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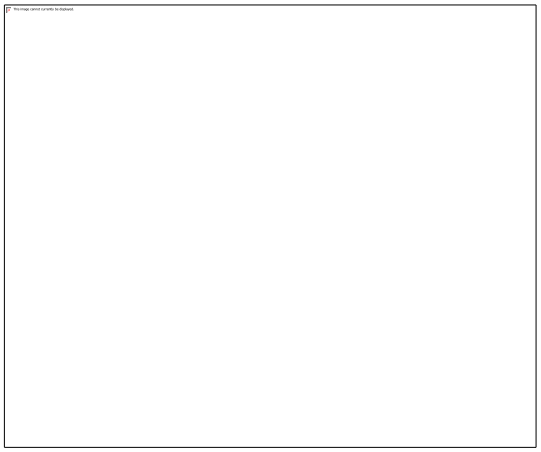

DISSERTATION RESEARCH PROJECT

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCER CONTENT ORIGINALITY, QUALITY, QUANTITY, AND HUMOR ON BRAND PREFERENCE AND E-WOM IN THE FASHION INDUSTRY

BY

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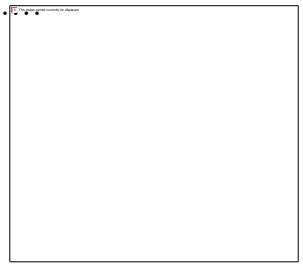
Student Signature… Date…09/09/26……

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DEDICATION

I would like to thank the Almighty for His grace throughout. To my parents, I appreciate you for planting the first seeds of curiosity in me. I dedicate this dissertation to my mentors and friends for watering them with love, patience and belief. And to my future children- may you one day read these pages and know that every late night, every doubt and every small victory was done with hope that you would grow believing your dreams are worth chasing. This work is dedicated to my family I have been blessed with whose unwavering support and encouragement have been instrumental in my academic journey and to the family I pray to nurture with that same love and support.

ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of factors that include originality, quality, quantity, and humor in the content created by social media influencers on brand preference and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) within the fashion sector. As fashion brands increasingly partner with influencers on social media, it is essential to identify which content features most effectively influence consumer attitudes and behavior. The objective of this research was to assess how these content characteristics impact brand preference and generate positive e-WOM among consumers. Employing a quantitative causal research approach, data were collected through a structured questionnaire distributed to consumers who follow fashion influencers on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Through convenience sampling, a total of 252 valid responses were obtained, resulting in a sample achievement rate of 65.6 given the target sample size derived from Sunders table was 384. Existing measurement scales were adapted to gauge influencer content attributes, brand preference, and e-WOM. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS and AMOS, involving reliability testing, factor analysis, validity checks, and hypothesis testing. The results indicated that social media influencer content originality and humor are strong drivers of brand preference in influencer marketing as well as that brand preference lead to positive electronic word-of-mouth. However, social media influencer content quality and quantity alone do not significantly influence such behaviour. The results also conclude that fashion brands can improve consumer preference and encourage positive online recommendations by collaborating with influencers who produce original, and humorous content. It is recommended that fashion marketers focus on authenticity and creativity in influencer content, and use humor to strengthen consumer connections and foster positive e-WOM. Future studies could examine these dynamics in other industries as well.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The emergence of social media has significantly changed how brands engage with consumers. Marketing strategies have shifted from traditional techniques to more interactive, personalized methods, with social media influencers (SMIs) becoming vital opinion leaders in this digital era. Such content providers are essential in linking brands with consumers on media channels such as Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, promoting products and promoting brands perceptions. The research objective is to examine the impact of content attributes (originality, quality, quantity, and humour) of social media influencers on brand preference and e-WOM in fashion and ultimately brand will be capable of raising customer loyalty in electronic environment.

1.1 Background of the Study

A prominent marketing tool in contemporary market has been found to be social media influencers due to their capability of producing realistic and reliable content. Their effectiveness can be attributed to their perceived credibility, attractiveness, and the trust they establish with their audience (Freberg, Graham and McGaughey, 2011). As consumers become more sceptical of traditional advertising, influencer marketing offers a more personalized and trustworthy alternative (Casaló, Belanche, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2021). Since the COVID-19 pandemic, social media has been playing a bigger part in marketing strategies, especially the fashion industry (Maurya and Singh, 2024). As far as celebrities of social media, like these ones-which include bloggers, vloggers, and also on social networks like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube-are concerned, they reach wider audiences than brands and thereby exert customer influence, leading them to consumption decisions. Campbell and Farrell (2020) said that fashion brands have been cooperating with marketing influencers so as to produce content for stimulating the consumers' aspiring lives, in accordance with those they aim at.

In the case study "Influencer marketing on TikTok: The Effectiveness of humor and followers hedonic experience" by Barta, Belanche, Fernandez and Flavian (2023), the figures given proved that TikTok is the fastest expanding social network in post-pandemic times, better than other social networks such as Instagram, WhatsApp and Facebook, which are utilized in social media influencer marketing. The statistics revealed that in 2020 (in the midst of covid 19 pandemic), 36% of U.S. Marketers use TikTok in order to carry out influencer marketing, and in 2021 this figure rose to 42% (eMarketer, 2022). Despite the prosperity enjoyed by the social media influencer marketing; nevertheless, the response by the followers to influencer market, has remained to be analysed.



Figure 1: Top 8 social media downloaded apps 2020 and 2021, in millions.

Nevertheless, not all influencer content yields beneficial marketing outcomes. Studies have shown that content characteristics and quality significantly impact consumer behaviour. Originality refers to the influencer's creativity and authenticity (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017), while quality relates to the content's professionalism and aesthetic appeal. Whereas the frequency of post impacts on engagement, the quality and humor will improve on the consumers' emotional bonding and also makes the content memorable (Yuan and Lou, 2020). The fast paced and highly visual fashion industry requires that an influencer be influential to consumers and have an impact on online opinions and hence, online word-of-mouth (E-WOM), however, little or no study has explored how these attributes impact on brand preference and E-WOM, particularly in developing regions like Zimbabwe and the African continent as a whole. This fact is the genesis of the current study.

1.2 Problem statement

The application of influencer marketing is widespread, but it poses a challenge for brands to be able to ascertain which attributes of an influencer's post lead to higher engagement, improved brand preference and more positive E-WOM. Rather than focusing on an influencer's followers, many marketers often end up spending a lot of money on influencers and content that does not receive the desired outcome. It remains unknown as to how the content attributes, namely, originality, quality, quantity and humor interact to affect brand preference and E-WOM both from a theoretical and a practical point of view, and that is what this study aims to find out.

1.3 Purpose of study

The purpose of the study is to examine how several attributes of a social media influencer's content (originality, quality, quantity and humour) influences consumers' brand preference and Electronic word-of-mouth (E-WOM) in the fashion sector.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The research intends to accomplish the following specific goals:

1. To assess how content originality affects brand preference.
2. To examine the correlation between content quality and brand preference
3. To assess the impact of influencer content quantity on brand preference.

4. To analyse the effect of humor in influencer content on brand preference.
5. To examine the relationship between brand preference and the valence of e-WOM.

1.5 Statement of hypotheses

H_1: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content originality and brand preference.

H_2: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quality and brand preference.

H_3: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quantity and brand preference.

H_4: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content humor and brand preference.

H_5: There is a positive relationship between brand preference and e-WOM.

1.6 Significance of the study

The successful completion of this study is anticipated to provide significant benefits for a number of stakeholders in the fashion industry. The following are a few of the major parties that the research project under consideration is likely to benefit.

1.6.1 To the Researcher

The study's findings will enhance the researcher's comprehension of digital consumer behaviour and the trends in influencer marketing. The findings will help the researcher in knowing whether social media content attributes play a part in customers' brand preferences and electronic word of mouth. In doing research studies, the researcher will develop more expertise, which will be extremely beneficial in future investigations.

1.6.2 To Bindura University of Science Education

The purpose of this study is to add to the literature of marketing communication and set up the background of future studies about influencer marketing and digital branding.

1.6.3 To Marketers in the Fashion Industry

The results will support fashion brands in establishing effective influencer collaborations with social media fashion influencers by identifying content characteristics that improve brand preference and encourage positive E-WOM, ultimately bolstering brand equity and increasing sales.

1.7 Assumptions

- The respondents are fully aware of what fashion influencers are and actively follow fashion influencers
- The sample is a true reflection of the total population meaning questionnaires will be returned once they have been fully completed and information given is accurate.
- Regardless of any unexpected results or patterns that may be discovered along the way, the data will be interpreted accurately and objectively

1.8 Delimitations

In the current study only four attributes (originality, quality, quantity and humor) of social media content were included in exploring the impact on brand preference and e-WoM within fashion sector. Another limitation is online questionnaire survey via Google forms was used, and delivered through social media websites. So respondents who have internet access were selected and included in the study. The current study was confined to fashion industry, hence generalizability to other industries may be constrained.

1.9 Limitations

Limitation of this study is utilizing self-reported questionnaires may introduce bias since the answers from participants may not accurately represent their true behaviours or attitudes towards social media influencers and brand choices. In addition, the use of online data collection excluding individuals without internet access or those not active on social medial platforms also potentially affect the diversity of the sample.

1.10 Definition of terms

Social Media Influencer (SMI). An influential individual within a specific sector who affects buying choices via social media. Lou and Yuan (2019) note that social media influencers play a vital role in shaping how consumers think and behave.

Content Originality: This refers to the distinctiveness, creativity, and genuineness of an influencer's posts (Kim and Kim, 2021). Unique content allows influencers to differentiate themselves and cultivate their personal brand, boosting audience engagement.

Content Quality: This encompasses the technical and visual aspects of influencer posts, such as clarity and overall production value (Casaló, Belanche, Flavian and Sanchez, 2021). High-quality content enhances the image of both the influencer and the brand, increasing audience interaction.

Content Quantity: The total volume of content generated by an influencer over time (Lee and Kim, 2020). Consistent posting can help influencers sustain audience interest and engagement.

Humor: The use of comedic or playful elements in influencer content to attract viewers (Rathore and Ahmed, 2021). Humor can enhance the appreciation of advertisements and engagement, making content more relatable and likely to be shared.

