Social Media User-Influencer Congruity:
An Analysis of Social Media Platforms Parasocial Relationships

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores and inspects the effect of user-influencer congruence on social media platforms para-social relationships and consumer brand engagement (COBRA). In addition, the paper inspects the influence of para-social relationships on consumers brand in addition to the influence of social media platform type in moderating the effect of personality on para-social relationships and COBRA. A conceptual framework is developed to demonstrate the proposed relationships. Data was collected using online questionnaires, with 180 valid responses. The results suggest that user-influencer personality congruence is a salient predictor of para-social relationships and COBRA and that para-social relationship(s) have a substantial impact on customer brand engagement. Nevertheless, the results also indicated that social media platform type do not influence the relationship between congruity and para-social relationships or COBRA.

KEYWORDS

Beauty Industry, Celebrity Endorsements, Customer Engagement, Influencer Marketing, Para Social Interaction Theory, Self-Congruity Theory, Social Media Influencer

1. INTRODUCTION

The evolution of the internet, as well as IT and the transformation of the Web Wide Web, changed the method in which customers choose to link, communicate and interact with each other. Social networking sites (SNSs), defined as media consisting of several actors who build ties and form relationships among each other, have provided convenient platforms for users to access and communicate information effortlessly (Goldenberg et al., 2009, Wallace, Buil & Chernatony, 2017). Boyd & Ellison (2007) define social networking sites as a "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p: 211). Similarly, social media has been explained as a collection of IT, which enable communications and interacting (Kapoor et al., 2017). The evolving nature, as well as the up-and-coming reach of SNS, has increased the social media adoption rate. This has not only led to an increasing number of users but also a range of platform

options being available to users such as LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, Instagram, WeChat, QQ, Twitter, Tumblr, Qzone, YouTube, Tik Tok, Sina Weibo, Reddit, Snapchat, Viber, Baidu Tieba, Pinterest, etc.

In the context of marketing, SNSs have created a win-win situation benefiting both customers as well as marketers (Hudson et al., 2016). Specifically, customers are a click away from satisfying their needs. In contrast, marketers and companies use different social media tools as a crucial medium for creating and delivering marketing messages and maintaining social relationships with customers, thus enhancing overall satisfaction (Gu & Ye, 2013). As a result, the convenience of ongoing interactions between the customers and marketers over these SNSs have substantially transformed consumers' behaviour and attitudes, giving them the authority to be the decision-makers for a brand. Therefore, SNSs seemingly play the role of facilitators for customers in today's social ecosystem (Munzel & Kunz, 2014; Pagani, Hofacker & Goldsmith, 2011).

Consequently, customers have now metamorphosed from mere receivers of a brand's merchandise to substantial co-creators in the value chain, which lead to the rise of social media influencers (SMIs) or micro-celebrities. SMIs have built a 'considerable community of social media users following them (De Veirman et al., 2017), who credits SMIs as trusted opinion leaders originating from 'people like me'. These micro-celebrities are comparatively more accessible, real and relatable than the traditional celebrities because of the confidential information they choose to share about the minute details of their lives on their social media profiles (Schau & Gilly, 2003). SMIs are defined as highly influential public figures with a considerable number of followers throughout various SM platforms (Varsamis, 2018). Several studies have also addressed these influential people as 'human brands' who can be defined as famous personalities used for marketing efforts (Close et al., 2011). The reviews and opinions given by a consumer have such immense reach and dominance over other consumers that have led to the abstraction of influencer marketing in the world of business strategies (Yusuf et al., 2018).

Considering this, conducting marketing activities through influencers can be perceived as a "form of marketing in which marketers select and finance SMIs to build and endorse their brand image in the minds of the influencer and the followers of these influencers" (Yodel, 2017) making them seem like authentic opinion leaders of the brand. For many years, marketers have been using celebrity endorsers in their advertising campaigns, keeping in mind that using a credible figure to convey their message would enhance the effectiveness and impact of their message (Friedman, Termini & Washington, 1976).

These celebrities tend to grab customer attention as well as increase the customer's brand recall and recognition. However, with technological developments and the increasing significance of social media marketing, marketers have started looking to SMIs as the new endorsers, who seem to show the qualities of both celebrities as well as peers (Booth & Matic, 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019). These celebrities–peer hybrids not only play the role of active ambassadors to brands but also carry the advantage of sharing social belonging with the users, satisfying their needs of consistency, identification, affiliation and attachment (Rindova et al., 2006). More and more brands are now working with SMIs to reach out to their target audience, promote their products and educate the consumers about their product use (e.g., tutorials, unboxing, hacks, etc.) (eMarketer, 2015). Marketers are now using research and different metrics to choose the most appropriate SMIs for their brands. Nevertheless, research in this area is still scarce (Uzunoglu & Kip, 2014). Therefore, this paper proposes to examine and comprehend the growing relevance of influencer marketing by focusing on understanding how customers tend to judge an influencer based on the congruence between their personality and the influencer's personality.

1.1 Social Media Platforms

E-Marketing and the Internet gained a great attention from scholars at many different fronts (El-Gohary, 2010; El-Gohary, et. al., 2009; El-Gohary, 2009). However, Social Media marketing started to gain much more attention recently. From the various available SM platforms, this study investigates only two major platforms: Instagram and YouTube. These have attracted much attention from both

consumers as well as marketers (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Within this regard, Instagram is one of the most rapidly rising image and short video-based social media applications with approximately one billion monthly unique visitors globally (Shaulova & Biagi, 2019). It offers users a distinctive way to post pictures and videos, and have the option of using different edits and filters to enhance the image quality (Hu, Manikonda & Kambhampati, 2014). The tagging (@) and hashtag (#) features used on Instagram allow users to tag and link conversations related to the same topic from different corners of the world, hence creating a trend. For example, a song 'In My Feelings' by the Canadian singer Drake created a craze on social media called the #kikichallenge where people made silly dance moves outside moving vehicles to the tune of the song. An Instagram based comedian, @theshiggyshow, who challenged people to #DotheShiggy, started this trend. This challenge attracted millions of responses from different parts of the world (Chauhan, 2018). Instagram users can be consumers, celebrities, organisations, small businesses, etc. who have the option of maintaining a private or public account. Because of the increasing user base and the innovative interface, Instagram has led to the rise of SMIs referred to as '#Instafamous' (Marwick, 2015; Senft, 2008, 2013). Instagram allows users to engage with these influencers in several ways such as by following, liking, commenting and sending direct messages. Additionally, the new Insta story feature allows users to give a 'shout out' to their favourite brands or accounts (e.g., @Ascia, @cameroondallas, @zachking are some famous Instagram SMIs). This tactic is a form of (E-WOM) where users can mention or upload a brand's name or profile screenshot as a means of showing support and increasing the brand has or page's exposure.

