Received: 1 July 2022 | Revised: 20 December 2024 | Accepted: 5 February 2025

DOI: 10.1111/jpim.12780

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

JOURNAL OF PRODUCT INNOVATION MANAGEMENT pdma

Promoting crowdsourced new products: Competing co-contributor attractiveness, similarity, and persuasion knowledge processes

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Funding information
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Grant/Award Number: 435-2017-0996

Associate Editor: Namwoon Kim

Abstract

Crowdsourcing has become an increasingly popular way for marketers to conceive of and design new products. Promoting these with "designed by consumers" claims has proven highly effective in boosting innovation appeal and market success. However, beyond the appeal of the perceived similarity between co-contributors and customers (Dahl et al., 2015), little is known about the effectiveness of different communication strategies for crowdsourced products. Central to the current investigation is the crucial creative strategy decision about whether to show the co-contributor in the advertisements and the persuasive role of the co-contributor's level of physical attractiveness. The use of attractive sources is highly prevalent in standard advertisements and is known to have reliable positive effects in persuading consumers (Mello et al., 2020). In contrast, our research suggests that showing attractive co-contributors in advertisements for crowdsourced products undermines their unique appeal and can even backfire. Through a series of qualitative and experimental studies, we found that this effect results from two mechanisms: (1) negative persuasion knowledge, where consumers question whether the attractive source is the genuine co-contributor, and (2) disruption of the similarity appeal that typically makes crowdsourced products well-received. These findings not only advance our understanding of the effectiveness of "designed by consumers" claims but also contribute significantly to the broader communication and persuasion literature. Importantly, our findings provide managers with actionable strategies for maximizing the commercial success of crowdsourced products.

KEYWORDS

crowdsourced innovation, persuasion knowledge, source attractiveness, source authenticity, source similarity

1 | INTRODUCTION

Crowdsourcing has become an increasingly popular way for marketers to conceive and design new products. A large majority of top companies in almost every product category – from Lego to BMW to Lay's – have adopted crowdsourcing to gather new ideas and engage the wider consumer market (Wang et al., 2019). For instance, Hitachi Europe and Longitudes Research report that 79.5% of European companies have undertaken a collaborative

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creation project with customers (Hitachi, 2016). In the same vein, Olenski (2015) reported in *Forbes* that 85% of the top global brands had used crowdsourcing in the previous 10 years. Importantly, promoting such products by including "designed by consumers" claims can be highly effective (Fuchs & Schreier, 2011; Schreier et al., 2012), and in particular can increase sales by as much as 20% (Nishikawa et al., 2017). However, little else is known about the many other aspects of communication strategy that might best serve crowdsourced products, which can offer both unique opportunities (Wang et al., 2019) and potential liabilities (Thompson & Malaviya, 2013). Given the substantial benefits crowdsourced products can offer, it is important to better understand what other aspects of the promotional strategy might further impact their appeal.

The current research examines the role of displaying an image or picture of the co-contributor (i.e., the consumer from the crowd who submitted the winning product design) when promoting crowdsourced products, as well as the persuasive effects of the co-contributor's physical attractiveness. Decisions about whether or not to explicitly display a message source and what kind of source to use are central to the promotional strategies of all kinds (Belch & Belch, 2024). Marketing practitioners currently use diverse approaches when featuring co-contributors, varying the amount and type of information that is typically included about them (Liljedal & Berg, 2020). However, existing research provides little help in understanding what the persuasive consequences of using different source strategies might be in this context.

The broader communication and persuasion literature reliably shows that using attractive message sources has positive persuasive effects in a variety of contexts (Mello et al., 2020), consistent with what is known as the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype (Dion et al., 1972). However, for crowdsourced products, we theorize these positive effects are likely to be counteracted by authenticity concerns that attractive co-contributors might be professional models rather than the actual co-contributors. We conceptualized this as a form of persuasion knowledge, where consumers' existing experiences with advertising may influence their assessment of co-contributor authenticity. This is consistent with the "true-to-fact" form of authenticity delineated by Moulard et al. (2021) and resembles the legitimacy/illegitimacy construct used to examine persuasion knowledge distinguishing between celebrities posing as experts versus genuine experts in advertising (Wilson et al., 2021). Moreover, there was reason to believe the perceived dissimilarity of attractive co-contributors (i.e., the extent to which the co-contributor seems different from versus resembles oneself) might also undermine the persuasiveness of crowdsourced promotions (Dahl et al., 2015).

Practitioner points

- The use of attractive message sources is widely believed to be persuasive in advertising generally, but showing attractive co-contributors in advertisements for crowdsourced products can backfire by making consumers skeptical about whether they are genuine customers or hired models.
- This authenticity concern leads to more negative attitudes and lower purchase intentions toward the brand, across very different product categories, types of promotional materials, and other co-contributor characteristics.
- If a co-contributor is highly attractive, one option for managers is simply to avoid showing any images of them in promotional materials, as "designed by consumers" claims alone can be effective.
- If showing the co-contributor is desired, it is recommended to style/dress them to appear more like average people, which best represents the "open call" aspect of crowdsourcing.

We investigated these possibilities using a combination of qualitative and experimental studies and found that: (1) consumers who were exposed to actual adverts for crowdsourced products spontaneously had skeptical thoughts about the authenticity of co-contributors, as well as thoughts about co-contributor similarity; (2) authenticity concerns (persuasion knowledge) counteracted or suppressed any positive effects of the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype when an attractive person was claimed to be the winning co-contributor, while these concerns disappeared when the same attractive individual appeared merely as a model in advertisements for standard, noncrowdsourced products; (3) the greater dissimilarity of attractive co-contributors also led to negative persuasion effects that were independent from those of the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process; and (4) these negative authenticity and similarity effects occurred for a variety of product categories, operationalizations of attractiveness, and media vehicles.

This research makes a number of theoretical contributions spanning both the innovation and marketing communication literatures. First, we identify co-contributor attractiveness as a previously unknown liability for "designed by consumer" claims. In contrast to the typically positive effects of attractiveness in standard advertising (Wilson & Sherrell, 1993), as well as the positive effects of "designed by consumers" claims (e.g. Nishikawa et al., 2017), displaying an attractive co-contributor

backfired by making potential consumers more negative toward crowdsourced products. This represents an important exception in marketing crowdsourced products. Second, our research further identifies (in)authenticity and (dis)similarity processes as the explanation for these backfire effects. These processes serve to suppress or counteract any positive effects that source attractiveness otherwise has on brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and choice. Third, these findings add to the persuasion knowledge literature, which has not sufficiently investigated source attractiveness (Eisend & Tarrahi, 2022). Although a great deal of research has identified other types of persuasion knowledge, the only study related to source attractiveness found that consumer skepticism did not impact the persuasiveness of celebrity endorsements for standard products. In contrast, our findings suggest consumers show spontaneous and reliable skepticism about the authenticity of attractive co-contributors for crowdsourced products, which is a novel and unique form of persuasion knowledge. Fourth, the current research contributes to the broader what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype literature (Mello et al., 2020) by identifying crowdsourced products as a distinct context where the normal positive effects of source attractiveness are suppressed, and attractiveness instead leads to negative outcomes. Finally, we offer a number of practical contributions by identifying source attractiveness as a previously unrecognized liability when advertising crowdsourced products. This provides clearer insight for managers, who otherwise lack agreement on what source strategies might be most effective for crowdsourced products. Our research also offers practical solutions that can be easily implemented. Specifically, the negative effects of co-contributor attractiveness can be avoided by either dressing down co-contributors to appear less attractive or by simply not showing any images of attractive contributors.

2 | THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

2.1 | Promoting crowdsourced new products

In practice, companies that engage in crowdsourcing new products typically provide an online platform to tap into a large and dispersed crowd of non-expert creativity and intelligence (Steils & Hanine, 2016), after which the most promising ideas are commercialized into finished products (Nishikawa et al., 2013). Research and practice have shown that crowdsourcing can improve innovation quality and performance (Magnusson, 2009), better fit the needs of target consumers (Nishikawa et al., 2013; Poetz & Schreier, 2012), and encourage consumer engagement with the company (Kull & Heath, 2016), among other things. As mentioned, it has also become increasingly common for firms to use "designed by consumers" claims in their marketing efforts for crowdsourced products.

While a good deal of research has identified the design benefits of crowdsourcing, much less has focused on understanding how best to promote such products (Dahl & Hofstetter, 2021). One exception is a literature that has examined the persuasive benefits of making the "designed by consumers" claim itself, which shows that advertising making such claims can effectively improve brand evaluations and sales (Fuchs & Schreier, 2011; Nishikawa et al., 2017). Other studies suggest this label is less effective for high-end luxury fashion items (Fuchs et al., 2013), highly complex products (Meißner et al., 2017; Schreier et al., 2012), or when it does not resonate with power distance beliefs (Song et al., 2021). The studies that originally identified the benefits of including a "designed by consumers" label explain its positive effects in terms of a similarity/identification mechanism (e.g., Dahl et al., 2015), where the "designed by consumers" label evokes consumer perceptions of similarity to the co-contributor and thereby increases brand identification and persuasion. However, these studies did not include source images, and thus participants seemed to simply imagine that the co-creators were similar to themselves.

Importantly, many fundamental aspects of the communication strategies that might be used to promote crowdsourced products remain unexamined. The current research explored creative advertising approaches for the message source (here the co-contributor). One of the most central decisions in any promotional campaign is whether to show the message source or not, and if so, what source characteristics are likely to be the most persuasive (Belch & Belch, 2024). As mentioned, the initial research showing that "designed by consumers" claims are persuasive did not show co-contributor images. In contrast, firms that engage in the promotion of crowdsourced products tend to use a broad range of executional strategies, including both showing and not showing the co-contributor. For example, Lay's "Do Us a Flavor" crowdsourcing campaign integrates co-contributor pictures alongside "designed by consumers" claims (see the web appendix for other cases). The use of source pictures or images as executional cues is supported by evidence indicating this can be persuasive in other marketing contexts (e.g., Choi et al., 2012; Darke et al., 2016), but this question has not been examined for crowdsourced products. An additional question here is what specific source characteristics might aid versus hinder the persuasiveness of the campaign. Physical attractiveness, expertise,

and similarity are all well-known source characteristics that have been shown to be persuasive in standard advertising (Mello et al., 2020). These characteristics naturally vary for co-contributors who are sampled from the brand's normal customer-base, and therefore some co-contributors are likely to be more attractive, expert, or similar than others. While these source characteristics might be expected to have similar effects for crowdsourced products, the lack of research makes such generalizations tentative. As detailed below, there were also theoretical reasons to expect different outcomes.

2.2 | Understanding audience perceptions of co-contributors

Given the lack of existing research examining the effects of different creative source strategies for crowdsourced products, we completed an initial qualitative study using real advertisements that either did or did not include an image of the co-contributor to gauge consumers' spontaneous reactions. This included a series of individual and group interviews (29 informants in total aged between 20 and 60 years, students and nonstudents, with various education levels, lifestyles, and occupations) following the procedures of Strauss and Corbin (1998). We also used projective techniques such as sentence completion, word association, and collage construction, in conjunction with a semi-directive interview guide. The interviews began by defining and talking about crowdsourcing strategies, with actual stimuli from various firms as supporting examples. We presented different types of marketing communications involving a range of brands (e.g. Lay's, Starbucks, Tape à L'Oeil, Danette, Kookai, Dell, and Coral) and categories (e.g., snacks, furniture, computers, hot beverages, fashion apparel, and detergent) in order to cover different types of crowdsourcing examples. This included adverts that mentioned and/or pictured the co-contributor and adverts that did not. The co-contributors varied in terms of gender, age, lifestyle, and attractiveness. General comments concerning these stimuli were followed by more specific questions related to the co-contributors and the crowdsourced products involved.

