Spring 5-2022

What Do Facial Products Have to Do with a Waterfall? The Role of Remoteness, Social Comparison, and Envy in the Purchasing Effectiveness of Sponsored Product Social Media Content

Louis J. Zmich

WHAT DO FACIAL PRODUCTS HAVE TO DO WITH A WATERFALL? THE ROLE OF REMOTENESS, SOCIAL COMPARISON, AND ENVY IN THE PURCHASING EFFECTIVENESS OF SPONSORED PRODUCT SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT

by

Louis J. Zmich, B.S., M.I.S.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Business Administration in Marketing

COLLEGE OF BUSINESS
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

May 2022

LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

March 31, 2022
Date of dissertation defense

We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared by

Louis J. Zmich, B.S., M.I.S.

entitled **What Do Facial Products Have to Do with a Waterfall? The Role of Remoteness, Social Comparison, and Envy in the Purchasing Effectiveness of Sponsored Product Social Media Content**

be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Business Administration, Marketing Concentration

Laura Flurry
Supervisor of Dissertation Research

William Locander
Head of Marketing and Analysis

Doctoral Committee Members:
Julie Moulard
William Locander
Mark Garza

Approved:

Christopher Martin
Dean of Business

Approved:

Ramu Ramachandran
Dean of the Graduate School

GS Form 13a
(01/20)

ABSTRACT

Advertising has gone from magazines, to television, and now social media. However, unlike the robust advertisement literature, the influencer marketing literature has not caught up to explain how social media sponsored content can perform its best. While companies rely on follower count and interaction (i.e., likes) to determine who to partner with, the need for clarity on how to best predict digital advertisement success is needed. This study brings the literature of advertising and cognitive psychology, and applies the associative memory, visual persuasion, and remote conveyor theories into the influencer marketing context. This study specifically looks at how creativity through remoteness in sponsored social media images affects purchase intentions and upward social comparison. This study then reaffirms the literature relationships between upward social comparison and purchase intentions through envy, while establishing a psychological boundary condition of self-esteem. Between two studies, this dissertation tests the conceptual model through fabricated Instagram posts, and with the partnership of a lifestyle influencer and their following.

APPROVAL FOR SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION

The author grants to the Prescott Memorial Library of Louisiana Tech University the right to reproduce, by appropriate methods, upon request, any or all portions of this Dissertation. It was understood that "proper request" consists of the agreement, on the part of the requesting party, that said reproduction is for his personal use and that subsequent reproduction will not occur without written approval of the author of this Dissertation. Further, any portions of the Dissertation used in books, papers, and other works must be appropriately referenced to this Dissertation.

Finally, the author of this Dissertation reserves the right to publish freely, in the literature, at any time, any or all portions of this Dissertation.

Author_____

Date _____

G.S. Form 14
(5/03)

DEDICATION

My dissertation is dedicated to and could not be completed without the support from my wonderful fiancé Shelby, my family, and my fantastic committee members. Delaying gratification is difficult in some circumstances, but four years is a long time to ask for someone to put their life on hold for the betterment of another. That level of commitment truly encouraged me to complete my degree and continue through the program and I could not have completed this journey without you Shelby. If honorary doctorates were awarded, you certainly earned yours. Thank you. While Ruston, Louisiana was no Chicago, we certainly enjoyed our time here, and will continue our journey south as we begin our careers together in Tampa, Florida.

To my family. Specifically, my grandmother (Elinor), my mom (Mary), and my dad (Ron), whose financial support and continuous encouragement allowed me this incredible experience to not only better myself and my career, but also better the lives of my future family.

Lastly, to my committee who saw several different versions of the final manuscript. Admittedly, early versions were much less comprehendible than this final draft. Regardless, my committee stood by my ideas and encouraged me through this monumental task. When it comes down to it, this dissertation taught me more about literature review, data collection, analysis, and the realities of manuscript delivery than any other experience. The program at Louisiana Tech certainly put me in a position to

succeed while writing this dissertation, but the process itself is one that will last with me forever. I am truly honored to have you all as my mentors, advisors, and future colleagues. Dr. Flurry, Dr. Moulard, Dr. Locander and Dr. Groza, thank you.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Like many grand projects, this dissertation was not completed in a vacuum. It took many helping hands to make this dream a reality. In the influencer marketing literature, social media influencers are a moving target. Gaining their attention is difficult and working with their followers in academic research was seemingly impossible. Therefore, I owe a large gratitude to those who helped me through both my initial formations of this research idea, and through to the data collection. Below are the content creators who made this dissertation possible. Without their support, the scope and interest of this project would not be where it is today. Thank you. To those who choose to opt-out of having their names featured in this manuscript, you know who you are, and I thank you as well.

Interviews

- Owen Belknap: Outdoor Sports Content Creator (@owendb123)
- Deuce Windham: Sports and Video Game Content Creator (@RevDeuceWindham)
- Roy S. Ford: Music and Entertainment Content Creator (@RoySFord)
- Olusola “Sola” Awe: Health, Wellness and Lifestyle Content Creator (@DiscoveringNatural)

Data Collection

- Olusola “Sola” Awe: Health, Wellness and Lifestyle Content Creator (@DiscoveringNatural)
- Stephani Narvaez: Lifestyle and Fashion Content Creator (@StephaniNarvaez)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"At the end of it all, I am trying to influence someone to buy something [from me]. So, I know that the clients [sponsors] are tracking these numbers [sales figures]. ***You have to be creative****, you can't keep pushing all these different unrelated products with no connection on people, because people can tell you are not real, and they bail, they just bail."*

– Sola of Discovering Natural

Social media has grown exponentially since YouTube's first video, "Me at the Zoo," was published by YouTube's co-founder Jawed Karim on April 23rd, 2005 (Smith, 2020). Since that moment, YouTube has grown to serve over two billion views per day. That number is more than Netflix and Facebook videos combined (Smith, 2020). To add to this scale, YouTube is the second-largest search engine globally, behind Google, the company that owns YouTube. Within this sea of content, there are a few who rise above the other content creators and cross the threshold to become social media influencers (SMIs). These individuals are independent entities that have the power to shape the attitudes, feelings, and actions of their audience members through their content on social media platforms (Freberg, Graham, McGaughey & Freberg, 2011; Audrezet, Kerviler & Moulard, 2020).

Some of the biggest names and companies on social media, Ryan Kaji (Ryan's World), Jimmy Donaldson (Mr. Beast), Dude Perfect, Rhett and Link (Good Mythical Morning), Mark Fischbach (Markiplier), are also the biggest money-makers on the internet, making an estimated $19.5 – 29.5 million dollars a year in advertising and sponsorship revenue (Berg & Brown, 2021). These sponsorships have the potential to turn a hobby into a full-time career as their channel begins to make a substantial portion of their income. As more companies reach out to these influencers, the messages can turn from simple pitches to aggressive advertisements. As one lifestyle social media influencer, Sola of Discovering Natural put it,

> *"When a company like Revlon reaches out to sponsor one of my videos, I am going to put in a lot of work to sell this product to my audience. When companies like this come to you, you are their employee now, and you have to put in the work to sell these products."*

These paid partnerships can be lucrative for both the influencer and the sponsoring company. As sportsman influencer Owen Belknap put it,

> *"When one of the boats I manage wins a big tournament, the first thing everyone asks is, what gear was that boat using? If people look to my [social media] page and see that the advertised gear I was using won that tournament, every shop along the coastline will carry that brand and sell out for weeks."*

In recent years, SMIs have gone from a buzzword to being one of the most cost-effective marketing trends to help companies persuade customers and showcase new products and services (Harrison, 2017; Booth & Matic, 2011). As influencers grow their audiences to hundreds, thousands, and even millions of people, they begin to shape the

opinions and behaviors of their followers via opinion leadership and independent third-party user-generated advertising (Freberg et al., 2011). Overtime, some SMIs grow to become internet celebrities and are often positioned strategically by organizations to serve as effective mass marketing tools alongside their traditional marketing budgets (Xu and Pratt, 2018). In fact, of the $276.07 billion dollars estimated to be spent in 2021 on advertising, $116 billion is estimated to be digital (e.g., social media ads, SEO management, etc.) (Guttmann, 2019). With so much of the advertising spend in the U.S. directed at digital mediums, it's no surprise that corporations are shaping the sponsored content seen on social media to resemble that of the advertisement literature (Kim and Kim, 2021). For example, like traditional advertising, social media influencers are sometimes given advertisement text copy to include in their posts, and direction for how the content should look and feel. This type of social media content is called retelling, with the text copy being the advertorial (Lambrou, 2020). Sometimes, and unfortunately, these advertorials are written, copied, and pasted word-for-word, like one Singaporean influencer embarrassingly displayed in 2016 when posting this:

> *"Hello Wendy! Here's your EDITED caption for skinny mint 2nd IG: Loving my SkinnyMint tea! The morning boost is supposed to make you less bloated, increase alertness, lessen cravings and snackings, and have anti-anxiety properties!" (Abidin, 2016, pp. 13-15).*

While this post was immediately taken down, people undoubtedly saw that posts sometimes have ulterior motives. Since then, several studies have shown that most followers are not privy to the sponsorships that occur behind the scenes, either because they don't see the #ad or #sponsored (or equivalent) or because the influencers are not

disclosing their paid partnerships (Kim, Jiang & Wang, 2021). However, a recent content analysis on social media influencer research detailed that the majority of SMI research and sponsored content has focused on this disclosure of the partnership topic, yet there remains a lack of research conducted on how sponsored posts as content should be designed (Vrontis, Makrides, Christofi & Thrassou, 2020; De Veirman & Hudders, 2020). This lack of sponsored content design research is troubling as traditional marketing teams spend time and effort to showcase their creativity with the advertisement copy, but then, as one interviewed SMI put it, leaves the influencers alone in making design and content decisions (Large Instagram Influencer, 2021). While this autonomy is often welcomed by the SMIs themselves, research on what is the best way to get followers to stop, view, and engage with a piece of content is beneficial to both the SMI and the partnering marketing managers. It's no secret that social media ads are not going away. The American Marketing Association sponsored a CMO study in 2017 and found marketers plan to increase their social media spend by 89% by 2022 (Gitlin, 2021). This shift in advertisement spend on social media is already felt by consumers, 74% of which claim they think they see too many ads on social media as it is (Gitlin, 2021). These preliminary numbers begin to tell a story of over saturation of social media advertising. As such, the need for creative, original, and attention-grabbing ads is going to become more important in the not-so-distant future.

Thus, this current study applies the Remote Conveyor Model, specifically the originality component of the creativity dimension, to help explain a sponsored content's effectiveness through the processes of social comparison, envy, and self-esteem. To the researcher's knowledge, this study will be the first to apply the conveyor-product-benefit

claim model from the advertising literature to the influencer marketing literature. Drawing on associative memory theory, and social comparison theory, this study provides needed clarity on what SMIs can do to create more original and creative content to encourage purchases from their followers.

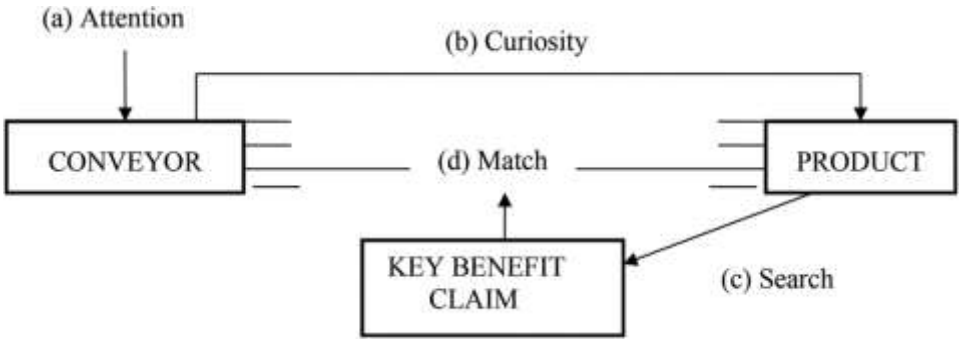
Background

Companies begin to approach SMIs to sponsor videos or regular social media posts and stories as the creator's channel grows. The sponsors may provide products or services to the SMI or could pay for the production costs of the content in exchange for an advertisement mention within the post (i.e., "I love this product, use code SUMMER for 20% off by using this link"). Some sponsorships go further, supplying full advertisement scripts to the SMI (i.e., advertorials). This type of sponsorship has become widely popular on Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, and others. Of this year's digital marketing spend, the influencer marketing industry is estimated to spend $2.3 billion in 2020, up from just $0.5 billion in 2015 (Kim et al., 2021). This influencer-sponsor relationship essentially creates a user-generated advertisement for the sponsoring brand, intending to speed up sales and jump-start a new product or service line through a dedicated audience cultivated over years of work and content creation (Stubb & Colliander, 2019).

This partnership between the sponsoring company and SMI certainly has its value-added advantages. The SMI is now being paid for their content creation hobby, solidifying their intention of making content on social media full-time. Further, the sponsoring brand is, in some cases, receiving more exposure in one post than its entire marketing budget could achieve with traditional social media advertising means. This is

due to prominent followings of millions of people that some SMIs amass. Not to mention that when surveyed, 92% of social media users report that they trust influencers over traditional marketing messages (Fertik, 2020). Further, 74% of "digital natives" actively resist being targeted by "traditional" branded pages on social media (Kim & Kim, 2021, p. 405). However, while social media users trust influencers more than traditional brands, the revenue growth from social media content is estimated to decrease from 35.6% in 2017 to 16.9% in 2021 (Cooper, 2020). This slowing of revenue growth from sponsored social media content may be due to the overcrowding of the space. For example, searching for #ad or #sponsored on Instagram yields more than 19.7 million posts as of the time of writing. This crowding of the digital sponsored content space creates another need to highlight the best mechanisms to attract followers to stop, view, and interact with the sponsored messages. Thus, this study suggests that SMI sponsored posts lead to more purchasing intentions when the originality of the post, manipulated through the remoteness of the conveyer (i.e., the social media image), is achieved. The *remote conveyor model* details how more remote (i.e., dissimilar) the conveyor is to the sponsoring product, the more curiosity is generated from the viewer (Rossiter, 2008). Specifically, the remote conveyor model functions around the core concept of a key benefit claim (KBC) solving the connection between what is driving the context of the image, and the product on display. Rossiter (2008) suggests that creative advertisements can grab the attention of viewers by a) drawing *attention* to the ad, b) raising *curiosity* about the relationship between the product and the conveyor, which will initiate c) a *search* of the ad content for the missing link that eventually d) leads the viewer to

successfully *match* the conveyor context with the key benefit claim of the advertisement (see Figure 1 pulled from Althuizen, 2017; Rossiter, 2008).



Source: Rossiter (2008); Althuizen (2017)

Figure 1.1: Remote Conveyor Model

The conceptual similarity between advertisement conveyors and social media sponsored content is critical in our understanding of what makes a sponsored social media post successful. The key benefit claim of the product is provided to the influencer as part of the sponsorship via the advertorial. Yet, the influencer must convey the imagery to their audience through their curated social media content. In this study, the context is Instagram, and the conveyor is the imagery the social media influencers create. The theory driving the originality and creativity of the post is the level of remoteness between the influencer's content and product. Associative memory and related theories help frame the discussion around why remoteness between conveyor and product matter when driving attention to sponsored content (Althuizen, 2017). Associative memory theory suggests that the advertised product and the conveyor used to broadcast the key benefit claim should appear out of context, which will then cause viewers to grow curious about how the product and conveyor are related (Rossiter & Bellman, 2005; Ang, 2014).

This level of remoteness between the conveyor and the product is described as the conceptual distance between the conveyor in the image and the product being advertised (Althuizen, 2017). The remoteness perceived when viewing an advertisement is triggered by the conveyor and the product appearing out of context. For example, an advertisement showcasing a woman (the conveyor) applying makeup (the product) in a bathroom (context) is not out of context, as women applying makeup is not out the ordinary for most people's social norms. However, a woman (the conveyor) applying makeup (the product) under water (context) is out of context because the social norm for how makeup is traditionally applied, is violated. Thus, the remote conveyor model would suggest that this level of remoteness between the conveyor (a woman under water) and the makeup (the product) will cause the viewer to search for the key benefit claim for the product, which in this fictitious example is how waterproof the makeup is.

This level of remoteness is resolved when the viewer matches the disconnect between the context of the image and product, with the key benefit claim. The emotional response to this connection is feelings of originality, curiosity, and creativity (Althuizen, 2017). Specifically, originality is classified as one dimension of conveyor creativity (i.e., originality and effectiveness) (Parnes, 1961; Althuizen, 2017). Originality as a dimension of creativity is often measured through the lens of remoteness, highlighting how the originality of the advertisement *through* contextual remoteness is what sparks feelings of creativity (Ang, 2000; Althuizen, 2017). Additionally, effectiveness is measured by how well the benefits are conveyed through the product advertorial message (Althuizen, 2017). Often, companies that sponsor social media influencers include these benefit claims in the provided post descriptions (Lambrou, 2020). Since the benefits of the

sponsored products are often provided, the influencer is tasked with creating the visual content itself (Awe, 2021). Thus, this study assumes the advertisement team provides the *effectiveness* dimensions of the creativity construct, and instead focuses on the *originality* component of creativity by measuring how remote the influencer can make the context of their sponsored posts to the product in question.

In the context of this study, creativity on social media entices individuals to post content that creates a digital "creative self" (Choi, 2019). The creative self is the idealization of achieving attributes of a desired lifestyle, being popular online, and is the driving mechanism of social comparison from social media users (Choi, 2019). In other words, when one individual sees another that is more creative, the individual can either compare themselves upward or downward to the other depending on their internal drive to perform like the other (Festinger, 1954). Social comparison theory helps support the claim that individuals compare themselves to others online, forming levels of envy that eventually lead to the purchasing of the same goods used in online advertisements (Chae, 2018; Sung & Phau, 2020). Additionally, Michinov, Jamet, Métayer and Hénaff (2015) demonstrated that individuals socially compared themselves to highly creative individuals more than less creative partners. Michinov et al. (2015) go on to explain that individuals who produce creative ideas are more likely to gain attention from group members. Lastly, highly creative individuals encourage self-evaluation in others, motiving others to be more creative, akin to living up to the individual's creative superiority (Michinov et al., 2015). Belk (2011) goes on to suggest that in our hyper-consumer culture of digital communication, following others who promote envy within

us is *preferable* as this action increases the chances of us acquiring goods like the people we follow.

Thus, this study proposes that the advertisement literature, specifically Rossiter's (2008) model for the components of creative and effective ads should be applied to the sponsored social media post context. The originality dimension of creativity evokes upward social comparison, which leads to envy and ultimately purchase intentions. Additionally, this study suggests that the relationship between upward social comparison and envy are limited by the individual characteristics like self-esteem, serving as a needed boundary condition in the influencer marketing literature (Vrontis et al., 2020).

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

While we may have a rough definition of social media influencers and their role in the online advertising landscape, it remains essential to explore how influencers capture the attention of their followers. The present study suggests that the advertising literature, specifically, the remote-conveyor model helps explain why some sponsored posts are perceived as more creative, and thus perform better than others in the ever-growing digital landscape. Additionally, this study details how self-esteem serves as a needed follower-centric boundary condition between the upward social comparison and envy relationship on purchase intentions. Thus, this study plans to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: *How can social media influencers leverage creativity in their sponsored posts to attract more purchase intentions from followers?*

RQ2: *How do individual psychological differences (i.e., self-esteem) affect the upward social comparison and envy relationship felt when viewing sponsored content?*

Managerial Importance

The current research addresses several existing problems for marketing managers. First, companies can now pay individuals on social media platforms to push their products or services to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of followers. The scale and possibilities associated with influencer sales online are seemingly endless. Instead of an advertising team promoting products, they now have SMIs to do the work of an entire marketing team with one post. As a result, product managers may look to social media influencers to engage with and promote their products or services on various social media platforms. However, increasing the marketing budget to accommodate social media influencer sponsorships would be misplaced if the influencer does a poor job creating content that grabs follower attention. Additionally, some followers may socially compare themselves to the influencer more when the sponsored content is both remote and perceived to be creative. This upward social comparison from the follower may lead them to envy the creativity of the influencer, further encouraging the purchase of the products advertised. However, this relationship is hypothesized to be moderated by the self-esteem of the follower, a much-need boundary condition in social media sponsorship research. The managerial contributions involve proposing a new influencer marketing roadmap through the remoteness-conveyor model. The current research expects to demonstrate that influencers and product managers should not be afraid to get creative with the key benefit claims of the sponsored products through remote and contrasting imagery when

creating content. In-fact, it is proposed here that in the cluttered space of social media, it's the contrasting imagery that will cause followers to stop, search, envy, and purchase the products on display.

Theoretical Importance

The current research addresses several existing literature gaps. First, the research examines influencer marketing in the realm of advertising and online sponsorship, as no known studies at the time of writing have taken this aspect of the advertising literature and applied it to the sponsored content of the influencer marketing literature. While some recent studies have looked at SMIs via influence theory and persuasion knowledge in the context of selling, and other studies have examined how creativity via product descriptions online attract more buyer attention, no studies to this author's knowledge have specifically linked social media influencers to the remote-conveyor model of advertising (Ki & Kim, 2019; Singh, Crisafulli, Quamina & Xue, 2020; Yao & Shao, 2021; Yao, Shao & Zhang, 2021). Second, the research addresses the void of partnerships with social media influencers by working with a lifestyle influencer, Sola of Discovering Natural, to survey and poll their audience on actual social media content. This research answers the ever-growing call for external validity regarding the lack of sponsored content creation research and provides data that pertains to actual followers alongside panel survey data (West, Koslow & Kilgour, 2019; Vrontis et al., 2020). Third, this study addresses the need for researchers to explore how the ever-changing advertising landscape is now prevalent in online mediums like social media, while also addressing the consumer response to creative and original content (West et al., 2019).

The multiple gaps addressed are the main theoretical contributions of this study. First, this study brings the literature of advertising and cognitive psychology, and applies the associative memory, visual persuasion, and remote conveyor theories and applies them in the influencer marketing context (Mednick, 1962; Kroeber-Riel, 1993; Rossier & Bellman, 2005; Ang, 2014). Second, this study reaffirms the relationships between upward social comparison and purchase intentions through envy, while establishing a psychological boundary condition of self-esteem. Thus, this study tests and re-tests the conceptual model through two studies, one with fabricated Instagram posts, and another with the partnership of a lifestyle influencer and their following. Study 1 applies the concept of the remote-conveyor model by searching through the popular Instagram posts that feature #ad or #sponsored and choosing several images that both display and do not display a level of remoteness between the influencer and the sponsored product. The purpose of Study 1 is to form a connection between the advertising literature and social media literature by applying the remote-conveyor model to influencer marketing. Study 2 builds on Study 1 by applying the same study framework, but with the real followers of a lifestyle influencer advertising haircare products. The influencer will post content that is both remote (e.g., a moisturizing haircare cream by a waterfall to illustrate its moisturizing properties), and non-remote (e.g., the same product and description in a bathroom). The changing condition is believed to promote more upward social comparison, envy, and purchase intentions. Additionally, it is believed that while the direct effect between creativity and purchase intentions remains, high levels of self-esteem will moderate the social comparison and envy relationship. The purpose of Study 2 is to reaffirm the theoretical robustness in a real-world test.

Dissertation Organization

The current research follows a five-chapter format. Chapter 1 provided an overview of the present state of the literature, research questions, and proposed contributions. Chapter 2 provides a systematic literature review (SLR) surrounding how advertising, influencers, and social media drive sponsored content and online purchases. Chapter 3 presents the methods research design, along with the preliminary qualitative research analysis and results. Chapter 4 follows with the analysis and results of the subsequent quantitative studies. Chapter 5 concludes the research with discussion, managerial implications, limitations, and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter first details a review of influencers, influencer marketing, social media, and their connection to the advertising literature. Second, this research examines the current way companies measure influencer effectiveness, followed by a detailed review of how creativity in sponsored content may present a more useful measure for predicting influencer-sponsored post success. The following literature review assesses both past and recent research findings related to the remote-conveyor, upward social comparison, self-esteem, envy, and purchase intentions. The interwoven principles of social comparison, associative memory, visual persuasion, and remote conveyor theories and models help reinforce each part of the proposed framework. Relevant research questions and hypotheses, placed throughout the review, follow corresponding portions that explain the logic for each construct in sequential order. The concluding section presents the academic and managerial implications of the proposed relationships.

What Is an Influencer?

To understand the general term influencer, it's best to grasp how people are influenced and what it means to influence someone else. Cialdini (2009) investigated the power needed to influence another by describing six foundations needed for one to comply with an influence request: reciprocation, consistency, social proof, liking, authority, and scarcity.

In the context of influencers, people look to those of high status to *reciprocate* a favor through engagement. For example, one of the first known public displays of an influencer offering her reciprocation for a gift was when Josiah Wedgwood made a pottery set for Queen Charlotte of England (Ahmad, 2017; Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020).

Consistency is built into the routine that an influencer creates, which their followers come to expect. For example, companies in the early 1950s began to create their own branded influencers like Frosted Flakes' Tony the Tiger. Followers of this brand became accustomed to the consistent message and slogan, "They're great!" (Ahmad, 2017; Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020).

Social proof implied that influencers are following social norms deemed acceptable by the community. Before and after Tony the Tiger, alcohol and cigarette brands created their influencers in the 1800 and 1900s. Lillie Langtry for Brown's Iron Bitters in 1800, Fatty Arbuckle for Murad Cigarettes in 1905, the Marlboro Man in 1957, and Joe Camel in 1988 (Ahmad, 2017). These brands began to set the norm for cigarette and alcohol advertising through fictitious yet societally "cool" influencers.

Liking is the principle that makes one comply with the requests given by those influencers we like (Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020). For example, Coco Channel transformed the clothing influencer space by introducing the "little black dress" in 1920, Nike made one of the most significant influencers deals of all time when they signed Michael Jordan to create an Air Jordan's line in 1984, and L'Oréal Elvive created a brand-new hairstyle coined, "The Rachel" made popular by then Friends T.V. star Jennifer Aniston (Brooks, 2019). Each of these instances revolved around brands and influencers that people liked.

Authority means that followers accept the request given by those they deem trustful or accepted sources of information (Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020). This number ranges slightly depending on the source, but according to the Digital Marketing Institute, 70 percent of teenagers trust influencers more than celebrities, with 40 percent of millennials saying they know their favorite influencer more than most of their friends (Digital Marketing Institute, 2021). It's this authority mechanism that creates interest and drives influence in the online marketing space.

