

Exploring influencee resonance with social media influencers

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Abstract

The rise of social media has redefined consumer engagement, with social media influencers (SMIs) emerging as powerful intermediaries shaping audience behaviours, perceptions and brand relationships. This study explores influencee resonance, focusing on the psychological, social, and narrative factors that drive varying levels of connection between influencees and influencers. Resonance determines the depth and longevity of the influencee-influencer relationship, shaping not only engagement patterns but also the extent to which influencees internalise, trust, and act upon the content they consume. It investigates how authenticity, transparency, shared experiences, values, and aspirations contribute to the strength of resonance, influencing consumer trust and engagement.

Using a qualitative, exploratory research design, this researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with twelve South African social media users, applying thematic analysis via ATLAS.ti to identify patterns in influencee-influencer relationships. Findings reveal that authenticity, consistency, and relatability are fundamental to deep resonance, fostering long-term trust and engagement. Influencees who experience deep resonance often integrate influencers into their self-identity, drawing personal inspiration and validation from their content. Conversely, shallow resonance is driven by entertainment or aesthetic appeal, with engagement remaining passive and transient. Factors such as perceived inauthenticity, commercialisation, and misalignment with audience expectations diminish resonance, leading to disengagement.

This study contributes to theoretical discourse on digital influence by applying Parasocial Relationship Theory, Social Influence Theory and applying the model of Brand Resonance to explain the evolving nature of influencee-influencer dynamics and introducing a typology for the types of resonance. From a practical perspective, the findings provide actionable insights for brands and influencers, emphasising the need to foster genuine connections, maintain narrative consistency, and align content with audience values to enhance engagement, loyalty, and consumer-brand trust in influencer marketing.

Key Words

Influencer Resonance, Social Media Influencers, Authenticity, Parasocial Relationships, Brand engagement

Plagiarism Declaration

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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Text of Research

Chapter 1: Introduction

This research examines influencee resonance with social media influencers, focusing on the factors that drive meaningful connections, sustain relationships, and foster trust in influencers' messaging and promotions. Chapter One introduces the theoretical framework underpinning this study, exploring key concepts such as parasocial interaction, social influence theory, and the Keller (2001) Brand Resonance Model to contextualise how and why individuals engage deeply with influencers on digital platforms.

1.1 Background of social media platforms and influencers

Social media has fundamentally transformed marketing and advertising, positioning influencers as central figures in shaping consumer behaviour and determining brand success. The global influencer marketing industry has experienced exponential growth, with its market value surpassing \$23.5 billion in 2023, more than tripling since 2019 measured by the total value of all transactions happening between brands and influencers in promotional activities (Statista, 2024; Fortune Business Insights, 2024).

This surge underscores the profound economic significance of influencer-driven strategies in the contemporary digital landscape. Worldwide, there are a variety of social media platforms used with the top ranked being YouTube, followed by WhatsApp and Facebook (McInnes, 2024) [appendix 1]. This has opened up opportunities for individuals to amass huge followings, in which they create content and can launch full time careers as what is now called 'social media influencers'. Social media influencers (SMIs) utilise their follower base to promote brands, share insights, opinions and create entertaining content which all can be leveraged for gaining benefits in the form of money, material items, services and connections/networks (Goanta & Bertaglia, 2023).

Throughout history, influencers have played a pivotal role in shaping societies, driving cultural shifts, and setting trends. These individuals have amassed significant followings, often

sparkling further influence as their followers impact others, resulting in both positive and negative outcomes. Influence is a highly debated topic with the factors that create an effective influencer being the topic of high debate and vigorous research. Effective influencers create a power dynamic in which their opinions and thoughts can be brought into practice in highly inflated ways that can shift industries, communities and countries.

The rise of social media has created the opportunity for influencers to gain an audience far beyond their personal and geographical reach thus creating a platform for further impact (Vrontis et al., 2021). Social media platforms have thus become the 'home ground' for huge audiences which can be utilised for advertising and marketing. The role of the person being influenced, referred to as the 'influencee' from here on out, is less understood in influencer dynamics and in particular, the resonance of influencee to the influencer in impacting the strength of the relationship (Romero et al., 2011). Influence is a crucial component of the social media dynamic, offering valuable insights into optimising engagement by uncovering the deeper reasons why an influencee resonates with an influencer beyond simply liking or disliking their content. It seeks to understand the underlying factors that drive individuals to invest their time engaging with one influencer over another and to maintain an ongoing parasocial relationship through online platforms.

Social media platforms have become significant drivers of the global economy, facilitating new revenue streams through advertising, e-commerce, and content monetisation. According to Statista, global spending on social media advertising surpassed \$230 billion in 2023, highlighting its importance as a marketing channel (Statista, 2023). Influencer marketing has emerged as a highly effective digital strategy, delivering significant returns on investment (ROI) for brands. Research indicates that influencer marketing yields an average return of \$5.78 for every \$1 spent, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing brand visibility and driving consumer engagement (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2023). Performance metrics such as conversion rates, engagement rates, and brand recall are commonly used to assess the success of influencer campaigns (Haenlein et al., 2022).

However, while influencer marketing presents considerable opportunities, it also poses challenges, particularly in relation to influencer fraud and fake engagement. Studies reveal that up to 55% of Instagram influencers engage in fraudulent activities, such as artificially inflating their follower count through bots or purchasing fake likes and comments (Audrezet

et al., 2020). This deceptive practice can mislead brands into investing in partnerships that do not yield genuine audience engagement or consumer conversions, thereby undermining the credibility and long-term sustainability of influencer marketing strategies. Consequently, brands must develop robust evaluation frameworks to ensure authenticity, transparency, and effective ROI assessment when collaborating with social media influencers (Haenlein et al., 2022).

In South Africa, the impact of social media is particularly pronounced, with 26 million active users engaging across various platforms representing 42.8% of the population (Statista, 2024; Moodley & Machela, 2022). Influencer marketing has proven to be an effective model in this region, significantly influencing consumer decision-making processes and enhancing brand awareness. Notably, 34.1% of South African social media users follow influencers and online experts, underscoring the significant role influencers play in shaping consumer opinions and behaviours (Meltwater, 2024). Furthermore, 64.5% of users engage with brands on social media, and 78% utilise these platforms for brand research before making purchasing decisions. This trend highlights the critical importance for businesses to maintain a robust and engaging social media presence to effectively reach and influence potential customers (Meltwater, 2024). Collectively, these statistics show the pervasive reach of social media allows influencers to connect authentically with audiences, fostering trust and driving purchasing behaviours.

Several influencers have risen to prominence solely through social media platforms, exemplifying the medium's power in creating new public figures. For instance, Charli D'Amelio, a dancer and content creator, gained massive popularity on TikTok, amassing over 150 million followers. Her success led to collaborations with major brands such as Hollister and Dunkin' Donuts (Renna, 2024). Similarly, MrBeast (Jimmy Donaldson) built a substantial following on YouTube, with over 104 million subscribers, through his engaging content and philanthropic initiatives (Walsh, 2025; Chapman, 2025).

The influence of social media extends beyond individual endorsements, significantly impacting business operations and the global economy. Companies leverage influencer collaborations to enhance brand visibility, engage target demographics, and drive sales. The authenticity and relatability of influencers resonate with consumers, often leading to higher engagement rates compared to traditional advertising methods (Pan et al., 2024). This shift

has prompted businesses to allocate substantial portions of their marketing budgets to influencer partnerships, recognising their effectiveness in reaching and persuading audiences (Kutz et al., 2024). In addition, a study by Leung et al. (2022) identified key factors that enhance influencer marketing effectiveness, including influencer originality, follower size, and sponsor salience. The study also noted that posts announcing new product launches tend to diminish effectiveness, suggesting that the nature of the content plays a crucial role in consumer engagement.

The concepts of authenticity and trust are pivotal in the effectiveness of influencer marketing. Academic research indicates that authenticity in influencer-created content significantly enhances followers' trust, leading to stronger consumer-influencer relationships (Lee et al., 2021). Authentic influencers, who genuinely endorse products and services they believe in, bolster their credibility, thereby strengthening the bond with their audience (Sprout Social, 2023).

Thus, the integration of social media influencers into marketing strategies has redefined consumer engagement and brand interaction. The substantial followings and earnings of top influencers underscore their significant role in the digital economy. As the social media industry continues to evolve, understanding how influencers impact consumer decision making, brand perceptions and behaviour remains crucial for businesses aiming to navigate the complexities of modern consumer landscapes.

Although existing studies on influencer marketing primarily focus on engagement statistics, purchasing behaviours, and ROI-based analyses (Vrontis et al., 2021; Rachmad, 2024), there is a lack of research examining the influencee perspective including the influence perspective which extends beyond the lived experience of influencers. This study addresses this gap by investigating the emotional, and psychological mechanisms of influencee resonance with social media influencers.

1.2 The Foundations of Influence

Understanding the role of social media in Modern Consumer Behaviour:

Influence is the ability to shape or affect the thoughts, opinions, perceptions or actions of others, this concept that underpins both traditional marketing and contemporary digital strategies (Chopra, Avhad & Jaju, 2021). While influencer marketing research focuses heavily on influencers' effectiveness, the perspective of influencees remains underexplored. The role of resonance (the degree to which influencees feel connected to an influencer) is crucial in determining whether engagement is deep and meaningful or surface-level and fleeting (Liu & Zheng, 2024).

Influencers are individuals who leverage their self-brands to create value for followers while promoting products and services (George & George, 2023). These relationships are often characterised by parasocial dynamics, where followers perceive influencers as trusted figures, enhancing the effectiveness of marketing strategies (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). The study of parasocial relationships (Hoffner & Bond, 2022) and brand resonance Jiménez-Marín, Sanz-Marcos, & Tobar-Pesantez (2021) provides a theoretical framework for understanding why influencees sustain long-term relationships with influencers despite having no direct, personal interaction. However, these models have not been extensively applied to social media influencer relationships, particularly in terms of how shared experiences, values, and narratives shape resonance (Akhtar et al., 2023).

Thus, this research seeks to answer a critical, unanswered question in the literature:

What drives influencees to experience resonance with social media influencers?

By examining this question, the study aims to bridge the gap between quantitative engagement data and the emotional, psychological, and identity-driven reasons people form lasting attachments to influencers.

1.3 Impact of the research

Understanding influencee resonance has significant implications for academia, marketers, and influencers. For researchers, the study advances theoretical knowledge on the emotional and psychological dynamics of influencer relationships. For marketers, it provides actionable insights for selected influencers, designing campaigns that foster genuine connections with

audiences. For influencers, the findings highlight the importance of authenticity and self-branding in building long-lasting relationships with followers. From the perspective of individual consumers of social media content, there is an added element of importance when suspecting with whom to interact and give the power of influence as the power of SMIs is already effective in terms of consumer sales; politics and trendsetting with effective influencers already shifting markets and perspectives. As social media continues to expand its role in global commerce and culture, these insights are crucial for navigating the evolving landscape of digital marketing.

In the world of social media marketing, there are various interactions which can be used to send target messages to audiences, gain feedback and data on consumer needs and wants as well as advertise and sell products and services. This multidimensional relationship involves brands - marketers, marketers - influencers, influencers - brands, influencers - audience, audience - brands, audience - marketers. Due to the complexity and nuances of these relationships, it is essential for the growing industry to have a deep and rich understanding of each stakeholder. Many of these dynamics are well researched and understood, particularly using quantitative metrics of engagement rates, success rate of advertisements, sales volumes, follower retention, purchasing behaviour etc, however there is little known about the relationship between influencer and follower (influencee) from the perspective of the influence from a qualitative perspective. This leads to the need for deeper understanding of what makes a person resonate with an influencer, why people choose to spend their time interacting with and listening to an influencer with whom they may not have a personal connection, and how strong is that connection from the introspective perspective of the person following. Influencer marketing is at a critical crossroads, brands, marketers, and influencers must move beyond simple engagement metrics and understand the deeper emotional mechanisms that sustain long-term influence.

For academics, this research contributes a qualitative, influencee-focused perspective to the influencer marketing field, deepening our understanding of parasocial relationships and resonance in a digital context. For brands and marketers, it provides practical insights into crafting more meaningful influencer partnerships, ensuring campaigns foster genuine engagement rather than relying on surface-level metrics. For influencers, it offers guidance on how to sustain long-term audience connections by leveraging authenticity, shared

narratives, and transparent engagement. Unlike existing research, which focuses on quantitative engagement trends, this study positions the influencee as the focal point of analysis, examining how and why people develop resonance with influencers beyond mere content consumption.

Understanding influencee resonance is essential for building stronger consumer trust in influencer marketing campaigns as well as developing content strategies that foster deep, lasting engagement. The research will also contribute to reducing the risks associated with influencer fraud and disingenuous brand partnerships. As social media continues to reshape the global economy and redefine consumer-brand relationships, the urgency of this research cannot be overstated.

1.4 Research structure

This report is structured as follows: Chapter 2 reviews the existing literature on social media marketing, parasocial relationships, and brand resonance. Chapter 3 states the research questions as well as the reasoning behind the selected questions. Chapter 4 outlines the research methodology, emphasising qualitative approaches such as interpretive phenomenology and narrative inquiry. Chapter 5 presents the findings, organised by themes derived from the data analysis. Chapter 6 discusses the implications of these findings, with chapter 7 offering recommendations for future research and practical applications.

This study explores the phenomenon of influencee resonance with social media influencers, aiming to understand the underlying motivations, perceptions, and emotional connections that shape this resonance. For clarity, key terms used in this report are further defined. Influencees refer to social media users who form meaningful connections or resonate with influencer figures. Resonance is defined as the emotional or cognitive connection influencees feel toward influencers, driven by perceptions of authenticity, relatability, and alignment with personal values or interests. The influencer brand encompasses the curated identity, lifestyle, and values that the influencer represents and communicates to their audience.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the existing scholarly literature with focus on social media influencers. This section aims to explore and critically evaluate the body of knowledge, identify the gaps in current understanding and establish a theoretic foundation for the subsequent research. By synthesising findings from a diverse range of academic sources, this literature review contextualises the significance of the study and informs the selection of the research questions used for further exploration.

The review will examine available literature on the topics of social media, influence, social media influencers, resonance, authenticity and trust. The structure of the research will be as follows: Social media, examining the history, evolution, commercialisation and rise of different platforms; Social Influence, the process, societal impact, and ethical considerations; Social Media Influencers, their impact in marketing, and the nuances of their effect; Consumer empowerment, drivers and impacts; and finally resonance, the dimensions, social media, social identity, parasocial interactions and the role of authenticity.

2.1 Social Media

2.1.1 Introduction: Social Media as a Transformative Force

Over the past two decades, social media has emerged as a transformative force in communication, reshaping interactions for individuals, businesses, and societies. Unlike traditional media, which imposed geographical and content-based limitations, social media platforms have enabled brands to reach global audiences instantly, removing barriers that once constrained business outreach (Li, Larimo & Leonidou., 2023). Social media is broadly defined as online platforms where people connect, interact, and share information through multiple formats, including images, sound, and written content (Li, Larimo & Leonidou., 2023). These platforms have further evolved into digital ecosystems, where individuals not only consume content but actively shape conversations and influence collective narratives.

A significant factor in social media's influence is its ability to form smaller, highly engaged subgroups based on common interests. The formation of these communities enhances communication by increasing the referral effect, where ideas, opinions, and brand messages spread exponentially based on the strength of interpersonal connections within these groups (Muller & Peres, 2019). Within these communities, key opinion leaders and influential figures play a crucial role in amplifying messages, making social media an essential tool for both brand marketing and consumer engagement.

2.1.2 The Evolution of Social Media Platforms

The evolution of social media has been shaped by technological advancements, shifting user behaviours, and broader societal trends. Early platforms such as Six Degrees and Friendster laid the groundwork for digital networking by enabling virtual connections and online interactions (Aichner et al., 2021). The emergence of Myspace and Facebook in the mid-2000s marked a turning point, introducing customisable profiles, interactive networking features, and algorithm-driven content distribution. These innovations transformed social media into a more personalised and engaging experience, fostering greater user retention and content consumption (Aichner et al., 2021).

Between 2006 and 2010, the advent of Twitter and Instagram further reshaped the digital landscape, shifting focus towards real-time updates, visual storytelling, and concise communication (Aichner et al., 2021). This period coincided with the widespread adoption of smartphones, significantly enhancing accessibility and engagement, and cementing social media as an integral part of daily life. In the current era, platforms such as TikTok and LinkedIn continue to diversify the role of social media, integrating entertainment, professional networking, and e-commerce functionalities (Alalwan, 2018).

The ongoing integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) has further expanded the capabilities of social media, enabling immersive digital interactions, enhanced content personalisation, and deeper brand engagement (Vlasic et al., 2021). As platforms

continue to evolve, social media remains a dynamic force in shaping digital communication, cultural trends, and online consumer behaviour.

2.1.3 The Commercialisation of Social Media

Social media's integration into commercial markets evolved alongside its rise in popularity. As individuals built social networks and gained popularity, brands simultaneously established social media accounts, leveraging these digital spaces to enhance brand awareness, market products, and engage with consumers (Kasilingam & Ajitha, 2022). The cost-effectiveness of social media marketing has been particularly beneficial for small and medium enterprises (SMEs), allowing them to reach global audiences without significant investment in traditional advertising (Fan et al., 2021).

Industries that rely heavily on public perception and reputation management, particularly service-based industries, have experienced rapid shifts in consumer engagement due to the instantaneous nature of content sharing (Liu, Min & Ha, 2020). The ability for consumers to post reviews, share experiences, and engage in brand discussions in real time has heightened the need for brands to maintain constant accountability and responsiveness. A single viral post—positive or negative—can significantly impact a company's reputation, reinforcing the necessity for proactive digital engagement strategies.

2.1.4 The Rise of the Creator Economy

A defining feature of modern social media is the emergence of the creator economy, where individuals monetise digital content and online influence through brand partnerships, sponsorships, and fan-funded models such as Patreon and YouTube memberships (Blaier, Fossen & Shapira, 2024). Unlike traditional employment models, social media enables individuals to generate income through the creation of content, maintaining an engaged audience as well as brand promotions. Platforms such as Instagram and TikTok have further facilitated the ability of influencers to directly monetise their content through direct sales, allowing creators and businesses to sell products and services within the app, revolutionising online shopping and digital commerce, as well as (in certain locations) get paid by the TikTok platform for creating engaging content. The data generated through these platforms also fuels

business growth, market research, and product development, making social media not just a marketing tool but an economic driver that influences purchasing behaviours on a global scale (Bleier, Fossen & Shapira, 2024).

Social media has evolved from a communication tool into an essential pillar of modern society, influencing personal interactions, business operations, and economic structures. Its ability to eliminate geographical barriers, foster niche communities, and amplify brand messaging has reshaped traditional marketing and consumer engagement strategies. The commercialisation of social media has further enabled businesses and creators to monetise content, but it has also introduced challenges related to market competition, privacy concerns, and digital ethics.

As social media continues to expand and integrate emerging technologies, its role in society will remain multifaceted, offering both opportunities for innovation and economic growth while requiring increased regulation and ethical responsibility. Understanding the power and limitations of these platforms is crucial for businesses, consumers, and policymakers, ensuring that digital spaces remain inclusive, fair, and transparent.

2.2 Social Influence in the digital age

Influence is a fundamental social phenomenon that plays a crucial role in shaping consumer behaviour, perceptions, and interactions. The ability to influence another is characterised by Social Influence Theory (SIT), which suggests that the relationship between two parties, such as an influencer and their audience, exists on a spectrum ranging from highly effective to ineffective (Peng et al., 2018). This relationship is asymmetrical yet interdependent, with one party exerting greater influence over the other. However, influence is not a static process; it evolves as engagement deepens, reinforcing the dynamic nature of digital interactions (Peng et al., 2018).

2.2.1 Process of Social Influence

Social influence is often described as occurring in three progressive stages: compliance, identification, and internalisation (Kelman, 2017). Compliance occurs when an individual outwardly conforms to an influencer's messaging for social approval or external benefits which explains a superficial or shallow level of influence. Identification involves a deeper emotional connection, where the individual aligns with an influencer's attitudes, values, or lifestyle because they aspire to be like them. At this stage, the follower's engagement is not merely transactional but rooted in admiration and relatability. Internalisation is the most profound level of influence, where the influencer's values and beliefs become fully integrated into the follower's self-concept, resulting in enduring behavioural or ideological shifts (Kelman, 2017). This framework provides insight into why consumers align themselves with specific online figures and how influencers can shape purchasing decisions, lifestyle choices, and ideological standpoints, ultimately fostering either superficial engagement or deep, lasting resonance with their audiences.

2.2.2 Parasocial Interaction and Trust in Influencers

Beyond traditional social influence, Parasocial Interaction Theory offers a deeper understanding of influencer-follower dynamics. Originally conceptualised by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial interactions (PSIs) describe one-sided emotional bonds that audiences develop with media personalities. These relationships are amplified on social media, where influencers provide consistent and intimate glimpses into their lives, fostering trust and perceived authenticity (Hwang & Zhang, 2018). The trust cultivated through PSIs significantly increases audience susceptibility to an influencer's recommendations, as followers may view them as acting in their best interest. However, this asymmetrical bond raises ethical concerns, particularly regarding transparency in sponsored content, as followers may struggle to distinguish between genuine endorsements and paid promotions (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

While the authenticity of influencer content plays a crucial role in engagement, social media algorithms significantly shape and amplify influencer visibility. These algorithms prioritise content that generates high engagement metrics (such as likes, shares, and comments), which can reinforce the perception of social proof and credibility (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

The amplification of influencer content through algorithmic curation means that the most engaging figures gain disproportionate visibility, potentially leading to a self-perpetuating cycle of influence. While this benefits influencers who can sustain engagement, it also raises concerns about algorithmic bias, as platforms may favour sensational or controversial content that maximises user retention (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

2.2.3 Cultural and Demographic Factors in Susceptibility to Influence

The degree to which individuals are susceptible to social influence varies based on cultural and demographic factors. Research suggests that collectivist cultures, which prioritise social harmony and group norms, tend to exhibit higher susceptibility to influencer persuasion, particularly from authority figures or community-endorsed personalities (Silva et al., 2023). In contrast, individualist cultures value independence, meaning that audiences may be more inclined to follow influencers who promote uniqueness and self-expression (Silva et al., 2023).

In addition to cultural background, factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status play a role in how individuals connect with influencers. For example, younger demographics, particularly Generation Z and Millennials, are more engaged with influencer marketing, often valuing relatability and authenticity over traditional celebrity endorsements (Silva et al., 2023).

2.2.4 Aspiration versus Inspiration in the context of influence

In the context of social influence, "inspiration" and "aspiration" represent distinct yet interconnected concepts that shape individual motivation and behaviour. Inspiration refers to the process by which individuals are mentally stimulated to feel or do something, especially something creative or beneficial. It often involves an external trigger that evokes a sense of admiration or a desire to emulate certain qualities or actions. Aspiration, on the other hand, pertains to an individual's internal ambition or strong desire to achieve a particular goal or status. It reflects a forward-looking intention to attain objectives that are personally significant.

In the realm of social influence, role models serve three distinct functions: acting as behavioural models, representing the possible, and being inspirational (Downes et al., 2021). These functions highlight the nuanced ways in which individuals can be inspired by others, leading to personal aspirations. For instance, observing a role model's achievements can inspire an individual, thereby shaping their aspirations and motivating them to pursue similar goals.

Furthermore, research indicates that aspirations are not solely self-generated but are significantly influenced by social contexts and comparisons. Individuals often form aspirations through processes such as imitation, self-reflection, and adoption, which are embedded in consistent and mutually reinforcing cognitions (Cook & Artino, 2016). This underscores the interplay between external inspirations and internal aspirations, suggesting that what individuals aspire to achieve is often a reflection of the inspirations they encounter in their social environment.

