THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION AND SOCIAL MEDIA PARTICIPATION IN THE TWO-STEP FLOW OF COMMUNICATION

by

Charles Aaron Lawry

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As members of the Dissertation Committee, we certify that we have read the dissertation prepared by Charles Aaron Lawry, titled The Role of Parasocial Interaction and Social Media Participation in the Two-Step Flow of Communication and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Anita Bhappu  
Date: 4/18/2013

Sabrina Helm  
Date: 4/18/2013

Mike Staten  
Date: 4/18/2013

Final approval and acceptance of this dissertation is contingent upon the candidate’s submission of the final copies of the dissertation to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this dissertation prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement.

Dissertation Director: Anita Bhappu  
Date: 4/18/2013
STATEMENT BY AUTHOR

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SIGNED: Charles Aaron Lawry
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DEDICATION

To Grandpop Clarence Lawry and Grandpa Robert “Bob” Baumann.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ......................................................................................................................... 7
LIST OF TABLES ................................................................................................................................. 8
ABSTRACT .............................................................................................................................................. 9

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ....................................................................................................... 10
  Research Questions and Goals for the Current Study ................................................................. 10
  Proposed Contributions to Marketing Theory and Practice .................................................... 13

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .............................................................................................. 16
  What is an Opinion Leader? ......................................................................................................... 16
  Characteristics of Opinion Leadership ....................................................................................... 19
  The “Influentials Hypothesis” ..................................................................................................... 36
  Opinion Leadership in a Computer-Mediated Environment ...................................................... 46
  What is Parasocial Interaction (PSI)? ......................................................................................... 54
  Antecedents of Parasocial Interaction ....................................................................................... 62
  Empathy and Interpersonal Affect ............................................................................................... 65
  Parasocial Interaction in Marketing and Consumer Research .................................................. 68

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES ............................................. 73
  Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory ............................................................................... 73

CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY ............................................................................... 81
  Study Context .............................................................................................................................. 81
  Research Tools, Sampling and Data Collection Procedures ...................................................... 82
  Development of the Survey Instrument ..................................................................................... 84
  Operational Definitions of the Measures .................................................................................... 87

CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING .................................................. 94
  Data Analysis .............................................................................................................................. 94
  Demographics and Characteristics of the Respondents .......................................................... 95
  Convergent and Discriminant Validity ..................................................................................... 96
  Hypothesis Testing and Results .............................................................................................. 100

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS ........................................ 103
  Discussion of the Results .......................................................................................................... 103
  Theoretical Implications .......................................................................................................... 107
  Managerial Implications ........................................................................................................... 110
  Study Limitations ...................................................................................................................... 112
  Conclusions ............................................................................................................................... 113

APPENDIX A: DISCLOSURE FORM ................................................................................................. 114

APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT ............................................................................................ 117

REFERENCES ..................................................................................................................................... 132
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Stages in the Development of a Parasocial Relationship ........................................... 60
Figure 2. Theoretical Model ........................................................................................................... 80
Figure 3. Fictional Social Media Website ..................................................................................... 86
Figure 4. Structural Equation Model Results .............................................................................. 102
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Antecedents to Opinion Leadership................................................................. 91
Table 2. Opinion Leadership And Willingness To Participate (WTP)......................................... 93
Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis. .................................................................................. 98
Table 4. Discriminant Validity. ............................................................................................... 99
Table 5. Latent Regression Path Analysis. .............................................................................. 101
ABSTRACT

The Two-Step Flow of Communication suggests that opinion leaders have a greater impact on consumers' product choices and decisions than marketers. With the advent of the Internet and e-commerce, many consumer researchers expanded the study of opinion leadership to incorporate electronic Word-of-Mouth behavior (eWOM) into the Two-Step Flow of Communication. Yet, with the recent and increasing prominence of social media, there appears to be a gap within the opinion leadership literature.

Several studies have examined how the Internet and social media empower opinion leaders to instantaneously influence large crowds with eWOM. Marginally few studies, however, have considered how the production of user-generated content (UGC) among opinion leaders can further expand their peer influence. Furthermore, emergent research illustrates that social media is transforming into an enclave for celebrity culture, wherein celebrities use social media to invoke gossip and fantasy in consumers.

These technological and cultural shifts within the Internet and social media necessitate an understanding of how UGC, social media and celebrity culture fit within the Two-Step Flow of Communication. In order to address these gaps, the current study probed the relationships amongst parasocial interaction, opinion leadership and willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM. Specifically, parasocial interaction is a history of interactions between a consumer and celebrity that manifest into a fantasized, personal relationship. Relevant hypotheses were developed and used to construct a theoretical model. Data were collected from a nationally representative sample (n = 555) and a Structural Equation Model was subsequently run to test the hypotheses.

The findings suggest that social values, knowledge and parasocial interaction are positively related to opinion leadership. In turn, opinion leadership is positively related to willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM. Parasocial interaction, too, is positively related to willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM. A mediation effect was supported whereby opinion leadership significantly mediates the relationship between parasocial interaction and UGC, but not eWOM. The production of UGC is shown to be dependent upon parasocial interaction and opinion leadership. Nonetheless, eWOM does not seem to necessitate opinion leadership and can be produced directly from parasocial interactions.
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Research Questions and Goals for the Current Study

The Two-Step Flow of Communication initially rose to prominence during the 1950’s (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), and arguably, it has become an impactful theory of interpersonal relations and opinion leadership (Kadushin, 2006). The Two-Step Flow of Communication states that interpersonal relationships and WOM communication are more influential on consumer behavior than the mass media. The theory further elaborates that opinion leaders, also known as influentials with domain-specific knowledge (Piirto, 1992), mediate the flow of information between the mass media and consumers. By reviewing the findings from several empirical tests of the Two-Step Flow of Communication, Katz (1957) found that three antecedents are indicative of opinion leadership: the personification of certain values (who one is), competence (what one knows), and a strategic social location (who one knows). The suggested theoretical framework has helped researchers to formulate empirical studies wherein the personification of certain values leads to opinion leadership, including innovativeness (Venkatraman, 1989), materialism (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006), extroversion (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012a), and need for uniqueness (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Various researchers have also supported that competence (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b) leads to opinion leadership via knowledge (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999) and enduring involvement (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). A number of studies have further added that “who one knows” or a strategic social location enhances opinion leadership, especially when opinion leaders are situated at the centers (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980) or at hubs within their social networks (Burt, 1999; Goldenberg, Han, Lehmann, & Hong, 2009).
Additionally, when a person is an opinion leader, s/he is more likely than a non-opinion leader to disseminate positive and negative WOM that influences and sways his/her fellow peers’ decisions (Goldsmith & De Witt, 2003). With the advent of e-commerce during the 1990s, researchers expanded the study of opinion leadership to incorporate eWOM, or positive and/or negative statements that customers make about a product or company through the Internet (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004). This research mainly focused on the influential roles that opinion leaders assumed as avid Internet users and consumer reviewers at discussion groups and retailer websites (Lyons & Henderson, 2005; Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). Nevertheless, with the emergence of social media during the last decade, there appears to be a gap within the opinion leadership literature. Social media is defined as online communities where consumers can develop cyber identities and gain an online presence, while making friends and interacting with other consumers (Osetreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2012). It has been shown that social media empowers opinion leaders to influence larger groups of people and more distantly related “followers” with eWOM (Acar & Polonsky, 2007; Li & Du, 2011); however, very few studies have included user-generated content (UGC) in their models (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). UGC is original content that consumers post to websites, and it is usually creative in nature (i.e. videos, music, photos, etc.) (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). It is pertinent to incorporate UGC into opinion leadership research because it accurately reflects the technological capabilities available to opinion leaders today. Opinion leaders can showcase their talents and competence with UGC in a one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many format online (Li & Du, 2011).

Equally, Katz (1955) argued that "the way in which people influence each other is not only affected by the primary groups in which they live; it is co-determined by the broad
institutional setting of the American scene” (p. 9). In cultural studies, a *scene* is defined as a physical or virtual space where social practices intertwine and interact within the processes of differentiation, change and cross-fertilization (Straw, 1991). Thus, opinion leadership should also be understood against the backdrop of a dynamically unfolding, historical and cultural landscape. To date, there has been a paucity of opinion leadership research that accounts for the emergent social and cultural scenes within social media. In recent years, celebrity culture is among the scenes that social media has brought to the fore. A *celebrity* is a person who has the ability to generate large-scale mass media and public attention, while invoking gossip, fantasy, identification, status, affiliation and attachment in consumers (Rindova, Pollock, & Hayward, 2006). *Celebrity culture*, on the other hand, refers to the obsessiveness with and worshipping of celebrities that is quite prevalent in the United States of America (McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2010; Schor, 1998). Social media feeds consumers’ insatiable appetites for celebrity culture with gossip blogs and celebrity-owned, social media accounts (Marwick & Boyd, 2011; Tufekci, 2008; Wu, Hofman, Mason, & Watts, 2011).

Celebrity culture has altered the types of strategic social locations, or “who one knows” variables that precede opinion leadership. For example, opinion leaders have been shown to use their imaginary relationships with celebrities to seem more competent and to enhance their perceived social stature (End, 2001). This illusory relationship between a consumer and celebrity is called parasocial interaction (PSI). *Parasocial interaction (PSI)* is defined as a history of interactions between a consumer and celebrity that manifest into a seemingly imagined or illusory relationship, because no “true” face-to-face relationship exists and the interaction is primarily constructed within a fantasy cultivated through the mass media (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Conclusively, there has been a lack of research on the relationship between opinion
leadership and user-generated content, and marginally few studies have integrated into the Two-Step Flow of Communication the cultural shifts that social media has brought to the fore. Therefore, the following research questions support the current study: What impact, if any, can the emergence of celebrity-obsessed and social media cultures have on opinion leadership and the Two-Step Flow of Communication? How does parasocial interaction influence opinion leadership and willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM? How does opinion leadership influence the proposed relationships between parasocial interaction and willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM?

**Proposed Contributions to Marketing Theory and Practice**

These research questions are salient for academicians and practitioners alike. For academicians the theoretical contributions of the current study are two-fold. The study of UGC can provide insight into previously unexplored forms of online peer influence and social media participation. UGC is different than eWOM because it involves creative acts such as posting videos, photographs or music in mostly public or personally identifiable forums (Daugherty et al., 2008). eWOM, on the other hand, is limited to written statements and related activities such as forwarding, or sharing information (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). There remain ample opportunities to examine non-verbal and creative forms of online peer influence within the Two-Step Flow of Communication such as postings, subscriptions, bookmarks and social media personalization. Coeally, by incorporating parasocial interaction into the Two-Step Flow of Communication, researchers can fulfill Katz and Lazarsfeld’s (1955) call upon researchers to not only understand the mediatinal role of opinion leadership, but also to see how opinion leadership fits into a contemporary, changing historical and cultural landscape. The study of sociocultural phenomena, such as how parasocial interaction relates to opinion leadership, can
help researchers conduct a more comprehensive study of opinion leadership. The *Two-Step Flow of Communication* added to consumer research opinion leadership as an intervening variable between mass media effects and consumer behavior (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). By integrating parasocial interaction into the model, the macrocosmic perspective of mass media effects and the atomistic perspective of interpersonal relations can be combined.

For practitioners, the implications of the research questions are immediately clear. By 2015, revenue from social commerce is forecasted to reach $14 billion, and it is predicted to represent almost 5 percent of online sales volume during the same year (Carroll, 2011). Ostensibly, opinion leaders will contribute to this significant increase in online sales, by using social media platforms to make recommendations and oversee their followers’ purchase decisions. Results from the current study can assist marketers and retailers with identifying opinion leaders. When opinion leaders are successfully identified within social media, they can be targeted individually with personalized direct marketing and encouraged to develop UGC that will inspire other customers’ purchase decisions. At same time, social media provides a new platform for celebrity endorsement and sponsorships. For example, when describing the sources of fashion ideas, 34 percent of consumers turn to people they know, 31 percent go online and 11 percent look to celebrities (Cotton Inc., 2012b). Thus, parasocial interactions with the celebrities that opinion leaders worship can be leveraged to inspire their creation of UGC, and UGC can be used to inspire non-opinion leaders to purchase new products.

A review of the literature will be presented in Chapter Two, starting with opinion leadership and concluding with parasocial interaction. Then, the relevance of the *Two-Step Flow of Communication* will be explained in Chapter Three, and it will be used to support the development of a theoretical model that highlights two relationships: parasocial interaction as an
antecedent to opinion leadership, and UGC as an outcome variable from opinion leadership.

Moreover, Chapter Four will trace the study context, sampling and data collection procedures, the development of the survey instrument, and provide operational definitions for the constructs. Chapter Five will present the data analysis, which includes the confirmation of a structural model and testing of the hypotheses within a latent regression framework. Chapter Six will delve into the discussion of the findings, implications and conclusions for the current study.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

What is an Opinion Leader?

Opinion leadership is defined as the ability to communicate about and “exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others” (Flynn, Goldsmith, & Eastman, 1996; Rogers & Cartano, 1962). Etymologically, opinion leadership is comprised of two major components: interpersonal communication and personal influence. The communicative component of opinion leadership stems from the Diffusion of Innovation literature (Gatignon & Robertson, 1985; Rogers, 1962), wherein opinion leaders are defined as “peer group legitimate(s)” (Baumgarten, 1975, p. 12) who share product information and provide input about usage experiences with the general population. The influential component has been drawn from the communication and political science literature. These researchers describe opinion leaders as people who influence their peers’ voting records to a greater degree than the mass media (Berelson, Lazarsfeld, & McPhee, 1954). Marketing researchers later discovered that opinion leadership is domain specific (King & Summers, 1970). In other words, people most often display opinion leadership within specific product classes.

A product class is defined as “the group of products that are homogeneous or generally considered substitutes for each other. The class is considered narrow or broad depending on how substitutable the various products are” (Kahn, 2005, p. 572). The idea of organizing products with homogeneous characteristics into classes was developed in the 1920’s as part of the Marketing Commodities paradigm, which provided classification systems for products and explained how they were related to different marketing functions (Shaw, 2005). Within this field of research, Nelson (1970) suggested a parsimonious approach to classifying products, and he divided products into two classes: search goods or experience goods. Whereas the benefits of
search products can be easily determined prior to purchase (i.e. computers, appliances and sports equipment), the benefits of experience products cannot be easily determined until actual use (i.e. music, cinema and fashion) (Shaw, 2005). Darby and Karni (1973) added to Nelson’s classifications a third category: credence goods. *Credence goods* are products that cannot be judged even after purchase without additional, costly information (i.e. cab rides, medical procedures and automobile repairs) (Darby & Karni, 1973). For example, within the search class, a person who actively seeks information and communicates about computers, and influences the software or hardware choices of his/her peers can be described as an opinion leader. Within the experience class, a person who actively seeks information and communicates about fashion, and influences the stylistic choices of his/her peers can be described as an opinion leader. Within the credence class, a person who actively seeks information and communicates about surgeons, and influences which primary care providers his/her peers select, can be described as an opinion leader. For the purposes of the current study, then, *opinion leaders* are well-informed and influential peers that mass consumers turn to in order to solicit information, advice, opinions, or ideas about specific product classes (Nelson, 1970; Rogers & Cartano, 1962; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Personal influence and social influence are particularly relevant topics for opinion leadership. Opinion leaders have been shown to possess characteristics such as domain-specific knowledge (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999), product involvement (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988) and charisma (Dichter, 1966), which gives them the ability to sway the decisions and attitudes of their peers through personal influence (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Opinion leaders can additionally sway the decisions and attitudes of his/her peers through social influence as part of a reference group comprised of early adopters (Baumgarten, 1975) or individuals with high socioeconomic status (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980).
King and Summers (1970) found that 69 percent of the people in their sample were opinion leaders for at least one product class. As a result, marketing researchers have emphasized that opinion leadership is an individual difference variable (Flynn et al., 1996). An individual difference variable subjectively taps into personal characteristics and traits that vary across individuals (Shaughnessy & Zechmeister, 1999). Consumer research on individual differences, or the “personology of the consumer” seeks an understanding of an “individual person in his or her role as a consumer” (Baumgartner, 2002, p. 286). Then, it is possible for an individual to be an opinion leader in one product class, but a follower in a different product class (Baumgarten, 1975; King & Summers, 1970). It is also plausible that someone can be an opinion leader in multiple product classes, but these product classes are typically very similar to each other (King & Summers, 1970; Rogers & Cartano, 1962). For instance, an opinion leader on food is likely to also be an opinion leader on other domestic products such as home décor and appliances.

Therefore, an opinion leader is profoundly different from a market maven. Market mavens are people who are omniscient, or possess general marketplace knowledge, expertise and influence (Feick & Price, 1987). Even though market mavenism can lead to opinion leadership (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Engelland, Hopkins, & Larson, 2001), market mavens and opinion leaders derive their abilities from totally different knowledge bases. Whereas opinion leadership is domain-specific and increases customer loyalty within a product class, a need for variety characterizes market mavenism and it is negatively related to customer loyalty within any product class (Stokburger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009). As such, a market maven is known as a diffuser of marketplace information (Feick & Price, 1987). Market mavens are valuable to superstores and big box retailers, because they are knowledgeable about many different types of products (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). On the other hand, opinion leaders are valuable to specialty
retailers and brands, because they are experts on specific product classes. Numerous studies have demonstrated that demographic variables are not particularly effective for differentiating opinion leaders from other types of consumers (Chan & Misra, 1990; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b; Myers & Robertson, 1972; Stokburger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Then, what exactly are the characteristics of opinion leadership?

**Characteristics of Opinion Leadership**

Product involvement, knowledge, innovativeness and need for uniqueness are the key determinants of opinion leadership that have been classically identified within the marketing and consumer research literature. *Product involvement* is defined as “an unobservable state reflecting the amount of interest, arousal or emotional attachment a consumer has with a product class” (Bloch, 1986, p. 52). Unobservable means that product involvement should not be confused for the amount of experience or the time spent shopping within product classes. A heavy or experienced user may not be heavily involved with the products that s/he habitually consumes day-to-day. To the contrary, involvement implies a higher level of interest, arousal and emotional attachment to a specific product class that eschews temporality. When involvement is high, a consumer senses that a product class is very meaningful, and s/he often believes that a product class is constitutive of his/her identity (Traylor & Joseph, 1984). Because opinion leaders are highly involved and self-identify with specific product classes, they feel as if sharing information about related brands, manufacturers, retailers, products or service providers with their friends, family and acquaintances is a necessity (Feick & Price, 1987). Product involvement, then, gives opinion leadership an autonomic quality. By autonomic, I mean that opinion leaders usually exist in society without formal recognition (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980) and they seem to have a natural proclivity, or know-how within a product class (Price,
Feick, & Higie, 1987). Thus, prior empirical studies have found a positive link between product involvement and opinion leadership (Chan & Misra, 1990; Darden & Reynolds, 1972; Summers, 1970).

There are two different kinds of product involvement that have been tested as antecedents to opinion leadership: situational involvement and enduring involvement. Situational involvement is product involvement that only occurs in specific situations or types of purchases (Richins & Bloch, 1986). For example, situational involvement occurs when a light bulb stops working and a consumer decides that s/he needs to buy a new one. Perhaps, his/her product involvement momentarily increases, as s/he reconsiders at the hardware store the pros and cons of different light bulbs: fluorescent vs. LED, bright vs. soft, and daylight hues vs. “true” white hues. Nevertheless, this interest in light bulbs is fleeting, and it will decline as soon as purchase needs and the novelty of shopping wears off (Richins & Bloch, 1986). By contrast, enduring involvement is an ongoing phenomenon and it “transcends situational influences” (Richins & Bloch, 1986, p. 280). If a consumer experiences enduring involvement with computers, s/he will consistently find it pleasurable and interesting to compare and know about different computer models.

When comparing the effects of situational and enduring involvement on opinion leadership, researchers have shown that the relationship between enduring involvement and opinion leadership is significant, but the relationship between situational involvement and opinion leadership is non-significant (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). These findings reveal a noteworthy distinction between situational involvement and enduring involvement. The higher levels of interest, arousal and attachment that are inherent to enduring involvement are necessary ingredients for opinion leadership and personal influence. Specifically, opinion leadership
mediates the relationship between enduring involvement and, information sharing and personal influence (Venkatraman, 1990). In fact, situational involvement and enduring involvement both can lead to information sharing (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). A consumer may decide in a moment of situational involvement to share with their friends the benefits of an LED light bulb that s/he recently purchased. Yet, findings suggest that enduring involvement is a necessary prerequisite for opinion leadership and the ability to influence other people (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988; Venkatraman, 1990).

