Influencer Trends Shift: The Psychological Predictors of Influencer Engagement on Instagram

Abby C. Hendricks* and Laura F. Bright
Stan Richards School of Advertising and Public Relations, The University of Texas at Austin
*Corresponding Author: abbyhendricks@utexas.edu, @abbychendricks

As advancements in technology continue to rise, consumers are constantly distracted, leaving advertisers to find creative ways to break through this barrier. Partnering with popular influencers on social media platforms has proven successful in reaching consumers where they are. As trends in influencer marketing continue to shift, it is important to understand the antecedents to engagement with influencers. The current research examines the concept of influencer engagement on Instagram and its proposed psychological predictors: authenticity, envy, upward social comparison, and narcissism. Results indicate that influencer authenticity, envy towards the influencer, and the personality trait narcissism positively impact influencer engagement on Instagram, while upward social comparisons to the influencer negatively impact influencer engagement. Recent research on influencers has focused on outcomes such as attitudes, trust, and purchase intentions, while this study focuses on behavioral engagement, a more accurate measurement within the context of Instagram. Managerial and theoretical implications are discussed.

Keywords: social media engagement, influencer, authenticity, envy, upward social comparison

When media multitasking is often a norm, it is difficult for advertisers to obtain consumer attention in media saturated environments. Social media influencers (SMIs) are used to break through these distractions by engaging with consumers, especially those of younger generations including Millennials and Gen Z. Influencers can be defined as influential online personas who have established large audiences on social media platforms by having authentic, likable personalities and a consistent online presence (Lou et al., 2019). Across studies, influencers are described in many ways, such as celebrity endorsers (Xiao et al., 2018), social media stars (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020), and micro-celebrities (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). Through the popular phenomenon of influencer marketing, brands

partner with "social media stars" to reach target audiences (Gaenssle & Budzinski, 2020) by investing in influencers on social media platforms to promote the brand, products, services, and messages. It is common for influencers to work across platforms to cross-promote branded messaging, such as YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and TikTok, however the current research will focus on Instagram.

Instagram is a popular platform for influencers and influencer marketing, ranking as the 4th most used social media channel, only outranked by Facebook and messenger apps ("44 Instagram Statistics", 2021). More than a billion people use Instagram monthly and of these users, 130 million click on posts involving shopping and 50% of users visit a website with purchase intentions after seeing a product on Instagram ("44 Instagram Statistics", 2021). Instagram offers users unique interactive experiences that allow influencers the opportunity to engage with followers through posts to the Feed, Stories, Reels, and Instagram Live. Each feature allows for different opportunities such as sharing everyday life on Stories, interacting with followers in real time by going Live, and sharing more in-depth details, information, and content on Reels (Instagram's Official Site, 2021). Further, Instagram users can share thoughts and information through captions, promote other users, influencers, or brands through tagging, and can like, share, comment on, and save posts from others. Similarly, features including stickers, filters, hashtags, filming options, and shopping avenues make for excellent opportunities for influencer success.

It is important to understand the motivation of Instagram users to engage with influencers as there are many avenues on Instagram to do so. The current research contributes to this effort by analyzing the psychological traits that could potentially contribute most to influencer engagement on Instagram. While recent research on influencers has focused on outcomes such as attitudes (Moulard et al., 2015), trust (Van Noort et al., 2012), and purchase intentions (Beldad et al., 2010; Xiang et al., 2016; Jorge et al., 2018; Ki & Kim, 2019), the current study focuses on behavioral engagement with influencers – a more accurate measurement of advertising effectiveness within the context of Instagram – providing a better understanding of consumer's online behaviors. Specifically, the current research dives deeper into influencers on Instagram, discusses the importance of influencer engagement, and examines four psychological factors in predicting influencer engagement: authenticity, envy, upward social comparison, and

narcissism. Social comparison theory is used as a lens to examine these relationships in the following literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencers on Instagram

As we have seen for decades in traditional advertising, characteristics of a brand endorser are important to consider with relation to the effectiveness of the content they are delivering – and the same holds true for influencer-endorsed content to be effective. Characteristics such as trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness impact the acceptance of celebrity-endorsed content (Ohanian, 1991). While influencers are often associated with celebrities, it is important to understand the differences between influencers and traditional celebrities and what additional psychological traits could be impacting the consumer experience with influencers.

Campbell and Farrell (2020) organize influential personas into five distinct categories, including celebrities and influencers, and based on factors such as follower count and engagement, including (1) celebrity influencers (more than 1 million followers), (2) mega influencers (1 million or more followers), (3) macro influencers (between 100,000 and 1 million followers), (4) micro influencers (between 10,000 and 100,000 followers), and (5) nano influencers (fewer than 10,000 followers). Celebrities (i.e., Kim Kardashian) have the largest following base with public recognition outside of social media platforms and are often associated with brands from their celebrity-related work, such as sports, music, acting, fashion, and reality TV. With this public recognition, celebrities often hold large endorsement partnerships with advertisers, however, a strong connection to the brand and to consumers is often neglected. In contrast, influencers gain their popularity through a consistent presence on social media platforms (Lou et al., 2019), seeming more relatable to consumers compared to celebrities. For instance, social media users who repeatedly interact with an influencer in their daily routine may feel they can relate to that online persona, compared to a celebrity that does not have a similar presence. Thus, influencers can form the connections needed to break through the media saturated environment by building trust and demonstrating expertise, often resulting in audience growth (Jin et al., 2019). But, while recommendations from influencers are considered more genuine,

influencers are often relatively unknown to people outside of their social media followers, making them quite different from a traditional celebrity.

