

Charles Alves de Castro

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland



University Fernando Pessoa

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influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

Charles Alves de Castro

Thesis presented to the University Fernando Pessoa
as part of the requirements for obtaining a
PhD in Communication Sciences.

RESUMO

CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO: Uma investigação dos traços de personalidade que podem identificar os jovens que serão suscetíveis à influência de influenciadores de mídia social: o caso da Geração Z na Irlanda

Este estudo exploratório visa aprofundar a compreensão geral dos influenciadores de mídia social e tentou entender quem será suscetível à influência deles. O principal objetivo desta pesquisa é determinar se existe um perfil de personalidade específico que predispõe os jovens à influência de influenciadores de mídia social. Isto depende de uma abordagem de métodos mistos. Os participantes ($N=91$) responderam a um questionário chamado SUSIS, perguntando-lhes sobre seus hábitos nas redes sociais e sua relação com os influenciadores. Eles foram solicitados a listar seus cinco principais influenciadores de mídia social e sobre sua compreensão e percepção em relação aos influenciadores digitais e conteúdo potencialmente prejudicial postado por eles. Os participantes também completaram um teste padrão de personalidade, a versão HEXACO-PI-R de 60 itens. Além disso, foi realizada uma análise temática das questões 5 e 6 do SUSIS para identificar padrões e semelhanças que possam apoiar a análise quantitativa dos dados. Além disso, foi realizada uma discussão crítica sobre quem é responsável pela proteção ética dos jovens no ambiente digital. O presente estudo revelou relações estatisticamente significativas entre o Questionário SUSIS e os Itens HEXACO-PI-R 60. O SUSIS Questionnaire é um novo instrumento desenvolvido, testado e validado neste estudo. Este questionário pode medir a influência dos influenciadores digitais nos jovens de duas dimensões diferentes, Percepção Social e Conteúdos Nocivos, compreendendo holisticamente a influência dos influenciadores na vida desses jovens, tanto de perspectivas positivas como negativas. Este estudo apresentou um modelo de equações estruturais que confirma a confiabilidade do Questionário SUSIS. Quando associado às dimensões do HEXACO, o modelo confirma

que traços de personalidade, honestidade-humildade e consciência apresentam significativamente interdependência com a susceptibilidade a ser influenciado pelos influenciadores digitais. Os participantes que obtiveram uma pontuação elevada nestes dois traços de personalidade são menos susceptíveis a serem influenciados pelos influenciadores digitais. A vertente qualitativa utilizou uma análise temática que trouxe uma visão holística da influência dos influenciadores nos jovens, descrevendo os motivos, os principais influenciadores e os principais canais que representam as opiniões dos participantes. Finalmente, esta pesquisa oferece evidências sobre a influência dos influenciadores digitais na vida dos jovens de uma perspectiva quantitativa e qualitativa.

Palavras-chave: Influenciadores de Mídia Social. Gen Zers. Ambiente Digital. Irlanda.

ABSTRACT

CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO: An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

This exploratory study aims to further the overall understanding of social media influencers (SMIs) and to specifically attempt to understand who will be susceptible to influence by them. The main objective of this research is to determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers. This relies on a mixed-methods approach. Participants ($N=91$) answered a questionnaire called SUSIS, asking them about their social media browsing habits and their relationship with SMIs. They were asked to list their top five social media influencers and about their understanding and perception of influencers and potentially harmful content posted by SMIs. They also completed a standard test of personality, the HEXACO-PI-R 60-item version. Furthermore, a thematic analysis of questions 5 and 6 was run to identify patterns and similarities that can support the quantitative data analysis. In addition, a critical discussion about who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment was carried out. The current study revealed statistically significant relationships between the SUSIS Questionnaire and the HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items. SUSIS Questionnaire is a new instrument developed, tested and validated in this study. This questionnaire can measure the influence of SMIs on young people from two different dimensions, Social Perception and Harmful Content, holistically understanding the influence of SMIs on young people's lives from both positive and negative perspectives. This study presented a unique structural equation model (SEM) that confirms the reliability of the SUSIS Questionnaire. When associated with the HEXACO dimensions, the model confirms that personality traits, Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness significantly present interdependence with the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. The participants

that highly scored in these two personality traits are less susceptible to being influenced by SMIs. The qualitative strand employed a thematic analysis that brought a holistic overview of the influence of SMIs on young people outlining the motives, the main influencers and the main channels that represent participants' views. Finally, this research offered evidence about the influence of SMIs on young people's lives from a quantitative and qualitative perspective.

Keywords: Social Media Influencers. Gen Zers. Digital Environment. Ireland.

SOMMAIRE

CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO: Une enquête sur les traits de personnalité permettant d'identifier les jeunes susceptibles d'être influencés par les influenceurs des médias sociaux: le cas de la génération Z en Irlande

Cette étude exploratoire vise à approfondir la compréhension générale des influenceurs des médias sociaux et à essayer ou à comprendre qui sera sensible à leur influence. L'objectif principal de cette recherche est de déterminer s'il existe un profil de personnalité spécifique qui prédispose les jeunes à l'influence des influenceurs des médias sociaux. Cela dépend d'une approche mixte des méthodes. Les participants ($N=91$) ont répondu à un questionnaire appelé SUSIS, les interrogeant sur leurs habitudes dans les réseaux sociaux et leur relation avec les influenceurs. Ils ont été invités à énumérer leurs cinq principaux influenceurs des médias sociaux et à indiquer leur compréhension et leur perspicacité des informations numériques et des contenus potentiellement dangereux qu'ils publient. Les participants ont également complété un schéma de personnalité, la version HEXACO-PI-R de 60 éléments. De plus, une analyse thématique des questions 5 et 6 du SUSIS a été effectuée afin de cerner les tendances et les similitudes qui peuvent appuyer l'analyse quantitative des données. En outre, une discussion critique a eu lieu sur qui est responsable de la protection éthique des jeunes dans l'environnement numérique. La présente étude a révélé des relations statistiquement significatives entre le questionnaire SUSIS et les éléments hexaco-pi-r 60. Le questionnaire SUSIS est un nouvel instrument développé, testé et validé dans cette étude. Ce questionnaire peut mesurer l'influence des influenceurs numériques chez les jeunes de deux dimensions différentes, la perception sociale et les contenus préjudiciables, en comprenant de manière holistique l'influence des influenceurs dans la vie de ces jeunes, à la fois positive et négative. Cette étude a présenté un modèle d'analyse structurelle qui confirme la fiabilité du questionnaire SUSIS. Lorsqu'il est associé aux dimensions hexaco, le modèle confirme que les traits de personnalité,

L'honnêteté-humilité et la conscience présentent une interdépendance significative avec la susceptibilité d'être influencé par les influenceurs numériques. Les participants qui ont obtenu un score élevé dans ces deux traits de personnalité sont moins susceptibles d'être influencés par les liens d'influenceurs numériques. L'aspect qualitatif a utilisé une analyse thématique qui a apporté une vision holistique de l'influence des influenceurs chez les jeunes, décrivant les motivations, les principaux influenceurs et les principaux canaux qui représentent les opinions des participants. Enfin, cette recherche fournit des preuves sur l'influence des influenceurs des médias sociaux sur la vie des jeunes dans une perspective quantitative et qualitative.

Mots-clés: Influenceurs des Médias Sociaux. Gen Zers. Environnement Numérique. Irlande.

RESUMEN

CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO: Uma investigação dos traços de personalidade que puede identificar a los jóvenes que serão suscetíveis à influência de influenciadores de mídia social: o caso da Geração Z na Irlanda

Este estudio exploratorio tiene como objetivo profundizar la comprensión general de los influencers en las redes sociales y tratar de comprender quién será susceptible a su influencia. El objetivo principal de esta investigación es determinar si existe un perfil de personalidad específico que predisponga a los jóvenes a la influencia de los influencers de las redes sociales. Esto depende de un enfoque de métodos mixtos. Los participantes ($N=91$) respondieron a un cuestionario llamado SUSIS, preguntándoles sobre sus hábitos en las redes sociales y su relación con los influencers. Se les pidió que enumeraran sus cinco principales influencers de las redes sociales y sobre su comprensión y conocimiento de los influencers digitales y el contenido potencialmente dañino publicado por ellos. Los participantes también completaron un patrón de personalidad, la versión HEXACO-PI-R de 60 elementos. Además, se realizó un análisis temático de las preguntas 5 y 6 del SUSIS para identificar patrones y similitudes que puedan apoyar el análisis cuantitativo de los datos. Además, se llevó a cabo una discusión crítica sobre quién es responsable de la protección ética de los jóvenes en el entorno digital. El presente estudio reveló relaciones estadísticamente significativas entre el Cuestionario SUSIS y el HEXACO-PI-R. El cuestionario SUSIS es un nuevo instrumento desarrollado, probado y validado en este estudio. Este cuestionario puede medir la influencia de los influencers digitales en jóvenes en dos dimensiones diferentes, Percepción Social y Contenidos Nocivos, entendiendo holísticamente la influencia de los influencers en la vida de estos jóvenes, tanto positiva como negativa. Este estudio presentó un modelo de análisis estructural que confirma la confiabilidad del Cuestionario SUSIS. Cuando se asocia con dimensiones HEXACO, el modelo confirma que los rasgos de personalidad, honestidad-humildad y conciencia

presentan una interdependencia significativa con la susceptibilidad a ser influenciados por los influencers digitales. Los participantes que obtuvieron una puntuación alta en estos dos rasgos de personalidad tienen menos probabilidades de ser influenciados por los enlaces de influencia digital. El aspecto cualitativo utilizó un análisis temático que aportó una visión holística de la influencia de los influencers en los jóvenes, describiendo los motivos, los principales influencers y los principales canales que representan las opiniones de los participantes. Finalmente, esta investigación proporciona evidencia sobre la influencia de los influenciadores digitales en la vida de los jóvenes desde una perspectiva cuantitativa y cualitativa.

Palabras clave: Social Media Influencers. Generación Z. Entorno Digital. Irlanda.

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To the memory of my dear grandmothers
Luzia Lopes de Macedo and Zélia Alves da Costa Lima

I did it for you.

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

SMIs	Social Media Influencers
Gen Z	Generation Z
fMRI	Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging
COBRAs	Consumers' Online Brand-Related Activities
HEXACO	Honesty-humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, and Openness to experience
SUSIS	SUSceptibility to being Influenced by Social media influencers
RQ1	Research Question 1
RQ2	Research Question 2
RQ3	Research Question 3
H1	Hypothesis 1
H2	Hypothesis 2
www/web	World Wide Web
ARPANET	Advanced Research Projects Agency Network
TCP	Transmission Central Protocol

IP	Internet Protocol
MUD	Multi-User Domain
UN	United Nations
MMPI	Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory
HFSS	High-Fat, Sugar and/or Salt
USA	The United States of America
FFM	Five-Factor Model
16 PF	The Sixteen Personality Factors Questionnaire
MBTI	Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator
SM	Social Media
BSMAS	Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale
EU	European Union
POCC	Positive Online Content Campaign
BIK	Better Internet for Kids
APA	American Psychology Association
WoM	Word-of-Mouth
e-WoM	Electronic Word-of-Mouth
MMR	Mixed-Methods Research
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
CAS	Common Analysis of Structure
LVA	Latent Variable Analysis
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis

EFA Exploratory Factor Analysis

PA Path Analysis

Harm Harmful

PLS Partial Least Squares

TA Thematic Analysis

CI Confidence Interval

GLOSSARY

1. For the purpose of this study, “social media influencers (SMIs) are simply people on social media who spread their knowledge about a specific niche and encourage fans and followers to take action, thus establishing respect and trust or an independent third-party supporter who shape audience attitudes through social media interactions, blogs and other digital media means” (Freberg *et al.*, 2011; Ryan, 2014; Wielki, 2020).
2. The term “undue influence” is commonly used in the field of law and is legally defined as “influence which deprives a person influenced of free agency or destroys freedom of his will and renders it more the will of another than his own” (Distler, 2019, p. 132). However, in this study, “*undue influence is considered a way to persuade vulnerable young people toward harmful content spread online*”. Undue influence might occur when a more powerful party exerts its influence over a less powerful party to achieve its desired outcome (Campisi, Winet and Calvert, 2018; Distler, 2019). For example, outcomes related to monetisation, number of followers, and coercion of any kind. The interpretation of this term in this study is directly linked to harmful content spread online, and the final consideration was based on the following authors: Campisi, Winet and Calvert (2018), Distler (2019), Hassan and Shah (2019), Madison (2020), Dimsdale (2021), The Consilience Project (2021).
3. “Harmful and negative content in this study are considered several types of material that may offend other persons' values and feelings”: content related to offences on expressing political opinions, religious beliefs or views on racial

matters, violent or sexually exploitative content, cyberbullying, any type of coercion or sexual extortion etc. (Commission of the European Communities, 1996; International Save the Children Alliance, 2008; The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017). It is essential to note that the European Commission highlights that what is considered harmful depends on cultural differences, and the fundamental rights, especially the right of freedom of expression, have to be fully respected. In this study, 28 types of potential harmful content were listed.

4. *“Young people, and youths in this project are referred to as the sample population”, specifically, young people aged 16 to 26 years old, also referred to as Gen Zers or members of the generation Z (Gartner, 2019; Spitznagel, 2020).*
5. In the context of this study, *“young people can be categorised within the Generation Z cohort. The most impacted and susceptible to be influenced by SMIs is Generation Z, made up of those born between 1995 to 2012”* (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Generation Z is the first generation to have grown up surrounded by digital communication, who have never experienced the world without internet access (Djafarova and Bowes, 2021). Additionally, Generation Z is the largest generation, accounting for about 32% of the world's population, and is expected to have a significant impact on global consumer sales (Miller and Lu, 2018).
6. This study requires Garda Vetting. In Ireland, anyone who works or volunteers with children and vulnerable adults must undergo *“Garda vetting. This is a process to check whether a person has a criminal record or any specified reason why the person might pose a threat to vulnerable people”*. Garda vetting is conducted by the Garda Síochána National Vetting Bureau, which will send a vetting disclosure to the organisation. When someone is Garda vetted, they do not have to be re-vetted unless they move jobs or change positions within a sporting or community organisation (National Vetting Bureau, 2022). The researcher in this project is garda vetted.
7. In this study the concept of *“quality content refers to content that increases young people skills, knowledge, and competencies, emphasising creativity and being reliable and safe”* (Council of the European Union, 2012; European Commission, 2012).

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

INTRODUCTION

Drawing from the interdisciplinary areas of marketing and psychology, this research aims to understand the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). Marketing and psychology have always been understood as interdisciplinary disciplines in which the studies of social and behavioural sciences can amplify marketing horizons and contribute to best practices and new strategic models in the field of marketing (Lazer and Kelley, 1960; Donthu *et al.*, 2021). An example is the journal *Psychology & Marketing*, which publishes original research related to the applications of psychological theories and techniques to the marketing field (*Psychology & Marketing*, 2022). Psychological theories' lens contributes to understanding and exploring several consumption-related phenomena and marketing-communications trends and facts (Otterbring, 2021). This interdisciplinary approach has demonstrated efficacy and reliability in both fields, generally relying on self-reported preferences, perceptions, attitudes, intentions, personality assessment or other similar measures as the principal outcomes (Otterbring, 2021). Mixed-methods research is recommended to expand results and promote methodological pluralism in this interdisciplinary approach (Otterbring, 2021). The integration of both disciplines in this research has a personal and technical motivation, as I have studied and researched marketing topics since my master's degree in marketing, including digital and social media marketing. Psychology has always been an interesting topic to advance knowledge, mainly because I completed a master's degree in human resources management, and it had some topics associated with psychology, such as psychometric tests related to intelligence and personality. Thus, both subjects pertain to the same macro field of social sciences. The technical motivation relies on the reliability of past research combining and incorporating psychology and marketing into a research study (Lynn *et al.*, 2017; Donthu *et al.*, 2021; Otterbring, 2021; Colmekcioglu, Dedeoglu and Okumus, 2022).

From the above discussion, this study intends to link psychology and marketing communications-related topics such as the study of personality, para-social relationships and consumer trust in order to assess young people's susceptibility to influence by social media influencers (SMIs) and understand who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs.

Brands at all levels contract social media influencers (SMIs) to promote their products and services and mostly to generate brand awareness within a specific target audience (Ryan, 2014; Chaffey, 2021; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021). This has an important role in influencing young people in various ways, mainly because SMIs are very popular amongst this specific age group (Abidin, 2015; Nafees *et al.*, 2021; Colmekcioglu, Dedeoglu and Okumus, 2022). For example, brands often pay influencers to promote products or content influencers create (Pradhan *et al.*, 2022). Although social media influencers target all age groups, this research focuses on young people from 16 to 26 years old within the Generation Z cohort living in Ireland.

Generation Z is the young people cohort born between 1995-2012, and this is a generation that tends to socialise through social media channels, a habit that has considerably modified their time use patterns and their social interactions in all spheres (Wood, Borja and Hoke, 2021; Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera, 2022; Fan *et al.*, 2022). This cohort is considered to be a generation that responds rapidly and has a necessity for immediacy and permanent interaction, even related to social media, where they consider themselves competent users and make use of these channels as their main source of information (Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera, 2022). In the study of Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera (2022), Generation Z shows to make more intensive use of Instagram (96%), followed by YouTube (71.4%) and Spotify (49.3%) when compared to other generations. Concerning their approach to SMIs, Gen Zers expect influencers to be interactive, communicative, enthusiastic, credible and inspiring (Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera, 2022). Therefore, this cohort is an ideal sample group for my research, as they are actively online and tend to follow and interact with SMIs. Hence, Ireland is chosen as an accessible location for data collection and research.

A recent study in Ireland so-called, the 2021 Sign of the Times survey by the Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight (B&A), conducted with 1.000 subjects ($N = 1.000$), reports that during the COVID-19 pandemic Generation Z (16-24 in this survey) have been spending more time on TikTok and Instagram (82%) as an escape (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021). This rise might be connected with the rise of mental health issues during the pandemic, 70% of this generation feel that Covid has worsened their mental health, and 65% (compared with 43% of the total

sample) feel tired all the time (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021). Furthermore, the time spent on streaming services as entertainment are also high, 93% YouTube, 91% Netflix, 40% Amazon Prime, 32% Disney, and 40% online gaming (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021).

Additionally, the Digital News Report Ireland 2020, a study for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, depicts that Gen Z in Ireland is also increasingly using social media as their primary source for news consumption, growing by 3% points in five years (Kirk *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, there is a higher level of social media use for news among the 18-24s group, and smartphones are used by 71% of Gen Z as their main device for accessing news, and this has increased by 18% points over five years (Kirk *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, it is clear from the data above that the Gen Z cohort has always been connected in their social media channels, using them as the main source to collect information, entertainment, and socialise with their peers. Also, smartphones among Gen Z have been growing as mobiles are accessible, affordable and faster for the return of information. Therefore, the data provided and the discussions above explain the purpose for the choice of this population in this research because there is a need for a population who is online, has internet access, follows influencers, has social media channels, and is exposed to social networks and SMIs, and finally be accessible to this study.

Furthermore, it is worth outlining the SMIs' perspective. They attempt to impact all areas of their target audience's lives (Yuan and Lou, 2020). Examples include, encouraging people to buy or use a particular product/service, using their influence to change habits, attitudes and behaviours, including food consumption, lifestyle choices and even how a target audience communicates and the language they use (Nielsen, 2015; Glucksman, 2017; Goodman and Jaworska, 2020). Research increasingly demonstrates that digital influencers seem to be a crucial influence in the lives of young people, firstly, because young people spend a large part of their time online and are therefore very much exposed in a range of ways to influencers' content. Secondly, young people increasingly relate personally with SMIs and turn to them not only for entertainment but also for information, advice, company and comfort use (Qutteina *et al.*, 2019; Van Eldik *et al.*, 2019; Frontiers in Psychology, 2020; Wielki, 2020). Thus, there is an ongoing and dynamic relationship between young people in general, specifically Generation Z and

SMIs that is reinforced on a daily basis and deeply integrated into the basic routines of young people's lives. The journal *Frontiers in Psychology* recently devoted an entire volume to this issue entitled "*The Role of Social Media Influencers in the Lives of Children and Adolescents*" (*Frontiers in Psychology*, 2020).

It is important to note that SMIs may influence young people in both arguably positive and negative ways, for example, motivating them to behave pro-socially or adopt healthier or sustainable lifestyle choices as opposed to encouraging smoking, drinking, or even criminal behaviour (Wielki, 2020; Ryu and Han, 2021; Yıldırım, 2021).

This raises several important questions. Should we be concerned about the influence of SMIs on young people? Should this be a concern for the government? Should SMIs be regulated, registered, and policed? Should brands responsible for any perceived undue content be sanctioned in any way, and should such findings be made public? Whilst SMIs have undoubtedly had a profound influence on the lives of young people, it is not easy or arguably not even possible to fully quantify the extent to which this occurs and, consequently, the extent to which this may impact at a societal level (Freberg *et al.*, 2011).

While some previous studies have investigated the tendency of young people to be influenced by SMIs' advertisement content or specific categories of content, such as cigarette smoking, or alcohol intake, none to date have focused on specifically attempting to understand if Gen Zers will be susceptible to influence by SMIs from a holistic perspective, as well as trying to identify specific personality traits that might be more susceptible than others (Boyle *et al.*, 2016; Hébert *et al.*, 2017; Curtis *et al.*, 2018; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020; Russell *et al.*, 2021). **This research's main objective is to assess young people's susceptibility to influence by social media influencers (SMIs).**

Problem Statement

The internet and especially social media have changed how consumers and marketers communicate, allowing users to connect with peers by adding them to networks of friends, which facilitates communication, particularly among peer groups. Further, studies such as that conducted by Wang, Chunling and Yujie (2012) have confirmed the importance and influence of peer communication through social media in purchase decisions and online behaviour. Sherman, Payton and Hernandez (2016) found through

functional magnetic resonance imaging scanning (fMRI) that young people were more likely to favourably respond to or like, photos on Instagram depicted with many likes than photos with few likes, thus showing the influence of virtual peer endorsement.

This has presented new opportunities for marketers, and the use of social media in marketing is now evolving to the use of consumers' online brand-related activities (COBRAs), where internet users are encouraged to interact, express, share and create content about the firm's brands (Morris, 2009; Mutinga, Moorman and Smith, 2015). A new breed of highly influential consumers engaging in COBRAs, termed social media influencers (SMIs), arguably represents the most powerful public relations tool in a firm's marketing toolbox (Freberg *et al.*, 2011; Freberg, Palenchar and Veil, 2013). However, the use of SMIs in marketing also represents a worrying development in terms of susceptible young people who might be overly influenced by them (Parliament UK House of Commons, 2019).

Specifically, research is needed to reveal the impact of SMIs on young people, which may have both desirable and undesirable consequences. Additionally, influencer content may affect areas including youths' psychological well-being, materialism, and body satisfaction (Kraut *et al.*, 1998; Meier and Gray, 2014; Hogue and Mills, 2018; Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). According to the above discussion, **the research problem relies on the following: From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs?** Because if I can understand who will be susceptible to being influenced by SMIs, then I can work towards raising awareness among young people about the influence of social media influencers' content on their lives. This research topic aims to enrich our knowledge of the role of social media influencers in the lives of young people.

Guiding Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

In order to address the research problem of this study, specific guiding research questions were formulated focusing on two major issues, [1] on determining the specific personality traits (e.g. Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience) associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers. [2] Additionally, gathering insights about who their

influencers are, their motives for following these influencers, and who is responsible for protecting young people in the digital environment. This study is exploratory in nature, and brings a mixed-methods approach, relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods following a fixed mixed-methods convergent parallel design in which the use of quantitative and qualitative procedures are fixed and planned at the start of the research process, the measures are implemented as planned, and both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, and both quantitative and qualitative are prioritised with equal weight (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Guiding Research Questions:

1. (RQ1) What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?

This first question pertains to the quantitative approach of the mixed-methods design. In order to effectively answer this question, two hypotheses were formulated based on the literature review of this study, as well as the theories of personality, para-social relationship and consumer trust.

H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).

H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

The hypotheses of this study will be tested to understand if there will be a specific personality trait that is more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. The theories of para-social relationship and consumer trust might evidence the susceptibility of this young sample to be influenced by SMIs.

The second and third guiding research questions are the nested element of the mixed-method research design in which these questions will be useful for getting a wider

perspective on the topic under investigation. The results can be compared or combined to obtain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. This combination is useful to validate one set of findings with the other, or to determine if participants respond in a similar way if they check quantitative predetermined scales and if they are asked open-ended qualitative questions (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

2. (RQ2) What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them?
3. (RQ3) Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

The susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs was explored through their motives and preferences to follow their SMIs. This qualitative analysis is intended to contribute to the quantitative analysis. Additionally, through the guiding research question three, I intended to bring an ethical discussion about the responsibility of protecting young people in the digital environment. This question was answered through a critical literature review method relying on a qualitative approach that contributed to the broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this case, I argue that if young people are exposed to harmful content, this might have a negative influence on their lives, such as increasing alcohol and cigarette intake, and therefore, who is responsible for ethically protecting them against the disclosure of harmful content spread by SMIs?

Finally, this project's general objective **aims to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). In addition, this study aims to raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives.** In order to achieve this general research objective, I set up two specific objectives:

A – Determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers.

B – Holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers’ content on young people’s lives.

Thus, if I can understand who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs, then I can work towards raising awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers’ content on their lives.

This research results from a theoretical framework integrated into an empirical research study that is organised into two sections, containing three chapters representing three years of acquiring knowledge and experiences to contribute to science from a practical and scientific approach.

The Importance of This Study

This study aims to have a direct impact on young people, where the insights discovered here can be used to make young people aware about the influence of SMIs in their lives, either positive or negative influence. This research makes a unique and novel contribution to the fields of marketing and psychology, as from my knowledge, there is no publication with the same architecture available.

Additionally, this study has the potential to enable marketers, educators, parents, and other interested parties to develop a greater understanding of the susceptibility of young people to influence by SMIs. Therefore, this study may enable young people to develop resilience to negative influences and focus on positive influences. In particular, the findings of this study may be of interest and disseminated to the Irish Department of Youth & Children’s affairs, potentially influencing policy in this area (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2022).

Scientific Goals

The adoption of a mixed-methods approach and the various research techniques contributes to the scientific field of methodology. It also contributed to the understanding of the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by social media influencers in an array of aspects, such as types of content, discrimination between positive and negative

content, the definition of harmful content, types of content available and types of influencers.

The connection between the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs and personality theories enriches the field of psychology, personality and individual differences with a novel discussion and potential new knowledge in this regard. The adoption of the personality test HEXACO-PI-R 60 items version is another important aspect that might increase the reliability and validity of this method.

The research brings an ethical discussion about the responsibility of young people in the digital environment from different perspectives, such as government, companies and parents. Thus, this discussion contributed to the broad scientific field of social sciences.

From a scientific point of view, the implication of this research might be seen as a social intervention, as the findings discovered here will help elaborate articles that might help other social scientists explore deep the influence of SMIs on young people, and the results discover here aims to raise awareness and inform a specific cohort of our society about the impact of SMIs on young people's lives.

This research developed, tested and validated a new instrument able to measure the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs. This instrument is called SUSIS Questionnaire. This is composed of indicators representing parasocial relationships, consumer trust, perception towards influencers/susceptibility and potential harmful content posted by SMIs. This set of theories and concepts built the SUSIS Questionnaire. This is an excellent contribution from this study, providing the scientific field with a new validated instrument to measure the influence of SMIs on young people. Additionally, the findings here contribute to advanced knowledge of parasocial relationship theories and consumer trust.

Furthermore, the employability of HEXACO provided the understanding that individuals from this sample who highly scored in honesty-humility and conscientiousness are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. These findings contribute to the theories of personality and individual differences.

In addition, the discussions and findings of this project might have a relevant impact on the field of marketing, mainly in terms of exploring the influence of SMIs on young people. This can contribute to developing new marketing strategies focused on

generation Z and influencers, serving as a guide to sustain a strategy from a macro-level perspective. The understating of further profiling and understanding of content categories and cohort differences, mainly related to personality profile and gender, might demonstrate specific needs and preferences in different contexts. Therefore, being a necessary implication for innovation policymakers and commercial decision-makers. Finally, the results of this study might be relevant to social responsibility programmes and corporate governance statue of social media companies as a potential programme to reduce the negative impact of social media on young people's lives.

Thesis Outline

This thesis is divided into five sections: (1) Introduction, (2) Literature Review, (3) Methodology, (4) Results & Discussion and (5) Findings and Conclusions.

(1) Introduction

The first section provides an introduction to this study. Here, the introduction to the main topics, the research problem, the research questions, aims and objectives, as well as the scientific goals of this research are outlined.

(2) Literature Review

This section aims to review the relevant literature in the area and it is divided into seven sections. This chapter has a contextual approach related to the field under investigation and serves as a conceptual and fundamental basis for this research's general findings and statements. As well as this chapter answered research question three through a critical literature review analysis and outlined gaps in the literature available. In the end, a new conceptual model is provided in order to be tested in this research.

(3) Methodology

Section three presents the research design and methods of this thesis, including research questions, aims and objectives; philosophical approach; research design;

research methodology; methods of data collection, including sampling, ethical considerations; and data analysis.

(4) Results & Discussions

This section presents the study's main results, divided into quantitative and qualitative results. In addition, the research questions were answered and discussed in this chapter, and the findings were discussed as well.

(5) Findings and Conclusions

This final section presents the study's findings, and the final interpretation evaluates and analyses the findings from both strands – quantitative and qualitative. Further research and limitations were discussed in this section. Finally, the study's conclusion was outlined, and recommendations were offered.

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

CHAPTER I

1.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of this chapter is to demonstrate, explain, and critically evaluate the current literature available about the topics covered in this project. Current research is compared and contrasted with previous research, and synthesis was formed from the deep analysis.

This chapter starts with an explanation of the general context of the evolution of the internet and social media, constantly referring to the main core topic of this research, social media influencers (SMIs). Then, following the precedent topic, the researcher addresses the context of social media influencers, outlining the main trends and concerns. Further, the literature review covers the impact of social media influencers on young people, followed by the consumer behaviour of Generation Z in this digital era. In addition, an analysis of the personality topic and its theories are addressed and examined. Furthermore, there is an entire section devoted to answering RQ3 “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*”. This question was answered using a critical literature review approach. The last section of the literature review presents a synthesis about the entire review and proposes a new conceptual framework to be tested in the study, including the research questions and hypotheses.

1.1 The Evolution of the Internet and Social Media¹

This section reviews and analyses factors impacting the evolution of the internet, the web, and social media channels, charting historical trends and highlighting recent technological developments. The review comprised a deep search using electronic journal databases. The review presents updated information about technological trends, marketing, and chronological elements regarding the evolution of the internet and social media.

¹ Parts of this Section 1.1 was published as an article: Alves de Castro, C., O’Reilly, I. and Carthy, A. (2022) ‘The Evolution of the Internet and Social Media: a literature review’, *International Journal of e-Education, e-Business, e-Management and e-Learning (IJEEEE)*, 12(1), 30-41, available: <https://10.17706/ijeeee.2022.12.1.30-41>.

1.1.1 Context and Discussion

Globalisation is not a recent phenomenon as it has been economically present in our world since the 19th century as a result of the British industrial revolution that impacted global trade (Vanham, 2019). In fact, the world has faced many globalisation waves across several centuries. Nowadays, our globe faces the most recent wave known as Globalisation 4.0 and defined as “a means to comprehend how profoundly the context for governance and cooperation is changing due to the fourth industrial revolution” (World Economic Forum, 2019; Postel-Vinay, 2020). The new wave is shaped by the digital and technological innovations that directly impact our daily lives, changing our habits, attitudes and even shaping our culture. Schwab (2017, p. 12) the pioneer of this concept, stated that the fourth industrial revolution is described by a “much more ubiquitous and mobile internet, by smaller and more powerful sensors that have become cheaper, and by artificial intelligence and machine learning” (Schwab, 2016, 2017, p. 12). Additionally, this revolution originated from the merging of digital, physical, and biological transformations impacting modern society directly and intensely (Andreula, 2020; Postel-Vinay, 2020).

The impact occurs as a result of many new technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), robotics, the internet of things (IoT), autonomous vehicles, 3D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, quantum computing and finally, the recent increase of social media channels (Schwab, 2016, 2017). Although these systems are interrelated in complex ways, one common element that influences them is the "internet" and the "web".

It is important to this research to discuss and visit themes regarding new technologies and new trends driven by new technologies, as this study aims to understand the impact of social media channels and influencers on young people. In fact, it has been argued that many individuals cannot live without the internet and consequently without creating and processing data (Sheff, 2011). In the modern world, we are surrounded by equipment connected to the internet that accesses the world wide web. Every day we create new data through the internet, web, or social media channels because data is built through relationships, and individuals are catalysts in this process of interaction as we are inherently social beings. Thus, one click, a friend you have on social media, equipment

in your house connected to the internet, or a notification you clicked on your smartphone, are all generating data that fuel our relationship with the web and internet technologies (Capadisli *et al.*, 2016). It is impossible for many people to live in this world without being connected anymore, which is a new way of building relationships and networks. Generation Z and those born after them have never lived and experienced a world without the internet and social media. They were born in a connected world, touching screens, doing many virtual tasks at the same time, and often watching three to five screens simultaneously (Oliveira, 2019; Vogels, 2019). Therefore, discussing the evolution of the internet, world wide web and social media networks are necessary to understand our relationship with these digital elements and comprehend our role within the fourth industrial revolution.

The internet brought a significant change in the way we communicate and relate with one another. Most research and business ideas come from recognising a problem that could satisfy and supply the needs of a particular population, society or powerful organisation (Ahmadfaizar, 2020). In the case of the internet, what was needed was a means of inter-communication in a more flexible and interconnected manner relying on the accessibility set by the law of supply and demand in the post-second world war context (Boulos and Wheeler, 2007). Computers already existed at that time; however, they were not connected. They were a basic machine compared to the computer we know today (Poe, 2011).

In 1969, The North American government' department of defence created the Advanced Research Projects Agency Network (ARPANET), a set of computers and computer protocols (a sort of lingua franca for machines) that would link not only the defence establishment's computers in a distributed network but their computers in other departments, research centres and universities, thus permitting various PCs to connect among themselves on a single network (Poe, 2011). However, ARPANET was not useful and accessible to the entire population and not even many universities, federal institutions and/or businesses (Poe, 2011). Computer companies produced and sold computers that served only as a reader and stored some limited input data. The leading trigger group interested in a more interconnected system was scientists wishing to trade information pertaining to research and development progress (Ryan, 2010; Poe, 2011).

What was needed, they said, was a network of networks, a massive grid that would enable every scientist to talk to every other scientist no matter what network he or she was on. As many parties and interests were involved, it took well over a decade, a lot of negotiation, and a boatload of money to create this “inter-network”. (Poe, 2011, p. 213)

Another vital development was the email in the 1960s. The email was initially a technique to exchange messages between one computer and another, however both computers were required to make connections online (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011).

The innovative ARPANET continued its development over the 70s and the scientists Robert Kahn and Vinton Cerf finally created the Transmission Control Protocol and Internet Protocol, or TCP/IP. It is a communication model that set guidelines for how data could be transferred between various networks (Benito-Osorio *et al.*, 2013).

By the mid-1980s, ARPANET adopted TCP/IP, and from there, researchers started to build the "network of networks" – the "internet", thus most important institutes and universities in the USA and some overseas, were finally connected and communicating through the internet (Poe, 2011). Despite this, the first internet was not accessible, and usability required a high level of expertise. Then, a young British mind working in a Swiss lab called Tim Berners Lee decided to design a possibility to transform the internet into a more accessible and collaborative instrument as he noticed that there was growing interest in the capacity to access information on computers or communicate effectively with others through computers (Ryan, 2010).

From 1989 to 1990, Berners Lee created the revolutionary "world wide web" or simply the web. It is an element of the internet defined as a techno-social system to enable humans to interact based on technological networks, in other words, the standard way to access and transmit data online in the form of websites and hyperlinks (Poe, 2011; Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012; Benito-Osorio *et al.*, 2013). The system is designed to operate and co-operate with people to enhance an individual's cognition, communication and collaboration (Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012).

The evolution of the World Wide Web can be divided into four stages, Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3.0 and Web 4.0 (Ahmadfaizar, 2020). Table 1 describes each stages' period.

Table 1: The evolution of the World Wide Web, (Berners-Lee, 1998; Hassanzadeh and Reza Keyvanpour, 2011; Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012; Benito-Osorio *et al.*, 2013; Capadisli *et al.*, 2016; Ahmadfaizar, 2020; David, 2020; The Evolution of the Web, 2021).

Web	Period	Brief Description	References
1.0	1990 - 2000	The read-only web, used as a system of cognition.	(Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012; Capadisli <i>et al.</i> , 2016)
2.0	2000 - 2010	The read-write web.	(Berners-Lee, 1998)
3.0	2010 - 2020	Semantic web designed to decrease human tasks and decisions and leave them to machines by providing machine-readable contents on the web.	(Hassanzadeh and Reza Keyvanpour, 2011; Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012)
4.0	2020 - 2030	Web 4.0 is characterised as a read-write-execution-concurrency web with intelligent interactions. It intends to act like a human brain creating interrelationships between human and machine. "Web 4.0 will give users unique and interconnected social and personal lives".	(Aghaei, Mohammad Ali and Hadi Khosravi, 2012; Ahmadfaizar, 2020)

The number of active internet users worldwide was estimated to be 4.57 billion as of July 2020, comprising 59 per cent (%) of the entire world population (Roser, Ritchie and Ortiz-Ospina, 2015; Internetworldstats, 2020; Statista, 2020). As the web has become more accessible and popular, smartphones utilising new technologies such as 4G, 5G and very soon 6G, became the vital channel for internet access worldwide as mobile internet users account for 91% of total internet customers (Roser, Ritchie and Ortiz-Ospina, 2015; Internetworldstats, 2020; Statista, 2020). This reflects how the internet and web have ended up being relatively vital to individuals, professionals, and companies across the globe. The rise in modern technology has also resulted in professional communication moving from written kind to digital kind such as emails, online meetings, WebEx

seminars, Webinars, and many other digital possibilities. Due to the recent corona virus outbreak, there has also been an increase in the number of people working from home online as well as dealing with new technologies, platforms, software, and social media networks (Desilver, 2020).

Today, people, experts and companies are making use of social media on an everyday basis, sharing details, or promoting their company or brands. Although there are many benefits of social media, the disadvantages are no less. One example of benefits for organisations might be the increased knowledge exchange efficiency or improved customer relations. On the other hand, as a disadvantage, we can consider social media due to their transparent and unmediated nature may collide with political systems and cultural values in different societies (Schlagwein and Prasarnphanich, 2014).

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist, recognised by several as the father of sociology, and Ferdinand Tonnies, a German sociologist, were the pioneers of social networks during the late 1800s (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011; Vinet and Zhedanov, 2011). They believe that individuals sharing values and beliefs, consequently interacting among them and creating a relationship, might generate social groups within society (Vinet and Zhedanov, 2011). Also, from 1837, the radio and telephone were utilised for social communication (Woods and Woods, 2006).

Although social networks have progressed throughout the years and in the contemporary world involved the use of electronic media, they did not begin with the computer, they started with the telephone (Woods and Woods, 2006; Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011).

Throughout the 1950s, phone phreaking, the term coined for the telephone network's rogue browsing, began (Lapsley, 2020). This process was accomplished using homemade electronic devices that enabled unapproved access to the telephone system to make free phone calls. Phreaks were able to locate telephone company test lines as well as conference circuits and could hack right into company unused voice mail boxes to host the first blogs and podcasts (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011; Baraniuk, 2013; Lapsley, 2020).

Contrary to popular belief, social media was developed during the 1970s (Jakobsson, 2006). The development of a real-time virtual world with role-playing games, interactive fiction, and online chat so-called MUD, initially called Multi-User Dungeon, Multi-User Measurement, or Multi-User Domain, is largely message-based which

requires users to type commands making use of a natural language (Jakobsson, 2006). Therefore, the MUD created relationship and interaction among users, even though access to it was restricted to a small number of users. The popularisation and creation of the internet and the world wide web were the catalysts to establish connexion among computers that came years later (Jakobsson, 2006).

Another example appeared in 1978 recognised as BBS, which is a basic synonym for bulletin board system (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011). Individuals log in to the system to submit, download and install software application, read information, or exchange messages with others. In the early years, bulletin boards were accessed via a telephone line. Early bulletin board systems did not have shade or graphics. Bulletin board systems were the predecessors of the World Wide Web (Jakobsson, 2006; Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011).

Several social networking websites were produced in the 1990s after the development of the World Wide Web. Some examples include 6 Degrees, BlackPlanet, Asian Opportunity, and MoveOn. They were the most popular ethnic community social networking sites but with restricted functions and limited possibilities to connect with friends (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011; Zharotia, 2018). These social networking websites have been online where individuals could connect among them, including sites for public policy advocacy and social media-based upon internet of contacts design (Constantinides and Fountain, 2008). Other examples were the launch of QQ in China that was earlier utilised for instant messaging service, Skyrock as a French Blogging service, LunarStorm started as a community site, and Cyworld was a renowned Korean discussion forum tool (Zharotia, 2018).

Additionally, blogging was developed in the 90s, and the first blog was created in 1994 by Justin Hall on Links.net and in 1997 the term “weblog” was invented by Jorn Barger as the term reflected the process of “logging the web” (Zharotia, 2018; Vaughan, 2020). Thus, users started to share their personal life in their blogs, and companies began to make promotions in their blogs and third-party blogs. Very similar to banner ads that can be seen on Facebook and other social media nowadays. Lately, Peter Morholz shortened "weblog" to "blog" in 1999 as the most popular term and the one we know today. At that time, it was already possible through Blogs and Emails to exchange messages and interact with peers and people in general (Lambert, 2005, p. 168).

This relationship intensified from 2000 onwards, clearly impacted by globalisation, the popularisation of the internet, the rise of the middle class in emerging countries, and integration of markets worldwide, consequently a relevant increase of individuals' dynamism all over the globe (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2020). This created demand for a new product in the market to facilitate relationships and interaction among people. In 2000, social media channels started to appear with new technologies, well designed, with new interaction tools and possibilities for personalisation (Appel *et al.*, 2020).

The number of social media networks rapidly increased and changed the interaction of individuals, companies' businesses, marketing, education, films, and friendship, based on social networking. Amongst those that were released were LunarStorm, 6 levels, Cyworld, Ryze, and Wikipedia about 2000. In 2001, Fotolog, Skies Blog and Friendster were launched, and in 2003, MySpace, LinkedIn, LastFM, Tribe.net and Hi5. In 2004, prominent names like Facebook (Harvard), Orkut, Dogster, and Mixi advanced. During 2005, big names like Yahoo! 360, YouTube, and Black Earth all arrived (Edosomwan *et al.*, 2011; Van Dijck, 2013; Zharotia, 2018; Appel *et al.*, 2020).

In 2006, Twitter appeared, offering a possibility for users to follow each other and write small post messages with a maximum of 140 characters. Arguably the most interesting fact around that time was that in 2007, a massive wave of shares started to occur within social media channels. Thus, the first videos "going viral" on YouTube happened at that time. One of the best examples is the video of "Charlie bit my finger". This short video has received so far over 878 million views, one of the most famous videos of YouTube, yielding to Charlie's family about \$1.3 million in royalties, nearly 850 million hits on YouTube, and transforming his adorable children into accidental viral superstars (Davies-Carr, 2017). It is impressive how a non-intentional video went viral effortlessly and how powerful online engagement is where celebrities can easily be created from social media unexpectedly. The disadvantage might be a lack of preparation to deal with the excesses of fame and money. Even though it is a popular video, nowadays, there are videos produced by influencers, singers or celebrities reaching over 1 billion views. For example, "Baby Shark Dance" is the most viewed video so far. During the corona virus pandemic, the video reached 7.24 billion views due to children staying at home and interacting more with YouTube videos (Beaumont-Thomas, 2020).

Over the years, many other social media channels appeared, such as Instagram (2010), Snapchat (2011), Vine (2013) and the most recent Tik Tok (2019) and Clubhouse (2020) (Vamp Brands, 2020). These companies appear in the market and boom quickly; however, they can also disappear rapidly. These companies must update their channels daily, be attentive to what is going on in the market and how users have been responding to channels' features. Nowadays, the number of global social network users is about 3.6 billion, expecting a rise to 4.41 billion in 2025 (Ali, 2020; Statista, 2020; Via Statista, 2020). Facebook is still the market leader with over 2.7 billion monthly active users as of the second quarter of 2020, and Facebook is the most extensive social network worldwide (Via Statista, 2020).

Recent successes and failures in viral advertising demonstrate how challenging it is for marketing experts to regulate their message as it is released virally. In 2007, the band Radiohead released their album "In Rainbows" online, enabling followers to download it for any quantity of money they picked, including free (Rose, 2016). Despite almost giving the album away, In Rainbows' digital launch still pulled in more cash than Radiohead's previous album, Hail to the Thief (Rose, 2016). This situation is also an example of viral marketing defined as a form of marketing that happens when buzz marketing generates word-of-mouth (online or offline) interaction among users, especially on the internet (Rollins, Anitsal and Meral Anitsal, 2019). Today, viral marketing is very present within the digital world, giving possibilities to increase brand awareness and visibility through conversions, views, and shares.

Social media is a catalyst in viral marketing, and it enables an extraordinary quantity of individual, informal communication in real-time from anywhere in the world. There are no boundaries, and it is even complex and difficult to predict what a campaign can reach. Social media permits customers to correspond with peers on other continents yet maintains the discussion as laid-back as a Facebook wall surface message. Besides, blog sites allow us to evaluate a wide array of opinions and have given "breaking information" an entirely new definition.

Nowadays, the most crucial boom concerning social media channels is the growth of digital influencers' worldwide. However, the roots of influencers can be considered a few centuries ago. The pioneer is considered Josiah Wedgwood, a potter who produced ceramic pieces for the British Queen and afterwards became famous for it. I can argue

that being influenced by word-of-mouth or social media influencers have the same perspective, and the main difference is the range of people impacted by it today. Currently, digital influencers can reach millions of followers. Thus, their power to influence followers and peers can reach people on a large scale, but the essence relies on the concept of word-of-mouth within marketing, however in this scenario regarding an online approach. The key to the advancement of the modern version of word-of-mouth marketing is the internet. This new version relies on the dynamism caused by social media and its growth on a large scale worldwide, mainly triggered by marketing activities, organisations, and their brands.

Therefore, we are experiencing a new possibility to communicate with peers and brands. Finally, observing the current scenario, the definition of digital influencers and social media marketing arouse. A digital influencer is simply a person with social media who spread their knowledge about a specific niche and encourages fans and followers to take action, thus establishing respect and trust (Ryan, 2010; Wielki, 2020). The internet, the web and social media channels are all connected, these systems are in continuous development, in transition, like a metamorphosis in digital networks, almost always without boundaries.

1.1.2 Summary and Discussion

The primary purpose of this section is to provide objective and coherent information about the evolution of the internet and social media, mainly due to the lack of literature integrating the history of the internet, the web and social media channels contrasting with new trends such as globalisation 4.0. The insights discussed and outlined here can enrich this study and be used as a guide to explore important elements concerning the evolution of the internet from a chronological point of view and discussions about the transition of channels towards reaching the popular social media networks and social media influencers.

In conclusion, this section provides innovative knowledge about the topics covered, delivers consistent secondary data, and brings in its essence updated information about new technological trends, marketing, and chronological elements regarding the internet and social media evolution. The digital world has been in transition, changing

every day, recent trends will keep arising. After the web 4.0, nobody knows what will occur. Therefore, research is required to understand all systems' challenges, advantages, and disadvantages and possibly predict what will come next. In sum, it is evident that the internet, the web, social media channels, and all technological advances impact individuals' everyday lives, being part of our minds, bodies, and inducing societal change. This includes understand the impact of SMIs on young people's lives. The future is unpredictable, but we can expect humans, machines, and robots to interact with each other and even be part of each other as one interconnected environment. Mainly due to the advancements and up-scaling focused on the internet of things, artificial intelligence, machine-learning, brain-computer interfaces and simulated reality (virtual & augmented) and simulation technologies.

1.2 Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context²

These three main sections, “Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context, The Impact of SMIs on Young people, and Consumer Behaviour in a Digital Era – Generation Z in Perspective” aims to further the overall understanding of SMIs and outlines the impact of SMIs on young people' lives. Thus, the main objective of this literature review section is to raise awareness about the influence of social media influencers on young people and how brands promote their products and content through social media influencers. Also, through deeply analysis was possible to collaborate on the elaboration of the research questions of this study based on insights and secondary data collected in these three main sections.

1.2.1 Context and Discussion

Postmodernity in the western world can be understood as a period in which capitalism drives society. After several transformations, such as the globalisation of markets, financial deregulation, flexible production methods and the emergence of new industries such as the services and information industries, consumption became the main

² Parts of this Section 1.2 was published as an article: Alves de Castro, C., O'Reilly, I. and Carthy, A. (2021) Social Media Influencers in Context: a literature review, *Journal of Marketing Management (JMM)*, 9(2), 59-71, available: <https://10.15640/jmm.v9n2a9>.

driving force of postmodern society. In this period a new person appears, who is assigned the role of consumer, with consumption assuming a central position in his or her life (Powell, 2014).

Alongside postmodernity, the recent technological boom has given rise to a true digital culture, mainly based on consumption. The explosive growth of digital technologies has had enormous repercussions on the way companies have been strategically adding value to reach their customers, leads and users (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012). The use of the internet also gave rise to social networks, which revolutionised how the world is connected and how people communicate and interact with each other. Predominantly, the new digital age changed the way young people build their relationships as well as how they consume and share information.

As the digital age has been transforming and developing, it has been gaining huge space and becoming a powerful tool in many areas, such as marketing and communication. In recent times, we have been facing a cruel pandemic that drives people to be incarcerated in their homes, avoiding physical contact, and therefore creating a scenario where more time is being spent on the internet, social media channels and consequently there is more exposure to all factors arising from this phenomenon.

More than ever, companies and brands are investing in digital strategies to be competitive and stay updated. The rise of social media networks such as Facebook and Instagram have enabled companies to find more targeted ways to influence people's behaviour through the use of social media influencers (SMIs).

Many researchers say that the SMIs exert an interference power over people, mainly shaping and transforming people's opinions, as well as influencing their purchase decision-making process or just influencing people to buy, exposing them to brands' logos and advertisements (Glucksman, 2017; Kalu, 2019). Some influencers have millions of followers and when they act on their massive number of followers, they have the ability to influence a large part of public opinion, transforming behaviours, changing attitudes, interfering in people's personality and identity and mostly giving rise to consumer products and creating brand awareness.

Ryan (2014), states that SMIs are the online opinion leaders. They harness the power of the web to extol the virtues of products and brands that they like, and equally to denigrate those they find unsatisfactory. It can happen through blogs, podcasts, forums,

and social media channels. Therefore, they have the virtual ear of the online masses (Ryan, 2014).

Andy Warhol, in 1968, anticipated that in the future, "everyone will be famous for 15 minutes" (Willett, 2010). However, he could not have predicted that a quick sweep up in Instagram or TikTok using specific algorithms could make thousands of babies, kids, young people, and adults famous (Greenspan, 2021). This fame is correlated to what is created and produced by SMIs, because the content will define which target audience, they are focusing on and their interest will generate conversions and followers. Therefore, it is a matter of monetisation and the generation of capital for brands.

The content produced is determined by the relationship of identification of their followers with the content produced by them (SMIs and Brands), that is when a company hires a digital influencer to check its content and its degree of influence. Thus, brands are aware of the power of influence of these people on the consumption behaviours of specific populations and that is why they use the marketing of influence to boost their business.

Accordingly, SMIs sell their image to influence people's consumption habits and thoughts through a process of presenting the self as a commodity, the subject as merchandise. This occurs through building a brand that, a posteriori, will be replaced by the exchange value of the author themselves. This is only possible because of the way society is organised to enhance the image and value of what is being sold as a commodity for its beauty and easy consumption (Nobre, Abrantes and Silva, 2019).

Therefore, people read and listen to what they (SMIs) have to say; they value their opinion and trust their judgement (Ryan, 2014). Nowadays, there are many SMIs styles, focused on different aspects of daily living, such as travelling, fitness, lifestyle, cuisine, education, fashion and beauty etc. A report issued by Double Click (2006) entitled, "*Influencing the Influencers: How Online Advertising and Media Impact Word of Mouth*", helps to understand digital influencers and how to recognise them. The report included a list, and a person who strongly agreed to three or more of the following sentences can be defined as an influencer:

- They consider themselves expert in certain areas (such as their work, hobbies, or interests);

- People often ask their advice about purchases in areas where they are knowledgeable;
- When they encounter a new product they like, they tend to recommend it to friends and followers;
- They have a large social network circle and often refer people to one another based on their interests;
- They are active online, using blogs, social networking channels, websites, e-mail, discussion groups, online community boards, etc, to connect with their peers (Double Click, 2006).

Arguably SMIs have already won the pivotal battle for the hearts and minds of online consumers (Ryan, 2014). In the end, it is all about consuming, it can be, imagery, information, data, time, advice, and products/services all of which can involve tangible and intangible consumption. This inevitably raises questions as to the impact such influence may have. The proceeding section will focus specifically on the impact social media influences may have on young people.

1.3 The Impact of SMIs on Young People

Adolescence is a stage of rapid and extensive physical, psychological, and biological change (Gray, Culpepper and Welsh, 2012). Personality tends to stabilise by the age of 30 and remain relatively stable thereafter (Terracciano, Costa and McCrae, 2006). However, during adolescence, personality, although still relatively stable, can be a little more flexible. Research using the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) involving thousands of subjects shows that whilst personality tends to stabilise by the age of 30, self-discipline is more common amongst those over 30 whereas thrill-seeking is more common in those under 30 (Solomon, 2020). Therefore, this predisposes young people to influence online and as young people today were born in the digital age this also predisposes them to have online experiences, in fact it is usual to find a higher number of young people following influencers as well as becoming influencers.

Adolescence originates from the Latin “adolescentia”, meaning "a period of growth, of developing" (Harper, 2020). It is characterised by the experience of passing from childhood to adulthood encompassing roughly the period from the 15th to the 21st

year; or age 14 to 25 in males, 12 to 21 in females (Harper, 2020). Although it is important to recognise that the most profound changes occur during puberty and shortly after this. Adolescence is a period of changes in social roles and in the way the subject recognises themselves and is recognised.

The tendency of young people to identify with external groups appears not only as a search for identity but also as a search for similarity with peers, where they can find self-confidence and preserve their esteem, therefore there is a massive over-identification process, where everyone identifies with each other (Turkle, 2015; Saidel, 2017). Once a group has been joined, there is pressure to adopt and follow its habits and customs based on ideologies, myths, archetypes and values – it is important to highlight that these aspects and this process of identification can be compared with the creation of a brand personality, as the same features are involved in the development and the study of brands. In sum, young people have a higher propensity to interact with influencers associated with their identities, it is basically how they communicate and recognise themselves with their peers. Also, these communication and integration processes among peers identifying themselves with common themes are correlated to SMIs and how they spread their message through online channels. Creating content for a specific niche is based on a target audience and its characteristics relying on demographic and psychographic aspects, and young people by their nature are more susceptible to be influenced by specific topics particularly when they correspond with their identities, core personality or any group or individual for which they have positive regard.

Typically, brands tend to contract SMIs based on their representativeness within the digital world and the degree to which they are correlated to their brand's personality and values, because the SMIs will be the brand's voice and image for thousands or millions of followers (Ryan, 2014; Chaffey, 2021).

SMI is a growing industry, in 2018 Instagram reached 1 billion users and became one of the most important channels for advertising (Moore and Craciun, 2020). As a result, there was a boom in Google with searches for “influencer marketing” receiving an average of 61.000 searches a month (Brooks, 2019). In 2019 Instagram created the possibility for influencers to sell online through its own channel using ‘shoppable’ tag (Brooks, 2019). In the same year, the word “Influencer” was officially added to the English dictionary. Nowadays, in 2020, the influencer “industry” is deemed to be worth

5-10 billion USD (\$) (Brooks, 2019). It shows just how difficult it is to quantify what the real value and the real impact of SMI is.

Based on recent research, (Via Statista, 2020) released a graph showing the growth of social media channels by active users. Facebook is still the leader in the market, with 2.603 billion users, followed by YouTube (2 billion) and WhatsApp (2 billion) (Clement, 2020; Statista, 2020; Via Statista, 2020). Instagram as one of the most important channels for SMIs reached 1.082 billion, followed by the new trend Tik Tok with 800 million active users (Clement, 2020). These are the most popular social networks worldwide measured by the number of active users. This is a massive industry that seems to be only at the beginning of its growth and development.

Even though many young people spend a great amount of time online and on social media, a later report informs that a significant percentage of them, between 36% and 42% of Gen Zers and 31% of teenagers in the United States, hold undesirable attitudes towards online ads and adopt distinctive behaviours to escape from advertisements (Media Kix, 2018), as cited in (Lou and Kim, 2019). The most impacted and susceptible to be influenced by SMIs is Generation Z, made up of those born from 1995 to 2012 (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Therefore, the most efficient way to reach this audience is considering social media influencers (SMIs) as a marketing strategy for brands. Indeed, (Gartner, 2019) found that an estimated 84% of millennials are likely to be impacted by social media influencers content leading them to make a purchase or be more susceptible to doing so.

Day-by-day more studies are being conducted in an attempt to understand those channels and their impact on society mainly related to young users and the influence of SMIs on their attitude, behaviour, personality, and identity. It is clearly apparent that those platforms are changing our culture and society itself. Due to a consistent imminent presence of social media networks within the lives of their users, social systems have a determinedly solid social effect mainly among vulnerable young people. A study using 256 ($N=256$) adults and young people found that young people are more susceptible to being negatively influenced on the internet than adults (Kraut *et al.*, 1998). The overuse of internet by young people for interpersonal communication was associated with larger reduction in communication with family members and friends. Also, it shows large rises of depression and loneliness amongst the adolescent group (Kraut *et al.*, 1998). Face-to-

face contact with family and friends performs an important role in fostering interpersonal and social skills in young people (Turkle, 2015; Saidel, 2017).

The relationship of content created by SMIs could generate a parasocial interaction, a kind of intimate relationship between the influenced and the spokesperson. According to Gleason, Theran and Newberg (2017), as cited in Van Eldik *et al.* (2019) a parasocial relationship is associated with the construction of young people's identity (Gleason, Theran and Newberg, 2017). Therefore, there are possibilities to associate SMIs as catalysts in interfering in adolescent's personality and identity formation as well as a potential to open discussion on how we can understand the degree of influence by SMIs.

Psychologists have been warning about the negative impact of social media on young people, mainly related to instant fame from a SMIs' point of view as well as the undue influence from SMIs on young people. Through social media networks, young people have become obsessed with their own image. As they are undergoing a process of physical and biological transformation, they can be confused or feel blinded by all the fame. If they are aware of it or not, SMIs are continually fighting to be seen and battling that threat of invisibility (Mahon, 2020; Greenspan, 2021). Specialists say this new wave of influencers are more likely to develop emotional issues than past eras of child stars (such as Hollywood stars), as their lives are always broadcast, and watched by thousands or millions around the world (Jumana, 2019).

In a world connected by social networks, it is common to notice a high number of users who show symptoms of depression and anxiety (Turkle, 2015; Saidel, 2017). This compounded by the fact that there is often misinformation online as to the causes and the most effective means of tackling such issues, and the addictive potential of using social networks can lead the user to a situation of psychological vulnerability.

Released in November 2018, a study carried out by scientists from the Department of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania (USA), with 143 students ($N=143$), found that decreasing the time spent using social networks leads to considerable reductions in depression and loneliness (Hunt, Marx and Lipson, 2018). The research mentions that most publications suggest an intense comparison between the lives of others and the user's own experience (Hunt, Marx and Lipson, 2018). It leads people towards making comparisons between how their lives are and the lives of influencers in social

media channels, or the perceived perfect reality they tend to show on social media. Thus, young people are not seeing 'real life' they are seeing a false and manipulated version of life.

Illustrating another scenario but complementing the above, a study from 2018 made by York College in Canada with 143 female ($N=143$) undergraduate students (initial sample) registered in an Introduction to Psychology course found that female young people who were inquired to associate with a post from somebody whom they perceive as more attractive had noticeably decreased levels of self-worth a short time later (Hogue and Mills, 2018). This happens because users trust in a seemingly perfect reality portrayed by SMIs, in addition to the imposition of unrealistic and often unattainable societal standards with respect to body image.

The 120 (90% sample) undergraduate female participants in the study were either instructed to discover on Facebook and Instagram a peer who they felt was more alluring, or a family member who they did not feel was more appealing and leave a comment (Hogue and Mills, 2018). Specifically "they felt worse about their own appearances only in the first condition, with peers, but not family." These young women felt dissatisfied with their bodies as well as "felt worse about their own appearance after looking at social media pages of someone that they perceived to be more attractive than them" (Hogue and Mills, 2018). Hogue and Mills (2018) suggest that we should constrain our time on social networks significantly, and that reconnecting with companions and family in genuine life, is vital.

Turkle (2015) discusses the above in multiple scenarios and highlights that there is an empathy gap among young people who have grown up emotionally disconnected while constantly connected to phones, games, and social media. Margaux (2016) concurs, arguing that young people can be affected by a lack of empathy and may even lose interest in having a personal contact.

Recent research focused on young people and young adults, found that social media influencers are promoting content related to alcohol and drinking, both by sponsoring particular brands and as the promotion of a lifestyle choice (Curtis *et al.*, 2018). The study assessed the interactions between young adults/young people' alcohol-related social media engagement and their drinking behaviour and issues (Curtis *et al.*, 2018). Engagement measures such as likes, comments, social shares, saved items, click-

throughs, reposts or retweets in a specific platform were assessed. It aids in assessing how content material is perceived via a specific target audience primarily based on the time they spend focusing on such material and reactions to what they share. In summary, the research shows “a statistically significant relationship and moderate effect sizes between alcohol-related social media engagement and alcohol consumption” as well as “a greater alcohol-related social media engagement was correlated with both greater self-reported drinking and alcohol-related problems” (Curtis *et al.*, 2018).

A recent study investigated alcohol posts from influencers on Instagram, as it is one of the most used social networks among SMIs. The first study among students (18-25 years) found most influencers (63.5%) had recently posted alcohol-related content (Hendriks *et al.*, 2020). Also, these alcohol posts were often shared by influencers related to this lifestyle cohort (Hendriks *et al.*, 2020). Additionally, while a reasonable number of alcohol posts (19.5%) clearly indicated an alcohol brand by SMIs in their most recent 100 posts, and a vast majority (63.5%) of influencers had at least one alcohol post (Hendriks *et al.*, 2020). Considering, that those influencers have thousands and millions of followers, the outcome is a massive number of young people exposed to alcohol related posts, thus being susceptible to being negatively influenced, in this case to drink alcohol. As most of the influencers are lifestyle influencers, we can consider that they are promoting alcohol as part of their lifestyle, therefore popularising alcohol drinking behaviour, mainly among youths. This type of negative influence spread by SMIs is only one among many kinds.

With respect to food and diet, obesity is one of the most common issues related to global health and wellbeing. There is clear evidence that the exposure of children to the marketing of high-fat, sugar and/or salt (HFSS) foods and beverages leads to rising levels of obesity mainly being promoted in social media networks such as YouTube, Twitter and Instagram where children became a target audience for the food industry (World Health Organization, 2018). There is a huge concern as to how those social media networks are influencing children and young people’ dietary behaviour. A recent study using YouTube videos towards children, revealed that at least one food or beverage cue was used in nearly all videos analysed in the research and less healthy food was more frequently displayed than healthy food (Coates *et al.*, 2019; E. Coates *et al.*, 2019).

The principle of social learning states that the more children like a character the more likely they are to imitate their behaviour, for example, a social media influencer (Bandura, 2001). Exposure to an esteemed media figure, such as an influencer, promoting a food commodity or advertising a given diet will then foster these habits in children. A study investigating the effect on children's ad libitum snack intake of social media marketing of snack foods via influencer Instagram profiles, found that influencer marketing of unhealthy foods led to the immediate food consumption of these foods by young people and children, while there was no such effect on influencers promoting healthy foods (E. Coates *et al.*, 2019). One of the main reasons for that is the higher volume of advertising emphasising unhealthy food and poor nutritional quality food as well as the specific of targeting teens and young people. In the USA the food industry spends more than \$1.6 billion a year on this specific target audience (Harris and Graff, 2011).

However, it is important to state that we naturally crave fat, sugar, and salt as these were extremely difficult to find in the stone age, when we evolved into our current form. We needed to be very strongly motivated to eat such foods and to feel intense pleasure by doing so because there was massive risk involved in hunting for the foods that were richer in calories at that time. Now, such foods are plentiful, but we still have our basic stone age biological programming, making it easier to market such foods too because we are already primed to want them. It usually takes less persuasion to convince someone to eat unhealthily, engage in sexualised behaviour or in certain circumstances, even to engage aggressively, as these are all-natural inclinations that we all already have. That said, increased exposure to junk food for vulnerable young people does easily arouse interest in junk food in their minds driving them to ask their parents to buy it or sometimes purchasing it by themselves.