Finally, *scarcity* refers to the limited availability of opportunities, which can create influence on its own. A famous example of this was when Supreme, the limited availability fashion brand, created a demand for their products through extreme scarcity. People of influence wore their brand as a public display of power within their influence circles (Kulkarni, 2019).

Over the years, academic research moved from focusing on how celebrities influence others to how "ordinary" people gain a following online and then influence their followers through social norms and trends (Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020). However, the research surrounding influencers has ranged in their definitions, from being classified as "instafamous," meaning a person became and maintains fame through the social media platform, Instagram (Marwick, 2015), to micro-celebrity (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017), "market maven" or opinion leaders (Windahl & McQuail, 1993; Northhouse, 2016; Lin et al., 2018; Yesiloglu & Costello, 2020), those with social status (Van den Bulte & Joshi, 2007), those who are subject-matter experts (Song, Cho & Kim, 2017), and those who contain powerful sources of information (Gladwell, 2011). While the term defining those who influence others online has changed over the years, the point remains

that digital medias have created a new section of influencer marketing through the power of social media.

Social Media Influencers

Just as traditional advertising has changed over time, so too has social media and the concept of an *influencer* as illustrated by the varying influencer definitions displayed in Table 2.1. Scholarly research has found difficulty in defining the term *influencer*. A social media user may perceive an influencer to be a regular person, while others may look at influencers as celebrities. These differences may be based on the different characteristics of the influencer themselves. For example, some influencers migrated to social media after becoming famous through other outlets, like Cristiano Ronaldo, the most followed person on Facebook and Instagram (Garner-Purkis, 2021). However, other creators amass their following over time, like Felix Kjellberg (PewDiePie on YouTube), the most subscribed individual on YouTube (Urgo, 2021). Since Felix has made his career off the growing success of video game culture, his fanbase (100+ million) is more accessible to a wide range of products and services, where Cristiano Ronaldo's audience is limited to the sporting and celebrity communities. Given that more people watched the famous Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) championships for League of Legends than the Super Bowl in 2019, it's safe to say that Felix's audience is quite expansive (Pei, 2019). Like traditional advertisements, social media influencers (SMIs) play a decisive role in consumer decision-making regarding opinions, direction, and purchases (Zeljko, Jakovic & Strugar, 2018).

Table 2.1

Definitions of Influencer

Author (s)	Term/Label	Definition
Brown and Hayes (2008)	Third Party	"A third party who significantly shapes the customer's purchasing decision, but may never be accountable for it."
Senft (2008)	Micro-Celebrity	"… involves people amping up their popularity over the Web using techniques like videos, blogs and social networking sites" (p. 25)
Freberg, Graham, McGaughey and Freberg (2011)	Social Media Influencer	"Social media influencers (SMIs) represent a new type of independent third-party endorser who shape audience attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media."
Marwick and Boyd (2011)	Micro-Celebrity	"using social media to develop and maintain an audience." (p. 140)
Wong (2014)	Social Media Influencer	"a form of marketing that identifies and targets individuals who have influence over potential buyers"
Abidin (2015)	Internet Users	"Influencers are every day, ordinary Internet users who accumulate a relatively large following on blogs and social media through the textual and visual narration of their personal lives and lifestyles, engage with their following in digital and physical spaces, and monetize their following by integrating "advertorials" into their blog or social media posts."
De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017)	Third Party	"...people who built a large network of followers, and are regarded as trusted tastemakers in one or several niches..."
Ewers (2017)	Internet Users	"'Regular' people, who built up a large community on their social media platforms or blogs, increasingly gain a form of celebrity status simply through their online activities. Their wide reach enables them to get in touch with and influence a great audience, which is why they are also referred to as influencers (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014)."
Sudha and Sheena (2017)	Social Media Influencer	"…entities 'who have an influence over a specific online target audience or medium' that can be activated by brands via sponsoring their content or interactions with their audience 'to increase reach, sales and engagement' through positive association."

Author (s)	Term/Label	Definition
Chae (2018)	Micro-Celebrity	"Referred to as a micro-celebrity, this new type of celebrity involves the practice of self-presentation on social media, which is accomplished by the creation of one's own online image and the use of that image to attract attention and a large number of followers…often called social media influencers (influencers)."
Holmes (2018)	Social Media Influencer	"An influencer can be a blogger, a YouTube video star or someone who posts regularly on social media."
Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB) (2018)	Micro-Celebrity	"…have the potential to create engagement, drive conversation and/or sell products/services with the intended target audience. These individuals can range from being celebrities to more micro-targeted professional or non-professional 'peers'…"
Lungeanu and Parisi (2018)	Social Media Influencer	"On Instagram, the most popular users who are able to exert a major influence over other users are called 'influencers'..."
Zeljko, Jakovic and Strugar (2018)	Social Media Influencer	"Influencers are individuals who are extremely exposed in the digital world of social networks. These are people who have a significant influence on public decisions regarding the products they buy, the services they use, and the initiatives they are supporting. They represent how brands can connect with their target groups through a voice that potential users of products or services trust."
Ge and Gretzel (2018)	Social Media Influencer	"individuals who are in a consumer's social graph and have a direct impact on the behavior of that consumer" (p. 1273)
Lou and Yuan (2019)	Social Media Influencer	"…is first and foremost a content generator: one who has the status of expertise in a specific area, who has cultivated a sizable number of captive followers – who are of marketing value to brands – by regularly producing valuable content via social media." (p. 59)
Yesiloglu and Costello (2021)	Social Media Influencer	"... as a person who has a strategic approach and ability to influence individuals and their (buying) decisions within digital communication platforms."
Geyser (2021)	Influencer	"…an individual who has the power to affect the purchase decisions of others because of his/her authority, knowledge, position or relationship with his/her audience"

Over time, the definition of an influencer has changed. Senft (2008) described the influencer marketing profession as a micro-celebrity that "…involves people amping up their popularity over the Web using techniques like videos, blogs, and social networking sites" (p. 25). It wasn't until 2011 that researchers began calling these online individuals with large followings *social media* influencers "a new type of independent third-part endorser who shapes audiences' attitudes through blogs, tweets, and the use of other social media" (Freberg et al., 2011, p. 90). Freberg et al. (2011) has remained the prominent definition, with variations of the definition added over time. Marwick and Boyd (2011) added that social media influencers are micro-celebrities who "maintain an audience" (p. 140), while Lou and Yuan (2019) added that social media influencers must create value to brands by posting content in their area of expertise. This study adopts the definition proposed by Yesiloglu and Costello (2020), "as a person who has a strategic approach and ability to influence individuals and their (buying) decisions within digital communication platforms" (p.7). As such, successful influencers maintain followers by growing, maintaining, and interacting with the social media communities that form around the influencer, an audience that advertisers can promote to through sponsored social media content (Musson, 2019).

Influencer Marketing

Digital advertising, the way brands market products and services over various online channels, has significantly changed the marketing landscape. Digital marketing morphed the conventional marketing strategies, adding additional layers and omnichannel outlets due to the digital customer journey and the always-on methodology (Zahay & Roberts, 2018). Firms now leverage both the social media channels and the prominent

people on these platforms to connect with consumers, either directly through their brand pages or indirectly through individuals defined here as influencers. This type of digital human endorsement is categorized as influencer marketing, a strategy that involves "the communication of brands to consumers using an independent person with credibility, an established following and the authority to influence potential customers" (Allen, 2020, pg. 6; Brown & Hayes, 2008; Audrezet et al., 2018). Researchers began to work social media influencers into their content marketing strategy, like Sudha and Sheena (2017) who define the influencer marketing strategy as "a process of identifying and activating individuals who influence a specific target audience or medium, to be part of a brand's campaign towards increased reach, sales, or engagement" (p. 16). Over time, advertising firms began to reach consumers by sponsoring and paying social media users with large followings to promote products through content media like images, videos, and blogs (Zelijko et al., 2018; Allen, 2020). This form of influencer marketing via digital advertising is not only prominent but is more routine than ever before.

While platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram maintain popularity through content like still images, text, videos, and animated images (GIFs), social media influencers offer an increase in advertisement value as they focus on their follower's needs for information, emotional support, and entertainment (Allen, 2020). Specifically, influencers can instantly reach customers worldwide with content that can be accessed anywhere, at any time. This natural progression on social media, posting content about one's everyday life, reduces the perceived power distance between influencers and followers (Allen, 2020). With the integration of product and service items through SMI paid partnerships on Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Pinterest, and many more, brands

can now embed links to the same items featured in the post, furthering the direct connection to a product page for offerings that spark follower interests. Commenting, direct messaging, and live streaming make up the influencer's arsenal of product promotion capabilities, enabling followers to send real-time feedback and questions to influencers and the sponsoring brands, strengthening their audience relationships by reciprocating with personalized responses (Allen, 2020).

The main issue for brand managers, however, is the *revenue growth* made from social media content is estimated to decrease (Cooper, 2020), while the *money invested* in the influencer marketing industry is now worth more than 10 billion dollars (Brooks, 2019) and shows no signs of slowing down. This distinction is important because this means companies are spending more and more money each year but are potentially receiving less value in return. Companies can now pay individuals on social media platforms to push their products or services to hundreds of thousands, if not millions of followers. The scale and possibilities associated with influencer sales online are seemingly endless. Thus, the advertising landscape has changed. Instead of an advertising team promoting products, you now have contracted advertisers to do the work of an entire marketing team with one post. The questions remain, however, who do you choose to market your products and how do you predict overall campaign success?

How Influencer Effectiveness Is Currently Measured

Until recently, with the writing of a dedicated textbook surrounding influencer marketing and social media influencers (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020), one could argue that the previous literature muddied the clarity surrounding how success is defined for an influencer. As Allen (2020) detailed in her research, authors sometimes use the terms

influencer, celebrity, and opinion leader depending on their understanding of an influencer, all of which have different degrees of what success looks like. Some authors consider a large following as a prerequisite to garner success. While others assume that name recognition is enough to drive interest in product endorsement. For example, as recent as 2017, authors like Ewers (2017) classified influencers as *regular people* who "built up a large community on their social media platforms or blogs, increasingly gain celebrity status simply through their online activities" (p. 1), and Ioanid and Militaru (2015) consider a high number of followers to be a defining prerequisite characteristic of social media influencer success (Allen, 2020). The emphasis on follower count has almost exclusively been used as a determining factor for not only anticipated success but how much money these influencers make. For example, in preparation for this study, several preliminary interviews of social media influencers took place. Within those interviews, a popular influencer on Instagram mentioned that brands pay about $0.01 per follower to make a sponsored post. This means that an influencer with 500,000 followers could reasonably charge $5,000 per sponsored post. When companies must consider their return on investment, relying solely on having followers does not mean that products or services will sell on these platforms.

For example, inadequacies in measuring a brand's social media success by follower count or engagement (e.g., "likes") are becoming an issue for companies. In the same preliminary interviews, two smaller influencers on social media explained how product fit and creator content freedom and autonomy means a lot more than potential interaction when advertising to followers. In fact, scholars have emphasized the need to address ways other than follower count and post interactions (e.g., likes, shares,

comments) to determine the potential success of an influencer-sponsor relationship (Vrontis et al., 2020). This may be because as influencers garner mass numbers of followers, their sponsored posts may come off as non-unique, and less interesting since their followers know that millions of people now know about this new product (De Veirman, Cauberghe & Hudders, 2017). A famous example that highlights the inadequacies of follower count predicting partnership success was in 2019 when famous influencer Arii failed to sell even 36 t-shirts to her 2.6-million followers (Säinas, 2019). However, arguably a more tragic example was when Caroline Calloway had to scrap a worldwide tour of her creative Instagram workshops, as her followers never followed through to purchasing (MediaKit, 2021). If the follower-count and interaction ratios were a predictor of success, then examples like this would not happen. These examples have spurred firms to follow the cliché of "quality over quantity" when sponsoring social media influencers in their marketing strategies (Syrdal and Briggs, 2018; Allen, 2020). However, literature has yet to define what "quality" means in this context.

There are agreements to this sentiment. For example, Freberg et al. (2011) suggest that sponsoring firms should look at the number of views, content shares, or followers as merely a starting point rather than a sure sign of success. Smaller follower counts may be a sound starting point for some brands, as smaller influencers tend to be more dialed-in to their follower-base as they usually interact with all who choose to comment and message. For example, one medium-sized YouTube influencer mentions that she no longer can reply to all messages anymore and has created additional channels to interact with a smaller audience of followers (Awe, 2020). This YouTube creator, Sola Awe of Discovering Natural, describes a smaller audience as an opportunity to get creative with

her content and connect deeper with the most dedicated of her audience. As such, those dedicated followers may be more likely to purchase a sponsored product or service. For example, Gary Vaynerchuk, a famous inspirational influencer on social media, aims to inspire his followers to reallocate attention to social media users with smaller followings, powerful voices, and greater anticipated return on investment through their ability to be more creative with less strings (Allen, 2020).

As mentioned, the "going rate" for influencers was $0.01 per follower. Thus, advertisers must have a more concrete predictor for partnership success if their advertisement spend is contingent on the number of followers an influencer has. While the monetization structure for paying influencers to feature products on social media changes depending on the type of content needed, this rate held consistent with other influencers interviewed. Regardless of the follower count, however, influencers maintain similar agreements with brands or agencies to post sponsored content. Brands will approach influencers, or the influencer's management team, and the terms of the contract are decided like how much content is posted during a designated period (Biaudet, 2017). While some brands may request to approve content or, in increasingly popular situations, provide scripts or monitor an entire campaign to ensure the product, service, and brand are appropriately communicated, influencers tend to maintain most of the control and creativity of the content posted (Biaudet, 2017; Childers & Boatwright, 2020). In return for the guidelines proposed by the sponsoring company, influencers then have the job to create enough influence to help drive sales of the product in question. While sponsoring companies may look to influencers with large followings to promote their products or services, the ultimate result is money spent by their followers *due to* their influence.

Mega, Macro, Micro, and Nano Influencers

One useful way to apply follower count, however, is determining the type of influencer to partner with. Once a company understands that influencer marketing is a powerful tool in their marketing plan, the choice between the size of influencer chosen can affect both the amount of money spent and the return on investment. The data-rich nature of social media is what drives brands and marketers to these platforms to advertise on. Facebook and Instagram (now known as Meta), Google, Twitter, YouTube, TikTok and other major social media sites all provide real-time updates to metrics, analytics, and financials on a post-by-post basis. With this collection of data, the influencer begins to fall into various categories based on their size. For example, platforms like Social Blade keeps a real-time count of the YouTube subscribers each channel has, bracketing influencers into top-tier lists. Companies like Influencer Marketing Hub go further and break influencers down into the following:

1. *Nano Influencers (1,000 – 10,000 followers):* Nano influencers are those who tend to promote their content to local communities and across multiple social media channels. These influencers have higher engagement and operate as the local opinion leaders (Au-Yong-Oliveira, Cardoso, Goncalves, Tavares & Branco, 2019).
2. *Micro Influencer (10,000 – 100,000 followers):* Micro influencers are defined as those who engage more with their followers and offer a more personal nature to their relationship and communications, which has a direct impact on the behavior and level of persuasion felt by the consumer (Brown & Fiorella, 2013; Kay, Mulcahy & Parkinson, 2020).

3. *Macro Influencers (100,000 – 1M followers):* Macro influencers are "individuals, businesses or media with a large, active social following comprised of people with whom they have a loosely defined or unknown relationship" (Brown & Fiorella, 2013, pg. 114).
4. *Mega Influencers (1M+ Followers):* Mega influencers themselves become celebrities and have a large enough following to create movements within communities based on their opinions, actions, and endorsements. These influencers are "traditional" influencers since mega influencers tend to be the most talked about due to their sheer size (Britt, Hayes, Britt & Park, 2020).

These definitions of social media influencers remain broad and unclear. As mentioned earlier, the size of the influencer does not guarantee a successful sponsorship. Some nano influencers could sell more sponsored product or service than a mega influencer, depending on the engagement of the audience and the product or service being sold. Brown and Fiorella (2013) propose differences between macro and micro influencers regarding their level of influence over others in their social networks (Allen, 2020). Further, Brown and Fiorella (2013) classify friends and family as micro influencers, while Au-Yong-Oliveira et al. (2019) classify nano influencers as friends and family. This distinction may be due to the closeness a consumer feels toward an individual, but the level of influence a consumer feels is based on the context and the relationship. In an advertising context, those who trust and gain value from the influencer are those who purchase from an advertisement (Massey & Dawes, 2007), while those

influenced by others online are relying on their perceived relationships with the online personality to base decisions (Brown & Fiorella, 2013).

An influencer's status level within the online space can also correlate with different characteristics, perceptions, and behaviors among followers (Allen, 2020). When consumers search for information within this new marketing paradigm, the first-place consumers go, is to reviews and recommendation sources online (Tilters, 2017). PwC Global Consumer Insights Survey (2019) found that social networking channels were the *most* influential for people who sought information about a purchase. This may be because followers tend to admire or emulate macro influencers, and heavily relate to micro influencers (Bernazzani, 2017; Fernandes, 2018). Consumers form unilateral relationships with smaller influencers, as consumers feel that the human-to-human contact, even through a screen, is enough to be effective in influencing purchasing decisions (Weiss, 2014). Comments, direct messages, tweeting, and live chatting all serve as communication to and from the influencer. As influencers become larger on the platform, managing those messages becomes harder to do properly. Macro influencers tend to hire staff to reply to comments, emails, direct messages, and moderate live chat sessions. Where micro influencers are replying themselves, adding to the authenticity of the message. In preparation for the influencer interviews for this study, the influencers who responded back as themselves, versus a PR person was the difference from feeling genuine and "corporate."

Influencer Size and Effectiveness

The persuasion knowledge model demonstrates the relationships that consumers have with influencers (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The framework of the model suggests

that once consumers realize that a particular message has persuasive intent, people will naturally resist the message (Friestad & Wright, 1994; Kay et al., 2020). So, what can influencers do to mitigate this resistance? The current study suggests that forming interest in the sponsored content presented will mitigate the natural resistance. If consumers know that the post is sponsored, but are interested in the content itself, then the consumers will search for the connections associated within the sponsored post.

Smaller influencers, like nano, micro, and some macro influencers engage more with their followers, some of which produce content daily and have more creative freedom than bigger mega influencers (Kay et al., 2020). This level of deep engagement can help explain why influencers have greater personal connection with their followers, and over time, gain opinion leadership within the communities they represent (Dhanik, 2016; DeVeirman et al., 2017). As the follower count of the influencer grows, the level of perceived expertise, celebrity status, and overall persuasive nature increases as well (Kusumasondjaja & Tjiptono, 2019). However, without a sense of creativity, followers may like and comment on a post, but never follow through to the purchasing of a sponsored product.

Taken together, advertisement and content managers for organizations should understand that the type of influencer sponsored will dictate the type of message produced. Nano and micro influencers will have a smaller audience, but that audience tends to be more engaging and dedicated to what the influencer has to say (Fernandes, 2018; Holmes, 2018). While some brand managers view micro influencers as more economical endorsers compared to macro influencers, the price may be warranted if the potential reach is substantial enough (Holmes & McNeal, 2018). Macro and mega

influencers have the potential to reach millions of people in a matter of a few days, sometimes hours. Thus, the cost is relative dependent on the messaging, positioning, and product or service being sold.

Effectiveness in the Scope of this Study

If we take Instagram as a guideline for this study, then one may conclude that an *influencer* is someone who has a large enough following to obtain sponsorship on a platform, but still converts those likes to sales. This study accepts the definition of a social media influencer as "a person who has a strategic approach and ability to influence individuals and their (buying) decisions within digital communication platforms" (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). Thus, to successfully influence another person, one must change their course of buying decisions due to the force of another person (Cialdini, 1987). One may provide influence tactics on someone else, but the recipient of those tactics is not *influenced* until an action is made because of those tactics. By this logic, through the context of this study, a *social media influencer* is only someone who successfully convinces another individual to change an opinion, course of action, or purchase a product or service because of viewing their content.

When brands decide to work with influencers, the product, sales, and campaign managers must balance between freedom, control, brand image, creativity, authenticity, and the follower-base of the influencer (Biaudet, 2017). Social media platforms are becoming a one-stop-shop for all things advertising for brands. Platforms allow individuals to grow into influencers, expressing themselves through their content, making a living through advertisements and brand sponsorships. An influencer's reach can reach brands and consumers around the world, at any time of day. This power should not be

taken lightly with sponsoring brands, as the influencer chosen in the partnership can either increase sales dramatically, or quickly create a bad reputation for the sponsoring company based on the actions of the influencer.

How Companies Can Identify the Right Influencer

Given that follower count and likes are not enough to ensure a safe sponsorship endorsement, identifying which influencer is right for a specific product or service partnership is not the only consideration to the success of that advertising endeavor and maintaining the brand image and identify of the company moving forward. Kumar and Mirchandani (2012) suggested a seven-step framework to identify a social media influencer that could properly integrate into a company's sales process.

1. *Monitor the conversation on social media:* Marketing, brand, and sales teams should remain current on what the digital trends are, and who is leading those conversations within those online niche groups.
2. *Identify influential individuals online:* These influencers should align with both the company image, and the messaging the company wants to convey online.
3. *Ascertain the factors that influential individuals share:* These factors will allow companies to create profiles for the influencers that will properly fit with the points outlined in sub-point 2.
4. *Locate potential influencers who share passions similar to your product or service:* Since social media is filled with niche categories, smaller companies can use these areas of social media to their advantage by partnering with smaller influencers who share similar passions.

5. *Recruit the individuals you identified as value-adders:* Once talks are initiated with the influencers, the company can begin to draft contracts that outline the parameters of the engagement.
6. *Incentivize influencers to spread eWOM:* Given that the influencer marketing space is lucrative for both the company and the influencer, proper incentives should be negotiated, with expectations based on the level of influence the person has within their communities.
7. *Reap the rewards of the mutual partnership:* When done correctly, these social media campaigns drive a lot of website, social media, and order traffic, so the partnership can remain mutually beneficial given the proper sales metrics are achieved.

Brown and Hayes (2008) took these seven principles and broke them into three dimensions, reach and frequency of impact, relevance of impact, and resonance to a decision (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). *Reach* refers to the number of people who, in theory, can view the social media influencer's content (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). This number is simply the number of followers the SMI has (SanMiguel & Sádaba, 2018). Social media platforms all keep traditional metrics to analyze how much of that potential audience was actually reached. Metrics like growth rate, impressions, website traffic, engagement, views, and likes are all considered by both the influencer and marketing team (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). *Targeted reach* is then considered to be the total amount of people who can view the SMI's content based on the education, age, income, occupation, location, education, and interests of the target audience (Bailis, 2019).

Relevance refers to the alignment, similarity, and closeness of values between the influencer and the company (Solis & Webber, 2012; Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). A sponsoring company should look at their normal target audience and compare that to the influencer's target audience to see if they align, and how closely the influencer's topics mesh with the product or service the brand is trying to sell (Backaler, 2018). Some SMI partnerships seem to fit well together like home video bloggers (vlogger) partnering with Procter and Gamble. The partnership works because both audiences for home vloggers and Procter and Gamble have a lot of overlap, leading to increased sales potential.

Resonance refers to the influencer's ability to spark actions, reflections, and emotions from their followers and the target brand's audience (Yesiloglu and Costello, 2020). Resonance is linked to eWOM because influencers are well aware that their audience is their career, and resonating with their followers by providing value and entertainment is what keeps their content engaging (Backaler, 2018). Within the resonance category are a few algorithmic metrics that social media companies use to keep followers engaged and interested in SMI content. First, social media platforms prefer, except for Snapchat and TikTok, longer-form content. In fact, YouTube personalities often joke about their videos needing to be 10 minutes or more, so they will ramble to the camera for a while to extend the watch time. Second is the frequency of the posted content. Google analytics, along with each social media platform's software, offers influencers heat-maps of what day and time their posts receive the most attention. Amplitude then refers to the amount of engagement the influencer's content receives in a given period of time (Solis & Webber, 2012). Put together, these analytics are what drives the creator to mold their content based on these analogisms.

The metrics laid out here will help managers and brand coordinators locate and recruit social media influencers for their partnerships. Without finding this proper fit, the messaging between the brand and influencer's audience may get lost. There are plenty of successful cases where influencers helped brands showcase their products to millions of people. However, when the proper research is not conducted ahead of time, some companies may partner with a top influencer just because they have a lot of followers, and the messaging could impact the overall performance of the advertisement. One example is the now infamous Pepsi commercial featuring popular celebrity and social media icon Kendall Jenner. During what was depicted as a racial injustice protest, Kendall Jenner walks up to police in riot gear and hands them a Pepsi as a sign of making amends and solving race relations in the same commercial. The advertisement was a bust and caused more outrage than good marketing messages. There was no creativity there as this celebrity would clearly have nothing to do with the tensions highlighted within the advertisement. Since it did not make sense as to why she was there, the consumer base naturally did not like the ad. If Pepsi would have done the work outlined here, this situation could have been avoided. Figure 2.1 describes this process of locating the proper influencer for a brand partnership.