Additionally, variables that measure similarly emotive and experiential facets of enduring involvement such as interest, arousal or attachment, are positively related to opinion leadership. Retail work experience provides consumers with insight into the retail industry and may increase their interest in certain product classes. Prior research has supported that opinion leadership is higher among people with retail work experience, as compared to those with little or no retail work experience (Darden & Howell, 1987). Exposure to cultural activities such as the performing arts can increase interest and arousal. Hence, exposure to cultural activities has been shown to increase opinion leadership (Langeard, Crousillat, & Weisz, 1977). Researchers also have proposed that activism may be a possible motivation for opinion leadership (Price et al., 1987). Consumer activists typically feel very passionate about a specific topic and product class (e.g. localism and food, animal rights and fashion, or consumer protection and credit cards). This form of enduring involvement often leads consumer activists to be opinion leaders, and in turn, they provide other customers with product information that can assist them with overcoming socially or environmentally detrimental and unjust business practices (Price et al., 1987).

Moreover, findings have shown a positive correlation between materialism and opinion leadership (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). When they tested the correlation between
materialism and opinion leadership, Fitzmaurice and Comegys (2006) used Richins and Dawson's (1992) materialism scale. Materialism was conceptualized in their study as the personal values that guide a "consuming desire for goods" (Richins & Dawson, 1992, p. 303). These values include acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Because materialists also derive pleasure from specific product classes and exhibit high levels of product attachment, they have an increased likelihood of being opinion leaders (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006).

Anachronistically, opinion leadership is most common in experience goods and credence goods contexts, in which materialism is not as prevalent. The findings on materialism should be accepted with caution because acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success are not always salient to experience good and credence goods contexts (e.g. service settings). In sum, enduring involvement provides opinion leaders with an interest, arousal and attachment to product classes that activates information sharing among consumers. But, information sharing cannot be effective unless the opinion leader is knowledgeable, too. Without knowledge, an opinion leader may not be perceived as a reliable source of information.

Empirical research has illustrated that knowledge is positively related to opinion leadership (Chan & Misra, 1990; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012a; Jacoby & Hoyer, 1981). Knowledge describes how well informed an opinion leader is about brands, products, manufacturers, retailers or services within a given product class. Three different types of knowledge have been examined in prior marketing and consumer research: subjective knowledge, objective knowledge and prior experience (Brucks, 1985). The definitions for these different knowledge constructs were developed from the methods used to measure the subjective knowledge, objective knowledge
and prior experience constructs. Subjective knowledge is self-reported and encompasses "what the consumer thinks he or she knows" (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999, p. 57). Objective knowledge is "actual knowledge," which can be measured with a test provided by the researcher (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999, p. 57). For example, in order to measure objective knowledge of cars, a researcher could provide the participants with an exam on different vehicle models and features. A high score would indicate that s/he knows a lot about cars. Prior experience is self-reported, and it measures a consumer's frequency with spending money and participating within a specific product class (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999).

While objective knowledge is intended to reflect the amount of information actually stored in a person's memory, subjective knowledge is better described as a measure of an individual's perceived amount of confidence in his/her knowledge (Brucks, 1985). The subjective knowledge construct is commonly adapted in the field of opinion leadership research. Findings have supported that opinion leadership does not rest upon actual, or objective knowledge, as much as keeping up the "appearance" of competence (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b, p. 4). An appearance of competence means that opinion leaders may not objectively know everything about a product class, but opinion leaders can supplement their knowledge gaps with influencer traits (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b). An influencer trait is an individual's perceived ability to successfully influence other people (Childers, 1986). Influencer traits are measured along self-reported items such as, "I usually succeed if I want to convince someone about something" (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b). Gnambs and Batinic (2012) observed that influencer traits moderated the relationship between objective knowledge and opinion leadership. Notably, the relationship between objective knowledge and opinion leadership was rather weak and non-significant, when the influencer traits were high. When the influencer traits were low, the
relationship between objective knowledge and opinion leadership was strong and significant.

Thus, it is conceivable that opinion leadership is not always dependent upon knowledge. Influencer traits can bolster the competencies of opinion leaders in the eyes of important others, even when their objective knowledge is scarce. For instance, dominant personalities have been shown to be perceived as competent and influential in group settings, regardless of their actual knowledge (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). In face-to-face group settings, peers appear to evaluate their leaders' competencies based upon their assertiveness, rather than with talents such as task abilities or leadership skills (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009). Extroversion and openness also are related to opinion leadership. Specifically, Gnambs and Batinic (2012a) supported that knowledge partially mediates the relationship between extroversion/openness and opinion leadership. These results demonstrate that knowledge is not useless for the opinion leader, but enhances the appearance of competence, that may be projected from personality characteristics such as extroversion, openness, and dominance. Opinion leadership, therefore, should not be equated with consumer expertise.

Personality characteristics can produce outcomes that differentiate opinion leaders from the masses. Opinion leaders may occasionally rely upon their outgoing personalities to signal competence, but they still possess more accurate knowledge about products than mass consumers because opinion leaders are better at interpreting product information (van Eck, Jager, & Leeflang, 2011). As a result, the knowledge that opinion leaders develop and share tends to increase the diffusion of information and innovations across social networks (van Eck et al., 2011). In essence, when information is perceived as accurate, mass consumers need fewer checks and balances before they are willing to adopt a style, product or innovation. The implications of this scenario, from the purview of the opinion leader, is that s/he must be less sensitive to
normative influence and remain closer to the forefront of innovation than mass consumers (Grewal, Mehta, & Kardes, 2000; van Eck et al., 2011). Such observations have led researchers to examine the relationship between innovativeness and opinion leadership.

*Consumer innovativeness* is defined as "the tendency to buy new products more often and more quickly than other people" (Roehrich, 2004, p. 671). The frequency and timing of product adoption, as articulated in this definition, stems from the *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 1962). Early sociologists discussed various means for spreading social practices, cultural phenomena and information (e.g. diffusion, syncretism, acculturation and transculturation), but Everett Rogers is credited for codifying, testing and popularizing diffusion as a theory on the spread of innovations. *Diffusion*, according to Rogers (1961), is "the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (p. 5). Rogers (1962) categorized the members of a social system according to their levels of communication and timing of adoption in the following order: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Within Rogers’ model, the adoption of products across time forms an S-curve. The innovators and laggards create the smallest groups of adopters, and the early/late majority creates the apex of the S-curve. When the apex is reached, Rogers (1962) argued that a critical mass occurs, whereby the innovation becomes self-sustaining.

Innovators adopt a new product before manufacturers release it to the general public (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Innovators may use products during a beta testing phase or when its availability is very limited. They are usually comprised of younger age groups and wealthier social classes (Rogers, 1962). For example, the early generations of Mercedes-Benz Gelaendewagens could only be purchased in Western Europe and Mexico. A number of
innovators in the United States, who could be characterized as young celebrities and wealthier customers, imported the vehicle from Mexico at a premium price in the United States. Early adopters acquire a new product immediately after its release to the general public (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). They can be described as younger, more affluent, educated and socially forward than the general public (Rogers, 1962). For example, when Apple first releases a new iPhone model in limited quantities, early adopters are the consumers who gather at the Apple store before its opens, so that they can own a brand new iPhone before other consumers. Comparatively, the early majority and late majority are not interested in adopting a new product during its first release. Whereas the early majority need evidence that the new product is functional and worth owning, the late majority will not purchase a new product until they eventually cave into social pressure to conform with the masses (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Laggards are the last group of adopters, who are described as older and more conservative (Rogers, 1962). Their goal is to resist change, and laggards will not adopt a new product until they are practically forced to (e.g. when laws prohibit the use of older models or manufacturers no longer produce them).

Thus, innovativeness implies that someone is an innovator, or is a member of the first group to know about and rush out to buy new products. Akin to opinion leadership, innovativeness is domain-specific (Gatignon & Robertson, 1985). As such, a consumer can be an innovator in one product category (e.g. fashion), but a non-innovator in a different product category (e.g. computers) (Grewal et al., 2000). Innovativeness, like opinion leadership, also suggests that innovators are more knowledgeable, less sensitive to normative influence and possess higher levels of enduring involvement with a product class than the masses (Roehrich, 2004; van Eck et al., 2011). Similarly, opinion leaders and innovators are cosmopolite,
gregarious and well-integrated into their social groups (Baumgarten, 1975). Given the similarities between innovativeness and opinion leadership, it may come as no surprise that innovativeness is positively related to opinion leadership (Baumgarten, 1975; Grewal et al., 2000; Venkatraman, 1989). With these similarities in mind, an important issue is highlighted: Are opinion leaders and innovators simply different names for the same creature? Perplexingly, empirical research suggests that opinion leadership and innovativeness are distinct phenomena, but they can occur conterminously.

Opinion leaders share more information, belong to a greater number of social organizations and have stronger social, as well as, personal motives for information-sharing than innovators (Venkatraman, 1989). Venkatraman (1989) described the difference between social and personal motives that underlie opinion leadership and innovativeness as follows:

In the case of movies, opinion leaders may go to a movie because they believe someone may want their opinion on it or because it may be a topic of conversation at social gatherings. For (innovators), on the other hand, the personal motives may be more important - they go to movies simply because they enjoy going to movies or because they have great interest in and knowledge about movies (p. 54).

Whereas innovators enjoy the hedonic experience of watching a film's early release, film opinion leaders additionally feel that information sharing is a necessary outcome from their movie-going experiences. Turnbull and Meenaghan (1980) also conjectured that innovators communicate through observation more so than verbal communication. In other words, innovators gesturally communicate their adoption of new products by using and/or wearing them in the presence of others, more so than verbally sharing product features and information with non-innovators.

Despite the apparent differences between innovativeness and opinion leadership, researchers have profiled consumers who can act as both opinion leaders and innovators. In an early study, Baumgarten (1975) found that 12.1 percent of his sample qualified as opinion
leaders and innovators. The author referred to these "dual-roled change agents" as innovative communicators (p. 12). Innovative communicators were shown to be more socially active, narcissistic and exhibitionistic than innovators usually are. Likewise, innovative communicators were shown to be more impulsive, had higher socioeconomic statuses and possessed lower intellectual pursuits than the opinion leaders in the study (Baumgarten, 1975). In a later study, Venkatraman (1989) found that innovative communicators experienced similar levels of enduring involvement, knowledge and influence as opinion leaders. Venkatraman's (1989) findings reiterate that innovative communicators, like opinion leaders, have the ability to influence other people. Innovative communicators represent a mashup of opinion leadership and innovator qualities. Opinion leadership and innovativeness can overlap whereby opinion leaders become more impulsive and adopt new products without consulting as many information sources. Alternatively, innovators can become more socially active, while inflating their personal and social motivations for opinion leadership (e.g. narcissism and exhibitionism, respectively).

It is challenging to pinpoint the circumstances that lead to an increase in opinion leaders’ innovativeness or an increase in innovators’ opinion leadership. The Diffusion of Innovations theory has a number of flaws, particularly due to the rigidity of the S-curve. In reality, innovations are not adopted in even time increments along a perfect S-curve. Conceptually, the S-curve model can help researchers visualize the different social groups that may foster the development and acceptance of new products. Yet, the haphazard and episodic nature of real, interpersonal communication and product use suggests that opinion leadership and innovativeness can overlap in any number of different combinations. From a macro-level perspective, though, Rogers (1962) proposed, "When the social system is oriented to change, opinion leaders are more innovative…” (p. 27). Social systems that undergo frequent changes are
likely to be comprised of fast-paced, highly industrialized economies. Opinion leaders in these types of social systems need to work harder to keep track of new innovations and trends. By contrast, social systems that are not oriented towards change, do not require an opinion leader to be particularly innovative (Rogers, 1962), because s/he can weigh the pros and cons of innovations within his/her area of expertise prior to adoption.

When opinion leaders are innovative to some degree in a social system that favors change, they may feel as if their unique roles in society confer status upon them. Whereas consumer researchers have argued that an opinion leader's influence is rooted in subjective knowledge, diffusion researchers have contended that an opinion leader's influence stems from the status perceptions derived from his/her feelings of innovativeness (Venkatraman, 1989). Status consumption shares a positive correlation with opinion leadership (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Perhaps, as their innovativeness increases, opinion leaders believe that they deserve special recognition within society. This desire for social status implies that an opinion leader can defy the characteristics that researchers have traditionally assigned to them, such as an internal locus of control (Workman & Studak, 2007) and insensitivity to normative influence (van Eck et al., 2011), especially as s/he incorporates aspects of innovativeness into his/her social orientation.

Grewal et al. (2000) estimated, "Public access to ownership and, thereby, learning, paints the owner as informed" (p. 236). That is, when opinion leaders are among the first customers to own a new product, this ownership signals their innovativeness and informativeness to the public. According to Social Identity Theory, attitudes are "normative attributes of social groups that define who we are and provide us with an identity in society" (Smith & Hogg, 2008). In consumer research, the social identity function is the process by which these attitudes support the
use of products that will project the self-concept in a social group (Grewal et al., 2000). At the same time, this projected self helps opinion leaders relate to others and it functions as a way to leave a favorable impression on a social group (Smith & Hogg, 2008). Because innovations are exciting and trend-setting, they are strong candidates for eliciting the social-identity function amongst opinion leaders (Grewal et al., 2000).

For example, an automotive opinion leader normally could be expected to be knowledgeable about the automotive industry, to experience enduring involvement with car models and discuss various cars with other customers. By purchasing a new, innovative car such as a Fisker Karma, s/he is not only an opinion leader, but begins to assume the qualities of an innovative communicator. As a result, the characteristics of innovator communicators such as exhibitionism and narcissism may become more visibly expressed in this opinion leader (Baumgarten, 1975). In addition to being a source of enjoyment, the Fisker Karma vehicle may be tied to his/her self-concept, and may be used to impress other customers. In parallel with these arguments, Grewal et al. (2000) conducted an empirical study and found that the social identity function is positively related to opinion leadership for publicly consumed goods (i.e. a new car), but not for privately consumed goods (i.e. a new computer). The researchers also reported that the social identity function is positively related to innovativeness and enduring involvement for publicly and privately consumed goods (Grewal et al., 2000). Therefore, findings support that the social identity function significantly increases opinion leadership, when an innovative product is publicly consumed.

By drawing upon the social identity research on opinion leadership, social networking specialists have offered an alternative perspective on the role of opinion leaders in society. The opinion leadership literature that has been so far discussed in the current study positioned
opinion leaders at the centers of their social networks. From a centralized location, opinion leaders can act as the trendsetters, while seeking and diffusing new information to the masses. Paradoxically, the innovativeness and social identity research findings alluded to the fact that opinion leaders are not always innovators. When opinion leaders are not innovators, they can exist in a state of flux. They can be neither innovators nor opinion leaders, in the traditional sense (Rogers & Cartano, 1962). Opinion leaders can be stuck somewhere in-between, where they are only slightly innovative, but not innovative enough to feel as if they are deserving of special recognition. As a result, opinion leaders who are in a state of flux thrive on the edges of their social networks, rather than the center.

For example, Goldenberg et al. (2009) described two types of hubs that are key to the adoption process: innovator hubs vs. follower hubs. Hubs are dense clusters of interconnected people within a social network. An innovator hub mostly consists of innovators, but a follower hub mostly consists of people who follow the innovators. The authors reported that innovator hubs increase the speed of adoption by two times, but follower hubs greatly impact the market size (number of adoptions) by seven times (Goldenberg et al., 2009). There are very few innovators in society. According to the Diffusion of Innovations, only 2.5 percent of the population can be categorized as innovators (Rogers, 1962). As such, the innovator hubs can be expected to be much smaller, when compared to the follower hubs in social networks. An opinion leader who belongs to a follower hub has an opportunity to influence a much larger number of people within the general population than an opinion leader who belongs to an innovator hub. Opinion leaders, therefore, can belong to the follower hubs and maintain a degree of separation from the innovator hubs. Even so, these opinion leaders continue to influence innumerable peers across their social networks because they possess a high number of social ties.
More precisely, opinion leaders can be referred to as "opinion brokers" (Burt, 1999, p. 37) or "people who use people" (Feick, Price, & Higie, 1986, p. 301) because they play an instrumental role in brokering information between groups. When opinion leaders broker information between groups, and relinquish the bureaucratic control of a central network position, they can more effectively increase the number of adoptions within a social network (Burt, 1999). To this end, studies have demonstrated that opinion leadership is positively correlated with opinion seeking (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Feick, Price, & Higie, 1986; Flynn et al., 1996; Sun et al., 2006). Opinion seeking is defined as the need to seek the advice of others when making a purchase decision (Flynn et al., 1996). Feick et al. (1986) found that 54.5 percent of the opinion leaders in their study were also opinion seekers for sporting goods, 44.2 percent for food products, 42.0 percent for health and beauty, 39.2 percent for household goods, 30.4 percent for clothing/accessories and 22.7 percent for nonprescription drugs. The data suggest that the overlap between opinion leadership and opinion seeking largely depends upon the product class. As knowledge becomes more specialized and innovative, the overlap between opinion leadership and opinion seeking appears to decrease. For instance, sporting goods and food products are very broad product classes, in which most consumers can be somewhat knowledgeable, and innovations in these product classes usually occur in slow cycles. The overlap between opinion seeking and opinion leadership is somewhat high within these product classes. To the contrary, clothing and prescription drugs call upon a special knowledge and innovations in these product classes occur in rapid cycles. The overlap between opinion seeking and opinion leadership is somewhat low in these product classes.

Researchers cannot locate where the thresholds for opinion leadership and opinion seeking begin or end, because the prior studies measured opinion leadership with two-item
scales, and used dichotomous responses (Feick et al., 1986). Suffice to say, “there are seekers who are not the leaders” (Flynn et al., 1986, p. 138), meaning some people are solely opinion seekers. Findings have shown that opinion seekers and opinion leaders rely upon different sources of information. Whereas opinion leaders consult a variety of sources (i.e. retail stores, television, magazines, etc.), opinion seekers rely upon the expert advice and knowledge of opinion leaders (Shoham & Ruvio, 2008). To date, prior research has not profiled the information brokering variety of opinion leaders, but these data suggest that they are likely to incorporate other opinion leaders into their information sources. In addition to the mass media and retail stores, information brokers seek the opinions of other leaders within their respective peer groups.

The subfields of innovativeness, social identity and social networking within the opinion leadership literature challenge the notion that opinion leaders resist normative influence (van Eck et al., 2011) and develop an internal locus of control (Workman & Studak, 2007) When opinion leaders are highly innovative (Baumgarten, 1975), they may buy new products to project their status, or defend their central network positions. When opinion leaders are less innovative, their opinion seeking increases and they relinquish central network positions in order to act as information brokers. These goals seem anathematic to the resistance of normative influence and an increased locus of control that have been thought to underlie opinion leadership. Innovative opinion leaders are susceptible to normative influence, because they attempt to impress their peers. Information brokers seem to have a weakened internal locus of control, as they seek the opinions of other leaders, prior to diffusing information. However, recent studies on the need for uniqueness have furnished evidence for the ways that some opinion leaders reconcile status seeking and opinion seeking with their resistance of normative influence and relinquishment of
bureaucratic control, or central network positions.

*Need for uniqueness* is defined as "an enduring personality trait by which consumers pursue dissimilarity through products and brands in an effort to develop a distinctive self and social image" (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005, p. 295). Dissimilarity seems to be a strong word to describe the need for uniqueness, due to its negative connotation. Nevertheless, it successfully encompasses the dialectical quality of the need for uniqueness construct. In essence, need for uniqueness is drawn from Reference Theory. *Reference Theory* proposes that consumers use comparison groups as frames of reference in order to determine their relative status or position within a social system (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). In turn, individuals with a need for uniqueness are predisposed to seek differentiation from comparison groups, when s/he feels that the norms within a group infringe upon his/her personal freedoms or individuality (Brehm & Brehm, 1981). This perceived infringement leads opinion leaders with a need for uniqueness towards psychological reactance, or to resist group norms with non-compliant actions (Chan & Misra, 1990; Workman & Caldwell, 2007; Zettenberg, 1971). In order to support these claims, previous research has demonstrated that opinion leadership is positively related to need for uniqueness (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Because opinion leadership and need for uniqueness are positively related, opinion leadership actually reinforces a desire to resist group norms with non-compliant actions.

At the same time, studies have illustrated that opinion leadership is positively related to attention to social comparison information (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). *Attention to social comparison information* is a form of self-monitoring in which people are attentive to and influenced by what other people think about their choices (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). When consumers heed attention to social comparison information, they become
more susceptible to normative influence (Bearden & Rose, 1990), are more socially anxious (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984), and participate in status consumption to a greater degree (Clark, Zboja, & Goldsmith, 2007) than consumers who do not heed attention to social comparison information. What is more, the correlation between need for uniqueness and attention to social comparison information is negative (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). The research, then, suggests that opinion leaders have the ability to counterbalance their need for uniqueness with an attention to social comparison information as part of their advisory roles. Information brokers can relinquish their positions at the center of social networks and heed attention to social comparison information, but affirm their internal locus of control with a need for uniqueness.

