



Investigating the Influence of Social Media Influencers on Consumer Decision Making Process of Plurals and Millennials

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The study examines how consumer decision making process of millennials and plurals gets impacted due to social media influencers. The impact was measured by using social media influencers as exogenous construct and five stages of consumer decision making process as endogenous construct.

Research Methodology: A theoretical model was developed by reviewing earlier literature available on different journals and websites. A sample of total 500 respondents was collected through structured questionnaire by using stratified proportionate sampling whereby count of plurals and millennials was 250 each. The data was examined through Smart PLS 3.0 by performing structure equational modelling. **Findings:** The results indicated that all the stages of consumer decision making process of millennials and plurals were impacted due to social media influencers. Furthermore, the highest impact was found on need recognition stage (H1), followed by post purchase behaviour (H5), purchase stage (H4), evaluation of alternatives (H3), and search of information (H2).

Limitations: This research has few limitations as it was conducted in only northern states of India; however, further research can be conducted in other areas which may yield other productive results. Moreover, only

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behavioural aspect of consumer attitude was tested, rather cognitive and affective components of consumer behaviour can be considered in future research.

Implications: Through this research, marketers can avail the opportunity to understand buying process of two generations: plurals and millennials which would be valuable for firms in strategizing digital marketing plans and policies to target both age groups on social media. This study has illustrated buying process of two generations in order to fulfil the literature gap as there was inadequate literature on plurals and millennials. Hence, both literature gap and originality have been attained and fulfilled.

Introduction

One third of world population will be producing big electronic data through their connection to social media by 2021 due to hasty growth in users' time devotion on social media platforms: Snapchat, Instagram (Gomez et al., 2019). The continuous usage of social media in digital life of people has generated positive outcome in context to bringing change in lifestyles (Djafarova, 2017), learning behavior, and most imperatively communication exchange of them (Ting et al., 2016). Social media (SM) has undermined the conventional public idols, rather introduced digital idols to world labeled as social media influencers (SMI) (Helal, 2018; Hou, 2019). For instance, YouTube influencers are recognized as the cultural icons of members of millennials and own YouTube channels where they promote commodities (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). As plurals, millennials share friendly and intense connection with the viewers (Appel et al., 2019) corporates are gradually preferring social media influencers (vloggers, and Instapopular personalities), for endorsing their products and services (Duffet, 2017). SMI strategize their content effectively before posting it on social media which consequently bind their followers, and eventually, evoke sense of loyalty and reliability among viewers (An et al., 2020). The viewers-influencers engagement either through images, text, videos, live session persuade viewers to follow influencers' daily lifestyle (Tripathi, 2019). SMI post content either as brand endorser, or a well-wisher, arise demand among plurals (born between 1995-2012) (Saini & Sidhu, 2020), and

millennials (born between 1981-1994) (Sidhu & Saini, 2021), to buy same products and services which SMI have been consuming (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Therefore, they act as middleman who unite corporates and consumers (Driel & Dumitrica, 2021), wherein SMI positively impact products selling and are found to be advantageous for brands (Zak & Hasprova, 2020). SMI has been recognized as new brands in the business by Forbes magazine (Arora, 2019). Furthermore, SMI impact one stage of consumer decision making process which further effectively influence next stage; hence, there is a constant implication of SMI on CDMP. While reviewing literature it was found that researchers have focused primarily on characteristics of social media influencers but impact of them on buying decisions on generation cohort has been defined inadequately (Harrigan et al., (2021). Thus, to accomplish the research gap, we address the relationship among SMI and CDMP of plurals and millennials by stating that CDMP is affected positively by SMI. This core objective was accomplished through following questions. (1) Which is the major social media platform consumers use to follow SMI? (2) What is the influence of SMI on CDMP? (3) How does SMI influence CDMP? (4) Which of the stage of CDMP is majorly influenced by SMI?

