



A Study of Social Media Influencers and Impact on Consumer Buying Behaviour in the United Kingdom

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Abstract

Influencer marketing has grown in popularity over the last few years. A social media influencer (SMI) is a user who has developed a following in a specific industry, has a huge following, and the ability to persuade others by their authenticity and reach. Brands are collaborating with and exploiting social media influencers (SMIs) to reach their target audiences, raise brand recognition, improve brand image, and increase profitability. On social media channels, brands collaborate with SMIs to promote new items or a company's brand appeal. According to polls, Chinese internet retailers such as Taobao and Tmall are among the most popular platforms that rely heavily on influencer marketing. Simultaneously, more than half of stores in the United States partner with proponents to engage online audiences. Despite this accomplishment, a number of challenges remain, such as determining the effectiveness of a promotion plan and selecting the optimal SMI for a marketing campaign. As a result, marketers must be knowledgeable about both consumer awareness and the influencer referral effect.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of how SMIs function by: (1) identifying the personality and content features elicited by SMIs; (2) demonstrating the mechanism by which SMIs can influence choice imitation via the enhancement of customer loyalty; and (3) determining whether demographic factors such as gender, income, and education levels influence the relationship between SMIs and choice imitation. The present study's theoretical base is derived from exploratory investigations and literature surveys. People in the United Kingdom between the ages of 18 and 65 are the target respondents. In order to analyze the research questions, questionnaires are sent using the platform MTurk. Specifically, this study identifies the effectiveness of SMIs on the selective imitation of their followers. The current study indicates that there are two key components of SMIs that influence decision imitation, namely personality and content traits, by factor analysis. In comparison to regular celebrity endorsers, SMIs minimize followers' persuasion knowledge and increase purchase intent. This study also demonstrates that customer loyalty mediates the positive effect of SMIs on decision imitation. Due to the fact that SMIs establish a parasocial relationship with their followers. The consumer loyalty of the followers will increase, and they will be more likely to adopt the recommended lifestyles and purchase the recommended products.

Second, this study investigates the effects of several demographic characteristics on the link between social imitation cues and decision imitation. This study demonstrates that an increase in affluence will increase the influence of SMI content characteristics on decision imitation. It can be explained by the greater effort expended by higher income groups in elaborating more complex information and messages provided by SMIs. In addition, this study refutes the influence of gender on the link between SMI personality traits and choice imitation. Lastly, this study refutes ideas that the level of education may influence the association between SMIs and choice imitation.

Collectively, the findings contribute to marketing literature regarding the personality and content characteristics of a SMI. In addition, this study reveals the method via which SMIs influence choice imitation via customer loyalty. In addition to their theoretical significance, the findings have management implications for digital marketing communication with SMIs.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers, Closeness, Interactivity, Customer Loyalty, Attractiveness, Social Congruence, Engagement, Parasocial Relationship, Source Credibility, Source Expertise, Persuasion Knowledge, Choice Imitation, Purchase Intention

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Introduction

The rapid development of information technology and the shift in lifestyles following governments and organizations' lockdown measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 both contribute to the success of e-commerce. Instead of cinemas, Netflix becomes the primary platform for filmmakers to showcase their work. Instead of television stations, social media becomes the primary source of entertainment for the public. Instead of celebrities, social media influencers become the icons and stars capable of altering their followers' behavior and influencing their consumer behavior.

Contemporary social media and social networking sites (SNSs) have had a substantial impact on how people receive information and news. The number of U.S. people who rely heavily on social media for news has steadily climbed over the past five years, according to a recent Pew Research Center survey (Gottfried and Shearer 2016). People are now exposed to thousands of advertising per day, with the great majority originating from social networking sites (Ganguly 2015). Some age groups, especially millennials and younger generations, have developed a habitual reliance on social media (Gottfried and Shearer 2016). Consequently, their desire to collect data from social media and other clients is greater than ever. Recent Twitter and Annalect data indicates that roughly 40% of surveyed Twitter users have made a purchase as a result of an influencer's post (Karp 2016).

According to Ki and Kim (2019), a social media influencer (SMI) is an individual who possesses the ability to influence others through social media platforms. Due to the SMI's potential influence, many more brands are approaching SMIs to create branded content such as product placements or brand recommendations. Audrezet et al. (2020) refer to this practice as influencer marketing. Influencer marketing is a hybrid of traditional and new marketing techniques. It reinvents the concept of celebrity endorsement as a modern content-driven marketing campaign. The primary distinction between influencer marketing and other forms of marketing is that the campaigns' outcomes are the result of collaborations between brands and influencers. According to Feeley (2020), influencer marketing reached a global value of USD 4.6 billion in 2018. Between 2019 and 2025, it is expected to grow at a rate of more than 25% per year. The alignment of SMIs with their audiences enables the former to be more effective at product placement and recommendation than traditional celebrities. One of the most common errors made by traditional media is their failure to distinguish between celebrities and online influencers.

To begin, while SMIs are extremely popular on social media, they may not be as well-known as celebrities in the offline world. Second, the majority of influencers have developed a strong bond with their audiences, who are ardent and enthusiastic supporters of the SMIs. As a result, if influencers do not endorse a particular brand, their followers will abandon the brand.

Given that consumers prefer personal content over corporate websites, influencer marketing can be viewed as a way to avoid being a "product pusher" (Agrawal, 2016). Ad blocking is destroying the marketing ecosystem as a whole. For businesses that rely on advertising revenue, ad blocking behaviors are quite detrimental to their survival. As a result, it is critical for businesses to leverage influencer marketing to ensure that intended advertisement messages reach target customers without being blocked.

As the number of ad blockers increases, there is a shift away from traditional media toward social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Retailers must tailor their social media strategies to their customers' online and offline behaviors. With the increasing importance of influencer marketing, this paper is going to investigate the mechanism by which social media influencers influence their followers' loyalty and, consequently, their purchasing behaviors.

1.2 Research/ Problem Statement

Social media is a type of computer-aided technology that enables people to interact. It has evolved into a platform that anyone with an internet connection can access. Given the internet's rapid growth and the enormous amount of time spent on social media, marketers have been urged to investigate advertising tactics that capitalize on these new mass media communication channels. According to the most recent statistics, more than half of the world's population, or 3.6 billion people, use social media (Freberg et al., 2011). Marketers may choose to target a specific demographic on social media due to the audience's precision. Businesses can leverage social media to launch low-cost marketing campaigns.

The term "social media influencer" is one of the most frequently used in marketing. Influencer marketing on social media is rapidly growing in importance as a customer acquisition strategy, as it enables marketers to communicate directly with customers, strengthen their message, and increase brand awareness.

Due to their business expertise and broad reach, marketers are paying close attention to and engaging with social media influencers. Brands believe that by interacting with influencers, they can maximize their social media investment. Social media's rise has altered how businesses market themselves, with influencers playing a significant role.

Brands are increasingly relying on social media influencers as a marketing strategy (Dean, 2019). Numerous business owners have noticed influencers' growing influence. Social media influencers are gaining traction in the corporate world. They have been shown to be an effective method of promoting products. The organization's tagline is "Developing authentic relationships," and it collaborates with inspiring and effective storytellers on social media. Their combined net worth exceeds millions of dollars, and businesses view them as valuable marketing assets.

Influencers are well-known on social media for their content as well as their recommendations of products and brands. They have a devoted following of fans and followers who appreciate their perspective. Influencers are viewed as authentic on platforms such as Facebook (Meta), Instagram, and Twitter, and they have a sizable and loyal following. Social media influencers use social media to promote new products or a company's brand appeal, either directly or indirectly.

Due to increased competition, social media influencers are highly sought after. However, as competition intensifies, businesses and organizations are having a harder time identifying genuine influencers with a sizable following. By delivering up-to-date information and influencing consumers' attitudes and behaviors, an influencer promoted a product that the consumer admired and encouraged them to purchase it.

Influencer-generated branded content is viewed as having more organic, genuine, and direct touch with potential consumers than brand-generated advertisements (Talavera 2015). The rise in influencer marketing's popularity has been exponential. In 2018, according to a recent report, 39 percent of marketers planned to boost their influencer marketing budgets, and 19 percent planned to spend more than \$100,000 per campaign (Bevilacqua and Del Giudice 2018). Despite the presence of several studies that have explored the effects of celebrity endorsers on advertising (e.g. Amos, Holmes, and Strutton, 2008), this body of literature does not take into account the peculiarity of social media influencers, or "celebrity" content creators. In addition, although there has been recent research on influencer advertising (e.g. De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017; Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Evans et al. 2017; Johansen and Guldvik 2017), none of this research has centered on the fundamental mechanisms that make influencer marketing effective. In academia and industry alike, influencer marketing is gaining traction. The mechanism by which social media influencers influence customer behavior, on the other hand, has not been extensively studied. As a result, the study is being conducted in order to fill a research gap.

1.3 Research Aim(s) / Purpose(s)

Aim: What questions that my study is going to answer?

In this research, we are going to investigate the followings,

1. What are the potential features of social media influencers in practice?
2. What is the mechanism of social media influencers changing customer loyalty?
3. How does customer loyalty affect customer behavior?
4. How do the demographic factors, like income level, gender and education level moderate the effect of social media influencers on customer loyalty and imitation behavior?

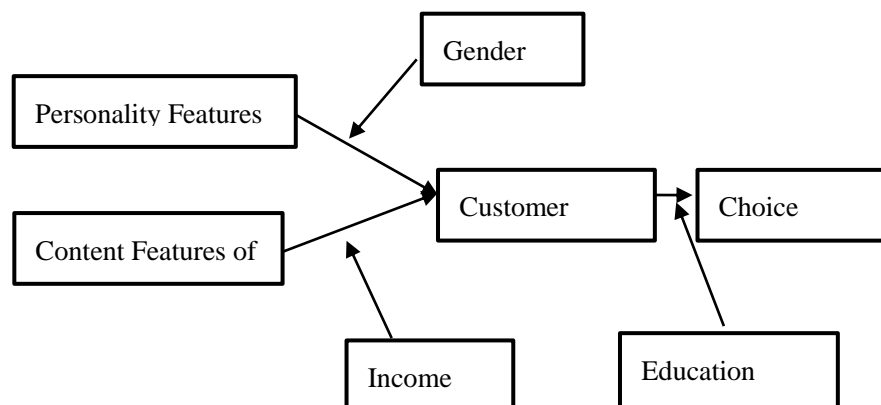
Objectives:

1. To investigate the traits that social media influencers show when it comes to marketing.
2. To examine how the characteristics of social media influencers displayed in a marketing setting affect customer loyalty.
3. To study how changes in customer loyalty affect customer behavior, such as purchase intention and imitation of choices.
4. To explore how demographic factors determine the extent to which independent variables influence dependent variables.

Questionnaire will be designed to ask the respondents about the personality and content features of the social media influencers. Also, the change in the level of customer loyalty will be assessed in the survey. Last, respondents will be asked to show how the change in customer loyalty will impact their imitation behaviors.

Demographic data, like education level, gender and income level, of respondents will be collected to check if there are moderation effects.

1.4 Rationale for the Research



Social media influencers play a more important role in the contemporary business world. But what constitutes a SMI? In this study, a SMI is considered having personality- and content- determined traits. These two features will affect customer loyalty, which in turns contribute to the choice imitation, i.e. purchase intention.

Personality features of SMIs include closeness and interactivity between SMIs and recipients. Smith et al. (2005) defined interpersonal closeness as “the affective ties such as intimacy and connectedness, that an individual feels with another. Also, Wang et al (2012) suggested that people use others as a source of inspiration, especially to those whom they feel closest to, in order to determine their own belief about styles, trends and products. Therefore, it is expected that the increase in perceived closeness between SMIs and consumers will increase customer loyalty. Perceived interactivity is positively related to customer loyalty. Burgoon et. al. (1999) defined interactivity as the extent to which an individual perceives that he/ she is participating in the interaction with a SMI. Social media platforms allow users to find, network and interact with one another easily. Consumers expect their communications on social media platforms to be more bilateral and responsive. The enhanced responsiveness will increase the social glue of customers to the SMIs. Therefore, the increase in perceived interactivity between SMIs and consumers will increase customer loyalty.

Content features of SMIs consist of attractiveness and credibility of the message delivered. Perceived attractiveness of content created by SMIs is positively related to customer loyalty. Content features of SMIs include attractiveness and credibility of the messages created by the SMIs. Argo and Main (2008) regarded attractiveness as the degree in which something or someone is viewed as pleasing visually and it can be measured by asking how attractive, appealing or good- looking that something or someone is. By using this definition, I define attractiveness as the extent to which a consumer finds a SMI’s online content attractive, appealing or good- looking. Therefore, the increase in perceived attractiveness of content created by SMIs will increase the customer loyalty

Perceived credibility of content created by SMIs is positively related to customer loyalty. From many studies, it is found that the credibility and information quality of the content shared by social media influencers plays an important role in affecting the attitude of followers to the product and the brand advertised. Referring to the Information Adoption Model, information quality is about the product information and shopping advice provided by fellow consumers while source credibility is about the opinion provided by the consumers who have experienced the product on the online platform. De Veirman et al. (2017) suggested that consumers view a SMI a reliable opinion leader in a particular niche. The trustworthiness is an important factor that affects consumer’s attitude toward SMIs and hence it will affect the customer loyalty to the SMIs. Cheung et. al (2008) concluded that source’s trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness are the major factors in affecting consumers’ perception. Cheung et. al. (2008) suggested four dimensions to measure information quality, i.e. relevance, comprehensiveness, accuracy and timeliness of receiving the message. They also proposed to use trustworthiness and expertise to measure the source credibility. Therefore, the increase in perceived credibility of content created by SMIs will increase the customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is positively related to the purchase intention and imitation behaviors of followers. By using the social default theory, the followers may see the influencers as the models of social behaviors and they will act accordingly due to the increase in loyalty to the influencers. For example, if the influencer suggests going to a certain cafe for a high tea, the followers may have a higher incentive to follow suit and go to the restaurants for having leisure and fun. Therefore, the increase in consumer loyalty will increase the likelihood for the customers to adopt the exemplars of SMIs as their own social defaults.

SMIs act as important references who have an influence on their judgements regarding whether behaviors are appropriate to display in a specific social environment (Martin & Bush, 2000). Lueg and Finney (2007) found that the more a consumer transforms a reference's choice possibilities into social defaults, the more choice copying occurs (e.g., shopping in the same store or buying the same brand). Similarly, Ki and Kim (2019) found that when customers follow and watch a SMI with inspiring taste and viewpoints, they express a significant desire to mimic the

SMI. As a result, we believe that the more consumers are motivated to accept a SMI's examples and choices as their own social defaults, the more likely they are to emulate the SMI's decisions. Choice imitation takes place when the followers are inspired to buy the goods or services recommended by the SMIs.

1.5 Significance of the Research

Celebrity endorsement has been replaced by social media influencers' recommendation gradually in the marketing world. It is easy to imagine a celebrity teaming up with a company to pitch a product - even if the pitch is a series of 10-minute videos instead of a 30-second television ad. Unlike celebrities, influencers can be found anywhere. What makes them influential is their large following on the web and social media. A fashion photographer on Instagram, a well-read cybersecurity blogger tweeting, or a respected marketing manager on LinkedIn can be an influencer. Therefore, it is time for the academics and marketing insiders to have a better understanding about social media influencer marketing.

Social media influencers (SMIs) have access to a large number of audiences. With their credibility established by their authenticity and reach, they can act as a persuasive force to encourage the followers to buy the products that they promote and even motivate them to do the word of mouth marketing by sharing the news or videos of their favorite SMIs in the social media platforms. They can develop a solid relationship with their followers by showing their daily lives and sharing opinions on current issues and the unbiased filter of "people like me" will be reinforced (Allsop et. al., 2007). Customer loyalty will then be enhanced to affect the customers' intention to buy the goods and/or services promoted by the SMIs.

Influencer marketing is a brand that works with an online influencer to market one of its products or services. Some influencer marketing collaborations are less tangible – brands simply work with influencers to improve brand recognition. An early example of influencer marketing was YouTube's PewDiePie. He teamed up with the makers of a horror film set in the French Catacombs under Paris, and created a series of videos in which he faced challenges in the Catacombs. The video was perfect content for PewDiePie's 27 million subscribers, and received nearly double the views as the trailer for the film. The swift evolution of marketing highlights the need for us to explore the mechanism of how social media influencers will affect customer loyalty and choice imitation.

1.6 Scope of the Research

This study will cover the aspects of social media and influence marketing. It aims at explaining how the choice imitation may take place in which the purchase intention is enhanced by the social media influencers (SMIs). Information adoption model, consumer inspiration model and social default theories lay down a solid foundation for further expansion of academic boundary to investigate how personality and content features of SMIs will result in choice imitation mediated by customer loyalty and moderated by gender, income and education levels.

Social Media Marketing

Byrne et. al. (2017) defined social media marketing as "a type of marketing that focuses on using key leaders to drive a brand's message to the larger market." Li and Du (2011) has also mentioned that the influencers are similar to the key opinion leaders since they have a strong personal brand.

Social Influence Marketing

Singh and Diamond (2012) defined social influence marketing as "a technique that employs social media and social influencers to achieve organizational goals and fulfill business needs." Veiman et. al. (2017) suggested that the electronic word of mouth has greater impacts on consumer decision making than traditional advertising.

Information Adoption Model

Sussman and Siegal (2003) pointed out the Information Adoption Model (IAM) to explain how individuals would adopt information and then change their intention and subsequent behaviors in the communication platforms which are mediated by computer. There are two important aspects, namely information quality and source credibility. Referring to the online platform, information quality is about the product information and shopping advice provided by fellow consumers while source credibility is about the opinion provided by the consumers who have experienced the product. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) defined the source credibility as the degree to which an information source is regarded as believable, competent and trustworthy by its information recipients, i.e. followers in the case of influencer marketing.

Consumer Inspiration Theory

Bottger et. al. (2017) proposed that the inspiration acts as the external stimuli that triggers the need of recipients to do something accordingly. Inspiration facilitates two types of changes, i.e. behavioral change and emotional change. The former will motivate the followers to buy the product recommended by the SMIs, i.e. choice imitation. The latter will help build up the social glue between the SMIs and recipients. As a result, the loyalty of recipients to the SMIs will increase.