For example, innovative communicators have been shown to possess a greater need for uniqueness than information brokers (Workman & Caldwell, 2007). It is plausible that their increased need for uniqueness may be described as a reconciliation of their increased status seeking and attention to social comparison information. Innovative communicators can seek status and heed attention to social comparison information, but as psychological reactance sets in, they may express a need for uniqueness. Correspondingly, opinion seeking has been shown to be negatively related to need for uniqueness and positively related to attention to social comparison information (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). It is plausible that a decreased need for uniqueness is likely among information brokers, as they have a greater tendency to seek information from other opinion leaders. By doing so, information brokers can relinquish their positions at the center of social networks, but heed attention to social comparison information, in order to police the boundaries between themselves and their followers. In fact, there is a positive relationship between opinion seeking and status
consumption (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006), which lends further support to information brokers’ needs to police the boundaries between themselves and their followers.

In conclusion, the research has illustrated that the words "opinion leader" and "opinion leadership" are not catchall terminology. Subjective knowledge, enduring involvement, innovativeness and need for uniqueness are commonly known predictors of opinion leadership. Less frequently studied predictors such as retail work experience, exposure to cultural activities, materialism, the social identity function, opinion seeking, status consumption and attention to social comparison information have led researchers to reconsider how they characterize opinion leaders. The interrelationships between opinion leadership / innovativeness and opinion leadership / opinion seeking highlight the possibility of myriad types of opinion leaders including innovative communicators and information brokers, as those formally identified within the literature. Now that the characteristics of opinion leadership have been reviewed, in conjunction with the various predictors, it is important to discuss how opinion leaders influence mass consumers.

The “Influentials Hypothesis”

The ability to influence other customers within specific product categories has been cited as a definitive characteristic of opinion leadership (Flynn et al., 1996; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). King and Summers (1970) noted, “personal influence refers to an effect, while interpersonal communication refers to an exchange of information between individuals” (p. 45). Even though interpersonal communication characterizes an opinion leader, s/he must strive to change, or affect another person’s behavior or attitudes (Venkatraman, 1989). Many consumers make clothing, music, food, wine, film, or other product recommendations to each other. But, an opinion leader thinks about and observes how their advice and opinions can influence mass
consumers within a given product class. Due to their knack for sociability, opinion leaders often spread their influence when they entertain, socialize, travel, participate in sports and shop with other people (Piirto, 1992). Hence, self-involvement (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980) can, too, motivate people to be opinion leaders because it enhances his/her self-concept. An opinion leader may derive a sense of pleasure from his/her ability to get other customers to buy or do the things that s/he recommends.

The concept of opinion leadership is drawn from the premise that, essentially, consumption is mimetic. Mimesis occurs when people imitate the ideas, actions and behaviors of another person, group or culture (Taussig, 1991). For example, past studies on opinion leadership have rested upon what Watts and Dodds (2007) called the Influentials Hypothesis (p. 441). The Influentials Hypothesis asserts that small numbers of opinion leaders have the power to influence the trends in much larger communities, nation-states, or global regions through social contagion (Watts & Dodds, 2007) because most people imitate the purchases, ideas, styles or opinions of other consumers with more involvement than him/her in a given product class. Opinion leaders are not members of the mass media and become “amateur” experts on topics due to their practical experience (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980; Watts & Dodds, 2007). This persuasibility leads to a pivotal question: why are mass consumers receptive to the personal influence of opinion leaders?

Foremost, people frequently develop opinion leadership for experience and credence goods that are hedonic (Price et al., 1987), creative (Childers, 1986), or high risk in nature (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Notably, these appear to be product classes that are frequently used as forms of self-extension and status seeking. Self-extension is the degree to which a consumer incorporates a possession into his/her self-identity (Belk, 1988), or that the possession
serves as a symbol, or badge for how s/he sees him/herself (Wicklund & Gollwitzer, 1982). For example, consumers can display or use their possessions in order to project their self-concept in private or public settings. In a private setting, a Singaporean expat may gain pleasure from reading a book that is set in his/her home country. In a public setting, the same person may gain pleasure from conspicuously displaying this book on a coffee table during a house-warming party. By conversing with an opinion leader, s/he could either be shown this book for the first time, or receive confirmation that it is the “right” book for him/her. Prior empirical work on opinion leadership has supported that most opinion leaders are more homophilious (than heterophilious) with members of their peer groups (Aral, Muchnik, & Sundararajan, 2009; Venkatraman, 1989). Homophily is defined as a personal characteristic in which people share the same backgrounds and tastes (Aral, 2011). Heterophily is defined in opposition to homophily, as a personal characteristic in which people do not share the same backgrounds and tastes. Opinion leaders differ from mass consumers in terms of knowledge and product involvement, but they usually share a similar socioeconomic and cultural background with the people who seek their advice. Due to this homophily, mass consumers are likely to be receptive to the advice and ideas of opinion leaders.

Some opinion leaders acquire a higher social status than their peers (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980; van Eck et al., 2011; Venkatraman, 1989). By social status, I mean that opinion leaders can be quite popular, interconnected and act as the tastemakers within their social circles (Piirto, 1992; Rogers & Cartano, 1962). When an opinion leader ranks highly in their social circles, his/her peers may assume the roles of aspirants, and become receptive to the opinion leader’s influence because they aspire to be more popular or “in the know.” As part of the Bandwagon Effect, a high status opinion leader belongs to the cadre of high status and elite
consumers (Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). The *Bandwagon Effect* is a diffusion process in which mass consumers adopt the same trends and innovations as high status and elite consumers with the dream of some day joining their social group (Leibenstein, 1950). Hence, mass consumers may emulate an opinion leader’s interests and copy his/her styles in order to feel more prestigious, wealthy, popular or trendy (Van den Bulte & Joshi, 2007). In comparison to opinion leaders, mass consumers also have been shown to be risk-aversive (Baumgarten, 1975; Flynn et al., 1996). Mass consumers often wait for opinion leaders to make high-risk and expensive purchases such as luxury goods, electronics, automobiles, or services before taking the plunge themselves. An opinion leader’s subjective knowledge and practical experience, thus, are invaluable for mass consumers when perceived risks are high (i.e. monetary costs, product failure or newness), which makes them susceptible to an opinion leader’s personal influence.

Furthermore, opinion leaders can serve as confidants for mass consumers (Price et al., 1987). That is, opinion leaders are thought to influence mass consumers more strongly and personally than the mass media (Berelson et al., 1954; Flynn et al., 1996; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; van Eck et al., 2011). Opinion leaders appear to lack an ulterior motive or agenda, when compared to retailers and businesses that pay for promotional and advertising services (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012). Because opinion leaders are more conversant and homophilious with mass consumers than the mass media (Aral et al., 2009; Watts & Dodds, 2007), they are seen through the eyes of mass consumers as more trustworthy and credible than the mass media. Some people even see marketing and consumption as exploitative pursuits (Cherrier, 2009; Iyer & Muncy, 2009), and many express a general skepticism towards mass media (Boush, Kim, Kahle, & Batra, 1993; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1998). As a result, opinion leaders filter and activate the flow of information between the mass media and mass consumers (Kratzer & Lettl, 2009;
van Eck et al., 2011). Opinion leaders consume greater volumes of mass media (Hoffmann & Soyez, 2010; Vernette, 1999), and they provide other consumers with relatable and useful pieces of information (Goldsmith & Desborde, 1991; Price et al., 1987). In other words, opinion leaders are not only perceived as trustworthy, but they help other customers save time in their shopping and information search processes. For example, an agent-based simulation study demonstrated that opinion leaders increase the speed of information streams and adoption processes across social networks (van Eck et al., 2011). The effectiveness of opinion leadership has led some researchers to suggest that the mass media should reduce their presence in society (Goldenberg, Libai, & Muller, 2001; Silverman, 1997); however, findings have supported that less extensive use of mass media does not necessarily increase the influence that opinion leaders have on information streams and adoption processes (van Eck et al., 2011).

Word-of-Mouth communication (WOM) is the predominant form of interpersonal influence that has been found to be an outcome from opinion leadership, because it is domain-specific in nature (Baumgarten, 1975; Corey, 1971; Goldsmith & De Witt, 2003; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). WOM has been described as a form of verbal and/or written communication that occurs between a receiver and a communicator, whom the receiver sees as non-commercial when s/he shares information with him or her about a brand, product or service (Arndt, 1967; Buttle, 1998). Formally, WOM is defined as "a process of personal influence, in which interpersonal communications between a sender and a receiver can change the receiver's behavior or attitudes" (Sweeney et al., 2008, p. 346). Researchers and practitioners consider WOM to be among the most powerful and persuasive tools available to marketers and retailers, as it is naturally embedded in the conversational flows of consumer society (Buttle, 1998). WOM provides consumers with "informal channels of communication" (Dichter, 1966) in which they
can exchange information about brands, products, retailers and service providers. Akin to opinion seekers (Flynn et al., 1996), receivers presume information delivered through WOM to be more candid and agenda-free than information disseminated through marketing activities (Brooks, 1957). Thus, WOM most commonly occurs between friends, family and colleagues who are deemed to be more reliable, trustworthy and socially supportive than mass media and mass retailers (Day, 1971). Even though seeking information from friends and family requires significant time and effort, customers have reported that the value of doing so is much higher than seeking information from the mass media (Newman & Staelin, 1973).

WOM can be classified as negative or positive, depending on the level of customer satisfaction (Anderson, 1998; de Matos & Rossi, 2008; Szymanski & Henard, 2001). If a customer is satisfied, the message usually contains positive verbal and non-verbal cues such as "relating pleasant, vivid, or novel experiences; recommendations to others and even conspicuous display" (Anderson, 1998, p. 6). When conversing with a sender about a positive experience, the receiver may experience positive behavioral or attitudinal shifts including significant improvements in advertising effectiveness (Hogan, Lemon, & Libai, 2004), brand attitudes (Herr, Kardes, & Kim, 1991), service quality perceptions (Webster, 1991), product acceptance (Arndt, 1967; Bone, 1995), purchases (East, Hammond, & Lomax, 2008; Liu, 2006) and referrals (Buttle, 1998; Reingen, 1987). If a customer is dissatisfied, the message usually contains negative verbal and non-verbal cues such as "product denigration, relating unpleasant experiences, rumor, and private complaining" (Anderson, 1998, p. 6). When conversing with a sender about a negative experience, the receiver may undergo negative behavioral or attitudinal shifts including brand-switching and negative brand attitudes. But, empirical evidence suggests that negative WOM alone does not always have a negative effect on subsequent consumer
behaviors, such as long-term repurchase intentions, service quality perceptions or referral activities (Buttle, 1998; Charlett, Garland, & Marr, 1995).

Foremost, customers resist negative WOM when brand loyalty is high, and they resist positive WOM when brand loyalty is low (de Matos & Rossi, 2008; East et al., 2008). When a customer hears that his/her favorite store or establishment mistreated someone else, s/he is likely to be skeptical, especially if s/he never had a negative experience with the same store or establishment. WOM is also least effective when it is unsolicited or comes from a single source (Buttle, 1998), because the customer has no "stake" in the conversation (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988), or is unable to verify a similarly negative / positive account with another customer (Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008). Findings have supported that there are several moderators that can determine the impact of negative WOM on subsequent consumer behaviors including customer expectations, blame perceptions, retailer responsiveness, satisfaction with service recovery, perceived justice and emotions (Blodgett, Granbois, & Walters, 1993; Chebat & Slusarczyk, 2005; del Río-Lanza, Vázquez-Casielles, & Díaz-Martín, 2009; Richins, 1983; Sweeney et al., 2008; Webster, 1991). For example, respondents in Sweeney et al.'s (2008) focus groups identified the sender's source credibility, trustworthiness and homophily as the variables that are positively related to WOM effectiveness. These findings lend support to the following allegory that Dichter (1966) offered about WOM:

In reality we are dealing with what we call a motivated reaction. It is a dialogue between the sender and the receiver of a message. Three different people, a hunter, a forester, and an artist, going into the same forest see three different forests. Their interests differ, and a varied communication dialogue takes place (p. 154).

Contrary to its seemingly one-sided nature, Dichter (1966) explained that WOM could be dialogical in nature, as it develops into a sense of give-and-take between the sender, receiver and
firm (or advertisement). Dichter's (1966) allegory further illustrates that WOM does not have to be limited to the conversations between opinion leaders and mass consumers.

Recently, studies have demonstrated that when an opinion leader is a WOM communicator, s/he is more influential with changing a receiver's behavior or attitudes than a non-opinion leader (Gilly, Graham, Wolfinbarger, & Yale, 1998). Opinion leaders share many of the sources of influence that are associated with WOM effectiveness. Much like opinion leadership, WOM provides consumers with the vital input they need before purchasing high-risk or experience-based products (de Matos & Rossi, 2008). Because they are very knowledgeable (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b), WOM from an opinion leader can give consumers reassurance concerning specific brand and product choices (Bone, 1995; Gilly et al., 1998), thereby reducing perceived risk (Arndt, 1967). Involvement, which is also an important predictor of opinion leadership, leads to WOM communication (Venkatraman, 1990). Richins and Root-Shaffer (1988) reported that enduring involvement is positively related to opinion leadership, product news WOM and personal experience WOM. The authors defined personal experience WOM as positive statements that the respondents made about their new cars and stories explaining how, or why they bought new cars. They defined product news WOM as general commentary on technological advances and new car models in the automotive industry (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988). Thus, as an opinion leader's enduring involvement increases, his/her personal experience WOM and product news WOM can become more effective.

Opinion leaders, too, have the necessary skills to produce an Aha Experience. An Aha Experience is a "dialogue of conviction" that is derived from the sender's involvement with a product class and it increases WOM effectiveness (Dichter, 1966). The receiver is more likely to agree with the sender and say "Aha" when the sender contributes to the dialogue expressive
movements, a sense of understanding, evidence and hesitation (Dichter, 1966). Opinion leaders possess capabilities that can foster these basic elements of the Aha Experience. Enduring involvement can serve as an impetus for expressive movements, when an opinion leader conveys enthusiasm about a topic. Previous studies in sociolinguistics have shown that enthusiasm for a topic and polysemy (semantic ambiguity) lead to an increase in non-verbal cues such as nodding (Poggi, D'Errico, & Vincze, 2010) and hand gestures (Morrel-Samuels & Krauss, 1992). When sharing a vivid story or news with an important other, an opinion leader's speech may become somewhat restricted (Bernstein, 1964) and s/he may communicate with hand gestures or other expressive movements to convey his/her enthusiasm. Hence, opinion leaders are likely to convey an Aha Experience with expressive movements.

Perceptual homophily, or similarity of values and experiences, is positively related to WOM effectiveness (Gilly et al., 1998). Because homophily enhances opinion leadership, opinion leaders are likely to engender WOM with a sense of understanding. Similarly, knowledge can help an opinion leader furnish evidence for his/her WOM comments. Knowledge increases WOM effectiveness (Newman & Staelin, 1973; Sweeney et al., 2008), which an opinion leader can further enhance with his/her domain-specific expertise. Lastly, hesitation means that the sender sparks intrigue by conveying that his/her knowledge is specialized, or even a secret (Dichter, 1966). The need for uniqueness that underpins opinion leadership can increase hesitation when sharing information with other people. A need for uniqueness gives opinion leaders the ability to counteract group norms with non-compliant actions (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005). Thus, opinion leaders may withhold certain pieces of information from WOM receivers in order to feel unique and privileged, or to prevent someone from stealing their "thunder." Overall, there are vast similarities between the characteristics of an opinion leader and the rudimentary
elements of the Aha Experience. These similarities make opinion leaders strong contenders for producing an Aha Experience, which is additionally indicative of their WOM effectiveness.

The sociability that informs opinion leadership also contributes significantly to WOM effectiveness. Network analyses have demonstrated that opinion leaders, as members of multiple groups, increase the spread and reach of WOM communication (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Brown and Reingen (1987) investigated the effects of weak ties and strong social ties, between opinion leaders and mass consumers, on the spread of service-based referrals within a social network. *Weak ties* are defined as relationships that are tenuous or random (Goldenberg et al., 2001). For example, person (A) is directly connected to person (B). Person (B) is directly connected to person (C). Persons (A) and (C) do not personally know each other, but they are connected by virtue of their shared relationship with (B). The relationship between (A) and (C) is a weak social tie. *Strong ties* are defined as relationships that are stable, and result from frequent, intimate interactions with two or more parties (Goldenberg et al., 2001). Hence, (A) and (B), or (B) and (C) represent strong social ties. Brown and Reingen (1987) found that weak and strong social ties both play a role in the spread of service-based referrals. Whereas weak social ties are powerful on a macro-level and help to disseminate WOM across social groups, strong social ties are more powerful on a micro-level and help to disseminate WOM within social groups (Brown & Reingen, 1987). Because most opinion leaders are members of multiple social groups, they possess a combination of weak and strong social ties (Burt, 1999; Goldenberg et al., 2009), which increases the momentum and effectiveness of their WOM communication (Goldenberg et al., 2001).

Opinion leaders and WOM communication contribute to customer information search processes and shopping experiences a human touch, which buffers the plasticity and
mechanization that some consumers associate with brands and marketers (Cherrier, 2009). Opinion leaders and WOM communication mutually reduce perceived risks, while delivering to consumers information in a conversational and familiar voice that seems to be competent, trustworthy, socially supportive, honest and reliable (Day, 1971). As mentioned earlier, customers have acknowledged that the time and effort required to converse with opinion leaders and personal contacts can be somewhat time-consuming (Newman & Staelin, 1973). Consequently, the visible emergence of highly accessible, computer-mediated shopping environments such as the Internet, social media, and mobile technologies have tremendously reduced the time and effort ordinarily required to converse with personal contacts and opinion leaders. Additionally, when opinion leaders pair these powerful technologies with their own requisite knowledge, enduring involvement and innovativeness, they are capable of exerting considerable personal influence and readily spreading mass-mediated messages, news, ideas and user-generated content (UGC) to myriad social circles.

**Opinion Leadership In A Computer-Mediated Environment**

In a computer-mediated environment, opinion leaders exhibit significantly higher levels of enduring involvement, innovativeness, exploratory behavior and perceived knowledge about the Internet because they spend longer periods of time online than non-leaders (Lyons & Henderson, 2005; Sun et al., 2006). Due to these positive attitudes towards the Internet (Eastman, Eastman, & Eastman, 2002), opinion leadership also is positively related to the perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use of online shopping (O'Cass & Fenech, 2003). In fact, findings have suggested that early online shoppers were probably opinion leaders who had a higher degree of venturesomeness, openness to change and lower perceived risk associated with online shopping than mass consumers (Siu & Cheng, 2001). These personal characteristics of
innovativeness, early adoption and openness to change are indicative of the segment referred to earlier as innovative communicators. Ostensibly, because innovative communicators can be impulsive (Baumgarten, 1975) and status seeking (Grewal et al., 2000), it is plausible that online shopping may have provided them with instant gratification and an opportunity to own the newest products in their social circles. Now that the Internet is more widely available and accepted, innovative and non-innovative opinion leaders use it not only to shop, but also as a forum for reviewing products and shopping experiences, and sharing information and advice with mass consumers. This phenomenon is known as eWOM (electronic word-of-mouth communication).

*eWOM is defined as "positive or negative statement(s) made by potential, actual or former customers about a product or company, which is available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet" (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004, p. 39). The anonymity and omnipresence that the Internet affords customers differentiates eWOM from traditional WOM. eWOM is unique in that it can be simultaneously directed to innumerable people, can potentially live online for an indefinite time period, and can be completely anonymous (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Broadly speaking, the Internet gives buyers and sellers the opportunity to do, say and become almost anything they want (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002). For example, a customer can easily criticize and/or praise businesses under the guise of an Internet alias or profile, and influence hundreds, thousands or millions of site visitors. This sense of autonomy can reduce social anxiety and public self-awareness, while increasing self-disclosure and feelings of intimacy between the eWOM communicator and his/her audience (Sun et al., 2006). An eWOM communicator can reach an unlimited number of people; nonetheless, their messages can seem rather personal (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002). Prior to the development of video chatting freeware
like Skype, eWOM was primarily disseminated through e-mail, weblogs, bulletin boards, chat rooms and instant messaging (IM) clients (Sun et al., 2006). Sun et al. (2006) noted that eWOM mainly conveys personal experiences and opinions through the written word, a format that seems to be more formal than traditional WOM, and permits people to seek information at their convenience. The benefits of eWOM such as increased anonymity, self-disclosure, intimacy and formality can make it seem as credible as traditional WOM (Bae & Lee, 2011; Buttle, 1998; Yang, Mai, & Ben-Ur, 2012).

