

**THE IMPACT OF FOLLOWERS'
ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS ON THE
EFFECTIVENESS OF SOCIAL
MEDIA INFLUENCERS AS
PRODUCT ENDORSERS**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements of the University of Brighton
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 2022

ABSTRACT

This research concerns the effectiveness of social media influencers as endorsers of dermal filler treatment to ameliorate the facial signs of ageing, for UK-resident Generation X women. Influencers have emerged as contemporary opinion leaders with the ability to shape the choices of like-minded followers with whom they are in direct digital contact. Whereas previous studies have largely focused on influencer characteristics, this research examined the role of salient attitudes and beliefs held by followers as determinants of endorsement effectiveness.

A two-phase research design was used. The first, qualitative phase of 19 semi-structured interviews explored Youth-Ideal, a novel appearance ideal that encourages women to maintain a youthful appearance into midlife and confirmed the inclusion of Youth-Ideal Internalisation as a latent variable in the subsequent, quantitative phase. This second phase of the research analysed data from 733 participants using structural equation modelling (SEM) to test a conceptual model, based on the Theory of Reasoned Action, made up of twenty hypothesised relationships between four follower characteristics, identified as either emergent attitudes to the influencer (perceived similarity, attitude congruence) or pre-existing perspectives concerning the endorsed product (attitude to the behaviour and Youth-Ideal internalisation) and four discrete measures of endorsement effectiveness (perceived credibility, acceptance of information, comparison behaviour and booking intention).

The findings reveal that both followers' emergent attitudes to the influencer and their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs affect the performance of an influencer-led endorsement. However, the power and timing of those effects vary, hence, a communication cascade is proposed spanning from receipt of endorsement content to behavioural intention, where emergent attitudes, those directed towards the influencer, have the greatest impact on the formation of perceptions of credibility and acceptance of information and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs stemming from the nature of the endorsed product have more influence on followers' intended behaviour.

This evaluation of the impact of both emergent and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs held by followers on the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement helps fill gaps in existing influencer marketing knowledge by uncovering how the object of the endorsement can impact both followers' perceptions of the influencer and their behavioural intention.

By demonstrating the importance of salient aspects of followers' attitudinal profiles, this research can also guide marketing professionals in their identification of an appropriate influencer. Further, understanding the nature, direction and magnitude of the target consumer's attitude toward the endorsed product will help in the development of communication strategy and messaging.

Keywords: influencer marketing – attitudes/beliefs – dermal filler treatment - endorsement effectiveness – Generation X

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DEDICATION

For Joseph Trevor Bowden. Because on all the hardest days, I reminded myself I was doing this for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When I told friends I wanted to do a PhD, a few of them were nonplussed and asked why I would take such a detour at this stage of my life (while implying 'surely, that ship has sailed'). My standard response was 'because I've always wanted to', which was my way of admitting that I regretted the decision I took to walk away from academia so many years earlier when I graduated from university 'the first time'.

But, to say this journey has been anything like I imagined would be pure fiction, so I'm eternally grateful to all those who helped me plot the course and avoid as many doctoral roadblocks and dead-ends as possible. Included in this group of wonderful navigators are my supervisors, Dr Francisca Farache and Dr Nasos Poulis. Thank you for taking a chance on me, and also, for not giving up after the first year!

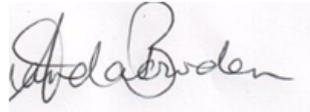
I'm also indebted to my friends in the PhD group at Brighton Business School for the hours they endured my rants on phone calls, video calls and via Whatsapp. You are amazing people who I never would have met 'in my old life' and you have brought such fun (and sense!) to this experience. Thank you.

Finally, I have to acknowledge the invaluable support of the person who was my companion in the spare room and the garden office as well as on frustration-busting runs on pretty much every day of the last three years. So, huge thanks are also extended to the tortured Northern soul that is James Arthur. Hopefully, it all makes sense now I've got to the end.

DECLARATION

I declare that the research contained in this thesis, unless otherwise formally indicated within the text, is the original work of the author. The thesis has not been previously submitted to this or any other university for a degree and does not incorporate any material already submitted for a degree.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Anela Braden", is centered above the "Signed" label. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

Dated 9 October 2022

PUBLICATIONS

Bowden, A., Poulis, N. and Farache, F., 2022. What Women Do: First Report of the Effect of Youth-Ideal Internalisation on Generation X Female Consumer Behaviour. In *Proceedings of the 51st European Marketing Academy Conference*, Budapest, Hungary. European Marketing Academy, EMAC.

1 INTRODUCTION

This doctoral research concerns social media influencers as product endorsers and evaluates the impact of salient follower attitudes and beliefs on their effectiveness. Both pre-existing dispositions and those that emerge after review of the endorsement content are considered. In addition, this research explores the actuality and effect of a novel belief system, derived from literature reports.

This introductory chapter presents the background, purpose and context of the research and describes the developing role of social media influencers in product marketing strategy. The final sections of the chapter outline the study's scope, aims and objectives and explain the structure of this thesis.

1.1 Background to the Research

The growth of social media platforms has led to the emergence of a new category of opinion leaders, Social Media Influencers (hereafter 'influencers') with direct access to an online community of consumers with whom they have shared interests. The potential for these digital opinion leaders to influence those within their network, known as their followers, has enabled them to act as product and lifestyle endorsers (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Lee and Theokary, 2021), leading to their increasing deployment by marketing professionals (Moorman, 2019) and an expanding volume of research literature reporting their effectiveness as drivers of behavioural intention (e.g., Daniel, Crawford Jackson and Westermann, 2018; Kim and Kim, 2018).

This research aims to understand the effect of followers' attitudes and beliefs on an influencer-led product endorsement, encompassing their responses to the influencer and the endorsed product. Concerning the latter, the focus will be on salient views and convictions that predate the influencer's testimonial, i.e., pre-existing attitudes and beliefs that followers effectively bring to their evaluation of the endorsement.

Consequently, the product at the heart of this research, dermal filler treatment, was selected due to reported consumer preconceptions

associated with their use (Bonell, Barlow and Griffiths, 2021). Sometimes referred to as soft tissue augmentation products, dermal fillers are injected into the facial tissue to diminish the appearance of ageing-related features such as nasolabial folds and marionette lines around the mouth and replace lost volume in the cheeks (Gold, 2007). Using dermal filler treatment as the endorsed product makes possible the assessment of the influence of pre-existing follower dispositions.

The gap in existing influencer marketing knowledge being addressed by this research is outlined in the next section.

1.2 Research Gap

It may be premature to declare influencers as proven product endorsers since, rather than follow the guidance of Pornpitakpan (2004) and take into account the effect on the endorsement of both source and receiver characteristics, to date, influencer research has focused primarily on attributes of the message originator (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2020; Freberg *et al.*, 2011). This leaves a gap in our understanding of this emergent endorsement tool relating to the nature of followers' evaluation of the endorsement proposition, including, according to the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), the impact on their subsequent behaviour of any salient attitudes and beliefs they may hold. Given the increasing prominence of influencers in consumer marketing, this lack of research focused on followers' responses signals the clear need for further study (Hermawan, 2020).

The need to add to existing knowledge in this way is reinforced by findings from offline endorsement research that demonstrate the importance of understanding both the nature and direction of consumer attitudes toward the product or service being promoted (e.g., Bergkvist, Hjalmarson and Mägi, 2016; Kim and Na, 2007), and the salience of beliefs influenced by prevailing sociocultural norms (Day *et al.*, 2015; Gottlieb, Gingiss and Weinstein, 1992; Ham, Jegar and Frajman Ivković, 2015). This is illustrated by the adverse effect on endorsement effectiveness resulting from negative antecedent notions and opinions concerning organically produced (Chen, 2007) or

genetically modified foods (Bredahl, 2001), counterfeit fashion items (Kim, Ko and Koh, 2016) and religiosity in banking (Souiden and Rani, 2015).

This research reinforces the need to be fully cognisant of what the target consumer thinks and believes about a product before endorsement activities commence, yet, in influencer research, beyond consideration of sponsorship disclosure (Evans *et al.*, 2017) and the match-up between product and endorser (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Lim *et al.*, 2017), the potential impact on influencer-led endorsement effectiveness of attitudes and beliefs held by followers relating to the endorsed product remains largely unstudied.

Moreover, to date, research has progressed either without reference to the commodity being endorsed (Freberg *et al.* 2011; Gräve, 2017), or by consideration of an entire market sector such as fashion (Audrezet, Kerviler and Guidry Moulard, 2020; Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018; Nash, 2019), and beauty (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019, Gannon and Prothero, 2018; Konstantopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Wright, 2017). Even in market-specific research, any impact on influencer effectiveness due to the endorsement of a particular product/brand, if present, is largely disregarded as it is usually the case that the researcher has chosen a somewhat arbitrary product or service to illustrate an aspect of the influencer's capacity to effect behavioural intention (e.g., Evans *et al.*, 2017; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). Consequently, there is little existing research into the effectiveness of influencers as purposeful endorsers of a particular product or brand and as a result, guidance on how best to utilise influencers in this respect is limited (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Evans *et al.*, 2017; Trivedi and Sama, 2020). Indeed, although several influencer effectiveness studies include post-intervention assessment of attitude to a brand or product (Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020; Jin and Phua, 2014; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020), they do so without reference to attitudes or beliefs already established in the minds of followers before their receipt of the endorsement communication. This is at odds with the statement of Chen (2007) that a favourable attitude towards a specific product is a dominant predictor of behavioural intention. Hence an understanding of the prevailing attitudinal spectrum of consumers informs whether the influencer needs to address any

particular issues in their content. Indeed, predicting the effectiveness of influencer endorsements may be particularly challenging for campaigns that focus on products for which there is clear evidence of existing consumer perceptions (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020) without an appreciation of the salient attitudes and beliefs and how they could limit or enhance the endorsement.

As discussed, one way to narrow this knowledge gap is through the assessment of an influencer-led endorsement of a product for which there is evidence of existing consumer preconceptions, supporting the selection of dermal filler treatment as the endorsement focus based on literature reports of women's opposition to their use for age concealment for a variety of reasons including risk aversion and lack of belief in their ability to make the recipient look younger or better (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007). There is also evidence of judgement directed at those whose goal is to look more attractive and youthful (Chonody and Teater, 2016). This is despite the widespread promotion of the benefits of treatment, including on social media, which perpetuates the message that '*beauty is correlated with happiness and success*' (Perlini, Bertolissi and Lind, 1999, p.352) and encourages women to believe they have a responsibility to engage in 'positive ageing', including making efforts to moderate facial wrinkles and sagginess (Bayer, 2005; Ruel, 2007).

Indeed, societal pressure to maintain a youthful appearance throughout midlife has been described in the literature (e.g., Bayer, 2005) and has even been associated with interest in dermal filler treatment (Delinsky, 2005), yet, as it has not been empirically investigated, it is difficult to know if this association is a true reflection of consumer behaviour. Here, this sociocultural component is proposed to manifest as a belief system that, if internalised, leads to a desire to conform to normalised beauty standards, including, for Generation X women, a youthful facial appearance.

Consequently, the choice to use dermal filler treatment as the test case is appropriate for research that aims to evaluate the impact of salient follower-held pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. Factors to be considered include attitudes to the practice of age concealment and belief in an appearance

ideal that advocates the maintenance of a youthful appearance into midlife (Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012).

In addition to the evaluation of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs concerning the endorsed product, this research also considers the relative importance of followers' emergent attitudes to the influencer. Although the consequences of followers' perceptions of the influencer's credibility (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017), similarity (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018) and attitudinal congruence (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020) have been reported, the literature has yet to demonstrate their relative importance as determinants of an endorsement's effectiveness. Consequently, this study seeks to evaluate the comparative contribution of these follower discernments of the influencer.

In summary, this research broadens our understanding of influencer endorsements by evaluating the impact of both pre-existing and emergent attitudes and beliefs held by followers. The controversial endorsement of dermal filler treatment for age concealment directed towards women in midlife, defined here as members of the Generation X cohort, offers a stringent test of an influencer's competency as an endorser and may improve our ability to predict their effectiveness and aid the delineation of the commodities for which they are a persuasive third-party supporter, allowing the boundaries of their usefulness to be further understood.

The next section describes the research context including the utility of the endorsed product as a means to ameliorate the signs of ageing, the population under investigation and the choice to conduct the research in the United Kingdom.

1.3 The Contextual Landscape

An evaluation of the potential for influencers to be effective endorsers of dermal filler treatment requires consideration of the relevant market forces and features of the environment within which the promotional activity takes place. Consequently, this section describes the relevance of the contextual landscape to this research.

1.3.1 Treatment with Dermal Fillers

Dermal fillers are used to change an individual's facial appearance for non-medical reasons. They are injected into the facial tissue, to smooth lines and provide volume enhancement (Gold, 2007), commonly to reduce the signs of ageing (Bayer, 2005; Ruel, 2007). Dermal filler treatment is an example of a non-surgical cosmetic procedure (NSCP) and does not require anaesthesia or to be carried out in a hospital setting. According to Slevac and Tiggemann (2010), 52% of women would consider a non-surgical cosmetic procedure if the cost was not an issue.

Women accounted for 93% of all cosmetic procedures conducted in the UK in 2021 (BAAPS, 2021) and similarly, dermal filler treatment is predominantly used by midlife females, evidenced by US data showing that 97% of hyaluronic acid-based dermal filler procedures were administered to women, with an average age of 49 years (ASPS, 2019). These data are offered here in the absence of UK-specific information based on the cultural congruence between the UK and the US (Hofstede Insights, 2018). The predominant use of dermal filler treatment by midlife women supports the choice of a female, Generation X research sample, made up of individuals born between 1965 and 1980 inclusive (Pew Research Center, 2014).

There has been a recent rise in the popularity of dermal filler treatment in the UK, including for age concealment (Adatia and Boscarino, 2021). One reported upshot of the COVID-19 pandemic is an increased desire to '*restart normal life with a younger appearance*' (Pussetti, 2021, p.99). Indeed, the widespread availability of treatment clinics means that perceived disparities between actual and desired appearance can be addressed relatively easily with no significant downtime (Morton, 2015). Dermal filler treatment is, therefore, increasingly being accepted by midlife women as an effective way to achieve a more youthful appearance (Macia, Duboz and Chev e, 2015).

1.3.2 Media Pressure

The growth in the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment reflects a societal drive to achieve eternal youth (Smirnova, 2012), as women are increasingly told by both online and offline media that they have a

responsibility to avoid the demonstrable signs of ageing such as facial wrinkles and sagginess, reinforcing societal pressure to maintain a youthful appearance (Bayer, 2005; Raisborough *et al.*, 2014; Ruel, 2007; Small, 2021). Indeed, dermal filler treatment offers women the chance to narrow perceived gaps between personal appearance and prevailing appearance ideals (Morton, 2015). The increased marketing and media coverage of cosmetic procedures, depicting them as a means to conform to normalised beauty standards, has contributed to the growing interest in dermal filler treatment (Delinsky, 2005; Hughes, 2017).

1.3.3 Regulation of Dermal Fillers in the United Kingdom

The choice to locate this research in the UK is based on two discriminatory market features. Firstly, dermal filler treatment can legally be performed by practitioners with and without medical qualifications, and although a recent governmental committee reviewed the UK's licensing and regulatory landscape relating to non-surgical cosmetic procedures to improve standards and protect public safety, to date legislation has not been enacted to limit who is permitted to administer them (APPG on Beauty, Aesthetics and Wellbeing, 2021; MHRA, 2013). The second factor relates to the direct promotion of dermal filler treatment to the potential consumer, which is also allowed in the UK (Advertising Standards Authority, 2019; Dept. of Health, 2013). Since the main source of information about cosmetic procedures is the internet (Barati *et al.*, 2020), dermal filler manufacturers are broadening their UK marketing programmes to include social media advertising and endorsement by influencers who specialise in beauty and appearance-related communication.

These factors, not replicated in the European Union or North America (Dept of Health, 2013; Griffiths and Mullock, 2018; Vischer, 2022), enable the widespread availability and awareness of dermal filler treatment in the UK, and support 1) the use of influencer marketing as a valid promotional tool in this market sector, and 2) the choice of location for this research.

1.3.4 Ethical Considerations

In an environment where dermal filler treatment is increasingly being promoted to the public (Fitzgerald, 2018), it is appropriate to consider the ethics of the use of influencers as a means of increasing awareness and demand. Having the freedom to modify one's face raises the questions of whether the use of appearance-altering procedures should be considered a beauty practice or a medical intervention, and given the prevailing market conditions, how endorsement can be done in a way that prioritises the wellbeing of the recipient.

Cosmetic interventions can be considered a response to societal pressures, (Atiyeh, Rubiez and Hayek, 2008), yet can be a positive and empowering experience (Garnham, 2013) through which women take control of their bodies and exercise agency to mould them as they wish (Negrin, 2002; Wijsbek, 2000). Although the decision to proceed is a personal one and should rest with the individual (Henderson-King and Brooks, 2009), questioning the ethics of the use of influencers as demand generators is warranted. Bearing in mind that influencers are considered purveyors of advice and reassurance (Freberg *et al.*, 2011), a key consideration here is the issue of authenticity and the dependence of an influencer's success and longevity on their true and honest representation of themselves to their followers (Audrezet, de Kerviler and Guidry, 2018). Within this ethical framework (Wellman *et al.*, 2020) an influencer may be better placed than other endorsers to provide the information with which an individual can make an informed decision about their wellbeing. The counter-argument raises the issue of harm to public health through the endorsement, not just of the product, but societal pressures relating to appearance ideals. In this scenario, the influencer is part of an industry that promotes medical interventions as consumer goods and is focused on commercial imperatives (Fatah, 2012; Nuffield, 2017). Endorsement of dermal fillers may seem unwise in these circumstances, but the provision of responsible guidance relating to risks and the need to consult with a medically-qualified technician, who can act should there be problems during the treatment process, may

counterbalance falsehoods perpetrated by unscrupulous practitioners (Taber, 2012).

It is not the purpose of this research to judge or advocate the use of dermal filler treatment by UK-resident, Generation X women, nor determine if the promotion of this product to these consumers is appropriate. In simple terms, using dermal filler treatment as the endorsed product enables a stringent test of the efficacy of influencer-led endorsements. Nevertheless, the researcher is conscious of the need to act responsibly in the provision of reliable product information.

In conclusion, the promotion of dermal filler treatment by influencers must provide the consumer with a realistic picture of treatment benefits and potential consequences to enable informed decisions to be made (Mehlman *et al.*, 2004). Influencers are in a unique position as their equity relies on their authenticity as a 'normal consumer' to provide experience-based, realistic facts about procedures that are increasingly popular.

1.4 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to contribute to influencer marketing knowledge by evaluating the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on influencers' effectiveness as product endorsers. As described earlier in this chapter, this will be achieved through the assessment of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment, commonly associated with consumer preconceptions. In addition, this research will investigate a novel belief system, associated with the reported societal pressure directed at midlife women that encourages the effortful maintenance of a youthful appearance in defiance of the biological ageing process evident in the emergence of lines, wrinkles etc. on their faces.

This research, then, answers two research questions:

RQ 1: Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and what factors are involved in its propagation?

RQ 2: How do followers' attitudes and beliefs impact the effectiveness of influencer-led product endorsements?

The following objectives plot the process of conducting this research:

- 1) To critically review the existing literature on influencer-led product endorsement effectiveness, specifically to understand current knowledge of the role of attitudes and beliefs.
 - Use as the means to develop hypotheses that predict how consumer preconceptions impact markers of endorsement effectiveness.
- 2) To critically review the existing literature on the use of cosmetic procedures for age concealment, specifically to understand the prevailing societal pressures that may influence the adoption of the behaviour.
 - Develop a concept that captures belief in an appearance ideal linked to the maintenance of a youthful appearance by midlife women.
- 3) Carry out a study made up of two discrete phases of data collection to answer the research questions by completing the empirical exploration of the proposed appearance ideal/belief system and hypothesis testing.
- 4) Conclude the findings and describe how the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement is impacted by the existence of both pre-existing attitudes and beliefs relating to the endorsed product and emergent attitudes to the influencer.
- 5) Propose a means to incorporate these findings into influencer marketing practice.

This research constitutes an important advance in our understanding of influencer marketing. The insights generated will help determine the true potential of influencers as effective product endorsers because they uncover the effects of both established attitudes and beliefs salient to the focal product and emergent attitudes to the influencer. Further, it sheds light on a proposed, novel belief system that results from the prevailing sociocultural focus on the benefits for midlife women of maintaining a youthful appearance.

1.5 Scope of this Research

This research focuses on the impact of salient attitudes and beliefs held by UK-resident Generation X female followers on an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment. Consequently, this study focuses on the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment, e.g., as a means of diminishing the appearance of fine lines and wrinkles on the face and replacing lost facial volume (Gold, 2007). Cross-sectional survey data is used to evaluate the hypothesised relationships between four follower characteristics and four discrete measures of endorsement effectiveness. Collectively the assessment of those hypotheses provides the means to answer the principal research question (RQ2). One proposed impact variable is the focus of a separate research phase conducted before hypothesis testing to confirm its suitability as such. Findings from this first phase of the research are used to finalise the variables and measurement scales included in the subsequent survey.

As the purpose of this research is to extend influencer marketing knowledge it does not encompass consideration of the practice of age concealment from a feminist perspective (Hurd Clark, Repta and Griffin, 2007; Pussetti, 2021) nor does it debate whether cosmetic interventions such as those performed using dermal fillers are evidence of female oppression or liberation. Although feminist theory has been used as the foundation for other research on appearance modification by midlife women (Berwick and Humble, 2017; Heggenstaller *et al.*, 2018), and was considered a possible focus of this research, here it is out of scope. It is in the gift of the researcher to determine the lens through which a particular study will be viewed, and the choice made here is to take a more neutral, business-focused approach, where dermal filler treatment is selected as the endorsed product only to offer a stringent test of influencer marketing.

1.6 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis is made up of eight chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Theoretical and Conceptual Model, Methodology, First Phase Results, Second Phase Results, Discussion and Conclusions.

The Literature Review focuses on two streams of knowledge; 1) what is known about the factors or variables that impact the effectiveness of influencer-led product endorsements and 2) how the outcome of the endorsement is measured. The first focuses on how followers process the information relating to the endorsement and what they think of the endorser (the influencer), and the extent to which their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs concerning the product direct or influence those behaviours. The second centres on the markers of an effective endorsement, both actual behaviours reported by followers and those that are intended. The chapter finishes with predictions concerning how the identified impact variables and effectiveness markers interact in the form of five groups of hypotheses.

In the Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Model chapter, the foundation theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) is introduced and its suitability for use in this research is explained. The TRA provides support for the development of the Conceptual Model, the model to be tested, which is built systematically following the same process used for the Literature Review.

At this point the thesis focuses on the Methodology to be employed to answer the research questions posed and provide a valuable contribution to knowledge, starting with an explanation of the adopted research philosophy including epistemological and ontological positions. Due to the demands of the research, a Pragmatic stance has been chosen not only as a means to focus on the research questions and conduct a study composed of two phases of data collection but also to align with the essence of the research being grounded in the desire to understand beliefs, experiences, and outcomes in the context of the endorsement of a somewhat controversial product. Ontologically, this research focuses on a singular, actual reality that manifests as individual experiential or observational perspectives that are explored in the first phase of the research.

The results chapters are concerned with the results of the two phases of data collection. The first focuses on the first research phase and the output from a series of semi-structured interviews that were used to answer RQ1.

Following that is an explanation of the results of the hypothesis testing phase that utilised an online survey to answer RQ2.

The Discussion concentrates on translating results into findings, to distil from the two research phases an explanation for the behaviours and behavioural intentions reported by the respondents. The Conclusions capture the contributions to knowledge made by this research, propose how those insights can inform future practitioners of influencer marketing, and suggest potential avenues for additional research.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Chapter Introduction

As explained in the previous chapter, this research investigates the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment used to treat facial signs of ageing (Gold, 2007), and seeks to build on existing knowledge of this emergent marketing tool in two ways. Firstly, by expanding understanding of followers' response to the endorsement messaging, by evaluating the impact of both pre-existing attitudes and beliefs as well as attitudes directed toward the influencer that emerge following its review. And secondly, assessing the capability of the influencer to be an effective endorser of a product, which, whilst being strongly linked to social media (Al-Yahya *et al.*, 2020), is generally associated with unfavourable attributions (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016).

Responding to calls to action from other researchers (e.g., Taylor, 2020; Tanwar, Chaudhry and Srivastava, 2022; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021), this research sheds light for the first time on the effects of established attitudes and beliefs salient to the endorsed product and so reveal the importance of understanding followers' mindset when formulating influencer marketing strategies. This represents a gap in existing knowledge as current literature tends to focus on ways to identify the right influencer for the product to be supported, without considering that endorsement efficacy depends on the psychological processes of the consumer and their congruence with the product. The consumer's positive attitude toward the product has been shown to wield a significant impact on brand attitude and behavioural intention (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2017). Hence, anticipating the consumer's reaction to the product is key to any endorsement, including an understanding of those pre-existing attitudes and beliefs that may impact its chances of success. The aim here, then, is to understand how harmony between the product and the follower's self-identity (McCracken, 1989) impacts effectiveness, and whether an influencer can bring about

behavioural intention concerning the use of a product associated with disharmonious preconceptions through the provision of informative content.

In addition to an investigation of the impact of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, attention will also be paid to followers' response to the influencer who endorses such a potentially polarising product (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016) to determine the role and relative power of their attitudes to the endorser. Consequently, this review of existing literature will include both research relating to attitudes and beliefs salient to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment purposes and studies of endorsement dynamics that involve an assessment of factors that determine followers' attitude to the influencer.

To clearly outline the arena in which this research is anchored, this chapter has three focus areas: 1) how influencers can elicit a response from their followers that enables them to act as endorsers, 2) the potential impact of followers' preconceptions concerning the endorsed product, and 3) what is meant by 'effectiveness' in the context of influencer marketing.

2.2 The Influencer as a 21st Century Endorser

Endorsement is a form of advertising that uses a third party to provide recommendations to consumers concerning a particular product or service (Canning and West, 2006). An endorser is defined as '*any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement*' (McCracken, 1989, p.310). They can be a typical customer, product expert, company president or celebrity (Friedman, Termini and Washington, 1976), providing their inclusion has the effect of making the campaign more convincing to the target consumer (Canning and West, 2006).

Consideration of influencers as 21st Century endorsers (Archer and Harrigan, 2016; Kapitan and Silvera, 2016) is a developing category within marketing literature (Voorveld, 2019). Like their offline counterparts, influencers' potential to act as endorsers derives from their recognition by consumers, in this instance on social media platforms rather than more generally, as

evidenced by their '*sizeable network of followers*' (De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders, 2017, p.278). Hence influencers have emerged as online product and lifestyle endorsers (Breves *et al.*, 2019) who act as a source of supportive communication for a product or service not just in advertising but also in reviews derived from their personal experiences (Freberg *et al.*, 2011). Influencers, therefore, offer their followers an example to be copied and provide them with advice and information on products and services (Van der Merwe and Van Heerden, 2009).

An advantage of influencer endorsers is that their communication is directly targeted to an audience (made up of their followers) that is generally predisposed to be interested in the topic of the content being dispersed to them, for whom the influencer is considered an expert in the field. These features make them an attractive proposition to many commercial entities. In a study carried out by Tapinfluence (2017) (a specialist influencer marketing agency), influencer-led endorsement campaigns were shown to realise incremental sales volume beyond that of traditional digital advertising. Further, influencers' legitimacy as experts (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018, p.348) confers on them a potential shield against negative meaning transfer (Breberina, Shukla and Rosendo-Rios, 2021). Thus, the benefit of adopting an influencer marketing strategy is well-recognised by marketing professionals (Moorman, 2020).

Unsurprisingly then, the effectiveness of influencers as endorsers, in terms of their persuasiveness and ability to drive their followers to the desired behaviour, is well documented in the literature (e.g., Daniel, Crawford Jackson and Westermann, 2018; Freberg *et al.*, 2011; Kim and Kim, 2018). Nevertheless, as with any communication dynamic, each element of the message chain linking the source to the receiver should be considered, (Pornikapptan, 2004), yet, to date little research attention has been directed to followers' participation in the endorsement or to mapping the scope of influencers, in terms of identifying the products and services for which they are a persuasive third-party supporter (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Daniel, Crawford Jackson and Westermann, 2018; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). There is, then, much to learn about influencer marketing in terms of

understanding followers' responses and the relative importance of their salient pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and emergent attitudes to the influencer, as it appears the evidence supporting their status as competent endorsers, albeit generally positive, is relatively superficial. As Sundermann and Raabe (2019) comment, the current corpus is '*a rag rug of fragmented research questions*' (p.278), and consequently provides little guidance on how best to utilise this nascent endorsement tool.

In consideration of the product endorsed by the influencer, research has generally fallen into three groups: 1) product-neutral, where there is no mention of a specific brand or category (e.g., Ki and Kim, 2019), 2) category-specific, where the focus is on a broad group of products such as fashion (Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2019) or beauty (Konstantopoulou *et al.*, 2018), or 3) nominal product used, where a product or brand is chosen for inclusion in the research primarily on the basis that it is familiar to the participants or non-controversial (Evans *et al.*, 2017). Studies that purposefully aim to determine the efficacy of influencer endorsement of a particular product or brand are still largely outstanding.

Similarly, research is limited when the aim is to evaluate followers' responses in the context of the product or brand being endorsed (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2018, Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Although there are exceptions, for example, the appraisal of envy in the context of the endorsement of luxury goods (Chae, 2018), speaking generally, indicators chosen to designate a follower's positive reaction do not typically appear to have been selected based on their fit with the endorsed product. For example, evaluating followers' parasocial interaction with influencers who endorse vaping (Daniel, Crawford Jackson and Westermann, 2018) rather than assessing their reaction to the behaviour being demonstrated. Since endorsement efficacy depends on psychological processes originated by the consumer (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2017) elements of the receiver's response that are salient to the campaign seem necessary foci of research.

Consequently, this research seeks to narrow these gaps by investigating whether an influencer can be used to endorse a product associated with

potentially adverse pre-existing preconceptions. Research to date has focused primarily on followers' responses after receipt of the influencer's endorsement content rather than taking into account opinions or potential prejudices already held (e.g., Lou, 2022; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2019).

As mentioned, the areas of focus for this research encompass indicators of followers' response to the influencer, as well as those which relate to the endorsed product. The following sub-sections describe current knowledge on perceived similarity, that is, whether followers believe the influencer to be like them (e.g., Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020; Wright, 2019), attitude congruence, their shared interests and mindset (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013), followers' attitude to the use of the endorsed product by the influencer, and the desire of followers to maintain a youthful appearance throughout midlife. To start, the particular relevance of perceptions of likeness in this research is discussed.

2.2.1 Perceived Similarity

Influencers offer a unique, dual-aspect endorser profile of aspiration combined with relatability, which is predicated on the belief that the influencer is an '*ordinary consumer*' (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018, p.348) with legitimacy as an expert. Perception of similarity with the influencer is aided by the demonstration that '*they lead normal lives*' (Balaban and Mustăţea, 2019, p.40), which is achieved through periodic glimpses of their everyday activities. The appearance of relatability as an ordinary consumer is a feature that differentiates influencers from other types of endorsers, e.g., celebrities.

Beyond the appeal of normality, perceptions of similarity, or likeness, can be based on demographics or ideology, e.g., age, sex, political party affiliation or religion (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Whatever its source, perceived similarity has been shown to contribute to belief in an endorser (Ohanian, 1990), and the more similar receivers feel to the sender, the more persuasive the sender (Kahle and Homer, 1985).

The benefit to the endorsement campaign of this apparent similarity between the influencer and their followers is explained by the Source Attractiveness Model (McGuire, 1985), which states that a persuasive communicator must be similar to their target receiver, and the Theory of Homophily (Lazarsfeld and Merton, 1954), which describes the tendency people have to be attracted to those with whom they feel a sense of commonality, aiding the flow of information through the lowering of communication barriers.

The feeling that influencers are ‘just like us’ has been consistently demonstrated as a reason for their persuasiveness (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). However, if this were completely true, and followers believed themselves to be mirror images of the influencer, it is questionable if followers would feel the need to copy the influencer, negating the potential for the influencer to act as an endorser. Thus, there must be some degree of difference between them that is sufficient to create within followers a desire to be *more like* the influencers they follow. This concept is explained by the work of Sokolova and Kefi (2020) who evaluated an influencer-led beauty product endorsement and highlighted the impact of *aspiration* to be similar, the sense of ‘I want to be like the influencer’ rather than ‘the influencer is like me’ which is the usual observation when people compare themselves to others. Interestingly, though, this self-other similarity asymmetry (Tversky, 1977) where people typically consider themselves less similar to others than others are to them, can reverse if there is a desire to be more similar to someone (White, 2008). It is possible, therefore, that influencers incite the desire to be similar in their followers, a concept that resonates with the notion of a relationship initiated by the follower (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020).

This is supported by the demonstration that resemblances in fundamental characteristics such as age and gender have been shown to facilitate the desire to become more alike in other ways (Bandura and Cervone, 1986). In the online world, a match between follower and influencer has been found to strengthen the intention of the former to go along with the advice provided by the latter (Casaló, Flavián and Ibáñez-Sánchez, 2018). It seems, then, that

an influencer should aim to forge a basic connection with their followers, relying for example on demographic parallels, if they are to be capable of instigating those feelings of 'wishful identification' which lead to emulation behaviours (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005).

A further attribute that may help to forge the follower: influencer connection is physical appearance. Phenotypic similarity, or, more simply put, people who look like us, can generate feelings of closeness or kinship (Park and Schaller, 2005), meaning that appearance has a role to play in perceptions of similarity. An influencer who aims to endorse an appearance-related product, such as dermal filler treatment, should not be so attractive that they cannot engender among their followers the baseline requirement of perceived similarity (Agthe, Spörrle and Maner, 2011; AlFarraj *et al.*, 2021), because a follower who sees themselves in how the influencer looks is more likely to follow their advice (Wright, 2019). On this point, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) have shown that a beauty influencer does not need to be considered attractive by their followers to be effective, possibly signalling another area where normality is the basis from which perceptions of similarity develop. Likewise, in offline advertising idealised images of models can negatively affect women's estimation of their attractiveness (Thornton and Maurice, 1999), and, potentially, the effectiveness of the endorsement.

Overall, the dynamic between followers and influencer seems to rely on the former being inspired, based on their perception of similarity or aspiration to be similar, to consume products or services recommended by the latter. Being able to see the benefits of the product on someone who one considers similar in appearance terms encourages adoption (Wright, 2019). Interestingly, the drive to be similar and '*be like everyone else*' is a commonly mentioned motivation for women to have cosmetic surgery (Clarke *et al.*, 2012, p.444). Hence, perceived similarity is relevant in this research as it has an impact on the influencer-led endorsement of appearance-related products (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). Beyond what is currently understood, there is much to learn about the extent to which a general feeling of similarity can contribute to influencer

effectiveness, particularly whether it can act as a means of negating any endorsement disapproval.

Also, in an environment where followers' pre-existing attitudes may have a bearing on endorsement effectiveness, similarity based on like-mindedness or attitudinal congruence should be considered. This will be addressed in the next section.

2.2.2 Attitude Congruence

An attitude is '*an individual's disposition to respond favorably or unfavorably to an object, person, institution or event or any other discriminable aspect of the individual's world*' (Ajzen, 1989, p.241). Favourable attitudes are known to affect behaviour in a positive manner (Bhattacharjee and Sanford, 2009). Whether positive or not, attitudes are always inferred from specific responses to the attitude object, which can be in the form of expressions of beliefs (cognition), feelings (affect), or behavioural intentions (conation) – the so-called tripartite classification (Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960).

Attitudinal congruence is a known driver of interpersonal attraction (Chen, 2020) and a mediator of consumer behaviour (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1979; Ing and Ming, 2018). Consequently, attitude research is an important consideration when developing a marketing strategy (Teng, Khong and Goh, 2015). Establishing an understanding of the effect of attitudes held by the consumer should be part of building a knowledge base for a new promotional tool, such as influencer marketing. This is supported by a meta-analysis of advertising effectiveness studies carried out by Brown and Stayman (1992), where antecedent constructs of both affective and cognitive influences were demonstrated to affect brand attitudes and ultimately behavioural intention, although the point was made that many of the studies analysed involved student samples that tended to exhibit an associated larger effect. This highlights both that the totality of the effect of the attitude should be taken into account through the assessment of consumer beliefs, feelings, and behavioural intention and that attitudinal research relating to marketing strategy development is best carried out using representatives of the target consumer demographic. It is important to note, though, that only beliefs that

are salient to the individual have a causal impact on attitudes (Ajzen, 1989) so it is vital to limit the extent of any attitudinal evaluation to those that are known to be important to the matter at hand.

The perception of attitudinal or ideological congruence is a strong indicator of the connection between people (McGuire, 1966), and has consistently been found to be positively associated with attraction (Byrne and Lambert, 1971; Condon and Crano, 1988). Agreement with the beliefs of others validates a person's perspective (Byrne and Clore, 1970), increasing the likelihood of a mutually enjoyable relationship developing (Condon and Crano, 1988). Interestingly, this explanation of the effects of attitude congruence derives from experimental conditions where the subject did not meet the individual they were assessing. In offline circumstances this could be considered a limitation, however, in digital advertising research, this lack of 'real life' contact could be said to mimic the experiences of influencers and followers, reinforcing the possibility of a strong relationship forming between parties who never meet (Lou, 2022). Not also does attitudinal likeness have a bearing on attraction to the influencer, but people with whom we feel this connection are more likely to be associated with family (Park and Schaller, 2005) and perceived to have positive traits (Hoffner and Buchanan, 2005). Further, in an endorsement scenario, attitude congruence influences an individual's perspective of the endorsed brand (Ribeiro, Fernandes and Lopes, 2021). The inclusion of attitude congruence as part of the evaluation of followers' response to the influencer's endorsement is therefore warranted, not least because of its likely effect on followers' thoughts relating to the endorsed product.

2.3 The Impact of the Endorsed Product

The emergence of dermal fillers as a means to diminish the appearance of wrinkles, skin laxity and volume loss (Brandt and Cazzaniga, 2013), and hence reduce the effects of ageing on the face, offers a cost-effective and convenient option, versus cosmetic surgery, for those looking to achieve a younger-looking visage (Bray, Hopkins and Roberts, 2010). Although increasingly popular in the UK (Morton, 2015), it is evident in the existing

data corpus that women have strong feelings relating to this form of appearance modification. The following section focuses on these prevailing attitudes and how they could impact an influencer-led endorsement.

2.3.1 Attitude to the Use of Dermal Filler Treatment for Age Concealment

Reports in the literature relating to midlife women's attitudes toward beauty work are predominantly negative (Berwick and Humble, 2017; Ehlinger-Martin *et al.*, 2016; Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007), tending to focus on assumptions related to the personal characteristics and values of those who choose to be treated (Macia, Duboz and Chevé, 2015) particularly if their goal is to conceal their chronological age (Chasteen *et al.*, 2011 Gosselink *et al.*, 2008; Schoemann and Branscombe, 2011). Unfavourable attitudes also arise from the belief that negative results and post-treatment regrets are commonplace (Berwick and Humble, 2017; Hurd, 2000). There are also concerns about the risk of adverse events (Jarthon and Durand, 2017) and the fear that something of such personal importance as appearance could be damaged or distorted (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007; von Soest *et al.*, 2009). Attitudes relating to dermal filler treatment are therefore derived from reactions to behaviour and expectation of the outcome of that behaviour.

Attitudes associated with cosmetic surgery (Vaughan-Turnbull and Lewis, 2015) and the use of BOTOX[®] (Carter Singh *et al.*, 2006) are also relevant here, as well as those specifically related to dermal filler treatment, as they indicate associations relating to deliberate appearance modification (Honigman and Castle, 2006). Indeed, the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery's definition of cosmetic surgery as '*a unique discipline of medicine focused on enhancing appearance through surgical and medical techniques*' (AACS, 2020) covers both invasive and non-invasive procedures, including those using dermal fillers. Hence, research addressing attitudes to *cosmetic surgery* in broad terms can be assumed to include perspectives on non-surgical cosmetic procedures unless an alternative definition, specifically excluding the use of dermal fillers from consideration, was provided to the respondents (Brown *et al.*, 2007).

The use of appearance enhancement in midlife has been attributed to anxiety about ageing that is increasingly prevalent in society (Muise and Desmarais, 2010), and the belief that beauty is the key to the attainment, or maintenance, of happiness or success (Kwan and Trautner, 2009). The remedy of some perceived physical defect has been reported as the primary motivation for cosmetic surgery (Markley Rountree and Davis, 2011), which links back to section 2.2.1 where it was noted that women embark on beauty work to '*be like everyone else*' (Clarke *et al.*, 2012, p.444). At this point, it is appropriate to mention that not all research has resulted in negative findings. For example, researchers have demonstrated that appearance modification treatment can be empowering (Kwan and Trautner, 2009), reinforce self-belief (Gimlin, 2000) and in many cases is said to be undertaken to look better, not younger (Garnham, 2013).

Nevertheless, there is a complex network of beliefs, opinions, assumptions and concerns that underpins the act of changing one's appearance to become more attractive. Although attractiveness tends to be coupled with social benefits (Henderson-King and Brooks, 2009), good-looking people have been associated with conceit and dishonesty (Dermer and Thiel, 1975), and for some, purposefully enhancing how one looks is a sign of not being true to oneself or community (Pussetti, 2021). Women who act in this way are criticised for '*trying too hard*' (Gosselink *et al.*, 2008, p.308) and perceived as wanting to gain personal power at the expense of other women (Hurd Clarke, 2017). Yet, there is an interesting paradox regarding the utilisation of cosmetic procedures as women's advocacy of natural ageing and criticism of others is often accompanied by their consumption or interest in using age concealment techniques themselves (Harris, 1994).

This double-standard of condemnation coupled with sanction is aided by the secrecy associated with treatment with dermal fillers. Women seem to be reluctant to discuss their actions due to shame or embarrassment, and so are more likely to perpetuate the myth that their appearance is natural to avoid doing so (Pussetti, 2021). The assumed negative psychosocial consequences of undergoing cosmetic interventions are associated with judgement and exclusion (Samper *et al.*, 2018; Schoemann and

Branscombe, 2011; Tam *et al.*, 2012). People who opt to have facial treatment have been referred to as a stigmatised group (Bonell, Barlow and Griffiths, 2021) due to descriptions such as 'materialistic', 'self-conscious' and 'perfectionistic' being applied to them (Delinsky, 2005). Although attention paid to maintaining or improving the appearance through the use of anti-ageing creams or regular exercise is lauded (Jarthon and Durand, 2017; Muise and Desmarais, 2010), when attention turns to deliberate acts to modify the appearance the expectation of harsh judgement is well documented (Calasanti, 2005; Gosselink *et al.*, 2008).

As this research aims to map the behavioural intentions of Generation X women, a target population for marketers of dermal fillers for the treatment of age-related concerns, it is worth noting that this disapproving mindset is held more firmly if these techniques are used by individuals in their 40s who are yet to display age-related changes (Chasteen *et al.*, 2011). However, while the negativity is widespread across all age ranges, it is tempered by concurrent fear of ageing and belief in the importance of appearance (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016). Women with these characteristics were more likely to support the use of cosmetic procedures, illustrating that for some people, and in some circumstances, behavioural beliefs linked to aesthetic services can be more positive.

Treatment with dermal fillers is increasingly popular in the United Kingdom (APPG on Beauty, Aesthetics and Wellbeing, 2021), which belies published data that describes it in such negative terms and has led to the coining of the phrase 'the Cosmetic Surgery Paradox' (Bonell, Barlow and Griffiths, 2021). This inconsistency may be partially explained by one hallmark of research in this area, that many of the findings relate to expectations, rather than from direct experience (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007), reflecting the point made by Bredahl (2001) that attitudes regarding a product can be well established despite the lack of actual user experience. There is a sense of the real power of word-of-mouth communication in the development of an environment of judgement into which the influencer is challenged to present content that can overcome negativity without diminishing or ignoring women's real concerns. A statistically significant attitude-intention effect has

been found for negative perceptions (Dodge and Jaccard, 2007) and consequently, it is anticipated that such strongly held attitudes towards appearance-enhancement may impact the ability of an influencer to create demand.

In summary, the prevailing attitude commonly associated with the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment is predominantly negative. Major sources of concern relate to perceptions of unfairness due to the assumed benefits of attractiveness, the risk that treatment will lead to facial disfigurement, and the assumed traits of poor judgement and weak values inherent in those who undertake such procedures. There is also the traditional feminist perspective that age-concealment is a practice resulting from repression (Holstein, 2001), countered by a post-modernist perception centred around women's freedom to mould their bodies and appearance as they wish (Askegaard, Gertson and Langer, 2002). Whilst recognising the value of these views, further consideration of them is beyond the scope of this research.

Essentially, all of these data point to the existence of salient beliefs, pieces of information that are assumed to be factual, that are contributing to attitude development. The nature and origins of these beliefs will be discussed in the next section.

2.3.2 Prevailing Social Pressures Related to Ageing

Beliefs cause attitudes, or '*a person's attitude is a function of his [sic] salient beliefs at a given point in time*' (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975, p.222). In turn, salient beliefs are determinants of the adoption of a behaviour (Ajzen, 1989). Beliefs arise based on perceptions of normative behaviour, which develop from the approval or disapproval of important others, such as family, friends and peers. This perceived social pressure encourages the adoption or consideration of sanctioned behaviours (Ajzen, 1989). Indeed, the '*vicarious experience of cosmetic surgery (via family and friends)*' increases the likelihood of women having a procedure (Brown *et al.*, 2007, p.501). Therefore, this research considers prevailing societal conditions salient to the endorsement of dermal filler treatment for Generation X women. As these

treatments are used in this population to address facial changes due to ageing (Gold, 2007), the key normative beliefs to be considered relate to the perceived social imperative to manage the manifestations of getting older (Bayer, 2005).

Appearance and ageing-related beliefs are entwined, particularly in women, for whom physical appearance is of greater concern across the ages (Öberg and Tornstam, 1999). The term 'ageism' was first coined by Butler in 1969 to mean age-related discrimination and has been described as '*the ultimate prejudice*' (Angus and Reeve, 2006, p.139). The archetype of the dependent older person has been maintained in part through the actions of the media which has perpetuated the undesirability of appearing to be ageing and the edict that appearing youthful is a personal responsibility (Coupland, 2009). Increasingly, in this '*age-resisting culture*' (Ballard, Elston and Gabe, 2005, p.185), women consider ageing to be a disease that should be either prevented or treated (Bayer, 2005; Smirnova, 2012). The concept of ageing being unhealthy (Calasanti *et al.*, 2018) is linked to perceptions of old people as being infirm and incapable (Nelson, 2005).

Consequently, as the signs of ageing appear on the face, including the appearance of fine lines, wrinkles on the forehead and around the eyes, and sagging around the jawline (Ehlinger-Martin *et al.*, 2016), women increasingly experience ageing anxiety and fear of being outcast (Chonody and Teater 2016) and so the drive to manage ageing begins (Jarthon and Durand, 2017; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999; Slevic and Tiggemann, 2010). Fear of ageing, coupled with the urge to avoid categorisation as incapable, can differentiate women who have a positive attitude to cosmetic facial enhancement, from those who do not (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016).

These beliefs feed on those dominant societal ideals depicted in the media as images of highly attractive and age-defying models and celebrities (Heggenstaller *et al.*, 2018), leading women to believe the ideal appearance is related to being '*very thin, with long legs, light eyes, clear skin and no wrinkles*' (Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012 p.668). The inclusion of 'no wrinkles' is an indicator that youth is a requirement for beauty (Del Rosso, 2017). And so, belief in the moral obligation to look younger than one's

chronological age builds, leading women to consciously model their appearance after media characters (Nabi, 2009) and seek techniques, such as cosmetic procedures (Bayer, 2005) that enable the avoidance of the consequences of time, or the re-creation of their younger selves (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007). Not doing so is an apparent indicator of a lack of care for oneself, poor self-discipline and laziness (Pussetti, 2021).

Women's desire to reach the normalised standard that equates youth with beauty (Smirnova, 2012) has been seized by the beauty industry and turned into the concept of 'Anti-Ageing' (Bayer, 2005), now a frequently used marketing term with which many women are familiar (Bromstein, 2019). So pervasive is this move to eternal youth that purchasing a skin cream that claims anti-ageing properties is a common transaction for many women (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007). Indeed, between 1960 and 2010 there was a ten-fold increase in the number of advertisements for products that claim anti-ageing properties (Brown and Knight, 2015), giving a snapshot of the rise of the normalisation of trying to hold back the years in terms of women's appearance.