This research article has been divided and described in four core sections. The initial segment synthesizes reviewed literature on social media influencers and their relationship with consumer decision making process. The succeeding section explains the adopted research methodology including research design, research instrument. The third section interperates the findings obtained by using Structural Equation Modeling. The last segment enlightens conclusion, and limitations of study.

Literature Review

Social Media Influencers

Social media influencers are digital users who has capacity to accumulate followers over the pictorial and textual tale of their daily life, (Duffet, 2015) and post opinions on products and services (Driel & Dumitrica, 2021).

SMI are categorized mainly as content creators who build up a virtual follower on SM (Kim & Kim, 2020). Moreover, influencers on YouTube and Facebook are named as digital content creator who produce content to gain attention of users (Davidaviciene et al., 2019). According to Ibrahim et al., (2021), YouTube influencers have become more eminent celebrities than Hollywood movie's stars. Additionally, SMI have humongous fan following especially, among plurals who get persuaded by SMI in their shopping decisions (De Veirman, 2017; Grave, 2017). According to Huang & Copeland (2020), credibility of SMI is extremely vital to plurals than their physical appeal and interaction in making their intention to buy. For example, 70 percent of consumers buy SMI recommended products, or services due to strong networking of SMI that has potential to viral the information on products and services (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Moreover, Harrigan et al., (2021), documented that most of SM users in India prefer to buy products endorsed by YouTube influencers, Instagram influencers. Thus, indubitably, SMI has direct influence on consumer decision process. In addition, SMI has been categorized into three different types: Micro influencers (Gomez A. R., 2019), Macro influencers (Harrigan et al., 2021), and Mega influencers (Hou, 2019) depending on the count of followers on SM.

Relationship Between SMI and Consumer Decision Making Process

This is a process in which consumers follow multiple stages of products and services consumption which shape their attitude of buying (Kotler and Keller 2016, p. 181-182). Need recognition is the phase from where the process starts. Buyers find generation of new need through checking profiles of SMI as SMI daily post the content about their personal life which includes the brands they buy, palace where they eat and travel, products they use (Makudza et al., 2020). Then they tend to find information on wished products and services through social media. Here, SMI satisfies their drive by facilitating enormous information which suits their search agenda. If consumers like something, they search for limited information as they trust their SMI and rely on them for information (Slijepcevic, 2020). Once they are done with information search, they

enter third phase: evaluation of alternatives. At this stage, consumers start figuring out the best alternative so they evaluate the gathered information. In general, consumers evaluate the options multiple times to choose the best product for them (Oumayma, 2020). The next stage of purchase is critical as this stage makes consumer attitude and convert that buying attitude to buying intention. SMI helps them to make their mind and decide what and where to buy. Thus, this stage is most crucial among all stages as some risk is associated with this stage (Alalwan, 2018). If bought product meets consumer expectations by satisfying their needs, it will create feeling of satisfaction among consumers. However, if the purchased item does not meet their expectation, then they do not wish to buy same product in future. Consumers express their satisfied and dissatisfied feelings through reviews, ratings, feedback, opinions (Wibowo et al., 2021).

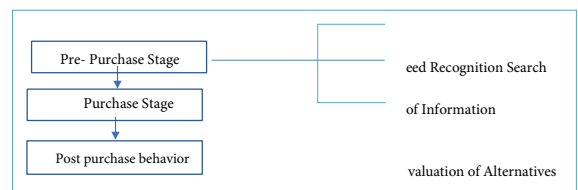


Fig. 1: Consumer decision making process

Source: Song & Yoo, 2016 and Kotler & Keller, 2016, p. 181-182

A conceptual research Model is developed based on the literature reviewed where by the effect of exogenous construct (independent variable) on endogenous constructs (dependent variables) was examined and is depicted in figure 2.

Objectives of the Study

The prime research objective is to study the influence of social media influencers on consumer decision Making Process of Plurals and Millennials. This main objective was fulfilled by setting up secondary objectives and the proposed hypotheses were designed as per objectives.

