

UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS' INTENTION TO ACT ON SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS'  
COSMETIC SURGERY RECOMMENDATIONS

by

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## ABSTRACT

DAISY ORTIZ-BERGER. Understanding Consumers' Intention to Act on Social Media Influencers' Cosmetic Surgery Recommendations  
(Under the direction of DR. JARED M. HANSEN)

A growing concern is how social media is redefining how consumers view themselves and their choices to reshape their physical bodies. There is a stream of research that indicates that attractiveness is important to people. Some studies focus on the perceived benefits of attractiveness in their authenticity. A different stream has started to look at coolness. Other studies have focused on attractiveness and envy. This research combines all of these different reasons, comparing how they work in tandem, with a new lens of focus: consumers' views of the attractiveness, authenticity, and coolness of the social media influencer, and how those elements in tandem, in combination with envy, impact consumers' behavioral intention to do the things (e.g., cosmetic procedures or surgeries) recommended by the influencers. Additionally, it examines if potential envy antecedents of (a) attractiveness to improve job opportunities versus (b) attractiveness to 'fit in' vary depending on the consumer life stage. I elaborate on implications for future research related to marketing and society, marketing managerial practice, and consumer well-being.

Keywords: Instagram; social media influencer; technology acceptance model (TAM); structural equation modeling; attractiveness; authenticity; coolness; envy; fitting in; career opportunities; cosmetic surgery

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## DEDICATION

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

There has been a dramatic increase in influencer marketing studies from 2018 to 2020, with most studies focusing on influencers' commercial usage like branding and public relations, or their use to raise awareness (health communications) and their impact on public opinion. While the research primarily focused on food, attractiveness, and other items, Hudders et al. (2020), identified that the two most important social media influencer traits in their literature review are impact and reach. Reach is the ability to have a sizable base of followers and, as a result, a sizable secondary reach through these followers. The term "impact" describes one's ability to affect other people's decision-making. In a meta-analysis, Ao et al. (2023) looked at how social media influencers affected consumer engagement and intent to buy. They looked at expertise, and credibility, among other factors such as entertainment values and attractiveness. Being an influencer also requires being authentic and having expertise, as these qualities can impact followers' decisions and increase their number of followers.

All of these studies begin to show the similarities of the characteristics of influencer marketing; however, my study includes constructs that explain the relationship between authenticity, coolness, envy, and perceived usefulness of the social media influencer's recommendations. Additionally, how does fitting in and career opportunities mediate the relationship between the constructs and perceive usefulness to drive purchase intent. Covid-19 turned our lives upside down, with impacts to the global society, including supply chain shortages, labor shortages, and the closure of retail establishments. This past year, consumers have experienced other setbacks such as a global economic downturn, increased interest rates, housing shortages driving up housing prices, resulting in heightened challenges for individuals to meet their daily expenses, let alone extras. Businesses now have to fight harder to win over customers' dollars and stand out from the crowd to gain their trust and loyalty.

As Americans move to digital platforms to obtain news and information, when asked which platform they prefer, half of Americans prefer a digital device; 33% prefer TV; even few prefer radio (7%) or print (5%) as per the Pew Research Center, *News Platform Fact Sheet*, (Forman-Katz & Matsa, 2022). This makes targeting consumers with traditional media even more limited and according to Pew Research Center survey (2022), young people in the US between the ages of 18 and 29 have a high level of confidence in the information they obtain from social networking platforms.

Today, more Americans are on social media obtaining news and information and teens and Millennials spend most of their time on their mobile devices. Statistica (2023) reported that the global number of mobile users reached 7.1 billion. China had the highest number of smartphone users, with over 974 million, followed by India with over 659 million and the United States with 236 million (Statistica, 2021, 2023). These statistics confirm that mobile use trends will continue to increase. Some changes in the social media landscape include TikTok's rise and Facebook's fall.

According to Statista (2023), there are around 4.8 billion internet users worldwide. Facebook alone has 2.9 billion monthly users, without including its other services such as WhatsApp, Messenger, and Instagram.

Today, social media as a business model is in a state of influx, with ego wars going on between Elon Musk (X formerly Twitter) and Mark Zuckerberg (Meta) and the Government intervening with information and privacy concerns (Cheong, 2023; Edelman, 2021). Additionally, Mark Zuckerberg and Apple's CEO, Tim Cook opposing positions on selling personal information and the deeply divergent visions for the digital future (Edelman, 2021). The rise of influencer marketing and its escalating popularity among businesses reflect a powerful strategy aimed at

fostering customer loyalty and enhancing engagement. From its noteworthy surge from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to a substantial \$21.1 billion in 2023, the trend continues to soar (IMH, 2023). The social media ecosystem with artificial intelligence, machine learning, and augmented reality technology continues to drive enhancements and functionality for users which continues to be a hot topic for research. Influencers on social media, sometimes called micro-celebrities (Ao et al., 2023), are those who have achieved fame within a niche demographic. Social media influencers, sometimes known as "stars" of social media, are those who have become well-known and well-respected as a result of their use of these platforms. Micro-celebrities are primarily differentiated from typical A-listers by their strong and intimate bond with their viewers.

In order to establish this intimate bond, the micro-celebrity must divulge elements of their personal life. In his 2016 publication, Carter defines influencers as those who, through blogs, posts, and other social media platforms, can alter the opinions of their audience as a distinct type of third-party endorser. Carter (2016) describes influencers as persons who are trustworthy and have significant followers on social media. This definition emphasizes the importance of reach and impact. In recent years, the sector has become more professionalized, resulting in an increase in the number of influencers and the emergence of organizations that specialize in influencer marketing as a strategy for communication (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

*Why consumers follow influencers.* Lee et al. (2022) examined four distinct motives that might drive individuals to follow influencers on the social media platform Instagram. These motivations include authenticity, consumerism, creative inspiration, and envy. These motivations have differing impacts on both trust levels and the frequency of purchases made by users. Moreover, the concept of materialism exhibited a prominent trait of individual variation that demonstrated a strong association with the four motives and the impact of materialism on

consumer buying behavior. This study offers a unique look at the relationship between attractiveness and various aspects of influencer following, including authenticity, coolness, envy, the perceived value of the recommendations made by social media influencers, and the intention of their followers to get cosmetic surgery.

*Why consumers pursue cosmetic procedures and surgeries.* What motivates consumers to pursue cosmetic procedures and surgeries? The idea of ‘attractiveness advantage’ is that physically appealing individuals are preferred and receive more rewards or opportunities. In a review of the literature on the attractiveness advantage, Nault, Pitesa, and Thau (2020) find that highly attractive people earn about 20 percent additional money and get promotions more often. Therefore, it is regrettably unsurprising that a staggering number of over 10-12 million surgical and non-surgical surgeries for cosmetic procedures were performed globally in a single year. Among these procedures, liposuction emerged as the most favored cosmetic surgeries (ISAPS, 2018). Furthermore, it is anticipated that these numbers will continue to rise in the future. Although not all consumers who undergo plastic surgery exhibit body dysmorphic disorder, I argue that there is a correlation between analytical thinking and a higher inclination towards plastic surgery (Mittal et al., 2021), which could potentially serve as an indicator for this illness.

According to the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (2021), elective procedures that aim to improve one's appearance by surgical and medical techniques are referred to as cosmetic surgery. Discussions about cosmetic surgery, which can permanently alter a person's body size and shape, are often taboo, even among close family members. The United States alone saw almost 18 million cosmetic surgery procedures in a single year. The majority of these operations were for physical rather than cosmetic reasons; the most common surgical treatments were liposuction and breast augmentation.

### **1.1. Problem Statement and Research Goals**

This research study is unique in its primary focus on a comprehensive exploration of all four domains (attractiveness, authenticity, coolness, and envy), focusing on consumers' perceptions about the social media influencers in combination with the impact of envy on the perceived usefulness of influencer recommendations within a single framework. It is the only contribution in the current knowledge that deals with these concepts in this way. The secondary focus is on examining the mediating role of the consumer life stage through the lens of the consumer age, looking at whether different consumer groups by age focus more on career-related benefits or fitting in related benefits correlated with intentions or willingness to undergo cosmetic procedures/surgeries. The primary and secondary goals are both related to the managerial practice of marketing management. This study's third goal is related to the field of marketing and society/ethics. It expands our comprehension of the impact of several topics on behavioral intention. To summarize, I will be exploring the following two social media digital marketing management research questions:

**RQ1:** What are the elements that impact consumers' behavioral intention to engage in cosmetic surgeries/procedures and recommend them?

**RQ2:** Do consumers at different life stages (age) focus on different benefits (fitting-in or career opportunities) associated with attractiveness?

This research will identify new motivators driving consumers to follow social media influencers, their relevance in influencing consumer decision-making or purchase intent where social is a primary source of information for most Americans. Additionally, this research adds to the conversation by looking at how social media influencers (SMIs) normalize body augmentation and how that affects the products those SMIs endorse. Hence, marketers must carefully assess how customers perceive the results of cosmetic surgery, specifically to their influence on a brand that

is backed by an influencer (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). The informational value of influencer content typically has a favorable impact on the trust that followers have in influencer posts, as well as their intent to make purchases (Walker et al., 2019). When women see a discrepancy between their appearance and the societal beauty standards that they have internalized, particularly those perpetuated by idealized images on social media, they frequently contemplate having cosmetic surgery (Walker et al., 2019). Non-celebrity influencers that utilize social media to generate income have become part of the societal norms of beauty, alongside famous figures like Kylie Jenner and Beyoncé Knowles. An outcome of this phenomenon has been the widespread adoption of influencer marketing. This tactic entails collaborating with prominent figures who are well-liked by many.

The objective is to generate favorable reactions from consumers towards a company through shared posts (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). The created posts made possible by shared images (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencer marketing continues to be a strategy that companies continue to consider as they need to amplify their messages authentically with a new set of consumers that are always on social media. Building upon the theory of planned behavior, Ajzen (1991), as a decision-making framework empirically evaluates customers' motivation to pursue cosmetic operations (Sood et al., 2017). A key aspect of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is the consistent observation that previous behavior has a significant impact on predicting future intentions, even when considering a person's attitudes, behavior control and subjective norms.

Marketers, policymakers, parents, and plastic surgeons will all benefit from this research's theoretical framework for understanding how social media influencers (SMIs) impact behavioral intentions. Additionally, it will delve into the attitudes that motivate consumers to participate in, contemplate, and acquire products, services, and surgeries associated with reshaping and



enhancing the physical body. To foster more involvement of marketing academics in research that is both effective and relevant to managerial practices, I will provide prospective directions for future research in this field. Furthermore, I stress the need to carry out research that directly influences the process of making managerial decisions. Based on an extensive current body of literature, the upcoming methods section will detail the process of choosing the sample and the research tools used to evaluate the conceptual model. Furthermore, the statistical methodology used to assess the collected data will be explained. The study finishes with subsequent chapters focused on data analysis and outcomes, along with a section for discussion.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Consumer Behavioral Intention and Social Media Marketing**

The theory of planned behavior is one of the most prominent and frequently cited models for predicting human social behavior since its introduction in 1985. Attitudes, subjective standards, and perceived control over behaviors influence behavior intentions (Ajzen, 2011). An individual's attitude can be defined as their emotional inclination towards an object, which can be either positive or negative (Fishbein, 1963). Subjective norms encompass the societal effects on behavior, reflecting an individual's perspective of the social expectations and pressures linked to the action in issue. Perceived behavioral control is the assessment made by an individual regarding the level of ease or difficulty in carrying out a specific behavior. This assessment considers both internal and external elements that may impact their capacity to successfully perform the behavior (Ajzen, 1991, 2011). Ajzen (1991) proposed the idea of perceived behavioral control, which is defined as an individual's subjective assessment of how easy or difficult it is to carry out a certain behavior.

#### **2.1.1. Attitude and Behavioral Intention**

Numerous studies from a variety of disciplines have utilized the TPB to examine a vast array of social behaviors, including health-related behaviors, environmental conservation actions, online consumer decision-making, and job pursuits, among others (Ajzen, 2011; Godin et al., 2008; Ha et al., 2019; Kaiser & Scheuthle, 2003; Schreurs et al., 2009; Taylor & Todd, 1995). The TPB is well-liked by academics because of its adaptability and wide range of uses in explaining and forecasting human behavior. A system's perceived usefulness is the extent to which an employee believes it would enhance their job performance, according to Davis (1989). According to Ha et al. (2019), this suggests that the TPB and TAM measure perceived behavioral control and ease of use, respectively.

In addition, the TPB permits the incorporation of additional variables that may moderate or mediate the relationships between the core constructs, thereby enhancing its explanatory power. Initially, the theory integrates cognitive and social components, recognizing the significance of both individual beliefs and social influences in determining behavior. Researchers have augmented the theory by incorporating additional variables, such as moral considerations, self-identity, past behavior, and even anticipated regret which proved to have a strongly anticipated regret–intention relationship thereby enhancing its predictive accuracy and explanatory capacity across multiple domains (Albarracin et al., 2001; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Johnstone & Lindh, 2018; Sandberg & Conner, 2008).

Given the positives of using TPB for understanding consumer behavior intentions, other academics have completely rejected the TPB as an adequate explanation for human social behavior, and it has been the subject of much criticism and heated controversy (Sniehotta et al., 2014). According to Ajzen (1991), TPB explains between 25% and 30% of the variation in human behavior. Despite the general usefulness of these theories, their sufficiency remains unresolved (Conner & Armitage, 1998). Empirical data shows that factors beyond the TPB regularly predict behavior. Carraro and Gaudreau (2013) stated that nudging, which manipulates salience, cost, and reinforcement of behavioral options without people's awareness, has been shown to change behavior independently of intentions or perceived behavioral control (Johnson et al., 2012; Marteau, 2011).

**Table 1. Prior Research on Theory of Planned Behavior**

Citation	Construct/Topic	Article Context	Findings	Sample Context
(Ajzen, 1991, 2011)	Theory of Planned Behavior	TPB predicts behavior and is influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, behavioral beliefs, and control beliefs. Controlling behavior controls intention-behavior connection strength.	The theory is supported by the weight of a lot of real-world data, which may be best summed up in meta-analytic synthesis like the one in this set of articles.	Citations per year have consistently increased from 22 in 1985 to 5,559 in 2023.
(Taylor & Todd, 1995)	TPB-Decomposed and Crossover (Antecedents of BI in a consumer setting.)	The literature implies that TPB model variations with multidimensional belief and crossover effects may improve explanatory power and understanding of intention model linkages.	The TPB model improves knowledge of these correlations slightly by including crossover effects. The universal model of phenomena provided by TRA and TPB is valuable.	800 potential VCR-Plus users. We received 790 viable replies, 384 of which were female.
(Armitage & Conner, 2001)	TPB- Meta-Analysis	Divides PBC measures into self-efficacy, PBC, and 'perceived control over behavior.	It supports the TPB's ability to predict intents and behavior.	The 161 publications contained 185 independent empirical TPB testing.
(Albarracin et al., 2001)	TPB- Condom Use	Examines how to develop TPB theory to better understand how attitudes affect behavior through numerous processes.	The review demonstrates that condom use is accurately predicted by theories of reasoned action and planned conduct. Having the right intentions makes people more likely to use condoms.	This meta-analysis examined 96 data sets from 42 papers to assess the idea of reasoned action, planned conduct, or both.
(Kaiser & Scheuthle, 2003)	TPB- Environmental Consideration	(TPB) in comprehending eco-friendly behavior intentions with the aim of measuring real benefit through a moral extension (ecological conduct) and (environmental concerns).	As before, behavior intention explains 48% of ecological behavior. A moral component to the TPB did not increase explained variation. just world belief helped explain intention.	8177 people were randomly selected; 943 gave written consent (11.5%) and 896 (95.0%) completed questionnaires. 92% of 823 respondents completed the second survey.

**Table 1. Prior Research on Theory of Planned Behavior (continued)**

Citation	Construct/Topic	Article Context	Findings	Sample Context
(Godin et al., 2008)	TPB – Healthcare Professionals The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Based on social cognitive theories, systematically review the published scientific literature about what makes health professionals act the way they do; specifically, what makes them use research results or not use them.	The TPB seems to be a good way to predict behavior, but other theories are better at explaining how intentions change over time.	Seventy-eight studies qualified. 72 studies examined intention and 16 prospective studies examined conduct.
(Sandberg & Conner, 2008)	TPB-Anticipated Regret	Meta-analysis of TPB studies to statistically establish the cumulative effects of anticipated regret (AR) on TPB variables-predicted intentions and behavior. This is the first study to quantify AR, intents, and prospective behavior.	On top of the TPB factors, an independent and substantial contribution to intention prediction came from a robust AR-intention link.	AR and intentions had a high sample sizes (N = 11, 254). Comparatively, TPB factors explained 30% of intentions, less than Armitage and Conner's (2001) 39%. AR added 7% and improved the model significantly.
(Schreurs et al., 2009)	TPB-Job Pursuit & Organizational Behavior	The research encompasses the job-seeking actions of applicants and their determination to persist in seeking employment even after the application process.	Using a sample of military applicants, this study tested the TPB's ability to explain job pursuit intention and conduct. Attitude, subjective norm, and controllability positively correlated with job pursuing intention.	A two-measurement longitudinal research with a sample of prospective Belgian military recruits. Out of the 238 final participants, 89% of the applicants were men.
(Johnstone & Lindh, 2018)	TPB - Influencers	Traditional theories of planned conduct fail to account for unconscious and indirect axiological change, it claims.	The study explains the intention-to-purchase gap for ethical products by examining how influencers might help millennial consumers overcome purchasing aversion, which is linked to age.	The convenience data collection online survey received 788 responses from 59 countries.
(Ha et al., 2019)	TPB & TAM-Online Purchases	Examine how various factors affect the intention of Vietnamese customers to shop online based on (TAM) and (TPB).	According to the study, perceived utility, simplicity of use, attitude, subjective norm, and trust increased online purchase intention.	An online questionnaire with 5-month data gathering. Using EFA and multiple regression on 423 responses.

*Consumer behavioral intention to undergo cosmetic surgery.* The motivations of patients undergoing cosmetic procedures have been experimentally understood using the theory of planned behavior (TPB) as a conceptual framework (Sood et al., 2017). Studies on behavioral intention to accept goods or services usually involve three often used concepts: attitude, subjective criteria, and perceived behavioral control. Sood et al. (2017) found that young consumers have favorable intentions for cosmetic procedures for the first time if they have a positive attitude and adhere to subjective norms. Numerous studies have shown the possibility that past behavior is a predictor of the decision to undertake cosmetic procedures (Aktas et al., 2023). Attitudes, subjective standards, perceived behavioral control, and prior behavior all play a role in predicting intents, according to the TPB. The desire could be the result of a long-standing insecurity about one's physical appearance or a profound contentment with the results of past surgical procedures. One of the problems with the studies is that they do not tell you which component is more important. According to multiple meta-analytic studies (Albarracin et al., 2001; Armitage & Conner, 2001; Sandberg & Conner, 2008), investigating self-identity and predicted effect could be important factors that have not been included yet. Yet, studies have included social media usage as a moderator for intent to go under the knife. Holland (2016) did a systematic study of all the research that had already been done on the link between girls and women's use of social media, being unhappy with their bodies, and disordered eating behaviors.

The detrimental effects of social media on adolescent mental health, including problems like poor self-esteem, anxiety, and depression, were highlighted in a recent article by Lawrence Robinson and Melinda Smith, M.A., published on HelpGuide.org. According to the article, these detrimental consequences are caused by a decrease in in-person peer interaction and an increase in ongoing online comparison Valkenburg et al.'s (2006) study was ground-breaking since it

showed how using buddy networking sites affects adolescents' social self-esteem and general health. Adolescents' sense of self-worth is directly affected by profile criticism. Adolescent self-esteem was diminished by negative input, but positive feedback enhanced it. These feelings of low self-esteem and body dissatisfaction can be triggers to drive adolescents to consider cosmetic surgery. Social media opens the doors for comparisons and the use of use of photograph retouching can also lead to decreased self-confidence, physical attractiveness, and the desire to have cosmetic surgery (Shome et al., 2020). This is particularly prevalent for individuals who had the option to retouch their selfies before uploading them to social sites.

According to a Pew study, *Teens, Social Media, and Technology 2022*, (by Emily Al Vogels, Risa Gelles-Watnick and Navid Massarat), social media use has continued to increase and more young people view social sites for entertainment, to cultivate and sustain friendships, it is important to engage in the sharing and develop common interests, as well as to delve into personal identities and foster connections with family members. The frequent display of cosmetic surgery on social media has the effect of making these treatments appear normal and can also create a desire to imitate this behavior (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). Higher exposure to appearances on Facebook, including posting, viewing, and commenting on photos, is linked to “weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and self-objectification” in female high school students (Meier & Gray, 2014).

Negative body image is linked to positive attitudes regarding cosmetic surgery (Cash & Strachan, 2002; Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005). Several models have been put forward to explain how social factors affect mental health problems like eating disorders and body image issues. Two of the most popular are the sociocultural and objectification theories. Sociocultural theory, as described by Tiggemann (2012), states that the media promotes

contemporary thin beauty ideals, which women commonly strive for despite their impossibility, resulting in body dissatisfaction. In addition, this theory suggests that women internalize exaggerated beauty standards and engage in appearance comparisons, thereby serving as potential mechanisms in body dissatisfaction (Groesz et al., 2002). According to objectification theory, Western society views the female body as an object judged by its looks (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). Self-objectification is the constant scrutiny of a person's appearance.

According to research conducted by Fredrickson and Roberts in 1997, regularly monitoring and scrutinizing one's own body might result in higher levels of guilt and anxiety related to body image. These negative emotions drive other mental health issues, such as disordered eating. Furthermore, feelings of shame and concern regarding one's physical appearance might contribute to various other medical and psychological health issues. Research shows the use of social media sites is related to an increase in the prevalence of eating issues and unhappiness with one's body. This is impacted by many factors, including how long you spend on social sites, the frequency with which it is utilized, and the number of friends available on Facebook (Fardouly et al., 2015; Kim & Chock, 2015; Tiggemann, 2012; Tiggemann & Williams, 2012). Specifically, exposure to Facebook has been found to contribute to frequent engagement in appearance-related social comparisons, leading to body image concerns among young women (Fardouly et al., 2015).

Greater body dissatisfaction, poorer self-assessed attractiveness and appearance investment are also associated with favorable intent for cosmetic surgery (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005; Sarwer, 2019; Swami, 2009). Most of these studies focus on female college samples, emphasizing that social media usage or media influence can make cosmetic surgery seem desirable and approachable perpetuating unattainable beauty standards and ideals among individuals (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). Not only do young college women face the



problem of unachievable beauty standards, but there is also data suggesting that middle-aged women suffer greater degrees of dissatisfaction with their bodies compared to younger women (Sarwer, 2019; Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). From positive uses of social media to a deep, darker side of social media that impact both young and older women experiences by engaging in social media platforms amplifies body dissatisfaction. According to Swami (2009), it has been revealed that having a poor view of one's body, being influenced by the media, and having a higher weight status are all factors that predict a greater likelihood of considering cosmetic surgery. Research has provided evidence that supports the notion that individuals who dedicate a significant amount of time to using Facebook tend to believe that others have more fulfilling lives compared to their own. This perception is further heightened when they have a larger number of Facebook "friends" whom they have no personal connection with (Chou & Edge, 2012). Facebook provides additional features, such as user-generated comments, which can impact individuals' body image problems.

In a controlled trial, Fardouly (2015) discovered that being exposed to Facebook did not directly impact body satisfaction or the inclination to alter weight and shape among young women. Nevertheless, women who engage in frequent appearance comparisons are more likely to experience a heightened urge to alter their facial, hair, and body when using Facebook. The results indicate that the impact of Facebook exposure on women's appearance worries varies among individuals. According to Laughter et al. (2023), frequent usage of social media can result in the development of unrealistic physical image standards and heightened self-awareness and worry about one's looks. Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a condition of feeling strong dissatisfaction with one's body image, excessive reliance on social media, sadness, and the presence of eating disorders (Mittal et al., 2021). BDD sufferers obsess over bodily flaws that others do not see (Kuck et al., 2021). This focus can hinder social and career fulfillment, and cause many comorbidities,

including mental health illnesses. BDD sufferers using social media excessively are more prone to obsess over their appearance and seek non-invasive cosmetic and plastic surgery to repair their "flaws" (Laughter et al., 2023). Social media may reinforce linkages between analytic thinking and cosmetic surgeries, making it more harmful than helpful. Filters and editing software commonly target certain body parts. Mass media has shaped our beauty standards for years.

In today's world, the proliferation of social media platforms, together with fast photo-sharing capabilities and editing tools, has added another layer of complexity to the way people evaluate physical attractiveness (Maymone et al., 2019). This phenomenon is highlighted by the growing tendency of individuals sharing their carefully edited and enhanced versions of self-portraits, which are more frequently referred to as "selfies." Regrettably, a person's appearance in real life may not be adequately reflected by a selfie, regardless of whether the image was altered using filters or was taken without any editing (Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2021). The availability of social media platforms like Instagram and photo-editing tools like Facetune has led to the ability for users to utilize filters, manipulate body proportions, retouch, and maybe enhance their self-portraits. As a result, our genuine attractiveness and sense of self have been damaged. In our current society, we are surrounded by a culture that promotes artificial beauty and individuals who may not be genuine. Unfortunately, we have not fully grasped the potential negative effects of the widespread use of social media and the many editing tools on the well-being of young girls and frequent smartphone users.

