headquartered in the United States, with the exception of TikTok, as reported by Statista (2023), may

play a role. As a consequence, the long history of SMPs in the United States may have a different perception than that of the Chinese platform TikTok.

In the context of country-of-origin literature, Thakor and Kohli (1996) defined brand origin ("BO") as "the place, region, or country to which the brand is perceived to belong by its target consumers". The effect of brand BO is important as it forms brand image and brand perception, which leads to a favorable or unfavorable brand attitude (Thakor and Kohli, 1996; Thakor and Lavack, 2003). In the case of Chinese brands, they are usually perceived as having less quality and less value (Schniederjans et al., 2004). Additionally, Akdeniz & Kara (2014) discovered that Chinese BO has a significant negative effect on brand image and is perceived as having less quality than global brands. Conversely, US brands are perceived to be of higher quality when compared to China and South Korea, as they are considered to be more developed (Iyer & Kalita, 1997).

In light of this, it is reasonable to conclude that TikTok, being a Chinese app, may be perceived as a lower-quality platform relative to other SMPs. Despite having its headquarters in California, TikTok is owned by ByteDance, a Chinese company that also owns Douyin, a counterpart app that operates solely within China and complies with the country's censorship guidelines (Tidy and Smith, 2020). As an outcome, TikTok is still widely regarded as a "Chinese app" and has faced political scrutiny (Tidy and Smith, 2020), which is likely to contribute to consumer perceptions of the app being of lower quality than other SMPs.

2.5 Mechanism and hypothesis

Therefore, it can be concluded that the factors discussed contribute to shaping SMP perception to varying extents. While some factors may be easily distinguishable as contributing to premiumness or non-premiumness, such as in the case of TikTok having a lower premiumness level and Instagram having a higher one, other factors may have a more nuanced impact. Nonetheless, it is essential to consider all factors that affect people's perception of SMPs when examining the SMP-brand fit idea.

Given the previously mentioned arguments, SoMe perception has been shaped by a range of different factors, yet tends to generate similar evaluations among users. SMPs that appeal to users' ideal self, are used for building connections, and promote quality content, such as Instagram or LinkedIn, may be perceived as premium by their users. Conversely, platforms that appeal to users' true self, are used for entertainment purposes, and may have lower quality content, such as TikTok or

Facebook, are likely to be perceived by users as non-premium. This perception may be further amplified in the case of TikTok due to its country of origin.

Based on our investigation and literature review, we can develop the following logic to support the formulation of our hypotheses:

The differentiation of brands in terms of their prestige and brand equity, as established by Keller (1993), permits their classification into premium and non-premium categories, as demonstrated by Guitart, Gonzales, and Stremersch (2018). As highlighted in the fitness scenarios, consumers tend to use quality and price as cues to identify or forecast the premiumness of a brand, especially when encountering an unfamiliar one. In the case of premium brands, which are typically associated with high quality, high price, and prestige, individuals tend to assign them to a premium category in their thinking and may even assign them a specific position on a mental scale. However, when a premium brand is advertised on a non-premium SMP, it may create a contextual disparity, resulting in a decrease in the individual's brand perception, which means it lowers the premiumness or quality rank that was initially assigned to the brand. This is due to the fact that the context of the non-premium SMP may not correspond with the premium image that the brand wishes to transmit, resulting in a decline in the brand's perceived value.

Premium associations with a brand can be formed when a person sees the attributes of such a premium brand: high quality, high cost, and prestige. When this person is exposed to premium brand advertising on a non-premium SMP, their perception of the brand may become muddled due to the cognitive dissonance caused by the inconsistencies presented, resulting in the person rating this brand lower than it was originally perceived.

This is associated with the context literature, which shows that consumer preferences are influenced by the context provided by the set of alternatives. For example, Simonson (1989) describes a compromise effect in which the middle option in the choice set gains a large choice. In SM platform perception, advertisements of brands that are similar or, on average, close to the context will be preferred over those that stand out, in this case premium brands for Instagram and non-premium brands for TikTok.

Following this logic, the attraction effect comes into play. This effect explains why the addition of a similar but inferior option increases the relative choice share of the option to which it is similar (Huber, Payne, and Puto 1982; Huber and Puto 1983). As a result, when an inferior option appears on the SM platform, it increases the relative choice share of the option to which it is similar. This finding implies that, within the context of the platform, the presence of non-premium brands on TikTok, despite their inferiority compared to premium brands, may lead to an increase in their relative appeal. On the other hand, premium brands that are perceived as superior to others are likely to derive greater benefits on Instagram. As Rooderkerk et al. (2011) demonstrated that context effects can be used to predict new product success through choice context, we believe that choice sets can also predict a brand's success based on the context in which it chooses to advertise.

H1a: *When a premium brand is advertised on a non-premium SMP, it will result in a lower brand perception than when advertised on a premium SMP.*

Similarly, when a person sees a non-premium brand (low quality, low price, and prestige), it is expected that the person will categorize it as non-premium. However, when it is displayed and advertised on a premium SMP, there will be a contextual disparity, resulting in the individual's brand perception of what it initially had and its mental scale position being increased.

H1b: *When a non-premium brand is advertised on a premium SMP, it will result in a higher brand perception than when advertised on a non-premium SMP.*

Now, when both brand and SMP are perceived to be in the same category, premium brand in premium SMP or non-premium brand in non-premium SMP, there would be an absence of inconsistency. Hence, the brand perception will create good fitness, which won't change the individual's brand perception.

H1c: *When a premium (non-premium) brand is advertised on a premium (non-premium) SMP, the brand perception will be the highest (lowest).*

2.6 High and low involvement goods

Given the nature of the products or services they provide, some brands may not have strong SMP-brand fitness. To delve deeper into this subject, it is necessary to understand the concept of consumer involvement and how it affects the relationship and interaction between consumers and brands.

Martin (1998) introduced the concept of involvement in relation to the meaning of a product and the relationship between the consumer and a product or product category. Pelsmacker et al. (2021) defined involvement as the importance people attach to a product or a buying decision, the extent to which one has to think it over and the level of perceived risk associated with an inadequate brand choice. For example, Chand (n.d.) states that products that are considered high-involvement are those that reflect the consumer's personality, status, and lifestyle, such as an expensive TV, car or house. Conversely, low-involvement products are those that are considered routine purchases, like chocolate, coffee or ice cream.

Given the usual high price and being guided by brand image, consumers of high-involvement products first want to learn about the product and need to collect information (Pelsmacker et al., 2021). While low-involvement goods require little cognitive effort, they usually become routinized and can also be classified as "little pleasures" for which the product attitude is formed after consumption (Pelsmacker et al., 2021). As a result, we can anticipate that when people see a high-involvement product advertised, psychologically, brand image will become more important, and people will seek out all possible information or guides, including the SMP it is advertised on. Following this, premiumness will be important due to price information and quality. However, given the low information search and the fact that consumers will rather evaluate their experience after consumption, SMP analysis for low-involvement goods may not be considered.

For low-involvement goods, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2a: *The advertising of low-involvement products will have no impact on brand perception, regardless of the SMP used.*

Radder and Huang (2008) argue in their article that advertising plays a more important role in raising awareness of high-involvement brands, while it is less important for low-involvement brands. However, the link between brand recognition and advertising for both high and low involvement products cannot be underestimated. Another important note that Radder and Huang (2008) highlighted in the results of their study is that people tend to pay specific attention to brand names in low-involvement situations, while in high-involvement situations they draw their attention to other brand elements as well.

Additionally, Lin (2013) demonstrated that factors that affect high-involvement goods positively are brand valuation, but price promotion negatively affects them

by lowering purchasing behavior. Shamdasani, Stanaland, & Tan (2001) emphasized that in online contexts, this positive effect of the congruency between website content and advertised products is stronger for high-involvement products. The above-mentioned factors can potentially have an impact on the level of involvement that consumers have with a product, such as the particular SMP, the context it provides and the content. Thus, while the significance of these factors might be less pronounced for low involvement goods, they could be of greater importance for high-involvement goods, hence further research is necessary to establish the veracity of this claim.

For high-involvement goods, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2b: *The advertising of high-involvement products will have an impact on brand perception.*

3. Research Model

The purpose of the literature review was to provide a comprehensive overview of previous research and theoretical knowledge that pertains to the research question and topics presented in the introduction. Specifically, the aim was to examine the relevance of contextual fitness for brands and its potential effects on brand perception. In this regard, we elucidated how the overall perception of SMPs can be shaped by factors such as ideal or true self-identification, the purpose of usage, algorithm quality, and country of origin. With this knowledge, we intend to investigate how the perception of a SMP may influence brand advertising, particularly depending on its premiumness.

