FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER CHARACTERISTICS AND

PSYCHOLOGICAL-RELATED FACTORS ON FOLLOWER PURCHASE

INTENTIONS IN THE FAST-MOVING CONSUMER GOODS INDUSTRY:

THE ROLE OF TRUST IN SPONSORED POSTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

INFLUENCER TYPE

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of

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by

Maria Lovera

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To: Dean William G. Hardin
    College of Business

This dissertation, written by Maria Lovera and entitled The Impact of Social Media Influencer Characteristics and Psychological-Related Factors on Follower Purchase Intentions in the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Industry: The Role of Trust in Sponsored Posts and Social Media Influencer Type, having been approved with respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this dissertation and recommend that it be approved.

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Florida International University, 2024

DEDICATION

I dedicate this journey and accomplishment to my family. There aren't enough words to express how grateful I am to have a supportive family. I especially want to thank my husband, Bill Leon, for his encouragement, love, and unwavering support, allowing me to pursue and complete this journey.

I want to thank my mom, who passed away in 2008, for motivating me to achieve my goals even against the odds. Her courage, determination and resilience enabled her to escape from a civil war in the Dominican Republic and emigrate to the United States without knowing the language or the culture. She did this to ensure she could provide for me and my siblings and give us the opportunity to succeed.

Many other family members provided emotional support during this journey. There are too many to name them individually, but I am extremely thankful for their encouragement and inspiration.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Marketing practitioners frequently partner with social media influencers (SMIs) to drive preference and purchase intention for their products/services and usually choose SMIs based on the number of followers they have in order to reach a large audience. Most of the academic literature on SMIs has been focused on the fashion, beauty, luxury goods, travel, and gaming industries, leaving a gap in understanding how SMIs' effectiveness across other industries, such as the $11 trillion fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG). In addition, U.S. federal regulations require SMIs to disclose when their posts have been sponsored, e.g. they have received compensation for posting branded content. The academic research findings regarding sponsored posts have been mixed, with both positive and negative impacts. Furthermore, there has been a recent rise in the use of virtual (non-human) influencers (VIs), and there is limited understanding of the impact VIs have on purchase intention for branded/sponsored posts.

The purpose of this research was to better understand the impact of SMIs on follower purchase intention within the FMCG in the United States. The data for this research was collected using a self-administered quantitative survey among SMI followers, including those who follow human SMIs and those who follow VIs. This research used social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as the theoretical basis to help understand SMIs' impact on their followers as endorsers of products/brands. Source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and parasocial relationship theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) were also applied as sub-theories. The results from this study suggest that SMI characteristics such as credibility and authenticity are important for both followers of human and non-human SMIs. The results of this study also found some differences in terms of psychological factors, with parasocial relationship and wishful identification being more important for those who follow human SMIs. However, trust in sponsored posts was an important factor for all SMI followers and had a significant mediating role in influencing purchase intent. In addition, these study results suggest that an SMI's category (based on follower size) was not an important factor in influencing purchase intent and therefore should not be the primary or sole factor when selecting and partnering with a social media influencer.

Keywords: social media influencer marketing, human and virtual social media influencers, purchase intention, fast-moving consumer goods

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

SMI	Social Media Influencer
SMIM	Social Media Influencer Marketing
CGI	Computer Generated Images
VI	Virtual Influencer (non-human)
AI	Artificial Intelligence
FMCG	Fast-Moving Consumer Goods
ROI	Return on Investment
SLT	Social Learning Theory
IV	Independent Variable
DV	Dependent Variable
MED	Mediator
CRED	Perceived Credibility
AUTH	Perceived Authenticity
INVOLVE	Involvement
PSR	Parasocial Relationship
WISH	Wishful Identification
TSP	Trust in Sponsored Posts
PI	Purchase Intent

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

Social-media influencer marketing (SMIM) has become a common strategy for marketing practitioners (Phua et al., 2017), as they invest in SMIM to increase brand relevance and grow market share. SMIM is defined as a "strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance" (Leung et al., 2022, p. 228). Social media influencers (SMIs) are defined as "online personalities with large numbers of followers across one or more media platforms … who have an influence on their followers" (Lou & Yuan, 2019, p. 58).

Marketing practitioners choose to partner with SMIs to increase purchase intention for their products/services/brands. Spears and Singh (2004) summarized the definition of purchase intention as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (p. 56). Globally, SMIM investments in 2023 were estimated to be over $21 billion (Statista, December 2023). SMIM investments in the U.S. were nearly $5 billion in 2022 and are expected to grow to over $7 billion by 2024 (eMarketer, July 2022). Marketing industry research conducted in 2022 found that 70% of marketing practitioners intend to invest in SMIM (Enberg, 2023). However, determining the effectiveness of SMIM continues to be a challenge. In 2020, the Association of National Advertisers (ANA) surveyed its members and found that measurement was the number one challenge experienced with influencer marketing (Association of National Advertisers, 2020).

SMIs attract and engage with followers by creating and posting their own content on one or more social media platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok. SMIs create and post content for entertainment purposes and provide information on their lifestyle. They also use their posts to highlight the products/services that they use and/or are paid to promote. Some SMIs have become online celebrities by establishing themselves as experts in specific content areas such as travel, fashion, fitness, and beauty (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). As such, SMIM is another form of celebrity endorsement marketing (Schouten et al., 2020). However, SMIs are different from traditional celebrities who become famous due to a specific ability (e.g., movies, music, television, sports, politics, etc.) or through social status afforded to them at birth (e.g., children of wealthy people) (Khamis et al., 2017).

People who follow SMIs view them as more authentic and credible than traditional celebrities (De Veirman et al., 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). According to the Pew Research Center (2021), 40% of social media users say they follow social media influencers (SMIs), and 53% of social media users who follow SMIs report purchasing something after seeing an influencer post about it on social media. In academia, SMIM is also known as online influencer marketing (OIM) (Leung et al., 2022). For this research, SMIM will be used to refer to the influencer marketing strategy that focuses specifically on partnering with influencers that have emerged exclusively through social media.

Marketing practitioners promote their products and services through SMIs by either sending them free products to try or through cash payments for sponsored posts (Campbell & Grimm, 2019). Marketing practitioners typically choose to partner with

SMIs for their posts based on the number of followers that they have and pay them accordingly (Enberg, 2023 – see Appendix B). Based on U.S. regulatory requirements, SMIs must disclose their posts as sponsored when they are paid to promote products/services with either free products or other monetary payment methods (U.S. Federal Trade Commission, 2017).

Marketing practitioners have deemed SMIM as a cost-effective way to reach and engage with consumers (eMarketer, July 2022). According to industry research, approximately "60 percent of marketers believed that influencer marketing had a greater return on investment (ROI) than traditional advertising" (Statista, March 2021). Academic research has found that consumers find SMI content more engaging and authentic than content created by brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019). However, SMIM costs are increasing due to the high demand for SMI content, and marketing professionals continue to face challenges in determining which SMIs will be most effective. A recent industry report highlights the challenges of measuring the effectiveness of SMIs, with marketing practitioners finding both success and failure with mega influencers (those who have more than a million followers) as well as micro-influencers, those with fewer than 100K followers (eMarketer, June 2023).

Recently, Computer-Generated Images (CGI) influencers, also known as virtual influencers (VIs), have been developed and used to promote branded products. A virtual influencer is digitally created and programmed to appear and behave like real humans (Ahn et al., 2022). Several VIs have attracted a substantial number of followers. The most well-known VI in the U.S. is Miquela (formerly Lil Miquela), who has over three million followers. Miquela began her 'career' on Instagram in 2016. She was designed as a 19-

year-old robot living in Los Angeles. Despite clearly communicating in her profile that she is a robot, she is shown engaged in human activities such as shopping and socializing with real humans. In 2018, Miquela was named one of the 25 most influential 'people' on the internet (Time Magazine, June 2018). The use of virtual influencers is believed to be a more efficient option for marketers than the use of human SMIs. Bohndel et al. (2023) noted that third-party agencies create virtual influencers for their clients, allowing marketing companies to control the entire content creation process. Additionally, "VIs do not get sick, nor do they age, and they are available at any time" (Bohndel et al., 2023, p. 5).

Significance of the Problem

SMIM investments were reported to be $4.1B in 2022, +12% vs. the prior year Statista, December 2023), and marketing practitioners are expected to continue to increase their investments in SMIM. An industry survey by eMarketer (July 2022) estimated that SMIM investments will reach over $7 billion in the U.S. by 2024. In another industry survey conducted in November 2022, more than half (53%) of advertisers said they planned to increase their influencer marketing budgets in 2023 (Papsadore, 2023). However, SMIM costs have been rising due to the high demand for SMI content, and measuring effectiveness continues to be a challenge (Enberg, May 2023).

Research Gap

While SMIs continue to be leveraged by marketing practitioners to promote their products, there remain challenges in determining the factors that impact SMIM effectiveness. From an academic point of view, the literature on human SMIs is

extensive, and several factors have been identified as impacting SMI effectiveness, such as credibility and likeability (see literature reviews by Vrontis et al., 2021, and Ye et al., 2021). However, Vrontis et al. (2021) noted that the research on SMI effectiveness is extremely fragmented and varies across industries. In addition, the majority of SMIM research has focused on luxury, fashion, beauty, gaming, and travel industries (Ye et al., 2021), leaving a gap in understanding how effective SMIM is across other industries such as fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG), which is estimated to be an $11 trillion industry in the U.S. (Statista, n.d.). FMCG are relatively inexpensive products that are purchased frequently and used on an everyday basis, such as toiletries, cleaning products, candy, soda (pop), beer, yogurt, cereal, milk, etc. (Kenton, December 2021). In addition, to date, there is limited understanding and mixed results regarding VIs and whether they are as effective as human SMIs in engaging with their followers and endorsing branded products (Bohndel et al., 2023; Sands et al., 2022).

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research study.

Research Question 1: What social media influencer (SMI) characteristics and psychological-related factors impact their followers' purchase intentions in the FMCG industry?

Research Question 2: What is the mediating role of trust in sponsored posts?

Research Question 3: How does this compare between virtual and human social media influencers?

Research Contributions

  This research was intended to extend the academic and practitioner knowledge of SMIM. Specifically, this research sought to broaden the understanding of the SMI characteristics and psychological-related factors that contribute to increasing purchase intention for their branded posts within the fast-moving consumer goods industry. This research was intended to help further inform marketing practitioners in this industry in identifying and selecting SMIs for their brands/products. Finally, this research was designed to contribute to understanding virtual influencers' ability to impact their followers' purchase intention.

CHAPTER II: BACKGROUND LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORY

A wide range of academic research has discussed and assessed the emergence of social media influencer marketing (SMIM) as a marketing strategy and the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) on their followers (Hudders et al., 2021; Leung et al., 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Phua et al., 2017; Vrontis et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2021; Yodel, 2017). As summarized by Leung et al. (2022), SMIM is defined as a "strategy in which a firm selects and incentivizes online influencers to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance" (p. 228). SMIM is commonly used by marketing practitioners to connect and engage with their target consumers through SMIs to drive interest and purchase intention for their products and services (Yodel, 2017). Spears and Singh (2004) summarized the definition of purchase intention as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (p. 56).

SMIs are defined as regular people who become online celebrities by attracting a large number of followers through their online social activities (Jin et al., 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). SMIs attract followers by posting information about their lifestyle as well as about products or services that they use or are paid to promote, known as sponsored posts. According to the Pew Research Center (2021a), 40% of social media users say they follow social media influencers. Various terms for SMIs have been used, such as blogger, vlogger, YouTuber, and Instafamous (Ye et al., 2021). For the purpose of this research, the acronym SMI will be used to refer to these types of social media influencers.

SMIs are different from traditional celebrities who become famous by achieving "something remarkable (like elite sportspeople, politicians and innovators) … or were hugely popular in the culture industries (such as cinema, music) ... or were born into the privileged echelons of society" (Khamis et al., 2017, p. 195). SMIs develop a strong connection with their followers, who perceive them to be real, relatable, and more approachable than traditional celebrities (Jin et al., 2019). In addition, SMIs have been perceived as being more trustworthy than traditional celebrities (Schouten et al., 2020), and SMI content has been found to be more engaging and authentic than that of traditional celebrities (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

SMIM is another form of celebrity endorsement marketing (Schouten et al., 2020), which is the use of celebrities in advertising. Advertisers have been partnering with celebrities to increase interest in their products/services for decades (see literature review, Erdogan 1999). Prior research has found that celebrity endorsement marketing activates an individual's intent to purchase or use the endorsed product or service by transferring the positive image and characteristics of a celebrity onto the brand (Atkin & Block, 1983). As summarized by Biswas et al., research has shown that celebrities "can enhance audience attentiveness, make the ad memorable, credible, and desirable, and add glamour to the product" (2009, p. 121). Prior research has found that celebrities are effective endorsers because of their aspirational reference group associations (Assael, 1984; Solomon & Assael, 1987). Aspirational reference groups are people or groups that others want to be like or belong to, e.g., athletes, actors, models, musicians, etc. (N., Sam, 2013). Biswas et al. (2009) noted that celebrities are effective endorsers because of their

symbolic aspirational reference group associations, which means that celebrities are people that others desire to be like.

Marketing practitioners often select SMIs based on follower size, which reflects how many people they can reach with a particular campaign (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017) and because SMIs with a large number of followers can positively impact a follower's perception of the influencer's popularity, status, and reputation (Leung et al., 2022, p. 99). SMIs are classified into four categories based on the number of followers they have (Campbell & Farrell, 2020). SMIs who have over 1M followers are classified as 'mega-influencers,' those with 100k – 1M followers are "macro-influencers," those with 10k – 100k followers are 'micro-influencers," and those with less than 10K followers are called "nano-influencers" (Campbell & Farrell, 2020, pp. 471-472).

Psychological-related factors such as parasocial interaction/relationships (imaginary friendship, Horton & Wohl, 1956) and wishful identification (the desire to be or act like another person, Feilitzen & Linné, 1975) have been found to impact emotional attachment to SMIs, which in turn has a significant positive effect on the purchase of the products recommended by SMIs (Ladhari et al., 2020). Swant (2016) reported that people who follow influencers on the social media platform Twitter have the same trust in them as they do their friends. According to Pew Research (2021a), 53% of social media users who follow SMIs report purchasing something after seeing an influencer post about it on social media.

Marketing practitioners pay SMIs to promote their products/brands either by sending them free products or by paying them directly. All SMI posts that are

sponsored/branded endorsements must be disclosed per U.S. regulatory requirements, and as such, are considered advertising. In 2017, the U.S. regulatory requirements for disclosure of social media-sponsored posts were updated and began to be enforced (U.S. Federal Trade Commission, 2017). Specifically, all social media posts that have been paid for either by free product or cash payments must be clearly disclosed in the post. This change in disclosure requirements led to additional academic research to determine the impact of the sponsored posts. Research by Djafarova and Trofimenko (2019) found that consumers were starting to lose trust in SMIs who regularly promote products and services for payment. Other research found that sponsorship disclosures have a positive impact on purchase likelihood (Kay et al., 2020). As noted by Vrontis et al. (2021) sponsorship disclosures help to provide transparency about the relationship between the SMI and the brands they endorse, and "this transparency may be appreciated in the long run, softening consumer resistance … [because] consumers dislike the feeling of being misled" (p. 637).

The majority of SMIM research has focused on human SMIs and their impact on the luxury, fashion, beauty, gaming, and travel industries (Ye et al., 2021). As summarized by Bohndel et al. (2023), academic research has found that [human] SMI characteristics such as credibility and likeability increase the intentions to buy products. However, per Vrontis et al. (2021), the research findings have been inconsistent across industries and products, which led the authors to suggest that "different contexts and products require influencers that exhibit different characteristics" (p. 637).

While the majority of SMIs are human beings, there is a sub-category of SMIs that are computer-generated images (CGI), also known as virtual influencers (VIs). A

virtual influencer has been defined as an entity—whether it is human-like or not—that is autonomously controlled by artificial intelligence (AI) (Seymour et al., 2018). Many VIs are programmed and created to look and behave like humans (Ahn et al., 2022), and as noted by Moustakas et al. (2020), many VIs "are similar to human beings in terms of their physical appearance, personality, and behavior. They display human characteristics through their posts and interaction with their followers" (p. 1). Mourtizen et al. (2023) defined VIs as distinct from other digitally created characters such as avatars, which are often used in customer service roles as virtual assistants and chatbots. This research study will focus on VIs that have attracted a significant number of followers on social media and are distinct from avatars used as virtual assistants or chatbots.

In the U.S., the top VI based on a number of followers is Miquela (3.2 million followers), which was created in 2016 and has promoted products for brands such as Samsung and Calvin Klein (Bohndel et al., 2023). Research by Sands et al. (2022) found that consumers are becoming more comfortable with virtual beings having brand interactions. Sands et al. (2022) noted that "32% of millennials following profiles that they know are not real people on Twitter or Instagram" (p. 779). The authors also noted that "from an engagement perspective, consumers have nearly three times the engagement rate on Instagram with virtual influencers compared to human influencers" (p. 779).

The use of VIs is believed to be a more efficient option for marketers than the use of human SMIs. Bohndel et al. (2023) noted that virtual influencers are created by third-party agencies, which allows marketing companies to control the entire content creation process. In their qualitative study, Moustakas et al. (2020, p. 2) found that VIs "enable

brands to exercise greater control over their influencer's behaviour and content."

Additionally, "VIs do not get sick, nor do they age, and they are available at any time"

(Bohndel et al., 2023, p. 5). However, research on VIs' impact on their followers has so

far been mixed and is still emerging (Ahn et al., 2022). As summarized by Sands et al.

(2022), prior research has found that virtual influencers can build rapport and connect

with their followers. Consumers have also been found to imitate virtual influencer

behavior, as they do with friends and colleagues (Kramer, 2018). However, other

research found that people showed more affinity, trustworthiness, and preference for

human [travel] agents compared to virtual agents (Seymour et al., 2020).

Theoretical Basis

Several theories have been used to help explain the dynamics between social

media influencers and their followers. This research used social learning theory

(Bandura, 1977) as the underlying basis to help understand SMIs' impact on their

followers as endorsers of products/brands. In addition, source credibility theory (Hovland

& Weiss, 1951) and parasocial relationship theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) were applied

as sub-theories to help explain the SMI characteristics and psychological factors that

enable them to influence their followers.

Social learning theory (SLT) by Bandura (1977) proposed that individuals acquire

new behavior through direct experiences or indirect experiences by observing, modeling,

and imitating the behaviors of others. More specifically, the actions of others influence

how people behave in many situations in everyday life, driven by "the power of example"

(Bandura, 1978, p. 148). For example, "people applaud when others clap, they exit from

social functions when they see others leaving, they wear their hair like others …"

12

(Bandura, 1978, p. 148). SLT has been applied in academic research related to marketing, specifically to help understand the impact of socialization agents such as celebrities, family members, or peers on an individual's consumption behavior (Lim et al., 2017). Social media influencers, like celebrities, are another type of socialization agent because they can shape their followers' attitudes and decision-making through their social media content.

Source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) states that people are more likely to be influenced when the source of the message is credible, specifically "the extent to which the recipient perceives the source as having relevant knowledge and/or experience and therefore trusts the source to give unbiased information" (p. 21). Source credibility theory has been used to explain how the perceived level of a social media influencer's credibility impacts the effectiveness of an influencer endorsement on consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Munnukka et al. (2019) noted that "the perceived credibility of the message source enhances the likelihood that the target audience will accept the message" (p. 227).

Source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) was originally developed with two sub-constructs: trustworthiness and expertise. Expertise has been defined as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions," and trustworthiness refers to "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid" (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). Subsequent empirical research conducted by Munnukka et al. (2016) found that source credibility contains two additional sub-constructs: attractiveness and homophily/similarity. As noted by Munnukka et al. (2016), attractiveness is defined as

the likeability and familiarity of a brand's endorser, and homophily/similarity is defined as the tendency to affiliate with or be attracted to others like oneself. McPherson et al. (2001) noted that the principle of homophily was the basis for the "birds of a feather" phenomenon (p. 417). This research study included the four sub-constructs of source credibility validated by Munnukka et al. (2016).

Parasocial interaction/relationship theory was developed by Horton and Wohl (1956) and defined as "the apparent face-to-face interaction that can occur between media characters and their audience" (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 198). This theory explains how people develop imaginary, one-sided relationships with media figures such as celebrities, actors, news or talk show hosts, etc. As noted by Ballantine and Martin (2005), "the behavior of the media figure during each interaction event (e.g., television program, commercial, or talk show interview) helps a viewer to form an opinion about that character … those opinions will then influence a viewer's feeling about that persona's behavior, which will then affect the parasocial relationship with that person" (p. 198). Once viewers develop a parasocial relationship with a media figure, they "often feel that they know and understand the persona in the same intimate way that they know and understand their flesh-and-blood friends" (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 199). This theory has been applied in the context of social media users to explain how they develop relationships with other online users (Ballantine & Martin, 2005).

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH MODEL AND HYPOTHESES

The purpose of this research was to assess the SMI characteristics and psychological-related factors that impact their followers' trust in sponsored posts and purchase intention in the fast-moving consumer goods industry and compare the impact of human versus virtual influencers. As previously noted, purchase intention, defined as "an individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand" (Spears & Singh, 2004, p. 56), is an outcome that is important to marketing practitioners in determining the effectiveness of their SMIM strategy. Figure 1 below shows the conceptual research model developed for this study based on a deductive approach. A deductive approach requires a researcher to develop hypotheses based on existing theories and research and to quantitatively test to determine whether the hypotheses are supported (Babbie, 2020).