Consumers on social media follow the influencers based on the content uploaded by them. As these influencers post their daily life routine on social media including their diet regime, latest fashion

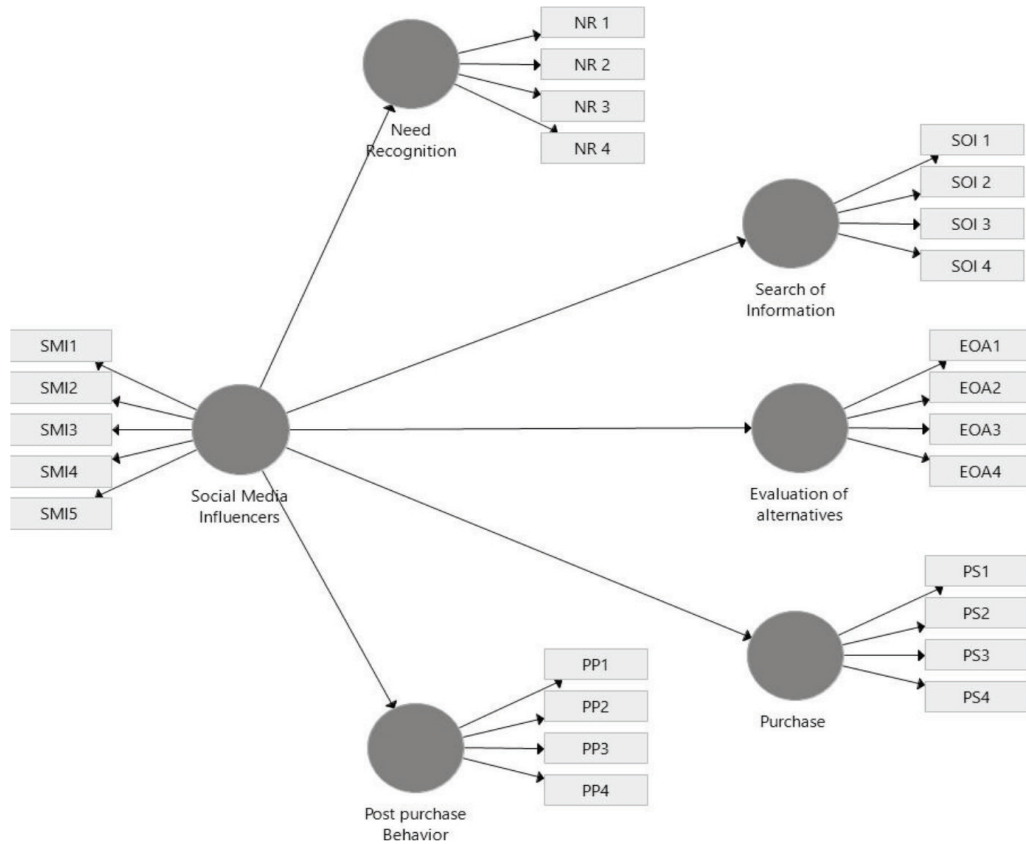


Figure 2: Research model measuring influence of social media influencers on consumer decision making process.

Source: The authors.

items, transportation facilities, hotels' journey, which eventually leave an impact on users. They demand the same products and services which their favourite influencers are using so, new needs regarding products and services arise in consumers (Makudza et al., 2020). Based on this theoretical foundation, to study the effect of SMI on need recognition of plurals and millennials has been stated as first objective of study. In order to accomplish this objective, framed hypothesis is as follows.

H1: There is a positive impact of SMI on need recognition of plurals and millennials.

To satisfy new needs, consumers start searching for information on wished products and services on social media. At this moment, SMI gratifies their drive by easing their process of finding information by

providing enormous knowledge in the form of website link and offline stores' location which suits their search agenda. It is often believed that consumers search for limited information as they trust their favourite social media influencers and rely on them for information (Slijepcevic, 2020). Based on this theoretical foundation, to determine the impact of SMI on information search of plurals and millennials has been stated as second objective of study. In order to accomplish this objective, framed hypothesis is as follows.