Therefore, there is a need to monitor how vulnerable young people may be exposed to unhealthy foods on social media channels as well as advertisements promoted by social media influencers (SMIs). I can argue that SMIs can change children's dietary behaviour or create an unhealthy food behaviour towards this vulnerable population. Most countries have not established policies in this regard and children have the right to health protection according to the Convention on the Rights of the Child established by the United Nations Human Rights signed by 194 countries (Bäckström, 1989). Article 24 of

this convention states that children must have the "highest attainable standard of health" which means that countries who have signed this convention must "inform, educate, and support society in child health knowledge" (Bäckström, 1989; NCD Child, 2020). According to Coates *et al.* (2019) food-marketing restrictions should be applied to new forms of digital marketing, particularly social media, on which vulnerable young people spend a lot of their online time. An efficient recommendation for this issue is stated in the study "*What Do Young people See on Social Media? A Diary Study of Food Marketing Images on Social Media*" Qutteina *et al.* (2019), as follows:

We highlight the spread of food norms on social media that encourage the overconsumption of non-core foods. Branded non-core foods are promoted via earned, paid and owned media marketing strategies by peers, influencers and marketers alike. Thus we call for reinforced food marketing regulations on social media. This is especially important in the case of paid marketing via influencers, who inconsistently disclose the paid marketing nature of the food messages they share. There is a need for stricter regulations to govern how influencers disclose food endorsements, including a consistent disclosure of every food message posted on social media. Disclosure also must be as clear and obvious to young people consumers as the food message portrayed (including for images that show on a minor's timeline). Furthermore, disclosure could be coupled with advertising literacy to ensure that young people truly grasp the monetary motivations of paid influencers. (Qutteina *et al.*, 2019, p. 10)

Although researchers are increasingly highlighting the negative consequences of social media influence, there has been limited response from governments and regulatory bodies. This section explored the negative impact of SMIs on young people, mainly on young people, such as depression, anxiety, excess visibility, susceptibility to undue influence regarding unhealthy dietary behaviour and alcohol. However, it is not possible to cover all harmful topics and the aim was to demonstrate that there exists a real possibility to be susceptible to undue influence and therefore to influence young people on their attitudes, behaviour, and personality development.

1.4 Consumer Behaviour in a Digital Era – Generation Z in Perspective³

The buyer decision-making process could be defined as stages of consumer experiences before making the final purchasing decision. Marketers have developed a model used to define and analyse the buyer decision-making process and by following the model, marketers are able to develop activities aimed to consumers in all decision stages, such as evaluating and understanding phenomena generated by the internal and external influences that affected the final decision making (Kotler and Armstrong, 2012).

The decision-making process entails five stages, 1) problem recognition, 2) information search 3) evaluation of alternatives, 4) purchase decision – product choice 5) post-purchase behaviour (Lawson, 2010). However, these steps represent a cognitive decision-making process, which does not mean that all consumers will pass through this standardised process. Depending on the purchase decisions, some stages can be more important than others, could be more habitual or more affective or other situational factors can alter the process such as the time at which a decision is being made. In a general context, purchase final decisions are made automatically without obtaining much information, and other times they can resemble an around the clock job (Solomon, 2020).

According to Leo, Bennett and Hartel (2005), consumer features in decision-making can be measured and evaluated through an examination of consumer styles. There are eight different decision-making styles, as proposed by Sproles and Kendall (1986): quality-conscious, brand-conscious, innovative/fashion-conscious, recreation conscious, price-conscious, impulsive, confused by over choice and brand-loyal (Sproles and Kendall, 1986; Leo, Bennett and Hartel, 2005).

The cited above demonstrates that an individual tends to choose the product or brand that somehow meets his/her self-image. Therefore, brands are often a way for consumers to express their identity, in addition to being a way for people to reflect what they want to be for others. In other words, the choice of a brand can be made based on what individuals want to project and represent in their social environment (Solomon, 2020).

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Brands are on social media channels to influence and affect users' decision-making process. It is not different when we speak about Generation Z and all the digital influence behind their purchase. This group of individuals, born between 1995 and 2012, is shaking the world in an online and offline sphere (Francis and Hoefel, 2018). Consumer behaviour regarding Generation Z is moving at a quick speed and changing mindsets, even though it is a challenging spectrum for marketers as they change as fast as technology trends. They are now cultural leaders and digital influencers, capable of influencing purchase decision making as well as having the power to buy, they are target audiences, mainly because they represent 32% - 2.47 billion of the world's population (influenced and influencers) (Spitznagel, 2020). However, reaching those young people is not easy, even though strategies have been made to get their attention, mainly based on their similarities, such as social media influencers focusing on a specific topic and being representative for their young followers.

For example, lifestyle is an important influencing factor. In this way, if a consumer's lifestyle is known, marketers can develop appropriate communication strategies and position their product to capture a specific target audience. Thus, conformity between products, strategies and consumer knowledge allows marketers to influence consumer behaviours and attitudes by directing individuals' interest towards their brands (Deniz, Goderkmeerdan and Yuce, 2011).

Individuals consume products and brands to take advantage of symbolic properties as well as functional benefits (Hyatt, 1992). The consumer chooses products and brands to cultivate and preserve their identity or related to their personality traits, and some goods are capable of serving the consumer in this sense, as they have a symbolic value. Customers use products and brands as a way of communicating with others (Hyatt, 1992). This consumption is directly related to the use of goods in the development of self-identity. In other words, there is evidence that individuals use brands as a means of encoding what they intend to be and as a means of decoding other people's consumption practices (Solomon, 2020).

In the case of young people, this process can be more intense, as their personality and identity formation are in transformation. For example, young people may be searching for similarities, ideologies, and related identity in order to understand their place in the world, to make social comparisons and simply to satisfy a need to fit in and

feel 'normal'. At the same time, young people do of course exercise independence and often this is in fact a central aspect of personality and identity formation in adolescence. Young consumers will to a greater or lesser extent exercise personal choice and gravitate towards online stores where they learn about new styles from around the world via social media channels and young people will in turn spread their own content in social media channels (Ryan, 2014; Solomon, 2020). The ultimate goal is to have the personality of the consumer fully aligned to the brand's personality and much study and effort is often made to develop this linkage in order to enhance brands' performance. Brands personality is defined as the set of traits people attribute to a product as if it was a person (Solomon, 2020).

Thus, the brand's personality is an important tool for brand management and marketing as a whole, because it is the job of marketers to develop traits that are long-lasting and, above all, distinct. Aaker (1997) identified five dimensions of the brand's personality: 1) sincerity; 2) excitement; 3) competence; 4) sophistication and 5) ruggedness (Aaker, 1997). It should be noted that brand personality is one of the most relevant components that influences and reinforces the consumer-brand relationship.

These young people have different roles when it comes to consumption: they are influenced by their purchases, but they are also influencers. They are influenced by social media influencers, by what they say on social networks or by celebrities who perform an SMI role. They also have a great power to influence, especially, their families, have a great ability to dictate trends and influence their purchases.

According to the study carried out by Nielsen (2015) - "*Global Generational Report, How We Live, Eat, Play, Work and Save for Our Futures*" - this generation has the following aims in life, and those aspects are very relevant to our consumer market and have attracted the attention of marketers:

- 1- make money (37%);
- 2- achieve a rewarding career (31%);
- 3- have a healthy life (29%);
- 4- spend more time with their families (20%);

In their free time, these children and young people spend most of their time connected to technological devices, mainly smartphones, and their preferred activities are: listening to music, playing online or accessing social networks (Nielsen, 2015).

Nielsen Global Survey on Generation Attitudes was conducted with more than 30,000 consumers ($N=+30,000$), they were interviewed in 60 countries in Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, Africa and North America (Nielsen, 2015). Considering the number of people using the Internet in each country and the age and sex of the sample, this sample is considered to be representative of online consumers. It has a margin of $\pm 0.6\%$ error. This Nielsen survey was based only on the behaviour of respondents with online access. Internet penetration rates vary from country to country. Nielsen uses a minimum 60% Internet penetration or an online population of 10 million for inclusion in research (Nielsen, 2015).

First, it is necessary to cite that the consumer socialisation process influences consumer behaviour as well. It is through socialisation that individuals adopt norms and values that help their adaptation to social life (Solomon, 2020). Concerning consumption, it is from this process that individuals assimilate some skills, knowledge and attitudes associated with the purchase decision-making process that influence their behaviours as consumers. In other words, consumers learn how people behave and what principles are used at the time of purchase. Several agents influence the attitudes, behaviours and motivation of young people, specifically, active agents who intervene directly in their lives from an early age. During the primary socialisation process, which corresponds to the childhood period, the main players are: peer groups (e.g. friends and SMIs), the family and the media (e.g. SMIs, YouTube videos etc.) (Solomon, 2020). Therefore, consumer socialisation is almost exclusively carried out under the control of others' impact (Hota and McGuiggan, 2006). Agents of customer socialisation, such as parents, mass media and peers, are external forces that initiate children and teens, by assisting them in their positions as customers, guiding them to their first consumer experience and showing them attitudes towards their role in the marketplace as customers (Hota and McGuiggan, 2006).

Much of the information we receive every minute is related to offline and online advertising. Gen Zers have a certain type of barrier to getting advertising messages even though they have always been online. It is a generation who can easily detect whether advertising is important to them or not (Acoba *et al.*, 2018). On the other hand, it is a generation that can be easily influenced by social media influencers and opinion leaders, who are present in their same reference group (Wielki, 2020).

In order to show how difficult, it is for advertisers to keep their message in front of them, a new Canadian analysis using data from Nielsen Digital Ad Ratings assessed Gen Z Canadians aged 13 to 17. More than 90% of impressions are missed while targeting Gen Zers (Acoba *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, less than one-in-10 impressions had an impact on Canadians' Gen Zers through those promotions (Acoba *et al.*, 2018).

Advertisers must concentrate on two main goals: including Gen Z in their community efficiently and delivering relevant addressable content. That is where the social media influencers come in and their role in the market as influencers, promoters and content creators. Their main goal is to target Gen Z.

Nielsen's research recommends that brands, agencies and media companies are able to leverage their own first-party data assets and merge them with third-party data to create custom target segments (Acoba *et al.*, 2018). Brands and marketers can use these segments to find the right audience and convey their messages in the most appropriate context based on an audience's interests, purchase history, and prior engagement (Acoba *et al.*, 2018).

Even though it has been challenging and difficult for brands to deliver their advertisement message to young people, it is still a field in development. For example, Facebook makes about 98% of its revenues in advertising, thus it daily keeps its eyes on consumers and recently it has been developing more private modes of communications than sharable modes. In contrast to other groups, the actions of generation Z reflects a major shift in the field of marketing (Wilson, 2020). These children and young people are consumers, advocates and entrepreneurs, and this group, while made up of very young people, should not be overlooked.

These young people are more interested in digital content, more involved and conscious of the issues affecting them, offering their views on every topic naturally. The attributes that this generation expects from its benchmarks are time, choice and creativity. This does not imply that these characteristics are necessary to build a bond with the company (Schlagwein and Prasarnphanich, 2014; Commerce, 2019; Wilson, 2020). These individuals expect the minimum promised by brands to be certain features.

Although there are both positive and negative influences that SMIs can spread, perhaps one of the issues that can skew towards negative influences is that being an influencer is a new job, within a consumption market and society that expects influencers

to work for their sponsor brands. Thus, as the main aim of many companies is to be profitable, many influencers may be pressured to promote unrealistic goals or represent themselves in an unrealistic fashion to promote a given brand and profit from doing so.

1.4.1 Summary and Discussion

The internet and especially social media have changed how consumers and marketers communicate, allowing users to connect with peers by adding them to networks of friends, facilitating communication, particularly among peer groups. Further, studies such as that conducted by Wang, Chunling and Yujie (2012) have confirmed the importance and influence of peer communication through social media in purchase decisions and online behaviour. More recently, Sherman, Payton and Hernandez (2016) found through fMRI - Functional magnetic resonance imaging scanning that young people were more likely to favourably respond to, or like, photos on Instagram depicted with many likes than photos with few likes, thus showing the influence of virtual peer endorsement.

In sum, psychologists and researchers have been concerned and warning about the negative impact of social media influencers on young people (Turtle, 2015). The main concerns specified in this literature review and most stated in research are related to depression and anxiety correlated to instant fame, and the reduction in depression and loneliness is linked to the decreasing amount of time spent in social media networks. However, the contrary does not have the same effect. In addition, young people who grow up with an excess of exposure to social media channels, the internet, and games may have an empathy gap (Turtle, 2015). Another finding is that social media influencers can cause a dissatisfied feeling related in particular to body image from a female perspective increasingly, unrealistic and unhealthy male body images are now also being portrayed. As the perfect body exposed to social media and promoted by SMIs can cause identity conflict. Research has shown a statistically meaningful association between alcohol consumption related social media interaction within the younger population (Curtis *et al.*, 2018; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020). Also, it shows a greater presence with social media related to alcohol was associated with both greater self-reported consumption and alcohol-related issues.

Another major concern is regarding the exposure of young people to the marketing of high-fat, sugar and/or salt food and beverages promoted by advertisements in social media channels, and the research cited confirms that these ads can raise the level of obesity in young people mainly being promoted in social media channels. Additionally, less healthy food had more frequent exposure than healthy food in those social media channels. Therefore, a possible explanation might be related to social learning theory, whereby youth exposed to an esteemed media figure such as an influencer promoting unhealthy food could foster unhealthy habits leading to obesity.

Therefore, more should be done to prevent young people from being negatively influenced by social media and social media influencers. It could result in positive outcomes, such as reducing levels of depression and anxiety, reducing obesity and alcohol issues as well as promoting acceptance and inclusiveness. Due to many elements causing a negative influence on young people by SMIs, researchers find that more should be done to protect the rights of young people. Governments should regulate and create policies to supervise how those undue influences have been generated and how it may be possible to avoid them.

A gap in the literature shows that research is needed to unravel the impact of SMIs on young people that may have both desirable and undesirable consequences. As well as, understand the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs, and how to recognise cohorts that might be more susceptible than others. Thus, personality test theories might help in this understanding of who will be susceptible to be influenced by social media influencers.

1.5 Personality

This section introduces the topic of personality as this project aims to investigate the personality traits or profiles associated with the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by social media influencers.

1.5.1 Introduction

According to Holt *et al.* (2012, p. 4), psychology is the scientific study of behaviour and the mind, where behaviour is referred to as the actions and responses that we can directly observe and the term mind refers to internal states and processes such as thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Psychology helps individuals to critique and question the world around us, for example our society, how it is constructed and all the influences that shape us.

The same authors claim that the five main goals of psychology are the following:

- To describe how people behave.
- To understand the causes of such behaviours.
- To predict how people will behave in specific contexts.
- To influence behaviour through the control of its causes.
- To apply psychological knowledge in ways that promote welfare. (Holt *et al.*, 2012, p. 6)

Both the person's behaviour and its causes can be assessed through several levels of analysis: 1) biological level, which includes genetic influences and brain processes; 2) psychological level, referring to the person's thoughts, motives, and feelings; 3) and the environmental level, which includes the past and current physical and social environments to which the person is exposed. Also, the authors established that there are six different main perspectives in psychology, diverging in terms of how human nature is conceived, the main causal factors in behaviour, and the focus and methods of discovery (Walker, 2002; Holt *et al.*, 2012). Table 1 summarises those perspectives and their main characteristics.

Table 2 - Main perspectives in psychology, (Holt *et al.*, 2012, p. 26).

	Psychodynamic	Behavioural	Humanistic	Cognitive	Sociocultural	Biological
Conception of human nature	Human is controlled by inner forces and conflicts	Human reacts to the environment	Human is a free agent, seeking self-actualization	Human as thinker	Human as social being embedded in a culture	Human as an animal

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

Main causal factors in behaviour	Unconscious motives, conflicts, and defences; early childhood experiences and unsolved conflicts	Past learning experiences and other stimuli, and behavioural consequences that exist in the environment	Free will, choice and innate drive towards self-actualization; search for personal meaning of existence	Thoughts, anticipations, planning, perceptions, attention, memory processes	Social forces (norms, social interactions, and group processes in culture and social environment)	Genetic and evolutionary factors; brain and biochemical processes
Focus and methods of discovery	Intensive observations of personality processes in clinical settings; some laboratory research	Study of learning processes and real-world settings, with emphasis on precise observation of stimuli and responses	Study of meaning, values, and purpose in life; study of self-concept and its role in emotion, thought, and behaviour	Study of cognitive processes under highly controlled laboratory conditions	Study of behaviour and mental processes of people in different cultures; experiments assessing people's responses to social stimuli	Study of brain-behaviour relations; role of hormones and biochemical factors in behaviour; behaviour genetics research

It is important to add that these six perspectives of psychology are linked to the three levels of analysis previously mentioned. Behaviour and its causes can be assessed by hormones and brain functioning, as well as by genetic factors, referring to the biological level of analysis, which can tell us a lot, but not everything. Thus, it is important to assess the psychological level of analysis, looking to the cognitive perspective to analyse how memory, planning, and thought influence behaviour. Also, the psychodynamic and humanistic perspectives can help to assess behaviour, especially by analysing how motives and personality traits influence such behaviour (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). Last, we can also consider the environmental level of analysis, using the sociocultural and behavioural perspectives to assess how stimuli in both social and physical environments shape and influence thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Taking all of this into consideration, the six perspectives of psychology and the three levels of analysis are linked to each other, interacting simultaneously in terms of assessing people's behaviour and thoughts and depending on each other to be accurate and to provide substantial knowledge about human psychology (Holt *et al.*, 2012; Stangor and Walinga, 2014).

The most important perspective of psychology to the present study is the cognitive perspective, more precisely social constructivism, which refers to the manner in which our experiences and behaviours are influenced by social factors (Cooper, 2002; Maltby,

Day and Macaskill, 2017). There are other elements that influence us psychologically such as law, policy, climate, geography, culture etc. Social media channels and consequently influencers are considered to mainly influence social construction. Mainly when it involves children and young people who are born in a digital culture, being exposed to screens since they were babies (Mahon, 2020). In contrast, negative influences by SMIs could also impact social construction, however, combatting such negative influences is possible through education, informing and teaching young people how to prevent themselves from being impacted by undue influences and become aware of who they are following in social media networks and how to filter and compare harmful and relevant posts exposed to them.

Individual differences is the branch of psychology that considers how and why people differ psychologically and how such differences may be measured by the use of psychological tests and other techniques (Cooper, 2002, p. 1). Additionally, individual differences as a branch is quite broad, for example it also includes areas such as intelligence and emotional intelligence (Pal, Pal and Tourani, 2004). Personality is one branch within this broad area. It has over 50 different meanings that derive from several fields such as philosophy, theology, law, sociology, and psychology. Personality can be defined as enduring interpersonal, emotional, attitudinal, experiential, and motivational styles, explained by McCrae and Costa (1989). Or it can be also defined as “an individual’s characteristic pattern of thought, emotion, and behaviour, together with the psychological mechanisms – hidden or not – behind those patterns” (Funder, 2016, p. 5). After analysing several authors, Karuppaiya (2007) claims that personality can be defined as follows:

- It is not just an accumulation of several pieces, it has organisation;
- It is a psychological concept that is also tied to the physical body;
- It is displayed in multiple ways in thoughts, feelings, and behaviours;
- It is active and has different processes;
- Shows up in recurrences, consistencies, and patterns;
- Determines how people relate to the world.

In other words, but within the same context, Passer and Smith (2007, pp. 442–443) state that “the concept of personality arises from the fascinating spectrum of human

individuality”. Passer and Smith (2007, pp. 442–443) define personality “as the distinctive and relatively enduring ways of thinking, feeling, and acting that characterise a person’s response to life situations”. On the other hand, Friedman and Schustack (2014, pp. 14–15) state that personality psychology is “the scientific study of the psychological forces that make people uniquely themselves”. The same authors emphasise eight key aspects of personality which together supports the understanding of the complex nature of an individual. These eight aspects are: 1) unconscious aspects; 2) ego forces; 3) biological being; 4) conditioned and shaped; 5) cognitive dimensions; 6) an individual is a collection of traits, skills and predispositions; 7) spiritual dimensions; and 8) interaction. These various elements cooperate among themselves to unveil human nature (Friedman and Schustack, 2014).

Finally, it is crucial to mention that these eight aspects presented by Friedman and Schustack (2014) are directly linked to the perspectives in psychology presented by Holt *et al.* (2012, p. 4), since they are included in each perspective, either in terms of their focus, behavioural causes, or conception of human nature. Thus, psychology and personality are two connected concepts, being related to each other through the several perspectives and the different levels of analysis (Cooper, 2020).

1.5.2 Trait Theories

Martin, Carlson and Buskist (2010, p. 610) claim that a trait is “an enduring personal characteristic that reveals itself in a particular pattern of behaviour in different situations”. Through time, trait researchers and theorists tried to identify and categorise the individual’s traits, which resulted in competing theories. The most well-known trait theories are Eysenck’s three factors, Cattell’s 16 PF, and the Five-Factor Model (FFM) or the Big Five (Cattell, 1957; Goldberg, 1993; Eysenck, 2013; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020).

Before approaching the 16PF the concepts of Q-data, T-data and L-data have to be defined (Cattell, 1957). Q-data refers to the data that are gathered from self-reports and questionnaires (Cattell, 1957). However, Cattell suggest that people do not have a good understanding of their personality, which requires the collection of more data: the T-data, collected by placing a person into a controlled test situation and noting/rating the

responses, refers to test data; and the L-data, that refers to information gathered about a person’s life (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). Based on these types of data, Cattell (1957) proposed the 16 PF, which is the Sixteen Personality Factors Questionnaire, including the 16 basic personality traits (Table 3).

Table 3 - Sixteen Personality Factors (16PF), (Cattell, 1957).

Sixteen Personality Factors	
Outgoing - Reserved	More – Less intelligent
Stable - Emotional	Assertive - Humble
Happy-go-lucky - Sober	Conscientious - Expedient
Venturesome - Shy	Tender-minded – Tough-minded
Suspicious - Trusting	Imaginative - Practical
Shrewd - Forthright	Apprehensive - Placid
Experimenting - Conservative	Self-sufficient – Group-tied
Controlled - Casual	Tense - Relaxed

In turn, Eysenck’s three factors theory suggests that there are three personality dimensions: 1) extroversion, including factors such as assertiveness and outgoingness; 2) neuroticism, including apprehensiveness and emotional instability; and 3) psychoticism, including cruelty and impulsivity, as well as shrewdness and tough-mindedness (Eysenck, 2013). This approach to personality traits is one of the few that considers the biological bases of personality, personality theory, and evidence that arise from statistical and empirical analyses of personality traits (Friedman and Schustack, 2014).

Recently, personality traits were defined as the “identifiable characteristics that define a person” (Solomon, 2020, p. 249). The same author states some examples related to consumer behaviour, such as the need for uniqueness, introversion/extroversion, and attention to social comparison information. In an employed example, could be a pattern personality type of a group of individuals, this type (e.g. frugality) “tends to favour cost-saving measures such as limiting time in the shower to save water and bringing leftovers from home to have for lunch at work” (Solomon, 2020, p. 249). Therefore, traits are useful descriptions of how individuals behave (Cooper, 2002).

Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann Jr. (2003, p. 506) consider “the big five framework as a hierarchical model of personality traits with five broader factors, which represent personality at the broadest level of abstraction”.

The big five dimensions also are known as the neo-personality inventory, a set of five dimensions that form the basis of personality: openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (Solomon, 2020). Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann Jr. (2003, p. 506) explain that each bipolar dimension summarises several more specific facets, which in turn, subsume a larger number of even more specific traits. The origin of the name refers that the framework intends that human personality might be assessed along five major elements, each of which is distinct and independent from the others (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). To sum up, it was based on a study translated into many languages including participants from all continents, the study included 1.710 adjectives in English, which ultimately made up five major classifications of personality (Grant, 2015). The big five is actually called the big five because many studies have confirmed these are the most stable aspects of personality across our lives (John and Srivastava, 1999; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020). These are the five areas that are the least likely to change i.e. the most strongly biologically influenced of all personality traits (John and Srivastava, 1999; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020). Each classification can be described as follows, according to Solomon (2020, p. 249):

- Openness to experience: The degree to which an individual is open to new ways of doing things. An example of measurement, if the individual agree/disagree on: love to think up new ways of doing things.
- Conscientiousness: The level of organisation and structure a person needs. An example of measurement, if the individual agree/disagree on: I am always prepared.
- Extroversion: How well a person tolerates stimulation from people. An example of measurement, if the individual agree/disagree on: talk a lot of different people at parties.

- Agreeableness: The degree to which we defer to other people. An example of measurement, if the individual agree/disagree on: take time out for others.
- Neuroticism (emotional instability): How well a person copes with stress. An example of measurement, if the individual agree/disagree on: get upset easily. (Solomon, 2020, p. 255)

The five dimensions structure suggests that most of individual differences in human personality might be classified into the five broad, empirically derived domains (Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann Jr, 2003). They provide genetic and biological roots, and neuroscience, neuromarketing and topics related to brain studies have started mapping the five dimensions to important brain areas (Solomon, 2020).

Every element reviews a variety of specific features (e.g., sociability), which in turn includes more particular traits (e.g., talkative, outgoing). This model recommends that most individual differences in personality can be classified into these five broad spheres, also it has been used for most of the researchers focused on social media and personality (Correa, Hinsley and de Zúñiga, 2010). The reason we focus on them is that they are the aspects of personality that have been found to be most stable across the lifespan (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020). Other aspects of personality have been found to be more changeable from situation to situation, but these aspects tend to be much more stable. For example, if you are an extrovert, you are likely to stay that way throughout your entire life and so on for all of these areas in the big five. Therefore, this is important because these will be areas that will influence our decisions on an ongoing basis and it is a good idea, for example from a marketing perspective to appeal to these basic aspects of personality because then it will be possible to find ways to hook consumers long term rather than focusing on aspects of personality that might change all the time because if we focus on these, we cannot guarantee that consumers will stick with a product or brand.

Significantly research about individual differences and personality dimensions present that the big five framework have been highlighted as leading factors in

determining the preferences and interaction styles employing the five factors model of personality being a well-accepted model (Eftekhar *et al.*, 2014; Wehrli, 2008).

However, Solomon (2020) states that it is important to understand deeply the personality test and its mechanisms in the study in order to elaborate a well-structured assessment that can give detailed, accurate and reliable answers for what the research is trying to find and answer.

1.5.3 Measuring Personality

The existence of several types of personality tests is justified theoretically and methodologically. On one hand, theoretical reasons refer to the fact that some tests are more or less appropriate to measure personality in different contexts. For instance, we cannot ask people to report about their unconscious motivations since they are unconscious. On the other hand, methodological reasons refer to the fact that it is important to have several tests to measure personality since each one of them suffers from inherent biases (Friedman and Schustack, 2014). The main types of personality measures/tests are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4 - Different types of personality measures/tests, (Friedman and Schustack, 2014, p. 25).

Type of test	Examples
Self-report tests	HEXACO Personality Inventory (PI-R) Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MMPI) Affective Communication Test (ACT) Millon Clinical Multiaxial Inventory NEO-PI Personality Research Form (PRF) Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)
Q-sort tests	Self-concept Self-esteem Family relations
Ratings and judgments by others	Ratings by parents, teachers, friends, spouse Judgments by psychologists
Biological measures	Reaction time Skin conductance Electro-encephalogram (EEG) Positron emission tomography (PET) scan, magnetic resonance imagery (MRI), functional MRI (fMRI) Postmortem analyses Hormonal and neurotransmitter levels Chromosomal and gene analyses

Behavioural observations	Experience sampling Judgments by video-tape coders
Interviews	Type A structured interview Kinsey sexual interview Clinical (psychiatric) intake interview
Expressive behaviour	Speech rate Gaze patterns Posture Gesture Gait Interpersonal distance
Document behaviour	Psychobiography Dream diaries
Projective tests	Draw-A-Person Rorschach Inkblot Thematic Apperception Test (TAT)
Demographics and lifestyle	Age Cultural group Sexual orientation Political affiliation
Online Internet analysis of social media and Big Data	Counting patterns of Facebook “likes” Analyzing Twitter tweets

According to several other authors, to measure personality we can use explicit or implicit approaches (Table 5). Explicit approaches refer to self-reporting questionnaires, which ask users to rate to what extent certain statements apply to them and to their reality. These questionnaires are basically the five-factor model, the BFI-10, the 20-item mini IPIP, the 40-item minimarkers, the 44-item BFI, the 50-item IPIP-NEO-50, the 60-item NEO-FFI, the 240-item IPIP-PI-R, and the 300-item IPIP-NEO (John and Srivastava, 1999; Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann Jr, 2003; Donnellan *et al.*, 2006; Goldberg *et al.*, 2006; Rammstedt and John, 2007).

C. Cooper (2002) states that the self-report questionnaire is the most obvious way to measure personality. However, a few questions cannot be developed and there is no assurance that the questions you can ask can calculate the characteristics as you intend. Additionally, how someone fills a box in a questionnaire does not mean we can accept that answer at face value (Cooper, 2002). Therefore, it is not easy to explore personality tests, even though there are valid accuracy and possibilities to investigate and test (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017).

Table 5 - Summary of explicit and implicit approaches to measure personality, (Zhang and Conrad, 2014).

Approach	Techniques	Advantages and disadvantages
Explicit	Self-reporting questionnaires (HEXACO-PI-R, five-factor model, BFI-10, 20-item mini IPIP, 40-item minimarkers, 44-item BFI, 50 item IPIP-NEO-50, 60 item NEO-FFI, 240 item IPIP-PI-R, 300-item IPIP-NEO)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easy administration - Validated questionnaires for most traits - Transparency to users - Time consuming and innaccuracy
Implicit	Machine learning techniques (user generated content in social media, combination of statistical and linguistic features, structural social network properties, gaming behaviour, non-verbal data, multi modal personality recognition)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accuracy - Privacy implications - Substantial data

Recently, Zhang and Conrad (2014) proved that self-reporting questionnaires are useful due to the fact that they are easily administered, there are validated questionnaires for most traits, and there is significant transparency to users. Still, the authors claim that there are some disadvantages, such as time-consuming methodologies and eventual inaccuracy.

According to Friedman and Schustack (2014, p. 26) “with the proliferation of electronic devices like iPhones, self-report assessments can now be done electronically, sampling the person at different times or in different situations”. Such flexibility means that these tests are more feasible to measure personality stability and change through time and to assess how personality affects behaviours and feelings.

Ratings and judgments by others was a personality measurement test developed by Terman (1921), who examined children’s high intelligence, personality and social skills. The author collected information about these children (who were about 11 years old) with their parents and teachers, including several dimensions: prudence or forethought, conscientiousness, freedom from vanity, and truthfulness. In sum, the ratings obtained from this test are reliable and valid, predicting expected behaviours (Terman, 1921).

Biological measures are based on the fact that the nervous system is key. Thus, these tests measure the nervous-system-related behaviours (e.g. skin conductance and reaction time). Still, previous attempts were disappointing. Current attempts are more

exciting, focusing on the nervous system by aiming directly at the brain (Friedman and Schustack, 2014). Behavioural observations, on the other hand, was developed by (Galton, 1907), who collected physical measurements of people and studied their reactions in controlled contexts. Ekman, Friesen and Hager (2002) claim that behavioural observation can be simple, when counting people's experiences, or complex, when understanding people's interactions with each other. Also, facial expressions of emotion can be observed and coded through this personality test.

A quite obvious manner to find out about someone's personality is to conduct an interview. According to Friedman and Schustack (2014, p. 30) "the classic interview in psychology is the psychotherapeutic interview, in which the client (patient) talks about important or troubling parts of his or her life". The validity of this test is difficult to determine. However, one way to assess its validity is to judge the therapy's results. Overall, interviews are valuable assessment tools when measuring personality, although it is time consuming.

In turn, implicit approaches are related to the use of machine learning techniques. Personality traits can be determined from user generated content in social media channels (e.g., Facebook likes, language that is used), Twitter user types (e.g. number of total followers), a combination of both statistical and linguistic features (e.g. emoticons, punctuation, retweets), and structural social network properties (Smith *et al.*, 2019). Also, traits can be measured through gaming behaviour, with implicit association tests being used to measure reaction times to visual stimuli, associated to contrasting personality descriptors (Smith *et al.*, 2019).

It is possible to use non-verbal data to measure personality traits (e.g. video and speech), such as prosody, gaze behaviour, intonation, and gestures. Several studies used different non-verbal data, such as:

- Speech features (Polzehl, 2015).
- Video features – speaking time, speed and amount of times people look at the camera (Biel and Gatica-Perez, 2013).
- Video meetings features – speech and gaze attention (Staiano *et al.*, 2011).
- Facial features (Rojas *et al.*, 2011).

Also, personality traits can be measured through multi-modal personality recognition. According to Smith *et al.* (2019), some researchers used a combination of textual features (e.g. emotional and linguistic) that were extracted from videos, in addition to audio-video features, while others used a combination of lexical features and non-verbal behaviour.

Considering these machine learning techniques, their main advantages are related to the fact that they have good accuracy. However, they can have some privacy implications since users have to give their consent, they assume the use of substantial data and a poor availability of existing datasets for other uses and contexts (Smith *et al.*, 2019).

Considering the scope of this work, it is important to mention the study of Orchard *et al.* (2014) for comparative purpose, since it implies that differing user profiles may interact differently with social media channels. These profiles could be personality, age, and sex. The study applied the Eysenck's three-factor short scale model (EPQ-R – extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism) being a universal measure of personality combined with relevant theory and extra scales provided by Beck (sociotropy and autonomy). All aspects of this model are associated with behavioural social factors.

Even though the EPQ-R model seems similar to the big five framework, this is a much broad and complex method (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). In order to investigate personality profile of a specific sample group, in a specific location, in this case Dublin, age group 16-26 years old, this method is not recommended due to its universal application, broad focus and complexity. Also, Amichai-Hamburger (2002) suggests that more specific personality traits may be more fruitful in identifying explicit links, such as the big five dimensions framework.

An alternative framework to assess personality profile is the Meyers-Briggs type indicator, based on Jung's studies, in which he believed that each of us has inborn predispositions (Solomon, 2020). Along these dimensions that then interact with the environment to shape personality. The assessment MBTI measures if social media users are more likely to be extroverts, use intuition and arrive at decisions by thinking likewise the big five. According to The Myers & Briggs Foundation & MBTI Training Institute (2021), the four dimensions are the ones presented on Table 6.

Table 6 – The four dimensions of Myers-Briggs type indicator MBTI, (The Myers & Briggs Foundation & MBTI Training Institute, 2021).

Focus of attention	Extroversion (E)	Introversion (I)
	External world	Internal world
Take in information	Sensing (S)	Intuition (N)
	Sequential step-by-step	Big picture
Make decisions	Thinking (T)	Feeling (F)
	Step from the situation, take an object view	Step into the situation, take a subject view
Deal with the outer world	Judging (J)	Perceiving (P)
	A planned approach to meeting the deadline in a scheduled way	A spontaneous approach to meeting the deadline with a rush of activity

An example of Myer-Briggs application can be seen in the study of Harrington and Loffredo (2010) to analyse students who prefer to attend online and offline lessons, it shows that “statistically significant majority of MBTI introvert type university students preferred online classes and extravert type students preferred face-to-face classes” validating the efficacy and reliability of this indicator within this specific research (Harrington and Loffredo, 2010). It validated one aspect of it, the introversion/extraversion dimension, which is the only one that really aligns with any other test of personality. However, many researchers, such as the professor of management and psychology at the University of Pennsylvania Adam Grant, Michael Ashton professor of psychology at Brock University and the professor of management David M. Boje from the New Mexico State University have questioning the validity and reliability of MBTI for many reasons, such as nuances constraint (black-and-white categories), unreliability because the same individual might have different results in case of retaking the test, the indicate does not provide predictive validity and Jung’s theory might be outdated (Grant, 2015; Pan, 2018; Gholipour, 2019; Psychometric Success, 2021).

Additionally, the National Academy of Sciences Committee examined data from over 20 MBTI research studies and assumed that simply the Introversion-Extroversion scale has satisfactory construct validity, the other aspects not enough (Grant, 2015; Pan,

2018; Gholipour, 2019; Psychometric Success, 2021). Finally, an in-depth analysis about the above-mentioned framework was published revealing that “the Myers-Briggs Indicator does not measure personality traits but only registers preferences” (Murray, 1990, p. 1199).

In sum, there are several tests to measure personality. When it comes to establishing which one is the best, the answer depends on the assessor, the person, and on the aim of the assessment. For instance, if the goal is to assess the unconscious motives behind aggressive behaviours, we should use behavioural observations, rather than self-report personality tests. Still, the most important aspect is to focus on continuously evaluating their validity. The main advantages and limitations of previously mentioned tests are summarised in Table 7.

Table 7 - Main advantages and limitations of personality measuring tests, (Friedman and Schustack, 2014, p. 36).

Tests	Advantages	Limitations
Self-report tests	Straightforward to standardize, easy to administer, reliable, capture views of self well	Limited in richness, easy to fake, depend on self-knowledge
Q-sort	More active (with more people involvement) than questionnaires, can yield ranking of characteristics, and same items can be used to rate different targets	Limited in richness, easy to fake, depend on self-knowledge
Ratings by others	Provide a perspective not biased by the self-reports of the individual, and clearly reveal “visible” traits, can be used to rate children	Invalid to the extent that raters lack knowledge or are biased
Biological	Can reveal individual reactions without relying on self-report or rater judgment	Difficult and expensive to use, relation between biological substrates and complex behaviour patterns is not often simple
Behavioural observations	Capture what the individual actually does	Can be hard to interpret as personality or may be unrepresentative of whole range of person’s behaviour
Interviews	Can probe deeply and use follow-up questions, very flexible	Can be biased by the interviewer or respondent, expensive, and time-consuming
Expressive behaviour	Captures actual unique behavioural style, including subtitles and emotions	Difficult to capture, code, and interpret
Document analysis	Can be used to assess an individual across time, quite detailed and objective, can be used for deceased persons	Show only certain aspects of the person, may not be completely honest, and may not be available from important times or events

Projective tests	Go below the surface and assess aspects that the person may not be able to self-report	Significant problems of reliability and validity
Demographics and lifestyle	Shows the framework and grouping in which the person functions (age, gender, occupation, culture)	By itself can tell little about the individual person
Online Internet analysis of social media and Big Data	Gather huge amounts of relevant data fairly inexpensively, captures areas of current interest and focus, reveals network ties to other individuals	Unobtrusive but possibly subject to self-presentation biases

1.5.4 Personality and Social Media

Through the understanding of personality it might be possible to comprehend the interaction of humans with the digital world, for example confirming that personality traits might predict the increase of social media channels usage and potential addiction, and negative outcomes from this addiction, such as low self-esteem, shyness, introversion, neuroticism, high levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Sheldon, Anthony and Sykes, 2020). A study in Norway with a sample population of 23.500 subjects, ¼ 35.8 years old (Range = 16-88 years old), depicts that SM (social media) addiction was positively correlated to higher narcissism and addiction may be a consequence of low self-esteem, thus unveiling that individuals addicted to social media channels tend to seek ego-enhancing possibilities to fulfil their needs and desires in a form of self-idealisation (Andreassen, Pallesen and Griffiths, 2017; Banyai *et al.*, 2017). To accomplish the study above they used the BSMAS (Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale), the Narcissistic Personality Inventory-16, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

Following the same line, a study with 5.961 young people in Hungary based on latent profile analysis and BSMAS identified that 4,5% of overall sample at-risk suffers from low self-esteem, high level of depression symptoms and elevated social media use, this study advises that vulnerable youngsters such as young people identified with problematic social media use should be targeted by school-based prevention and intervention programmes (Banyai *et al.*, 2017).

Individual differences might influence our motivation for engaging with different social media channels as well as might be possible to identify, categorise and predict through personality traits who might be susceptible to social media addiction or any

motivational act that drives people on social media, such as follow an influencer or publish post related a specific content group, such as alcohol post or violent posts (Curtis *et al.*, 2018; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020; Sheldon, Anthony and Sykes, 2020).

However, most of research covering the relationship between personality and social media are mostly focused on the prediction of usage and addiction. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature to assess the tendency on the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs in both perspectives, from positive content and harmful content. If I can understand, by self-reported personality traits, who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs, determining the specific personality traits (e.g., extraversion, agreeableness, openness to new experiences, conscientiousness etc.) and/or personality profiles that are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers. Then I can work towards informing young people about the impact of SMIs on their lives. Still, Orchard *et al.* (2014) affirm that research has rarely explored the effect of personality on social media channels and vice-versa.

It is possible through trait analysis to predict patterns of those who have been influenced by SMIs. There is an increased ‘chance’ that they would be susceptible to any content promoted by social media influencers. Orchard *et al.* (2014) recommend that personality translates to the internet in an anticipated approach, with people seeking out actions that match their susceptible desires.

Past research focused on social media platforms and the employability of the big five dimensions confirms its efficacy, a great example is the study of Eftekhar *et al.* (2014) that discovered visual markers of personality from Facebook photos and photo related-activities, a number of 115 ($N=115$) profiles were analysed, confirming that using the big five framework to measure the levels of users’ visual contribution, relatively accurate predictions of the profile owners. One of the main findings was Facebook users adapt the creation of their profiles and manage their interactions to gratify their psychological needs on that specific social media channel. In sum, the users might represent their personality and traits through their Facebook’s profile picture, however it might be also manipulative, depending about what the user is intending to show and communicate (Orchard *et al.*, 2014).

Another recent study found a positive relationship between openness to experience and social media use, on the other hand people with greater levels of

neuroticism and negative affectivity are more likely to engage in specific online activities such as interaction via instant messaging and social networking websites (Correa, Hinsley and de Zúñiga, 2010). The predicted levels of social media use based on the big five dimensions was successfully assessed. The main finding is that individuals' personality traits – extraversion, emotional stability, and openness to experiences – play an important role in the use of interactive social media (Correa, Hinsley and de Zúñiga, 2010).

On the other hand, the big five framework assesses personality traits in a qualitative manner incorporating quantitative data analysis. As in all qualitative techniques, there are limitations and the data analysis tends to be very challenging (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). Also, psychology is a humanistic science that is not exact. Interpretation plays a key role in understanding and applying the big five framework.

The research carried by Correa, Hinsley and de Zúñiga (2010), that “sought to predict levels of social media use based on the psychological Big-Five framework”, shows consistency and reliability using the method of big five dimensions. As well as the study of Gosling, Rentfrow and Swann Jr. (2003) proves and validates the measure of this technique within research methods. Also, the study of Perugini and Solano (2020) with 420 participants (211 men, 209 women), mean age 40.29 years ($SD=14.93$), using the big five inventory as data collection, found that most frequent use reasons to social media channels use in relation to the general population were personal relationship maintenance, search for information, pastime, exhibitionism, and search for companionship, concluding that normal and maladaptive personality traits increased the explained variance for the three reasons for social media site use, beyond age and gender. In addition, they argue that personality traits are an important variable affecting media use motivation and gratification, as well as the methods demonstrates validity and reliability of the big five inventory (Perugini and Solano, 2020).

Therefore, the most complete method analysed is the big five framework, according to the literature available it is a modern and efficient framework to measure personality traits (Wehrli, 2008). It predicts performance or satisfaction within an enterprise, it is multicultural, specific in nature, have been well accepted in social media research and have demonstrated very good validity and reliability within the academic field (Moore and Craciun, 2020). The HEXACO personality test was based on the big

five adding one more dimension, showing even a greater advantage over the big five test. However, there is not research available specifically focusing on the investigation of what are the personality profiles of young people who are susceptible to be influenced by social media influencers. Thus, the topic proposed is a novel regarding its nature but also in relation to the big five employability.

1.6 Ethics in the Digital Environment⁴

Many ethical questions have been raised regarding the use of social media, the impact of influencers on young people and the use of internet, mainly related to the protection of young people in the digital environment. In order to critically address the research question “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*”, this section critically review the main literature available to understand the role of parents, the government, and companies in protecting youth within the digital environment (Light and McGrath, 2010; Jones, 2017; Michaelidou and Micevski, 2019). I employed a holistic process that covers a state-of-the-art review and desk research (Silverman, 2013). This section is divided into four sub-sections; (1) Government Policies from the European Union (EU) Perspective; (2) Parental Control; (3) An Overview of Companies and the Private and Self-Regulation Sectors; and (4) the Ethical Dilemma. Throughout, I reviewed specific topics regarding the potentially harmful content for young people within the digital environment, questioned how ethical concerns shape content and interactions online and discussed how internet parenting styles impact risks and opportunities for youth in the digital world.

Therefore, this section's purpose is to present, explain, and evaluate the existing literature about the topic and provide evidence, recommendations, and solutions to answer the research question that is outlined in the thesis' results section. Current research in this area is compared with previous research focusing on the following concepts/issues: government policies from an EU perspective, parental controls, self-regulation (corporate

⁴ Parts of this Section 1.6 was published as an article: Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2022) 'An Ethical Discussion About the Responsibility for Protection of Minors in the Digital Environment: A state-of-the-art review', *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 9(5), 343–370, available: <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.95.12433>.

and private sector), and ethical perspectives (Light and McGrath, 2010; Jones, 2017; Michaelidou and Micevski, 2019).

1.6.1 Introduction

Internet use has raised many ethical concerns and questions, mainly concerning youth's online safety and protection within the digital environment (Light and McGrath, 2010; Jones, 2017; Michaelidou and Micevski, 2019). Some of the issues that may affect this group include data protection, regulations, policies, addiction, exposure to harmful content, unhealthy eating habits, mental health issues, increased alcohol consumption, sexual and violent content spread online, and many other issues. Numerous studies addressing many of these issues have been conducted by researchers (O'Neill, 2013; Coates *et al.*, 2019; Lou and Kim, 2019; Qutteina *et al.*, 2019; Van Eldik *et al.*, 2019; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020; Smahel *et al.*, 2020).

Are companies such as Facebook, Tik Tok, Instagram and YouTube liable for protecting young people in the digital environment? Or are governments? Or Parents? This is the research question that this section aims to answer, "*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*"

1.6.2 Government Policies from the European Union (EU) Perspective

The protection of young people in the digital environment is a critical goal of the EU (European Union). In fact, in 1996, the European Commission published a document recognising the importance of this issue, mainly because new media platforms could contribute more visibly and at a faster rate than traditional media to make such content more accessible to youths (Commission of the European Communities, 1996). However, this document was only the starting point, since, in that same year, the European Commission published another document with the primary goal of proposing the first specific control measures to protect minors, to create a more critical approach to the use of online content, essentially based on technological standards, content filtering systems,

covering parental control software, and an age-based labelling system (Commission of the European Communities, 1996).

Therefore, the European Commission laid the foundations for several programs to protect young people in general in the digital environment, and increasing awareness of such a problem. According to the European Audiovisual Observatory IRIS plus EAO (2012), the European Commission has significantly contributed to increasing awareness of the need to evaluate and rethink the regulatory and legal framework protecting minors and young people in the digital environment, especially in keeping with the dynamism and changing nature of the media landscape. Hence, it was being acknowledged that the existing model for protecting minors in the audiovisual environment was transitioning to the online world/digital environment, with the internet making it quite impossible to apply the existing and more traditional protection standards (IRIS plus EAO, 2012, 2015).

Such acknowledgement was the foundation of the “Action plan for a safer internet”, which was created in 1999 to promote a favourable environment to the development of the internet industry, more precisely by encouraging safe use of the web and by combating illegal and harmful content (Labio-Bernal, Romero-Domínguez and García-Orta, 2020).

The main pillars of the “Action plan for a safer internet” are the following; 1) the development of content classification and filtering systems; 2) safety through a European network of hotlines for reporting illegal content; 3) the development of self-regulation initiatives; and 4) initiatives to raise awareness and educate through media literacy programs (O’Neill, 2018; Labio-Bernal, Romero-Domínguez and García-Orta, 2020). Overall, all of these fundamental pillars have been maintained throughout the different stages of the plan’s implementation, increasing awareness regarding the importance of protecting minors, their dignity, and their privacy in the digital environment. Hence, in the second stage of the program “Safer internet plus” (2005-2008), the need to expand the action’s strategies according to the changes occurring in terms of technology and communication trends was highlighted (EUR-Lex, 2009). The third stage of the program was launched in 2009, more precisely in the context of a consolidated online environment, which was even more used by minors, despite them being significantly vulnerable (IRIS plus EAO, 2015).

Since the implementation of this first project, several European institutions have developed quite intense initiatives, such as:

- 1) The “dotSAFE” program.
- 2) The “Safer internet forum”, since 2004, with legal authorities, representatives from the industry, civil organisations (child protection groups, parent-teacher associations, and consumer groups), and legislative institutions.
- 3) Insafe and INHOPE, referring to a global network of hotlines for reporting illegal content online with the goal of eliminating online child sexual abuse.
- 4) “EU kids online”, consisting in mapping experiences of children online in order to assess their safety and risks on websites.
- 5) “Mediappro”, which is a media literacy project.
- 6) “SIP-Bench” program, referring to parental control strategies.
- 7) The celebration of Safer Internet Day.
- 8) The creation of the “Internet governance forum”.
- 9) The establishment of several points of contact where children can get educated about navigating safely on the internet and on how to combat cyberbullying and online sexual abuse – Safer Internet Centres (SICs).
- 10) The Poscon (Positive Online Content and Services for Children in Europe) Network.
- 11) The European NGO Alliance for Child Safety Online.
- 12) The Net Children Go Mobile.
- 13) And the SPIRTO (Self-Produced Images Risk Taking Online) (IRIS plus EAO, 2015).

The final stage of the program which began in 2014, is still underway today and is focusing on specific areas of action, namely:

- 1) To increase awareness and empowerment, which includes teaching digital literacy and online safety, in all schools within the EU.
- 2) To encourage the production of educational and creative online content for children and promote positive online experiences for children.

- 3) To combat online child sexual abuse material, as well as sexual exploitation of children.
- 4) To create a safe environment for children, mainly through age-appropriate privacy configurations, age-based and content-based classifications, and broader use of parental controls (IRIS plus EAO, 2015).

Still, it is noteworthy to mention that this last stage of the program was only launched after the publication of two specific documents in 2012, with one examining the biggest challenges in the online sector regarding child protection and the other introducing a new line of action that was dedicated to the promotion of quality content for minors (Council of the European Union, 2012; European Commission, 2012). The concept of “quality content” refers to content that increases their skills, knowledge, and competencies, emphasising creativity and being reliable and safe. Furthermore, the same document also recognises that this type of content can encourage better web use. This recognition differs from previous and earlier stages, considering that the EU had only highlighted the importance of the parents, educators and civil society’s roles in making such digital environment safe, hence leaving the creation, production and distribution of online content to the relevant industry (Council of the European Union, 2012; European Commission, 2012).

The new campaign POCC (“Positive Online Content Campaign”) aims to raise awareness regarding the importance of quality content for minors while simultaneously encouraging the involvement of children and young people in creating such content, promoting a safe online environment and experience to minors overall (POCC, 2019). The rationale of this specific program is that by exposing children to high-quality online content in their first online experiences, they will be able to learn to fully recognise the components of positive and appropriate content and services in the digital environment (Council of the European Union, 2012; POCC, 2019).

Nowadays, all these challenges are incorporated in the “Better Internet for Kids” (BIK) program, which consists of a hub for research, practices, cooperation networks and a wide range of media literacy initiatives (BIK, 2021). The case of Spain must be highlighted since it has addressed the BIK in a broader context, including broader policy initiatives. For instance, in 2013, Spain published one of the most relevant general

political frameworks, the *Digital Agenda for Spain*, serving as an umbrella program for government actions directly related to the information society and the digital agenda (Gobierno de España, 2013). The following year, Spain launched the *Spanish national cybersecurity strategy*, essentially covering areas related to promoting a culture of cyber security for all citizens in general and increasing online protection levels (European Audiovisual Observatory, 2016; Gobierno de España, 2019).

Even though there was a change in policy regarding the inclusion of creative and quality content, the EU has traditionally shown a significant preference for self-regulation, which has been expressed in multiple initiatives since 2007. Indeed, in that year, the European Commission published the *European framework for safer mobile use by younger teenagers and children*, which was the outcome of the work developed by the High-Level Group on Child Protection, comprising the following members: mobile operators, GSMA Europe, child protection organisations, content providers, and the European Commission (European Commission, 2007; GSMA Europe, 2021). Furthermore, the mobile operators and the content providers that comprise this group also signed the Agreement on Safer Internet Day, and since then have been working on its implementation, namely by encouraging the participation of even more mobile operators, as well as by ensuring the development of national codes of conduct for self-regulation, aiming to make it easier to implement such agreements (European Commission, 2007; GSMA Europe, 2021).

In 2012, several members of the GSMA Europe joined the ICT Coalition, which aimed for safer use of connected devices and online services by children and young people (ICT Coalition, 2021). In more detail, some of the companies that ended up joining this initiative were:

Apple, BSkyB, BT, Dailymotion, Deutsche Telekom, Facebook, France Telecom-Orange, Google, Hyves, KPN, Liberty Global, LG Electronics, Mediaset, Microsoft, Netlog, Nintendo, Nokia, Opera Software, Research in Motion, RTL Group, Samsung, Skyrock, Stardoll, Sulake, Telefonica, TeliaSonera, Telecom Italia, Telenor Group, Tuenti, Vivendi, and Vodafone. (Labio-Bernal, Romero-Domínguez and García-Orta, 2020, p. 137)

More recently, in 2016, the initiative changed its name to “Alliance to better protect minors online” (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017). The Alliance includes all the following member companies:

ASKfm, BT Group, Deutsche Telekom, Disney, Facebook, Google, KPN, the Lego Group, Liberty Global, Microsoft, Orange, Rovio, Samsung Electronics, Sky, Spotify, Sulake, Super RTL, TIM (Telecom Italia), Telefónica, Telenor, Telia Company, Twitter, Vivendi, and Vodafone. (Labio-Bernal, Romero-Domínguez and García-Orta, 2020, p. 137)

In addition to these company members, the initiative also included the participation of other associations, such as: “BBFC, Child Helpline International, Coface, Enacso, EUN Partnership, FTelecoms, FOSI, FSM, GSMA, ICT Coalition, NICAM, Toy Industries of Europe, and Unicef” (Labio-Bernal, Romero-Domínguez and García-Orta, 2020, p. 137). In sum, the Alliance has emerged due to recognising the constant risks associated with online services, proposing the identification of potential areas where minors' safety and rights could be compromised. Thus, the combination of parents' efforts, national and international organisations, educators, civil society, and public authorities in a global approach guarantees the protection of minors in the digital environment (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017).

1.6.3 Parental Control: An Overview

Overall, youths' experiences with digital technologies involve an increasing quota of young users born and developing in environments where digital technologies are widely available and used. Nowadays, this occurs from early infancy, since children aged 2-4 years use touchscreen devices, such as smartphones or tablets, to play or watch movies, and parents frequently introduce these digital technologies to their children to use them in certain social situations (Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014; Smahel *et al.*, 2020; YPULSE, 2021).

Considering the most recent report on the worldwide internet diffusion among young people, one in three users is estimated to be a child or teenager (under 18) (UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, the report depicts that minors mostly use digital technologies at home, with more intense and prolonged activities during the weekends. Also, children often use digital technologies at school at least a day a week (UNICEF, 2019). Therefore, it is evident that the access to digital technologies and environments is expanding among young generations, which justifies why this reality ends up raising questions as to how to guarantee young generations the opportunities offered by new technologies (to study, to socialise or to enhance their skills), and on how to protect them from potential dangers of the digitalised world or harmful content (i.e., contact with unknown people and exposure to pornographic or violent content) (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017; Livingstone, Winther and Saeed, 2019).

Nonetheless, parents are also directly exposed to digital technologies in many fields of their life. These new technologies have changed how family members communicate, enjoy themselves, acquire information, and solve daily problems. Still, parents are the first mediators of their childrens' experiences in digital environments: they integrate digital technologies into their ordinary routines, promoting both constructive and safe uses (Smahel *et al.*, 2020). Thus, the concept of digital parenting emerges, consisting of a description of their practices and efforts to comprehend, support, and regulate their childrens' activities in such digital environments (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008).

Some studies of young digital users (9-16 years old) in many European countries have compared parents' opinions before and after the diffusion of mobile services (Livingstone *et al.*, 2012; Mascheroni and Cuman, 2014). After four years, most parents declare that they know less about their kids' online activities and have more difficulties closely monitoring their digital technologies usage. However, parents are more aware of the risks of using the web, preferring to talk to their children about Internet security rather than limiting or even prohibiting Internet use (Livingstone *et al.*, 2017). Hence, parents can either encourage or limit the use of digital technologies to their children, according to the opportunities or danger they attribute to them (Smahel *et al.*, 2020).

In this sense, a new parenting style emerged, being completely different from the traditional ones (i.e., authoritative parenting, laissez-faire parenting, authoritarian

parenting, and permissive parenting) – the internet parenting style (Darling and Steinberg, 1993; Lau and Yuen, 2013). Parenting styles refer to the context in which parents raise and socialise with their children, comprehending two different dimensions: responsiveness/warmth (involvement, acceptance, and affect that they express towards the child's needs) and demandingness/control (rules, control, and maturity expectations for the child's socialisation) (Darling and Steinberg, 1993).

Regarding the internet parenting style, researchers have identified the key dimensions of parental warmth/control more strictly related to the child's behaviours on the Internet/digital technologies (Table 8). It is essential to mention that these internet parenting styles are related to the child's use of digital technologies – for instance, a low parental control might result in more time of Internet usage by children (Valcke *et al.*, 2010; Lau and Yuen, 2013).

Table 8: Key dimensions of the internet parenting style, (Valcke *et al.*, 2010, p. 89).

Style dimensions	Item/Examples
Parental control	Supervision: <i>"I'm around when my child surfs on the Internet"</i>
	Stopping internet usage: <i>"I stop my child when he/she visits a less suitable website"</i>
	Internet usage rules: <i>"I limit the time my child is allowed on the Internet"</i>
Parental warmth	Communication: <i>"I talk with my child about the dangers related to the Internet"</i>
	Support: <i>"I show my child 'child friendly' websites."</i>

Internet parenting styles also depend on the youth's characteristics, such as age, self-esteem, emotional regulation, and behavioural problems. More specifically, styles vary and accommodate child's age. For instance, parents who adopt an authoritative style when children are in infancy tend to become more permissive as children get older (Martínez *et al.*, 2019). Nonetheless, parental mediation, which differs from parenting styles, is more important to the present study, considering that it refers to "the diverse practices through which parents try to manage and regulate their children's experiences with the media" (Livingstone *et al.*, 2015, p. 7). There are two broad mediation approaches among the existing literature: *enabling* (or *instructive*) mediation and

restrictive mediation (Livingstone *et al.*, 2017). Table 9 summarises the main parental mediation strategies, providing some examples regarding the most common practices.

Table 9: Main parental mediation strategies and examples of common practices, (Coyne *et al.*, 2017).

Parental mediation strategy	Examples of common practices
Enabling or active mediation	Parents engage in different activities to enhance the kid's appropriate use of the digital technologies (explain the usage of the device and/or talk about the contents)
Co-use or co-viewing mediation	Parents are present when the kid displays the activity with the media but do not talk about the content
Restrictive mediation	Strict attention to rules and control to the kid's digital activities (rules of when the kid can use digital technologies or pose time restrictions)
Technical restriction	Adoption of software applications or other technical tools to control the kid's activities (filters on PC for the kid's safety)

The enabling or active mediation is the most common approach in European families with 9-16 years old children, while restrictive mediation is more frequent in families with younger children (Livingstone *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, it is possible to conclude that parental mediation regarding digital technologies also changes according to the kids' ages, aiming to suit their needs better and protect them from online harm.

Regarding parental control, it is vital to this study to approach the EU Kids Online Project. Essentially, this project was funded by the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme, consisting of a thematic network that aimed to identify, compare, and draw conclusions from existing research about children and online technologies in Europe (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; EU Kids Online, 2021). Furthermore, this project constructed a publicly accessible, as well as searchable, database of nearly 400 studies conducted across Europe, which is why EU Kids Online has concluded that the existing research is "unevenly distributed across Europe, with most in Germany, the UK, Denmark and least in Cyprus, Bulgaria, Poland, Iceland, Slovenia and Ireland" (Livingstone and Haddon, 2009, p. 236).

In another report, it has been established that “EU Kids Online is a thematic network designed to inform this policy context by examining European research (national and multi-national) on cultural, contextual and risk issues in children’s safe use of the internet and online technologies” (De Haan and Livingstone, 2009, p. 3). The programme explicitly addresses three intersecting domains:

- 1) Minors (mainly up to 18 years old), their families, domestic users.
- 2) Online technologies: mainly but not only the internet; focusing on use and risk.
- 3) European empirical research and policy, prioritising the 21 countries in the network (De Haan and Livingstone, 2009, p. 3).

After analysing the existing research within the scope of the EU Kids Online project, it is possible to conclude that children can encounter four main types or forms of risks in digital technologies and four types of online opportunities (Table 10).

Table 10: Risks and opportunities for children in digital technologies, (De Haan and Livingstone, 2009, p. 5).

		Content: Child as recipient	Contact: Child as participant	Conduct: Child as actor
OPPORTUNITIES	Education learning and digital literacy	Educational resources	Contact with others who share one’s interests	Self-initiated or collaborative learning
	Participation and civic engagement	Global information	Exchange among interest groups	Concrete forms of civic engagement
	Creativity and self-expression	Diversity of resources	Being invited/inspired to create or participate	User-generated content creation
	Identity and social connection	Advice (personal/health/sexual etc)	Social networking, shared experiences with others	Expression of identity
RISKS	Commercial	Advertising, spam, sponsorship	Tracking/harvesting personal info	Gambling, illegal downloads, hacking
	Aggressive	Violent/gruesome/hateful content	Being bullied, harassed or stalked	Bullying or harassing another
	Sexual	Pornographic/harmful sexual content	Meeting strangers, being groomed	Creating/uploading pornographic material

	Values	Racist, biased info/advice (e.g., drugs)	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion	Providing advice e.g., suicide/pro-anorexia
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Still, and since the EU Kids Online project is a part of the Safer Internet plus Programme, the main emphasis is on online risks. Considering this specific focus, the significant policy recommendations of the EU Kids Online project aim to safeguard children and young people from negative experiences, where parental control or mediation is one of the critical strategies (De Haan and Livingstone, 2009).

In a more recent report, Zaman and Nouwen (2016) noted there is an increasing number of parental controls and technology tracking and monitoring technologies in the market. They were initially launched as tools, apps (applications) or services that parents can rely on to keep their children safe, allowing them to prevent their kids from seeing inappropriate online content, detect cyberbullying at early stages, and limit chatting or in-app purchases. The following table (Table 11) summarises the current parental controls in the market, categorising them according to their function, implementation, and design initiator (Zaman and Nouwen, 2016).

Table 11: Parental controls’ categorisation according to function, implementation, and design initiator (Zaman and Nouwen, 2016).

Axes	Type	Functionalities
Function	Time restrictions	Limit the time kids can spend online (Some apps allow the definition of specific time slots during which the kid can go online on weekdays or weekends)
	Content restrictions: - Incoming content interventions - Outgoing content interventions	Filtering content, allowing pre-approved content only, blocking pre-defined inappropriate content
		Blocking the type of information that can be uploaded or emailed
	Activity restrictions: - Economic activities - Social activities - Entertainment activities	Blocking online purchases
		Limit the people with whom the kid can interact Blocking multiplayer games
Monitoring and tracking	Monitor kids’ online activities and follow-up actions	
	Operating systems	Windows and iOS
	Web browsers	E.g., a kids’ browser that functions as a “walled garden.”
	Computer control software	Program designed to protect the kid online, typically using a combination of restrictive functionalities

Implementation	Mobile devices	Create restricted user profiles to limit access to features/content on tablets or phones and limit access to certain apps
	Home network	E.g., router-based solutions that filter internet content before it enters the house
	Game consoles	----- -----
Design initiator	Telecoms operators	System of parental controls to prevent content being seen by minors
	Software providers	----- -----
	Social networking site owners	Strict privacy settings for kids
	Hardware manufacturers	Administrator controls to set up a restricted profile for kids (password protection, content, activity restrictions)
	Game platform owners	----- -----
	Content providers	----- -----

Even though there are several studies about parental controls, the literature has not yet reached a conclusive answer regarding their effectiveness in reducing minors' online risks. Some research supports the effectiveness of preventive software, especially filtering, blocking, and monitoring software, in reducing unwanted exposure to online sexual material for kids (10-15 years old). Nonetheless, the evidence cannot be generalised to all ages (Ybarra *et al.*, 2009). In a separate study, the obtained results demonstrated that parental controls failed to reduce online risks for kids, which highlights the need for further studies in this area of expertise (Duerager and Livingstone, 2012).

Moreover, the conducted research fails in another aspect, directly related to the parents' determination to use parental controls to keep their children safe in digital environments. For instance, parents of minors aged 10 to 15 years old were stated to be more likely to adopt filtering software than parents of minors aged 16 to 17 years old. In contrast, parents that do not trust their children are more likely to use filtering and blocking software to prevent their exposure to online sexual content (Mitchell, Finkelhor and Wolak, 2005).

According to Zaman and Nouwen (2016, p. 3), the contradictory research findings and conclusions regarding the effectiveness of parental controls are partly due to the following facts, which are currently missing:

- 1) A clear operationalisation of notions of technically mediated parental mediation.
- 2) An up-to-date categorisation of the wide diversity of existing tools.
- 3) An in-depth understanding of how parents use these tools (rather than whether parents use them).

Thus, it is vital to conduct more studies to better understand parents' current parental control practices and technologies to keep their children safe in the digital environment.

1.6.4 Self-Regulation Sector

To understand how social media companies are trying to protect children and young people from harmful content and any problem caused by the digital environment, it is important to address two specific initiatives within the self-regulation sector, namely the “Alliance to Better Protect Minors Online” (hereafter referred to as the Alliance) and the “ICT Coalition for Children Online” (hereafter referred to as the ICT Coalition) (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017; ICT Coalition, 2021).

