

Effectiveness of social media influencers and their impact on customers' attitudes and buying intention

Abstract

People are using social media more often now than ever before, which has allowed them to access a wealth of information from many different sources. These days, social media influencers may have meaningful conversations with their followers because to unprecedented technological breakthroughs. There is no denying that these interactions have influenced young people's decisions, attitudes, and behaviors in one way or another. This research makes a contribution to the existing body of psychological literature by putting up a novel strategy for the construction of collective cognitive maps. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to make an effort to determine the mental models that teenagers have by using cognitive approaches. It is evident from the statistics that the influencers' distinctive qualities are connected to one another. The consequence of this is that the specific characteristics of the influencer are reinforced to the conduct of the adolescents.

Keywords; Social Media Influencers; Homophily; Credibility; Expertise; Trustworthiness;

1. Introduction

The structure and dynamics of the relationship between brands and consumers have been studied by academics and marketers [1]. This relationship has been the subject of their attention in recent decades. According to the findings of current research, the interactive capabilities of social media (SM) have the potential to provide a conceptual counterpart to the conversational character that lies at the foundation of the idea of engagement. Some examples of tangible expressions of engagement are the interactions that social media users have with certain companies. These interactions are characterized by varied degrees of emotive, cognitive, and/or behavioral involvement. Consumers are brought much closer to companies via the use of social media platforms (SMs) since they facilitate communication and provide access to online material. As a consequence of this, businesses have adapted their influence methods in order to facilitate the development of robust connections with users and, therefore, to raise the percentage of users who interact with their content [2].

There is a consensus within the research literature on consumer engagement that being able to interact with the brand is a necessary condition for experiencing engagement [3]. The impression of two-way communication and the responses to the activities that customers do, on the other hand, are very important to consumers. In other words, they are seeking for genuine information that is more in line with their own lifestyle [4]. Because of this, an increasing percentage of consumer interaction exchanges occur in the digital sphere with human brands (HB), which include athletes, singers, and social media influencers [5]. They have more power than traditional celebrities because people see them as more approachable and trustworthy because they frequently share stories from their daily lives [6]. This new sort of HB, known as an influencer, engages in active and collaborative actions with their followers and authorized businesses. For instance, they may remark on the items they have tried and provide their followers with a discount code [7].

Strategic communications management is important for us so that followers and leaders can keep interacting with each other [9]. This is because discussion is what social media sites are all about [8]. In addition, Levesque et al. (2023) [10] showed how a relationship between an influencer and a fan can be good for both of their health. As a result, a complete analysis that includes both the social and interactive aspects [10] of the engagement relationship being studied would make consumer behavior models [11] more accurate at predicting and explaining behavior. It would also help us understand the mental models that shape the daily lives of social media users in relation to influencers better.

To the best of our knowledge, the literature on the subject of influencers and the idea of customer interaction with this new HB is scarce. Furthermore, methods used to evaluate consumer involvement with an inanimate brand may sometimes focus on a specific area of interaction (behavioral, for instance; see [12]), or they may gauge visitor engagement or brand usage, neither of which is often applicable to an HB [13]. The fact that the manifestation of engagement dimensions varies significantly between items and situations is something that a lot of studies fail to take into consideration [14]. Therefore, because of the unique characteristics of HB (for example, living being), the measuring equipment that are now available are not suitable for the setting of the research. When considering the fact that strong engagement might motivate followers to willingly function as an influencer's ambassador within their circle, this is a crucial issue to keep in mind [15]. A measuring tool that works well for studying how influencers engage on social media (IESM), especially on Instagram. The following study questions have been asked, and we will answer them:

To what extent does the idea of engaging with the influencer on social media become articulated?

What kinds of measuring tools are currently available for use in relation to this kind of engagement?

In the settings that were investigated, how effective are they?

A theoretical foundation for follower engagement is provided by this research, which makes a contribution to the existing body of scientific literature. This base is set by going into more detail about the personal, social, and interactive parts of this link. The assessment scale that is tailored to the situation draws attention to mental and behavioral processes that might strengthen IESM in a way that needs many aspects. Therefore, the research has significance for academics, managers (for example, an influencer agent), and those who have influence.

Each part is both qualitative (in-depth conversations) and quantitative (questionnaires). In Section 3, the approach is explained. The analysis and results are in Section 4, and the talk is at the end of the paper in Section 5.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

2.1. Social Media Influencers

In order to maintain a current awareness of the most recent trends, individuals or consumers who are interested in a certain industry should follow influencers and connect with them.

Sharing original content and stories gives people the chance to get fans and fame online, which eventually leads to the creation of social media stars.