YouTube has been referred to as a "convergence of traditional entertainment choices of television, music, and film" (Shao, 2009, p.12). It is one of the most popular search platforms after Google (The Top 500, 2017). According to Pew Research (2014), YouTube has a more extensive user base than LinkedIn or Twitter (Mitchell, Gottfried, Kiley & Matsa, 2014). YouTube users have the option to set up personal profiles with a log of their subscribers, likes, recent activities, history, etc. The content on YouTube is purely video-based, ranging from professionally produced content (Kruitbosch & Nack 2008) to user-generated content. (Burgess & Green 2009). YouTube has also become a potential platform for ordinary people to broadcast themselves and create an 'influencer' image by creating and posting content including DIY tutorials, music covers, unboxing, fitness and lifestyle videos, web series, etc. (Burgess & Green 2009; and Lange 2007). For example, Shawn Mendes, a famous singer, started his career by singing song covers on YouTube and now is considered one of the most admired singers among the younger generations. MyLifeasEva, PewDiePie, Zoella, and Michelle Phan are some other famous YouTube SMIs. These YouTube celebrities are seen as more authentic than mainstream celebrities are because of the blurred social distance between them. Several studies in the literature have addressed YouTube celebrities (Lange, 2007, March; Burgess & Green, 2009, Ferchaud et al., 2018, and Lee & Watkins, 2016). Customer engagement on YouTube is demonstrated through acts that a YouTube user can use concerning the materials offered on the platform (such as like, dislike, share, etc.). Furthermore, customer engagement as a result of watching a video is expected to be higher compared to other non-video based platforms.

1.2 Beauty Influencers

Given the increasing desire for Korean' glass skin' and 'on-fleek' makeup among female consumers, the beauty industry is rapidly evolving and diversifying the female-dominated market. Consequently, the changing digital landscape has changed the way the cosmetics industry chooses to promote itself, demanding a change in the marketing strategies of these companies. A journey from airbrushed and highly edited ad campaigns to authenticity and complete transparency has led to the rise of #beautygurus and #instafamous beauty influencers on SM platforms like YouTube and Instagram. However, there is no proper definition for a beauty influencer ("Beauty Influencer Marketing, 2018). This study defines a beauty influencer as 'a social media user who has the resources, knowledge, and expertise to produce and publish original content on the apprised makeup trends, and latest fads. These social media-based influencers use uprightness, authenticity, and expertise to give their followers a

glimpse of their everyday lives, hence shaping customer opinions. Most importantly, when it comes to makeup brands, these influencers do not 'sell' the brand; they critique it by comparing different competitors' brands (Kinski, 2017), making it all the more important for marketers to stay in the SMIs' good books. Moreover, these SM channels are offering a platform for brands and influencers to collaborate and deliver better and more innovative solutions for the beauty-conscious crowd.

The concept of self-congruity will be used in this paper to support marketers as well as influencers in branding themselves. Previous studies have suggested different metrics for measuring an ideal SMI based on popularity, views, followers, etc. However, this study looks at these beauty influencers from the customer's perspective and identifies how important a factor the blogger's personality is in assessing the effectiveness of the blogger. Users tend to look for actual and ideal self-congruities in different situations (He & Mukherjee, 2007). Accordingly, Wang et al., (2015) concluded that when an SMI portrays a realistic image of themselves by displaying their makeup-free skin or talking about their skin issues, users tend to relate with them more forcefully, experiencing actual self-congruity.

Meanwhile, as a blogger or SMI displays a charismatic image of himself or herself by always looking perfect, this encourages the users to connect with the SMI because they idealise them and wish to become like them. Self-congruity is a relevant psychological concept to apply to the beauty industry, as self-congruity can be related to personality-based images, and the beauty industry falls under the hedonic consumption category. Beauty followers account for approximately 25% of the entire Instagram community (Rao, McDowell & Parisi, 2018), whereas on YouTube, the cosmetics content alone amounts to around 169 billion views ("YoutTube: Annual beauty", 2019). The authenticity and the creative personalities of these beauty influencers have made them more appealing than traditional celebrities (Frechaud et al., 2018). Given the increasing importance of SMIs in the beauty sector, this study focuses on congruity relationships in the beauty industry, specifically with the beauty influencers on YouTube and Instagram.

1.3 Research Problem

Influencer marketing is an evolving concept and is a crucial marketing tool used by marketers that have been changing business dynamics. Marketing literature has identified the role of SMIs mainly from the marketers' perspective; however, very few studies have considered analysing influencer marketing from the users' perspective. Therefore, after identifying this issue, the current study aims to evaluate customers' perspectives of SMIs. Furthermore, alongside the advancement of SM channels, the balance of roles and relationships between customers and marketers as well as between customers and celebrity influencers has shifted. The power of control and decision has dramatically changed from marketers or celebrity endorsers to customers, who choose to define a brand, product or celebrity.

Moreover, they also have the power to influence other users via different social media platforms, making these users hybrid personalities between a peer and a celebrity. Such a shift of power represents a huge challenge for marketers who needs to keep the customers' positive perception of firm brands and to regulate what is being discussed about such brand via E-WOM. Therefore, understanding these relationships is essential for marketers so they can deal with their customers thoughtfully and choose the right influencers to promote and disseminate brand-related information, which may give them better control over what ideas reach their target customers. Keeping these issues in mind, we believe there is a strong need to observe consumer relationships and behaviours from a digital perspective.

1.4 Research Questions

This research directs towards answering the below-mentioned research questions:

RQ1: How do consumers evaluate their relationships with SMIs by comparing their personalities with the SMIs' personalities?
RQ2.1: How does the consumers' perspective of SMIs affect the influencer marketing strategies adopted by marketers?

RQ 2.2: How do the influencer marketing strategies adopted by marketers shape the consumers' judgment about the brands?

RQ3: Are social media platforms context-specific concerning consumer engagement?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Image Congruity

Image congruity is a subject that gained considerable attention in the literature over the last few years. It is elucidated as the "degree of match or mismatch between a consumer's self-concept and a product or brand image, store image, destination image or user image of a given product, brand or service" (Sirgy et al., 2000; Sirgy & Su, 2000; Sirgy et al.,1997). Meanwhile, image congruity is considered as a fundamental determinant of consumer attitudes (Jamal & Goode, 2001; Sirgy et al., 1997; Samli & Sirgy, 1981). The literature highlights brand image as a broad concept involving both cognitive as well as emotional factors, reflecting the value-based and utility-based aspects of a brand (Sirgy & Johar, 1999). Image congruity is further classified into two broad outlooks, which are self-image, and functional congruity (Wang et al., 2015; He & Mukherjee, 2007); however, this study will be focusing only on the self-congruity aspect. The image congruity construct has pertained to different product categories in the literature, such as tourism (Ahn, Ekinci & Li, 2013), coffee shops (Kang et al., 2012), the fashion and beauty industry (Audrezet et al., 2018), sports (Lee & Koo 2015) and more. The following sections thoroughly discuss the two aspects of image congruity.

