

## Understanding followers' cross-platform tracking behavior

### Abstract:

The increase in resources dedicated to companies' social network presence requires a better understanding of the behavior of followers, in particular their mono or multi-platform monitoring behavior with regard to influencers. Examining the answers to a survey of 237 social media users, we highlight the importance of the desire to belong to a group, of curiosity and of boredom. These findings are consistent with contributions from the social media engagement theory. Our contributions are both theoretical (highlighting the importance of the type of platform) and operational (by clearly defining the impact of each variable on the behavior of followers).

- hypotheses related to the SME theory were validated at statistical level
- we correctly identified the variables within each factor that significantly explain followers' commitment through multiplatform tracking behavior.
- This precision about the impact of each variable can help firms to adapt their cooperation strategy with influencers according to their specific expectations and requirements.

Keywords: Social Media Theory, follower behavior, social media, user experience, user engagement, social interactions

Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) recently developed the Social Media Engagement Theory (SME) to gain a better understanding of followers' engagement on platforms. By adopting an influencer funding strategy, companies seek to develop coherent word-of-mouth messaging for their brand image within different social networks (Torres et al., 2019) in order to increase their product sales (Appel et al., 2020). While there has been a growing amount of research on the impact of influencers on followers' purchasing behavior (Bergkvist et al., 2016; Torres et al., 2019), our review of the literature indicated that very few studies have examined the behavior of followers, and even fewer followers' cross-platform monitoring of influencers. We thus drew up the following research question: What are the factors that explain a follower's mono or cross-platform tracking behavior? This question is important since, as mentioned earlier, understanding such behavior can have a substantial impact on a company's digital strategy and visibility. According to the study by Talkwalker (2019), 65.8% of the professionals questioned said that the number one priority for brands is to improve brand visibility.

In the first section, we focus more specifically on the theoretical foundations underlying this issue (SME theory and the notion of follower engagement). The second section explains the methodology adopted (the stated preference method). We also present the main characteristics of the sample (237 respondents selected). In the third section, we focus on the results of the survey. We then present the specifications of the econometric model and the results obtained. In the fourth section, we discuss the results and present the main theoretical and operational contributions. The managerial implications are laid out in the fifth part, and we conclude with the limitations and avenues for future research in the sixth section.

## 1. Theoretical background and hypotheses

The theory of social media engagement was recently expounded by Di Gangi and Wasko (2016). This baseline study was underpinned by two main questions: 1) what factors shape engagement in social media?, and 2) to what extent does user engagement affect an individual's social media usage behavior? The theory aims to understand and define the engagement of platform users based on their experience. Considerable debate has arisen over the notion of user engagement which remains somewhat vague (Ray et al., 2014) as it simultaneously engages the experiential, psychological and behavioral dimensions of the user (Di Gangi and Wasko, 2016).

Within the framework of the SME theory, Di Gangi and Wasko (2016) put forward two components that constitute engagement:

- 1) Individual involvement, defined as the intensity with which users perceive their role on the social media platform (Ray et al., 2014).
- 2) Personal significance, defined as the individual's level of satisfaction with the way their needs and interests are met through the use of social networks (Debats, 1998).

Given that we seek to understand the factors behind the platform tracking behavior of followers, we focus more specifically on the second of the two points mentioned above, that is to say, personal significance. This personal meaning explains the importance of the social media platform for individual users (Wogu et al., 2019), informing them of whether or not the platform meets their needs or corresponds to their values or interests (Debats, 1998). Followers develop

a system of preferences based on individual motivations and/or characteristics which they are able to combine. Langner et al. (2013) argue that people build themselves up psychologically by belonging to social groups that match their own characteristics.

These groups exhibit a shared set of values that members are persuaded to follow, and these can explain the use of one or more platforms. Changing platform or the simultaneous use of several platforms can also be motivated by a desire to reduce the boredom induced by tracking a single platform (Randheer, 2015) or by greater curiosity (Jayanthi and Rajendran, 2014). In this case, the individual is looking for something new (Aroean, 2012).

H1: Response to a personal need explains a follower’s behavior in tracking influencers on different platforms

H2: The desire to belong to a group explains a follower’s behavior in tracking influencers on different platforms

H3: Curiosity explains a follower’s behavior in tracking influencers on different platforms

H4: Boredom explains a follower’s behavior in tracking influencers on different platforms

## 2. Methodology

Methodologically, we decided to adopt the stated preferences method developed by Arrow et al. (1993). We sought to understand the behavior of followers in their decision to follow (or not) influencers on several platforms. Methodological recommendations were recently set out by Johnston et al. (2017). The survey was pre-tested with 12 people of different gender, age and PCS. The pre-test allowed us to identify any biases due to the questionnaire design (Carson et al., 1998).

Once the questionnaire had been pre-tested and corrected following any comments, it was administered electronically. We received 584 questionnaires, of which we retained 237 valid responses, in other words, 40% of the total (Table 1).

