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**FERNANDA POLLI LEITE**

**DIGITAL INFLUENCERS' SELF-DISCLOSURE AND THE PURCHASE  
INTENTIONS OF ENDORSED BRANDS**

**CURITIBA**

**2020**

**FERNANDA POLLI LEITE**

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A dissertation presented to the Graduate Program in Administration - Master's in Administration, from the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, as a partial requirement to obtain a master's degree. Area of Concentration: Strategic Administration. Research Line: Consumer Behavior.

Advisor: Prof. Dr. Paulo de Paula Baptista

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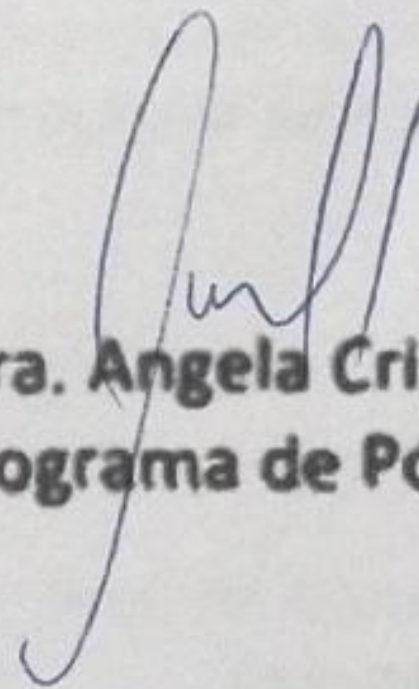
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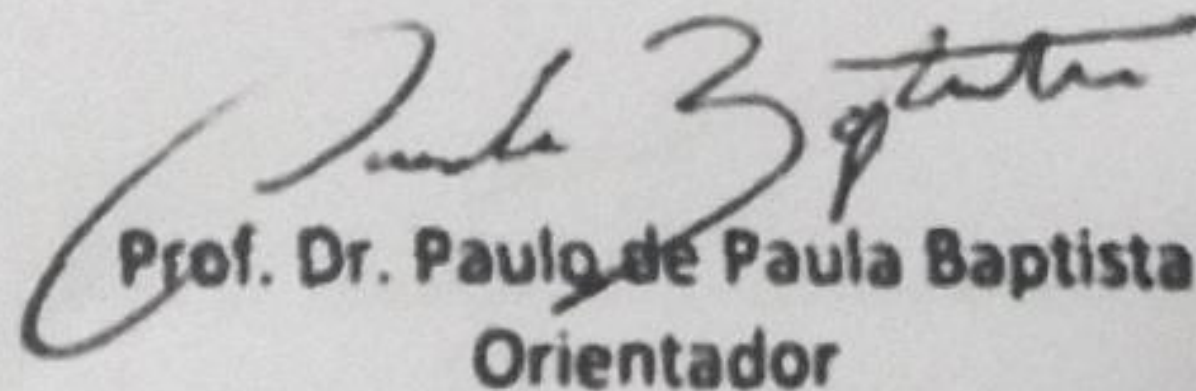
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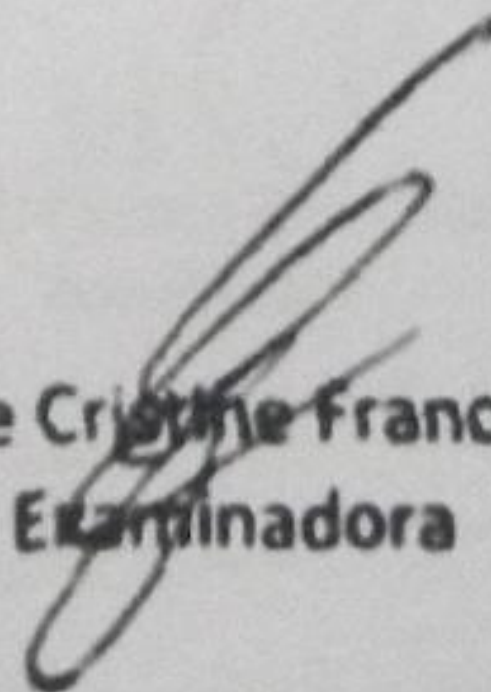
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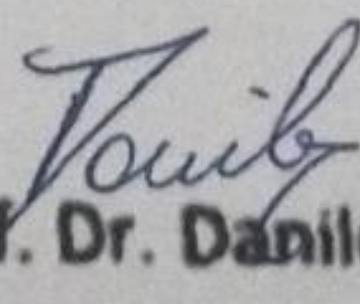
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A dissertation presented to the Graduate Program in Administration - Master's in Administration, from the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná, as a partial requirement to obtain a master's degree. Area of Concentration: Strategic Administration. Research Line: Consumer Behavior.

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Curitiba, 26 de Março de 2020.

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved big Sister (*in memoriam*),  
who always motivated me to pursue my dreams,  
and always said: "*Go, Girl! You Can Do It.*"

## ABSTRACT

This study proposes that influencer endorsements predict both positive consumer behavior outcomes and the development of the consumer-brand relationship. It is also argued that high levels of intimate disclosure by influencers can affect consumers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand. However, the literature indicates that there is no direct effect of self-disclosure on purchase intentions. Hence, other variables may intensify this relationship. This research suggests that the sense of parasocial relationship with an endorsing influencer, over source credibility, might be a less traditional and more effective way to enhance consumers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand, and that self-brand connections and brand trust play distinct roles in this endorsement process. The results of the survey support this argumentation. In particular, with a novel combination of factors, this study integrates the theoretical perspectives of the influencer-follower relationship, and the consumer-brand relationship, to explain the role of influencers' intimate disclosure in the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. This study further offers some guidelines on how marketing strategies can benefit from influencers' intimate disclosure styles and their relationship with followers on social media, to develop consumer-brand relationships and to influence consumers' buying intentions positively.

**Keywords:** Self-disclosure. Parasocial relationships. Source credibility. Self-brand connections. Brand trust. Influencer endorsements.

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Self-disclosure provides structure and content for the comprehension of consumer-brand relationships and the effectiveness of digital influencers' endorsements. Self-disclosure is a kind of communication through which individuals provide others with personal information about themselves (Taylor and Altman 1987). This study examines media users' perceptions of influencers' disclosure on social media.

Thus, **it is argued that high levels of intimate disclosure by influencers can determine consumers' intent to purchase the brand endorsed by these influencers.** Literature indicates that there is no direct influence of self-disclosure on purchase intentions (PI) (Labrecque 2014; Chung and Cho 2017; Ko and Wu 2017). Hence, other variables may influence this relationship.

One of these variables, **source credibility (SC)**, is a well-known construct commonly utilized as an enhancer tool in the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements (Ohanian 1990). According to Bergkvist and Zhou's (2016) literature review, high levels of source credibility lead to more considerable persuasion effects.

However, **it is argued that the benefits of traditional source credibility traits may raise questions in the context of social media and influencer endorsements.** Hence, there is a need for further understanding of how influencer credibility acts as a mediator in the relationship between self-disclosure and consumers' purchase intentions (Chung and Cho 2017). In particular, one question that arises is related to **the extent to which influencer credibility traits might be sufficient to persuade consumers to purchase an endorsed brand.**

Social media has provided a convenient way for influencers to interact with a large number of followers (Chung and Cho 2017). Influencers usually incorporate their product recommendations into their daily lifestyles through social media (Hwang and Zhang 2018). Since frequent interactions with fans are rich in personal details, influencers can create a sense of intimacy, connection, and perceived friendship with their followers, thus fostering a parasocial relationship (PSR) (Chung and Cho 2017; Ko and Wu 2017). A PSR is a type of long-term interpersonal relationship that individuals establish with media personalities, a friendship that exists even when the person is not present (Horton and Wohl 1956; Schramm and Hartmann 2008).

The **PSR** is an appropriate concept to address the relationships between digital influencers and their followers and to assess influencer persuasion power in terms of advertising

effectiveness (Hwang and Zhang 2018). Despite advancements in analyzing the effects of the PSR in advertising, influencer endorsement literature provides limited insights on its role in a more comprehensive framework. In this context, **it is argued that a sense of PSR with an endorsing influencer might be an alternative way to persuade consumers to purchase an endorsed brand.** Therefore, the inclusion of SC and PSR in the same framework will show that the latter can play a vital role in the effectiveness of influencer endorsements.

Sokolova and Kefi (2019) also combined SC and PSR to show their positive effect on purchase intentions. They analyzed attractiveness and attitude homophily as antecedents of PSR and SC. Hence, this study introduces self-disclosure as an antecedent of PSR and SC. There are some explanations for this choice.

First, none of the previous studies tested self-disclosure as an antecedent of the combined PSR and SC in the same model. Thus, there is a need to further comprehend to what extent these combined factors may intensify the self-disclosure effect on consumers' purchase intentions.

Second, although previous studies tested the effect of self-disclosure on PSR (Chung and Cho 2017; Ko and Wu 2017) and SC (Chung and Cho 2014) separately, Ko and Wu (2017) applied the research in the context of the influencer. Moreover, even though self-disclosure is a critical component in the development of personal bonds (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Chung and Cho 2017), none of the previous studies have investigated intimate self-disclosure in the context of influencer-follower relationships.

In sum, since researchers recently started to relate user-perceived self-disclosure to the endorsement process, this study assesses perceived influencers' intimate disclosure to improve the comprehension of the influencer endorsements phenomenon (Tang and Wang 2012; Ko and Wu 2017; Ferchaud et al. 2018). Furthermore, in the progress of the research, a 9-item measure of perceived influencers' intimate disclosure was developed to assess the effect of self-disclosure on consumers' purchase intentions.

Although literature has evidenced the direct relationship between PSR and PI (Kim, Ko, and Kim 2015; Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley 2016; Gong and Li 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018; Sokolova and Kefi 2019), and between SC and PI (Ohanian 1990; Yoon, Kim, and Kim 1998; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019; Sokolova and Kefi 2019), these relationships do not explain other mechanisms that can be associated to the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. In this regard, literature affirms that factors related to the consumer-brand relationship might help to explain the effect of PSR and SC on PI. For example, Chung and Cho (2017) found that SC affected PI through brand credibility.

In this context, since **self-brand connections** (SBC) (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015b; Escalas and Bettman 2017) and **brand trust** (BT) (Dwivedi and Johnson 2013) have not undergone many empirical investigations in the endorsement literature, the present research introduced these variables in the tested model. SBC refers to how consumers make connections between their self-concepts and brands (Escalas and Bettman 2003), while BT consists of “the consumer's willingness to depend on or believe in the brand's ability to perform its declared function” (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001, p. 82).

In particular, Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) state that endorsement research falls mainly within the category of persuasion source's effects. Thus, this study aims to remove this limitation by integrating digital influencers' persuasion effects and meaning transfer processes. Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) state that this is a new area in celebrity endorsement; in turn, there are few studies on the psychological mechanisms underlying endorser persuasion and meaning transfer processes. In this way, SBC and BT variables were added to the tested model under the assumption that symbolic and aspirational associations may be transferred from the endorsing influencer to the endorsed brand, and in turn, may be transferred from the endorsed brand to consumers (McCracken 1989; Escalas and Bettman 2003). Hence, this study assesses whether PSR and SC have an indirect effect on PI via consumers' integration of the endorsed brand into their self-concept (SBC) or via the reduction of perceived risks concerning the endorsed brand (BT).

Based on this, **it is argued that endorsing influencers play a crucial role in determining positive behavior outcomes towards the endorsed brand and the development of the consumer-brand relationship, and that SBC and BT play a distinct role in the effectiveness of this process.**

In this way, this study aims to answer the following **research problem**: what is the relationship between influencers' intimate disclosure on social media and consumers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand, passing through SC, PSR, SBC, and BT?

In particular, the **objective of this dissertation** is to empirically assess the relationship between influencers' intimate disclosure on social media and consumers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand, specifically by combining SC, PSR, SBC, and BT as intervening variables of this relationship. Following are the **specific objectives**:

a) Analyze the effect of influencers' intimate self-disclosure on parasocial relationship intensity and source credibility.

b) Analyze the direct effect of the parasocial relationship on purchase intentions of the endorsed brand, and the indirect effect of PSR on purchase intentions, through self-brand connections and brand trust.

c) Analyze the direct effect of source credibility on purchase intentions of the endorsed brand, and the indirect effect of SC on purchase intentions, through self-brand connections and brand trust.

There is a **managerial need** to understand what kind of endorsing influencers can turn followers into consumers (Chung and Cho 2017). Hence, this study allows brand managers to expand their knowledge on influencer endorsements. The industry has already signaled the critical role of influencers in branding a business. A recent managerial report from Edelman (2019) showed that 63% of the participants trust what influencers say about brands much more than what brands say about themselves in their advertising. Also, 58% said that they bought a new product because of an influencer.

Based on this, digital influencers are increasingly becoming influential models on social media (Hwang and Zhang 2018), thus playing a critical role both in terms of endorsement influence and in terms of market economic value (WGSN 2019). In sum, these individuals assume the role of intermediaries between the brand and consumer (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014), by becoming relevant sources of advice to these consumers (Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez 2018).

Thus, since most of the previous studies focused on traditional celebrities, this study contributes to the comprehension of the recent phenomenon of influencer endorsements and how it increasingly encompasses a significant portion of the capabilities of brand marketing strategies. Regarding the critical role of influencers in facilitating consumer-brand relationships, this study is also an opportunity for managers to understand the role of BT and SBC as an enhancer tool to the success of influencer endorsements.

Concerning BT, managerial reports have demonstrated the importance of trust in the influencer and the endorsed brand to the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. For example, the Edelman report (2019) showed that 40% of the survey participants stated that they trusted a brand because of an influencer. Concerning SBC, industry research shows that besides the increasing persuasion power of digital influencers, family and friends still are the most significant influence on consumers' decision making (SurveyMonkey 2018). Thus, this study reiterates the influencers' critical role as a pseudo-friend of their followers. The sense of

friendship should increase influencers' persuasive power and enhance a sense of connectedness between them and their followers and between their followers and the brands they endorse.

**Finally, it is argued that self-disclosure, along with the concepts of PSR, SC, SBC, and BT, can be used as an enhancing tool for designing successful social media strategies.**

In particular, with a novel combination of factors, this study integrates the theoretical perspectives of the influencer-follower relationship (combined with an influencer's perceived credibility traits), and the consumer-brand relationship to explain the role of influencers' intimate disclosure in the effectiveness of influencer endorsements. Besides, this study explains how marketing strategies can benefit from the way digital influencers reveal themselves in social media, and from their relationship with followers, in order to develop consumer-brand relationships and to affect consumers' buying intentions.

The following dissertation is divided into a theoretical framework, in which the constructs of the proposed model are presented with their theoretical justifications, and hypotheses deductions. Finally, the procedures, results, and discussion are further detailed.



## 2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The following paragraphs present a brief explanation about the study's object and context of analysis, which is the digital influencer as a brand endorser on social media, more specifically on Instagram and YouTube.

According to Lou and Yuan (2019), a digital influencer is a content-generator, who has expertise in a specific area and usually has a substantial number of followers. The content quality and relevance, and the prominence of the content-generator on social media are also important factors to describe an influencer (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014).

One of the main questions when defining a digital influencer is whether this individual can be considered a celebrity or not. The literature indicates that digital influencers can be traditional celebrities or ordinary individuals. Based on this, this study focuses on ordinary people who have become famous through the use of online media (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018; Nouri 2018).

The reason for choosing this group of influencers is related to their increasing **popularity** across different online platforms (Seo and Hyun 2018) and to their **social influence** on social media (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014).

Marketing managers are increasingly considering partnering with digital influencers. Brand management strategies usually involve rewarding the influencers monetarily, or with products and services, once they promote a particular brand (Lu, Chang, and Chang 2014). Thus, these individuals assume the role of intermediaries between the brand and consumer (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014), and they become relevant sources of advice to these consumers (Casaló, Flavián, and Ibáñez-Sánchez 2018). In this way, this study focus on followers' perceptions of the influencer they follow (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014; Huang 2014).

The next topic will discuss digital influencers' self-disclosure by addressing aspects that may be associated with the magnitude of their influence on consumers.

### 2.1 SELF-DISCLOSURE

Social penetration theory is probably one of the most related to self-disclosure (Huang 2014). In this study, the social penetration theory offers a comprehensive model for the self-disclosure construct. The psychologists Altman and Taylor formulated the theory, which

referred to the “range of interpersonal behaviors that occur in the growth of interpersonal relationships” (Taylor, Altman, 1969, p.1).

Altman and Taylor (1973 apud Altman 1973) understand the development of interpersonal relationships as a multilevel behavioral process. Besides, this process may occur over time and at different levels of intimacy exchange (Taylor 1968). This intimacy exchange occurs mainly through self-disclosure by revealing personal information such as a person's biographical data, feelings, thoughts, desires, values, or beliefs to others (Altman and Taylor 1973 apud Kim and Song 2016; Collins and Miller 1994). In this context, self-disclosure is a kind of communication through which individuals reveal personal information about themselves to others (Taylor and Altman 1987; Catona and Greene 2016).

After explaining the origins of self-disclosure and delimiting its definition, it is essential to present the perspectives of self-disclosure analysis to describe its concept more completely (Omarzu 2000).

### 2.1.1 Perspectives of Self-disclosure Analysis

Individuals exhibit a wide variety of self-disclosure behaviors. Thus, self-disclosure is a multidimensional concept (Omarzu 2000). Most studies in this area highlight two significant self-disclosure dimensions: **breadth/amount and depth/intimacy** (Cozby 1973; Chelune 1975; Derlega and Chaikin 1977; Omarzu 2000; Catona and Greene 2016; Kim and Song 2016; Lin and Utz 2017).

The **breadth dimension** refers to the number of different topics of an individual's life that are revealed to others as the relationship evolves (Taylor 1968; Derlega and Chaikin 1977). For example, topics related to work, family issues, friends, or personal beliefs (Kim and Song 2016).

Social penetration theory provides a metaphor for understanding the **depth dimension** of self-disclosure (Posey et al. 2010). The theory says that individuals are like multi-layered onions that together form a person's total personality, that is, his self. The outer layers contain more public information about the individual, such as biographical data, while the inner layers contain information that increases the individual's vulnerability, such as personal values and self-concept (Altman and Taylor 1973 apud Allensworth 1996). Thus, revealing each layer of self to others can lead to the intimacy and consequent development of a relationship (Taylor

and Altman 1987). Hence, intimacy develops mainly through the individual's self-disclosure (Derlega and Chaikin 1977).