Kiecker and Cowles (2002) argued that the spontaneity of certain kinds of eWOM, when compared to traditional WOM, increases the persuasibility and spread of messages. More specifically, the authors created a typology for the various types of eWOM: spontaneous, quasi-spontaneous, independent (third-party sponsored) and corporate sponsored (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002). Spontaneous eWOM is drawn from individual consumers, and may be reactive in nature (e.g. forwarding and replying to e-mails). Quasi-spontaneous eWOM is still written by individual consumers, but exists within a forum or environment that the marketer has developed (e.g. music reviews on Amazon.com). Independent (third-party sponsored) eWOM is hosted by professional associations and interest groups such as AskJeeves.com, Epinion.com, or Yahoo! Answers. Corporate-sponsored eWOM is commercial in nature, and is wholly developed within a marketing firm or public relations agency. Kiecker and Cowles (2002) mentioned that despite its believable and professional-sounding tone, corporate-sponsored eWOM is "not WOM communication at all" (p. 316), as it seriously lacks any real spontaneity and is writhe with agendas such as monetization. Whereas spontaneous eWOM is perceived as highly credible, the authors concluded that consumers find it more difficult to evaluate the credibility of quasi-spontaneous, independent and corporate-sponsored eWOM (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002).
The credibility of eWOM can also depend upon the communicator's underlying motives for sharing and forwarding content. Henning-Thurau et al. (2004) suggested that customers can be grouped into four segments based upon their motives for eWOM communication: self-interested helpers driven by economic incentives; consumer advocates with expressed concern for other consumers; true altruists that display a highly altruistic orientation, and score low on all the other dimensions; or multiple-motive consumers that score relatively high across all the clusters (pp. 49-50). Furthermore, the authors revealed that multiple-motive consumers engaged in the most eWOM and visited websites most frequently, but altruists and advocates engaged in the least eWOM and visited websites least frequently. Researchers have previously demonstrated that consumers positively associate experience with credibility (Newman & Staelin, 1973; Yang et al., 2012). Then, it can be postulated that consumers might trust multi-motive consumers the most, due to their high levels of involvement and experience with the Internet. Comparatively, there is the possibility that altruists and advocates may appear the most credible, as their motives and personal characteristics seem to be divorced entirely from the "cold commercialism" of mass marketing and communications (Dichter, 1996, p. 147). What is more, Bae and Lee (2011) illustrated that product type and media format moderate the relationship between eWOM and source credibility. The source credibility of eWOM is significantly greater for experience goods than for search goods when the source is a consumer-developed website, compared to a marketer-developed website (Bae & Lee, 2011). This increase in source credibility is specific to experience goods and consumer-developed websites because consumers find it challenging to evaluate the attributes and reliability of experience goods without touching, feeling or experiencing them firsthand.

Opinion leaders, especially, have been shown to influence mass consumers with eWOM
(Yang et al., 2012). There is a positive relationship between opinion leadership and online forwarding, chatting, online reviews and Internet use (Cole, Long, Chiagouris, & Gopalakrishna, 2011; Ho & Dempsey, 2010; Lyons & Henderson, 2005; Sun et al., 2006). Opinion leaders are able to influence mass consumers online due to the sheer volume of their eWOM. When they examined the distribution of messages across online discussion groups on music and mobile phones, prior researchers revealed that a select few individuals contributed a high proportion of messages, but a large number of individuals contributed very few messages (Steyer, Garcia-Bardidia, & Quester, 2006). The top five contributors in each discussion group accounted for 20 percent of the message volume in their areas of expertise (Steyer et al., 2006). Similarly, Huang (2010) demonstrated that the involvement of opinion leaders has a positive effect on the spread of experiential information through online bulletin board systems. Whereas experiential information contains eWOM with hedonic or symbolic meanings, cognitive information contains eWOM that references utilitarian functions, specifications and economic value (Huang, 2010). Findings not only supported that experiential posts enhance eWOM more than cognitive posts, but opinion leaders are more inclined to write experiential posts than non-opinion leaders, due to their involvement with a product class. Therefore, opinion leadership and experiential posts are effective conduits for the dissemination and power of eWOM (Huang, 2010).

Since the early 2000s, opinion leadership in social media has further contributed to the dissemination and power of eWOM (van Eck et al., 2011). Social media is defined as "an online community, wherein the consumer can develop an on-site identity, make online friends, attend virtual social events, build a reputation, [or] interact with other consumers" (Osetreicher-Singer & Zalmanson, 2012, p. 2). Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, Google+ and YouTube are popular examples of social media. Surprisingly, social media can also encompass other types of virtual
communities such as blogs, peer-to-peer content sharing, bookmarking, auctioneering, and matchmaking and crowdsourcing websites. EBay, Flickr, TripAdvisor, Last.FM, Pandora Radio, Soundcloud, Pinterest, Etsy, Reddit and Match.com are examples of these alternative forms of social media. Compared to opinion leadership in traditional offline and online environments, to date there has been a lack of opinion leadership research on social media. The role of opinion leadership in social media needs to be further examined because opinion leaders can broadcast product information and recommendations, and showcase their professional knowledge in a one-to-one, one-to-many, or many-to-many format online (Li & Du, 2011). These capabilities differ considerably from traditional WOM, which is often bound to a one-to-one format. It is possible for face-to-face communication to take place in front of large groups or between large groups of people; however, group-level communication requires significant coordination and scheduling offline. To the contrary, social media can be accessed instantaneously and opinion leaders can influence the attitudes and behaviors of mass consumers with greater ease than face-to-face communications permit (Li & Du, 2011).

Recent studies suggest that opinion leaders are, indeed, channeling the communicative power of social media in order to influence large groups of people. In a study on social networks, opinion leadership was found to be positively related to brand communication, but was negatively related to the hours spent using online social networks every day (Acar & Polonsky, 2007). Because opinion leaders are experienced Internet users, they may spend large amounts of time interacting with the mass media and update their social media sites only as new information emerges. Similar to traditional WOM, mass media is often the main source of message diffusion in social media and the opinion leader promotes these messages through internal communication power (Ko, Yin, & Kuo, 2008). For example, Ko et al. (2008) demonstrated that messages
diffuse across blogs through the combined efforts of an internal social system and external mass media channels. They noted that in a blogging network, a small number of elite bloggers first interact with the mass media. As other opinion leaders broker this information from the elite group to their followers, internal communication power builds and the message is spread throughout the blogging network (Ko et al., 2008). At the same time, the ubiquity of social media allows marketers, brands and retailers to study opinion leaders and use their feedback to improve, or create new products and services. An exploratory study of a fashion community at Myspace.com noted that opinion leaders frequently posted photos and comments about their personal styles, purchase decisions and attitudes towards high-end fashion brands and designers (Thomas, Peters, & Tolson, 2007). When opinion leaders personally contribute original content to a social media site, they assume an informal, but participatory role in shaping the meanings and values associated with brands and designers.

Social media participation often precludes that opinion leaders contribute user-generated content (UGC) as part of their unofficial "duties" as online, domain-specific advisors. UGC is digital content developed primarily through the creative efforts of individual consumers rather than the mass media or corporations (Daugherty et al., 2008). As defined previously, eWOM is a positive or negative statement about a product or company that is posted online (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). Arguably, UGC is somewhat unique from eWOM. If a customer films and posts an original video to YouTube, s/he effectively creates UGC. On the other hand, if a different customer forwards the link to the original customer’s video via Facebook, s/he effectively creates eWOM (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Whereas eWOM is simply formulated through written statements and related activities (e.g. forwarding and information sharing), UGC stems from creative acts such as filmography, photography, music composition and creative writing. UGC
and eWOM may differ, but they are interrelated. eWOM relies upon the creation of UGC, and UGC gains its influence when eWOM is present (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Consumers have described UGC as more credible and believable than mass-media content because they consider UGC to originate from opinion leaders, whom they generally trust (Cheong & Morrison, 2008).

A previous study demonstrated that opinion leaders on YouTube create publicly visible channels embedded with their own UGC and that of other users (Susarla, Oh, & Tan, 2012). Much like eWOM, the spread of UGC begins within a group of homophilious and high status individuals; usually groups of opinion leaders, who subscribe to the channels of one another. As a certain channel subscription gains popularity, it breaks free of this cohesive group and disseminates through incoming / outgoing channel subscriptions amongst their personal networks (Susarla et al., 2012).

Since UGC is imbued with feelings of creativity and spontaneity, it affords opinion leaders the opportunity to generate social media such as podcasts, video blogs (vlogs), photo journals and musical playlists to signal their competencies and attract an audience (Marshall, 2010). Notably, opinion leaders and their experiences with UGC add yet another conceptual layer to opinion leadership in social media. Even though the Internet can provide consumers with anonymity and less social anxiety than face-to-face communication, social media has a potentially transcendental side: celebrity culture. A celebrity is defined as an individual who possesses two major characteristics:

…one defining characteristic of celebrity is that a social actor attracts large-scale public attention: the greater the number of people who know of and pay attention to the actor, the greater the extent and value of that actor's celebrity. A second defining characteristic of celebrity is that the actor elicits positive emotional responses from the public. These responses arise because the actor has a positive valence for the audience to the extent that he or she helps fulfill various behavioral goals, which, in the cases of celebrity, include meeting an audience's needs for gossip, fantasy, identification, status, affiliation and attachment (Rindova et al., 2006, pp. 50-51).
According to Rindova et al.'s (2006) definition, a celebrity is defined by his/her ability to garner large-scale mass media and public attention, while satiating in consumers extrinsic desires for gossip, fantasy, identification, status, affiliation and attachment. Celebrity culture refers to the general obsession with celebrities that stimulates these extrinsic desires, and is quite prevalent in the United States of America (McCutcheon et al., 2010). Celebrity culture is so prevalent in the United States that many consumers have replaced their aspirations for the lifestyles and possessions of their somewhat wealthier friends with aspirations for the lifestyles and possessions of much wealthier celebrities (Schor, 1998). This powerful celebrity culture has led social media to become crammed with celebrity-inspired social networks and gossip blogs in recent years such as Pérez Hilton, Dlisted, Gawker and TMZ (Tufekci, 2008; Wu et al., 2011). Dialectically, celebrities have created social media accounts and personalized sites of their own in order to build a sense of intimacy between themselves and consumers (Marwick & Boyd, 2011). Status seeking and narcissistic opinion leaders (i.e. innovative communicators) are likely to appreciate the social media presence of celebrities, as they may strive to cultivate their own followings to feel more attractive, liked or special in the eyes of important others (Buffardi & Campbell, 2008). Having a celebrity as a "friend" on a social media website would seem to increase a status seeking opinion leader's perceived social standing and credibility within the celebrity's domain of expertise (End, 2001). In this celebrity-obsessed culture, it is important to highlight the profound effect that celebrity-consumer relationships can have on opinion leadership and social media participation. In doing so, it is necessary to study the anatomy of celebrity-consumer relationships, which are rooted in parasocial interaction.

**What is Parasocial Interaction (PSI)?**

Advertising, communication and mass media researchers have made significant strides
within research on celebrity-consumer relationships (Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2006). With the influx of films, sitcoms, and game shows during the 1950s, researchers sought an understanding of how consumers’ mass mediated experiences with television and film celebrities mirrored real social relationships and aspects of everyday lives. Horton and Wohl (1956) were among the first researchers to explore parasocial interaction. They theorized parasocial interaction to be the appearance of a real, face-to-face relationship between a consumer and celebrity that provides a "simulacrum" of dialogical give and take, even though the relationship may be one-sided, non-dialectical and primarily controlled by the celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956). For the purposes of the current study parasocial interaction is defined as a history of interactions between a consumer and celebrity that manifests into a seemingly imagined or illusory relationship, because no “true” face-to-face relationship exists and the interaction is primarily constructed within a fantasy cultivated through the mass media.

According to the authors, consumers assume dual roles as observers and participants during a celebrity’s performance. When consumers observe the dialogical and gestural cues of a celebrity (i.e. modes of direct address, small talk and looking directly into the camera), the experience may feel participatory and through “continuous interplay,” consumers can develop feelings of intimacy towards a celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 216). These participatory and intimate feelings that are characteristic of parasocial interaction have been theorized to occur under the following conditions:

1. When the celebrity provides a continuing, dependable relationship.

In order to justify this antecedent, Horton and Wohl (1956) described a talk show host, who typically shares with consumers a chronicle of past experiences and histories. For example,
Oprah Winfrey often seeks "first-time" experiences under the watchful eyes of her audience: a cross-country road trip, meeting an estranged sister, a week at the Miraval Life in Balance Spa, a mammogram, building a school in Africa, or going on tour with Tina Turner. This chronicle of shared experiences lead consumers to feel as if they are actually participating with Oprah, face-to-face or side-by-side, on these journeys.

2. When the consumer possesses knowledge of the celebrity.

Horton and Wohl (1956) also contended that a consumer may acquire so much knowledge about and prior experiences with a celebrity that it seems as if s/he understands or even knows the celebrity to some degree. Knowledge and loyalty, therefore, are key ingredients for creating a perceived sense of intimacy with the celebrity. The more knowledgeable and loyal the consumer is, the more likely s/he is to develop a parasocial interaction with a specific celebrity.

3. When the consumer is accepting of his / her role within the parasocial relationship.

Horton and Wohl (1956) emphasized, "independence is relative" (p. 220). In order for a parasocial relationship to be successful, the consumer must generally accept the celebrity’s perspective, as well as, be receptive to his/her non-dialectical (one-sided) communication. Those who resist, analyze or repudiate the celebrity’s persona or do not share the majority of their viewpoints probably are not loyal followers, and they are not likely to participate in the parasocial interaction. Furthermore, the celebrity maintains the parasocial relationship with a façade that "conceal(s) discrepancies between the public image / private life" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 228). Mass media builds the continuing relationship, increases knowledge and encourages consumers to accept their role within the parasocial interactions by seeding them with positive information.

Parasocial interactions, however, provide consumers with certain benefits. Foremost,
parasocial interactions give consumers favorable self-concepts and help them to relive former social roles through acts of recapitulation (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 224). By favorable self-concepts, Horton and Wohl (1956) refer to social mobility and status, which an individual may aspire towards through his/her parasocial interaction with a wealthier or status-laden celebrity. As a social reward, the prestige of the celebrity is perceived to transfer onto the consumer. That is, the consumer basks in the reflected glory of the celebrity, by means of how others perceive him or her to be linked to the celebrity. Basking in Reflected Glory (BIRGing) is a phenomenon that was initially studied in the 1970s and has since been extensively developed within Impression Management Theory (Cialdini et al., 1976). BIRGing is defined as “the tendency to showcase positive associations (with important people) and ‘bury’ negative ones” in order to elicit emotional and social value from the positive associations (Sigelman, 1986, p. 90).

Researchers have found that consumers sometimes wear the same clothing (Cialdini et al., 1976; Hunt, Bristol, & Bashaw, 1999), hang out with the friends of celebrities (Dijkstra, Cillessen, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2010) or add celebrities as “friends” on their social media websites (End, 2001) in order to bask in the reflected glory of him or her. A consumer may use parasocial interaction with a celebrity as a means for seeking attention from high status individuals within their personal networks. Recapitulation is another reason that consumers embark on parasocial interaction. Recapitulation is described as a feeling of nostalgia that offers people a chance to relive former events (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In an effort to satisfy their needs for status or nostalgia, consumers may also become involved in the following types of parasocial interactions: a generally vicarious way of living through the celebrity, a compensatory experience when consumers realize that a celebrity lifestyle is practically unachievable, and sociability for people who are socially inept and psychologically isolated (Horton & Wohl, 1956).
In concert with Horton and Wohl’s (1956) unidirectional concept of parasociality, the levels of vicariousness, compensation and sociability primarily depend upon the amount of media exposure and typify a uses and gratification approach to media consumption (Bryant, 2002). From a uses and gratification perspective, a consumer assumes a passive role and media channels activate their utopian imaginations and enact desires that satisfy a need to withdrawal from everyday life. The uses and gratification approach only considers the relationship between a celebrity and consumer without accounting for network effects or the consumer’s face-to-face relationships. In simpler terms, the uses and gratification approach can be called an escapist concept, as it suggests that consumers seek an escape or “mental” break from society (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Even though Horton and Wohl (1956) argued that parasocial relationships could supplant face-to-face relationships, they did not consider how social psychological predictors of interpersonal influence might also apply to parasociality. In fact, researchers have countered that the premises of Horton and Wohl’s (1956) article are contradictory. On the one hand, they described parasocial interaction as a unidirectional, non-reciprocal process; however, they also conveyed the notion that parasocial interaction may be bundled with a consumer’s real life and relationships (Tsao, 1996). These issues, alternatively, have been debated within research on parasocial relationships, which interpret parasociality through the lens of social cognitive theories (Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Giles, 2002; Gleich, 1997; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Schiappa & Gregg, 2005; Turner, 1993).

Giles (2002), in particular, can be credited with drawing upon the social psychological literature in order to frame parasociality within the realm of everyday social activities (p. 286). He explained how parasociality shares similarities with other types of imaginative activity (e.g. imaginary friends, cyber friends, long-distance relationships) that psychologists have empirically
studied and deemed to be socially viable (e.g. see Giles & Naylor, 2000; Gleason et al., 2000; Lea & Spears, 1995; Rohfling, 1995 qtd. in Giles, 2002). Giles (2002) added that, what is more, anthropologists such as Caughey (1984) have catalogued an extensive, global history of parasocial and imaginary figures in society. These observations lend some credence to parasocial interaction as a serious line of empirical inquiry, but the support of the uses and gratification approach among many communication researchers has detracted from the credibility of parasocial interaction research, and researchers have infrequently produced new knowledge on the subject of parasocial interaction.

In order to address this need for stronger theoretical and empirical support, Giles (2002) created a continuum of parasocial interaction and a processual conceptual model that discriminates between a parasocial interaction and a parasocial relationship. The continuum of parasocial interaction suggests that parasociality cannot be confined to a single medium or type of experience. According to Giles (2002), parasocial interaction occurs with increasing levels of abstraction and psychological distance, from face-to-face encounters with strangers (dyadic, small group, large group and celebrity sightings) to mass-mediated parasocial interactions (1st, 2nd and 3rd levels). Parasocial interactions also entail varying levels of imaginative activity that depend upon real-life social constraints. Other researchers have similarly conceded that parasocial interactions generally exist on a continuum ranging from low to high involvement (Gleich, 1997; Horton & Wohl, 1956; McCutcheon et al., 2010). As parasocial interactions become more abstract, the potential for future, face-to-face social contact decreases. For example, watching a newscaster may result in a serendipitous meeting some day, but a cartoon character remains purely fictional and infinitely parasocial (Giles, 2002, p. 295). There is no chance of meeting a real, physical manifestation of a cartoon character. Even so, the
development of a parasocial relationship between a consumer and celebrity in many ways can resemble the development of a face-to-face relationship.

Giles’ (2002) conceptual model outlines the ways that parasocial interactions become parasocial relationships and can be integrated into the nexus of everyday, face-to-face relationships. According to the model (Figure 1), the viewing episode is the preliminary stage of parasocial relationship formation. During the first stage, the consumer’s parasocial interaction is reliant upon cognitive activities such as making judgments and formulating opinions about the celebrity that, over time, increase physical attractiveness or feelings of closeness. The first stage is akin the entry stages of most relationships whereby people aim to reduce uncertainty through verbal communication and are likely to converse, form opinions and decide if they want to pursue the relationship any further (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). In concert with these findings about face-to-face relationships, Giles (2002) argued that further interactions must occur between the consumer and celebrity, beyond the initial meeting, in order for a parasocial relationship to unfold.

Figure 1. Stages in the development of a parasocial relationship (Giles, 2002).
When they interact with celebrities through a viewing episode, consumers may exhibit any of the following behaviors: imitative behavior, discussion with friends or other encounters. Once the threshold has been crossed from the viewing episode to these behaviors, a parasocial relationship starts to be initiated (Giles, 2002). However, the progression of the consumer from these behaviors to the imagined interaction stage determines whether a parasocial relationship fully emerges. *Imitative behavior* is common when the consumer empathizes with a celebrity and imitates their behavior (e.g. a heartbroken man or woman eating a pastry in front of Tiffany and Company because Holly Golightly had breakfast at Tiffany’s every morning in Audrey Hepburn’s iconic film to lament her own romantic life). *Discussion with friends* is common among consumers who are susceptible to social influence and can have some effect on their perceptions of the celebrity. *Other encounters* might include media outlets (i.e. celebrity gossip blogs), or other types of interpersonal interactions not accounted for within the model. Lastly, these experiences lead to *imagined interaction*, which approaches a parasocial relationship (Giles, 2002). That is, the consumer reaches a level of perceived intimacy with the celebrity. Horton and Wohl (1956, p. 217) aptly called this perception the “illusion of intimacy” and it perpetuates a parasocial relationship through knowledge, trust and fantasy.

In conclusion, Giles’ conceptual model (2002) contributes to parasocial research the idea that parasocial interaction can fit into the realm of everyday life. His second model shows that consumers cross a threshold from getting to know the celebrity to thinking that they intimately know the celebrity. It is possible for a consumer to only exhibit imitative behavior, discussion with friends or other encounters without actually leading to imagined interaction. In such cases, a parasocial relationship fails to materialize. Because his research was conceptual in nature, Giles did not exactly typify the different types of emotions, cognition and behaviors that ensue during
the entry stage of the parasocial relationship. It is equally important, therefore, to consider how researchers have quantified the emotions, thoughts, attitudes and behaviors that shape parasocial interactions (PSI).