Social Default Theory

Huh et. al. (2014) proposed the social default theory to explain why some people want to follow others' opinion. When the recipients do not know what to do or choose not to spend effort on figuring out the choices on their own, they may choose to follow what others are doing and treat them as standard options and act accordingly. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) mentioned the idea of social influence, which is the process in which people adapt and change their opinions, beliefs or behaviors after interacting with others. It can be used to explain why many people choose to be followers. First, it has the informational value for the followers to have social proof, especially when the people are unsure of what is correct then they will look to others for correct models. For example, when someone goes to a new restaurant for dining for the first time, he/ she may model what others ordered to make their menu choice. Second, it has the normative value in which the followers can gain conformity by adjusting their behaviors so as to be liked and accepted by others. For example, some youngsters smoke due to peer influence.

Choice Imitation

Imitation takes place when an individual makes choices and takes actions according to the most likely selected ones chosen by another reference agency, i.e. social media influencers in this study. Such behavior can be inferred to the agency's goals, beliefs, intentions, social status (Charpentier and O'Doherty, 2018; Dunne and O'Doherty, 2013). Particularly, "imitation" means a wide range of cognitive and behavioral experience from motor movement mimicking (Carcea and Froemke, 2019) to following the agency's choices (Burke et al., 2010; Najjar et al., 2019; Suzuki et al., 2012).

Social media influencer acts as an agency for the customers to mimic their behaviors or follow their choices. Consumers' needs are triggered by the marketers or businesses before they seek information about the potential choices. They will then compare the possible options before they make the purchase decision. Post- purchase behavior like sharing the feelings of using the product or leaving comments on the services provided by the business will follow after the products are consumed. According to Chen (2007), a favorable attitude towards products endorsed by social media influencers may have a higher chance of affecting the purchase decision. The mechanism of choice imitation is included as the consequence in this study.

Purchase Intention

Purchase intention is a part of complex consumers' purchase decisions (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010). It is also known as the cognitive behavior spent on buying a particular brand (Shah et. al, 2012).

Hosein (2012) concluded that the consumer's intention to purchase has a significant impact on the sales and profits of the businesses since it is highly likely for the purchase intention to be converted to actual purchase decision.

Moe (2003) classified the purchase intention into goal- oriented and exploration- oriented browsing behaviors. For being goal- oriented, consumers look for information before they make their purchase decision. For being exploration- oriented, consumers act openly and freely rather than making any pre- plans before they make a purchase decision. Both types of behaviors can be found in both regular and online consumers.

1.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlines the background of the study in which marketers may spend more effort in understanding the impact of social media influencers since they are growing their importance in the marketing community. Research statement is introduced to suggest that this study is going to fill in the gap of academics since the mechanism of how social media influencers will affect choice imitation of customers is not yet investigated.

Also, this chapter describes the rationale and questions of this research. The personality and content features of SMIs are supposed to enhance the customer loyalty which in turn affects the choice imitation of customers, i.e. increase in purchase intention after a certain goods or service is endorsed by the SMI.

Lastly, this chapter delineates the research significance and lays out scope of the study.

Chapter 2 Literature Review**2.1 Social Media, Digital Marketing and Influencer Marketing****2.1.1 Social Media**

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) define social media as "a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content" (p. 61).

Based on the work of Kaplan and Haenlein (2010), Kietzmann et al. (2011), Zhu and Chen (2015), social media can be categorized into four features,

1. Relationship: It regards social media platforms as profile based and it comprises mainly of personalized messages. For example, Facebook.
2. Self- media: It also regards social media platforms as profile based and it gives users the opportunity to control their own social media channels of communications. For example, Twitter.
3. Creative outlet: It sees the platforms as content based and enables uses to demonstrate their interests and novelty. For example, YouTube.
4. Collaboration: It also sees the platforms as content based and enables people to ask for advice or find the most impressive and compelling message of the day.

The acute features of social media are social presence and self- disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010).

Social media platforms can be differentiated by seven aspects (Kietzmann et al. 2011) : identity (“the degree in which users show their identities in a social media environment”), conversations (“the degree in which users interact with each other,”), sharing (“the degree in which users share, get and exchange content,”), presence (“the degree in which users can know whether other users are accessible,”) relationships (“the degree in which users can be related to other users,”), reputation (“the degree in which users can identify the social status of others,”), and groups (“the degree in which users may think they belong to a certain communities,”).

Different social media platforms have different unique presences and advantages. For example, companies can promote their products on Instagram by posting attractive pictures (Newberry 2016).

Social media is now regarded as a promising way for advertisers to promote their products or brands and communicate with potential customers. Also, marketers make good use of social media platforms to stimulate brand awareness and enhance brand loyalty (Zhou et al. 2012).

Previous research on social media uses and gratifications theory (UGT) put much emphasis on the role of social interaction since social media is basically and significantly viewed as “social” (Erz, Marder, and Osadchaya 2018). However, Yang and Ha (2021) found the newer social media platforms may have different orientations from the older ones. For example, Instagram and TikTok (Douyin) offer an environment for users to demonstrate their online personalities, and a place for influencers and content creators to stay connected with followers while Facebook is a wonderful place for people to connect and stay in touch with each other easily.

2.1.2 Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT)

Previous studies comprehensively used the UGT as a means to explain the media selection of an audience (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973). As mentioned by Severin and Tankard (1997), people may use the same social media platform for different reasons or purposes. According to the UGT, people may use social media to fulfill different needs, i.e. cognitive needs to seek information, tension- release needs to spare passing time, affective needs to obtain entertainment, and social need to communicating with others (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1973).

Phua, Venus Jin, and Kim (2017) argue that people may use social media to satisfy their entertaining, informational and socializing needs. Plume and Slade (2018) noted that social media may help individuals “pass time, escape their everyday lives, and engage in behaviors they find entertaining” (p. 473) when they are incentivized by enjoyable gratification.

HennigThurau et al. (2004) argue that the social networking sites may enhance electronic word of mouth communication, i.e. potential, existing and former consumers may post their comments on a product or a company. Their proclamations and reviews can affect other people’s comments or purchase intentions toward the specific products. Therefore, the main drive for the use of social media is to share information.

2.1.3 Digital Marketing

Campaigns using digital marketing are becoming increasingly common and effective. People are increasingly preferring to use digital gadgets rather than visiting the store in person as digital platforms are increasingly included into marketing campaigns and everyday lives. Switching communication channels, from traditional to digital, has become a major task for businesses in today's competitive market, particularly in marketing communication channels. How does it keep a good communication flow while presenting a variety of great products? It also has a positive effect on cost effectiveness (Dwivedi et al., 2020). Many media are influenced by digital channels, including marketing via mobile communication channels and other advertising media for introducing businesses and benefits.

According to Goldfarb & Tucker (2019), the Internet and Information Technology can be used to optimize marketing methods, allowing for significant corporate expansion. Value creation appears to be highly important in today's dynamic and aggressive industry. According to Smith (2011), businesses can increase service quality by utilizing technology and its different benefits. Despite this, De-Pelsmacker et al. (2018) call digital marketing "social media marketing."

According to Livingston (2010), Social Media Marketing (SMM) promotes the exchange of information between customers and businesses. The use of digital channels allows for a high level of communication between the two parties. Naturally, intensive communication is accompanied by a sense of responsibility, which in turn fosters consumer trust. It will also develop brand loyalty automatically.

2.2 Social Media Influencers and Celebrities

2.2.1 *Influencer Marketing*

Because of their fame, trustworthiness, knowledge, prestige, or relationship with their viewers, an influencer is a person, a group, or an organization that has the power to affect the decisions of a target audience on a digital platform. Certain contributors obtain a huge following and establish a fanbase with the help of the internet's accessibility and speed of dissemination, transforming into social media influencers (Influence L., 2020).

Consumers are growingly dependent on peer- to- peer interaction. Due to this quest, influencer marketing has become more and more important as a crucial element of digital marketing strategies of firms according to the Association of National Advertisers (2018).

It is often regarded as key to enhancing online brand engagement (Newberry 2018). Bloggers or social media influencers may facilitate the generation of word of mouth (WOM) about a brand, product, or service precisely via the content of their posts, videos and messages. Sponsored blogging is one of the ways to make good use of influencers' networks and ability to affect their followers. Some are successful, i.e. Nokia's campaign of promoting camera phone in Finland, while some are unsuccessful, i.e. "Raging Cow" campaign of Dr Pepper (Corcoran et al. 2006).

Influencer marketing combines elements of paid and earned media while the traditional marketing strategy focuses on paid and owned media only (Hewett et al. 2016). The ability of influencers to affect the cognitive, emotional and behavioral ideas about the company is rather significant since the role of earned media is increasing.

Hughes et al. (2019) point out that the influencer marketing is different from both the WOM and conventional advertising since influencers combine elements of paid and earned media. From the perspective of enhancing motivation, conventional advertising may have many different objectives like building brand equity, while influencers may focus on how to increase the loyalty of their followers. From another perspective of message design and implementation, it is the company's responsibility to prepare the message in the traditional advertising while the influencers may produce their own posts and message, subject to their own personalities and image delivered in the public.

Influencer marketing is a marketing technique that leverages the influence of influential persons or opinion leaders to increase brand recognition and/or purchase intent among customers (e.g., Brown and Hayes 2008; Scott 2015). The influencer's innate qualities play a significant impact in luring firms and marketers to approach them closely. In comparison to the costly sums required to sign one or more well-known celebrity endorsers, firms might opt for less expensive influencers (Hall 2015). In addition, most social media influencers have already established themselves by focusing in particular areas. This implies that customers are more inclined to accept or trust the ideas of influencers when those influencers engage with brands that align well with their personal areas of expertise (Hall 2016). A recent survey on social media trends revealed that 94 percent of marketers that have utilized influencer marketing initiatives found them to be beneficial (Ahmad 2018). According to the same publication, the return on investment (ROI) for influencer marketing was eleven times that of traditional advertising.

Mass communication channels such as television stations, radio stations, and newspapers are no longer the primary information sources for consumers in the current media environment. Instead, customers frequently use social media channels or virtual communities to exchange information and create relationships (Hair, Clark, and Shapiro 2010). Influencers on social media utilize these same channels, providing distinct value to both consumers and advertising. Freberg et al. (2011) defined social media influencers as "a new sort of independent third party endorser who influences audience attitudes via blogs, tweets, and other social media" (p. 90). Another term used to describe them is "endorser," which is described as "any individual who enjoys public fame and leverages this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in advertising" (McCracken 1989, p. 310). In contrast to traditional endorsers, who are typically celebrities or public figures who gained their fame or popularity via traditional media, social media influencers are typically "grassroots" individuals who have created likable online personalities and achieved high visibility among their followers by creating viral content on social media (Garcia 2017).

2.2.2 *Social Media Influencer*

Social media influencers are online personalities with a big following on one or more social media platforms (e.g., YouTube, Instagram, Snapchat, or personal blogs) who have an effect on their followers (Agrawal 2016; Varsamis 2018). In contrast to celebrities or public figures that are well-known through traditional media, social media influencers are "ordinary individuals" who have become "online celebrities" through generating and posting content on social media. Typically, they have knowledge in particular fields, such as healthy living, travel, food, lifestyle, beauty, and fashion. A recent Twitter survey indicated that customers may trust social media influencers as much as they trust their friends (Swant 2016).

Influencer marketing is therefore a form of marketing in which marketers and brands invest in selected influencers to develop and/or promote their branded content to both the influencers' own following and the brands' target consumers (Yodel 2017).

The use of social media influencers has grown dramatically since 2016, as consumers have switched away from television and toward social media and other OTT (Over the top) channels. The phrase "social media influencer" is becoming increasingly prevalent. Instagram, YouTube, Facebook (Meta), and Twitter are among the most popular social media platforms among influencers. Brands value social media influencers because they may start trends and encourage their followers to buy the things they endorse. As a result, in order to promote their products and enhance sales, brands are attempting to engage with genuine and successful influencers. Due to rising competition, social media influencers are in high demand. However, as competition grows, recognising authentic influencers with a significant number of followers has become the biggest challenge for brands and organizations.

Social media influencers are the individuals who have developed an ample and extensive social network which have a larger number of followers. They are seen as self-produced celebrities in a niche market (Evans et al. 2017; De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017; Jin and Phua 2014).

Grave (2017) suggests that social media influencers are recognized as typically more credible to consumers when compared to traditional celebrities. One of the reasons is they are perceived to be more trustworthy than traditional celebrities who deliberately have more collaborations with companies.

Social media influencers, no matter from China or the Western world, share the similarities in two aspects. First, SMIs are content producers who have a large number of followers. For example, Papi Jiang has gathered more than 40 million followers on different Chinese platforms for her sarcastic videos mocking people in daily life. Second, SMIs are compelling and eloquent opinion leaders who have robust influence on product evaluation and decision-making process of consumers (Escalas and Bettman 2017). Jin and Phua (2014) suggest that a product endorsement is recognized as more credible and legitimate when it is interacted with an influencer compared to that by a marketer.

A celebrity endorser, according to McCracken (1989, p. 310), is "any figure who enjoys public recognition and leverages that reputation on behalf of a consumer commodity by appearing with it in an advertisement." Celebrities are frequently utilized to promote products because they have a higher possibility of attracting audience attention and influencing consumer attitudes and buying intentions (Munnukka, Uusitalo, & Toivonen, 2016; Pradhan, Duraipandian, & Sethi, 2016; Zhou & Whitla, 2013).

As a result, the advantages of celebrity endorsement by businesses are widely documented in the literature (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Keel & Nataraajan, 2012). However, in a unique growing market like Ghana, a Sub-Saharan African country, the impact of celebrity endorsement methods on consumer purchase patterns has not been properly investigated (Agyepong, 2017).

Celebrities are well-known people in their fields who are well-liked by a huge number of people (Spry et al., 2011). A celebrity can be a comedian, athlete, actor/actress, or other public figure who is well-known for accomplishments outside of the product or service she is endorsing or promoting.

Lay endorsers, specialists, and celebrities can all advocate items (Erdogan, 1999; Wei & Lu, 2013), projecting a picture of the endorsed brand that reflects the endorser's personality (Erdogan, Baker, & Tagg, 2001; Keller, 2013). Brand endorsement is a method of brand communication in which a celebrity is given the authority to act as the brand's spokesman in various capacities in order to deliver the necessary information to project the brand (Patra & Datta, 2010). Furthermore, celebrity endorsement has an impact on the effectiveness of advertising, brand identification, recall, buy intent, and even purchasing behavior of customers (Hollensen & Schimmelpfennig, 2013; Spry et al., 2011). This implies that consumers easily identify products or service advertisements with celebrities, which aids them in recalling the message and influences their buy intention in the short or long term.

2.2.3 Social Influence Theory

Using the social influence theory (SIT), the concept of celebrity endorsement could be properly explained. The social influence hypothesis considers how people in a social network are affected by others to behave in specific ways (Li, 2013; Venkatesh & Brown, 2001). Social influence, according to Venkatesh and Brown (2001), is viewed as a push to adhere to specific behaviors via messages and signals that assist in establishing these impressions.

Informational and normative influence are two types of social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). While informational social influence persuades individuals to accept information gained from external sources as evidence of reality, normative social influence refers to the influence of members in a group to conform to the expectations of another member (Li, 2013). This implies that celebrity endorsements communicate legitimate and true messages or information about brands, which may alter an individual's impression of the brand as a result of social identification (Hsu & Lin, 2008). This also suggests that source credibility, attractiveness, trustworthiness, familiarity, and objectivity are important factors to consider when evaluating the information that is made available to the public (Ilicic & Webster, 2015; Munnukka et al., 2016; Samu & Wymer, 2017).

Furthermore, according to persuasion theory (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 2005; Ohanian, 1990), source trustworthiness and attractiveness are important since these characteristics in communication can persuade consumers and improve message receptivity. As a result, Solomon (2014) stresses the persuasiveness of communication or messaging from celebrities as product and service endorsers, because celebrity endorsers are used to affect or modify consumers' attitudes and perceptions toward the brand. Temperley and Tangen (2006) support this

claim by revealing that a corporation's dedication to signing celebrities is motivated by the desire to achieve certain company objectives through the celebrity.

This amount of perceived power may explain why celebrity endorsements are said to be used in one-quarter of all commercials (Biswas et al., 2009). As previously stated, the source theory proposes that an endorser's perceived level of competence, attractiveness, familiarity, and trustworthiness determines the impact of a communication (Arai, Ko, & Ross, 2014; Erdogan, 1999; La-Ferle & Choi, 2005; Solomon, 2014). According to the opinions of the target audience, trustworthiness refers to an endorser's honesty, integrity, and believability, implying that the brand will deliver on its promises (Arai et al., 2014; Jin & Phua, 2014). The attribute of likability, which can impact belief, views, attitudes, and behavior, is one of the most important determinants of source credibility.

When receivers accept a source's impact on their personal attitudes and value structures, this happens (Solomon, 2014). Shalev and Morwitz (2012) also found that consumers welcome influence from sources with whom they can identify, but reject it when they want to distance themselves from a source. As a result of their status as aspirational leaders, celebrities have a high likelihood of persuading consumers to accept product messages and act on them by purchasing the goods (Jin & Phua, 2014; Liu & Brock, 2011). Furthermore, celebrity endorsers have traditionally been picked based on their appearance in order to benefit from the twin effect of celebrity status and physical attractiveness (Erdogan, 1999; Ohanian, 1990). The source attractiveness model (McCracken, 1989) emphasizes that a message's impact is dependent on its source.

Familiarity is the ability to recognize a source by observing its physical look and behavior (Spry et al., 2011). Overall, attractiveness does not only refer to physical appearance, but also to a variety of other virtues that customers may see in a celebrity endorser, such as academic abilities, personality traits, lifestyles, or athletic capabilities (Erdogan, 1999; Liu et al., 2007). The major purpose of using celebrities as product and service endorsers, it could be said, is to boost brand awareness and persuade consumers to have a favorable attitude toward the brand (Erdogan et al., 2001; Liu et al., 2007; Spry et al., 2011). As a result, source models may play a critical role in persuading consumers of the attractiveness or legitimacy of a product.

Despite the fact that social media influencers are different from traditional celebrities (Grave 2017), they are still regarded as a desire group that consumers think that they are relevant personally and act as a source of information to evaluate the brands in the contemporary context (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

2.3 Personality Features of SMIs - Closeness and Interactivity

Genuine opinion leaders are influencers who share genuine material that his target audience enjoys. An Influencer's followers admire him because of his personal experience, skill, and unbiased attitude. Authenticity rises when influencers work with a small number of brands, indicating exclusivity, when consumers are less resistant to messages, when personal characteristics of the influencer strengthen the influencer's influence over the audience, positive interaction with consumers, and finally, when influencers correctly advertise a suitable product, enhancing their authenticity.

The strength of brand endorsement is well registered in the literature (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983; Ohanian 1990; Bergkvist and Zhou 2016). They offer insights into source effect, elemental endorsement processes, and the provision in which the effects may be enhanced. In terms of the qualities of an influencer, the source credibility model and the source attractiveness model advocate that the trustworthiness of an endorser has a constructive impact on consumers' recognition of a message.