2.1.1 Congruity and Celebrity Endorsements

Celebrity endorser refers to "a public figure who enjoys recognition and who uses this acknowledgement and appreciation on behalf of a brand or product by endorsing the product or brand in an advertisement" (Lieb, 2018; McCracken, 1989). Meanwhile, celebrity endorsement is an effective promotion strategy that helps marketers transfer the values and personality of a celebrity to the brand image, hence affecting consumers' preferences based on their confidence in the celebrities' expertise, attractiveness and trustworthiness. Consequently, consumers tend to prefer certain brands as was to reflect a lifestyle comparable to the lifestyle of the celebrity him/herself (Zhu et al., 2019; Erfgen et al., 2015; Mishra, Roy & Bailey, 2015; Miller & Allen, 2012). In marketing literature, there are two major theories used to discuss the concept of celebrity endorsements, which are the Matchup Hypothesis (Till & Busler, 2000; Kamins, 1990; Misra & Beatty, 1990), and the Meanings Transfer Model (Choi, Lee & Kim, 2005; Erdogan, Baker & Tagg, 2001; Miciak & Shanklin, 1994; McCracken, 1989).

The first theory, the match-up hypothesis, can be understood as a congruence (Misra & Beatty, 1990; Fleck & Quester, 2007) or fit (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012), which suggests that the celebrity's characteristics should be relevant to the brand's attributes. Using a celebrity in ad campaigns whose image fits the endorsed brand image is perceived to be more persuasive than lesser fit (Erdogan, 1999; Knoll & Mathes, 2017). Likewise, the 'meanings transfer model' implies that the consumers' society is based around certain beliefs and cultures, and the celebrities have some cultural significance in the eyes of the customers; thus the celebrity endorser transfers some meaning to the product or brand that they endorse (McCracken, 1989; Mishra, Roy & Bailey, 2015).

From a customers' perspective, several studies have used the balance theory to explain their arguments (Roy, Gammoh & Koh, 2012; Mowen, 1980), stating that customers prefer to maintain balance in the different elements of their societal and social environment. As such, customers prefer brands and celebrities that are similar to their self-perception (Roy, Gammoh & Koh, 2012; Mowen, 1980). The abovementioned theories are in line with congruity theory, which claims that incongruence results in negative consumer behaviour and negative evaluation of the brand (Keel & Nataraajan, 2012).

In the marketing literature, several scholars have used the self-congruity concept to demonstrate the customer-brand relationship, customers brand loyalty, brand attitudes, and buying intentions (Wang et

al., 2015; Aguirre-Rodriguez et al., 2015; Roy & Rabbanee, 2015; Koo, Cho & Kim, 2014; Kang et al., 2012). As an extension of these studies, self-congruity has also been applied to celebrity endorsements, which is a commonly adopted strategy used by marketers to promote their brand or product based on a personality or lifestyle. As customers, tend to buy the brands of a specific product as a source of self-countenance and expression and try to portray a certain standard of living (Mishra, Roy & Bailey, 2015; Chernev, Hamilton & Gal, 2011). Consequently, congruent celebrity endorsements tend to be more efficient than incongruent celebrity endorsements (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Thompson, 2006; Wang et al., 2015; Kamins & Gupta, 1994). However, the majority of research studies have applied congruity theory to understand celebrity–brand congruity and consumer–brand congruity, although celebrity–consumer congruity also plays a crucial role in influencing customers' attitudes (Boon & Lomore, 2001; Choi & Rifon, 2012; Albert, Ambroise & Florence, 2017). Consequently, this paper represents an endeavour to comprehend the impact of celebrity-consumer congruity or, more specifically, SMI-social media user congruity on customers' engagement on SM platforms.

2.1.2 Self-Congruity and Social Media

The increasing importance of understanding customers' relationships and behaviours on SNSs encourage the adoption of the congruity theory to the online context and specifically to the evolving SM platforms such as YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram. Self-expression on SNSs is considered as a significant research subject in marketing (Kim & Lee 2011). Social media platforms offer a unique setting for consumers to express themselves, given the degree of control that the users have on their self-presentation (Seidman, 2013; Koo et al., 2014). McKenna, Green and Gleason (2002) found that components of both actual and ideal selves are portrayed through user's social media profiles. Moreover, these social media platforms expose users to high levels of social contact; as a result, Walther (2007) suggested that the proliferation of self-image along with self-presentation has occurred. These SM platforms permit users to build 'social relationships', defined as "the extent to which a user gains benefits from the social platform and eventually builds interpersonal relationships with that social ecosystem" (Kim et al., 2011a).

The literature on celebrities as well as human brands (Close, Moulard & Monroe, 2011; Thompson, 2006) has called for more studies on the how people behave and portray the self-concept with relation to the internet. According to Kim, Lee and Bonn (2016), users tend to use self-expression to reflect an identity of belongingness to a social group and continue to engage with these groups to build on these identities (Kim, Lee & Bonn, 2016). However, there is much debate on whether an individual expresses their actual self or ideal self on social platforms. According to Back et al., (2010), social media users' are inclined to display their genuine selves on Facebook to maintain authenticity in these 'extended social networks'. Whereas Manago et al., (2008) propose that user profiles on social networks are used to express an idealised self, termed the 'idealised virtual identity hypothesis', which has been defined as user profiles displaying idealised characteristics that are different from their actual selves. Contrary to that, Back et al. (2010) proposed the 'extended real-life hypothesis', where users express their real-life personalities on social networks.

2.2 Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has been elucidated as "the art and science of engaging people who are influential online to share brand messages with their audiences in the form of sponsored content" (Sammis, Lincoln & Pomponi, 2016; p 7). As such, micro-celebrities or SMIs serve as a tool for a creative marketing approach, referred to as influencer marketing, to build stronger relationships with customers. Brown (2008) defines influencer marketing as a "method that ascertains and targets potential influencers in a market and hires them as representatives of their brand". Brown (2008). These influencers are a crucial part of the decision-making ecosystem of a consumer, revolving around the daily lives of the decision-makers (Brown, 2008). It is nearly impossible for an individual to scroll down their social media feed without encountering influencer marketing.

Consequently, influencer marketing can be perceived from two different stances: as a form of product placement (Russell & Belch, 2005; Audrezet et al., 2018) or as E-WOM marketing (Pophal, 2016; Wroblewski, 2017). For example, marketers can either send samples of their products to the influencers, who then review the products on their channels, or marketers pay the influencers to endorse their brands on their social profiles (Sammis, Lincoln & Pomponi, 2016). Emphasising the product placement side of influencer marketing, which has also been referred to as sponsored posts, seeding campaigns or native advertising, marketers deliberately include controlled brand-related messages into the regular posts, blogs or vlogs of the SMIs (Audrezet et al., 2018). On the other hand, E-WOM is a promotional technique that gives more control to the consumers than the marketers; however, with influencer marketing, it can be seen as an old strategy implemented differently. Influencer marketing allows marketers to choose the right influencer reliant on the sort of followers and the strength of the relationship they share with their followers (Ewers, 2017), thus controlling who spreads what message about their brand.