Figure 2
Model Hypothesis
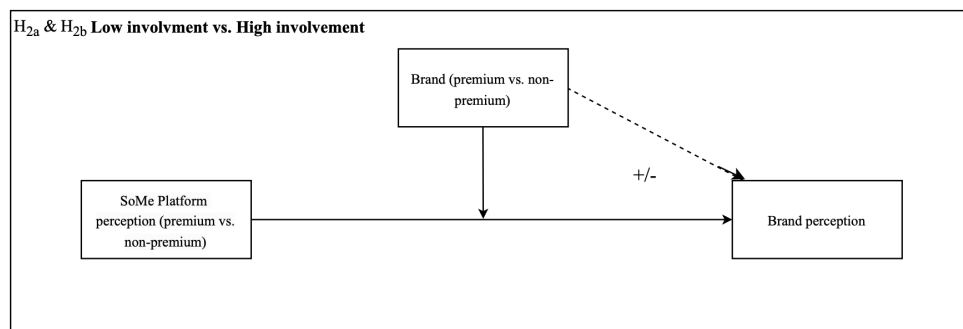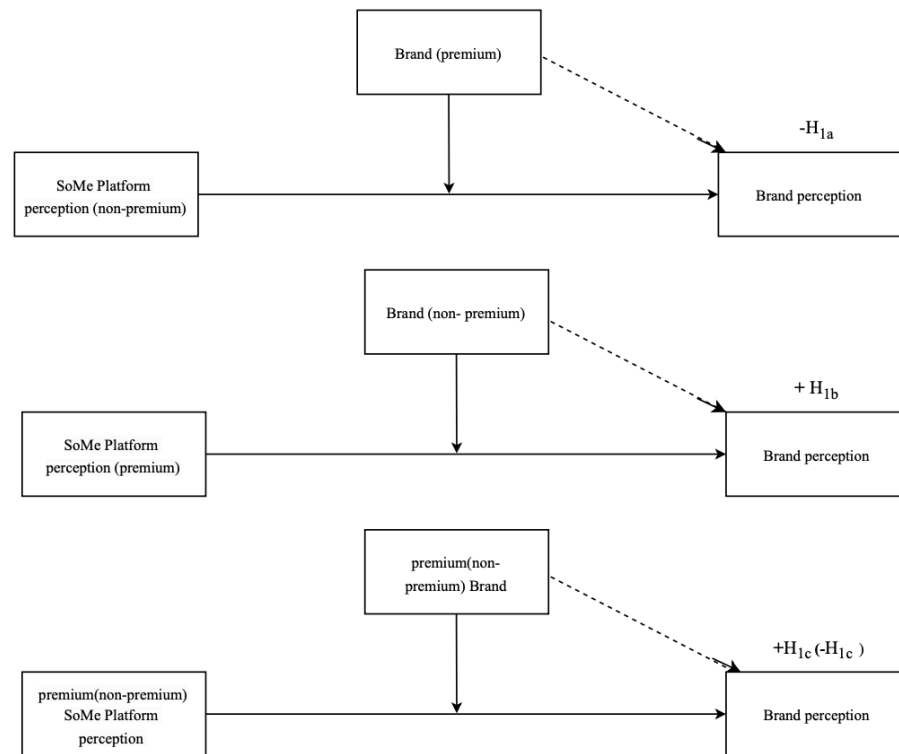
Figure 2 depicts the model's expected relationship based on the following hypothesis. The studies that will be conducted to investigate these expected relationships will be described in the following section. Study 1 is exploratory, while Studies 2 and 3 investigate hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c, and Study 3 investigates hypotheses 2a and 2b.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Study 1

4.1.1 Participants

10 international students (5 female and 5 male) from BI Norwegian Business School participated in a 40-minute interview and in-person mapping session, which consisted of six questions. The sample was selected using a convenience sampling

approach due to its accessibility and availability. Most of the participants were already known, and all were pursuing bachelor's and master's degrees at the institution.

4.1.2 Design

Participants were asked whether they are users of the SoMe channels (TikTok, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube and Facebook). Then, for those who were not active on them, they were asked if they understood the general concept of the platform on which they were not active.

Prior to the commencement of the mapping session, participants were not provided with any explicit definitions or explanations of the concept of "fit" beyond clear instructions to prevent any preconceived notions of the construct from influencing their responses. The mapping session began when participants were instructed to "rank the SMPs from high to low quality". Then they were asked "Why did they arrange them that way?", and a deep explanation was sought. This question was followed by asking them "What elements raise the quality of the SMP?", in order to identify elements that could match the proposed literature.

Finally, participants were requested to categorize images of popular existing brand logos (both premium and non-premium) with the SMPs (both premium and non-premium) they perceived as being most congruent or fitting for advertising. This approach was derived from Olson and Thjømøe's (2011) fitness mapping methodology.

In addition, the study focused on two SMPs, namely Instagram and TikTok, and examined participants' perceptions of the congruence or fit between well-known brand logos (both premium and non-premium) and these platforms for advertising purposes. The choice of product categories utilized in the study was guided by market data indicating that the automotive, retail, and consumer goods sectors allocate a significant proportion of their marketing budgets to digital platforms (Gartner (n.d.), Oluwatomisin, 2022).

To enhance the study's ecological validity and facilitate the exercise, actual brand logos from the following categories were employed: automotive (Kia vs. BMW), retail (Louis Vuitton vs. H&M), and consumer goods (Godiva vs. Hershey). Moreover, the product categories were further classified based on the degree of product involvement and durability. For instance, cars were used to represent high-

involvement durable goods, while coats were chosen as a medium-involvement durable product, and chocolate was selected as a low-involvement non-durable good. This classification was done to account for potential differences in participants' perceptions of the fit or congruence between the brands and the SMPs, as well as for different product types. (For further details regarding the questionnaire and accompanying images, please refer to Appendix A.)

4.1.3 Results

The present study revealed that all participants were active users of various SMPs. However, a small subset of respondents (n = 3) disclosed that they did not utilize the TikTok platform. Nonetheless, these individuals demonstrated awareness of the fundamental concept of TikTok and attributed their non-engagement to the perception of excessive time consumption. This highlights the potential for SMP saturation among users, leading to a perceived need to limit one's active presence on these platforms.

The results of the present study's quality ranking of SMPs revealed a clear hierarchy, with LinkedIn being ranked as the highest quality platform, followed by Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, and TikTok in that order. This implies that, according to the participants (excluding professional SMP LinkedIn), Instagram has the highest overall quality, whereas TikTok is perceived as a low-quality platform.

When asked to justify their selections, the majority of participants cited the content provided by the platform as the primary factor influencing their ranking. For example, one participant argued that LinkedIn is a valuable tool for job seeking, while Instagram allows for easy connections with friends and family. In contrast, TikTok was criticized for primarily providing content in the form of memes and funny videos, which was not perceived as having high value for the user. Other participants suggested that the quality of the information received through the platform was also a key factor in their proposed ranking. These observations are in line with the hypothesized perception of SMPs with respect to the inferred quality of the content and information provided by the platform.

The ensuing analysis of participant responses yielded several key factors that were deemed critical in determining the quality of a given SMPs. Answers were categorized into the following variables: content, relevance, exposure, algorithm quality, quantity of ads, influencer reputation, and ease of use. It is worth noting

that these factors were not ranked in any particular order, but instead were organically given by the participants.

With regards to content, participants highlighted the significance of the quality and relevance of the information presented by the platform. This includes the quality of the visual and written content, such as videos in the case of YouTube and TikTok, images for Facebook and Instagram, and posts for LinkedIn. According to the participants, SMPs that offer greater exposure to user-generated content and provide personalized content tailored to individual users, known as algorithm quality, were perceived as being of higher quality. Additionally, the study found that participants believed the quantity of advertisements, the reputation of influencers, and ease of use were significant factors in determining the quality of SMPs. Respondents perceived platforms with fewer ads as having higher quality, reputable influencers as improving a platform's quality, and easy-to-use platforms as having higher quality.

The last task, to pair product brands with SMPs, revealed a distinct pattern of brand-platform preference. Specifically, BMW and Kia were preferred to be advertised on Instagram. However, BMW was found to be highly preferred on Instagram compared to Kia. In contrast, Godiva chocolate was preferred to be advertised on Instagram, while Hershey's chocolate was preferred to be advertised on TikTok. Furthermore, the findings indicate a preference for advertising both Louis Vuitton and H&M on Instagram, with a higher preference for Louis Vuitton compared to H&M.

These findings suggest that certain product brands may be more effectively marketed on specific SMPs. For example, premium brands such as Louis Vuitton and BMW may be more positively received on Instagram, a platform known for its visual-based content and high engagement from users with high purchasing power. In contrast, Godiva chocolate, a high-end brand, may be more effectively marketed on Instagram, a platform that is widely used for sharing food and lifestyle content. Additionally, Hershey's chocolate may be more effectively marketed on TikTok, a platform known for its viral and entertaining content.

4.2 Study 2

To further continue our research, this study was conducted to evaluate people's perceptions of durable, high-involvement goods (car brands) advertised on SMPs.

Data collection was performed in accordance with the data protection regulations (GDPR) and all participants were recruited with proper explanations about the purpose of the study, confidentiality matters and participation conditions. Any comments, feedback or suggestions were welcomed and participants could contact researchers using the presented contact details.

4.2.1 Participants

In this study, a simple random sampling technique was employed to recruit a sample of 313 students from BI Norwegian Business School who voluntarily participated in the Qualtrics survey. The population under study consisted of English-speaking students from BI Norwegian Business School who demonstrated proficiency in the language and were considered to possess an international mindset. The demographic characteristics of the sample were comparable to those of the TikTok user base, with 60% belonging to the Gen-Z cohort and 72% having a presence on Instagram, as reported by Doyle (2022).

4.2.2 Data Collection

The data collection period for this study lasted approximately eight weeks and was conducted using Qualtrics Survey Software. Participants were randomly selected and approached in BI facilities, where they were provided with a card containing a QR code that directed them to the online survey, which was intended to be accessed via their mobile phones to simulate a more authentic SoMe setting. The card also included the researchers' contact information and information indicating that the survey was compliant with GDPR guidelines. To avoid any potential bias, we visited the campus at different times of the day and selected different locations to approach potential candidates. Participants were encouraged to complete the survey during their free time and in a comfortable location, as the survey was expected to take approximately five minutes and required careful reading.

