

## THE EFFECTS OF MEDIA USE MOTIVATION ON CONSUMER RETAIL CHANNEL CHOICE: A PSYCHOLOGICAL SENSE OF COMMUNITY APPROACH

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### ABSTRACT

Media consumption has expanded through the popularity of the internet and one-person media channels such as YouTube and Instagram. The present study attempts to deepen our understanding of media consumption behavior. In particular, we explore how consumers' activities within social media platforms and motivations to use the venues lead to further brand-relevant behaviors such as purchase intention through various channels (i.e., brick-and-mortar, e-commerce, mobile apps). Theoretically grounded in the theory of psychological sense of community, this study examines consumers' motives for using media and perceived interactivity as antecedents of developing attitudinal/behavioral intention through the psychological sense of community. Data were collected through a quantitative survey ( $n = 277$ ) and structural equation modeling was used to examine the suggested relationships. The findings of this study provide implications for digital marketing managers and fashion and beauty brand managers in the under-researched area of transactional commerce activities.

Keywords: Social media; Psychological sense of community; Retail channel choice; Fashion industry

### 1. Introduction

Social media platforms have become the core of interactive communication strategies in various industries due to consumers' affinity for media content consumption and/or content generation instead of mass broadcast stations. As a catalyst for consumer socialization, communication, and interaction venues, more than 72% of Americans use social media sites, and more than half of social media users visit the site several times a day (Auxier and Anderson, 2021). It is evident that social media platforms (SMPs) empower consumers through access to product information and sharing of product reviews (Heinonen, 2011), as well as engaging in social commerce, i.e., browsing and making transactions at their fingertips using the "swipe up" function (Coelho et al., 2018). Therefore, many industry sources illustrate social media marketing effectiveness and brand marketers use over 20 types of SMPs as a new and updated integrated marketing communication tool (Lang, 2020; Stelzner, 2017). It is inevitable for retailers and brands to utilize social media marketing as it has become the essential way to engage consumers (Akar and Topçu, 2011; Dessart, 2017; Dolan et al., 2016). However, few studies have focused on what drives successful relationship building in the SMPs. According to Dessart (2017), knowledge regarding antecedents of relationship building through social media is still lacking and limited.

While recent research has explored both the antecedents and outcomes of social media marketing, a deeper understanding of users' motivation to engage and interact with SMPs is still needed (Dolan et al., 2016). One of several motivational factors, interactivity is identified to affect users' use of SMPs because the SMP users tend to be active and have the freedom to create/share any content (Wang et al., 2012). A recent study by Lyu and Kim (2020) found the effects of interactivity and a feeling of psychological connectedness as the drivers of predicting users' attitudes toward an SMP and intention to purchase the sponsoring brand via e-commerce and mobile apps. Compared to prevalent approaches which investigate a user's interaction and behavioral intention within the SMPs through

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benefit-seeking behaviors (e.g., Nurfarida and Sudarmiati, 2021), a psychological sense of community elaborates the *perception* of users toward others and a feeling of belonging with members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Sarason, 1974). In a traditional and a virtual community setting, a sense of community has been identified as the critical factor in establishing and maintaining a successful community (Blanchard, 2008). However, a few studies have verified the psychological sense of community and motivation-based approaches as the critical factors that may promote consumers' engagement and behavioral intention.

The purpose of this study is to provide empirical and research-based evidence for brand marketers regarding their resource allocation and return on investment for interactive communication channels (e.g., Instagram) to promote harmonized retail experiences (Dennis, 2019). According to Dennis (2019), the essence of harmonized retail lies in "amplifying the wow" throughout the customer journey by acquiring the customer insights and providing a blended and frictionless customer experience. Accordingly, we aim to explore what factors lead consumers to have a feeling of attachment, which may ultimately trigger brand-related behaviors. In particular, we examine the role of media use motivation on interactivity and relationship building (e.g., a psychological sense of community), which may influence their attitude change toward the sponsoring brand appearing on the SMPs and their purchase intention through more than one channel (i.e., omnichannel). In this study, we pose the following research questions: a) To what extent do consumers/users' motivation for using SMPs impact perceived interactivity and psychological sense of community? b) what are the consequences of SMPs' interactivity and psychological sense of community? Our current study expands the current literature on consumer engagement and social media marketing by examining the effects of consumers' motives and psychological connection with the SMPs. Because participants' behaviors are heterogeneous in the SMPs, it is critical to examine what intrinsic and external factors affect participants' behavioral intentions. Similar to Wolny and Mueleer (2013), our study findings expect to expand the current literature on effective social media marketing. Further, the findings provide pragmatic solutions for digital marketing managers in the industry.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

### 2.1. Social Media Use Motivations and Perceived Interactivity

Media dependency theory (DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach, 1989) and the uses and gratification theory (Katz et al., 1973) explain users' active search for specific media to satisfy specific needs they have, as well as achieving various goals they aim through using the medium. Both theories have been widely used to address questions about understanding motivations of selection, use, and goals of certain media (McQuail, 1987). In particular, the uses and gratification theory elaborate users' selection/motivation of using the media by gratifying given needs through enhanced knowledge, relaxation, social interaction/companionship, diversion, or escape experience (Severin and Tankard, 1997).

In the uses and gratification theory, information search explains people's use of the Internet for self-education and is documented as one of the most sought benefits of using online media to support purchase decisions (e.g., Hahn and Kim, 2013). Relaxation/entertainment and pass-time motives explain people's online use motives for enjoyment and passing time without any purpose (Chung and Yoo, 2008). These motives are widely used to explore users' social media use (Maclay, 2018; Panger, 2018). Socialization motives elaborate on people's motivations to use the media for interpersonal communication and activities (Yoo, 2011). According to Khan (2017), relaxation and social interactions are the main predictors of attracting users to interact in the SMPs. Similarly, Hu et al. (2021) find that social media users tend to make non-rational choices based on hedonic attributes of social media (e.g., entertainment and need for recognition) from the frequent social media users. Several recent studies show that social support through interactions/communications with family and friends in the SMPs becomes the main reason for the users' active participation (Burke, 2011; Lyu and Kim, 2020). Additionally, utilitarian and hedonic motivational factors, such as information seeking and socialization, are confirmed as the antecedents of increasing positive perceived interactions on Facebook (Hsu et al., 2015).