Researchers discovered that the use of an endorser provides a constructive and practical associative linkage that translates amiable emotions about the endorser to the recommended brand or product (Keller 1993) from the perspective of associative learning (Anderson 1976). Likewise, McCracken (1989) proposes the meaning transfer model which stresses that an influencer presents significant and figurative meanings to a brand or product through the associations that consumers hold regarding the influencer. Hence, the venerated features and symbolic meanings can be obtained collected by consumers via consumption as part of the development of their self image (Escalas and Bettman 2005). However, the effectiveness of influencer endorsement may be different since the match between the influencer and the recommended brand or product is different with respect to the images and cultural meanings (McCracken 1989).

On the side of that view, the match- up hypothesis depicts that when there is a fit and match between the image of a brand or product and an endorser, consumers are expected to develop positive recommendations and comments on the brand or product and the message delivered (Kamins 1990). For instance, the match- up impact is likely to be significant if a product related to attractiveness, i.e. cosmetics, is congruent with the physical attractiveness of an endorser (Kahle and Homer 1985). Therefore, the benefit of the information which match endorser and product is to enhance the condition of fit and it will in turn affect consumer evaluation as it is comparable to consumers' existing cognitive structure and facilitates them to adapt to the environment (Lynch and Schuler 1994). Koernig and Page (2002) tested the match- up hypothesis in the service marketing context and discovered that the match- up effect is prominent only if the attractiveness level of a service provider is consistent with the expectation of consumers on the type of services offered.

2.3.1 Social Congruence

When influencers communicate directly with the audience and provide personal details about themselves, consumers find them relatable. Consumers pay greater attention to and feel more connected to items that they find appealing and similar. Influencers who appear to be more similar to their followers are more likely to be trusted.

While the majority of research has concentrated on the endorser-product link, Choi and Rifon (2012) claimed that the relationship between customers and endorsers is also an important factor of brand endorsement configuration.

Celebrity endorsers are likely to motivate consumers' acceptance or desire to consume endorsed brands and products as a way to obtain endorser-conveyed meanings and associations because they represent important cultural meanings and are considered a reference group with significant relevance upon consumers' evaluations, aspirations, or behaviors (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

Choi and Rifon (2012) found that the congruence between consumers' ideal self-image and a celebrity endorser's image resulted in a favorable consumer attitude toward the ad and increased purchase intention, whereas the congruence between the celebrity endorser and the endorsed product had a direct, positive impact on consumers' attitude toward the ad.

Similarly, Xu and Pratt (2018) used the ideal self-celebrity congruence model to investigate the effect of social media influencer endorsement on Chinese Generation Y in the context of destination marketing, finding that such congruence had a positive effect on visit intention toward the endorsed destination.

Aside from the potential positive impact of brand endorsement on consumer attitudes and buy intent, the digital environment and inventive technologies have created new avenues for consumers to engage and interact with influencer-generated brand content.

Consumer interaction activities on social media are highly contextualized and might vary based on platforms, content, and themes involved (Gavilances, Flatten, and Brettel 2018). Previous research has suggested that consumer engagement levels range from low (e.g. consuming) to high (e.g. contributing), and psychological and motivational factors are important engagement antecedents that influence consumer responses to brand content on social media (Maslowska, Malthouse, and Collinger 2016).

Consumer involvement with brand material is vital in assessing the success of social media advertising (Voorveld et al. 2018), hence it is included in this study to provide more insight into how consumers react to brand endorsement on social media. Lou and Yuan (2019) define social media influencers as content providers with celebrity status whose image can be transferred to the endorsed product and business (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017).

Because consumers are prone to imitate endorsers' attitudes and behaviors in order to be like them, and because they use brands and products to express and enhance their self-concepts (Sirgy 1982), they may follow the behavior and attitude endorsed by a social media influencer if the influencer's image resonates with their ideal self (Choi and Rifon 2007; Basil 1996; Xu and Pratt 2018). This means that self-influencer image congruence could be used as a motivational framework to influence consumers' perceptions of branded messages, engagement with brand material on social media, and brand purchase intentions.

Consumers are more likely to form favorable brand attitudes and be affected in purchasing decisions when a social media influencer's picture matches their ideal self-image. These findings are in line with earlier research, which suggests that a self-endorser match-up has a good impact on product evaluation and judgment (Choi and Rifon 2012). Despite previous research suggesting that a social media influencer's number of followers has a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of an endorsed brand (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017), it is suggested that social media influencers are more effective when there is a 'fit' between the endorser and the targeted consumer. Successful social media managers carefully identify influencers who can resonate well with target consumers in order to increase good brand association and, as a result, product sales. Backlash against some of the most well-known social media influencers has generated ethical issues among marketers regarding influencer marketing methods and how firms can combat the growing vlogger backlash and influencer fraud (Romano 2018; Sloane 2018).

2.3.2 Engagement

Following the work of Hollebeek (2011), engagement is defined as a "customer's cognitive, emotional and behavioral activities." Indirect customer engagement include incentivized referrals, social media interactions about products or brands, customers' response and feedback to companies (Pansari and Kumar 2017).

Danaher and Dagger (2013) examine the impact of spending on social media advertising on the performance of firms and value of shareholders. Kuma et al. (2013) suggest that both social media and customer WOM enhance the return on investment (ROI), and Kumar and Pansari (2016) show the relationship between ROI and engagement.

Marketers are actively combining social media with their promotional events to produce digital engagement. For example, sports brand Adidas states that "digital engagement is key to us" and it will concentrate on digital and social platforms to sustain its advertising efforts exclusively (McCarthy 2017).

Prior research mainly focuses on the executional factors in the ad content that produce digital engagement (Ashley and Tuten 2015; De Vries and Carlson 2014). The research on media context demonstrates the engagement

with magazines, TV programs and websites that may translate to the evaluations of the advertisements embedded in the medium (Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane 2007; Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel 2009; Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse 2016). Hilde et al. (2018) argue that social media platform engagement will submerge into how people engage with advertising within the platforms and subsequently influences the evaluation of the ad.

Engagement experience framework demonstrates that digital engagement stems from experiences obtained from digital platforms and has three unique features (Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse 2016).

1. Engagement experience framework explains the interactions between consumer and media, which in turn allow us to enrich our understanding on social media engagement.
2. The framework put much emphasis on engagement intensity, i.e. intensity of advertising use, or engagement valence, i.e. positive or negative posts responding the advertising, enabling context- specific engagement measurement that may vary among different social media platforms.
3. The framework can be used to predict the effectiveness of advertising (Davis Mersey, Malthouse, and Calder 2010) and hence extend the knowledge of the relation between social media engagement and social media advertising.

Most of the existing social media advertising studies concentrate on social media as a whole (e.g., Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011; Okazaki, Rubio, and Campo 2014; Van Noort, Antheunis, and Verlegh 2014) or on one particular social media platform like Facebook (Chi 2011; Chu 2011; Nelson-Field, Riebe, and Sharp 2012), YouTube (Liu-Thompkins 2012; Walther et al. 2010), Twitter (Liu, Burns, and Hou 2017; Sook Kwon et al. 2014), or Pinterest (Phillips, Miller, and McQuarrie 2014).

Hilde et al. (2018) show that digital engagement is mainly context specific. Engagement consists of different types of experiences for each social media platform and the term social media may not be specific to a certain environment.

Borrowing the idea proposed by Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse (2016), engagement can be regarded as “a multilevel, multidimensional construct that emerges from the thoughts and feelings about one or more rich experiences involved in reaching a personal goal” (p. 40).

Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) also suggest that engagement can be revealed and signified in different experiences.

Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse (2016) demonstrate that engagement with a newspaper can be used to predict the consumption behavior and that engagement with TV programs can be used to predict the assessments of advertising embedded.

Context refers to the ad environment offered by the medium. Moorman, Neijens, and Smit (2002) define such an environment as the total medium context, i.e. including all different social media platforms.

Borrowing the ideas from Bronner and Neijens (2006), Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane (2007), and Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse (2016), social media engagement can be defined as the affective, intuitive perceptions that people experience when using a specific medium at a specific moment.

Media experience is defined as the particular experience obtained in a detailed social consumption occasion. Calder, Isaac, and Malthouse (2016) suggest that social media engagement is the sum of these particular social media experiences. Akin social media engagement, social media advertising engagement is the sum of experiences that people earn while encountering social media advertising on that platform.

Studies on media context offer fascinating evidence for the concept that the same source sending the same message to the same group of audience in different scenarios may generate different impacts depending on the environment that the message is shown (Norris and Colman 1992). Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel (2009) suggest that engagement with a medium can be viewed as an imperative feature that produces responses to the advertising materials. The increase in engagement of a consumer in media will increase in the evaluation favorability of the advertisement included.

Previous studies provide theoretical explanations for why engagement with social media platforms will affect the advertisement evaluation (Dahlen 2005; Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane 2007; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2007; Moorman et al. 2012; De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002). They can be concluded as follows,

First, engagement can produce a priming effect. In this notion, Dahlen (2005) suggest that the context acts as an intelligible prime that “activates a semantic network of related material that guides attention and determines the interpretation of the ad” (p. 90; Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane 2007, p. 8). If the experience with a social media platform is topical, the priming will increase the chance that the ads delivered in the platforms are also experienced in the same way.

Second, engagement can help access mood congruency. It is hypothesized that “The ad context makes a certain mood or affect more accessible and relieves the processing of stimuli with similar moods or affects” (Dahlen 2005, p. 90; Malthouse, Calder, and Tamhane 2007, p. 8). Therefore, if the social media platform is experienced as calm, and consumers may be shown calm ads on the same platform, this similarity between the two will increase the depth of information processing and hence the evaluations on advertisement.

Third, engagement can enhance congruity between the social media influencers and their followers. Dahlen (2005) defines congruity as “the medium and the advertised brand converge and become more similar in consumers’ minds” (p. 90). Therefore, if the social media platform is experienced as calm, ads will be regarded as an indispensable part of the platform and hence more likely will be experienced in a similar manner.

Engagement allows people to influence others in terms of attitude towards a certain social issue or purchase intention of a certain product. It can be regarded as an empowerment function (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011).

Based on the features and characteristics of social media, such as richness of media, extent of self-disclosure, form of self- presentation, main characteristics of relationships and information, social media can be classified into different dimensions (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Kietzmann et al. 2011; and Zhu and Chen 2015).

People can use a social media platform in a passive way, i.e. only reading or surfing, or an active way, i.e. leaving comments and sharing posts. Hence, engagement may take place and differ between different situations, depending on how people use the platforms. Also, the type of device used to get into the platforms may also affect the level of engagement of users (Muntinga, Moorman, and Smit 2011).

Engaging consumers with social media content related to the brand effectively may further improve the images of the brand since it can positively enhance consumer acceptance to the messages, attitude and behaviors of the brand (Schivinski, Christodoulides, and Dabrowski 2016).

Choosing the brands and products that are recommended by social media influencers which match the ideal self of consumers enables them to get some of the paramount meanings and relevancies that these influencers demonstrate and include them in the process of building, keeping and improving their self- concepts (Escalas and Bettman 2017; McCracken 1989).

2.3.3 Parasocial Relationship

Lee and Watkins (2016) define parasocial relationship as a mock and phony friendship, i.e. pseudo- friendship. Horton and Wohl (1956) suggest the parasocial relationship is a kind of psychological association between a performer and an audience. This affection and friendship is not real and is built via the imagination of the audience. Audiences can construct parasocial relationships with social media influencers in the same manner as with celebrities.

Previous studies argue that repeated and continued exposure to the personality social media influencer is a paramount factor in forming parasocial relationships (Chung and Cho 2017). Followers regard an influencer as a credible or trustworthy resource for purchase information after being repeatedly exposed to the influencer (Lee and Watkins 2016; Colliander and Dahlen 2011).

Lou and Yuan (2019) demonstrate that parasocial relationships and interests of followers in products promoted by influencers are positively related. Since followers develop their intimacy and favorable internal relationship with influencers, they may finally take the advice of those influencers in a serious manner. Xiao and Zhang (2016) suggest that it is a feature of the digital celebrity economy when advertisers make good use of these relationships and level of influence. Hence, parasocial relationships can partly show the persuasion power of influencers over followers regarding the effectiveness of endorsement (Hwang and Zhang 2018).

Aside from social identification, which is an internalization process in which people identify with a social group, (Tajfel and Turner 1986), the seeming face-to-face and one-sided quasi-interactions between a media viewer and a media character are known as parasocial identification. (Horton and Wohl 1956). It refers to imagined exchanges between a media viewer and a media figure, which leads to the establishment of parasocial connections. (Rubin and Perse 1987). According to Nordlund (1978), if people's fundamental demands for companionship or interpersonal relationships aren't met to a decent amount in their social lives, they're more inclined to satisfy them in other ways.

The premise that people use the same cognitive processes to evaluate media characters as they do to judge other persons in real life legitimizes the practice of parasocial identification. (Rubin and Perse 1987). McQuail et al. (1972) stated that a media viewer first evaluates a media character's personality before viewing him or her as a social surrogate. In this sense, both the desire to alleviate loneliness and the reliance on media consumption lead a media watcher to develop one-sided parasocial identification with a fictional character. (Giles 2002; Giles and Maltby 2004)

Based on Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory, the identification process is started because of a perceived image-congruence between a person and a model, such as a celebrity, TV personality, or social media influencer, to mention a few examples. The higher an individual's image-congruence perception, the more likely he or she is to identify with the target model. Few research have demonstrated the impact of celebrity endorser identity on customer behavior in the social media world, notwithstanding the limited number of studies concentrating on the endorsement of social media influencers. (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017; Evans et al. 2017). Twitter users who highly identified with a celebrity endorser were found to be socially affected by the celebrity, resulting in a high level of product participation and intent to share marketing content (Jin and Phua 2014)

This finding is consistent with findings from early studies on traditional media, which showed that parasocial identification has a mediating role in influencing how consumers carry out a modeled action advised by a celebrity (Basil 1996). As a result, we anticipate that an influencer with a similar image to a customer will evoke

significant parasocial identification from the consumer, resulting in a beneficial impact on overall perception and interaction with brand material on social media.

Previous research has explored the imagined interactions between a media viewer and a traditional media figure. In a similar line, the data suggested that parasocial identification may occur in a social media situation. Despite the fact that customers do not genuinely know influencers, they feel as though they do through social media interactions, creating interpersonal bonds with them. A higher degree of self-influencer congruence leads to increased parasocial identification with the social media influencer, according to the current study.

Furthermore, the relationship between self-influencer congruence and endorsement effectiveness is mediated by the customers' parasocial identity. Our findings shed light on how endorsement works in today's social media landscape. According to social cognitive theory (Bandura 1986), individuals validate the attitude or conduct espoused by social media influencers. When customers find an influencer's image appealing and relatable, they may want to emulate the influencer and improve their ideal self-image by purchasing and using the product recommended by the influencer.

2.4 Content Features of SMIs - Attractiveness and Credibility

The attractiveness of social media influencers is important in attracting new followers. People like influencers who are visually appealing or have a good demeanor, which could include someone who is neither impolite nor disrespectful (Vrontis et al., 2021). By sharing fascinating material with their followers, they will be able to communicate with them more frequently over time. A good-looking influencer is more likely to be persuasive, successful, and powerful. As a result, s/he is likely to have a huge number of followers.

Influencers must be trustworthy since it is the foundation of their long-term connections with their communities, audiences, and brands (University Canada West, 2020). Influencers acquire trust when they inform customers about paid content and when they support a product that matches their expertise, knowledge, and reputation. In other words, influencers' openness and transparency establish trust. The term "trustworthiness" is strongly linked to "honesty," which refers to the consumer's confidence in the endorser.

2.4.1 Source Credibility

Source credibility is ordinarily measured based on three aspects. First, attractiveness which is the influence liking a communicator has on the validity of a message (McGuire 1985). Second, expertise which is the degree in which a communicator is recognized as a source of authentic contention (Hovland, Janis, and Kelley 1953). Third, trustworthiness which is the sincerity and reliability of a communicator (Erdogan 1999).

The credibility of a communicator or message source is crucial to its persuasiveness (Hovland and Weiss 1951). Hall (2015) referred to social media influencers as "micro-endorsers" (in contrast to "larger" celebrity endorsing celebrities). In ads, endorsers perform the same function as message providers in the process of persuasion. Earlier scholars measured the influence of a source's influence on the persuasiveness of communications based on its credibility (e.g., Giffin 1967; Hovland and Weiss 1951; McGuire 1985). Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953) established two criteria for determining the legitimacy of a source: knowledge and dependability. Source expertise is a source's competency or qualification, including the source's knowledge or abilities, to make certain assertions about a certain subject or issue (McCroskey 1966). Source credibility refers to a recipient's opinion of a source as honest, sincere, or trustworthy (Giffin 1967). McGuire (1985) offered a third element of source credibility: physical attractiveness or likeability.

Similarly, Ohanian (1990) described source credibility as a three-dimensional construct, building on strands from prior literature that encompassed dependability, knowledge, and attractiveness. Previous research on source credibility have examined the impact of endorsers on customers (e.g., Cunningham and Bright 2012; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015; Guido and Peluso 2009; Lee and Koo 2015).

While the existing literature has offered support for the importance of source credibility in the research on endorsement, this method has been considered to merely measure the effectiveness of endorsements on his or her qualities and omit other factors in the process of endorsement (McCracken 1989). Lou and Yuan (2019) highlight the relevance of message content, source credibility and homophilic bonding in influencer marketing. Wu et al. (2016) investigate the importance of source credibility in affecting the perception of consumers of advertisement. Prior studies on the endorsement of influencers have mainly emphasized on the source credibility of social media influencers. In these studies, influencers are viewed as more favorable in terms of trustworthiness and congruence to the followers as compared to the traditional celebrities (Lyons and Henderson 2005; Grave 2017).

2.4.2 Source Expertise

Source expertise means the credibility level the source has. Expertise shows the degree in which a consumer is accomplished to discuss a subject (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). For example, source qualifications suggested by Berlo, Lemert, and Mertz (1969), competence, education, expertise, knowledge, and ability to share knowledge (Hinkin and Schriesheim 1989). This can be explained by the informational power that the social media influencers

hold since they may have some knowledge that others do not have (Deutsch and Gerard 1955). Social media influencers may have specific knowledge in a certain area so they can become experts in that area (French and Raven 1959). Endorsers are highly likely regarded as experts if they show their competencies and knowledge in the relevant dimension (Homer and Kahle 1990)

Source expertise inspires the change in attitude (Hovland and Weiss 1951), confidence level and positivity (Tormala, Brinol, and Petty 2007) and change in behavior (Crisci and Kassino 1973) and contributes to a higher level of persuasion (Petty and Wegener 1998). The increase in level of expertise will enhance the level of persuasion, which in turn will lead to an increase in the level of processing of the advertising message (Homer and Kahle 1990). In the context of influencer marketing, the increase in the level of expertise will increase the motive to buy the products (Uribe, Buzeta, and Velasquez 2016). Consumers may prefer the products which are recommended or used by the social media influencers with a high level of expertise since they identify the message as more convincing, plausible, and trustworthy (Kiecker and Cowles 2002).