Figure 1

The Conceptual Research Model
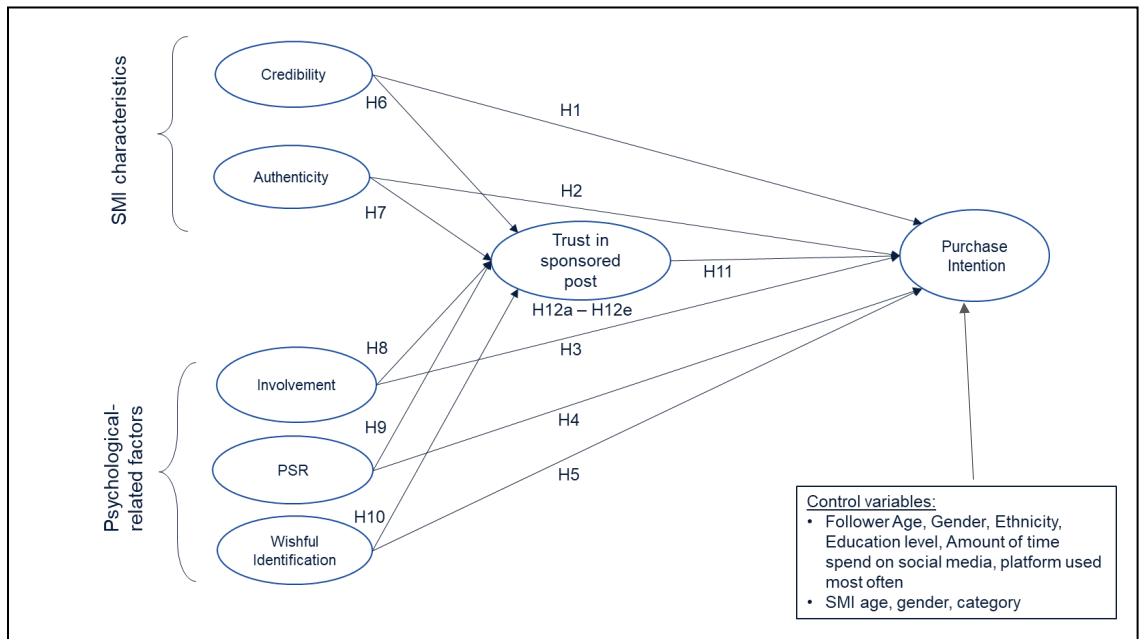
Credibility

Based on source credibility theory, the perceived level of a source's credibility impacts the receiver's attitude and behavioral intention (Ohanian, 1990). As noted by Munnukka et al. (2019), "having an endorser with higher credibility and persuasiveness leads to the audience having more positive attitudes toward the endorsement, more positive brand attitudes, and increased buying intentions" (p. 227). The concept of credibility has evolved since it was first developed (Hovland & Weiss, 1951; Munnukka et al., 2016; Ohanian, 1990). For example, Hovland and Weiss (1951) developed the concept of credibility using two components – expertise and trustworthiness. Research conducted by Ohanian (1990) found that attractiveness was also a component of credibility. However, Munnukka et al. (2016) found that credibility consists of four components: expertise, trustworthiness, attractiveness (familiarity and likeability) and homophily/similarity. This research study used the credibility construct developed by Munnukka et al. (2016).

Expertise. Expertise has been defined as "the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions" (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). A literature review conducted by Erdogan (1999) noted that "it does not really matter whether an endorser is an expert; all that matters is how the target audience perceives the endorser" (p. 298). As such, expertness is not absolute; it is about perception. As summarized by Munnukka et al. (2016), "expertness refers to the perceived competence of a source to make a claim, such as an endorser's knowledge, experience or skills" (p. 184). Prior research has found that celebrities' perceived expertness is significantly related to purchase intention (Ohanian, 1991). Additionally, as noted by Ladhari et al. (2020), when

the source of the message is perceived as having enough expertness, the message has a positive impact on attitudes and behaviors.

Trustworthiness. Trustworthiness refers to "the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid" (Hovland et al., 1953, p. 21). As summarized by Lou and Yuan (2019), source trustworthiness refers to "an individual's perception of a source as honest, sincere, or truthful" (p. 61).

Attractiveness. As summarized in prior research (Munnukka et al., 2016) attractiveness refers to the likeability and familiarity of an endorser of a brand (p. 184), which is not necessarily related to physical appearance. Prior research suggests that endorser characteristics such as expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intentions (Lafferty et al., 2002; Lee & Koo, 2015; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Homophily. Homophily refers to the tendency to affiliate with or be attracted to others who are similar to oneself, also known as the 'birds of a feather" phenomenon" (McPherson et al., 2001, p. 417). As summarized by Kim and Kim (2022), homophily provides the follower with a feeling of similarity and friendship with their SMI, which creates an "emotional bonding" (p. 96). Previous research has shown that followers who perceive more similarity with the SMIs are more likely to be attached to, recommend the SMI, and purchase the products or brands featured in the SMI's posts (Ladhari et al., 2020). Taken together, based on theory and prior research, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: The higher the perceived credibility of an SMI, the higher their followers' purchase intention.

Authenticity

As summarized by Kim and Kim (2021), authenticity has been defined as "being true to oneself or to others … and implies sincerity, genuineness, truthfulness, and originality" (p. 225). Authenticity refers to being original and real, "not to be a copy or an imitation" (Grayson & Martinec, 2004, p. 297). More specifically, Lee and Easton (2021) define "perceived SMI authenticity as the extent to which consumers perceived SMIs to be kindhearted (sincerity), engage in intrinsically motivated brand endorsements (truthful endorsements), reveal personal information about themselves (visibility), are naturally talented in their area of expertise (expertise), and are distinct from other SMIs (uniqueness)" (p. 827). In SMIM, followers who perceive that an influencer is authentic will believe that the SMI's posts are based on sincere opinions (Kim & Kim, 2021). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H2: The higher the perceived authenticity of the SMI, the higher the follower's purchase intention.

Involvement

Involvement is defined as "the perceived personal importance" of particular stimuli [product or subject] within a specific situation (Antil, 1984, p. 204). As summarized by Choo et al. (2014) involvement has four sub-dimensions, (a) product involvement, (b) purchase decision involvement, (c) consumption involvement, and (d) advertising involvement. Empirical research by Lou and Yuan (2019) found that SMI followers with high involvement have a positive impact on trust in branded posts as well as purchase intention. For the purposes of this research, involvement was defined as

18

social media users' involvement in following SMIs' posts or updates, consistent with Lou and Yuan (2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H3: The higher the follower's level of involvement with the SMI, the higher their purchase intention.

Parasocial Relationship

A parasocial relationship refers to an imagined friendship between a follower and a media person (Horton & Wohl, 1956). A media person is someone who is well-known and famous within mass media channels, such as actors, news or talk show hosts, etc. SMIs are micro-celebrities who frequently post content about their lives and activities to engage and interact with their followers, which gives their followers "the impression that they know the influencers well and that they have a personal relationship with them" (Ye et al., 2021, p. 174). This parasocial relationship is developed by the follower from the interactions they have with the SMIs. Once viewers develop a parasocial relationship with a media figure, they "often feel that they know and understand the persona in the same intimate way that they know and understand their flesh-and-blood friends" (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 199). Research has found that a follower's parasocial relationship with a SMI positively affects their purchase intentions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Based on theory and prior literature, the following hypothesis was proposed.

H4: The higher the follower's perceived parasocial relationship with the SMI, the

higher the purchase intention.

Wishful Identification

Wishful identification refers to the psychological desire to become or act like

someone else, such as a media personality (Feilitzen & Linné, 1975). Wishful

identification is also described as imitation and is derived from social learning theory

(Bandura, 1977). As it relates to celebrity endorsers, wishful identification is when an

individual aspires to be like a specific celebrity (Kamins et al., 1989). Wishful

identification … "can entice viewers, via characters they attempt to emulate, to purchase

or desiring to purchase a product their favourite character uses" (Shoenberger & Kim,

2017, p. 51). Schouten et al. (2020) found evidence that SMI endorsements led to higher

wishful identification with the SMI as compared to traditional celebrity endorsements.

Prior research has found that wishful identification strongly influences a person's trust in

a brand and purchase intention toward a product if it is endorsed by their role models (Hu

et al., 2020, p.5). Therefore, based on theory and prior literature, the following hypothesis

was proposed:

H5: The higher a follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher level

of purchase intention.

Trust in Sponsored Posts

As it relates to marketing communication, trust is defined as the "willingness to

rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman et al., 1993, p. 82).

Prior research has found that SMI followers' trust in product reviews was shaped by the

SMI's expertise (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As mentioned previously, expertise is a

sub-factor of credibility. Munnukka et al. (2016) noted that source credibility has been found to significantly impact consumers' attitudes toward advertisements. In addition, Kim and Kim (2021) found that the authenticity of social media influencers also leads to relational trust among their followers. Thus, the two SMI characteristics of credibility and authenticity can have a direct impact on the follower's trust in an SMI's sponsored posts. Furthermore, as noted by Kim and Kim, trust is "a relationship trait established through continuous interactions" (2021, p. 225). The authors suggested that the follower's trust in an influencer helps them believe that their relationship with the social media influencer will have a positive effect on them. Therefore, one can deduce that the psychologically related factors of involvement, PSR, and wishful identification, which are relationship-driven, will impact the follower's trust in the SMI's sponsored posts. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H6: The higher the SMI credibility, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.

H7: The higher the SMI authenticity, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.

H8: The higher the follower's involvement with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.

H9: The higher the follower's parasocial relationship with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.

H10: The higher the follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.

As noted previously, all SMI posts that are sponsored/branded endorsements must be disclosed per U.S. regulatory requirements, and as such are considered advertising. Trust in advertising is defined as "confidence that advertising is a reliable source of product/service information and willingness to act on the basis of information conveyed by advertising" (Soh et al., 2009, p. 86). Therefore, since a sponsored post is a form of advertising, it can be deduced that the higher the level of trust the follower has in the sponsored SMI post, the higher the purchase intention for the brand/product that is being advertised. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

> H11: The higher the level of trust in the SMIs sponsored post, the higher the purchase intention.

Mediating Role of Trust in Sponsored Posts

In research conducted by Lou and Yuan (2019), trust in sponsored posts was found to be a partial mediator of the SMI characteristics such as credibility (all sub-constructs) and follower involvement and purchase intention. Other recent literature has found that trust in the influencer is a partial mediator between SMI relationship constructs such as homophily and authenticity, and purchase intention as an outcome (Kim & Kim, 2021). Other research, summarized by Ye et al. (2020) has shown that for influencers "to be persuasive, it is very important that [their] followers feel connected to the influencers and that there is a parasocial relationship between them" (p. 174). Matin et al. (2022) summarized prior research, which found that "the degree to which the consumer identifies with the influencer … can determine the perception of fit between the influencer and the consumer [which] can then result in higher levels of trust in the sponsored content" (p. 98). Based on this, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H12a: The effect of credibility on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.

H12b: The effect of authenticity on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.

H12c: The effect of involvement on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.

H12d: The effect of the parasocial relationship on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.

H12e: The effect of wishful identification on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.

Table 1 below summarizes all the construct definitions.

Table 1: Construct Definitions

Construct		Definition	Source
Independent Variable	Credibility	A person's perceived trustworthiness, attractiveness (familiarity and likeability), homophily (similarity) and expertise	Munnukka et al., 2016; Ohanian, 1990
	Trustworthiness	An individual's perception of a source as honest, sincere, or truthful	Lou & Yuan, 2019
	Attractiveness	A person's physical (aesthetically pleasing/beautiful) and social (likeability and familiarity) traits	McGuire, 1985; Ohanian, 1990
	Homophily	The tendency to affiliate with or be attracted to others similar to oneself	McPherson et al., 2001
	Expertise	The extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions	Hovland, et al., 1953
	Authenticity	Being true to oneself or to others. Implies sincerity, genuineness, truthfulness, and originality	Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Lea & Eastin 2021
	Involvement	The recognition of the relevance and personal significance of a particular subject in a given situation. Social media users' involvement in following SMIs posts or updates,	Antil, 1984; Lou & Yuan, 2021
	Parasocial Relationship	A media user's reaction to a media performer such that the media user perceives the performer as an intimate conversational partner	Horton & Wohl, 1956
	Wishful Identification	People's desire to become or to act in the same way as a certain media character	Feilitzen & Linne, 1975
Mediator	Trust in Sponsored posts	The willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence Confidence that advertising is a reliable source of product/service information and willingness to act on the basis of information conveyed by advertising	Moorman et al., 1993 Soh et al., 2009
Dependent Variable	Purchase Intent	An individual's conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand	Spears & Singh 2004

CHAPTER IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The population of interest and unit of analysis for this study was SMI followers in

the U.S. who were 18 – 64 years old. The U.S. Census estimated that 262 million adults

in the U.S. are 18 years or older (U.S. Census, 2023). Nearly 40% of adults in the U.S.

report following SMIs (Pew Research Center, 2021). Therefore, the minimum required

sample size to ensure a 95% confidence level in the data was 385 people (Qualtrics, n.d.).

However, to ensure a large enough sample size for comparing SMI followers of human

SMIs to those who follow non-human SMIs, a sample size of 1,000 was needed, given

that only 32% of millennials indicate that they follow non-human SMIs (Sands et al.,

2022).

Procedure

The data for this research was collected between December 2023 and January

2024 via an online self-administered quantitative survey administered through the

Qualtrics platform. Participant recruitment was completed using the Amazon Mechanical

Turk database. Participant screening criteria were adults aged 18-64 who self-reported

following Social Media Influencers (SMIs) across the top four social media platforms

(Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, and TikTok).

An informational letter was included at the beginning of the survey to explain the

study to participants and to obtain their informed consent (see Appendix D). Each

respondent received a compensation of $1.25 for participating in the study. The survey

was designed to minimize common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003) by including

psychological separation in the questionnaire between the dependent and independent

variables (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Reverse-coded items were included to strengthen data quality (Mead & Craig, 2012). The average completion time for the survey was approximately 14 minutes.

Measures

To increase construct validity and reliability, latent constructs were operationalized by adapting measurement items from existing research studies (Babbie, 2020). Participants were asked to provide answers to each measurement item using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = disagree, 5 = agree).

Credibility. The four sub-factors of credibility were measured separately to be consistent with prior research (e.g., Munnukka et al., 2016). The credibility construct was developed by aggregating the four sub-constructs, trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness, and homophily, which were measured using 17 items adapted from prior research studies (e.g., Ha & Perks, 2005; Kim & Kim, 2021; Ladhari et al., 2020; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Munnukka et al., 2016; Nguyen et al., 2015; Ohanian, 1991).

Authenticity. Authenticity was measured with one global item, consistent with Bergkvist and Rossiter (2007) and Bergkvist (2015) arguments that a global item can be used to measure a construct, sourced from Kim and Kim (2021), "the influencer I follow is unique." Global items have been used in academic research in the marketing and psychology fields to minimize survey fatigue when controlling for multiple variables (Atroszko et al., 2017, Bergkvist, 2015; Fisher et al., 2015).

Involvement. Involvement was measured with one global item (see Bergkvist, 2015; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007), "following my favorite influencer's posts/updates on

social media is a significant part of my life" adapted from Choo et al. (2014) and Lou and Yuan (2019).

Parasocial relationship: Parasocial relationship was measured with eight items adapted from Dibble et al. (2016), which included "the influencer I follow makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend", "the influencer I follow is a natural, down-to-earth person" and "I look forward to watching the influencer I follow in his/her next video."

Wishful identification. Wishful identification was measured using one global item (see Bergkvist, 2015; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007), adapted from Hoffner and Buchanan (2005), specifically "the influencer that I follow is the type of person I want to be like myself."

Trust in sponsored posts. Trust in sponsored posts was measured using one global item (see Bergkvist, 2015; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007), adapted from Wu and Lin (2017), specifically "the sponsored posts of the influencer that I follow are honest."

Purchase intention. Purchase intention is the dependent variable and was measured using one global item (see Bergkvist, 2015; Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007), adapted from Yuan and Jang (2008) and Wu and Wang (2005), specifically, "I intend to purchase products endorsed by the influencer that I follow."

Table 2 includes all the construct measurement items included in the survey instrument.

Table 2

Construct Measurement Items

Construct	Measurement items	Source
Credibility:	Total score is based on four subconstructs: Trustworthiness, attractiveness, homophily, and expertise.	Munnukka et al., 2016
Trustworthiness	TRUSTW1: The influencer I follow is trustworthy. TRUSTW2: The influencer I follow is honest. TRUSTW3: The influencer I follow is reliable. TRUSTW4: The influencer I follow has a good reputation.	Lou & Yuan, 2019, adopted from Munnukka et al., 2016
Attractiveness	ATTRACT1: I like this influencer. ATTRACT2: This influencer is physically attractive. ATTRACT3: This influencer makes me feel comfortable. ATTRACT4: I am always aware of the influencer on social media.	Ha & Perks, 2005 Nguyen et al., 2015
Homophily	HOM1: The influencer I follow thinks like me. HOM2: The influencer I follow behaves like me. HOM3: The influencer I follow is similar to me. HOM4: The influencer I follow is like me.	Kim & Kim, 2021; McPherson et al., 2001
Expertise	EXP1: The influencer I follow is an expert. EXP2: The influencer I follow is knowledgeable. EXP3: The influencer I follow is experienced. EXP4: The influencer I follow is qualified.	Ohanian, 1991, as adapted by Ladhari et al., 2020
Authenticity	AUTH: The influencer I follow is unique.	Grayson & Martinec, 2004; Kim & Kim, 2021
Involvement	INVOLVE: Following my favorite influencer's posts/updates on social media is a significant part of my life.	Choo et al., 2014; Lou & Yuan, 2019

Table 2 - continued

Construct Measurement Items

Construct	Measurement items	Source
Parasocial Relationship	PSR1: The influencer I follow makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend. PSR2: The influencer I follow is a natural, down-to-earth person. PSR3: I look forward to watching the influencer I follow in his/her next video. PSR4: If the influencer I follow appeared in a video on another channel, I would watch or read his/her post. PSR5: The influencer I follow seems to understand the kind of things I want to know. PSR6: I miss seeing the influencer I follow when he/she is ill or on vacation. PSR7: I want to meet the influencer I follow in person. PSR8: I feel sorry for the influencer I follow when he/she makes a mistake.	Dibble et al., 2016
Wishful Identification	WISH: Sometimes I wish I could be more like my favorite influencer.	Hoffner & Buchanan, 2005
Trust in sponsored post	TSP: The sponsored posts of the social media influencer that I follow are honest.	Wu & Lin, 2017
Purchase Intention	PI: I intend to purchase products endorsed by the influencer that I follow.	Wu & Wang 2005; Yuan & Jang 2008
SMI Type	This will be coded as a dichotomous variable. 1= Human influencer 2= CGI Influencer	

Control variables. A total of nine control variables were included in this study. Respondent (follower) demographic information such as age, gender, and ethnicity as well as education level were included as control variables. Lou and Yuan noted that demographic factors such as age and gender "are crucial variables for classifying social media users and should be included as potential covariates" (2019, p. 63). In addition, Pew Research (2021a) highlighted age, gender, and other demographic differences among social media users. Ethnicity definitions were based on the definitions used by the U.S. Census Bureau (2021). Another control variable was the social media platform used most often by the respondents to follower the SMIs. According to Pew Research (2021a), the use of social media platforms varies by age. Younger adults (18-29) use Instagram and TikTok, while older adults (30-44) use Facebook and YouTube. Furthermore, time spent online and on social media also varies by age and gender (Pew Research, 2021b; Statista, 2023). Therefore, it was important to also include these as control variables.

In addition, the SMI demographics (i.e., age and gender) were also used as control variables and were based on the SMI followers' perceptions. The SMI category was also included as a control variable. As noted previously, prior academic research (Campbell & Farrell, 2020) identified four different categories of SMIs based on the follower count of each SMI: mega-influencers have over 1M followers, macro-influencers have between 101K and 1M followers, micro-influencers have between 10K and 100K followers, and nano influencers have less than 10K followers. Research has also found that the SMI category impacts a follower's perception of the influencer's popularity, status, and reputation (Leung et al., 2022, p. 99). Therefore, it was important to include this variable as a control.

Subgroup Comparison: SMI Type. Social media influencer type refers to whether the social media influencer is a human or a virtual (non-human) influencer (VI). Some research suggests that VIs can provide similar engagement as human SMIs (Baklanov, 2020) and that VI characteristics, such as credibility and competence, are not significantly different from human SMIs (Bohndel et al., 2023). However, Bohndel et al. (2023) also found significant negative differences for VIs on characteristics such as likeability (a sub-construct of credibility) and authenticity. As noted previously, research conducted by Seymour et al. (2020) found that people showed more affinity, trustworthiness, and preference for human [travel] agents compared to virtual agents. However, the empirical research on VIs is still emerging. Therefore, a subgroup analysis between VIs and human SMIs was conducted to identify any similarities and differences across these two groups in their purchase intention (the dependent variable) as well as whether there was a mediating relationship between the independent variables and the hypothesized mediator.

Informed Pilot

An informed pilot study was conducted in September 2023 with five followers of social media influencers to review the measurement instrument and provide additional feedback regarding face validity for all latent constructs (Babbie, 2020). No changes were recommended to the latent construct measurement items. However, the informed pilot participants suggested that a brief description and definition of a non-human SMI should be included in the question related to whether respondents were following human vs non-human SMI. In addition, the informed pilot suggested that more specific sub-categories for the fast-moving consumer goods industry be provided as options for respondents to

select since the definition of FMCG is not a common understanding outside of the industry. Both suggestions were incorporated into the survey.

