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Influencer Marketing on Social Media: How Different Social Media Platforms Afford Influencer–Follower Relation and Drive Advertising Effectiveness

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ABSTRACT

Research on influencer marketing has grown exponentially over the past few years. Overall, the extant literature has been classified into three major clusters that examine sources involved in influencer marketing, message, and audience. However, there is a distinct research gap pertaining to how and why discrete social media platforms affect the effectiveness of influencer advertising differently. Theoretically, this research is the first to (1) map out followers' gratifications pertaining to their interactions with influencers across discrete social media platforms and (2) explore how these varying gratifications and platform characteristics affect influencer–follower relation and subsequent advertising outcomes. In our current investigation, we take individual factors (gratifications) and platform factors (characteristics) into consideration. We demonstrate that consumers' interactions with influencers are contingent on the specific affordances and characteristics of social media platforms. We find that the platform factors (characteristics) and individual factors (i.e., consumers' fulfilled gratifications) positively correlate with the parasocial relation (PSR) between influencers and followers. The strength of influencer–follower PSR differs as a function of the platforms. More importantly, this influencer–follower PSR positively predicts advertising outcomes across different platforms.

Social media influencers (SMIs) are ordinary Internet users who secure a large number of followers on blogs and/or social media via creating valuable domain content and sharing their personal lives. They also monetize their influence over followers by posting sponsored content and/or receiving other forms of incentives from brands and companies (Abidin 2015; Lou and Yuan 2019). Investment in influencer marketing has skyrocketed over the past few years, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic (Taylor 2020). Global investment in influencer marketing grew from \$1.7 billion in 2016 to an estimated \$13.8 billion in 2021 (Influencer Marketing Hub 2021a). Industry forecasts often emphasize the importance of choosing the right social media platforms for influencer marketing and list the top five venues for efficient influencer marketing: Instagram, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn (James 2020). However, empirical research on social media platforms' roles in consumers' interactions with influencers, and on how consumers' interactions and relations with influencers affect campaign effectiveness, is scarce. Over the past few years, academic research on influencer marketing has grown exponentially and offered comprehensive insights on how it affects consumer behavior and why it works (for a review, see Ye et al. 2021). In particular, past research has

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explored the following topics in some depth: the role of disclosure language (e.g., Boerman et al. 2017; Evans et al. 2017), influencer–follower relationship (Lou 2022), factors (e.g., number of followers) that affect campaign outcomes (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017), and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) influencers as brand endorsers (Thomas and Fowler 2021). Overall, the extant literature has been classified into three major clusters that examine sources involved in influencer marketing, message, and audience (for a review, see Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021).

However, there is a distinct research gap regarding how discrete social media platforms differently affect influencer–follower interactions and the efficacy of influencer marketing. To our knowledge, no research has yet explored (1) how different social media platforms affect users’ gratifications pertaining to their following and interacting with influencers; (2) how different social media platforms’ characteristics and users’ fulfilled gratifications affect the developed relations between influencers and users; and more important, (3) how followers’ interactions with and relationships with influencers differently affect marketing outcomes, as a function of platform differences and varying fulfilled gratifications. This research is designed to fill these gaps. Theoretically, this research is novel in that it maps out followers’ varying gratifications deriving from their interactions with influencers and subsequent relations developed with influencers across different social media platforms. We further argue that the influencer–follower relation subsequently affects the effectiveness of influencer advertising across different platforms. This focus corresponds to a recent call that future research “should more frequently compare different social media platforms” when investigating brand communications (Voorveld 2019, 22).

This research is designed to make four contributions to the literature on influencer marketing. First, we advance the literature by offering in-depth insights into how eight popular social media platforms—Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Pinterest—affect users’ gratifications when they interact with influencers. Second, we demonstrate that followers’ interactions and experiences with influencers are contingent on the specific characteristics of social media platforms. Followers’ fulfilled affordance-based gratifications during their interactions with influencers positively shape their parasocial relation with influencers, and this relation differs as a function of the platforms. Affordance-based gratifications refer to media users’ needs and the subsequent fulfillment that media affordances enable, and these affordances have been categorized into four groups: modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability (Sundar and Limperos 2013). Parasocial relation herein describes the imaginary and enduring relation that audiences have developed toward media characters (Horton and Wohl 1956). Third, informed by prior literature, we develop a theorization around the concept of social media platform characteristics and identify four dimensions (media richness, self-disclosure, intimacy, and usage) relevant to consumers’ interactions with influencers. Social media characteristics herein describe the unique characteristics and dimensions that classify social media platforms (e.g., social media high in media richness) (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Reich and Pittman 2020). This systematic theorization and operationalization can be applied to future research on digital advertising and computer-mediated communication. Finally, we test the theoretical connections among affordance-based gratifications, social media platform characteristics, and advertising outcomes, and identify the perceived parasocial relation (the imaginary, intimate, and enduring relation felt by followers) with influencers as a mediator that links these antecedents (gratifications and platform characteristics) with key advertising outcomes (brand awareness and purchase intentions). We also compare how consumers’ gratifications of their interactions with influencers vary across eight different social media platforms, which in turn differently shape consumers’ parasocial relation with influencers on those platforms. Furthermore, we find that consumers’ parasocial relation with influencers that are afforded by social media platforms positively predict advertising outcomes across those different platforms.

Theoretical background

Influencer marketing and social media

Influencer marketing refers to brands and companies that sponsor SMIs to promote products and/or services to monetize influencers' popularity and influence over their captive followers (Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021; Lou 2022). Although the phenomenon of influencers emerged as early as 2015 in blogs, it soon migrated to social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube (Borchers 2019). There are varied terms labeling influencers across different social media platforms, such as vlogger (Folkvord et al. 2019), YouTuber (Boerman and Van Reijmersdal 2020), and "Instafamous" (Djafarova and Trofimenko 2019). Collectively, recent research often uses the overarching term *social media influencers* to describe influencers. Influencers leverage social media platforms to narrate their lives and create useful content to attract followers and subsequent sponsorship deals (e.g., Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021; Lou 2022; Ye et al. 2021). Indeed, social media have become an integral part of contemporary consumers' daily Internet usage, with more than 3.6 billion global social media users in 2020 and a projection of 4.41 billion users in 2025 (Statista 2021). Internet users spend an average of 2.4 hours daily on social media, and recent growth in social media use is largely attributed to the soaring use of mobile devices (Statista 2021). Recent studies on influencer advertising have proposed and examined factors that explicate its impact on consumer behaviors, such as influencer credibility and content value (Lou and Yuan 2019), the parasocial relation between influencers and followers (Boerman and Van Reijmersdal 2020), product–influencer fit (Ju and Lou 2022; Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2020), influencer–follower relation (e.g., exchange- versus communal-oriented relation) (Ju and Lou 2022), influencer types (e.g., micro-versus megainfluencers) (Park et al. 2021), the number of followers and product divergence (De Veirman, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2017), among others.

Social media platforms have become the optimal venues for influencer marketing for the following reasons. First, social media platforms offer distinct and rich technological capabilities (hereafter termed affordances) and properties that enable influencers to self-present or self-brand, communicate lifestyles, and advertise products to followers (Hurley 2019). For instance, Instagram is famous for its preestablished aesthetics and filtered images, which makes it a desirable marketplace for touting beauty products and luxurious lifestyles and brands (Djafarova and Rushworth 2017).

Second, social media platforms enable Internet users to access, share, engage with, and cocreate with influencers (Lou 2022). In particular, the relation between influencers and followers has been redefined as a transparasocial relationship, which is characterized as "collectively reciprocal, (a) synchronously interactive, and co-created" (Lou 2022, 1). In other words, social media enable followers to interact with influencers actively synchronously or asynchronously and to participate in the narration and content created and shared by the influencers. This is important because the opportunities afforded by social media platforms that allow followers to cocreate with influencers essentially distinguish the parasocial relations developed between audience and media characters, which greatly contributes to the efficacy of influencer marketing (Lou 2022).

Third, social media platforms provide a seamless shopping environment by integrating electronic commerce functions within the platforms (e.g., Facebook Shops, Instagram, TikTok), which are also described as social commerce (Influencer Marketing Hub 2021b). For instance, influencers can tag promoted products in their sponsored posts (e.g., Instagram). With a few clicks, consumers can make purchases within the app. Influencers have been said to be efficient brand endorsers in this social commerce ecosystem, as they can transfer their reputation to endorsed brands and can seamlessly integrate "shoppable" posts into their self-branding (Llewellyn 2020).

Collectively, we argue that the technological affordances of social media platforms give rise to the proliferation of SMIs and influencer marketing. Yet how different social media platforms are experienced and rated when followers engage with influencers is still unknown. In the next

section, we draw on the perspective of affordance-based gratifications and elaborate on consumer gratifications fulfilled during their interactions with influencers across different social media platforms.

Affordance-based gratifications across social media platforms

Media gratifications serve as a fundamental framework explaining media users' intentions, behaviors, and relations with a particular medium (Gao and Feng 2016). Traditional uses-and-gratifications (U&G) scholars have conceptualized gratifications as representing "need satisfactions" during media exposure and usage (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1974). Under this view, individuals' innate social and psychological needs dictate their expectations from surrounding media, which further determines their media engagement activities. When a medium matches a person's expectations (i.e., when needs are satisfied), media gratifications are thus fulfilled (Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch 1974). In essence, early U&G theory emphasizes the purposiveness of the "active audience" in media consumption, in contrast to the media effects approach which assumes a "passive audience" (Rubin 2009). In the past decades, U&G literature, applied in different types of media, has documented a range of prevailing gratifications among media users, such as information seeking, entertainment, and social interaction (e.g., Gao and Feng 2016; Greenberg 1974; Ko, Cho, and Roberts 2005; Lee and Cho 2020). However, given the explosive growth of the Internet and new technologies, the traditional U&G approach can be problematic: First, it is completely audience centered in attempting to capture the dynamics between emergent media and communication technologies and media users (Sundar and Bellur 2011; Sundar and Limperos 2013). Second, the theory in its traditional form fails to specify the unique features of modern media, and thus limits new gratifications categories to emerge for theory development (Rubin 2009; Sundar and Limperos 2013).