2.4.3 Persuasion Knowledge

Persuasion knowledge is defined as “consumers’ knowledge and beliefs of various advertising-related issues, such as the goals and tactics marketers use to persuade them, the extent to which consumers find these techniques effective and appropriate, but also personal beliefs about how to cope with these persuasion tactics and goals” (Boerman et al. 2018, p. 83). It is about the understanding of consumers on objectives and strategies used by advertisers to induce them to buy the goods and services.

Eisend (2015) suggests that persuasion knowledge of consumers will undermine the effectiveness of promotional messages and create resistance to the promotion efforts made by the marketers. Therefore, persuasion knowledge and persuasion effectiveness are negatively related. Logically, if the influencers directly reveal their sponsorship with brands, their power to convince consumers may be undermined (Boerman et al. 2018), and consumers’ intention to purchase intentions may decrease. However, parasocial relationships may enhance the influencers’ ability to induce followers to buy goods and services. For example, if the persuasion knowledge is derived from the social media influencer who has a close parasocial relationship with the consumer, the convincing power of the influence is in general higher. Zhang (2018) has studied the purchase intention of video viewers of YouTube influencers. Even if the influencers have revealed the sponsorship of brands, the viewers were still eager to buy the sponsored product when they have developed intimacies with influencers.

On the contrary, Yang and Ha (2021) demonstrate that persuasion knowledge may not negatively affect influencers’ persuasive power. Their study finds that followers who have high persuasion knowledge are inclined to have higher purchase intentions than followers who have low persuasion knowledge. It can be attributed to the close parasocial relationship between influencers and followers.

Actually, when consumers recognize the persuasion attempts of influencers, they will still buy the goods or services endorsed in order to show their support to the pseudo friends via purchase. This shows that followers approve of the influencers receiving sponsorships from brands as a means of compensation to the influencers’ effort in providing entertainment and enjoyment to them. The followers will in turn buy the endorsed product in order to show their support to the influencers.

The effectiveness of brand endorsement is influenced by perceived endorser motive, which is determined to be a crucial determinant (Carr and Hayes 2014; Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). Its origins can be found in attribution theory, which states that people draw causal inferences about other people's acts by assigning thoughts, perceptions, and intentions to them. (Kelley 1972). Consumers' causal inferences or opinions about why a celebrity or speaker recommends a product are referred to as perceived endorsement motive. (Rifon et al. 2004). Consumers make correspondent inferences when judging celebrity-endorsed advertising, according to previous study, even if they are less likely to have a detailed understanding of the endorser's goals. (Cronley et al. 1999).

Consumers want to know why the endorser agreed to be linked with the product in the first place. According to Heider (1958), there are two potential reasons for an endorser's product promotion: (1) personal elements within the endorser's control, and (2) situational factors outside the endorser's control. For example, unless the endorsers have explicitly stated that the brand recommendations are their own objective opinions and not a result of monetary incentive or other forms of compensation from a sponsor, consumers may discount the intrinsic motive behind the brand endorsement, such as his or her belief in the qualities or features of the product (Kelley 1972). In light of this, studies in the field of celebrity endorsement show that when analyzing advertising messages, consumers cognitively infer a reason for the endorsement activity. (Silvera and Austad 2004). The perceived endorser motive examines whether customers believe an endorser's intention is selfless or self-serving (Drumwright 1996). Consumers may infer that celebrities are aiming to improve their own image, reputation, or popularity by associating with a well-known business if they have a self-serving purpose. Consumers who feel celebrities' motives are altruistic, on the other hand, may assume that they actually care about their fans' well-being and want to provide them with useful information.

Previous study has shown that perceived endorser purpose has a variety of consequences on brand outcomes. Kim, Lee, and Kim (2017) discovered that the connection between brand attitude and behavioral intention is moderated by perceived endorser motive. The congruence effects on sponsor credibility were revealed to be mediated by perceived endorser motive (Rifon et al. 2004). While previous study focused on the impacts of altruistic motive on consumers' brand assessments, based on the reviewed literature, it is acceptable to suggest that the effects of self-serving motive also play a role in this process. In particular, a misalignment between an endorser's image and the consumer's ideal self-image would prompt skepticism in the consumer's mind about the endorsement's motivation. (Hastie 1984). As a result, they label the motivation as self-serving, leading to increased resistance to persuasive messaging. (Petty, Cacioppo, and Goldman 1981).

When these factors are considered together and applied to the current study, it is predicted that a perceived self-serving motive will reduce the impact of parasocial identification on consumers' evaluations of the endorsement. Skepticism of an influencer's motivation for recommending a brand is said to improve information processing (Rifon et al. 2004). Consumers may create more thought processing and so pay more attention to the statements in persuasive communications when they consider why social media celebrities advocate products or businesses. Counter-arguments about the persuasive messages may emerge as their cognitive elaboration rises, reducing the effectiveness of the endorsement. (Petty, socialCacioppo, and Schumann 1983)

2.4.4 Customer Perceived Value

All marketing decisions are based on the customer's perception of value. Smith (2011) discovered that customer perceived value is a complicated and context-specific phenomenon that still requires exploration. Smith, for example, examines functional, , and emotional values in virtual communities. In the tourism industry, Morris (2009) distinguishes between functional, social, and epistemic values. In the hospitality business, Dwivedi et al. (2020) stress the importance of utilitarian and hedonic values. A multidimensional construct incorporating multiple factors of consumer value perception as a ratio between the value acquired by customers and the expenditures paid while purchasing and using a service (Royle & Laing, 2014). Consumer value is frequently divided into utilitarian and hedonic values (Babin et al., 1994; Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Overby and Lee, 2006), which are also relevant in the context of internet use (e.g. Chiu et al., 2014; Liu et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2018; Zheng et al., 2019).

2.4.4.1 Utilitarian Value

The utilitarian value of the internet entails its purposeful use (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Kim et al., 2013). When it comes to using the internet, consumers with utilitarian values are more task-oriented (Babin et al., 1994; Overby and Lee, 2006) and focused on problem-solving (Liu et al., 2020; Zheng et al., 2019). Given the internet's prominence as a source of information (Bobkowski, 2015; Hofer et al., 2019; Ratchford et al., 2001), the current study suggests that utilitarian value is frequently attained through the acquisition of information on the internet (Go et al., 2016; Khan, 2017; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Salehan et al., 2017), including information seeking, learning new things, and comprehending what happens in the world

2.4.4.2 Hedonic Value

By contrast, hedonic value indicates that consumers place a premium on the enjoyable components of the purchasing process (Babin et al., 1994; Overby and Lee, 2006; Zheng et al., 2019). Hedonic consumers are more experience-oriented (Mathwick et al., 2001; Salehan et al., 2017) and place a higher premium on "fun, fantasy, and enjoyment" when using the internet (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Kim et al., 2013). Thus, this study indicates that the internet frequently satisfies users' different requirements by delivering hedonic value (Go et al., 2016; Liu et al., 2016; Mathwick et al., 2001; Zheng et al., 2019), such as passing time, getting enjoyment, and avoiding reality. Hughes et al. (2019) suggest that the hedonic value may offer a reason for the users of social media platform, i.e. Facebook to share information or give positive comments to the post or message with a high level of commercial intention. It confirms that hedonic messages have a compensatory role in reducing the negative impact of undesired messages. They also suggest that hedonic elements will enhance social transmission and virality of the message shown online.

2.4.4.3 Social Value

With the advancement of information and communication technologies, the Web 2.0 era has seen a rise in social internet usage (Bargh and McKenna, 2004). For instance, when people use this technology, they tend to communicate with one another, establish social ties, and preserve interpersonal relationships (Go et al., 2016; Salehan et al., 2017; Stafford et al., 2004). Due to the fact that the internet has evolved into a social environment, social value in this study refers to how people connect with one another through their use of the internet (Liu et al., 2016; Papacharissi and Rubin, 2000; Salehan et al., 2017), which includes maintaining friendships, assisting others, and expressing their opinions.

2.5 Customer Loyalty

Oliver's (1997) model explicitly examines the conditions under which loyalty originates and the elements that may obstruct it. Despite situational influences and marketing efforts that could cause switching behavior, Oliver (1997, p. 392) defined loyalty as a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, resulting in repetitive same-brand or same-brand-set purchasing. He proposed a four-stage loyalty model, meaning that distinct components of loyalty evolve sequentially rather than simultaneously (Oliver 1999).

This model goes beyond clarity by incorporating an observable activity, such as actual purchasing behavior, into the loyalty sequence "cognitive-affective-conative." Consumers can be loyal at any stage of the attitude development structure, according to Oliver (1999). Various elements impacting loyalty can be identified at each stage of loyalty.

Cognitive loyalty. It is the first stage of loyalty, during which the customer's loyalty is determined by the brand attribute information available to them in contrast to other brands. It is mostly concerned with the brand's performance. In nature, this stage is shallow. At this point, information about the offering, such as price, quality, and so on, determines consumer loyalty. Because it is oriented towards the expenses and benefits of an offering rather than the brand itself, it is the weakest sort of loyalty. As a result, once customers consider alternative solutions to be superior in terms of cost-benefit ratio, they are more inclined to switch (Kalyanaram and Little 1994; Sivakumar and Raj 1997). The consumer's evaluative response to experience, namely the perceived performance of an offering in relation to price (= value), has a significant impact on cognitive loyalty.

Affective loyalty. It is a term used to describe how someone feels about something. Affective loyalty refers to having a positive attitude toward a particular brand or product. Attitude is a product of intellect (e.g., expectation). Confirmation of expectations leads to satisfaction, which in turn leads to affective loyalty (Bitner 1990). "The consumer's fulfillment response, the degree to which the level of fulfillment is pleasurable or unpleasant," defined Oliver (1997). (p. 28). Satisfaction is a global affect evaluation or feeling state that may be predicted from the cognitive component of the evaluation, namely perceived performance. Affective loyalty deteriorates as well. The degradation is mostly due to increased competitive attractiveness (Sambandam and Lord 1995) and greater liking for competitive brands, which is transmitted, for example, through imagery and association employed in competitive communications (Oliver 1999).

Conative loyalty. It is the third phase of loyalty which implies brand-specific commitment to repurchase. It is related to the intention to rebuy and motivation. It is experienced when the customer focuses on wanting to rebuy the brand. Conative loyalty emphasizes that attitudinal devotion must be accompanied by a desire to carry out a specific action, such as repurchasing a specific brand. It is more powerful than affective loyalty, but it also has flaws. Consistent delivery failures are a particularly powerful element in eroding customer loyalty. When customers face frequent service failures, they are more likely to try other offerings. Despite the fact that the customer is conatively loyal, he or she has not established the resolve to ignore rival options (Oliver 1999).

Action loyalty. According to action control studies, not all intentions are translated into action (Kuhl and Beckmann 1985). In accordance with this line of research, the three prior loyalty levels may lead to a readiness to act (in this case, to buy). This readiness is accompanied by the consumer's willingness to look for the preferred offering despite the significant effort required. Alternatives to competitive offerings are not evaluated. This repurchase facilitator is known as action inertia (Oliver 1999). Action loyalty refers to a customer who buys a product from a specific brand despite all odds and at any expense. Customers like these are the ultimate goal for any business. It is a loyalty phase in which a customer's preference for a brand is created, ensuring the customer's repurchase behavior. It is the dedication to the act of repurchasing. It is accompanied by a desire to overcome any hurdles that may stand in the way of the act. Action is experienced as a result of engaging both of these states at the same time. When this interaction is repeated, action inertia develops, leading to repurchasing behavior.

Due to the affective factors between SMIs and their followers, the personality traits of SMIs significantly contribute to the improvement of client loyalty. Pham et al. (2001) proposed that regardless of involvement level or product category, consumers' information processing is dominated by affect. In a series of tests, Pham et al. (2001) evaluated consumers' emotional and rational responses (i.e., affect and cognition) by exposing them to products depicted in newsmagazines and television commercials of varying product categories and participation levels. Despite the moderating effects of participation and product categories, their findings indicate that affective responses influence attitudes more than reason-based responses. The dominance of affect in information processing may be explained by Forgas' (1995) affect infusion model, which proposes that "affectively loaded information exerts an influence and becomes incorporated into the judgmental process, entering the judge's deliberations and eventually coloring the judgmental outcome" (p. 39). Positive attitude formation is associated with observable affect infusion.

Customers who are loyal are assets that are prioritized by both large and small businesses in order to increase profits in a sustainable way (Morris, 2009). Low yield causes business owners to rethink their customer retention strategies (Kannan & Li, 2017). In a competitive market, loyal customers are essential (Bala & Verma, 2018). The fundamental reason for this is because devoted customers are always happy to talk about and recommend the products they use to other potential customers. Consumer loyalty has a favorable impact on the economy, as seen by

premium prices and cost efficiency. It is the major choice in companies as a priority for high profit and long-term business performance, according to Kannan & Li (2017).

To gain consumer trust, the organization must emphasize change and strive to provide the best service possible. Tiago and Verssimo (2014) state that purchasing begins with a belief in the brand name and emblem, rather than a purchase based solely on the product.

Because the business world has changed fundamentally in the form of a shift in the market system from exchanging goods to exchanging services, interactivity, connectivity, and continuous relationships, businesspeople must build intense communication to create and maintain relationships with loyal customers (Morris, 2009).

Technological progress, new communication channels, and funding for media facilities are the main forces behind this (Goldfarb & Tucker, 2019). Pieiro-Otero & Martnez-Rolán (2016) link this to how organizations engage with customers and save money by transferring interactions from traditional communication means like television and sales to electronic media like the web and email. These digital channels result in cost savings and increased interaction between consumers and businesses (Smith, 2011).

Companies can use digital marketing to communicate more closely with customers, allowing them to establish positive relationships and lower expenses proportionately while doing so. Consumers are shown new information, such as brands and the best time to buy and use things, as examples of interactions that occur through digital channels. Newsletters, routine service, recurring buy reminders, and information about new items are all examples of ways to disseminate product knowledge to coworkers. According to Bala and Verma (2018), there is currently a scarcity of research on consumer loyalty. Consumer satisfaction studies alone are insufficient to build long-term customer loyalty. Client contentment, the argument goes, is still easy to spot and predict, whereas customer loyalty is far more difficult.

Customer loyalty is an intangible asset that has a major impact on the earnings of many businesses, according to a variety of sources (Bowen & Chen, 2001). Various definitions of client loyalty have been discussed by marketing academics. Marketing researchers have begun to use diverse definitions of customer loyalty depending on the research context's objectives and subject.

Customer loyalty, for example, is defined by (Uncles et al., 2003) as a sense of attachment to someone who is loyal to the object of loyalty, and not just in business transactions. Customer loyalty has the impact of improving the company's growth potential by creating switching behavior by staying out of view of situational influence and marketing efforts. Many marketing researchers have taken advantage of Oliver's concept of client loyalty, according to multiple literature evaluations (Evanschitzky et al., 2012).

Customer loyalty can be divided into two categories: active loyalty and passive loyalty. Active and passive loyal consumers are the two categories of loyal customers. Both are vital, but with the proliferation of internet and social media applications, enthusiastic loyalty has become much more critical. Because of its importance, customer loyalty continues to attract the attention of academics. Customer loyalty's antecedents are understood through awareness, and the interaction between these characteristics is still viewed as a study priority (Herhausen et al., 2020). Customers in the market are still expected to pay attention to marketing researchers as they investigate their requirements, wants, and factors that impact each other's assessments, attitudes, choices, and purchasing behavior.

Customer loyalty, according to Bowen & Chen (2001), is an important source of numerous competitive benefits for different organizations. Customer loyalty, in particular, can be seen as one of the most important success factors for other market enterprises. Intelligent marketing techniques and approaches will also be developed by marketing professionals in order to keep loyal customers. Digital marketing has a tremendous impact on increasing customer loyalty, i.e. meeting the specific needs of the most important clients. Skills require the formation of relationship marketing with social media so that consumers form relationships with brands.

This study investigates the connections formed through digital marketing in promoting a company's brands and products to ensure their effectiveness. The implications of this study lead to the conclusion that digital marketing is a tool that may be employed in modern-day marketing operations conducted over the Internet. There is a dynamic in the psychology of the particular client, specifically the type of sensation seeking, that ultimately modifies the road from contentment and perceived value to loyalty.

According to a study (Yadav et al., 2015), perceived value has a favorable impact on consumer loyalty. Perceived value is a crucial driving force and a strong predictor of consumer loyalty, according to Yadav et al. (2015). Customers will be more loyal if they receive a sense of value that corresponds to their expectations. Client satisfaction has a positive and considerable impact on customer loyalty, according to Uncles et al. (2003)

The company's mission is to provide customer pleasure. Customers will be happy if the items or services they receive fit their needs (Bowen & Chen, 2001). Customer loyalty to the company, goods, or services can be formed by achieving customer pleasure. Three prevalent conceptualizations of loyalty exist, according to Uncles et al. (2003): as an attitude that leads to a relationship with the brand; as revealed behavior; and as buying modified by individual qualities, circumstances, and/or the purchase situation.

Loyalty is defined, in accordance with Oliver (1997), as a deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a preferred product or service in the future, resulting in repetitive same-brand or same-brand set purchases, despite any situational influences or marketing efforts that might lead to switching behavior. This term is used

because it encompasses both the mental and behavioral components of loyalty. Customer loyalty is described as a "deeply held commitment to repurchase or repatronize a favorite product or service in the future" (Reichheld, 1992). The number of recurring purchases can be used to assess the construct (Zeithaml, et al., 1996). There are three basic perspectives on loyalty: (1) an attitude that leads to a brand relationship, (2) favorable behavior, and (3) purchasing that is moderated by individual characteristics, circumstances, and the purchase situation (Uncles, Dowling, & Hammond, 2003).

Customer loyalty also includes word-of-mouth referrals and the propensity to buy again (Dimitriadis, 2006). Customer loyalty has been compared to behavioral intention in earlier research. They measured passengers' repurchase intent, word of mouth, and feedback in three dimensions (Huang, 2009; Park, Robertson, & Wu, 2005; Saha & Theingi, 2009). As a result, the behavioral intent resembles that of a devoted consumer.