Responses to the initial projective techniques suggested that informants perceived the authenticity of the crowdsourcing process to be higher when they knew more about the co-contributor. For instance, they said that a co-contributor picture "made the process more real." There were also a number of comments consistent with a similarity-identification mechanism (Dahl et al., 2015), where seeing co-contributors as similar to oneself led to positive reactions. For instance, "*I feel close to him because he's an average person, who doesn't seem particularly creative, er, who seems quite nice...*" (Claude, male, 43 years old); and "*[I feel close to them] On age! Then, they also look like active people, food-lovers, who like travelling and moving, like myself*" (Moira, female, 35 years old). Other comments were explicit about the link between similarity and identification with the co-contributors or brands, such as "*The Kookai winner, Louise, we're in the same age range, well maybe a few years younger. We could be mates, er, yeah I mean, same age range, same type of affinity...*" (Sonya, female, 36 years old); and "*... it's better if the brand shows only Mr. and Mrs. Everyone. If the brand wants to advertise a perfume or Nespresso or whatever, then it's better to have celebrities, but if the aim is to show that the brand cares about people, I think it's better to show Mr. and Mrs. Everyone.*" (Cornélia, female, 29 years old).

However, other responses also revealed a good deal of skepticism. When probed about their reasons for such skepticism, interviewees most often indicated the unusual attractiveness of co-contributors shown in some of the adverts. Specifically, consumers raised concerns that highly attractive co-contributors might in fact be paid models rather than true co-contributors. As Noémie (female, 36 years old) stated "*I think this [is] a photo-shopped photo, [that man] is a model. When cutting this part [with the new product], this guy looks like posing for a fashion apparel brand*". Another participant, Florence (female, 35 years old), stated: "*Honestly, I have doubts that he is the real winner.... He is really good-looking. This brand is really lucky to have a so handsome winner... Yes, I am skeptical... [..]*". Thus, doubt and skepticism seemed to arise from the idea that a pictured co-contributor should not be unusually attractive if they are to be viewed as authentic. As Nadia (female, 29 years old) put it, "*I'm not saying that the winner has to be ugly as sin, but I think he has to be as close as possible to Mr. and Mrs. Everybody.*" This suggests that when an advert claims a new product is a result of collaboration with a consumer, at least some audience members expect the co-contributor to resemble an ordinary, regular, or everyday person. If the co-contributor attractiveness conflicted with this everyday image, skepticism resulted: "*This winner doesn't look like Mr. and Mrs. Everybody and that bothers me. He does not seem real to me.*" (Kadi, female, 38 years old). See the web appendix for more details.

Overall, this qualitative study suggests that, in addition to having a number of positive thoughts about the similarity of co-contributors pictured in advertisements, informants also had spontaneous negative thoughts about the authenticity of co-contributors who were more attractive, at least in part because they suspected they were professional models rather than everyday consumers. That is, when co-contributors were perceived as

highly attractive, consumers expressed skepticism about their authenticity as actual product co-designers.[1]

2.3 | Hypothesis development

2.3.1 | Attractive co-contributors and authenticity process (persuasion knowledge)

Consistent with observations in the initial qualitative study, we chose to focus our research on physical attractiveness, authenticity, and similarity perceptions concerning the message source, as well as the alternative strategy of not displaying the source. Attractiveness is one of the most studied source characteristics in traditional advertising (see Mello et al., 2020), and there is a good deal of evidence as to its persuasive powers (e.g., Joseph, 1982; Kahle & Homer, 1985; Till & Busler, 2000; Wilson & Sherrell, 1993; Wright, 2016; but see Bower & Landreth, 2001). One prevalent explanation for its positive persuasive effects is the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype. According to this, attractive sources are broadly evaluated as more intelligent, socially skilled, ethical, and competent (Dion et al., 1972; Eagly et al., 1991; Langlois et al., 2000); and such attractive sources can have reliable positive downstream impacts on attitudes and purchase intentions (e.g., Baker & Churchill Jr., 1977). The well-known matchup hypothesis (Kahle & Homer, 1985; Kamins, 1990) further suggests that source attractiveness has particularly strong persuasive effects for appearance-related products.

In clear contrast, one of the main observations in our qualitative study was that advertising images of attractive co-contributors spontaneously generated skepticism as to whether they were genuine co-designers. Skepticism about a source's authenticity primarily relates to the trustworthiness aspect of credibility (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998), in that it concerns whether the co-contributor is genuine, real, or authentic. Credibility also includes the additional but separate dimension of expertise (Hovland et al., 1953), which concerns whether the co-contributor has the necessary knowledge or skill needed.

We draw on the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad & Wright, 1994) to develop more specific predictions concerning the role of such skepticism in consumer responses to co-contributor attractiveness. This model suggests that consumers, rather than being passive recipients of marketing messages, actively engage with persuasion attempts using knowledge of marketing tactics gained from past experiences. This can take numerous forms, including sensitivity to the apparent motives of a persuasive source (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), as well as recognizing the use of common persuasion tactics, such as flattery (Campbell & Kirmani, 2000), rhetorical questions (Ahluwalia & Burnkrant, 2004), scarcity (Aguirre-Rodriguez, 2013), attention-getting tactics (Germelmann et al., 2020), and covert marketing (Wei et al., 2008), among others. Tactics that seem manipulative or deceptive lead to consumer skepticism and generally cause consumers to respond more negatively than would otherwise be expected. Very little work has examined the potential role of persuasion knowledge concerning attractive advertising sources. One exception is a study by Obermiller et al. (2005) that found general skepticism toward advertising as a whole had no relation to the distrust of attractive celebrities in advertisements. However, this study did not involve co-contributors or crowdsourced products.

From a persuasion knowledge perspective, our qualitative study suggests that co-contributor attractiveness is a potential liability for crowdsourced products because it spontaneously evokes negative persuasion knowledge concerns as to whether these individuals are authentic product co-designers (who are expected to look like an average consumer) or hired models. Consumers are likely to be highly aware of the fact that the attractive sources used in other advertising contexts are typically paid models or celebrities, and this persuasion knowledge might in turn lead them to suspect an attractive source that is said to be a co-contributor might really be a model. Based on persuasion knowledge theory, we expect that doubts about a co-contributor's authenticity would lead to negative brand attitudes and lower purchase intentions due to the possible deception or manipulation implied. This prediction is consistent with prior evidence that informing consumers they have been deceived by an advertisement leads to distrust and more negative attitudes/purchase intentions (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). A negative authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process would offset any competing positive attractiveness effects that the traditional what-is-beautiful-is-good process would normally have on persuasion. Based on our theorizing, we therefore propose the following primary hypotheses concerning this novel persuasion knowledge process:

> **Hypothesis 1a.** An image of an attractive co-contributor in an advert for a new crowdsourced product should generate doubts about source authenticity (persuasion knowledge) compared to an image of a co-contributor of

[1]**Endnotes.**
Although not the central focus the current article, it was also relatively common for interviewees to mention any related professional credentials or expertise conveyed about the co-contributor when explaining skepticism.

average attractiveness or no image of the co-contributor at all.

Hypothesis 2a. The attractiveness of the co-contributor should have negative indirect effects on downstream brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and choice via lower perceptions of source authenticity (persuasion knowledge).

2.3.2 | Attractive co-contributors and similarity process

The qualitative study also indicated that consumers responded positively to adverts for crowdsourced products when they perceived the co-contributor was highly similar to them, consistent with the existing explanation for the appeal of crowdsourced products (Dahl et al., 2015). This similarity mechanism also offers an additional reason that participants might respond negatively when an advert shows an attractive co-contributor. Specifically, highly attractive co-contributors might be viewed as somewhat dissimilar to respondents, who are, on average, likely to be of more typical or moderate attractiveness. If so, the perceived dissimilarity of a highly attractive co-contributor should make them less persuasive than either a moderately attractive co-contributor or when no image of the co-contributor is used. This reasoning implies that the dissimilarity of an attractive co-contributor should undermine or counteract any positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effects. Although our primary interest was in identifying the novel persuasion knowledge process concerning co-contributor authenticity, we also examined the additional possibility that attractive co-contributors might be less persuasive because they are perceived as dissimilar to respondents. Based on this argument, we made the following additional predictions:

Hypothesis 1b. An image of an attractive co-contributor in an advert for a new crowdsourced product should decrease perceptions of source similarity compared to an image of a co-contributor of average attractiveness or no image of the co-contributor at all.

Hypothesis 2b. The attractiveness of the co-contributor should have negative indirect effects on downstream brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and choice via lower perceptions of source similarity.

In summary, the use of more attractive message sources is typically associated with positive persuasion effects in traditional advertising contexts, consistent with a what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype. However, for crowdsourced products, these positive effects seemed likely to be counteracted by the negative effects of persuasion knowledge concerns about the authenticity of the attractive co-contributor and/or their perceived dissimilarity to average audience members. Of note, our theoretical framework emphasizes process predictions rather than overall outcomes. While source attractiveness should positively influence persuasion through the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype, both the persuasion knowledge and similarity processes should have counteracting negative effects The net impact on persuasion depends on the relative strength of these opposing processes. As a result, it was not possible to offer a priori predictions for the overall mean differences We nonetheless test these overall persuasion differences, as it is relevant to know whether persuasion knowledge and/or dissimilarity effects simply nullify the otherwise positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effects, or alternatively reverse them. In fact, the evidence supports both possibilities.

2.3.3 | Qualifying the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process for attractive co-contributors

We also examined whether the type of advertisement would moderate any negative persuasion knowledge effects. As noted, concerns about the authenticity of an attractive co-contributor should arise because their appearance may indicate the source is, in fact, a professional actor/model rather than the claimed co-contributor. In contrast, an attractive source in an advert for a product that is not crowdsourced is, in fact, very likely to be a professional model and would not involve any pretense that the source is a regular customer. As a result, while there should be concerns about the authenticity of the attractive co-contributor in the crowdsourced advert, these concerns should not apply when the innovation is not crowdsourced. That is, ad type should moderate the negative effects of the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process. This led to the following formal hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3. An attractive source image will only lead to authenticity (persuasion knowledge) concerns and negative indirect persuasion effects when a crowdsourcing claim is made, and not otherwise.

3 | OVERVIEW OF EXPERIMENTS

We conducted five between-subjects experiments to test these predictions using a variety of sampling procedures, operationalizations of physical attractiveness, measures

of persuasion outcomes, product categories, and promotional vehicles (e.g., traditional poster adverts, Facebook posts, etc.). This broad range of methods allowed us to verify the robustness of the experimental findings. To the degree a consistent pattern of results is observed despite such methodological variations, the more valid those findings can be considered (Lynch Jr., 1982). Exp 1 first compared the presence versus absence of an attractive co-contributor picture in an advert for a crowdsourced dish soap. This study aimed to establish the basic effect of co-contributor attractiveness on perceived authenticity and similarity (Hypotheses 1a and 1b), as well as their subsequent persuasive effects (Hypotheses 2a and 2b). The no source comparison condition also allowed us to gauge whether the overall direction of any persuasion effects for the attractive co-contributor was positive or negative. Exps 2 and 3 instead compared co-contributor images that were of high vs. average attractiveness. Exp 2 used a very subtle manipulation of attractiveness where the hairstyle and dress of the same co-contributor were physically changed to create high and average attractiveness conditions for a laundry detergent advert. Exp 3 used an advert for a crowdsourced beverage and manipulated co-contributor attractiveness by digitally retouching a stock image of an attractive woman on features known to relate to physical attractiveness to create a moderately attractive version of the same person. Both methods allowed for highly controlled manipulations of attractiveness. Exp 4 tested the key moderated mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 3) by comparing a crowdsourced versus a standard advertisement. This study also used an appearance-related product (face cream) to further test the generalizability of the findings. Finally, Exp 5 further established the generalizability of our main predictions (Hypotheses 1a and 2a) by manipulating co-contributor attractiveness and product category (beauty vs. non-beauty) in the same study and by using an incentivized persuasion measure. Manipulating product category allowed for a direct test of whether or not the co-contributor attractiveness effects depended on the type of product involved, in this case for products that were either appearance related or not.