The Alliance consists of a self-regulatory initiative launched on the Safer Internet Day in 2017, comprising several Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and media companies, NGOs, and UNICEF, and aiming to better protect minors online by improving their online environment. According to the (European Commission, 2019, p. 14), the main idea behind the Alliance “is to build on companies’ existing competencies in these fields to improve their products and services to combat harmful content, conduct and contact on the internet and making devices and services safer to use for minors”. In the Statement of Purpose, which is the document that establishes the aims, the scope, and the method of the initiative, the Alliance’s objectives are clearly defined. Overall, the Alliance aims to tackle three types of risks minors are exposed to on the internet, more precisely:

- 1) Harmful content, for instance violent or sexually exploitative content.
- 2) Harmful conduct, such as cyberbullying.
- 3) Harmful contact, such as coercion, “grooming”, or sexual extortion (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017; European Commission, 2019).

The Alliance started with 22 endorsing companies, including several network operators, online content and services providers, and manufacturers. By the end of 2017, three additional companies joined the Alliance, bringing to a total of 25 endorsing companies. Moreover, the Alliance has 13 Associate Members, including NGOs and UNICEF (The alliance to better protect minors online, 2017). The diversity of companies demonstrates the geographical scope of the Alliance. Their operations are developed in several EU Member States and other countries, demonstrating the initiative’s global operations and scope. Table 12 summarises the Alliance’s members and associate members according to their sectors, geographical scope, and organisation type.

Table 12: Alliance members and associate members, their sector/organisation type, and geographical scope, (European Commission, 2019).

Name	Sector/Organisation type	Geographical scope
Endorsing Companies		
ASKfm	Social media	Global
BT Group plc	Telecoms provider	European
Deutsche Telekom AG	Telecoms provider	European
Facebook	Social media	Global
Google Inc.	Technology (e.g., internet services, software/electronics development)	Global
KPN	Telecoms provider	National
Liberty Global	Telecoms provider	Global
Microsoft Corporation	Technology (e.g., internet services, software/electronics development)	Global
Orange Group	Telecoms provider	Global
Rovio Entertainment Ltd.	Video game developer	Global
SUPER RTL/Mediengruppe RTL Deutschland	Telecoms provider	European
Samsung Electronics	Technology (e.g., internet services, software/electronics development)	Global
Sky	Telecoms provider	European
Snap Inc.	Social media	Global
Spotify AB	Entertainment	Global
Sulake Corporation Oy	Video game developer	European
Telefónica, S.A.	Telecoms provider	Global
Telenor Group	Telecoms provider	Global
Telia Company	Telecoms provider	Global
The LEGO Group	Entertainment	Global
The Walt Disney Company	Entertainment	Global
TIM SpA	Telecoms provider	National
Twitter	Social media	Global
Vivendi	Entertainment	Global
Vodafone Group Services Limited	Telecoms provider	Global
Associate Members		
BBFC	NGO	National
Child Helpline International	NGO	Global
COFACE Families Europe	NGO Association	European
eNACSO	NGO Association	European

EUN Partnership	Network of ministries	European
FFTelecoms	Trade Association	National
FOSI	Non-profit organisation	Global
FSM	Non-profit organization	National
GSM Association	Trade Association	Global
ICT Coalition	Self-regulatory initiative	European
NICAM	Institute	National
Toy Industries of Europe	Trade Association	European
UNICEF	International organisation	Global

On the other hand, the ICT Coalition consists of a self-regulatory consortium of internet companies representing the entire content, services, and devices value chain. Essentially, this initiative brings together, and for the first time, key industry players from across the communications and internet market, including online services, connectivity platforms, and connected gaming and mobile devices. The main goal of the ICT Coalition is to “encourage the safe and responsible use of online services and internet devices among children and young people and to empower parents and carers to engage with and help protect their children in the digital world” (O’Neill, 2014).

In 2012, the ICT Coalition announced a set of specific principles, aiming for the development of products/services to enhance the safety of minors online and referring to several areas: 1) content; 2) parental controls; 3) responding to abuse/misuse; 4) child abuse material or illegal contact; 5) privacy and control, and 6) education and awareness. Overall, this initiative’s signatories to these principles ended up committing to:

- 1) Developing innovative strategies to enhance online safety and encouraging a responsible use of the internet and internet devices by children and young people.
- 2) Empowering parents and carers to engage with and help to protect their children.
- 3) Providing easily accessible, clear, and transparent information about online safety and behaviour.
- 4) Raising awareness of how, and to whom, to report abuse and concerns (O’Neill, 2014).

The 16 companies included in the ICT Coalition refer to 5 different content types: IPTV services/Video-on-demand; own- or third-party apps, other commercial content; user-generated content; communication/chat content; and cloud-hosting services

(O’Neill, 2014). Table 13 presents the 16 companies that integrate this initiative and the corresponding type of content that they provide to their users.

Table 13: Companies that integrate the ICT Coalition and the type of content they provide to users, (O’Neill, 2014, p. 12).

Type of content	Company
IPTV services/Video on-demand	Deutsche Telekom, KPN, Orange, Portugal Telecom, TDC, Telecom Italia, Telefónica, TeliaSonera, Vodafone
Own- or third-party apps, other commercial content	All (except TDC)
User-generated content	Facebook, Google, Portugal Telecom
Communication/chat content	Orange, Unibet, Google, Facebook, Telecom Italia, Portugal Telecom
Cloud-hosting services	Deutsche Telekom, Vodafone, Portugal Telecom, Telecom Italia

1.6.5 Ethical Dilemma

The concept of ethics is defined as the systematic exploration of questions about how we should act concerning others (Rhodes, 1986). Another concept directly related to this is ethical sensitivity, referring to the individual’s conscience, whose actions might affect the welfare of others. Within the context of the digital environment, ethics involves four different aspects:

- 1) Determining whether the technological options either directly or indirectly affect another person negatively.
- 2) Developing an ideal plan of action.
- 3) Identifying the important values that are associated with each specific situation.
- 4) Implementing a solution/plan of action to be monitored and evaluated (Rest, 1982).

Moreover, it has been established that ethical choices occur along an ethical context continuum (ECC) and are influenced by the social and cultural norms prevalent where they occur and by the values people hold in a culture or society. In addition, the

ECC allows people to evaluate the situation, question, or issue, namely if it is potentially harmful to others, neutral, or beneficial to others (Olcott *et al.*, 2015).

The main ethical frameworks that reflect the ethical philosophies that help to determine the action to be taken are: 1) duties; 2) best outcomes (harm-benefit); 3) rights; and 4) virtue-based approach. Overall, all these ethical frameworks are promoted and enforced through tools, namely the codes of conduct and ethical guidelines, and regulatory mechanisms, such as ethics review committees (UNICEF, 2012).

It is essential to mention the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), a not-for-profit organisation federating independent children's rights institutions (ICRIs) that aims to facilitate the promotion and protection of children's rights (Milovidov, 2019). The ENOC was launched in 1997, and its mandate is to:

- 1) Develop strategies for the implementation of the recommendations of the CRC.
- 2) Facilitate information sharing and exchange between its members.
- 3) At the international level, promote the establishment of ICRIs in countries where these do not yet exist and assist in their setup.
- 4) Encourage contact and mutual assistance between ICRIs and their members (Milovidov, 2019, p. 3).

According to (Milovidov, 2019, p. 5),

The impact on children and families is growing exponentially as new technologies are developed and themes such as “safety by design” or “privacy by design” are also being developed to reflect the ethical considerations being raised by the digital world. Along with ethical considerations, human rights issues, and other concerns, there are large disparities when we examine children's digital access, skills and use. (Milovidov, 2019, p. 5)

Taking into consideration the European context, nowadays, children can find support on several issues, such as radicalisation, cyberbullying, extremism, online child

sexual exploitation, and hate speech, as well as seek assistance in terms of digital reputation, online sharing, identity, and footprints (Kirchschläger, 2019). Nonetheless, it is important to mention that society is currently having some difficulties applying appropriate standards to each new device, software, and platform to protect children and young people. In fact, the industry has been continuously looking at self-regulation while governments are trying to impose regulations on industry players. Still, the absence of effective standards results in the emergence of new areas of child online protection (Milovidov, 2019) (Table 14).

Table 14: Some of the new areas of child online protection issues that emerge due to the absence of effective standards (Milovidov, 2019).

Emerging issue	Impact on children and young adults
Artificial intelligence	Impact on children’s development, behaviours, and ability to learn new skills
Algorithms	Bias and discrimination on social media sites and websites
Inclusion and access	Different inclusion and access to online environments
LGBTQIA	Identity and share with others when faced with discrimination, hate speech, apps with conversion therapy
Disability	Children with special needs face more online harms
Ethnic minorities	Bias and discrimination continue online, with hate speech more toxic
Cybersecurity in family homes	Hacking, surveillance of webcams, home assistants

Most recently, the Council of Europe 2016-2021 strategy for children’s rights focuses on five specific areas, more precisely: equal opportunities, participation, violence-free life, child-friendly justice and digital environment rights (Council of Europe, 2016). Regarding the latter, it is being reinforced by the Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on guidelines to respect, protect, and fulfil children’s rights in the digital environment (Council of Europe, 2018). In sum, this Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 aims to ensure children’s interaction and safety, including topics such as: the provision of child-friendly content, the protection of personal data, helplines and hotlines, resilience and vulnerability, and both the role and responsibilities of business enterprises (Council of Europe, 2018). Hence, the main goal

is to reinforce the protection and safety of children and young people in the digital environment while simultaneously ensuring that their rights are always safe and guaranteed.

1.6.6 Summary and Discussion

Across the various topics discussed in this section was possible to answer the research question “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*” outlined in the thesis’ results chapter. Furthermore, this section resulted in another important delivery for this research. The review analysis made it possible to list 28 types of potential harmful content spread online, some of them promoted by SMIs and bloggers (Table 15). This list was formulated based on research studies and real situations. This list can be seen below. However, it is noteworthy that what is harmful content will depend on the culture and country. Therefore, the list below is based on my interpretation and analysis. In addition, through this list was possible to compose the Q3 of the SUSIS Questionnaire, in order to understand the sample perception towards harmful online content that might be posted by SMIs. Furthermore, based on this list was possible to create a construct in the conceptual framework called Harm (Harmful).

Table 15 - Types of Potential Harmful Content.

	Types of Potential Harmful Content	Sources
1	Products or brands	(Uzunoglu and Misci Kip, 2014; Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Arora <i>et al.</i> , 2019; D. Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Stoldt <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Audrezet, de Kerviler and Guidry Moulard, 2020; Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; Ki <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Djafarova and Bowes, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021; Nafees <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Reinikainen <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Zhou <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Cheung <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Farivar, Wang and Turel, 2022; Masuda, Han and Lee, 2022)

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2	Violent content	(Moreno <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Gupta, 2019; Jordan, Kalin and Dabrowski, 2020; Frischlich, 2021)
3	Unhealthy food	(Harris and Graff, 2011; Coates <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Qutteina <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Buente <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Pollack <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Kucharczuk, Oliver and Dowdell, 2022)
4	Sexualised body image	(Allem <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Guinta and John, 2018; Sumter, Cingel and Hollander, 2021)
5	An ideal body image	(VanderStoep and Johnston, 2009; Meier and Gray, 2014; Chua and Chang, 2016; Fardouly, Pinkus and Vartanian, 2017; Hogue and Mills, 2018; Kleemans <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Raggatt <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Ando <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Jarman <i>et al.</i> , 2022; Roberts <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
6	An unrealistic lifestyle	(Goodman and Jaworska, 2020; Vasquez, 2020; Martinelli, 2021; Lim <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
7	Alcohol products or brands	(Hendriks <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Carah and Brodmerkel, 2021; Russell <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
8	Alcohol intake	(Egan and Moreno, 2011; Boyle <i>et al.</i> , 2016, 2021; Curtis <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Hendriks <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
9	Cigarette smoking	(Yoo, Yang and Cho, 2016; Allem <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Hébert <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Kong <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Cavazos-Rehg <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Dalisay <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
10	Cigarette products or brands	(Hébert <i>et al.</i> , 2017; O'Brien <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Dalisay <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
11	Drugs intake	(Moreno <i>et al.</i> , 2009; Allem <i>et al.</i> , 2017; Buente <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Dalisay <i>et al.</i> , 2022)
12	Sexual or pornographic content	(Moreno <i>et al.</i> , 2009; O'Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter, 2014; Uhls, Ellison and Subrahmanyam, 2017; Guinta and John, 2018; Jennings, 2021; Sanchez, 2022)

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13	Cyberbullying	(Moreno <i>et al.</i> , 2009; O’Keeffe and Clarke-Pearson, 2011; The Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter, 2014; Uhls, Ellison and Subrahmanyam, 2017; Guinta and John, 2018)
14	Any type of bullying	(Abidin, 2019; Martínez <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Thelwall and Cash, 2021)
15	Any type of abusive forms of marketing	(Archer, 2019; De Regt, Montecchi and Ferguson, 2019; Wolf, Nalloor and Archer, 2019; Davies and Hobbs, 2020; Goodwin, Joseff and Woolley, 2020; Hu <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Lee and Theokary, 2021; Farivar, Wang and Turel, 2022; Leite, Pontes and de Paula Baptista, 2022)
16	Incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination	(Cammaerts, 2009; Kiai, 2015; Alakali, Faga and Mbursa, 2017; Blaya, 2019; Clissold <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
17	Any type of criminal activities	(Alakali, Faga and Mbursa, 2017; Allen and van Zyl, 2020; Jordan, Kalin and Dabrowski, 2020; Quincy and Manduza, 2021; Sirola <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Baker, 2022)
18	Any form of terrorism	(Harwood, 2019; Allen and van Zyl, 2020; Singh, 2020)
19	Any content related to human trafficking	(Sierra-Rodríguez, Arroyo-Machado and Barroso-Hurtado, 2022)
20	Incitement to a religion or belief	(Commission of the European Communities, 1996)
21	Fake news about politics	(Ferran, Turner and Faulders, 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Singer and Brooking, 2018; Schirch, 2021)
22	Fake news	(De Regt, Montecchi and Ferguson, 2019; Hobbs <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Al-Zaman, 2021; Leader <i>et al.</i> , 2021; Lotito, Zanella and Casari, 2021; Baker, 2022)
23	Any kind of discrimination	(Sinha-Roy and Ball, 2021)
24	Cultural discrimination	(Commission of the European Communities, 1996)

25	Dangerous games	(Agence France-Presse, 2021; DeTuro, 2021)
26	Risky experiences	(Agence France-Presse, 2021; Sirola <i>et al.</i> , 2021)
27	Unhealthy food intake	(E. Coates <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Pollack <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Hawkins, Farrow and Thomas, 2021; Kucharczuk, Oliver and Dowdell, 2022)
28	Any type of coercion or sexual extortion	(Albert and Salam, 2012; Leber and Abrahams, 2019; Albury <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Quincy and Manduza, 2021; Sinha-Roy and Ball, 2021)

This section addressed essential topics in this research, covering the importance of the government, companies, and parents working together to protect young people in the digital environment and essential concepts, such as harmful and good online content. As well, ethics concepts were outlined. This is necessary to give an ethical background to this study and discuss ethical issues in the digital environment, mainly related to social media. Finally, a deep discussion of this matter is addressed in the thesis' results chapter.

1.7 Research Hypotheses, Proposed Model and Gaps

Based on the above sections, the present section focuses on presenting a synthesis literature review with the goal of presenting the hypotheses, conceptual model and gaps in the literature. Therefore, all the concepts and theories associated with the construction and development of the research questions and subsequent hypotheses are discussed. This second chapter aims to provide support to the study's structural backbone, tackling all the issues that arise from analysing the research questions and subsequently proposing hypotheses.

Firstly, the personality traits theory is approached, based on the discussion of the specific model that will be used in the empirical part of this study, the HEXACO personality model, as well as the HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised, which comprehends a 60-item scale that allows assessing personality traits. Afterwards, a brief approach will be presented regarding personality traits as predictors of susceptibility

towards social media influencers, aiming to better understand if there is any correlation between these constructs.

Secondly, the perception towards influencers/susceptibility is discussed, specifically focusing on the endorser source effects, the perceived authenticity of celebrity endorsers, endorser relevance and impacts of positive and negative social media content. Thus, in this second moment the goal is to provide a deep insight towards the existing literature, namely in terms of relationship between perception towards influencers and the factors that influence followers' susceptibility to them. Ultimately, a discussion about the impacts of social media content is presented, thus approaching some level of influence that these celebrity endorsers have on their followers, either positive or harmful to their well-being.

Thirdly, the phenomena of parasocial relationships, as well as parasocial interactions, is discussed, based on the analysis of four different topics: 1) predictors of parasocial relationships and interactions; 2) impacts of the parasocial phenomena; 3) marketing approach on parasocial relationships in social media; and 4) parasocial relationship and persuasion of consumers: the influencer marketing.

Lastly, and before presenting the main conclusions of the literature review, the concept of consumer trust is approached, serving almost as a link of all the concepts that were previously discussed. Essentially, in this last section of this chapter, and while simultaneously contextualising the concept of trust, the connection between all the constructs that are comprised in both the research questions and in the proposed hypotheses is presented, thus combining them all into a clear line of thought.

1.7.1 Personality Traits

The section 1.5 (Personality) presents a deep analysis about the personality topic and its theories. In this section, I synthesised the topic of personality in order to contextualise the conceptual model.

The etymology of the concept of personality refers to two Greek words, Per and Sonare, having later changed to the noun Persona, ultimately naming the mask that actors wore on the theater to show their different characters' personalities (Cooper, 2002; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). In ancient Greek, these masks were used to entertain

the audience, aiming to both perform well and to portray the real picture of the character being performed to the audience. Therefore, this word (Persona) reflects the person's personality in two different senses: 1) as the actors' performance to portray the characters' personality; and 2) as a demonstration that one person's behaviours might not be congruent with their personality (Shian *et al.*, 2022).

Regarding the study of personality, the American Psychology Association (APA) claimed that it "focuses on two broad areas: One is understanding individual differences in particular personality characteristics, such as sociability or irritability. The other is understanding how the various parts of a person come together as a whole" (American Psychological Association, 2022).

Therefore, the study of personality is a quite challenging process in terms of understanding its every aspect, both logically and effectively. Generally, personality is characterised according to two types: optimistic, when the person has an optimistic personality, thinking positively and hoping well; and pessimistic, when the person is constantly superconscious and afraid of taking several challenges (Cooper, 2002; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017).

According to Warr (1999), personality is defined as the permanent trait of an individual, which indicates long-term and persistent individual distinctions regarding the emotive style, having a similar influence on the individual's visceral outburst. In this sense, personality traits are basically characterised as the individual's generally constant patterns of behaviour, emotion, motivation, and cognition (Zillig, Hemenover and Dienstbier, 2002).

Thus, it is possible to claim that different facets of human personality play a significant role on its development, with the dominance of one or more elements providing a distinct shape to a person's personality. In fact, several features of human personality, such as social boldness, sincerity, humanity, modesty, and forgiveness, are major components of the personality itself, affecting the person's internal life (Abu-Raiya, 2014). Therefore, personality traits are very important factors when it comes to understanding one's personality, especially by analysing the individual's behaviours (Abu-Raiya, 2014).

1.7.2 The HEXACO Personality Model

The HEXACO personality model, which is employed in the present study, is an extension of the Big Five-Factor model, being different from the latter due to the addition of the H factor, referring to honesty-humility (Mata *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, the HEXACO model comprises 6 specific factors, aiming to assess the individual's personality traits, namely:

- 1) Honesty-Humility;
- 2) Emotionality;
- 3) eXtraversion;
- 4) Agreeableness (versus Anger);
- 5) Conscientiousness;
- 6) Openness to Experience (HEXACO, 2022a).

Regarding the first factor of the HEXACO model (Honesty-Humility), individuals who score high in the honesty and humility scale are expected to be honest in their overall interactions, never taking advantage of others in order to achieve their personal gain and success (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014). They generally adhere to the laws, not expecting any social or pretentious status from anyone. On the contrary, individuals who are less responsive to honesty and humility are more dishonest with other people, easily taking advantage of others for personal gain and success and being only concerned with themselves throughout their lives (Camps, Stouten and Euwema, 2016).

In turn, the emotionality factor is mainly characterised by mushiness, fearfulness, worriedness, helplessness, and nervousness (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014). Thus, emotional individuals are emotional by nature, placing a high value on emotions in every relationship with others, being extremely sensitive in their daily activities and needing others' sympathy (Othman *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, emotional people express anxiousness when they face some negative experiences. On the other hand, people with low emotionality are less sensitive, not requiring/expecting an emotional attachment to and from others, being more relaxed under stressful situations (Othman *et al.*, 2020).

The extraversion factor is deeply associated to a positive nature of the person, referring to the category of self-confidence, self-esteem, seeking of excitement, social-audaciousness, sociability, positive emotions, and liveliness. Indeed, people's differences

in terms of their social interactions, energy levels, and assertiveness all refer to the extraversion personality traits, meaning that an extraverted person confidently enjoys social gatherings and every event of life in general (Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011). They are often energetic, thus facing every life challenge with bravery, and experience positive emotions. In turn, introvert people are both emotionally and socially repressed and conservative, possibly being unsocial throughout their lives, given the fact that they often tend to be stressed in social gatherings. Also, introvert people seem to be pessimistic by nature, avoiding being the center of attention in social events and interactions (Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011).

In terms of agreeableness, this factor is mainly characterised by gentleness, forgiveness, flexible morality, low self-confidence, patience, and high trust levels on others. Thus, people who are agreeable can forgive others for their mistakes, with their nature being quite flexible (Ashton and Lee, 2009). They tend to judge others with sympathy, being willing to work together due to their adaptable nature. Overall, agreeable individuals are empathetic to others, caring for their well-being and treating them fairly and respectfully (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014). On the other hand, disagreeable people present low consideration for others, presenting a fiery temperament when confronted with other people's mistakes (Ashton and Lee, 2009).

Some traits that refer to conscientiousness are self-discipline, competence, organisation, continuous effort, striving for accomplishment, and goal orientation, as well as a high degree of deliberation, thus allowing conscientious people to evaluate the pros and cons of several situations (Ashton and Lee, 2010). These individuals are more self-disciplined, being extremely focused on the pursuit of their goals, thus preferring to follow established guidelines. They are also perfectionists, proficient in comprehending new situations and make valuable decisions about each situation. In turn, people with poor conscientiousness cannot tackle any problem, with their low self-esteem mining their success and achievement of goals, feeling satisfied with work/goals of less importance (Ashton and Lee, 2010).

Lastly, openness to experience is associated to people's broad-mindedness, penetrable awareness, and depth of attitude, being reflected in a curious, imaginative, and creative person (Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011). Basically, a person of aesthetic nature can respond honestly to any event, being more sensitive to the beauty of nature.

These people also tend to have a more creative mind, being constantly thinking about new things in different areas of life. On the contrary, less flexible people present a less artistic view of life, not being that open to experiences. They are often less interested in innovative activities, living a more simple and quiet life, and presenting perspectives that lack novelty and creativity (Hakimi, Hejazi and Lavasani, 2011).

The HEXACO personality model comprises a specific personality measurement instrument, designated as HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised (HEXACO-PI-R), which was developed by Ashton and Lee (2009). The study of the six dimensions of the HEXACO model is based on this 60-item scale, which comprehends four underlying facets for each domain, thus representing consistent patterns of behaviours, feelings, and thoughts (Ashton and Lee, 2009). Hence, there are a total of 24 (Table 16) observed variables/facets by using this scale, which are clustered based on similarities and differences in their function. These facets are presented in Table 1. Even though there are alternatives, such as the 100- and 200-item scale, the HEXACO 60-item scale was the selected one for this study. Overall, each personality trait/domain comprises 4 facets, which consist of two to three items that are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) (Ashton and Lee, 2009).

Table 16 - Domain and facet level scales of HEXACO-60, (Ashton and Lee, 2009).

Domain	Facet level	Factor
Honesty-Humility	Sincerity	Tendency to be genuine in interpersonal relations
	Fairness	Tendency to avoid fraud and corruption
	Greed Avoidance	Tendency to be uninterested in possessing lavish wealth, luxury goods, and signs of high social status
	Modesty	Tendency to be modest and unassuming
Emotionality	Fearfulness	Tendency to experience fear
	Anxiety	Tendency to worry in a variety of contexts
	Dependence	One's need for emotional support from others
	Sentimentality	Tendency to feel strong emotional bonds with others
Extraversion	Social Self-Esteem	Tendency to have positive self-regard, particularly in social contexts
	Social Boldness	One's comfort of confidence within a variety of social situations
	Sociability	Tendency to enjoy conversation, social interaction, and parties
	Liveliness	One's typical enthusiasm and energy

Domain	Facet level	Factor
Agreeableness	Forgiveness	One's willingness to feel trust and liking toward those who may have caused one harm
	Gentleness	Tendency to be mild and lenient in dealings with other people
	Flexibility	One's willingness to compromise and cooperate with others
	Patience	Tendency to remain calm rather than to become angry
Conscientiousness	Organisation	Tendency to seek order, particularly in one's physical surroundings
	Diligence	Tendency to work hard
	Perfectionism	Tendency to be thorough and concerned with details
	Prudence	Tendency to deliberate carefully and to inhibit impulses
Openness to Experience	Aesthetic Appreciation	One's enjoyment of beauty in art and in nature
	Inquisitiveness	Tendency to seek information about, and experience with, the natural and human world
	Creativity	One's preference for innovation and experiment
	Unconventionality	Tendency to accept the unusual
Interstitial Scale	Altruism (versus Antagonism)	Tendency to be sympathetic and soft-hearted toward others

1.7.3 Personality Traits as Predictors of Susceptibility Towards SMIs

According to the literature, people's susceptibility through interpersonal influence depends on their own personality (Hoffmann and Broekhuizen, 2009). The study conducted by Janis (1954) had already stated that people with low levels of self-esteem are more susceptible to persuasion. However, when analysing research regarding the effects of personality traits on word-of-mouth (WoM) and on eWoM (electronic word-of-mouth), and simultaneously, it is evident that there is still a gap in this approach (Tapanainen, Dao and Nguyen, 2021).

A study that recently tried to fill such gap was the one conducted by König *et al.* (2022), analysing the effect of personality traits in people's susceptibility. These authors focus on the Big Five personality trait model, aiming to provide a further insight regarding

the relationship between personality traits and susceptibility towards SMIs (which is a synonym of eWoM in this study) (König *et al.*, 2022).

Firstly, based on previous literature, it has been suggested that extraversion is likely to affect an individual's level of susceptibility, considering that extraverted people typically prefer and seek out social interaction (Mooradian and Swan, 2006). Nevertheless, Adamopoulos, Ghose and Todri (2018) found that introverted individuals that use social media tend to be more responsive to eWoM and SMIs than their extraverted peers, meaning that it is possible that introverted individuals present a higher tendency and susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs.

Regarding emotional stability, related to the tendency of calmness and less irritability, it has been demonstrated that lower levels are associated to a higher probability of internet usage to avoid loneliness, as well as to the need of stronger social support or guidance by others' recommendations (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010). Thus, it seems very probable that less emotionally stable individuals are more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010).

In terms of openness to new experiences, individuals who seem to be more receptive to new experiences are often willing to take new routes, including the usage of new technologies, products, or services (Butt and Phillips, 2008). More precisely, open individuals tend to buy products that have not been extensively evaluated or recommended by their peers, not feeling the need to further investigate the product before acquiring it. Therefore, individuals who are open to new experiences are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, in the sense that they do not need any recommendation of feedback to support their purchase behaviours (Butt and Phillips, 2008).

Finally, in terms of conscientiousness, which refers to individuals that are purposeful, thorough, punctual, and organised, it has been demonstrated that it is negatively correlated with internet usage, especially with social media platforms, since these individuals tend to consider them as a source of distraction (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010). Nonetheless, a positive correlation between conscientiousness and informational usage of social media has been found by Hughes *et al.* (2012). Therefore, it is possible to postulate that higher levels of conscientiousness are effective for SMIs, and not for their followers, meaning that conscientious individuals are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs (Adamopoulos, Ghose and Todri, 2018).

By analysing the results obtained by König *et al.* (2022), it is possible to argue that personality traits have negative effects on consumer susceptibility towards SMIs. Despite being almost impossible to avoid susceptibility, individuals show different perspectives regarding the level of susceptibility to SMIs (König *et al.*, 2022). More specifically, in terms of all the personality traits that were analysed (extraversion, emotional stability, openness to new experiences, and conscientiousness) individuals with higher levels are less susceptible to the influence of SMIs (König *et al.*, 2022).

1.7.4 Perception towards Influencers/Susceptibility

Social media influencers (SMIs) are social media users that present potential to create engagement, conversations and sell products/services with an intended target audience, ranging from celebrities to micro-targeted professionals or nonprofessional peers (Double Click, 2006; Kim and Kim, 2021). Overall, SMIs have sizable groups of followers on their social media platforms, serving as experts in their content areas. Therefore, influencer marketing refers to the type of endorsement marketing that is based on product recommendations from influencers to drive sales, even though the intended goals do involve much broader outcomes, such as generating word-of-mouth effects, gaining attention of future customers, and creating customer engagement to a specific brand/product (Kim and Kim, 2021).

Influencer marketing is evolving into a long-term reality, with marketers fully recognising the value of continuously spreading their messages through influencers on their social media platforms (Kim and Kim, 2021). As a matter of fact, SMIs deliver the brand's message to their followers by leveraging the pre-established relationship (parasocial relationship) and trust that they have cultivated with their followers. According to Eyal (2018), trust is vital in influencer marketing, considering that 92% of social media users claim to trust influencers more than traditional marketing channels. Nonetheless, recent marketing literature seems to not provide any guidelines for this current marketing phenomenon, considering that it overfocuses on several transactional outcomes, such as followers' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions (Kim and Kim, 2021).

In this specific context, it is important to mention the concept of celebrity endorser, classically defined as “any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement” (McCracken, 1989, p. 310). Therefore, SMIs are also celebrity endorsers, in the sense that they use their social media platforms to promote certain brands/products among their followers. Moreover, McCracken (1989) also claims that the endorser’s effectiveness depends on the meanings she or he brings into the endorsement process. Still, even though most social media users/consumers may never become a celebrity, they can aspire to identify with this group, namely by purchasing the brand/product that is recommended by the SMI/celebrity.

The celebrity endorser’s effectiveness has been broadly studied in the marketing literature, with some theories being also used to explain the generation of parasocial relationships, as it is mentioned by (Chung and Cho, 2017). As a matter of fact, Giles, (2002) pointed out that perceived authenticity and coherent representation are key mediators for parasocial relationships to be formed, with perceived attraction and realism being familiar themes within the celebrity endorsement literature. To better explain the endorsement process, two main theories have emerged - source effect theories and endorser relevance, with endorser authenticity also being discussed as a reliable facilitator of an effective endorsement.

1.7.4.1 Endorser Source Effects

Traditionally, source effects models have been widely used to specify the level of persuasion of celebrity endorsers. In more recent research it has been proven that source effects are positively correlated with the generation of parasocial interaction, being generally proposed that endorsers who are perceived by their followers as credible, attractive, and well liked will have positive effects on brand evaluation (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; Bergkvist, Hjalmarson and Mägi, 2016; Yuan, Kim and Kim, 2021). Table 17 specifies the endorser source effects, which have a direct impact on the celebrity endorsement’s effectiveness, as proposed by the pertaining literature.

Table 17 - Endorser source effects that affect the celebrity endorsement’s effectiveness, (Chung and Cho, 2017).

Source		Dimensions/Characteristics			
Source credibility	Expertise	Skilled	Experienced		Expert
	Trustworthiness	Perceived motivations	Reliable	Sincere	Trustworthy
Source attractiveness		Familiar	Likable		Similar
		Intimate		Understandable	

Source credibility is divided into two dimensions: expertise and trustworthiness, which are defined by Ohanian (1990, p.41) as “the extent to which a communicator is perceived to be a source of valid assertions” and as “the degree of confidence in the communicator’s intent to communicate the assertions he considers most valid”, respectively. Thus, source credibility is often associated with the communicator’s positive characteristics, that essentially affect the receiver’s acceptance of a specific message.

In more detail, expertise can also be described as skilled, experienced, expert, qualified, and knowledgeable, with different types of celebrities having distinct levels of expertise in different products/services (Ohanian, 1990). For instance, sports celebrities (athletes) are perceived by consumers as having high expertise in sports products, while fashion bloggers are experts on several fashion-related questions and aspects (Ohanian, 1990).

Trustworthiness can also be described as reliable, sincere, trustworthy, honest, and dependable, basically referring to the level of perceived trustworthiness by consumers/followers regarding the celebrity, based on their earlier knowledge and experience/interaction. However, even though Ohanian (1990) found that expertise has a positive effect on brand evaluations, the same was not applied in terms of trustworthiness. Still, celebrity source credibility and closer trustworthiness towards the celebrity can cover the motivations of the sender/communicator, which happens, for instance, when a celebrity is being motivated by money, and not by the fact of liking the product, which can pose a negative impact for the brand and its evaluation (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; Bergkvist, Hjalmarson and Mägi, 2016).

On the other hand, source attractiveness refers to the follower’s perception of the celebrity endorser, specifically in terms of his or her physical appeal, being also described as sexy, elegant, beautiful, classy, and attractive (Ohanian, 1990). Regarding the source

attractiveness, it is argued that the effectiveness of the message actually depends on the likability, familiarity, and similarity of the source (celebrity endorser) (McCracken, 1989). Based on more recent research, the source effects that do facilitate the creation of a higher consumer trust in celebrity endorsers are intimacy, openness, understandability, and self-disclosure, with the attraction to the celebrity endorser consisting of one of the drivers for parasocial relationships to be formed between followers and SMIs (Chung and Cho, 2017).

1.7.4.2 Perceived Authenticity of Celebrity Endorsers

When investigating the main reasons why consumers form strong attachments to celebrity endorsers, Thomson (2006) discovered that the consumers' attachment is influenced by specific human needs, such as relatedness and autonomy, thus suggesting that the perceived authenticity of celebrity endorsers plays a significant role in attachment, as therefore in the formation of parasocial relationships, as it is corroborated in Giles (2002) study.

Currently, authenticity is described as genuine, original, real, and traditional, with real authentic content being fairly appreciated by followers, since it contributes to the sense of relatedness with the celebrity endorser. According to Ilicic and Webster (2016), it is extremely important for the celebrity endorser to be open, truthful, and honest in his or her interactions with followers, building authenticity by being transparent about his/her characteristics and daily life. Moreover, this feeling of authenticity also serves as a mediator of both consumers' attitudes and purchase intentions, thus significantly impacting the celebrity endorser's effectiveness (Ilicic and Webster, 2016). The major antecedents of the perceived authenticity of the celebrity endorser are presented in Table 18.

Table 18 - Antecedents of the perceived authenticity of celebrity endorsers, (Ilicic and Webster, 2016).

1. Perceived motivations for posting
2. Transparency
3. Openness
4. Stability

- Morality - Candidness - Consistency
5. Rarity - Talent - Discretion - Originality

Considering that the celebrity endorser's true self and motivations are often unobservable to followers, they tend to infer the celebrity's motivations based on previous information regarding his/her authenticity. More precisely, this previous information is based on the celebrity's behaviours in general, which builds up a sense of authenticity or not towards that celebrity endorser (Ilicic and Webster, 2016). Overall, the perceived authenticity of celebrity endorsers is determined by several factors, such as rarity, candidness, morality, discretion, originality, and talent (Ilicic and Webster, 2016).

In this context, the study conducted by Djafarova and Rushworth (2017) is vital, contributing to a better understanding regarding the effectiveness of the celebrity endorser authenticity-wise. Basically, the authors discovered that non-traditional celebrities and Instagram influencers have a stronger influence on consumers' purchase intentions, mainly due to their greater authenticity, and when compared to traditional celebrities (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). As a matter of fact, non-traditional celebrities were found to be seen as more credible by their followers, since they can more easily relate to them (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). Therefore, celebrity endorsers who are authentic seem to be more effective.

1.7.4.3 Endorser Relevance

Initial research concerning celebrity endorsers suggested that they are more efficient when both the endorser and the product are congruent, meaning when the celebrity endorser is relevant to the endorsement itself (Kamins, 1990). A common argument throughout the literature is that attractive celebrities are more effective endorsers for products/brands to enhance one's attractiveness. Still, both the celebrities' physical attractiveness and expertise are important factors, the latter posing a significant contribution when forming a brand-endorser partnership (Till and Busler, 2000).

As a matter of fact, another important factor in terms of endorser-brand relevance is related to the fact that the celebrity endorser must fit the current associations of the brand, thus allowing a transfer of meaning between the brand and the endorser. Moreover, perceived congruence also results from a positive correlation between the consumers' self-image and the celebrity endorser's image, as it is pointed out by McCormick (2016). Moreover, the endorser-product fit/congruence is linked to the formation of parasocial relationships, with Giles (2002) claiming that social media celebrities/influencers should maintain a coherent representation across all social media channels, with the corresponding product fitting such representation. Essentially, the major antecedents of endorser relevance are three: attractiveness, coherent representation, and expertise (McCormick, 2016).

Lastly, it is also important to mention the study conducted by McCormick (2016) because the author demonstrated that even with unfamiliar celebrities, and if the image of the product being advertised is congruent with that celebrity, followers' attitudes towards the product and the brand are positive. Hence, a realistic and congruent relationship between celebrity endorsers, either familiar or unfamiliar to followers, and the brand can lead to a positive perception of the advertisement, which is more believable by consumers (McCormick, 2016).

1.7.4.4 Impacts of Positive and Negative Social Media Content

After carefully analysing the literature, it became evident that social media platforms have several positive impacts on people's lives, both in terms of well-being and of social and emotional support. For instance, social media users, regardless of their age, can receive supportive comments and likes, find communities that struggle with the same issues and build empathy. Among adolescents, social media can facilitate their self-expression, as well as their connection to like-minded communities. An important impact refers to specific social media communities (such as the LGBTQ+), which use social media to identify individuals who may be at risk of committing suicide (Spies Shapiro and Margolin, 2014).

Another positive impact of social media platforms refers to the access of information, including health information, politics, and current worldwide events. For

example, users of Facebook and Twitter were more likely to get the flu vaccine, as it is mentioned in the study conducted by (Ahmed *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, social media helps to share health issues, to message health providers, and to request health advice or information, thus positively impacting individuals' lives and well-being (Zhao and Zhang, 2017).

However, most of the research in social media highlights the negative impacts on people's well-being, especially in terms of mental health. For instance, some studies stress that social media usage is correlated to adolescents' lack of quantity and quality of sleep, which can ultimately lead to anxiety, anger, depression, drug abuse, and in more severe cases suicide (Arora *et al.*, 2018).

Regarding Instagram and Facebook, which consists of image-driven platforms, some of the negative impacts that have been discovered are associated with increased levels of anxiety and depression, sometimes due to cyberbullying, which has a stronger correlation to suicide when it is perpetrated in social media, rather than through traditional face-to-face interactions (Kuehn, Wagner and Velloza, 2019). In those same social media platforms, other studies demonstrated that they are associated with other negative impacts, such as: lower levels of self-worth, negative body image, higher levels of anxiety, specifically the FoMO (fear of missing out), which was found to be a mediating factor in adolescents' distraction in classes, and also contributing to lower levels of life satisfaction, less satisfaction with relationships, feelings of being constantly overwhelmed, and increased levels of anxiety (Shafer, 2017). Table 19 summarises all the mentioned positive and negative impacts of social media content outlined in this section.

Overall, it is possible to argue that social media content, which significantly relates to SMIs, can be either positive or harmful to individuals who use social media platforms daily. Despite presenting multiple positive impacts, truly promoting, and developing people's well-being and health, social media content can have much more negative impacts, ultimately leading to severe consequences (depression and suicide). Therefore, SMIs must be fully aware when posting their content, trying to positively impact their followers' lives, rather than contributing to their suffering by creating problems that will directly impact their mental health and well-being.

Table 19 - Positive and negative impacts of social media content.

Positive impacts	Negative impacts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social support, empathy • Medium of self-expression • Connection to like-minded communities • Identification of individuals who might be at risk (suicide, depression) • Access to information (health, politics, worldwide events) • Improvement of well-being (messages to health providers, health advice and information) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affects mental health • Lack of sleep (quantity and quality) • Anxiety • Anger • Depression • Drug abuse • Suicide • Cyberbullying • Lower self-worth • FoMO • Distraction • Less satisfaction (with life and relationships) • Feelings of being overwhelmed • Negative body image

1.7.5 Parasocial Relationships

The concepts of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships were introduced by Horton and Wohl (1956) in communication studies, being defined as occurring between the media consumer and the media performers. Overall, parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships or interactions between the media viewer and the media character/person involved, with the former exerting time, effort, and emotional energy into this specific relationship, while the latter has no idea that this relationship even exists (Horton and Wohl, 1956). The parasocial interaction thus revolves around an interpersonal involvement of the media user with what they consume, with their involvement enhancing the parasocial interaction (Perse and Rubin, 1989).

Parasocial relationships refer to a long-term effect, developing during media consumption by people and after their initial media consumption event (Perse and Rubin, 1989). They are like interpersonal relationships in the sense that they are voluntary, provide companionship, and are formed based on social attraction (Brown, 2015). Moreover, it has been demonstrated that the current media-saturated society allows people to know each other more parasocial rather than through direct and interpersonal contact, which is why the parasocial interaction is a contact or an exposure to mediated people (Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes, 2005).

Even though both concepts are used interchangeably, they slightly differ from each other. In fact, parasocial interactions are associated to the “media user’s reaction to a media performer such that the media user perceives the performer as an intimate conversational partner” (Dibble, Hartmann and Rosaen, 2016, p. 21).

In other words, the parasocial interaction is what the media user experiences after watching the media performers’ content. Even though these interactions are one-sided, media users still perceive them as authentic, despite being aware that the person on the screen is not having a direct conversation with and to them. Nevertheless, the user’s need to escape might encourage this belief, or a suspension of disbelief, that the person is truly talking to them. In fact, it has been proven that SMIs can relate to their followers directly, thus encouraging and allowing the development of connections that are similar to interpersonal bonds (Cummins and Cui, 2014).

In terms of social media influencers, self-disclosure is an important aspect when it comes to parasocial relationships. As a matter of fact, social media influencers often display their lives, as well as specific content, to thousands of followers (media users), providing them a glimpse of their lifestyle. Therefore, parasocial relationships refer to a long-term version of repeated and constant interactions with the same person (the social media influencer) (Chung and Cho, 2017).

The study conducted by Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011) has examined the media viewers’ experience in terms of parasocial interactions, namely with a TV performer. Their findings demonstrated that parasocial interactions with TV performers can result from their addressing style, their perceived attractiveness, the viewers’ perspective-taking ability, and the viewers’ loneliness. In past study, Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) had already studied the parasocial relationships with television characters, assessing their connection to viewers’ loneliness and the likeness of the character itself. They found out that viewers with unsatisfied interpersonal needs can fulfill them through parasocial interactions.

In a more recent study, Liebers and Schramm (2019) present an overview regarding the current extent of parasocial research, thoroughly analysing the development of the parasocial research field, the types of media characters that were investigated, and the methodological aspects that were adopted in current research. Overall, they found 261 published empirical articles about parasocial interaction and relationships from 1956 to

2015, with a significant increase in 2014-2015 due to the publication of studies concerning social media networks (Liebers and Schramm, 2019).

Liebers and Schramm (2019) also point out that most of the existing research about parasocial relationships focuses on the interactions between individuals and TV characters. Nevertheless, it is important to also focus on social media influencers, considering that they use social media to gain a large, yet niche, audience, interacting with people across several platforms, such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok, YouTube, and Facebook (Liebers and Schramm, 2019). More precisely, social media influencers often interact with people while promoting several companies, or even to fulfil a particular entertainment need. Thus, social media can truly impact real-life relationships and parasocial relationships, since they influence people's, as well as adolescents', "identity development, access to information and relationships" (Bond, 2016, p. 656).

1.7.5.1 Predictors of Parasocial Relationships and Interactions

Overall, the predictors of parasocial relationships and interactions consider the multiple aspects of the experience of visualising media content that truly encourage the development of the parasocial phenomena. According to McLaughlin and Wohn (2021), there are three predictors of parasocial relationships and interactions, which are highlighted by their study with live streamers: 1) source characteristics; 2) behavioural characteristics; and 3) viewer characteristics.

The source characteristics basically refer to the characteristics of the media character, consisting of both social and physical attractiveness of the media character to the media viewer/individual (McLaughlin and Wohn, 2021). Moreover, it is important to add that the message source/channel is crucial to the parasocial phenomena, considering that its impact can lead to positive outcomes. The behavioural characteristics are those that can lead to higher levels of parasocial interaction, such as direct interactions with live streamers, which ends up mimicking face-to-face interactions upon which real-world relationships are formed and built upon. In fact, it is such perceived intimacy and reality with the social media character that allows viewers to feel connected to them, thus leading to stronger parasocial relationships (McLaughlin and Wohn, 2021). Some of the viewers'

characteristics, such as feelings of loneliness and introversion/extroversion, impact the development of parasocial relationships, with several studies having presented correlations between these variables (McLaughlin and Wohn, 2021).

For instance, a positive correlation between parasocial relationships and introversion and shyness has been found by Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (2005) while Baek, Bae and Jang (2013) proved that there is a positive correlation between parasocial relationships and social media addiction and loneliness of the viewer, as well as between parasocial relationship dependency and loneliness of the viewer. In sum, the more social media users/viewers depend on these platforms to alleviate their loneliness, the more potential there is for parasocial relationships to develop.

Finally, the third predictor of parasocial relationships and interactions is the behaviour of the viewer. Indeed, the causes behind the viewers' loneliness will lead to different levels of parasocial relationship strength. Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (2005) demonstrated that there is a positive correlation between parasocial relationship strength and the characteristics of the viewers' behaviour. Still, when loneliness has a positive correlation with parasocial relationships, it has a negative correlation with parasocial interaction. Overall, the strongest predictor of parasocial relationships in general is interpersonal attractiveness, while the strongest predictor of parasocial interaction is the direct interaction between the viewer and the social media character (McLaughlin and Wohn, 2021).

According to Chung and Cho (2017), self-disclosure is also a predictor of parasocial relationships, referring to contexts of intimate share (personal feelings or beliefs) between celebrities and followers. In this context, social media allows its users to both share and engage with content and with other users to whom they relate the most. Therefore, social media does rely on users' self-disclosure, which strengthens the perceived authenticity and intimacy, and ultimately develops parasocial relationships. In sum, parasocial relationships, specifically between celebrities/SMIs and their followers, are characterized as being intimate, reciprocal, and interpersonal.

1.7.5.2 Impacts of the Parasocial Phenomena

In general, the parasocial phenomena can either have positive or negative impacts. While parasocial interactions are formed through a sense of mutual interaction with the social media character, parasocial relationships are associated to an ongoing feeling of intimacy between media viewers and the social media character. According to Tukachinsky, Walter and Saucier (2020) parasocial relationships are strongly related to interpersonal involvement, bonds, and persuasive outcomes. On the contrary, Baek, Bae and Jang (2013) claimed that parasocial relationships, and specifically through social media, can result in feelings of alienation, loneliness, or life dissatisfaction, potentially leading to social isolation and disengagement from the real world. Thus, feelings of interpersonal distrust and loneliness are impacted by media consumer's indulgence in parasocial relationships. Moreover, these relationships can also create either unachievable or unrealistic relationship standards, thus making it more difficult for individuals to form real relationships with their peers (Derrick, Gabriel and Toppin, 2008).

However, parasocial relationships can also elicit a sense of motivation, belonging, and inspiration for viewers, with some authors demonstrating a positive correlation between social media engagement and motivation to engage in more social activities, namely by the representation provided by the social media character (Boon and Lomore, 2001). Furthermore, there is also a positive benefit from parasocial relationships, especially to viewers with low self-esteem, who are more likely to be attracted to social media characters that represent their ideal self instead of people with higher self-esteem levels. This benefit is related to the fact that viewers with less self-esteem can gather a sense of belonging and obtain a substitution for something they cannot achieve in their social lives by viewing content from social media characters who they relate to (Derrick, Gabriel and Toppin, 2008).

Ultimately, parasocial interactions also present some positive outcomes for celebrities. In fact, through social media platforms parasocial interactions elicit a positive impact on celebrity endorsement, since people are more likely to support a specific brand when it is promoted by a celebrity/social media character that they feel connected to by interactions. Therefore, parasocial interactions are simultaneously beneficial for the brand and for celebrities, the latter being related to the fact that celebrities' fans do trust that celebrity, which directly impacts their trust in that same brand. Nonetheless, without parasocial relationships or self-disclosure, interacting with celebrities on social media

platforms can pose negative impacts, especially in terms of consumer purchase intention and if the experience is negative (Chung and Cho, 2017).

1.7.5.3 A Marketing Approach on Parasocial Relationships in Social Media

Previous studies already showed that one of the main reasons why media users engage with parasocial relationships with social media influencers is related to their curiosity towards their lives, aiming to know more about their activities and life events (Horton and Wohl, 1956). In this sense, social media made it easier to share such type of information, thus strengthening social media parasocial relationships, while simultaneously contributing to the increase of an illusion of intimacy with the influencers, thus generating a positive attitude and behavioural intentions regarding celebrity endorsement (Bond, 2016).

According to Labrecque (2014), the online environment offers a better platform for parasocial relationships, especially when compared to more traditional media channels. This is mainly because social media is more open in terms of communication and interactivity attempts, which does help to build parasocial relationships more easily. In fact, by being connected either to celebrities or brands in social media users can feel that they know the sender of such information, not requiring any type of interaction with them per se.

On his study, Bond (2016) discovered that two-sided social media interactions do strengthen the parasocial relationship. By analysing parasocial relationships on Twitter, he concluded that adolescents tend to feel a stronger parasocial relationship with social media influencers when these respond or retweet their tweets, the contrary being observed when there is not such type of two-sided interactions (Bond, 2016).

The first study that connected parasocial relationships to the marketing field was developed by Gummesson (1994), which basically listed parasocial relationships by objects and symbols as one of the 30 relations that occur in the marketing context. Overall, this author claimed that relationships do not only occur between people, with individuals also having relationships with symbols or objects (brands, for instance). Since then, the literature regarding parasocial relationships has significantly increased, focusing on both

brands and other people. More recent research assumes that the parasocial relationship theory is able to offer unique insights to marketing related themes, such as brand-consumer relationships and celebrity endorsement effectiveness.

It was precisely due to this increased research on the matter that it was possible to conclude that currently 50% of adolescents are addicted to their phones, using them for social media browsing. Therefore, it is reasonable to infer that parasocial relationships might be stronger and easier to achieve in social media platforms rather than in more traditional channels (Bond, 2016).

On a different perspective, Chung and Cho (2017) demonstrated that parasocial relationships can truly lead to higher purchase intentions, as well as to a greater trust towards both the brand and the celebrity endorser. This is essentially due to the users' main interest on following specific social media influencers, to acknowledge their lifestyle, which sometimes results in an admiration towards that media person. This admiration can influence users' purchase intention, who may want to buy a certain product due to their admiration to a celebrity that uses it daily (Lueck, 2015).

1.7.5.4 Parasocial Relationships and Persuasion of Consumers: The Influencer Marketing

According to De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) the influencer marketing, based on the use of a celebrity endorser, is effective due to two specific reasons: 1) the endorser's audience is easily reachable; and 2) consumers are inexperienced with this type of marketing strategy. The study conducted by Colliander and Erlandsson (2015) is crucial in this approach, considering that they combined parasocial interaction and relationship theories with the persuasion knowledge model. In the social media context, and according to a marketing perspective, parasocial relationships are often related to endorsers' role as promoters among their followers. Hence, the endorsers' goal is to persuade their followers to either consume or purchase the brand they are endorsing.

The persuasion knowledge model basically addresses how and whether single persuasion attempts, such as an advertisement on an Instagram post, affect both consumers' knowledge and attitudes (Colliander and Erlandsson, 2015). Moreover, this

model also explains how persuasion knowledge accumulates over time, forming a common persuasion knowledge and thus affecting consumers' perspectives regarding advertisement in general. Ultimately, the persuasion knowledge model assumes that people learn about persuasion from several different sources (their own experiences, experiences from family and friends, and observation of marketers), thus developing their personal knowledge (Friestad and Wright, 1994). In other words, people are more capable of identifying when, how, and why they are being influenced.

Over the last few years, the persuasion knowledge model has been widely adapted to the social media context, with several scholars focusing on whether consumers are able to recognise the new forms of marketing (such as influencer marketing and product placements) as commercial content, due to their hidden nature. Several studies have proved that most consumers do not recognise when they are looking at an advertisement on social media platforms, meaning that promotions from celebrity endorsers on social media platforms are less likely to trigger persuasion knowledge (Boerman, Willemsen and van der Aa, 2017).

As a matter of fact, it has been demonstrated that 56% of the participants that were exposed to a disclosure did not recognise it, which means that the content disseminated by the celebrity endorser was viewed without activation in persuasion knowledge, possibly being more effective in terms of engagement and purchase intention. This can be explained by the consumers' difficulty in distinguishing commercial and normal content posted by social media celebrities, considering that not every content they post is commercial. For instance, when they post about their families, meals, or training, these posts are mixed with posts of normal users, which justifies why they are often considered and seen as fellow social media users rather than as endorsers who are actively promoting a brand/product and persuading consumers to buy it or use it (Boerman, Willemsen and van der Aa, 2017).

Overall, persuasion knowledge is expected to be developed throughout an individual's life span, starting in their infancy, and developing towards adulthood. This means that young people still have an inadequate understanding of persuasion, possibly making them unable to decide whether they want to be persuaded or to resist such urge. In other words, young people might not know when, how, and where they are being influenced. Nevertheless, and considering that nowadays adolescents are digital natives,

being used to messages and advertisement on social media platforms, they are more aware and well trained to recognise persuasion attempts by celebrity endorsers (Wright, Friestad and Boush, 2005).

1.7.6 Consumer Trust

Overall, the concept of trust is defined as “the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party in situations involving risk” (Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2019, p.5). Within this study’s scope, trust can be considered as the relationship between the SMIs and his/her followers, with the latter being perceived to both act and react, being able to make a decision towards the influencer. Nonetheless, because trusting someone is associated with some certain level of risk, there is always the possibility of losing something important. Despite not being completely related to the action of taking risk, trusting involves someone to be vulnerable and willing to take some risk (Pilgrim and Bohnet-Joschko, 2019).

Regarding the specific relationship between SMIs and followers, there are some characteristics of each party that must be addressed. In fact, personality traits of followers are extremely important in terms of trust since they end up determining whether they trust the influencer or not. Thus, the followers trust on the influencer based on several personality traits, which are related to their types of personalities, experiences they lived, and their cultural backgrounds. However, SMIs also have some specific characteristics that impact their followers’ trust, namely their trustworthiness and their expertise, which sum up to the influencer’s credibility. Therefore, credibility is a predecessor of trust with this regard. In other words, if the information provided by the SMI is credible, it is more likely to promote trust of that party among the followers (Ohanian, 1990).

Furthermore, the SMIs’ credibility also depends on their consistency, namely in terms of their messages and posts on social media regarding a specific product or service. Thus, influencers will be more credible if they make several posts about a specific product/brand, rather than posting contents one single time (Westerman, Spence and van der Heide, 2014). Also, the SMIs credibility also relies on their expertise, especially about the product/brand that is being recommended to their followers, thus complementing the influencers’ trustworthiness. Based on previous literature, the persuasiveness the

influencers hold over their followers is significantly increased when the variable is expertise, rather than trustworthiness. Therefore, SMIs must be strongly aligned with attitudes, intentions, and beliefs, even though both expertise and trustworthiness are vital for the influencers' credibility (O'hara, Netemeyer and Burton, 1991).

As it was previously mentioned, trustworthiness refers to the motivation a SMI either has or not to lie to his/her followers. In case of lying to their followers, SMIs can be perceived as less trustworthy, thus negatively impacting their followers' trust. In marketing, trustworthiness is also associated with believability, honesty, and integrity of the influencer. Furthermore, the existing literature highlights the importance of one person's integrity, benevolence, and ability in terms of trustworthiness, meaning that these domains must be considered by SMIs to be perceived as trustworthy by their followers, thus truly influencing them (Mayer, Davis and Schoorman, 1995).

Still, trustworthiness also comprises people's opinions about the SMI, which is designated as reflected trustworthiness. Essentially, reflected trustworthiness is associated with the influencer's deriving qualities of trustworthiness, such as his/her performance, reputation, and appearance. Basically, the influencer's performance is associated to present events and the influencer's performance in general, while the influencer's reputation is related to what the influencer has previously done (past events) up until the present. In other words, the influencer's reputation is the assessment of their social media content in general, based on his/her responses to the content and the interaction with the followers (Moturu and Liu, 2011).

Another crucial factor that indicates the SMIs' credibility is their social connections with their followers (also designated as parasocial relationships), as well as with other SMIs, thus impacting trust. In this context, the followers' responses on social media are very important, considering that if the interaction with the SMI is high, it means that his/her content/posts are perceived as trustworthy by the followers, promoting a sense of trust between both parties (Moturu and Liu, 2011). Considering the physical appearance of the SMI, this is also important in terms of his/her trustworthiness, referring to the influencer's identity, status or personality, as well as to the external/visual characteristics of the influencer's content in general, being directly associated with the construct of quality content. Thus, quality content also positively affects the influencer's trustworthiness among his/her followers (Moturu and Liu, 2011).

Expertise, on the other hand, is associated to the “extent to which a communicator is perceived to be capable of making correct assertions” (Braunsberger and Munch, 1998, p. 24). In fact, it has been demonstrated that influencers with a high level of expertise have a more powerful persuasion capability among their followers. With this regard, Braunsberger and Munch (1998) suggested that a party with high expertise leads to a more positive attitude towards the other party, the former referring to the influencer and the latter to the followers. So, broadly speaking, if expertise is present in SMIs, the higher their persuasion power will be among their followers, who in turn will believe on the influencers’ opinions regarding a product/service/brand, thus resulting in a higher level of trust towards influencers, as well as a higher credibility on this party and on the brand they are promoting or advertising.

Finally, the brand’s role in the credibility and trustworthiness of SMIs is vital, given the fact that if followers perceive the brand as being coherent with the influencer’s image, it contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness towards both (SMIs and the brand itself). This positive effect, for both influencers and brands, is confirmed and supported by the attributional theory, which clearly suggests that an influencer gives the impression that he/she is internally motivated, rather than externally (profit) motivated, when the promoted brand fits what he/she stands for on the rest of the social media content (Breves *et al.*, 2019).

1.7.7 Conclusion

The RQ1 of this study is: *What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?* Thus, the two proposed hypotheses to answer to this specific research question are the following ones:

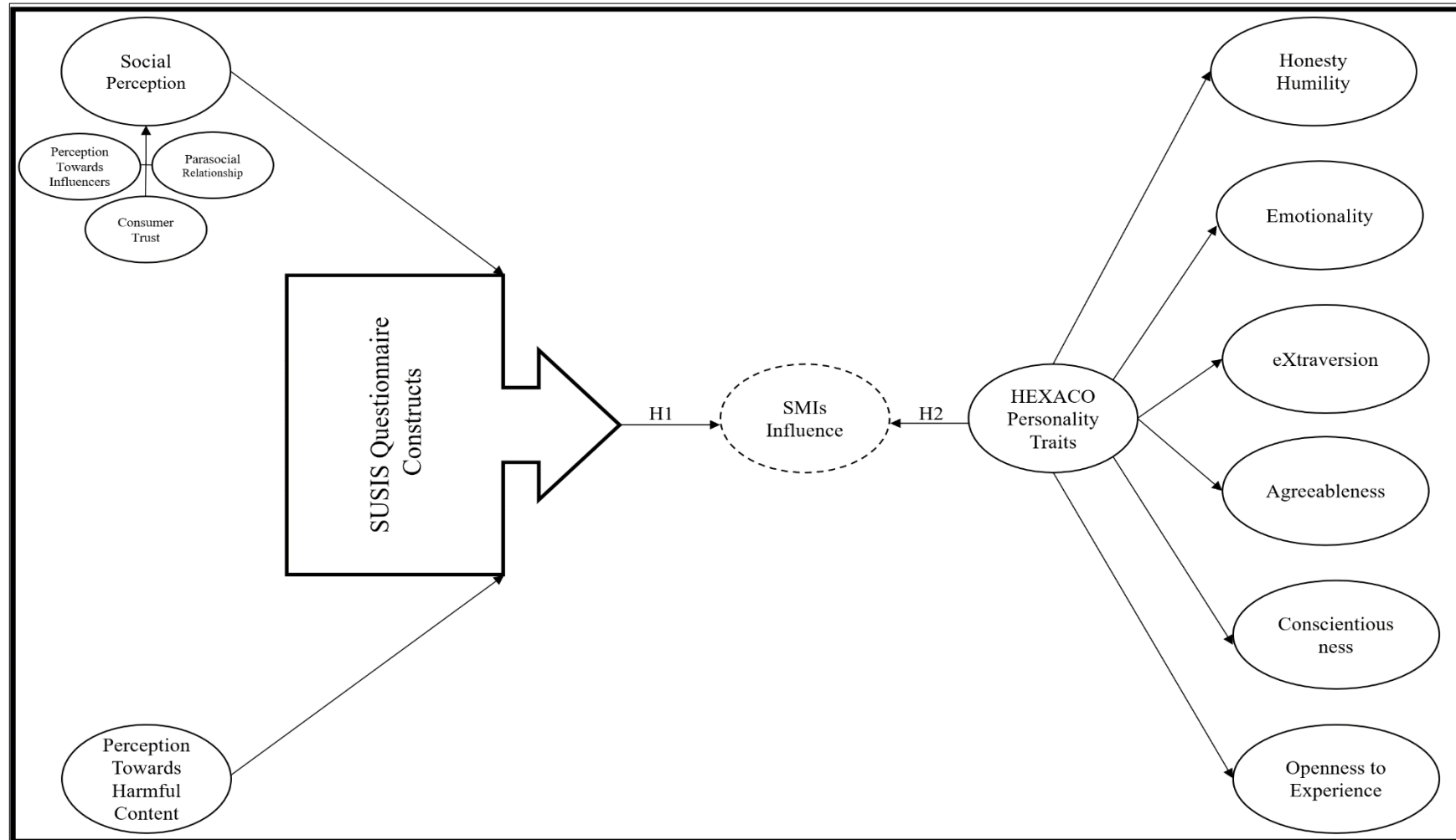
H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI’s influence (“SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).

H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI’s influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-

Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

Taking these hypotheses into consideration, the full conceptual model to be tested in this investigation is designed as demonstrated below (Figure 1).

Figure 1 - Conceptual framework of the model to be tested in the present investigation.



Based on the conducted literature review, it has been demonstrated that the phenomenon under investigation is still underdeveloped, considering that social media platforms only achieved their peak in 2020, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, being a recent technological phenomenon. However, by analysing the existing literature, and sometimes adapting it to the current context (social media), it is possible to infer that personality traits have a positive correlation with susceptibility towards social media influencers, meaning that specific traits will indeed increase the susceptibility of followers to be influenced by these celebrity endorsers. Nonetheless, personality traits are not the only variable that positively impacts followers' susceptibility, since the literature also demonstrated a positive correlation with the perception towards influencers (related to their credibility and trustworthiness), with the impacts of social media content (either positive or harmful to followers), with parasocial relationships (with closer relationships increasing the probability of susceptibility), and with trust (especially towards the social media influencer, but sometimes even with the brand that is being advertised).

Although the potential negative impacts of young people being exposed to some types of harmful messages on social media have been well documented, surprisingly little research has focused on personality traits that predispose young people to be susceptible to be influenced in this regard.

Therefore, all the analysed concepts are clearly linked to each other, establishing intertwined connections among them. The theories of parasocial relationships, perception towards influencers/susceptibility and consumer trust are interrelated serving as a foundation of the construct Social Perception of the conceptual framework. In addition, 28 types of potential harmful content (Table 15) build the construct Harmful in the conceptual framework.

Additionally, when analysing such recent, yet broader, subject, it is important to keep in mind that there are multiple concepts under discussion, being almost interdependent, and ultimately necessary, to present a fluid line of thought. For this reason, and bringing an exploratory approach to this research I proposed the RQ2, in order to explore who the sample population are following and why. The motives that make the sample follow their SMIs might bring more insights to this research and fill the gaps in the literature review.

The RQ2 in this research is: *What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them?*

There is also no previous research in an Irish context that has attempted to analyse the impact of social media influencer's content on young peoples' lives aiming to inform, and aware young people about this. This study attempts to clarify those shortcomings and fill the gaps through mixed-methods research approach.

Finally, this research intends to bring an ethical discussion about the responsibility to protect young people in the digital environment. As seen in the literature review, SMIs content and social media content can cause both positive and harmful effects in young's people lives. Therefore, from an exploratory view I propose to critically discuss the RQ3: *Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?* This study attempts to answer these research questions and filled the gaps in the literature, mainly within an Irish content.

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

CHAPTER II

2.0 METHODOLOGY

The present chapter introduces the methodological foundation of the thesis and the methods and practical applications will be explained in detail. The conceptual plurality of the mixed-methods research (MMR) will work with internal coherence. This coherence begins with a discussion within the philosophical domains, expanding and ending under a theoretical, methodological, and practical approach. Finally, resulting in the technical considerations, experimental and instrumental specifications of this research.