These differences may add confusion to the concept of influencers and influencer marketing. On one hand, partnerships between influencers and brands have seen success, especially on Instagram. In fact, about 87% of industry professionals use Instagram for influencer marketing (The State of Influencer Marketing, 2020) as higher engagement such as likes, comments, and shares is seen over time on the platform (Arora et al., 2019). Further, likes on Instagram posts impact social influence compared to other engagement and platforms (Arora et al., 2019). In contrast, however, influencers are often associated with "doing vain things online" (Abidin, 2016), simply promoting a luxurious lifestyle that many people can only envy. For instance, changing the angle of the body or face and makeup techniques are often used to "give the illusion of fuller foreheads, higher nose bridges, rounder cheeks, and sharper chins" often eliciting feelings of desire, envy, and comparison among followers (Abidin, 2016). But with a recent shift in mindsets among the young generations, in-authentic filters and self-presentations online are no longer trending. Instead, a curated feed is ditched for an unfiltered, authentic look referred to as the Anti-Aesthetic trend (Kaindl, 2020). Lately, popular Instagram personas share more 'real moments' pushing influencers for authenticity (Battan, 2019). These interesting trends surrounding deception and skepticism among consumers regarding influencers sustaining such a high-end lifestyle and the shift towards authenticity is a popular discussion among popular press and academic scholars, making the relationship(s) between using Instagram, personality traits (narcissism), and psychological tendencies (envy and upward social comparisons) important to understand.

Specifically, it is important to understand the puzzling paradox Instagram creates by increasing the presence of undesirable personality characteristics and negative impacts on mental health, while also providing positive outcomes. For instance, individuals with narcissistic personality traits spend more time on Instagram overall, posting selfies and other image-building content (Moon et al., 2016), sometimes in attempts to belittle those of higher status. Further, within the Instagram platform, young women make comparisons to other individual's, leading to struggles with body image and eating disorders (Hogue & Mills, 2019; Wells et al., 2021). Nonetheless, while Instagram harbors undesirable

characteristics and negative impacts, image-based platforms have been found to produce positive outcomes as well, such as decreased feelings of loneliness and increased happiness (Pittman & Reich, 2016). These contrasting experiences of undesirable characteristics, negative impacts on mental health, and positive outcomes may impact the influencer-endorsed content individuals see across Instagram, impacting vulnerability to persuasion. It is important to keep these findings in mind as influencers engage with audiences and promote content.

Influencer Engagement

The terms engage and engagement are central to describing interactions and interactive experiences with consumers in digital marketing efforts, and especially in influencer marketing and influencer research. Often, the reach of Instagram is not enough, leaving engagement to be an important factor in reaching goals and achieving key performance indicators (KPIs) for brands. Consumer engagement behaviors are often defined as a motivational state leading to interactions and involvement with a brand or brand-related messages (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The concept of consumer engagement is rooted in relationship marketing (Ashley et al., 2011), where brands are cultivating long-term relationships and brand loyalty with consumers, rather than focusing on immediate sales and profits. Here, brands are not only encouraging consumers to purchase products or services, but also promoting brand values, sharing expertise, building consumer trust and loyalty, and encouraging engagement with the brand through consistent interaction with consumers on social media. Based on engagement being viewed as various relational constructs, including brand loyalty, relationship marketing, and social networks (Schultz & Peltier, 2013; Barger et al., 2016), brand engagement (Calder et al., 2016) and consumer engagement (Barger et al., 2016) are often associated. Aside from brands and brand engagement, there are individuals of high-status, including influencers, celebrities, politicians, and so on, who interact with and influence consumers on Instagram. For instance, with the popularity of influencer marketing, partnering with influencers on social media platforms who share the same brand values offer ideal opportunities for building these relationships through engagement and interaction with consumers. Thus, the association between brand and consumer engagement provides a broader approach to understanding interactions with influencers, referred to as influencer

engagement. The current research defines influencer engagement as interactions with influencer-related content, focusing on the consumption of and contribution to content in terms of following influencers, likes, comments, and shares.