Interactivity is defined as the "extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real-time" (Steuer, 1992, p. 84) and is an essential factor to attract and engage customers in e- and m-commerce (Fiore et al., 2005). As a multidimensional and subjective concept, interactivity has been operationalized with three distinct yet correlated dimensions to capture different aspects of communication types, including human-to-human and human-to-system (Chu and Yuan, 2013; Hoffman and Novak, 1996). Perceived control captures users' perception of system attributes and the extent to which an individual feel in control of interactions (Zhao and Lu, 2012), perceived responsiveness addresses speed and availability of information through reciprocal relationships (Chen et al., 2005), and perceived personalization elaborates a subjective understanding of two-way interactions between marketing messages/posts and users to investigate human-computer interactions in SMPs (Wu, 2006). Unlike traditional communication channels, social media presents heterogeneous behaviors of users due to openness. Thus, we examine what motives lead consumers to perceive interactivity in the SMPs similar

to Hsu et al. (2015) findings. We expect that people's motivations to use media and their perception of interactivity may lead to their attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Previous studies have contended that consumers' desires to use social media may lead them to interact with SMPs often and other users, in turn creating a feeling of belonging based on shared values (Lee and Ma, 2012; Panteli and Sockalingam, 2005). Therefore, we expect that users' motives to be connected through using the SMP to increase their positive perception of interactivity. Based on the previous literature, we propose the following hypotheses:

*H1a-c: Motivations for social media use – a) information seeking, b) relaxation, and c) being connected – will influence consumers' perception of interactivity of the SMPs.*

## 2.2. Perceived Interactivity and Psychological Sense of Community

Many researchers have used interactivity to understand online relationship building (Wang et al., 2013). In general, interactivity includes not only technological capability, such as the level of system availability and its features, but also a process of message exchange, a user's perception of using technology or experience of going through a process, or a combination of all three experiences (McMillan and Hwang, 2002). Since users' interaction can be subjective and heterogenous, the perception-based approach addresses users' awareness of support exchange in computer-mediated environments (Lee et al., 2006). In the SMPs, perceived interactivity is a key to connecting with more users due to the importance of user engagement (Wang et al., 2013; Lyu and Kim, 2020). Since the open nature of SMPs tends to provide different understanding and levels of interactivity among users, the present study explores users' perceived interactivity. As an attribute of interpersonal communication, perceived interactivity is a crucial predictor of building community and repeated uses of social sites/apps (Chen et al., 2005; Li et al., 2001).

Consumers' motivations for using social media and perceived interactivity may be antecedents of a psychological sense of community (PSoC). According to DeFleur and Ball-Rokeach's (1989) media dependency theory, the users/consumers may seek to understand themselves and others or orient themselves toward the interaction and action in the social setting. In this regard, one's frequency and dependency on a particular media channel may predict other activities happening on the particular media channel. Though the quantity and quality of users' social interactions are heterogeneous, they are positively related in the context of community development and PSoC in a virtual setting (Bhattacharya et al., 1995; Kim et al., 2012).

PSoC is defined as an individual's feeling of belonging, a feeling that members of a group are essential to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members' needs will be met through their commitment to being together (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Yilmaz, 2016). PSoC lies in individuals' perception of experience between themselves and their surroundings instead of the social structural nature of relationships (i.e., social capital). In the community psychology literature, PSoC has been employed to explore relational bonds and an individual's psychological state of belonging (Sonn and Fisher, 1996) because individuals' awareness of reciprocal relationships is key to building a community (Zhao and Lu, 2012). In a virtual setting, perceived interactivity has been identified as one of the critical antecedents to build PSoC regardless of temporal and spatial constraints (Carlson et al., 2008; Dawson, 2006). Since the perception of available content and controllability of information in a virtual world encourages users to be more involved, it can cultivate a stronger sense of community (Halic et al., 2010). This study adopts PSoC as a critical determinant among the SMP users since PSoC explains relationship building from a user's perspective. Within a SMP, quantifiable participation and interaction between users are not required to establish a feeling of togetherness/bonding, but how users perceive and be aware of interactivity is important (Hsieh and Tseng, 2018). Therefore, we expect that the more users interact with the SMPs, the higher the chance to develop PSoC in the SMPs (Swimberghe et al., 2018).

Though actual social interactions are unnecessary and different users show different levels of participation in SMPs, users' perception of interactions between users and a brand's SMP is vital to create a feeling of belonging (i.e., PSoC) (Carlson et al., 2008). Users of the SMPs do not necessarily interact with other users, but they feel connected as they experience shared emotion toward a specific brand via interaction with an SMP itself and the content (Drengner et al., 2012). Similar to the empirical findings of Lyu and Kim (2020), we expect that perceived interactivity leads to developing PSoC in the setting of the SMPs. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis.

*H2: Consumers who perceive the SMP as interactive will likely develop a psychological sense of community within the SMP.*

## 2.3. Perceived Interactivity and Attractiveness of SMPs

Perceived interactivity is an imperative predictor of one's evaluation of a website (Ghose and Dou, 1998). As one of the antecedents of consumers' attitudes and behavioral outcomes in online settings, perceived interactivity is created based on how users perceive the content (Wu, 2005). Since the website content itself is the consumption object and provides experience to users, attributes of an e-commerce site, including attractiveness, are essential factors that lead to further behavioral and attitudinal intention (Chniti and Bouslama, 2015; Mathwick et al., 2001).

Website attractiveness involves a mix of technical and artistic attributes, including colors, graphics, and content quality (McLaughlin, 1996). Because image and presentation of the product in website result in consumer purchase behaviors (Junaini and Sidi, 2005) and identification (Lee and Yurchinsin, 2011), we argue that the greater the degree of interactivity, the more significant effect on website attractiveness, which may increase positive evaluations of the site (Ghose and Dou, 1998; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). If users perceive the site as more controllable and responsive, they perceive the site as more valuable and attractive (Chung and Zhao, 2017). In other words, as users are exposed to the SMPs' content through interactions, they will be likely to evaluate the SMPs as attractive (Danaher et al., 2006). Thus, we expect that the longer users visit the SMPs, the more likely they are to immerse themselves in engaging content such as pictures and vivid content, thus leading them to perceive the overall site as attractive and attached (Cyr et al., 2009).