Understanding the distinction and relationship between inspiration and aspiration is crucial in the broader theory of influence, as it elucidates how external stimuli can shape internal goals and motivations, ultimately guiding behaviour and decision-making processes.

The study of social influence in digital media reveals a complex, multi-layered process that extends beyond simple endorsement. Social Influence Theory explains how audiences are shaped by influencers, while Parasocial Interaction Theory highlights the trust and emotional investment followers place in online figures. Simultaneously, algorithmic amplification and cultural factors further determine how influence is reinforced and sustained. The concepts of aspiration versus inspiration in the context of social influence is important when distinguishing between the type of influence. Understanding these interconnected dynamics is essential for businesses, policymakers, and consumers navigating the evolving landscape of social media influence.

2.3 Social Media Influencers

2.3.1 Definition of Social Media Influencers

Social Media Influencers (SMIs) are individuals who have amassed a significant following on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and X and have the ability to influence the

decision-making processes of their followers (Vrontis et al., 2021). This influence extends beyond entertainment and engagement, shaping consumer behaviours, opinions, and purchasing decisions. The growing reliance on influencer recommendations has led to the rise of Influencer Marketing (IM), which capitalises on trust and authenticity to persuade audiences effectively.

2.3.2 The Shift from Traditional Marketing to Influencer Marketing

The practice of endorsing brands and products through influential figures is not new; celebrity endorsements have long been used in traditional advertising (Masuda et al., 2022). However, the advent of social media has fundamentally changed the landscape, making Influencer Marketing (IM) a dominant strategy for many brands. Unlike traditional advertising, which often relies on faceless promotions or unknown salespeople, IM plays on trustworthiness and social identity theory—followers feel more connected to influencers they associate with personally (Masuda et al., 2022).

As a result, brands increasingly allocate substantial budgets to influencer partnerships, recognising their power in fostering authentic connections and driving consumer engagement.

2.3.3 Tiers of Social Media Influencers and Engagement Differences

Social media influencers (SMIs) vary in impact and engagement based on the size of their following, which directly influences their relationship with audiences and their perceived authenticity. Brewster and Lyu (2020) categorise influencers into four key tiers. Nano influencers (0–5,000 followers) tend to have the strongest personal connections with their audience, often seen as the most relatable and trustworthy due to their close-knit communities. Micro influencers (5,000–100,000 followers) maintain high engagement rates, as their niche expertise and perceived authenticity create deeper audience interactions. Macro influencers (100,000 – 1 million followers) reach a wider audience, though their engagement rates are slightly lower compared to smaller influencers, as their content is

consumed on a broader scale. Finally, mega influencers (over 1 million followers) operate with celebrity-like status, making them highly attractive for brand collaborations, though their vast reach often results in lower audience trust and engagement (Brewster & Lyu, 2020). These distinctions illustrate how audience size influences engagement dynamics, credibility, and marketing effectiveness, shaping the way brands and consumers interact with different types of influencers.

While nano influencers tend to cultivate deeper parasocial relationships, engagement does not always equate to credibility. Studies indicate that the perceived authenticity of content matters more than follower count when it comes to influencing purchasing decisions (Brewster & Lyu, 2020). Additionally, the disclosure of sponsored content and its alignment with an influencer's personal brand also affect audience trust.

2.3.4 The Role of Authenticity in Influencer Marketing Success

A critical factor in the effectiveness of influencer marketing is perceived authenticity; the extent to which an influencer's content feels genuine, relatable, and unforced (Agustian et al., 2023). Research suggests that audiences are more likely to trust and act on recommendations when influencers share personal stories and experiences, engage in authentic interactions with their audience, and disclose sponsorships transparently (Evans et al., 2017).

This balance is particularly crucial for micro and nano influencers, as their audience values personal connections over celebrity appeal. However, fake followers, exaggerated lifestyles, and overly commercialised content can undermine an influencer's credibility, leading to lower trust and engagement levels. Brands and influencers must prioritise ethical practices to maintain audience confidence.

2.3.5 Self-Branding & Content Strategy in Influencer Marketing

A successful influencer must not only promote brands but also build a strong personal brand. The concept of the "self-brand" is crucial in sustaining an engaged audience and positioning the influencer as a trusted voice in their niche (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

Marketing managers often assist influencers in crafting and maintaining a consistent self-brand, ensuring that their content, aligns with their values, beliefs, and personality, resonates authentically with their audience and balances trending content with long-term engagement strategies.

While social media thrives on trending audios, posts, and viral moments, influencers who rely solely on trends often struggle to maintain a loyal following. The most successful influencers balance trend participation with genuine, consistent content creation (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

Social media influencers have the ability to reach substantial audiences and thus need to be intentional in curating a brand that is authentic, trustworthy, and aligned with audience expectations in order to cultivate long-term loyalty. The strategic development of an influencer's personal brand plays a pivotal role in sustaining engagement, as influencees seek consistency, relatability, and perceived sincerity in the content they consume. Given the competitive and dynamic nature of digital platforms, influencers must carefully balance commercial partnerships with authenticity, ensuring that endorsements align with their established identity and values.

Moreover, the literature highlights that resonance between influencers and influencees is driven by emotional connection, perceived credibility, and content consistency. When these elements are disrupted; whether through misaligned sponsorships, drastic content shifts, or perceived inauthenticity; followers may disengage, weakening the influencer's impact. The increasing scrutiny on influencer transparency underscores the necessity of building trust through genuine interactions, maintaining narrative coherence, and demonstrating an ethical approach to audience engagement.

Ultimately, social media influence is not just about reach but about the depth of connection fostered through authentic storytelling and meaningful engagement. Understanding these dynamics is critical for both influencers and brands seeking to navigate the evolving digital landscape, reinforcing the importance of intentional brand positioning, credibility, and sustained audience trust.

2.4 The Role of Influencee Empowerment in Influencer Marketing

2.4.1 Introduction: Empowerment in the Digital Age

While influencers strategically curate their self-brand to build trust and maintain audience engagement, the relationship between influencers and their followers is not entirely one-directional. Influencees play a significant role in shaping influencer success. As consumers of online content, influencees exercise agency in deciding which influencers to follow, engage with, and trust.

Consumer empowerment theory states that individuals gain greater control over their decision-making when they have access to relevant information, autonomy, and the ability to critically evaluate marketing messages (Tajurahim et al., 2020). Social media has amplified this empowerment, shifting consumers from passive recipients of brand and influencer messaging to active participants who shape narratives, challenge authenticity, and influence market trends. Unlike traditional marketing channels where brands dictate the message, digital platforms enable influencees to engage in dialogue, scrutinise endorsements, and hold influencers accountable for their transparency and consistency.

This increasing influence of consumers of content in digital marketing underscores the importance of resonance, as influencers must cultivate trust and authenticity to maintain long-term engagement. Understanding how influencees perceive their role and exercise their decision-making power is essential for brands and influencers alike, as it determines whether influencer-follower relationships are sustained or eroded over time. The following sections will explore how influencee empowerment shapes engagement, impacts influencer credibility, and ultimately influences the effectiveness of influencer marketing strategies.

The growing accessibility of digital platforms has further expanded the opportunities for consumer engagement, allowing individuals to exchange experiences, post reviews, and challenge corporate narratives. Social media fosters an environment where consumers feel heard and valued, enabling them to shape brand perception and market trends through direct interaction (Hudson et al., 2016; Onofrei, Filieri & Kennedy, 2022). By facilitating two-way communication, these platforms have redefined the brand-consumer relationship, making

empowerment a central component of consumer engagement (Ananda, 2019). This section explores the mechanisms of consumer empowerment on social media, the theoretical frameworks underpinning this phenomenon, and its implications for influencer marketing and brand trust.

2.4.2 Key Drivers of Influencee Empowerment on Social Media

One of the most significant ways social media has empowered consumers is by increasing access to information and enhancing brand transparency. Digital platforms provide consumers with real-time insights into corporate practices, product quality, and ethical considerations, thereby enabling them to make better-informed purchasing decisions. Unlike in the past, where brands controlled the dissemination of product information, social media allows consumers to fact-check claims, research competing products, and hold companies accountable for misleading advertising. The transparency and authenticity of the brand is relevant for commercial brands; but more relevantly; the self-brands of influencers. The ability to instantly access reviews, independent expert analyses, and customer testimonials has reshaped the consumer decision-making process, making it more data-driven and less susceptible to traditional advertising tactics (Tajurahim et al., 2020).

Beyond direct access to brand information, user-generated content (UGC) has emerged as a crucial factor in consumer empowerment. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok have enabled consumers to share firsthand experiences, provide product recommendations, and warn others about deceptive marketing practices. The credibility of UGC often surpasses that of corporate messaging, as consumers tend to trust peer reviews and community-driven insights over brand-sponsored promotions (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2009; Tsiakali, 2018). Studies have shown that positive UGC strengthens brand credibility, while negative reviews and viral brand criticisms can significantly damage a company's reputation (Yuksel, Milne, & Miller, 2016). This dynamic illustrates the growing power of consumers to influence brand success through collective discourse, reinforcing the importance of authenticity and ethical business practices in maintaining consumer trust.

Psychological and social empowerment are also central to this evolving landscape, as social media provides individuals with platforms for self-expression and community engagement

(Berezan et al., 2018). Consumers no longer interact with brands in isolation but rather as part of larger digital communities where they can seek validation, exchange opinions, and advocate for shared interests. The ability to participate in collective conversations fosters a sense of agency, allowing consumers to feel that their voices contribute to broader market trends and corporate strategies (Ahmad et al., 2024). The interactive nature of social media encourages brands to engage directly with their audiences, shifting marketing efforts from monologues to dialogues. This evolution has redefined consumer-brand interactions, placing greater emphasis on partnership and trust rather than one-sided persuasion.

2.4.3 Uses and Gratifications Theory

Consumer empowerment on social media can be examined through several theoretical frameworks, including the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory and Dual-Process Theory. U&G Theory posits that individuals engage with media platforms to satisfy specific needs, such as information-seeking, entertainment, and social interaction (Mendes-Filho & Tan, 2009). In the context of consumer empowerment, social media fulfils multiple functions by allowing users to research brands, compare options, and derive social validation from peer interactions. The theory underscores the shift from passive content consumption to active engagement, reinforcing the notion that consumers now play an influential role in shaping brand perception and corporate reputation.

2.4.4 Impact of Influencee Empowerment on Influencer Marketing

The increasing empowerment of consumers has profoundly altered the dynamics of influencer marketing, shifting power away from brands and placing greater influence in the hands of audiences. Social media users now have the ability to publicly challenge influencers, scrutinise brand partnerships, and demand greater transparency in advertising practices. As a result, influencers must navigate an increasingly discerning audience that prioritises authenticity and ethical engagement over mere promotional content. Consumers who feel empowered are more likely to question influencer endorsements, assess the alignment

between a brand's values and an influencer's persona, and reject content that appears overly commercialised (Tajurahim et al., 2020).

The shift towards consumer-driven discourse means that brands and influencers must engage in meaningful dialogue with their audiences rather than relying on one-directional marketing tactics. As consumers become more active participants in shaping brand narratives, businesses must adopt consumer-centric strategies that emphasise transparency, authenticity, and ethical alignment to maintain trust and loyalty (Keller, 2010). The empowered consumer is also a more engaged consumer. When individuals feel that their voices matter and that brands are responsive to their concerns, they are more likely to establish long-term connections with both influencers and businesses. Empowerment enhances trust, deepens engagement, and fosters advocacy, as consumers who feel in control of their purchasing decisions are more likely to share positive brand experiences and recommend products to others. The interplay between empowerment and consumer trust is essential in the context of influencer marketing, as it determines whether audiences perceive endorsements as credible or merely transactional.

2.4.5 Influencee Empowerment in Influencer Relationships

Consumer empowerment has transformed how individuals engage with brands and influencers, shifting from passive consumption to active participation (Haenlein et al., 2022). In the digital age, influencees do not simply follow influencers but curate their own influencer feeds, interact with content in meaningful ways, and contribute to the shaping of influencer content. This interactive dynamic has strengthened the role of consumers in the social media ecosystem, making them key actors in driving resonance and engagement.

Social media allows users to filter content and choose influencers that align with their personal values, aspirations, and interests (Tajurahim et al., 2020). Unlike traditional advertising, where consumers were exposed to pre-selected marketing messages, today's influencees actively follow influencers whose content resonates with their personal identity. As engagement evolves, influencees become active participants in content creation. They provide direct feedback, influence content direction, and even contribute through participatory

activities such as live Q&As, polls, and comment sections (Boerman, 2020). This dynamic empowers influencees to feel invested in the influencer's journey, increasing trust and long-term engagement (Jiménez & San Martín, 2017).

Beyond engagement, influencees actively extend an influencer's reach through content sharing, where they distribute influencer posts to their own network, user-generated content (UGC), where they integrate influencer messaging into their own social media presence (Muntinga, Moorman & Smit., 2011). As well as brand advocacy, where they adopt and endorse an influencer's lifestyle, brands, or messages (Labrecque et al., 2013).

Through these mechanisms, influencees become co-creators in the influencer ecosystem, reinforcing their personal connection and enhancing the depth of resonance (Haenlein et al., 2020).

Social media has redefined the concept of consumer empowerment, enabling individuals to access real-time information, engage in peer-driven discourse, and hold brands accountable for their actions. The rise of user-generated content and interactive digital communities has given consumers unprecedented control over market narratives, challenging traditional brand-consumer power structures. The theoretical frameworks of U&G Theory and Dual-Process Theory provide valuable insights into the mechanisms of consumer empowerment, illustrating how individuals engage with content for both quick decision-making and in-depth evaluation.

The impact of consumer empowerment on influencer marketing is particularly significant, as audiences now demand greater transparency and alignment between brand values and influencer messaging. This shift has compelled brands and influencers to adopt more consumer-centric approaches, fostering trust and long-term loyalty through authentic interactions. As social media continues to evolve, businesses must recognise that consumer empowerment is not merely a byproduct of digital engagement but a defining characteristic of the modern marketplace. By embracing transparency, responsiveness, and ethical branding, companies and influencers can build sustainable relationships with empowered audiences who actively shape the future of consumer culture.

The perspective on consumer empowerment from the influence, being able to select who they follow and choose to engage with is an important element of what drives the influencers' ability to create an engaged and loyal following. Thus, consumers (influencees) are empowered to select the influencers to which they give the power of influence.

2.5 Resonance

2.5.1 Introduction to Resonance

Resonance is a pivotal concept in understanding the depth and quality of engagement between individuals, brands, and audiences (Husain, Paul & Koles, 2022). As a multidimensional construct, resonance encompasses emotional, cognitive, and behavioural alignment, fostering strong and enduring connections (Husain, Paul & Koles, 2022). In the context of consumer-brand and influencer-follower relationships, resonance transcends superficial interactions, creating meaningful, value-driven connections that influence loyalty, decision-making, and advocacy.

With the advent of social media as a dominant communication platform, resonance has become a cornerstone for understanding how brands and influencers forge lasting relationships in a landscape characterised by rapid information exchange and personalised digital interactions. This section examines the dimensions, mechanisms, and theoretical underpinnings of resonance, particularly in relation to social media influence.

2.5.2 Keller's Brand Resonance Model

Keller's (1993, 2001) Brand Resonance Model, also known as the Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) Model, provides a structured framework for understanding how brands develop meaningful connections with consumers. The model conceptualises brand equity as a pyramid comprising four hierarchical stages: brand identity (salience), brand meaning (performance and imagery), brand response (judgments and feelings), and brand resonance (deep consumer loyalty and engagement) (Keller, 1993). At the pinnacle of this framework,

brand resonance represents the strongest form of consumer-brand connection, characterised by loyalty, attachment, a sense of community, and active engagement (Keller, 2001, 2013).

In the context of social media influencers, this model can be applied to analyse how influencers cultivate a 'self-brand', positioning themselves as more than just content creators but as entities with personal and emotional significance to their audience (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017). Social media influencers strategically navigate Keller's brand-building process by first establishing a distinctive online presence (salience), curating content that reinforces their personal narrative (brand meaning), eliciting consumer judgments and emotional responses (brand response), and ultimately fostering strong, participatory relationships with their followers (brand resonance). As consumers interact with influencers over time, the depth of resonance determines whether their engagement remains transactional—such as occasional likes and comments—or evolves into long-term loyalty and advocacy, mirroring traditional brand-consumer relationships (Keller, 2013).

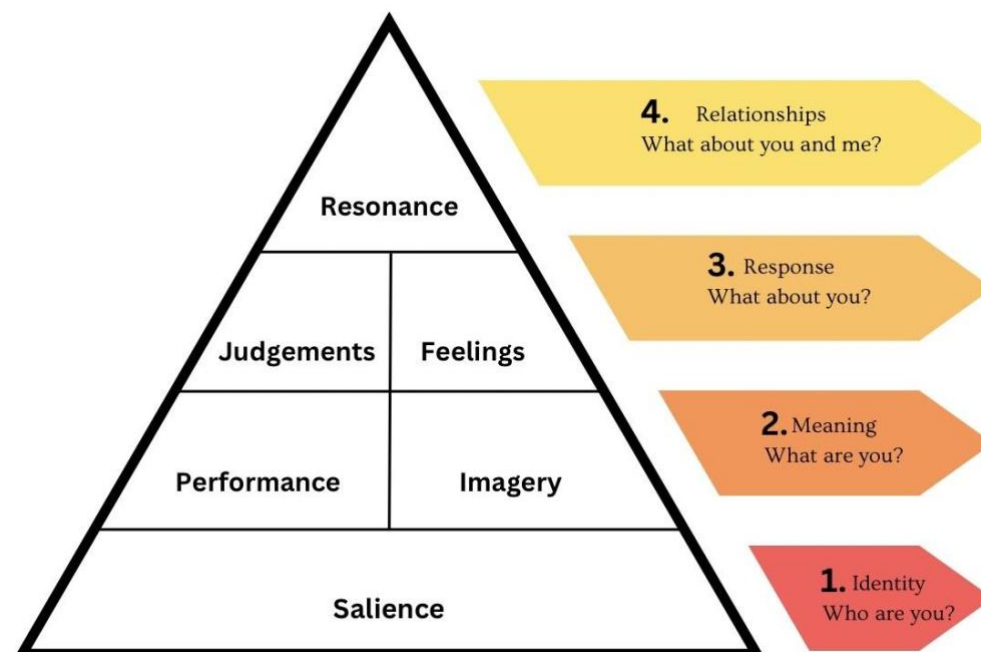


Figure 1: Derived from Keller's (1993; 2001) Customer-Based Brand Equity Model

Given that influencer marketing thrives on trust and relatability, achieving high brand resonance is crucial for influencers seeking sustained influence and credibility within digital spaces. Keller's model, therefore, serves as a useful theoretical lens for examining how influencees perceive and internalise the personal brands of social media influencers, shaping their level of engagement, trust, and eventual brand advocacy (Dwivedi et al., 2023). Given that influencer marketing thrives on trust and relatability, achieving high brand resonance is crucial for influencers seeking sustained influence and credibility within digital spaces. Keller's model, therefore, serves as a useful theoretical lens for examining how influencees perceive and internalise the personal brands of social media influencers, shaping their level of engagement, trust, and eventual brand advocacy (Dwivedi et al., 2023).

2.5.3 Resonance in Social Media and Influencer Marketing

With social media as a primary mode of communication, resonance has evolved into a bidirectional relationship involving multiple stakeholders: influencers, brands, and consumers. Unlike traditional marketing, where brands unilaterally communicate with consumers, social media facilitates continuous interaction, fostering deeper resonance (Husain, Paul & Koles., 2022; Belanche et al. 2021).

Influencer-Brand Resonance is explained by brands engaging influencers through monetary compensation, product gifting, or long-term collaborations, aiming to align brand messaging with the influencer's audience (Pan et al., 2024). Whereas Influencer-Consumer Resonance can be described by consumers engaging with influencers for entertainment, advice, or social validation, often forming parasocial relationships that mimic real-life friendships (Hofner & Bond, 2022). The other type of resonance, consumer-brand resonance is explained as when influencer marketing successfully creates resonance, it can lead to direct interactions between the consumer and brand, including purchases, brand loyalty, and advocacy. Social media algorithms further amplify resonance by tailoring content to users' preferences, reinforcing engagement and personalisation (Keller, 2010).

2.5.4 Social Identity Theory and Resonance in Social media

Social Identity Theory explains how individuals categorise themselves into social groups, shaping their self-concept and influencing their attitudes, behaviours, and affiliations (Tajfel, 1979; Farivar & Wang, 2022). Within the social media landscape, influencees actively seek out and engage with influencers who reflect their values, beliefs, and aspirations, reinforcing their digital social identity (Farivar & Wang, 2022). This process fosters a sense of belonging, as influencees align themselves with communities built around shared interests, lifestyle choices, and ideological standpoints.

Resonance with social media influencers is often rooted in perceived group membership, where influencees feel a deeper connection to influencers who represent their in-group (Harwood, 2021). This phenomenon explains why certain influencers cultivate highly loyal followings, as their content reinforces the identity and values of their audience. However, this same mechanism also contributes to group polarisation, digital echo chambers, and cancel culture, wherein collective identity determines not only which influencers are embraced but also which are scrutinised or rejected when their actions are perceived to conflict with group norms (Kim & Kim, 2021). Understanding social identity in this context is critical for deciphering how resonance is cultivated and maintained within the highly interactive digital ecosystem of influencer culture.

2.5.5 Parasocial Interaction and Resonance with social media influencers

Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) has traditionally been applied to static media figures, yet its relevance to interactive social media environments remains debated. While some studies confirm that perceived closeness increases engagement (Kim & Kim, 2021; Enke & Borchers, 2021), others argue that audience-influencer relationships are more reciprocal than the original theory accounts for (Luders et al., 2022). This study builds on these discussions by examining how interactivity alters parasocial dynamics, particularly in relation to authenticity and trust. This deep-seated connection enhances resonance, making influencees more likely to internalise an influencer's recommendations, engage with their content, and feel a sense of personal investment in their digital persona.

Unlike traditional celebrity-fan relationships, social media enables constant interaction, direct communication, and curated self-disclosure, further strengthening parasocial bonds (Labrecque et al., 2013). However, this heightened sense of connection also raises ethical concerns, as influencees may overestimate their relational closeness to influencers, leading to increased susceptibility to persuasion, aspirational comparisons and in some cases, emotional dependency (Ki et al., 2020). This power dynamic underscores the importance of authenticity and responsible engagement in influencer marketing, as trust violations, such as deceptive endorsements or inconsistent branding, can rapidly erode audience loyalty and trigger disengagement.

By applying Parasocial Interaction Theory to the study of resonance, this research seeks to explore how and why influencees form deep connections with influencers, what factors sustain these relationships, and how perceived authenticity strengthens or weakens parasocial bonds in the evolving digital landscape.

2.5.6 Resonance & Authenticity: A Crucial Interplay

Resonance and authenticity are deeply interconnected in influencer marketing. Authenticity is the perception of genuineness and transparency, which directly amplifies cognitive and affective resonance (Tseng & Wang, 2023). Studies suggest that consumers are highly sensitive to inauthentic content, with any perceived insincerity leading to diminished trust and disengagement (Audrezet, Kerviler & Moulard, 2020).

While resonance enhances trust and engagement, it is not guaranteed or permanent. Some of the key challenges include Over-commercialisation which is described as excessive brand partnerships can reduce perceived authenticity. as well as algorithmic dependency in which Influencers rely on platform algorithms to sustain visibility, making resonance unpredictable. Lastly, shifting consumer expectations described by how trends evolve, requiring influencers to adapt their branding strategies without losing authenticity. Thus, brands and influencers must consistently reinforce alignment with their audience while avoiding practices that undermine trust (Escalas & Bettman, 2003; Rojas- Lamorena, Del Barrio-Garcia & Alcantara-Pilar, 2022).