Sundar and Limperos (2013) criticized traditional U&G studies, stating that they suffer from "user determinism in the media-user equation" (506). They argue that the U&G approach is biased in predicting that only users' preexisting needs and motives shape media gratifications that are sought and potentially obtained from media engagement. Instead, they proposed to pay attention to medium-related factors and base new media users' gratifications on the specific technological features of media per se—in other words, the technological affordances of emergent media. Indeed, when individuals interact with technologies and modern media platforms, they perceive various affordances—the "action possibilities" embedded in the interactive environment—and these perceived affordances, in turn, guide how they engage with and act on those interfaces (Gibson 1979; Norman 1990). In view of this, Sundar and Limperos (2013) suggest that the prevailing affordances of new media contribute to media users' gratification expectations and subsequent fulfillment. Specifically, they propose an affordance-based gratifications framework, which adopts a systematic affordance typology from the MAIN model (Sundar 2008) that incorporates four facets of emergent media affordances: modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability. They theorize that 16 types of new gratifications can be triggered by these technological affordances.

For instance, modality refers to the various means of media content presentation (e.g., audio, video). Sundar and Limperos (2013) proposed four gratifications underpinning modality affordance: realism (e.g., virtual environment), coolness (e.g., new interfaces), novelty (new features in video games), and being there (social presence) (see detailed definitions in Table 1). Agency affordance refers to users' autonomy or agency in terms of content filtering and/or creation, which enables five gratifications: agency enhancement (or autonomy), community building (social networking), bandwagon (exposure to/influenced by others' thoughts), filtering/tailoring (setting preferences), and ownness (ownership). Interactivity affordance enables media users to produce and receive content in real time; consequently, interactivity-based gratifications reflect that the need for interaction, activity, responsiveness, and dynamic control can be fulfilled on interactive media. Finally, the navigability affordance "allows user movement through the medium" (Sundar

Table 1. Definitions of affordance-based gratifications.

Variable	Definition
Modality-based gratifications	
Realism	The gratification of communicating and interacting in a face-to-face way and experiencing real life in virtual environments
Coolness	The gratification of communicating and interacting on unique, distinctive, and stylish interfaces
Novelty	The gratification of communicating and interacting with innovative technology and experiencing unusual, different features
Being there	The gratification of being present and immersion in psychically distant environments
Agency-based gratifications	
Agency enhancement	The gratification of possessing autonomy in communication and freely expressing own identity, thoughts, and opinions
Community building	The gratification of connecting with other people and expanding social networks
Bandwagon	The gratification of knowing, reviewing, and comparing the opinions and thoughts of other people
Filtering/tailoring	The gratification of setting own preferences and filtering certain information
Ownness	The gratification of possessing ownership on the content and information
Interactivity-based gratifications	
Interaction	The gratification of interacting with others, performing tasks, and fulfilling own needs continuously
Activity	The gratification of being active in communication and interaction
Responsiveness	The gratification of having someone to respond well to own needs and requests
Dynamic control	The gratification of possessing control on the interaction content and process
Navigability-based gratifications	
Browsing/variety seeking	The gratification of seeking, browsing, and surfing various information freely
Scaffolding/navigation aids	The gratification of easily exploring information, using, and interacting with navigation aids
Play/fun	The gratification of having fun and an entertaining experience

and Limperos 2013, 516), which facilitates three gratifications, including browsing/variety seeking, scaffolds/navigation aids, and play/fun. Notably, the four sets of affordance-based gratifications delineate unique user experiences in relation to emergent media and advanced technologies, signaling a clear distinction from the traditional gratifications uncovered in prior U&G literature (Sundar and Limperos 2013).

Building on Sundar and Limperos's (2013) framework and measurements, Rathnayake and Winter (2018) tested them in relation to social media use and verified the validity of the measures. Nevertheless, one significant limitation of Rathnayake and Winter's (2018) work is that they investigated social media as a broad term without comparing different social media platforms to see how affordance-based gratifications vary. Researchers have found that people use multiple social media platforms simultaneously because different platforms can afford different gratifications (e.g., Gao and Feng 2016; Quan-Haase and Young 2010). For instance, Twitter promotes microblogging, while Instagram focuses on photo sharing and Snapchat emphasizes short video sharing; as a result, these differences in modality can lead users to obtain varied media experiences and need fulfillment (Voorveld et al. 2018).

Specific to the influencer–follower context, previous literature discovered that a certain influencer's impact on followers can vary across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, indicating that followers interact and engage quite differently with a single influencer depending on the platform (e.g., Arora et al. 2019). In particular, Arora et al. (2019) proposed an influencer index that can be platform specific, which is predicted by key factors such as engagement, outreach, sentiment, and growth on each platform. Furthermore, Rathnayake and Winter (2018) acknowledge that different platforms score differently in the discrete gratifications and suggest future research should consider the differences among platforms. For example, one platform (e.g., TikTok) may provide more coolness gratification than another platform (e.g., LinkedIn). Taken together, given that followers' gratifications are cultivated and satisfied during their interactions with influencers, we thus expect that the affordance-based gratifications fulfilled during followers' interactions with influencers are contingent on specific social media platforms. Therefore, we draw on the updated version of U&G theory to offer a hypothesis:

H1: The affordance-based gratifications (e.g., realism, coolness, novelty, being there) of followers' interactions with influencers will differ across different social media platforms.

Five characteristics of social media platform

Debate is ongoing regarding a definition of the term *social media* (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). Voorveld et al. (2018), who investigated consumers' engagement with social media and social media advertising across different platforms, argued that "there is no such thing as 'social media'" (38). They further explicated that although advertising scholars often use the term *social media*, "not all platforms are created equal" (Voorveld et al. 2018, 50). It is not surprising to see that consumers engage with different social media platforms and advertising on those social media platforms differently, given that those media platforms boast varying technological affordances and functions and fulfill different gratifications (Sundar and Limperos 2013). Prior research has proposed that various social media should be classified based on their characteristics and features, including media richness and degree of self-disclosure (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010); platform intimacy; modality; and usage (or practicality/entertainment level) (Reich and Pittman 2020). Accordingly, corresponding to the call by Voorveld et al. (2018) that future research involving social media platforms should investigate specific context characteristics, we develop a new theorization pertaining to social media platforms' characteristics and classify them into five dimensions—media richness, self-disclosure, intimacy, modality, and usage—that we argue relate to influencer marketing.

Media richness

Media richness is premised on the assumption that the objective of communication is to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty (Daft and Lengel 1986). Media differ in their capacities for "immediate feedback, the number of cues and channels utilized, personalization, and language variety" (Daft and Lengel 1986, 560). Face-to-face communication is considered the richest medium, as it allows immediate feedback, multiple cues (voice, facial cues, and body language), and natural language, which facilitates equivocality reduction. Media low in richness refer to those that afford fewer cues (e.g., e-mail) and restrict immediate feedback (e.g., TV), thus being less efficient in resolving equivocality. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) conceptualized media richness in terms of the amount of information transmitted within a given time frame and the level to which social media resolve ambiguity and uncertainty during communication. In the influencer context, we argue that media richness shapes the level of information and interaction that influencers have with followers, which has a profound impact on followers' experiences with influencers on social media.

Self-disclosure

Self-disclosure, as afforded by social media platforms, is a critical component for influencer-follower relation formation and development (Abidin 2015). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) categorize self-disclosure as the social dimension of social media. They described self-disclosure as a key component of self-presentation. Self-disclosure refers to a conscious or unconscious sharing of personal information (e.g., beliefs, thoughts, emotions, feelings, opinions) in the process of self-presentation, which is also an integral step in building close relationships. Relevant to the influencer context, influencers often narrate their lives and engage in self-disclosure to build rapport with followers, which makes them appear more authentic and easier to relate to from the perspective of their followers, thus helping forge more intimate relationships (Lou 2022).

Platform intimacy

Reich and Pittman (2020) identified three additional dimensions that differentiate social media platforms: platform intimacy, modality, and usage. They describe platform intimacy as the felt

intimacy toward social media platforms, which differs across platforms and is often contingent on platform modality (Reich and Pittman 2020). For instance, one may feel that Instagram is more intimate than Twitter, as Instagram affords more visual-focused and image-rich content, whereas Twitter is predominantly text based (Pittman and Reich 2016). Platform intimacy matters greatly for influencer marketing, as influencers are driven to foster intimate relationships with followers, and this enhanced influencer–follower relationship largely contributes to the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Ye et al. 2021).

Modality

Modality describes the type of content that is created and transmitted on social media platforms, such as textual, aural, audiovisual, and multimedia content (Sundar 2008). Modality is tied to the structure of a given medium. Most social media platforms enable multiple modalities, including text, images, audio, and video. Influencer marketing also relies on social media modalities to create valuable content that efficiently engages followers.

Usage

Finally, usage refers to the degree of practicality and/or enjoyment of a given social media platform (Reich and Pittman 2020). For instance, Twitter is rated as more utilitarian than Instagram (Reich and Pittman 2020), as Twitter typically consists of bite-sized information-laden texts, whereas Instagram is predominantly visual based that is pleasing to review. Relevant to influencer marketing, platform usage can affect the information and entertainment value of influencer-generated content, which in turn shapes follower trust and campaign outcomes (Lou and Yuan 2019).