Besides, we examine how attractiveness may develop a psychological sense of community. Swimberghe et al. (2018) confirmed that how elderly consumers perceive the quality of content and brand affects their PSoC development regardless of actual contacts. As PSoC is generally developed based on subjective judgment (McMillan and Chavis, 1986), the degree to which users view the content as attractive and fulfilling their needs may develop psychological bonding with the SMP. Regardless of possible relationships, to the best of our knowledge, no previous studies have examined the dynamic inter-relationship between perceived interactivity of the SMP, attitude toward the SMP content presentation (i.e., attractiveness), and the brand appearing on the SMPs through the development of PSoC. Thus, based on previous studies, we expect that consumers who perceive the SMP as having a high level of interactivity are more likely to express a positive attitude toward the SMP (e.g., find the SMP attractive), as well as develop a feeling of belonging based on awareness of the SMP's attractiveness. Thus, we propose the following hypotheses.

*H3: Perceived interactivity will positively influence users' perception of the SMP' attractiveness/appearance.*

*H4: Attractiveness of the SMP will positively relate to the psychological sense of community within the SMP.*

#### 2.4. Psychological Sense of Community and Attitude and Behavioral Intention toward the Brand Featured on SMPs

Historically, psychological sense of community (PSoC) is used to explain individuals' identification and sense of belonging to a group of individuals (Brodsky, 1996; Sarason, 1974). While traditional brand community and community literature address the importance of actual social interactions, PSoC highlights relational bonds based on an individual's psychological state (Sonn and Fisher, 1996). As a relational approach to understanding users' behaviors within a community, the concept of PSoC denotes an individual's feeling without any actual social interaction with others (Carlson et al., 2008; Obst et al., 2002; Sarason, 1974). Compared to traditional brand community formation where brand admirers and loyal customer participation are required, PSoC explains individuals' emotional bonding experience with the community (Drengner et al., 2012).

Many studies have found that the formation of PSoC and attitude positively affect behavioral intention (McMillan and Hwang, 2002). For example, Carlson et al. (2008) found that PSoC serves as a critical factor in consumers' favorable brand-related outcomes in a virtual community. Chen et al. (2013) also indicated that attitude indirectly affects behavioral intention to use an online community through a sense of community. Since the SMPs serve as a new communication platform where consumers seek brand information and a feeling of belonging, the development of PSoC within the SMPs may lead consumers to favor brands that are featured in the SMPs. In other words, as consumers feel PSoC by interacting with the content (e.g., pictures or stories) on a selected SMP, their affective feeling toward the page may create a positive evaluation of the brand (Lyu and Kim, 2020). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

*H5: Consumers' psychological sense of community within the SMP will positively impact their attitude toward the brand featured on the SMP.*

Attitude predicts consumers' behavior towards a brand, advertisement, and purchase of branded products (Lee, 2007; Spears and Singh, 2004). Consumers' favorable or unfavorable attitude toward a particular brand plays a critical role in their purchase intention toward that brand's merchandise. In addition, attitude toward a retail brand increases purchase intention toward retail channels newly introduced by the brand for communications and transactions (e.g., Kim and Park, 2005). So far, numerous empirical media-related studies have found that consumer attitude and other behavioral outcomes toward e-commerce sites are affected by particular media use (e.g., Lee and Kim, 2011). As consumers favorably evaluate the brand featured on SMPs, this affective evaluation may create a positive behavioral intention toward the retailers. That is, users are more likely to purchase a product or service if they have positive feelings and affection toward the brand (i.e., positive attitude). Because we expect that PSoC evokes affective responses to the SMP, a positive attitude toward the brand may significantly affect purchase intention (Lyu and Kim, 2020). In a similar vein, this study examines the effects of attitude on purchase intention through three different transactional channels (i.e., brick-and-mortar stores, e-commerce, and mobile apps). Traditionally, different consumers' motivations are identified as the main factor that leads the consumers to select different shopping channels

due to several reasons (Boardman and McCormick, 2018). For instance, physical stores are popular for all consumers who prefer to have social interactions while e-commerce is favored by consumers who seek convenience and enjoyment. Since this study aims to examine the effects of different social media use motives (i.e., information seeking, relaxation, being connected) on behavioral outcomes, we assume that the different motives may affect the selection of different shopping channels (Boardman and McCormick, 2018). Therefore, we included an omnichannel option that includes brick-and-mortar retailers along with electronic retail venues to holistically capture how the attitude toward a brand's SMP affects consumers' purchase intention. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

*H6a-c: Consumers' attitude level toward the brands frequently featured on the SMP will positively influence their purchase intentions via a) brick-and-mortar retail, b) e-commerce, and c) mobile apps operated by the brands.*

## 2.5. Perceived Interactivity and Behavioral Outcomes

Several previous studies have shown that perceived interactivity influences consumers' behavioral outcomes. For example, Wu (1999, 2005) demonstrated that perceived interactivity strongly predicts a positive attitude towards the site, the brand, and purchase intention. Johnson et al. (2006) also confirmed the effects of perceived interactivity on attitude toward the site. Further, Jiang and Benbasat (2007) found perceived interactivity to be a determinant of intention to return to a site. Similarly, Kim et al.'s (2012) experimental online study demonstrated the effect of perceived interactivity on positive attitude development. Ahn et al. (2014) also presented the effects of perceived interactivity on attitude toward a sports website, ultimately affecting future behaviors. Fiore et al. (2005) also found that image interactivity of technology, such as 3D virtual models in online apparel shopping, enhances users'/consumers' attitudes toward purchasing garments from an e-commerce site. In turn, this attitude leads to purchase intention and patronage intention to buy garments from the e-commerce site. The more interactive one perceives a venue, the more favorable one's behaviors (e.g., Jung et al., 2014).

More recently, Lyu and Kim (2020) found that the perceived interactivity of the SMPs influences consumers' behavioral intention toward digital retail channels of brands featured on the SMPs. Brands' presence on the SMPs affects consumers' intention to visit and/or purchase from brick-and-mortar retail stores (Doyle, 2018; Forbes Communications Council, 2019). Accordingly, some digital direct-to-consumer brands plan to launch physical retail spaces to preserve their brand-customer relationship (Salpini, 2019). In order to suggest a holistic understanding, we hypothesize that perceived interactivity can further influence the level of consumers' purchase intention toward the omnichannel retail options operated by the brand featured on the SMP.