Resonance serves as a critical foundation in understanding consumer-brand and influencer-follower relationships. By fostering cognitive, affective, and behavioural resonance, influencers and brands can build long-term engagement and loyalty in digital environments. Theoretical frameworks such as Social Identity Theory and Parasocial Interaction Theory provide deeper insights into how resonance operates in social media culture. However, sustaining resonance requires a commitment to authenticity, ethical marketing practices, and adaptability to changing digital landscapes (Tseng et al., 2023).

2.6 Conclusion

The literature review explored the multifaceted nature of resonance between influencees and social media influencers, drawing on established theories of social influence, parasocial relationships, social identity theory, consumer engagement and brand resonance. The existing research underscores the significance of authenticity, perceived relatability, and trust in shaping the depth of engagement between audiences and influencers. Several frameworks, including Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and the Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2013), provide valuable insights into the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that drive influencee-influencer relationships. However, these frameworks primarily focus on the unidirectional nature of influence and do not fully account for the active role of influencees in curating their own resonance with influencers.

This review provides the foundation for the present study by identifying these theoretical gaps and proposing a nuanced approach to understanding how resonance is formed, maintained, and evolved in social media environments. The following chapters will investigate these concepts through empirical research, exploring how influencees perceive, interpret, and engage with influencers in ways that go beyond traditional audience-follower dynamics.

Chapter 3: Research Questions

The increasing influence of social media influencers (SMIs) on consumer attitudes, decision-making, and identity formation has been widely explored in recent literature (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). Studies have examined influencer credibility, authenticity, and marketing effectiveness, particularly in shaping consumer trust and engagement (Kim & Kim, 2021; Moulard, Raggio & Folse, 2021). However, much of the existing research focuses on influencers as strategic marketing agents, with less attention paid to the lived experiences of influencees—the followers who engage with influencers in deeply personal ways.

A growing body of research suggests that parasocial relationships (PSRs), a concept originally developed to describe one-sided media relationships with television personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956), are now more interactive and dynamic in the context of social media (Luders, Dinkelberg & Quayle, 2022). Unlike traditional celebrities, influencers foster continuous engagement through direct communication, personal storytelling, and perceived relatability (Enke & Borchers, 2021). This shift suggests that resonance—the depth of emotional and cognitive alignment between an influencee and an influencer—plays a critical but underexplored role in understanding how and why followers maintain long-term engagement with influencers.

While Identification Theory (Kelman, 1958) provides a useful framework for examining why individuals adopt influencer attitudes, behaviours, and values, research has yet to fully investigate how resonance operates within parasocial relationships on social media. What makes some followers develop deep, lasting resonance with an influencer while others engage superficially? Furthermore, the role of personal narratives and overlapping identities in fostering resonance has been largely overlooked, despite evidence suggesting that authenticity, relatability, and perceived similarity are key factors in online engagement (Khamis, Ang & Welling, 2017).

Given these gaps in the literature, this research seeks to address how resonance functions as a mechanism within parasocial relationships with influencers and how personal narratives, authenticity, and engagement strategies shape the nature of the resonance experienced by

influencees. The following research questions were developed to explore these issues while allowing for emergent insights beyond initial expectations.

3.1 Main Research Question:

What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?

The aim of this research is to explore the mechanisms behind resonance formation between influencees and social media influencers (SMIs). Using Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979) as a foundation, the study examines how the level of resonance varies from superficial to deeply embedded. This differentiation has significant implications for the degree to which an influencee can be affected by an influencer's content, shaping both their engagement patterns and their susceptibility to persuasion. The distinction between superficial and deep resonance has not yet been fully explored in scholarly literature, making it an essential component in understanding the dynamics of influence in digital spaces.

By analysing the different psychological, social, and contextual factors that contribute to resonance, this study aims to bridge gaps in existing research and offer new insights into how and why individuals experience varying levels of connection with influencers.

3.2 Sub-Questions

3.2.1 How do overlapping personal narratives affect how influencees experience resonance with social media influencers?

This question investigates the depth and nature of resonance between influencees and social media influencers, with a particular focus on how shared personal narratives contribute to the formation of strong, meaningful connections. Given the evolving nature of parasocial relationships in digital environments, this research explores how perceived synchronicity

between an influencee's lived experiences and an influencer's content fosters different levels of resonance, ranging from superficial engagement to deep identification.

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979) suggests that individuals seek social validation and belonging by identifying with others who reflect their values, beliefs, and experiences. This framework provides a useful foundation for understanding why influencees feel a stronger attachment to certain influencers. Additionally, Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and Identification Theory (Kelman, 1958) suggest that audience members internalise the attitudes and behaviours of public figures based on perceived authenticity, trustworthiness, and emotional connection. However, limited research has examined how these processes function specifically in influencer marketing, where engagement is no longer strictly one-directional. This research aims to bridge these gaps by analysing how shared experiences shape influencee-influencer relationships and the extent to which these relationships influence consumer attitudes, identity construction, and purchasing behaviour.

While parasocial relationships and influencer credibility have been widely studied (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Kim & Kim, 2021), research typically treats engagement as a binary construct: engaged or disengaged, without considering the fluidity of resonance (Belanche et al., 2021; Moulard, Raggio & Folse, 2021). The extent to which influencees experience varying degrees of resonance, from superficial entertainment-driven interactions to deep identity-based connections, remains underexplored. This study addresses this gap by asking: What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop different levels of resonance with influencers?

3.2.2 How does authenticity contribute to resonance?

The concept of authenticity has become central to influencer marketing, as consumers increasingly demand transparency and credibility from digital personalities (Kim & Kim, 2021; Aw & Agnihotri, 2024). This question examines how perceived authenticity, sincerity, and trustworthiness affect the level of resonance influencees feel toward influencers.

Drawing on Consumer Trust Frameworks (Liu et al., 2018), this study investigates how influencees differentiate between genuine, relatable influencers and those perceived as

overly commercialised or performative. Additionally, this research aims to understand how authenticity gaps; where an influencer's behaviour contradicts their established persona, impact resonance and audience loyalty. By addressing this question, the study contributes to broader discussions on trust, authenticity, and influencer-follower relationships within the context of social media marketing. Given the increasing scepticism toward influencer endorsements, understanding how trust is built, maintained, or lost is critical for both academics and practitioners in digital marketing

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

This section outlines the underlying philosophy of the research. The following chapter unpacks the methodology used to answer the research questions in Chapter 3. The qualitative methodology, using narrative inquiry, was selected to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of influencees, allowing for an in-depth exploration of how resonance with social media influencers is formed, maintained, or diminished.

The chapter begins by detailing the research design and philosophical underpinnings, justifying the interpretivist approach as the most suitable framework for understanding the subjective and socially constructed nature of influencee - influencer relationships. This is followed by a discussion on the sampling strategy, data collection methods, and unit of analysis, ensuring alignment with the research objectives. The process of thematic analysis is then outlined, illustrating how data was systematically coded and interpreted to identify emerging patterns of resonance. Finally, the quality control measures, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study are discussed, ensuring transparency and rigour in the research process.

By adopting a qualitative, narrative-driven approach, this study seeks to provide rich, context-sensitive insights into the dynamics of influencer resonance, offering a deeper understanding of the psychological and social mechanisms that shape influencee engagement in the digital age.

4.1 Purpose of research design

This study relied on guidance from SAGE Research Methods (n.d.) to identify and refine the most appropriate qualitative research methods. The platform provided comprehensive resources, including case studies and tutorials, which informed the selection and application of thematic analysis. Given the dynamic nature of social media and its evolving role in marketing, exploratory research was deemed most appropriate to investigate the novel phenomenon of influencer brand resonance. This design allowed for the identification of underlying patterns and emerging themes within an area lacking substantial prior research.

Due to the nature of the research question, the design of the research was exploratory, this led me to choose an interpretivism philosophy leading to qualitative research being performed. The nature of the study was to unpack social factors, which are derived from subjective past experiences of the interviewee which can be used to gain further understanding of the theory and concepts being analysed, this understanding aligns with the nature of exploratory research as there is a lack of literature which aligns directly with the topic. Exploratory research is a useful tool when the researcher is unpacking new phenomena and concepts which have not yet been extensively researched and understood within the context, this requires a high-level search of existing literature coupled with unstructured/ semi structured interviews to explore the experiences of the interviewees (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

While a case study approach could have provided in-depth analysis of a single influencer-following relationship, it was deemed too restrictive for capturing the diverse experiences of influencees. Similarly, ethnographic observation was impractical given the digital nature of social media engagement (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis, therefore, offered a structured yet flexible method to identify patterns across multiple narratives.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The selected research philosophy requires the development of knowledge and theories, thereby contributing to the existing literature on concepts. As a result, interpretivism was the relevant philosophy for this research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Interpretivism is defined as "a philosophy which advocates the necessity of understanding differences between humans in their role as social actors" (Saunders & Lewis, 2018, p. 109). This aligns with the research questions, which aimed to unpack the social factors associated with influencer marketing and its impact on buyers' purchase decision-making.

Interpretivism underpins this study as it prioritises subjective meanings, allowing influencees' experiences to be understood in their own words. This aligns with thematic analysis, which emphasises uncovering patterns in meaning rather than objective quantification.

4.3 Approach selected

While initial theoretical frameworks informed the development of interview questions, the abductive approach allowed the flexibility to identify themes that were not anticipated, such as the role of micro-influencers in establishing brand authenticity. The research was performed using primary data collection to develop theory and find themes that arise through interviews, this was analysed and explained afterward thus leading the used approach to be inductive (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). An abduction approach was utilised in the research and analysis of the sample, this approach helped develop theory by the analysis of experiences and phenomena that arose through interviews which helped generate new theory and add to existing theory (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

An abductive approach guided the research, combining elements of deduction and induction to allow for both theoretical refinement and emergent insights (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Given that parasocial relationship theory often assumes a one-directional, audience-driven engagement, this study sought to explore a more nuanced model incorporating self-perception and influencer storytelling. The potential role of overlapping personal narratives

was considered early in the research design as a factor influencing resonance, shaping the thematic focus of the study. Abduction was particularly well-suited for exploratory research, as it allowed for the integration of existing theories with real-world observations. By adopting this approach, the study aimed to not only examine how influencees experience and engage with influencers but also to contribute to the development of expanded theoretical frameworks on influencer brand resonance.

The abductive approach allowed flexibility in interpreting data as it emerged, thereby enabling the discovery of nuanced themes that may not fit neatly into pre-existing theories. This approach also supported the iterative nature of qualitative research, where data collection and analysis occur simultaneously, refining the research focus as insights are gained.

4.4 Population

In this research, the population included all South African social media users who follow and actively engage with social media influencers. Social media users (SMU) formed the main criteria for selection, including, but not limited to, users of Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok and YouTube. The population was diverse in demographics of race, socioeconomic levels, education, gender, and geographic location within South Africa. The ages of the participants ranged from 18 – 45 as this is the age demographic of the majority of social media users worldwide (McInnes, 2024). South Africa has a population of ± 62 million people, with 26 million South Africans being users of Social Media platforms, this is around 42% of the population which makes social media an extremely effective tool for marketing within the country (McInnes, 2024). The sample that was selected reflected the diversity of SMUs in South Africa.

A research population is defined as the complete list of all individuals, groups or organisations that fit the requirement for research (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Influencers are defined as a person who posts content on social media for the sake of engaging with followers and creating an online identity (Vrontis et al., 2021). The influencers in focus could have been involved in paid brand collaborations, but the study does not exclusively target

commercial influencer relationships. Influencees are social media users who engage with these influencers' content and have purchased products or services based on influencer endorsements or had alterations to their behaviour due to content created by the influencer mentioned.

Given the diversity of influencers and their followers, this study acknowledged that not all social media users follow influencers. For this reason, a specific inclusion criterion is that participants must have followed at least one influencer and made a purchase decision based on an influencer's recommendation.

4.5 Methodological choices

While mono-method qualitative research limits generalisability, it provides the depth and richness required to explore the complex, subjective nature of influencee-influencer dynamics, which would not be achievable through quantitative methods (Seale, 1999). A mono-method qualitative approach was thus used, relying solely on primary data collection through semi-structured interviews. This approach was appropriate for capturing the complex and subjective nature of influencee - influencer relationships. The use of qualitative interviews provided rich, narrative data that was essential for understanding how influencees emotionally engage with influencers and perceive their authenticity, trustworthiness, and resonance.

4.6 Research Strategy

Narrative inquiry was particularly effective in capturing the flow of influencee experiences over time, providing insights into how past interactions with influencers shaped current perceptions and behaviours. Narrative inquiry as a research strategy was useful in gaining insight into personal experience and authentic responses that were then interpreted. Narrative inquiries follow a method of allowing the interviewee to tell a story which helps the researcher find the flow as well as timelines and real-life experiences of the story

(Saunders & Lewis, 2018). It is a particularly useful tool when trying to gain a full picture understanding of a context without only looking at bits of information in the analysis stage of research.

4.7 Time horizon

Although a cross-sectional design limits the ability to observe evolving behaviours, it aligns with the exploratory nature of the research and the practical constraints of time and resources. This approach provided a valuable snapshot of current influencer marketing dynamics. A cross-section time horizon was thus selected due to the nature of the research as well as the time given for the research period. A single interview was performed for each interviewee which looked at the sample's experiences, at present, and in the past without having follow up interviews to note any changes in behaviour. Cross-sectional time horizons look at a 'snapshot' of time of a particular topic (Saunders & Lewis, 2018).

Participants were provided with detailed information about the study and gave their informed consent prior to the interviews. Measures were taken to anonymise data to ensure confidentiality.

4.8 Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis was the individual influencee, with the focus being on the relationship between influencers and their followers (influencees). The study explored how followers perceived their connection to the influencer, and how these relationships impact resonance both with the influencer and what they represent (brands, themes, opinions etc.). This unit of analysis was critical because it focused on the interaction between the influencer's personal brand and the follower's decision-making process, which is central to understanding brand resonance.

4.9 Sampling method and size

The sampling method needed to align with the type of research performed as well as the data that is going to be extracted, by correctly aligning selection methods, sampling methods and type of analysis performed this is a quality control method that was used (Hammarberg, Kirkman & De Lacey, 2016). The sample is defined as a subgroup of the entire population which is measured in the same unit of analysis as that of the population (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). There are many sampling methods available for qualitative research, with stratified and purposive sampling methods being relevant in this research. Non - probability sampling methods which are done via selection from the population, thus ensuring that the sampled individuals are representative of the particular population and have the necessary characteristics for selection (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). Purposive sampling requires the researcher to use personal judgement for selection based on educated deductions made before interviewing, this is a common tool for qualitative analysis as it helps ensure that the selected interviewee can answer the required questions to gain meaningful insight.

The criteria for purposive sampling will be:

- South African Resident and Citizen
- Social Media users of Instagram, Facebook, X, TikTok, LinkedIn or YouTube (or other social media platforms).
- Males or Females Between the ages of 18 and 45
- Follow social media influencers
- Have purchased products or services that have been endorsed by social media influencers or changed their behaviour in some way based on content produced by the influencer.

Boddy (2016) states that for qualitative research a substantial sample size for research is dependent on the nature and scientific paradigm of the information that is to be gathered. Saturation was reached at 15 participants, as new interviews did not yield additional insights beyond those already established. Guest, Namey & Chen (2020) suggest that saturation often occurs between 12-20 interviews in qualitative research, reinforcing the adequacy of the sample size. Given that social media engagement is highest among young adults, the inclusion criteria prioritised individuals aged 18-45, ensuring relevance to the study's

objectives. Saturation was reached when no new information was found in interviews thus it is assumed that all possible data from the population had been extracted (Boddy, 2016).

A pilot interview was completed before a finalised interview guide was made to find any areas where there are constraints in flows, missing questions or irrelevant questions asked (Fischer et al., 2021). Piloting is usually associated with quantitative research but is a useful tool particularly in narrative inquiry style qualitative research, this part of the research process helps ensure that the interview guide is correctly probing interviewees without over or under-stepping (Majid et al., 2017). The practical benefits of this step in the research process will benefit the quality of the results and provide a quality control measure.

4.10 Measurement Instrument

An interview guide was used as the measurement instrument, a semi structured open-ended questionnaire was the guide [appendix 4]. This allowed for a narrative inquiry of the interviewees to occur and allow for additional follow up questions to be asked to probe the interviewee into giving more relevant information about what has been said. Questions were developed based off of literature that was related to the topic and using the reference interview questions within those articles. As the researcher, my familiarity with social media platforms and personal experience as a user informed the development of interview questions while being mindful to avoid bias during analysis.

4.11 Data gathering process

Primary data was collected through semi structured interviews in which the interviewer prompted the interviewee by asking open ended questions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the selected participants. These interviews focused on the participants' experiences and perceptions of social media influencers, exploring themes such as trustworthiness, authenticity, resonance with influencer content, and how these factors influence their behaviour, beliefs and purchasing decisions.

The interviews were conducted using an interview guide, with open-ended questions that allow participants to share their narratives freely. The interview process allowed for probing questions, ensuring that participants provide detailed responses about their emotional connections with influencers and how this affects their relationship with promoted brands.

4.12 Analysis approach

Analysis of primary data was conducted using digital analysis of transcripts using a service such as Otter.AI, ATLAS and Microsoft 365 that is able to transcribe the interviews and analyse the contents of the transcripts, finding codes and themes within the content and then categorising the data. Data was categorised in a step-by-step order from codes to categories to themes and then to theory for the primary data collected. The step-by-step process defined by “searching, evaluating, recognising, coding, mapping, exploring, and describing patterns, trends, categories and themes in raw data” (Mezmir, 2020). These interpretations in qualitative analysis are made from a combination of the transcript, as well as associated visual or other material gained from samples during the interview (Mezmir, 2020). The stages of qualitative data analysis can be summarised into familiarisation, data reduction, displaying data, and drawing conclusions (Mezmir, 2020). Secondary analysis was done via cross-referencing and the use of empirical data from high quality journals.

The primary data was transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis. This method is well-suited to identifying patterns and themes within qualitative data, allowing the researcher to explore how participants perceive and engage with influencers. Thematic analysis involved the following steps:

1. Familiarisation with the data.
2. Initial coding of transcripts to identify key themes.
3. Grouping codes into broader categories related to influencer brand resonance.
4. Identifying relationships between themes to generate insights into the influencee - influencer dynamic.

The use of thematic analysis aligns with the abductive approach, enabling the researcher to generate new theoretical insights based on the data collected.

4.13 Quality controls

The validity, reliability, and ethics of both the collection and analysis of data are essential in maintaining quality of the research. Having quality controls in place ensures that these processes are being followed. Sampling method selection helped increase quality of the data, by following a purposive method of sampling using the predefined selection criterion was a quality control in ensuring that interviews performed will be with samples that are relevant and reliable for the research (Collingridge & Gantt, 2019).

Credibility was ensured through triangulation of findings across multiple participants, and detailed descriptions were provided to enhance transferability. Triangulation of data was used to ensure quality, accuracy and reliability of data collected through the use of both primary and secondary data collection. Theory triangulation will also be a quality control check by utilising a variety of theories to reinforce data collected (Fischer et al., 2021). The collection of data was done with the highest possible degree of rigour in ensuring that the researcher's view was separated from that of the qualitative narrative received. The data that was collected was stored and analysed isolated from that of the research performed by the researcher to prevent any crossover between interview-data and researcher data.

To ensure the rigour and validity of the study, the following quality control measures were implemented: Pilot interviews were conducted to refine the interview guide and ensure that questions are appropriate for eliciting rich, meaningful data. Triangulation was employed through the comparison of primary interview data with secondary literature to confirm findings and ensure that the research captures a comprehensive understanding of influencer brand resonance. Secondary research was used for triangulation of the results to verify whether the findings agree to disagree with current or prior research. Reflexivity was practised throughout the research process to minimise researcher bias and maintain objectivity in the interpretation of the data. All data was stored on encrypted drives with password protection. Pseudonyms (interview numbers) were assigned to participants, and direct identifiers were removed from transcripts to ensure confidentiality.

Chapter 5: Findings

This chapter presents the findings derived from the research questions outlined in Chapter Three, framed within the inductive nature of the exploratory narrative inquiry qualitative research method employed in this study. The semi-structured interview guide, informed by the literature review in Chapter Two, served as the basis for the interview questions. The data analysis followed an inductive approach, allowing for the generation of codes, which were subsequently categorised. These categories were synthesised into overarching themes, which are presented and discussed in this chapter to address the research questions comprehensively. Thus, this chapter is presented per theme that emerged for each research question.

A total of thirteen interviews were conducted (including a pilot) of which twelve have been included in the findings section. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face, or via Microsoft Teams meetings and were recorded and transcribed using Otter.ai software. Interviewees were selected via the pre-decided population and sampling criteria which led to a diverse sample selected. Interviewees ranged in ages, occupations, geographic distribution (within South Africa) and gender. All interviewees were active users of social media platforms either in their personal and professional lives and engage with influencers through these platforms. Due to the nature of the research, interview probes were conducted based off of previous responses thus leading to slight variations in each interview. The interview guide provided the basic outline however the narrative approach meant that all interviews were unique in nature.

Through the inductive approach, the analysis on ATLAS.TI and manual analysis generated 748 unique codes from 12 interviews [Appendix 5]. This process enabled the identification of emergent themes, some of which extended beyond the scope of the initial research questions. This comprehensive approach provided a holistic understanding of the experiences and perceptions of influencees, while also uncovering nuanced insights into the dynamics of parasocial relationships and their influence on attitudes and behaviours.

By linking the emergent themes to the research questions, this chapter aims to provide for a robust discussion that situates the findings within the broader theoretical and practical context of social media influence and resonance in the following chapter.

Table 1: Breakdown of demographics and information about the participants

#	Age	Gender	Work	From / living	Social media	Interests
1	30	Female	Student / supply chain specialist	Johannesburg	Instagram X TikTok	Travel, shopping, socialising
2	34	Female	Auditor / Student / pharmacist	From Rustenburg, Northwest, lives in Johannesburg	Instagram Pinterest LinkedIn	Travel, DIY
3	30	Female	Nail tech / student	From Limpopo lives in Johannesburg	TikTok Pinterest Facebook	Working and studying
4	30	Female	Technical Risk Analyst	From Pretoria, lives in Johannesburg Gauteng	Instagram / Threads	Fashion, going out, food
5	25	Male	Finance	From Johannesburg lives in Cape Town	Instagram TikTok X	Sports, Padel, Golf, Surfing
6	23	Female	Interior design	Cape Town	Instagram, TikTok	Socialising with family and friends.
7	23	Female	Deck Hand/ Hospitality	Johannesburg born, Lives in Cape Town	Instagram, TikTok	Socialising, travel
8	42	Female	Interior design	Johannesburg	Instagram, Pinterest	Cooking, homemaking
9	25	Female	Credit analyst/ Banking	Johannesburg	TikTok, Instagram , Facebook	Gym, Cooking, Socialising

10	25	Female	Events management	From Durban, lives in Johannesburg	Instagram, YouTube, Facebook	Cooking, being in nature, exploring spirituality
11	27	Male	Sales	Johannesburg	TikTok Instagram YouTube	Music, Podcasting
12	27	Male	Auditor, Attorney	Johannesburg	Instagram X	DIY Politics Sports

Table 2 presents the influencers mentioned by each participant, their respective content niches, and an estimate of how long each influencee has followed them. The length of followership serves as an indicator of the strength and longevity of the parasocial relationships influencees have developed with these influencers. Since resonance is not static but evolves over time, this measure provides insight into the nature of influencee-influencer connections—whether they are fleeting engagements, sustained interactions, or deeply embedded within the influencee’s identity and daily routines.

Table 2: Influencers mentioned and type of content for each participant

#	Influencer mentioned	Field / content / industry	Estimate of how long they followed the influencer
1	Sarah Langa	Luxury lifestyle	Since she started ¹
	Kamo Mafokwane	Luxury lifestyle	Not mentioned
2	Nicolette Mashile	Finance / budgeting	Three years
3	Sequelle	Dancing, comedy, entertainment	One to two years
	Sima	Nail tech, business	Two to three years
4	Kay Naomi	Beauty	Two to three years

¹ The interviewee did not mention an exact duration of following the influencer.