H2: There is a positive impact of SMI on information search of plurals and millennials.

Soon after finding relevant and reliable information, consumers commence figuring out the best alternative among the chosen options. Generally, consumers evaluate the options multiple times to choose

the best product for them (Oumayma, 2020). Based on this theoretical foundation, to determine the effect of SMI on evaluation of alternatives of plurals and millennials has been stated as third objective of study. In order to accomplish this objective, framed hypothesis is as follows.

H3: There is a positive impact of SMI on evaluation of alternatives of plurals and millennials.

Consumer positive attitude towards buying a finalized products and services convert to buying intention. The intent to buy is considered as critical step as it comes with few risks including, pseudo products, payment issues. Once a purchase intention is built by consumers they decide where to make a purchase. (Alalwan, 2018). Based on this theoretical foundation, to determine the effect of SMI on purchase of plurals and millennials has been stated as fourth objective of study. In order to accomplish this objective, framed hypothesis is as follows.

H4: There is a positive effect of SMI on purchase of plurals and millennials.

In case the purchased commodities meet expectations of consumer by satisfying their new and unmet needs, it will create feeling of satisfaction among consumers. However, if the purchased item does not meet their expectation, then they do not wish to buy same product in future. Consumers express their satisfied and dissatisfied feelings through reviews, ratings, feedback, opinions (Wibowo et al., 2021). Based on this theoretical foundation, to determine the impact of SMI on post- purchase behavior of plurals and millennials has been stated as fifth objective of study. In order to accomplish this objective, framed hypothesis is as follows.

H5: There is a positive impact of SMI on post-purchase behavior of plurals and millennials.

Research Methodology

Study design

Quantitative research method has been adopted to test research hypothesis and achieve research objectives. The sample unit of the research was comprised of all social media users in Jalandhar, Ludhiana and Amritsar cities of India by adopting multistage sampling. These three cities have been chosen as sample area based on census 2011 as these are three major populated cities of Punjab (Source: <http://censusindia.gov.in/>). Stratified proportionate sampling was chosen to collect data of 500 respondents with 250 plurals and 250 millennials. We divided population into two categories age wise including plurals who born between 1995 to 2012 year, millennials who born between 1981 to 1994 year (Saini & Sidhu, 2020; Sidhu & Saini, 2021).

Research Instrument

The responses of social media users were collected through surveyed method by using a structured questionnaire in the form of primary data. The questionnaire followed three parts: the section-1 included demographic variables such as age, gender, education, residential status; the subsequent section was consisted of questions on social media platforms and SMIs; the next section involved a set of 20 items measured by using seven-point Likert scale (one as strongly disagree to seven as strongly agree. The data was tested statistically on smart PLS 3.0.

Table 1: The preliminary list of scale's items along with sources

Main Construct	Items	Sources
Need Recognition	My new needs are effectively generated by social media influencers.	(Voramontri & Klieb, 2019)
	I recognize need of buying new products promoted by social media influencers.	
	I crave for new products and services used by social media influencers.	
	Social media influencers make me realize that my current state is dissimilar to desired state.	

Main Construct	Items	Sources
Search of Information	social media influencers make it easy to find information on products and services.	(Wibowo et al., 2021)
	social media influencers provide accurate information	
	social media influencers provide sufficient information	
	social media influencers provide reliable information	
Evaluation of Alternatives	I follow social media influencers profile to compare considered options	(Voramontri & Klieb, 2019)
	Social media influencers aid me in narrowing down the options effectively.	
	Social media influencers are reliable to evaluate products and services.	
	Social media influencers provide solutions to my needs.	
Purchase	I follow goods and services used by social media influencers.	(Voramontri & Klieb, 2019)
	Social media influencers alter my purchase intentions significantly.	
	Social media influencers change my purchase decision effectively.	
	I plan to buy goods and services used by social media influencers.	
Post Purchase Behaviour	I repurchase products/services marketed by social media influencers.	(Voramontri & Klieb, 2019)
	I recommend bought products/services to other users.	
	I will buy products/services in future which are promoted by social media influencers.	
	I feel satisfied by purchasing products/services promoted by social media influencers.	