*H7a-c: Perceived interactivity directly influences attitude toward the brand appeared on the SMP and intention toward the brand's transactional channels: a) brick-and-mortar b) e-commerce site and c) mobile apps.*

Based on an extensive review of communication theories and psychology literature, this study presents a conceptual model that explains media users' motives and their cognitive and affective evaluation of such media and the effects of this evaluation on attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Figure 1 depicts the proposed model of causal relationships among various factors and variables.

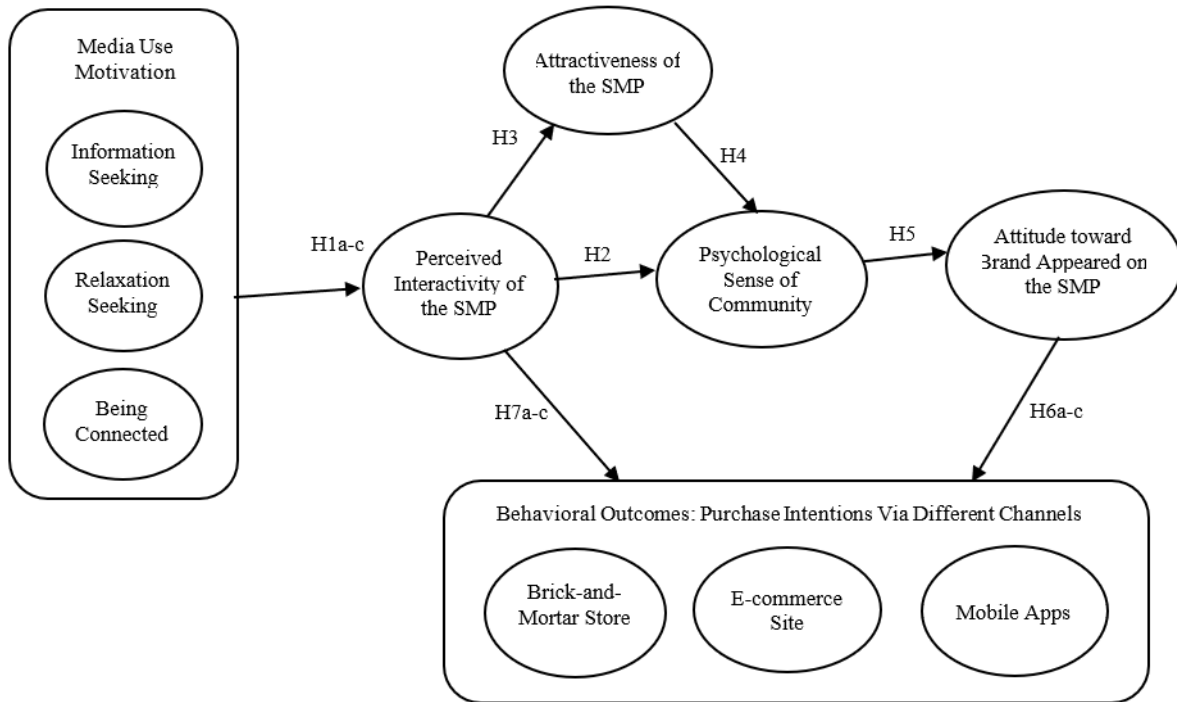


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

### 3. Research Method

#### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

A quantitative survey method was used for this study. Our primary purpose was to investigate the effects of motivations, perceived interactivity, and PSoc in SMPs on the intention to purchase products via multiple retail channels. Therefore, a survey was an acceptable approach (Creswell, 2013). The sample was recruited through a Human Intelligence Task (HIIT) posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Some prior studies have found the MTurk to be suitable for academic research due to the diversity of participants (Casler et al., 2013; Mason and Suri, 2011), while other scholars raised concerns over the quality of the data collected via MTurk (e.g., Chmielewski and Kucker, 2020; Kennedy et al., 2020). To ensure the quality of the data, the following steps were utilized. First, participants who had used the SMP within the past seven days were included to ensure active use of the SMP. Second, participants were asked to identify a specific SMP that they visited most frequently and asked to select the product categories and one specific social media account most explored/visited to find information about their chosen product category. According to Lou and Yuan (2019), the content generated by influencers and other users of an SMP impacts consumers more than content generated by the brand because consumers perceive other users and influencers as more authentic. Thus, we asked the participants to choose the specific SMP account instead of the brand's SMP. Also, participants were asked to identify the *top three brands that most frequently appeared* on their chosen SMP. Finally, they were asked to choose *one brand* out of the three to which they felt most connected on a personal level within the selected SMP. After excluding 91 incomplete and 22 ineligible responses (e.g., responses in which numbers or symbols were entered where text was required), a total of 277 responses were retained for analysis (response rate =71.5%).

#### 3.2. Instrument Development and Data Analysis

After participants identified a specific SMP and the brand with which they felt most connected, they were presented with a six-section questionnaire including a) social media use motivations, b) perceived interactivity, c) psychological sense of community, d) the attractiveness of the SMP, e) attitude toward the brand featured on SMP, and f) purchase intention toward various channels operated by the brand featured on the selected SMP. All measures were adapted from existing literature and modified to suit the context. All the measures are adapted from existing literature (see table 1 and table 2 for the details) and used a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Three questions to assess the intention to purchase through each channel (i.e., brick-and-mortar, e-commerce, mobile store) were taken from Nysveen et al. (2005).

To analyze the data, we utilized a series of statistical analyses. Using SPSS 22.0, the survey respondent profiling was utilized and a two-step approach using AMOS was engaged to test the measurement model and structural relationships (Anderson et al., 1987). Since our goal was to examine the effects of several variables (e.g., media use motive, perceived interactivity) on psychological and behavioral outcomes, structural equation modeling (SEM) was appropriate to verify the complex relationship between the variables (Shaneen et al., 2017).