In numerous photo-sharing platforms, these tools offer built-in capabilities to modify facial and physiological characteristics, such as resizing and reshaping, as well as skin tone and complexion. (Chen et al., 2019) describes that various image editing tools are available, and certain types of photo editing may increase individuals' awareness of their perceived physical

flaws. Therefore, this disparity between the idealized beauty projected by selfies and the actual lived experiences of individuals can foster unrealistic and unattainable expectations of perfection (Chen et al., 2019; Maymone et al., 2019). This whole process of posting photos and sharing images has turned into a serious addiction. Famous body image expert, Adrenne Ressler, remarked that people feel compelled to edit and alter their photographs so that they appear like their "best selves" rather than their "real selves." Ressler works for The Renfrew Center Foundation as Vice President of Professional Development. She is worried that habits on social media contribute to diminished self-esteem and body image problems, which in turn lead to harmful behaviors including addictions, eating disorders, and selfie dysmorphia. Research has demonstrated that selfies have a notable impact on the formation of these concepts. Researchers have introduced the term "Snapchat dysmorphia" to highlight the negative effects of selfie filters on one's self-perception (Rajanala et al., 2018).

In an article published in Teen Vogue, writer Melissa Walker emphasizes the statement made by psychologist Jill Weber, who asserts that girls who frequently post selfies often face challenges related to their self-esteem (Walker et al., 2019). Selfies are commonly seen as a shallow form of online self-obsession, but they remain popular as a powerful way for individuals to define themselves or convey poor self-image (Murray, 2015). In the contemporary day, the significance of beauty is heightened due to the pervasive influence of social media and television on individuals' daily existence (Murray, 2015). Our exposure to numerous photographs is facilitated by the seemingly infinite scrolling feature on social media platforms. Ultimately, the act of altering photographs to enhance one's appearance in selfies might serve as a catalyst for individuals to seek out cosmetic surgery and related operations in their quest for perfection.

Previous research made the connection between the use of editing tools and preferences for cosmetic treatments. Chen et al. (2019) discovered that users of Snapchat and Tinder filters generally rate cosmetic procedures as more acceptable. Users can also rapidly change particular bodily parts with editing tools, providing a glimpse of the "perfection" that could be. The individual in these scenarios employs an analytical approach to enhance their appearance by focusing on a particular body part for modification, such as teeth whitening, skin tanning or lightening, altering eye shape and color, reducing wrinkles around the eyes, slimming legs, or augmenting lips (Mittal et al., 2021).

If these editing tools were offered as less expensive and safer alternatives to surgical treatments, would they discourage people from getting surgery (Et al., Mittal, 2021)? Today's society, which is marked by the prevalence of toddler beauty pageants, the widespread use of digital image retouching, constant peer pressure, and the powerful influence of social media influencers pushing unattainable beauty standards, presents significant challenges for adolescents and young adults in particular when it comes to developing a healthy self-perception (Chen et al., 2019). Adolescents and young adults, especially young women, are more vulnerable to idealized body image influences due to the appeal of image-based social media (Laughter et al., 2023).

Continuous exposure to unattainable beauty standards prevalent on these platforms' harms both self-esteem and body dissatisfaction, thereby exacerbating the risk of deteriorating mental health outcomes. Digital retouching and airbrushing are widely used in the advertising, fashion, and entertainment sectors, creating an illusion of perfection that can lead to distorted self-perception and feelings of worthlessness (Murray, 2015; Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2021). The pressure to fit in with accepted standards of beauty has only increased with the rise of social media (Murray, 2015). Teenagers and young adults are particularly vulnerable to the pervasive pressure

to evaluate their physical attractiveness about the idealized pictures promoted by social media influencers (Abidin, 2016a; Pan et al., 2022). Constant exposure to "picture-perfect" depictions of beauty can cause body dissatisfaction, low self-esteem, and a drive to undertake cosmetic modifications to achieve the perceived ideal.

**Table 2. Prior Research Relevant to Behavioral Intention Towards Cosmetic Surgery**

Citation	Construct/Topic	Article Context	Findings	Sample Context
(Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997)	Objectification Theory -	Girls and women with body surveillance, shame, and worry are more likely to develop psychological issues like eating disorders.	The thin ideal in social beauty connects being healthy, fit, and beautiful, and it's shown on TV, social media, and in ads. This study looks at thin ideal and its effects on body image, self-esteem, mental health, and society as a whole.	Meta-analysis
(Groesz et al., 2002)	No Theory Specified	A sociocultural view that mass media promotes a thin ideal that causes body dissatisfaction. There are preventative and research implications for social comparison processes.	Thin media pictures negatively affected body image more than average-size, plus-size, or inanimate images.	The main influence of mass media pictures of the thin ideal and the moderating effects of pre-existing body image disorders, age, and stimulus presentation were examined in 25 research.
(Cash & Strachan, 2002)	No Theory Specified	Within the "usual care" setting of autonomous self-help, this research looked at body-image CBT (cognitive behavioral therapy) program.	According to the study, participants' perceptions of their bodies improved regardless of the context. Trainees who made it through the program reported feeling better about their bodies in general, less dysfunctional investment in their looks, and less body-image dysphoria.	The study included 86 women and 3 males from mid-Atlantic community and college groups..
(Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005)	Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale.	Cosmetic surgery may be accepted more due to worries of becoming unattractive than to expectations of getting more appealing.	Initial findings utilizing this 15-item measure show that cosmetic surgery acceptance is adversely associated with physical appearance satisfaction and positively related to makeup use opinions. Age positively correlated with cosmetic surgery attitudes for women but not males.	The Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale was developed through studies with 1288 adult and undergraduate women and men.

**Table 2. Prior Research on Behavioral Intention Towards Cosmetic Surgery (continued)**

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Construct/Topic</b>	<b>Article Context</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Sample Context</b>
(Valkenburg et al., 2006)	No Theory Specified	Examines the effects of social networking on young adult's self-esteem and well-being.	Teenage social media use indirectly affected social self-esteem and well-being. Personal feedback can also alter adolescents' well-being and self-esteem.	In an online study of 881 Dutch teens aged 10–19 with a social networking profile, 45% were boys and 55% were girls.
(Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010)	TPB Middle-aged women's cosmetic surgery attitudes	Body dissatisfaction, Spending money on appearance, and concerns about aging predicted cosmetic surgery attitudes.	Cosmetic surgery attitudes were primarily shaped by the media. Television, body dissatisfaction, and appearance predicted real consideration.	The following variables were measured in 108 women (ages 35 to 55): body dissatisfaction, investment in one's looks, concern about aging, exposure to media (TV and magazines), and attitudes toward cosmetic surgery (general, social, and actual contemplation).
(Chou & Edge, 2012)	No Theory Specified	Facebook does influence people's perceptions about the lives of others as they present a positive image of themselves.	Facebook users' attitudes of others differ from non-users. According to the availability heuristic, Facebook users make decisions based on easily recalled events. Second, Facebook users attribute positive posts to others' personalities rather than external factors.	A Utah public university surveyed 425 first-year students on their Facebook usage, how often they log in, how many individuals they consider "friends," and how they see others' lives.
(Tiggemann & Williams, 2012)	Objectification Theory	A lengthy study that explored the objectification theory examined the mental health effects of living in a culture that regards women as sexual objects (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997).	The main mediators were appearance and body shame. Results corroborate objectification theory. Self-objectification can cause eating disorders, depression, and erectile dysfunction in young women.	116 Australian female undergraduates were included in the test.
(Tiggemann, 2012)	No Theory Specified	Contemporary body image can be understood using the sociocultural mode. It also proposes a causal model linking sociocultural standards to body image disturbance.	Parental, peer, and media influence leads to internalizing thinness and comparing their looks which leads to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating.	Meta-Analytic

**Table 2. Prior Research on Behavioral Intention Towards Cosmetic Surgery (continued)**

Citation	Construct/Topic	Article Context	Findings	Sample Context
(Meier & Gray, 2014)	No Theory Specified	Adolescent girls' use of Facebook and internet "appearance exposure"	There was a strong correlation between higher exposure to appearance, but not overall Facebook usage, and factors such as weight dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, self-objectification, and thin-ideal	A survey of 103 female middle and high school students
(Fardouly et al., 2015)	No Theory Specified	The effects of Facebook on the self-perception, emotional state, and propensity to engage in social comparisons based on physical attractiveness of young adult women were investigated.	Compared to those who used a control website, Facebook users reported higher levels of depression. More Facebook comparisons of women's looks made them desire to alter their hairstyle, skin tone, and facial features.	112 were given ten minutes to peruse one of three websites—Facebook, a magazine, or an appearance-neutral control—before being asked to rate their level of happiness.
(Murray, 2015)	No Theory Specified	Examines how young women in their teens and early twenties view themselves through social media's "selfies" and other self-portraits.	The selfie pokes fun at the narcissistic drive to present oneself in a perfect light, but it also highlights the predatory component of looking, both in terms of voyeurism and the pleasure of knowing you are being watched.	Article
(Abidin, 2016a)	Grounded Theory Analysis	This essay examines Influencers who have become semi-professional selfie-producers who view selfies as a commercial, thoughtful, and rebellious activity.	Instagram influencers disguise authenticity and reflexivity with selfies. Female influencers have changed people's perceptions of selfies, making good selfies and abilities vital in the job market.	Selfies were the highlight of several “meet the Influencer” gatherings with Influencers and their managers.



**Table 2. Prior Research on Behavioral Intention Towards Cosmetic Surgery (continued)**

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Construct/Topic</b>	<b>Article Context</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Sample Context</b>
(Holland & Tiggemann, 2016)	No Theory Specified	Social media, eating disorders, and body image: a comprehensive analysis of social media use is linked to body image and food issues. SNSs are omnipresent, thus researchers must evaluate their involvement in unhealthy body image and eating disorders.	Social media use increases body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, according to multiple studies. Regardless of gender, these findings were consistent	Meta Analysis
(Sood et al., 2017)	(TPB)	There is a lot of pressure on young women to be physically attractive because femininity is often linked to how one looks. Cosmetic surgery lets such people join this world of fake beauty.	For female responders, having a positive attitude significantly increased the likelihood that they would get a cosmetic procedure. When it came to men, however, subjective norms significantly influenced their intention to get a cosmetic operation.	214 Australians participated in the study
(Chen et al., 2019)	No Theory Specified	To examine whether self-esteem, social networking, and photo editing apps affect cosmetic surgery attitudes.	Use of Tinder, YouTube, auto-filters or Snapchat; placing self-worth on beauty hence deleting selfies from posts you were not happy with the digital enhancement drove cosmetic surgery acceptability.	252 population-based survey participants
(Maymone et al., 2019)	No Theory Specified	Studies show that biological, psychological, cultural, and social factors affect beauty and appeal. Social media and editing apps have influenced beauty standards in recent years.	The interaction of time-constant physiological features and environmental exposures may shape true beauty possibly favoring fake features created by selfies and edited photographs.	Essay

**Table 2. Prior Research on Behavioral Intention Towards Cosmetic Surgery (continued)**

<b>Citation</b>	<b>Construct/Topic</b>	<b>Article Context</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Sample Context</b>
(Sarwer, 2019)	CBT - The psychological aspects of cosmetic surgery	The cognitive-behavioral theory of body image states that cosmetic surgery and minimally invasive therapies are typically used by people who are dissatisfied with their appearance and have body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). Body dysmorphia.	Most people who consider these treatments are uncomfortable with them, especially in the region of their body they want to change. Cosmetic operations seldom relieve body dysmorphic disorder symptoms, yet most people without the disease feel better about their bodies.	Literature Review
(Mittal et al., 2021)	No Theory Specified	Research is investigating if holistic and analytic thinking affect cosmetic surgery choices.	Analytical thinking increased cosmetic procedure openness in five eye-tracking and behavioral trials. If a person engages in analytical thinking, which promotes hyper-focusing, they may seek support and treatment for a bodily trait they dislike.	After discussing cosmetic procedure preferences, individuals were randomly assigned to an analytical or holistic thinking style.
(Kuck et al., 2021)	No Theory Specified	Examines the link between the intensity of BDD and overall self-esteem in a cross-sectional study of people with BDD, people without BDD, and people who had cosmetic surgery.	Low self-esteem is linked to depression and BDD. It seems to show that poor self-evaluation in BDD affects more than just how someone looks.	Meta-analysis
(Laughter et al., 2023)	No Theory Specified	Minimally invasive cosmetic and plastic surgery may be sought after by individuals with body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) due to an increase in preoccupation with perceived image faults, social media addiction, depression, and other BDD comorbidities.	Thanks to filters (the "selfie look") and excessive exposure, the beauty standards set by social media can exacerbate treatment barriers for BDD patients.	

### **2.1.2. Perceived usefulness and behavioral intention**

One of the elements of TPB is perceived usefulness (Ajzen, 1991; Sood et al., 2017; Swami, 2009). A very large number of studies, as indicated by multiple meta-analyses have shown support for perceived usefulness (Ao et al., 2023; Mahmood et al., 2001; McComb et al., 2023; Rossmannek & Chen, 2023) and if something is perceived useful by consumers, it can predict a consumer's intent to use or purchase. Some studies support the TPB (perceived behavioral control) model combined with TAM (perceived ease of use) to significantly predict consumers' use of social sites for transactions (Hansen et al., 2018) or adopt technology (Venkatesh et al., 2003) or healthcare professional behaviors (Godin et al., 2008). However, what makes something perceived as useful obviously might change by context. In this section, I focus on the particular elements that might make consumers view the adoption of the recommended products and procedures as more useful to them. A multitude of studies have emphasized the extensive use of technology, mobile devices, Zoom, and other video platforms by consumers during the global pandemic. These tools were employed for entertainment purposes, financial transactions, purchases, and professional interactions with colleagues (Al-Marroof et al., 2020; Jílková & Králová, 2021; Rafdinal & Senalasar, 2021).

Plastic surgeons have observed a significant increase in the number of surgeries performed after the reopening of medical facilities during the pandemic. Changes to the body through cosmetic surgery have shown a consistent increase, even throughout the pandemic, as individuals worldwide grow increasingly concerned about their appearance during video chats (Williams, 2020). The American Society of Plastic Surgeons 2022 reports that the motivations for individuals seeking plastic surgery at present include rejuvenating their appearance. They want to appear younger after experiencing the effects of pandemic-related stress and aging, address noticeable

bodily changes before resuming in-person interactions, seize the opportunity for surgery that was postponed during the pandemic, enhance self-esteem and confidence, and rectify facial concerns identified during video calls. There is speculation that the growth in cosmetic procedures is driven by the rise in videoconferencing, where people spend a significant amount of time looking at themselves on screen. This trend is referred to as the "Zoom Boom" (Chen et al., 2021). Our self-perception has shifted from limited instances of observing ourselves in the mirror when preparing or during infrequent visits to the bathroom, to now constantly viewing ourselves on a video screen for extended periods of up to eight hours per day (Mittal et al., 2021). Consumers are utilizing augmented reality (AR) technology to create an idealized version of beauty, characterized by flawless skin, whiter teeth, and larger eyes. This practice has become more of a necessity rather than a choice, as individuals can no longer imagine themselves without the use of filters (Rodner et al., 2021). Influencing their perception of identity, and enticing them to manifest their digitally enhanced self-portrait (Chua & Chang, 2016). An efficient and effortless technique to utilize augmented reality is through "try-on selfie" operations, which allow people to visualize their appearance before and after the procedure with minimal discomfort.

Peers fulfill several functions, such as serving as imagined audiences, judges, sources of vicarious learning, and targets for comparison, in influencing the way young females perceive and present beauty (Chua & Chang, 2016). Their attempts at edited self-presentation and hunt for peer acknowledgment were driven by feelings of poor self-esteem and insecurity (Chua & Chang, 2016). According to Rodner et al. (2021), women utilize face filters as a means of gathering ideas and motivation for potential surgical procedures. Sharing before and after images on social media can effectively persuade individuals that natural characteristics are flawed, or irregular compared to the "after" photos and demonstrate the desired appearance through post-operative photos

(Tootoonchi Tabrizi & Ozturk, 2022). A lot of famous people contribute to this idealized body image culture by posting photos of their flawless bodies online. We cannot help but think about the media's criteria for beauty in light of this. The media and the fashion industry promote unattainable standards of beauty that are impossible to achieve without resorting to dangerous substances, which are recognized by everyone.

Tootoonchi Tabrizi & Ozturk (2022) discovered that individuals who frequently use social media are integrating medical practices into their online presence. This is because they recognize that social media serves as a powerful marketing tool, allowing them to create a platform for educating patients. Surgeons who primarily focus on aesthetic surgery were more inclined to utilize social media. The beauty industry is made up of many different areas, such as manufacturers of cosmetics, magazines for women, star culture, the fashion sector, social networking sites for marketers, and the growing field of aesthetic services (Elias & Gill, 2017). An instructional software that teaches beauty skills is one example; another is a virtual makeover app that lets users simulate a "new smile" or changed nose before deciding to get plastic surgery.

Aesthetic applications use a variety of metrics to determine how attractive a person is, while self-surveillance apps check for injuries and flaws. The majority of beauty apps, meanwhile, are those that allow users to alter their appearance by adding filters or other enhancements to photos (Elias & Gill, 2017). Before sharing their photos on social media, users can employ selfie-modification applications to make their photos look better. A third group of apps, however, goes a step further by letting users virtually undergo cosmetic procedures like eyelid reshaping, and nose reconstruction or experimenting with different looks, hairstyles, and makeup. Two beauty apps that are marketed as "augmented reality" because of their real-time cameras are ShadeScout and L'Oréal Makeup Genius. With these apps, you can "virtually try on any product" and "see how

it looks on you, as if you're looking in a mirror!" Apps like iWhite Instant and Modiface-Hair Color Studio let you "try on" different hair colors and see if cosmetic dental treatments are a good fit for you. A lot of attention is paid to how involved apps are and how well they work with personalized photos. A feature of iWhite instant called "automatic smile zoom" gives an even closer look at your outcome as you can see the levels of how different levels of whiteness improve your smile. Several apps let you try out different kinds of plastic surgery and cosmetic treatments on your face and body. Those using Android devices can get this software in the Play Store by looking for "Plastic Surgery Simulator Lite." Its install count exceeds five million smartphones. Think about how you might look different if you were smaller, or if your nose or chin were different. If you want to do that, you can use one of these apps to simulate real plastic surgery or just make yourself look better on your social media posts and selfies.

FaceTouchUp offers the opportunity to "visualize the new you™" and guarantees the use of advanced digital imaging technology, similar to what doctor's use, to visualize the benefits of plastic surgery. This technology is accessible through a user-friendly website. Offering rhinoplasty, genioplasty, liposuction, mammoplasty, and other cosmetic procedures. The plastic surgery industry has strong connections with horizontal links, as surgeons offer their services on websites and apps that specialize in this field. These platforms claim to attract new patients, enhance the reputation of the practice, and many other benefits while increasing word-of-mouth referrals (Elias & Gill, 2017). In "The Conspicuous Body: Capitalism, Consumerism, Class and Consumption," Carolan (2005) asserts that cosmetic plastic surgery, which refers to surgical procedures performed for aesthetic purposes rather than medical grounds, did not gain widespread popularity until the mid-twentieth century. The fast rise of cosmetic surgery in Western societies

can be better comprehended by considering its connection to the wider framework of consumer capitalism.

Cosmetic surgery is a conspicuous type of spending. It is a cultural reaction to the conflicting demands of consumer capitalism, serving as a symbolic solution to the conflict between restraining desire and indulging in pleasure (Carolan, 2005). Social media influencers can influence and alter consumers' behavior, purchasing concerns, and overall lifestyles (Lee et al., 2022). Campbell and Farrell (2020) suggest that micro-influencers, with small follower counts, have the potential to enhance authenticity and credibility by establishing a connection with the specific requirements of their followers. The level of consumer confidence in an influencer has a direct impact on their loyalty and good marketing outcomes, such as their attitude towards the product and their likelihood of purchasing it (Kim & Kim, 2021). In the realm of influencer marketing, influencers share valuable, captivating, and alluring content through their posts. Subsequently, supporters express their appreciation by engaging in actions such as liking, sharing, and discussing (Kim & Kim, 2021). Social media influencers utilize their platforms to enhance fans' purchasing intention and product awareness or attractiveness. To enhance the informational value and comprehension of a product, social media influencers disseminate testimonials or product attributes (Kay et al., 2020). Social media influencers create posts that include testimonials or factual information about the attributes of a product, to increase the value of the content and improve product knowledge (Kay et al., 2020).

Brand awareness and purchase intents are impacted by the trust that followers have in influencers' sponsored posts, which is in turn influenced by the informational value of the influencer's content as well as their attractiveness, trustworthiness, and similarity to their followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). People were more likely to believe influencers' marketed posts when they

believed that the influencer was trustworthy, attractive, and similar to them. It is expected that the reliability and attractiveness of influencers can impact the trust their followers have in their sponsored material, given that influencers typically create reputable and attractive online personas. Furthermore, influencers' perceived closeness to their followers is a key factor in the influencers' ability to attract and retain followers (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Social media influencers are those who can generate interaction, stimulate discourse, and promote the purchase of items or services to a specific target audience on social media platforms.

Famous people or highly specific groups of people in the professional or nonprofessional spheres might fall under this category. Their suggestions and influence are considered "useful" since they attract new buyers, create buzz about a product or service, and get people involved with the brand or product (Kim et al., 2022).

Moving from theorized general concepts to the myriads of alternative, specific forms they might take in the real world, in the next subsections I theorize on how four specific attitudinal elements might play a role in consumers' behavioral intention to follow influencers recommendations on products, services, and surgeries related to body shaping and augmentation.

## **2.2. Explaining consumer behavioral intention toward body change/augmentation practices and social media sharing**

According to the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (Chen et al., 2019) Surgeons saw 55% of selfie-booster patients in 2017. Researchers Arab et al. (2019) found that negative self-images, increased social media use, and exposure to cosmetic surgery information all predict the likelihood that an individual may seek out this procedure in the future. Educating patients (Camp & Mills, 2012), advertising procedures (Arab et al., 2019), and shaping public opinion about cosmetic and novel procedures are all goals of many cosmetic surgeons' social media campaigns. To reach a wider audience and educate them about their credentials,



practice philosophy, facilities, and frequently asked questions (FAQs) concerning procedures, some cosmetic surgeons have created practice websites on the powerful Internet. Even though most plastic surgery websites have not changed in a while, modern consumers want online connections. Social media and networking sites mirror this assumption (Mills and Camp, 2012).

Patients seeking plastic surgery appreciate prudence, and the practice has grown thanks to patient referrals. This disproves the assumption that engaging in social media and other forms of online engagement draws in patients. Surgeons may prefer public discretion when it comes to facelifts. These clinics cater to quieter, more senior individuals who might rather rely on recommendations from friends and family than research online or on social media when choosing a surgeon. The changing social and technological habits of the over-fifty set will cause this to change (Camp & Mills, 2012). According to Tootoonchi Tabrizi and Ozturk (2022), Instagram ads make surgery and decision-making easier. Comprehensive patient education regarding cosmetic surgery, including all associated risks and adverse effects, is recommended in the seminal work of Tootoonchi Tabrizi and Ozturk. Cosmetic surgery is something that each individual decides for themselves, and the authors do not take a stance against this. As an alternative, they stress that when considering transformational solutions, deliberate and well-informed decision-making is crucial. Researching the preferences of young clientele for cosmetic surgery was proposed by Sood et al. (2017) to make use of the theory of planned behavior (TPB).

The intention of young consumers to undergo a cosmetic procedure can be influenced by their attitude towards such procedures and positive reinforcement from others. However, their perception of having greater control over their abilities does not have an impact on their intention to undergo cosmetic surgery (Sood et al., 2017). The study conducted by Furnham and Levitas in 2012 found that individuals with low life satisfaction, as well as those who were exposed to

cosmetic surgery through television shows and spent a lot of time on social media, were more likely to get cosmetic surgery. Despite being traditionally taboo in many cultures, the changing accessibility of Western beauty standards and advancements in medical technology have significantly shifted consumer attitudes toward body modification and beauty in recent decades. Previously, Asian women had the belief that modifying their bodies was undesirable. However, they are now increasingly opting for bodily alterations, such as plastic surgery, to achieve an unattainable standard of beauty (Li et al., 2020).

These effects are consistent regardless of other variables such as ethnicity, relationship status, body type, and parental status. Overall, a concentrated analysis of certain body regions appears to not only enhance scrutiny and willingness to undergo cosmetic procedures and operations but also influence real purchasing decisions (Mittal et al., 2021). Moreover, the widespread presence of social media and the use of photo filters has profound impacts on the cosmetic surgery industry. Social media platforms like Snapchat and Instagram with the use of photo editing filters allow users to change facial features like wrinkles, the color of their hair, and body shape may increase cosmetic surgery interest (Chen et al., 2019). Academics have investigated the impact of digital technology, particularly social networking, and photo editing software, on people's self-esteem and beauty standards (Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2021) and experts are concerned that the broad availability of these digital technologies may encourage a culture in which people's appearances are continually modified to meet unattainable perfection demands as per the ASPS 2020 Plastic Surgery Statistics Report.