The literature has addressed the notion of influencer marketing on social media from different perspectives. Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) investigated the effects of Instagram influencers on young females' purchase intentions. Similarly, Gong & Li (2019) examined the impact of PSR on consumers' approval of the promotional activities carried by influencers and how that influences their engagement with a brand. Along similar lines, Johansen and Guldvik (2017), in an experiment, evaluated the reactions of social media users to influencer-oriented ads vs conventional ads and how this impacted consumers' purchase intentions. Likewise, Choi & lee (2019) examined the impact of an influencer's trustworthiness, attractiveness and expertise on consumers' attitude and engagement with brands, and how PSR regulates the consumers' responses to influencer-oriented brand endorsement.

Kim & Song (2016) emphasised the importance of self-disclosure in para-social interactions (PSIs), concluding that self-disclosure by SMIs leads to stronger PSRs. Self-disclosure theory explains that when a celebrity connects with their fans intimately or informally, it increases the PSIs and PSRs between the celebrity and his/her followers. Consequently, in the social media landscape, followers experience higher levels of self-disclosure because of the uncensored updates about an influencer's intimate details, as well as having an interface that allows them to reach out to their favourite influencers. This, in turn, increases emotional engagement between celebrities and fans, which enhances the quality of PSR (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Audrezet et al., 2018).

Influencer marketing benefits not only marketers but also influencers themselves. On one side, the marketers can use an inexpensive promotional strategy to get their message across to the perfect target group (Loeffler, 2016); while this may be true, influencers can also benefit in several ways. Firstly, the partnership they share with the brand allows them to have access to newly launched products, especially in the case of premium products, which are usually limited stock. Secondly, this also helps them grow their popularity and form a VIP or elite image in their followers' opinion (Ewers, 2017).

2.3. Engagement

In social sciences, the theory of engagement was addressed from various standpoints such as organisational behaviour, psychology, sociology, marketing and political science (Kuvykaitė & Tarutė, 2015). The literature on engagement has 50 definitions that address the concept from different aspects and dimensions (Brodie, Hollebeek, Juric & Ilic, 2011). Nevertheless, in light of the study emphasis on marketing and consumer psychology, the term 'engagement' will be used to address co-creation, decision-making and interaction, where the engagement context and consumer engagement behaviours change as per the objects or brands (Hollebeek, 2011). Brodie et al., (2011) defined customer engagement as "a psychological state, which occurs by virtue of interactive customer experiences with a focal object" (Brodie et al., 2011, p. 6). Whereas Hollebeek, et al., (2016) and Hollebeek, Malthouse and Block (2016) viewed this concept as an involuntary usage of knowledge, skills etc. along with the resources for interacting with a brand.

Considering the related literature, customer engagement was addressed based on two major foundations, which are service-dominant logic (Hollebeek, Malthouse & Block, 2016; Brodie et al., 2011) and relationship marketing (Brodie et al., 2013). Alongside the shift from conventional to non-conventional standpoints, the concept of marketing has also transferred to a customer-centric concept instead of a product-centric concept (Deshpandé, Farley & Webster, 1993). Relationship marketing has been referred to as marketing efforts that lead to establishing and preserving prosperous relationships between marketers and consumers. In the new era, marketers not only focus on products but on co-creating value and building relationships. (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Likewise, the goods-dominant logic point of view considered consumers as the endpoint of the value chain. In contrast, the service-dominant logic perspective treats consumers as co-originators of the value through continuous interaction and collaboration among customers, firms and other players of the value chain (Dolan et al., 2015; Karpen, Bove & Lukas, 2011). This co-creation of value is a result of customers' 'engaging' behaviours (Lusch, Vargo & Tanniru, 2010).

Customer engagement behaviour lies beyond mere transactional exchanges, transforming the customers' status from just beneficiaries to becoming brand advocates. These behaviours have led to addressing engagement as three measurement constructs, which are the cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions (Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Calder et al., 2009; Sprott et al., 2009; Bowden, 2009). The cognitive aspect looks at consumers' engagement behaviour from an intellectual perspective concerning the utilitarian aspects of brands or objects, such as though processing, interest and elaboration of costs and benefits (Hollebeek et al., 2014). However, the emotional aspect is related to the hedonic attributes that stimulate feelings or emotions towards an object or brand (Abdul-Ghani et al., 2011). Meanwhile, the behavioural dimension directly linked to the action of engagement and interaction (Van Doorn et al., 2010). However, this paper focuses on the behavioural and emotional conceptualisation of media engagement, combined with COBRA typology and PSR.

2.3.1 COBRA Typology

In applying the UGT to social media, two trends have been explored. Firstly, users tend to engage in more than one social media platform simultaneously; secondly, consumers perceive social media channels as information and communication means to satisfy customers' needs (Chi, 2011; Kwon et al., 2014; Muntinga et al., 2011; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011). These studies on social media UGT have analysed numerous motives why users engage in different behaviours on social media. For example, Park, Kee and Valenzuela (2009), in their study on users' motivations for using Facebook, found four primary needs: "socialising, entertainment, self-status seeking and information seeking" (Park, Kee and Valenzuela, 2009). Drawing on this theory, Shao (2009) suggested that customers interact with user-generated content in 3 different ways, which are producing, consuming, and participating in brand-related content. These findings were further validated by Muntinga et al. (2011), resulting in a theoretical framework called the COBRA typology. Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski (2016) defined COBRA as "as a set of brand-related online activities on the part of the consumer that vary in the degree to which the consumer interacts with social media and engages in the consumption, contribution, and creation of media content" (Schivinski, Christodoulides & Dabrowski, 2016, p.6).

2.3.2 Para-Social Relationships (PSIs)

They were proposed in 1956, by Horton & Wohl (1956) who defined PSIs as "pseudo-intimate relationship between the audience and media personalities" (Lim & Kim, 2011, p. 767; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Whereas Ellis, Streeter & Engelbrecht (1983) define it as "simulacrum of conversational give and take" (Ellis, Streeter & Engelbrecht, 1983, p. 215) to describe the relationship between fans and famous media personalities. These para-social interactions between fans/users and media figures are seen as illusions of reciprocal social exchanges, which are initiated by celebrities, which allow the attendance of the viewers (fans) in their enactments and indulge in informal tones and

body languages giving a gist of face to face direct conversations. Horton & Wohl (1956) view PSIs as a practice that is "characterised by felt reciprocity with a TV performer that comprises a sense of mutual awareness, attention, and adjustment" (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Consequently, these para-social Interactions eventually transform into Para-social relationships. Para-social Relationships or PSR's are more enduring emotional bonds that are fans develop with their media personalities. These bonds can either be negative or positive long-term socio-emotional bonds between fans and media celebrities. However, some scholars have used PSR to address these asymmetrical relationships based on a unique media experience, Horton & Wohl (1956) refer PSR's as more persistent one-sided intimate relationships between fans and celebrities that develop as a result of multiple encounters.