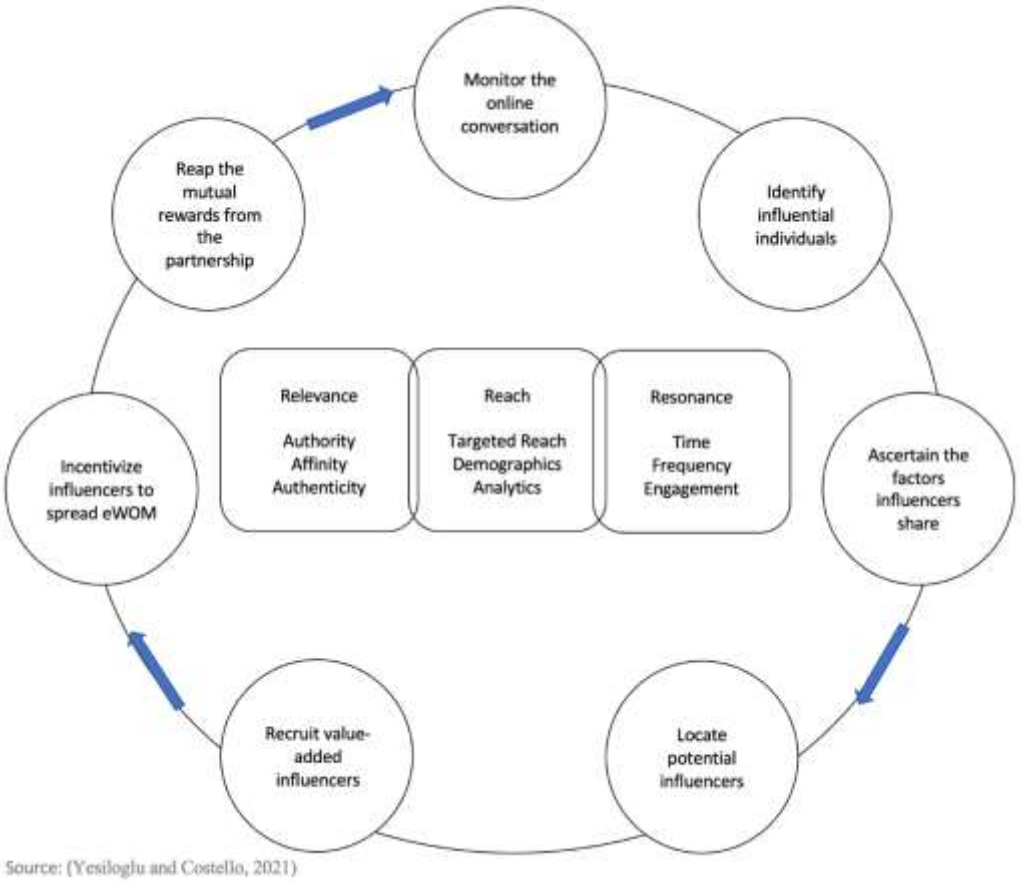


Figure 2.1: Selecting the Right Social Media Influencer

When classifying influencers, it can become difficult to properly categorize specific content creators. For example, many creators often have multiple channels, creating mini communities within their larger original community. For example, Matthew Patrick is a YouTube social media influencer who originally started his channel *Game Theory* back in 2011 (YouTube). Since that time, he has grown his follower base to over 28.84 million subscribers across multiple channels, *The Film Theorists*, *The Food Theorists*, and *GTLive* (YouTube). While each channel can be classified as *gaming*, one could also classify the theorists' channels as *educational* as Matthew often times refers to scientific theories, and published sources to back-up his statements within the videos.

Another example is Felix Kjellberg, the creator of PewDiePie on YouTube, and is currently the most subscribed non-business account on the platform (SocialBlade). His content has morphed over the years, moving from comedy shorts to music videos, vlogging-style, and reactionary content. However, Felix is probably most known for his gaming-focused play-through content. The varying levels of content that Felix puts out means that he seldom reaches the top charts when searching for top influencers on various platforms, simply because he does not focus on one form of content. However, what Felix, Matthew and other top content creators do that sets them apart is their willingness to take creative risks and diversify their content through creative means.

How Creativity Is a New Predictor for Effectiveness

The current study proposes that identifying which influencer is right for the product campaign is only one half of the process. The second step is to then narrow down the handful of selected influencers by those who are the most creative with their content. As such, this study suggests that creativity is the new predictor of future content success. Creativity in advertising is not a new construct. In fact, creative ads are shown to, on average, return nearly double the sales impact when compared to non-creative ads (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013). Further, creativity research in advertising suggests that an audience perceives ads as creative when the elements in an ad are novel, different, yet useful and valuable (Smith, MacKenzie, Yang, Buchholz & Darley, 2007). Specifically, Smith et al. (2007) go on to define creativity as:

> "…the art of establishing new and meaningful relationships between previously unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable, and in good taste, but

which somehow presents the product in a fresh new light" (El-Murand and West 2004, p. 190).

Specifically, creativity in the context of advertising is concerned with showcasing value in a new, novel, or unique way. However, the work done with regards to creativity and advertising has recently led to more questions that need further investigation. For example, a recent content analysis regarding the future directions of creativity in advertising research suggests that creativity must be framed within the context of creative development and creative effectiveness, where previous studies assumed both aspects were covered in the creativity theory development (West et al., 2019). Additionally, studies on social media sponsored content have called for similar research direction, calling for future studies to highlight how sponsored content should be crafted (De Veirman & Hudders, 2020).

To satisfy these calls for research, the current study utilizes the remote-conveyor model to connect the advertising and social media literature and frame the success of original and creative advertising that both grabs the viewer's attention (i.e., original), and positively influences the viewer's evaluations of the product within the advertisement (i.e., creative)(Sgourev & Althuizen, 2014; Chen, Yang & Smith, 2016; Althuizen, 2017). Creativity in the advertisement and social psychology literature has been explored from various angles like hiring creative teams to make content (Althuizen, 2012), to orchestrating sharing spaces for creativity to thrive (Cocu, Pecheanu & Susnea, 2014), establishing a "creative self" on social media (Choi, 2019), and offering financial incentives for individuals to create creative ideas (Burroughs, Dahl, Moreau, Chattopadhyay & Gorn, 2011). Recently, the cognitive psychology literature on creativity

shows supporting evidence that creative product descriptions increase the overall level of persuasiveness of the product in online contexts (Yao, Shao, and Zhang, 2021). Additionally, studies indicate that metaphors, analogies, and personifications of the product via language are perceived as being more creative than simply the benefits of the product spelled out plainly (Tao & Shao, 2021). However, no literature to date has suggested that creativity is a better predictor for social media sponsored content effectiveness than the methods currently used (i.e., follower count and likes).

Creativity Through Metaphor

Using metaphors or analogies through text to convey the *key benefit claim* of a product is effective as it causes the viewer to perceive a message and a feeling that was not originally there (Morgan & Reichert, 1999). For example, metaphor theory suggests that the tenor, or the subject in the statement, is delivered via a vehicle, or the phrase (Richards, 1936). The tenor in the headline "Red Bull gives you wings" is the "Red Bull" drink while the "wings" are the vehicle used to drive the key benefit claim of the product. Energy drinks and flying originate from different domains, but when put together in a slogan creates a level of remoteness between the two ideas, causing the viewer of the message to think more about its meaning (Mednick, 1963).

This idea of creativity displayed through metaphors, and the level of remoteness between the subject and the benefits claimed within the advertisement was the theoretical underpinnings of visual "remoteness" displayed between attribute-benefit linkages in Ang's (1997) original Remote Associate Matching Model, which was then later refined to the Remote-Conveyor Model (Rossiter, 2008; Rossiter & Bellman, 2005). The main message conveyed in the various models is one of uniqueness, a puzzling set of

statements that seem disorganized, yet come together through association after the viewer figures out how the statements are related. This cognitive puzzle is the key to "breaking through to attract interest," something that is increasingly more difficult with the swipe-by nature of modern-day social media ads (Rossiter, 2008, p. 142). This framework helps address previous paradoxical concerns about influencers both growing their audiences, while attracting follow-through to purchase sponsored products.

Key Benefit Claim

The current research surrounds the essence of a product's *key benefit claim* (KBC). It is regarded as the most important part of the creative pitch in advertisement agencies (Rossiter, 2008). Rossiter (2008) detailed how other researchers called the KBC the consumer insight (e.g., Wing, 2008), the brand essence (e.g., Roberts, 2008), or the proposition of the advertisement (e.g., Murphy, 2008). Often the KBC is the tag line like "Just do it" (Nike), or "I'm lovin' it" (McDonalds; see Althuizen, 2017). However, in the modern ads of social media, the KBC is often the creative production itself, the idea that is exemplified within the advertisement (Rossiter, 2008). The crux of the argument for the KBC is its differentiation between the benefit *claim,* and simply a *benefit.* A benefit, as described by Mayer (1958) and again by Rossiter (2008) is an attribute about a product that can be compiled along-side a long list of other claims that similar products within a given category can also claim. For example, deodorants will often claim that they are *long-lasting*, *antiperspirant*, or recently, *aluminum-free.* These deodorant statements are called "composite" benefits since they are widely claimed by other deodorant companies within the same product category (Rossiter, 2008). The *claim* that differentiates a benefit from a KBC is the sales angle taken by the company to promote its unique selling

proposition (USP; see Mayer, 1958 from Rosser Reeves). KBCs must satisfy three points: (1) the claim must be a *proposition* that is implied by the viewer; (2) must be *unique*, something that competing brands do not already mention; and (3) must *sell*, meaning the customer takes the claim into account and is a driver of their purchasing decisions (Rossiter, 2008).

Key benefit claims can be explicit or implicit. For example, some of the biggest companies that advertise on Instagram have explicit KBCs, "The happiest place on earth" (i.e., Disney); "Fifteen minutes could save you 15%" (i.e., Geico). While others can be implicit, "Touching lives, improving life" (i.e., P&G); "Work Hard. Have Fun" (i.e., Amazon). However, often, especially on social media, the KBC is supplied to the influencer through the advertorial text included in the post descriptions (Lambrou, 2020). With the KBC provided to the SMI, the advertisement teams allow the SMI to create the visual content themselves, often without input from the advertisement team (Large Social Media Influencer). Given that the KBC is provided to the SMI, this study assumes the advertisement team provided the *effectiveness* dimensions of the creativity construct (i.e., originality and effectiveness; Parnes, 1961; Althuizen, 2017). Instead, this study is interested in the *originality* component of creativity, by measuring how remote the influencer can make the context of their sponsored posts to the product in question. As mentioned in the previous section relating to Figure 1-1, attention is achieved through the level of creativity conveyed through remoteness. This attention precedes curiosity, which then leads the viewer to search for the KBC. Thus, creativity is essential to get right by the social media influencer before the KBC provided by the advertising firm (if given at all) can be realized.

Remoteness and Creativity

Visual analogies are often perceived as being more creative because the conveyor of the message was able to connect two seemingly unrelated concepts and make them make sense in the viewers' perceptions (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). Rossiter and Bellman (2005) highlight that for the conveyor to get across the KBC in a creative and effective manor, the advertisement must (1) be attention getting, (2) quickly and correctly label the product, (3) display the conveyor and the product in a remote (distant) way, (4) have a strong association with the KBC, and (5) be free of conflicting, negative associations (Althuizen, 2017).

Several examples are given in Althuizen (2017); however, the most potent example is shown in Figure 2.2A, comparing the level of creativity between a race-car driver wearing a watch to display its level of toughness, or a dolphin wearing the same item, a watch, to display its level of waterproofness (Althuizen, 2017; Rossiter & Bellman, 2005). In the first example, a tough-guy and a rugged watch intuitively makes sense and are thus considered to be less remote, failing Rossiter and Bellman's (2005) point 3. However, the dolphin and a watch are puzzling, and on the surface does not make sense. This disconnect energizes the brain to resolve this conflict, triggering a search for the KBC within the advertisement (Jhang, Grant & Campbell, 2012; Althuizen, 2017).

In Figure 2.2B, the same level of creativity is applied, as car crashes and wrinkles are not associated with each other, until you realize the KBC is eliminating the bad wrinkles on your forehead which looks like it got in a wreck! Compare that image to the smooth faced man, that intuitively makes sense, thus fails Rossiter and Bellman (2005)

point 1 and 3. Figure 2.2C is more interesting, because both ads are creative and clever, and will convey that the floss does its job well. The floss saves your family photo and is so good, it can pick seeds out of a kiwi. However, the second photo in example 3 fails to grab the viewers' attention in a metaphoric way as the concept is too connected to the product's intended purpose. The ad is certainly attention-grabbing, as most people will not notice that the woman has six fingers on her left hand. However, the floss and a family photo are not disconnected from each other, thus failing Rossiter and Bellman (2005) point 3. However, picking seeds out of a kiwi is indeed remote and yet is strongly associated with the intended use. The first photo in Figure 2.2C is so good at grabbing the user's attention one focuses on the food in the man's teeth, without realizing the women has six fingers on her hand. However, unlike the second photo in Figure 2.2C, the use of the product in this setting is still considered non-remote as the couple using the product in this situation would be considered normal use.

Finally, in Figure 2.2D conveys the exact same message, but the first image is more creative as Volkswagen and animals are remote from each other, until you realize that the KBC is precision parking so good, even the fish bubbles won't pop. Compare that to Figure 2.2D, and while the KBC is the same, the negative emotions between a funeral a portable restroom with Volkswagen fails point 5 of being free of negative or conflicting imagery and messaging of Rossiter and Bellman (2005). The KBC holds the common point that the conveyor and product have a connection, which in the dolphin example is the waterproofness of the watch. This level of remoteness, when connected via the KBC, results in feelings of creativeness and brand awareness and recall (Rossiter, 2008).

Figure 2.2A: Creative (top) vs. Non-creative (bottom) Ads Displaying Similar Products – Watches

Figure 2.2B: Creative (left) vs. Non-creative (right) Ads Displaying Similar Products – Moisturizer Cream

Figure 2.2C: Creative (top) vs. Non-creative (bottom) Ads Displaying Similar Products – Floss

Sources: Lina (2014); Kaval (2019); Time+Tide (2020); Brasil (2021); Volkswagen (2021)

Figure 2.2D: Creative (left) vs. Non-creative (right) Ads Displaying Similar Products – Self-Assist Parking

There are however several highlighted situations where remoteness and creativity are not advised for advertising. These boundary conditions as outlined in Rossiter (2008) are (1) long-copy advertisement, (2) text-heavy or informational, (3) technical ads like when demonstrating an outdoors product, (4) serious classified ads where professionalism is expected, like buying a home, and (5) very short ads where the message can be lost if concise messaging is not provided.

However, even Rossiter (2008) admits that these examples are only guidelines and not rules, because sometimes serious ads can be creative but still get the message across.

For example, in Figure 2.3, this serious and informative ad displays the seal and a clock which are seemingly unrelated, until one sees the key benefit claim of the ad, which is to inform the consumer that a species dies out every 60 seconds.

Source: Bund (2011)

Figure 2.3: Example of Creativity in Serious Advertising

While the images presented here convey the sentiment that creativity in ads can grab the viewer's attention, it's important to note that these examples are taken from professional ad campaigns and not social media sponsored content. In fact, it is quite difficult to find proper remote ads on Instagram as most of what is posted is non-remote, non-creative sponsored social media posts of makeup products in the bathroom, or sporting equipment on the field. Creative sponsored social media advertisements are more often conveyed in video format, like on YouTube where creators can perform skits

and routines around the product, but for platforms like Instagram, the lack of creative content as described in this study is striking. Thus presents the need for empirical field studies to collect remote-conveyor-based data to support the claim that creativity in sponsored posts is a predictor for purchase intention of followers.

Associative Memory Theory

The human brain is comprised of knowledge networks that form from the association developments between concepts, objects, and beliefs (Althuizen, 2017). The more these associations are used by the individual, the stronger the association becomes (Rietzschel, Nijstad & Stoebe, 2007). Each object is given a role-specific identity, which is then stored in a structure used to recall the information when needed to generalize (Hinton, 2014). For example, if two objects are associated with similar patterns, like categorizing objects as "tough," then the heuristic formed is a generalization for all things "tough." Meaning when someone sees an advertisement with a "tough guy" and a "tough watch," the association makes sense and is less stimulating and engaging because the connection is automatically made and processed (Hinton, 2014). On the other hand, when exposed to a conveyor like a dolphin, the brain begins to search for related objects that are similar like other mammals, energetic creatures, and water dwellers. These associations come easy to those who have been associated with the object over many years, like visiting a zoo and seeing the dolphin exhibits. The faster one can make a connection between two objects, the more familiar the objects feel, as no elaborate processing was needed (Estes, Gibbert, Guest, & Mazursky, 2012). For example, if the advertisement displayed a dolphin and a boat, the resulting advertisement would be

considered less novel because individuals perceive the difficulty to process information as more novel (Pocheptova, Labroo & Dhar, 2010).

Creative Advertising on Social Media

In the advertising literature, creativity is regarded as more intuitive, original, and persuasive than non-creative counterparts (Aaker, 1975; Yao et al., 2021). Through the lens of metaphors, analogies, and wordplay, the concept of seemingly conflicting messages converging on a common eye-catching claim has caused consumers to stop, and engage with traditional advertisements (West, Koslow & Kilgour, 2019). Given that Figure 2.4 shows the construction of a traditional advertisement consisting of (1) a company headline (Instagram partnered line), (2) sponsored company logo (company Instagram page), (3) the product in question (displayed in the photo), (4) the supporting text and key benefit claim (Instagram description), and (5) a call to action (supported links and hashtags), the present study suggests that the same models used in the advertising literature can be applied to social media influencer sponsored posts. The remote-conveyor model suggests that successful ads capture the viewer's attention through creativity, and conveying the key benefit claim (Rossiter, 2008). Given that advertising companies provide the influencer with the key benefit claim in the text used in the social media post, this study focuses specifically on the creativity of the sponsored post. Creativity is measured through the level of remoteness between the way the influencer presents the Instagram post image and the product advertised. The more remote the influencer can *effectively* distance the context of the image from the product in question, the more creative the advertisement will be perceived by the follower,

prompting them to search for the key benefit claim, find the association, and have a drive to purchase the advertised product.

H1a: *The more remote the image of the sponsored social media post is from the sponsored product, the greater the follower's purchase intentions.*

Source: Hook Agency (2021); Blackwell (2021)

Figure 2.4: Similarities Between Traditional (Left) and Social Media (Right) Advertisements

Creativity in advertising has been established as an outcome from solving the connection between two concepts in an advertisement (Althuizen, 2017). The more mental processing done to establish this connection, the more creative the advertisement becomes, if the associated connection intuitively makes sense given the key benefit claim that ties the objects together (Rossiter, 2008; see Figure 2.5. detailing the "kissable" nature of her face, a metaphor displayed through the wall of lipstick stains). As influencers post their content online, they, as their followers, are establishing a digital

representation of their "self" image. The more creative content posted, creates a social image of a "creative self" displayed for those who follow the influencer (Bergman, Fearrington, Davenport & Bergman, 2011; Choi, 2016; Choi, 2020). Social comparison theory helps explain this connection between creativity and social comparison. Social comparison theory suggests that upward comparison to another individual can be contrastive or assimilative depending on how close one individual feels to another (Breidenthal, Liu, Bai & Mao, 2020). Given that social media influencers are perceived as being less distant from their followers, removing the power barrier between well-known individuals and followers (Allen, 2020), social comparison theory would suggest that assimilative individuals would compare themselves more to a creative individual they perceive to be like them (Breidenthal et al., 2020). This is because creative individuals who have assimilative connections with others are perceived to be more accessible and to enhance the lives of others who look up to them (Breidenthal et al., 2020).

Thus, as followers stop, ponder, and connect the disassociated conveyor-product relationship, they begin to compare their creative self to that of the influencer. The more remote the Instagram post-product relationship is, the more creative the sponsored post is perceived to be. As such, followers will aspire to become more like the influencer, through means of social comparison.

H1b: *The more remote the image of the sponsored social media post is from the sponsored product, the more upward social comparison is felt by the follower.*

Source: Martino (2021)

Figure 2.5: Example of a Remote Influencer to Product Comparison

Theories of Creativity

Theories used in creativity research are usually broken down by creativity *effectiveness* and creativity *development* (West et al., 2019). The two subfields have different limitations when it comes to theory development. For example, creativity effectiveness lacks proper theory development on how creative ads affect consumers, while creativity development has no shortage of theories used that they often conflict with one another (West et al., 2019). For the scope of this study, the focus is on creativity

effectiveness, specifically how creativity acts as a predictor for sponsored post success on social media platform Instagram.

Individual Differences in Online Advertising

The relationship between social comparison and envy has been well studied. However, there are increasing calls to set boundary conditions for this relationship, specifically regarding the individual differences of the follower (Vrontis et al., 2020). The boundary condition explored in this study is self-esteem, which seems fitting considering the context of social media and influencer marketing.

Theory of Social Comparison

In social situations, individuals tend to compare themselves to others who they feel are on the same or similar social plane (Festinger, 1954). The theory of social comparison suggests that individuals develop notions that some other is experiencing an outcome that is relevant to all parties on the same social plane (Tesser, 1988). Once this notion is established, the individual must self-evaluate themselves in terms of their life domain, and the successes experienced by all parties of that domain. For example, a salesperson and a manager may compare themselves to each other, but the resulting comparison is less negatively impactful given that the two individuals operate on different social planes within a company. However, one manager comparing themselves to another manager, may see a promotion opportunity for the other as a negative self-evaluation outcome, resulting in a negative form of envy due to the upward social comparison across the same domains (Ganegoda & Bordia, 2019). Whereas a salesperson comparing themselves to the same promoted manager is suggested to not develop the same negative levels of envy because the two social domains are different.

The literature on the relationship between upward social comparison and envy is well established. One must first socially compare before envy is produced (Latif et al., 2021; Breidenthal, Liu, Bai & Mao, 2020; Chae, 2017; Belk, 2011). Once envy is produced, the outcome can either be benign, meaning the comparing individual has positive thoughts that are motivating to attain the superior social status of the other. Or, the outcomes can be malicious, where negative thoughts emerge and hostility and a desire to undermine the other's success and social status consumes the comparing individual (Sung & Phau, 2019). However, Belk (2011) argues that in the context of our resource-affluent, credit worthiness society of consumption, most envy experienced in the modern word is benign given that the envied objects can be obtained by the average consumer.

Theory of Envy

Consumer goods are often used as status claims or markers in a social setting, signifying the membership or rights to belong within a specific group of people (Douglas & Isherwood, 2021). Research on luxury goods point to how the status claims designated to an individual when modeling luxury products are done so through the desire to for the products themselves, chasing after a superior social status and a sense of pride in being unique (Sung & Phau, 2018). The theory of envy, however, modifies this conceptualization slightly by underling that status in a society is a social phenomenon that is awarded to an individual by others (Belk, 2011). This is because social comparison changes as society evolves, and tastes and preferences change. In other words, envy that is felt toward someone one day, may be different the next. Luxury products envied and desired in one decade are no longer considered "status bearing" in the next.

As such, the traditional view of envy was a longing to see the envied lose the thing we social desire more than we want to acquire the object itself (Belk, 2011). This feeling was thought to be enhanced when the social distance between the envied and envious is closer. However, the more modern version of envy theory contextualizes the modern-day society as one of wealth and abundance. Meaning those who want to obtain the socially desirable products can do so with relative ease. "The *self* is freely changeable and there are no more elites; popular culture *is* culture" (Belk, 2011, p. 9). We have discretionary income, access to consumer credit, a better distribution of goods, and brand identities cultivated for specific niches of social status. Thus, the nature of envy is no longer simply malicious, or a "getting even" mechanism. Instead, envy is a sliding scale between benign, where getting socially even with the envied individual is achieved through acquiring the same status-chasing item, or malicious, where the status is taken away from the envied by the envious (Belk, 2011).

In the context of social media, envy is a mixed motive feeling, a love/hate relationship where followers either love the influencer and want to acquire their lifestyle (and thus, the items within it), or love to hate the influencer and are secretly following to watch them fail (taking away their status by aiding a controversy, for example) (Belk, 2011). Social media influencers are the digital elites showcasing the "want-to-have" items for those *choosing* to follow the individual online. We seek out those we envy online to feed our desire of benign envy, acquiring objects as symbols that contribute to our individualism or affiliative identity (Belk, 2011).

Upward Social Comparison and Envy

The relationship between upward social comparison and envy, as established in the psychology and marketing literature suggests that upward social comparison should produce benign envy feelings of motivation, inspiration, and a feeling of desire to become more like the influencer (Blomfield Neira & Barber, 2014; Latif, Weng, Pitafi, Ali, Siddiqui, Malik & Latif, 2021). Traditional advertisement perspective would suggest that a celebrity-viewer connection would elicit more benign envy, while an influencer-follower connection would elicit more malicious envy due to the social domain the parties operate (Ganegoda & Bordia, 2019). However, Belk (2011) suggests that since we choose who we follow on social networking sites, we willingly associate ourselves with that person. As such, we begin to know them and look up to them, which are all feelings of benign envy. Even in cases where we do not know the influencer in question, the feelings remain non-malicious as the individual on social networking sites can move past the post. We ultimately choose which content to "level up" and purchase the product to elevate social status, rather than "level down" and deprive someone else of the goods we long for (Belk, 2011). Given that followers on social media can only "level down" in this sense by depriving the commission from the influencer by not buying, the concept of malicious envy in the content of social media sponsored posts is not as relevant as it is in a fact-to-face setting.

H2: *Upward social comparison leads to higher levels of benign envy toward the influencer.*

Self-Esteem and Envy

When one socially compares themselves upward to another, they can either feel inspired to become more like the targeted other or feel inadequate due a poor self-evaluation of themselves (Vogel, Rose, Roberts, and Eckles, 2014). This individual difference of self-comparison and evaluation is viewed as the positive or negative outcomes of self-esteem (Coopersmith, 1967). The self-esteem construct is a broader component of the self-concept, which develops over time and is in a constant fluid state that can change depending on the day and the context of the situation (Leary, Tambor, Terdal & Downs, 1995; Heatherton & Wyland, 2003; Vogel et al., 2014). Vogel et al. (2014) suggest that self-esteem is affected by long-term exposure to social media through everyday usage. Some users may experience lower levels of self-esteem through longer periods of use, while others may have positive levels of self-esteem depending on what type of content they interact with on social media (Forest & Wood, 2012). Individual psychological variables like self-esteem are important to examine in the social media marketing literature as the level of self-esteem can dictate the frequency in which one socially compares themselves to another (Buunk & Gibbons, 2007; Chae, 2017). Additionally, while self-esteem was used in studies pertaining to social media usage, future research calls suggest self-esteem should be examined in the context of influencer endorsement (i.e., sponsored ads) as a boundary condition (Vrontis et al., 2020).

Through the advancement of social networking sites, the ability to compare oneself to another is easier than ever as the platforms themselves encourage interaction and communication with other users (Choi, 2020). As individuals post content on their individual social media pages, they begin to establish a digital representation of their

"self" (Choi, 2020, p. 651). Individuals often portray the best parts of their lives on social media as a form of both self-expression and outward identity crafting for others to see and interact with. As individuals form their respective selves on social media, people naturally begin to evaluate their social status by comparing their creative selves with those they follow, namely, social media influencers (Park, Kim, and Park, 2021). Since individuals on social media have the freedom to choose which groups they seek to gain status (Belk, 2011), the resulting upward comparisons between the members of that group are ever changing depending on what the social group deems acceptable behavior (Schoeck, 1966). Social media influencers sit in an interesting intersection between regular user, and advertiser. Influencers serve as the "catalogs of what many young people dream of having and the lifestyle they dream of living (Marwick, 2015, p. 155). Belk (2011) furthers this sentiment by suggesting that people follow others (on social media) because they *want* to envy someone else. Almost akin to passing the burden of finding the next styles and trends to the influencer, for the followers to reap the reward without the time needed to find such items. As such, individuals follow and compare themselves to social media influencers because the influencers directly have what followers do not, but wish to have (Saul, 2016). Thus, people are likely to upward compare themselves to the influencers who express themselves in more creative ways, as they themselves were less creative (Choi, 2020).