Separately, Qualtrics released the results of a research study they conducted to improve data collection quality (Geisen, 2022). Qualtrics recommended including a "commitment request" item at the beginning of the survey to ask respondents to commit to providing thoughtful answers to questions. This commitment request item was added to the survey instrument (see Appendix E for the final survey instrument).

Full-Scale Research

The final survey was administered to 1,000 participants over four weeks, from December 2023 through January 2024. The survey data was cleaned to remove respondents who did not meet all the criteria for the study. Specifically, respondents who did not agree to provide thoughtful answers (as recommended by Qualtrics) were removed, as well as those who did not provide answers to age or the number of SMIs they follow, those who did not recall seeing a sponsored post in the past six months; those who did not choose an FMCG sub-category for the type of product that was advertised in the sponsored post, and those who did not correctly answer the psychological separation questions (attention checks) or did not provide answers regarding the dependent variable. The data was also reviewed for extreme outliers, after which 21 additional respondents were removed. A total of 692 respondents were retained for the subsequent analyses. Of those, 612 follow a human SMI most often, and 80 follow a non-human SMI.

The data codes used for all demographics, social media use, and SMI category variables are provided in Appendix F. Frequencies for the demographics of the total

sample of respondents, as well as social media use were calculated using SPSS and provided in Appendix G for the total sample. In summary, of the 692 total respondents, 67.1% (464) were male and 32.9% (228) were female. The highest frequencies for respondent age were those between the ages of 25 to 34 years old (68.1%) and 35 to 44 years old (18.5%). In terms of ethnicity, 95.2% of the respondents were Caucasian (white, non-Hispanic), 3.3% were Asian, while Black, Hispanic, and Native American were less than 1% each.

Additional information collected included education level, social media platform used most often, and amount of time per day spent on social media (see Appendix G). As for education level, 75.7% (524) had a bachelor's degree, 14.2% (98) had a master's degree or higher, 7.7% (53) had a high school diploma/GED, and 2.4% (17) listed completing some college or an associate's degree. In terms of the platform used most often to follow SMIs, 72.5% used Instagram, 16.3% used YouTube, 9.0% used Facebook, and 2.2% used TikTok. The highest frequencies for time spent per day on social media were 44.4% for those who spent 3 to 4 hours, followed by 37.3% who spent 2 to 3 hours. Follower age, gender, ethnicity, education, platform used to follow SMIs, and amount of time spent on social media were included in the analysis as control variables.

Data regarding SMI demographics (age, gender), as well as SMI category (number of followers), as perceived by followers, were also collected for use as additional control variables (see Appendix H). The highest frequencies for perceived SMI age was 74.7% (517) between 25 to 34 years old, while 18.1% (125) were 35 to 44 years old, 4.8% (33) were 18 to 24 years old, and only 2.4% (17) were the ages of 45 to 64

years old. SMI gender was reported to be 61.4% (425) male, 38.0% female (263), and 0.6% (4) were not sure. In terms of the SMI category, 64.2% of SMIs were following micro-influencers (between 10K and 100K followers), 17.2% were following macro-influencers (between 101K and 1M followers), and 13.4% were following nano-influencers (less than 10K followers), while 5.2% were following mega influencers.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Analysis – Total Sample

The data for the total sample was reviewed and analyzed using the following

steps:

Step 1: The data set was reviewed to check for any missing data, and reverse-

coded items were recoded.

Step 2: A reliability analysis using SPSS 29 was conducted to assess the factor

configuration of the measures with multiple items.

Step 3: SPSS 29 was used to create an aggregate average (mean) of the items in

each scale and descriptive statistics were computed for all variables. In addition,

correlations, normality tests as well as Q-Q plots were run and interpreted.

Step 4: Four regression analyses using SPSS 29 were run to test whether the

independent variables and the mediator have the hypothesized influence on the dependent

variable using the established Barron and Kenny (1986) method.

Step 5: The Sobel test using a Sobel calculator from Quantsy.org (n.d.) was used

to confirm the mediation relationship between the independent variables and the

mediator.

Results – Total Sample

Step 1: The data set was reviewed to check for any missing data, and none were

found. Reverse coded items were re-coded accordingly.

Step 2: The survey contained adapted scales measuring credibility and parasocial

relationship. Scale reliability analyses were performed for these constructs by calculating

their Cronbach's alpha. For Cronbach's alpha, a score above 0.70 is deemed reliable

(James et al., 1984). The seventeen items measuring credibility had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.826 which was acceptable. The eight items measuring parasocial relationships had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.693, which was slightly lower than the acceptable score. However, removing one item from this scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.709, which was acceptable. Therefore, seven items for the parasocial relationship construct were retained and used in the subsequent analyses. Table 3 summarizes the Cronbach's alpha values.

Table 3

Scale Reliability Statistics

Scale	Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of Items
Credibility	0.826	0.841	17
Parasocial Relationship	0.709	0.713	7

Step 3: The mean scores for the credibility and parasocial relationship measurement items were computed, and descriptive statistics were then run for all variables, including those used as controls. Table 4 below summarizes the descriptive statistics (mean score and standard deviation).

Table 4

Variable Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness Statistic	Std. Error	Kurtosis Statistic	Std. Error
Age	692	2.32	.769	1.492	.093	2.741	.186
Gender	692	1.33	.470	.727	.093	-1.476	.186
Education	692	3.88	.934	-2.095	.093	4.437	.186
Ethnicity	692	1.14	.642	4.609	.093	20.027	.186
Platform following SMI	692	2.12	.571	.706	.093	1.837	.186
Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	692	2.82	.909	.808	.093	.429	.186
SMI Age	692	2.18	.548	1.131	.093	2.772	.186
SMI Gender	692	1.39	.500	.584	.093	-1.315	.186
SMI Category	692	2.14	.704	.694	.093	.870	.186
Credibility	692	4.17	.41980	-.574	.093	.424	.186
Authenticity	692	4.15	.686	-.555	.093	.461	.186
Involvement	692	4.09	.693	-.407	.093	.069	.186
Parasocial Relationship	692	4.17	.45422	-.391	.093	-.142	.186
Wishful ID	692	4.08	.696	-.595	.093	.700	.186
Trust in Sponsored Posts	692	4.12	.725	-.604	.093	.341	.186
Purchase Intent	692	4.04	.726	-.451	.093	.069	.186

A Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis was performed to assess the relationship among the study variables (Agresti, 2018). The rule of thumb for interpreting the correlation coefficient (Hinkle et al., 2003) is as follows: .90-1.00 = very high; .70-.90 = high; 0.50-0.70 = moderate; .30-.50 = low; .00-.30 = negligible. Table 4 below shows the correlations between the variables.

Histograms (with normal overlays) and boxplots were also created for all aggregate scales, checking whether there were any additional outliers (see Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). Several outliers were shown in the boxplots for the credibility and parasocial relationship variables. However, the author made the decision to keep these outliers because they are just out values (marked with a small circle in SPSS) and neither far out nor extreme values (marked with a star in SPSS).

Table 5

Variable Correlations

		CRED	AUTH	INVOLVE	PSR	WISH	TSP	PI
CRED	Pearson Correlation	-						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
	N	692						
AUTH	Pearson Correlation	.530**	-					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001						
	N	692	692					
INVOLVE	Pearson Correlation	.485**	.520**	-				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001					
	N	692	692	692				
PSR	Pearson Correlation	.753**	.491**	.508**	-			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001				
	N	692	692	692	692			
WISH	Pearson Correlation	.514**	.554**	.562**	.537**	-		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001			
	N	692	692	692	692	692		
TSP	Pearson Correlation	.478**	.570**	.543**	.524**	.623**	-	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001		
	N	692	692	692	692	692	692	
PI	Pearson Correlation	.488**	.505**	.491**	.487**	.630**	.565**	-
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	
	N	692	692	692	692	692	692	692

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

Figure 2

Credibility Variable: Histogram (with Normal Overlay)
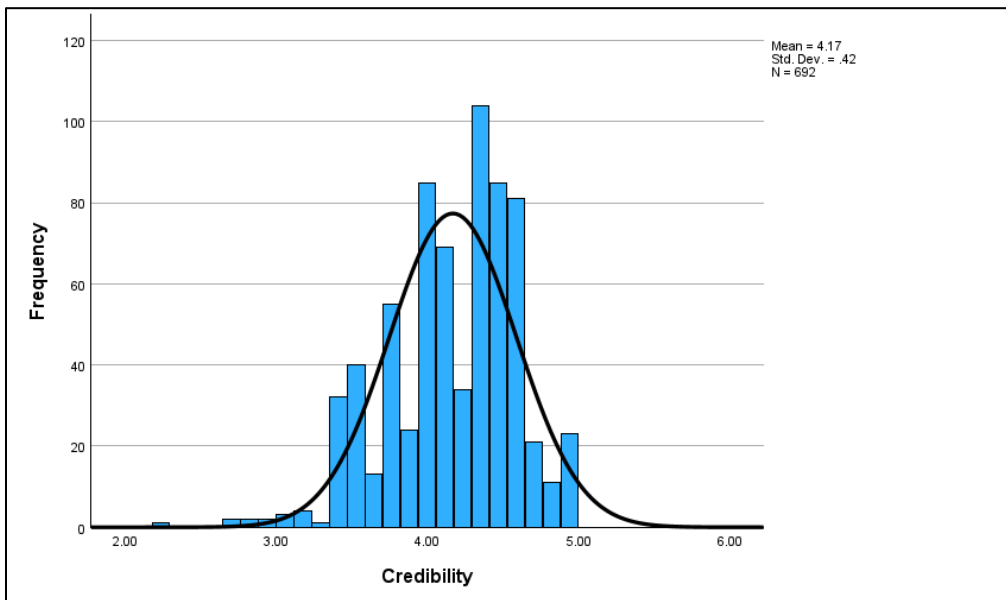
Figure 3

Credibility (CRED) Variable: Boxplot
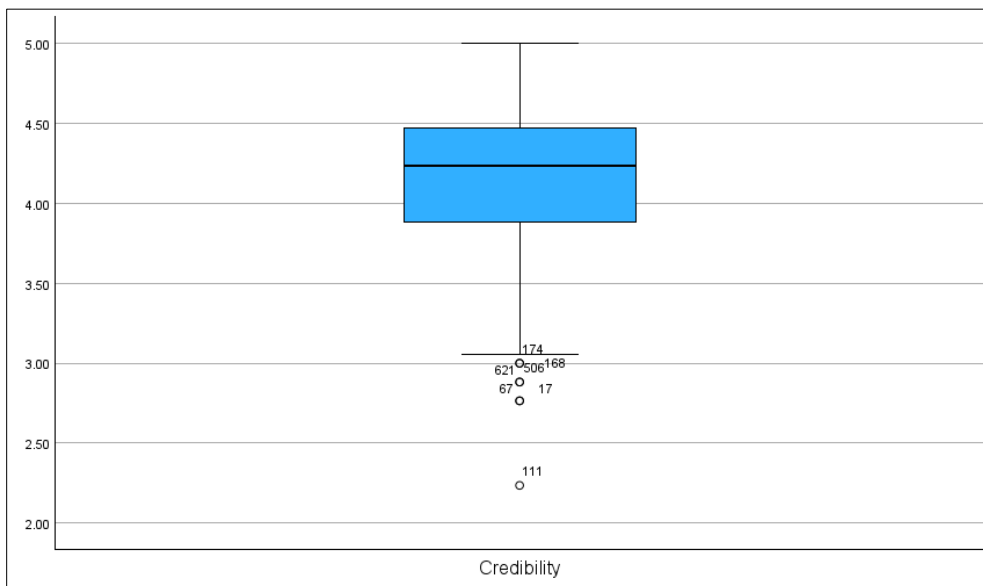
Figure 4

Parasocial Relationship (PSR) Variable: Histogram (with Normal Overlay)
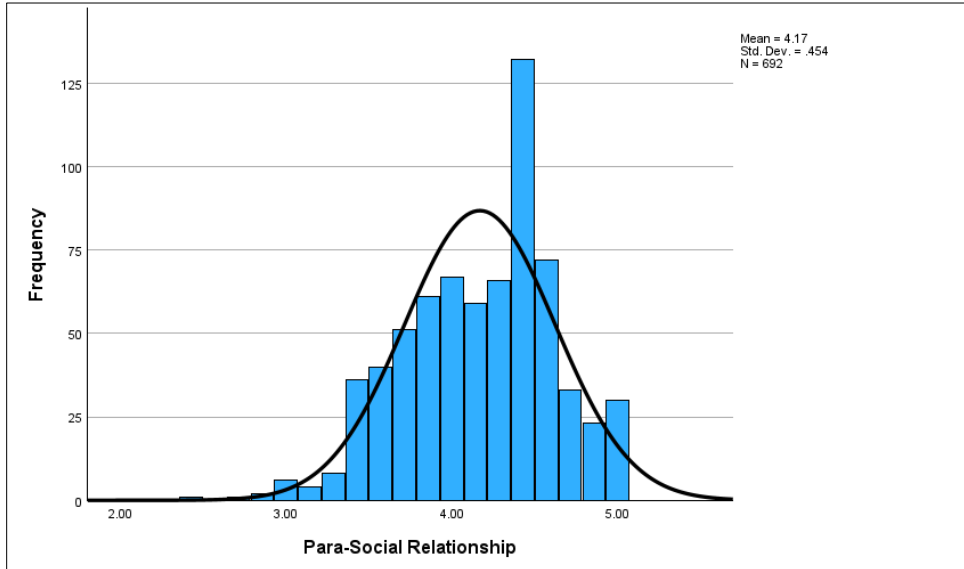
Figure 5

Parasocial Relationship (PSR) Variable: Boxplot
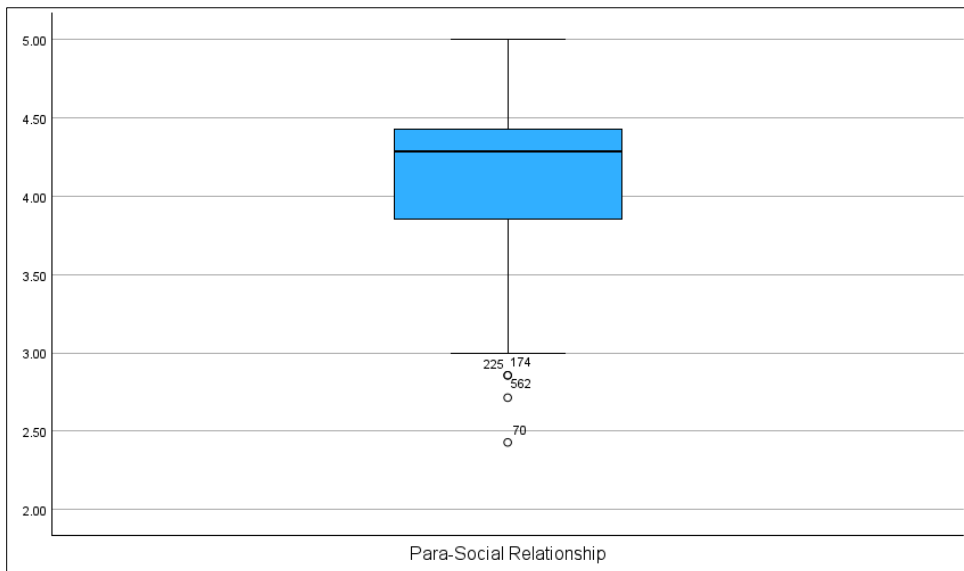
Normality tests (see Table 6), as well as Quantile-Quantile (Q-Q) plots, were run and interpreted for all variables. In a Q-Q plot, for normally distributed data, the observed data are approximate to the expected data. After reviewing the Q-Q plots a conclusion was made that the distribution of the data approximates normality (see Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12).

Table 6

Variables Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Credibility	.095	692	<.001	.971	692	<.001
Authenticity	.284	692	<.001	.793	692	<.001
Involvement	.282	692	<.001	.808	692	<.001
Parasocial Relationship	.135	692	<.001	.971	692	<.001
Wishful ID	.304	692	<.001	.793	692	<.001
Trust in Sponsored Posts	.276	692	<.001	.806	692	<.001
Purchase Intent	.283	692	<.001	.820	692	<.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Figure 6

Variable Credibility: Normal Q-Q Plot
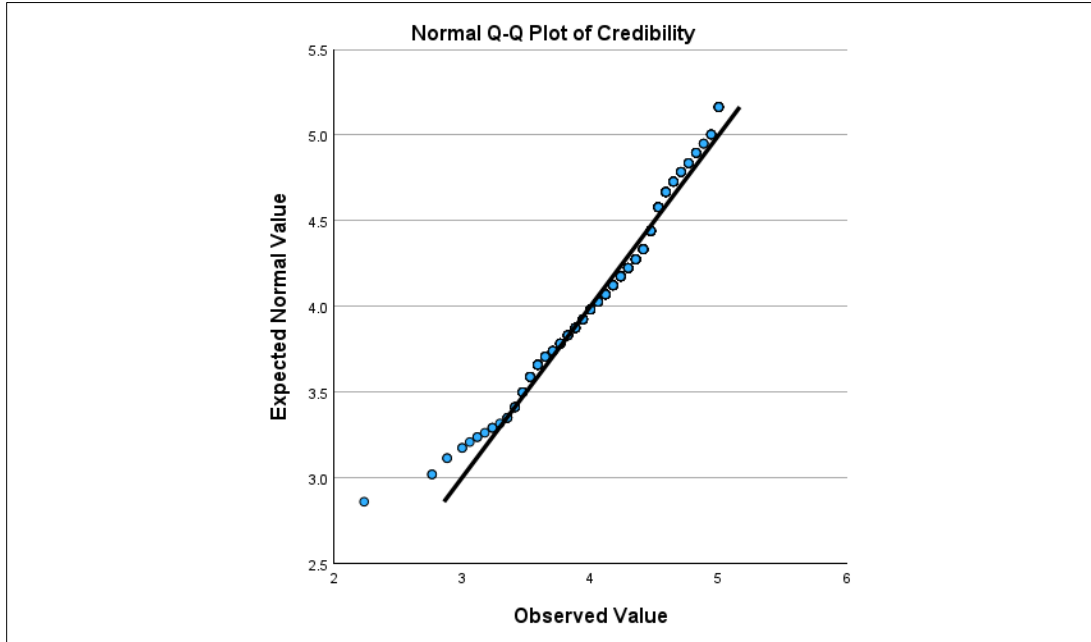
Figure 7

Variable Authenticity: Normal Q-Q Plot
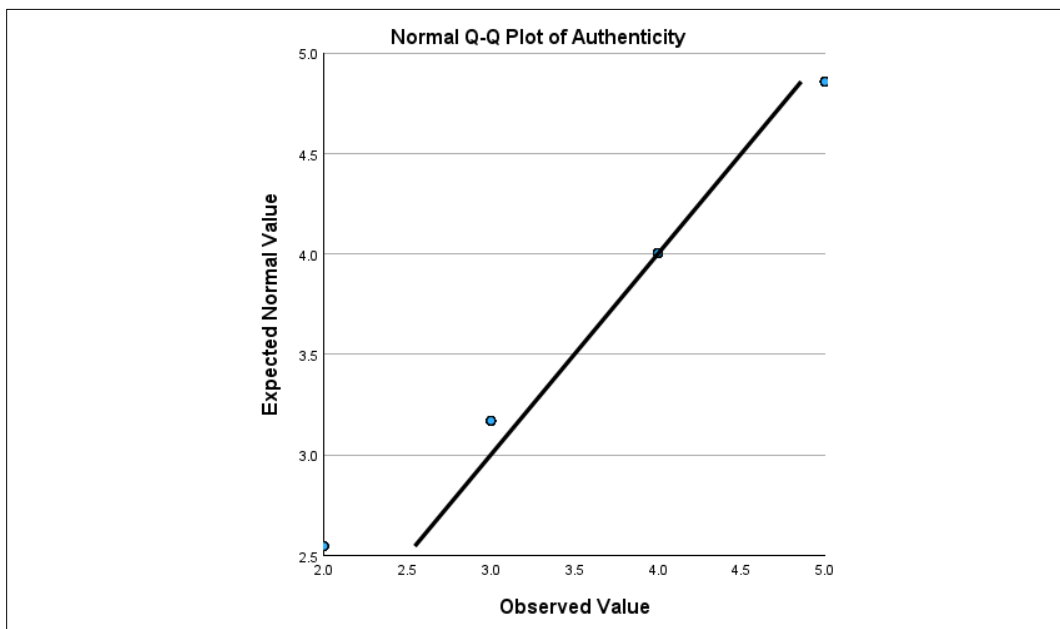
Figure 8