Motivation to comply with this appearance ideal and pursue the goal of youthful beauty (Brooks, 2010) is influenced by factors such as the behaviour of referent others (Ajzen, 1989), a desire to align 'feel age' with one's appearance (Morton, 2015), avoid age discrimination (Schoemann and Branscombe, 2011) and achieve the success that reportedly comes from looking young (Perlini, Bertolissi and Lind, 1999). Each of these concerns may be influenced by spending time on social media viewing younger or enhanced women (Aniulis, Sharp and Thomas, 2021) or interacting with a younger social group in the workplace (Ballard, Elston and Gabe, 2005).

Such pressures, embodied by the judgement of others, urge the individual to act in a certain way, and consequently, are important in decision-making (Deutsch and Gerrard, 1955). According to Kelman (1961), social influences enable the internalisation of normative beliefs when the suggested behaviour is congruent with and reinforces the individual's values. Ultimately this leads to attitude formation or evolution. Hence, normative beliefs related to what is deemed attractive can manifest in some as an internalisation of appearance

ideals. There is, therefore, a cascade of events from the establishment of a normative belief, or belief system, to the development and internalisation of an appearance ideal, leading to behavioural intention and later, actual behaviour.

Indeed, there is compelling evidence in the literature that normative beliefs related to appearance are a strong driver of cosmetic interventions, supporting a relationship between internalisation and attitudes toward appearance modification (Menzel *et al.*, 2011; Nerini, Matera and Stefanile, 2014; Sharp, Tiggemann and Mattiske, 2014), and indicating that acceptance of normative beliefs has the potential to affect behavioural intention. Seeing close friends or family undergo cosmetic procedures can also reinforce the normalisation of their use and increase the likelihood of acceptance by others (Brown *et al.*, 2007). This latter finding was observed only in women, which the researchers attributed to two factors. Firstly, their female respondents knew more people who had undergone cosmetic treatment than did the male participants, and even where male respondents were familiar with individuals who had had cosmetic procedures, they were less likely than the female participants to partake themselves. It could also be concluded, based on this insight, that normative beliefs relating to cosmetic treatments are more powerful for women.

Several authors reference the focus on youth and ostensible benefits of the maintenance of a youthful appearance (e.g., Bayer, 2005; Saucier, 2004; Woodward, 1988), yet to date, none have proposed a direct, empirical linkage of this emerging normative belief to the use of ageing-related appearance modification. The aspirational standard for midlife women to look younger than their years (Bayer, 2005) arising from a societal obsession with youth, is an indicator of an appearance ideal which will be known here as 'Youth-Ideal'. A similar term, '*thin-youth ideal*' was used by Gendron and Lydecker (2016) to describe the idealisation of a slender body form and youthful appearance brought about by the anti-ageing culture of Western Societies (p.255), which overlaps with the theme explored by Haboush, Warren and Benuto (2012) mentioned earlier. In both studies, the respondents were undergraduates (mean age: 18.9 years and 19.7 years

respectively) and the focus was on ageing anxiety and ageism directed towards older adults reinforcing the pervasiveness of the normative belief that ageing is something to fear. These studies (Gendron and Lydecker, 2016; Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012) demonstrate the existence of a widespread belief in the power of youth, albeit in a young respondent sample. However, in a society that is reported to value and require youthfulness (Bayer, 2005), it follows that 'Youth-Ideal' will apply across the lifespan. Indeed, Öberg and Tornstam (2003) included a series of items they described as being related to 'Youth Image Ideal', or the denial of old age and idealisation of youthfulness, in a scale to measure attitudes toward the embodiment of old age and reported 54% of their mixed sample (age range 20 – 84 years) agreed with the statement '*It is important to keep a youthful look*' (p. 140).

All of these data are supportive of the premise that there is within the female mind belief in the value of appearing physically youthful throughout life. However, this desire, known here as 'Youth-Ideal' has not yet been reported as an appearance ideal or studied in a Generation X female population, nor has there been an attempt to quantify or measure individual awareness or acceptance of it as such. Nevertheless, it seems feasible that the connection between the fear of ageing and the adoption of facial rejuvenation strategies (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016), could be facilitated by the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal'. Certainly, existing evidence points to the drive to look youthful leading to increased use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Bayer, 2005), in an attempt to overcome perceived age-based discrimination (Pearl and Percec, 2019). There may also be unwitting reinforcement by beauty product advertising which frequently utilises the word 'youth' and makes elaborate promises to restore it (Calasanti, 2005). Hence, there is support in the extant literature for an appearance ideal that prescribes the avoidance of demonstrable ageing (Bayer, 2005), where being facially youthful is considered advantageous and desirable (Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012). As argued earlier, this appearance standard will be termed 'Youth-Ideal'.

Against this background of ageist beauty norms, women seek information about ways to achieve their preferred method of ageing prevention (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007), leading some to the adoption of cosmetic treatments (Ehlinger-Martin *et al.*, 2016). Evidence suggests that endorsement of societal and media appearance ideals is related to favourable attitudes towards cosmetic procedures (Henderson-King and Brooks, 2009), reinforcing the point made earlier that beliefs cause attitudes. The opportunity for endorsement of dermal filler treatment by influencers who have reach into the demographic of the target consumer (Gold, 2007) is therefore feasible. Much has been written confirming influencers' effectiveness in the beauty industry (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Wright, 2019) and although researchers have not focused too much attention on specific sectors within that vast market, the prevailing norms relating to society's expectation of how a midlife woman should manage her ageing appearance and increasingly prevalent anti-ageing messaging points to the likelihood of a receptive audience. It seems appropriate, then, to consider internalisation or belief in the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' as an important part of this research. These four factors, 1) perceived similarity and 2) attitude congruence, 3) attitude to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment, hereafter 'attitude to the behaviour', and 4) internalisation of belief in the proposed 'Youth-Ideal' archetype, are central to this research and referred to here as 'impact variables'.

Attention now turns to the means of measuring endorsement effectiveness.

2.4 Measuring the Effectiveness of Influencer Marketing

Effectiveness is the extent to which an influencer marketing campaign produces the outcomes desired, and the targeted result of the communication is achieved (Sundermann and Raabe, 2019). However, measuring the impact of influencer-led endorsements can be challenging, and a potential limitation of this type of promotion. Followers gained or likes achieved are readily available quantitative measures but are not believed to accurately gauge campaign effectiveness (Gräve, 2019). As a result, influencer research has tended to evaluate the formation of brand preference

or the evidence of behavioural change largely through the appraisal of attitudinal and behavioural endpoints (Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman, 2020). Hence, this review will focus on both types of effectiveness markers, highlighting their relevance to the planned research.

Firstly, the detection of a favourable post-intervention attitude is suggestive of a successful campaign and attitudinal endpoints that have featured in the literature to date have tended to focus on followers' disposition toward a range of aspects of the communication including the brand (Lim *et al*, 2017), future purchase (Nunes *et al*, 2018), and message content (Ki and Kim, 2019). Although perceived credibility has not been considered an attitudinal response in the influencer literature to date, it will be framed as such in this research. Evaluation of perceived credibility usually involves the communication target providing their evaluation of the originator, thus, perceived credibility represents a manifestation of an individual's disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably, in this case, to a person (Ajzen, 1989), and can, therefore, be thought of as an attitudinal marker of effectiveness (Hudders, De Jans and De Veirman, 2020).

The second type of measure of endorsement effectiveness involves the assessment of behavioural intention. In influencer marketing, these have predominantly concerned the intention to disseminate a message through word-of-mouth (eWOM) or purchase intention (Konstantopoulou *et al.*, 2019). However, in this research, where the endorsement focuses on a somewhat controversial product, dermal filler treatment, additional behaviours that follow receipt of an influencer's content are also considered as signals of endorsement success. Behavioural effectiveness measurements featured in this review are, therefore, 1) followers' acceptance of the information provided, 2) the extent to which they compare themselves with the influencer and 3) their intention to book a consultation with a medically qualified practitioner to discuss their suitability for dermal filler treatment.

Before embarking on the review, however, it is first appropriate to discuss the structure of the remainder of this chapter. Having considered 'impact variables', those factors that could have a bearing on the effectiveness of an

influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment, the focal point from here on concerns measuring effectiveness.

2.4.1 Perceived Credibility

True acceptance of a message requires that the originator is considered believable, and so, perceived credibility, a key determinant of persuasiveness (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990; Pornikapptan, 2004; Teng *et al.*, 2014), is a relevant attitudinal effectiveness measure for inclusion in this research.

That the receiver's perception of source credibility influences an advertisement's effectiveness is well-established in offline endorsement research (Bergkvist and Zhou, 2016; Wathen and Burkell, 2002; Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). Similarly, perceived credibility has been shown to contribute to influencer efficacy (Lou and Yuan, 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), and a credible influencer is persuasive (Nunes *et al.*, 2018; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020) and an effective endorser (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Wright, 2019). There may even be reason to anticipate their outperformance of traditional celebrity endorsers (actors, athletes, music performers etc) on this parameter (Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017). However, existing research does not reach a consensus on whether the single entity (credibility) or one or more of the separate domains of attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (Hovland and Weiss, 1951; Ohanian, 1990) is exerting the strongest influence on effectiveness. In the absence of guidance, researchers have tended to include an aggregate assessment by utilising the Ohanian Source Credibility Scale (1990), a 15-item semantic differential scale consisting of separate 5-item sub-scales for attractiveness, expertise and trustworthiness (e.g., Leite and Baptista, 2021; Lim *et al.*, 2017). This research will follow and hypothesise relationships between perceived credibility and the impact variables, while, through the use of the Ohanian scale, making provision to conduct additional analyses per domain.

Although there is not a large body of data revealing the origins of the receiver's, in this case, the follower's, stance on the credibility of the originator, known here as the influencer, some reliance on the characteristics

of the message recipient has been assumed (Self, 1996). Understanding potential antecedents of credibility will add to existing knowledge of influencer marketing, and this research seeks to determine the role of each of the four impact variables, perceived similarity, attitude congruence, attitude to the behaviour and belief in the 'Youth-Ideal' archetype, in the determination of credibility.

2.4.2 Acceptance of Information

The first behavioural effectiveness measure for consideration is Acceptance of Information, or the purposeful engagement with a message due to confidence in it (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008; Teng *et al.*, 2014). Several scholars have reported that message processing takes into account receiver attitudes that are salient to its content (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Pornikapptan, 2004; Sussman and Siegel, 2003) so that the assessment of the information is through the lens of those attitudes. Hence, attitudinal variation forms the basis of response variability (Cheung, Lee and Rabjohn, 2008), explaining why only some information has the desired effect. Any decision to behave as recommended by the communicator signals that the information has been accepted as evidence of reality (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Wathan and Burkell, 2002). It follows then that their followers' acceptance of the information disseminated is a key determinant of influencer effectiveness, and so, within the context of this research, attention is paid to how the impact variables described earlier affect information acceptance.

2.4.3 Comparison with Similar Others

The second behavioural effectiveness measure is comparison behaviour. According to Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), perceptions of similarity result in the act of comparing oneself with the individual with whom that likeness exists. This is evidenced by women tending to '*look to someone else to see if we're OK*' (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007, p.81). In midlife, this could include comparing their physical appearance with those of a similar age to assess how 'well' they are ageing. Some are boosted by comparisons that result in a sense of having aged better, although this

seems less likely in the light of the media's depiction of well-known midlife women as glamorous and youthful (Ballard, Elston and Gabe, 2005).

Nevertheless, there exists in the female psyche a desire not to appear different to others in a social group (Clarke *et al.*, 2012), something that may be problematic if one's appearance is out of kilter with the expectations, of other women and wider social norms. Of course, this disparity could be due to appearing younger than expected, but in the light of the appearance archetype, 'Youth-Ideal', described earlier, it is not surprising that a significant association has been shown between comparison behaviour and the acceptance of appearance-altering procedures, such as cosmetic surgery (Luther, 2009). Comparison with the influencer is consequently a relevant consideration for this research.

2.4.4 Booking Intention

The third behavioural effectiveness measure is booking intention. Although purchase intention, the desire to purchase a product in the future (Cheung & Thadani, 2012; Dodds and Monroe, 1985), has been used as an effectiveness measure in many influencer studies (e.g., Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Lou and Yuan, 2019; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), with findings supporting influencers as drivers of purchase intention, albeit without clear agreement on why this is so (Sundermann and Raabe, 2019), it is not an appropriate endpoint for this research for two reasons. Firstly, the consumer does not directly purchase the product themselves, but rather they undergo a procedure utilising it provided by an aesthetic practitioner. Secondly, and more importantly, it is not appropriate for the influencer to advocate for their followers to commit to such a significant decision without them having a prior consultation with a medical professional to discuss treatment in more detail (AAPG on Beauty, Aesthetics and Wellbeing, 2021; Dept. of Health, 2013). Consequently, booking intention is a more fitting behavioural effectiveness measure.

Booking intention has been used as an endpoint in behavioural research featuring female samples in studies to assess intention to book health screening appointments (Ryan, Waller and Marlow, 2019) and evaluate the

relationship between photo-editing and intention to have a consultation with a cosmetic dermatologist (Agrawal and Agrawal, 2021). According to guidelines issued by the Department of Health (Dept. of Health, 2013), the process to undergo a dermal filler treatment should start with a consultation with a medical professional, after which there should be a period of reflection before the treatment takes place. Importantly, the consultation process allows the practitioner to provide the potential customer with the information they need to be able to give informed consent if they subsequently decide that having a procedure is right for them. In this research, the intention to schedule a consultation is considered an indicator of followers' interest in dermal filler treatment and based on the finding of Ramirez, Scherz and Smith (2021) that 88% of those who have a consultation proceed to have treatment, a clear signal of future conversion. In summary, this research will utilise booking intention as a behavioural effectiveness measure as it reflects best practice in the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry.

2.5 Covariates

Finally, it is necessary to identify other participant characteristics that may affect the outcome of this research, i.e., covariates. Consideration should be given to issue involvement as previous influencer studies have shown that it contributes to endorsement effectiveness (e.g., Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019), including as a covariate (Lou and Yuan, 2019). The term 'involvement' is used to describe the extent to which a product is intrinsically important to an individual and has personal meaning (Radder and Huang, 2008).

Involvement is known to be a key motivator for information seeking, increasing the amount of consideration given to product-related information and ultimately affecting message persuasion (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019). Although involvement varies by individual consumer (Gu, Park and Konana, 2012), it is an important variable when developing advertising strategy (Laurent and Kapferer, 1985), and hence influencer deployment, because the personal relevance of a focal object is a predictor of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). According to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) issue involvement is the basis of selecting whether to process an

incoming message via a central or peripheral process, both of which are routes of persuasion (Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman, 1981). The central route is selected by a highly involved consumer and constitutes detailed consideration of the information provided, whereas the peripheral route, associated with issues of low personal relevance, is more cursory and reliant on perceptions of the source and other 'cues' (Nunes *et al.*, 2018; Petty, Cacioppo and Goldman, 1981).

Involvement has been shown to impact a woman's attitude to aesthetic services, with those who consider their appearance important expressing a more favourable disposition (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016). Consequently, involvement will be evaluated as a covariate due to this finding, the positive association between involvement and advertising effectiveness (O'Cass, 2000; Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann, 1983) and the guidance of Lou and Yuan (2019) that it should be controlled when evaluating marketing practices.

Two further potential covariates worth mentioning are marital/relationship status, which has also been shown to play a significant role in decision-making concerning cosmetic surgery (Al-Yahya *et al.*, 2020) and employment, as midlife women in the workplace may believe their appearance is connected to their job security and ability to maintain an income (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2017; Honigman and Castle, 2006).

Consequently, it will be important to ensure that involvement, marital/relationship status, and employment standing are controlled to prevent their interference with the outcome of this research.

2.6 Chapter Summary

Assessment of the impact of attitudes and beliefs on the ability of an influencer to realise an endorsement's desired outcome is the focus of this research. In totality, this review of the literature has described how influencers can act as endorsers, explored attitudes and beliefs related to the focal product, dermal filler treatment for age concealment, and reviewed four

effectiveness measures, perceived credibility, acceptance of information, comparison behaviour and booking intention.

Lastly, the evidence for three additional variables, involvement, marital/relationship status and employment, to be considered as covariates was reviewed.

The following chapter explains the rationale for the adoption of the foundation theory – the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), describes the hypotheses to be tested and visualises the conceptual model underpinning this research.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL MODEL

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The theoretical framework for this research originates in the exploration of social behaviour and enables the evaluation of the voluntary intention to act. As laid out in the previous chapter, attitudes and beliefs, including those previously established, contribute to the persuasiveness of a post or review (Cheung *et al.*, 2009; Erkan and Evans, 2016) and ultimately will determine followers' response to the influencer's endorsement.

Three theories are utilised as the guiding principles of this research; the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016) and Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) were described in sections 2.2.4.2 and 2.2.4.3 respectively of the previous chapter. The third, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) acts as the foundation theory or cornerstone of the research as it provides both structure for the evaluation of the impact variables and effectiveness measures described in the prior chapter and connection to the other theories. The rationale for using this well-established theory will be outlined in the first section of this chapter.

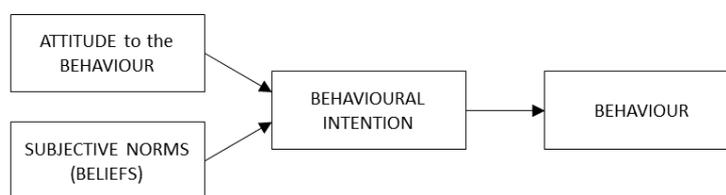
Thereafter, the conceptual model will be built systematically, piece by piece, combining each of the constituent variables into a diagrammatic representation of the proposed network of inter-relationships described in Chapter 2. By the end of this chapter, the validity of the conceptual model as a basis on which to conduct the research will be clear, and further, operationalised to link to the study's methodology.

3.2 The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)

At the centre of this research is the desire to evaluate those attitudes and beliefs held by followers that have the potential to impact an influencer-led endorsement. To test the boundaries of influencer marketing, this research focuses on the endorsement of a product that is associated with well-documented and largely negative attitudinal and belief-related

preconceptions. Consequently, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) is selected as the foundation theory because it advances that attitudes and beliefs jointly determine behavioural intention, which is the driving force behind actual behaviour – i.e., intending to do something is a strong indicator that it will be done (Sheeran and Orbell, 1998). The stronger the attitudes and beliefs (subjective norms), the stronger will be the intent (Hale, Householder and Greene, 2002).

Figure 3.1 The Theory of Reasoned Action



Source: Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975

Originally developed to assess health-related issues, the TRA has been the basis of the evaluation of exercise behaviours (Andrew Smith and Biddle, 1999) and condom usage (Albarracin, 2001). It has also been used as a framework for research into consumer behaviour, such as coupon usage (Shimp and Kavas, 1984), brand loyalty (Ha, 1998), and environmental concerns (Bang *et al.*, 2000).

The attitudinal element is described as Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB) and is made up of a cognition component derived from behavioural beliefs (what we think of people who behave in a certain way) and an affect component resulting from the evaluation of the outcome of that behaviour in terms of possible positive or negative consequences. An individual's ATTB is automatically formed once beliefs link behaviour and a specific outcome (Ajzen, 1989).

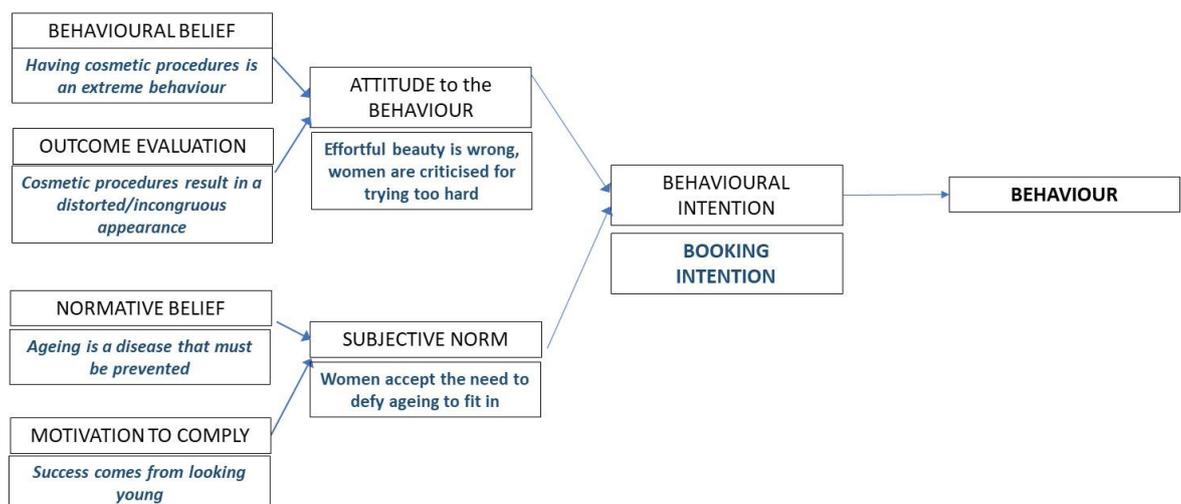
The subjective norm component of the theory describes the perceived social pressure to carry out a behaviour (Fishbein, 1963) and takes into account normative beliefs, whether the behaviour is considered acceptable based on the actions of referent individuals such as family, friends and peers, and the motivation to comply with their perspective on it (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Consequently, the effect of the subjective norm depends on the acceptance of the belief and individual motivation to do as prescribed (Hale, Householder and Greene, 2012).

Although appearing to be equal in Figure 3.1, the relative importance of ATTB and the subjective norm will undoubtedly vary between different behaviours and different populations. For example, only subjective norms significantly predicted intention to exercise (Andrew Smith and Biddle, 1999), whereas condom use intention was more dependent on attitudes (Albarracin *et al.*, 2001).

Considering the context of this research, the intention to undergo cosmetic surgery has been the subject of two studies based on the theory. One found a significant correlation between the constructs of the TRA (Barati *et al.*, 2020) and the second showed a significant relationship between attitudes toward cosmetic surgery and participants' behavioural intention (Dehdari *et al.*, 2015). To assess the suitability of the TRA to serve as the foundation theory, the issues relating to dermal filler treatment described in section 2.3.1, i.e., having a cosmetic procedure is an extreme behaviour resulting in a distorted appearance that is likely to be judged critically, and that ageing should be prevented because looking younger is preferable, have been represented in the format of the TRA, resulting in the following proposed mechanism:

Figure 3.2 How the Theory of Reasoned Action links to the proposed research



Therefore, the adoption of this theoretical framework for the evaluation of the endorsement of dermal filler treatment by influencers is considered an appropriate choice, and one that offers a holistic evaluation of the effects of associated attitudes and beliefs on the endorsement.

Indeed, the need for a rounded approach that takes into account both attitudes and beliefs is the reason that using the IACM (Erkan and Evans, 2016) alone as the theoretical framework is insufficient. Although Erkan and Evans (2016) acknowledge their model was partly derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), it does not specifically incorporate the effect of subjective norms. It is not clear in either the original inductive work on IACM done by Erkan and Evans (2016) or the Nunes *et al*, (2018) deductive test of the theory whether either group felt that normative beliefs and motivation to comply were inherent in their evaluation of attitude, but it seems unlikely that they would make this assumption as each group was demonstrably familiar with the TRA and the contribution of subjective norms to behavioural intention. Therefore, a potential criticism of the IACM could be that it does not take into account either normative beliefs or the receiver's motivation to engage in the suggested behaviour.

In this research, where marketing practice improvements are the aim, it is important to determine how both attitudes and beliefs affect the behaviour of the population under consideration (Fishbein & Yzer, 2003) so that all potential barriers to behaviour can be identified. Moreover, consumer beliefs are fundamental components of behaviour, and consequently, the contributions of both behavioural and normative beliefs should be taken into account (Fishbein, 1963) as will be the case in this research.

Before moving on in this explanation of the theoretical foundation of this research, it is worth reviewing the choice of the Theory of Reasoned Action over the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991). The latter was developed by Icek Ajzen to extend the TRA to take into account situations where the focal actor may not have complete volitional control over a behaviour, e.g., where the lack of available time, money, skills or the cooperation of another person limits an individual's ability to perform the

behaviour. The TPB, therefore, includes the component of *perceived behavioural control* and hence, a person's perception of their control over behavioural performance is a further determinant of intention, in addition to attitude and subjective norm (Glanz, Rimer and Viswanath, 2008). In this research, however, respondents were instructed to assume they have sufficient financial and other resources to readily access dermal filler treatment should they desire to do so, and consequently, the behaviour is assumed to be determined by attitudinal and normative control (Albarracin *et al.*, 2003), meaning that the TRA is an appropriate choice for the foundation theory of this research.

3.3 Research Framework

This research empirically evaluates followers' attitudes and beliefs as determinants of four measures of the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers, based on an interpretation of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Hypothesised relationships between those follower attitudes and beliefs and each of the effectiveness measures are collated into groups, hence:

H1: determinants of Perceived Credibility

H2: determinants of Acceptance of Information

H3: determinants of Comparison Behaviour

H4: determinants of Booking Intention

The relationship between subjective norm and attitude to the behaviour, in this context, designated as H5, completes the investigation.

3.3.1 Attitudes to be Evaluated

Expanding from the single attitudinal component of the TRA, Attitude to the Behaviour, this research evaluates the effect of two additional dispositional variables as described in the previous chapter. These are Perceived Similarity (PS), and Attitude Congruence (AC).

Although Perceived Similarity has not commonly been referred to as an attitude, whether one thinks of another individual as similar could be considered either 'a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to a person' per Ajzen's (1989) definition of what constitutes an attitude, or as a behavioural belief as it represents what we think of another person who behaves in a certain way. Hence, Perceived Similarity is included within the group of attitudes to be evaluated. The same applies to Attitude Congruence, the extent to which one considers another's values to be in sync with their own.

Further, this research sheds light on any difference in effect that may exist between aspects of the followers' mindset that were established before the encounter with the endorsement message and those that are formed after that point. Consequently, the variables assumed to determine the effectiveness of the endorsement are categorised as either 'pre-existing' or 'emergent'. Attitude to the Behaviour is therefore considered pre-existing as it represents a salient element of their mindset that they bring to the evaluation of the endorsement. In contrast, Perceived Similarity and Attitude Congruence represent emergent follower dispositions as, in this research, only can arise once the endorsement has been received and reviewed. That these factors are truly emergent is an important aspect of this research for a reason that should be mentioned. The need to have a clear distinction between emergent and pre-existing factors led to the choice to use a fictitious rather than real influencer (see section 4.7.2) because doing so guarantees that participants could not have formed particular attitudinal positions towards her in advance of the research, and so these aspects of their response were indeed emergent rather than pre-existing. Hence, there is a clear contrast between attitudes that are established and those that are newly formed. In totality, all of the emergent attitudes correspond to the respondent's reaction to the influencer and are therefore referred to collectively as 'attitudes to the influencer' in keeping with the term commonly used in the influencer literature (e.g., Belanche *et al.*, 2021; Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020; Lou, 2022). The investigation of two categories of attitude in the way described is analogous to the work of

Mitchell and Olsen (1981) who determined that both product attitudes and beliefs and attitude toward the advertisement mediated behavioural intention. So, it was appropriate to look at the contributions of both product-generated and endorser-generated responses in this research.

3.3.2 Subjective Norm to be Evaluated

In addition to the effect of attitudes as drivers of behaviour, the TRA states that the expectations of others also act as motivators of a decision to act in a certain way. This normative component, or subjective norm, derives, according to the theory, from the individual's perspective on what is considered normal (i.e., normative beliefs) and their motivation to comply with those normal behaviours. 'Youth-Ideal', derived by the researcher from literature reports of an increasingly dominant focus on the maintenance of physical, including facial, youthfulness (see section 2.3.2) is the proposed subjective norm component in this research.

'Youth-Ideal', as conceived by the researcher, represents a normative belief resulting from society's expectation of how a midlife woman should manage her ageing appearance, where the motivations to comply are the apparent social and other benefits of defying biological ageing. Hence, based on the derivation of a subjective norm provided by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), it can be described as such. The researcher coined the term 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation to indicate acceptance of this subjective norm and its integration into the female consciousness.

In this research, Youth-Ideal Internalisation is considered a pre-existing aspect of followers' mindset as it was established before they reviewed the endorsement communication.

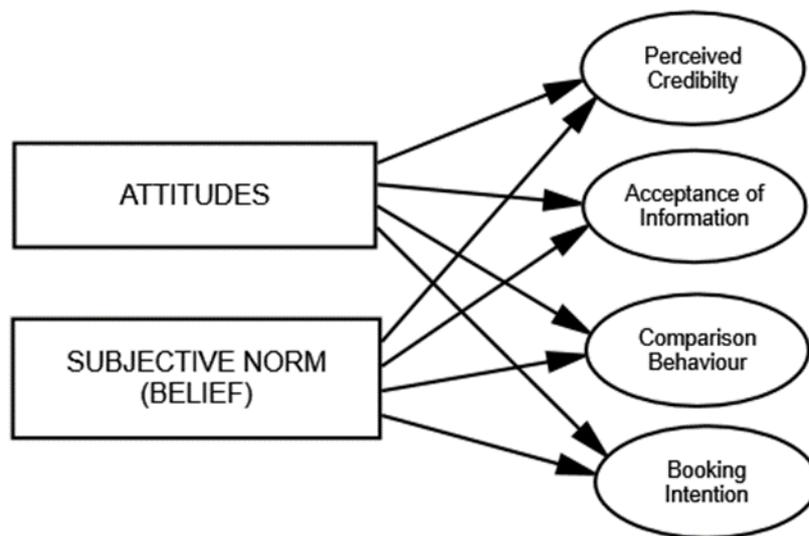
3.3.3 Effectiveness Measures

As explained in section 2.4, this research involves four effectiveness measures. These are Perceived Credibility (PC), Acceptance of Information (AOI), Comparison Behaviour (CB) and Booking Intention (BI). Both AOI and CB are evaluated as behaviours, i.e., the respondents' actions subsequent to their review of the influencer's posts, whereas BI is evaluated as a potential

future behaviour, i.e., the respondents' intention to make a booking with an appropriate practitioner in the future.

A diagrammatic representation of this research is shown in Figure 3.3. The impact of attitudes and a subjective norm on the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement is assessed using four effectiveness markers, PerceivedCredibility, Acceptance of Information, Comparison Behaviour and Booking Intention to represent the behavioural component of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

Figure 3.3 Modification of the Theory of Reasoned Action to accommodate the use of four effectiveness measures



3.4 Hypothesis Development

The conceptual model for this research consists of path diagrams for the groups of hypotheses mentioned earlier in this chapter (see Section 3.3). Each of those groups relates to a series of relationships between an effectiveness measure, acting as a dependent variable, and the proposed determinants, acting as independent variables. Those relationships are explained in the remainder of this section.

3.4.1 H1 – Determinants of Perceived Credibility

The receiver's belief in the influencer's credibility is an important contributor to endorsement efficacy (Lou and Yuan, 2019), as a credible influencer is persuasive (Nunes *et al.*, 2018; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020) and an effective endorser (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Wright, 2019).

There is not a large body of data revealing the origins of the receiver's, in this case, the follower's, stance on the credibility of the originator and understanding potential antecedents of credibility will add to existing knowledge of influencer marketing. Consequently, this research seeks to determine the role of each of the four impact variables, perceived similarity, attitude congruence, attitude to the behaviour and belief in the 'Youth-Ideal' archetype, in the determination of credibility.

i) The Impact of Perceived Similarity on Perceived Credibility

As described in section 2.2.1, believing oneself to be similar to another person can engender a sense of closeness and kinship, so, it seems reasonable to surmise that there will also be an associated belief in the other's credibility (Chen, 2020). Indeed, some authors have included similarity as a component of credibility, along with trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (e.g., Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen, 2015).

Perceptions of similarity and credibility are also reported to be directionally aligned, including by Atkinson, Brady and Casas (1981) where sexual orientation similarity was related to more positive credibility ratings.

Purchaser: supplier similarity is significantly related to trustworthiness, a component of credibility (Ohanian, 1990), particularly early on in the relationship, in a way that can be thought of as analogous to followers having

never met the individual they are assessing for signs of credibility (Nagel *et al.*, 2021). As yet influencer research has not specifically investigated how perceived credibility might be affected by feelings of attribute similarity (Voorveld, 2019). Even so, based on offline advertising research (Ohanian, 1990), it seems reasonable that a relationship between these two receiver response variables would also translate to influencer marketing and therefore, the first hypothesis to be tested in this research is:

H1a: Perceived Similarity (PS) has a positive impact on Perceived Credibility (PC) (PS → PC)

ii) The Impact of Attitude Congruence on Perceived Credibility

As discussed earlier (see section 2.2.2), the similarity of values, or attitude congruence, is associated with an interpersonal connection (McGuire, 1966), and attraction (Byrne and Lamberth, 1971; Condon and Crano, 1988). Believing another person to be attractive is, according to Ohanian (1990), one of the three building blocks of credibility. There exists then, a link between attitude congruence, attraction and credibility (Atkinson, Brady and Casas, 1981), where the latter is impacted by the resemblance between the originator's perceived values and those of the receiver (Wilson and Sherrell, 1993). Again, the assessment of attitude congruence as an antecedent of perceived credibility is yet to feature in influencer research, although there is evidence in other areas. For example, when investigating the psychology of counselling, Lewis and Walsh (1980) saw that counsellors who agreed with their clients' stated views were rated as more credible. This supports the second hypothesis to be tested, which is:

H1b: Attitude Congruence (AC) has a positive impact on Perceived Credibility (PC) (AC → PC)

iii) The Impact of Attitude to the Behaviour on Perceived Credibility

Consumers tend to evaluate the credibility of a source subjectively, making assumptions because they do not have sufficient information about the sender to truly understand their motivations or opinions (Ayeh, Au and Law, 2013). That subjectivity also applies to the content of the message, and hence, those who are already receptive to communication because they

have an interest in the subject matter will be more likely to judge it as credible (Wathen and Burkell, 2002).

Although the endorsement literature is more concerned with the impact of credibility on attitude to the brand (e.g., Lafferty, Goldsmith and Newell, 2002), an influencer's promotional patronages will also likely have an impact on their followers' perceptions of their credibility, which can be damaged by actions that followers consider inappropriate (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). So, it follows that a pre-existing attitude relating to the endorsed product and its uses forms one aspect of followers' subjective assessment of the influencer's communication. As a result, perceived credibility will be impacted by the advocated behaviour's fit with the receiver's disposition towards it (Wilson and Sherrell, 1993) enabling attitude to the product, or use of the product, to have a direct impact on perceived credibility. This assumes the communication is two-sided or balanced, in that the endorser makes both positive and negative comments about the product allowing the receiver's true perspective to be unaffected by overt bias on the part of the endorser (Kamins *et al.*, 1989; Kelman, 1961).

Whereas much has been written about the importance of the match-up between the endorser and the endorsed product (Breves *et al.*, 2019; Kamins and Gupta, 1994; Till and Busler, 2000), and how a close fit leads to increased perceived credibility (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020), it is the opinion of the researcher that careful selection of the products to endorse is necessary not just because the Match-Up Hypothesis requires it, but also because of the importance of the harmony between follower and product (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2017). It is proposed, then:

H1c: Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB) has a positive impact on Perceived Credibility (PC) (ATTB → PC)

iv) The Impact of Youth-Ideal Internalisation on Perceived Credibility

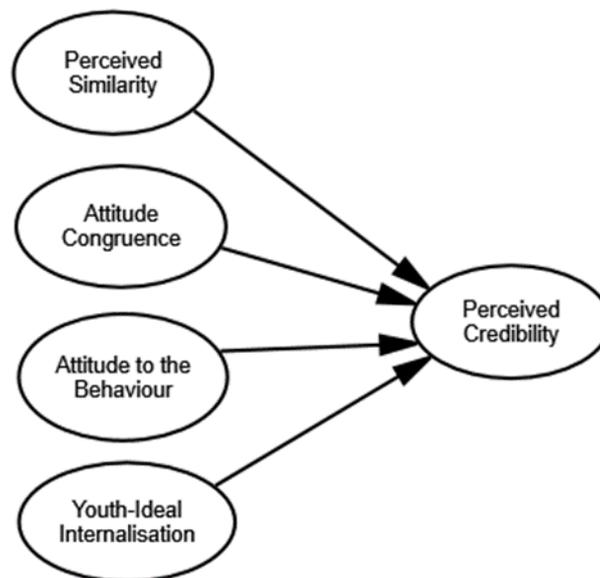
A lack of coherence between the influencer and follower based on attribute similarity, attitude congruence or attitude to use of the endorsed product, has the potential to correspond to reduced perceived credibility. Each of these constructs forms part of the receiver's subjective assessment of the message

and the source as described earlier. Likewise, receiver beliefs can also have an effect (Wathen and Burkell, 2002). Therefore, possession of the belief proposed in section 2.3.2, referred to as ‘Youth-Ideal’ Internalisation (YII), where women cognitively buy into socially defined appearance ideals related to youthfulness, is assumed to impact judgement of credibility based on greater interest in the content of the communication. It is therefore proposed:

H1d: Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) has a positive impact on Perceived Credibility (PC) (YII → PC)

A diagrammatic representation of the hypotheses making up H1 is shown in Figure 3.4.

Figure 3.4 The H1 Group of Hypotheses



3.4.2 H2 – Determinants of Acceptance of Information

The Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016) describes how the receiver’s attitude to the information provided and their assessment of its quality and credibility determine its acceptance. This research extends these findings by evaluating salient follower attributes as determinants of information acceptance. However, there is no consideration within the IACM model of the message receiver, and hence, any proposals concerning relationships between acceptance of information and the impact variables of interest in this study, which relate instead to followers’ response

to the influencer and the product, must be derived from other, analogous research.

i) The Impact of Perceived Similarity on Acceptance of Information

One such source of instruction is research on the acceptance of advice. A greater willingness to accept advice proffered is seen when the advice-giver is of the same gender and of a similar age (Gino, Shang and Croson, 2009), which translates to the online world as product reviews having greater influence if they are from someone who is perceived to be similar (Shin *et al.*, 2017). In light of these analogous data points, it is proposed:

H2a: Perceived Similarity (PS) has a positive impact on Acceptance of Information (AOI) (PS → AOI)

ii) The Impact of Attitude Congruence on Acceptance of Information

It is noted in the article from Gino, Shang and Croson (2009) that deeper likenesses, such as those based on values and morals, are often assumed based on surface-level similarity perceptions (e.g., gender, age, etc.). They suggest that their finding that advice is more often accepted when given by a similar other is due to these *assumed* similarities, rather than those that were more apparent. On this basis, it is proposed:

H2b: Attitude Congruence (AC) has a positive impact on Acceptance of Information (AOI) (AC → AOI)

iii) The Impact of Attitude to the Behaviour on Acceptance of Information

The IACM proposes a positive relationship exists between a favourable attitude towards a message and its acceptance (Erkan and Evans, 2016), derived from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) that has it that attitude to the behaviour is an antecedent of behavioural intention. Although the IACM involves attitude *to the information* rather than to a specific behaviour, it is proposed that attitude to a behaviour would have the same influence on information acceptance. Indeed, Nunes *et al.* (2018) applied a similar extrapolation of the

IACM in their work on influencer marketing, utilising attitude *to the purchase* of the recommended products/services. Therefore, it is proposed:

H2c: Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB) has a positive impact on
Acceptance of Information (AOI) (ATTB → AOI)

iv) The Impact of ‘Youth-Ideal’ Internalisation on Acceptance of Information

Interestingly, Erkan and Evans (2016) did not include all elements of the TRA in their model. Specifically, they excluded the subjective norms component, which refers to the impact of the expectations of society and referent others on an individual’s intended behaviour, because they thought it would have no impact in the context of eWOM. In contrast, as argued in section 2.3.2, it is highly likely that pressures or norms, in the form of the proposed appearance standard ‘Youth-Ideal’, have an impact on how women manage their appearance, and so it is suggested:

H2d: Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) has a positive impact on
Acceptance of Information (AOI) (YII → AOI)

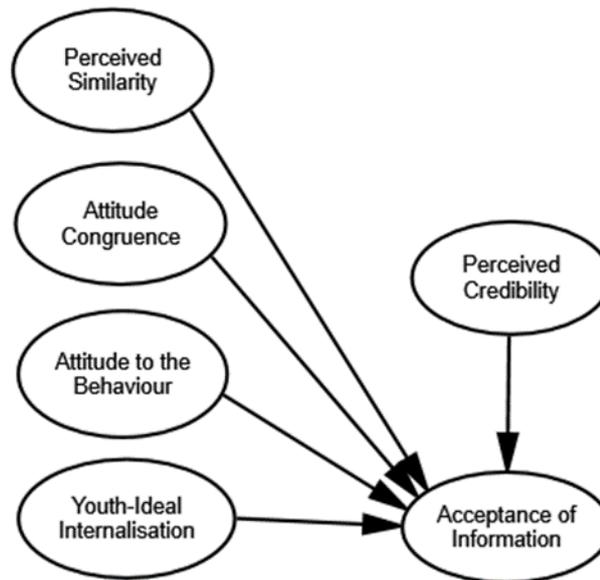
v) The Impact of Perceived Credibility on Acceptance of Information

According to Nunes *et al.* (2017), consumer perceptions of influencer credibility affect their acceptance of the information provided. Although the study was not limited to a particular market sector, brand or product, the authors did not highlight any reasons why the link would not have universal applicability. So, it seems reasonable to assume that perceived credibility (of the influencer) acts also as an independent variable, impacting other effectiveness measures. Hence, it is proposed:

H2e: Perceived Credibility (PC) has a positive impact on Acceptance
of Information (AOI) (PC→ AOI)

A diagrammatic representation of the hypotheses making up H2 is shown in Figure 3.5.

Figure 3.5 The H2 Group of Hypotheses



3.4.3 H3 – Determinants of Comparison Behaviour

This section concerns hypothesised determinants of the act of comparing with the influencer. As this research pertains to the endorsement of an appearance-related product it is appropriate to consider this natural inclination.

i) The Impact of Perceived Similarity on Comparison Behaviour

The urge to compare with others for self-evaluation is dependent on perceptions of similarity between the comparer and the comparison target. Although Festinger (1954) failed to define ‘similar’ in the context of the comparison target, his primary focus was on the evaluation of abilities and opinions, resulting in comparisons made based on similarities in performance. Subsequently, it has been shown that individuals select comparison targets due to similarity in associated, relevant attributes, such as practice, experience and age or a particular attribute alone, such as physical appearance (Goethals and Darley, 1977). Indeed, females, who are generally the audience for beauty influencers (Lokithasan *et al.*, 2019), are particularly keen to make comparisons with other females because of their uncertainty about their appearance (Jones, 2001; Luther, 2009).

Many authors have determined that consumers compare themselves, even unconsciously (Chatard *et al.*, 2017), with individuals featured in advertising,

whether it be in print, online, or around TV programmes and films (Buunk and Dijkstra, 2011; Jones, 2001; Lewis and Weaver, 2019; Patrick, Neighbors and Knee, 2004; Richins, 1991; Want, Vickers and Amos 2009). Indeed, in the beauty industry advertising tends to use very attractive models, so-called '*idealised advertising imagery*' (Gulas and McKeage, 2000, p.17) who are assumed to have benefitted from the featured product's effectiveness (Sääksjärvi, Hellén and Balabanis, 2016). Even so, consumers reportedly engage in comparison behaviour on viewing such advertisements (Richins, 1991), a finding that could be interpreted as further evidence of consumers' aspiration to be similar to the advertisement's featured individual (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

Similar findings have been shown with social media advertising (Meier and Schäfer, 2018), for example, using Facebook or Instagram (Brown and Tiggemann, 2016). In this medium consumers can be targeted with advertisements designed to appeal to their profile, tastes and/or interests (Jung, 2017), increasing their opportunity to compare with an aspirational, similar other (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018), in other words, to someone who is perceived to represent the "ideal" (Feltman and Szymanski, 2018; Tiggemann *et al.*, 2018;) in the eyes of the targeted receiver.

Comparison behaviour has been demonstrated in influencer marketing too (Chae, 2018; Kim and Kim, 2017), and so, it is appropriate, particularly considering the context of this research to anticipate followers comparing themselves with the influencer, if, per Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954), they perceive there to be similarities between them. The first hypothesis relating to comparison behaviour is, therefore:

H3a: Perceived Similarity (PS) has a positive impact on Comparison Behaviour (CB) (PS→CB)

ii) **The Impact of Perceived Dissimilarity on Comparison Behaviour**

In online studies, little attention has been paid to the consequences of followers feeling little or no perceived similarity with the influencer (Sääksjärvi, Hellén and Balabanis, 2016). Potentially this is due to the

assumption that this is a scenario that does not arise in circumstances where followers deliberately choose to connect. Yet, it seems unlikely that followers never seek out influencers whom they consider different, possibly enjoying the contrast in their lifestyles or activities. Hence, an understanding of the consequences of the lack of similarity, i.e., divergence or dissimilarity, seems necessary.

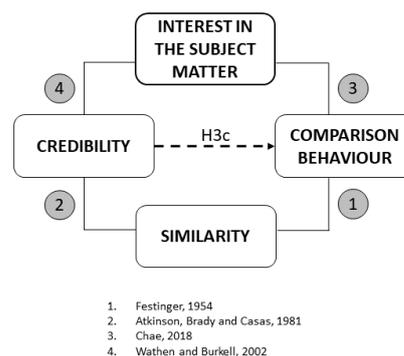
Festinger (1954) describes the effect of dissimilarity thus '*a person does not tend to evaluate his opinions or his abilities by comparison with others who are too divergent from himself*' (p.120). Comparison, then, is more likely with a similar rather than a dissimilar other (Byrne, Clore Jr and Worchel, 1966), and even if the comparison does take place, it has little effect (Wood, 1989). More likely though is that any urge to compare with a dissimilar other (i.e., a professional model) is easily dismissed (Hogg, Bruce and Hough, 1999). However, even though those data points suggest a lack of comparison with a dissimilar other, it seems logical that comparison is necessary for the feeling of dissimilarity to be constructed in the first place. Indeed, if comparison is an automatic process, it will happen regardless of the presence of similarity (Want, Vickers and Amos, 2009) and rather, the issue is not whether comparison happens but how the direction of the comparison, either upwards or downwards, determines subsequent action (Mussweiler, Rüter and Epstude, 2004). Thus, testing the degree of similarity or dissimilarity with the person featured in an endorsement scenario determines the comparison direction (Sääksjärvi, Hellén and Balabanis, 2016), which in turn governs what the comparer does next, i.e., whether they take steps toward self-improvement due to an upwards comparison or whether the result is inactivity due to downwards comparison. Hence, it is proposed that followers will unconsciously compare with the influencer even if they perceive there to be dissimilarities between them, and so, it follows that:

H3b: Perceived Dissimilarity (PD) has a positive impact on
Comparison Behaviour (CB) (PD→CB)

iii) The Impact of Perceived Credibility on Comparison Behaviour

Although it has not been featured in the literature, several seemingly disparate findings relating to credibility, comparison, and similarity can be connected to support the existence of a direct relationship between perceived credibility and comparison behaviour. Firstly, that similarity is the trigger for comparison behaviour according to Festinger (1954). Secondly, the correlation, reported by Atkinson, Brady and Casas (1981), between similarity and credibility. Thirdly, the link between comparison behaviour and interest in the content posted by the influencer (Chae, 2018), and finally, the connection between interest in the subject matter and credibility (Wathen and Burkell, 2002). A visual description of the proposed derivation of a relationship between credibility and comparison is shown in Figure 3.6 below:

Figure 3.6 How the Extant Literature Support Hypothesis 3c

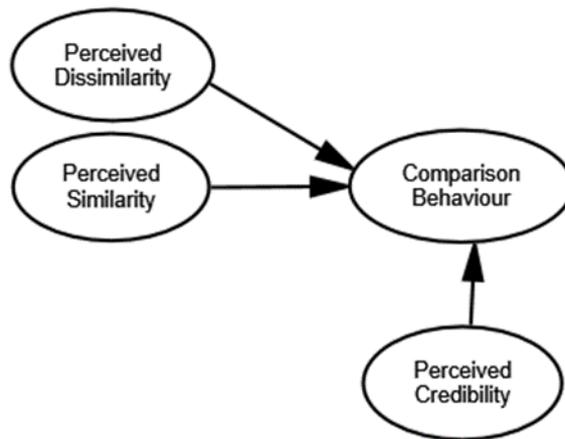


Hence, based on an amalgam of these findings, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3c: Perceived Credibility (PC) has a positive impact on Comparison Behaviour (CB) (PC → CB)

A diagrammatic representation of the hypotheses making up H3 is shown in Figure 3.7.