The **depth dimension** describes the intimacy level of disclosure in a specific area of an individual's life (Taylor 1968; Kim and Song 2016). During the act of self-disclosure, different levels of intimacy are exchanged as a means to deepen and develop interpersonal relationships (Taylor 1968; Collins and Miller 1994). Thus, interpersonal relationships move from “non-intimate to more intimate levels of exchange” (Cozby 1973, p. 73); the higher the level of perceived self-disclosure, the greater the intimacy/depth of this disclosure, and vice versa. However, to measure the depth of self-disclosure, some care must be taken.

Mitchell et al. (2008) indicate that studies on self-disclosure did not consistently distinguish between depth/intimacy and frequency/breadth of self-disclosure. For example, measuring self-disclosure with a five-point Likert scale where one indicates “very little” and five indicates “great deal” is limited because it is unclear whether it measures the frequency/breadth or depth/intimacy of self-disclosure. For example, “5” may indicate that the individual has revealed both many details and a greater depth of personal details (Mitchell 2006).

In this way, studies have mainly measured the breadth/amount of self-disclosure rather than depth/intimacy (Jourard 1961; Kim and Song 2016; Chung and Cho 2017; Ko and Wu 2017). Hence, this study focuses on the depth/intimacy perspective of self-disclosure.

Besides the limited number of scales measuring the depth/intimacy of self-disclosure, literature evidences different terms (i.e., item-scale) that may fit into self-disclosure construct. In order to assess a more robust analysis of self-disclosure scale, there is a need for a scale development with structured items since self-disclosure can present a broad range of items that can describe the construct. For example, Chung and Cho (2017) focused on the receiver's perception of a celebrity's self-disclosure, and adapted the items-scale from previous literature without explanations of the criteria for the items' selection.

While looking for a more robust items' selection criteria, it was observed that Morton (1978) distinguishes between two styles (not dimensions) of self-disclosure: **descriptive/factual** (disclosure of personal facts) and **evaluative** (disclosure of emotions, judgments, and opinions) self-disclosure. **These styles of self-disclosure can be applied under the breadth, and depth dimensions of self-disclosure** since each style can have its breadth (i.e., self-disclosing factually and evaluatively in different topics) and its depth (i. e., self-disclosing factually and evaluatively at different levels of depth/intimacy).

**Descriptive/factual** self-disclosure is more closely associated with the individual objectively describing personal events. One can only be intimate with another by revealing particular or even unavailable facts about oneself (Morton 1978). The **evaluative** disclosure expresses the individual's interpretations and reactions about issues or facts that occurred (i.e., the individual reveals something about his own internal experience or point of view) (Stiles 1978; Dindia 1988). Thus, it is possible to have intimacy when presenting personal feelings as a strong expression of love or shame (Morton 1978).

For example, little is known about someone when he/she makes a **descriptive/factual statement** as 'my teacher made fun of me in front of the whole class' or 'I have had three boyfriends to date.' However, an **evaluative statement**, in this case, would give personal meaning to this event, such as 'I was humiliated by the teacher and I am still afraid of public speaking' or 'My last breakup was so painful that I am not sure if I can love someone again' (Reis and Shaver 1988; Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Kim and Song 2016).

Later, Mitchell et al. (2008) highlighted that Morton's (1978) definition of **evaluative self-disclosure** could be broken down into two styles: **emotional** (emotions) and **cognitive** (judgments, opinions) self-disclosure. In regard of this, Mitchell et al. (2008) understand three styles of self-disclosure: **descriptive/factual self-disclosure** (as Morton's), **emotional, and cognitive self-disclosure** (Morton's evaluative disclosure divided into two styles). Understanding that emotional revelations are different from cognitive one, this study uses this distinction as well.

Based on this, the selection of items-scale already validated in the literature, and terms from theoretical references would be the most appropriate for the analysis of the self-disclosure latent variable in this study.

### 2.1.2 Online Self-Disclosure

Digital devices help individuals to share personal content increasingly and more widely than ever before. For example, some people are so active on their social networks that their social media friends are likely to know more about their daily activities, connections, and thoughts than their own families (Belk 2013). In this context, self-disclosure has emerged as one of the most salient behaviors in computer-mediated communication (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Carpenter and Greene 2016).

The theoretical basis of the self-disclosure concept (Altman and Taylor 1973 apud Altman 1973) was first developed in an environment where reciprocity is expected. However, in the social media environment, reciprocity may not always be expected or guaranteed (Kim and Song 2016). Nevertheless, social networking sites have been a predominant form of communication for many teenagers and young adults (Utz 2015). Thereby, researchers are increasingly trying to comprehend self-disclosure in the virtual environment.

Studies have researched mainly the self-disclosure behavior among users in the virtual environment (Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino 2006; Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Posey et al. 2010; Nguyen, Bin, and Campbell 2012; Qiu et al. 2012; Bazarova and Choi 2014; Yu, Hu, and Cheng 2015; Cheung, Lee, and Chan 2015; Lin and Utz 2017; Tsay-Vogel, Shanahan, and Signorielli 2016).

Digital influencers who endorse brands also reveal themselves in their social media profiles. For example, beauty YouTubers share their lives with viewers through audiovisual items, in addition to sharing their experiences and opinions on the use of beauty products (Ko and Wu 2017). In this way, other studies have discussed how social media users have perceived celebrities' self-disclosure (Kim and Song 2016; Chung and Cho 2014; Chung and Cho 2017), YouTubers' self-disclosure (Ferchaud et al. 2018), and even brands self-disclosure (Labrecque 2014).

Regarding this study, the effects of disclosure intimacy on relational consequences have been shown in the online environment (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Utz 2015). The following topic covers this discussion by indicating the main consequences of self-disclosure found in the academic literature.

### **2.1.3 Self-Disclosure Outcomes**

The reception of self-disclosure from someone else can function as a social reward (Cozby 1972), even in the social media environment, where reciprocity may not always be expected (Kim and Song 2016). Despite the relationship between a digital influencer and his/her followers does not contain many aspects that are configured as reciprocity between both, when the influencer communicates personal information that is not publicly known, it can indicate to the recipient of the message that he/she is appreciated and trusted by the discloser, principally, whether this information is perceived as typically disclosed only to friends (Worthy, Gary, and Kahn 1969).

In this way, self-disclosure can lead to positive outcomes, such as trust, interpersonal solidarity (Wheless 1976), and feelings of social presence (Kim and Song 2016). Also, Cayanus and Martin (2008) found that teacher self-disclosure was related to affective learning, student motivation, student interest, and perceived teacher clarity.

The reception of self-disclosure is more rewarding with increased intimacy (Worthy, Gary, and Kahn 1969). Thus, literature evidences the relationship between self-disclosure and various relational outcomes (Utz 2015). Cayanus and Martin (2008) point out that much research involving self-disclosure focuses on self-disclosure and liking (Taylor, Gould, and Brounstein 1981; Berg and Archer 1983; Collins and Miller 1994). In other words, the more people reveal themselves to another person, the more they tend to like that individual (Berg and Archer 1983) or, people tend to like more those who reveal themselves more intimately than those who have low levels of self-disclosure (Collins and Miller 1994).

The liking can be intensified when the recipient believes that he/she was personally chosen for intimate disclosure (Taylor, Gould, and Brounstein 1981; Collins and Miller 1994). For Jiang, Bazarova and Hancock (2010), understanding the possible reasons for certain information shared by the other is essential because these attributions of the receiver become part of the meaning attributed to the discloser's self-disclosure, which should, in turn, affect the receiver's responses to the self-disclosure.

In this way, Berg and Archer (1983) state that the exchange of self-disclosure plays a crucial role in interpersonal communication. Thus, intimate disclosure may be interpreted as a sign of a compliment. Receivers of self-disclosure may feel that they are credible and well-liked individuals to earn such vulnerable, intimate disclosure (Wheless and Grotz 1977).

Based on this discussion, this study focuses on the parasocial relationship as a crucial outcome of perceived influencer's intimate disclosure. Before explaining about PSR, there is a need to understand the origin of this term by clarifying the parasocial phenomena and the different concepts and studies about this topic.

## 2.2 PARASOCIAL PHENOMENA

The concept of parasocial interaction (PSI) was introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) to refer to the viewers' involvement with media personalities. PSI resembles interpersonal interaction in which one party seems to address the other directly, adjusting its actions to the latter's responses (Horton and Wohl 1956).

Horton and Wohl (1956) have described that it is up to the media figure/persona to create an illusion of intimacy by suggesting supposed reciprocity. This intimacy illusion can be achieved through the conversational style and gestures made by the persona, for example, by directing his/her speech to the viewers as if he/she was talking to them in person. The audience, in turn, can respond to this behavior as if the media character were actually in their living room, for example, responding to the journalist's goodnight or nodding (Hartmann 2008).

Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) affirm that for the media's users to feel in a parasocial interaction, the persona must evoke the viewers' sense that he/she is aware of them and pays attention to them, thus acquiring a sense of **mutual awareness, attention, and adjustment** (Horton and Wohl 1956).

Moreover, PSI is characterized by non-interference or asymmetry, i.e., the media figure fully controls the course of action. Nevertheless, the PSI is favored by the mass media, which allows, despite the broad audience, each viewer to be addressed relatively in their privacy, as if the media figure were present (Horton and Strauss 1957).

Although the analysis of the PSI concept was first based on the mass media, later approaches broadened the concept to any social interaction with mediated characters (Giles 2002). Since the creation of the PSI term, other concepts have been proposed to explain the parasocial phenomena, such as a) parasocial breakup - PB (Cohen 2003), b) para-love - PL, c) para-friendship - PF (Tukachinsky 2010), d) experience of parasocial interaction - EPSI (Hartmann and Goldhoorn 2011), e) parasocial attachment - PSA (Stever 2013; Cohen and Hoffner 2016; Erickson and Cin 2017), f) parasocial engagement - PE (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018), g) PSI processes (Klimmt, Hartman, and Schramm 2006) and h) parasocial relationship (Horton and Wohl 1956).

**Parasocial breakup** evaluates the expected reactions of viewers to the loss of parasocial relationships (Cohen 2003). **Para-friendship** would be feelings of affinity to the persona, while **para-love** would be an attraction or love for the persona (Tukachinsky 2010). The **parasocial experience** scale was created in an attempt to measure parasocial interaction, as proposed in the original literature. Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011, p.1107) define EPSI as an immediate feeling or impression of reciprocity with a media character, as a "sense of mutual awareness, attention, and adjustment." **Parasocial attachment** refers to the extent to which the media personality becomes "a source of felt security and safe haven" (Stever 2017, p.2). The **parasocial engagement** was used by Tukachinsky and Stever (2018) to describe parasocial relationships as a dynamic process of engagement levels with the media personality.

**PSI processes** refer to cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that may occur as possible responses from viewers directed to the media character (Klimmt, Hartman, and Schramm 2006). Hartmann (2016) affirms that parasocial processes, unlike PSI, capture all kinds of responses from the moment media users are exposed to the persona, regardless the viewer's feeling or not of being part of a reciprocal encounter (Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006; Schramm and Hartmann 2008).

Another concept used to describe the parasocial phenomenon is the **parasocial relationship**, introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956). PSR was chosen to compose the concept model of this study once that its relational nature meets the research purposes and due to its significant use in studies related to the parasocial phenomena. Furthermore, PSR fits very well in studies that deal with relationships between media figures and their viewers/media users.

Before explaining about PSR, there is a need to distinguish between PSI and PSR once that, since the creation of both concepts, the literature presents some confusion regarding it (Giles 2002; Schramm and Hartmann 2008). For this reason, the following topic will explain the distinction between PSI and PSR more profoundly.

### **2.2.1 Parasocial Interactions vs. Parasocial Relationships**

The PSI and PSR concepts have been used to explain a range of media exposure phenomena (Schramm 2015). Rosaen and Dibble (2015) argue that in the decades following the publication of Horton and Wohl's (1956) paper, the concepts of PSR and PSI lost their clarity. One of the reasons for this is that Horton and Wohl (1956) used the term parasocial relationship as part of their explanation of parasocial interaction. Although Horton and Wohl (1956) have defined the PSR as it is understood today (i.e., as a continuous and intimate relationship), Rosaen and Dibble (2015) affirm that the most common mistake was to treat the entire parasocial experience as a parasocial interaction.

For example, Rubin and McHugh (1987, p.280) defined PSI as a “one-sided interpersonal relationship that television viewers establish with media characters,” and subsequent literature has understood PSI for years as a more intimate, friend-like relationship between a media figure and viewers. Furthermore, Giles (2002) and Schramm and Hartmann (2008) indicate that the terms PSI and PSR have been used interchangeably, as a continuous interpersonal involvement with media personalities that may occur during media exposure as



well as pre or post-exposure situations (Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006; Schramm and Hartmann 2008; Schramm and Wirth 2010).

Although there is no widely accepted concept for PSI and PSR (Schramm 2015), PSI is understood as a momentary activity, i.e., interpersonal processes that occur narrowly during media exposure, between persona and viewer (Giles 2002; Schramm and Hartmann 2008; Tukachinsky and Sangalang 2016). For example, when the media user feels a sense of mutual attention towards the media character who looks at the camera to greet the viewers (Hartmann 2016).

On the other hand, the PSR is a long-term relationship that can last beyond media exposure, like a friendship that exists even when the person is not present (Giles 2002; Schramm and Hartmann 2008; Tukachinsky and Sangalang 2016). An example of a PSR would be media users' sense of closeness and intimacy with the persona as if they were real friends. Moreover, for the PSI to happen, there is a need for the presence of another mediated, while the PSR can be experienced even if the other is not present (Hartmann 2016).

Thus, the understanding of the PSI and PSR (e.g., based on short – PSI, and long-term – PSR social ties) is equivocal, as it allows both concepts to be used interchangeably (Hartmann 2016).

In this way, only the PSR can be defined as a social bond. PSI, on the other hand, is characterized as a feeling of reciprocal interaction, which does not depend on any sense of social tie. Based on this, PSR may “co-develop with PSI or can emerge absent any parasocial interaction” (Rosaen and Dibble 2015, p.2; Hartmann 2016). For example, it is possible to develop PSR after observing fictional movie characters without illusory interaction with them (Hartmann, 2016). Thus, although related, PSI and PSR are two distinct concepts (Rosaen and Dibble 2015).

Besides, Hartmann (2016) states that the PSI has no valence once that it can be equally felt, regardless of whether the viewer likes the persona or not. On the other hand, PSR can be positive and negative, such as friendship versus antipathy.

Based on these distinctions, Hartmann (2008), and Rosaen and Dibble (2015) argue that many researchers have studied PSR rather than PSI, even describing the term as parasocial interaction. This confounding factor is reflected in most existing PSI scales; despite the title of parasocial interaction, the majority PSI scales measure parasocial relationships, such as the PSI scale developed by Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985), one of the most popular between the parasocial studies.

Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) indicate that this scale mainly captures viewers' feelings of friendship with media personalities, rather than capturing whether the audience feels involved in real interaction with the persona during their media exposure. Based on this, the authors introduced a scale called Experience of Parasocial Interaction (EPSI) as an effort to explore viewers' illusory experience of being involved in real social interaction with the persona during the exposition.

Despite the distinctions between PSI and PSR, it is noteworthy that the concepts can complement each other. In the same way that PSR can grow and develop through repeated PSI, so specific parasocial interactions can be more intense when a viewer has an established PSR with the media character (Tukachinsky and Sangalang 2016). In summary, PSI can facilitate PSR, while PSR can strengthen PSI (Hu 2016).

In this context, this research focuses on the PSR since it is intended to work on longer-lasting relationships that resemble real social relationships (Rosaen and Dibble 2015). Although PSR and PSI have been used interchangeably for years, the following section describes the concept of PSR based on the possible distinctions already pointed out by the literature.

### 2.3 PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Parasocial relationships develop similarly to interpersonal relationships (Rubin and Mchugh 1987). Viewers can engage in PSR even when they are not exposed to the persona, just as people continue in interpersonal relationships when the other is not present (Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann 2008). In this way, PSR can be considered a sense of affective, interpersonal involvement with media personalities (Rubin and Perse 1987).

According to Horton and Wohl (1956), an essential feature of PSR is the lack of effective reciprocity. It means that the viewer can freely choose between the relationships offered, but cannot create one because the interaction is non-dialectical, being controlled by the media character. Thus, if dissatisfied with the experience, the viewer has only the option to withdraw.

Also, when a media user feels psychologically close to a media figure, he can treat the personality as a friend and establish a friendly relationship with him. Despite the lack of face-to-face communication, the PSR allows media users to seek out more information about the media figure and gain a deeper understanding of him/her through alternative channels (Zhang 2018).

Finally, it is possible to understand that PSR can be either positive, such as an intimate affective friendship, or negative, consisting of dislike or hatred feelings (Hartmann, Stuke, and Daschmann 2008; Hartmann 2016). In this context, this study will analyze positive PSR.

### **2.3.1 Online Parasocial Relationships**

The PSR was first studied in social psychology (Horton and Wohl 1956) and later incorporated into media and communication studies (Levy 1979; Rubin, Perse, and Powell 1985; Rubin and Mchugh 1987). Recently, marketing scholars have turned their attention to PSR, applying it in the context of social media (Baek, Bae, and Jang 2013; Labrecque 2014; Kim and Song 2016; Lee and Watkins 2016; Yuan, Kim, and Kim 2016; Chung and Cho 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018).

In this context, the development of PSR is not restricted to traditional media once that it can be seen in the online environment as well (Labrecque 2014). In social media, followers of digital influencers are often aware that their comments will hardly be read and answered by influencers. Nevertheless, these followers may experience a psychological process very similar to real relationships and feel emotional intimacy with those influencers after a period of exposition to them (Ding and Qiu 2017). Thus, social media is a valuable tool that assists in the development of PSR with media figures (Chung and Cho 2017).

PSR theory can explain an essential part of the relationships developed between media users and digital influencers (Chung and Cho 2017), since some users may experience great intimacy and strong PSR with the influencers they follow (Baek, Bae, and Jang 2013). As the media users hear and see the influencers directly through their social media accounts, they may feel as if they know the influencer personally (Kim and Song 2016; Chung and Cho 2017).