Findings of the Study

The results in Table 2 revealed that 54 percent of participants were male; however, 46 percent were female. In age category, both 18-26 and 27-40 had equal number

of respondents with percentage of 50. 12 percent of participants were doctorate, 79 percent were post graduate, and 10 percent were degree holder. 58 percent of respondents lived in urban area; whereas, 22 percent have been living in rural area and 22 percent of participants lived in semi-urban area.

Table 2: Analysis of demographic variables

Category		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Gender	Male	272	54
	Female	228	46
Total		500	100
Age	18-26	250	50
	27-40	250	50
Total		500	100

Category		Frequency	Valid Percentage
Education	School Level	0	0
	Graduate	48	10
	Post Graduate	393	79
	Doctorate	59	12
Total		500	100
Residential Status	Urban	289	58
	Rural	112	22
	Semi-urban	99	20
Total		500	100

Hypotheses Testing

Smart PLS 3.0 was utilized to investigate the data empirically. A path model was developed to examine the influence of social media influencers as exogenous

construct on consumer decision making process of plurals and millennials as endogenous construct. The hypotheses were tested by performing consistent algorithm as the model was reflective in nature.

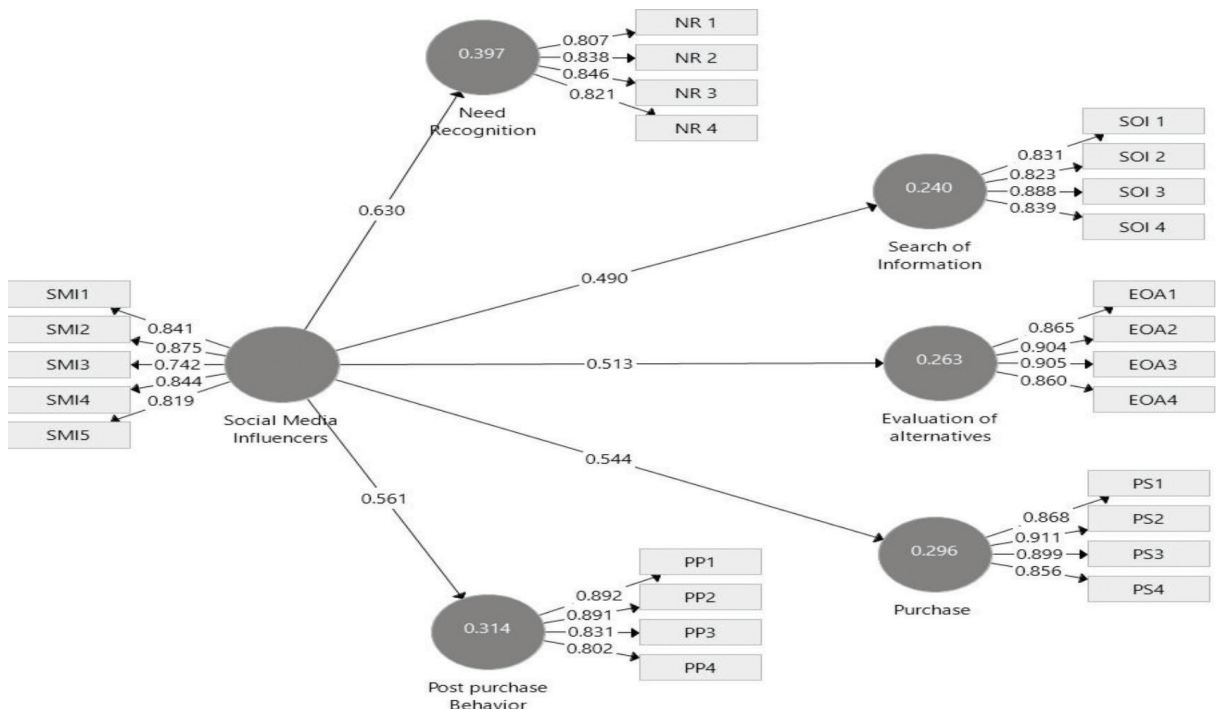


Figure 3: Path model measuring the influence of social media influencers on consumer decision making process. Source: The output generated through PLS SEM.