Brand Preference: It is defined as consumer's tendency to favour a specific brand based on perceived value and satisfaction (Kotler and Keller, 2016). Influencers can sway brand preference through their endorsements and reviews of products.

E-WOM (Electronic Word of Mouth): The digital exchange of opinions about brands or products among consumers (Hudders, Lou and Brabandere, 2021). E-WOM can have a significant influence on consumers' attitudes and buying behaviours.

1.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the research, emphasizing the increasing relevance of social media influencers in shaping consumer behaviours and perceptions. It presented the problem statement, defined objectives, and proposed hypotheses focused on examining how content attributes affect consumer responses such as brand preference and E-WOM. The next chapter will explore existing theoretical and empirical literature related to the study.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses both the theoretical and empirical works considering certain characteristics of social media influencer content, such as originality, quantity, quality, and humor, on brand preference and e-WOM in fashion. The chapter contains five sub sections, namely, review of theoretical variables, literature review, empirical data review, research gaps review and chapter summary.

2.1Theoretical Review

2.1.1 Social media influencer

Social media influencer-An individual recognized for their presence on social media and whose following in terms of how many trust their advice and purchase intent towards a given product or service they share on social media is relevant (Freberg, Graham and McGaughey, 2011). As De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) described social media influencers are often called content creators, combining non-branded and branded posts, in which their contents contribute to consumers' perceptions with the help of parasocial interaction. Influencers like Madam Boss have worked with clothing brands promoting brands, showcasing outfits, styling tips and reviewing products in the fashion marketing context. The followers are found to trust the influencers more than other famous celebrities because influencers appear to be more trustworthy and a post from such kind of influencer, with regard to his/her personal life and wearing brands, might contribute significantly to shaping consumers' choices on the brands that can be bought in the local market.

2.1.2 Content originality

Content originality implies an influencer's capacity for innovative, authentic and independent ideas and creation of new work which is not copied from elsewhere and the role played by originality to create innovation and creativities (Srivastava, 2021). Originality enhances brand preference by promoting brand authenticity and strengthens consumer affective and trust-based relationships with brands. In the fashion marketing context, an influencer who produce authentic look books, styling video or narrative-driven content rather than re-creating what the brands provided as an image exhibit higher level of originality.

2.1.3 Content quality

Content quality encompasses the subjective assessment of influencer content in terms of its excellence, informativeness, clarity and visual appeal (Lou and Yuan, 2019). High-quality content involves professional visuals, detailed content presentation, thorough information, high professionalization and quality production. Filieri, McLeay and Tsui (2018) stated that high-quality content significantly reduce information gaps of customers and increase perceived usefulness, as fashion influencers post content of good quality that provides accurate product information and visually stunning details. Fashion influencers' posts with professional visuals, specific sizing, detailed product reviews and high-quality production of YouTube videos are examples of high-quality content in fashion context; for example, quality assessment and preference of the fashion brands may be boosted by the review of fabrics, size or how the clothes can be styled on different types of figure when the fashion influencers upload high-quality fashion reviews.

2.1.4 Content quantity

Content quantity is concerned with the frequency of postings made by social media influencer during a particular period of time (Schivinski, Christodoulides and Dabrowski, 2016) measuring how often consumers are exposed to the brands. The higher frequency of content made may contribute to the brand visibility but too much of posting could result in the audience exhaustion or overload (Voorveld, van Noort, Muntinga and Bronner, 2018). The fashion influencers who update content at a rate of three to five times a week may keep the brand within the minds of the consumers however; over posting of advertising might be undesirable resulting in negative consequences toward the brand preference.

2.1.5 Humor

Humor content refers to the use of funny or comical messages or presentations by social media influencers in order to make their audiences laughing, happy or feel pleasant (Srivastava, 2021). Humor can be incorporated in the advertisement because it has the ability to attract more consumer attention and brand recall (Srivastava, 2021) also be easily shared on social media due to the positive feelings associated to it. Humoristic posts made by fashion influencers might consist of comedy skits, memes or comical fashion disaster (such as Wardrobe malfunction) and these types of content can make users actively involved in responding the influencer and this may lead to a favorable association with the brand.

2.1.6 Brand preference

The brand preference indicates to the consumer likelihood of choosing one brand than another due to his or her knowledge, satisfaction or experience about a brand. (Hu and Shi, 2020). Brand preference developed from consistent and positive experiences with the brand or due to its communication persuasiveness; it indicates that consumer tends to prefer one brand over other brands (e.g. Zara). In this context, a brand preference may refer to an influential consumer who consistently selects clothing of specific brand like Zara because he/she has strong association toward the brand due to his/her repeated experience with this fashion brand.

2.1.7 Electronic word of mouth

Electronic word of mouth can be defined as sharing of recommendations, opinions and comments about particular brands or products in electronic form through different channels such as social media platforms, blogs or other websites (Ismagilova, Slade, Rana & Dwivedi, 2020). Due to perceived authenticity and trustworthiness, e-WOM play an important role for consumers in their decision-making process. Consumers may share what they have observed from influencers and contribute comments, reviews and opinions about a certain brand (e.g. Fashion brand review on Instagram or TikTok); for example, when an influencer promote certain clothing item and it get good reviews from his/her followers on the platform.

2.2Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Social media influencer content originality on brand preference

The parasocial interaction theory was established by Horton and Wohl in 1956, explaining the one-sided relationships followers may develop toward the characters of media (like social media influencers). The creators stated that parasocial interaction happens when followers perceived the figures in media as "intimate conversational partners," although without the mutual intimacy involved. The theory can be applied to influencer marketing because the influencers, by showing their private lifestyle and personal anecdotes in social media content, may appear to be close friends with their followers, despite the non-existence of a genuine interaction between them. Repeatedly exposed to the influencer's content over time, followers become very familiar with the influencer; and through this sense of familiarity, they may have formed a connection with the influencer and therefore gain high levels of trust toward him or her. By enhancing the influencer-consumer bond and the feeling of connectedness, parasocial interaction helps to strengthen the persuasive power of the influencer's messages over his or her followers' attitudes toward promoted brands (Giles, 2002). Followers who develop parasocial relationship with a social media influencer will tend to trust what the influencer says about a certain brand and will be more likely to hold positive brand attitudes and exhibit brand preference (Labrecque, 2014). For example, Instagram, TikTok and YouTube use features like liked, comment and story updates which give the impression that interaction between influencer and follower is mutually established despite its fundamental limit; hence leading to an increase in the parasocial intimacy between them.

2.2.2 Social media influencer content quality and brand preference

The Algorithmic Persuasion Theory of Social Media Influence is a modern framework emerging from research on algorithmic media and computational communication. (Tufekci 2020). It centres on how social media platforms utilize algorithms to prioritize, promote and recommend content to users. The theory outlines two interconnected persuasion mechanisms which are content-driven engagement signals and algorithm amplification systems. Content-driven engagement signals include quantifiable interactions like shares, comments, likes, watch duration and saves. Higher quality influencer content is more likely to generate increased engagement in these areas. Moreover, Algorithmic amplification systems is a mechanism where social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube tend to promote content that performs well through engagement metrics, thereby enhancing visibility via recommendation algorithms and discovery features. Within this framework, the quality of influencer content is crucial for achieving algorithmic success. Engaging and well-crafted

content is more likely to be amplified, resulting in wider audience reach and repeated interactions. Current research in digital marketing supports that algorithmic amplification enhances persuasive effectiveness by increasing visibility and exposure opportunities. (Riedl and Smarandache, 2021). Therefore, high quality influencer content elicits stronger engagement signals, rewarded by algorithms with increased visibility. This enhanced exposure fosters familiarity with both the influencer and the brands they endorse, improving cognitive recognition and emotional connections. Long-term cumulative exposure of content quality yields positive evaluations towards the brand and further develops brand preference.

2.2.3 Number of social media influencer contents on brand preference

The Social Influence Heuristic Theory in Influencer Marketing incorporates concepts of social influence, such as social roof, credibility signals and identity driven persuasion. As observed by Lim, Kumar and Jagani (2023), in a social media setting, users tend to use mental shortcuts, also called heuristic, instead of extensive analysis to evaluate influencer content. In other words, people resort to mental shortcuts like number of posts, number of likes, number of followers or even comments to assess the popularity or trustworthiness of influencers or brands. Within this theory, quantity of content serve as one of the influential heuristic criteria. Frequent posts imply popularity, expertise and trust worthiness (Hendra, Hendratni, Istiqomah, Putrianti, Mundzir and Bait, 2025).Higher posting frequency enables audiences to perceive both the influencers and the brands they promote as credible and widely accepted. This leads to the conclusion that an increase in content quantity enhances heuristics assessments, improving perceived credibility and ultimately fostering increased brand preference.

2.2.4 Social media influencer content humor on brand preference.

Construal Level Theory by Trope and Liberman (2010), examines how psychological distance influences mental processing. When this distance is minimized, individuals interpret information more concretely and engage on a deeper emotional level. Wang and Pavelko (2024) further developed this concept to social media, showing that humor minimizes psychological distance between consumers and branded messages. Humor creates a conversional tone that enhances relatability. As psychological distance decreases, emotional engagement and processing fluency increase, resulting in more favourable brand perceptions (Lee and Watkins, 2020). Thus, humor reduces psychological distance, fosters emotional engagement and promotes brand preference.

2.2.5 Brand preference on electronic word-of- mouth

The Social Media Engagement Theory posits that engagement is a multifaceted psychological state that includes cognitive connections, emotional connections, and behavioural connections with a brand, shaped by digital interactions (Brodie, Hollebeek, Jurić and Ilić, 2011). On social media platforms, this type of engagement plays a crucial role in fostering electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM), where consumers openly discuss their opinions, experiences, and recommendations regarding a brand.

In this scenario, brand preference strengthens consumer engagement by reflecting a favourable evaluation and consistent loyalty to a brand. Consumers are more likely to forge deeper emotional ties, enhance their cognitive engagement, and increase their interactions with that brand on social media (Hollebeek, Glynn & Brodie, 2014). This increased participation makes it more likely that consumers will engage in eWOM activities such as reviewing, sharing, and recommending. Thus, the Social Media Engagement Theory supports the idea that brand preference positively influences eWOM, as highly engaged consumers are more inclined to share and advocate for positive brand experiences in online communities (van Doorn, Lemon, Mittal, Nass, Pick, Pirner and Verhoef, 2010).