In the context of social media, influencers feel like ordinary people, operating on the same social plane as their followers, in contrast to celebrities (Chae, 2017). Balance theory suggests that those on the same social plane "ought" to receive similar advantages and benefits in a society, while those who are perceived to be of higher social status

deserve the life accomplishments they receive (Ganegoda & Bordia, 2019). Those who compare themselves to others they like on the same social plane may develop a more positive form of envy, while those who compare themselves to others they see as competitors may develop a more negative form of envy. If influencers lesson the power distance between themselves and their followers (Allen, 2020), then balance theory would suggest that the envy created by a sponsored post would be a malicious one (Latif et al., 2021). However, those who upward socially compare themselves to those they deem similar may elicit positive emotions such as benign envy, because comparison with people who are better off, but on your same social plane, can be motivating and uplifting (Park et al., 2021).

While the argument in this study suggests that the social media context does not amount to high levels of malicious envy, it's important to explore the situations where an individual's psychological characteristic can affect this outcome. Self-esteem is an interesting psychological characteristic as social media perpetuates the level and frequency of self-evaluation and self-identification (Appel, Crusius & Gerlach, 2015). Social media exposes users to the best parts of other's self-identity, offering more points of self-evaluation daily than ever before (Lin, 2018; Latif et al., 2021). Differing levels of self-esteem can affect the way users compare themselves to others, as a damaged self-image can negatively impact the comparison of the self to another (Choi, 2020). Further, those with lower levels of self-esteem may feel shame or humiliation when viewing someone else who is perceived to be better off (Taylor & Strutton, 2016). However, those will high levels of self-esteem may look to those who are more socially successful as an inspiration point, a goal to achieve and a status to emulate (Belk, 2011).

H3: *The relationship between upward social comparison and envy is moderated by the level of follower self-esteem. Specifically, the positive relationship between social comparison and envy is strengthened when follower self-esteem is positive.*

Envy and Purchase Intention

The current research proposes that the purchase intention of consumers is based on the level of influencer-product remoteness directly, and then through the interactions of social comparison, envy, and self-esteem. Specifically, the present research proposes that the more remote a social media influencer is to the sponsored product, the more purchase intentions are elicited by their followers. The present study bases these suggestions on social learning theory, which suggests that the purchase intentions of consumers is highly influenced by the respondent's attitudes and effectiveness of the influencing agent promoting the products or service (Bandura, 1963; Lim, Radzol, Cheah & Wong, 2017). From this perspective, companies can utilize social media influencers as modern-ad advertisement campaigns to sell a wide range of products or services.

Social comparison theory also helps explain why social media influencers may play a bigger role in the online advertising process than previous research has suggested. Social comparison theory suggests that followers of an influencer compare themselves to the influencer's self-identity and then acquire products and/or experiences that help fulfill that self-identity (Festinger, 1954; Allen, 2020). Given the amount of content consumers watch online, their perceptions of what products or services they should own, are molded by those they frequently watch online (Festinger, 1954). Essentially, the more ingrained a person becomes with those they follow online, the more they want to emulate them, and use the same products or services the influencer uses (Festinger, 1954; Allen, 2020).

Therefore, a follower who sees products as part of an influencer's social identity will want to emulate that influencer and purchase the same goods or experiences the influencer is showcasing (Allen, 2020).

The goal of sponsored social media content is to persuade the audience enough to purchase the goods or services offered in the sponsored post. Rather than an individual being motivated to cause someone else to lose the possessions which they envy (malicious envy), benign envy inspires the individuals to purchase the same possessions the envied person has (Belk, 2011). The conceptualization of benign envy and purchase intention makes more sense in the context of social media because the idea that an individual would want to maliciously work against an influencer due to their sponsored goods is only possible in a non-healthy individual situation (Stearns, 1999; Belk, 2011). Lastly, benign envy has been shown to motivate individuals to purchase the envied product, where malicious envy encourages purchasing, but of an alternative product on display (Van de Ven, Zeelenberg & Pieters, 2011; Sung & Phau, 2020). Figure 2.6 displays the conceptual model.

H4: *The more benign the follower's envy, the greater their purchase intentions.*

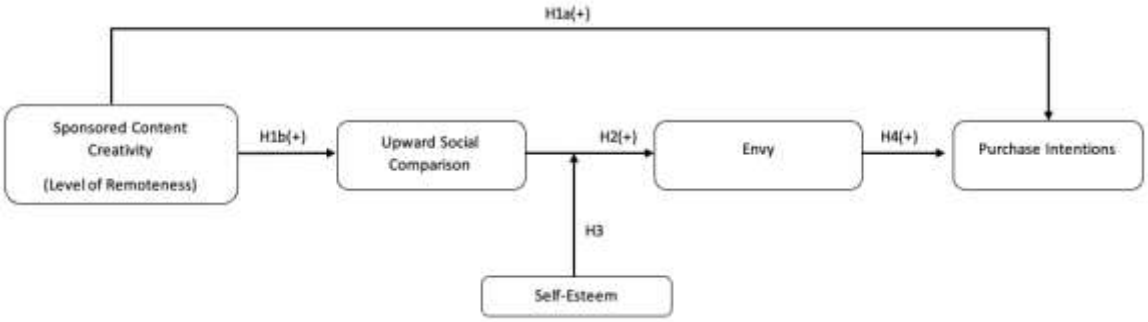


Figure 2.6: Conceptual Model

Summary

Social media helps companies target specific audience groups with their online advertising and allows for a back-and-forth interaction between the consumer and company, unlike traditional media, which encouraged a multi-step process to get in touch with the advertising brand (Salvation & Sorooshian, 2018). This is due to social media's ability to share product information and real-time resources with consumers, which is considered more credible since these resources tend to be shared amongst friends and family (Leng, Lada & Muhammad, 2011). When social media influencers are sponsored by advertising firms, the follower reactions to the sponsored content are based on the level of involvement the follower has with the product category. Research shows that involvement plays an important role in the level of reaction followers have to influencer content posted on Instagram (Belanche, Flavian, and Ibanez-Sanchez, 2020). Followers who are heavily involved in the fashion and beauty industry, for example, will react stronger to an influencer sponsored post regarding that product category than other social media users. Additionally, there seems to be an interaction between the type of key benefit claim, level of conveyor remoteness, and the product involvement from the follower (Althuizen, 2017). These studies are important for the context of this study

because if followers of the influencer are already involved with that influencer's product category, and non-followers can be captivated by the remoteness and originality of the influencer's post, then the creative sponsored content displayed in this study can capture the attention of both followers and non-followers of the influencer.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the preliminary exploratory research conducted in two qualitative research studies, followed by the research outline for Studies 1 and 2. The first of two qualitative research studies consisted of in-depth interviews with social media influencers. The second qualitative research study was an open-ended questionnaire survey conducted between two convenience sample classes of undergraduate students, where class conversations identified how social media users react to sponsored content. In the second qualitative study, the student interviews, a Qualtrics survey utilized. The open-ended questionnaire via an online survey was used to gather demographics of the students and identify how many students purchased sponsored social media products in the past.

This chapter also outlines the research design and procedures suggested to conduct the two proposed studies followed by an outline of the methods and research procedures. A grounded theory approach to qualitative research was used to assess how social media influencers are perceived online. The grounded theory approach works well in the present study's context as both qualitative and quantitative data generation techniques can be used to assess the areas of a given research study (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). Grounded theory begins with a sampling of the population, followed by a data

collection, multiple states of coding, then forming the grounded theory of the study in the final stages (Tie et al., 2019).

Research Scope

The current research explores two main issues: (1) understanding how the remote-conveyor model used in advertising can be applied to social media and the sponsored post context, and (2) detailing how that level of remoteness influences the social comparison, envy, self-esteem, and purchase intentions of the sponsored product. Corporations often reach out to social media influencers to promote various products or services, and those advertisements are often met with increased sales and brand adoption. Compared to traditional advertising, social media influencers can potentially cover more ground, and gain more attention depending on their audience size. However, there is still a place for an enhanced understanding of the best ways to promote the products or services offered to social media influencers. Depending on the level of influencer-product remoteness, consumers may see the sponsored post as more creative, engaging, and appealing. For example, the beauty industry is perfect for those who publish content sponsored online, as influencer marketing research suggests that those connections manifest into followers wanting to emulate the social media influencer (Rasmussen, 2018). For example, in a pre-study for the present study, multiple respondents mentioned being 90 percent influenced by Michelle Phan, a YouTube beauty influencer with over 7 million subscribers, to purchase a recent beauty product. Those respondents did not consider the salespeople in Ulta or any other large beauty store. Instead, they purchased online, thanks to Michelle. However, the same influencer may have other sponsored posts not do as well, depending on the level of creativity the follower perceives in the message.

Preliminary Exploratory Research

Pre-Test Study 1

The qualitative study consisted of five interviews with social media influencers ranging in follower size from 2,000 to 400,000. Figure 3.1 showcases the themes covered in the interviews with the influencers. These interviews were used to highlight the need for research within the field of influencer marketing and pave the way for future questioning in the quantitative section.

1. *How did you get started with this [social media content creator], and what has your career progression looked like?*
2. *Have you ever felt like this [content creation] feels like a "traditional" job now with everything going on [sponsorship opportunities/brand deals]?*
3. *How specific do the sponsors get with the direction of your content?*
4. *What does the monetization look like when working with sponsors?*
5. *Have you felt a pressure to perform and sell within the sponsorship opportunities you've had?*
6. *Have you felt pushback from your audience based on the content you've posted?*
7. *Do you sometimes see yourself as a worker, a vehicle to influence others for a company?*
8. *Have you ever had to change your content based on platform changes [algorithms]?*

Note: All interviews were conversational, and the flow was directed by the influencer based on what they were comfortable disclosing. As such, the questions above are not verbatim, rather are common themes discussed across all interviews.

Figure 3.1: Interview Themes Covered with Social Media Influencers

The first pre-test consisted of in-depth interviews of social media influencers who met two criteria, (1) maintained over 1,000 followers/subscribers on social media, and (2) displayed regular sponsorship opportunities on their dedicated pages. The author's selection of which social media influencer to contact was due to randomized convince samples based on the channels populated on the researcher's respective social media feeds of YouTube and Instagram. The sample obtained consisted of influencers, four males and two females. Each influencer was active on Instagram, with three of the six influencers active on YouTube and other platforms like Twitter and Facebook. The follower size of the six influencers ranged from 2,000 followers to 714,000 followers when considering platforms like Facebook and YouTube.

After each influencer interview, referrals from the influencers aided in the sampling process as well. 1,000 followers/subscribers were chosen as a cutoff because 1,000 is a consistent number across platforms where content creators can be paid for Google ads placed on their videos (e.g., YouTube content). Influencers were contacted via direct messages or email, followed by reminder messages to schedule a time to meet via the video conferencing application, Zoom. A sample of an email sent to the influencers is shown in Figure 3.2. One hundred social media influencers were contacted, with follower sizes ranging from 1,000 to 944,000. Eight influencers responded to the correspondence, and five interviews with six influencers (two influencers in the same interview) were conducted, resulting in an 8% response rate. The final sample of five interviews consisted of two females and four males. Each influencer completed paperwork to opt-in or out to have their information disclosed in this study. Each

interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, and each interview was recorded at the approval of the influencer.

Subject: PhD Student Dissertation Outreach: Social Media Influencer Research Study

Message (Please Keep This Short): Yes sir, I'll keep this short. I am conducting scientific research on social media influencers and their careers.

What is in it for you?
• An emailed overview of my dissertation results (i.e., "White Paper of Results").
• Your name will be featured as a contributor to this research published in an academic journal (if you opt-in).

What are the next steps?
I want to be flexible around your schedule, and interviews can be conducted online to maintain social distancing. Any block of time I can have of your schedule would be much appreciated! Please email me back expressing your interest.

Extra Information for Legitimacy:
LinkedIn Profile to research who I am: https://www.linkedin.com/in/louiszmich/
My website, which contains my current CV: https://www.louiszmich.com/
My profile on Louisiana Tech's website: https://business.latech.edu/graduate-programs/dba-faces/
Podcast explaining my research in sales: https://1894.latech.edu/podcast/louis-zmich-the-art-of-the-sale/

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Louis Zmich

Figure 3.2: Sample Email Sent Through One Influencer's Online Chat Function

Pre-Test Study 1: Qualitative Analysis and Results

The resulting interviews were re-watched and analyzed to explore the themes addressed within each interview. Overall, consensus was clear that sponsorship opportunities are both exciting and stressful as the sponsoring organizations offer lucrative contracts for a range of social media posts (i.e., stories, posts, videos, livestreams). Each influencer mentioned that they consider their audience's wants and

needs before accepting sponsorship opportunities, but there was a common theme of feeling pressure to "push" product and services to their followers. Several influencers mentioned that their followers will blindly buy anything showcased on their social media pages. As such, the influencers felt a pressure to research the companies thoroughly to make sure the products and services they showcase are of sound quality, as any bad products or services would tarnish their reputation.

Each influencer mentioned that the sponsorship dynamic felt like both an advertisement and a sales-type pitch. Finally, another common theme within all the interviews was the level of freedom given to post whatever content they wanted if the public-relations teams of the brand approved the post. This final point was interesting as the context of the study assumes that influencers are not currently taking a creative route to their content but are allowed to do so based on the content freedom and flexibility given by the sponsoring brands. The overall results of the first pre-test concluded the need to solidify what makes sponsored content standout, as little to no direction is given by the sponsoring companies. Additionally, the pressure felt by the influencers to post valuable content for their followers is noteworthy as the findings from this study may offer more direction and clarity around sponsored content and the need for creativity in the content posted.

Pre-Test Study 2

The second pre-test conducted a preliminary open-discussion interview, followed by a quantitative survey through Qualtrics, administered to two convenience samples of undergraduate marketing students at a southern university in the United States. The quantitative survey was used to collect demographics and identify whether students

bought sponsored products from influencer posts. Fifty-two undergraduate business students participated in preliminary open-ended interview questions in-class in exchange for class extra credit. Students were then instructed to voluntarily participate in a Qualtrics survey to reveal their demographics and purchase history of sponsored content products on social media. The final sample of 23 survey respondents containing ten males, twelve females, and one other, with an average age of 22 years old. Open class discussion interviews were manually transcribed before being concept coded using the qualitative research software MaxQDA. The concepts unearthed through coding helped frame the current study. First, many of the respondents explained their awareness of the salesmanship presented in sponsorship posts, and how their favorite social media influencers recommend products or services. The same students explained that they are interested in buying these products or services showcased, more so than a product representative in a store. These responses align with the interviews conducted in pre-test 1, how the social media influencers themselves all expressed the feeling of a pressure to "pitch" to their audiences whenever a company offers a sponsorship opportunity.

Interestingly, pre-test 2 offers support that the extensive background research conducted by influencers on the sponsoring company to ensure that their audience would enjoy the product or service highlighted is paying off as their target age demographic liked the sponsored content posted. Additionally, like the influencers, students expressed a feeling of ad-pressure when sponsored companies' partner with influencers. Specifically, the students felt that some advertisements were too "salesy" for their liking. However, both influencers and students expressed the ease and future potential of buying sponsored product or services from influencers on social media. Most importantly,

however, only *two* of the 23 respondents interviewed indicated that they bought the sponsored product in question. So, while the students all enjoyed seeing the sponsored content, the conversion of liking to buying is not one-to-one. This further creates the need to find mechanisms that, when applied, will convert followers from liking the content, the method currently used to determine success, to buying the products showcased.

Main Study

Two quantitative studies, a survey, and a replication field study with a real influencer and their followers frames the present work. The experiment for Study 1 was administered in partnership with a Qualtrics data manager to ensure consistency and quality of the data collected. The online panel of respondents must have met the criteria of being (1) 18 years or older, and (2) a frequent social media user. The term "frequent social media user" was chosen and used by Qualtrics in similar studies. The frequency of social media usage is self-reported to Qualtrics, by the respondent, as someone that uses social media (specifically Instagram) throughout the day. The survey highlights level of remoteness, feelings of upward social comparison, self-esteem, envy, and purchase intentions. Study 1 is a randomized cross-sectional, one-factor, between-subjects design where all respondents will first read a definition of a social media influencer, then randomly fall into one of two conditions. Respondents viewed one of two images taken from Instagram that either displayed the influencer in a remote context with the sponsored product or a non-remote context. The level of remoteness suggested corresponded to how similar or dissimilar the context of the image was to the product in the photo. For example, this study is focusing on beauty products, specifically how moisturizing a product can be. Thus, an image suggested to be non-remote displayed an

influencer putting on facial moisturizer in front of a mirror. The follower then read the description to understand that the product is moisturizing. In other words, non-remote posts did nothing to suggest the key benefit claim without further cognitive work from the follower. However, the image suggested to be remote displayed an influencer surrounded by water, like a waterfall, applying the same facial moisturizer. This condition is remote as a waterfall and facial products do not immediately make sense in the same context, until the follower realizes the metaphor is a hydrating product. These two conditions preceded a manipulation check, where respondents answered a series of six questions adapted from Ang (2000) which averaged to a remoteness score. The remote condition should score higher relative to the non-remote condition and visa-versa to pass the respective manipulation checks.

All posts were fabricated in Study 1 and contained visual disclosure elements like #ad or #sponsored. Each post was digitally altered to consist of the same description, brand name, location, and when applicable, the name of the social media influencer that aided in the purchasing of the product or service. The only changing variable was the image displaying the level of remoteness to the product. Once completed, respondents answered a series of questions related to the product-imagery remoteness, level of upward social comparison, self-esteem, envy, and purchase intentions.

Study 2 replicated Study 1 in a real-world context. Olusola (Sola) from Discovering Natural partnered with this study to provide external validity to the findings of Study 1. Sola's social media followers served as the population of the sample. The sample was collected through a self-selection process where Sola posted on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube that her followers had the chance to confidentially participate in

an academic study. The demographics of Sola's followers are 64.4% in the age range of 25-44, with 94.5% women, and her average sponsored post interaction on Instagram is 2,535 interactions (only 11% of the interactions are from non-followers). While this population is predominantly female, the sample is representative of the context of this study, as beauty product sponsored content are regularly studied in the influencer marketing literature (Ki et al., 2020; Choi, 2020). Sola posted a link to a Qualtrics survey and emphasized that completed respondents had a chance to win one of 4, $100 Amazon gift cards. Sola provided the researchers with a screenshot of one post, her applying facial moisturizer in front of a blank background. The researchers then duplicated Sola's image and created two posts each with the same product but with varying degrees of remoteness between the image context and the product. Sola was compensated for each Instagram posts she provides the researchers, along with compensation for each completed survey, up to 350 completed surveys.

Her followers that signed-up were randomly assigned to two conditions, remote and non-remote. Discovering Natural has over 32,000 followers on Instagram, thus 350 completed surveys are approximately a one percent response rate, which seems feasible for this context. Additionally, Sola has indicated to the researchers that her followers on Instagram are more engaging than other platforms, improving the likelihood of completed surveys.

Quantitative Study Measurements

Following previous studies' calls for research on social media influencer effectiveness, this study controls for follower size, influencer gender, influencer

familiarity, and influencer credibility to isolate the changing condition of creativity in the sponsored content (Lee & Kim, 2020).

Level of Remoteness. Five items were adapted from Ang (2000) when averaged together to form the remoteness index indicating how remote the conveyor is from the sponsored product. The higher the index number, the more remote the advertisement was perceived to be. However, upon inspection of item five, "The social media influencer and the product were likely to be associated or occur together in the same post," it was decided to present the two statements as a single item. Therefore, to maintain face validity of the scale, item five was split into two different items, "The social media influencer and the product were likely to be associated" and "The social media influencer and the product are likely to occur together in the same post." All items contain the common stem: "Please answer the following questions based on the sponsored social media post you just saw…" The questions ask about the sponsored post being realistic, believable, unique, rare, and the association between the conveyor and product. All items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from I strongly agree to I strongly disagree. Ang (2000) suggested that the more remote an advertisement is perceived to be, the more creative the viewer thinks that advertisement is. Thus, for the purpose of this study, the level of remoteness index is used as a measure for creativity in the advertisement.

All the questions are averaged together to form "remoteness."

The image you just saw:

1. Was Believable – Was Unbelievable
2. Was Realistic – Was Unrealistic

3. Was Often Seen in Sponsored Instagram Posts – Was Rarely Seen in Sponsored Instagram Posts
4. Was Associated to the Product Advertised – Was Not Associated to the Product Advertised
5. Occurs with the Product Naturally – Does Not Occur with the Product Naturally

The post you just saw:

6. Was Common – Was Unique

Upward Social Comparison. Six items from the Iowa-Netherlands Comparison Orientation Measure (Gibbons & Buunk, 1999) were adapted based on Steers, Wickham & Acitelli (2014) measurement of upward social comparison and Munnukka, Uusitalo, and Toivonen (2016) measurements of social similarity. All items contained the common stem: "When viewing the sponsored post…" All items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from I strongly agree to I strongly disagree. A higher overall score indicates more social comparison to the social media influencer.

When viewing the sponsored post…

1. I found myself identifying with the social media influencer
2. I found myself being a lot like the social media influencer
3. I found myself having a lot in common with the social media influencer
4. I compared how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with the social media influencer

5. I found myself wanting to be as popular as the social media influencer
6. I compared my accomplishments with those of the social media influencer

Envy. Taken from Sing and Ang (2020), benign and malicious envy are measured using a single bipolar scale ranging from -3 (extremely undeserved) to +3 (extremely deserved). The more deserving the individual is perceived to be, the more benign envy is felt, compared to perceiving someone else as being undeserving.

How much did you believe the social media influencer deserved their good fortune?

1. On a bipolar scale from -3 (extremely undeserved) to +3 (extremely deserved).

Undeserving (Malicious) ⟷ Deserving (Benign).

Self-Esteem. Ten items from the Rosenberg (1979) self-esteem scale were used to measure the individual psychological differences between social media followers. All items contained the same stem: "Please record the appropriate answer for each item…" and some items included "…On the whole, I am satisfied with my life," and "…I feel that I have a number of good qualities." All items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from I strongly agree to I strongly disagree.

Please record the appropriate answer for each item…

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
2. At times I think I am no good at all ®
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities

4. I am able to do things as well as most other people
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of ®
6. I certainly feel useless at times ®
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself ®
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure ®
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself

Purchase Intentions. Five items from the Spears and Sing (2004) purchase intentions scale was adapted to measure the individual intentions to buy the product featured in the sponsored social media post. All items contained the same stem: "Please describe your overall feelings about the sponsored item…" and some items included "…I would buy this product," and "…I have a very high interest in purchasing the product." All items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from I strongly agree to I strongly disagree.

Please describe your overall feelings about the sponsored item…

1. I would buy the product
2. I intend to buy the product in the future
3. I have a very high interest in purchasing the product
4. I am going to purchase the product
5. I will probably end up buying the product

Manipulations

Manipulation checks for both Study 1 and 2 ensured that participants can validate whether they were in the remote or non-remote conditions. The manipulation involved

either the product and the influencer conveyed in a situation that intuitively makes sense (e.g., non-remote: a picture of a beauty product applied in the bathroom), or a situation where that did not intuitively make sense (e.g., remote: a picture of the same beauty product applied under a waterfall). In this example, each condition conveyed the point of how hydrating the beauty product was for the skin, with only the context of the photo changing. Respondents then indicated whether the influencer and the product were similar or dissimilar to each other, confirming the appropriate condition.

Model Fit and Validity

In accordance with Anderson and Gerbing's (1988) protocol, the proposed conceptual model in Figure 2.6 was first fit using SPSS AMOS. Once the measurement model (i.e., five-factor confirmatory factor analysis) yielded satisfactory model fit statistics, then the factor loadings and average variance extractions (AVEs) ensured the reliability of the model was intact (e.g., 0.7 and 0.5, respectively) (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Additionally, all reliability and validity measures were assessed using established standards and correlation analysis (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). As a final robustness measure, the sorted scales in the survey were presented in a way that would not clearly relate each construct to one another. This method of survey design helped reduce common method bias, along with including an unmeasured latent common factor as a supplementary analysis (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003).

Direct, Indirect, and Moderating Effects

This study first measured the relationships between constructs using structure equation modeling (SEM), then utilized the work of Hayes (2018) to optimize PROCESS in SPSS to measure the moderated serial mediation model displayed in Figure 2.6 and

exemplified in Hayes (2013) Model 91 (see Figure 3.3). PROCESS was chosen for the present study in tandem with SEM because the conditional direct effects can be first analyzed in SEM followed by a robustness check of the measurement model along with the moderated mediation analysis of the indirect effects for the present study (Hayes, Montoya & Rockwood, 2017). The hypotheses presented in this study align with Model 91 from Hayes (2013), thus PROCESS makes sense as a robustness check given the context of this study. PROCESS is a macro program designed to install into SPSS and is built using ordinary least squares (OLS) (Hayes, 2013b). PROCESS is widely used in both social and business research and works well for estimating the direct and indirect effects in a single model (Hayes, 2013). The term "moderated serial mediation" is used in this study as PROCESS "allows mediators to be linked serially in a causal sequence rather than only in parallel" and "offers measures of effect size for indirect effects in both single and multiple mediator models" (Hayes, 2012, p. 3). Given the theoretical literature link between upward social comparison and envy, and the calls for self-esteem as a boundary condition between this link, the moderated serial mediation fits nicely for this study. The PROCESS macro calculates the proposed hypotheses simultaneously in a series of regression analysis, where the direct and indirect effects are calculated by taking the sum of the sequential regression weights (Hayes, 2018). Lastly, PROCESS generates a results index of moderated mediation simple slopes (standard error, t-value, p-value), which provides an easier method of analyzing the relationships between variables (Hayes, 2018).