Variable Involvement: Normal Q-Q Plot
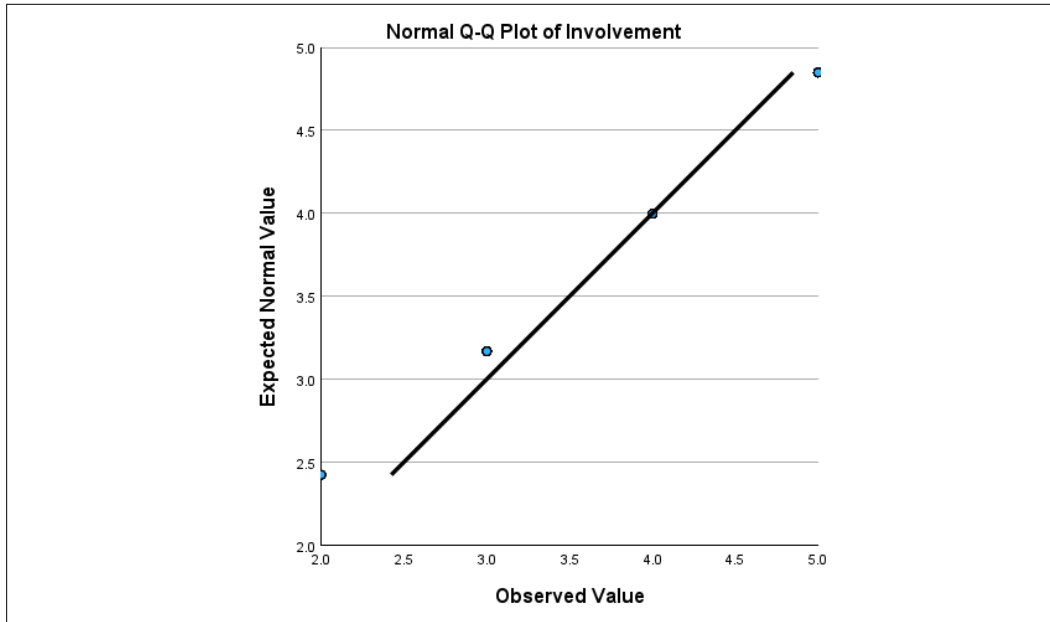
Figure 9

Variable Parasocial Relationship: Normal Q-Q Plot
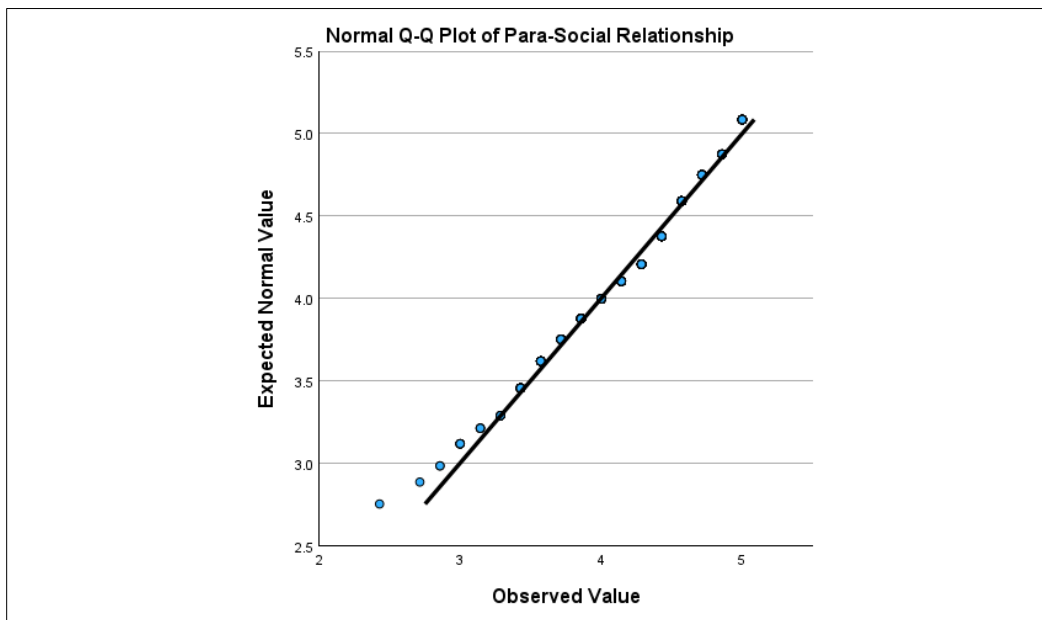
Figure 10

Variable Wishful Identification: Normal Q-Q Plot
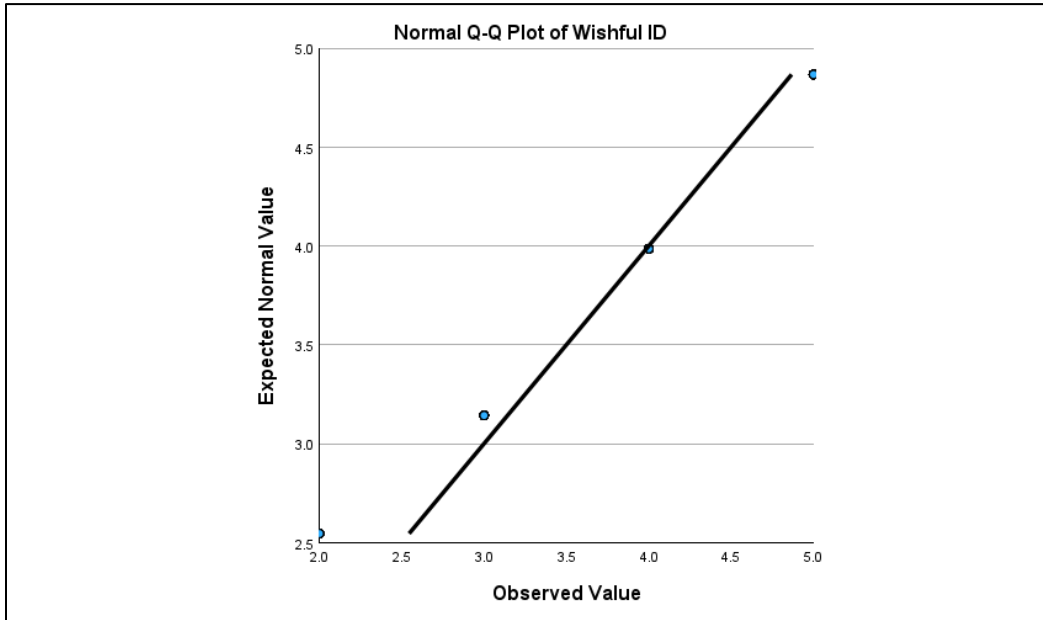
Figure 11

Variable Trust in Sponsored Posts: Normal Q-Q Plot
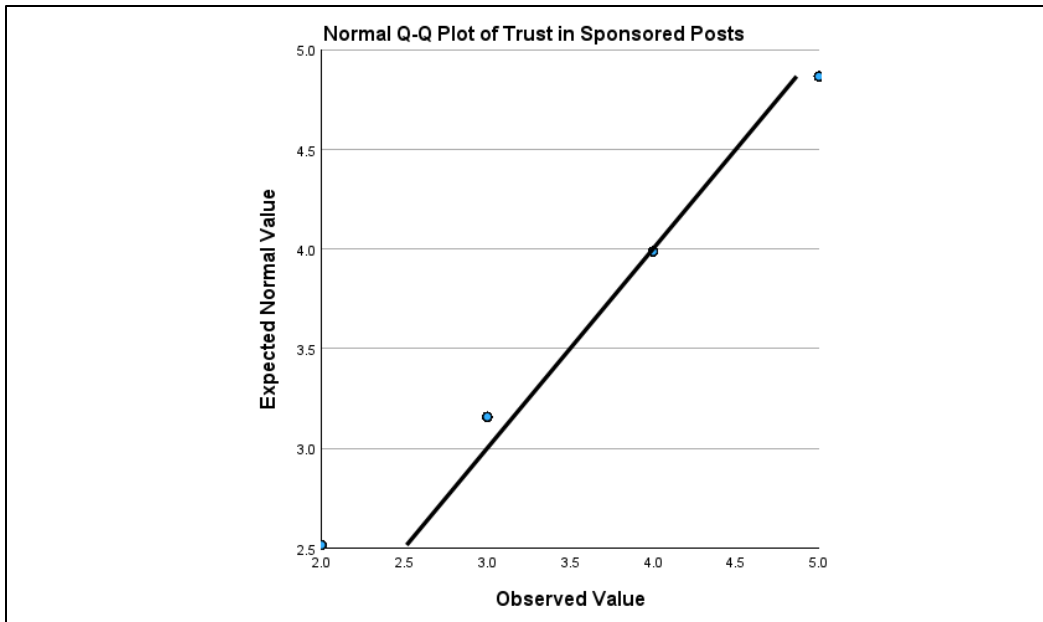
Figure 12

Variable Purchase Intent: Normal Q-Q Plot
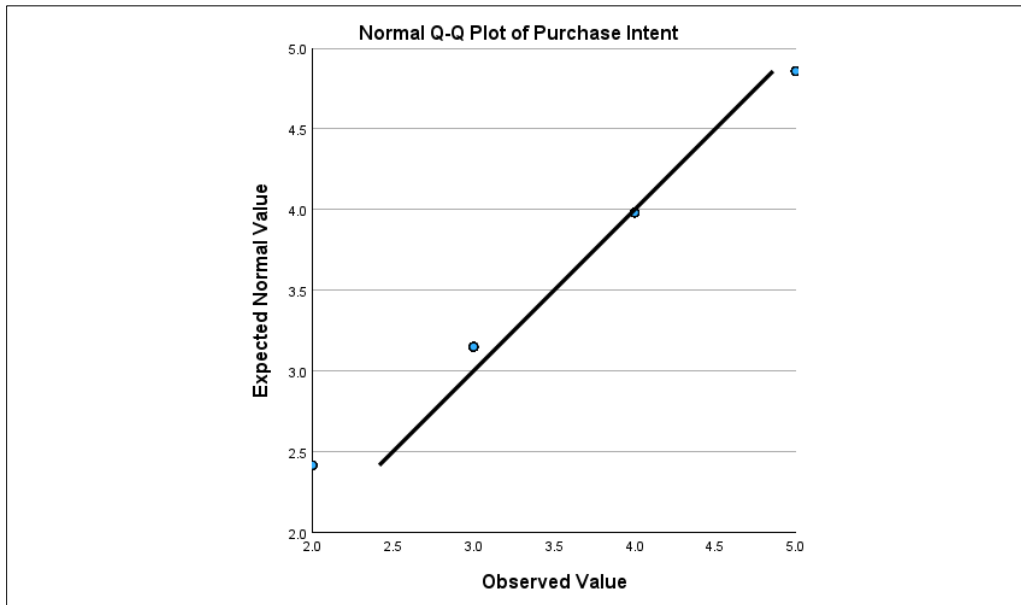
Step 4: Regression analyses using SPSS 29 were conducted to test whether the

independent and mediating variables have the suggested influence on the dependent

variable. Four different regressions were conducted to evaluate all of the hypotheses in

the research model, with control variables included in each regression, based on the

established Barron and Kenny (1986) method:

a) Regression to test the five independent variables as predictors and the dependent

variable (purchase intent) as the outcome (H1 – H5).

b) Regression to test the five independent variables and the mediator (trust in

sponsored posts) as the outcome (H6 – H10).

c) Regression to test the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) and the dependent

variable (purchase interest) as the outcome (H11).

d) Multiple regression testing the full model with the independent variables as predictors of the dependent variable (Block 2) and trust in sponsored posts as a partial mediator in the relationship between the independent variables and purchase interest as the outcome (Block 3).

Appendix I provides the complete tables and figures for each of the regressions conducted in this part of the analysis. The first regression model summary showed that Model 2 was significant, which includes the influence of the independent variables beyond the control variables. Specifically, the R square value increased from .016 to .467, which was significant (F change value of < .001).

The results from the first regression provided support for Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 5 (see Appendix I, Regression #1). The resulting tolerance and VIF statistics did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). For Hypothesis 1, the unstandardized coefficient for credibility was .208, indicating that for each unit, an increase in credibility leads to an increase of 0.208 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero ($t(677) = 2.665, p = .008$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 1.

For Hypothesis 2, the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity was .149, indicating that each unit increase in perceived authenticity leads to an increase of 0.149 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(677) = 3.734, p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 2.

47

For Hypothesis 3, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement was .110, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase of 0.110 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significant ($t(677) = 2.824$, $p = .005$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 3.

For Hypothesis 4, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .083, indicating that each unit increase in parasocial relationship leads to an increase of 0.083 units in purchase intent. However, this relationship was not significant ($t(677) = 1.124$, $p = .261$. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 4.

For Hypothesis 5, the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification was .423, indicating that each unit increase in perceived wishful identification leads to an increase of .423 units of purchase intention, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significant [$t(677) = 10.548$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 5.

The second regression tested the influence of the five independent variables on the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) as the outcome, in addition to the control variables. The model summary (see Appendix I, Regression #2) showed that Model 2 is significant, which included the influence of the independent variables beyond the control variables. Specifically, the R square value increased from .020 to .514. which was significant (F change value of < .001).

The tolerance and VIF statistics of this regression did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). The results of this regression provided support for Hypotheses 7, 8, 9, and 10. For Hypothesis 6, the relationship between credibility and

trust in sponsored posts was negative. The unstandardized coefficient for credibility was -.041, indicating that for each unit, an increase in credibility leads to a decrease of .041 units in trust in sponsored posts, the opposite direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was not significantly different from zero ($t(677) = -.543$, $p = 0.587$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 6.

For Hypothesis 7, there was a positive relationship between authenticity and trust in sponsored posts. The unstandardized coefficient was .221, indicating that each unit increase in perceived authenticity leads to an increase of 0.221 units in trust in sponsored posts. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(677) = 5.802$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 7.

For Hypothesis 8, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement was .130, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase of 0.130 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significant ($t(677) = 4.035$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 8.

For Hypothesis 9, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .306, indicating that each unit increase in perceived parasocial relationship leads to an increase of .306 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significant [$t(677) = 4.348$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 9.

For Hypothesis 10, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .342, indicating that each unit increase in wishful identification leads to an increase of .342 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research

model. This relationship was significant [$t(677) = 8.929$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 10.

A third regression tested the influence of the mediator variable (trust in sponsored posts) on the dependent variable (purchase interest) as the outcome, in addition to the control variables. The model summary (see Appendix I, Regression #3) showed that Model 2 is significant. Specifically, the R square value increased from .016 to .334, which is significant (F change value of $p < .001$). The tolerance and VIF statistics of this regression did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010).

The results of this third regression provided support for Hypothesis 11, which proposed that there is a positive and direct relationship between the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) and the dependent variable (purchase intent). The unstandardized coefficient for the mediator was .570, indicating that for each unit increase in trust in sponsored posts leads to an increase of .570 units in purchase intent, the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero ($t(681) = .570$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 11.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the mediating effect of trust in sponsored posts on the relationship between the independent variables and purchase intent as the outcome (the dependent variable). Neither tolerance nor VIF statistics indicated the presence of marked multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). Three models were obtained (see Appendix I, Multiple Regression). Model 1 examined the relationship between the control variables on the dependent variable (purchase intent). This model was not significant. Model 2 examined the relationship between the independent variables as predictors and purchase intent as the outcome (dependent

variable). This model was significant [F change value of $p < .001$] and the R square value increased from .016 to .467. The result of the full model (Model 3) which examined the relationship between the independent and mediator variables on purchase intent as the outcome (dependent variable) was also significant. The R square value increased from .467 in Model 2 to .485 in Model 3. This change was significant [F change value of $p < .001$].

The multiple regression model tested Hypotheses 12a-e, and the results provided support for H12(b), 12(c), 12(d) and 12(e) (see Appendix I, Multiple Regression). For Hypothesis 12(a), the unstandardized coefficient for credibility was .216, and this coefficient was significant [$t(676) = 2.810, p = .005$]. However, the comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the influence of the independent variable credibility on purchase intent as the outcome was not reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .208 to .216. Therefore, this result did not support Hypothesis 12(a).

For Hypothesis 12(b), the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity was .106 and this coefficient is significant [$t(676) = 2.646, p = .008$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 shows that the direct effect of independent variable authenticity on the purchase intent outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .149 to .106. This result provided support for Hypothesis 12(b).

For Hypothesis 12(c), the unstandardized coefficient for involvement was .076, and this coefficient is significant [$t(676) = 1.954, p = .051$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the direct effect of independent variable involvement on the purchase intent outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .110 to .076. This result provides support for Hypothesis 12(c).

For Hypothesis 12(d), the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .024, and this coefficient was not significant [$t(676) = .326, p = .745$]. The comparison between the previous Regression #2 which evaluated the relationship between the independent variables and the mediator found that the influence of parasocial relationship on the mediator was significant (see Appendix I, Regression #2). However, when trust in sponsored posts was introduced as a mediator in Model 3 of the multiple regression, the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intent became insignificant [$t(676) = .326, p = .745$]. These results suggested full mediation instead of partial mediation as hypothesized. Therefore, Hypothesis 12(b) was supported.

For Hypothesis 12(e), the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification was .357, and this coefficient is significant [$t(676) = 8.564, p < .001$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the direct effect of the independent variable wishful identification on the purchase intent outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .423 to .357. This result provided support for Hypothesis 12(e).

Step 5: The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982;) was conducted to confirm whether the mediation was significant for each of the independent variables, using the Sobel calculator from QuantPsy.org (n.d.). If the test statistic result is +/- 1.96, the mediation result is significant. Based on the Sobel test, mediation was significant for all the independent variables except credibility (see Appendix J).

Table 7 below summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing among the total sample in this study.

Table 7

Summary of Hypothesis Testing – Total Sample

H1.	The higher the perceived credibility of an SMI, the higher their followers' purchase intention.	**Supported**
H2.	The higher the perceived authenticity of the SMI, the higher the follower's purchase intention.	**Supported**
H3.	The higher the follower's level of involvement with the SMI, the higher their purchase intention.	**Supported**
H4.	The higher the follower's perceived parasocial relationship with the SMI, the higher the purchase intention.	Not Supported
H5.	The higher a follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher level of purchase intention.	**Supported**
H6.	The higher the SMI credibility, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	Not Supported
H7.	The higher the SMI authenticity, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H8.	The higher the follower's involvement with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H9.	The higher the follower's parasocial relationship with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H10.	The higher the follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H11.	The higher the level of trust in the SMI's sponsored post, the higher the purchase intent.	**Supported**
H12(a).	The effect of credibility on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	Not Supported
H12(b).	The effect of authenticity on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H12(c).	The effect of involvement on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**
H12(d).	The effect of parasocial relationship on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported** **(full mediation)**
H12(e).	The effect of wishful identification on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**

Analysis – Subgroups

For the subgroup analysis, the data was reviewed using the following steps:

Step 1: SPSS 29 was used to split the data into two groups – those who follow human SMIs (coded as Group 1] and those who follow non-human SMIs (coded as Group 2]. Frequencies were computed for each group.

Step 2: SPSS 29 was used to compute descriptive statistics for each subgroup and to perform an independent-sample t-test to determine whether the subgroups had any significant differences.

Step 3: A regression analysis using SPSS 29 was used to test whether the independent variables and the mediator have the hypothesized influence on the dependent variable. Four different regressions were conducted to evaluate all the hypotheses in the research model, with control variables included in each regression, using the established Barron and Kenny (1986) method:

a)   Regression to test the influence of the five independent variables as predictors and the dependent variable (purchase intent) as the outcome (H1 – H5).

b)   Regression to test the influence of the five independent variables on the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) as the outcome (H6 – H10).

c)   Regression to test the influence of the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) on the dependent variable (purchase interest) as the outcome (H11).

d)   Multiple regression testing the influence of the independent variables as predictors of purchase intent as the dependent variable (Block 2) and trust in sponsored posts as a partial mediator in the relationship between the independent variables and purchase interest (Block 3) as the outcome (H12a-e).

Step 4: The Sobel test using a Sobel calculator from QuantPsy.org (n.d.) was

used to confirm the mediation relationship between the independent variables and the

mediator.

Results – Subgroups

Step 1: Of the 692 total respondents, 612 (88.4%) reported that the SMI they

followed most often were human (Group 1), and 80 (11.6%) reported that the SMI they

followed most often were non-human (Group 2). Figure 13 below summarizes the

frequencies for the respondent demographics across the two groups as well as the

platform used most often to follow SMIs and the amount of time spent on social media,

which are included in the subgroup analyses as control variables.

Subgroup data regarding perceived SMI demographics (age, gender) and SMI

category (number of followers) were also computed. Figure 14 below summarizes the

frequencies for each of these variables, which are also used as controls in the subgroup

analyses.

Figure 13

Subgroups: Follower Demographics and Social Media Use

Age

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	35	5.7%
	2	405	66.2%
	3	121	19.8%
	4	35	5.7%
	5	16	2.6%
2	1	2	2.5%
	2	66	82.5%
	3	7	8.8%
	4	3	3.8%
	5	2	2.5%

Gender

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	413	67.5%
	2	199	32.5%
2	1	51	63.7%
	2	29	36.3%

Education

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	52	8.5%
	2	7	1.1%
	3	9	1.5%
	4	453	74.0%
	5	91	14.9%
2	1	1	1.3%
	3	1	1.3%
	4	71	88.8%
	5	7	8.8%

Ethnicity

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	585	95.6%
	2	2	0.3%
	3	2	0.3%
	4	18	2.9%
	5	5	0.8%
2	1	74	92.5%
	2	1	1.3%
	4	5	6.3%

Amount of Time Spent on Social Media

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	13	2.1%
	2	220	35.9%
	3	274	44.8%
	4	55	9.0%
	5	50	8.2%
2	1	2	2.5%
	2	38	47.5%
	3	33	41.3%
	4	3	3.8%
	5	4	5.0%

Platform following SMI

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	49	8.0%
	2	452	73.9%
	3	97	15.8%
	4	14	2.3%
2	1	13	16.3%
	2	50	62.5%
	3	16	20.0%
	4	1	1.3%

Figure 14

Subgroups: Perceived SMI demographics and SMI category

SMI Age

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	30	4.9%
	2	450	73.5%
	3	116	19.0%
	4	15	2.5%
	5	1	0.2%
2	1	3	3.8%
	2	67	83.8%
	3	9	11.3%
	4	1	1.3%

SMI Gender

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	380	62.1%
	2	229	37.4%
	3	3	0.5%
2	1	45	56.3%
	2	34	42.5%
	3	1	1.3%

SMI Category

SMI Human vs CGI		N	%
1	1	71	11.6%
	2	390	63.7%
	3	116	19.0%
	4	35	5.7%
2	1	22	27.5%
	2	54	67.5%
	3	3	3.8%
	4	1	1.3%

57

Step 2: SPSS 29 was used to calculate the descriptive statistics for the demographics of each group. See Table 8 below for a summary of those results. An independent samples t-test (Levene's Test for Equality of Variances) was conducted to determine whether there were any significant differences in the subgroups. The results of the independent samples t-test (see Table 9 below) showed no significant differences between the subgroups as it relates to gender, ethnicity, amount of time spent on social media, and platform used to follow SMI. However, there was a significant difference in age and education: $[t(690) = 9.120, p = .003]$ and $[t(690) = 17.576, p < .001]$, respectively, with the vast majority of Group 2 (88%) aged 25 to 34 years old and with more bachelor's degrees.