Figure 3.7 The H3 Group of Hypotheses



3.4.4 H4 – Determinants of Booking Intention

This section explains how each of the impact variables is proposed to affect followers' intention to book a consultation with an aesthetic practitioner.

i) The Impact of Perceived Similarity on Booking Intention

Several influencer studies have shown a positive relationship between perceived similarity and purchase intention (e.g., Balaban and Mustăţea, 2019; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020; Lou and Yuan, 2019), including within the beauty market (e.g., Wright, 2019). Followers are more disposed to want to own or utilise a product endorsed by an influencer with whom they identify (Abdullah *et al.*, 2020). Perceived similarity has also been shown to contribute to persuasiveness and interest in a product (Yuan and Lou, 2020). Hence, it follows that a follower who considers themselves similar to an influencer or aspires to be similar to them is more likely to express their intention to purchase the endorsed product. Aspiration to be similar, already discussed in section 2.2.1, is also salient here. Seemingly, feeling too similar to an influencer, leaving nothing with which to aspire, can have a negative effect, resulting in a lack of desire to acquire the product or service (Albert, Ambroise and Valette-Florence, 2017). On balance, though, the evidence is supportive of the following hypothesis:

H4a: Perceived Similarity (PS) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (PS→ BI)

ii) The Impact of Attitude Congruence on Booking Intention

Literature concerning the effect of attitude congruence on behavioural intention is contradictory. Both positive (Simpson *et al.*, 2000) and negative findings (Mazzini Muda, 2020) have been reported. Therefore, this research will test a hypothesis based on the same premise as the proposed relationship between attitude congruence and acceptance of information. In section 2.2.2 it was queried whether the effects attributed to general perceptions of similarity may have been due to similarities in values and morals (Gino, Shang and Croson, 2009). And so, with that in mind, a relationship is proposed between deep-seated similarity (i.e., attitude congruence) and booking intention:

H4b: Attitude Congruence (AC) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (AC→ BI)

iii) The Impact of Attitude to the Behaviour on Booking Intention

The next two hypotheses in this group (4c and 4d) are derived directly from the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which states that attitudes and beliefs are antecedents of behavioural intention. However, for the construct attitude to the behaviour (ATTB), there are also supportive data in the influencer literature that do not reference the TRA (e.g., Astuti and Risqiani, 2020), including findings indicating strong alignment between the consumer and the product can lead to a more favourable attitude towards the product and greater purchase intention (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Hence, the following is proposed:

H4c: Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (ATTB→ BI)

iv) The Impact of Youth-Ideal Internalisation on Booking Intention

Normative influences, including appearance ideals, encourage conformity as a means of achieving social approval (Tsao *et al.*, 2015), so it is no surprise that the internalisation of beliefs relating to physical appearance has been associated with interest in cosmetic surgery (Nerini, Matera and Stefanile, 2014), particularly for women who are susceptible to pressures to act due to the expectation of others (Sharp, Tiggemann and Mattiske, 2014). Also,

brand attachment can build for a product that appears to deliver the means to achieve a version of the ideal self (Japutra, Ekinci and Simkin, 2019).

For an individual who has internalised belief in 'Youth-Ideal', the goal will be a younger-looking appearance and, it is anticipated, the acceptance of age concealment tools as a means of achieving the desired self-improvement. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H4d: Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (ATTB→ BI)

Finally, it is important to assess the impact of the other effectiveness measures (Perceived Credibility (PC), Acceptance of Information (AOI) and Comparison Behaviour (CB)) on Booking Intention. This assertion stems from the comment of Sundermann and Raabe (2019) that further research is needed to clarify '*the extent to which SMI [Social Media Influencer] communication can contribute to the establishment and securing of the economic position of a commercial entity* (p. 291). Therefore, it seems appropriate to complete the evaluation of the potential predictors of booking intention.

v) The Impact of Perceived Credibility on Booking Intention

As explained in section 2.4.1, a credible influencer is a persuasive endorser (Lou and Yuan, 2019) and an effective driver of behavioural intention (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). Hence, providing the influencer is perceived to be credible by their followers, their endorsement of dermal filler treatment will lead to booking intention:

H4e: Perceived Credibility (PC) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (PC→ BI)

vi) The Impact of Acceptance of Information on Booking Intention

Nunes *et al.* (2018) demonstrated that acceptance of information has a direct impact on purchase intention, a finding which supports the Information Acceptance Model (IACM) (Erkan and Evans, 2016). The same relationship exists where online reviews and recommendations are used to aid purchase decision-making (Kumar and Benbasat, 2006). Hence, it is proposed:

H4f: Acceptance of Information (AOI) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (AOI→ BI)

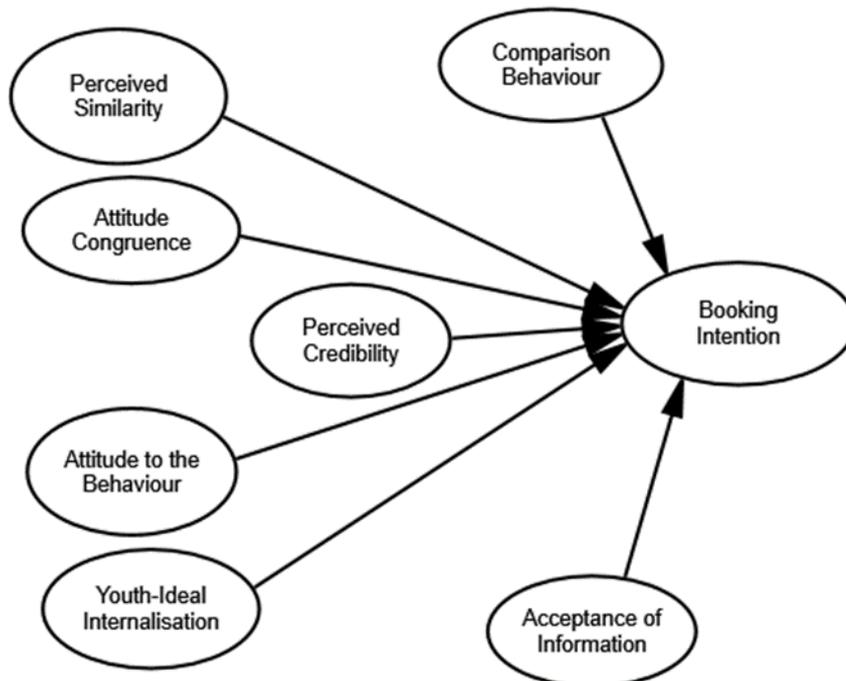
vii) The Impact of Comparison Behaviour on Booking Intention

Existing literature points to comparison behaviour being a predictor of behavioural intention. For example, in advertising research, purchase intention can result from comparison with models (Lennon, Lillethun and Buckland, 1999), although this may be mediated by dissatisfaction with the self if the models featured are highly attractive (Richins, 1991). In terms of appearance management, comparing oneself with people on social media has been associated with a desire for thinness (Jiotsa *et al.*, 2021) and consideration of cosmetic surgery (Nerini, 2014). Together these findings imply that comparison behaviour may lead to a desire to be more attractive and consequently an intention to book a consultation to investigate dermal filler treatment further. Hence, it is proposed:

H4g: Comparison Behaviour (CB) has a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) (CB→ BI)

A diagrammatic representation of the hypotheses making up H4 is shown in Figure 3.8.

Figure 3.8 The H4 Group of Hypotheses



3.4.5 H5 - The Relationship between Internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' and Attitude to Dermal Filler Treatment

As mentioned in section 2.3.2, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) have it that beliefs are the antecedents of attitudes. And so, this research should involve an investigation of the relationship between the proposed belief system, 'Youth-Ideal', and attitude to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment, i.e., attitude to the behaviour. It would be expected that the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' would positively impact attitude toward the use of dermal filler treatment. Simply, belief in the imperative to maintain a youthful appearance will lead to a more favourable attitude to the use of dermal filler treatment to achieve it. However, it is also necessary for there to be compatibility, in that both belief construct and attitude involve the same target and context (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005). Here, both relate to the management of the ageing face and the utilisation of a specific anti-ageing option available to Generation X women, and so, appear to possess the required congruence. Consequently, it is proposed that:

H5: Internalisation of Youth-Ideal (YII) will positively impact Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB) (YII → ATTB)

Testing this hypothesis will not only determine the actuality that beliefs cause attitudes in this context but in so doing, will also signal whether the belief system, 'Youth-Ideal', is compatible with attitude to the behaviour exhibited here. A diagrammatic representation of H5 is shown in Figure 3.9

Figure 3.9 Hypothesis H5



The complete conceptual model is shown in Figure 3.10. As the 'Youth-Ideal' concept has not been established in the population to be involved here, i.e.,

Generation X women, 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation is shown in the final conceptual model (see Figure 3.10) as a green rather than a blue box to represent this absence of confirmatory data. Research on 'Youth-Ideal' is necessary before the final conceptual model can be confirmed and hypothesis testing can take place. The nature of this groundwork research, together with an explanation of the selected methodology for the entire research programme is the subject of the next chapter.

3.5 Chapter Summary

In this research, the foundation theory, on which the conceptual model is based, is the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which states that an individual's decision to act is derived from their attitudes and beliefs relative to the behaviour in question. Hence, it was proposed that salient dispositions and norms will determine the success of a product endorsement activity undertaken by an influencer.

Relationships between the effectiveness measures and a series of proposed determinants, or impact variables, were hypothesised. A summary of those hypotheses is shown in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Summary of Hypotheses 1-5

		Independent Variables							
		PS	AC	ATTB	YII	PD	PC	AOI	CB
Dependent Variables	PC	1a	1b	1c	1d				
	AOI	2a	2b	2c	2d				
	CB	3a				3b	3c		
	BI	4a	4b	4c	4d		4e	4f	4g
	ATTB				5				

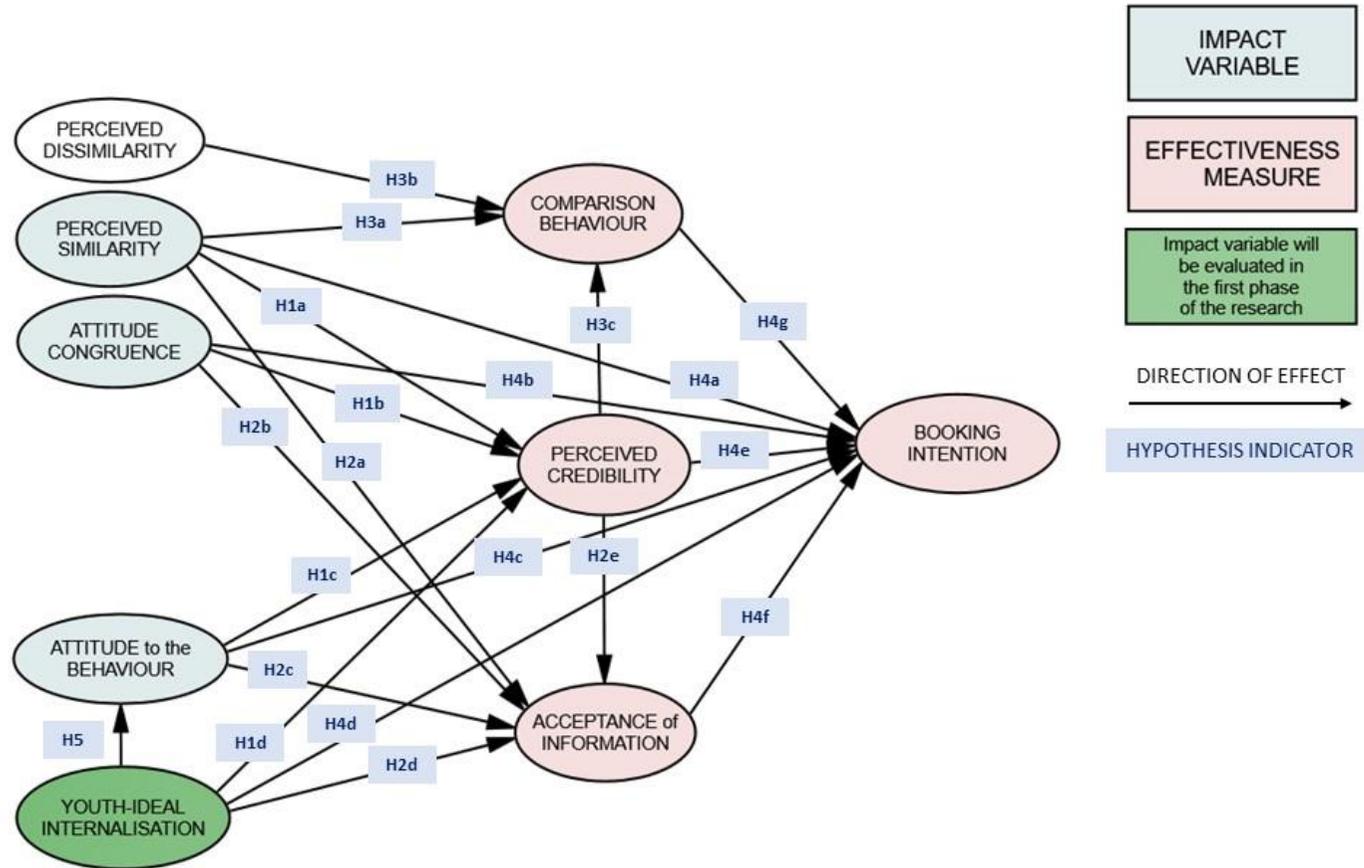
Note: AC (Attitude Congruence), AOI (Acceptance of Information), ATTB (Attitude to the Behaviour), BI (Booking Intention), CB (Comparison Behaviour), PC (Perceived Credibility), PD (Perceived Dissimilarity), PS (Perceived Similarity), YII (Youth-Ideal Internalisation)

The first hypothesis group (H1a, b, c and d) concerns the potential for the impact variables to predict followers' perceptions of the credibility of the

influencer. In the second group, four hypotheses (H2a, b, c, d and e) concern the relationship between the impact variables and acceptance of information, while H2e proposes the link between acceptance of information and perceived credibility. Next, group three has to do with comparison behaviour and how it might be related to perceived similarity (H3a), perceived dissimilarity (H3b) and perceived credibility (H3c). The fourth hypothesis group is focused on behavioural intention, specifically the intention to make a booking for a consultation with a medically qualified practitioner and proposes how it might be affected by first, the impact variables, perceived similarity (H4a), attitude congruence (H4b), attitude to the behaviour (H4c) and 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation (H4d), and then, perceived credibility (H4e), acceptance of information (H4f) and comparison behaviour (H4g). Also, the necessity of testing the relationship between the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' and attitude to the behaviour was described (H5), both as a means to investigate whether the former is an antecedent of the latter, and to assess their compatibility.

In summary, this research assesses the effects of pre-existing and emergent aspects of followers' mindsets on an influencer-led endorsement. Emergent attitudes are known collectively as attitudes to the influencer. In this way, it is possible to evaluate within the same investigation the effects of followers' response to both the product and the endorser.

Figure 3.10 The Complete Conceptual Model for this research (including assigned hypothesis indicator)



NB: Original in Colour

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Chapter Introduction

As detailed in Chapters 2 and 3, this research aimed to understand, through the lens of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers.

Specifically, this research investigated follower attitudes and beliefs salient to the use of dermal fillers for age concealment by Generation X women, and their impact on influencer effectiveness was measured using four variables derived from the literature. In the previous chapter, a conceptual model was developed to test hypothesised relationships between impact variables and effectiveness measures to demonstrate the significance of follower viewpoints and principles on the endorsement, thereby providing an important contribution to existing influencer marketing knowledge

All but one of the variables included in this research were taken from online and offline endorsement research. The concept of 'Youth-Ideal' was originated by the researcher as a derivation of existing literature concerning the relationship between ageing and appearance ideals and subsequently, the proposed impact variable, 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation, required additional investigation to explore its validity as such. Consequently, this research encompassed phases to address each of the two separate, but connected, research questions, identified as RQ1 and RQ2 based on the timing of their completion.

This chapter discusses the fundamental aspects of research methodology, including research philosophy, approach and design options, before identifying and justifying the means chosen to address each of the research questions and displaying the manner of the connection between research phases diagrammatically. The sampling strategy is then described, after which the individual procedures adopted to answer each research question are detailed in terms of the data collection method and the analytical process utilised. Finally, ethical considerations and the positionality of the researcher

are presented. The starting point of the chapter is a description of the philosophical basis on which this research rests.

4.2 Research Philosophy

Research philosophy refers to the philosophical view and assumptions of a researcher regarding how research should be conducted to develop knowledge (Collis and Hussey, 2013). An important aspect of the development of research methodology is the selection of research philosophy since traditionally the choice of methodology derives from a particular philosophical basis, or research paradigm (Bryman, 1984).

Consideration of epistemology, what constitutes knowledge, and ontology, the nature of reality (Bryman and Bell, 2011) is the starting point, and the combination of selected epistemological and ontological stances determines the research paradigm to be followed, and subsequently the appropriate methodology. Three potential research paradigms, Positivism, Interpretivism and Pragmatism, which are, according to Creswell (2014), the most widely discussed in the literature, were assessed in terms of their appropriate fit with this research. Each will be described to illustrate this process.

A scientific, objective, numerical worldview where there is a single reality is the foundation of Positivism; knowledge is measurable and built based on scales or other data collection instruments to measure variables. Positivism tends to employ quantitative and statistical analysis in an analogous way to the methods utilised in the natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

Conclusions are deduced from the resulting data to explain social situations in terms of associations between variables. Positivists use existing literature to determine theories and hypotheses and focus on numerical data to understand human behaviour (Creswell, 2014), leading to acceptance or rejection of those hypotheses.

By contrast, in Interpretivism, knowledge is derived from interpretation and relies more on feelings and emotions than on numerical data (Creswell, 2014). Interpretivists believe that multiple realities exist in the human mind and hence reality is subjective (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Taking

an inductive approach to derive theory from data, interpretivists utilise qualitative methods for data collection and analysis to understand social phenomena (Creswell, 2014).

Bryman and Bell (2011) describe Positivism and Interpretivism as two extremes of an ontological spectrum, and researchers are encouraged to opt for one or the other in a stark, binary choice, followed seamlessly by the selection of associated research methodology. Following this process, though, takes no account of the research to be undertaken, with the possibility that the method applied may not suit the problem (i.e., the research question) under investigation. Indeed, this was the circumstance here, where the aim was to answer two connected research questions. Whereas the focus of RQ1 was women's experiences of societal pressures that reinforce appearance ideals, which calls for an Interpretivist stance and consideration of non-numerical inputs such as emotions and feelings, RQ2 involved an examination of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which has most commonly been approached using a quantitative assessment of variables, per a Positivist worldview (e.g., Albarracin *et al.*, 2001; Bang *et al.*, 2000; Belleau *et al.*, 2007; Shimp and Kavas, 1984) including research on intention to have cosmetic surgery (Phuah, Ting and Kelly, 2019). Hence, the disparity in the needs of the research questions makes neither Positivism nor Interpretivism a suitable choice.

An alternative paradigm exists that claims to bridge the gap between Positivism's scientific method and Interpretivism's more naturalistic approach (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019). Originating in the United States in the 19th Century, Pragmatism has been described as an intermediary philosophical position (Holden and Lynch, 2004) that allows a researcher to give priority to their research question, meaning that the methodology is determined by the problem under investigation rather than being an automatic selection based on research philosophy.

According to Dewey (1929), Pragmatism first requires the identification of the problem, which is the primary concern rather than the methods chosen to address it. There must also be an acknowledgement of the researcher's

existing beliefs, since, at the core of the Pragmatic researcher is the acknowledgement that underlying every human action is a belief based on reality, as perceived by the individual respondent (Holden and Lynch, 2004), where each version of reality is personal (Rosenau, 1992). Further, Pragmatists accept that existing societal structures and norms will evolve as humans interact, learn, and grow, proving that reality is not constant but something that morphs as time passes (Holden and Lynch, 2004). Experience, therefore, produces knowledge from which reality can be reconstructed (Hall, 2013). Thus, the paradigm of Deweyan Pragmatism does not follow the traditional route of establishing philosophical positions on the nature of reality and the formation of knowledge (Morgan, 2014). Indeed, the central focus is on the nature of human experience, replacing the emphasis on traditional concepts of epistemology with inquiry directed towards action and outcome, and accepting that knowledge develops from the continual testing of beliefs via a feedback loop (Morgan, 2014). Further, while reality is limited by the nature of the world in which we live, interpretation of that reality is based on individual experiences, meaning that ontological arguments concerning a single reality versus a multiplicity of conceptions are, according to Morgan (2014) '*just discussions about two sides of the same coin*' (p.4).

With a clear focus on the problem(s) being addressed, Pragmatism can be associated with the combination of different methods within a single study. Quantitative techniques are employed when there is a need to assess large data sets to generalise results, whereas qualitative methods are used when the goal is to explore respondents' perspectives of social phenomena (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2009).

The choice of research philosophy and the rationale for its adoption is discussed in the next section.

4.3 Rationale for the Adopted Research Philosophy

This research was conducted within a Pragmatist paradigm based on five considerations. Firstly, the importance of individual beliefs in both Pragmatism, where beliefs dictate actions in a cyclical way that translates

into constant learning and adaptation based on an individual's experience of those actions, including the resulting outcomes (Ormerod, 2006) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), which posits that behavioural intention is the result of established beliefs, perspectives on norms and an understanding of the potential consequent outcomes. There is synchronicity, therefore, in the significance of beliefs in two critical components of the research – the Theoretical Framework (see Chapter 3) and the chosen research philosophy.

Secondly, to a Pragmatist, experience is the ultimate truth, leading to the adoption of better actions in a particular context, and experience is how reality is perceived (Silcock, 2015). The stated purpose of this research is to contribute to existing knowledge relating to the optimal deployment of influencers as product endorsers, and therefore as a Pragmatist, the researcher is recognising that one aim of the research is improved marketing practice.

Thirdly, as a theory of truth, Pragmatism states that the basis of knowledge is experience (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019), which is both the means to understand reality (Shannon-Baker, 2016) and causal in the formation of beliefs (Dewey, 1929). Pragmatists claim that beliefs, actions, and experiences are intrinsically linked, and inseparable from the situations and context in which they occur, with beliefs relating to how to act in certain situations being supported by previous experiences and the expectation of future outcomes. As those outcomes change, so do allied beliefs. Human actions, therefore, can never be separated from past experiences and from beliefs that have originated from those experiences (Feilzer, 2010). Reality is therefore a normative concept based on the freedom to believe what we want in any given situation (Feilzer, 2010). Hence, the evaluation of human activity is at the heart of problem-solving (Morgan, 2014) and so the focus of research should be directed towards the investigation of beliefs and the actions they engender (Denzin, 2010). In terms of the research described here, experiences of ageing and beliefs relating to the use of age concealment processes (Chasteen *et al.*, 2011; Macia, Duboz and Chev e, 2015) by Generation X women (Calasanti *et al.*, 2018) were evaluated to

understand prevailing realities for this population, which was subsequently tested as part of a multi-variant evaluation of the effectiveness of influencer marketing measured using respondent actions and intentions to enable the hoped-for improvement in practice described earlier.

Although the experiences of the women to be involved in the research are reflected in their realities, humans do not generally act alone or without input from others, and hence beliefs and actions are inherently social (Morgan, 2014). For Dewey, the heart of Pragmatism was the concept of Inquiry, or an exercise undertaken to examine beliefs through action, and research is a form of Inquiry that involves aspects of everyday life (1929). Consequently, beliefs can only be judged in terms of the actions they engender (Ormerod, 2006), and so it is appropriate to assess the impact of beliefs in the context of the evaluation of stated behavioural intentions. In this research, Generation X women's response to social pressure to behave in a certain way, concerning facial ageing, was examined as an example of normative reality, and the formation of beliefs as a result of either personal or third-party experiences was evaluated. Consequently, the resulting intended actions of target participants, following receipt of stimuli advocating a certain action, were determined.

This research, therefore, acknowledges that knowledge and reality are based on beliefs that are socially constructed (Morgan, 2014). Although knowledge is based on experiences unique to the individual it is shaped by their existence within society, and through the investigation of actions and experiences, Pragmatists aim to solve practical problems in the real world (Creswell, 2014; Morgan, 2007).

The fourth consideration supporting the adoption of a Pragmatic stance is the acceptance that reality is an individual construct, which may be shared by others, and is constantly evolving. Research, therefore, is an investigation of some part of reality that generates knowledge that is subject to change (Feilzer, 2010) as beliefs develop over generations and, at any point in time, can only be properly judged by the assessment of resultant actions (Ormerod, 2006). Experiences resulting from actions reconstruct reality in a continuous loop of progress (Hall, 2013), and hence knowledge evolves as

the circumstances under which it was generated change (Tashakkori, Teddlie and Sines, 2012). Indeed, Philipps and Burbules (2000) have proposed that subjective states, usually referred to as realities, should probably be called perspectives to better reflect their transitory nature. The speed of this evolution is not so great as to make any knowledge generated by research invalid, however, knowledge should indeed be viewed as being in a state of constant development.

It was appropriate, therefore, to adopt a Pragmatist approach for the research outlined in this thesis due to both the developing nature of the use of influencers as product endorsers, and the evolution of the experience of ageing for women in the early 21st Century, which is markedly different to that of their grandmothers (Katz, 2001) and will likely evolve further in the years to come. Further, dermal filler treatment, available only in the last decade or two (Gold, 2007) has shown a rapid increase in recent times (ASPS, 2019), possibly signalling the evolution of a belief that ageing can be 'managed' (Bayer, 2005).

Lastly, in Pragmatism the primary focus is directed towards conducting research in the way that best meets the needs of the research questions to be answered (Holden and Lynch, 2004), and in this research where the two questions under investigation concern the lived experiences of Generation X women and evaluation of the relationships between salient variables, the adoption of a specific philosophical stance and consequent methodology was not supported. It was the judgement of the researcher, therefore, that adopting a Pragmatic approach best served the goal to broaden understanding of the capabilities of influencers as effective endorsers, taking into account the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs, including those related to the promoted product. The approach taken for this research will be discussed in the next section.

4.4 Research Approach

According to Creswell (2014), the decision-making points in determining an appropriate research approach are first, the determination of the philosophical assumptions or paradigm underpinning the study, followed by

the selection of research design and finally, the choice of the specific methods to be deployed. The chosen components of the approach for this research were 1) to adopt a Pragmatist paradigm, to enable prioritisation of the research questions rather than a particular philosophical stance (Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2005), 2) to utilise a two-phase design to allow for the research questions to be answered sequentially and ensure the appropriate methodology was used in each case, and 3) to use as data collection methods, semi-structured interviews to explore the proposed impact variable, 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation based on the concept 'Youth-Ideal', followed by a survey to investigate influencer-led endorsements by evaluating the relationships between followers' attitudes and beliefs and markers of effectiveness. Hence, the findings from the first phase were built into the second (Creswell, 2014). This helped ensure that the quantitative data collection incorporated variables salient to the problem being addressed, and investigated it in an appropriate way (Morgan, 1998). This correlates well with both the centrality of beliefs within the Pragmatic paradigm (Morgan, 2014), the acceptance that they can only truly be judged in terms of the outcomes of the actions they engender (Ormerod, 2006), and the aim to achieve methodological coherence with synchronicity between research questions and the chosen methods (Morse *et al.*, 2002).

This research, then, expands knowledge by providing clarity on an appearance ideal-related belief concept derived from the literature, namely 'Youth-Ideal' and enabling a deeper understanding of the effect of followers' salient attitudes and beliefs on influencer effectiveness.

A detailed explanation of the design of the research follows.

4.5 Research Design

The general plan of how the research is conducted to answer the research questions is known as the research design (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). In this research, two research questions were posed. The first, RQ1, concerned the proposed concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and its internalisation by Generation X women. However, this phenomenon, where women demonstrate a tendency to accept or act upon belief in the benefit of

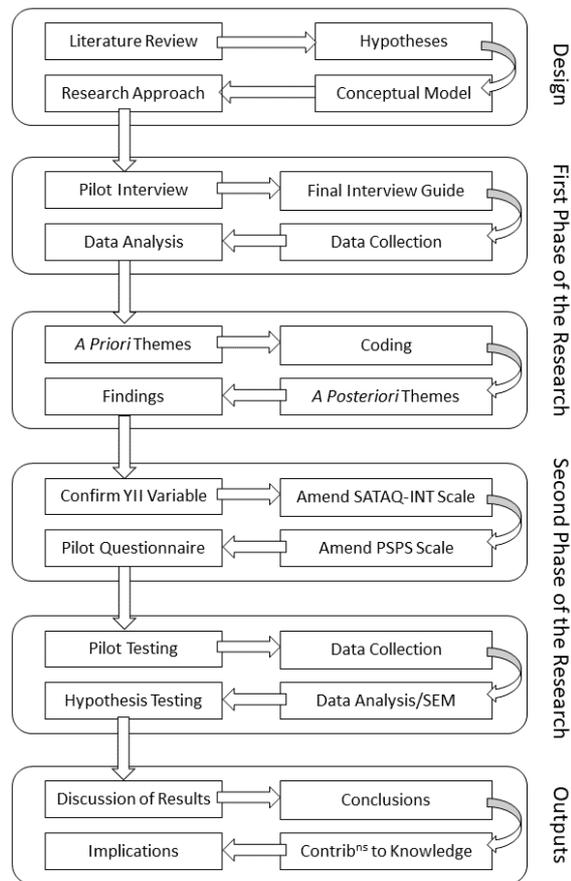
appearing youthful had not been fully explored to date (Gendron and Lydecker, 2016; Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012; Menzel *et al.*, 2011), and so the researcher believed the concept required discrete evaluation before 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation could be confirmed as an impact variable. The choice is supported by Campbell and Fiske (1959), who stated that a psychological trait, or characteristic, such as 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation, is best understood by gathering different forms of data. Hence, RQ1 was answered in the first phase of the research using a qualitative approach.

Further support for the use of a qualitative method for the first phase was the absence of an established scale to measure the internalisation of the emergent concept of 'Youth-Ideal'. Two existing instruments, commonly used to evaluate appearance-related matters, were used after they had been adapted to ensure they were fit for purpose. These were the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) and the Internalisation Sub-scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004). The first phase of the research was also used as the means to identify the amendments required to these scales and guide necessary adaptations.

This was followed by a second phase focused on RQ2 concerning the problem at the centre of this research – the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers. This phase involved testing the hypotheses based on relationships between salient factors or variables that were posed in Chapter 2. Hence, RQ2 was answered using a quantitative method.

Hence, this research adopted a design involving two research phases employing qualitative and quantitative components respectively to answer the two research questions. The findings of the first phase were necessary inputs into the finalisation of the variables to be included in the second phase (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The Priority Sequence Model (Morgan, 1998) of complementarity was followed and the research was carried out using a qual→QUAN design. Figure 4.1 shows the research design in diagrammatic form.

Figure 4.1 Research Design



At this point, it is worth considering the ontological alignment between the first (qualitative) and second (quantitative) phase of this research, where belief in a single, objective reality of the latter seems at odds with the subjective multiplicity of realities of the former. Pragmatic research tends to be considered as flowing from an ontological stance that is located in the middle of the objectivity–subjectivity continuum (Maarouf, 2019), which in this research translated to the acceptance, by the researcher, of a single reality perceived differently by the participant social actors, each of whom had, as described earlier, their perspective based on their own lived experiences of that reality (Philipps and Burbules, 2000). Hence, the choice to combine the quantitative assessment of one external reality with the qualitative exploration of individual perceptions is supported ontologically (Maarouf, 2019). This can be illustrated by considering human ageing, an aspect of this research, where the singular reality is the inevitability of growing older, yet there are reportedly different perceptions of how it can or should be addressed once the signs start to become apparent (Hurd Clarke and Griffin,

2007). The chosen research design was, therefore, supported philosophically by addressing both research questions in a way that emphasises experience, actions and outcomes, and ontologically, through the acceptance that a single reality can manifest as many individual perspectives.

The data collection methods for each research phase are discussed in the following section.

4.5.1 Data Collection Methods

This research took place in two discrete phases, the first of which was qualitative and involved semi-structured interviews, followed by a quantitative hypothesis testing phase utilising data from an online survey.

4.5.1.1 The Use of Semi-Structured Interviews in the First Phase

The purpose of conducting the first research phase was to investigate a concept, 'Youth-Ideal', derived from the literature, and its internalisation by Generation X women, the target population of the product endorsement at the centre of this endeavour. 'Youth-Ideal' has been purposefully described here as a concept, to represent that it was an idea consequent to the researcher's reading on the subject of active age concealment by midlife women. It was derived from two premises; first, the existence of a normative pressure encouraging the achievement of a demonstrably youthful appearance by midlife women (Coupland, 2009; Smirnova, 2012), and, secondly, that youthfulness will be accompanied by social and other benefits (Bayer, 2005; Saucier, 2004; Woodward, 1988). Hence, the proposal put forward in Chapter 2 was that 'Youth-Ideal' is a belief system that is an appropriate manifestation of the subjective norm component of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) on the basis that it encompasses both of the required constituents (normative belief and motivation to comply). So, the purpose of the first phase of this research was to explore this proposed belief and determine its suitability as the subjective norm. Semi-structured interviews were chosen as the data collection method as they are commonly used to explore respondents' experiences, beliefs and motivations (Gill *et al.*, 2008). The format of a semi-structured interview is open, allowing the interviewee more freedom to

express themselves with the potential that new areas of enquiry may emerge. The interview guide acts as a framework of themes to be explored rather than a rigid series of questions, meaning that respondents have the freedom to raise issues they feel are relevant to the conversation taking place (Bryman and Bell, 2011).

This is a key point that had a bearing on the ontological basis of this research. It was earlier stated (section 4.3.1) that reality is based on beliefs (Morgan, 2014), meaning that 'Youth-Ideal' as a belief system could be a contributor to the formation of reality. It cannot have a direct effect on the singular reality of human ageing since that is a biological inevitability, so, it was proposed that 'Youth-Ideal' is involved in the development of an individual's perspective of that reality. Those individual perspectives could feasibly span from acceptance of all that ageing means with little or no response to defiance by any means possible (Hurd Clarke, 2017). Hence, a Generation X woman's perspective, or individual reality, relating to ageing is formed, in part, by her response to the normative pressures linked to ageing and the benefits of youthfulness described earlier. In essence, then, the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' is proposed to act as a lens, through which the individual examines the inevitability of the ageing process and creates their version of that reality. Moreover, beliefs that prescribe how to act arise not just from one's own experience and actions but those of others, observed directly or indirectly, including from reading media reports (Maxwell, 2012). And so, even though, as described in 2.2.2.2, internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' may not always be based on first-hand experiences, it can still contribute to the formation of a perspective or individual reality. This assimilates well with the Pragmatist mindset that accepts that reality has an individual component.

In summary, the first phase of the research deployed semi-structured interviews to explore the proposed concept, 'Youth-Ideal', described, based on existing literature, as a contributor to determining how a Generation X woman chooses to display who she is to the world around her. It furthers her interest in appearance modification and age concealment with the potential to impact the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment.

4.5.1.2 The Use of an Online Survey in the Second Phase

Questionnaires are an established method to collect input from a large number of participants (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009) and attitudes and beliefs have traditionally been investigated in this way (Bryman, 1984). This method of data collection lends itself to hypothesis testing as information concerning the variables of interest and the relationships that exist between them in a particular population is gathered (Coughlan, Cronin and Ryan, 2009). Moreover, the data can be generalised from a sample to a population (Creswell, 2014) so that inferences can be made about influencer effectiveness. A survey is an economical and rapid way to gather data from a large group of people, each of whom has the characteristics necessary to qualify them to be suitable participants (Morse *et al.*, 2002). In summary, an online survey was selected as the method used to collect the data necessary to test the 20 hypotheses generated by the literature review.

4.5.2 Sampling

Sampling strategy refers to the choice of the population for the proposed research, based on the nature of the investigation to be undertaken (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). A group of individuals, the sample, is taken from the whole assembly of people who could participate (Bryman and Bell, 2011). It was not practical to involve all UK-based Generation X women in this research due to time and cost issues; therefore, a sample was selected as appropriate for each phase of this research.

Criterion sampling was the primary sampling strategy for both phases of the research, based on matching the profile of the consumer to which the endorsement of dermal filler treatment tends to be directed. This type of sampling involves selecting participants based on their inclusion in a particular category related to the nature of the study (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015) and is considered a reliable form of non-probability sampling (Welman and Kruger, 1999).

The selection criteria for this research were gender (female, or identify as female), age (Generation X) and location (UK-based). The rationale for the inclusion of participants who meet the gender, age and location selection

criteria derives from the need to ensure interviewees have lived the phenomenon under investigation (Donalek, 2014) and hence are involved in the issue being researched (Groenewald, 2004).

The criteria used to identify appropriate participants did not vary between phases. Hence, the population for both phases of this research were Generation X women residents of the UK, where the generational cohort is defined as born between 1965 and 1980 (Pew Research Center, 2014). A generational cohort is used to demark the age boundaries of the sample. The term 'midlife' has been used in the thesis to this point due to the various respondent age ranges used in the extant research that underpins this study, but it does not precisely describe the age range of the sample used here. Hence, the adoption of 'Generation X'. Consequently, when referring to the participants of this research the descriptive term 'Generation X' will be used, whereas 'midlife' will be used generically to encapsulate the varying cohorts of women featured in the literature as potential target consumers for age concealment products and practices. The source of the sample is known as the sampling frame and was online for both phases of the research to reflect the primary purpose to broaden existing knowledge of influencer marketing.

4.5.2.1 Rationale for Participant Gender and Age Criteria

The rationale for limiting the research to female respondents, including both those who were born female and those who identify as female, was due to the predominant use of cosmetic treatments by women. The British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons reports that 97% of cosmetic procedures involved women in 2021 (BAAPS, 2021). There are no comparable data specifically for dermal filler treatment, although in the United States women account for 97% of recipients (ASPS, 2019). This latter data point is offered here as a contributor to the justification for limiting this research to female participants based on cultural congruence between the UK and the US (Hofstede Insights, 2018).

There are two reasons why focusing on Generation X was appropriate in this assessment of the efficacy of influencers as endorsers of dermal fillers. Firstly, dermal fillers are commonly used for restorative purposes such as

facial volume replacement (Bayer, 2005) and to redress the facial signs of ageing (Gold, 2007). Again, using US data in the absence of UK-specific information, two-thirds of hyaluronic acid-based dermal filler procedures carried out in 2018 were on patients aged 35-64 years, with an average recipient age of 49 years (ASPS, 2019).

Secondly, influencer marketing is commonly associated with a younger target consumer e.g., millennials or Generation Y (eMarketer, 2020), where the use of influencers to convey promotional messaging to a targeted and receptive audience has become established practice for many brands (Business Insider, 2019). Questions remain, however, about the applicability of influencer marketing for older consumers. Although many researchers have included broad age ranges in their studies it tends to be hard to determine whether the response is affected by age as few appear to have analysed their data in this way for reasons that are not explained in their publications (e.g., Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020; Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ki and Kim, 2019). The limited evaluation of Generation X consumer behaviour is even more acute in beauty influencer research, where the mean respondent age is often under 35 years (e.g., Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Konstantopoulou *et al*, 2019; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020; Wright, 2017). Where older women are included, findings tend to be reported for the entire respondent group rather than by age cohort (Balabanis and Chatzopoulou, 2019; Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2020). An exception is the work of Sokolova and Kefi (2020), who did demonstrate a difference between generations concerning social attractiveness (friendliness) and feelings of Parasocial Interaction (PSI) (Horton and Wohl, 1956) directed towards the influencer, although they did not provide an explanation why this was so. Their recommendation was for further research to take place to understand the impact of receiver age. And so, although the aim of this research was not to compare influencer effectiveness between generational cohorts, attention has been paid to assessing the extent to which they are deemed credible by Generation X women.

Based on existing research, then, it is fair to conclude that the impact of receiver age on influencer effectiveness is under-evaluated (Thakker, 2021; Vrontis *et al.*, 2021). It cannot currently be assumed that the success of influencer marketing in younger age groups will transfer to Generation X, due to the lack of substantive research on this issue. This research, therefore, sought to provide further understanding of the appropriateness of influencer marketing in a more mature population.

All of that said, the primary reason for focusing on Generation X, female respondents was the nature of the product at the centre of this research. Respondents' gender and age were, therefore, critical selection criteria and participation was limited to females, either born or identifying as such, who were part of the Generation X cohort.

4.5.2.2 Rationale for the Research to be UK Focused

The research was limited to participants who were residents of the UK due to features of the UK dermal filler market rather than influencer marketing practices, in which regard the UK is similar to most European and North American countries in having an established contingent of influencers acting as product endorsers (Booth and Matic, 2011; Breves *et al.*, 2019). Instead, the choice to limit participants based on geography related to the need to ensure the sample consisted of individuals who had comparable knowledge of the research topic (Morse *et al.*, 2002) and the researcher considered that UK-centric factors may have had an indirect influence on the research in this respect. These derive from the way dermal fillers are regulated in the UK, which is not replicated in the European Union or North America. Their regulatory classification allows both medically and non-medically qualified practitioners to offer treatment, resulting in the wide availability of treatment providers (Morton, 2015), and direct-to-consumer product promotion by dermal filler manufacturers and other involved parties, including influencers. Consequently, participation was limited to UK residents only, due to their exposure to prevailing market forces relating to the promotion and availability of dermal fillers, which could have an impact on their views, indeed their realities, and hence the data generated in this research. The researcher

accepted that, by applying only three selection criteria for both phases of the study, the resulting samples would likely be diverse in terms of ethnicity and, potentially, nationality. This reinforces a point made previously (see section 2.3.1) that marketing research should be carried out on the target population. For this reason, selection criteria were limited to those designed to generate an appropriate sample for the product being endorsed. Further, preventing Generation X women based outside the UK from taking part eliminates the potential for their lack of familiarity with the unique aspects of the UK dermal filler market to impact the outcome of the research. It is important to note that the opportunity to participate was offered regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, or gender at birth.

The next two sections of this chapter describe the predetermined process followed for each of the research phases. Section 4.6 concerns the first, qualitative phase and Section 4.7, the second, quantitative phase.

4.6 The First Phase (RQ1): Semi-Structured Interviews

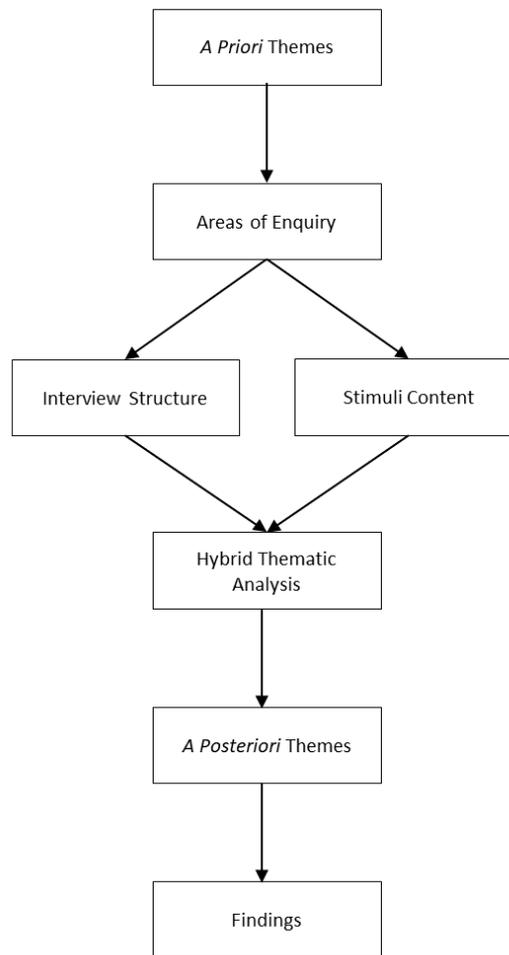
4.6.1 Procedure

The purpose of the first research phase was to explore the 'Youth-Ideal' concept. RQ1 – '*Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and what factors are involved in its propagation*' - also sought to understand the factors behind its internalisation to enable the adaptation of the scales to be used to measure it, should it be determined to be an appropriate impact variable for inclusion in the second research phase.

Semi-structured interviews enabled the conversation to cover the topics set out in the interview guide while maintaining an openness that allowed for digressions and further probing as appropriate. All study materials were approved by the University of Brighton's Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix 1). Respondents were given details of the research before they agreed to participate and signed a consent form before the interview took place, and this was reviewed with each interviewee including providing reassurance regarding confidentiality and anonymity.

Interviews were conducted using the Microsoft Teams videoconferencing application during January and February 2021. As the United Kingdom was in the third period of national lockdown at that time due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with no pre-set end date, it was not possible to meet the respondents in person, and hence, the University of Brighton mandated that research be carried out online. Interviews conducted using videoconferencing permit synchronous (real-time) communication that allows for the natural back and forth of face-to-face conversations, including the transmission of verbal and non-verbal signals (Salmons, 2011). The videoconferencing platform generated a preliminary transcript that was subsequently checked and amended by the researcher to ensure it was faithful to the conversation. As interviews were recorded for sound and vision, the researcher was able to review and assess respondents' unspoken cues e.g., gestures and body language during the analysis period. Audio and video files were saved to a secure file depository provided by the University. The procedure followed for this first, qualitative phase is shown in Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 The Hybrid Thematic Analysis Procedure Followed for the First Phase of the Research



Following a hybrid approach, encompassing both deductive top-down and inductive bottom-up thematic analysis (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Swain, 2018), an initial set of themes was developed *a priori* based on the literature from which the proposed phenomenon of ‘Youth-Ideal’ was derived (see section 2.3.2). These themes also informed the areas of enquiry included in the interview guide and the content of the accompanying stimuli (see Appendices 2 and 3). That said, respondents were encouraged to talk about and elaborate on other connected topics if they wanted to do so.

The transcripts were initially evaluated using the *a priori* themes in a deductive manner. A table was created to display the data with the preliminary themes on the y-axis and the summarised responses made by each respondent on the x-axis. This proved to be an excellent way to become familiar with the data and complete the first round of data reduction.

Moreover, responses to certain questions and about particular issues could be collated (Swain, 2018) so that aspects of the data, e.g. common issues, could be displayed quantitatively (Neuendorf, 2019). This was followed by an inductive thematic analysis based on the data involving iterative coding leading to the development of axial and selective codes and finally a *posteriori* themes that either replaced the original themes or expanded upon them. This process aimed to identify themes '*that emerge as being important to the description of the phenomenon*' (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006, p.82).

4.6.2 Stimuli

The interview process was aided by the use of materials designed to stimulate discussion of the topics being investigated or enable them to be communicated in a consistent manner (Stacey and Vincent, 2011). While stimuli may take many forms including text, photographs, video and graphics, the materials used here were combinations of explanatory text and photographic images. Five flashcards containing imagery or textual content (see Appendix 2) acted as stimulus materials for the semi-structured interviews. Their use encouraged open discussion by presenting discussion points consistently (Barter and Renold, 1999), and in a way that aimed to minimise the potential sensitivity of discussing topics relating to the respondent's appearance (Stacey and Vincent, 2011). Following the guidance of Mapp (2017), the flashcards were designed to be specific to the subject under discussion and were embedded within the flow of the interview to provide a different way for the respondent to engage and an opportunity to refocus the conversation.

4.6.2.1 Origins of the Pre-Prepared Statements Used to Explain 'Youth-Ideal' and 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation'

The use of pre-prepared statements to explain 'Youth-Ideal' and 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation' in descriptive rather than emotive terms presented the concept with clarity while provoking a reaction, supportive or otherwise. According to Vincent and O'Mahoney (2018), the use of prompts is particularly useful if the phenomenon cannot easily be isolated or described,

as might be the case with a novel concept that may be perceived differently by the respondents.

Hence, two flashcards bore statements, prepared by the researcher, to describe 'Youth-Ideal' (YI) (see Figure 4.3) and "Youth-Ideal' Internalisation' (YII) (see Figure 4.4), based on several articles written since 2014 concerning the societal view of female ageing (Appleton, 2018; Brightside, 2020, Goecker, 2019; Hindustan Times, 2014; Kinickie, 2018; Pender, 2018). These statements, presented to the respondents during the discussion focusing on their perspectives on societal pressures relating to ageing and appearance, made it possible to introduce the concepts uniformly and with clarity while providing a means, through the participant's candid deconstruction of the content, to expose their inner thoughts, opinions, and prejudices.