Experts in business and academia are very interested in social media stars because they can be used to sell brands. There have been huge changes in the world of social media marketing because of SMIs [18]. Because of their widespread use, social media influencers (SMIs) have been more interested in working together with companies.

The majority of celebrities achieve fame, but influencers establish their online reputation and appeal by providing content on social networking platforms. This is in contrast to the typical methods of becoming famous. Because of this, they must be distinguished from conventional fame. As a result of the way in which they engage and interact with clients, Djafarova and Rushworth [19] discovered that social media stars may be more successful as endorsers than traditional celebrities. According to [20], the fact that they often provide personal information and engage in relationships with one another makes them more accessible and relevant. There's also the fact that social media stars often include sponsored posts in their daily stories. This creates real endorsement content that people like [21].

2.2. What social media influencers are like

2.2.1. Being homophilic

There are many of these traits, such as views, ideals, schooling, and social standing. De Bruyn and Lilien [22] say that "homophily" is when two people are alike in ways like their morals, life experiences, and things they like and don't like.

Numerous research have been conducted to explore homophily in its many manifestations, and the findings have shown that homophily encourages contact. Shen et al. [23] came to the conclusion that homophily has an effect on consumer engagement and the desire to make a purchase. It is thus reasonable to presume that:

H1. The homophily of consumers with social media influencers has an effect on the customers' intentions to make a purchase.

H2. Engagement with customers is impacted when homophily is present with social media influencers.

2.2.2. Expertise

As a result of the communicator's knowledge and professional experience, expertise is a highly essential component [24], and it has been taken into consideration in a variety of studies that have been conducted on digital influencers. Moreover, the research conducted by reference found that the competence of the influencer was a key role in influencing the desire to make a purchase. In addition, the reference revealed that competence has an effect on the intention to buy and the level of consumer involvement. Therefore, the assumptions made are as follows:

H3. One's inclination to make a purchase is influenced by the knowledge of social media influencers.

H4. It is possible for client engagement to be affected by the knowledge of social media influencers.

2.2.3. Trustworthiness

People tend to think of trust as a relationship attribute that grows over time via consistent interaction with one another. The amount of trust people have in their business partners affects how well they can predict and value future deals. Therefore, trust may be an asset in maintaining the integrity of relationships [25].

H5. An individual's desire to make a purchase is influenced by the credibility of social media influencers.

The trustworthiness of social media stars is a big factor that affects how engaged clients are with them.

2.2.4. Ability to trust

Because people trust the experts, they give consumers useful information, which makes the companies' ads more effective. Because the buyer trusts the star, they are sympathetic to the ad. Scientists did some study and found that people are likely to follow the advice of an influential person they trust a lot. It would mean that the influencer's reputation is a big factor that affects how people act (see Figure 1). Other thing Mainolfi found was that the trustworthiness of social media stars affects how involved customers are and how likely they are to buy something.

The following theories are thus proposed by us:

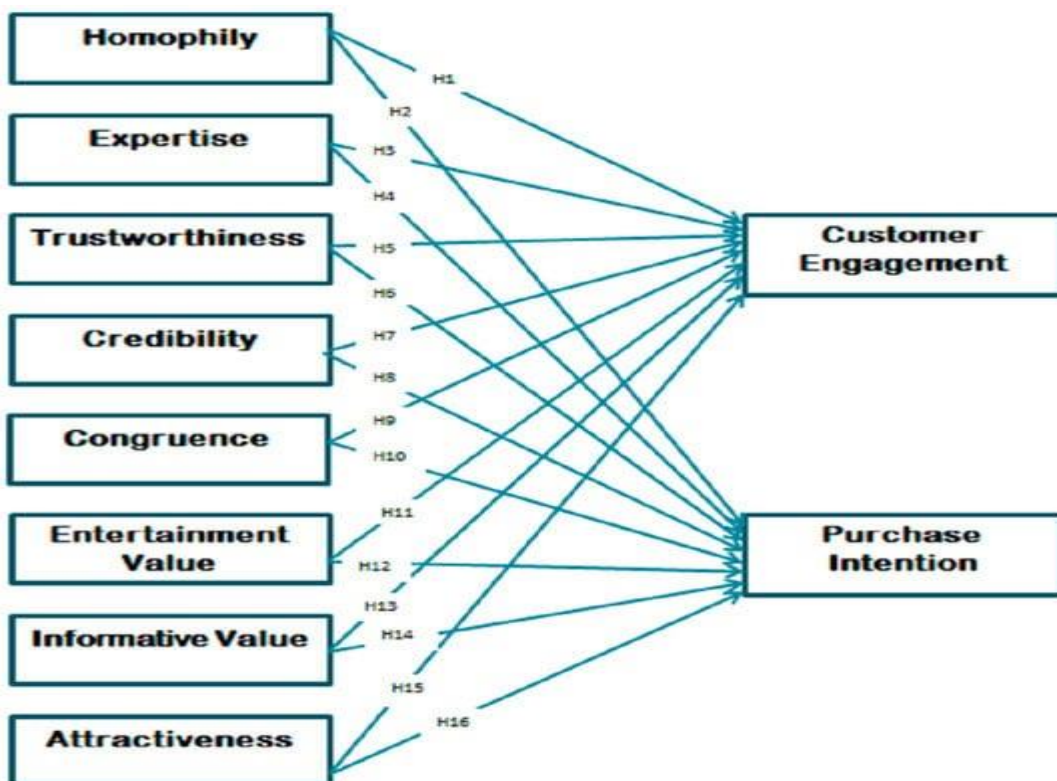


Figure 1. Study framework.

H7. The buying intention of consumers is influenced by the trustworthiness of social media influencers.

H8. A significant factor that influences client engagement is the reputation of social media influencers.

2.2.5. Matching with the Product

"Congruency" refers to how closely the star and the object fit together. According to Lynch and Schüler, the presence of congruence between the influencer and the brand or product is a factor that both facilitates and affects the transmission of meaning.

The degree to which social media influencers are aligned with the product has an effect on the purchaser's intention to buy.

How interested people are in a product is affected by how closely social media stars are linked to it.

2.2.6. Value as entertainment

In addition to business purposes, people will also use social networking sites for fun. "Entertainment encompasses those emotional aspects such as fun, enjoyment, and pleasure that have a direct impact on the probability that followers will express a more intense attachment to the influencer, and as a result, it can be considered an antecedent of engagement," in line with Chen and. Another way to look at it is that fun can come before participation. Customers' opinions of social media stars are affected by how entertaining those influencers are, which in turn affects their desire to buy a product. And because of this, it's likely that how entertaining people think influencers are may also affect their involvement and decision to buy.

Customer engagement is impacted by the entertainment value of social media influencers, as stated in Hypothesis 12.

3. Method

3.1. Getting the Data

The participants were given two screening questions on the second page of the questionnaire, which had been thoroughly examined by the authors. This was done in order to obtain data from samples that were typical of the whole. (1) Who do you think is the most influential person on social media? (That is, the authors carefully checked the participants' answers to this question by searching for the names of the social media influencers they mentioned on Google. We did these tests to see if the variables in this study were linked as we thought they might be (also called confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling; $N = 388$) and to see if the hypotheses were true. The demographic information of the people used for analysis is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographics.

Demographic Variables		N = 381	Percent (%)
Gender	Female	265	69.6%
	Male	116	30.4%
Age	20s	267	70.1%
	30s	98	25.7%
	40s	16	4.2%
The most-used social media platform to interact with the favorite influencer	Facebook	103	20.7%
	Twitter	29	7.6%
	Instagram	101	26.5%
	YouTube	136	36.5%
	Others	12	2.4%
Education	High school	78	20.4%
	College or university degree	270	70.9%
	Graduate degree	33	8.7%
Vocation	Self-employed	65	17.1%
	Employed	96	25.2%
	Out of work and looking for work	33	8.7%
	Homemaker	60	15.7%
	Student	97	25.5%
	Military	21	5.5%
	Other	9	2.3%
The amount of time spent on social media per day	Less than 2 h	30	7.9%
	Between 2 and 4 h	190	49.9%
	More than 5 h	161	42.3%

3.2. Measures

A pilot test, the writers asked two experts to look over the changed items and operationalizations of all the constructions. The test results led to some small changes being made to the way some questions were worded and how the form was put together as a whole. After that, the writers were done with the questionnaire. The subjects were to use a seven-point Likert scale to answer all questions except those about demographics. This study looked at the writings of Kim and Kim to figure out what kinds of people are social media leaders. Third, four items from the original literature were changed and adapted in order to measure the amount of psychological well-being. Fourth, three items provided by Liu, Wong, and Rongwei were used to measure how socially responsible influencers were seen to be. The authors used a procedural remedy suggested to randomly organize the survey questions in order to eliminate any potential problems that might arise from the use of a common technique bias.