Collectively, we classify social media platform characteristics into these five dimensions and operationalize them to investigate their relations with followers' interactions and experiences with influencers. Given that these characteristics differ across social media platforms (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Reich and Pittman 2020; Voorveld et al. 2018), they are also intertwined with influencers' content creation and narrations and followers' interactions (e.g., Abidin 2015; Lou 2022; Ye et al. 2021). However, given limited empirical evidence, we ask the following research question:

RQ1: How will perceived social media platform characteristics (e.g., media richness, level of self-disclosure, platform intimacy) differ across platforms in relation to followers' interactions with influencers?

How gratifications and platform characteristics drive advertising effectiveness

On one hand, prior research has looked into the impact of U&G of media or Internet use on downstream factors, including gratifications of magazine reading on advertising engagement (Kim et al. 2015); viewing unboxing videos on purchase intentions (Kim 2020); online game playing on consumer loyalty (Huang and Hsieh 2011); using online websites on human interaction (Ko, Cho, and Roberts 2005); exposure to wireless advertising messages on consumer attitudes (Peters, Amato, and Hollenbeck 2007); and gratifications of using smart speakers on parasocial relation and subsequent ad attitudes and brand attitudes (Lee and Cho 2020). Plume and Slade (2018) demonstrated that gratifications of Facebook use positively predicted users' intentions to share sponsored ads on Facebook. Similarly, Kim (2020) found that gratifications of watching YouTube unboxing videos directly predicted purchase intentions or indirectly affected purchase intentions via parasocial relations with YouTubers. Taken together, we argue that the affordance-based gratifications of interactions with influencers are positively related to users' purchase intentions toward influencer-promoted products (e.g., Kim 2020). Similarly, we would expect that gratifications would also contribute to users' awareness of those promoted brands (Lee and Cho 2020). We focus on brand awareness and purchase intentions as two key advertising outcomes in this research, as the two variables represent brands' leading goals in influencer

marketing: boosting brand awareness and sales (Esseveld 2017; Statista 2018). This selection also echoes that of a recent study investigating the effectiveness of influencer advertising (Lou and Yuan 2019). Therefore, we offer a second hypothesis:

H2: The affordance-based gratifications (e.g., realism, coolness, novelty, being there) of interactions with influencers are positively related to (a) brand awareness and (b) purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored posts.

On the other hand, regarding the effects of platform characteristics on advertising effectiveness, we argue that media richness plays a significant role in the extent of content usefulness and comprehensiveness that influencers share with followers. Media with high richness can help users reduce communication ambiguity and uncertainty (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010). We argue that the level of media richness can affect influencer-generated content's granularity and level of detail. For example, richer media (e.g., YouTube) is expected to help influencers create and disseminate more comprehensive and coherent content regarding sponsored products than less rich media (e.g., blogs). The level of influencer-sponsored content's usefulness affects advertising outcomes like brand awareness and purchase intentions (Lou and Yuan 2019). Further, the level of self-disclosure that is enabled by social media platforms directly affects the intimacy and closeness developed between influencers and followers. Platform self-disclosure herein describes the "conscious and unconscious revelation of personal information (e.g., thoughts, feelings, likes, dislikes)" that is afforded by a specific platform (Kaplan and Haenlein 2010, 62). Self-disclosure plays a critical role in developing close relationships between two entities, including influencers and followers. The extent to which influencers self-disclose with followers positively correlates with the strength of the parasocial relation (PSR) or transparasocial relation between influencers and their followers, which in turn influences campaign effectiveness and advertising outcomes such as brand awareness and purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored products (Lou and Kim 2019; Lou 2022). Similarly, Reich and Pittman (2020) argued that platform intimacy, especially when there is a fit between platform and appeal in terms of intimacy, positively affects such advertising outcomes as attitude toward the ads and brands. We argue that platform intimacy dictates the level of influencer-follower relation and sharing, which also affects advertising outcomes such as brand awareness and purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored products (Lou 2022). Finally, platform modality and usage directly affect the format of content that influencers can share with followers (e.g., multimedia content versus textual content only). We expect platforms that afford multimodality content (versus single modality, such as text only) can help influencers create more informative and detailed sharing, which contributes to an increased perceived value of influencer-generated contents. This perceived content value subsequently positively affects influencer campaign outcomes like brand awareness and purchase intentions (Lou and Yuan 2019; Lou and Kim 2019). We offer a third hypothesis:

H3: Platform characteristics (e.g., media richness, level of self-disclosure, platform intimacy) in relation to followers' interactions with influencers are positively related to (a) brand awareness and (b) purchase intentions toward influencer-promoted products.

The role of parasocial relation between influencers and followers

Lee and Cho (2020) explicated the gratifications of using smart speakers and identified users' PSR with smart speakers as a mediator that connects the impact of gratifications and advertising effectiveness. Similarly, Kim (2020) identified PSRs with YouTubers as a mediator that links gratifications and advertising outcomes. PSR herein refers to the imaginary and lasting social relation between audience and media characters, including celebrities and mediated characters appearing in TV, radio, or other theatrics (Horton and Wohl 1956). The original concept of parasocial delineates this unilateral relation between viewers and media personae as

nonreciprocal, unidirectional, and controlled by producers. Yet Lou (2022) recently reconceptualized the relation between influencers and followers as a transparasocial relation, which transcends the boundary of PSR and categorizes influencer–follower relation as “collectively reciprocal, (a)synchronously interactive, and co-created” (1). Lou (2022) further argued that influencer–follower relation plays a critical role in explaining followers’ generally accepting or benign attitudes toward influencer-sponsored products and brands. Informed by these findings in prior literature, we argue that followers’ fulfilled gratifications during their interactions with influencers will contribute to enhanced interpersonal relations or a sense of community (e.g., Blight, Ruppel, and Schoenbauer 2017; Kim 2020; Lee and Cho 2020), namely, the PSR with influencers. This PSR between influencers and followers has been found to mediate the impact of gratifications on advertising outcomes, such as brand attitudes/awareness and purchase intentions (e.g., Kim 2020; Lee and Cho 2020). Therefore, we propose a fourth hypothesis:

H4: Followers’ perceived parasocial relation with influencers mediates the effects of gratifications (e.g., realism, coolness, novelty, being there) on (a) brand awareness and (b) purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored posts.

Furthermore, as we elaborated, all platform characteristics—media richness, self-disclosure, intimacy, modality, and usage—play a role in shaping the format and value of influencer-generated content, which have been found to influence the PSR between influencers and followers (Lou and Kim 2019). Based on prior findings concerning the link between the PSR and advertising outcomes (e.g., Kim 2020; Lee and Cho 2020), we argue that the PSR between influencers and followers affects advertising outcomes such as brand awareness and purchase intentions. Collectively, we offer a fifth hypothesis:

H5: Followers’ perceived parasocial relation with influencers mediates the effects of platform characteristics (e.g., media richness, level of self-disclosure, platform intimacy) on (a) brand awareness and (b) purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored posts.

We display the hypothesized relations in a conceptual model in Figure 1.

Method

Design and procedure

In this study, we focused on eight leading social media platforms for influencer marketing, including the top five platforms for influencers: Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn (James 2020). We also added three burgeoning platforms that are accelerating social commerce functions and are thus attracting an increasing number of influencers: Snapchat,

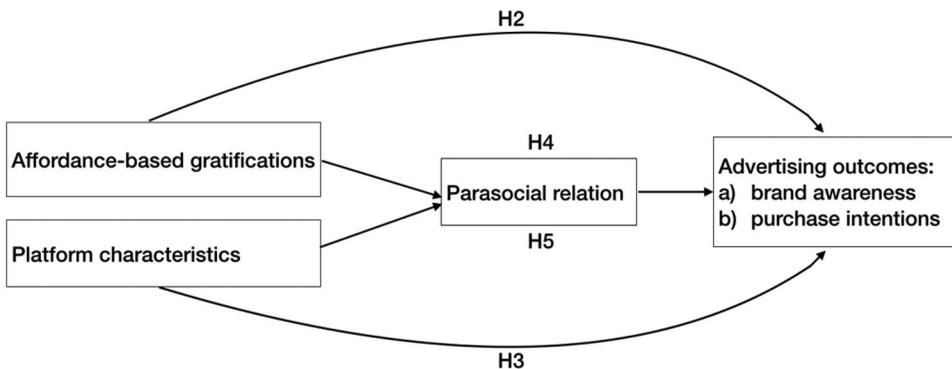


Figure 1. Conceptual model of social media platforms and influencer marketing effectiveness.

TikTok, and Pinterest (McCarthy 2021). We adopted the same procedure that Voorveld et al. (2018) used when examining consumers' interactions with social media and social media advertising across multiple social media platforms. In particular, we recruited a representative sample to examine each social media platform through a single-source approach. We started the online survey with several screening questions to make sure only those who (1) were age 18 and above, (2) were regular social media users, and (3) were following at least one SMI participated.

Specifically, after giving consent, the participants first answered questions about their general social media use (i.e., platforms, duration), platforms they used to follow influencers, and the types of influencers they followed. Following this, we randomly presented each of the eight platforms to the participants. For each platform, the participants first indicated whether they have used the platform in the past week and whether they were following any influencer on that platform. (If so, they were asked to list their favorite influencer's social media handle.) Only those who had used the platform in the past week and who could provide the name of the influencer they were following were prompted to answer questions regarding affordance-based gratifications, platform characteristics, perceived PSR with the named influencer, and items measuring advertising effectiveness. Those who had not used the platform in the past week and those who could not name the followed influencer on that platform would proceed to answer questions regarding the next platform. This same procedure was repeated for each platform (see procedure flow in Figure 2). At the beginning of the survey, we offered a short definition of SMI to help participants understand the questions. For questions asking about each particular platform, we asked the participants to recall and assess their overall perceptions of that platform and their experiences with their favorite influencer on that platform.

In prior research investigating consumers' experiences and/or interactions with influencers, consumers were often asked to report their interactions with influencers on social media in their entirety (e.g., Lou and Yuan 2019; Shan, Chen, and Lin 2020) or on one particular platform (e.g., Instagram, Ki et al. 2020). In contrast, in this research, users (age 18 and above) were asked to rate their experiences on each of the eight platforms through their engagement with influencers in a random order, thereby facilitating comparisons among the eight social media platforms that are externally valid and context specific.

