



Priscila Rodrigues Tarlé Soares

**“Subscribe to my Channel”: The Impact of Digital Influencers on Attitude Towards  
Brand, Purchase Intention and Brand Attachment**

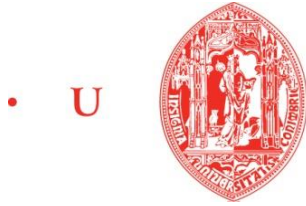
Dissertation of Masters in Marketing, presented to the Faculty of Economics of the University of  
Coimbra to obtain a Masters’ degree.

Coimbra, 2018



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Advisor: Professor Arnaldo Coelho, PhD

Co-Advisor: Professor Cristela Bairrada, PhD

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I dedicate this work to my mother.

## **Acknowledgements**

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*"Words are, in my not-so-humble opinion, our most inexhaustible source of magic. Capable of both inflicting injury, and remedying it."*

J. K. Rowling

*"Without our stories we are incomplete."*

Neil Gaiman

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** This research aims to discover the links between digital influencers and three key marketing concepts: attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention. Seeing as digital influencers have become key aspects of online communities, and their key role in supporting and endorsing brands, studying their role within marketing strategies is essential to improve such strategies and develop better relationships with customers.

**Design/ Methodology Approach:** The methodology adopted in this dissertation is a survey. Once the key variables were identified, and metrics for each of them were found in literature, a questionnaire was created and shared through social media. Answers were then compiled in a statistics software and analyzes using both IBM SPSS and IBM SPSS AMOS.

**Findings:** Findings indicate that customer social participation is the best predictive of positive perceptions of influencers, from those that were considered, and that positive perceptions of influencer credibility positively affected attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intentions. Furthermore, they also show positive connections between perceived fit, attitude towards sponsorship and credibility.

**Originality/value:** Considering the lack of research on influencers and their role in marketing, this dissertation hopes to take a step towards filling these gaps in literature. The study proves to have an innovative take on the role these individuals have on marketing. Furthermore, it also considers variables such as the attitude towards sponsored content, which may shed light on different interactions between influencers and their audiences.

**Practical Implications:** This study contributes to the field of marketing by having an innovative take on the role of digital influencers. Not only does this shed light on their possible roles in marketing strategies, but also provides basis for further discussion and research on the topic.

**Keywords:** digital marketing, digital influencers, attitude towards brand, brand attachment, purchase intention.



## Resumo

**Propósito:** Esta pesquisa busca descobrir a correlação entre influenciadores digitais e três conceitos-chave de marketing: atitude face a marca, *brand attachment* e intenção de compra. Considerando que os influenciadores digitais se tornaram aspectos chave das comunidades online, e seu papel fundamental no apoio e endosso às marcas, estudar sua função nas estratégias de marketing é essencial para melhorar essas estratégias e desenvolver melhores relacionamentos com os clientes.

**Metodologia:** A metodologia adotada nesta dissertação foi um questionário. Uma vez que as variáveis principais foram identificadas, e métricas para cada uma delas foram retiradas da literatura, um questionário foi criado e compartilhado através das mídias sociais. As respostas foram então compiladas em um software estatístico e analisados usando o IBM SPSS e o IBM SPSS AMOS.

**Resultados:** Os resultados indicam que *customer social participation* é a variável mais preditiva de percepções positivas dos influenciadores. As percepções positivas da credibilidade do influenciador afetaram positivamente a atitude em relação à marca, o *brand attachment* e as intenções de compra. Os resultados mostram, ainda, conexões positivas entre *perceived fit*, atitude em relação ao conteúdo patrocinado e credibilidade.

**Originalidade/valor:** Considerando a falta de pesquisas sobre o papel dos influenciadores no marketing, o estudo prova ter uma visão inovadora sobre a função destes indivíduos no campo. Ao considerar variáveis como a atitude face o conteúdo patrocinado, esta pesquisa também lança novas questões quanto as interações entre influenciadores, marcas e seus públicos.

**Implicações Práticas:** Este estudo contribui para o campo de marketing por ter uma visão inovadora sobre o papel dos influenciadores digitais. Isso não apenas esclarece seus possíveis papéis nas estratégias de marketing, mas também fornece base para futuras discussões e pesquisas sobre o tema.

**Palavras-chave:** marketing digital, influenciadores digitais, brand attachment, intenção de compra, atitude face à marca

**Index of Figures**

Figure 1 - Conceptual Model ..... 34

Figure 2 - Initial Measurement Model ..... 62

Figure 3 - Final Measurements Model ..... 63

Figure 4 - Structural Model ..... 71

## Index of Tables

Table 1- Types of Online Interaction .....	21
Table 2 - Genuine vs. Sponsored Recommendations .....	25
Table 3 - Consumer Social Participation .....	50
Table 4 - Active Participation.....	50
Table 5 - User Generated Content .....	50
Table 6 - Influencer Credibility .....	51
Table 7 - Influencer Similarity .....	51
Table 8 - Influencer Familiarity .....	52
Table 9 - Perceived Fit.....	52
Table 10 - Attitude Towards Sponsored Content .....	52
Table 11 - Attitude Towards Brand.....	53
Table 12 - Brand Attachment .....	53
Table 13 - Purchase Intention.....	53
Table 14 - Age of Respondents .....	55
Table 15 - Completed schooling of respondents .....	56
Table 16 - Medium income of respondents .....	56
Table 17 - Time spent online.....	57
Table 18 - KMO Values .....	58
Table 19 - Cronbach's Alpha .....	59
Table 20 - Exploratory Factor Analysis .....	59
Table 21 - Model fit.....	62
Table 22 – Measurements’ model fit.....	64
Table 23 - Confirmatory factor analysis results .....	65
Table 24 - Standard Deviation, Correlation Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha - Final CFA.....	67
Table 25 - Descriptive analysis .....	69
Table 26 - Global fit .....	70
Table 27 - Hypotheses .....	71

## Acronyms

AP	Active Participation
ATB	Attitude Towards Brand
AVE	Average Variance Extracted
BA	Brand Attachment
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
CFI	Comparative Fit Index
CR	Composite Reliability
CRED	Credibility
CSP	Customer Social Participation
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
FAMI	Familiarity
FTC	Federal Trade Commission
IFI	Incremental Fit Index
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin
PF	Perceived Fit
PI	Purchase Intention
PSI	Parasocial Interaction
RMSEA	Root Mean Square Error of Approximation
SEM	Structural Equations Model
SIMI	Similarity
SPONS	Attitude Towards Sponsored Content
SRW	Standardized Regression Weights
TLI	Tucker-Lewis Fit Index
UGC	User-Generated Content
WOM	Word-of-Mouth

# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	ii
Abstract.....	iv
Resumo .....	v
Index of Figures.....	vi
Index of Tables .....	vii
Acronyms .....	viii
Table of Contents .....	ix
1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Research Problem and Objectives .....	4
1.1.1 Main Research Objective .....	4
1.1.2 Secondary Research Objectives .....	5
1.2 Research Structure.....	5
2. Literature Review .....	7
2.1 Digital Influencers .....	7
2.1.1 Influence and Communication.....	7
2.1.1.1 From Traditional Communities to Online Communities.....	9
2.1.2 Who Are the Digital Influencers .....	11
2.2 Perceptions about Digital Influencers .....	14
2.2.1 Influencer Credibility .....	14
2.2.2 Influencer Attractiveness: Similarity.....	16
2.2.3 Influencer Attractiveness: Familiarity.....	17
2.3 Social Media Engagement.....	19
2.3.1 Customer Social Participation .....	19

2.3.2 Active Participation.....	21
2.3.3 User Generated Social Media Content .....	22
2.4 Sponsorship .....	23
2.4.1 Attitude Towards Sponsored Content .....	24
2.4.2 Perceived Fit.....	27
2.5 The Impacts of Digital Influencers.....	28
2.5.1 Attitude Towards Brand .....	28
2.5.2 Brand Attachment .....	29
2.5.3 Purchase Intention .....	30
3. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses .....	32
3.1 Conceptual Model .....	32
3.2 Hypotheses .....	34
3.2.1 Engagement and Perceptions of Influencers .....	35
3.2.2 Sponsorship .....	39
3.2.3 Impacts of Digital Influencers.....	40
4. Methodology .....	47
4.1 Population and Sample Selection.....	47
4.2 Data Collection Method .....	48
4.2.1 Questionnaire Elaboration.....	48
4.2.2 Question Terminology.....	49
4.2.3 Metrics.....	50
4.3 Pre-Testing .....	54
4.4 Data Insertion in Statistic Software.....	55
4.5 Sample Characterization .....	55
4.6 Statistical Analysis .....	57

4.6.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis .....	58
4.6.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis Results .....	59
4.6.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis .....	61
4.6.4 Model Fit .....	62
4.6.5 Quality of the Measurement Model.....	64
5. Results .....	69
5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Variables .....	69
5.2 Structural Model Adjustment .....	70
5.3 Hypotheses Testing .....	71
5.4 Discussion.....	74
5.4.1 Engagement and Perceptions of Digital Influencers .....	74
5.4.2 Sponsorship .....	75
5.4.3 Outcomes .....	76
6. Final Considerations .....	78
6.1 Contributes of the Study.....	79
6.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research .....	80
Bibliographic References .....	82
Appendixes .....	92





## **1. Introduction**

The impact of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention is the central theme of this dissertation. The widespread of social media as a marketing platform, and the constant evolution of the digital space have created multiple opportunities for companies and marketers, which have, in latest years, gathered attention from the academic community as a field of study (Carlson & Lee, 2015; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). However, trust, or rather the lack of it, has showed to be a possible issue in digital marketing and brand generated content (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Influential members of social media platforms can become a bridge between companies and consumers, offering a possible solution for the gap created by the lack of trust. Recognizing and harnessing the power of such members in the online environment could prove essential for strong social media and digital marketing strategies (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Web 2.0 was conceptualized as websites and online services that depend on its users to create content, as opposed to having editors or hired content creators (O'Reilly, 2005). The introduction of Web 2.0 and evolution of social networks and their functionalities has allowed consumers, who once were merely receivers of marketing messages, to create original content of their own. This, in turn, led to the rise of platforms such as Youtube, Instagram, Facebook and other websites where consumers can share this content, giving way to new levels of communication where the consumer can be informed about products, services and companies through means other than an advertisement.

The possibilities created by content platforms have changed the relationship between consumers and brands and created new links between content producers and online content consumers. This new online social environment has created the electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), which became an essential functionality for consumers to learn more about brands and products (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006).

In this scenario, some individuals have stood out, gathering millions of followers around the world (Carlson & Lee, 2015). Their social media reach has allowed these people to adopt the role of digital (or social media) influencers; consumers that, through the production of original

content posted in social media, can endorse and promote products and brands, thus influencing their massive following to become potential consumers.

The two-step flow theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966) postulates that people's opinions are formed through the influence of "opinion leaders", who, in turn, depend on mass media to form their own opinions. Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1966) study emphasizes the role of community opinion leaders as builders of public opinion and mediators of marketing messages.

Though the theory conceptualized by these authors originally referred to offline opinion-formers and the role of such people in local communities, one can draw parallels between their findings and the role of digital influencers. Like offline opinion leaders, digital influencers adopt a mediating role between marketing messages and consumers, adapting these messages in order to present them in personal ways, which resonates with their audience (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014).

The role of endorsement has been widely studied, especially in the context of celebrity endorsers, and though one can find similarities between celebrities and influencers, it is important to denote their differences and the specific impact of influencers. That is because social media influencers are first perceived as fellow consumers (as opposed to spokespersons for brands), which can lead to stronger ties and higher regard for their opinion on products.

Considering the possible impact of these individuals on digital marketing strategies and the relationship between consumers and brands, three important variables were conceived as possibly impacted outcomes: attitude towards the brand, brand attachment and purchase intention. All of them have been widely studied in the field of marketing (Kaushal & Kumar, 2016; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, & Iacobucci, 2010; Spears & Singh, 2004). Attitude towards the brand and brand attachment are considered essential in predicting and influencing consumer behavior, while purchase intention is a conscious plan to turn such behavior into future action (Spears & Singh, 2004).

Attitude towards brand can be defined as favorable or unfavorable feelings and beliefs towards brands. This variable has been widely studied by researchers, as well as its relationship with purchase intention and attitude towards advertisements. Marketing professionals use multiple techniques to convince consumers to form a positive attitude towards their products, as

researchers have found this plays a dominant role in the making of purchase decisions (Kaushal & Kumar, 2016).

Traditional marketing states that the advertisement has a dominant role in impacting attitude towards the brand. However, as technology evolves, traditional marketing strategies no longer detain the same influence over customers. Counting on advertising alone to divulge a company's products is no longer enough, especially in a world where television and the internet both bombard customers with marketing messages daily (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Thus, it is important to find alternative ways to influence consumers to form a positive attitude towards brands, incorporating new technology into marketing strategies (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Digital influencers can become possible contributors and affect this variable through their social media endorsement and promotion of certain brands. Their role as mediators between consumers and brands and the perception of these people as consumers can influence attitude towards a product or brand (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Brand attachment can be seen as similar to attachment in interpersonal relationships, and refers to a connection between the consumer and the brand and the positive feelings the consumer has towards the brand (Yao, Chen, & Xu, 2015). This bond between the brand and the self can be a driver of purchase and a key element in loyalty, making it an important variable in determining customer lifetime value, as showed by (Park et al., 2010).

Purchase intention has been one of the most studied subjects by marketing researchers, as impacting it is one of the key objectives of the field. It refers to the behavioral tendency and possibility for consumers to attempt to purchase a product (Spears & Singh, 2004). This variable gives valuable insight into consumer patterns.

One specific social media platform was chosen as a focus of this study: Youtube. The author decided on this platform due to its popularity with digital influencers and content creators. It counts with billions of users worldwide, and its growth can create a profitable environment for the development of marketing strategies (Correia, 2016). Additionally, Youtube offers the possibility of monetizing creators' videos, as well as tools for the advertisement and promotion of products within videos.

## **1.1 Research Problem and Objectives**

The study of the impact of digital influencers due to the increasing importance of these individuals for the Marketing area. Social media has become an important tool to create and maintain relationships with consumers, and its relevancy for the Marketing world has become increasingly important. The widespread of online opinion leaders represent an immense opportunity for brands and the development of their relationship with consumers.

Thus, the rising importance of digital influencers, and the opportunities they present for the field of digital marketing make the study of their contributions necessary, considering the scarcity of existing literature and the innovative perspective that it can offer for digital marketing theory.

As consumers take on the mantle of online content creators and possible opinion leaders, they present new opportunities and challenges for the development of Marketing, seeing as traditional techniques rapidly become obsolete in the face of new technologies, and that the continuous production of advertisement “noise” does little to move consumers (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Studying the relationship between these new individuals’ influence – which stand between consumers and companies – and consumers’ attitudes towards brands and brand attachment can solidify and evolve companies’ communication strategies, while the impact of these individuals on purchase intention can highlight their importance in marketing strategies.

Therefore, the research problem dealt with in this investigation is: **what is the impact of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention?**

### **1.1.1 Main Research Objective**

Explore the impact of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention.

### **1.1.2 Secondary Research Objectives**

Propose a conceptual model to understand the impact of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention

Explore whether active participation in social media has a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of digital influencers, represented by the constructs: credibility, familiarity and similarity.

Explore whether customer social participation has a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of digital influencers, represented by the constructs: credibility, familiarity and similarity.

Explore whether user-generated social media content has a positive impact on consumers' perceptions of digital influencers, represented by the constructs: credibility, familiarity and similarity.

Verify whether consumers' attitude towards sponsored content impacts digital influencers' credibility.

Verify whether the perceived fit between influencers and the products they endorse impacts consumer's attitude towards sponsored content.

Explore if the perceptions of digital influencers, represented by credibility, familiarity and similarity, has a positive impact on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention.

Explore the correlations between attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention.

## **1.2 Research Structure**

The following investigation aims to understand the impact of digital influencers on the three key marketing concepts discussed in this introductory chapter: brand attachment, attitude towards brand and purchase intention. This dissertation will be divided in five chapters. The first chapter introduces the main theme of the research and presents the research problem and the objectives delineated by the researcher, offering an overview of what will be discussed.

Chapter two is a literature review, which will present relevant theoretical background for the research, conceptualizing each of the variables of this paper, presenting previous finds on links between the variables and the theoretical background that supports the hypotheses of this study. Through the presentation of these concepts, chapter two will construct the theoretical basis upon which the paper will be sustained.

Chapter three will present the conceptual model of the study. This includes a conceptual map built to visually represent the hypotheses and key variables, as well as how they relate with one another. It will also further discuss findings in literature that support the hypotheses proposed.

The fourth chapter will present the methodology adopted by the author. It will contain the operationalization of variables, and explain how the research was constructed and conducted, as well as how the data was collected, treated and calculated. It presents a detailed account of how the research was conducted.

The fifth chapter will present the results found by the empirical research. It will detail the statistical findings and thoroughly interpret them, as to accept or decline the validity of the hypotheses.

Finally, the fifth chapter will present all final considerations and the research's conclusions, its limitations and recommendations for future studies on the topic.

## **2. Literature Review**

The following chapter aims to provide a theoretical basis for the study, by analyzing previous literature on digital influencers, brand attachment, purchase intention and attitude towards brands, as well as all secondary variables utilized in this study. The multiple theories presented in this chapter have become the basis for the conception of the theme of this dissertation and its development.

In order to further elucidate the main goal of the dissertation and understand the role of each construct, some relations between different theories were suggested and elaborated, furthering the understanding of the role of digital influencers in marketing. Through these relations the author has achieved a consensus on the importance of the theme and justification for its development.