Table 8

Subgroups: Descriptive Statistics

	SMI Human vs Virtual	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Age	Group 1	612	2.33	.780	.032
	Group 2	80	2.21	.669	.075
Gender	Group 1	612	1.33	.469	.019
	Group 2	80	1.36	.484	.054
Education	Group 1	612	3.86	.977	.039
	Group 2	80	4.04	.462	.052
Ethnicity	Group 1	612	1.13	.629	.025
	Group 2	80	1.20	.736	.082
Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	Group 1	612	2.85	.917	.037
	Group 2	80	2.61	.819	.092
Platform following SMI	Group 1	612	2.12	.561	.023
	Group 2	80	2.06	.643	.072

Table 9

Subgroups: Independent Samples Test

| | | Levene's Test For Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
		F	Sig.	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Diff.	Std. Error Diff.	Lower	Upper
Age	Equal variances assumed	9.120	.003	1.323	690	.093	.186	.121	.091	-.059	.300
	Equal variances not assumed			1.488	109.121	.070	.140	.121	.081	-.040	.282
Gender	Equal variances assumed	1.490	.223	-.667	690	.252	.505	-.037	.056	-.147	.073
	Equal variances not assumed			-.651	99.395	.258	.516	-.037	.057	-.151	.076
Education	Equal variances assumed	17.576	<.001	-1.635	690	.051	.103	-.181	.111	-.399	.036
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.787	189.808	.003	.006	-.181	.065	-.310	-.053
Ethnicity	Equal variances assumed	2.994	.084	-.908	690	.182	.364	-.069	.076	-.219	.081
	Equal variances not assumed			-.804	94.678	.212	.423	-.069	.086	-.240	.102
Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	Equal variances assumed	.162	.687	2.217	690	.013	.027	.239	.108	.027	.450
	Equal variances not assumed			2.418	106.627	.009	.017	.239	.099	.043	.435
Platform following SMI	Equal variances assumed	1.351	.246	.908	690	.182	.364	.062	.068	-.072	.195
	Equal variances not assumed			.818	95.392	.208	.415	.062	.075	-.088	.211

Step 3: SPSS 29 was used to determine the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable beyond the control variables. Four separate regressions were conducted to evaluate all the hypotheses in the research model, with control variables included in each regression, based on the established Barron and Kenny (1986) method:

a) Regression to test the five independent variables as predictors and the dependent variable (purchase intent) as the outcome (H1 – H5).

b) Regression to test the five independent variables and the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) as the outcome (H6 – H10).

c) Regression to test the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) and the dependent variable (purchase interest) as the outcome (H11).

d) Multiple regression testing the full model with the independent variables as predictors of the dependent variable (Block 2) and trust in sponsored posts as a partial mediator in the relationship between the independent variables and purchase interest (Block 3) as the outcome (H12a-e).

Step 3a: The first subgroup regression tested the influence of the five independent variables on the dependent variable (purchase intent) as the outcome. The first subgroup regression model summary (see Table 11 below) showed that Model 2, which evaluated the influence of the independent variables on the dependent variable, beyond the control variables, for Group 1 (those who follow human SMIs) and Group 2 (those who follow non-human SMIs) were both significant. Specifically, the R square value for Group 1 increased from .024 to .485, which was significant (F change value of < .001), and the R square value for Group 2 increased from .074 to .443, which was significant (F change value of < .001).

60

Table 10

Subgroups: Variables Entered/Removed[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
Group 1	1	SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility[b]	.	Enter
Group 2	1	SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Table 11

Subgroups: Model Summary

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
							Change Statistics			
Group 1	1	.154[a]	.024	.009	.726	.024	1.626	9	602	.104
	2	.697[b]	.485	.473	.530	.462	107.090	5	597	<.001
Group 2	1	.271[c]	.074	-.045	.709	.074	.618	9	70	.777
	2	.666[d]	.443	.323	.570	.370	8.633	5	65	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender

b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility

c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender

d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility

Table 12

Subgroups: Analysis of Variance[(a)]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group 1	1	Regression	7.721	9	.858	1.626	.104[b]
		Residual	317.708	602	.528		
		Total	325.430	611			
	2	Regression	157.942	14	11.282	40.212	<.001[c]
		Residual	167.488	597	.281		
		Total	325.430	611			
Group 2	1	Regression	2.795	9	.311	.618	.777[d]
		Residual	35.155	70	.502		
		Total	37.950	79			
	2	Regression	16.825	14	1.202	3.698	<.001[e]
		Residual	21.125	65	.325		
		Total	37.950	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender
e. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility

The subgroup results from Model 2 in the first regression provided support for Hypotheses 1, 2, 3 and 5 among Group 1, and support for Hypothesis 1 among Group 2 (see Table 13 below). The resulting tolerance and VIF statistics did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010).

For Hypothesis 1, which evaluated the influence of credibility on purchase intent as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for credibility in Group 1 was .169, indicating that each unit increase in credibility leads to an increase of 0.169 units in purchase intent in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 1.986$, $p = .048$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for credibility was .565, indicating that each unit increase in credibility leads to an increase of .565 units in purchase interest, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(65) = 2.067$, $p = .043$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 1 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 2, which evaluated the influence of authenticity on purchase intent as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity in Group 1 was .166, indicating that each unit increase in perceived authenticity leads to an increase of 0.166 units in purchase intent in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 3.911$, $p = < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 2. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity was -.014, indicating that each unit increase in authenticity leads to a decrease of .014 units of purchase intent, in the opposite direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significant from zero [$t(65) = -.107$, $p = .915$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 2 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 3, which evaluated the influence of involvement on purchase intent as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement in Group 1 was .107, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase

of 0.107 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 2.625, p = .009$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 3. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement was .232, indicating that each unit increase in involvement leads to an increase of .232 units of purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significant from zero [$t(65) = 1.608, p = .113$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 3 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 4, the direct influence of parasocial relationship on purchase intent as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship in Group 1 was .071, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase of 0.071 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significantly different from zero [$t(597) = .900, p = .368$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 4 among Group 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .233, indicating that each unit increase in involvement leads to an increase of .233 units of purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significant from zero [$t(65) = 1.024, p = .309$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 4 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 5, which evaluated the influence of wishful identification on purchase intent as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification in Group 1 was .441, indicating that each unit increase in perceived wishful identification leads to an increase of 0.441 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero

$[t(597) = 10.383, p < .001]$. This result provided support for Hypothesis 5 among Group

1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification was .238,

indicating that each unit increase in wishful identification leads to an increase of .238

units of purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model.

However, this relationship was not significant from zero $[t(65) = 1.650, p = .104]$. This

result did not provide support for Hypothesis 5 among Group 2.

Table 13

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	1	(Constant)	4.398	.245		17.924	<.001		
		Age	-.077	.043	-.082	-1.774	.077	.750	1.333
		Gender	-.056	.078	-.036	-.716	.475	.644	1.553
		Education	-.021	.031	-.028	-.675	.500	.957	1.045
		Ethnicity	-.047	.047	-.041	-1.002	.317	.985	1.015
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.018	.033	.022	.537	.592	.934	1.071
		Platform following SMI	.036	.053	.028	.689	.491	.987	1.013
		SMI Age	.058	.061	.044	.954	.340	.749	1.335
		SMI Gender	-.132	.073	-.090	-1.810	.071	.655	1.527
		SMI Category	-.015	.043	-.014	-.341	.733	.954	1.048
	2	(Constant)	.062	.324		.192	.848		
		Age	-.042	.032	-.045	-1.320	.187	.745	1.342
		Gender	-.110	.058	-.071	-1.904	.057	.625	1.599
		Education	.028	.023	.038	1.248	.213	.928	1.077
		Ethnicity	-.039	.034	-.034	-1.132	.258	.982	1.018
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.001	.024	-.002	-.061	.951	.912	1.096
		Platform following SMI	.056	.039	.043	1.433	.152	.970	1.031
		SMI Age	.006	.044	.005	.133	.894	.744	1.345
		SMI Gender	.021	.054	.015	.398	.691	.642	1.558
		SMI Category	.035	.032	.034	1.108	.268	.914	1.095
		Credibility	.169	.085	.095	1.986	.048	.375	2.669
		Authenticity	.166	.042	.153	3.911	<.001	.562	1.778
		Involvement	.107	.041	.102	2.625	.009	.576	1.735
		Para-Social Relationship	.071	.079	.044	.900	.368	.366	2.733
		Wishful ID	.441	.042	.431	10.383	<.001	.501	1.997

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

67

Table 13 - continued

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	1	(Constant)	4.504	.974		4.625	<.001		
		Age	.250	.172	.241	1.454	.150	.480	2.083
		Gender	.091	.245	.063	.370	.712	.454	2.205
		Education	.006	.179	.004	.033	.974	.925	1.082
		Ethnicity	-.129	.129	-.138	-1.004	.319	.705	1.418
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.013	.110	-.015	-.118	.906	.788	1.270
		Platform following SMI	.032	.132	.030	.246	.806	.888	1.126
		SMI Age	-.360	.241	-.228	-1.496	.139	.570	1.755
		SMI Gender	-.003	.208	-.003	-.016	.987	.533	1.876
		SMI Category	-.193	.170	-.158	-1.138	.259	.685	1.459
	2	(Constant)	.285	1.036		.275	.784		
		Age	.176	.141	.170	1.251	.215	.464	2.156
		Gender	-.188	.206	-.131	-.913	.364	.414	2.417
		Education	-.004	.146	-.003	-.028	.978	.907	1.102
		Ethnicity	-.079	.111	-.084	-.714	.478	.619	1.615
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.037	.095	-.044	-.389	.698	.679	1.473
		Platform following SMI	-.228	.117	-.212	-1.947	.056	.725	1.380
		SMI Age	-.226	.199	-.143	-1.135	.260	.538	1.859
		SMI Gender	-.042	.172	-.032	-.243	.809	.502	1.992
		SMI Category	-.136	.139	-.111	-.981	.330	.663	1.509
		Credibility	.565	.273	.358	2.067	.043	.285	3.510
		Authenticity	-.014	.130	-.015	-.107	.915	.426	2.348
		Involvement	.232	.144	.225	1.608	.113	.435	2.296
		Para-Social Relationship	.233	.227	.154	1.024	.309	.381	2.625
		Wishful ID	.238	.144	.192	1.650	.104	.635	1.574

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Step 3b: The second regression assessed the influence of the five independent variables on the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) as the outcome. The regression model summary (see Table 15 below) showed that Model 2 for both Group 1 (those who follow human SMIs) and Group 2 (those who follow non-human SMIs) was significant, which included the influence of the independent variables beyond the control variables. Specifically, the R square value for Group 1 increased from .021 to .519, which was significant (F change value of < .001), and the R square value for Group 2 increased from .196 to .600, which was significant (F change value of < .001).

Table 14

Subgroups: Variables Entered/Removed[(a)]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
Group 1	1	SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility[b]	.	Enter
Group 2	1	SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts
b. All requested variables entered.

Table 15

Subgroups: Model Summary

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Group 1	1	.146[a]	.021	.007	.738	.021	1.459	9	602	.160
	2	.721[b]	.519	.508	.519	.498	123.622	5	597	<.001
Group 2	1	.443[c]	.196	.093	.565	.196	1.897	9	70	.066
	2	.775[d]	.600	.514	.413	.404	13.147	5	65	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility

Table 16

Subgroups: Analysis of Variance[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group 1	1	Regression	7.149	9	.794	1.459	.160[b]
		Residual	327.864	602	.545		
		Total	335.013	611			
	2	Regression	173.929	14	12.423	46.043	<.001[c]
		Residual	161.084	597	.270		
		Total	335.013	611			
Group 2	1	Regression	5.452	9	.606	1.897	.066[d]
		Residual	22.348	70	.319		
		Total	27.800	79			
	2	Regression	16.689	14	1.192	6.973	<.001[e]
		Residual	11.111	65	.171		
		Total	27.800	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender
e. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility

The results from Model 2 in the second subgroup regression, which evaluated the influence of the independent variable on the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) as the outcome variable, provided support for Hypotheses 7, 8, 9, and 10 among Group 1 and support for Hypotheses 7 and 8 among Group 2 (see Table 17 below). The resulting tolerance and VIF statistics did not indicate the presence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010).

For Hypothesis 6, which evaluated the influence of credibility on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for credibility in Group 1 was -.002, indicating that each unit increase in credibility leads to a decrease of 0.002 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the opposite direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significantly different from zero [$t(597) = -.025$, $p = .980$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 6. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for credibility was -.231, indicating that each unit increase in credibility leads to a decrease of 0.231 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the opposite direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was not significantly different from zero [$t(65) = -1.165$, $p = .248$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 6 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 7, which evaluated the influence of authenticity on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity in Group 1 was .225, indicating that each unit increase in perceived authenticity leads to an increase of 0.225 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 5.414$, $p = < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 7 among Group 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity was .270, indicating that each unit increase in authenticity leads to an increase of .270 units of trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significant from zero [$t(65) = 2.861$, $p = .006$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 7 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 8, which evaluated the influence of involvement on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement in Group 1 was .168, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase of 0.168 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 4.213$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 8 among Group 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for involvement was .261, indicating that each unit increase in involvement leads to an increase of .261 units of trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was also significant from zero [$t(65) = 2.493$, $p = .015$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 8 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 9, which evaluated the influence of parasocial relationship on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship in Group 1 was .309, indicating that each unit increase in perceived involvement leads to an increase of 0.309 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 4.001$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 9 among Group 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship was .237, indicating that each unit increase in involvement leads to an increase of 0.237 units of trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significant from zero [$t(65) = 1.442$, $p = 154$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 9 among Group 2.

For Hypothesis 10, which evaluated the influence of wishful identification on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) as the outcome variable, the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification in Group 1 was .344, indicating that each unit increase in perceived wishful identification leads to an increase of 0.344 units in trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero [$t(597) = 8.262, p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 10 among Group 1. For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification was .117, indicating that each unit increase in wishful identification leads to an increase of .117 units of trust in sponsored posts, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. However, this relationship was not significant from zero [$t(65) = 1.118, p = .268$]. This result did not provide support for Hypothesis 10 among Group 2.

Table 17

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	1	(Constant)	4.565	.249		18.314	<.001		
		Age	-.072	.044	-.076	-1.628	.104	.750	1.333
		Gender	.099	.079	.063	1.246	.213	.644	1.553
		Education	-.078	.031	-.103	-2.505	.013	.957	1.045
		Ethnicity	-.009	.048	-.007	-.178	.858	.985	1.015
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.002	.034	-.002	-.048	.962	.934	1.071
		Platform following SMI	-.052	.054	-.039	-.970	.333	.987	1.013
		SMI Age	.050	.062	.038	.810	.418	.749	1.335
		SMI Gender	-.115	.074	-.077	-1.547	.122	.655	1.527
		SMI Category	.037	.043	.035	.859	.391	.954	1.048

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Table 17 - continued

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	2	(Constant)	-.212	.317		-.667	.505		
		Age	-.042	.031	-.045	-1.354	.176	.745	1.342
		Gender	.070	.057	.044	1.233	.218	.625	1.599
		Education	-.024	.022	-.032	-1.087	.277	.928	1.077
		Ethnicity	.005	.034	.005	.160	.873	.982	1.018
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.027	.024	-.033	-1.107	.269	.912	1.096
		Platform following SMI	-.031	.038	-.024	-.824	.410	.970	1.031
		SMI Age	.008	.043	.006	.175	.861	.744	1.345
		SMI Gender	.040	.053	.027	.767	.444	.642	1.558
		SMI Category	.087	.031	.083	2.784	.006	.914	1.095
		Credibility	-.002	.083	-.001	-.025	.980	.375	2.669
		Authenticity	.225	.042	.205	5.414	<.001	.562	1.778
		Involvement	.168	.040	.158	4.213	<.001	.576	1.735
		Parasocial Relationship	.309	.077	.188	4.001	<.001	.366	2.733
		Wishful ID	.344	.042	.331	8.262	<.001	.501	1.997

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Table 17 - continued

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	1	(Constant)	3.937	.776		5.071	<.001		
		Age	.050	.137	.056	.365	.716	.480	2.083
		Gender	.670	.195	.546	3.434	.001	.454	2.205
		Education	.041	.143	.032	.284	.778	.925	1.082
		Ethnicity	-.307	.103	-.381	-2.983	.004	.705	1.418
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.070	.087	-.097	-.800	.426	.788	1.270
		Platform following SMI	.058	.105	.063	.557	.579	.888	1.126
		SMI Age	-.154	.192	-.114	-.801	.426	.570	1.755
		SMI Gender	-.276	.166	-.244	-1.662	.101	.533	1.876
		SMI Category	.044	.135	.042	.323	.748	.685	1.459

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Table 17 - continued

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	2	(Constant)	1.492	.751		1.985	.051		
		Age	.025	.102	.029	.250	.804	.464	2.156
		Gender	.556	.149	.454	3.722	<.001	.414	2.417
		Education	.072	.106	.056	.683	.497	.907	1.102
		Ethnicity	-.189	.080	-.235	-2.359	.021	.619	1.615
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.012	.069	.017	.178	.859	.679	1.473
		Platform following SMI	-.092	.085	-.100	-1.087	.281	.725	1.380
		SMI Age	-.177	.145	-.131	-1.225	.225	.538	1.859
		SMI Gender	-.340	.125	-.301	-2.719	.008	.502	1.992
		SMI Category	.050	.101	.048	.500	.619	.663	1.509
		Credibility	-.231	.198	-.171	-1.165	.248	.285	3.510
		Authenticity	.270	.094	.344	2.861	.006	.426	2.348
		Involvement	.261	.105	.296	2.493	.015	.435	2.296
		Parasocial Relationship	.237	.165	.183	1.442	.154	.381	2.625
		Wishful ID	.117	.104	.110	1.118	.268	.635	1.574

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Step 3c: The third subgroup regression evaluated the influence of the mediator variable (trust in sponsored posts) on the dependent variable (purchase intent) beyond the control variables. The model summary (see Table 19 below) shows that Model 2 was significant for both Group 1 and Group 2. Specifically, for Group 1, the R square value increased from .024 to .338, which was significant (F change value of <.001), and for Group 2, the R square value increased from .074 to .386, which was significant (F change value of <.001).

Table 18

Subgroups: Variables Entered/Removed[(a)]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
Group 1	1	SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter
Group 2	1	SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Table 19

Subgroups: Model Summary

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	Change Statistics F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
Group 1	1	.154[a]	.024	.009	.726	.024	1.626	9	602	.104
	2	.582[b]	.338	.327	.599	.314	285.507	1	601	<.001
Group 2	1	.271[c]	.074	-.045	.709	.074	.618	9	70	.777
	2	.621[d]	.386	.297	.581	.312	35.098	1	69	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender

b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts

c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender

d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Table 20

Subgroups: Analysis of Variance[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group 1	1	Regression	7.721	9	.858	1.626	.104[b]
		Residual	317.708	602	.528		
		Total	325.430	611			
	2	Regression	110.042	10	11.004	30.705	<.001[c]
		Residual	215.388	601	.358		
		Total	325.430	611			
Group 2	1	Regression	2.795	9	.311	.618	.777[d]
		Residual	35.155	70	.502		
		Total	37.950	79			
	2	Regression	14.648	10	1.465	4.338	<.001[e]
		Residual	23.302	69	.338		
		Total	37.950	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender
e. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts

The results of Model 2 from the third subgroup regression provided support for Hypothesis 11, which proposed a positive direct influence between the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) and the dependent variable (purchase intent), for both Group 1 and Group 2 (see Table 21 below). For Group 1, the unstandardized coefficient for the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) was .559, indicating that each unit increase in trust in sponsored posts leads to an increase of .559 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero ($t(601) = 16.897, p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 11 among Group 1.

For Group 2, the unstandardized coefficient for the mediator (trust in sponsored posts) was .728, indicating that each unit increase in trust in sponsored posts leads to an increase of .728 units in purchase intent, in the same direction as predicted in the research model. This relationship was significantly different from zero ($t(69) = 5.924$, $p < .001$]. This result provided support for Hypothesis 11 among Group 2.