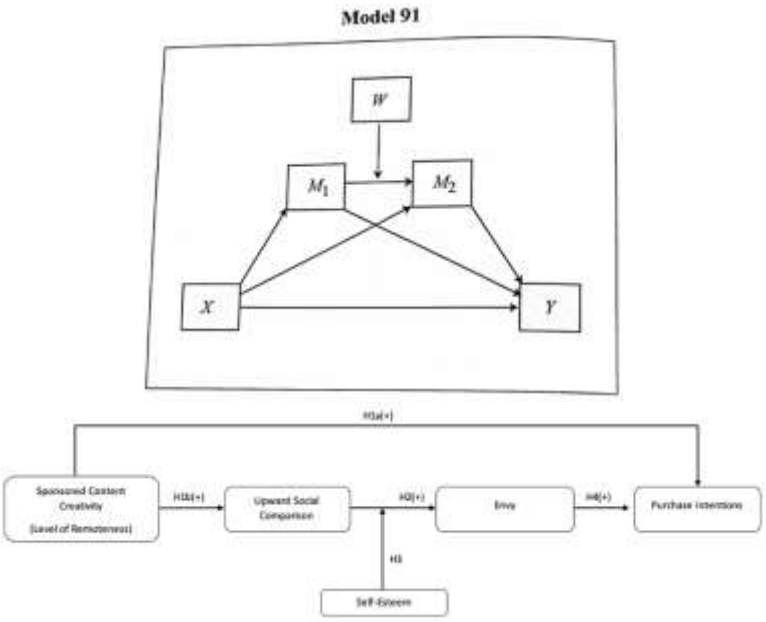


Figure 3.3: Model 91 (top) From Hayes (2013b) Compared to this Study's Conceptual Model (bottom)

This study proposes that that sponsored post creativity (X) effects both upward social comparison (M1) and purchase intentions (Y). Additionally, upward social comparison (M1) is predicted to effect envy (M2), which effects purchase intentions (Y). Lastly, the relationship between upward social comparison (M1) and envy (M2) is suggested to be moderated by self-esteem (W). Since the conceptual model in this study has two mediators, and one moderator, the model has four specific indirect effects (H1b, H2, H3 & H4), and one direct effect (H1a). Through the PROCESS macro, the direct effect is interpreted the same way as in a regression analysis, where the estimated change in Y differs by the unit change in X (Hayes, 2018). Thus, the direct effect of H1a is estimated in PROCESS in a similar fashion. The indirect effects (i.e., H1b, H2 & H4) are estimated by multiplying the regression weights corresponding to the indirect pathways in the conceptual model shown in Figure 3.1 (Hayes, 2018). The interpretation of these

regression weights is estimated as the difference in Y (purchase intention) reflected in a change in X (post creativity) through the causal sequence from X to M1 (upward social comparison) to M2 (envy) to Y (Hayes, 2018). This total sum of the regression weights in this sequence is the total indirect effect of X on Y.

The moderation (H3) of self-esteem (W) on the relationship between upward social comparison (M1) on purchase intention (Y) through envy (M2) is also calculated simultaneously in PROCESS based on the confidence intervals (CI) of the total, direct, and indirect effects (Hayes, 2018). This analysis estimates the indirect effect of M1 on Y through M2 as W changes by one unit and is called the *index of moderated mediation* (Hayes, 2018). If the index is zero, then there is no relationship between M1 (upward social comparison) and W (self-esteem), meaning there is no moderated mediation. PROCESS automatically performs an inferential bootstrap test of the interaction CI to test whether the moderated mediation differs significantly from zero. If the inferential test suggests that the moderated mediation deviates significantly from zero, then the result is a linear relationship between the moderator and the indirect effect of M1 and Y through M2 (Hayes, 2018).

Conclusion

By examining how the remoteness of the influencer to the sponsored product affects purchase intentions directly, and through the mechanisms of upward social comparison, envy, and self-esteem, this research builds on the advertising literature in the context of influencer marketing. Additionally, by partnering with a social media influencer to conduct this study, the present research contributes to the influencer marketing literature by offering real-world data from the followers of a macro influencer.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSES AND RESULTS

The present study first collected feedback from industry experts in social media and digital marketing to confirm the manipulation potency present in the experiment for Study 1 and Study 2. Next, the author collected a convenience sample of students to further test the manipulations and measurement scale reliabilities present in the study. Third, the author collected data from a panel of social media users from Qualtrics to test the hypothesized model. Finally, a field study was conducted for Study 2, using the followers of Discovering Natural over the course of four weeks on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. The author conducted all analyses using SPSS software.

Quantitative Pre-Test

The current research first contacted the marketing doctoral students at a Southern United States University who are familiar with, and conduct research in, digital and content marketing to analyze the manipulation conditions for their potency in the study. The author created the images by first contracting a model (user Claudia196) on the freelancing platform Fiverr to serve as the mock-influencer for the pre-test and Study 1 panel data research. Freelancing was chosen to reduce potential confounds of respondents recognizing the influencer. Additionally, a fictitious product BeauteSkin was created to use in the description of the sponsored Instagram post. Lastly, another freelancing

graphic designer (user Vpreneurs85) was contracted to create a digital overlay to place on the model images to illustrate the illusion of being under a waterfall for the remote condition of the experiment. Figure 4.1 and Figure 4.2 display the images originally used for the industry experts to analyze and offer feedback.

Figure 4.1: Non-Remote Pre-Test Condition

Figure 4.2: Remote Pre-Test Condition First Draft

After the first round of feedback, it was determined that the splash overlay was not contrasting enough to successfully manipulate the remote condition. Thus, a background of a waterfall was obtained and applied to the remote condition from the royalty-free platform Unsplash from Jesse van Vilet (user @jessevanvliet). Fiverr and Unsplash were specifically chosen for their commercial use authorization and royalty-free nature of their platforms, respectively. The background and overlay were applied

using the online digital marketing platform Canva. Canva was chosen because the platform is easy to use and provides a simple layout for future influencers to replicate when modeling this study in their content creation. After the new background was applied, the final remote condition was as chosen as shown in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Remote Pre-Test Condition Final Draft

The description of the fictitious product was modeled from several beauty-industry sponsored posts on Instagram. Additionally, the fictitious product, BeauteSkin, was determined by our subject-matter experts to be both effective at conveying the nature of the product (moisturizer cream), while acting as a real beauty company. Lastly, the beauty category was chosen as the product for this study because of the nature of the partnering influencer, Discovering Natural's content.

The current study proceeded to test the survey structure and measurement scales through fifty-eight undergraduate students recruited from a Northern United States University. Respondents were offered extra credit to complete the 15-minute survey to encourage quality responses. Respondents were removed if they failed to pass the three attention-check questions within the survey. The final sample consisted of 58 students. The average age for the student sample was 22, with 21 females and 37 males (36% and 64%, respectively).

Pre-Test: Exploratory Factor Analysis

A test of normality on each scale in the hypothesized model was used to measure the kurtosis and skewness as a Z-score of each item, measured against the absolute value of 1.96 (Allen, 2020). Skewness and kurtosis tell the author how symmetrical (or asymmetrical) and normally (or tailed) distributed the data is (Kline, 2011). Skewness measures how far the data is pushed to one side or the other of the distribution curve, while kurtosis tells the author how tall or shallow the distribution curve is in the dataset. Having abnormal skewness or kurtosis may indicate to the author the lack of variance for specific items in a questionnaire, which may lead to that item not fully capturing the essence of the reflective construct. The author observed fairly normal distributions of the

indicators on latent factors. However, there was heavy levels of kurtosis for Self-Esteem 1 and Self-Esteem 7. The kurtosis level ranged from benign (-1.948) to 4.873, respectively. While this does violate the strict rules of normality, these values are within the range of -7 to 7 as described by Kline (2011). Next, the author conducted a common factor analysis with orthogonal rotation on the items proposed in the hypothesized model constructs.

Convergent validity was first tested to ensure that each item was loading strongly on the intended latent factor. Factor loadings that were above 0.60 with a communality of above 0.50 were kept in the factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Items that were both below the 0.60 factor loadings cut-off and scored a communality of below 0.50 were removed from the factor analysis. Initial analysis removed Remoteness 3, 4 and 6. The secondary analysis of the rotated factor matrix without any further items removed revealed that Self-Esteem was loading on two different factors as shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Rotated Self-Esteem Factor Matrix

	Factor					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
SE1						
SE2		.984				
SE3				.619		
SE4				.599		
SE5		.585				
SE6		.715				
SE7				.769		
SE8		.536				
SE9		.549				
SE10				.621		

Note: Extraction Method: Maximum Likelihood.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.
Rotation converged in 7 iterations.

The resulting two-factor pattern matrix revealed that the positively worded scale items, Self-Esteem 3, 4, 7, and 10 and the negatively worded scale items, Self-Esteem 2, 5, 6, 8, and 9 all loaded on individual factors apart from Self-Esteem 1 which did not load heavily on any factor. As noted in Allen (2020), the loading of positively and negatively worded items can happen from method flaws, which is known as an *artifactual factor*. However, the construct of Self-Esteem, specifically the widely used Rosenberg (1965) scale used in the present study, has been examined by numerous researchers to identify why the current study findings of a two-factor construct are present in the pre-test (Greenberger, Chen, Dmitrieva & Farruggia, 2003; DiStefano & Motl, 2009). One explanation may be that the negatively worded items in the scale, “At times I think I am no good at all; I feel I do not have much to be proud of; I certainly feel useless at times;

All in all, I am inclined to think I am a failure" may produce responses of an individual's unwillingness to admit self-descriptions of low self-esteem as a means of self-preservation of one's self-image (DiStefano & Motl, 2009). The negatively worded items in the scale refer to the individual's self-worth, while the positively worded items in the scale "On the whole I am satisfied with myself; I feel that I have a number of good qualities; I am able to do things as well as most other people…" describe the individual in a means of attributes and the good qualities that make up the individual. Given that the present study is focused on individuals comparing themselves socially to an influencer based on their creative attributes as a person rather than comparing their self-worth as an individual, the current research treats each factor as a separate construct, using only the positively worded items to indicate Self-Esteem.

To test the manipulation check, respondents were surveyed based on their perception of how remote the influencer was to the product being sponsored. The more remote images were designed to show the influencer under a waterfall to promote a sense of hydration without explicitly stating that fact. For example, Ang (2000) found that participants rated a grandmother picking up a couch with one finger to be more remote than a weightlifter lifting weights when promoting a particular soft drink product. Additionally, Yao, Shao and Zhang (2021) demonstrated that when words in product descriptions displayed a level of remoteness, consumers needed to look beyond concrete details seen in the product to understand its merits, and thus capture the attention of that individual. To assess if consumers perceived the images as more or less remote, the level of remoteness was an average of six items designed to show a distance between what is normally shown on Instagram and what is perceived to be unique, unbelievable,

uncommon, a rarely seen in sponsored social media content. Table 4.2 displays the means and Table 4.3 displays the independent t-test results of the remoteness manipulation check. Each item in the Remoteness scale was measure on a sliding scale of 1 to 5. Where 1 was less remote, and 5 was very remote.

Table 4.2

Pre-Test Remoteness Manipulation Check

	Condition	N	Mean	St. Deviation
		Remoteness		
	1	31	2.796	0.861
	2	28	3.821	1.116

Table 4.3

Pre-Test Remoteness Independent T-Test

	F	Sig.	T	DF
		Remoteness		
Variances Assumed	2.339	0.000	-3.974	57.000
Variances Not Assumed		0.000	-3.922	50.681

The independent samples t-test produced significant findings ($t = -3.975$, $df = 57$, $p = 0.000$) with condition 1 (non-remote) scoring a mean of 2.80 and condition 2 (remote) scoring a mean of 3.82. This pre-test suggests that the manipulations were working correctly. That is, the more remote condition was producing higher perceptions of remoteness compared to the non-remote condition.

Quantitative Main Study

Once the pre-test was confirmed, the main analysis was broken into two studies. The first was a Qualtrics panel and the second was a collaboration effort with social media influencer Sola from Discovering Natural. The Qualtrics survey yielded 330 respondents of individuals who lived in the United States and who Qualtrics determined were social media users. Specifically, those who primarily used Instagram. Considering the number of indicators (15), the number of latent constructs (5), and the number of estimated parameters (5), this sample meets the minimum sample size required of 100 respondents in both Study 1 (330 respondents) and Study 2 (104 respondents), respectively (Hair et al., 2019). The respondents were compensated in Study 1 by Qualtrics directly, and in Study 2 by the influencer through a giveaway of five $100 Amazon gift cards to randomly be distributed to those who participated and consented to having their email collected at the end of the survey. Respondents in both studies were removed if they failed to meet all three attention check questions. For Study 1, the sample characteristics include both male and female (50% and 50%) along with other characteristics shown in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

Study 1 Sample Characteristics

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	165	50%
Female	165	50%
Other	0	0%
Age		
18 - 24	68	20.6%
25 - 34	214	64.8%
35 - 44	48	14.5%
Education		
Some High School	7	2.1%
High School/Equivalent	68	20.6%
Some College	70	21.2%
Associate's Degree	30	9.1%
Bachelor's Degree	103	31.2%
Master's Degree	44	13.3%
Doctorate Degree	1	0.3%
Professional Degree (JD, MD)	7	2.1%
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	25	7.6%
$10,000 to $19,999	19	5.8%
$20,000 to $29,999	31	9.4%
$30,000 to $39,999	33	10%
$40,000 to $49,999	30	9.1%
$50,000 to $59,999	44	13.3%
$60,000 to $69,999	28	8.5%
$70,000 to $79,999	31	9.4%
$80,000 to $89,999	16	4.8%
$90,000 to $99,999	19	5.8%
$100,000 to $149,999	27	8.2%
$150,000 or more	27	8.2%

Study 1: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

After assessing the normality of the data by computing z-scores for each item of the latent constructs and analyzing the skewness and kurtosis, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the data collected from the 330 respondents. Model fit was assessed first by analyzing the chi-square statistic, which was significant (Chi-square = 198.36, df = 84, p = 0.000). A more conservative approach to confirmatory factor analysis states that a significant Chi-square value means the measurement model does not fit the data proposed in the hypothesized model. However, Chi-square is sensitive to larger sample sizes and models more complex in nature, which can inflate the Chi-square value (Schumacker & Lomax , 2004). Thus, other model fit indices are commonly used to assess model fit of a CFA. The CFI of 0.969, GFI of 0.924 and RMSEA of 0.064 (90% CI HI = 0.076, LO = 0.053) indicate a good fit based on the sample size of Study 1 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.5 displays the model fit statistics of the Study 1 measurement model.

Table 4.5

Study 1 Measurement Model Fit Statistics

Fit Measures	
X^2 Goodness-of-Fit	198.36
Degrees of Freedom	84
CFI	0.969
NFI	0.947
TLI	0.961
RMSEA	0.064
RMSEA 90% Confidence Interval: HI	0.076
RMSEA 90% Confidence Interval: LO	0.053
Standardized RMR	0.0569

In addition to the model fit statistics, all factor loadings averaged to above 0.70 on their respective constructs (Figure 4.4), suggesting convergent validity, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.50, suggesting adequate discriminate reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Finally, the construct reliabilities for each latent factor exceeded 0.70, suggesting convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.6 shows that the AVE for every construct exceeds the squared correlation estimates for each other construct, further indicating discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

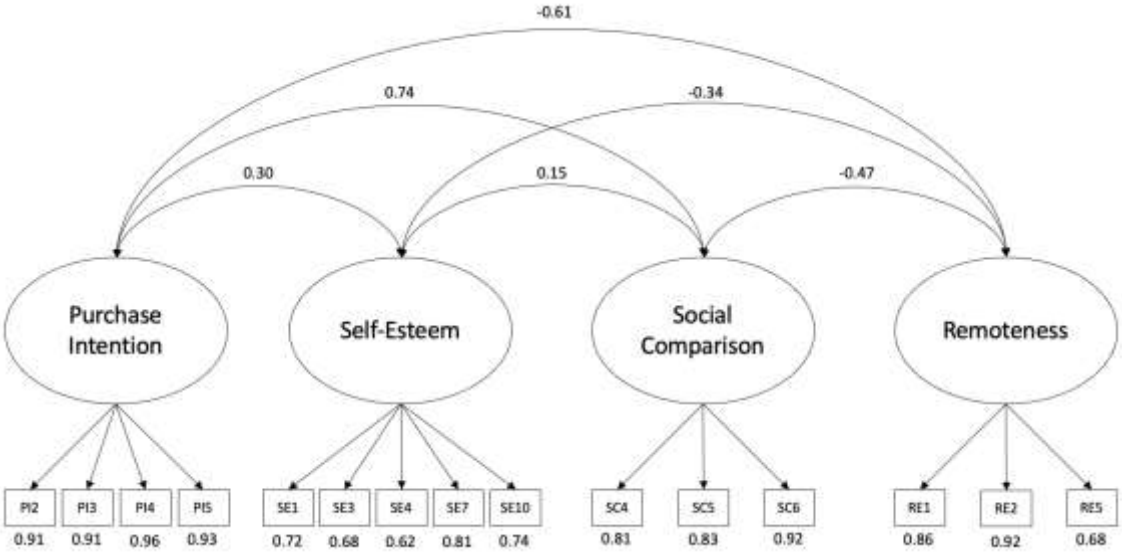


Figure 4.4: Study 1 CFA Model Fit

Table 4.6

Study 1 Validity Analysis

	Construct Reliability	AVE	Purchase Intention	Self-Esteem	Social Comparison	Remoteness
Purchase Intention	0.961	0.860	**0.928**			
Self-Esteem	0.838	0.511	0.295***	**0.714**		
Social Comparison	0.889	0.729	0.744***	0.154*	**0.854**	
Remoteness	0.863	0.682	-0.614***	-0.335***	-0.472***	**0.826**

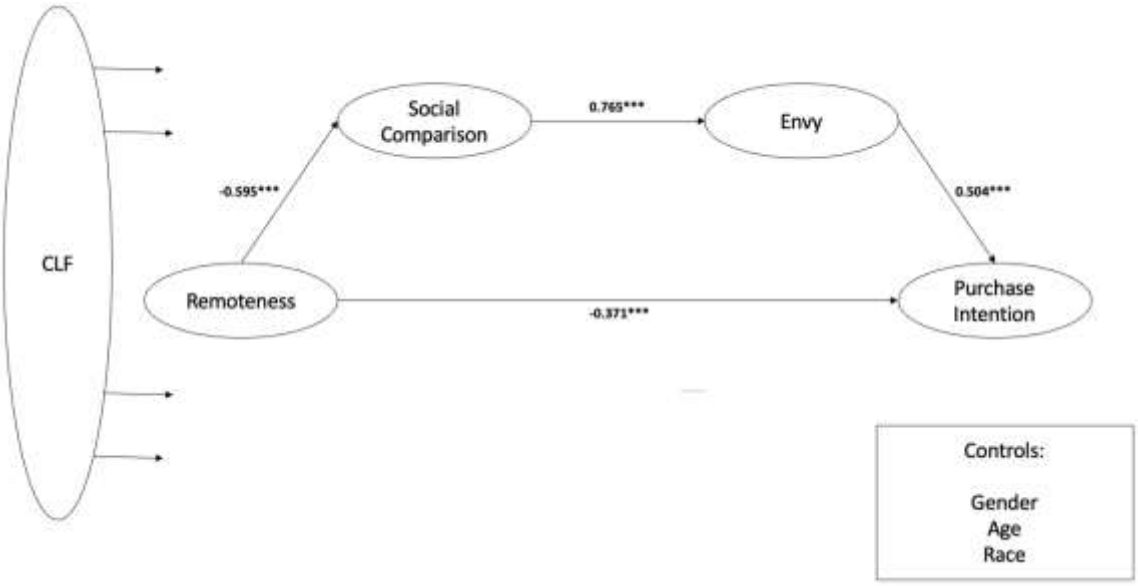
*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Study 1: Structural Model Specifications

Once model fit was observed through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the author formed the structural model as illustrated in Figure 4.5, modeling the hypothesized model shown in Figure 2.6. This structural model was then compared to the model fit Chi-square value of the CFA. The Chi-square of the fully structural model is 350.3 with 99 degrees of freedom (p = 0.000). A Chi-square difference test revealed that there is a statistically significant difference between the CFA and the structural model proposed in this study. This indicated that the proposed constraints on the model via the estimated paths worsens the fit of the overall model. However, the model fit indices indicate adequate fit with CFI of 0.935, NFI of 0.912, and RMSEA of 0.088 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

Since both the independent and dependent variables were collected together in the same dataset, the author tested for common method bias (CMB) by first creating and estimating a common latent factor (CLF), where the CLF reflected all indicators in the

structural model (Podsakoff, MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). The unconstrained model with the CLF had a Chi-square of 146.6 with 69 degrees of freedom. The full constrained model with the CLF has a Chi-square of 198.4 with 84 degrees of freedom. When computing a Chi-square difference test, the Chi-square was significant (p = 0.000), meaning that the unconstrained model with the CLF and the fully constrained model with the CLF were statistically different from each other. This suggests there is evidence of common method bias with the Qualtrics data obtained in Study 1. As a result, all structural paths were estimated in Study 1 with the inclusion of the unconstrained CLF as demonstrated by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012). This method of addressing CMB is more robust than both a correlation-based marker variable or the Harman's one factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Figure 4.5 shows the structural model with the common latent factor included in the model.



*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Figure 4.5: Study 1 Structural Model with CLF

With the CLF in the model, the model fit remains satisfactory with CFI of 0.967, GFI of 0.924, SRMR of 0.0442, and RMSEA of 0.057. The factor loadings of the estimated for the latent factors reflect no major changes from the original CFA, which indicates that there is no interpretational confounding (Hair et al., 2019). While all of the hypothesized structural paths were statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), the directions of the hypothesized relationships were unexpected. For example, Remoteness, while significantly related to Social Comparison and Purchase Intention, were negative (β = -0.595, p = 0.000; β = -0.371, p = 0.000, respectively). These results contrasted H1a and H1b. Social Comparison was positively related to Envy (β = 0.765, p = 0.000), confirming H2, and Envy was positively related to Purchase Intention (β = 0.504, p = 0.000), confirming H4. Table 4.7 shows the structural relationships and standardized regression weights while Table 4.8 shows the hypotheses and their support.

Table 4.7

Study 1 Direct Structural Model Estimates

Structural Path	Standardized Regression Weight *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	-0.371***
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	-0.595***
Social Comparison -> Envy	0.765***
Envy -> Purchase Intention	0.504***

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 4.8

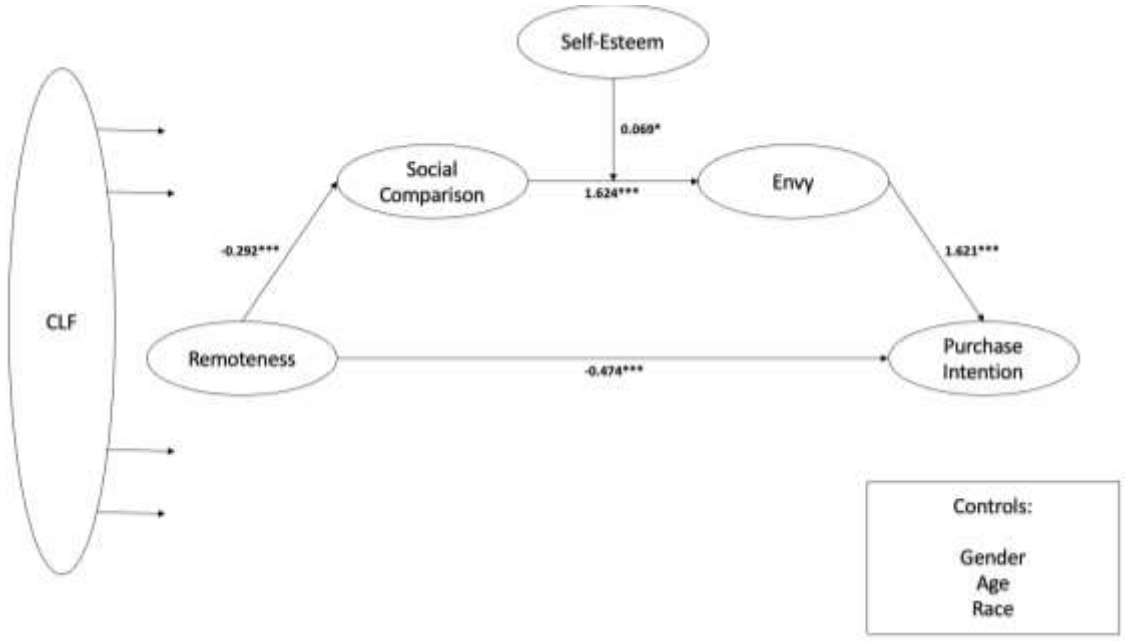
Study 1 Structural Model Conclusions

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Not Supported (Inverse)
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Not Supported (Inverse)
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Moderation Hypotheses

To test H3, whether Self Esteem moderates the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy, SPSS PROCESS was used to both validate the SEM results, and simultaneously test the moderation hypotheses. Summated factor scores from the structural model, including the CLF were use in SPSS v. 26 with the Hayes PROCESS Macro installed. Figure 4.6 shows the moderation PROCESS model while Table 4.9 and 4.10 test both the regression hypotheses and the moderation hypotheses simultaneously, while Table 4.11 displays the moderation index. Additionally, PROCESS is an OLS-based approach to regression, meaning that the model is fully identified with additional paths. Regardless, however, the findings from the SEM model to the PROCESS model remained the same.



*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Figure 4.6: Study 1 PROCESS Model 91

Table 4.9

Study 1 PROCESS Direct Structural Model Estimates

Structural Path	Unstandardized Regression Weight *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	-0.474***
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	-0.292***
Social Comparison -> Envy	1.624***
Envy -> Purchase Intention	1.621***
Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	0.069*

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 4.10

Study 1 Structural Model Conclusions

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Not Supported (Inverse)
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Not Supported (Inverse)
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H3	Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 4.11

Study 1 Index of Self-Esteem Moderation

Self-Esteem	Value	Effect	Low CI	High CI
Low	-0.7101	-0.7358	-0.8378	-0.6381
Medium	0.0497	-0.7545	-0.8570	-0.6552
High	0.6832	-0.7700	-0.8759	-0.6681

Like in the SEM model, CLF, Age, Gender, and Race were controlled via covariates in the PROCESS model. No major changes are reported from the structural model to the PROCESS model in relation to hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2 and H4. However, the interaction between Self-Esteem and the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy is significant (β = 0.069, p = 0.04). This relationship suggests that when a non-follower viewing sponsored content from a person they do not know, has a high Self-Esteem, the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy is enhanced as compared to those with lower levels of Self-Esteem. Table 4.9 shows this relationship.