### **2.1 Digital Influencers**

#### **2.1.1 Influence and Communication**

Influence can be broadly defined as the ability to affect a person, thing or series of events (Brown & Hayes, 2008). Influence is an essential part of marketing, which aims to make people consume certain products. However, according to Brown and Hayes (2008), traditional marketing has been gradually becoming obsolete, especially when faced with new technologies and their users.

These authors have identified lack of innovation as one of the main reasons why marketing can no longer answer its consumers' needs. The lack of connection between the marketing and sales departments, and the huge volume of marketing messages consumers face daily are some of the major obstacles to obtaining good results from traditional marketing strategies (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

Additionally, commercial messages have become so abundant that consumers filter them out, rather than listening. The constant noise generated by advertisement ends up being ignored by consumers. Even when consumers do remember an ad, though, they often don't recall the products the messages are trying to sell (Brown & Hayes, 2008).

The development and evolution of the internet has also made interaction among users a big part of marketing, and the spread of information stopped being a unidirectional action from companies to users to become a multidirectional effort from users and companies alike.

Tim O'Reilly called this Web 2.0. The decentralization of information is the basis for Web 2.0, which becomes a platform for its exchange (O'Reilly, 2005). Thus, the internet has gone from a broadcasting medium, to an interactive one (Constantinides & Holleschovsky, 2016).

These developments made it so that the consumer was no longer a mere receptor of marketing messages, but an individual with a voice that could be heard by millions. Marketing, then, must adapt to the changing nature of consumer paths in the digital economy (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2017).

This also led to the evolution of Word-of-Mouth (WOM). Traditional WOM can be characterized as “*an informal behavior of informative communication about products, brands and consumers' experiences with them*” (Kiss & Bichler, 2008). Its importance to marketing has been highlighted by other studies in the past, as a possible driver of sales amongst social groups, because consumers tend to rely on the opinions of their peers (Brown, Broderick, & Lee, 2007; Erkan & Evans, 2016).

Electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) is a natural evolution of traditional WOM. Because technology now allows it, consumers are able to exchange experiences and recommendations, as well as get information about brand and products through the internet. The audience leaves behind the limitations of small, social groups and becomes available to big masses of people at once (Kiss & Bichler, 2008).

The internet has made it possible for eWOM generated by ordinary consumers to reach a mass audience, and consumers now have the opportunity to reach thousands and thousands of people, sharing or seeking opinions and information on products and brands (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013).

EWOM has been studied as an influential marketing instrument, since consumers search for information posted by other customers in order to feel comfortable or informed on their purchase decision (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Researchers have found links between eWOM and purchase intention, and Erkan and Evans (2016) concluded that both characteristics of eWOM



information and the attitude of consumers towards eWOM information have a positive impact on consumers' purchase intentions

Social media sites are considered appropriate platforms for eWOM. These websites are made for sharing, commenting and interacting, and these functionalities can easily be used to communicate with brands, showcase preferences, intentionally post about brands or share information on products, as well as leave reviews (Erkan & Evans, 2016).

### **2.1.1.1 From Traditional Communities to Online Communities**

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) wrote that "*community is a core construct in social thought*" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 2). Bauman (2003) defined community as a safe, cozy space, where individuals can relax, and count on each other's good will. It is a space in which dialogue is open and mutually beneficial, and wherein individuals' trust is bilateral.

The role of communities has been studied in sociology and anthropology (e.g. Bauman, 2013; Etzioni & Etzioni, 1999), due to its mediating role in social interaction and individual behavior. Its conceptualization has evolved from physical communities where members meet face-to-face, to wider, online communities.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) look at this mediating role and analyze how communities can impact consumer behavior, developing the concept of brand communities. Their findings point out that these "imagined" communities represent a form of human association situated within a consumption context (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

However, these authors give little thought to the social aspect of brand communities (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) look at brand communities focusing on this social aspect, searching for small groups within brand communities to conceptualize these interactions.

"A small group brand community is a friendship group of consumers with a shared enthusiasm for the brand and a well-developed social identity, whose members engage jointly in group actions to accomplish collective goals and/or to express mutual sentiments and commitments. Group activities centered on the

brand intermingle with other social activities in these brand communities.” (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006, p. 45)

Traditionally, communities were constricted by geographical barriers. Conceptualizations of communities were often surrounded as much by the idea of physical closeness as by the notion of emotional connection (e.g. Primo, 1997).

However, the evolution of Web 2.0 has created an environment through which consumers can surpass geographical barriers. Physical proximity is no longer a determinant factor for the creation of communities. This is also true for brand communities. Social media websites become beacons for the creation of virtual brand communities, wherein consumers can exchange information, share opinions and ideas, and continuously redefine what products and brands mean in their lives (Schembri & Latimer, 2016).

Tsai and Bagozzi (2014) study the motivations behind participation in virtual communities and their findings indicate that group mentality (or ‘we-intention’) can be predictive of individual behavior. That is, a person may possess “*a collective intention when they intent to act as part of a group activity*” (Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014).

For marketing, that means that virtual communities might be used as drivers of intention. Virtual communities can also offer insights on product innovation, and help brands bond with their consumers, creating deeper, enduring relationships with them (Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014).

However, for virtual community-based marketing to work, users must be led to actively participate in these communities, creating and sharing brand-related content (Tsai & Bagozzi, 2014).

Conceptualizing communities is essential for the understanding of the role of digital influencers as opinion leaders (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014). Seeing as ties between brand communities and consumption behavior have been previously studied (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Schembri & Latimer, 2016), and communities form around digital influencers much like fan communities, understanding the role of this construct in marketing is important to fully comprehend the phenomenon of digital influencers (Brown et al., 2007).

### 2.1.2 Who Are the Digital Influencers

Digital influencers are individuals whose messages have a wider reach, due to their higher number of social media followers. Because of that, they have the power to disseminate messages to bigger audiences. Unlike corporate marketing messages, though, influencers' mass-transmitted messages are often perceived as more trustworthy and personal, due to these being perceived as another customer's experiences (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Connections between trust and user-generated content have been researched in the past, and previous studies have found that it *“has significant influence on consumers' brand perceptions, brand choices, and new consumer acquisition”* (Lee & Watkins, 2016, p. 5754).

McQuarrie, Miller and Phillips (2013) highlight the fact that these users are not celebrities, or necessarily experts in their fields, but social media has provided ordinary consumers with the opportunity to “grab the megaphone”, amassing a huge following and widely spreading their opinions.

The trust in social media personalities comes from the perception that spontaneity and face-to-face talks about brands are more credible than ad campaigns. Because social media offers the possibility of worldwide communication without the interference of companies, these interactions are perceived as honest. Social circles are one of the main sources of influence, surpassing marketing messages and even personal preferences, which indicates that consumers tend to follow their peers (Kotler et al., 2017)

Social media allows for individuals to create large-scale eWOM networks, sharing their thoughts and experiences about brands, companies and products online. The traditional role of social circles has been widened within the online space, as technology has made personal opinions easily accessible to worldwide audiences (Kotler et al., 2017). These, in turn, may seek out this information to support their purchase decisions (Constantinides & Holleschovsky, 2016).

Participants in Uzunoglu and Misci Kip (2014) study also point out that reliable influencers' recommendations can bring prestige to brands, and that social media members might become influential due to their reliability. These authors, thus, found that trustworthiness is a major source of power within social media.

Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip (2014) applied the two-step flow of communication model (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1966) to the digital environment, as a way to explain the emergence of digital influencers.

According to Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1966) model, opinion leaders are people in a community that detain some influence over the opinions of others in that same community. That way, ideas flow from mass media (through advertisement), to opinion leaders, to everyone else. This model was a direct contrast with the 1930s' model of the hypodermic needle, which suggested that an intended message is directly received and wholly accepted by the receiver.

The adaptation made by Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip (2014) postulates that influencers adopt the role of online opinion leaders. The authors consider the fact that digital influencers are more information savvy and more willing to consume media content. Like Katz and Lazarsfeld's opinion leaders, influencers have the ability to filter messages disseminated by mass media or brands (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Additionally, Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip (2014) state that digital influencers' role as early adopters gives them key roles in launching new products, and offers new marketing opportunities in launching existing products to new markets.

Centeno and Wang (2017) study the mediating role of celebrities as human brands and their effects on co-creation. Their study also dips into social media participation, about which they find that:

“The comments and reactions for each post by celebrities and other instrumental stakeholders suggest that the attraction that celebrity human brands radiate is worthy of consumers' expressions of attitudes.”

(Centeno & Wang, 2017, p. 137)

The mediating effect of celebrities can be transposed to the role of influencers, who take on the role of “web-celebrities” (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Thus, their social media participation elicits similar reactions to that of celebrities.

The allure of social media influencers can be explained through para-social interaction (PSI) theories. PSI is used to explain the relationship between media personalities and media users, and can be considered a “friendship” between a media personality and a media user (Perse &

Rubin, 1989 apud. Lee & Watkins, 2016). It builds upon an impression-formation process similar to the one that happens in real-life encounters (Knoll, Schramm, Schallhorn, & Wynistorf, 2015).

Originally used to explain the proximity felt by fans towards celebrities or media characters, Lee and Watkins (2016) have transposed these arguments to social media and social media influencers, highlighting the role of social media sites wherein followers can interact with influencers as essential to the development of such connections.

Citing Labrecque (2014), Lee and Watkins (2016) define PSI as an illusionary experience, through which consumers interact with personas as if they're present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship, that is, media users can create personal ties with digital influencers through their online engagement. Some characteristics of PSI resemble interpersonal friendships, providing companionship, and it is a strong factor in establishing relationships.

“After a media character has been categorized, PSI can start as parasocial processing including all cognitive, affective, and behavioural reactions to a media character. In other words, PSI then functions as some kind of interpersonal involvement encompassing the extent ‘to which the individual interacts psychologically with a media character’” (Knoll et al., 2015, p. 723)

In a social media context, wherein users' interaction with their favorite social media personalities becomes more balanced due to the two-way characteristic of social media communications, the development of PSI becomes even more swift. Repeated exposure to vloggers or other social media influencers elicit feelings that are similar to traditional relationship enhancers (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

PSI is essential to understanding the strength of social media influencers because continuous strengthening of the “relationship” with influencers lead customers to seek out the opinions of those influencers on products, brands and services (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Additionally, PSI can influence how consumers react to brands and products, as shown by Lee and Watkins (2016), who found that “*consumers who view vloggers as similar to them will likely develop PSI with the vlogger and have the same positive brand evaluations as the vlogger*” (Lee & Watkins, 2016, p. 5759) .

## **2.2 Perceptions about Digital Influencers**

Endorsement models have been created and widely studied, especially as they pertain to celebrity endorsers (Adnan, Jan, & Alam, 2017; Jaffari & Hunjra, 2017). Like PSI theory, though, these models can be applied to digital influencers, especially as their social media presence grows and they acquire a status of “web-celebrities”. Two models are commonly used to measure and infer how customers are impacted by celebrity endorsement: the source credibility model and the physical attractiveness model (Adnan et al., 2017).

Some of these variables, such as attractiveness, are also antecedents to PSI (Lee & Watkins, 2016), meaning that they help create conditions to create or strengthen PSI between customers and the object of PSI (e.g. influencers).

The source credibility model aims to elucidate on the trustworthiness and expertise of the endorser. That is, the variables in this model argue that communication from a high-credibility source has greater persuasive effects than communication from a low-credibility source (Bergkvist, Hjalmarson, & Mägi, 2016). Trustworthiness, in particular, has been considered essential in the digital environment, and perceiving an endorser as credible has been found to lead to positive associations with the brands they endorse (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014a).

The model of physical attractiveness also valuable insight into perceptions of endorsers. Media personalities who are socially attractive provide a better context for PSI, and perceived similarity between a personality and the customer makes PSI more likely (Lee & Watkins, 2016). An adapted version, presented by Lee and Watkins (2016), used the concept of attitude homophily for similarity and applied the concept of parasocial interaction to familiarity. This model has been studied through these two variables: influencer similarity and influencer familiarity.

### **2.2.1 Influencer Credibility**

Credibility can influence beliefs, opinions, attitudes and behavior through internalization. It is an attribute of believability and honesty observed by consumers (Wang, Kao, & Ngamsiriudom, 2017). Trustworthiness can be defined as "*the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent*

*to communicate the assertions he considers most valid*" (Hovland, Janis & Kelley, 1953 apud. Ohanian, 1990, p. 4)

Perceived trustworthiness of an endorser leads people to believe that the messages being conveyed by that endorser are also trustworthy. When consumers see the source of the messages as credible, they will assume that the messages are also believable (Wang et al., 2017).

This variable has been widely studied in the celebrity endorsement context, as one of the key variables in impacting customers' perceptions of the endorsement and the outcomes of it, such as purchase intention and brand attitude (Ohanian, 1990). Alongside expertise, it makes up the source credibility model, one of two key theories utilized in literature to study the role of celebrity endorsements (Ohanian, 1990).

Current literature supports the fact that positive evaluations of trustworthiness in endorsers generated equally positive evaluations of the brand they were endorsing and its products (Ohanian, 1990). Existing research has linked this variable to attitude change and persuasion, and found that positive evaluations of trustworthiness positively impact purchase intentions and attitude towards advertisements and brands (Choi & Rifon, 2012; Chung & Cho, 2017; Ohanian, 1990).

Chung and Cho (2017) also linked it to PSI in celebrity endorsement contexts. Their study positively correlates celebrities' social media usage to PSI, and finds that higher levels of PSI have a positive outcome on perceived trustworthiness. Furthermore, their research discusses self-disclosure, pointing out its effectiveness in forming PSI and impacting perceptions of honesty.

Willingness to disclose personal details is "*precious*" (Chung & Cho, 2017) and interpreted as an offer of friendship. Digital influencers' social media presence is characterized by a measure of closeness and willingness to divulge such details online (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Participants in (Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014) study have identified trustworthiness as one of the main sources of influencers' power. That is, according to participants the fact that influencers are perceived as trustworthy is what makes them potential sources of influence. Likewise, "reliable" bloggers can bring prestige to brands.

Ohanian (1990) also finds that perceived honesty can generate a positive impact on endorsers' recommendations:

“...a source who was perceived to be both an expert and trustworthy generated the most opinion change.

In fact, the trustworthy communicator was persuasive, whether an expert or not.” (Ohanian, 1990, p. 4)

Literature also finds that digital influencers are perceived as “one of us” by consumers (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014). These perceptions lead not only to a higher acceptance of their recommendations, but also to more positive attitudes towards brands endorsed and recommended by these individuals.

However, in spite of the fact that customers are already predisposed to accept digital influencers as more trustworthy than marketing messages due to their role as fellow consumers (Lee, Lee, & Hansen, 2017), the recent tendency towards making sponsored videos, combined with laws that demand the disclosure of paid advertisement can negatively impact perceptions of influencers and their credibility (Lu, Chang, & Chang, 2014b).

### **2.2.2 Influencer Attractiveness: Similarity**

The physical attractiveness model postulates that the effectiveness of a message depends on physical attributes of the source, one of them being similarity. Attractiveness has been widely researched as an important factor in individuals' judgment (Ohanian, 1990). Similarity refers to perceived levels of commonalities between the source of the message and its receiver (Adnan et al., 2017).

Similarity can be one of the drivers of PSI, as it requires a level of identification with the message source. It is more likely for PSI to occur when a media user perceives the media personality to be similar to themselves and others in their interpersonal network (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Traditional theory relates the effectiveness of similarity to an attractive tendency towards people who are “like” us (Adnan et al., 2017). Lee and Watkins (2016) use the term *attitude homophily*, characterized as “the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status, and the like”.



According Lee and Watkins (2016), perceived similarities between a media user's beliefs and those of a media personality can generate and strengthen parasocial interaction, as well as an increased likeliness that the media user will continue to interact with the personality. Furthermore, their study found that this perception of similarity can also strengthen positive brand perceptions through the development of PSI.

In social media interactions, similarity is revealed through self-disclosure (Chung & Cho, 2017). The information digital influencers divulge in social media can become the basis for perceptions of attitude homophily. Chung and Cho (2017) found that self-disclosure can be a strong driver of PSI, as it makes interactions feel more personal, and enhances the sensation of closeness with social media personalities.

Similarity, or homophily, pertains to the degree to which the media user identifies with the influencer. Lee and Watkin's (2016) study's results indicate that homophily is a strong antecedent for the development of PSI. As users perceive themselves as similar to digital influencers, they become more likely to continue interacting with them and seeking out their recommendations, thus driving a continuous relationship with these individuals.

This variable has been linked to purchase intention (Adnan et al., 2017) and attitude towards the product (Bekk, Spörrle, Völckner, Spieß, & Woschée, 2017). Findings tend to point out that perceived similarity leads to the consumer subconsciously mimicking the thoughts and feelings of the endorser (Bekk et al., 2017).

Within the social media environment, similarity becomes more encompassing as a higher level of information regarding the influencers is shared. That is, more personal details are disclosed, leading to higher levels of similarity being perceived by media users (Chung & Cho, 2017).

### **2.2.3 Influencer Attractiveness: Familiarity**

Traditionally, literature has defined familiarity as the extent that the message receiver recognizes the endorser (Adnan, Jan, & Alam 2017). However, by applying the concept of parasocial interaction to this construct, it has been adapted to refer to the extent that the message receiver or media user feels familiar with a media personality and the "relationship" developed between a media user and a media personality.

The development of PSI occurs when users are constantly or repeatedly exposed to a media personality (Chung & Cho, 2017). It leads to an increasing sense of closeness, intimacy and identification with this personality. PSI functions as an interpersonal involvement and psychological interaction with media characters and personalities (Knoll et al., 2015).