#### **2.3.1.1 Online Parasocial Relationship: One-Way versus Two-Ways**

One of the main questions that arise when adapting the concept of PSR to the digital environment is whether this interpersonal relationship remains unilateral (Horton and Wohl 1956; Rubin and Mchugh 1987). Horton and Wohl (1956) talk about the lack of reciprocity in the relationship between viewer and media character, but with the advent of digital media, the interaction between people has changed and, consequently, with media personalities as well.

In the context of digital influencers, Kim and Song (2016) state that social media allow people to respond to celebrity messages, so some people may feel and act like they are in an interpersonal relationship (Yuan, Kim, and Kim 2016). Thus, PSRs with celebrities are sometimes responsive while others are not (Baek, Bae, and Jang 2013). As much as media users make comments and questions on influencers' profiles, hardly all users will be answered due to the high number of followers and reactions on the social network (Sokolova and Kefi 2019).

Although online media enables direct bilateral communication between an individual and the persona, interactions between followers and digital influencers/celebrities still reflect more one-sided than two-way conversation (Labrecque 2014) since the feeling of being in a two-way relationship is more illusory than real (Sokolova and Kefi 2019).

This is explained by the fact that users can follow the content of digital influencers without the obligation of reciprocity, as can be observed in the context of social media (Hargittai and Litt 2011). Even so, communication remains unilateral as the digital influencer still controls their communication messages. Further, it is interesting to note that digital influencers interact more with users when they open up for such a conversation to happen. Therefore, this relationship between social media users and digital influencers **remains a parasocial relationship rather than a typical interpersonal relationship** (Kim and Song 2016).

#### 2.4 PERCEIVED INFLUENCER DISCLOSURE AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

According to the social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973 apud Cayanus and Martin 2008), revealing personal information about oneself can lead to the development of intimate relationships. Thus, self-disclosure is a critical component in the development of personal relationships, as it helps develop intimacy between partners (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Chung and Cho 2017). For example, Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock (2010) found that in both computer-mediated and face-to-face communication, participants who received high levels of self-disclosure felt more intimate toward their partner than those who received low levels of self-disclosure.

Based on this, digital influencer self-disclosure can be an antecedent of the development of a PSR between followers and influencers. The relationship between self-disclosure and PSR may be mainly explained by the intimacy that the follower may feel when receiving personal disclosure from the influencer.

Influencer self-disclosure can be seen through their message content on social media (Labrecque 2014). Besides posting online product reviews, several digital influencers disclose scenes from their daily lives, personal preferences, and feelings to their followers (Bond 2016). The act of revealing oneself can be perceived as a sign that the influencer values the interpersonal relationship with his/her followers and wants to maintain it. Therefore, consumers interpret influencers' self-disclosure as a sign of offering friendship (Chung and Cho 2017). The higher the self-disclosure from the media figure (i.e., digital influencer), the deeper the perceived intimacy towards him and the lower the uncertainties about him. Thus, this can lead the individual to like more the media figure (Perse and Rubin 1989) and may lead to a sense of friendship with the media figure. Therefore, followers' perceptions of the digital influencer's self-disclosure can have a positive impact on their perception of PSR. In this context, PSR can happen through open communication, such as sharing personal details and establishing feelings of one to one relationship (Labrecque 2014).

Regarding the **self-disclosure dimensions**, Chung and Cho (2017) indicate that celebrities wishing to create a highly intimate personal relationship with consumers must consider the depth/intimacy of their disclosure on social media when creating their content. Thus, not revealing personal details on social networking sites may harm the development of a PSR between followers and influencers. Lack of self-disclosure can create distant, less authentic, and honest images, and even diminish trust in the influencer.

Studies indicate that there is a positive relationship between self-disclosure and friendship development (Parks and Floyd 1996; Valkenburg and Peter 2009; Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010). In particular, studies show that there is a positive association between celebrities' self-disclosure and PSR (Chung and Cho 2017) and between YouTubers' self-disclosure and PSR (Ko and Wu 2017).

Thus, self-disclosure might play an essential role in the development of 'pseudo-relationships' with media figures—since high levels of self-disclosure should create intimacy and trust between partners (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010; Labrecque 2014; Chung and Cho 2017)—and may consequently strengthen PSR from media users towards the influencer they follow (Bond 2016). This leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1:** The influencer's intimate self-disclosure is positively related to PSR intensity.

## 2.5 PERCEIVED INFLUENCER DISCLOSURE AND SOURCE CREDIBILITY

Celebrity endorsements have become increasingly prevalent on online platforms (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). The goal of a celebrity endorsement is to add value to a brand, product, or service offering (Keller 2005). In this context, Djafarova and Trofimenko (2018) argue that SC theory is suitably applicable to the online context, due to its attention to perceived characteristics.

Endorsers who have positive traits can lead to having SC (Ohanian 1990). In this way, credibility is perceived by the audience, instead of being an attribute of the endorser (Erdogan 1999; Ohanian 1990). SC is a “term commonly used to imply a communicator’s positive characteristics that affect the receiver's acceptance of a message” (Ohanian 1990, p. 41).

Attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise are the three characteristics of the SC construct embraced in this study. These three dimensions measure the effectiveness of endorsers in the area of the endorsed product (Ohanian 1990): **expertise**, which refers to the extent to which an endorser is perceived to hold valid assertions involving the experience, knowledge, and skills of the endorser; **trustworthiness**, which refers to the honesty, integrity, and the degree of confidence in an endorser (Ohanian 1990; Erdogan 1999); and **attractiveness**, which refers to consumer perceptions of the physical appeal of an endorser (Ohanian 1990).

Literature indicates that there is a positive association between self-disclosure and source credibility. **First**, once self-disclosure emphasizes impression formation, individuals can reveal intimate details attempting to increase their attractiveness (Berg and Archer 1982; Berg and Archer 1983; Jacobs, Hyman, and McQuitty 2001). Berg and Archer (1983) found that the receipt of intimate self-disclosure leads to more attraction for the discloser than nonintimate disclosure. In the context of a salesperson, Jacobs, Hyman and McQuitty (2001) found that self-disclosure is positively related to attraction to a salesperson.

**Second**, high levels of self-disclosure may enhance the perceived trustworthiness of the discloser by the receiver (Wheless 1978; Jacobs, Hyman, and McQuitty 2001; Chung and Cho 2017). Wheless (1978) and Jacobs, Hyman and McQuitty (2001) found that self-disclosure is positively related to the perceived trustworthiness of the individual. In the online context, Huang (2014) found that the amount of self-disclosure influences blog readers to trust product review blogs, whereas Chung and Cho (2017) found that when a consumer feels that a celebrity is self-disclosing, this feeling leads to a higher level of trust in that celebrity, through PSR.

**Finally**, the audience’s perceived self-disclosure can positively enhance the perception of a celebrity’s expertise. Chung and Cho (2014) tested expertise, along with trustworthiness,

to measure celebrity credibility in the context of social networking. The authors argue that a high level of intimacy would make the celebrities' claims appear more reliable. In this way, self-disclosure, as perceived by the audience, might increase the perception that the endorser will deliver what he/she promised (Chung and Cho 2014).

In general, the reason for the relationship between self-disclosure and SC lies in the assumption that followers use all available information to evaluate the influencer's credibility. Huang (2014) explains that more complete and personal information shared by influencers helps the followers to satisfy their need for information about the influencers and to increase a sense of familiarity with them. Similarly, when influencers assume high levels of intimate disclosure, they provide followers with a substantial depth of knowledge about them. In turn, the influencers' intimate disclosure likely enhances followers' evaluations, which results in higher credibility perceptions (Chung and Cho 2017). In sum, a deep understanding of the influencer would make their claims appear more credible. Based on this, the second hypothesis is:

**H2:** The influencer's intimate self-disclosure is positively related to SC.

## 2.6 PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS

Brands can benefit from the PSR with an endorsing influencer (Yuan, Kim, and Kim 2016; Lee and Watkins 2016; Gong and Li 2017; Chung and Cho 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018). For instance, PSR positively affects customer equity drivers, which consist of brand equity, value equity, and relationship equity (Yuan, Kim, and Kim 2016). Moreover, the follower's PSR with a digital influencer has a positive impact on the endorsed product's eWOM intentions (Hwang and Zhang 2018).

Endorsers with a strong PSR can lead to greater success of brand endorsement (Chung and Cho 2017). In this context, the follower's PSR with a digital influencer is a positive predictor of attitudes toward advertising and attitudes toward the endorsed product (Gong and Li 2017). Also, vlogger's PSR can positively relate to perceived brand quality, brand effect, and vlogger-endorsed brand preference (Liu, Liu, and Zhang 2019).

In this way, parasocial responses towards the media figure can affect processes of formation and changes in consumer attitudes. Advertising has long practiced this by attempting to transfer the image of a celebrity to a product to reinforce the attractiveness of the product to

consumers (Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006; Mccracken 1989; Escalas and Bettman 2017). Chung and Cho (2017) add that celebrity fame and popularity do not transfer directly to the effectiveness of their endorsement, but instead through the establishment of PSR with consumers. As seen, PSR can lead to brand endorsement effectiveness in different ways. This study evaluates the **purchase intent of the brand endorsed by a digital influencer** as one of the PSR's outcomes.

**Social comparison theory** (Festinger 1954), **reference groups'** theoretical framework (Solomon 2016), and **uncertainty reduction theory** (Berger and Calabrese 1975) form the theoretical background to understand how PSR influences the effectiveness of influencer endorsement of a brand.

According to **social comparison theory**, people need self-assessment, so when engaging in social comparison, individuals self-assess whether they are doing worse or better than the target of comparison (Festinger 1954). Garcia, Tor, and Schiff (2013) bring together some important factors to explain the influence of social comparison on consumer consumption decisions: a) a person tends to evaluate his skills against others who are similar to himself (Festinger 1954); b) the more relevant is the dimension of comparison for the individual, the higher are the possibilities to compare with others; c) the comparison tends to be stronger when the other is interpersonally close - a friend or brother (Garcia, Tor, and Schiff 2013).

In this way, **reference group literature** states that people compare themselves with those perceived as a direct, closer, and more informal role models (Solomon et al. 2006), such as family and friends (Festinger 1954). In PSR processes, influencers move from a secondary and formal reference group to a primary and more informal social influence group. The rationale for this is that, since digital influencers can be seen as their followers' friends, consumers usually search for friends' recommendations, due to the fact they are similar in various attributes (Moschis 1976). Still, Lee and Watkins (2016) explain that, since individuals tend to compare themselves with other more significant, and similar ones, consumers similarly compare their brand consumption with that of influencers as the PSR increases.

In this context, influencers in the role of pseudo-friends raise the perceived proximity and their relevance to their followers (Klimmt, Hartmann, and Schramm 2006). Also, by incorporating endorsements into personal stories on social media, the endorsing influencer strategically utilizes the benefits of emotional involvement created in the domains of the PSR to their advantage (Lueck 2012). This might increase followers' likelihood of comparing themselves with the influencers (Festinger 1954; Garcia, Tor, and Schiff 2013), thus contributing to consumers' likelihood of imitating the influencers' behavior by purchasing the



brands that may help their lifestyle becoming as admirable as perceived of the influencers' life (Lueck 2012).

Furthermore, **uncertainty reduction theory** contributes to the explanation that the sense of an illusory friendship with an influencer may reduce followers' uncertainty feelings (Lee and Lee 2017). The rationale for this is that, once consumers trust friends' recommendations, they might trust the influencers' advice with whom they have a feeling of PSR (Escalas and Bettman 2017).

When faced with a high level of uncertainty about the appropriateness of their behavior or opinions in a particular situation, individuals look for other people similar to them to reduce these uncertainties (Festinger 1954; Berger and Calabrese 1975). Thus, Perse and Rubin (1989) point out that media figures can be used as models to reduce uncertainties about how to behave socially, as consumers can observe these personas interacting socially in the media and compare their skills, behaviors, and actions with these media figures.

In this context, individuals who have PSR with media figures already have reduced uncertainties about them since friendship is already established. In sum, consumers compare their brand consumption behavior with that of influencers and reduce particular uncertainties related to the endorsed brand to the extent that perceived PSR increases (Berger and Calabrese 1975; Lee and Watkins 2016).

Thus, the literature gives evidence of the positive association between PSR and purchase intention of an endorsed brand (Kim, Ko, and Kim 2015; Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley 2016; Gong and Li 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018; Sokolova and Kefi 2019). This leads to the third hypothesis:

**H3:** The PSR with a digital influencer is positively related to the PI of the brand he/she endorses.

## 2.7 SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS

In a literature review, Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) state that celebrity endorsements research falls mainly within the category of persuasion source's effects. Thus, endorsing influencers who are perceived as credible can have positive effects on brand evaluation (Ohanian 1990; Bergkvist and Zhou 2016), following that information from reliable sources is viewed to be more valid than other information (Chung and Cho 2017).

Ohanian (1990), who introduced attractiveness into the original source credibility construct, found that celebrity endorser's credibility can be a predictor of intention to purchase a specific product. Subsequent studies confirmed that attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness (Yoon, Kim, and Kim 1998; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019; Sokolova and Kefi 2019) are essential to purchase intentions.

**First, attractiveness** is a predominant factor in the fashion and beauty sectors (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019) — the context of this study. For example, Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2019) found that attractiveness showed a positive effect on purchase intention for the advertised fashion products.

**Second**, followers may perceive influencers as **trustful** information sources (Uzunoglu and Kip 2014; De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017; Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). In this way, digital influencers endorsers are increasingly being selected by brand managers under the assumption of their trustworthiness. Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget (2019) compared celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising, and they found that influencer endorsements led to higher trustworthiness than celebrity endorsements. Uzunoglu and Kip (2014, p. 595) state that “the trust bloggers inspire is a major source of blogger's reliability, making them powerful in the eyes of brands.” For example, bloggers who demonstrated that they had tried a product are the most valued, once consumers look for recommendations of trustworthy sources.

**Finally**, digital influencers often have topic **expertise** over which they have been able to establish a career. In this way, devoting a career to a specific domain of interest can raise a perception that influencers are more knowledgeable on products of their expertise than traditional celebrities (Uzunoglu and Kip 2014; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019).

Furthermore, influencers have the power to transform an unknown brand into a well-known brand, generating positive associations through persuasion techniques (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). Also, influencers share advice, user-oriented reviews, personal experiences, and recommendations about more specific subjects on social networking (Uzunoglu and Kip 2014). In this way, **endorser credibility traits might reduce perceived risk and increase consumer confidence in products** (Chung and Cho 2017).

Hence, following previous works (Ohanian 1990; Yoon, Kim, and Kim 1998; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019; Sokolova and Kefi 2019), the fourth hypothesis is formulated as:

**H4:** Influencer credibility is positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.

Although the literature has evidenced the direct effect of PSR and SC on purchase intentions, this relationship does not explain other mechanisms that could be associated with the effectiveness of influencer endorsements.

In this context, a brand can be an active relational partner (Fournier 1998; Yague-Guillen, Munuera-Alemán, and Delgado-Ballester 2003). Thus, endorsing influencers can intensify consumers' positive purchase intentions through the development of a relationship with the endorsed brand.

In the following topics, two concepts are introduced as mechanisms of the relationship between PSR/SC and purchase intentions: **self-brand connections and brand trust**.

## 2.8 PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS

**Social comparison theory** (Festinger 1954), **reference groups** (Solomon 2016), and the **meaning transfer model** (McCracken 1989) may help to explain the association between PSR and self-brand connections.

Regarding the **theory of social comparison and reference groups**, several studies have investigated the psychological mechanisms that promote social influence (Shalev and Morwitz 2012). In this way, a prominent principle is that consumers accept the influence of a source with which they identify and reject the influence when they wish to dissociate from the source (Escalas and Bettman 2003, 2005).

Once consumers use similar and relevant people as a source to evaluate their beliefs about the world, endorsing influencers (e.g., as a pseudo-friend) can be considered as a **reference group** to their followers (Rehman 2011), and consequently as a **role model of comparison** to them (Escalas and Bettman 2003). Reference groups are essential to the consumer as comparison models. Consumers are motivated by their own needs to use brand associations derived from different types of groups in order to build and present their self-identities (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

Besides, individuals purchase a product not only for their functionality but also for what the product means (Levy 1959). In this way, **brand meanings** arise from the use of brands by reference groups (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Thus, endorsing influencers can provide a set of meanings that become associated with the brands they endorse (McCracken 1989; Miller and Allen 2012). Consumers, in turn, form associations between the influencer and the brands they

use and transfer these meanings to themselves, as they select brands with relevant meanings for some aspect of their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2005).

When brand associations are used to build or communicate the self-concept to others, many consumers develop a connection with the brand. This connection may be called a **self-brand connection**, which refers to the extent to which individuals incorporate brands in the mental representation of the self (Escalas and Bettman 2003; Escalas 2004).

Thus, according to Escalas and Bettman (2003, 2009), consumers buy brands in part to build their self-concepts and, in turn, form self-brand connections. In this context, brands with images consistent with the endorser enhance consumers' self-brand connections when they like the endorser. Further, consumers accept meanings of brands associated with an endorser whom they perceive as similar to themselves or who they aspire to be. Based on this, the positive effect of influencer endorsement on self-brand connections is stronger for brands that communicate something symbolic about their users compared to brands that do not communicate much about the user's self-identity (Escalas and Bettman 2009).

Hence, consumers are more likely to develop SBC when there is a strong usage association between the reference group and the brand, and a strong connection between the reference group and consumer self-concept. Consumers will have stronger SBC when they realize that the person they identify with uses the specific brand (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

Based on the above, Escalas and Bettman (2017) found that PSR has a significant positive effect on self-brand connections. More specifically, the authors found that PSR mediated the effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connections. Lee and Lee (2017) found that consumers' relationships with services, brands, and other customers positively influenced their self-brand connections. Also, Zhang (2018) observed that the PSR between consumers and celebrities is an essential factor in the process of endorsement of a brand. The study showed that the PSR allowed consumers to establish self-brand connections with the endorsed brand.