Across studies, we consistently found evidence for the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) mechanism (Hypotheses 1a and 2a supported), where attractive images raised concerns about the authenticity of co-contributors and decreased persuasion. The similarity mechanism, where attractive co-contributors are seen as less similar than average consumers, was also observed in some studies but was not consistently significant (Hypotheses 1b and 2b partially supported). Both these negative processes tended to suppress the positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effects that physical attractiveness typically has on persuasion for non-crowdsourced products.

4 | EXPERIMENT 1: COMPARING THE PRESENCE VS. ABSENCE OF AN ATTRACTIVE CO-CONTRIBUTOR PICTURE

4.1 | Method

We designed a simple between-subjects experiment where the presence versus absence of an attractive co-contributor picture was manipulated. Note that this initial all-or-nothing manipulation was useful in that it allowed us to get a sense of the overall direction of the mean effect that source attractiveness had on persuasion. This also allowed us to compare the attractiveness condition to the kind of no-image co-contributor claims used in past studies that have shown the benefits of such claims (e.g., Dahl et al., 2015).

The experimental stimuli featured a Facebook advertisement for a new dish soap scent, presented as the result of a crowdsourcing contest. Both conditions included the statement "designed by our winning customer Linda" and the key manipulation was whether or not the co-contributor's picture was shown (see the web appendix for detailed stimuli). A picture of an attractive woman sourced on the internet (who was a regular person who had just received a make-over beauty treatment but was not a professional model) was shown in one condition, whereas this picture was excluded from the control condition. Remember that the direction of the predicted negative effects of persuasion knowledge and similarity are in opposition to any positive stereotype effects of the attractive source.

We generally targeted 75 to 100 participants per cell in our studies, unless indicated otherwise. In this case, respondents were 210 US adults ($M_{AGE} = 39.443$; 71.429% female) sampled from the Cloudresearch Prime Panels. No respondents were dropped. Each randomly saw one treatment and, in order, indicated their brand attitudes (4 items; Mitchell & Olson, 1981; $\alpha = 0.948$), the co-contributor's perceived authenticity (1 item; "seems to be the real winner"), perceived similarity (3 items; Thompson & Malaviya, 2013; $\alpha = 0.879$), purchase intentions (3 items; Zeithaml et al., 1996; $\alpha = 0.934$), and demographics. Respondents who saw the photo version of the advert also rated the attractiveness of the co-contributor (Ohanian, 1990). All items were measured on 7-point Likert or bi-polar scales and are shown in Table 1.

It is worth noting that the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) measures used here and in our other experiments reflected whether the source was perceived as the real co-contributor (Moulard et al., 2021). Of further note, all authenticity items were positively worded to help

TABLE 1 Measures and items (7-point Likert or bi-polar scales).

Product category involvement (Strazzieri, 1994) • I am interested in this product category • This product category really matters to me • I give special importance to products in this category.
Perceived co-contributor attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990) • attractive/unattractive • classy/not classy • beautiful/ugly • elegant/plain • sexy/not sexy
Perceived co-contributor expertise (Ohanian, 1990) • expert/inexpert • qualified/unqualified • skilled/unskilled
Perceived co-contributor authenticity (*adapted from* Moulard et al., 2014) • Is the genuine winner • Seems like the real winner • Is the authentic winner who won the competition
Perceived similarity with the co-contributor (*adapted from* Thompson & Malaviya, 2013) • You feel you are similar to this customer • You have similar preferences to this customer • You have a common psychological bond with the winning consumer
Attitude toward the brand (Mitchell & Olson, 1981) • bad/good • unpleasant/pleasant • poor quality/good quality • I dislike this brand very much/I like this brand very much
Purchase Intentions (Zeithaml et al., 1996) • I am likely to purchase products from [Brand]. • I could consider buying products from [Brand] if I need a product of this kind. • It is possible for me to buy [Brand] products.
Skepticism toward Advertising (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) • Advertising's aim is to inform the consumer. • I believe advertising is informative. • Advertising is generally truthful. • Advertising is truth well told. • In general, advertising presents a true picture of the product being advertised. • We can depend on getting the truth in most advertising. • Advertising is a reliable source of information about the quality and performance of products. • I feel I've been accurately informed after viewing most advertisements. • Most advertising provides consumers with essential information.

reduce any potential reactivity or demand that might result from using negatively phrased items (see Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

4.2 | Results

4.2.1 | Initial analyses

As intended, the co-contributor in the picture condition was perceived as attractive ($M_{PRESENCE} = 4.734$, $SD = 1.253$, $t = 6.031$, $p < 0.001$ versus the midpoint of 4). We also examined the overall persuasive effects of source attractiveness. One-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) showed the attractive co-contributor image led to lower brand attitudes ($M_{PRESENCE} = 4.795$, $SD = 1.590 < M_{ABSENCE} = 5.248$, $SD = 1.439$; $F(1, 208) = 4.675$, $p = 0.032$) and lower purchase intentions relative to no image ($M_{PRESENCE} = 4.135$, $SD = 1.736 < M_{ABSENCE} = 4.615$, $SD = 1.558$; $F(1, 208) = 4.443$, $p = 0.036$, see Table 2). This suggests that the overall persuasive effects of source attractiveness were, in fact, negative in this case.

4.2.2 | Test of Hypothesis 1

An ANOVA showed support for Hypothesis 1a, revealing that exposure to the attractive co-contributor (i.e. presence) decreased perceptions of authenticity in comparison with the "designed by our winning customer" label alone ($M_{PRESENCE} = 4.689$, $SD = 1.612 < M_{ABSENCE} = 5.183$, $SD = 1.392$; $F(1, 208) = 5.643$, $p = 0.018$). That is, an attractive co-contributor activated negative persuasion knowledge in the form of doubt as to whether the co-contributor was genuine. The ANOVA for perceived similarity was marginally significant ($M_{PRESENCE} = 3.809$, $SD = 1.426 < M_{ABSENCE} = 4.149$, $SD = 1.345$; $F(1, 208) = 3.159$, $p = 0.077$), indicating the attractive co-contributor was perceived as less similar to participants than the imagined co-contributor in the no image condition (Hypothesis 1b partially supported).

4.2.3 | Test of Hypothesis 2

To test Hypothesis 2, we conducted a serial mediation analysis with attractive co-contributor (dummy-coded 1 = presence, 0 = absence) as the independent variable, authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity as parallel mediators, attitude toward the brand as a second (serial) mediator, and purchase intentions as the dependent variable (PROCESS macro, Model 80, 5000 bootstraps, Hayes, 2022; see Figure 1). This analysis showed a significant and negative attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → A_b → purchase intentions path ($a_{_auth} \times b_{1_AUTH} \times b_2 = -0.139$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.278; −0.024]), indicating that lower authenticity evoked by an attractive co-contributor decreased brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Hypothesis 2a supported). The attractiveness → similarity → A_b → purchase intentions

TABLE 2 - Summary of results for experimental studies.

#	Factors		Purchase intentions	Brand attitude	Authenticity	Similarity
Exp 1	Co-contributor picture	M (s.d.)	4.135 (1.736)	4.795 (1.590)	4.689 (1.612)	3.809 (1.426)
	Absence of picture	M (s.d.)	4.615 (1.558)	5.248 (1.439)	5.183 (1.392)	4.149 (1.345)
	Picture main effect:	F (1, 208)	4.443*	4.675*	5.643*	3.159
		p-value	*0.036*	*0.032*	*0.018*	*0.077*
Exp 2	High attractiveness (HA)	M (s.d.)	2.235 (1.453)	3.634 (1.327)	3.803 (1.635)	2.587 (1.643)
	Average attractiveness (AA)	M (s.d.)	2.350 (1.347)	3.827 (1.049)	4.342 (1.275)	2.910 (1.439)
	Attractiveness main effect:	F (1, 147)	0.254	0.980	5.083*	1.640
		p-value	*0.615*	*0.324*	*0.026*	*0.202*
Exp 3	High attractiveness (HA)	M (s.d.)	4.837 (1.574)	5.381 (1.447)	4.757 (1.528)	3.983 (1.668)
	Average attractiveness (AA)	M (s.d.)	4.677 (1.644)	5.257 (1.469)	5.299 (1.315)	4.249 (1.534)
	Attractiveness main effect:	F (1, 742)	1.847	1.337	26.897***	5.130*
		p-value	*0.175*	*0.248*	*<0.001*	*0.024*
Exp 4	*Co-contributor ad*	M (s.d.)	4.489 (1.645)	5.295 (1.535)	5.232 (1.392)	3.989 (1.667)
	High attractiveness (HA)	M (s.d.)	4.525 (1.654)	5.280 (1.566)	4.904 (1.498)	3.676 (1.765)
	Average attractiveness (AA)	M (s.d.)	4.454 (1.643)	5.309 (1.512)	5.549 (1.206)	4.292 (1.513)
	Standard ad	M (s.d.)	4.618 (1.618)	5.343 (1.514)	5.007 (1.383)	4.010 (1.583)
	High attractiveness (HA)	M (s.d.)	4.550 (1.617)	5.560 (1.398)	4.960 (1.364)	3.959 (1.663)
	Average attractiveness (AA)	M (s.d.)	4.681 (1.624)	5.137 (1.596)	5.052 (1.405)	4.059 (1.509)
	Ad-type × Attractiveness interaction effect:	F (1, 454)	0.435	2.515	4.648*	2.920
		p-value	*0.510*	*0.113*	*0.032*	*0.088*
	Ad-type main effect:	F (1, 454)	0.686	0.142	2.958	0.027
		p-value	*0.408*	*0.706*	*0.086*	*0.870*
	High attractiveness (HA)	M (s.e.)	4.537 (1.632)	5.416 (1.490)	4.932 (1.431)	3.814 (1.718)
	Average attractiveness (AA)	M (s.e.)	4.566 (1.634)	5.224 (1.553)	5.305 (1.328)	4.177 (1.512)
	Attractiveness main effect:	F (1, 454)	0.038	1.922	8.254**	5.622*
		p-value	*0.845*	*0.166*	*0.004*	*0.018*
			Product choice (%)		**Authenticity**	**Similarity**
Exp 5	*Beauty product (skin)*		77%	M (s.d.)	5.328 (1.122)	3.663 (1.122)
With product category as a covariate	High attractiveness (HA)		73%	M (s.d.)	5.025 (1.12)	3.295 (1.320)
	Average attractiveness (AA)		72%	M (s.d.)	5.642 (1.114)	3.750 (1.315)
	Control (absence of picture)		85%	M (s.d.)	5.317 (1.115)	3.943 (1.316)
	Non-beauty product (silver)		89%	M (s.d.)	5.648 (1.123)	4.012 (1.123)
	High attractiveness (HA)		84%	M (s.d.)	5.310 (1.115)	3.659 (1.315)
	Average attractiveness (AA)		93%	M (s.d.)	5.976 (1.115)	4.152 (1.316)
	Control (absence of picture)		91%	M (s.d.)	5.658 (1.116)	4.225 (1.318)
	Product-type × Attractiveness interaction effect:			F (2, 467)	0.029	0.087
				p-value	*0.971*	*0.917*
	Product-type main effect:			F (1, 467)	9.453**	8.081*
				p-value	*0.002*	*0.005*
	High attractiveness (HA)		78%	M (s.d.)	5.167 (1.113)	3.477 (1.313)
	Average attractiveness (AA)		83%	M (s.d.)	5.809 (1.114)	3.951 (1.315)
	Control (absence of picture)		88%	M (s.d.)	5.488 (1.116)	4.084 (1.317)
	Attractiveness main effect:[¥]			F (2, 467)	12.890***	9.160***
				p-value	*<0.001*	*<0.001*

*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.[¥]LSD post-hoc tests: (1) On Authenticity: HA vs. AA $p < 0.001$; HA vs. Control $p = 0.011$; AA vs. Control $p < 0.001$; (2) On Similarity: HA vs. AA $p = 0.002$; HA vs. Control $p < 0.001$; AA vs. Control $p = 0.361$.