Lee and Watkins (2016) cite Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) to point out that PSI includes seeking guidance from a media persona and seeing them as personal friends, wishing to meet them or imagining being part of their social world. Knoll et. al (2015) recognize that the process of developing PSI is comparable to real-life encounters and can start as “*parasocial processing including all cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions to a media character*” (Knoll et al., 2015, p. 4).

The impression-formation process in PSI is considered similar what happens in real-life encounters, and theory suggests that it is an unconscious process (Knoll et al., 2015). With cognitive, affective and behavioral components, PSI is an encompassing variable that can be a powerful aspect of understanding how users relate to media personalities (Knoll et al., 2015; Lee & Watkins, 2016).

As an aspect of endorsement, familiarity has been linked to positive impacts on purchase intentions and perceptions of brands (Adnan et al., 2017; Chung & Cho, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Both Chung and Chao (2017) and Lee and Watkins (2016) have found correlations between social media presence (from celebrities and youtubers, respectively), PSI and brand credibility, purchase intentions and brand perceptions.

According to Chung and Chao (2017), celebrity endorsers with social media presence that disclose personal details (self-disclosure) tend to generate PSI, which, in turn, has positive effects on their endorsement. Meanwhile, Lee and Watkins (2016) researched the impact of developing PSI with Youtube vloggers and its outcomes. Their study found that PSI can influence brand perceptions and lead to users’ perceptions of products aligning with vloggers’ reviews.

Furthermore, familiarity as a PSI construct has been found to lead users to align their opinions with media personalities’ reviews and recommendations. That is, when a user develops PSI with

a media personality, their opinions tend to follow those of this media personality (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

## **2.3 Social Media Engagement**

This subsection will detail variables relating to social media engagement. Engagement is a key part of the experience with digital influencers, as the relationship between users and influencers develops from the interactions between them. Chung and Cho (2017) found that continuous engagement through social media, mediated by self-disclosure fostered the development of parasocial interaction between celebrities and users, and positively impacted celebrity endorsements.

Three variables were considered for social media engagement: customer social participation, which pertains to levels of emotional connection with social networking sites and other social media users (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), user generated content, which involves how users interact with content provided by other users (Khan, 2017; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007), and active participation, which pertains to how actively users engage in social media by creating content of their own (Khan, 2017).

These have been considered an encompassing set of variables pertaining to the engagement experience, as take into account emotional attachment, the content generated by users and the creation of original content by users. Considering studies such as Chung and Cho's (2017) and Lee and Watkins' (2016), which have connected interaction and positive impacts on endorsement and brand perceptions.

### **2.3.1 Customer Social Participation**

Customer social participation in offline environments has been a traditional topic of study within marketing literature, and its role in online interaction has been a topic of increasing interest for academic researchers (Chae & Ko, 2016). Social media is characterized by interactions between the sender and the receiver (Chae & Ko, 2016). It provides an environment through which people can communicate and interact, share information and create new connections in spite of location, and it has simplified the process of participation for customers.

Social networking sites (SNSs) can both support the maintenance of preexisting social connections or help the creation of new connections (Ellison et al., 2007).

Ellison et al. (2007) acknowledge that social networking sites have given way to a new phenomenon. These websites allow communities to form around shared interests, as opposed to shared geography, meaning that barriers previously caused by location have become less impeding.

This has given way to a new form of socialization, which happens firstly online, then offline, and research points out that relationships that begin online, usually develop to face-to-face meetings (Ellison et al., 2007).

Ellison et al. (2007) also refer to customer social participation as the degree of personal emotional connection users have with social networking sites and how integrated the usage of these sites is in their lives.

Chae and Ko (2016) recognized the differences amongst scholars to achieve a single definition of customer social participations. In their research, they chose to conceptualize customer social participation with a focus on co-creation:

“...an effort to achieve co-creation of values through required but voluntary interactive participation of the customers in service production and delivery process in social media.” (Chae & Ko, 2016, p. 3805)

Chae and Ko's (2016) study sought to explore how customer social participation happens in SNSs. Their findings include seven types of customer social participation, which the authors categorized in three main groups of interactions: customer-customer, customer-brand and customer-media.

Table 1- Types of Online Interaction

Types of Interaction	Categorization of Activity
<b>System - User Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• User exchanges information with the system</li> <li>• Accessing websites and shopping mall and interaction through new media technology, such as smartphone and tablet</li> </ul>
<b>Brand - User Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship between firm/brand and users through interaction</li> <li>• Supply evaluation and opinion on brand product at social media service</li> </ul>
<b>User - User Interactions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interaction among users mediated by communication channel</li> <li>• The degree of control of discourse and role exchange among participants during communication proces</li> </ul>

(Chae & Ko, 2016)

Table 1 shows how Chae and Ko (2016) categorized these three groups. It is possible to see that the relationship with digital influencers occurs mostly on a customer-customer basis, which includes eWOM and sharing of benefits.

In Youtube’s case, participation can be expressed through likes, subscriptions and comments (Lee & Watkins, 2016). It has become increasingly popular among marketers and influencers alike, due to the possibilities it provides for promotions and customer feedbacks. Besides, its popularity is right behind Facebook’s, and about 400 hours of video content is uploaded every minute on Youtube (Khan, 2017).

### 2.3.2 Active Participation

Online users can be divided into passive users (or lurkers), who read, but not post, messages or comments online. Khan (2017) cites Takahashi, Fujimoto, and Yamasaki (2003) to define lurkers as those who do not post messages in online communities, engaging in consumption

(and not productive or participatory) behavior. These users make up about 90% of online communities (Khan, 2017)

Active participation, on the other hand, involves user-to-user and user-to-content interaction, such as commenting, sharing, liking and engaging actively in social media. Khan (2017) also points out Shao's (2009) study, in which the author divides active participation in participation and production. However, active participation includes both of those constructs, and can also refer to those who create content, such as influencers.

On Youtube, engagement is manifested through liking, disliking, commenting, sharing, uploading and subscribing to videos (Khan, 2017). Active participation, thus, effectively includes engagement and interaction, which are the key aspects of developing PSI (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

### **2.3.3 User Generated Social Media Content**

Social media has made it possible for users to create, share and view content (Ellison et al., 2007). However, the very concept of social media makes it dependent of this content, and users have a significant role in the maintenance and evolution of social networking sites. User generated social media content is defined as "*the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users*" (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Youtube, in particular, is characterized as a content-sharing site (Khan, 2017), which means that it is highly dependent on the creation of this content by its users, mainly in the form of videos, but also in comments. Khan (2017) found that leaving comments in videos is a strong predictor of social interaction in this platform.

Vickery and Wunsch-Vincent (2007) sought to define user generated content (UGC). Their research found that user-generated content depends on three distinct characteristics:

- It must be published;
- It requires creative effort;
- And it is created outside professional routines and practices.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) also highlight the fact that UGC has evolved from its beginnings in the early 80s. Social, technological and economical innovations have led to the development of a generation of individuals who have been brought up around the internet and social media sites, and whose content is very different from what was observed in the 80s.

Khan (2017) supports that, pointing out that Youtube, in particular, allows for both passive and active engagement by its users. It encourages both the consumption of content, in the form of watching videos, and participatory and interactive acts such as uploading videos, commenting, liking and disliking.

Digital influencers are, first and foremost, content creators. However, participatory acts, such as commenting and interacting with these individuals also generates user content (Khan, 2017). User-generated content is, thus, both the backbone of digital influencer existence and the result of online interactions in social networking sites.

User generated content has given way to collaborative projects and created new opportunities for co-creation between users and companies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015). When companies properly evaluate and understand the value of their customers, learning how to work alongside them in social media, it creates both opportunities for collaboration and could cause positive evaluations for the companies (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

## **2.4 Sponsorship**

Online reviews have been studied and proved to have an impact on swaying the opinions and convincing possible customer of purchasing products or trying out brands, especially as they are often seen as a fellow consumer's opinion, therefore unbiased and honest (Hwang & Jeong, 2016). However, as social media evolves and companies become more involved in social media platforms, there's a rising trend of seeking out reviews, partnering up with social media personalities and using their opinions as promotional tools.

Sponsored videos, in the case of Youtube, have become a common type of partnership between companies and influencers. Due to the commercial nature of such partnerships, though, the United States' Federal Trade Commission (FTC) has mandated that sponsorship and paid

advertisement posts are disclosed, a demand that has been appearing on multiple other countries as well (Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

Studies, such as Hwang and Jeong's (2016) and Lu, Chang, and Chang's (2014) have sought to research the effects of disclosing sponsorship, especially as it may sway perceptions of credibility consumers have of digital influencers.

Social media personalities are highly valued for their status as "fellow consumers" (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2014), and the commercial act of sponsorship might have negative effects on this perception (Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

On the other hand, product fit was also chosen as a variable because it may sway the attitude toward sponsored content. Kamins and Gupta (1994) used the matchup hypothesis to measure the impact of product type on attitude towards celebrity sponsorship. Their findings point out that a higher degree of congruence between the sponsor and the product improves the believability of the sponsor.

Therefore, this section will showcase theories regarding media users' attitude towards sponsored content and perceived fit between influencers and products they sponsor, as both can possibly impact consumers' relationship with influencers.

#### **2.4.1 Attitude Towards Sponsored Content**

Reviews are a popular type of content on social media platforms. Users share their experience and thoughts on brands, products and services, which can be widely different depending on usage, expectation and personal preference (Lu et al., 2014). These online reviews are often seen as more trustworthy than content created by the company, such as ads and company-generated social media information, as they are perceived as users' unbiased experiences (Erkan & Evans, 2016). Consumers can, then, easily access a multitude of information on products, companies, services and brands.

The popularity of such reviews are rooted in the same kind of trust that people have in WOM, which has been known to have a higher impact on purchase intention than commercial messages (Awad & Ragowsky, 2008; Boerman, Willemsen, & Van Der Aa, 2017). Traditionally, leveraging WOM has been done through press releases, expert and celebrity endorsement



(Forrest & Cao, 2010). However, as technology evolved and made it possible for eWOM to develop, users' advocacy for businesses, brands and services has acquired a new dimension, attaining global impact.

Marketers, then, now look to social media and see new strategical opportunities (Forrest & Cao, 2010). Sponsored recommendation posts have become a popular marketing tool. Marketers identify key users and content creators and compensate them for creating content reviewing or using certain products.

The table below shows the differences between genuine recommendations and sponsored recommendations, as categorized by Forrest and Cao (2010).

*Table 2 - Genuine vs. Sponsored Recommendations*

	<b>Genuine Recommendations</b>	<b>Sponsored Recommendations</b>
<b>Marketers</b>	No participation	Identify key consumers using network analysis, communications traffic and content analysis.
<b>Agents who work for the marketer</b>	No participation	Double identities as a regular consumer and a concealed agent to make active recommendations.
<b>Consumers</b>	Actively make recommendations to others and receive recommendations from others.	Actively participate to make recommendations to others and receive recommendations from others.

(Forrest & Cao, 2010)

According to Forrest and Cao (2010), the flipside of these strategies is their lack of transparency. While consumers tend to evaluate the information provided by advertisement cautiously, online reviews are extended an extra measure of trust, because consumers assume they are not paid (Del Riego, 2009).

However, with the FTC's new rules regarding sponsorship as it pertains to an online environment, and considering the fact that Youtube is an American company, and therefore

subject to implement such policies, there has been an effort to disclose sponsorship (Forrest & Cao, 2010). This can affect media users' perceptions of influencers, especially their perception of influencers' credibility and status as consumers, placing them in the same categories as advertisers or celebrity endorsers (Boerman et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

The rise of digital influencers and their popularity led to the possibility of creating online content as a full time job, paid through the creation and publication of sponsored content, partnerships with brand and companies, and creation of partnerships with lines and even new brands altogether (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

However, as social media becomes a profitable business for content creators, these compensations can generate negative perceptions of their role as advertisers and opinion leaders, putting in jeopardy their effectiveness in endorsing, recommending and reviewing products (Hwang & Jeong, 2016).

Hwang and Jeong (2016) sought to study the effect of sponsorship disclosure on consumers' response to the blog post. These authors recall studies in which sponsorship disclosure has had a negative effect on consumers' attitude towards the sponsored brand. Meanwhile, Carr and Hayes (2014) studied how different levels of sponsorship disclosure (partial versus total disclosure) impacted perceived credibility of bloggers.

Carr and Hayes' (2014) study found that partial sponsorship disclosure (e.g. implied, impartial, inequivocal, possibly deceitful) disclosure had more negative impact on media users' perception of the bloggers' credibility, as opposed to explicitly disclosed sponsorship, which made users perceive the bloggers as more credible.

Likewise, Heang and Jeong (2016) found that the negative impact of disclosing sponsorship was counteracted by a simultaneous disclosure of "honest opinions". That is, while disclosing sponsorship indeed had negative effects on perceived trustworthiness, an influencers' claim that the opinions disclosed were honest could counteract that, inducing more favorable attitude towards the sponsored content.

## 2.4.2 Perceived Fit

Perceived fit is a variable which has been widely studied as relating to celebrity sponsorship, brand extension, attitude towards advertisement and purchase intention, and has also appeared on past studies as congruence or similarity (e.g. (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013; Lu et al., 2014; Srivastava & Sharma, 2012). Aaker and Keller (1990) conceptualized perceived fit as it pertained to brand extension. According to these authors, perceived fit is how a consumer perceives the relation between brand extension and the established brand.

In this dissertation, perceived fit refers to the perceived connection between influencers and the products they endorse or recommend. In past studies, the relationship between celebrity endorsers and the products they endorse has been studied through the “match-up” hypothesis, a theory which postulates *“that the visual imagery contained in the advertisement conveys information over and above the information contained in explicit verbal arguments”* (McCormick, 2016, p. 40).

In endorsement literature, that means that when the desired image of the brand fits with what is associated with the endorser (or when the expectations/perceptions customers have of the celebrity fit with the desired perception of the brand or product) (McCormick, 2016).

“Ultimately, consumers’ acceptance of the endorsement starts before the celebrity is even selected, and the acceptance of the endorsement might only occur when the consumer perceives the images of the celebrity to be favorable” (McCormick, 2016, p. 40)

Kamins and Gupta (1994) looked at the relationship between spokesperson and product type, using the matchup hypothesis perspective. In their study, they state that higher degrees of congruence between the endorser and the product lead to more effective endorsements. This is due to the fact that congruence has been found to affect both identification and internalization processes (Kamins & Gupta, 1994). That is, the processes that lead consumers to accept, identify with and believe in endorsers.

McCormick's (2016) study also confirms this hypothesis, adding that endorser-product fit also has an impact on attitude towards advertisement and towards the brand, and that the matchup hypothesis can be applied even to unfamiliar celebrities.

As social media influencers effectively adopt the role of endorsers, it is possible to infer that the findings of existing literature can be applied to these individuals as well. Furthermore, existing literature on perceived fit has found links between perceived fit and attitude towards advertisement, which serves as a basis for a link between perceived fit and attitude towards sponsored content, which, in spite of relaying on influencers' opinion or usage of products, can still be considered a type of advertisement.

## **2.5 The Impacts of Digital Influencers**

The following section will conceptualize and present findings regarding the three variables impacted by the presence and actions of digital influencers. Attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention were chosen due to their role as important variables in predicting and influencing consumer behavior (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Spears & Singh, 2004; Yao et al., 2015).

### **2.5.1 Attitude Towards Brand**

Marketing research has long focused a lot of its attention on figuring out how to determine and influence its customers' attitudes (Spears & Singh, 2004). That is because attitude is a good predictive of consumer behavior, which is ultimately what marketers want to impact (Spears & Singh, 2004). Attitude towards the brand is one of the main topics of study within this subject, and its importance has been amply studied by marketing researchers.

Spears and Singh (2004, p. 55) center their conceptualization of attitude towards brand around Mitchell and Olson's (1981, p. 318) definition of this construct: "*an individual's internal evaluation of the brand.*" This differs attitude from attachment or feelings, as it conceptualizes this construct as an internal process of evaluative nature (i.e. it has both degrees of goodness and badness). Posavac et al. (2014) define attitude as an integration of multiple evaluative beliefs, but that it may be affected by a number of inputs.

Establishing favorable association with a product is how firms seek to create a positive attitude towards the brand, because this concept is often related to two main constructs: attitude towards advertisement, and purchase intention (Mitchell & Olson, 2000; Spears & Singh, 2004).

Furthermore, much of the existing research focuses on attitude towards the ad as an influencer of attitude towards the brand, or on both of these constructs as influencers of purchase intention (Mitchell & Olson, 2000; Spears & Singh, 2004). Suh and Yi (2006) recall Mackenzie et al.'s research, which showed these connections through the comparison of four theoretical models of advertisement.

Bergkvist et al., (2016) look at the relationship between attitude towards celebrity endorsers, attitude towards endorsement and attitude towards the brand. Their findings indicate that consumers have a more positive attitude towards endorsements that seem genuine, as opposed to driven by money, and that attitude towards the endorser has a significant effect on attitude towards brand.

“This suggests that consumers make an overall assessment of a particular endorsement and that it is this assessment, rather than previously studied factors, that directly influences their brand attitudes.”

(Bergkvist et al., 2016, p. 181)

This points towards the possible existence of a significant relationship between consumers' attitudes towards influencers and attitude towards brand. Given influencers' role as online spokespersons, it is possible to infer that consumers' relationship with these people will also influence the relationship between consumers and endorsed brands.

### **2.5.2 Brand Attachment**

Brand attachment refers to the positive feelings and connection customers feel towards a brand (Yao et al., 2015). Park et al. (2010) formally conceptualizes it as “*the strength of the bond connecting the brand with the self*”. These feelings can generate loyalty and increase the value of a brand, leading to willingness to pay higher prices and actively seek out a specific brand.