5	James Duncan O'Brian	Surfing, Travel, lifestyle	Eight to ten years
6	Alix Earle	Beauty, fashion, lifestyle	One year
	Amber Interiors	Interior design	Not mentioned
	Kelly Ressler	Interior design	Not mentioned
7	Indy Clinton	Lifestyle	One Year
8	Carla Rockmore	Fashion	Two Years
9	Kaity	Fitness, ED recovery	Five Years
10	Liz	Life, romance	Not mentioned
11	Sammy Virgie	DJ / Garage music	Two years
	KSI	Lifestyle, Music, Video games	Not mentioned
12	Richard Spoor	Politics and Law	Over eight years
	Caitlin Rawson	Left wing politics	Over five years

5.1 Main Research Question: What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?

This question was explored during the interview in a variety of ways. Firstly, by looking at which influencer the participant first decided to mention, what they found most poignant about their content, whether the content altered their feelings, opinions or behaviours in any way, as well as by assessing the synchronicities between the lives of both the participant and their chosen influencer. As well as if more influencers were mentioned, to which of the aforementioned influencers they felt the most connected. This question examines the mechanisms that contribute to resonance formation between influencees and social media influencers (SMIs). The findings suggest that resonance is shaped by a combination of cognitive, emotional, and social factors, with influencees actively constructing meaning from influencer content based on their personal experiences and expectations.

Codes were created using ATLAS.TI software, edited manually and grouped into themes pertaining to the relevant research question as well as relevant quotes off of which the codes were based. The overarching question (main question) was broken down into sub questions specifically targeting an element of the main research question. Interviews revealed that resonance with influencers develops across a spectrum of engagement. Some influencees experience only surface-level resonance, engaging primarily for entertainment, aesthetics, or informational content, while others experience deep emotional resonance, leading to changes in self-perception, values, and behaviours.

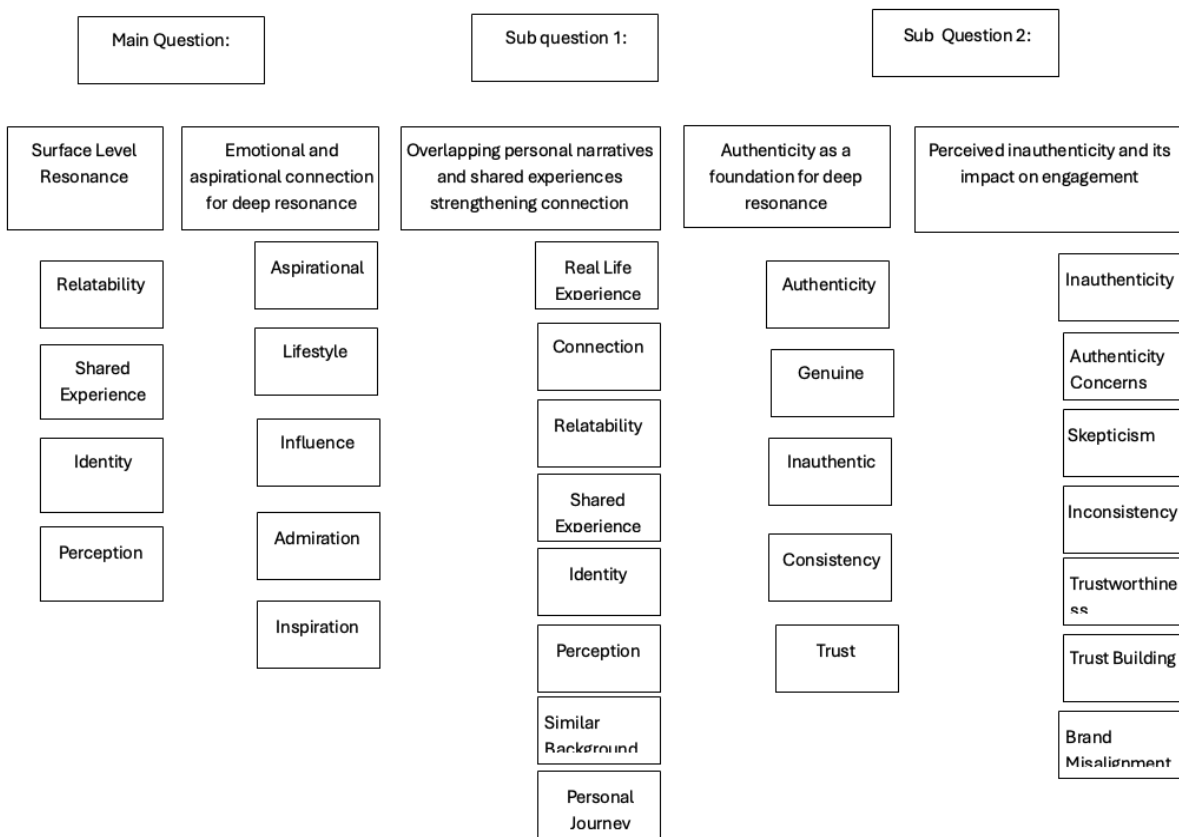
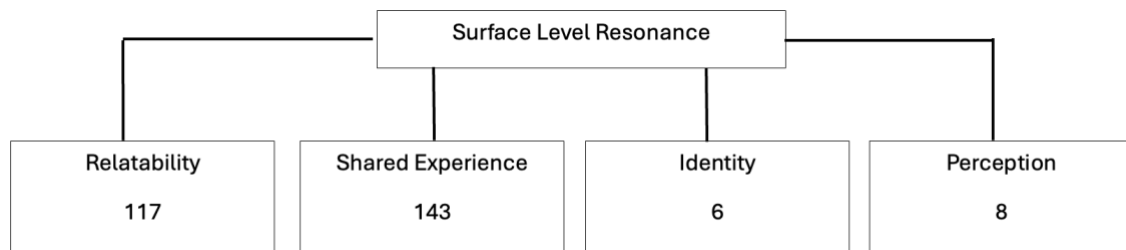


Figure 2: Overview of research questions, themes and code groups for the analysis of the findings

5.1.1 Theme: Surface level resonance

Figure 3: The related code groups for the theme of surface level resonance



The data suggest that some influencees engage with influencer content primarily for entertainment purposes rather than forming deep emotional connections. Influencees in this category described their engagement as casual, light-hearted, and largely passive, focused on enjoying humour, trends, and aesthetic appeal rather than feeling a strong personal attachment to the influencer.

For example, interviewee 3 discusses how their engagement with an influencer is centred around their light-hearted videos rather than an emotional connection

Interview 3:

"He posts about dancing and music. It's basically entertainment."

"For me, social media is purely for entertainment, and then every now and then you can, you can choose what you want to keep and what you don't want to keep in your life."

"Mostly, I watch for entertainment. So it's not that deep."

"It's just funny. So I don't know how to put this. He's got the way he speaks, the way he does things, it's just funny."

Interviewee 4 talks about how she gets daily inspiration for fashion and beauty products from social media without interacting with influencers beyond this, and being willing to unfollow influencers if their content is no longer relevant:

Interview 4:

"I honestly, to be fair, it's literally just the beauty and fashion content, which, like, I say, she's very consistent as well."

"Generally, sometimes I just feel like, sometimes you get over a person not because they're doing something wrong or different. It's just, yeah, it's not important in your life anymore."

"I do, like, let's say on, my 'For You' page, not people I necessarily follow, but I do look at a lot of travel stuff."

Interviewee 5 describes their use of social media is on mindless scrolling rather than active engagement with creators:

Interviewee 5:

"I use TikTok, Instagram, and X. TikTok is mindless scrolling for me, and then Instagram is obviously keeping up with social life."

Interviewee 2 discusses how social media assist in helping them relax and 'switch -off'

Interviewee 2

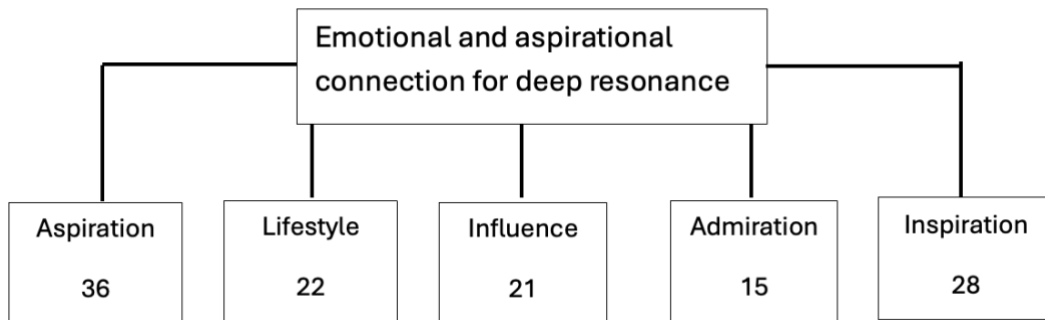
"I also enjoy comedy, like your jokes and videos like that. I do enjoy that, just to enjoy and relax and not have anything heavy."

Influencers who resonated with influencers at a surface level were less likely to describe feeling a personal connection, trust, or long-term loyalty toward the influencer. Instead, they engaged with content temporarily, often shifting interest when trends changed or when they found new, more engaging content.

Some influencees reported that while they enjoyed consuming influencer content, they did not actively engage with it beyond passive viewing, nor did they feel influenced by the influencer in a way that impacted their decisions or self-perception.

5.1.2 Theme: Emotional and aspirational connection for deep resonance

Figure 4: The related code groups for the theme of emotional and aspirational connection for deep resonance



The data suggests that many influencees engage deeply with influencers who embody aspirational lifestyles, success stories, or personal growth journeys. Influencees frequently describe following influencers who serve as role models, whether in career achievements, lifestyle choices, or self-improvement journeys. This aspirational connection was expressed through admiration, inspiration, and motivation, shaping how influencees engaged with influencer content.

Several influencees highlighted how watching influencers achieve their goals reinforced their own personal ambitions. This was particularly evident in narratives that focused on career success, travel experiences, and self-betterment. For instance, Interviewee 11 described being drawn to an influencer because of their exciting, travel-filled lifestyle:

Interview 11:

"I think [what draws me in] is the traveling of it all. Yeah, because like, you see the different places that these people get to go... he was playing in this festival"

at a ski resort, and then like, oh my goodness, that's so cool."

"I think to an extent, it's aspirational, even though that's not like the front-of-mind reason. But like, whenever I think about it, in terms of the whole industry and wanting to be involved in it, I always ask my friends who are big in the industry why they don't record live sets and things like that. Because my brain works like, 'yes, this party is cool, but watching it back on social media is cooler.' I think social media is giving me the opportunity to see it for myself. So if I could do that for somebody else, where it's like, 'yes, we're having a party in a hotel room, but it looks amazing,' that's what interests me."

"I think social media is giving me the opportunity to see it for myself. So if I could do that for somebody else, where it's like, yes, we're having a party in, let's say, like, a hotel room, but it looks amazing. And like, everybody's like, Oh my goodness, where's that? I want to go to that."

Interviewee 11

"It's like, I follow a lot of other DJs where it's like, they're very much local club DJs and all of that. Just because when you watch the best doing something, you almost have something that's aspirational to look at. And it's like, then you follow everyone else to see what's realistic at the time, and then almost like to see the progression of how it goes."

Other influencees emphasised that seeing influencers overcome challenges provided a sense of guidance and relatability for their own journeys. Interviewee 3 described following an influencer who shares business advice and problem-solving strategies:

Interview 3:

"So she posts only business-related issues. She will post about how to get around certain problems when you are young, and you are into business, and then

challenges that she faces and how she resolves them specifically in business... Some of them do happen to me, and then I'll look back and be like, Oh, Sima dealt with it like this, which is the best way to deal with it."

"I think it's easy for anyone to be able to relate to someone who's just about positivity and wanting to upgrade their life and just, you know, bring, you know, better. I don't even know what the word is, like, just better... Like, better practices in your day-to-day life, like better things to make yourself feel better about yourself. Like it's all about, like, self-worth. And I feel like that's something that, like, I've struggled with. So it's definitely something that I can relate to with her."

Similarly, Interviewee 5 explained how following an influencer directly impacted their hobbies and lifestyle choices:

Interviewee 5

"Yeah, yes, it definitely has. He's the reason I got into surfing myself, watching all his episodes as a young kid. Growing up, I always wanted to learn to surf and be more like that, or do things along those lines. He's also influenced me. He traveled around the world, and some of the places that he goes or sees have influenced me to want to go there and see what he did, why he did it, the food he ate there in those specific places."

Some influencees also expressed a strong personal aspiration to mirror aspects of an influencer's life. Interviewee 6 described wanting to model her future on an influencer's lifestyle and career trajectory:

Interviewee 6

"Watching her as a designer, do you interact with her content beyond just for work inspiration? Oh, for sure. I think it goes back to what I was saying earlier. Like, she's also got a really solid family, and she's always posting her kids, and she's

got, like, a gorgeous husband, and they all live such a nice life. And like, that's what I want. Like, that's basically everything that she's got—that's what I want."

"Like, there's actually a girl called Amber, and her handle is Amber Interiors. And she's, like, she's such a boss. Like, she literally is, like, so young and started her own design studio. And, like, that's someone that, like, I like following because I can manifest what I want to be in the future."

Overall, the findings indicate that influencees engage deeply with influencers who represent an ideal they aspire to achieve, whether in their career paths, lifestyle choices, or personal development. This resonance is further reinforced when the influencer shares struggles and successes, making their journey feel attainable.

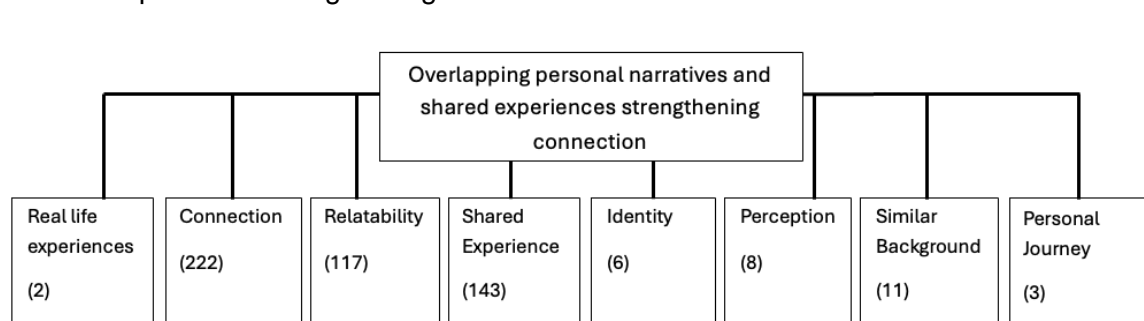
5.2 Sub Question 1: How do overlapping personal narratives affect how influencees experience resonance with social media influencers?

The sub-question explores the extent to which influencees perceive resonance with influencers based on their overlapping personal narratives which looks at shared life experiences, values, and aspirations. The findings indicate that resonance is not merely a product of content consumption but is significantly influenced by the influencee's ability to relate to an influencer on a personal level. Participants expressed that their engagement with influencers was often reinforced when they identified aspects of their own lives within the influencer's narrative.

The data suggests that resonance is shaped by three key factors: shared experiences, alignment of values, and aspirational identification. Influencees who recognised their own struggles, achievements, or personal journeys reflected in an influencer's content were more likely to form deeper connections. Similarly, values alignment played a significant role, as influencees gravitated toward influencers who embodied and consistently promoted principles that resonated with their own beliefs. Aspirational resonance was also observed, with some participants describing their engagement with influencers as a source of motivation and inspiration for personal growth.

5.2.1 Theme: Overlapping Personal Narratives and shared experience strengthening connection

Figure 5: The related code groups for the theme of overlapping personal narratives and shared experience strengthening connection



The data suggests that influencees develop stronger resonance with influencers when they perceive similarities between their own lives and the influencer's story. This overlapping personal narrative creates a sense of belonging, validation, and deep emotional engagement.

Many influencees expressed a stronger connection when influencers shared authentic personal experiences such as career challenges, self-improvement journeys, or cultural backgrounds. Interviewees described feeling motivated, inspired, or reassured when they saw aspects of their own lives reflected in the influencer's content.

For instance, interviewee 9 discusses how following an influencer who went through an eating disorder and anorexia that lives a similar life to hers has been assisting her recovery journey in her therapy:

Interviewee 9:

"I've had a past of eating disorders, so it kind of hits home to see her posting about her experiences, and it's something that I can resonate with, because I've also found a safe space in fitness coming from that dark place in my life. It's also nice seeing someone who went from the same space as you go into this healthy lifestyle, because, I mean, there's so many people out there that take the wrong direction and kind of act like, Oh, I'm doing better, and I'm doing well, but you can

see that they're not. So it's someone that I can see, you know, they really are doing well."

Interviewee 10 explained how self-worth and personal improvement key factors in their resonance with an influencer were:

Interviewee 10:

"I think it's easy for anyone to be able to relate to someone who's just about positivity and wanting to upgrade their life and just, you know, bring you know, better... Like, what's the word? Elements of total lo elements, which is like better practices in your day-to-day life, like better things to make yourself feel better about yourself. Like it's all about, like, self-worth. And I feel like that's something that, like, I've struggled with. So it's definitely something that I can relate to with her."

"She posts about a lot of her experiences. So if she travels, she'll post about places she is. She posts about her fitness when she's in the gym, food...friends...sometimes inspirational quotes and stuff that she's obviously edited herself... It's just like a normal lifestyle kind of vibes. I think everything ties into each other."

Interviewee 3 explains how it feels to have a similar experience with body-related issues to someone on social media has helped them gain confidence. Thus, it has emerged that shared struggles are a common occurrence between influencees who explain a strong sense of resonance with their chosen influencer. Another key aspect was the perception of authenticity in storytelling. Influencees trusted influencers more when they shared unfiltered experiences and personal struggles. Interviewee 3 described how an influencer's openness about body image and self-acceptance strengthened their connection:

Interviewee 3

"So is body positivity something that is important to you when you're following an influencer?"

"Yes, someone who will uplift you, someone who will make you feel that you're

okay, you're fine."

"[I get drawn into his content because of] the fact that he is very obese, and you have got a lot of energy, he has got extreme energy."

"For me, it's motivational that size cannot stop you from doing anything. Okay, you can still be doing things while you are still obese. He really inspires me. Makes me feel like nothing can stop you if you put your mind onto it. So he's very inspirational without meaning to me."

"He is comfortable in his body. He is comfortable with what he is. He accepted himself, and then he made it easy for others to accept themselves and be comfortable with their bodies as well. So do you feel like the content he posts and his videos and tiktoks and whatever are his true self, and you believe that it's who he is in person and that he's not putting on an act? Or yeah, I believe together is 100% correct. It's him. He doesn't hide anything, even the most embarrassing things about himself, he will still post them. They will like that he can easily uplift your self esteem."

Additionally, some influencees felt more drawn to influencers with similar life stages or backgrounds. Interviewee 10 noted how shared age and experiences reinforced their relatability:

Interviewee 10:

"I follow another person who does podcasts, called Jay Shetty. He's got a lot of ads and stuff, but his information is still solid. But with her (Liz), I just think it's because we are a similar age, you know, we look kind of similar. And it's just like, you know, if someone's gone through the same things that you've gone through it's easy to be able to relate to someone like that."

These findings indicate that deep resonance is strengthened by relatability, shared values, and common experiences. Influencees often seek out and sustain engagement with

influencers whose narratives align with their own, fostering trust, validation, and long-term connection.

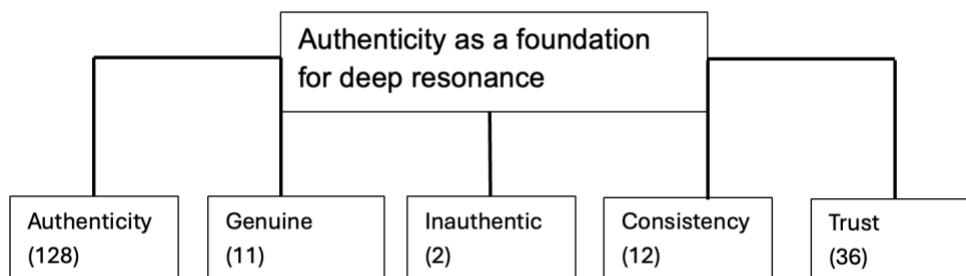
5.3 Sub Question 2: How does authenticity contribute to resonance?

This sub-question investigates how authenticity contributes to resonance between influencees and influencers. The findings indicate that authenticity is a fundamental determinant of resonance, influencing both the depth of connection and the longevity of engagement. Influencees consistently emphasised that their trust and emotional investment in an influencer were contingent on the perceived sincerity, consistency, and transparency of the influencer’s content.

Participants expressed that authenticity was most evident when influencers shared unfiltered aspects of their lives, openly discussed personal challenges, and maintained a consistent identity over time. Conversely, perceptions of inauthenticity—such as excessive brand endorsements, drastic shifts in content, or an overly curated online persona—often led to disengagement. Influencees valued influencers who remained true to their brand and demonstrated honesty in their interactions, as this reinforced a sense of reliability and trust.

5.3.1 Theme: Authenticity as a foundation for deep resonance

Figure 6: The related code groups for the theme of authenticity as a foundation for deep resonance



The data suggests that authenticity is a central factor in shaping influencee resonance with social media influencers. Influencees frequently described trust, sincerity, and consistency

as essential elements that influence their connection with an influencer. Many participants expressed a preference for influencers who share genuine personal experiences, remain transparent about their values, and maintain consistency in their content and messaging.

A recurring theme in the data was trust in the influencer's sincerity, with influencees feeling more engaged when influencers appeared relatable and honest. Interviewees highlighted that influencers who disclose personal struggles, share unfiltered moments, or remain true to their brand identity over time create stronger audience connections.

For example, Interviewee 9 describes how the influencer she follows within the context of eating disorder recovery and mental health is perceived as authentic in comparison to others, who may not be who they appear.

Interviewee 9:

"The way she engages with followers just kind of tells you what they're going through and what they've been through, also kind of gives you that reassurance that she is speaking the truth. You can also see in the way her body has changed her mindset, she speaks a lot about her mindset, which is the main thing you'll see with an eating disorder, it's not really physical, but it's the mental part that's really important for someone. And you can just see through the way that she speaks. Previously, she used to really speak differently about weight gain and food challenges and now it's like a whole different perspective. So that kind of gives me comfort that she really is talking the truth. I also follow a few other people that kind of act like they are doing well and act like they're recovering, but you can just see, physically and in their posts, that there's nothing different."

Interviewee 11 describes how his chosen influencer, even when doing paid promotional content, still makes it seem holistic and consistent with their personal brand which thereby retains the feeling of authenticity for viewers.

Interviewee 11:

"It [his content] feels almost like a look into his life. It doesn't look like it's ever promotional. At least how it comes across, because obviously all of its promotional but it comes across like it's not forced down your throats. It's like, 'oh, I went on a boat and I DJed with my friends and had a good time'. It's very interesting, because it feels like I'm just watching his life unfold. It never feels like I'm watching an influencer for a specific reason. And I really like content like that."

"It's like everybody's making content for views. Everybody's making content so that they can get out there to the people, so they can grow their audiences and all of that. But at the same time, it feels like there is definitely a way you conduct yourself where it feels very inauthentic. So like, influencers, for example, that do, 'get ready with me' videos, but like, every single day, or like 'day in the lives', every single day, it kind of feels like sometimes the content of what's happening isn't changing, but because it did well, another time they'll do it again and again. And I think Tiktok has that problem. It's very, I want to say, unoriginal, because it's like, if you have something that works, you'll just beat it until it stops working, like beating a dead horse. But with him [Sammy], you'll hardly see something over and over and over again. And it's like, when influencers post 'what would you like to see from my pages?'. There's stuff that obviously you'd say I'd like to see more of this. But with him, never does it. Like, just carries on".