Hence, a more intense PSR with the endorsing influencer may have a positive relationship with consumers' connection with the endorsed brand (Escalas and Bettman 2017; Lee and Lee 2017; Zhang 2018). This leads to the fifth hypothesis:

**H5:** The PSR is positively related to consumer SBCs towards the endorsed brand.

## 2.9 SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS

According to Bergkvist and Zhou (2016), a new area of research in celebrity endorsement is non-evaluative meaning transfer. Based on the ideas presented by McCracken (1989), this line of research aims to reveal the transfer of non-evaluative characteristics from the celebrity to the brand.

Previous research shows that endorser credibility can be transferred to brand beliefs (Yoon, Kim, and Kim 1998), to brand credibility (Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell 2011; Chung and Cho 2017), to consumer-based brand equity (Spry, Pappu, and Cornwell 2011; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a), and brand attitude (Munnukka et al. 2019). In this study, a relationship between SC and SBC is expected. Support for this logic comes from the **meaning transfer model** (McCracken 1989) and the **value-expressive function of reference groups** (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989).

When a brand is linked with a celebrity through a brand endorsement, associative links are formed in the consumer mind. Consumers who perceive certain celebrities as possessing attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise are more willing to identify themselves with the associations carried by the celebrity (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a). Hence, the celebrity endorsement process enables the transfer of a celebrity's traits to the endorsed brands (McCracken 1989). Accordingly, if the consumer is looking to fulfill particular self-definitional needs (Belk 1988), such as aspiring to be as the celebrity, he/she may form an SBC with the endorsed brand. In this case, he/she uses the endorsed brand as a resource to appropriate the celebrity's credibility traits to develop his/her own identity (McCracken 1989; Escalas and Bettman 2009).

Moreover, due to the reference group status, celebrities may provide a value-expressive function to consumers, enabling them to develop and enhance their self-concept by identifying themselves with the celebrity. Value expressiveness is motivated by the individual's desire to enhance self-concept by association with a reference group, operating through the process of identification (Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel 1989).

According to Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald (2015b), endorser **attractiveness** may effectively bring consumers closer to the brand, by possibly developing positive brand associations. **Expertise** may increase consumer belief that the brand will perform well, probably increasing consumers' confidence to incorporate the brand into their own self. Further, **trustworthiness** may help reduce the psychological risks associated with integrating a brand into the self-concept.

Following previous works (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015b), the sixth hypothesis is formulated as:

**H6:** Influencer credibility is positively related to consumer SBCs towards the endorsed brand.

## 2.10 SELF-BRAND CONNECTIONS AND CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS

When consumers have high self-brand connections with a brand, their evaluation of it tends to be high as well (Swaminathan, Page, and Gurhan-Canli 2007), thus maintaining positive attitudes towards the brand (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

Brands, as well as possessions, are imbued with meanings and symbolism so that consumers can incorporate them as sources of development and expression of their identities, or self (Escalas and Bettman 2005). Thus, since consumers tend to develop their identities and present themselves to others through their brand choices, brands closely associated with their self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003) may generate higher brand favorability than less meaningful brands (Lee and Lee 2017). Hence, brands that help consumers to achieve their personal identity goals are more likely to have positive consumer responses (Escalas 2004).

Based on this, consumers with SBC should behave more consistently towards the endorsed brand. The results of Escalas's (2004) study showed that consumers evaluate more favorably and are more likely to buy meaningful brands than brands with little or no SBC. Complementary to the previous study, Lee and Lee (2017) found that customers' SBC had a positive impact on their brand usage intention. Besides, Zhang (2018) showed that establishing a personal connection with the endorsed brand - self-brand connections - resulted in more favorable consumers' brand attitudes.

Previous research indicates that SBCs are positively related to positive brand attitudes (Escalas 2004; Zhang 2018) and behavioral intentions (Escalas 2004; Lee and Lee 2017). This leads to the seventh hypothesis:

**H7:** Followers' SBCs are positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.

## 2.11 PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND BRAND TRUST

Academic studies have treated trust as an essential aspect of the relationship between consumer and seller, consumer and manufacturer (Kennedy, Ferrell, and Leclair 2001), and consumer and brand (Delgado-Ballester 2003).

In the case of the consumer-brand relationship (Fournier 1998), this study defines **brand trust** as a sense of consumer security and willingness to believe that the brand will meet its consumer expectations and deliver on its promises in situations of risk to him (Delgado-Ballester, and Munuera-Alemán 2001; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Yague-Guillen, Munuera-Alemán, and Delgado-Ballester 2003; Delgado-Ballester 2003; Sichtmann 2007). Thus, trusting the brand means that there is a high probability that it will perform actions that will bring positive results to the consumer (Delgado-Ballester 2003). Since trust involves two trading partners, this study considers the influencer's follower as a trustworthy consumer and the brand as the trusted target (Sichtmann 2007).

Sherman-Morris (2005) noted that the PSR between the audience and the host of meteorology increased confidence in the host and the consequent intention to take shelter during thunderstorms if he advised. Thus, what the author showed is that more intense PSR results in higher confidence and that reliable media figures have more persuasive power than unreliable personas.

Although in this study, the relationship analyzed is between PSR and BT, it is argued that trust in the digital influencer and his brand recommendations are essential for consumers to trust the brand being recommended. Thus, the sense of para-friendship (PSR) with the digital influencer indicates that the followers tend to have greater trust in him, which may be positively related to trust in the endorsed brand.

In this context, the relationship between the PSR and BT explanations rests upon the **uncertainty reduction theory** (Berger and Calabrese 1975) and the **meaning transfer model** (McCracken 1989).

Regarding **uncertainty reduction theory**, a plausible explanation for the relationship between PSR and brand trust is that the degree of perceived risk may vary according to the level of trust in the endorser and the endorsed brand (Kotler and Keller 2012). For example, Frederick et al. (2012) found that PSR can help diminish perceptions of user uncertainty about the media figure.

Fu, Xu and Yan (2017) state that with the vast amount of information online, consumers tend to seek advice from individuals they can trust. Hence, since consumer-brand exchange

processes involve risks, trust plays an essential role in the process. However, sometimes, the brand alone cannot conquer the consumer's trust. Thus, trust can be transferred from someone trusted (e.g., an endorsing influencer) to an unfamiliar trading partner (e.g., an endorsed brand) (McCracken 1989; Doney, Cannon, and Mullen 1998).

Research shows that digital influencers have been perceived as more reliable than celebrities concerning the endorsed products and brands (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). This reinforces the argument that with the establishment of PSR with digital influencers, consumer confidence in the influencer can be transferred to the brand. Marketing and advertising literature documents the transfer of celebrity qualities, demographics, and attitudes to the products they promote, which ultimately influence consumers' attitudes toward the endorsed brand (Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova 2013).

An example of this trust transference in the media figure to the endorsed brand was presented by Tsiotsou (2016), who confirmed that when consumers parasocially identify themselves with the members of a consumption community, they develop a level of trust that can be transferred to the brand. Thus, the author emphasizes the importance of PSR in developing relationships with service or product brands.

In sum, a stronger PSR presupposes **uncertainty' reduction** feelings towards the endorsing influencer (Perse and Rubin 1989; Frederick et al. 2012), thus leading consumers to increase their trust in the endorsed brand through a **meaning transfer model** (McCracken 1989; Doney and Cannon 1997; Lau and Lee 1999; Tsiotsou 2016).

Moreover, as the brand analyzed in this study is fictitious, it is noteworthy that the ability to reduce consumer uncertainty is particularly essential for new products (Rogers 1983). Hence, endorsing influencers might play a key role in reducing uncertainty regarding an unknown brand.

Finally, a strong PSR can increase followers' trust in influencer recommendations, by reducing possible perceived risks, and consequently, leading followers to trust the recommended brand. This leads to the eighth hypothesis:

**H8:** The PSR is positively related to BT towards the endorsed brand.



## 2.12 SOURCE CREDIBILITY AND BRAND TRUST

Evidence of the relationship between source credibility and brand trust is obtained from the **uncertainty reduction theory** (Berger and Calabrese 1975) and the **non-evaluative meaning transfer model** (the transfer of celebrity traits to the brand) (McCracken 1989; Bergkvist and Zhou 2016).

Trust in influencers' product review is built from their expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness related to the endorsed product (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017; Lou and Yuan 2019). For example, Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) utilized results from in-depth interviews to show that participants agreed that trust in an influencer review is built from their knowledge and expertise relating to the endorsed product. Furthermore, Lou and Yuan (2019) found that influencers' credibility (trustworthiness and attractiveness) positively affected followers' trust in influencer-generated branded posts.

In this context, the endorsing influencer's credibility might develop positive brand associations by raising consumers' belief that the brand will perform well and by helping them to reduce psychological risks (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015b) associated with brand trust.

Accordingly, consumers may purchase a product that had become known to them solely through an online endorser whom they trust on social media (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017). Also, consumers are likely to develop or enhance a relationship with the brands that are endorsed by preferred credible influencers (Dwivedi and Johnson 2013). Thereby, as influencers present a credible and appealing online persona, perceived credibility can influence followers' trust (Lou and Yuan 2019) in the endorsed brand, through the transfer of celebrity traits to the brand (McCracken 1989).

Hence, following previous work (Dwivedi and Johnson 2013), the ninth hypothesis is formulated:

**H9:** Influencer credibility is positively related to BT towards the endorsed brand.

## 2.13 BRAND TRUST AND CONSUMERS' PURCHASE INTENTIONS

Whether an individual trusts someone, he is likely to develop some form of positive behavioral intention toward the other party (Lau and Lee 1999). For example, Doney and

Cannon (1997) found that consumer confidence in the supplier company was positively related to the future intentions of purchasing products from this supplier. Since buyers can trust in the supplier's integrity, they believe that the supplier would not take advantage of the buyer's interests. Similarly, Kennedy, Ferrell and LeClair (2001) found that both trust in the seller and trust in the manufacturer positively influenced the customer's repurchase intention.

Moreover, trust in the website can influence online buying intent (Yoon 2002), while trust in the social media website can positively affect the consumer's intent to purchase the brand they follow on social media (Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova 2013).

In sum, literature has shown that trust in the supplier (Doney and Cannon 1997), the manufacturer, the seller (Kennedy, Ferrell, and Leclair 2001), the website (Yoon 2002), and social media (Pentina, Zhang, and Basmanova 2013) may lead to positive behavioral outcomes. Similarly, the more an individual trusts in a brand, the higher is the likelihood of favorable responses towards the brand (Luk and Yip 2008).

For example, indirectly, brand trust has a positive effect on consumer repurchase intentions, mediated by trust in the retailer (Zboja and Voorhees 2006). Garretson and Niedrich (2004) found that trust in the media character who promotes a product can positively influence the media users' brand attitudes. Moreover, Chung and Cho (2017) found that trust in the endorsing influencer, along with brand credibility, are essential factors in explaining the relationship between PSR and purchase intent.

In this process, this study reiterates the endorsing influencer key role in enhancing the consumer-brand relationship, and consequently, leading to consumer PI (Garretson and Niedrich 2004; Zboja and Voorhees 2006). In particular, favorable perceptions of the endorsed brand (e.g., BT), are essential factors in explaining the relationship between PSR and PI.

Finally, directly, higher levels of BT are positively related to buying loyalty (Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Matzler, Grabner-Krauter, and Bidmon 2008; Tsiotsou 2016), to higher brand spend (Luk and Yip 2008), and to consumer's purchase intentions (Sichtmann 2007; Haefner, Deli-Gray, and Rosenbloom 2011; Alif Fianto et al. 2014). This leads to the tenth hypothesis:

**H10:** Followers' BT is positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.

Once presented the hypotheses and their respective theoretical justifications, the methodological procedures used in the application of the tested model are as follows.

### 3 METHODOLOGY

This chapter is intended to present the methodological procedures used in this dissertation, including research design, problem specification, proposal of the conceptual model, constitutive and operational definitions of the variables, and the collection procedures.

#### 3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN

Once defined and presented the objectives of this study, the design of this research used to achieve such purposes is as follows.

The **phenomenon of this research** is the digital influencer in the role of an endorser of an unknown brand on Instagram and YouTube.

The present study consists of **conclusive-descriptive research** (Babbie 2006). The **temporal perspective** adopted is cross-sectional, involving the information's collection from the sample in a single period (Babbie 2006).

The **units of analysis** in this study are individuals in the role of consumers (Babbie 2006). In this way, individuals in the role of consumers are examined to create brief descriptions about them and explain the differences between them.

#### 3.2 PROBLEM SPECIFICATION

As mentioned above, the problem that this research intends to answer is: **“what is the relationship between influencers' intimate disclosure on social media and consumers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand, passing through SC, PSR, SBC, and BT?”**. To answer the previous research problem, ten hypotheses were proposed.

##### 3.2.1 Research Hypotheses and Proposed Model

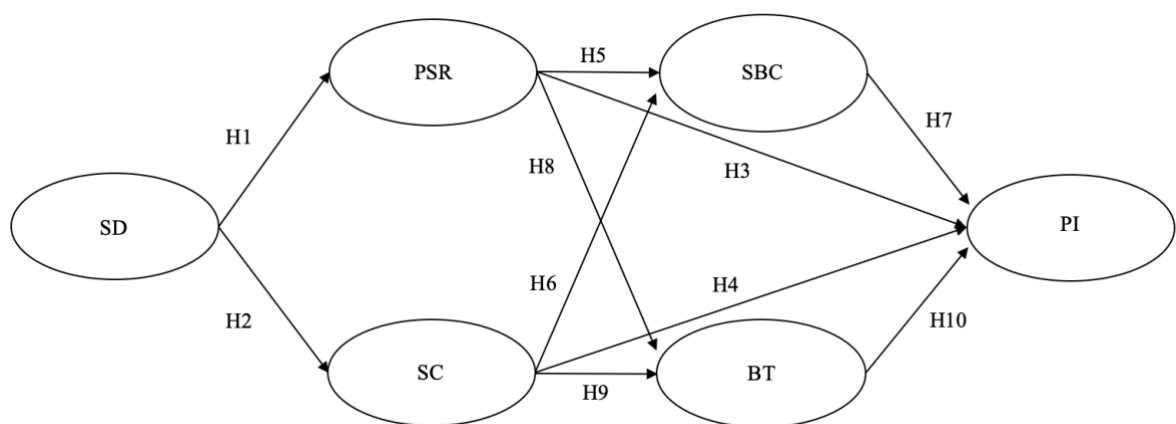
This study was conducted to test a model that presents relationships between six variables. Self-disclosure, Parasocial Relationship, Self-Brand Connections, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention are unidimensional variables, while the Source Credibility variable is

operationalized as a second-order fully reflective construct (Ohanian 1990). In the proposed model, all of the measures are hypothesized as reflective. The hypotheses proposed in the relationship model are as follow:

- H1:** The influencer's intimate self-disclosure is positively related to PSR intensity.
- H2:** The influencer's intimate self-disclosure is positively related to SC.
- H3:** The PSR with a digital influencer is positively related to the PI of the brand he/she endorses.
- H4:** Influencer credibility is positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.
- H5:** The PSR is positively related to consumer SBC towards the endorsed brand.
- H6:** Influencer credibility is positively related to consumer SBCs towards the endorsed brand.
- H7:** Followers' SBCs are positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.
- H8:** The PSR is positively related to BT towards the endorsed brand.
- H9:** Influencer credibility is positively related to BT towards the endorsed brand.
- H10:** Followers' BT is positively related to the PI of the endorsed brand.

This study investigated the relationship between the digital influencers' self-disclosure and the purchase intention of endorsed brands. SD is identified as an exogenous construct or independent variable, while PI is considered an endogenous construct or dependent variable; PSR, SC, SBC, and BT are identified both as exogenous and endogenous constructs (Hair et al. 2014). **Figure 1** shows these structural relationships. All proposed hypotheses are specified.

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Model



Source: the author, 2020

### 3.3 CONSTITUTIVE AND OPERATIONAL DEFINITION OF VARIABLES

The six constructs, along with the **constitutive (CD) and operational (OD) definitions** are as follows:

**Self-Disclosure's CD.** Self-disclosure is a kind of communication through which individuals reveal personal information about themselves to others (Taylor and Altman 1987; Catona and Greene 2016), including descriptive/factual, emotional and cognitive information (Morton 1978; Reis and Shaver 1988; Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Mitchell et al. 2008).

**Descriptive self-disclosure** consists of revealing information, and behaviors, e.g., it is the privacy of facts disclosed about oneself (Morton 1978; Reis and Shaver 1988; Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Mitchell et al. 2008). One can only be intimate with another by revealing particular or even unavailable information about oneself (Morton 1978). **Emotional self-disclosure** consists in revealing particular feelings, emotions, desires, and moods to others (Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Mitchell et al. 2008). Thus, it is possible to have intimacy when presenting personal feelings, such as a strong expression of love or shame (Morton 1978). Finally, **cognitive self-disclosure** consists in revealing particular thoughts, opinions, and beliefs to others (Waring and Russel 1980; Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Mitchell et al. 2008).

**Self-Disclosure's OD.** The SD measure is adapted from literature – fifteen item-scale (refined to nine item-scale) (Wheless 1976; Berg and Archer 1982; Dindia 1988; Reis and Shaver 1988; Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco 1998; Laurenceau et al. 2004; Kim and Song 2016; Chung and Cho 2017). This scale measured the perceived intimacy level of self-disclosure by the respondents' chosen digital influencers. The scale assessed three styles of self-disclosure: descriptive/factual, emotional, and cognitive (Morton 1978; Reis and Shaver 1988; Laurenceau, Barret, and Pietromonaco 1998; Mitchell et al. 2008). The self-disclosure item pool generation, scale purification, and construct validity can be found in **Appendix A**.

The reasons for the development of this scale remains upon several assumptions. First, many studies employ scales that measure the self-disclosure, and not the perceived partner disclosure (Jourard and Lasakow 1958; Jourard 1961; Pedersen and Higbee 1968; Wheless 1976; Qiu et al. 2012; Tang and Wang 2012). Second, those authors who employed a scale to analyze each style of self-disclosure/perceived partner disclosure used only one item to measure

each style (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco 1998; Laurenceau, Barrett, and Rovine 2005), diminishing the opportunity of more robust analysis. Third, authors included different styles of self-disclosure in the same item-scale, such as thoughts and feelings (Laurenceau, Barrett, and Pietromonaco 1998; Manne et al. 2004), and feelings and opinions (Chung and Cho 2017). Fourth, self-disclosure studies analyzed the self-disclosure construct observationally, especially in psychology, based on a code system in which trained coders observe participants' discussion and classify as factual/descriptive, emotional/evaluative or cognitive/evaluative (Morton 1978; Berg and Archer 1982; Dindia 1988; Dindia, Fiszpatrick, and Kenny 1997; Mitchell et al. 2008).