Yao, Chen, and Xu (2015) note the two different sides in attachment: emotional and cognitive connection. Citing Thomson et al. (2005), Yao, Chen, and Xu (2015) note that while cognitive links are formed between brands and customers, forming a brand-self connection, it is emotional in nature.

Park et al. (2010) also use the same concepts to explain the connection between the brand and the self, but further it, adding that this connection can elicit feelings such as anxiety from being separated from the brand, happiness from its proximity and pride by displaying the brand. However, these authors also point out that attachment is made up of more than emotions. That is, there is a rich cognitive background to attachment, which includes memories, previous experience with the brand, thoughts and mental representations of the brand.

Though attitude and attachment are both psychological in nature, attitude is characterized by its ability to range from positive to negative, and it's more a reaction to a brand based on personal evaluation (Spears & Singh, 2004). Meanwhile, attachment requires a higher level of personal connection and is comprised solely of positive feelings (Yao et al., 2015).

That means that while attitude towards the brand has been significantly linked with purchase intention, brand attachment may also be a good predictor of it, if not a better one. Due to the positive nature of attachment and the connection it generates, it not only means a stronger, emotional link with a brand, but can also lead to long term loyalty, and the usage of a brand as an expression of the self (Yao et al., 2015).

Celebrity endorsement literature has provided insight into possible connections customers find between themselves and the endorsers, which make the endorsement more effective and customers more likely to acquire the products (McCormick, 2016). Brand attachment thrives on a similar identification with the brand, which elicits feelings akin to those in interpersonal relationships (Yao et al., 2015).

Lee and Watkins (2016) found that developing PSI with digital influencers (namely Youtube vloggers) led to more positive perceptions of luxury brands. Connections created with digital influencers could, thus, lead to creating or harnessing strong ties of attachment with the brands they recommend or endorse (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Yao et al., 2015).

### **2.5.3 Purchase Intention**

Antecedents of purchase intention have been widely studied by marketing researchers, who seek to impact more consumers through different marketing strategies. This variable is one of the key

subjects of Marketing, as it can be used as a predictive of sales numbers and a basis for studying loyalty, repurchasing and finding out what actually drives customers to purchase a product.

Citing Eagly and Chaiken (1993), Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) define intention as a motivation (in the sense of making a conscious plan) to exert a determined action. Spears and Singh (2004) defined purchase intention as “an individual’s conscious plan to make an effort to purchase a brand”. Their definition is very encompassing of customers’ planning and conscious decision to acquire a product, service or brand.

This differs from attitude or attachment in the sense that it encompasses an effort to carry out a certain behavior (Spears & Singh, 2004). This characteristic is also what makes this variable predictive of consumer behavior, thus, essential in understanding an important outcome for any marketing variable.

This set of characteristics make purchase intention an essential variable in understanding consumption behavior. Unlike the evaluation present in attitude towards the brand (Spears & Singh, 2004) or the positive feelings found in attachment (Yao et al., 2015), purchase intention includes a conscious plan to engage in such behavior, whether immediately or not (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006).

The relationship between attitude towards brand and purchase intention was amply studied by Spears and Singh (2004), who sought to create valid measures for these variables Their study discusses the correlation between these variables, namely how attitude can impact intention, and how both of these constructs have been widely discussed in marketing literature as complementary variables.

Additionally, Park et al. (2010) analyzed the effects of brand attachment and their results point to the existence of a relationship between attachment and purchase intention. That is because attachment represented by both brand–self connection and prominence is a good predictor of consumer behavioral intention (Park et al., 2010).

### 3. Conceptual Model and Hypotheses

The following chapter will present the conceptual model proposed as a basis for this empirical study. Then, all of the hypotheses of the study will be introduced, along with the theoretical basis that support them.

#### 3.1 Conceptual Model

The first step in building a conceptual model was defining the main research problem. Since the impact of influencers is a relatively new area of marketing, there is a wide variety of possibilities regarding its study. Considering brand attachment, attitude towards brand and purchase intentions are key variables in marketing (Park et al., 2010; Spears & Singh, 2004), these were selected as possible outcomes of digital influencers being used in marketing.

Therefore, the main research problem was defined as: **what is the impact of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention?**

The author then identified key variables and studies which could support the main research objective. Studies on celebrity endorsement (e.g. Bergkvist et al., 2016; Khan, 2017; Ohanian, 1990), consumer participation in social media (e.g. Chae & Ko, 2016; Erkan & Evans, 2016; Khan, 2017; Vickery & Wunsch-Vincent, 2007), brand attachment (e.g. Park et al., 2010), purchase intention and attitude towards brand (e.g. Spears & Singh, 2004), sponsorship and sponsored content (e.g. Boerman et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016) and, finally, influence and influencers (e.g. Brown & Hayes, 2008; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014) were then analyzed to define which variables would be taken into consideration in this research.

From this review the concepts *active participation*, *customer social participation* and *user generated social media content* were identified as possible antecedents of the interaction with digital influencers. *Credibility*, *similarity* and *familiarity* are used to determine customers' perceptions of influencers. Though these variables are commonly used for celebrity endorsers, the role of influencers as endorsers makes it possible to use the same variables to assess consumers' perceptions of them.



Sponsorship is a key part of social media marketing, and one of the most explicit types of interactions between brands and influencers (Boerman et al., 2017; Hwang & Jeong, 2016). Under American law, influencers are obligated to disclose when a video or post is sponsored by a company or brand (Del Riego, 2009). However, this disclosure might sway users' perceptions of the influencer or the brand.

Additionally, the perceived fit between the influencer and products that appear on their pages might also impact how users react to endorsements (Hwang & Jeong, 2016; Verhellen, Dens, & Pelsmacker, 2016). Thus, *attitude towards sponsored content* and *perceived fit* between the influencer and sponsored products have been added as important variables that might impact users' relationship with influencers.

Finally, *attitude towards brand*, *brand attachment* and *purchase intention* were considered as consequences for their importance in marketing literature, and because these three variables are considered good predictors of customer behavior.

The **secondary research objectives** were then defined as:

Propose a conceptual model to understand the impact of *digital influencers* on *attitude towards brand*, *brand attachment* and *purchase intention*.

Verify whether the construct *customer social participation* has a positive correlation with customers' perceptions of influencers, represented by the constructs *credibility*, *familiarity* and *similarity*.

Verify whether the construct *user-generated social media content* has a positive correlation with customers' perceptions of influencers, represented by the constructs *credibility*, *familiarity* and *similarity*.

Verify whether the construct *active participation* has a positive correlation with customers' perceptions of influencers, represented by the constructs *credibility*, *familiarity* and *similarity*.

Verify whether consumer's *attitude towards sponsored content* has an impact on digital influencers' *credibility*.

Verify whether the *perceived fit* between influencers and the products they sponsor can positively impact consumers' *attitude towards sponsored content*.

Verify whether the *perceived fit* between influencers and the products they sponsor can positively impact *attitude towards brand*.

Verify whether there is a positive relationship between *attitude towards brand* and *brand attachment*.

Verify whether there is a positive relationship between *brand attachment* and *purchase intention*.

Verify whether there is a positive between *attitude towards brand* and *purchase intention*.

Considering the main research objective and all of the secondary objectives, the following model was then conceived as a graphic representation of all the variables and the interrelationships between them present in the empirical research.

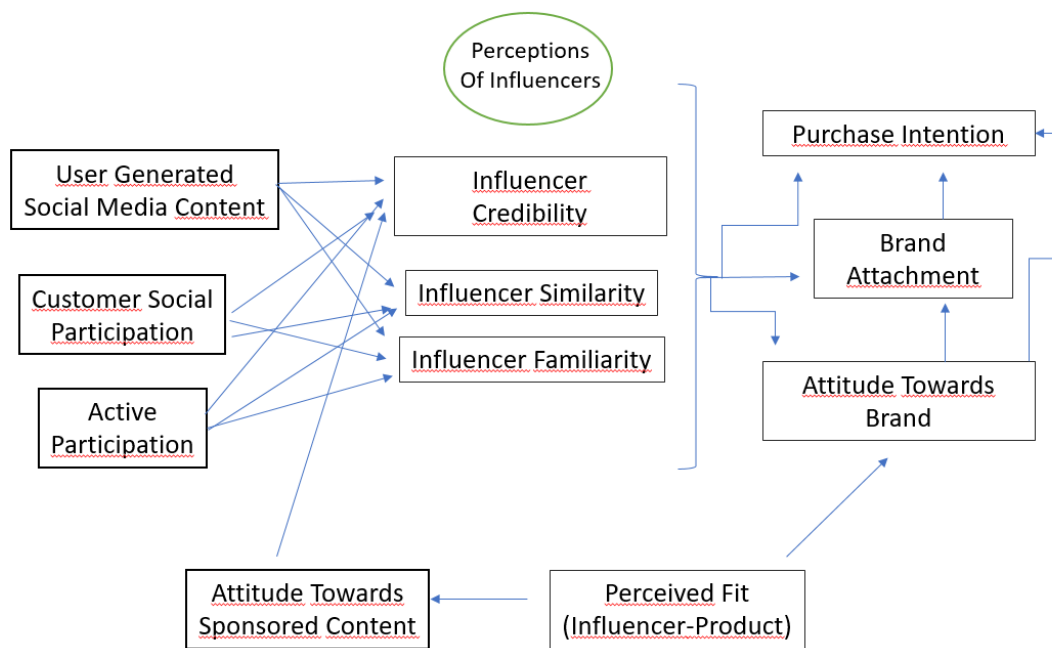


Figure 1 - Conceptual Model

### 3.2 Hypotheses

Once the conceptual model had been defined, it was possible to outline the hypotheses that would guide the study. According to Marconi and Lakatos (2003, p. 127), a hypothesis is a

“*supposed, probable and provisory answer to a research problem*”. Additionally, these authors also argue that the hypotheses must have a theoretical basis that support them.

Using the directives proposed by Marconi and Lakatos (2003) and existing literature on the theme, the author has formulated a set of hypotheses, presented below.

### **3.2.1 Engagement and Perceptions of Influencers**

As defined in the literature review, active participation refers to users of social media who leave comments, like/dislike content and share content (Khan, 2017). Interactivity is a major part of social media and active participation is one of the main aspects of interaction. Chae and Ko (2016) argued that social media interaction could be classified in three different ways, customer-customer, customer-brand and customer-media.

According to Chae and Ko (2016), voluntary, active participation by users in social media must be motivated. When motivated, users actively seek and provide information to other users regarding brands and products, and this information exchange can influence their behavior and participation activities (Chae & Ko, 2016).

Chung and Cho (2017) also found that interaction and exchanges with celebrities in social media has a significant impact on celebrity endorsement and parasocial relationships. According to these authors, frequent messages and exchanges in social media can strengthen the sensation of proximity with social media personalities. This points us to the existence of a relationship between active participation and familiarity.

**H1: There is a positive relationship between *active participation* and *influencer familiarity*.**

Actively participating in social media can also influence users’ perceptions of influencer credibility. Khan (2017) sought to discover antecedents of active participation and engagement on Youtube. The findings of this study point out that social interaction and information seeking are two key aspects of active participation in this social media platform.

Lee et al. (2017) did find that user generated advertising was more favorably viewed than advertising created by the company. Additionally, (Boerman et al., 2017) found that sponsored posts that had been flagged as such on Facebook were less likely to generate eWOM.

These findings point towards the existence of a relationship between users' active participation in social media and positive perceptions of influencer credibility, which is further supported by Chung and Cho's (2017) findings of correlations between social media participation and positive evaluations of source trustworthiness.

**H2: There is a positive relationship between *active participation* and *influencer credibility*.**

Chung and Cho (2017) found strong ties between social media interaction and positive evaluations of celebrities present in social media. According to these authors, social media interaction between fans and celebrities generates PSI and strengthens users' positive evaluations of these celebrities and their endorsements.

Self-disclosure, or the sharing of personal information, is interpreted as a sign of friendship, which enhances the feeling of similarity between users and celebrities in social media. Lee and Watkins (2016) also put attitude homophily, or similarity, as an antecedent to PSI, formed by identifying similar traits between oneself and a social media personality.

These findings point out the existence of a positive relationship between active participation and perceptions of influencer similarity.

**H3: There is a positive relationship between *active participation* and *influencer similarity*.**

Customer social participation is defined as “*an effort to achieve co-creation of values through required but voluntary interactive participation of the customers in service production and delivery process in social media*” (Chae & Ko, 2016, p. 3805). According to the results found by Chae and Ko (2016), participation motivation and customer social participation are significantly tied.

Furthermore, Ellison et al. (2007) found links between participation intensity (i.e. the strength of customer social participation), social capital and intensity of engagement with other users and organizations.

Seeing as social interaction has been identified as one of the key motives behind participation in social media (Khan 2017), and social interaction has been positively linked with PSI (Lee & Watkins, 2016), it is possible to infer that there is a bridge between customer social participation and influencer familiarity.

**H4: There is a positive relationship between *customer social participation and influencer familiarity*.**

Social participation in social media has been tied to higher levels of engagement with other users, which means that users with higher degrees of social participation are more likely to engage with user generated content (Ellison et al., 2007).

Chung and Cho (2017) also found positive links between interaction in social media and positive evaluations of source credibility. Specifically, celebrities that perform self-disclosure and interact with users are seen as more trustworthy than those that don't, which also influences the response towards their endorsements.

Additionally, (Yuan, Kim, & Kim, 2016) found that motivations to use social network can influence whether customers form PSI and influence their perceptions of celebrities.

These findings all point towards the existence of the relationship proposed in hypothesis 5.

**H5: There is a positive relationship between *customer social participation and influencer credibility*.**

Lee and Watkins (2016) state that users tend to interact more with those who are similar to them, as these interactions allow them to confirm their own beliefs. This dissertation proposes that higher degrees of customer social participation lead to more positive perceptions of influencer similarity.

Chung and Cho (2017) seem to support that correlation, as their findings indicate that exchanges with celebrities through social media enhance the feeling of intimacy and proximity, especially if they are mediated through self-disclosure.

Hypothesis 6 is further supported by the findings of (Yuan et al., 2016) that users who feel strongly motivated to use social media for entertainment and building relationships are more likely to form PSI.

**H6: There is a positive relationship between *customer social participation and influencer similarity*.**

Credibility is the key variable in the source credibility model and has been proven to affect receivers' acceptance of messages, and one of the main aspects of credible eWOM messages (Lee et al., 2017).

Hautz, Füller, Hutter, & Thürridl (2014) studied the role of user generated content on source credibility and found that viewers tend to see videos made by fellow consumers as more credible than firm-generated advertising. The ability for interaction is pointed by Lee et al. (2017) as an aspect that facilitated the validation of the source's credibility. Furthermore, Hautz et al. (2014) also linked user generated content to credibility, and found a positive connection between these variables.

The results found by Hautz et al. (2014) support the connection between user generated content and credibility as well as the connection with expertise, especially when compared to viewers' perceptions of these variables in agency-generated videos.

**H7: There is a positive connection between *user generated social media content* and *influencer credibility*.**

Similarity is one of the key variables in the source attractiveness model, often used alongside the source credibility model when studying celebrity endorsers. Studies state that consumers that perceive similarities between themselves and the endorser are more likely to attract these customers and sway their perceptions of the products being endorsed.

Lee and Watkins (2016) sought to study the role of Youtubers in influencing consumers' perceptions of luxury brands, as used attitude homophily as one of their variables. Similarity and attitude homophily are used interchangeably in this dissertation because attitude homophily is defined as “*the degree to which people who interact are similar in beliefs, education, social status, and the like*” (Eyal & Rubin, 2003, p. 80 apud. Lee & Watkins, 2016, p. 5755).

Though no studies were found that linked similarity to user-generated content, this dissertation argues that there is a bridge between these two concepts, as participation in social media and creation and consumption of UGC will most likely affect users' perceptions of content creators, especially in terms of how similar users see themselves to influencers.

**H8: There is a positive connection between *user generated social media content* and *influencer similarity*.**

Parasocial interaction, or PSI, explains the interpersonal relationship between users and media personalities (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

According to Lee and Watkins (2016) PSI is a perceived reciprocal friendship between a media user and a media personality. It is used as a measure for familiarity because it elicits the same kind of feeling that a user understands influencers in an intimate way, as if they were flesh and blood friends or family.

User generated social media content is linked to familiarity because in order to elicit these feelings, a user must consume influencers' content and develop an ongoing relationship with these personalities. Chung and Cho (2017) seem to support this relationship, by finding that higher levels of social media interaction can lead to PSI forming between celebrities and users.

**H9: There is a positive connection between *user generated social media content* and *influencer familiarity*.**

### **3.2.2 Sponsorship**

Perceived fit, also called congruence, has been widely studied in marketing literature, originally as the consistency between parent brands and brand extensions (Aaker & Keller, 1990). As it pertains to endorsements, fit refers to the level of congruence or consistency between an endorser and the product, brand or service they are endorsing (Bergkvist et al., 2016).

Significant ties have been found between perceived fit and purchase intentions and attitude towards the endorsement. Meanwhile, a perceived lack of fit between the influencer and the brand may lead to negative effects on brand evaluation (Bergkvist et al., 2016).

This dissertation argues that perceived fit also has a positive impact on attitude towards sponsored posts. A connection between fit and endorsement effectiveness has been corroborated by Bergkvist et al. (2016). These findings support the existence of a relationship between positive evaluations of perceived fit between influencers and brands and users' attitude towards influencers' sponsored content.