"How can somebody be having so much fun? Look like it's easy, look like they're enjoying what they're doing, but literally, have been putting in all of this work for so long, and it's like, you just think there would be almost an area of, when you're the best at something, you kind of have that arrogance about you, or that, I want to say image protection, like you're trying to make people realize that, 'yes, I'm the best' and you have to carry yourself at the same time. But it's like, you can make you feel like he's just enjoying himself with people there. "

"It always said he's playing for himself, and then everybody else is around enjoying it. And it's like, yeah, and you seem to enjoy that type of music, so that could be one

of the reasons why you follow him."

"So I think that that was probably the most interesting thing—how can somebody be having so much fun? Look like it's easy, look like they're enjoying what they're doing, but literally, have been putting in all of this work for so long. And it's like, you just think there would be an area of, when you're the best at something, you kind of have that arrogance about you, or that, I want to say, image protection. But he just seems like he gets there and he just enjoys it."

Interviewee 1 highlights the expectation for influencers to maintain quality control over their content. Influencees recognise when content appears rushed or lacks coherence, which diminishes trust and engagement.

"100% the consistency and quality of the content that they post. And the reason why I say quality is because some influences really push nonsense trash where it's like there's no thought process that's gone through this campaign, and you've just come up with something that is either a rush job or it just doesn't make sense." - Interviewee 1

The quote below illustrates how influencees associate authenticity with long-term consistency in storytelling. If an influencer continuously references their own lived experiences rather than fabricating new narratives, their content is seen as genuine and credible.

"She has, like I said, she likes storytelling, so she has all the stories that she was explaining to us. And you can see, as it goes, that she still relates to the same story, to show that, you know, it's an actual event that happened." - Interviewee 2

The selection of brand partnerships influences perceived authenticity. Interviewee 4 highlights that influencees disengage from influencers who take on irrelevant promotions

purely for financial incentives, as it diminishes the trust in their recommendations. Instead, followers appreciate influencers who remain aligned with their personal brand, ensuring that endorsements feel genuine rather than transactional.

"Yes, exactly, yeah, even the job she takes on is very consistent, very on-brand, like I'm saying, it's not like someone is just going to take up a random endorsement or job just because they want to get paid." - Interviewee 4

Influencees prefer influencers who engage in thoughtful, relevant brand collaborations. Interviewee 1 highlights that when an influencer strategically aligns their promotions with their established identity, they appear genuine and credible, rather than commercially motivated:

"I think she's quite authentic as well. She chooses the brands that she chooses to represent or work with, rather, in a strategic manner. So it's not just like fluff and buff, it's stuff that makes sense and aligns with her." - Interviewee 1

Influencees value full process disclosure, as it removes doubts about manipulation or dishonesty. The ability to witness an entire creation process reinforces the perception that the influencer is open, transparent, and not fabricating their expertise.

"She posts about how she starts with everything until the very end. If she's making hair, she's going to show you from the beginning how she starts until she finishes." - Interviewee 3

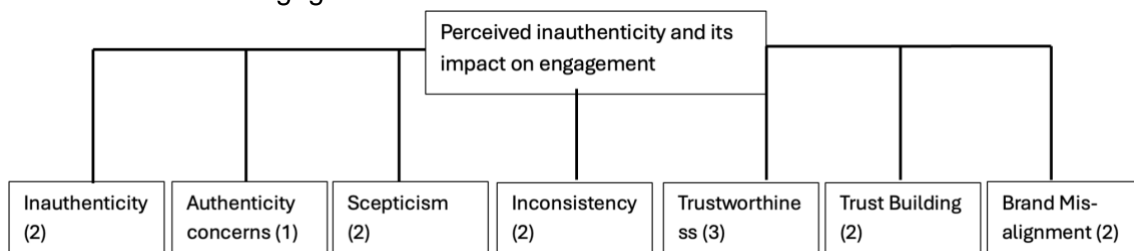
Trust is further strengthened when influencers provide proof of authenticity, such as tagging brands or physical locations. This "verifiable trail" reassures influencees that the influencer is not deceiving their audience but instead providing real, experience-based recommendations.

"I do trust what he's posting, because most of his promotional content, they are all

approved... Whenever he posts about something, he will tag that company or it will take that place. So if, mostly when people lie about something, they will never tag the actual place. But he does, so you feel like it's a verifiable trail." - Interviewee 3

5.3.2 Theme: Perceived inauthenticity and its impact on resonance and engagement

Figure 7: The related code groups for the theme of perceived inauthenticity and its impact on resonance and engagement



Perceived inauthenticity plays a significant role in determining whether influencees maintain or disengage from an influencer. Influencees often express scepticism when influencers engage in overly promotional content, brand endorsements that feel disingenuous, or drastic shifts in personality, lifestyle, or opinions that seem forced.

For example, interviewee 1 mentions a promotion that many local influencers endorsed which was perceived as ingenuine and inauthentic to viewers as the paid promotion was not consistent with them, their content style or their interests -

"But unfortunately for them, it's a learning curve that's on a public platform, which could be detrimental to their brand. And I just look at it now, for example, there's a new campaign all the [local influencer] girls were doing that was a cryptocurrency campaign, where I think all of them were like, 'Oh, since I joined Pocket Broker, I've been able to, you know, have extra money to buy handbags. if you use my code, you're going to get 50% off your first deposit'. So whatever that was, the Pocket Broker, the entire slip on social media, it just became inauthentic because all of

them were basically saying that they're using Pocket Broker to get money to buy more handbags. Yet, I'm pretty sure they don't even know how that online platform even operates." - Interviewee 1

"It has to be authentic. It has to speak to their brand. It has to make logical sense. You can't tell me you focus on beauty and lifestyle and you're going to tell me about cryptocurrency, I know your real life, you probably don't have time to do that, and you would not bundle your investments on an app, you'd probably have a financial advisor. So it's stuff like that that sometimes irritates me, because it seems very inauthentic." -Interviewee 1

Interviewee 6 discusses how she perceives the influencer she chose to speak about as inauthentic and creating content since it does well for engagement and views. The interviewee does not believe that the influencer's content is a reflection of their real life, however, still chooses to engage actively with her content for the sake of entertainment.

"No, I don't think [she is being authentic]. I think it's important to remember that most of the time it is just a performance, it's just an act. Most of the time they don't have these big, huge social lives, or all this money. I think definitely Alix is probably a little bit different. I think she does come from a lot of money, but I don't think she's authentic or being true to herself. I think it's what she knows that is what her viewers want to see." - Interviewee 6:

Interviewee 7 mentions how content creators (influencers) who are employed in the industry that they are a part of creates unrealistic perceptions of the truth of the lifestyle. The influencee finds that this type of content is inauthentic and potentially causes external issues such as misleading people into believing that the industry operates differently than it does:

"I like watching travel videos... but sometimes when I see a yachting TikTok, let's say like a girl that works on the yachts, and it's like, literally, the most unrealistic thing I've seen, then I kind of stay away from seeing videos about my

lifestyle." - Interviewee 7

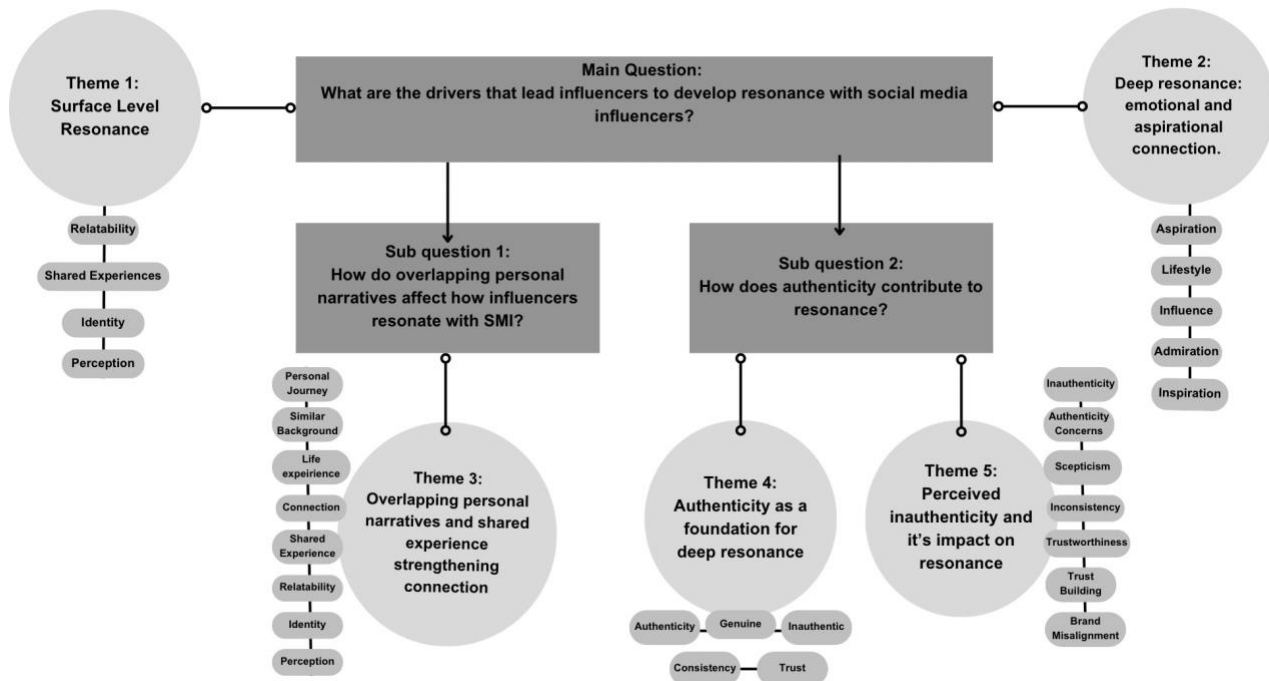
Interviewee 4 mentions how she finds it inauthentic when luxury influencers suddenly promote products that do not align with their personal brand:

"Another example that I can think of would be like, if someone today is posting about, I don't know, let's say Mac lipsticks and a new range, whatever, then tomorrow, it's an OMO ad. That wouldn't make sense to me."- interviewee 4

"If influencers take long-winded hiatuses, if I can say, because, I mean, you're not my friend, I don't follow you because we're friends, you know, I'd like, you know, some [consistent] content. So if they take long-winded breaks, and then, as well, as I think I've mentioned this one a lot, just the inconsistency of the actual brand, like, if I feel like the brand or how they interact as well, I think I prefer someone kind. And if you know, let's say in a comment section if someone is rude or untoward." - interviewee 4

5.4 Summary of Results

Figure 8: Relationship of research questions and emergent themes and related codes



This chapter presented and analysed the findings from the twelve interviews conducted, identifying key themes that emerged from the influencee narratives. The insights gained provided a deeper understanding of the real-lived experiences of social media users who actively engage with influencers, highlighting the factors that shape their perceptions, interactions, and levels of resonance. Through thematic analysis, it was possible to categorise influencee-influencer relationships along a spectrum of resonance, ranging from shallow, entertainment-driven engagement to deep, identity-driven connections.

The findings indicate that resonance is not a binary concept but rather exists on a continuum, influenced by shared experiences, authenticity, and the perceived sincerity of the influencer. While some influencees engage with influencers for aesthetic appeal, entertainment, or practical recommendations, others form deeper emotional bonds, seeing influencers as aspirational or even as figures of personal validation. The study further highlights how authenticity is a key determinant of sustained engagement, with influencees demonstrating

a preference for influencers who maintain consistency in their values, messaging, and personal brand.

The implications of these findings extend beyond social media engagement, contributing to a broader understanding of how digital audiences interpret and internalise influencer content. The study's insights support and expand existing theoretical frameworks, including Parasocial Relationship Theory, Social Influence Theory, and the Brand Resonance Model, by emphasising the active role of influencees in shaping their own resonance with influencers.

The next chapter will build upon these findings by integrating them with the existing literature, critically evaluating how they align with, contradict, or extend previous research on resonance in social media influencer relationships. This discussion will further explore the theoretical and practical implications of the findings, particularly in the evolving landscape of digital influence and consumer engagement

Chapter 6: Discussion

This discussion chapter critically examines the findings of this study, contextualising them within the broader theoretical framework and existing literature on social media influencers and their resonance with audiences. This chapter explores the implications of the results, addressing the research questions and evaluating the significance of the study's contributions to the field. By synthesising key themes and drawing connections between the findings and prior research, this chapter provides a nuanced understanding of how influencers cultivate audience resonance. Furthermore, it highlights practical insights, theoretical advancements, and potential directions for future research in this dynamic and evolving area.

The discussion is structured around the research questions and sub questions, each of which unpacks different elements of influencee resonance. Section 6.1 outlines the drivers of resonance, providing an understanding of what leads influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers. section 6.2 goes into the first sub question which looks at overlapping personal narratives and the effect on influencee resonance. Section 6.3 investigates the role of authenticity on establishing and maintaining resonance with social media influencers. Section 6.4 introduces the evolving nature of resonance and the introduction of theory to the body of literature in the creation of the typology of resonance, representing a key contribution to the existing literature on influencer engagement and parasocial relationships. Finally, Section 6.5 synthesises these insights, bringing together the study's findings to consolidate the findings into the main and sub questions. This final section reinforces the argument that resonance is an evolving, layered interaction, shaped by personal narratives, authenticity, and the influencee's self-concept, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding digital influence.

By synthesising these themes, this chapter offers a comprehensive interpretation of resonance, highlighting how influencees actively shape their engagement with influencers and how resonance is moderated by perceived authenticity, emotional alignment, and personal identification. Table 3 shows the relationship between the research questions, codes and themes for further analysis and discussion.

Table 3: Mapping of Subcategory to Category and Theme Formation in Relation to each Research Question

Research Question	Codes	Themes
<p>Main question: What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?</p>	<p>Admiration, Aspiration, Inspiration, Influence, Lifestyle, Content, Entertainment, Enjoyment, Experiences</p>	<p>Entertainment driving Surface level resonance Emotional and aspirational connection for deep resonance</p>
<p>Sub question 1: How do overlapping personal narratives affect how influencees experience resonance with social media influencers?</p>	<p>Relatability, Shared Experience, Identity, Perception, Similar Background, Personal Journey, Connection, Real-Life Experience</p>	<p>The Role of Overlapping Personal Narratives in Strengthening Resonance</p>
<p>Sub question 2: How does authenticity contribute to resonance?</p>	<p>Authenticity, Genuine, Inauthentic, Trust, Consistency</p>	<p>Authenticity as a foundation for deep resonance Perceived inauthenticity and inconsistency and its impact on engagement</p>

6.1 Understanding Influencee resonance

Main Question: What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?

This research aimed to explore the mechanisms underlying resonance between influencees and social media influencers. A notable pattern in the interviews was that many participants mentioned multiple influencers throughout their discussions, raising questions about why certain influencers were recalled first and which influencers truly held the strongest resonance.

The data suggests that mentioning an influencer first does not necessarily indicate the strongest connection. Instead, the order of recall may be influenced by the recency of engagement, the emotional impact of a particular piece of content or social desirability in the context of the interview. For instance, some interviewees first mentioned influencers who were currently trending or those whose content aligned with mainstream appeal, even though they later described deeper resonance with other influencers who had personally impacted their lives in meaningful ways. This distinction highlights the fluid nature of resonance, where influencees may engage with different influencers for different needs, some for entertainment and aesthetic appeal, others for emotional validation, guidance, or self-reflection.

The findings reflected various levels and drivers of resonance. The spectrum of resonance seen ranged from shallow (or entertainment driven) resonance to deep resonance, which was more driven by identity, trust and other drivers.

The discussion now turns to the specific drivers of resonance, unpacking the psychological and social mechanisms that contribute to varying depths of connection between influencees and influencers. Drivers of resonance differed according to the level of resonance that was experienced; thus the spectrum will be discussed prior to unpacking the individual drivers for each level of resonance.

6.1.1 The Spectrum of Resonance

This study reveals that resonance with social media influencers exists on a spectrum, shaped by varying depths of engagement, emotional investment, and behavioural impact. While previous research has explored influencer credibility, authenticity, and engagement, there has been no structured framework for differentiating the levels of resonance influencees experience. The findings of this study introduce a categorisation scheme that identifies three primary levels of resonance: shallow, intermediate, and deep. Each representing distinct motivations, interactions, and outcomes within influencee-influencer relationships. Crucially, this study also finds that resonance is not a static or linear progression. Influencees can simultaneously engage with an influencer at multiple levels, deriving entertainment (shallow resonance), practical inspiration (intermediate resonance), and deep emotional connection (deep resonance) all at once. This fluidity challenges previous literature, which often conceptualises engagement as a one-directional or transactional process, instead positioning resonance as a multi-layered and evolving phenomenon.

The nature of these engagements is shaped by the influencee's motivations, expectations, and the perceived authenticity of the influencer. At one end of the spectrum, shallow resonance is predominantly entertainment-driven, with influencees following influencers for aesthetic appeal, humour, or surface-level inspiration. This form of engagement is often fleeting, marked by passive content consumption without significant emotional investment. The absence of a deep connection means that the influencee's loyalty to the influencer is contingent upon continued entertainment value rather than a sustained sense of identification.

At a moderate level, interest-based resonance emerges when influencees engage with influencers who provide practical or aspirational value. These influencees may follow influencers for fitness advice, career guidance or lifestyle content that aligns with their evolving interests. While this engagement is more substantial than entertainment-driven resonance, it does not necessarily translate into deep emotional attachment. The connection remains functional, with the influencee seeking knowledge or insight without internalising the influencer's persona as part of their identity.

In contrast, deep resonance is formed when influencees perceive a strong personal connection with an influencer, often rooted in shared experiences, struggles, or values. This level of engagement is trust-based and identity-driven, where influencees see their own challenges, aspirations, and lived realities reflected in the influencer's narrative. For these influencees, the influencer is not just a source of entertainment or advice but a figure of validation, inspiration and emotional support. The connection extends beyond content consumption, fostering a sense of loyalty and long-term engagement. Many interviewees articulated how their attachment to an influencer deepened when they recognised elements of their own lives mirrored in the influencer's journey, reinforcing the significance of authenticity and relatability in shaping resonance.

These findings align with established theories on social influence, media engagement, and consumer-brand relationships, suggesting that influencee-influencer connections are not merely passive but involve active interpretation and emotional investment. Parasocial Relationship Theory (Hoffner & Bond, 2022) provides a relevant framework for understanding how influencees develop one-sided yet emotionally significant connections with influencers. Traditionally applied to celebrities and media figures, this theory posits that audiences engage with public personas as if they were part of their social circles, forming imagined friendships that can influence attitudes, behaviours and identity construction. In the context of social media, however, parasocial relationships are no longer entirely uni-directional. Unlike traditional media figures, influencers actively engage with their audiences, responding to comments, sharing personal anecdotes, and fostering a sense of intimacy that strengthens the perceived relationship. This interactivity blurs the lines between parasocial and reciprocal engagement, amplifying the perceived authenticity of the influencer and making resonance more dynamic than static.

Building on this, Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958) suggests that an influencer's trustworthiness and credibility determine the extent to which their influencee internalises their content. At lower levels of resonance, influencees engage superficially, treating the influencer's content as mere entertainment or background noise. At higher levels, the influencee internalises the influencer's perspectives, behaviours and values, incorporating them into their own identity and decision-making processes. This theory is particularly relevant in understanding why influencees disengage when they perceive inauthenticity—

once trust is eroded, the influencee no longer views the influencer as a credible or meaningful source of guidance.

Furthermore, the Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2001; Jimenez-Marin, Sanz-Marcoz & Tobar-Pesantez, 2021) helps conceptualise how influencer relationships parallel traditional consumer-brand dynamics. Just as consumers form strong emotional bonds with brands that reflect their values and identities, influencees develop deep resonance with influencers who align with their personal narratives. The model emphasises four levels of connection: brand awareness, brand performance, brand judgments, and brand resonance, where the latter signifies the highest level of attachment. Applied to influencer engagement, resonance is strongest when an influencee perceives an influencer not just as a content creator but as an extension of their own identity—a figure whose experiences, values, and perspectives reinforce the influencee’s self-concept.

These findings suggest that resonance is neither static nor universally experienced; rather, it is shaped by authenticity, perceived relatability, and shared personal narratives. The following sections will further deconstruct the specific drivers of deep resonance, the role of overlapping life experiences and values, and the impact of authenticity and transparency in strengthening or weakening the influencee-influencer connection.

6.1.2 Emotional and Aspirational Connection

The study reveals that influencees do not merely consume content passively; rather, they seek emotional resonance with influencers whose stories, values, and struggles align with their own experiences or aspirations. Emotional connection is particularly strong when an influencee perceives an influencer as someone who has overcome similar obstacles, achieved personal or professional growth, or embody a lifestyle they aspire to attain.

For many participants, an influencer’s ability to share their personal struggles and triumphs fosters a sense of validation and relatability. Several interviewees expressed a heightened sense of loyalty towards influencers who had openly discussed challenges related to mental

health, career setbacks, or body image struggles, as these narratives closely reflected their own lived experiences. One interviewee articulated this sentiment, stating:

"I've had a past of eating disorders, so it kind of hits home to see her posting about her experiences, and it's something that I can resonate with because I've also found a safe space in fitness coming from that dark place in my life."

This direct quote underscores the impact of narrative-driven engagement, where an influencee perceives an influencer's journey as mirroring their own transformation, thus deepening emotional investment. The perceived authenticity of these narratives reinforces the bond, making the influencee more likely to trust and engage with the influencer's recommendations and perspectives.

These findings align with Parasocial Relationship Theory, which posits that audiences develop one-sided yet emotionally significant relationships with media figures, forming an imagined sense of connection and trust (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). The study builds on this framework by demonstrating that parasocial relationships are not solely constructed by the influencer's presence, but by the extent to which an influencee perceives their own identity reflected in the influencer's narrative.

Furthermore, the findings contribute to Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), which suggests that trustworthiness and credibility are key determinants of whether an individual internalises an influencer's content. The study confirms that influencees are more likely to develop deep resonance with influencers who are perceived as authentic and transparent, particularly those who engage in consistent storytelling and demonstrate vulnerability in their content.

The findings also expand upon the Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2001, 2013; Jimenez-Marin, Sanz-Marcoz & Tobar-Pesantez, 2021), which traditionally examines how consumers establish strong emotional bonds with brands. The data suggests that deep resonance with influencers functions similarly to brand attachment, where emotional engagement and identification drive long-term loyalty. However, the findings propose an extension of this model, arguing that resonance with influencers is not just about attachment but about

personal identification. Influencees are not simply attached to an influencer's content—they see their own aspirations and struggles reflected in the influencer's narrative, reinforcing a sense of belonging and personal validation.

Thus, emotional and aspirational resonance serve as fundamental drivers of deep connection, shaping how influencees engage with influencers beyond passive content consumption.

6.1.3 Influencees as Active Participants in the Relationship

The study also highlights that resonance is not solely dictated by the influencer's content or persona, but by the influencee's active role in curating and maintaining the relationship. Contrary to traditional models of parasocial relationships, which view audience engagement as largely unidirectional, the findings suggest that influencees exercise agency in determining the extent of their resonance with influencers.

Rather than passively consuming all content from followed influencers, influencees selectively engage based on their evolving interests, values, and perceptions of authenticity.

This self-curation process includes actively seeking out content that reinforces their self-identity; disengaging from influencers perceived as inauthentic or inconsistent and favouring influencers whose messaging aligns with their personal growth and evolving worldview.

One interviewee explained this selective engagement, stating:

"Yes, exactly, yeah, even the job she takes on is very consistent, very on-brand, like I'm saying, it's not like someone is just going to take up a random endorsement or job just because they want to get paid."