In the context of social media, previous research has focused on the behaviors of consumer engagement, measuring it through actions that consumers take in response to brand-related content on social media, such as liking, commenting/replying, sharing the content with others, and posting user-generated content (i.e., reviews) (Barger et al., 2016). Specifically, consumer factors such as social influence and bonding with others, need for self-enhancement, number of friends/followers, and personality traits lead to engagement behavior (Barger et al, 2016). Thus, it is important to understand the psychological variables that have been found to impact behaviors such as, authenticity of influencers (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016), feelings of envy towards the influencer (Lee & Eastin, 2020), behaviors of upward social comparison to the influencer (Chae, 2018), and the personality trait of narcissism (McCain & Campbell, 2018).

Authenticity of Influencers

Authenticity is defined as a demonstration of the influencer's true, unique self (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016) often through posting original content and sharing personal details. Indeed, previous research has highlighted the importance of authenticity (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016; Audrezet et al., 2018; Pöyry et al., 2019), finding that authenticity influences word of mouth, purchase likelihood and intentions, and following celebrities on social media. Specifically, consumers were found to follow celebrities on social media to obtain a sense of personal information, such as a look into their everyday life instead of fancy events that are portrayed through the traditional media (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016), which consumers are often not able to relate to. Thus, authentic social media posts were found to be key aspects in what consumers enjoy about following celebrities on social media.

Influencers build authenticity on social media by sharing information from their personal life (Jorge et al., 2018), sharing consistently to create a reliable persona (Marwick, 2013), and being transparent about brand partnerships (Evans et al., 2017). When authenticity is experienced through social media content, an emotional attachment to the influencer is often felt as consumers believe to be interacting with the influencer's

personal life (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016). The audience will often feel an "illusion of intimacy," referred to as parasocial interaction, where followers reward the influencer with loyalty and engagement (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Engagement, here, is a result of reciprocity between influencer and follower, where each party gives and receives equal effort in the relationship (Schultz & Peltier, 2013). For instance, in the beauty industry, an influencer may share valuable expertise and connections (Jorge et al., 2018) and consumers may respond with engagement or purchase intentions. Indeed, parasocial interactions on social media platforms have been found to positively influence purchase intentions (Xiang et al., 2016).

Instagram also allows brands to be presented more authentically through the influencer's own words, often in the form of personally created content by the influencer (Chae, 2018). In the beauty industry, influencers portray authenticity by personalizing the message to carefully explain why the product or brand is enjoyed, while offering insights into the influencer's personal life (Jorge et al., 2018). In fact, influencers often rely on an "ethics of authenticity" when navigating brand partnerships (Wellman et al., 2020), keeping two core themes in mind: 1) being true both oneself and the brand and 2) being true to the audience by creating content that is desired by the followers. Here, a balance between sponsored content, original content, and editorial content is important in building credibility and authenticity (Balaban & Mustatea, 2019) and balancing commercialism (Jorge et al., 2018). Thus, an influencer is often mindful of brand partnerships to earn the trust of followers. Mega influencers often have the advantage of aligning personal branding and values more closely with paid partnerships, affording the influencer the opportunity to only promote and share products that they truly use and enjoy (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), which creates even more authenticity. Typically, as influencers gain more presence on Instagram, they can be more selective with brand partnerships (Campbell & Farrell, 2020), assisting in building an authentic online persona.

Consumer Envy

Influencers often share their luxurious life of high-end products, expensive travels, and interactions with celebrities and public figures with their online followers (Abidin, 2016; Marwick, 2015). In other words, influencers promote a lifestyle that many young people fantasize about having but may not be able to obtain (Marwick, 2015), often

eliciting feelings of envy. Envy refers to a psychological feeling that "occurs when a person lacks another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it" (Parrott & Smith, 1993, p. 906). There are two types of envy widely discussed in literature: benign envy and malicious envy. Benign envy is often associated with positive thoughts towards another person with a desire for what the person has (Van de Ven et al., 2009), such as desire for the lifestyle of an influencer. In contrast, malicious envy is more destructive with a desire to bring the other person down from the spotlight (Van de Ven et al., 2009), such as sending negative messages and comments to intentionally be mean to the influencer.

In advertising contexts, consumer envy is elicited through celebrity and influencer endorsements, where consumers feel envious and are motivated to be like the person who is seen as 'superior' (Belk, 2008). Envy towards influencers on Instagram is associated with benign envy (Jin et al., 2019), a desire to be like the influencer, rather than malicious intent (Lee & Eastin, 2020), as influencers are more like ordinary people compared to celebrities (Chae, 2018). However, the effects of malicious envy have been found to be stronger on social media platforms (Wu & Srite, 2021), thus, as consumers engage with influencers on Instagram, effects of malicious envy may transpire.

While malicious envy may still occur while utilizing social media platforms, envy towards influencers has seen positive effects. Indeed, envy towards influencers is positively associated with trustworthiness and social presence (Jin et al., 2019), where the more a consumer feels the presence of another human, through interactivity and engagement, the more likely the consumer is to trust (Van Noort et al., 2012) and have purchase intentions (Beldad et al., 2010). Specifically, purchase intentions have been found to be enhanced through feelings of envy, where both benign and malicious envy increase the purchase intention of the item being envied (Lin, 2018).