More specifically, a PSR is a one-sided relationship in which one person emotionally connects with another famous personality, which is entirely unaware of the other person. These kinds of relationships are common with famous celebrities, sports stars and media personalities. According to the media literature, PSIs have been addressed as "imaginary social relationships" (Cohen, 2004), "imaginary friendships" (Perse, 1990), "an illusion of a face-to-face relationship" (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and "an interpersonal interaction between the media user and the media celebrity" (Schramm & Wirth, 2010; Rubin & Step, 2000). However, Cohen (2004) & Klimt et al. (2006) consider PSRs as extensions of real social behaviour, as they show similar characteristics based on affective, cognitive and behavioural interactions (Cohen, 2004; Klimmt et al., 2006; Yuksel & Labrecque, 2016). Accordingly, the theory of PSRs evaluates the biased relationship between the audience and the media persona based on three responses: perceptual-cognitive response, affective response and behavioural response. The perceptual-cognitive response is an individual's perception and evaluation of the celebrity, relating them to their personal experiences and comparing between themselves and the persona. The affective response is related to the positive and negative emotions towards a persona. Lastly, behavioural intervention refers to the verbal, non-verbal and para-verbal behaviours and behavioural intentions of an individual (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008; Klimmt et al., 2006; Hartmann et al., 2004).

3. RESEARCH CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

H1: User-SMI image congruity positively affects PSRs between the user and the SMI.
H2: User-SMI image congruity positively affects customers' engagement behaviour on SNSs (COBRA).
H3a: The relationship between self-congruity and PSRs is moderated by platform type.
H3b: The relationship between self-congruity and customers' engagement with brands (COBRA) is moderated by platform type.
**H4:** User-SMI PSRs have a positive impact on consumers' engagement behaviour on SNSs (COBRA).

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

In addition to this paper aim to identify the impact of congruity between a social media user and an influencer on customers' engagement on social media platforms, as measured by COBRA and PSRs, the study intends to understand how customer engagement differs between two different social media platforms. Building on the existing published works, the cause and effect relationship between the independent research variable (self-congruity) and its dependent variables (COBRA and PSRs) will be inspected. Taking into consideration the nature and aim of the current study, which depends on the belief that consumer behaviour and relationships can be measured and quantified, this study proposes

Figure 1. The research conceptual framework
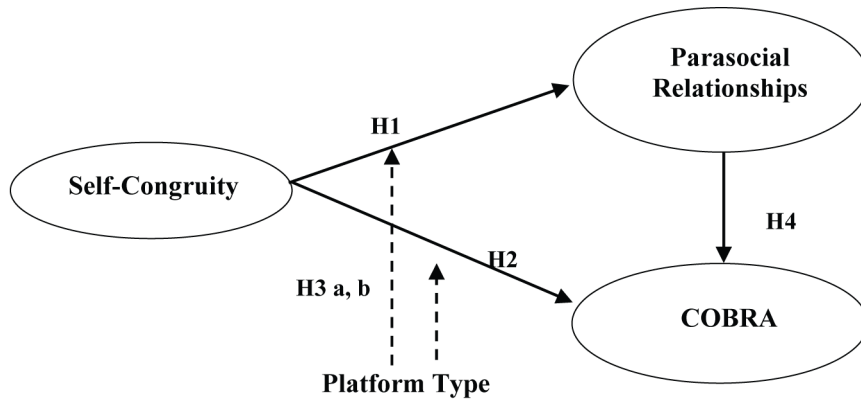
hypotheses. It uses scientific methods to collect and interpret data. Hence, this study resonates most appropriately with the positivist approach to understanding consumers' social media behaviour.

4.2 Data Collection

Following a thorough literature review, well-established and previously validated measures have been used in this paper. Furthermore, the questionnaire was also assessed and scrutinised by experts in the marketing and academic field to ensure that the items were not ambiguous and were entirely reflective of the constructs being measured. Moreover, a pilot examination was conducted to confirm if all questionnaire questions are well designed and easily understood from a layperson's perspective. The questionnaire was piloted on a random sample of female students' and employees at Qatar University via an online survey tool, SurveyMonkey. Thirty participants completed the pilot survey. The suggestions drawn from the pilot study helped the researcher eliminate any vague terminology or ambiguous questions used in the questionnaire; moreover, it also helped prove the high content validity of the questionnaire. The survey consisted of 42 items organised into five sections.

An online questionnaire was adopted to assemble the required data. Since this paper examines consumer behaviour on social media platforms, an online survey was deemed more suitable. Moreover, online surveys ensure better reach to the target population, are comparatively cheaper and are easier to administer. The target population used in this study is the female population aged above the age of 16 years living in the State of Qatar. Given the fact that the current research only focuses on understanding consumer behaviour in the beauty industry, focusing the study on females will result in more valid and relevant results. A combination of two commonly used non-probability sampling techniques, snowball sampling and convenient sampling, was adopted to collect data (Tansey, 2007). The questionnaire resulted in a total of 270 completed responses and 180 usable responses after discarding incomplete or irrelevant responses as described above.

4.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed with two sophisticated statistical software packages: IBM SPSS v23 and AMOS v24. SPSS was used to carry out the descriptive analysis, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) test, Barlett's test, the reliability analysis, and moderated multiple regression (MMR) analysis. Confirmatory factor analysis was done depending on SPSS/AMOS v24 package.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Descriptive Analysis

With a total response figure of 270 participants, all incomplete and unusable responses were filtered out; consequently, 180 usable responses were used for the sample population.

5.1.1 Age

In the current study, the population was segregated into four age groups: 16–21 years, 22–26 years, 27–31years and above 31. In accordance with a similar study in the literature (Wang, Huang & Chen, 2015), which tested beauty bloggers' informational influence, this study shows similar results concerning the age group of the sample population. The mainstream of the participants who partook in the current study age ranged from 22–26 years of age [mean (M) =2.36, standard deviation (SD) = 0.824)]. Breaking down the proportions, the group aged 22–26 had the highest percentage (47.8%), followed by the older population belonging to the 27–31 age group with 30.0%. The next place belonged to the younger population, whose age ranged from 16 to 21 years with 12.8%. Lastly, the lowest proportion (9.4%) belonged to the oldest age category of above 31 years. This sample population also accords with the sample of Wang, Huang and Chen (2015), which tested beauty bloggers' informational influence. According to the study of Wang, Huang and Chen (2015), the majority of the sample size fitted with the age group of 21–25 years.