Study 2: Data Collection

While the data was collected for Study 1, social media influencer Olusola "Sola" Awe from Discovering Natural agreed to participate in Study 2 to collect field data from her followers. To gain as many respondents as possible, Sola posted a similar announcement shown in Figure 4.7 on her Instagram, YouTube, and Facebook channels.

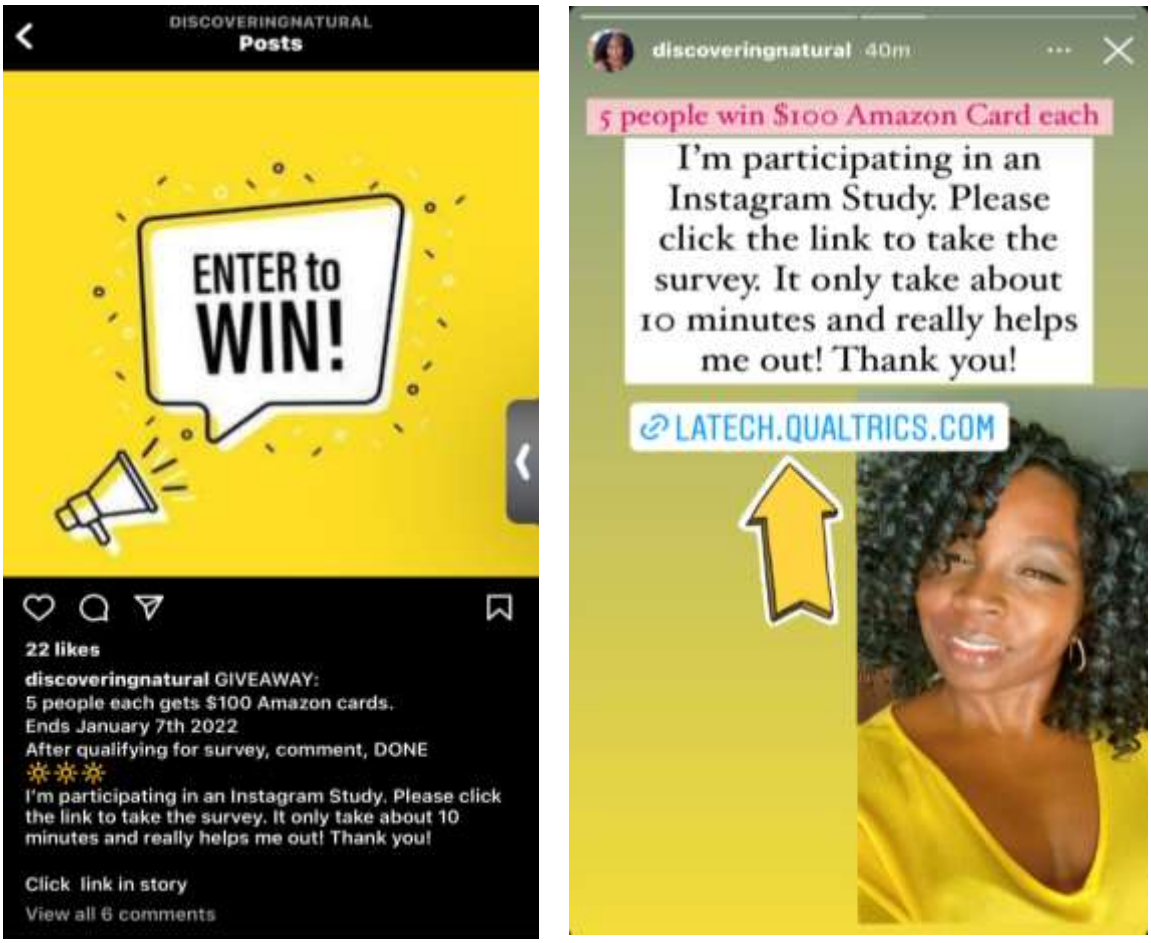


Figure 4.7: Instagram Post (Left) and Instagram Story (Right) from Discovering Natural

The only additional variables that were collected with Study 2 were "How long have you followed Discovering Natural?" and "Please enter your email and consent to having your email collected to be entered into the giveaway." The giveaway referred to

the five, $100-dollar Amazon gift cards that the influencer would giveaway randomly to those who completed the survey. The inclusion of the giveaway helped ensure that the respondents provided detailed and thorough answers to the questions. Like Study 1, Study 2 used the same conditions, remote and non-remote, but instead of hiring a freelance model, Study 2 used Sola as the model. Figures 4.8 and 4.9 show the remote and non-remote conditions, respectively. The study kept all variables about the images the same from Study 1 to Study 2, while only changing the unknown model for a known influencer. The use of Sola in the images for Study 2 will help show differences between those who do not follow an influencer (Study 1) and those who do follow the influencer (Study 2).

Figure 4.8: Discovering Natural in Non-Remote Condition

Figure 4.9: Discovering Natural in Remote Condition

One hundred and four respondents were recruited through the single post featured in Figure 4.7 (Left) on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, followed by a series of Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube "Story" posts in Figure 4.7 (Right) spaced one week apart for four weeks. Stories are different than actual "posts" as the stories are automatically removed from their respective platforms in 24 hours. This method allowed the influencer's social media "feed" to stay relevant to their channels, while also

promoting the study to their followers. The field survey yielded 104 respondents of individuals who lived in several countries around the world and who were social media users. Considering the number of indicators (15), the number of latent constructs (5) and the number of estimated parameters (5) this sample meets the minimum sample size required of 100 respondents (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.12 shows the demographic breakdown of Study 2.

Table 4.12

Study 2 Sample Characteristic

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	3	2.9%
Female	97	93.3%
Other: Prefer Not To Specify	4	3.8%
Age		
18 - 24	16	15.4%
25 - 34	39	37.5%
35 - 44	29	27.9%
45 - 54	11	10.6%
55 - 64	9	8.7%
Education		
Some High School	6	5.8%
High School/Equivalent	12	11.5%
Some College	21	20.2%
Associate's Degree	12	11.5%
Bachelor's Degree	36	34.6%
Master's Degree	7	6.7%
Doctorate Degree	1	1.0%
Professional Degree (JD, MD)	5	4.8%

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Annual Household Income		
Less than $10,000	32	30.8%
$10,000 to $19,999	9	8.7%
$20,000 to $29,999	6	5.8%
$30,000 to $39,999	9	8.7%
$40,000 to $49,999	7	6.7%
$50,000 to $59,999	12	11.5%
$60,000 to $69,999	6	5.8%
$70,000 to $79,999	4	3.8%
$80,000 to $89,999	4	3.8%
$90,000 to $99,999	4	3.8%
$100,000 to $149,999	4	3.8%
$150,000 or more	3	2.9%
Years Following Discovering Natural		
0-1	40	38.5%
2-3	36	34.6%
4-5	17	16.3%
5+	16	15.4%
Most Used Social Media Platform		
Facebook	20	19.2%
Instagram	33	31.7%
YouTube	44	42.3%
TikTok	6	5.8%
Pinterest	1	1.0%

Study 2: Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Since Study 2 is a replication of Study 1, the same justification was used in assessing the normality of the data by first computing z-scores for each item of the latent constructs and analyzing the skewness and kurtosis. Similar to Study 1, Study 2 had mild skewness and kurtosis with some items in the Self-Esteem scale. Specifically, the skewness and kurtosis of Self-Esteem 3 (-2.291, 6.152), 4 (-1.713, 3.284), 7 (-2.090, 4.355) and 10 (-1.669, 2.150) were above the absolute value of 1.98. While this does violate the strict rules of normality, these values are within the range of -7 to 7 as described by Kline (2011). To maintain that the manipulations were working properly for

Study 2, an independent samples t-test was used with the remoteness scale. For Study 2, the non-remote condition produced a mean of 2.73, while the remote condition produced a mean of 3.26. The t-test was significant ($F = 2.344$, $p = 0.037$). The significance indicated that the manipulation checks worked as predicted in both the controlled Study 1 and the field Study 2. Like in Study 1, the negatively worded items in the Self-Esteem scale were not included in the Study 2 analysis.

Convergent validity on all the items collected for Study 2 was first tested to ensure that each item was loading strongly on the intendent latent factor. Factor loadings that were above 0.60 with a communality of above 0.50 were kept in the factor analysis (Hair et al., 2019). Items that were both below the 0.60 factor loadings cut-off and scored a communality of below 0.50 were removed from the factor analysis.

Additionally, when a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted on the data collected from 104 respondents, Model fit was assessed first by analyzing the chi-square statistic, which was significant (Chi-square = 85.250, df = 59, $p = 0.014$). Given the parameters in this study, the Chi-square is assessed with other variables to confirm model fit (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004). Thus, other model fit indices are commonly used to assess model fit of a CFA. The CFI of 0.972, GFI of 0.891 and RMSEA of 0.066 (90% CI HI = 0.095, LO = 0.030) indicate a good fit based on the sample size of Study 2 (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.13 displays the model fit statistics of the Study 2 measurement model.

Table 4.13

Study 2 Measurement Model Fit Statistics

Fit Measures	
X^2 Goodness-of-Fit	85.250
Degrees of Freedom	59
CFI	0.972
NFI	0.915
TLI	0.963
RMSEA	0.066
RMSEA 90% CI: HI	0.095
RMSEA 90% CI: LO	0.030
Standardized RMR = .0569	0.0496

In addition to the model fit statistics, all factor loadings averaged to above 0.70 on their respective constructs (Figure 4.10), suggesting convergent validity, and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded 0.50, suggesting adequate discriminate reliability, and the construct reliabilities for each latent factor exceeded 0.70, suggesting convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019). Table 4.14 shows that the AVE for every construct exceeds the squared correlation estimates for each of the other constructs, further indicating discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2019).

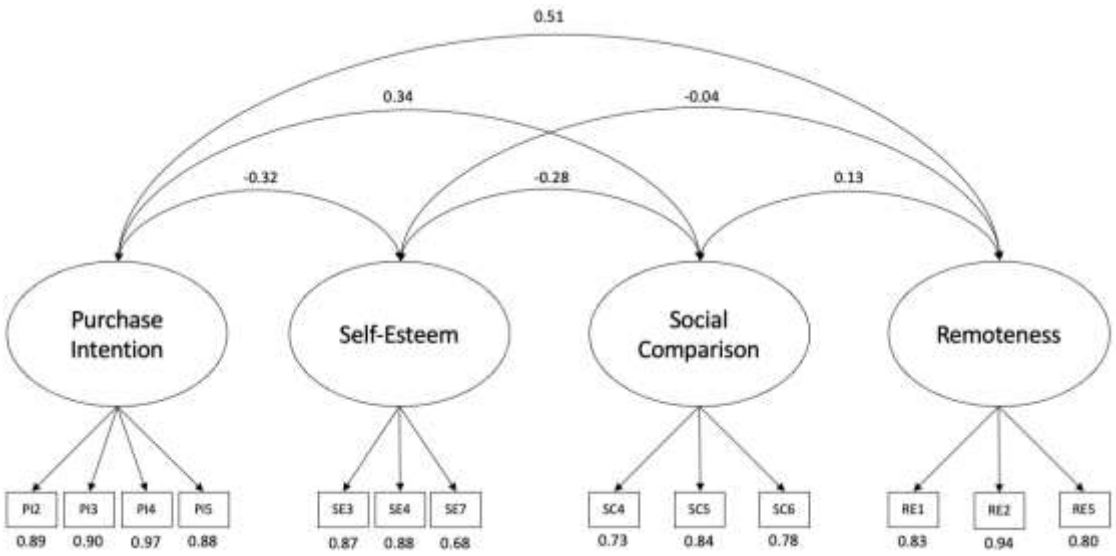


Figure 4.10: Study 2 CFA Model Fit

Table 4.14

Study 2 Validity Analysis

	Construct Reliability	AVE	Purchase Intention	Self-Esteem	Social Comparison	Remoteness
Purchase Intention	0.950	0.827	**0.910**			
Self-Esteem	0.896	0.742	0.344**	**0.862**		
Social Comparison	0.851	0.659	0.513**	0.132	**0.812**	
Remoteness	0.825	0.612	-0.324**	-0.285**	-0.040	**0.782**

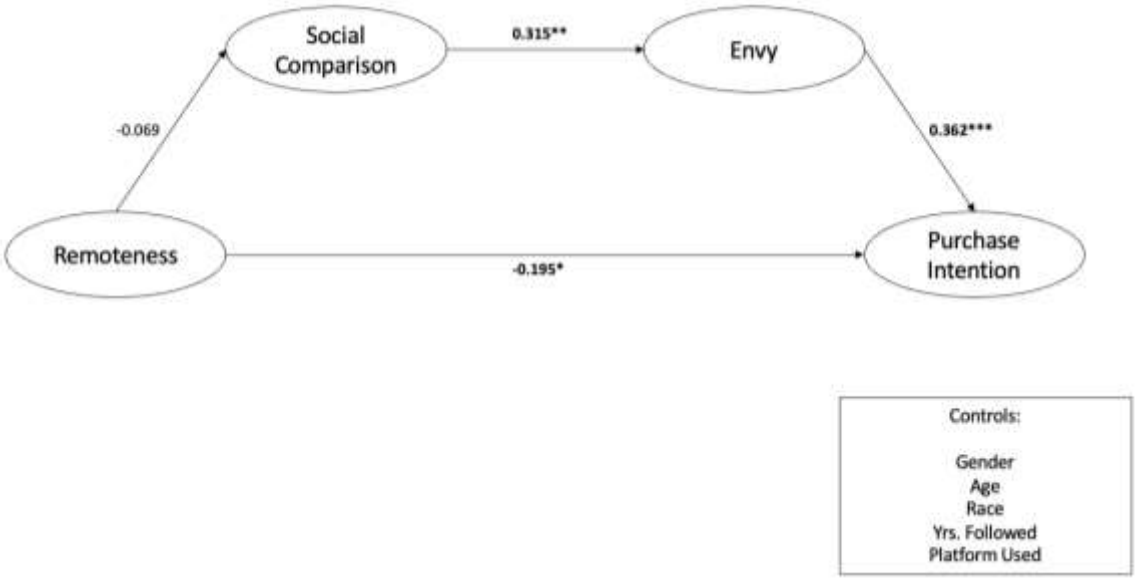
*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Study 2: Structural Model Specifications

Once model fit was observed through the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the author formed the structural model as illustrated in Figure 4.14, modeling the hypothesized model shown in Figure 2.6. Given that the data collection parameters were more open for Study 2 compared to that of Study 1 (i.e., more social media platforms

than Instagram were utilized), Study 2 also controlled for the platform respondents used the most, and the number of years the respondent had followed Discovering Natural. This structural model was them compared to the model fit Chi-square value of the CFA. The Chi-square of the fully structural model is 221.3 with 127 degrees of freedom ($p = 0.000$). Like in Study 1, the proposed structural model worsens fit when compared to the CFA, however, the model fit indices indicate adequate fit with CFI of 0.903, NFI of 0.810, and RMSEA of 0.085 (Schumacker & Lomax, 2004).

The author also checked for common method bias in the Study 2 data. The unconstrained model with the common latent factor (CLF) had a Chi-square of 68.8 with 46 degrees of freedom. The fully constrained model with the CLF has a Chi-square of 85.3 with 59 degrees of freedom. When computing a Chi-square difference test, the Chi-square was insignificant ($p = 0.223$), meaning that the unconstrained model with the CLF and the fully constrained model with the CLF were not statistically different from each other. This suggests there was no evidence of common method bias with the influencer data obtained in Study 2 (Podsakoff et al., 2012). Figure 4.11 shows the structural model.



*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Figure 4.11: Study 2 Structural Model

The factor loadings of the estimated paths for the latent factors reflect no major changes from the original CFA, which indicates that there is no interpretational confounding (Hair et al., 2019). The influencer dataset produced interesting results as the structural paths were in opposite directions from hypothesized. For example, Remoteness, while significantly related to Social Comparison and Purchase Intention in Study 1, was only significantly related to Purchase Intention in Study 2 (β = -0.171, p = 0.054). This result contrasted H1a. Social Comparison was positively related to Envy (β = 0.315, p = 0.004), confirming H2, and Envy was positively related to Purchase Intention (β = 0.362, p = 0.000), confirming H4. Table 4.15 shows the structural relationships and standardized regression weights while Table 4.16 shows the hypotheses and their support.

Table 4.15

Study 2 Direct Structural Model Estimates

Structural Path	Standardized Regression Weight *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	-0.195*
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	-0.069
Social Comparison -> Envy	0.315**
Envy -> Purchase Intention	0.362***

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 4.16

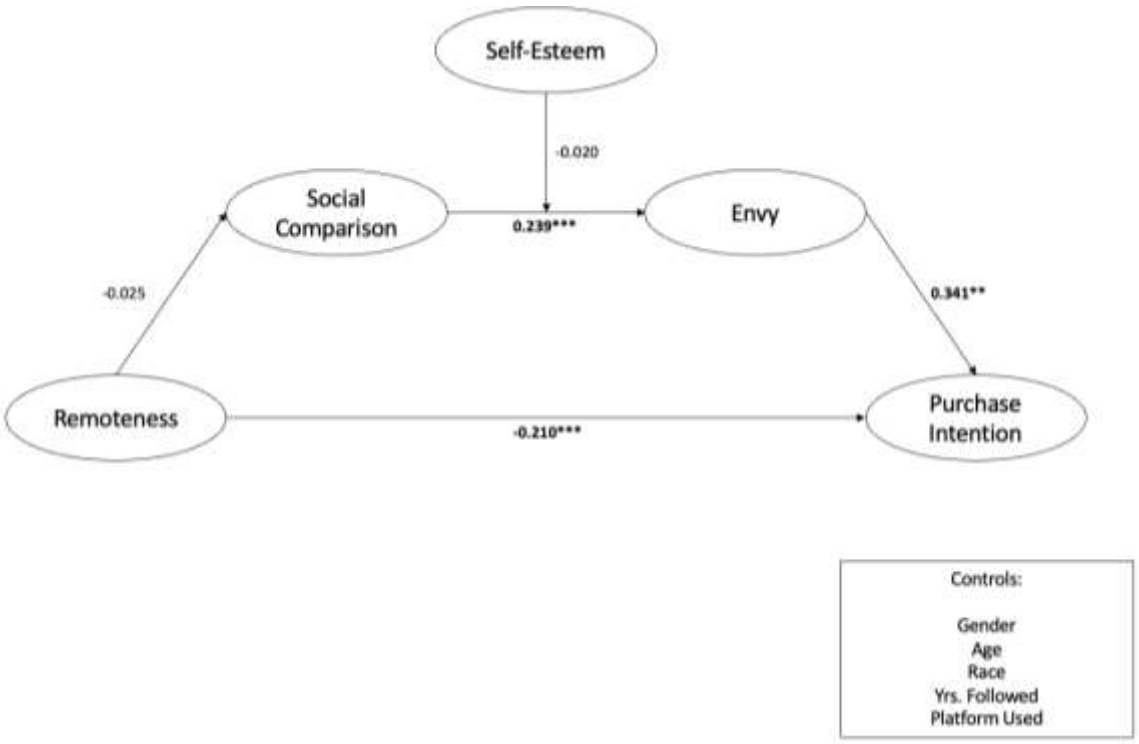
Study 2 Structural Model Conclusions

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Not Supported (Inverse)
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Not Supported
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Moderation Hypotheses

As a robustness test of the moderation hypotheses H3, SPSS PROCESS was used to both validate the SEM results, and simultaneously test the moderated mediation hypotheses. Figure 4.12 shows the PROCESS Model 91 serial moderation mediation analysis while Table 4.17 and Table 4.18 test the both the regression hypotheses and the moderation hypotheses simultaneously. The findings from the SEM model to the PROCESS model remained the same.



*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Figure 4.12: Study 2 PROCESS Model 91

Table 4.17

Study 2 PROCESS Direct Structural Model Estimates

Structural Path	Unstandardized Regression Weight *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	-0.210***
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	-0.025
Social Comparison -> Envy	0.239***
Envy -> Purchase Intention	0.341**
Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	-0.020

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 4.18

Study 2 Structural Model Conclusions

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Not Supported (Inverse)
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Not Supported
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H3	Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	Not Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

Like in the SEM model, Age, Gender, Race, Years Followed, and Platform Most Used were controlled via covariates in the model. No major changes are reported from the structural model to the PROCESS model in relation to hypotheses H1a, H1b, H2 and H4. However, the interaction between Self-Esteem and the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy, while mild in Study 1, is insignificant in Study 2 (β = -0.020, p = 0.857). This relationship suggests that Self-Esteem may not play a role in the social comparison to envy relationship with followers of an influencer.

Conclusion

Chapter IV included the statistical analysis and the results for both a panel and field experiment to test H1 – H4 in the proposed study. The pre-test served multiple purposes. First, experts in the field of social media marketing tested and provided feedback for the survey structure and manipulation checks used in the two full studies. Additionally, the pre-test uncovered the validity of each scale, along with the unexpected two-factor nature of the Self-Esteem construct. Interestingly, while both Study 1 and Study 2 asked the same questions, in the same order, with only the follower status changing (non-follower of a fictitious influencer in Study 1 and followers of the influencer in Study 2), common method bias was present for the panel data in Study 1 but

not with the field data in Study 2. After the manipulations were enhanced in the survey after the pre-test feedback, two main rounds of data collection took place with 330 respondents in Study 1 and 104 respondents in Study 2. The proposed theoretical models were tested and Study 1 showed inverse relationships between Remoteness and Social Comparison and Remoteness and Purchase Intention. In Study 2, the relationship between Remoteness and Social Comparison was insignificant, while the relationship between Remoteness and Purchase Intention was again inversely related, showing no support for H1a or H1b in both studies. Additionally, both Study 1 and Study 2 confirmed the social comparison theory that Social Comparison has a positive relationship with Envy. Specifically, both studies offered support that specifically Upward Social Comparison leads to Benign Envy as indicated in positive beta weights in both studies. Both studies offer support that Benign Envy has positive relationship with Purchase Intention, showing support for H4. Lastly, Study 1 offered support that those who are non-followers of an influencer's sponsored Instagram post and who have higher levels of Self-Esteem also have elevated relationships between Social Comparison and Envy. However, this moderation hypothesis was not shown in Study 2. These findings offer support for H3 in Study 1 but not in Study 2.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The current study examined the role that creativity plays in sponsored social media product posts. Specifically, the study focused on the remote-conveyor model commonly used in the traditional advertisement literature. This study focused on the curiosity-raising component of a sponsored post by manipulating the remoteness of the portrayer in both a controlled panel setting with a hired model, and in a field setting with an influencer and her followers. By providing both internal and external validity of both the theoretical foundations of social comparison and envy theory and the remote-conveyor model, the current literature makes several conclusions and contributions to the social media influencer literature.

Discussion and Future Research

Remoteness is the underlying construct that frames this research. The metaphor formed when the conveyor of the sponsored post is out of context in relation to the sponsored product, is resolved when viewers read the post descriptions to find the key-benefit claim given by the advertising company to connect why the conveyor and the product are seen in the same image. When this connection is made, the feelings of originality and creativity are felt by the viewer as the viewer solved the metaphor puzzle, connecting seemingly out of context concepts together (Lagerwef & Meijers, 2008).

The proposed model links the remoteness concept to that of the creative digital self that social media users portray online. This mechanism of a digital creative self is one that has been studied before in the marketing literature (Chae, 2017). While the idea is rather new, it highlights how most images created and posted to social media are idealized versions of one's selves. A version that is meticulously thought through, crafted, and then displayed to the world. The idea drawn in the present study looked to highlight how the remoteness mechanism promoted more feelings of creativity from the viewer, allowing for viewers to compare their creative selves online to that of the influencer. In essence, the follower may want to be more like the influencer in the process. Thus, this research accepted the cross-discipline calls from Vrontis et al. (2021) by merging the advertisement literature's use of remoteness and its creativity components to showcase how social media has developed a means to express one's creative self in the best light to their followers.

Creativity in advertising has been studied for some time. However, as advertisement companies move from magazine pages to digital screens, the need for proper measurement tools to predict sponsorship success is needed. As Peppler and Solomou (2011) pointed out over a decade ago, and then was reinforced by Vrontis et al. (2021), the evaluations of various measurements of social media success, follower count, interactions, likes, shares, etc. analyzed by a panel of experts is not a proxy for field studies. This is because a YouTube video that has more views than another is not necessarily more creative, nor is a post on Instagram that has received the most likes (Peppler & Solomou, 2011). For example, a video with less views may convert more purchases than a video with ten times as many. Thus, interactions alone should not be

used to predict success 1-to-1. As such, the current research looked to address this approach to creativity by measuring creativity through the level of curiosity-raising components featured in a sponsored post by measuring how remote the influencer was from the product in question. By doing so, the present study looked to highlight creativity as a new measure for success, rather than simple interaction metrics. Additionally, the present study hoped to provide an example of how field studies can be conducted with social media influencers and their respective following.

Research Question 1

The first research question asked, *how can social media influencers leverage creativity in their sponsored posts to attract more purchase intentions from followers?* The current study aimed to provide an answer to this question by manipulating the level of remoteness in the sponsored post while keeping all other aspects of the post constant. By isolating the level of remoteness in the post, the present study was able to specifically analyze if the post was viewed as being more uncommon, unique, rarely seen in sponsored posts, and overall curiosity raising. By establishing that the influencer in the sponsored post was perceived as more remote and thus, more creative, the present study introduced Upward Social Comparison as a mechanism that would, through Benign Envy, encourage more Purchase Intentions of the sponsored product.

Social media users over time develop feelings of social comparison to the social media influencer, wanting to be more like the influencer (Chae, 2018). As such, a simple way to be more like another person is to acquire and use similar products and live a similar lifestyle to those we look up to. Through this mechanism of Social Comparison, Envy is introduced on a sliding scale from malicious, meaning the follower wants to “get

even" socially by taking something away from the other person, and benign, as "getting even" is accomplished by propping up oneself socially by acquiring a similar lifestyle as the other (Belk, 2011). This combination of Social Comparison and Envy is the driving mechanism that is hypothesized in the present study to be set in motion by the Remoteness of the sponsored post. Remoteness, the level of out-of-context imagery between the influencer and the sponsoring product was predicted to lead to higher levels of direct Purchase Intentions as those who see a creative social media post were expected to want the product advertised more than a non-creative post that is thought to be seen more frequently on social media. Additionally, the level of Remoteness was expected to relate to higher levels of Upward Social Comparison to the influencer based on the idea that the viewer would want to be more like a creative individual than a non-creative individual. To examine these relationships, the proposed structural model tested the following relationships:

H1a: *The more remote the image of the sponsored social media post is from the sponsored product, the greater the follower's purchase intentions.*

H1b: *The more remote the image of the sponsored social media post is from the sponsored product; the more upward social comparison is felt by the follower.*

The results do not support the proposed relationships for H1a and H1b, and instead show an opposite relationship across both studies. Like in studies that interact with and personally question the respondents to determine which pieces of content are both curiosity raising and benefit-conveying (Althuizen, 2017), the present study found that in pre-testing the manipulations produced feelings of purchase intentions and social comparison. However, the present study shows that in both a panel and field experiment,

the manipulations produced opposite effects, showing either a negative relationship between Remoteness and Purchase Intentions or a negative and an insignificant relationship between Remoteness and Social Comparison (Study 1 and Study 2, respectively).