**4. Findings**

**4.1. Survey Respondents' Profiling**

Our sample was slightly biased in terms of gender and age. More than half of our respondents were male ( $n = 157, 55.5\%$ ). Over 40% of the respondents were in their 30s, and about 34% were in their 20s ( $m = 35.9$ ). Over three-quarters were Caucasians (76.7%), followed by African Americans (10.2%), Asian Americans (7.8%), and Hispanic Americans (4.9%). Over 42% of respondents were married, followed by single/never married ( $n = 112, 39.6\%$ ). Over 200 respondents reported that they had a bachelor's degree (38.5%) or some college education (35.0%). Discretionary monthly income was evenly distributed from "less than \$100" to "\$400 to \$499" in increments of \$100. Slightly less than 70% of the respondents reported that they had a household size of two to four persons, while 23% reported that they lived alone.

When asked to identify their most frequently visited SMP, the majority of participants reported that it was Facebook ( $n = 127; 44.9\%$ ), followed by YouTube ( $n = 57$ ), Twitter ( $n = 40$ ), Instagram ( $n = 23$ ), Reddit ( $n = 18$ ), and Pinterest ( $n = 12$ ). This finding is in line with studies showing that Facebook is the most widely used SMP, with 1.45 billion daily active users worldwide (Williams, 2019) and nearly 230 million users in the US as of 2018 (Clement, 2019). Our sample's age cohorts, parallel to the findings of Statista.com (n.d.), reported that the majority of Facebook users in the US are 25 to 44 years old. When asked with what product/service categories they most frequently interacted, participants most often mentioned entertainment (e.g., books, games, music) ( $n = 145, 47.5\%$ ), followed by health and personal care ( $n = 32, 10.5\%$ ), and beauty and personal hygiene products ( $n = 24, 7.9\%$ ). A minimal number of participants mentioned consumer electronics and accessories and grocery and gourmet food.

**4.2. Measurement Model**

Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the results of the measurement model of research constructs, including standardized factor loadings, standard errors (S.E.),  $t$  values, average variance extracted, and squared multiple correlations. As shown in Tables 1 and 2, reliability was confirmed through a series of examinations of factor analysis, factor loadings and Cronbach's Alpha ( $>.70$ ), and composite reliability. As presented in Table 3, construct and discriminant validity were also assessed based on comparisons of AVEs and correlations. Confirmatory factor analysis of the measurement model for multi-item scales showed that factor loadings of indicators for each construct were statistically significant (standardized weight  $>.6$ ) and adequate for structural model testing. The average variance extracted values for all five constructs ranged from .54 to .79, which were acceptable; factor loadings indicated that the data fit the measurement model ( $\chi^2_{(df=195)} = 431.09, \chi^2/df = 2.21, p < .01$ ; NFI = .88, IFI = .93, CFI = .93, RMSEA = .066). Table 2 summarizes the measurement assessment. Therefore, we conducted subsequent structural equation analyses using these measurement models to test the proposed hypotheses.

**Table 1: Principal Factor Analysis of the Proposed Model Constructs**

Factor Dimensions and Items	Factor loadings	Total variance explained (%)	Eigen-values**	Cronbach's <i>alpha</i>
Adopted from Patwardhan and Yang (2003)				
In your daily life, using [____] is:				
<i>Information search</i>				
● To gain insight on why you do some of the things you do.	.67	36.11	3.25	.79
● To decide where to go for services such as health, financial, or household.	.82			
● To figure out what to buy.	.82			
● To plan where to go for evening and weekend activities	.73			
<i>Relaxation</i>				
● To unwind after a hard day or week.	.88	21.26	1.91	.84
● To relax when you are by yourself.	.92			
<i>Being connected</i>				
● To stay on top of what is happening in the community.	.81	11.49	1.03	.64
● To discover better ways to communicate with others.	.78			

Perceived Interactivity of the SMP				
<i>Personalization</i>				
● I felt I had a personal conversation with someone who has a sociable, knowledgeable and warm representative from [_____]’s page.	.71	44.63	4.02	.81
● I perceive [_____]’s page to be sensitive to my information needs.	.76			
● [_____]’s page was like talking back to me while I clicked through the page.	.84			
<i>Control</i>				
● I was in control of my navigation through [_____]’s page.	.86	18.47	1.66	.74
● I had some control over the content of [_____]’s page that I wanted to see.	.70			
● I was in total control over the pace of my visit to [_____]’s page.	.85			
<i>Responsiveness*</i>				
● I could communicate with the host of [_____]’s page directly for further questions about [_____] brand if I wanted to.	.72	8.42	.76	.77
● [_____]’s page had the ability to respond to my specific questions quickly and efficiently.	.81			

Note: \* One of this dimension’s item was removed from the further analysis due to cross-loading on personalization and responsiveness dimensions. Item 6, reads, “I could communicate in real-time with other customers who shared my interests in [\_\_\_\_\_]’s page.”: \*\* Third dimension’s eigenvalue is smaller than the typical cut-off suggested by the literature. However, researchers proceeded with the dimensionality based on theoretical support.

Table 2: Measurement Model Analysis

Research Constructs and Items	Standardized coefficients	t-values	AVEs	CR <sup>1</sup>
Perceived Interactivity of the SMP	Adopted from Wu (2005)			
● <i>Personalization</i>	.89	-	.79	
● <i>Control</i>	.76	14.31	.58	
● <i>Responsiveness</i>	.67	12.19	.45	
Attractiveness of the SMP	Adopted from Mathwick et al. (2001)			
Below are several items to understand your thoughts on _____’s page.				.79
● The way _____’s page displays the information is attractive.	.91	-	.83	
● _____’s page is aesthetically appealing.	.87	26.37	.75	
Psychological sense of community at the SMP <sup>2</sup>	Adopted from Peterson et al. (2008)			
● I can get what I need in [_____]’s page.	.61	-	.38	.54
● [_____]’s page helps me fulfill my needs.	.60	11.09	.36	
● I feel like a member of [_____]’s page.	.76	10.11	.57	
● I belong in [_____]’s page.	.77	10.26	.60	
● People in this [_____]’s page are good at influencing each other.	.69	9.45	.47	
● I feel connected to [_____]’s page.	.87	11.08	.75	
● I have a good bond with others in [_____]’s page.	.79	10.40	.62	
Attitude toward the brand appeared on the SMP	Adopted from Sengupta and Johar (2002)			
● To what extent [_____] brand is a part of you and who you are?	.82	-	.67	.77
● To what extent do you feel personally connected to [_____] brand?	.83	26.37	.70	
● To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward [_____] brand often automatic, or coming to mind seemingly on their own?	.93	19.04	.85	
● To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward [_____] brand come to you naturally and instantly?	.93	19.11	.86	

Note: <sup>1</sup> CR: Composite Reliability: <sup>2</sup> One item was dropped due to the low loadings: item 5: I have a say about what goes on in [\_\_\_\_\_]’s page.