The main aim is to comprehend the social phenomenon in its deepness and complexity. Therefore, describing the events in a rigorous form, providing as much detail as possible. However, research questions are provided and will be answered through the data collection and analysis, therefore from the employability of the methodology. The outcomes of the methods will provide reliable data for validation and confirmation.

A mixed-methods method was chosen for this study because both quantitative and qualitative data are being collected and analysed; this research has exploratory characteristics, being an exploratory study in nature. MMR is most appropriate because this project relies on measuring the overlapping and different facets of the phenomenon studied in this research, generating an improved, elaborated, and expanded understating of that phenomenon (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998). But, not limited to that, the choice was made to merge strengths from two different methods, qualitative and quantitative research models resulting in a more accurate, detailed and robust mixed-methodological structure to answer the research questions and understand the phenomenon under investigation deeply (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989; Morgan, 1998; Leavy, 2017).

According to Creswell *et al.* (2003, p. 80) is strongly suggested to select carefully a single design that best matches the research problem. This choice will help manage easily, implement and describe the study, and provide the investigator with a framework and logic to guide the employment of the research procedures. Furthermore, Creswell *et*

al. (2003) recommends three major decisions while choosing the design “the timing of the use of collected data, the relative weight of the quantitative and qualitative approaches, and the approach to mixing the two datasets”.

According to Creswell *et al.* (2003, p. 80), the design choice of this study can be illustrated as below in Table 20:

Table 20 - Decisions for Mixed-Methods Design, (Creswell *et al.*, 2003, p. 80).

Decisions for Mixed-Methods Design Criteria for Timing, Weighting, and Mixing		
Decisions	The choices for this study	
What will the timing of the quantitative and qualitative methods be?	Concurrent/Parallel timing	Quantitative first
What will the weighting of the quantitative and qualitative methods be?	Equal weight	Quantitative and Qualitative emphasis
How will the quantitative and qualitative methods be mixed?	Compared and Discussed	Qualitative results complements the Quantitative results

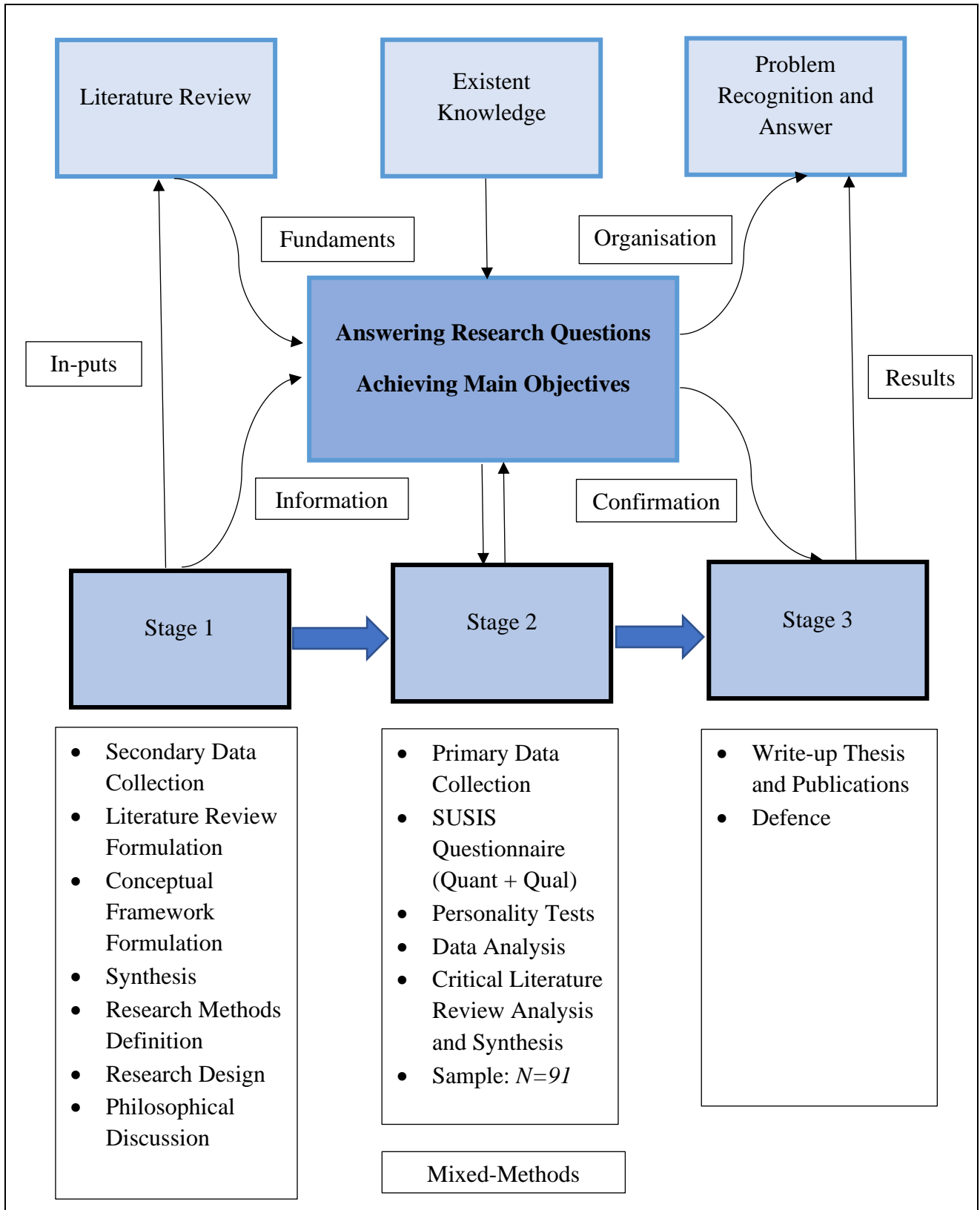
In summary, this study provides a concurrent timing as a time frame for data collection both quantitative and qualitative elements, both strands are emphasised. Additionally, the weight for both methods are equal. Therefore, qualitative is compared to quantitative. The diagram below (Diagram 1 - Summary of Mixed-Methods) represents a summary of the methodology used in this study. Thus, the MMR design is defined as the convergent parallel design in which quantitative and qualitative data are collected concurrently, the data analysis is completed separated, and finally results are compared and discussed (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Conceptualising the theories mentioned above, Bryman (2004, p. 12) states that quantitative research is “a genre which uses a special language which appears to exhibit some similarity to how scientists talk about how they investigate the natural order — variables, control, measurement, experiment”. On the other hand, qualitative research is considered an “approach to the study of the social world which seeks to describe and

analyse the culture and behaviour of humans and their groups from the perspective of those being studied” (Bryman, 2004, p. 46). The main difference between both is that quantitative research tends to adopt a pre-defined, structured design to study based on hypotheses drawn from theory. In contrast, qualitative methods tend to be more open, flexible, interactive work plan, in which specific procedures emerge and change as the research proceeds (Corbetta, 2003; Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017). This research combines both methods to enhance validity and provide mutual confirmation by advancing a systematic integration of qualitative and quantitative methods known as mixed-methods research (MMR) (Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017). In addition, this research is exploratory in nature, using also a qualitative approach to gather preliminary data to help refine the research questions or develop a deeper understanding of the topic (Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017). In this case, the convergent parallel design is used to complement the data and answer the research questions. This can provide a more robust and nuanced understanding of the research questions and enhance the validity and reliability of the study findings (Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017).

Therefore, this study follows a convergent parallel design that is a mixed methods design in which the researcher collects data concurrently and analyses two separate databases—quantitative and qualitative—and then compare the findings for the purpose of getting a more complete understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell and Clark, 2018; Edmonds and Kennedy, 2017).

Diagram 1 - Summary of Mixed-Methods.



2.1 Mixed-Methods Purpose Statement

This study aims to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). A fixed mixed-methods convergent parallel design will be used to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently through a questionnaire and personality test.

Questionnaire and personality test data were collected from $N=91$ young people part of the generation Z cohort, at two educational institutions located in Ireland, to determine the specific personality traits associated with susceptibility to be influenced by social media influencers and assess the factors that might motivate young people to follow their influencers (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Therefore, the purpose of this study within the mixed-methods fundamentals is complementarity purpose because I am seeking to compare both forms of data to search for congruent findings (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007). Furthermore, the complementarity purpose relies on results from both methods quantitative and qualitative that was employed concurrently. Therefore, these figures reflect on methods, samples, and implementation. Finally, throughout this analysis and according to Madey (1982); Greene, Caracelli and Graham (1989); and Creswell *et al.* (2003), this research fits in the complementarity purpose dimension aiming “to increase the validity of constructs and inquiry results by capitalizing on inherent methods strengths” and therefore following the convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p. 259).

2.2 Guiding Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

This research's main objective is to assess young people's susceptibility to influence by social media influencers (SMIs).

Research is needed to unravel the impact of SMIs on young people, which may have both desirable and undesirable consequences. Additionally, influencer content may affect areas including youths' psychological well-being, materialism, and body satisfaction (Kraut *et al.*, 1998; Meier and Gray, 2014; Hogue and Mills, 2018; Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). **The research problem relies on the following: From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to**

influence by SMIs? Because if I can understand who will be susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, then we can work towards raising awareness among young people about the influence of social media influencers' content on their lives. This research topic aims to enrich our knowledge of the role of social media influencers in the lives of young people.

In order to address the research problem of this study, specific guiding research questions were formulated focusing on two major issues, [1] on determining the specific personality traits (e.g. Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience) associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers. [2] Additionally, gathering insights about who their influencers are, their motives for following these influencers, and who is responsible for protecting young people in the digital environment. A mixed-method approach will be employed, relying on both quantitative and qualitative methods following a fixed mixed-methods convergent parallel design in which the use of quantitative and qualitative procedures are fixed and planned at the start of the research process, the measures are implemented as planned, and both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time, but priority is equal, in this case, the quantitative and qualitative elements have equal priorities (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Guiding Research Questions:

1. (RQ1) What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?

This first question pertains to the quantitative approach of the mixed-method design. In order to effectively answer this question, hypotheses were formulated based on the literature review of this study, as well as the theories of personality, para-social relationship and consumer trust. The hypotheses are:

- H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).
- H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS

questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

The second and third guiding research questions are the nested element of the mixed-method research design in which these questions will be useful for getting a wider perspective on the topic under investigation. The results can be compared or combined to obtain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. This combination is useful to validate one set of findings with the other, or to determine if participants respond in a similar way if they check quantitative predetermined scales and if they are asked open-ended qualitative questions (Creswell and Clark, 2018).

2. (RQ2) What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them?
3. (RQ3) Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

The susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs were explored through their motives and preferences to follow their SMIs. This qualitative analysis intends to contribute to the quantitative analysis. Additionally, through the guiding research question three, I intended to bring an ethical discussion about the responsibility of protecting young people in the digital environment. This question is answered through a critical literature review method relying on a qualitative approach that will contribute to a broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. In this case, I argue that if young people are exposed to harmful content, this might have a negative influence on their lives, such as increasing alcohol and cigarette intake, and therefore, who is responsible for ethically protecting them against the disclosure of harmful content spread by SMIs?

Finally, this project's general objective **aims to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). In addition, this study aims to raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives.** In order to achieve this general research objective, I set up two specific objectives:

A – Determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers.

B – Holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers’ content on young peoples’ lives.

Thus, if I can understand who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs, then I can work towards raising awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers’ content on their lives.

2.3 Research Paradigm

This study pertains to the pragmatism philosophical underpinning emphasising the scientific character of this investigation as well as highlighting the philosophical contribution in two different approaches, as a fundament to build the methodology (1) and as a critical thinking domain providing a broad reflection on the paradoxical explanation of reality according to the nature of this study (2). This characterisation is given due to this research's involvement with social institutions and their features, such as companies, brands, money, genders, government, law, etc. (Leavy, 2017). Also, according to this research’s implication, contribution and impact on the society itself (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Finally, due to its plural and dynamic methodological approach (mixed methods) that concentrates on a practical perspective to generate accurate results. In sum, the practical elements involve a singular paradigm in this research, so-called pragmatism.

Pragmatism is recognised as an American philosophical belief system that started at the beginning of the 20th century by an array of philosophers such as Peirce, S. C., James, W., Dewey, J., and Mead, H. G. (Leavy, 2017). This paradigm defends the use of different types of instruments that may be useful in various research scenarios and/or in the perspective of a particular research question (s) (Leavy, 2017). Pragmatism suggests that any theory might be helpful and, therefore, valid. In other words, pragmatism focus on the results of practical actions. Research in the field refers to pragmatism as a catalyst to support the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods, place the research questions at the core of the inquiry, and align all the methodological decisions to the

research questions themselves (Leavy, 2017). According to Peirce (Lecture VII, page 250) cited by Campbell (2005, p. 7), “pragmatism is the doctrine that every conception is a conception of conceivable practical effects”. In sum, pragmatism is the most practical paradigm amongst all models.

Beforehand, the existence of an array of paradigms represents different views of the world and realities and provides theoretical and practical instruments that might be used to resolve research questions (Morgan, 2014; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Every concept has a different epistemology approach, ontology, axiology, methodology and rhetoric of study – but commonly philosophical in nature (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). A brief example is the positivism approach, which is highly associated with quantitative methods, and interpretivism, with qualitative methods (Goldkuhl, 2012). On the other hand, pragmatism might be highly involved with mixed methods due to its flexible approach of non-extremes (Morgan, 2014). For instance, pragmatists argue to bridge the disparity amongst the scientific approach and structuralist orientation of past approaches and the naturalistic techniques and flexible orientation of newer approaches (Goldkuhl, 2012; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Alternatively, positivism seeks a general scientific approach to all knowledge domains without distinguishing between social and natural domains and seeking to extract universal laws from a finite set of empirical observations (Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

In contrast with the above-cited, Leavy (2017, pp. 168–169), state the main features of pragmatism concerning mixed methods research (MMR):

- The natural/physical world as well as the social and psychological world including subjective thoughts are both recognised.
- Knowledge is both constructed and based on the reality of the world we experience and live in.
- Theories are visible instrumentally; they are true to the extent that they are applicable in a particular circumstance.
- Action is emphasised over philosophising. (Leavy, 2017, pp. 168–169)

From this perspective, the study in question relies on the pragmatic approach. The study's nature is based on practical actions using a mixed-method methodological perspective. Particular instruments will be applied regarding specific research questions, such as personality tests and questionnaire based on quantitative and qualitative approach. Additionally, this study's reality is based on individuals' actions, surroundings and using things. The actions are emphasised in this study; however, philosophy is not discarded but integrated and enriches the entire project's fundamentals and critical analysis. Finally, the critical features of pragmatism give it an emancipatory potential. Projects under the banner of pragmatism can generate social change in an informed and reflected way, through deep reflection based on previous theory and creative insight (Baker, 1992; Frega and Silva, 2011; Kaushik and Walsh, 2019).

2.4 The Use of Mixed-Methods Research (MMR) in Pragmatism

Mixed-method research (MMR) merges quantitative with qualitative techniques to in-depth explain the research phenomenon (Woolcock, Bamberger and Rao, 2010). Simply, MMR includes collecting and integrating quantitative and qualitative data in a specific study, which might result in a more accurate, detailed and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon investigated (Leavy, 2017). The paradigm concerning mixed-methods tends to be exceptionally diverse, methodologically and theoretically, where the research dilemma is at the centre of the study and its features. Additionally, there is not a specific paradigm that MMR is committed to (Leavy, 2017). According to Green (2007, p. 20), MMR relies on a “mixed methods way of thinking”. It means multiple ways of understanding reality, seeing, hearing, and many ways to interpret the social world through different views. However, Leavy (2017, p. 168) states that “pragmatist is the prevailing norm” within the mixed-methods methodological approach.

The focus of pragmatism is well related to mixed-methods concepts, in which pragmatism focuses on the individual capacity to understand, learn, and make choices in our environments; to respond to, and be dynamic with the micro-macro environments that might be involved with socio-institutions, as well as to adapt to new transformations within the environments, such as the digital sphere (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). The flexibility to understand and interpret practical actions in the world are common norms

in pragmatism and mixed-methods concepts. Pragmatists consider that we are free to choose from a variety of research methods as best fits the needs of our study (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Thus, mixed-method approach under a pragmatic point of view might provide an adequate construct coverage and enhance validity (Woolcock, Bamberger and Rao, 2010).

Researchers in mixed-methods seek to expand the range and validity of information by triangulating and data triangulation (Woolcock, Bamberger and Rao, 2010). Triangulation is a commonly used strategy when multiple methods or data sources are applied to address the same question. Consequently, data triangulation uses multiple data sources to examine an assertion (Morse, 1991; Woolcock, Bamberger and Rao, 2010; Leavy, 2017). Therefore, this mechanism provides a profound exploration through various angles of explanation of complex real-world events. To enhance causal explanations in interventions, pre-and post-test comparison designs are recommended, coupled with implementation measures. Therefore, both the role of the research design and the implementation process might be distinguished in the success or failure of interventions (Morse, 1991; Woolcock, Bamberger and Rao, 2010; Leavy, 2017). In fact, the complementarity purpose of this research aims “to increase the validity of constructs and inquiry results by capitalising on inherent methods strengths” (Greene, Caracelli and Graham, 1989, p. 259).

This study follows a pragmatic philosophical layer as a paradigm, highlighting its potential regarding the mixed-methods approach used in this project, underlying the practical instruments such as the personality test and SUSIS questionnaire.

Therefore, this study will employ mixed-methods within critical pragmatic thinking and its philosophical views. This model will support answering the research questions, like a pillar, sustaining the entire project.

2.5 Research Approach & Design

According to Creswell *et al.* (2003), there are several types of design for mixed-methods research. However, they state that there are four major styles, the triangulation

or convergent design, the embedded design, the (sequential) explanatory design, and the (sequential) exploratory design (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Leavy, 2017).

This research is a convergent parallel design, with the objective of understanding the phenomenon under investigation through quantitative data and qualitative data, whereas the quantitative and qualitative approaches are emphasised equally and complemented by the qualitative data set (Creswell *et al.*, 2003). Thus, the design QUAN + QUAL, means that the research starts with gathering and analysing quantitative and qualitative data concurrently. Therefore, this study will start with the employability of questionnaires relying on statistical analysis, followed by personality tests under statistical analysis. The SUSIS questionnaire has both open-ended and closed-ended questions, thus proving the possibility of embedding the qualitative strand within the quantitative strand. The use of qualitative methods is necessary to complement and expand on the quantitative results (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

The choice was made according to the research's intentions configured as the quantitative data that will be used to test the hypotheses. But, not limited to that, the qualitative data expands the researcher's considerations about the phenomenon investigated (Leavy, 2017). Therefore, the qualitative data might complement results from quantitative data. Additionally, this analysis will provide the answer to the RQ2 and RQ3 in this research (Leavy, 2017). In this perspective, the RQ2 will be answered through the questionnaire open-ended items and the RQ3 will be answered through the critical literature review and desk research analysis. This integration involved embedding the results from the quantitative and qualitative data so that a comparison and complementation can be made and a more complete understanding emerge than that provided by the quantitative or the qualitative results alone (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

This model has strengths and challenges, according to the foremost theorists such as (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Subedi, 2016; Leavy, 2017; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

The main advantages are considered, firstly its organisation providing to the researcher an uncomplicated model to be employed, it is an efficient design in which both types of data are collected during one phase of the research at the same time.

Secondly, the quantitative and qualitative data can be collected and analysed together or separately and independently, using the techniques traditionally associated with each. Thus, the researcher will benefit gaining knowledge about both quantitative and qualitative approach.

Thirdly, the design provides itself to multiphase inquiries or single mixed-method research. The design facilitates the direct comparison of participants' perspectives gathered in an open-ended questioning format in closed-ended questioning. Researchers are able to give voice to participants as well as report statistical developments.

Finally, in the case of this research the design highlights the equally importance of the quantitative and qualitative strands, mainly because this research has an exploratory approach (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Even though the convergent parallel mixed methods design is simple to employ from the researcher point of view, the theorists cited above highlight a few challenges faced by this model (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Subedi, 2016; Leavy, 2017; Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Firstly, the need to merge a qualitative and a quantitative database might be challenging to merge two sets of very different data and their results in a meaningful way. The best solution for this potential issue might be to design the study in advance so that the quantitative and qualitative data address the same concepts. This strategy facilitates merging the data sets (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

Secondly, the need to explain divergences that might appear when comparing results. Contradictions may provide new insights into the topic, but these differences can be difficult to resolve and may require the collection of additional data (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018). The main solution collect additional data, reanalyse and then develops as to what type of additional data to collect or to re-analyse: quantitative data, qualitative data, or both.

Finally, the decision on the quantitative methods and quantitative results analyses must be further explained in detail. Sometimes this explanation might be challenging depending on the study (Creswell *et al.*, 2003).

This project intends to overcome the limitations of quantitative and qualitative approaches using the fixed mixed-methods and the convergent parallel design.

In conclusion, in mixed-methods studies is possible to use both inductive and deductive logic. However, it depends on the research structure (Creswell and Clark, 2018). As the meanings in this research will emerge from subjects through all the methods employed, thus this study is configured as inductive logic, a reasoning approach well-known in qualitative studies (Berg, 2012). The main objective of inductive research is to understand a phenomenon (Berg, 2012). However, the research questions were set up before the field research (Berg, 2012). This research explores the existing literature about the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by social media influencers and its broad themes. In addition, the research questions were developed according to the literature review gaps (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Berg, 2012). Also, through the integration analysis at the end of this research will be possible to create a profoundly understating of the area studied and create generalisation through empirical results (Berg, 2012). Therefore, this research is inductive, trying to understand the phenomenon studied as well as expand the analysis through the mixed-methods approach. See the table 21 below outlining the procedures for implementing a fixed convergent parallel mixed-methods design.

Table 21 - Procedures for Implementing a Convergent Design, (Creswell and Clark, 2018, p.185).

Procedures for Implementing a Convergent Design STEP 1 Fixed Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design Purpose: Complimentary		
<p>Design the Quantitative Strand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ1: What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers? • Hypotheses 1 and 2. <p>Collect the Quantitative Data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics clearance and consent forms were granted. • Sample: $N=91$, young people from 18-26 years old living in Ireland. • Collect closed-ended data with instruments. 	and	<p>Design the Qualitative Strand:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them? • Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment? <p>Collect the Qualitative Data:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethics clearance and consent forms were granted. • Sample: $N=81$, young people from 18-26 years old living in Ireland.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect open-ended data with protocols. Free answer. • Desk Research/Secondary Data.
STEP 2		
Analyse the Quantitative Data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SPSS. • SmartPLS. • Excel. • Descriptive statistics. • Structural Equation Model (SEM). 	and	Analyse the Qualitative Data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical Literature Review. • NVivo/Excel. • Theme Development. • Thematic Analysis.

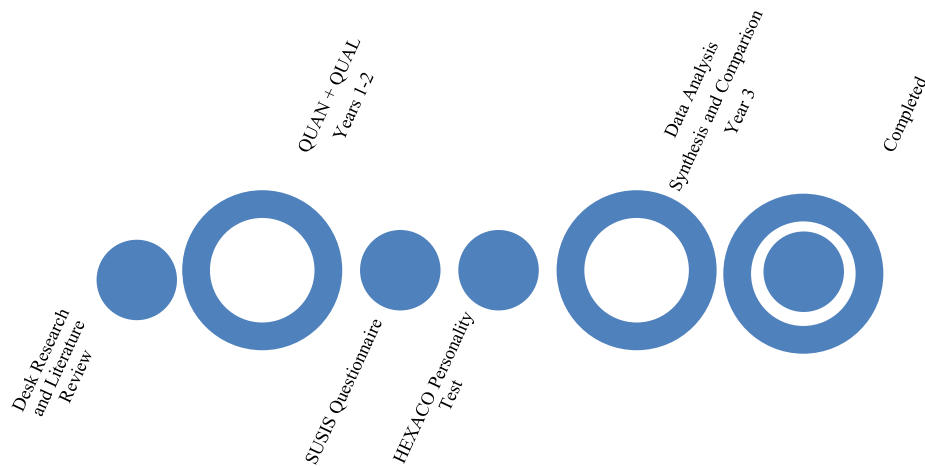
2.6 Methods of Data Collection

This study employed a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection, aiming to achieve the two objectives and answer the three research questions of this project. This included using desk research combined with critical literature review analysis to collect secondary data. Additionally, this included a questionnaire composed with closed-ended questions and open-ended questions, thus quantitative and qualitative items. Finally, the personality test HEXACO-PI-R 60 items to collect primary data employed concurrently with the questionnaire. Commonly, the inductive approach incorporates a range of methods for data collection to gather as many insights of the phenomenon as possible (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The combination of quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection intends to increase the validity of constructs and inquiry results by capitalizing on inherent methods' strengths and expanding the critical analysis and knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018).

The research includes desk research combined with critical literature review in order to build the theoretical framework of the study and answer the research question three. The quantitative methods is based on the SUSIS Questionnaire and HEXACO personality test, they were analysed statistically. In addition, two questions from SUSIS Questionnaire were analysed through the thematic analysis technique, being a qualitative approach, Questions 5 and 6, which is well explained in the sub-section questionnaires.

This combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches aims to get insights from the sample about the phenomenon under investigation. These methods were designed according to the time available to complete this research. The diagram below illustrates how the time were distributed, the methods were deployed, and results integrated, aiming to complete this project successfully. This research has been run from September 2020 to May 2023. This MMR approach aims to give more complete understanding of the phenomenon under investigation as well as corroborate quantitative scales and complement the quantitative findings with the qualitative findings.

Diagram 2 - Research Time Period.



2.6.1 Desk Research and Critical Literature Review Analysis

This project began with a screening strategy that included desk research and critical literature review analysis (Garrard, 2020). This combination of methods is essential to enrich this study with secondary data to create a theoretical foundation regarding the topics studied and the phenomenon under investigation. The literature review section, Chapter 1, addresses this screening strategy, integrating seven sub-sections, 1. The evolution of the internet and social media, 2. Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context, 3. The impact of SMIs on young people, 4. Consumer Behaviour in a

Digital Era – Generation Z in Perspective, 5. Personality, 6. Ethics in the Digital Environment and 7. Research Hypotheses, Proposed Model and Gaps. Each sub-section has its own role in this project, bringing knowledge and critical discussion about the phenomenon, subjects, and themes under investigation. In addition, this stage is vital to build the theoretical and methodological foundation of the project, serving as a guide to the researcher in order to design the conceptual framework of this study, methodology and methods of data collection. Furthermore, the research question three “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*” was answered in this stage.

Desk research, also known as secondary data collection, aims to give additional and extra knowledge, interpretation and conclusion about the topic studied in this research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Two types were used in this project, structured data that comprises numerical data, such as survey, database or spreadsheet and unstructured data, such as text, audio and visual data (Garrard, 2020). This stage is reported across the entire literature review section in Chapter 1, outlining numerical facts from surveys and reports and a compilation of text extractions from documents, theoretical books and journal articles. Thus, this action is known as multiple-sources secondary data collection, as there are data from various sources in which they are combined into one project (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The main advantages of running desk research are the usefulness to compare and contextualise data, as well as data collected, which can lead to unforeseen discoveries and new insights, but also save time and money in the research (Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The documents collected through this method were stored using NVivo 12 Pro, Excel and Mendeley (Excel, 2022; Mendeley, 2022; NVivo, 2022). They were organised according to each literature review’s sub-section, to answer the research question three and used in the methodology and discussion chapters. This stage of storing documents intercross the critical literature review method, and then they are incorporated. Because the data extracted was integrated into the literature review (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The critical literature review is the process of “making reasoned judgements and organising valuable thoughts into the written review, and it provides the context and

theoretical framework” for this research (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, pp. 73–74). The objectives of these integrated methods are summarised below, based on Webster and Watson (2002) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019):

- To find gaps and build the research questions.
- To give a historical background to this research.
- To give an overview of this research’s context.
- To discuss the relevant theories and concepts underpinned by this research.
- Revisit, compare and contrast the current research with past research.
- To bring definitions and clarifications about the topics studied.
- To bring insights into the themes explored and explained in the current research.
- To support evidence about the significance of this project.
- To answer research question four, “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*”.
- To support the methods’ choices and support their design.
- To bring critical insights into the findings and discussions of this research.

Therefore, based on the objectives above and how the critical literature review was carried out, this can be considered a combination of critical literature review types. Based on Webster and Watson (2002); Bryman (2004) and Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), the table 22 below was created to illustrate which types of the critical literature review were employed in each section of this research according to their main characteristics. Desk research was incorporated in all sections, critical evaluation is the basis, and this review's preliminary outcomes were a foundation for elaborating the research questions. In addition, the composition of this review was conducted according to the twelve steps recommended by Kable, Pich and Maslin-Prothero (2012). The search for documents was based on themes, and they named each section of this critical review, the sources were stored in folders according to each theme based on Garrard (2020).

Table 22 - Critical Review Strategy Implemented.

Implementation/Themes	Type	Characteristics
Introduction	Integrative Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature.
The evolution of the internet and social media	Historical Review Theoretical Review	Examines the evolution of specific themes over a period of time. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps.
SMIs in context, the impact of SMIs on young people, consumer behaviour in a digital era – generation Z in perspective	Integrative Review Theoretical Review Historical Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps. Examines the evolution of specific themes over a period of time.
Personality	Integrative Review Theoretical Review Historical Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps. Examines the evolution of specific themes over a period of time.
Ethics in the digital environment, addressing research question four, “who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?”.	Integrative Review Theoretical Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps.
	Integrative Review Theoretical Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps.
Research Hypotheses, Proposed Model and Gaps	Integrative Review Theoretical Review	Critiques and syntheses representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps.

	Historical Review	Examines the evolution of specific themes over a period of time. Build the conceptual framework, research questions and research hypotheses.
Methodology	Methodological Review	Focuses on research approaches, strategies, data collection techniques and analysis.
Results, Discussion and Findings	Integrative Review Theoretical Review	Critiques and synthesises representative literature. Examines the existent theory available to reveal gaps.
DESK RESEARCH		
CRITICAL EVALUATION		
RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOUNDATION		

The desk research and critical literature review comprised of a deep search using electronic journal databases such as: ScienceDirect, Elsevier, JSTOR, Emerald, Springer, Sage, Pubmed, and Research Gate. The Harzing ABS (Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide June 2021) ranking scale was used draw knowledge from top tier ABS 3 (A highly regarded journal), 4 (A top journal) & 4* (A world elite journal) publications, this was downloaded for free as the ABS journal ranking list and it was used to assess journal quality (Harzing, 2022).

Articles, books and reports were chosen according to the following criteria: 1. Must be peer-reviewed; 2. Impact factor; 3. Relationship of the keywords and abstract with the topic covered in this paper; 4. The reliability and validation of research methods; 5. The reliability of the publisher.

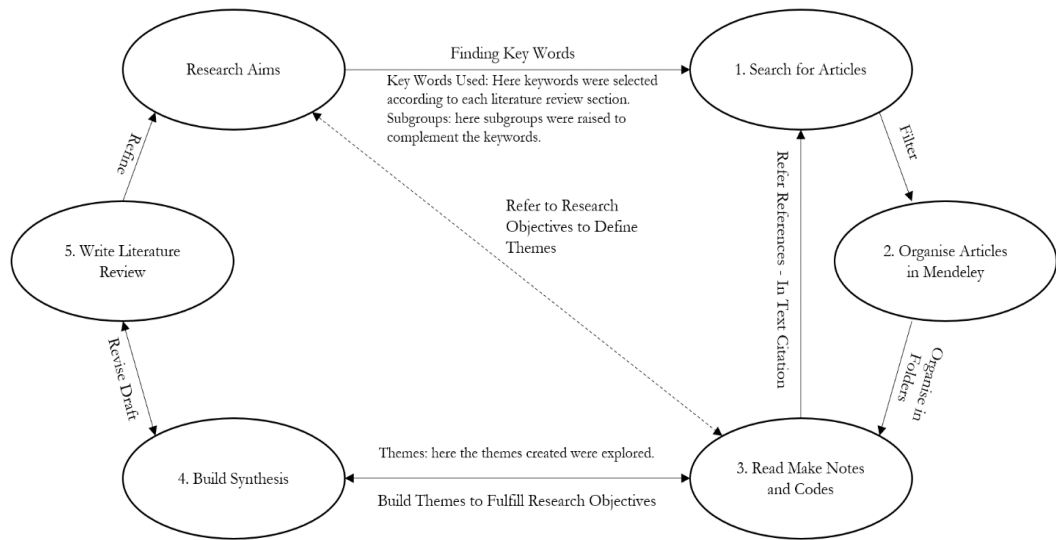
Blogs and websites were used in this review because topics related to technology, the internet and social media are frequently published in these sources. Additionally, blogs were carefully selected according to: 1. If the website provides security by an SSL certificate; 2. Clear privacy policy available; 3. Contact information available; 4. The trust Seal was verified through words like "secure and verified"; 5. The quality of content

provided; 6. If the content was fully referenced; 7. Based on the quality of reviews available online.

In order to critically evaluate the content, the six elements of Bloom's Taxonomy was considered (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation) to effectively develop critical thinking towards the main themes explored in this study as well as achieve a critical analysis based on the objectives and research questions (Bloom *et al.*, 1956).

All the data collected through the integration between the critical review search and desk research were evaluated according to their (a) overall suitability in answering research question three and meeting the objectives of this research, (b) the precise suitability of data analysis, resulting in the conceptual framework and research questions in this study (c) assessment of costs and benefits (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Therefore, the suitability was ensured by the evaluation of data, if the information provided is suitable for this research, thus the validity is measured. Furthermore, the reliability is based on the steps above to encounter the material, providing transparency on how the data was collected, organised and their sources. In addition, costs are null as the Technological University Dublin has a vast library catalogue and a partnership with most academic databases, the researcher had free access to the material. Finally, the benefits are assessed through the critical review itself because it was possible to achieve the objectives of running this critical review and, as a result of the critical review and desk research, four articles were published, Appendix 11. The Figure 2 below shows a framework elaborated by me to illustrate the literature review process.

Figure 2 - Literature Review Process.



2.6.2 Questionnaire

Questionnaire is a method that initiates this project. A questionnaire is a type of data collection in which the participants are asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order (De Vaus, 2014). This method is one of the most widely used to collect data within the survey strategy. It provides an efficient manner of collecting responses from a sample prior to quantitative analysis. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019), questionnaires tend to be used primarily in explanatory research enabling the researcher to examine and explain relationships between variables. As well as, it is recommended to combine questionnaires with other methods, such as in a mixed-method design using quantitative and qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The main advantage of this method consists in costs and employment efficiency (Bryman, 2004). Generally, it is considered a cheap and efficient way of obtaining reliable information from a certain number of subjects and is widely used in marketing and psychology (Cooper, 2020; Thøgersen, 2021).

Therefore, based on the main advantages, the alignment with the research's questions, aims and objectives, this method was chosen to explore if there is evidence of susceptibility to being influenced by social media influencers' content. In addition, many

insights to enrich this research might be gathered through this method, such as the sample attitude towards SMIs, what type of content they consider as harmful content and which type of harmful content they have received from SMIs.

2.6.2.1 SUSIS Questionnaire Design

In order to answer effectively the research questions 1 and 2. This research is driven by a design variant that is found in other studies' design relatable to the MMR approach. The questionnaire variant, also called data-validation variant is used in this study including both open-ended and closed-ended questions and the results from the open-ended questions are used to confirm, complement or validate the results from the closed-ended questions (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018). Because the qualitative items are an add-on to the quantitative instrument. The qualitative database will provide the project with emergent themes and interesting quotes that can be used to validate and embellish the quantitative questionnaire findings (Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018). The study of Bryanton and Weeks (2014) is an example as they used an instrument contained both multiple choice questions and open-ended questions to gain multiple perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation.

The questionnaire was designed to be self-completed by participants and delivered on paper in a face-to-face category in educational institutions' classrooms. The researcher or assistants should physically meet subjects and deliver the forms directly to them (De Vaus, 2014). This choice is based on the characteristics of the sample population, being young people aged 16 to 26 years old. According to a neuroscience research, young people might not concentrate well in class and are easily distracted due to their brain structure, they do not have the same mental capacity as an adult (Dumontheil *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, a face-to-face and on paper questionnaire might keep them focused, as well as if anyone misses a question, the researcher can get back to the participant and ask them to fill the gap. This can bring more reliability to the method and facilitate getting participants' views on the topic (Therapy, Speech and Language Department NHS, 2020). Furthermore, Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2019) suggest that long questionnaires are best-delivered face-to-face, and questions can be even more complex than questions delivered online or via phone.

The definition of questions and variables in the questionnaire was chosen according to the literature review and based on the main objective of this method of trying to understand the susceptibility of this young sample to be influenced by SMIs, understand if there are personality traits associated with the results and gather extra insights within the same domain. Also, to answer research question RQ2, “*What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives to follow these SMIs?*”. In addition, the data collected through the questionnaire will be related to the data set collected through the HEXACO personality test 60-item version. This combination will try to understand if there is a specific personality profile that is more susceptible to being influenced by SMIs.

The questionnaire in question was named as SUSIS Questionnaire, this abbreviation directly represents the aim of this research technique, SUSceptibility to being Influenced by Social media influencers – SUSIS.

Finally, through the SUSIS Questionnaire will be possible to test the two hypotheses of this study:

- Hypothesis 1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI’s influence.
- Hypothesis 2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI’s influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire.

The variables and the questionnaire structure can be seen in the table 23 below.

Table 23 – SUSIS Questionnaire Structure.

Category	Measures	Questions	Scale	Based on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics • Factual 	Name, gender, age, location, school, education, social media channels visited at least once a week, time per day spent on the social media channels, and favourite social media platforms.	<p>Q1</p> <p>9 items</p>	Free answer, ranking question and multiple choice	(Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ryu and Han, 2021)

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<p>Perception towards influencers/Susceptibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	<p>Variable: Perception towards influencers, 20 items (From 1 to 17).</p>	<p>Q2 17 items</p>	<p>Likert: Level of Agreement 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree</p>	<p>(Vagias, 2006; Ki, 2018; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019)</p>
<p>Perception of harmful online content posted by SMIs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	<p>Variable: Frequency that the sample sees or receives harmful online content posted by SMIs (From 1 to 28).</p>	<p>Q3 28 items</p>	<p>Likert: Frequency – 5 points 1 – Never 2 – Rarely 3 – Sometimes 4 – Often 5 – Always</p>	<p>Based on Table 15. (Commission of the European Communities, 1996; EUR-Lex, 2009; Harris and Graff, 2011; European Commission, 2012; Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014; Curtis <i>et al.</i>, 2018; World Health Organization, 2018; Coates <i>et al.</i>, 2019; E. Coates <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Kalu, 2019; Lou and Kim, 2019; Milovidov, 2019; POOC, 2019; Qutteina <i>et al.</i>, 2019; Hendriks <i>et al.</i>, 2020; Kirk <i>et al.</i>, 2020)</p>
<p>Perception towards harmful online content posted by SMIs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	<p>Variable: Consideration on types of content they believe as harmful content posted by Social Media Influencers (From 1 to 28).</p>	<p>Q4 28 items</p>	<p>Likert: Level of Consideration 1 – Would not consider 2 – Might or might not consider 3 – Definitely consider</p>	<p>As above</p>
<p>Most followed influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude 	<p>Variable: Five most favourite influencers and in which social</p>	<p>Q5</p>	<p>Free Answer</p>	<p>(De Vaus, 2014; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; Wielki,</p>

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opinion 	media channel they follow them.			2020; Therapy, Speech and Language Department NHS, 2020)
<p>Main motives to follow their favourite influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitude Opinion 	Variable: Five main motives that make them follow their favourite influencers.	Q6	As above	As above
<p>Susceptibility to be influenced by social media influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attitude Opinion 	Measure the susceptibility to be influenced by social media influencers in different dimensions (From 1 to 39). Variable Trustworthiness – From 1 to 5 Variable Similarity – From 6 to 11 Variable Distributive Fairness – From 12 to 13 Variable Procedural Fairness – From 14 to 15 Variable Parasocial Relationship – From 16 to 26 Variable Emotional Attachment – From 27 to 31 Variable Perceived Information Value – From 32 to 35 Variable Consumer Trust – From 36 to 39	Q7 39 items	Likert: Level of Agreement 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree	(Vagias, 2006; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Yuan and Lou, 2020; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021)

As from above, the questionnaire adopts various methods for designing its questions. Through the design process, questions were adopted and adapted from published and validated questionnaires and questions were developed specifically for this

questionnaire. Questions adopted and adapted from other questionnaires might increase or assess the method's reliability (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Whilst the questions elaborated by the researcher must be reviewed and checked if they will meet the research's objective (Bryman, 2004). Furthermore, a key element in the questionnaire is the Likert scale to assess respondents' attitudes, behaviour and opinions (De Vaus, 2014). A statement is elaborated through a Likert scale in which respondents need to rate their level of agreement. The aim of employing Likert scales in this study is to add a degree of granularity to specific questions, especially those where a Yes/No kind of response is not sensible.

The typology of questions was chosen according to their functionality and suitability. Open questions and a variety of closed questions categories such as list questions, category questions, ranking questions and rating questions were employed. Open questions, also known as free or open-ended questions, allow respondents to give answers in their own way. Whilst the closed questions or closed-ended questions give a set of alternative answers in which subjects are instructed to choose in a minimal writing way (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The table below shows the typology in full and their characteristics according to each question.

Table 24 - Typology of Questions.

Typology	Question/Item	Rationale
Open Questions	Q1 – Items 1, 3,4, 5 and 6 Q5 Q6	Used to extract opinions and information from participants in an insightful way, where they can freely express their opinion about the topic and give detailed information. Also, used in demographics, such as name, age, location and education (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).
Closed List Questions	Q1 – Item 9	They can choose one response in each case. This is useful to ensure that the participants have considered all possible answers (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). E.g., “what is your favourite social media platform?”.
Closed Category Questions	Q1 – Item 2 and 8	This type is helpful to collect data about behaviour or attributes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill,

		2019). E.g., “how much time per day do you spend on the social media channels you visit at least once per week?”.
Closed Ranking Questions	Q1 – Item 7	This model asks participants to rank items according to their choice (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). E.g., “please rank the most visited social media platform at least once a week, as 1 being the most visited. E.g. Instagram (1), WhatsApp (2), Twitter (3)”.
Closed Rating Questions	Q2 Q3 Q4 Q7	This category is mainly used to collect opinion data, and Likert-styles ratings were used in these questions (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). E.g., “to what extent do you agree with the following statements?”.

The order and flow of questions were reviewed in different stages of designing the method. This is important to keep a logical sense from the respondents' perspective and not from a researcher's perspective, as well as this can help to avoid bias and boredom. Additionally, the visual presentation of the methods was carefully designed, trying to bring a user-friendly approach, focusing on easy reading and filling. Arrows in blue bypassing each scale box were used to call participants' attention and keep them focused (Bryman, 2004; De Vaus, 2014; Leavy, 2017).

The questionnaire starts with an introductory page where participants are welcomed to the research, thanked to be part of the study, explained the purpose of the method and research, as well as asked them for honest answers and opinions. Following up, the researcher included a paragraph explaining the meaning of social media influencers in the context of this project. Ethics, time commitment, confidentiality, anonymity and participants' rights are outlined and clear to respondents. Finally, the questionnaire ends with a closing message thanking them for taking the time to complete the questionnaire (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The complete questionnaire can be accessed in Appendix 6.

In sum, existing and validated sources provided the foundation for the questions which were then tailored for the SUSIS questionnaire, reinforcing their relevance and trustworthiness (Vagias, 2006; Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Yuan and

Lou, 2020; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021). This adaptation holds the potential to either enhance or evaluate the methodology's credibility (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). Alternatively, researcher-generated questions underwent rigorous review to ensure alignment with the research aim (Bryman, 2004). The questionnaire prominently features the Likert scale, a tool used to measure respondents' stance on various statements (De Vaus, 2014). The use of Likert scales introduces a refined layer of detail to specific questions, with the nature of questions selected based on their relevance and aptness.

Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2019) suggest that questionnaires predominantly cater to explanatory research, serving as a tool for researchers to probe and elucidate the interplay between variables. A meticulous literature review methodology was employed to frame the questionnaire's scales, enabling a fact-based verification of factors that predispose young individuals to SMIs' influence. Consequently, this approach was chosen to undertake a quantitative exploration aimed at gauging the extent to which individuals are susceptible to the pull of social media influencers.

2.6.3 Personality Test HEXACO-PI-R 60-Item Version

This study will be using the explicit approach to measure personality. This approach refers to self-reporting questionnaires, which ask users to rate to what extent certain statements apply to them and their reality (Donnellan *et al.*, 2006; Goldberg *et al.*, 2006; Rammstedt and John, 2007). The 60-item HEXACO-PI-R Personality Inventory examines six trait dimensions, Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness (versus Anger), Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience. HEXACO was developed by Kibeom Lee and Michael Ashton in 2000 and focused on the most accepted six dimensions in psychology (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014).

This model's reliability and validity are ensured through research publications, replications and recommendations in different countries, thus being well accepted in the research field (Ion *et al.*, 2017). The recognition is based on the instrument's classification, employability, structure and characteristics (Lee and Ashton, 2018). The model accounts with six dimensions, twenty-four sub-facets (sub-components) of the major factors. It is considered superior to the big five factor model because HEXACO

includes a sixth dimension, the honesty-humility, whilst in the big five this dimension is not included (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014; Ashton and Lee, 2020). The HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items version can be found in Appendix 4. A description of the six dimensions scales can be seen in the table 25 below.

Table 25 - HEXACO Scale Descriptions, (HEXACO, 2022a).

THE HEXACO PERSONALITY INVENTORY	
<p>Honesty-Humility</p> <p>“I wouldn’t pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Honesty-Humility scale avoid manipulating others for personal gain, feel little temptation to break rules, are uninterested in lavish wealth and luxuries, and feel no special entitlement to elevated social status. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale will flatter others to get what they want, are inclined to break rules for personal profit, are motivated by material gain, and feel a strong sense of self-importance (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>
<p>Emotionality</p> <p>“I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Emotionality scale experience fear of physical dangers, experience anxiety in response to life’s stresses, feel a need for emotional support from others, and feel empathy and sentimental attachments with others. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale are not deterred by the prospect of physical harm, feel little worry even in stressful situations, have little need to share their concerns with others, and feel emotionally detached from others (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>
<p>eXtraversion</p> <p>“I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Extraversion scale feel positively about themselves, feel confident when leading or addressing groups of people, enjoy social gatherings and interactions, and experience positive feelings of enthusiasm and energy. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale consider themselves unpopular, feel awkward when they are the center of social attention, are indifferent to social activities, and feel less lively and optimistic than others do (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>
<p>Agreeableness (versus Anger)</p> <p>“I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Agreeableness scale forgive the wrongs that they suffered, are lenient in judging others, are willing to compromise and cooperate with others, and can easily control their temper. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale hold grudges against those who have harmed them, are rather critical of others’ shortcomings, are stubborn in defending their point of view, and feel anger readily in response to mistreatment (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>

<p>Conscientiousness</p> <p>“I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Conscientiousness scale organise their time and their physical surroundings, work in a disciplined way toward their goals, strive for accuracy and perfection in their tasks, and deliberate carefully when making decisions. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale tend to be unconcerned with orderly surroundings or schedules, avoid difficult tasks or challenging goals, are satisfied with work that contains some errors, and make decisions on impulse or with little reflection (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>
<p>Openness to Experience</p> <p>“I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery” (Lee and Ashton, 2004, 2018)</p>	<p>Persons with very high scores on the Openness to Experience scale become absorbed in the beauty of art and nature, are inquisitive about various domains of knowledge, use their imagination freely in everyday life, and take an interest in unusual ideas or people. Conversely, persons with very low scores on this scale are rather unimpressed by most works of art, feel little intellectual curiosity, avoid creative pursuits, and feel little attraction toward ideas that may seem radical or unconventional (HEXACO, 2022a).</p>

This study focuses on these dimensions because they are the aspects of personality that are most stable across the lifespan (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020). Furthermore, this self-report is validated, and its reliability is confirmed through the studies of Ashton and Lee (2009); Aghababaei (2014) and Aghababaei and Arji (2014). The self-report questionnaire is composed of 60 items and scored on a 5-point Likert-type scale with scores ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Ashton and Lee (2009) analysed the psychometric properties of the HEXACO-PI-R 60-items version and determined the alpha reliability of the six-factor scales ranging from .73 to .80 in samples of college students ($N= 936$) and community adults ($N= 734$). Despite their concision and breadth of content, the dimension demonstrated internal consistency reliabilities in the .70s. Every dimension comprised 10 items, which together represented four different narrow traits. Scale intercorrelations were all below .30 and thus equated favourably with rates of the Big Five factors (Ashton and Lee, 2009). Furthermore, “when six factors were extracted and rotated, all items of a given scale showed their primary loadings on the same factor” (Ashton and Lee, 2009, p. 343).

As this study’s participants are young people, it is noteworthy to cite a few studies using HEXACO with the same or similar sample characteristics. Although specific use of HEXACO measuring the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs was

not found, highlighting the novelty of this research. A study using a sample of $N=225$ young people aged 11 to 17 years old in Canada employed HEXACO successfully in order to explore temperament and personality to understand if there is convergence (Farrell *et al.*, 2015). In Iran, research comparing social media users and non-users using a female high school student sample population of $N=246$ found a significant difference between the two groups in the components of personality traits (honesty-humility, emotionality, extroversion, and openness to experience) ($P < 0.050$), HEXACO was employed and recommended in which Cronbach's alpha ranges from .73 to .81 (Jadidi and Rezaie, 2019). Finally, the HEXACO showed a precise personality composition organised in six traits and evidence of predictive validity in a study with $N=1,089$ Italian children, and therefore, the method is securely recommended (Sergi *et al.*, 2020).

The permission to utilize the HEXACO-PI-R for this research study can be found in Appendix 3. The analysis from HEXACO will offer the possibility to address the first research question in this research, “*what personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?*” and achieve objective A, “*determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers*”. This will be possible by combining the SUSIS questionnaire and personality test data in a joint analysis.

Finally, the choice of this method was based on its recognition in the research field, its practicality and alignment with the research's intentions, as well as the user qualification suits to the researcher's profile, as the HEXACO website suggests the application of this test must be made by someone qualified in the field of psychology, education, counselling, or management. The researcher holds a BSc in Business, an MSc in Human Resources Management and completed a module specifically about personality and HEXACO application at Dublin City University – Appendix 12 (HEXACO, 2022b).

2.6.4 Pilot Study

A pilot study was required in this study. This is known as a “small study to test research protocols, data collection instruments, sample recruitment strategies, and other research techniques in preparation for a larger study” (Hassan, Schattner and Mazza, 2006, p. 71). This process is essential to increase the likelihood of success of the study

and ensure that the entire project will run according to the expectations (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). This is very common in most business and marketing processes, even within a company. This helps to reduce risks, mitigate failures and reduce costs (Solomon, 2020). Four criteria were used to select the pilot participants: access, geographic proximity, convenience according to resources and time available, and sample characteristics.

The pilot study started in December 2021 and ended in January 2022. The questionnaire design was reviewed by all supervisors in this study, who recommended changes regarding vocabulary, scales design, question design, and phrase formulation. The post-doctorate researcher in the research centre was also consulted, and she recommended more changes regarding the length and presentation. The researcher considered all recommendations.

Two PhD students in the research centre were the first people to conduct a trial. However, their personas were not similar to the intended sample's personas, as they are over 26 years old. They were easy to access and completed the questionnaire and the personality test HEXACO-PI-R 60 items version. Both of them recommended a change in a Likert scale in questions 3 and 4. After the researcher's analysis, these scales were changed to the current scales presented in the questionnaire.

The researcher invited family members, relatives, and friends with the intended sample characteristics, such as those aged 16-26 years old, with access to the internet and social media. Consent forms were delivered and collected. Twenty-three people were contacted, in which ten participants accepted to be part of the pilot study. The forms were delivered either physically and online. The online format was the printable PDF format, and then there was no difference from the paper format. They were instructed on how to fill the form either in-person or online, as applicable. Five participants filled out the forms online, and five completed a physical/printed version. The pilot study sample was between 15 to 19 years old, 7 females and 3 males. All confirmed that they had internet access and subscribed to different social media platforms.

After filling out the forms, they were required to give insights and recommendations about their experiences filling the forms and the topic covered. Some insights were:

- ✓ “The personality test was very easy to fill out, even though I was afraid to put my name on it”.
- ✓ “I do not want to put the school’s name on the questionnaire”.
- ✓ “I decided to complete the personality test first. After that, fill out the questionnaire”.
- ✓ “I found the questionnaire more interesting than the personality test”.
- ✓ “I think that the questionnaire is longer but still more interesting to answer”.
- ✓ “I think it is necessary to take a break in the middle of the questionnaire, maybe after filling the Q5 and Q6”.
- ✓ “Found the research very interesting”.
- ✓ Two participants did not want to fill in their names in the personality test.
- ✓ Three participants mentioned that was no required pause between both forms.
- ✓ No issues concerning vocabulary, phrase formulation, questions flow, design and presentation were reported.
- ✓ The time spent filling both forms was between 20 to 40 minutes.
- ✓ All participants found it easy to fill out and found the research interesting.

I found difficulties recruiting participants because I am an international student and do not have access to many people in Ireland. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic was an ongoing issue, and national restrictions to access participants were in place. In addition, ethical considerations followed the protocol of the section “Ethics” below.

The data collected was transcribed into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) computer software for data analysis (IBM-SPSS, v28, 2022). Also, the researcher decided to analyse questions Q5 and Q6 (free text) in NVivo software for qualitative data analysis (IBM-SPSS, 2022; NVivo, 2022). Some participants wrote long phrases that would likely be better analysed through a thematic analysis instead of quantitatively. The transcription process and analysis were essential, and no issues were found.

Finally, the insights discovered in this pilot study were vital to enhancing the questionnaire quality and were an experience to avoid mistakes in the data collection process. For example, the researcher decided to allow participants to replace their names

with nicknames, as this information is not relevant. During data transcription names were to be replaced by codes, and anonymity would be ensured during the data analysis.

2.7 Sampling

The sampling choices were made according to the theories outlined above (Creswell *et al.*, 2003; Bryman, 2004; Green, 2007; Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Silverman, 2013; Onwuegbuzie and Collins, 2007; Palinkas *et al.*, 2015; Subedi, 2016; Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Clark, 2018). This study investigates the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by social media influencers. According to the theory analysed and evaluated, I decided to select the sample purposively utilising a homogeneous sampling scheme. Therefore, the sampling approach in this study can be considered a non-probability sampling method following the purposive approach. According to Teddlie and Yu (2007, p. 80), “purposive sampling techniques have also been referred to as nonprobability sampling or purposeful sampling or qualitative sampling”. Purposive sampling aims to select subjects based on a specific purpose rather than randomly and driven by time and accessibility (Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Silverman, 2013). Therefore, selecting subjects especially knowledgeable about or experienced with the central phenomenon under investigation in this research (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015).

There are several variants of purposive sampling, the one which is directly connected with the purpose of this study as well as with the characteristics of the subject is the homogeneous or homogeneity sampling scheme that is based on choosing subjects based on similar or specific characteristics (Collins, Onwuegbuzie and Jiao, 2007; Palinkas *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, the sample population for this study will be selected according to their experiences with social media channels. Consequently, they must have social media habits and knowledge about social media features such as channels’ name and differences, profiles, post on their channels, and following influencers.

Young people are the target profile in this research aged 16 to 26 years old, mainly because this young population pertains to the generation Z group. Gen Z is the population that has spent more time in social media channels, about 4.5 hours a day on different platforms, according to a survey in the USA with 1.000 subjects ($N=1.000$) between 13-39 years old. Generation Z in this survey is represented by subjects from 13-19 years old

(Chaffey, 2021; YPULSE, 2021). This survey was managed by YPULSE leader in youth research in New York (YPULSE, 2021). In addition, this survey presents other important data regarding their online habits, such as who they are following on social networks based on account types, such as celebrities, musicians, big brands etc. The two of the top types of accounts followed by Gen Z are online celebrities/creators (e.g. bloggers, vloggers, YouTubers, Instagrammers, social media stars, etc.) and meme accounts, therefore considered as influencers (YPULSE, 2021). YPULSE (2021) noted that influencers are as influential as ever among Gen Z consumers, and this data shows that online celebrities (influencers) are a significant part of their social media experience (56%) (YPULSE, 2021).

Additionally, a recent study in Ireland so-called the 2021 Sign of the Times survey by the Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight (B&A), conducted with 1.000 subjects ($N=1.000$), reports that during the COVID-19 pandemic Generation Z (16-24 in this survey) have been spending more time on TikTok and Instagram (82%) as an escape (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021). This rise might be connected with the rise of mental health issues during the pandemic, 70% per cent of this generation feel that Covid has worsened their mental health, and 65% (compared with 43% of the total sample) feel tired all the time (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021). Furthermore, the time spent on streaming services as entertainment are also high, 93% YouTube, 91% Netflix, 40% Amazon Prime, 32% Disney, and 40% online gaming (Behaviour & Attitudes Research and Insight, 2021; Reaper, 2021).

In contrast, the Digital News Report Ireland 2020, a study for the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at Oxford University, depicts that Gen Z in Ireland is also increasingly using social media as their primary source for news consumption, growing by 3% points in five years (Kirk *et al.*, 2020). Furthermore, there is a higher level of social media use for news among 18-24s, and smartphones are used by 71% of Gen Z as their main device for accessing news, and this has increased by 18% points over five years (Kirk *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, it is clear from the data above that Gen Z has always been connected in their social media channels, using them as the main source to collect information, entertainment and socialise with their peers. Also, smartphones among Gen Z have been

growing as mobiles are accessible, affordable and faster for return of information. Therefore, the data provided and the discussions above explain the purpose for the choice of this population in this research because we need a population who is online, have internet access, follow influencers, have social media channels, and are exposed to social networks and SMIs, and finally be accessible to this study.

The homogeneity of this sample is evident, as we are focusing on a particular age group, from 16 to 26 years old, equally divided between males and females, enrolled in schools and colleges located in Ireland as well as labelled as Gen Z due to their age range. But, then, they share common characteristics (Leavy, 2017).

Furthermore, as stated above, the purposive sample design is also driven by time and accessibility, as such this research intends to collect data in secondary schools and colleges located in Ireland where the researcher's office is set. Therefore, being closer to the secondary schools and colleges provides more accessible access to the population under investigation and time efficiency to collect the data.

The sample size was set according to the purposeful sampling theory that "is based on the premise that seeking out the best cases for the study produces the best data, and research results are a direct result of the cases sampled" (Leavy, 2017, p. 79). Leavy (2017 p. 180) highlights that mixed-methods researchers use equally size samples during the entire research, even though it is not a definitive norm.

Additionally, as I am trying to understand a phenomenon, the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by social media influencers, thus according to (Morse, 1994; Creswell, 1998), the field of phenomenology requires about ten subjects for semi-structured interviews and an experimental approach about 21 subjects. Furthermore, this research faces other characteristics that might affect sample sizes, such as time limit, funding, accessibility, travel limits, limited resources and capabilities available, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, and the complexity of gathering subjects willing to participate in this study (Leavy, 2017). Therefore, this study's sample size is $N=91$.

2.8 Ethics

This study was formulated to comply with University ethical guidelines and was submitted to and approved by the relevant committees. Ethics refers to the "standards of

behaviour that guide the researcher’s conduct in relation to the rights of those who become the subject of this study or affected by it” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019, p. 253). This research was carried out following the norms, policies and recommendations provided in the Research Integrity (UK edition) Course delivered by Epigeum – Oxford University Press (Epigeum, 2022). The Technological University Dublin provides the course to all research students.

The ethical approval for this research was established by the Technological University Dublin Blanchardstown Campus in the School of Business – Appendix 1. Some potential ethical questions might arise about information access, the subject’s age, parents’ approval and confidentiality. According to the ethical guidelines set by the Technological University Dublin, subjects may be contacted only after the research has been approved (Research Ethics & Integrity, TU Dublin, 2022).

The researcher applied to the TU Dublin Blanchardstown Research Ethics Committee, and a formal confirmation was received by email, including a formal letter of approval, on the 24th of September 2021 from the Chair, TU Dublin Research Ethics Committee Blanchardstown Campus (Appendix 1). Thus, the research conformed to the ethical standard required by TU Dublin, and the formal document can be seen in Appendix 1. Also, the list of documents submitted to the committee can be seen in the Table 21 below. Most of these documents were provided by TU Dublin.

Table 26 - List of Ethics Forms, elaborated by the author (2022)

Documents Submitted to TU Dublin’s Ethics Committee
PG1: Application for Admission to Postgraduate Degree Programme - 4FAD06
Application for Ethical Clearance of a Project - 4FAD17
Conflict of Interest - 4FRD06
Consent and Advice Form Given to Subjects Prior to Their Participation in Research - 4FRD04
Consent Form for Research Involving ‘Less Powerful’ Subjects or Those Under 18 yrs - 4FRD05 – Appendix 2
General Hazard / Risk Assessment - 4FRD11
Impact on the Human Subject and/or the Researcher - 4FRD03
Garda Vetting Approval – Appendix 13
SUSIS Questionnaire – Appendix 6
Personality Test HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items Version – Appendix 4

Official participants for this study were selected in the partner school and a private higher education institution located in Ireland. The selection was made according to the characteristics explained in the sampling section above. Formal emails and letters were sent to schools and private higher education institutions located in Ireland. According to the methodology's profile rules, all participants were contacted through the partner school and the private higher education institution. It is essential to state that subjects' under 18 years old, their guardians were contacted for participation approval, and the researcher has been Garda Vetted.

Confidentiality is assured throughout the research, and any identifying details were eliminated from the data, the data generated were not identifiable. Given names were exchanged for the purpose of communication. However, the names of the participants were replaced during the research, such as in the data transcripts, to protect participant identity. Example includes, Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3 etc.

The participants and the partner institutions were fully aware before the research started that the data obtained were solely used for this study and will be treated confidentially. The data were stored securely, and the right to access the data sets rests only with the researcher. The researcher will retain the data gathered in this study for a minimum of five years. All the paper forms were stored in a safe space in the researcher's office. The data transcribed in an online version was stored on an encrypted digital storage device. After the minimum time requirement, the documents, physical forms, and online transcriptions will be destroyed (Research Ethics & Integrity, TU Dublin, 2022).

2.9 Access

Gaining access to institutions in order to employ the research techniques and address field research was an important aspect of this research. Therefore, after TU Dublin approved the ethics clearance, the researcher elaborated an invitation letter informing the school about the study's background, objectives and benefits. In addition, a letter of support was attached to the same document in order to get formal approval from the institution's principal/director, and this letter is available in Appendix 7. This

document was sent through post and email to about 68 institutions located in Ireland, and a table where the researcher organised the contact with all institutions can be seen in Appendix 8.

A list of institutions was formulated, organised by name, email, address, phone number, principal/director's name and the number of times the institution was contacted and from which mean (phone, email, post or in-person). The primary source for contacting an institution and finding their information were the "Find a School" for secondary schools and the "Education in Ireland - Where Can I Study In Ireland?" for higher education institutions, both websites from the Department of Education and the Government of Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2022). The "Find a School" service is a map-based application that allows anybody to find schools in Ireland and relevant information regarding those schools, and the second is a website including higher education institutions contacts.

Two institutions have accepted to participate in this research, one secondary school and one private higher education institution, both located in Ireland. The principal and the director have signed letters of support. The secondary school accepted and signed the formal letter on the 7th of December 2021, and the private higher education institution accepted to participate on the 01st of September 2022.

2.10 Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

2.10.1 Recruitment & Participation

Signed support letters from the institutions' principal and director to participate in this research were obtained. The institutions were informed about the sample's characteristics. The school preferred to contact the potential students by themselves because teachers have educational training in dealing with students under 18 years old. Thus, teachers were informed about all the research's details. Posteriori, students were contacted by their teachers, and the project was presented to them. Students who demonstrated interest and matched with the sample's characteristics received a copy of the "consent form for research involving 'less powerful' subjects or those under 18 yrs - 4FRD05" this form can be seen in Appendix 2.

After that, students were required to take the form 4FRD05 home in order to get parents' or guardians' approval. Even students aged 18 years old were required to fill the form 4FRD05, which was a school's requirement.

In the private higher education institution, the researcher was responsible to contact the students and provide information about the research. After that, students who were interested in participating in the project were informed about the day of data collection. In the private higher education institution, all participants are above 18 years old, and consent were given by them through the first page of the questionnaire. Only students who have social media account, follow influencers and internet access were selected.

2.10.2 Data Collection - Secondary School

Data collection is defined as collecting, measuring and analysing accurate insights for research using standard research techniques (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). A specific questionnaire designed for this study (SUSIS) and the personality test HEXACO-PI-R 60 items version were used to collect data.

The first data collection was in a secondary school located in Ireland, where over 105 consent forms were distributed, and 57 positive responses were gathered. Therefore, 57 students in the first school returned the form 4FRD05 to their teachers, fully filled and including their parents' signature authorising their participation in this study. Of these 37 participants were females, and 20 are males. All were aged between 16 to 18 years old. The consent forms were distributed from the 15th of December 2021 to the 31st of January 2022, and 105 forms were distributed earlier. A teacher distributed and collected the consent forms. They were delivered to the researcher, who analysed them and confirmed the parent's signature on all forms.

The school scheduled a specific date for the researcher to visit the school and employ the questionnaire and personality test. The data collection was set to the 4th of February 2022 at 9 am in the first school in Ireland, specifically in the school's music room. The entire process followed the COVID-19 restriction policies and guidelines recommended by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre in Ireland (HSE-HPSC, 2022).