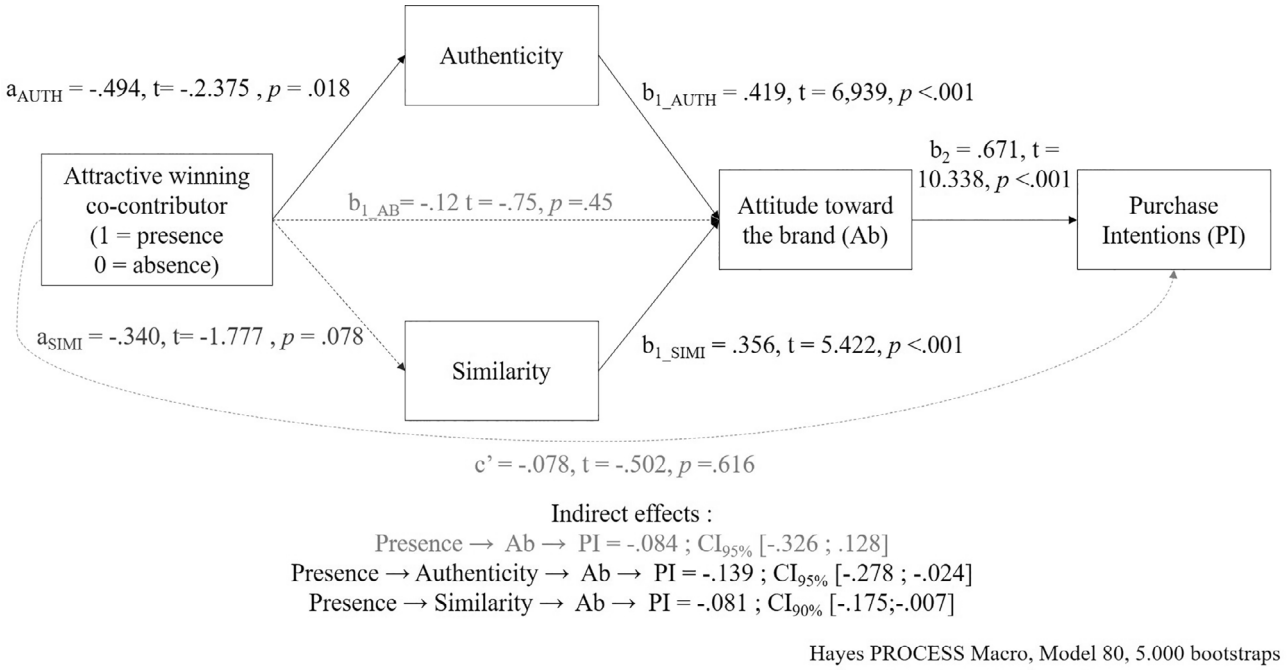


FIGURE 1 Mediation Model in Experiment 1.

path was also marginally significant and negative ($a_{simi} \times b_{1_SIMI} \times b_2 = -0.081$; $CI_{90\%}$ [−0.175; −0.007]), indicating that the lower similarity of an attractive co-contributor marginally decreased brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Hypothesis 2b supported). Finally, the attractiveness → A_b → purchase intentions path offered a residual test of the traditional what-is-beautiful-is-good effect of source attractiveness, but was not significant here ($b_{1_Ab} \times b_2 = -0.084$; $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.326; 0.128]).

There was also some possibility that similarity and authenticity might operate through a serial process rather than the parallel processes tested above. However, a test of the attractiveness → similarity → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → A_b → purchase intentions path (PROCESS macro, Model 6, 5000 bootstraps, Hayes, 2022) showed this serial mediation was not significant ($CI_{95\%}$ [−0.109; 0.003]). Moreover, although there was some mixed support for serial mediation in our remaining studies, the parallel process results were always reliable and remained significant even in any cases where the serial process was also significant. The remaining studies focus on the parallel process model only for these reasons.

4.3 | Discussion

These results are largely consistent with our predictions, as well as the observations in the initial qualitative study, and shed light on the detrimental effects an attractive co-contributor can cause when advertising a product that is said to be designed by customers. That is, showing an attractive co-contributor caused concerns about their authenticity, leading to significantly lower attitudes and purchase intentions (consistent with Hypotheses 1a and 2a). There was also marginal evidence to support the alternative idea that an attractive co-contributor would lower the perceived similarity of the co-contributor and thereby lower persuasion outcomes (partially supporting Hypotheses 1b and 2b). The mean differences further suggested that showing an attractive co-contributor actually backfired relative to the no-image control by leading to more negative attitudes and purchase intentions in an overall sense as well. Finally, this initial picture versus no-picture co-contributor manipulation has practical implications for advertising crowdsourced products by suggesting that if the co-creator is attractive, it is better not to include their picture in advertising.

5 | EXPERIMENT 2: COMPARING IMAGES OF HIGHLY AND MODERATELY ATTRACTIVE CO-CONTRIBUTORS

5.1 | Method

This second experiment compared high versus average attractiveness conditions by physically varying the hairstyle and outfit of the same person to make them seem more or less attractive in physical appearance. The message source was in reality a student and not a professional model. This procedure allowed for a subtle but highly controlled manipulation of the level of

attractiveness and was also potentially useful because it suggests a means by which managers can effectively alter the attractiveness of co-contributors. Finally, laundry detergent was used as the product category in this case.

As part of their course assignment, university students were asked to recruit at least 15 respondents each from outside the university community. Although this was a convenience sampling procedure, the final sample was heterogeneous, nonstudent, and likely similar to a real online brand audience (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015). We targeted 75 participants per condition in this case. Specifically, the sample included 149 adult respondents (61.074% female; $M_{AGE} = 31.554$ years). No subjects were dropped. Each respondent was provided a link to the questionnaire and randomly assigned to either the average or high co-contributor attractiveness condition. The experimental adverts consisted of Facebook posts where a new scent for a laundry detergent was said to be crowdsourced (see manipulations in the web appendix). This included a picture of a woman said to be the co-contributor. The same source was either shown in plain clothes with unkept hair (averagely attractive co-contributor, AA) or in a dress with styled hair (highly attractive co-contributor, HA). A pretest using an adult sample ($n = 21$; $M_{AGE} = 32.623$ years old, 65% female) confirmed the relative attractiveness of the source in the two photos ($M_{HA} = 4.641 > M_{AA} = 3.782$, $t = 3.621$, $p = 0.002$, paired). After viewing the Facebook post, respondents answered the same measure of brand attitude ($\alpha = 0.922$), a standard measure of the co-contributor's perceived authenticity (Moulard et al., 2014; $\alpha = 0.920$), and the same perceived similarity and purchase intentions measures ($\alpha s >= 0.928$), in that order.

5.2 | Results

5.2.1 | Initial analyses

An initial confirmatory factor analysis was first conducted to determine whether the authenticity and similarity constructs were empirically distinct. First, a χ2-difference test revealed a two-factor model was significantly better than a single-factor model ($p < 0.00001$). Second, the correlation between these constructs was 0.16, consistent with recommendations that this should be below the threshold of 0.85 (Garson, 2002). A Fornell–Larcker test revealed the average variances extracted exceeded the shared variance between the constructs, supporting discriminant validity. Moreover, the factor loadings in the two-factor model proved to be high and significant (all $\lambda > 0.8$, all $ps < 0.00001$), indicating the focal items reflect their underlying constructs in a valid way. (The same conclusions hold for the remaining studies.) Finally, additional ANOVAs examining any overall persuasion effects of attractiveness on brand attitudes ($M_{HA} = 3.634$, $SD = 1.327$; $M_{AA} = 3.827$, $SD = 1.049$; $F(1, 147) = 0.980$, $p = 0.324$) and purchase intentions ($M_{HA} = 2.235$, $SD = 1.453$; $M_{AA} = 2.350$, $SD = 1.347$; $F(1, 147) = 0.254$, $p = 0.615$) showed no significant mean differences in this case.

5.2.2 | Test of Hypothesis 1

Supporting Hypothesis 1a again, an ANOVA showed attractiveness decreased the perceived authenticity of the co-contributor ($M_{HA} = 3.803$, $SD = 1.635 < M_{AA} = 4.342$, $SD = 1.275$; $F(1, 147) = 5.083$, $p = 0.026$), meaning persuasion knowledge was activated in the form of greater doubt as to the authenticity of the attractive (vs. average) co-contributor. In contrast, source attractiveness did not significantly impact perceived similarity ($F(1, 147) = 1.640$, $p = 0.202$, $M_{HA} = 2.587$, $SD = 1.643$; $M_{AA} = 2.910$, $SD = 1.439$), suggesting this process did not operate here (Hypothesis 1b not supported).

5.2.3 | Test of Hypothesis 2

A serial mediation analysis (PROCESS macro, Model 6, 5000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2022) again supported Hypothesis 2a in that the attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → A_b → PI path was significant and negative again ($a \times b_1 \times b_2 = -0.054$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.143; −0.002]), indicating that lower authenticity evoked by an attractive co-contributor subsequently decreased brand attitudes ($b_1 = 0.203$, $t = 3.103$, $p = 0.002$) and purchase intentions ($b_2 = 0.495$, $t = 5.425$, $p < 0.001$). Additionally, the residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effect (attractiveness → A_b → PI path) was not significant ($a_{1_Ab} \times b_2 = -0.042$; $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.232; 0.163]). See Figure 2 for further path details. Finally, the attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → A_b → PI path held when similarity was added as a parallel mediator, but the similarity path was not significant (Hypothesis 2b not supported).

5.3 | Discussion

Overall, this study confirmed that an attractive co-contributor was perceived as less authentic (Hypothesis 1a) leading to negative downstream effects on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Hypothesis 2a), in this case relative to a co-contributor of average attractiveness. There were, however, no overall mean differences in attractiveness on the

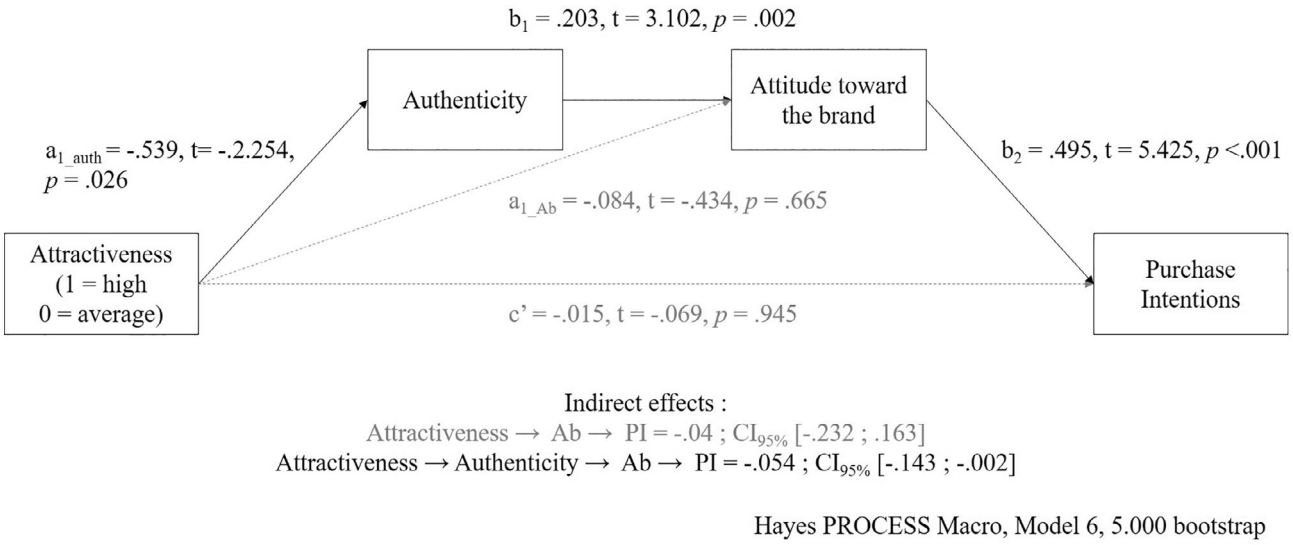


FIGURE 2 Mediation Model in Experiment 2.

persuasion measures. Finally, these findings offer additional managerial implications in that the dress and styling of the same co-contributor can be effectively used to alter the perceived authenticity of the co-contributor, where styling that conveys average attractiveness minimizes any doubts about source authenticity.