2.3 Empirical evidence and hypothesis development

2.3.1 H1: Social media influencer content originality and brand preference

Originality in content is crucial for the success of social media influencers and influences consumers' brand choices. In a study conducted by Bhardwaj, Kumar, Gupta, Baber and Venkatesh (2024) indicated that social influencers directly affect consumer behaviour related to brands they endorse. The researchers emphasized the significance of authenticity and originality in content, stating that these traits can enhance brand preference and increase the likelihood of consumers buying promoted items. Research done by Barta, Belanche, Fernández and Flavián (2023) discovered that unique and creative posts from influencers significantly enhance followers' desire to engage with them and follow their advice, particularly on TikTok. The authors carried out a survey of followers of a well-liked Spanish TikTok influencer. They reached the conclusion that "Originality of influencers' social media content matters significantly as it has a positive influence on followers' intentions of following their social media accounts and their advice". Followers find original content from

influencers to be a more immersive and pleasant experience, which is known as a hedonic effect. Because of this hedonic experience, they tend to believe in and see the influencers as role models, making followers more accepting to their suggestions, and giving them a tendency to prefer the brands mentioned in the content. It is also believed that original posts make the content feel more authentic and unique in nature, not similar to what can be copied easily by others and the creation of a similar concept by different accounts. This in turn builds more trust toward the influencers, and consumers become more agreeable to what they want to suggest to them (Bastrygina and Lim, 2023). Accordingly, the regular posting of original and enjoyable short-form video content by the influencer should bring about increased attention to its channel by followers, evoke pleasant feelings in followers, and increase consumer preference for the advertised brand. They deduced that there exists a significant relationship between social media influencer content originality and brand preference for advertised product(s). Accordingly, it is therefore hypothesized that; there exists a positive relationship between social media influencer content originality and brand preference.

2.3.2 H2: Social media influencer content quality and brand preference

The high-quality content generated by social media influencers can significantly impact consumer purchase behaviors. This is because studies show that it does play a crucial part in changing consumer purchase intention as posts that are well designed, entertaining, informative capture the followers' interest and encourage engagement with the posts. Therefore, through their highly informative and engaging content, the influencers have a huge effect on a customer's purchase intention, motivating the followers to make a purchase and purchase the products they have advertised (Frontiers, 2024). Thus, by having quality content, more consumers are interested in what they have to say.

An extensive study done by Gomes, Marques and Dias (2022) identified the influence of trust, expertise, content quality, similarity, para-social interaction, and the perception towards sponsored posts on purchase intention. It was found in their study that the quality of the blog content had positive effect on purchase intention, showing there is a positive impact that influencer quality content has on purchase intention. Thus, there is evidence to suggest the quality of influencer content impacts on brand choice.

In an additional study done by Perdana, Mustikarini, and Parega (2023) on the effects of social media influencers, the content quality of the influencers was tested to find the effects that it has on the consumer purchase decisions. It was confirmed in this study that content quality from an influencer holds a critical position to positively alter customer decisions and preferences towards a brand, when consumers have trusted information that is believed to be engaging, informative, credible, and visually appropriate for the product advertised. Also, the relationship between content quality, purchase intention, and the customer's brand choice is mediated by the concept of customer trust. Thus, high-quality content not only directly persuades consumers, but also builds brand trust and purchase intention towards the promoted product. They concluded there is a positive relationship between social media content quality and brand preference for the suggested products they endorse. Thus, based on the previous study evidence on the topic, it can be hypothesized that there is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quality and brand preference.

2.3.3 H3: Social media influencer content quantity and brand preference

The rise of social media has revolutionized the way brands connect with consumers, primarily through influencers. The practice of influencers to frequently post branded content to followers on social media sites like Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, introducing the use of a variety of products and services, is becoming increasingly important for brands. The quantity that the influencer has produced, such as the volume of postings with respect to certain brands that may include any messages, reviews and endorsements have become important factors influencing consumers' Brand Preference. (Barta et al., 2023).

In a study conducted by Hendra, Hendratni, Istiqomah, Putrianti, Mundzir and Bait (2025), on the influence of influencer credibility, posting frequency, and entertainment value on consumer engagement with social media behaviour with regards to culinary products: they discovered the importance of credibility, posting frequency, and entertainment value to customer engagement. They found that consistent posting contributes to increased engagement. The importance of posting frequency is due to continuous consumer engagement with new content on a more frequent basis to develop a better consumer purchase intention and Brand Preference.

An experiment by Barroquillo, Hiquiana, Gueta and Mesina (2025) identified that when there is proper manipulation of advertising frequency, both the immediate and long-term consumer responses are increased significantly. It was found that there is a positive correlation between advertising frequency and purchase intention, as well as between advertising frequency and brand loyalty. Thus, increased frequency resulted in greater intent to purchase, and loyalty to the brand. These effects on brand purchase intention and brand loyalty, as over time, this repetition reinforces the persuasive messages in the advertising in a form of product quality, benefits, or the feeling evoked towards using that certain brand. Therefore, the effectiveness of repetition through increasing ad frequency also needs careful consideration of too much or too little. The more frequent the consumers are exposed to the product, the more they get familiar with the product and eventually leads to higher intent and tendency to purchase, while the less frequent they are exposed to, less consumer awareness is built up. On the other hand, too frequent exposure could lead to advertising fatigue among consumers. (Kronrod and Huber, 2019). Thus, content quantity (posting frequency) has a strong influence towards the purchase intention and Brand Preference. Therefore, it is hypothesized that; there is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quantity and brand preference.

2.3.4 H4: Social media influencer content humor and brand preference.

Humorous advertisements are typically regarded as more engaging, memorable, and enjoyable than non-humorous ones. In the highly competitive environment of social media, where users constantly scroll through large volumes of content, humor helps adverts stand out and capture attention. As a result, viewers are more likely to take the time to process and remember the advertised product (Zaki, Kamarulzaman and Mohtar, 2019). Humor is pivotal, as its perceived presence significantly affects both the viewer's perception of the social media influencer (SMI) and the content itself, as well as their preference for the brand being endorsed.

Pratas and Gonçalves (2025) in their study on the impact of humanized and humorous content on social media for brand metrics highlighted that humanized and humorous content affects brand metrics, finding that such content tends to be more engaging and effective than rational messaging. They concluded that humorous content significantly enhances brand perceptions and purchase intentions.

Research carried out by Snyder and Forbus (2024) explored the use of humor in social media content featuring a product and a social media influencer (SMI). The experiment involved 292 self-identified males aged 18 to 40 in the U.S., who viewed one of two versions of a men's grooming product advert on Instagram, either labelled as "humorous" or "non-humorous." After viewing the advert, participants filled out a survey assessing their thoughts on the SMI, the advertisement, the brand, and their likelihood to make a purchase. From the study they concluded that humor significantly impacts how participants perceive the SMI, the brand, and their inclination to buy the product. Based on the insights presented, it is proposed that; there is a positive relationship between social media influencer content humor and brand preference.

2.3.5 H5: There is a positive relationship between brand preference and e-WOM.

Brand preference and electronic word of mouth (e-WOM) are connected concepts in modern digital marketing. Consumers who have a strong preference for a brand are more likely to participate in positive e-WOM, whether through writing reviews, recommending the brand, or sharing related content. Therefore, brand preference not only impacts individual buying behaviours but also significantly influences online discussions that can enhance a brand's reputation and draw in new customers (Maru and Sai Vijay, 2024).

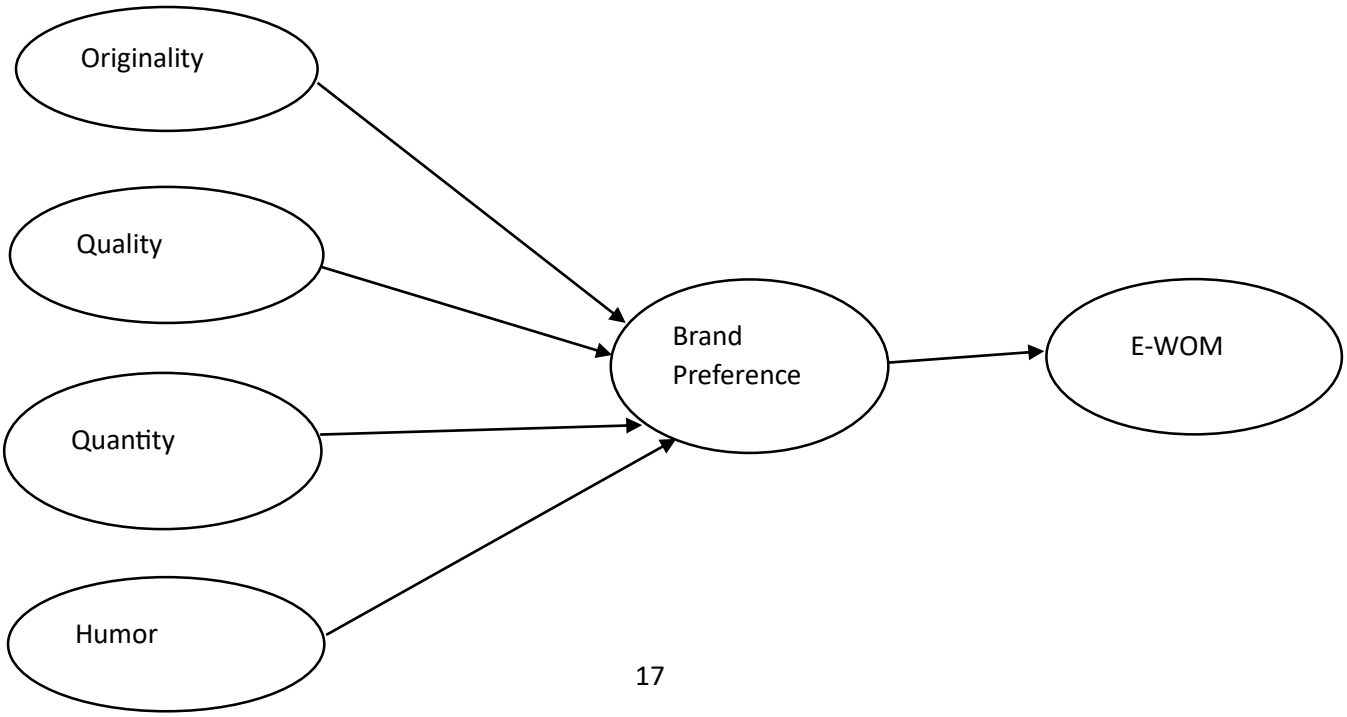
In a study carried out by Cáceres and Barbier (2025) in Peru indicated that brand preference leads to electronic word-of-mouth. The research aimed to explore the relationships between customer-based brand equity (CBBE), brand attachment, and electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) in the higher education context. The researchers used purposive sampling to gather data from 707 postgraduate business students enrolled in business schools in Lima, Peru. The results indicated that brand attachment and trust positively influenced e-WOM, aligning with previous studies. A significant positive relationship was found between brand attachment and CBBE; individuals with a strong emotional connection to the brand tended to view the institution more favourably and felt a deep commitment to its reputation. This emotion connection will in turn prompt them to do e-WOM positively by recommending the institution, sharing personal achievement story or defending the brand over online discussion. So positive relationship exists between brand preference and e-WOM where consumers' positive attachment and connection to the brand will tend to endorse and recommend the brand in e-WOM. The study conducted by Mim, Jam and Lee (2022) to explore the influences of credible sources in brand attachment, brand trust and brand identification, thus increasing the e-WOM shows that brand attachment and brand trust has also have a positive