The assistant teacher was present in class during the entire application. Also, this assistant teacher was responsible for meeting any student's needs, such as contacting the school's counsellor. The researcher was responsible for the project, application process and student management, such as explaining to the students their rights and providing any support needed to complete the forms.

During the data collection, 36 students were present, of which 21 were females, and 15 were males, and all were aged between 16 to 18 years old. The students completed both forms between 20 to 30 minutes. The researcher filled out a detailed Invigilator Report Form, outlining the entire data collection process and stating the time, students' actions, and other insights. The Invigilator Report Form for the first data collection is available in Appendix 9.

The 21 absent students were contacted by the assistant teacher, who used her classes to employ the SUSIS questionnaire and HEXACO personality test for these students. The completed forms were delivered to the researcher on the 9th of March, 2022. The researcher retained all forms in secure storage.

2.10.3 Data Collection - Private Higher Education Institution

The second data collection occurred in a Private Higher Education Institution located in Ireland. This institution accepted to participate in this research on the 1st of September 2022, and the institution's director signed the letter of support. The researcher was responsible to contact the students, invite them to participate, select them according to the sample population and employ the SUSIS questionnaire and HEXACO personality test.

Between September to November 2022, I visited different classes, from different courses, and in different times to invite students, in which about 200 students were invited to participate in this research. The day for the data collection was scheduled to the 14th of November 2022 at 12.20 am according to the students timetable gap, around lunch period.

Consent forms were not distributed as per the previous data collection above, because these students are over 18 years old, and the consent was asked to them in the first page of the questionnaire, as well as when I was employing the questionnaires, I

explained to them the ethics involved in this research, confidentiality and anonymity aspects were also explained.

The entire process followed the COVID-19 restriction policies and guidelines recommended by the Health Protection Surveillance Centre in Ireland (HSE-HPSC, 2022).

During the data collection, 34 students were present, of which 20 were females, and 14 were males, and all subjects were aged between 18 to 26 years old from undergraduate and postgraduate courses. The students completed both forms (questionnaire and personality test) between 30 to 40 minutes. The researcher filled out a detailed Invigilator Report Form, outlining the entire data collection process and stating the time, students' actions, and other insights. The Invigilator Report Form for the first data collection is available in Appendix 10.

2.11 Data Analysis

This study is exploratory in nature and relies on a mixed method fixed convergent parallel design and data analysis in this research is divided into two strands, quantitative data analysis and qualitative data analysis. This section outlines the beginning of the data analysis, including steps to clean, transcribe and prepare the data. After this stage, the data analysis' results are fully described in the next chapter.

2.11.1 Quantitative Data Analysis⁵

The quantitative data analysis relied on different statistical techniques that are depicted below. This quantitative strand implemented a nonexperimental design in order to assess the association between the HEXACO dimensions and the influence of Gen Zers who lives in Ireland to be influenced by SMIs. This influence was measured by the SUSIS questionnaire using different constructs. The analysis also tried to validate the SUSIS questionnaire. Randomisation of participants was not employed as there was no control

⁵ Parts of the sections SUSIS Questionnaire Design, Data Analysis and Findings were published as an article: Alves de Castro, C. (2023) 'Designing and Validating a Method to Measure Young People's Susceptibility to Social Media Influencers: The SUSIS Questionnaire', *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(6), 398–411, available: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i6.6165>.

group. This thesis is a union of several constructs formed by SUSIS questionnaire and HEXACO personality dimensions. There is no (single) dependent variable. This study is a nonexperimental design as I am not examining distinctions or variations between naturally existing groups and no control group is involved.

Through this analysis was possible to understand that a set of constructs organised in the SUSIS questionnaire demonstrates susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. Those who score high in the set of items that composes the Social Perception Construct (Perception Towards Influencers, Parasocial Relationship and Consumer Trust) and Perception Towards Harmful Content (5 constructs), might have a higher susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, and those who score low in the set of items that composes the Social Perception Construct (Perception Towards Influencers, Parasocial Relationship and Consumer Trust) and Perception Towards Harmful Content (5 constructs) might have a low susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. When these constructs are associated to the HEXACO personality traits dimensions, it will be possible to identify specific personality traits that are significant associated with the SUSIS questionnaire, and then will be possible to assess a specific cohort who might be associated with the susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

In order to employ the quantitative data analysis, IBM SPSS Statistics (SPSS) 28.0 software was used in this research (IBM-SPSS, 2022). This software can assess the reliability of constructs. SPSS provides statistical analysis, manipulating data, and generate data visualization output, such as graphs, dendrograms, and tables that represent the data analysis and its path (Pallant, 2020). SPSS is used in the entire quantitative analysis, from raw data to data visualization results, including data transcription, descriptive statistics, cluster analysis, and factor analysis(Field, 2018). This software was chosen because this is the most used software in the field of social sciences, as well as due to accessibility as the university provides easy access to SPSS (Pallant, 2020). The software was used to confirm and validate the results from this quantitative analysis.

To begging with, two important elements were considered in the process of data analysis, a) demographics, outlining information about the sample, such as general demographics, size and social media habits; and b) response bias, that was checked during the data validation. Additionally, due to the complexity of the data involving two self-

report questionnaires and many variables, I established the following data analysis organisational process:

1. Data preparation
2. Descriptive statistics
3. Inferential Analysis
4. Interpretation

This step-by-step is useful to outline how the data manipulation was conducted and then analysed in this study. Firstly, the data was collected through face-to-face paper self-report questionnaires. The questionnaires were analysed, and the questionnaires missing responses were eliminated from the study. The valid 91 questionnaires were transcribed into SPSS in two different datasets, one for the questionnaire susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs, and one for the personality HEXACO inventory questionnaire. This helped in the organisation of constructs. Data manipulation and formatting were important to answer the research questions and achieve the objectives of this study. In the table 27 below is possible to see how this process worked.

Table 27 - Step-by-Step Quantitative Analysis Strand.

Step-by-Step Quantitative Analysis Strand	
Preparation	<p>A) Data collection and transcription: I collected the data through two self-report face-to-face questionnaires, 1 for HEXACO-PI-R 60 items version, and 1 for the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs – SUSIS Questionnaire. The data was transcribed directly into SPSS. In relation to questions 5 and 6, they are part of the qualitative analysis, and it will be explained in the next sections.</p> <p>B) Prepare data input: data manipulation was necessary, this was related to reversing and</p>

	<p>calculating scores in both questionnaires, merging columns and clustering items.</p> <p>C) Data input: variables were created in SPSS, and the data was organised.</p> <p>D) Data formatting: some extra manipulation was necessary, such as understanding the constructs, mainly for questions 3 and 4, where 5 constructs were generated from these questions.</p> <p>E) Data cleaning: Questionnaires with blank answers in the quantitative elements, were eliminated from the study, 91 questionnaires remained.</p>
Descriptive analysis	<p>This step outlines the subjects' demographics and their social media habits. This section is outlined in the next chapter, Chapter 3 Results & Discussions. The descriptive analysis data came from the first section of the SUSIS Questionnaire.</p>
Inferential analysis	<p>Inferential statistics is a branch of statistics that involves using data from a sample of individuals to make inferences and predictions about a larger population (Pallant, 2020). The data analysis process included analysis on combined constructs to build a Structural Equation Model with the SmartPLS software. This process was necessary to test the hypotheses and answer the RQ1 of this study. This process will be described in the results chapter.</p>
Interpretation	<p>The goal of data interpretation in this thesis was to turn data into information that can be used to make informed decisions. This is outlined in the Chapter 3 – Results and Discussion. Data interpretation is merged into discussion sections.</p>

During this process, it is important to mention, that in the self-report HEXACO personality inventory the items indicated with R, can be seen the Appendix 5, they are

reverse-keyed items; for these items, responses were reversed prior to computing scale scores in SPSS:

- 5 = 1
- 4 = 2
- 3 = 3
- 2 = 4
- 1 = 5

Facet scale scores were computed as means across all items in facet, after recording of reverse-keyed items (Ashton and Lee, 2009). Note that the facet scales of the 60-item version of the HEXACO-PI-R are very short and are not intended to have high levels of internal-consistency reliability (HEXACO, 2022a). They are recommended for use as predictors of conceptually related criterion variables and as indicators of the HEXACO personality factors. The HEXACO 60 scale contains items that are positively (31) and negatively worded (29) to help reduce stereotypical and false responding. Before the data can be analysed, the scores for the negatively worded items were reversed as explained above, making all responses positive. The table 28 below shows how the items on the HEXACO test are ‘supposed’ to represent each of the six factors. Here is an abbreviated copy of the HEXACO Test, including the item numbers (Table 28).

Table 28 - HEXACO Factors by Item Number.

Trait	Item Numbers
Agreeableness	3, 9, 15, 21, 27, 33, 39, 45, 51, 57
Conscientiousness	2, 8, 14, 20, 26, 32, 38, 44, 50, 56
Emotionality	5, 11, 17, 23, 29, 35, 41, 47, 53, 59
Extraversion	4, 10, 16, 22, 28, 34, 40, 46, 52, 58
Honesty-Humility	6, 12, 18, 24, 30, 36, 42, 48, 54, 60
Openness to Experience	1, 7, 13, 19, 25, 31, 37, 43, 49, 55

As seen in the sections 1.5 Personality and 1.6.3 Personality Test of this study, the HEXACO Personality Inventory instrument was developed in 2000 by Kibeom Lee and

Michael Ashton (Lee and Ashton, 2004; Ashton and Lee, 2009; Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014). This inventory analyses the six recognised personality dimensions: honesty-humility, emotionality, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience (HEXACO, 2022a). Many studies have concluded that the HEXACO model to have an acceptable classification and framework of personality structure and characteristics (Ashton and Lee, 2009; Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014; Lee and Ashton, 2018)

Therefore, the HEXACO-60 Item Inventory is reputable personality test, reliable and already validated by many studies, already cited in the literature review section and methodology sections of this study (Ashton and Lee, 2009). For this reason, there is no need to run a factor analysis and measure the consistency of the HEXACO-60 Item Inventory (Ashton and Lee, 2009). In the table below I highlight three recent studies which employed the HEXACO in a sample population similar as to this study (Weller and Tikir, 2011; Wakabayashi, 2014; Ristic *et al.*, 2021). This table serves as a guide to ensure consistency for the HEXACO personality test in this study. In the table is possible to see that the Cronbach's alpha (α) values are above or close to 0.7 considered to be acceptable, while values above 0.8 are considered to be good (Cronbach, 1990). Cronbach's alpha (α) measures the reliability or internal consistency in a psychometric test (Cronbach, 1990).

Table 29 - HEXACO Reference Studies.

SELECTED STUDIES - HEXACO			
STUDY 1 - JAPAN			
Reference: (Wakabayashi, 2014)			
Table 1, page 215, Research conducted with a Japanese sample			
Total Sample: $N = 492$ Mean age = 20.4			
	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Honesty-Humility	106.6	18.21	0.88
Emotionality	109.9	16.34	0.84
Extraversion	100.7	19.57	0.9
Agreeableness	91.5	17.87	0.88
Conscientiousness	95.2	17.85	0.87
Openness to Experience	100.8	17.09	0.84

STUDY 2 - THE UNITED STATES			
Reference: (Weller and Tikir, 2011)			
Page 187, Table 3, Research conducted in The United States			
Total Sample: $N = 231$ Mean age = 19.0			
	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Honesty-Humility	3.31	0.5	0.88
Emotionality	3.22	0.49	0.87
Extraversion	3.75	0.46	0.9
Agreeableness	3.2	0.48	0.89
Conscientiousness	3.3	0.53	0.9
Openness to Experience	3.01	0.57	0.9
STUDY 3 - SERBIA			
Reference: (Ristic <i>et al.</i> , 2021)			
Page 936, Table 1, Research conducted with a Serbian sample			
Total Sample: $N = 617$ Mean age = 22.19			
	M	SD	Cronbach's α
Honesty-Humility	35.32	6.56	0.706
Emotionality	30.83	6.26	0.707
Extraversion	34.45	5.85	0.718
Agreeableness	30.91	6.18	0.628
Conscientiousness	36.21	6.12	0.735
Openness to Experience	35.81	6.87	0.747

SUSIS Questionnaire is a new instrument developed in this study to assess the influence of Social Media Influencers (SMIs) on Gen Zers in Ireland. Therefore, in this case was necessary to manipulate the data and use factor analysis to assess internal consistency of all items.

The initial process led to reverse 3 items of SUSIS questionnaire in the question 2, they are: Q2_3 (I do not feel part of a social media environment), Q2_14 (I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to a social media environment), and Q2_15 (I do not follow many social media influencers).

In this stage the constructs for SUSIS Questionnaire were organised as follows: CT1_Percep represents the perception towards influencers, CT2_Harm_1, 2, 3, 4, 5 represents the perception towards harmful content, CT3_Parasoc represents the degree of parasocial relationship, and CT4_Trust represents the degree of consumer trust. In this

stage I am organising the data, and setting the constructs in order to measure the internal consistency of items, therefore it is already expected that some items will be eliminated. My focus here is to have a reliable and consistent instrument to measure the influence of SMIs. Therefore, I will focus on items that will help to achieve the objectives of this study.

The question 4 (all items - 28), and Q7 – Items 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, and 35, were eliminated of this study as they do not represent enough relevance to support the objectives of this study, these elements were based in the following variables: distributive fairness, procedural fairness, emotional attachment, and perceive information value (please see Table 19 – SUSIS Questionnaire Structure).

The table 30 below shows the organisation of constructs and the remained items that will be analysed through an exploratory factor analysis.

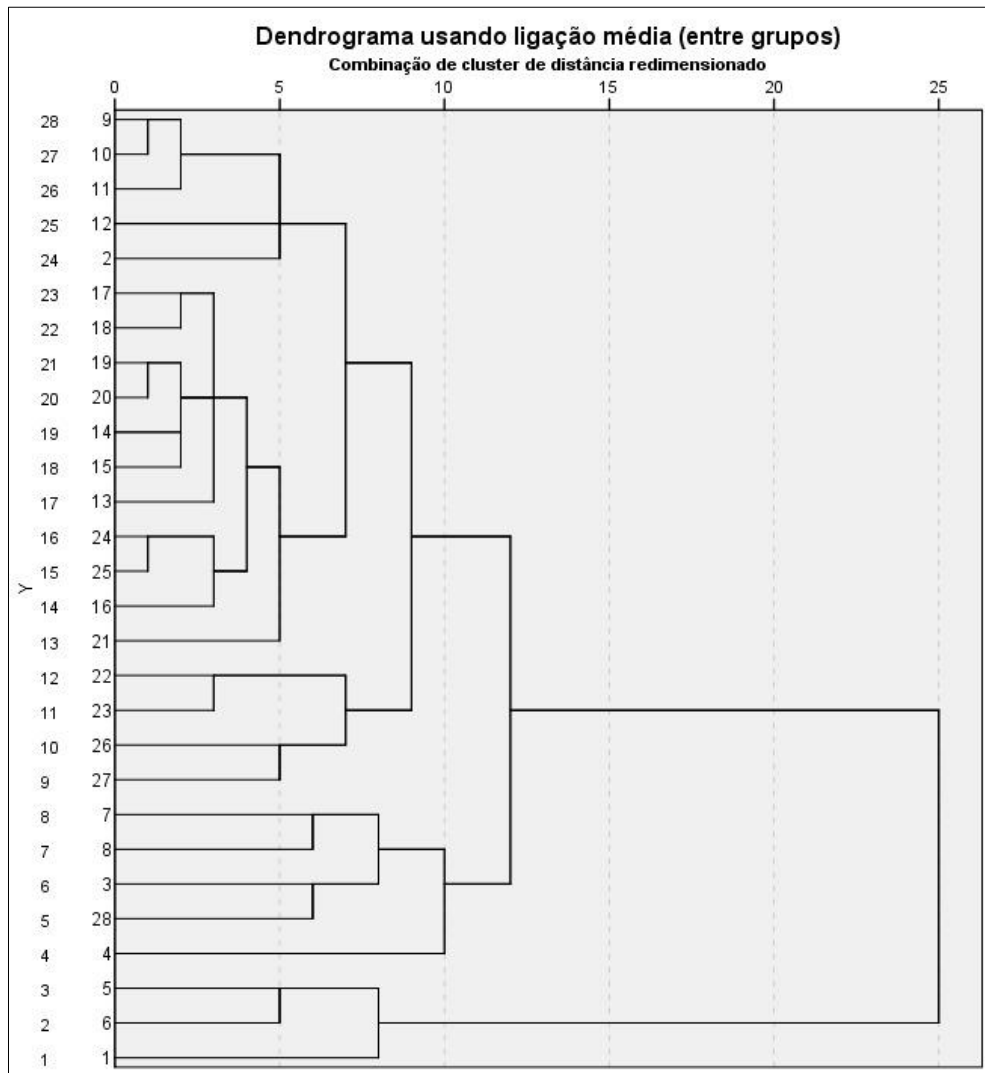
Table 30 – First Constructs Organisation – SUSIS Questionnaire.

Constructs Organisation - SUSIS Questionnaire	
CT1_Percep	Question 2 – 17 items 3 reversed items: Q2_3, Q2_14, and Q2_15
CT2_Harm_1_Addictive and Vicious Content	Question 3 – 5 items (9, 10, 11, 12, 2)
CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful and Unreasonable Content	Question 3 – 11 items (13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25)
CT2_Harm_3_Fraudulent and Hazardous Content	Question 3 – 4 items (22, 23, 26, 27)
CT2_Harm_4_Noxious Content	Question 3 – 5 items (3, 4, 7, 8, 28)
CT2_Harm_5_Delusory Content	Question 3 – 3 items (1, 5, 6)
CT3_Parasoc	Question 7 – 11 items (From 16 to 26)
CT4_Trust	Question 7 – 9 items Variable Trustworthiness – From 1 to 5 Variable Consumer Trust on Intention to Purchase & Recommend Brands – From 36 to 39

The constructs related to question 3 were clustered to provide a more robust analysis and enhance the quality of the interpretation. The dendrogram below was created via SPSS, showing the cluster path among items in Q3. The SPSS output to building the dendrogram can be seen in appendix 14. This dendrogram is tree-like diagram that shows

the relationship between different clusters of data from Q3 (Field, 2018). The dendrogram below shows the hierarchical relationship between the clusters created from the data collection in Q3 of SUSIS Questionnaire, with the length of the branches representing the distance or dissimilarity between the clusters.

Table 31 - Dendrogram of Q3 SUSIS Questionnaire.



As the items were clustered, I defined a name for each group based on the characteristics of each type of harmful content included in each group. Adjectives were used to represent a cluster of categories. Thus, generating new master categories. These master categories are:

Addictive and Vicious Content: These words are linked to being addicted to something and being violent or ruthless.

Wrongful and Unreasonable Content: These words give an idea of doing something illegal, wrong and illogic.

Fraudulent and Hazardous Content: These words are linked to fraud, fake, dangerous, and risky.

Noxious Content: This word represents something toxic or damaging. It can be from a body or mental health perspective.

Delusory Content: This word brings the illusion of having something or being deluded by someone.

The search for these words was made via Oxford Languages Platform for research purposes. Each word choice was based on the similarities of the content categories with the chosen words and their synonyms. A list of words was generated, and the most similar words were finally chosen after a deep analysis (Oxford University Press, 2022).

Table 32 - Construct Harm Divided into 5 Mains Groups.

<u>HARMFUL CONTENT - 5 MAIN GROUPS</u>
<u>Addictive and Vicious Content</u>
CT2_Harm_1
9. Promoting cigarette products or brands
10. Promoting cigarette smoking
11. Promoting drugs intake
12. Promoting sexual or pornographic content
2. Promoting violent content
<u>Wrongful and Unreasonable Content</u>
CT2_Harm_2
17. Promoting incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination
18. Promoting any type of criminal activities
19. Promoting any form of terrorism
20. Promoting any content related to human trafficking
14. Promoting any type of coercion or sexual extortion
15. Promoting any type of bullying
13. Promoting cyberbullying

24. Promoting any kind of discrimination
25. Promoting cultural discrimination
16. Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing
21. Promoting incitement to a religion or belief
Fraudulent and Hazardous Content
CT2_Harm_3
22. Promoting fake news about politics
23. Promoting fake news
26. Promoting dangerous games
27. Promoting risky experiences
Noxious Content
CT2_Harm_4
7. Promoting alcohol products or brands
8. Promoting alcohol intake
3. Promoting unhealthy food
28. Promoting unhealthy food intake
4. Promoting sexualised body image
Delusory Content
CT2_Harm_5
5. Promoting an ideal body image
6. Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle
1. Promoting products or brands

After the organisation of constructs and understanding of the items composing the constructs, then the next step is to run the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to reduce items and measure internal consistency.

2.11.2 Overview of Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was employed using SPSS (IBM-SPSS, 2022). Factor analysis is a technique used to reduce a large number of variables into fewer numbers of “factors” (constructs). Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) is a dimension reduction technique. This technique attempts to extract factors from combinations of the original variables that explain maximum common variance (Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017; Cooper, 2020).

2.11.3 Uses for Exploratory Factor Analysis

Test Construction is usually performed using statistical software (SPSS), which takes a large set of variables and looks for a way that the data may be ‘reduced’ or summarized using a smaller set of factors (Cooper, 2002, 2020; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). A factor is essentially a ‘clump’ of related items. In the context of questionnaire responses EFA is used to uncover latent factors (hidden constructs) that explain variations in the way people answer questions. It looks at patterns of variation in the data to indicate which items are related to which factors.

EFA is commonly encountered as part of the process of identification of personality dimensions through dozens of questions relating to components of personality or analysing the questions in the SUSIS questionnaire. Such as:

- Do you enjoy socializing with different people at parties?
- Do you worry a lot?
- Do you enjoy trying out new things?
- Do you get upset very easily?

Questions consistently responded to in a similar manner by different respondents supposedly address the same underlying construct or ‘Common Factor’ - e.g., Extraversion-Introversion, Openness to Experience, Parasocial Relationship questions etc (Cooper, 2002, 2020; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017).

Data Reduction in factor analysis is also used for ‘conceptual spring-cleaning’ (Cooper, 2002, 2020; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). By comparing the factor correlations between a variety of scales, researchers aim to show precisely what the underlying structure of a concept truly represents. In the case of personality, there has been a lot of debate over the number of factors that are required to adequately describe an individual’s character (Cooper, 2002, 2020; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). Many studies have been carried out to compare different scales, and so far, the consensus is that the big five factors give the most adequate account (John and Srivastava, 1999; Anglim and O’Connor, 2019). However, the HEXACO model has garnered considerable support recently (Ashton and Lee, 2009; Lee and Ashton, 2018; Ashton and Lee, 2020). Then, this is what was used in this study. It has one dimension more than the big five (honesty-

humility), and these six HEXACO dimensions are the most stable dimensions across the lifespan (Lee and Ashton, 2004; Ashton and Lee, 2009; Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014).

Refining questionnaires, factor analysis is very useful for checking the psychometric properties of questionnaires, particularly when they are to be used in new cultures or populations. Essentially, the scoring patterns on individual scales or sub-scales should be similar across all populations in order to justify claims that the test is valid across all such cultures or populations. However, since cultural variations for example, are often found, then it is necessary to refine these questionnaires to account for this difference (Cooper, 2002, 2020; Maltby, Day and Macaskill, 2017). Therefore, in regard to SUSIS Questionnaire, I try to find variations and establish the final constructs.

There are two techniques regarding EFA (Table 33). Exploratory Factor Analysis will allow me to explore the inter-relationships among a set of variables from SUSIS Questionnaire (Heck, 1998).

Table 33 - Two main approaches to FA: Exploratory and Confirmatory, (Heck, 1998).

	Approach	Techniques
Factor Analysis (FA)	Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Principle Components analysis • Principle axis-factoring
	Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Path analysis • Latent variable analysis • Structural equation modelling

2.11.4 Steps Involved in Exploratory Factor Analysis

According to Pallant (2020), the steps involved in Factor Analysis are:

1. Assessing the suitability of the data.
2. Factor Extraction, means assessing the strength of the relationship between the factors.
3. Factor Rotation and Interpretation.

In assessing the data's suitability, variables must be measured on a continuous scale. Categorical data are inappropriate for use with EFA. Variables should be normally

distributed, and outliers should have been dealt with appropriately. The relationship between all variables should appear to be linear or at least not U-shaped or J-shaped. All variables should be independent - thus, variables cannot be calculated from any other variables, e.g., if item A was height and B was weight, then it would be inappropriate for C to be a height to weight ratio since it would necessarily be correlated to both A and B.

In factor extraction, this stage involves discovering the smallest number of factors that can be used to best represent the inter-relations among a set of variables (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996; Pallant, 2020).

Finally, in factor rotation and interpretation means that all of the analysis aimed at establishing the suitability of the data for the final factor analysis and towards helping to decide how many factors need to be kept – the official term for this is ‘retained for further analysis’ (Pallant, 2020). Once the number of factors has been determined, the next step is to try to interpret them. To assist in this process the factors will be ‘rotated’ (Heck, 1998; Pallant, 2020). This does not change the underlying solution but rather presents the pattern of loadings in a manner that is easier to interpret. Each factor should have some large loadings and some small ones - each factor should only have substantial loadings on only a few items - known as a simple structure. Large numbers of mediocre loadings should be avoided (Heck, 1998; Pallant, 2020).

2.11.5 Conducting Exploratory Factor Analysis

This study relies on an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to statistically examine the factors included in SUSIS questionnaire in order to understand their suitability to this research. The analysis allowed us to explore the inter-relationships among a set of variables. According to Pallant (2020), the steps involved in Factor Analysis are: 1. Assessing the suitability of the data. 2. Factor Extraction. Assessing the strength of the relationship between the factors. 3. Factor Rotation and Interpretation. The first step was followed and therefore, the data were screened and cleaned and found suitable for further analysis.

Concerning the factor extraction, it involves discovering the smallest number of factors that can be used to best represent the inter-relations among a set of variables. The process of deciding how many factors to keep is called extraction (Field, 2018). While

assessing the strength of the relationship between constructs Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) recommend an inspection of the Correlation Matrix that shows correlation coefficients for all combinations of specified variables or evidence of coefficients of greater than .3. If all correlations are smaller than this then there would seem to be no real relationship between any of the items. The Correlation Matrix shows the loadings of each of the variables on the factors that were extracted (Field, 2018). The loadings are the correlations between the variables and the factors. These loadings allowed me to interpret the factors. The sign indicates whether the variable has a positive or negative correlation with the factor. The size of the loading indicates whether a variable makes a significant contribution to a factor. This process was made to all variables included in SUSIS questionnaire.

The correlation matrix was inspected and many correlations $> .3$ were found, thus further analysis was undertaken.

The next piece of output reports the outcome of the KMO and Bartlett's Test. These help to assess the factorability (suitability) of the data (Field, 2018). The KMO index ranges from 0 to 1 and Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) recommend that a reading around .6 as a minimum value for a good factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity should be significant ($p < .05$). Items that did not reach these values were eliminated and only good items remained. Below is the SPSS output for the constructs of this study related to the SUSIS questionnaire, which meet all of these conditions above.

The results of the KMO (.53, .78, .71, .59, .67, .68, .68 and .83) and Bartlett's Tests ($p < .001$) indicated that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Additionally, through the Principal Component Analysis, the communalities values were checked, and they are high enough concerning to the remained items. Finally, the total variance value was checked and only items with results around .70 remained in the research (Field, 2018).

Table 34 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 1 – Perception Towards Influencers.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.538
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	101.313
	df	3

	Sig.	<.001
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Table 35 - Construct 1 – Perception Towards Influencers, Remained Items.

1. I follow many social media influencers
2. I enjoy following influencers online
6. The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me

Table 36 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 2 – Harm 1, Addictive and Vicious Content.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.784
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	405.235
	df	10
	Sig.	<.001

Table 37 - Construct 2 – Harm 1, Addictive and Vicious Content, Remained Items.

2. Promoting violent content - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
9. Promoting cigarette products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
10. Promoting cigarette smoking - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
12. Promoting sexual or pornographic content - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content

Table 38 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 2 – Harm 2, Wrongful and Unreasonable Content.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.719
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	100.710
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Table 39 - Construct 2 – Harm 2, Wrongful and Unreasonable Content, Remained Items.

16. Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
15. Promoting any type of bullying - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
24. Promoting any kind of discrimination - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content

Table 40 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 2 – Harm 3, Fraudulent and Hazardous Content.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.593
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	136.463
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Table 41 - Construct 2 – Harm 3, Fraudulent and Hazardous Content, Remained Items.

22. Promoting fake news about politics - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
23. Promoting fake news - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
26. Promoting dangerous games - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content

Table 42 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 2 – Harm 4, Noxious Content.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.675
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	86.582
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Table 43 - Construct 2 – Harm 4, Noxious Content, Remained Items.

7. Promoting alcohol products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
8. Promoting alcohol intake - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
3. Promoting unhealthy food - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content

Table 44 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 2 – Harm 5, Delusory Content.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.682
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	90.490
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Table 45 - Construct 2 – Harm 5, Delusory Content, Remained Items.

1. Promoting products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
5. Promoting an ideal body image - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content
6. Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content

Table 46 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 3 – Parasocial Relationship.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.685
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	73.714
	df	3
	Sig.	<.001

Table 47 - Construct 3 – Parasocial Relationship, Remained Items.

18. If influencers that I follow start another social media channel, I will also follow them there
19. Influencers seem to understand the kinds of thing I want to know
24. Influencers that I follow are the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with

Table 48 - KMO and Bartlett's Test Construct 4 – Consumer Trust.

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.833
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	257.757
	df	6
	Sig.	<.001

Table 49 - Construct 4 – Consumer Trust, Remained Items.

36. I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow
37. I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow
38. In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow

The items from SUSIS questionnaire that are not listed above are not suitable for this study, and for this reason they were rejected and eliminated. Because their total variance was lower than .70. In addition, their KMO and Bartlett's Test were lower than expected. The table shows in detail which items remained and were rejected.

Table 50 - Total Items by Construct, Remained Items, and Rejected Items.

Constructs Organisation - SUSIS Questionnaire	
Total Items by Construct, Remained Items, and Rejected Items	
CT1_Percep	Question 2 – 17 items. Remained: Q2_1, Q2_2, and Q2_6.

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	Rejected Items: Q2_3, Q2_4, Q2_5, Q2_7, Q2_8, Q2_9, Q2_10, Q2_11, Q2_12, Q2_13, Q2_14, Q2_15, Q2_16, and Q2_17.
CT2_Harm_1_Addictive and Vicious Content	Question 3 – 5 items. Remained: Q3_2, Q3_9, Q3_10, and Q3_12. Rejected Items: Q3_11.
CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful and Unreasonable Content	Question 3 – 11 items. Remained: Q3_15, Q2_16, and Q2_24. Rejected Items: Q3_13, Q3_14, Q3_17, Q3_18, Q3_19, Q3_20, Q3_21, and Q3_25.
CT2_Harm_3_Fraudulent and Hazardous Content	Question 3 – 4 items. Remained: Q3_22, Q3_23, and Q3_26. Rejected Items: Q3_27.
CT2_Harm_4_Noxious Content	Question 3 – 5 items. Remained: Q3_3, Q3_7, and Q3_8. Rejected Items: Q3_4, and Q3_28.
CT2_Harm_5_Delusory Content	Question 3 – 3 items. Remained: Q3_1, Q3_5, and Q3_6. Rejected Items: None.
CT3_Parasoc	Question 7 – 11 items. Remained: Q7_18, Q7_19, and Q7_24. Rejected Items: Q7_16, Q7_17, Q7_20, Q7_21, Q7_22, Q7_23, Q7_25, and Q7_26.
CT4_Trust	Question 7 – 9 items. Remained: Q7_36, Q7_37, and Q7_38. Rejected Items: Q7_1, Q7_2, Q7_3, Q7_39, Q7_4, and Q7_5.
Question 7 Extra Variables	Question 7 – 19 items. Remained: None. Rejected Items: Q7_6, Q7_7, Q7_8, Q7_9, Q7_10, Q7_11, Q7_12, Q7_13, Q7_14, Q7_15, Q7_27, Q7_28, Q7_29, Q7_30, Q7_31, Q7_32, Q7_33, Q7_34, and Q7_35.

All of the analysis conducted so far aimed towards establishing the suitability of the data and decide which factors need to be kept (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996). As per the table above the items kept are suitable for this study.

The next step of the data analysis was conducted via the software SmartPLS designed for conducting Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach (Ringle, da Silva and Bido, 2014; SmartPLS, 2022). It is a popular tool for SEM because it is user-friendly and easy to use, even for researchers without extensive statistical training, it is commonly used in the field of marketing and management (Ringle, da Silva and Bido, 2014; SmartPLS, 2022). I decided to use this approach because it is recommended when the model is complex and involves many constructs, indicators and/or model relationships, as well as because I am testing different indicators to create a reliable SUSIS Questionnaire (Hair *et al.*, 2019). In addition, PLS-SEM is recommended for small sample sizes (Hair *et al.*, 2019).

The table below shows the steps recommended to conduct a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach, and the steps I have taken to find robust results for this research (Hair *et al.*, 2017, 2019, 2022).

Table 51 - Steps Recommended to Conduct a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) Approach, (Hair *et al.*, 2017, 2019, 2022).

Steps	Description
Data Preparation	Data was already prepared, checking missing values and eliminating rejected items. An Excel table was created merging all indicators from the SUSIS Questionnaire and HEXACO personality test. The data from both questionnaires were uploaded to the SMART PLS Software.
Specifying the model	The researcher specifies the model by defining the relationships between the latent variables and observed variables in the form of a path diagram – This is outlined in the next chapter – Results.
Estimating the model	SmartPLS automates the estimation process, making it easy for the researcher to obtain results quickly. This is outlined in the next chapter – Results. This is a form of regression analysis that is well-suited for SEM.
Model evaluation	I evaluated the model using different indexes, such p-value, Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and

	Cronbach's α . This is outlined in the next chapter – Results.
Model modification	In case the model fit is not satisfactory, I could change the path and the model structure.
Hypotheses testing	I could test the two hypotheses in this study and interpret the relationships between variables by examining the significance of the path coefficients and the standardised path coefficients. This is outlined in the next chapter – Results.

Only for a matter of information, a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a statistical technique that is generally employed to test relationships among variables in a complex theoretical model, as it is the case of this research (Ringle, da Silva and Bido, 2014; Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). Additionally, It pertains to the field of multivariate analysis method that combines aspects of regression analysis, factor analysis, and path analysis (Ringle, da Silva and Bido, 2014; Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). As seen in the above sections, factor analysis was completed and indicators were tested to understand their internal consistency. Furthermore, Structural Equation Modeling allowed me to examine the relationships between latent (unobserved) variables and observed variables, and to test the fit of the theoretical model to the data (Hair *et al.*, 2017, 2019, 2022). This is fully explained in the model presentation in the next chapter – Results.

The Chapter 3 – Results & Discussion covers the results from the data analysis, test the hypotheses, interpret the results and discuss the results. The next section below covers the qualitative data analysis process.

2.11.6 Qualitative Data Analysis Q5 and Q6 – Thematic Analysis (TA)⁶

As part of this mixed-methods research design, the qualitative strand will be analysed through a thematic analysis. Two questions of the questionnaire were free answers designed in order to get as much insights as possible from the participants' answers. These questions are: Q5 - Please indicate your five most favourite influencers and in which social media channel you follow them; and Q6 - Please indicate five main motives that make you follow your favourite influencers. The discoveries from these questions provided insights to answer the research question two: RQ2. *What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives to follow them?* This question pertains to the qualitative strand of this MMR design. The insights from this qualitative analysis will be compared to the quantitative analysis in order to get a broad and deep synthesis about the two strands, and therefore providing to this project a more solid, robust and complete understanding about the phenomenon under investigation. The two main reasons for choosing this method were accessibility and flexibility. The two questions were displayed in the questionnaire as the figure two below.

⁶ Parts of the sections SUSIS Questionnaire Design, Data Analysis and Findings were published as an article: Alves de Castro, C. (2023) 'Thematic analysis in social media influencers: who are they following and why?', *Frontiers in Communication*, 8(1217684), 1-15, available: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1217684>.

Figure 3 - Q5 and 6, SUSIS Questionnaire.

Q5.
Please indicate your five most favourite influencers and in which social media channel you follow them.

Number	Influencers	Channel on which you prefer to see their content
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Q6.
Please indicate five main motives that make you follow your favourite influencers.

Number	Motives
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Braun and Clarke (2006) refer to thematic analysis (TA) as a foundational technique for qualitative analysis, because this method offers core skills that will be valuable for conducting various types of qualitative analysis, very commonly used in psychology but not limited to this field. The main aim of this method is to seek for themes, or patterns that happens through a dataset (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2006) suggested a six-phase process to conduct the TA, these six steps can

assist the entire analysis process and support the researcher recognise and attend to the important elements of a thematic analysis. I used in this research this logical approach, however this is not a rule, and the process can be flexible (Xu and Zammit, 2020). The six steps are as follows:

1. familiarizing yourself with your data,
2. generating initial codes,
3. searching for themes,
4. reviewing themes,
5. defining and naming themes, and
6. producing the report.

In this analysis I used NVivo 12 Pro and Excel to organise and store the data transcribed from the paper based questionnaires (Excel, 2022; NVivo, 2022). Through NVivo was possible to code the qualitative data in order to organise themes and patterns for deep analysis in order to answer the research question two (RQ2), as well as to give further insights to this research, such as complementing the achievement of the specific and general objectives. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Through NVivo was possible to explore themes and organise them into codes and nodes. NVivo has demonstrated an efficient research software for storing, managing, and analysing qualitative data (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019).

A TA is not tied to a specific research philosophy, so there is some flexibility on this approach, as well as it is very straightforward to use (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Due to its theoretical flexibility TA offers a straightforward and useful instrument, that may provide a rich and detailed account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Although the process is flexible, the TA must be transparent around the process and practice of the method, this is a vital element to ensure reliability (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The choice of this technique in this study come across the action of field research, the constructive knowledge from all forms of information gathered, and the different world's views from participants and the researcher, because thematic analysis is not tied to any pre-existing theoretical framework, and so it can be used within different theoretical frameworks, like all theories employed in this study and can be used to do different things within them

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). This research pertains to a pragmatic view emphasizing the research questions by adopting various methods and techniques that best matched the research's purpose (Morgan, 2014). Thus, the TA suits to the research purpose and fits into the convergent parallel mixed-methods design. Past pragmatic research using MMR design integrating TA in the methods can be seen in the literature and demonstrates reliability (Penders *et al.*, 2019).

Additionally, to the pragmatic orientation, a deductive assumption is employed as a way to interpret the data, mainly because I wanted to assure that the codes could contribute to generate themes that were relevant in order to answer the RQ2, as well as to make sure that the participants/data-based meanings that were emphasised were relevant to the RQ2 (Byrne, 2022). Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2019) outlines that a deductive approach is more pre-specified based on a theory or codebook, pre-established themes firmly linked to the research questions and research objectives. Thus, a priori deductive approach was chosen because it facilitates the interpretation of identifiable themes and behavioural patterns (Lambert and O'Halloran, 2008). From this perspective, I was guided to analyse the entire data in detail, in a more data-driven approach. The participants views are clear in their answers, because most of participants wrote between one to three lines of text, and no more than that, hence all text written were coded in a very direct manner, please see the figure 3 as an example. I created a table as per the figure below in which I transcribed all the text from the paper based questionnaire into a table created in Word outlining the 5 favourite influencers that this young sample follows, the channels where they follow them and the motives to be following them. However, not all participants filled all gaps or concurrently linked the influencers to the motives. For this reason the influencers, channels and motives were analysed in different codes, and not all together. Additionally, all Word files were converted to PDF and after that stored in NVivo. For comparison reasons I included a figure of the participant 1's response before the data transcription, and data cleaning, see it in the Figure 4 below.

Figure 4 - Participant 1 Data Transcription.

Number	Influencers	Channel on which you prefer to see their content	Motives
1	Jamila Jameel	Instagram	She stands up for what she believes in, especially women's rights, body image, mental health.
2	Keilidh Mua	TikTok/Instagram	She is a makeup artist who I learn tips from. She also talks about mental health.
3	Stacey Solomon	Instagram	Stacey shows what a realistic life looks like, even for famous people.
4	Miriam Mullins	TikTok	She posts content to let people know its ok to be who you are, lots of awareness.
5	Saffron Barker	Instagram/YouTube	She posts lots of content about products, the gym, a healthy lifestyle.

Figure 5 - Participant 1 Response Before Data Transcription.

Q5.
Please indicate your five most favourite influencers and in which social media channel you follow them.

Number	Influencers	Channel on which you prefer to see their content
1	Jamila Jameel	Instagram
2	Keirrah Mwa	tik tok / Instagram
3	Stacey Solomon	Instagram
4	Miriam Mullins	tiktok
5	Saaron Barber	Instagram / Youtube

Q6.
Please indicate five main motives that make you follow your favourite influencers.

Number	Motives
1	She stands up for what she believes in, especially women's rights, body image, mental health
2	She is a makeup artist who I learn tips from. She also talks about mental health
3	Stacey shows what a realistic life looks like, even for famous people
4	She posts content to let people know it's ok to be who you are & lots of awareness
5	She posts lots of content about products, the gym & a healthy lifestyle

This process of reading, re-reading and manually transcribing the data is part of the first step of the TA, "1. familiarizing yourself with your data". This step is very time consuming, as I needed to read the answers from all participants, transcribed them to Word, convert the Word document to PDF, import the PDF document to NVivo and

finally start coding all text. This process gave to me intimacy with the data and I could identify appropriate information very relevant to the research question. Additionally, all answers to the question 5 in which participants had to indicate their favourite influencers and channels, while I was transcribing the data, I checked all influencers and their respective channels. I wanted to make sure that all of them are available online, and they exist. I could conclude that all of them are available online, they exist and they are related to the indicated channels. Finally, I could familiarise with the influencers as well, and could observe the influencer's style and content. During this first step I took some notes about the data, it can be seen in the Box 1 below. This process of taking notes and documenting the data analysis is beneficial to the research, mainly in terms of transparency (Byrne, 2022).

Box 1 - Example of Preliminary Notes Taken During Phase 1.

"Participants have been using the word "relatable" very often".

"There is a great diversity of influencers, and it might be difficult to find a pattern".

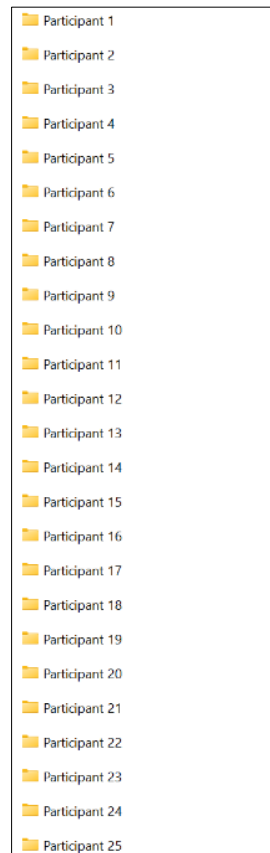
"Participants always refer to celebrities and singers as influencers".

"Participants were not assigning the influencers to the motives, they were generalising the motives".

"Participants tend to be motivated and inspired by their influencers".

It is important to mention, that all names were replaced by Participant 1, Participant 2, 3, 4, 5, etc. in a numerical order, see below the figures 6 and 7. As well as, folders were created to store the Word and PDF documents. A master folder was created named "Thematic Analysis", and sub folders for each participant were also created. After that, the documents were imported to NVivo, please see the figure 7.

Figure 6 – Sub-folders.



Sub-folders were created for all 91 participants, however not all of them filled the Q5 and Q6, the total number of participants who fully or partially filled the questions 5 and 6 are $N=81$. Note that not all participants are listed in figures 5 and 6 in order to save space in the print screen.

Figure 7 - Documents Imported to NVivo.

The screenshot shows the NVivo software interface with a list of 25 participants. The interface includes a menu bar (File, Home, Import, Create, Explore, Share), a toolbar with various analysis tools, and a left-hand navigation pane. The main window displays a table with the following data:

Name	References
Participant 1	15
Participant 2	15
Participant 3	15
Participant 4	15
Participant 5	15
Participant 6	15
Participant 7	15
Participant 8	14
Participant 9	12
Participant 10	15
Participant 11	9
Participant 12	6
Participant 13	15
Participant 14	14
Participant 15	15
Participant 16	15
Participant 17	9
Participant 18	7
Participant 19	14
Participant 22	15
Participant 23	15
Participant 24	15
Participant 25	15

Data cleaning was ensured in the qualitative analysis, in which from the total population in this research $N=91$. $n=10$ participants were removed from the qualitative analysis as they did not answer these two questions, or their calligraphy was incomprehensible to understand. Therefore, the total sample for the qualitative analysis is $N=81$. The figure below outlines the sample demographics, in which the total of the population is $N=81$, $n=50$ female, $n=31$ Male, $n=56$ ages from 16 to 19 years old, $n=25$ ages from 20 to 26 years old, $n=52$ are enrolled in a secondary school and $n=29$ are enrolled in a private higher education institution. It is important to remember that all participants are living in Ireland and pertain to the generation Z cohort. The table below was elaborated from the attributes and cases functionality in NVivo, after that export to Excel (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019; Excel, 2022; NVivo, 2022).

Figure 8 - Sample Demographics, Qualitative Strand.

Participants Demographics			
Sex	Age	Institution	Course of Study
Sex = Female (50)	Age = 16 (36)	Secondary School (52)	Leaving Certificate (31)
Sex = Male (31)	Age = 17 (13)	Private Higher Education Institution (29)	Secondary School (14)
Total (81)	Age = 18 (5)	Total (81)	Transition Year (TY) (7)
	Age = 19 (2)		Undergraduate Course (23)
	Age = 20 (1)		Postgraduate Course (6)
	Age = 21 (3)		Total (81)
	Age = 22 (1)		
	Age = 23 (2)		
	Age = 25 (12)		
	Age = 26 (6)		
	Total (81)		

This deep understanding of the sample and the data concluded the first step of the thematic analysis. The second step relies on “2. generating initial codes”. This process is used to categorise data with similar meanings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Coding involves labelling each unit of data within a data item with a code that summarises extract’s meaning (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). Researchers are encouraged to examine the entire dataset in a systematic manner, treat each data element with equal consideration, and identify facets of the data item that are of interest and may help develop themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). A code can be a single word or a short expression, and a unit of data is a number of words, or sentences (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

In this coding process, I coded any any data that could be useful in answering a research question and contribute to the research objectives (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). This repeated process can be helpful to identify themes and interpret them (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). As these two questions and participants responses were very straightforward, I coded all of the information provided by the subjects as they could be useful. This coding process was done via NVivo, in which I coded all participants files stored in NVivo, and saved the codes in their respective nodes. A code book was generated by NVivo as seen below in the Table 52. The table 52 outlines the codes names, the description of each code, the number of respondents and number of references per node. References in NVivo is a count of the number of selections within that source that have been coded to a node (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). There is a variance in the participants responses column, some participants filled the questions partially, according to their interests and preferences. It means that some participants

might do not have five favourite influencers, or five main motives to follow these influencers.

Table 52 - Code Book.

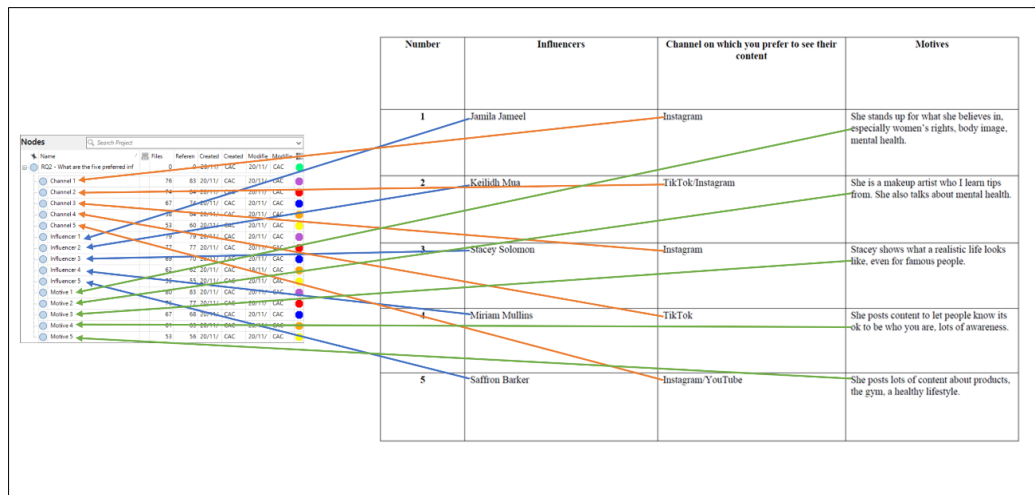
Code Name (Nodes)	Description	Responses	Number of References
Influencer 1	1 st favourite influencer	79	79
Influencer 2	2 nd favourite influencer	77	77
Influencer 3	3 rd favourite influencer	69	70
Influencer 4	4 th favourite influencer	62	62
Influencer 5	5 th favourite influencer	55	55
Channel 1	Social media channels on which the participants prefer to see their 1 st favourite influencer's content	76	83
Channel 2	Social media channels on which the participants prefer to see their 2 nd favourite influencer's content	74	84
Channel 3	Social media channels on which the participants prefer to see their 3 rd favourite influencer's content	67	74
Channel 4	Social media channels on which the participants prefer to see their 4 th favourite influencer's content	58	64
Channel 5	Social media channels on which the participants prefer to see their 5 th favourite influencer's content	53	60
Motive 1	The 1 st main motive that makes the participants follow their favourite influencers	80	83
Motive 2	The 2 nd main motive that makes the participants follow their favourite influencers	76	77
Motive 3	The 3 rd main motive that makes the participants follow their favourite influencers	67	68

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

Code Name (Nodes)	Description	Responses	Number of References
Motive 4	The 4 th main motive that makes the participants follow their favourite influencers	61	63
Motive 5	The 5 th main motive that makes the participants follow their favourite influencers	53	56

From the code book is possible to notice that the coding process was flexible thinking mainly on answering the RQ2 (*What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives to follow them?*) and contribute to the research objective (Assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs)). In figure 9 below, it is possible to see how I coded the document transcribed from the paper questionnaires and stored in NVivo. These responses are from participant 1, the influencers were coded in the influencers' nodes, the channels in the channels' nodes and the motives in the motives' nodes in numerical ranking order, from 1 to 5 coherent to the RQ2.

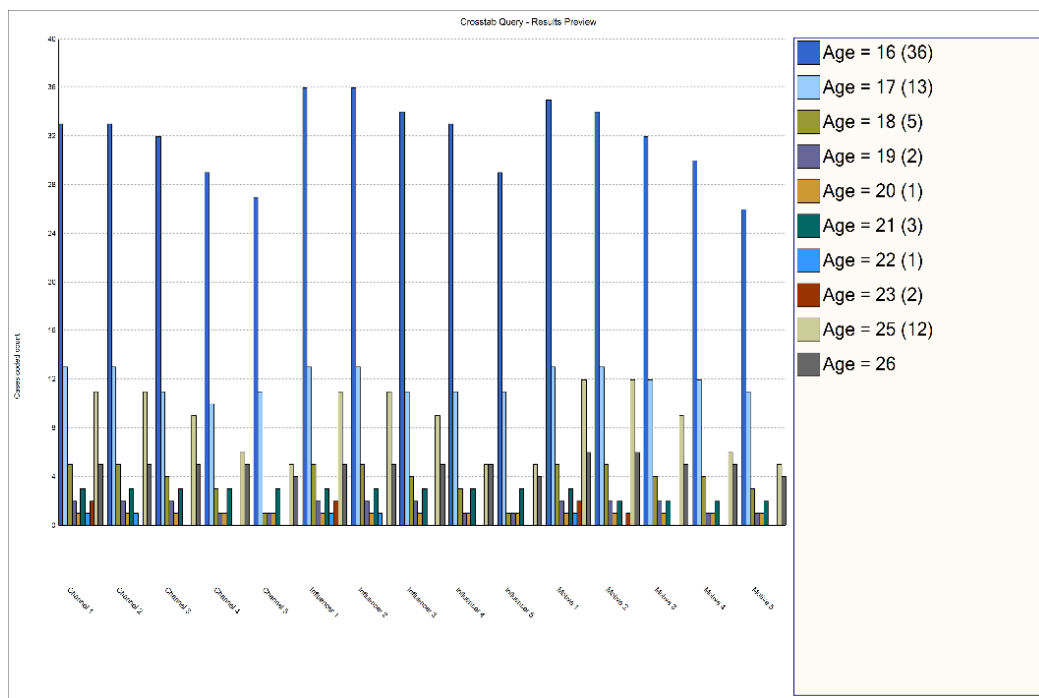
Figure 9 - Coding Process.



Through NVivo was possible to generate graphs for comparison and interpretation of the coding process, as mentioned in the literature all processes in the TA should be transparent and documented in order to ensure reliability and validity (Braun and Clarke,

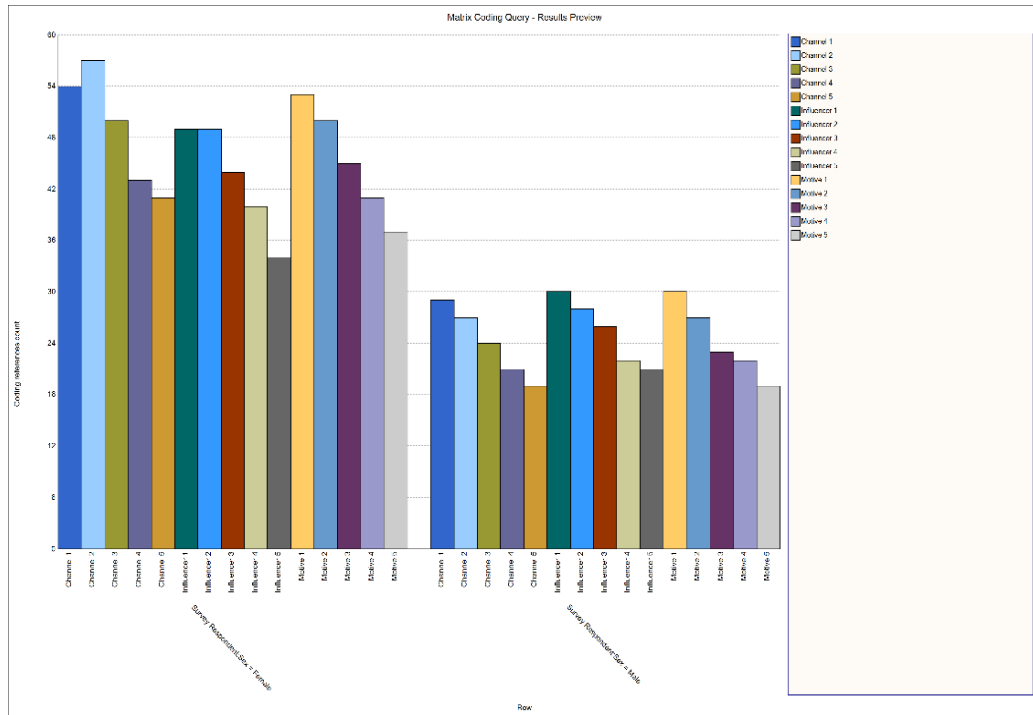
2006; Byrne, 2022). In the graph 1 below is possible to see all the codes/nodes in the horizontal axis, and in the vertical axis outlines the number of cases coded count by age. In NVivo, cases represent the units of analysis (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). Thus, the highest cases coded count cohort response were the ages groups 16 to 17 years old, that is also the majority of the population and the group 25 to 26 accounting for $n=18$ participants in total. The most cases coded count appear in the influencers and motives nodes simply because these spaces in the questionnaire required more writing effort, compared to channels, that requires one or two words (e.g. YouTube, Instagram or both).

Graph 1 - Codes by Age.



The graph 2 below shows the coding references count by sex. The horizontal axis outlines the coding references count by sex, and the vertical axis the codes/nodes. As the female population is the majority in this study accounting for $n=50$ and the male population $n=31$, then is evident that the majority of references were coded in the female group.

Graph 2 - Codes by Sex.



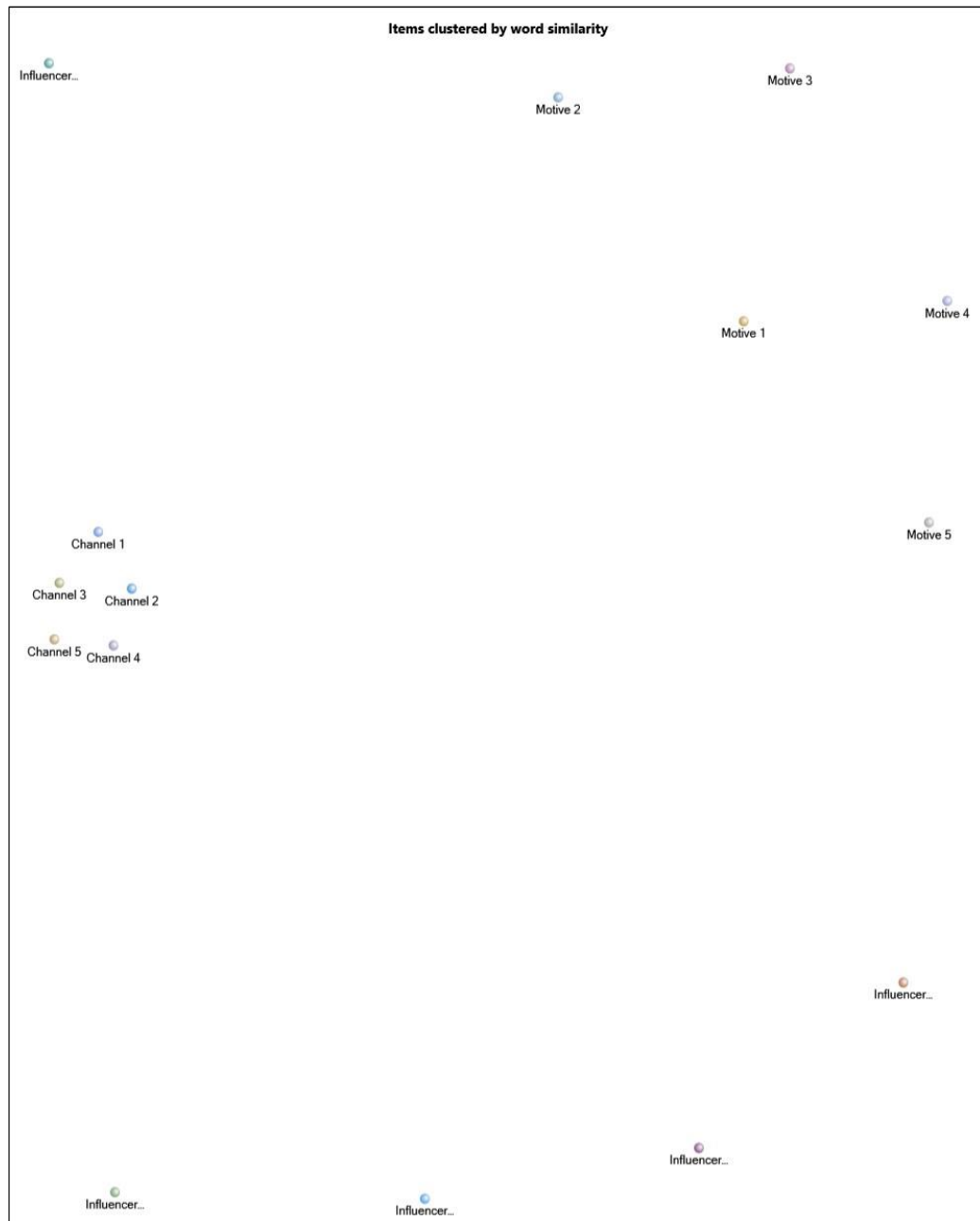
After all relevant data being coded, begins then the third phase of the TA is “3. Searching/generating themes” (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019; Xu and Zammit, 2020; Byrne, 2022). This process starts after exhaustive analysis and evaluation of codes, in order to identify patterns and relationships to create a list of themes that are related to the RQ2 and research objectives. A theme is a broad category containing multiple codes that appear to be related to each other and indicate ideas that are generally important to the research question (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The difference between codes and themes is that codes are a way to organise the data by coding the data, while a theme is a set of codes, therefore, codes are organised by drawing them together as themes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

I immersed myself into my data, and codes, in order to make judgements and create relationship among codes, until get to the point to create themes. Some initial aspects were taken into consideration prior establishing themes, as follows 1) The key concepts in the codes; 2) Try to find evident patterns; 3) Try to find important elements; 4) Try to find trends; 5) Codes that appear to related to one another; 6) Why and how a particular set of codes seems to be related (Bryman, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006;

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Therefore, I went through the data saved in the codes, and coded them into new themes, so I created nodes in NVivo, named them as themes. All data coded into the themes' nodes were selected according to these 6 aspects below. Finally, I could identify patterns and relationships, creating themes and sub-themes to be explored aiming to answer the RQ2 and contribute to the research objectives of this research.

Firstly, I decided to analyse the words similarity in NVivo by codes. The graph 3 below outlines the nodes, and each node refers to a code, all references within a code were clustered by word similarity. It is evident that the "Channels" element has more word similarities, therefore there will be more patterns. The "Motives" element can generate patterns, but still the similarity is medium to low. The "Influencers" nodes show a diversity of words, it means that to generate patterns in this regard will be difficult, but there is a level of similarity among four of them.

Graph 3 - Items Clustered by Word Similarity.



I started analysing the influencers and channels codes, identifying patterns and relationships. As the RQ2 requires the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows, I decided to create patterns based on a ranking ranging from 1 to 5, as per the table 53 below.

Table 53 - Ranking 1-5.

Ranking	
1	First
2	Second
3	Third
4	Fourth
5	Fifth

I selected the most cited influencers and channels, and created themes based on the ranking scale. Nodes were created in NVivo using the themes' names in order to store the selected items. This process can be seen in figure 10 below, in which the codes nodes are in red, and the themes nodes are in blue.

Figure 10 - Codes and Themes for Influencers and Channels.

The screenshot shows the NVivo Nodes list with the following structure:

- RQ2 - What are the five preferred influencers that t** (Theme, blue circle)
 - Channel 1** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 1st Preferred Channels (Code, red circle)
 - Channel 2** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 2nd Preferred Channels (Code, red circle)
 - Channel 3** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 3rd Preferred Channels (Code, red circle)
 - Channel 4** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 4th Preferred Channels (Code, red circle)
 - Channel 5** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 5th Preferred Channels (Code, red circle)
 - Influencers 1** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 1st Preferred Influencers (Code, red circle)
 - Influencers 2** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 2nd Preferred Influencers (Code, red circle)
 - Influencers 3** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 3rd Preferred Influencers (Code, red circle)
 - Influencers 4** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 4th Preferred Influencers (Code, red circle)
 - Influencers 5** (Theme, blue circle)
 - 5th Preferred Influencers (Code, red circle)

Name	Files	References	Created On	Created By	Modified O	Modified By	Color
RQ2 - What are the five preferred influencers that t	0	0	20/11/202	CAC	20/11/202	CAC	Blue
Channel 1	76	83	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
1st Preferred Channels	67	71	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Channel 2	74	84	20/11/202	CAC	20/11/202	CAC	Blue
2nd Preferred Channels	66	69	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Channel 3	67	74	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
3rd Preferred Channels	55	58	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Channel 4	58	64	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
4th Preferred Channels	54	58	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Channel 5	53	60	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
5th Preferred Channels	50	56	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Influencers 1	79	79	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
1st Preferred Influencers	16	16	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Influencers 2	77	77	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
2nd Preferred Influencers	15	15	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Influencers 3	69	70	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
3rd Preferred Influencers	6	6	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Influencers 4	62	62	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
4th Preferred Influencers	12	12	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red
Influencers 5	55	55	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Blue
5th Preferred Influencers	4	4	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Red

After that, I ran a word frequency analysis by node in NVivo, where I could identify the most cited influencers and channels. The final analysis can be seen in the table below. I decided not to select only one 1st preferred influencer or only one 2nd

preferred influencer, because I want the result to represent the entire population, and not only a part of it. Therefore, for each cohort I selected the most cited items. In qualitative analysis is essential to explore the participants' views and gather as much insights as possible (Morse, 1994). Thus, the choice for including all the patterns was decisive in order to get valid outcomes that represents the entire population's views. The word frequency count was important to rank the most cited influencers and channels. In the right column is possible to identify the most cited influencers and channels, and their position in the ranking.

Table 54 – Word Frequency Analysis by Themes/Nodes.

Theme Analysis – Influencers and Social Media Channels	
Theme – 1st Preferred Influencers	Word Frequency Count
1. KSI	7
2. Molly Mae	4
3. Ronaldo	3
4. PewDiePie	2
Theme – 2nd Preferred Influencers	Word Frequency Count
1. KSI	3
1. Olivia Neill	3
2. Chloe Burrows	2
2. Ronaldo	2
2. Sidemen	2
Theme – 3rd Preferred Influencers	Word Frequency Count
1. CBUM	2
2. Sidemen	2
3. W2S	2
Theme – 4th Preferred Influencers	Word Frequency Count
1. Adele	2
1. Hybrid Calisthenics	2
1. Emma Chamberlain	2
1. Olivia Neill	2
1. Sidemen	2
Theme – 5th Preferred Influencers	Word Frequency Count
1. Sidemen	2
1. Jacksepticeye	2
1. Kardashian	2

Theme – 1st Preferred Channels	Word Frequency Count
1. Instagram	37
2. YouTube	34
3. TikTok	10
4. Telegram	1
4. Twitter	1
Theme – 2nd Preferred Channels	Word Frequency Count
1. Instagram	40
2. YouTube	28
3. TikTok	12
4. Spotify	4
Theme – 3rd Preferred Channels	Word Frequency Count
1. Instagram	35
2. YouTube	23
3. TikTok	13
4. Spotify	2
5. Twitch	1
Theme – 4th Preferred Channels	Word Frequency Count
1. Instagram	28
2. YouTube	17
3. TikTok	13
4. Spotify	4
5. Twitch	1
5. Twitter	1
Theme – 5th Preferred Channels	Word Frequency Count
1. Instagram	29
2. YouTube	15
3. TikTok	12
4. Twitter	2
5. Twitch	1
5. Spotify	1

The ranking confirms the graph “Items Clustered by Word Similarity”, as there were a diverse number of different influencers cited. The patterns analysed by word frequency identified a few influencers with few same citations ranging from 2-7, but mostly with only two identical citations. Whereas, regarding the channels, the patterns were easily identified as most participants cited Instagram as their preferred channel, followed by YouTube, and then TikTok. Other channels were also cited and were possible to identify patterns, such as Spotify, Twitter, Twitch and Telegram.

The following variable analysed were motives codes. In this case, I analysed all motives codes and stored the patterns and relationship into new themes' nodes created in NVivo. I created themes based on the participants responses, and my interpretation. Patterns and relationships were identified. The research objectives and RQ2 were taken into consideration. The figure 11 below shows the creation of themes' nodes in NVivo and their connection to codes. The orange circles represent the codes, the green circles represent the themes, and the yellow circles represent the sub-themes. It is possible to see that this analysis goes beyond to only outlining the five motives, but contrast and relate the participants' responses and my interpretations with the theory covered in this research.

Figure 11 - Codes and Themes for Motives.

Motive 1	80	83	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Orange
Motive 2	76	77	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Orange
Motive 3	67	68	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Orange
Motive 4	61	63	20/11/202	CAC	20/11/202	CAC	Orange
Motive 5	53	56	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Orange
Demonstration of some degree of being i	29	45	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Green
Influenced by some sense of social ca	5	5	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Following them because of products-bra	12	16	20/11/202	CAC	20/11/202	CAC	Green
Following them because their content is i	22	26	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Green
Demonstration of interest for their co	44	63	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Interested in their lifestyle and or demons	43	65	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Green
Lifestyle	21	29	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Searching for content related to sport	16	26	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Showing some degree of care for app	29	39	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Searching for advice, tips and learning	51	82	20/11/202	CAC	21/11/202	CAC	Green
Searching for news, political opinion a	17	21	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Seeking for entertainment	56	115	20/11/202	CAC	20/11/202	CAC	Green
Showing some degree of parasocial relati	16	21	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Green
Attachment	34	53	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Relationship	2	2	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Yellow
Showing some degree of relatability	28	33	20/11/202	CAC	24/11/202	CAC	Green
Showing some degree of trust	18	25	20/11/202	CAC	22/11/202	CAC	Green

The central theme identified based on the analysis is the “Demonstration of some degree of being influenced by SMIs”. Because many quotations demonstrate a degree of influence, in a variety of ways, such as in relation to entertainment, motivation, inspiration, or some sense of familiarity. Other behavioural themes were generated, based

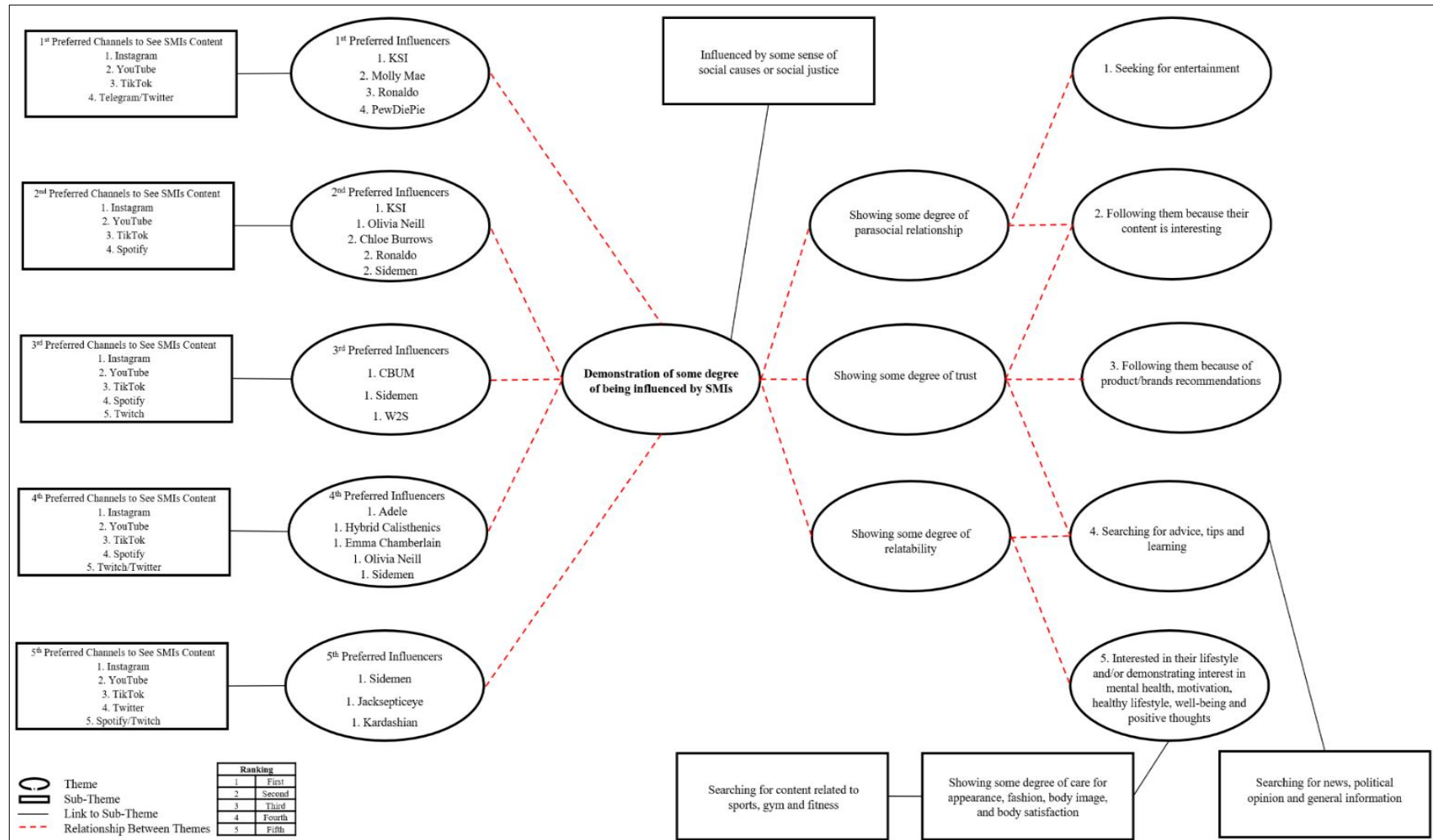
on my analysis towards the participants responses as well as related to theory covered in this research. The next themes are “Showing some degree of parasocial relationship”, “Showing some degree of trust”, “Showing some degree of relatability”. These themes are related to the research general objective and specific objectives. From this analysis will be possible to create comparisons from the quantitative analysis and the qualitative analysis. The identification of themes related to the theories covered in this project, and main objective of this research will provide a insightful answer to the RQ2, research objectives, and the conclusion of this project.

Finally, the last themes created were the main motives to be influenced by SMIs, because the influence was clear through their responses. My analysis in this regard was not based on ranking the number of codes, but based on the analysis of each individual quotation and their power, clarity, linkage to the theory and connection among themes. The themes concerning the motives are, “1. Seeking for entertainment”, “2. Following them because their content is interesting”, “3. Following them because of product/brands recommendations”, “4. Searching for advice, tips and learning”, and “5. Interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts”. Sub-themes were identified based on occurrences linked to the main themes. These sub-themes are, “Influenced by some sense of social causes or social justice”, “Searching for news, political opinion and general information”, “Showing some degree of care for appearance, fashion, body image, and body satisfaction”, and “Searching for content related to sports, gym and fitness”. These sub-themes are specific participants’ motives to make them following influencers, and the sub-themes are linked to specific themes.

As the themes were generated, therefore the 3rd phase was completed. The “4th phase reviewing themes”, was blurred with the 3rd phase through an exhaustive analysis, as known qualitative data analysis is time consuming and requires full attention (Bryman, 2004). In this 4th phase, I performed a recursive review of candidate topics in relation to the coded data elements and the dataset as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Furthermore, I considered some refinement requisites, as follows, 1) if they are themes; 2) the quality of these themes; 3) the boundaries of these themes; 4) if they are meaningful; and 5) if there is coherence in the generation of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Also, a review of the relationships among the data items and codes

that inform each theme and sub-theme were conducted, followed by a revision of the candidate themes in relation to the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). After rigorous analysis, I identified themes that were not fitting with my analysis and for this reason they were eliminated, specifically 4 themes and 2 sub-themes were eliminated from the analysis. According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, (2019) these negative cases should be seen as positive for the research, as the analysis will refine my explanations and interpretations. At the end of this phase I completed a final thematic map (Figure 12), including central themes in relation to the phenomenon under investigation, and to contribute to answer the RQ2 and achieve the objectives of this study.

Figure 12 - Finalised Thematic Map Demonstrating Themes.



The next phase, “5. defining and naming themes” requires a presentation of a detailed analysis of the thematic structure (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). The themes and sub-themes should express the RQ2 and research objectives. All the themes should be brought together to create a clear and informative narrative that matches the content of the dataset and is relevant to the research question, as per the thematic map above, it is clear the representation of the RQ2, and research objectives as recommended by the main theorists (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). A final revision was made but at this stage, the themes are consolidated and there were not needed to extract any themes or modify them.

During this phase is recommended that the researcher choose extracts from the data, such as quotations from participants’ answers in order to communicate the author’s point of view on a given topic in a clear and persuasive way (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). In addition, multiple extracts should be used to demonstrate the participants’ diverse views, as well as demonstrate the coherence and cohesion of the analysis. Each extract should be deeply analysed and interpreted according to their constitutive theme (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Also, this interpretation should take into consideration the broader context of the research and the linkage among themes and sub-themes. There are two ways to make this analysis, the first is the illustratively covering a surface-level analysis of what subject’s wrote in the questionnaire, or analytical when the researcher contextualise the interpretation with the available literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). In this case I followed a mix of both analyses, because in this section I illustratively analysed and the results section (next chapter) I also used the analytical analysis.

Following the above, I created a table with themes and sub-themes, outlining the main extracts from the data, in a quotation format, and I included an illustrative analysis for each theme and sub-theme – Table 55. This table does not provide the themes and sub-themes related to the channels and influencers, because these elements are fully and deeply analysed in the above sections, and a ranking quantitative count was used to evaluate them. However, in the results sections (next chapter), I analysed the influencers and channels’ themes and sub-themes in order to provide an insightful analysis about these events. The table 55 below constitutes a link between themes and sub-themes and

my interpretation about participants' views, as well as provides an explanation about my choice of ranking the motives.

Table 55 - Illustrative Report on Data Excerpts From Participants Regarding Motives.

Themes (Generated nodes in NVivo)	Quotations (Coded into themes' nodes in NVivo)
Demonstration of some degree of being influenced by SMIs	P15: "They boost my mood"; P2: "I've been following Shane for a very very long time now and I feel like he is great at what he does"; P21: "They make me laugh"; P33: "Inspirational"; P42: "Motivate me"; P42: "They make me feel better"; P42: "Teach me to respect myself"; P50: "Inspires me"; P53: "Someone humble and good personality, appreciates fans"; P61: "Positive influence"; P73: "I like how he put on make up and it entertains me, and it amuses me to see it"; P73: "I like the energy they have and they motivate me a lot"; P73: "I like how he dances and in general all his TikToks"; P74: "They inspire to become a better person"; P76: "She inspires me with her way of living"; P76: "Her videos are full of joy and make me happy"; P75: "Addiction";
These participants demonstrated some degree of being influenced by SMIs at different levels and approaches. This influence is identified when there is a factor that might influence the participants' behaviour and attitudes, or there is a reaction as a causal effect from SMI content such as changing moods, changing a state of behaviour, making them laugh, a sense of motivation and inspiration, making the participants feel better and a sense of relatability. Also, there is evidence of attachment that might result in susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, specifically participants 2, 53 and 73. This theme is considered the core theme in the analysis, as it is directly linked to the phenomenon under investigation.	
1) Seeking entertainment	P15: "They are funny to watch"; P15: "To watch when I'm bored"; P16: "They're funny"; P17: "Their humour"; P19: "Funny/Creative content"; P2: "Haunted videos – It's entertaining"; P2: "Another podcast that is very funny and entertaining"; P20: "In movies and sometimes she posts videos of her cooking which are funny"; P20: "I like listening to her music"; P24: "it is enjoyable to watch"; P25: "Entertaining videos"; P26: "Funny content" and "Watch shows with them in it"; P27: "Entertainment"; P3: "Entertaining"; P30: "Comedy"; P35: "Enjoyable"; P49: "Good music"; P52: "Fun Vlogs"; P53: "Someone who regularly posts, entertaining, useful"; P64: "Gossip"; P71: "Laugh"; P72: "He is funny to watch"; P73: "I like how he put on make up and it entertains me"; P75: "Videos about content that is interesting and or entertaining to me"; P78: "They make funny cartoons"; P8: "Horror Stories"; P85: "Entertaining"; P87: "Distraction of life"; P89: "Entertainment";
Entertainment was chosen as the first main motive that make this sample follow their influencers. These participants show a great example of seeking social media channels and influencers to entertain them. This specific theme can relate to other themes because content that is interesting to them will always entertain them. Different content categories also imply there is a degree of entertainment involved, such as sports, fitness, gym, make-up, news, beauty, learning, etc. Therefore, seeking entertainment is	

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evident but also related to other themes and is consequently the main motive for following or seeing influencers and their content. Being entertained by SMIs makes them engaged to their content.	
4) Searching for advice, tips and learning	<p>P1: "She is a makeup artist who I learn tips from"; P10: "Beauty tips"; P12: "She teaches how to do different things with makeup"; P14: "They often teach me about history"; P22: "Photography videos with well editable sequences. I love photography and cinematography, overall enjoyable content"; P22: "Uploads tips and diet plans he used to gain weight"; P22: "Computer hardware reviewer. Insightful information about computers, hardware and honest reviews"; P24: "Gives me a vision into the first time farmer"; P27: "Learning new information"; P42: "Help me educate myself on how to lose weight properly"; P5: "Learn from them, e.g., makeup"; P50: "They give good tips"; P55: "Artist with helpful advice"; P55: "Helps explain some of my favourite games"; P6: "Give advice"; P61: "Teaching useful skills/knowledge"; P63: "To learn about what happens in the celebrities' life"; P65: "Knowledge"; P66: "Japanese teachers"; P7: "Help with study skills"; P80: "Learn something about psychology"; P82: "Updates on music, fashion, inspiration and life tips"; P83: "For healthy lifestyle advice" and "I follow established doctors on Instagram and YouTube"; P89: "Advices" and "Daily Advices"; P56: "Into martial arts";</p>
These participants consider influencers as a sort of source for advice and tips and to teach something. In this perspective, it is possible to see some degree of trust and relatability, as they seek for advice and a way to learn. In addition, they consider influencers as a trusted source of information.	
5) Interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts	<p>P1: "She posts lots of content about products, the gym, a healthy lifestyle"; P10: "Their personal life/experiences"; P19: "Interesting lifestyle"; P4: "Funny/different lifestyle (bus life)"; Participants 49, 59, 64: "Lifestyle"; P63: "To see the lifestyle"; P7: "Day to day life"; P71: "Follow their healthy life"; P74: "They promote healthy lifestyles"; P76: "shares her journey" and "I also like following her journey"; P81: "They promote a healthy lifestyle"; P86: "Veganism" and "Digital Nomads"; P1: "mental health", and "She also talks about mental health"; P1: "She posts content to let people know its ok to be who you are, lots of awareness"; P16: "Their content is very positive"; P22: "Fitness channel, main focus is how he gained weight as he was underweight and he is now healthy. Uploads tips and diet plans he used to gain weight"; P22: "promotes body positivity"; P26: "Inspiration"; P40: "Motivating"; P42: "Motivate me"; P5: "They're positive/uplifting"; P50: "Inspires me"; P52: "Body Positivity"; P53: "Someone authentic, promoting healthy but balanced lifestyle"; P57: "Positive Influencer"; P6: "Promote positive mental health"; P61: "Mood boosters"; P70: "Exercise and healthy food"; P73: "I like the energy they have and they motivate me a lot"; P74: "They promote self-love and acceptance"; P76: "She supports positive living"; P77: "Work out, personal life, unique point of view"; P84: "Nutrition, healthy lifestyle"; P86: "Motivation to work out"; P88: "Happiness"; P9: "Their optimism/pessimism";</p>

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	P90: "Being fit and healthy"; P83: "For healthy lifestyle advice"; P33: "Inspirational";
These participants answered that one of the motives that make them follow influencers is related to their lifestyle. It is possible to see their interest and attachment to the way they live. They perceive these influencers as positive people, inspirational, motivational and who follow a healthy lifestyle. This analysis also implies a degree of being influenced by SMIs, as influencers have the power to motivate, such as in participants 42, 73 and 76. Also, they might be simply interested in their way of living and their day-to-day routine.	
Shows some degree of relatability	P14: "Their personality is like mine"; P15: "I relate to some of their videos"; P16: "They have the same interests as me"; P16: "I can relate to them"; P21: "They share similar hobbies"; P4: "relatable"; P51: "Just like her"; P53: "Someone who posts original content and relatable"; P54: "Shared interests"; P64: "I identify myself with her personality"; P65: "Relatability"; P79: "Share common ideas"; P87: "Relatable to my life"; P9: "How relatable they are"; P71: "Their charisma";
These participants show a sense of relatability and how relatable they think they are to their SMIs. Participants recognise their personalities related to them, they share habits like theirs, and therefore they are relatable to them. Being relatable to this degree might show a sort of attachment and parasocial relationship.	
2) Following them because their content is interesting	P23: "Interested in the sport"; P23: "Interested in the content"; P24: "I am interested in the content he puts up and it is enjoyable to watch"; P24: "Interested in the content and gives me information on different types of equipment"; P26: "Enjoy content from them"; P35: "Enjoyable"; P39: "I like their videos and ideas"; P42: "I enjoy their content"; P5: "Enjoy their content"; P56: "I like their content"; P75: "Videos about content that is interesting"; P14: "Their content is interesting"; Participants 3, 35, 39, 41, 54: "Interesting"; P6: "Talk about the things I'm interested in"; P74: "Interesting content overall"; P85: "Musically interesting"; P14: "Their content is engaging";
This motive that makes this young sample follow their SMIs is simply because the content is interesting to them. Specific categories of content correlated to the sample's needs and desires will always be interesting and will make the sample engaged with the SMI. This theme could be related to many types of content and depends on their taste and what they are looking for. This degree of interest is a sort of recognition of a need that can be fulfilled when they are exposed to the SMI content, causing arousal or excitement, like those who mentioned "enjoyable", therefore causing engagement such as cited by participant 14.	
3) Following them because of product/brands recommendations	P10: "Their own brands e.g., Saffron x Primark"; P11: "Shop on pretty little thing"; P12: "She promotes jewellery"; P13: "makeup products"; P13: "Clothing brands/clothing style"; P16: "They promote products that I already own and enjoy"; P19: "Brands ambassador, that I have used before"; P21: "They promote brands I like"; P22: "Computer hardware reviewer"; P72: "I like to see the products and brands she uses"; P72: "I like the products she uses"; P73: "I discovered her on social media for one of the things she was sponsoring, and I like it"; P81: "They promote brands that I may like"; P82: "Product recommendation" and "To learn better products for skincare and tips";
For this motive, there is a clear and direct relationship between the participants and product/brand recommendations. This is not subjective, but a realistic and clear expression. This shows a sense of consumer trust, as these participants trust SMI recommendations when considering a product for purchase, following a brand or using a product or service.	
Showing some degree of parasocial relationship	P1: "Stacey shows what a realistic life looks like, even for famous people";

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	<p>P2: "I've been following Shane for a very very long time now and I feel like he is great at what he does"; P2: "She's very out there. She began her yt career doing story times and now she does all kinds of things"; P2: "I originally met them on David Dobrik's vlogs. They are very funny and I enjoy listening to their podcast"; P20: "Is in movies I have seen"; P25: "He is a great person and my favourite footballer"; P25: "Watch shows with them in it"; P39: "I like their videos and ideas"; P51: "Saw her on TV"; P53: "Someone humble and good personality, appreciates fans"; P53: "Someone who had to work for their followers and were not always famous"; P72: "I like her fashion sense and I like to watch her videos"; P76: "Her videos are full of joy and make me happy"; P76: "She is a writer and inspires me with her books and quotes"; P79: "I like their personality"; P9: "Is active with their followers"; P87: "Interaction"; P71: "I feel connected to him";</p>
<p>The participants demonstrate some degree of parasocial relationship in their answers. There is a level of intimacy, relatability, attachment and trust that generates an illusion of intimate friendship or close contact. This is also represented by participants using their names as if they were someone close or familiar. Additionally, using adjectives such as "great person, humble, good personality" shows a feeling of knowing that person intimately or a sense of being connected, both showing a degree of parasocial relationship.</p>	
Showing some degree of trust	<p>P1: "She posts content to let people know its ok to be who you are, lots of awareness"; P22: "honest reviews"; P23: "Interested in the content, seems like a good person"; P23: "They are good people"; P23: "Good influence/Look up to them"; P24: "Interested in the content, seems like a good person"; P42: "Teach me to respect myself" and "They make me feel better"; P52: "Being genuine"; P57: "Genuine Influencer"; P58: "Honesty"; P77: "Financial topics and reality, tell the truth"; P9: "Their honesty";</p>
<p>This theme was generated based on participants' responses showing a certain degree of trust and trustworthiness regarding their influencers. This was seen in the theme of product/brand recommendations. This is more clearly seen by how they consider SMIs to be trustworthy, honest and genuine.</p>	
Sub-Themes (Generated nodes in NVivo)	Quotations (Coded into sub-themes' nodes in NVivo)
Showing some degree of care for appearance, fashion, body image and body satisfaction	<p>P22: "Fitness channel, main focus is how he gained weight as he was underweight and he is now healthy. Uploads tips and diet plans he used to gain weight"; P22: "Body builder, promotes body positivity and is open about schemes influences how to gain popularity"; P42: "Help me educate myself on how to lose weight properly"; P52: "Body Positivity"; P60: "Beauty"; Participants 19, 37, 49, 58, 63, 66: "Fashion"; P74: "They promote body positivity"; Participants 1, 90: "Body image";</p>
<p>These excerpts outline participants' interests and attachments to content related to body image/satisfaction and general appearance. This sub-theme is linked to the lifestyle theme as both topics are correlated and share common interests.</p>	
Searching for content related to sports, gym and fitness	<p>P11: "Love sports"; Participants 30, 60: "Sports"; P31: "Soccer"; Participants 31, 51: "Gym"; Participants 31, 36: "Basketball"; Participants 32, 36, 37, 68: "Football"; Participants 36, 37: "Boxing"; P36: "Rugby"; Participants 37, 40: "Fitness"; P38: "Rugby Training, Recovery Training, Building a gym"; P56: "Kickboxing"; P66: "Exercise"; P77: "Work out"; P90: "Being fit";</p>

There are several excerpts specifically related to sports, gym and fitness, forming this sub-theme. Additionally, it is linked to the lifestyle theme.	
Searching for news, political opinion and general information	P10: "They live in a different county so seeing any parts of the UK/USA"; P13: "News/popularity" and "Trends going around"; P21: "They post useful information on topics I enjoy"; P24: "Gives me news on latest competitions"; P25: "Information about FIFA"; Participants 59, 60, 84: "News"; P61: "Useful information"; P84: "News/Information"; P85: "Political opinion";
Participants in this sub-theme show that they use it as a source of information, news and political opinion. This highlights the influential power influencers have over their audience. This sub-theme is linked to the theme of searching for advice, tips and learning, which is also a type of searching for specific information.	
Influenced by some sense of social causes or social justice	P1: "She stands up for what she believes in, especially women's rights, body image, mental health"; P11: "Support man united"; P14: "Their channel is not based on commercial interest"; P20: "Would post things about the environment/climate change and women's rights and injustices"; P65: "Speak out against systemic issues";
These excerpts illustrate that participants care and might be influenced by content related to social causes or social justice. This sub-theme is directly linked to the core theme in this project, a demonstration of some degree of being influenced by SMIs.	

Finally, the last phase in the TA is "6. producing the report", generally this phase is blurred with the previous phase as in qualitative data analysis the write-up process occurs during the entire analytical work (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

Phase 6 can be considered the conclusion and final review of the report (such as a journal article or thesis) that the researcher most likely started writing before starting the thematic analysis. Thus, being the case of this study as I have written the report through the entire analysis in my thesis, and an article that will come from this TA analysis. As well as, the results and discussion sections (next chapters) about the TA analysis can also be considered in the phase 6, and it is included in the next chapter of this thesis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022).

2.12 Validity and Reliability

This research stresses validity and reliability to certify that the data have been appropriately collected and interpreted. Therefore, this stage strengthens the credibility of this project (Yin, 2015; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). The results of this study will be validated through statistical tests that can be seen in Chapter 3. Test validity is the degree to which evidence and theory support the interpretations of test scores (Heck, 1998; Pallant, 2020).

The internal reliability will be checked for all scales through the Cronbach's Alpha. Internal consistency reliability refers to the way that things "fit together". Internal consistency is measured by calculating the Cronbach alpha statistic, which is represented in the literature using the Greek symbol " α " (Cronbach, 1990; Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996; Pallant, 2020). According to (Cronbach, 1990), values over .7 indicate good internal consistency reliability.

Furthermore, internal validity will be ensured in both phases. This is a process that establishes that the data is accurate and correctly processed (Creswell and Clark, 2018; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Three validation strategies will be used in this research, encompassing the three qualitative validity lenses: the researcher's lens, the participants' lens, and the readers' lens (Creswell, 2016). From a researcher's perspective, triangulation will be used as a tactic to construct validity (Leavy, 2017). Triangulation includes using multiple sources of evidence, statistic tests, extensive quotations, and reviews of transcripts to verify data accuracy (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Finally, reliability will be evaluated. Reliability refers to how other researchers can carry out the same findings of the research in distinct contexts (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

2.13 Threats to Validity

From an internal validity perspective, self-report questionnaires may limit the research's validity (Creswell, 2009). Because they ask subjects to respond the questions honestly, participants can presume and assume what is being asked and can respond to these questions introspectively. In order to mitigate this threat, I explained to the students, in person, that they were asked to answer the questionnaires as truthfully as they could, as their answers would have no effect on them personally. This process of data collection and analysis was entirely anonymous. Variables in this study were not controlled, and for this reason this study pertains to the nonexperimental design approach. Thus, this perspective might be a threat to internal validity as well. Therefore, interpreting relationships among variables that were not there were avoided and not included in this

study in order to eliminate this threat. Only relationships presented in the data were reported in this study.

From an external validity perspective, this study was conducted in Ireland with a small sample population ($N=91$) although the size is justified, and therefore generalisability across group, time, and place might be an external threat to validity. The Gen Z cohort characteristics might differ from one country to another, as cultural patterns also change. Therefore, the results of this research might be difficult to generalise to all Generation Z population worldwide, but possibly to be generalised across Ireland.

2.14 Summary

The first section of this chapter 2 outlined an overview of the research methodology and considered different authors' lenses to explain the methods adopted. This was followed by a description of the methods, the philosophical underpinning and the research design for this study. Also, the research questions, aims and objectives were outlined in this section. After that, the data collection methods were explained, and how the critical literature review, desk research, the questionnaire, and personality test were designed, implemented and/or adopted. Furthermore, ethics, sample population, access and data collection processes were described and conceptualised. Finally, the data analysis process from both strands, quantitative and qualitative, was reported in this chapter, followed by a discussion about validity and reliability.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis will discuss the data analysis results, interpretation and discussion of the results, test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. Finally, the last chapter will conclude the thesis by outlining the findings, further research, recommendations and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER III

3.0 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

The present chapter introduces the results of this study followed by the discussion based on the results. This study aims to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). A fixed mixed-methods convergent parallel design was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently through the SUSIS questionnaire and HEXACO personality test. A sample of $N=91$ young people aged from 16 to 26 years old participated in this study, in which 91 responses were valid and reliable to be used in the quantitative analysis and 81 responses were valid and reliable to be used in the qualitative analysis. In Chapter 2 (sections 2.10 and 2.11), I presented the data collection procedures used in this study, and some elements from the data analysis such as data preparation, data cleaning, exploratory factor analysis and the qualitative data analysis.

In the results chapter, I covered the quantitative data analysis and results aiming to test the hypotheses and answer the research question 1 (RQ1) What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?

The two hypotheses were tested and interpreted. The hypotheses are:

- H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).
- H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

A descriptive analysis of the sample was addressed in both strands, quantitative and qualitative, including demographics and facts. Additionally, structural equation model (SEM) was presented, evaluation of the sample size, and reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity and discriminant validity of the indicators were stated.

The qualitative analysis was interpreted as a strategy to merge both strands of this mixed-methods design. As per the table below:

Table 56 - Procedures for Implementing a Convergent Design, (Creswell and Clark, 2018, p.185).

Procedures for Implementing a Convergent Design STEPS 3 & 4 Fixed Convergent Parallel Mixed Methods Design Purpose: Complimentary		
Step 3: Use Strategies to Merge the Two Sets of Results	and	Step 4: Interpret the Merged Results
Used Strategies to Merge the Two Sets of Results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify content areas represented in both data sets and compare, contrast, and/or synthesize the results in the discussion section. • Identify differences within one set of results based on dimensions within the other set and examine the differences within the discussion section. 		Use Strategies to Merge the Two Sets of Results: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify content areas represented in both data sets and compare, contrast, and/or synthesize the results in the discussion section. • Identify differences within one set of results based on dimensions within the other set and examine the differences within a display organized by the dimensions.

Finally, the quantitative and qualitative research questions were answered and discussed.

The quantitative analysis gave the possibility to discuss the research problem of this thesis “From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs?”

The qualitative data results were presented and answered the second and third guiding research questions: (RQ2) What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them? And (RQ3) Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

The specific objectives of this study were achieved based on the results and discussion, A – Determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers. And B – Holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers’ content on young peoples’ lives.

The results were compared in order to obtain a more complete understanding of the phenomenon. This combination was useful to validate one set of findings with the other.

3.1 Data Collection

The data collection happened during one year (2022) in two educational institutions located in Ireland, a public secondary school and a higher private education institution. This process was challenging as this research began in September 2020 during COVID-19 pandemic, and education institutions were reluctant to give access to the target sample population. This study was designed to be developed in Ireland, and collect data in person at educational institutions. More details about recruitment, access and data collection can be seen in the chapter 3 of this thesis.

Even though, there were difficulties in the data collection process, I managed to recruit $N=91$ participants, in which $n=91$ are valid for the quantitative strand of this research and $n=81$ are valid for the qualitative strand of this research. This difference occurred because from the $N=91$, $n=10$ subjects did not answer properly the questions 5 and 6 of the SUSIS questionnaire being the qualitative source of primary data collection, and for this reason they were eliminated from the qualitative strand of this research. $N=91$ is statistically sufficient for this research.

3.2 Data Cleaning and Transcription

The data cleaning process in detail can be identified in Chapter 2 of this thesis. After exporting and transcribing the data from the paper-based questionnaires (SUSIS and HEXACO) to Word and NVivo concerned to the qualitative strand, and SPSS and Excel in relation to the quantitative strand of this research, I examined the data for missing values and data manipulation was conducted (Appendix 15 and 16). Only questionnaires with all items filled remained in this research. The entire sample $N=91$ fully filled the quantitative strand of the SUSIS Questionnaire and HEXACO Personality Inventory, mainly because during the employability of these questionnaires, I checked them and asked participants who missed questions to fill them out, as it is outlined in the invigilator forms in the appendix section. However, qualitative strand (Questions 5 and 6 – SUSIS

Questionnaire) was appropriately answered by $n=81$ participants, as previously explained in this thesis, $n=10$ participants did not complete the questions 5 and 6 of the SUSIS questionnaire or I could not understand the calligraphy, and therefore they were eliminated.

3.3 Evaluation of the Sample Size

The inverse square root method was created by Kock and Hadaya (2018). This method assumes a normal distribution and is suitable for models with continuous variables.

The formula used to calculate the minimum sample size is:

$$N > (Z_{\alpha/2} + Z_{\beta})^2 / \Delta^2$$

Or as

$$N > \frac{(Z_{\alpha/2} + Z_{\beta})^2}{\Delta^2}$$

In this case, I used a confidence interval of 95%, which means that $Z_{\alpha/2} = 1.96$, and a power level of 80%, which means that $Z_{\beta} = 0.84$.

$$N > (1.96 + 0.84)^2 / \Delta^2$$

Or as

$$N > \frac{(1.96+0.84)^2}{0.377^2}$$

I used a previously calculated value for Δ , which is 0.377. This value is likely based on prior research that suggests this is a meaningful effect size to detect in the context of the Structural Equation Model (Kock and Hadaya, 2018).

Considering CI95%, the sample size was calculated to ensure a sufficient N for the correlations made using the formula by Kock and Hadaya (2018) below. No missing data points were present so no corrections for missing values were necessary. The Structural Equation Model was analysed considering 4 aspects: Reliability, Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity (Kock and Hadaya, 2018).

Therefore, the minimum sample size of 56 is to ensure adequate power for the analyses based on the chosen confidence interval, power level, and effect size. The sample size in this research is 91.

$$N > 7.84/0.377^2$$

$$N > 7.84/0.142129$$

$$N > 55.15 \therefore \geq 56 \text{ (sample size)}$$

No missing data points were present in this study, so no corrections for missing values were necessary. The Structural Equation Model was analysed considering 4 aspects: Reliability, Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity.

3.4 Description of the Sample – $N=91$

The table below depicts the frequency counts for selected variables. This information was collected through the SUSIS questionnaire demographics and factual questions. These questions sought to collect information regarding participants' sex, age, education, social media channels visited at least once a week, time per day spent on the social media channels, and favourite social media platforms. This first section was named Q1 including 9 items in which these questions can be categorised as free answer questions, ranking questions and multiple-choice questions. Table below shows that all participants are part of the Generation Z as their age range is from 16 to 26 years old. All participants are resident and living in Ireland as it was a requirement to participate in this study. 71.4% of the sample ($n=65$) ages between 16 – 20 years old, 22% ($n=20$) of the sample population ages between 21 to 25 years old and 6.6% of the sample ages 26 ($n=6$) years old. In relation to sex, 62.6% ($n=57$) of the sample is female, and 37.4% male ($n=34$).

The education background was another variable, in which the majority of the population 64.8% ($n=59$) study in a secondary school and 35.2% ($n=32$) study in a private higher education institution, these institutions are located in Ireland. 64.8% ($n=59$) are attending the leaving certificate, secondary school and transition year courses. 28.6

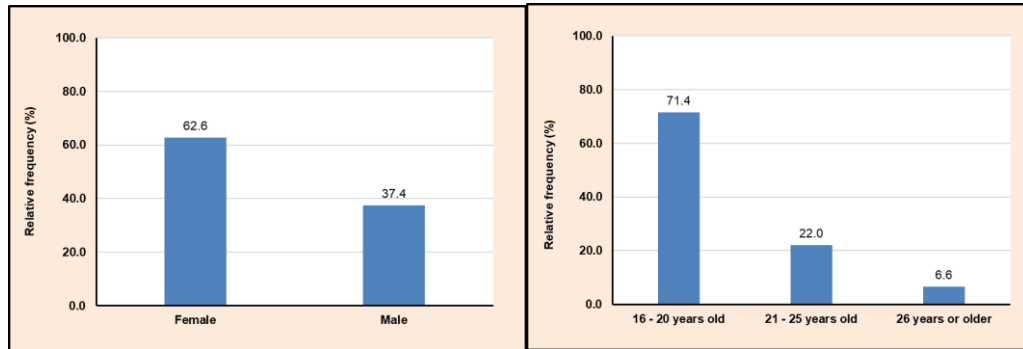
($n=26$) of the sample are attending undergraduate courses and the remained 6.6% ($n=6$) are attending postgraduate course in the private higher education institution. The participants' names and nick names were removed from the data analysis, and the education institutions' names were also removed in order to follow the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (European Union, 2023).

Table 57 - Frequency Counts for Selected Variables $N=91$.

General Features	($N=91$)	%
Sex		
Female	57	62.6
Male	34	37.4
Age range		
16 - 20 years old	65	71.4
21 - 25 years old	20	22.0
26 years	6	6.6
What school are you at?		
Secondary School	59	64.8
Private Higher Education Institution	32	35.2
What course of study are you attending?		
Leaving Certificate	35	38.5
Secondary School	17	18.7
Transition Year (TY)	7	7.7
Undergraduate Course	26	28.6
Postgraduate Course	6	6.6

The graphs below display that the same information in a clear visual manner. The female sample accounts for the majority of the participants (62.6%) and subjects with 16-20 years old (71.4%) account for the majority of the sample. Other graphs in relation to descriptive analysis can be seen in the appendix section.

Graph 4 - Sex and Age.



The three tables below show the information collected from the Question 1 – Item 7, asking subjects about which social media channels they have visited at least once per week in a ranking order. The most visited channels as the 1st most visited in a ranking order are Snapchat (39.6%), TikTok (23.1%), Instagram (23.1%), WhatsApp (19.8%) and YouTube (16.5%). Followed by Facebook (4.4%), and Twitter (3.3%). The less visited channels are LinkedIn (1.1%), We Chat (1.1%), and Telegram (1.1%). Other channels were named by participants and 4.4% of respondents visit them as the 1st most visited.

Table 58 - Social Media Channels Visited at Least Once per Week in Ranking Order/1.

Most Visited	Snapchat		TikTok		Instagram		WhatsApp	
	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%
1 st	36	39.6	21	23.1	21	23.1	18	19.8
2 nd	15	16.5	28	30.7	21	23.1	9	9.9
3 rd	8	8.8	12	13.2	24	26.4	12	13.2
4 th	3	3.3	5	5.5	16	17.6	8	8.8
5 th	5	5.5	2	2.2	1	1.1	22	24.2
6 th	3	3.3	6	6.6	0	0.0	8	8.8
7 th	6	6.6	1	1.1	0	0.0	1	1.1
8 th	6	6.6	2	2.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
9 th	0	0.0	2	2.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Not Visited	9	9.9	12	13.2	8	8.8	13	14.2

Table 59 - Social Media Channels Visited at Least Once per Week in Ranking Order/2.

Most Visited	YouTube		Facebook		Twitter		LinkedIn	
	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%

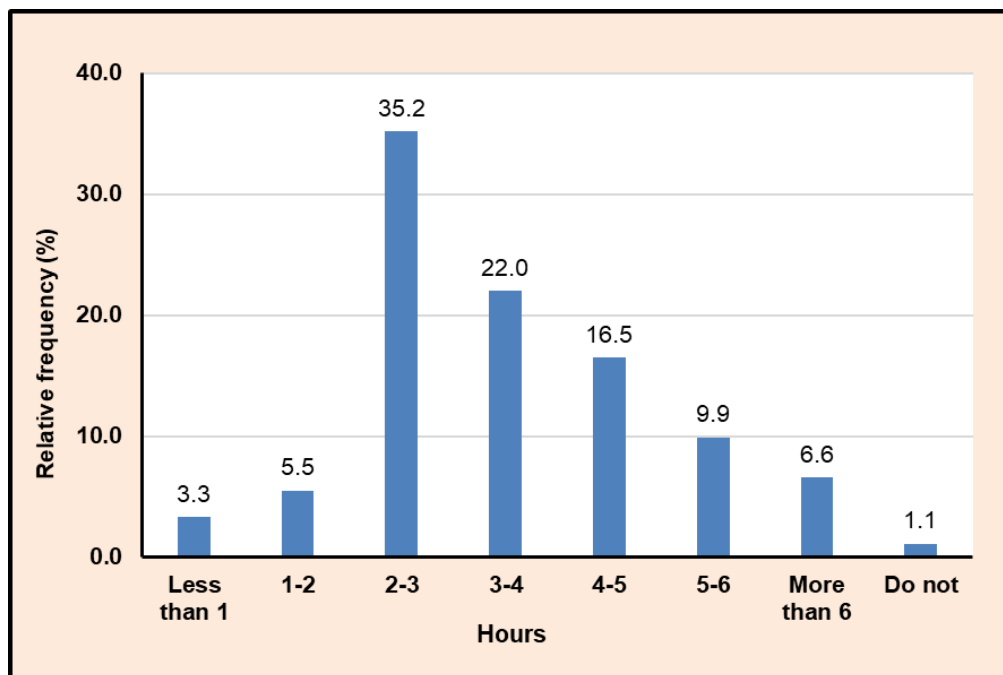
1st	15	16.5	4	4.4	3	3.3	1	1.1
2nd	8	8.8	4	4.4	3	3.3	1	1.1
3rd	17	18.7	7	7.7	4	4.4	2	2.2
4th	17	18.7	13	14.2	6	6.6	0	0.0
5th	10	11.0	7	7.7	9	9.9	1	1.1
6th	7	7.7	12	13.2	6	6.6	0	0.0
7th	3	3.3	7	7.7	8	8.8	0	0.0
8th	1	1.1	1	1.1	3	3.3	3	3.3
9th	0	0.0	1	1.1	1	1.1	1	1.1
10 th	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	5.5
11th	0	0.0	1	1.1	1	1.1	1	1.1
Not Visited	13	14.2	34	37.4	47	51.6	76	83.5

Table 60 - Social Media Channels Visited at Least Once per Week in Ranking Order/3.

Less Visited	We Chat		Telegram		QQ		Other	
	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%	(n=91)	%
1st	1	1.1	1	1.1	0	0.0	4	4.4
2nd	1	1.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
3rd	1	1.1	3	3.3	1	1.1	0	0.0
4th	0	0.0	3	3.3	0	0.0	1	1.1
5th	0	0.0	2	2.2	0	0.0	3	3.3
6th	0	0.0	2	2.2	0	0.0	1	1.1
7th	4	4.4	5	5.5	0	0.0	4	4.4
8th	10	11.0	5	5.5	2	2.2	0	0.0
9th	14	15.4	3	3.3	5	5.5	1	1.1
10 th	0	0.0	1	1.1	0	0.0	2	2.2
11th	1	1.1	6	6.6	1	1.1	1	1.1
Not Visited	59	64.8	60	65.9	82	90.1	74	81.3

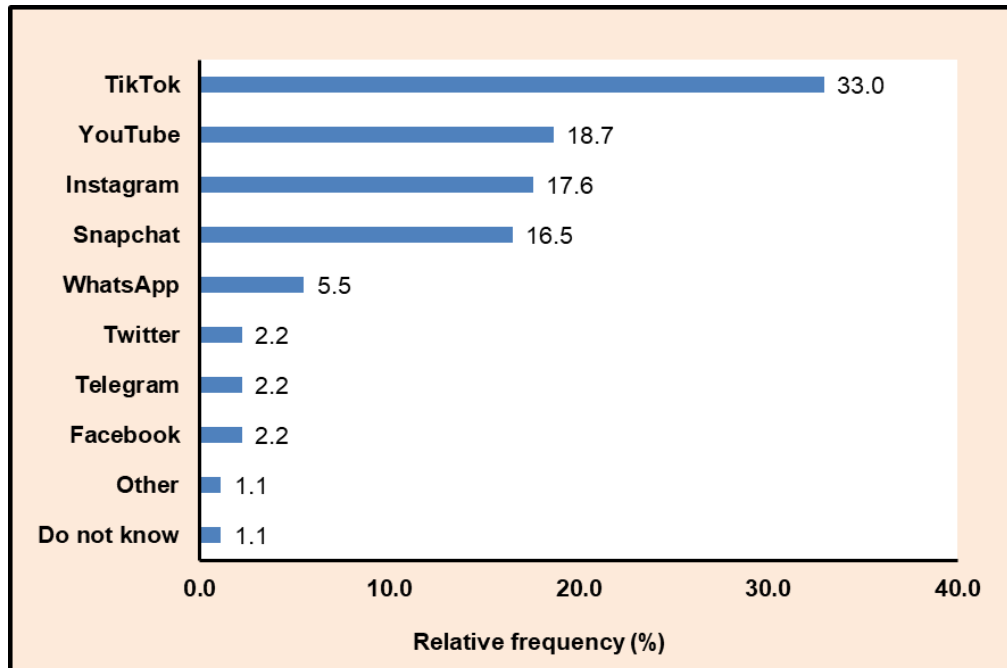
Another factual question in regard to participants' social media habits asked them how much time per day they spend on the social media channels they visit at least once per week (channels in the tables above). The majority of the population (35.2%) spend about 2-3 hours accessing those channels per day, 22% about 3-4 hours, 16.5% about 4-5 hours, 9.9% about 5-6 hours, 6.6% more than 6 hours per day, 5.5% about 1-2 hours and 3.3% of the sample less than 1 hours per day. The remained 1.1% do not know.

Graph 5 - Time per Day Spent on Social Media Channels Visited at Least Once per Week.



Finally, the last question asked the participants what their favourite social media platform is. 33% of the sample answered TikTok as their favourite social media platform. Followed by YouTube (18.7%), Instagram (17.6%), Snapchat (16.5%), WhatsApp (5.5%), Twitter (2.2%), Telegram (2.2%), Facebook (2.2%), Others (1.1%) and Do not know (1.1%). A full detail descriptive statistics tables exported from SPSS can be seen in Appendices 15 and 16, the graphs and tables above were build based on descriptive statistical analysis via SPSS.

Graph 6 - Favourite Social Media Platforms.



3.5 Quantitative Analysis Results: Testing H1 and H2 and Answering RQ1

The focus of this section was to present the results from the quantitative data analysis aiming to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs) (General Research Objective) and determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers (Specific Objective - A). To address this specific objective, the RQ1 was taken into consideration: What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers? To answer this question, two hypotheses were tested:

H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).

H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

The quantitative strand sample population comprised $N=91$ participants between 16 and 26 years old, part of the Generation Z cohort and living in Ireland. The quantitative strand is prioritised in the mixed-methods design due to its importance within the research and its direct link to the research problem: From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs?

3.5.1 Structural Equation Model (SEM)

A structural equation model (SEM) was developed to represent the SMI's influence using the SUSIS questionnaire. SEM is used to investigate complex phenomena involving factors (latent variables) that cannot be measured directly (Mueller, 1997; Maciel *et al.*, 2014). Personality traits from HEXACO-PI-R-60 (HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised, 60-item test) were evaluated for association with the data obtained from SUSIS. Participation of the 7 questions that compose SUSIS was evaluated to create a model composed of 25 indicators and 2 convergence areas:

Convergence Area: SOCIAL_PERCEPTION

- **CT1**_Perception;
- **CT3**_Parasocial;
- **CT4**_Trust.

Convergence Area: HARMFUL

- **CT2_Harm_1**_Addictive and Vicious Content;
- **CT2_Harm_2**_Wrongful and Unreasonable Content;
- **CT2_Harm_3**_Fraudulent and Hazardous Content;
- **CT2_Harm_4**_Noxious Content;
- **CT2_Harm_5**_Delusory Content.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Principal Component Analysis (PCA) filtered out the factors. Elimination criteria were Factor Loadings < 0.3000 (EFA) or if the presence of the indicator explained $< 70\%$ of the variance of the dependent variable.

Table 61 - List of indicator constructs, their question source, the number of indicators and which were eliminated or kept after filter criteria.

Indicator Constructs	Source	Indicators		
		Total	Eliminated	Remaining
CT1_Perception	Q2	17	3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17	1, 2, 6
CT2_Harm_1_Addictive	Q3	5	11	2, 9, 10, 12
CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful /Unreasonable	Q3	11	13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25	15, 16, 24
CT2_Harm_3_ Fraudulent	Q3	4	27	22, 23, 26
CT2_Harm_4_Noxious	Q3	5	4, 28	3, 7, 8
CT2_Harm_5_Delusory	Q3	3	N/A	1, 5, 6
CT3_Parasocial	Q7	11	16, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 26	18, 19, 24
CT4_Trust	Q7	9	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 39	36, 37, 38

The SEM was initially composed of 11 constructs: Perception, Harm_1_Addictive, Harm_2_Wrongful, Harm_3_Fraudulent, Harm_4_Noxious, Harm_5_Delusory, Parasocial, Trust, SOCIAL_PERCEPTION, HARMFUL and INFLUENCE_SMI.

Discriminant validity assessment was performed, considering a criterion by (Hulland, 1999), by which an indicator is acceptable with a factor loading ≥ 0.708 . Hair *et al.* (2022) suggest removing all indicators below this cut-off from the model, after which 25 indicators remained to compose the SEM.

The model that represents SMI influence was thus composed of 11 constructs and 25 observable variables. Exogenous latent variables are explained by previously calculated values, external to the model, and are therefore explainable through observable variables. Endogenous variables are explained through exogenous variables.

Table 62 - Organisation of latent variables and the number of constituent indicators for each construct.

Constructs			
Endogenous Latent Variables		Exogenous Latent Variables	Number of Indicators
INFLUENCE_SMI _s	SOCIAL_ PERCEPTION	C1_Perception	3
		C3_Parasocial	3
		C4_Trust	3
	HARMFUL	H_Addictive	4
		H_Wrongful	3
		H_Fraudulent	3
		H_Noxious	3
		H_Delusory	3

The model in reference to HEXACO-PI-R-60 is composed of 6 exogenous latent variables, which represent the following personality traits: HHUM (Honesty-Humility), EMOT (Emotionality), EXTRV (Extraversion), AGREE (Agreeableness), CONSC (Conscientiousness) and OPEX (Openness to Experience).

Using a structural equation modelling method, the following hypotheses were tested:

- **Hypothesis 1:** The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire.

The 25 observable variables (SUSIS) used in the model are of the ordinal, qualitative type (representing 5 levels) and the latent variables are of the continuous, quantitative type.

3.5.2 Reliability, Internal Consistency, Convergent Validity and Discriminant Validity

The reliability of the indicators measures the strength of the dependence of the latent variable in relation to the observable variables. It is strong when the factor loading is ≥ 0.708 (Hulland, 1999). The internal consistency of the constructs refers to how the indicators of the construct are interrelated; the reliability criterion Diamantopoulos *et al.* (2012) state that the reliability is acceptable when RhoC is between 0.6 and 0.95 and Cronbach's α is > 0.7 .

The convergent validity of the construct correlates to how much said construct converges to explain the variance of the indicators. This is measured by Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and is defined as the square of the average of the factor loadings associated to the construct. AVE was considered acceptable when > 0.5 , as defined by Hair *et al.* (2022).

The discriminant validity of the construct correlates to the relationship between a heterotrait (HT) and monotrait (MT), acceptable when $HT/MT < 0.9$ (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015). The heterotrait-monotrait ratio is the average of all indicator correlations among constructs that measure different constructs (heterotrait-heteromethod correlations) in relation to the geometric average of the average correlations of the indicators that measure the same construct (monotrait-heteromethod correlations).

Table 63 - Indicators that passed filter criteria and their factor loadings, indicating reliability. All factor loadings were considered strong unless otherwise noted.

Construct	Indicators (Factor Loadings)
C1_Perception	Q2_1 (0.843) Q2_2 (0.919) Q2_6 (0.675; weak)
C3_Parasocial	Q7_18 (0.850) Q7_19 (0.861) Q7_24 (0.776)

C4_Trust	Q7_36 (0.933) Q7_37 (0.937) Q7_38 (0.909)
H_ADDICTIVE	Q3_2 (0.689) Q3_10 (0.878) Q3_9 (0.940) Q3_12 (0.706)
H_WRONGFUL	Q3_15 (0.854) Q3_16 (0.880) Q3_24 (0.858)
H_FRAUDULENT	Q3_22 (0.881) Q3_23 (0.946) Q3_26 (0.761)
H_NOXIOUS	Q3_3 (0.765) Q3_7 (0.884) Q3_8 (0.872)
H_DELUSORY	Q3_1 (0.795) Q3_5 (0.864) Q3_6 (0.879)

Table 64 - Rho C values and Cronbach's α for each construct (internal consistency), average variance extracted (AVE; convergent validity) and heterotrait/monotrait ratios (HT/MT; discriminant validity) of the constructs. All internal consistency data were in an acceptable range.

Construct	RhoC	Cronbach's α	AVE	HT/MT
C1_Perception	0.761	0.743	0.670 (acceptable)	
C3_Parasocial	0.794	0.776	0.689 (acceptable)	

C4_Trust	0.920	0.918	0.859 (acceptable)	
H_ADDICTIVE	0.966	0.948	0.906 (acceptable)	
H_WRONGFUL	0.832	0.831	0.747 (acceptable)	
H_FRAUDULENT	0.852	0.830	0.750 (acceptable)	
H_NOXIOUS	0.815	0.795	0.709 (acceptable)	
H_DELUSORY	0.803	0.802	0.717 (acceptable)	
SOCIAL_PERCEPTION	0.837	0.829	0.429 (low)	0.879 (acceptable)
HARMFUL	0.913	0.907	0.407 (low)	1.013 (above acceptable)
INFLUENCE_SMI _s	0.920	0.912	0.311 (low)	0.528 (acceptable)

3.5.3 Overview of the Structural Equation Model (SEM)

Correspondence between SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and HARMFUL in relation to INFLUENCE_SMI_s can be interpreted as: The path coefficient of SOCIAL_PERCEPTION in relation to INFLUENCE_SMI_s is 0.377 and the path coefficient of HARMFUL in relation to INFLUENCE_SMI_s is 0.771.

The relationship among the variables of interest was established as seen in Figure 13 below. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used as mentioned in the beginning of this section, in order to identify the relationship among the factors used in the modelling method. This method included several models, including the Covariance Analysis of Structure (CAS), the Latent Variable Analysis (LVA), the Confirmatory Factorial Analysis (CFA), and the Path Analysis (PA); it was also known as the LISREL

analysis. The SEM employed a series of dependency relations at the same time, which is especially useful when a dependent variable becomes independent in subsequent dependency relations (Mueller, 1997; Maciel *et al.*, 2014).

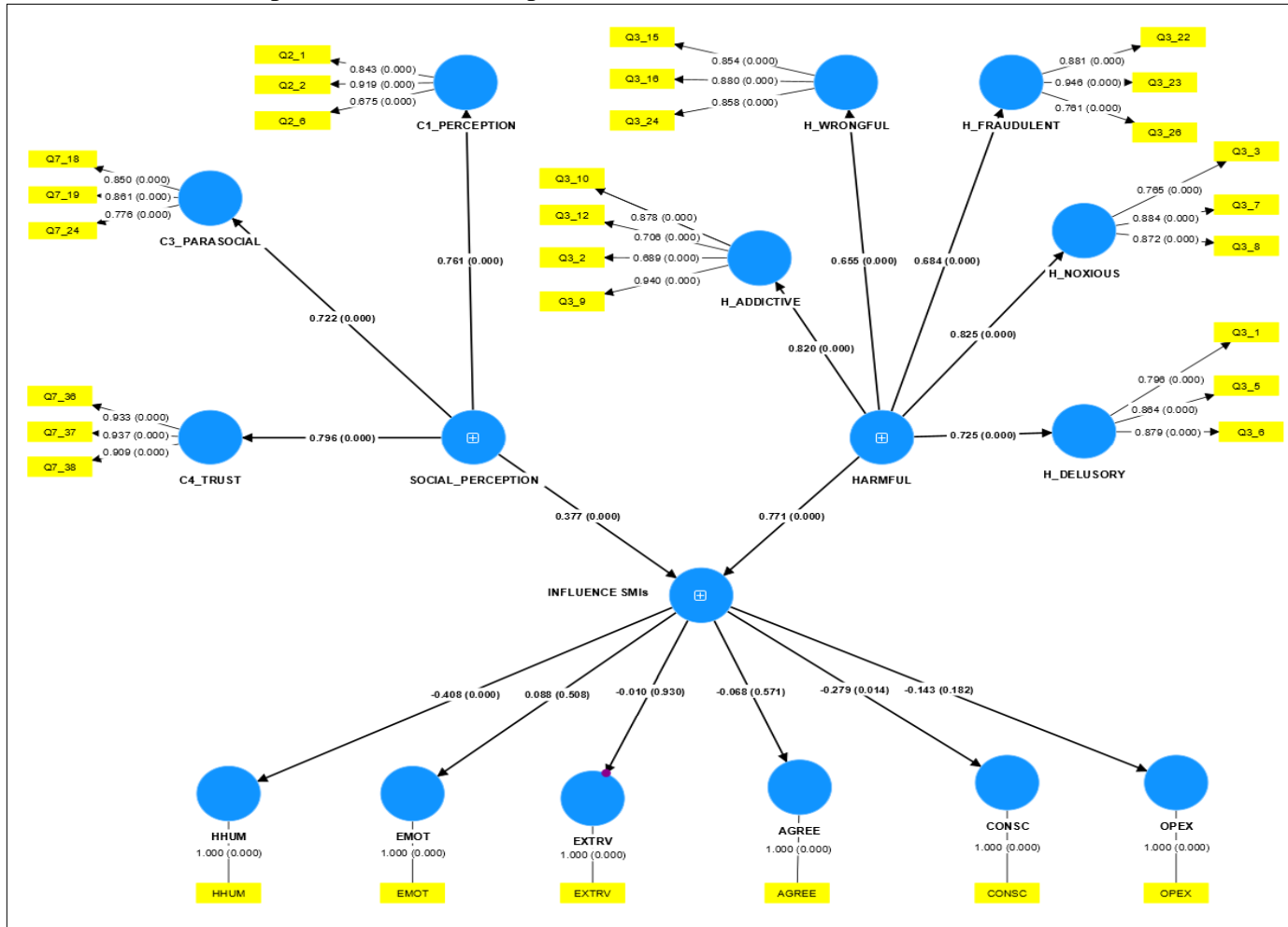
The exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) variables are the constructs, in Table 65 below is possible to see the remaining constructs that composes the SUSIS questionnaire. Therefore, considering all the evaluations, the final SUSIS questionnaire will be composed of 25 indicators and 2 convergence areas, as seen in the figure 13 below. In addition, when the HEXACO personality traits were added to the model it is possible to see a good association in this regard, thus is confirmed that the HEXACO PI 60 items' results can be integrated to the model, as seen in the figure 13 below.

In general, SEM models involve measurement and structural theories, in this research the proposed conceptual framework was tested and represented in the figure 13 below. The theories and concepts proposed in the conceptual framework, are represented by the SUSIS questionnaire and finally tested via the SEM model as per the figure 13. The measurement theory specifies how measured variables represent the constructs involved in the conceptual framework logically and systematically, that is, the theory specifies a series of relationships that suggest how measured variables represent a latent construct that is not directly measured (Mueller, 1997; Maciel *et al.*, 2014).

The test of hypotheses in order to answer the RQ1 can be seen in the following paragraphs followed by the RQ1 answer.

Note: In figure 13, below, P-values in parentheses were generated by SmartPLS, and for all constructs were <0.0005, being visualised in this figure as 0.000.

Figure 13 - Overview of the SEM, with path coefficients and p-values.



Note: P-values in parentheses were generated by SmartPLS, and for all constructs were <0.0005, being visualized in this figure as 0.000.

Table 65 - Description of Final Constructs and the Respective Items.

Endogenous Latent Var.		Exogenous Latent Variables			
		Constructs			
		Constructs	Indicators	Scale	Item
INFLUENCE_SMIs	SOCIAL PERCEPTION	C1_Perception	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): I follow many social media influencers	Likert 1 - 5	Q2_1
		C1_Perception	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): I enjoy following influencers online	Likert 1 - 5	Q2_2
		C1_Perception	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me	Likert 1 - 5	Q2_6
	HARMFUL	CT2_Harm_1_Addictive/Vicious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting violent content	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_2
		CT2_Harm_1_Addictive/Vicious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting cigarette products or brands	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_9
		CT2_Harm_1_Addictive/Vicious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting cigarette smoking	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_10
		CT2_Harm_1_Addictive/Vicious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting sexual or pornographic content	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_12
		CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful/Unreasonable	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting any type of bullying	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_15
		CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful/Unreasonable	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_16
		CT2_Harm_2_Wrongful/Unreasonable	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting any kind of discrimination	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_24
		CT2_Harm_3_Fraudulent	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting fake news about politics	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_22
		CT2_Harm_3_Fraudulent	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting fake news	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_23

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

SOCIAL PERCEPTION	CT2_Harm_3_ Fraudulent	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting dangerous games	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_26
	CT2_Harm_4_ Noxious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting unhealthy food	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_3
	CT2_Harm_4_ Noxious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting alcohol products or brands	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_7
	CT2_Harm_4_ Noxious	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting alcohol intake	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_8
	CT2_Harm_5_ Delusory	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting products or brands	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_1
	CT2_Harm_5_ Delusory	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting an ideal body image	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_5
	CT2_Harm_5_ Delusory	Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle	Likert 1 - 5	Q3_6
	CT3_Parasocial	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): If influencers that I follow start another social media channel, I will also follow them there	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_18
	CT3_Parasocial	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Influencers seem to understand the kinds of thing I want to know	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_19
	CT3_Parasocial	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): Influencers that I follow are the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_24
	CT4_Trust	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_36
	CT4_Trust	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_37
	CT4_Trust	To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale): In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow	Likert 1 - 5	Q7_38

Hypothesis 1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence.

Analysis of Hypothesis 1:

- a) Premise X. The relationship between SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and INFLUENCE_SMI is indicated by path coefficient = 0.377 and $p = 0.000$, highly significant, thereby confirming the confidence of this relationship.
- b) Premise Y. The relationship between HARMFUL and INFLUENCE_SMI is indicated by path coefficient = 0.771 and $p = 0.000$, highly significant, thereby confirming the confidence of this relationship.

Since premises X and Y are confirmed above, Hypothesis 1 can be accepted as true.

Hypothesis 2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire.

Analysis of Hypothesis 2:

- a) The relationship between HHUM and INFLUENCE_SMI presented a path coefficient of -0.408, indicating an inversely proportional relationship, and $p = 0.000$, indicating statistical significance. Therefore, this personality trait holds interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.
- b) The relationship between CONS and INFLUENCE_SMI presented a path coefficient of -0.279, indicating an inversely proportional relationship, and $p = 0.014$, indicating statistical significance. Therefore, this personality trait holds interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.
- c) Personality traits EMOT (path coefficient = 0.088; $p = 0.508$), EXTRV (path coefficient = -0.010; $p = 0.930$), AGREE (path coefficient = -0.068; $p = 0.571$) and OPEX (path coefficient = -0.143; $p = 0.182$) presented low path coefficients and non-significant p-values ($p > 0.05$), indicating that these personality traits do not correspond with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

Final Remarks

- a) Two constructs, SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and HARMFUL, composed of twenty-five questions on the SUSIS questionnaire, significantly represent SMIs' influence.
- b) Personality traits HHUM and CONS significantly present interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

SPSS and SmartPLS (Partial Least Square - Path Modeling) software were used in this data analysis also Excel was used in data organisation, descriptive statistics and data visualisation (Excel, 2022; IBM-SPSS, 2022; SmartPLS, 2022). The reliability test was performed to determine the highest significance level, and thus it produces consistent results in the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient calculation as per the table 64 above. Finally, it is possible to confirm that the measurement model for each construct were validated through successive adjustments.

3.5.4 RQ1: What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?

In order to answer this question SUSIS questionnaire was developed to measure the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, after the constructs validation as seen in the above sections, the six HEXACO personality dimensions was associated with the SUSIS' results.

Two hypotheses were tested in order to answer the RQ1:

- H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).
- H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

The structural equation model analysis (Figure 13) demonstrates that the Two constructs, SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and HARMFUL, composed of twenty-five

questions on the SUSIS questionnaire, significantly represent SMIs' influence. When associated to HEXACO dimensions, the model confirms that personality traits HHUM (Honesty-Humility) and CONS (Conscientiousness) significantly present interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

On the other hand, the model indicates that the personality traits EMOT (Emotionality), EXTRV (eXtraversion), AGREE (Agreeableness) and OPEX (Openness to Experience) do not correspond with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

3.5.5 RQ1: Discussion

The quantitative strand of this research revealed significant findings for the first research question, which asked “*What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers?*”. The results indicated by the SEM was significantly related to the HEXACO personality dimensions Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness as these both dimensions presented significantly interdependence with the construct that measure the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. The SEM confirmed that the SUSIS questionnaire is an efficient instrument to measure the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs.

Therefore, I can confirm based on the SEM results that subjects from this sample population that highly scored in these two personality traits are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. Because these two personality dimensions was indicated in the results as having an inversely proportional relationship. This means that these two traits have an inverse relationship with the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, that is, when one tends to increase the other tends to decrease.

Through this analysis was possible to resolve the research problem in this study “*From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs?*”, the answer is yes, and confirmed by the SEM results as per the Figure 13. The sample population in this research pertains to the generation Z cohort and all of them were living in Ireland at the time of this study. The Gen Zers who participated in this study were susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, in different perspectives, this is confirmed when the SUSIS questionnaire based on 25 indicators – Table 65 was validated through the SEM model – Figure 13.