Social media users are confronted with an abundance of photoshopped images in this context, many of which portray filtered and altered versions of individuals who appear to have flawless attributes (Meier & Gray, 2014). Users who interact with this form of digitally polished

content may experience the impacts of social comparison theory (O'Brien et al., 2009). According to this theory, people judge themselves concerning others, especially digitally manufactured representations that may not accurately reflect real-world features (Ozimek et al., 2018). As users internalize these digitally enhanced beauty criteria, they are likely to develop a desire for actual aesthetic modifications that resemble the idealized appearances promoted across social media platforms and editing tools (Vendemia & DeAndrea, 2021). As a result, the concept of hoping for identical changes in the real world takes root. One way for these people to join the culture of artificially enhanced beauty is through cosmetic surgery (Sood et al., 2017). In a study by Tootoonchi Tabrizi and Ozturk (2022), the focus was on the patient's mental health rather than the practical advantages of the procedures, such as better breathing (Sood et al., 2017). Prioritizing the improvement of one's physical appearance through cosmetic operations might contribute to one's emotional and psychological health and self-esteem. According to Sood et al. (2017), there are several potential consequences stemming from the positive effects of attitude and subjective norms on the intention to undergo cosmetic procedures. One such consequence is the possibility of incentivizing young consumers to promote cosmetic procedures by sharing their experiences on social media and offering discounts or other incentives to those who do so.

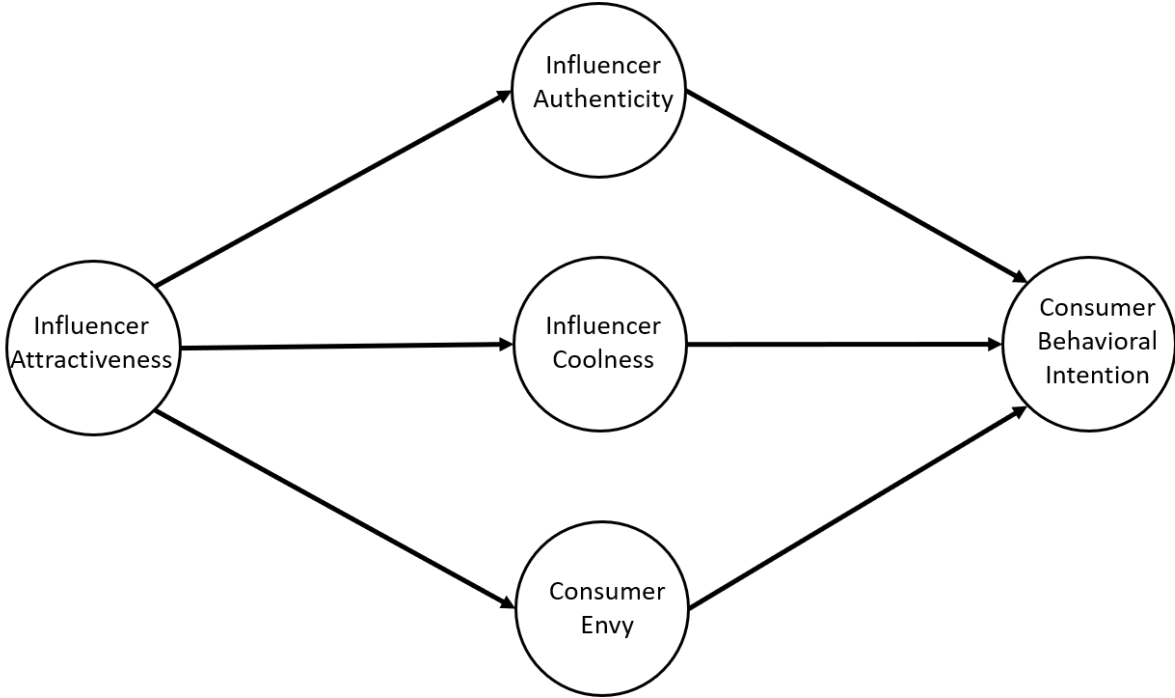
A 2020 survey conducted by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons revealed that a total of \$16.7 billion was spent on cosmetic procedures. Cosmetic procedures can offer psychological benefits, such as increased self-esteem, as well as societal advantages, such as receiving social accolades based on one's appearance. Several studies have shown that cosmetic procedures can boost confidence, self-esteem, and general health (Schettino et al., 2023; Von Soest, 2009; Shakespeare & Cole\*, 1997). Additionally, it can have a negative impact on psychosocial outcomes, particularly when influential people in society impose unreasonable standards. There

was an increase in body monitoring and a decrease in body contentment after viewing sexualized body-positive selfies. Body satisfaction decreases the chance of cosmetic body modification and social cosmetic surgery, according to Schettino et al. (2023). After controlling social motivation and desire, serial mediation research indicated that sexualized selfies indirectly impacted the acceptability of cosmetic surgery.

Based on the hierarchy of effects, the sequence of stages that a consumer goes through before making a purchase decision or deciding on cosmetic surgery, would include authenticity, coolness, and envy and possibly the role of technology with uses of filters for selfies. Consumers may first evaluate the authenticity of the influencer's recommendation by considering factors such as the influencer's credibility, expertise, and sincerity. An authentic recommendation may move the follower to the next stage, "coolness." There is a coolness factor of the product or service being recommended, which could be influenced by factors such as its design, brand image, or perceived trendiness (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018). Finding the product or service cool to motivate consumers to obtain higher status. How can using the same product or service used by an influencer enhance their social status or help them fit in with a particular group? Finally, the most impactful attitudinal driver is "envy."

Consumers experience feelings of envy toward others who have experienced using a product or service and achieved outcomes that they cannot achieve. In other words, consumers' envy towards influencers' recommended service could also be a major motivator when deciding to purchase to achieve the same desired outcomes (Jin & Ryu, 2020). Not all consumers will follow this exact sequence when they follow influencers who make recommendations on posts; however, the hierarchy of effects provides a useful framework for understanding how different factors could influence consumer's behavior and intention to follow, interact with, and purchase recommendations

of influencers on social media. The next section will highlight items with the potential to motivate followers of an influencer's endorsement or recommendations of a product, brand, or cosmetic procedure. *The Global Web Index (1/1/23 – 6/30/23)* captures four main reasons users are seeking information on Instagram: *Benefits*, what deals, rates or unique offers can financial services providers make available; *Brand Social Responsibilities*, what activities is the company involved in or are they supporting social causes (community development, financial literacy and donating programs). *Travel*, after being restricted and sharing outdoor spaces due to Covid-19, consumers are looking for travel deals and purchasing travel insurance; and staying connected as users are looking for trending topics on social media and expect influencers to be their source of truth on all things new, trending, modern. I argue here (as shown in Figure 1) that it is a combination of several things: attractiveness, authenticity, coolness, and consumer envy. In the next several subsections, I outline hypotheses connecting each of these concepts to behavioral intention. However, while authenticity and coolness are both normally looked at as favorable 'positive' things, envy is usually viewed as a negative which is less healthy. As shown in Figure 2, I then examine the last set of hypotheses focusing on how different consumers might focus on different elements shown in the main model, depending on their life stage (age), as outlined in Figure 3 much later in section 2 of this dissertation.



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**Figure 1. Hypothesized Main Effects**

### **2.2.1 Perceived Influencer Attractiveness**

Mills and Aronson (1965) did a groundbreaking study in social psychology that showed how physical attractiveness can affect how people act in social situations. In their study, they looked at how the physical attractiveness of communicators could affect people's views and found opinions were affected and changed by attractive communicators than by unattractive ones (Mills & Aronson, 1965). The results indicate that attractiveness has a huge effect on how well you can persuade others. Building on this research, Snyder and Rothbart (1971) investigated if a source's attractiveness affected its credibility. They examined how physical attractiveness affects communicator credibility and found that attractive communicators changed opinions more than unattractive ones (Snyder & Rothbart, 1971). This showed that appearance affects initial attraction and communicative credibility, and they are likely to be trusted and change perspectives based on the information offered. And yet, (Horai et al., 1974) compared sources sharing information from a visually pleasing source as opposed to situations involving non-differing unattractive or unpictured sources, as predicted, there was a significant increase in the level of consensus in viewpoints observed in two distinct circumstances whereby the sources that were attractive were perceived more positively compared to the source that was unattractive.

One study in particular highlighted the important of physical attractiveness when it pertains to women's perceptions of their female counterparts (Hazlett & Hoehn-Saric, 2000). Their study's interpretation from the facial electromyography (EMG) analysis suggests that women may display facial expressions associated with a threat or defensive response when they encounter attractive individuals of the same sex. The origin of this behavior may be attributed to the perception of a competitor with a high social status, which has the potential to jeopardize one's reproductive success and social position. Women's success is attributed to luck or attractiveness, while men's

is linked to aptitude and competence (Cash et al., 1977). Goldberg (1968) found that women are generally tough on each other, and women thought that equal work for women was more difficult than for men. Because they are women, attractive women are treated differently than attractive guys. Thus, beauty maintains gender discrimination a problem in itself whereby being attractive means being feminine and incompetent, while being less attractive means violating gender roles (Maheshwari, 2022).

In addition to the study, it is essential to acknowledge that over the past few decades, an increasing body of work consistently reaffirmed the significance of physical attractiveness in various contexts. Numerous independent research, together with several extensive meta-analytic evaluations, consistently indicates a relationship between physical attractiveness and an array of different outcomes, even how attractive people perform well in any situation (Hosoda et al., 2003; Maheshwari, 2022; Nault et al., 2020). These outcomes involve not only social interactions but also extend to various areas of life, including career achievement, relationships, and overall well-being. Recent meta-analyses conducted by Langlois et al., (2000) revealed that after engaging in interpersonal interactions, perceivers tend to evaluate attractive individuals more favorably. Furthermore, compared to less beautiful people, attractive people get increased favorable treatment, including more incentives, help, acceptance, and social and visual attention (Hosoda et al., 2003). Additionally, compared to less beautiful people, attractive people are more likely to have favorable life outcomes, such as professional success, popularity, dating experiences, sexual experiences, and physical health (Langlois et al., 2000). According to Dion et al. (1972), physical attractiveness and beauty are positive stereotypes.

The concept of attractiveness advantage suggests that physically attractive individuals are more likely to receive preferential treatment, such as job offers, promotions, and other



opportunities (Nault et al., 2020). This advantage is often attributed to the societal emphasis placed on physical appearance, and the belief that attractive people possess more positive traits such as intelligence, competence, and social skills hence, attractive individuals gain greater popularity (Gross & Crofton, 1977). Physically attractive people are stereotyped as having more likable personalities than less attractive people, according to Gross and Crofton (1977). We also expect them to have more success and happiness in their lives. According to Wiedemann and von Mettenheim (2020), a person must possess all three qualities—attractiveness, skill, and trustworthiness—to be considered credible. "The degree to which a stimulus person's facial features are pleasing to observe" is the definition of attractiveness. The idea of sexual selection discusses traits that are beneficial to reproduction, such as physical appeal, and this goes back to Darwin's theory of natural selection, which posits that reproduction is fundamental to survival. On the other hand, attractiveness is not without its drawbacks (Maheshwari, 2022). Furthermore, it was discovered by Lou and Yuan (2019) that consumers' brand awareness might be significantly impacted by influencers' attractiveness, knowledge, and trustworthiness.

There may be the perception that attractive people are frequently thought to have a high social status and may be seen as "cool" or trendy if they have the right attitude (Reinikainen et al., 2021). In addition, there is a possibility that individuals get the impression that attractive people are more authentic or genuine, which might further contribute to their appeal (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). The processing of human faces is characterized by the rapid interpretation of personality traits, emotions, and assessments of attractiveness and appeal (Fribourg et al., 2021). It is commonly believed that "beauty filters" on platforms like Snapchat and Instagram can enhance users' appearance by adding virtual content to their faces and sometimes distorting their features to make them look more attractive. However, the study conducted by Fribourg et al. found that

altering participants' eye size, inter-distance, eyebrows, and face width made them feel less attractive.

The cognitive-behavioral view of body image says that people would look for ways to lessen distressing feelings about their own body image (for example, unhappy with how they look), by using appearance-correcting methods like the use of filters or cosmetic surgery (Cash & Strachan, 2002; Sarwer, 2019). According to Tahir and Bilal (2023), the media plays a significant role in shaping societal beauty ideals and perpetuates the acceptance and glorification of cosmetic surgery. This is facilitated by the widespread accessibility of media platforms, including advertisements on Instagram and reality television programs, which contribute to the normalization of cosmetic surgical procedures (Tahir & Bilal, 2023). This type of media portrayal serves to mainstream the perception of cosmetic surgery as a marketable product, while simultaneously presenting it as a procedure with few associated risks. To what degree do influencers or celebrities impact the perception of their followers or fans about the naturalness of their aesthetic attributes, as well as the notion that these attributes can be achieved by expedient cosmetic procedures aimed at enhancing attractiveness and youthfulness?

We can see Instagram stories of #RealHousewives of New Jersey, Jennifer Fessler, posting her before and after photo of her procedure. She stated in a reunion show that “I wanted to look my best after my first season, in case I was not asked to come back for the next season.” She posted her positive cosmetic journey, while others abstain from posting their before and after photos particularly when their surgeries have been “botched.” Influencers either share their personal experience and go on to state what they did to “tweak” a problem area or like in the case of Lisa Marie Pressley, where we only heard about her procedure’s complications after her death. Tragically some celebrities, for example, like Lisa Marie Pressley kept her weight-loss procedure

a secret and then died unexpectedly from a complication. According to the report, her cause of death was a blockage of the small intestine, the result of a weight loss surgery she underwent in 2020. “The obstruction was in the form of a strangulated small bowel caused by adhesions that developed after bariatric surgery years ago” as the report stated. These and other fatal complications are brushed under the table or patients do not believe that they will experience any complications until they do. Hollywood’s beauty standards are hard to live up to unless you go to extremes to achieve them, use filter apps on your smartphone or undergo cosmetic surgery.

### **2.2.2. Perceived Influencer Authenticity**

In this section I outline relevant research on authenticity, and then I hypothesize connections between consumers’ perceptions about social media influencer attractiveness and perceptions about the social media influencer authenticity, as they related to consumers behavioral intentions to follow the recommendations of the influencers on the topics of cosmetic procedures and surgeries. There are two kinds of authenticity that SMIs use to build business partnerships, according to Audrezet et al. (2020), these are passionate authenticity and transparent authenticity. Passionate means that real people or brands are driven by their wants and needs instead of those that are shaped by outside factors (Moulard et al., 2014, 2015, 2016). That is, they care more about their deepest wants and hobbies than about making money. Passionately real leaders share fun and deeply satisfying digital content. SMIs choose fashion and leisure names that go with their style, show respect for who they are, and let them be creative. Overall, we can say that passionate authenticity is a way to make sure that the creative process is interesting on its own. There is a second type of authenticity that we call "transparent" which is being clear about a brand means giving correct information about the product or service that the relationship is about. Part of being

transparent is also sharing information about the terms of the partnership with the brand and material that has not been changed.

Hudders et al. (2020) highlights how influencers utilized personal narratives to promote sponsored material on social media. These narratives create a sense of authenticity based on their online identity, which includes how an influencer can set beauty standards based on their attractiveness and how they recommend product use impacting public perception and consumer intent. Social media influencers endorsed unhealthy food products more often than healthy products and other unhealthy behaviors like vaping and taking dangerous dieting pills (Hudders et al., 2020). In their study, Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that certain attributes of the source, such as trustworthiness, attractiveness, and resemblance, had an impact on the level of trust that followers placed in the sponsored message. This enhanced trust, in turn, led to higher levels of brand awareness and purchase intent. The influencer's likeability was influenced by the number of followers, which was perceived as a measure of popularity and, to some extent, opinion leadership. This suggests that the influencer is seen as an expert and influential figure in a specific domain. The likeability of influencer sponsored material was found to enhance its persuasiveness, as demonstrated by Hudders et al. (2020) and Ye et al. (2021).

Everyday people who have built up huge online followings by sharing their knowledge in certain online communities are known as social media influencers (Argyris et al., 2021). Audrezet et al. (2020) state that with time, some influencers get more skilled at making complex media like movies, novels, and photographs. By sharing their own experiences, influencers give off an air of genuineness and authenticity that makes their content more credible. As a result, followers feel a stronger connection to influencers than they would with more conventional celebrities, which may lead to feelings of intimacy and even envy. Any well-known Instagram user who has a large

following, impeccable taste in clothing and accessories, and the ability to make money off of their online persona is considered an influencer. Influencers handle their brand of passionate sincerity (Audrezet et al., 2020). When they put out digital material that people actually want to consume, influencers show their true colors. Social media influencers (SMIs) keep their genuine feelings in check by shopping with brands that they feel represent them well. When it comes to fashion and lifestyle brands SMIs promote and manage their passionate authenticity by choosing brands that fit with their style, value their uniqueness, and gives them room to be themselves creatively. Transparent authenticity is when a SMI releases unaltered content and is open and honest about the parameters of the connection with the brand (Audrezet et al., 2020).

Being both renowned and ordinary is a distinctive identity that SMIs enjoy (Jin et al., 2019). Information on famous people is easily accessible thanks to the proliferation of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Managing their online personas and establishing direct relationships with fans has been revolutionized by social media (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). According to Argyris et al. (2021), when an Influencer is credible, their audience is more likely to buy the brand that the Influencer endorses. Relational resources that contribute to the development of trust among followers can be an influencer's source traits, such as their knowledge, honesty, physical beauty, and homophily (Kim & Kim, 2021). Trust was found to be the intermediary between expertise, authenticity, and homophily and their effects on marketing outcomes and loyalty (Kim & Kim, 2021). Perceived credibility among audiences of influencers is positively impacted by VPIE (Visual presentation of influencer's extroversion as an antecedent to credibility) (Argyris et al., 2021). Perceived socialization of these Influencers has a positive relationship with perceived credibility (Jin et al., 2019), and audiences can discern their extroversion from Instagram photos.

Credibility, along with perceived likeness, is a key component in elevating Instagram celebrities to a more influential status. If Instagram stars are seen as "more like us," people would have more faith in them, according to Jin et al. (2019). Despite the importance of credibility and knowledge, SMIs are pressured to produce a "perfect" image to complement user-generated material on Instagram and other picture-sharing platforms in order to increase their earnings (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). According to De Veirman et al. (2017), brands can benefit from influencers since they boost the brand's reputation and encourage more people to buy the brand's products. Because of their charisma and the ease with which their followers may relate to them, influencers are great brand advocates (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). As Tran and Strutton (2014) point out, fans of reality or "celebrity" TV shows often try to model their lives after those they adore. How the prominence of celebrity endorsers affects the way viewers perceive, believe, or intend to buy the things they promote is an important consideration in this context (Tran & Strutton, 2014). A photo or post that shows a part of the celebrity's real self is considered authentic (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). The customer forms an emotional connection to the celebrity as a result of the star's perceived authenticity. Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) state that using personal tales and images is a great method to demonstrate authenticity. Research by Walker et al. (2019) shows that influencer-branded posts and the trust their followers have in them are both positively impacted by influencer content.

The meta-analysis by Hudders et al. (2020) found that influencers' authenticity is valued, but evident sponsorships can lower their ratings. Additionally, paid influencer endorsements and brand evaluations do work; however, source and message factors increase the influencer's impact. Influencer marketers with strong parasocial ties to their followers and sponsored content linked to their area of expertise have greater influencing value and advertising disclosure increases

transparency (Hudders et al., 2020) with possible transparency measures damaging influencers' credibility and honesty according to research by Kim and Kim (2021), the audience's understanding of the speaker's intent can be shaped by their persuasive and manipulative techniques. Rather than just communicating information, these intentions cause listeners to infer the speaker's biases. The impact of a speaker's message can be shaped by how their aim is perceived. This means that influencers' intentions can be defined and measured in terms of their authenticity (Kim & Kim, 2021).

People are more likely to trust a social media influencer whose visual appeal is high. The fact that the communicator looks so much like the speaker also suggests that they share some common history (Kim & Kim, 2021). Teens and young adults who use social media, particularly for photo-related activities, are more likely to suffer from body dissatisfaction and eating disorders, according to a recent study. The influential body positivity movement has become very popular on many social media sites. People are being encouraged to reject unrealistic and overly narrow definitions of beauty as part of this movement, which also seeks to challenge dominant narratives about beauty and promote acceptance of a more diverse variety of body shapes and attributes. Various body types and positive body image themes would be displayed in body positivity posts. The objectification of humans and an emphasis on physical beauty are, nonetheless, possible inclusions. According to Lazuka et al. (2020), this material should be cited. According to Lou et al. (2022), influencers' physical appeal has a role in drawing in followers and making them remember the sponsored brands.

Instagram in particular places a heavy emphasis on visual material, thus SMIs have to carefully craft an idealized image to go along with their user-generated content and maximize their earnings (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). Influencers improve the public's perception of a brand and

increase sales for that company's products, according to research by De Veirman et al. (2017). One reason influencers work so well as brand advocates is the personal connection they can forge with their followers (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). According to research by Tran and Strutton (2014), a lot of people who watch reality or "celebrity" TV shows want to be just like their favorite stars. The influence of celebrity endorsers on viewers' opinions, views, and intents to buy the things they promote is investigated in the study by Tran and Strutton (2014). According to Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016), an authentic post or photo of a celebrity shows a real part of their authentic self. As a result, when fans believe the celebrity is authentic, they have a stronger emotional connection to them. Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) state that using personal stories and photographs is a great way to show that you're genuine. When influencers share positive content, their followers are more likely to believe postings advertising influencer-branded products. According to Walker et al. (2019), it also has the effect of making their followers more likely to buy anything.

And yet the most recent SMI trend is a message of “deinfluencing” in which national brands like Citibank, Sony, Netflix, MAC Makeup are compared to non-branded products, especially on TikTok. The hashtag “deinfluencing” has been viewed 812.7 million times on TikTok. Due to economic conditions, consumers are becoming more cautious when making purchases. Influencers have turned to reviewing trending products, primarily beauty and wellness products to provide advice on whether to or avoid purchasing.

This trend is driving influencers to be more “authentic” and also part of the “counterculture” movement that rejects endorsements from big brands and influencers approve the better product, even if it is not known, for the sake of appearing more authentic to their audience. Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, when consumers view social media influencers as more



attractive, the consumers then perceive the influencers to be more authentic. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 1: Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer authenticity.**

*Authenticity to Consumer Intention.* Fifty percent of all internet users follow influencers and trust their recommendations, and 40% of those same users have made a purchase after viewing it on social media platforms like Instagram or YouTube (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). In 2018, 19% of the purchases made in the US were influenced by influencers (Audrezet & Charry, 2019) and marketing interest in SMIs has grown in tandem with the popularity of SMI marketing among practitioners (Ao et al., 2023; Hudders et al., 2020; Lou et al., 2022; Abidin, 2015b; Abidin, 2016b). Researchers and businesspeople alike need to figure out what SMIs are and how they influence consumers' decisions to buy. Original creative content such as photographs, text, and sometimes videos, give SMIs their authenticity (Audrezet et al., 2020). The content usually takes the kind of a short narrative that connects the influencer's personal life to the advertised product or service. There is an emotional component to SMIs that pertains to the brand and the experience of creating the content, in addition to factual information about the product or service (Georgakopoulou, 2022; Moulard et al., 2015; Shoenberger & Kim, 2022). When influencers share digital content that is enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding, it shows that they are genuine and enthusiastic, Hirschman's (1983) theory of "marketing to oneself," justifies these actions.

By selecting apparel and accessories that complement their unique sense of style, celebrate their uniqueness, and allow them to express themselves creatively, SMIs foster a feeling of true and profound dedication (Audrezet et al., 2020). Transparent authenticity is described by Audrezet et al. (2020) as a type of social media influencer marketing (SMI) in which the influencer shares details about the brand's product or service. To be authentically transparent, one must share unaltered content and disclose all terms and conditions of one's relationship with a particular

business. According to Moulard et al. (2015), passionate authenticity refers to the idea that genuine individuals or brands are driven more by their inner aspirations and passions than by financial gain. SMIs are more likely to be driven by this principle.

Greater oversight has emerged to forestall this kind of misunderstanding. The features of SMIs and their effects on customer outcomes are the primary and most prevalent areas of study in the existing literature. Perceived credibility is a key factor in the effectiveness of influencer marketing in social media environments, according to many experts (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Notably, Fink et al. (2020) demonstrated that consumers are more likely to purchase if they believe the influencer is credible. Using the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1990) in the context of social media, the three components of an influencer's credibility are their trustworthiness, attractiveness, and knowledge. Authenticity is a quality that has been identified as important in marketing studies. According to Chronis and Hampton (2008), consumers are more and more looking for genuine items and brands. Message receptivity is improved, perceived quality is enhanced, and purchase intentions are increased by authenticity (Labrecque et al., 2011; Moulard et al., 2016; Napoli et al., 2014). Marketers are aware of the fact that there are various models for authenticity, even though most definitions center on truthfulness, genuineness, or reality (Beverland & Farrelly, 2010).

Grayson and Martinec (2004) proposed a prominent thought for authenticity in marketing, proposing two distinct types: indexical and iconic. Indexical authenticity pertains to the determination of whether an object, such as a painting, is the genuine article or a bona fide original, while all other objects that bear resemblance are deemed inauthentic replicas. Iconic authenticity, in contrast, pertains to the extent to which an object is seen as a true depiction of something else (Grayson & Martinec, 2004). Self-determination theory posits that authenticity pertains to an

individual's involvement in acts driven by intrinsic motivation, which arise from a person's innate desires and passions. Influencers that demonstrate honesty and refrain from misrepresenting their affiliation with brands have been found to improve subjective wellbeing, as evidenced by Reinecke and Trepte's study in 2014. Nevertheless, when SMIs choose to follow this course, they must exercise caution in declining commercial opportunities that are inconsistent with their personal interests, as well as refusing brands that want non-disclosure of sponsorship in order to resemble genuine endorsements (Reinecke & Trepte, 2014).