4.2.3 Design

Our study utilized a between-subject experiment, employing a 2x2 factorial design with factors of *SMP perception* (Instagram vs. TikTok) and *brand premiumness* (premium vs. non-premium). Instagram and Tiktok were selected due to their being the most polar opposites in quality evaluation and having the most similar platform designs when it comes to advertising.

To manipulate brand premiumness, we used brand descriptions, as shown in Table 1, of products from the same categories as those mentioned in Study 1, but these brands were unknown to participants. The use of unknown brands was intended to avoid any potential biases related to known brands or pre-existing brand attitudes. We followed the definition of premium brands provided by Guitart, Gonzales, and Stremersch (2018), which includes descriptions highlighting the product's quality, price, and value compared to other brands in the same category.

Table 1. Treatment Conditions

	Brand Description
Premium	**ZX** vehicles offer sustainable luxury for 80,000 EUR with premium alternative drive trains, lightweight construction, aerodynamics, and a cutting-edge driving experience. ZX blends performance and eco-friendliness with sleek designs using renewable and recycled materials. The vehicle accelerates to 100 km/h in 15 sec, showcasing innovative engineering and advanced technology. The luxurious interior features a harmonious blend of materials and fabrics, highlighting sustainability and refined style. Drive into the future with ZX where performance meets luxury.
Non-Premium	**ZX** vehicles offer cheap and efficient transportation with an average price of 25,000 EUR and a speed of 150 km/h. Despite their affordability, they offer a surprising amount of driving sophistication and features. The clean and easy-to-use dashboard features climate and audio controls, while the interior has a mature and sophisticated look with nicely textured hard plastic. Good value for the money, ZX vehicles provide a subcompact option with a balance of simplicity, speed and driving sophistication.

To assess brand perception following each condition, a four-item brand image scale developed by Horen and Pieters (2017) was utilized. Further, to maintain the integrity of the study, a cover story was used to mask its true purpose, which focused on the trustworthiness of SoMe ads. Consequently, questions were included to assess users' trust in advertisements. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the four experimental conditions.

4.2.4 Survey Structure

The survey commenced with the collection of participant demographic information, including age, sex, nationality, and other related variables for grouping purposes. Subsequently, the survey included screening questions regarding participants' SoMe usage patterns, including the platforms they use, their perceptions of the quality of the platforms, and their experiences with advertisements on the platforms. Next, participants were presented with a description of a fictitious automotive brand named "ZX", which depending on the condition, was either classified as premium or non-premium, and exposed to an advertisement on one of two SMPs, namely Instagram or TikTok. Participants were instructed to indicate which platform they were viewing the advertisement on to ensure attention to this element of the study.

Following this, they evaluated their brand perception and provided their likelihood to interact with the post across digital metrics such as likes, shares, comments, clicks, and searches for more information. Lastly, the survey included approximately three questions on advertisement trustworthiness for the cover story. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

4.2.5 Data Analysis

After receiving all our responses during an 8-week collection period, we downloaded the data to further analyze it in the statistical software SPSS. Of the 313 responses obtained in this study, 122 were removed from the dataset due to inconsistencies identified during data analysis. Specifically, 10 responses were excluded on the basis of platform identification mismatch, wherein respondents selected an incorrect SMP (e.g., Instagram instead of TikTok) or indicated uncertainty ("Not sure"), which could imply a lack of knowledge and result in inaccurate SoMe perception responses. Next, 112 respondents were eliminated due to non-compliance with a scale question in which the order of one item was reversed. It is posited that respondents who did not answer in accordance with the reverse ordering likely did not read the question carefully. The exclusion of such responses adheres to established methodological standards and was undertaken to ensure the validity and reliability of the final dataset.

After eliminating the aforementioned subjects, the final dataset contained 191 individuals, 103 females and 88 males. According to Table 2 below, the majority of participants were bachelor's degree students, accounting for nearly 60% of the sample, followed by master's degree students (35%) and PhD students (3%). An additional category was included to account for individuals who are not full-time students. Based on the distribution of participants across the age category, it can be inferred that the mean age is approximately 21–22 years, as indicated by the highest proportion of participants in this range. Regarding the participants' nationalities, more than half of the participants (56%), who responded to the survey, were Norwegian, while the rest of the participants represented a diverse range of nationalities from 32 different countries across the globe. Countries ranged from Asia, East and Western Europe, North America and South America. (A detailed list of the nations represented in the sample can be found in Appendix C.)

Table 2. Survey Demographics

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	88	46.1
Female	103	53.9
Program		
Bachelor	113	59.2
Master's degree	68	35.6
PHD	6	3.1
Other	4	2.1
Age		
18	3	1.5
19	9	4.7
20	21	11.0
21	37	19.4
22	29	15.2
23	26	13.6
24	21	11.0
25	12	6.3
26	9	4.7
27	11	5.8
28 or older	13	6.8

In terms of SoMe habits, 94% of participants confirmed they were active SoMe users. On SMPs, the majority of participants (45%) reported using a combination of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. The second most popular category (25%) consisted of those who used the same SMPs as the aforementioned category, but did not actively use TikTok. This suggests the presence of participants who were familiar with TikTok, but did not actively use the platform. In relation to SoMe advertising, the majority of participants (with the exception of n=2), reported receiving ads on SoMe and 42% of participants reported having made purchases as a result of these advertisements.

With respect to the quality evaluation of SMPs, the results indicated that YouTube was rated the highest, with an average mean of 69.72 (SD=22.13) on a 100-point scale. Instagram ranked second at 61.07 (SD=25.44), followed by TikTok 49.97 (SD=31.43) and lastly, Facebook 35.47 (SD=23.83) as presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Platform Quality Evaluation

	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Facebook
Mean	69.723	49.969	61.073	35.466
Std. Error of Mean	1.601	2.274	1.841	1.724
95% CI Mean Upper	72.861	54.426	64.681	38.846
95% CI Mean Lower	66.584	45.511	57.466	32.086
Std. Deviation	22.130	31.430	25.437	23.833
Variance	489.738	987.831	647.016	568.008

Factor Analysis

To simplify the interpretation of the results, a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted with IBM SPSS 29 software. The analysis aimed to reduce the number of variables in the item scale. The four experimental condition variables, namely Quality (V1), Superiority (V2), Well-made (V3), and Prestigious (V4), were measured on a 7-point Likert scale and treated as continuous variables during the analysis, as shown in Table 4. If all four variables, as described below, are favorable, they will be averaged and used as a single factor to calculate brand perception - the dependent variable.

Table 4. Component Loadings

	PC1	Uniqueness
Well-made	0.915	0.163
Quality	0.914	0.165
Superiority	0.912	0.167
Prestigious	0.690	0.523

Bartlett's test of Sphericity and Kaiser-MeyerOlkin test (KMO) were performed to examine how well these variables were correlated. The null hypothesis is rejected by Bartlett's test of sphericity, since the approximate ($X^2 = 496.245, p=<.001$) as presented in Table 5. We further use the KMO measure of sampling adequacy index to compare the magnitudes of the observed correlation coefficients to the magnitudes of the partial correlation coefficients (Malhotra, 2010). In our case, the value of the KMO is large (KMO =.81). Thus, factor analysis may be considered an appropriate technique.

Table 5. Bartlett's & KMO Test

Bartlett's test of sphericity

X^2	df	p
496.245	6	< .001

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test

Indicator	MSA
Quality	0.776
Superiority	0.820
Well_Made	0.800
Prestigious	0.926
Overall	0.814

Following the confirmatory factor analysis, a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was performed with the Varimax rotation method to simplify the interpretation of factors by reducing the number of variables with high loadings. Table 5 shows that no variables were excluded due to low communalities ($<.5$). As a result, these four variables were combined into a single variable, brand perception, which is used as a dependent variable in the subsequent analysis.
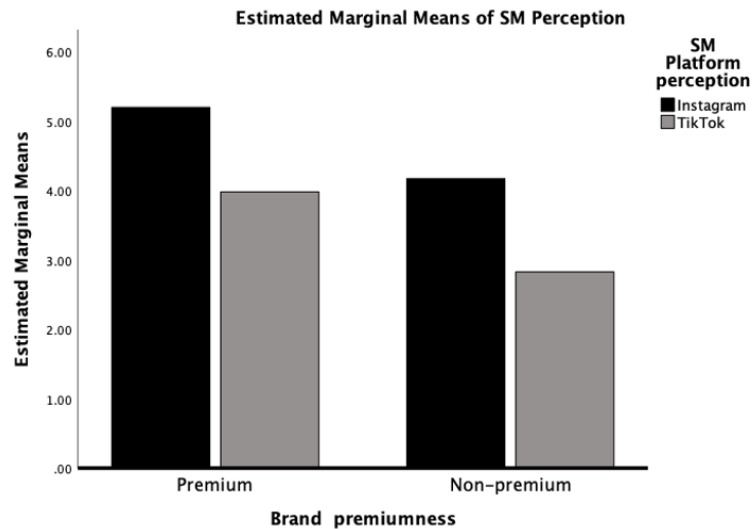
Analysis of Brand Perception and Independent Variables

In order to determine if there were significant differences between the four experimental conditions, a statistical analysis called Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted (Malhotra, 2010). A two-way ANOVA was considered acceptable since we had a dependent continuous variable *brand perception* and two independent variables *brand* (0=Premium, 1=Non-premium) and *SMP* (0=Premium, 1=Non-premium). The statistical analysis revealed that independent variables *brand* ($F_{(3, 187)} = 21.83$, $p < .001$) and *SMP* ($F_{(3, 187)} = 30.16$, $p < .001$) were significant. However, there was no interaction effect found between both variables, as seen in Figure 3. These results indicate that changes in brand premiumness did not affect brand perception scores, as it was observed that Instagram had the highest average brand perception scores in both premium and non-premium brand conditions.