**H10: There is a positive relationship between *perceived fit* and *attitude towards sponsored content*.**

Credibility is considered one of the key concepts that lead users to seek and follow bloggers' recommendations (Hsu, Lin, & Chiang, 2013). Positive evaluations of a source's credibility can lead to increased acceptance of their recommendations and content. However, sponsorship disclosure can affect these evaluations (Lu et al., 2014).

Lu et al. (2014) found connections between source credibility and attitude towards sponsored recommendations, and link possible skepticism to the same kind of skeptical attitude consumers have towards advertisement.

Hwang and Jeong (2016) found that sponsorship disclosure can negatively impact the credibility of online recommendations, even if such impacts can be partially counteracted by a simultaneous claim of honesty in any opinions and recommendations given in the sponsored content.

This dissertation argues that users' attitude towards sponsored content has an impact on influencer credibility because it can be viewed as a non-personal, paid promotion, which, in turn, would affect the personalized approach influencers have as fellow consumers.

**H11: Media users' attitude towards sponsored content has an impact on the influencer credibility.**

### **3.2.3 Impacts of Digital Influencers**

Credibility has been found to have very strong ties to purchase intention (Adnan et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2017). According to past studies, perceptions of an endorser as credible can not only strengthen the effectiveness of their recommendations, but also translate into positive perceptions of the brand and lead to a higher degree of trust being placed on the brand (Ohanian, 1990).

Ohanian (1990) also states that trustworthiness can have an effect on attitude changes, and that it is the most important variable in the perception of source credibility.

For digital influencers, trustworthiness is especially important, according to Uzunoğlu and Misci Kip (2014). Much of the effectiveness of influencers' recommendations comes from the perceived honesty users have of these people, as their opinions are often coded as unbiased by social media users.



This, tied to the extensive positive effects of trustworthiness in purchase intention found in literature (Adnan et al., 2017; Ilicic, Kulczynski, & Baxter, 2018; Khan, 2017; Ohanian, 1990) support hypothesis 12.

**H12: Positive perceptions of *influencer credibility* has a positive relationship with *purchase intention***

Ties between similarity and purchase intention have been found in traditional celebrity endorsement literature, such as Adnan, Jan, and Alam (2017). As attitude homophily, Lee and Watkins (2016) positively correlated these two constructs, finding that not only is similarity a good antecedent of PSI, but also a strong influencer of purchase intention.

Likewise, such findings are also supported by Bekk et al. (2017). These authors found that similarity is an essential force of persuasion, and that perceived similarity between the audience and the endorsers leads to positive results on purchase intention and attitude towards the products being endorsed.

**H13: Positive perceptions of *influencer similarity* has a positive relationship with *purchase intention***

Traditional celebrity endorsement research has found strong ties between familiarity and purchase intentions, as shown by Adnam, Jan and Alam (2017). Familiarity from a PSI dimension has been positively linked to purchase intentions by Lee and Watkins (2016). In their study, the development of parasocial interaction with vloggers translated to more positive purchase intentions and receptions of their recommendations.

Likewise, social media positively impacted the development of PSI with celebrities and caused more positive perceptions of their endorsements in Chung and Cho's (2017) research. All of which favorably support hypothesis 14.

**H14: Positive perceptions of *influencer familiarity* has a positive relationship with *purchase intention***

Trustworthiness in endorsement has been linked to positive evaluations of brands (Ohanian, 1990), and attitudinal changes towards the endorsement itself (Ilicic et al., 2018).

Brand attachment and endorser trustworthiness weren't directly linked in any of the studies explored, but they do offer some cues that point out to the existence of a positive relationship between them.

The genuineness discussed by Ilicic et al. (2018) in their recent study found that perceiving celebrities as genuine and sincere has positive effects on endorsements and can lead to better perceptions of previously negatively perceived celebrities.

Chung and Cho (2017) found that social media also has positive effects on brand credibility and purchase intention for celebrity endorser engagement. The existence of documented links between perceptions of brands and trustworthiness points out to possible correlations between attachment and trustworthiness as well.

**H15: Positive perceptions of *influencer credibility* has a positive relationship with *brand attachment***

Similarity has been linked to attitudinal change, and celebrity endorsement literature often state that perceived similarities between the audience and a spokesperson or endorser can lead to better acceptance of the messages emitted by these people (Adnan et al., 2017).

Brand attachment grows from a connection between the brand and the self (Park et al., 2010), while similarity leads to perceived connections between the self and the endorser (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Although links between perceived similarity or attitude homophily and brand attachment weren't directly present in any of the works researched, the existence of research pointing out that similarity can lead to strong ties and perceptions of closeness with the endorser (Lee & Watkins, 2016), which in turn might translate to equal feelings towards the brand.

**H16: Positive perceptions of *influencer similarity* has a positive relationship with *brand attachment***

Familiarity, as shown in this dissertation to be acting as a measure for parasocial interaction, has been found to have significant links with attitudinal change (Chung & Cho, 2017) and brand perceptions (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Since parasocial interaction causes people to perceive a close relationship with influencers through a process that is similar to the formation of face-to-face friendship (Chung & Cho,

2017), it is possible to infer that it could lead to the development of attachment with the brands these influencers endorse.

Chung and Cho's (2017) findings point out that PSI mimics interpersonal processes, and generates a close relationship with endorsers, especially with the presence of social media. Furthermore, their study points out that this relationship could have ramifications on how people deal with the endorsed brands as well.

**H17: Positive perceptions of *influencer familiarity* has a positive relationship with *brand attachment***

Credibility has been found to have positive effects on attitudinal changes (Ohanian, 1990) and perceptions of the brand (Ilicic et al., 2018). Overall, studies have found that a positive evaluation of honesty has proportionally positive effects on how customers perceive brands, leading to higher degrees of trust in the brand and more positive evaluations of the brand as credible and trustworthy (Adnan et al., 2017; Ilicic et al., 2018; Ohanian, 1990).

Additionally, perceived honesty has also been linked to positive perceptions of endorsements. According to Chung and Cho (2016), a perceived level of openness and willingness to be vulnerable can result in the formation of parasocial relationships, which in turn leads to more positive brand perceptions and attitude towards brands (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

**H18: Positive perceptions of *influencer credibility* has a positive relationship with *attitude towards brand***

As previously stated, perceived similarities between influencers and media users can lead to better message acceptance and positively influence brand perceptions (Lee & Watkins, 2016). According to Lee and Watkins (2016), perceived similarity, or attitude homophily, leads users to continue their interactions with influencers, and a higher degree of acceptance of their recommendations.

Chung and Cho (2016) also corroborate the existence of a relationship between perceived similarity and positive attitude towards celebrity endorsements. According to these authors, social media exchanges and a perceived relationship with celebrities in social media leads to more positive receptions of endorsements, brand credibility and purchase intentions.

These findings point towards the existence of a positive relationship between perceived influencer similarity and attitude towards brand.

**H19: Positive perceptions of *influencer similarity* lead to a more positive *attitude towards brand***

Parasocial interaction has been linked to positive evaluations of brands and endorsements. Lee and Watkins (2016) found that forming PSI with vloggers positively influenced perceptions of luxury brands and purchase intentions. Seeing as consumers' attitudes towards brands are internal evaluations of brands, it is possible to hypothesize that PSI, or familiarity, can influence this variable.

Furthermore, (Labrecque, 2014) also supports the existence of such relationship, by finding a positive correlation between parasocial interaction with brands and loyalty. According to this author, PSI strengthens the relationship between consumers and brands, increasing loyalty intentions and generating positive perceptions of these brands.

These findings support the existence of a correlation between familiarity and attitude towards brand.

**H20: Positive perceptions of *influencer familiarity* lead to a more positive *attitude towards brand***

(Bergkvist et al., 2016) found that perceived celebrity-brand fit has positive effects on attitude towards the brand. According to these authors, a perceived level of congruence between a celebrity and a brand they endorse can lead to positive brand attributions (as opposed to lack of fit, which leads to negative brand evaluations), which in turn affects attitude towards the brand.

It is possible to argue that influencer-brand fit is equally important, as they take on the role of social media endorsers. The results found by Lee and Watkins (2016) have also established that positive perceptions and PSI with vloggers leads to more positive evaluations of brands, meaning that these individuals have an impact on brand perceptions.

These findings point towards the existence of a positive correlation between perceived fit and attitude towards the brand, supporting hypothesis 21.

**H21: *Perceived fit* has a positive relationship with *attitude towards brand***

Relationships between the three outcome variables will also be explored in this study. The relationship between brand attitude and brand attachment has been discussed by Park et al. (2010). Their study sought to differentiate the two constructs, characterizing each of them and creating measures for future studies.

The results of this study point out that, while attitude can capture the mind of the consumer, it can range from positive to negative, while attachment captures both the heart and minds of consumers and are purely positive. This dissertation argues that a positive attitude towards brand can generate attachment because it elicits positive feelings, which can grow to become a connection between the brand and the self.

Likewise, significant links between attitude towards the brand and purchase intention were discussed by Kaushal and Kumar (2016). This study found that positive attitude towards the brand can positively affect purchase intentions. Though Kaushal and Kumar's (2016) study uses attitude towards the brand as a mediating factor, their findings support the hypothesis that positive attitude towards the brand has a positive impact on purchase intentions.

**H22: Positive *attitude towards the brand* has a positive effect on *brand attachment*.**

Kaushal and Kumar (2016) found that attitude towards the brand significantly influences purchase intentions. According to these authors, attitude towards the brand has a mediating role on the relationship between attitude towards the advertisement and purchase intention. This means that the brand, more than the advertisement, is a deciding factor on a customer's purchase intention.

Furthermore, (Spears & Singh, 2004) also support the existence of a relationship between attitude towards the brand and purchase intentions.

These studies corroborate the existence of the relationship proposed on hypothesis 23.

**H23: Positive *attitude towards the brand* has a positive effect on *purchase intention*.**

Finally, the last relationship explored in this research is between brand attachment and purchase intention. Park et al. (2010) found significant links between these variables, as their results prove that brand attachment leads to consumers being more willing to invest personal resources, such as time and money, into acquiring a specific brand.

Additionally, studies also found that attachment is a good predictor of consumer intentions in general and purchase intentions specifically (Arya & Verma, 2018; Park et al., 2010). These findings corroborate the existence of a positive correlation between these variables.

**H24: *Brand attachment has a positive impact on purchase intentions.***

## 4. Methodology

This chapter will present an account of the methodology adopted in this research, detailing the procedures and instruments employed to achieve the dissertation's goals.

Firstly, the population and sample selection processes will be described, followed by the methods used to collect data. The chapter will also present what went into the data collection process, from choosing the proper metrics to developing the questionnaire. Then, the pre-testing, data insertion and error verification stages will be introduced.

The chapter will then move on to detail all of the methodological components of the research, presenting the steps taken to achieve final results. A brief explanation of the structural equations model will be followed by an account of how the data collected was treated and analyzed.

### 4.1 Population and Sample Selection

Sampling is a process through which researchers choose a part of the population to analyze (Marconi & Lakatos, 2003). This happens due to a lack of resources, such as time and money, which make it impossible to analyze an entire population of subjects. Most empirical studies utilize samples. If a sample is characteristic of the desired population, its results can be extrapolated, and used to propose conclusions to the work and verify the validity of the research's hypotheses (Neuman, 2013).

Given that digital influencers on Youtube is the main theme of this dissertation, the population was defined as people who actively follow one or more digital influencers in this platform. As the scarcity of resources made it impossible to list or analyze the entire population, the author decided to adopt a *non-probability probabilistic convenience sampling* (Marconi & Lakatos, 2003).

Though this sampling method is not considered ideal, it is commonly used for research that lacks resources, and consists of selecting a sample based on the researcher's accessibility (Neuman, 2013). In this case, the questionnaire was shared through the author's Facebook page, and in large Facebook groups.

## **4.2 Data Collection Method**

A quantitative data collection method was chosen for this research, and a survey was used to gather data. Such a method is appropriate for this research due to the fact that existing literature provides adequate metrics to measure the constructs present in the conceptual model, and that it aims to verify a specific set of hypotheses. Marconi and Lakatos (2003) state that a questionnaire is an adequate tool to acquire information on conscious or explicit actions and opinions.

Albeit being a valid, common method for information gathering, questionnaires have the disadvantage of having a low response rate, and the impossibility of explaining questions to respondents. Amongst its advantages are the need for few resources, the liberty in replies, and less risk of distortion or researcher bias (Marconi & Lakatos, 2003).

In this dissertation, the data was collected throughout the months of February, March and April of 2018, through an online questionnaire, created through the Google Forms platform, and shared via social media, through Facebook. The online platforms were chosen due to them being easy to administrate, free, fast and easily shared with a large number of people.

### **4.2.1 Questionnaire Elaboration**

In order to properly conduct the survey, a questionnaire was elaborated. Marconi and Lakatos (2003) define a questionnaire as a data collection tool, made up of an ordered series of questions. It is a useful instrument to verify hypotheses and requires the researcher to observe and uphold specific norms, such as type, order and groups of questions. However, as Neuman (2013) points out, this method is prone to confusion, thus, clarity is essential when elaborating the questions and organizing the questionnaire. The researcher must be very familiar with the theme, which in turn must be in line with the objectives of the research.

Taking into account the resources available, the goals of the research and the advantages of the questionnaire, the present work chose this as its data collection tool. The questionnaire was composed of six sections. Section one introduced the questionnaire, and asked participants for their cooperation, and was composed by general sample characterization questions. Sections two to six present questions related to the research's variables. These questions were grouped



according to the variables and overarching topics related to each variable (social network participation, relationship with digital influencers, trustworthiness and expertise of digital influencers, sponsorship and outcomes).

The questionnaire was developed through the Google Forms platform, and its link was shared through Facebook, and in Facebook groups, alongside a request for cooperation. The questionnaire was applied in Portuguese, as most of the respondents were of Portuguese and Brazilian origin. Answers were received throughout the months of February, March and April of 2018.

An English version of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix I of this research.

#### **4.2.2 Question Terminology**

Questions referring to personal data, used for characterizing the sample, were all multiple choice questions. Respondents could choose only one final answer. According to Neuman (2013), closed questions have the advantage of being easier and quicker to answer, being easier to compare and replicate and having fewer irrelevant questions. Thus, this format offers more precise answers that are easier to code and interpret.

All of the questions referring to variables used a 7 points Likert scale to measure respondents' opinions, with the exception of the Brand Attachment questions, which required the use of a 1 – 10 scale. The Likert scale was coded as: 1 – totally disagree; 2 – disagree; 3 – partially disagree; 4 – neither agree nor disagree; 5 – partially agree; 6 – agree and 7 – totally agree. The Likert scale is thought to be one of the most used formats when researchers wish to combine multiple ranked items, and its simplicity makes it friendly for respondents and researchers alike (Neuman, 2013).

The questionnaire also featured one open question with a short answer, inquiring respondents on who is their favorite youtuber. This question was used to create a basis upon which respondents could answer further questions regarding their perception of youtubers.

### 4.2.3 Metrics

The metrics presented in this chapter were adapted from its original authors, following the needs posed by the research and the orientation of this research's advisor. They are presented here in English, however their translation to Portuguese for the application of the questionnaire was also done under the advisor's orientation.

Presented below are the adapted versions of these measures, alongside their references.

*Table 3 - Consumer Social Participation*

Customer Social Participation	1. I use social networking sites regularly	(Ellison et al., 2007)
	2. Using social networking sites is a part of my daily activities	
	3. I like using social networking sites	

*Table 4 - Active Participation*

Active Participation	1. I actively participate in my favorite social networking sites	(Casaló et al., 2007)
	2. I frequently provide useful information to other members	
	3. In general, I post messages and share information frequently in social networking sites	

*Table 5 - User Generated Content*

User Generated Content	1. I am satisfied with users' communications about brands on social media	(Mägi, 2003) (Tsiros et al., 2004)
	2. Other users' communications level on social media achieves my expectations	(Bruhn et al., 2012)

	3. Users' communications on social media are attractive	(Van Doorn et al., 2010)
	4. There's a feeling of human warmth in social media	

Table 6 - Influencer Credibility

Credibility	1. I believe Youtubers' recommendations to be true	(Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975)
	2. I trust in the information provided by youtubers	
	3. Youtubers are trustworthy	

Table 7 - Influencer Similarity

Similarity	1. This Youtuber thinks like me	(Lee & Watkins, 2016)
	2. This Youtuber is similar to me.	
	3. I identify with this Youtuber	
	4. This Youtuber shares my values.	
	5. This Youtuber has a lot in common with me.	
	6. This Youtuber behaves like me.	
	7. This Youtuber has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine.	
	8. This Youtuber could be my friend	
	9. I would like to have a friendly chat with this Youtuber	
	10. This Youtuber treats people like I do	

Table 8 - Influencer Familiarity

Familiarity	1. I like watching this youtuber's videos in their channel	(Lee & Watkins, 2016)
	2. If this Youtuber appeared on a different channel, I would watch the video	
	3. I feel as if I'm a part of this Youtuber's group	
	4. This Youtuber is like an old friend	
	5. I would like to meet this Youtuber in person	
	6. If there was a story about this Youtuber in a magazine, I would read it.	
	7. This Youtuber makes me feel comfortable, as if I'm with friends	
	8. When this Youtuber shares an opinion on products, it helps me make up my mind about them	

Table 9 - Perceived Fit

Perceived Fit	Considering the recommendations of your favorite Youtuber:	(Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013)
	1. These products are a good fit with my favorite Youtuber	
	2. These products are a logical fit with my favorite Youtuber	
	3. These products are appropriate to be related with my favorite Youtuber	

Table 10 - Attitude Towards Sponsored Content

Attitude Towards Sponsored Content	1. Sponsored videos tell the truth	(Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014)
	2. I believe what my favorite Youtuber says on sponsored videos	
	3. Sponsored videos give me real information about the product	

	4. I was well informed after watching a sponsored video	
--	---	--

Table 11 - Attitude Towards Brand

Attitude Towards Brand	1. I really like this brand	(Kaushal & Kumar, 2016)
	2. My attitude towards this brand is very positive	
	3. I have an extremely favorable attitude towards this brand	

Table 12 - Brand Attachment

Brand Attachment	1. To what extent are these brands a part of you and who you are?	(Park et al. 2010)
	2. To what extent do you feel that you are personally connected with these brands?	
	3. To what extent are your thoughts and feelings toward these brands often automatic, coming to mind seemingly on their own?	
	4. To what extent do your thoughts and feelings toward these brands come to you naturally and instantly?"	