Table 3: Construct Reliability and Validity

Main Construct	Items	Code	Loadings ≥ 0.7	Cronbach's Alpha	CR ≥ 0.7	AVE ≥ 0.5
Need Recognition	My new needs are effectively generated by social media influencers.	NR1	0.807	0.848	0.897	0.685
	I recognize need of buying new products promoted by social media influencers.	NR2	0.838			
	I crave for new products and services used by social media influencers.	NR3	0.846			
	Social media influencers make me realize that my current state is dissimilar to desired state.	NR4	0.821			
Search of Information	social media influencers make it easy to find information on products and services.	SOI 1	0.831	0.867	0.909	0.715
	social media influencers provide accurate information	SOI 2	0.823			
	social media influencers provide sufficient information	SOI 3	0.888			
	social media influencers provide reliable information	SOI 4	0.839			
	I follow social media influencers profile to compare considered options					
Evaluation of narrowing down the options effectively.	evaluate products and services.					
	solutions to my needs. media influencers.					
	purchase intentions significantly.					
	purchase decision effectively.					

Main Construct	Items	Code	Loadings ≥ 0.7	Cronbach's Alpha	CR ≥ 0.7	AVE ≥ 0.5
Purchase	social media influencers.					
	I repurchase products/ services marketed by social media influencers.		PS 1		0.892	
	I recommend bought products/services to other users.		PP 2		0.891	
	I will buy products/ser- vices in future					
	Instagram					
	Twitter					
	YouTube					

Measurement of Measurement Model Measurement of the Structural Model

Reliability and validity of observed variables were calculated under the measurement model (Henseler et al., 2015); however, outer loadings were measured and further compared with the acceptable range. Value of outer loadings should be either 0.70, or greater is accepted statistically as threshold value (Schuberth, 2021). Table 3 shows outer loadings for all endogenous constructs weighed between 0.802 and 0.911. Moreover, values of both Composite Reliability, and Cronbach's alpha were found to be more than 0.848 which was statistically greater than threshold value of 0.70 (Tashtoush, 2021); thus, 0.848 established that high reliability of scales. AVE was calculated to examine the convergent validity of each construct. The value of AVE is more than 0.5 for each construct, thus proposed research model established good validity.

The structural model was measured through path coefficient (β), R square, f square, T-statistics, and Q2, (Sudirjo, 2021). It was found that R square for NR was 0.397 which means that 39.7% of the change in the NR was due to SMIs. However, R square was 0.240, 0.263, 0.296, 0.314 for SOI, EOA, PS, PP respectively. R square with value of 0.26, 0.50, 0.75 is regarded as weak, moderate, substantial (Hussain et al., 2018). Thus, out of all stages, SOI was weekly impacted by SMIs. Furthermore, hypotheses were verified by performing T-statistics that were calculated through bootstrapping (using 5000 sub sample). Table 4 shows the value of path coefficient, T statistics, p value and results of hypotheses.