Table 21

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	1	(Constant)	4.398	.245		17.924	<.001		
		Age	-.077	.043	-.082	-1.774	.077	.750	1.333
		Gender	-.056	.078	-.036	-.716	.475	.644	1.553
		Education	-.021	.031	-.028	-.675	.500	.957	1.045
		Ethnicity	-.047	.047	-.041	-1.002	.317	.985	1.015
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.018	.033	.022	.537	.592	.934	1.071
		Platform following SMI	.036	.053	.028	.689	.491	.987	1.013
		SMI Age	.058	.061	.044	.954	.340	.749	1.335
		SMI Gender	-.132	.073	-.090	-1.810	.071	.655	1.527
		SMI Category	-.015	.043	-.014	-.341	.733	.954	1.048
	2	(Constant)	1.848	.252		7.324	<.001		
		Age	-.037	.036	-.040	-1.029	.304	.747	1.339
		Gender	-.111	.064	-.071	-1.724	.085	.642	1.557
		Education	.023	.025	.031	.901	.368	.947	1.056
		Ethnicity	-.042	.039	-.037	-1.094	.275	.985	1.015
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.019	.027	.024	.684	.494	.934	1.071
		Platform following SMI	.065	.043	.050	1.502	.134	.986	1.015
		SMI Age	.030	.050	.023	.600	.549	.748	1.336
		SMI Gender	-.068	.060	-.046	-1.129	.259	.652	1.533
		SMI Category	-.035	.035	-.034	-1.005	.315	.953	1.050
		Trust in Sponsored Posts	.559	.033	.567	16.897	<.001	.979	1.022

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

83

Table 21 - continued

Subgroups: Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	1	(Constant)	4.504	.974		4.625	<.001		
		Age	.250	.172	.241	1.454	.150	.480	2.083
		Gender	.091	.245	.063	.370	.712	.454	2.205
		Education	.006	.179	.004	.033	.974	.925	1.082
		Ethnicity	-.129	.129	-.138	-1.004	.319	.705	1.418
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.013	.110	-.015	-.118	.906	.788	1.270
		Platform following SMI	.032	.132	.030	.246	.806	.888	1.126
		SMI Age	-.360	.241	-.228	-1.496	.139	.570	1.755
		SMI Gender	-.003	.208	-.003	-.016	.987	.533	1.876
		SMI Category	-.193	.170	-.158	-1.138	.259	.685	1.459
	2	(Constant)	1.637	.934		1.753	.084		
		Age	.214	.141	.206	1.514	.135	.479	2.087
		Gender	-.397	.217	-.277	-1.832	.071	.388	2.576
		Education	-.024	.147	-.016	-.161	.873	.924	1.083
		Ethnicity	.094	.112	.100	.836	.406	.626	1.598
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.038	.090	.045	.421	.675	.781	1.281
		Platform following SMI	-.010	.108	-.009	-.094	.925	.884	1.131
		SMI Age	-.248	.198	-.157	-1.252	.215	.565	1.771
		SMI Gender	.197	.174	.150	1.135	.260	.513	1.950
		SMI Category	-.225	.139	-.184	-1.615	.111	.684	1.461
		Trust in Sponsored Posts	.728	.123	.623	5.924	<.001	.804	1.244

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Step 3d: A multiple regression was conducted by subgroup to examine the mediating effect of trust in sponsored posts on the relationship between the independent variables as predictors of purchase intent, the dependent variable. Three models were obtained for each subgroup (see Table 23 below). Neither tolerance nor VIF statistics indicated the presence of marked multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010).

Model 1 examined the influence of the control variables on the dependent variable (purchase intent). This model was not significant for either Group 1 or Group 2. Model 2 examined the relationship between the independent variables as predictors of purchase intent, the dependent variable. Model 2 was significant for both Group 1 and Group 2, with the R square value increasing from .024 to .485 and .074 to .443, respectively, an F change value of $p < .001$ for both groups (see Table 23 below). Model 3 examined the relationship between the independent and mediator variables on the dependent variable (purchase intent). Model 3 was significant for Group 1 with the R square increasing from .485 to .499, an F change value of $p < .001$, and was also significant for Group 2 with the R square increasing from .443 to .526, an F change value of $p = .001$.

Table 22

Subgroups: Variables Entered/Removed[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
Group 1	1	SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility[b]	.	Enter
	3	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter
Group 2	1	SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
	2	Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility[b]	.	Enter
	3	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Table 23

Subgroups: Model Summary

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
						Change Statistics				
Group 1	1	.154[a]	.024	.009	.726	.024	1.626	9	602	.104
	2	.697[b]	.485	.473	.530	.462	107.090	5	597	<.001
	3	.707[c]	.499	.487	.523	.014	16.659	1	596	<.001
Group 2	1	.271[d]	.074	-.045	.709	.074	.618	9	70	.777
	2	.666[e]	.443	.323	.570	.370	8.633	5	65	<.001
	3	.725[f]	.526	.415	.530	.083	11.197	1	64	.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender

b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility

c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility, Trust in Sponsored Posts

d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender

e. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility

f. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Table 24

Subgroups: Analysis of Variance[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Group 1	1	Regression	7.721	9	.858	1.626	.104[b]
		Residual	317.708	602	.528		
		Total	325.430	611			
	2	Regression	157.942	14	11.282	40.212	<.001[c]
		Residual	167.488	597	.281		
		Total	325.430	611			
	3	Regression	162.496	15	10.833	39.627	<.001[d]
		Residual	162.934	596	.273		
		Total	325.430	611			
Group 2	1	Regression	2.795	9	.311	.618	.777[e]
		Residual	35.155	70	.502		
		Total	37.950	79			
	2	Regression	16.825	14	1.202	3.698	<.001[f]
		Residual	21.125	65	.325		
		Total	37.950	79			
	3	Regression	19.970	15	1.331	4.739	<.001[g]
		Residual	17.980	64	.281		
		Total	37.950	79			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Ethnicity, SMI Gender, Platform follow SMI, Education, Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, Gender, Involvement, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationship, Wishful ID, Credibility, Trust in Sponsored Posts
e. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender
f. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility
g. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, Education, Platform follow SMI, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, SMI Age, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Age, Gender, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Authenticity, Involvement, Credibility, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Specifically, the multiple regression model evaluated Hypotheses 12 (a) – (e) for each subgroup, the mediator's influence on the independent variables, with purchase intent as the dependent variable. The results from Model 3 provided support for H12(b), 12(c), 12(d) and 12(e) for Group 1 (see Table 25 below).

For Hypothesis 12(a), the unstandardized coefficient for credibility in Model 3 was .169 among Group 1, and this coefficient was significant [$t(596) = 2.016$, $p = .044$]. However, the comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 in this multiple regression showed that the influence of credibility on purchase intent as the outcome did not change, with an unstandardized coefficient of .169 for both Model 2 and Model 3. Therefore, this result did not provide support for Hypothesis 12(a).

For Hypothesis 12(b), the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity in Model 3 was .128 among Group 1, and this coefficient was significant [$t(596) = 2.985$, $p = .003$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the influence of authenticity on purchase intent as the outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .166 to .128. This result provided support for Hypothesis 12(b).

For Hypothesis 12(c), the unstandardized coefficient for involvement in Model 3 was .079 among Group 1, and this coefficient was significant [$t(596) = 1.927$, $p = .054$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the influence of involvement on the purchase intent as the outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .107 to .079. This result provided support for Hypothesis 12(c).

For Hypothesis 12(d), the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship in Model 3 was .019 for Group 1, and this coefficient was not significant [$t(596) = .240$, $p = .810$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the influence of

parasocial relationship on purchase intent as the outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .071 to .019. While this result was not significant as already noted, when comparing the results of Model 2 in the third regression (see Table 17 above) which evaluated the influence of parasocial relationship on the mediator, the result was significant [$t(597) = 4.001, p < .001$]. When trust in sponsored posts was introduced as a mediator in Model 3 of the multiple regression, the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intent became insignificant (see Table 25 below). These results suggest full mediation instead of partial mediation as hypothesized. Therefore, Hypothesis 12(b) was supported.

For Hypothesis 12(e), the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification in Model 3 was .383 for Group 1, and this coefficient was significant [$t(596) = 8.657, p < .001$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 showed that the influence of wishful identification on purchase intent as the outcome was reduced from an unstandardized coefficient of .441 to .383. This result provided support for Hypothesis 12(e).

Table 25

Subgroups: Group 1 Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	1	(Constant)	4.398	.245		17.924	<.001		
		Age	-.077	.043	-.082	-1.774	.077	.750	1.333
		Gender	-.056	.078	-.036	-.716	.475	.644	1.553
		Education	-.021	.031	-.028	-.675	.500	.957	1.045
		Ethnicity	-.047	.047	-.041	-1.002	.317	.985	1.015
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.018	.033	.022	.537	.592	.934	1.071
		Platform following SMI	.036	.053	.028	.689	.491	.987	1.013
		SMI Age	.058	.061	.044	.954	.340	.749	1.335
		SMI Gender	-.132	.073	-.090	-1.810	.071	.655	1.527
		SMI Category	-.015	.043	-.014	-.341	.733	.954	1.048
	2	(Constant)	.062	.324		.192	.848		
		Age	-.042	.032	-.045	-1.320	.187	.745	1.342
		Gender	-.110	.058	-.071	-1.904	.057	.625	1.599
		Education	.028	.023	.038	1.248	.213	.928	1.077
		Ethnicity	-.039	.034	-.034	-1.132	.258	.982	1.018
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.001	.024	-.002	-.061	.951	.912	1.096
		Platform following SMI	.056	.039	.043	1.433	.152	.970	1.031
		SMI Age	.006	.044	.005	.133	.894	.744	1.345
		SMI Gender	.021	.054	.015	.398	.691	.642	1.558
		SMI Category	.035	.032	.034	1.108	.268	.914	1.095
		Credibility	.169	.085	.095	1.986	.048	.375	2.669
		Authenticity	.166	.042	.153	3.911	<.001	.562	1.778
		Involvement	.107	.041	.102	2.625	.009	.576	1.735
		Parasocial Relationship	.071	.079	.044	.900	.368	.366	2.733
		Wishful ID	.441	.042	.431	10.383	<.001	.501	1.997

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Table 25 - continued

Subgroups: Group 1 Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 1	3	(Constant)	.098	.320		.306	.760		
		Age	-.035	.031	-.037	-1.110	.268	.743	1.346
		Gender	-.122	.057	-.078	-2.133	.033	.624	1.603
		Education	.032	.022	.043	1.444	.149	.926	1.080
		Ethnicity	-.040	.034	-.034	-1.173	.241	.982	1.018
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.003	.024	.004	.123	.902	.910	1.098
		Platform following SMI	.061	.038	.047	1.588	.113	.968	1.033
		SMI Age	.005	.044	.004	.105	.916	.744	1.345
		SMI Gender	.015	.053	.010	.275	.783	.641	1.560
		SMI Category	.021	.032	.020	.654	.514	.902	1.109
		Credibility	.169	.084	.095	2.016	.044	.375	2.669
		Authenticity	.128	.043	.118	2.985	.003	.536	1.865
		Involvement	.079	.041	.075	1.927	.054	.560	1.787
		Parasocial Relationship	.019	.079	.012	.240	.810	.356	2.807
		Wishful ID	.383	.044	.374	8.657	<.001	.449	2.225
		Trust in Sponsored Posts	.168	.041	.171	4.082	<.001	.481	2.080

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

For Group 2, the multiple regression analysis evaluated the influence of the mediator on the independent variables, with purchase intent as the dependent variable. Model 3 in this multiple regression (see Table 26 below) and Model 2 in the second subgroup regression (see Table 17 above) provided support for Hypothesis 12(b) and 12(c).

For Hypothesis 12(a) the unstandardized coefficient for credibility in Model 3 was .688 for Group 2, and this coefficient was significant [$t(64) = 2.679, p = .009$]. However, the comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 in this multiple regression showed that the influence of credibility on purchase intent as the outcome increased from an unstandardized coefficient of .565 to .688. In addition, credibility had no direct influence on trust in sponsored posts as the mediator in the second subgroup regression [$t(65) = -1.165, p = .248$] (see Table 17 above). Therefore, these results did not support Hypothesis 12(a).

For Hypothesis 12(b), the unstandardized coefficient for authenticity in Model 3 was -.158 and this coefficient was not significant [$t(64) = -1.228, p = 224$]. While this result was not significant as already noted, the results of Model 2 in the second subgroup regression (see Table 17 above) showed that the direct influence of authenticity on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) was significant [$t(65) = 2.861, p = .006$]. However, when trust in sponsored posts was introduced in Model 3 of the multiple regression, the relationship between authenticity and purchase intent became insignificant. These results suggested full mediation instead of partial mediation as hypothesized. Therefore, Hypothesis 12(b) was supported.

For Hypothesis 12(c), the unstandardized coefficient for involvement in Model 3 was .093 and this coefficient was not significant [$t(64) = .663$, p = .509]. While this result was not significant as already noted, the results of Model 2 in the second subgroup regression (see Table 17 above) showed that the direct influence of involvement on trust in sponsored posts (the mediator) was significant [$t(65) = 2.493$, $p = .015$]. However, when trust in sponsored posts was introduced in Model 3 of the multiple regression, the relationship between involvement and purchase intent became insignificant. These results suggest full mediation instead of partial mediation as hypothesized. Therefore, Hypothesis 12(c) was supported.

For Hypothesis 12(d), the unstandardized coefficient for parasocial relationship in Model 3 was .106 for Group 2, and this coefficient was not significant [$t(64) = .495$, $p = .622$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 in this multiple regression showed that the unstandardized coefficient for the influence of parasocial relationship on purchase intent as the dependent variable was reduced from .233 to .106. However, this result was not significant. Therefore, these results did not provide support for Hypothesis 12(d).

For Hypothesis 12(e), the unstandardized coefficient for wishful identification in Model 3 was .175 for Group 2, and this coefficient was not significant [$t(64) = 1.298$, $p = .199$]. The comparison between Model 2 and Model 3 in this multiple regression showed that the unstandardized coefficient for the influence of wishful identification on purchase intent as the dependent variable was reduced from .238 to .175. However, this result was not significant. Therefore, these results do not provide support for Hypothesis 12(e).

Table 26

Subgroups: Group 2 Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	1	(Constant)	4.504	.974		4.625	<.001		
		Age	.250	.172	.241	1.454	.150	.480	2.083
		Gender	.091	.245	.063	.370	.712	.454	2.205
		Education	.006	.179	.004	.033	.974	.925	1.082
		Ethnicity	-.129	.129	-.138	-1.004	.319	.705	1.418
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.013	.110	-.015	-.118	.906	.788	1.270
		Platform following SMI	.032	.132	.030	.246	.806	.888	1.126
		SMI Age	-.360	.241	-.228	-1.496	.139	.570	1.755
		SMI Gender	-.003	.208	-.003	-.016	.987	.533	1.876
		SMI Category	-.193	.170	-.158	-1.138	.259	.685	1.459

a.   Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Table 26 - continued

Subgroups: Group 2 Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	2	(Constant)	.285	1.036		.275	.784		
		Age	.176	.141	.170	1.251	.215	.464	2.156
		Gender	-.188	.206	-.131	-.913	.364	.414	2.417
		Education	-.004	.146	-.003	-.028	.978	.907	1.102
		Ethnicity	-.079	.111	-.084	-.714	.478	.619	1.615
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.037	.095	-.044	-.389	.698	.679	1.473
		Platform following SMI	-.228	.117	-.212	-1.947	.056	.725	1.380
		SMI Age	-.226	.199	-.143	-1.135	.260	.538	1.859
		SMI Gender	-.042	.172	-.032	-.243	.809	.502	1.992
		SMI Category	-.136	.139	-.111	-.981	.330	.663	1.509
		Credibility	.565	.273	.358	2.067	.043	.285	3.510
		Authenticity	-.014	.130	-.015	-.107	.915	.426	2.348
		Involvement	.232	.144	.225	1.608	.113	.435	2.296
		Parasocial Relationship	.233	.227	.154	1.024	.309	.381	2.625
		Wishful ID	.238	.144	.192	1.650	.104	.635	1.574

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Table 26 - continued

Subgroups: Group 2 Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

SMI Human vs Virtual	Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
			B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
Group 2	3	(Constant)	-.509	.992		-.513	.610		
		Age	.163	.131	.157	1.242	.219	.463	2.158
		Gender	-.484	.211	-.338	-2.295	.025	.341	2.932
		Education	-.042	.136	-.028	-.313	.756	.901	1.110
		Ethnicity	.022	.107	.023	.202	.840	.570	1.753
		Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.044	.088	-.051	-.492	.624	.679	1.473
		Platform following SMI	-.179	.110	-.166	-1.629	.108	.712	1.405
		SMI Age	-.132	.187	-.084	-.705	.484	.526	1.902
		SMI Gender	.139	.169	.105	.822	.414	.451	2.219
		SMI Category	-.163	.129	-.133	-1.260	.212	.660	1.514
		Credibility	.688	.257	.436	2.679	.009	.279	3.584
		Authenticity	-.158	.128	-.172	-1.228	.224	.378	2.643
		Involvement	.093	.141	.091	.663	.509	.397	2.516
		Parasocial Relationship	.106	.214	.070	.495	.622	.369	2.709
		Wishful ID	.175	.135	.142	1.298	.199	.623	1.604
		Trust in Sponsored Posts	.532	.159	.455	3.346	.001	.400	2.502

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Table 27 below summarizes all of the regression results for Groups 1 and 2.

Table 27

Subgroup Analysis - Regression Summaries

Step 3a.	IV→DV	*Model 2 (see Table 13)*			
	Group 1: Human Influencer			Group 2: Virtual Influencer	
	Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)		Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)
CRED	.169	**.048**		.565	**.043**
AUTH	.166	**<.001**		-.014	.915
INVOLVE	.107	**.009**		.232	.113
PSR	.071	.368		.233	.309
WISH	.441	**<.001**		.238	.104

Step 3b.	IV→MED	*Model 2 (see Table 17)*			
	Group 1: Human Influencer			Group 2: Virtual Influencer	
	Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)		Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)
CRED	-.002	.980		-.231	.248
AUTH	.225	**<.001**		.270	**.006**
INVOLVE	.168	**<.001**		.261	**.015**
PSR	.309	**<.001**		.237	.154
WISH	.344	**<.001**		.117	.268

Step 3c.	MED→DV	*Model 2 (see Table 21)*			
	Group 1: Human Influencer			Group 2: Virtual Influencer	
	Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)		Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)
TSP	.559	**<.001**		.728	**<.001**

Step 3d.	IV & MED →DV	*Model 3 (see Tables 25 and 26)*			
	Group 1: Human Influencer			Group 2: Virtual Influencer	
	Unstd. Beta	Sig. (p-value)		Unstd. Beta	Signif. (p-value)
CRED	.169	**.044**		.688	**.009**
AUTH	.128	**.003**		-.158	.224
INVOLVE	.079	**.054**		.093	.509
PSR	.019	.810		.106	.622
WISH	.383	**<.001**		.175	.199
TSP	.168	**<.001**		.532	**<.001**

Step 4: The Sobel test (Sobel, 1982) was conducted using a Sobel calculator from QuantPsy.org to confirm the mediating relationship between the independent variables and the mediator on the dependent variable for each subgroup. For Group 1, the Sobel test for mediation confirmed Hypotheses 12(b), with a p-value of .000, Hypothesis 12(c) with a p-value of .000, Hypothesis 12(d) with a p-value of .000, and Hypothesis 12(e) with a p-value of .0. For Group 2, the Sobel test for mediation confirmed Hypothesis 12(b) with a p-value of .010, and Hypothesis 12(c) with a p-value of .022 (see Figures 15-19 below).   Table 28 below summarizes the results of the hypothesis testing for each subgroup in this study.