Client loyalty can minimize the cost of switching airline services, hence airline companies offer a variety of marketing programs to encourage customer loyalty. As a result, they fight fiercely to improve customer satisfaction in order to gain client loyalty by delivering high-quality service. Thus, in order to boost the profitability of the low-cost airline sector, customer loyalty should be factored into the research.

2.6 Choice Imitation

Choice imitation exists in two levels: Product level and brand level. In the choice- imitation- product level, the followers are more likely to buy the same goods or services that are recommended by the SMIs after they saw the messages posted. It can be shown by the purchase intention stimulated by the SMIs. In the choice- imitation- brand level, the followers are willing to buy the goods or services of the same brand that are endorsed by the SMIs.

Purchase intentions are defined by Spears and Singh (2004) as "a person's deliberate intent to purchase a brand" (p. 56). De Magistris and Gracia (2008) thought that purchase intentions preceded actual purchasing behavior because purchase intentions reflect the possibility or likelihood that consumers will be inclined to purchase a specific product. Advertisers and researchers frequently use purchase intentions to measure consumers' product perceptions (Spears and Singh 2004). Prior research has demonstrated that consumers' perceptions of commercials and brands, electronic word of mouth (eWOM), and/or brand awareness impact their purchasing inclinations (e.g., Alhabash et al. 2015; Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Newell 2002; Lee and Koo 2015). Particularly, Dao and colleagues (2014) found that perceived advertising value increased online purchase intentions among Vietnamese social media users.

Purchase intention is one form of behavioral responses that demonstrates the intent of consumers to buy a particular goods and services. Aluri, Slevitch, and Larzelere (2016) suggest that the purchase intent is influenced by subjective judgment like attitudes, perceptions, and satisfaction of individuals. According to Shin and Biocca (2017), purchase intention is an important indicator of purchase behavior.

Previous research shows that fulfillment and purchase intention are positively related. Cheung and Lee (2009) suggest that social motives and customer needs are positively related to user satisfaction. Social interaction can substantially anticipate people's intention of use and purchase (Stafford and Stafford 2001). Perceived enjoyment and satisfaction of websites anticipate satisfaction and purchase intention of users on shopping websites (Cheung, Chiu, and Lee 2011). However, Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) argue that entertainment motive would not directly contribute to purchase intentions even if the motive to seek information could positively influence purchase intentions of consumers.

Choice imitation is more comprehensive than purchase intention in the sense that it also involves the enhanced favorability to the brand. On one hand, the incentive to buy the recommended products or services increases, resulting from the augmented customer loyalty. On the other hand, the followers may develop intimacy with the brand in which they may help share the news about the company via their social media platforms, i.e. electronic word of mouth (eWOM).

2.7 Moderator of Demographic Factors

In recent years, moderator factors have gained in popularity in the marketing literature, and experts have recognized their usefulness in forecasting consumer behavior (e.g., Baron and Kenny, 1986; McMullan, 2005; Sharma et al., 1981).

Particularly with regard to the customer satisfaction construct and the satisfaction-loyalty link, marketing researchers have shown a growing interest in moderator variables (e.g., Bloemer and de Ruyter, 1998; Bolton et al., 2004; Evanschitzky and Wunderlich, 2006; Feick, 2001; Olsen et al., 2005; Patterson, 2000; Ranaweera et al., 2005).

2.7.1 Definition of Moderator

Modifiers are variables that can change the direction of the relationship between independent and dependent variables. The use of moderators is underrepresented in MIS research; yet, demographic variables are critical in describing the effect and direction of various connections in the marketing industry (Roslow, Li, & Nicholls, 2000).

The value of moderators stems from their potential to improve knowledge of the linkages between relevant independent and dependent variables, as well as seemingly established associations. For example, customer satisfaction is supposed to lead to customer loyalty, hence its importance in maintaining effective customer relationships has been contested (e.g., Oliva et al., 1992; Oliver, 1999; Reichheld, 1993).

Demographic characteristics were investigated in a prior study to determine the effects of the association between demographic factors and satisfaction, as well as the moderating influence between service marketing mix and contentment (Charoensettasilp & Wu, 2013). They had a direct effect on satisfaction, but they were not moderating factors between service marketing mix and satisfaction, according to the findings.

Serenkom et al. (2006) investigated the impact of moderating variables such as age, income, and gender (Serenko, Turel, & Yol, 2006). The demographic variables as moderators have an influence, and they are necessary to characterize the phenomena of some relationship between independent and dependent variables, according to the findings.

2.7.2 Gender as a Moderator

Male and female internet users may have distinct communication styles (Chang, 2016; Kimbrough et al., 2013) and decision-making processes (Guadagno et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2017). For instance, male users are frequently task-oriented, whereas female users are frequently relationship-oriented (Chang, 2016; Guadagno et al., 2011; Kimbrough et al., 2013). When they use the internet, these characteristics will almost certainly impact their online sharing behavior. Thus, the importance of gender variations in online content sharing may provide a contingent view for the cognitive-affective-conative paradigm.

Given that male and female internet users frequently have distinct decision-making patterns (e.g. Chang, 2016; Guadagno et al., 2011; Kimbrough et al., 2013; Wang et al., 2017), understanding the moderating role of gender differences in determining online content sharing will assist digital marketing practitioners in effectively implementing and managing their UGC practises.

To begin, this study predicts that male users will have a stronger positive association between life happiness and online content sharing than female users will. According to social role theory, individuals frequently conform to the normative expectations associated with their gender roles (Eagly, 1987, 1997). Men frequently engage in task-oriented activities on the internet in response to these expectations, whereas women spend their time engaging in social engagement and relationship maintenance (Chang, 2016; Kimbrough et al., 2013). Because male users utilize online content sharing to reflect their achievement of life goals, they are more likely to share work-related content on the internet (Hargitt and Walejko, 2008; Lu et al., 2016). Male users appear to have a greater impact on online content sharing than female users.

In marketing studies, gender, like age, is commonly utilized as a moderator variable (Saad and Gill 2000). In addition to its likely direct impact on outcome variables like loyalty, gender is frequently used as a moderator variable in marketing in general and consumer behavior in particular (Fournier 1998; Korgaonkar et al. 1985; Odekerken-Schroder et al. 2000). However, according to my review of the research, gender is rarely explored in studies of how SMI personality traits influence customer loyalty.

Men are more inclined than women to take risks (Powell and Ansic, 1997; for a discussion of gender differences in shopping risk, see also Garbarino and Strahilevitz, 2004), according to social role theory (Archer, 1996; Eagly, 1987), because men are socially expected to engage in hazardous behavior.

Men who follow internalized gender roles may be less inclined to remain loyal when their satisfaction levels alter because switching providers and trying something new is riskier. Women, on the other hand, are expected to react less strongly to changes in satisfaction levels.

Gender moderates the relationship between various characteristics of satisfaction and selected measures of loyalty, according to empirical data in the context of loyalty. According to Mittal and Kamakura (2001) and Homburg and Giering (2001), men have a stronger association between satisfaction and repurchase behavior than women: Men are more likely than women to repurchase a product if they are pleased with it.

Most studies looked at the differences between men and women based on general quantitative analysis results, such as the differences between genders in terms of results on impulse buying scales or the number of impulsive purchases made in a certain period of time (Bellenger, Robertson & Hirschman, 1978; Dittmar, 1989; Dittmar & Beattie, 1998; Dittmar, Beattie & Friese, 1995, 1996; Dittmar & Drury, 2000; Verplanken & Herabadi, 2001).

According to conventional thinking, men dislike shopping and are uninterested in doing so; convincing them to be patient companions for women while shopping is difficult. Women appear to like shopping more than males; they enjoy wandering carefully through stores, inspecting shelves and hangers, comparing prices, items, and values, conversing with salespeople and other customers, asking questions, trying on things, and finally purchasing. Nonetheless, these viewpoints are supported not only by prejudices, but also by study findings and literature on consumer behavior.

Women own the vast majority of retail merchandise, particularly when it comes to fundamental necessities (e.g. Bakewell & Mitchel, 2004; Dholakia, 1999; Kitlinska & Strzalka, 2010; Kollat & Willet, 1967).

Women are frequently quite keen to purchase, even for mundane items that do not provide them with any special pleasure or sensation (Dholakia, 1999; Underhill, 2000). According to Underhill (2000), shopping allowed people to get out and might be used as an antidote to loneliness or monotonous home life.

Men tend to walk faster through shopping malls than women, spend less time looking about, and find it difficult to focus their attention on something they don't want to buy. They, on the other hand, acquire needs much faster than women, do not enjoy seeking, selecting, and experimenting, and are more susceptible to children's cries and sales incentives (Underhill, 2000).

When men are under cognitive overload, research has revealed that they commonly use simple tactics (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2004). Men simplify the shopping process when compared to women by paying attention to a lesser number of information sources (Laroche, Saad, Clevelan & Browne, 2000). Men are better at buying durable products like vehicles, tools, stereos, and computers than women are at preparing a meal, creating a cake, getting a professional haircut, and applying makeup.

Shopping is a transformative experience for women, a way of becoming a better, more ideal version of themselves; it includes emotional and psychological components that males do not have (Underhill, 2000). As a result, women are more likely than men to purchase emotionally and engagedly, whereas men are less connected with shopping and more puzzled by over-choice (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2004). Furthermore, according to certain results, women value symbolic (hedonic) as well as utilitarian (functional and financial) motives and criteria more than males (Dholakia, 1999; Gsiorowska, 2003).

To summarize, women and men have radically opposing values when it comes to "effective" shopping (Bakewell & Mitchell, 2003, 2004, 2006), and these disparities are reflected in the amount of time spent browsing and searching for multiple options. Men like to buy quickly and avoid exerting as much effort as possible, but women enjoy the act of shopping and are willing to invest a significant amount of time and energy on it. Women also shop for longer and are more involved in the process than males (Dholakia, 1999). Women and men differ not only in terms of shopping frequency, but also in terms of purchasing style, according to these data. Women appear to place a greater emphasis on the content of purchasing behavior and are more concerned with the purchasing process, whereas men appear to be more goal-oriented and concerned with the outcome.

Coley and Burgess (2003) and Gsiorowska (2003) conducted the only two studies that focused on the differences between men and women in terms of the structure and psychological background of impulse buying (2003). The structure of impulse purchasing differs between genders, according to Coley and Burgess (2003). Men were associated with low reasoning and quick action, but no emotional arousal, whereas women were associated with positive affect activation and no significant drop in reasoning.

In addition, as Gsiorowska (2003) discovered, the structure of impulse purchase inclination factors changes between men and women. This propensity was linked to emotions obtained from the shopping experience or from owning new items in the case of women. This group's impulse buying tendency is linked to a high level of impulsive experience seeking (Zuckerman et al., 1993) and materialism, as well as characteristics of money views anchored in the now and the future (Gsiorowska, 2003). As a result, it will be linked to the chosen content of behavior rather than its formal features.

At the same time, because men (during shopping) want to find what they need with the least amount of effort and finish it quickly, impulse buying would imply making a quick decision with little thought, as well as the quickest possible consumption of the purchased goods, with no special affective engagement. Men's impulse buying was previously linked to present temporal orientation, the desire for rapid gratification, and a focus on benefit obtained from what they bought (Gsiorowska, 2003). Furthermore, when compared to women, men's impulsive buying tendencies were more closely linked to characteristics of present-oriented money views (Gsiorowska, 2003). According to the aforementioned theoretical and empirical studies, women's impulsive buying has a stimulating, emotive nature, while men's impulse buying has a functional, formal character.

According to the arguments above, males are more inclined to take risks than women (Powell and Ansic 1997) because they are socially expected to do so (social role theory) and because this conduct has provided men an advantage in natural selection (evolutionary psychology). Men should be less inclined to remain loyal if their satisfaction levels fluctuate because switching providers and trying something new is more risky. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be less affected by fluctuations in satisfaction than males. The relationship between various characteristics of satisfaction and selected measures of loyalty has been found to be moderated by gender, according to empirical research in the context of loyalty. Mittal and Kamakura (2001), for example, discovered that men have a stronger association with repurchase activity than women. In a similar vein, Homburg and Giering (2001) provided some evidence for a moderating influence. They were able to demonstrate that males are more likely than women to repurchase a product if they are satisfied with it.

2.7.3 Income Level as a Moderator

Consumer loyalty is linked to income, according to a large body of research (Crask and Reynolds, 1978; Korgaonkar et al., 1985; Zeithaml, 1985), and we predict the link between satisfaction and loyalty to be larger for low-income consumers than for higher-income consumers.

People with higher wealth have often obtained higher levels of education and process information better, which is relevant for two reasons (Farley, 1964; Walsh and Mitchell, 2005), which is in keeping with the theoretical explanation often presented to justify the moderating influence of education.

First, consumers with higher incomes have more options when they are unsatisfied or bored with a service provider. Low-income customers, on the other hand, are more likely to avoid search fees and stick with a service provider, even if their satisfaction levels fall. When it comes to switching service providers, low-income consumers face higher opportunity costs than high-income ones. As a result, sustaining an imperfect relationship may be preferable (in terms of overall utility) than looking for and transferring to a new service provider who may be even worse (i.e. give less satisfactory service) than the existing one.

Second, because income and education are linked, low-income consumers are more likely to avoid the "cost of thinking" (Shugan, 1980) by evaluating services and making purchasing decisions based on fewer information cues, such as contentment. Information processing and the application of additional information cues are inevitably involved in defection and the search for a new service provider, which low-income clients are generally driven to avoid.

As a result, a change in a low-income client's degree of pleasure will have a considerably greater impact on his or her level of loyalty than a higher-income consumer. The wealthier consumer will also look for evidence to base his repurchase (intention) on other than his current level of happiness.

2.7.4 Education Level as a Moderator

Prior study has also revealed a link between a consumer's educational background and his or her ethical thinking, beliefs, and attitudes (Rest and Thoma, 1985). There is evidence (e.g. Goolsby and Hunt, 1992) that consumers with higher education make more ethical decisions than those with lower education. This is consistent with Kohlberg's (1984) claim that education improves one's ability to make moral decisions.

This is because, while poorly educated people may be unable to analyze the complex relationships between the elements in a moral dilemma and thus recognize the potential consequences of a particular unethical action, higher-educated people have a better understanding of unethical behavior, a more complete understanding of its negative consequences, and are more sensitive to unethical practices (Goolsby and Hunt, 1992; Kohlberg, 1984). Based on the foregoing, one may expect a larger link between idealism and perceived marketing unethicality in higher-educated consumers, but a lesser link between egoism and perceived marketing unethicality in lower-educated consumers.

Suki (2011) did a study in Malaysia to see if gender, age, and education truly do have a role in online music adoption. Younger people under the age of 25, males, and those with a higher education level were shown to be more significantly influenced by perceived fun and considered ease of use when it came to internet music.

Early adopters, according to Rogers (1983), have more formal education than later adopters. Early technology users might be identified by their educational level (Im et al., 2003). According to Liebermann and Stashevsky (2002), users with a lower level of education perceive higher barriers to Internet and e-commerce use than users with a higher level of education. A higher educational level may lead to a stronger understanding of new technologies, speeding the early adoption of new technology.

According to Rhee and Kim (2004), people with a higher degree of education are more likely to utilize the Internet. Early adopters of new technologies have greater educational levels, according to Porter and Donthu (2006), whereas less-educated people have more technology anxiety, which makes it difficult for them to master newer technologies.

According to Weijters et al. (2007), people with greater levels of education are more likely to have been exposed to technology in their daily lives, not just at work. Onyia and Tagg (2011) discovered that a customer's degree of education has a substantial impact on their attitude toward online banking in Nigeria. Chong (2013) discovered a link between educational level and m-commerce activity.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy

In this investigation, positivism is employed. Ontology is the nature of reality as determined by science (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). As a result, ontology is primarily concerned with the nature of the phenomenon. It is seeking an answer or reality to a research question through indicating that existing types of knowledge can be found.

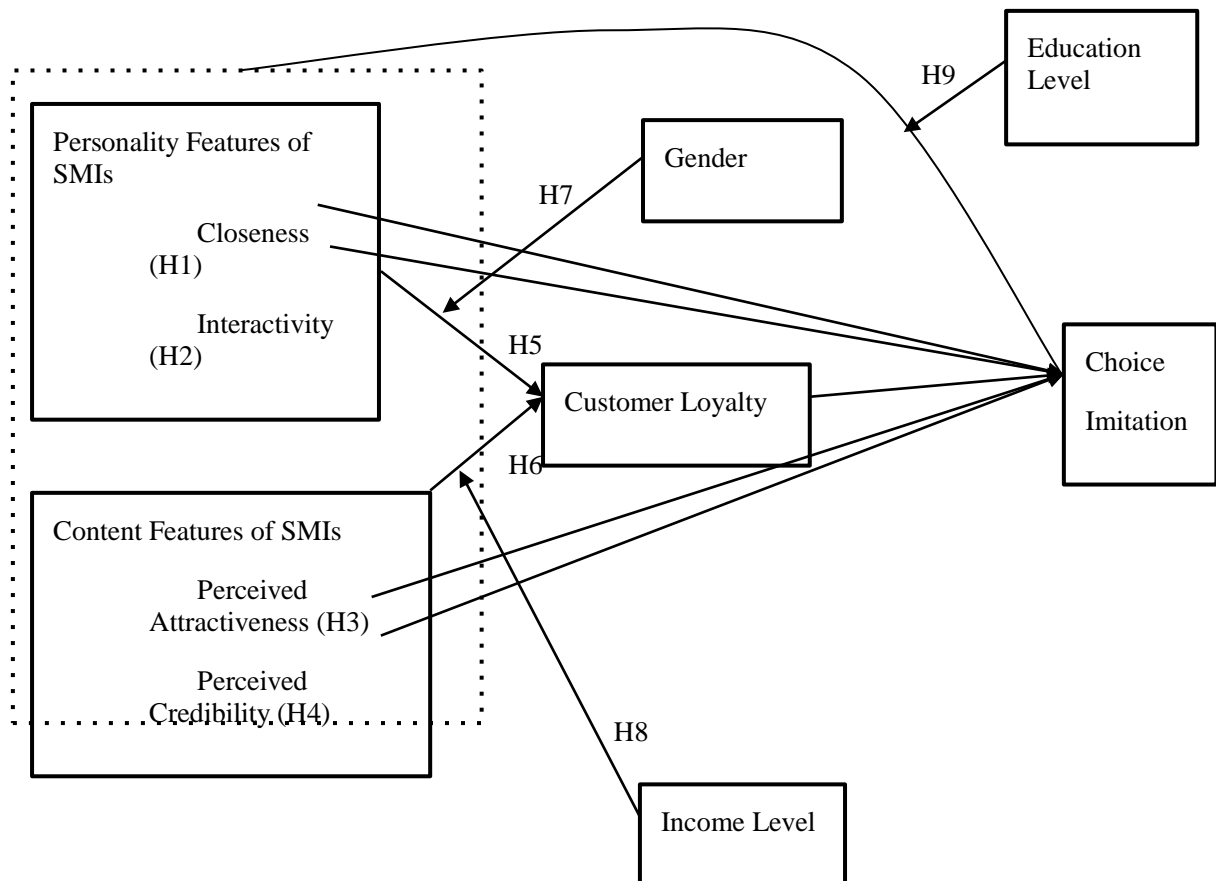
In terms of ontology, variables are assumed to be of independent character. Variable correlation analysis allows for its demonstration. In order to extrapolate the findings from the British respondents to other economies or

countries, a single reality is postulated.