6 | EXPERIMENT 3: A REPLICATION USING A DIFFERENT ATTRACTIVENESS OPERATIONALIZATION AND PRODUCT CATEGORY

6.1 | Method

This experiment primarily served as a replication of Exp 2, in this case using another means of manipulating source attractiveness in a highly controlled fashion, as well as using a different product category (i.e., a new crowdsourced frappé flavor). While our previous experiments identified a reliable authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process, there was no evidence of the standard what-is-beautiful-is-good effect, either in terms of mean differences or the residual process effect after controlling for the authenticity and similarity mechanisms. However, these studies both used regular people rather than a professional model for the highly attractive source, which might have limited our ability to identify any positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effect. In this study, co-contributor attractiveness was instead manipulated using a photo of an attractive professional female model, which was retouched to create an additional average attractiveness image based on prior research concerning the features that can reduce physical attractiveness: adding skin blemishes and removing makeup (Mulhern et al., 2003), reducing eye size (Geldart et al., 1999), reducing facial symmetry (Kościński, 2007), flattening the smile line (Al Thaki et al., 2017), and adding weight (Furnham et al., 2002; see manipulations in the web appendix).

We targeted a larger number of participants per cell in this case, in order to provide greater power to identify any residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effects. Respondents were recruited using Cloudresearch Prime Panels. The final sample was composed of 744 US adult respondents (49.731% female; $M_{AGE} = 50.812$ years). No subjects were dropped from the study. Each respondent randomly saw one treatment, then completed our measures in order: purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.948$), brand attitudes ($\alpha = 0.967$), co-contributor's authenticity ($\alpha = 0.959$), co-contributor's similarity ($\alpha = 0.906$) and the attractiveness manipulation check ($\alpha = 0.936$). All measures were identical to Exp 2 and used 7-point Likert or bipolar scales.

6.2 | Results

6.2.1 | Initial analyses

An ANOVA showed the highly attractive co-contributor was indeed rated as more attractive than the average co-contributor, as intended ($M_{HA} = 5.584$, $SD = 1.185 > M_{AA} = 4.514$, $SD = 1.226$, $F\ (1,\ 742) = 146.576$, $p < 0.001$). Additional ANOVAs examining the overall persuasion effects again showed no significant mean

effects of attractiveness on either brand attitudes ($M_{HA} = 5.381$, $SD = 1.447 < M_{AA} = 5.257$, $SD = 1.469$, $F(1, 742) = 1.337$, $p = 0.248$) or purchase intentions ($M_{HA} = 4.837$, $SD = 1.574$; $M_{AA} = 4.677$, $SD = 1.644$, $F(1, 742) = 1.847$, $p = 0.175$).

6.2.2 | Test of Hypothesis 1

The authenticity (persuasion knowledge) measure again showed participants saw the attractive (vs. average) co-contributor as less authentic ($M_{HA} = 4.757$, $SD = 1.528 < M_{AA} = 5.299$, $SD = 1.315$, $F(1, 742) = 26.897$, $p < 0.001$; Hypothesis 1a supported). In this case, the ANOVA on similarity perceptions was also significant, where the average co-contributor was viewed as more similar than the highly attractive co-contributor ($M_{HA} = 3.983$, $SD = 1.668 < M_{AA} = 4.249$, $SD = 1.534$; $F(1, 742) = 5.130$, $p = 0.024$; Hypothesis 1b supported).

6.2.3 | Test of Hypothesis 2

Given that attractiveness significantly impacted both co-contributor authenticity and similarity, we included both the attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → A_b → PI path and the alternative attractiveness → similarity → A_b → PI path in the main process model. Specifically, we used the Hayes (2022) PROCESS macro to compute model 80 with 5000 bootstraps, where authenticity and similarity were specified as parallel mediators of the effects attractiveness had on brand attitudes and purchase intentions (see Figure 3). This showed both the authenticity ($a_{AUTH} \times b_{1_AUTH} \times b_2 = -0.170$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.242; −0.105]) and the similarity paths were significant ($a_{SIMI} \times b_{1_SIMI} \times b_2 = -0.061$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.120; −0.001]), meaning they served as parallel mediators of the persuasion variables (Hypotheses 2a and 2b supported). The direction of these effects meant that perceptions of co-contributor inauthenticity (persuasion knowledge) and dissimilarity led to more negative attitudes and purchase intentions. Finally, and importantly, there was also a significant and *positive* residual attractiveness → A_b → PI path ($a_{Ab} \times b_2 = 0.328$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.205; 0.460]), consistent with the what-is-beautiful-is-good idea that attractive sources should have positive downstream persuasion effects.

6.3 | Discussion

Overall, the proposed authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process was again significant (supporting Hypotheses 1a and 2a), as was the similarity process (supporting Hypotheses 1b and 2b), and the residual positive effect of the what-is-beautiful-is-good effect. The fact that attractiveness had no overall mean effects on persuasion in the ANOVAs, but significant positive persuasion effects emerged after accounting for the counteracting authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity mechanisms, is consistent with what is known as a suppression effect (Rucker et al., 2011). That is, inauthenticity concerns and perceived dissimilarity suppressed the positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effect that would otherwise be observed. We attribute the fact that we saw this positive attractiveness effect here for the first time to the use of a professional model as the attractive co-contributor and the greater statistical power offered by the larger sample size used here. It seems these levels of attractiveness and statistical power were necessary to identify the residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effect on persuasion.

7 | EXPERIMENT 4: TESTING THE MODERATING EFFECT OF ADVERTISEMENT TYPE (A CROWDSOURCED VERSUS A STANDARD INNOVATION)

This study additionally examined whether the type of advertisement would moderate the negative effects of persuasion knowledge (Hypothesis 3). Specifically, we also varied whether the advertised product was said to be crowdsourced or not. Remember that our main argument is that concerns about the authenticity of an attractive co-contributor arise because their attractiveness may indicate they are, in fact, a model/actor. However, when the advertised product innovation is not said to be crowdsourced, using an attractive model is an accepted practice, and there is no pretense this source is anything other than a model/actor. Therefore, in this case, no negative persuasion knowledge concerns should be evoked.

All the studies to this point have examined co-contributor attractiveness for products that are largely unrelated to physical appearance. However, past research concerning the match-up hypothesis suggests that attractiveness is particularly likely to have positive effects when paired with an appearance-related product (Till & Busler, 2000; Wright, 2016). It was therefore possible that our previous studies had disadvantaged the more positive source attractiveness effects, as the products used were not obviously appearance-related (e.g., dish soap, laundry detergent, and a coffee beverage). This fourth experiment therefore re-tested our predictions in the context of adverts for an appearance-related face cream.

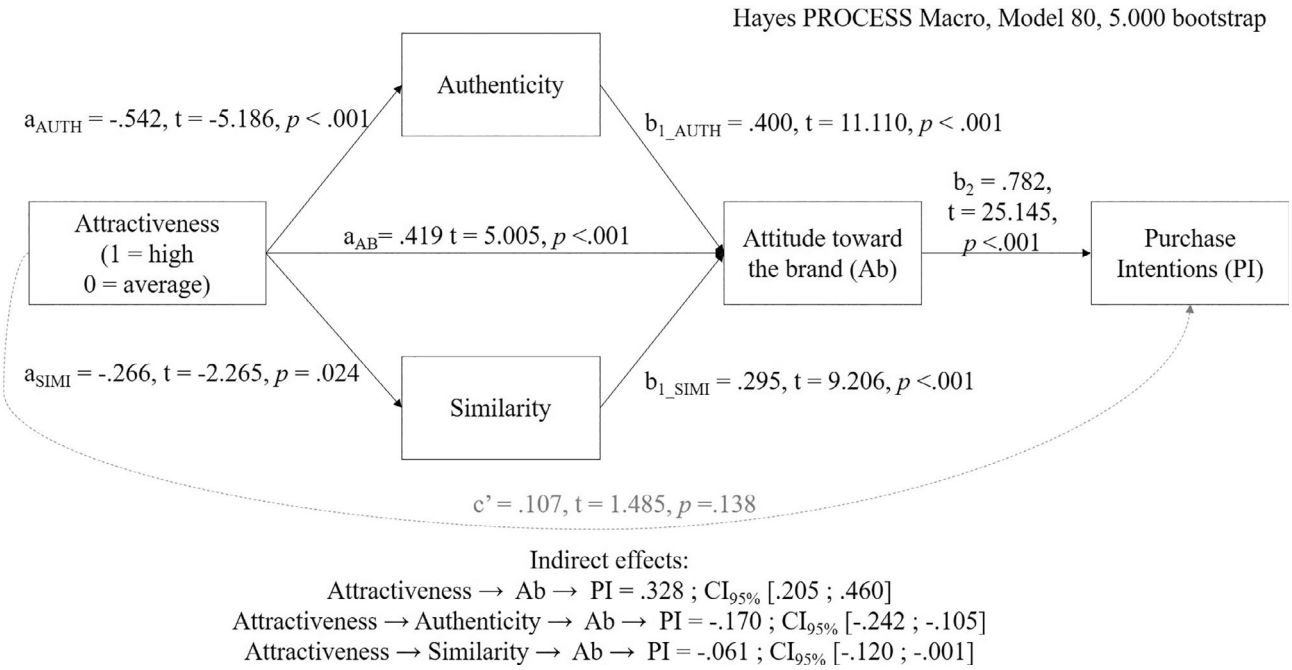


FIGURE 3 Mediation Model in Experiment 3.

7.1 | Method

In order to examine these questions, we completed a 2x2 between-subjects experiment that manipulated both source attractiveness (high vs. average) and the type of advert (standard vs. crowdsourced innovation). A pretest involving 89 US-based female participants (M_{AGE} = 47.301) from the Cloudresearch Prime Panels rated two face variations using Ohanian's attractiveness scale (1990; α = 0.870). A professional model was used in the high attractiveness condition, and this was digitally retouched in the average attractiveness condition byadding skin blemishes and removing make-up (Mulhern et al., 2003), flattening the smile line (Al Thaki et al., 2017), nose widening (Groyecka et al., 2017), and shortening hair length (Bereczkei & Mesko, 2006). Of note, the apparent weight of the source was not altered in this case, in contrast to Exp 3. The pretest also included a measure of perceived expertise (3 items, adapted from Ohanian, 1990; α = 0.852; see Table 1) to examine whether this source characteristic might have inadvertently varied as well. This pretest indicated the attractive source was indeed perceived as more attractive than the average source (M_{HA} = 5.476, SD = 1.131 > M_{AA} = 4.204, SD = 1.440, F (1, 87) = 21.100, p < 0.001), but importantly these sources did not differ in perceived expertise (M_{HA} = 5.014, SD = 1.320; M_{AA} = 4.592, SD = 1.320, F (1, 87) = 2.016, p = 0.159).