Influencers are required to disclose any relationships they have with the companies they promote in their tweets, vlogs, blogs, or Instagram posts. This requirement was added to the endorsement standards in 2017 by the US Federal Trade Commission. In particular, the rules specify that the hashtag "ad" ought to be prominently displayed (in the first three lines of the caption) in such material. Overly commercialized influencers often lose followers (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). According to De Veirman & Hudders (2020), influencers' credibility and the public's perception of their ads are both diminished when consumers become more aware of sponsorships. When customers perceive social media influencers as more genuine, they are more likely to accept the influencers' advice, according to the data and reasoning presented so far. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 2: Increases in perceived influencer authenticity are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention to act on and share the influencer's cosmetic procedure/surgery recommendations.**

### **2.2.3. Perceived Influencer Coolness**

In this section I outline relevant research on coolness, and then I hypothesize connections between consumers' perceptions about social media influencer attractiveness and perceptions about the social media influencer coolness, as they related to consumers behavioral intentions to follow the recommendations of the influencers on the topics of cosmetic procedures and surgeries. The concept of "cool" has been analyzed in several disciplines and contexts, going beyond the investigations carried out by (R. W. Belk et al., 2010) and (Haselstein, 2013). The concept of "cool" is complex and always changing, encompassing elements of culture, aesthetics, individualism, and social interactions, and scrutinized in various disciplines, including sociology, psychology, marketing management and consumer behavior to name a few. The concept of cool has been characterized as having an expanding transcultural appeal, as stated by Haselstein (2013) whereby cool can mean a male subject's control of emotion; jazz music/relaxed and constrained or 20<sup>th</sup> Century, African American culture resisting oppression or just "ok"/satisfied; cleaver and stylish; lacking warmth or affection/unfriendly.

Coolness or Cool can be difficult to define beyond the positive meaning. Recent studies, such as Sigismondi (2018), have identified cool as a global phenomenon. While (Brown, 2021) describes cool as a way to survive and a place where new cultures can grow during modern life's problems; cool as a form of capitalism; cool as a way for consumers, especially young people, to set themselves apart; cool as a response the rationality of subculture and cool as a way to protest through performances of affectlessness. For brands pursuing market leadership rather than niche play, the strategy to develop a cool image might not work due to its subjective and dynamic nature (Warren et al., 2019). Broad adoption of coolness leads to less autonomy, making it challenging for mass-market brands to maintain perceived coolness. Trying to appeal to all consumers is difficult due to

their varying norms and autonomous expectations (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Cool brands help consumers express desired identity traits (Berger & Heath, 2008). For example, countercultural consumers view Harley-Davidson as a cool brand, whereas mainstream consumers view it as "inappropriately loud and obnoxious" (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Starbucks and the Gap, which are cool to less countercultural consumers, can seem too mainstream to other consumers who want to be countercultural (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). The coolness of a product can mean different things to different people, like being rebellious, different, and unique (Berger and Heath, 2007). People form a strong bond with a brand when they buy trendy and cool items that help them show who they are and who they want to be (Escalas & Bettman, 2008).

Brand love, which is a relationship between a consumer and a brand, is linked to how a person currently wants to show their identity (Batra et al., 2012). People who own cool things are better able to express themselves and play out the identities they want to have (Sundar et al., 2014). Because of this, people tend to love products that help them reach symbolic goals more (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). Ocejio (2017) studied ethnography on bartenders, butchers, distillers, and barbers associated with the 'hipster' culture revealed minimal proof that the motivation to become 'cool' and 'trendy' is what compels individuals to dedicate themselves to mastering these abilities and forsaking more conventional forms of work.

In a study conducted by Dar Nimrod et al. (2012), 'passions' or 'skills' are considered to be desirable characteristics of being cool. Halselstein (2013) wrote about the term "cool" as being used indiscriminately and becoming difficult to define beyond a general positive meaning. Coolness is the preferred term to highlight an individual's public self-presentation and the effects of his or her self-presentation on others. Contemporary coolness is connected with fashion and lifestyle. "Cool" retains some counter-cultural meaning, but it usually tuned down to mean differences from the

mainstream (Warren & Campbell, 2014). For example, African American coolness manifests as the attitude and emotional self-control by hinting at its formation in historical dynamics of racial oppression. It has been said that being cool is like “masking behavior” that conceals feelings of contempt, anger, and surfeit. In 20th-century Black America, influenced by African culture, cool attitudes were essential for psychological survival. Cool attitude came from slavery-era emotional and physical action whereby jazz culture's aesthetic development embodied experiences in racist contexts (Brown 2021). Black American cultural innovations have long been appropriated and commercialized by Whites (Tate, 2003) and cool's trajectory is tied to this. Brown (2021) calls out poor education, separation from emotions and relationships, unattainable self-reliance ambitions, and dangerous drug use all linked to the idealized ‘laid back’ demeanor of being cool.

Studies have examined males and coolness as a pathological version of ‘ideal’ masculinity that permeates popular culture. Another example of being cool was a symbolically countercultural cool in the 1950s and 1960s which appealed to an audience dissatisfied with post-war consumer capitalism. For example, the “Beatniks” movement that emerged in San Francisco after World War II, where writers rejected traditional poetry, capitalistic and materialist features of American life through their shared opinion in music and poetry, even how they dressed, mostly black clothing and berets, a part of the legacy of 1960s counterculture. While the counter-culture movement was not limited to the West Coast, ex-hippie marketers had a leg up in the '60s advertising game thanks to their awareness of the public's cynicism towards authority figures, corporations, and the "good life" ideals promoted by suburbanites. By re-engaging would-be rebels in suspicion of the corporate mainstream, they were able to silence them and undermine Cool's initial promise (Frank, 1997).

Quick social media communication has fueled a "wokeness" among today's youth, yet many conceptions of coolness fail to include political and moral engagement. There is evidence that

interpersonal contact and narcissism are positively associated with the following reasons for using social media: surveillance, documenting, coolness, and originality (Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Brand betrayal can damage parasocial ties between influencers and their followers and the perceived coolness of social media influencers who have backed the brand (Reinikainen et al., 2021). The pursuit of endorsements from "cool" influencers by companies in an effort to capture the attention and trust of those influencers' followers has led to the intermingling of these personal, online interactions (Reinikainen et al., 2021). According to Reinikainen et al. (2021), "influencer coolness" is based on the idea of "brand coolness" (Warren et al., 2019), which is a desirable quality in both human and corporate brands. The following characteristics are associated with cool brands: remarkable popularity, aesthetic appeal, energy, status, rebellion, originality, authenticity, subculture, and iconic status (Warren et al., 2019). Last but not least, compared to less cool companies, cool ones will have more exposure, a larger customer base, and a bigger price premium due to their high status, popularity, and iconic status (Warren et al., 2019).

The term "cool" has multiple connotations in common parlance and is still used as a casual noun to express acceptance, like "good" or "ok" (Brown, 2021). The broad glorification of cool, together with its possible opacity and variety of meaning, might be brought to light by this. Indeed, in western-based fashion culture, the term "cool" can signify seemingly opposing things: first, that one is trendy, popular, and socially sanctioned—a trait that can be seen as a sign of success or "in the know"—or second, that one is inauthentic, lacking in imagination or confidence—or third, that one is not dependent on or even rebellious against fashion. Thus, "cool" can either mean genuine or, even more annoyingly, fake. According to Brown (2021), if cool is defined as "the game of refusing to play others' games," then it might also mean not playing that game.

The 2010 study conducted by Belk, Tian, and Paavola, involving young adults from America and Finland, demonstrates a correlation between coolness and consumption as the American teenagers mentioned brand names rather than specific styles when asked about fashionable clothing styles (R. W. Belk, Tian, K. and Paavola, H. et al., 2010). The phrase "cool" has become catchall for the development of international communication campaigns (Sigismondi, 2018). For example, the cola wars between Coca-Cola and Pepsi, was a brand competition for the cool niche, youth audience and had global implications. Coca-Cola has dominated the global soft drinks and beverages market for decades, with little domestic competition until the 1960s. The Pepsi Generation ad campaign, imagery of youth rebellion, transformed the competitive landscape with its "Come alive!" The slogan portrayed consumers as rebels defying past norms with their "You're in the Pepsi generation" advertising (Sigismondi, 2018) presenting a coolness hierarchy comprising uniqueness, attractiveness, and subcultural appeal. Technology businesses seeking product differentiation use "coolness" as a key criterion. iMac, iPod, iPhone, and iPad, which are considered "cool," have transformed their parent companies (Tiwari et al., 2021). These astonishing successes demonstrate the importance of consumers recognizing "coolness" in technological products. As per Tiwari et al (2021), there is a strong correlation between "product coolness and brand love" Tiwari et al., (2021., p. 2) suggesting that organizations must produce cool products to succeed in the market. According to Dar-Nimrod et al. (2018) and Li et al. (2019), attractiveness is both a socially desired quality and a contributor to coolness. According to Dar-Nimrod et al. (2018) and Li et al. (2019), attractiveness is both a socially desired quality and a contributor to coolness. To be cool, attractive people do not need as many other qualities (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018). Clients are more likely to buy trendy products if they look attractive (Kim & Park, 2019).



Brands that have been around for a while and have done well, like Apple and Harley Davidson, have a talent for making products more attractive and people want to buy (Kim & Park, 2019; Kim et al., 2015). Technology can elicit more positive heuristics, such as coolness, which is more likely to succeed in the market (Kim et al., 2015) or “The Coolness Concept.” These elements are similar to DarNimrod et al. (2012); however, they focused on coolness's evaluation rather than coolness as a trait. DarNimrod et al. (2012) found two determinants in coolness; the first and most important element was Cachet Coolness, which involves socially desirable traits including friendliness, attractiveness, and personal competency and boosts status. Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, when consumers view social media influencers as more attractive, the consumers then perceive the influencers to be cooler. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 3: Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer coolness.**

*Coolness to Intention.* When identifying social media influencers as cool, one has to start with the brands and companies that they self-represent. Take the study by Warren et al. (2019) as an example, describing cool brands as being popular, iconic, unique, authentic, energetic, high-status, rebellious, and aesthetically appealing Brand coolness affects critical outcome factors such as consumers' views, contentment, intents to talk about, and readiness to pay for the brand. The authors design scale items to accurately assess brand coolness and show how cool companies vary over time. Brands may start as hip to a small consumer subculture that has traits such as, rebellious, authentic, and original with some companies becoming popular and legendary after being accepted by the public. According to Warren (2010) coolness starts with people, some cooler than others, and spreads to products, brands, and trends. A brand gets popular because cool people use it.

Other consumers try to be cool by adopting the same brand as cool consumers. However, widespread acceptance by non-cool consumers reduces the brand's coolness (Warren et al., 2019).

According to the meaning of the transfer model, some objects become fashionable, and cool trends spread throughout subcultures and society (Warren & Campbell, 2014). Another way for brands to become autonomous is by forming partnerships with influential people (McCracken, 1986). Brands might become autonomous through association with influencers since meaning often passes from people to brands (McCracken, 1986). The perceived autonomy of a brand can be influenced by the actions of influencers, such as Virgin and Richard Branson, as well as its endorsers and consumers, like Snoop Dogg and Monster Energy Drink. In my research, I am interested in finding out if a product's perceived coolness—stems from the perception of the influencer being cool to encourage customers to buy the product.

Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, when consumers view social media influencers as cool, the consumers then have a greater intention to follow the recommendations of the influencers. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 4: Increases in perceived influencer coolness are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention to act on and share the influencer's cosmetic procedure/surgery recommendations.**

#### **2.2.4. Consumer Envy**

In this section I outline relevant research on envy, and then I hypothesize connections between consumers' perceptions about social media influencer attractiveness and consumer envy, as they related to consumers behavioral intentions to follow the recommendations of the influencers on the topics of cosmetic procedures and surgeries. Research on envy in offline contexts is primarily influenced by two seminal publications: Parrott and Smith's 1993 work and Smith and Kim's 2007 research. Envy is a painful feeling caused by comparing ourselves to others who have what we want. Studies have used this offline envy research to define envy in social networking platforms. Parrot & Smith (1993) distinguished envy from jealousy whereby envy is when someone wants or

wishes they had someone else's better quality, achievement, or property. On the other hand, envy cannot exist apart from relationships; it sets in when one feels threatened by the prospect of losing a significant other to an adversary (Parrott and Smith, 1993).

According to Smith & Kim (2007), envy is the prevailing emotional reaction towards competitors who have superior qualities. The most deadly and joyless sin is also considered a vicious emotion (Richards, 2000). When an individual finds themselves in a situation where they do not possess the same level of talent, achievement, or possession as another person, it is common for them to have feelings of envy or a desire to attain those qualities.

Envy is a multifaceted emotion characterized by a complex interplay of positive and negative aspects, resulting in a sophisticated psychological terrain (Van de Ven et al., 2009). Numerous narratives emphasize the classification of envy as a mortal sin, resulting in either demise or the cultivation of disdain inside a person towards the blessings or prosperity of others. These stories appear in religious text, in classical and contemporary fiction. For example, in religious text Cain experienced feelings of envy toward his sibling due to God's preference for Abel's sacrificial offering (Genesis 4). The motivation behind Joseph's brothers' decision to sell him into slavery can be attributed to their feelings of envy, which sprang from Joseph being favored by their father, Jacob (Genesis 37:3-28). Envy expresses the sentiment, "I don't want you to have more than me." A mood of cruelty permeates it. "Envy causes rotting of the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). The Oxford English Dictionary states that the verb "to envy" means "to feel displeasure and ill will at (another person's) superiority in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to look at another's possession of (some superior advantage that one would like to have for himself) with discontent." Older definitions of the word "envy" show

how aggressive it can be such as holding a grudge against (someone) or to dislike or disapprove of (someone or something).

Classical fiction has many similar examples such as William Shakespear's play *Othello* is replete with countless instances that demonstrate the devastating repercussions of envy. The character, Lago feels envy over Othello's triumphs in the military and his subsequent advancement serves as the driving force behind a complex network of falsehoods and manipulation ultimately leading to the demise of Othello, culminating in the homicide of Desdemona, Othello's spouse. In the wake of seeing his terrible error, Othello succumbs to despair and chooses to end his own life. Other classics end in similar tragedies such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the creature envies normal humans and their relationships which feeds his hatred and crimes. And yet, a different spin to love and envy, *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jay Gatsby experiences a profound sense of envy towards Tom Buchanan, a key figure in the story. This sentiment mostly stems from Gatsby's unreciprocated affection for Tom's spouse, Daisy, as well as the striking disparity between Gatsby's humble origins and Tom's affluent way of life. There are so many classics that stem from envy of love, money, fame, attractiveness and privilege like in Contemporary fiction such as Disney's Cinderella where her stepsisters are envious of Cinderella's beauty and kindness. The Stepmother and stepsisters treat her poorly and keep her from attending the ball because of their envy.

Wikipedia provides detailed explanations of the seven deadly sins, which are also referred to as the cardinal sins. These sins were initially used in early Christian teachings to educate and guide followers about the inclination of sinful behavior in fallen humanity. Additionally, they are featured in Dante Alighieri's epic poem, *The Divine Comedy*. Each of the seven deadly sins is associated with a corresponding opposite virtue, namely chastity, abstinence, liberality, diligence,

patience, kindness, and humility. Interpretations and versions, particularly those of the more orthodox and Pentecostal Protestant denominations, have instead inclined towards depicting the consequence for individuals who commit one or more of these sins, as eternal torment in Hell, rather than the potential process of purification through penance in Purgatory as taught in Catholicism. Envy is marked by an unquenchable longing; individuals who engage in the sin of Envy covet something that another person possesses, which they regard as a deficiency in themselves.

The passage in the New Testament, specifically Galatians 5:19-21, enumerates the visible actions that stem from human nature: “Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hate, variance, emulations, anger, contention, seditions, heresies,” Galatians 5:13-14 states that “Those who engage in envy, murder, and drunkenness will not be granted the inheritance of the kingdom of God” (KJV). The Roman Catholic Church acknowledges seven sacred qualities that align with each of the seven deadly sins, envy, which is a form of jealousy, its opposite is kindness, which is a virtue associated with admiration. When you admire someone for their accomplishments, this decreases the feelings of envy. Envy can also potentially function as a catalyst, when utilized in a healthy matter, for personal growth and accomplishment, since it motivates individuals to strive for self-improvement and success (Van de Ven et al., 2009).

The constructive dimension of envy can be compared to a catalyst that stimulates one’s resolve to attain greater levels of achievement, so converting a potentially adverse sentiment into a motivating factor for individual advancement can be rewarding and positive (Nabi & Keblusek, 2014). Nevertheless, the concept of envy also unveils its capacity for adverse consequences (Meier & Johnson, 2022). The primary objective of malicious envy is to engage in acts of aggression towards others, whereas the primary objective of benign envy is to enhance one's personal

development. If not properly addressed, envy has the potential to develop into resentment, resulting in emotions of inadequacy, bitterness, and potentially even violence towards the one who is being envied. The adverse expression of envy has the potential to undermine one's self-esteem, cultivate a sense of competition, and cultivate detrimental social interactions (Foster et al., 1972). The act of striving to imitate others might potentially develop into an unwholesome preoccupation, leading individuals to overlook their own distinct attributes and objectives (Foster et al., 1972).

As mentioned previously, envy experienced in the context of upward social comparisons might manifest in either benign or malicious forms (Belk, 2011; Lange & Crusius, 2015b; Van de Ven et al., 2009). In addition to its malevolent manifestation, envy has the potential to serve as a motivational force for individuals seeking to get the advantages possessed by others, without resorting to violent behavior (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). Benign envy is characterized by a cognitive state that includes more favorable evaluations of the person being envied (Van de Ven et al., 2009), heightened motivation and persistence (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Van de Ven et al., 2011a), a longing to attain the advantages possessed by the other person (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012), and a shift in focus towards strategies that can facilitate the attainment of the desired upward objective. Malicious envy encompasses the presence of unfavorable cognitions towards the individual being envied (Van de Ven et al., 2009), the experience of Schadenfreude in response to their suffering, and a redirection of attention from the object of envy to the envied individual. Consumer envy is commonly regarded as a relatively harmless manifestation of envy, as opposed to being characterized by evil intent (Lee & Eastin, 2020).

According to Lee & Eastin (2020) advertisers often intentionally incite envy to encourage consumers to buy their products to look like the picture-perfect model or celebrity. This envy is likely to be benign and associated with awe and a desire to be like them, not hostile envy. When

individuals observe a celebrity or model featured in an advertisement and experience feelings of envy, that feeling is not driven by animosity but rather directed towards the aspiration for self-improvement (Belk, 2008). Consumer envy can arise due to the accessibility of observing the lifestyles, shopping habits, vacation choices, and recreational activities of others through social platforms as well as by following influencers. According to Lou et al., (2022), SMIs are regular Internet users who gain a lot of followers on blogs and social media by generating valuable domain content and sharing their personal life.

Sponsored content and other incentives from businesses and companies help them monetize their following (Abidin 2015; Lou and Yuan 2019). Influencer marketing and use of online platforms has grown rapidly, especially after the COVID-19 epidemic (Jílková & Králová, 2021). With over 2.9 billion active users per month, Facebook surpassed one billion registered accounts in August 2023, making it the first social network to do so (Statista, August 2023). The four largest social media networks—Facebook (main platform), WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Instagram—are all owned by Meta (previously Facebook). Each of these platforms has over one billion active users per month. Industry predictions place Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn as the top five social media platforms for influencer marketing. Buunk & Gibbons (2007) found a link between public self-consciousness (a person with strong concerns about how others see them in social circumstances) and social comparison whereby people who are very self-conscious in public compare themselves to others, even social media influencers.

The ideas of Marketing 3.0 and Marketing 4.0 introduced by Philip Kotler capture the transformative characteristics of marketing in an era characterized by digital advancements and increased societal awareness. Marketing 3.0 places emphasis on cultural, spiritual, and collaborative dimensions, whereas Marketing 4.0 highlights the importance of digital technologies

and integrated marketing tactics in comprehending and engaging with contemporary consumers (Vaidya et al., 2023). If content is “King” in social media marketing; then engagement is “Queen” (Lou et al., 2022). Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are regular Internet users who gain a lot of followers on blogs and social media by generating valuable domain content and sharing their personal lives. Sponsored content and other incentives from businesses and companies help them monetize their following (Abidin 2015; Lou and Yuan 2019). Influencer marketing has grown rapidly, especially after the COVID-19 epidemic (Jílková & Králová, 2021).

The integration of Instagram's aesthetic appeal, user interaction, and social media influencer phenomenon has resulted in a significant shift, rendering the platform a powerful instrument for companies seeking to develop and enhance their visibility in the domains of beauty, lifestyle, and luxury (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). This is consistent with the overarching patterns observed in consumer culture, where aesthetics, aspirations, and identity are interconnected and influence consumer decision-making and social perspectives (Jin et al., 2019). Digital marketers must determine whether collaborating with social media influencers is more advantageous compared to collaborating with traditional celebrities. According to De Veirman et al. (2016), influencers are individuals who have established a substantial following and are recognized as authoritative figures in specific areas of interest. Abidin (2016) posits that individuals known as micro-celebrities are ordinary internet users who amass a substantial number of followers by showcasing their personal lives and lifestyles.

These micro-celebrities actively interact with followers in both online and actual realms and capitalize on that activity by incorporating 'advertorials' in posts and participating in paid guest appearances at various events. Needless to say, influencers and micro-celebrities are very similar in their use of Instagram to attract followers. The perceived value of opinions derived from robust



social ties on social media sites, such as Instagram, is regarded as highly relevant by individuals who are members or followers (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Consumers are more likely to experience heightened social presence than engaging with Instagram social media influencers as opposed to traditional celebrities as they feel influencers are more like them, regular, ordinary people (Jin et al., 2019). This admiration or engagement can lead to various feelings, for example, inspiration, as many followers are inspired by influencer's achievements, lifestyles and content. Aspirations as followers emulate certain aspects of the influencers' lives, their fashion sense, travel experiences, fitness routines or other lifestyle choices. Followers experience "FOMO" (fear of missing out) when they observe influencers partaking in exclusive events or engaging in activities that are beyond their reach.

Miceli & Castelfranchi (2007) note that envy often comes from those who stimulate personal liking and bear likeness because there is an inherent tendency to aspire to similar accomplishments. There seems to be a positive relationship between social comparison and envy and between envy, social comparison, and body image-related behavior (Arnocky et al., 2015). When combined with a real affection for the object of envy, it becomes an aspiration to emulate rather than acquire (Lange & Crusius, 2015). According to Chae (2017), envy arises when an individual's accomplishments seem reachable due to common features, leading to a desire to emulate them. Lee & Eastin (2020) describe envy and the desire to copy social media influencers as their persona's likability and relatability create an illusion of accessibility to their assets, which increases envy and want. Lockwood & Kunda (1997) state that envy happens when someone's accomplishments seem possible based on how much they are like the person. This is because people are driven to have similar accomplishments.

It is common knowledge that envy can be a powerful motivator. There is a significant amount of research that points to antisocial outcomes from envy (Smith & Kim, 2007). Nevertheless, envy was also a reliable indicator of friendly tendencies in other cases. For instance, a desire to improve oneself (Cohen-Charash, 2009), increase one's performance (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004), and desire for status-associated items (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012).

Even though these studies used unitary envy measures, the expected effects were varied and in part defied the idea that envy is a hostile emotion. Additionally, Miceli and Castelfranchi (2007) highlighted in their research that consumers are more likely to feel envy of people they like because they are similar to them. Arnocky et al., (2015) also found that envy has a strong link between social comparison and the desire to change behavior around improving body image and also the desire to be like a social media personality (Nabi & Keblusek, 2014). However, as consumers view influencers as more reliable and authentic compared to media celebrities, they are more likely to listen to their fashion advice and buy the brands and goods influencers recommend.

Envy, in its simplest form, can be described as the need to own something that another person has, resulting in subsequent misery. When you want something that someone else has, you not only feel bad about not having it, but you probably feel even worse when you see them having it (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007). According to Jin & Phua (2014) there is a correlation between the number of subscribers an individual has and their perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness among consumers. The concept of source credibility pertains to the perception of the information source by consumers, which is influenced by factors such as attractiveness, trustworthiness, and expertise in the specific domain of the endorsed product (Ohanian, 1990). I posit that followers spending time on social media sites, viewing influencer's social media posts on their attractive, ideal-self, luxurious lifestyles and access to other celebrities can drive intense

feelings of “Influencer Envy.” Based on all of the preceding logic, when consumers view social media influencers as more attractive, the consumers feel more envy toward the influencers. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 5: Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.**

*Consumer envy to intention.* The cognitive act of comparing oneself to another or other people is known as social comparison. Comparisons are a basic cognitive process that occurs universally among humans, aiding in the understanding of social dynamics by offering insights about one's own position in relation to others or serving as a source of motivation. Although there are advantages, engaging in upward comparisons with individuals who outperform oneself, has been recognized as potentially troublesome on social media. Users often portray an "ideal self" on social media, presenting a positively biased picture of themselves. Envy, defined as the distress produced by the success of others, can arise when individuals consistently compare themselves to others who appear to be more fortunate (Wenninger et al., 2021). Such comparisons are spread on social media and might adversely affect individuals' emotional well-being.