4. Findings from Experience

4.1. Strengths and Weaknesses Tests

There were two steps that the writers followed to make sure that all of the measures were valid and reliable, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing [59]. It is necessary to do empirical testing before using structural equation modeling to test the study assumptions. The writers finished the first part of the process using SPSS 28.0. The writers could fully check the validity of all the measures. One of the questionnaire questions that measured perceived friendship was taken out because it had a weight of less than 0.50 on the scaled regression scale. This was done to keep the degree of convergent validity. Thus, the validity tests could go ahead. The measurement model's predicted fit indices were found to be good enough. This proves that all measures are valid and convergent. The authors also found the overall reliability of all the

constructs using the confirmatory factor analysis results. The numbers were greater than 0.70, which shows that the constructs were valid (see Table 3).

Table 2. Item confirmatory factor analysis results.

Constructs and Items	Standardized Regression Weight	Critical Ratio
Language similarity ($\alpha = 0.820$) My favorite social media influencer uses a similar communication style (language, phrases, terms, etc.) as me on the social networking pages.	0.632	Fixed
Interest similarity ($\alpha = 0.762$) I am interested in what my favorite social media influencer talks about on social networking pages.	0.821	Fixed
Self-disclosure ($\alpha = 0.814$) My favorite social media influencer voluntarily shares personal facts with followers on social networking pages.	0.621	Fixed
Psychological well-being ($\alpha = 0.823$) My favorite social media influencer's pages satisfy my overall needs.	0.813	Fixed
Loyalty ($\alpha = 0.768$) I intend to purchase products associated with my favorite social media influencer.	0.643	Fixed

In accordance with the advice, the authors conducted tests to determine the discriminant validity of each and every concept. The first step was to find the average variance for each construct by using the standardized regression weights of all the items that made up that construct (see Table 3).

Table 3. Measures of construct dependability include Φ , mean, SD, AVE, and CCR.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Language similarity	1						
2. Interest similarity	0.495 **	1					
3. Interaction frequency	0.542 **	0.682 **	1				
4. Self-disclosure	0.434 **	0.620 **	0.632 **	1			
5. Perceived friendship	0.526 **	0.569 **	0.501 **	0.582 **	1		
6. Psychological well-being	0.309 **	0.463 **	0.390 **	0.477 **	0.507 **	1	
7. Loyalty	0.347 **	0.491 **	0.437 **	0.533 **	0.591 **	0.564 **	1
Mean	4.683	5.782	5.550	5.701	5.330	5.549	5.808
SD	1.327	1.059	1.040	1.012	1.246	1.318	1.160
AVE	0.471	0.560	0.519	0.474	0.536	0.628	0.497
CCR	0.778	0.787	0.810	0.815	0.873	0.834	0.794

The procedure fix that was used in this study was proven to be successful at preventing common method bias. This happened because the measurement model's normed χ^2 number was a lot higher than the one-factor model's. What this means is that the measuring model is better at explaining factors than the one-factor model.

4.2. Tests of Research Hypotheses

The parasocial interaction, self-congruity, and psychological well-being theories using a single method that covered everything. That is, the suggested model's fit results were good enough to fully understand the real-world data in the social sciences. $\chi^2 = 887.539$, 357 degrees of freedom (the normed χ^2 number is 2.486), $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.063, IFI = 0.911, TLI = 0.898, and CFI = 0.910.

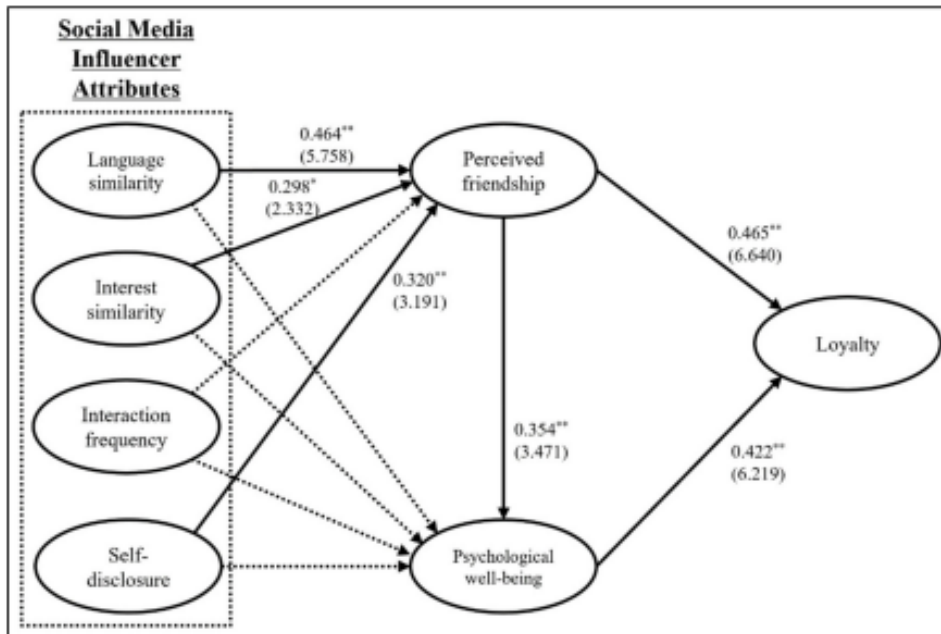


Figure 2. Looking at models with structure equations.** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. Note. The straight line shows an important path, the dashed line shows a path that is not significant.