This highlights that influencees expect continuity and alignment between an influencer's personal brand and the endorsements or content they produce. A perceived deviation from this authenticity, such as endorsing unrelated products or changing their content to chase

trends, often leads to disengagement. These findings align with the Consumer Empowerment Framework (Labrecque et al., 2013), Section 2.4.4], which suggests that digital audiences are not passive consumers but active curators of their online experience. Influencees do not merely follow influencers indefinitely; rather, they engage strategically, selecting and maintaining connections with influencers who provide relevant, authentic, and meaningful content.

Additionally, the study contributes to Social Media Resonance models, which posits that resonance is strengthened when audiences actively participate in content engagement, whether through interaction, content sharing, or selective curation. This perspective challenges earlier conceptualisations of parasocial relationships by suggesting that influencees are not merely audience members but co-creators of the influencer-influencee dynamic.

A key implication of this finding is that resonance is not static; it evolves as influencees' personal interests, values, and self-concept shift over time. If an influencer no longer aligns with an influencee's identity, the resonance may fade, leading to disengagement. However, when an influencer continues to reinforce a sense of identification and belonging, deep resonance is sustained.

Thus, the study emphasises the interactive nature of influencer engagement, where influencees actively shape, reinforce, and redefine their connections based on personal relevance and perceived authenticity. This insight adds depth to existing theories by acknowledging that resonance is not purely an outcome of influencer credibility, but also a reflection of the influencee's self-perception and selective engagement patterns.

6.1.4 Conclusion: The Complex Nature of Deep Resonance

The findings demonstrate that deep resonance is a product of both emotional identification and active audience participation. While aspirational and inspirational content strengthens emotional engagement, it is ultimately the influencee's agency in curating their digital environment that sustains or weakens resonance over time.

The study builds upon established theories by extending the existing parasocial relationship theory to account for influencee agency as well as expanding Social Influence Theory by demonstrating the role of authenticity and credibility in shaping resonance. Lastly, refining the Brand Resonance Model to incorporate personal identification as a critical factor in influencer attachment. These insights contribute to a more nuanced understanding of resonance, positioning it as a dynamic, evolving interaction rather than a fixed or one-directional experience. The following sections will explore how shared experiences, values, and authenticity further shape resonance, providing deeper insight into the mechanisms underlying influencee-influencer relationships.

6.2 The Role of Overlapping Personal Narratives in Shaping Resonance: My story Vs their story

Sub question 1:

How do overlapping personal narratives affect how influencees experience resonance with social media influencers?

The extent to which influencees resonate with influencers is deeply intertwined with shared life experiences, values, and aspirations. The findings reveal that influencees feel a stronger connection when they perceive aspects of their own lives reflected in the narratives of influencers, fostering a sense of familiarity, validation, and relatability. While some influencees engage with influencers purely for entertainment, others form deeper, more meaningful connections with those whose content aligns with their personal struggles, ambitions or cultural backgrounds.

This alignment between the personal stories of influencees and influencers contributes to a heightened sense of trust and emotional engagement, reinforcing resonance as a dynamic and reciprocal process rather than a passive experience. The study also highlights a crucial distinction between inspiration and aspiration, which further delineates the depth of

resonance experienced by influencees. The following sections explore these findings in greater detail, linking them to relevant theoretical frameworks.

6.2.1 Relatability as a Driver of Stronger Resonance

A key driver of deep resonance is the degree to which an influencee perceives an influencer as sharing similar struggles, values, or experiences. Influencees gravitate towards influencers whose narratives reflect familiar challenges and aspirations, reinforcing a sense of connection and personal identification. Many participants in the study described how their favourite influencers had undergone similar life transitions, setbacks, or personal growth journeys, making their content not only engaging but also deeply validating.

For example, one interviewee articulated the significance of this connection, stating:

"The way she engages with followers just kind of tells you what they're going through and what they've been through, also gives you that reassurance that she is speaking the truth. You can also see in the way her body has changed her mindset, she speaks a lot about her mindset, which is the main thing you'll see with an eating disorder. It's not really physical, but it's the mental part that's really important for someone. And you can just see through the way that she speaks."

This sentiment underscores the importance of relatability in strengthening emotional bonds, where influencees seek out mirrored experiences, whether in career struggles, self-improvement journeys, or personal values. The ability of an influencer to articulate shared hardships or triumphs reinforces their perceived authenticity, making them more persuasive and influential.

These findings align with Parasocial Relationship Theory (Hoffner & Bond, 2022), which suggests that influencees perceived to have a connection with influencers due to shared life experiences and consistent engagement. Unlike traditional parasocial interactions, where media figures remain distant and unattainable, social media influencers actively curate content that mirrors the lived experiences of their audience, fostering a heightened sense of intimacy.

The results also build on Identity and Social Influence Theory, which posits that the more an individual relates to another person's experiences, the more likely they are to be influenced by their perspectives and decisions (Kelman, 1958). This theory suggests that influencees are more susceptible to adopting attitudes, behaviours, and purchasing decisions when they feel that the influencer represents their own struggles and aspirations.

Importantly, the findings suggest that resonance is not merely about passive content consumption but about self-reflection and identity reinforcement. Influencees do not simply follow influencers who entertain them; they seek validation, guidance, and reassurance from those whose lives appear to parallel their own. In this sense, resonance functions as a form of social identity reinforcement, where influencees perceive their engagement with influencers as an extension of their own self-concept.

6.2.2 The Distinction Between Inspiration and Aspiration

A particularly significant insight emerging from the data is the distinction between inspiration and aspiration, which has implications for the depth and longevity of influencee-influencer relationships. While both inspiration and aspiration contribute to resonance, they operate on different psychological levels, shaping how influencees engage with content and whether they internalise the influencer's message. Chopra et al. (2021) provide critical insights into how millennials engage with influencers, demonstrating that consumer psychology plays a central role in determining whether an influencee views an influencer as an aspirational figure to admire or an inspirational figure to emulate.

For some influencees, engagement is aspirational, meaning that they admire an influencer's lifestyle, success, or personal achievements, but perceive them as distant or unattainable. This type of resonance is often driven by idealisation, where influencees consume content as a form of escapism rather than as a model for personal growth. One interviewee described this phenomenon, explaining:

"It [his content] feels almost like a look into his life. It doesn't look like it's ever promotional. At least how it comes across, because obviously all of it is promotional, but it comes

across like it's not forced down your throat. It's like, 'Oh, I went on a boat and I DJed with my friends and had a good time.' It's very interesting because it feels like I'm just watching his life unfold."

This statement reflects aspirational resonance, where the influencee is engaged with the influencer's content for its entertainment value or lifestyle appeal, but does not necessarily internalise their perspectives or recommendations. This form of resonance is often transient, as it does not foster the deep trust or emotional investment required for long-term engagement.

By contrast, inspirational resonance is rooted in relatability and personal motivation, where influencees feel encouraged by the influencer's transparency, struggles, and growth. Influencees who engage with an influencer for inspiration rather than mere admiration are more likely to trust their recommendations, adopt their perspectives, and maintain long-term engagement. One interviewee described this distinction, stating:

"It's also nice seeing someone who went from the same space as you into this healthy lifestyle, because, I mean, there are so many people out there that take the wrong direction and kind of act like, 'Oh, I'm doing better,' and I'm doing well, but you can see that they're not. So, it's someone that I can see, you know, they really are doing well."

This illustrates how inspirational resonance fosters a deeper level of trust and engagement, as influencees perceive the influencer's journey as both authentic and attainable. They see the influencer not as an unattainable ideal, but as a source of guidance, reinforcing their own self-development. This statement encapsulates inspirational resonance, where the influencee is motivated by the influencer's journey rather than merely admiring their achievements. Chopra et al. (2021) similarly argue that influencers who position themselves as relatable figures with tangible success stories—rather than unattainable ideals—foster stronger engagement and loyalty among millennial audiences.

These findings contribute to the Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2001, 2013; Jimenez-Marin, Sanz-Marcoz & Tobar-Pesantez, 2021), suggesting that the distinction between inspiration (practical takeaways) and aspiration (idealised admiration) should be further

explored. The model traditionally focuses on emotional bonds between consumers and brands, but this study highlights that influencer resonance extends beyond brand attachment—it is deeply shaped by identity alignment and perceived attainability.

Additionally, the findings build on the Dimensions of Resonance (2.5.2), suggesting an unexplored fourth dimension: relatability-based resonance. Current models classify resonance into cognitive, affective, and behavioural dimensions, but the study indicates that resonance is also driven by the extent to which an influencee sees their own life reflected in the influencer's journey (Festinger, 1957; Keller, 2010). This dimension is particularly important in influencer marketing, where authenticity and relatability significantly impact engagement and trust.

Thus, the study confirms that inspiration leads to deeper, more enduring resonance than aspiration, as it fosters trust, motivation, and internalised behavioural change. Influencees who engage purely on an aspirational level may consume content passively, but those who experience inspirational resonance are more likely to actively integrate the influencer's insights into their own lives, reinforcing long-term engagement.

6.2.3 Conclusion: Overlapping Narratives as a Foundation for Resonance

The findings highlight that influencees do not passively engage with influencer content; rather, they seek out narratives that reflect their own experiences, values, and aspirations. The study reinforces that resonance is strongest when influencees perceive an influencer as a reflection of their own journey, validating their struggles and guiding their aspirations.

By applying Parasocial Relationship Theory and Social Influence Theory, the study suggests that resonance is not simply about admiration but about shared identity and perceived relatability. The findings further contribute to influencer marketing literature by distinguishing inspiration from aspiration, demonstrating that inspiration fosters deeper, trust-based resonance, while aspiration often remains superficial and transient.

These insights are critical for understanding how influencee-influencer relationships evolve, setting the stage for further exploration into the role of authenticity, transparency, and perceived sincerity in sustaining long-term resonance.

6.3 Authenticity in resonance

Sub question 2:

How does authenticity contribute to resonance?

Authenticity remains one of the most significant determinants of resonance between influencees and influencers. The findings illustrate that influencees place a high premium on genuineness, consistency, and transparency, with perceived inauthenticity often leading to disengagement. Authenticity in influencer marketing is not simply about honesty in promotional content, but also about long-term consistency in messaging, values, and interactions. Influencees develop trust in influencers who maintain a coherent brand identity, exhibit sincerity in their endorsements, and engage with their audience in a manner that feels organic rather than performative. Conversely, when influencers are perceived as transactional, opportunistic, or insincere, their ability to foster deep resonance diminishes.

This section explores the role of authenticity in sustaining long-term resonance, as well as the consequences of perceived inauthenticity. The discussion integrates theoretical insights from Social Influence Theory, the Consumer Trust Framework, and Parasocial Relationship Theory, reinforcing how credibility and perceived sincerity influence the strength and longevity of influencee-influencer relationships.

6.3.1 The Impact of Perceived Authenticity

A recurring theme in the findings is that authenticity acts as the foundation for long-term resonance. Influencees trust influencers who remain consistent in their branding, personal values, and interactions, allowing them to maintain an air of credibility. Many interviewees expressed a strong preference for influencers who appear to genuinely believe in the

products or messages they endorse, rather than those who seemingly engage in partnerships for financial gain alone.

One interviewee described this distinction, stating:

"There are influencers who I feel genuinely use the products they endorse, and then there are those who are just clearly doing it for the check. You can always tell when someone really stands behind something—it comes through in how they talk about it, how often they use it, and whether it actually fits with the rest of their content."

This insight aligns with Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), which suggests that influencees internalise messages only when they perceive the source as credible and authentic. Trust is a prerequisite for persuasion and long-term engagement, meaning that influencers who fail to cultivate authenticity are less likely to foster deep resonance.

The findings further reinforce the Consumer Trust Framework, which posits that audiences evaluate influencers based on reliability, expertise, and sincerity (Liu et al., 2018). Influencees develop stronger attachments to influencers who exhibit consistency in their messaging and personal brand. When an influencer authentically integrates endorsements into their existing content in a way that feels natural, influencees are more likely to accept their recommendations.

The study also highlights that influencees actively monitor whether an influencer's partnerships align with their established identity. If an influencer suddenly promotes a product or service that contradicts their usual content, followers often perceive this as a violation of authenticity, leading to diminished trust. This is particularly evident in cases where influencers engage in contradictory endorsements, as illustrated by one interviewee's response:

"If someone one day promotes an organic skincare brand and then next week is talking about how much they love a completely synthetic beauty product, it just makes no sense. It tells me they'll promote anything for the money."

These findings support existing literature on influencer credibility, reinforcing that authenticity is not just about honesty but about consistency and coherence across time. Influencers who stay true to their core brand identity and personal values are more likely to sustain deep, trust-based resonance, while those who appear inconsistent risk alienating their audience.

6.3.2 Perceived inauthenticity and its impact on engagement

While authenticity fosters engagement, perceived inauthenticity often results in active disengagement, scepticism, and reduced resonance. Influencees are acutely aware of performative marketing tactics, staged content, and inconsistent branding, and they adjust their engagement accordingly.

Many participants reported disengaging from influencers who engage in excessive brand collaborations, especially when those endorsements appear misaligned with their usual content. One interviewee shared their frustration with irrelevant sponsorships, stating:

"When someone starts posting ad after ad, it feels like they've lost their original purpose. They're not engaging with their audience anymore—it's just a sales platform now."

This reaction aligns with Consumer Scepticism in Influencer Marketing (2.5.2), which highlights that influencees are not passive consumers but actively assess the credibility of influencers. As the influencer marketing industry has expanded, audiences have developed a heightened awareness of brand partnerships, allowing them to differentiate between genuine endorsements and purely transactional promotions.

Interestingly, some influencees reported continuing to follow influencers they perceive as inauthentic but only for entertainment purposes, not for trust-based engagement. In these cases, the influencer is viewed as a spectacle rather than a credible source of influence. One participant articulated this perspective, explaining:

"I still follow some influencers even though I know they're in it for the money. But I don't take them seriously—I just watch for fun. If they tell me to buy something, I probably won't listen."

This shift in perception reflects Parasocial Breakup Theory, which suggests that when an audience feels an influencer has violated expectations of authenticity, they may psychologically 'break up' with them (Cuddy, 2023). While some influencees choose to completely disengage, others maintain a passive, entertainment-driven connection, where trust in recommendations is lost but casual viewing continues.

6.4 The Evolving Nature of Influencee-Influencer Resonance

The findings confirm that resonance is not a binary concept but exists on a spectrum, evolving over time based on authenticity, personal relevance, and changing audience expectations. Influencees play an active role in selecting, engaging with, and maintaining connections with influencers, adjusting their levels of engagement in response to shifts in content, messaging, and perceived sincerity. Iqbal et al. (2023) argue that influencer-follower relationships can either be long-term or fleeting, depending on the level of resonance established. The research categorises influencer marketing effectiveness, noting that shallow, entertainment-based resonance often leads to transient interactions, whereas deep, identity-driven resonance fosters long-term loyalty and behavioural influence.

The research highlights that authenticity remains non-negotiable, serving as the foundation for deep resonance. Even entertainment-driven engagement is shaped by authenticity, reinforcing the idea that influencees are not merely passive consumers but critical evaluators of influencer credibility. Moreover, the distinction between aspirational and inspirational resonance is significant; while both contribute to engagement, inspirational resonance fosters deeper trust and loyalty, whereas aspirational resonance can remain more superficial and fleeting.

The study builds on Parasocial Relationship Theory, adding a two-way dynamic to influencer resonance. Unlike traditional parasocial interactions, social media audiences actively interpret, assess, and sometimes reject influencer content, making resonance a negotiated process rather than a fixed state. This also expands the Brand Resonance Model, suggesting that resonance is not only emotional but also shaped by personal narratives, trust, and identity alignment.

6.5 Contribution to literature: Typology of levels of resonance

This study reveals that resonance with social media influencers is not a fixed or binary phenomenon but rather a fluid, multi-layered process that varies in depth, emotional engagement, and behavioural impact. Unlike traditional parasocial relationships, where audience members engage in one-directional admiration of media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956), social media platforms allow for dynamic, evolving relationships in which influencees actively negotiate their level of engagement with influencers.

Bringing Together Personal Narratives, Authenticity, and Engagement

By exploring the drivers of resonance (Main Question), the role of personal narratives (Sub-Question 1) and the influence of authenticity (Sub-Question 2), this study highlights that resonance exists on a continuum rather than in discrete categories.

Overlapping personal narratives are critical in shaping resonance, as influencees seek out influencers who reflect their own experiences, values, or aspirations.

Authenticity operates across all levels of resonance, but its significance differs—while deep resonance relies on authenticity for identity validation, in shallow resonance, authenticity enhances entertainment value but is not a prerequisite for engagement.

Influencees can experience multiple forms of resonance simultaneously, contradicting previous assumptions that engagement with influencers is either deeply meaningful or purely superficial. Instead, influencees may engage at different levels depending on context, personal needs, and the evolving nature of the influencer's content.

The results of these findings suggest that influencee resonance is a fluid and layered model of engagement where influencees may engage with influencers on varying levels. This challenges the dominant view in influencer marketing literature, which often conceptualises engagement as either transactional (i.e., product endorsement-driven) or deeply relational (i.e., based on parasocial intimacy).

Introducing Typology as a Conceptual Framework

Typology provides a structured yet non-hierarchical classification system for understanding social phenomena that do not fit into rigid categorical distinctions (Bailey, 1994). Unlike linear models that assume a singular path from weak to strong engagement, typology allows for overlapping, coexisting forms of resonance, accommodating the reality that influencees may interact with influencers in multiple ways at once.

The following typology of resonance integrates emotional connection, engagement type, authenticity's role, behavioural impact, and longevity of engagement into a flexible framework, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how and why influencees develop resonance with influencers.

Table 4: Typology of Resonance

Resonance Type	Emotional Connection	Use & Engagement	Role of Authenticity	Behavioural Impact	Longevity of Engagement
Shallow Resonance	Minimal emotional connection, engagement is passive or entertainment-based	Informational or entertainment-driven — watches for enjoyment, trends, or general inspiration	Present — authenticity enhances enjoyment, but does not drive engagement ²	Low — little to no impact on decision-making or personal identity	Short-term — engagement is transient, influenced by trends or momentary interest
Intermediate Resonance	Moderate connection, inspiration, admiration without deep personal identification	Practical — uses influencer’s recommendations selectively	Important — authenticity enhances credibility, but influencee evaluates content critically	Medium — some changes in lifestyle or behaviour but within a limited scope	Fluctuating — engagement varies depending on relevance to the influencee’s life at the time
Deep Resonance	Strong emotional connection, identity-level influence, aspirational alignment	Transformational — actively integrates lessons, adopts values or perspectives	Critical — authenticity fosters trust, self-validation, and perceived alignment with personal values	High — Influencee may make life-altering decisions based on influencer’s guidance (e.g., career, self-perception, lifestyle)	Sustained — engagement remains strong over time, adapting as the influencee evolves

² Does not include instances where influencees perceive the influencer as ‘inauthentic’.

The typology of resonance developed in this study provides a structured yet flexible framework for understanding how influencees engage with social media influencers at different levels. By categorising engagement into shallow, intermediate, and deep resonance, this study challenges the dominant binary view of audience engagement in influencer marketing literature and instead proposes a multi-layered, evolving process of resonance.

This framework not only refines theoretical perspectives on digital influence but also has practical implications for influencers, marketers, and brands. The findings suggest that engagement is not a linear progression; influencees may engage at multiple levels simultaneously, influenced by personal needs, content type, and authenticity perceptions. Moreover, the role of overlapping personal narratives and authenticity in shaping resonance highlights the active role of influencees in curating their engagement, rather than passively adopting influencer messaging.

By integrating insights from parasocial relationship theory, social influence theory, and branding research, this study offers a new way to conceptualise influencer engagement, moving beyond the assumption that influencees are either passive followers or deeply connected audience members. Instead, it positions resonance as a spectrum of engagement that shifts and adapts over time.

The next chapter will conclude this research by summarising key findings, discussing broader implications, and outlining future directions for research on influencee-influencer relationships in digital spaces.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

Chapter One introduced the phenomenon of resonance between influencees and social media influencers, highlighting its growing significance in the digital marketing and consumer engagement landscape. Given the increasing reliance on social media as a platform for brand-building and consumer influence, the study set out to examine how resonance manifests, what drives deep engagement, and how influencees interpret and experience connections with influencers. This research aimed to fill the gap in existing literature by exploring the concept of levels of resonance, extending theories of parasocial relationships and brand resonance into the digital influencer space.

With this in mind, the study sought to address the overarching research question:

What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?

To achieve this, the research investigated the key psychological and social drivers of deep resonance, the role of shared experiences in reinforcing influencee-influencer connections, and the impact of authenticity, transparency, and sincerity on sustaining long-term engagement.

The study was qualitative in nature, relying on narrative inquiry to uncover the lived experiences of influencees and how they make sense of their relationships with influencers. Through in-depth interviews, the research identified a spectrum of resonance, ranging from superficial, entertainment-driven engagement to deep, identity-driven resonance. This spectrum was shaped by influencees' personal narratives, perceptions of authenticity, and the level of emotional investment they placed in an influencer.

A key contribution of this research is the development of a multi-dimensional understanding of resonance, extending Keller's Brand Resonance Model to include the influencee - influencer dynamic. While Keller's model primarily conceptualises brand-consumer relationships, this study argues that influencer brands function similarly to traditional consumer brands, with influencees forming connections based on trust, identification, and

perceived authenticity. The findings suggest that deep resonance is achieved when influencees perceive an influencer as an extension of their own self-identity, reinforcing the notion that influencers are not merely content creators but symbols of personal validation, aspiration, and guidance.

The primary objectives of this research were:

- To examine the key psychological and social drivers that lead influencees to develop deep engagement with certain influencers.
- To develop a deeper understanding of how influencees experience and interpret resonance with social media influencers.
- To investigate how shared life experiences, values, and aspirations shape the depth of resonance.
- To explore how authenticity contributes to the sustainability of influencee-influencer relationships.

Each of these objectives was successfully met, offering a nuanced and theoretically informed understanding of influencer resonance. Furthermore, this research has introduced the concept of levels of resonance, expanding upon traditional theories of parasocial relationships and social influence to argue that resonance is not a binary construct but an evolving and influencee-driven process.

7.1 Key Findings and Contributions to Theory

The study provides empirical evidence that influencee - influencer relationships follow a trajectory similar to consumer-brand relationships, with Keller's Brand Resonance Model (Keller, 2001) serving as a useful framework for understanding varying levels of audience engagement. The research highlights that influencees do not merely consume content passively but actively construct meaning and affiliation based on how closely an influencer's narrative aligns with their own lived experiences and aspirations. Authenticity and perceived sincerity emerge as pivotal drivers of deep resonance, reinforcing existing literature on the role of credibility in social influence (Kelman, 1958).

A key contribution of this study is the refinement of resonance as a construct. While Keller's model identifies brand resonance as the pinnacle of consumer-brand relationships, this study extends the model by demonstrating that resonance with influencers is not only about emotional attachment but also about self-identity reinforcement. The study proposes a Spectrum of Resonance, distinguishing between superficial, interest-based, and deep identity-driven engagement, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of how influencees engage with influencers over time.

7.1.1 Types of resonance

The findings reveal that influencee-influencer relationships exist on a spectrum of resonance, ranging from shallow to deep connections. Influencees engage with influencers for various purposes, including entertainment, aesthetic inspiration, practical advice, and emotional validation. However, the depth of this engagement is shaped by how personally relevant and authentic the influencer appears to the influencee.

For some, influencers serve as casual entertainment figures, while for others, influencers become trusted digital figures whose experiences mirror their own. This finding aligns with Parasocial Relationship Theory (Hoffner & Bond, 2022), which explains how audiences form one-sided but emotionally significant attachments to media figures. However, in the context of social media, these relationships are no longer entirely one-directional—influencees actively engage through likes, comments, and direct interactions, which reinforces the perceived authenticity and relevance of the influencer.

The study also finds that influencees experience resonance in ways similar to brand-consumer relationships (Keller, 1993). Just as consumers develop emotional bonds with brands that reflect their identity, influencees resonate most deeply with influencers whose content aligns with their values, experiences, and aspirations. This expands Keller's Brand Resonance Model, highlighting that influencer resonance is not purely emotional or aspirational but deeply intertwined with identity reinforcement.