Figure 4.3 The Description of 'Youth-Ideal' Reviewed by the Interviewees

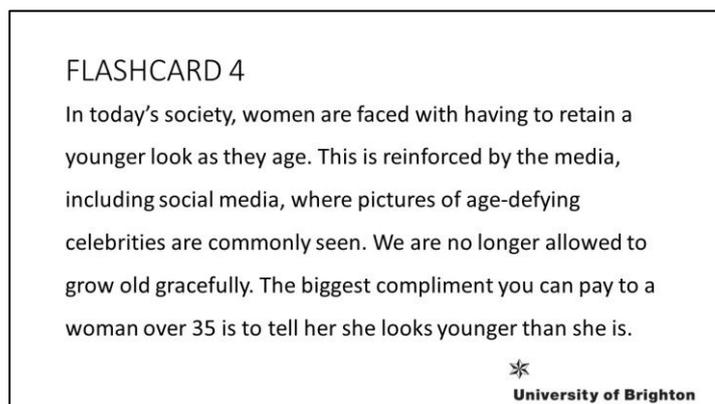
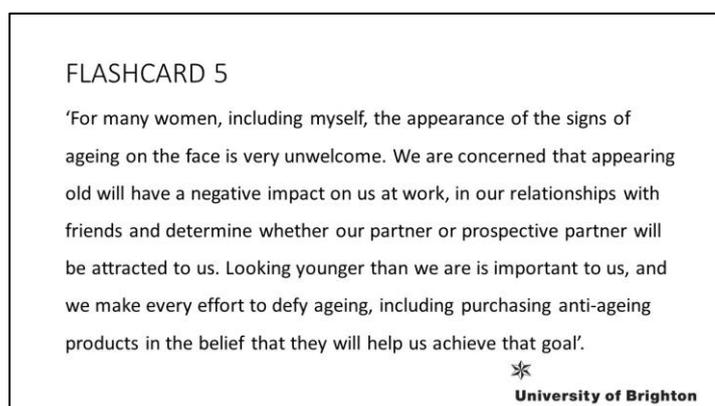


Figure 4.4 The Description of 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation Reviewed by the Interviewees



As described in section 4.4, this qualitative phase also sought to explore respondents' perspectives on referent others and sources of 'Youth-Ideal' pressure. The goal here was to determine the modifications required for the two existing measurement instruments (the Internalisation Sub-scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004) and the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996)) to be used to evaluate 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation in the subsequent quantitative phase. Each of the original versions of the scales references four influences, matched to the population with which the instruments were originally conceived, i.e., young females who have internalised a thin-ideal ideology (Blowers *et al.*, 2003). For the SATAQ-INT, these influences are 'models in magazines', 'people in movies', 'models in music videos' and 'people on TV', and for the PSPS they are 'friends', 'family', 'people I've dated' and 'the media'. Consequently, the statements included alternative references considered suitable for Generation X based on available research. Firstly, the statement describing 'Youth-Ideal' referenced 'the media' but this was extended to include social media (Al-Yahya *et al.*, 2020), and rather than 'models' or 'people in movies', reference was made to 'age-defying celebrities' (Appleton, 2018). In the description of 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation, the workplace was described as a source of ageing-related pressure (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008), reference to the influence of 'friends' was maintained and 'people I've dated' was revised to 'partner or prospective partner' to encompass both respondents in relationships and those who were single.

The key point to highlight here is the necessity to use a qualitative method to answer RQ1 due to the required exploration of both the 'Youth-Ideal' concept and the need to have a broad discussion about referent others and sources of pressure so that the adaptations to the measurement instruments truly reflected the population under investigation. Although the references made in the YI and YII statements were based on published reports concerning the ageing concerns and practices of midlife women, their relevance to this sample could not be assumed. Consequently, respondents were asked to

critically appraise these statements, comparing them with their views and experiences and, if possible, describe their reference points.

4.6.3 Recruitment

Respondents for the first phase were made aware of the opportunity to participate via social media advertising. As described earlier (see section 4.5.2), only those individuals who met all three selection criteria (age, gender and location) were permitted to take part. Announcements asking for volunteers were placed on Facebook and LinkedIn groups focused on subjects not concerned with beauty or appearance-related matters¹ to prevent selection bias, which were likely to include women who met the selection criteria. Any interested individuals were requested to contact the researcher via direct messaging. On receipt of an initial message of interest, each potential respondent was sent the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix 3) via email. After allowing them time to review its contents, confirmation of their willingness to participate was sought, followed, if positive, by the provision of the Consent Form, again by email. More than 50% of those sent the PIS were interviewed, aided, in part, by the restriction on social activity imposed by the UK Government in place at the time of recruitment due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations in the literature regarding the number of respondents required for qualitative research indicate that saturation is likely to be reached after 12 interviews have been completed (Guest, Bunce and Johnson, 2006) and that 15 is the maximum number of transcripts that should be analysed to avoid difficulties arising from the manipulation of a large data set (Carson *et al.*, 2001). The precise number of participants included here was based more on the former and so depended largely on sampling adequacy as determined by saturation, identified by repetition within respondent experience narratives indicating the recruitment of additional interviewees would not reveal further aspects of the phenomenon (Morse *et al.*, 2002). Replication is also an indicator of the

¹ Groups include a running forum, a parenting forum, community noticeboards for three different geographical areas, and a forum for freelance workers.

comprehensiveness of the data gathering. After 19 interviews were completed, it was clear that no new insights or themes were being generated by respondents (Fusch and Ness, 2015) and hence recruitment was halted. The interview guide used is presented in Appendix 4.

4.6.4 Pilot Interview Process

Three semi-structured interviews were completed before the start of data collection proper to test the suitability of the materials and methods employed. In this way, any problems arising, e.g., non-comprehension of the stimulus materials or lack of fluency or proficiency in the interview guide could be identified and corrected before impacting the quality of the resulting findings. As a result of the pilot test, three minor changes were made to the interview guide. Firstly, during the discussion concerning the magazine front covers (on flashcard 1, see Appendix 2), the question ‘In your opinion, what are these magazines trying to do by highlighting those themes?’ was inserted immediately after a discussion of the general themes covered by the articles featured. The reason for this was twofold; first, to continue the discussion from ‘what’ to ‘why’ to encourage the respondent to consider the direction being set by the publications featured, and second, to provide an opportunity for respondents to describe their thoughts and feelings about how the mainstream media was communicating to Generation X women. Secondly, the question ‘What pressures relating to ageing or your appearance have you experienced?’ was changed because one pilot respondent felt it to be too assumptive and critical. Hence, the final version of the interview guide included the question ‘In your opinion, what effect are messages like this having on women of your age’ to continue the previous discussion on the impact of the media and allow a smoother entry into the conversation about appearance-related pressures by asking ‘Please tell me about any pressure you may have felt relating to how you look’. Finally, the well-known British women featured in flashcards 2 and 3 were changed because a number of the women were not known to the pilot respondents. The number of women included in the montage was reduced from 12 to 9 to make each face easier to see and simplify the discussion and a more complete representation of Generation X (age range in 2020: 39-56 years) was given by including

women at the younger end of the age range. Hence, the age range changed from 48-56 years to 42-56 years. The intention to include women who, in the opinion of the researcher, may have undergone cosmetic treatment was maintained. In subsequent interviews, there were no issues with recognition. These alterations were included in the version of the interview guide for all subsequent interviews (see Appendix 4).

4.6.5 Member Checking

According to Creswell and Miller (2000), validity in qualitative enquiry can be achieved in several ways, including through the use of member checking where study participants are the means to assess study credibility. In this research, interviewees were invited to participate in this process, either through a discussion with the researcher or their review of the study report. Those who participated were asked if the themes and outputs made sense to them, whether they were presented with sufficient evidence and if the researcher's account (either verbal or written) was representative of their views. Of the 19 interviewees, seven were happy to meet to discuss the findings and three others agreed to read and comment on the written report. All suggested amendments received were carefully considered as part of the reflexive process of self-critique conducted by the researcher throughout the research.

This process was of particular importance here as the intention was to represent multiple perspectives of a singular reality, and so, allowing interviewees to react and provide further input was a means to uncover and eliminate any unconscious partiality and add credibility to the final write-up of the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1986).

4.6.6 Data Analysis

As described in section 4.6.1, a list of *a priori* themes was created based on the literature review outlined in section 2.3.2. This was an appropriate starting point for the validation of a concept that was built as a derivation of extant research (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Indeed, this process informed the structure and content of the interview guide by including open questions

linked to aspects of the available literature followed by probes to explore the individual experiences of each respondent (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Five initial themes resulted from the literature review. They are explained in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Initial Themes used as the Starting Point for Analysis of the First Phase Data

Social obsession with youth	Capturing the essence of the 'Youth-Ideal' concept and taking inspiration from other research that highlights youth as valued (Bayer, 2005) and equated with beauty (Del Rosso, 2017; Smirnova, 2012)
Appearance matters to women	Women are more invested in their appearance than men (Öberg and Tornstam, 1999), and feel a responsibility to stay young-looking (Coupland, 2009)
Ageing is inevitable	The singular reality at the heart of the ontological basis of this research, yet the fear of ageing leads to the emergence of multiple perspectives (Milfelner and Kikel, 2016) including those which subscribe to a belief in the premise that ageing can be avoided (Bayer, 2005)
Growing old gracefully	A phrase that is used to mean either a lack of active appearance management in midlife or that that appearance is actively managed for reasons other than age concealment (Coupland, 2009)
Normative anti-ageing behaviour	The emergence of anti-ageing as a category within the beauty market (Bromstein, 2019) gave rise to the widespread use of creams etc. that purport to have restorative properties (Ehlinger-Martin <i>et al.</i> , 2016), coupled with the increase in the use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures (Bayer, 2005)

Initial codes linked to these themes were either topic-based or derived from prior theory (Maxwell, 2012), and together formed the framework for the initial deductive analysis of the transcripts of the audio recordings of each interview and were the means to arrange the mass of data created into patterns and assign axial codes to give a more granular account (Swain, 2018). However, during the subsequent inductive assessment of the data, it was clear that some codes were redundant, and that the commentary

covered additional aspects beyond the range of these initial codes, so, the number of codes fluctuated until all the text was coded. As part of this stage of the analysis, responses to the definitions of 'Youth-Ideal' and 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation provided to the respondents in the form of flashcards were evaluated in detail and coded. As this concept is yet to appear in the literature, new codes specifically categorised how respondents felt about these descriptions.

The second stage, or selective coding, involved comparing transcripts and contrasting the experiences and perspectives of the respondents, and then re-organising and combining codes to create *a posteriori* themes that identified consistencies in the reported experiences, observations or behaviours of the respondents. The coding process is shown in diagrammatic form in Appendix 5.

The final stage of the analysis looked for contexts within which 'Youth-Ideal' was most apparent, accordingly to the input of the respondents. At this point, the goal was to identify the environment(s) in which the observed tendencies appear and determine the key sources of influence and pressure at the root of encouraging women's internalisation of the edicts within 'Youth-Ideal'. This process was used to help confirm the appropriate referents to be incorporated into the SATAQ-INT and PSPS scales to be used in the survey.

The analysis of the interview transcripts had two important outputs. Firstly, to enable a decision concerning the suitability of 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation as an impact variable, and then, to identify the changes needed to the measurement scales to be used to measure it in survey participants. Once these verifications were in place, the second phase of the research could proceed.

4.7 The Second Phase (RQ2): Online Survey

4.7.1 Procedure

In all, 20 hypotheses arose from the literature review set out in Chapter 2 and collectively, answered RQ2. The method used was a cross-sectional, self-administered online survey, with participants accessed via their existing membership of online respondent panels. Potential respondents were provided with details of the research in the form of an information sheet and gave informed consent before taking part. The survey was cross-sectional and collected data at one point in time. There was, however, a temporal order in which the respondent was asked to review elements of the questionnaire. Following the completion of questions relating to participant demographics, a series of instruments were used to understand the participant's pre-existing salient attitudes and beliefs, followed by their review of influencer content, their appraisal of the influencer and finally, the assessment of their subsequent and intended behaviours. The schedule of the survey is shown in the table below:

Table 4.2 Design of the Survey

Background Information	Demographic Information Social Media Usage Focus on Appearance-Related Activities Appearance Involvement
Pre-Existing Attitudes and Beliefs	Feelings about Getting Older Acceptance of Dermal filler treatment Appearance Goals
Exposure to/Review of Influencer Biography and Social Media Posts	
Post-Exposure Perspectives	Attitude to the Influencer Comparison with the Influencer Congruence of Attitudes (with the Influencer) Perceived Similarity/Dissimilarity (to the Influencer) Acceptance of Influencer's Information Booking Intention

In total, each respondent answered 95 individual questions (see Appendix 6).

4.7.2 Measurement Scales

Existing measurement instruments were used per the guidance of Bryman and Bell (2011). All scales used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, reflecting the most commonly used format of the original versions of the scales deployed. The survey was divided into four parts as detailed in Table 4.2. The instruments used in each section will now be described:

Section 1: Background Information

Each participant was asked to indicate their year of birth, the gender with which they identify and to confirm they were currently residing in the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland) to verify their qualification as a suitable participant based on the selection criteria explained in section 4.5.2. Mechanisms were built into each of these three initial questions to ensure that anyone who did not qualify was excluded without completing the survey. Qualified participants were then asked for details of their employment, income, education, marital/relationship status and whether they were a parent. Thereafter, they were asked to provide information on their use of social media, including whether they followed influencers. The final two blocks of questions in this section concerned their appearance and how they chose to manage it, and their interest in that process, measured using the Appearance Involvement Scale (Sun and Guo, 2017 – adapted from O’Cass, 2000), a 4-item scale with good internal consistency indicated by a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of 0.72 (Sun and Guo, 2017).

Section 2: Pre-Existing Attitudes and Beliefs

The scales used in this section of the questionnaire were focused on understanding 1) the participants' attitude to the use of dermal filler treatment to conceal the facial signs of ageing and 2) the extent of their internalisation of the 'Youth-Ideal' archetype. As there were no scales available to measure these particular characteristics, existing scales were adapted so that they became fit for purpose.

Firstly, in the case of the pre-existing attitude to the behaviour described above, two scales were identified from the literature that measured key elements of the behaviour under investigation. The guide adopted here was the Principle of Compatibility (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1975; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1980) which states that a specific behaviour can be predicted from compatible measures of attitude toward it, providing action, target and context are compatible. Consequently, the scales utilised here needed to provide the means to assess the act of having a dermal filler treatment (action) to ameliorate the demonstrable signs of ageing from the face (target) for age concealment (context). The two scales chosen were the Attitude to Ageing Scale (Gupta and Schork, 1993), made up of six items that spoke to concerns relating to the impact of ageing on appearance, and the Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005), made up of three sub-scales (Intrapersonal, Social and Consider) each of five items.

The Attitude to Ageing Scale was developed to assess ageing-related body image concerns to understand the development of eating disorders in a non-clinical population. Minor changes were made to three of the six items to make them applicable here. In two cases reference to 'losing weight' was replaced by 'having a dermal filler treatment' and in the third 'my body' was substituted by 'my face'. Details of all the scales used in this research, including details of any changes made can be found in Appendix 7. The scale was reported to have good internal consistency indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.85 (Thompson and Bardone-Cone, 2019). However, during the analysis of the survey data, one item was calculated to have a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.116, and so was removed from the analysis. The remaining five items were maintained.

The Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale aims to evaluate an individual's interest in appearance modification by assessing their intrapersonal (self-related) and social (relating to other people) motivations and their likelihood to consider treatment in the future. Each sub-scale has been shown to have good internal consistency indicated by the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients, Intrapersonal: 0.88-0.91 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King,

2005), Social: 0.84-0.88 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005), Consider: 0.86-0.92 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005; Nerini, Materia and Stefanile, 2014) This research utilised all three sub-scales; references to 'cosmetic surgery' and 'plastic surgery' were replaced throughout by 'dermal filler treatment'.

In the initial, first-order measurement model these scales were included independently of each other (see Figure 6.1), however, they were subsequently combined to form an 'ATTB Scale' based on their correlation and the development of a second-order model that better fit the data (see Section 6.5.1.1.1). All structural models subsequently developed for use in this research were derived from the second-order measurement model.

The second pre-existing characteristic measured in this section of the questionnaire was the participant's internalisation of the 'Youth-Ideal' archetype. As for ATTB, there was no available scale to use and so two existing instruments were selected and adapted to make them fit for purpose. The chosen instruments were the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996), made up of 8 items to evaluate the participant's views concerning pressure coming from external sources that encourage the achievement of certain appearance goals, and the Internalisation Sub-Scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004), also made up of 8 items to determine the extent of their assimilation and acceptance.

These scales were selected because they each measure one of the two aspects of a subjective norm, descriptive and social norms, both of which are necessary for a complete assessment of the component (Ajzen, 1991; Ham, Jeger and Frajman Ivković, 2015). Descriptive norms refer to the actual behaviours of others, whereas social norms refer to how perceptions of other people's opinions affect an individual's behaviour. Hence, the SATAQ-INT was used to measure descriptive norms by focusing on key groups of referent others while the PSPS assessed social norms in the form of sources of external appearance-related pressure.

The internalisation sub-scale of the SATAQ-INT was originally developed to assess Thin-Ideal Internalisation and is most commonly used in research into eating disorders (e.g., Thompson and Stice, 2001) and considerations of body image (e.g., Harper and Tiggemann, 2008). It asks respondents to compare with celebrities and fashion models, which other literature suggests may not be appropriate reference groups for Generation X women (Yu, Kozar and Damhorst, 2013). Consequently, it required amending to make it suitable for this research. Likewise, the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS), which was developed for the assessment of weight-related concerns in a younger population (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) also needed adaptation for this sample. Specifically, it was important to confirm whether the reference points identified in the scales were appropriate for this sample of participants, at this time, bearing in mind the medium being investigated, i.e., online communication. Justification for the changes to these instruments is provided by the findings of the first research phase as described in Chapter 5. Both scales were reported to have good internal consistency indicated by the following Cronbach's alpha coefficients: SATAQ-INT: 0.92 (Vartanian and Dey, 2013) and PSPS: 0.87 (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996).

As described earlier for the Attitude to Ageing and Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery scales, the SATAQ-INT and PSPS scales were combined to form a 'YII Scale' based on their correlation and the development of a second-order model that better fit the data (see Section 6.5.1.1.1). The structural model used in this research included both the derived ATTB and YII scales (see Figure 6.3).

Section 3: Review of Stimulus Materials (Influencer Biography and Social Media Posts)

Following completion of the scales measuring pre-existing characteristics, survey participants were asked to review stimulus materials, a biography of a fictitious female, Generation X influencer, described as an experienced beauty-focused endorser who has undergone dermal filler treatment herself, and two posts relating to her advocacy of dermal filler treatment as a means of ameliorating the signs of ageing on her face (Gold, 2007).

In her biography, the influencer was described in terms taken from the description of a 'citizen influencer' by Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid (2018) to convey her relative 'ordinary-ness' and approachability while confirming her long involvement in the beauty industry. Her performance data (21,107 followers and 1,294 followees) were derived from both published information and two real-world examples of UK beauty influencers, ReallyRee and Alice Hart-Davies who focus on the female midlife demographic. In practice, this involved using the work of De Veirman, Cauberghe and Hudders (2017) to engineer follower and followee numbers to convey perceptions of popularity, likeability, and specialism in her field of influence, and comparing them with the current statistics for the real-life influencers. It was important to use engagement data that stemmed from the literature with a degree of validation by comparing it with an actual circumstance. Also, in doing so, the figures were not inadvertently biased or an exaggerated reflection of the influencer's authenticity (Audrezet, Kerviler and Guidry Moulard, 2020).

The first post, formatted for Instagram, included before- and after-treatment close-ups of the influencer's face with copy explaining her rationale for having the procedure, her delight in the results and how followers can copy her behaviour. The second focused on the treatment itself, explaining exactly where the dermal filler has been applied to cause the change in her appearance (see Figure 4.5). Both posts include 'likes' which are used as a proxy for net sentiment rate, a measure of the positivity of the response, in the form of comments, to influencer content and an indicator of communication quality (Grave, 2019). The posts used as stimuli could not include comments because they may have biased the respondent, hence the use of likes instead. As before, the number used was derived from the average number of likes received per post by the two real influencers, ReallyRee and Alice Hart-Davis. Copies of all the influencer materials can be found in Appendix 8.

Figure 4.5 Social Media Posts Used as Stimuli during the Survey



The rationale for the researcher’s choice to create a fictitious beauty influencer was a) avoidance of preconceived attitudes toward the influencer by respondents, b) maintenance of the privacy of an actual influencer and c) the ability to create content appropriate for this research. Before the creation of the stimulus materials, the researcher studied posts from actual, UK-based beauty influencers targeting a midlife female follower profile to mimic the post length (approximate number of words), as well as the tone and language style adopted. For each of the two influencers used as inspiration, Instagram posts related to beauty treatments and products from the first quarter of 2021 were examined, excluding those featuring video content. Generally, close-up, well-lit images were used with copy that was brief but informative and always upbeat. These insights were used to inform the template for the posts created here. Also, based on findings in recent publications, the influencer is described as having experience and knowledge of the beauty industry, something that is an important aspect of influencer credibility in this market segment (Konstantopoulou *et al.*, 2019; Wright, 2017). This was a critical consideration for the decision to use a

fictitious rather than real influencer, bearing in mind the reported importance of credibility to influencer effectiveness. The imperative was to remain faithful to the guidance of Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid (2018) and include reference to attributes reported to communicate credibility, such as expertise, follower and followee numbers and engagement statistics while maintaining the appearance of 'ordinariness' that is a hallmark of a successful influencer. The ultimate check of whether credibility had been compromised would be the scores generated for this variable.

Finally, the images used were sourced from a copyright-free database and selected due, in part, to the skin tone of the individual featured as it was considered important that the fictitious influencer would appropriately represent the multi-cultural nature of UK society.

Following the review of the biography and posts, each participant had to complete an attention check embedded in the survey immediately beneath the stimulus materials, which involved ticking a box to indicate they had read and understood the materials before they could move on to the next section.

Section 4: Post-Exposure Perspectives

The closing section of the survey included scales that measured credibility, comparison behaviour, similarity, dissimilarity, attitude congruence, acceptance of information and booking intention.

Perceived Credibility was measured using the 15-item Source Credibility Scale (Ohanian, 1990). The scale evaluates the three components of credibility (trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness) using three five-item semantic differential sub-scales. No changes were made to the trustworthiness or expertise sub-scale and a single adaptation, to replace 'Elegant – Plain' with 'Natural – Unnatural', was applied to the attractiveness sub-scale. This change reflected a key concern associated with the use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures expressed both in the literature (e.g., Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007) and during first-phase interviews (see Section 5.3.2.4). The scale has a good internal consistency indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of >0.8 (Ohanian, 1990).

The State Appearance Comparison Scale (Schaefer and Thompson, 2014; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004) was used to measure comparison behaviour. Originally developed to assess a consumer's tendency to compare their body with those of models in advertising, alterations were made to all three items to reflect the participant's comparison with the influencer. Again, this highlights the importance of image selection when preparing the stimulus materials to ensure that the influencer's face, rather than her hair or body was most prominent and would be the focus of the participant's attention (see Figure 4.5). The scale has a good internal consistency indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.91 (Tiggemann and McGill, 2004).

Attitude Congruence was measured using the Perceived Congruence Scale (Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020, based on Xu and Pratt, 2018) and the Attitude Homophily Scale (McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond, 2006). Two scales were utilised because they covered slightly different aspects of attitudinal congruence. The first (Perceived Congruence Scale) was developed for use with social media influencers and specifically included the assessment of compatibility with the influencer's personal beliefs and lifestyle, which resonates well with the purpose of this research. Minor changes were made to each of the three items of the scale to aid comprehension and ease of interpretation by the survey participant, e.g., 'How do you perceive the compatibility between you and your preferred fashion influencers' was changed to 'I am compatible with the influencer'.

The second scale used to measure attitude congruence was made up of 15 items, 7 of which had to be reversed before data analysis, e.g., 'The influencer doesn't share my values'. Originally, the scale referred to 'this person' as it was created to evaluate one individual's congruence with any other, and this was changed to 'the influencer' throughout. Both scales were reported to have good internal consistency indicated by Cronbach's alpha coefficient of >0.7 (Perceived Congruence Scale, Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020) and 0.92 (Attitude Homophily Scale, McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond, 2006).

Similarity and Dissimilarity were measured using a scale developed by Yuan and Lou (2020) for their work on how influencers cultivate relationships with

followers. Of the six items, three concerned the assessment of similarity and three the assessment of dissimilarity. No amendments were needed to the original version of the scale to make it suitable for this research. It was reported to have good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha coefficient: 0.92 (Yuan and Lou, 2020)).

Information acceptance was measured using a five-item scale developed by Cheung *et al.* (2009) as part of an electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) study to evaluate the adoption of online reviews. Previously, two items from the scale had been used by Erkan and Evans (2016), the originators of the Information Acceptance Model, to measure information adoption. However, a minimum of three items per scale is usually recommended for Structural Equation Modelling (Marsh *et al.*, 1998; Robinson, 2018), so the entire scale of Cheung *et al.* (2009) was used here. The scale had good internal consistency indicated by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.772 (Cheung *et al.*, 2009).

Booking Intention was measured using a three-item scale previously used to assess purchase intention in an influencer marketing context (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ki and Kim, 2019). References to 'purchase intention' were amended to 'booking intention' as befits this research. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients reported for this scale were 0.92 (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019) and 0.912 (Ki and Kim, 2019) showing it had good internal consistency.

In summary, the use of a survey to answer RQ2 suited the intention to understand relationships between a series of variables in a given population (Coughlan, Cronin and Ryan, 2009). Achieving the required response rate for the formation of a statistically relevant sample can be difficult, supporting the choice to access an existing panel, where response rates were guaranteed. Surveying at a single point in time translates to a snapshot of the phenomenon under investigation without taking into consideration the impact of unforeseen variables. Nevertheless, the output delivers learnings about influencer marketing that have, so far, not been extensively described in the literature, e.g., the impact of attitudes and beliefs held by followers on their effectiveness.

A summary of the scales used is provided in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Summary of the Measurement Instruments Used

Background Information			
Appearance Involvement	Fashion Involvement Scale – (4 items)	Sun and Guo, 2017 (adapted from O’Cass, 2000)	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.72 (reported), 0.897 (this research)
Pre-Existing Attitudes and Beliefs			
Attitude to Ageing	Attitude About Ageing Scale – (6 items)	Gupta and Schork, 1993	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.85 (reported), 0.850 (this research)
Acceptance of Dermal Filler Treatment	Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale – (15 items) Intrapersonal (5 items) Social (5 items) Consider (5 items)	Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.84-0.92 (reported), 0.914-0.937 (this research)
Appearance Goals	Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) – (8 items)	Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.87 (reported), 0.916 (this research)
	Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) – (8 items)	Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson <i>et al.</i> , 2004	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.92 (reported, Vartanian and Dey, 2013), 0.899 (this research)
Post-Exposure Perspectives			
Perceived Credibility	Source Credibility Scale – (15 items) Attractiveness (5 items) Expertise (5 items) Trustworthiness (5 items)	Ohanian, 1990	Cronbach’s alpha: >0.8 (reported), 0.951 (this research)
Comparison Behaviour	Physical Appearance Comparison Scale – (3 items)	Adapted from Schaefer and Thompson, 2014	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.91 (reported, Tiggemann and McGill, 2004), 0.941 (this research)
Perceived Similarity/Dissimilarity	Similarity/Dissimilarity Scale – (6 items)	Yuan and Lou (2020)	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.92 (reported), 0.86-0.918 (this research)
Attitude Congruence	Perceived Congruence Scale – (3 items)	From Chetioui, 2019 – based on Xu (Rinka) and Pratt, 2018	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.7-0.92 (reported), 0.946 (this research)
	Attitude Congruence (Homophily) – (15 items)	From McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond, 2006	
Acceptance of Information	Acceptance of Information Scale – (5 items)	From Nunes <i>et al.</i> , 2018 – based on Teng <i>et al.</i> , 2014	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.77 (reported), 0.910 (this research)
Booking Intention	Purchase Intention Scale – (3 items)	Adapted from Ki and Kim, 2019; Jimenez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019)	Cronbach’s alpha: 0.912-0.92 (reported), 0.961 (this research)

4.7.3 Recruitment

To avoid issues with achieving the necessary number of survey responses required (Kelley *et al.*, 2003) respondents were accessed via their membership of an existing online respondent panel as it was possible to recruit participants who met the gender, age and location selection criteria (Chandler *et al.*, 2019). A panel is ‘a database of potential participants who declare that they will cooperate for future data collection if selected’ (ISO 20252, Section 3.1, International Organization for Standardization, 2019). Access to the panel was provided by Qualtrics®, a research company, with only those respondents who fit the selection criteria set by the researcher being eligible.

According to Postoaca (2006), online panels have been used in survey research since the late 1990s. Most are built through non-probability sampling including advertising, snowballing etc. (Callegaro *et al.*, 2014), rather than through probability sampling of the general population, and this distinction must be a consideration in the choice to use a commercially available panel. Firstly, there is the question of their ‘location’, in that by recruiting the respondent sample from an online panel the entire offline population is missed. This was not necessarily a concern for this research, which sought to understand the effectiveness of social media influencers as an emergent, internet-based, endorsement community. The most significant issue of online panels expressed in the available literature, though, is their reliability as a source of quality data (Callegaro *et al.*, 2014; Chandler *et al.*, 2019). However, much work has been done to overcome this potential drawback and the use of online participant recruitment in behavioural research continues to grow as participants who produce low-quality data can be identified and removed from the sample either by screening or the use of ‘attention checks’ which ask for the entry of specific responses, making non-probability online panels a viable option for participant recruitment (Chandler *et al.*, 2019).

A number of the features expounded in the literature (Chandler *et al.*, 2019) as a means of maximising the output of high-quality, reliable data were utilised, including using existing, proven measurement scales, employing a

consistent 5-point Likert response mechanism and deploying screening tasks within the questionnaire as attention checks. Also, the panel operator assessed, during the pilot phase, the median time for completion and, following confirmation of the robustness of the output of the pilot cases by the researcher, used this as the basis of identifying and excluding participants who completed the task so speedily that the quality of their responses was called into question.

The ideal length of an online survey is reported to be between 10 and 15 minutes (Revilla and Höhne, 2020), and longer surveys are known to generate more undifferentiated responses (e.g., 'don't know', 'neither agree nor disagree' etc.) (Deutskens *et al.*, 2004), the survey was limited to allow completion within this approximate time frame. This was confirmed during the pilot phase when all participants completed the survey within 15 minutes. It was assumed that some respondents would choose to complete the survey on their PC while others would use their phone, so, it was necessary for the format of the survey on the Qualtrics® platform to be responsive to the device being used by the participant. During development, the legibility of all elements of the survey on a phone screen was confirmed by the researcher and two other individuals who fit the inclusion criteria for the research. Each person used a different phone make and model.

In terms of sample size for this phase of the research, it was important to include sufficient participants to enable the results to be generalised to the entire population (Bryman and Bell, 2011), and so, following the guidance of Creswell (2014) the sample size was dictated by the margin of error (or confidence interval), the confidence level and the size of the entire population of possible participants. For this research, these parameters were defined as a 5% margin of error, a confidence level of 99% and a total population of approximately 6.5M Generation X women residents of the UK (ONS, 2019). Therefore, the quantitative phase of this research required a sample of 666 participants.

4.7.4 Pilot Testing of the Survey

Fifty quantitative surveys were completed before the start of data collection proper to identify issues, e.g., the inappropriateness of measurement instruments, and correct them before impacting the quality of the final data. No changes were made to the questionnaire after reviewing the data generated by the pilot respondents, which included the assessment of outliers, variability and missing data as indicators of inattention or miscomprehension (Pallant, 2016).

4.7.5 Data Analysis

Once completed, survey data was uploaded to SPSS 25 software for analysis, starting with a thorough check to ensure there were no missing values or outliers. Once the data had been cleaned appropriately, descriptive statistics were calculated and examined, and the internal reliability of the measurement scales was tested by calculating Cronbach's alpha (α). Finally, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), using AMOS 23 software, was used to validate the conceptual model described in Chapter 3.

SEM is commonly used for hypothesis testing (Bentler and Chou, 1987) as it simultaneously tests the relationships between dependent and independent variables in a conceptual model (Henri, 2007). It was selected for use in this research because, as a multivariate statistical technique, it offered the possibility of testing the entirety of the proposed conceptual model with the additional benefit of providing both an evaluation of hypothesized causal relationships between variables as well as known or fixed relationships between others (Fan *et al.*, 2016). Using SEM, therefore, made it possible to evaluate the relationships between the impact variables (Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence, Attitude to the Behaviour and 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation) and the effectiveness measures outlined in Chapter 2.

4.8 Research Ethics

The context of this research, the endorsement of appearance-modifying products, raised two ethical questions. The first related to the sharing of personal information by those involved and reinforced the imperative that

ethical standards needed to be upheld so that respondents, and their disclosures, were treated fairly, compassionately, and with respect (Dawson, 2019). Ethical behaviour not only ensures that those who give up their valuable time and perspectives to help expand human knowledge and understanding are protected from harm but that the data generated are robust and trustworthy (Israel and Hay, 2006). To this end, this research was formulated following the guidelines of the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Brighton and, following a review of all aspects, approved to proceed (see Appendix 1).

In practical terms, participants who met the selection criteria were recruited by self-selection via their participation in online forums (i.e., Facebook groups or respondent panels), with all subsequent contact limited to either the researcher, in the case of the qualitative interview phase, or the panel operator, Qualtrics®, for the quantitative survey. Participation was confirmed only once the individual had read a detailed Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 3) prepared by the researcher explaining the nature of the research. Before proceeding with data collection, written informed consent, requiring agreement with several inclusion criteria, was obtained (see Appendix 9).

The second ethical consideration, discussed in section 1.3.4, is related to the commercial environment, where dermal filler treatment is increasingly being promoted to the public (Fitzgerald, 2018), and consequently, questioning the appropriateness of influencers as demand generators, increasing awareness and demand, was warranted. It was not the purpose of this research to judge or advocate the use of dermal filler treatment by midlife women, nor determine if the promotion of this product to these consumers is appropriate (Bunker and Griffiths, 2012). In simple terms, dermal filler treatment as the endorsement focus offers a stringent test of the efficacy of influencer-led endorsements. Nevertheless, the researcher was conscious of the need to maintain that neutrality throughout this research, and to act responsibly in the provision of reliable product information. As a result, the information provided to survey respondents was carefully crafted by consulting the recommendations of Save Face, an independent source of information on

best-practice in the non-surgical cosmetic procedure industry recognised by the UK Government (Save Face, 2019) to ensure it was a truthful and balanced account of the use of the product with a realistic picture of treatment benefits and consequences to enable informed responses to be forthcoming (Mehlman *et al.*, 2004).

The researcher believes that every effort was made to conduct appropriate and ethical research, taking into account the controversial nature of the product and the surrounding industry in the UK.

4.9 The Researcher's Role

As described earlier, inquiry is a defining process within Pragmatism, the adopted research philosophy, to examine and resolve problems (Morgan, 2014), and this chapter has outlined how two methods of inquiry were chosen to answer the research questions. It is now appropriate to describe how the participation of the researcher varied between phases, firstly by considering the contrasting conditions in which the inquiry took place. One benefit of the design of this research is that varying levels of researcher involvement can be adopted without diminishing the accuracy of the resulting outcomes.

In this research, then, the researcher had a participative role in the first, qualitative phase and maintained distance for the quantitative survey. In the first phase, the researcher was keen to achieve 'inquiry from the inside' and delve deeply into the phenomenon under consideration and so adopted an immersive approach (Everard and Louis, 1981). In contrast, quantitative research where the aim is to generalise from a sample to an entire population has been described as 'inquiry from the outside' due to the usual lack of interaction between the researcher and the participants (Everard and Louis, 1981). This characterisation can be applied to the second phase as there was no direct contact between the survey participants and the researcher. The inputs received, therefore, represent participants' independent thoughts and opinions.

That said, it is worth reflecting further on the researcher's stance during the interview process where the imperative was to be true to the respondents' perspectives so that the resulting knowledge was reliable and valid (Morse *et al.*, 2002). To do so it is necessary to provide some background information about the researcher. As a female, Generation X, UK resident, she would qualify as a potential respondent. Moreover, personal experience within the beauty industry, in a marketing capacity, conferred a degree of expertise that is likely beyond that of the typical consumer. And finally, the concept being discussed, 'Youth-Ideal' was developed by the researcher from literature reports (see section 2.3.2), so there was a natural desire to be proved right in terms of its existence and relevance to this research. These factors exemplify both a strong self-interest component and a fair amount of 'skin in the game' in terms of proficiency on the subject under discussion that necessitated the need for the researcher to be reflexive throughout data collection and analysis. There is a clear requirement, then, for an explanation and justification of the role of the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

Because the remainder of this section concerns the personal reflections of the researcher, the use of the first person will be adopted.

I intended to be active in every interview to encourage participation but also to ensure that the purpose of the research, to explore the 'Youth-Ideal' concept, was achieved. Pawson and Tilley (1997) offered guidance here when they advocated that interviews with this intention should be concept-driven and so, I aimed to lead a conversation that focused on my conceptualisation and its explicit evaluation. The style I adopted was participative, I am, after all, my own respondent, and took on the mantle of having some expertise in the subject being discussed.

Even so, I never corrected or actively disagreed with the position being put forward by my respondents, even though it was, at times, hard to maintain objectivity. I am someone with a strong presence, and I knew that the credibility of my research rested on my ability to walk a path of 'encouraging neutrality'. To this end, I started each interview with questions focused on the respondent's appearance management routine and observations of related media messaging to generate an open discussion in a relaxed atmosphere. In most cases, it was the interviewee who initiated the conversation about

ageing-related concerns or pressures, usually after reviewing a flashcard showing magazine covers featuring articles such as 'Younger, Prettier, Happier!' (Good Housekeeping, July 2017) and 'How to Age Well' (Woman & Home, September 2019). This was gratifying as it enabled me both to introduce 'Youth-Ideal' as another aspect of the ongoing conversation and offer a potential explanation for the magazines' intention in including such content. I found that following this path encouraged participation as interviewees were keen to put forward their thoughts on this topic and I got a strong sense that this was the point at which many became particularly engaged in the discussion.

As Pawson and Tilley (1997) advise, I took on the role of helping the respondent to grasp the concept at the centre of the discussion, and I enjoyed this aspect of the interview process with its echoes of my pre-academia life in industry. I realised it was possible that some of the women I interviewed would not respond well to this approach and may, as a result, provide inputs that were distorted or not a true reflection of their attitudes and beliefs. I was conscious at all times of keeping my feet firmly on the path described earlier, and it was never my impression that any of the discussions had become unproductive or superficial because the interviewee felt alienated or dissatisfied by the tone of the conversation.

I was, then, unprepared for the responses of some interviewees concerning the demonstration, by other women, of the behaviours inherent in 'Youth-Ideal'. My initial, rather robotic response to those opinions, with which I did not necessarily agree, was to ask questions such as 'why do you say that' to explore the interviewee's perspective more deeply and I found this to be a great way to maintain distance and impartiality while encouraging further candour. That said, I was concerned that the robustness of the views expressed, and the liveliness and enthusiasm exhibited when describing friends who had been having non-surgical cosmetic procedures without telling their husbands could easily take up a disproportionate amount of the available time for the discussion. Equally, I knew these narratives were an important aspect of the social processes being investigated. Ultimately, I realised, this was a test of my prowess as an interviewer. Indeed, I came to think of their openness as an indication of the trust that had been built between myself and the respondent, which may have originated from the fact that I, too, was facing the same concerns about the mark of time on my facial appearance. I felt that

it was that vulnerability and uncomfortable self-awareness that encouraged my respondents to become so involved in the conversation and enable me to see the problems of ageing through their eyes (Bryman, 1984). I found that my perspectives of the phenomenon reflect another reality that I could compare to those of the respondents, even though by doing so I had to question my viewpoint (Donalek, 2004).

Overall, I found the interview experience both enlightening, in terms of the strength of feelings engendered by the discussion, and challenging, when the opinions expressed were so at odds with my own. For a Pragmatist, experience is the basis of reality, and so, because I'm a Generation X woman living in the UK, I supposed my experiences would be similar enough to my respondents that our perspectives would align. But now I see more than ever that experiences are interpreted so that even matched events can give rise to an array of beliefs and perceptions. And hence, even though all the women I interviewed were experiencing the singular reality of physical ageing, we were each seeing it in our own way leading to the multiple perspectives discussed earlier in this chapter. So, regardless of the similarities in our age, location and gender, there was no reason to assume that our perspectives on ageing would align.

To summarise, even though it was not as I imagined it would be, I was pleased to have been part of such a fulfilling process that reinforced for me the great privilege of conducting research with my peers and I have endeavoured to treat their inputs with the respect that they deserve.

4.10 Summary of Research Methodology

The purpose of this research was to understand, through the lens of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975), the impact of attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers in the context of dermal filler treatment used to effect appearance modification. A Pragmatic philosophical stance was adopted, and the research was conducted by following a two-phase design, to answer two research questions:

RQ 1: Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of ‘Youth-Ideal’ and what factors are involved in its propagation?

RQ 2: How do attitudes and beliefs held by followers impact influencer-led product endorsements?

The methodology followed is summarised in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Summary of the Research Methodology

Research Paradigm	Pragmatism – the adoption of a philosophical and methodological approach that works best for the research problems(s) to be investigated (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998)
Epistemology	The basis of knowledge is social and based on experience (Kaushik and Walsh, 2019)
Ontology	Pragmatic research flows from an ontological stance located in the middle of the objectivity–subjectivity continuum (Maarouf, 2019), which in this research translated to the acceptance, by the researcher, of a single reality perceived differently based on individual lived experiences of that reality (Philipps and Burbules, 2000)
Methodology	Two-phase research design incorporating 1) a qualitative method to explore a proposed concept based on individual experiences and perspectives, and 2) a quantitative method to test 20 hypotheses derived from the literature

The combination of the two phases of the research is represented in the revised version of the conceptual model shown in Figure 4.6. Impact variables and effectiveness measures are distinguished, and the importance

of the first phase of the research is indicated. A final version of the conceptual model is included later in this thesis following the description of the findings resulting from that first phase.

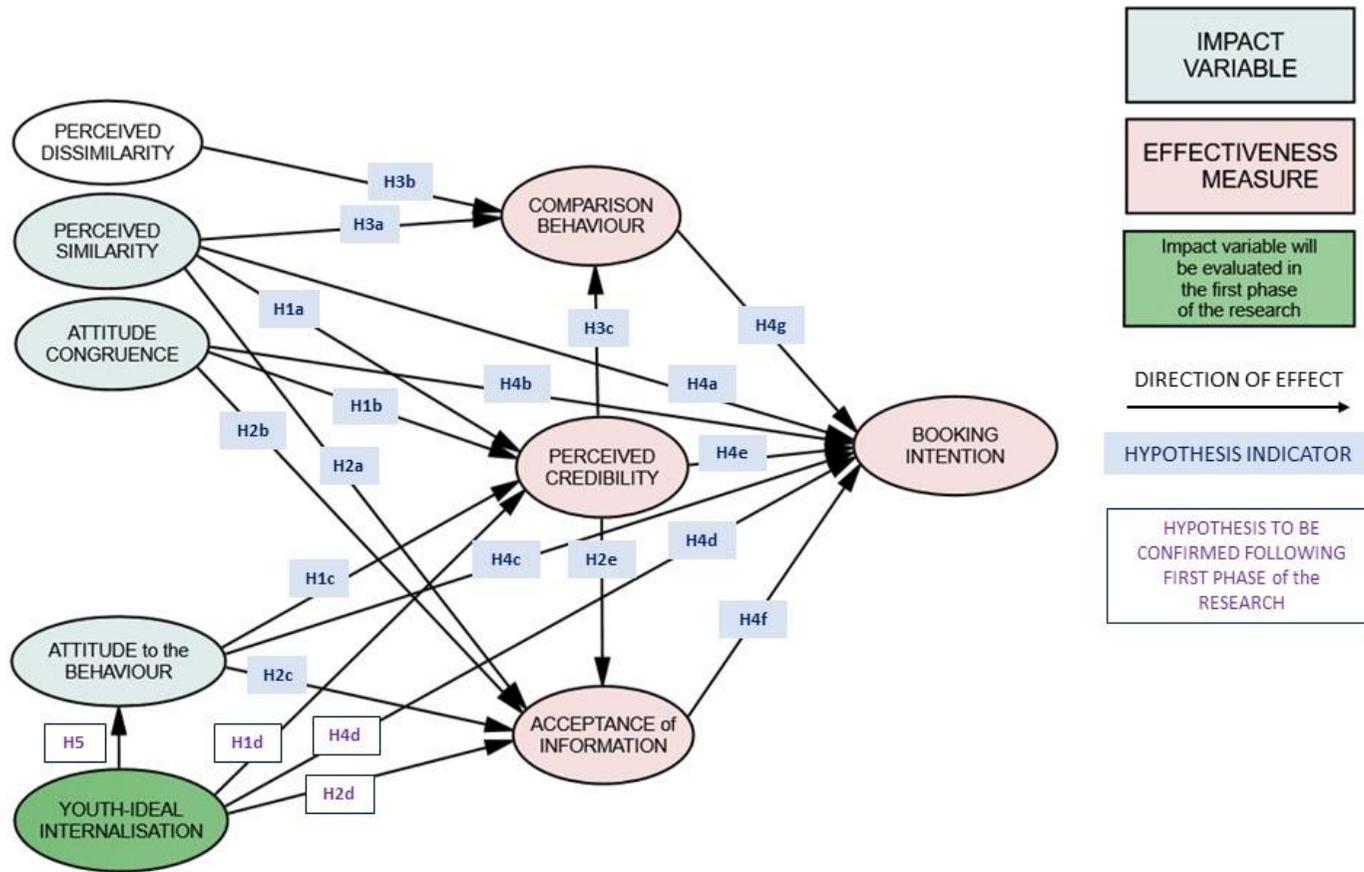
The final output of the research, after completion of both phases, will be a broader understanding of the impact of attitudes and beliefs on influencer-led endorsement effectiveness.

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has outlined the philosophical basis of this research and described in detail the methodology adopted. The rationale for selecting a Pragmatic paradigm and research approach, and the choice of a two-phase design, incorporating qualitative interviews followed by quantitative hypothesis testing were explained. Finally, the research methods were explained and rationalised and sampling strategies, piloting, data collection and analytical processes were laid out.

The following chapter presents the results and findings of the first of the two phases of this research, the exploration of the 'Youth-Ideal' concept using semi-structured interviews.

Figure 4.6 The Revised Conceptual Model Showing How the Two Phases of the Research Combine



NB: Original in Colour

5 FIRST PHASE RESULTS: EXPLORATION OF 'YOUTH-IDEAL'

5.1 Chapter Introduction

The chapter focuses on the results of the first of the two phases of this research as described in the previous chapter. The purpose of this phase was to explore the proposed concept of 'Youth-Ideal' in UK-resident Generation X females and assess the nature of its contribution to individual perspectives of the importance of appearance management as it relates to human biological ageing. A further, operational goal was to determine the referent others and sources of pressure that have a hand in perpetuating the 'Youth-Ideal' message to guide the appropriate amendments needed for two measurement scales to be used to measure the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' in the subsequent quantitative research phase.

One consequence of perceived social forces is that our beliefs and behaviours are affected to the extent that they become more like those of the people around us, which could impact decision-making (Niosi, 2021). The result may be the demonstration of behaviour that is consistent with the actions or opinions of a referent group or shaped by external pressure, potentially as a means to be accepted, hence normative conformity arises (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). An examination of these factors, namely referent others and external pressures, in the context of the midlife female, is warranted to be able to predict the effectiveness of influencers as endorsers of dermal filler treatment. It is appropriate, therefore, to ask RQ1: *Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and what factors are involved in its propagation?*

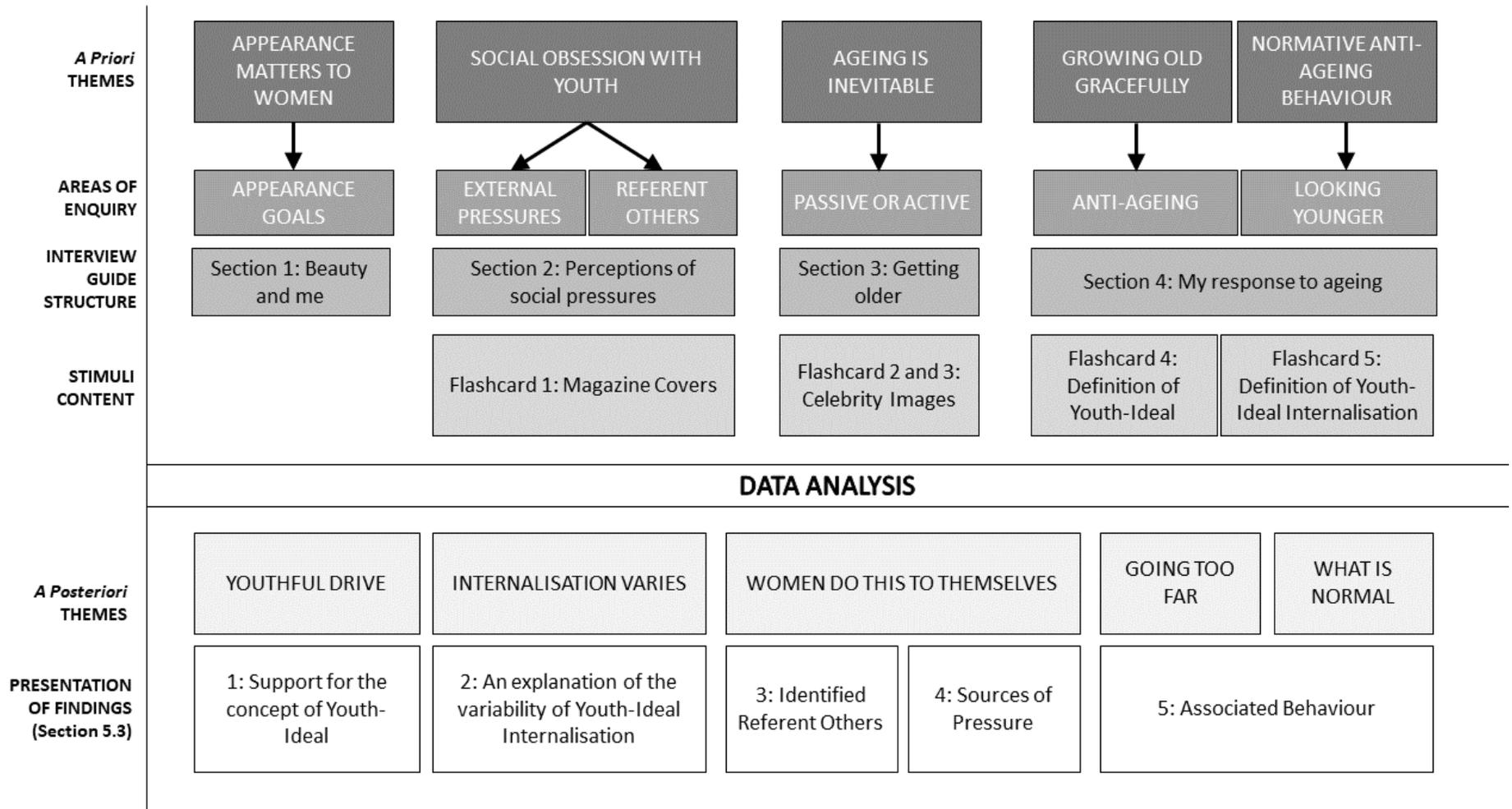
This chapter describes the output of the semi-structured interviews used to answer RQ1. Firstly, the procedure is explained, including demographic details of the respondents and analytical techniques employed. Thereafter the findings are described in terms of the respondents' consideration of the 'Youth-Ideal' concept, highlighting their thoughts and opinions on the mechanisms and disseminators responsible for perpetuating appearance-related messages to Generation X females. The operationalisation of these

inputs is rationalised before the additional data realised from the interviews relating to age concealment practices and characteristics of those who may be most likely to exhibit internalisation of 'Youth-ideal' is briefly described. The chapter ends with the version of the conceptual model to be investigated in the subsequent quantitative, hypothesis testing phase of this research.