Additionally, it was observed that there was a significant main effect of the *SMP* on brand perception, in which the premium condition (Instagram) resulted in a significantly higher brand perception compared to the non-premium condition (TikTok). Furthermore, *brand* had a strong major influence on brand perception, as the premium brand had a higher mean than the non-premium brand.

Figure 3
Graph of Means

Estimated Marginal Means of SM Perception

SM Platform perception
■ Instagram
▨ TikTok

Estimated Marginal Means

6.00

5.00

4.00

3.00

2.00

1.00

.00

Premium   Non-premium

Brand premiumness

To investigate further, a post hoc test was selected; in this case, the Bonferroni test was chosen as it enables multiple comparisons between groups (Foster et al., 2018). The post hoc analyses revealed that, the average mean difference for the premium brand condition was significantly lower in the TikTok condition (M = 3.98, SD = 1.24, p < .01) compared to Instagram (M = 5.20, SD = 1.82, p < .01), but significantly higher than TikTok of the non-premium brand (M = 2.83, SD = 1.74, p < .01). Albeit, there was no substantial difference between the premium and non-premium conditions for TikTok and Instagram.

Table 6. ANOVA, Descriptives and Post Hoc Comparison - Brand perception

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Brand	56.073	1	56.073	21.833	< .001
SM_Platform	77.457	1	77.457	30.159	< .001
Brand ✳ SM_Platform	0.192	1	0.192	0.075	0.785
Residuals	480.265	187	2.568		

Brand	SM_Platform	Mean	SD	SE	Coefficient of variation
Non-premium	Non-premium	2.825	1.738	0.275	0.615
	Premium	4.170	1.553	0.213	0.373
Premium	Non-premium	3.979	1.242	0.181	0.312
	Premium	5.196	1.822	0.255	0.351

			95% CI for Mean Difference				
		Mean Difference	Lower	Upper	SE	t	p_{bonf}
(Premium-TikTok)	(Premium- Instagram)	-1.217	-2.057	-0.377	0.324	-3.757	0.001 **
	(Nonpremium-Instagram)	-0.191	-1.023	0.641	0.321	-0.595	1.000
	(Nonpremium-TikTok)	1.154	0.260	2.047	0.345	3.347	0.006 **
(Premium- Instagram)	(Nonpremium-Instagram)	1.026	0.211	1.841	0.314	3.265	0.008 **
	(Nonpremium-TikTok)	2.371	1.494	3.248	0.338	7.005	< .001 ***
(Nonpremium-Instagram)	(Nonpremium-TikTok)	1.345	0.475	2.215	0.336	4.007	< .001 ***

Note. P-value and confidence intervals adjusted for comparing a family of 4 estimates (confidence intervals corrected using the tukey method).
* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001
For clarity, "premium" was written as Instagram and "non-premium" as TikTok on the SM Platform.

In conclusion, the results indicate that the SMP used for advertising has a significant impact on brand perception, with Instagram (a premium platform) resulting in a higher brand perception compared to TikTok (a non-premium platform). This finding suggests that advertising on Instagram may provide brands with an automatic perception boost in terms of quality, prestigiousness, well-made and superiority compared to advertising on a non-premium platform such as TikTok.

In our final analysis, we examined the digital metric variables to derive additional insights into the topic. Our findings indicated that among the participants, 20% would comment on the SoMe ad, 2% would like the ad, 3% would share it, 23.5% would click on it (CTR), 34.5% would search for more information about it (SEO), and 4.7% would express interest in purchasing the product, as presented in Table 7. Notably, the results varied across conditions; the Instagram condition showed the highest levels of digital metric interactions, particularly in the premium condition compared to the non-premium condition. Conversely, TikTok conditions had the lowest digital-metric interactions overall.

Table 7. Digital Metrics

Variable	N	%
Like		
No	152	79.58
Yes	39	20.42
Comment		
No	186	97.38
Yes	5	2.62
Share		
No	185	98.56
Yes	6	3.14
Click on the ad		
No	146	76.44
Yes	45	23.56
Use Search Engine		
No	125	65.45
Yes	66	34.55
Interested in Buying		
No	182	95.29
Yes	9	4.71

4.3 Study 3

This study was conducted to evaluate people's perceptions of non-durable, low-involvement goods (a chocolate brand) advertised on SMPs. Data collection was performed in accordance with the data protection regulations (GDPR) and all participants were recruited with proper explanations about the purpose of the study,

confidentiality matters and participation conditions. Any comments, feedback or suggestions were welcomed and participants could contact researchers using the presented contact details.

4.3.1 Participants and Data Collection

To minimize potential contamination from the previous study, this one used a simple random sampling technique to recruit 321 students from the University of Oslo (UiO) and the Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet) who freely participated in the survey. This study's data collection period lasted about four weeks, and participants were solicited in the same way, utilizing a card with a QR code. To prevent any potential prejudice, the researchers visited the schools at various times of day and chose diverse areas to approach potential candidates. Participants were encouraged to complete the survey in their spare time and in a comfortable setting, as it was expected to take roughly five minutes and required careful reading.

4.3.2 Design

This study utilized the same between-subject experiment, employing a 2x2 factorial design with factors of *SMP perception* (Instagram vs. TikTok) and *brand premiumness* (premium vs. non-premium). However, this time the brand for chocolate "HC" is a low-involvement, non-durable product to contrast the previous study's high-involvement and durable car brand "ZX".

In order to manipulate brand premiumness, we utilized the brand description of a product from the same categories as those mentioned in Study 1, but these brands were unknown to participants to avoid any potential biases related to known brands or pre-existing brand attitudes. The brand description followed the definition of premium brands provided by Guitart, Gonzales, and Stremersch (2018), which includes descriptions highlighting the product's quality, price, and value compared to other brands in the same category.

Table 8. Treatment Conditions

	Brand Description
Premium	**HC**, a chocolate so luxurious and exceptional, it elevates the art of confectionery to new heights. Made with the finest, all-natural ingredients and offering a diverse range of rich, complex flavors, each bite of HC is a journey for the senses. The secret to its unparalleled quality lies in the meticulously selected cacao beans, naturally fermented, and harvested to bring out their inherent flavor and color. With options to suit every preference, including lactose-free, gluten-free, vegan, calorie-conscious, sorbet, and even spirit-infused, HC offers a chocolate experience unlike any other. Available for a price of 11 EUR, each bite of HC promises a superior level of taste, making it a truly indulgent and unforgettable treat.
Non-Premium	**HC** is a budget-friendly chocolate option for those looking for a quick and inexpensive treat. Made with a mix of mostly natural ingredients and permitted flavorings and colorings, its quality may not meet the standards of more premium chocolate brands, however it offers a range of options to suit different preferences, including all-natural, low/no sugar, and lactose-free varieties. Price for HH regular chocolate is 3.5 EUR.

The same four-item brand image scale from Horen and Pieters (2017) was used to assess brand perception, and the cover narrative was also kept. As a result, questions were included to gauge customers' trust in advertisements. Participants were allocated to one of four experimental conditions at random.

4.2.4 Survey Structure

The survey utilized the same questionnaire structure and set of questions as Study 2. However, the study differed in that the brand's product was categorized as low-involvement. Specifically, participants were presented with a description of a fictional chocolate brand, named "HC," which was categorized as either premium or non-premium based on their condition. Additionally, participants were exposed to an advertisement on either Instagram or TikTok and were instructed to identify the platform on which they viewed the advertisement to ensure proper attention to this element of the study. The modifications to the questionnaire can be found in Appendix D.

4.2.5 Data Analysis

Of the 321 responses obtained in this study, 123 were removed from the dataset, out of which 21 were excluded on the basis of platform identification mismatch and one did not consent to participate. Additionally, 100 respondents were eliminated due to non-compliance with a scale question in which the order of one item was reversed. After eliminating the aforementioned subjects, the final dataset contained 199 individuals: 116 females and 83 males. The majority of participants were bachelor's degree students (52%), followed by master's degree students (40%) and PhD students (4%). An additional category was included to account for individuals who may not be full-time students. Based on the distribution of participants across

the category age in Table 9, it can be inferred that the mean age is approximately 21-24 years. Regarding the participants' nationalities, more than half of the participants (56%), who responded to the survey, were Norwegian, while the rest of the participants represented a diverse range of nationalities from 40 different countries across the globe. (A detailed list of the nations represented in the sample can be found in Appendix E.)

Table 9. Survey Demographics

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	83	41.7
Female	116	58.3
Program		
Bachelor	105	53.8
Master's degree	81	40.7
PHD	8	4.0
Other	5	2.5
Age		
19	11	5.5
20	18	9.0
21	33	16.6
22	19	9.5
23	27	13.6
24	31	15.6
25	19	9.5
26	14	7.0
27	8	4.0
28 or older	19	9.5

According to the study's findings, 80% of participants claimed active SoMe usage, while the rest identified as less active SoMe users. The majority of participants (40%) reported using a combination of YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok on SMPs. The second most popular category (23%) included individuals who used the same SMPs as the first but did not actively use TikTok; the results were comparable to Study 2.