First and foremost, the construct Social_Perception composed by the concepts and theories discussed in the literature, Perception towards Influencers/Susceptibility, Parasocial Relationship and Consumer Trust. In addition to the construct Harmful based on 28 types of potential harmful content noted across the literature review process in this research.

It is noteworthy that there is a gap in the literature, mainly from a marketing perspective covering this current phenomenon of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, considering that marketing overfocuses on several transactional outcomes, such as followers' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions (Kim and Kim, 2021). I also did not find any research available in an Irish context trying to understand the impact of SMIs on young people or trying to understand this phenomenon in different perspectives in Ireland.

This study filled this gap, and demonstrates that the Gen Zers under investigation are susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. As mentioned in the literature SMIs deliver the message to their followers by leveraging the pre-established relationship (parasocial relationship) and trust that they have cultivated with their followers (Yuan and Lou, 2020). According to Eyal (2018), trust is vital in influencer marketing. This study confirm that parasocial relationship and trust are indeed effective indicators to measure the susceptibility to be influence by SMIs. This sample proves the susceptibility when they demonstrates some level of parasocial relationship and consumer trust as confirmed in SEM – Figure 13 via SUSIS Questionnaire.

This study also demonstrates that the sample population who participated in this research have seen and might be influenced by different types of harmful content posted by SMIs, as demonstrated in the literature review and in the SEM model. Confirming that SMIs' content might have both positive and negative influence on this young cohort. Although, this might be subjective. Nonetheless, this study confirm that there is an association of potential types of harmful content posted by SMIs (See Table 65) and this young sample's responses in the SUSIS questionnaire.

From a marketing perspective, many indicators (See Table 65) are directly related to SMIs' suggestions to products and brands, it means that this sample are influenced by SMIs' advices and suggestions to buy products and brands. This confirms that SMIs are important players for marketing communication strategies nowadays, mainly when the

influencer is credible and trustworthiness (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Coco and Eckert, 2020; Ki *et al.*, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2021; Pradhan *et al.*, 2022). Mainly because the brand's role in the credibility and trustworthiness of SMIs is vital, given the fact that if followers perceive the brand as being coherent with the influencer's image, it contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness towards both (SMIs and the brand itself) (Breves *et al.*, 2019, 2021).

This result might be encompass with the Chung and Cho (2017) who demonstrated that parasocial relationships can truly lead to higher purchase intentions, as well as to a greater trust towards both the brand and the celebrity endorser. Therefore, this also might be applied to SMIs, and not only to celebrities. Although, it will depend on the SMIs' reach, number of followers, and level of engagement. Because in this study is possible to see this interrelationship between parasocial relationship and consumer trust, as seen in the SEM model – Figure 13.

Finally, it is evident that this young sample in this study are susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. The personality traits that are associated with this influence are Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness. The participants that highly scored in these two personality traits are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Regarding the first factor Honesty-Humility, the literature shows that individuals who score high on the honesty and humility scale are expected to be honest in their overall interactions, never taking advantage of others in order to achieve their personal gain and success (Ashton, Lee and de Vries, 2014). They generally adhere to the laws, not expecting any social or pretentious status from anyone. On the contrary, individuals who are less responsive to honesty and humility are more dishonest with other people, easily taking advantage of others for personal gain and success and being only concerned with themselves throughout their lives (Camps, Stouten and Euwema, 2016). Based on my interpretation, I would say that this cohort who score high in honesty-humility might be more aware about ethics, moral and social norms, and this might make them more aware and informed about SMIs' influence and impact on their lives. Therefore, this awareness might act as a shield and reduce the level of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the contrary, I can say that participants who score low in Honesty-Humility are more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Regarding the second factor, individuals who score high in conscientiousness are more self-disciplined, being extremely focused on the pursuit of their goals, thus preferring to follow established guidelines (Ashton and Lee, 2010). They are also perfectionists, proficient in comprehending new situations and make valuable decisions about each situation. In turn, people with poor conscientiousness cannot tackle any problem, with their low self-esteem mining their success and achievement of goals, feeling satisfied with work/goals of less importance (Ashton and Lee, 2010). In this perspective, I can say that high level of conscientiousness, awareness and focus might lead to low levels of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the other hand, low scores in Conscientiousness might lead to higher scores in susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs mainly due to their low self-esteem.

According to the literature, people's susceptibility through interpersonal influence depends on their own personality (Hoffmann and Broekhuizen, 2009). The study conducted by Janis (1954) had already stated that people with low levels of self-esteem are more susceptible to persuasion. In Addition, Adamopoulos, Ghose and Todri (2018) found that introverted individuals that use social media tend to be more responsive to eWoM and SMIs than their extraverted peers, meaning that it is possible that introverted individuals present a higher tendency and susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs.

This study is in line with the literature review findings that demonstrated that more conscientiousness individuals are negatively associated with internet usage, especially with social media platforms, since these individuals tend to consider these means as sources of distraction (Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky, 2010). Nonetheless, a positive correlation between conscientiousness and informational usage of social media has been found by Hughes *et al.* (2012). Therefore, it is possible to postulate that higher levels of conscientiousness are effective for SMIs, and not for their followers, meaning that conscientious individuals are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs (Adamopoulos, Ghose and Todri, 2018). This research confirms that conscientious individuals are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

This research did not find any association in relation to Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness and Openness to Experience with susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, therefore they do not correspond with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

By analysing the results obtained by König *et al.* (2022), it is possible to argue that personality traits have negative effects on consumer susceptibility towards SMIs. Despite being almost impossible to avoid susceptibility, individuals show different perspectives regarding the level of susceptibility to SMIs (König *et al.*, 2022). More specifically, in terms of all the personality traits that were analysed (extraversion, emotional stability, openness to new experiences, and conscientiousness) individuals with higher levels are less susceptible to the influence of SMIs (König *et al.*, 2022).

This study filled the gaps in the literature in regard the association of personality traits with the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. Mostly, important presented a new model of measurement to evaluate the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs based in relevant theories cited in the literature review. Therefore, contributing to these theories and to the broad field of science. Finally, this quantitative strand was able to answer the RQ1, contribute to the general understanding of the general research objective that is to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs) and achieved the Specific Objective - A that is to determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers. As well as contributed to the Specific Objective – B that is to holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers' content on young people's lives in Ireland.

3.6 Qualitative Analysis Results: Answering RQ2

The focus of this section was to present the results from the qualitative data analysis aiming to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs) (General Research Objective) and to holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers' content on young people's lives in Ireland (Specific Objective - B). To address this specific objective, the RQ2 was taken into consideration: Who are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and what are their motives for following them? To answer this question, this study analysed two free-answer questions (Q5 & 6) from SUSIS Questionnaire via thematic analysis using NVivo. The qualitative strand sample population comprised $N=81$ participants between 16 and 26 years old, part of the Generation Z cohort and living in Ireland.

3.6.1 Participants

The sample population was recruited via two educational institutions in Ireland: a secondary school and a private higher education institution. All participants were volunteers, and no incentives were offered to participate in this study. The sample was selected purposively utilising a homogeneous sampling scheme. The sample size was set according to the purposeful sampling theory that “is based on the premise that seeking out the best cases for the study produces the best data, and research results are a direct result of the cases sampled” (Leavy, 2017, p. 79). First, two educational institutions were contacted, which agreed to participate in this study. Next, written consent was obtained from subjects over 18 years old and from subjects and their parents or legal guardians when under 18 years old.

Sample demographics of the total population ($N=81$) are as follows: $n=50$ female, $n=31$ male; $n=56$ ages from 16 to 19 years old, $n=25$ ages from 20 to 26 years old; $n=52$ are enrolled in a secondary school and $n=29$ are enrolled in a private higher education institution (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019; NVivo, 2022). All participants lived in Ireland at the time of this study and pertained to the Generation Z cohort.

3.6.2 Procedure and Results

In this study, a six-phase processes proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to conduct the TA (Thematic Analysis), designed to support the researcher in recognising and attending to the important elements of a TA, and is a flexible process (Xu and Zammit, 2020). The six phases are as follows: 1) familiarizing yourself with your data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. For pragmatic orientation, a deductive assumption was employed to interpret the data to ensure that the codes could contribute to generating themes that were relevant to answer the research question, as well as to make sure that the emphasized participant/data-based meanings were relevant (Byrne, 2022).

Data were transcribed from the paper-based questionnaires, organised with NVivo 12 Pro and Excel, then stored (NVivo, 2022). NVivo was then used to sort the qualitative data into codes and nodes, organising themes and patterns for deep analysis and giving further insights into this research.

Next, initial codes were generated to categorise data with similar meanings (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). Coding involves labelling each unit of data within a data item with a code that summarises the excerpt's meaning (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019). In this coding process, all data that could be useful in answering the research question and contribute to the research question (RQ2) were coded to help identify and interpret themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). A codebook was generated by NVivo, as seen in chapter 2, including code names, descriptions, the number of respondents and the number of references per node, a count of the number of selections within a source coded into a node (Jackson and Bazeley, 2019).

The coding process was flexible, thinking mainly about answering the RQ2 and contribute to the research purpose with influencers, channel and motives receiving their own sets of nodes from 1 to 5.

The highest cases coded were counted in the ages 16 to 17, which composed most of the population, followed by the group 25 to 26 ($n=18$). The most cases coded appear in the influencer and motive nodes as these spaces in the questionnaire required more effort compared to channels, which required one or two words (e.g. YouTube, Instagram or both).

After all relevant data was coded, patterns and relationships were identified and a list of themes related to the RQ2 and research objective was created. A theme is a broader category containing multiple codes that appear to be related to each other and indicate ideas that are generally important to the research question (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Delving into the data and codes, judgements were made to create relationships among codes until themes evolved. Six aspects were taken into consideration prior to and during the establishment of themes: 1) the fundamental concepts in the codes; 2) evident patterns; 3) important elements; 4) trends; 5) codes that appear to relate to one another; and 6) reasons as to why and how codes are seemingly related (Bryman, 2004; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

The influencer and channel codes were analysed first to identify patterns and relationships. As the RQ2 involves five preferred influencers for this young sample population, patterns were created with a ranking scale from 1-5, indicating the first to fifth most preferred influencers. The most cited influencers, channels and created themes were then selected based on this ranking scale. Nodes were then created in NVivo using the theme names for storage.

Upon organising the data, a word frequency analysis was carried out for each node, identifying the most cited influencers and channels. To ensure that the entire sample population was considered, all preferred influencers and channels were included in this analysis, not just the most cited examples. This is because, in qualitative analysis, it is essential to explore the participants' views and gather as many insights as possible (Morse, 1994).

Motive codes were then analysed, storing the patterns and relationships into new theme nodes using NVivo. Themes were created based on participant responses and experimenter interpretation of these data, taking the RQ2 into consideration to identify patterns and relationships.

The central theme identified based on the analysis is the “*demonstration of some degree of being influenced by SMIs*”, since many quotes demonstrate a degree of influence in various ways, including entertainment, motivation, inspiration or some sense of familiarity. Other behavioural themes were generated based on an analysis of the participants' responses and related to the theory covered in this research. These themes are “*showing some degree of parasocial relationship*”, “*showing some degree of trust*” and “*showing some degree of relatability*”. Identifying themes related to these theories provides an insightful answer to the RQ2, making comparisons and synthesis possible.

Finally, the last themes created were the main motives to be influenced by SMIs since the influence was evident through their responses. In this analysis, each quote and its power, clarity, linkage to the theory and connection among themes were considered rather than ranking by frequency of a code. Such themes concerning motives are: “*seeking for entertainment*”, “*following them because their content is interesting*”, “*following them because of product/brand recommendations*”, “*searching for advice, tips and learning*” and “*interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts*”. Sub-themes were

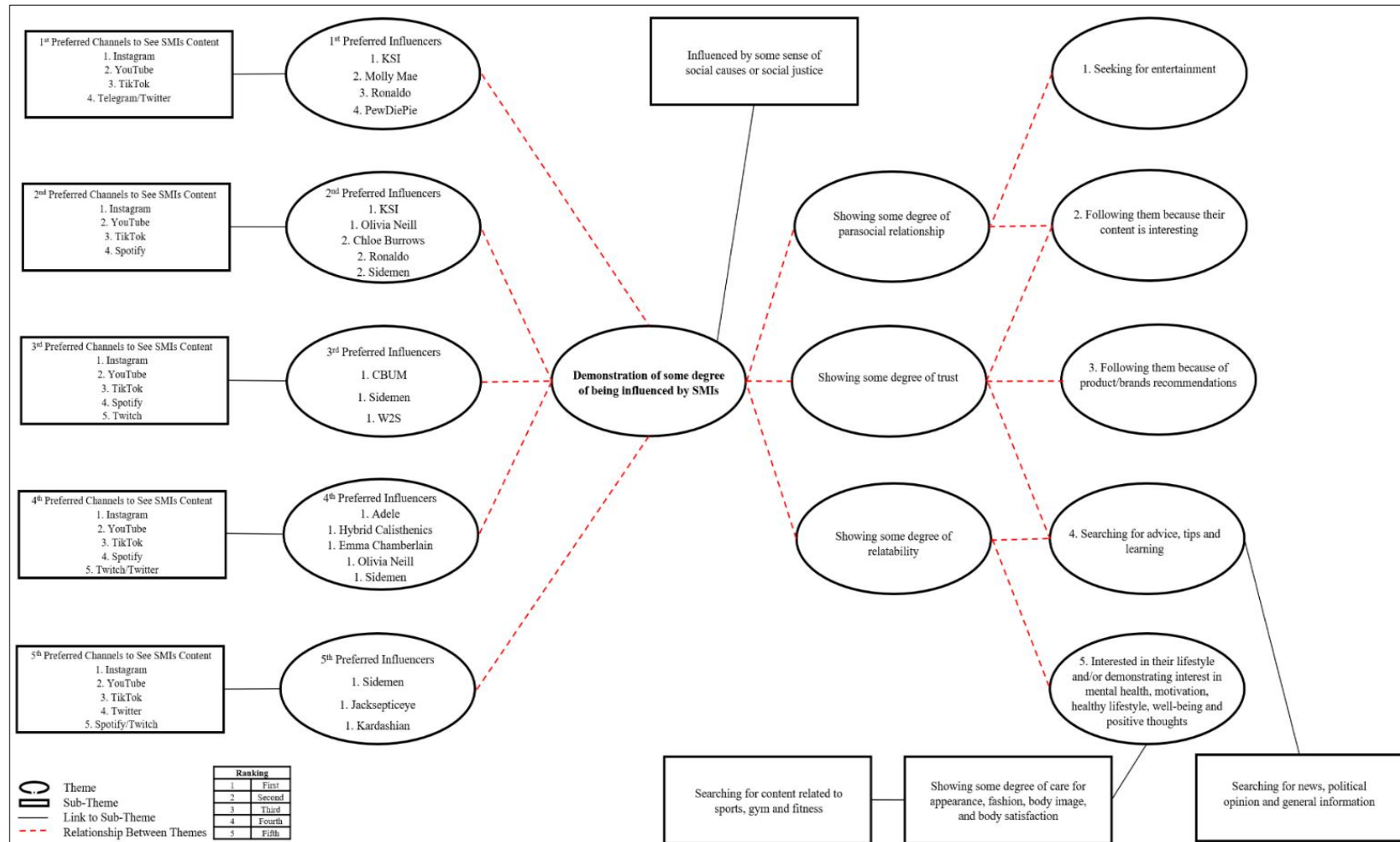
identified based on occurrences linked to the main themes: “*influenced by some sense of social causes or social justice*”, “*searching for news, political opinion and general information*”, “*showing some degree of care for appearance, fashion, body image and body satisfaction*” and “*searching for content related to sports, gym and fitness*”. These sub-themes are motives by individuals to make them following influencers.

Next, a recursive review of candidate topics was carried out in relation to the coded data elements and the dataset as a whole (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Some refinement requisites were as follows, 1) if they are themes; 2) the quality of these themes; 3) the boundaries of these themes; 4) if they are meaningful; and 5) if there is coherence in the generation of themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). A review of the relationships among the data items and codes that inform each theme and sub-theme was then conducted, followed by a revision of the candidate themes in relation to the data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). After rigorous analysis, 4 themes and 2 sub-themes did not fit into the RQ2 and were removed. These negative cases should be seen as positive for the research, as the analysis will help refine explanations and interpretations (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2019).

Once the data were coded and organised, the thematic structure was analysed and presented to name and define themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022) that express the RQ2 and research objective. The themes were brought together to create a clear and informative narrative that matches the content of the dataset and is relevant to RQ2 (Figure 14) and research objectives as recommended by the main theorists (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). During a final revision, some themes were consolidated without the need to remove or modify any themes.

Multiple excerpts from the data collected were chosen to support the analysis of the RQ2 in a clear and persuasive way while maintaining the diversity of the participants' viewpoints and the coherence and cohesion of the analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). These excerpts were deeply analysed and interpreted according to its constitutive theme, considering the broader context of the research and the linkage among themes and sub-themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). This was done by illustratively covering a surface-level analysis of what subjects wrote in the questionnaire (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Byrne, 2022). Please see Table 55 - Illustrative report on data excerpts from participants regarding motives, located in the Chapter 2.

Figure 14 - Finalised Thematic Map Demonstrating Themes, Sub-themes and Relationships.



The themes and sub-themes, outlining the main excerpts from the data in a quotation format, were documented with an illustrative analysis for each theme and sub-theme (Table 55). Themes and sub-themes related to channels and influencers were quantitatively ranked and fully and deeply analysed in the Chapter 2 and are therefore not included here. The data excerpt table links themes and sub-themes, additionally including an interpretation of participants' views and an explanation as to the ranking of the motives.

3.6.3 RQ2: What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives to follow these SMIs?

The five preferred influencers that this young sample follows, sorted by participant ranking, are seen in Table 66 below.

Table 66 - Consolidated ranking of the 5 Main Influencers by frequency.

Ranking – 5 Main Influencers	
1 st	KSI
2 nd	KSI, Olivia Neill
3 rd	CBUM, Sidemen, W2S
4 th	Adele, Hybrid Calisthenics, Emma Chamberlain, Olivia Neill, Sidemen
5 th	Sidemen, Jacksepticeye, Kardashian

In this population of youth in Ireland part of the Generation Z cohort, five main motives were documented, and quotes related to the motives can be seen in Table 55 (Chapter 2).

The first motive that makes this young sample follow their influencers was “*Seeking for entertainment*”, which the sample demonstrated through many quotes, outlined in Table 55.

After entertainment, the second main motive was “*Following them because their content is interesting*”, as indicated by responses that clearly outlined interest in SMIs' content.

The third main motive, “*Following them because of products/brands recommendations*”. This is evident from responses that indicated that the participants

receive and search for content related to product/brand recommendations, additionally trusting these recommendations.

The fourth motive “*Searching for advice, tips and learning*” relying on SMIs to provide advice and be a source for learning.

Finally, the fifth motive is: “*Interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts*”.

3.6.4 RQ2: Discussion

The data and its analysis showed that this young sample population exhibits at least some degree of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs from different perspectives. The parasocial relationship that is usually attributed to celebrity culture can also be identified in the field of SMIs, and this research supported this link from the relatability, attachment and high level of knowledge about SMIs and their content that participants expressed, as if they were a friend (Horton and Wohl, 1956; Aw *et al.*, 2022). This illusory relationship occurs when influencers show their day-to-day routine, lifestyle and part of their intimate and private life through their posts, therefore establishing an illusory personal bond with their followers (Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera, 2022). Yuan and Lou (2020) outline that influencers are social agents that contribute to the audience’s parasocial experience with them, such as through social mediation. Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera (2022) confirmed that the main defining factors of an influencer’s strength for Generation Z are communicative skills (54.5%), dynamism of posts (57.9%) and interaction with audiences (61.7%). Linking these factors with the research data, a parasocial relationship could be inferred between the sample population and their listed influencers. Some degree of intimacy from different perspectives, such as interactive, marketing and disclosive, could be observed.

From a marketing perspective, parasocial relationships can lead to trust, thereby leading to increased levels of purchase intentions and brand evaluations, mainly when the SMIs’ content contains advertising disclosures (Breves *et al.*, 2019, 2021). As seen from the data, there is a certain degree of trust related to participant interaction with SMIs’ content. The sample trust their influencers when searching for products and brand recommendations, which can be explained through a high level of parasocial relationship.

Additionally, the sample shows some sense of relatability to their SMIs, sharing common characteristics and personality traits. This might be another factor that strengthens the relationship between followers and SMIs, as they perceive their own characteristics and personality in their influencers.

These three main themes – parasocial relationship, trust and relatability – are the main factors that make this sample be susceptible to being influenced by SMIs in this qualitative analysis. Therefore, this influence is the central theme in the present thematic analysis. As such, the answer to the research question 2 is evident in the thematic map (Figure 14), mainly because this map was generated with the research objective and research question 2 in mind. The main influencers that this young sample follows, sorted by participant ranking, are seen in Table 67.

Table 67 - Consolidated Ranking of the 5 Main Influencers by Frequency.

Ranking – 5 Main Influencers	
1 st	KSI
2 nd	KSI, Olivia Neill
3 rd	CBUM, Sidemen, W2S
4 th	Adele, Hybrid Calisthenics, Emma Chamberlain, Olivia Neill, Sidemen
5 th	Sidemen, Jacksepticeye, Kardashian

These influencers can be inferred to influence this sample more than other SMIs as they were cited more frequently. These influencers, a brief description and the type of content they post, their preferred social media platform and the number of followers/subscribers can be found in Table 68. These data can be useful to improve marketing research as well as to enhance the quality of marketing communication.

Table 68 - Main Influencers Analysis.

Influencer	Characteristics	Main Channel(s)	Followers/ Subscribers	References
KSI	YouTuber, entertainment star, recording artist and professional boxer.	YouTube	37.2 million	(Sidemen Wikidata, 2022; Sidemen YouTube Channel, 2022)
Olivia Neill	Northern Irish TikTok royalty, famous because of her dances on TikTok and weekly vlogs on YouTube. Promotes her lifestyle, fashion content and brands.	TikTok	2.8 million	(Barry, 2022; Neill, 2022)

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CBUM	Chris Bumstead is an IFBB Classic Physique Professional bodybuilder from Canada. Content related to training regimen, diet plan, nutrition, lifestyle, brands.	Instagram/YouTube	17.7 million	(Magnante Matthew, 2022)
Sidemen	The Sidemen (formerly The Ultimate Sidemen), are the largest YouTube group in the UK, made up of Zerkaa (Josh Bradley), Miniminter (Simon Minter), TBJZL (Tobi Brown), KSI (Olajide "JJ" Olatunji), Behzinga (Ethan Payne), Vikkstar123 (Vikram Barn) and W2S (Harry Lewis). They promote content from a variety of topics, mostly related to games, cars, sports and brands.	YouTube	22.8 million Total member reach is approximately 127.5 million	(Sidemen Wikidata, 2022; Sidemen YouTube Channel, 2022)
W2S	Harold Harry Lewis, 26 years old, is a YouTuber personality and the youngest member of the Sidemen. Game player commentator.	YouTube	20.1 million	(Sidemen Wikidata, 2022; Sidemen YouTube Channel, 2022)
Adele	British Singer	YouTube, Instagram and Spotify	124.2 million	(Beatty Jamie, 2021)
Hybrid Calisthenics	Content creator and entrepreneur, promoting content related to fitness, gym, lifestyle, routine, content creator tips, products and brands.	YouTube and TikTok	5 million	(Hybrid Calisthenics, 2022)
Emma Chamberlain	Forbes List #5 Top Creators (2022). Chamberlain's content included cooking videos, fashion hauls, and car vlogs, among others. She was known for her penchant with coffee, as well as her authentic self-deprecating humour. Chamberlain gained notoriety for her niche editing style defined by zooms, adding text to the screen, and pauses. She is also entrepreneur.	Instagram and YouTube	28 million	(Bromwich, 2019; Forbes, 2022)
Jacksepticeye	Irish YouTuber who creates videos on video games, sketches and occasional vlogs.	YouTube	41.9 million	(Jacksepticeye Wikidata, 2022)
Kardashian	Founded by Robert Kardashian and Kris Jenner, it consists of their children, all influencers. They have an American reality television series (Keeping Up With The Kardashians) which focuses on the personal lives of the Kardashian family. Content related to lifestyle, routine, celebrities' life, fame, fitness, make-up, fashion and products/brands.	Instagram	1.2 billion	(Nozari, 2022)

The main channels for the influencers are also the most cited social media channels in this study. In the qualitative data analysis, Instagram is the most cited channel for all five ranking places, followed by YouTube and TikTok. This data is linked to SMIs' main channels (Table 68). This is in line with the understanding that Gen Zers are more present on Instagram and YouTube (Borau-Boira, Pérez-Escoda and Ruiz-Poveda Vera

2022). Channels are important to create more effective digital marketing and integrated marketing communications strategies (Ryan, 2014; Chen, Yan and Smith, 2022).

The various motives in this study are directly connected to the susceptibility of this young sample to being influenced by SMIs since the reasons given are the catalysts that explain their attachment to influencers' content. Many motives exist for the consumption of influencer content, including interest, escapism, community, subjective norms related to the influencer, relatability, influencer authenticity, influencer-related perceived behaviour control, attitudes toward the influencer, personal relevance, trust, inspiration and perceived risk (Coco and Eckert, 2020; Chopra, Avhad and Jaju, 2021; Croes and Bartels, 2021; Klucarova, 2022). In this population of youth in Ireland, five main motives and some sub-themes were documented.

The first motive that makes this young sample follow their influencers was "*Seeking for entertainment*", which the sample demonstrated through many quotes, outlined in Appendix 2. This motive has already been referenced in the literature, in which it is related to parasocial relationships and the entertainment value of content to make that content more engaging and attractive. This is especially true after the COVID-19 outbreak, upon which influencer marketing grew and people increasingly turned to social media for entertainment and online social experiences (Kim and Kim, 2021; Rohde and Mau, 2021). This theme is connected to parasocial relationships and the next main motive.

After entertainment, the second main motive was "*Following them because their content is interesting*", as indicated by responses that clearly outlined interest in SMI content. While interest in SMI content can make a given person search for and follow the influencer, this varies and depends on each person's interests and needs. This theme is linked to the theme of trust, since the factors that cause participants to show interest are what might lead them to trust the influencers and their content.

Trust is also directly linked to the third main motive, "*Following them because of products/brands recommendations*". This is evident from responses that indicated that the participants receive and search for content related to product/brand recommendations, additionally trusting these recommendations. SMIs are well-known to be important in marketing communications to build trust and loyalty (Ryan, 2014; E. Coates *et al.*, 2019; Hughes, Swaminathan and Brooks, 2019; Ki *et al.*, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2021; Rohde and Mau, 2021; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Zhou *et al.*, 2021; Dinh and

Lee, 2022; Masuda, Han and Lee, 2022). The descriptive statistics also shows that TikTok (33%), YouTube (18.7%), and Instagram (17.6%) are the favourite channels of the sample population in this study, and the most visited channels are Snapchat (39.6%), TikTok (23.1%), Instagram (23.1%), WhatsApp (19.8%) and YouTube (16.5%). The majority of the population (35.2%) spend about 2-3 hours accessing those channels per day according to the descriptive statistics analysis.

The qualitative analysis shows that SMIs indeed hold an important role in influencing young people to follow brands and buy products and are therefore key players in marketing strategies and should be taken into consideration to enhance the effectiveness of strategies, particularly in terms of digital marketing and social media marketing.

The next motive “*Searching for advice, tips and learning*” also demonstrates some degree of trust, as they are relying on SMIs to provide advice and be a source for learning. This is in addition to using SMIs as a source for “*news, political opinions and general information*”, one of the sub-themes. This is in line with the results from the Digital News Report Ireland 2020, which showed that Gen Z in Ireland is increasingly using social media as their primary source for news consumption (Kirk *et al.*, 2020). This is also congruent with the results from a study involving in-depth interviews of small, female sample ($N=18$) aged 18–30 years old, in which the participants were more likely to follow the advice of influencers than celebrities, deeming them more credible (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017).

Finally, the last motive was built based on participant response patterns (Table 55 – Chapter 3): “*Interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts*”. This theme is linked to the theme of relatability and two sub-themes: “*Showing some degree of care for appearance, fashion, body image and body satisfaction*” and “*searching for content related to sports, gym and fitness*”. This theme and the two sub-themes align with much of the principal content of the five main influencers, including CBUM, Hybrid Calisthenics and Olivia Neill. This demonstrates interest in the lifestyle of SMIs, as well as different ways of living, such as a healthy lifestyle, digital nomad lifestyle and veganism. In addition, this theme encompasses care for appearance and seeking advice in this regard.

A final sub-theme, “*influenced by some sense of social cause or social justice*”, is linked to the core theme. This sub-theme might leverage the degree of influence, since some participants show specific interest in influencers that have content related to women’s rights, environment/climate change and injustices. Indeed, green influencers who are engaged in climate change and social causes are known to be impactful and engaging among their followers (Pittman and Abell, 2021; Yıldırım, 2021).

In sum, through this holistic analysis the sample population in this study was found to be susceptible to being influenced by SMIs in several different contexts. The main drivers that generated this influence were parasocial relationship, trust and relatability. Different results can stem from such influence, mostly related to entertainment, interest in the content produced by SMIs and product/brand recommendations. From a marketing perspective and the participant responses, it is evident that SMIs have an important and influential role in marketing communication strategies, specifically regarding product and brand recommendations.

3.6.5 RQ3: Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

This section is part of the qualitative strand of this research and sought to critically review the main literature available to understand the role of parents, the government, and companies in protecting youth within the digital environment (Light and McGrath, 2010; Jones, 2017; Michaelidou and Micevski, 2019). I employed a holistic process that covers a state-of-the-art review and desk research (Silverman, 2013). This section answer and discuss the RQ2: Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

3.6.5.1 The methodological process

In order to answer the research question “*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*” this critical review adopted a qualitative approach involving a state-of-the-art review employing various academic online databases catalogues and European Union repository that was conducted according

to the twelve steps recommended by (Kable, Pich and Maslin-Prothero, 2012). Additionally, specific keywords derived from the research question were utilised to select papers and reports, such as protection of young people, ethics, minors and digital environment, in addition to subgroups, such as harmful content, vulnerable young people on the internet, and policies to protect young people in the digital environment.

An additional element of this qualitative study involved an evaluation and analysis of reports and an analysis of the implementation of programmes created by the European Union. Desk research was employed in order to review reports, acts, policies, legislation, measures, documents, reviews, summaries, regulations and statutes from an European perspective, such as the European Audiovisual Observatory, EU Kids Online, the Council of Europe, the European Commission, and the ICT Coalition. This stage aimed to collect secondary data for this study as well as to give details about the chronological development of the topic studied and evaluated regulations and acts linked to the protection of young people in the digital environment.

In addition, I considered the six elements of Bloom's Taxonomy (Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation) to effectively develop critical thinking towards the main themes explored in this section as well as achieve a critical analysis based on the objectives and RQ3 (Bloom *et al.*, 1956). Furthermore, articles and reports were chosen according to the following criteria: 1. Must be peer-reviewed; 2. Publication/Journal ranking (The Harzing ABS (Association of Business Schools Academic Journal Quality Guide June 2021)); 3. Relationship of the keywords and abstract with the topic covered in this paper; 4. The reliability and validation of research methods; 5. The reliability of the publisher.

Finally, the literature review's section "2.6 Ethics in the Digital Environment" was entirely devoted to answer this research question and deeply analysed the themes explored here.

3.6.5.2 The answer and discussion:

The key learning points from my review of "*who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?*" relies on pieces of evidence that the governments – the European Union and its countries, the private sector and parents have

different roles in protecting young people in the digital environment, even though they and we are all responsible for young people's protection within and out of the digital world. According to the (International Save the Children Alliance, 2008), supported by the United Nations, families, communities, governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) together play a vital role in realising youths' rights to protection. Thus, all the institutions present in our society are responsible for protecting young people in the digital environment.

The European Union has been acting through important programmes to ensure the safety of young people within the digital environment, such as the "EU kids online", consisting of mapping experiences of minors online to assess their safety and risks on websites. Another important aspect is the definition of what is good content for young people online, then "quality content" for young people refers to content that increases their skills, knowledge, and competencies, emphasising creativity and being reliable and safe (Council of the European Union, 2012).

Also, the digital environment perspective is included in the Council of Europe 2016-2021 strategy for minors' rights focusing on five specific areas, more precisely: equal opportunities, participation, violence-free life, child-friendly justice and "digital environment" rights (Council of Europe, 2016). In addition, this is reinforced by the Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on guidelines to respect, protect, and fulfil the minors' rights in the digital environment (Council of Europe, 2018). Finally, the Alliance depicts that a combination of efforts of parents, national and international organisations, educators, civil society, and public authorities in a global approach must guarantee the protection of young people in the digital environment.

From a parental control perspective, I have perceived that it is a challenge for them to track and control their childrens' actions online and have more difficulties closely monitoring their digital technologies usage (Duerager and Livingstone, 2012; Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014). However, parents are more aware of the risks of using the web, preferring to talk to their children about Internet security rather than limiting or even prohibiting Internet use (Livingstone *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the best solution for parents is to encourage, prohibit or limit the use of digital technologies to their children, according to the opportunities or danger they attribute to them, although always trying to monitor

and be part of their children's internet and social media habits. Furthermore, it is recommended that more studies should be conducted to better understand parents' current parental control practices and technologies to keep their children safe in the digital environment, even though there are several applications and software to help parents to monitor their children online.

From the private sector standpoint, two specific initiatives are very important the "Alliance to Better Protect Minors Online" and the "ICT Coalition for Children Online", both acting to protect minors online. However, further research in the area is recommended to understand the real effectiveness of these programmes and the main actions to protect youth by the social media companies and their outcomes, such as content analysis and minimum age subscription. For example, one of the most challenging aspects for social media companies is to ensure that minors under the minimum age subscription are not subscribing to their channels (O'Neill, 2013). This issue might be solved through a face recognition system using a document showing their age and picture simultaneously and submitted for evaluation prior to subscription (O'Neill, 2013).

In conclusion, from an ethical point of view, (Rest, 1982) established four different ethical aspects within the digital environment, as follows; a) Determining whether the technological options either directly or indirectly affect another person negatively; b) Developing an ideal plan of action; c) Identifying the important values that are associated with each specific situation; and d) Implementing a solution/plan of action to be monitored and evaluated. Therefore, it is recommended that the government/state and companies follow these ethical rules to develop efficient measures and programmes to protect young people in the digital environment. The responsibility to protect young people in the digital environment relies on us all and all institutions in our society, as the internet and social media are present in our daily lives. Although parents, government and the private sector have been acting directly to ensure the protection of young people, further research is recommended to evaluate the current programmes, to understand the parents' control, how to empower and effectively train parents for better results as well as it is expected that companies and the government constantly update and review their programmes, policies, and legislation in order to have outstanding results. An integrative response from parents, companies and the government might be the best measure, even

though there are currently no studies in this regard and no standardised measures to ensure efficient control.

3.7 Mixed-Methods Comparison

A fixed mixed-methods convergent parallel design was employed to collect quantitative and qualitative data concurrently through the SUSIS questionnaire and HEXACO personality test. The SUSIS Questionnaire has two questions (Q5 and 6) that pertains to the qualitative strand of this research. SUSIS Questionnaire was tested and validated via a Structural Equation Model (SEM) (Figure 13). The qualitative questions were analysed via thematic analysis. The HEXACO personality test was integrated into the SEM.

The mixed-methods convergent parallel design asks for a comparative section at the end of the data analysis and results covering both strands, quantitative and qualitative results. In my view the convergency occurred as both sets of results contributed to the achieve the general and specific objectives of this study. The main takeaways from this analysis are:

- Parasocial relationship were detected in both strands;
- Consumer trust was heavily identified in both strands;
- The susceptibility of being influenced by SMIs was confirmed in both strands;
- Personality was mentioned in both strands, but from different approaches;
- The perception towards influencers/susceptibility was identified in both strands.

Therefore, the indicators above were presented in both strands. I highlight that the indicators tested in the quantitative strand were confirmed in the qualitative analysis results. Mainly when it comes to consumer trust, it is evident that there is a strong relationship between the participants of this study and their SMIs, in a way that they trust on them, resulting in searching for advice, information, products and brands recommendations, and life-style tips. A certain degree of parasocial relationship is confirmed in both strands. The qualitative strand brings the relatability factor as many

participants use the word “relatable” to their influencers. Finally, both strands confirm the susceptibility of this young sample to be influenced by SMIs in different perspectives.

3.8 Summary

This chapter begun presenting the data collection process and outlined important figures from the data analysis such as the data cleaning and transcription, the calculation and evaluation of the sample size, and presented in detail de descriptive analysis in regard to the participants of this study.

This chapter presented the results of quantitative and qualitative data analysis. The first strand discussed was the quantitative data analysis results in which the structural equation model (SEM) was broadly discussed, followed by the steps taken by me to test the hypotheses and measure the reliability of all indicators from SUSIS Questionnaire. The reliability, internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were presented, resulting in proving the efficacy of 25 indicators presented in SUSIS Questionnaire that measured the influence of SMIs on this young sample. A final SEM model was created based on the objectives of this research. SUSIS questionnaire indicators and HEXACO personality test results were merged in the model, showing the main results of this study. Through this analysis was possible to test both hypotheses of this study.

Therefore, this chapter presented the test of hypotheses providing answers to the RQ1 of this study. The answer of the RQ1 was provided and discussed in this chapter.

Furthermore, this chapter presented the results from the qualitative data analysis, outlining the thematic analysis process and the final result, a thematic map. Through this analysis was possible to answer the RQ2. Thus, the RQ2 answer was outlined, followed by a discussion section about the answer and its related topics. Finally, this chapter stated the process to answer the RQ3, followed by its answer and discussion. A final section providing a comparison between quantitative and qualitative results was provided following the mixed-methods approach.

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FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

The present chapter introduces a summary of findings from this study. Additionally, it discusses and evaluate the findings. Finally, I discussed the main contributions of this study in different perspectives, including the theoretical contribution. Furthermore, suggestions for future research is outlined with recommendations and suggestions to develop future studies in line with the current study. After that, the limitations of the study are presented. Finally, a conclusion section brings the summary of this research and conclude the thesis.

This research's main objective is to assess young people's susceptibility to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). The research problem relies on the following: From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs? Because if I can understand who will be susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, then we can work towards raising awareness among young people about the influence of social media influencers' content on their lives. This research topic aims to enrich our knowledge of the role of social media influencers in the lives of young people.

In order to achieve the main objective of this study, three guiding research questions were answered, and two hypotheses were tested:

1. (RQ1) What personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers? The hypotheses are:
 - H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).
 - H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).
2. (RQ2) What are the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows and their motives for following them?

3. (RQ3) Who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment?

Furthermore, two specific objectives were proposed in order to achieve the main objective of this study.

A – Determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers.

B – Holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers' content on young peoples' lives.

Thus, if I can understand who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs, then I can work towards raising awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives. This study intends to raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives based on the main findings discovered in this research.

The research was organised in five sections. The introduction section introduced and outlined the research problem, and research questions. The literature review section explored the main literature available in regard to the phenomenon under investigation, and presented a new conceptual framework to be tested in this study. The methodology section presented the research design, methods, data collection and analysis. The chapter results and discussion, outlined the results from the data analysis, tested the hypotheses, answered the research questions and discussed them. This final chapter discusses the research conclusions, findings, limitations and puts forward ideas for further research.

Summary of Findings

In sum, researchers have been concerned and warning about the negative impact of social media and social media influencers on young people's lives (Coates *et al.*, 2019; Qutteina *et al.*, 2019; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020; Thelwall and Cash, 2021; Dinh and Lee, 2022). The main concerns specified in this thesis, as well as most stated in research, are related to depression and anxiety correlated to instant fame, and the reduction in depression and loneliness is linked to the decreasing amount of time spent on social media networks (Kraut *et al.*, 1998; Hunt, Marx and Lipson, 2018). However, the contrary does not have the same effect. In addition, young people who grow up with an excess of

exposition to social media channels, the internet and games may have an empathy gap (Turkle, 2015).

In the quantitative strand of this research, the presence of harmful content posted by SMIs was confirmed through the question 3 of SUSIS Questionnaire. This indicator demonstrates different types of potential harmful content that might be posted by SMIs. Therefore, there might be a possibility that harmful content can negatively influence the participants of this study. Five types of potential harmful content were generated from the analysis, they are: Addictive and Vicious content, Wrongful and Unreasonable, Fraudulent and Hazardous, Noxious and Delusory content. Research has shown a statistically meaningful association between alcohol consumption related social media interaction within the younger population, including SMIs' posts (Curtis *et al.*, 2018). Also, shows a greater presence on social media related to alcohol was associated with both greater self-reported consumption and alcohol-related issues (Curtis *et al.*, 2018; Hendriks *et al.*, 2020; Russell *et al.*, 2021). This is in line with the Noxious potential harmful group composed by promoting alcohol intake and alcohol products and brands in this study. Thus, if SMIs tend to promote alcohol intake it might increase the susceptibility of this young sample to consume alcohol or increase alcohol intake. Further, this influence might be applied to other substances such as cigarettes and tobacco (Yoo, Yang and Cho, 2016; O'Brien *et al.*, 2020). As per the Addictive group of the harmful construct, promoting cigarette smoking and cigarette products and brands.

Furthermore, social media influencers can cause a dissatisfied feeling related to body image mainly from a women's perspective (Fardouly, Pinkus and Vartanian, 2017; Hogue and Mills, 2018; Kleemans *et al.*, 2018). As the perfect body exposed to social media and promoted by SMIs can cause identity conflict. In the qualitative strand of this research is possible to understand that this young sample are showing some degree of care for appearance, fashion, body image, and body satisfaction and uses SMIs as source for advice and information in this regard. As well as they are searching for content related to sports, gym and fitness, that might be related to body image. Therefore, what SMIs are posting concerning to body built and body image might have a positive or negative impact on this young sample.

Therefore, more should be done to prevent youngsters from being negatively influenced by social media and social media influencers. It could result in positive

outcomes, such as reducing levels of depression and anxiety, reducing cigarette and alcohol issues as well as raise better individuals in our consumer society full of irregularities. Due to many elements causing a negative influence on young people by SMIs, I find that more should be done to protect the rights of young people. The government should regulate and create policies to supervise how those harmful influences have been generated and how it would be possible to avoid them.

On the other hand, SMIs can play an important role of positively influencing young people. In the qualitative strand of this study was possible to perceive that the participants of this study tend to follow SMIs that are involved with some sort of social causes or social justice, such as women's rights. In addition, this young sample follow their SMIs in order to search for advice, tips and learning from different perspectives. Therefore, if SMIs promote advice in relation to topics that can be beneficial to our society it might generate a positive impact. Because influencers can drive individuals to a sustainable lifestyle and green consumption (Yıldırım, 2021). A great example is the study of Yıldırım (2021) that depicts that green SMIs have the power to promote sustainable consumption patterns and brings ecological perspective for sustainable consumption. Thus, the positive impact of SMIs can also be seen in the literature. However, Generation Z is a very challenging generation marketing-wise, considering that they grew up with technology and with the awareness of environmental issues and social causes. Therefore, the main characteristics of these individuals according to a consumer focused perspective are related to eco-consciousness, digital advancement, and social responsibility.

Based on these findings, marketers should keep in mind that to attract these young people they must develop a brand or product/service that can be relatable to the consumer, in the sense of sharing the same values and/or perspectives (Acoba *et al.*, 2018; Francis and Hoefel, 2018). To make the brand or product more appealing to young people, marketers can also contract SMIs that are relatable to consumers, defending the same causes and values and sharing some personality traits or attributes with individuals from Generation Z. Additionally, SMIs might be advocates to promote sustainable consumption patterns and in particular to lead towards sustainable economic growth and development. However, not only green influencers should play this role, but influencers from all areas should partner to support sustainable actions to ensure and improve the

quality of our lives, protect our ecosystem and ensure the preservation of our natural resources for future generations. This is an example of potential positive impact of SMIs, in order to contrast to the potential harmful impact.

Data analysis revealed significant findings for the first research question which asked what personality traits are associated with susceptibility to influence by social media influencers. In order to answer this question SUSIS questionnaire was tested and validated, being a new instrument to measure the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. Through a structural equation model (SEM) the six HEXACO personality dimensions was associated with the SUSIS' results.

Two hypotheses were tested in order to answer the RQ1:

- H1: The set of constructs formed by the SUSIS questionnaire sufficiently represents SMI's influence ("SOCIAL_PERCEPTION (Perception towards influencers, parasocial relationship and consumer trust) and HARMFUL).
- H2: There are HEXACO personality traits that significantly correspond to SMI's influence, representable by the constructs obtained by the SUSIS questionnaire (Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience).

The structural equation model analysis (Figure 13) demonstrates that the Two constructs, SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and HARMFUL, composed of twenty-five questions on the SUSIS questionnaire, significantly represent SMIs' influence. When associated to HEXACO dimensions, the model confirms that personality traits HHUM (Honesty-Humility) and CONS (Conscientiousness) significantly present interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMIs scores.

On the other hand, the model indicates that the personality traits EMOT (Emotionality), EXTRV (eXtraversion), AGREE (Agreeableness) and OPEX (Openness to Experience) do not correspond with INFLUENCE_SMIs scores.

Therefore, I can confirm based on the SEM results that subjects from this sample population that highly scored in HHUM (Honesty-Humility) and CONS (Conscientiousness) are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. Because these two personality dimensions was indicated in the results as having an inversely proportional

relationship. This means that these two traits have an inverse relationship with the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, that is, when one tends to increase the other tends to decrease.

Based on the quantitative analysis was possible to resolve the research problem in this study “*From a generation Z perspective, is it possible to associate personality traits with susceptibility to influence by SMIs?*”, the answer is yes, and confirmed by the SEM results as per the Figure 13. The sample population in this research pertains to the generation Z cohort and all of them were living in Ireland at the time of this study. The Gen Zers who participated in this study were susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, in different perspectives, this is confirmed when the SUSIS questionnaire based on 25 indicators – Table 65 was validated through the SEM model – Figure 13.

This study demonstrates that the Gen Zers under investigation are susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. As mentioned in the literature SMIs deliver the message to their followers by leveraging the pre-established relationship (parasocial relationship) and trust that they have cultivated with their followers (Yuan and Lou, 2020). According to (Eyal, 2018), trust is vital in influencer marketing. This study confirm that parasocial relationship and trust are indeed effective indicators to measure the susceptibility to be influence by SMIs. This sample proves the susceptibility when they demonstrates some level of parasocial relationship and consumer trust as confirmed in SEM – Figure 13 via SUSIS Questionnaire. Therefore, it is evident that this young sample in this study are susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. The personality traits that are associated with this influence are Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness. The participants that highly scored in these two personality traits are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Participants who scored high in honesty-humility might be more aware about ethics, moral and social norms, and this might make them more aware and informed about SMIs’ influence and impact on their lives. Therefore, this awareness might act as a shield and reduce the level of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the contrary, I can say that participants who score low in Honesty-Humility are more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Regarding the second factor, high level of conscientiousness might lead to low levels of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the other hand, low scores in Conscientiousness might lead to higher scores in susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs

mainly due to their low self-esteem. This research confirms that conscientious individuals are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

This research presented a new model of measurement to evaluate the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs – SUSIS Questionnaire. The final SUSIS Questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 18. It was built based in relevant theories cited in the new conceptual model that was tested and validated. Therefore, contributing to these theories and to the broad field of science.

The quantitative strand was able to answer the RQ1, contribute to the general understanding of the general research objective that is to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs) and achieved the Specific Objective - A that is to determine whether there is a specific personality profile that predisposes young people to influence by social media influencers. Therefore, being individuals who have low score in Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness might have a predisposition to be influenced by SMIs.

As well as contributed to the Specific Objective – B that is to holistically analyse the influence of social media influencers' content on young people's lives in Ireland. Thus, was possible to understand that SMIs might cause both negative and positive influence on followers. The sample population of this study demonstrates that they might be influenced through positive and harmful content posted by SMIs.

The research objective B outcome also provides insights into the factors that lead Generation Z to be influenced by social media influencers (SMIs). The thematic analysis from the qualitative strand brought a holistic overview of this matter using participant responses and outlined main influencers, their main channels and the motives for following them.

The qualitative strand found that the five preferred influencers that this young sample follows, sorted by participant ranking, are seen in Table 69 below.

Table 69 - Consolidated ranking of the 5 Main Influencers by frequency.

Ranking – 5 Main Influencers	
1 st	KSI
2 nd	KSI, Olivia Neill
3 rd	CBUM, Sidemen, W2S

4 th	Adele, Hybrid Calisthenics, Emma Chamberlain, Olivia Neill, Sidemen
5 th	Sidemen, Jacksepticeye, Kardashian

In this population of youth in Ireland part of the Generation Z cohort, five main motives were documented, and quotes related to the motives can be seen in Table 55 (Chapter 3).

The first motive that makes this young sample follow their influencers was “*Seeking for entertainment*”, which the sample demonstrated through many quotes, outlined in Table 55.

After entertainment, the second main motive was “*Following them because their content is interesting*”, as indicated by responses that clearly outlined interest in SMIs’ content.

The third main motive, “*Following them because of products/brands recommendations*”. This is evident from responses that indicated that the participants receive and search for content related to product/brand recommendations, additionally trusting these recommendations.

The fourth motive “*Searching for advice, tips and learning*” relying on SMIs to provide advice and be a source for learning.

Finally, the fifth motive is: “*Interested in their lifestyle and/or demonstrating interest in mental health, motivation, healthy lifestyle, well-being and positive thoughts*”.

Therefore, this research offers specific evidence for the influence of SMIs on young people’s lives and it is in line with previously published findings in the area, expanding it by providing a more focused point of view, given the sampled population. Since motives to follow influencers can differ by age, sex, region and culture, this provides specific insight into Generation Z youth in Ireland.

The findings from this study can be useful for marketers to understand the importance of SMIs within marketing communication strategies, as well as to studies from the field of social sciences that aim to explore the influence of SMIs from both positive and negative perspectives. This research show direct evidence of harmful content promoted by SMIs, with the possible evidence that this content might influence this young sample in this study. In addition, the intent of participants to seek information related to news and political opinion may also be a concern, as the information provided may not

always be accurate, intentionally or unintentionally, thereby drastically increasing the spread of fake news as these influencers can reach millions of subscribers. Similarly, the attachment to other information provided by SMIs, such as political opinions, is also concerning.

In summary, this research clearly highlighted five main factors influencing young people in Ireland to follow their influencers. In addition, this study shows evidence that their favourite SMIs hold influence over this sample in different contexts. Some degree of parasocial relationship and trust are identified through the quantitative and qualitative analysis as drivers of this influence. In marketing communications, marketers can encourage the presence of the factors discovered here to enhance the online presence of SMIs within marketing communication strategies focused on specific target audiences, such as the Generation Z cohort studied here. Marketers might also use this study as a foundation for designing new frameworks and strategies they wish to impose on customers who follow influencers to increase the leverage of a marketing communication strategy by better understanding target audiences and the macroenvironment.

Finally, as the evidence of harmful content is confirmed, I brought a discussion in the RQ3, who is responsible for ethically protecting young people in the digital environment. Through a critical literature review analysis was found that the responsibility to protect young people in the digital environment relies on us all and all institutions in our society, as the internet and social media are present in our daily lives. Although parents, the government and the private sector have been acting directly to ensure the protection of young people, further research is recommended to evaluate the current programmes, to understand the parents' control, how to empower and effectively train parents for better results as well as it is expected that companies and the government constantly update and review their programmes, policies, and legislation in order to have outstanding results. An integrative response from parents, companies and the government might be the best measure, even though there are currently no studies in this regard and no standardised measures to ensure efficient control.

This study is original and unique as I did not find any research available in an Irish context trying to understand the susceptibility of Gen Zers to be influenced by SMIs or trying to understand this phenomenon in different perspectives in Ireland.

Implications

In marketing communications, marketers can encourage the presence of the factors discovered in this study to enhance the online presence of SMIs within marketing communication strategies focused on specific target audiences, such as the Generation Z cohort studied here. Marketers might also use this study as a foundation for designing new frameworks and strategies they wish to impose on customers who follow influencers to increase the leverage of a marketing communication strategy by better understanding target audiences and the macroenvironment.

The HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items had not previously used in studies related to SMIs and the susceptibility of Gen Zers to be influenced by SMIs. This research illuminated the benefits of using the HEXACO, as an instrument to understand personality traits in this group. This research helped the already growing body of investigations supporting the HEXACO model. This research also supports the use of honesty-humility dimension as a sixth factor. The current study extends the literature in regard to HEXACO and its personality dimensions. This study has shown that honesty-humility personality trait can be used to understand who will be susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. In addition to the other five factors. This study advances the knowledge in the field by providing an additional instrument SUSIS Questionnaire, and personality dimensions to understand the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs. It is recommended that HEXACO could be used alongside SUSIS Questionnaire in a larger sample and in different countries in order to predict who will be susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

The latter can be used by psychologists to understand deeply the susceptibility of young people in different contexts. In addition, psychologists can use the SUSIS Questionnaire to understand the degree of parasocial relationship within a specific sample population.

SUSIS Questionnaire is a new instrument that can be used in different studies, mainly in the fields of marketing, communication science and psychology in order to understand the susceptibility of young people to be influenced by SMIs. This instrument can be associate to other instruments and generate valid outcomes in different contexts.

This study demonstrates that individuals with low scores in honesty-humility and consciousness can be more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs, in both positive and

negative ways. Therefore, I can work towards raising awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives. This study also intends to raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives based on the main findings discovered in this research.

Therefore, in order to raise awareness among young people about the impact of SMIs in their lives in a more effective approach, I propose a further study which includes developing and employing a workshop as a research methodology aiming to help young people recognise potentially harmful content posted by SMIs and consequently inform them and raise awareness about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives, either positive or negative impacts. Because as seen in the findings of this study, SMIs can cause both positive and harmful influences.

The digital transformation phenomenon has reshaped society, the labour market, and the education field led by innovation and technological evolution. Due to the rapid changes in society, the European Union launched The Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) in order to support the sustainable and effective adaptation of the education and training systems of EU Member States to the digital age (Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), 2022). The plan affirms that it is essential to educate people regarding the impact of digital technology on well-being and the way technology systems work (European Commission, 2022, p. 10). Additionally, this strategy mentions the necessity of developing possibilities to understand digital technologies' risks and opportunities and foster healthy, safe and meaningful use of digital technology (European Commission, 2022).

Furthermore, it is necessary to create possibilities in which individuals empower themselves to critically evaluate, be more resilient against manipulation and filter information due to the information overload and the lack of effective means to verify the information within this digital transformation topic (European Commission, 2022). Thus, the education and training systems play a vital role in filling these gaps. For example, schools should include curricular and/or co-curricular activities that help students become self-aware about their exposure to potentially harmful content online and raise awareness about social media influencers' impact on their lives. Additionally, The Economic and Social Research Institute in Dublin affirms that student wellbeing in Ireland should be paramount after the COVID-19 pandemic. This implies that results from programmes that

help students to understand, be informed and be aware of topics related to digital transformation might be beneficial to their well-being (Mohan *et al.*, 2020).

Therefore, the workshop proposed here as future research aims to be a useful resource for students in Ireland in order to help them recognise and avoid harmful content posted by SMIs. Furthermore, this programme will walk alongside the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027). As a result, the outcome of this workshop might positively impact students' well-being, be more cautious about what is good online content and be more resilient against online manipulation.

The literature confirms that the workshop method is an efficient learning technique for students mainly regarding the three types of objectives related to “knowledge, skills or attitudes” (Akkuş Çakır *et al.*, 2017; Gairal-Casadó *et al.*, 2019; EUROPARC, 2022; Read *et al.*, 2022). Also, workshops can be categorised into three main styles, “workshops as a means, as practice and as research methodology” (Ørngreen and Levinsen, 2017). Nonetheless, workshops must be planned and structured before their employability. Also, a measurement phase is essential to ensure quality. Therefore, the mixed-methods research design is recommended for measuring workshops performance or collecting data from the workshop, as future research, the effectiveness of this workshop should be measured via mixed-methods, employing a questionnaire and interviews (Ørngreen and Levinsen, 2017). Mohan *et al.* (2020) outline that the mixed-method approach has been increasingly used in the education field in Ireland over the past ten years. It is recommended to continue using this method for examining interventions and practices in heterogeneous environments. Finally, a workshop must be piloted before its employability and understanding its audience and objectives are essential for effectively employing a suitable workshop. The Appendix 19: Further Research – A Proposed Workshop, outlines a potential workshop structure for future research, including activities for students, and research techniques to measure its effectiveness.

Suggestions for Future Research

Further study can investigate and define different types of influence and content, such as contrasting positive and negative content. Although the findings provided important insights, it is crucial to reflect critically on some aspects of the research, such

as explicitly investigating the effect of marketing advertisements promoted by SMIs on young people's lives.

This research tested a new conceptual model based on relevant theories. Parasocial relationship and consumer trust were highlighted in this new conceptual model. Valuable insights were gathered from the understanding of this new model. However, I would suggest bringing to the model the concept of parasocial interaction, because the influence of parasocial interaction can breakup behaviour on an already established consumer trust connection that has not been investigated in this study. Further, the degree of parasocial interaction with SMIs and specific groups should be studied and reported.

This study confirms the susceptibility of this young sample to be influenced by SMIs through a new tested questionnaire, SUSIS. This influence was confirmed based on different scales and theories, such as the theories that built the Social Perception construct. Also, this research did not focus on only one social media platform or only category of SMIs. Further research should deeply investigate, the relational bond between individuals and SMIs in a specific social media platform or from a specific SMIs category perspective.

This investigation did not cover brand attitude and loyalty as a dyadic relationship between SMIs and followers. Future research could investigate the integrated effects of branding strategies that contract SMIs for partnership, and try to understand followers' behaviour, attitudes, and purchase intention.

Although this study was conducted in Ireland, future research could be conducted with a similar methodology with other populations in different parts of the world. This could add to the existing body of knowledge of the SUSIS Questionnaire and HEXACO-PI-R and contribute further knowledge from different perspectives. Also, this could enhance the validity of both instruments across the world. Interesting findings can come out from this future research recommendation, because cultural differences can bring new findings about the susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs, and HEXACO personality traits.

This study brought to attention the possibility of SMIs posting potential harmful content, and might be influencing followers in a negative perspective. I suggest that a future research should seek to deeply understand what are the consequences of harmful

posts from SMIs in the lives of young people. As well as, a possibility of creating a workshop to inform and aware young people about the impact of SMIs in their lives, both positive and negative impacts. In addition, in this case measure the efficacy of this workshop. The Appendix 19: Further Research – A Proposed Workshop, outlines a potential workshop structure for future research, including activities for students, and research techniques to measure its effectiveness.

Research is needed to unravel the impact of SMIs on young people that may have both desirable and undesirable consequences. Might be interesting to try to understand separately what are the benefits and consequences of being influenced by SMIs.

The thematic map from the analysis can be used for, and studied more deeply in, further research studies. As well as, the new SEM model.

Thus, if investigators can understand who will be susceptible to influence by SMIs, then we can work towards raising awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives, and therefore mitigate the negative consequences.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of the research are design and methodological attributes that impacted or influenced the application, investigation, understanding or interpretation of the research results (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019). These attributes are the constraints on the generalisability and utility of findings that result from the circumstances in which the research was designed and how the methods were used to establish internal and external validity (Bryman, 2004; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

This study has some limitations. The first limitation related to the paper self-reporting questionnaire, in order to collect data. Subjects were invited to fill the questionnaire on a voluntary basis. As Sellbom *et al.* (2018) stated, self-reporting instruments may limit the study's validity, as they ask participants to answer the questions honestly, presume the subjects know what is being asked of them, and assume they can answer introspectively. As the paper-based questionnaires was only to be taken once by

the participants, it assessed their personalities on that specific day, as opposed to how they may feel on an alternate day or at a different point of time.

I employed both questionnaire in a face-to-face basis, this might make participants feeling apprehensive, have some reservations or a lack of trust in the source, research, the questionnaires, or research aims. In order to mitigate, this limitations and bias, I informed the participants that they could answer the questionnaires as anonymous in order to ensure the confidential element outlined in the ethics section.

Another limitation in this research was my bias as the researcher regarding the importance of utilising the SUSIS Questionnaire and HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items. To alleviate this limitation I maintained awareness about the possibility of occur this limitation, and I interpreted only relationships that were presented in the questionnaires. Statistical analysis using SPSS and Smart PLS were used and I only interpreted associations that were depicted in these analysis.

Although, the sample size in this study is justified and correctly calculated, the current sample size is small to represent the Gen Zers worldwide. As known in quantitative research methods, as larger the sample more accurate would be the results (Bryman, 2004; Pallant, 2020).

The access to schools in order to increase the sample was a limitation, this difficulty occurred because this research begun in September 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was very serious, and schools in Ireland were reluctant to give access to students for research purposes.

The participants under 18 years old were difficult to have access and get approval from their parents and guardians, due to bias in regard the aim of the study as well as the use of personality tests. Therefore, sample bias might have occurred from participants point of view and their parents point of view.

Finally, the longitudinal effects in relation to the time available to investigate the phenomenon and carry out the research is constrained by the due date to complete the PhD (3 years) and the funding available.

In sum, a larger sample size can reveal further themes and subthemes from a qualitative perspective, providing more robust data to increase the power effect of quantitative analysis. Also, as the questionnaire employed was paper-based and given face-to-face, this created difficulty in accessing educational institutions and the sampled

population. In future studies, an online questionnaire may more easily provide results from a larger sample size. Further analyses should also more deeply investigate the motives that make young people follow their influencers from a cross-cultural perspective, making the results applicable to different counties and cultures.

Conclusion

The current study revealed statistically significant relationships between the SUSIS Questionnaire and the HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items. SUSIS Questionnaire is a new instrument developed, tested and validated in this study. This questionnaire can measure the influence of SMIs on young people from two different dimensions, Social Perception and Harmful Content, holistically understand the influence of SMIs on young people's lives in both positive and negative perspective.

The structural equation model (SEM) analysis (Figure 13) demonstrates that the Two constructs, SOCIAL_PERCEPTION and HARMFUL, composed of twenty-five questions from the SUSIS questionnaire, significantly represent SMIs' influence on this young sample. When associated to HEXACO dimensions, the model confirms that personality traits, Honesty-Humility and Conscientiousness significantly present interdependence with INFLUENCE_SMI scores.

The participants that highly scored in these two personality traits are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs. Participants who scored high in honesty-humility might be more aware about ethics, moral and social norms, and this might make them more aware and informed about SMIs' influence and impact on their lives. Therefore, this awareness might act as a shield and reduce the level of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the contrary, participants who score low in Honesty-Humility are more susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Additionally, high level of conscientiousness might lead to low levels of susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs. On the other hand, low scores in Conscientiousness might lead to higher scores in susceptibility to be influenced by SMIs mainly due to their low self-esteem. This research confirms that conscientious individuals are less susceptible to be influenced by SMIs.

Through the SUSIS Questionnaire was possible to confirm a certain degree of parasocial relationship, consumer trust and perception towards influencers from a susceptibility perspective in this young sample. The questionnaire confirm that these factors can measure the influence of SMIs on young people. Therefore, this study advances the knowledge and contribute to these theories. As well as, the use of harmful content as potential posts from SMIs, can also influence this young sample. Thus, through the confirmation of the relationship among these variables was possible to confirm and test the conceptual model of this study, as well as present a SEM model. This is unique and a novelty in the literature. Mainly from an Irish context.

The thematic analysis intended to bring a holistic overview of the influence of SMIs on young people outlining the motives, the main influencers and the main channels that represent participants' views. The thematic analysis technique demonstrated an efficient method to explore and investigate young people's views on this topic. The thematic map from the analysis can be used for further research studies and explored deeply. This study can also serve as a worked example of Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to thematic analysis.

This research offered evidence about the influence of SMIs on young people's lives from a quantitative and qualitative perspective. The mixed-methods approach in this study is recommended for further research in this scenario in order to deeply understand the phenomenon under investigation. This study is in line with the main findings from the available literature review, as demonstrated in the results and discussion section. It is noteworthy that the motives to follow influencers might differ regarding age, sex, region and cultural differences. This study happened in Ireland, with participants living in Ireland, and therefore in an Irish context.

The thematic map that was built based on the qualitative results is also unique and a novelty in the literature. It confirms the influence of SMIs from different angles, and presents evidence of certain degree of parasocial relationship, consumer trust and relatability between followers and their SMIs.

This study confirms that parasocial relationships can be formed with social media influencers, enhancing the knowledge within this theory that has always investigated the parasocial relationships with celebrities. Consumer trust is also confirmed, and SMIs are recommended in this study as key players for digital marketing campaigns, mainly

because there is evidence in this study that participants search for SMIs advice and tips mainly regarding to products and brands.

From a marketing perspective, many indicators (See Table 65) are directly related to SMIs' suggestions to products and brands, it means that this sample are influenced by SMIs' advice and suggestions to buy products and brands. This confirms that SMIs are important players for marketing communication strategies nowadays, mainly when the influencer is credible and trustworthiness (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017; Coco and Eckert, 2020; Ki *et al.*, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2021; Pradhan *et al.*, 2022). Mainly because the brand's role in the credibility and trustworthiness of SMIs is vital, given the fact that if followers perceive the brand as being coherent with the influencer's image, it contributes to the credibility and trustworthiness towards both (SMIs and the brand itself) (Breves *et al.*, 2019, 2021).