Table 3: Correlation Coefficients and Descriptive Statistics of Model Constructs ( $n = 277$ )

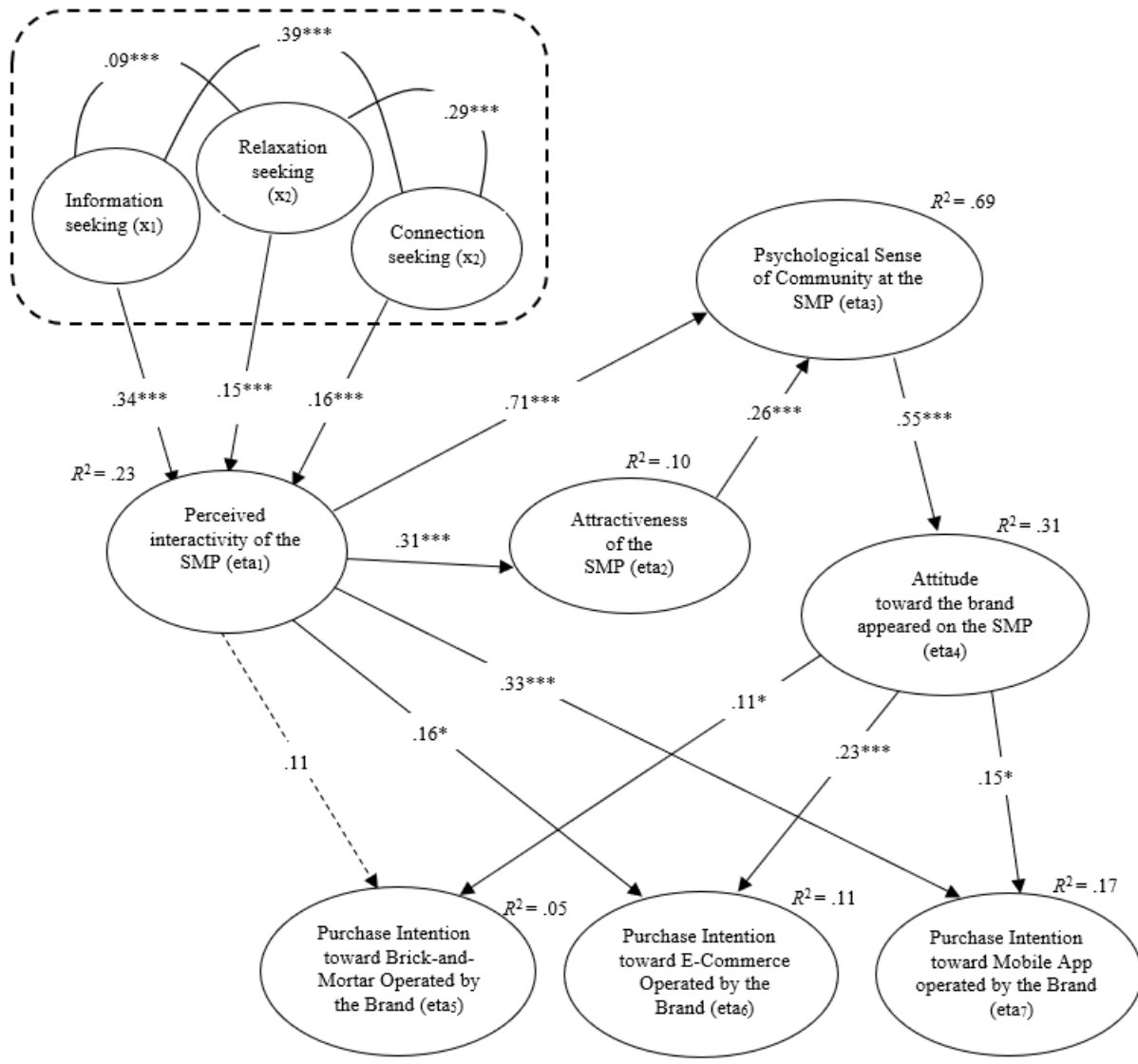
Research Constructs	Correlation Coefficients									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Information Seeking	1									
2. Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Relaxation Seeking	.09	1								
3. Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Being Connected	.39**	.29**	1							
4. Perceived Interactivity of the SMP	-.33**	-.20**	-.26**	1						
5. Attractiveness of the SMP	-.04	-.25**	-.04	.34**	1					
6. PSOC at the SMP	-.34**	-.33**	-.31**	.73**	.45**	1				
7. Attitude toward Brand Appeared on The SMP	-.32**	-.21**	-.24**	.45**	.23**	.53**	1			
8. Purchase Intention via Brick-and-Mortar Store	-.04	-.02	.03	.05	-.01	.08	-.07	1		
9. Purchase Intention via E-Commerce Site	.08	.01	-.05	-.04	-.08	-.11	-.18**	-.05	1	
10. Purchase Intention via Mobile App	.10	.01	.13*	-.11	-.04	-.19**	-.15*	-.07	.23**	1
Mean	4.78	2.88	3.56	4.66	5.69	5.18	4.53	3.71	3.47	4.49
SD	1.48	1.63	1.66	1.06	0.98	1.01	1.60	2.16	2.03	1.98

Note: <sup>a</sup> measurement for all constructs were based on a seven-point scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree.” \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$  using a two-tail test.