Quantitative research is concerned with the measurement of quantity in relation to a given phenomenon, which is stated in numerical terms. Quantitative research is also frequently used to test current theories (Creswell, 2002; Biggam, 2008). In terms of epistemology, scientific procedures, i.e. questionnaires, will be intended to collect data in order to explain causal explanation and prediction as the principal contribution to knowledge.

In terms of axiology, researchers have no subjective position on the link between variables, and the research is really value-free. Large samples, such as 483 in the present study, are analyzed using highly organized and deductive reasonings, which are common procedures. Analyzing the link between variables will include quantitative analysis.

3.2 Theoretical Framework



3.3 Hypothesis Development

SMIs can be thought of as having personality-driven and content-driven characteristics that increase customer loyalty to the brand or product advocated by the SMIs. Increased customer loyalty encourages decision copying, as seen by increased purchase intent and brand favorability. Gender, income level, and education level are examples of demographic parameters that can be used to explain the direction and influence of independent variables on dependent variables.

3.3.1 *Personality- determined Traits (Closeness and Interactivity) Affect Choice Imitation*

Personality features of SMIs include closeness and interactivity between SMIs and recipients. Smith et al. (2005) defined interpersonal closeness as “the affective ties such as intimacy and connectedness, that an individual feels with another. Also, Wang et al (2012) suggested that people use others as a source of inspiration, especially to those whom they feel closest to, in order to determine their own belief about styles, trends and products.

Consumer engagement literature emphasizes certain potential aspects that may affect consumer engagement, such as customer emotions, company activities, and product involvement (Harmeling et al. 2017, Pansari and Kumar 2017). According to Hughes et al. (2019), companies should launch influencer marketing initiatives across many platforms at the same time. The basic environment for social media influencers to establish their impact is provided

by social media platforms. Some people who interact with social media influencers and follow their posts and messages may eventually become the influencer's followers.

Followers have opted to receive information from social media influencers and are likely to be very concerned about the environment. Such a high degree of engagement will progressively translate into various aspects of marketing efforts that will increase engagement. As a result, the increased level of interaction will enhance the link between customers and the SMI-endorsed businesses or goods. Therefore, I propose that:

H1: Closeness of SMIs has a positive impact on choice imitation

Given the interactivity with which consumers may now not only closely follow but also quickly interact with media characters, such as social media influencers, the performance of parasocial identification in conventional media could potentially occur on social media (Labrecque 2014). Consumers can learn about social media influencers since they interact with them on a regular basis. Consumers should examine the overlap between influencers' image and their own self-concept in the meanwhile. As a result, parasocial identity may be aided and cultivated.

Burgoon et. al. (1999) defined interactivity as the extent to which an individual perceives that he/ she is participating in the interaction with a SMI. Social media platforms allow users to find, network and interact with one another easily. Jeong and Coyle (2014) argue that social media has turned to be a handy and favorable means to interact with friends and fulfill social needs. Consumers expect their communications on social media platforms to be more bilateral and responsive. The enhanced responsiveness will increase the social glue of customers to the SMIs.

Karatsoli and Nathanail (2020) also demonstrated that shared material on social media can be a powerful source of inspiration and influence for customers. They highlighted how a tiny and indirect virtual engagement on social media can elicit consumer inspiration, implying that a customer's interaction on social media (e.g., shared reviews, images, and videos) can influence his or her vacation or shopping preferences (e.g., whether to buy a product).

In light of the foregoing, I believe that SMIs that provide a higher level of involvement will strengthen their audience's perception of a close link with influencer-endorsed brands or items. As a result, here's what I have come up with:

H2: Interactivity of SMIs has a positive impact on choice imitation

3.3.2 Content- determined Traits (Attractiveness and Credibility) Affect Choice Imitation

Content features of SMIs include attractiveness and credibility of the messages created by the SMIs.

The extent to which a SMI's material is visually appealing increases customers' awareness in the same way that a person's physical attractiveness does (Ki, Cuevas, et al., 2020). Aljukhadar et al. (2020) found that the visual appeal of social media material has a substantial impact on customer motivation. Consumers utilize social media largely to seek inspiration, according to their findings from interviews. The majority of interviewees said that the visual attractiveness of a social media post (e.g. visually appealing photographs) influenced how they dressed. As a result, the visual appeal of social media content was linked to inspiration and adherence.

The hedonic value of a message signifies the attractiveness of SMIs. Hedonic value relates to the amusement, indulgence, happiness, and satisfaction a consumer may obtain from reading the message. In the conventional marketing context, researchers have demonstrated the hedonic value can attract attention to the promotional materials (Teixeria, Picard, and El Kaliouby 2014) and affects attitude toward an ad (Kim, Ratneshwar, and Thorson 2017). Berger and Schwartz (2011) suggest that the hedonic elements of the message may affect the attitudes and word of mouth (WOM). The particular feeling like anxiety may stimulate arousal, and hence results in a larger tendency of sharing and spreading the content shown online (Berger and Milkman 2012). Some scholars stretch these findings and suggest that consumers may share eloquent or empathic brand messages more frequently than authoritative messages (Ordenes et al. 2019). The increase in hedonic value is regarded as an important drive for the enhanced virality of the message (Herhausen et al. 2019). As a result, increasing the message's attractiveness, as measured by the hedonic value supplied, would enhance the bond between customers and businesses.

Argo and Main (2008) regarded attractiveness as the degree in which something or someone is viewed as pleasing visually and it can be measured by asking how attractive, appealing or good- looking that something or someone is. By using this definition, I define attractiveness as the extent to which a consumer finds a SMI's online content attractive, appealing or good- looking. Chan and Prendergast (2008) discovered that the more appealing a SMI's content appears, the more he or she inspires and captures the attention of his or her audience. According to McQuarrie et al. (2012), a SMI with aesthetically appealing material, particularly in terms of aesthetic taste and lifestyle, is more likely to encourage customers to aspire to the aesthetic taste and lifestyle the SMI promotes. Given the foregoing, I feel that the more visually appealing content SMIs provide, the higher the level of customer loyalty to the endorsed brand or product:

H3: Perceived attractiveness of content provided by SMIs has a positive impact on choice imitation

Credibility relates to how credible and realistic an advertisement appears to an individual (Williams & Drolet, 2005), and it is becoming increasingly important in influencer marketing. People used to base their purchasing decisions on brand-generated information (King et al., 2014). However, consumers have recently been discovered to be more reliant on user-generated content.

From many studies, it is found that the credibility and information quality of the content shared by social media influencers plays an important role in affecting the attitude of followers to the product and the brand advertised. Referring to the Information Adoption Model, information quality is about the product information and shopping advice provided by fellow consumers while source credibility is about the opinion provided by the consumers who have experienced the product on the online platform. De Veirman et al. (2017) suggested that consumers view a SMI a reliable opinion leader in a particular niche. The trustworthiness is an important factor that affects consumer's attitude toward SMIs and hence it will affect the customer loyalty to the SMIs. Cheung et al. (2008) concluded that source's trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness are the major factors in affecting consumers' perception. Cheung et al. (2008) suggested four dimensions to measure information quality, i.e. relevance, comprehensiveness, accuracy and timeliness of receiving the message. They also proposed to use trustworthiness and expertise to measure the source credibility.

Consumers are increasingly using SMIs' branded content as their primary source of information (Ayeh et al., 2013), believing that the content produced by SMIs is noncommercial in nature and therefore more authentic and trustworthy than marketer-generated sources (Scott, 2011). Consumers value SMIs' suggestions and advice because they are based on real-life experiences and help them lower the risk of making a decision, especially when they are unfamiliar with specific styles, trends, items, or companies (Smith et al., 2005). Nonetheless, consumers' subjective feelings about whether the SMIs' content is convincing, genuine, and real may influence the extent to which these SMIs develop attachment with them (Smith et al., 2007). Therefore, I propose that:

H4: Perceived credibility of content provided by SMIs has a positive impact on choice imitation

3.3.3 Effect of Customer Loyalty as a Mediator on Choice Imitation

Based on theories of social defaults and customer inspiration, I propose that customers who are inspired by SMIs will be inspired to adopt the SMIs' examples as their own social defaults. I contend that the more customers are inspired by a SMI who promotes new consumption-related concepts (e.g., inspiring lifestyles or helpful suggestions and recommendations), the more likely they are to form relationships with the company and adopt the SMI's example as their own social default. Rauschnabel et al. (2019), in the context of a brand's AR marketing, provided empirical proof that customers who are inspired by SMIs will help promote the businesses with which they have formed a link. According to their findings, consumers are encouraged to try the new product featured in the app after seeing a brand's virtual products that an AR program replicates. This indicates that customers that have a high level of loyalty will most likely model their behavior after the SMIs.

Social glue is defined as an empathic understanding and strong emotional link between people, according to the research (Chartrand & Bargh, 1999). When people look up to a SMI for inspiration, they not only mimic his or her choices, but they also develop similar sentiments of emotional attachment to him or her (Ki, Cuevas, et al., 2020).

Landis et al. (2009) also demonstrated that when a person is inspired, he or she is more likely to act in a prosocial or pro-relational manner. For instance, the more people are motivated by social media content, the more likely they are to engage in prosocial acts (such as sharing expertise or providing feedback) (Izogo & Mpinganjira, 2020). Consumers create a sense of attachment to a SMI when they are encouraged to adopt the exemplars of the SMI's shared lifestyle, style, suggestions, and recommendations as their own social defaults, according to another study (Ki, Cuevas, et al., 2020).

Given the foregoing, it is believed that the more customers form an emotional tie with a brand in reaction to a SMI, the more likely they are to have positive emotional responses, i.e., to form an emotional bond with the SMI. As a result, here's what this study comes up with:

H5: Enhancement of personality features of SMIs will increase the level of customer loyalty, the level of choice imitation will increase

H6: Enhancement of content features of SMIs will increase the level of customer loyalty, the level of choice imitation will increase

3.4 Demographic Factors as Moderators

The demographic features of the respondents, such as their gender, income level, and educational level, are used as moderators.

3.4.1 Gender as a Moderator

Men, unlike women, were more likely to use social media's online material to assist them shop online, according to Wang et al. (2019). Women, on the other hand, tended to see social media as a people-oriented platform where they could communicate with others (Eagly et al., 2000). These disparities in how men and women are portrayed in terms of social media use and purchasing decisions provide fascinating insights into how men and women may differ in terms of the inspiration mechanism used by SMIs and customers. Women are more likely to use social media to build friendships and social affiliation, according to Thelwall (2008), whereas men are more likely to use social media to communicate about a hobby or interest (Smith, 2011), learn about events (Raacke & Bonds-Raacke, 2008), gain access to general information (Krasnova et al., 2017), or for educational purposes (Hall et al., 2013). Taken above, I believe that women are more likely to be affected by the closeness and interactivity of the SMIs than men. Therefore, I propose that,

H7: The impact of personality features of SMIs on choice imitation is stronger for female followers than male followers

3.4.2 Income Level as a Moderator

Increased income may cause a weakening of the relationship between SMI content and customer loyalty. Consumer loyalty is linked to income, according to a large body of studies (Crask and Reynolds 1978; Korgaonkar, Lund, and Price 1985; Zeithaml 1985). Lower-income customers are expected to have a larger link between satisfaction and loyalty than higher-income customers. The rationale for this is very similar to that presented in theory to support education's moderating influence. Because lower-income consumers lack other variance-explaining information cues, a change in their satisfaction level is more likely to result in a change in loyalty levels than higher-income consumers, whereas wealthier consumers look for information cues other than their current satisfaction level to determine their repurchase intention. Furthermore, Homburg and Giering (2001) find some evidence that income has an impact on the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty. As a result, I propose that:

H8: The impact of content features of SMIs on choice imitation is stronger for higher income group than lower income group

3.4.3 Education Level as a Moderator

Education's role in the context of loyalty has received little attention. It is widely accepted that persons with greater levels of education engage in more information gathering and processing and use more information before making decisions, whereas people with lower levels of education rely on fewer information signals (Capon and Burke 1980; Claxton, Frey, and Portis 1974). Better educated customers, in contrast to those with lower educational attainment, are said to feel more at ease while dealing with and relying on new information (Homburg and Giering 2001).

As a result, we expect that better-educated consumers will seek more information about a merchant in addition to their happiness level, whereas less-educated persons will consider contentment to be an important information cue in making their purchase decision. Education's role as a moderator is based on scant empirical evidence. Mittal and Kamakura (2001) discovered that education moderates the relationship between satisfaction and retention, with the association being less for those with greater education.

The information seeking motivation, on the other hand, may present additional options and alternatives for highly educated customers to shift their consumption behavior; yet, the SMIs may not encourage them to change their intention to buy or brand favorability. As a result, I propose that:

H9: The impact of SMIs on choice imitation is stronger for lower educated group than higher educated group

3.5 Studies

3.5.1 Questionnaire Development

The study developed an online survey questionnaire and administered it via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). The measurement items were adapted from scales validated previously. The items for attractiveness were adapted from Argo and Main (2008), credibility from Williams and Drolet (2005), closeness from Joo et al. (2017), interactivity from Ki and Kim (2019), customer loyalty from Oliver (1999), and choice imitation from Yoo and Donthu (2001).

Instead of 5-point Likert scales, 7-point scales will be used. Since the introduction of the Likert scale in 1932, users have debated its optimal usefulness in terms of reliability and validity of the number of scale points. In his initial study, Likert (1932,7) examined the unlimited number of defined attitudes that exist in a particular individual, as well as the possibility of organizing them into "clusters" of answers. He then discussed the premise of his "opinion survey," for which he offered findings and psychological explanations. The fundamental assumptions of his survey are, firstly, that the presentation of items on a scale is such that participants can pick between clearly

opposed options. Second, the selected competing concerns were empirically significant, with the outcomes forming an empirical evaluation of the degree of success. Thus, it is argued specifically in the context of attitude clustering.

Due to the choice of items on the scale determined by the survey's design, there is a potential that the 7 point scale will perform better than the 5 point scale when considering the dependability of responses from survey participants. The seven-point scale provides more alternatives, which increases the likelihood of matching people's objective reality. A seven-point scale reveals more information about the motif and hence appeals to the participants' "rational faculty" (Chang 1994, Cox 1980).

On a 5-point scale, a respondent's total agreement with the theme of the question may fall between the two descriptive options supplied. On repeated administration, he/she may select a different response option, e.g., 3 instead of 4, if he/she thinks between the two possibilities on a 5-point scale. By evoking retrieval beyond the maximum level of agreement afforded by a 5-point scale, a 7-point scale may remove, to some extent, the difficulty of selecting between two unfavorable points on a 5-point scale. Consequently, this difficulty of being forced to choose between two equally awful points on a 5-point Likert scale can be mitigated to some extent by providing extra options (in between) on a 7-point scale (Pearse, 2011).

The supply of either five or seven scale points would be more interesting to the minds of respondents if the statements on the scale were closer to the truth of the universe for both the respondents and the surveyor. It may produce 'curves of reliability' towards the 'zenith of validity' The paradox of choice and explicit larger extent of measurement by a seven-point scale falls squarely within the domain of the response reason, without which reliability considerations carry no weight. Validity of the Likert scale is determined by the application of the topic at hand; in the context of respondents' comprehension and as judged by the creator of the response item. When the topic at hand is pertinent to the context of the respondents, the addition of more options may increase the content and construct validity of the scale. Providing options closer to the respondent's original perspective decreases the influence of ambiguity in responses (Finstad, 2010). In addition, comprehension of all objects and points on a scale necessitates a distinct judgment time and memory span based on the style of communication. While listening to the responses of a lengthy scale, it may take less time to discern the numerous alternatives than with a written scale. Even with more points on the Likert scale, a written scale will increase validity. The human mind possesses a span of absolute judgment that allows it to differentiate seven categories simultaneously, which is supported by research about the span of immediate memory.

3.5.2 Sampling

The final questionnaire will be distributed to MTurk masters who lived in the UK and have a HIT approval rate greater than 95. To further ensure the quality of the data, the survey participants will further be limited to those who are between the ages of 18 and 65 who visit social media on a regular basis. Also, I will limit the participants to the users of TikTok since it focuses more on ephemeral interactions (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and is a growing platform for influencer marketing (Tobin, 2020). More importantly, as far as I know, there is no research which has specifically investigated the platform. Doing research on the change in consumer behavior of TikTok users will have academic contribution since it pushes the knowledge boundary a little bit further.

3.5.3 Pilot Study

Before answering the questions, respondents were asked to read the definition and examples of SMIs carefully. Respondents will be asked to name one of their favorite social media influencers on TikTok and state which specific area, i.e. beauty, fashion and food, etc, in which the SMI specialized in. The names of the SMIs which are provided by the respondents will be embedded automatically in the remaining parts of the questionnaire. The items for gender and choice imitation will be measured on a nominal scale, i.e. 'yes' or 'no'. Other items will be measured on a 7-point Likert- style scale that ranges from "strongly agree" (1) to "strongly disagree" (7).

3.5.4 Data Collection

After the responses are collected, a dataset will be formed for analysis. F- tests will be carried out to confirm the minimum sample size which is required for the regression model. Descriptive analysis will be used to show the information of respondents, i.e. ages, marital status and income level. With the help of the supervisor, a structural equation model will be produced to test the structural model's fit and robustness tests may also be carried out to test the hypotheses.