Wenninger et al. (2021) found that negative psychological impacts, like social media anxiety and SNS fatigue, are associated with having feelings of envy on SNS (Liu & Ma, 2018). The study also found a positive outcome, namely an increased propensity to develop a relationship on the social media platform with the person who caused the envy (Jin, 2018). A longitudinal panel study found that depressed people are more likely to have envy-inducing thoughts when they are exposed to attractive profiles on social networking sites (Appel et al., 2016). The impact of social media envy on consumers' propensity to make a purchase was the subject of Wenninger's (2021) review. Social media platforms still rely on advertising to generate revenue, and the companies behind these platforms benefit from the sales that users make as a result of using their platforms.

It is not surprising that SNS travel sites influence users' plans to visit, given that travel experiences are highly praised on social media (Krasnova et al., 2015). Users' intents to purchase a MacBook Pro were influenced by jealousy after reading posts on social media in (Lin, 2018).

Lin (2018) observed that malevolent envy motivates people to buy a smartphone better than the envied target's. Consumers level up to receive the coveted item. Studies on purchase behavior in response to SNS-induced envy are called “leveling up oneself” since buying desired things or services can get one closer to the envied individual (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). Multiple research articles have examined how social media envy affects consumers' purchasing decisions (Jin & Ryu, 2020).

SNS providers prioritize purchases made from SNS usage, and advertising drives their revenue models (Ven, 2022). For example, travel experiences are highly regarded on social media platforms (Krasnova et al., 2015), hence it is not surprising that travel destinations shared on social networking sites influence users' desire to visit.

According to Lin (2018), individuals are motivated to purchase a smartphone that surpasses the one owned by the person they envy. Consumers want to elevate their status and acquire the coveted item confirming prior research on consumer behavior where a response to envy is triggered by social networking sites (SNS) referred to as “self-improvement.” Purchasing desired products or services might bring individuals closer to the person they envy. Based on all of the preceding logic, when consumers have more envy toward social media influencers, the consumers then have a greater intention to follow the recommendations of the influencers. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 6: Increases in consumer envy are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention to act on and share the influencer’s cosmetic procedure/surgery recommendations.**

### **2.2.5. The Mediating Effect of Envy on Coolness to Intention**

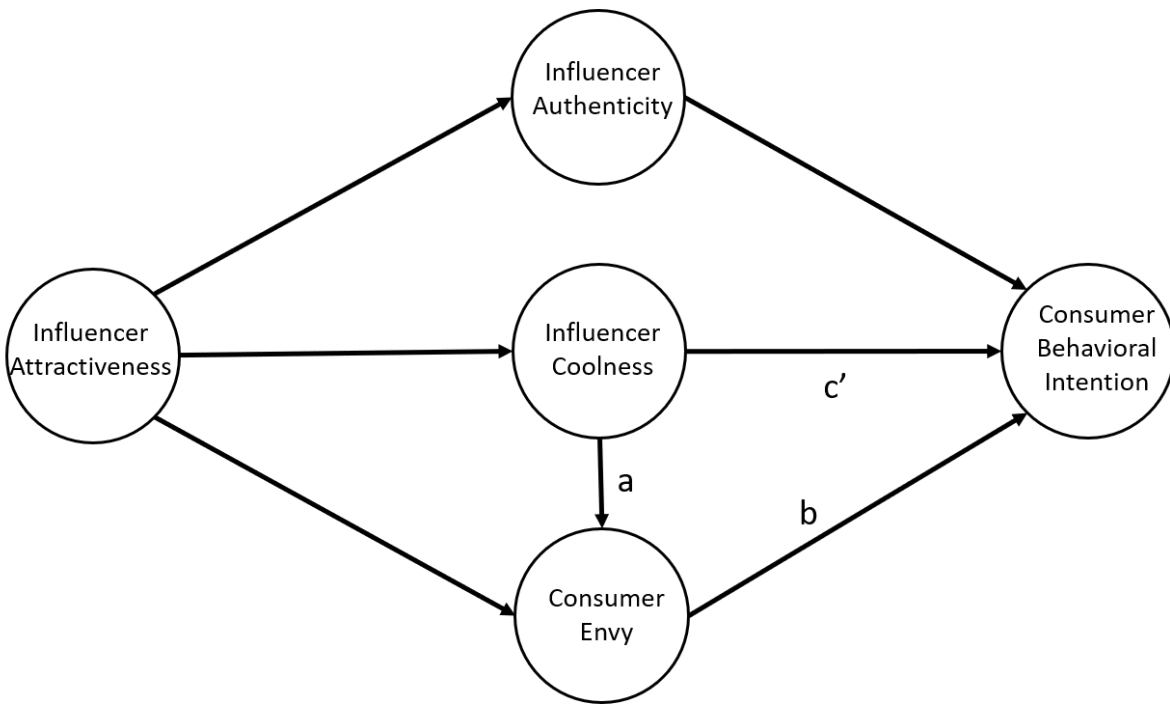
In this section, I discuss the possible relationship between coolness and envy as well as how they might work together in impacting behavioral intention. I argue that increases in perceived influencer coolness could lead to increases in consumer envy through the mechanism of upward social comparison (see, e.g., Belk, 2011; Lange & Crusius, 2015b; Van de Ven et al., 2009). I argue that when consumers view social media influencers as cool, possessing desirable traits such as attractiveness, status, and success, they are more likely to engage in comparisons between themselves and the influencers. These upward comparisons can trigger feelings of envy, as consumers may feel a sense of inadequacy or a desire to attain the same qualities and possessions as the cool influencers. The perceived gap between the consumer's current state and the idealized image presented by the cool influencer can intensify feelings of longing and resentment, characteristic of envy. Additionally, I propose that the association between coolness and envy is rooted in the notion that cool influencers often display an "ideal self" on social media, presenting a positively biased picture of their lives. This curated portrayal of success, attractiveness, and desirability can heighten the sense of envy experienced by consumers, as they may feel that the influencer's achievements and lifestyle are both admirable and frustratingly out of reach. The illusion of accessibility created by the influencer's persona, combined with their likability and relatability, can further fuel consumer envy. As a result, increases in perceived influencer coolness can intensify the emotional response of envy, as consumers grapple with the discrepancy between their own lives and the idealized image presented by the cool influencer. Stated formally,

**Hypothesis 7: Increases in perceived influencer coolness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.**

Continuing with this line of thought, I believe that consumer envy acts as a mediator for perceived coolness and behavior intention. This is because people are more likely to compare

themselves to social media influencers who they think are cool because they have desirable traits like being attractive, authentic, high-status, etc. These comparisons can trigger feelings of envy, characterized by a combination of admiration and resentment towards those perceived as possessing superior qualities or possessions; coolness creates more envy, which in turn drives consumer intention. Envy can motivate consumers to "level up" and purchase desired products or services—in this case cosmetic surgeries and procedures—to get closer to the same level of desired attributes of the envied social media influencer. Thus, I argue that envy mediates the relationship between coolness and consumer intention. Graphically, it takes the form of what is shown in Figure 2 using the a, b, and c' notation. Stated formally,

**Hypothesis 8: Consumer envy mediates the relationship between perceived influencer coolness and consumer behavioral intention.**



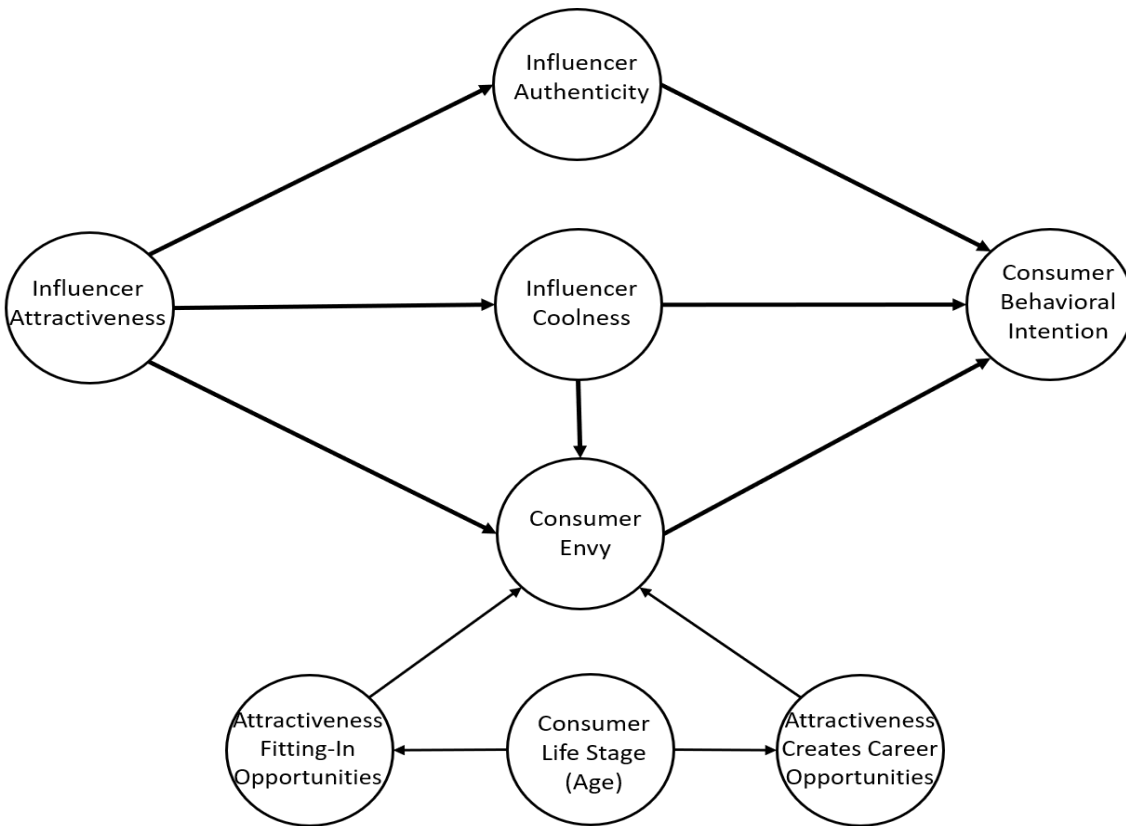
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**Figure 2. Hypothesized Mediating Effect of Envy on Coolness to Intention**

### **2.3 Consumer Life Stages and Envy**

This section outlines hypotheses outlining how life stage advancement might place different focus on different attractiveness benefits, that in turn, increase consumer envy, as summarized in Figure 3. A life stage denotes a phase or interval in an individual's life marked by certain developmental milestones, encounters, and difficulties that change as people age. Thus, these phases are typically operationalized using age, although they can also be influenced by aspects such as physical, cognitive, emotional, and social development, as well as cultural and societal conventions; life stages refer to a method of classifying and comprehending the many periods of human existence. In this research, I focus on age. The concept of consumer life stages has been applied to several different situations (e.g., Appau et al., 2020; Barnhart & Peñaloza, 2013; Barnhart & Peñaloza, 2013; Carrington & Ozanne, 2022; McAlexander et al., 2014; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Mogilner et al., 2012; Peterson, 2001; Schau et al., 2009; Sandikci & Ger, 2010; Thompson et al., 2018; Üstüner & Holt, 2010; Weinberger et al., 2017), as outlined in Table 3.





**Figure 3. Hypothesized Effects of Life Stages and Attractiveness Benefits Focus**

**Table 3. Examples of prior research on consumer life stage**

<b>Article Reference</b>	<b>Focus of Consumer Life Stage in Research</b>
Appau, Ozanne, & Klein (2020)	Explores how consumers navigate difficult life transitions and the impact of permanent liminality on consumption.
Barnhart & Peñaloza (2013)	Investigates how elderly consumers negotiate their identity and the role of consumption in this process.
Carrington & Ozanne (2022)	Examines the influence of celebrities on consumer behavior and identity formation across different life stages.
McAlexander et al. (2014)	Analyzes the intersection of religion and consumption, and how religious identity shapes consumer behavior.
Mick & Buhl (1992)	Proposes a meaning-based model of advertising experiences, highlighting the role of life themes in shaping consumer responses.
Mogilner, Aaker, & Kamvar (2012)	Investigates the relationship between happiness and consumer choice across different life stages.
Peterson (2001)	Discusses the limitations and insights of using college students as subjects in consumer research, relevant to studying life stages.
Schau, Gilly & Wolfinbarger (2009)	Explores the resurgence of identity-inspired consumption during retirement, a key life stage transition.
Sandikci & Ger (2010)	Examines how stigmatized practices, such as veiling, become fashionable and impact consumption across life stages.
Thompson, Henry, & Bardhi (2018)	Theorizes how lifestyle displacement and discordant performances of taste shape consumer behavior and identity.
Üstüner & Holt (2010)	Proposes a theory of status consumption in less industrialized countries, relevant to understanding life stage influences.
Weinberger, Zavisca, & Silva (2017)	Investigates middle-class consumer lifestyles and exploratory experiences during the transition to adulthood.

### **2.3.1. Younger Life Stages and ‘Fitting In’ Benefits Focus**

A lot of individuals worry excessively about their appearance when they are teenagers and young adults, when their social circles and love relationships are the most crucial. There is widespread agreement among psychologists that one's physical attractiveness has a significant role in one's social relationships. Being physically attractive, or having the "attraction advantage," implies that attractive people are more competent, as previously stated in this study. People who score higher on the attractiveness scale tend to move up in their careers and earn 20% more than ordinary workers (Nault et al., 2020). In an effort to fit in and be accepted, many teenagers go to extreme measures to fit into the norms and expectations of their social group.

Bullying has the potential to intensify individuals' inclination to adhere to prevailing societal norms of physical attractiveness, which frequently exhibit characteristics that are unattainable and idolized driving many to pursue cosmetic surgery motivated by a desire to conform to societal norms and attain social approval (NewsRX, 2017). The influence of media and celebrities on adolescents is often defined by their exposure to visual depictions and prominent individuals who embody societal standards of beauty (Walker et al., 2019). The continuous juxtaposition with unachievable benchmarks, along with occurrences of bullying, can amplify an adolescents' tendency towards exploring cosmetic procedures (Furnham & Levitas, 2012; Swami, 2009; Walker et al., 2019).

An example of how a recognized supermodel, Gisele Bündchen, struggled with feeling the pressures of beauty in society. In her 2018 release "Lessons: My Path to a Meaningful Life," Gisele shares her memoir about her life and struggles with her looks and fitting in. In 2015, she regretted having cosmetic surgery. "I woke up regretful and disbelieving. "I felt estranged from my body," she told People. She hid under baggy clothes for nearly a year following the treatment due to discomfort and self-doubt. Gisele admitted that she craved external approval as a child. "I

urgently wanted acceptance.” “I wanted to please everyone,” she told The Guardian. Her incessant need for approval and anxiety and panic attacks may have led her to plastic surgery. As other users of social networking sites view and comment on adolescent body modification photos, the technique is influenced by communication and social media (Siibak, 2009). Objectifying comments and views on adolescent profiles on social media may put pressure on them to maintain a certain physical look (de Vries et al., 2014).

The objectification theory of cosmetic surgery states that peer pressure and media portrayals of attractive people would lead individuals to seek out such procedures (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). The majority of people would like to improve their appearance someday (Pempek et al., 2009). The need to appear attractive causes people to overdo it on their diets and workouts, say Fredrickson and Roberts (1997) and Moradi (2010). According to Slevec and Tiggemann (2010), there is evidence that many studies have linked beauty standards with attitudes and behaviors related to cosmetic surgery. Because of the objectification of people on social media, adolescents may develop indirect expectations about physical appearance. Teens' increased propensity to partake in risky social media use with an emphasis on physical attractiveness is consistent with previous research (Saiphoo and Vahedi, 2019). When Siibak (2009) polled teens in Estonia about their social media profile pictures, they discovered that "good looks" were the top consideration. Most young people, especially women, "untag" themselves from friend photos when they do not like them (Pottek et al., 2009). Sometimes, to present themselves more positively, teenagers will edit their social media accounts (Ringrose, 2011).

Research suggests that kids may feel pressured to conform to social media norms in order to gain followers, likes, and positive comments on their posts. More than 64,000 cosmetic surgeries

were conducted on patients aged 13–19 in 2015, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS).

Among teenagers, the most common cosmetic procedures included nose reshaping, male breast reduction for teenage boys with large breasts, breast augmentation, ear surgery, and liposuction. A study conducted by Ishigooka et al. (1998) found a correlation between an excessive fixation with physical attractiveness and impaired social functioning, with a specific focus on those with mental disorders. The researchers hypothesized that individuals who place a significant priority on their physical appearance may have challenges in their social relationships and general functioning. Sixty individuals in the study had previously undergone a minimum of three cosmetic surgical procedures prior to their research implying that underlying reasons for individuals undergoing many cosmetic surgeries are likely to be complex and varied (Ishigooka et al., 1998). While it is acknowledged that certain individuals who pursue cosmetic surgery may be motivated by issues about body dysmorphic disorder or other mental health conditions, some studies suggest that a considerable proportion of persons who get cosmetic surgery do not necessarily exhibit symptoms of a clinically diagnosable mental issue. The impact of societal and cultural expectations about adherence to traditional beauty ideals can significantly shape individuals' choices to pursue cosmetic interventions, particularly throughout their formative years and early adulthood when social validation and assimilation hold utmost significance (de Vries et al., 2014).

The ASPS research also found that 44% of cosmetic surgery patients were moms and daughters. I posit that family members support cosmetic modifications to ensure their children obtain confidence and are accepted by peers. Additionally, older people had more cosmetic surgery with females wanting 91% of cosmetic operations. The findings indicate that women have

elective cosmetic procedures at different ages (ASPS, 2015). Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, when consumers focus more on more advanced life stage results in consumers focusing less on fitting in.

***Fitting In and Characteristics of Being Young.*** Rapid development is a characteristic of adolescence, and many aspects of this stage increase teens' consciousness of their bodies and the way they look. Adolescence, the impact of friends and peers, the pursuit of romantic partnerships, and maturing self-awareness all play a role (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2015). In addition, young people are under intense pressure to meet the beauty standards propagated by the media, particularly television, movies, and social media (Groesz et al., 2002). Because of how pervasive these difficulties are in the lives of today's youth, issues related to body image are often cited as among the most pressing problems facing today's youth (Maymone et al., 2019). Individuals who possess a positive body image demonstrate a deep sense of acceptance and appreciation for their bodies, placing greater importance on their functionality rather than just their appearance (Ricciardelli & Yager, 2015). They have strong self-confidence, retain a positive mindset regarding their relationship with food, and display perseverance in the face of cultural and media influences. As per Ricciardelli & Yager (2015), those individuals who have worries about their body image tend to excessively value their physical appearance, weight, size, or shape. They frequently avoid social and personal situations in which they expect to be evaluated based on their physical characteristics.

Even though Facebook states that users must be 13 or older to use the site, there are estimates that over 7.5 million children under the age of 13 also have accounts. In August 2023, Statista reported that 23.6% of Facebook users in the US were in the 25–34 age range, making

up Facebook's biggest audience in the nation. The smallest audience was among teens, with approximately 1 in 20 users falling into that age bracket.

The extent of time that adolescents and young adults dedicate to utilizing electronic media is rather significant. On average, individuals between the ages of 11 and 18 “spend more than 11 hours per day engaged” on gaming/media (Kaiser Family Foundation 2010). According to Pempek et al. (2009), late teens and emerging adults spend an average of around 30 minutes per day exclusively on Facebook. A significant number of teenagers commence and conclude their day by perusing social networking service (SNS) updates. Moreover, the usage of social networking sites often interrupts the solitary activities and ongoing face-to-face encounters of adolescents. The ubiquity of social networking site (SNS) usage among adolescents is undeniable. However, the effects on their personal growth and social interactions are just beginning to be comprehended. In the tourism industry around the world, Millennials are an important group of customers. Millennial customers know a lot about technology (Nowak et al., 2006) and often use social media to get information and make choices (Bolton et al., 2013). Millennial buyers are more likely than people from other age groups to compare themselves to others, according to several news sources. Also, when they see posts from their friends on social media, they are more likely to feel jealous (Krasnova et al., 2013).

While computers were originally created for adults, teens and young adults have adopted these technologies for their own social reasons. They are often the most knowledgeable in their families about how to use computers and social networking sites (SNSs). At first, teens and young adults were the main users of social networking sites (SNSs) like Facebook and MySpace (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014), by 2020, internet users aged 15 to 25 were on Instagram using the popular photo-sharing app. Even though Snapchat is more popular now, Facebook still dominated

with the largest audience. When asked to rate the most important social network sites they use, teenagers (mean age: 16) rated Snapchat, Instagram, and Twitter as more important than Facebook.

Consumer behavior is shaped by a multitude of psychological and social factors, including the inclination to adhere to societal or group standards. Individuals frequently strive to assimilate into specific social or status cohorts, since this can afford them a feeling of inclusion, approval, and acknowledgment (Meier & Johnson, 2022). According to O'Neil-Hart and Blumenstein (2016), a significant majority of teenage YouTube users, specifically 70%, consider YouTube influencers as their equals. Additionally, 60% of YouTube users prefer to follow the recommendations of these influencers when it comes to purchasing decisions, rather than relying on guidance from traditional celebrities in TV or movies. Put simply, "blending in" motivates consumers to assign higher significance to the utilitarian or pragmatic features of items or services that are linked to a specific level of social standing. Even individuals seeking acceptance from their peers of accomplished professionals may place great importance on the practicality of a top-tier device regarded as a symbol of prestige within that social circle. These are examples of the pragmatic advantages of the product heightened by their aspiration to belong to that social group. This phenomenon is frequently observed in the field of marketing and consumer behavior, where the convergence of consumers' longing for social approval and their evaluation of a product's usefulness impacts their choices and preferences when buying. Marketers frequently leverage this understanding to develop and market items that cater to consumers' cravings for both social validation and utility.

**Hypothesis 9: Increases in consumer life stage are negatively associated with increases in the importance of attractiveness creating 'fitting in' benefits.**



The desire to fit in and look cool is often motivated by the fundamental human need for social acceptance and a feeling of connection. During the period of youth, particularly in adolescence, peer interactions have a crucial influence on the formation of one's self-identity (Phalet & Baysu, 2020). Being regarded as cool by one's peers can amplify one's perception of social identity and inclusion, serving as a substantial means of validation and self-esteem (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018). The urge to assimilate and be fashionable can result in falling to peer pressure and following. Adolescents may be inclined to adopt specific behaviors, styles, or interests in order to belong to the perceived norms of their peer group (Valkenburg et al., 2006). This can influence their preferences in attire, hobbies, and even their engagement in activities they may not really enjoy. Fitting in and being considered cool often involves keeping up with current trends and pop culture (Crosnoe & Johnson, 2011).

Young people may closely follow fashion trends, music, and popular activities to ensure they are coordinated with the latest cool trends. This can result in spending on trendy clothes, attending popular events, or engaging with specific forms of social media. Social media platforms have become crucial in the modern era for anybody seeking to cultivate a cool image (Meier & Gray, 2014). Adolescents meticulously shape their online identities and accounts to project an image that corresponds to their individual concept of coolness. This may encompass meticulously selected photographs, curated content, and a focus on activities or experiences that effectively communicate a particular image (McLean et al., 2015).

The pursuit of being perceived as cool might occasionally result in difficulties with authenticity. Adolescents may experience pressure to portray a phony or inauthentic image, leading to emotional and psychological repercussions (Wang et al., 2023). Striking a balance between the desire to conform and the need to maintain integrity can present a multifaceted

dilemma in adolescence. Adolescents frequently explore numerous identities, test out diverse hobbies, and participate in various activities in order to discover their own self and striving for coolness can serve as a catalyst in this endeavor. Parents and guardians frequently have a significant role in providing guidance and support to young individuals as they negotiate the intricacies of social integration and the pursuit of popularity. They can offer counsel on achieving a healthy balance between assimilating with peers and retaining one's values and authenticity. The driving force for this behavior stems from the desire for peer approval, social belonging, and personal esteem. Adolescents frequently face the challenge of balancing societal expectations with their own self-discovery, and parental advice can assist them throughout this transformative stage.

***Fitting In and Stronger Envy of Social Media Influencers.*** Social media influencers often curate content that highlights an idealized version of their lives. This content can be highly aspirational and present a lifestyle or image that many young individuals desire to emulate. As a result, wanting to be looked as cool and fit in can lead to a stronger sense of envy or aspiration towards these influencers (Chae, 2017). The pervasive nature of social media platforms has given rise to a comparative culture, where individuals often measure their own lives and achievements against the seemingly glamorous and exciting lives portrayed by influencers (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). This can result in feelings of inadequacy or envy when one perceives their own life as less exciting or less cool by comparison.

Many social media influencers endorse and promote products, luxury goods, and lifestyle choices and while they are recognized as authentic in their content delivery, there could be followers or critiques that find their post too positively curated (Jin & Ryu, 2020). The desire to fit in and be cool can lead young people to aspire to acquire these products and experiences as a means of achieving the influencer's level of coolness, potentially contributing to a consumerist

mindset. The strong emphasis on influencers and their portrayal of cool lifestyles can impact young individuals' self-image and self-esteem (Smith, 2000). Envy of influencers can lead a person to feel inadequate or feel low self-esteem, as their lifestyle or level of wealth and access could be unachievable for some youth.

The strong desire to emulate influencers can also influence young people's career and educational choices (Kim et al., 2022). They may be inclined to pursue careers in fields related to social media, marketing, or content creation, inspired by the perceived success and lifestyle of influencers. Recognizing the potential impact of envy related to social media influencers, many educators and parents are emphasizing the importance of teaching resilience and media literacy to young individuals (Lee, 2009). Lee (2009) states that the use of social media for young people was associated with improvements in well-being for extroverts. These improvements included boosts to self-esteem as well as reductions in feelings of loneliness and negative affect. On the other hand, introverts exhibited lower levels of well-being related to these same characteristics.

To address the sense of envy and aspiration towards influencers, young individuals are encouraged to maintain their authenticity and prioritize personal values and goals. The ability to admire influencers without feeling compelled to imitate them is a sign of emotional maturity and self-assuredness. The connection between fitting in and the stronger envy of social media influencers underscores the complex influence of digital culture on young people's perceptions of coolness and aspiration. Recognizing and addressing the emotional impact of envy while promoting resilience and authenticity is essential in helping young individuals navigate the digital landscape and maintain their well-being (Lee, 2009).

**Hypothesis 10: Increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with 'fitting in' are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.**

### **2.3.2. Older Life Stages and ‘Career Opportunities’ Benefits Focus**

According to the United States Census Bureau (2018), it is estimated that by 2030, over 20% of the population in the United States will be aged 65 or older. This is an increase from 13% in 2010 and 9.8% in 1970. In comparison, the United Kingdom is projected to have a slightly greater proportion, with 26% of the population being over 65. China, Japan, and Korea are globally recognized as the nations with the most rapid aging populations, with individuals aged 65 and over constituting over 30% of their total population. Hence, marketers find this demographic trend highly intriguing due to the larger market size and economic influence of older consumers. Additionally, older consumers own a greater degree of control over household assets compared to younger individuals (Yoon & Cole, 2008). The diverse consumer behaviors exhibited by mature individuals, their decision-making procedures, and the impact of various psycho-social factors on their specific consumer attitudes and behaviors can depend on many aspects of life including, career mobility, family matters, health, wealth management and retirement to name a few. Many brands utilize different marketing strategies targeted towards senior customers. (Yannopoulou et al., 2023) enhances the conversation about the mature consumer market by expanding the concept not just by biological age, but also the psychological, social, and biological elements, as well as life experiences and circumstances.

Mature consumers remain under-researched (Moschis, 2012). Some studies indicate that older consumers possess a distinct consumer identification process (Schau et al., 2009). This finding suggests that marketers should focus on creating more refined customer segmentation in order to tailor marketing communications specifically for this group. The marketing concept of the “digital divide” (Parsons & Hick, 2008) has been used to study mature consumers, however segmenting them based on their digital technology access is risky. According to recent studies, such as Medlock et al. (2015) and Nunan & Di Domenico (2019), older consumers are more likely

to use social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube for both socializing and finding health-related information. Facebook was the best medium for targeting an older audience, according to Statistica. Half of the 47 million American elders are active Facebook users, according to Senior Living.

They are on social media and being influenced just like their younger peers by social media influencers or experts in their fields. Although ageism exists in our society, as mature consumers are living longer and taking care of their health and being productive members of society, this demographic group can no longer be ignored. Back in the 1960s, the Women's Liberation Movement made a lot of changes in society, including improvements in women's rights, gender equality, and the recognition of women's power and autonomy (Lee & Clark, 2014). Along with its focus on challenging traditional gender roles and fighting for women's rights and jobs, the movement had a big effect on how people saw beauty and how they tried to get it. As women tried to break away from society's expectations and find their own identities, the idea of beauty changed from being a passive, objectified concept to one that gave women the freedom to use their bodies and looks as a way to express themselves and gain power (Rothman & Rothman, 2004). Several crucial marketing strategies were implemented between the 1960s and the 1980s, according to research by Lee & Clark (2014), which examined women's magazines and revealed the most popular plastic surgery operations. The invention of silicone implants in 1962 was a pivotal factor in the development of contemporary plastic surgery (ASPS, 2013b).

In 1982, liposuction was introduced, which is another controversial but evolutionary technique (News-Medical.Net, 2013). Efforts were made in the 1980s by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons to raise public awareness and provide easier access to information regarding plastic surgery (ASPS, 2013b). Consequently, doctors were finally able to market the surgery

according to a 1982 Supreme Court ruling (Hennink-Kaminski & Reichert, 2011). The phenomenon of sexual objectification of women holds significant influence within the context of contemporary 'choice feminism' or 'post-feminism' (Hatton & Trautner, 2012). The research by Hatton & Trautner explains the beliefs that any action undertaken by women, such as opting for breast augmentation, featuring in nude magazine covers, or engaging in extreme dieting, can be considered feminist. In contrast to the stance advocated during the 1970s, wherein these images were debated as instances of objectification, contemporary perceptions, especially within the realm of popular culture, often normalize these activities. Feminist academics have debated cosmetic surgery's impact on women. This debate includes several viewpoints such as cosmetic surgery has been studied for its psychological and economic benefits for women. Davis (1995) and Kuczynski (2006) argue that women should have control over their bodies and emotions and women can choose cosmetic surgery to improve their self-esteem, a sort of choice feminism. Cosmetic surgery may reinforce patriarchal society's subordination of women, according to feminist experts. Women feel pressure to conform to beauty standards, leading to cosmetic changes (Schettino et al., 2023). Thus, male-dominated norms maintain their subjection.

Morgan (1991) argues that cosmetic surgery reinforces patriarchy, Eurocentrism, and white supremacy by forcing women to comply. Naomi Wolf, an American feminist, expounds upon the concept of the beauty myth in her literary work. Within this text, Wolf posits that the notion of beauty functions as a strategic tool devised by the patriarchal "male gaze" and global capitalism, with the explicit intention of exerting control over women. Wolf (1991) views cosmetic surgery as violence against women and altering women's bodies to fit society's beauty standards (Gottschall et al., 2008). It is intriguing to observe the varying perspectives on beauty held by different social groupings. Women are consistently the primary center of attention when it comes

to physical appearance, regardless of cultural differences (Gottschall et al., 2008). Online platforms have been found to exacerbate societal expectations of the ideal female image by leveraging technology to construct a flawless depiction of women that conforms to prevailing norms, thereby restricting the diverse range of aesthetics that women possess into a singular notion of perfection (Qihang et al., 2022).

As Bordo (2003) notes, celebrities' age-defying and forever youthful appearances are hard for the average middle-aged woman to achieve. As women compare themselves to unrealistic age-related norms in the media, they may develop body dissatisfaction and aging anxiety. Media and advertising perpetuate upward comparison when middle-aged women compare themselves to unreachable celebrity ideals (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). Constant comparison can lower a woman's self-esteem and cause pressure to reach unrealistic beauty standards. Thus, cosmetic surgery may seem like a tempting option to obtain the youthful, perfect look of female influencers. Media portrays middle-aged beauty as desirable, happy, wealthy, and successful, exacerbating the issue (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). Internalizing these signals may strengthen the idea that beauty equals self-worth, leading some middle-aged women to think their value and social acceptance depend on their appearance (Lee & Clark, 2014). Thus, cosmetic surgery may help them acquire acceptability in a youth-focused society by improving their appearance (Furnham & Levitas, 2012). It is interesting to point out that the narratives examined in the study by Lee & Clark (2014), whereby top women's magazines presented beauty ideals that were perceived as unquestionable and unassailable, characterized by youthfulness, physical fitness, firm skin, and ample breast size.

Over the course of three decades and spanning three publications, the discourse surrounding cosmetic surgery has been constructed on the premise that conforming to prevailing beauty standards is essential for attaining attractiveness and happiness. Furthermore, the discourse

surrounding cosmetic surgery has suggested a correlation between women's physical appearance and their potential for success and competitiveness in the labor market, particularly in light of the increasing presence of career-oriented women since the 1970s (Lee & Clark, 2014). Previous feminist scholars have argued that the normalizing of cosmetic surgery can be attributed to the construction of narrative connections between women's looks, success, happiness, and the practice of cosmetic surgery (Morgan, 1991; Wolf, 1991). The emphasis on looks as a predictor of success and pleasure can have far-reaching effects beyond individual psychology (Lee & Clark, 2014). It promotes ageism and values young beauty over wisdom and experience. Women may feel pushed to prioritize their beauty above other parts of their lives and job progress due to society's emphasis on physical attractiveness (Sarwer, 2019).

Cosmetic surgery's rise from luxury to a mainstream alternative shows a shift in society's view on appearance and self-improvement (Lee & Clark, 2014). As beauty standards have changed, more people from different professions and living situations are choosing cosmetic surgery to improve their appearance and self-confidence. Attractiveness investment uniquely predicts social incentives and cosmetic surgery contemplation (Slevec & Tiggemann, 2010). It is well-known that one's outward appearance impacts one's social relationships and self-perception (Sarwer, 2019; Sarwer & Crerand, 2004), and Western women have been conditioned to place a high value on physical attractiveness (Saucier, 2004). Slevec and Tiggemann (2010) found that some middle-aged women may seek out cosmetic surgery as a means to avoid body dissatisfaction and maintain self-esteem. This trend might grow in popularity as cosmetic procedures gain acceptance (Lee & Clark, 2014).

Anxiety about getting older was a positive and unique predictor of social reasons for cosmetic surgery. This means that middle-aged women may get these procedures to improve their



social lives by getting better jobs (Saucier, 2004) and dating opportunities (Didie & Sarwer, 2003). Anxiety about getting older was also linked to thinking about the future. This suggests that being unhappy with your body and caring about how you look may lead to plastic surgery (Saucier, 2004). In businesses that value appearance, jobseekers may choose cosmetic surgery to boost their confidence and attractiveness. Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, when consumers have more advanced life stage results in consumers focusing more on career opportunities. Or, stated formally,

**Hypothesis 11: Increases in consumer life stage are positively associated with increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with career opportunities.**

Continuing this line of logic, consumers are giving considerable importance to their career advancement and prospects. Career aspirations are the objectives and aspirations that individuals have about their professional endeavors. Individuals may strive to enhance their professional trajectories, accomplish notable achievements, get job fulfillment, or secure occupational positions. Those who prioritize their professional prospects and progression are more likely to envy the professional career success of social media influencers. Thus, when consumers focus more on the benefits associated with attractiveness creating career opportunities, the consumers become more envious. Stated formally,

**Hypothesis 12: Increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with career opportunities are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.**

## **CHAPTER 3: METHOD**

In this method section, I provide a detailed account of how the structures were measured. Next, I provide an overview of the primary survey sample's summary data. Furthermore, I critically evaluate the analytical methodologies employed to analyze the gathered data that substantiates each model. Furthermore, I present a detailed explanation of the exploratory factor analysis and provide the loadings of the confirmatory factor analysis, along with other relevant model fit statistics. Furthermore, I provide an explanation of the path analysis coefficients and assess the model fit, determining whether the data aligns with the hypotheses for each individual model.

### **3.1 Research Design**

The topics investigated in this research require information from respondents who follow influencers, have considered cosmetic surgery, or have had a cosmetic procedure. There are no objective data sources for the constructs. All of them require self-reported information from consumers. Thus, this study uses a cross-sectional, online survey research design to have consumer respondents score validated scales from the literature on the different topics. In the rest of this section, I describe the sample, survey scale items, and statistical approaches used to analyze the collected data.

### **3.2 Sample Size**

A universal goal of survey research is to collect data representative of a population. Two of the most consistent flaws with survey research is “disregard for sampling error when determining sample size and disregard for response and non-response bias.” (Wunsch, 1986, p.31). For this study, the minimum number of survey respondents was determined using the G\*Power software (Soper). I used a priori method of power analysis to determine the minimal sample size required to determine the effect and the minimum sample size given the structural complexity of the model. I

looked at the number of variables in the models shown in Figures 1, 2, and 3. Figure 1 had the largest number of constructs, so I used that figure for calculating the needed minimum sample size. The anticipated effect size ( $f^2$ ) of .30, desired statistical power level of .95, number of latent variables of 2, number of observed variables of nine, and probability level of .05. Based on the parameters above, the G\*Power calculated a minimum sample size to be 147 respondents. As described in the next section, I surpassed that needed sample size, gathering data from 204 consumers.

### **3.3 Data Collection**

After obtaining university IRB approval (IRB-24-0473), I used the Qualtrics survey software to administer the questionnaire online. I first gathered responses from more than 150 college students and used that data to examine the scales. Then I gathered data for the main study from consumers (not students) who were affiliated with a popular cosmetic surgeon in the Northeastern United States. The cosmetic surgeon's office sent out an email to approximately a thousand consumers who were in their office database; the email invited them to participate in the survey and had a link to the survey. Data was collected over three weeks. 204 people completed the survey, which is approximately a 20 percent response rate.

### **3.4. Scale Item Measures**

Survey participants first answered questions on their demographics (age, biological sex, relationship status, income, religion/religiosity, and education). Then they answered questions that contained the scale items for each of the different constructs shown in Table 4: consumer behavioral intention, perceived influencer attractiveness, perceived influencer authenticity, perceived influencer coolness, consumer envy, attractiveness focus on career opportunities, and

attractiveness focus on fitting in. The survey measures are reflective and use five-point scales Likert scales ranging from “strongly disagree” = 1 to “strongly agree” = 5.

**Table 4. Construct Scale Items**

<p><b>Influencer Authenticity</b> (Kowalczyk and Pounders 2016, <i>Journal of Product &amp; Brand Management</i>; Moulard et al. 2015, <i>Psychology and Marketing</i>; Warren et al. 2019, <i>Journal of Marketing</i>). Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <p><i>Regarding the social media influencers' authenticity, to what extent would you say that the influencer _____”</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. is genuine</li> <li>2. seems real to me</li> <li>3. is authentic</li> <li>4. is trustworthy</li> </ol>
<p><b>Influencer Coolness</b> (Shalev and Morwitz 2012, <i>Journal of Consumer Research</i>; Warren et al. 2019, <i>Journal of Marketing</i>). Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <p><i>Regarding the social media influencers' coolness factor, to what extent would you say that they come across as _____”</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. cool</li> <li>2. captivating</li> <li>3. magnetic</li> <li>4. charismatic</li> </ol>
<p><b>Envy</b> – existing scale is on general situations of envy or social comparison, not envy itself toward a particular person (e.g., Buunk et al., 1990; Gibbons and Buunk, 1999). Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <p><i>When you think about the social media influencers you are familiar with, to what extent do you feel _____</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I find myself desiring the looks of the social media influencers that I follow.</li> <li>2. I desire the lifestyle portrayed by this person.</li> <li>3. I want to get what they have achieved</li> <li>4. I envy their success</li> </ol>

**Table 4. Construct Scale Items (continued)**

<p><b>Behavioral Intention</b> (Davis (1989); Hansen, Saradikis, &amp; Benson (2018); Manis and Choi (2018).) Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I intend to (or already did) follow their surgical recommendations.</li> <li>2. I intend to (or already did) follow their nonsurgical recommendations (such as Botox, mole removals, etc.)</li> <li>3. I plan to (or already did) share their posts with friends.</li> </ol>
<p><b>Fitting In</b> (Li et al, 2019 “Multidimensional Perceived Person-Group Fit Scale”). Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <p>To what extent do you agree that _____.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I worry about not being part of the popular crowd</li> <li>2. I feel insecure if I'm not part of a specific social circle</li> <li>3. I try hard to dress and act like the other people in my social group</li> <li>4. fit in better with people I'd like to hang out with</li> <li>5. feel more like I belong with the cool people</li> <li>6. be invited to more exclusive social activities if I looked more attractive, youthful, and healthy</li> </ol>
<p><b>Career Opportunities</b> (Savickas &amp; Porfeli, 2012). Scale: 1-5 Likert agreement (1 = “strongly disagree” to 5 = “strongly agree”).</p> <p>If someone looks more attractive/youthful/healthy at work, I believe people will treat them as if they _____.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. are more adaptive to needed organizational change</li> <li>2. can contribute more value to the company</li> <li>3. have more credibility are invited to important meetings/events</li> <li>4. shine at presentations</li> <li>5. get access to senior executives/exposure</li> </ol>
<p><b>Age (Consumer Life Stage Proxy)</b></p> <p>What is your age?</p> <p>18-24</p> <p>25-29</p> <p>30-34</p> <p>35-39</p>

**Table 4. Construct Scale Items (continued)**

40-44 45-49 50-54 55-59 60-64 65-69 70 or older
<p><b>Demographic - Biological Sex</b></p> <p>What is your biological sex?</p> <p>Female</p> <p>Male</p>
<p><b>Demographic - Income</b></p> <p>What is your household income (last year)?</p> <p>No income</p> <p>Less than \$20,000</p> <p>\$20,00 to \$39,999</p> <p>\$40,000 to \$59,999</p> <p>\$60,000 to \$79,999</p> <p>\$80,000 to \$99,999</p> <p>\$100,000 to \$149,000</p> <p>\$150,000 to \$199,000</p> <p>\$200,000 to \$249,000</p> <p>\$250,000 or more</p>

**Table 4. Construct Scale Items (continued)**

**Demographic - Ethnicity**

Ethnicity is defined as the shared origins, social background, culture, distinctive traditions, sense of identity and group, common language, and/or religious traditions. Which of the following ethnic groups do you strongly associate your ethnicity with? (*You can click more than one*).

African American/Black  
Caribbean  
Pacific Islander  
Native American  
Latino/Hispanic  
White North American  
White European  
White Middle Eastern  
East Asian  
South Asian  
Indian  
Other (please explain)

**Demographic – Marital Status**

What is your marital status?  
Single, not cohabitating  
Single, cohabitating  
Married  
Separated  
Divorced  
Widowed

**3.5. Model Specification**

The researchers employed structural equation modeling to predict the various route connections between the latent components, while also accounting for measurement error (Dellande et al., 2004; Grégoire & Fisher, 2006). I used the SmartPLS 4.0 program for the analysis, as documented by Ringle et al. (2022). The investigation employed a two-stage modeling technique, beginning with an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and followed by a confirmatory factor analysis. In the PLS-SEM study, I employed a standard bootstrap procedure with 5000 resamples to calculate the path coefficients and evaluate the significance of the parameter estimates (see to Sung, 2021;

Xiong et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020 for more details). This approach is consistent with the method proposed by Henseler, Ringle, and Sinkovics (2009). The T-values were calculated using a 5000-iteration bootstrapping method, and their significance levels were evaluated using a two-tailed distribution. The SEM technique enabled the simultaneous examination of the direct, specific indirect, and total effects for the probable mediation pathway in them.



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, the data analysis results are discussed in detail. First, a preliminary descriptive statistics analysis of the sample is provided. Then, the methodologies used to analyze the survey data are explained. A reliability test is conducted using coefficient Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the scales. Following that, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) is performed to evaluate the measurements used. I then used SmartPLS 4.0 software to conduct a partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) and correlation to analyze the data. There has been an increased number of published articles using PLS-SEM in marketing and other disciplines (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2011) whereby it is a valid predictive approach to estimating statistical models designed to provide causal explanations (Wold, 1982). PLS-SEM helps with using a causal-predictive approach to understanding the influence of the exogenous variables and based on all the constructs being reflective in the model, I applied the steps in Hair et al. for evaluating reflective models.

### 4.1 Sample Demographic Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics of the 204-participant survey sample are as follows. **Age:** 18-24 = 6.4%, 25-29 = 14.2%, 30-34 = 23.0%, 35-39 = 12.3%, 40-44 = 13.2%, 45-49 = 9.3%, 50-54 = 9.8%, 55-59 = 6.4%, 60-64 = 3.9%, 66-69 = 1.5%. **Income:** No income = 1.0%, Less than \$20,000 = 1.5%, \$20,00 to \$39,999 = 4.4%, \$40,000 to \$59,999 = 9.3%, \$60,000 to \$79,999 = 10.8%, \$80,000 to \$99,999 = 14.2%, \$100,000 to \$149,000 = 15.2%, \$150,000 to \$199,000 = 18.1%, \$200,000 to \$249,000 = 10.3%, \$250,000 or more = 15.2%. **Biological Sex:** Female = 96.6%, Male = 3.4%. **Race:** Hispanic/Latino = 23.5%. **Marital Status:** Single, not cohabitating = 28.9%, Single, cohabitating = 17.2%, Married = 46.6%, Separated = 2.5%, Divorced = 6.4%, Widowed = 1.0%.

**Education Level:** *high school* = 6.4%, *trade school certificate/degree*= 11.3%, *some college* = 20.6%, *college bachelors degree* = 40.2%, *masters degree* =17.6%, *doctoral degree* = 3.9%.

**Table 5. Demographic Description**

Variable	Category	N	%
<b>Respondent's Demographic</b>			
	<b>N</b>	<b>204</b>	
Age	18-24	13	6.4%
	25-29	29	14.2%
	30-34	47	23.0%
	35-39	25	12.3%
	40-44	27	13.2%
	45-49	19	9.3%
	50-54	20	9.8%
	55-59	13	6.4%
	60-64	8	3.9%
	65+	3	1.5%
Gender	Female	197	96.6%
	Male	7	3.4%
Race	White/Europe	63	31%
	Hispanic/Latino	48	23%
	White/Middle Eastern	23	11%
Marital Status	Single/Not cohabitating	59	29%
	Single/Cohabitating	35	17%
	Married	95	47%
	Separated	5	3%
	Divorced	13	6%
	Widowed	2	1%

## 4.2 Measurement Model Results

While I examined the data to ensure the results as shown in the path analysis below have loadings above 0.70 which indicates the construct explains more than 50 percent of the indicator's variance;

hence, confirming item reliability. Using Joreskog's (1971) composite reliability to measure internal consistency reliability the higher the values, the higher level of reliability.

I first examined the loadings of all the scale items on their constructs. As seen in Table 6, they all loaded correctly (greater than 0.70) and there were no significant cross loadings.

**Table 6. Construct Scale Item Loadings and Check of Potential Cross Loadings**

Scale Item	Attractive- ness	Authen- ticity	Behavioral Intention	Cool- ness	Envy	Life Stage	career opport	fitting in
Age	-0.27	-0.07	-0.06	-0.15	-0.31	1.00	-0.11	-0.25
Attractiveness_1	<b>0.89</b>	0.31	0.36	0.53	0.44	-0.26	0.30	0.21
Attractiveness_3	<b>0.90</b>	0.34	0.33	0.55	0.43	-0.19	0.17	0.16
Attractiveness_4	<b>0.90</b>	0.34	0.21	0.56	0.43	-0.33	0.23	0.20
Attractiveness_5	<b>0.84</b>	0.47	0.28	0.54	0.37	-0.17	0.21	0.16
Authenticity_1	0.38	<b>0.93</b>	0.34	0.47	0.31	-0.05	0.12	0.12
Authenticity_2	0.40	<b>0.93</b>	0.39	0.49	0.33	-0.05	0.17	0.15
Authenticity_3	0.38	<b>0.96</b>	0.42	0.47	0.31	-0.07	0.17	0.11
Authenticity_4	0.39	<b>0.91</b>	0.42	0.51	0.34	-0.07	0.20	0.18
Behavioral_Intent_1	0.30	0.41	<b>0.90</b>	0.35	0.32	0.02	0.27	0.27
Behavioral_Intent_2	0.28	0.35	<b>0.85</b>	0.26	0.28	-0.10	0.14	0.17
Behavioral_Intent_3	0.26	0.32	<b>0.81</b>	0.25	0.29	-0.09	0.20	0.22
Career_Opport_1	0.10	0.14	0.17	0.14	0.30	0.02	<b>0.77</b>	0.30
Career_Opport_2	0.25	0.17	0.22	0.21	0.32	-0.09	<b>0.88</b>	0.35
Career_Opport_3	0.26	0.12	0.15	0.25	0.35	-0.10	<b>0.89</b>	0.35
Career_Opport_4	0.22	0.12	0.20	0.24	0.29	-0.13	<b>0.87</b>	0.40
Career_Opport_5	0.27	0.26	0.29	0.33	0.35	-0.16	<b>0.85</b>	0.35
Career_Opport_6	0.20	0.11	0.20	0.20	0.34	-0.11	<b>0.85</b>	0.33
Coolness_1	0.54	0.52	0.37	<b>0.87</b>	0.48	-0.10	0.29	0.36

**Table 6. Construct Scale Item Loadings and Check of Potential Cross Loadings (continued)**

Scale Item	Attractive- ness	<u>Authen- ticity</u>	Behavioral Intention	Cool- ness	Envy	Life Stage	<u>career opport</u>	fitting in
Coolness_3	0.53	0.36	0.26	<b>0.84</b>	0.40	-0.11	0.20	0.24
Coolness_4	0.53	0.45	0.29	<b>0.93</b>	0.44	-0.14	0.26	0.34
Coolness_5	0.59	0.51	0.28	<b>0.90</b>	0.39	-0.17	0.21	0.28
Envy_1	0.52	0.36	0.34	0.48	<b>0.87</b>	-0.24	0.34	0.45
Envy_2	0.39	0.29	0.27	0.45	<b>0.92</b>	-0.29	0.33	0.47
Envy_3	0.41	0.29	0.30	0.43	<b>0.91</b>	-0.26	0.34	0.40
Envy_4	0.34	0.28	0.33	0.36	<b>0.84</b>	-0.30	0.34	0.54
Fitting_In_1	0.23	0.15	0.17	0.32	0.39	-0.27	0.36	<b>0.81</b>
Fitting_In_2	0.11	0.08	0.15	0.25	0.41	-0.22	0.27	<b>0.82</b>
Fitting_In_3	0.14	0.07	0.17	0.24	0.38	-0.18	0.25	<b>0.81</b>
Fitting_In_4	0.14	0.13	0.26	0.24	0.45	-0.22	0.31	<b>0.84</b>
Fitting_In_5	0.11	0.17	0.24	0.26	0.43	-0.18	0.34	<b>0.85</b>
Fitting_In_6	0.26	0.15	0.29	0.40	0.54	-0.20	0.45	<b>0.85</b>

With all items loading correctly, I next evaluated the measurement model. Part of the PLS-SEM analysis is a rule of thumb regarding evaluating the model results in reliability for exploratory research should be a minimum of 0.60; however, reliability for research that depends on established measures should be 0.70 or higher (Hair et al., 2019). The models are all reflective models with arrows (relationships) pointing from the construct to the observed indicators meaning that all indicators are highly correlated. I examined the construct reliability using Cronbach alphas ( $\alpha$ ), which need to be above 0.70 to indicate high reliability. I examined composite reliability (CR) to assess internal consistency, which needs to be above 0.80. I used the average variance extracted (AVE) to assess convergent validity, which needs to be at least 0.50. Assessing the convergent

validity of each construct I can explain if the constructs converge to explain the variance of each item or in other words examine the extent to which a measure correlates positively with alternative measures of the same construct (Hair Jr, Hult, Ringle & Sarstedt, 2016). As the model proposed, the outer loadings average variance extracted (AVE) values seem to be acceptable as the threshold for this measure is 0.50 or higher indicating that the constructs explain the variance of the items. As seen in Table 7, all the constructs met the criteria for  $\alpha$ , CR, and AVE, indicating reliability and validity.