**Parasocial Relationship's CD.** The PSR consists of a long-term unilateral relationship that individuals establish with media personalities (digital influencers). It is considered a more intimate type of relationship, such as a friendship that exists even when the person is not present (Horton and Wohl 1956; Schramm and Hartmann 2008).

**Parasocial Relationship's OD.** The PSR measure is from Escalas and Bettman (2017) – 13 item-scale; the items are originated from Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985). The scale was further refined by deleting four items to improve model fit, and convergent and discriminant validity of the PSR scale (the items do not diminish the theoretical meaning of the latent variable). This scale measured the sense of PSR that the respondents have towards the influencer they follow on Instagram/YouTube.

**Source Credibility's CD.** SC refers to the perceived endorser's positive traits that influence the receiver's acceptance of a message. Attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise are the three characteristics of the source credibility that measure the effectiveness of endorsers in the area of the endorsed product (Ohanian 1990).

**Source Credibility's OD.** The SC items were derived from Ohanian (1990) – 15 item-scale. This scale measured the perceived attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise that the respondents have of the influencer they follow on Instagram/YouTube.

**Self-Brand Connections' CD.** SBC refers to how consumers make connections between their self-concepts and brands; it explains the extent to which brands are incorporated into consumer self-concept (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

**Self-Brand Connections' OD.** The SBC measures were from Escalas (2004) – seven item-scale - modified versions to adequate the hypothetical nature of the fictitious brand used in this study. This scale measured the degree of connection between the respondents' self-concept and the brand endorsed by the influencer they follow on Instagram/YouTube.

**Brand Trust's CD.** BT consists of the consumer's sense of security and willingness to believe that the brand will meet his consumer expectations and deliver on its promises (Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Alemán 2001; Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Yague-Guillen, Munuera-Alemán, and Delgado-Ballester 2003; Delgado-Ballester 2003; Sichtmann 2007).

**Brand Trust's OD.** The BT items were from Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) – four item-scale - modified versions to adequate the hypothetical nature of the fictitious brand used in this study. This scale measured the respondents' degree of trust in the brand endorsed by the influencer they follow on Instagram/YouTube.

**Purchase Intentions' CD.** PI is an “individual conscious plan to make an effort to acquire the brand” endorsed by the digital influencer (Spears and Singh 2004, p. 56).

**Purchase Intentions' OD.** The brand PI measures were derived from Lepkowska-White, Brashear, and Weinberger (2003) – three item-scale. This scale measured the likelihood of the respondents to buy the brand endorsed by the digital influencer they follow on Instagram/YouTube.

All questions employed a **five-point Likert-type scale** ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), except for the self-disclosure scale, which ranged from 1 (extremely superficial) to 5 (extremely intimate), and for the SC scale, which employed a five-point semantic differential scale. All the scale items with their descriptive statistics, including checks for indicators means and standard deviations, can be seen in **Appendix B**.

The questionnaire contained 57 items to capture the tested model. In the revised measurement model, the indicators were reduced from 57 to 47 due to low factor loadings, high cross-loading modification indices, or high standardized residual covariances. Once 18% of the items were deleted, these are minor modifications, according to Hair et al. (2014).

### 3.4 PROCEDURES

The **population** of this research is the group of individuals residing in the US, who use skincare products, have a profile on Instagram or YouTube, and follow digital influencers who endorse brands related to the fashion and beauty segments.

Concerning the research **sample**, participants were recruited from Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk) and administered an online survey embedded on Qualtrics. The study targeted female respondents residing in the US, who use body lotion or moisturizer, have a profile on Instagram or YouTube, and follow at least one of the twenty female beauty/fashion digital influencers indicated in the questionnaire. **Sampling** is non-probabilistic, by convenience technique (Malhotra et al. 2005; Babbie 2006).

In the **questionnaire**, participants were asked to select up to two digital influencers that they follow most often on Instagram/YouTube. After this, participants were instructed to rank the selected digital influencers in order of preference. Next, it was asked participants to keep the second most favorite influencer in mind to answer the rest of the survey; participants who selected just one digital influencer continued to analyze this influencer they knew. After this, participants completed the self-disclosure scale, which reflected how they perceive the influencer's intimacy level of self-disclosure on Instagram/YouTube. Participants were then told that the survey was conducted by market researchers who had decided to launch a new brand of body lotion. It was next asked participants to indicate how they would feel about this new brand of body lotion if it were endorsed by the influencer they had listed as their second favorite in the prior task. These evaluations included their intention to purchase the endorsed brand, followed by BT, SBC, PSR, and SC items. Finally, participants filled in some demographic- and social media use-related questions. The full questionnaire can be found in **Appendix C**.

The following procedures were used for the **selection of stimuli**:

*Segment selection.* Fashion and beauty segments were chosen due to their high penetration on the Instagram and YouTube social network, due to the growing number of influencers related to the subject, and due to the billion-dollar revenue of the industry worldwide (WGSN 2019). A list of top earners with Instagram endorsements (Hopper HQ 2018) shows that Huda Kattan is the digital influencer who makes the most money through her social media content, charging about \$ 33,000 per sponsored post; her profile is related to the beauty industry. In the fashion business, Chiara Ferragni stands out as one of the top earners on Instagram, charging about \$ 19,000 per sponsored post.



Another reason for choosing the fashion and beauty segments is related to possessions as an extension of the self and how people form impressions about others based on their possessions (Belk 1988). Fashion and beauty are segments that are strongly related to possessions to express the self. Therefore, digital influencers use this logic to show that the brands and products they endorse are part of their self and that the consumer can express their self that way too.

*Product category.* Single category product over multiple product categories was chosen under the assumption that the respondents are highly involved consumers with the category indicated and are most likely to have relevant knowledge about the influencers' brand endorsements on social media.

Besides to be highly related to fashion and beauty segments, skincare products (i. e., body lotion) can be considered products of greater involvement (mean = 3.7 on a five-point scale). Thus, the higher the involvement with the product, the greater the perceived risk (Solomon 2016). Consequently, the perceived risk causes consumers to develop routines to reduce the uncertainties and negative consequences of the risk, such as collecting information from friends, for example (Kotler and Keller 2012). Thus, the digital influencer, in the role of a friend of his/her followers, can be a strong influence on followers' consumption decisions (Solomon 2016). Thus, products of greater involvement would be the most suitable for the proposed analysis.

Moreover, a body lotion over a facial moisturizer was chosen because facial skincare products usually are bought under dermatologists' recommendations. In contrast, people are more willing to consider a new brand of body lotion in the market, without the need of a dermatologist's recommendation.

*Influencer Endorsers.* The endorsers featured in the cover story were selected, primarily, through articles from recognized websites that indicated the top fashion and beauty influencers in recent years (Forbes 2017; Hopper HQ 2018). Next, the top-ranked influencer's posts content and stories on Instagram and YouTube were analyzed.

The choice for the beauty/fashion digital influencers rested upon delimiting criteria: the influencer should endorse brands related to the fashion and beauty segments (to ensure congruence between influencer business and chosen product category); have become famous through the use of online media in the fashion and beauty industry (to ensure that she is a digital influencer, and not a celebrity from another context); do not have developed their own brands - exception for those who created a brand but continue to endorse products of other brands (to

ensure that the endorsement of the proposed fictitious brand is credible). This exercise generated a total of 20 influencers' names, who were presented in the questionnaire.

*Brand selection.* The choice for a fictitious brand was taken to eliminate the influence of prior consumer knowledge, SBC, BT, and PI (Chung and Cho 2017) that could influence the results.

To test the reliability of the measures and the suitability of the stimulus used in this study, a pilot test of the survey questionnaire using 35 individuals from MTurk was conducted. Regarding the results of the pilot test, the wording and length of the survey were improved, as well as, new influencers were added. The results showed that the levels of reliability of the measures were adequate (SD:  $\alpha = 0.929$ ; PSR:  $\alpha = 0.910$ ; SC:  $\alpha = 0.955$ ; SBC:  $\alpha = 0.932$ ; BT:  $\alpha = 0.876$ ; PI:  $\alpha = 0.792$ ), and the stimulus was appropriate.

### 3.4.1 Data Preparation

Of the 1,544 participants who responded to the initial request, 600 completed the questionnaires. After excluding the participants who were not eligible to continue the questionnaire, and those who failed on the attention criteria (attention check question - typed the wrong analyzed influencer or did not remember the influencer they were analyzing; time to finish the survey - less than four minutes were removed; and read the brand endorsement cover story - less than five seconds were removed) the database was left with 442 participants, to carry out data analysis.

The **normality of the data** assumption is seemingly satisfied. All skewness values and most kurtosis values of observed variables show acceptable values within the range  $|\pm 2|$ . Since only two of the forty-seven variables demonstrate slightly higher kurtosis values (ranging from 3.5 to 5.6), these are non-threatening (Curran, West, and Finch 1996). Mahalanobis distance was used in each model construct to identify **outliers** ( $p < 0.001$ ). Finally, nine outliers identified in more than one construct were excluded from the database. The database contained no missing values.

### 3.4.2 Demographics

In the **final sample of 433 respondents** from the US, the average age is 32 years. Nearly 89% of the participants have Instagram accounts, and 82% of them have YouTube accounts. The participants are frequent users of social media (for those who have a profile on Instagram, 66% visit social networking at least once per day; YouTube, 65% visit social networking at least once per day). Moreover, they are experienced about the influencer's content (70% have been following the influencer for more than six months, and 62% see the content posted by the influencer once a week or more).

The respondents also answered some item-scales that aimed to assess their involvement with the product category and perceived fit between influencers and the fictitious brand. These item-scales were assessed to design the profile of respondents only.

In regard of this, the respondents are highly involved with the product category (mean = 3.7 on a five-point scale: "I am particularly interested in the recommended product"; mean = 3.6: "Given my personal interests, this product is not very relevant to me" – *reverse*; mean = 3.9: "Overall, I am quite involved when I am purchasing body lotion for personal use") (Chandrashekar 2004). Finally, the respondents agree that the digital influencer analyzed has fit with the endorsed brand (mean = 4.1 on a five-point scale: "It makes sense for [influencer's name] to promote a lotion brand"); adapted from Becker-Olson (2003).

### 3.4.3 Analysis Decisions

The SEM software IBM SPSS Amos®, version 23, was used to perform a CFA based on data from 433 women from the US. Structural equation modeling was used for subsequent hypothesis tests.

The six latent variables contain a  $p:f$  ratio of at least 3:1. The final sample size (433 responses) in this study is a 9:1 ratio of observations to variables ( $N:p$ ), which falls within acceptable limits (Hair et al. 2014).

In this study, the sample data are analyzed by a covariance matrix of measured items. The variances can be freely estimated, once that one path from each of the six latent variables (SD, PSR, SC, SBC, BT, and PI) to their respective indicator variables is fixed to 1.0, according literature recommendations (Jackson, Gillaspay, and Purc-Stephenson 2009; Hair et al. 2014; Byrne 2016).

The estimation method used was the maximum likelihood, once preliminary analysis with the data leads to the belief that the distributional properties of the data are acceptable for this approach, and once the sample size is also sufficient to enable maximum likelihood estimation (Hair et al. 2014). For the application of SEM, the modeling strategy used was a confirmatory modeling strategy, which aims to assess how well the model fits the data (Hair et al. 2014).

## 4 RESULTS

Assessment of fit, standardized factor loadings, average variance extracted, and composite construct reliability were estimated for the tested model. All the cutoff criteria for fit indices were based on the guidelines provided by Hair et al. (2014), who take into account the sample size and the number of observed variables to establish the cutoff criteria.

### 4.1 MODEL EVALUATION

The **measurement model** including all constructs received satisfactory fit ( $\chi^2=1899.6$ ;  $df=1006$ ;  $\chi^2/df=1.888$ ;  $RMSEA=.045$ ;  $CFI=0.94$ ), and the average variance extracted (AVE) estimates of 0.50 and above indicate convergent validity among items in the given scale, except for the attractiveness dimension of SC (0.473) (**Table 1**). Regarding the composite reliability, the values of 0.80 and above meet the recommended levels as per the literature (Hair et al. 2014).

Table 1. Latent Variables' Reliability for the Measurement Model

Latent Variables' Reliability for the Measurement Model			
Latent Variables	CA	CR	AVE
Self-Disclosure	0.902	0.903	0.510
Parasocial Relationships	0.905	0.907	0.521
Attractiveness (SC)	0.813	0.818	0.473
Trustworthiness (SC)	0.901	0.902	0.649
Expertise (SC)	0.904	0.906	0.658
Self-Brand Connections	0.935	0.937	0.679
Brand Trust	0.916	0.917	0.734
Purchase Intentions	0.942	0.942	0.845

*Note.* CA = Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; SC = Source Credibility's Dimensions

Source: the author, 2020

The test of **discriminant validity** shows that all the square roots of AVE estimates are higher than the corresponding inter-construct correlation estimates (**Table 2**). In summary, convergent and discriminant validities were supported by all the tests (Hair et al. 2014).

Table 2. Descriptive, Standardized Correlations and Square-Root of AVE

Descriptive, Standardized Correlations and Square-Root of AVE										
	Mean	S.D.	SD	PSR	ATT	TW	EXP	SBC	BT	PI
SD	3.54	0.75	<b>0.714</b>							
PSR	3.45	0.79	0.477	<b>0.722</b>						
ATT	4.30	0.60	0.265	0.550	<b>0.688</b>					
TW	4.01	0.71	0.427	0.696	0.636	<b>0.806</b>				
EXP	4.27	0.67	0.326	0.465	0.608	0.722	<b>0.811</b>			
SBC	2.86	0.98	0.294	0.717	0.346	0.491	0.262	<b>0.824</b>		
BT	3.71	0.80	0.283	0.692	0.428	0.593	0.418	0.632	<b>0.857</b>	
PI	3.63	0.96	0.342	0.715	0.419	0.528	0.372	0.607	0.757	<b>0.919</b>

*Note.* All correlations are significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed). The figures corresponding to the square root of AVE for each column construct are typed in bold along the diagonal. S.D. = Standard Deviation; SD = Self-Disclosure; PSR = Parasocial Relationships; ATT = Attractiveness; TW = Trustworthiness; EXP = Expertise; SBC = Self-Brand Connections; BT = Brand Trust; PI = Purchase Intentions.

Source: the author, 2020

An examination of the **unstandardized solution** reveals all estimates to be reasonable, their standard errors to be minimal, and their critical ratios show evidence of their strong statistical significance. For the tested model, the factor loadings, covariances, and variances are significant at the level of  $p < 0.001$ .

All **standardized factor loadings** range from 0.62 to 0.93, falling within the acceptable limits of 0.5 or higher (Hair et al. 2014). All the **correlations between latent variables** are under 0.80 and above 0.25 (0.26 the lowest and 0.76 the highest). The **squared multiple correlation** values for the **observed variables** range from 0.39 to 0.87 for the tested model. In sum, the measurement model tested shows that the questionnaire measures these key constructs satisfactorily (Hair et al. 2014). The standardized factor loadings for the measurement model can be found in **Appendix D**.

## 4.2 ASSESSMENT OF STRUCTURAL MODEL VALIDITY

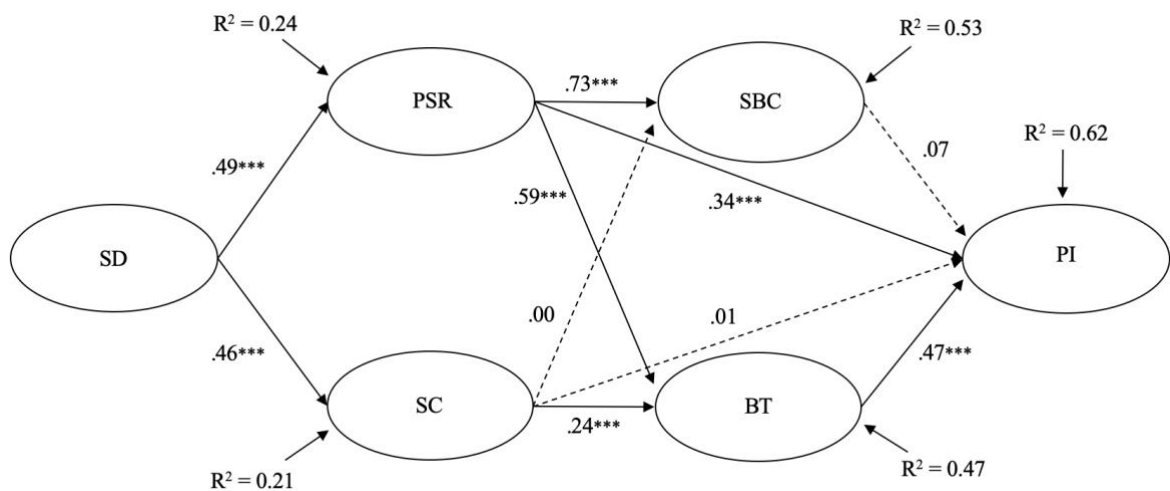
Fit statistics were assessed and compared to the CFA models, to test the validity of the structural model. For the tested model, the  $\chi^2$  is 2117.0 with 1021 degrees of freedom, and the normed chi-square is 2.073. The model CFI is 0.92, with an RMSEA of 0.050. All these

measures are within a range that would be associated with a good fit (Hair et al. 2014). These diagnostics suggest the model provides an excellent overall fit. The overall model fit changed very little from the CFA model.

The path coefficients and loading estimates were examined to test whether the structural relationships are consistent with theoretical expectations. The loading estimates are virtually unchanged from the CFA results. The maximum change for those estimated standardized loadings that changed is .02. Thus, there is now evidence of stability among the measured indicator variables, indicating that no problem is evident due to interpretational confounding and further supports the measurement model's validity. As would be expected with so little change in loadings, the construct reliabilities are identical as well. Only one construct reliability change and the maximum change is .01.

Path analysis procedures provide standardized structural path estimates for each relationship in the model shown in **Figure 2**.