US female participants were recruited on Cloudresearch Prime Panels for the main study. The use of a female sample was consistent with the typical targeting for this product. We targeted 100 participants per cell. After removing 3 participants who indicated they were not female, the final sample was composed of 458 female respondents (M_{AGE} = 44.430 years). Respondents first rated their involvement in the product category (α = 0.964) and their brand awareness (yes-no). Participants were then shown print ads where a fictitious brand presented its new face cream with yaupon tea as an added ingredient. This was either presented as the winning new product idea from an innovation contest (crowdsourcing ad-type) or simply as a new product from the brand (standard ad-type). A picture of the message source was inserted into each advert, which varied in attractiveness according to condition. After seeing one of the four experimental adverts, respondents completed measures of: purchase intentions (α = 0.933), brand attitude (α = 0.954), perceived source authenticity (α = 0.922), perceived source similarity (α = 0.912) and a manipulation check for source attractiveness (α = 0.914); in that order. The source authenticity items were adjusted to remove any specific reference to the crowdsourcing contest winner, so that the measure would be relevant to both crowdsourced and standard types of adverts. Specifically, the questions here asked: "When you think about the person in the advertisement, would you say that... She is a genuine person/ She seems real/ She is authentic". The remaining ratings were the same as our previous studies.

7.2 | Results

7.2.1 | Initial analyses

A two-way ANOVA with source attractiveness and ad type as independent factors confirmed the attractive source was indeed viewed as more attractive ($M_{HA} = 5.400$, $SD = 1.332 > M_{AA} = 4.540$, $SD = 1.381$, $F\ (1, 454) = 46.135$, $p < 0.001$ for the main effect), but these perceptions did not depend on the ad type (main effect: $p = 0.944$ and ad-type × attractiveness interaction: $p = 0.292$). Therefore, the attractiveness manipulation was successful. Secondly, a check for the ad type manipulation also indicated participants correctly identified the different kinds of ads (86.030% correct). Finally, the ANOVAs for overall persuasion effects showed no significant main effects or interactions on brand attitudes or purchase intentions (see Table 2), meaning again there were no overall effects of source attractiveness on persuasion.

7.2.2 | Test of Hypothesis 3

The ANOVA for source authenticity (persuasion knowledge) revealed an attractiveness main effect ($F\ (1, 454) = 8.254$, $p = 0.004$) and a marginal ad-type effect ($F\ (1, 454) = 2.958$, $p = 0.086$), both qualified by the predicted interaction ($F\ (1, 454) = 4.648$, $p = 0.032$). As in previous studies, when the advert involved a co-contributor, source attractiveness decreased perceived authenticity ($M_{HA} = 4.904$, $SD = 1.498 < M_{AA} = 5.549$, $SD = 1.206$; $F\ (1, 454) = 12.929$, $p < 0.001$), whereas there was no attractiveness effect on authenticity for the standard advert ($p = 0.616$). These findings are, therefore, consistent with Hypothesis 3.

An ANOVA for source similarity showed a marginal attractiveness × ad-type interaction ($F\ (1, 454) = 2.920$, $p = 0.088$). Participants viewed the average (vs. attractive) model as more similar for the crowdsourcing advert ($M_{AA} = 4.292$, $SD = 1.513 > M_{HA} = 3.676$, $SD = 1.765$; $F\ (1, 454) = 8.511$, $p = 0.004$) but not for the standard advert ($p = 0.643$).

In order to examine the downstream effects of both authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity, we used a PROCESS model 85 (Hayes, 2022; 5000 bootstraps) involving moderated mediation with parallel mediational paths (attractiveness→ authenticity (persuasion knowledge) // similarity → A_b → PI), where ad type served as the moderator (see Figure 4). Most importantly, this analysis showed that the attractiveness → authenticity → A_b → PI path was significantly moderated by ad type (MM index = −0.135, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.284; −0.008]), where this path was significant for the crowdsourcing advert ($a_{AUTH} \times b_{1_AUTH} \times b_{2_AB} = -0.158$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.277; −0.067]), but not the standard advert ($a_{AUTH} \times b_{2_AUTH} \times b_{2_AB} = -0.023$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.115; 0.068]). These findings support the Hypothesis 3 prediction that an attractive source image will only lead to negative downstream effects via perceived authenticity when a crowdsourcing claim is made and not otherwise. In addition, moderation of the attractiveness → similarity → A_b → PI path was marginally significant (MM index = −0.0756, $CI_{90\%}$ [−0.154; −0.005]), relating to a significant similarity path for the crowdsourcing advert ($a_{SIMI} \times b_{2_SIMI} = -0.090$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.168; −0.026]) but not the standard advert ($a_{AB} \times b_{2_SIMI} = -0.015$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.083; 0.044]). That is, the decreased similarity of an attractive (vs. average) source drove negative downstream effects for the crowdsourcing advert but not the standard advert. Finally, it is worth noting the residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effect (attractiveness → A_b → PI path) was again significant and positive, in this case for both types of adverts (Crowdsourcing: $a_{AB} \times b_{2_AB} = 0.231$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.028; 0.443]; Standard: $a_{AB} \times b_{2_AB} = 0.288$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.096; 0.481]).

7.3 | Discussion

Overall, the predicted authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process was held for the crowdsourcing advert but not the standard advert (supporting Hypothesis 3). The source similarity process was also marginally moderated by the type of advertising, which was not anticipated. It is not clear why the dissimilarity of the attractive source only had negative effects on persuasion when the advertised product was crowdsourced and when it was a standard innovation. Finally, the positive what-is-beautiful-is-good residual effect was again significant, which we again attribute to the use of a professional model in the highly attractive condition. The fact that a beauty product was involved might have also been a factor. Additionally, this study suggests the authenticity (persuasion knowledge), similarity, and what-is-beautiful-is-good effects all held for an appearance-related product, just as they had all held for the nonappearance product examined in Exp 3. Both of these experiments, therefore, offer evidence that all three processes can have simultaneous and offsetting effects on persuasion.

8 | EXPERIMENT 5: EXAMINING APPEARANCE AND NON-APPEARANCE-RELATED PRODUCTS

8.1 | Method

A number of important methodological refinements were made. First, we manipulated the product category (beauty

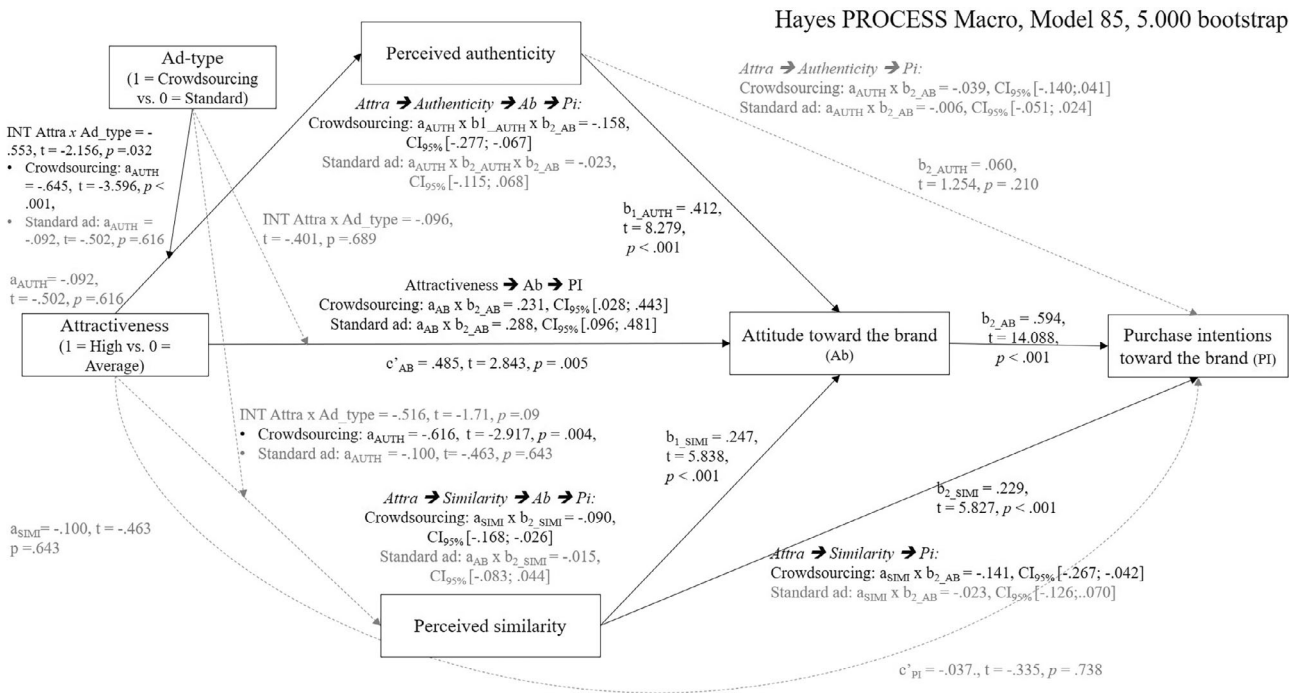


FIGURE 4 Moderated Mediation Model in Experiment 4.

vs. non-beauty products) in the same study to test whether this would moderate the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) or similarity processes. The authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process was expected to generalize across these categories because it primarily concerns perceptions of the source, not the type of product involved, which suggests it should apply to both appearance and non-appearance-related products. The same was true for the source similarity process. That is, Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a and 2b should hold regardless of product category. Additionally, both average attractiveness and no image co-contributor comparison conditions were included in this case. An incentivized choice measure was also included to test our predictions using a more robust dependent measure involving real consequences.

Finally, an additional trait measure of ad skepticism (Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998) was included to help validate the idea that authenticity concerns serve as a form of persuasion knowledge. Ad skepticism is a standard measure of persuasion knowledge assessing general and enduring concerns about the truthfulness of advertising. Specifically, we examined whether our authenticity measure mediated any effects that ad skepticism has on persuasion outcomes. This would mean that our authenticity measure could capture the negative effects that the standard ad skepticism measure should have on persuasion outcomes, thereby establishing the authenticity measure as a measure of persuasion knowledge.

The pictures of the co-contributors were created in a slightly different way. For the highly attractive conditions, we used a picture of an attractive businesswoman from the internet, specifically choosing someone who was not a professional model. The moderately attractive co-contributor conditions digitally altered this picture in ways that are known to lower attractiveness, including adding skin blemishes, removing makeup (Mulhern et al., 2003), flattening her smile (Al Thaki et al., 2017), widening her nose (Groyecka et al., 2017), and using a flatter hairstyle (Bereczkei & Mesko, 2006). The co-contributor's weight again remained constant. These photos were inserted into digital ads for a fictitious brand showcasing its new crowdsourced product, either skin cleansing pads (beauty-related products) or silver polish pads (beauty-unrelated products). The co-contributor was again described as the winner of a customer innovation contest. Control conditions were identical in all respects except they did not include the co-contributor's picture (see adverts in the web appendix).

US females were recruited on Profilic, consistent with the typical target market for these products. We targeted 75 participants per cell in this case, given that the larger number of cells still allowed for a high degree of statistical power. Six participants who indicated they were not female were removed, making the final sample size 474 respondents, $M_{AGE} = 44.658$ years. After viewing the target advert, respondents rated their product category involvement ($\alpha = 0.944$) and brand awareness (yes-no). Then, after viewing one of the six experimental stimuli, they completed an incentivized choice measure in which participants chose whether they would purchase the

advertised crowdsourced product or a non-crowdsourced alternative in the same product category. A picture and description of the alternative brand were also shown (see the web appendix). The choice was incentivized by informing participants that five people would be randomly selected to receive the product they chose (upon study completion, five winners received a voucher of equivalent value). All participants then completed measures of source authenticity ($\alpha = 0.948$), similarity ($\alpha = 0.909$), and attractiveness ($\alpha = 0.944$; manipulation check). Finally, a trait measure of general ad skepticism was completed ($\alpha = 0.960$; 9 items, Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998).