Table 13 - Purchase Intention

Purchase Intention	Considering the recommendations of your favorite Youtuber:	(Lu, Chang & Chang, 2014)
--------------------	--	---------------------------

	1. I would consider buying products endorsed by my favorite Youtuber	
	2. I intend on buying products endorsed by my favorite Youtuber	
	3. It is possible that I buy products endorsed by my favorite Youtuber	
	4. I will buy these products the next time I need (such products)	
	5. If I need to, I will buy products endorsed by my favorite Youtuber	

### 4.3 Pre-Testing

Before applying the questionnaire to a wider sample, it was necessary to do a pretest, which was applied to a small sample with similar characteristics to the overall population. This phase aimed to shed light on any possible errors and dissonances within the questionnaire, and verify whether all the questions were properly comprehended and could be answered.

The pretest was applied to a small sample of 20 people who had characteristics similar to the target population of this study. The questionnaire was sent to a group of people via Facebook instant message, and aimed to verify the comprehension of the questions and metrics, which had been translated to Portuguese from English, and the total time it took to respond to the whole questionnaire.

The results of this pretest pointed out the need to modify some questions for clarity and revealed that the total response time was around 10 minutes. However, the overall response to the questionnaire was mostly positive and followed the expected goals of the research.

#### 4.4 Data Insertion in Statistic Software

The next step after collecting all of the data was inserting it into a statistic software. The Faculty of Economics of the University of Coimbra offered the license for IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science), which was used to create the database and analyze all of the gathered information.

In order to facilitate the identification of different variables, acronyms for each of the items were created. Incomplete questionnaires were then discarded, as they weren't accepted by the AMOS software.

#### 4.5 Sample Characterization

This topic will present an overall characterization of the sample. The information presented below and its subsequent profile was achieved by asking respondents to provide their age, sex, schooling, family income and nationality. 301 answers were considered valid for the research (i.e. left no unanswered questions). However, due to the profile of respondents, the author chose to consider only Brazilian women respondents, which will be further characterized below.

*Table 14 - Age of Respondents*

Age	f	%
<b>1 - Up to 15 years old</b>	6	1.99%
<b>2 - 16 - 20 years old</b>	121	40.20%
<b>3 - 21 - 30 years old</b>	157	52.16%
<b>4 - 31 - 40 years old</b>	12	3.99%
<b>5 - 41 - 50 years old</b>	1	0.33%
<b>6 - Over 50 years old</b>	4	1.33%
<b>Total:</b>	301	

The questionnaire had six age tiers. From the graphic above it is possible to see that most of the sample was comprised of “millennials”, people between the ages of 21 and 30, which made up 52.16% of the answers. This was followed by people between the ages of 16 and 20, which made up 40.20% of answers. The information was expected, as influencers are mostly popular amongst these age ranges (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

People up to 15 years old made up only 1.99% of the respondents, while people between 31 and 40 made up 3.99% of the sample. The least present demographic were adults between the ages of 41 and 50, that made up only 0.33% of the sample. Finally, people above 50 made up 1.33% of the sample. This representation can be explained by the convenience data collection method.

*Table 15 - Completed schooling of respondents*

<b>Schooling</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1 – Middle School (3º ciclo)</b>	14	4.65%
<b>2 – High school (secundário)</b>	140	46.51%
<b>3 – Bachelor’s degree (licenciatura)</b>	134	44.52%
<b>4 – Master’s degree (mestrado)</b>	10	3.32%
<b>5 – Doctor’s degree (doutoramento)</b>	3	1.00%
<b>Total:</b>	301	

Following what was found in the age characterization, 46.51% of respondents had a high school degree, while 44.52% had finished university. These were the most prevalent answers. Next, 4.65% of respondents had only finished middle school, 3.32% of respondents had a masters’ degree and only 1% had completed a doctorate.

*Table 16 - Medium income of respondents*

<b>Income</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1 – Up to R\$1449,99 (€370,99)</b>	58	19.27%
<b>2 - R\$1450,00 to R\$2899,99 (€371,00 - €725,99)</b>	66	21.93%
<b>3 - R\$2900,00 to 7249,99 (€726,00 - €1800,99)</b>	106	35.22%
<b>4 - R\$7250,00 to 14499,99 (€1801,00 - €3625,99)</b>	48	15.95%
<b>5 - R\$14500,00 or over (€3626,00 or over)</b>	23	7.64%
<b>Total:</b>	301	

Income had a fairly equal distribution amongst all tiers, with most respondents fitting in the medium income ranges. The first tier was comprised of people with an income of up to 370,99€, and made up 19.27% of the sample. Secondly, came people who made between 371€ and 725.99€, who made up 21.93%. Most of the respondents came from the third tier, with an income between 726€ and 1800.99€ representing 35.22% of responses. The last two tiers,



incomes between 1801.00€ and 3625.99€ and over 3626€ are the least represented, with 15.95% and 7.64% of respondents, respectively.

Table 17 - Time spent online

<b>Time Spent Online</b>	<b>f</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>1 – Up to 14 hours a week</b>	41	13.62%
<b>2 - From 15 to 21 hours a week</b>	49	16.28%
<b>3 - From 22 to 28 hours a week</b>	62	20.60%
<b>4 - From 29 to 35 hours a week</b>	41	13.62%
<b>5 - Over 35 hours a week</b>	108	35.88%
<b>Total:</b>	301	

Finally, the last item aimed to categorize the amount of time respondents spent online per week. The responses were evenly distributed, and all tiers were evenly represented by the sample in question. 13.62% of respondents spent up to 14 hours online; 16.28% of people spent between 15 and 21 hours online; 20.60% spent between 22 and 28 hours online; 13.62% spent between 29 and 35 hours online and 35.88% spent over 35 hours online per week.

#### **4.6 Statistical Analysis**

In this topic the author will explain all the methods used for the different analysis developed, present the statistical data and the steps taken to examine them and the outcomes of these analyses. The Structural Equations Model – SEM, was the chosen model to analyze the statistical data, which required the use of the IBM SPSS AMOS software (version 25). As an extension of SPSS, the software allows the utilization of the SPSS database.

The Structural Equations Model was developed during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and is used to “test the validity of theoretical models that define hypothetical and causal relationships between variables” (Marôco, 2010).

This model was chosen due to its singular ability to consider multiple types of variables at once, combining techniques of multiple regressions and factor analysis. Another singularity of the SEM is the fact that its analyses are based on theoretical models researchers establish *a priori*.

That means that the theory is in the heart of the analysis, unlike traditional regressions models which put the data in its place (Marôco, 2010).

#### 4.6.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

The factor analysis is divided in two different types of analyses: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). According to Marôco (2010), a factor analysis is a general linear modelling technique used to uncover underlying relationships between variables, by identifying a set of latent variables that explain the structure observed amongst a set of manifest variables.

The EFA, in particular, is used when researchers don't have underlying data on the factorial structure that explains the aforementioned correlation, or when researchers need to confirm or reject a factor structure (Damásio, 2012). Factor rotation allows the analysis to figure out structural patterns (Marôco, 2010). Two methods are implemented to evaluate whether the database can undergo a factor analysis (Damásio, 2012): the Keyser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index and Bartlett's test of sphericity (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974).

Bartlett's test of sphericity aims to evaluate whether the variance and covariance matrix is similar to the identity matrix, indicating a lack of correlation amongst the data. Bartlett's test also evaluates the general significance of all the correlations of the data matrix examined, thus pointing out whether the data matrix is similar to the identity matrix. Meanwhile, the KMO index points out how much of the item variance is explained by a latent variable (Damásio, 2012).

The Varimax rotation was the method chosen to carry out these analyses. This orthogonal rotation method minimizes the number of elevated loadings, approximating each main component to -1 or +1 in case they're correlated, or zero in case a linear association is inexistent. It also transforms correlated factors into independent factors (Pestana & Gageiro, 2003).

The KMO values can be interpreted according to table 18, found below.

*Table 18 - KMO Values*

<b>KMO</b>	<b>Factor Analysis</b>
<b>1 - 0.9</b>	Very good

<b>0.8 - 0.9</b>	Good
<b>0.7 - 0.8</b>	Average
<b>0.6 - 0.7</b>	Reasonable
<b>0.5- 0.6</b>	Bad
<b>&lt; 0.5</b>	Unacceptable

(Pestana & Gageiro, 2003)

In addition to these tests, an analysis of internal factor consistency was carried out, using Cronbach's Alpha. The internal consistency is defined as a correlation between the utilized scale and other hypothetical scales of the same universe, and ranges from 0 to 1 (Pestana & Gageiro, 2003). Table 19, found below, presents the interpretation of the values found by this test.

Table 19 - Cronbach's Alpha

<b>Value</b>	<b>Internal Consistency</b>
<b>&gt; 0.9</b>	Very good
<b>0.8 - 0.9</b>	Good
<b>0.7 - 0.8</b>	Average
<b>0.6 - 0.7</b>	Bad
<b>&lt; 0.6</b>	Inadmissable

(Pestana & Gageiro, 2003)

#### 4.6.2 Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

The final values of the EFA can be found in table 20, below.

Table 20 - Exploratory Factor Analysis

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>KM O</b>	<b>Bartlett's Test</b>	<b>% Explained Variance</b>
<b>Customer Social Participation</b>	CSP1	0.879	0.73	0	80.773
	CSP2				
	CSP3				
<b>Active Participation</b>	AP1	0.812	0.702	0	72.652
	AP2				
	AP3				
<b>User Generated Content</b>	UGC 1	0.833	0.769	0	68.363
	UGC 2				
	UGC 3				

	UGC 4				
<b>Credibility</b>	CRE D1	0.926	0.74 5	0	87.09
	CRE D2				
	CRE D3				
<b>Familiarity</b>	*	0.917	0.90 2	0	71.211
	FAMI 2				
	*				
	FAMI 4				
	FAMI 5				
	FAMI 6				
	FAMI 7				
	FAMI 8				
<b>Similarity</b>	SIMI 1	0.937	0.90 4	0	80.027
	*				
	SIMI 3				
	SIMI 4				
	*				
	*				
	*				
	SIMI 8				
	*				
	SIMI 10				
	*				
<b>Attitude Towards Sponsored Content</b>	*	0.881	0.72 1	0	81.322
	SPON S2				
	SPON S3				
	SPON S4				

<b>Perceived Fit</b>	PF1	0.971	0.76 1	0	94.512
	PF2				
	PF3				
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	BA1	0.935	0.70 9	0	88.493
	*				
	BA3				
	BA4				
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	ATB1	0.976	0.77 5	0	95.526
	ATB2				
	ATB3				
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	PI1	0.956	0.86 1	0	88.25
	PI2				
	PI3				
	PI4				
	*				

\* - these items were excluded from the model during the respecification process.

Once the EFA had been conducted, the author verified that all of the variables presented acceptable results. The KMO indexes found were all over 0,7, while the Bartlett's sphericity tests were all equal to 0,00. This points out to the existence of a correlation between variables. All of the variables also presented a Cronbach's Alpha of over 0,8, which means that their internal consistency is good.

It is important to highlight that seven items were excluded, due to their low explanatory capacity.

#### 4.6.3 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Unlike the EFA, the CFA is conducted once the researcher has information on the factor structure. It is used to confirm whether certain latent variables are responsible for the behavior of specific manifest variables. The CFA is also used as a technique of evaluation for the quality of the measurement model (Marôco, 2010).

SEM is comprised of two key aspects. It measures latent variables and analyzes the causality relations amongst these variables. The measurement model represents the model achieved in the CFA, and it defines how latent variables are operationalized by observed variables (Marôco, 2010).

Figure 2 shows the proposed initial measurement model.

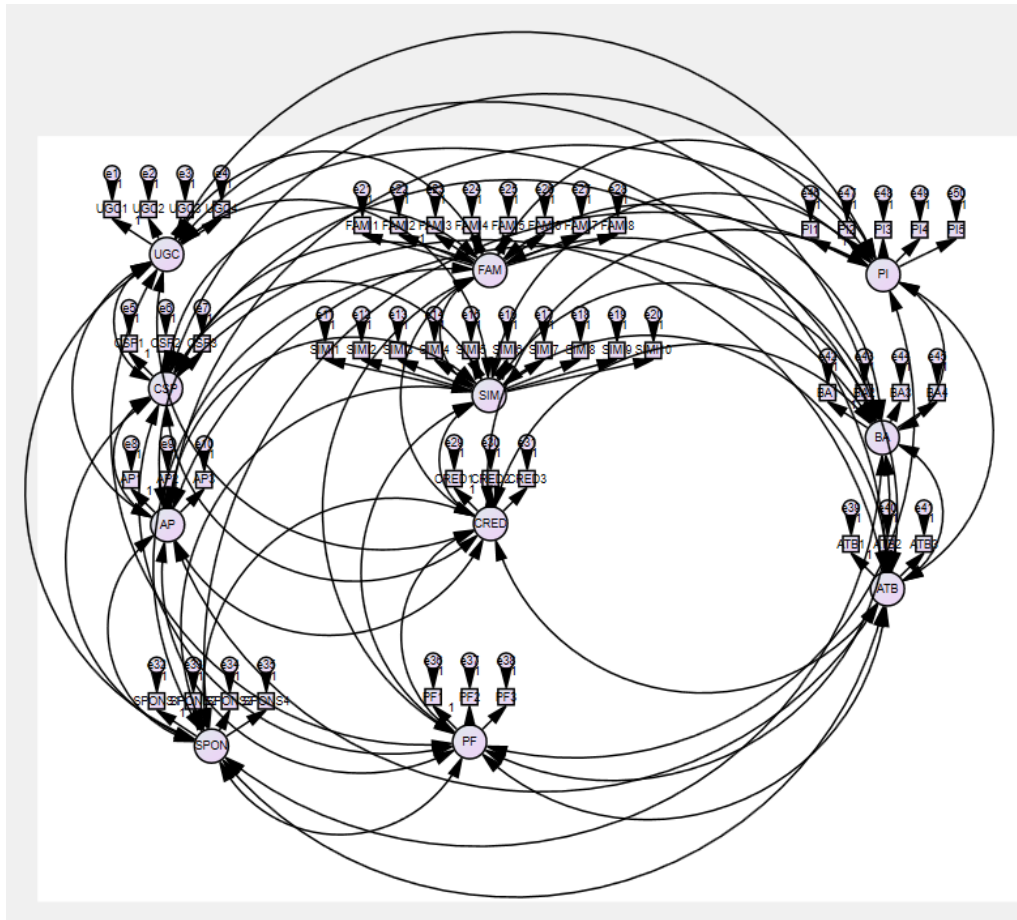


Figure 2 - Initial Measurement Model

#### 4.6.4 Model Fit

According to Marôco (2014), this assessment aims to evaluate how well the theoretical model reproduces the correlational structure of the observed variables. In order to find out whether the model fit is good, the researcher counts on certain measures, such as Chi-Square  $\chi^2$ , Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Fit Index (TLI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA).

Table 21 shows the interpretations for the different values found in each of these measures.

Table 21 - Model fit

Indicator	Values		Reference
$\chi^2$	-	The smaller, the better	(Marôco, 2010)
$\chi^2/df$	> 5	Bad fit	(Marôco, 2010)
	]2;5]	Average fit	

	]1;2]	Good fit	
	~1	Very good fit	
<b>CFI</b>	< 0.8	Bad fit	(Marôco, 2010)
	[0.8; 0.9[	Average fit	
<b>TLI</b>	[0.9; 0.95[	Good fit	
	> 0.95	Very good fit	
<b>IFI</b>	> 0.95	Very good fit	(Lisboa, Augusto, & Ferreira, 2012)
<b>RMSEA</b>	> 0.1	Unacceptable fit	(Marôco, 2010)
	]0.05; 0.10]	Acceptable fit	
	< 0.05	Very good fit	

A process of respecification was necessary to significantly improve the model adjustment. Through the modification indices, the researcher had to modify the model, eliminating items with little significance, as pointed out by Marôco (2014).

This analysis led to the elimination of 7 items in the database. Figure 3 shows the measurement model once the items had been deleted.