**Antecedents of Parasocial Interaction**

Given that most researchers have developed their studies from Horton and Wohl’s (1956) concept of parasociality, a uses and gratification approach has strongly influenced their selection of hypothesized predictors. Many researchers have considered whether loneliness or a need for sociality may be related to the development of parasocial interactions. Whereas loneliness has explained television reliance and exposure among socially isolated individuals, it has not been found to be an antecedent of parasocial interaction (Rubin et al., 1985; Wang & Fink, 2008). From an attributional standpoint, chronically lonely individuals are less likely to perceive media as an escape, and they derive less gratification from media than situationally lonely and non-lonely individuals (Canary & Spitzberg, 1993). It seems that loneliness may not, at least, play a direct role in parasocial interaction and there have been minimal findings to the contrary.

For instance, Wang and Fink (2008) could not find a direct relationship between different types of loneliness and parasocial interaction, but they detected an interaction with gender. The authors defined *family loneliness* as “detachment or abandonment from family relations” (Wang & Fink, 2008). They additionally defined *chronic loneliness* as enduring dissatisfaction with close relationships that is enhanced by perceptions of abandonment and it may lead people to withdrawal from interpersonal communication (Wang & Fink, 2008). Whereas chronic loneliness appeared to be positively related to parasocial interaction among the men, it was not significantly related to parasocial interaction among the women in their study (Wang & Fink, 2008). Contrastingly, Lim and Kim (2011) discovered a positive relationship between loneliness
and parasocial interactions with teleshopping hosts. Teleshopping became a gateway through which older customers could interact with salespeople, much like they would have formed customer relationships in brick and mortar stores, if they had the strength and agility to go shopping. Thus, their convenience sample was made up of elderly people with mobility issues and is not generalizable.

Tsao (1996) challenged the uses and gratification approach, and he contended that socially deprived individuals are not always prone to parasocial interaction. Paradoxically, Tsao (1996) found that empathy and extroversion are positively related to parasocial interaction. The major difference in social power or socioeconomic status between a consumer and an celebrity may be a possible explanation for these findings (Horton & Wohl, 1956). If a parasocial relationship mirrors face-to-face relationships, then extroverted people may be more likely than introverted, or lonely individuals to possess the ambition, or have aspirations to “befriend” a stranger with higher levels of social power, prestige or socioeconomic status (Tsao, 1996). The self-esteem that extroversion requires, too, might increase parasocial interaction in some cases. Positive self-evaluation is positively related to parasocial interaction, because ego-centric individuals may enjoy having their positive self-perceptions reinforced through parasociality (Turner, 1993). Moreover, parasocial interaction was discovered to stem from broader sets of deficiencies that do not include loneliness such as a lack of creativity, intelligence, critical thinking, spatial ability and need for cognition (McCutcheon, 2002).

Attraction and homophily are additional determinants of parasocial interaction. If consumers derive social rewards and meanings from parasocial interactions, then it is plausible that they may find the celebrity to be prestigious (Horton & Wohl, 1956), attractive (Giles, 2002), admirable (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009) or relatable (Tsao, 1996). Using Uncertainty
Reduction Theory, Rubin and McHugh (1987) incorporated attraction and parasocial interaction as mediators within a full model of communication and relationship importance. According to Uncertainty Reduction Theory, individuals form social relationships with strangers only after gaining acquiescence with them through the reciprocity of speech, communication and mutual feelings of attraction (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Berger and Calabrese (1975) articulated that media exposure should increase attraction and thereby, attraction should increase parasocial interaction and relationship importance. Their empirical tests specifically indicated that task attraction and social attraction are predictive of parasocial interaction, but physical attraction does not predict parasocial interaction. The authors also supported that parasocial interaction mediates attraction and relationship importance.

By conducting a study of respondents’ attitudes towards characters on Lost, Tian and Hoffner (2010) contributed additional support to Rubin and McHugh’s (1987) findings. The respondents in their study were more likely to develop parasocial interactions with the characters that they liked or had neutral feelings about than the characters they disliked. Respondents who were socially attracted to characters also reported higher levels of self-identification and social influence. The forms of social attraction and liking that typically define face-to-face relationships may also precede parasocial interaction. Consistent with earlier findings (Turner, 1993), Tian and Hoffner (2010) confirmed that similarity and identification are positively related to parasocial interaction. They elaborated, "Identification and parasocial interaction reinforce each other, by strengthening the emotional bond between the character and (consumer)" (Tian & Hoffner, 2010, p. 265). This observation reifies prior research on relationship attraction, homophily and parasocial interaction. No single amount of media exposure (Rubin & Perse, 1987) or communication (Rubin & McHugh, 1987) can generate parasocial interaction.
Likewise, similarities between counterparts must be salient and meaningful in order to foster parasocial interactions (Tian & Hoffner, 2010).

**Empathy and Interpersonal Affect**

It is also important to consider whether parasocial interactions are behaviorally similar to face-to-face relationships. This question has been explored within parasocial research on attachment and interpersonal affect. Gleich’s (1997) research on media psychology supplied the momentum for examining the behavioral aspects of parasociality. By performing a factor analysis, he identified three dimensions of parasocial interaction: companionship (i.e. the feeling that a celebrity is a friend), person-program interaction (i.e. perceiving a celebrity as the image or character that s/he portrays), and empathetic interaction (i.e. intensive affective reactions) (Gleich, 1997). Specifically the *empathetic interaction* dimension contains emotive behaviors such as talking to the television screen, feeling sorry for a character, or imagining and treating celebrities as if they have formed an attachment or emotional bonds with him or her. Subsequent empirical studies recorded more in-depth descriptions of the types of behaviors and underlying feelings of attachment that may underscore parasocial interaction (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; McCutcheon, 2002; Schiappa & Gregg, 2005).

Kassing and Sanderson (2009) conducted a naturalistic inquiry into the behaviors that characterized parasocial interactions with Floyd Landis, an American road cyclist, who participated in the Tour de France and notoriously tested positive for illegal, performance-enhancing substances. When analyzing the comments that fans had left about Floyd Landis on social media sites, the authors observed high levels of interpersonal affect and behavior within fans’ dialogues such as crying, shaking, jumping up and down, feeling tired or depressed about the race. For instance, a participant recalled driving 70 MPH while reading updates about the
race on his cell phone and screaming, “Come On Floyd!!!” (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Participants who framed their interactions as real social relationships even went so far as to display behaviors such as expressing gratitude and giving advice to Floyd Landis. Kassing and Sanderson’s (2009) observations support that empathetic reactions can preclude parasocial interaction, leading to behaviors that are common within caring, face-to-face relationships.

McCutcheon (2002, p. 2) proposed that personal love styles could be reflected within parasocial relationship styles: “For example, if Susan adopts a selfless, all-giving, non-demanding love style with her partner, will that style typify her approach to other important social relationships?” After comparing six love styles from the love attitudes scale, McCutcheon (2002) concluded that parasocial interactions with celebrities correlated positively with game-playing and dependent love styles. Whereas game-playing individuals treat significant others as physical conquests, dependent individuals exhibit possessive behaviors (McCutcheon, 2002). The correlation between parasocial interaction and game-playing was highly significant and greater than with the dependent love style, lending support to earlier findings concerning the positive relationship between self-esteem and parasociality (Turner, 1993).

Breakups, too, can profoundly influence the feelings and behaviors of consumers as an outcome from their parasocial interactions with celebrities. A parasocial breakup occurs when a celebrity dies, retires, a television series ends or the character is removed from the show (e.g. a celebrity quits or the character dies). Emotionally intensive, empathetic interactions with celebrities may cause the end of a parasocial relationship to be somewhat depressing or traumatic for consumers, who may display the distressful behaviors that usually follow the dissolution of a face-to-face relationship (Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003; Cohen, 2003; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011). Cohen (2004) found that much like orthosocial (face-to-face) relationships, parasocial
interaction and relationship intensity are strongly related to breakup distress. Moreover, anxiously-ambivalently attached individuals anticipate the most negative responses to breakups from television characters, when compared to avoidant and secure attachment styles (Cohen, 2004). Because anxiously-ambivalently attached individuals also anticipate the most negative responses from face-to-face breakups, it may be claimed that the behavioral characteristics of parasocial breakups can mirror face-to-face breakups. The attachment styles and love styles that describe face-to-face relationships seem to predict the attachment styles and love styles that will describe parasocial relationships.

Parasocial interactions can even compel consumers to change their attitudes and behaviors when they sense an emotional bond with or attachment to a celebrity. Perceived similarity, liking and parasocial interaction have been shown to influence consumers to alter their physical appearances, attitudes, values, careers, hobbies or other activities so that their personal characteristics match those of a celebrity (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Many researchers have dedicated their attention to the negative effects that parasocial interactions can have on adults, teenagers and children (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Davis & Mares, 1998; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Trampe, Stapel, & Siero, 2007). Paradoxically, the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis has been used to conjecture that parasocial interactions can also have positive influences on people (Brown, 2010; Czaja, 2011; Schiappa et al., 2006). Schiappa and Gregg (2005) conceptualized the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis to be the notion that parasocial interactions may offer “socially beneficial functions” (p. 93). The main premise of the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis is that socializing prejudicial individuals through parasocial interactions with a representative category member (e.g. racial, sexual orientation, gender, religion, etc.) stimulates a positive shift in their opinions and behaviors. Because these are experimental studies based in laboratories, the
ecological validity can be called into question, as prejudicial individuals usually avoid bonding with a representative category member.

The uses and gratification approach espoused within Horton and Wohl’s (1956) research portrays parasocial interaction as non-reciprocal and imaginary. Research on the social cognitive traits and behavioral characteristics of parasocial interactions has not only repudiated the uses and gratification approach, but has called attention to the ways that parasocial interactions influence people’s identities, attitudes, lifestyles and behaviors within real life situations (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). The individual differences and many different social milieus of parasocial interactions that have been revealed in the former studies convey parasociality as a continuum of experiences rather than a pathology or erotomania (Giles, 2002). Most importantly, parasocial interaction research has shifted from a media effects concept to a multidimensional construct that encompasses many types of imaginary, social relationships (Giles, 2002; Gleich, 1997; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

**Parasocial Interaction in Marketing and Consumer Research**

To date, there do not appear to be any major empirical research studies on parasocial interaction within prior marketing and consumer research literature. Fetscherin and Dato-on (2010) produced a concise empirical report on brand love. They confirmed that parasocial interaction is strongly tied to brand love. The positive association between parasocial interaction and brand love upholds prior research findings in the mass media literature, regarding how face-to-face attachment and love styles transfer onto parasocial interaction (Cohen, 1997; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; McCutcheon, 2002). There also are a very limited number of studies on parasocial interaction about consumers that are confined to the teleshopping phenomenon (Stephens & Hill, 1996). Teleshopping research has mainly considered the effects that
convenience, loneliness, impulse shopping and television exposure can have on parasocial interaction (Lim & Kim, 2011; Park & Lennon, 2004). Hence, the theoretical frameworks within teleshopping research have not really moved beyond a uses and gratification perspective. There remains a need for empirical studies that push the boundaries of parasocial interaction research towards understanding celebrity-consumer relationships outside of the television context, within different media formats and across marketing channels.

Gummesson (2002) contributed to the marketing literature the concept of parasocial interaction and emphasized the importance of adding parasocial concepts to market research. He depicted businessmen and designers as celebrities in their own right, who enrich a brand name and increase its notoriety by constructing illusory relationships with consumers. Richard Branson, Donald Trump, Twiggy, and Marks & Spencer are some of the names that he mentioned as linking media attraction and celebrity status with brand awareness (Gummesson, 2008). Thomson (2006) described customer relationships with celebrities as parasocial in nature (e.g. sports figures, pop stars, politicians). Using Self Determination theory, the author hypothesized that the autonomy and relatedness associated with parasocial interaction can give consumers feelings of empowerment and senses of belonging. In turn, he found that autonomy and relatedness increase emotional attachments to celebrities (Thomson, 2006).

Consumer research on celebrity product endorsement has also ruminated on the effects that parasocial interactions might have on brand relationships. Consumers have been shown to be particularly obsessed with celebrity personae and Hollywood culture (McCutcheon et al., 2010). Celebrity endorsed products not only enhance a brand’s credibility, but they can produce in some consumers fantasies of acquiescence, identification or affiliation with celebrity personae (Choi & Rifon, 2007). Zimmerman and Ayoob (2004) developed a conceptual framework for celebrity-
endorsed products including a Michael Graves tea kettle and Martha Stewart home products. The authors argued that *construction*, the “Be and Be with [a celebrity] fantasy” (Zimmerman & Ayoob, 2004, p. 11), is a core activity for celebrity product consumption. They referred to construction as the parasocial aspect of celebrity product consumption that allows consumers to enter seemingly one-way relationships with celebrities at will and to drop their “friendships” without accepting the repercussions of face-to-face human relationships (Zimmerman & Ayoob, 2004).

However, credibility and companionship do not determine the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser. McCracken (1989) countered that celebrity endorsers are most effective when they enable the transfer of cultural meanings and values. The author described celebrities as cultural artifacts that, by way of an endorsement, encode their meanings into products. When consuming a celebrity product, cultural meanings then shape consumers’ experiences with their products. Choi and Rifon (2007) created a celebrity image scale that paradigmatically taps into the different meanings that celebrities can transfer to products such as genuineness, competence, excitement and sociability. Because every celebrity projects a unique persona, the effectiveness of a celebrity endorser depends upon the congruity between the celebrity’s and the brand’s images (Choi & Rifon, 2007). When the perceived fit between the celebrity, brand and personal image of the consumer is strong, the celebrity is able to effectively influence the consumer with parasocial interaction.

Celebrity endorsers are frequently used in fashion advertisements, but the fashion designers themselves are celebrities, too. The veneration and celebration of fashion designers is a tradition that can be traced to European, couture fashion workshops and the modern, global luxury retail business. Dion and Arnould (2011) employed McCracken’s (1989) meaning transfer
model to explain how creative directors’ charisma and aesthetic ideologies permeate European, luxury fashion brands. The authors contended that the legitimacy of a luxury fashion brand rests upon the transfer of charisma and aesthetics from the creative director to the brands, retail stores and ultimately, to the salespeople through embodied acts, narratives and rituals (Dion & Arnould, 2011). Although it was beyond the scope of their study, they postulated that the diffusion of the creative director’s charisma and aesthetic ideologies could be “productive of the development of parasocial relationships between the salesperson and clients and the artistic creator…” (Dion & Arnould, 2011, p. 39). Similarly, Zimmerman and Ayoob (2004) observed the following about celebrity products:

Consumers consume Donna Karan clothes by shopping; they project their values by driving BMWs; they collect art deco furniture; and they reflect on their life experiences through the products they interact with. However, consumers cannot be their mobile phone, and they cannot be with a can of Coca Cola. Without the ability to be narrative, consumers can never be or be with products (p. 12).

The “be with” fantasy is most relevant for the PSI context, as it increases the interpersonal affect and attraction that transmit between the consumer and celebrity through celebrity-sponsored products. Zimmerman and Ayoob’s (2004), and Dion and Arnould’s (2011) observations triangulate back to parasocial research findings within the media and communications literature. Personal narratives and histories have been shown to essentially generate parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). As discussed earlier, prior research has also indicated that knowledge, similarity, attraction and attachment may underlie these narratives or personal histories. But, there remains a need for marketing research that examines parasocial interaction. Moreover, marketing research on celebrity worship should advance the auratic, semiotic, cultural and social cognitive perspectives towards understanding how parasocial interactions can influence opinion leadership and social media participation, as it is recognized as
a major source of celebrity culture and parasocial interactions within society.
 CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES

"For it develops that, in all walks of life, there are persons who are especially likely to lead the crystallization of opinions in their fellows." – Elihu Katz and Paul F. Lazarsfeld (1955), p. 3

Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory

The Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory is the culmination of almost two decades' worth of empirical, social science research conducted within Columbia University’s Bureau of Applied Social Research (1940-1957). The theory is discussed in its entirety across the following key scientific reports: Personal Influence (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and "The Two-Step Flow of Communication: An Up-to-date Report" (Katz, 1957). The People's Choice Study of 1940 provided empirical support for the Two-Step Flow of Communication. The researchers conducted a panel study (n = 2,400) in Erie County, Ohio (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, & Gaudet, 1968). In so doing, the researchers found that, "...ideas, often, seem to flow from radio and print to opinion leaders and from them to less active sections of the population" (p. 32). This major finding violated the researchers' hypotheses, since they expected the mass media to have an immutable effect on voting behavior. With this discovery in mind, the next group of social researchers decided to focus on interpersonal relations, and to expand the study context to incorporate the following domains: household, fashion, public affairs and movies. In 1945, they conducted a survey of middle-class consumers in Decatur, IL (n = 800), and relied upon a snowballing technique to identify potential opinion leaders. The results further supported the theory across the four categories. Opinion leaders were more avid consumers of mass media than non-opinion leaders, and the flow of communications generally moved from mass media, to opinion leaders, and then to non-opinion leaders (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Katz and Lazarsfeld also provided an in-depth interpretation of these findings. They defined an opinion leader "as a communicator and as a relay point in the network of mass
communications" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 1). This definition suggests that the Two-Step Flow of Communication is, essentially, a theory of personal influence. The mass media influences opinion leaders, and the opinion leaders themselves influence mass consumers. The shared opinions and decisions amongst members of a social group rely heavily on the presence of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are knowledgeable about how group members think and can serve as mediators between the mass media and the social group. According to the researchers, they found opinion leaders in every social stratum. In an immediate social environment, opinion leadership evolves horizontally amongst similar people, and is most common for small purchases (e.g. soap and newspapers). Simultaneously, opinion leadership can be a vertical phenomenon, whereby the influence for new products and riskier purchases moves between social stratum (e.g. new fashion apparel and automobiles) (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Furthermore, social pressure is the generative mechanism for opinion leadership in both directions. Horizontally, people are more likely to be receptive to an opinion leader's influence when like-minded others in their group do the same. Vertically, people are more likely to be receptive to mass media's influence, by way of an opinion leader, when it helps him/her rise in esteem with his/her friends (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).

Another point of the Decatur study is "the way in which people influence each other is not only affected by the primary groups in which they live; it is co-determined by the broad institutional setting of the American scene" (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). The coterminous processes of horizontal and vertical opinion leadership illustrate that opinion leaders may share similarities with the people they immediately influence. Yet, regional, national, global or cyber cultures often shape the actions of opinion leaders and mass consumers. There is always some deviation within social groups and among opinion leaders, whereby they actively negotiate the
diffusion of tastes and culture. Hence, the *Two-Step Flow of Communication* anathematized the contemporaneous social theories that were primarily being developed within the Frankfurt School. Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Walter Benjamin and Jürgen Habermas are the iconic figures from this school of advanced socioscientific thought, which drew upon the works of Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud and Weber to critique the cultural products and ephemera of the 20th century. To that end, communication theories in the postwar United States and Europe mainly studied the (ill) effects of media with intervening variables such as exposure, medium, content and personal characteristics. As a result, audience research (the study of what types of people are receptive to communications); content analysis (the study of the language, logic and layout of communications); and effect analysis (the study of how mass communications impact people) were the predominant forms of social research pursued on communications during the 1950s (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). In the words of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955), the following was a common misperception of the era:

…the mass media loomed as agents of evil aiming at the total destruction of democratic society. First the newspaper, and later the radio, were feared as powerful weapons able to rubber-stamp ideas upon the minds of defenseless readers and listeners… a 'golden' voice on the radio could sway men in any direction (p. 16).

To the contrary, Katz and Lazarsfeld's (1955) interpretation of the *Two-Step Flow of Communication* ascribed to mass media consumption the qualities of a give-and-take process that was not as deterministic as scholarly critics thought. Whereas the majority of non-opinion leaders avoided media exposure, opinion leaders were shown to consume mass media in the domains that were meaningful and salient for them. Effectively, they added to the intervening variables between mass media and reception the influence of interpersonal relations, which converged the macroscopic theoretical lens of mass communication effects and the microscopic theoretical lens of social relations (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955).
In a later article, Katz (1957) explicitly summarized the findings from the People's Choice, Personal Influence and a then forthcoming study on the diffusion of drug choices amongst physicians. Concomitantly, he developed a clear theoretical framework for the Two-Step Flow of Communication. Across the almost two decades of research, Katz (1957) argued that opinion leadership is dependent on three antecedents: (1) the personification of certain values (who one is), (2) competence (what one knows), and (3) a strategic social location (whom one knows). Values are enduring beliefs that guide behaviors, modes of conduct and states of being (Rokeach, 1973). For example, materialism has been framed as a mode of conduct that is guided by specific values such as acquisition centrality, acquisition as the pursuit of happiness and possession-defined success (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Values, or who one is, are central to opinion leadership because an opinion leader usually shares similar values with other people in his/her social group. Homophily enhances opinion leadership and it has been shown to increase the flow of information within social networks (Aral et al., 2009; Brown & Reingen, 1987; Venkatraman, 1989). Many values are domain-specific. For instance, youthfulness is a value that can be associated with trendy products like designer clothing and pop music (Katz, 1957). Other values are generic and applicable to most forms of opinion leadership such as the social values that underlie consumption. Within consumer research, social values are defined as the importance attached to conspicuous consumption and self-expression within social groups (Moschis, 1981).