Table 4: Path coefficient, T statistics, P value

Constructs Assumed Path	Hypotheses	Standardised Beta	T Statistics ≥ 1.96	P Values < 0.05	Hypotheses Results	Effect size f ²	Total Effect
Social Media Influencers -> Need Recognition	H1	0.630	15.541	0.000	Supported	0.658	Strong
Social Media Influencers -> Search of Information	H2	0.490	10.802	0.000	Supported	0.316	Moderate
Social Media Influencers -> Evaluation of Alternatives	H3	0.513	11.066	0.000	Supported	0.356	Strong

Constructs Assumed Path	Hypotheses	Standardised Beta	T Statistics ≥ 1.96	P	Hypotheses Results	Effect size	Total Effect
				Values < 0.05		f2	
Social Media Influencers -> Purchase	H4	0.544	11.779	0.000	Supported	0.420	Strong
Social Media Influencers -> Post purchase	H5	0.561	13.105	0.000	Supported	0.459	Strong

Acceptance of any hypothesis is dependent on T value which is supposed to be either have value of 1.96, or more than this. Another determinant is p value which should be less than 0.050 (Henseler et al., 2015). As in Figure 3 and Table 4, for first path, beta value was found to be 0.630, T value was 15.541 and p value was 0.000; hence, all the values are ranged in threshold value so, we accepted alternative hypothesis which specified that SMIs have a significant effect on NR of plurals and millennials. Correspondingly, in second path, beta value was 0.490, T value was 10.802 and p value was 0.000; so, it supported second hypothesis which stated that SMIs have a significant effect on SOI of plurals and millennials. Correspondingly, in third path, beta value was 0.513, T value was 11.066 and p value was 0.000; consequently, supported third hypothesis which indicated that SMIs have a significant effect on EOA of plurals and millennials. Likewise, in fourth path, beta value was 0.544, T value was 11.779 and p value was 0.000; hence, the values supported fourth hypothesis which specified that SMIs have a significant effect on Purchase of plurals and millennials. In the fifth path, beta value was found to be 0.561, T value was 13.105, and p value was 0.000; hence, the values supported fifth hypothesis. Conclusively, all the five stages of consumer decision making process of plurals and millennials were affected positively by social media influencers. Nevertheless, f square explains the level of impact on endogenous construct. F square with value of 0.35 shows strong effect, value of 0.15 means moderate effect; whereas 0.02 depicts weak effect on latent construct (Zhang et al., 2020). As f square for NR was above than 0.35, SMI highly and strongly impacted this stage; whereas, there was moderate effect of social media influencers on SOI.

Conclusion and Implications

This investigation confirmed that both plurals and millennials have been using social media extensively

for their shopping purpose. The empirical analysis has supported that SMI affected all stages of consumer decision making process of both plurals and millennials substantially. SMI largely influenced their phase of recognising need about products and services as SMI have arisen consumers interest by showing them their lifestyle which made consumers feel that they also needed same product. Majority of participants agreed that SMI are the prime determinant behind their buying decision as SMI encouraged them to follow the products which they are using; thus, the first objective was accomplished. The second objective has also been fulfilled as respondents agreed that SMI have made their information search easy. Moreover, SMI provided them trustworthy, adequate, and precise information on services and products. Additionally, third objective was acknowledged as respondents responded that SMI has provided solution to their immediate needs and helped them in choosing one alternative. The analysis indicated accomplishment of fourth objective as well because it was found that SMI have persuaded plurals and millennials in shaping their buying actions. Furthermore, last objective was also fulfilled as respondents responded that they feel satisfied by buying products that were advertised by SMI and will continue to follow SMI' recommendations in future. Because, all five objectives have been accomplished, indubitably SMI have a substantial influence on all phases of CDMP of plurals and millennials.

Limitations and Future Research Opportunities

Due to few constraints this study offers some limitations. First limitation is associated with social media platforms as in this study a holistically all social media

channels have been included; whereas, future study can be performed on any platform; Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter. Next limitation is that results have been generated through combination of plurals and millennials; whereas, future researches could be conducted by comparing buying decisions of both generation cohorts. This study is limited to SMI as whole; however, future studies could consider the sub categories of SMI and examine their impact on consumer decision making process of plurals and millennials. Another limitation is that a small sample of 500 respondents has been considered in this research; however, a large sample could generate different outcomes to the existing findings. The fourth limitation is related to sample area because this study was three cities of India; other cities, nations could be considered to determine whether plurals and millennials respond to SMI in similar manner as they did in sample area selected in this study.

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