Similarly, SoMe's quality evaluation results were evaluated in the same order as Study 2. As seen in Table 10, there are some differences in the mean value.

Table 10. Platform Quality Evaluation

	YouTube	TikTok	Instagram	Facebook
Mean	64.849	44.211	63.693	47.246
Std. Error of Mean	1.660	2.376	2.026	1.963
95% CI Mean Upper	68.103	48.868	67.665	51.094
95% CI Mean Lower	61.596	39.554	59.722	43.399
Std. Deviation	23.418	33.519	28.583	27.691
Variance	548.391	1123.501	817.002	766.793

For the statistical analysis, considering that the previous study approved the studied scale, the factor analysis was omitted. Subsequently, a Two-way ANOVA was used to evaluate whether there were significant differences between the two independent variables. As shown in Table 11, the statistical analysis found no significant differences in brand perception among the variables or interaction effects. As a result, a post-hoc test was not carried out.

Table 11. ANOVA - Brand_perception

Cases	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
SM_Platform	3.981	1	3.981	3.487	0.063
Brand	2.833	1	2.833	2.481	0.117
SM_Platform ∗ Brand	2.530	1	2.530	2.216	0.138
Residuals	222.632	195	1.142		

Given the matching of demographic data and SMP quality evaluations across Studies 2 and 3, it is possible to conclude that the outcomes differ when a low involvement and non-durable product is offered. Premium brands advertising low-involvement products on non-premium SMPs, in particular, are unlikely to have a major negative impact on brand perception. Furthermore, non-premium brands advertising low-involvement products on premium SMPs like Instagram are unlikely to see a significant increase in brand perception. These findings imply that, regardless of how demographic and quality evaluation variables are matched between trials, the level of involvement of the advertised product plays a major role in determining the impact of SMP and brand reputation on customer perception.

Finally, we studied the digital metric variables to gain more insight into the subject. In comparison to Study 2, none of the participants liked, commented on, or shared the ad, maybe due to the low-involvement of this product. However, 3% of people would click on it (CTR), 15% would look for more information about it (SEO), and

19% would be interested in buying the product. This could be because it is less expensive than a high-involvement product. Notably, the results varied among circumstances, but there was no discernible pattern or condition that differed significantly.

5. Results

The findings of this study provide support for Hypothesis 1a, indicating that a premium brand advertised on Instagram elicits a higher level of brand perception compared to when advertised on TikTok. Specifically, in the present study, the automotive brand ZX, when advertised on Instagram, elicited the highest brand perception among participants, even though the advertisement shown on both platforms was identical. This result suggests that the mere identification of the platform where the advertisement is presented can evoke certain associations and contribute to brand perception. Therefore, brands seeking to establish themselves as premium should avoid advertising on platforms such as TikTok, as it may negatively impact their brand perception.

It has been found that Hypothesis 1b is supported by the data, which indicates that a non-premium brand advertised on a premium SMP like Instagram elicits a significantly higher brand perception than when advertised on a non-premium platform like TikTok. The difference in means between these two platforms was greater for the non-premium brand condition compared to the premium brand condition. These findings suggest that advertising on a non-premium platform like TikTok may result in a diminished brand image, even for non-premium brands that may already possess some brand equity. Therefore, it is important for non-premium brands to carefully consider their current brand position and the potential consequences of advertising on different SMPs.

In light of the overall findings and mean average comparisons, our study provides evidence in support of hypothesis 1c. Specifically, we observed that the premium brand promoted on Instagram had the highest brand image, whereas the lowest was seen for the non-premium brand advertised on TikTok. These findings suggest that companies that prioritize maintaining a high level of brand equity should avoid advertising on TikTok and instead focus on advertising on premium SMPs such as Instagram.

However, companies that have low levels of brand equity or whose product or service is not a top priority may still find value in advertising on TikTok. As an example, Guitart et al. (2018) found that non-premium brand advertisements tended to utilize more informal and humorous appeals, while premium brand ads emphasized sophistication, glamour, and technology. Thus, for premium brands, advertising on platforms such as Instagram may be more effective in maintaining their desired brand image. However, non-premium brands may still benefit from using alternative SMPs, such as TikTok, if they wish to convey a more lighthearted and relatable image to their audience. It is important for such companies to carefully consider the consequences of their advertising choices on different SMPs.

The findings of study 3 support hypotheses 2a and 2b, which proposed that the effect of platform premiumness and brand premiumness on brand perception would vary depending on the level of product involvement. Specifically, the results indicate that a significant effect on brand perception was only observed when the high-involvement brand ZX was advertised, as opposed to the low-involvement brand HC. Notably, when the low-involvement product was advertised using the same elements as the high-involvement brand, neither the premiumness of the SMP nor the premiumness of the brand itself significantly impacted brand perception. These findings suggest that product involvement plays a critical role in the relationship between platform premiumness, brand premiumness, and consumer perception.

6. Discussion & Managerial Implications

As previously noted, marketers are increasingly utilizing digital channels to diversify their marketing strategies. However, some marketers merely adhere to guidelines provided by SMPs or follow research on engagement, hashtags, or humor without taking into account the implications of the platform itself on brand image, since they lack antecedent knowledge. This study is the first to recognize the mental associations individuals already possess towards SMPs as brands and how this congruency can have either a positive or negative impact on their brand perception based on the level of premiumness and involvement of the brand being advertised. As a result, they should follow the advice in this section.

Our findings provide valuable insights for businesses and marketing managers to consider when deciding on advertising strategies. First, Study 1 demonstrates that

individuals possess a mental hierarchy for the quality of SMPs and that, for popular brands, there is a greater tendency to associate premium brands with high-quality platforms and non-premium brands with low-quality SMPs. This implies that managers ought to determine the premium status of their brand and subsequently advertise on a platform that is congruent with it. To maintain a high-quality image, premium brands such as BMW should consider advertising on Instagram, which is preferred by consumers. Even non-premium brands, such as Kia, should consider advertising on Instagram because it is a SMP that consumers associate with quality. To maintain a positive brand perception, non-premium brands should advertise on high-quality SMPs.

Study 2 reinforces the recommendation for marketers to maintain positive brand perception by advertising on premium SMPs, particularly Instagram, which received the highest evaluations. This advice is especially important for premium brands, as their brand perception is more vulnerable to decreasing and being perceived as non-premium or lower.

Brand perception is part of brand equity, which some can consider a value of the brand that is part of the balance sheet (Feldewick, 1996). De Oliveira et al.'s (2015) financial model demonstrates that brand perception, as a component of brand equity, directly affects a firm's future cash flows and its current net present value. Additionally, Shay & Van Der Horst's (2019) model shows that brand equity can be assessed through SoMe metrics and its impact on ROI. Our findings align with these models, as advertising on premium SMPs elicits more active audience responses (e.g., comments and sharing), which are more valuable to a company's brand equity than passive responses (e.g., likes, hearts, and video views) (Shay & Van Der Horst, 2019).

Third, according to Study 3, the aforementioned effect will not be applicable for brand managers who advertise low-involvement products. For example, chocolate brands such as Godiva will not suffer any negative brand perception by advertising on non-premium SMPs such as TikTok, so they can diversify and advertise on both or choose the one that appears to be more affordable. Similarly, for non-premium brands such as Hershey, advertising on either platform will have no effect on brand equity dilution. In the case of premium brands that offer both high- and low-involvement products such as clothing, bags, and makeup, it is recommended to have a diversified presence on SMPs. Specifically, brands can promote their low-

involvement products, such as makeup, on platforms like TikTok while advertising their high-involvement product categories on Instagram.

Marketers have to comprehend how to follow the how's from academic literature while also remembering that each SMP has its own language, trends, and guidelines to follow. It is critical to remember that the digital world is constantly changing, and these recommendations should be approached with caution. Furthermore, the section that follows will highlight the limitations and implications of these findings, which marketers should be aware of.

7. Limitations and Further Research

7.1 Limitations

The study employed an online questionnaire to collect data from respondents. Although this setting may not fully replicate a natural environment where users navigate SMPs organically, the questionnaire was designed to fit the screen and simulate the experience of viewing ads on mobile platforms. Further, the presented images were stills and not actual video or in-motion images, which could influence them, but the full effect could not be captured because each person's surrounding content is different. However, we create the illusion that the advertisement appears in their SoMe, despite their differences in content.

While the limitations of artificial settings are acknowledged, the insights generated from this study are likely to be transferable to natural settings where evaluations occur. Another limitation of this study concerns the generalizability of the findings. As the sample is composed mainly of Gen Z and millennials, it may not be fully representative of the wider population. As such, caution should be exercised when generalizing the results to other demographics (Malhotra, 2010).

Furthermore, Study 3 was conducted immediately following a potential ban on TikTok on March 23, 2023, during which the CEO of the company was summoned to testify in Congress about data protection and alleged data leakage from China (The Guardian, 2023). It remains unclear whether this event may have influenced the participants' perceptions of TikTok, whether it strengthened their associations with the platform, or whether it was perceived as an unrelated incident, particularly given that the study was conducted among students in Norway.

As SMPs have been witnessed to grow quickly and then collapse, Facebook ranked lowest in quality for Studies 2 and 3. This is akin to when the SMP was still popular in the 2010s; however, attitudes can change over time and between generations, and Facebook's user base and reputation are currently in decline (The Economist, 2021). The same phenomenon can occur with what is currently deemed premium and high-quality, such as Instagram and LinkedIn, affecting the outcomes of this research and necessitating a new investigation. Conversely, in the long run, apps like TikTok may become the norm in society, losing their non-premium status. As a consequence, time can influence the overall perception of the SMP, which should be regarded as a constraint in the future.