Social values are common amongst opinion leaders. Opinion leaders have been found to share more information, belong to greater numbers of social organizations, and to have stronger social motives for their information sharing than non-opinion leaders (Venkatraman, 1989). In a similar vein, researchers have found that the social identity function is positively related to
opinion leadership for publicly consumed goods, but not for privately consumed goods (Grewal et al., 2000). By consuming products conspicuously, opinion leaders can signal to mass consumers that they are "in the know." Because they desire an internal locus of control, opinion leaders counterbalance this conspicuousness with self-expression through a need for uniqueness (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Clark & Goldsmith, 2005; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). As mentioned previously, social values encompass both conspicuous consumption and self-expression / need for uniqueness. In sum, the following hypothesis is derived:

**H1:** Social values are positively related to opinion leadership.

Competence (what one knows) is an essential ingredient for opinion leadership. According to Katz (1957), competence does not refer to formal education, but it is embodied through experience and familiarity. Numerous empirical studies, beyond the *Bureau of Applied Social Research* canon (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), have supported that knowledge is positively related to opinion leadership (Chan & Misra, 1990; Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b; Jacoby & Kyner, 1973; van Eck et al., 2011). The more knowledgeable that an opinion leader appears to be, the more influential s/he is on his/her peers (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b). Knowledge also helps to diffuse the flow of information within social networks because people trust that an opinion leader has accurately interpreted product information (van Eck et al., 2011). Thus, the following hypothesis can be developed:

**H2:** Knowledge is positively related to opinion leadership.

Katz (1957) asserted that opinion leadership is dependent upon a strategic social location (whom one knows). The author further articulated that "whom one knows" means that other people within an opinion leader's group find him/her influential, or attractive because of the people that s/he knows outside of the social group (Katz, 1957). As of the writing of Katz's
(1957) article, the researchers observed that opinion leaders belonged to more organizations and in the case of doctors, they frequently attended out-of-town meetings where they could interact with people outside their immediate social groups. Or as other researchers have interpreted the Two-Step Flow of Communication, social capital increases the potential for opinion leadership (Kadushin, 2006). Social capital is described as:

… the general availability of useful others, and/or the availability of specific useful others, and/or the ability or talent of an individual to select persons in his or her interpersonal environment who might be able to solve a particular problem (Kadushin, 2006).

The notion of social capital makes opinion leaders people who use other people (Feick et al., 1986). More than fifty years have passed since the Bureau of Applied Social Research canon on opinion leadership began. The people that opinion leaders use in pursuit of their interstitial roles between the mass media and mass consumers can now include cyber, illusory and fantasized relationships that manifest through mass media and the Internet. Unprecedented access to the lives of celebrities via social media and television has fueled in many consumers a strong interest and emotional attachment to celebrities (McCutcheon et al., 2010; Tufekci, 2008; Wu et al., 2011). Such illusory relationships and celebrity obsessions converge into parasocial interactions (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Parasocial interactions give people the feeling that they are intimate friends with celebrities (Giles, 2002). Specifically, parasocial interaction with a celebrity who specializes in the opinion leader's domain of expertise should boost his/her opinion leadership, as an available and useful source of social capital (End, 2001). The opinion leader may also bask in the reflected glory of a celebrity (Cialdini et al., 1976). This leads us to:

**H3:** Parasocial interaction (PSI) is positively related to opinion leadership.

Furthermore, prior literature has demonstrated that knowledge (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and similarity (Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Turner, 1993) are key predictors of parasocial interaction
(Horton & Wohl, 1956). As a person knows more about and identifies with a celebrity, parasocial interaction intensifies:

**H4:** Knowledge is positively related to PSI.

**H5:** Similarity is positively related to PSI.

According to the *Two-Step Flow of Communication*, an opinion leader's primary function is to act as a communicator and mediator of information between the mass media and mass consumers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Prior studies have shown that an opinion leader may accomplish this task with traditional WOM (Gilly et al., 1998; Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988), eWOM (Kiecker & Cowles, 2002; Sun et al., 2006), or social media (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Ko et al., 2008). Given that technology has expanded the possibilities of parasocial interaction and opinion leadership, it is appropriate to focus on the latter category: social media. Previous studies have shown that opinion leadership is positively related to social media participation (Ko et al., 2008) and brand communication within online social networks (Acar & Polonsky, 2007). Additionally, researchers have illustrated that opinion leaders are multimodal and they usually participate in social media via user-generated content (UGC) and eWOM (Cheong & Morrison, 2008; Daugherty et al., 2008):

**H6:** Opinion leadership is positively related to willingness to participate in UGC.

**H7:** Opinion leadership is positively related to willingness to participate in eWOM.

There is also the possibility that parasocial interaction also leads directly to social media participation and bypasses opinion leadership. Prior studies have demonstrated that parasocial interaction is positively related to domain-specific social media participation (End, 2001; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

**H8:** PSI is positively related to willingness to participate in UGC.
**H9:** PSI is positively related to willingness to participate in eWOM.

Furthermore, there are indirect relationships between PSI and social media participation through opinion leadership. According to the *Two-Step Flow of Communication*, opinion leadership gives consumers the capacity to influence others. This sharing of domain-specific information and/or content is unique to opinion leaders. Opinion leadership is a necessary step prior to the dissemination of information and/or content. The effect of opinion leadership should buffer, or wash out the relationship between PSI and social media participation:

**H10:** Opinion leadership will mediate the positive relationship between PSI and willingness to participate in UGC.

**H11:** Opinion leadership will mediate the positive relationship between PSI and willingness to participate in eWOM.

In the current study, the following theoretical model was derived from the hypotheses:

*Figure 2. Theoretical Model*
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Context

Opinion leadership is an extensively studied phenomenon and it has become a classic domain of inquiry within marketing and consumer research. When examining the *Two-Step Flow of Communication* (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955) and opinion leadership within the wider spectrum of social research, it is evident that opinion leadership has been studied for almost 75 years. Empirical research has provided insight into the various drivers of opinion leadership, which primarily include market mavenry (Clark & Goldsmith, 2005), knowledge (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999), enduring involvement (Richins & Root-Shaffer, 1988), innovativeness (Baumgarten, 1975), attention to social comparison information (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008) and need for uniqueness (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006). Likewise, many researchers have probed the outcomes that characterize opinion leadership, with the greatest attention given to opinion seeking (Flynn et al., 1996), interpersonal influence (Venkatraman, 1989), traditional WOM (Gilly et al., 1998) and eWOM (Sun et al., 2006). A much smaller number of empirical studies have considered exactly how social media has transformed opinion leadership, or for that matter, included in their models the sociocultural milieus that ensconce opinion leadership and social media participation. The major achievement of the *Two-Step Flow of Communication* was to demonstrate that interpersonal influence plays a greater role in consumer decision-making and the diffusion of information than the mass media. The *Bureau of Applied Social Research* was additionally concerned with illustrating how the American "scene," or culture increased the propagation of information streams (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, p. 9). By incorporating parasocial interaction and social media participation into the *Two-Step Flow of Communication*, the current study aims to further understand the role of interpersonal influence in the diffusion of
information and to illustrate how the American “scene” increases the flow of information.

Opinion leadership is most common for experience product classes or as Price et al. (1987) pointed out, "opinion leaders are more likely in product categories in which pleasure or satisfaction is derived from product usage, or where association with the product provides a form of self-expression” (p. 332). In order to capture the domain-specificity and self-expression that underscores opinion leadership, the fashion context was chosen for the current study. The fashion context refers to the social practice and art of dress. It can also be known as the design, purchase and personal display of clothing. The fashion context has been examined in several opinion leadership studies precisely for its conspicuousness, expressiveness and innovativeness (Bearden & Rose, 1990; Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006; Darden & Reynolds, 1972; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008; Summers, 1970; Vernette, 1999). In the past, the fashion context has been shown to be successful when testing the psychometric properties of the opinion leadership scale (Flynn et al., 1996). Previous exploratory studies have also supported that the fashion context is an area where users often contribute both UGC and eWOM, while also deriving from celebrities social capital as part of their opinion leadership lexicons (Thomas et al., 2007). Hence, the fashion context is not only valuable for studying opinion leadership, but is compatible with the overall goals of the current study such as contributing concepts of social media participation and parasocial interaction to the opinion leadership literature.

**Research Tools, Sampling and Data Collection Procedures**

A cross-sectional survey design was chosen for the current study. The sampling frame consisted of fashion consumers in the United States. The data were collected via an online, self-administered survey instrument because the online format has been described as an effective and efficient research tool for studying unique populations, such as fashion consumers (Wright,
The independent variables were tapped into by using pre-established scales from the marketing and communication research literature. Because social media is a multimodal and interactive phenomenon, the dependent variables (UGC and eWOM) were measured with a visual stimulus. The visual stimulus contained a photograph of a fictional social media website in which the respondents were encouraged to contribute UGC and eWOM. A fictional social media website was used as a visual stimulus rather than a real social media website because loyalty towards any specific, branded social media website could bias the responses. In order to simulate the social pressure that ordinarily underlies social media use and the ability to communicate within a one-to-many format (Li & Du, 2011), a photo gallery was incorporated into the fictional social media website. Then, the respondents were directed to read a description of the fictional social media website. Subsequently, they reported on their willingness to contribute UGC and eWOM to the fictional social media website. In light of the research questions, the fictional social media website provided the opportunity to observe how the emergence of social media cultures impacts opinion leadership.

A national sample of 2500 respondents, 18 years or older, in the United States were initially targeted for the study. By using screening criteria, the researcher aimed to specifically recruit the sampling frame of fashion consumers. The screening criteria for the survey required participants to be the primary shoppers for fashion products in their households, and they needed to have purchased at least one fashion product online or in a physical store during the past three months. As such, the researcher sought fashion consumers with a basic knowledge of fashion and with recent experience shopping for fashion products across marketing channels. Fashion products were henceforth defined in the study as “items you can wear such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, i.e., belts, ties, hats, scarves, leather goods and jewelry.”
The data were purchased from SurveyMonkey Audience™, an established market research firm that vets and maintains reliable consumer panels. As members of the panel, the respondents received incentives in the form of shopping points that were redeemable online for consumer goods and services. The market research firm sent the survey announcement to the panel members. If they met the screening criteria, a brief description of the study was provided to the panelists, and they were invited to voluntarily participate in the study. When a panelist volunteered to be a respondent, s/he was given a disclosure form that outlined his/her rights as a human subject and it described in detail the requirements for the study. If they read the disclosure form and agreed to voluntarily participate, respondents were permitted to complete the survey instrument.

Development of the Survey Instrument

The current research was part of a larger study about fashion consumers and technology use that was sponsored by Demandware, Inc. (www.demandware.com). However, Demandware had no involvement in the study design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of data and portions of the survey instrument that will be herein reported. The researcher does not have any financial interests in Demandware and a disclosure form was filed with the Office of Responsible Conduct of Research at the University of Arizona. As it pertains to the current study, the survey instrument contained 54 items. First, the respondents were presented with six statements related to opinion leadership and then, ten statements related to social values. Afterwards, the respondents were asked the following question:

Do you have a favorite fashion designer? A fashion designer is a person who designs, creates and/or sells fashion products to customers. You may choose any type of fashion designer. It does not have to be someone who specializes in designer or luxury goods… What is the name of your favorite fashion designer?

The respondents were then instructed to imagine that the statements in the next section described
the one, favorite fashion designer that they had chosen. Each statement contained an open-ended field so that the respondents could imagine that it contained the name of their favorite fashion designer. The statements were presented to them in the following order: knowledge (5 items), similarity (12 items) and parasocial interaction (17 items).

Afterwards, the respondents were shown a visual stimulus in order to measure the dependent variables: willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM (Figure 3). The visual stimulus was developed with Prototyper 1.1, a wireframe program for building social media websites. The visual stimulus contained a fictional social media website with a photo gallery and a statement that encouraged their participation. The respondents were asked to imagine that their favorite fashion designer just launched a fictional social media website. The photo gallery was drawn from royalty-free photographs and represented a diverse mixture of genders and ethnicities. The diversity helped to reduce possible biases due to the perceived attractiveness and homophily of the models in the photographs. The respondents were invited to imagine that they could submit self-portraits of themselves wearing their favorite fashion designer’s clothing via the social media website. UGC is creative, original content that can be personalized and uploaded to social media websites, usually in a one-to-many format. By encouraging the respondents to submit self-portraits, the researcher wanted to capture the sense of creativity and personalization that accompanies UGC. Similarly, eWOM in a social media community involves browsing and providing written feedback on other users’ content or opinions. By convincing the respondents that the photo gallery was constructed from other users’ self-portraits, the visual stimulus could test whether the respondents perceived themselves to possess sufficient knowledge and leadership skills to advise other community members on their fashion tastes.
Figure 3. Fictional social media website.

The respondents were directed to use the fictional social media website to answer four questions about their willingness to participate in eWOM and UGC. Lastly, the final section of the survey instrument contained ten questions to gather basic demographic information. In an effort to prevent nay- / yea- saying and order effects (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003), the opinion leadership variable was measured prior to the antecedents (knowledge, similarity and social values). A series of questions not included in the current study acted as a distraction task between the dependent variables and independent variables.

A pre-test was run on consumers recruited from the Ask Your Target Market™ online panel (n = 40). The pre-test revealed that the respondents did not understand how a fashion
designer was defined in the context of the survey because they overlooked the definition. As such, the researcher bolded the “fashion designer” definition and reformatted the survey so that the respondents were required to confirm that they read the definition before moving forward. By entering all the measurement items into an exploratory factor analysis (EFA), the researcher additionally evaluated the construct validity. Lastly, a multiple regression was run in order to pre-test the theoretical model. The valence of the proposed relationships were consistent with the hypotheses, but due to the small sample size, most of the relationships were not significant at the .05 level. Before the final programming of the survey instrument, students and staff members at the University of Arizona (n = 17) were asked to identify any unclear instructions or ambiguous measurement items within the survey instrument. Their responses were compared with the results from the EFA in order to refine the measurement items and survey instrument.

**Operational Definitions of the Measures**

Tables 1 and 2 provide detailed listings of the scales that were used in order to build the constructs and test the theoretical model. All of the measurement items, except for social media participation, were adapted from validated scales within the marketing, communications and consumer research literature. Basic demographic information was also gathered for the study including age, gender, family status and income.

**Social Values**

*Social Values* is operationalized as the importance attached to conspicuous consumption and self-expression within social groups. The measure of social values differs from status consumption, as the scalar items assess social influence and conformity in addition to impression management (Fitzmaurice & Comegys, 2006). In its original form, four core measurement items were developed within a psychological study on consumer socialization (Moschis, 1981). Six
items were later added and contributed to the scale aspects of attention to social comparison information such as “I tend to pay attention to what others are buying” and “I actively avoid buying products that are not in style” (Wiedmann, Hennigs, & Siebels, 2009). In the current study, the ten items have been adapted from Wiedmann et al. (2009).

Knowledge

Knowledge is operationalized as subjective knowledge, or how the consumer personally rates his / her knowledge of the fashion designer. Subjective knowledge is based upon the respondent’s perception of the amount of information about the fashion designer that s/he has stored in his / her memory. Five measurement items were adapted from the Subjective Knowledge scale (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999).

Similarity

Similarity is operationalized as perceived homophily, or the measurement of similarity-dissimilarity between two people (McCroskey, Richmond, & Daly, 1975). As an antecedent to parasocial interaction, similarity encompasses physical and attitudinal likenesses between the celebrity and consumer. In total, 12 items were adapted from a 16-item perceived homophily scale (McCroskey et al., 1975) that measures the similarity-dissimilarity between two parties across four dimensions: attitude, background, values and appearance. Four items were dropped from the original scale because the pre-test indicated that they could not be successfully used in the fashion context.

Parasocial Interaction

Parasocial interaction (PSI) is operationalized as parasocial interaction with a fashion designer. Seventeen items were adapted from the Parasocial Interaction scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). The scale incorporates four major dimensions: identification, interest, group
membership and problem-solving. Auter and Palmgreen’s (2000) scale is among the most frequently cited parasocial interaction measures. It was chosen because the multidimensionality of the scale disregards the uses and gratification approach to parasociality. Additionally, the scale seemed to be the most amenable to the fashion context.

**Opinion Leadership**

*Opinion leadership* is the ability of certain individuals to “exert an unequal amount of influence on the decisions of others” (Rogers & Cartano, 1962). The original opinion leadership scale only contained two items and was developed by Paul Lazarsfeld in 1944. Rogers and Cartano (1962) improved the two-item scale, and they added four items that strengthened the dimensionality of the scale. King and Summers (1970) further modified and purified the scale. They found that Rogers and Cartano’s (1962) scale had a positive bias, which necessitated the removal of the word “new” from the individual items and the addition of one more item (King & Summers, 1970). Childers (1986) modified the King and Summers (1970) scale, and increased its nomological validity, by adding five response categories to each of the seven items. Goldsmith and Desborde (1991) retested the Childers (1986) scale on another sample and successfully ruled out the possibility of social desirability and yea-saying responses. Flynn et al. (1996) adapted six items from the previous study (Goldsmith & Desborde, 1991) and confirmed that their scale measured actual influence, rather than communicativeness. The opinion leadership scale in the current study borrows the six items from Flynn et al. (1996). The researchers demonstrated that the scale is effective at detecting opinion leadership within the fashion context, and Flynn et al.’s (1996) study is among the more recent, rigorous validations of the scale.
Willingness to Participate (WTP)

As explained in the *Development of the Survey Instrument* section, a visual stimulus was used to measure Willingness to Participate (WTP) in social media. Prior to the emergence of social media, “WTP” was defined as “willingness to pay” and is known as the *old* WTP (Parent, Plangger, & Bal, 2011). According to Parent et al. (2011), firms must not only study purchase intentions, but also measure or predict levels of consumer engagement with brands, products and services through social media participation. Thus, the *new* WTP measures six progressive levels of participation: viewing, forwarding, commenting, creating, moderating and arbitrating (Parent et al., 2011). When examining the opinion leadership literature on social media, researchers have argued that there is a need for additional research on eWOM and UGC. *eWOM* is a positive or negative statement about a product or company that is posted online (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2004). *UGC* is user-generated content that consumers post to websites, which is usually creative in nature (i.e. videos, music, photos, etc.) (Cheong & Morrison, 2008). Comparatively, the “viewing, forwarding and commenting” levels are indicative of eWOM, and the “creating, moderating and arbitrating” levels are indicative of UGC. Two outcome variables were developed for the current study and measure willingness to participate in eWOM (i.e. browsing the photo gallery and leaving comments for other users) and UGC (i.e. posting a photo online and with a mobile phone). According to Parent et al.’s (2011) framework, eWOM conveys a basic level of social media participation and UGC conveys a deeper level of social media participation.
Table 1. **Antecedents to Opinion Leadership.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Measurement items</th>
<th>Source(s):</th>
<th>Scale type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Social Values   | • I like to know what fashion products make good impressions on others.  
• I usually keep up with style changes by watching what others buy.  
• Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what designers and brands to buy to make good impressions on others.  
• Before purchasing a fashion product, it is important to know what kinds of people buy certain designers or brands.  
• Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what others think of people who wear certain designers or brands.  
• I tend to pay attention to what others are buying.  
• Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what my friends think of different fashion designers or brands.  
• I actively avoid buying fashion products that are not in style.  
• If I were to buy something expensive, I would worry about what others would think of me.  
• My friends and I tend to buy the same fashion designers and brands. | Wiedmann et al., 2009 | 7-point Likert: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) |

*Final items retained after the confirmation of a measurement model (CFA).*
Table 1. Antecedents to Opinion Leadership (Cont’d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parasocial Interaction (PSI)</th>
<th>Auter &amp; Palmgreen, 2000</th>
<th>7-point Likert: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I usually agree with him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to dress more like him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the way s/he handles problems.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I could handle problems as well as him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d enjoy interacting with him/her and my friends at the same time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My friends are like him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often can relate to his/her point of view.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I care about what happens to him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hope that s/he has reached his/her goals.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy trying to predict what styles s/he will come up with next season.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to meet him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify with him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can imagine myself as him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the same problems as him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hold the same beliefs or attitudes as him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the same qualities as him/her.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/he reminds me of myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity</td>
<td>McCroskey et al., 1975</td>
<td>7-point semantic differential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When comparing myself to my favorite fashion designer, I believe that she/he…</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t think / thinks like me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doesn’t behave / behaves like me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is different from me / similar to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is unlike / like me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongs to a social class different / similar to mine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is in an economic situation different / similar to mine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has status different from / similar to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comes from a background different from / similar to mine.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks different from / similar to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a different size than I am / the same size as me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an appearance unlike / like my own.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not resemble / resembles me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Final items retained after the confirmation of a measurement model (CFA).
Table 2. *Opinion Leadership and Willingness to Participate (WTP).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Measurement items</th>
<th>Source(s):</th>
<th>Scale type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Opinion Leadership                | • My opinions on fashion products seem not to matter to other people. \(^R\)  
• When they choose fashion products, other people do not turn to me for advice. \(^R\)  
• Other people come to me for advice about choosing fashion products.  
• People that I know pick fashion products based on what I have told them. \(^*\)  
• I often persuade other people to buy the fashion products that I like.  
• I often influence other people’s opinions about fashion products. \(^*\)  | Flynn et al., 1996 | 7-point Likert: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)                |
| eWOM (WTP)                        | • I would be willing to look at other people’s photos in the online community to gain inspiration for my own outfits. \(^*\)  
• I would be willing to leave comments about other people’s photos of themselves wearing products that my favorite fashion designer has created. \(^*\)  | Parent et al., 2011 | 7-point Likert: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)                |
| User-generated content (WTP)      | • I would be willing to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer. \(^*\)  
• I would be willing to use my mobile device to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer. \(^*\)  | Parent et al., 2011 | 7-point Likert: strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7)                |