5.1.2 Nationality

The population highlighted in this study was divided into two main types: Qatari and non-Qatari. Taking into consideration the average score of the population, the majority of the population were non-Qataris (M = 1.53, SD = 0.500). Consequently, 53.3% of the study population belonged to the expatriate group (i.e. the non-Qatari citizens of Qatar), whereas the local Qatari population had a comparatively lower ratio of 46.7%. This is understandable, given the overall characteristics of the population of the State of Qatar. According to the world population review, the total population of Qatar consists of 2,839,386 people, with only 10% of the population being local Qataris, whereas the other 90% population belongs to other nationalities (Qatar Population, 2019). Since the study was distributed to all females all living in the State of Qatar, the sample population reflects more than half of the population being non-Qataris residing in Qatar and the rest of the sample are Qataris.

5.1.3 Education Level

The current study apportioned the population into three different categories based on the level of education, which are professional or doctorate degree, Bachelor's degree or less, and Master degree. The calculated average of the research population shows that the largest proportion of the study population were Master degree holders (M = 1.78, SD = 0.679). In percentages, 49.4% of the population were Master degree holders, similar to a previous study on beauty bloggers' informational influence (Wang, Huang & Chen; 2015), followed by educational degrees at the Bachelor's level or lower with 36.1% and the lowest proportion of population fell under the category of professional or doctorate degree holders, with 14.4%.

5.1.4 Social Media Usage Based on Age

See Table 1.

Table 1. Cross tabulation of social media usage based on age

		YouTube	Instagram	Total
Age Group	Above 31	70.6%	29.4%	100.0%
	27-31	44.4%	55.6%	100.0%
	22-26	41.9%	58.1%	100.0%
	16-21	52.2%	47.8%	100.0%
Total		*46.7%*	*53.3%*	*100.0%*

5.1.5 Social Media Usage Based on Nationality

See Table 2.

Table 2. Cross tabulation of social media usage based on nationality

		YouTube	Instagram	Total
Nationality	Non-Qatari	39.6%	60.4%	100.0%
	Qatari	54.8%	45.2%	100.0%
Total		*46.7%*	*53.3%*	*100.0%*

5.2 Inferential Statistics

5.2.1 Reliability Analysis

The following table shows the overall Cronbach's α values for all constructs that were considered in this research. The α values for the 36 item measures used in the study to measure the given constructs

Table 3. Reliability results

Construct	Reliability	No. of Items
Self-Congruity	0.723	11
Parasocial Relationships	0.760	14
COBRA	0.849	12
Overall Reliability	0.897	36

(self-congruity, PSRs and COBRA) was calculated and as seen in table 3, the α values for all the research constructs is greater than 0.7, which falls into the acceptable range ($\alpha > 0.7$). With an overall Cronbach's α of 0.897, the existence of a high level of internal consistency of the research items is guaranteed according to the guidance provided by El-Gohary (2012), and Nunnally (1978).

5.2.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The study involves three constructs: self-congruity (independent variable), PSRs (dependent variable) and COBRA (dependent variable) measuring having a total of 36 items. The results of the confirmatory

factor analysis indicated that all ten items weighing self-congruity showed a significant relationship with the intended construct; likewise, all 12 items measuring COBRA were significant for estimating the required constructs. However, out of the 14 items used to measure PSRs, one item ("I really love the way this influencer portrays their personality") was deleted, as it did not show a significant relationship with the respective construct, PSRs (p = 0.718).

Moreover, the Cronbach's α value has increased for PSRs from 0.760 to 0.773 after removing this item. Likewise, the overall Cronbach's αvalue for all items also increased from 0.897 to 0.900 after removing the item. As such and considering the CFA analysis results, almost all the items showed high convergent validity. This can be inferred from the significance value shown. As the level of significance is below $p < 0.05$ for all items, it can be concluded that the items are appropriate for measuring the proposed research constructs, as they significantly meet the test of construct validity (Shahid, 2011). Similarly, composite reliability showed favourable results for all 35 items: all items showed composite reliability that is > 0.7, which indicates high internal consistency as well as high-reliability levels (Eid & El-Gohary, 2013; El-Gohary, & Eid, 2012; Hair et al., 2010).

5.3 Hypothesis Testing

Before testing the hypotheses via multiple linear regression and MMR, Pearson's correlation coefficient and linearity tests were done to test the strength and nature of the relationship between the research independent and dependent variables, as well as to ensure data normality (normal distribution of the data). Results of the Pearson's r signposted that PSRs showed a comparatively stronger positive association with self-congruity ($r = 0.608$, $p < 0.01$) than COBRA ($r = 0.591$, $p < 0.01$). Two P-P plots were generated to examine the linearity of the dependent variables in the study. These figures presented the P-P plots of the standardised residuals of a linear regression model. It was observed that the regression line closely passes through all 35 data points in both cases; forming a close linear pattern and thus showing approximately normally distributed data.

5.3.1 Regression Analysis

The current study uses multiple linear regression to examine the relationship between self-congruity and PSRs, self-congruity and COBRA, and PSRs and COBRA.

Testing the effect of Self-Congruity on PSRs (H1): Multiple linear regression was used to predict PSRs on the basis of self-congruity ($F_{(1,178)} = 104.645$, $p < 0.000$). With an R^2 of 0.370, the model is a significant predictor of PSRs and explained 37% of the variance. Moreover, the results show the regression coefficients, indicating a significant positive relationship between self-congruity and PSRs. Self-congruity ($\beta = 0.591$, $p = 0.000$) shows that with an increase in the congruity between the SMI and the user's personality, the PSR between them increases by 0.591 units. With a tolerance of 1.000 and a VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) of 1.00, we can conclude that the generated results are reliable.

Testing the Effect of Self-Congruity on COBRA (H2): Multiple regression was carried out to inspect the relationship between self-congruity and COBRA. The outcomes showed that self-congruity is a significant predictor of the customer's engagement with social media (COBRA). The regression equation showed significant results, ($F_{(1,178)} = 95.430$, $p < 0.00$). Likewise, the R^2 of 0.349% indicates that 34.9% of COBRA is explained by self-congruity. The regression coefficients confirm the existence of a positive relationship between self-congruity and COBRA. With a regression coefficient of $\beta = 0.608$ ($p = 0.000$), we can infer that customer's engagement (COBRA) increases by 0.608 units with every one-unit increase in self-congruity. The tolerance and VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values fell into acceptable ranges (i.e. tolerance is more than 0.10 and VIF less than 10) (Sarstedt, Marko & Mooi, 2014), with a tolerance score of 1 and a VIF of 1, proving the results to be reliable.

Testing the Effect of PSRs on COBRA (H4): Multiple linear regression was used to predict the nature of the relationship between PSRs (x) on COBRA (y). The results displayed a significant relationship between the suggested independent and dependent variables ($F_{(1,178)}$ = 108.49, p < 0.000). In other words, PSRs have a significant effect on customer's engagement (COBRA) Furthermore; this can be justified by the R^2 value, which shows that the PSRs between SMIs and users can explain 37.9% of COBRA. The regression coefficients derived from the results support this finding, with β = 0.615 and p = 0.00. As such, a significant positive relationship between the predictor variable (PSRs) and the outcome variable (COBRA) exist. The results are considered to be reliable, given the acceptable of tolerance and VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) values that fall in the acceptable range, with tolerance = 1.00 and VIF = 1.00.

5.3.2 Testing for the Moderation Effects via MMR

MMR was employed to test the moderation effect of platform type (YouTube or Instagram) on the relationship between self-congruity, PSRs and COBRA. This study postulates that the kind of platform used impacts the strength of the relationships users share with SMIs and the level of engagement with brands users express on social platforms. The following sections examine the moderating effect of platform type on PSRs and COBRA.

Moderating Effect of Platform Type on PSRs: MMR was used to calculate the moderating effects of the platform on PSRs. To test the hypothesis that platform type moderates the relationship between self-congruity and PSRs, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, a new variable was created for self-congruity and platform (*Platform_dummy*). A significant amount of variance in PSR (R^2 = 0.374, $F_{(2, 177)}$ = 52.866, p < 0.001) was found for these variables. To avoid the issue of multicollinearity between the interaction terms, the variables were centred, and a third variable showing the interaction between self-congruity and platform was created (*Interaction*) (Aiken & West, 1991).

Consequently, the interaction term was added to the regression model, which affected the variance in PSR (ΔR^2 = 0.002, $F_{(1,176)}$ = 0.502, p = 0.480). However, this variance was, highly insignificant showing that the platform has an insignificant impact on PSRs. According to the regression coefficients in Model 1, self-congruity has a significant positive impact on PSRs (p = 0.000); however, platform has an insignificant impact on PSRs (p = 0.306). On the contrary, in Model 2, the impact of the platform on PSRs is insignificant (p = 0.280), and the interacting effect of platform and self-congruity on Para social relationships is insignificant (p = 0.480). However, it can be inferred that YouTube has a higher moderating effect on the relationship between self-congruity and PSR (β = –0.132) (YouTube was coded 0, Instagram was coded 1). However, it can be concluded from Model 2 that the interaction variable is insignificant, thereby proving that the platform does not significantly moderate the relationship between self-congruity and PSRs.

Moderating Impact of Platform Type on COBRA: MMR was used to calculate the moderating effects of platform on COBRA. To test the hypothesis that platform type moderates the relationship between self-congruity and COBRA, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted. In the first step, the new variable for self-congruity and platform (*Platform_dummy*) was used, as in the examination of platform and PSRs. These variables justified a significant degree of variance in COBRA (R^2 = 0.373, $F_{(2, 177)}$ = 52.564, p < 0.001). To avoid the issue of multicollinearity among the interaction terms, the variables were centred, and a third variable showing the interaction between self-congruity and platform was used (*Interaction*) (Aiken & West, 1991). Consequently, the interaction term was added to the regression model, which resulted in affecting the variance

in COBRA (ΔR^2 =0.009, $F_{(1,176)}$ = 2.487, p = 0.1170; however, this variance was insignificant, showing that platform has an insignificant impact on COBRA.

Examining the regression coefficients in Model 1, we can see that self-congruity has a significant positive impact on COBRA (p = 0.000) and that platform had a considerable significant impact on COBRA (p = 0.007). Subsequently, in Model 2, self-congruity (0.00) and platform (0.007) have a significant impact on COBRA; however, the interaction variable showed an insignificant effect on COBRA (p = 0.117). However, it can be inferred that YouTube has a higher moderating effect on the relationship between self-congruity and COBRA (β = –0.329) (YouTube was coded as 0 and Instagram was coded as 1, as previously described). Overall, it can be concluded from Model 2 that the interaction variable is insignificant; thereby proving that platform does not significantly moderate the relationship between self-congruity and COBRA.

From this moderation analysis, we can conclude that in general, note the type of platform does not have a significant impact on the relationship between self-congruity (independent variable) and either PSRs or COBRA. Even though the moderating effect exists, it is highly insignificant, proving that the platform does not moderate these relationships. Nevertheless, it can be inferred that YouTube has a much more substantial impact on these relationships than Instagram and that comparatively; COBRA seems to be more affected by the type of platform than PSRs. However, these results are insignificant, although they do not comply with the proposed hypotheses.

Table 4. Summary of results

Hypothesis	R	R²	Sig. P-value	β	Inference
H1: User-SMI image congruity positively affects PSRs between the user and the SMI.	0.608	0.370	0.00	0.591	Accepted
H2: User-SMI image congruity positively affects customers' engagement behaviour on SNSs (COBRA).	0.591	0.349	0.00	0.608	Accepted
H3a: The relationship between self-congruity and PSRs is moderated by platform type.	0.613	0.002	0.480	0.132	Rejected
H3b: The relationship between self-congruity and customers' engagement with brands (COBRA) is moderated by platform type.	0.618	0.009	0.117	0.329	Rejected
H4: User-SMI PSRs have a positive impact on consumers' engagement behaviour on SNSs (COBRA).	0.615	0.379	0.00	0.615	Accepted

6. CONCLUSION

Social media user rate has increased exponentially over the last decade, having a significant impact on marketing and advertising. These channels have become essential communication tools for marketers to engage with the intended customers and develop sophisticated interactions and value co-creation (Colliander et al., 2015). Consequently, this increased participation and interaction between consumers and marketers on social media has led to the rise of digital celebrities referred to as SMIs or micro-celebrities, who are ordinary individuals who become famous by producing and sharing content on social media.

This paper showed the importance and impact of those influencers on customers' day-to-day lives. From the customer's perspective, this study identifies how the users and influencers' personalities interact with each other and form superficial, one-sided relationships, which, in turn, shape customers' opinions about brands and products. More specifically, the study aims to understand how customers form opinions and judgements about different brands based on the kind of relationship they share with their favourite influencers and to help marketers implement influencer marketing strategies effectively.

This study explored a specific type of audience and SMIs, namely the beauty-conscious female customers and beauty influencers. The results of the current study showed themes relating to all of the research questions. By using a quantitative methodology and appropriate statistical procedures, this study validated the proposed hypotheses and answered the research questions, forming a basis for future exploration.

Making some fruitful contributions to the literature concerning the concept of influencer marketing in a more contemporary setting, this research identifies the role of social media and SMIs in shaping the opinions of consumers in this technologically advanced social world. Grounded on the established literature concerning social media and consumer psychology, this study explores three crucial relationships. Based on the self-congruity theory, the study analysed the impact of substantial congruity between a social media user and an influencer on, firstly, the PSRs that users share with their favourite influencer and, secondly, on the engagement behaviour of consumers with the brands endorsed by these influencers. The study tested if customers tend to interact or relate differently on diverse SM platforms based on the motives that they wish to fulfil.