8.2 | Results

8.2.1 | Initial analyses

A two-way ANOVA with attractiveness and product category as independent factors confirmed a co-contributor main effect on perceived attractiveness ($F(2, 468) = 85.528$, $p < 0.001$), where the attractive source was indeed viewed as more attractive ($M_{HA} = 5.284$, $SD = 1.087 > M_{AA} = 3.639$, $SD = 1.256$, $p < 0.001$), and both of these conditions differed from the control ($M_{CONTROL} = 4.460$, $SD = 0.975$, $ps < 0.001$). Product category had no effects ($p = 0.346$ and $p = 0.137$ for main and interaction effects, respectively). Overall, the attractiveness manipulation was successful. A check for the product category manipulation also indicated participants correctly identified the different kinds of products (98.10% correct responses). Additionally, a series of ANOVAs on the control variables (i.e. age, category involvement, and ad skepticism) yielded no significant effects, except for category involvement ($F(1, 468) = 3.146$, $p = 0.008$) which was higher for the skin cleanser ($M_{SKIN} = 4.213$, $SD = 1.657$) than for silver polish ($M_{SILVER} = 3.622$, $SD = 1.642$, $F(1, 468) = 14.937$, $p < 0.001$). This was statistically controlled using category involvement as a covariate in subsequent analyses.

The dichotomous choice measure was tested for any overall effects of persuasion. This involved using a hierarchical logistic regression analysis for attractiveness (dummy indicators: AA vs. HA, and control vs. HA), product category (skincare = 1), and their interactions. Category involvement was a covariate. Bootstrap estimation was used to avoid potential bias due to the overall imbalance in choices (88.1% vs. 11.9% for advertised vs. alternative options). The series of tested models (see Table 3) revealed that Model 2 was the most parsimonious and offered a good fit to the data. This showed that the choice of the advertised product was significantly lower for an attractive co-contributor versus no image (78% vs. 88%, $p = 0.021$), whereas high and average attractiveness conditions did not differ (78% vs. 83%, $p = 0.310$). The category main effect was also significant (89% vs. 77%, for cleaner vs. cream, $p < 0.001$). Notably, there were no significant interactions (see Model 3), indicating that the co-contributor effects on preferences did not vary by product type. Therefore, attractiveness had a negative overall persuasion effect on the choice of the advertised brand when compared to no image, but not when compared to a moderately attractive co-contributor. This conclusion reflects the pattern from the relevant previous experiments.

8.2.2 | Test of Hypothesis 1

An ANCOVA on perceived authenticity (persuasion knowledge) revealed significant attractiveness ($F(2, 467) = 12.890$, $p < 0.001$) and product category main effects ($F(1, 467) = 9.453$, $p = 0.002$), but no interaction ($F(2, 467) = 0.029$, $p = 0.971$). Higher attractiveness again decreased authenticity when the advert included the co-contributor's picture ($M_{HA} = 5.167$, $SD = 1.113 < M_{AA} = 5.809$, $SD = 1.114$, $p < 0.001$; consistent with Hypothesis 1a). Perceived authenticity was also significantly higher in the no-picture versus highly attractive condition ($M_{CONTROL} = 5.488$, $SD = 1.116 > M_{HA} = 5.167$, $SD = 1.113$, $p = 0.011$) and significantly lower than the average attractiveness co-contributor condition ($M_{CONTROL} = 5.488$, $SD = 1.116 < M_{AA} = 5.809$, $SD = 1.114$; $p = 0.01$).

The ANCOVA for similarity perceptions also showed attractiveness ($F(2, 467) = 9.160$, $p < 0.001$) and category main effects ($F(1, 467) = 8.081$, $p = 0.005$; $M_{SKIN} = 3.663$, $SD = 1.123 < M_{SILVER} = 4.012$, $SD = 1.122$) but no interaction ($p = 0.917$). As expected, participants saw the attractive co-contributor as less similar than the average co-contributor ($M_{HA} = 3.477$, $SD = 1.313 < M_{AA} = 3.951$, $SD = 1.315$; $p = 0.002$) or control ($M_{HA} = 3.477$, $SD = 1.313 < M_{CONTROL} = 4.084$, $SD = 1.317$; $p < 0.001$; Hypothesis 1b supported). The latter conditions did not differ ($M_{HA} = 3.951$, $SD = 1.315$; $M_{CONTROL} = 4.084$, $SD = 1.317$; $p = 0.37$).

8.2.3 | Test of Hypothesis 2

The downstream effects of authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity on choice were examined using PROCESS model 4 (Hayes, 2022; 5000 bootstraps), which included authenticity and similarity as parallel mediators (attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) // similarity → choice) and category

TABLE 3 Study 5 - Results from the LOGISTIC regression analysis on choice of advertised product.

	Model 0		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 2		
									95% CI for Odds Ratio		
	β	***p-value***	***β***	***p-value***	***β***	***p-value***	***β***	***p-value***	**Lower**	**Odds**	**Upper**
Intercept	1.609	<0.001	1.301	<0.001	**1.649**	**<0.001**	1.49	<0.001			
Average vs. Highly Attractive			0.304	0.288	**0.288**	**0.328**	0.907	0.064	0.750	1.333	2.371
Control vs. Highly Attractive			**0.742**	**0.015**	**0.727**	**0.024**	0.648	0.193	1.109	2.068	3.858
Product category (Cream = 1)					**−0.969**	**<0.001**	−0.708	0.096	0.225	0.379	0.639
AA vs. HA * Product category							−0.935	0.141			
Control vs. HA * Product category							0.139	0.838			
Category Involvement			−0.005	0.948	**0.047**	**0.545**	0.045	0.586	0.901	1.048	1.219
Overall model fit (−2 LL)			421.299		**407.240**		404.178				
Chi-square statistics and *p*-value			$\chi^2(3) = 5.833$, $p = 0.120$		$\boldsymbol{\chi^2(4) = 19.892}$, $\boldsymbol{p < 0.001}$		$\chi^2(6) = 22.954$, $p < 0.001$				
Model improvement vs. previous step			$\chi^2(3) = 5.833$, $p = 0.120$		$\boldsymbol{\chi^2(1) = 14.060}$, $\boldsymbol{p < 0.001}$		$\chi^2(2) = 3.062$, $p = 0.216$				
Nagelkerke pseudo-R^2			0.021		**0.069**		0.080				

Note: The bold formatting here serves as a visual indicator for model selection rather than statistical properties.

involvement as a covariate (see Figure 5). Product category was not included as a moderator given the attractiveness × product-category interaction was not significant for authenticity, similarity, or choice. Attractiveness served as a multicategory variable with the highly attractive condition as the comparison case (i.e. AA vs. HA and control vs. HA), meaning we expected positive coefficients in the attractiveness → authenticity (persuasion knowledge) → choice path for both contrasts. The findings confirmed this expectation: (a) AA vs. HA: $a_{AUTH} \times b_{1_AUTH} = 0.169$; $CI_{95\%}$ [0.010; 0.364]; (b) control vs. HA: $a_{AUTH} \times b1_{AUTH} \times b_{2_AB} = 0.087$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.001; 0.213] (Hypothesis 2a supported). The attractiveness → similarity → choice path was also positive and significant for both contrasts: (a) AA vs. HA: $a_{SIMI} \times b_{1_SIMI} = 0.113$; $CI_{95\%}$ [0.011; 0.256]; (b) control vs. HA: $a_{SIMI} \times b_{1_SIMI} = 0.143$, $CI_{95\%}$ [0.016; 0.316] (Hypothesis 2b supported). Finally, the residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effects (attractiveness → choice paths) were not significant (AA vs. HA: $c' = 0.016$, $p = 0.959$; control vs. HA: $c' = 0.494$, $p = 0.130$). Together, these findings provide evidence for both the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity mechanisms, but not the residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effect.

8.2.4 | Examining skepticism

The purpose of the analyses here was to use ad skepticism, which is a standardized trait measure of persuasion knowledge relating to a general distrust of advertising, to validate perceived authenticity as a measure of persuasion knowledge in the current context. An additional process analysis (Hayes, 2022; Model 4 with 5000 bootstraps) that examined the effect of ad skepticism on choice via mediation by authenticity was computed. Both category involvement and similarity were covaried in this case. This showed ad skepticism had an indirect negative effect on choice via perceived authenticity ($a \times b = -0.051$, $CI_{95\%}$ [−0.117; −0.003]), where ad skepticism lowered perceptions of co-contributor authenticity ($a = -0.192$, $p < 0.001$), which subsequently lowered the choice of the advertised product ($b = 0.264$, $p = 0.012$). These results show that authenticity mediated the effects of a standard persuasion knowledge measure on choice, thereby validating authenticity as related to persuasion knowledge.

8.3 | Discussion

In summary, these findings provide additional support for our predictions that an attractive co-contributor evokes concerns about authenticity leading to negative downstream effects (Hypotheses 1a and 2a), in this case by lowering incentivized choices for the co-produced product. As expected, there was no evidence of moderation by product category, implying attractiveness and similarity led to negative outcomes whether or not a beauty product was involved. In contrast, there was no residual what-is-beautiful-is-good effect in this case, consistent with observations in our other studies that used

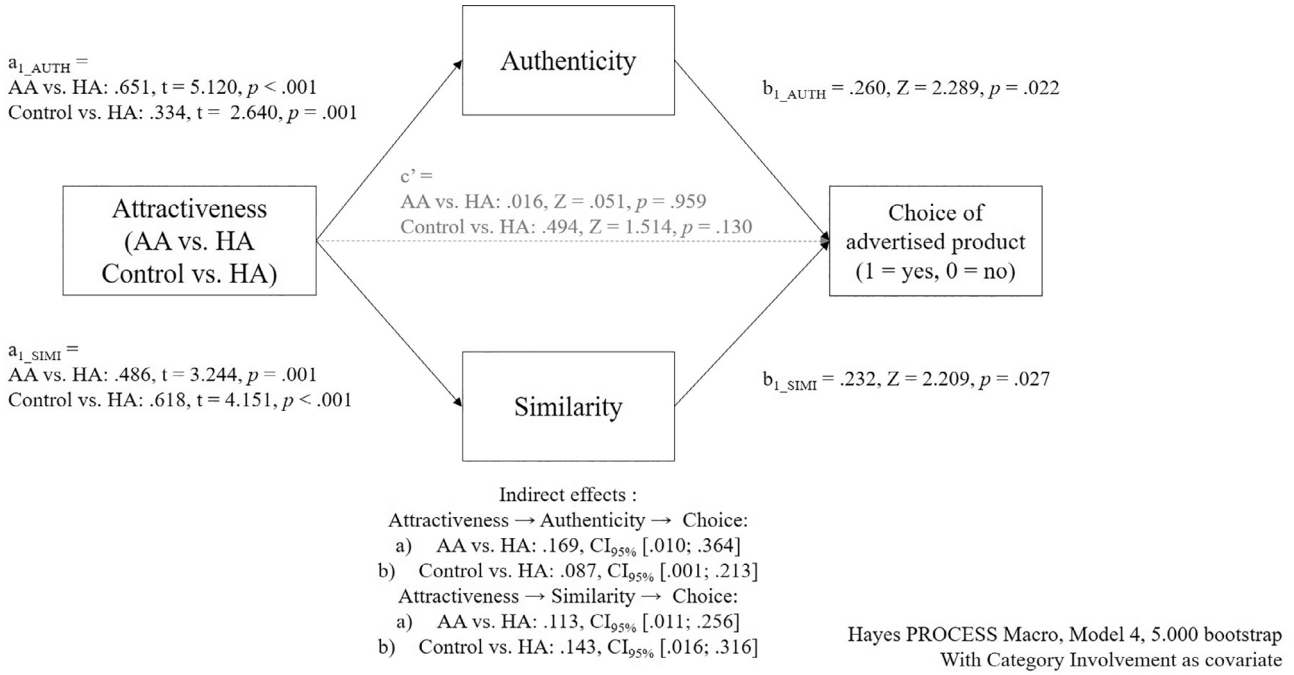


FIGURE 5 Mediation Model in Experiment 5.

co-contributors who were not professional models (i.e., Exps 1 and 2). Finally, the attractive co-contributor had a negative overall effect on choices compared to the no-image control, meaning that source attractiveness backfired in an overall sense. This replicates the mean negative persuasion effects of attractiveness observed in Exp 1, which also used a no-image comparison condition. In contrast, comparisons between high- and average-attractiveness co-contributors showed only indirect downstream persuasion effects consistent with the comparisons used in Exps 2–4. Finally, there was evidence that the authenticity process had effects on choice that were similar to a standard measure of persuasion knowledge in the form of ad skepticism, offering validity to the idea that the attractiveness → authenticity → choice path assesses a persuasion knowledge process. Overall, these results again support our main predictions and replicate a number of different aspects of the findings in our other experiments.