*Items retained after the confirmation of the final measurement model (CFA).*
CHAPTER FIVE: DATA ANALYSIS AND HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Data Analysis

SPSS 16.0 and Mplus 6.0 were the statistical programs used to analyze the data. In the context of the larger research study, 2500 respondents were asked whether they had a favorite fashion designer. 841 out of the 2500 respondents indicated that they had a favorite fashion designer and agreed to participate in the current research, representing an initial response rate of 23.9 percent. Then, a reliability check was conducted to identify inaccurate responses. Using a seven-point Likert scale (strongly disagree to strongly agree), respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: “I have tried to honestly answer all of the questions in this survey to the best of my ability.” If a respondent chose < 7 for his/her response, the case was dropped. After dropping those cases, the sample size was reduced to 676 cases. Furthermore, the open-ended fields where participants had to identify their favorite fashion designers were individually checked for accuracy. The survey defined a fashion designer as “a person who designs, creates and/or sells fashion products to customers.” In some cases, respondents did not follow the instructions and chose multiple fashion designers, made-up / fictitious names, identified a non-human designer (e.g. Nike), or entered no data at all. Thus, 121 additional cases (9.6 percent) were dropped from the dataset. Afterwards, a missing values analysis was conducted on the remaining cases within the dataset. Missingness was 1.09 percent, which is far below the five percent threshold for data imputation (Fichman & Cummings, 2003). As a result, listwise deletion was chosen for the analyses within the current study. Listwise deletion can slightly reduce statistical power, but with 1.0 percent missingness, the loss of statistical power is inconsequential, particularly for regression analyses (Graham, 2009).
Demographics and Characteristics of the Respondents

After accounting for the dropped cases, the final response rate was 15.7 percent (n = 555). Descriptive statistics indicated that 68.3 percent of the respondents were women and 31.7 percent were men. This gender split resembles typical fashion customers within the United States, where men comprise approximately one-third of the mass fashion market (Young, 2012). The mass fashion or mass-market fashion sector is comprised of retailers, brands and designers that sell products nationwide at moderate prices. GAP, Levi’s and Nike are examples of mass market fashion brands (Hameide, 2011). Respondents’ income is also reflective of actual mass fashion customers, who possess an above average household income (Cotton Inc., 2012a) with 49.5 percent of the respondents earning more than $60,000 per year. Given that the median household income in the United States is $50,054 (Tavernise, 2012), this sample is somewhat representative of the household incomes of mass fashion customers in the United States. With regard to their technology use, 39.2 percent of the respondents in the current study reported that they purchased the majority of their fashion products online. According to recent findings, conversion rates on retail websites are typically less than 3 percent (Perez, 2013). Hence, the rate of e-commerce adoption among the respondents in the current study is somewhat inflated. A possible explanation for the heightened adoption rate amongst the respondents is that they were recruited from an online panel, which tends to attract Internet savvy consumers (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Among the respondents who shopped online, 68.7 percent indicated that they frequently purchased fashion products from a desktop or laptop computer, and 26.1 percent reported that they frequently purchased fashion products from a mobile phone. These frequencies are similar to those that e-commerce and m-commerce experts have reported. In 2012, 73 percent of Internet users indicated that they frequently purchased apparel online (License! Global, 2012), and
mobile purchases represented up to 18.9 percent of last year’s recorded online traffic (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b; Warc, 2013).

**Convergent and Discriminant Validity**

Prior to testing the hypotheses, a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed in order to refine the measures and test the validity of the proposed theoretical model. CFA is a structural equation modeling technique for testing a priori measurement models. It allows a researcher to measure hypothetical constructs and assess the reliability of the indicators with established fit parameters. Pre-validated scales were used to build the main constructs, and there were a priori assumptions described for the Willingness to Participate (WTP) measures. Thus, CFA was more appropriate for the current study than an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which presupposes that an a priori measurement model has not been articulated (Kline, 2010).

Traditional scale setting techniques were used in order to specify a measurement model (Little, Slegers, & Card, 2006). After running the initial CFA, the fit statistics suggested a mediocre model fit ($\chi^2 = 1134.48$, df = 375, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .065, TLI = .94, CFI = .93) (Chen, Curran, Bollen, Kirby, & Paxton, 2008; Hu & Bentler, 1999). The manifest variables did not correctly load onto the latent opinion leadership and knowledge constructs. After conducting further research, it was discovered that there had been a server failure during the data collection, which erroneously converted several of the ordinal values into binary values. Unfortunately, an information technology specialist could not recover the data. Four items were dropped from the opinion leadership construct and three items were dropped from the knowledge construct. By removing items with factor loadings less than .60 (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988) and carefully evaluating the modification indices, the measurement model was further refined. Afterwards, the model fit significantly improved. The fit statistics indicated a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 1134.48$, df =
In accordance with prior recommendations (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2009), convergent validity was thereby established. The composite reliability (CR) was greater than the average variance extracted (AVE), and the AVE was greater than .50 (Table 3). Furthermore, discriminant validity was established. The AVE was greater than the corresponding squared interconstruct correlation for each latent variable (Table 4) (Fornell & Larcker, 1981).
Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Items</th>
<th>Std. Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social Values</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what designers and brands to buy to make good impressions on others.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before purchasing a fashion product, it is important to know what kinds of people buy certain designers or brands.</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what others think of people who wear certain designers or brands.</td>
<td>.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tend to pay attention to what others are buying.</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what my friends think of different fashion designers or brands.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.86</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know pretty much everything about him / her.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compared to most people, I know a lot about him / her.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parasocial Interaction (PSI)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the way s/he handles problems.</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I wish I could handle problems as well as him/her.</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I often can relate to his/her point of view.</td>
<td>.77</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I care about what happens to him/her.</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify with him/her.</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can imagine myself as him/her.</td>
<td>.75</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hold the same beliefs or attitudes as him/her.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have the same qualities as him/her.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S/he reminds me of myself.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>.96</td>
<td>.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When comparing myself to my favorite fashion designer, I believe that she/he...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belongs to a social class different / similar to mine.</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is in an economic situation different / similar to mine.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has status different from / similar to me.</td>
<td>.81</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comes from a background different from / similar to mine.</td>
<td>.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Looks different from / similar to me.</td>
<td>.93</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is a different size than I am / the same size as me.</td>
<td>.86</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an appearance unlike / like my own.</td>
<td>.88</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does not resemble / resembles me.</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Cont’d).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement Items</th>
<th>Std. Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Composite Reliability</th>
<th>AVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Opinion Leadership</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• People that I know pick fashion products based on what I have told them.</td>
<td>.87</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I often influence other people’s opinions about fashion products.</td>
<td>.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>eWOM (WTP)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would be willing to look at other people’s photos in the online community to gain inspiration for my own outfits.</td>
<td>.83</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would be willing to leave comments about other people’s photos of themselves wearing products that my favorite fashion designer has created.</td>
<td>.84</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>User-generated Content (WTP)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would be willing to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer.</td>
<td>.94</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• I would be willing to use my mobile device to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer.</td>
<td>.95</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Model Fit: $\chi^2 (375) = 1134.48$, $p < .001$
RMSEA = .065, TLI = .94, CFI = .93

*CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index, RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

Table 4. Discriminant Validity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. OL</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Social Values</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.29</td>
<td>.34</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Knowledge</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>.44</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. PSI</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. UGC</td>
<td>.89</td>
<td>.50</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. eWOM</td>
<td>.71</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Similarity</td>
<td>.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The numbers in the diagonal line are the average variance extracted (AVE) by each construct. The numbers above the diagonal are the squared correlation coefficients (SIC).*
Hypothesis Testing and Results

In order to test the hypotheses, a latent regression model / path analysis was run in Mplus 6.0. It is commonly known that demographic variables do not effectively distinguish opinion leaders from non-opinion leaders (Chan & Misra, 1990; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b; Myers & Robertson, 1972; Stokburger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Previous research has also examined opinion leadership within populations of male and female fashion consumers. Men and women did not appear to be any more, or any less interested in fashion than the other gender (Baumgarten, 1975; Darden & Reynolds, 1972; Summers, 1970; Vernette, 1999). Technology adoption research, on the other hand, has suggested that age and income could influence willingness to participate in eWOM and UGC (Gatignon & Robertson, 1985; Im, Bayus, & Mason, 2003; Turnbull & Meenaghan, 1980). Age and income were entered as control variables within the analysis, by regressing eWOM and UGC onto them. Then, the latent regression model was estimated. The fit indices were within an acceptable range and suggested a good model fit: $X^2 = 1277.78$, df = 431, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .065, TLI = .93, CFI = .94. The results of the path analysis can be found in Table 5.

All of the hypotheses were statistically significant and could be fully supported except for H10, which showed a partial mediation on the relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and UGC (Figure 4). Social Values, Knowledge, and PSI positively impacted opinion leadership. Social values led to opinion leadership, lending support to H1 ($\beta = .35, t = 6.61, p < .001$).

Knowledge led to opinion leadership, lending support to H2 ($\beta = .24, t = 3.76, p < .001$). PSI led to opinion leadership, thereby lending support to H3 ($\beta = .14, t = 2.25, p < .05$). Knowledge and similarity positively impacted PSI. Knowledge led to PSI, lending support to H4 ($\beta = .51, t = 13.40, p < .001$). Similarity also led to PSI, lending support to H5 ($\beta = .38, t = 9.76, p < .001$).
Opinion leadership (OL) and PSI were revealed as positively related to willingness to participate in UGC and eWOM. OL led to UGC, additionally lending support to H6 ($\beta = .24, t = 4.38, p < .001$). OL also led to eWOM, lending support to H7 ($\beta = .19, t = 3.20, p < .001$). PSI led to UGC, thereby lending support to H8 ($\beta = .23, t = 4.38, p < .001$). PSI led to eWOM, lending support to H9 ($\beta = .28, t = 4.95, p < .001$). Furthermore, the indirect paths between PSI, UGC and eWOM were tested to find out whether OL could possibly be a mediator. In order to test the strength of the mediation effect, a Sobel Test was subsequently conducted using the Delta Method (MacKinnon, 2008). OL weakened the path between PSI and UGC ($\beta = .03$). According to the Sobel Test, the mediation effect was significant ($t = 2.03, p < .05$), lending support to H10. OL similarly weakened the path between PSI and eWOM ($\beta = .03$). According to the Sobel Test, the mediation effect was not significant ($t = 1.85, p = .06$). As a result, H11 could only be partially supported.

Table 5. Latent Regression Path Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural paths</th>
<th>Standardized estimate</th>
<th>Standard error</th>
<th>t-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Values $\rightarrow$ OL (H1)</td>
<td>.35</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>6.61***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge $\rightarrow$ OL (H2)</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>3.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI $\rightarrow$ OL (H3)</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>2.25*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge $\rightarrow$ PSI (H4)</td>
<td>.51</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>13.40***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Similarity $\rightarrow$ PSI (H5)</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>9.76***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL $\rightarrow$ UGC (H6)</td>
<td>.24</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>4.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OL $\rightarrow$ eWOM (H7)</td>
<td>.19</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>3.20***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI $\rightarrow$ UGC (H8)</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>4.38***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI $\rightarrow$ eWOM (H9)</td>
<td>.28</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>4.95***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI $\rightarrow$ OL $\rightarrow$ UGC (H10)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>2.03*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSI $\rightarrow$ OL $\rightarrow$ eWOM (H11)</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>1.85n.s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
Figure 4. Structural Equation Model Results.

Model Fit: $\chi^2 (431) = 1277.78, p < .001$; RMSEA = .065, TLI = .93, CFI = .94

CFI = Comparative Fit Index, TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index,
RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation

*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001
CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Discussion of the Results

Direct Effects on Opinion Leadership

There are visible differences among the antecedents of opinion leadership that warrant interpretation and discussion. Social values were added into the model as a means for understanding how the personification of certain values, in this case the emphasis on conspicuous consumption and self-expression, relates to opinion leadership. The path coefficient between social values and opinion leadership had the strongest standardized estimate ($\beta = .35^{***}$). As previous studies have suggested, the importance attached to conspicuous consumption and self-expression within social groups such as the social identity function (Grewal et al., 2000), status consumption (Bertrandias & Goldsmith, 2006) and attention to social comparison information (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008) are positively related to opinion leadership. The positive relationship between social values and opinion leadership in the current study emphasizes that opinion leaders may consume goods publicly in order to signal their trendiness and project their status. In other words, opinion leaders are very sensitive to how the things they buy reflect upon their group membership. Because the current study focused on the fashion context, it can be conjectured that fashion opinion leaders are especially attuned to their group membership and social status. The findings support that fashion opinion leaders bear greater resemblance to innovative communicators than information brokers. Whereas innovative communicators have been described as narcissistic and status-seeking (Baumgarten, 1975), information brokers are willing to relinquish their central network positions in order to gather and share information with their peers (Burt, 1999).
As prior empirical findings have demonstrated (Flynn & Goldsmith, 1999; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012a; Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), knowledge is also a strong predictor of opinion leadership ($\beta = .24^{***}$). The knowledge construct in the current study was used to measure subjective knowledge about celebrities within a specific product class (fashion designers). Opinion leaders do not have to be objectively and demonstrably more knowledgeable than their peers. They may only believe themselves to be more knowledgeable than peers, and may be successful at conveying an “air” of competence and apt to express influencer traits within social groups (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b). Dichter (1966) argued that opinion leaders sometimes attempt to spark intrigue with their peers by conveying that his/her knowledge is specialized or privileged. The positive relationship between the knowledge of fashion designers and opinion leadership, when juxtaposed with the former discussion on social values, offers the real possibility that fashion opinion leaders may spark intrigue or withhold information, too. Using the measurement items as a point of reference, an opinion leader who purports that “I know pretty much everything about (Rem Koolhaas)…” could spark intrigue, by virtue of asking his/her important others, “have you ever heard of Rem Koolhaas?” On the same token, an opinion leader could withhold information by telling his/her peers about Rem Koolhaas, but failing to mention that Koolhaas manufactures products under the brand name, United Nude.

Another goal of the theoretical model was to illustrate how the emergence of celebrity culture has transformed opinion leadership. By drawing upon the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory, parasocial interaction (PSI) was incorporated as the strategic social location, or who one knows variable (Katz, 1957) in order to address how the American “scene” and consumer culture can impact opinion leadership (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). First, a distinction between knowledge and PSI needs to be highlighted. Whereas knowledge measured
how much a respondent thought s/he knew about a celebrity, PSI measured the strength of a seemingly imagined or illusory relationship between a consumer and celebrity. For example, a high score on knowledge would indicate that a respondent “knows of” and “knows about” a designer (i.e. Versace). But, a high score on PSI would indicate that a respondent senses that s/he fantasizes about personally knowing and having a relationship with Versace. Although the path between PSI and opinion leadership was significant at the .05 level, the path coefficient was much lower ($\beta = .14^*$) than the other antecedents to opinion leadership. PSI is predictive of opinion leadership; however, opinion leadership may not be contingent upon PSI.

Comparatively, knowledge of celebrities is more predictive of opinion leadership than a deeper, fantasized and intimate knowledge of celebrities through parasocial interaction. Another possible explanation is that most people do not experience high levels of parasocial interaction. On a scale of 1 to 7, the mean of PSI was somewhat low ($M = 3.14$). Among the people with strong parasocial relationships, most but not all tended to be opinion leaders.

**Direct Effects on PSI, UGC and eWOM**

As studies have previously noted, knowledge is positively related to PSI (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The findings revealed that this strong effect still existed, even when accounting for the established, positive relationship between knowledge and opinion leadership. Fundamentally, knowledge increases feelings of involvement and attachment, which both enhance PSI and opinion leadership. Similarity is additionally a strong predictor of PSI (Flynn et al., 1996; Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b; Goldsmith & Clark, 2008; Tian & Hoffner, 2010; Turner, 1993). In turn, PSI leads to the production of UGC and eWOM, even though opinion leadership also has a significant impact on UGC and eWOM. Parasocial interaction, then, not only provides consumers with an escape from reality and can fulfill their emotional desires (Horton & Wohl,
1956). PSI can have some utility, by giving rise to opinion leadership and fostering the generation of social media streams including eWOM and UGC.

Indirect Effects on UGC and eWOM

By examining the indirect paths between PSI, UGC and eWOM, it is possible to further interpret how PSI and opinion leadership relate to social media participation. Opinion leadership fully mediated the association between PSI and UGC, but partially mediated the association between PSI and eWOM. The results from the mediation analysis support that PSI and opinion leadership relate to UGC quite differently than to eWOM. PSI, in conjunction with opinion leadership, has a significant impact on UGC. The creative and visual elements of UGC such as posting photos to a fashion designer’s website and browsing through other consumers’ photographs is creative in nature, it makes use of people’s imagination and can intensify a customer’s perceived emotional bonds with the designer. A deep level of enduring involvement with fashion and fashion designers underscores these feelings and activities. An opinion leader is more likely than a non-opinion leader to experience deep levels of enduring involvement with fashion and fashion designers. An opinion leader is also more likely than a non-opinion leader to invest the time and effort involved with posting self-portraits, or UGC. The extroversion that might be required to take a self-portrait and share it with an entire community of strangers seems to reside in opinion leaders.

From the partial mediation, it can be inferred that the production of eWOM is not dependent upon opinion leadership, when PSI is occurring. In fact, the direct path between PSI and eWOM is so strong that opinion leadership does not fully wash out the effect. This finding confirms that PSI can lead directly to eWOM and does not necessitate opinion leadership. This is surprising, given the differences between PSI and opinion leadership. Whereas PSI can stem
from certain types of loneliness (Buttle, 1998; Wang & Fink, 2008) and cognitive deficiencies (McCutcheon, Ashe, Houran, & Maltby, 2003), opinion leaders are known to be quite sociable (Baumgarten, 1975; Feick et al., 1986), and they are skilled at consolidating and brokering information (Burt, 1999; van Eck et al., 2011).

**Theoretical Implications**

According to the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), the personification of certain values (who you are), competence (what you know) and a strategic social location (who you know) enhances opinion leadership. The results from the current study showed that the personification of certain values is especially predictive of opinion leadership. Social values were chosen for the theoretical model, as they are salient for understanding opinion leadership in the fashion context. Since opinion leadership is domain-specific (Piirto, 1992; Stokburger-Sauer & Hoyer, 2009), the types of values that opinion leaders personify should vary across product classes. Whereas most fashion opinion leaders perceive social values to be important, opinion leaders in different product classes (e.g. credence goods) might be less likely to embody social values, when conspicuous consumption and self-expression are not central to their consumption experiences. Because the personification of certain values was found to be key to opinion leadership, the current study contributes to prior theorizations of opinion leaders as being more homophilious than heterophilious with the members of their social groups. The personification of certain values can act as a platform for building the self-concept, and opinion leaders are able to gain the trust of their peers because they share similar backgrounds, interests and values (Day, 1971; Price et al., 1987).

Since the personification of certain values is so integral to opinion leadership, it may seem that most opinion leaders within a given domain hold the same values. Prior researchers
have questioned this assumption, and they argued that opinion leadership is an individual difference variable (Flynn et al., 1996). Researchers have further elaborated that opinion leadership is often comprised of a delicate balance between fitting in and resisting social norms (Goldsmith & Clark, 2008). Thus, while the current study has shown that the personification of certain values is important, all opinion leaders within a given domain should not be identical. The relatively strong effect of knowledge on opinion leadership, as demonstrated in the current theoretical model, also needs to be taken into account. When an opinion leader lacks the personification of certain values, s/he could supplant this deficiency with knowledge, or an opinion leader that lacks knowledge, could supplant this deficiency with the personification of certain values (Gnambs & Batinic, 2012b).