Upward Social Comparison

Social comparison theory suggests that individuals have an intrinsic need to compare themselves with others to evaluate their general placement based on factors such as capabilities, accomplishments, opinions, and more (Festinger, 1954). There are three types of social comparisons, including parallel comparisons (comparisons to those like themselves), downward comparisons (comparisons to those that are seen as inferior), and

upward comparisons (comparisons to those seen as better). The current research focuses on upward comparisons as consumers often make upward comparisons on social media (Midgley et al., 2021) and feel envious of influencers (Abidin, 2016; Chae, 2018; Marwick, 2015), making it important to understand the relationship between upward social comparisons towards influencers on Instagram and the effect on engagement.

In general, social media provides an abundance of opportunities to make social comparisons. Previous studies have found the frequency of using these platforms to provoke both upward and downward social comparisons (Vogel et al., 2015; Chae, 2021). Indeed, the frequency of viewing makeup tutorials on YouTube predicted social comparisons (Chae, 2021), while the frequency of Facebook use led to upward social comparisons as well (Vogel et al., 2015). In the context of Instagram, users compare themselves with others while browsing and interacting on the platform (Pedalino & Camerini, 2022; Yang, 2016). Specifically, the followers who are more frequently exposed to influencer content while using social media (especially while browsing) are more likely to make upward social comparisons to the influencer (Chae, 2018; Pedalino & Camerini, 2022).

Social comparison tendencies are related to more interaction on Instagram (Yang, 2016) as well as a positive effect on the intention to share the influencer's content and an increase in purchase intentions (Ki & Kim, 2019). Moreover, upward social comparison has been associated with increased social media consumption (Reer et al., 2019) and overall problematic social media use (Kim et al., 2021).

Narcissism

Narcissism refers to having a highly positive self-concept (Campbell et al., 2002), often being an unrealistic self-image, with excessive interest in oneself. There are three theoretical constructs often used in association with increased social media use, such as engagement behaviors, for narcissists (McCain & Campbell, 2018): (1) the personality trait of narcissism itself, (2) self-enhancement opportunities available on social media platforms, and (3) the fit of the platform, including its affordances, such as interactivity, and its association with a dangerous cycle of social media use.

First, the personality trait of narcissism is largely composed of extraversion (Brown et al., 2009), which has been linked to spending more time on social media, in general

(Gosling et al., 2011; McCain & Campbell, 2018), spending more time on Instagram, specifically (Moon et al., 2016), more engagement on social media (Gosling et al., 2011; Hunt & Langstedt, 2014), such as the use of photo sharing (Hunt & Langstedt, 2014), and motivations for self-presentation (Hunt & Langstedt, 2014), such as using a more edited profile photo on social media platforms (Kramer & Winter, 2008).

Second, as individuals high in extroversion are motivated to present themselves online (Hunt & Langstedt, 2014), Instagram proves to be an excellent avenue for promoting oneself. Instagram allows for self-enhancement in the form of photographs, such as selfies (Abidin, 2016), videos, stories, and live interaction, as well as filming and editing features. Thus, narcissistic individuals will be drawn to social media (i.e., Instagram) to fulfill enhancement and self-presentation needs.

Third, Instagram offers affordances to its users, such as the ability to interact with others. Previous research suggests extroverts are more likely to use the communication abilities of social media platforms (Hamid et al., 2015), such as sharing photos and commenting on photos of others. Here, the fit of social media platforms allow for affordances, but also for a rabbit-hole of social media use and effects. For instance, Instagram offers the ability to make upward social comparisons with high-status individuals, such as influencers and celebrities, through following accounts and engaging with content, such as likes, comments, and shares. Social comparisons are just one effect of social media use. In addition to comparisons, previous research indicates frequent usage of Instagram influences extroverted users to become even more extroverted (Hamid et al., 2015), allowing social media users to enter a continuous loop of social media use and its effects. As individuals high in narcissism are very active on social media and are attracted to intrapersonal opportunities found on Instagram, it is important to understand the relationship between narcissism and influencer engagement on Instagram.

Hypothesis Building

As mentioned above, narcissism is widely related to frequent social media usage, relating to engagement with others and self-presentation strategies. With frequent use of social media platforms, users will come across many different types of digital content, especially including influencer-promoted content. Influencers have been accused of simply promoting an unsustainable lifestyle (Abidin, 2016), encouraging their followers to make

upward social comparisons to the life they share on social media (Chae, 2018), which often creates envy (Chae, 2018). However, with a new shift towards authenticity in the online space, influencers are being pushed to show less "glamor" and more of a relatable lifestyle (Battan, 2019; Kaindl, 2020). Thus, with this logical association between each of the variables of interest, the current study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Authenticity of influencers will positively impact influencer engagement on Instagram.

H2: Envy of influencers will positively impact influencer engagement on Instagram.

H3: Upward social comparison to influencers will positively impact influencer engagement on Instagram.