4.3. Hypotheses Testing: Structural Equation Modeling Analyses

Figure 2 shows the results of multiple group analysis testing of the proposed structural model fit and path coefficients (Byrne, 2001). In order to assess the model fit, a *Chi*-square statistic, normative fit index (NFI), relative fit index (RFI), comparative fit index (CFI), incremental fit index (IFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used following criteria suggested by Schumacker and Lomax (2004). Figure 2 presents the results of testing the proposed conceptual model, including the significant standardized beta coefficients and t-values for each relationship and squared multiple correlations ( $R^2$ ) for each endogenous construct. All, except one, hypotheses were statistically supported using a two-tail test ( $p < .05$ ). Hypotheses 1a-c, which proposed that media use motivations positively and directly affect the perceived interactivity of SMPs, was supported. Participants’ media use motivations such as information search (H1a), relaxation (H1b), and desire for being connected (H1c) positively influenced their perception of interactivity of SMPs (H1a:  $\gamma_{11} = .34, t = 5.43$ ; H1b:  $\gamma_{12} = .15, t = 2.45$ ; H1c:  $\gamma_{13} = .16, t = 2.42$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was fully supported. In turn, consumers’ perception of interactivity of the SMP positively and directly influenced both their perceptions of PSOC and attractiveness of the SMP (H2:  $\beta_{31} = .31, t = 4.57$ , H3:  $\beta_{21} = .71, t = 9.00$ ; respectively). In addition, the attractiveness of SMP influenced consumers’ perception of a psychological sense of community within the SMP (H4:  $\beta_{32} = .26, t = 4.77$ ). Therefore, Hypotheses 2, 3, and 4 received full statistical support.

Hypothesis 5, which proposed that users’/consumers’ PSOC positively and directly influences attitudes toward brands appearing on the SMP, was supported (H5:  $\beta_{43} = .55, t = 7.38$ ). Hypothesis 6 predicted that consumers’ attitude toward a brand appearing on the SMP is positively related to their purchase intention toward the retail channels operated by the brand. The suggested relationships received statistical support (H6a:  $\beta_{54} = .11, t = 2.20$ ; H6b:  $\beta_{64} = .23, t = 3.43$ ; H6c:  $\beta_{74} = .15, t = 2.30$ ). Finally, Hypothesis 7, which stated that perceived interactivity of the SMP positively and directly influences consumers’ purchase intention toward retail channels operated by brands appearing on the SMP, received partial support (H7a:  $\beta_{51} = .11, t = 1.47, p = .14$ ; H7b:  $\beta_{61} = .16, t = 2.32$ ; H7c:  $\beta_{71} = .33, t = 4.81$ ).



Note: Standardized path coefficients and adjusted R<sup>2</sup> are reported.  
 \* p < .05; \*\*\* p < .001  
 Dashed lines indicate the media uses motivation of the SMP specified by each participant

Chi-square (df=195) = 431.09  
 Chi-square/df = 2.21  
 p < .01  
 NFI = 0.88  
 IFI = 0.93  
 CFI = 0.93  
 RMSEA = .066

Figure 2: Structural Equation Modeling Analysis of the Proposed Conceptual Model (n = 277)

#### 4.4. Decomposition of Effects Analysis

To further assess the significance of indirect effects of predictor variables on consumer response variables, we conducted a decomposition of effects analysis (Table 4). The results confirmed that social media users' motives had significant indirect effects on attitude toward brands appearing on the SMP, suggesting the important mediating effects of perceived interactivity of the SMP, the attractiveness of the SMP, and perceived sense of community within the SMP. Our proposed conceptual model explained a small to moderate amount of variance in the exogenous variables, including attitude toward brands appearing on the SMP (R<sup>2</sup> = .31) and purchase intention for the brick-and-mortar channel (R<sup>2</sup> = .05), purchase intention for the e-commerce channel (R<sup>2</sup> = .11), and purchase intention for the mobile apps (R<sup>2</sup> = .17). For these consumer response variables, social media use motives had strong indirect effects (brick-

and-mortar store: .06-.10, e-commerce sites: .04-.09, mobile apps: .04-.10). Perceived interactivity of the SMP had the strongest indirect effect on purchase intention via retail channels (.04, .10, and .07, respectively). The PSoC within the SMP exhibited strong direct effects on attitude (.55) and purchase intention via brick-and-mortar stores (.06), e-commerce sites (.23), and mobile apps (.15).

Table 4: Decomposition Analysis of Indirect, Direct, and Total Effects of Predictor Variables on PSoC at the SMP and Attitude toward the Brand Appeared on the SMP

Predictor Variables	Dependent Variables					
	PSoC at the SMP			Attitude toward the Brand Appeared on the SMP		
	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect	Indirect Effect	Direct Effect	Total Effect
Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Information Seeking	.24***	-	.24***	.15**	-	.15**
Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Relaxation seeking	.11***	-	.11***	.06*	-	.06*
Media Use Motivation of the SMP: Connection seeking	.11***	-	.11***	.07*	-	.07*
Perceived Interactivity of the SMP	.08***	.71***	.79***	.43***	-	.43***
Attractiveness of the SMP	-	.26***	.26***	.14***	-	.14***
PSoC at the SMP	-	-	-	-	.55***	.55***
	<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.05			.11

Note: \*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$  using a two-tail test.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

### 5.1. Theoretical Implications

This research shows that consumers’ motivational variables, including information search, relaxation, and desire for being connected, positively and directly impacted their perception of the SMP interactivity. Our findings expand the current literature by demonstrating the critical role of social media users’ motivations on their perception of the SMP interactions (H1) (Hsu et al., 2015; Lyu and Kim, 2020). As a result, the consumers may think of the SMP as appealing and develop a feeling of psychological bonding. We also expected that consumers’ perception of interactivity of the SMP positively and directly influenced their perceptions of the SMP, PSoC, and future intention to purchase the brand featured in the SMP via omni-channels (H2). Our findings confirmed that the perceived interactivity of the SMP strongly predicts the users’ PSoC within the SMP, which supports findings from previous studies (e.g., Rovai, 2002). Besides, the results demonstrated that the attractiveness of the SMP influenced consumers’ development of PSoC, this finding is consistent with existing literature (H3) (e.g., Li et al., 2001; Mathwick, 2002; Royal and Rossi, 1996). Our findings also expand the extant research by showing that consumers’ PSoC in the digital world is based on their virtual interactions with the content and fellow members.