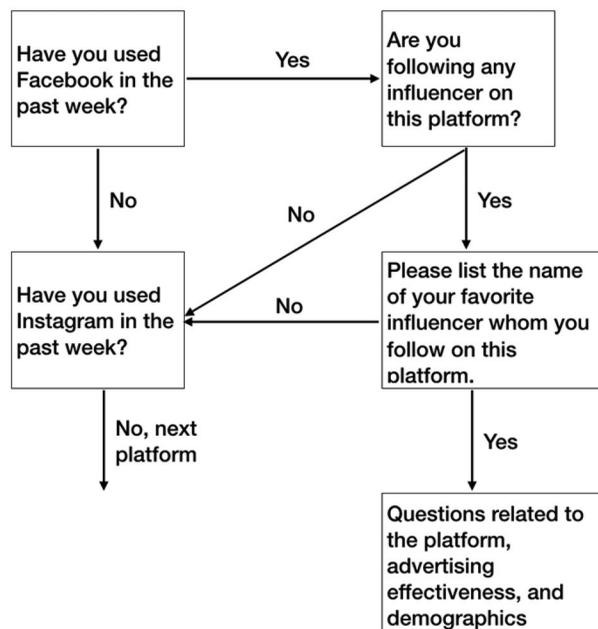


Figure 2. Illustration of study procedure.

Participants and data collection

We employed the online panel Dynata to collect data. Panelists were limited to those residing in the United States, who were at least 18 years old, and who were following influencers on any of the eight social media platforms. We set the following quota to reflect the current demographics of the U.S. population to aim for a representative sample: gender (51 percent female) race (76 percent White or Latino, 13 percent African American, 5 percent Asian) (The World Bank 2019; United States Census Bureau 2019). After screening those who were not qualified, we secured a total of 1,216 participants who participated and completed the final survey. Their average age was 46 years old ($SD=15.32$, ages 18 to 70), with 50.9 percent females, 48.6 percent male, 80.1 percent White or Latino, 11 percent African American, and 5.8 percent Asian. The majority of them had a bachelor's or master's degree (35.2 percent with bachelor's, 23 percent with master's, and 29.5 percent with a high school education). The majority of them had an annual household income below \$75,000 (53.2 percent), and 44 percent had an annual household income above \$75,000. It took around 25 minutes to complete the survey. The participants were compensated by the online panel based on their remuneration policy.

Measures

Affordance-based gratifications

We adapted the measures of affordance-based gratifications from Sundar and Limperos (2013). We revised the wording to start with “Following and/or interacting with [influencer name] on [social media platform]” before measuring each construct. We adopted a total of 14 constructs: realism, coolness, novelty, being there, agency enhancement, community building, bandwagon, interaction, activity, responsiveness, dynamic control, browsing/variety seeking, scaffolding, and play/fun. We excluded two constructs—filtering/tailoring and ownness—as they had little to do with the gratifications of following and/or interacting with influencers (see full measures in [Supplementary Material](#), Appendix A). For instance, we measured the realism gratification using such items as “Following and/or interacting with [influencer name] on [social media platform] makes me feel that I can experience the real world through [influencer name]” on a 7-point Likert scale anchored by *Strongly disagree* and *Strongly agree*.

Because affordance-based gratifications have been well established in the literature (e.g., Sundar and Limperos 2013; Rathnayake and Winter 2018), we performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the 14 constructs using AMOS 25 in SPSS. We conducted both first-order and second-order CFA (classifying them into four major constructs, as suggested by Sundar and Limperos 2013) to test the measurement fit. Based on the standards for model fit indices (e.g., Hair 2010), the first-order CFA model achieved acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df=4.83$, CFI = .98, NFI = .97, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .04. The reliability analyses also demonstrated overall satisfactory reliability of all constructs (see [Supplementary Material](#), Appendix A). The second-order CFA model indicated a slightly less acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df=6.15$, CFI = .96, NFI = .96, TLI = .96, RMSEA = .04. There was no significant difference between the first-order CFA model fit and second-order CFA model fit (chi-square difference not significant). Given the focus of this research, we treat all 14 constructs as first-order latent constructs to yield a more nuanced characterization of the platform differences.

Platform characteristics

We measured the five previously identified social media characteristics pertaining to followers' interactions with influencers (see full measures in [Supplementary Material](#), Appendix A). Media richness was measured using four items, including “Compared to other platforms, I think [social media platform] allows [influencer name] to explain complex/difficult ideas better” on a 7-point Likert scale, with options varying from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree* (Lee and Borah 2020). We measured self-disclosure using four items in the format of

“On [social media platform], [influencer name] often discloses personal things/life about herself/himself” on a 7-point Likert scale (Kim and Song 2016). Intimacy, modality, and usage were measured by a set of semantic differential scales on a 7-point scale, using items including *Nonintimate/Intimate* (intimacy), *Written/Visual* (modality), and *Functional/Fun* (usage) (Reich and Pittman 2020).

Because the theorization and operationalization of platform characteristics have not been systematically validated together, we first performed an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on the measurements of the selected five constructs. A principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation was performed on all the influencer interaction moments across eight platforms, revealing three factors (all eigenvalues greater than one). EFA categorized media richness and self-disclosure as one factor, along with intimacy and usage. We first performed CFA using the three-factor recommendation of EFA. The CFA model fit was not satisfactory: $\chi^2/df=14.87$, comparative fit index (CFI) = .96, normed fit index (NFI) = .95, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .94, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .07. Informed by current theory, we further treated media richness and self-disclosure as separate factors, along with intimacy and usage, and performed CFA on the four-factor measurement. The CFA model demonstrated acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df=3.01$, CFI = .99, NFI = .99, TLI = .99, RMSEA = .03. Therefore, we adopted a four-factor solution for platform characteristics, including media richness, self-disclosure, intimacy, and usage. The reliability analyses also demonstrated overall satisfactory reliability of the four constructs (see [Supplementary Material, Appendix A](#)).

Parasocial relation

Followers' PSRs with influencers were measured using 15 items extracted from Rosaen and Dibble (2016), with items such as “[Influencer name] makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend” on a 7-point Likert scale, with response options anchored at *Strongly disagree* and *Strongly agree* (see [Supplementary Material, Appendix A](#)).

Brand awareness

We measured brand awareness because it is an important outcome measure in its own right and is generally a prerequisite for achieving other advertising goals. We used three items from previous literature (Lou and Yuan 2019), with items in the format of “When following and/or interacting with [influencer name] on [social media platform], I know what certain brands look like” on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at *Strongly disagree* and *Strongly agree*.

Purchase intentions

Because the ultimate purchase is often a key goal of advertising, we also included purchase intentions as a dependent measure of advertising outcomes. We asked the participants to rate their purchase intentions toward influencer-sponsored products on three items, with items in the format of “When following and/or interacting with [influencer name] on [social media platform], it's likely that I would buy certain products/brands because of his/her posts” on a 7-point Likert scale anchored at *Strongly disagree* and *Strongly agree* (Lou and Yuan 2019).

Data analysis

To test our research question and hypotheses, we analyzed data using Stata 16.1. We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to test hypotheses 1 and 2. To address hypotheses 3 and 4, we conducted a series of linear regressions and controlled for the participants' age,

gender, race, education, and income. We further took the logarithm of age to control for the skewness pertinent in this variable. To investigate the mediating effect of PSR on brand awareness and purchase intentions, respectively, we constructed a system of simultaneous equations as follows (Wooldridge 2002):

$$PSR_i = \beta_1 X_i + \epsilon_i \tag{1}$$

$$Brand\ awareness / Purchase\ Intention_i = \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 PSR_i + \mu_i \tag{2}$$

Results

How gratifications and platform characteristics differ across platforms

Among the recruited 1,216 participants, 53 percent ($n=648$) reported following influencers on Facebook, 42 percent ($n=505$) on Instagram, 49 percent ($n=594$) on YouTube, 31 percent ($n=374$) on Twitter, 17 percent ($n=203$) on Snapchat, 20 percent ($n=240$) on TikTok, 16 percent ($n=196$) on LinkedIn, and 18 percent ($n=217$) on Pinterest (see Table 2).

Hypothesis 1 and research question 1 examine whether and how followers' affordance-based gratifications and perceived social media platform characteristics in relation to followers' interactions with influencers differ across platforms. The results indicate significant differences between gratifications and platform characteristics across the eight platforms (see Table 2), thereby supporting hypothesis 1. Except for browsing gratification, self-disclosure, and intimacy, the rest of the gratifications and platform characteristics differed significantly across the eight platforms (all $ps < .05$). To illustrate that there are key differences in the primary gratifications achieved on different social media platforms, we explore affordance-based gratifications across the eight platforms in the sections that follow.

Table 2. Summary statistics of major variables with the different platforms.