9 | GENERAL DISCUSSION

The goal of the current research was to examine central creative strategy options concerning whether or not to show co-contributors when promoting crowdsourced products, and if so, what kinds of benefits or liabilities might be associated with the physical attractiveness of the co-contributor. The initial qualitative study showed consumers spontaneously expressed concerns about whether attractive co-contributors were really everyday people versus professional models. Five experiments showed that an attractive co-contributor raised concerns about their authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and thereby lowered brand attitudes, purchase intentions, and incentivized choices (Hypotheses 1a and 2a). These negative persuasion knowledge effects were robust in that they were shown across a variety of different operationalizations of source attractiveness, products, media vehicles, and countries. Exp 4 further showed these negative attractiveness effects occurred only when the source was said to be a co-contributor, and not for attractive sources in a regular innovation advert, consistent with the prediction that authenticity should only be a concern for co-contributors (Hypothesis 3). These experiments also offer a combination of mediation and moderation evidence for the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) mechanism. Overall, a wide variety of different methods supported our main predictions.

There was also relatively consistent evidence for the similarity explanation (Dahl et al., 2015, Hypotheses 1b and 2b) that attractive co-contributors can also have negative persuasive effects because they are perceived as dissimilar to everyday consumers, compared to average co-contributors or unportrayed co-contributors. The similarity of co-contributors was also routinely mentioned in our qualitative study, and its negative persuasion effects were quite robust in that the similarity process was significant or marginal in all but one case (Exp 2). Finally, the tests of the similarity and authenticity (persuasion

knowledge) mechanisms statistically controlled for each other, suggesting each played a unique role in undermining the persuasiveness of adverts for crowdsourced products.

The broader advertising and persuasion literatures suggest source attractiveness typically has positive persuasive effects (Mello et al., 2020), consistent with the what-is-beautiful-is-good stereotype. Indeed, our own research found positive attractiveness effects in standard adverts without a co-contributor (Exp 4). However, these positive effects were less reliable when a co-contributor was involved, were only evident when attractiveness was manipulated at particularly high levels using professional models (Exps 3 and 4), and only when the offsetting authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity mechanisms were statistically accounted for. The latter finding suggests the negative authenticity and similarity mechanisms suppressed any positive what-is-beautiful-is-good effects.

10 | IMPLICATIONS

The current research has a number of theoretical implications. First, our research qualifies past evidence in the innovation literature suggesting that "designed by consumers" claims are an effective means of advertising new crowdsourced products (e.g., Nishikawa et al., 2017). As mentioned, such claims have generally been examined in the absence of co-contributor images and little attention has been paid to the potential importance of other executional advertising tactics. The primary contribution of our research is in identifying a novel persuasion knowledge process that reliably undermines the persuasiveness of such claims when an attractive co-contributor is shown in the advert due to concerns about their authenticity. A secondary contribution is that our research also suggests an attractive co-contributor can undermine "designed by consumers" claims by disrupting the perceived similarity mechanism itself (Dahl et al., 2015). As mentioned, "designed by consumers" claims are normally thought to be persuasive because consumers see the co-contributor as similar to themselves, leading to stronger identification and increased liking, but attractive co-contributors directly undermined perceived similarity and its benefits.

Our findings also serve as a novel exception to the positive effects that source attractiveness normally has in the broader advertising and persuasion literature. In contrast, our research shows that a combination of authenticity (persuasion knowledge) concerns and perceptions of dissimilarity can mask or reverse any persuasive effects of an attractive message source promoting crowdsourced products. Finally, our research is the first to show that source attractiveness can have negative persuasion knowledge effects. The limited persuasion knowledge research concerning source attractiveness focuses on standard forms of advertising and shows that it has little impact on the positive effects of source attractiveness (Obermiller et al., 2005). Our research suggests that source attractiveness instead has negative persuasive effects when used to advertise crowdsourced products and identifies source authenticity concerns as a novel persuasion knowledge mechanism for these negative effects.

In terms of practical implications, companies communicating about their crowdsourced products may find the present findings particularly relevant. Incorporating pictures of the winning co-contributor in their advertising campaigns might seem to offer practitioners a strategy to showcase customer collaboration and bolster the merits of crowdsourcing. However, managers should be mindful that these images may elicit spontaneous concerns. Indeed, an additional survey we conducted with 41 senior marketing and innovation managers revealed a clear majority (81%) believed that showing co-contributors in promotions was important, whereas there was no clear consensus on how their attractiveness might impact advertising appeal (39% indicated an attractive co-contributor would have positive effects, 27% believed the opposite, while 34% said they did not know). In contrast, our results suggest co-contributor attractiveness is unlikely to produce any positive persuasive effects, and is even likely to backfire compared to showing no image of the co-contributor. Our research also offers managers potential solutions to the liabilities of attractive co-contributors. For instance, Exp 2 suggests the possibility of avoiding authenticity concerns by styling/dressing the co-contributor to look like an everyday consumer. Another solution is simply not to display the co-contributor if they are highly attractive. In fact, there was never any obvious advantage of showing an image of any kind of co-contributor, whether attractive or not, suggesting the best strategy may be to provide "designed by consumer" claims alone. Alternatively, our evidence shows that source attractiveness does have positive persuasive effects for advertising concerning innovative products that were not crowdsourced, in part because authenticity and similarity mechanisms are not relevant for this type of innovation. More broadly our research helps inform marketers about some of the unique considerations about the use of a common strategic option when advertising crowdsourced products, in keeping with calls to better define the advertising strategies and tactics that are helpful in promoting crowdsourced products per se (Wang et al., 2019).

The current work and existing research underline the importance of similarity perceptions between customers and co-contributors, and we show in particular that these perceptions are vulnerable to something as simple as displaying the image of a co-contributor who is physically attractive, or even just styling or dressing up an average-looking co-contributor. This underlines the importance of identifying other aspects of the creative strategy that might help further reinforce the similarity mechanism involved. One possibility investigated here was just showing an average attractiveness co-contributor, but this did little to foster perceptions of similarity compared to showing no image. This may be because seeing someone of similar physical attractiveness was not terribly central to participants in terms of the similarities that are important to them, or more specifically the similarities they identify with personally. Some of the comments made in our qualitative research focused on other similarities in terms of lifestyles and activities, or demographic qualities such as age. Future research might examine whether providing information about other such similarities might be effective in maintaining or increasing perceptions of co-contributor similarity. In turn, the current research also suggests it is important to take steps to maintain or reinforce the perceived authenticity of the co-contributor. For instance, offering personal details about the co-contributor might help reinforce their credibility as the genuine co-creator. Participants were clearly sensitive to this authenticity issue, and skepticism was mentioned regularly in our qualitative study, and not just in reference to attractiveness.

Our research examined some of the key creative strategy decisions concerning the message source when promoting crowdsourced innovations. However, there are many other strategic and tactical creative options for promoting products. Broadly speaking, our research helps to underline that it cannot be simply assumed that what is effective for regular products will also be effective for crowdsourced innovations. There are likely other aspects of promotional strategy that have unique or exaggerated effects when promoting crowdsourced products as well, and our findings further suggest that focusing on maintaining and building similarity and authenticity should be central goals. For instance, message strategies are another central set of decisions for any promotion, and here again, it would be important to use messages that reinforce the similarity benefits of crowdsourced claims, as well as maintaining the authenticity of the co-contributor. For instance, personal testimonials from co-contributors might be used to both improve similarity appeal and reinforce authenticity. One example of this is research showing that offering an origin story that explains how a co-contributor managed to conceive of their innovation can increase product appeal via increased similarity perceptions (Wang et al., 2019). Such origin stories might also help avoid any additional persuasion knowledge concerns about the authenticity of the co-contributor. Emotional appeals that help audiences feel close or personally connected may also better reinforce similarity/identity than more rational appeals. The same may be true for maintaining the authenticity of the co-contributor. There are many future research possibilities in this area.

11 | LIMITATIONS

It is possible experimental demand was introduced in our experiments by virtue of the fact that we directly asked participants about the authenticity of the co-contributor. That is, asking the question itself might have induced concerns that the co-contributor was not authentic. However, there are a number of reasons to doubt demand as the explanation for the current results. First, our experiments used between-subjects manipulations of source attractiveness, which are generally recognized as less vulnerable to experimental demand (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 2008). Second, Exp 4 predicted and showed an interaction rather than testing a simple main effect, and Exp 5 used an incentivized dependent measure, both of which are procedures that are less vulnerable to demand. Finally, participants in our qualitative study spontaneously raised the issue of authenticity when viewing promotions with attractive co-contributors, suggesting such concerns arise quite naturally. Nonetheless, future research should examine the negative effects of co-contributor attractiveness in a more naturalistic setting.

There were also some potential limitations in how attractiveness was manipulated. We varied attractiveness using a number of different methods, but with a general emphasis on using the same person (Exp 2) or the same initial image (Exps 3–5) for both high and average attractiveness conditions, and altering dress/makeup or retouching the image to vary their attractiveness. These methods help control any confounds of the images involved. Moreover, regardless of the different procedures used, we found relatively consistent results for the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) and similarity mechanisms, suggesting the results are quite robust with respect to these variations. Another limitation of our studies was that the advertising sources were always women, raising the question of whether the findings would hold for male co-contributors. However, an additional experiment (see the web appendix) found evidence for the negative authenticity (persuasion knowledge) mechanism for male co-contributors. Further research

could explore the effects of picturing male co-contributors in product categories primarily catering to a male audience.

Although not the central focus here, it was relatively common for interviewees in the qualitative study to mention concerns about the professional credentials or expertise of the co-contributor. This concern might be addressed in future research, including the possibility that such expertise concerns are more likely for technical or complex products (e.g., computer equipment or medicine) than for simple products (e.g., new coffee flavors). Additionally, the authenticity (persuasion knowledge) process identified here might apply to professional designers as well. That is, showing a highly attractive professional designer in an advertisement for an innovative product might raise questions as to whether the image is of a professional designer or a model. Finally, it is possible that other elements of the creative strategy might instead undermine perceptions of source expertise, for instance, if the co-contributor offers a message that seems uninformed or uneducated in style or substance. Conversely, a co-contributor message could reveal a degree of expertise that seems too high for a regular customer, thereby undermining perceptions of authenticity for that reason. In these senses, the level of co-contributor expertise conveyed is likely to be nuanced and may involve an inverted-U pattern where appearing either too high or too low in expertise is deemed problematic.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors thank Valérie Swaen and Christoph Fuchs for their valuable help and feedback on earlier versions of this article. This study is partly based on the first author's dissertation (Université Catholique de Louvain, LouRIM, Belgium). Additionally, this study is affiliated with the multidisciplinary Area of Excellence "The Complexity Advantage" and its sub-area "The Complexity of Crowds" at NEOMA Business School.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research was partially funded by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (435-2017-0996).

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The authors have read and agreed to the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) international standards for authors.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

How to cite this article: Cambier, Fanny, Peter R. Darke, and Ingrid Poncin. 2025. "Promoting Crowdsourced New Products: Competing Co-Contributor Attractiveness, Similarity, and Persuasion Knowledge Processes." *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12780