Furthermore, even though PSI is not as strongly related to opinion leadership as values and knowledge, it elucidates the roles of parasocial interaction and social media participation in the Two-Step Flow of Communication and illustrates how opinion leadership operates in the American “scene”, which is generally obsessed with celebrity culture and engrossed in social media. Among the opinion leaders with parasocial relationships, the model shows that they can bask in the reflected glory of celebrities in order to gain legitimacy through social media participation. Specifically, the significantly stronger bearing of PSI on UGC than eWOM implies that BIRGing develops through an opinion leader’s publicly visible social media postings rather than his/her interpersonal communications between community members. The study contributes to the notion that, as a form of online interpersonal influence, eWOM can be as credible as face-to-face communication, because consumers perceive the “written word” as a personable and intimate form of self-disclosure (Buttle, 1998). By contrast, UGC appears to transcend the online and physical domains, and it is multimodal, creative and somewhat abstract in nature. The
findings demonstrate that PSI should not be merely theorized as a type of uses and gratification suited for socially alienated or cognitively deficient people, but can increase opinion leadership within a celebrity’s domain of experience, thereby encouraging social media participation (UGC and eWOM).

Opportunities for future research include probing how PSI and opinion leadership relate to other types of UGC such as Web 2.0. Consumers can post videos that showcase their expertise (e.g. makeup application tips, music lessons and film reviews). In addition to domain-specific involvement and knowledge, Web 2.0 calls upon significant technical knowledge and Internet experience in order to record, edit and post content. It will be important to study how the willingness to post many types of UGC differs across variables such as perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness, Internet experience and innovativeness. Furthermore, researchers should examine the circumstances that lead UGC and eWOM to become viral. The current study only considered the antecedents to opinion leadership and the initial posting of UGC and sharing of eWOM. What happens during the next step and thereafter amongst members of a social network or crowdsourcing community? Does the effect of PSI carry over to the reposting and sharing of content amongst community members, beyond the initial fantasizing that accrues between the celebrity figure and opinion leader? It can be helpful to pursue these research question through a qualitative lens in order to offer a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) of the relationships between opinion leadership, PSI and social media participation and to properly situate the Two-Step Flow of Communication within celebrity and social media cultures. Likewise, experimental studies can be used to measure the ways that opinion leadership increases the actual production of UGC and eWOM.
Managerial Implications

The results demonstrate that the identification of an opinion leader depends upon understanding the values of customers within a given product class. For example, the interest circles and user groups that are mentioned on a customer’s profile can reveal information about personal values. Thus, firms should develop psychographic profiles for their opinion leaders, rather than solely focusing on their demographics. The opinion leaders will be customers who display heightened attention to the values that are found to be most germane within a product class. For instance, functional values (i.e. durability, efficiency, etc.) are probably important to customers when they purchase search goods such as home and kitchen appliances. A home and kitchen appliance brand might conduct an inventory of these values amongst their customers. Opinion leaders are likely to be people that really care about these functional values, in addition, to whatever set of values that the brand finds to be salient for their customers. Moreover, these values should be measured in concert with a general assessment of the opinion leadership status of customers in order to test whether the chosen values actually underlie opinion leadership.

Firms should listen closely to their social media streams and customer service transcripts. Social media can be leveraged to solicit feedback from opinion leaders after they have been identified. Opinion leaders, then, should be tapped as a resource for improving experiences, products or services through feedback mechanisms.

The current study also discovered that parasocial interaction could be used to target opinion leaders with direct marketing and disseminate messages or interpersonal influence through waves of social contagion. The process of choosing celebrity sponsors and increasing parasocial interaction among opinion leaders should be approached with caution. Managers should collaborate with talent agencies or public relations firms to find celebrities who are
prominent and knowledgeable figures within a specific product class. For instance, well-known celebrity car collectors include Jerry Seinfeld, Ralph Lauren and Jay Leno. An automotive brand might be able to encourage parasocial interactions through direct marketing to automotive opinion leaders that features these celebrities. Alternatively, analysts could profile a celebrity car collector and recommend him/her as a friend to opinion leaders.

Social media participation is an invaluable outcome from PSI and opinion leadership. After choosing a celebrity sponsor, opinion leaders can be individually encouraged to contribute user-generated content (UGC) and eWOM. A celebrity sponsor especially should be prominently featured as an initiator of the UGC because it was shown in the current study to be contingent upon opinion leadership. Through direct marketing, opinion leaders can be sent personalized messages from a celebrity encouraging them to follow suit and produce their own UGC. A celebrity sponsor also can send messages to opinion leaders, asking for domain-specific feedback or advice, and encourage opinion leaders to contribute eWOM. Through experiential marketing, contests can also be run which challenge and attract opinion leaders. As part of a contest, opinion leaders could be asked to upload UGC to social media channels that reflects their involvement with and “love” of a fashion, music or automotive brand, etc. The social media community could serve as a panel of voters for the best video. The reward would offer the chance to act as an interviewer for a domain-specific celebrity. For example, a social network might ask music opinion leaders to upload videos that reflect their love of a consumer electronics firm that designs music players. The winner could be given the opportunity to interview a musical celebrity sponsor such as Will.i.am, One Direction or Adele. This strategic production UGC and eWOM, which originates from celebrities and opinion leaders, can help brands and firms to
inspire and build relationships with the customers that are part of the celebrities’ and opinion leaders’ social networks.

**Study Limitations**

The study limitations fall into two general areas of concern: statistical/methodological and conceptual/theoretical. Statistically, the model cannot be presumed to be causal. Alternative models are possible and should be tested in future studies. Even though the composite reliability and average variance extracted were within a good range, the measurement of opinion leadership only consisted of two items. Because the measure was self-reported, it is not a comprehensive measure of opinion leadership and there is a risk of biases, due to social desirability. Additional control variables that have been shown to be antecedents of parasocial interaction (e.g. loneliness and attractiveness) and opinion leadership (e.g. involvement, innovativeness and personality) were not included in the theoretical model. The inclusion of these control variables could attenuate or increase the predictive validity of the model.

Opinion leaders can be expected to seek a tradeoff between fitting in and standing out in a crowd. They counterbalance their group membership with a sense of personal style and uniqueness. This tradeoff between fitting in and being unique, unfortunately, was not a part of the current study. Thus, current findings may give researchers the impression that opinion leadership is only comprised of a desire for social values and basking in the reflected glory of celebrities. It also should be mentioned that the current findings are primarily generalizable to the fashion context. This study should be replicated across multiple product classes in order to see if there are differences in how opinion leaders express their personal values and knowledge. The Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory, too, is limited in its unidimensional portrayal of
information and product diffusion. Alternative theories can be developed to demonstrate how the flow of information and ideas is multidimensional.

**Conclusions**

The current study effectively addressed the following research gap within opinion leadership literature: the need to incorporate the emergence of social media and the celebrity obsessed, American “scene” into opinion leadership research, by examining how parasocial interaction, user-generated content (UGC) and eWOM fit into the Two-Step Flow of Communication Theory. Social values and knowledge were discovered to be the key predictors of opinion leadership. Parasocial interaction (PSI) was found to directly and positively influence the production of UGC and eWOM. However, opinion leadership fully mediated the relationship between PSI and UGC. The findings illustrated that whereas UGC is contingent upon opinion leadership and PSI, eWOM can potentially stem from PSI alone. PSI and social media participation variables, therefore, can be described as valuable additions to the study of opinion leadership within the social, historical and cultural milieus of consumer society. Lastly, the Two-Step Flow of Communication should be reevaluated accordingly, as cultural shifts and innovations emerge over the years. With increasing global liquidity and accelerating flows of information (Appadurai, 2005), the nature of opinion leadership will gradually change, relative to society. When humankind can instantaneously and most effortlessly access anything and everything they want to know about products, goods, services and experiences, the advice of opinion leaders and mass mediated messages may become impertinent. Then, consumer researchers will be faced with a new challenge of understanding how consumer decision-making operates in virtual worlds where people could some day use and wear technologies to increase their immunity to interpersonal and mass media influence.
APPENDIX A: DISCLOSURE FORM

The University of Arizona Consent to Participate in Research

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study Title:</th>
<th>Digital Divas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Investigator:</td>
<td>Dr. Anita Bhappu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sponsor:</td>
<td>Demandware</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is a consent form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

You may or may not benefit as a result of participating in this study. Also, as explained below, your participation may result in unintended or harmful effects for you that may be minor or may be serious, depending on the nature of the research.

1. Why is this study being done?

This study is being conducted to better understand how consumers think about fashion, social networking, and online/mobile shopping. In addition to increasing academic knowledge about consumer perceptions in the marketplace, this study is designed to gain information that will help with the marketing and retailing of fashion products.

2. How many people will take part in this study?

Approximately 5,000 people will participate in this study.

3. What will happen if I take part in this study?

During this study, you will respond to survey questions related to your feelings and attitudes about fashion, social networking and online/mobile shopping.

4. How long will I be in the study?

You will need about an (1) hour to complete this study.

5. Can I stop being in the study?

Your participation is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study. If you decide to take part in the study, you may leave the study at any time. No matter what decision you make, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any of your usual benefits. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The University of Arizona. If you are a student or employee at the University of Arizona, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.
6. **What risks, side effects or discomforts can I expect from being in the study?**

The things that you will be doing have no more risk than expressing your opinion in a regular conversation with others. Although we have tried to avoid risks, you may feel that some questions we ask you may be challenging. If this occurs, you can elect to skip the question or stop participating immediately.

7. **What benefits can I expect from being in the study?**

You will not receive any benefit from taking part in this study.

8. **What other choices do I have if I do not take part in the study?**

You may choose not to participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

9. **Will my study-related information be kept confidential?**

Your personal information will be kept confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications resulting from the study.

Efforts will also be made to keep your survey responses confidential. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, this information may be disclosed if required by state law. The following groups may also review your survey responses (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies
- The University of Arizona Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices
- The sponsor supporting the study, their agents or study monitors

10. **What are the costs of taking part in this study?**

Aside for your time, there are no costs associated with taking part in the study.

11. **Will I be paid for taking part in this study?**

You will receive the number of market points that you have negotiated with the third-party vendor for completing the survey.

12. **What happens if I am injured because I took part in this study?**

If you suffer an injury from participating in this study, you should seek treatment. The University of Arizona has no funds set aside for the payment of treatment expenses for this study.
13. What are my rights if I take part in this study?

If you choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights you may have as a participant in this study.

You will be provided with any new information that develops during the course of the research that may affect your decision whether or not to continue participation in the study.

You may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The University of Arizona reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

14. Who can answer my questions about the study?

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact the principal investigator, Dr. Anita Bhappu, at (520) 621-5948.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Subjects Protection Program at (520) 626-6721 or online at http://orcr.vpr.arizona.edu/irb.

15. How do I consent to participate in this study?

By clicking on “I agree” below, you affirm that 1) you have read this form, 2) you are aware that you are being asked to participate in a research study, and 3) you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
APPENDIX B: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

Q1. Are you the primary shopper for fashion products in your household? Fashion products include items that you can wear such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, i.e. belts, ties, hats, scarves, leather goods, jewelry, etc.

1 Yes Q1_1
0 No (Discontinue) Q1_2

Q2. How many fashion products did you purchase in the past 3 months? Include purchases made at both online websites and in physical stores.

0 (Discontinue) Q2_1
1 1-3 Q2_2
2 4-6 Q2_3
3 7-10 Q2_4
4 11-13 Q2_5
5 14-16 Q2_6
6 17-20 Q2_7
7 21-23 Q2_8
8 24-26 Q2_9
9 27-30 Q2_10
10 More than 30 items Q2_11

Q3. Who do you shop for fashion products in your household (check all that apply)?

1 Me Q3_1
2 Spouse or Partner Q3_2
3 Child(ren) Q3_4
4 Parent(s) Q3_5
Q4. How much did you spend on fashion products in the past 3 months? Include purchases made at both online websites and in physical stores.

1 Under $25 Q4_1
2 $26 - $50 Q4_2
3 $51 - $100 Q4_3
4 $101 - $150 Q4_4
5 $151 - $200 Q4_5
6 $201-$300 Q4_6
7 $301- 400 Q4_7
8 $401-$600 Q4_8
9 $601-$800 Q4_9
10 $801-$1000 Q4_10
11 More than $1000 Q4_11

Q5. What was the price of the most expensive fashion product that you have ever purchased in person at a physical retail store?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In person at a physical retail store:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐ 1 Less than $100 Q5_1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 2 $100-$500 Q5_2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 3 $501-$1,000 Q5_3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 4 $1,001-$2,500 Q5_4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 5 $2501-$5,000 Q5_5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 6 $5,001-$7,500 Q5_6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 7 $7,501-$10,000 Q5_7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ 8 Greater than $10,000 Q5_8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q5. What is the price of the most expensive fashion product that you have ever purchased online? (this could include retail websites, marketplaces such as eBay and Amazon, or flash sales such as Gilt, HauteLook, RueLaLa, etc.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Online at a retail website or flash sale:</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ 1 Less than $100 Q5_1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 2 $100-$500 Q5_2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 3 $501-$1,000 Q5_3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 4 $1,001-$2,500 Q5_4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 5 $2,501-$5,000 Q5_5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 6 $5,001-$7,500 Q5_6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 7 $7,501-$10,000 Q5_7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ 8 Greater than $10,000 Q5_8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please carefully read the following statements about fashion products and select an appropriate response for each. Fashion products include items that you can wear such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, i.e. belts, ties, hats, scarves, leather goods, jewelry, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1_1 I like to read about fashion products in magazines, on websites, on blogs or through other media outlets.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_2 I buy fashion products that are stylish even when they do not seem to be particularly functional.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_3 In the past, I have waited at a retail store in person so that I could be among the first people to own a new fashion product.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_4 I almost always purchase fashion products with known designer</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_5</td>
<td>I am willing to purchase fashion products that are functional but out-of-season to save money.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_6</td>
<td>I am a strong follower of the New York Fashion Week events (through the media and/or in-person).</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_7</td>
<td>Shopping for fashion products is one of my favorite things to do.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_8</td>
<td>I am more likely to buy fashion products when there is a promotion or discount.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_9</td>
<td>I like introducing new fashion products to my friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_10</td>
<td>I like helping people by providing them with information about fashion products.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_11</td>
<td>People ask me for information about fashion products, places to shop, or sales.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_12</td>
<td>If someone asked where to get the best buy on several types of fashion products, I could tell him or her where to shop.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_13</td>
<td>My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new fashion products or sales.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_14</td>
<td>I can be described as a person who knows a lot about new fashion products, sales, stores and so on, but do not necessarily feel I am an expert on any one fashion product.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please carefully read the following statements about your experiences with choosing fashion products and select an appropriate response for each. Fashion products include items that you can wear such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, i.e. belts, ties, hats, scarves, leather goods, jewelry, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q1_15 I usually tell my friends, family and/or colleagues about a bad shopping experience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q1_16 I usually tell my friends, family and/or colleagues about a good shopping experience.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q2_1 My opinions on fashion products do not seem to count with other people.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_2 Other people come to me for advice about choosing fashion products.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_3 People that I know pick fashion products based on what I have told them.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_4 I often persuade other people to buy the fashion products that I like.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_5 I often influence other people’s opinions about fashion products.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_6 When I consider buying fashion products, I ask other people for advice.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_7 I don’t need to talk to others before I buy fashion products.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_8 I rarely ask other people what</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_9</td>
<td>I like to get others’ opinions before I buy new fashion products.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_10</td>
<td>I feel more comfortable buying a fashion product when I have gotten other people’s opinions on it.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q2_11</td>
<td>When choosing fashion products, other people’s opinions are not important to me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

Please carefully read the following statements about your experiences with buying fashion products and select an appropriate response. Fashion products include items that you can wear such as clothing, shoes, and accessories, i.e. belts, ties, hats, scarves, leather goods, jewelry, etc.

| Q2_12 | I like to know what fashion products make good impressions on others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Q2_13 | I usually keep up with style changes by watching what others buy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Q2_14 | Before purchasing a fashion product it is important to know what designers and brands to buy to make good impressions on others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
| Q2_15 | Before purchasing a fashion product, it is important to know what kinds of people buy certain designers or brands. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
Do you have a favorite fashion designer? A fashion designer is a person who designs, creates and/or sells fashion products to customers. You may choose any type of fashion designer. It does not have to be someone who specializes in designing luxury goods.

☐ 0 No (Skip to Part V: Digital Engagement)Q4_1
☐ 1 Yes Q4_1

Q4_2 What is the name of your favorite fashion designer?

________________________

________________________
Instructions: Please read the following statements about your favorite fashion designer and select an appropriate response to evaluate your knowledge about him or her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_3</th>
<th>I know pretty much everything about him/her.</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_4</td>
<td>Among my circle of friends, I’m one of the “experts” on him/her.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_5</td>
<td>I do not feel very knowledgeable about him/her.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_6</td>
<td>Compared to most people, I know a lot about him/her.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_7</td>
<td>I really do not know a lot about him/her.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Instructions: Please read the following statements about your favorite fashion designer and select the box that most closely matches your opinions about him or her.

I think my favorite fashion designer is:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_8 1</th>
<th>Unfriendly</th>
<th>-3</th>
<th>-2</th>
<th>-1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Friendly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_8 2</td>
<td>Outdated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modern</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_8 3</td>
<td>Unpopular</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_8 4</td>
<td>Harsh</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_8 5</td>
<td>Fake</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Realistic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I think the products that my favorite fashion designer creates are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_9_1Inferior</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Superior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_9_2Low Quality</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>High Quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_9_3Poor</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I think that my favorite fashion designer can be described as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_10_1Bad</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_10_2Unpleasant</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Pleasant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_10_3Worthless</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Valuable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When comparing myself to my favorite fashion designer, I believe that she/he:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_1 Doesn’t think like me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Thinks like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_2 Doesn’t behave like me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Behaves like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_3 Is different than me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Is similar to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_4 Is unlike me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Is like me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_5 Belongs to a different social class than me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Belongs to a social class similar to mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_6 Is in an economic situation different than mine.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Is in economic situation similar to mine.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_7 Has status different than me.</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Has status similar to me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_11_8 Comes from a background different from</td>
<td>-3 -2 -1 0 1 2 3</td>
<td>Comes from a background similar to mine.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructions: Please carefully read the following statements about your favorite fashion designer and select an appropriate response to evaluate your viewpoints on him or her.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q4_12 I usually agree with him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_13 I would like to dress more like him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_14 I like the way she/he handles problems.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_15 I wish I could handle problems as well as him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_16 I’d enjoy interacting with him/her and my friends at the same time.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_17 My friends are like him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_18 I often can relate to his/her point of view.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_19 I care about what happens to him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q4_20 I hope that she/he has reached his/her goals.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_21</strong> I enjoy trying to predict what styles she/he will come up with next season.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_22</strong> I would like to meet him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_23</strong> I can identify with him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_24</strong> I can imagine myself as him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_25</strong> I have the same problems as him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_26</strong> I hold the same beliefs or attitudes as him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_27</strong> I have the same qualities as him/her.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Q4_28</strong> She/he reminds me of myself.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Instructions: Imagine that your favorite fashion designer has launched a new online community. Please view the below image and carefully read the message.

This gallery is a statement of your favorite fashion designer's collection and the people who wear it.

You are invited to submit photos of yourself wearing outfits from your favorite designer's collection so that other customers can gain inspiration from your personal tastes in fashion.

Together we are creating a gallery of images that reflect personal styles from across the globe.

Click here to get started.
Instructions: Please read the following statements about your willingness to participate in activities at your favorite fashion designer’s new, online community and select an appropriate response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_29</th>
<th>I would be willing to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_30</th>
<th>I would be willing to use my mobile device to submit a photo of me dressed in an outfit by my favorite fashion designer.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_31</th>
<th>I would be willing to look at other people’s photos in the online community to gain inspiration for my own outfits.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_32</th>
<th>I would be willing to leave comments about other people’s photos of themselves wearing products that my favorite fashion designer has created.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q4_33</th>
<th>I would be willing to download a mobile, iPad or tablet device app that provides daily updates from this online community.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_1 Please indicate your age range (check one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 24 years old</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34 years old</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44 years old</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54 years old</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64 years old</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 years or older</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7_2 Please indicate your gender (check one):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_3 How many children (18 years or younger) make up your household? (Check one)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 or more</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_4 What is your family status? (Check one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Status</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Single, with children</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, with children</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitating, with children</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married, no children</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single, no children</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabitating, no children</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_5 What is your sexual orientation/identity?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation/Identity</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gay/lesbian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Straight/heterosexual</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prefer not to say/answer</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q7_6 Are you the primary wage earner in your household? (Check one)

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_7 What is your employment status? (Check one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employed, full-time</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed, part-time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stay-at-home parent/caregiver</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_8 What is your yearly household income before taxes? (Check one)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $29,999</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$30,000 - $44,999</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$45,000 - $59,999</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000 - $74,999</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$75,000 - $99,999</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000 or more</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q7_9 I have tried to honestly answer all of the questions in this survey to the best of my ability.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for completing the survey!
REFERENCES


Hu, L., & Bentler, P. M. (1999). Cutoff criteria for fit indexes in covariance structure analysis:


