

**It's an Influencer's World & We're All Just Living in It:
How Can Fashion Influencers Build Their Community with a Generation Z Audience?**

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Introduction: People are more willing to trust someone they consider to be just like them, and fashion brands and marketers have taken notice. With social media acting as an integral part of consumers' lives, most fashion influencers use Instagram as their main platform, and people follow them based their interests and values. Fashion influencers can affect the purchase decisions of consumers, which has led many influencers to partner with brands in paid advertising. In order to be able to use their Instagram platform as a profession, fashion influencers need to know how to grow their community. This research seeks to identify if certain variables have an effect on a consumers' follow intention and consequently have an effect on their level of interaction and intention to emulate. The four independent variables in this research are 1) perceived originality, 2) perceived quality, 3) perceived similar style, and 4) perceived similar values. These independent variables could then have an effect on a consumer's intention to follow the fashion influencer. After they choose to follow a person, the independent variables could affect their intention to interact and intention to emulate the said fashion influencer.

Literature Review: *Perceived Originality.* Creating original and genuine content is regarded as a way for influencers to connect with their audience and grab their attention (Casaló, 2018). For the purpose of this study, it can be defined as perceived newness or uniqueness, according to the consumer, compared to other influencers on Instagram (Li, Zhang, & Wang, 2015). The originality of the content posted on a fashion Instagram influencer's account can have a direct effect on the user's perception that the influencer is someone worth following (Casaló, 2018). Therefore, we proposed **H1:** Perceived originality will have a positive effect on intention to follow. *Perceived Quality.* In addition to originality, high quality and engaging content are important because there is a lot of competition on Instagram, and consumers know exactly what they like and do not like on their feed (Galbato, 2018). Quality in regard to Instagram includes the types of pictures posted on the account, image resolution, picture editing, aesthetics, and overall appeal to the consumer. Characteristics of posted content, such as the attractiveness and quality of the images, are also critical for consumers to decide to follow a particular influencer (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). As a result, we proposed **H2:** Perceived quality will have a positive effect on intention to follow.

Perceived Style. One of the major factors for fashion influencers is their style. Fashion influencers typically have a defined sense of style that a consumer can recognize. People make an evaluation of similarity between themselves and the other person on first encounters (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004). When their estimates suggest a high degree of perceived similarity with each other, they will want to seek out future interactions with that person. This

phenomenon is known as the similar attraction theory (SAT) (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004). There have been few studies that focused on perceived similar fashion style resulting in more followers, or even the consumer liking a fashion influencer better because of their similar style. Therefore, based on previous research regarding the similarity attraction theory, we proposed, **H3**: Perceived similar style will have a positive effect on intention to follow. Perceived Value. According to Berg and Clark (1986), perceived similarity between personalities between individuals could generate a feeling of recognition, self-confirmation, and self-reassurance, which could then lead to more enjoyable interactions, thus increase attraction. Therefore, if a consumer is looking at a fashion influencer's Instagram page and happens to see something that portrays the values of said consumer, they would feel more of a connection to the influencer, although they had never met. As a result, the following hypothesis was proposed. **H4**: Perceived

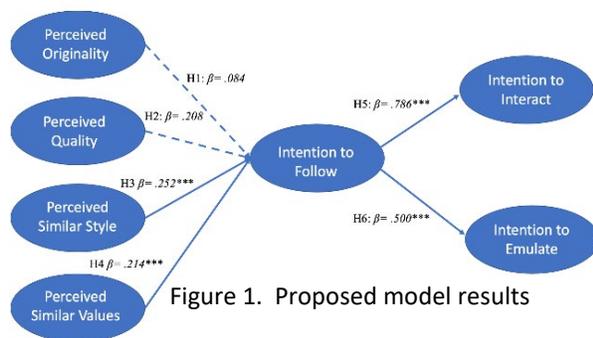


Figure 1. Proposed model results

similar values will have a positive effect on intention to follow. Intention to Interact. Fashion influencers need to have an online community that engages with them. Interaction, in terms of Instagram, include liking or commenting on a post, reacting or replying to an Instagram story, or even direct messaging the influencer. Not a lot of research has been done to find a correlation between following an influencer and interacting with them. However, as previous literature (Sunnafrank & Ramirez, 2004) has mentioned, once similarities are established between two people, they are more likely to seek out future interactions. Therefore, we proposed **H5**: Intention to follow will have a positive effect on intention to interact. Intention to Emulate. Emulation does not mean the consumer copies everything the influencer wears as they wore it. It could be buying a similar shirt, wearing their hair in the same way, or buying a product the influencer recommends. It measures the potential economic values that a fashion influencer may generate through the social media platforms (Casaló, 2018). Taking all of this into consideration, it is plausible to propose that: **H6**: Intention to follow will have a positive effect on intention to emulate. The proposed hypotheses are illustrated in Figure 1.

Methodology: An online questionnaire was developed on Qualtrics based on a previous study (Casaló, 2018). The data was collected from a total of 203 Gen Z females (18-25 years old, Mean_{age}= 20) who were followers of fashion influencers. After data cleaning, 179 completed responses were analyzed. The variables measured demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha ranged between .74 to .93).

Analysis and results: Using SPSS 25, multiple regressions were conducted to test the hypotheses. The results suggest that Perceived Originality and Perceived Quality did not have a significant impact on Intention to Follow. Therefore, H1 and H2 were not supported. However, Perceived Similar Style and Perceived Similar Values were found to significantly increase

intention to follow (Similar_Style: $\beta=.25$, $p<.001$; Similar_Values, $\beta=.21$, $p<.001$). Moreover, intention to follow significantly increases Intention to Interact and Intention to Emulate (Interact: $\beta=.79$, $p<.001$; Emulate, $\beta=.59$, $p<.001$). Therefore, H3 to H6 were supported (see Figure 1).

Findings and Implications:

For *Theoretical implication*—the study provides empirical support of the similarity attraction theory (SAT) on how fashion influencers can build their followers. The results imply that perceived similar style and perceived similar values are a couple of the main qualities consumers consider before following a fashion influencer. After they follow the said influencer, they are then more likely to interact (i.e. liking, commenting, direct messaging, etc.) with the influencer's account and emulate their style. These results can provide valuable information to those fashion influencers seeking to grow their online community and marketers seeking to use influencers as a form of advertising. Brands can narrow their search for the micro influencer by selecting someone that matches their targeted demographics and shares the brand's values. It is also important for influencers to voice their values and try to connect with groups that share the same opinions, so that they can build the trustful consumer community.

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