5.2 Procedure

The hybrid thematic analytic process (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Swain, 2018) adopted for the first, qualitative phase of this research was made up of a series of interconnected steps. The five *a priori* themes derived from the literature in advance of data collection were the starting point for determining the areas of enquiry or scope of the semi-structured interview and hence were integral to the creation of the research materials (interview guide and content of the stimuli). Following the completion of 19 interviews, those preliminary themes acted as the basis of the initial deductive analysis that was followed by an inductive assessment and finally, the creation of five *a posteriori* themes that better represented the insights generated. Figure 5.1 provides a diagrammatic representation of the process including how the outcomes of this phase of the research are explained later in this chapter (section 5.3).

Figure 5.1 The Six Interconnected Steps of the Hybrid Thematic Analysis Procedure



5.2.1 Planning and Conducting the Interviews

The interview guide was constructed in four sections, 1) Beauty and me, to understand the importance of appearance to the respondent, 2) Perceptions of social pressures, to explore referent others and possible sources of external appearance-related pressure, 3) Getting older, to uncover ageing-related perspectives and practices, and 4) My response to ageing, where the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' was raised and the extent of internalisation assessed.

The average interview duration was 58 minutes (range: 37-84), and all were conducted online per the University of Brighton's policy during the COVID-19 pandemic and recorded for transcription by the researcher.

As explained in section 4.5.1, semi-structured interviews were the method chosen for this phase of the research to permit an open conversation with digressions into interesting discussions of the experiences and viewpoints of the interviewee as appropriate. Hence, there was some variance in the questions asked of each respondent, as will become evident in this section.

5.2.2 Demographics of Participants

Nineteen participants were recruited for this phase of the research using advertisements on social network sites asking for volunteers. Three selection criteria were used: gender (female or identify as female), age (birth year 1965-1980 inclusive) and current residence in the United Kingdom (although not necessarily a British national). Before recruitment, all participants were provided with an explanation of the entire research (both phases) (see Appendix 3), and once they indicated their willingness to take part, written informed consent was obtained (see Appendix 9). The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1 Demographics of Interview Participants

Interview Number	ID	Year of Birth	Marital Status	Employment Status	Has Children?
1	ID:1	1965	Single	Self-Employed	Yes
2	ID:2	1971	Single	Employee	No
3	ID:3	1967	Partnered	Employee	No
4	ID:4	1975	Married	Employee	Yes
5	ID:5	1972	Married	Stay-at-Home Mother	Yes
6	ID:6	1970	Married	Employee	Yes
7	ID:7	1972	Married	Stay-at-Home Mother	Yes
8	ID:8	1973	Married	Employee	No
9	ID:9	1976	Partnered	Employee	No
10	ID:10	1971	Divorced	Employee	Yes
11	ID:11	1967	Married	Employee	Yes
12	ID:12	1976	Partnered	Self-Employed	Yes
13	ID:13	1970	Married	Employee	Yes
14	ID:14	1971	Separated	Employee	Yes
15	ID:15	1970	Married	Employee	Yes
16	ID:16	1978	Married	Employee	Yes
17	ID:17	1979	Married	Stay-at-Home Mother	Yes
18	ID:18	1973	Married	Employee	Yes
19	ID:19	1979	Married	Self-Employed	Yes

N.B.: In terms of ethnicity, 17 interviewees were White British, 1 British Asian, and 1 Mixed Ethnicity.

5.2.3 Data Analysis

The five *a priori* themes derived from the extant literature in advance of data collection were ‘Social Obsession with Youth’, ‘Appearance Matters to Women’, ‘Ageing is Inevitable’, ‘Growing Old Gracefully’ and ‘Normative Anti-Ageing Behaviour’ (see Table 4.3 and Appendix 5) and represented the researcher’s first effort to identify indicatory facets of, due to or associated with the phenomenon under investigation.

It is also important to note here consideration, during the analysis, of the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Tylka, 2011), which has it that beauty ideals are reinforced and transmitted by sociocultural influences, namely peers, parents (family), partners and the media. This model has been used in research on body image and dissatisfaction (e.g., Slevec and Tiggemann, 2010) and so was an appropriate frame of reference when

exploring the origins of 'Youth-Ideal' and the contexts in which it is internalised, particularly the influence of potential referent others and sources of external appearance-related pressure.

As a first step toward understanding the experiences of each interviewee, the researcher listened to each audio file and read the resulting transcript several times before commencing the analysis. This was important in the process of understanding the interviewees' perspectives and developing a level of familiarity with each individual so that the essence of their belief in the ideals being discussed could be interpreted correctly.

A hybrid approach to thematic analysis was adopted based on the method of Swain (2018). As a first step, the data were assessed deductively (top-down) by creating a matrix (Miles and Huberman, 1994) to organise it by respondent and *a priori* theme. Displaying the data in this way gave a broad indication of the appropriateness of the initial themes by demonstrating which of them were represented in the respondents' inputs, and how and when they were being mentioned. Thereafter, an inductive method of bottom-up data analysis was employed to identify patterns within the matrix. This also included reviewing each of the transcripts several times to ensure the coding phase was comprehensive. During this process, 64 axial codes were generated, which were gradually reduced to 31 selective codes during the second cycle of interpretation. At this stage, the appropriateness of the *a priori* themes was considered and revised based on the outputs of the inductive analysis. Five *a posteriori* themes emerged that re-tell the thematic story of the phenomenon of 'Youth-Ideal' from the perspective of those experiencing it. They are, 'Youthful Drive', 'Internalisation Varies', 'Women do this to Themselves', 'Going too Far' and 'What is Normal' (see Figure 5.1) and will be explained in the next section.

See also Appendix 5 for a diagrammatical representation of the coding process employed.

5.3 Results

This section starts with an explanation of the key insights generated from the thematic analysis and the development of the *a posteriori* themes.

Thereafter, the findings are operationalised to guide the amendment of the measurement scales used in the quantitative phase.

5.3.1 Support for the Concept of ‘Youth-Ideal’

The first of the *a posteriori* themes is ‘Youthful Drive’. All interviewees were aware of a force or pressure that encourages women to believe in the need to maintain a youthful appearance as they get older, designated as the concept ‘Youth-Ideal’ in this research, and many thought that the momentum of the ‘drive to youth’ was growing and becoming stronger. The sentiment of one respondent captured the collective perception:

‘We keep being told that we don’t want to show the outward appearance of being old’ (ID:2)

Notwithstanding the desire to appear youthful, all interviewees accepted that ageing, the process of getting older and experiencing the associated physiological changes, e.g., grey hair and wrinkles, is everyone’s destiny and therefore unavoidable,

‘It’s inevitable. It’s going to happen. We’re going to get older’. (ID:6)

As described in section 5.2.2, each interview was punctuated by the use of flashcards (see Appendix 2). Following the review of flashcard 4 (see Figure 4.3), all respondents agreed that the statement describing ‘Youth-Ideal’ was a true reflection of UK society’s expectation of how women should age in the 21st Century. One interviewee, though, believed it was only a component of a more corrosive under-valuing of the aged,

‘It’s all true, but it’s only part of a bigger truth, that society doesn’t value ageing’ (ID:7).

On this latter point, the view held by ID:7 was echoed in a recent report (Centre for Ageing Better, 2021), of a discourse analysis study covering governmental, industrial and media communications, showing that language used in the UK supports and reinforces negative attitudes to ageing.

According to the authors, it is not just that ageing is inevitable, as expressed by the interviewees here, but that UK society holds strong the idea that physical and mental decline is also unavoidable. This, then, is the pervasive backdrop to the comments of the interviewees in this research.

It was therefore considered appropriate in an interview with the express purpose of confirming, falsifying or refining a new concept (Pawson, 1996) that the 'Youth-Ideal' statement was deliberately worded to be provocative, suggesting that women were 'faced with having to retain a younger look', were 'no longer able to grow old gracefully', and would consider 'the biggest compliment they could receive being told they look younger than they are'. Yet still, although there was considerable debate about the semantics, when asked if it was true or false, all 19 respondents believed it to be true.

A detailed examination of the statement was carried out by reviewing the sentences that the respondent believed were either highly indicative of or at odds with their perception of the external pressure being described in the 'Youth-Ideal' statement. All the women with whom the first sentence was discussed (13/19) agreed that it captured the current climate that prescribes looking younger than their chronological age should be their goal, although six interviewees were reluctant to accept the directive,

'I'd like to think that nobody has to retain a younger look, but I've seen plenty of women who do feel like that'. (ID:16)

As was the case throughout the interview, respondents were keen to deflect to 'other women' declaring themselves to be unaffected by the issues raised. This could be an example of psychological projection, a defence mechanism where people attribute behaviours they do not like in themselves to others (Freud, 1923).

The most contentious part of the description of 'Youth-Ideal' was the phrase 'we are no longer allowed to grow old gracefully'. More than half of the respondents with whom this was discussed believed it to be false, with the majority of them stating that women could choose their path through ageing. Interestingly, two women who disagreed with the phrase highlighted the

British actor, Helen Mirren as evidence that growing old gracefully was permitted and even applauded, although one did also ponder,

'Helen Mirren is amazing, although I don't know whether she has had aesthetics [NSCPs] to maintain her appearance'. (ID:18)

It is clear from this and other, similar comments that the phrase 'growing old gracefully' is interpreted differently by women and can span from making no effort to disguise ageing to actively trying to avoid looking your age through the adoption of age-resistance practices. This broad range of options to achieve one's interpretation of what it means to grow old gracefully means both that Youth-Ideal is not associated with a collective goal, and that there is no collective behaviour that is followed by all. For example, ID:11 felt that growing old gracefully meant utilising beauty enhancements, makeup, and hair dye, was fine, although the intention should not be to look decades younger,

'I look back at pictures of my grandma at 50, but even at 50, she looked 80. Because there weren't any beauty enhancements was there? And so, I do think we are allowed to grow old gracefully. I think nowadays you know it's perfectly normal, isn't it, to see a woman over 60 in, you know, with long blonde hair, tight jeans and a leather jacket. Just rocking a look like that even when they're older. Whereas you know when I was young my mother wouldn't have done anything like that past 30. But trying to look, you know, like you're in your 20s. It's not a good look, is it, over a certain age, to be honest.' (ID:11)

An opposite view was expressed by ID:14, who was clear that growing old gracefully corresponded to *'accepting your age, and not really caring'*.

The goal behind the apparent youthful drive is somewhat of an amorphous goal, further complicated by the lack of a clear means to achieve it. This is a true conundrum for women in the area of ageing. Contrast that with 'thin-ideal', where both the goal and how to reach it are significantly more apparent. The drive to youthfulness is clear, yet the goal is indeterminate both in terms of description and outcome. Yet, still, as stated in the 'Youth-Ideal' statement, the majority of respondents (17/19) believed being told they

look younger than they are to be a compliment, with 7 of the 17 judging it to be the biggest compliment they could receive, reinforcing that the drive to the goal is strong.

And, according to 15 of the 19 respondents, possibly the most obvious manifestation of this youthful drive is in the realm of skincare products, which still frequently use the term 'anti-ageing' to describe moisturisers designed for mature skin, long after many have decreed the phrase to be inappropriate (Bromstein, 2019; Walsh, 2017). The consistent feedback from these respondents was that it suggested both that ageing was to be avoided, and that it could be prevented, in a way that one respondent said was '*in defiance of human law*' (ID:9). That the phrase elicited such a singularly negative response is interesting and may indicate that while women are content to be guided to an acceptance of 'Youth-Ideal', such overt messaging is too stark and brings a woman closer to the realisation of what Sontag (1972) described as '*her dirty secret*' (p.29), her chronological age.

Nevertheless, all these indicators point to the existence, and awareness of, the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' in this population. Still, the rationale for following the directive was less easy to determine. Beyond statements such as '*I feel better if I look like good on the outside*' (ID:10), most respondents could not articulate clearly what they saw as the goal of 'Youth-Ideal', or why it gained traction with women. The ethereal nature of 'Youth-Ideal', thousands of years in the making, was a consistent thread through the interviews, in as much as the respondents did not have a specific ambition in mind when they used the phrases 'good for my age' and 'best version of me', other than, as one respondent explained, '*however you perceive good for you*' (ID:12). An indication of this sense of a blurred or uncertain aspiration was brought to life when respondents were asked if they knew what their [chronological] age looked like, as the response almost invariably was that they did not. It seems paradoxical that a drive that is so well recognised and so clear in its message does not have a distinct, tangible endpoint.

Notwithstanding this apparent lack of a concrete benefit for its adoption, the consistency of responses from interviewees concerning societal pressures relating to ageing and their reaction to the statement outlining the concept

'Youth-Ideal', it seems reasonable to suggest that it is an appearance ideal with which UK-resident Generation X women are familiar. Moreover, these findings provide support for it to be included within the second research phase as an independent variable representing the subjective norm of the foundation theory. The following section describes how the societal view permeates individual beliefs and behaviour, captured in the following comment,

'I do think there's a pressure to look younger as you age... but it's a question of how confident you are in yourself whether you choose to listen' (ID:12).

5.3.2 The Degree of Internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' Varies

The second *a posteriori* theme 'Internalisation Varies' reflects the variability in the internalisation of 'Youth-Ideal' as determined by the evaluation of both direct and indirect cues.

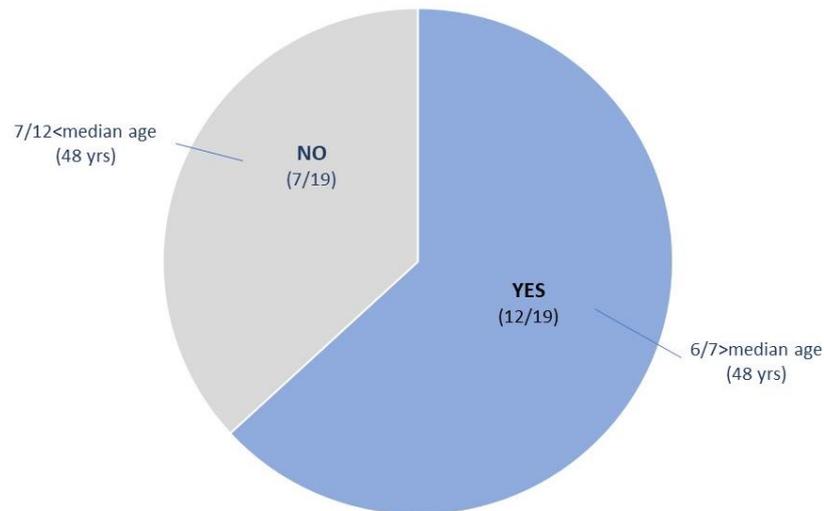
5.3.2.1 Direct Acknowledgment of Internalisation

Firstly, flashcard 5, bearing a statement describing possible manifestations of internalisation (see Figure 4.4), was used to stimulate discussion around each respondent's direct acknowledgement of their acceptance of the concept. The statement included the phrase 'the signs of ageing are unwelcome' and described how 'attempts to defy ageing' were employed because 'looking younger than we are is important to us'. At this point, interviewees were asked to consider themselves rather than others or the wider society, so that an understanding of the extent of *their* internalisation could be assessed. Before dissecting the individual elements of the statement, each participant was asked simply, 'Is this statement describing you?'. The majority of respondents (12) said that it was. Here, then, is the first clear sign of 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation, and it is relatively common, at least in this sample. Seven of the 12 were younger than the median age (48 years), whereas all but one who answered 'No' were older than the median age. This is noteworthy because this finding appears to agree with literature reports that women's interest in their appearance wanes over time (Halliwell

and Dittmar, 2003; Thompson *et al.*, 1999; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004).

Figure 5.2 shows the data in chart form:

Figure 5.2 Self-Identification of ‘Youth-Ideal’ Internalisation (N=19)



Although it is impossible to say with certainty why this might be the case, there may be a reason to suggest that either internalisation of ‘Youth-Ideal’ also wanes as a woman gets older, or that some aspect of society that is having an impact on internalisation is more apparent to, or compelling for, younger women. On that latter point, possibly the most obvious potential candidate here is social media, to which 40-year-old women have been exposed for much of their adult life.

Of the 7 respondents who felt the statement did not reflect their viewpoint, 3 said it did describe women they knew,

‘Not really me. I’m sure other people would agree’ (ID:6)

‘I don’t identify with it. Other women, but not including me. There are quite a lot of other women who follow this. They experience the pressures and act upon it’. (ID:15)

‘Not me. I’m aware that this feeling is out there’. (ID:2)

It was clear from listening to, and interpreting the words and tone used by the respondents to express their perspective of ‘Youth-Ideal’, that some were reluctant to volunteer themselves as having internalised the belief. Again, as seen in the responses to the ‘Youth-Ideal’ statement, there was a clear

projection of internalisation to others, possibly indicating that it is considered an unattractive or embarrassing attribute.

Even for those who had acknowledged their internalisation, there seemed to be an attempt to distance themselves from the notion, summed up by one participant as,

'I'd like to hope that I don't live by this [‘Youth-Ideal’] but I think at the back of my mind I probably do’ (ID:3).

And another interviewee, who likewise agreed that the statement reflected her perspectives, made it clear that other women’s adoption was greater than her own,

'I wouldn't change the statement because I think it is true. It's certainly how some of my friends feel. They worry that they won't be able to do the jobs they want to do, they won't get a promotion [because of their appearance]. (ID:13)

Only the interviewee who had regular treatment with non-surgical cosmetic procedures freely admitted ‘Youth-Ideal’ was reflective of her ageing philosophy, possibly even believing it to be an achievement of which she should be proud,

'I always want to be one of those people that wants to look younger than my age. Because I think it's a sign of health, right? You know, my perception in my head is if someone looks young for their age, it means they've looked after themselves. So, for me, I'd never want to look older than I am. I always want to look younger than I am’. (ID:8)

Therefore, based on the responses collected here, it seems that internalisation of ‘Youth-Ideal’ may not be universal, experienced by everyone, or binary, where acceptance is either ‘all or nothing’, but associated with degrees of both acceptance and willingness to admit it.

The final two elements of the ‘Youth-Ideal’ internalisation statement focused on behaviour ‘I make every effort to defy ageing’, and prominence within the respondent’s life ‘looking younger is important to me’. The former was discussed with 16 of the 19 interviewees, of whom 5 were in agreement and

11 were not, yet of those who disagreed they made every effort to defy ageing 7 were regularly dyeing their hair to cover grey. Either the process of restoring hair colour does not equate, in the minds of these women, to defiance of ageing, demonstrating the possible normalisation of the process, or these interviewees felt they were not making 'every effort'.

In summary, the output from the analysis of responses to flashcards 4 and 5 shows a widespread awareness of 'Youth-Ideal', but a variable adoption of it as a personal philosophy. It was assumed, though, that, with a potentially sensitive topic such as ageing, it would also be necessary to evaluate indirect indicators of internalisation, and these will be described in the next section.

5.3.2.2 Indirect Indicators of Internalisation

Each interview covered four topics where the respondent's views could signal tacit acceptance of 'Youth-Ideal': willingness to tell a stranger your age, the definition of 'looking good', use of anti-ageing products (e.g., creams, lotions), and personal ageing philosophy.

The majority (12/19) of the sample would reveal their age to a person they did not know, 11 without hesitation, and one after counter-asking how old the stranger thought she looked. The respondent who frequently underwent non-surgical cosmetic procedures declared,

'I'm quite proud of my age. I'm proud of how I look now I've had fillers'.

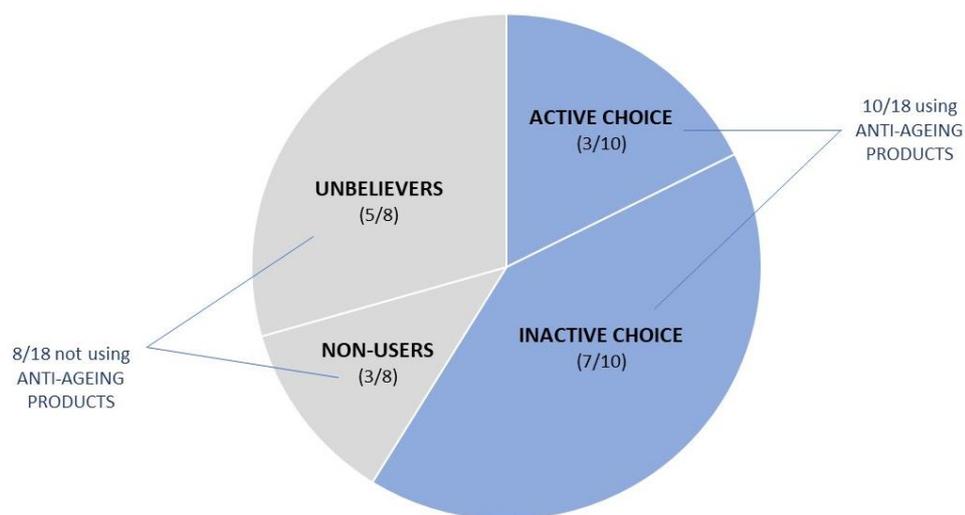
(ID:8)

The request to define the phrases 'looking good' and 'ageing well', in the context of their appearance or that of women they knew, came early in the interview and acted as an ice-breaker, encouraging the women to contribute candidly. The most commonly mentioned adjective in the resulting definitions was 'healthy', mentioned spontaneously by 8 respondents concerning the definition of 'looking good', which, according to Clarke and Korotchenko (2011) is an indirect way of saying 'youthful'. Similarly, 'ageing well' was predicated on being healthy for 9 of the respondents. Thus, looking good and ageing well are both associated with youthfulness and, without realising,

these Generation X women were reflecting the essence of the 'Youth-Ideal' proposition.

The third indirect signal was gleaned from a discussion on anti-ageing products, such as moisturisers, serums etc. that specifically claim a rejuvenating effect on the face. Again, a sizeable proportion of the interviewees were regularly using them (10/18), although only 3 stated they had made an active choice to purchase a product(s) due to those particular claims, suggesting their desire to address the signs of ageing on their faces. That all of these women were younger than the median age of the sample is possibly an indication that the anticipation of the effects of ageing may also play a role in the internalisation of the 'Youth-Ideal' archetype. This may indicate different patterns of behaviour within the cohort, possibly due to different message exposure or experiences. For the remaining seven respondents, the choice was due to other factors such as Sun Protection Factor (SPF), thicker consistency and price. In the non-user group (8/18), 5 expressed their lack of belief in the products' ability to address the facial signs of ageing and hence could be described as 'unbelievers'. Figure 5.3 shows these data in chart form:

Figure 5.3 Use of Anti-Ageing Products (N=18)



The last indirect indicator came from responses generated when interviewees were asked to 'please describe your ageing philosophy'. There was no concurrent flashcard to stimulate the discussion at this point, so the

output is entirely the unprompted thoughts of the interviewees. Seventeen (17) summarised their approach to maintaining their appearance as they got older, and their responses have been clustered into four 'ageing regimens'. The first is complete passivity, mentioned by 5 respondents who said that, because ageing is inevitable their approach would be to accede to it,

'I'm going to accept it, go with it. It's an inevitability so I'm not going to make an effort. I don't want to be that person that tries too hard or forces against nature'. (ID:1)

The second cluster of responses emphasises the benefits of general healthiness as a means of maintaining an attractive appearance, without addressing the signs of ageing on the face specifically. This approach was advocated by 8 respondents, and explained by one as,

'I'm going to age the way nature wants me to age, but obviously, I like to try to look as good, as healthy and fresh as I can'. (ID:3)

A third cluster represents a regimen that actively addresses the early signs of ageing, including using anti-ageing products, being more conscious about diet and exercise and dyeing hair to cover grey. All of the respondents in this cluster (n=3) were younger than the median age of the sample (48 years). This approach was captured by one interviewee as,

'I have taken steps with my skincare routine because my skin feels drier than it did when I was younger'. (ID:16)

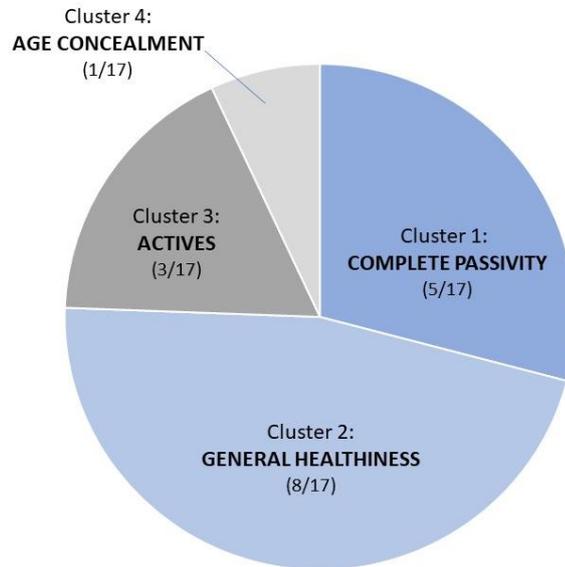
The final regimen was represented by only a single respondent who candidly described her current, and planned future use of NSCPs as a means of age concealment,

'I look after myself, and I've had work done. I can always look the best I can for my age. I'm consciously going to look after myself. I want to feel younger'. (ID:8)

Similarly to the direct evaluation of internalisation, analysis of the indirect indicators shows wide variability in acceptance of 'Youth-Ideal'. In a qualitative appraisal such as this though, it is difficult to truly determine the reasons for this inconsistency, but the age of the respondent may be

emerging as a potential marker. Figure 5.4 shows the regimens described above in chart form:

Figure 5.4 The Four Clusters of ‘Personal Ageing Philosophy’ (N=17)



At this point, all that can be proposed is that ‘Youth-Ideal’ is a concept that Generation X women understand, with some of them building it into their lifestyle and behaviour. The next stage of the analysis focuses on the propagators of the ‘Youth-Ideal’ message.

5.3.3 How ‘Youth-Ideal’ is Perpetuated

The third *a posteriori* theme generated from the data, ‘Women do this to Themselves’ reflects a nuanced interpretation of respondents’ views on the people and entities that were believed to be reinforcing the ‘Youth-Ideal’ message, causing it to be propagated and internalised. Although several factors emerged as propagators of ‘Youth-Ideal’ one thread in the transcripts was the amplification applied to anti-ageing messages by women themselves. This will be explained further in the section describing sources of pressure (see section 5.3.3.2).

Operationally, the insights underpinning this theme were used to modify two measurement instruments used to measure ‘Youth-Ideal’ internalisation in the second phase of the research. The first scale, the Internalisation Sub-Scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*,

2004), was selected as a means of evaluating referent others, i.e., people who are sources of influence and provide a model of behaviour (Schwartz and Ames, 1977). The second scale, the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) was chosen to evaluate sources of pressure that influence the ageing-related behaviour of Generation X females. The original scales included four referent others (SATAQ-INT) and four external pressures (PSPS) (see section 4.7.2). The outputs from the first research phase determined whether changes were necessary and identified suitable replacements, which are explained in the following sections.

5.3.3.1 Referent Others

Firstly, it is necessary to review the relevance of the four types of referent others used in the original version of the SATAQ-INT scale. They were, 'people on TV', 'models in magazines', 'people in movies' and 'models in music videos'. Of these, only the first was mentioned as a source of appearance-related inspiration,

'I love Clare Balding [TV presenter], she's just who she is. She looks good for what she is, but she isn't trying to be somebody that she isn't. She's not kind of, you know, trying to look overly glamorous because you know, she's a sporty type of person. And she's not the most attractive person in the world, but she seems very comfortable in her own skin regardless, so she's not trying to keep up with the fact that you know she's got a lot of TV presenting stuff on her CV, but she's not trying to compete with other people in terms of how she looks'. (ID:5)

'Davina McCall [TV presenter] is a role model for me. So, you know she's trying to, you know, combat her ageing and be fit and healthy and for me, that's a sort of good metaphor, really'. (ID:11)

There were no mentions of models, either in magazines or music videos. Only one film actor, Helen Mirren, was spontaneously mentioned, although the focus was on the fact that she seemed to be ageing naturally (see section 5.3.1). Consequently, of the four original referents included in the SATAQ-INT scale, only one, 'people on TV' was an appropriate fit for the revised version used here, although 'people' was changed to 'women' due to the nature of the research and the participants involved.

To maintain a close match with the structure of the original version and the inclusion of four types of referent other, in addition to 'women on TV', a further three were distilled from the interview outputs. One of these was 'women who appear on social media', included in part due to the focus of the research on influencers, and also because of interviewees' references to the increasing influence of women with a social media presence, such as,

'I've started in the last year following this... a couple of sites on Instagram called Social Versus Reality. It's trying to say to everybody, look, without all of the face tuning and everything else, they look like you and me. And there's quite a few influencers out there... I actually started following a lot of these women, and it's actually been really positive for me as a person'. (ID:8)

As explained in the previous chapter (section 4.6.2.1), the 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation statement (see Figure 4.4) cited friends, partners and work colleagues as potential referents. There was little tolerance for the suggestion that friends were the cause of 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation and almost universal confirmation that friendship with an appearance critic would not survive,

'If anyone was [sic] to judge me in that way, well, frankly, they wouldn't be my friend'. (ID:14)

'If they were going to judge me because of how I look, that would probably be game over'. (ID:5)

Similarly, the phrase 'concerned about appearing old to a partner or prospective partner' did not generate a clear sense that men were at the root of women's decision to internalise the edicts of 'Youth-Ideal', although broad

generalisations about the likely actions or motivations of men were expressed,

'Men are generally going to go for a younger woman'. (ID:8)

And the trials associated with the search for a partner during midlife were also heard,

'But if you're single, looks have a massive role in online dating which is one of the saddest things that has happened in our society'. (ID:15)

Even so, the consistent response to this aspect of the statement was disagreement, at least in terms of their partner,

'My husband doesn't notice really when I get my haircut, put on weight, lose weight, and that's a good thing and a bad thing, right? But it does mean that there's no ups and downs with it. So, I'm not worried that my husband won't be attracted to me because I've got [sic] older. So, I didn't agree really with that sentence. (ID:11)

The inclusion of partners or prospective partners as referents in the scale could not, therefore, be justified. In contrast, there was clear concern about the reaction of work colleagues to an ageing employee,

'People at work look at me and see someone older and judge me because of it, think me less capable or old-fashioned. The way I look is not in my favour now'. (ID:19)

This was also manifested as competition with other women in the workplace,

'It's more of, like, peer pressure. The other women all look so good so you think I better dress well, you know, and look good and stuff. And sometimes it's just easier to conform, isn't it?' (ID:9)

As a result of these concerns, 'women at work' was incorporated into the revised scale.

The final referent type was described as 'my role models' to encompass the broad array of other sources of inspiration mentioned concerning

appearance management and the absence of any further consensual motivating person or group beyond what has already been detailed in this section. Family members, particularly sisters and mothers, were mentioned by some but their status as an embodiment of an appearance goal did not outweigh that of friends, service providers such as hairdressers, members of the British Royal Family, personal trainers, etc. Given this multiplicity of influences, the use of a collective term such as 'role model' meaning an individual who inspires and motivates someone '*to do their utmost best*' (Lockwood and Kunda, 1997, p.91) was chosen.

In summary, the four types of referent other with the potential to influence how a Generation X woman takes care of her appearance included in the revision of the SATAQ-INT scale used in this research were, 'women on TV', 'women who appear on social media', 'women at work' and 'my role models'.

5.3.3.2 Sources of Pressure

Similar to the SATAQ-INT scale, the PSPS included four sources of perceived sociocultural pressure. They were, 'friends', 'family', 'people I've dated' and 'the media'. As discussed in the previous section, interviewees' explanations of the impact of the opinions of friends, family members and partners did not identify them as a consistent source of appearance-related pressure for the sample. This is an interesting finding as it shows, concerning the first two potential pressure sources, that there is a marked difference between acting as an inspirational model to be copied (a referent other) and actively coercing someone to adapt their behaviour or practices. The former is perceived positively, whereas the latter is unwelcome.

In contrast, the media was acknowledged as a potent force guiding Generation X women, gleaned from interviewees' evaluation of flashcard 1 showing a series of magazine front covers (see Appendix 2). Magazines were chosen as they are examples of mainstream media, and the intention was to explore the veracity of 'Youth-Ideal' as an established and familiar norm evidenced by its inclusion in mass-market publications. The particular covers used were selected on the basis that they 1) were from UK editions of women's lifestyle magazines targeting the Generation X cohort (Good

Housekeeping and Woman & Home), 2) were published recently (between July 2017 and September 2019) and 3) included reference to articles on ageing and appearance, and 4) the same titles had been used by Coupland (2009) in a discourse analysis on the media's guidance to midlife women regarding ageing-related appearance matters. Respondents were given time to review the flashcard, following which they were asked to summarise the main themes presented as they saw them. Reference to ageing, staying young and anti-ageing was, on average, the second mention across the sample; for 7 respondents it was the first theme mentioned although to that point no reference had been made to ageing during the interview or in the consent and information materials sent beforehand. Nor were the ageing-related articles prominently featured on all five magazine covers. Possibly, this is a further indirect indicator of the presence of 'Youth-Ideal' in the minds of the respondents.

Flashcard 1 was used to open a discussion about the media, and its role in appearance-related pressures. Respondents were asked if the magazine covers were indicative of how the media 'spoke to' Generation X women, and whether these magazine headlines were consistent with messages communicated by other media outlets, e.g., TV, social media, etc. From the interviewees' responses, it was clear that both the online and offline media affect the way they, and, in their opinion, other women, thought about their appearance. The 'stay-young' message exemplified by the magazine covers on flashcard 1 was considered by all respondents as being consistently and relentlessly communicated across all media channels. As described by the respondents, the media perpetuates the stay-young message in two ways. Firstly, by providing an instruction guide detailing how to achieve the aspirational goals upheld as achievable,

'Some people will see it as a helpful guide to caring for their appearance, whereas others might find it intimidating and worry they haven't done what they should and end up feeling worse'. (ID:12)

Secondly, as a promotor of false hopes, inappropriate priorities and irresponsibly unachievable standards,

'Can be a demonstration of what is not attainable – we're holding women to the wrong standard'. (ID:8)

As a result, while appearing to convey a positive message of possibility, the media is widely considered to have a negative core that condemns ageing by perpetuating unrealistic dreams. For one respondent, the result was,

'The media is training women to believe ageing is something to fear'. (ID:17)

Following the review of flashcard 1, the discussion invariably moved to the media's focus on age-defying celebrities, directive magazine and newspaper articles focused on appearance, social media content that celebrates attractiveness, and the high-profile examples of midlife female TV personalities being replaced by younger others. One interviewee commented that these examples were *'teaching women that there is a certain way to look'* (ID:15).

At the end of the discussion stimulated by flashcard 1, it seemed feasible to conclude that the media was truly 'the bad guy', the originator and sole perpetrator of 'Youth-Ideal'. However, this was countered by respondents' dismissive attitude to the mainstream media,

'Everything [referring to the magazine front covers] still has the notion of looking beautiful and looking younger than you are, but it's a bit old-fashioned and quite sexist...' (ID:4)

'Because I'm a bit older, I don't necessarily want to be told how to look good. I know how to do that myself. I'd hoped magazines like this had moved on'. (ID:15)

For some, there had been a move towards a more positive, interest-led, modern communication platform, i.e., social media influencers,

'Social media enables the flexibility to choose what you read and follow – based on your own interests. A lot of women that I follow on Instagram, that I'm drawn to, had careers and then they had kids, and then they've had to reinvent their careers. And so, I follow quite a lot of women like that, and I

also follow women who are very vested in body positivity.

And so, less about how they look, but how they feel'. (ID:16)

Based on these findings, traditional media is seen as having a very single-minded perspective on Generation X women's appearance and ageing, the impact of which is subdued due to the sense of 'message fatigue' and lack of relevance. The benefits of selecting content based on individual circumstances, as offered by social media influencers, seem to be gaining traction over the traditional media monologue, supporting both the relevance of influencers as product endorsers for Generation X women and suggesting their value may grow further in the future. Yet still, the media was acknowledged as a source of pressure on women to look a certain way, reinforcing society's obsession with youth, which several interviewees saw as the continuation of a historical devaluing of women as they age. Consequently, 'the media' was included in the revised PSPS as a source of appearance-related pressure experienced by Generation X women. Moreover, due to the number of references (see sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.3.1) to a societal drive to an ageing avoidance culture (Ballard, Elston and Gabe, 2005) it seemed appropriate to include 'society' as one of the sources of pressure included in the revised version of the PSPS.

In contrast, only 2 respondents felt that men, either individually or collectively, were directly accountable for the prevailing drive to youth,

'Sometimes partners look for younger models, which reinforces that women have to keep on looking good for as long as possible in order to be able to maintain a lifestyle, a relationship, those sorts of things'. (ID:18)

'Men value a woman's appearance above their abilities'. (ID:19)

The tone of the comments about the role of male partners, though, suggested their words lacked true conviction, and that the desire to maintain or establish a romantic relationship was not the main force shaping women's thoughts about their appearance. More emphasis was applied when they talked about the workplace as a source of age discrimination, and how the

feeling that the way they look mattered at work was instigated by the actions of both men and women,

'At work you want to look good to fit in. You're in a man's world and they judge on looks'. (ID:9)

'I hope people don't judge me based on how I look only how I perform' (ID:13)

Correspondingly, the phrase 'we are concerned about appearing old at work' included in the 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation statement reflected for most of the sample the real issue of prejudice in the workplace, albeit one that none of the interviewees had experienced first-hand. These findings suggest ageism at work can be an expectation, as expressed by ID:7,

'Yes, the workplace is where this behaviour is most aggressively manifest'.

Or a perception, as expressed by ID:5,

'I would imagine it's the case because I think women, in general, are much more conscious of how they look. At work, you need to look the part, not old, tired and worn out'.

The absence of factual evidence of this phenomenon was intriguing, possibly indicating the emergence of a normative belief concerning Generation X women's treatment in the workplace. It was important, therefore, to reflect 'people I work with' as a source of appearance-related pressure in the scale to be used to measure 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation in the second phase of the research.

Yet, it was evident from the discussions that it is the women themselves who are assuming this, rather than describing actual ageism examples. This is the undercurrent within the transcripts, reflected in the theme, 'Women do this to Themselves', and appears to reflect the most burdensome appearance-related pressure, as expressed by this sample, that which they put on themselves,

'I worry what other people think about me. I spend so much time looking at myself on camera [videoconference calls], it's intrusive, I can't believe I've let myself fall to this level'. (ID:4)

It was apparent that many of the women were listening to and being directed by an inner voice,

'It takes a bit more effort to go out feeling good. I don't want to feel invisible, but I feel in myself that I look older, so I compare with others to see how they're doing'. (ID:10)

And that the media was partially responsible for initiating this self-critical thinking,

'The media puts it in our faces, but not alone. We definitely do this to ourselves, or we allow it to happen. Because it isn't like we're fighting a suffragette movement with the right to have the vote... women are choosing to spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking about it... and staring in the mirror or doing things to change how they look. Time that could be allocated to earning money'. (ID:19)

Although women's attempts to follow 'Youth-Ideal' guidance may be further perpetuating the stay young message in a cyclical motion,

'I don't know whether women are actually putting pressure on themselves as well or whether it's a society thing. I think it becomes a vicious cycle'. (ID:13)

It seems, then, that 'Youth-Ideal' may be a strong message conveyed by the media and others, but there is a stronger, or louder, voice on the subject of ageing-related appearance norms inside women's heads, amplifying or quietening what has been heard, seen and demonstrated from and by an array of other people and circumstances. Further, the actions of those that are listening to that inner voice and have internalised 'Youth-Ideal' may be assisting in the continuation of belief in the benefits of a youthful appearance. As a result, it was appropriate to include 'myself' as a source of pressure in the revised PSPS. Hence, the four sources of appearance-related pressure

salient for Generation X women included in the revision of the scale were 'the media', 'society', 'people I work with' and 'myself'.

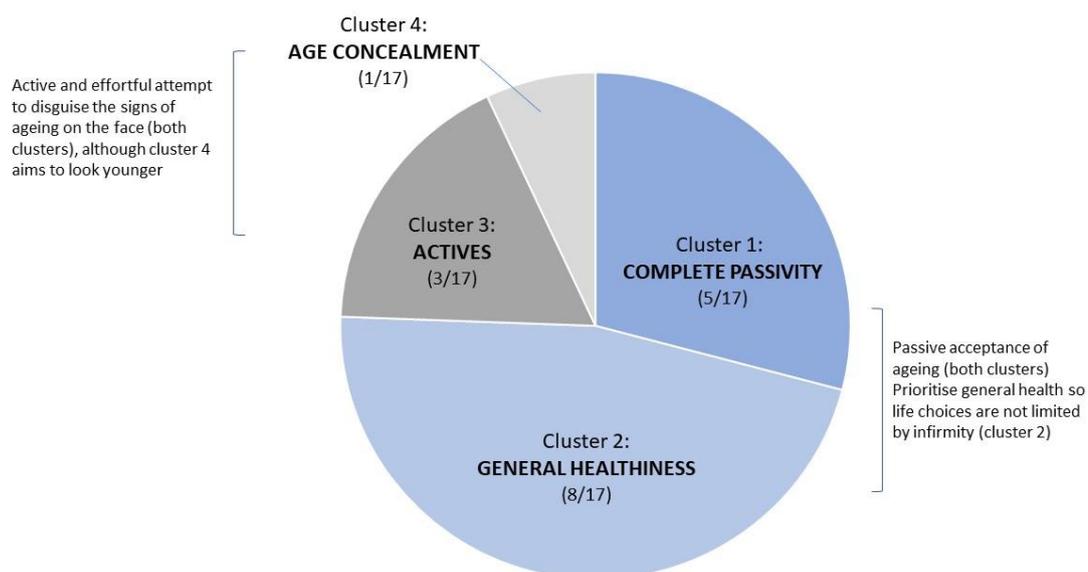
Finally, in consideration of the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson *et al.*, 1999) referred to earlier (see section 5.2.3), these data show that although the influence of peers, family and partners appears limited in this population, the media is a key propagator of appearance ideals.

The final two *a posteriori* themes, 'Going Too Far' and 'What is Normal' focus on the actions taken in response to 'Youth-Ideal' and will be explained in the next section.

5.3.4 Behavioural Intentions and 'Youth-Ideal' Internalisation

So far then, the findings of the first phase of this research indicate that Generation X women are in the thrall of societal pressure which drives them to endeavour to look younger than their actual age. As explained, internalisation levels vary and consequently so do the resulting actions. Thinking back to the 'ageing regimen' clusters described earlier (section 5.3.2.2), for clusters 1 and 2, there is passive acceptance of ageing, with, for cluster 2, priority given to maintaining physical capabilities, health, and overall fitness so that life choices are not limited by infirmity. Collectively, clusters 1 and 2 account for 13 of the 17 respondents with whom this was discussed, representing the majority. The opposing, less popular view, represented here by clusters 3 and 4 (4/17) is an active and effortful attempt to disguise the signs of ageing on the face (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 Details of Ageing Philosophy per Cluster



Notwithstanding these findings on ageing philosophy, there was commonality across the spectrum in terms of the age-resistance actions undertaken. Firstly, all respondents expressed a desire to maintain a healthy body weight. So, too, was the goal to look natural, although the definition of this word varied markedly between clusters. Use of anti-ageing skincare, make-up and hair dye was evident in both passives (clusters 1 and 2) and actives (clusters 3 and 4), suggesting that the philosophies claimed by the interviewees were not entirely consistent with their actions or, these particular activities are so widespread and ingrained in the female psyche that they are not considered to be age-resisting at all. Indeed, the process of restoring the colour of one's hair has reached a level of acceptance that does not seem to correspond to evidence of age defiance anymore, reflecting the normalisation of this habit in the UK, where hair dye can be purchased in the supermarket. An indication of this was shown by respondents' 'stance on age defiance' and whether they were regularly dyeing their hair to cover grey, where 7 of the 11 respondents who claimed not to be trying to defy ageing were regularly minimising one of the most visible signs. Interestingly, this contradiction was apparent in all 4 clusters including cluster 1 (passive/accept it), where all 5 respondents in the group stated their actions did not constitute age defiance, yet 3 of them were tinting their hair. So, normative age resistance is exactly that, normal, and hence acceptable. Yet, there is a point where 'What is

Normal' transitions into 'Going Too Far'. Many respondents said they would not traverse that boundary, which translated into the use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures (NSCPs), such as dermal fillers and BOTOX[®],

'I don't want to look any older than I have to, but there's a limit to what I would do to achieve that'. (ID:5)

That women are quick to judge the appearance of others and focus on flaws or highlight practices that cause a changed or unnatural look was evident during a section of the interview which focused on the appearance of a group of well-known British Generation X women. Nine celebrities were selected by the researcher because their youthful faces bore little or no evidence of natural ageing hallmarks, e.g., sagging jaw lines, prominent nasolabial folds, or marionette lines (Brandt and Cazzaniga, 2008), suggesting they may have crossed the boundary mentioned earlier and gone beyond 'What is Normal' into 'Going Too Far'. Following review by the interviewees, three consistent thoughts about the celebrities' appearance were mentioned: first, those that were considered natural were congratulated and admired, second, those considered to have had 'work done' were universally condemned and frequently described as 'Going Too Far', and third, any sign of ageing, such as a gaunt face, was highlighted and blamed on the individual being too thin.

These views are consistent with respondents' general thoughts on the use of dermal fillers for age concealment. Both reveal a predominantly negative point of view. Ten (10) of the 19 were unreservedly critical of the processes or the recipients (the Negatives), 3 were positive about the practice (the Positives) and the remaining 6 were classified as having an intermediate stance (the Neutrals), on the basis that their responses started with a positive sentiment, such as that provided by ID:14,

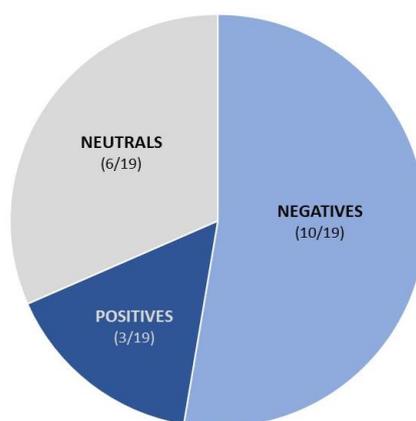
'It's their choice. Feel free to make the choices that are right for you'.

Invariably though, what followed was condemning,

'I feel sorry for them. That they feel a pressure to do it'.

Figure 5.6 shows these data in chart form.