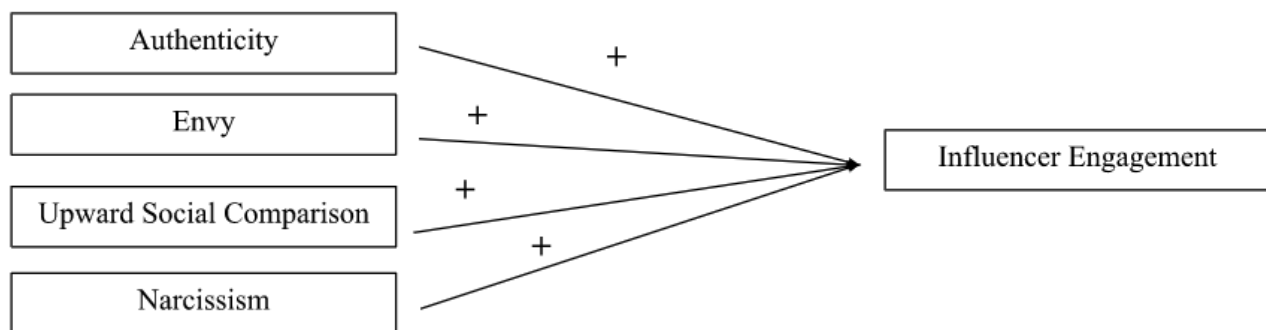*H4:* Narcissism will positively impact influencer engagement on Instagram.

Figure 1. A conceptual model of proposed hypotheses.

Participants

An online survey was developed and administered using Qualtrics, a web-based survey instrument. The survey was distributed to an opt-in participant pool, recruited for online research, at a large Southwest university in the United States. A total of 250 participants took part in the study. Prior to conducting any analyses, 71 participants were removed from the dataset for failing attention check items and screening questions. The final sample consisted of 179 active Instagram users.

Among this sample, 81.6% (n = 146) were female, 16.8% (n = 30) were male, and 1.7% (n = 3) were non-binary/third gender. In regards to origin, 31% (N = 55) were of Hispanic/Latino/Spanish origin. Moreover, regarding ethnicity, 69% were Caucasian (N = 123), 6% (N = 10) were African American, 15% (N = 26) were Asian, and 11% (N = 20)

preferred not to indicate their ethnicity. In terms of Instagram behavior, 40% (N = 66) of respondents indicated using Instagram within 15 minutes before going to sleep every day, while 41% (N = 74) of respondents indicated using Instagram within 15 minutes after waking up every day. In the sample, all participants follow at least one influencer on Instagram.

Participants indicated following influencers across industry verticals including lifestyle, skincare and wellness, beauty, fashion, fitness, home, food and cooking, travel, music, art, photography, architecture, politics, sports, gaming, comedy, religion, education, financial, relationships, celebrities, models, and brands. Finally, behaviors on Instagram involving influencers include commenting, liking, and saving influencer posts, interacting with Instagram lives, reels, stories, polls, and videos, browsing for inspiration, purchasing clothes, checking product reviews and recommendations, looking for collaboration opportunities, seeking workout routines, enjoy exotic travel experiences, and finding new makeup and skincare routines. The most popular Instagram influencer indicated by participants was @emmachamberlain (N = 17). Other Instagram influencers mentioned were @jennapalek (N = 6), @bretmanrock (N = 4), and @indyblue_ (N = 4).

Table 1 *Descriptive statistics for model constructs.*

Variables	M	SD	Cronbach's alpha
Authenticity	4.84	1.09	.95
Consumer Envy	3.08	1.22	.84
Upward Social Comparison	5.27	1.08	.91
Narcissism	.38	.21	.76
Engagement	3.39	1.01	.92

Notes. Composite measures were computed as an average of the multi-item scales.

Measures

The survey included measures related to consumption, contribution, and creation on Instagram, the authenticity of influencers, feelings of envy toward influencers, characteristics of the personality trait narcissism, and behaviors of upward social comparison.

Independent Variables

Respondent's levels of perceived authenticity (Lee & Eastin, 2020), envy (Appel et al., 2015), upward social comparison (Wu & Srite, 2021), and narcissism (Ames et al., 2006), were measured by adapting existing scales to fit within the context of influencers on Instagram.

Authenticity was measured on a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = not at all descriptive, 7 = exactly descriptive) including 18 items measuring sincerity, truthful endorsement, visibility, expertise, and uniqueness (α = .95, M = 4.83, SD = 1.09). Participants responded to how descriptive each item was of the Instagram influencer(s) such as, "The Instagram influencer not only posts about the good in his/her life but also about hardships."

Envy was measured on a seven-point Likert type scale (0 = not at all, 6 = perfectly) with 7 items measuring envy (α = .84, M = 3.08, SD = 1.22). Participants indicated the extent to which statements described their feelings about the Instagram influencer. For instance, "I envy the life of the influencer" and "I want to change roles with the influencer."