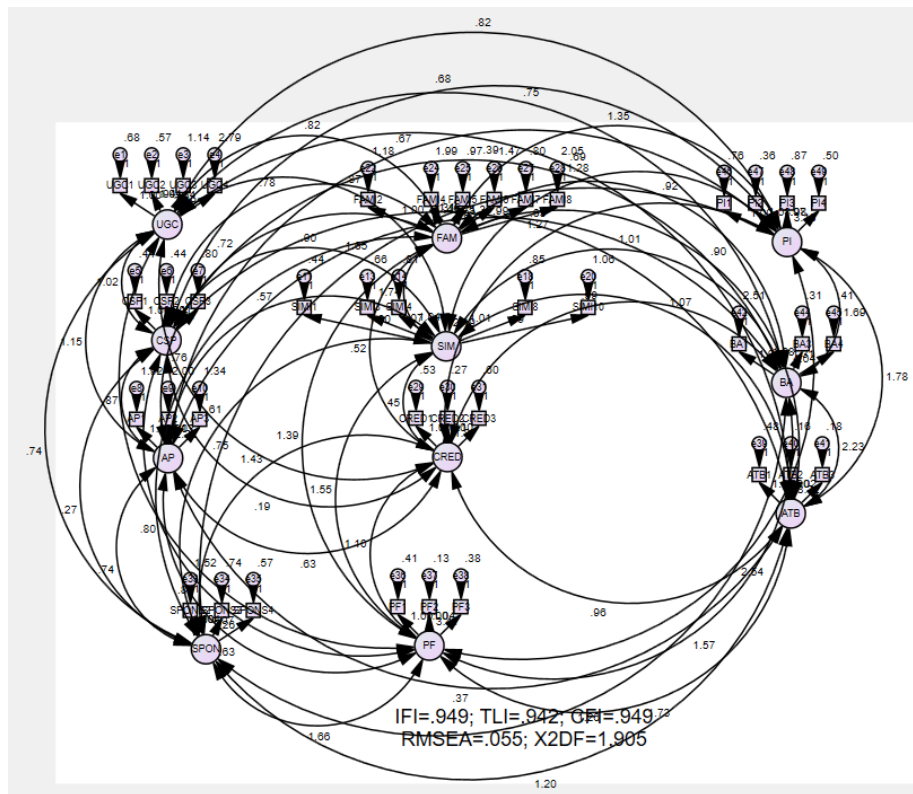


Figure 3 - Final Measurements Model

Once the items had been deleted, the indicators were recalculated. Table 22 shows the values obtained after the items were deleted.

Table 22 – Measurements' model fit

<b>Global Fit</b>	<b>Sample</b>
$\chi^2$	1305.2
<b>Df</b>	685
<b>IFI</b>	0.949
<b>TLI</b>	0.942
<b>CFI</b>	0.949
<b>RMSEA</b>	0.55

#### 4.6.5 Quality of the Measurement Model

While the overall model needs to present a good global adjustment, it should also have a good individual adjustment. In order to assess that, an evaluation of the measurement model has to be conducted. An analysis of the discriminant validity and measurement reliability of latent variables were the methods utilized to verify individual adjustment. The reliability of indicators refers to the reproducibility and consistence of the indicators.

This section will present the individual-item reliability, the latent variable reliability and the average variance extracted.

##### 4.6.5.1 Individual Item Reliability

The multiple correlation coefficient ( $R^2$ ) is an evaluation of the degree of correlation squared between latent variables and each of its indicators. A  $R^2$  value of less than 0,25 means that the factor explains less than 25% of the variance manifested by the variable, which in turn indicates there is a problem with the variable (Marôco, 2010).

Table 23 presents all of the individual values for the Standardized Regression Weights (SRW), which is the terminology used by the AMOS software for the individual item reliability measures.



Table 23 - Confirmatory factor analysis results

Items	Estimate	C.R.
<b>User Generated Content</b>		
UGC1	0.868	18.301
UGC3	0.787	15.789
UGC4	0.484	8.529
UGC2	0.894	19.167
<b>Customer Social Participation</b>		
CSP1	0.865	18.146
CSP2	0.887	18.838
CSP3	0.786	15.736
<b>Active Participation</b>		
AP1	0.732	13.535
AP2	0.735	13.608
AP3	0.841	16.172
<b>Similarity</b>		
SIMI1	0.912	20.425
SIMI3	0.889	19.55
SIMI4	0.864	18.653
SIMI8	0.851	18.191
SIMI10	0.82	17.16
<b>Familiarity</b>		
FAMI2	0.792	16.24
FAMI4	0.763	15.372
FAMI5	0.882	19.235
FAMI6	0.825	17.255
FAMI7	0.898	19.813
FAMI8	0.696	13.539
<b>Credibility</b>		
CRED1	0.883	19.185
CRED2	0.945	21.478
CRED3	0.871	18.774
<b>Sponsorship</b>		
SPONS2	0.786	15.827
SPONS3	0.868	18.372
SPONS4	0.905	19.625
<b>Perceived Fit</b>		
PF1	0.945	21.902
PF2	0.983	23.592
PF3	0.949	22.08

<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>		
<b>ATB1</b>	0.941	21.778
<b>ATB2</b>	0.98	23.454
<b>ATB3</b>	0.977	23.343
<b>Brand Attachment</b>		
<b>BA1</b>	0.785	16.238
<b>BA3</b>	0.977	23.152
<b>BA4</b>	0.972	22.904
<b>Purchase Intention</b>		
<b>PI1</b>	0.898	19.984
<b>PI2</b>	0.955	22.28
<b>PI3</b>	0.883	19.422
<b>PI4</b>	0.938	21.559

#### **4.6.5.2 Composite Reliability**

Theory suggests that the composite reliability (CR) should have a value of over 0,7 to be found acceptable. This indicator measures how each latent variable is measured by the indicators. Cronbach's Alpha is also considered in this assessment. Variables with an alpha of over 0,7 are considered acceptable. All of the variables showed acceptable CR and alpha values, as shown in table 24.

#### **4.6.5.3 Average Variance Extracted**

Theory suggests that the average variance extracted (AVE) value be of at least 0,5 (Marôco, 2010). It is possible to see, in table 24, that all of the variables studied had acceptable AVE values, meaning that the reliability hypotheses have all been accepted.

Table 24 - Standard Deviation, Correlation Matrix and Cronbach's Alpha - Final CFA

<i>Variable</i>	<b>SD</b>	<b>X1</b>	<b>X2</b>	<b>X3</b>	<b>X4</b>	<b>X5</b>	<b>X6</b>	<b>X7</b>	<b>X8</b>	<b>X9</b>	<b>X10</b>	<b>X11</b>	<b>C.R.</b>	<b>AVE</b>
<i>User Generated Content (X1)</i>	1.447	0.833											0.852	0.602
<i>Customer Social Participation (X2)</i>	1.147	0.617	0.879										0.884	0.718
<i>Active Participation (X3)</i>	1.489	0.532	0.507	0.812									0.814	0.594
<i>Similarity (X4)</i>	1.481	0.408	0.530	0.260	0.937								0.938	0.753
<i>Familiarity (X5)</i>	1.408	0.404	0.485	0.342	0.832	0.917							0.920	0.660
<i>Credibility (X6)</i>	1.366	0.379	0.122	0.308	0.220	0.273	0.926						0.928	0.810
<i>Attitude Towards Sponsorship (X7)</i>	1.504	0.340	0.155	0.330	0.272	0.360	0.695	0.881					0.890	0.730
<i>Perceived Fit (X8)</i>	1.847	0.301	0.377	0.228	0.566	0.535	0.437	0.596	0.971				0.972	0.920
<i>Attitude Towards Brand (X9)</i>	1.929	0.246	0.285	0.129	0.374	0.331	0.365	0.414	0.484	0.976			0.977	0.933
<i>Brand Attachment (X10)</i>	2.009	0.257	0.168	0.152	0.340	0.324	0.362	0.418	0.424	0.577	0.935		0.939	0.839
<i>Purchase Intention (X11)</i>	1.785	0.317	0.330	0.252	0.483	0.536	0.522	0.614	0.770	0.518	0.470	0.956	0.956	0.844

#### **4.6.5.4 Discriminant Validity**

This value indicates the extension to which independent latent variables are correlated, and how correlated are each latent variable's indicators. Discriminant validity also determines whether factors (composed by a set of items) are distinct.

To determine whether the variables possess discriminant validity, there must be a comparison between the average variance extracted (AVE) and the correlation amongst variables. The squared value of correlation between latent variables must be lower than the average variance extracted.

The results of this test can be found in Appendix II. All of the variables presented a squared value of correlation lower than the AVE value, with the exception of the correlation between the variables Similarity and Familiarity. These variables showed a correlation value of 0.832, which, when squared, is roughly 0.69. This value proved to be bigger than the AVE value for familiarity, which was 0.66.

Following the suggestions of (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), a new model was tested exclusively with these variables, with their correlation fixed on 1. The researcher was then able to conclude that the relationship between variables was significantly superior when the correlation is not fixed on 1, therefore confirming the existence of discriminant validity, as their correlation is statistically different from 1.

## 5. Results

This chapter will present all of the key information regarding the results of this investigation, obtained from the statistical analysis. An introductory descriptive analysis will be presented, followed by an estimation of the model and a hypotheses test. Finally, the last part of the chapter will be an overall discussion of results and a summarization of them.

### 5.1 Descriptive Analysis of Variables

The descriptive analysis allows researchers to foresee the behavior of variables in a study, by making the average value of answers and their standard deviations known. Such information can help characterize sample behavior.

*Table 25 - Descriptive analysis*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maximum</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Customer Social Participation</b>	1	7	6.256	1.262
<b>User Generated Content</b>	1	7	4.591	1.432
<b>Active Participation</b>	1	7	4.405	1.783
<b>Credibility</b>	1	7	3.505	1.468
<b>Similarity</b>	1	7	5.504	1.564
<b>Familiarity</b>	1	7	5.131	1.721
<b>Attitude Towards Sponsored Content</b>	1	7	3.294	1.655
<b>Perceived Fit</b>	1	7	5.047	1.897
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	1	7	4.656	1.968
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	1	10	4.687	2.48
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	1	7	4.244	1.892

A seven-point Likert scale was used for most of the variables, except for Brand Attachment, with 1 being equivalent to “I disagree completely” and 7 to “I agree completely”. Customer social participation had both the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation, which indicates this variable’s importance, and a higher level of congruency amongst answers.

As for antecedents of the perceptions of influencers, both active participation and user generated content have average means, just above 4, with active participation showing a high standard deviation, which indicates a high level of variability in answers. Meanwhile, user generated content shows an average standard deviation, which means answers varied slightly.

Amongst the perceptions of influencers, familiarity and similarity presented overall means above 5, which could indicate a high level of importance. However, both variables also show a high level of variability, meaning answers did not present much congruence. Meanwhile, credibility showed a lower mean, of around 3.5, with average levels of standard deviation. This suggests that perceptions of credibility are lower than similarity or familiarity.

Both attitude towards sponsored content and perceived fit presented high levels of standard deviations, meaning neither of these variables showed a high degree of congruence in their answers. While attitude towards the brand showed values just above 3, suggesting respondents did not feel too positive about it, perceived fit presented a mean above 5, suggesting its importance.

Attitude towards brand and purchase intention also presented average mean values and high standard deviation values, meaning that answers had a higher level of variability.

For the Brand Attachment variable, the researcher used an eleven-point scale ranging from 0 to 10. Although this variable presented a mean of 4.687, this is considered low when taking into account the different scale used. In contrast, this variable also presented the highest standard deviation of all, meaning that answers varied much more than in other variables.

## 5.2 Structural Model Adjustment

Once the Structural Equations Model had been estimated, after the hypotheses proposed had been established, the model fit suffered a slight decrease. However, the indexes for  $\chi^2 = 1734.5$ ,  $df = 710$   $\chi^2/df = 2.44$ , IFI = 0.916, TLI = 0.907, CFI = 0.916 and RMSEA = 0.069. The values can be seen in table 26.

Table 26 - Global fit

Global Fit	Sample
$\chi^2$	1734.5
Df	710
IFI	0.916
TLI	0.907
CFI	0.916
RMSEA	0.069

The values presented are within the acceptable parameters for a model fit, meaning that they are considered good (according to what was shown in section 4.6.4).

The final structural model obtained is presented in figure 4.

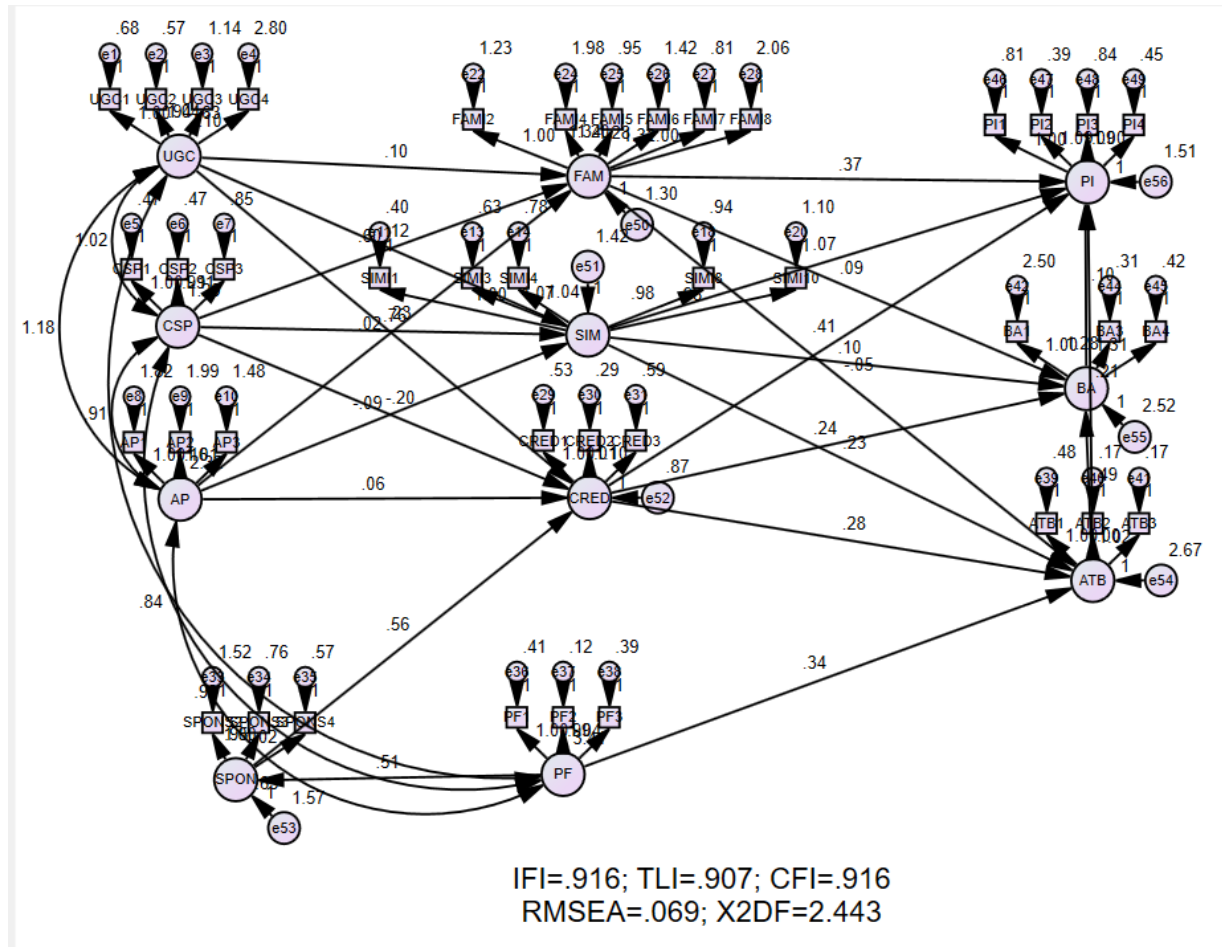


Figure 4 - Structural Model

### 5.3 Hypotheses Testing

The results for the hypotheses testing are found in table 27.

Table 27 - Hypotheses

			<b>HYPOTHESIS</b>	<b>SRW</b>	<b>P</b>
<b>Credibility</b>	<---	Active Participation	H1	0.068	
<b>Similarity</b>	<---	Active Participation	H2	-0.094	
<b>Familiarity</b>	<---	Active Participation	H3	0.021	

<b>Credibility</b>	<---	CustomerSocial Participation	H4	-0.168	**
<b>Similarity</b>	<---	Customer Social Participation	H5	0.576	**
<b>Familiarity</b>	<---	Customer Social Participation	H6	0.491	**
<b>Credibility</b>	<---	User Generated Content	H7	0.247	**
<b>Similarity</b>	<---	User Generated Content	H8	0.112	
<b>Familiarity</b>	<---	User Generated Content	H9	0.099	
<b>Attitude Towards Sponsored Content</b>	<---	Perceived Fit	H10	0.603	**
<b>Credibility</b>	<---	Attitude Towards Sponsored Content	H11	0.667	**
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<---	Credibility	H12	0.325	**
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<---	Similarity	H13	0.064	
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<---	Familiarity	H14	0.307	**
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	<---	Credibility	H15	0.164	**
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	<---	Similarity	H16	0.079	
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	<---	Familiarity	H17	0.063	
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	<---	Credibility	H18	0.192	**
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	<---	Similarity	H19	0.184	**
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	<---	Familiarity	H20	-0.036	
<b>Attitude Towards Brand</b>	<---	Perceived Fit	H21	0.327	**
<b>Brand Attachment</b>	<---	Attitude Towards Brand	H22	0.47	**
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<---	Attitude Towards Brand	H23	0.231	**
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<---	Brand Attachment	H24	0.118	**

Observations: \*\*<0.01; \*0.05 (one-tailed tests)

The hypothesis pertaining to the relationships between active participation and the perceptions of influencers (credibility, similarity and familiarity), did not find statistical support. Therefore, the relationship between Credibility and Active Participation, described in H1 (SRW = 0.068;  $P > 0.1$ ), Similarity and Active Participation, described in H2 (SRW = -0.094;  $P > 0.1$ ) and Familiarity and Active Participation, described in H3 (SRW = 0.021;  $P > 0.1$ ) have not been statistically accepted.