Chapter 4 Analysis

4.1 Summary

The MTurk platform was used to collect 483 responses for analysis. A minimum sample size of 242 was required for a regression model with 25 predictors to achieve 95 percent power (greater than the recommended threshold of 80 percent) in detecting a medium effect size ($f^2=0.15$) at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ (Cohen, 2013), according to the results of the F tests. 58.4% of the population is female, while 41.2% is male. 22.2 % of them belong to the lower income group, or earn less than 1000 pounds per month. 47.8 % belong to the middle income group, or those who earn between £1,001 and £3,000 per month. 30 % are in the higher income bracket, or earn more than £3000 per month. In terms of education, 49.5% have a college degree or less, 30.6% have a bachelor's degree, and 19.9% have a master's degree or higher. The study explored hypotheses using the statistical software SPSS and the linear regression method.

4.2 Data Analysis and Findings

4.2.1 Correlation Analysis

		Correlations					
		Closeness	Interactivity	Attractiveness	Credibility	Loyalty	Imitation
Closeness	Pearson Correlation	--					
	N	483					
Interactivity	Pearson Correlation	.680**	--				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001					
	N	483	483				
Attractiveness	Pearson Correlation	.700**	.486**	--			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001				
	N	483	483	483			
Credibility	Pearson Correlation	.729**	.435**	.798**	--		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001			
	N	483	483	483	483		
Loyalty	Pearson Correlation	.763**	.628**	.741**	.696**	--	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		
	N	483	483	483	483	483	
Imitation	Pearson Correlation	.480**	.426**	.430**	.378**	.539**	--
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	483	483	483	483	483	483

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1: Correlation and Discriminant Validity (n = 483)

Discriminant validity is demonstrated by correlations between trait factors that are significantly lower than the upper bound of unity (Grobler and colleagues, 2018). Table 1 shows that a correlation is statistically significant if the "Sig. (2-tailed)" value is less than 0.05. The instrument also proved discriminant validity, since all potential pairs of constructs had correlations less than one.

4.2.2 Results of Independent Variables on Choice Imitation

Hypothesis	Structural Path		β	t- value	Result
	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable			
1	Closeness	Choice Imitation	0.480*	11.985	Supported
2	Interactivity	Choice Imitation	0.426*	10.32	Supported
3	Perceived Attractiveness	Choice Imitation	0.430*	10.437	Supported
4	Perceived Credibility	Choice Imitation	0.378*	8.951	Supported

Table 2: Structural Equation Model Results (n = 483)

Note: * $p < 0.05$

According to Table 2, the proximity and interactivity of SMIs, as well as the perceived attractiveness and credibility of the content provided by SMIs, all have a beneficial effect on choice imitation. Closed (H1: $\beta = 0.480$, $p < 0.05$) and interacting (H2: $\beta = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$) SMI personal traits influenced decision imitation positively. The fact that the content supplied by the SMIS was appealing (H3: $\beta = 0.430$, $p < 0.05$) and credible (H4: $\beta = 0.378$, $p < 0.05$) had a positive effect on decision imitation. It suggests that if SMIs can develop close relationships with their followers and make them feel like they are part of the same group (closeness), keep in contact with their followers (interactivity), offer more attractive and appealing content (perceived attractiveness), and provide more authentic and credible

information and message, customers will be more eager to follow the SMIs' lifestyles and buy the products endorsed by the SMIs.

The concept of SMI endorsement could be well addressed using the social influence theory (SIT). The social influence hypothesis examines how individuals in a social network are influenced to behave in particular ways by others (Li, 2013; Venkatesh & Brown, 2001). According to Venkatesh and Brown (2001), social influence is a push to adhere to particular behaviors through messages and cues that aid in generating these impressions. Since consumers are prone to imitate endorsers' attitudes and behaviors in order to be like them and because they use brands and products to express and enhance their self-concepts (Sirgy 1982), they may imitate a social media influencer's behavior and attitude if the influencer's image resonates with their ideal self (Choi and Rifon 2007; Basil 1996; Xu and Pratt 2018). This indicates that self-influencer image congruence could be utilized as a motivational framework to influence consumers' perceptions of branded messages, engagement with brand content on social media, and brand purchase intentions. Deutsch and Gerard (1955) discussed the concept of social influence, which is the process by which individuals adapt and modify their attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors in response to interaction with others. It explains why many individuals choose to be followers. Huh et al. (2014) presented the social default theory to explain why some individuals desire to adopt the viewpoint of others. When recipients do not know what to do or do not wish to make the effort to figure out the possibilities themselves, they may choose to imitate what others are doing and accept them as normal options. The congruence between a celebrity endorser's image and customers' self-concept may even inspire consumers to create parasocial identification, or an imaginary relationship, with the endorser, in addition to influencing evaluative results for brands/products. (Choi and Rifon 2007). This explains why an increase in proximity (H1) and interaction (H2) will increase the probability of choice imitation.

According to persuasion theory (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Flynn, 2005; Ohanian, 1990), source credibility and attractiveness are essential because they can influence consumers and increase message receptivity. Expanding the well-established credence of 'what is lovely is good', the experimental findings argue that what is relevant and significant regarding the association between endorser and product is also crucial for increasing the credibility of brand endorsement (Wright 2016). The match-up between the brands or products and endorsers can be applied to different aspects, existing research has examined the consistency of expertise (Till and Busler 2000), credibility (Kamins and Gupta 1994), enchantment (Kahle and Homer 1985), personality (Batra and Homer 2004), and some other factors like cultural values (Choi, Lee, and Kim 2005). All these factors may play a salient role in determining matchup effects of endorsers. This explains why an increase in the perceived attractiveness of SMI content will lead to an increase in the likelihood of choice imitation (H3).

Regarding the online platform, information quality refers to the product information and purchase recommendations provided by other consumers, whereas source credibility refers to the opinion provided by consumers who have really utilized the product. Petty and Cacioppo (1986) defined source credibility as the extent to which information recipients, i.e. followers in influencer marketing, see an information source is credible, competent, and trustworthy. It provides an explanation for why reliable information might result in choice imitation. Since the message given by SMIs can be of utilitarian, hedonistic, and social value to customers. Prior research on influencer endorsement has focused mostly on the source credibility of social media influencers. Compared to traditional celebrities, influencers are perceived as more trustworthy and consistent with their following, according to these research (Lyons and Henderson 2005; Grave 2017). This explains why the increase in perceived credibility of SMIs' content will increase the likelihood of imitation (H4).

4.2.3 Results of the Mediation Effects of Loyalty

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.675	Sobel test:	7.15702962	0.07092328
b	0.752	Aroian test:	7.15212881	0.07097188
s _a	0.026	Goodman test:	7.16194053	0.07087465
s _b	0.101	Reset all	Calculate	

Table 3: Mediation Effect of Loyalty on how Personality Features of SMIs on Choice Imitation

Test statistic = 7.15702962

Std. Error = 0.07092328

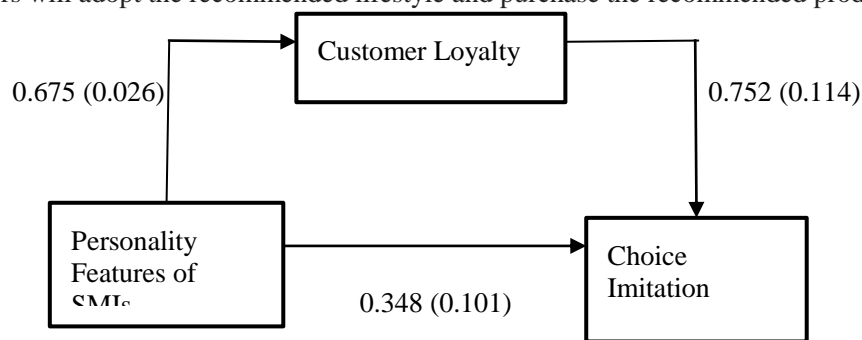
p-value = 0.000000

Customer loyalty is defined as a "strong intention to repurchase or patronize a preferred product or service in the future" (Reichheld, 1992). The number of repeat purchases can be used to evaluate the structure (Zeithaml, et al., 1996). There are three fundamental perspectives on customer loyalty: (1) an attitude that leads to a brand

relationship, (2) positive conduct, and (3) purchasing that is moderated by individual qualities, circumstances, and the purchase situation (Uncles, Dowling, & Hammond, 2003).

According to the Cognitive- Affective- Conative Loyalty model presented by Oliver (1999), respondents may gain information from the SMIs' messages and develop good feelings for the SMIs as a result of their greater interaction. Finally, they take steps to develop brand loyalty for the products recommended by SMIs. According to Bottger et al. (2017), inspiration serves as the external stimulus that motivates recipients to behave accordingly. Inspiration fosters two sorts of change, namely behavioral and emotional transformation. The former will encourage followers to purchase the product suggested by SMIs, i.e. choice imitation. The latter will aid in strengthening the social bond between SMIs and beneficiaries. As a result, the beneficiaries' devotion to the SMIs will increase. Due to the affective factors between SMIs and their followers, the personality traits of SMIs contribute significantly to the enhancement of customer loyalty. Pham et al. (2001) postulated that regardless of involvement level or product category, affect dominates consumers' information processing.

In this scenario, the p-value is less than 0.05, thus we may conclude that the indirect relationship between personality and choice imitation through customer loyalty is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). This study implies that the personality characteristics of SMIs will improve choice imitation through fostering consumer loyalty. According to the mechanism, the increased proximity and interaction of SMIs will boost consumer loyalty. Therefore, buyers will adopt the recommended lifestyle and purchase the recommended products.



Sig. Level < 0.001

Input:		Test statistic:	Std. Error:	p-value:
a	0.633	Sobel test: 9.54245375	0.06560545	0
b	0.989	Aroian test: 9.53607498	0.06564934	0
s _a	0.025	Goodman test: 9.54884534	0.06556154	0
s _b	0.096	Reset all	Calculate	

Table 4: Mediation Effect of Loyalty on how Content Features of SMIs on Choice Imitation

Test statistic = 9.54245375

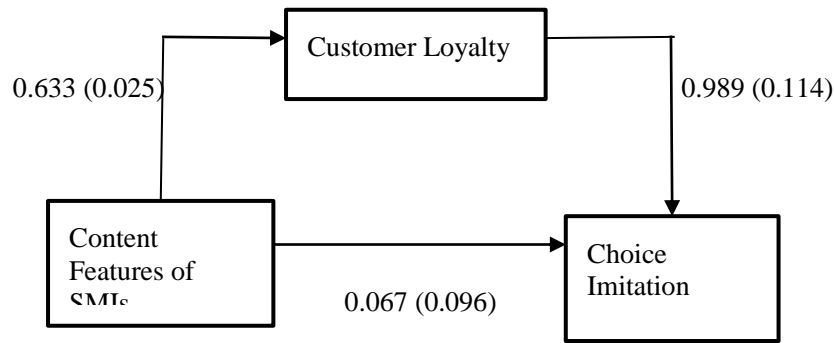
Std. Error = 0.06560545

p-value = 0.000000

Perception of a self-serving motive will reduce the effect of parasocial identification on consumers' evaluations of the endorsement. It is believed that skepticism of an influencer's motivation for endorsing a brand improves information processing (Rifon et al. 2004). When consumers consider why social media celebrities endorse a product or service, they may engage in more cognitive processing and, as a result, pay more attention to persuasive communications' claims. As cognitive elaboration of persuasive messages increases, counter arguments may emerge, reducing the endorsement's effectiveness (Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann, 1983).

In this instance, the p-value is less than 0.05, thus we may conclude that the indirect relationship between content characteristics of SMIs and choice imitation via customer loyalty is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.05$). This study implies that the content characteristics of SMIs will improve choice imitation through fostering consumer loyalty. The mechanism concludes that an increase in the perceived attractiveness and credibility of SMI content will boost consumer loyalty. Therefore, buyers will adopt the recommended lifestyle and purchase the recommended products.

4.2.4 Results of Moderator Effect of Demographic Factors



Sig. Level < 0.001

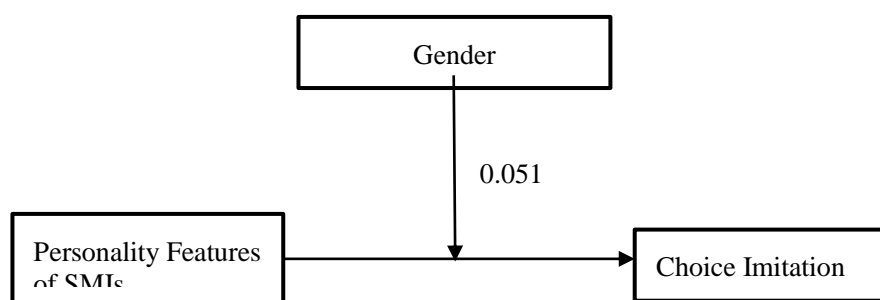
Gender on Personality Features of SMIs and Choice Imitation

Gender has long been recognized as a factor in how people respond to marketing campaigns. Apart from possible direct effects of gender on outcome variables such as loyalty (e.g., Fournier 1998; Korgaonkar, Lund, and Price 1985; Odekerken-Schröder et al. 2000), gender is widely used as a moderator variable in marketing in general and consumer behavior in particular (e.g., Fournier 1998; Korgaonkar, Lund, and Price 1985; Odekerken-Schröder et al. 2000). (Saad and Gill 2000). The use of social role theory and evolutionary psychology can both be used to explain such a moderating influence. (See Archer 1996 for a comparison and discussion of the two approaches.)

There is a significant causal relationship between the independent variable Personality and the dependent variable Choice Imitation (p -value < 0.001). Since P -value is less than 0.05, the Personality Features of SMIs and Choice Imitation factors have a significant connection.

When examining the consequences of the moderating effect. We can see that the P -value for the interaction term (INT) is 0.051. Given that the P -value is greater than 0.05, we may conclude that the moderator variable Gender has no effect on the link between the independent variable Personality and the dependent variable Choice Imitation. This indicates that the effect of SMI personality traits on choice imitation is not gender-dependent. It can be explained by the huge anti- sexual discrimination effort paid by the UK government. In 2017, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community in the United Kingdom commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Sexual Offences Act, which decriminalised private sex between men over 21. (the law in Scotland and Northern Ireland did not catch up until 1980 and 1982 respectively). Clause 2A/section 28 of the Local Government Act, which forbade the "promotion" of homosexuality by local authorities, was abolished in 2000 in Scotland and in 2003 in the rest of the United Kingdom. The legislation never resulted in any prosecutions, but the fear was sufficient to deter local authorities, notably in schools, from taking effective action for nearly two decades. The Equality Act of 2010 included sexual orientation and gender reassignment (to use the outdated nomenclature of the law) as two of the nine "protected characteristics" that service providers must consider when creating and delivering services. This legislative advancement and the public celebration of the LGBTQ community by corporations going rainbow for pride may convince heterosexuals that the LGBTQ community has attained equality and acceptance. The equality between men

and women may render useless the moderating impact of gender. To do additional research on the moderating effect of other demographic variables on the connection between SMI personality traits and choice imitation.



Sig. Level < 0.001

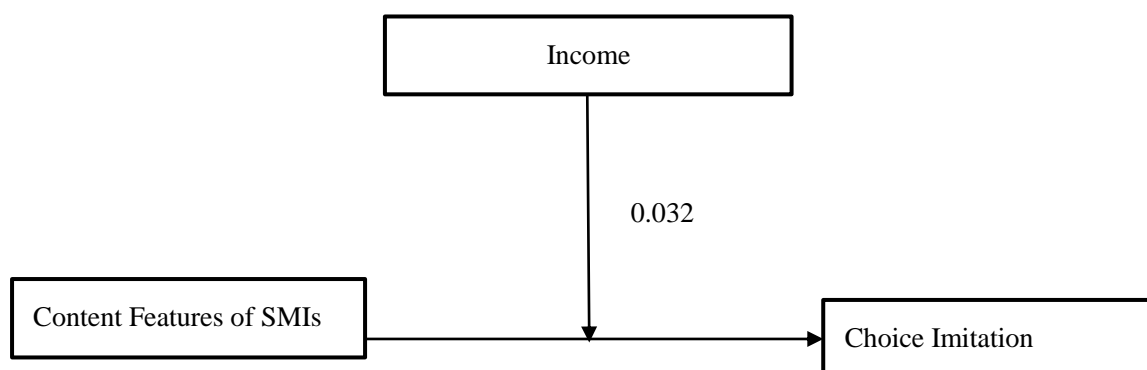
Income Level on Content Features of SMIs and Choice Imitation

It is assumed that higher-income individuals have greater educational attainment (Farley 1964). As a result, consumers with lower incomes rely more on store satisfaction as a crucial information signal, whereas consumers with higher incomes exert more effort to comprehend the SMIs' content.

The relationship between the independent variable Content Features of information provided by SMIs and the dependent variable Choice Imitation is strongly causal ($P\text{-value} < 0.001$). Since $P\text{-value} < 0.05$, the connection between Content and Choice Imitation is statistically significant.

We can observe that the $P\text{-value}$ for the interaction term (INT) is 0.032. As the $P\text{-value}$ is less than 0.05, we may assume that the moderator variable Income influences the association between the independent variable Content and the dependent variable Choice Imitation. Therefore, the effect of content characteristics of SMIs on decision imitation is amplified by income level. The message and information offered by SMIs are expected to be more elaborated for those from higher income brackets. Once people discover that the information given by SMIs is engaging and credible, they will be more inclined to follow the advice and purchase the products supported by SMIs.

Education Level on SMIs and Choice Imitation

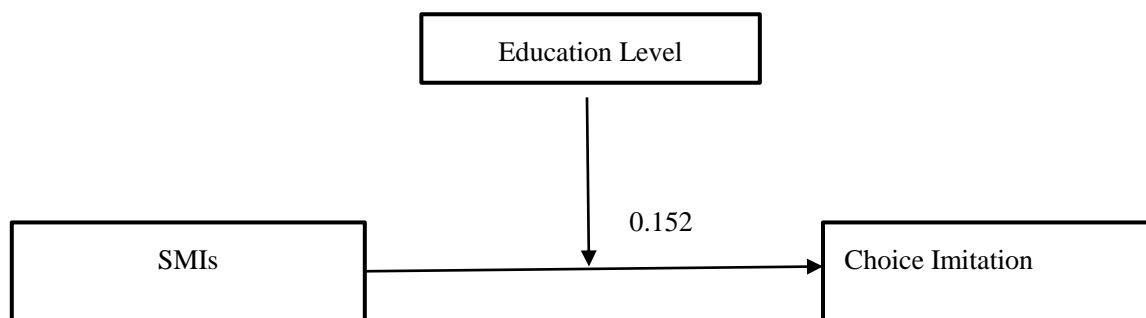


Sig. Level < 0.001

There is a significant causal relationship between the independent variable SMI and the dependent variable Choice Imitation ($P\text{-value} < 0.001$). Since $P\text{-value} < 0.05$, the connection between SMI and Choice Imitation is statistically significant.