									F (7, 2969) ^a
N	648	505	594	374	203	240	196	217	
Realism	5.12	5.03	5.33	5.08	5.50	5.51	5.39	5.33	6.44**
Coolness	5.58	5.70	5.75	5.57	5.85	5.96	5.79	5.93	4.78**
Novelty	5.63	5.59	5.64	5.63	5.81	5.87	5.73	5.91	2.96**
Being there	5.52	5.57	5.65	5.50	5.72	5.77	5.71	5.86	2.83**
Agency enhancement	5.60	5.55	5.55	5.64	5.76	5.76	5.75	5.84	2.31*
Community building	5.46	5.44	5.24	5.53	5.73	5.83	5.73	5.78	7.82**
Bandwagon	5.63	5.54	5.50	5.66	5.63	5.85	5.77	5.79	2.92**
Interaction	5.47	5.44	5.34	5.43	5.69	5.75	5.76	5.73	5.14**
Activity	5.32	5.24	5.21	5.36	5.68	5.64	5.72	5.72	7.70**
Responsiveness	5.56	5.45	5.58	5.52	5.83	5.89	5.71	5.81	4.60**
Dynamic control	5.02	5.07	5.13	5.13	5.61	5.48	5.65	5.58	8.69**
Browsing	5.59	5.59	5.61	5.59	5.73	5.73	5.74	5.84	1.71
Scaffolding	5.65	5.66	5.70	5.66	5.86	5.88	5.72	5.92	2.39*
Play/fun	5.57	5.69	5.73	5.59	5.83	6.00	5.70	5.93	4.72**
Media richness	5.58	5.52	5.66	5.49	5.85	5.83	5.72	5.71	3.64**
Self-disclosure	5.69	5.74	5.74	5.71	5.95	5.79	5.74	5.71	1.16
Intimacy	5.26	5.28	5.36	5.16	5.33	5.32	5.37	5.38	0.91
Usage	5.22	5.37	5.43	5.07	5.58	5.58	5.07	5.50	4.93**

^aBased on a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with platform as fixed factor and the engagement dimension as dependent variable on data file with all media consumption moments as cases; Wilks's lambda = 0.86, $F=3.16$, $p < .001$.

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

Facebook

Followers who engage with influencers rated scaffolding/navigation ($M=5.65$), bandwagon ($M=5.63$), and novelty ($M=5.63$) as the top three affordance-based gratifications achieved on Facebook. Scaffolding gratification allows users to easily navigate and link to other information when engaging with influencers, such as product information and posts shared by other users. Facebook also scored high on bandwagon and novelty. With respect to bandwagon, it is not surprising to see that users often see other followers' comments and reactions to influencers' content and thus adjust their thoughts and opinions accordingly. However, it is interesting to see that users still rate their experience with influencers on Facebook as quite novel. With its multimedia affordances and modalities, influencers can still leverage Facebook to provide unusual experiences to followers.

Instagram

Instagram scored high on the coolness gratification ($M=5.70$), followed by play/fun ($M=5.69$) and scaffolding ($M=5.66$). With its Instagram Stories (which allows users to share multiple videos/photos throughout the day), shoppable tags, and live videos, Instagram provides unique and distinctive ways for users to engage with influencers. The results also showed that users rated their experiences with influencers to be mostly entertaining and fun on Instagram (Table 2). Finally, Instagram enabled users to easily navigate and link to other sources, including online stores, shoppable products, and brands, when engaging with influencer content.

YouTube

Similar to Instagram, YouTube received its highest rating on coolness ($M=5.75$): Users indicated that YouTube is a unique and stylish platform to engage with influencers. It scored the second highest on play/fun ($M=5.73$), followed by scaffolding ($M=5.70$). Like Instagram, YouTube was rated to be largely entertaining when interacting with influencers, and participants thought it was easy to navigate and locate useful information related to influencer content.

Twitter

Twitter achieved its highest ratings on both bandwagon ($M=5.66$) and scaffolding ($M=5.66$): Users were often influenced by other users' comments and thoughts when engaging with influencers, and users found Twitter easy to use and explore when engaging with influencers. Twitter also received high scores on agency-enhancement gratification ($M=5.64$): Users consider Twitter a platform where they can freely express their opinions and assert their identity when engaging with influencers.

Snapchat

Snapchat's highest score was for scaffolding ($M=5.86$), indicating that Snapchat is easy to use and offers aids for efficient use when engaging with influencers. It scored high on coolness ($M=5.85$), followed by play/fun ($M=5.83$) and responsiveness ($M=5.83$). Snapchat was also considered a unique and distinctive platform to engage with influencers, and participants believed that it provided largely entertaining experiences during the process. Results show that influencers on Snapchat were often responsive to followers' requests and comments.

TikTok

TikTok scored highest on the play/fun gratification ($M=6.00$), indicative of followers' interactions with influencers on TikTok being enjoyable and pleasing. It scored its second-highest means on coolness ($M=5.96$), followed by responsiveness ($M=5.89$). TikTok, not surprisingly, was rated to be cool and distinctive in terms of engaging with influencers. Influencers on TikTok were often reported to be quite responsive to followers' comments and questions.

LinkedIn

LinkedIn got its highest scores for coolness ($M=5.79$), followed by bandwagon ($M=5.77$) and interaction ($M=5.76$). LinkedIn was also considered a rather unique platform to interact with influencers. Also, users on LinkedIn tended to be influenced by other users' comments and opinions when engaging with influencers. Finally, results showed that users considered LinkedIn efficient in terms of allowing followers to specify their needs and preferences (e.g., via polls or comments) when engaging with influencers.

Pinterest

Pinterest received its highest scores on both coolness ($M=5.93$) and play/fun ($M=5.93$), followed by scaffolding ($M=5.92$). Pinterest was found to be a cool and unconventional platform to engage with influencers, and users' experiences were mostly enjoyable and entertaining. Pinterest also facilitated efficient use and enabled users to easily locate useful information when engaging with influencers.

Notably, among the four identified platform characteristics, the eight platforms were significantly different on the dimensions of media richness ($F(7, 2969) = 3.64, p < .01$) and usage ($F(7, 2969) = 4.93, p < .01$). In particular, Snapchat was rated to afford the highest level of media richness ($M=5.85$) in relation to followers' interactions with influencers, followed by TikTok ($M=5.83$) and LinkedIn ($M=5.72$). Moreover, Snapchat and TikTok were rated as facilitating the highest level of usage—enjoyment and pleasure ($M=5.58$)—among users, offering mostly entertaining influencer content, whereas LinkedIn was rated to have the lowest level of usage/enjoyment ($M=5.07$) when engaging with influencers. The level of self-disclosure was consistently high across all eight platforms, indicating that influencers can leverage any platform to achieve the goal of self-disclosure ($F(7, 2969) = 1.16, n.s.$). There was no significant difference between platform intimacy in relation to influencers ($F(7, 2969) = 0.91, n.s.$).

How gratifications and platform characteristics drive advertising effectiveness

The results of linear regressions showed that affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics were efficient factors predicting brand awareness and purchase intentions, thus supporting hypotheses 2 and 3. We elaborate on the findings for each platform in the sections that follow (see [Tables 3](#) and [4](#)).

Facebook

Gratifications including coolness ($\beta = .18, p < .01$), bandwagon ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), browsing ($\beta = .14, p < .01$), scaffolding ($\beta = .17, p < .01$), and play/fun ($\beta = .11, p < .01$), and platform characteristics including media richness ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), were positively associated with brand awareness. In other words, the unique experience afforded by Facebook, as well as Facebook's navigability (i.e., browsing, scaffolding, and play/fun) positively predicts users' brand awareness when they were exposed to influencer-sponsored posts. Media richness that can help decrease information ambiguity also positively drives brand awareness. Moreover, realism ($\beta = .19, p < .01$), coolness ($\beta = .20, p < .01$), bandwagon ($\beta = .15, p < .05$), dynamic control ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), scaffolding ($\beta = .18, p < .05$), and play/fun ($\beta = .17, p < .01$) were positively correlated with purchase intentions, whereas agency enhancement ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$) was negatively related to purchase intentions. Media richness ($\beta = .16, p < .01$) was also positively associated with purchase intentions.

Instagram

Only two gratifications—coolness ($\beta = .30, p < .01$) and browsing ($\beta = .14, p < .05$)—emerged as significant predictors of brand awareness. It is understandable that the unique experience

Table 3. Affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics predicting brand awareness.

Gratifications & Platform Characteristics								
Realism	0.03	0.07	0.03	0.07	0.10	0.05	0.10	0.10
Coolness	0.18**	0.30**	-0.07	0.14 [†]	0.23*	-0.06	-0.05	0.07
Novelty	-0.02	-0.03	0.17*	-0.10	-0.11	0.20 [†]	0.20 [†]	0.17
Being there	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.17*	0.33**	-0.06	0.02	0.05
Agency enhancement	0.04	-0.03	-0.04	0.16*	-0.01	0.01	0.32**	-0.05
Community building	-0.04	-0.01	0.05	0.25**	0.16*	-0.00	0.03	0.04
Bandwagon	0.09*	0.06	-0.07	-0.13 [†]	-0.05	-0.09	0.04	-0.10
Interaction	-0.02	0.08	0.01	-0.02	-0.07	-0.01	-0.17	-0.13
Activity	0.05	0.08	0.21**	-0.09	0.19*	0.19*	0.17 [†]	-0.09
Responsiveness	-0.03	0.04	0.00	-0.07	-0.21*	0.15	0.11	0.03
Dynamic control	0.02	0.07	0.09 [†]	0.10 [†]	0.11 [†]	0.11	-0.05	0.29**
Browsing	0.14**	0.14*	0.07	-0.07	0.18*	0.14	-0.12	0.25**
Scaffolding	0.17**	0.06	0.24**	0.15 [†]	-0.03	0.30**	0.21 [†]	0.12
Play/fun	0.11**	0.06	0.08	0.08	0.08	-0.12	-0.04	0.11
Media richness	0.13**	-0.03	-0.04	0.05	-0.15	0.08	-0.02	0.00
Self-disclosure	0.04	0.07	0.24**	0.33**	0.14	-0.02	0.17 [†]	0.05
Intimacy	-0.00	-0.07 [†]	-0.04	-0.07 [†]	0.01	-0.04	0.02	-0.02
Usage	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.07 [†]	0.07 [†]	0.00	0.06
Gender	-0.06	-0.07	0.01	0.18 [†]	-0.06	0.08	0.05	0.14
Log age	-0.34**	0.16	-0.16	-0.13	-0.32*	-0.39*	0.11	0.19
Race	0.00	0.13*	0.09 [†]	0.04	0.10	0.02	-0.17*	0.01
Education	-0.01	0.00	0.02	-0.01	-0.02	-0.09	0.07	0.02
Income	0.03 [†]	0.02	0.01	0.02	0.08*	0.08 [†]	-0.02	0.04
Social media usage	-0.02	0.02	0.01	0.04	0.00	-0.01	0.01	0.00
<i>N</i>	647	503	591	373	202	238	195	216
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.55	0.53	0.54	0.63	0.79	0.59	0.80	0.63

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

with and exposure to influencer-generated content contribute to users' brand awareness on Instagram. None of the platform characteristics was significant in predicting brand awareness. Two gratifications emerged as significant predictors of purchase intentions on Instagram: realism ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$) and dynamic control ($\beta = .17$, $p < .01$). In other words, the perception of realism and followers' roles in their interactions with influencers and creation of influencer-generated content greatly shaped followers' purchase intentions. None of the platform characteristics was significant in predicting purchase intentions.