The findings suggest that self-congruity between a user and influencer is undoubtedly a positive predictor of PSRs as well as COBRA. However, it is worth mentioning that the influence of self-congruity on PSRs was comparatively higher than the impact on consumers' engagement on SM platforms (COBRA). However, the impact of PSRs on COBRA was comparatively more elevated than the direct effect of self-congruity. Hence, for an SMI to affect a customer's opinion and attitudes towards a brand, it is more important that they share a strong interpersonal relationship rather than just congruity between their personalities. These interpersonal relationships grow eventually as the user follows and gets regular updates on the influencers' whereabouts and activities.

Moreover, the collaborative nature of social media allows users to connect with these influencers through comments and direct messages. As such, this study helps us understand that social media and influencer marketing has made the whole concept of marketing strategies more personal and customised to the particular needs of a customer. However, contradicting several previous studies (Voorveld et al., 2018; Belanche et al., 2019), the results of this study show that platform type does not really have an impact on the PSRs or COBRA. In other words, if a user experiences a match between their personality and the influencers' personality, they share a kind of relationship and show similar engagement behaviour regardless of which platform they are using. This may be a result of the integrated nature of social media platforms, which allow users to show similar aspects of their lives on all their social profiles.

In particular, this study answers all of the research questions. Firstly, Question 1 addresses the impact of personality on the user–influencer relationships. From the first hypothesis, which tests the impact of self-congruity on Para-social Relationships, we can conclude that users tend to choose SMIs based on how well their personality matches with the influencer's personality. More specifically, they tend to seek a reflection of himself or herself in the influencer's personality. Therefore, when users find influencers similar to their characters, they tend to share a much stronger and positive relationship with the influencers, as a source to create, conserve and boost their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman, 2017). Secondly, these relationships shape the influencer marketing strategy. Instead of investing considerable amounts in the mass advertisement, marketers could adapt influencer-marketing strategies to endorse their brands. However, it is of utmost importance to choose the right influencer and the right content to deliver their brand message to the target customers.

This study suggests that marketers should look at the SMI personality factor as an essential consideration in planning their strategies, as these strategies play a vital role in shaping the consumers' judgements and opinions about brands. For example, customers tend to have a more positive opinion about vlogs or posts that come from influencers who display a more honest and uncensored version of themselves, thereby coming across as trustworthy and authentic. Besides, users are also inclined towards influencers who either they see as a reflection of themselves or as someone, they romanticise and wish to be like them. Therefore, marketers need to develop strategies where they collaborate with SMIs in a more trustworthy way. Lastly, considering the third question, this study proves that social media platforms are not context-specific; in other words, the users' relationships and engagement behaviour remain the same across different platforms.

7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study has certain limitations, which are highlighted in this section to be addressed in future studies. Firstly, the scope of the study is focused on the beauty industry and therefore, applying the findings of this research to different industries or sectors cannot be considered valid. Furthermore, the study is focused on females older than 16 years of age. This shows that the sample was concentrated on a specific category, ignoring a large proportion of the market. As a result, future studies could focus on a different industry and/or involving a much broader sample. Several studies in the literature have focused on understanding these relationships in the travel and tourism industry, the sports industry, the food industry etc. Moreover, understanding consumption behaviour in Generation Z (the age group considered to be the greatest users of social media who tend to have more regular interactions with brands via social media than users above the age of 37).

Secondly, this study used self-administered online surveys, which limits the flexibility and personalisation of the research, as well as the administration of the survey, which remained the same throughout the data collection process and could be altered to suit different contexts. Moreover, compared with interviews, customers may give false or thoughtless answers, which may lower the data quality, making the results unreliable. However convenient, surveys leave a lot of information untapped; therefore, future studies could adopt an experimental design or multi-method approach to get a more in-depth assessment of the proposed relationships in the framework, which could further validate the findings of the study. Moreover, the study used multiple regression analysis to analyse the results of the study; however, much more sophisticated statistical tools such as SEM (Structural Equations Model) or PROCESS Hayes (moderation) could be used to test the proposed hypotheses.

Thirdly, the integrated model proposed in the study only analysed the impact of self-congruity and PSRs on engagement on social media; however, consumers' purchase intentions are an essential aspect to be considered to evaluate the effectiveness of a celebrity's message. Moreover, most studies have used functional congruity as a crucial determinant of the congruity theory (Wang et al., 2015). However, this study focused on the self-congruity and hedonic aspects of social media influencers. Future research can analyse the integrated impact of self-congruity and functional congruity on PSR and COBRA. Moreover, future studies could also consider other determinants of consumer behaviour such as purchase intentions, brand familiarity, and customer involvement to understand relationships between users and influencers.

Consequently, this study focused solely on the relationship between the SMI and the user, disregarding the other factors related to this relationship. From a psychological perspective, future research on social media behaviour should analyse the impact of these superficial relationships on society and social relations as a whole. These relationships advance the definition of PSIs because of the narrowed gaps and increased interactivity between the followers and celebrities, thereby affecting individuals as well as the influencers' social relationships.

Fourthly, this study only focuses on the congruity between an SMI's personality and their followers, and its impact on brand engagement. However, future studies could compare the effect of

user-influencer congruity versus brand–influencer congruity, and examine the integrated impact of these harmonious relationships on different determinants of consumer behaviour. This may give us a more holistic understanding of the evolving relationships on social media. Moreover, in addition to personality traits, other indices related to social media influencers such as the number of followers, functional–hedonic attributes and the quality of content posted, popularity, knowledge etc. could be considered in future studies to examine the impact on consumer behaviour.

Lastly, the study was conducted on people residing in the state of Qatar, leading to a geographic limitation. However, it aimed to include different nationalities to achieve higher external validity. The generalisation of the findings may be limited to the Qatari population or the GCC countries, given the similar lifestyle and standard of living. However, similar trends may not be seen in Western cultures; therefore, future research could conduct a cross-cultural analysis to study any differing opinions and relationships concerning SMIs in different types of market. Moreover, since the study considered the overall social media behaviour of users in Qatar, it did not allow us to differentiate between the consumption behaviours of Qataris and those of the expatriates. Future studies could consider comparing the two consumer groups and their behaviour on social media.

To conclude, for marketers, this study demonstrates the growing importance of influencer marketing. It verifies the fact that the personality impressions created by the influencers tend to shape consumers' opinions about them as well the content presented by them. This is because of the blend of hedonic and functional means used by influencers to convey an impression of authenticity and expertise. Therefore, personality is an essential measure for marketers to consider in their quest for the perfect influencer. Understanding the hidden psychological mechanism behind how influencers influence is crucial for marketers who wish to create appealing content and implement successful influencer marketing campaigns. The relationships established by these influencers give marketers several opportunities to build strong alliances with relevant SMIs, increase their brand exposure and build long-term relationships with the target audience via these influencers. Considering the ongoing growth of influencers' roles in different disciplines such as marketing, psychology, politics, communication, etc., the study provides fundamental knowledge to researchers and marketers.

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