impact on e-WOM. Consumers' higher trust in brand advocated by credible sources like social media influencers may increase their emotional connection and identification toward the brand. Thus, such psychological bonds make consumers prefer brand over rivals which may inspire people to post positive feedback, recommendations and personal stories to promote e-WOM. Overall, the findings from the studies clearly demonstrate that heightened emotional attachment, trust, and positive brand perceptions (key components of brand preference) foster greater participation in e-WOM communication. Basing on the above reviewed evidence on the discussion it is hypothesized that; there is a positive relationship between brand preference and e-WOM

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Based on theoretical principles and analysis of empirical research, a conceptual framework is presented. This model illustrates the relationships among the variables studied in research and forms the foundation for the methodology explained in chapter 3. The framework posits that specific characteristics of social media influencer content such as originality (H1), quality (H2), quantity (H3) and humor (H4) play a crucial role in determining brand preference. These factors are anticipated to directly influence consumer's perceptions and attitudes towards a brand. Furthermore, it is proposed that brand preference directly impacts electronic word-of-mouth (H5), indicating that consumers who prefer a band are more likely inclined to participate in positive e-WOM communication.

Figure 2: Conceptual framework illustrating the impact of social media influencer content characteristics on brand preference and electronic word-of mouth (e-WOM)



2.5 Gap analysis

There is a lot of research on influencer marketing but most of the studies focused on developed countries and not much has been done in emerging economies like Zimbabwe. Furthermore, existing studies often assess influencer characteristics individually rather than exploring the combined impacts of originality, quality, quantity, and humor. Lastly, there is limited focus on how influencer content affects brand preference and electronic word-of-mouth in fashion. This study aims to address these gaps by integrating multiple content characteristics within the context of a developing country's fashion industry.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has reviewed crucial concepts, theories, which include social learning theory, uses and gratifications theory and parasocial interaction theory. Empirical research relevant to social media influencer marketing were also highlighted in the chapter backing the hypotheses, A gap analysis or the justification of the study was made and a summary was given to cap the chapter. The next chapter will outline the research methodology utilized in this study.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter focus on how the research methodology was used in collecting data and information from the respondents. It was employed to evaluate how the characteristics of social media influencer content-originality, quantity, quality and humor affect brand preference and E-WoM in the fashion industry. The researcher focused on sub topics that include research design, target population, research instrument, and sampling procedures concluding with a summary. The researcher used quantitative research methodology and the methodology is crafted to ensure results are reliable and valid.

3.1 Research Design

The study utilizes a quantitative, casual approach to examine how the independent variable (influencer content traits which include originality, quantity, quality and humor) collectively impact the dependent variables (brand preference and E-WoM). The researcher used quantitative research method to investigate the topic under study in order to quantify brand preference and E-WoM attitudes towards social media influencer content traits. Quantitative research is often associated with a deductive approach, which involves evaluating theories through empirical observation (Bell, Bryman, and Harley, 2019). This emotional attachment is the one that is going to trigger customers to conduct e-WOM through recommending institution, sharing personal success story or arguing for the brand among discussions online. So it shows there is a positive relation between brand preference and e-WOM where consumers' strong positive emotional bond and connection to the brand will naturally induce them to promote and recommend brand with e-WOM. With regard to Mim, Jam & Lee (2022) studies on how trustworthy sources may foster brand attachment, brand trust, brand identification, leading to increased e-WOM, brand attachment and brand trust positively effect on e-WOM as well. High brand trust through credible sources such as opinion leaders on social networking may encourage high emotional bond and identification toward brand

thus to create this strong psychological linkage and prefer the brand among its counterparts to share positive feedback, recommendations and experience toward e-WOM.

3.2 Target Population

Willie (2024) described population as a group of objects, events, or individuals that possess shared traits pertinent to a particular research study. Targeted population denotes a particular subgroup within a larger population that is the main focus of research, intervention, or marketing efforts. This group comprises individuals with distinct traits or who fulfil specific requirements. The researcher targeted social media users who engage with fashion influencers on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. The size of population for this study is 100 000. This study target a population of 100 000 which taking into account a sample size of 383 as highlighted on the table.

3.3 Sampling Frame

Active social media users who follow at least one or more fashion influencer made up the sampling frame for the study. This was to ensure that participants have sufficient exposure in order to yield informed responses.

3.4 Sample Size

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill,(2005)a targeted population size of 100 000 gives a sample size of 383 to ensure statistical robustness and reduce sampling error, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the samples size is determined the table1 below. Kaur (2017) described it as a work of selecting the amount of interpretations or replicates to include in a statistical sample. It refers to the amount of essentials drained from a sample to make sure proper presentation of the specified goal population.

Table 1: Sample sizes for various population sizes at a 95% level of certainty

POPULATION	5%	3%	2%	1%
50	44	48	49	50
100	79	91	96	99
150	108	132	141	148
200	132	168	185	196

250	151	203	226	244
300	168	234	267	291
400	196	291	434	384
500	217	340	414	475
750	254	440	571	696
1000	278	516	706	906
1200	300	578	810	1071
2000	322	696	1091	1655
5000	357	879	1622	3288
10 000	370	964	1936	4899
100 000	383	1056	2345	9513

Source: Saunders et al (2019, p 298)

The researcher used **Yamene's formula** to compute the actual sample size:

n = N/ (1+N (e) ^ 2

where:

n= necessary sample size

N=estimated size of the population

e=level of precision/acceptance sampling error (usually 5%)

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) for populations size of 100 000 individuals, the necessary sample size at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error will be 383.

n= 1 000 000/ (1+100 000(0.05) ^ 2

n= 383

3.5 Sampling Procedures

Sampling refers to selecting participants from a population using specific methods so that researchers can gather reliable and meaningful data. (Berndt 2020). This means that the researcher studies a smaller group to draw conclusions about the entire population. The researcher employs non-probability convenience sampling method, whereby the candidates are intentionally chosen based on their relevance to the study. These include people who have

actively engage in fashion influencer accounts and fashion influencer-generated contents. This makes sure that the respondent is the people who has specific attributes for response.

3.5.1 Reasoning for selecting the sampling method.

The researcher chose non-probability convenience sampling method. The method would allow the researcher to conveniently gain access to the suitable respondent who has relevance in the research, specifically, it is people who have actively engage in fashion influencer and fashion influencer-generated content. The non-probability convenience method is ideal in this study as a suitable respondent would be those who has an actual interaction in the fashion influencer contents. Thus, by gathering information from people who actively interact with fashion influencer, the response would be valuable. Though non-probability convenience sampling does not give all people equal opportunity to be a respondent, but, for exploratory and behaviour type of research like this study is an effective method.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhills, (2019, p. 448) described research instruments as data collection procedures and techniques used to gather information such as structured questionnaires, interviews and observation schedules. The researcher used questionnaires as an instrument for collecting data.

3.6.1 Questionnaire

The Questionnaire is an organized research instrument composed of a set of written questions through which data could be elicited systematically and it's generally used for a survey in which it could efficiently administer large populations in quantitative and/or qualitative ways (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2019). Questionnaires were structured and designed to shed light on the main objective of the research, and it can be sectioned into four areas: section A is for demographics, section B asks the respondent to rate attributes of social media content by choosing 9 statements, section C with 6 statements are for brand preference and social media influencers content, section D (as shown in appendix A).Questionnaires are ideal for quantitative research because they provide standardized, reliable, and quantifiable data. The respondents were expected to spend approximately 10-15 minutes filling in the questionnaire. With questionnaires it was possible to have similar questionnaires and so measure similar

objectives using the respondents, thus strengthening the validity of research. The measurement scales on which the questionnaires are based upon are discussed below.

3.6.1.2 Justification for using a Questionnaire

A questionnaire was chosen as the primary research tool, since questionnaires are well-suited to quantitative research because its primary goal is to gather standardized, measurable data from many people. In this questionnaire, the researcher was able to gather information regarding the characteristics of social media influencer's content and how consumers reacted. Questionnaires also enhance objectivity and reduce researcher bias because respondents complete the instrument independently without influence from the researcher. This improves the reliability of the data collected and ensures that responses reflect the true perceptions of participants regarding influencer content originality, quality, quantity, humour, and their influence on brand preference and E-WOM. In addition, questionnaires are suitable because they produce quantifiable data that can easily be coded and analysed statistically. This aligns with the study's quantitative approach and its aim of establishing relationships between variables.