One explanation for this lack of positive findings may be due to the nature of how consumers view content on social media. In a post-test debrief conversation with the students involved in pretesting, several comments mentioned that the remote post succeeded in grabbing their attention, but after they moved on to the questions, they forgot what the product was they were viewing. This comment was echoed by others who mentioned that on social media, users are trained to continuously swipe past content, so anything that is not straight to the point gets lost in the noise of social media content. These sentiments are reaffirming the findings of Ang (2000) who showed that the time spent viewing the remote and non-remote ads played a large role in how creative the viewer thought the ad was. For example, those who spent 15 seconds viewing an advertisement thought the ad was more creative than those who only saw the ad for 4 seconds. In fact, those in the 4-second condition saw no significant difference between the remote and non-remote ads in both an advertisement for chili sauce and soft drinks (Ang, 2000). According to Facebook's internal data, the average user spends only 1.7 seconds looking at a piece of content before moving on to the next post (Facebook, 2016). This element of time may help explain why in non-follower situations, viewers showed a negative relationship between the perceived level of remoteness and their desire to socially compare themselves to the influencer. In non-follower situations, viewers may be looking for information rather quickly, and by not spending much time viewing the

social media post, form negative sentiment toward comparing themselves to that of the influencer as the remoteness of the post distracts the viewer from gaining any new information about the sponsored product.

Additionally, Yao et al. (2021) detail that decoding creative product descriptions requires a high level of construal. That is, deciphering the metaphor present in a piece of marketing material requires the viewer to both decode the message, form the proper connections between the product and the remote conveyor, then process the information to find the benefit claim present in the marketing material (Yang, Mao, Jia, Bublitz, Fischer & Block, 2019). This type of processing can be done when reading a magazine, viewing a TV commercial, or reading product descriptions. However, social media content is different from these other forms of marketing in that content is meant to be consumed quickly, with forced timed viewership granted only to those who pay for that privilege like with un-skippable YouTube advertisements or push paid marketing on Instagram and Facebook stories. The Elaboration Likelihood Model may help explain this further, as "variables influencing a person's ability to process a message argument include the presence of distracting stimuli, message repetitiveness, complexity and the amount of issue-relevant prior experience the intended individuals have (Petty and Cacioppo, 1983)" (Kitchen, Kerr, Shultz, McColl & Pals, 2010, p. 2035). Thus, the key benefit claim may not be seen if the respondent becomes distracted by the level of remoteness in the image, or becomes desensitized to stimulus in a sponsored post after scrolling for some time on social media.

In Study 2, it may be that the viewers of the influencer were already socially comparing themselves to the influencer, since they followed her for some time, which

may help explain the non-significant Remoteness to Social Comparison finding. However, the negative relationship between Remoteness and Purchase Intention is shown in Study 1 then reaffirmed in Study 2. Future research may benefit by either controlling for time viewers spend looking at the sponsored post or manipulate the time the post is shown before viewers can move on in the survey, then use time as a dimension in the study as a boundary condition to these modeled effects.

Regardless the proposed recommendation from the present study is for influencers to convey their sponsored product placements as simply and informative as possible to drive-home the key benefit claims provided to them by the sponsoring company. The present study shows that the perceived level of remoteness between the influencer and the product is indeed recognized by the viewer and negatively impacts how they socially compare themselves to the influencer and how driven they are to purchase the product in the sponsored post.

What influencers will benefit from, however, is forming a follower base that both socially compares themselves to the influencer and those who form a strong level of benign envy for the influencer. As shown in both Study 1 and Study 2, the more a viewer socially compares themselves to the influencer, the more benign envy is formed to that influencer. As such, Benign Envy is shown to positively relate the greater levels of Purchase Intentions. These findings are consistent with social comparison theory and the theory of envy outlined in Breidenthal et al. (2020) and Belk (2011), respectively. Additionally, the results from the present study help confirm the findings found in Duan (2021) which demonstrate that when the viewer and the person posting the image on social media have strong ties together, benign envy affects a viewer’s purchase intentions

specifically for materials posts, not experiential posts. The present study helps add to Duan (2021) by demonstrating that Social Comparison precedes Benign Envy in the relationship to Purchase Intention. That is, the indirect effects of Social Comparison to Purchase Intention through Envy were greater than the either of the direct effects of Social Comparison and Purchase Intention and Envy and Purchase Intention in both Study 1 and Study 2 as demonstrated in the Model 91 PROCESS output. While this finding confirms the theories highlighted in the present study, they are worth noting for Influencers, that content which increases Upward Social Comparison is helpful in producing Benign Envy and ultimately Purchase Intentions with the sponsored products. Future research would benefit from taking the findings from both Duan (2021) and the present study to search for new factors that may increase Social Comparison within the sponsored content produced by the influencer to trigger feelings of Benign Envy over Malicious Envy in experiential products and services.

Research Question 2

The second research question asked, *how do individual psychological differences (i.e., self-esteem) affect the upward social comparison and envy relationship felt when viewing sponsored content?* The present study sought to test these moderation hypotheses by exploring how the individual levels of Self-Esteem interact with the feelings of Upward Social Comparison and Envy when viewing a remote and non-remote sponsored post. Study 1 and Study 2 showed contrasting results. In Study 1, while mild, non-followers of the influencer showed the moderation of Self-Esteem on the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy to be positive. That is, those non-followers who had greater feelings of positive self attributes had greater effects between the relationship

of Social Comparison and Benign Envy. However, in Study 2, these same moderation hypotheses were unfounded, with the moderation effect being insignificant. This may show support that influencers who make content directed at non-followers, should do so in a manner that helps boost the attribute Self-Esteem of the individual, as this type of content may lead that individual to form higher levels of Benign Envy when socially comparing themselves to the influencer. These results are conflicting to the current research stream on Self-Esteem and Social Comparison. For example, Bergagna and Tartaglia (2018) show that an increase level of Self-Esteem produced lower levels of social media usage and Social Comparison Orientation. Likewise, Vogel, Rose, Roberts and Eckles (2014) show that increased social media usage produced lower trait Self-Esteem, while self-evaluation Self-Esteem was lowered when viewers saw Upward Social Comparison information in someone's profile. The conflicting information on Self-Esteem help explain why Vrontis et al. (2021) concluded that more phycological-based boundary conditions are needed in the marketing literature. It could be that those respondents in Study 1 of the present study had higher levels of Self-Esteem and as such were looking for other influencers to look-up to, increasing their social status in the process. While in Study 2 respondents who followed an influencer for some time are already socially comparing themselves to the influencer, so a phycological moderation variable like Self-Esteem has no effect since the decision to follower and social compare against the influencer was already made. Regardless, the conflicting results between the two present studies, and the conflicting results of Study 1 in comparison to the current marketing literature warrants future research to explore more ways as to how Self-Esteem effects the way users perceived sponsored social media posts.

Theoretical Contribution

The current research offers two main overarching theoretical contributions. First, the present study forms a basis and structure for how to contact, network with, and survey both social media influencers and their followers to collect usable and clean data for experiments. The use of actual follower data is critical in examining how these social media posts interact with the intended viewer. Subject matter as fluid as social media and influencer marketing deserves more field studies to confirm the hypothesized relationships and theories presented in our discipline. By providing field data in the present study, the supported hypotheses between Upward Social Comparison and Benign Envy and Benign Envy and Purchase Intentions offer much needed external validity to both the social comparison theory and envy theory (Breidenthal et al., 2020; Belk, 2011). Additionally, the present study showcased that the remote-conveyor model can be applied to social media and influencer marketing research both in controlled panel settings and field settings. The application of the remote-conveyor model helps extend the scope of how the model can be used across multiple disciplines. Confirmed across three different studies, the remoteness manipulation worked as intended with students, panelists, and influencer followers. The present study thus offers further support for the validity of the Ang (2000) Remoteness scale and Rossiter and Bellman (2005) remote-conveyor model.

The second theoretical contribution is found with the two different results of Self-Esteem as a boundary condition in the present study. In a controlled setting, the inclusion of Self-Esteem was moderately increasing the relationship with Social Comparison and Envy. However, in a field setting, this boundary condition did not exist. These two data points are important in the theoretical contribution of the psychological constraints

present in the influencer marketing literature. As mentioned in Vrontis et al. (2021), future research should continue to test of Self-Esteem acts as a boundary condition when present in influencer promotions. It may be that in non-follower situation, Self-Esteem is present as a boundary condition, but is non-existent in follower situations. Regardless, the contrasting results in this study should be explored more by those conducting research in influencer marketing.

Managerial Contribution

The main contributions of this study are relevant for influencers and their partnering sponsored brands. The findings across three studies show support that influencers should showcase their sponsored product as succinctly and straight-forward as possible. While producing content that is creative and engaging seems enticing, the results of this study suggest that posts may perform better that are common, seen on Instagram, and believable. The negative relationships that Remoteness has between Social Comparison and Purchase Intention indicate that in the context of this study, social media influencers are better off showcasing the product itself rather than trying to interact with the product in a creative manner. Additionally, once a social media influencer can produce feelings of Upward Social Comparison amongst either their followers or non-followers, the conversion to Purchase Intentions is enhanced both directly and through feelings on Benign Envy. These two findings are important to both sponsoring brands and social media influencers as both non-followers and followers alike are looking to those in social media content as a means of comparison, and then purchasing what the influencer is using to “get even” in their own social circles. This may mean that influencers should consider what products they choose to incorporate in their feed. Cultivating a feeling of

Upward Social Comparison and Benign Envy could mean that non-followers and followers alike will purchase products based on the mere recommendations of the influencer and not based on the merits of the product itself. This places the burden on the influencer to only promote products that are of high quality as low-quality product experiences may tarnish the reputation of the influencer.

Limitations

The present study is not without several limitations. First, due to the industry of beauty products, the sampling demographics for the influencer study was primarily women. While this type of demographic is common for the beauty industry, future research would benefit from more diverse samples across multiple categories of social media sponsored product. It may be that the product category moderates the relationships within the hypothesized model and may explain why the field data of mostly women produced no method bias where a panel of more men (i.e., the Qualtrics panel data from Study 1) produced suggested common method bias (CMB). CMB is certainly an issue and a limitation for Study 1 but may be explained by male respondents answering questions regarding a women influencer using a beauty product they naturally may not care about. Additionally, the pre-test was conducted on a student sample, which may have produced relationships that are not replicable in real-world situations as student samples can vary from the target population of the study. However, this study focuses primary on social media users, so a student sample is indicative of that population to some extent.

The second limitation surrounds the nature of the data collection for Study 1. The inclusion of the common latent factor produced signs of common method bias. This type

of panel collection of data, while common, is not idea when asking respondents what they think about a fictitious social media sponsored post and their willingness to purchase the fictitious sponsored product. Future research should try and test the proposed model in the current study with real products, with the ability to purchase the product from the sponsored social media post to mitigate the potential confounds that can arise when researchers ask panelists to give their opinions on a fictitious brand and a fictitious scenario. The inclusion of the second field study in the analysis helps confirm the results of the study but could go further in using actual products that can be bought rather than asking the respondents how willing they are to purchase the sponsored product. Additionally, self-selection bias must be considered as the study has no way of confirming that those who follow the influencer and are choosing to take a survey for the influencer are not already socially comparing themselves to and are envious of the influencer. This is important to note because there may be differences in the results from an influencer's "most loyal" followers as compared to their "everyday" followers.

The present study would have benefited by having the influencer post the social media content to their feed rather than to the questionnaire. Once their followers interacted with the content, they then could respond to a series of questions relating to their experience seeing that specific social media post. Capturing data in this manner is more conclusive to the mechanisms within the study. Additionally, the study would have benefitted from partnering with a more diverse group of influencers based on different product categories. Third, Study 1 was conducted with a mock-influencer with panel data serving as the respondents. As a result, the study was limited in its ability to compare non-followers to followers directly. Future research would benefit from creating several

pieces of sponsored content, then paying to have the content advertised to both the influencer's followers and non-followers on both Facebook and Instagram. The paid posts could then link to a survey where respondents were broken into one of four groups, follower-remote, follower-non-remote, non-follower-remote, and non-follower-non-remote to compare the differences from a similar population in the same round of data collection. This type of study would serve as a more robust example of what posts look like on the feed of those who browse social media and would act a more real-world scenario that gained attention of the respondents.

Post-Hoc Analysis

After analyzing and considering the possible sources for the negative relationships associated between Remoteness and both Purchase Intention and Social Comparison, an analysis of each item of Remoteness was conducted to explore what could be contributing to these counterintuitive relationships. At its core, remoteness in the context of the present study concerns the product in the social media post appearing to be out of context with the influencer displaying the sponsored product. The more out of context the product and influencer appear, the more remote, and thus creative, the follower should perceive the social media post. Additionally, and crucially, the viewer must then make the connection between the sponsored product and social media influencer via the text in the description. The text is what bridges the two constructs together, completing the metaphor and producing the "aha" moment for the viewer. In the pre-test and following two studies, this remoteness manipulation was present. However, not every item in the scale from Ang (2000) concerns the present study's definition of remoteness. Out of the six items, only Remoteness 6, "The sponsored social media *post* was Common: Unique"

explicitly hits on the remoteness component of interest in the present study, how creative the Instagram *post* is. All the other remoteness items were prefaced with *"the image was,"* followed by, "Believable: Unbelievable," "Realistic: Unrealistic," "Often/Rarely seen in sponsored Instagram posts," "Was/was not associated to the product advertised," "Occurs/Does not occur with the product naturally," which all touch on the merits of the content, without addressing the post as a whole. This may lead to respondents to only judge the image itself, without ever reading the description. Without the description, the key benefit claim can never complete the metaphor showcased in the post.

In addition to the present study suggesting the need for a more modern, updated scale to properly measure remoteness in the context of social media, the present study also performed a post-hoc analysis of the hypothesized model with Remoteness 6 as a single-item indicator for Remoteness. As shown with Envy in the present study, single-item indicators have the potential to measure more effectively and consistently the construct in question as respondents can identify with and take more time to answer the item (Hoeppner, Kelly, Urbanoski & Slaymaker, 2011). Additionally, the use of a single-item scale in the context of social media research may present a more realistic way of obtaining field data, as the nature of professional panel data is not the same as "everyday people" taking a survey online. Regardless, from a face-validity point of view, it's compelling that Remoteness 6 both targets the construct well and address the main concern of the study.

Post-Hoc PROCESS

The PROCESS model procedure from Study 1 was conducted, but instead of using the entire remoteness scale, only Remoteness 6 was retained in the model. The

independent samples t-test between the remote and non-remote condition of Remoteness 6 produced significant findings at a 0.10 significance level for both the panel ($t = -1.901$, $df = 328$, $p = 0.058$) and field data ($t = -1.664$, $df = 102$, $p = 0.099$) suggesting the manipulations worked as intended given the sample size using a single item. Condition 1 (non-remote) produced a mean of 3.26 (out of five) for the panel data and 3.68 for the field data, followed by condition 2 (remote) producing a mean of 3.66 with the panel data and 4.43 with the field data.

While using Remoteness 6, the panel and influencer dataset produced results more in-line with the hypothesized relationships. For example, Remoteness 6 in the panel and field data is positively related to both Social Comparison and Purchase Intention. This result contrasted H1a and H1b in the main study, but this post-hoc analysis may suggest a different outcome. A similar outcome to Study 1 and Study 2 was observed for the rest of the relationships in the post-hoc analysis. Social Comparison was positively related to Envy, confirming H2, and Envy was positively related to Purchase Intention, confirming H4. However, the interaction between Self-Esteem and the relationship between Social Comparison and Envy was insignificant, showing no support for the moderation hypothesis H3. Table 5.1 and 5.2 show the path relationships and unstandardized regression weights from the PROCESS model for both the panel data and field data while Table 5.2 and 5.3 show the hypotheses and their support.

Table 5.1

Panel Data Remoteness 6 Direct Path Estimates

Structural Path	Unstandardized Regression Weights *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	0.071***
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	0.111***
Social Comparison -> Envy	1.371***
Envy -> Purchase Intention	1.051***
Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	0.051

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 5.2

Panel Data Remoteness 6 Model Conclusion

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Supported
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Supported
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H3	Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	Not Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 5.3

Field Data Remoteness 6 Direct Path Estimates

Structural Path	Unstandardized Regression Weight *(*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001)*
Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	0.137***
Remoteness -> Social Comparison	0.100**
Social Comparison -> Envy	0.226**
Envy -> Purchase Intention	0.381**
Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	-0.006

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Table 5.4

Field Data Remoteness 6 Model Conclusion

Hypothesis	Tested Relationship	Result
H1a	Remoteness -> Purchase Intention	Supported
H1b	Remoteness -> Social Comparison	Supported
H2	Social Comparison -> Envy	Supported
H3	Self Esteem -> Social Comparison/Envy	Not Supported
H4	Envy -> Purchase Intention	Supported

*Note: *p < 0.05 | **p < 0.01 | ***p < 0.00*

Post-Hoc Conclusion

While this post-hoc analysis is not as robust as the main study, there are some interesting findings to be discussed. First, the need for an updated remoteness scale for use within the context of social media marketing is clear. When asking respondents whether the *image* they saw was unbelievable, unrealistic, etc., the key benefit claim in the post description may never be seen and the metaphor may never resolve in the viewer's mind. This disconnection may be due to when the research was published. Ang (2000) produced the initial scale for Remoteness, but Rossiter and Bellman (2005) developed the theoretical support for the Remote-Conveyor Model which included the key benefit claim component to the remoteness construct. Since 2005, like what was shown in Althuizen (2017), studies using the Remote-Conveyor Model do so with a panel of individuals evaluating advertisements, and not via an online survey format. Thus, to properly examine the construct in a social media context, research may need a new remoteness scale to include wording that provokes the search for the key benefit claim. In other words, the items may need to change to indicate that the entire post should be considered when making a judgement on the merits of the sponsored post.

As demonstrated in the present study, the structure of traditional advertising and sponsored social media posts are similar, however, the nature of how we consume these two mediums is quite different. When viewing a magazine, for example, physical or virtual, the intent is to read the contents within. Thus, it may not be uncommon for individuals to read the full-page advertisements because the original intent of the viewer was to read the contents within the magazine. However, when viewing a sponsored post on Instagram, for example, the main component are the images shown to the user. In fact, on mobile devices, only the first three lines of text in the description are shown to the viewer, followed by a small "more" text line where, when clicked, will drop-down the rest of the description. Mobile users may not be as inclined to search for more explanation when viewing content unless prompted, especially when the post is pushed to them via paid sponsorship. This may help explain why when pre-testing the Ang (2000) remoteness scale, Remoteness 6 was the only item positively related to the outcome variables (i.e., Social Comparison, Envy, Purchase Intention). This may be because Remoteness 6 concerns the entire social media post, and not just the image itself.

The post-hoc findings may suggest that, when prompted, users will evaluate a sponsored post from image to description and the Remote-Conveyor Model works as theorized. However, when not prompted, only the image is evaluated, and the key benefit claim is missed, so the viewer never completes the metaphors intended by the content creator. Future research may benefit from exploring a 2 (remote/non remote) x 2 (prompted/not prompted) field experiment where the followers of an influencer are prompted to explore the entire post via either an on-image prompt, like an arrow pointing to the description, or via the first three lines of the description, "click to read more." This

proposed experiment way give insight on how users consume the content depicted online, both remote and non-remote.

REFERENCES

Aaker, D. A. (1975). ADMOD: An advertising decision model. *Journal of Marketing Research*, *12*(1), 37-45.

Abidin, C. (2015). *Communicative intimacies: Influencers and perceived interconnectedness*.

Abidin, C. (2016). *Please subscribe: Influencers, social media, and the commodification of everyday life* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Western Australia).

Althuizen, N. (2017). Communicating a key benefit claim creatively and effectively through five conveyor properties. *Psychology & Marketing*, *34*(1), 5-18.

Ahmad, I. (2017, August 2). *The rise of influencer marketing [infographic]*. Social Media Today. https://www.socialmediatoday.com/social-business/rise-influencer-marketing-infographic

Allen, Juliann. (2020). *Dissertation*. 873. https://digitalcommons.latech.edu/dissertations/873

Anderson, J. C., & Gerbing, D. W. (1988). Structural equation modeling in practice: A review and recommended two-step approach. *Psychological Bulletin*, *103*(3), 411.

Ang, K. A. L. (1997). *Towards a theory of creativity in print advertising: The case of the remote associate matching model*.

Ang, L. (2000). Creativity in print advertising: A test of the remote associate matching model. *Australasian Marketing Journal*, *8*(1), 31-44.

Ang, L. (2014). *Principles of integrated marketing communications*. Cambridge University Press.

Appel, H., Gerlach, A. L., & Crusius, J. (2016). The interplay between Facebook use, social comparison, envy, and depression. *Current opinion in psychology*, *9*, 44-49.

Au-Yong-Oliveira, M., Cardoso, A. S., Goncalves, M., Tavares, A., & Branco, F. (2019, June). Strain Effect-A Case Study About the Power of Nano-Influencers. In *2019 14th Iberian conference on information systems and technologies (CISTI)* (pp. 1-5). IEEE.

Audrezet, A., de Kerviler, G., & Moulard, J. G. (2020). Authenticity under threat: When social media influencers need to go beyond self-presentation. Journal of Business Research, 117, 557-569.

Backaler, J., & Shankman, P. (2018). Digital influence. Macmillan.

Bagozzi, R. P., & Yi, Y. (1988). On the evaluation of structural equation models. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 16(1), 74-94.

Bailis, R., (2019). The state of influencer marketing: 10 influencer marketing statistics to inform where you invest. Big Commerce. Accessed 13/07/2019, https://www.bigcom- merce.com/blog/influencer-marketing-statistics/#key-takeaways-on-influencer-mar- keting-for-2019.

Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). Social learning theory (Vol. 1). Prentice Hall: Englewood cliffs.

Belk, R. (2011). Benign envy. AMS Review, 1(3-4), 117-134.

Belanche, D., Flavián, M., & Ibáñez-Sánchez, S. (2020). Followers' reactions to influencers' Instagram posts. Spanish Journal of Marketing-ESIC.

Berg, M., & Brown, A. (2021, August 11). The highest-paid YouTube stars of 2020. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/maddieberg/2020/12/18/the-highest-paid-youtube-stars-of-2020/?sh=25e11a5e6e50.

Bergagna, E., & Tartaglia, S. (2018). Self-esteem, social comparison, and Facebook use. Europe's Journal of Psychology, 14(4), 831.

Bergman, S., Fearrington, M., Davenport, S. and Bergman, J. (2011), Millennials, narcissism, and social networking: What narcissists do on social networking sites and why. Personality and Individual Differences, 50(5), 706-711.

Bernazzani, S. (2017). Micro-influencer marketing: a comprehensive guide. Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management, 11, 194-231.

Biaudet, S. (2017). Influencer marketing as a marketing tool: The process of creating an influencer marketing campaign on Instagram.

Blackwell, M. (2021). Date night in brought to you by @deliverydotcom. Instagram. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSHflGhrZ8q/.

Blomfield Neira, C. J., & Barber, B. L. (2014). Social networking site use: Linked to adolescents' social self-concept, self-esteem, and depressed mood. Australian Journal of Psychology, 66(1), 56-64.

Booth, N., & Matic, J. A. (2011). Mapping and leveraging influencers in social media to shape corporate brand perceptions. Corporate Communications: An International Journal.

Brasil, F. C. B. (2021). Nivea for men - “rat”. AdForum. https://www.adforum.com/creative-work/ad/player/34481935/rat/nivea-for-men

Breidenthal, A. P., Liu, D., Bai, Y., & Mao, Y. (2020). The dark side of creativity: Coworker envy and ostracism as a response to employee creativity. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 161, 242-254.

Britt, R. K., Hayes, J. L., Britt, B. C., & Park, H. (2020). Too big to sell? A computational analysis of network and content characteristics among mega and micro beauty and fashion social media influencers. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 20(2), 111-118.

Brooks, A. (2019, May 9). [Timeline] A brief history of influencers. Social Media Today. https://www.socialmediatoday.com/news/timeline-a-brief-history-of-influencers/554377/

Brown, D., & Fiorella, S. (2013). Influence marketing: How to create, manage, and measure brand influencers in social media marketing. Que Publishing.

Brown, D., & Hayes, N. (2008). Influencer marketing. Routledge.

Bund: Grey seal. RSS. (2011, June 1). https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/bund_grey_seal

Burroughs, J. E., Dahl, D. W., Moreau, C. P., Chattopadhyay, A., & Gorn, G. J. (2011). Facilitating and rewarding creativity during new product development. Journal of Marketing, 75(4), 53-67.

Buunk, A. P., & Gibbons, F. X. (2007). Social comparison: The end of a theory and the emergence of a field. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 102(1), 3-21.

Chae, J. (2017). Virtual makeover: Selfie-taking and social media use increase selfie-editing frequency through social comparison. Computers in Human Behavior, 66, 370-376.

Chae, J. (2018). Explaining females’ envy toward social media influencers. Media Psychology, 21(2), 246-262.

Chen, J., Yang, X., & Smith, R. E. (2016). The effects of creativity on advertising wear-in and wear-out. Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, 44(3), 334-349.

Childers, C., & Boatwright, B. (2020). Do digital natives recognize digital influence? Generational differences and understanding of social media influencers. Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising, 1-18.

Choi, A. (2016), Fashion photography on social media: insights from Hong Kong fashion image producers, International Journal of Management and Applied Research, 3 (4), 130-144. doi: 10.18646/2056.34.16-011

Choi, A. (2020). Social comparison in fashion blogging: 'Creative self' as the new genre in fashion communication. Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal.

Cialdini, R. B., & James, L. (2009). Influence: Science and practice (Vol. 4). Pearson Education.