The findings of the study led to the formation of a typology of resonance [table 4], which categorises influencee-influencer relationships based on the depth of engagement, emotional investment, and the perceived authenticity of the influencer. This typology challenges traditional influencer marketing models that often treat engagement as a binary concept—either engaged or disengaged—by demonstrating that resonance exists on a fluid spectrum rather than a static state.

The typology identifies three primary levels of resonance: shallow, intermediate, and deep. Shallow resonance is characterised by entertainment-driven engagement, where influencees consume content passively for enjoyment, aesthetic inspiration, or general interest without significant emotional attachment. Intermediate resonance reflects more purposeful engagement, where influencees actively seek out content for guidance, practical advice, or aspirational motivation, but without fully integrating the influencer’s values into their identity. Deep resonance represents the strongest form of engagement, where influencees internalise the influencer’s perspectives, values, and experiences as part of their own identity, often forming a sense of trust and long-term loyalty.

By introducing this typology, the study provides a new conceptual framework for understanding influencer engagement, challenging simplistic models that equate high follower counts with influence. Instead, it highlights that resonance is a dynamic, evolving process, shaped by context, personal narratives, and the credibility of the influencer. The following section presents the detailed typology of resonance, outlining the characteristics, behavioural outcomes, and implications of each level.

7.1.2 What are the drivers that lead influencees to develop resonance with social media influencers?

The study identifies three primary drivers that shape influencee resonance with social media influencers: emotional and aspirational connection, active influencee participation, and narrative consistency and trust. These drivers explain why some influencees develop deep, identity-driven resonance, while others engage at a more superficial level.

Emotional and Aspirational Connection: Influencees resonate most with influencers who share relatable personal struggles, growth narratives, and authentic life experiences. When influencees see their own challenges, aspirations, or transformations reflected in an influencer's content, the connection is strengthened, fostering a sense of identification and trust. This supports Social Influence Theory (Kelman, 1958), which posits that individuals are more likely to internalise messages from sources they relate to and trust. Deep resonance is particularly evident when an influencer's story validates or inspires the influencee's own self-concept, making them more receptive to the influencer's values, perspectives, and recommendations.

Active Influencee Participation: Contrary to traditional models of passive media consumption, influencees actively curate their social media experience, choosing which influencers to follow or disengage from based on perceived authenticity, consistency, and relevance. This aligns with the Consumer Empowerment Framework (Labrecque et al., 2013), which highlights that digital audiences are selective and strategic in their engagement with online content. Influencees consciously seek out influencers who align with their evolving identities and personal aspirations, demonstrating that resonance is not static but dynamic, shaped by influencees' changing interests and values over time.

Narrative Consistency and Trust: Long-term engagement with influencers depends on the consistency of their storytelling, endorsements, and personal brand identity. Influencees build resonance over time when influencers maintain coherence in their messaging, values, and self-presentation. Sudden shifts in content style, excessive sponsorships, or perceived inauthentic endorsements can break this resonance, leading to disengagement. This reinforces Keller's Brand Resonance Model (1993), as consistency in branding—whether for corporate brands or personal influencer brands—is crucial for fostering trust-based, long-term engagement.

These findings suggest that trust is essential for deep resonance, yet highly fragile. The moment an influencer is perceived as disingenuous or inconsistent, their ability to sustain influence is significantly weakened. Even for influencees who engage with influencers

primarily for entertainment, perceived authenticity still affects the level of influence and the longevity of engagement

7.1.3 How do overlapping personal narratives affect how influencees experience resonance with social media influencers?

The findings confirm that shared life experiences, values, and aspirations are fundamental in shaping resonance depth. Influencees are more likely to trust, engage with, and remain loyal to influencers who mirror aspects of their own identity. The study distinguishes between two forms of narrative-driven resonance: aspirational and inspirational resonance.

Aspirational Resonance: Influencees admire an influencer's lifestyle, success, or persona, but do not perceive them as fully relatable or attainable. This results in short-term engagement, where influencees consume content for entertainment, inspiration, or aesthetic appeal, but do not internalise the influencer's values or behaviours. Aspirational resonance is common in fashion, luxury lifestyle, and celebrity-driven influencer marketing, where influencees may admire an influencer's achievements without seeing themselves reflected in their content.

Inspirational Resonance: Influencees feel a personal connection with the influencer's journey, struggles, or transformations, seeing them as a source of validation, guidance, and motivation. Unlike aspirational resonance, which remains surface-level, inspirational resonance fosters long-term engagement, as influencees identify with the influencer's narrative and values. This aligns with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1979), which suggests that individuals seek out and engage with figures who reinforce their self-concept and belonging to social groups.

Narrative-Driven Identity Reinforcement: The study also finds that resonance functions as a form of identity reinforcement. Influencees actively seek influencers who reflect their personal aspirations, struggles, or cultural backgrounds, using their engagement to validate aspects of their own self-identity. This reinforces existing research on self-categorisation in digital

environments (Turner, 1987) and highlights that resonance is not just about admiration but about constructing a sense of self through online interactions.

These findings demonstrate that resonance is not solely a product of influencer marketing tactics but deeply embedded in influencee psychology. The more an influencer's narrative aligns with an influencee's lived experiences or aspirations, the more meaningful the connection becomes, leading to deeper resonance and sustained engagement.

7.1.4 How does authenticity contribute to resonance?

Authenticity is a non-negotiable factor in fostering deep resonance. Influencees consistently expressed trust and emotional investment in influencers who demonstrated honesty, transparency, and consistency in their content. Conversely, perceived inauthenticity—such as excessive sponsorships, conflicting brand endorsements, or staged content—led to immediate disengagement.

Perceived Authenticity Leads to Deep Engagement: Influencees trust influencers who share unfiltered, real-life moments, openly discuss their struggles, and maintain genuine engagement with their audience. This trust fosters long-term loyalty, similar to how consumers develop brand trust through transparent and consistent marketing. This aligns with Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), which suggests that audience perceptions of trustworthiness and expertise directly influence persuasion effectiveness.

Perceived Inauthenticity Causes Disengagement: Influencees actively withdraw from influencers who appear transactional, performative, or inconsistent in their messaging. When an influencer is perceived as prioritising monetary gain over authenticity, influencees disengage. This supports Parasocial Breakup Theory (Cuddy, 2023), which suggests that audiences 'break up' with influencers when they fail to meet authenticity expectations. The study finds that resonance loss is often irreversible—once trust is broken, influencees rarely re-engage with the influencer in a meaningful way.

Expanding the Role of Authenticity in Influencer Branding: These findings extend upon the suggestions of Keller's Brand Resonance Model (1993; 2001; 2013) by demonstrating

that self-branded influencers must maintain authenticity to retain influencee engagement. Unlike traditional corporate branding, where credibility is built through products and services, influencer branding relies heavily on personality, relatability, and perceived sincerity.

This study highlights that authenticity plays a role across all levels of resonance; In shallow resonance, authenticity enhances entertainment value but is not critical for engagement. In intermediate resonance, authenticity is important for credibility and trust but does not necessarily lead to deep identification. In deep resonance, authenticity is foundational, it serves as identity reinforcement and the primary driver of long-term loyalty.

These insights confirm that authenticity is central to the sustainability of influencer-follower relationships. Without it, even highly engaging influencers struggle to maintain meaningful resonance over time.

7.2 Contributions to Theory and Practice

The contributions of the research include developing a Typology of Resonance [table 4] which introduces a structured framework that categorises resonance into shallow, intermediate, and deep levels, providing a nuanced understanding of how and why influencees engage with social media influencers at varying depths. The research further contributed to the literature by expanding the concept of Resonance, demonstrating that resonance is not a binary state (engaged vs. disengaged) but rather a fluid, multi-dimensional process, shaped by emotional investment, authenticity, and identity reinforcement. Further, by refining and applying Keller's Brand Resonance Model; extending consumer-brand relationship theories to influencer engagement by illustrating that authenticity, consistency, and alignment with personal identity drive long-term resonance, much like traditional brand loyalty.

Bridging Parasocial Relationship Theory with Active Audience Engagement – Challenging the traditional assumption that parasocial relationships are one-directional and passive by showing that influencees actively curate their relationships with influencers, selectively engaging based on perceived authenticity and relevance.

7.3 Practical Implications

This study builds upon and extends Keller's Brand Resonance Model by demonstrating that resonance in influencer marketing operates similarly to brand-consumer relationships. However, unlike traditional consumer-brand dynamics, the influencee-influencer relationship is interactive and co-created, rather than unidirectional. Influencees are not just passive consumers; they actively select, curate, and adjust their engagement based on authenticity and perceived alignment with their identity.

The findings of this study have significant implications for both theoretical frameworks and practical applications in the fields of marketing, influencer strategy, and digital engagement. In marketing, brands and advertisers increasingly rely on influencers to drive consumer behaviour, yet the dynamics of influencee-influencer relationships remain underexplored in existing models of brand engagement and consumer loyalty. This study applies Keller's Brand Resonance Model by demonstrating that influencer resonance follows a similar trajectory to traditional consumer-brand relationships, where trust, authenticity, and identity alignment are key to fostering long-term engagement. The introduction of levels of resonance (shallow, moderate, deep) refines the model further, offering a more nuanced understanding of influencer marketing effectiveness and the factors that drive brand loyalty through influencers.

Practically, this research provides actionable insights for brands, influencers, and digital marketing strategists. The findings highlight that deep resonance—driven by authenticity, consistent branding, and shared personal narratives—is essential for long-term influencee engagement and trust. This challenges the current transactional approach in influencer marketing, where high-frequency sponsorships and inauthentic brand partnerships can erode credibility. Instead, brands and influencers must focus on building trust-based relationships with their audience, prioritising genuine storytelling, transparency, and value-driven content.

For the social media industry, platforms can leverage these insights to optimise content algorithms and influencer discovery tools, promoting authentic and deeply engaging content over purely viral or aspirational material. The study also raises questions about the evolving role of AI-driven influencers and virtual brand ambassadors, suggesting that future marketing strategies must balance automation with human-centric authenticity to maintain resonance.

Ultimately, this study provides a conceptual foundation for marketing practitioners to develop more effective influencer-brand collaborations, ensuring that resonance-driven engagement is prioritised over fleeting visibility. By bridging theories of brand resonance, parasocial relationships, and consumer identity, this research contributes to the advancement of social media marketing strategies, helping brands cultivate genuine, long-term relationships with their digital audiences.

7.4 Limitations

Despite the valuable insights provided by this research, certain limitations must be acknowledged. These limitations stem primarily from the nature of qualitative research, time constraints, potential researcher bias, and ethical considerations. While steps were taken to mitigate these limitations, they inevitably influenced the scope and interpretation of the findings.

7.4.1 Researcher's Bias

Qualitative research inherently involves the researcher as an instrument in the data collection and interpretation process. While steps were taken to minimise bias—such as reflexivity, triangulation, and maintaining a structured coding framework—there remains an inherent subjectivity in the way narratives were analysed and interpreted. The researcher's own experiences, perspectives, and pre-existing knowledge may have influenced the way data was coded and thematically grouped. While this is a recognised limitation in qualitative inquiry, future studies could employ multiple researchers or an independent auditor to

enhance reliability and ensure that the analysis remains as objective as possible (Kohler et al., 2022).

7.4.2 Time Limitations

The study was conducted within a constrained time frame, which limited the number of participants that could be interviewed and the depth of longitudinal engagement with respondents. A more extended research period could have allowed for additional rounds of interviews, member checking, and a deeper iterative process of thematic analysis. Moreover, the cross-sectional nature of the study means that findings represent a snapshot in time rather than a longitudinal evolution of influencee -influencer relationships. Future research could employ a longitudinal approach, tracking participants over an extended period to better understand how resonance develops, changes, or weakens over time.

7.4.3 Ethical Considerations

While all necessary ethical protocols were followed—including informed consent, anonymity, and data protection—ethical concerns remain a potential limitation. Some participants may have moderated their responses due to social desirability bias, particularly when discussing their relationships with influencers. Additionally, given the subjective nature of personal narratives, there is always the risk that interviewees' recollections were shaped by cognitive biases or external influences, which may impact the accuracy of self-reported experiences. Future research could complement qualitative interviews with digital ethnography or observational data to further validate participants' self-reported resonance with influencers.

7.4.4 Generalisability and Transferability

Due to the qualitative nature of the research, the findings are not generalisable to all social media users. Instead, they offer contextual insights into a specific group of South African influencees within the chosen age and demographic criteria. While this research provides a deep, nuanced understanding of resonance in influencer marketing, it does not claim

statistical representativeness. Future studies could incorporate mixed-method approaches, combining qualitative depth with quantitative breadth, to provide a more comprehensive analysis of how resonance operates across different social media contexts.

7.5 Future Research Directions

The study opens avenues for further exploration into how resonance evolves over time and how authenticity influences long-term engagement.

Table 5: Future research directions

Future research Directions: possible avenues of exploration	
1	Understanding the nature of the connection between influencee and influencer when there is no resonance present. Looking at followership in which there is antiresonance.
2	Extending the research to other populations and other types of influencers.
3	The evolving nature of authenticity in influencer marketing—How do audience expectations of authenticity shift in response to changing trends, platform dynamics, or influencer growth?
4	The consequences of level of resonance for brand sponsorships and paid partnerships.
5	The role of influencee and influencer fit what level of resonance is required to determine brand outcomes, brand loyalty and brand performance.
6	Longitudinal studies on how resonance changes over time—Does resonance strengthen or weaken as influencees follow an influencer for extended periods?
7	Further distinction between aspirational vs. inspirational resonance—What are the long-term effects of these different engagement styles on consumer behaviour?

Aw & Agnihotri (2024) provide a comprehensive review of the current landscape of influencer marketing, highlighting key research gaps that align with the findings of this study. They propose that future research should focus on refining the conceptualisation of resonance, particularly in light of AI-generated influencers and evolving authenticity metrics in digital spaces. This study's findings reinforce their argument, as authenticity emerged as a primary determinant of deep resonance—a factor that becomes increasingly complex as AI-generated influencers enter the market. While AI influencers may offer scalability and consistency, they lack the human elements of personal struggle, relatability, and shared experiences, which this study has found to be central to deep influencee-influencer connections.

As social media continues to shape consumer behaviour, understanding the evolving nature of influencee-influencer relationships will be crucial for brands, influencers, and researchers alike. The findings reinforce that resonance is deeply rooted in authenticity, trust, and perceived sincerity, suggesting that influencers who prioritise genuine connections over purely transactional engagements are more likely to sustain meaningful, long-term influence.

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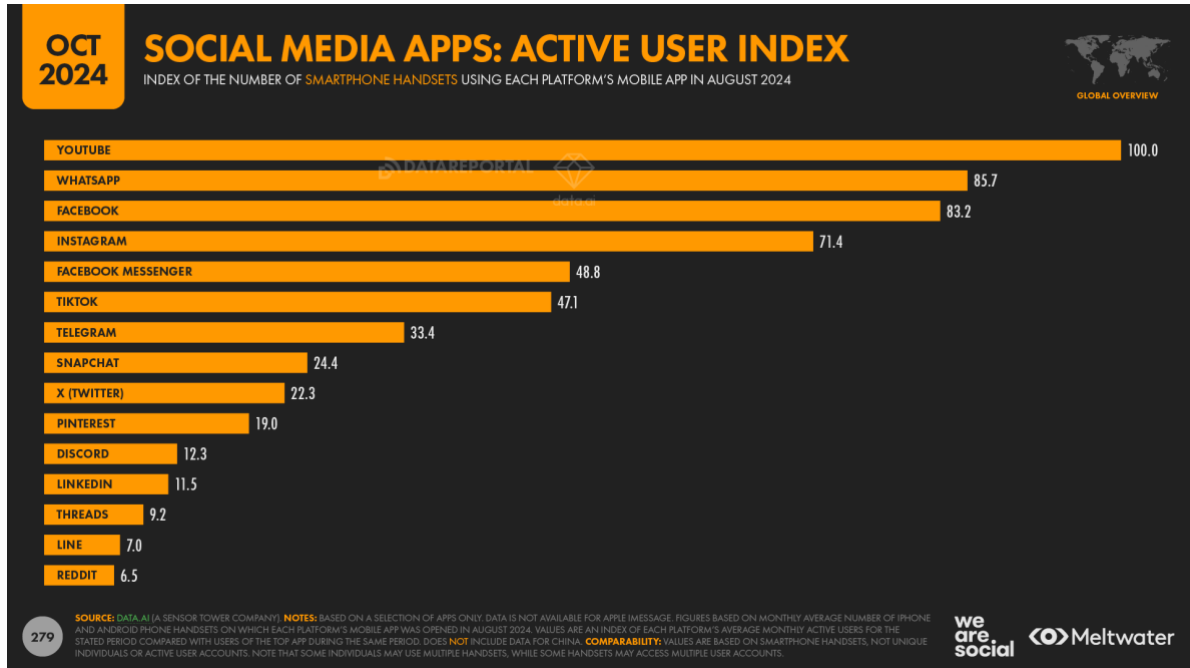
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Appendices

Appendix 1: Statistics of social media usage



Appendix 1: image showing the worldwide statistics of top ranked social media platforms by active usership (datareportal, 2024)

Appendix 2: Example of consent form

Informed Consent:

My name is Loren Kramer, I am currently a student at the University of Pretoria's Gordon Institute of Business Science and completing my research in partial fulfilment of an MBA. I am conducting research on social media parasocial relationships and how resonance between consumers and creators is affected through various ways. Our interview is expected to last about 30 minutes and will help us understand how resonance between these parties affects consumers (influencees), their decision making and their interactions with social media influencers. Your participation is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without penalty. All data will be reported without identifiers. If you have any concerns, please contact my supervisor or me. Our details are provided below.

Researcher name: Loren Kramer Research Supervisor Name: Professor Nicola Kleyn

Email: 23040158@mygibs.co.za

Email: Kleynn@gibs.co.za

Phone: +27 79 517 3397.


Phone: +1 460 570 8388

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix 3: Ethical Clearance

GIBS

Masters Research  10 Oct 2024

to me, Masters 

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

**Ethical Clearance
Approved**

Dear Loren Kramer,

Please be advised that your application for Ethical Clearance has been approved.

You are therefore allowed to continue collecting your data.

We wish you everything of the best for the rest of the project.

[Ethical Clearance Form](#)

Kind Regards

This email has been sent from an unmonitored email account. If you have any comments or concerns, please contact the GIBS Research Admin team.

**Gordon Institute
of Business Science**
University of Pretoria

Appendix 4: Interview Guide:

Hello, thank you for agreeing to participate in my research. I am doing research as part of my MBA degree at GIBS university, and I am exploring individuals' experiences and perceptions following social media influencers. Influencers, for the sake of the interview, are defined as a person who posts content on social media for the sake of engaging with followers and creating an online identity.

All of your responses will be kept **confidential** with your identity remaining undisclosed in any records. Do you consent to the interview and being recorded for research purposes? This interview should take approximately 45 minutes.

Part 1: Finding the Influencer (use for one or two creators)

- Can you please tell me about an influencer you follow?
- Probe: what platforms do you follow them on? How long have you followed them?
- Can you tell me about who they are, their life, their story?
- Probe: Do you follow multiple influencers? If so, with which one do you feel the most connection?
- Probe: which platforms do you use to follow influencers?
- Probe: with which of these influencers do you feel the most connection?

Part 2: Unpacking the resonance

- What type of content that they post do you relate to the most?
- Probe: what aspects of the influencer's life draw you in?
- Probe: what do you associate with this influencer in terms of content?
- How does their content make you feel? Did it alter your behaviour?
- Have you made any real-life changes based off of something posted by the influencer?
- If the influencer changed the main theme of their content would you continue to follow them? And why?
- Do you actively seek out their content when you log into social media or do you only view it passively/ or when it shows on your feed?

- What about their content makes you stay a loyal follower? Do you enjoy their content for the reasons stated earlier or do you enjoy the personality and style of the influencer?

Part 3: Relating back to their life

- If spoken about multiple: What are you getting from influencer A compared to influencer B and vice versa, and do you find that there is commonality between the influencers you follow?
- Probe: do you see synchronicities between your life and theirs'?
- Probe: How does the influencer's lifestyle or values align with your own?
- Do you feel that your own identity is reflected in the influencers you follow?
- Please can you tell me a bit about yourself and briefly explain your background such as your age, occupation and where you come from?
- How often do you use social media, and which platforms are your most used.