Figure 5.6 Stance on the use of Dermal Filler Treatment for Age Concealment



As an indication of the acceptability of dermal filler treatment to the interviewees, they were each asked whether they were likely to have treatment in the future. In general, there was little support for such an endeavour, in line with their earlier comments indicating their lack of support for other women's choice to have treatment. However, the possibility was not ruled out entirely as several interviewees used the phrase 'never say never' suggesting the potential for a change of heart. Despite what appeared from interviewee narratives to be a widespread aversion to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment, support may be greater than initially presumed. There may be a reason to anticipate that in an anonymous environment, such as an online survey, the true intentions of Generation X women may be revealed. There is then, the possibility of eliciting the desired behavioural intention in what appeared to be a highly resistant population, thereby justifying the decision to embark on the second, quantitative research phase to evaluate social media influencers as endorsers of dermal filler treatment.

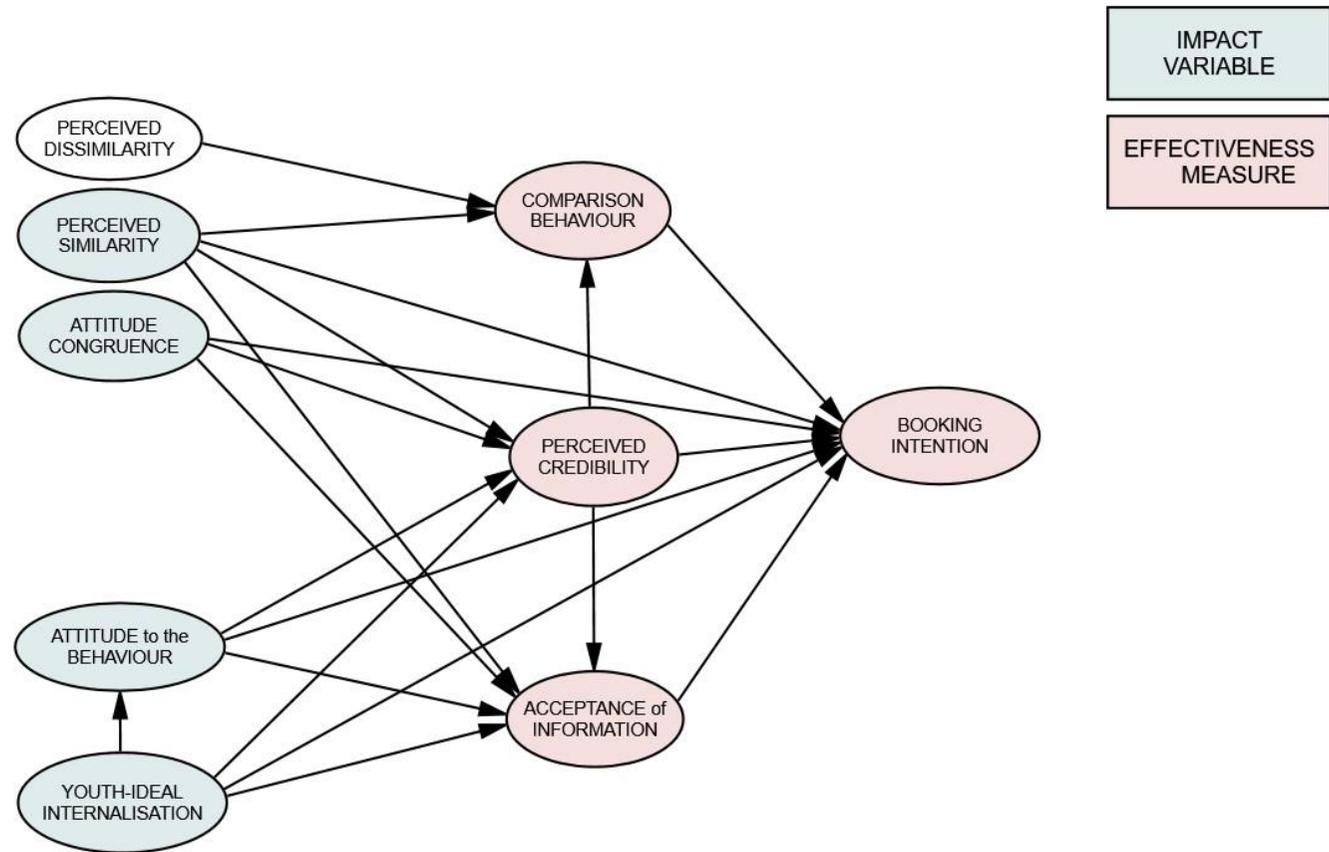
5.3.5 Impact of the First Phase on the Second Phase

Three outcomes from the first, qualitative phase of the research informed the second, quantitative phase. They were 1) confirmation of 'Youth-Ideal' as a salient appearance ideal for the Generation X cohort under investigation here, 2) determination of the changes required to the SATAQ-INT (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004) and PSPS (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) measurement instruments so that they were suitable for the measurement of 'Youth-Ideal' internalisation and 3) identification of certain characteristics of the respondent that might influence their responses, suggesting the need for supplementary statistical analyses. Each of these outcomes will be reviewed in the following sections.

5.3.5.1 Confirmation of 'Youth-Ideal' as the Subjective Norm

As explained in section 2.3.2, 'Youth-Ideal' was conceptualised as a belief system that concerns the pressure on Generation X women to make efforts to retain a youthful appearance and proposed to be the subjective norm component to be tested as part of the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) in the second phase of this research. It had not, though, been the subject of intense research, so a discrete phase of qualitative research was required to explore it. The results presented in this chapter provide support for the existence and internalisation of Youth-Ideal, now defined, based on these findings as 'the encouragement applied to women to retain a younger look as they age'. It is, therefore, appropriate to amend the conceptual model developed in Chapter 3 to incorporate this finding by recolouring the Youth-Ideal Internalisation variable to match the other three impact variables:

Figure 5.7 The Conceptual Model for this Research, following confirmation of Youth-Ideal Internalisation as an impact variable



NB: Original in Colour

5.3.5.2 Amendments to the Scales used to Measure Youth-Ideal Internalisation

The outputs of the first phase also determined the changes required to the Internalisation Sub-scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004) and the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996), so that they were fit for measuring the extent of the internalisation of the Youth-Ideal archetype. A review of how the findings of the first phase guided these alterations follows.

5.3.5.2.1 Changes to the Internalisation Sub-Scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT)

The insights gleaned from the first phase of this research were used to identify the four most appropriate referent individuals or groups who personify the ideal being internalised. Table 5.2 shows the substitutions supported by the findings of the first research phase:

Table 5.2 Replacement terms for use in the Sociocultural Attitudes to Appearance Questionnaire

Original Referent Group	Replacement Referent Group	Rationale – based on First phase Research Findings
People on TV	Women on TV	Change to 'women' for clarity (throughout)
Models who appear in magazines	Women in the media	Magazine readership is infrequent, and the content of magazines may not be considered credible by Generation X women, whereas the influence of social media is increasing
People in movies	Women at work	The workplace is an environment where Generation X anticipate age-based discrimination and make efforts to benchmark with the women around them
Models in music videos	My role models	Interviewees referred to several potential role models, many of whom were known to them e.g., peers, family members, mentors etc

As would be expected for a scale that was originated to measure adherence to the ideal of being thin, respondents are asked to rate how they would like their *body* to look, e.g., 'I would like my body to look like people who are in

movies'. For this research, references to 'my body' were revised to 'my appearance', which was defined as referring to facial attractiveness or beauty in the instructions provided to survey participants.

5.3.5.2.2 Changes to the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS)

Similar to the SATAQ-INT, the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) originated from work on body image, and focused on pressure to 'lose weight' and 'have a thin body'. Here, 'lose weight' was substituted for 'remove the signs of ageing from my appearance' and 'have a thin body' was replaced by 'look younger than I am'. Table 5.3 shows the substitutions are supported by the findings of the first research phase:

Table 5.3 Replacement terms for use in the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale

Original Source of Pressure	Replacement Source of Pressure	Rationale – based on Qualitative findings
Friends	Myself	'Myself' was the most commonly referenced source of pressure on appearance – whereas friends did not have a significant impact
Family	People I work with	Greater perceived pressure on appearance in the workplace
People I've dated	Society	This reflects the essence of Youth-Ideal and reflects the 'Subjective Norm' status of the belief
The media	The media	The media was confirmed as having a significant impact on appearance ideals

5.3.5.3 Additional Findings that May Impact the Second Phase

Based on the findings of the first phase, three potential covariates warranted additional investigation as part of the quantitative evaluation to answer RQ2. They were respondent age, within the spectrum of the Generation X cohort, involvement, and parenthood.

In terms of age, there appeared to be some indicators of an age-dependent response to Youth-Ideal. As mentioned in section 5.3.2.1, those respondents who expressed a direct acknowledgement of internalisation were

predominantly under the median age of the sample (48 years). This could point to the Youth-Ideal message having had a greater impact on younger women, possibly through their exposure to social media and celebrity culture in their 20s and 30s, or conversely, that older women have moved past the point of following its directive. A more detailed analysis of the effect of age was therefore merited.

Similarly, the importance of issue involvement was apparent to the researcher during the detailed analysis of the interview transcripts, as it appeared that respondents who were more invested in their appearance seemed to be more likely to have internalised the Youth-Ideal message. An Involvement scale was included in the survey so that the impact of involvement on internalisation could be assessed.

Lastly, through repeated listening to the audio recordings and carefully analysing how respondents described their feelings about the practice of using dermal filler treatment to modify the appearance, there seemed to be a reason to believe that mothers of daughters had a particular point of view that was distinct from that of mothers of (only) sons or women without children. The following verbatim accounts illustrate this point,

'I hope my daughter will never want to do this' [referring to dermal filler treatment]. (ID:17)

'The message to my 13-year-old daughter has to be 'I am enough'. (ID:19)

'I'm the mother of a girl, and you know I'm very aware of that, she's 16 now, and it does generally worry me that for women... I mean the [aesthetics] industry's huge, right? So, it's clearly real and it's out there and it is getting worse, isn't it? It's bothersome, to be honest. Men don't have these conversations, do they?' (ID:11)

Consequently, parenthood was included as a potential covariate for investigation in the subsequent quantitative hypothesis testing phase, and a question was added to the survey to identify respondents who have children, including those with daughters.

5.4 Chapter Summary

The first phase of this research consisted of 19 semi-structured interviews with female Generation X residents of the UK. The findings collectively answer the question '*Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and what factors are involved in its propagation?*' (RQ1).

Firstly, the results confirm broad awareness of the pressure, referred to here as Youth-Ideal. So, the simple answer to the query 'Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal?' is 'Yes'. However, what followed in terms of the respondents' thoughts, experiences and behaviours varied, revealing a broad spectrum of outcomes. Secondly, the goal to understand the reasons women respond to the urgings of the Youth-ideal belief system was much harder to achieve. Those sociocultural influences referred to in the Tripartite Influence Model (Thompson *et al.*, 1999) have some effect, although the self may be a stronger driver. Equally, the answer could lie in the consequences of not responding, as concerns around ageing and employment and marital/sexual relationships were apparent, as was the desire to avoid infirmity and maintain good health for as long as possible.

Notwithstanding that the insights generated here suggest the rationale for belief in Youth-Ideal is multi-faceted rather than attributable to a single cause, the response for many is the internalisation of the drive to eliminate or reduce the demonstrable signs of ageing and the associated use of age-resisting activities. However, some of those activities are also adopted by women who deny internalisation as they are considered normative and so are not categorised as age-resistance at all (e.g., dyeing hair to cover grey). Based on this sample, few women who have internalised Youth-Ideal appear to choose dermal filler treatment as their age-resistance activity of choice, as such procedures are thought extreme and inappropriate. Consequently, internalisation does not necessarily mean tolerance or usage of the entire range of accessible ageing avoidance tools. Yet still, the phrase 'never say never' was heard in several interviews when discussing the choice to use dermal filler treatment as a means of concealing one's chronological age

suggesting the possibility of future use, or indeed, the possibility of a latent belief in Youth-Ideal being roused at a later date, possibly if the physical signs of ageing become more apparent.

In summary, based on this qualitative investigation, it is clear that, although respondents perceive growing older to be an inevitability, confirming the singular reality described in section 4.3, they were all aware of a social pressure to maintain a youthful appearance, and some believed themselves to have internalised belief in it. Consequently, Youth-Ideal is a salient belief for this evaluation of the effectiveness of influencers as endorsers of dermal filler treatment, and therefore it is appropriate to include Youth-Ideal Internalisation as an impact variable in the quantitative phase of this research to understand, in this context, the impact of this subjective norm on behavioural intention. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

6 SECOND PHASE RESULTS: HYPOTHESIS TESTING

6.1 Chapter Introduction

This chapter focuses on the analysis and results of the hypothesis testing phase of this research outlined in Chapter 4, including the examination of the pilot data, review of the demographic profile of the participants, reliability assessment and descriptive statistics. This evaluation has employed Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS 23 software to analyse the collected data beginning with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and validity assessment before carrying out hypothesis testing. The chapter ends with a summary of the results of the principal research phase of this study.

6.1.1 Sample

Data were collected from 733 respondents between June and July 2021 via the use of Qualtrics®, an online survey platform. This number is greater than the sample size estimated in section 4.7.3, which was 666. This is due to a desire to collect a total sample that is at least 10% greater than required to allow for potential exclusions.

6.1.1.1 Demographic Profile

As explained in section 4.5.2, respondent selection was made based on birth year, gender, and country of residence. Hence the sample is made up of Generation X female respondents residing in the United Kingdom. Table 6.1 presents the birth year of the respondents. The entire sample was born within the Generation X cohort (1965-1980) (Pew Research Center, 2014) and had a median birth year equal to that of the cohort, i.e., 1973. The figures show that 47.2% of the sample were over the median age (48 years) and 52.8% were median age or younger.

Table 6.1 Birth Year of the Respondents

Birth Year (Range)	N	% of sample
1965 - 1970	237	32.3%
1971 - 1975	236	32.2%
1976 - 1980	260	35.5%

Of the respondents who provided details of their employment status, 76% (n=513) were employed and 24% (n=162) were not. The education level of the respondents is shown in Table 6.2. The figures show that 34.4% of respondents were at a bachelor's degree level or above, while 62.9% had school-based or vocational qualifications.

Table 6.2 Education Level of the Respondents

Education Level	N	% of sample
Secondary School (O-level/GCSE)	185	25.2%
Secondary School (A-level)	104	14.2%
College (BTech/HND/NVQ)	172	23.5%
Undergraduate Degree (BA/BSc)	167	22.8%
Graduate Degree (Masters)	68	9.3%
Graduate Degree (Doctorate)	17	2.3%
Other	8	1.1%
None	12	1.6%

The relationship status of the respondents is detailed in Table 6.3. The data show that 67.6% were in a relationship or married and 30.7% were single or widowed.

Table 6.3 Relationship Status of the Respondents

Relationship Status	N	% of sample
In a relationship	157	21.4%
Married	339	46.2%
Single	216	29.5%
Widowed	9	1.2%
Prefer Not to Say	12	1.6%

The potential for parenthood, specifically having daughters, to be a consideration in the decision to embark on age concealment strategies was a finding of the first, qualitative phase of this research, i.e., that being the mother of female children may be contributing to a woman's decision to reject any thought of modifying her appearance including using dermal filler treatment for age concealment (see Section 5.3.5.3). Hence, a question relating to this was included in the survey. Table 6.4 shows the parenthood status of the respondents.

Table 6.4 Parenthood Status of the Respondents

Parenthood Status	N	% of sample
Has children	543	74.1%
Does not have children	182	24.8%
Prefer Not to Say	8	1.1%
Has daughter(s)	410	55.9%
Does not have daughter(s)	315	43.0%

6.1.1.2 Social Media Usage

Respondents were asked about their use of social media and their familiarity with influencers. The results are shown in Table 6.5. The mean score for familiarity with influencers was 2.43, based on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from not at all familiar (1) to extremely familiar (5). Of those who were using either Facebook or Instagram as their primary social media platform, 71.5% and 43.0% respectively were not following any influencers.

Table 6.5 Social Media Usage

Social Media Usage	N	% of sample
Uses social media	686	93.6%
Time spent browsing social media/day	67	9.1%
- <10 mins	215	29.3%
- 10 mins to 1 hour	198	27.0%
- 1-2 hours	200	27.3%
- More than 2 hours		
Platform used most often:		
- Facebook	466	63.6%
- Instagram	79	10.8%
- Other	148	20.2%
Following at least one influencer	234	31.9%
Not following any influencers	499	68.1%

6.1.1.3 Beauty Practices

Respondents were asked for details of their previous and ongoing use of beauty products and services. The results are shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Beauty Products and Services Used by the Respondents

Beauty Practices	N	% of sample
Uses beauty services	612	83.4%
- Hair cut	470	64.1%
- Hair dye	409	55.8%
- Facial treatment	193	26.3%
- Hair removal	159	21.7%
- Manicure	201	27.4%
- Make-up application	143	19.5%
Dyes hair to cover grey	489	66.7%
Has purchased anti-ageing products	499	68.1%

Respondents were also asked if they had ever had a non-surgical cosmetic procedure (NSCP) or undergone cosmetic surgery. The results are shown in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7 Previous Use of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures or Cosmetic Surgery

Previous NSCPs or Cosmetic Surgery	N	% of sample
Has had a non-surgical cosmetic procedure	146	19.9%
- Skin Peel	53	7.2%
- Microdermabrasion	49	6.7%
- BOTOX® or another wrinkle relaxant	47	6.4%
- Microblading	38	5.2%
- Dermal Fillers	31	4.2%
Has had cosmetic surgery	68	9.3%
- Breast augmentation	23	3.1%
- Rhinoplasty	12	1.6%
- Breast reduction	10	1.4%
- Facelift	10	1.4%
- Blepharoplasty	7	1.0%
- Liposuction	7	1.0%

A total of 47 respondents (6.4% of the sample) had previously had both non-surgical cosmetic procedure(s) and cosmetic surgery (32% of those who previously had NSCPs, 69% of those who previously had cosmetic surgery). The median birth year for each group 1) previously had NSCPs, 2) previously had cosmetic surgery, and 3) previously had NSCPs and cosmetic surgery was 1974, 1973 and 1973 respectively. Almost half the sample (49.4%) stated they were unlikely to have NSCPs based on those who answered either 'extremely unlikely' or 'somewhat unlikely' on a five-point Likert scale, whereas 31.1% said they were 'somewhat likely' or 'extremely likely'. The remainder (19.5%) said they were 'neither likely nor unlikely'. On the same basis, more than half of the sample (56.6%) stated they were unlikely to have dermal fillers specifically, versus 26.5% who said they were likely.

6.1.2 Sub-Group Analyses

Further evaluation of those respondents who did not use social media (N = 44) and those who did not regularly use any beauty practices (not including NSCPs or cosmetic surgery) (N = 121) was carried out to determine if their behaviours differed from those of the total sample. The results are shown in Table 6.8.

Table 6.8 Behaviours of the Respondents Not Using Social Media and Beauty Practices

Behaviour	Total Sample (N = 733)	Do Not Use Social Media (N = 44)	Do Not Use Beauty Practices (N = 121)
% Not Using social media	6.0%	-	27.3%
% Not Using beauty practices	16.5%	9.9%	-
% Following at least one influencer	31.9%	0%	13.2%
Familiarity with influencers (mean score)	2.43	1.32	1.93
% Dyeing hair to cover grey	66.7%	63.6%	45.5%
% Has had a non-surgical cosmetic procedure	19.9%	9.1%	5.0%
% Has had a dermal filler treatment (DFT)	4.2%	0%	0%
% Has had cosmetic surgery	9.3%	4.5%	4.1%
Likelihood to have an NSCP (mean score)	2.59	2.14	1.88
Likelihood to have DF (mean score)	2.39	1.91	1.69
% Has purchased anti-ageing products	68.1%	54.5%	38.8%

Of the 733 participants, 44 did not use social media and 121 did not use beauty practices. There were 12 respondents (1.6% of the total sample) who were not using either social media or beauty practices.

Independent t-tests were carried out to determine whether the behaviour of those not using social media differed from social media users. The results are shown in Table 6.9.

Table 6.9 Comparison of Behaviours of Social Media Users and Non-Users

Behaviour	Groups	Mean	SD	t	p
Number of influencers followed	Uses social media	1.76	1.190	16.722	<0.001
	Do not use social media	1.00	0.000		
Familiarity with influencers*	Uses social media	2.50	1.196	10.633	<0.001
	Do not use social media	1.32	0.674		
Ever had an NSCP**	Uses social media	1.80	0.402	1.215	0.230
	Do not use social media	1.86	0.347		
Ever Had Cosmetic Surgery**	Uses social media	1.91	0.291	0.559	0.577
	Do not use social media	1.93	0.255		
Likelihood to have an NSCP*	Uses social media	2.63	1.433	3.253	0.001
	Do not use social media	1.91	1.378		
Likelihood to have DFT*	Uses social media	2.42	1.421	2.921	0.005
	Do not use social media	1.84	1.275		
Purchased Anti-Ageing Products*	Uses social media	3.77	1.410	2.125	0.039
	Do not use social media	3.23	1.669		

Note: NSCP: Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedure; DFT: Dermal Filler Treatment, *5-point Likert Scale, **Nominal scale (1 = Yes, 2 = No).

Participants who used social media were more familiar with influencers ($p < 0.001$), were following more of them ($p < 0.001$), were more likely to have an NSCP ($p = 0.001$) or a DFT ($p = 0.005$) and purchase anti-ageing products ($p = 0.039$), than those who were not. In contrast, the use of social media did not correlate with having previously had either an NSCP ($p = 0.230$) or cosmetic surgery ($p = 0.577$).

The analysis was repeated for those using beauty practices versus those not. The results are shown in Table 6.10.

Table 6.10 Comparison of Behaviours of Beauty Practice Users and Non-Users

Behaviour	Groups	Mean	SD	t	p
Number of influencers followed	Uses beauty practices	1.79	1.204	5.334	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	1.31	0.845		
Familiarity with influencers*	Uses beauty practices	2.53	1.209	5.664	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	1.93	1.042		
Ever had an NSCP**	Uses beauty practices	1.77	0.420	6.863	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	1.95	0.218		
Ever Had Cosmetic Surgery**	Uses beauty practices	1.90	0.304	2.809	0.005
	Do not use beauty practices	1.96	0.200		
Likelihood to have an NSCP*	Uses beauty practices	2.73	1.441	6.741	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	1.69	1.226		
Likelihood to have DFT*	Uses beauty practices	2.53	1.431	7.140	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	1.69	1.133		
Purchased Anti-Ageing Products*	Uses beauty practices	3.93	1.329	7.218	<0.001
	Do not use beauty practices	2.83	1.569		

Note: NSCP: Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedure; DFT: Dermal Filler Treatment, *5-point Likert Scale, **Nominal scale (1 = Yes, 2 = No).

Participants who used beauty practices could be distinguished from those who did not on each of the parameters measured: were more familiar with influencers ($p<0.001$), were following more influencers ($p<0.001$), were more likely to have an NSCP ($p<0.001$) or a dermal filler treatment ($p<0.001$) and purchase anti-ageing products ($p<0.001$) and were more likely to have previously had either an NSCP ($p<0.001$) or cosmetic surgery ($p=0.005$).

6.1.3 Summary of the Section

Analysis of the demographic profile of the respondents indicates that they are a suitable representation of the Generation X cohort. Information regarding their behaviours and practices has been collated.

6.2 Preliminary Reviews of the Data

Two preliminary evaluations were carried out to ensure the operational competence of the survey. First, the clarity of the language used was reviewed, followed by a pilot data collection phase.

6.2.1 Comprehension Test of the Survey

Before commencing data collection, the survey was reviewed for clarity by six individuals who fit the selection criteria, including both native and non-native English speakers. No comprehension issues were flagged for the established measurement scales and only minor amendments were recommended for the demographics section. The researcher discussed with each reviewer their reasons for suggesting changes to understand their concerns and to discuss potential improvements. At the end of this review, the final version of the survey was uploaded by the researcher to the Qualtrics® platform.

6.2.2 Review of Pilot Data

As described in section 4.7.4, the survey was pilot tested before commencing full data collection (Malmqvist *et al.*, 2019). The resulting pilot data, made up of 50 cases, was examined to determine survey competence. In the absence of an agreed method for calculating the number of participants in a survey pilot, 50 cases lie between 30, the minimum suggested, and 10% of the intended total sample (Hill, 1998). A statistical review of these data was carried out including reliability (Cronbach's alpha) and normality tests (1) skewness to assess symmetry and 2) kurtosis to assess 'peakedness' (Pallant, 2016, p.69) of the distribution, identification of outliers using histograms and box plots, assessment of response variance per case, correlation analyses (Pearson correlation) and simple linear regressions to identify any issues with the data which may be due to participant error, reluctant respondents, or lack of comprehension. None were identified following a review of the outcomes of this limited evaluation meaning that no changes to the survey were required and so, the decision

was taken to make the survey available for completion by existing members of online respondent panels as described in section 4.5.1.2.

6.2.3 Summary of the Section

Data collection for this phase of the research employed an online survey. Two tests of suitability were completed before its full deployment. These were 1) a comprehension test to assess ease of readability and understanding of the questions posed, and 2) a pilot phase constituting 50 cases to confirm the survey was fit for purpose. Both tests were completed successfully and so, the survey was published online for completion by suitable respondents.

6.3 Review of the Complete Data Set

The final data set, consisting of 733 cases, was downloaded from the Qualtrics® platform after the required sample was obtained. To prepare the data for the planned analysis, initial actions focused on the management of missing values, assessment of outliers and completion of normality tests.

6.3.1 Missing Data

The survey was made up of 90 measurement scale items (excluding demographics sections), hence for a sample of 733 cases, 65,970 data points were expected. Table 6.11 summarises the source of the 30 missing data points identified:

Table 6.11 Number of Missing Data Points for each Continuous Variable

Variable	Items	Total Data Points Collected	Number of Missing Data Points
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	15	10,995	0
Acceptance of Information	5	3,665	0
Attitude Congruence	18	13,194	0
Attitude to Ageing	5	3,665	0
Booking Intention	3	2,155	0
Comparison Behaviour	3	2,199	0
Internalisation	8	5,852	12
Involvement	4	2,932	0
Perceived Credibility	15	10,995	0
Perceived Dissimilarity	3	2,199	0
Perceived Pressures	8	5,846	18
Perceived Similarity	3	2,199	0
TOTAL	90	65,940	30

In total, there were 30 missing values randomly distributed across the sample, accounting for 0.05% of the anticipated data set. As a rule of thumb, Jakobsen *et al.* (2017) recommend that if the proportion of missing data is below 5%, they can be ignored as their potential impact is negligible. Nevertheless, following the four-step process for identifying missing data and

applying remedies described by Hair *et al.* (2014), missing data were substituted by the mean score of the item concerned.

6.3.2 Outliers

Outliers are defined as cases with values that are much higher or lower than the majority of other cases (Pallant, 2016), usually arising from misreporting or variability within the data. The presence of outliers in a data set may lead to errors in statistical analyses (Osbourne and Overbay, 2004), although, according to Barnett and Lewis (1994) not all outliers contaminate a data set, and hence, not all outliers need to be removed.

The first step in the management of outliers is their identification. This was achieved in two ways. Firstly, the distribution of data points for each continuous variable was assessed using histograms and boxplots generated by SPSS 25. In the histogram, the tails of the distribution were examined for data points sitting on their own, and in the boxplots, attention was paid to extreme points indicated by an asterisk (*) denoting their location as being more than 3 box lengths from the edge of the box. No outliers of concern were identified as a result of reviewing either the histograms or boxplots. Thereafter, following the guidance of Hair *et al.* (2014), a univariate detection method was employed where the scores for each continuous variable were converted to a standard score or Z-score. For this sample size, an outlier case is described as having a standard score outside the range of -4 to +4. Table 6.12 presents the calculated Z-scores, demonstrating a lack of evidence of the presence of outliers:

Table 6.12 Standard Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum
Z-score: Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	733	-2.15	2.28
Z-score: Acceptance of Information	733	-2.47	2.17
Z-score: Attitude Congruence	733	-2.53	3.02
Z-score: Attitude to Ageing	733	-2.59	2.01
Z-score: Booking Intention	733	-1.33	2.03
Z-score: Comparison Behaviour	733	-1.62	1.76
Z-score: Internalisation	733	-1.74	2.88
Z-score: Involvement	733	-2.72	1.80
Z-score: Perceived Credibility	733	-3.21	1.86
Z-score: Perceived Dissimilarity	733	-2.26	2.03
Z-score: Perceived Pressures	733	-1.78	2.51
Z-score: Perceived Similarity	733	-1.94	2.25

6.3.3 Normality

The distribution of the data for each continuous variable was also assessed for normality, using Skewness (an indication of the symmetry of the data) and Kurtosis (the sharpness of the peak of the distribution curve) and by assessing the mean and median values. The results indicate that the data are normally distributed as none of the skewness nor kurtosis values for the variables used in this research exceed the critical value (i.e., 2.58 at 0.01 significance level) (Hair *et al.*, 2014). In addition, the mean and median scores have similar values (see Table 6.13).

Table 6.13 Mean, Median, Skewness and Kurtosis Scores

	N	Mean	Median	Skewness	Kurtosis
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	733	44.14	45	-0.083	-0.508
Acceptance of Information	733	15.66	15	-0.198	0.123
Attitude Congruence	733	50.83	53	-0.149	0.509
Attitude to Ageing	733	16.27	16	-0.305	-0.102
Booking Intention	733	7.76	8	0.136	-1.003
Comparison Behaviour	733	8.76	9	-0.133	-0.981
Internalisation	733	20.04	20	0.185	-0.480
Involvement	733	13.63	14	-0.361	0.070
Perceived Credibility	733	52.95	52	-0.161	0.421
Perceived Dissimilarity	733	9.32	9	-0.010	-0.127
Perceived Pressures	733	21.26	22	-0.006	-0.574
Perceived Similarity	733	8.55	9	-0.115	-0.347

6.3.4 Summary of the Section

Data from 733 respondents were screened and where necessary cleaned for use in the subsequent analysis. Missing data were replaced by mean scores as proposed by Hair *et al.* (2014). There were no outliers for which remediation was necessary. Tests for skewness and kurtosis indicated the data were normally distributed.

6.4 Descriptive Statistics

6.4.1 Scale Scores

For all variables, measurement scales utilised a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). All negatively worded items, e.g., 'I would never have any kind of dermal filler treatment', were reversed before calculating scale scores. The mean item scores for all 12 variables are shown in Table 6.14

Table 6.14 Mean Item Scores for each Measurement Scale

Scale	N	Mean Item Score
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	733	2.94
Acceptance of Information	733	3.13
Attitude Congruence	733	2.82
Attitude to Ageing	733	3.25
Booking Intention	733	2.59
Comparison Behaviour	733	2.92
Internalisation	733	2.51
Involvement	733	3.41
Perceived Credibility	733	3.53
Perceived Dissimilarity	733	3.11
Perceived Pressures	733	2.66
Perceived Similarity	733	2.85

The mean scores for each item are shown in Table 6.15. Two of the measurement scales used (Acceptance of Dermal Fillers and Perceived Credibility) are composite scales and are made up of three subscales of five items each. Acceptance of Dermal Fillers consists of the internalisation (accint1-5), social (accsoc1-5) and consideration (acccon1-5) sub-scales. Perceived Credibility consists of attractiveness (att1-5), trustworthiness (trust1-5) and expertise (exp1-5) sub-scales.

Table 6.15 Mean Scores per Item

Variable	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variable	Items	Mean	Std. Dev.
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	accint1	3.02	1.15	Attitude Congruence	cong1	2.80	1.04
	accint2	3.20	1.10		cong2	2.73	1.03
	accint3	3.13	1.09		cong3	2.82	1.11
	accint4	3.48	1.04		cong4	2.75	1.08
	accint5	3.44	1.03		cong5	2.47	0.98
	accsoc1	2.58	1.24		cong6	2.99	0.95
	accsoc2	2.92	1.28		cong7	2.76	1.04
	accsoc3	2.53	1.21		cong8	3.15	0.86
	accsoc4	2.48	1.25		cong9	2.84	1.01
	accsoc5	2.65	1.26		cong10	2.74	0.95
	acccon1	2.82	1.27		cong11	2.95	0.98
	acccon2	3.08	1.38		cong12	2.84	1.01
	acccon3	3.13	1.32		cong13	2.65	1.05
	acccon4	2.66	1.33		cong14	2.77	0.99
	acccon5	2.95	1.33		cong15	2.98	0.93
Acceptance of Information	aoi1	3.24	0.92		cong16	2.72	1.00
	aoi2	3.39	0.94		cong17	3.06	0.83
	aoi3	3.14	1.01		cong18	2.81	0.96
	aoi4	3.07	1.04				
	aoi5	2.83	1.11				
Attitude to Ageing	age1	3.47	1.08	Booking Intention	book1	2.62	1.25
	age2	3.05	1.16		book2	2.65	1.26
	age3	3.06	1.11		book3	2.49	1.20
	age4	3.35	1.08	Internalisation	int1	2.45	1.18
	age5	3.34	1.07		int2	2.53	1.16
Comparison Behaviour	comp1	3.02	1.24		int3	2.85	1.14
	comp2	2.83	1.23		int4	2.72	1.13
	comp3	2.91	1.27		int5	2.47	1.18
Involvement	inv1	3.52	1.01	int6	2.33	0.98	
	inv2	3.53	0.99	int7	2.39	1.17	
	inv3	3.30	1.03	int8	2.31	1.09	
	inv4	3.29	1.03	Perceived Pressures	psps1	2.80	1.14
Perceived Credibility	att1	3.85	1.00		psps2	2.93	1.16
	att2	3.61	1.00		psps3	2.19	1.09
	att3	3.76	0.99		psps4	2.24	1.10
	att4	3.52	1.12		psps5	2.71	1.22
	att5	3.29	0.97		psps6	2.78	1.21
	trust1	3.46	1.00		psps7	2.74	1.23
	trust2	3.59	1.01		psps8	2.86	1.23
	trust3	3.58	0.98	Perceived Dissimilarity	dissim1	3.07	1.07
	trust4	3.60	1.02		dissim2	3.18	1.07
	trust5	3.53	0.99		dissim3	3.07	1.02
exp1	3.26	1.12	Perceived Similarity	sim1	3.00	1.03	
exp2	3.58	1.01		sim2	2.76	1.03	
exp3	3.66	1.01		sim3	2.79	1.03	
exp4	3.26	1.12					
exp5	3.39	1.04					

6.4.2 Reliability Assessment

A further test of the measurement scales is the assessment of their internal reliability, i.e., that they are measuring consistently, and the inter-relatedness of the items (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Cronbach's alpha is a commonly used objective technique for testing internal reliability. Expressed as a figure between 0 and 1, alpha values greater than 0.75 are deemed acceptable (Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). The Cronbach's alphas for the 12 variables assessed are presented in Table 6.16. For the two composite scales (Acceptance of Dermal Fillers and Perceived Credibility), Cronbach's alpha for each of their three sub-scales is shown. The results indicate acceptable internal reliability for all measurement scales used.

Table 6.16 Internal Reliability Assessment

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	15	0.963
- Interpersonal sub-scale	5	0.933
- Social sub-scale	5	0.937
- Consider sub-scale	5	0.914
Acceptance of Information	5	0.910
Attitude Congruence	18	0.946
Attitude to Ageing	5	0.850
Booking Intention	3	0.961
Comparison Behaviour	3	0.941
Internalisation	8	0.899
Involvement	4	0.897
Perceived Credibility	15	0.951
- Attractiveness	5	0.867
- Trustworthiness	5	0.923
- Expertise	5	0.924
Perceived Dissimilarity	3	0.860
Perceived Pressures	8	0.916
Perceived Similarity	3	0.918

6.4.3 Sampling Adequacy

The suitability of the data set for structure detection was assessed using two statistical tests. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling

Adequacy indicates the proportion of variance in the variables that might be caused by underlying factors. Outcome values range from 0 to 1 with high values (close to 1.0) indicating the data are appropriate for factor analysis. Bartlett's test of sphericity assesses the relatedness of the variables. The resulting p -value should be less than 0.05, i.e., significant, indicating the data are suitable for factor analysis. Table 6.17 shows the results of the KMO and Bartlett's tests for this research. The figures confirm the suitability of the data for confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 6.17 KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity

Test	Value
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.927
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	8522.405
Df	120
Significance	0.000

6.4.4 Common Method Bias

Common Method Bias (CMB) is the '*variance that is attributable to the measurement method rather than to the constructs the measures are assumed to represent*' (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2008, p.879), e.g., the use of a self-reported online survey may have influenced the results for some participants due to lack of familiarity with the platform interface.

Harman's Single Factor Test, an exploratory factor analysis without rotation for each latent variable item, is frequently used to assess the presence of CMB in a data set (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2008). All items are loaded into one common factor, and a variance threshold of 50% is used to determine the presence of CMB. If the total variance extracted does not exceed this threshold, there is no evidence of CMB in the data.

The result of applying Harman's Single Factor Test to the data set was 37.854%, less than the threshold of 50%. Hence, there is no evidence of bias due to the measurement method in the data.

6.4.5 Summary of the Section

Descriptive statistics of the variables were presented, reliability and sampling adequacy were demonstrated and Harman's Single Factor Test showed no evidence of bias in the data set, enabling the next phase of the analysis, structural equation modelling, to proceed.

6.5 Structural Equation Modelling

Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) is performed in two phases, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) followed by testing of the structural model. CFA is used to confirm the relationships between the variables and their items and to assess the extent to which the data meet the hypothesised structure (Hair *et al.*, 2014). The following sub-section describes the process to complete the confirmatory factor analysis phase.

6.5.1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

The first stage of CFA is to summarise the information generated by the survey into observed (measured) variables which are used as indicators of latent or inferred variables. Each item in a measurement scale constitutes an observed variable. In this research, a total of 90 measurement items were used, and consequently, the first stage of CFA was data reduction, whereby a large number of variables can be condensed to simplify the multivariate analysis while still retaining the nature and character of the original variables (Hair *et al.*, 2014). As already explained, two of the measurement scales used (Acceptance of Dermal Fillers and Perceived Credibility) were originally conceived as composite scales with three sub-scales, and so were collapsed accordingly. A third scale, Attitude Congruence, consisted of 18 separate items, and so was subjected to principal components analysis (PCA) using SPSS 25 to determine the minimum number of factors needed to account for the maximum amount of the variance of the original items. Before performing PCA, the suitability of the data for each variable for factor analysis was assessed using KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity as described in section 6.4.3. PCA utilised oblimin rotation to confirm the strength of factor loadings.

Table 6.18 summarises the component factor analysis for the three scales for which data reduction was deployed.

Table 6.18 Data Reduction Utilising Principal Components Analysis

Scale	Items	KMO	Barlett's	Factors	% of total variance
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	15	0.959	0.000	3	81
				- Intrapersonal - Social - Consider	
Attitude Congruence	18	0.959	0.000	2	69
				- attcong1 - attcong2	
Perceived Credibility	15	0.952	0.000	3	74
				- Attractiveness - Trustworthiness - Expertise	

6.5.2 Measurement Model

Hence, the CFA for this research utilised a measurement model based on 11 latent variables and 42 observed variables. N.B., involvement was not used as a latent variable as the stated intention was to investigate it as a covariate only (see section 2.5). Table 6.19 shows the final latent and observed variables included in the confirmatory factor analysis.

Table 6.19 The Latent (Endogenous) and Observed (Exogenous) Variables used in CFA

Latent Variable	Observed Variables				
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	intrapersonal	social	consider		
Acceptance of Information	aoi1	aoi2	aoi3	aoi4	aoi5
Attitude Congruence	attcong1	attcong2			
Attitude to Ageing	age1	age2	age3	age4	age5
Booking Intention	book1	book2	book3		
Comparison Behaviour	comp1	comp2	comp3		
Internalisation	int1	int2	int3	int4	int5
	int6	int7	int8		
Perceived Credibility	attractiveness	expertise	trust		
Perceived Dissimilarity	dissim1	dissim2	dissim3		
Perceived Pressures	pres1	pres2	pres3	pres4	pres5
	pres6	pres7	pres8		
Perceived Similarity	sim1	sim2	sim3		

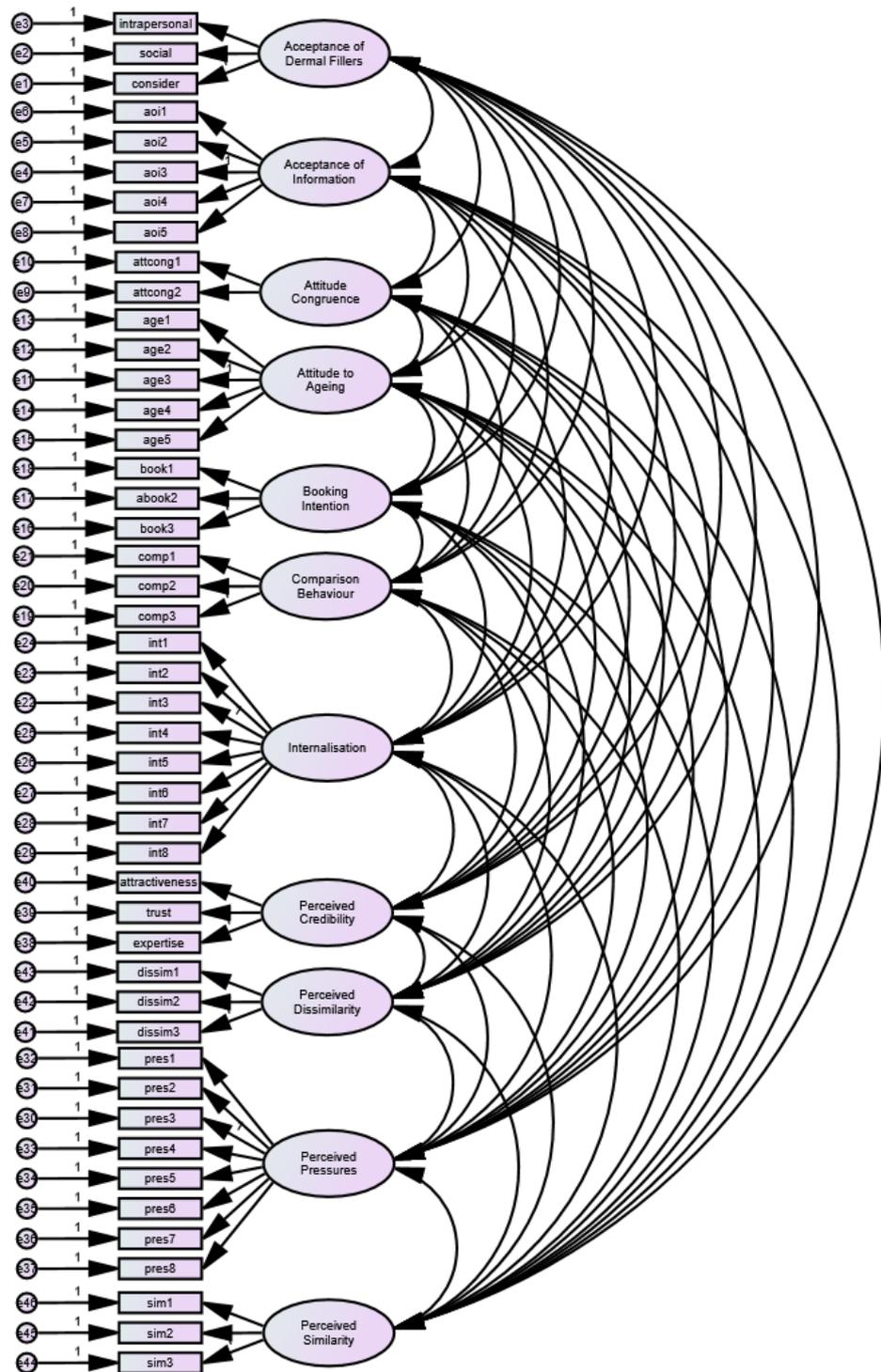
The initial measurement model is shown in Figure 6.1. Model fit indices were used to compare the covariance matrix of the model to the observed data. Following the guidance of Hair *et al.* (2014), five indices were used to make this assessment. These are 1) Chi-square (χ^2) to degrees of freedom (Df), 2) an absolute fit index (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)), 3) a goodness-of-fit index (Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI)), 4) an incremental fit index (Comparative Fit Index (CFI)) and 5) a badness-of-fit index (Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR)). Each of these has an approximate value that can be used to determine acceptability. Continuing to follow the guidance of Hair *et al.* (2014), these are shown in Table 6.20 together with the corresponding values for the initial measurement model shown in Figure 6.1. In each case, the recommended value shown is based on the sample size and number of observed variables for this research.

Table 6.20 Target and Actual Model Fit Values

Index Type	Index	Recommended Values	Actual Value
Absolute	- Chi-Square	- Although good model fit is usually characterised by an insignificant <i>p</i> -value, with $n \Rightarrow 250$ and more than 30 observed variables, significant <i>p</i> -values are expected (Hair <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	- 3614.958
	- Degrees of Freedom		- 976
	- <i>p</i>		- $p=0.000$
	- χ^2/Df	- A ratio of up to 5:1 is considered acceptable (Shadfar and Malekmohammadi, 2013)	- 3.704
	- RMSEA	- <0.07	- 0.061
Incremental	- CFI	- Above 0.9	- 0.916
Goodness-of-fit	- TLI	- Above 0.9	- 0.907
Badness-of-fit	- SRMR	- 0.08 or less	- 0.0712

Based on these model fit values, the initial measurement model is accepted.

Figure 6.1 Initial Measurement Model



6.5.2.1 Second-Order Model

As explained in Sections 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2 respectively, two variables for evaluation as part of this research are Attitude to the Behaviour and Youth-

Ideal Internalisation. Both are derived from the foundation theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and represent an attitude and a belief that has the potential to impact behavioural intention, in this research identified as the intention to make a booking for a consultation for dermal filler treatment (see Section 2.4.4). Neither is represented in the initial measurement model as they are not either an observed variable or a first-order latent variable. Therefore, an exercise to evaluate them as potential second-order latent variables was conducted, the first step of which was to assess the extent of the correlation of their proposed lower-order variables. For Attitude to the Behaviour, these were proposed to be Attitude to Ageing and Acceptance of Dermal Fillers, both of which were identified during the literature review as indicators of an individual's response to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment. Similarly, for Youth-Ideal Internalisation, first-order latent variables were proposed to be the internalisation of appearance ideals ('internalisation') and perceptions of societal pressures relating to a drive towards the maintenance of a youthful appearance ('perceived pressures'). Table 6.21 shows the correlation coefficients for each pair of first-order latent variables indicating a large correlation in both cases (Cohen, 1988).

Table 6.21 Correlation Coefficients for Proposed Second-Order Latent Variables

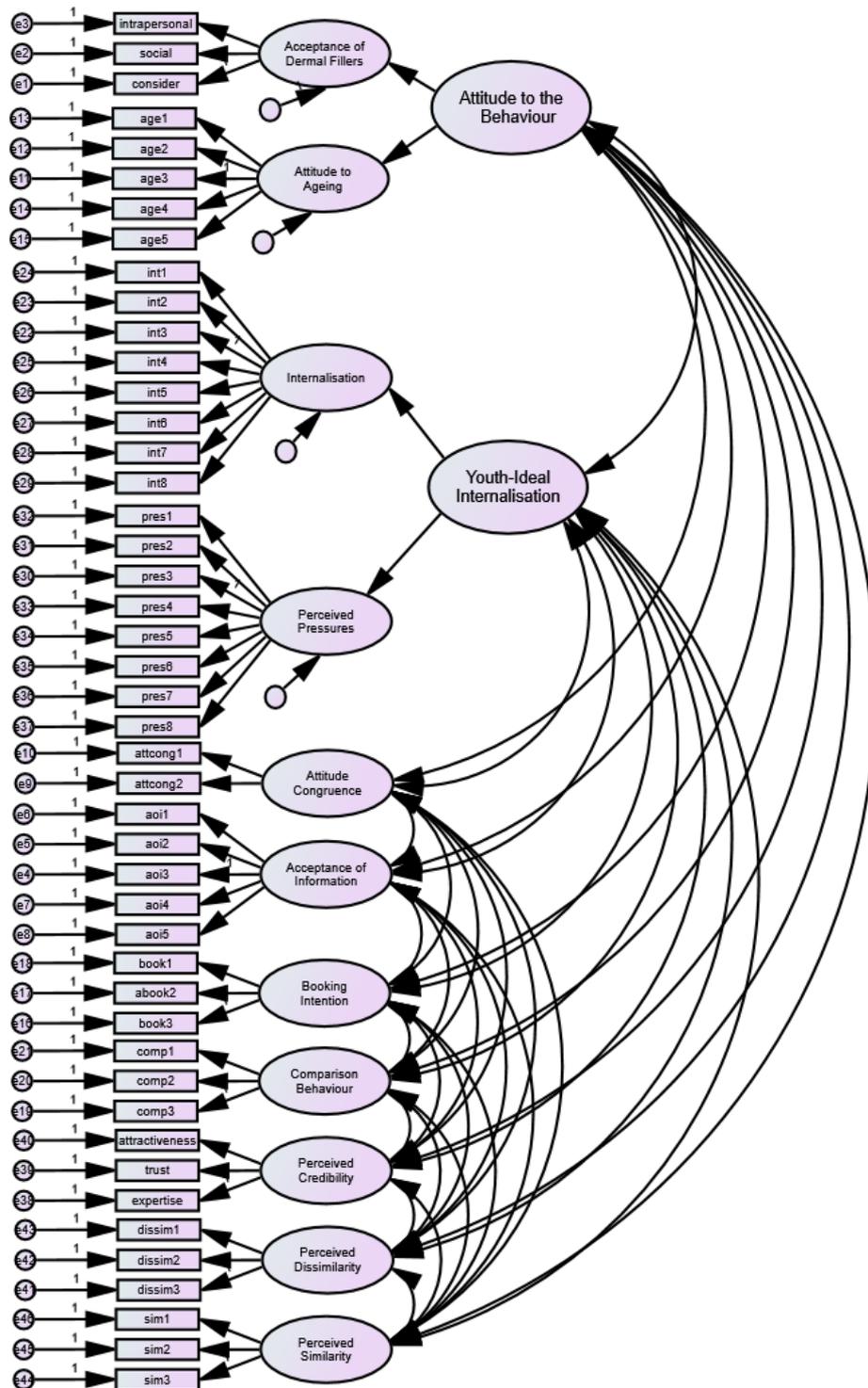
Second-Order Variable	First-Order Variables	Correlation Coefficient (r)
Attitude to the Behaviour	Acceptance of Dermal Fillers - Attitude to Ageing	0.859
Youth-Ideal Internalisation	Internalisation - Perceived Pressures	0.668

The second-order measurement model was constructed in AMOS 23 assuming these relationships and is shown in Figure 6.2. Model fit statistics are presented in Table 6.22.

Table 6.22 Second-Order Measurement Model – Model Fit Statistics

Index Type	Index	Recommended Values	Actual Value
Absolute	- Chi-Square	- Although good model fit is usually characterised by an insignificant p -value, with $n \geq 250$ and more than 30 observed variables, significant p -values are expected (Hair <i>et al.</i> , 2014)	- 3793.864
	- Degrees of Freedom		- 992
	- p		- $p=0.000$
	- χ^2/Df	- A ratio of up to 5:1 is considered acceptable (Shadfar and Malek, 2013)	- 3.824
	- RMSEA	- <0.07	- 0.062
Incremental	- CFI	- Above 0.9	- 0.910
Goodness-of-fit	- TLI	- Above 0.9	- 0.902
Badness-of-fit	- SRMR	- 0.08 or less	- 0.0725

Figure 6.2 Second-Order Measurement Model



The second-order measurement model was compared to the initial model (see Figure 6.1) where these latent variables are presumed to be unrelated. The method used to compare the difference between the models was the Chi-Square Difference Test where the difference between the χ^2 values and

the degrees of freedom of the two models in question are calculated as follows:

$$\chi^2_{\text{diff}} = \chi^2_{\text{second order}} - \chi^2_{\text{first order}}$$

$$3793.864 - 3614.958$$

$$= 178.906$$

$$Df_{\text{diff}} = Df_{\text{second order}} - Df_{\text{first order}}$$

$$992 - 976$$

$$= 16$$

These data were checked for significance using a Chi-Square Difference calculator (<https://www.socscistatistics.com/pvalues/chidistribution.aspx>), which showed the models were significantly different ($p < 0.01$). Hence, the second-order model, with the relationships between latent variables detailed in Table 6.21 assumed, is a good fit for the data. All subsequent structural models analysed as part of this research are derived from the second-order measurement model.

6.5.2.2 Construct Validity

Before the development of the structural model and hypothesis testing attention turned to the evaluation of construct validity, whether the constructs in the second-order measurement model represent the concept of interest (Bryman and Bell, 2011). In this research, two tests were carried out to do this: 1) the assessment of the relatedness of the observed variables within a measurement scale, or convergent validity, and 2) the assessment of the overlap of observed variables across measurement scales, or discriminant validity.

Convergent validity is determined by evaluating factor loadings, critical ratios, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). The latter is calculated using the formula K^2/n , where K is the sum of the factor loadings for a latent variable and n is the number of items (Farrell, 2010). Factor loadings and AVE values should be greater than 0.5, CR should be higher than 0.7 and critical ratios should be greater than 1.96 (Hair *et al.*,

2014). As shown in Table 6.23, all values are acceptable for this research and hence convergent validity is achieved.

Table 6.23 Convergent Validity

Variable	Scale/Item	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio	Composite Reliability	AVE
SECOND-ORDER					
Attitude to the Behaviour				0.923	0.858
	Acceptance of Dermal Fillers	0.97			
	Attitude to Ageing	0.88	15.271		
Youth-Ideal Internalisation				0.798	0.664
	Internalisation	0.82	12.452		
	Perceived Pressures	0.81			
FIRST-ORDER					
Acceptance of Dermal Fillers				0.918	0.788
	Interpersonal	0.83	32.921		
	Social	0.90	40.217		
	Consider	0.93			
Acceptance of Information				0.910	0.669
	aoi1	0.77	25.184		
	aoi2	0.74	23.501		
	aoi3	0.83	28.681		
	aoi4	0.89	32.472		
	aoi5	0.85			
Attitude Congruence				0.916	0.733
	attcong1	0.84	32.297		
	attcong2	0.89			
Attitude to Ageing				0.840	0.521
	age1	0.57	12.568		
	age2	0.88	16.429		
	age3	0.87	16.287		
	age4	0.66	13.387		
	age5	0.56			
Booking Intention				0.961	0.890
	book1	0.96	48.565		
	book2	0.96	49.805		
	book3	0.91			
Comparison Behaviour				0.941	0.842
	comp1	0.86	37.821		
	comp2	0.95	50.486		
	comp3	0.94			
Internalisation				0.901	0.540
	int1	0.80	15.308		
	int2	0.87	15.931		
	int3	0.77	14.961		
	int4	0.79	15.209		
	int5	0.87	15.941		
	int6	0.62	11.524		
	int7	0.51	13.148		
	int8	0.55			

Table 6.23 Convergent Validity (cont.)

Variable	Scale/Item	Factor Loading	Critical Ratio	Composite Reliability	AVE
Perceived Credibility	attractiveness	0.82	12.103	0.806	0.591
	trust	0.90	20.558		
	expertise	0.59			
Perceived Dissimilarity	dissim1	0.67	20.548	0.868	0.690
	dissim2	0.91	31.405		
	dissim3	0.89			
Perceived Pressures	psps1	0.63	19.351	0.909	0.564
	psps2	0.62	18.708		
	psps3	0.61	18.498		
	psps4	0.59	17.830		
	psps5	0.86	31.463		
	psps6	0.89	33.964		
	psps7	0.85	31.165		
	psps8	0.87			
Perceived Similarity	sim1	0.86	34.663	0.920	0.793
	sim2	0.89	31.405		
	sim3	0.92			

Discriminant validity is determined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio of Correlations (Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt, 2015) to determine the similarity between latent variables by measuring the cross-loadings of the items of each latent variable with every other. The resulting HTMT Correlations for this research are shown in Table 6.24. According to Henseler, Ringle and Sarstedt (2015) who originated the HTMT method, ratios should be below 0.9 to ensure discrimination between constructs, and hence, the results indicate that discriminant validity is achieved.

Table 6.24 Discriminant Validity

	ATTB	YII	AOI	AC	BI	CB	PC	PD	PS
Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB)									
Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII)	0.769								
Acceptance of Information (AOI)	0.725	0.605							
Attitude Congruence (AC)	0.716	0.630	0.819						
Booking Intention (BI)	0.805	0.633	0.770	0.720					
Comparison Behaviour (CB)	0.687	0.662	0.671	0.730	0.630				
Perceived Credibility (PC)	0.496	0.316	0.650	0.566	0.467	0.476			
Perceived Dissimilarity (PD)	-0.472	-0.373	-0.510	-0.655	-0.456	-0.480	-0.426		
Perceived Similarity (PS)	0.686	0.590	0.790	0.898	0.702	0.675	0.494	-0.630	

6.5.3 Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

Before evaluating the structural model, multicollinearity was assessed using linear regression analysis in SPSS 25 software. All variables were regressed onto each other systematically and the resulting tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values were assessed. Multicollinearity is the degree of correlation between the independent variables. All VIF values were below the threshold of 5 (Hair *et al.*, 2014) and hence there is no indication of multicollinearity in the model and the analysis could proceed.

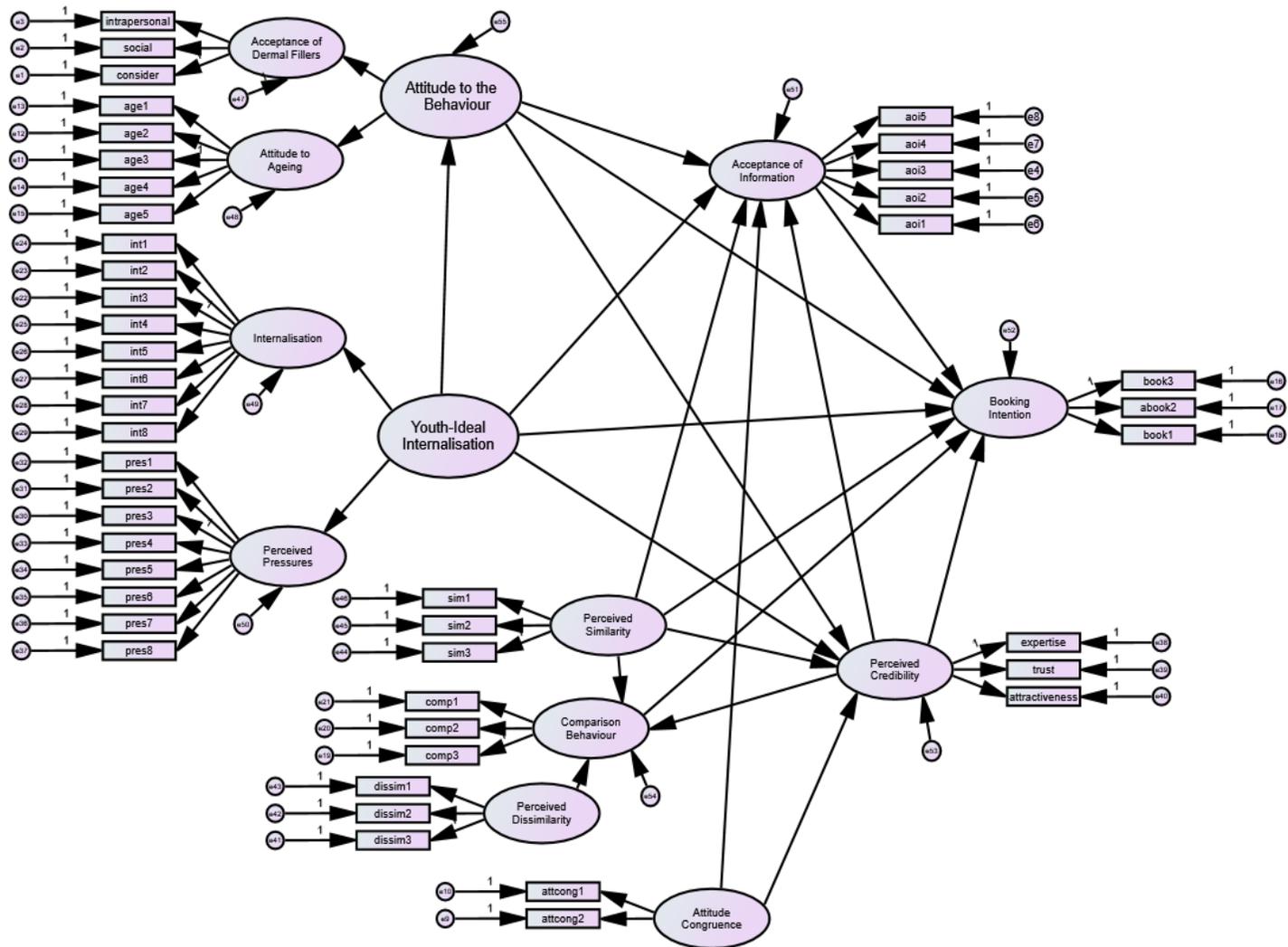
The structural model shown in Figure 6.3, based on the second-order measurement model resulting from the confirmatory factor analysis, includes paths between first- and second-order latent variables representing the four groups of hypotheses proposed in Chapters 2 and 3.

The fit of the structural model with the data was evaluated using goodness-of-fit indices. These are detailed in Table 6.25 and confirm the structural model can be accepted.

Table 6.25 Structural Model – Model Fit Statistics

Index	Actual Values
Chi-Square	3744.369
Degrees of	999
Significance	$p=0.000$
χ^2/Df	3.748
RMSEA	0.061
CFI	0.912
TLI	0.905
SRMR	0.0772

Figure 6.3 Structural Model



The research hypotheses were tested by evaluating standardised path estimates (β coefficients), critical ratios and p values. Relationships between variables are significant when critical ratios are above 1.96 and p -values are below 0.05. Table 6.26 presents the results of the path estimates of the five hypotheses groups, totalling 20 individual hypotheses. The data show that 14 hypotheses were found to be statistically significant as their critical ratios are above 1.96 and their p values below 0.05, whilst six were found to be not significant.

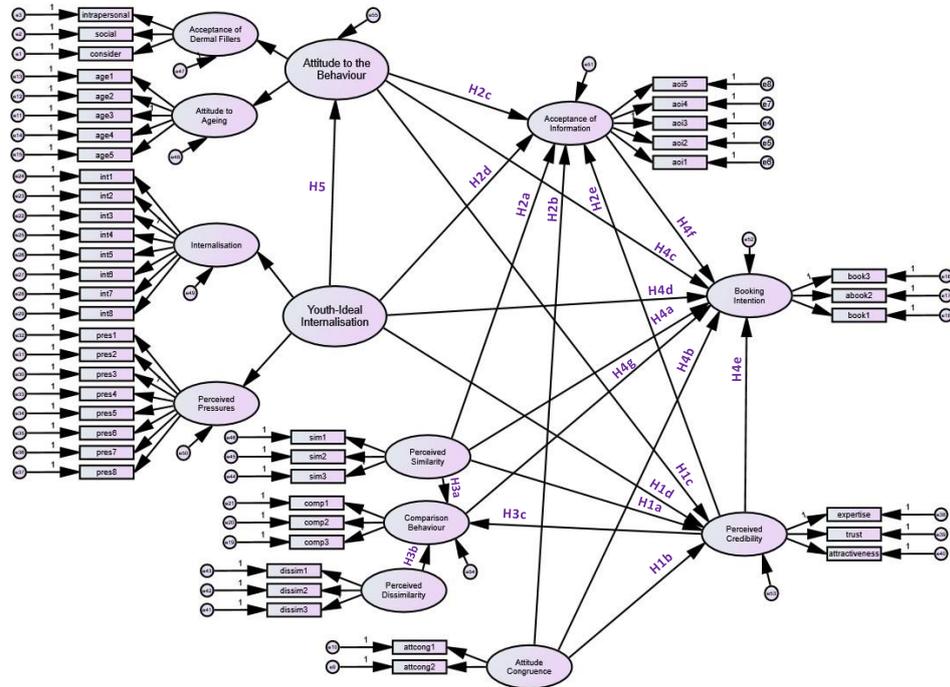
Table 6.26 Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Std. β	Critical Ratio	p Value	Finding
H1a: PS \rightarrow PC	0.301	2.486	0.013	Supported
H1b: AC \rightarrow PC	0.859	6.749	<0.001	Supported
H1c: ATTB \rightarrow PC	0.299	3.258	0.001	Supported
H1d: YII \rightarrow PC	0.262	2.129	0.033	Supported
H2a: PS \rightarrow AOI	0.286	3.568	<0.001	Supported
H2b: AC \rightarrow AOI	0.361	3.649	<0.001	Supported
H2c: ATTB \rightarrow AOI	0.081	1.306	0.192	Not Supported
H2d: YII \rightarrow AOI	0.121	1.451	0.147	Not Supported
H2e: PC \rightarrow AOI	0.243	6.868	<0.001	Supported
H3a: PS \rightarrow CB	0.599	13.602	<0.001	Supported
H3b: PD \rightarrow CB	0.008	0.186	0.852	Not Supported
H3c: PC \rightarrow CB	0.191	5.282	<0.001	Supported
H4a: PS \rightarrow BI	0.028	0.341	0.733	Not Supported
H4b: AC \rightarrow BI	0.135	1.547	0.122	Not Supported
H4c: ATTB \rightarrow BI	0.596	8.612	<0.001	Supported
H4d: YII \rightarrow BI	0.200	2.339	0.019	Supported
H4e: PC \rightarrow BI	0.088	2.309	0.021	Supported
H4f: AOI \rightarrow BI	0.414	7.658	<0.001	Supported
H4g: CB \rightarrow BI	0.061	1.852	0.064	Not Supported
H5: YII \rightarrow ATTB	0.829	17.088	<0.001	Supported

Note: AC (Attitude Congruence), AOI (Acceptance of Information), ATTB (Attitude to the Behaviour), BI (Booking Intention), CB (Comparison Behaviour), PC (Perceived Credibility), PD (Perceived Dissimilarity), PS (Perceived Similarity), YII (Youth-Ideal Internalisation)

Figure 6.4 shows the structural model with the numbered hypotheses overlaid:

Figure 6.4 Structural Model Showing Numbered Hypotheses



Firstly, considering the group of hypotheses that concern proposed impacts on perceived credibility. H1a is supported since the relationship between perceived similarity and perceived credibility was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.301$, critical ratio = 2.486, $p=0.013$). H1b is also supported since the relationship between attitude congruence and perceived credibility was found to be significant ($\beta = 0.859$, critical ratio = 6.749, $p<0.001$). Similarly, H1c and H1d are supported since both the relationship between attitude to the behaviour and perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.299$, critical ratio = 3.258, $p=0.001$) and Youth-Ideal internalisation and perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.262$, critical ratio = 2.129, $p=0.033$) are significant.

The second group of hypotheses propose how the information provided by the influencer is accepted by followers. H2a focusses on perceived similarity and is supported ($\beta = 0.286$, critical ratio = 3.568, $p<0.001$). Likewise, for H2b, concerning the impact of attitude congruence on acceptance of information ($\beta = 0.361$, critical ratio = 3.649, $p<0.001$). Both H2c and H2d are not supported. Neither attitude to the behaviour ($\beta = 0.081$, critical ratio =

1.306, $p=0.192$) nor Youth-Ideal internalisation affect acceptance of information ($\beta = 0.121$, critical ratio = 1.451, $p=0.147$) and consequently did not generate significant results. H2e which proposes perceived credibility has a positive effect on acceptance of information is supported ($\beta = 0.243$, critical ratio = 6.868, $p<0.001$).

Thirdly, three variables were proposed to have an impact on comparison behaviour. H3a, concerning perceived similarity, was supported ($\beta = 0.599$, critical ratio = 13.602, $p<0.001$). H3b, involving perceived dissimilarity, was not supported ($\beta = 0.008$, critical ratio = 0.186, $p=0.852$). And finally, H3c, focussing on perceived credibility, was supported ($\beta = 0.191$, critical ratio = 5.282, $p<0.001$).

The fourth set of seven hypotheses relates to effects on booking intention. H4a, concerning perceived similarity, was not supported ($\beta = 0.028$, critical ratio = 0.341, $p=0.733$). H4b was also not supported since the relationship between attitude congruence and booking intention was not significant ($\beta = 0.135$, critical ratio = 1.547, $p=0.122$). H4c, H4d, H4e and H4f were all supported. Hence, attitude to the behaviour ($\beta = 0.596$, critical ratio = 8.612, $p<0.001$), Youth-Ideal internalisation ($\beta = 0.200$, critical ratio = 2.339, $p=0.019$), perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.088$, critical ratio = 2.309, $p=0.021$) and acceptance of information ($\beta = 0.414$, critical ratio = 7.658, $p<0.001$) all have a positive effect on booking intention. H4g was not supported indicating comparison behaviour does not affect booking intention ($\beta = 0.061$, critical ratio = 1.852, $p=0.064$).

Finally, H5 concerned the relationship between Youth-Ideal internalisation and attitude to the behaviour and was supported ($\beta = 0.829$, critical ratio = 17.088, $p<0.001$). Hence Youth-Ideal internalisation has a positive effect on attitude to the behaviour.

6.5.3.1 R-Squared (Coefficient of Determination) Results

R-squared (R^2) indicates the proportion of the variance in a dependent variable that is explained by the related independent variables. For this research, four variables act as dependent variables. They are acceptance of information, booking intention, comparison behaviour, and perceived credibility. The R-squared results for each, together with the contribution of each independent variable with which it has a significant relationship are shown in Table 6.27. For each dependent variable, one independent variable is exerting a disproportionate effect.

Table 6.27 R-Squared Results

Dependent Variable	Proportion of Variance Explained (by the model)	Independent Variable	Proportion of Variance Explained (by each independent variable)
Acceptance of Information	75.0%	Attitude Congruence	13.0%
		Perceived Similarity	8.2%
		Perceived Credibility	5.9%
Booking Intention	74.5%	Attitude to the Behaviour	35.5%
		Acceptance of Information	17.1%
		Youth-Ideal Internalisation	4.0%
		Perceived Credibility	0.8%
Comparison Behaviour	51.0%	Perceived Similarity	35.9%
		Perceived Credibility	3.7%
Perceived Credibility	37.2%	Attitude Congruence	73.8%
		Perceived Similarity	9.1%
		Attitude to the Behaviour	8.9%
		Youth-Ideal Internalisation	6.9%

6.5.4 Indirect Relationships

Further analysis was carried out to understand whether other constructs were influencing the relationships between independent and dependent variables. Using AMOS 23 software and the existing structural model (see Figure 6.3) mediation analysis with bootstrapping re-sampling (2000 bootstrap samples, 95% CI) was used to assess indirect relationships. H1a, b and c have no possible indirect paths in the model. H1d, the supported

direct path from Youth-Ideal Internalisation to Perceived Credibility, has an indirect path via Attitude to the Behaviour ($p < 0.001$). H2a and 2b, relating to direct paths to Acceptance of Information from Perceived Similarity and Attitude Congruence respectively, were both supported and were both shown to have indirect paths via Perceived Credibility. Although both H2c and 2d (YII \rightarrow AOI, and ATTB \rightarrow AOI respectively) were not supported, each has a significant indirect path via Perceived Credibility. For H3a, which was supported, an indirect path was found to be significant between Perceived Similarity and Comparison Behaviour via Perceived Credibility. Neither H4a nor 4b, concerning the direct paths to Booking Intention from Perceived Similarity and Attitude Congruence, were supported, yet each was determined to have indirect paths via both Perceived Credibility and Acceptance of Information. There are also indirect paths via Perceived Credibility for both 4c (ATTB \rightarrow BI) and 4d (YII \rightarrow BI), and a further indirect path for 4d via Attitude to the Behaviour. An indirect path was found between Perceived Credibility and Booking Intention via Acceptance of Information. The results of these further analyses of indirect paths are shown in Table 6.28.

Table 6.28 Indirect Relationships

Hypothesis		Possible Mediator	Path	Confidence Intervals	p-value	Finding
H1a: PS → PC	Supported	None				
H1b: AC → PC	Supported	None				
H1c: ATTB → PC	Supported	None				
H1d: YII → PC	Supported	ATTB	YII → ATTB → PC	(0.089, 0.474)	0.002	There is an indirect path via ATTB
H2a: PS → AOI	Supported	PC	PS → PC → AOI	(-0.025, -0.171)	0.025	There is an indirect path via PC
H2b: AC → AOI	Supported	PC	AC → PC → AOI	(0.112, 0.341)	0.001	There is an indirect path via PC
H2c: ATTB → AOI	Not Supported	PC	ATTB → PC → AOI	(0.029, 0.147)	0.002	There is an indirect path via PC
H2d: YII → AOI	Not Supported	PC	YII → PC → AOI	(-0.179, -0.012)	0.022	There is an indirect path via PC
		ATTB	YII → ATTB → AOI	(-0.077, 0.226)	0.248	No indirect path via ATTB
H2e: PC → AOI	Supported	None				
H3a: PS → CB	Supported	PC	PS → PC → CB	(-0.025, -0.171)	0.025	There is an indirect path via PC
H3b: PD → CB	Not Supported	None				
H3c: PC → CB	Supported	None				
H4a: PS → BI	Not Supported	PC	PS → PC → BI	(-0.176, -0.013)	0.025	There is an indirect path via PC
		AOI	PS → AOI → BI	(0.035, 0.273)	0.007	There is an indirect path via AOI
H4b: AC → BI	Not Supported	PC	AC → PC → BI	(-0.275, -0.020)	0.018	There is an indirect path via PC
		AOI	AC → AOI → BI	(0.069, 0.491)	0.005	There is an indirect path via AOI
H4c: ATTB → BI	Supported	PC	ATTB → PC → BI	(-0.111, -0.004)	0.015	There is an indirect path via PC
		AOI	ATTB → AOI → BI	(-0.038, 0.130)	0.221	No indirect path via AOI
H4d: YII → BI	Supported	PC	YII → PC → BI	(0.002, 0.114)	0.028	There is an indirect path via PC
		AOI	YII → AOI → BI	(-0.032, 0.216)	0.163	No indirect path via AOI
		ATTB	YII → ATTB → BI	(0.479, 0.931)	0.002	There is an indirect path via ATTB
H4e: PC → BI	Supported	AOI	PC → AOI → BI	(0.009, 0.026)	0.001	There is an indirect path via AOI
		CB	PC → CB → BI	(0.000, 0.005)	0.113	No indirect path via CB
H4f: AOI → BI	Supported	None				
H4g: CB → BI	Not Supported	None				
H5: YII → ATTB	Supported	None				

Note: AC (Attitude Congruence), AOI (Acceptance of Information), ATTB (Attitude to the Behaviour), BI (Booking Intention), CB (Comparison Behaviour), PC (Perceived Credibility), PD (Perceived Dissimilarity), PS (Perceived Similarity), YII (Youth-Ideal Internalisation)

Figures 6.5 to 6.14 depict the combined results of hypotheses testing and the assessment of indirect relationships between variables, starting with Hypotheses 1a -1d:

Figure 6.5 H1a-d: Direct and Indirect Relationships

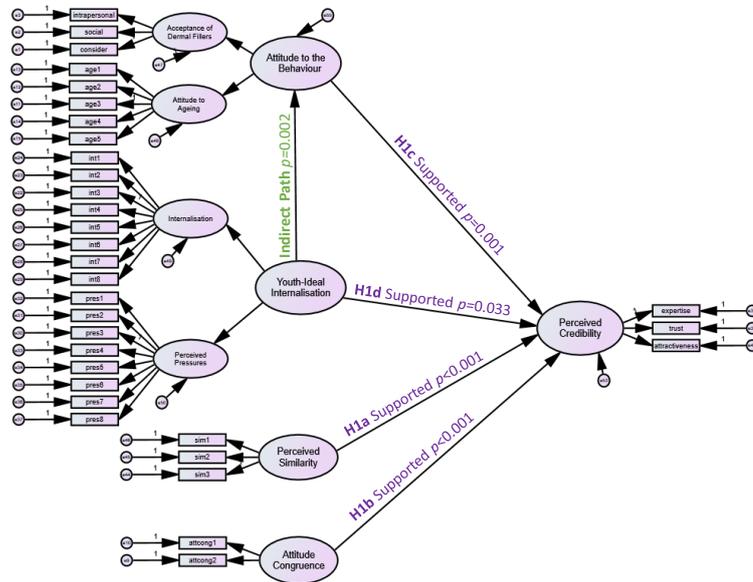


Figure 6.6 H2a: Direct and Indirect Relationships

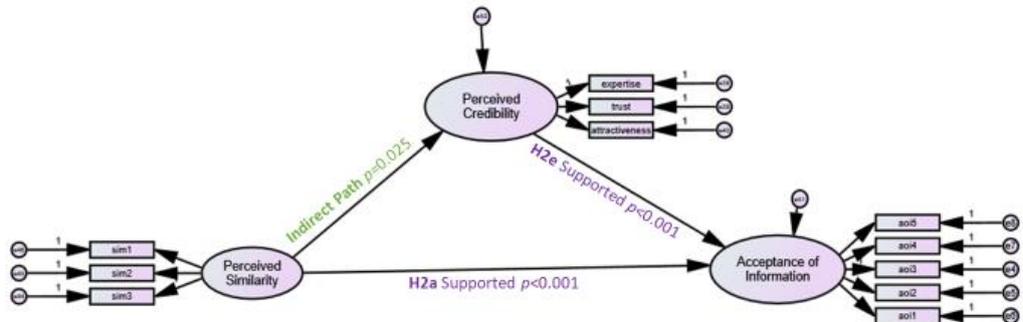


Figure 6.7 H2b: Direct and Indirect Relationships

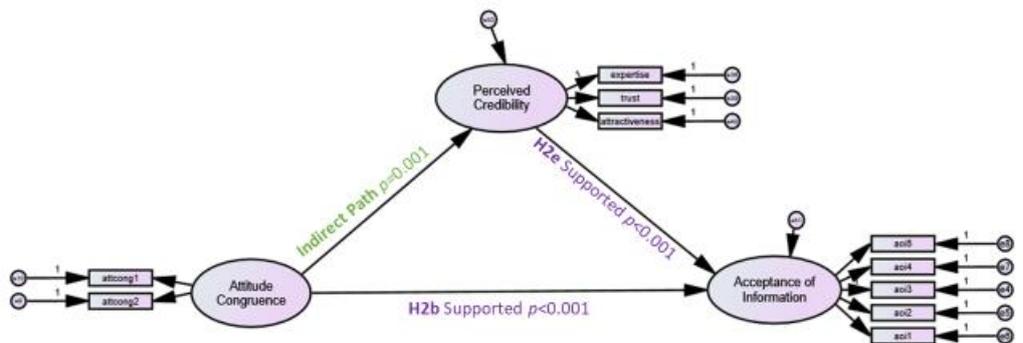


Figure 6.8 H2c: Direct and Indirect Relationships

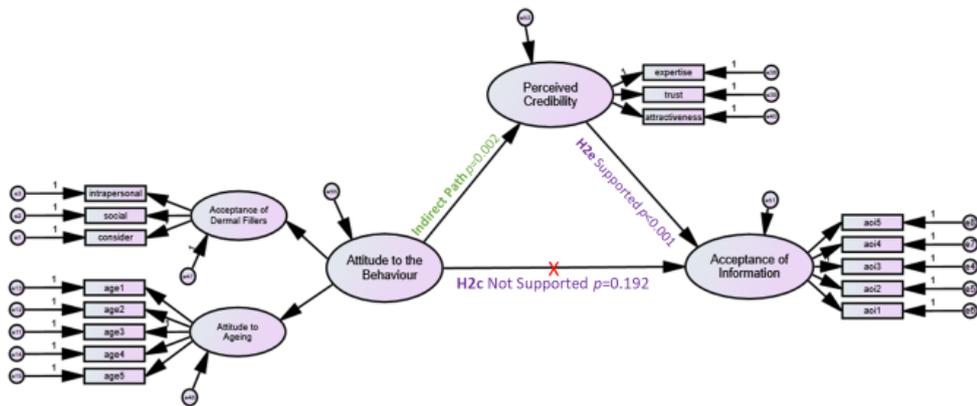


Figure 6.9 H2d: Direct and Indirect Relationships

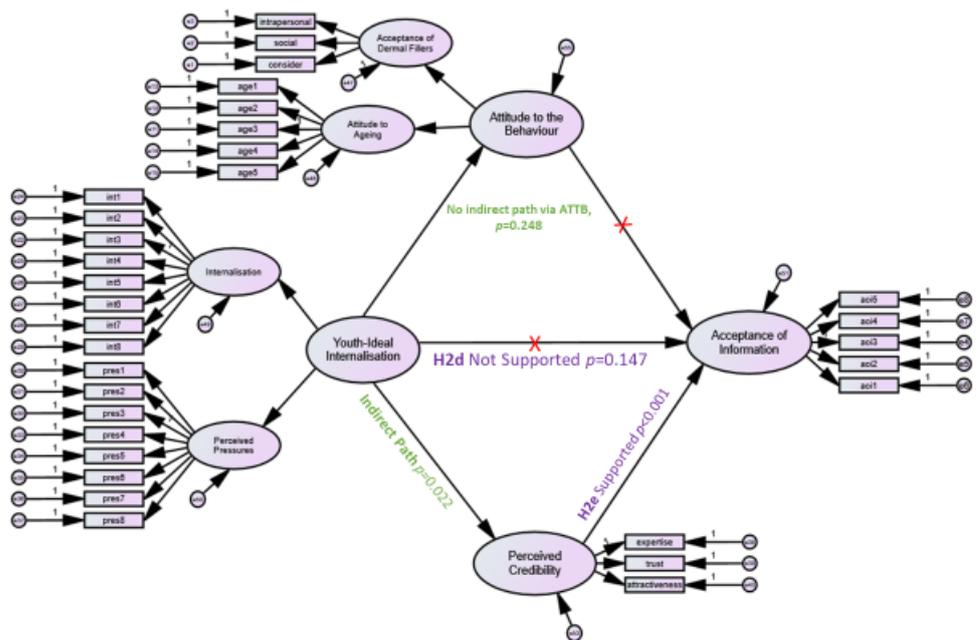


Figure 6.10 H3a-c: Direct and Indirect Relationships

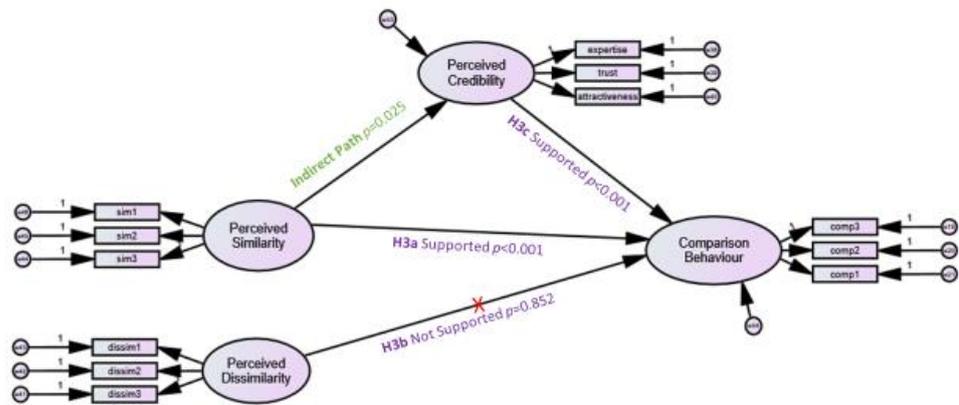


Figure 6.11 H4a: Direct and Indirect Relationships

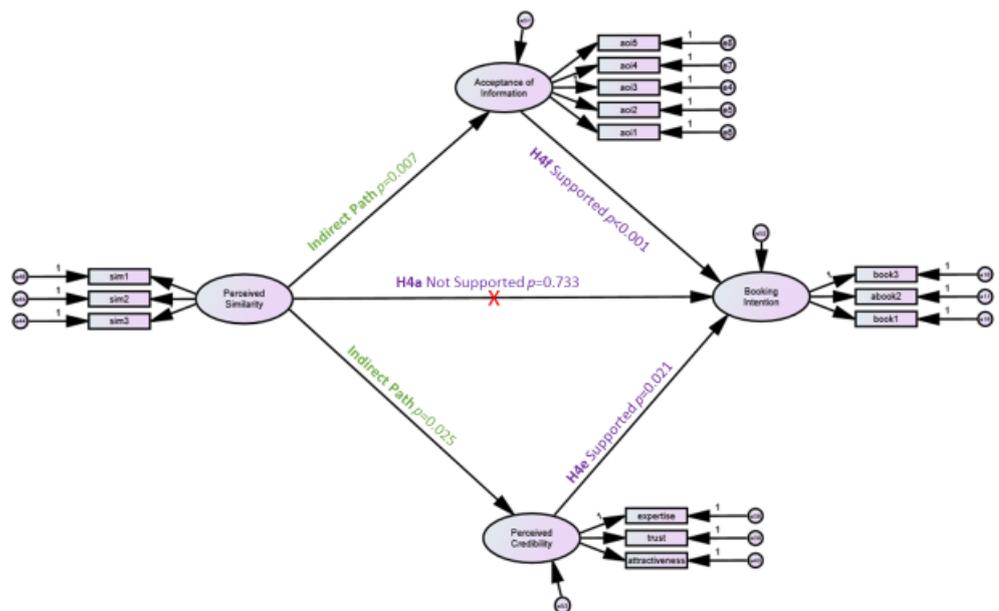


Figure 6.12 H4b: Direct and Indirect Relationships

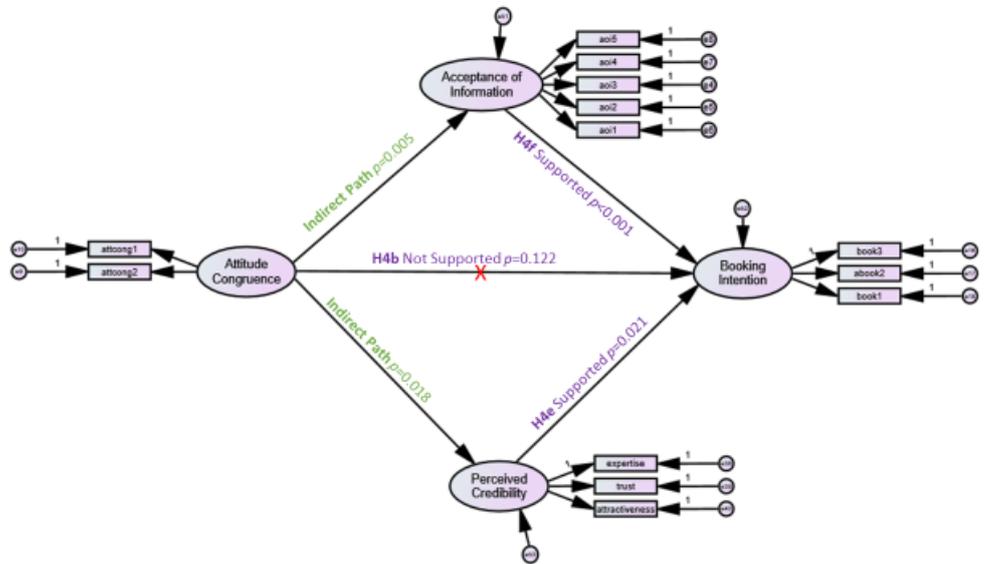


Figure 6.13 H4c: Direct and Indirect Relationships

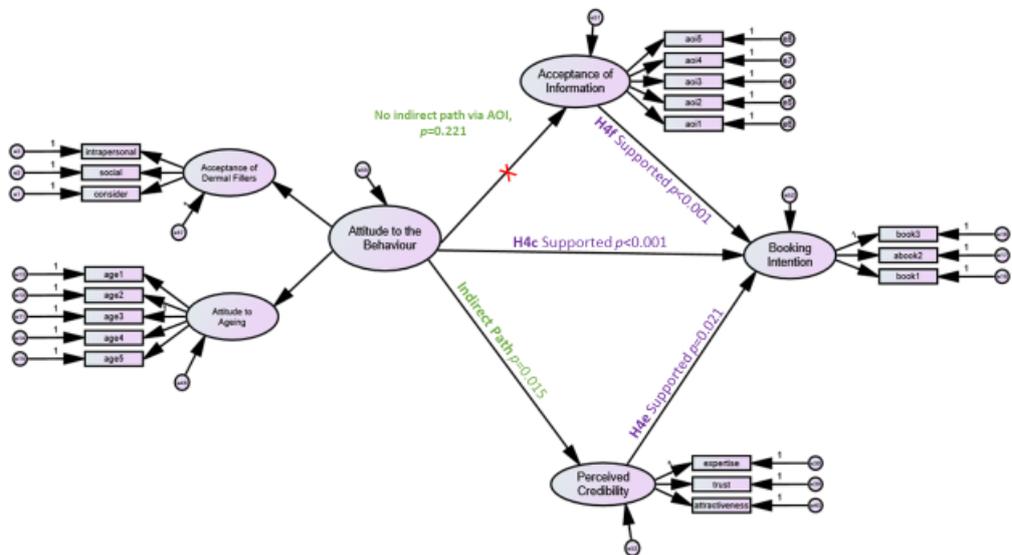
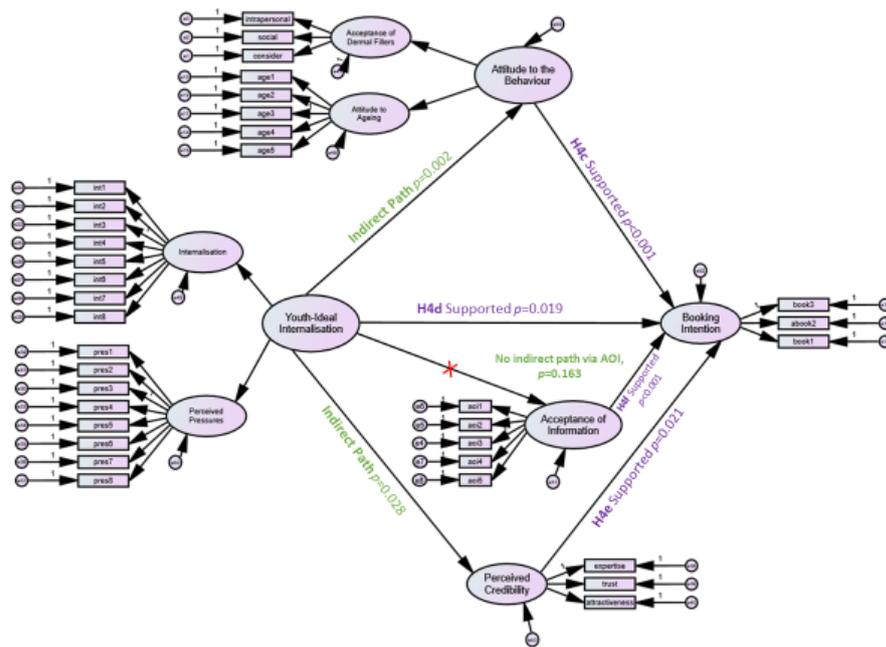


Figure 6.14 H4d: Direct and Indirect Relationships



6.5.5 Analysis of the Domains of Perceived Credibility

As explained in section 4.7.2, the Source Credibility Scale (Ohanian, 1990) used here to measure Perceived Credibility is made up of three sub-scales, each focused on one constituent or domain (attractiveness, trustworthiness, expertise). Hence, it was possible to complete additional analyses to assess their influence. The results of this analysis on the H1 hypotheses are shown in Table 6.29.

Table 6.29 Regression Analysis of H1 based on the Individual Domains of Perceived Credibility

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable (Domain of Credibility)	Std. β Coefficient	p -value
H1a	Perceived Similarity	Attractiveness	0.411	<0.001
		Expertise	0.378	<0.001
		Trustworthiness	0.413	<0.001
H1b	Attitude Congruence	Attractiveness	0.446	<0.001
		Expertise	0.448	<0.001
		Trustworthiness	0.500	<0.001
H1c	Attitude to the Behaviour	Attractiveness	0.369	<0.001
		Expertise	0.364	<0.001
		Trustworthiness	0.382	<0.001
H1d	Youth-Ideal Internalisation	Attractiveness	0.242	<0.001
		Expertise	0.230	<0.001
		Trustworthiness	0.230	<0.001

The results show that none of the independent variables has a disproportionate influence on any of the domains of Perceived Credibility.

Three further hypotheses (H2e, H3c and H4e) were analysed in the same way. However, in each case, the domains of Perceived Credibility were evaluated as independent variables. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 6.30.

Table 6.30 Regression Analysis of H2e, H3c and H4e based on the Individual Domains of Perceived Credibility

Hypothesis	Independent Variable (Domain of Credibility)	Dependent Variable	Std. β Coefficient	p -value
H2e	Attractiveness	Acceptance of Information	0.105	0.036
	Expertise		0.235	<0.001
	Trustworthiness		0.292	<0.001
H3c	Attractiveness	Comparison Behaviour	0.235	<0.001
	Expertise		0.079	0.111
	Trustworthiness		0.167	0.004
H4e	Attractiveness	Booking Intention	0.177	0.001
	Expertise		0.179	<0.001
	Trustworthiness		0.115	0.048

The results of the additional analysis of H2e show that although attractiveness ($p=0.036$) has a positive impact on Acceptance of Information (AOI), its influence is not as strong as that of trustworthiness ($p<0.001$) or expertise ($p<0.001$). By contrast, the analysis of H3c shows attractiveness has a stronger influence ($p<0.001$) on Comparison Behaviour (CB) than trustworthiness ($p=0.004$), while the effect of expertise is not significant ($p=0.111$). And for H4e, all three domains have a significant effect on Booking Intention (BI), although trustworthiness ($p=0.048$) has the weakest impact.

6.5.6 The Impact of Descriptive Norms vs Social Norms

As described in 4.7.2, the two scales used to measure Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) were the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) and the Internalisation Sub-Scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004). The PSPS was used to measure the impact of social norms (how perceptions of other people's opinions affect an individual's behaviour) and the SATAQ-INT to evaluate the impact of descriptive norms (the actual behaviours of others). Regression analysis was used to determine the relative impact of each scale, and hence, each norm, on Booking Intention, to further investigate H4d, and on ATTB, to further investigate H5. The results are shown in Table 6.31.

Table 6.31 Regression Analysis of H4d and H5 based on Social Norms vs Descriptive Norms

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Std. β Coefficient	p -value	Coefficient of Determination (R^2)
H4d	Social Norms (PSPS)	Booking Intention	0.385	<0.001	0.281
	Descriptive Norms (SATAQ-INT)		0.221	<0.001	0.224
H5	Social Norms (PSPS)	Attitude to the	0.478	<0.001	0.391
	Descriptive Norms (SATAQ-INT)		0.224	<0.001	0.288

This analysis shows that both social and descriptive norms have a positive impact on Booking Intention (BI) and Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB); social norms have a greater effect in both cases.

6.5.7 Covariate Analysis

A series of eight possible covariates (age, employment status, relationship status, parenthood (having children and having daughters), involvement, likelihood to have dermal filler treatment, and whether following influencers) were evaluated. Firstly, using group analysis with AMOS 23 and the structural model (see Figure 6.3), and subsequently deploying SPSS 25 to perform independent sample t-tests for each of the latent variable constructs. Six (relationship status, parenthood (having children and having daughters), involvement, likelihood to have dermal filler treatment and whether following influencers) were found to generate significantly different models ($p < 0.05$), and each was assessed to determine where those differences lay in terms of the variables that were contributing to the variance in the models observed. Four covariates were found to have either a moderate (>6%) or large (>14%) effect (Pallant, 2016) on one or more individual latent variable constructs. The results of these analyses are shown in Table 6.32.

Table 6.32 Covariate Analysis

Covariate	Groups	N	Model Comparison	Latent Variable Construct	Mean Total Scale Score	Std. Dev.	Difference Between Groups	t	Effect Size (Eta Squared)	% variance determined by covariate	Effect Size (M/L)
Age	1 = Older than the median birth year (1973) 2 = Median birth year or younger	391 342	$p = 0.845$								
Employment Status	1 = Working 2 = Not working	513 162	$p = 0.786$								
Relationship Status	1 = Coupled 2 = Single	496 225	$p = 0.049$	Relationship Status (i.e., being in a couple or single), does not have a moderate or large effect on any individual variable within the model							
Parenthood -1	1 = Has children 2 = Does not have children	543 182	$p = 0.002$	ATTB	63.01 53.09	16.617 16.025	$p < 0.001$	7.036	0.064	6.4%	Moderate
Parenthood -2	1 = Has female children 2 = Does not have female children	410 315	$p = 0.027$	Having female children does not have a moderate or large effect on any individual variable within the model							
Involvement	1 = Appearance not important (scale score is median or lower) 2 = Appearance is important (scale score is over the median)	416 317	$p < 0.001$	ATTB	54.05 68.74	15.057 15.856	$p < 0.001$	12.787	0.183	18.3%	Large
				AOI	14.31 17.42	3.879 4.223	$p < 0.001$	10.220	0.125	12.5%	Moderate
				BI	6.70 9.15	3.229 3.525	$p < 0.001$	9.752	0.115	11.5%	Moderate
				PS	7.75 9.61	2.707 2.715	$p < 0.001$	9.206	0.104	10.4%	Moderate
				AC	47.27 55.50	11.639 13.123	$p < 0.001$	8.979	0.099	9.9%	Moderate
				YII	37.78 45.93	12.004 13.039	$p < 0.001$	8.771	0.095	9.5%	Moderate

Table 6.32 Covariate Analysis (cont.)