Upward social comparison was measured on a seven-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) with 11 items (α = .91, M = 5.27, SD = 1.08). Participants indicated the level of agreement with items such as, "The Instagram influencer(s) have a better life than me" and "The Instagram influencer(s) achieved more than me."

Narcissism was measured on a 16-item pair measure (α = .76, M = .38, SD = .21). Participants indicated which statement represented themselves more strongly such as, "I like to be the center of attention; I prefer to blend in with the crowd" and "I am apt to show off if I get the chance; I try not to be a showoff."

Dependent Variable

Respondent's levels of influencer engagement were measured by three dimensions (contribution, consumption, and creation) of the consumer engagement with influencers on Instagram. The current study adapted the social media brand-related content (CESBC) scale (Schivinski et al., 2016) to fit the context of influencers on Instagram. Participants were asked to respond to a series of Likert-type statements on a seven-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) to indicate the extent the participant engages with influencers on Instagram. The contribution dimension included statements such as, "I comment on posts related to influencers on Instagram," while the consumption dimension included statements such as, "I read the influencer's posts on Instagram," and "I initiate posts related to influencers on Instagram" on the creation dimension. The composite measure of the multi-item scales achieved good reliability (α = .92, M = 3.39, SD = 1.01).

Table 2
Correlations between key variables.

	1	2	3	4	5
Engagement	-				
Authenticity	.16*	-			
Consumer Envy	.33**	.07	-		
Upward Social Comparison	-.02	.29**	.34**	-	
Narcissism	.23**	.03	.09	-.11	-

Notes. *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$.

RESULTS

To test the hypothesized conceptual framework for influencer engagement on Instagram, a linear regression was undertaken using IBM SPSS Statistics 27 Software. The model was significant (R^2 = 0.194, $F(4, 174)$ = 10.49, adjusted R^2 = 0.176).

Specifically, the results indicate that all four antecedents: authenticity, envy, upward social comparison, and narcissism, had significant relationships with influencer engagement on Instagram (see Figure 2). However, one antecedent, had negative and predictive effects for influencer engagement which was inverse of the hypothesized model.

Hypothesis Testing

The current study used linear regression to test the relationship between authenticity, envy, comparison, narcissism, and influencer engagement. **H1** posits that authenticity positively impacts a consumer's engagement with influencers on Instagram. A significant, positive relationship was revealed ($\beta = .20$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, **H1** was supported – authenticity of the influencer will predict engagement. **H2** posits that envy has a positive relationship with influencer engagement on Instagram. A significant, positive relationship was revealed ($\beta = .37$, $p < .001$). Thus, **H2** was supported – feelings of envy toward an Instagram influencer will encourage more engagement. **H3** posits that upward social comparison to influencers has a positive relationship with influencer engagement. In contrast, a significant, negative relationship was revealed ($\beta = -.18$, $p < .05$). Thus, **H3** was not supported and instead, when upward social comparison towards an Instagram influencer occurs, there is less engagement with the influencer. Further, it is important to note that while the data in the current study do not show a significant correlation between upward social comparison and engagement with influencers, upward social comparison proves to be an important variable in the linear regression. Here, upward social comparison is a suppressor variable, which is not independently correlated to engagement nor a predictor of engagement but enhances the predictive impact of other variables in the current study, including authenticity, envy, and narcissism. **H4** posits that narcissism will have a positive relationship with influencer engagement on Instagram. A significant, positive relationship was revealed ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$). Thus, **H4** was supported – those individuals high in narcissism engage more with influencers on Instagram.
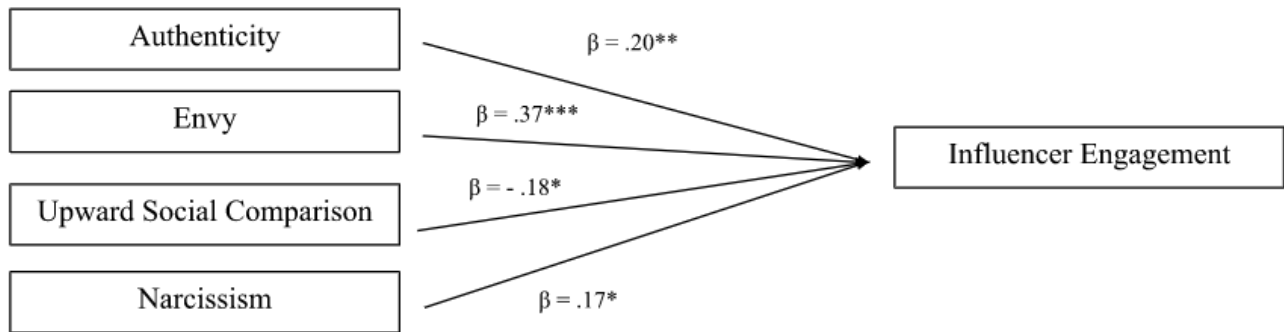
Figure 2. The predictive model of influencer engagement.