**Table 7. Construct Reliability and Validity**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>rho_a</b>	<b>rho_c</b>	<b>AVE</b>
Attractiveness	0.91	0.91	0.93	0.78
Authenticity	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.87
Behavioral Intention	0.81	0.83	0.89	0.73
Coolness	0.91	0.91	0.94	0.79
Envy	0.91	0.91	0.93	0.78
Career Opportunities	0.93	0.93	0.94	0.73
Fitting In	0.91	0.91	0.93	0.69

### **4.3 Model Fit**

I examined the models shown in Figures 1 and 2 for model fit. I first ran the CB-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0 to acquire the RMSEA and CFI scores. I then ran the PLS-SEM in SmartPLS 4.0 to acquire the SRMR scores (and because I use PLS-SEM for structural modeling). Model fit is deemed acceptable usually if  $RMSEA < 0.08$ ,  $CFI > 0.85$ ,  $SRMR < 0.08$ . As seen in Table 8, the RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR are all good for the model shown in Figure 1. The RMSEA and CFI continue to remain good for the model shown in Figure 2. However, the SRMR is no longer below the 0.08

normal standard. However, this is to be expected given the additional complexity that was added to the model. Thus, overall model fit is still judged to be adequate.

**Table 8. Model Fit Statistics**

<b>Model Fit</b>	<b>Figure 1 Model</b>	<b>Figure 2 Model</b>
SRMR	0.06	0.19
RMSEA	0.08	0.08
CFI	0.90	0.86

#### **4.4 Common Source Bias and Discriminant Validity**

Common method bias is the amount of variation that may be attributed to the measurement method itself, rather than the concepts being measured. This variability might lead to inaccuracies in measurement and jeopardize the accuracy of the estimates of the actual relationship between theoretical constructs. Researchers recognize common method bias as a potential issue in studies that rely on self-report measures, such as survey questionnaires (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003; Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009).

I minimized the potential for common source bias by applying procedural remedies (psychological separation and physical separation on different survey pages with different headers) and statistical techniques mentioned in Viswanathan and Kayande (2012) and Podsakoff et al. (2003). I also followed the procedure of having all constructs become exogenous and load solely on an endogenous, generated random variable to test for common-methods variance concern (Lindell & Whitney, 2001; Richardson, Simmering, & Sturman, 2009). I examined the inner model VIF scores and they were all less than the 3.3 threshold (max = 1.77) when using a randomly generated dependent variable (that was created in the Excel csv file using the “=rand( )” function).

**Table 9. Inner Model VIF for Randomly Generated Dependent Variable**

	<b>VIF</b>
Attractiveness -> Random	1.52
Authenticity -> Random	1.20
Behavioral Intention -> Random	1.01
Coolness -> Random	1.16
Envy -> Random	1.77
Life Stage -> Random	1.15
career opportunities -> Random	1.21
fitting in -> Random	1.41

Discriminant validity is established using HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) scores, and the square root of AVE calculations, including the Fornell and Larcker's (1981) approach of examining if the square root of the AVE of each construct is greater than the correlations between variables; furthermore, the calculated HTMT scores need to be below the 0.90 threshold (see, e.g., Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015; Rönkkö & Cho, 2022) to indicate discriminant validity of the constructs. The HTMT is a mean value of the correlations for the items measuring the same construct. The normal standard is that if the HTMT values are high (meaning above 0.85), discriminant validity is not present. Bootstrapping can be applied to test if the HTMT value is different from 1.00 or if the upper bound of the 95 percent confidence interval of HTMT is lower than 0.90 or 0.85. As seen in Table 10, the largest HTMT score is 0.68 which is below the 0.90 threshold. Additionally, as seen in Table 11, the square root of the AVE of all constructs (shown on the diagonal) is greater than the correlations between constructs. Thus, discriminate validity is established.

**Table 10. HTMT Scores**

Construct	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1. Attractiveness	--						
2. Authenticity	0.45	--					
3. Behavioral Intention	0.39	0.48	--				
4. Coolness	0.68	0.56	0.39	--			
5. Envy	0.52	0.37	0.41	0.53	--		
6. Life Stage	0.28	0.07	0.09	0.15	0.32	--	
7. Career Opportunities	0.28	0.19	0.27	0.29	0.42	0.12	--
8. Fitting In	0.22	0.16	0.23	0.37	0.57	0.27	0.43

**Table 11. Comparison of Latent Variable Correlations with AVE Square Root**

	1	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Attractiveness	<b>0.88</b>							
2. Authenticity	0.41	<b>0.93</b>						
3. Behavioral Intention	0.33	0.42	<b>0.85</b>					
4. Coolness	0.62	0.52	0.34	<b>0.89</b>				
5. Envy	0.47	0.35	0.35	0.49	<b>0.88</b>			
6. Life Stage	-0.27	-0.07	-0.06	-0.15	-0.31	<b>1.00</b>		
7. career opportunities	0.26	0.18	0.24	0.27	0.38	-0.11	<b>0.85</b>	
8. fitting in	0.20	0.15	0.26	0.35	0.53	-0.25	0.40	<b>0.83</b>

**Note: AVE Square Roots are displayed on the diagonal in bold**

The goal of PLS-SEM is to maximize the explained variance ( $R^2$  Value). I evaluated the path coefficients to assess the predictive power and statistical significance of the relationships in the model. The value is assessed through a review of the coefficients of determination ( $R^2$  values).



**Table 12. Adjusted R-Square**

	<b>Figure 1</b>	<b>Figure 2</b>
Authenticity	0.17	0.17
Behavioral Intention	0.23	0.22
Coolness	0.47	0.46
Envy	0.29	0.44
Career Opportunities		0.01
Fitting In		0.06

***Note:** The additional antecedents of envy in Figure 2 result in a sizeable increase of the adjusted R-square value for envy.*

The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> of Envy does increase when the additional explanatory variables are added to the model in Figure 2.

**Table 13. F- Square**

Figure 1 Model	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Attractiveness		0.21		0.36	0.06
2. Authenticity			0.09	0.16	0.01
3. Intention					
4. Coolness			0.01		0.06
5. Envy			0.04		

Figure 2 Model	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Attractiveness		0.21		0.36	0.07			
2. Authenticity			0.09	0.16	0.01			
3. Intention								
4. Coolness			0.01		0.01			
5. Envy			0.04				0.07	
6. Life Stage							0.01	
7. Career Opportunities					0.02			
8. Fitting In					0.19			

**Note:** Effect sizes of less than 0.02 indicate that there is no effect (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 14. Construct Correlations**

	Authenticity	Career	Coolness	Envy	FittingIn	Lifestage
Authenticity	1.00	0.19	0.48	0.34	0.17	(0.06)
Career	0.19	1.00	0.30	0.39	0.41	(0.12)
Coolness	0.48	0.30	1.00	0.52	0.34	(0.16)
Envy	0.34	0.39	0.52	1.00	0.58	(0.33)
FittingIn	0.17	0.41	0.34	0.58	1.00	(0.26)
Lifestage	(0.06)	(0.12)	(0.16)	(0.33)	(0.26)	1.00

The correlations of constructs are reported in Table 14 above.

#### 4.5 Structural Model Results

I first ran separate PLS-SEM bootstrap models for H1 and H2 on authenticity (Model 1), H3 and H4 on coolness (Model 2), and H5 and H6 on envy (Model 3) to behavioral intention. And then I ran a combined model having authenticity and coolness (Model 4) and then a combined model having all of them together (Model 5). Those five models are shown in Table 15. I also ran the models with control variables for biological sex, race/ethnicity (Hispanic/Latino), and income. The biological sex variable made analysis impossible because 97% of the sample was female. The other two control variables did not have significant effects.

The results related to hypotheses 1 and 2 are contained in Models 1, 4, and 5; they support hypothesis 1 that Perceived Influencer attractiveness is positively associated with increases in Perceived Influencer Authenticity ( $p < .001$ ) and hypothesis 2 that Perceived Influencer Authenticity is positively associated with increases in behavioral intention ( $p < .001$ ). The results related to hypotheses 3 and 4 are contained in Models 2, 4, and 5; the results in Models 2 and 4 support hypothesis 3 that Perceived Influencer attractiveness is positively associated with increases in Perceived Influencer Coolness ( $p < .001$ ) and hypothesis 4 that Perceived Influencer Coolness is positively associated with increases in behavioral intention ( $p < .001$ ). However, in Model 5 the

connection from Coolness to Intention is no longer statistically significant once Envy is also included as a predictor of Intention—this is explored later in the mediation analysis. The results related to hypotheses 5 and 6 are contained in Models 3, 4, and 5; they support hypothesis 5 that Perceived Influencer attractiveness is positively associated with increases in Consumer Envy ( $p < .001$ ) and hypothesis 6 that Consumer Envy is positively associated with increases in behavioral intention ( $p < .001$ ).

**Table 15. Hypothesized Main Effects in Figure 1**

Path	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
H1 Attractiveness -> Authenticity	0.43 (0.06) ***			0.42 (0.07) ***	0.41 (0.07) ***
H2 Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.42 (0.06) ***			0.34 (0.08) ***	0.31 (0.08) ***
H3 Attractiveness -> Coolness		0.62 (0.05) ***		0.62 (0.05) ***	0.62 (0.05) ***
H4 Coolness -> Behavioral Intention		0.34 (0.06) ***		0.17 (0.07) *	0.08 (0.08) <sup>ns</sup>
H5 Attractiveness -> Envy			0.48 (0.06) ***		0.48 (0.06) ***
H6 Envy -> Behavioral Intention			0.35 (0.06) ***		0.21 (0.07) **

**Note: Std Deviation is reported in the parenthesis.  $p < 0.001 = ***$ ,  $p < 0.01 = **$ ,  $p < 0.05 = *$ ,  $p < 0.10 = ^T$ ,  $p > 0.1 = ^{ns}$  (not significant)**

Next, I examined hypotheses 7 and 8 look more closely at Perceived Influencer Coolness, Consumer Envy, and Behavioral Intention. As noted earlier, when both coolness and envy are simultaneously estimated, the paths from coolness to intention are no longer statistically significant, as shown in Model 5 of Table 15. To test if it is due to mediation, the PLS-SEM bootstrap was next run on the model shown in Figure 2 in which there is a path added from coolness to envy. Looking at Table 16, there is a significant direct path from coolness to envy ( $\beta = 0.32$ , STDEV = 0.09,  $T = 3.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting hypothesis 7. As to hypothesis 8 on mediation, the combination of the Direct Effects in Table 14, Total Effects in Table 15, and Specific Partial Effects in Table 16 together indicate that mediation has occurred. In detail, mediation analysis was examined using the hypothesized mediating role of envy on the linkage between coolness and intention. The total effect of coolness (Table 17) on intention was significant ( $\beta = 0.15$ , STDEV = 0.07,  $T = 2.1$ ,  $p < 0.04$ ) but the direct effect of coolness on intention (Table 16) is not significant ( $\beta = 0.08$ , STDEV = 0.08,  $T = 1.0$ ,  $p = 0.30$ ) while the specific indirect effect of coolness on intention through envy (Table 18) is significant ( $\beta = 0.07$ , STDEV = 0.03,  $T = 2.1$ ,  $p = 0.04$ ). This indicates the relationship between coolness and intention is fully mediated by envy.

**Table 16. Direct Effects for Figure 2 Model**

Path	Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
Attractiveness -> Authenticity	0.41	0.07	6.3	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Coolness	0.62	0.05	12.9	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Envy	0.28	0.08	3.4	0.001
Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.31	0.08	4.0	<0.001
Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.08	0.08	1.0	0.301
Coolness -> Envy	0.32	0.09	3.6	<0.001
Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.21	0.07	2.8	0.005

**Table 17. Total Effects for Figure 2 Model**

	Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
Attractiveness -> Authenticity	0.41	0.07	6.3	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Behavioral Intention	0.27	0.05	5.9	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Coolness	0.62	0.05	12.9	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Envy	0.48	0.06	8.3	<0.001
Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.31	0.08	4.0	<0.001
Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.15	0.07	2.1	0.037
Coolness -> Envy	0.32	0.09	3.6	<0.001
Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.21	0.07	2.8	0.005

**Table 18. Indirect Specific Effects for Figure 2 Model**

	Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
Attractiveness -> Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.13	0.04	3.4	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Envy	0.20	0.06	3.3	<0.001
Coolness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.07	0.03	2.1	0.040
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.04	0.02	2.0	0.048
Attractiveness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.06	0.03	2.1	0.032
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.05	0.05	1.0	0.305

Next, I examined hypotheses 9, 10, 11, 12 related to consumer life stage and attractiveness benefits as they impact envy as shown in Figure 3. As seen in Table 19, I find support for hypotheses 9 and 10. In particular, there is a significant negative relationship between consumer life stage advancement (getting older) and a focus on attractiveness fitting in benefits ( $\beta = -0.25$ , STDEV = 0.06,  $T = 4.4$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, there is a significant positive relationship between a focus on attractiveness fitting in benefits and envy ( $\beta = 0.37$ , STDEV = 0.06,  $T = 6.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In contrast, I do not find support for hypothesis 11 on consumer life stage and attractiveness of career opportunities focus ( $\beta = -0.11$ , STDEV = 0.07,  $T = 1.6$ ,  $p = 0.11$ ). I do find marginal support for hypothesis 12 on attractiveness career opportunities focus and envy ( $\beta = 0.12$ , STDEV = 0.06,  $T = 1.9$ ,  $p = 0.063$ ). The rest of the hypotheses' support remains consistent when these new variables are added to the model, as seen in Tables 19, 20, and 21.

**Table 19. Direct Effects for Figure 3 Model**

		Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
	Attractiveness -> Authenticity	0.41	0.07	6.3	<0.001
	Attractiveness -> Coolness	0.62	0.05	12.9	<0.001
	Attractiveness -> Envy	0.26	0.07	3.7	<0.001
	Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.31	0.08	4.0	<0.001
	Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.08	0.08	1.0	0.298
	Coolness -> Envy	0.16	0.09	1.9	0.053
	Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.21	0.07	2.9	0.004
H9	Life Stage -> Fitting In	-0.25	0.06	4.4	<0.001
H10	Fitting In -> Envy	0.37	0.06	6.6	<0.001
H11	Life Stage -> Career Opportunities	-0.11	0.07	1.6	0.113
H12	Career Opportunities -> Envy	0.12	0.07	1.9	0.063



**Table 20. Total Effects for Figure 3 Model**

	Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
Attractiveness -> Behavioral Intention	0.25	0.05	5.6	<0.001
Attractiveness -> Envy	0.10	0.05	1.9	0.063
Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.03	0.02	1.5	0.146
Life Stage -> Behavioral Intention	-0.02	0.01	2.0	0.045
Life Stage -> Envy	-0.11	0.03	3.4	0.001
Career Opportunities -> Behavioral Intention	0.03	0.02	1.5	0.143
Fitting In -> Behavioral Intention	0.08	0.03	2.5	0.012

**Table 21. Indirect Specific Effects for Figure 3 Model**

	Coefficient	STDEV	T stat	P value
Attractiveness -> Authenticity -> Behavioral Intention	0.13	0.04	3.4	0.001
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Envy	0.10	0.05	1.9	0.063
Coolness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.03	0.02	1.5	0.146
Life Stage -> career opportunities -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.00	0.00	0.9	0.362
Life Stage -> fitting in -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	-0.02	0.01	2.0	0.045
Life Stage -> fitting in -> Envy	-0.09	0.03	3.3	0.001
Life Stage -> career opportunities -> Envy	-0.01	0.01	1.1	0.293
career opportunities -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.03	0.02	1.5	0.143
fitting in -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.08	0.03	2.5	0.012
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.02	0.02	1.4	0.158
Attractiveness -> Envy -> Behavioral Intention	0.06	0.02	2.2	0.025
Attractiveness -> Coolness -> Behavioral Intention	0.05	0.05	1.0	0.303

**Table 22. Summary of Supported Hypotheses**

<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Support</b>
H1	Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer authenticity.	Yes
H2	Increases in perceived influencer authenticity are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.	Yes
H3	Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer coolness.	Yes
H4	Increases in perceived influencer coolness are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.	Yes
H5	Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.	Yes
H6	Increases in consumer envy are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.	Yes
H7	Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.	Yes
H8	Consumer envy mediates the relationship between perceived influencer coolness and consumer behavioral intention.	Yes
H9	Increases in consumer life stage are negatively associated with increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with ‘fitting in’.	Yes
H10	Increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with ‘fitting in’ are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.	Yes
H11	Increases in consumer life stage are positively associated with increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with career opportunity.	No
H12	Increases in the importance of attractiveness benefits associated with career opportunities are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.	Yes

A summary of whether the support was found for each of the twelve hypotheses is contained in Table 22, with the results of the analysis supporting 11 out of the 12 hypotheses.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

This chapter highlights the research findings organized into five distinct parts. In the first portion of the study, we have a research overview. Then, in the second section, we analyze the findings of the proposed research model. Section three covers theoretical and managerial contributions as well as the literature, while sections four and five address the study's limitations, possible future research directions, and concluding remarks.

### **5.1. Overview**

The primary objective of this study contributes to the ongoing discourse regarding the key determinants that prompt consumers to adhere to and act upon recommendations made by social media influencers. Additionally, to explain possible life influences, the study sought to understand the reasons that consumers have for wanting to improve their attractiveness (Lange & Crusius, 2015). First, this study addressed the aforementioned literature gap by empirically evaluating the extent to which the attractiveness “advantage” of a social media influencer can lead followers to view influencers as more authentic, and cooler than other media celebrities (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016). There is a positive association between the attractiveness of an influencer and the perceptions of authenticity and coolness, as well as an increase in envy among followers (Arnocky et al., 2015; Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016; Warren et al., 2019). Second, the study investigated how each of the factors (attractiveness, authenticity, coolness, and envy) independently contributes to increasing consumers’ behavioral intention (Sellers, 2019). Upon closer examination, it becomes evident that envy acts as a mediator between coolness and intention when considered collectively. Third, the research reveals that there is a negative association between the life stage of the consumer and the importance placed on fitting in. This suggests that younger consumers are more concerned about fitting in than their older counterparts (Spies Shapiro & Margolin, 2014). It

is interesting to note that the relationship between the life stage of the consumer and the emphasis placed on career opportunities does not yield statistical significance, suggesting its relevance across a variety of age groups. Finally, the study also investigated how both aspects of attractiveness, whether centered around fitting in or career opportunities, exhibit a correlation with increased envy among followers. The findings derived from this study can provide valuable guidance for both researchers and professionals, enhancing their understanding of the underlying causes that drive consumers to associate themselves with social media influencers. In this chapter, we explore the significant findings uncovered through the survey, providing insight into the underlying processes.

## **5.2. Key Research Findings**

As seen in Table 22, the results of the research study support nearly all of the hypotheses.

***Hypothesis 1. Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer authenticity.*** There is evidence to support the theory that the attractiveness of social media influencers has a role in drawing in and keeping the attention of followers toward the sponsored brands (Lou et al., 2022). People are more likely to believe a social media influencer if they find them physically attractive (Kim & Kim, 2021). Because of their charisma and the ease with which their followers may relate to them, influencers are great brand advocates (Lefebvre & Cowart, 2021). According to Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016), an authentic post or photo shows a part of the real self of the star. People are more likely to believe social media influencers when they think they are attractive.

***Hypothesis 2. Increases in perceived influencer authenticity are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.*** The results of the data analysis are consistent with the idea that influencers that demonstrate honesty and refrain from misrepresenting their

affiliation with brands have been found to improve subjective wellbeing (Reinecke & Trepte's study in 2014). According to research (Labrecque et al., 2011; Moulard et al., 2016; Napoli et al., 2014), among other benefits, authenticity boosts message receptivity, perceived quality, and purchase intentions.

As previously mentioned, influencers played a significant role in 19% of U.S. purchases in 2018 (Audrezet & Charry, 2019), with 40% of those purchases being influenced by Instagram or YouTube (Digital Marketing Institute, 2019). Fink et al. (2020) further demonstrated that the perceived credibility of influencers positively impacts purchase intention. In essence, when consumers perceive social media influencers as more authentic, they are more inclined to follow their recommendations.

***Hypothesis 3. Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in perceived influencer coolness.*** This study supports the idea that there is a positive relationship between perceived influencer attractiveness and perceived influencer coolness. This is consistent with prior research that shows attractiveness contributes to coolness (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018) and is socially desired (Li et al., 2019). Attractive people require less aspects of coolness to be cool (Dar-Nimrod et al., 2018). Customers are drawn to attractive devices and think they're cool (Kim & Park, 2019). For example, successful businesses like Apple and Harley Davidson have long employed strong visual design and styling to make their products attractive (Kim & Park, 2019; Kim et al., 2015) and cool (Warren & Campbell, 2014).

***Hypothesis 4. Increases in perceived influencer coolness are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.*** The results of this study support the notion that there exists a positive relationship between the perceived influencer coolness and the consumer's behavioral intention to follow the suggestions made by said influencer on social media. As

previously stated, research suggests that cool brands are seen as exceptional, visually attractive, dynamic, prestigious, defiant, innovative, genuine, subcultural, iconic, and popular (Warren et al., 2019). Brand coolness has a significant impact on key end factors, including customers' views, contentment, their intention to discuss the brand, and their readiness to pay for it (Warren et al., 2019). Based on the concept of the transfer model, certain objects gain popularity and trendy trends disseminate throughout subcultures and society (Warren & Campbell, 2014). McCracken (1986) summarizes that the behavior of famous people connected to a brand, like Richard Branson with Virgin, Snoop Dogg for Monster Drink, and even the brand's customers, like snowboarders, may influence how people regard the brand. The results support the idea that when consumers view social media influencers as cool, the consumers then have a greater intention to follow the recommendations of the influencers.

***Hypothesis 5. Increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy.*** The results of this study support the hypothesized idea that there is a positive relationship between perceived influencer attractiveness and consumer envy. According to Jin & Phua (2014) there is a correlation between the number of subscribers an individual has and their perceived attractiveness and trustworthiness among consumers. Consumers are more likely to experience a heightened sense of social presence then engaging with Instagram social media influencers as opposed to traditional celebrities as they feel influencers are more like them, regular, ordinary people (Jin et al., 2019), and this admiration or engagement can lead to various feelings, for example, inspiration, as many followers are inspired by influencer's achievements, lifestyles and content. Lee and Eastin (2020) describes envy and the desire to copy social media influencers as their persona's likability and relatability creates an illusion of accessibility to their assets, which increases envy and want. According to Chae (2017) and

Lockwood and Kunda (1997), envy arises when an individual's accomplishments seem reachable due to common features, leading to a desire to emulate them because people are driven to have similar accomplishments. Additionally, Arnocky et al. (2015) found that envy has a strong link between social comparison and desire to change behavior around improving body image and also the desire to be like a social media personality (see also Nabi & Keblusek, 2014). Consistent with and building on those studies, I found that as consumers perceive the social media influencers to be more attractive, the consumers feel more envy toward the social media influencers.

***Hypothesis 6. Increases in consumer envy are positively associated with increases in consumer behavioral intention.*** The results of this study support the hypothesized idea that there is a positive relationship between consumer envy and consumer behavioral intention. The results here—while in a new context—are consistent with Wenninger's (2021) review that examined how envy on social media affects individuals' purchase intentions, and advertising still drives SNS business models, and SNS providers value purchases generated by SNS use. According to Lin (2018), after reading SNS posts, envy affected users' purchasing intentions for a MacBook Pro, and malevolent envy motivates people to buy a smartphone better than the envied target's. Multiple research articles have examined how social media envy affects consumers' purchasing decisions (Jin & Ryu, 2020), and studies on purchase behavior in response to SNS-induced envy are called "leveling up oneself" since buying desired things or services can get one closer to the envied individual (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). For example, travel experiences are among the most admired on social media (Krasnova et al., 2015), thus it's no wonder that SNS travel places impact users' intentions to visit. Consumers want to elevate their status and acquire the coveted item, confirming prior research on consumer behavior where a response to envy is triggered by social



networking sites (SNS) referred to as "self-improvement," and purchasing desired products or services might bring individuals closer to the person they envy.