3.6.2 Measurement Scales

3.6.2.1 SMI Content Attributes

To measure the social media influencer content attributes (originality, quantity, quality and humor), the researcher used a scale suggested by Barta, Belanche, Fernandez and Flavian (2023), with 9 items. The ratings of the scale were based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The reliability of this scale yielded a Cronbach alpha of 0.896.

3.6.2.2 Brand Preference

In order to measure brand preference, the researcher used the scale developed by Ebrahim, Ghoneim, Irani and Fan (2016) comprising of six items. Scale was on 7-point Likert scale ranging 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Reliability of this scale resulted Cronbach alpha of 0.961.

3.6.2.3 Electronic Word of Mouth

To determine electronic word of mouth, the researcher used a scale developed by Alrwashdeh, Emeagwali & Aljuhmani, 2019). Electronic word of mouth was measured using six items scale developed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging 1(strongly disagree) to 7(strongly agree). Reliability of this scale resulted Cronbach alpha of 0.913.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

Validity is the degree to which a tool accurately measures what is intended to measure (Mehendale and Patil, 2024). To test validity of the measurement scale prior to data collection, expert review by the supervisor was done to ensure face validity by confirming the clarity and relevance of the items, convergent validity is analysed in main analysis with confirmatory factor analysis where average variance extracted is above 0.50 which suggest that the variance in the indicators of the construct will be accounted for to a sufficient extent. Reliability: is consistence of a tool under varying conditions (Cronbach, 1951). It represents how accurately a tool reproduces the same result under different circumstances (Lathlean and Gamish, 2015). In order to calculate the reliability of tool in this study Cronbach Alpha was calculated which as according to Chan and Idris (2017) should be greater than 0.7. In main analysis to calculate reliability of tool composite reliability was estimated derived from confirmatory factor analysis in AMOS which should be greater than 0.70.

3.8 Pilot Study

A pilot study was undertaken prior to the main data collection to ensure the wording, clarity, validity and reliability of the research instrument. It was undertaken to establish that the research instrument was well structured, clear for respondents to understand and able to collect accurate and valid data to fulfil the study's aims and objectives. A pilot study is useful to address problems such as poor questions or wording, structure and measurement errors, which could lead to poor main study results. For the purpose of this study, 13 participants were used in the pilot study, selected from friends, acquaintances and family members who are accustomed to using social media and follow influential online figures. These were suitable as they share many characteristics with the main target population in the study, particularly exposure to fashion-focused influential online content on social networking

platforms. These individuals were asked to fill in the questionnaire and their informal feedback was obtained about whether there were any difficult questions, confusing items, or misleading statements, and also the length of time it took to complete the questionnaire in order to avoid an excessively time-consuming instrument; this was approximately 10-15 minutes which was an acceptable timeframe for the main study. The results from the pilot study revealed that most questions were clear and relevant to the objectives of the study, but certain words/phrases were amended for better clarity to remove any potential ambiguity. Overall, the pilot study confirmed that the questionnaire was suitable for large-scale administration. It contributed to improving the instrument's reliability and validity, thereby strengthening the quality and credibility of the data collected in the main study.

3.9 Data Collection Procedures

The Questionnaires (Google Forms) was administered online via social media such as the following: WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram. The link to the Google Form was distributed among respondents who subscribe to or have interest in fashion influencers. Respondents were also reassured that their responses are confidential. The data collection period was conducted for about 6 weeks to ensure sufficient sample size was obtained. These completed questionnaires were then coded and entered in a statistical package (SPSS).

3.9.1 Primary Data

The primary data was collected online from consumers through the use of questionnaires designed using google forms. The questionnaire was shared as a link on various social media platforms. Due to the open access nature of online survey, participation was voluntarily with no personal identifying information being collected. Respondents completed the questionnaire and submit their responses privately to the researcher to ensure confidentiality. A convenience sampling technique was employed as a screening question was included in the questionnaire to ensure only respondents who follow fashion influencers were included in the study.

3.10 Data Analysis and Presentation

Data analysis is defined as the process of examining, cleaning, transforming and modelling data in order to uncover useful information, in order to make conclusions and support decision making in research (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). Both qualitative and quantitative analyses could be conducted, depending on the research being done (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The collected data are to be analysed using the SPSS package and the results are to be displayed.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

Marketing research ethics is defined as the professional standards of conduct and behaviour the researcher should follow while conducting the marketing research (Malhotra, 2010). The definition states that the researcher has duties and responsibilities towards all who participate in the research process. Ethical principles were respected throughout the process. Data was confidential, personal details of participants were not revealed. Involvement in the research was completely voluntary and participants were entitled to pull out of the study without any penalties at any point of time.

3.12 Summary

Chapter 3 Research Methodology This chapter explained how the research design has been framed and outlined the target population, the sample size, the sampling procedure used, the measurement scales, and data presentation. Questionnaire has been used as a measurement scale in this research. A pilot study was undertaken in order to ensure if participants would understand the questionnaire. The next chapter will focus on data analysis.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discussed the various research aspects that constitute part of the research such as research approach, population, sample size, sample technique, research instruments, research design, reliability and validity. The ensuing chapter discusses the presentation and analysis of research data. First, the chapter describes the response rate of questionnaire received followed by presenting respondent characteristics such as age, gender, income and level of education. Subsequently, the results obtained were associated with the specific objectives of the study which include: investigating the relationship between originality of the content and brand preference, investigating the relationship between the quality of the content and brand preference, investigating the relationship between the quantity of the content and brand preference, investigating the relationship between humor in influencer content and brand preference and investigating the relationship between brand preference and e-WOM. Sample size for this study was 384 respondents. Data collected from the questionnaires was analysed using AMOS SPSS software and presented.

4.1 Sample Achievement Rate

Sample achievement rate is the percentage of sample achieved to the size of sample recommended to attain. The online structured questionnaire design was using Google form and distributed via social media (WhatsApp, Facebook and Instagram). A sample achievement rate of 65.6 % was recorded as 252 were returned fully completed against the recommended sample size of 384 for large populations.

Table 2: sample achievement rate

Category	Frequency	Rate (%)
Target sample size	383	100
Questionnaire returned	252	65.6

Source: primary data

Sample achievement rate = Absolute frequency/Targeted frequency x 100%

252/384 x 100% =65.8%

4.2 Demographic Profile of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents who participated in the research study including gender, education level, age, marital status, income level, religion and social media platform most commonly used to access fashion content.

Table 3: Profile of Respondents

Questions		Frequency	Percentage of frequency
Age	18-25	127	50.4
	26-44	92	36.5
	44-60	29	11.5
	61 and above	4	1.59
	Total	**252**	**100**
SEX	Males	114	45.2
	Females	138	54.8
	Total	**252**	**100**
Marital Status	Single	148	58.7
	Married	86	34.1
	Divorced	8	3.2
	Widowed	10	4
	Total	**252**	**100**
Educational Level	Primary	6	2.4
	Secondary	64	25.4
	Tertiary/Diploma	82	32.5
	Degree	78	31
	Masters	15	6
	PhD	7	2.8
	Total	**252**	**100**
Level of Income	$100 and below	80	31.8
	$101-300	87	34.5
	$301-500	54	21.4
	$501 and above	31	12.3
	Total	**252**	**100**

Religion	Catholic	61	24.2
	Pentecostal	110	43.7
	Apostolic	34	13.5
	Muslim	16	6.4
	African tradition	31	12.3
	Total	**252**	**100**
Have heard of social media influencers	Yes	252	100
	No	-	-
	Total	**252**	**100**
Social Media Platform Used	TikTok	95	37.7
	Instagram	87	34.5
	Facebook	39	15.5
	YouTube	20	8
	Others	11	4.3
	Total	**252**	**100**

Source: Primary data

Based on the above table, it shows that from total population of 252 people, 54.8% was females while 45.2% was males. However the researcher was unable to get a fair proportion of the population since the method of sample chosen was convenience sampling. The results showed that there was a relatively fair number of people from each sex although there were more females than males in the sample. In terms of the age group of the participants, majority of the sample had 18-25 years, constituting 50.4% of the total population, followed by 26-44 with 36.5%, 44-60 with 11.5%, followed by 61 and above with 4%. Education attainment is reflected in the above table showing that the majority population having at least the ability to access higher education, 32.5% having at least a certificate or a diploma and 31% with degrees and only 2.4% having a certificate of primary school attendance, therefore meaning that most of the respondents in the study population were educated on average to high levels. These levels show that most respondents belong to a medium class as most respondents fall under a moderate income group with the dominant group in terms of income was $101-300 constituting 34.5% with the lowest being $500+ 12.3%. Most of the respondents are expected to earn more than $101 as they already have a certain education to earn such an income and also because they have been taught the importance of higher education and have attained at least a certificate or a degree. There is also an aspect of religiosity which shows the religion of the population which consists mainly of two kinds, Apostolic and Pentecostal (67.9%). From the table it shows that single individuals form majority of the population with 58.7%, followed by married individuals (34.1%), widowed (4%) and divorced (3.2%). The respondents showed that they are mostly active on social network sites, which are both the Instagram and the TikTok sites (37.7% and 34.5%).

4.3 Uni-dimensionality Test

The uni-dimensionality of constructs was assessed by indices developed from pattern of responses, reliability, validity and some of the principal components. All items of constructs were subjected to factor analysis to find out its reliability. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett's Test of Sphericity were used to determine if the items were appropriate for the measurement models and will be used to make decisions on which items were appropriate for hypothesis testing. These were carried out for the 4 constructs, and loadings that are significant for a given construct were used. Since the two constructs, quality of content and amount of content were measured by single item, CFAs of these two measures

could not be performed, since CFAs required multiple indicators to estimate factor loadings (Hair et al., 2019). All selected items for each construct were subjected to analysis, shown as follows.

4.3.1 Originality

Uni-dimensionality test was done on the 4-item scale to measure content originality. The four 4 items were OG1, OG2, OG3, and OG4 and none were rejected. The results are presented below on a table. The results are in table below:

Table 4: factors' analysis results for content originality

ITEMS	FACTORS
The posts on their account are novel	.860
The posts on their account are special and different	.832
The posts on their account are innovative	.875
The posts on their account are sophisticated	.858
Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy	.856
Reliability	.916

The dimensionality of the scale was analysed using principal factor analysis shown in diagram. The analysis found to be suitable to factor analysis because BTS was significant ($p < 0.001$) and the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.856.