Moreover, those interactions may lead the consumers to have a positive attitude toward the featured brand on the SMP based on PSoC, as well as affecting them to have the intention to purchase the featured brand electronically (Lyu and Kim, 2020; Wang et al., 2013; Zhao and Lu, 2012). In particular, our findings manifested the effects of consumers’ PSoC within the SMP on their attitude toward brands appearing on the SMP (H5). The results of direct effects of perceived interactivity on purchase intentions via omnichannel indicated an interesting finding. The results demonstrated that users’ perceived interactivity predicted users’ purchase intention only for electronic and mobile retail channels (H7a-b), not for brick-and-mortar stores (H7c). This finding may be carefully interpreted the role of PSoC as an antecedent of behavioral responses among consumers. In other words, the perceived interactivity may lead to immediate responses from the consumers in the same environment (i.e., e-commerce), but not to the real-world (i.e., brick-and-mortar store) without PSoC and a positive attitude. Thus, this study’s findings elucidate the importance of relationship-focused social media marketing based on the cultivation of psychological bonding to attract consumers to shop via omnichannel. We confirmed that when consumers positively evaluate a brand featured on an SMP, this evaluation positively and directly leads to their purchase intention through e-commerce and mobile apps operated by the brand (H6a-c). Our findings closely resemble Carlson et al.’s (2008) study, which confirmed that developing PSoC within a virtual community leads to customer retention and behavioral intention, such as word-of-mouth. Not only does the SMP retains customers, but PSoC within the SMP encourages new and potential customers to interact with

existing customers, an effective method for acquiring new customers to a brand. We expanded the previous findings of Carlson et al. (2008) by demonstrating the power of PSoC through users' positive and firm behavioral intentions, such as word-of-mouth communication, preferring the brand over competitors, and interest in attending brand-related events, and creating connoisseurship of the brand through a consumer-brand connection.

Another interesting finding is on the indirect effects of PSoC and attitude on consumers' behavior intentions for three retail channels. Unlike existing studies that have explored the role of social media marketing as a medium to lead a future intention in general, the present study findings highlight the significance of affective relationship building as the antecedents of behavioral outcomes. In particular, we found that utilitarian motives (i.e., information search) more strongly impacted endogenous variables such as perceived interactivity, PSoC, and attitude than did hedonic motivations (i.e., relaxing) or social motivations (i.e., being connected). Users' utilitarian motivation may lead to greater PSoC based on the gains/benefits that they could acquire from the content provided by a particular SMP. In turn, users more positively evaluate the brands appearing on the SMP. Therefore, we conclude that the SMP may offer abundant entertainment and social benefits for users, yet the SMP is most likely to be perceived as interactive and attractive when meeting users' functional needs. Accordingly, marketers should carefully interpret the findings of this study. Although consumers may develop subjective PSoC through emotional bonding with other SMP users and the content, the SMP should also deliver practical information. In other words, despite the frequent emphasis on the entertainment factor of SMPs, brand promoters/marketers and the SMP content creators should consider consumers' utilitarian motives for using the SMP when planning their marketing strategies.

### 5.2. Managerial Implications

Our empirical findings are practical for social media marketers and brand managers. Marketing practitioners must frequently assess marketing efforts to justify their marketing budget. The current findings demonstrate not only theoretical connections between consumers' attitudes and their purchase intention toward the brand through psychological ownership of the SMP but also provide research-based justification for marketers to allocate promotional budgets for SMPs. Interestingly, our findings indicate that consumers' social interactions within the SMPs may not be transferred to offline activity without building an affective relationship through the SMPs. Thus, marketers and brand managers should provide a holistic and harmonized omnichannel experience by capturing multiple touchpoints simultaneously through different channels (Hickman et al., 2020). For instance, our study finding validates the positive role of a social media influencer on the users' behavioral responses through the development of psychological connection. This finding provides an insight to marketers and retail store managers to pay more attention to providing consistent messages throughout omnichannel, as well as building psychological connection and belonging with the brand. Further, our study findings validated the importance of psychological bonding through the SMPs, so marketing professionals and brands should consider to better design a platform to attract more users to stay and be connected.

### 5.3. Decomposition of Effects Analysis

When it comes to users'/consumers' purchase intention via e-commerce sites operated by a sponsoring brand, perceived interactivity has the most substantial effect on purchase intention, followed by PSoC and attitude toward the sponsoring brand. Among three retail channel choices examined in this study (i.e., brick-and-mortar, e-commerce website, and mobile apps), we found that individual users' perceived interactivity of the SMP most strongly predicts their purchase intention via mobile apps. To the best of our knowledge, this finding is novel. Although trade articles have speculated that perceived interactivity strongly affects purchase intention via mobile apps, no previous study has provided empirical evidence of this claim. This finding allows industry professionals to focus their marketing efforts effectively.

It is interesting to note that purchase intention via mobile apps is predicted not only by attitude toward the sponsoring brand but also by consumers' perception of the interactivity of the SMP. This finding is in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Jung et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2007; Lyu and Kim, 2020), which demonstrate perceived interactivity as a critical determinant of users' perception (e.g., Kim et al., 2007), emotion/affect (e.g., Fiore et al., 2005), and behavioral responses toward the SMP and the brand appeared on the SMP (e.g., Fiore et al., 2005; Kim et al., 2007).

## 6. Limitations and Future Research Directions

The present study provides valuable insights to practitioners and scholars, as we empirically tested consumers' use motives and how they affect behavioral outcomes through perceived interactivity and a psychological sense of community. However, this study has some limitations which should be addressed in future research. As our main focus was examining the effects of consumers' motives and relationship building on behavioral outcomes, we asked the participants to select their most visited social media page, so a future study is encouraged to explore how relationship building may differ among consumers who visit the same page. We also did not explore the effects of

product categories and types of platforms (e.g., Facebook, Instagram) on consumer behaviors. Since consumers establish different engagement levels with different products or services via different SMPs (Brodie et al., 2011), future studies should compare different product categories and/or platforms to determine whether and how they affect consumers' motives. Second, there are increasing arguments on using Amazon M-turk as a data collection venue in behavioral research regardless of its advantages. In order to overcome some limitations of using the Amazon Mturk, researchers may collect national representative consumer data using a different venue. Also, most of our sample was Caucasian (76.7%), a fact that may limit the study's generalizability. Future studies should include more diverse ethnic backgrounds and conduct a different approach (e.g., qualitative) to see what truly motivates the consumers to use a certain SMP. Lastly, we allowed respondents to choose their most frequently visited influencer SMPs and did not explore the effects of different types of SMPs nor the potential effects of the relationship between influencer types and users. Based on recent studies reporting a positive relationship between consumer motives and social media types and influencer types (Kim and Lee, 2016; Lyu and Kim, 2020), future studies should compare the effects of different social media types.

### Acknowledgment

This research was supported by the Kent State University Fashion School.

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