*Table 1: Characteristics of the sample*

Criteria			%
<b>Gender</b>			
	Woman	158	66.67
	Man	79	33.33
	Total	237	100
<b>Age</b>			
	18-25	141	59.5
	26-	96	40.5
	Total	237	100
<b>Influencer tracking frequency</b>			
	Daily	135	56.96
	Weekly	86	36.29
	Monthly	16	6.75
	Total	237	100
<b>Influencer tracking on social media</b>			

YouTube	124	52.3
Instagram	194	81.9
Snapchat	53	22.4
Facebook	24	10.1
Twitter	23	9.7

### 3. Results

Logistic regression is used for its capacity to adapt to any type of independent variable (Greene et al., 2011). The latent variable corresponds to the follower's mono or multi-platform monitoring behavior (coded 1 if the individual chooses to follow an influencer on several platforms and 0 otherwise).

The econometric analysis of the data allowed us to identify 10 explanatory variables for the cross-platform behavior of followers (Tables 2).

*Table 2: Significant variables*

YT	YouTube
FRQ	Frequency: monthly influencer tracking
SK	Influencer has skills
BWP	Beauty/wellness purchases
FP	Food purchases
DP	Decor purchases
CP	Clothing purchases
IP	Influencer has an impact on my purchases
IRP	Influencer seeks to improve responses to needs
SC	Subscriber reviews increase my confidence

Hypothesis 1 that multiplatform monitoring behavior can be explained through a response to a personal interest or need is not rejected. It is clear that followers' cross-platform tracking is motivated by the type of purchase they wish to make. Thus, buyers of beauty/wellness products, specific foods and decorative items reveal a greater degree of multiplatform influencer tracking behavior.

Hypothesis 2 concerning the desire to belong to a group is also not rejected. Indeed, the "subscriber opinion" variable is significant in terms of statistical results. Thus, subscribers' opinions leading to an increase in a follower's trust will also encourage the latter to increase multiplatform influencer-tracking behavior.

Hypothesis 3 on the influence of curiosity on followers' cross-platform tracking behavior is also validated. Indeed, it appears that when an influencer is perceived as having certain skills, followers will track them on several platforms. Thus, based on their skills and the desire to transmit relevant information, influencers can incite their followers to follow them on several platforms.

Similarly, the frequency of consulting platforms has an impact on cross-platform behavior. Indeed, the "monthly influencer monitoring" variable reveals a negative impact on cross-platform behavior. This observation means that hypothesis 4 is not rejected.

In addition to these factors, our econometric analysis also highlights the significant influence of YouTube regarding the adoption of cross-platform behavior by followers, as individuals who follow influencers on YouTube are encouraged to follow the influencer on other platforms or social networks as well.

#### 4. Discussion and contributions

This study offers multiple contribution, mainly related to understanding followers' cross-platform tracking behavior with respect to a reference influencer. Our econometric processing showed that personal meaning is built on response to followers' needs and the desire to belong to a group. We also added curiosity and boredom variables as explanatory factors for this idea of engagement.

Beyond the statistical validation of the contribution of these variables to followers' commitment within the SME theory framework, our research helps to characterize the variables:

- the response to their needs. Thus, an individual wishing to buy a beauty or well-being product is liable to have 17.06% more cross-platform behavior compared to others. For a food purchase, this figure is 28.71%; for a decorative purchase it is 22.06%, and for a clothing purchase it is 16.47%.
- the desire to belong to a group, and above all, getting positive opinions from other subscribers that will give the follower confidence (+ 13.4%)
- curiosity on the part of the follower, but an almost intellectual curiosity since it is motivated by the influencer's skills (+ 15.3%) and the latter's desire to respond in a relevant way to his or her followers' questions (+ 14.85%).
- boredom, assessed through the frequency of monitoring the influencer. A low influencer tracking frequency means that a follower's propensity to follow the influencer on another platform is reduced by 47.73%.

These elements reflect two types of contribution from our research. First, all of the hypotheses related to the SME theory were validated at statistical level through our econometric analysis. However, beyond these relatively broad or even over-broad factors, we correctly identified the variables within each factor (types of purchase, professionalism of the influencer, etc.) that significantly explain followers' commitment through multiplatform tracking behavior.

Second, the operational contribution involves calculating the marginal effects of significant variables. This precision about the impact of each variable can help firms to adapt their cooperation strategy with influencers.

#### 5. Practical implications

Any business in the field of well-being, food, decor or clothing should pay particular attention to the multiplatform strategy developed by influencers and ensure consistency between

platforms and the involvement of followers on each of them. We show that in these activity sectors, followers display cross-platform tracking behavior superior to other sectors (from + 16.47% to 28.71%) with a view to a potential purchase.

Second, the professionalism of the influencer plays a key role in cross-platform monitoring behavior.

Finally, we show that the type of platform used by influencers plays a role in the multiplatform behavior of followers. Thus, an individual who follows an influencer on YouTube has a higher probability of following him or her on other platforms or social networks.

## 6. Limitations

There are three main limitations to this study. First, the SME theory emphasizes engagement, which takes into account both personal involvement and meaning. Our study focuses exclusively on personal meaning, so we only partially explain the commitment aspect of the SME theory. In addition, despite a survey that was administered to 584 people, only 237 responses were retained as being relevant to the study carried out. Ideally, a larger sample would help to fine-tune the econometric results. Finally, we highlighted the significant impact of YouTube on followers' multiplatform behavior. It would be interesting to investigate this aspect in greater depth in order to clarify its impact.

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