Although, there is suggestion to use SMIs as key players in marketing campaigns. Ethics must be ensured, because the responsibility to protect young people in the digital environment relies on us all and all institutions in our society, as the internet and social media are present in our daily lives.

In reviewing previous literature, I noted a call to researchers to study the influence of SMIs, as well as carry research about the impact of SMIs. In addition, I noted that research using HEXACO personality is required as it is a growing instrument. Another noted gap is concerning to parasocial relationship theory, as this is a theory generally associated to celebrities, there is a gap in the literature asking to associate parasocial relationship to SMIs. The same happens to consumer trust theory. Finally, research was also needed to understand the potential harmful influence of SMIs on young people. This study answered these calls and filled the gaps in the literature.

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An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics Approved by TU Dublin



24 September 2021

Dear Charles

Following consideration of an application for ethical approval of a research project by a panel of the Ethics Committee of TU Dublin, Blanchardstown Campus, Ethical approval for a research project titled *'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by Social Media Influencers (SMIs)'* has been authorised.

Should there be a material change to the proposed research, notice of such changes should be made to the ethics committee.

Yours sincerely


Pat O'Connor (Chair)
Ethics Committee
TU Dublin Blanchardstown Campus

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Appendix 2: Consent Form for Research Involving Subjects Under 18 Yrs 4FRD05

Consent form for research involving 'less powerful' subjects or those under 18 yrs		
	4FRD05	File Location:
		Current Revision: 02
		Approved by:
		Document Owner: Registrar
4FRD05.02	Document Level: 4	

Consent form for research involving 'less powerful' subjects or those under 18 yrs

Revision History

Revision	Date	Revision Description DCRT#	Originator
01	16 September 2008	New document	QA Officer
02	6 April 2011	Addition of space to identify subject	Registrar

Note: A completed form is required for each participant and this is to be retained by the researcher for a period of 3 years.

Researcher's name:	Title:
School/Department:	
Title of study:	
Objective of study:	
To be completed by the: subject/patient/volunteer/informant/interviewee/parent/guardian <u>Note: "You have the opportunity to discuss anything you want with the school's counsellor that may arise along this research".</u>	
Have you been fully informed/read the information sheet about this study?	YES/NO
Is your participation given voluntarily?	YES/NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?	YES/NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?	YES/NO

Have you received enough information about this study and any associated health and safety implications if applicable?	YES/NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from this study? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• at any time• without giving a reason for withdrawing• without affecting your future relationship with the Institute	YES/NO
Do you agree to take part in this study the results of which are likely to be published?	YES/NO
Have you been informed that this consent form shall be kept in the confidence of the researcher?	YES/NO
Participant/guardian Signature _____ Date _____	
Participant/guardian Email _____	
Phone Number or WhatsApp Number _____	
Name in block letters _____	
Name of person on whose behalf consent is being provided _____	
Signature of researcher: _ _____ _ Date: _____	
Benefit	
In what way, if any does the proposed study benefit the individual subject?	
Parent's / guardian's consent	
Has parent's/guardian's consent to be obtained?	YES
If Yes, in what form - verbal, written, witnessed, etc. – will consent be obtained. Please attach a copy of the relevant forms.	
Assent	

Will the child's or young person's assent be sought?

YES

Students provide assent or dissent to participate in this research through their signature in this form.

Risk

Are the risks of the investigation judged to be minimal or nil?

YES

Parent / guardian's signature: _____ **Date** _____

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Acknowledgement

TU Dublin acknowledges the work of the "Research Ethics Committee" of the Technological University Dublin and thank them for their permission in using their literature in the formation of this document.

Appendix 3: Permission to Use the HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items Version

This information is found in the public domain (<http://hexaco.org/hexaco-inventory>)
HEXACO-PI-R Materials for Researchers.

If you want to administer the inventory in pencil and paper form, both the 100-item and the 60-item versions of the HEXACO-PI-R are provided here in several languages. Both of these versions are available in self-report and observer report forms. You can download any of these forms free of charge, but only for the purpose of non-profit academic research. Please contact the authors if you would like to use the inventory for non-academic purposes.

B00139249 Charles Castro

From: Kibeom Lee <kibeom@ucalgary.ca>
Sent: 14 January 2022 13:37
To: B00139249 Charles Castro; mashton@brocku.ca
Subject: RE: Info - HEXACO Test - Academic Use

Dear Mr. Castro,

Thank you for your interest in the HEXACO-PI-R. The inventory can be used free of charge for educational and research purposes. The inventory and the scoring key can be downloaded from <https://hexaco.org/hexaco-inventory>.

If you'd like to use it for applied purposes, please let me know, we can send a site outlining terms and conditions.

Good luck with your research.

Best regards,
Kibeom

Appendix 4: HEXACO-PI-R 60 Items Version

HEXACO-PI-R
(SELF REPORT FORM)

© Kibeom Lee, Ph.D., & Michael C. Ashton, Ph.D.

DIRECTIONS

On the following pages you will find a series of statements about you. Please read each statement and decide how much you agree or disagree with that statement. Then write your response in the space next to the statement using the following scale:

- 5 = strongly agree
- 4 = agree
- 3 = neutral (neither agree nor disagree)
- 2 = disagree
- 1 = strongly disagree

Please answer every statement, even if you are not completely sure of your response.

Please provide the following information about yourself.

Name: _____

Sex (circle): Female: ____ Male: ____ Other: ____

Age: _____ years

What school are you at? _____

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

- 1 _____ I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery.
- 2 _____ I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute.
- 3 _____ I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me.
- 4 _____ I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall.
- 5 _____ I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions.
- 6 _____ I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
- 7 _____ I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries.
- 8 _____ I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal.
- 9 _____ People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.
- 10 _____ I rarely express my opinions in group meetings.
- 11 _____ I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.
- 12 _____ If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.
- 13 _____ I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song, or a painting.
- 14 _____ When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details.
- 15 _____ People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.
- 16 _____ I prefer jobs that involve active social interaction to those that involve working alone.
- 17 _____ When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable.
- 18 _____ Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
- 19 _____ I think that paying attention to radical ideas is a waste of time.
- 20 _____ I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought.
- 21 _____ People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.
- 22 _____ On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic.
- 23 _____ I feel like crying when I see other people crying.
- 24 _____ I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.
- 25 _____ If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert.
- 26 _____ When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized.
- 27 _____ My attitude toward people who have treated me badly is "forgive and forget".
- 28 _____ I feel that I am an unpopular person.
- 29 _____ When it comes to physical danger, I am very fearful.
- 30 _____ If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.

Continued...

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = neutral 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree

- 31 _____ I've never really enjoyed looking through an encyclopedia.
- 32 _____ I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by.
- 33 _____ I tend to be lenient in judging other people.
- 34 _____ In social situations, I'm usually the one who makes the first move.
- 35 _____ I worry a lot less than most people do.
- 36 _____ I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
- 37 _____ People have often told me that I have a good imagination.
- 38 _____ I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time.
- 39 _____ I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me.
- 40 _____ The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends.
- 41 _____ I can handle difficult situations without needing emotional support from anyone else.
- 42 _____ I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.
- 43 _____ I like people who have unconventional views.
- 44 _____ I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act.
- 45 _____ Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do.
- 46 _____ Most people are more upbeat and dynamic than I generally am.
- 47 _____ I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.
- 48 _____ I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.
- 49 _____ I don't think of myself as the artistic or creative type.
- 50 _____ People often call me a perfectionist.
- 51 _____ Even when people make a lot of mistakes, I rarely say anything negative.
- 52 _____ I sometimes feel that I am a worthless person.
- 53 _____ Even in an emergency I wouldn't feel like panicking.
- 54 _____ I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
- 55 _____ I find it boring to discuss philosophy.
- 56 _____ I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan.
- 57 _____ When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.
- 58 _____ When I'm in a group of people, I'm often the one who speaks on behalf of the group.
- 59 _____ I remain unemotional even in situations where most people get very sentimental.
- 60 _____ I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.

Appendix 5: HEXACO-PI Reversed Items (in Yellow) and Scoring Keys

- 1 I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery.
- 2 I plan ahead and organize things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute.
- 3 I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me.
- 4 I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall.
- 5 I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions.
- 6 I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.
- 7 I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries.
- 8 I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal.
- 9 People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.
- 10 I rarely express my opinions in group meetings.
- 11 I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.
- 12 If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.
- 13 I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song, or a painting.
- 14 When working on something, I don't pay much attention to small details.
- 15 People sometimes tell me that I'm too stubborn.
- 16 I prefer jobs that involve active social interaction to those that involve working alone.
- 17 When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable.
- 18 Having a lot of money is not especially important to me.
- 19 I think that paying attention to radical ideas is a waste of time.
- 20 I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought.
- 21 People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.
- 22 On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic.
- 23 I feel like crying when I see other people crying.
- 24 I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.
- 25 If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert.
- 26 When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganized.
- 27 My attitude toward people who have treated me badly is "forgive and forget".
- 28 I feel that I am an unpopular person.
- 29 When it comes to physical danger, I am very fearful.
- 30 If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.
- 31 I've never really enjoyed looking through an encyclopedia.
- 32 I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by.
- 33 I tend to be lenient in judging other people.
- 34 In social situations, I'm usually the one who makes the first move.

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

- 35 I worry a lot less than most people do.
- 36 I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.
- 37 People have often told me that I have a good imagination.
- 38 I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time.
- 39 I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me.
- 40 The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends.
- 41 I can handle difficult situations without needing emotional support from anyone else.
- 42 I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.
- 43 I like people who have unconventional views.
- 44 I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act.
- 45 Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do.
- 46 Most people are more upbeat and dynamic than I generally am.
- 47 I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.
- 48 I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.
- 49 I don't think of myself as the artistic or creative type.
- 50 People often call me a perfectionist.
- 51 Even when people make a lot of mistakes, I rarely say anything negative.
- 52 I sometimes feel that I am a worthless person.
- 53 Even in an emergency I wouldn't feel like panicking.
- 54 I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favors for me.
- 55 I find it boring to discuss philosophy.
- 56 I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan.
- 57 When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.
- 58 When I'm in a group of people, I'm often the one who speaks on behalf of the group.
- 59 I remain unemotional even in situations where most people get very sentimental.
- 60 I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.

Scoring Keys for the 60-Item Version	
Honesty-Humility	
Sincerity	6, 30R, 54
Fairness	12R, 36, 60R
Greed-Avoidance	18, 42R
Modesty	24R, 48R
Emotionality	
Fearfulness	5, 29, 53R
Anxiety	11, 35R
Dependence	17, 41R
Sentimentality	23, 47, 59R
Extraversion	
Social Self-Esteem	4, 28R, 52R
Social Boldness	10R, 34, 58

An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

Sociability	16, 40
Liveliness	22, 46R
Agreeableness	
Forgiveness	3, 27
Gentleness	9R, 33, 51
Flexibility	15R, 39, 57R
Patience	21R, 45
Conscientiousness	
Organization	2, 26R
Diligence	8, 32R
Perfectionism	14R, 38, 50
Prudence	20R, 44R, 56R
Openness to Experience	
Aesthetic Appreciation	1R, 25
Inquisitiveness	7, 31R
Creativity	13, 37, 49R
Unconventionality	19R, 43, 55R

Notes:

Items indicated with R are reverse-keyed items; for these items, responses should be reversed prior to computing scale scores: 5 □□1, 4 □□2, 3 □□3, 2 □□4, 1 □□5

Facet scale scores should be computed as means across all items in facet, after recoding of reverse-keyed items. Note that the facet scales of the 100- and 60-item versions of the HEXACO-PI-R are very short and are not intended to have high levels of internal-consistency reliability. They are recommended for use as predictors of conceptually related criterion variables and as indicators of the HEXACO personality factors.

Factor scale scores should be computed as means across all items in factor. If orthogonal factor scale scores are desired, these can be calculated as varimax-rotated principal components of facet scales as calculated by a computer statistical package. (Note that a moderately large sample size (~250) may be needed to produce a stable component solution.).

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Appendix 6: First Version of SUSIS Questionnaire

SUSIS Questionnaire Content

Welcome

Thank you very much for participating in this research. By answering the questions in this questionnaire, you are helping to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). It is very important to the success of this research that you provide your honest answers and opinions. Please remember there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions. The only answer is whatever you truly think or feel.

Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

For the purpose of this questionnaire, Social Media Influencers are simply people on social media who spread their knowledge about a specific niche and encourage fans and followers to take action, thus establishing respect and trust (Ryan, 2010; Wielki, 2020). They are defined as having at least three of the following characteristics:

- They consider themselves experts in certain areas (such as their work, hobbies, or interests).
- They are often asked for advice about purchases in areas where they are knowledgeable.
- When they encounter a new product they like, they tend to recommend it to friends and followers.
- They have a large social network circle, a large number of followers and often refer people to one another based on their interests.
- They are active online, using blogs, social media channels, websites, e-mail, discussion groups, online community boards, etc, to connect with their peers (Double Click, 2006).

Ethics

This research is being conducted by Charles Alves de Castro and has already been granted ethical approval to conduct this research.

Time Commitment

This questionnaire takes approximately 15 - 30 minutes to complete.

Participant Rights

Although there are minimal risks from participation in this study, you are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. If you have any questions that have not been answered in this information sheet, feel free to contact the researcher using the information provided below.

If participation in this study causes you any distress, your school offers a counselling service, and the school counsellor is aware that this study is taking place. Should you wish to do so, you may contact them and speak to them in confidence about any concerns or issues you have.

Participants can feel free to leave any questions blank if they want to. Once the data is analysed, participants will not be able to withdraw it, but all data will be anonymised, and individual participants will not be identifiable.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Any data collected as part of this study is for academic research purposes only.

Your confidentiality will be respected and any data that is published arising from this study will be anonymised so that no individual participant can be identified.

For Further Information

Please contact: Charles Alves de Castro

Phone: 0830246376

Email: charlesturcastro@yahoo.com.br

By filling out the questionnaire, you are indicating that you have read the information sheet and have given consent to participate in this study.

Q1.

Please answer the following questions by ticking or inserting your answer, as appropriate, in the space provided.

Full Name: _____

Sex: Male () Female () Other ()

Age: _____

In which city/town are you based? _____

What school are you at? _____

What course of study are you attending? _____

Which of the following social media channels do you visit at least once per week? Please rank them as 1 being the most visited. E.g. Instagram (1), WhatsApp (2), Twitter (3).

Instagram	()	YouTube	()
Facebook	()	TikTok	()
Twitter	()	Snapchat	()
WeChat	()	WhatsApp	()
QQ	()	Telegram	()
LinkedIn	()	Do not know	()

Other (please specify) _____

How much time per day do you spend on the social media channels you visit at least once per week? Please choose only one.

Less than 1 hour	()	Between 1 – 2 hours	()
Between 2 – 3 hours	()	Between 3 – 4 hours	()
Between 4 – 5 hours	()	Between 5 – 6 hours	()
More than 6 hours	()	Do not know	()

What is your favourite social media platform? Please choose only one.

Instagram	()	YouTube	()
Facebook	()	TikTok	()
Twitter	()	Snapchat	()
WeChat	()	WhatsApp	()
QQ	()	Telegram	()
LinkedIn	()	Do not know	()

Other (please specify) _____

Q2.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree



1. I follow many social media influencers 1 2 3 4 5
2. I enjoy following influencers online 1 2 3 4 5
3. I do not feel part of a social media environment 1 2 3 4 5
4. My perception often changes when I receive information from the influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
5. I value the opinion of the influencers that I follow as if they were someone close whom I trust 1 2 3 4 5
6. The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me 1 2 3 4 5
7. I often buy products suggested by social media influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
8. I ask my parents to buy products recommended by influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
9. There is a good chance that I will become an influencer 1 2 3 4 5
10. I would like to be an influencer as a career path or profession 1 2 3 4 5
11. In my opinion most of the social media influencers that I follow are honest and genuine 1 2 3 4 5
12. I do feel emotionally attached to social media influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
13. Social Media Influencers that I follow have a great deal of personal meaning for me 1 2 3 4 5
14. I do not feel a strong sense of belonging to a social media environment 1 2 3 4 5
15. I do not follow many social media influencers 1 2 3 4 5
16. Most of the social media influencers that I follow get paid to promote products and brands 1 2 3 4 5
17. I have tried a new risky experience because it was recommended by an influencer 1 2 3 4 5

Q3.

Please indicate how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content from social media influencers that you follow? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale).

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always



- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Promoting products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Promoting violent content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Promoting unhealthy food | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Promoting sexualised body image | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Promoting an ideal body image | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Promoting alcohol products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Promoting alcohol intake | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Promoting cigarette products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Promoting cigarette smoking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Promoting drugs intake | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Promoting sexual or pornographic content | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Promoting cyberbullying | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Promoting any type of coercion or sexual extortion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Promoting any type of bullying | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Promoting incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Promoting any type of criminal activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Promoting any form of terrorism | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Promoting any content related to human trafficking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Promoting incitement to a religion or belief | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Promoting fake news about politics | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Promoting fake news | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Promoting any kind of discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Promoting cultural discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Promoting dangerous games | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Promoting risky experiences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Promoting unhealthy food intake | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Q4.

Please indicate which of the following types of content you consider as harmful content posted by Social Media Influencers? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-3 scale).

1	2	3
Would not consider	Might or might not consider	Definitely consider



- | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 1. Promoting products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 2. Promoting violent content | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 3. Promoting unhealthy food | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 4. Promoting sexualised body image | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 5. Promoting an ideal body image | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 6. Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 7. Promoting alcohol products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 8. Promoting alcohol intake | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 9. Promoting cigarette products or brands | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 10. Promoting cigarette smoking | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 11. Promoting drugs intake | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 12. Promoting sexual or pornographic content | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 13. Promoting cyberbullying | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 14. Promoting any type of coercion or sexual extortion | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 15. Promoting any type of bullying | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 16. Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 17. Promoting incitement to racial hatred or racial discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 18. Promoting any type of criminal activities | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 19. Promoting any form of terrorism | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 20. Promoting any content related to human trafficking | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 21. Promoting incitement to a religion or belief | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 22. Promoting fake news about politics | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 23. Promoting fake news | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 24. Promoting any kind of discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 25. Promoting cultural discrimination | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 26. Promoting dangerous games | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 27. Promoting risky experiences | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| 28. Promoting unhealthy food intake | 1 | 2 | 3 |

Q5.

Please indicate your five most favourite influencers and in which social media channel you follow them.

Number	Influencers	Channel on which you prefer to see their content
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Q6.

Please indicate five main motives that make you follow your favourite influencers.

Number	Motives
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Q7.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

- 
1. I consider influencers earnest 1 2 3 4 5
 2. I feel social media influencers are truthful 1 2 3 4 5
 3. I consider influencers trustworthy 1 2 3 4 5
 4. I feel influencers are honest 1 2 3 4 5
 5. I would share intimate information with my favourite influencer if they asked 1 2 3 4 5
 6. I can easily identify with influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
 7. Influencers that I follow and I are a lot alike 1 2 3 4 5
 8. Influencers that I follow and I have a lot in common 1 2 3 4 5
 9. Influencers that I follow and I have the same hobby/ies 1 2 3 4 5
 10. Influencers that I follow and I have the same style 1 2 3 4 5
 11. Influencers that I follow and I use the same products (we have the same taste in products) 1 2 3 4 5
 12. The information influencers share benefits followers like me 1 2 3 4 5
 13. I think the time I spend on viewing influencers' content is worth it 1 2 3 4 5
 14. I am able to share my views and feelings with influencers I follow 1 2 3 4 5
 15. If I disagree with some messages or products posted by influencers that I follow, there is a way for me to let them know 1 2 3 4 5
 16. I look forward to seeing influencer's next post 1 2 3 4 5
 17. I see influencers as natural, down-to-earth people 1 2 3 4 5
 18. If influencers that I follow start another social media channel, I will also follow them there 1 2 3 4 5
 19. Influencers seem to understand the kinds of thing I want to know 1 2 3 4 5
 20. I miss seeing influencers when they do not post on time 1 2 3 4 5
 21. I would like to meet influencers that I follow in person 1 2 3 4 5
 22. If something bad happens to influencers that I follow, I feel sad 1 2 3 4 5
 23. I would invite influencers that I follow to my party 1 2 3 4 5

Q7. Continuation

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree



- | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 24. Influencers that I follow are the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. If influencers lived in my neighbourhood, we would be friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Influencers that I follow would fit in well with my group of friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. I feel emotionally connected to the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. I feel a bond with the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. I am very attached to the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. The influencers that I follow are special to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. I miss the influencers that I follow when they do not post an entry or I cannot view their posts | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. I accumulate knowledge through the information shared by the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 33. I acquire novel information through the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 34. I get interesting information through the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 35. The information provided by the influencers that I follow is useful to me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 36. I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 37. I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 38. In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 39. I would recommend products or brands promoted by influencers to my family and friends | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

8

Appendix 7: Letter of Support

Research Project: An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs): the case of Gen Zers in Ireland

Letter of Support

To whom it may concern

As the Principal of,

I am happy to support the project, “An investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs)”.

Specifically, our institution will be happy to be part of the study described in the project, which involves testing and evaluating the influence of social media influencers on young people as described above.

For further questions concerning this letter, as well as the coordination of the initiative, please contact Mr. Charles Alves de Castro (charlesturcastro@yahoo.com.br)

Yours sincerely,

Printed Name:

Date:

Appendix 9: Invigilator Report Form for Data Collection 1 – Secondary School

Invigilator Report Form

INFORMATION: EMPLOYABILITY OF A QUESTIONNAIRE AND PERSONALITY TEST		
Date of Application: 04/02/2022	Location: Secondary School located in Ireland	
Scheduled Start Time: 09:00	Actual Start Time: 09:30	
Scheduled Finish Time: 11:00	Actual Finish Time: 10:40	
<p>Notes: The school's assistant teacher, was responsible for following the application process. Thus, this assistant teacher was present in class during the entire application, also responsible for meeting any student's needs, such as contacting the school's counsellor.</p> <p>Charles Alves de Castro was responsible for the project, application process and students management. Such as explaining to the students their rights and providing any support needed.</p>		
<p>Late Arrival: __15__ minutes late</p> <p>REASON FOR LATE ARRIVAL: STUDENTS WERE ATTENDING ANOTHER CLASS.</p>		
INVIGILATOR SECTION		
Item	Provided to student	Submitted to invigilator
Questionnaire on Paper (7 questions – 131 items)	In class/on paper	In class/on paper
Personality Test on Paper (1 question - 65 items)	In class/on paper	In class/on paper
APPLICATION REPORTING:		
<p>(Record student breaks, incidents, concerns, contact with invigilator/counsellor).</p> <p>09:00 AWAITING PARTICIPANTS IN THE CLASS. THE APPLICATION IS HELD IN THE MUSIC ROOM OF THE SCHOOL. THE ENVIRONMENT IS QUIET AND APPROPRIATE FOR THE APPLICATION. SOCIAL DISTANCING IS POSSIBLE AND REQUIRED, AS WELL THE USE OF MASKS IS COMPULSORY INSIDE THE CLASS AND SCHOOL. THE CONSENT FORMS WERE ALREADY COLLECTED BY THE ASSISTANT TEACHER WHO HANDED OVER THEM TO ME.</p>		

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09:10 10 PARTICIPANTS ARRIVED. THE APPLICATION WILL START AFTER ALL PARTICIPANTS ARRIVE.

09:15 10 PARTICIPANTS WERE ORGANISED IN CLASS.

09:18 THE REST OF THE PARTICIPANTS (17) ARRIVED IN CLASS, AND THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY ORGANISED IN CLASS.

09:25 I PRESENTED MYSELF, THE PROJECT AND THE UNIVERSITY. EXPLAINED THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT, PRIVACY RIGHTS, ETHICS AND ANONYMITY COMMITMENT. THE QUESTIONNAIRES WERE DELIVERED. ALSO, I DELIVERED TU DUBLIN'S PENS TO THEM.

09:30 THE STUDENTS STARTED FILLING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

09:33 A STUDENT ASKED A QUESTION ABOUT THE CITY/TOWN ITEM IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

09:45 I NOTICED THAT SOME STUDENTS WERE USING THEIR SMARTPHONES TO ACCESS THEIR SOCIAL MEDIA CHANNELS AND INFLUENCERS.

09:45 I ASKED THE STUDENTS IF THEY NEEDED A BREAK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE. THEY DID NOT WANT TO.

09:55 06 STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

10:00 09 STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

10:05 ALL THE STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

10:07 COMFORT BREAK UNTIL 10:17.

10:17 STUDENTS WERE ALREADY IN CLASS WAITING FOR THE PERSONALITY TEST.

10:20 I EXPLAINED THE PERSONALITY TEST, READ THE DIRECTION AND DISTRIBUTED THE FORMS.

10:24 THEY STARTED FILLING THE PERSONALITY TEST.

10:30 NO QUESTIONS SO FAR.

10:48 ALL THE STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE PERSONALITY TEST.

10:50 I COLLECTED ALL THE FORMS.

10:55 THE FORMS WERE CHECKED IN CLASS AND STUDENTS WHO MISSED QUESTIONS WERE INVITED TO FILL THEM. THREE STUDENTS MISSED BETWEEN ONE TO FOUR ITEMS. THEY WERE FILLED.

11:05 I THANKED THEM, DISTRIBUTED CHOCOLATES, OFFERED MY SUPPORT FOR ANY QUERY. I ASKED THEM ABOUT THEIR INSIGHTS ABOUT THE FORMS, THEY TOLD ME IT WAS A GOOD

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EXPERIENCE, NOT BORING, NOT SO LONG, AND THEY ENJOYED PARTICIPATING IN THE RESEARCH.

11:20 AFTER ORGANISING THE FORMS AND THANKING THE COLLABORATORS, I LEFT.

Number of candidates (who filled the consent forms)	57	List of absentees:	21
Total of candidates present	36	21 Girls	15 BOYS
Date	04/02/2022		
Signature of invigilator			
CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO			

Notes:

The school was invited to participate in the project on the 03rd of December, 2021.

On the 07th of December 2021, the School's vice principal, accepted to take part in the research and signed the letter of support. On the same day, a specific assistant teacher to lead the project in the school, who immediately accepted.

The consent forms were distributed from the 15th of December 2021 to the 31st of January 2022, and 105 forms were distributed. The assistant teacher distributed and collected the consent forms.

The 21 absent students were contacted by the assistant teacher, who used their classes to employ the questionnaire and personality test for these absent students. The completed forms were delivered to the researcher on the 9th of March, 2022. The researcher retained all forms in secure storage.

Appendix 10: Invigilator Report Form for Data Collection 2 – Private Higher Education Institution

Invigilator Report Form

INFORMATION: EMPLOYABILITY OF A QUESTIONNAIRE AND PERSONALITY TEST		
Date of Application: 14/11/2022	Location: Private Higher Education Institution located in Ireland	
Scheduled Start Time: 12:20	Actual Start Time: 12:40	
Scheduled Finish Time: 13:40	Actual Finish Time: 14:10	
Charles Alves de Castro was responsible for the project, application process and students management. Such as, selectig and inviting students, and explaining to the students their rights and providing any support needed. The institution provided one classroom to employ the questionnaires. Due to the last application experience, students are allowed to use their smartphones to access their SMIs.		
Late Arrival: <u> 10 </u> minutes late		
REASON FOR LATE ARRIVAL: STUDENTS WERE LATE.		
INVIGILATOR SECTION		
Item	Provided to student	Submitted to invigilator
Questionnaire on Paper (7 questions – 131 items)	In class/on paper	In class/on paper
Personality Test on Paper (1 question - 65 items)	In class/on paper	In class/on paper
APPLICATION REPORTING:		
(Record student breaks, incidents, concerns, contact with invigilator).		
12:20 AWAITING PARTICIPANTS IN THE CLASS. THE APPLICATION IS HELD IN A CLASSROOM PROVIDED BY THE INSTITUTION. THE ENVIRONMENT IS QUIET AND APPROPRIATE FOR THE APPLICATION. SOCIAL DISTANCING IS POSSIBLE, AND THE USE OF MASKS IS NOT COMPULSORY INSIDE OF THE INSTITUTION. CONSENT WAS GIVEN BY THE STUDENTS IN THE FIRST PAGE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE. MAINLY BECAUSE THEY ARE OVER 18 YEARS OLD.		

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12:30 15 PARTICIPANTS ARRIVED. THE APPLICATION WILL START AFTER ALL PARTICIPANTS ARRIVE.

12:35 15 PARTICIPANTS WERE ORGANISED IN CLASS.

12:35 THE REST OF THE PARTICIPANTS (19) ARRIVED IN CLASS, AND THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY ORGANISED IN CLASS.

12:40 I PRESENTED MYSELF, THE PROJECT AND THE UNIVERSITY. EXPLAINED THE RIGHT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PROJECT, PRIVACY RIGHTS, ETHICS AND ANONYMITY COMMITMENT. THE QUESTIONNAIRES WERE DELIVERED.

12:45 THE STUDENTS STARTED FILLING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

12:58 A STUDENT ASKED A QUESTION ABOUT THE SCALES IN THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

13:05 I ASKED THE STUDENTS IF THEY NEEDED A BREAK IN THE MIDDLE OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE. THEY DID NOT WANT TO.

13:20 ALL THE STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE QUESTIONNAIRE.

13:20 COMFORT BREAK UNTIL 13:30.

13:30 I EXPLAINED THE PERSONALITY TEST, READ THE DIRECTIONS AND DISTRIBUTED THE FORMS.

13:35 THEY STARTED FILLING THE PERSONALITY TEST.

13:45 NO QUESTIONS SO FAR.

13:55 ALL THE STUDENTS FINISHED COMPLETING THE PERSONALITY TEST.

13:55 I COLLECTED ALL THE FORMS.

14:00 THE FORMS WERE CHECKED IN CLASS AND STUDENTS WHO MISSED QUESTIONS WERE INVITED TO FILL THEM. ONE STUDENT MISSED TWO ITEMS. THEY WERE FILLED.

14:05 I THANKED THEM, OFFERED MY SUPPORT FOR ANY QUERY. I ASKED THEM ABOUT THEIR INSIGHTS ABOUT THE FORMS, THEY TOLD ME IT WAS A GOOD EXPERIENCE.

14:10 AFTER ORGANISING THE FORMS AND THANKING THE COLLABORATORS, I LEFT.

Number of candidates (who filled the consent forms)	34	List of absentees:	00
Total of candidates present	34	20 Girls	14 BOYS

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Date	14/11/2022		
Signature of invigilator			
CHARLES ALVES DE CASTRO			

Notes:

The Private Higher Education Institution was invited to participate in the project on the 15th of August, 2022.

On the 01st of September 2022, the institution's director, accepted to take part in the research and signed the letter of support.

About 200 students from different courses were invited along the term to take part in the research data collection scheduled to the 14th of November 2022. These students were informed about the sample characteristics, mainly the age range from 16-26 years old. It was known that all students in this institution were over 18 years old. 34 participants were present and participated in the research.

Appendix 11: Publications and Conferences

PUBLISHED PAPERS

- Alves de Castro, C. (2023) 'Designing and Validating a Method to Measure Young People's Susceptibility to Social Media Influencers: The SUSIS Questionnaire', *Studies in Media and Communication*, 11(6), 398-411, available: <https://doi.org/10.11114/smc.v11i6.6165>.
- Alves de Castro, C. (2023) 'Thematic analysis in social media influencers: who are they following and why?', *Frontiers in Communication*, 8, 1217684, available: <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1217684>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2022) 'An Ethical Discussion About the Responsibility for Protection of Minors in the Digital Environment: A state-of-the-art review', *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*, 9(5), 343–370, available: <https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.95.12433>.
- Alves de Castro, C., O'Reilly, I. and Carthy, A. (2021) 'Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context: A Literature Review', *Journal of Marketing Management*, 9(2), 59–71, available: <https://doi.org/10.15640/jmm.v9n2a9>.
- Alves de Castro, C., O'Reilly, I. and Carthy, A. (2022) 'The Evolution of the Internet and Social Media: A Literature Review', *International Journal of e-Education, e-Business, e-Management and e-Learning*, 12(1), 30–41, available: <https://doi.org/10.17706/ijeeee.2022.12.1.30-41>.
- Alves de Castro, C., O'Reilly I. and Carthy, A. (2022) 'The Role of Influencers in Adolescents' Consumer Decision-Making Process: A Sustainability Approach', *Critical Letters in Economics & Finance*, 1(1), 31–46, available: <https://doi.org/10.21427/azb6-zn63>.

RELEVANT PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH EVENTS

- Alves de Castro, C. (2022) 'Who Are They Following And Why? A Thematic Analysis Using N Vivo', *Eighth International Conference on Communication & Media Studies*, Complutense University of Madrid, Faculty of Information Sciences, Madrid, Spain, 08/September/23, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.31448.88325>.
- Alves de Castro, C. (2022) 'Designing and Validating a Method to Measure Young People's Susceptibility to Social Media Influencers: the SUSIS Questionnaire', *FMOS Conference 2023*, American Institute of Applied Sciences, Switzerland, 09/June/23, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.36709.78565>.

- Alves de Castro, C. (2022) 'Personality Traits and Susceptibility to Social Media Influencers', *Practical Applied Research Conference (PARC) 2023*, Dublin Business School, Ireland, 26/May/23, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.31570.12485>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2022) 'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)', *2022 Irish Academy of Management (IAM) Annual Conference - Colloquium Session*, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, 24/August/2022, available: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20751841>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2022) 'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)', *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Research and Practice Showcase/Conference - Pedagogy and Practice Session*, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, 28/January/2022, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.34407.32166>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2022) 'An Ethical Discussion About the Responsibility for Protection of Minors in the Digital Environment: A state-of-the-art review', *1st Disrupting Thinking Conference: "COVID-19 Global Challenges - The Economic and Financial Dimensions"*, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, 18/January/2022, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.19307.82727>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2021) 'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)', *7th SIM (Società Italiana Marketing) Doctoral & Research Colloquium - Research Proposal*, University of Salento, Lecce, Italy, 22/November/2021, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.17315.37928>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2021) 'Social Media Influencers (SMIs) in Context: a literature review', *XVIII SIM (Società Italiana Marketing) Conference*, Organised by the Italian Marketing Society, Marche Polytechnic University, Ancona, Italy, 14/October/2021, ISBN 978-88-943918-6-2, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.31827.50721>.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2021) 'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)', *Lucerne Summer University: Ethics in a Global Context LSUE under the patronage of UNESCO - PhD Colloquium*, University of Lucerne, Switzerland, 10 to 15/June 2021.
- Alves de Castro, C., Carthy, A. and O'Reilly, I. (2021) 'An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)', *Exploring Research Methods Workshop - Poster*, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, 21/April/2021, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.27357.74722>.

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- Alves de Castro, C. and Carthy, A. (2020) ‘An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)’, *The 11th Annual Graduate Research Symposium 2020 - Poster*, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, 17/December/2020, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.10677.29923>.
- Alves de Castro, C. and Carthy, A. (2020) ‘An investigation of the personality traits that could identify vulnerable young people who will be susceptible to undue influence by social media influencers (SMIs)’, *The 1st Disrupting Thinking Research Conference 2020*, Technological University Dublin, Ireland, 15/December/2020, available: <https://doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.24911.71849>.

Appendix 12: Completed Modules and Credits



9th November 2022

To Whom it May Concern

This is to confirm that Mr. Charles Alves de Castro born on 9th September 1990, completed the following modules as part of his PhD programme at Technological University Dublin.

- GR50 1012 Research Integrity. 5 ECTS – February 2021.
- ASTC 1601 User experience design. 5 ECTS – January 2021.
- RESM 9004 Research Methodologies. 10 ECTS – January 2021.
- Lucerne Summer University: Ethics in a Global Context. 5 ECTS – June 2021.
- Individual Differences PY300. 5 ECTS – September 2021.
- Module 2 Starting your Research. 5 ECTS – March 2022.
- Module 4 Completing your Research. 5 ECTS – July 2022.

Should you have any further queries, please do not hesitate to contact me at giovanna.rampazzo@tudublin.ie.

Yours Sincerely,

Giovanna Rampazzo
Graduate Research School Office
Technological University Dublin
Kevin Street- Dublin 8
E: giovanna.rampazzo@tudublin.ie



Seoladh Cláraithe / Registered Address
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191 An Cuarbhóthar Thuaidh, D07 EWV4, Éire
TU Dublin - Park House Grangegorman
191 North Circular Road, D07 EWV4, Ireland


OT Baile Átha Cliath
Campas Shráid Chaoimhin
D08 NF82, Éire

TU Dublin
Kevin Street Campus
D08 NF82, Ireland

+353 1 402 3000
tudublin.ie

Appendix 13: Garda Vetting

An Garda Síochána





Biúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin,
Bóthar an Ráschúrsa,
Durlas,
Contae Thiobraid Árann,
E41 RD60.

Teileafón / Tel: (0504) 27300
Facs / Fax: (0504) 27373

National Vetting Bureau,
Racecourse Road,
Thurles,
Co. Tipperary,
E41 RD60.

Láitheán Gréasain/Web Site: www.garda.ie

Bi linn/Join us  

Luaig an uimhir tagarta B.N.G. a leanas le do thoil /
Please quote the following N.V.B. Ref. No: TUD002-20200911-00384

Nochtadh Grinnfhiosrúcháin / Vetting Disclosure

William O Reilly
Technological University Dublin: Student

Maidir le / Re: Charles Alves De Castro, 09/09/1990, 134 The Village, Clonsilla, Dublin 15, D15H26K

De bhun d'arratais de réir fhorálacha Alt 13 de na hAchtanna um an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin (Leanaí agus Daoine Soghonta), 2012 go 2016 maidir leis an té atá ainmnithe thuas, eisítear an nochtadh grinnfhiosrúcháin leis seo duit de réir fhorálacha Alt 14 de na hAchtanna um an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin (Leanaí agus Daoine Soghonta), 2012 go 2016.

Pursuant to your application within the provisions of Section 13 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016 in respect of the above named, the herewith vetting disclosure is issued to you within the provisions of Section 14 of the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Acts 2012 to 2016.

Rinneadh cuardaigh ar an / Searches were conducted on the 11/09/2020.

Taifead Coiriúil / Criminal Record

Nil / Nil

Tabhair faoi deara: Má dhearbhaíonn an té atá ainmnithe thuas go bhfuil an taifead coiriúil seo míchruinn, ba cheart don Teagmhálaí Ainmnithe aghaidh a thabhairt ar an gceist i scríbhinn chuig an mBiúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin.

Please Note: If the above-named asserts that this criminal record is inaccurate, the Liaison Person should address the matter in writing to the National Vetting Bureau.

Faisnéis Shonraithe / Specified Information

Nil / Nil

Ceannfort / Superintendent
Biúró Náisiúnta Grinnfhiosrúcháin / National Vetting Bureau

An Garda Síochána: Ag Coinneáil Daoine Sábháilte / Keeping People Safe

Appendix 14: Dendrogram Path

Planejamento de aglomeração							
Estágio	Cluster combinado		Coeficientes	O cluster de estágio é exibido primeiro			Próximo estágio
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2			Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
1	9	10	9.000	0	0	7	
2	19	20	10.000	0	0	6	
3	24	25	20.000	0	0	11	
4	14	15	33.000	0	0	6	
5	17	18	36.000	0	0	8	
6	14	19	41.500	4	2	8	
7	9	11	41.500	1	0	14	
8	14	17	44.500	6	5	10	
9	22	23	51.000	0	0	21	
10	13	14	53.833	0	8	12	
11	16	24	55.000	0	3	12	
12	13	16	63.429	10	11	16	
13	26	27	78.000	0	0	21	
14	9	12	83.000	7	0	17	
15	5	6	83.000	0	0	22	
16	13	21	89.800	12	0	20	
17	2	9	90.250	0	14	20	
18	7	8	105.000	0	0	23	
19	3	28	107.000	0	0	23	
20	2	13	115.364	17	16	24	
21	22	26	125.000	9	13	24	
22	1	5	128.500	0	15	27	
23	3	7	132.500	19	18	25	
24	2	22	154.594	20	21	26	
25	3	4	165.500	23	0	26	
26	2	3	208.420	24	25	27	
27	1	2	434.427	22	26	0	

Appendix 15: SUSIS Questionnaire Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics						
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	91	10	1	11	3.80	3.745
What school are you at?	91	1	1	2	1.35	.480
What course of study are you attending?	91	5	1	6	2.89	1.888
How much time per day do you spend on the social media channels you visit at least once per week?	91	7	1	8	4.04	1.490
What is your favourite social media platform?	91	12	1	13	6.78	3.130
Sex	91	1	1	2	1.63	.486
1. I follow many social media influencers	91	4	1	5	3.22	1.237
2. I enjoy following influencers online	91	4	1	5	3.21	1.038
6. The influencers that I follow suggest helpful products or brands to me	91	4	1	5	3.16	1.014
1. Promoting products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	3.71	1.057
3. Promoting unhealthy food - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	2.29	1.057
5. Promoting an ideal body image - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	3.35	1.205
6. Promoting an unrealistic lifestyle - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	3.27	1.221
7. Promoting alcohol products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	2.57	1.231
8. Promoting alcohol intake - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	2.19	1.237
9. Promoting cigarette products or brands - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	1.63	1.142
10. Promoting cigarette smoking - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	1.59	1.125
11. Promoting drugs intake - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	1.49	.947
12. Promoting sexual or pornographic content - how	91	4	1	5	1.63	.962

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regularly you see or receive the following kind of content						
15. Promoting any type of bullying - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	3	1	4	1.36	.675
16. Promoting any type of abusive forms of marketing - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	1.51	.822
22. Promoting fake news about politics - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	2.10	1.193
23. Promoting fake news - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	2.26	1.182
24. Promoting any kind of discrimination - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	4	1	5	1.59	.830
26. Promoting dangerous games - how regularly you see or receive the following kind of content	91	3	1	4	1.79	.937
17. I see influencers as natural, down-to-earth people	91	4	1	5	3.05	1.004
19. Influencers seem to understand the kinds of thing I want to know	91	4	1	5	3.09	.974
24. Influencers that I follow are the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with	91	4	1	5	3.36	1.028
36. I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow	91	4	1	5	2.70	1.059
37. I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow	91	4	1	5	2.90	1.086
38. In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow	91	4	1	5	2.65	1.058
39. I would recommend products or brands promoted by influencers to my family and friends	91	4	1	5	2.65	1.004
Valid N (listwise)	91					

Sex		
	N	%
Male	34	37.4%
Female	57	62.6%

Age		
	N	%

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16	43	47.3%
17	13	14.3%
18	5	5.5%
19	2	2.2%
20	2	2.2%
21	3	3.3%
22	1	1.1%
23	3	3.3%
24	1	1.1%
25	12	13.2%
26	6	6.6%

Appendix 16: HEXACO PI-R 60 Items Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Sex	91	1	2	1.63	.486
Age	91	1	11	3.79	3.752
What school are you at?	91	1	2	1.35	.480
1. I would be quite bored by a visit to an art gallery.	91	1	5	3.21	1.329
2. I plan ahead and organise things, to avoid scrambling at the last minute.	91	1	5	3.59	1.085
3. I rarely hold a grudge, even against people who have badly wronged me.	91	1	5	2.86	1.151
4. I feel reasonably satisfied with myself overall.	91	1	5	3.47	1.058
5. I would feel afraid if I had to travel in bad weather conditions.	91	1	5	2.79	1.169
6. I wouldn't use flattery to get a raise or promotion at work, even if I thought it would succeed.	91	1	5	3.49	1.109
7. I'm interested in learning about the history and politics of other countries.	91	1	5	3.34	1.240
8. I often push myself very hard when trying to achieve a goal.	91	2	5	3.82	.926
9. People sometimes tell me that I am too critical of others.	91	1	5	2.43	1.107
10. I rarely express my opinions in group meetings.	91	1	5	2.77	1.065
11. I sometimes can't help worrying about little things.	91	1	5	4.02	1.075
12. If I knew that I could never get caught, I would be willing to steal a million dollars.	91	1	5	3.55	1.352
13. I would enjoy creating a work of art, such as a novel, a song, or a painting.	91	1	5	3.03	1.456
14. When working on something, I don't pay much attention to the small details.	91	1	5	2.34	1.108
15. People sometimes tell me that I am too stubborn.	91	1	5	3.07	1.200
16. I prefer jobs that involve active social interactions to those that involve working alone.	91	1	5	3.46	1.078
17. When I suffer from a painful experience, I need someone to make me feel comfortable.	91	1	5	2.97	1.242
18. Having a lot of money is not specially important to me.	91	1	5	2.93	1.162
19. I think that paying attention to radical ideas is a waste of time.	91	1	5	2.90	.943

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20. I make decisions based on the feeling of the moment rather than on careful thought.	91	1	5	2.80	1.035
21. People think of me as someone who has a quick temper.	91	1	5	2.69	1.171
22. On most days, I feel cheerful and optimistic.	91	1	5	3.31	1.072
23. I feel like crying when I see other people crying.	91	1	5	3.03	1.260
24. I think that I am entitled to more respect than the average person is.	91	1	5	2.09	1.142
25. If I had the opportunity, I would like to attend a classical music concert.	91	1	5	3.11	1.426
26. When working, I sometimes have difficulties due to being disorganised.	91	1	5	2.92	1.276
27. My attitude toward people who have treated me badly is "forgive and forget".	91	1	5	2.79	1.060
28. I feel that I am an unpopular person.	91	1	5	3.05	1.119
29. When it comes to physical danger, I am very fearful.	91	1	5	3.04	1.219
30. If I want something from someone, I will laugh at that person's worst jokes.	91	1	5	2.65	1.139
31. I've never really enjoyed looking through an encyclopedia.	91	1	5	3.26	1.246
32. I do only the minimum amount of work needed to get by.	91	1	5	2.66	1.128
33. I tend to be lenient in judging other people.	91	1	5	3.22	.892
34. In social situations, I'm usually the one who makes the first move.	91	1	5	3.07	1.162
35. I worry a lot less than most people do.	91	1	5	2.45	1.310
36. I would never accept a bribe, even if it were very large.	91	1	5	3.24	1.068
37. People have often told me that I have a good imagination.	91	1	5	3.51	1.068
38. I always try to be accurate in my work, even at the expense of time.	91	1	5	3.74	.905
39. I am usually quite flexible in my opinions when people disagree with me.	91	1	5	3.53	.958
40. The first thing that I always do in a new place is to make friends.	91	1	5	3.29	1.057
41. I can handle difficult situations without needing emotional support from anyone else.	91	1	5	3.46	1.186
42. I would get a lot of pleasure from owning expensive luxury goods.	91	1	5	3.23	1.292

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43. I like people who have unconventional views.	91	1	5	3.36	.888
44. I make a lot of mistakes because I don't think before I act.	91	1	5	2.78	1.200
45. Most people tend to get angry more quickly than I do.	91	1	5	3.29	.946
46. Most people are more upbeat and dynamic than I generally am.	91	1	5	2.89	1.005
47. I feel strong emotions when someone close to me is going away for a long time.	91	1	5	3.76	.981
48. I want people to know that I am an important person of high status.	91	1	5	2.30	.960
49. I don't think of myself as the artistic or creative type.	91	1	5	3.07	1.289
50. People often call me a perfectionist.	91	1	5	2.81	1.182
51. Even when people make a lot of mistakes, I rarely say anything negative.	91	1	5	3.09	.985
52. I sometime feel that I am a worthless person.	91	1	5	2.88	1.332
53. Even in an emergency I wouldn't feel like panicking.	91	1	5	2.80	1.258
54. I wouldn't pretend to like someone just to get that person to do favours for me.	91	1	5	3.73	1.146
55. I find it boring to discuss philosophy.	91	1	5	2.97	1.251
56. I prefer to do whatever comes to mind, rather than stick to a plan.	91	1	5	2.87	1.128
57. When people tell me that I'm wrong, my first reaction is to argue with them.	91	1	5	2.86	1.111
58. When I'm in a group of people, I'm often the one who speaks on behalf of the group.	91	1	5	2.74	1.163
59. I remain unemotional even in situations where most people get very sentimental.	91	1	5	2.66	1.166
60. I'd be tempted to use counterfeit money, if I were sure I could get away with it.	91	1	5	2.76	1.328
Valid N (listwise)	91				

Appendix 17: Tested and Validated SUSIS Questionnaire

SUSIS Questionnaire Content

Welcome

Thank you very much for participating in this research. By answering the questions in this questionnaire, you are helping to assess the susceptibility of young people to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). It is very important to the success of this research that you provide your honest answers and opinions. Please remember there are no "right" or "wrong" answers to these questions. The only answer is whatever you truly think or feel.

Social Media Influencers (SMIs)

For the purpose of this questionnaire, Social Media Influencers are simply people on social media who spread their knowledge about a specific niche and encourage fans and followers to take action, thus establishing respect and trust (Ryan, 2010; Wielki, 2020). They are defined as having at least three of the following characteristics:

- They consider themselves experts in certain areas (such as their work, hobbies, or interests).
- They are often asked for advice about purchases in areas where they are knowledgeable.
- When they encounter a new product they like, they tend to recommend it to friends and followers.
- They have a large social network circle, a large number of followers and often refer people to one another based on their interests.
- They are active online, using blogs, social media channels, websites, e-mail, discussion groups, online community boards, etc. to connect with their peers (Double Click, 2006).

Ethics

This research is being conducted by Charles Alves de Castro and has already been granted ethical approval to conduct this research.

Time Commitment

This questionnaire takes approximately 15 - 30 minutes to complete.

Participant Rights

Although there are minimal risks from participation in this study, you are permitted to withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. If you have any questions that have not been answered in this information sheet, feel free to contact the researcher using the information provided below.

If participation in this study causes you any distress, your school offers a counselling service, and the school counsellor is aware that this study is taking place. Should you wish to do so, you may contact them and speak to them in confidence about any concerns or issues you have.

Participants can feel free to leave any questions blank if they want to. Once the data is analysed, participants will not be able to withdraw it, but all data will be anonymised, and individual participants will not be identifiable.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

Any data collected as part of this study is for academic research purposes only.

Your confidentiality will be respected and any data that is published arising from this study will be anonymised so that no individual participant can be identified.

For Further Information

Please contact: Charles Alves de Castro

Email: charlesturcastro@yahoo.com.br

By filling out the questionnaire, you are indicating that you have read the information sheet and have given consent to participate in this study.

Q1.

Please answer the following questions by ticking or inserting your answer, as appropriate, in the space provided.

Full Name: _____

Sex: Male () Female () Other ()

Age: _____

In which city/town are you based? _____

What school are you at? _____

What course of study are you attending? _____

Which of the following social media channels do you visit at least once per week? Please rank them as 1 being the most visited. E.g. Instagram (1), WhatsApp (2), Twitter (3).

Instagram	()	YouTube	()
Facebook	()	TikTok	()
Twitter	()	Snapchat	()
WeChat	()	WhatsApp	()
QQ	()	Telegram	()
LinkedIn	()	Do not know	()

Other (please specify) _____

How much time per day do you spend on the social media channels you visit at least once per week? Please choose only one.

Less than 1 hour	()	Between 1 – 2 hours	()
Between 2 – 3 hours	()	Between 3 – 4 hours	()
Between 4 – 5 hours	()	Between 5 – 6 hours	()
More than 6 hours	()	Do not know	()

What is your favourite social media platform? Please choose only one.

Instagram	()	YouTube	()
Facebook	()	TikTok	()
Twitter	()	Snapchat	()
WeChat	()	WhatsApp	()
QQ	()	Telegram	()
LinkedIn	()	Do not know	()

Other (please specify) _____

Q4.

Please indicate your five most favourite influencers and in which social media channel you follow them.

Number	Influencers	Channel on which you prefer to see their content
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		

Q5.

Please indicate five main motives that make you follow your favourite influencers.

Number	Motives
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	

Q6.

To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Please read the scale carefully and then circle the most appropriate answer on the 1-5 scale).

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree



1. If influencers that I follow start another social media channel, I will also follow them there 1 2 3 4 5
2. Influencers seem to understand the kinds of thing I want to know 1 2 3 4 5
3. Influencers that I follow are the kind of person I would like to play or hang out with 1 2 3 4 5
4. I would purchase a brand based on the advice I am given by the influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
5. I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5
6. In the future, I will purchase the products of brands recommended by the influencers that I follow 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire!

Appendix 18: Final SUSIS Questionnaire Structure

Category	Measures	Questions	Scale	Based on
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographics • Factual 	Name, gender, age, location, school, education, social media channels visited at least once a week, time per day spent on the social media channels, and favourite social media platforms.	Q1 9 items	Free answer, ranking question and multiple choice	(Bryman, 2004; Leavy, 2017; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ryu and Han, 2021)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception towards influencers • Attitude • Opinion 	Variable: Perception towards influencers/susceptibility, (From 1 to 3).	Q2 3 items	Likert: Level of Agreement 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree	(Vagias, 2006; Ki, 2018; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of harmful online content posted by SMIs • Attitude • Opinion 	Variable: Frequency that the sample sees or receives harmful online content posted by SMIs (From 1 to 16).	Q3 16 items	Likert: Frequency – 5 points 1 – Never 2 – Rarely 3 – Sometimes 4 – Often 5 – Always	Based on Table 15 of this study. (Commission of the European Communities, 1996; EUR-Lex, 2009; Harris and Graff, 2011; European Commission, 2012; Mascheroni and Ólafsson, 2014; Curtis <i>et al.</i> , 2018; World Health Organization, 2018; Coates <i>et al.</i> , 2019; E. Coates <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Kalu, 2019; Lou and Kim, 2019; Milovidov, 2019; POOC, 2019; Qutteina <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Hendriks <i>et al.</i> , 2020; Kirk <i>et al.</i> , 2020)
Most followed influencers	Variable: Five most favourite influencers and	Q4	Free Answer	(De Vaus, 2014; Saunders, Lewis

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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	in which social media channel they follow them.			and Thornhill, 2019; Wielki, 2020; Therapy, Speech and Language Department NHS, 2020)
<p>Main motives to follow their favourite influencers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	Variable: Five main motives that make them follow their favourite influencers.	Q5	As above	As above
<p>Susceptibility to be influenced by social media influencers from two dimensions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attitude • Opinion 	<p>Measure the susceptibility to be influenced by social media influencers in two different dimensions (From 1 to 6).</p> <p>Variable Parasocial Relationship – From 1 to 3</p> <p>Variable Consumer Trust – From 4 to 6</p>	Q6 6 items	<p>Likert: Level of Agreement 1 – Strongly disagree 2 – Disagree 3 – Neither agree nor disagree 4 – Agree 5 – Strongly agree</p>	(Vagias, 2006; David Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Yuan and Lou, 2020; Sánchez-Fernández and Jiménez-Castillo, 2021; Kim and Kim, 2021)

Appendix 19: Further Research – A Proposed Workshop

Workshop Outline

Workshop Title:

An overview of the impact of social media influencers' (SMIs) content on young people's lives.

Instructor Content Expertise:

Charles Alves de Castro is developing research based on an investigation of the personality traits that could identify young people who will be susceptible to influence by social media influencers (SMIs). Also, he holds an MSc in marketing with a focus on digital marketing and an MSc in human resources management. Additionally, he has three years of experience in the topic to be delivered in this workshop.

Learning Description:

This workshop provides an overview of the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) content on young people's lives. This workshop experience pertains to a foundation level (Level I: Awareness) (Institute for Human Services, 2012; Ohio Child Welfare Training Program, 2022). It will include a description of the digital transformation topic and insights on the evolution of the internet, social media and SMIs; the definition of SMIs and how to recognise them will be addressed using examples from different SMIs styles such as fashion, fitness, green influencers etc.; the concept of what is good vs potentially harmful online content will be delivered; types of positive and negative (harmful) content will be outlined using a few examples; how this content might affect young people's lives will be described; a brief discussion on online privacy will be pointed out; procedures for avoiding harmful online content will be discussed. I will use examples when necessary and suitable; at the end of the workshop, a small group brainstorming exercise on the following questions will be addressed: have you ever had any experience with harmful content spread by SMIs? Give examples; how can you recognise harmful online content promoted by SMIs? What would be an efficient way to avoid harmful online content? This activity will be addressed in small groups between 5-8 students, in which they will need to answer these questions through a canva template, writing down their answers in post-its and sticking them below the questions, each question will be written in a different colour, and the post-its will be in the same colours (Kolb, 1984; Bertella *et al.*, 2021; Canva, 2022; EUROPARC, 2022). Finally, a short questionnaire with five multiple-choice questions asking them about the performance of the workshop followed by a focus group interview will be employed to understand their views on the workshop content and measure the programme's effectiveness.

Intended Audience:

This workshop is for Gen Zers aged 16-26 who have internet access and social media accounts. The participants must have a basic understanding of social media platforms and follow SMIs on their online channels.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe ways how to recognise and avoid potentially harmful content posted by SMIs;
- Describe the pertinent digital issues delivered in the workshop;
- Be able to state the goals of the workshop;

Learning Expected Outcomes:

- Help young people to recognise potentially harmful content posted by SMIs;
- Raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives, either positive or negative impact;
- Raise resilience among young people about the promotion of potentially harmful content spread by SMIs;

Relevance to Target Audience:

This workshop aims to be a valuable resource for students in Ireland in order to help them recognise and avoid harmful content posted by SMIs. Furthermore, this programme will walk alongside the European Union's (Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027), 2022). As a result, the outcome of this workshop might positively impact students' well-being, be more cautious about what is good online content and be more resilient against online harmful content.

Workshop Format:

This workshop pertains to the "workshop as research methodology style". Focusing on studying domain-related cases using the workshop format as a research methodology. The workshop is authentic, as it aims to fulfil participants' expectations to achieve something related to their own interests. But, on the other hand, the workshop is specifically designed to fulfil a research purpose: to produce reliable and valid data about the domain in question (Ørngreen and Levinsen, 2017, p. 72).

Recommended Materials to Participants:

Books:

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- Aral, S. (2020). *The Hype Machine: How Social Media Disrupts Our Elections, Our Economy, and Our Health--and How We Must Adapt*. Currency;
- Mahon, C. M. (2020). *The Psychology of Social Media*. Routledge;
- Singer, P. W., & Brooking, E. T. (2018). *LikeWar: The weaponisation of social media*. Eamon Dolan Books;
- Turkle, S. (2015). *Reclaiming Conversation: The power of talk in a digital age*. Penguin Press;

Films (Suitable for ages 12 and up according to Netflix Ireland):

- Fincher, D., & Sorkin, A. (2010). *The Social Network* (Netflix, 2022).
- Orłowski-Yang, J., Coombe, D., & Curtis, V. (2020). *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix, 2022).

Agenda and Outline:

This workshop schedule was created based on (Read *et al.*, 2022).

Step	Time (mins)	Objective of the Step	Techniques / Items used	Stage on Methods and Evaluation
1	10	Introduce the event, the agenda, and ensure participants understand their involvement in the project	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Welcome and Why
2	10	Introduce the digital transformation topic and its concepts	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
	8	Link the topic mentioned above to the evolution of the internet, social media and SMIs	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
BREAK 5 mins				
3	10	Introduce the definition of SMIs and how to recognise them. Examples will be used from different SMIs styles such as fashion, fitness, green influencers etc	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
4	10	Introduce the concepts of good online content and potentially harmful online. Types of positive and negative (harmful) content will be outlined using a few examples	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer

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5	8	Describe how positive and negative content might affect adolescents' lives	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
6	8	Briefly discuss online privacy and how the importance of talking about this	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
7	8	Introduce procedures for avoiding harmful online content will be discussed	Ppt Slides and Interactive Questions	Knowledge Transfer
BREAK 5 mins				
8	35	Introduce and start working on the group activity	Ppt Slides, Post-Its, Colour Pens, Paper and Activity Framework	Knowledge Transfer and Drive Activity
9	10	Discuss their insights on the activity	Ppt Slides	Expectations and Views
10	10	Introduce and deliver the feedback questionnaire	Ppt Slides and Questionnaires Copies	Evaluation, Expectations and Views
11	5	Delivery of the key points from the presentation	Ppt Slides	Review and Knowledge Retention
12	45	Organise focus groups and employ the method. Gather data on experience of contributing	Ppt Slides, Focus Groups Guide, Laptop, iPad, and Smartphone	Evaluation, Expectations and Views
13	3	Thank all for their participation and pack up		
	190 mins			

Transfer of learning strategies within the outline:

Small group discussion and activity using the brainstorming model, examples will be employed during the workshop when it is suitable, interactive presentation including visual aids with clear and direct information, and books and films are recommended to expand knowledge and stimuli critical thinking towards the topic covered.

Training Techniques:

- Use of presentation and visual aids to transmit factual information and knowledge;
- Use of discussion to promote greater exploration of the information and to develop understanding;
- Questions will be asked to participants to help determine how well they understand the content;
- Practical group exercise will be employed to stimulate their critical thinking towards the topic under study and to understand their views on the topics covered;
- Questionnaire and focus groups interviews will be used to understand the effectiveness of the workshop according to the participants' views;

Total Time:

The total duration of the workshop is about 3 hours and 30 minutes, including the content delivery, activity, evaluation, breaks and possible delays. The workshop will be delivered in one single session.

Workshop Appendices:

1. *Activity Template:* This activity was formulated based on (Kolb, 1984; Bertella *et al.*, 2021; Canva, 2022; EUROPARC, 2022).

WORKSHOP: AN OVERVIEW OF THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS CONTENT ON ADOLESCENTS LIVES

Group number/name:

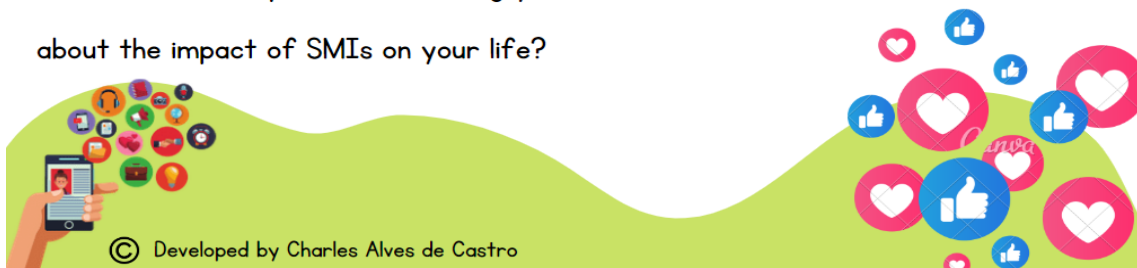
HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY EXPERIENCE WITH HARMFUL CONTENT SPREAD BY INFLUENCERS? Give examples related to your experiences.	HOW CAN YOU RECOGNISE HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT PROMOTED BY INFLUENCERS? Describe your ideas and give examples when necessary.
WHAT WOULD BE AN EFFICIENT WAY TO AVOID HARMFUL ONLINE CONTENT? Give your ideas.	

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2. *Questionnaire Template*: This questionnaire was built based on (Eustis *et al.*, 2017).



	Not at all helpful	Somewhat helpful	Very helpful
1- Overall, how helpful have you found this workshop?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2- At this point, how successful do you think this workshop was in informing you about recognising and avoiding potentially harmful content posted by influencers?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3- At this point, how successful do you think this workshop will be in helping you be more resilient against potentially harmful online content?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4- At this point, how successful do you think this workshop was in informing you about the impact of SMIs on your life?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



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3. *Focus Group Guide Template*: This framework was built based on (Krueger, 2002; Stellavato, 2013; Baroutian and Kensington-Miller, 2016; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2019).

Focus Group Interview Plan Aiming to Evaluate the Workshop Effectiveness and Performance		
Focus Group Information:		
Moderator:		
Introduction of interviewer and Topic Outline	<p>Hello, my name is Charles Alves de Castro, I would like to thank you all for taking your time to participate in this interview.</p> <p>The main focus of this interview is to examine the effectiveness of the workshop “An overview of the impact of social media influencers (SMIs) content on young people's lives”.</p> <p>The results will be used to ensure the quality of this workshop and contribute to the scientific field as a potential model to help students to recognise and avoid harmful content.</p>	
Instruction to Participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ No right or wrong answers, only different points of view ➤ We are tape recording, one person speaking at a time ➤ We are on a first name basis ➤ You do not need to agree with others, but you must listen respectfully as others share their views ➤ No smartphones are allowed at this time ➤ Turn off your electronic devices. If you cannot and if you must respond to a call, please do so as quietly a possible and re-join us as quickly as you can ➤ My role as moderator will be to guide the discussion ➤ Talk to each other 	
The Plan		
Topics Under Investigation	Main Questions	Additional Questions
<p>How effectively does the provision of a specifically designed workshop enable young people to recognise potentially harmful content posted by SMIs?</p> <p>The effectiveness of the workshop in achieving its objectives: “Help young people</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What did you think of the programme? 2. What was helpful about the workshop and what you have learnt? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Of all the things w discussed, what to you is the most important?
		<p>Clarifying Questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Could you expand a little on this? ➤ Could you tell me anything else?

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<p>to recognise potentially harmful content posted by SMIs; Raise awareness among young people about the impact of social media influencers' content on their lives; Raise resilience among young people about the promotion of potentially harmful content spread by SMIs”.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Has anything from the workshop been helpful for your life? 4. Tell me about positive or negative experiences you have had with the workshop? 5. What needs improvement? 6. Have we missed anything in the workshop? 7. Suppose that you were in charge and could make one change that would make the programme better. What would you do? 	<p>➤ Could you give me some examples?</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>I would like to thank you again for your contribution and for taking your time to participate in this interview.</p>	