Figure 2. Estimated Structural Equation Model



Note. N = 433. \*\*\*p < .001.

Source: the author, 2020

**Table 3** shows the path coefficient and the significance of the structural model for the entire sample. Regarding the levels of R<sup>2</sup>, the model explains 62% of the variance of the PI construct. Furthermore, each of the hypothesized direct path estimates is significant and in the predicted direction, **except H4 (SC → PI), H6 (SC → SBC), and H7 (SBC → PI)** for which we have a nonsignificant path ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $\beta = 0.00$  and  $\beta = 0.07$  respectively). Given that seven

of ten estimates are consistent with the hypotheses for the tested model, these results support the theoretical model, with a caveat for the paths that are not supported.

Table 3. Structural Parameters of the Research Model

Structural Parameters of the Research Model				
Structural Relationship	$\beta$	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Result
<i>H1</i> : SD + → PSR	0.49	8.28	0.000	Supported
<i>H2</i> : SD + → SC	0.46	7.42	0.000	Supported
<i>H3</i> : PSR + → PI	0.34	5.00	0.000	Supported
<i>H4</i> : SC + → PI	0.01	0.31	0.759	Rejected
<i>H5</i> : PSR + → SBC	0.73	12.75	0.000	Supported
<i>H6</i> : SC + → SBC	0.00	0.05	0.964	Rejected
<i>H7</i> : SBC + → PI	0.07	1.35	0.177	Rejected
<i>H8</i> : PSR + → BT	0.59	11.08	0.000	Supported
<i>H9</i> : SC + → BT	0.24	5.25	0.000	Supported
<i>H10</i> : BT + → PI	0.47	8.88	0.000	Supported

*Note:*  $\beta$  refers to the standardized beta coefficient; *t*-value refers to the critical ratio; *p*-value refers to the significance level.

Source: the author, 2020

As expected, influencers' perceived intimate self-disclosure is positively related to the PSR ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and to the SC ( $\beta = 0.46$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). **Hence, H1 and H2 are supported.** PSR exerts a direct significant impact on PI ( $\beta = 0.34$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), on SBC ( $\beta = 0.73$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), and on BT ( $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). SC exerts a direct significant impact on BT only ( $\beta = 0.24$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), where the impact of SC on BT is slightly lower than that of PSR ( $\beta = 0.24$  and  $\beta = 0.59$  respectively). **Hence H3, H5, H8, and H9 are supported.** BT exerts a direct significant impact on PI ( $\beta = 0.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), lending **support to H10.**

In sum, the comparison of fit statistics between the CFA and the structural model suggests that the structural model satisfactorily explains the observed covariance matrix, thus, showing evidence of structural model validity. The results show a reasonably good overall model fit, and the hypothesized relationships were generally supported. Consequently, we can interpret the precise nature of the relationships with a fair degree of confidence.



### 4.3 DIRECT, INDIRECT, AND TOTAL EFFECTS

The effect decomposition for the tested model is reported in **Table 4**, which breaks down total effects into direct effects and total indirect effects.

Table 4. Direct, Indirect and Total Effects

Decomposition for Effects of Exogenous Variables on Endogenous Variables for the Tested Model						
Endogenous variables	Exogenous variables					
	SD	SC	PSR	SBC	BT	
SC						
Direct	0.46	-	-	-	-	
Total Indirect	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	0.46	-	-	-	-	
PSR						
Direct	0.49	-	-	-	-	
Total Indirect	-	-	-	-	-	
Total	0.49	-	-	-	-	
SBC						
Direct	-	0.00	0.73	-	-	
Total Indirect	0.36	-	-	-	-	
Total	0.36	0.00	0.73	-	-	
BT						
Direct	-	0.24	0.59	-	-	
Total Indirect	0.40	-	-	-	-	
Total	0.40	0.24	0.59	-	-	
PI						
Direct	-	0.01	0.34	0.07	0.47	
Total Indirect	0.39	0.12	0.33	-	-	
Total	0.39	0.13	0.67	0.07	0.47	

*Note.* Standardized Parameter Estimate.

Source: the author, 2020

In the effect decomposition table, we see that the indirect effect size of SD on SBC, on BT and PI is very similar (0.36, 0.40, and 0.39, respectively).

Looking for the indirect and total effects of SC and PSR on PI, PSR has stronger indirect and total effects on PI than the latent SC variable. While PSR has an indirect effect on PI of

0.33, SC has 0.12. In the same way, while PSR has a total effect on PI of 0.67, SC has 0.13. It is interesting to note that, once SC has no direct, indirect, or total effects on PI, PSR has a significant (0.34) direct effect on PI, and meaningful indirect and total effects.

## 5 DISCUSSION

The **main objective** of this dissertation was to examine the impact of influencers' intimate self-disclosure on their followers' intent to purchase an endorsed brand. The findings reveal that intimate self-disclosure exerts an indirect impact on brand PI, thus supporting the use of digital influencers as an enhancer tool in the effectiveness of brand endorsements.

The results of **hypotheses 1 and 2** supported the direct and positive relationship between intimate self-disclosure and PSR, and between intimate self-disclosure and influencer credibility. Theoretically, the findings are consistent with previous research that explains the effect of self-disclosure on PSR (Chung and Cho 2017; Ko and Wu 2017) and SC (Chung and Cho 2014).

Although these relationships have been addressed in previous research, the self-disclosure and PSR relationship has been addressed in the influencer context only in a conference paper. Also, the self-disclosure and SC relationship has not been applied to the social media influencer context. Finally, none of the previous studies tested self-disclosure as an antecedent of the combined PSR and SC in the same model. Thus, these findings extend the theoretical knowledge regarding the new contexts of influencer endorsements and branding research streams.

Regarding **hypothesis 1**, the results are supportive of the self-disclosure theory in which self-disclosure helps to develop intimacy between partners (Jiang, Bazarova, and Hancock 2010). In this way, by revealing oneself, digital influencers can strengthen the perception of a PSR with followers (Ko and Wu 2017), since consumers interpret their self-disclosure as a sign of friendship being offered (Chung and Cho 2017).

Also, previous research mainly addressed the breadth dimension of self-disclosure (e.g., number of topics revealed) to examine the relationship between self-disclosure and PSR; this study extends theoretical knowledge by addressing the depth/intimacy perspective of self-disclosure.

Regarding **hypothesis 2**, the results support past research that addressed the relationship between self-disclosure and SC (Chung and Cho 2014). In this way, as self-disclosure emphasizes impression formation (Berg and Archer 1982), endorsing influencers revealing high levels of intimate details can be perceived as a credible source of information.

Although PSR and SC are positively determined by self-disclosure, self-disclosure has a slightly higher impact on PSR than on SC ( $\beta = 0.49$  and  $\beta = 0.46$ , respectively). This might

be explained by self-disclosure affinity with the PSR since intimacy is a predominant factor in both constructs (Horton and Wohl 1956; Taylor 1968).

**Hypotheses 3 and 4** predicted a direct and positive relationship between PSR and PI, and between endorser influencer credibility and PI. Thus, only **H3 supports past research**.

Regarding **hypothesis 3**, the results offer support to social comparison (Festinger 1954), uncertainty reduction theories (Berger and Calabrese 1975), and reference groups theoretical framework (Solomon 2016). In particular, consumers usually compare their brand consumption and often imitate influencer styles once they feel they relate to the influencers they follow (Lee and Watkins 2016). Furthermore, PSRs may influence brand-related responses and may even reduce perceived risks for consumers (Lee and Lee 2017). Since consumers usually trust friends' recommendations, they can rely on the influencers' advice with whom they have a PSR (Escalas and Bettman 2017). In turn, it can lead to the intent to purchase the endorsed brand. Overall, the results support past research regarding the relationship between PSRs and PI (Kim, Ko, and Kim 2015; Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley 2016; Gong and Li 2017; Hwang and Zhang 2018; Sokolova and Kefi 2019).

Regarding **hypothesis 4**, previous research (Ohanian 1990; Yoon, Kim, and Kim 1998; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019; Sokolova and Kefi 2019) observed a direct relationship between SC and PI. However, this study found no support for the SC and PI relationship. There are some possible explanations for this result.

The absence of the relationship between influencer credibility and PI has been signaled previously, where studies found differences in the significant effect of SC dimensions on PI (Lafferty, Goldsmith, and Newell 2002; Lou and Yuan 2019; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019). This lack of relationship significance could be attributed to the type of product tested, as examined by Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget (2019), who found that depending on the type of product tested, the significant effect of SC dimensions on PI can differ.

It could also be attributed to endorser traits-related factors, as examined by Lou and Yuan (2019). They explain that even if influencers are perceived as attractive, expert, and trustworthy, it is not necessary that these dimensions alone can drive the consumer to intend to purchase an endorsed brand. The results of this dissertation thereby suggest that, as information becomes abundant and users receive a considerable amount of endorsements daily on social media, consumers may require more than just attractiveness, expertise, and trustworthiness to be persuaded by an endorsing influencer. For example, Sokolova and Kefi (2019) argue that traditional celebrities usually exhibit an excellent physical appearance. On the other hand, social

media influencers do not always rely on physical appearance. Instead, they seem to be perceived as more authentic than traditional celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017).

Based on this, since influencer marketing is getting saturated by the enormous quantity of influencers recommending brands on social media, the results contribute to literature showing that the development of PSRs may be an alternative way for brands and influencers to stand out from the competition and to captivate consumers.

In this way, the PSR seems to be the indispensable factor linking the relationship between self-disclosure and PI. While PSR has significant direct and meaningful indirect and total effects on PI, SC has non-significant direct, and non-meaningful indirect or total effects on PI. This is in agreement with Chung and Cho (2017), who indicated that the success of celebrity endorsement depends on the quality of endorser-consumer relationships, such as PSR and perceived self-disclosure, and not only on the endorser's traits.

Empirical **support for hypothesis 5** is found in this study. From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between PSRs and consumer SBCs is consistent with the social comparison theory (Festinger 1954), reference groups (Solomon 2016), and the meaning-transfer model (McCracken 1989). In particular, these results suggest that digital influencers are essential to consumers as comparison models; they can provide a set of meanings that become associated with the brands they endorse (Miller and Allen 2012), thus enhancing consumers' self-brand connections (Escalas and Bettman 2003).

Previous research has demonstrated that PSRs with services, brands, other clients (Lee and Lee 2017), and traditional celebrities (Escalas and Bettman 2017) impact SBCs, but while Escalas and Bettman (2017) examined PSR effects on SBC in the traditional celebrity endorsement context, this study extends the body of knowledge to the new sphere of digital influencers brand endorsement.

Regarding **hypothesis 6**, there is no support for the relationship between SC and SBC in this study. This nonsignificant relationship could be attributed to the influencer endorsement context. As previous research (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a; Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015b) analyzed this relationship in the context of traditional celebrities, this may not work similarly to endorsing influencers.

The reason for this is that source credibility traits were developed in the traditional celebrity endorsement environment (Ohanian 1990). Escalas and Bettman (2017) state that in postmodern culture, consumers' identity-building needs are more complex than before, since consumers no longer seek to build a stable, consistent, and authentic identity. Consumers often change their self-concept depending on context or other factors that make one aspect of self-

identity more salient than the other. It can result in an active and continuous process of consumer identity-building, which can be expressed through the meanings that arise from celebrity endorsements. Based on this, consumer perceptions of endorser credibility may vary over time due to the celebrity's behavior in personal life (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015b). Therefore, traditional SC dimensions may not promote consumers' willingness to embody symbolic meanings associated with brands into their self-concept.

However, the PSR as a dynamic process may offer a vast range of associations that can be transferred to the brand and into consumers' self-concept. Also, as the influencer-consumer PSR may develop and change over time (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018), this process might follow the alterations in a consumer's self-identity.

Concerning **hypothesis 7**, unlike previous research (Escalas 2004; Lee and Lee 2017) that observed a direct relationship between SBC and the likelihood of purchase, there was **no support for H7** in this study.

The absence of this relationship could be attributed to the type of product tested. This study tested a body lotion as the endorsed product. Even though the product is related to the beauty segment, it is more appealing as a skincare product than an aesthetic one. Moreover, as SBCs are related to self-expression (Escalas and Bettman 2005), a product that is used publicly (vs. privately), or one that enhances self-expression may be adequate to the effect of SBCs on the intent to purchase a product. Regarding this, it was observed that previous studies examined American Express, Kodak film brands (Escalas 2004), and a hotel service brand (Lee and Lee 2017) within self-brand connections. Hence, these kinds of products and service may help consumers to express their self publicly more than a body lotion, which is a product used more privately.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that a fictitious brand was used due to the hypothetical nature of the study. Therefore, although PSR exerted an effect on SBC, SBC alone may not affect PI due to the unknown brand. It is probable that products with stronger psychological benefits and symbolic meanings may enhance consumers' perceptions of their self, helping them develop and define their self-concept (Levy 1959; Escalas and Bettman 2003; Escalas 2004).

Regarding **hypothesis 8**, PSR exerts an impact on BT. This relationship has not been addressed in previous research. Hence, this finding contributes to the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Calabrese 1975) and the meaning-transfer model (Mccracken 1989).

The results suggest that a strong sense of PSR may increase consumers' trust in the influencer's recommendations, reducing possible perceived risks, and leading them to trust the endorsed brand. Thus, trust is the association transferred from the influencer to the brand and

incorporated by the consumer, if the consumer believes that trust is a common trait between himself/herself and the influencer. In sum, this study suggests that PSRs enable a valuable trust-transfer process that can decrease consumer perceptions of uncertainty about the endorsed brand.

Concerning **hypothesis 9**, SC exerts a significant direct impact on BT. From a theoretical perspective, the relationship between SC and SBC contributes to the uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Calabrese 1975) and the non-evaluative meaning transfer model (McCracken 1989; Bergkvist and Zhou 2016).

While previous research has demonstrated that the SC of traditional celebrities (Dwivedi and Johnson 2013) influences BT and that the SC of influencers affects trust in branded posts (Lou and Yuan 2019), the results of this study extend theoretical knowledge to a new consumer-brand relationship construct in the area of influencer brand endorsements.

Although PSR and SC have a direct effect on BT, the impact of SC on BT is slightly lower than that of PSR ( $\beta = 0.24$  comparing to  $\beta = 0.59$ ). Thus, the results indicate that PSR can impact PI directly and indirectly via BT. While the indirect effect of PSR on PI is equivalent to the direct effect of PSR on PI ( $\beta = 0.33$  and  $\beta = 0.34$ , respectively), the indirect effect of SC on PI seems to be nonmeaningful ( $\beta = 0.12$ ). The findings therefore imply a dual pathway to brand purchase intentions enhancement: a direct effect from PSR, as well as an indirect effect via the development of BT.

Next, the combined SBCs and BT constructs are examined. Although PSR exerts a higher impact on SBCs than on BT, only BT is positively determined by both PSR and SC.

It is interesting to note that the  $R^2$  values indicate that the model explains 53% of the variance of SBC, whereas the variance of BT is explained by 47%. The result suggests that the feeling of being related to an influencer may be strictly crucial in order for consumers to incorporate an endorsed brand into their self-concept, whereas BT may not require the highest levels of perceived PSR in order to convince a consumer to trust a brand. This is also seen through the higher effect impact of PSR on SBC over PSR on BT ( $\beta = 0.73$  comparing to  $\beta = 0.59$ ).

Finally, regarding **hypothesis 10**, this study empirically supports previous studies in the finding of a direct link between BT and consumers' intent to purchase a brand. Moreover, the findings compare favorably with previous research (Sichtmann 2007; Luk and Yip 2008; Haefner, Deli-Gray, and Rosenbloom 2011; Alif Fianto et al. 2014). However, this relationship has not been addressed in previous research under the framework of influencer endorsement effectiveness.

This finding has critical theoretical implications for the literature of uncertainty reduction theory (Berger and Calabrese 1975). This study suggests that favorable brand-relational response from consumers (e.g., BT) flows over to the endorsed brand, expressed as the intent to purchase a brand. Additionally, when BT needs to be developed in the first instance, the endorsing influencer has an essential role in enabling the development of BT. Hence, this study reiterates the crucial role of perceived PSR in the trust-transfer meaning process, and in realizing the effectiveness of brand endorsement.

**In sum**, the results indicate that both the PSR and BT are essential variables in the relationship between self-disclosure and purchase intentions. The results show that self-disclosure exerts a higher effect on PSR, and PSR exerts a higher effect on BT. Also, PI is directly determined by BT, and both directly and indirectly determined by PSR. Hence, the model fits the data satisfactorily, and the analysis supports a fully mediated role of the PSR and BT constructs in explaining the hypothesized outcomes.

The findings complement theoretical perspectives on the influencer-follower relationship, the consumer-brand relationship, and influencer endorsement success. Thus, perceived self-disclosure cannot influence a consumer's intent to purchase an endorsed brand, until it is transferred to the influencer-follower relationship and the consumer-brand relationship via endorser meaning transfer.

Furthermore, this study collaborates with the new research stream of influencer marketing by examining the combined effects of the influencers' perceived SC and PSR on the users' PI. Based on this, regarding the model's explanatory power ( $R^2$ ), Sokolova and Kefi (2019) also combined credibility and PSR to explain PI. Their model explains 48.5% of the variance of the PI construct. By adding SBC and BT between the relationships of PSR and SC with PI, the model tested in this study raised the variance explanation of the PI to 62%, a reasonable amount of variability for the endogenous variable. These results expand the explanatory power of PI by adding factors of the consumer-brand relationship.

Last, regarding limited previous self-disclosure scales the development of a new scale contributes to the literature of self-disclosure by providing a consistent scale, created in the social media environment and containing a multi-diversity proposal of items from three styles of self-disclosure: factual/descriptive, emotional, and cognitive self-disclosure (Morton 1978; Dindia 1988; Mitchell et al. 2008).



## 5.1 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

Since researchers started recently to relate perceived PSR to the success of influencer endorsement, this study has substantial managerial implications for the influencer endorsement process. Moreover, as literature indicates the importance of understanding what kind of endorsers can turn followers into customers (Chung and Cho 2017), this study offers practical guidance for the selection of endorsing influencers and brand management strategies on social media.