According to Rogers (1983), early adopters have more formal education than later adopters. Early adopters of technology can be identified by their educational level (Im et al., 2003). According to Liebermann and Stashevsky (2002), Internet and e-commerce users with a lower level of education perceive greater barriers than those with a higher level of education. A higher level of education may result in a deeper understanding of new technologies, thereby accelerating their early adoption. However, because the TikTok platform has such a low entrance barrier, the gap in education level may not be as apparent.

The interaction term (INT) has a $P\text{-value}$ of 0.152, as observed. As the $P\text{-value}$ is greater than 0.05, we may conclude that the moderator variable Education Level has no effect on the link between the independent variable SMIs and the dependent variable Choice Imitation. This indicates that education level has no effect on the influence of SMIs on choice imitation. To study how other demographic variables may moderate the association between SMIs and decision imitation, it is necessary to do additional research.



Sig. Level < 0.001

4.2.5 Factor Analysis Output - Component Matrix

The component matrix displays Pearson correlations between items and components. Inexplicably, these correlations are referred to as factor loadings. If a variable includes more than one major factor loading, these are referred to as cross loadings, and they confound the interpretation of the examined factors. The below rotated component matrix answers the question, "which variables measure which factors?"

	Component	
	1	2
Credibility1	.919	
Credibility3	.886	
Credibility2	.884	
Attractiveness1	.872	
Attractiveness2	.866	
Attractiveness3	.841	
Interactivity3		.919
Interactivity4		.914
Interactivity1		.885

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

Technically, a factor (or component) represents the shared characteristics of its variables. By means of elimination and rotation, we may determine the two components that each of our factors represents. The rotated component matrix (preceding) reveals that there are two components of choice imitation-influencing factors: content elements and personality features of SMIs. Detailed descriptions of each component are provided below.

Credibility1	I find that [SMI]'s content is believable.
Credibility2	I find that [SMI]'s content is credible.
Credibility3	I find that [SMI]'s content is authentic.
Attractiveness1	I find [SMI's name]'s content good looking.
Attractiveness2	I find [SMI]'s content attractive.
Attractiveness3	I find [SMI]'s content visually appealing.

Component 1 - Content Features of SMIs.

While the second component is measured by the Interactivity of SMI.

Interactivity3	I feel that [SMI] would respond to me quickly and efficiently if I post a comment.
Interactivity4	I feel that [SMI] would allow me to communicate directly with him/ her.
Interactivity1	I feel that [SMI] would reply to me if I send a private message.

Component 2 - Personality Features of SMIs.

4.2.6 Regression Equation and Empirical Model

Choice Imitation = $\alpha_{11} + \beta_{11}CLO + \epsilon_{11} + \alpha_{21} + \beta_{21}INT + \epsilon_{21} + \alpha_{31} + \beta_{31}ATT + \epsilon_{31} + \alpha_{41} + \beta_{41}CRE + \epsilon_{41} + \alpha_{51} + \beta_{51}PER + \beta_{52}LOY + \epsilon_{51} + \alpha_{61} + \beta_{61}CON + \beta_{52}LOY + \epsilon_{61} + \alpha_{81} + \beta_{81}CON + \beta_{82}INC + \beta_{82}INC*CON + \epsilon_{81}$

Note:

CLO = Closeness

INT = Interactivity

ATT = Perceived Attractiveness

CRE = Perceived Credibility

PER = Personality Features of SMIs

LOY = Customer Loyalty

CON = Content Features of SMIs

INC = Income Level

The study reveals that proximity and interactivity of SMIs (i.e. personality characteristics of SMIs), perceived attractiveness and believability of SMIs (i.e. content characteristics of SMIs), and customer loyalty positively influence choice imitation. At the same time, the rise in affluence will amplify the influence of content characteristics of SMIs on decision imitation.

Chapter 5 General Discussion

5.1 Theoretical Implications

Based on the customer loyalty and social defaults theories, our study sheds fresh light on the SMI phenomena by examining if and how consumers are encouraged to adopt SMI examples as their own social defaults. Thus, we obtained a set of novel findings. Implications for theory and management are addressed in further depth below.

In multiple ways, our research contributes to academic understanding of the SMI phenomena. First, while the existing literature has amassed knowledge about the phenomena, the bulk of previous research treated SMIs narrowly by identifying them either as brand endorsers (Kapitan & Silvera, 2016) or online opinion leaders (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Our research demonstrates, however, that SMIs function as a source for improving consumer loyalty in addition to serving as brand endorsers. SMIs serve consumers' desire for loyalty by offering them with new ideas, some of which they may not be aware of or may find surprising (Bottger et al., 2017). These findings suggest that brand marketers may gain from influencer marketing if they engage with SMIs who can effectively provide their audience with innovative ideas and engaging online material.

Our research provides more insight into this element by demonstrating that SMIs excite customers during the loyalty-building process. In particular, the results of mediation research revealed that the more loyal customers are to SMIs, the more likely they are to be inspired to adopt as social defaults the examples offered by SMIs, including their lifestyle, style, suggestions, and recommendations. These findings expand the scope of the social defaults theory's applicability from the face-to-face social situation to the social media context. In the same way that face-to-face interpersonal contacts inspire people to create social defaults by witnessing the choices of others, the social media setting caused people to feel loyal and motivated to adopt a SMI's examples as their own social defaults by observing the SMI's content online. These findings suggest that SMIs exert a greater influence than endorsers or opinion leaders, as they inspire consumers not only by providing word-of-mouth recommendations about particular products or brands, but also by suggesting which lifestyles and styles are socially desirable to admire and imitate. Thus, marketers must know that consumers not only follow the ideas and suggestions of SMIs, but also imitate the lifestyle and aesthetic standards that SMIs set and lead.

Thirdly, our findings indicate that both the content and personality (i.e., characteristics of SMIs) influence the motivation of customers in a social media context. Specifically, we discovered that consumers are more loyal to SMIs the more they consider their social media content to be visually appealing and reliable. In addition, the more the audience's perception that SMIs are interpersonally near and participatory, the more likely they are to identify these SMIs as a source of motivation. While previous studies have identified various factors that confer SMIs' influence, such as the number of followers (De Veirman et al., 2017), the number of followers (De Veirman et al., 2017), the number of shares (Bakshy et al., 2011), and the frequency of posts (Freberg et al., 2011), our findings indicate that the fundamental traits that inspire consumers are SMIs' personality- and content-determined characteristics. Thus, to optimize consumer motivational appeal, we advise marketers to collaborate with SMIs whose personalities are welcoming and engaged, and whose online content is visually appealing and genuine.

By quantifying the impact of influencer marketing on consumers' decision imitation, our research contributes to the existing body of knowledge. Prior research have assessed its impact on social media advertising recognition (De Veirman et al., 2017), brand attitude (Evans et al., 2017), and purchase intent (Evans et al., 2017), but none has estimated the audience's actual choice imitation in response to SMIs' posts. Using individuals' choice imitation experiences (i.e., having purchased one of the same products, services, or brands SMIs posted on their social media) as one of the most important dependent variables in our study, we find that the more consumers feel "motivated to adopt SMIs' exemplars as social defaults," the greater their propensity to imitate the SMIs' choices at the product/service and brand levels. Therefore, brand marketers should recognize that the customer loyalty SMIs stimulate appeals considerably to customers and encourage them to purchase the marketer's products and brands. As for the emotional consequence, our findings partially confirmed the considerable influence of the "loyal customers are driven to accept SMIs' exemplars as social defaults" condition on choice imitation.

Finally, our findings contribute to the SMI literature by analyzing whether and how the inspiration mechanism between SMIs and customers varies according to the income level of consumers. We discovered that the relationships in our research model remained true for the effect of income level on the influence of the content characteristics of SMIs on choice imitation, which was found to be enhanced by the presence of SMIs with higher content quality. It is considered that individuals with a higher income are more keen to examine the information offered by SMIs. If they find the information reliable and appealing, they are more likely to adopt the SMI's position.

5.2 Managerial Implications

Phua, Venus Jin, and Kim (2017) suggest that individuals can use social media to fulfill their entertainment, informational, and social demands. Plume and Slade (2018) stated that when individuals are motivated by pleasurable pleasure, social media can help them "pass the time, escape their daily lives, and engage in behaviors

they find interesting" (p. 473) Among different social networking sites, TikTok is gaining popularity. Consequently, brands may invest more resources in online promotion via TikTok. SMIs on the platform are the collaboration's targets.

When selecting SMIs, marketers can focus on two factors, one of which is the content's high level of appeal and believability. Another form involves interaction. For certain products, like luxury automobiles, the level of product participation is greater, and the majority of the target market has a higher income. The income level has a moderating effect on the relationship between content characteristics of SMIs and choice imitation, which is represented in the fact that they would spend more time and effort extending the material offered by SMIs. In this instance, corporations that target higher income groups may collaborate with SMIs that specialize on providing reputable and engaging content. However, firms may also collaborate with SMIs who are keen to stay in touch with their followers by responding to their private messages, even if they are not particularly credible or enticing.

As Audunsson (2018) stated that influencer marketing has moved its focus from who to work with to how to use them. The findings of this study showed that the effectiveness of endorsement is not derived automatically from the psychological connections between consumers and influencers. Hence, companies may devote resources to capitalize the effect of the connections between influencers and customers, watch the contribution of these social media influences and monitor the content quality of the influencers.

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

5.3.1 Limitations

One of the key constraints of this work pertains to the intended audience. Since the current study focuses solely on the influence of SMIs on purchasing behavior in the United Kingdom, the slight difference between males and females may reduce the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between SMIs and imitation of their followers' choices. Future research must be conducted in different nations to determine if there is a substantial difference in the moderating influence of gender.

Another limitation is about the credibility of SMIs. Some critics contend that social media influencers fail to unveil their sponsorship provided by companies, hence it produces a perception that their posts and messages are integral WOM. This type of deceptive marketing exercise has captured the attention of the Federal Trade Commission (2017) to investigate the posts of Instagram recently (Ingram and Bartz 2017). It is reported that the Commission has contacted influencers directly and restated its requirements to reveal any connection between endorsers and advertisers. However, customers are having difficulty distinguishing sponsored brand endorsements from electronic word-of-mouth or subjective product reviews due to the current practice of influencer marketing through social media endorsements. The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in the United States has guidelines that state: 'influencers should clearly and conspicuously disclose their relationships to brands when promoting or endorsing products through social media' (FTC 2017). The terms '#sponsored,' 'promotion,' 'paid content,' and '#ad' are all FTC-approved disclosure wording. In recent years, China has tightened its regulatory framework for internet advertising and celebrity endorsement.

Despite the lack of formal endorsement rules addressing the type of proposed disclosure wording in social media influencers' brand posts, China passed draft revisions to the Advertising Law in 2015, bringing social media practices firmly under its reach (Abkowitz 2016). In China, it is common practice for social media influencers to share or retweet a brand's messages without explicitly disclosing that they are receiving a monetary incentive from the sponsor. According to a recent New York Times story, celebrities and influencers frequently purchase false followers to bolster their social media accounts. (Confessore, et al. 2018). Once the sponsorship received from the companies is exposed, the followers may learn persuasion knowledge and customer loyalty may drop; hence, the conclusion drawn from the current study may no longer be accurate. Brands and social media managers should conduct additional study into potential influencers by looking beyond the quantifiable indications seen on social media platforms, such as popularity, number of followers, and so on.

5.3.2 Future Research

Future research could evaluate the effect of gender on the influence of SMI content characteristics on choice imitation. Male consumers are more likely than female consumers to use social media to get information (Krasnova et al., 2017) and are relatively more influenced by online content when making purchase decisions (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999). The findings of Ki et al. (2022) suggest that men consumers are more prone than females to adopt as their own the SMI examples they witness. Given their findings, practitioners whose target consumers are predominantly male could benefit from incorporating new or informative product or brand-related ideas into the online content of social media influencers (SMIs) that male consumers are more inclined to like and follow than female consumers. In addition, it is noteworthy that male consumers place a greater emphasis on intimacy than female consumers do. Therefore, when developing influencer marketing campaigns aimed at male consumers, marketers may desire to engage with SMIs whose personalities show a high degree of proximity. By partnering with SMIs who share similar hobbies or interests as their target consumers, marketers may be able to optimize the

closeness appeal and hence increase the success of their influencer marketing initiatives. However, no research has been conducted on the effect of gender on the link between the content elements of SMIs and decision imitation.

In addition, the effect of education level on the personality/content characteristics of SMIs and choice imitation has not yet been investigated. This study's moderation section reveals that an increase in education does not increase the impact of SMIs on choice imitation. There are two plausible explanations for this. First, those with a greater level of education may be more likely to rely on their own expertise when making decisions, as opposed to the information of others. Additionally, persons with a greater degree of education may be older and less susceptible to the influence of SMIs, which are believed to be more influential among youth. However, additional research could be conducted to determine whether the education level influences the association between the personality/content characteristics of SMIs and choice imitation.

The extent of product involvement may be a factor in the method by which SMIs influence imitation choice. Hughes et al. (2019) suggest that the endorsement of experts may only be effective in a high involvement context. It has been discovered that expert endorsement can increase engagement on social media platforms with a high level of involvement and minimal distraction. In a low-engagement and high-distraction environment, however, the effect of expert recommendation on engagement is negligible. It's a good topic for further research on how SMIs influence choice imitation when purchasing products with varying levels of product involvement.

Lastly, additional research is required to evaluate the impact of additional demographic characteristics on the link between SMIs and choice imitation. Age is not accounted for in the model, however it is possible that age may modify the effect of SMIs on decision imitation. For instance, a study may be conducted to see whether younger individuals are more prone to follow those who are physically close to them. The level of money may also have a moderating effect on the effect of SMI personality characteristics on decision imitation.

5.4 Conclusion

This paper sheds light on the key factors contributing to the success of social media influencer marketing campaigns and provides a fresh and innovative contribution by testing the impact of increased customer loyalty on choice imitation of followers. Different platforms offer different experiences and priming impacts on customers. For example, the experience a customer obtains from a television program may be different from what he/ she can get from radio. Experience can be favorable or unfavorable and it is mainly related to the emotional and affective aspect, i.e. qualitative in nature. Therefore, marketers may not only rely on quantitative parameters like the number of comments, followers, likes and views when they plan and evaluate their expenditure on social media platforms. Particularly, some platforms are distinctive and the followers of these platforms are potentially the target customers of the brand, advertisers may also consider allowing budgets on these platforms even if the quantitative measures are not attractive.

By the same token, some social media influencers may be the experts in some areas and they can attract a small group of loyal and affluent customers who can be the target clients of the high- end investment products. These influencers may have a higher value than those with many more followers. Therefore, when the advertisers are choosing among different social media influencers for promotional objectives, they should carefully align character of social media influencer with (1) product type, i.e. cognitive or affective choice process involved, (2) advertising goal, i.e. awareness creation or likeability enhancement, and (3) advertisement message delivered (Hilde et al 2018).

In their study, Yang and Ha (2021) provide evidence that social media may use motivations to affect users' intentions to purchase the products endorsed by social media influencers. Also, the results re- confirm the previous findings that parasocial relationships and persuasion knowledge may be used as predictors of consumers' intention to purchase. Yang and Ha (2021) test the role of persuasion knowledge in affecting consumer's behavior. They conclude that persuasion knowledge moderates the impact of parasocial relationships on purchase intentions. That is, if the consumer has formed a relatively high level of parasocial relationship with influencers, the persuasion knowledge will decrease and it will enhance the intention to purchase.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Research Questionnaire

Forewords: This research aims at exploring how social media influencers would affect the choice imitation of their followers, mediated by the customer loyalty and moderated by the demographic factors like gender, income and education levels. The data collected will be kept confidential and used for research and analysis purposes only. After the research is done, all data will be destroyed.

Definition of Social Media Influencers (SMIs):

Individuals who have built a huge and wide social network with a large number of followers are known as social media influencers. They're thought of as self-made celebrities in a specialized industry (Evans et al. 2017; De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017; Jin and Phua 2014).

Based on the above- mentioned definition, please suggest ONE of your favorite SMIs on one of social media platforms, and state which specific area, i.e. beauty, fashion, food, health, in which the SMI specialized.

My Favorite SMI: _____

His/ Her Specific Area: _____

Gender: Male/ Female

Income Level:

- a. Less than £1000/ month
- b. £1001 to £2000/ month
- c. £2001 to £3000/ month
- d. more than £3000/ month

Education Level:

- a. College or below
- b. Bachelor
- c. Master
- d. Doctor or above

Closeness: State your preference to EACH of the following questions, i.e. '1' - Strongly Disagree to '7' - Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	When looking at [SMI]'s social media, I feel close to him/ her.							
2	When looking at [SMI]'s social media, I feel that s/he could be a friend of mine.							
3	When looking at [SMI]'s social media, I feel that I could belong to the same group as s/he.							

Interactivity: State your preference to EACH of the following questions, i.e. '1' - Strongly Disagree to '7' - Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I feel that [SMI] would reply to me if I send a private message.							
2	I feel that [SMI] would reply to me if I post a comment.							
3	I feel that [SMI] would respond to me quickly and efficiently if I post a comment.							
4	I feel that [SMI] would allow me to communicate directly with him/ her.							

Attractiveness: State your preference to EACH of the following questions, i.e. '1' - Strongly Disagree to '7' - Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I find [SMI's name]'s content good looking.							
2	I find [SMI]'s content attractive.							
3	I find [SMI]'s content visually appealing.							

Credibility: State your preference to EACH of the following questions, i.e. '1' - Strongly Disagree to '7' - Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I find that [SMI]'s content is believable.							
2	I find that [SMI]'s content is credible.							
3	I find that [SMI]'s content is authentic.							

Customer Loyalty: State your preference to EACH of the following questions, i.e. '1' - Strongly Disagree to '7' - Strongly Agree

No.	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	I have no inclination to switch to another brand even if its brand endorsed by [SMI] is more expensive than other brands.							
2	I have a positive attitude toward the brand or product recommended by the [SMI].							
3	I have an intention to repurchase the brand or product recommended by the [SMI].							
4	I have a willingness to purchase the brand or product recommended by the [SMI].							

Choice Imitation: Tick 'Yes' if you agree with the statement and 'No' if you disagree with it.

No.	Statement	Yes	No
1	After seeing [SMI]'s posts, have you ever thought of following the lifestyle of him/ her?		
2	After seeing [SMI]'s posts, have you ever tried some of his/ her suggestions or recommendations?		
3	After seeing [SMI]'s posts, have you ever bought one of the same products or services that s/he posted on his/ her social media?		
4	After seeing [SMI]'s posts, have you ever bought one of the same brands that s/he posted on his/ her social media?		

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