7.2 Further Research

Due to limitations in time and resources, the present study was limited to the evaluation of two SMPs with contrasting quality ratings. Future research may benefit from incorporating additional platforms, including emerging ones such as the gaming platform Twitch, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of platform premiumness on brand perception. Moreover, research could investigate the effect of platform premiumness on consumer perceptions of middle-involvement products as well as explore the potential applicability of these findings to other product categories. School institutions were one of the most relevant categories that inspired this study, as it is interesting how some international organizations choose to promote themselves on SoMe. Given the current study's focus on SoMe extremes (premium and non-premium) and only two SMPs, there is an opportunity for further research to examine these topics in greater depth and detail.

As the present studies aimed to mitigate any pre-existing attitudes towards known brands, future research may consider the inclusion of established brands and investigate the extent to which prior positive or negative brand attitudes may influence changes in brand perception. It is worth noting that brand image may differ across countries for established brands (Koubaa, 2008). As such, an international study may not be the most suitable approach, and instead, researchers may wish to focus on a single country to facilitate a more in-depth examination of the effects of prior brand attitudes on brand perception.

As previously stated, it is important to monitor how these emerging SMPs shape people's perceptions of SoMe in the long run. For example, TikTok's parent

company, ByteDance, launched "Lemon8" in 2023, an SMP similar to Instagram. This app is still in its early stages, but it is already generating buzz since it is said to be paying its content creators more than Meta does (The New York Times, 2023). As a result, the game and perceptions may change as Chinese-originated apps become more prevalent and people seek their true selves.

When Instagram introduced a similar full-screen feature and Reels (short videos mostly from TikTok) in 2022, users were outraged. Users and even celebrities wrote in their Instagram profiles to "stop copying TikTok"; this is likely due to TikTok's growing popularity (Cavallier, 2022). However, users continue to use Instagram for various reasons and like the perception they have of it, so they halted these changes. Reasons why these changes in SoMe perception should be tested in the distant future.

Furthermore, it is plausible that this effect extends to influencers, considering the surge in their popularity across various SMPs such as Instagram, YouTube, Twitch, and TikTok. Existing literature on influencers, such as the study by Casalo (2017), highlights the importance of content quality for their success on Instagram. However, Barta et al. (2023) argue that the quality of influencer content depends on the SMP being used. For instance, on TikTok, the quality is based on the hedonic experience of watching informal but well-edited videos, while Instagram influencers need to appeal to glamor and aesthetics in their posts. In contrast to celebrities, who are often viewed as aspirational and are suitable for pairing with high fashion, TikTokers' and high fashion's pairing may be considered "fundamentally odd" as they represent regular people and oppose everything that premium brands stand for (Higgins, 2021).

Following the logic of our thesis, it would be interesting to investigate whether the spillover effect of the SMP applies to influencers when they promote or become brand ambassadors outside of the SMP. For example, when a brand pairs with an influencer from a non-premium SMP, the brand's image could potentially be diluted. As brand image will continue to be a relevant topic, it is crucial to monitor how it evolves in response to emerging SoMe trends in the digital era.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Mapping Session Questionnaire

1.) Are you an active user of the following SMPs?

2.) If not, do you know what the main concept of each of them is?

3.) Could you rank the SM platforms from high to low quality? (Options: LinkedIn, Instagram, TikTok, Facebook and Youtube)

4.) Why did you arrange them this way?

5.) What elements do SMPs use to raise their quality?

6.) Pair brands that you would likely see advertised in each SMP (SM Options: Instagram and TikTok, Brands: Kia vs. BMW, Godiva vs. Hershey's, and Louis Vuitton vs. H&M)

Appendix A1: Mapping Session Images

Images used for Question 3
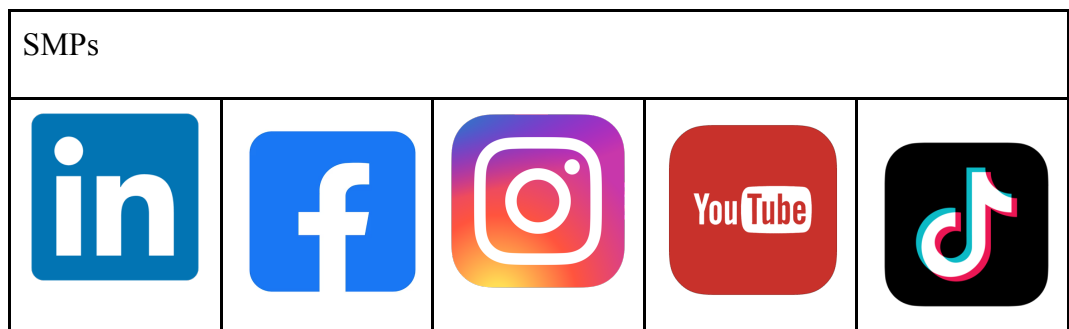
Images used for Question 6
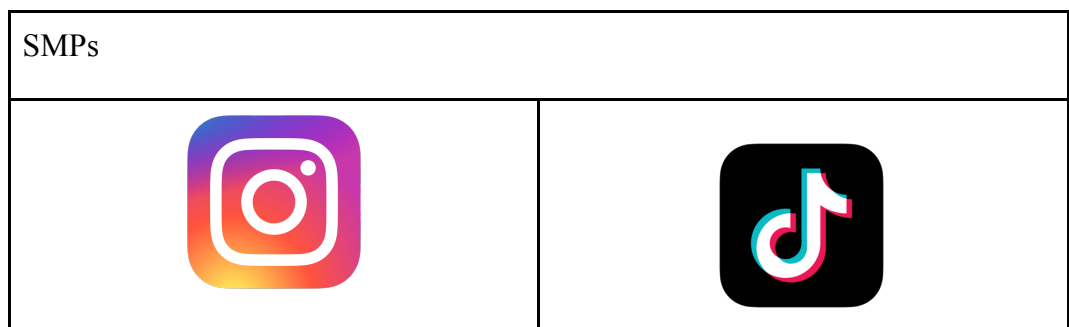
	Option A	Option B
high-involvement durable goods		
medium-involvement durable product		
low-involvement non-durable good.		

qualtrics.XM

Welcome to the research study!

Consent Form

About the study
This is a research project that shall serve as support for a possible publishing article. This survey aims to identify the perception of the younger generations on social media credibility. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. Your contribution is greatly appreciated.

Confidentiality
All data from participants will be treated with utmost confidentiality and will only be reported in an aggregate format (by reporting the combined results and never reporting individual results separately). The data collected will be stored in a HIPAA compliant, Qualtrics-secure database, which is only accessible to the principal researcher of this study.

Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely. However, you will not be compensated if you withdraw from the study before completion. If you desire to withdraw, please close your internet browser.

I consent, begin the study

I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

Appendix B1: Demographics

What is your age?   54

┌──┐ ▲
│   │ ▼
└──┘

What is your sex?

┌──┐
│   Male   │
└──┘

┌──┐
│   Female   │
└──┘

What program are you currently enrolled in?

┌──┐
│   Bachelor degree   │
└──┘

┌──┐
│   Master degree   │
└──┘

┌──┐
│   PHD   │
└──┘

┌──┐
│   Other   │
└──┘

What country are you from?

┌──┐ ▲
│   │ ▼
└──┘

Are you an active user of social media?

No

Yes

Which of the following social media platforms do you use? (You may select multiple options)

Youtube

Instagram

Facebook

TikTok

How will you evaluate the following platforms' quality? (From extremely low quality "0" to extremely high quality "100")

Quality definition: The extent to which the social media platform provides valuable content to the individual user

| 0 | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 |

Youtube

TikTok

Instagram

Facebook

Do you usually get ads on social media?

No

Yes

Have you ever purchased something after seeing it advertised on social media?

No

Yes

Do you trust social media advertisement?

No

Maybe

Yes

Appendix B3: Brand Premiumness Text

Premium

You will now be introduced to a new brand,
Read through one of their product descriptions <u>carefully</u>:

ZX vehicles offer sustainable luxury for 80,000 EUR with premium alternative drive trains, lightweight construction, aerodynamics and a cutting-edge driving experience. ZX blends performance and eco-friendliness with sleek designs using renewable and recycled materials. The vehicle accelerates to 100 km/h in 15 sec, showcasing innovative engineering and advanced technology. The luxurious interior features a harmonious blend of materials and fabrics, highlighting sustainability and refined style. Drive into the future with ZX where performance meets luxury.

Non-Premium

You will now be introduced to a new brand,
Read through one of their product descriptions <u>carefully</u>:

ZX vehicles offer cheap and efficient transportation with an average price of 25,000 EUR and a speed of 150 km/h. Despite their affordability, they offer a surprising amount of driving sophistication and features. The clean and easy-to-use dashboard features climate and audio controls, while the interior has a mature and sophisticated look with nicely textured hard plastic. Good value for the money, ZX vehicles provide a subcompact option with a balance of simplicity, speed and driving sophistication.

Appendix B3: SMP Manipulation
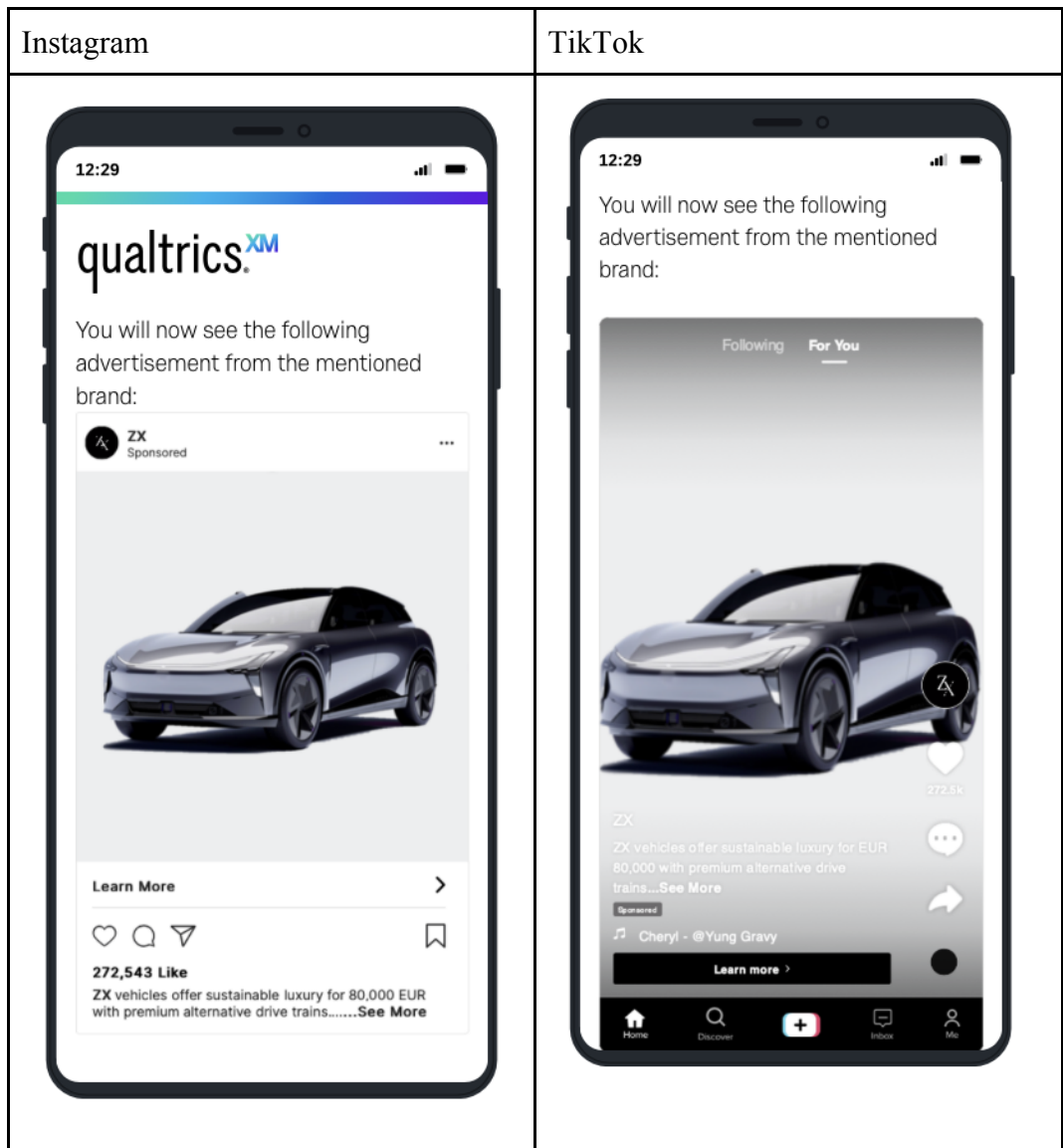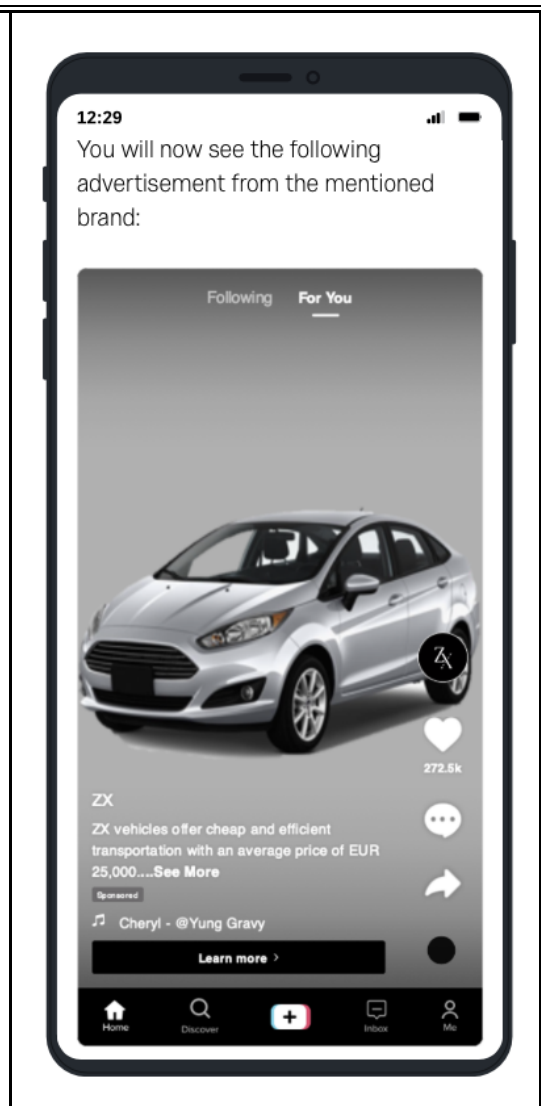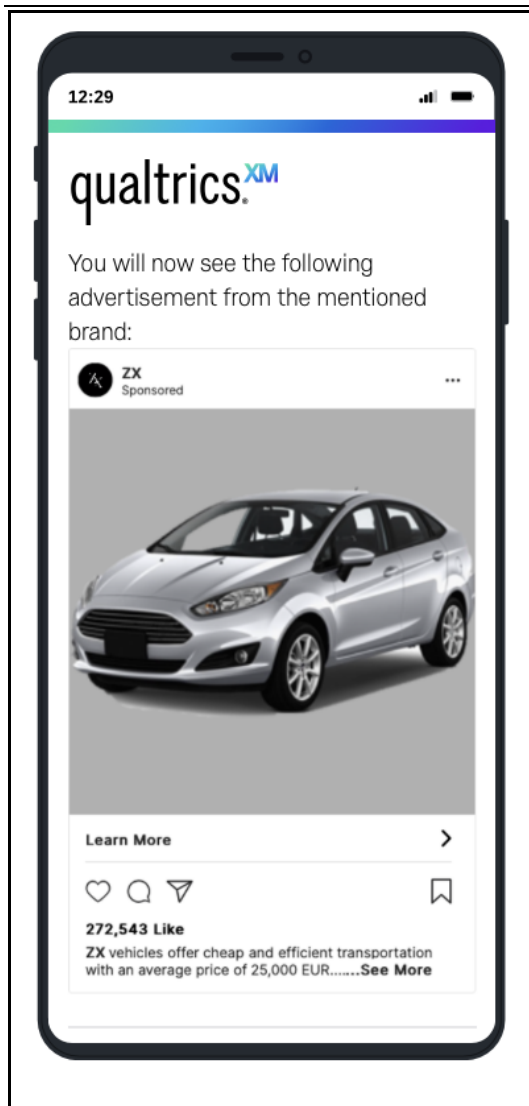
Instagram	TikTok

Appendix B4: Manipulation check

On which social media platform is this product being promoted?

Tiktok

Instagram

Not sure (Other)

Appendix B5: Brand Evaluation

After seeing the advertisement, how will you rate this brand's products (on a scale of 1 to 7)?

Have very Poor quality	O O O O O O O	Have very High quality
Are Inferior	O O O O O O O	Are Superior
Are Poorly made	O O O O O O O	Are Well made
Prestigious	O O O O O O O	Non Prestigious
Not Reliable	O O O O O O O	Reliable
Trustworthy	O O O O O O O	Not Trustworthy

If you saw this advertisement in your feed page, would you:

	Yes	No
Like this post	O	O
Comment on this post	O	O
Share this post	O	O
Click on it (to navigate on the brand's official website)	O	O
Search more about the brand or product (i.e. use Google)	O	O
Be interested in buying the product	O	O

Would you say the ad is trustworthy?

Yes

No

Appendix C: Study 2 Country List

List of Countries	Frequency	Percent
Australia	1	0.524
Brazil	3	1.571
China	6	3.141
Czech Republic	4	2.094
Denmark	1	0.524
France	5	2.618
Germany	3	1.571
Greece	2	1.047
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	1	0.524
Iceland	1	0.524
India	5	2.618
Iran	1	0.524
Italy	6	3.141
Kazakhstan	4	2.094
Latvia	4	2.094
Mexico	4	2.094
Norway	107	56.021
Pakistan	2	1.047
Poland	1	0.524
Romania	2	1.047
Russian Federation	3	1.571
Serbia	1	0.524
Spain	1	0.524
Sri Lanka	2	1.047
Sweden	1	0.524
Tajikistan	2	1.047
Thailand	2	1.047
Ukraine	4	2.094
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	1	0.524
United States of America	2	1.047
Uzbekistan	6	3.141
Viet Nam	3	1.571
Total	191	100.000

Appendix C: Study 2 Country List

Appendix D1: Brand Premiumness Text

Premium

You will now be introduced to a new brand,
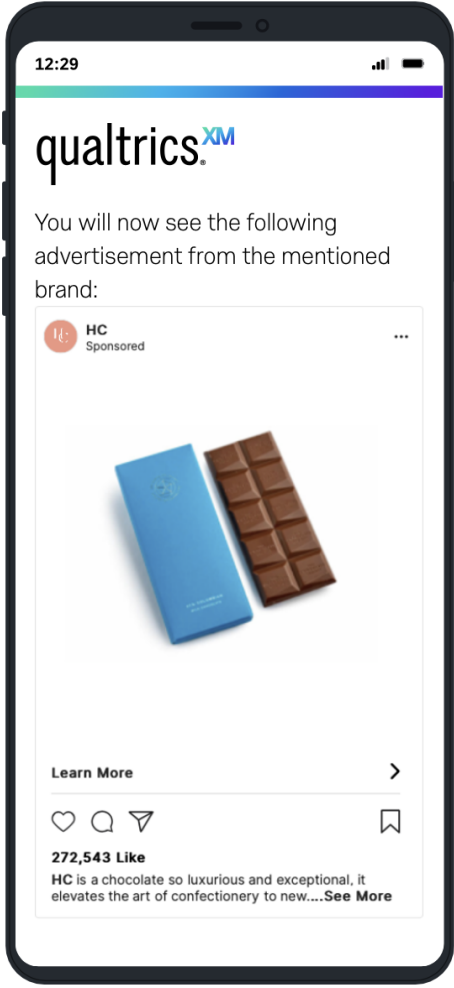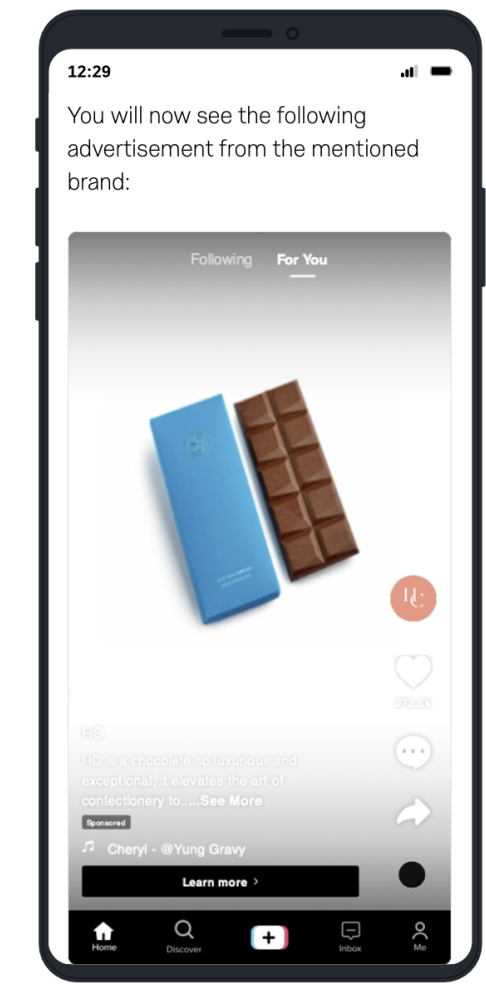Read through one of their product descriptions <u>carefully</u>:

HC, a chocolate so luxurious and exceptional, it elevates the art of confectionery to new heights. Made with the finest, all-natural ingredients and offering a diverse range of rich, complex flavors, each bite of HC is a journey for the senses. The secret to its unparalleled quality lies in the meticulously selected cacao beans, naturally fermented and harvested to bring out their inherent flavor and color. With options to suit every preference, including lactose-free, gluten-free, vegan, calorie-conscious, sorbet, and even spirit-infused, HC offers a chocolate experience unlike any other. Available for a price of 11 EUR, each bite of HC promises a superior level of taste, making it a truly indulgent and unforgettable treat.
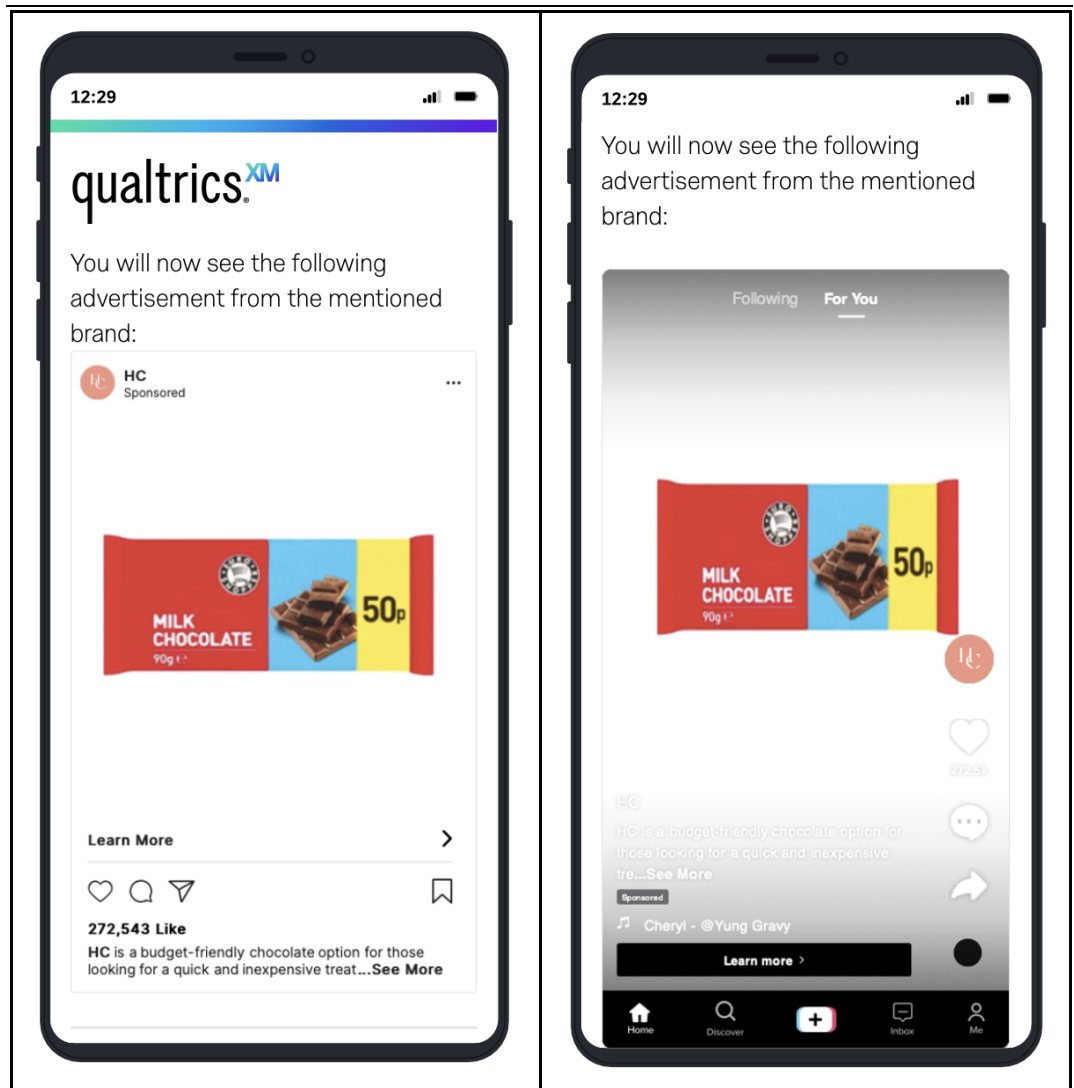
Non-Premium

You will now be introduced to a new brand,
Read through one of their product descriptions <u>carefully</u>:

HC is a budget-friendly chocolate option for those looking for a quick and inexpensive treat. Made with a mix of mostly natural ingredients and permitted flavorings and colorings, its quality may not meet the standards of more premium chocolate brands, however it offers a range of options to suit different preferences, including all-natural, low/no sugar, and lactose-free varieties. Price for HH regular chocolate is 3.5 EUR.

Appendix D2: SMP Manipulation

Instagram	TikTok

*The survey contained the exact the same questionnaire as the one in Study 2 ,
thus this appendix shows the difference in brand description and advertisements*

Appendix E: Study 3 Country List

List of Countries	Frequency	Percent
Afghanistan	1	0.503
Albania	1	0.503
Belgium	1	0.503
Brazil	1	0.503
Bulgaria	1	0.503
Canada	1	0.503
Chile	1	0.503
China	4	2.010
Czech Republic	2	1.005
Denmark	1	0.503
Egypt	2	1.005

Eritrea	1	0.503
Ethiopia	1	0.503
Finland	1	0.503
France	6	3.015
Germany	4	2.010
Greece	2	1.005
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	2	1.005
Hungary	1	0.503
India	4	2.010
Italy	5	2.513
Japan	1	0.503
Kazakhstan	2	1.005
Kyrgyzstan	2	1.005
Latvia	2	1.005
Lithuania	2	1.005
Malaysia	2	1.005
Mexico	6	3.015
Nepal	2	1.005
Netherlands	6	3.015
Norway	112	56.281
Poland	5	2.513
Portugal	1	0.503
Russian Federation	1	0.503
South Africa	2	1.005
Spain	3	1.508
Sri Lanka	1	0.503
Ukraine	1	0.503
United States of America	2	1.005
Uzbekistan	1	0.503
Viet Nam	2	1.005
Missing	0	0.000
Total	199	100.000