**First**, the results show the importance of influencers **disclosing intimate things** about themselves, in order to approximate them to their followers, and allowing them to gain leverage on persuasion effects. Thus, brand managers and strategic planners can utilize the intimate self-disclosure factor by observing influencers' writing styles and self-disclosure habits (Huang 2014). It is interesting to note that self-disclosure may be critical for PSR development since social media messages without self-disclosure content can create distant images and can even diminish confidence in an endorser (Chung and Cho 2017).

**Second**, by **combining parasocial relationships with source credibility**, this study demonstrates that in the influencer endorsement context, being perceived as attractive, trustworthy, and expert may not be enough to persuade consumers to purchase a brand endorsed on social media. This suggests that brand managers must look more carefully at endorsing influencers when selecting them, thus trying to identify their persuasive traits. These include understanding the influencer's path on the internet and evaluating the followers' perception of the influencer's traits and relationship-related factors. These strategic suggestions complement Lou and Yuan's (2019) recommendations that, instead of examining engagement metrics and influencers' numbers of followers, marketers should establish a partnership with influencers according to their capabilities of developing PSR, and develop more effective advertising campaigns on social media.

The results offer benefits to endorsing influencers as well, by indicating that the adoption of intimate self-disclosure and relationship-related factors are desired to fulfill persuasive strategies while creating content and collaborating with brands. These include incorporating communication styles that increase followers' involvement and perceived proximity to the influencer. For example, a conversational, responsive, and direct style of communication should be included as criteria to select brand endorsers (Chung and Cho 2017).

**Third**, **PSR** may facilitate consumer-brand relationships. In this aspect, brand managers may look to digital influencers not just as a powerful source of brand profitability but also as a

means of developing and maintaining a stable relationship between the brand and its' consumers. The rationale for this is that the consumer-brand relationship may be an assurance that consumers will buy the brand due to his/her relationship involvement with it, and not just because the consumer likes the brand's performance.

Further, this relationship involvement adds meanings into their lives, that is, functional, utilitarian, psychosocial, and emotional meanings (Fournier 1998). Thus, the results suggest that brand managers must focus on selecting endorsing influencers who present meanings and associations that are desired to be associated with the endorsed brand (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a).

Regarding this, PSR indirectly impacts PI by affecting consumer perceptions of **brand trust**. Trust is considered a priority in the role of digital influencers as opinion leaders (Uzunoglu and Kip 2014). Hence, a managerial implication is that marketers should focus on trust-building activities (Sichtmann 2007). It includes implementing trust-related benefits as communication triggers since trustful endorsing influencers help to reinforce the consumer's perceived trust in the endorsed brand.

Another practical implication relies on the use of **self-brand connections**. Although self-brand connections had a nonsignificant impact on purchase intention, SBC is an essential indicator of endorser effectiveness. Although SBC might perform well with some products and not with others, marketers should ensure that the endorsing influencer has a spontaneous bond with the brand (Dwivedi, Johnson, and McDonald 2015a) and that the influencer advertising campaigns communicate self-concept related factors.

In sum, brand managers should appreciate the fact that, by having the potential of being perceived as a pseudo-friend of their followers, endorsing influencers play a significant role in eliciting positive behavioral and relational outcomes towards the brand.

## 5.2 FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Despite the theoretical and managerial contributions discussed above, this study has limitations that suggest directions for future research.

**First**, plenty of PSR antecedents have been applied to the online context. Recent online related studies indicate that perceived interactivity with the persona (Labrecque 2014), motivation to use the social network, celebrity credibility (Yuan, Kim, and Kim 2016), viewers' perception of YouTubers' similarity, expertise, and friendliness (Ko and Wu 2017), need for

affiliation (Escalas and Bettman 2017), audience participation in vlogs (Munnukka et al. 2019), followers empathy with digital celebrities, low followers self-esteem (Hwang and Zhang 2018), physical and social attractiveness, reason for entertainment, and time spent with the media (Liu, Liu, and Zhang 2019) positively influenced or correlated with PSR.

Based on this, considering the explanatory power of PSR (24%) and SC (21%), the low  $R^2$  results indicate that future research should focus on other combined PSR and SC antecedents that might be important for the success of influencer endorsements.

**Second**, a PSR develops over time as a dynamic process (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018). Hence, as this is cross-sectional research, future investigations could examine the developments and dynamics of PSR over a more extended period (Liu, Liu, and Zhang 2019).

Also, the different stages of PSR development can be assessed (Tukachinsky and Stever 2018) in order to understand which stages of PSR have the highest effects of perceived self-disclosure. For example, Tukachinsky and Stever (2018), in their theoretical article, indicated that the self-disclosure of the media figure, specifically in the intensification stage, can be used as an independent variable of PSR. On the other hand, in the initiation stage, self-disclosure can have a negative impact on PSR since intimate self-disclosure at the beginning of a relationship may create an avoidance effect instead of a proximity effect between the discloser and recipient.

**Third**, this study focused on examining how the PSR and SC, directly and indirectly, affected the purchase intention of endorsed brands via self-brand connections and brand trust. Future research should further analyze other consumer-brand relationship-related factors that may also facilitate the effect of the perceived PSR and SC on the consumer intent to purchase the endorsed brand.

**Fourth**, since this study focused on the positive valence of the constructs, future research should explore the opposite effect related to self-disclosure and PSR and how it influences adverse outcomes for the brand. For example, researchers could further explore the negative effect of self-disclosure and whether it is related to parasocial breakup (Cohen 2003). Also, parasocial breakup with an endorsing influencer could be addressed to comprehend how this may lead to adverse consumer reactions towards the brands. Hence, negative consumer-brand related factors, such as brand hate (Zarantonello et al. 2016), brand hypocrisy (Guèvremont 2019), or brand distance (Grégoire, Tripp and Legoux 2009), could be explored as consequences of the parasocial breakup.

**Fifth**, regarding the nonsignificant relationship between SC and SBC, traditional SC dimensions may not promote consumers' willingness to embody the associations of attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise into their self-concept, and Dwivedi, Johnson, and

McDonald (2015b) stated that the impact of celebrity endorsements on consumer self-brand connection is an emergent empirical investigation in literature. Therefore, future research can further explore which endorser traits may enhance self-brand connections in the context of digital influencers; this seems to be the first study to examine the effect of SC on SBCs with endorsing influencers.

**Sixth**, regarding the absence of a relationship between SBC and PI, this study tested a body lotion as the endorsed product. Although the product is related to the beauty segment, it is more appealing as a skincare product than an aesthetic one. Thus, as SBCs are related to self-expression (Escalas and Bettman 2005), some brands can communicate something about the person using them better than other brands. Hence, a product that is used publicly (vs. privately) or that enhances self-expression may be adequate for the effect of SBC on the intent to purchase a product (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Thus, to enhance external validity, other categories and types of products can be selected in future research. Brand managers looking to enhance self-brand connections should also pay attention to publicly consumed products that are more likely to transmit symbolic meanings.

**Seventh**, this research took place within two related market segments: fashion and beauty. This approach may limit the identification of sector differences that might influence results, and it may limit the generalizability of the results to other consumer products (Kennedy, Ferrell, and Leclair 2001). Also, due to the nature of the segment and the product used in this research, the sample is focused on the female audience. In order to increase the generalizability of the results to other audiences and market segments, future research should select a product that is not gender-biased.

**Eighth**, to increase external validity, future studies should consider examining respondents in different countries. Since the use of celebrity endorsements varies across countries, marketing researchers could incorporate a cross-cultural approach to compare possible different results, such as elements of power distance beliefs (Winterich, Gangwar, and Grewal 2018).

On the other hand, other psychological factors could be incorporated in subsequent studies and compared across countries, such as social comparison traits. Consumers are more likely to seek information from friends (Moschis 1976). Hence, the PSR would facilitate and instigate a social comparison of consumers with the digital influencer they follow. It might lead the consumer to adopt consumption patterns similar to those of the influencer, such as buying the products he or she endorses (Yuksel and Labrecque 2016).

**Ninth**, this study used a survey approach; therefore, it has a correlational nature. Future research could develop experiments to establish the direction of causality between the variables. For example, different styles of self-disclosure could be manipulated to observe their importance in PSR and SC.

**Tenth**, this study approached the endorser meaning transfer in order to examine the influencer-follower relationship and consumer-brand relationship and how it is related to the success of influencer endorsement. The following studies could analyze a different perspective, such as human brands. The rationale for this relies on the assumption that, in the same way as brands, digital influencers can conquer a successful career by developing and maintaining a relationship with their followers and having their content consumed by the users. Based on this, researchers can analyze how endorsed brands can transfer meanings to the influencer and to what extent their followers incorporate these meanings and leading to positive outcomes for the influencer market.

Regarding this, Bergkvist and Zhou (2016) in their literature review about celebrity endorsements, stated that future research should focus on brand-to-celebrity transfer, in particular, “what factors regulate whether there is transfer from the brand to the celebrity, from the celebrity to the brand, or no transfer at all” (p. 13).

**Finally**, since literature gave evidence of differences between celebrities and influencer endorsement persuasion effects (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2019), future research could compare the positive brand outcomes from micro, macro, and mega endorsing influencers to observe the different factors between them. The rationale for this lies upon the assumption that mega influencers, by the vast number of followers, may approximate themselves from consumer perceptions of traditional celebrities, while micro-influencers produce more local content directed to a small number of followers. Hence, these potential differences may influence how brand managers select adequate and effective digital influencers to endorse their brands.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study indicate that perceived influencer intimate self-disclosure does indeed contribute to PI, primarily through PSR and BT. In particular, this research conciliates endorser credibility and PSR literature with relationship quality literature, thus enhancing the comprehension of the role of endorsing influencers as facilitators of the development of consumer-brand relationships and influence on consumers' positive behavioral outcomes.

Overall, the results of this study add to our understanding of the extent to which intimate influencer self-disclosure intensifies the perceived PSR and SC of the endorsing influencer. The results especially emphasize the importance of perceived PSR over the traditional SC factor in the effectiveness of digital influencer endorsement. The data also deepens our knowledge about the key role that influencers play in enhancing SBC and BT, and how these relationship-related factors can lead to brand PI. Therefore, this study integrates the follower-influencer relationship, the influencer-brand meaning transfer, and the consumer-brand relationship under the framework of influencer endorsement, in order to explain the effectiveness of digital influencer endorsements.

Finally, advertising agencies are increasingly considering digital influencers endorsements as an essential strategy for improving their brand communication results (Uzunoğlu and Kip 2014). Since social media and influencer marketing have become a substantial tool for defining marketing strategies, this study can benefit brands and digital influencers, by advising them to adopt more behaviors related to persuasive and relationship-building. In particular, the findings indicate that the endorsing influencers that can turn followers into consumers are those that, besides presenting positive traits, can maintain a strong relationship with their followers and are perceived as self-disclosing intimate things.

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## APPENDIX A – SELF-DISCLOSURE SCALE

### Self-Disclosure Item Pool Generation

With the final survey data (N= 433), an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted for the self-disclosure scale, which development relied on literature items. The self-disclosure scale aims to analyze the perceived partner disclosure or the participant perception of the influencer self-disclosure. As evidenced by the literature, self-disclosure could be divided into three styles: factual, emotional, and cognitive. During the analysis, 38 papers were reviewed to identify words and phrases used to describe and measure self-disclosure. An effort was made to extract all words that were likely to be useful in the development of a self-disclosure scale. This process resulted in 28 items related to self-disclosure that were extracted from 29 papers and coded as one of the self-disclosure styles.

For the self-disclosure scale development, it was decided to identify the terms most present in the discussions about the construct, due to the absence of scales that employ the different styles of self-disclosure. Only the concepts cited by at least three articles were selected, except for the terms wishes, mood, and actions. The terms attitudes, experiences, things, and needs were excluded due to their ambiguous meaning, incorporating both cognitive and affective elements. In **Table 5**, the first 15 items were selected for the self-disclosure scale tested in this study.

For **content validity**, the final version of the scale was judged by three Ph.D. Marketing professors who received a document containing a brief explanation about the self-disclosure definition, differences between the three styles of self-disclosure, the rationale for the scale development, self-disclosure items found in the literature, and the proposed items for each style of self-disclosure. All professors judged adequate the items related to each SD's style and suggested minor adjustments in the written sentences. A **pre-test** was undertaken via Amazon Mechanical Turk to identify opportunities to improve the content quality of the questionnaire and results.

Table 5. Self-Disclosure Terms

	Item	SD Style	Frequency*	Authors	Frequency**	Authors
1	<b>Feelings</b>	Emotional	21	Chung, Cho (2017); Kim, Song (2016); Morton (1978); Reis, Shaver (1988); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Tang, Wang (2012); Berg, Archer (1982); Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988); Dindia, Fitzpatrick, Kenny (1997); Yeh, Bedford (2003); Manne et al. (2004); Mitchell (2006); Mitchell et al. (2008); Lippert, Prager (2001); Mitchell (2008); Laurenceau et al. (2004); Waring, Russel (1980); Waring (1988); Collins, Miller (1994); Lin, Utz (2017)	5	Chung, Cho (2017); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Wheeless (1976); Manne et al. (2004); Laurenceau, Barrett, Rovine (2005)
2	<b>Emotions</b>	Emotional	10	Kim, Song (2016); Morton (1978); Reis, Shaver (1988); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Berg, Archer (1982); Mitchell (2006); Lippert, Prager (2001); Mitchell (2008); Waring, Chelune (1983); Omarzu (2000)	4	Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Wheeless (1976); Qiu et al. (2012); Manne et al. (2004)
3	<b>Information</b>	Factual	11	Kim, Song (2016); Reis, Shaver (1988); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Berg, Archer (1982); Dindia (1988); Dindia, Fitzpatrick, Kenny (1997); Yeh, Bedford (2003); Lippert, Prager (2001); Laurenceau et al. (2004); Collins, Miller (1994); Omarzu (2000)	2	Wheeless (1976); Laurenceau, Barrett, Rovine (2005)
4	<b>Thoughts</b>	Cognitive	10	Kim, Song (2016); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Tang, Wang (2012); Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988); Dindia, Fitzpatrick, Kenny (1997); Yeh, Bedford (2003); Manne et al. (2004); Mitchell et al. (2008); Waring, Chelune (1983)	3	Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Manne et al. (2004); Laurenceau, Barrett, Rovine (2005)
5	<b>Opinions</b>	Cognitive	8	Morton (1978); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988); Yeh, Bedford (2003); Laurenceau et al. (2004); Omarzu (2000); Cheung, Lee, Chan (2015)	2	Chung, Cho (2017); Wheeless (1976)
6	<b>Facts</b>	Factual	8	Morton (1978); Reis, Shaver (1988); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Berg, Archer (1982); Manne et al. (2004); Mitchell (2006); Laurenceau et al. (2004); Omarzu (2000)	2	Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Laurenceau, Barrett, Rovine (2005)
7	<b>Beliefs</b>	Cognitive	5	Chung, Cho (2017); Kim, Song (2016); Waring, Russel (1980); Waring, Chelune (1983); Waring (1988)	1	Wheeless (1976)
8	<b>Judgments</b>	Cognitive	5	Morton (1978); Laurenceau, Barrett, Pietromonaco (1998); Berg, Archer (1982); Dindia (1988); Yeh, Bedford (2003)	0	-
9	<b>Desires</b>	Emotional	3	Reis, Shaver (1988); Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988)	0	-
10	<b>Behaviors</b>	Factual	2	Reis, Shaver (1988); Mitchell et al. (2008)	1	Wheeless (1976)
11	<b>Ideas</b>	Cognitive	3	Chung, Cho (2017); Waring, Russel (1980); Waring (1988)	0	-
12	<b>Habits</b>	Factual	0	-	3	Miller, Berg, Archer (1983); Hooi, Cho (2013); Kim, Song (2016)
13	<b>Wishes</b>	Emotional	2	Mitchell (2008); Laurenceau et al. (2004)	0	-
14	<b>Mood</b>	Emotional	2	Berg, Archer (1982); Omarzu (2000)	0	-
15	<b>Actions</b>	Factual	1	Laurenceau et al. (2004)	0	-
16	<b>Attitudes</b>	-	6	Stiles (1979); Waring, Russel (1980); Waring, Chelune (1983); Waring (1988); Omarzu (2000); Cheung, Lee, Chan (2015)	0	-
17	<b>Experiences</b>	-	5	Reis, Shaver (1988); Tang, Wang (2012); Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988); Dindia, Fitzpatrick, Kenny (1997)	1	Wheeless (1976)
18	<b>Things</b>	-	2	Berg, Archer (1982); Mitchell (2008)	2	Kim, Song (2016); Wheeless (1976)
19	<b>Needs</b>	-	3	Mitchell (2008); Laurenceau et al. (2004); Waring, Chelune (1983)	0	-
20	<b>Values</b>	-	2	Kim, Song (2016); Berg, Archer (1982)	0	-
21	<b>Fantasies</b>	Emotional	2	Reis, Shaver (1988); Waring, Chelune (1983)	0	-
22	<b>Perceptions</b>	Cognitive	2	Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988)	0	-
23	<b>Intentions</b>	-	2	Stiles (1979); Dindia (1988)	0	-
24	<b>Life events</b>	Factual	1	Kim, Song (2016)	0	-
25	<b>Anxieties</b>	Emotional	1	Reis, Shaver (1988)	0	-
26	<b>Want</b>	Cognitive	1	Mitchell (2008)	0	-
27	<b>Activities</b>	Factual	1	Lin, Utz (2017)	0	-
28	<b>Life history</b>	Factual	0	-	1	Kim, Song (2016)

Note. \*Number of papers that mentioned the term on the conceptual background; \*\*Number of papers that mentioned the term on the scale measurement.

Source: the author, 2020

### **Self-Disclosure Scale Purification**

Using IBM SPSS for scale purification, approximately 50% (200) of the original sample was randomly selected.

The Kolmogorov Smirnov test shows the statistical significance of .000, confirming the null hypothesis that the data is nonnormal. However, the skewness and kurtosis tests show acceptable values ranging from -1 to 1. Once the skewness and kurtosis values are acceptable, the Pearson correlation matrix was used to verify the significance and correlation values between the fifteen self-disclosure items. The correlation analysis is statistically significant at the .01 level, and the factors correlations are positive, ranging from .357 to .698; fair values, according to Hair et al. (2014).