The relationships between Credibility and Customer Social Participation, Similarity and Customer Social Participation and Familiarity and Customer Social Participation, described by H4 (SRW = -0.168;  $P < 0.1$ ), H5 (SRW = 0.576;  $P < 0.01$ ) and H6 (SRW 0.491;  $P < 0.01$ ) respectively have found statistical support, and were therefore accepted. However, H4 (the



relationship between Customer Social Participation and Credibility) showed the existence of a negative relationship, as pointed out by the SRW value, contrarily to what was described in the hypothesis.

Likewise, the relationship between User Generated Social Media Content and Credibility, described in H7 (SRW = 0.247;  $P < 0.01$ ) was also supported by the statistical data and was therefore accepted.

Also rejected are the relationship between User Generated Social Media Content and Similarity, determined in H8 (SRW = 0.112;  $P > 0.1$ ) and User Generated Social Media Content and Familiarity, described in H9 (SRW = 0.099;  $P > 0.1$ ).

Both the relationships between Perceived Fit and Attitude Towards Sponsored Content and Attitude Towards Sponsored Content and Credibility, described in H10 (SRW = 0.603;  $P < 0.01$ ) and H11 (SRW = 0.667;  $P < 0.01$ ), respectively, have been accepted.

Statistical data confirmed the relationship between Purchase Intention and Credibility (H12: SRW = 0.325;  $P < 0.01$ ), but not the relationship between Similarity and Purchase Intention, described in H13 (SRW = 0.064;  $P > 0.1$ ), which was rejected. The relationship described in H14, between Purchase Intention and Familiarity (SRW = 0.307;  $P < 0.01$ ) was also accepted.

The relationship between Brand Attachment with Credibility (H15: SRW = 0.164;  $P < 0.01$ ) was accepted, but the relationships between Similarity and Brand Attachment, described in H16 (SRW = 0.079;  $P > 0.1$ ) Familiarity and Brand Attachment, determined in H17 (SRW = 0.063;  $P > 0.1$ ) were rejected.

Both Credibility and Similarity were found to have significant relationships with Attitude Towards Brand, as showed by the acceptance of H18 (SRW = 0.192;  $P < 0.01$ ) and H19 (SRW = 0.184;  $P < 0.01$ ), respectively.

The relationship between Familiarity and Attitude Towards Brand, determined in H20 (SRW = -0.036;  $P > 0.1$ ) was also rejected, while the one between Perceived Fit and Attitude Towards Brand (H21: SRW = 0.327;  $P < 0.01$ ) was found statistically acceptable.

Attitude towards brand showed statistically relevant relationships with both Brand Attachment (H22: SRW = 0.47;  $P < 0.01$ ) and Purchase Intention (H23: SRW = 0.231;  $P < 0.01$ ). Finally,

Purchase Intention also showed a statistically relevant relationship with Brand Attachment (H24:  $SRW = 0.118$ ;  $P < 0.1$ ).

## **5.4 Discussion**

In this topic, a discussion of the results of the variables' descriptive analysis and the hypothesis testing will be presented, as to provide a detailed account of the relationship between internet usage and digital influencers, sponsorship and the effects of digital influencers on attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention.

### **5.4.1 Engagement and Perceptions of Digital Influencers**

The analysis pertaining to online interaction and participation as antecedents to participants' perceptions of influencers showed that customer social participation had a statistically significant relationship with all of the perceptions of influencers, meaning that higher levels of social participation and engagement in social media led to more positive perceptions of digital influencers' credibility, similarity and familiarity (H4, H5 and H6, respectively).

These findings further support previous research, such as Khan (2017), which identified social interaction as one of the key motivations of consumption and participation on Youtube and (Chung & Cho, 2017), who identified that continuous social interaction through social media fostered parasocial interaction.

However, active participation was found not to have a statistically significant relationship with any of the variables pertaining to perceptions of influencers. No relevant relationship was found between active participation and credibility (H1), similarity (H2) or familiarity (H3) was supported by statistical data, meaning that active engagement in social media has not been shown to have a significant effect on how participants of the study perceived digital influencers.

Likewise, the only statistically relevant relationship found between perceptions of influencers and user generated social media content was between this variable and credibility. Thus, neither perceptions of familiarity (H9) or similarity (H8) were fostered by the consumption and interaction with user generated social media content.

Such findings do not go directly against any of the studies researched, as direct correlations between active participation and perceptions of influencers or user generated social media content and perceptions of familiarity or similarity.

This study does corroborate the findings of (Hautz et al., 2014) by finding a positive relationship between user generated social media content and credibility, though. These authors found a connection between user generated videos and perceived source credibility, with user generated content being perceived as more credible than advertisement created by companies.

Overall, these findings seem to point out that customer social participation is a better predictor of perceptions of similarity, credibility and familiarity than active participation, and that the consumption of user generated content is a good predictor of perceived credibility.

#### **5.4.2 Sponsorship**

Sponsorship was the second key element of this research. For the specific case of influencers, sponsorship can influence how users perceive their reviews and the level of trust they put into an influencer's opinions. Accordingly to what was found by (Bergkvist et al., 2016), perceived fit had a positive relationship with the attitude towards sponsored content (H10), meaning that higher levels of perceived fit between influencers and the brands and products they endorse led to a more positive attitude towards sponsored posts.

Partially in accordance to what was found by (Hwang & Jeong, 2016), users' attitude towards sponsored posts was found to have a positive relationship with the perceptions of influencer credibility (H11). Meaning that a more positive attitude towards influencers' sponsored content should lead to equally positive perceptions of influencers' credibility.

While Hwang and Jeong (2016) found that sponsorship disclosure could have negative effects on perceptions of source credibility, but such could be counteracted by declaring that all opinions showed in the sponsored content were honest. This dissertation found that the attitude towards sponsored content has a role similar to the one played by attitude towards advertisement in perceptions of source credibility.

### 5.4.3 Outcomes

Finally, the last set of hypotheses pertained to the effects of digital influencers on key marketing concepts. From these, four relationships did not find statistical support. Contrarily to the findings of Lee and Watkins (2016), the relationship between similarity and purchase intention was not supported by the results of the statistical analysis.

Likewise, neither familiarity (H17) nor similarity (H16) were found to have a statistical relevant relationship with brand attachment, thus the work does not corroborate the findings of (Arya & Verma, 2018).

Finally, no significant relationship was found between familiarity and attitude towards the brand (H20), contrarily to what was found by Lee and Watkins (2017), PSI did not influence participants' attitude towards brands or brand attachment.

However, significant relationships were found between purchase intention and credibility (H12) and familiarity (H14), supporting the findings of (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Lee et al., 2017; Ohanian, 1990).

The only statistically relevant relationship found with brand attachment was between this variable and perceived credibility, which further supports the findings of Ohanian (1990), whose study sought to validate a measuring scale for source credibility.

Attitude towards brand was found to have statistically relevant relationships with credibility (H18) and similarity (H19), partially supporting the findings of Lee and Watkins (2016), whose study found links between attitude homophily (similarity) and consumers' perspective of luxury brand items)

Finally, relationships between the three key marketing concepts, brand attachment, purchase intention and attitude towards brand were all confirmed by the statistical analysis. Supporting the findings of Park et al., (2010) and Spears and Singh (2004). Both brand attachment (H22) and purchase intention (H23) were found to have positive relationships with attitude towards brand, and brand attachment was also found to have a positive relationship with purchase intention (H24).

Therefore, results confirm that the perceptions of influencer credibility are positively influenced by customer social participation and user generates content, and have significant effects on brand attachment, attitude towards brand and purchase intentions, being considered the most relevant characteristic out of those explored in this study.

Furthermore, perceptions of familiarity and similarity were only influenced by customer social participation. Similarity was only found to have a significant relationship with attitude towards brand. Meanwhile, familiarity had a significant relationship with purchase intention.

Attitude towards sponsored posts was found to have significant relationships with perceived fit and credibility. While perceived fit was also found to be linked with attitude towards brand.

Finally, all of the outcome variables were found to have significant relationships amongst themselves, corroborating findings in literature that had previously linked purchase intention, attitude towards brand and brand attachment.

## 6. Final Considerations

This research aimed to investigate the effects of digital influencers as marketing tools, namely how consumers' perspectives of digital influencers can impact brand attachment, attitude towards brand and purchase intention. Adapted endorsement models were used to understand consumers' perceptions of influencers, and important variables such as attitude towards sponsorship were added to fully comprehend consumers' relationship with digital influencers.

An empirical research was done, by creating a questionnaire, which was then shared through social media, namely through Facebook. Given the profile of respondents, the researcher decided to focus on the answers of Brazilian women. A total of 301 women responded, forming the sample for the investigation.

The questionnaire contained a brief introduction on the research's theme, and the information that the questionnaire was completely anonymous. The first questions aimed to characterize the sample's sociodemographic profile. These were followed by questions structured through existing metrics for each of the variables (detailed in section 4.2.3 of this research).

After the data had been gathered, the researcher used the IBM SPSS software to create the statistical database. Then, the IBM SPSS AMOS software was used to analyze this data using the Structural Equations Model (SEM). Further tests, such as the EFA and the CFA were then conducted using these two softwares, all of which presented values considered good or very good.

Sample analysis revealed that active participation did not have significant relationships with any of the perceptions of influencers, while user generated social media content had a statistically significant relationship with credibility, and customer social participation had statistically significant relationships with all of the perceptions of influencers, proving to be the most important variable in predicting participants' relationships with influencers.

Credibility was the most significant variable relating to the characteristics of influencers, showing significant relationships with attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention. These findings align with what was shown by Ohanian (1990), whose study pointed

out source credibility as a variable capable of influencing purchase intention and the value of recommendations significantly.

Unlike the study made by Lee and Watkins (2016) familiarity did not present statistically relevant relationships with brand attachment or attitude towards brand. In spite of studies which link PSI with positive attitudinal effects (Labrecque, 2014; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Yuan et al., 2016), such relationships were not proved by this dissertation.

The same can be concluded for similarity, as the relationship between this variable and purchase intention or brand attachment were not proved by the analysis of statistical data.

However, the connections proposed by (Park et al., 2010; Spears & Singh, 2004) were all confirmed, with attitude towards brand having statistical relations with both purchase intention and brand attachment, and brand attachment also having a relevant relationship with purchase intention.

Therefore, it can be concluded that, while not all of the relationships explored in this work were corroborated, it has gathered promising data. Considering this, the next sections will further discuss the contributes of the study and recommendations for future research pertaining to this topic.

## **6.1 Contributes of the Study**

Existing research on digital influencers is scarce, given the newness of the theme. However, studies show, more and more, the importance of social media and eWOM for marketing (Erkan & Evans, 2016), and digital influencers have shown a capacity to generate eWOM and endorse brands and products through social media (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Uzunoğlu & Misci Kip, 2014).

Considering the gap found in literature on the effects of these individuals for marketing, this research sought to empirically evaluate the impact of digital influencers on key marketing concepts. In addition to the main relationship proposed by this dissertation, between the perceptions of influencers and attitude towards brand, brand attachment and purchase intention, another big contribution of this work is finding the correlation between the perceived fit between influencers and their sponsored content and the attitude towards sponsorship, which has also been linked to the perceptions of influencer credibility.

Amongst the greatest contributes of this study is the adaptation of measures historically used to evaluate the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements to the perceptions of influencers.

Furthermore, the results point out towards the existence of an important relationship between customer social participation and perceptions of digital influencers, and influencer credibility and all three marketing constructs explored in this research. For companies, that means that honesty, more than a sense of familiarity or similarity, can elicit positive responses from users and consumers.

Another important contribution of this work was the addition of the effects of attitude towards sponsored content on perceptions of credibility. Seeing as this has become a popular marketing strategy, it is essential to further comprehend how the attitude towards sponsored content can affect users' perceptions of digital influencers.

This study has provided important contributions to marketing literature, and offers further insight on the role of digital influencers and the outcomes of users' perceptions of them. By understanding how these individuals are perceived, and whether this can inspire attitudinal changes and influence attachment, marketing professionals can strengthen their strategies and create better relationships with both influencers and consumers alike.

For digital content creators, this research provides valuable insight on how viewers perceive them, therefore allowing them to better tailor their recommendations, sponsored content and strengthen their relationships with viewers.

## **6.2 Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research**

Due to a lack of time and resources, the main limitation of this work was the use of a non-probability convenience sample, which infers that its results cannot safely be extrapolated for the overall population. The use of a sample composed only of Brazilian women further limits the outcomes of this study. It is suggested that future research do studies of larger scopes, as to properly represent a larger number of people.

The lack of inclusion of one particular brand or influencer may have influenced participants' answers, as they were asked to base them on their favorite influencer. Further studies could



choose to focus on specific influencer-brand relationships. The use of an online questionnaire also doesn't allow the researcher to answer participants' questions or doubts.

As for future research, beyond the aforementioned recommendations, there is a need for more detailed studies regarding the antecedents of the perceptions of influencers. Understanding what leads people to engage with digital influencers might further enrich existing literature and provide insight on how to better tailor the relationship between users and digital influencers.

Finally, more studies pertaining to the perceptions of familiarity and similarity are needed, as these have identified as key concepts in endorsement (Chung & Cho, 2017; Khan, 2017; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Despite the results of the statistical analysis shown here, there is a need for more detailed research regarding these variables in particular, to confirm whether they play a part on digital influence or not.

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# Appendixes

## Appendix 1 - Survey

### Inquérito

Através deste formulário, serão recolhidos dados para a realização de uma dissertação do Mestrado em Marketing da Faculdade de Economia da Universidade de Coimbra. Toda informação fornecida é confidencial e anónima.

Pede-se que, ao responder o questionário, escolha as respostas que julga mais próximas de sua opinião. Não há respostas certas ou erradas.

\* Required

#### 1. Idade \*

Mark only one oval.

- Até 15 anos
- 16 - 20 anos
- 21 - 30 anos
- 31 - 40 anos
- 41 - 50 anos
- Acima de 50 anos

#### 2. Formação Académica (completa) \*

Mark only one oval.

- 3º Ciclo (Ensino Fundamental)
- Ensino Secundário (Ensino Médio)
- Licenciatura (Graduação)
- Mestrado
- Doutoramento (Doutorado)

#### 3. Sexo \*

Mark only one oval.

- Masculino
- Feminino
- Prefiro não responder

#### 4. Nacionalidade \*

Mark only one oval.

- Brasileiro(a)
- Português(a)
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_













Appendix 2 - Discriminant validity

			<b>Estimate</b>	<b>EST^2</b>	<b>AVE1</b>	<b>AVE2</b>
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	CustomerSocialParticipation	0.617	0.38069	0.602	0.718
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	ActiveParticipation	0.532	0.28302	0.602	0.594
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	Similarity	0.408	0.16646	0.602	0.753
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	Familiarity	0.404	0.16322	0.602	0.66
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	Credibility	0.379	0.14364	0.602	0.81
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.34	0.1156	0.602	0.73
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.301	0.0906	0.602	0.92
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.246	0.06052	0.602	0.933
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.257	0.06605	0.602	0.839
<b>UserGeneratedContent</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.317	0.10049	0.602	0.844
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	ActiveParticipation	0.507	0.25705	0.718	0.594
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	Similarity	0.53	0.2809	0.718	0.753
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	Familiarity	0.485	0.23523	0.718	0.66
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	Credibility	0.122	0.01488	0.718	0.81
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.155	0.02403	0.718	0.73
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.377	0.14213	0.718	0.92
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.285	0.08123	0.718	0.933
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.168	0.02822	0.718	0.839
<b>CustomerSocialParticipation</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.33	0.1089	0.718	0.844
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	Similarity	0.26	0.0676	0.594	0.753
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	Familiarity	0.342	0.11696	0.594	0.66
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	Credibility	0.308	0.09486	0.594	0.81
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.33	0.1089	0.594	0.73
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.228	0.05198	0.594	0.92
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.129	0.01664	0.594	0.933
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.152	0.0231	0.594	0.839
<b>ActiveParticipation</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.252	0.0635	0.594	0.844
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	Familiarity	0.832	0.69222	0.753	0.66
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	Credibility	0.22	0.0484	0.753	0.81
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.272	0.07398	0.753	0.73

<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.566	0.32036	0.753	0.92
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.374	0.13988	0.753	0.933
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.34	0.1156	0.753	0.839
<b>Similarity</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.483	0.23329	0.753	0.844
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	Credibility	0.273	0.07453	0.66	0.81
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.36	0.1296	0.66	0.73
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.535	0.28623	0.66	0.92
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.331	0.10956	0.66	0.933
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.324	0.10498	0.66	0.839
<b>Familiarity</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.536	0.2873	0.66	0.844
<b>Credibility</b>	<-->	AttitudeTowSpons	0.695	0.48303	0.81	0.73
<b>Credibility</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.437	0.19097	0.81	0.92
<b>Credibility</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.365	0.13323	0.81	0.933
<b>Credibility</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.362	0.13104	0.81	0.839
<b>Credibility</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.522	0.27248	0.81	0.844
<b>AttitudeTowSpons</b>	<-->	PerceivedFit	0.596	0.35522	0.73	0.92
<b>AttitudeTowSpons</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.414	0.1714	0.73	0.933
<b>AttitudeTowSpons</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.418	0.17472	0.73	0.839
<b>AttitudeTowSpons</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.614	0.377	0.73	0.844
<b>PerceivedFit</b>	<-->	AttTowBrand	0.484	0.23426	0.92	0.933
<b>PerceivedFit</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.424	0.17978	0.92	0.839
<b>PerceivedFit</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.77	0.5929	0.92	0.844
<b>AttTowBrand</b>	<-->	BrandAtt	0.577	0.33293	0.933	0.839
<b>AttTowBrand</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.518	0.26832	0.933	0.844
<b>BrandAtt</b>	<-->	PuchIntention	0.47	0.2209	0.839	0.844