YouTube

Three gratifications—novelty ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), activity ($\beta = .21$, $p < .01$), and scaffolding ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$)—emerged as significant in predicting brand awareness. This finding indicates that the novelty experience with influencers, active participation, and YouTube's ease of use all positively contributed to brand awareness. Level of platform self-disclosure ($\beta = .24$, $p < .01$) was also significantly associated with brand awareness: the higher level of self-disclosure that YouTube affords, the more likely those advertised brands will be recalled. Four gratifications turned out to be significant predictors of purchase intentions on YouTube: coolness ($\beta = -.16$, $p < .05$), activity ($\beta = .20$, $p < .01$), responsiveness ($\beta = .13$, $p < .05$), and scaffolding ($\beta = .18$, $p < .05$). Users' active participation, being able to receive feedback from influencers, and ease of navigation on YouTube positively shaped purchase intentions, whereas YouTube's coolness was negatively related to purchase intentions. Furthermore, the level of media richness ($\beta = .30$, $p < .01$) was positively related to purchase intentions.

Twitter

Three gratifications—being there ($\beta = .17$, $p < .05$), agency enhancement ($\beta = .16$, $p < .05$), and community building ($\beta = .25$, $p < .01$)—emerged as significant predictors of brand awareness. This finding indicates that users' perceived social presence, autonomy to express

Table 4. Affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics predicting purchase intentions.

Gratifications & Platform Characteristics								
Realism	0.19**	0.13*	0.08	0.25**	0.11	0.06	-0.03	0.10
Coolness	0.20**	0.16†	-0.16*	0.30**	0.17	-0.18†	0.12	0.01
Novelty	-0.12	-0.12	0.02	-0.25**	-0.11	0.29**	0.14	0.25*
Being there	0.01	0.12†	0.06	0.16*	-0.13	0.06	-0.24†	-0.02
Agency enhancement	-0.14*	-0.07	0.02	0.07	-0.01	-0.03	0.22†	0.06
Community building	-0.02	0.04	-0.01	0.13†	-0.11	-0.11	-0.09	0.00
Bandwagon	0.15*	0.03	0.01	0.06	-0.03	-0.08	0.31**	-0.10
Interaction	0.04	0.12†	-0.02	-0.03	0.12	0.09	-0.15	-0.28**
Activity	-0.06	0.05	0.20**	-0.14†	0.22	0.34**	0.07	0.14
Responsiveness	-0.04	0.03	0.13*	-0.07	-0.09	0.10	0.08	-0.02
Dynamic control	0.13**	0.17**	0.09†	0.15*	-0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.02
Browsing	0.02	0.03	-0.03	0.01	0.22*	0.05	0.15	0.15
Scaffolding	0.18*	0.09	0.18*	0.09	-0.21†	0.39**	0.06	0.09
Play/fun	0.17**	0.09	0.04	0.06	0.09	-0.12	0.04	0.29**
Media richness	0.16**	0.00	0.30**	-0.09	0.41**	0.14	0.03	0.25*
Self-disclosure	0.09†	0.12	0.07	0.17*	0.32**	-0.07	0.28**	0.03
Intimacy	0.07†	0.03	0.05	0.05	-0.01	0.03	0.04	0.00
Usage	-0.01	0.00	0.01	-0.02	0.05	0.01	0.01	0.01
Gender	0.12	-0.16	-0.04	-0.07	0.35*	0.13	0.07	0.31*
Log age	-0.58**	0.21	0.09	-0.20	-0.11	0.08	0.13	0.21
Race	-0.06	0.07	0.04	-0.05	0.18*	0.12†	-0.01	-0.10
Education	0.01	-0.02	-0.04	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.08	0.11
Income	0.04	-0.01	0.05	-0.01	0.13**	0.03	-0.09**	0.04
Social media usage	-0.02	0.05	0.05	0.08*	-0.00	-0.01	0.11**	-0.06
N	647	503	591	373	202	238	195	216
Adjusted R ²	0.53	0.52	0.54	0.59	0.67	0.62	0.83	0.63

†p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01.

themselves, and the opportunities to network positively predicts brand awareness. The level of self-disclosure ($\beta = .33, p < .01$) was also significantly associated with brand awareness. The extent to which Twitter affords influencers' self-disclosure positively predicts followers' brand awareness. Five gratifications were significantly related to purchase intentions: realism ($\beta = .25, p < .01$), coolness ($\beta = .30, p < .01$), novelty ($\beta = -.25, p < .01$), being there ($\beta = .16, p < .01$), and dynamic control ($\beta = .15, p < .05$). In particular, users' perceived realism, uniqueness, social presence, and their roles in interactions with influencers that are afforded by Twitter positively predicted purchase intentions, whereas novelty gratification was negatively related to purchase intentions. Self-disclosure ($\beta = .17, p < .05$) was also significant in predicting purchase intentions.

Snapchat

Six gratifications were significantly associated with brand awareness: coolness ($\beta = .23, p < .05$), being there ($\beta = .33, p < .01$), community building ($\beta = .16, p < .05$), activity ($\beta = .19, p < .05$), responsiveness ($\beta = -.21, p < .05$), and browsing ($\beta = .18, p < .05$). In particular, the perceived coolness, social presence, chance to network, active participation, and variety seeking that were afforded by Snapchat positively predicted brand awareness. However, influencers' responsiveness was negatively related to brand awareness. None of the platform characteristics was significantly related to brand awareness. Two gratifications emerged as significant predictors of purchase intentions: activity ($\beta = .22, p < .05$) and browsing ($\beta = .22, p < .05$). In particular, perceived active participation and variety seeking positively predicted purchase intentions. Media richness ($\beta = .41, p < .01$) and self-disclosure ($\beta = .32, p < .01$) were both positively related to purchase intentions.

TikTok

Two gratifications—activity ($\beta = .19, p < .05$) and scaffolding ($\beta = .30, p < .01$)—emerged to be significant predictors of brand awareness. Namely, users' perceived active participation and ease of navigability that were afforded by TikTok positively predicted brand awareness. None of the platform characteristics was significant in predicting brand awareness. Similarly, three gratifications—novelty ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), activity ($\beta = .34, p < .01$), and scaffolding ($\beta = .39, p < .01$)—positively predicted purchase intentions on TikTok. In other words, users' perceived uniqueness, active participation, and ease of use that were afforded by TikTok positively predicted purchase intentions. None of the platform characteristics was significantly predicting purchase intentions.

LinkedIn

Only one gratification—agency enhancement ($\beta = .32, p < .01$)—emerged as a significant predictor of brand awareness on LinkedIn. Namely, users' autonomy to freely express opinions on LinkedIn was a positive predictor of brand awareness. None of the platform characteristics was significant in predicting brand awareness. One gratification—bandwagon ($\beta = .31, p < .01$)—positively predicted purchase intentions. In other words, users' tendency to be influenced by others' opinions positively predicted purchase intentions. The extent to which influencers engaged in self-disclosure ($\beta = .28, p < .01$) also positively predicted purchase intentions.

Pinterest

Two gratifications—dynamic control ($\beta = .29, p < .01$) and browsing ($\beta = .25, p < .05$)—positively predicted brand awareness on Pinterest. Namely, users' influence in shaping influencer topics and content and variety seeking were positively related to brand awareness. None of the platform characteristics was significant in predicting brand awareness. Three gratifications—novelty ($\beta = .25, p < .05$), interaction ($\beta = -.28, p < .01$), and play/fun ($\beta = .29, p < .01$)—were

significantly associated with purchase intentions. In particular, users' perceived novelty and fun that were afforded by Pinterest positively predicted purchase intentions, whereas their interaction with influencers negatively predicted purchase intentions. Media richness ($\beta = .25, p < .05$) was also a predictor of purchase intentions.

The mediating role of parasocial relation

To address hypotheses 4 and 5, simultaneous regression results demonstrated that PSR was positively related to brand awareness across all platforms (all $ps < .05$) except TikTok (see Tables 5 and 6). For instance, gratifications including realism ($\beta = .13, p < .01$), coolness ($\beta = .15, p < .01$), responsiveness ($\beta = .10, p < .01$), and play/fun ($\beta = .08, p < .05$), as well as platform characteristics like media richness ($\beta = .09, p < .05$), self-disclosure ($\beta = .14, p < .01$), and intimacy ($\beta = .11, p < .01$), were positive predictors of the PSR between followers and influencers on Instagram, which in turn, positively predicted brand awareness (PSR \rightarrow brand awareness: $\beta = .16, p < .05$). Furthermore, regression results indicated that PSR was positively associated with purchase intentions across all platforms (all $ps < .05$) except Snapchat. For example, the same set of predictors (realism, coolness, responsiveness, play/fun, media richness, self-disclosure, and intimacy) were significant predictors of the PSR between followers and influencers on Instagram, which in turn positively predicted purchase intentions (PSR \rightarrow PI: $\beta = .44, p < .01$).