DISCUSSION

Instagram continues to be used globally, with many users interacting with posts that involve shopping and even following through by visiting the brand's website with purchase intentions. Indeed, many studies have explored social media influencers and influencer marketing, but the influencer phenomenon is new, and trends are constantly shifting, making there much more to explore.

The aim of the current research was to explore the psychological predictors that influence engagement with influencers on Instagram. Previous research has connected constructs such as authenticity, envy, comparison, and narcissism to intentions to follow celebrities (Kowalski & Pounders, 2016), intention to make purchases (Ki & Kim, 2019), intentions to share influencer content (Ki & Kim, 2019), intentions to spend more time using and engaging on social media (Gosling et al., 2011; Reer et al., 2019; Vogel et al., 2015; Yang, 2016), social media addiction (Kim et al., 2021), fear of missing out, and materialism (Dinh & Lee, 2021) across various social media platforms. Expanding on these findings, the current study explored the impact of authenticity, envy, upward social comparisons, and the personality trait narcissism on engagement with influencers on Instagram.

Theoretical Implications

The current study confirms that constructs of authenticity, envy, upward social comparison, and narcissism are all antecedents of influencer engagement on Instagram. Specifically, authenticity, envy, and narcissism are positively associated with engagement with influencers on Instagram, while upward social comparison is negatively associated. These results contradict previous findings of upward social comparison where comparison

is related to more interaction and browsing on Instagram (Yang, 2016). Looking further into passive and active engagement behaviors on social media, previous research has identified differences in the outcomes of engagement on social media. For instance, instead of upward social comparison influencing engagement, scholars have seen that passive social media use often leads to a negative impact on psychological well-being such as upward social comparison and depression, while active use leads to lower levels of upward social comparison (Pang, 2021). Indeed, simply being exposed to influencer-related content on social media can induce social comparisons (Chae, 2018; Chae, 2021) and are associated with feelings of envy, fear of missing out on trendy products shared by the influencer, increased motivations for possession of material items (materialism), and buying intentions (Chae, 2018; Dinh & Lee, 2021). Thus, it is important to consider the role comparison plays in engagement with influencers on Instagram. Although social comparisons may be related to an increase in social media consumption (Reer et al., 2019) and more interaction and browsing on Instagram (Yang, 2016), the current findings indicate upward social comparisons to the influencer negatively impact engagement.

Meanwhile, the role of envy has been found to be a dominant factor in predicting influencer engagement as comparisons to the influencer predict envy toward the influencer in the future (Chae, 2018). Envy toward influencers have positive effects such as increased purchase intentions (Lin, 2018) and social presence (Jin et al., 2019), however, there is much discussion on the negative impacts of envy. Indeed, recent discussions in the press have surrounded the connection between Instagram, comparison, envy, and negative psychological well-being (anxiety and depression) among young females (Wells et al., 2021; Woo, 2021). Specifically, within the Instagram platform, young women often make comparisons to others, leading to struggles with envy, body image, and eating disorders (Wells et al., 2021). Similarly, scholars have found that comparisons on social media lead to body image struggles for young women (Hogue & Mills, 2019; Pedalino & Camerini, 2022). While there are both positive and negative effects of envy while using social media, the current findings suggest that envy positively impacts engagement with influencers on Instagram.

Finally, the current findings suggest that the personality trait, Narcissism, positively impacts engagement with influencers on Instagram. Literature presents

narcissists as active users of social media to fulfill self-enhancement needs through self-promotions, maintaining a large following, and associating with people of high status. Thus, it is no surprise to see the personality trait of Narcissism positively influence engagement with influencers on Instagram.

Practical Implications

Regarding advertising and marketing implications, it is very important to know how influencers are impacting consumers as influencer marketing continues to rise in popularity. Specifically, the amount of money being poured into Instagram continues to increase year after year. Indeed, U.S. advertising revenues on Instagram are growing faster than Facebook's, which is expected to reach over $26 billion in ad revenues, growing 52% in 2021 (Lebrow, 2021). Thus, it is important to understand consumer motivations and behaviors toward influencer marketing on Instagram.

Moreover, brands, advertisers, and influencers should keep in mind the importance of experiencing authenticity from influencers when consumers engage with influencers on Instagram. Recent trends in social media suggest that consumers demand more of an "unfiltered look" that will shape more authenticity in self-expressions (Kaindl, 2020). Indeed, Instagram is experiencing a shift away from a staged and filtered aesthetic to a more unfiltered and transparent feed. Instagram users have seen and shared "Instagram vs. Reality" posts contributing to this shift in culture and we are beginning to see more personalized and candid content from Instagram influencers (Battan, 2019). For instance, Instagram stars have been speaking more about mental health and well-being through sharing candid thoughts in Instagram captions (Battan, 2019). Thus, as influencers continue to seek engagement on Instagram, it is important to stay updated on the shifting trends in authenticity, and other factors that influence engagement on social media.