To begin, Hypothesis 1 (H1) postulated that the extent to which social media users notice the digital characteristics of their preferred influencer has a favorable impact on their view of their connection with that influencer. A good chance that the weak links between the routes from social media influencer traits to mental health were what made the paths so weak.

It's clear that users' mental health has a big effect on how loyal they are to their favorite social media figure (standardized regression weight = 0.422, critical ratio = 6.219, p < 0.01). There is more evidence for Hypothesis 4 (see Table 4).

Table 4. Normalized structural estimations.

Path	Standardized Regression Weight	Standardized Error	Critical Ratio
H1-1 Language similarity→Perceived friendship	0.464	0.086	5.758 **
H1-2 Interest similarity→Perceived friendship	0.298	0.149	2.332 *
H1-3 Interaction frequency→Perceived friendship	-0.182	0.168	-1.448
H1-4 Self-disclosure→Perceived friendship	0.320	0.119	3.191 **
H2-1 Language similarity→Psychological well-being	-0.039	0.104	-0.397
H2-2 Interest similarity→Psychological well-being	0.210	0.172	1.404
H2-3 Interaction frequency→Psychological well-being	-0.046	0.191	-0.315
H2-4 Self-disclosure→Psychological well-being	0.224	0.138	1.896
H3-1 Perceived friendship→Psychological well-being	0.354	0.101	3.471 **
H3-2 Perceived friendship→Loyalty	0.465	0.049	6.640 **
H4 Psychological well-being→Loyalty	0.422	0.048	6.219 **

Indirect Path	Standardized Indirect Effects	Bootstrapping Confidence Intervals	p-Value
Language similarity→Psychological well-being	0.165	0.063-0.292	0.004
Interest similarity→Psychological well-being	0.106	0.014-0.259	0.020
Interaction frequency→Psychological well-being	-0.065	-0.229-0.013	0.085
Self-disclosure→Psychological well-being	0.114	0.032-0.230	0.033

Endogenous Variables	SMC (R ²)
Perceived friendship	0.642
Psychological well-being	0.421
Loyalty	0.629

The chi-squared value for the unconstrained model was 1294.862, and the degree of freedom for it was 714. The chi-squared value for the restricted model was 1298.335, and the degree of freedom for it was 715.

Conclusion

As a result, this research makes a myriad of contributions to the existing body of knowledge. First and foremost, this article outlines the main distinguishing characteristics of social media influencers and examines the impact that these influencers have on the behavior of adolescents by using a non-clinical sample of young Tunisians participants. In this work, a novel research approach is used. The cognitive technique that is based on structural analysis is really used in this process. Using a representative sample of young people from Tunisia, the current research was able to effectively create a collective cognitive map. The influence of Facebook bloggers and Instagrammers on the behavior of adolescents in Tunisia may be better understood with the aid of this map.

In this research, a number of significant discoveries are presented. First, the findings indicate that the particular characteristics of influencers that were examined in this paper have an effect on the behavior of adolescents. In point of fact, youths are more likely to see as trustworthy those influencers who exhibit a high degree of honesty and sincerity. According to them, this outcome is consistent. A further factor that influences the behavior of adolescents is the influencer's capacity to provide information that is both creative and distinctive. These discoveries lend credence to them.

The results that pertain to the graph of direct influence demonstrate that the distinguishing characteristics of the influencers are directly linked to one another. It is easier for the influencer to create material that is more creative when they have a high level of expertise and are distinctive. The amount of time that young people spend viewing original material goes up. As a result, the uniqueness of the information might be a cause of distraction while using digital devices.

There are concerning dangers associated with the growing prevalence of psychological issues among teenagers in Tunisia. A survey conducted by MICS6 in 2020 found that 18.7% of children aged 15–17 years old suffer from anxiety, and 5.2% of these youngsters are sad. The general delegate of child protection believes that they are connected, at least in part, to the excessive use of online social networking sites. On the other hand, scientific research that investigate the connection between the use of social media and psychiatric illnesses among young people in the setting of Tunisia are very uncommon. Our findings, in point of fact, highlighted the significance of the particular characteristics of influencers and the impact that they have on the conduct of adolescents.

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