Figure 15

Sobel Test for Mediation – Credibility

<u>*Group 1*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a -.025	Sobel test: 0.02499997	0.98005499
t_b 16.897	Aroian test: 0.02495631	0.98008981
	Goodman test: 0.02504387	0.98001997
	Reset all	Calculate

<u>*Group 2*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a -1.165	Sobel test: 1.14310532	0.25299487
t_b 5.924	Aroian test: 1.12774072	0.25942944
	Goodman test: 1.15911553	0.2464091
	Reset all	Calculate

Figure 16

Sobel Test for Mediation – Authenticity

<u>*Group 1*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 5.414	Sobel test: 5.15580751	2.5e-7
t_b 16.897	Aroian test: 5.14763847	2.6e-7
	Goodman test: 5.16401557	2.4e-7
	Reset all	Calculate

<u>*Group 2*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 2.861	Sobel test: 2.57628445	0.00998685
t_b 5.924	Aroian test: 2.54702689	0.01086451
	Goodman test: 2.60657398	0.00914531
	Reset all	Calculate

100

Figure 17

Sobel Test for Mediation – Involvement

<u>*Group 1*</u>   <u>*Group 2*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 4.213	Sobel test: 4.08784995	0.00004354
t_b 16.897	Aroian test: 4.08112668	0.00004482
	Goodman test: 4.09460655	0.00004229
Reset all	Calculate	

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 2.493	Sobel test: 2.29781948	0.02157207
t_b 5.924	Aroian test: 2.27050178	0.02317716
	Goodman test: 2.32614755	0.02001068
Reset all	Calculate	

Figure 18

Sobel Test for Mediation – Parasocial Relationship

<u>*Group 1*</u>   <u>*Group 2*</u>

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 4.001	Sobel test: 3.89334182	0.00009887
t_b 16.897	Aroian test: 3.88690157	0.00010153
	Goodman test: 3.89981419	0.00009627
Reset all	Calculate	

Input:	Test statistic:	p-value:
t_a 1.442	Sobel test: 1.40108888	0.1611875
t_b 5.924	Aroian test: 1.38261533	0.16678285
	Goodman test: 1.42032328	0.15551359
Reset all	Calculate	

101

Figure 19

Sobel Test for Mediation – Wishful Identification

<u>*Group 1*</u>

Input:		Test statistic:		*p*-value:
t_a 8.262	Sobel test:	7.42223588		0
t_b 16.897	Aroian test:	7.41176785		0
	Goodman test:	7.4327484		0
	Reset all		Calculate	

<u>*Group 2*</u>

Input:		Test statistic:		*p*-value:
t_a 1.118	Sobel test:	1.0986068		0.27193961
t_b 5.924	Aroian test:	1.08379759		0.27845455
	Goodman test:	1.11404016		0.26526196
	Reset all		Calculate	

Table 28

Subgroups: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis		Group 1	Group 2
H1.	The higher the perceived credibility of an SMI, the higher the followers' purchase intention	**Supported**	**Supported**
H2.	The higher the perceived authenticity of the SMI, the higher the follower's purchase intention.	**Supported**	Not Supported
H3.	The higher the follower's level of involvement with the SMI, the higher their purchase intention.	**Supported**	Not Supported
H4.	The higher the follower's perceived parasocial relationship with the SMI, the higher the purchase intention.	Not Supported	Not Supported
H5.	The higher a follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher level of purchase intention.	**Supported**	Not Supported
H6.	The higher the SMI credibility, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	Not Supported	Not supported
H7.	The higher the SMI authenticity, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**	**Supported**
H8.	The higher the follower's involvement with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**	**Supported**
H9.	The higher the follower's parasocial relationship with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**	Not Supported
H10.	The higher the follower's wishful identification with the SMI, the higher the follower's trust in their sponsored posts.	**Supported**	Not Supported
H11.	The higher the level of trust in the SMIs sponsored post, the higher the purchase intent.	**Supported**	**Supported**
H12(a).	The effect of credibility on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	Not Supported	Not Supported
H12(b).	The effect of authenticity on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**	**Supported (full mediation)**
H12(c).	The effect of involvement on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**	**Supported (full mediation)**
H12(d).	The effect of parasocial relationship on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported (full mediation)**	Not Supported
H12(e).	The effect of wishful identification on purchase intention will be partially mediated by the follower's trust in sponsored posts.	**Supported**	Not Supported

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Discussion

Marketing practitioners continue to leverage SMIs to connect with their target consumers. The academic research on this topic has been extensive, however the majority of SMI research has focused on the luxury, fashion, beauty, gaming, and travel industries, leaving gaps in the literature related to other industries, including the fast-moving consumer goods industry (Ye et al., 2021), an $11 trillion industry in the United States. Many marketing practitioners focus on partnering with SMIs with a large number of followers in order to reach as many consumers as possible (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; De Veirman et al., 2017), and because SMIs with a large number of followers can positively impact a follower's perception of the influencer's popularity, status, and reputation (Leung et al., 2022, p. 99). In addition, there has been an increase in the creation of, and interest in, partnering with non-human (virtual) influencers as marketing practitioners are seeking ways to improve marketing investment efficiency and ROI (Bohndel et al., 2023). The academic literature on virtual influencers is still emerging and will likely continue to be a topic of interest now and in the future as artificial intelligence (AI) starts to become more mainstream.

This research used social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) as the underlying basis to help understand SMIs' impact on their followers as endorsers of products/brands. In addition, source credibility theory (Hovland & Weiss, 1951) and parasocial relationship theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) were applied as sub-theories to help explain the SMI characteristics and psychological factors that enable them to influence their followers.

The purpose of this research was to help identify the factors that influence SMI effectiveness in the fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry and to help uncover and understand the differences between human and non-human SMIs (virtual influencers) and their impact on promoting these types of products. The data from this research suggests that an influencer marketing strategy can be viable and successful in the FMCG industry, confirming much of the prior research (see literature reviews by Vrontis et al., 2021 and Ye et al., 2021), which found that human SMI effectiveness is based on key characteristics such as credibility and authenticity as well as psychological factors such as involvement and wishful identification have a direct influence on purchase intent. These factors help to create an emotional connection with their followers. In addition, trust in sponsored posts partially mediates the relationship between authenticity, involvement, wishful identification, and purchase intent, while fully mediating the relationship between parasocial relations and purchase intent which suggests that developing trust among their followers is extremely important in influencing purchase behavior.

In terms of Vis (non-human SMIs), the data in this study suggest that there are some similarities and differences relative to human SMIs to take into consideration. Similar to non-human SMIs, credibility is a key factor directly influencing purchase intent. Authenticity and involvement are also important in establishing trust with followers of VIs, which then leads to purchase intent. However, other psychological factors, such as wishful identification and parasocial relationships do not have a direct influence on purchase intent. These results suggest that focusing on credibility, authenticity and involvement are universally important for SMI effectiveness.

This research also suggests that there should be less of a focus on follower size (e.g., the number of followers that an SMI has) as that variable did not have a significant impact on purchase intent as an outcome among those who follow both human SMIs and VIs. In addition, the platform used to follow SMIs did not make a significant impact on purchase intent, which is not consistent with some earlier research on the differences between social media platforms.

The data in this research study had a male skew, and therefore provided an additional perspective related to the male consumer, specifically the potential to use SMIs to connect with them and the SMI factors that can influence their purchase intent in the FMCG industry.

Implications and Future Research Suggestions

This research suggests that marketing practitioners should look beyond follower size as a metric to determine with which SMIs to partner to achieve their marketing objectives and leverage available Q-scores (Qscores.com), like what has been established and used for traditional celebrities, to determine whether the SMIs have relevant characteristics and connections with their target audience. This will allow marketing practitioners to determine which SMIs to partner with and which ones can deliver credible, authentic messages that connect with their audiences.

Future research should explore how purchase intent established by SMIs impacts and/or leads to actual purchase behavior and other marketing outcomes, such as brand equity and brand loyalty, as well as measuring marketing effectiveness and ROI. One way to research this could be to partner with established influencer marketing platforms such as Traackr (Traackr.com), one of the largest influencer marketing platforms that

helps create SMI partnerships and campaigns. These types of platforms can track, analyze, and more precisely determine the ROI of SMIM investments based on real-life behavior.

Further research should evaluate the short and long-term impact of 'de-influencers' on their followers' purchase and consumption behavior. De-influencing encourages people to buy less stuff and instead use what they already have (Scott, 2024). In addition, there has recently been substantial consumer backlash against human SMIs for flaunting their extravagant lifestyles and/or for accepting excessive gifts from brands, such as the fashion retailer Shein (Davis, 2023), as well as against brands that partner with SMIs that are perceived to be inconsistent with their brand, such as the Bud Light partnership with transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney (Liaukonyte et al., 2024). Therefore, other cultural and ethical factors should be investigated as they relate to brand/SMI (product-endorser) fit and related to transparency (e.g., the development of virtual influencers by advertising agencies or production companies for their marketing partners but who may not have disclosed this to their followers), given that prior research which suggested that consumers find SMI content more engaging and authentic than content created by brands (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Another area of research that should continue to be explored is the evolution of non-human influencers, particularly as more consumers and companies begin to adopt and use AI, as well as ethical considerations regarding transparency and other effects it will have on consumer perception and behavior. As an example, AdAge reported on consumer backlash related to an "deepfake" AI influencer marketing campaign (Sloane, 2024) where consumers were unsure whether the person in the ad was real, or AI

107

generated.   While a recent industry report by Influencer Marketing Hub (2023) summarized marketing practitioners' current and intended use of AI noted that 39.8% of those surveyed expect AI to significantly improve their influencer marketing efforts, 43.8% of those surveyed for the Influencer Marketing Hub report (2023) expressed concern regarding ethical considerations in using AI influencers. In addition, further research is recommended to better understand whether and in what context using more human-like VIs would be most effective for achieving marketing outcomes such as increasing purchase intent or increasing brand awareness/equity as opposed to using more avatar-like or other types of computer-generated images.

Study Limitations

As with all research, this research had some limitations. One limitation was that the data was collected for both the dependent and independent variables from a common source, which may create common method bias (Posdakoff et al., 2012). However, psychological separation (attention checks) was used to help reduce common method bias in this study. Future research should consider collecting data for independent and dependent at different points in time to address issues associated with potential common method bias.

Another limitation of this research was the relatively small sample size (N = 80) for people who follow non-human virtual influencers. Future research should focus on recruiting a larger sample size of followers of VIs. In addition, while recruitment for this research used an established survey response platform (Amazon's Mechanical Turk platform) and were selected solely based on whether they follow SMIs or not, another possible limitation is the potential that SMI followers may choose to follow and self-

select SMIs that advertise products that they are already interest in. Future research should explore ways to understand whether self-selection is a limiting condition.

The generalizability of this research is limited, given that 95% of the respondents in this study were Caucasian (White-non-Hispanic), and this was not a representative sample of the ethnic diversity in the United States, which estimated that, as of 2023, 58.9% of the U.S. population were White non-Hispanic (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023). More research is needed to determine whether ethnic and other cultural differences have an impact on marketing outcomes such as purchase intent.

For some measures global items were used to capture the constructs. Although using global items to measure constructs had advantages and limitations, for example, minimizing survey fatigue by shortening the number of questions used in a survey is one of the advantages, especially when needing to control for many different variables (see Atroszko et al., 2017; Bergkvist, 2014), a potential limitation is that global items may not capture the full meaning of a construct. Future research is encouraged to utilize multiple items to replicate and expand the current findings.

Lastly, this study focused on general perceptions of SMI characteristics and psychological factors and did not explore specific content or behaviors of SMIs that could impact marketing outcomes such as purchase intention. Further research should evaluate content types and sentiment as well as SMI behaviors e.g. extravagant lifestyles that could impact their followers' purchase and consumption behavior.

Conclusion

In summary, this research study has focused on the SMI characteristics and psychological factors that can influence purchase intent in the fast-moving consumer

goods industry. When partnering with human SMIs, credibility, authenticity, involvement, and wishful identification are important factors that lead to trust in the SMI which in turn leads to increased purchase intent. When partnering with non-human SMIs (virtual influencers), it is important to ensure that content is created that is credible, authentic, and that connects with their followers, which builds trust and positively impacts influence purchase intent. Audience reach, as determined by follower size, should not be the primary or sole factor when selecting and partnering with a social media influencer.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

eMarketer (July 2022): U.S. Influencer marketing spend, and share by platform

US Influencer Marketing Spending, 2019-2024
billions and % change

2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
$2.42	$2.90	$3.90	$4.99	$6.16	$7.14
26.4%	20.0%	34.7%	27.8%	23.4%	15.9%

■ Influencer marketing spending ■ % change

Note: payments made to influencers or their representatives to promote products and services primarily on social media and other platforms featuring user-generated content; excludes noncash payments such as free products or trips; excludes paid media
Source: eMarketer, July 2022

US Influencer Marketing Spending Share, by Platform, 2019-2024
% of total influencer marketing spending

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Instagram	43.1%	43.6%	45.0%	44.7%	44.6%	44.5%
YouTube	25.2%	23.7%	21.0%	19.0%	17.7%	17.2%
Facebook	20.8%	19.3%	16.5%	14.8%	13.6%	13.3%
TikTok	2.3%	5.4%	10.2%	15.5% / 17.1%		18.5%

■ Instagram ■ YouTube ■ Facebook ■ TikTok

Note: payments made to influencers or their representatives to promote products and services primarily on social media and other platforms featuring user-generated content; excludes noncash payments such as free products or trips; excludes paid media
Source: eMarketer, July 2022

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Appendix B

eMarketer (February 2023). Average pay rates for social media influencers branded posts, based on number of followers

Average Brand Sponsorship Pay Rates for US Creators on Instagram vs. TikTok, by Number of Followers, Q4 2022

Mega (more than 1 million followers)
Instagram: $15,000
TikTok: $9,090

Macro (500K-1 million followers)
Instagram: $10,000
TikTok: $4,004

Mid-tier (200K-500K followers)
Instagram: $5,706
TikTok: $2,421

Low mid-tier (50K-200K followers)
Instagram: $2,537
TikTok: $960

Micro (10K-50K followers)
Instagram: $1,028
TikTok: $984

Nano (2K-10K followers)
Instagram: $379
TikTok: $403

■ Instagram   ■ TikTok

Source: Hashtag Pay Me, "Is Bigger, Better?: How 'big' influences creator pay," Feb 8, 2023

Age gaps in Snapchat, Instagram use are particularly wide, less so for Facebook

% of U.S. adults in each age group who say they ever use …

Platform	Age 65+	50-64	30-49	18-29	Youngest - oldest DIFF
Snapchat	2			65	+63
Instagram	13			71	+58
YouTube		49		95	+46
TikTok	4			48	+44
Twitter	7			42	+35
Facebook		50		70	+20
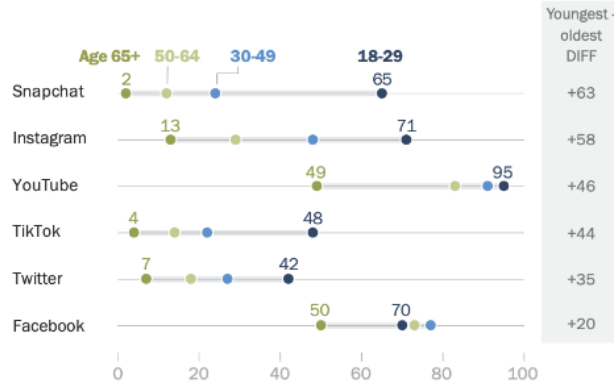
Note: All differences shown in DIFF column are statistically significant. The DIFF values shown are based on subtracting the rounded values in the chart. Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.
"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Use of online platforms, apps varies – sometimes widely – by demographic group

% of U.S. adults in each demographic group who say they ever use …

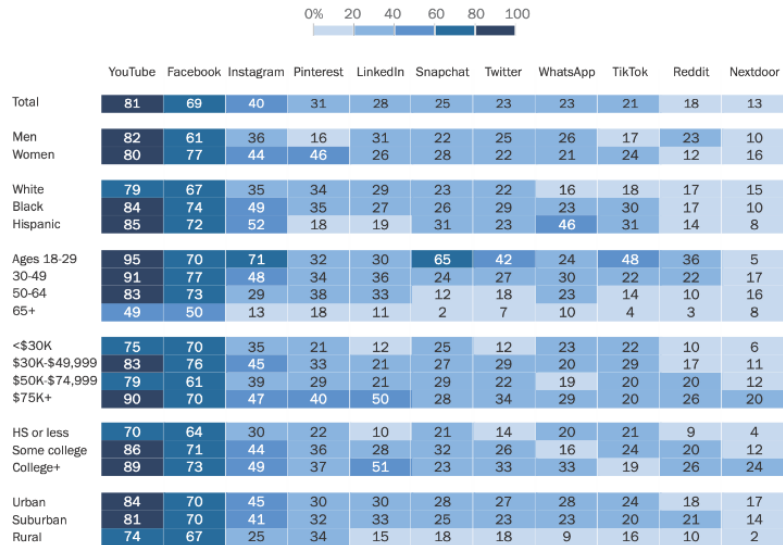|	YouTube	Facebook	Instagram	Pinterest	LinkedIn	Snapchat	Twitter	WhatsApp	TikTok	Reddit	Nextdoor
Total	81	69	40	31	28	25	23	23	21	18	13
Men	82	61	36	16	31	22	25	26	17	23	10
Women	80	77	44	46	26	28	22	21	24	12	16
White	79	67	35	34	29	23	22	16	18	17	15
Black	84	74	49	35	27	26	29	23	30	17	10
Hispanic	85	72	52	18	19	31	23	46	31	14	8
Ages 18-29	95	70	71	32	30	65	42	24	48	36	5
30-49	91	77	48	34	36	24	27	30	22	22	17
50-64	83	73	29	38	33	12	18	23	14	10	16
65+	49	50	13	18	11	2	7	10	4	3	8
<$30K	75	70	35	21	12	25	12	23	22	10	6
$30K-$49,999	83	76	45	33	21	27	29	20	29	17	11
$50K-$74,999	79	61	39	29	21	22	22	19	20	20	12
$75K+	90	70	47	40	50	28	34	29	20	26	20
HS or less	70	64	30	22	10	21	14	20	21	9	4
Some college	86	71	44	36	28	32	26	16	24	20	12
College+	89	73	49	37	51	23	33	33	19	26	24
Urban	84	70	45	30	30	28	27	28	24	18	17
Suburban	81	70	41	32	33	25	23	23	20	21	14
Rural	74	67	25	34	15	18	18	9	16	10	2

Note: White and Black adults include those who report being only one race and are not Hispanic. Hispanics are of any race. Not all numerical differences between groups shown are statistically significant (e.g., there are no statistically significant differences between the shares of White, Black or Hispanic Americans who say the use Facebook). Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.
"Social Media Use in 2021"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Seven-in-ten Facebook users say they visit site daily

Among U.S. adults who say they use ___, % who use that site ...

	Several times a day	About once a day	Less frequently	NET Daily
Facebook	49	22	29	70
Snapchat	45	14	40	59
Instagram	38	21	41	59
YouTube	36	18	45	54
Twitter	30	16	53	46

Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown. "Less frequently" category includes users who visit these sites a few times a week, every few weeks or less often. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 25-Feb. 8, 2021.
"Social Media Use in 2021"

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Appendix D

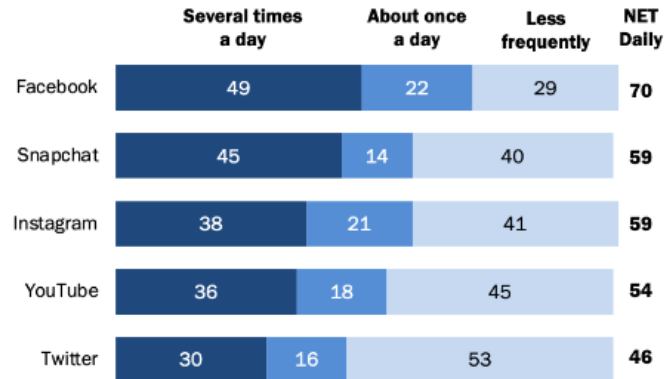### Survey Information and Informed Consent

SUMMARY INFORMATION

Things you should know about this study:

• Purpose: The purpose of the study is to help further understand online social media influencers.
• Procedures: If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill out a survey. **All information will be kept confidential.**
• Duration: This survey will take about 20 minutes.
• Risks: The main risk or discomfort from this research is associated with the possible slight discomfort of answering survey questions.
• Benefits: The main benefit to you from this research is to share your perceptions and experience with academics.
• Alternatives: There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study.
• Participation: Taking part in this research project is completely voluntary.

Please carefully read the detailed information provided below before agreeing to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
The purpose of this study is to help further understand social media influencers.

NUMBER OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS
If you decide to participate in this study, you will be one of 1000 people in this research study.

DURATION OF THE STUDY
Your participation will involve approximately 20 minutes.

PROCEDURES
If you agree to be in the study, we will ask you to do the following things:
• Provide your background information
• Answer questions that are presented in a survey

RISKS AND/OR DISCOMFORTS
The study has the following possible risks to you:
 • The study has minimal risk.
 • You will be asked to complete a survey which will take approximately 20 minutes.
 • The associated risk is the possible slight discomfort with answering survey questions.

BENEFITS

The study has the following possible benefits to you:
 • You will be providing helpful insights into social media influencers.
 • You will be helping academics better understand social media influencers.

ALTERNATIVES

There are no known alternatives available to you other than not taking part in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The records of this study will be kept private and will be protected to the fullest extent provided by law. In any sort of report that we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher team will have access to the records. However, your records may be inspected by an authorized University or other agents who will also keep the information confidential.

USE OF YOUR INFORMATION

The information collected as part of the research will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

RIGHT TO DECLINE OR WITHDRAW

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to participate in the study or withdraw your consent at any time during the study. You will not lose any benefits if you decide not to participate or if you quit the study early. The investigator reserves the right to remove you without your consent at such time that he/she feels it is in the best interest.

RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions about the purpose, procedures, or any other issues relating to this research study you may contact Professor Amin Shoja at Florida International University via phone at (305) 348-8243 or via email at ashoja@fiu.edu.

IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

If you would like to talk with someone about your rights of being a subject in this research study or about ethical issues with this research study, you may contact the FIU Office of Research Integrity by phone at 305-348-2494 or by email at ori@fiu.edu.

PARTICIPANT AGREEMENT

I have read the information in this consent form and agree to participate in this study. I have had a chance to ask any questions I have about this study, and they have been answered for me. By clicking on the "consent to participate" button below I am providing my informed consent.
- ❍ I consent to participate (1)
- ❍ I DO NOT consent to participate (2)

Survey Instrument

We care about the quality of our survey data. For us to get the most accurate measures of your opinions, it is very important that you provide thoughtful answers to each question in the survey.

Do you commit to providing thoughtful answers to the questions in this survey?

❍   Yes, I will (1)
❍   No, I will not (2)
❍   I cannot promise either way (3)

For the purpose of this study, **social media influencers are regular people** who have become online celebrities by creating and posting content on social media and who have a large number of followers (more than 1,000) on one or more social media channels.

Do you currently follow any social media influencers, as defined above?

❍   Yes (1)
❍   No (2)

How many social media influencers do you currently follow?

_____
_____

What is your current age?

○ 18-24 years old (1)
○ 25-34 years old (2)
○ 35-44 years old (3)
○ 45-54 years old (4)
○ 55-64 years old (5)
○ 65+ years old (6)

What is your gender?