4.3.2 Humor

The assessment of uni-dimensionality test was conducted on a scale comprising of 3 items in order to measure content humor. The 3 items were HM1, HM2, HM3 and none of the items were rejected. This was also was evidenced by their P- values and the items were considered for input in the measurement model. The items are on the table below:

Table 5: factors' analysis results for content humor

ITEMS	FACTOR
The posts on their account are fun	.871
The posts on their account are humorous	.819
The influencer's posts are amusing	.788
Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy	.733
Reliability	.865

These data was ideal for factor analysis because the Bartlett' test of Sphericity was significant ($p<.001$) and the Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was 0.733.

4.3.3 Brand Preference

The un-dimensionality test was carried out on the 6 items to determine content originality. The 6 items are BP1, BP2, BP3, BP4, BP5 and BP6. None of the 6 items had to be discarded. The output is displayed below in the table.

Table 6: factors' analysis results for brand preference

ITEMS	FACTOR
I like the fashion brand promoted by this social media influencer more than any other brand.	.884
This fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, is my preferred brand over any other brand.	.894
I would use this fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, more than any other brand	.899
When it comes to making a purchase, this fashion brand (promoted by the influencer) is my first preference.	.897
This fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, meets my requirements better than other brands.	.912
I am interested in trying fashion products from other brands recommended by this social media influencer.	.900
Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy	.942
Reliability	.961

The scale dimensionality of brand preference, as displayed in the above table, was examined by observing principal factors' analysis. The BTS was significant ($p<0.001$), and the KMO of sampling adequacy measure was 0.942. These values all show that factor analysis is suitable for the data.

4.3.4 Electronic Word of Mouth

A scale with 6 items tested and after uni-dimensionality test, all of the items loaded significantly as well and this was also supported by their P values. The selected items are shown in the table below.

Table 7: factor analysis for electronic Word of Mouth

ITEMS	FACTOR
To make sure I buy the right fashion products, I often read online reviews by other users.	.811
I often consult online reviews by others before choosing fashion brands.	.812
The information I share about fashion brands promoted by influencers influences others' opinions.	.820
I post my experiences with fashion brands that are promoted by social media influencers when asked by others.	.810
I am willing to share my experiences with fashion brands endorsed by influencers on social media.	.721
I try to effectively share my experiences with influencer-promoted fashion brands online.	.810
Kaiser Meyer-Olkin Sampling Adequacy	.917
Reliability	.913

The data showed a Kaiser-Mayer-Olin of 0.917 and its Sphericity was significant ($p<0.001$), this means that the data was suitable for factor analysis.

4.4 Normality and Sample Size Tests

Multivariate normality was assessed using Mardia's coefficient. The multivariate kurtosis was 14.927 with a critical ratio of 3.812, indicating a slight deviation from multivariate normality which should be <1.96. However, according to Hair et al., (2019), Maximum Likelihood is robust to moderate violations of multivariate normality when the sample size exceeds 252. Given that Mardia's coefficient in this study was 3.812 and N = 252, ML was deemed appropriate. The recommended sample size for Maximum Likelihood estimation in SEM is N ≥ 200 (Hair et al., 2019). The sample size of N =252 exceed the recommended minimum indication that the sample is adequate for obtaining reliable parameter estimates.

4.5 Measurement model

To demonstrate the construct validity and reliability of the conceptual model measuring the constructs in question the measurement model was evaluated (AMOS). The measurement model is presented below:



Figure 3: Measurement model

Source: AMOS

Key: OG- Originality
QL - Quality
QN- Quantity
HM- Humor
BP- Brand Preference
EW- Electronic Word of Mouth

The assessment of the measurement model indicates that all items significantly loaded to their respective factors, thereby suggesting the presence of convergence validity. The findings underscore the model's ability to accurately measure intended constructs; each item aligns with its designated factor of the measurement model. The assessment of convergence validity utilized the average variance extracted as a measure. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for all research constructs were above 0.5 indicating the presence of convergence validity. The finding's reliability was assessed using composite reliability, which exceeds 0.7. The table below displays the AVE coefficient and composite reliability. The Fornell-Larker criterion demonstrated discriminant validity by showing that the square roots of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each construct were higher than their correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This suggests that the constructs are separate and appropriate for structural analysis.

4.6 Reliability and Validity

The table below showed the reliability and validity of the constructs. Reliability was assessed using Composite Reliability (CR) and validity was measured using Average Variance extracted.

Table 8: Sample reliability and average variance extracted

Construct	Number of Items	Composite Reliability	AVE
Originality	4	0.917	0.733
Humor	3	0.866	0.683
Brand preference	6	0.961	0.806
Electronic word of mouth	6	0.913	0.637
Quality	1	N/A	N/A
Quantity	1	N/A	N/A

Source: Primary Data

4.7 Interpretation of study findings

The reliability of the measurement instrument met satisfactory criteria, each construct with composite reliability exceeding 0.7, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the scale items, meaning they reliably measure the same underlying construct. The instrument's convergent validity was deemed adequate, as each construct had AVE greater than 0.5, confirming that the instrument accurately measures the intended constructs, thereby supporting its overall validity. Quality and Quantity were assessed as single-item metrics. As composite reliability and average variance extracted require multiple indicators, these metrics are therefore not reported single-item metrics. Content validity was ensured through alignment with literature and expert review.

4.8 Hypotheses Testing

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used in AMOS to test the proposed hypotheses and whether the hypotheses was accepted or not. The test was conducted as shown in the structural model for the study.

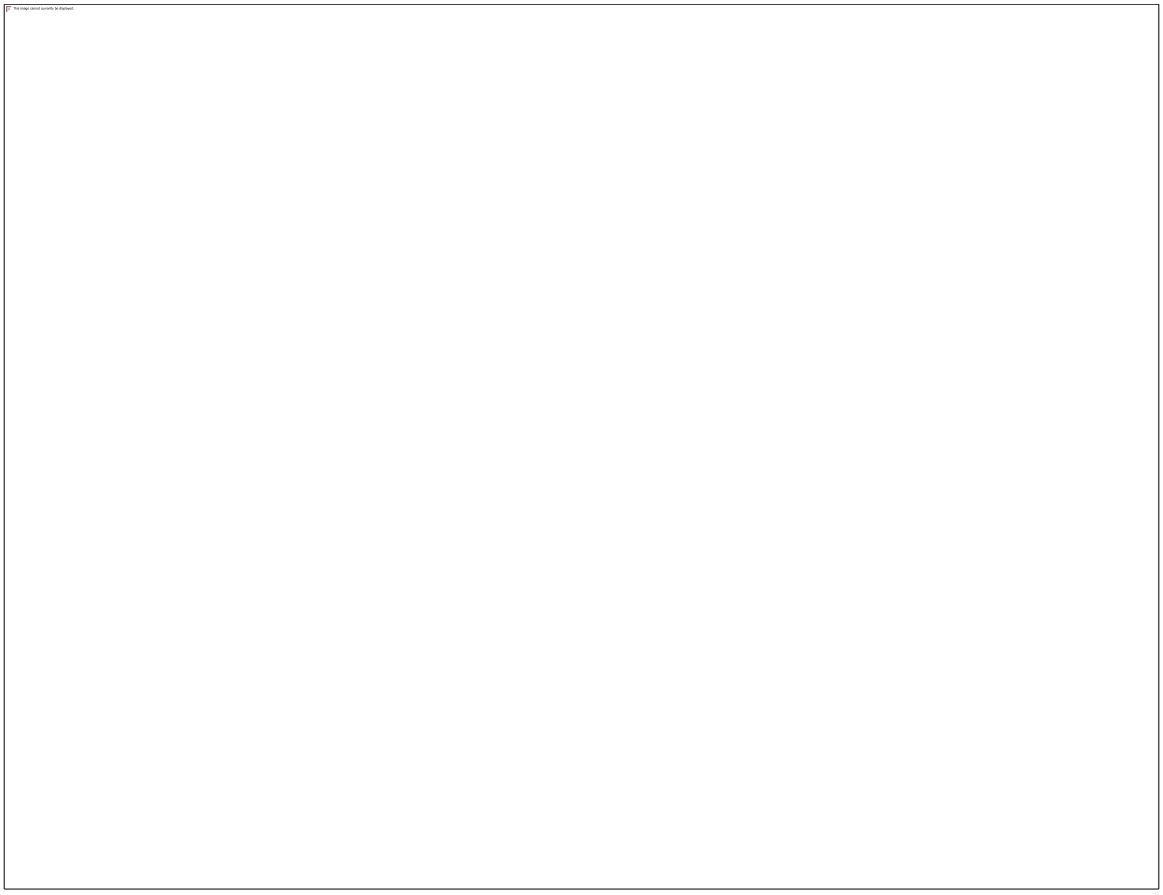


Figure 4: Structural model of the study
Source: AMOS

Structural Equation Modelling was conducted using AMOS SPPS to assess the fit of the hypothesized model. The structural model demonstrated good fit to the data: $\chi^2 = 239.894$, df = 180, p =0.002, $\chi^2/df = 1.327$. The incremental fit indices indicated excellent model fit, with Comparative Fit Index (CFI) =0.987 and Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) =0.984 and Incremental Fit Index (IFI) =0.987 all exceeding the threshold of.95 for good fit. The absolute fit indices also supported good fit, with Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) =0.036, 90% CI [0.023, 0.048], which is below the 0.06 cut-off for close fit. Although the chi-square test was significant, this is expected with a sample size of N = 252, as χ^2 is sensitive to sample size. The ratio of χ^2 to degrees of freedom is well below the conservative cut-off of 3.0, providing additional evidence of good model fit. Overall, the pattern of fit indices indicates that the hypothesized model provides a good representation of the observed data.