Claudia196, freelancing username, December 16, 2021.

Cocu, A., Pecheanu, E., & Susnea, I. (2015). Stimulating creativity through collaboration in an innovation laboratory. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 182, 173-178.

Cooper, P. (2020, July 29). 43 social media advertising stats that matter to marketers in 2020. Social Media Marketing & Management Dashboard. https://blog.hootsuite.com/social-media-advertising-stats/.

Coopersmith, S. (1967). The antecedents of self-esteem San Francisco. H Freeman and Company.

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: The impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. International Journal of Advertising, 36(5), 798-828.

De Veirman, M., & Hudders, L. (2020). Disclosing sponsored Instagram posts: the role of material connection with the brand and message-sidedness when disclosing covert advertising. International Journal of Advertising, 39(1), 94-130.

Dhanik, T. (2016). Micro, not macro: Rethinking influencer marketing. Retrieved from https://adage.com/article/ digitalnext/micro-macro-influencer-marketing-kim-kardashian/307118

DiStefano, C., & Motl, R. W. (2009). Personality correlates of method effects due to negatively worded items on the Rosenberg Self-Esteem scale. Personality and Individual Differences, 46(3), 309-313.

DMI. Digital Marketing Institute. (2021). https://digitalmarketinginstitute.com/blog/20-influencer-marketing-statistics-that-will-surprise-you

Douglas, M., & Isherwood, B. (2021). The world of goods. Routledge.

Duan, J. (2021). The Impact of Positive Purchase-Centered UGC on Audience's Purchase Intention: Roles of Tie Strength, Benign Envy and Purchase Type. Journal of Internet Commerce, 1-25.

El-Murad, J., & West, D. C. (2004). The definition and measurement of creativity: What do we know? Journal of Advertising Research, 44(2), 188-201.

Estes, Z., Gibbert, M., Guest, D., & Mazursky, D. (2012). A dual-process model of brand extension: Taxonomic feature-based and thematic relation-based similarity independently drive brand extension evaluation. Journal of Consumer Psychology, 22(1), 86-101.

Eyal, G. (2018). Why influencers fail to disclose commercial relationships and the brands that enable them. Adweek, Retrieved from https://www.adweek.com/digital/why-influencers-fail-to-disclose-commercial-relationships-and-the-brands-that-enable-them/.

Ewers, N. L. (2017). # Sponsored–influencer marketing on instagram: An analysis of the effects of sponsorship disclosure, product placement, type of influencer and their interplay on consumer responses (Master's thesis, University of Twente).

Fernandes, A. F. D. R. (2018). Understanding influencer endorsement in the luxury sector (Doctoral dissertation).

Fertik, M. (2020, July 2). Why is influencer marketing such a big deal right now? Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelfertik/2020/07/02/why-is-influencer-marketing-such-a-big-deal-right-now/?sh=70c2a9d975f3

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. Human Relations, 7(2), 117-140.

Forest, A. L., & Wood, J. V. (2012). When social networking is not working: Individuals with low self-esteem recognize but do not reap the benefits of self-disclosure on Facebook. Psychological Science, 23(3), 295-302.

Freberg, K., Graham, K., McGaughey, K., & Freberg, L. A. (2011). Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality. Public Relations Review, 37(1), 90-92.

Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The persuasion knowledge model: How people cope with persuasion attempts. Journal of Consumer Research, 21(1), 1-31.

Ganegoda, D. B., & Bordia, P. (2019). I can be happy for you, but not all the time: A contingency model of envy and positive empathy in the workplace. Journal of Applied Psychology, 104(6), 776.

Garner-Purkis, Z. (2020, August 5). Cristiano Ronaldo's Instagram success: A glimpse into how social media is changing soccer. Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/zakgarnerpurkis/2020/08/05/evidence-cristiano-ronaldos-instagram-is-more-important-than-his-soccer/?sh=57ddc10f296d

Ge, J., & Gretzel, U. (2018). Emoji rhetoric: a social media influencer perspective. Journal of Marketing Management, 34(15-16), 1272-1295

Geyser, W. (2021, August 17). What is an Influencer? - social media Influencers defined [Updated 2021]. Influencer Marketing Hub. https://influencermarketinghub.com/what-is-an-influencer/

Gibbons, F. X., & Buunk, B. P. (1999). Individual differences in social comparison: development of a scale of social comparison orientation. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 76(1), 129.

Gitlin, J. (2021). 74% of people are tired of social media ADS-BUT they're effective. SurveyMonkey. https://www.surveymonkey.com/curiosity/74-of-people-are-tired-of-social-media-ads-but-theyre-effective/

Gladwell, M. (2011). From innovation to revolution-do social media made protests possible: An absence of evidence. Foreign Aff., 90, 153.

Global Consumer Insights Survey. (2019.). It's time for a consumer-centered metric: introducing 'return on experience.' pwc.com. https://www.pwc.com/cl/es/publicaciones/assets/2019/report.pdf

Greenberger, E., Chen, C., Dmitrieva, J., & Farruggia, S. P. (2003). Item-wording and the dimensionality of the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale: Do they matter? Personality and Individual Differences, 35(6), 1241-1254.

Guttmann, A. (2019, March 28). U.S. advertising spending 2015-2022. Statista. https://www.statista.com/statistics/272314/advertising-spending-in-the-us/

Hair Jr, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., Anderson, R. E., Black, W. C., & Anderson, R. E. (2019). Multivariate data analysis. Cengage Learning.

Harrison, K. 2017. 'Top 10 trends that will transform digital marketing in 2017.' https://www.forbes.com/sites/kateharrison/2017/01/09/top -10trendsthat-will-transform-digital-marketing-in-2017/ #7e6d507d3bf5

Hayes, Andrew F. Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach. The Guilford Press, 2022.

Hayes, A. F. (2018). Introduction to mediation, moderation, and conditional process analysis: A regression-based approach. Guilford publications.

Hayes, A. F., Montoya, A. K., & Rockwood, N. J. (2017). The analysis of mechanisms and their contingencies: PROCESS versus structural equation modeling. Australasian Marketing Journal, 25(1), 76-81.

Hayes A. F. (2013) PROCESS: A versatile computational tool for observed variable mediation, moderation, and conditional process modeling. Available at: http://www.afhayes.com/public/process2012.pdf

Hayes, A. F. (2012). PROCESS: A versatile computational tool for observed variable mediation, moderation, and conditional process modeling.

Heatherton, T. F., & Wyland, C. L. (2003). Assessing self-esteem.

Hinton, A. (2014). Understanding context: Environment, language, and information architecture. O'Reilly Media, Inc.

Holmes, T. E. (2018, March 29). Micro-influencers: How small businesses sidestep traditional advertising to grow sales. USA Today. https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/small-business/2018/03/29/micro-influencers-how-small-businesses-sidestep-traditional-advertising-grow-sales/465217002/

Holmes, J. W., & McNeal, R. S. (2018). Social Media Use and Political Mobilization. International Journal of Public Administration in the Digital Age, 5(4), 50-60.

Hook Agency. (2021, August 2). Does she or doesn't she - Clairol classic hair coloring advertisement. https://hookagency.com/blog/does-she-doesnt-she/

Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB). 2018. Inside Influence Accessed February 1, 2018. https://www.iab.com/wpcontent/uploads/2018/01/IAB_Influencer_Marketing_for_Publishers_2018-01-25.pdf

Ioanid, A., Militaru, G., & Mihai, P. (2015). Social media strategies for organizations using influencers' power. European Scientific Journal, 11(10), 139-143.

Jessevanvliet, Freelancing username, December 4, 2021.

Jhang, J. H., Grant, S. J., & Campbell, M. C. (2012). Get it? Got it. Good! Enhancing new product acceptance by facilitating resolution of extreme incongruity. Journal of Marketing Research, 49(2), 247-259.

Kaval, Kaan. (2019, October 31). 10 creative Volkswagen ads that will make you amaze! Marketing Birds. https://themarketingbirds.com/10-creative-volkswagen-ads-that-will-make-you-amaze/

Kay, S., Mulcahy, R., & Parkinson, J. (2020). When less is more: The impact of macro and micro social media influencers' disclosure. Journal of Marketing Management, 36(3-4), 248-278.

Khamis, S., Ang, L., & Welling, R. (2017). Self-branding, 'micro-celebrity' and the rise of social media influencers. Celebrity Studies, 8(2), 191-208.

Ki, C. W. C., & Kim, Y. K. (2019). The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: The role of consumers' desire to mimic. Psychology & Marketing, 36(10), 905-922.

Kim, D. Y., & Kim, H. Y. (2021). Influencer advertising on social media: The multiple inference model on influencer-product congruence and sponsorship disclosure. Journal of Business Research, 130, 405-415.

Kim, S., Jiang, J. Y., & Wang, W. (2021, March). Discovering undisclosed paid partnership on social media via aspect-attentive sponsored post learning. In Proceedings of the 14th ACM International Conference on Web Search and Data Mining (pp. 319-327).

Kitchen, P. J., Kerr, G., Schultz, D. E., McColl, R., & Pals, H. (2014). The elaboration likelihood model: review, critique and research agenda. European Journal of Marketing.

Kline, R. B. (2011). Principles and practice of structural equation modeling (3rd ed.). Guilford publications.

Koslow, S., Sasser, S. L., & Riordan, E. A. (2006). Do marketers get the advertising they need or the advertising they deserve? Agency views of how clients influence creativity. Journal of Advertising, 35(3), 81-101.

Kroeber-Riel, W. (1993). Bildkommunikation. Vahlen.

Kulkarni, S. (2019, March 13). The supreme theory of Hype branding. Medium. https://medium.com/predict/https-medium-com-strategy-insider-the-supreme-theory-of-hype-branding-af3f9acd7fe

Kumar, V., & Mirchandani, R. (2012). Increasing the ROI of social media marketing. MIT Sloan Management Review, 54(1), 55.

Kusumasondjaja, S., & Tjiptono, F. (2019). Endorsement and visual complexity in food advertising on Instagram. Internet Research.

Lambrou, M. (Ed.). (2020). Narrative retellings: stylistic approaches. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Lagerwerf, L., & Meijers, A. (2008). Openness in metaphorical and straightforward advertisements: Appreciation effects. Journal of Advertising, 37(2), 19-30.

Latif, K., Weng, Q., Pitafi, A. H., Ali, A., Siddiqui, A. W., Malik, M. Y., & Latif, Z. (2021). Social comparison as a double-edged sword on social media: The role of envy type and online social identity. Telematics and Informatics, 56, 101470

Leary, M. R., Tambor, E. S., Terdal, S. K., & Downs, D. L. (1995). Self-esteem as an interpersonal monitor: The sociometer hypothesis. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 68(3), 518.

Leng, G.S., Lada, S. and Muhammad, M.Z. (2011), "Adoption in Malaysia using technology acceptance model (TAM), theory of planned behavior (TPB), and intrinsic motivation", Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce, 16(2), www.arraydev.com/commerce/jibc/2011-08/Mohd%20Zulkifli.pdf

Lee, S., & Kim, E. (2020). Influencer marketing on Instagram: How sponsorship disclosure, influencer credibility, and brand credibility impact the effectiveness of Instagram promotional post. Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, 11(3), 232-249.

Lim, X. J., Radzol, A. M., Cheah, J., & Wong, M. W. (2017). The impact of social media influencers on purchase intention and the mediation effect of customer attitude. Asian Journal of Business Research, 7(2), 19-36.

Lin, H. C., & Chang, C. M. (2018). What motivates health information exchange in social media? The roles of the social cognitive theory and perceived interactivity. Information & Management, 55(6), 771-780.

Lina, D. (2014, January 1). 33 powerful and CREATIVE print Ads that'll make you look twice. Bored Panda. https://www.boredpanda.com/creative-print-ads/?utm_source=google&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=organic

Lou, C., & Yuan, S. (2019). Influencer marketing: how message value and credibility affect consumer trust of branded content on social media. Journal of Interactive Advertising, 19(1), 58-73.

Lungeanu, M. I., & Parisi, L. (2018). What makes a fashion blogger on Instagram? The Romanian case study. *Observatorio*.

Martino, R. (2021). My 31st birthday is coming up so soon! *Instagram*. https://www.instagram.com/p/CSIz6NTNjwP/

Marwick, A. E. (2015). Instafame: Luxury selfies in the attention economy. *Public Culture, 27*(1), 137-160.

Marwick, A. E., & Boyd, D. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society, 13*(1), 114-133.

Massey, G. R., & Dawes, P. L. (2007). Personal characteristics, trust, conflict, and effectiveness in marketing/sales working relationships. *European Journal of Marketing*.

Mednick, M. T. (1963). Research creativity in psychology graduate students. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 27*(3), 265.

Morgan, S. E., & Reichert, T. (1999). The message is in the metaphor: Assessing the comprehension of metaphors in advertisements. *Journal of Advertising, 28*(4), 1-12.

Munnukka, J., Uusitalo, O., & Toivonen, H. (2016). Credibility of a peer endorser and advertising effectiveness. *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.

Musson, D. (2019). 18. Expertise in Your Ears; Why You Should Jump on the Podcasting Bandwagon. *Social Media in Higher Education: Case Studies, Reflections and Analysis*.

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: theory and practice*, SAGE.

O. Belknap. (2021). *Personal communication.*

Park, J., Kim, B., & Park, S. (2021). Understanding The Behavioral Consequences Of Upward Social Comparison On Social Networking Sites: The mediating role of emotions. *Sustainability, 13*(11), 5781.

Parnes, S. J. (1961). Effects of extended effort in creative problem solving. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 52*, 117-122.

Pei, A. (2019, April 14). This esports Giant draws in more viewers than the Super bowl, and it's expected to get even bigger. *CNBC*. https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/14/league-of-legends-gets-more-viewers-than-super-bowlwhats-coming-next.html

Peppler, K. A., & Solomou, M. (2011). Building creativity: Collaborative learning and creativity in social media environments. *On the Horizon*.

Petty, R. E., Cacioppo, J. T., & Schumann, D. (1983). Central and peripheral routes to advertising effectiveness: The moderating role of involvement. *Journal of Consumer Research, 10*(2), 135-146.

Pocheptova, A., Labroo, A. A., & Dhar, R. (2010). Making prod- UCTS feel special: When metacognitive difficulty enhances evaluation. *Journal of Marketing Research, 47*, 1059-1069.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2012). Sources of method bias in social science research and recommendations on how to control it. *Annual Review of Psychology, 63*, 539-569.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J. Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: a critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 88*(5), 879.

Preacher, K. J., Rucker, D. D., & Hayes, A. F. (2007). Addressing moderated mediation hypotheses: Theory, methods, and prescriptions. *Multivariate Behavioral Research, 42*(1), 185-227.

Rasmussen, L. (2018). Parasocial interaction in the digital age: An examination of relationship building and the effectiveness of YouTube celebrities. *The Journal of Social Media in Society, 7*(1), 280-294.

Reinartz, W., & Saffert, P. (2013). Creativity in advertising: When it works and when it doesn't. *Harvard Business Review, 91*(6), 106-111.

Richards, I.A. 1936. *The philosophy of rhetoric*. Clarendon Press.

Rietzschel E.F., Nijstad B.A., Stoebe W., 2007, Relative accessibility of domain knowledge and creativity: The effects of knowledge activation on the quantity and originality of generated ideas, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 43*: 933-946.

Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. Basic Books.

Rossiter, J. R. (2008). Defining the necessary components of creative, effective ads. *Journal of Advertising, 37*(4), 139-144.

Rossiter, J. R., & Bellman, S. (2005). *Marketing communications*. Pearson/Prentice Hall.

S. Awe (2021). *Personal communication.*

Säinas, S. (2019, August 24). Influencer with 2.6M Followers failed to Sell 36 T-Shirts. *Medium*. https://medium.com/@siimulation/influencer-with-2-6m-followers-failed-to-sell-36-t-shirts-2f72e0d408a1

Salvation, M. D., & Sorooshian, S. (2018). The role of social media marketing and product involvement on consumers' purchase intentions of smartphones. *Computational Methods in Social Sciences, 6*(1), 65-81.

SanMiguel, P., & Sádaba, T. (2018). Nice to be a fashion blogger, hard to be influential: An analysis based on personal characteristics, knowledge criteria, and social factors. *Journal of Global Fashion Marketing, 9*(1), 40-58.

Saul, H., 2016. Instafamous: Meet the social media influencers redefining celebrity [online]. *The Independent*. Available from: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/instagram-model-natasha-oakley-iskra- lawrence-kayla-itsines-kendall-jenner-jordyn-woods-a6907551.html [Accessed 18 August, 2021]

Schoeck, H. (1969). *Envy*. Liberty Press.

Schumacker, R. E., & Lomax, R. G. (2004). *A beginner's guide to structural equation modeling* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Sgourev, S. V., & Althuizen, N. (2014). "Notable" or "Not Able" when are acts of inconsistency rewarded? *American Sociological Review, 79*(2), 282-302.

Smith, K. (2020). 57 fascinating and Incredible YouTube statistics. *Brandwatch*. https://www.brandwatch.com/blog/youtube-stats/

Smith, R. E., MacKenzie, S. B., Yang, X., Buchholz, L. M., & Darley, W. K. (2007). Modeling the determinants and effects of creativity in advertising. *Marketing Science, 26*(6), 819-833.

Senft, T. M. (2008). *Camgirls: Celebrity & community in the age of social networks*. Lang.

Singh, J., Crisafulli, B., & Xue, M. T. (2020). 'To trust or not to trust': the impact of social media influencers on the reputation of corporate brands in crisis. *Journal of Business Research, 119*, 464-480.

Solis, B., & Webber, A. (2012). *The rise of digital influence*. Altimeter Group.

Song, S. Y., Cho, E., & Kim, Y. K. (2017). Personality factors and flow affecting opinion leadership in social media. *Personality and Individual Differences, 114*, 16-23.

Spears, N., & Singh, S. N. (2004). Measuring attitude toward the brand and purchase intentions. *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising*, *26*(2), 53–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/10641734.2004.10505164

Stearns, P. N. (1999). *The battleground of desire: The struggle for self-control in modern America*. New York University Press.

Steers, M. L. N., Wickham, R. E., & Acitelli, L. K. (2014). Seeing everyone else's highlight reels: How Facebook usage is linked to depressive symptoms. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 33*(8), 701-731.

Stubb, C., & Colliander, J. (2019). "This is not sponsored content"–The effects of impartiality disclosure and e-commerce landing pages on consumer responses to social media influencer posts. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *98*, 210-222.

Sudha, M., & Sheena, K. (2017). Impact of influencers in consumer decision process: the fashion industry. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management, 14*(3), 14-30.

Sung, B., & Phau, I. (2019). When pride meets envy: Is social superiority portrayal in luxury advertising perceived as prestige or arrogance. *Psychology & Marketing*, *36*(2), 113-119.

Syrdal, H. A., & Briggs, E. (2018). Engagement with social media content: A qualitative exploration. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *26*(1-2), 4-22.

Taylor, D. G., & Strutton, D. (2016). Does Facebook usage lead to conspicuous consumption? The role of envy, narcissism and self-promotion. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*.

Tesser, A. (1988). Toward a self-evaluation maintenance model of social behavior. In *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, *21*, 181-227. Academic Press.

Tie, C.Y., Birks, M., & Francis, K. (2019). *Grounded theory research: A design framework for novice researchers*. SAGE, 7, 2050312118822927.

Tilters. (2021, March 15). Why micro-influencers are a social media Marketing imperative for 2017. *The Tilt*. https://www.thetilt.com/content/micro-influencers-social-media-marketing

Time+Tide. (2020, January 3). The best watch ads of the last 50 years. *Time and Tide Watches*. https://timeandtidewatches.com/the-best-watch-ads-of-the-last-50-years/

Top 5 INFLUENCER Fails: When influencer marketing goes wrong. *Mediakix*. (2021, March 26). https://mediakix.com/blog/influencer-marketing-fails/

Urgo. (n.d.). Top 50 YOUTUBERS sorted by subscribers - SOCIALBLADE YouTube Stats: YouTube statistics. Top 50 YouTubers sorted by Subscribers - *Socialblade YouTube Stats | YouTube Statistics*. https://socialblade.com/youtube/top/50/mostsubscribed

Van den Bulte, C., & Joshi, Y. V. (2007). New product diffusion with influentials and imitators. *Marketing Science, 26*(3), 400-421.

Van de Ven, N., Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2011). The envy premium in product evaluation. *Journal of Consumer Research, 37*(6), 984–998.

Vogel, E. A., Rose, J. P., Roberts, L. R., & Eckles, K. (2014). Social comparison, social media, and self-esteem. *Psychology of Popular Media Culture, 3*(4), 206.

Volkswagen: Park ASSIST Technology, Portaloo-hearse. *RSS*. (2012, November 1). https://www.adsoftheworld.com/media/print/volkswagen_park_assist_technology_portalooheare

Vpreneurs85 (2021). *Freelancing username*.

Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: a systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*.

Weiss, R. (2014). Influencer marketing. How word-of-mouth marketing can strengthen your organization's brand. *Marketing Health Services, 34*(1), 16-17.

West, D., Koslow, S., & Kilgour, M. (2019). Future directions for advertising creativity research. *Journal of Advertising, 48*(1), 102-114.

Windahl, S., & McQuail, D. (1993). *Communication models for the study of mass communications*. Longman.

Wong, K. (2016, June 20). The explosive growth of influencer marketing and what it means for you. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/kylewong/2014/09/10/the-explosive-growth-of-influencer-marketing-and-what-it-means-for-you/

Xu, X., & Pratt, S. (2018). Social media influencers as endorsers to promote travel destinations: an application of self-congruence theory to the Chinese Generation Y. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing, 35*(7), 958-972.

Yang, X., Mao, H., Jia, L., & Bublitz, M. G. (2019). A sweet romance: Divergent effects of romantic stimuli on the consumption of sweets. *Journal of Consumer Research, 45*(6), 1213-1229.

Yao, F., & Shao, J. (2021). How highly creative product descriptions lead to attitude change: a dual-process model. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology, 33*(2), 207-227.

Yao, F. S., Shao, J. B., & Zhang, H. (2021). Is Creative Description Always Effective in Purchase Intention? The Construal Level Theory as a Moderating Effect. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*.

Yesiloglu, S., & Costello, J. (Eds.). (2021). *Influencer marketing: Building brand communities and engagement*. Routledge.

Zahay, D. L., & Roberts, M. L. (2018). *Internet marketing: Integrating online and offline strategies in a digital environment.* Cengage.

Zeljko, D., Jakovic, B., & Strugar, I. (2018). New methods of online advertising: Social media influencers. *Annals of DAAAM & Proceedings, 29.*

End Note: “Large Social Media Influencer” chose to remain anonymous throughout the course of our interview which took place via Zoom on May 6, 2021.

APPENDIX A

MANIPULATIONS

Survey Manipulations

Social Media Definition

Please read the following definition of a social media influencer:

> **"... a person who has influence on individuals and their (buying) decisions within digital communication platforms"** *(Yesiloglu and Costello (2020).*

Please take a moment to view the following sponsored social media post on Instagram.

Influencer Data Non-Remote Condition

Qualtrics Data Non-Remote Condition

Influencer Data Remote Condition

Qualtrics Data Remote Condition

APPENDIX B

MEASUREMENT SCALES

Upward Social Comparison
(Gibbons & Buunk, 1999; Steers, Wickham & Acitelli, 2014)

When viewing the sponsored Instagram post…

1. I found myself identifying with the social media influencer in the photo
2. I found myself being a lot like the social media influencer in the photo
3. I found myself having a lot in common with the social media influencer in the photo
4. I compared how I am doing socially (e.g., social skills, popularity) with the social media influencer in the photo
5. I found myself wanting to be as popular as the social media influencer in the photo
6. I compared my accomplishments with those of the social media influencer in the photo

Benign and Malicious Envy
(Sing and Ang, 2020)

How much did you believe the social media influencer deserved their good fortune?

1. On a bipolar scale from -3 (extremely undeserved) to +3 (extremely deserved). Deserving (Benign) -> Undeserving (Malicious).

Purchase Intentions
(Spears and Sing, 2004)

Please describe your overall feelings about the sponsored item…

1. I would buy the product
2. I intend to buy the product in the future
3. I have a very high interest in purchasing the product
4. I am going to purchase the product
5. I will probably end up buying the product

Perceived Level of Remoteness
(Ang, 2000)

All the questions are averaged together to form "remoteness".

Please answer the following questions based on the sponsored social media post you just saw:

1. Believable: Unbelievable
2. Realistic: Unrealistic
3. Often Seen in Sponsored Instagram Posts: Was Rarely Seen in Sponsored Instagram Posts
4. Was Associated to The Product Advertised: Was Not Associated to The Product Advertised
5. Occurs with The Product Naturally: Does Not Occur with The Product Naturally

The social media post was...

6. Common: Unique

Self-Esteem
(Rosenberg, 1979)

Please record the appropriate answer for each item…

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself
2. At times I think I am no good at all ®
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people
5. I feel I do not have much to be proud of ®
6. I certainly feel useless at times ®
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth
8. I wish I could have more respect for myself ®
9. All in all, I am inclined to think that I am a failure ®
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself

APPENDIX C

HUMAN USE APPROVAL LETTER

LOUISIANA TECH
UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF SPONSORED PROJECTS

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mr. Louis Zmich
Dr. Laura Flurry

FROM: Dr. Richard Kordal, Director of Intellectual Property & Commercialization (OIPC)
rkordal@latech.edu

SUBJECT: **HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW**

DATE: October 22, 2021

In order to facilitate your project, an **EXPEDITED REVIEW** has been done for your proposed study entitled:

"What Do Hair Products Have to Do with A Waterfall? The Role of Remoteness, Social Comparison, and Envy in Sponsored Social Media Content Effectiveness."

HUC 22-032

The proposed study's revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.

Projects should be renewed annually. ***This approval was finalized on October 22, 2021 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project continues beyond October 22, 2022.*** **ANY CHANGES** to your protocol procedures, including minor changes, should be reported immediately to the IRB for approval before implementation. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of Sponsored Projects.

You are requested to maintain written records of your procedures, data collected, and subjects involved. These records will need to be available upon request during the conduct of the study and retained by the university for three years after the conclusion of the study. If changes occur in recruiting of subjects, informed consent process or in your research protocol, or if

unanticipated problems should arise it is the Researchers responsibility to notify the Office of Sponsored Projects or IRB in writing. The project should be discontinued until modifications can be reviewed and approved.