○ Male (1)
○ Female (2)

What is your current marital status?

○ Married (1)
○ Widowed (2)
○ Divorced (3)
○ Separated (4)
○ Never Married (5)

In which state do you currently reside?

▼ Alabama (1) ... I do not reside in the United States (53)

What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

○ High school diploma (1)
○ Some College (2)
○ Associate's degree (3)
○ Bachelor's degree (4)
○ Master's degree or higher (5)

What is your ethnicity?

❍   White/Caucasian (non-Hispanic/Latino) (1)
❍   Black/African American (non-Hispanic/Latino) (2)
❍   Hispanic/Latino (3)
❍   Asian (4)
❍   American Indian or Alaska Native (5)
❍   Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (6)
❍   Other: please specify (7)

_____

For the purpose of this study, social media platforms are those sites where you can create and post your own content or where you can follow and watch content created by family, friends, and others.

Which social media platform do you use most often to stay connected with family and close friends?

❍   Facebook (1)
❍   Instagram (2)
❍   YouTube (3)
❍   TikTok (4)
❍   X (formerlyTwitter) (5)
❍   Reddit (6)
❍   Other - please specify (7)

_____

About how much time do you spend on social media each day?

❍   less than 1 hour (1)
❍   1-2 hours (2)
❍   3-4 hours (3)
❍   5-6 hours (4)
❍   more than 6 hours (5)

For the purposes of this research, your favorite social media influencer is the one that you follow most often.

Which social media platform do you use to view the posts of your favorite social media influencer?

○ Instagram (1)
○ YouTube (2)
○ TikTok (3)
○ Facebook (4)
○ Other - please specify: (5)

_____

For how long have you been following your favorite social media influencer?

○ less than 1 year (1)
○ between 1 and 2 years (2)
○ more than 2 years (3)

What is the approximate age of your favorite social media influencer?

○ 18 - 24 (1)
○ 25 - 34 (2)
○ 35 - 44 (3)
○ 45 - 54 (4)
○ 55+ (5)

What is the gender of your favorite social media influencer?

○ Male (1)
○ Female (2)
○ I'm not sure (3)

Thinking of your favorite social media influencer, what type of content is he/she most

known for?

- ○   Travel (1)
- ○   Fashion (2)
- ○   Beauty (hair, makeup, etc.) (3)
- ○   Technology/Gaming (4)
- ○   Food (e.g. Foodie/Chef) (5)
- ○   Other: please specify (6)

_____

Thinking about your favorite social media influencer, about how many total current

followers does he/she have?

- ○   less than 10,000 (1)
- ○   between 10,000 and 100,000 (2)
- ○   between 100,001 and 1 million (3)
- ○   over 1 million (4)

Many social media influencers are paid by brands to advertise and promote their

products. Those type of posts are called 'sponsored posts' or 'ads' and Social Media

Influencers are required to disclose those types of posts within the content of the post or

included in the post description, with a hashtag or other notation such as "paid

promotion".

In the past six months, has your favorite social media influencer posted a video or other

type of info/content for a product or brand that they were paid to advertise?

- ○   Yes (1)
- ○   No (2)
- ○   Not sure (3)

For what type of product did your favorite social media influencer create a

paid/sponsored post?

- ○   beverages (soda pop, bottled water, iced tea, etc.) (1)
- ○   toiletries (toothpaste, deodorant, body wash, shampoo) (2)
- ○   cosmetics (3)
- ○   clothing (4)
- ○   food products (cereal, yogurt, milk, fruit, etc.) (5)
- ○   skin care/sunscreen (6)
- ○   candy (7)
- ○   car/truck (8)
- ○   Other: please specify (9)

_____

The following question is to verify that you are a real person.

Which of the following is a vegetable?

- ○   Water (1)
- ○   Strawberry (3)
- ○   Chocolate (4)
- ○   Broccoli (5)
- ○   Milk (6)

Some social media influencers are not real human beings, instead, they are created using computer-generated images (CGI) or virtual characters such as avatars.

Is your favorite social media influencer a real human being or is he/she a computer-generated image/virtual character?

- ◯   Human being (1)
- ◯   CGI/Virtual Character (2)
- ◯   Don't know (3)

Please answer the following questions about your favorite social media influencer.

My favorite influencer is:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
trustworthy (1)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
honest (2)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
reliable (3)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯
truthful (4)	◯	◯	◯	◯	◯

Please answer the following questions about your favorite social media influencer:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I like this influencer (1)	○	○	○	○	○
This influencer is physically attractive (2)	○	○	○	○	○
This influencer does NOT makes me feel comfortable (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I am always aware of this influencer on social media (4)	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer that I follow has a good reputation (5)	○	○	○	○	○

My favorite social media influencer is:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
an expert (1)	○	○	○	○	○
knowledgeable (2)	○	○	○	○	○
experienced (3)	○	○	○	○	○
qualified (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following questions about your favorite social media influencer:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The influencer that I follow thinks like me (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer that I follow behaves like me (2)	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer that I follow is similar to me (3)	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer that I follow is not like me (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following questions about your favorite social media influencer:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
My favorite social media influencer is unique	○	○	○	○	○
Following my favorite influencer's posts/updates on social media is a significant part of my life	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer that I follow is the type of person I want to be like myself	○	○	○	○	○

To ensure that you are a real person, please choose music from the options provided below.
○   movies (1)
○   soccer (2)
○   yoga (3)
○   music (4)
○   swimming (5)

Please answer the following question about your favorite social media influencer:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The influencer I follow makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend (1)	○	○	○	○	○
The influencer I follow is a natural, down-to-earth person (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I look forward to watching the influencer I follow in his/her next video (3)	○	○	○	○	○
If the influencer I follow appeared in a video on another channel, I would watch or read his/her post (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following questions about your favorite social media influencer:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
The influencer I follow seems to understand the kind of things I want to know (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I miss seeing the influencer I follow when he/she is sick or on vacation (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I want to meet the influencer I follow in person (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I do not feel sorry for the influencer I follow when he/she makes a mistake (4)	○	○	○	○	○

Please answer the following question about the sponsored/paid posts created and shared by your favorite social media influencer.

The sponsored posts are:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
Honest	○	○	○	○	○

The following question is to verify that you are a real person.

 Please enter the word **yellow** in the space below.

_____

Please answer the following question about the products/brands featured in your favorite social media influencer's sponsored/paid posts:

	Strongly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Strongly agree (5)
I intend to purchase the product/brand endorsed by the influencer that I follow	○	○	○	○	○

Appendix F

Data Codes for Demographics and other Control Variables

Age	18-24	1
	25-34	2
	35-44	3
	45-54	4
	55-64	5

Gender	Male	1
	Female	2

Education	High School/GED	1
	Some College	2
	Associate's Degree	3
	Bachelor's Degree	4
	Master's Degree or higher	5

Ethnicity	White Caucasian (non-Hispanic)	1
	Black/African American (non-Hispanic)	2
	Hispanic/Latino	3
	Asian	4
	American Indian or Alaska Native	5

Social Media Platform Used Most Often	Facebook	1
	Instagram	2
	YouTube	3
	TikTok	4
	X (formerly Twitter)	5
	Reddit	6

Time Spent on Social Media per Day	less than 1 hour	1
	1 - 2 hours	2
	3-4 hours	3
	5-6 hours	4
	more than 6 hours	5

SMI Type	Human	1
	CGI/Virtual Character	2

SMI Age	18-24	1
	25-34	2
	35-44	3
	45-54	4
	55 or older	5

SMI Gender	Male	1
	Female	2
	I'm not sure	3

SMI Category (# of followers)	Less than 10,000	1
	Between 10,000 and 100,000	2
	Between 100,001 and 1 million	3
	Over 1 million	4

Appendix G

Total Sample Frequencies - Respondent Demographics and Social Media Use

Age

	N	%
1	37	5.3%
2	471	68.1%
3	128	18.5%
4	38	5.5%
5	18	2.6%

Gender

	N	%
1	464	67.1%
2	228	32.9%

Education

	N	%
1	53	7.7%
2	7	1.0%
3	10	1.4%
4	524	75.7%
5	98	14.2%

Ethnicity

	N	%
1	659	95.2%
2	3	0.4%
3	2	0.3%
4	23	3.3%
5	5	0.7%

Platform Used Most Often

	N	%
1	139	20.1%
2	487	70.4%
3	58	8.4%
4	2	0.3%
5	5	0.7%
6	1	0.1%

Amount of Time Spent on Social Media

	N	%
1	15	2.2%
2	258	37.3%
3	307	44.4%
4	58	8.4%
5	54	7.8%

Appendix H

Total Sample Frequencies - SMI demographics and SMI Category

SMI Age

	N	%
1	33	4.8%
2	517	74.7%
3	125	18.1%
4	16	2.3%
5	1	0.1%

SMI Gender

	N	%
1	425	61.4%
2	263	38.0%
3	4	0.6%

SMI Category

	N	%
1	93	13.4%
2	444	64.2%
3	119	17.2%
4	36	5.2%

Appendix I

Regression Analyses for Total Sample

Step 4a: Regression #1

Variables Entered/Removed[(a)]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
2	Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary – Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.125[a]	.016	.003	.725	.016	1.209	9	682	.286
2	.683[b]	.467	.456	.535	.451	114.711	5	677	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship
c. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Analysis of Variance[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.713	9	.635	1.209	.286[b]
	Residual	358.072	682	.525		
	Total	363.785	691			
2	Regression	169.939	14	12.139	42.393	<.001[c]
	Residual	193.845	677	.286		
	Total	363.785	691			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship

Regression Coefficient and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.314	.232		18.611	<.001		
	Age	-.051	.042	-.054	-1.220	.223	.744	1.345
	Gender	-.039	.073	-.025	-.527	.598	.640	1.562
	Education	-.023	.030	-.030	-.762	.446	.962	1.040
	Ethnicity	-.050	.043	-.044	-1.145	.253	.985	1.015
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.026	.031	.033	.836	.403	.934	1.071
	Platform following SMI	.042	.049	.033	.870	.385	.989	1.011
	SMI Age	.031	.058	.024	.535	.593	.746	1.340
	SMI Gender	-.101	.068	-.070	-1.480	.139	.652	1.533
	SMI Category	-.023	.040	-.022	-.566	.571	.952	1.051
2	(Constant)	.042	.291		.144	.885		
	Age	-.032	.031	-.034	-1.028	.304	.741	1.349
	Gender	-.105	.055	-.068	-1.921	.055	.622	1.608
	Education	.029	.023	.038	1.302	.193	.932	1.073
	Ethnicity	-.037	.032	-.033	-1.162	.246	.978	1.023
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.004	.023	.005	.163	.871	.925	1.081
	Platform following SMI	.024	.036	.019	.677	.499	.970	1.031
	SMI Age	-.003	.043	-.003	-.078	.938	.742	1.348
	SMI Gender	.029	.051	.020	.569	.570	.642	1.559
	SMI Category	.020	.030	.019	.646	.519	.916	1.092
	Credibility	.208	.078	.121	2.665	.008	.384	2.602
	Authenticity	.149	.040	.141	3.734	<.001	.554	1.805
	Involvement	.110	.039	.105	2.824	.005	.573	1.745
	Parasocial Relationship	.083	.074	.052	1.124	.261	.370	2.706
	Wishful ID	.423	.040	.406	10.548	<.001	.532	1.880

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Step #4b: Regression #2

Variables Entered/Removed[(a)]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
2	Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary[(c)]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.142[a]	.020	.007	.722	.020	1.566	9	682	.122
2	.717[b]	.514	.504	.511	.494	137.522	5	677	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship
c. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Analysis of Variance[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	7.355	9	.817	1.566	.122[b]
	Residual	355.957	682	.522		
	Total	363.312	691			
2	Regression	186.718	14	13.337	51.129	<.001[c]
	Residual	176.594	677	.261		
	Total	363.312	691			

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship

Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.472	.231		19.352	<.001		
	Age	-.059	.041	-.063	-1.425	.155	.744	1.345
	Gender	.136	.073	.088	1.857	.064	.640	1.562
	Education	-.077	.030	-.099	-2.550	.011	.962	1.040
	Ethnicity	-.035	.043	-.031	-.806	.420	.985	1.015
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.000	.031	-.001	-.016	.987	.934	1.071
	Platform following SMI	-.034	.048	-.027	-.713	.476	.989	1.011
	SMI Age	.039	.058	.029	.665	.506	.746	1.340
	SMI Gender	-.112	.068	-.077	-1.642	.101	.652	1.533
	SMI Category	.042	.040	.041	1.055	.292	.952	1.051
2	(Constant)	.055	.278		.197	.844		
	Age	-.042	.029	-.045	-1.443	.150	.741	1.349
	Gender	.095	.052	.062	1.813	.070	.622	1.608
	Education	-.024	.022	-.031	-1.109	.268	.932	1.073
	Ethnicity	-.012	.031	-.011	-.396	.692	.978	1.023
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	-.027	.022	-.033	-1.198	.231	.925	1.081
	Platform following SMI	-.053	.035	-.042	-1.542	.124	.970	1.031
	SMI Age	.010	.041	.007	.232	.817	.742	1.348
	SMI Gender	.010	.048	.007	.198	.843	.642	1.559
	SMI Category	.079	.029	.077	2.733	.006	.916	1.092
	Credibility	-.041	.075	-.023	-.543	.587	.384	2.602
	Authenticity	.221	.038	.209	5.802	<.001	.554	1.805
	Involvement	.175	.037	.168	4.733	<.001	.573	1.745
	Parasocial Relationship	.306	.070	.192	4.348	<.001	.370	2.706
	Wishful ID	.342	.038	.328	8.929	<.001	.532	1.880

a. Dependent Variable: Trust in Sponsored Posts

Step #4c: Regression #3

Variables Entered/Removed[(a)]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
2	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.125[a]	.016	.003	.725	.016	1.209	9	682	.286
2	.578[b]	.334	.324	.597	.318	324.790	1	681	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Analysis of Variance[(a)]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.713	9	.635	1.209	.286[b]
	Residual	358.072	682	.525		
	Total	363.785	691			
2	Regression	121.341	10	12.134	34.084	<.001[c]
	Residual	242.443	681	.356		
	Total	363.785	691			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.314	.232		18.611	<.001		
	Age	-.051	.042	-.054	-1.220	.223	.744	1.345
	Gender	-.039	.073	-.025	-.527	.598	.640	1.562
	Education	-.023	.030	-.030	-.762	.446	.962	1.040
	Ethnicity	-.050	.043	-.044	-1.145	.253	.985	1.015
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.026	.031	.033	.836	.403	.934	1.071
	Platform following SMI	.042	.049	.033	.870	.385	.989	1.011
	SMI Age	.031	.058	.024	.535	.593	.746	1.340
	SMI Gender	-.101	.068	-.070	-1.480	.139	.652	1.533
	SMI Category	-.023	.040	-.022	-.566	.571	.952	1.051
2	(Constant)	1.765	.238		7.429	<.001		
	Age	-.017	.034	-.018	-.497	.619	.741	1.349
	Gender	-.116	.060	-.075	-1.917	.056	.637	1.570
	Education	.021	.025	.027	.830	.407	.952	1.050
	Ethnicity	-.030	.036	-.026	-.833	.405	.984	1.016
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.027	.026	.033	1.026	.305	.934	1.071
	Platform following SMI	.062	.040	.049	1.547	.122	.988	1.012
	SMI Age	.009	.048	.007	.191	.849	.746	1.341
	SMI Gender	-.037	.056	-.026	-.662	.508	.650	1.539
	SMI Category	-.047	.033	-.045	-1.414	.158	.950	1.052
	Trust in Sponsored Posts	.570	.032	.570	18.022	<.001	.980	1.021

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Step #4d: Multiple Regression

Variable Entered/Removed[(a)]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender[b]	.	Enter
2	Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship[b]	.	Enter
3	Trust in Sponsored Posts[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. All requested variables entered.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.125[a]	.016	.003	.725	.016	1.209	9	682	.286
2	.683[b]	.467	.456	.535	.451	114.711	5	677	<.001
3	.697[c]	.485	.474	.526	.018	23.671	1	676	<.001

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Analysis of Variance[(a)]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.713	9	.635	1.209	.286[b]
	Residual	358.072	682	.525		
	Total	363.785	691			
2	Regression	169.939	14	12.139	42.393	<.001[c]
	Residual	193.845	677	.286		
	Total	363.785	691			
3	Regression	176.497	15	11.766	42.470	<.001[d]
	Residual	187.287	676	.277		
	Total	363.785	691			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent
b. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender
c. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship
d. Predictors: (Constant), SMI Category, SMI Gender, Ethnicity, Platform follow SMI, Education, SMI Age, Amount of Time Spent on Social Media, Age, Gender, Involvement, Credibility, Authenticity, Wishful ID, Parasocial Relationship, Trust in Sponsored Posts

Regression Coefficients and Multicollinearity Diagnostics[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	4.314	.232		18.611	<.001		
	Age	-.051	.042	-.054	-1.220	.223	.744	1.345
	Gender	-.039	.073	-.025	-.527	.598	.640	1.562
	Education	-.023	.030	-.030	-.762	.446	.962	1.040
	Ethnicity	-.050	.043	-.044	-1.145	.253	.985	1.015
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.026	.031	.033	.836	.403	.934	1.071
	Platform following SMI	.042	.049	.033	.870	.385	.989	1.011
	SMI Age	.031	.058	.024	.535	.593	.746	1.340
	SMI Gender	-.101	.068	-.070	-1.480	.139	.652	1.533
	SMI Category	-.023	.040	-.022	-.566	.571	.952	1.051
2	(Constant)	.042	.291		.144	.885		
	Age	-.032	.031	-.034	-1.028	.304	.741	1.349
	Gender	-.105	.055	-.068	-1.921	.055	.622	1.608
	Education	.029	.023	.038	1.302	.193	.932	1.073
	Ethnicity	-.037	.032	-.033	-1.162	.246	.978	1.023
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.004	.023	.005	.163	.871	.925	1.081
	Platform following SMI	.024	.036	.019	.677	.499	.970	1.031
	SMI Age	-.003	.043	-.003	-.078	.938	.742	1.348
	SMI Gender	.029	.051	.020	.569	.570	.642	1.559
	SMI Category	.020	.030	.019	.646	.519	.916	1.092
	Credibility	.208	.078	.121	2.665	.008	.384	2.602
	Authenticity	.149	.040	.141	3.734	<.001	.554	1.805
	Involvement	.110	.039	.105	2.824	.005	.573	1.745
	Parasocial Relationship	.083	.074	.052	1.124	.261	.370	2.706
	Wishful ID	.423	.040	.406	10.548	<.001	.532	1.880
3	(Constant)	.031	.286		.110	.912		
	Age	-.023	.030	-.025	-.774	.439	.739	1.354
	Gender	-.124	.054	-.080	-2.286	.023	.619	1.615
	Education	.034	.022	.044	1.530	.126	.931	1.075
	Ethnicity	-.035	.032	-.031	-1.107	.269	.978	1.023
	Amount of Time Spent on Social Media	.009	.023	.011	.389	.697	.923	1.083
	Platform following SMI	.035	.036	.027	.975	.330	.967	1.034
	SMI Age	-.005	.042	-.004	-.123	.902	.742	1.348
	SMI Gender	.027	.050	.019	.541	.589	.642	1.559
	SMI Category	.004	.030	.004	.145	.885	.906	1.104
	Credibility	.216	.077	.125	2.810	.005	.384	2.604
	Authenticity	.106	.040	.101	2.646	.008	.528	1.895
	Involvement	.076	.039	.072	1.954	.051	.555	1.803
	Parasocial Relationship	.024	.074	.015	.326	.745	.360	2.782
	Wishful ID	.357	.042	.343	8.564	<.001	.476	2.101
	Trust in Sponsored Posts	.193	.040	.193	4.865	<.001	.486	2.057

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intent

Appendix J

Sobel Test for Mediation – Total Sample

Sobel Test for Mediation - Credibility

Input:		Test statistic:		p-value:
t_a -.543	Sobel test:	0.5427537		0.5872994
t_b 18.022	Aroian test:	0.54192084		0.58787304
	Goodman test:	0.54359041		0.58672336
	Reset all		Calculate	

Sobel Test for Mediation - Authenticity

Input:		Test statistic:		p-value:
t_a 5.802	Sobel test:	5.52284649		3e-8
t_b 18.022	Aroian test:	5.5151589		3e-8
	Goodman test:	5.53056631		3e-8
	Reset all		Calculate	

Sobel Test for Mediation - Involvement

Input:		Test statistic:		p-value:
t_a 4.733	Sobel test:	4.57776533		0.0000047
t_b 18.022	Aroian test:	4.57118702		0.00000485
	Goodman test:	4.58437213		0.00000455
	Reset all		Calculate	

Sobel Test for Mediation – Parasocial Relationship

Input:		Test statistic:		p-value:
t_a 4.348		Sobel test:	4.22672778	0.00002371
t_b 18.022		Aroian test:	4.22059226	0.00002437
		Goodman test:	4.23289014	0.00002307
	Reset all		Calculate	

Sobel Test for Mediation – Wishful Identification

Input:		Test statistic:		p-value:
t_a 8.929		Sobel test:	8.00084882	0
t_b 18.022		Aroian test:	7.99097779	0
		Goodman test:	8.01075651	0
	Reset all		Calculate	

VITA

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1990 – 1994	B.S., Education New York University New York, New York
1986 – 1998	M.B.A., Marketing University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, North Carolina
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