Appendix 5: Full List of Code

Aesthetics	Authenticity Influence:	Authenticity Influence:
Aesthetics: Aesthetic	Enhancement	Trust Building
Aesthetics: Authenticity	Authenticity Influence:	Authenticity Influence:
Importance	Genuine	Trustworthiness
Aesthetics: Design	Authenticity Influence:	Authenticity Influence:
Aesthetics	Genuine Content	Trustworthy
Aesthetics: Fashion	Authenticity Influence:	Authenticity Influence:
Sense	Genuine Interests	Vulnerability
Aesthetics: Interesting	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour and
Fashion	Hobbies	Aesthetics
Aesthetics: Lack of	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour and
Influence	Humour	Aesthetics: Altered
Aesthetics: Perception of	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour
Authenticity	Influence	Behaviour and
Aesthetics: Platform	Authenticity Influence:	Aesthetics: Artistic
Differentiation	Lack of Authenticity	Preference
Aesthetics: Trend	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour and
Recognition	Perceived Authenticity	Aesthetics: Distinct
Authenticity Influence	Authenticity Influence:	Aesthetic Style
Authenticity Influence:	Perceived Sincerity	Behaviour and
Aspirational	Authenticity Influence:	Aesthetics: Lifestyle
Authenticity Influence:	Promotion	Differences
Authentic Content	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour and
Authenticity Influence:	Recognition	Aesthetics: Similarities in
Authenticity	Authenticity Influence:	Social Life
Authenticity Influence:	Relatability	Behaviour and
Authenticity Concerns	Authenticity Influence:	Aesthetics: Specific
Authenticity Influence:	Resonance	Brands
Connection	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour and
Authenticity Influence:	Resonance Connection	Aesthetics: Workplace
Consistency	Authenticity Influence:	Behaviour Change
Authenticity Influence:	Resonance Interpretation	Belief alignment
Content	Authenticity Influence:	Belief alignment:
Authenticity Influence:	Sincerity	Alignment of Views
Contrast	Authenticity Influence:	Belief alignment:
Authenticity Influence:	Scepticism	Alignment with Beliefs
Credibility	Authenticity Influence:	Belief alignment:
Authenticity Influence:	Transparency	Avoidance of Conflict
Emotional Connection	Authenticity Influence:	Belief alignment:
	Trust	Challenging Perspectives

Belief alignment:	Brand Representation:	Connection: Deep
Changing Beliefs	Beauty and Fashion	Connection
Belief alignment: Fair	Brand Representation:	Connection: Depth of
Reasoning	Brand Representation	Connection
Belief alignment: Fear of	Brand Representation:	Connection: Desire for
Disagreement	Campaign Alignment	Connection
Belief alignment:	Brand Representation:	Connection: Emotional
Platform Deletion	Personal Brand Values	Bond
Belief alignment: Shared	Brand Representation:	Connection: Engagement
Ideas	Pinterest	with Topics
Brand development	Brand Representation:	Connection: Family Life
Brand development:	Platform Preference	Connection: Friendship
Algorithm Curated	Commonalities	Connection
Brand development:	Commonalities:	Connection: Genuine
Brand Establishment	Manifestation	Connection
Brand development:	Commonalities: Physical	Connection: Humor
Brand Messaging	Resemblance	Connection
Brand development:	Commonalities: Shared	Connection: Influence
Change in Interest	Human Experiences	Connection
Brand development:	Commonalities: Similar	Connection: Inspirational
Content Exposure	Experiences	Message
Brand development:	Commonalities:	Connection: Lifestyle
Interests Alignment	Similarities in Age	Identification
Brand development: Paid	Connection	Connection: Lifestyle
Content Impact	Connection: Academic	Similarities
Brand development:	Reasons	Connection: Meaningful
Product Creation	Connection: Age	Connection
Brand development:	Proximity	Connection: Overcoming
Trendsetting	Connection: Alignment of	Obstacles
Brand image	Values	Connection: Perceived
Brand image: Brand	Connection: Bond	Sincerity
Association	Connection:	Connection: Personal
Brand image: Leading	Commonality	Issue
Reputation	Connection: Connection	Connection: Personal
Brand image: Proof of	Depth	Narrative Connection
Success	Connection: Connection	Connection: Personal
Brand image: Role Model	Shape	narratives shaping
Brand Representation	Connection: Content	connection
Brand Representation:	Connection	Connection: Personal
Age Relevance	Connection: Current	Relevance
Brand Representation:	Events	Connection: Range and
Algorithm Influence		Depth

Connection: Resonance
 Connection
 Connection: Selective
 Consumption
 Connection: Similarities
 in Experiences
 Connection: Similarity
 Connection
 Connection: Uplifting
 Consistency
 Consistency: Applicability
 Consistency: Consistent
 Message
 Consistency: Multi-
 Platform Engagement
 Content analysis
 Content analysis:
 Content Interpretation
 Content analysis: Interest
 Discovery
 Content analysis: News
 Connection
 Content analysis:
 Personal Triggers
 Content analysis:
 Relatable Experiences
 Content analysis:
 Sensitive Topics
 Content analysis: Social
 Media Preferences
 Content Engagement
 Content Engagement:
 Aspirational Experiences
 Content Engagement:
 Authenticity Connection
 Content Engagement:
 Breaking Biases
 Content Engagement:
 Content Enjoyment
 Content Engagement:
 Credibility Enhancement

Content Engagement:
 Duration of following
 Content Engagement:
 Educational Content
 Content Engagement:
 Educational Content
 Engagement
 Content Engagement:
 Experience Creation
 Content Engagement:
 Experiential Sharing
 Content Engagement:
 Lack of Transparency
 Content Engagement:
 Positive Content
 Content Engagement:
 Relatability Deepening
 Content Engagement:
 Sharing on Social Media
 Content Engagement:
 Storytelling Connection
 Content Preference
 Content Preference:
 Academic Purposes
 Content Preference:
 Content Preference
 Content Preference:
 Content Preference:
 Entertainment Focus
 Content Preference:
 Everyday Life
 Content Preference:
 Genuine Content
 Content Preference:
 Holiday Destinations
 Content Preference:
 Increased Content
 Content Preference:
 Verifiable Trail
 Content Preference:
 Verified Content
 Daily content

Daily content: Avoidance
 of Content
 Daily content: Common
 Ground
 Daily content: Consistent
 Content
 Daily content: Day-to-
 Day Activities
 Daily content: Outfit
 Inspiration
 Daily content: Source of
 News
 Everyday applications
 Everyday applications:
 Daily Life
 Everyday applications:
 Practical
 Implementations
 Financial Literacy
 Financial Literacy: Age
 Range
 Financial Literacy:
 Aspirational Content
 Financial Literacy:
 Content Learning
 Financial Literacy:
 Financial Literacy
 Financial Literacy:
 Financial Literacy
 Education
 Financial Literacy:
 Genuine Interest
 Financial Literacy:
 Incorporation into
 Existing Life
 Financial Literacy:
 Influencer Connection
 Financial Literacy:
 Inspiring Content
 Financial Literacy:
 Intellectual Value

Financial Literacy: Long-term connection
 Financial Literacy: Personal Longing
 Financial Literacy: Personal Narratives Influence
 Financial Literacy: Real-life Decisions
 Financial Literacy: Value in Content Impact
 Impact: Avoidance of negativity
 Impact: Connection Shaping
 Impact: Lack of resonance
 Impact: No Specific Influencer
 Impact: Resonance Drivers
 Influencer narratives
 Influencer narratives: Authentic Growth
 Influencer narratives: Content Differences
 Influencer narratives: Depth of Content
 Influencer narratives: Influencer Comparison
 Influencer narratives: Influencer Content
 Influencer narratives: Influencers
 Influencer narratives: International Influences
 Influencer narratives: Overlapping Personal Narratives
 Influencer narratives: Personal Narratives

Influencer narratives: Wide Variety of Viewers
 Interpersonal Connections
 Interpersonal Connections: Cautious Sharing
 Interpersonal Connections: Lack of Synchronicities
 Interpersonal Connections: Liking
 Interpersonal Connections: Non-commercial
 Interpersonal Connections: Shared Hobbies
 Lifestyle
 Lifestyle admiration
 Lifestyle admiration: Alignment with Hobbies
 Lifestyle admiration: Connection Influence
 Lifestyle admiration: Exciting Activities
 Lifestyle admiration: Influence on Connection
 Lifestyle admiration: Interest in Influencer's Life
 Lifestyle admiration: Laid Back Living
 Lifestyle admiration: Lifestyle admiration
 Lifestyle admiration: Limited Social Media Engagement
 Lifestyle admiration: Long-term Following
 Lifestyle admiration: No 9 to 5 Job

Lifestyle admiration: Online Following
 Lifestyle admiration: Surfing Lifestyle
 Lifestyle admiration: Vicarious Living
 Lifestyle Content
 Lifestyle Content: Beauty Content Association
 Lifestyle Content: Entertainment Value
 Lifestyle Content: Fashion Content Association
 Lifestyle Content: Humble Outlook
 Lifestyle Content: Interest in Lives
 Lifestyle Content: Interesting Perspective
 Lifestyle Content: Interior Design Interest
 Lifestyle Content: Intriguing
 Lifestyle Content: Liking Personality
 Lifestyle Content: Luxury Fashion
 Lifestyle Content: Makeup Brands
 Lifestyle Content: Personal Background Information
 Lifestyle Content: Product Recommendations
 Lifestyle Content: Real-life Aspects
 Lifestyle Content: Relatable Aspects
 Lifestyle Content: Relatable Lifestyle

Lifestyle Content: Social Lives
 Lifestyle Content: Unique Design
 Lifestyle Content: Unique Design Sense
 Lifestyle: Adventurous Lifestyle
 Lifestyle: Daily Routine
 Lifestyle: Influence of Travel
 Lifestyle: Introductory Question
 Lifestyle: Lifestyle Aspiration
 Lifestyle: Lifestyle Inspiration
 Lifestyle: Lifestyle Reflection
 Lifestyle: Personal Narrative
 Lifestyle: Sense of Community
 Lifestyle: Travel Aspiration
 Marketing strategies
 Marketing strategies: Aspirational Achievements
 Marketing strategies: Behind-the-Scenes Processes
 Marketing strategies: Paid Promotional Posts
 Marketing strategies: Scale Success
 Narrative analysis
 Narrative analysis: Choice of Platforms
 Narrative analysis: Ethical Principles

Narrative analysis: Experience Interpretation
 Narrative analysis: Inconsistencies
 Narrative analysis: Logical Consistency
 Narrative analysis: Multifaceted Identity
 Narrative analysis: Overlapping Narratives
 Narrative analysis: Practical Information
 Narrative analysis: Shared Narratives
 Narrative analysis: Shared Understanding
 Narrative analysis: Shared Values
 Narrative analysis: Values Alignment
 Personal interests
 Personal interests: Compartmentalization
 Personal interests: DIY Interests
 Personal interests: DIY Pages
 Personal interests: History Enjoyment
 Personal interests: Human Rights Activist
 Personal interests: Informative Content
 Personal interests: Lack of Personal Resonance
 Personal interests: Life Experiences
 Personal interests: LinkedIn Influencer Connection
 Personal interests: New Journey Exploration

Personal interests: Personal Friendship
 Personal interests: Personal Relationship Impact
 Personal interests: Physical Activities
 Personal interests: Richard Spoor
 Personal interests: Shared Personal Narratives
 Personal interests: Specific Activities
 Personal interests: Sports Interest
 Platform Usage
 Platform Usage: Activity Influence
 Platform Usage: Platform Usage
 Practical Inspiration
 Practical Inspiration: Diverse Usage
 Practical Inspiration: Influence by Example
 Practical Inspiration: Influence on Resonance
 Practical Inspiration: Not Instructional
 Practical Inspiration: Practical Ideas
 Practical Inspiration: Tips Included
 Practical Inspiration: Varied Usage
 Relationship Building
 Relationship Building: Connection Deepening
 Relationship Building: Duration of Following

Relationship Building: Evolving Content	Resonance Drivers: Charisma	Resonance Drivers: Deeper Connection
Relationship Building: Genuine Connections	Resonance Drivers: Comfort	Resonance Drivers: Depth
Relationship Building: Genuine Relationships	Resonance Drivers: Commonality	Resonance Drivers: Design
Relationship Building: Relationship Creation	Resonance Drivers: Community-building	Resonance Drivers: Determination
Resonance Resonance Drivers	Resonance Drivers: Connection	Resonance Drivers: Directness
Resonance Drivers: Acceptance	Resonance Drivers: Connection Depth	Resonance Drivers: Diversification
Resonance Drivers: Access	Resonance Drivers: Consistency	Resonance Drivers: Educational
Resonance Drivers: Activities	Resonance Drivers: Content	Resonance Drivers: Emulation
Resonance Drivers: Admiration	Resonance Drivers: Content Alignment	Resonance Drivers: Energy
Resonance Drivers: Advice	Resonance Drivers: Content Consumption	Resonance Drivers: Engagement
Resonance Drivers: Age	Resonance Drivers: Content Creation	Resonance Drivers: Enjoyment
Resonance Drivers: Alignment	Resonance Drivers: Content Engagement	Resonance Drivers: Entertaining
Resonance Drivers: Aspiration	Resonance Drivers: Content Impact	Resonance Drivers: Entertainment
Resonance Drivers: Aspirations	Resonance Drivers: Content Interaction	Resonance Drivers: Entertainment Focus
Resonance Drivers: Attractive	Resonance Drivers: Content Quality	Resonance Drivers: Experiences
Resonance Drivers: Audience Engagement	Resonance Drivers: Content Type	Resonance Drivers: Family
Resonance Drivers: Authenticity	Resonance Drivers: Contentment	Resonance Drivers: Family Life
Resonance Drivers: Authenticity Perception	Resonance Drivers: Contrast	Resonance Drivers: Fashion
Resonance Drivers: Background	Resonance Drivers: Cooking	Resonance Drivers: Followers
Resonance Drivers: Body Image	Resonance Drivers: Curiosity	Resonance Drivers: Frequent Use
Resonance Drivers: Building Community	Resonance Drivers: Deep Resonance	Resonance Drivers: Friends

Resonance Drivers:
Friendship Connection
Resonance Drivers:
Friendships
Resonance Drivers:
Fulfillment
Resonance Drivers:
Gender
Resonance Drivers:
Hobbies
Resonance Drivers:
Humor
Resonance Drivers:
Ideas
Resonance Drivers:
Identity
Resonance Drivers:
Imitation
Resonance Drivers:
Improvement
Resonance Drivers:
Influence
Resonance Drivers:
Influencers
Resonance Drivers:
Information Sharing
Resonance Drivers:
Inspiration
Resonance Drivers:
Instagram
Resonance Drivers:
Interaction
Resonance Drivers:
Interaction Style
Resonance Drivers:
Interactions
Resonance Drivers:
Interest
Resonance Drivers:
Interest Alignment
Resonance Drivers:
Interest Sparked

Resonance Drivers:
Interests
Resonance Drivers:
Kindness
Resonance Drivers:
Knowledge
Resonance Drivers: Lack
of Authenticity
Resonance Drivers:
Lifestyle
Resonance Drivers:
Lifestyle Choices
Resonance Drivers:
Lifestyle Influence
Resonance Drivers:
Lifestyle Similarities
Resonance Drivers:
Location
Resonance Drivers:
Luxury Content
Resonance Drivers:
Modernization
Resonance Drivers:
Motivation
Resonance Drivers:
Nuance
Resonance Drivers:
Obesity
Resonance Drivers:
Overcoming Challenges
Resonance Drivers:
Persistence
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Brand
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Connection
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Experiences
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Growth
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Interest

Resonance Drivers:
Personal Interests
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Journey
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Life
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Narratives
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Preferences
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Stories
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Taste
Resonance Drivers:
Personal Values
Resonance Drivers:
Personality
Resonance Drivers:
Personality Traits
Resonance Drivers:
Physical Appearance
Resonance Drivers:
Platform Choice
Resonance Drivers:
Platforms
Resonance Drivers:
Popularity
Resonance Drivers:
Positivity
Resonance Drivers:
Possibility
Resonance Drivers:
Practical Advice
Resonance Drivers:
Preference
Resonance Drivers:
Problem-solving
Resonance Drivers:
Professionalism
Resonance Drivers:
Progression

Resonance Drivers:
Promotion
Resonance Drivers:
Realness
Resonance Drivers:
Recognition
Resonance Drivers:
Relatability
Resonance Drivers:
Relatable
Resonance Drivers:
Relatable Content
Resonance Drivers:
Relationships
Resonance Drivers:
Relevance
Resonance Drivers:
Research
Resonance Drivers:
Resonance
Resonance Drivers:
Resonance Connection
Resonance Drivers:
Resonance Development
Resonance Drivers:
Resonance Drivers
Resonance Drivers:
Resonance Shape
Resonance Drivers: Role
Model
Resonance Drivers: Self-
Acceptance
Resonance Drivers: Self-
improvement
Resonance Drivers: Self-
taught
Resonance Drivers: Self-
worth
Resonance Drivers:
Shared Experience
Resonance Drivers:
Shared Experiences

Resonance Drivers:
Shared Interests
Resonance Drivers:
Shared Life Experiences
Resonance Drivers:
Shared Values
Resonance Drivers:
Similarity Connection
Resonance Drivers:
Sincerity
Resonance Drivers:
Social Media
Resonance Drivers:
Social Media Platforms
Resonance Drivers:
Stand Out
Resonance Drivers:
Storytelling
Resonance Drivers: Style
Influence
Resonance Drivers:
Success
Resonance Drivers:
Support
Resonance Drivers:
Synchronization
Resonance Drivers:
Talent
Resonance Drivers:
Theoretical Concepts
Resonance Drivers:
Toxicity
Resonance Drivers:
Transformation
Resonance Drivers:
Transparency
Resonance Drivers:
Trust
Resonance Drivers:
Twitter
Resonance Drivers:
Understanding

Resonance Drivers:
Unique Approach
Resonance Drivers:
Unique Characteristics
Resonance Drivers:
Unique Content
Resonance Drivers:
Validation
Resonance Drivers:
Values
Resonance Drivers:
Values Alignment
Resonance Interpretation
Resonance
Interpretation: Addition to
World
Resonance
Interpretation: Admiration
Resonance
Interpretation: Advice
Seeking
Resonance
Interpretation: Age
Difference
Resonance
Interpretation:
Agreement
Resonance
Interpretation: Alignment
Resonance
Interpretation: Appeal
Resonance
Interpretation: Appealing
Resonance
Interpretation: Aspiration
Resonance
Interpretation:
Aspirations
Resonance
Interpretation: Authentic
Connection

Resonance
Interpretation:
Authenticity
Resonance
Interpretation:
Authenticity Perception
Resonance
Interpretation: Avoidance
Resonance
Interpretation: Behaviour
Change
Resonance
Interpretation: Brand
Association
Resonance
Interpretation: Care
Resonance
Interpretation: Comfort
Resonance
Interpretation:
Commonalities
Resonance
Interpretation:
Community
Resonance
Interpretation:
Comparison
Resonance
Interpretation:
Connection
Resonance
Interpretation:
Connection Building
Resonance
Interpretation:
Connection Influence
Resonance
Interpretation:
Connection Strength
Resonance
Interpretation:
Consistency

Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Alignment
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Association
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Consumption
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Creation
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Creator
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Curation
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Focus
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Impact
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Preference
Resonance
Interpretation: Content
Resonance
Interpretation: Control
Resonance
Interpretation: Curiosity
Resonance
Interpretation: Decision
Making
Resonance
Interpretation: Dedication

Resonance
Interpretation: Deep
Connection
Resonance
Interpretation: Design
Elements
Resonance
Interpretation:
Disagreement
Resonance
Interpretation:
Disconnection
Resonance
Interpretation: Duration
Resonance
Interpretation: Effort
Resonance
Interpretation: Emotional
Attachment
Resonance
Interpretation: Emotional
Bond
Resonance
Interpretation: Emotional
Connection
Resonance
Interpretation: Empathy
Resonance
Interpretation:
Engagement
Resonance
Interpretation: Engaging
Content
Resonance
Interpretation: Enjoyment
Resonance
Interpretation:
Entertainment
Resonance
Interpretation: Evolution

Resonance
Interpretation: Excitement
Resonance
Interpretation: Experience
Resonance
Interpretation: Experience Interpretation
Resonance
Interpretation: Experiences
Resonance
Interpretation: Familiarity
Resonance
Interpretation: Family Dynamics
Resonance
Interpretation: Family Life
Resonance
Interpretation: Fulfillment
Resonance
Interpretation: Genuine Content
Resonance
Interpretation: Guidance
Resonance
Interpretation: Happiness
Resonance
Interpretation: Hobbies
Resonance
Interpretation: Hopefulness
Resonance
Interpretation: Humor
Resonance
Interpretation: Identity
Reflection
Resonance
Interpretation: Idolization
Resonance
Interpretation: Impact

Resonance
Interpretation: Influence
Resonance
Interpretation: Influencers
Resonance
Interpretation: Inspiration
Resonance
Interpretation: Inspirational
Resonance
Interpretation: Interesting
Resonance
Interpretation: Interpretation
Resonance
Interpretation: Intuition
Resonance
Interpretation: Lack of
Resonance
Resonance
Interpretation: Learning Opportunities
Resonance
Interpretation: Lifestyle
Resonance
Interpretation: Lifestyle Aspiration
Resonance
Interpretation: Logic
Resonance
Interpretation: Long-term connection
Resonance
Interpretation: Misalignment
Resonance
Interpretation: Motivating
Resonance
Interpretation: Motivation

Resonance
Interpretation: Overlapping Narratives
Resonance
Interpretation: Perception
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Beliefs
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Connection
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Connections
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Development
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Experiences
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Growth
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Identity
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Interests
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Narratives
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal narratives shaping connection
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Preferences
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal Reflection

Resonance
Interpretation: Personal
Reflections
Resonance
Interpretation: Personal
Touch
Resonance
Interpretation:
Personality
Resonance
Interpretation:
Personality Influence
Resonance
Interpretation: Platform
Preference
Resonance
Interpretation: Positive
change
Resonance
Interpretation: Practicality
Resonance
Interpretation: Realism
Resonance
Interpretation:
Reassurance
Resonance
Interpretation:
Recommendations
Resonance
Interpretation: Reflection
Resonance
Interpretation:
Reinforcement
Resonance
Interpretation:
Relatability
Resonance
Interpretation: Relatable
Resonance
Interpretation: Relatable
Content

Resonance
Interpretation: Relevance
Resonance
Interpretation:
Resonance
Resonance
Interpretation: Respect
Resonance
Interpretation: Self-
improvement
Resonance
Interpretation: Self-
Reflection
Resonance
Interpretation: Shared
Experiences
Resonance
Interpretation: Shared
Interests
Resonance
Interpretation: Shared
Understanding
Resonance
Interpretation: Shared
Values
Resonance
Interpretation: Similarity
Resonance
Interpretation: Simplicity
Resonance
Interpretation: Skepticism
Resonance
Interpretation: Social
Media Platforms
Resonance
Interpretation:
Storytelling
Resonance
Interpretation: Style
Influence

Resonance
Interpretation:
Subscription
Resonance
Interpretation:
Synchronicity
Resonance
Interpretation: Teaching
Resonance
Interpretation:
Transparency
Resonance
Interpretation: Trust
Resonance
Interpretation: Trust
Building
Resonance
Interpretation:
Understanding
Resonance
Interpretation: Unique
Perspective
Resonance
Interpretation:
Usefulness
Resonance
Interpretation: Value in
Content
Resonance
Interpretation: Values
Resonance
Interpretation: Values
Alignment
Resonance
Interpretation: Work-Life
Balance
Resonance: Activity
Connection
Resonance: Connection
Stability
Resonance: Connection
Strength

Resonance: Contribution to Resonance	Self-discovery: Enjoying Personalities	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Deep Resonance	Self-discovery: Journey Aspect	Impact: Bond
Resonance: Depth of Resonance	Self-discovery: Personal Alignment	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Forward-Thinking	Self-improvement	Impact: Comfort
Resonance: Irritation	Self-improvement: Apple	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Lack of Resonance	Self-improvement: Aspirational Qualities	Impact: Common Ground
Resonance: Location Mismatch	Self-improvement: Facebook	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Meaningful Bond	Self-improvement: Personal Changes	Impact: Community Connection
Resonance: Music Influence	Self-improvement: Podcast Channels	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Not Deep Resonance	Self-improvement: Podcast Connection	Impact: Connection
Resonance: Resonance Absence	Self-improvement: Professional Interest	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Resonance Deepening	Self-improvement: Regular Listening	Impact: Connection Formation
Resonance: Resonance Development	Self-improvement: Seeking Content	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Resonance Experience	Self-improvement: Self-image upgrade	Impact: Content Selection
Resonance: Resonance Interpretation	Self-improvement: Self-Improvement Interest	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Resonance Perception	Self-improvement: Self-Love	Impact: Credit Analyst
Resonance: Resonance Shape	Self-improvement: Self-worth promotion	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Shared Experiences Resonance	Shared experiences	Impact: Deep Resonance
Resonance: Shift in Resonance	Shared Experiences	Shared Experiences
Resonance: Sustained Interest	Impact: Alignment of Values	Impact: Depth of Resonance
Resonance: Values Resonance	Shared Experiences	Shared Experiences
Self-discovery	Impact: Aspirations	Impact: Entertainment Focus
	Shared Experiences	Shared Experiences
	Impact: Biases	Impact: Perception Influence
		Shared Experiences
		Impact: Perceptions
		Shared Experiences
		Impact: Personal Connection

Shared Experiences
 Impact: Personal Growth
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Personal Values
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Platform
 Preference
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Promotion
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Reflection
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Relatability
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Relevance
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Resonance
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: School
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Shared
 Experience
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Shared
 Experiences
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Shared Interest
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Shared Interests
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Shared Values
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Success Stories
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Supportive
 Relationships
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Understanding
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Uniqueness
 Shared Experiences
 Impact: Values

Shared experiences:
 Connection through
 shared experiences
 Shared experiences:
 Content Resonance
 Shared experiences:
 Curated Archive
 Shared experiences:
 Interest in Life
 Shared experiences:
 Lifestyle Similarity
 Shared experiences:
 Narrative Influence
 Shared experiences: No
 Shared Experiences
 Shared experiences:
 Shared Aspects
 Shared experiences:
 Shared Desires
 Shared experiences:
 Shared Life Experiences
 Shared experiences:
 Shared Sense of Humor
 Shared experiences:
 Synchronicities
 Social media
 Social media: Alignment
 with Job
 Social media:
 Inauthenticity
 Social media: Influencer
 Impact
 Social media: No
 Behaviour Change
 Social media: Personal
 Experiences Influence
 Social media: Relating
 Lifestyles
 Social media: Tik Tok
 Values Alignment
 Values Alignment:
 Aspirational Disconnect

Values Alignment:
 Community Values
 Values Alignment: Desire
 for Exploration
 Values Alignment: Desire
 for similar life
 Values Alignment:
 Genuine Interests
 Values Alignment:
 Individuals Not Priority
 Values Alignment:
 Interest Matching
 Values Alignment: Lack
 of Career Value
 Values Alignment: Lack
 of Emotional Attachment
 Values Alignment: Long-
 term Interest
 Values Alignment:
 Perceived Authenticity