Table 9: Hypothesis testing results

$\mathbf{H}_{no}$	Hypotheses	B Value	T Value	P Value	Decision
H1	Content Originality – Brand Preference	0.603	10.325	***	Accepted
H2	Content Quality – Brand Preference	0.057	1.678	0.093	Rejected
H3	Content Quantity – Brand Preference	0.049	1.517	0.129	Rejected
H4	Content Humor – Brand Preference	0.400	7.977	***	Accepted
H5	Brand Preference – Electronic Word of Mouth	0.645	11.350	***	Accepted

4.9 Interpretation of study findings

The table above indicates the study findings. Regarding the first hypothesis it suggested a positive link between social media influencer content originality and brand preference. This hypothesis was accepted, B=0.603, T=10.325, p <0.001. Hypotheses H2 predicted that social media influencer content quality leads to brand preference. This hypothesis was rejected, B=0.057, T=1.678, p>0.05. The structural equation modelling indicated that there is no statistically significant relationship between social media influencer content quality and brand preference. Hypotheses H3 hypothesised that there is a positive relationship between social media content quantity and brand preference. This hypothesis was rejected, (B= 0.049, T=1.517, p>0.05), due to the structural modelling equation which shows that there is an insignificant relationship statistically between social media content quantity and brand preference. Hypotheses H4 suggested a positive link between social media influencer content humor and brand preference. This hypothesis was accepted, B=0.400, T=7.977, p <0.001. The last hypotheses H5 predicted that brand preference leads to Electronic Word of Mouth. This hypothesis was accepted, B=0.645, T=11.350, p <0.001.

4.10 Discussions of Research Findings

The aim of this research was to explore how social media influencer content originality, quality, quantity and humor influence brand preference and subsequent e-WOM. Using SPSS AMOS, the study assessed whether positive relationships exist among the variables of interest and tested the formulated five hypotheses. The findings shed light on the intricate interactions on social media influencer content characteristics and how they shape consumer outcomes as outlined in the hypotheses. This section delves into each hypothesis and discusses the implications of the results.

H1: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content originality and brand preference. (Accepted)

In today's digital age, social media influencers become an integral part of in shaping consumer behaviour and perceptions, with content characteristics playing a significant role in influencing brand outcomes (Gao, Zhang and Wang 2024). A significant aspect of social media content characteristics impact on consumer behaviour is its originality which refers to the extent to which influencer content is unique and novel from other content on social media (Lou and Yuan, 2019).

In the context of social media influencer marketing content originality plays a critical role in encouraging brand preference and ultimately electronic word of mouth. When influencers post novel and unique content, consumers develop stronger preference for the brand being endorsed. Research suggests that originality enhances credibility, which directly influence brand preference (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Originality delves through content saturation on platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, showing creativity and reduce fatigue from consumer. Unique content acts as a credible signal of authenticity therefore making the endorsed brand to become valuable. According to Koay, Cheung, Soh and Teoh (2021), content originality has a greater influence on brand preference especially among Genz consumers who value uniqueness. These consumers tend to prefer being unique amongst peers and they actively seek for novel experiences online particularly from fashion influencers. Ki, Cuevas, Chong and Lim (2020) suggested that original posts enhance emotional attachment since they break habituation. If the content being posted is generally the same from other content creators followers get bored and disconnected therefore oginality keeps the relationship fresh. Drawing on signalling theory, original content signals effort and credibility which consumers interpret as credible cues of brand value.

H2: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quality and brand preference. (Rejected)

The non-significant results implies that quality, polish and being professional alone do not drive brand preference for the endorsed brand in influencer marketing. This supports the authenticity paradox in digital marketing where consumers prefer genuineness over production quality (De Veirman, Hudders and Nelson, 2019). The implication is that brands should always thrive to prioritize being authentic over excessive production investment. Barta et al., (2023) confirmed in their study that users may prioritise entertainment, novelty and relatability over production quality when forming attitudes towards brands.

Social media content quality engagement has a significant impact on brand preference was rejected in the structural modelling equation because a post that is of high quality in a production sense may not increase brand preference however, it appears to be commercial and lacks authenticity (Schivinski and Dabrowski 2016). Therefore, quality appears to be a threshold factor which means if content is not novel it damages authenticity but once a baseline is met, additional polish reaps diminishing returns.

H3: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content quantity and brand preference (Rejected)

The insignificant of social media influencer content quantity on brand preference could be due to overload and reduced credibility if the content being posted lacks value. This mirrors research by Abed, Dwivedi and Williams (2021) where they concluded that posting frequency influence awareness but not preference unless the content is relevant. When content becomes excessive it may lead to overload and reduce perceive quality. Sijoria, Mukherjee and Datta (2019) suggested that high posting frequency can lead to ad fatigue. Therefore, content volume without relevance reduces brand evaluation (Chu and Chen, 2019).

H4: There is a positive relationship between social media influencer content humor and brand preference (Accepted)

According to the results obtained, it indicates that there is a positive relationship between social media influencer content humor and brand preference. Humor increases enjoyment, reduce psychological resistance and has a positive effect which ultimately transfer to the brand being endorsed by the influencer. This aligns with Eisend (2018), who concluded that humorous advertisement evokes positive emotions and enhance brand attitude. When content is humorous it builds emotional attachment, increases memorability which is an important key identity factor in branding, leading to brand preference among Genz customers (Kim and Song 2022). This aligns with findings by Lee and Watkins (2020) who noted that content that is backed by humor encourages social sharing thereby amplifying brand exposure. Therefore, for marketers including humor in content posted by brand personalities can be a way to increase virality and brand preference for their brands.

H5: There is a positive relationship between brand preference and e-WOM. (Accepted)

Basing from the results computed, it clearly shows that a positive relationship exists between brand preference and e-WOM. When consumers develop a strong brand preference, they tend to reinforce their choice by sharing positive experiences and recommendations online. The theory of planned behaviour by Icek Ajzen (1985) has been helpful in supporting this hypothesis. The theory suggests favourable attitudes increase behavioural intentions which includes social sharing and recommendations. Huang and Mitchell (2019) also suggested that brand preference enhances online recommendation behaviour because consumers tend to become advocates in order to validate their decisions. When consumers have a positive brand evaluation, they become advocates for the brand in order to reinforce self-concept and reduce cognitive dissonance. Moreover Cheung, Pires and Rosenberger III (2020) states that brand preference directly increases electronic word of mouth intention especially in the context of social media. This relationship is stronger in digital environments where peer influence plays a bigger part thus making electronic word of mouth successful in social media influencer marketing (Mukherjee and Datta 2019).

4.11 Summary

The chapter presented an analysis of the collected data, linking the results to the existing research and theoretical framework relevant to the study's variables. Additionally, it provided insights in to the demographic characteristics of the participants and detailed the statistical model used to test the hypotheses. Hypotheses test was done to ascertain the relationships that exist between independent and dependent variables. It was noted that positive relationships exist between some of the variables. A discussion was made on the obtained results. The following chapter concentrates on the summary of results, providing recommendations as well as other areas of further research.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMANDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in the previous chapter in relation to the study objectives, relevant literature and hypotheses. It also provides conclusions drawn from the results and offers practical recommendations for marketers' future researchers.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The goal of this study was to assess the impact of social media influencer content characteristics namely originality, quality, quantity and humor on brand preference and electronic word of mouth in the fashion sector, utilizing a quantitative research design for data collection and analysing the results with SPSS AMOS. The study involved 252 participants to evaluate how social media influencer content characteristics lead to brand preference and ultimately e-WOM.

The first objective was to evaluate the impact of social media influencer content originality on brand preference revealing a positive correlation ($B=0.603$, $T=10.325$, $p < 0.001$). This confirms that when social media influencer content is novel and unique, it enhances consumers' preferences for the fashion brand being endorsed. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the importance of content originality in shaping consumer behaviour in social media environments. This result suggests that novel and unique social media influencer content on platforms like TikTok, Instagram or Facebook increase perceived informativeness and credibility stimulating brand preference.

The second objective sought to assess the impact of social media influencer content originality on brand preference, however, the results indicated no significant relationship (B=0.057, T=1.678, p>0.05). This finding may be attributed to the nature of preference being associated more with real and raw aesthetic rather than overly polished content. Users may engage with content and prefer the fashion brand being endorsed when it seems authentic hence overly polished content makes it seem like traditional advertising and triggers avoidance by the consumers. The AMOS analysis indicated weak regression weights on quantity and brand preference suggesting limited predictive power.

The third objective focused on evaluating the effect of social media influencer content quantity on brand preference, which demonstrated a negative and statistically insignificant association (B= 0.049, T=1.517, p > 0.05). Despite increase in brand awareness that may increase with posting content on social media platforms, this finding suggests that posting frequently alone may not be sufficient to drive brand preference in this context. Audiences may experience ad fatigue or rather lead to content saturation and perceive the content as overly promotional or rather repetitive. Consumers may perceive excessive posting as spam thereby reducing brand evaluation. The SEM results showed weak regression weight as well between quantity and brand preference.

The fourth objective was to assess the impact of social media influencer content humor on brand preference and showed a positive correlation (B=0.400, T=7.977, p < 0.001).This confirms that funny and playful content significantly increase brand preference. This finding supports the Construal Level Theory which explains that humorous content reduces psychological distance between the brand and the consumer. It states that humor evokes positive emotions and lowers resistance to persuasion thereby making the message more memorable. This result suggests that when a fashion influencer uses self-deprecating humor, the ad feels more of like entertainment rather than a sales pitch therefore viewers develop a positive attitude towards the endorsed brand.

The last objective was to evaluate the impact of brand preference on electronic word of mouth, revealing a positive correlation (B=0.645, T=11.350, p <0.001). This implies that when consumers prefer a brand, they are more likely to engage in positive electronic word of mouth. These results support with existing literature that explain that favourable attitudes drive behavioural intentions which includes sharing, reposting and recommending. When consumers favour a brand, they are likely to reinforce their self-concept and reduce cognitive dissonance after preferring a brand and making a purchase decision. Therefore, electronic word of mouth becomes free advertisement where consumers influence their peers according their preferred brands in the fashion industry.