Discussion

This study is the first to map out how different social media platforms shape users' interactions and relation building with SMIs differently. In particular, consumers' experiences with influencers are found to be contingent on context, which in turn shapes their relations with influencers across platforms. This influencer–follower relation was subsequently related to campaign effectiveness. These new findings advance the current literature on influencer marketing (e.g., Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021; Ye et al. 2021). In particular, we demonstrate that consumers' gratifications of interactions with influencers are platform specific and affordance based: Except for the gratification of browsing, the other 13 gratification dimensions—modality (realism, coolness, novelty, being there), agency (agency enhancement, community building, bandwagon), interactivity (interaction, activity, responsiveness, dynamic control), and navigability (scaffolding, play/fun)—differed significantly across the eight social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, LinkedIn, and Pinterest). Interestingly, each platform was distinct in terms of enabling different sets of top gratifications. In other words, each platform enabled followers to have a combination of prominent experiences even when they were following a single influencer. For instance, interactions with influencers on TikTok were distinct in fulfilling gratifications like play/fun, coolness, and responsiveness. Given the atmosphere of TikTok, consumers often find their interactions with influencers to be entertaining, cool, and in real time, whereas consumers experienced Instagram slightly differently, as they reported their interactions with influencers to be mostly cool, fun, and easy to navigate. TikTok and Snapchat share some overlapping patterns: Both were considered efficient to create fun, being experienced in real time, and being cool experiences for followers to engage with influencers. Looking at the eight platforms as a whole, the top five gratifications of interactions with influencers include coolness, scaffolding, play/fun, novelty, and agency enhancement. In other words, consumers interact with influencers on social media because they are motivated by cool experiences, ease of navigation, fun, novelty, and the autonomy to share their thoughts and identities with others. The current findings also help to expand prior findings that followers' motivations and/or experiences are centered either on influencer-generated content (Lou and Yuan 2019) or influencer traits (Ki et al. 2020).

Table 5. Simultaneous equations estimation using brand awareness as the dependent variable.

Predictors								
PSR	0.18**	0.16*	0.18**	0.28**	0.18*	-0.13	0.27**	0.40**
Realism	0.13**	0.05	0.13**	0.03	0.15**	0.04	0.18**	0.07
Coolness	0.11**	0.28**	0.07†	0.12†	-0.28**	0.10	0.05	0.08†
Novelty	-0.02	-0.03	-0.03	-0.08	-0.05	0.09	-0.02	0.06
Being there	0.02	0.04	-0.00	0.13**	0.13*	0.16**	0.15	0.08
Agency enhancement	0.02	0.02	0.08*	0.13*	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.05
Community building	-0.00	-0.01	-0.08**	0.27**	-0.03	-0.03	0.34**	-0.12
Bandwagon	0.04	0.09*	0.00	0.18**	0.16*	-0.19**	0.02	0.16
Interaction	0.01	0.03	0.08	-0.03	-0.06	-0.06	-0.03	-0.04
Activity	0.00	0.08	0.05	-0.03	-0.05	-0.01	-0.18†	0.05
Responsiveness	0.11**	0.02	0.12**	-0.07	0.20**	0.20*	0.10	-0.00
Dynamic control	-0.05**	0.07	-0.05†	0.15**	-0.03	0.17†	0.15*	-0.02
Browsing	-0.04	0.15**	0.05	-0.08	0.11*	0.06	0.15*	-0.09
Scaffolding	0.12**	0.05	0.00	0.11	0.05	0.06	0.14*	0.12
Play/fun	0.06*	0.08*	0.13**	0.11†	0.31**	0.08	-0.11†	0.05
Media richness	0.14**	0.09*	-0.04	-0.09†	0.28**	0.08	-0.09	-0.04
Self-disclosure	0.13**	0.14**	0.05	0.27**	0.12	0.08†	0.39**	-0.04
Intimacy	0.10**	-0.09*	-0.05	-0.10**	-0.03	-0.04	0.05	-0.04
Usage	0.01	0.00	0.03	0.01	0.09**	0.07†	0.03	0.04
Gender	-0.03	-0.05	0.17**	0.15	0.03	0.08	0.01	0.06*
Log age	0.32**	0.24*	-0.02	-0.14	-0.04	-0.37*	0.18*	0.07
Race	-0.01	0.00	-0.06	0.06	-0.31*	0.20†	0.17	0.17
Education	0.01	-0.01	0.03	-0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.08	0.03
Income	-0.04**	0.04*	-0.03	-0.02	0.07†	-0.08	0.06	-0.00
Social media usage	0.01	-0.02	0.00	0.04	0.01	0.08*	-0.02	0.04
<i>N</i>	647	503	591	373	202	238	195	216
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.71	0.73	0.70	0.67	0.81	0.64	0.83	0.70

Note. For each platform, we have two columns: the first column reports the coefficients of all independent variables (IVs) in predicting the parasocial relation (PSR); the second column reports the coefficients of all IVs (including the mediator, PSR) in predicting brand awareness.

†*p* < .10; **p* < .05; ***p* < .01.

Table 6. Simultaneous equations estimation using purchase intentions as the dependent variable.

Predictors	f	Instagram	YouTube	Twitter	Snapchat	TikTok	LinkedIn	Pinterest
PSR	0.29**	0.44**	0.35**	0.17**	-0.02	0.49**	0.22*	0.40**
Realism	0.13**	0.13**	0.13**	0.15**	0.12	0.04	-0.07	0.08†
Coolness	0.16**	0.09	0.07†	0.26**	0.16	0.04	0.18**	0.02
Novelty	-0.04	-0.01	-0.03	-0.08	-0.11	0.09	-0.12	0.08
Being there	0.04	0.04	-0.00	0.14**	-0.12	0.16**	0.17*	0.02
Agency enhancement	-0.01	-0.14*	0.02	0.13*	-0.01	0.02	0.00	0.02
Community building	-0.04	-0.01	-0.08**	0.16*	-0.11	-0.02	0.24*	-0.02
Bandwagon	0.07*	0.13*	0.02	0.19**	-0.03	0.09	0.01	-0.30**
Interaction	0.01	0.04	-0.03	0.06	0.12	-0.06	0.26**	-0.04
Activity	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.06	-0.16
Responsiveness	-0.02	0.01	0.05	-0.09	0.03	0.32**	0.10	0.05
Dynamic control	0.09**	0.10**	0.12**	0.15*	-0.09	0.03	-0.25**	-0.00
Browsing	-0.09**	-0.00	0.17**	-0.17**	-0.00	0.06	0.15*	0.12*
Scaffolding	-0.06†	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.23*	0.04	-0.01	-0.00
Play/fun	0.18**	0.03	0.00	0.15*	0.05	0.06	0.14*	0.07
Media richness	0.06†	0.08*	0.13**	0.09	0.09	0.08	-0.11†	-0.01
Self-disclosure	0.17**	0.09*	0.22**	-0.09†	0.42**	0.08	0.39**	0.21*
Intimacy	0.16**	-0.04	0.02	0.23**	0.32**	0.10	0.05	-0.02
Usage	0.10**	0.11**	0.08**	0.11**	-0.01	0.04	0.03	0.05†
Gender	-0.00	0.03	0.02	-0.04	0.05	0.04†	0.00	-0.01
Log age	-0.10*	0.17**	-0.07	0.08	0.35**	-0.01	0.01	0.23†
Race	-0.27**	0.24*	0.07	-0.11	-0.04	0.20†	0.18	0.20
Education	-0.02	-0.06	-0.02	-0.06	0.11*	-0.02	-0.08	-0.04
Income	0.03	0.00	0.03	0.06*	0.00	-0.02	0.02	0.08
Social media usage	-0.05**	0.06*	-0.03†	-0.01	0.13**	0.04	-0.02	-0.01
N	647	503	591	373	202	238	195	216
Adjusted R ²	0.71	0.56	0.58	0.68	0.71	0.83	0.90	0.83

Note. For each platform, we have two columns: the first column reports the coefficients of all independent variables (IVs) in predicting the parasocial relation (PSR), the second column reports the coefficients of all IVs (including the mediator, PSR) in predicting purchase intentions.

†p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01.

Regarding the four validated platform characteristics, the results showed that the eight platforms did not differ significantly in terms of levels of self-disclosure and intimacy. This finding differs from Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) and Reich and Pittman (2020), who argued that these dimensions should also vary across platforms, though our results support the general proposition of these authors that there are more differences than similarities. It may be that, in the current influencer context, influencers are renowned for their intimate relations with followers and their high level of self-disclosure during relation building (Lou 2022); thus, these perceived platform characteristics are so central to influencer marketing that they must be present for it to be effective, thereby making it a prerequisite to a platform being able to successfully host influencers. However, the eight platforms differed significantly in terms of media richness and usage when it comes to interactions with influencers. Participants rated Snapchat, TikTok, and LinkedIn as the top three platforms that enable influencers to share rich information. We expect the ephemeral nature of Snapchat and short-video-based TikTok to account for the different levels of content richness that consumers experienced. LinkedIn's high rating, however, could be due to its detailed networking information and multimedia cues that facilitate users in generating such perceptions. Finally, participants considered Snapchat, TikTok, and Pinterest as the top three platforms that offer the most entertaining experiences with influencers. Considering the eight platforms in their entirety, media richness and level of self-disclosure were rated as more pronounced characteristics that significantly predicted advertising outcomes when compared to intimacy and usage, which again echoes the dichotomy of platform dimensions advocated by Kaplan and Haenlein (2010).

The affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics were generally efficient in shaping campaign outcomes (i.e., brand awareness and purchase intentions). In particular, the types of affordance-based gratifications played varying roles in shaping brand awareness and purchase intentions across different platforms; there was no uniform pattern. For instance, when consumers engaged with influencers on Snapchat, their experiences of coolness, social presence with others, networking opportunities, active participation and cocreation, and variety seeking positively predicted their awareness of influencer-promoted brands. However, influencers' responsiveness negatively correlated with brand awareness. We expect that those pleasurable experiences can increase consumers' involvement and attention to influencer-promoted products and brands, yet influencers' instant responses may have distracted their attention from brand information.