The results are also consistent with the two hypotheses related to the mediation effect, both *Hypothesis 7. increases in perceived influencer attractiveness are positively associated with increases in consumer envy*. And also, *Hypothesis 8. Consumer envy mediates the relationship between perceived influencer coolness and consumer behavioral intention*. The results of the analysis of the dataset support the hypothesized idea that consumer envy mediates the positive relationship between perceived influencer coolness and consumer behavioral intention. This builds on the idea outlined earlier in the paper that when consumers view social media influencers as cool, possessing desirable traits such as attractiveness, status, and success, they are more likely to engage in comparisons between themselves and the influencers (Belk, 2011; Lange & Crusius, 2015b; Van de Ven et al., 2009). These upward comparisons can trigger feelings of envy, as consumers may feel a sense of inadequacy or a desire to attain the same qualities and possessions as the cool influencers. Cool influencers often display an "ideal self" on social media, presenting a positively biased picture of their lives, and this curated portrayal of success, attractiveness, and desirability can heighten the sense of envy experienced by consumers, as they may feel that the influencer's achievements and lifestyle are both admirable and frustratingly out of reach. The illusion of accessibility created by the influencer's persona, combined with their likability and relatability, can further fuel consumer envy (Lee & Eastin, 2020). Envy can motivate consumers to "level up" and purchase desired products or services—in this case cosmetic surgeries and procedures—to get closer to the same level of desired attributes of the envied social media influencer (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). Thus, consumer envy mediates the relationship between perceived coolness and behavioral intention because when consumers view social media

influencers as cool, possessing desirable traits such as attractiveness, authenticity, status, making them more likely to participate in comparisons with others who are perceived as having higher social status. These comparisons can trigger feelings of envy, characterized by a combination of admiration and resentment towards those perceived as possessing superior qualities or possessions; coolness creates more envy, which in turn drives consumer intention.

The results of the data analysis also support the majority of the hypotheses related to consumer life stage and consumer envy (*Hypotheses 9, 10, 11, and 12*). Support was found for the connections to a focus on fitting-in benefits when consumers are in younger life stages. Support was not found for the connections to a focus on careers opportunities benefits from attractiveness when consumers are in older life stages—meaning the effect occurs at younger stages, too. The paths from both reasons to consumer envy are significant, as seen in the tables.

### **5.3. Implications for Scholarship**

Prior influencer research describes influencers as third-party endorsers shaping consumers impressions through social media platforms including blogs and tweets, demonstrating the importance of their reach and influence (Carter, 2016). Since influencer marketing has become an established business strategy, the number of influencers and companies specializing in it has skyrocketed (Campbell & Farrell, 2020).

While other research identifies specific factors that compel individuals to follow influencers on social media platforms such as consumerism, creativity, and envy. These motivations influence trust levels and the frequency of user purchases differently (Lee et al., 2022). The study revealed that materialism is a notable personal trait that is closely linked to the four motives and has a substantial impact on consumer buying habits. According to Langlois et al. (2000) and other meta-analyses, attractive people tend to have higher levels of interpersonal and

professional competence, and social appeal, and they also tend to have more positive relationships, career success, and overall well-being.

My research introduces the attractiveness effect of the influencer and how that can positively impact how consumers perceive an influencer's authenticity, coolness and envy to influence their behavior intentions for cosmetic surgery and body enhancements. Even though consumers and followers may perceive an influencer's authenticity and coolness as positive or even good social behaviors, envy is generally negative. Envy can serve as a motivation, yet harboring ill will towards someone out of envy can have harmful and adverse consequences.

Many studies highlight how consumers (young or older) who spend a lot of time on social media platforms, want to obtain the same things influencers have. Envy usually comes from things that you like and have in common (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007). Arnocky et al. (2015) found a link between envy, social comparison, and changing how you act because of your body image. Lee and Eastin (2020) discuss envy and the urge to mimic social media influencers as their likability and relatability provide a perception that their assets are easy to obtain, which makes people want them more. My research found that envy is not a positive outcome but rather negatively related to following social media influencers. Comparing ourselves to those who have what we want causes envy, a terrible feeling. Studies have defined social media envy using offline envy studies whereby envy is when someone seeks someone else's greater qualities, achievement, or possession, according to Parrot & Smith (1993).

Social media users post many social comparisons, typically favoring themselves. Social media like Facebook and Instagram foster envy. According to Appel et al. (2016), this mechanism may cause social media's negative effects on well-being and depression. Another study that defines envy constructs is Social Comparison Theory. Social Comparison (SC) compares downward and

upward. Upward and downward social comparisons involve comparing oneself to someone better or worse on social media. However, this study also highlights that depending on a consumer's life stage, whether younger or older such factors like "fitting in" or obtaining "career opportunities" might also influence a consumer's behavior and intent to follow the recommendations of influencers for cosmetic surgery.

#### **5.4. Implications for Managerial Practice**

This research began by taking a practitioner-oriented approach to investigate the degree to which customers follow the advice of social media influencers in relation to cosmetic surgery and body enhancements. This study's key finding for practitioners is that there are factors that positively influence how consumers respond to the recommendations of social media influencers for something as personal, costly, and sometimes dangerous as cosmetic surgery. However, some procedures are more routine and common (Botox or fillers) and if the influencer looks more attractive after their procedure with minimum downtime, this can serve as a motivator for female consumers to a greater extent than male consumers (Aktas et al., 2023). As stated previously, the results of this study confirm that when consumers find social media influencers more attractive, they perceive them as more authentic, cool and which in turn drives envy. This potentially highlights another reason for marketers and cosmetic surgeons to consider connecting with influencers that seem more authentic and cooler. Attractiveness is still positively related to consumer behavior intentions to pursue the recommendations of social media influencers (Snyder & Rothbart, 1971; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020).

Additionally, the idea that marketers and cosmetic surgeons should at least consider the use of attractive social media influencers to drive interest, even using current influencer patients for "testimonials" in their campaigns plays a critical role in the making critical decisions.

Both researchers and practitioners could explore this scenario to ascertain its validity. The results of this study suggest that marketers and advertisers should consider partnering with social media influencers to promote healthy body image and discourage unrealistic beauty standards. As attractiveness can positively impact decisions for consumers to consider cosmetic surgery, beauty products, body piercings, tattoos, or other body enhancements, marketers need to be aware of the potential backlash of the use of attractive models in advertising and packaging design (Maymone et al., 2019). Additionally, be aware of the potential for unconscious bias by ensuring that their marketing campaigns are inclusive and representative of diverse group of people which will increase the appeal of products and services to a wider audience rather than relying solely on traditional beauty standards. Additionally, marketers should be mindful that their products could have a detrimental impact on consumers' feelings of worth and body image (Afful & Ricciardelli, 2015).

This can include avoiding the use of unrealistic or overly idealized body types in advertising or the use of virtual influencers, who look just as real as human SMIs but are AIs (Guthrie, 2020). Hussain (2020) finds that increased celebrity credibility, which is similar to trust arising from authenticity, results in improved consumer behavioral intention to purchase promoted products; therefore, using virtual influencers or models to promote beauty products, cosmetic procedures or fashion can trigger body dysmorphic disorder (Rajanala et al., 2018). Dove has led the effort in highlighting that beauty is universal with ads like “Dove Real Beauty Sketches” and its most recent short film on #DetoxYourFeed which highlighted moms and daughters talking about how social media is defining what beauty is and encouraging them to act against toxic beauty advice on social media with hashtags like #beautyis and #beautybias. Marketers should be aware of how they promote beauty in their ads or marketing campaigns and consider potential legal and

ethical implications as well as ensuring that their marketing practices comply with relevant regulations and guidelines related to discrimination or bias (Cohen et al., 2019). By taking these factors into account, marketing managers can help to create effective and ethical marketing campaigns that appeal to a wide range of consumers. Additionally, companies in the cosmetic surgery industry should consider the impact of social media influences on consumer decision-making and consider ways to promote responsible procedures.

### **5.5. Implications for consumer well-being and society**

In addition to adding to the current knowledge on the effects of social media on self-esteem and body image, this study has important theoretical implications. There are significant theoretical implications for this study on the impact of social media on self-esteem and body image. The Social Comparison Theory states that individuals evaluate themselves in relation to others (Chen et al., 2019). This discovery supports that hypothesis. Social media influencers often provide unrealistic standards of beauty, which can lead to low self-esteem and an increase in the desire for cosmetic surgery (Fardouly et al., 2015). People may seek out cosmetic treatment and beauty standard promoters on social media, according to Dolan et al. (2015). This study bolsters the argument put out by the Uses and Gratification theory in the existing literature. According to social learning theory, which has been previously established (Ao et al., 2023), individuals observe and mimic the behaviors of those around them. This study expands upon that notion. Some people may be more inclined to get plastic surgery if they see their favorite social media stars getting it done (Kim and Yoon, 2020).

Findings suggest that society should address the negative effects of social media on users' sense of self-worth and body image. Recognizing the influence of SMI and critically evaluating messaging about cosmetic surgery and beauty standards is crucial for consumers. As part of this

effort, it is necessary to seek out information from a range of sources and promote a culture that values self-love and body acceptance. Basically, it's everyone's responsibility to ensure that consumers are safe when they get cosmetic and plastic surgery. Evidence suggests that supply-side attractiveness benefits are located in social capital (e.g., sociability, dominance, and popularity) rather than in human capital (e.g., IQ, mental health, and physical health) (Nault et al., 2020).

My review examines that there is a lack of knowledge about the following: the extent to which decision makers may rationalize discriminatory treatment based on beauty; the extent to which attractiveness impacts social and human capital inequalities; and whether or not the mechanisms that generate these differences are fair. According to Nault et al. (2020), people who observe other people frequently hold preconceptions about their own style. These ideas might be formed by naive thinking that fails to capture the complexity of human nature, or they could be influenced by random opinions about both attractive and unattractive people. It should be noted that the research on attractiveness bias holds that a person's physical appearance influences their perception of their ability, which in turn drives bias (Kunst et al., 2022; Nault et al., 2020; Wiedmann & von Mettenheim, 2020).

## 5.6. Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that future research should focus on understanding how social media influencers can be utilized to promote healthier body image and self-esteem. Additionally, further investigation into the relationship between social media exposure and cosmetic surgery intentions and if this exposure increases feelings of envy and body dissatisfaction. Since there were so few participants in the sample who were 60 years or older, it would be beneficial to try to collect more information from this important segment of the population. It would also be fascinating to see future studies that break down these age groups by generation, comparing millennials to Gen Xers to Gen Zers, and so on. Additionally, it would be interesting to examine individuals who are not on social media versus those who are on social media to detect any age-associated biases.

***Marketing and Society/Ethics: Looking at Potential Antecedents of Envy.*** The previous sections focused on a set of factors shown in Models 1 and 2 that I argue increase consumers' desire to act on the recommendations of the social media influencers. Those models have important implications for digital marketing management. As mentioned previously, authenticity and coolness are mostly positive traits that motivate consumers to follow social media influencers. Envy, however, is viewed as a negative characteristic which should be minimized. This section focuses on a number of elements that might help minimize envy, as shown in Model 3 contained in Figure 3 below. The concepts outlined contain implications for scholars and practitioners interested in the topics of marketing and society, public policy, and community institutions.

***Social Media Usage and Envy.*** Have you ever gone on social media and scroll for hours through Instagram or Facebook viewing other people's posts about their vacations, their kids getting accepted to top colleges and obtaining work promotions as per LinkedIn and you started feeling negative about yourself and your accomplishments or question why them, not me? Maybe



you are experiencing envy? Envy, considered to be one of the most prevalent emotions (Foster et al., 1972, and also very negative, as it is both extremely unpleasant and morally wrong. There is widespread consensus on this matter, supported by numerous references in philosophy and literature, which assert that envy is the most antisocial of all impulses (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007).

Envy is a negative emotion that might occur when an individual is confronted with the superior belongings of another person (Crusius & Mussweiler, 2012). According to prevailing beliefs and the agreement among scholars, those who feel envy may be driven to obtain superior possessions of others. Consumer envy is commonly triggered in advertising by utilizing celebrity and influencer endorsements. This strategy aims to make customers feel envious and inspired to emulate the person who is perceived as being "superior" (Belk, 2011). Envy directed towards influencers on social media platforms is linked to benign envy, which is a desire to emulate the influencers, rather than having malicious intentions. This is because influencers are perceived to be more relatable compared to celebrities. However, it has been observed that the impact of malicious envy is more pronounced on social media platforms. The feeling of envy towards influencers is correlated with higher levels of trustworthiness and social presence, according to a study by Jin et al. (2019). According to Krasnova et al. (2013), there is a positive correlation between the level of influence and trust that an influencer has on a consumer and the likelihood of the consumer having an increased intention to make a purchase.

A large amount of data on social comparisons is provided by social media users, with a primary focus on positive self-images. As a result, platforms like Instagram and Facebook foster feelings of envy. According to Appel et al. (2016), there may be negative effects on mental health from excessive use of social media. This has not prevented businesses from recognizing the

benefits of forming partnerships with social media influencers (SMIs) to promote their products. Influencers who are less authentic can be motivated to promote and endorse goods and services that quite possibly do not tie to their personal image by being offered free products or even paid to do so. This strategy is known as influencer marketing (IM) (Vrontis et al., 2021).

Other studies that aim to define the concepts associated with envy include Social Comparison Theory. Social comparison (SC) can be categorized into two types: downward and upward. In contrast, upward social comparison involves comparing oneself to a highly accomplished social media user, whereas downward social comparison involves comparing oneself to a less accomplished person. Envy can be fostered by the use of social media self-comparisons, as stated by Krasnova et al. (2013a). Lange and Crusius (2015) and Van de Ven et al. (2009) have found that malignant jealousy is connected to upward social comparison, while benign envy is associated with downward social comparison. This means that malignant envy aims to attain the same benefit as the person being compared to. Despite being widely used and driven by hedonic motivations, the prevalence of Instagram and Facebook may actually diminish people's happiness. A study conducted by Krasnova et al. (2013b) discovered that those who use Facebook reported decreased levels of overall life satisfaction and heightened feelings of jealousy. Facebook's capacity to amplify sentiments of envy and self-obsession may be attributed to its capability to enable users to exhibit their most favorable or accomplished versions of themselves through their status updates.

Positional goods are represented in a manner that highlights the individual's superior qualities. The study conducted by Kao (2019) examined how audience psychological qualities, such as jealousy, and the storytelling style of the promoted brand, either portraying it as an underdog or a top dog, influence the evaluations of the brand. Individuals frequently strive to align

themselves with successful individuals and distance themselves from those who are unsuccessful. Given this, employing top-tier brand storytelling can be advantageous for a brand. Nevertheless, if that statement is accurate, what is the reason behind the ability of underdog stories to inspire individuals? Contrary to the social identity theory, the phenomena of people backing underdogs may appear paradoxical but is significant and cannot be disregarded (Kao, 2019). Positional commodities serve as both implicit and explicit indicators of the well-being and happiness of individuals who consume them. Due to the fact that the majority of individuals are highly concerned about the perception others develop of them, Facebook users typically present themselves in the most favorable manner. As a result, they aim to exert control or, at the very least, effectively handle those impressions.

The frequency with which individuals compare their own lives to those of influencers is predicted by variables related to social media use (such as exposure to influencers' social media and interest in specific content) as well as personality traits (such as public self-consciousness and self-esteem). This comparison, in turn, leads to feelings of envy towards the influencers (Chae, 2017). Kao (2019) asserts that malevolent envy compels individuals who are envious to desire the loss of the admired possession or advantage of the person they envy. Consumers who experience malignant envy may develop unpleasant emotional reactions and strong connections to a business or its creator when they are exposed to top dog brand storytelling that displays a very effortless entrepreneurial journey and success. Conversely, when it comes to underdog brand narrative, the presence of negative information, such as challenges, unfavorable circumstances, and limited resources, is unlikely to provoke any significant feelings of malignant envy. In Kao (2019) research, consumers who possess malevolent envy are more likely to develop higher brand preferences for underdog brands compared to top brands.

Envy has been a longstanding subject of study, and numerous academic fields have conducted research on the topic in recent decades. Envy is now often triggered by the use of social networking sites (SNS), with the object of envy being someone from the user's SNS connections. Additionally, it emphasizes the adverse emotional condition of envy and pertains to a comparison with others who are perceived to be in a higher social position inside the social networking site context (Wenninger et al., 2021). In light of technological advancements and the widespread use of social media, it is crucial to understand the distinct characteristics and implications of envy within the social media environment (Wenninger et al., 2021). According to the previous reasoning, when consumers spend more time on social media, they develop a stronger feeling of envy towards the perceived success of social media influencers and others.

***Consumer Religiosity and Envy.*** The influence of religion on behavior can vary greatly among individuals and is typically influenced by personal interpretations of religious teachings, cultural influences, and the specific religious tradition involved. In addition, it is important to highlight that not everyone adheres to religious beliefs. Instead, many people base their moral and ethical ideas on secular ideologies and humanist ideals. Many religions, especially Judeo-Christian based religions, teach a doctrine that is positive and drives moral consciousness, such as the importance of compassion, forgiveness, and love for one's neighbor. One of the ten commandments as described in Exodus 20:17 provides extensive instructions against coveting "Thou shall not covet," the possessions of one's neighbor, including their house, wife, servants, and livestock, as well as everything else that belongs to them.

According to McDaniel and Burnett (1990), a person is considered religious if they have a strong belief in a higher power and are devoted to following the rules that they believe these powers have established. Religiosity, according to this theory, is a system of dogma, rituals, and symbols

that believers follow to establish a relationship with an ultimate being, a higher power, or God. A person's religious beliefs can provide light on their social connections and personal accountability in a communal context (Koenig, 2012). McDaniel & Burnett (1990) stated that religiosity is defined as the “belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God.” Envy engenders a sense of entitlement and deprivation.

The individual holds the belief that there exists an obligation from a higher power, specifically God, towards them. Envy is a detrimental and unsightly emotion that can lead to negative consequences (Smith & Kim, 2007). According to James 3:16, the presence of envy and selfish ambition leads to disorder and the manifestation of various immoral behaviors. Many teachings in the Bible highlight the outcomes of envy and the greatest commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself,” therefore, envy or coveting is lessened by loving God with all your heart, soul and mind and your neighbor, like yourself.

Religiosity positioned within the realm of human values, pertains to how a person feels about a higher power and how that makes them act in society (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990). Its historical importance as a powerful force in society and its clear effect on individual behavior. According to Bjarnason (2016), religiosity can be divided into three main dimensions: religious affiliation, participation in spiritual activities, and adherence to principles of faith. Scholars have said that the U.S. is the most religious of the Western nations, which shows the importance of religion in decision-making. According to 2021 Gallup poll, about three in four Americans said they identify with a specific religious faith. LaBarbera & Gerhan (1997) explores the impact of religiosity on the subjective well-being of consumers residing in a materialistic society. The findings suggest that marketers could potentially enhance their strategies by incorporating

consumer religiosity as a segmentation and targeting approach when developing materialistic positioning and communication tactics (La Barbera & Gerhan, 1997).

The presence of religiosity provides a contextual framework within which the ethical dimensions of business, encompassing marketing and customer behavior, can be analyzed, and understood (Vitell, 2010). As per Kellermanns (2013), the family's spirituality and religious perspectives could influence the values of the firm they own. However, research by Wisker et al. (2019) on family businesses suggests that while spirituality levels have an impact, the religious beliefs and practices of the controlling family members do not necessarily have the same effect. This is because spirituality affects the family business's social responsibility to its employees, customers, stakeholders, and society as a whole. The authors of early studies on Religiosity and Business found that church attendance alone was insufficient to quantify religiosity, and a multi-item measure was necessary such as Allport and Ross (1967) scale to explore this complicated phenomenon.

Religion plays different parts in the lives of different people. In particular, the study highlights the extrinsic role for social approval or personal happiness, while the intrinsic role is a strong internal dedication to religion as a part of one's everyday life (Allport & Ross, 1967). Numerous studies have provided substantial evidence indicating a correlation between religiosity and customer or business ethics, suggesting that individuals with stronger religious beliefs often demonstrate elevated moral standards and integrity in their purchasing decisions or business practices (Vitell, 2010). The limitation of Religiosity studies tied to the business world might be due to how sensitive the topic can be to tie to business. Academic studies (Hirschman, 1983; LaBarbera, 1987) show plausible links between religiosity and certain aspects of consumer behavior. It is also possible that consumer religiosity, which refers to both the consumers' religious

devotion as well as their religious affiliation, is a significant construct in the process of explaining business patronage (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990). According to this study, an individual's religious orientation, like to other personal characteristics such as gender, age, and race, plays a significant role in shaping a customer's overall purchase motivations across many product categories. Based on all of the preceding outlined results and logic, consumers' belief in religious doctrine decreases their level of envy of other people, including social media influencers.

*Attractiveness Advantage and Perceive Usefulness of Cosmetic Surgery.* Another potential area of future interest is the implication that the attractiveness advantage may reinforce existing societal inequalities. If individuals who are already advantaged in terms of race, class, or other factors are also more likely to be seen as attractive, this could further entrench these inequalities and make it more difficult for those who are less privileged to succeed. Moreover, there may be legal and ethical implications related to discrimination based on physical appearance, particularly in hiring and promotion practices. Employers may need to be more aware of their biases and take steps to ensure that decisions are made based on merit rather than attractiveness. Overall, the attractiveness advantage is a complex phenomenon with potentially far-reaching implications for both individuals and society collectively. As research in this area continues to evolve, it will be important to consider these implications and work towards creating a more equitable and just society.

Instead of using the same old sexual appeals, the cosmetic and plastic surgery service business may use ads that highlight the importance of self-actualization as a driving force for elective surgeries. Individuals who want to look better in selfies may seek plastic surgery, a new trend that was highlighted in surveying members of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery in 2017. Facial plastic surgery is growing in popularity, and some even

call it mainstream, in this age of "resting rich face" (AAFPRS, 2018) which is different from previous generations who often kept their cosmetic tweaks secret. Tootoonchi Tabrizi and Ozturk (2022) note that a common misconception is that cosmetic operations and procedures are easy and straightforward, and that there is no risk or bad consequence associated with them. Cosmetic procedures are complex and there is a danger of normalizing cosmetic surgeries and spreading unrealistic, possibly damaging ideas by highlighting the immediate benefits and downplaying the risks, complications, or negative outcomes. According to a study by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2013), consumers aged 13–29 underwent more than one million cosmetic treatments.

Driving some of “beauty normalizing” trends are plastic surgeons themselves. (Fan et al., 2019) states among the most influential tweeters, 68% were surgeons working in private practice. There were more fake bots created by non-physicians than by American board-certified surgeons. Among the 7500 tweets examined, board-certified plastic surgeons from the United States or abroad were more likely to have educational posts while nonphysicians were more likely to have promotional ones. Although they may give in to peer pressure, plastic surgeons are fast to adjust to the ever-changing social media landscape (Arab et al., 2019; Chen et al., 2021). But among the top influencers, academic surgeons are noticeably underrepresented. Despite the fact that many influential people in the field of plastic surgery are also board-certified specialists, this subset of the conversation remains mostly unexplored.

Most recent scholars have identified the need to conduct future research on the effects of Cosmetic and Plastic surgeons on TikTok and other social media platforms as they post their procedures creating a new norm of “Influencer Doctors.” Tragically, a plastic surgeon's career took a nosedive once her TikTok antics became public knowledge. Dr. Katharine Grawe's medical



license was revoked by the Ohio Medical Board after it was determined that her patients suffered injury as a result of her livestreams of surgeries on the popular social media platform. Grawe, who goes by the name "Dr. Roxy" on TikTok and at her plastic surgery practice, "Roxy Plastic Surgery," is now facing a lifetime ban from practicing medicine in Ohio. This serves as a stark reminder of the potential consequences when the boundaries between professional responsibility and social media influence are blurred.

And, most recently, TikTok "Legging legs" is just the newest body-shaming word circulating online, with others claiming it is detrimental and even hazardous. Though it is not allowed on TikTok, the term has gained traction as a means of describing the "ideal" length and shape of legs to wear leggings, which promotes what experts perceive as an unhealthy self-image. Researchers should keep digging into the consequences of current social media trends on kids and teens, paying special attention to how they promote unrealistic standards of beauty and how they put others at risk, including those struggling with eating disorders. A decline in self-esteem and body image, especially among those who believe they fall short of societal beauty standards, may result from the increasing emphasis on outward appearance in today's culture (von Soest et al., 2009).

## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

This study is one of the first to empirically investigate how social media influencers do influence consumers intentions to undergo cosmetic surgery and share content from the influencers they follow to friends and other people on social media. The study highlights the importance of social media influencers' perceived attractiveness, perceived authenticity, and perceived coolness. (Audrezet et al., 2020; Haselstein, 2013; Karandashev et al., 2020). These are all very complex variables and thoroughly researched; however, I found that the impact of coolness on behavior intention appears to be mediated by consumer envy (Chae, 2017). Envy being the main factor to drive consumer intentions, especially with regard to social media influencer recommendations with significant support found.

The research also finds that consumer's lifestage (either young or mature) is positively associated with an emphasis on attractiveness for the benefit of fitting in and significant support was found (Bliss, 2020; Flecha-Ortíz et al., 2021). However, both younger and older consumers have varying emphasis on attractiveness and how it relates to career opportunities with no significant support found. Both fitting in and career opportunities/attractiveness benefits were significant and are positively associated with increases in consumer envy (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012; Sellers, 2019). Again all roads lead to envy, with extending the research and filling the gap in influencer marketing, this research contributes by proposing a conceptual framework that integrates, the attractiveness advantage, authenticity, coolness of the social media influencer leading to increased envy which in turn drives consumer behavioral intentions to do or purchase cosmetic surgery, beauty procedures or products (Brown & Tiggemann, 2016; Lee et al., 2022).

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