5.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that social media influencer content originality and humor are strong drivers of brand preference in influencer marketing. However, social media influencer content quality and quantity alone do not significantly influence such behaviour. Effective social media marketing, therefore, must prioritize originality and humorous content over high frequency posting and over production quality.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Prioritize Original and Humorous content in influencer collaborations

When brand collaborate with social media content influencers, they should brief them to create content that is original and entertaining rather than making it look like a sales pitch. The results indicate that humor and originality are the strongest drivers of brand preference in influencer marketing. In Zimbabwe, where consumers are now spending more time on social media platforms such as on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and Instagram getting more exposed to various content fashion influencers, original content hence signals authenticity and can cut through ad fatigue. Moreover, humor also plays an important role as it reduce psychological distance and makes the message more memorable. For instance, content that showcases a product in a unique way will outperform a scripted product demonstration as the content is perceived as credible. This approach aligns with the Uses and Gratifications theory which states that consumers are bound to engage with content that that brings about entertainment and is novel. Therefore, in social media marketing especially in the fashion industry, brands must invest in creative directions making sure that their influencers create unique and humorous content in order to yield higher brand preference and memorability among target audiences.

5.3.2 Balancing Production Quality with Authenticity and Avoid Over-Posting

According to the results, it showed that high content quality and frequent posting has no significant effect on brand preference. Consumers on platforms such as TikTok and Facebook favour more to real, raw and relatable content as compared to excessive polished content that looks like traditional advertisements. Brands must therefore maintain an average and standard quality in order to avoid over polished that questions authenticity. Moreover, posting should take into consideration value per post rather than frequency in order to prevent ad fatigue that comes with excessive posting. For example, three posts per week with original content are most probably to become effective than six posts per day that lacks originality and value. This approach can also optimize budgets while enhancing brand preference through audience trust and engagement.

5.3.3 Design Campaigns to Convert Brand Preference into Electronic Word-of-Mouth

The study indicated that brand preference influences electronic word-of-mouth strongly. Brands in the fashion must therefore design campaigns online that encourage sharing such as branded hashtags, calls-to-action, challenges and duets on their social media platforms. When consumers prefer a brand, they are more likely to recommend it online this generating organic reach which is regarded as more authentic rather than paid advertisements. On platforms such as TikTok and Instagram, a single influencer post can drive conversations ultimately scaling impact without having to pay on additional media expenditure.

5.4 Areas of Further Research

The study focused on the impact of social media influencer content originality, quality, quantity, and humor on brand preference and e-WoM. It can be noted that for future research other components of social media influencer content such as expertise, credibility and parasocial interaction can be used to see how well they influence brand preference. Researchers could also observe how social media influencer content affect brand preference in other industries as well not the fashion industry only.

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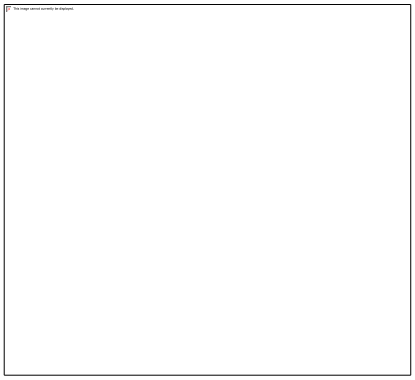
APPENDIX A: CODED QUESTIONNAIRE



RESEARCH SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear participant

I am Praisemore Muruko a student at Bindura University of Science Education conducting research into the **impact of social media influencer content originality, quality, quantity and humor on brand preference and E-WOM in the fashion industry.** This research is in partial fulfilment of my bachelor's degree in Marketing.

I would greatly appreciate your participation in this study. It comprises of 3 sections in which responses will be indicated by means of a tick. All the answers you will provide are neither right nor wrong. The information that you are going to provide will be strictly used for **academic purposes only**. Every answer that you will provide will be kept with confidentiality. For further clarity do not hesitate to ask.

Contact details:

Phone numbers: 0780 933 280 *email: praisemoremuruko@gmail.com*

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC

This section is aimed at knowing your age, income as well as educational level. Please tick (✔) in the appropriate box to show your response. DO NOT INCLUDE YOUR NAME.

1. DA Age group

1	18-25	
2	26-40	
3	41-60	
4	61 and above	

2. DS Sex

1	Male	
2	Female	

3. DM Marital status

1	Single	
2	Married	
3	Divorced	
4	Widowed	

4. DI Income level: monthly income

1	$100 and below	
2	$101- $300	
3	$301-$500	
4	$501 and above	

5. DE Education level

1	Primary education	
2	Secondary education	
3	Tertiary education/certificate/diploma	
4	Degree	
5	Masters	
6	PhD	

6. DR Religion

1	Catholic	
2	Pentecostal	
3	Apostolic	
4	Muslim	
5	African tradition	

7. SMI Have you ever heard of social media influencers before?

1	YES	
2	No	

8. SMP Which Social Media Platform do you use mostly to check for Fashion Content?

1	Tik Tok	
2	Instagram	
3	Facebook	
4	YouTube	
5	Others	

SECTION B: Social Media Influencer Content Attributes

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about fashion influencers you follow on social media. Kindly tick the statement that you believe in by means of a tick (✔).

Item no.	How well do you believe in these statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
OG1	The posts on their account are novel							
OG2	The posts on their account are special and different							
OG 3	The posts on their account are innovative							
OG4	The posts on their account are sophisticated							
QL 1	The posts on their account are of high quality							
QN 1	The influencer publishes many posts							
HM 1	The posts on their account are fun							
HM 2	The posts on their account are humorous							
HM 3	The influencer's posts are amusing							

SECTION C: BRAND PREFERENCE

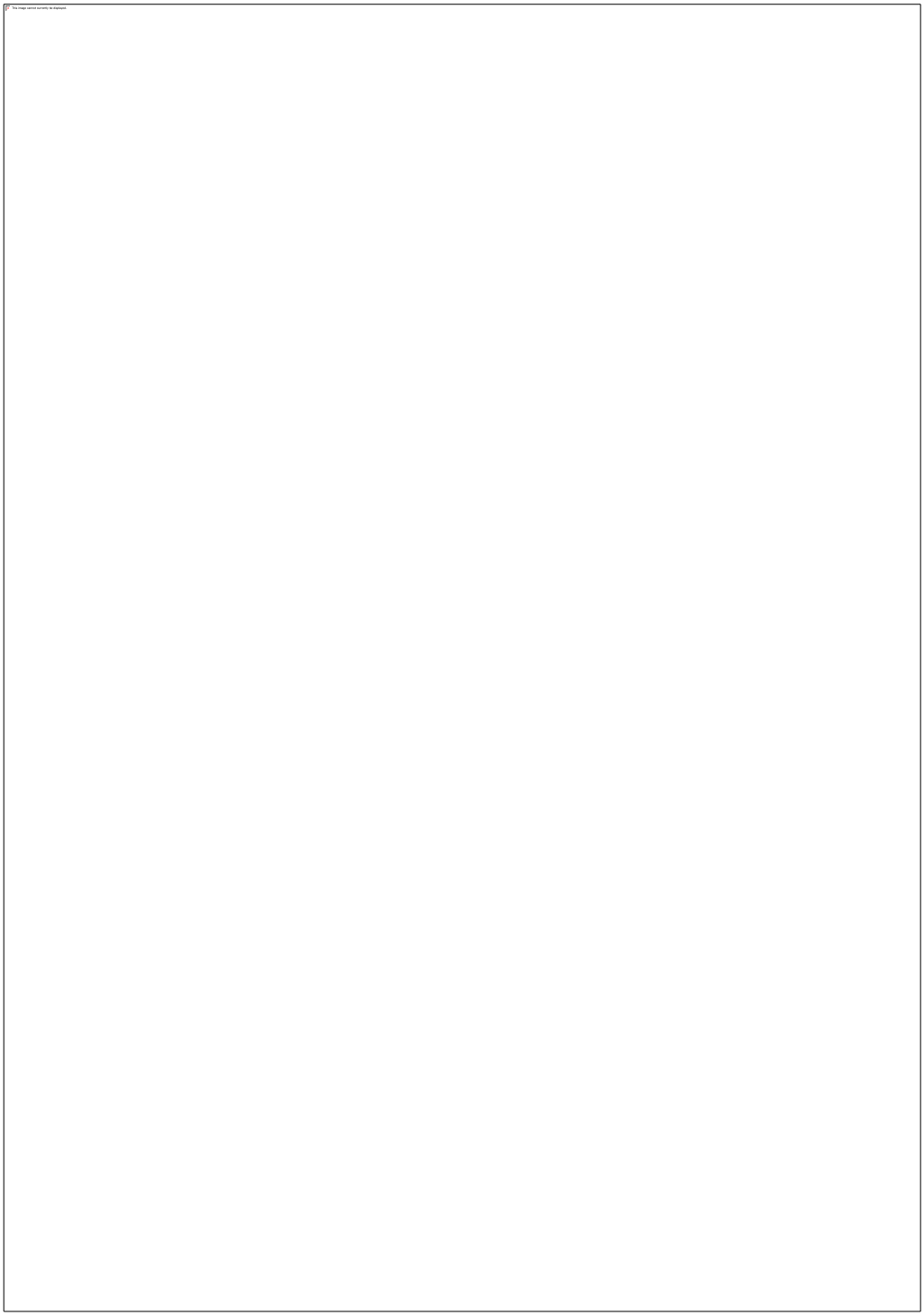
Item no.	How well do you believe in these statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
BP1	I like the fashion brand promoted by this social media influencer more than any other brand.							
BP2	This fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, is my preferred brand over any other brand.							
BP3	I would use this fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, more than any other brand							
BP4	When it comes to making a purchase, this fashion brand (promoted by the influencer) is my first preference.							
BP5	This fashion brand, promoted by the influencer, meets my requirements better than other brands.							
BP 6	I am interested in trying fashion products from other brands recommended by this social media influencer.							

SECTION D: ELECTRONIC WORD OF MOUTH (E-WOM)

Item no.	How well do you believe in these statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neutral	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
EW1	To make sure I buy the right fashion products, I often read online reviews by other users.							
EW2	I often consult online reviews by others before choosing fashion brands.							
EW3	The information I share about fashion brands promoted by influencers influences others' opinions.							
EW4	I post my experiences with fashion brands that are promoted by social media influencers when asked by others.							
EW5	I am willing to share my experiences with fashion brands endorsed by influencers on social media.							
EW6	I try to effectively share my experiences with influencer-promoted fashion brands online.							

THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!!

APPENDIX B



APPENDIX C