Among the four platform characteristics, only media richness and self-disclosure emerged as significant predictors of brand awareness on certain platforms (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Twitter). Media richness was positively related to brand awareness on Facebook, whereas self-disclosure was positively correlated with brand awareness on YouTube and Twitter. It could be that rich and versatile presentation on Facebook matters significantly, as it can make influencer-generated content stand out among other news feeds, whereas the high level of self-disclosure on YouTube and Twitter is more likely to attract users' attention and level of cognitive processing. Again, these speculations can be further verified via future qualitative research. In short, we should treat each social media platform as a combination of unique technological affordances and distinct characteristics that can give rise to different campaign outcomes.

Similarly, there was no consistent pattern concerning the predictive roles that affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics played in users' purchase intentions toward influencer-promoted products across different platforms. For instance, when consumers engage with influencers on Twitter, their enjoyment of realism, coolness, social presence with others, and roles in interactions with influencers positively predicted their purchase intentions, whereas the experience of novelty was negatively related to purchase intentions. It could be that the gratification of novelty was not expected on Twitter it comes to influencer-promoted products; instead, the gratification of realism and other dimensions were more likely to persuade users to trust sponsored posts and make purchases. With regard to the four platform characteristics, media richness and self-disclosure accounted for purchase intentions across six of eight platforms, with Instagram and TikTok being the exceptions. As Instagram is the most popular platform and TikTok is an emerging platform among influencers, it is not surprising to expect that

influencers are so well versed on both multimedia platforms that they were not limited by platform characteristics like media richness or self-disclosure when promoting sponsored products. In short, consumers' experiences with influencers on different platforms varied as a function of platform affordances and characteristics, which in turn likely shaped how influencer marketing messages were received among consumers. Nonetheless, the current findings offer only correlations without in-depth explanations; future research should explore more about the consumer psychology underlying these findings.

Furthermore, it is worth noting that affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics explained a significant amount of variance in campaign outcomes across different platforms (53 percent to 80 percent in brand awareness; 52 percent to 83 percent in purchase intentions). This again speaks to the fact that the selection of platforms is essential in achieving expected campaign outcomes. More importantly, we identified PSR between influencers and followers as a mediator through which gratifications and platform characteristics shaped campaign effectiveness. For instance, except for Snapchat, PSR significantly mediated the effects of gratifications and platform characteristics on purchase intentions on all of the platforms. This finding echoes prior arguments on the critical role of influencer–follower relation in the effectiveness of influencer marketing (Abidin 2015; Lou 2022). We further elaborate on the major theoretical contributions of the findings in the next section.

Theoretical implications

Extant research mostly focused on the factors—message, content, audiences, and influencers—involved in influencer marketing (see a review in Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021). However, how platforms affect the effectiveness of influencer marketing and consumer experiences have been ostensibly understudied. The first contribution of this research is to fill this gap. It also corresponds to Voorveld's (2019) call for more research on social media platform–based research when studying brand communications. As the first of its kind, this research offers a road map for future research that takes the roles of platforms into consideration when studying influencer marketing. Extant research on influencer marketing often focuses on a particular part of the persuasion process, including the effects of influencer-generated content and influencer credibility on downstream campaign outcomes (Lou and Yuan 2019; Lou and Kim 2019), the impact of influencer persona traits on psychological outcomes (e.g., attachment; Ki et al. 2020), the effects of message-level factors (endorser type, endorser–product fit) on advertising effectiveness (Schouten, Janssen, and Verspaget 2020), and the roles of sponsorship disclosure in advertising outcomes (Evans et al. 2017; De Jans, Cauberghe, and Hudders 2018). The current research offers in-depth insights on an indispensable element during the persuasion process: the social media platforms that afford influences and influencer marketing in the first place. Indeed, the term *social media influencer* itself signals the quintessential role those social media platforms play in influencer marketing. The current findings offer some insights by showing that social media platforms are experienced very differently by consumers when they engage with influencers, which in turn shapes how they perceive their relations with influencers and their subsequent reactions to influencer-promoted products and brands. We highlight the importance of treating social media platforms individually and as context specific, instead of treating them in their entirety when conducting influencer campaigns.

A second contribution of this article is that we provide further and more refined evidence for the effects of affordance-based gratifications and advertising outcomes. Echoing prior findings concerning the impact of gratifications on advertising outcomes (e.g., Huang and Hsieh 2011; Kim 2020; Kim et al. 2015; Peters, Amato, and Hollenbeck 2007), we employed the affordance-based gratifications approach and offer further evidence on the links between gratifications and advertising effectiveness, which advances the extant literature that mostly employed the perspective of U&G. Third, we identified the perceived prosocial relation with influencers as a mediator between technological affordances on advertising outcomes (brand awareness and

purchase intentions). This finding substantiates prior arguments on the mediating role of PSR in the relation between gratifications and downstream consumer behavior (e.g., Kim 2020; Lee and Cho 2020). This result is especially important in the current influencer context, as we draw the theoretical connections between platform-bound factors (affordance-based gratifications), the influencer–follower factor (PSR), and advertising evaluations. These connections represent a contribution, as the extant literature on influencer marketing has rarely investigated social media platforms in which influencer marketing is taking place (see Hudders, De Jans, and De Veirman 2021; Ye et al. 2021).

Finally, we systematically retheorized and operationalized the concept of social media platform characteristics/dimensions and uncovered four distinct dimensions: media richness, self-disclosure, intimacy, and usage (e.g., Kaplan and Haenlein 2010; Reich and Pittman 2020; Voorveld 2019). Although there have been sporadic accounts of social media platform traits/characteristics, no research has systematically compiled or validated those constructs. Voorveld et al. (2018) proposed that future research should examine the different features of social media and consider characteristics such as “modality, self-disclosure, media richness, privacy parameters” (52). Yet our analysis showed that the modality dimension in its entirety vanished. It could be that modality is reflected in and materializes via other dimensions like media richness. Our findings provide further evidence on platform intimacy as suggested by Reich and Pittman (2020). This new characteristic describes social media platforms in terms of the overall intimacy perceived by users. The results did not show significant differences in intimacy across the eight platforms, which could be due to the fact that influencers are often very well versed in creating intimate experiences with followers and therefore the evaluation of platform intimacy in relation to users’ interactions with influencers is not distinct across those platforms. However, the results indicated significant differences in platform usage, with TikTok, Snapchat, and Pinterest being rated as the top three platforms enabling mostly fun and enjoyable experiences with influencers. This comprehensive theorization and operationalization of platform characteristics can be applied to future research on digital and social media advertising, as well as computer-mediated communication.

Practical implications

For advertisers and marketers, the current findings suggest that platform or context does matter for influencer–follower relation building and advertising effectiveness. Advertisers should select the appropriate platforms for influencers to develop the most intimate and trustworthy relation with followers that carries over to campaign outcomes. Advertisers should assess each platform’s strengths that afford efficient influencer narrations and/or desirable followers’ experiences and select platforms that align with the goals of the campaigns and the nature of promotional messages. For instance, for influencer campaigns that involve intensive interactions between influencers and followers, and with the aim of creating realism and involving followers in value cocreation, Instagram emerges as the optimal platform that can potentially drive positive sales.

As some previous researchers claimed that “context trumps content” (Voorveld et al. 2018, 52), it is also important to look into platform characteristics. In particular, media richness and level of self-disclosure matter significantly in achieving optimal campaign outcomes. For instance, on one hand, media richness plays a meaningful role in affecting purchase intentions via Facebook, YouTube, Snapchat, and Pinterest. Influencers should leverage those platforms’ multimedia modalities to communicate clearly and efficiently with followers. On the other hand, the level of self-disclosure is critical for campaigns launched on Twitter, Snapchat, and LinkedIn. Marketers should encourage influencers to optimize the level of self-disclosure during their interactions with followers on these platforms to achieve desired sales. Although platform intimacy and usage did not significantly predict campaign outcomes, their roles should not be overlooked, given their fundamental roles in developing influencer–follower relations across platforms. Overall, even for the same influencer, the current findings help advertisers customize influencer campaigns for each platform and maximize message effectiveness and campaign goals.

Future research and limitations

This research bears some limitations that point to directions for future research. Although this research offered a comprehensive view concerning the correlations between affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics and advertising outcomes, more empirical testing and replications are needed to further ascertain causal relations between these constructs across different platforms. Future research can also conduct qualitative research, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to explicate the reasons why certain gratifications and platform characteristics play a lesser role than others for a given platform.

This research also examined social media users' or followers' perspectives toward affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics. Future research may also look into how influencers perceive and utilize those affordances of each platform and platform characteristics when creating content and/or interacting with followers. This can cross-validate the current findings from the followers' perspectives. The current findings are derived from an online panel surveying social media users in the United States, which may not be representative of populations in other cultural settings. Future research can recruit representative samples from other cultural sites to further validate the current findings. Furthermore, additional research can study an influencer campaign cases occurring on one or multiple social media platforms, survey the participating followers, and use their self-reported data to predict actual sales. In this vein, we can put the current hypotheses into a field setting to see whether and how affordance-based gratifications and platform characteristics predict campaign effectiveness. Future research can also test meaningful interaction effects between selected platform characteristics and user gratifications in experimental settings, as we expect that certain platform features can alter the effects of fulfilled gratifications on advertising outcomes. Finally, although we adopted a rigorous procedure to enroll qualified participants and made sure they actually followed at least one influencer on each platform, it may be possible that some participants had never seen any sponsored posts on some platforms. Future research could also exclude this possibility in their procedure to ensure higher validity of the study.

Conflict of interest disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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Data availability statement

The data sets and detailed results generated for this study are available on request to the corresponding author.

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