Limitations & Future Research

This research has several limitations. First, the findings are only generalizable to one social media platform: Instagram. While the photo and video sharing platform is a primary online location for influencers, research must be replicated for each platform as engagement may differ. Further, the current study does not explore the individual behaviors of online engagement, such as liking, commenting, sharing, saving, interacting, and creating. Third, the sample consists of college students and cannot be generalizable to

the population. Similarly, there is a large female base in the sample. Although the gender mix on Instagram is mostly even among females (51%) and males (49%), it is important to note that a higher percentage of females (43%) use Instagram compared to males (31%) in the U.S. (Instagram Statistics, 2021). Regarding the study design, there are similarities between the scales used (shown in the Appendix). For instance, the item stating "My life is inferior to the influencer" on the envy measurement is very similar to the item "This Instagram influencer(s) has a better life than me" on the upward social comparison measurement. Similarly, there is much skepticism discussed among scholars about the methodology of self-reporting on engagement behaviors across social media platforms.

Future research can focus on other variables of interest including skepticism among consumers toward engaging with influencers on Instagram. Further, future research should gather a larger and more representative sample of participants to further understanding on social media usage. Insights into consumer trends related to influencer content and behaviors on Instagram, such as frequency of engagement and specific behaviors of engagement, should be considered as they will provide both theoretical and practical implications for scholars and industry professionals interested in influencer marketing and social media engagement.

CONCLUSION

Like the characteristics of trustworthiness, expertise, and attractiveness in the source credibility model (Ohanian, 1991), which are well-known for impacting the acceptance of celebrity-endorsed content, the current research looks to better understand the factors that impact influencer engagement. Thus, the primary contribution of this research is to examine psychological predictors of influencer engagement from influencers on Instagram and how those might help establish a source credibility model for influencers on social media platforms, such as Instagram. Further, the findings add to the growing literature on Instagram usage.

While factors such as authenticity and envy are well-studied in the literature surrounding social media influencers and contribute to popular conversations in the press, little research has been done connecting the psychological predictors of influencer engagement on Instagram. This research provides theoretical contributions and

interesting insights into the relationships among several established constructs – authenticity, envy, upward social comparison, narcissism, and engagement on Instagram. Specifically, these insights allow for a better understanding of psychological traits that motivate Instagram users to engage with influencers.

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Funding and Acknowledgements

Online Connections

To follow these authors in social media:
Abby Hendricks: @abbychendricks
Laura Bright: @lbright

APPENDIX

Independent Variable	Measurement Items
Authenticity	The Instagram influencer seems kind and good hearted The Instagram influencer is sincere The Instagram influencer is down to earth The Instagram influencer comes off as very genuine Although the Instagram influencers post ads, they give meaningful insights into the products and services The Instagram influencer give very honest reviews on brands The products and brands the Instagram influencer endorse vibe well with his/her personality The Instagram influencer promote products they would actually use The Instagram influencer not only posts about the good in his/her life but also about hardships The Instagram influencer talks about real-life issues going on in his/her life The Instagram influencer talks about his/her flaws and is not ashamed of showing them to the public The Instagram influencer reveals a lot of his/her personal life to the public The Instagram influencer is skilled in his/her field The Instagram influencer is very knowledgeable in their field The Instagram influencer demonstrates a natural ability in their field The Instagram influencer is unique The Instagram influencer has distinctive characteristics The Instagram influencer's content is original and not a copy of someone else's
Envy	I envy the life of the influencer My life is inferior to the influencer I am bitter toward the influencer I feel disadvantaged by the influencer I want to change roles with the influencer I wish I were like the influencer I feel inspired by the influencer
Narcissism	I know that I am good because everybody keeps telling me so; When people compliment me, I sometimes get embarrassed I like to be the center of attention; I prefer to blend in with the crowd I think I am a special person; I am no better nor worse than most people I like having authority over people; I don't mind following orders I find it easy to manipulate people; I don't like it when I find myself manipulating people I insist upon getting the respect that is due me; I usually get the respect that I deserve I am apt to show off if I get the chance; I try not to be a show off I always know what I am doing; Sometimes I am not sure of what I am doing Everybody likes to hear my stories; Sometimes I tell good stories I expect a great deal from other people; I like to do things for other people I really like to be the center of attention; It makes me uncomfortable to be the center of attention People always seem to recognize my authority; Being an authority doesn't mean that much to me I am going to be a great person; I hope I am going to be successful I can make anybody believe anything I want them to; People sometimes believe what I tell them I am more capable than other people; There is a lot that I can learn from other people I am an extraordinary person; I am much like everybody else

Dependent Variable	Measurement Items
Engagement	Consumption
	I follow on social media
	I follow blogs
	I read posts
	I read fan page(s)
	I watch pictures/graphics/videos
	Contribution
	I comment on videos
	I comment on pictures
	I comment on posts
	I share content
	I "like" pictures
	I "like" posts
	Creation
	I initiate posts related to influencers
	I post pictures/graphics related to influencers on Instagram
	I post videos that show influencers on Instagram
	I write posts related to influencers on Instagram
	I write reviews related to influencers on Instagram