Bartlett's test was used to assess the overall significance of the correlation matrix. The test finds that the correlations, when taken collectively, are significant at the .000 level. Moreover, to assess the factorability of the overall set of variables and individual variables, the overall measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) falls in the acceptable range (above .8) with the value of .945, indicating that these variables meet the requirements for factor analysis (Hair et al. 2014).

The responses were analyzed via principal components and item analysis. By applying the latent root criterion of retaining factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, one factor is retained. The scree-test also indicates that one factor may be appropriate when considering the changes in eigenvalues. The factor retained represent 54.6 percent of the variance of the 15 variables, slightly sufficient in terms of total variance explained (Hair et al. 2014).

With one factor to be analyzed, the interpretation process proceeds by examining the unrotated factor matrices for adequate communalities and significant factor loadings. First, communalities levels lower than .50, e.g., items with factor loadings consistently lower than .70 were considered for deletion (Hair et al. 2014). Before the item's exclusion, the Cronbach's Alpha "if item deleted" option was assessed to confirm the need to delete the items considered before. In this way, one-by-one, four items were excluded from the construct (two from the factual SD style: Q14 - actions and Q15 - habits; and two from the cognitive SD style: Q22 - ideas and Q24 - judgments). Overall, these statistical analyses and judgment procedures resulted in the retention of 11 items for the self-disclosure construct. Regarding scale reliability, the alpha of .93 meets the recommended level in the literature (Hair et al. 2014).

### **Self-Disclosure Validity**

The final refined scale was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis for validation using the IBM SPSS Amos. For CFA, a new 50% sample in the original data set was randomly selected and tested.

In the final and revised self-disclosure construct, the indicators were reduced from 11 to 9 (Q12 - facts and Q19 - wishes items were excluded) due to cross-loading modification indices and standardized residual covariances problems.

Finally, fit indices, average variance extracted, and composite construct reliability was assessed. The self-disclosure scale including nine items received satisfactory fit ( $\chi^2/df=2.433$ ; root mean square error of approximation [RMSEA]=.058; comparative fit index [CFI]=0.98). Variance extracted estimate of 0.51 indicates convergent validity among items in the given scale. Regarding the composite reliability, the value of .90 meets the recommended levels in the literature (Hair et al. 2014).



## APPENDIX B – QUESTIONNAIRE’S SCALE ITEMS

Table 6. Questionnaire’s Scale Items

Scale Items		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Self-Disclosure			
Q11	She shares information about herself.	3.51	1.02
Q12	<i>She shares facts about herself. (excluded)</i>	3.52	0.99
Q13	She talks about her behaviors.	3.42	0.97
Q14	<i>She talks about her actions. (excluded)</i>	3.36	1.01
Q15	<i>She talks about her habits. (excluded)</i>	3.49	0.99
Q16	She shares her feelings.	3.66	0.99
Q17	She shares her emotions.	3.63	1.04
Q18	She shares her desires.	3.46	1.00
Q19	<i>She shares her wishes. (excluded)</i>	3.45	0.97
Q20	She talks about her moods.	3.53	1.00
Q21	She shares her thoughts.	3.67	0.99
Q22	<i>She shares her ideas. (excluded)</i>	3.66	0.96
Q23	She shares her opinions.	3.54	1.04
Q24	<i>She shares her judgments. (excluded)</i>	3.32	1.02
Q25	She shares her beliefs.	3.41	1.03
Parasocial Relationships		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q41	When [influencer's name] shows me how she feels about something, it helps me make up my own mind about the issue.	3.24	1.08
Q42	<i>I feel sorry for [influencer's name] when she makes a mistake. (excluded)</i>	3.31	1.11
Q43	[Influencer's name] makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends.	3.47	1.04
Q44	I see [influencer's name] as a natural, down-to-earth person.	3.64	1.11
Q45	I look forward to viewing or hearing about [influencer's name].	3.88	0.87
Q46	If [influencer's name] appeared on a television program, I would watch that program.	3.79	0.95
Q47	<i>I sometimes make remarks to [influencer's name] while viewing her Instagram stories, IGTV, or videos on Instagram/YouTube. (excluded)</i>	2.62	1.35
Q48	<i>If there were a story about [influencer's name] in a newspaper, magazine, or online, I would read it. (excluded)</i>	3.92	0.93
Q49	I would like to meet [influencer's name] in person.	3.58	1.12
Q50	I think [influencer's name] is like an old friend.	2.61	1.17
Q51	<i>I find [influencer's name] to be attractive. (excluded)</i>	4.35	0.78
Q52	I follow what [influencer's name] is saying and doing.	3.52	1.00
Q53	When I'm viewing [influencer's name] on Instagram/YouTube, I feel as if I am part of her group.	3.35	1.11
Source Credibility		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>

<i>Attractiveness</i>			
Q54_1	Unattractive - Attractive	4.56	0.68
Q54_2	Not Classy - Classy	4.15	0.85
Q54_3	Ugly - Beautiful	4.57	0.70
Q54_4	Plain - Elegant	4.17	0.84
Q54_5	Not Sexy - Sexy	4.06	0.86
<i>Trustworthiness</i>			
Q54_6	Undependable - Dependable	3.99	0.82
Q54_7	Dishonest - Honest	4.03	0.83
Q54_8	Unreliable - Reliable	4.04	0.83
Q54_9	Insincere - Sincere	4.00	0.90
Q54_10	Untrustworthy - Trustworthy	3.96	0.84
<i>Expertise</i>			
Q54_11	Not an expert - Expert	4.12	0.88
Q54_12	Inexperienced - Experienced	4.34	0.72
Q54_13	Unknowledgeable - Knowledgeable	4.35	0.74
Q54_14	Unqualified - Qualified	4.23	0.79
Q54_15	Unskilled - Skilled	4.32	0.80
<b>Self-Brand Connections</b>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Q31	The lotion's brand could reflect who I am.	2.77	1.17
Q32	I could identify with the lotion's brand.	3.10	1.16
Q33	I could feel a personal connection to the lotion's brand.	2.79	1.18
Q34	I could use the lotion's brand to communicate who I am to other people.	2.64	1.22
Q35	I think the lotion's brand could help me become the type of person I want to be.	2.49	1.24
Q36	I would consider the lotion's brand to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others).	2.72	1.18
Q37	The lotion's brand would suit me well.	3.49	0.92
<b>Brand Trust</b>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
29_1	I would trust this brand of lotion.	3.76	0.89
29_2	I would rely on this brand of lotion.	3.51	0.96
29_3	This seems to be an honest brand of lotion.	3.65	0.88
29_4	This brand of lotion seems to be safe.	3.91	0.84
<b>Purchase Intentions</b>		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
28_1	If I were looking for a lotion, my likelihood of purchasing the brand recommended by [influencer's name] would be high.	3.56	1.04
28_2	If I were to buy a lotion, the probability that I would consider buying the brand recommended by [influencer's name] would be high.	3.64	1.03
28_3	If I had to buy a lotion, my willingness to buy the product recommended by [influencer's name] would be high.	3.68	0.98

*Note.* Based on a sample of 433 observations.

Source: the author, 2020

## APPENDIX C - QUESTIONNAIRE

### Questionnaire

**Q1 Dear Participant:** My name is Fernanda Polli, and I am conducting market research with my team to understand **opinions regarding digital influencers**. It will take approximately **10 minutes** to complete the following questionnaire. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. What we ask is your honesty in answering this survey. The results will only be used and presented on a consolidated basis. No responses will be disclosed individually. The survey starts with **four screening questions** to select the ideal respondents' profile. **Thank you very much for your cooperation!**

Q2 How do you identify yourself?

Female (1)

Male (2)

*Display This Question: If Q2 = 1*

Q3 Please select all the **cosmetic products** you use.

Body lotion (1)

Lipstick (2)

Moisturizer (3)

Makeup remover (4)

I do not use any of the products listed above (5)

*Display This Question: If Q3 = 1 Or Q3 = 3*

Q4 Please indicate all **social media platforms** in which you have a profile.

Facebook (1)

Instagram (2)

YouTube (3)

Twitter (4)

I do not have a profile on the social media platforms listed above (5)

*Display This Question: If Q4 = 2 Or Q4 = 3*

Q5 Please select up to **2 digital influencers** that you follow more often on **INSTAGRAM/YOUTUBE**.

Aimee Song (1)

Amanda Steele (2)

Camila Coelho (3)

Chloe Morello (4)

Chrissy (5)

Christen Dominique (6)

Desi Perkins (7)

Huda Beauty (8)

Jaclyn Hill (9)

Jenn Im (10)

Kandee Johnson (11)

Karen Sarahi Gonzalez (12)

Kathleenlights (13)

Lauren Curtis (14)

Michelle Phan (15)

Nicole Guerriero (16)

Nikkie Tutorials (17)

Tati Westbrook (18)

Shayla Mitchell (19)

Zoe Sugg (20)

**I do not follow any of the digital influencers listed (21)**

*Display This Question: If Q5 = 21*

Q6 Do you follow any other **beauty/fashion influencers** on Instagram/YouTube?

- Yes. Please enter the influencer’s name: (1) \_\_\_\_\_
- No (2)

Q7 We appreciate your help, but unfortunately, you have not reached the requirements to continue answering this survey. Therefore, we recommend you return the HIT. Please remember, surveys with more than one attempt will be rejected. **Thank You!**

*Skip To: End of Survey If Q7(1) Is Displayed*

Q8 Please rank the following digital influencers in order of preference (**drag your favorite digital influencer at the top**). To rank the listed items, drag and drop each item. (If you previously selected just one digital influencer, please click on the option available below, drag and drop it to continue).

- \_\_\_\_\_ Aimee Song (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Amanda Steele (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Camila Coelho (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chloe Morello (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chrisspy (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Christen Dominique (6)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Desi Perkins (7)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Huda Beauty (8)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jaclyn Hill (9)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Jenn Im (10)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Kandee Johnson (11)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Karen Sarahi Gonzalez (12)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Kathleenlights (13)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Lauren Curtis (14)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Michelle Phan (15)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nicole Guerriero (16)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Nikkie Tutorials (17)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Shayla Mitchell (18)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Tati Westbrook (19)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Zoe Sugg (20)

Q9 In the next sections, you will be asked to answer some questions about **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}**. Keep this influencer in mind and her content posted on Instagram/YouTube to answer the rest of the survey. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers. It’s all about your candid and honest opinion.

Q10 Please indicate the degree to which **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** discloses personal things about herself on Instagram/YouTube. Note that (1) and (2) indicate that the disclosure is **less intimate** or **more superficial** while (4) and (5) indicate that the disclosure is **more intimate** or **deeper**.

Q11

	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares <b>information</b> about herself (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q12	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares <b>facts</b> about herself (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q13	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She talks about her <b>behaviors</b> (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q14	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She talks about her <b>actions</b> (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q15	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She talks about her <b>habits</b> (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q16	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>feelings</b> (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q17	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>emotions</b> (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q18	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>desires</b> (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q19	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>wishes</b> (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q20	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She talks about her <b>moods</b> (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q21	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>thoughts</b> (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q22	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>ideas</b> (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q23	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>opinions</b> (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q24	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her <b>judgments</b> (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q25

	Extremely superficial (1) (1)	Somewhat superficial (2) (2)	Neither superficial nor intimate (3) (3)	Somewhat intimate (4) (4)	Extremely intimate (5) (5)
She shares her beliefs (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q26 After reading the following content, please provide your opinion about it in the following questions. The company for which we are conducting this research is launching a **new brand of body lotion** and has decided to gift some digital influencers with this new product. How would you feel about this **new brand of lotion** if you saw **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** commenting that she is delighted with the product's performance and therefore she recommends the brand to her followers? Think about **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** recommending this **new brand of** lotion on her social media and answer the following questions based on your opinion about it, even if you do not know the brand.

Q28 Based on the previous content, please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
If I were looking for a <b>lotion</b> , my likelihood of purchasing the brand recommended by <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> would be high. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I were to buy a <b>lotion</b> , the probability that I would consider buying the brand recommended by <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> would be high. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I had to buy a <b>lotion</b> , my willingness to buy the product recommended by <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> would be high. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



Q29 Think about this **new brand of lotion** that is being recommended by **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}**, and please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I would trust this <b>brand of lotion</b> . (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I would rely on this <b>brand of lotion</b> . (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This seems to be an honest <b>brand of lotion</b> . (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
This <b>brand of lotion</b> seems to be safe. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q30 Think about this new brand of lotion that is being recommended by **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}**, and please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

Q31

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
The <b>lotion's brand</b> could reflect who I am. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q32

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I could identify with the <b>lotion's brand</b> . (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q33

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I could feel a personal connection to the <b>lotion's brand</b> . (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q34	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I could use the <b>lotion's brand</b> to communicate who I am to other people. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q35	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I think the <b>lotion's brand</b> could help me become the type of person I want to be. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q36	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I would consider the <b>lotion's brand</b> to be "me" (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others). (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q37	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
The <b>lotion's brand</b> would suit me well. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q38 In the following sections, you will be asked to answer some questions about your interaction with the digital influencer you are analyzing. **Please enter the name of the digital influencer you are analyzing in this survey.**

Q40 Please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

Q41

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
When <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> shows me how she feels about something, it helps me make up my own mind about the issue. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q42

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I feel sorry for <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> when she makes a mistake. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q43

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
<b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q44

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I see <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> as a natural, down-to-earth person. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q45

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I look forward to viewing or hearing about <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> . (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q46	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
If <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> appeared on a television program, I would watch that program. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q47	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I sometimes make remarks to <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> while viewing her Instagram stories, IGTV, or videos on Instagram/YouTube. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q48	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
If there were a story about <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> in a newspaper, magazine, or online, I would read it. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q49	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I would like to meet <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> in person. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Q50	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I think <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> is like an old friend. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q51

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I find <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> to be attractive. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q52

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I follow what <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> is saying and doing. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q53

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
When I'm viewing <b>#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}</b> on Instagram/YouTube, I feel as if I am part of her group. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q54 Which of the following adjectives best describes **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}**.

	1	2	3	4	5	
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	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	
Unattractive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Attractive
Not Classy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Classy
Ugly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Beautiful
Plain	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Elegant
Not Sexy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sexy
Undependable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Dependable
Dishonest	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Honest
Unreliable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Reliable
Insincere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Sincere
Untrustworthy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Trustworthy
Not an expert	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Expert
Inexperienced	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Experienced
Unknowledgeable	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Knowledgeable
Unqualified	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Qualified
Unskilled	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Skilled

Q55 It makes sense for **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** to promote a **lotion brand**.

Strongly disagree (1) (1)

Somewhat disagree (2) (2)

Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)

Somewhat agree (4) (4)

Strongly agree (5) (5)

Q56 Consider the **body lotion product** and please indicate the degree to which you agree with the following statements.

	Strongly disagree (1) (1)	Somewhat disagree (2) (2)	Neither disagree nor agree (3) (3)	Somewhat agree (4) (4)	Strongly agree (5) (5)
I am particularly interested in the <b>recommended product</b> . (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Given my personal interests, this <b>product</b> is not very relevant to me. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Overall, I am quite involved when I am purchasing <b>body lotion</b> for personal use. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q57 How long have you been following **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** on Social Media?

- Less than a week (1)
- Between one week and one month (2)
- Between one month and six months (3)
- Between six months and one year (4)
- More than one year (5)

Q58 How often do you see the content posted by **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** on Social Media?

- Less than once a month (1)
- Once a month (2)
- A few times a month (3)
- Once a week (4)
- A few times a week (5)
- Once per day (6)
- More than once per day (7)

Q59 Do you remember seeing **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** promoting a brand on social media recently?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Q60 Have you ever bought any product promoted by **#{Q8/ChoiceGroup/ChoiceWithHighestValue}** on social media?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

*Display This Question: If Q4 = 2*

Q61 How often do you visit **Instagram** (via the website or mobile app)?

- Less than once a week (1)
- Once a week (2)
- A few times a week (3)
- Once per day (4)
- More than once per day (5)

*Display This Question: If Q4 = 3*

Q62 How often do you visit **YouTube** (via the website or mobile app)?

- Less than once a week (1)
- Once a week (2)
- A few times a week (3)
- Once per day (4)
- More than once per day (5)

Q63 *Finally, we would like to know just a little about you so we can see how different types of people feel about the issues we have been examining.* How old are you?

Q64 What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Some high school (1)
- High school graduate (2)
- Some college but no degree (3)
- Associate's degree (4)
- Bachelor's degree (5)
- Master's degree (6)
- Doctorate degree (7)
- Professional degree (8)

Q65 What is your country of residence?

- U.S (1)
- Another. Which one? (2) \_\_\_\_\_

Q66 Here is your ID: **#{e://Field/Random%20ID}** Copy this value to paste into MTurk. When you have copied this ID, please **click the next button to submit your survey.**



## APPENDIX D – STANDARDIZED FACTOR LOADINGS

Table 7. Standardized Factor Loadings for the Measurement Model

Standardized Factor Loadings for the Measurement Model						
	SD	PSR	SC	SBC	BT	PI
Q11	0.68					
Q13	0.62					
Q16	0.83					
Q17	0.76					
Q18	0.71					
Q20	0.70					
Q21	0.77					
Q23	0.66					
Q25	0.68					
Q41		0.69				
Q43		0.78				
Q44		0.72				
Q45		0.75				
Q46		0.74				
Q49		0.72				
Q50		0.72				
Q52		0.62				
Q53		0.75				
Q54_1			0.72			
Q54_2			0.70			
Q54_3			0.73			
Q54_4			0.64			
Q54_5			0.65			
Q54_6			0.76			
Q54_7			0.83			
Q54_8			0.75			
Q54_9			0.81			
Q54_10			0.87			
Q54_11			0.80			
Q54_12			0.83			
Q54_13			0.83			
Q54_14			0.81			
Q54_15			0.80			
Q31				0.87		
Q32				0.83		
Q33				0.86		

Q34	0.83	
Q35	0.83	
Q36	0.85	
Q37	0.69	
29_1		0.90
29_2		0.87
29_3		0.86
29_4		0.80
28_1		0.92
28_2		0.93
28_3		0.91

*Note.* SD = Self-Disclosure; PSR = Parasocial Relationships; SC = Source Credibility; SBC = Self-Brand Connections; BT = Brand Trust; PI = Purchase Intention.

Source: the author, 2020