Covariate	Groups	N	Model Comparison	Latent Variable Construct	Mean Total Scale Score	Std. Dev.	Difference Between Groups	t	Effect Size (Eta Squared)	% variance determined by covariate	Effect Size (M/L)
				PC	63.92 71.05	13.273 14.433	$p < 0.001$	6.940	0.062	6.2%	Moderate
Following Influencers	1 = Not following any influencers 2 = Following at least one influencer	499 234	$p = 0.003$	YII	38.40 47.49	12.375 12.440	$p < 0.001$	9.252	0.105	10.5%	Moderate
				PS	7.980 9.770	2.770 2.667	$p < 0.001$	8.827	0.096	9.6%	Moderate
				ATTB	57.11 67.42	16.548 15.920	$p < 0.001$	7.958	0.080	8.0%	Moderate
				BI	7.09 9.18	3.419 3.478	$p < 0.001$	7.641	0.074	7.4%	Moderate
				AC	48.70 55.38	13.206 11.131	$p < 0.001$	7.128	0.065	6.5%	Moderate
Likelihood to have Dermal Filler Treatment	1 = Unlikely 2 = Likely	415 194	$p < 0.001$	ATTB	51.13 74.10	13.875 9.092	$p < 0.001$	21.237	0.426	42.6%	Large
				BI	5.99 10.42	3.008 2.485	$p < 0.001$	16.223	0.302	30.2%	Large
				AC	46.52 58.77	12.233 12.309	$p < 0.001$	11.492	0.179	17.9%	Large
				CB	7.55 10.58	3.41 2.93	$p < 0.001$	9.505	0.130	13.0%	Moderate
				AOI	14.25 18.02	4.033 3.808	$p < 0.001$	9.030	0.118	11.8%	Moderate
				PS	7.57 9.96	2.693 2.510	$p < 0.001$	8.935	0.116	11.6%	Moderate
				YII	36.76 47.36	11.938 11.876	$p < 0.001$	8.494	0.106	10.6%	Moderate

6.5.8 Summary of the Section

Using SEM to generate a second-order model, the 20 hypotheses proposed in Chapters 2 and 3 were tested. Fourteen of the 20 hypotheses were supported, whilst 6 were rejected. Subsequent indirect paths analysis identified variables that were mediating direct relationships. Covariate analysis revealed the presence of six influencing factors, two of which, involvement and likelihood to have dermal filler treatment, were shown to have a large effect on variables within the model.

6.6 Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the results of the hypothesis testing phase of this research were presented. Firstly, the data were evaluated for discrepancies and suitability for confirmatory factor analysis. Once confirmed as robust, the data were subjected to both first- and second-order CFA, generating measurement models which were deemed acceptable in terms of goodness-of-fit indices. Thereafter, a second-order structural model was developed to test the 20 hypotheses derived in Chapters 2 and 3 (H1-5 inclusive). Subsequent analysis was conducted to determine indirect paths between latent variables, and independent sample t-tests evaluated potential covariates.

The following chapter discusses these results taking into account existing literature and proposes how they constitute a contribution to knowledge.

7 DISCUSSION

7.1 Chapter Introduction

This research concerned the effect of pre-existing and emergent attitudes and beliefs, as antecedents of consumer behaviour, on the effectiveness of an influencer-led product endorsement of dermal filler treatment, used to ameliorate the demonstrable signs of ageing from the face, e.g., line, wrinkles, sagginess (skin laxity), and directed to UK-resident Generation X females. Using the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) as its theoretical foundation (see Chapter 3), this investigation was carried out using two phases of research to study predicted relationships between four proposed impact variables², representing salient follower attitudes and beliefs with the potential to act as endorsement determinants, and four effectiveness measures.

Previous chapters have presented the results of the first, qualitative phase (Chapter 5) and the second, quantitative hypothesis testing phase (Chapter 6) of this research. Collectively, these data provide evidence that both pre-existing and emergent beliefs and attitudes held by the follower, salient to the product and the medium, determine the success of an influencer-led endorsement.

This chapter discusses these results alongside the extant literature and interprets them in a way that extends existing influencer marketing knowledge. It is divided into three parts, the first two of which summarise findings relating to each of the two research questions, RQ1 and RQ2, posed in Chapter 4. The manner of answering RQ2 is the systematic review of the effectiveness markers and impact variables derived from the review of the literature summarised in Chapter 2, including, where appropriate, additional analyses to illustrate the point(s) being made. The third section assesses the performance of the foundation theory in terms of the prediction of

² NB: Variables included in the hypothesis testing phase of this research are capitalised to differentiate them from the attribute on which they are based, i.e., Attitude to the Behaviour refers to the variable, whereas attitude to the behaviour concerns the underpinning attribute.

behavioural intention in this context and evaluates the appropriateness of its use.

While the need to confirm the veracity of the conceptual appearance ideal, Youth-Ideal, brought about the inclusion of RQ1 in this research, the results of the first phase yielded supplementary information, beyond the investigation of influencer marketing, that contributes to existing knowledge on how UK-resident Generation X woman react to a society that is increasingly focused on the value of youth (Calasanti *et al.*, 2018). Hence, this chapter starts by summarising the findings relating to RQ1 and the appearance ideal known here as Youth-Ideal.

7.2 Research Question 1 - Discussion

RQ1: Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal' and what factors are involved in its propagation?

7.2.1 Rationale for the Inclusion of RQ1 in this Research

Before summarising those findings that help answer RQ1, it is important to briefly review why it was deemed to be a necessary part of this research. As explained in Chapter 3, the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) has it that attitudes and beliefs, specifically, *Attitude to the Behaviour* and *Subjective Norms* respectively, determine behavioural intention, and subsequently, actual behaviour. Hence, it was important to identify attitudinal and belief-related characteristics of the target consumer salient to the endorsement of dermal filler treatment. The subjective norm that emerged from this broad review of available literature related to belief in the benefits of youthfulness, where youth and beauty are synonymous (see section 2.3.2) and was termed Youth-Ideal in keeping with the nomenclature used by others to describe similar traits that manifest as ageist opinions (Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012) or ageing anxiety (Gendron and Lydecker, 2016). Youth-Ideal was to be included in the hypothesis testing phase as an impact variable with the potential to influence the outcome of the endorsement to be tested. However, faced with the lack of substantive data relating to its manifestation as a relevant appearance

ideal for Generation X women, exploration of its legitimacy was required. Hence, the first phase of this research was conceived to assess the suitability of Youth-Ideal as the subjective norm for inclusion as an impact variable in the subsequent hypothesis testing phase, and a non-probability sample was built based on selection criteria related to gender, age and residence in the UK (see section 4.5.2).

7.2.2 Confirmation of Youth-Ideal as an Impact Variable

Interviewee narratives were supportive of the existence of an appearance ideal consistent with the definition of Youth-Ideal presented to them (see Figure 5.1), with some indicating it had been internalised (see section 5.3.2), meaning Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) could be included as an impact variable in the subsequent phase of the research. Indeed, the response to the first query within RQ1 '*Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of 'Youth-Ideal and what factors are involved in its propagation'*' could, based on the insights generated from those interviews, simply be stated as 'yes' due to the universality of their awareness of a force within UK society that encourages Generation X women to maintain a youthful appearance. All 19 interviewees were aware of such a force and declared themselves familiar with the behavioural edicts inherent within it (see section 5.3.1), confirming one of the 'rules' of the Commodified Feminine consumer that '*ageing is bad and must be striven against or disguised*' (Benwell and Stokoe, 2006, p.174).

These results were consistent with what had been shown prior (e.g., Gimlin, 2007; Morton, 2014), that UK-resident Generation X women feel a drive, manifest in the expectations of society, media, and peers, to avoid demonstrable signs of midlife ageing. Rather than highlighting the benefits of being active and healthy, as might be assumed in later life, these expectations are focused on physical appearance using, among other tactics, the promotion of age-defying female celebrities as the standard setters, allowing others to see who they could be, with a bit of effort (Öberg and Tornstam, 1999). Although this research has focused solely on facial

appearance, it follows that Youth-Ideal will also manifest as a desire to maintain or acquire a youthful body shape.

While this finding is reassuring in terms of the veracity of this research, it is important to recognise the difference between cognisance of the perceived advantage of a youthful facial appearance and internalisation, where the ideal evolves into a personal belief system (Dittmar and Howard, 2004). Although Youth-Ideal appeared to be omnipresent, interviewees identified with it to different extents. As a result, although the primary purpose of the first phase could be said to have been achieved through this confirmation of awareness, it was important to consider the subsequent aspects of RQ1 that aimed to understand how the Youth-Ideal message is perpetuated.

Hence, the analysis of the outputs of the first phase was continued beyond achieving confirmation of the Youth-Ideal concept to identify the key sources of influence at the root of internalisation. In short, exploring the factors that help to shape interviewees' views of the 'best-way-for-them' to take care of their facial appearance. Once known, these sources of pressure and referent others could be incorporated into the scales chosen to measure YII (the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) and the Internalisation Sub-scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004) respectively).

As this research was concerned with consumer behaviour it was important to be mindful that the actions of social connections contribute to the formation or confirmation of beliefs (Ajzen, 1989) with the potential to affect behaviour (Calder and Burnkrant, 1977). Indeed, the various references to a societal fixation on youthfulness, known here as Youth-Ideal, that appear in the extant literature (e.g., Gendron and Lydecker, 2016; Haboush, Warren and Benuto, 2012; Öberg and Tornstam, 2003) consistently reference a sociocultural model where various actors originate or promulgate powerful messages directed to midlife women that dictate which physical characteristics are deemed acceptable and which are not (Hurd Clarke, 2017). Hence, the second key output of the first phase was the clarification of the influences that fit the medium (i.e., social media), the sample (i.e.,

Generation X females), the timeline (i.e., 2021) and the location (i.e., the UK) of this research. To this end, much of the insight gleaned from interviewees' descriptions was consistent with literature reports on the impact of work colleagues (Clarke and Korotchenko, 2011), personal role models (Brown *et al.*, 2007), online and offline media (Brown and Tiggemann, 2016; Coupland, 2009), and the ethereal feeling that 'society' was guiding midlife women towards belief in Youth-Ideal by providing both encouraging and discouraging embodiments of appearance-related behaviours (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007). These findings informed the changes made to the existing scales to re-purpose them for the measurement of Youth-Ideal internalisation. Details of the original and adapted versions of the measurement scales used in this research can be found in Appendix 7.

Yet still, there was more to be unearthed on the internalisation of Youth-Ideal by UK-resident Generation X women, and three themes, in particular, that are the product of the richness of the empirical data, are worth additional attention as they are yet to feature broadly in the literature (Pussetti, 2021). They are 1) the importance of the self as the source of appearance-related pressure, 2) the issue of motivation to comply with Youth-Ideal, and 3) the dichotomy between Youth-Ideal and Anti-Ageing. The remainder of this section is devoted to explaining these themes.

7.2.2.1 The Self as Source of Appearance-Related Pressure

Social influence is the most pervasive determinant of behaviour (Burnkrant and Cosineau, 1975), and this was reflected in interviewee narratives that described being conscious of appearance-related pressure coming from various external sources. However, an interpretation of those same descriptions suggested that as strong, or even stronger, a pressure originated from within the individual, and so, it is reasonable to assume that the external voices are informing the inner. Indeed, according to Sirgy (1982), such directive messages contribute to the development of an individual's image of their 'ideal self' or how they would like to perceive themselves, and so, the profile of the ideal self originates from information acquired from various sources that is assimilated and processed internally. It

is clear, though, that women are not just regurgitating what has been read or seen but are, as posited in the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), processing the message in a way that reflects personal relevance, motivation, prior knowledge etc. Hence, the individual can imagine different possible selves and make their mind up about how they want to grow old (Kozar and Damhorst, 2009; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999) and whether their goal is self-evaluation or self-improvement (Halliwell and Dittmar, 2005). These options are reflected in interviewees' differing views on the overall message of lifestyle magazines for Generation X women. Some interviewees almost believed the magazines to be playbooks that explain how to achieve the required appearance standards, whilst for others, such magazines were dangerous co-conspirators of an ageist society. This schism demonstrates again the importance of attitude when evaluating consumer behaviour.

It is interesting to consider these findings in the light of the amorphous nature of the goal to 'look younger' embodied in the Youth-Ideal concept. In section 5.3.1 mention was made of the indeterminate sense of the desired state and the less than obvious means of reaching it. Without a clear path to follow, a degree of individual interpretation of appearance-related directives seems likely, based on personal situation and preferred communication medium and role model etc. Consequently, guidance on the use of hair dyes, anti-ageing creams, and surgical and non-surgical cosmetic interventions may be viewed by women as options from which they select their preferred means of realising their ideal appearance (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007). The voice coming from within, therefore, appears to be guiding the individual towards achieving their ideal self, built from their assimilation of information originating from some or all of the external sources of pressure and referent others discussed here.

This possibility raises two further notable points. First, it reinforces the importance, in a marketing environment, of understanding the target consumer's real-ideal image discrepancy so that a brand's attributes can be communicated in a way that is in line with the person they desire to be, allowing the product to be imagined as the means to reach that goal (Klipfel,

Barclay and Bockorny, 2015). Secondly, the concept of 'look good for my age' (Coupland, 2009) may be both an individual's best guess of the goal of Youth-Ideal and an indirect reference to the ideal self, constructed from their interpretation of appearance-related information received. The drive to maintain or acquire a youthful appearance that seems to come from within may simply be a way to get closer to the ideal version of ourselves. What encourages women to pursue the realisation of this blueprint is the subject of the next section.

7.2.2.2 Motivation to Comply with Youth-Ideal

In terms of what drives women to comply with the Youth-Ideal decree, there were indications that women expect age-related pressure to build as they get older with increasingly negative consequences. Indeed, women in their 40s and 50s in 2021 were likely raised to believe appearance to be integral to social status and the achievement of life ambitions and have maintained this tendency in later life (Hurd Clarke, 2017). Practically, the concerns expressed were predominantly focused on employment matters, for example, the difficulties in securing a new job when competing with younger candidates and the frustration of feeling undervalued as a mature employee. With this mindset, contemplation of available avoidance tactics to circumvent anticipated career roadblocks seems reasonable, and one option could be to modify one's appearance accordingly, particularly in light of women's interest in other women's appearance-related thoughts and achievements and tendency to '*look to someone else to see if we're OK*' (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007, p.81). Simply, avoiding the appearance of ageing may be a rational response to prevailing conditions, or at the least the perceived conditions. This latter point highlights that beliefs need not be accurate, balanced or logical (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005) and that they are fashioned from a wide variety of cultural, personal and situational factors, exposure to information and prejudices.

Indeed, the internalisation of a belief can be enhanced if the individual is convinced (or hopes) that in doing so their ability to deal with stresses caused by their environment will improve (Kelman, 1961). So, the

consequences of not responding to Youth-Ideal may be a stronger motivation than the possible benefits of compliance, and in the workplace, this may be particularly enhanced if Generation X women suspect limitations will result from the apparent weakened value of accumulated life experience.

Unsurprisingly, employment-related ageism is a common reason for midlife women to undertake beauty work (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008), their goal being to avoid age-based discrimination in the workplace, where those in managerial positions tend to perceive women as being older than their same-age male colleagues.

Yet, based on the above, and in contrast with their adamant affirmations of endemic ageism in the workplace, there was no evidence within the respondents' transcripts of first-hand experience of it. Rather, interviewees' commentaries were largely based on assumptions and expectations (see section 5.3.3), that in themselves gave the impression of the unconscious acceptance of Youth-Ideal, reinforcing the sense that Generation X women are doing this to themselves, fuelled perhaps by the dual messages of encouraging attainability and condemnation of the failure to act communicated by the media and other sources of appearance-related pressure.

As a result of this contemplation of the contribution of workplace ageism to the internalisation of Youth-Ideal two observations are noteworthy. First, it appears that, contrary to other recent reports based on similar sample sizes (e.g., Pearl and Percec, 2019), concerns arising from the fear of work-based age discrimination seem to arise based on its expected presence in the workplace and the inevitability that it will happen to Generation X women disproportionately, rather than as a response to actual discriminatory experiences. This is not to say that age discrimination in the workplace does not happen, only that, in the minds of the Generation X women interviewed it seemed to have morphed into an unavoidable consequence of being employed and was, therefore, a potentially more dominant vector for Youth-Ideal than may be warranted. Also, at a time when working from home is more common than ever (Pikoos *et al.*, 2021), due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of videoconferencing means individuals are increasingly

made aware of how they look in comparison with their ideal because their image is on the screen directly in front of them. Previously, it was not the norm to take a mirror into a meeting, but that is effectively what is happening when using Zoom, Skype, Microsoft Teams etc. No wonder, then, that dermatologists have reported an increase in requests for dermal filler treatment (Rice *et al.*, 2021). And even though this consequence of the COVID-19 global health emergency may reflect dissatisfaction brought on by a distorted impression of the appearance due to the vagaries of videoconference technology, it is another factor that could cause further deterioration in how Generation X women contemplate the workplace. The second noteworthy observation relates to the abhorrence of looking older than one's age and will be discussed in the next section.

7.2.2.3 The Dichotomy between Youth-Ideal and Anti-Ageing

According to interviewees' accounts, Generation X women's motivation to comply was to avoid the negativity, in the workplace and elsewhere, which they assumed would be associated with looking older than either their 'feel age' (Yu, Kozar and Damhorst, 2013) or chronological age. An initial indication of this perspective came via interviewees' spontaneous reference to ageing during the discussion (see section 5.3.2.2), and comments such as 'I don't want to look older than I am'. Whereas the literature-derived concept of Youth-Ideal had focused on the specific goal of looking younger, it may be more likely that Generation X women who state they want to look good 'for their age' are indirectly voicing their true intention, which is to avoid ever being considered older than they are. This possibility clarifies why interviewees were not concerned with telling a stranger their age (see section 5.3.2.2) as the issue is probably not how old they are but that they are not labelled as 'old'. This inference supposes that ageism has two sides: the drive to youth, and the avoidance of old. So, rather than seeking youthfulness, Generation X women may be attempting to avoid looking old, whatever they perceive that to mean, and with it the assumed consequences of invisibility and social exclusion (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2008). It follows that the use of anti-ageing products (e.g., creams, lotions) and covering grey hair with dye, neither of which seem to equate with Youth-Ideal

internalisation, are simply examples of behaviours that are synonymous with women taking care of their appearance with this goal in mind. Unlike the other side of this ageism coin, making an effort to look good 'for my age' is not usually accompanied by the judgement of others (Coupland, 2009) and consequently, Generation X women are free to choose which anti-ageing products or techniques to utilise. Concerning the practice of covering grey hair, acceptance may be related to the consideration of hair as 'comparatively inconsequential' (Ward and Holland, 2011, p.290) when compared to an individual's overall physical appearance, but, if that were the case, it begs the question why in the UK almost 70% of women choose to colour it (69% as stated by Cecil *et al.* (2022) and 67% found in this research). An alternative explanation may lie in the fact that any effect produced by creams, lotions or dyes is easily reversed. Neither renders the appearance irrevocably changed, as may be the perception for other anti-ageing solutions, e.g., dermal filler treatment (Ehlinger-Martin *et al.*, 2016; Hurd Clark, Repta and Griffin, 2007). Although only a conjecture, the root of these different perceptions may simply be the issue of permanence.

This explanation helps to dissect two further unexpected findings that arose from the interviews. Firstly, YII seemed to be more common in women at the younger end of the Generation X cohort (approximately 40-48 years) as reported in section 5.3.2.1. With the lens of 'avoidance of looking old' in place, this finding could be a reflection of their concerns about age-related changes to come, particularly if the bombardment by anti-ageing messages thrown by the media is taken into account. As well as highlighting inspiring ways to address the signs of ageing already manifest, online and offline articles are equally capable of encouraging the consumer to worry about something that might have not yet happened. Indeed, Öberg and Tornstam (2003) state apprehension of future facial and bodily changes as a potential reason why younger respondents in their quantitative study conveyed more negative attitudes towards the elderly, something that might be a result of the reported recent increase in the amount of advertising focusing on anti-ageing and 'liberation from the problem of ageing' in media directed towards women (Brown and Knight, 2015).

It may also be that Youth-Ideal follows a similar path to that of the appearance ideal known as Thin-Ideal (Thompson and Stice, 1999). Thinness is also touted as attainable by the media (Mask and Blanchard, 2011), and worryingly, Thin-Ideal has been observed in primary school-aged children and remains stable into adulthood (Brown and Slaughter, 2011). Indeed, Gendron and Lydecker (2016) who coined the term 'Thin-Youth Ideal', reported evidence of ageing anxiety in college students including a dread of looking older. These data may indicate that the initial descriptions of an appearance ideal manifest in Generation X women reported here may be the fruit of seeds that were planted years before, and one consequence of the increasing media emphasis on the perils of 'looking old' is that younger women within the cohort, possibly a more receptive audience than those who are 50+, are more likely to exhibit YII.

The second unexpected finding relates to the paradoxical lack of acceptance of dermal filler treatment by interviewees who readily self-identified as believing in Youth-Ideal. Interviewees seemed to believe that the reason such treatment is problematic was due to the likelihood of an unnatural result i.e., a distorted appearance. The word 'natural' was used frequently by interviewees as part of their definitions of 'looking good' (see section 5.3.2.2), reflecting a generally held view that dermal filler treatment is too risky to contemplate. Yet, it might be expected that concerns about risk would be described using words more in keeping with safety than was apparent from interviewee' narratives, suggesting that the reason that the potential for a poor outcome acts as a barrier to acceptance of dermal fillers is due to concerns for personal reputational security rather than health-related apprehension. As claimed by Hurd Clarke and Griffin (2007) 'natural' may well be a proxy for 'undetectable' supporting the possibility that the true barrier to the adoption of dermal filler treatment by Generation X women may be the embarrassment associated with having their wish to conceal their age literally showing on their faces. So, any judgement accorded to women who undergo dermal filler treatment may be due in part to perceptions that their actions are a cunning attempt to disguise, or mask, their true appearance (Ballard, Elston and Gabe, 2005). Whatever the reason behind this apparent

distaste to use dermal filler treatment to diminish the signs of ageing, which most of the interviewees found to be unwelcome, it seems likely that it is somehow connected to being overt about wanting to look better, younger or just not any older than one's actual age. Possibly, then, Generation X women are still working out how to follow the edicts of Youth-Ideal while avoiding being judged for doing so.

7.2.3 Summary of the Section

As Youth-Ideal was conceived as a force or pressure encouraging Generation X women to believe in the need to maintain a youthful appearance as they get older, the first phase of this research provided sufficient evidence for the inclusion of Youth-Ideal Internalisation as an impact variable in the subsequent hypothesis testing phase, and to guide the changes needed to the two existing scales chosen to measure it. Although the findings indicate a broad awareness of the appearance ideal, the extent of its internalisation appears to vary in a way that may be linked to a discrepancy between real and ideal selves, personal circumstances, including employment status, and the impact of external sources of age-related appearance-focused pressure. The drive to look younger or avoid the demonstrable signs of ageing on the face appears to correspond to the ready acceptance of some but not all available appearance-modification options. Certain anti-ageing behaviours appear to not be associated with Youth-Ideal, potentially those considered normative (e.g., the use of anti-ageing creams and dyeing grey hair). Yet, the internalisation of Youth-Ideal does not automatically lead to the acceptance of more extreme options, such as undertaking dermal filler treatment, the use of which tends to be judged negatively by Generation X women suggesting that while anti-ageing practices are acceptable, to seek youthfulness is less tolerable. Modifying the appearance in this way seems quite a long way from becoming normalised for this population, even by those who possess the urge to retain a younger appearance as they age and may even be considered deceptive or misrepresentative behaviour (Samper *et al.*, 2018; Schoemann and Branscombe, 2011). Although, as reported in section 5.3.4, the 'never say never' response provided by interviewees when discussing the likelihood that

they would have a dermal filler treatment suggests the possibility of patronage even in what appeared to be a highly resistant population. This finding helps to explain the current growth in the use of dermal filler treatment by midlife women (Adatia and Boscarino, 2021) and justifies the decision to embark on the second phase of this research to evaluate the effectiveness of social media influencers as endorsers of dermal filler treatment.

In summary, Generation X women exhibit behaviours consistent with attempting to delay or disguise the visual signifiers of ageing, to narrow the gap between real and ideal images of themselves. This is usually achieved through the use of products and treatments designed to smooth skin and cover grey hair, of which there is widespread utility. There is certainly an awareness of a consumer-directed message that advocates youthfulness, or Youth-Ideal, and some have internalised this to a greater extent than others and with it a drive to reduce the degree to which their chronological age is reflected on their faces. Internalisation is aligned with normative rather than extreme behaviours (e.g., the use of anti-ageing creams rather than dermal filler treatment) but within the spectrum of degree of acceptance, there are those for whom Youth-Ideal does translate to the use of more 'extreme' practices (Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007) to look younger than their years, not simply good for them.

These findings reflect the difficulty of reaching a detailed understanding of the consequences of the internalisation of Youth-Ideal in terms of associated behaviour from qualitative research consisting of only 19 interviewees. There was, though, a reason to believe Youth-Ideal internalisation would contribute to shaping the outcome of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment. The precise nature of its effect will be discussed in the following section.

7.3 Research Question 2 - Discussion

RQ2: How do followers' attitudes and beliefs impact the effectiveness of influencer-led product endorsements?

To answer RQ2 the quantitative survey results will be dissected in two ways. Firstly, by reviewing the outcome of testing Hypotheses 1-5 inclusive and summarising the effect of the impact variables (Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence, Attitude to the Behaviour and Youth-Ideal Internalisation) on each of the factors used to measure endorsement effectiveness (Perceived Credibility, Acceptance of Information, Comparison Behaviour and Booking Intention), including, where appropriate, additional analyses to illustrate the point(s) being made. Following that review, the accumulated insights relating to each of the four proposed impact variables will be discussed. The result of this process will be that both the effect of attitudes and beliefs held by followers and the effectiveness of the influencer as a product endorser will have been thoroughly evaluated. This section starts, then, with the evaluation of H1, concerning the relationships between the impact variables and the first of the measures of influencer effectiveness, perceived credibility.

7.3.1 Predictors of Perceived Credibility

Rather than just assess the effect of perceived credibility on another variable (e.g., purchase intention), as has commonly been done in endorsement research, e.g., Lou and Yuan (2019), and will be covered here by H4e, this research also sought to understand the effect of the four identified impact variables, Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence, Attitude to the Behaviour and Youth-Ideal Internalisation, on followers' perception of the influencer's credibility. In this way, the research aimed to determine whether any, some, or all of the four factors were antecedents, or precursors, of perceived credibility.

Before going on to describe the results of testing H1, it is worth highlighting that the fictitious influencer featured in the hypothesis testing phase of this research (Tess McGill) generated comparable Source Credibility Scale (Ohanian, 1990) scores to those of an actual influencer used by Breves *et al.* (2019) in a study that demonstrated a positive relationship between

perceived credibility and brand evaluation. Although this does not conclusively indicate that the fictitious influencer was perceived as credible by the respondents, it did provide a level of confidence in the outcome of testing H1.

Those results, based on data generated from the second-order structural model (see section 6.5.3), showed that each of the four impact variables had a direct and positive effect on Perceived Credibility. Hence, all four of the hypotheses within the H1 group were supported, meaning that each of the impact variables could be described as an antecedent of influencer credibility. Firstly, a follower's perception of similarity between themselves and the influencer leads them to perceive the influencer to be credible. Hence, Perceived Similarity predicts Perceived Credibility ($p=0.013$) as proposed by H1a, which was therefore supported. Secondly, a follower's belief that they share similar values and morals to the influencer (attitude congruence) leads them to perceive the influencer to be credible. Hence, Attitude Congruence predicts Perceived Credibility ($p<0.001$) as proposed by H1b, which was therefore supported. This latter finding is in agreement with Sokolova and Kefi (2020) who reported the significant contribution of shared values to the effectiveness of Instagram and YouTube personalities focused on the beauty industry, including for female Generation X respondents.

It is important to bear in mind when reviewing data relating to H1 that credibility is judged subjectively. It is not a fact, or a given, it is a perception and will depend to an extent on the receiver's interest in the subject matter (Pornikapptan, 2004). The results of testing H1c illustrate this point by demonstrating that perceived credibility is affected by the fit of the advocated product, in this case, dermal filler treatment, with the respondent's disposition towards its use. Hence, Attitude to the Behaviour predicts Perceived Credibility ($p<0.001$), and H1c is supported. Finally, for this first group of hypotheses, testing H1d showed that the respondent's internalisation of the Youth-Ideal archetype was positively related to perceived credibility. Hence, Youth-Ideal Internalisation predicts Perceived Credibility ($p<0.001$), and H1d is supported.

These data are suggestive that several factors, dependent on the precise circumstances of the interaction, could affect followers' judgement of the influencer's credibility. Interestingly, one of the criticisms of the work of Byrne (Byrne and Clore Jr., 1970, Byrne and Lamberth, 1971) on the association between similarity measures and attraction mentioned in section 2.2.1 arose from the fact that the subjects of his experiments never met, meaning, according to the critics, that they could not have developed feelings of similarity, which have to be built up from multiple two-sided interactions (Duck and Barnes, 1992). However, in the online world, it is clear that perceptions of similarity and even an assessment of shared values can be formed from a one-way connection that those same critics would probably consider very superficial. That they are not superficial is evidenced by the findings of H1a and H1b. Yet, these data do not indicate whether similarity is a component of credibility as suggested by Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen (2015), or it is an antecedent, the presence of which encourages feelings of credibility to arise (Lou and Yuan, 2019). Further light may be shed on this query by the result of Hypothesis 4a, which concerned the effect of perceived similarity on booking intention.

The outcome of testing H1d, that YII predicts Perceived Credibility, also reinforces the premise stated earlier (see 2.3.2) that beliefs cause attitudes (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Indeed, in section 2.4.1 Perceived Credibility was described as an attitude, per the definition of Ajzen (1989), as it reflects an aspect of followers' disposition toward the influencer. In this case, a *pre-existing* belief (YII) is making a difference in the judgement of source credibility, something that has not yet been featured in influencer marketing literature. Moreover, the supported path between YII and Perceived Credibility also has a significant indirect path via ATTB ($p=0.002$), hence YII also predicts ATTB.

Further regression analysis was carried out to determine the effects of the impact variables on the three domains of credibility as proposed by Ohanian's Source Credibility model (1990) (see section 6.5.5). The resulting β coefficients and p values indicated the four impact variables had an approximately equivalent effect on all three domains of credibility:

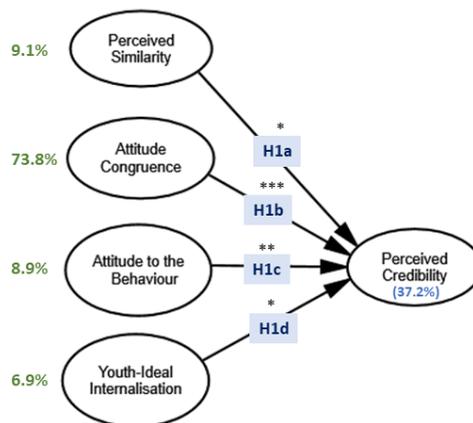
trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness (Ohanian, 1990), demonstrating their broad influence on a variable that others have shown to be critical to endorsement effectiveness (e.g., Erkan and Evans, 2016), and also highlighting the variety of judgements that have a bearing on it.

In contrast, the proportion of the variance of Perceived Credibility accounted for by each of the four impact variables in the structural model varied greatly (see Table 6.27). The contribution of Attitude Congruence was much greater (73.8%) than any of the other variables suggesting that homophily of values and ideologies is the more powerful determinant. This finding indicates not only that a generalised feeling of similarity with another person is not the same as sharing their values, but also highlights the disparity in the relative effect of 'attitude to the influencer' and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs as defined in Chapter 3. In this research, Attitude Congruence was categorised by the researcher as an 'attitude to the influencer' rather than a 'pre-existing attitude', even though the respondent's morals, with which they are comparing their perceptions of the fictitious influencer's values, could also be considered as pre-existent. However, continuing with the researcher's categorisation of attitudinal type enables the dominance of 'attitude to the influencer' over 'pre-existing attitudes and beliefs' in respect of the formation of perceived credibility to be seen. As might be expected, and possibly hoped for by marketing professionals, this suggests that followers' assessments of endorser credibility are formed after reading the influencer's thoughts and opinions on the endorsed product, and although credibility evaluations also depend on aspects of followers' previous mindset, their impact is considerably less.

In summary, perceptions of influencer credibility depend on pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and judgements about the endorser that were, in this case, formed following review of the endorsement content. So, those who consider perceived credibility to be a determinant of endorsement effectiveness should seek to understand more about what makes someone credible as the data presented here suggest that credibility perceptions made by the receiver are dependent on more than their assessment of the trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness of the source (Ohanian, 1990).

In particular, the sizeable contribution made by Attitude Congruence reinforces the particular benefit of the closeness of values and morals between influencer and follower, but equally also highlights the potential harm that could result if the influencer’s reputation was damaged or somehow called into question. Further, perceptions of credibility are determined by followers’ acceptance of beliefs salient to the endorsement and their attitude to the behaviour exhibited by the influencer, which, in an endorsement scenario, could be their use of the endorsed product. Credibility, then, does somewhat depend on choosing a product that fits with followers’ pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, which, of course, requires that those characteristics are well understood. These findings, displayed in graphic form in Figure 7.1, add to influencer marketing knowledge by demonstrating the importance of attitudes and beliefs as antecedents of perceived credibility.

Figure 7.1 Summary of the Results of Testing H1



Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
 Figure in blue = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model
 Figures in green = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by each independent variable

Next, the results of Hypothesis 2 concerning the effect of the impact variables on followers’ engagement with the influencer’s content will be discussed.

7.3.2 Predictors of Acceptance of Information

The flow of events proposed in the Information Acceptance Model (Erkan and Evans, 2016) begins with the positive perception of source credibility

and ends with behavioural intention (e.g., eWOM or purchase intention). Acceptance of Information is an intermediary step between those two points and is important to endorsement effectiveness as it signals that the message has been accepted as evidence of reality. The second group of hypotheses, H2, was therefore focused on understanding the relationships between the impact variables, extended to include perceived credibility, and information acceptance.

Again, scores generated by the scale used to measure Acceptance of Information in this research were evaluated in comparison with published data that employed the same instrument. Using the work of Erkan and Evans (2016) to provide an analogous data set, the evaluation revealed comparable mean item scores (e.g., 3.47 (Erkan and Evans, 2016), 3.13 (this research)). It, therefore, seemed reasonable to assume the information within the influencer's posts and biography had been accepted by the survey respondents. The remainder of this section is presented with this assumption in mind.

Each of the three 'attitudes to the influencer' showed a significant direct and positive relationship with Acceptance of Information: H2a: Perceived Similarity ($p < 0.001$), H2b: Attitude Congruence ($p < 0.001$), H2e: Perceived Credibility ($p < 0.001$), whereas both pre-existing variables, Attitude to the Behaviour (H2c: $p = 0.192$) and Youth-Ideal Internalisation (H2d: $p = 0.147$) did not. As previously seen with the evaluation of the factors that give rise to perceptions of influencer credibility, Acceptance of Information appears to follow the same pattern of post-intervention attitudes having the greatest effect, and once again, Attitude Congruence made a greater contribution (13.0%) to the variance of the dependent variable, Acceptance of Information, than either Perceived Similarity (8.2%) or Perceived Credibility (5.9%) (see Table 6.27).

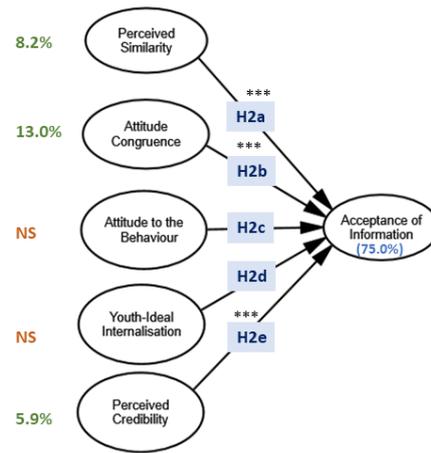
The outcomes of testing H2c and H2d suggest that pre-existing dispositions do not contribute to the decision whether to accept proffered information concerning an endorsement in the way that post-intervention attitudes do. This may offer further encouragement for those marketing products considered to be controversial, such as dermal filler treatment, as it suggests

that acceptance of endorsement-related information is considered independently of any pre-existing prejudice or prior knowledge. Curiously, the lack of a significant relationship between internalisation of the Youth-Ideal archetype and Acceptance of Information emerged even though the content of the stimulus materials provided to survey participants reflected the findings of the first phase of the research, meaning that although reference was made to the influencer's goal to defy ageing naturally, there was no mention of the potentially polarising issue of whether she intended to look younger or not look old. Yet, still, the relationship between these two variables was not significant, and H2d was not supported. Collectively, then, these results help to frame an influencer's content regarding an endorsed product beyond the need for it to be accurate and informative (Erkan and Evans, 2016), by demonstrating the importance of including glimpses of ordinariness that support feelings of similarity (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018) and reinforcing the need to provide some indication of their values and standards (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020).

As for the assessment of H1, further regression analysis was carried out for H2e to determine the strength of the relationship between each of the three domains of credibility (trustworthiness, expertise, attractiveness) and Acceptance of Information (see Table 6.29). The results show that all three domains have a significant effect on information acceptance. This suggests that the attractiveness of the influencer was taken into account by survey participants when considering whether to accept the information she was providing, which follows, given the nature of the endorsement. It also highlights the superiority of trustworthiness and expertise in that evaluation, as attractiveness had the weakest impact on Acceptance of Information ($p=0.036$). Other researchers' investigations of the relationship between source credibility and information acceptance (e.g., Erkan and Evans, 2016; Nunes *et al.*, 2018) did not include evaluations of the domains of credibility, and this absence of comparative precedence is unfortunate. However, in the context of this research, it may be that this finding indicates the participants' positive evaluation of the dermal filler treatment received by the influencer.

Considering the results of testing H2 overall, it is followers' reactions to the influencer that are instrumental to information acceptance, rather than their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, even when the latter are salient to the content of the communication. Assessing these findings through the lens of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) suggests that respondents may be following a peripheral rather than a central route of message processing. Peripheral processing emphasises consideration of attributes of the source rather than message content, and so is consistent with the significant relationships found between attitudes to the influencer and information acceptance. A hallmark of central processing, on the other hand, is interest in the subject, as might be assumed to be indicated by pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, which usually motivates the recipient to conduct a detailed review of the message. That this does not appear to have happened here is interesting and the reasons for this are worth consideration. One explanation could be a lack of interest in the subject, although this seems unlikely in this demographic bearing in mind the findings of the first phase; a further explanation could be the uninspiring nature of the information contained within the biography and posts. So, while it may be fortuitous that deeply held attitudes and beliefs related to the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment are not predictive of acceptance of information concerning their endorsement, the reason for this may be the limited value of the content of the posts or conversely that the use of images proved to be a distraction that led to the cursory review of the copy. The net result of peripheral processing is the lack of a detailed, thoughtful review of the message content and, consequently, any attitude change that results from the communication is likely to be short-lived if present at all. So, while the apparent absence of any impact of pre-existing attitudes on message acceptance may be an unexpected fillip for the endorsement of divisive products, an unfortunate consequence could be that the information is less likely to encourage followers to modify those attitudes for very long. The results of testing H2 are displayed in graphic form in Figure 7.2.

Figure 7.2 Summary of the Results of Testing H2



Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
 Figure in blue = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model
 Figures in green = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by each independent variable
 NS – not significant

The results of the analysis of the third effectiveness measure, Comparison Behaviour, may help to understand further the rationale for the apparent use of peripheral processing by survey respondents to evaluate the stimulus materials.

7.3.3 Predictors of Comparison Behaviour

Comparison Behaviour was included in this research because women tend to compare their appearance with each other, particularly when assessing the effect of ageing (Hurd Clarke, Repta and Griffin, 2007). It seemed reasonable, therefore, to expect the female Generation X survey participants to assess their appearance in comparison with that of the fictitious influencer whose pre-and post-treatment images were featured in the stimulus materials. Hence, the third group of hypotheses (H3) focused on evaluating the effect of Perceived Similarity and Perceived Credibility, as well as the effect of perceptions of discordance with the influencer (Perceived Dissimilarity), on Comparison Behaviour.

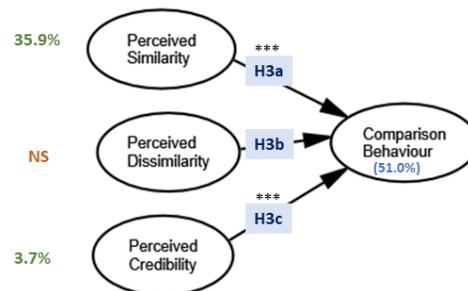
According to Festinger's Social Comparison Theory (1954), people compare with those they consider similar, and indeed, this was the case here where a positive and direct relationship was observed between Perceived Similarity and Comparison Behaviour ($p < 0.001$), supporting H3a. Conversely, the theory is less well-defined concerning the effect of dissimilarity (see section

2.4.3) stating only that people *tend* not to evaluate their opinions or abilities with a dissimilar other. It seems logical, though, that some comparison will have to take place to know whether a person is dissimilar to oneself, and on that basis, H3b proposed a relationship between Perceived Dissimilarity and Comparison Behaviour. The data show, however, that no relationship exists between the two variables ($p=0.852$), so, H3b is not supported. This suggests that perceptions of dissimilarity are built from other cues without the need for a direct comparison with the other person. Indeed, the Physical Appearance Comparison Scale (Schaefer and Thompson, 2014) was included in the survey post-intervention but before the Similarity/Dissimilarity scale (Yuan and Lou, 2020) to avoid priming the respondents by asking them to consider their differences and inadvertently discouraging them from comparing with the influencer. The respondents' decision not to compare seems therefore to reflect their natural *tendency* not to compare with a dissimilar other, as stated by Festinger (1954), with the assessment of dissimilarity potentially coming instinctively following a review of the stimulus materials.

Finally, the relationship between Perceived Credibility and Comparison Behaviour was found to be predictive ($p<0.001$), supporting H3c. As this interaction has not been reported in the literature, further investigation was warranted, and linear regression analysis was performed (see Table 6.29). The results showed that the attractiveness domain of credibility had a stronger relationship with Comparison Behaviour ($\beta=0.235$, $p<0.001$) than trustworthiness ($\beta=0.167$, $p=0.004$), and that effect of expertise on Comparison Behaviour was not significant ($\beta=0.079$, $p=0.111$). This suggests that comparison is more likely with an attractive other and that comparison is unlikely with an expert. The first insight is interesting when framed alongside the similarity–attraction hypothesis put forward by Byrne and Nelson (1965) which posits the existence of a linear relationship between perceptions of similarity and feelings of attraction. Conflating attraction and perceptions of attractiveness as measured here gives rise to the possibility that what is being observed in these data may be consistent with attraction/attractiveness being an intermediary of the similarity–comparison relationship. Indeed, the

structural model included a significant indirect path between Perceived Similarity and Comparison Behaviour via Perceived Credibility ($p=0.025$). Likewise, the absence of a relationship between expertise and comparison behaviour is reminiscent of one of Festinger's (1954) original propositions, Corollary IIIA, which suggests individuals have a tendency not to compare with divergent others. Here, the predicted lack of comparison is linked to the possession of expertise in beauty matters that some may have judged as being quite different to their own. All of that said, the contribution of Perceived Credibility to the variance of Comparison Behaviour in the structural model was much lower than that of Perceived Similarity (3.7% vs 35.9% respectively) (see Table 6.27) indicating the vastly superior strength of the latter as a predictor of comparison. The results of testing H3 are displayed in graphic form in Figure 7.3.

Figure 7.3 Summary of the Results of Testing H3



Notes: * $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$, *** $p<0.001$
 Figure in blue = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model
 Figures in green = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by each independent variable
 NS – not significant

Returning to the suggestion that respondents peripherally processed the stimulus materials included as a means of introducing an intervention into the survey design, distraction, known to affect persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986), was highlighted as a potential reason for this (see section 7.2.2). This proposal stems from the potential drawback of using photographs, purported to be of the influencer, as a central part of both posts included in the stimulus package (see Figure 4.5). They included so-called 'before and after' images of an age-matched female's face, where the 'before' showed the effects of ageing in terms of the appearance of fine lines and sagging skin and the 'after' how those changes had been ameliorated by treatment with dermal fillers. The posts were formulated in the style of Instagram, which tends to be

the social media platform most often used by influencers as visual content is the dominant element of each communication enabling efficient sharing of thoughts and opinions (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the attention of the survey participants may have been disproportionately drawn to reviewing the images, rather than studying the copy provided alongside. It follows that the potency of the attractiveness domain of perceived credibility may also be a consequence of the focus on the imagery presented, and hence distraction may also be the foundation of the outcome of H3c.

When distraction occurs, the detailed study of the message requires more cognitive effort, giving rise to a tendency toward peripheral processing (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986). Further, distraction is detrimental to message conveyance because the thoughts that would normally be stimulated by the message are disrupted, and this may be evident in the results of the hypothesis group focused on behavioural intention (H4).

First, though, to summarise the results of testing hypothesis group 3. These data demonstrate that followers compare themselves with influencers whom they perceive to be similar and that perceptions of dissimilarity prevent or discourage them from doing so. Belief in the influencer's credibility also seems to promote the act of comparison, although this appears to be due to how the influencer looks rather than their trustworthiness or expertise. Indeed, the inclusion within the stimuli of unambiguous images of the functionality of dermal filler treatment for Generation X female faces may have led to perceptions of the attractiveness of the influencer emerging as a key aspect of her credibility and may well be the reason for respondents' distracted peripheral processing of the message. Ultimately, then, the format of the social media posts may have affected the outcome of this research.

In the following section, attention will turn to predictors of booking intention including consideration of the impact of comparison behaviour. Evidence that comparison is a determinant of behavioural intention in this context may provide support for the priority use of attractive influencers as product endorsers. This will be discussed further in the next section.

7.3.4 Predictors of Booking Intention

To remain consistent with the earlier stated intention to conduct research in keeping with the ethical promotion of dermal filler treatment, booking intention was used as the final measure of influencer effectiveness rather than purchase intention. As encouraged by a governmental report on the use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures in the UK (Dept. of Health, 2013), before having treatment each patient (as treatment recipients are described by the report's author) should undertake consultation with a medically qualified person during which session all aspects of the procedure should be communicated clearly. And so, the intent to engage in a treatment consultation was used in this research to reflect behavioural intention.

As before, all four impact variables were evaluated as predictors of Booking Intention, as were Perceived Credibility, Acceptance of Information and Comparison Behaviour. Hence, H4 was made up of 7 hypotheses. Testing the structural model showed that four of them, relating to Attitude to the Behaviour (H4c: $p < 0.001$), Youth-Ideal Internalisation (H4d: $p = 0.019$), Perceived Credibility (H4e: $p = 0.021$) and Acceptance of Information (H4f: $p < 0.001$) were supported. The remaining three hypotheses, relating to Perceived Similarity (H4a: $p = 0.733$), Attitude Congruence (H4b: $p = 0.122$) and Comparison Behaviour (H4g: $p = 0.064$) were not supported.

Hence, Booking Intention is predicted by both pre-existing attitudes and beliefs (ATTB, YII) and an attitude to the influencer (PC). However, the dominant contributor to its variance is Attitude to the Behaviour (see Table 6.27), accounting for more than twice the contribution of its nearest neighbour (Acceptance of Information) and suggesting that in the context of the influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment, followers' established views and opinions largely determine behavioural intention. It appears necessary, then, for an endorsement to be thought of as effective by this measure it must be capable of overcoming or changing potentially long-established attitudes. This reinforces the importance of the influencer selecting the right product to endorse, beyond the consideration of its appropriateness (i.e., the Match-Up Hypothesis (Till and Busler, 2000)) but in terms of evaluating the strength and direction of the attitude of the

endorsement's target consumer to the product concerned, and, more importantly, the possibility that any negativity could be reversed.

Again, the need to address product-related caution raises the issue of the consumer's motivation to utilise the endorsed product. When ATTB has such an impact on behavioural intention, as seen here, it is wise to consider the match between the product's image and the consumer's self-concept, or their thoughts and feelings about themselves (Rosenberg, 1979). Ideally, there should be harmony between these factors, or self-congruity, indicating the consumer can see themselves using the product resulting in preference and adoption (Sirgy, 1985), which did not appear to be evident in the first phase findings as interviewees were reluctant to embrace the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment. And so, the findings of this research indicate the dependence of Booking Intention on Attitude to the Behaviour (i.e., stance on the use of dermal fillers treatments as anti-ageing tools), in an environment where there appears to be a disparity between the product's image and the target consumer's self-concept. However, this supposition that the target consumer would reject the product based on its poor fit with their self-image seems at odds with the reported increase in the use of dermal filler treatment mentioned earlier (see section 7.1.3), and possibly indicates the strength of the drive to achieve one's ideal self, in this case, to realise the appearance of being facially more youthful, even when to do so may not entirely be in keeping with an individual's principles. Further, the data show that Booking Intention is also dependent on YII, so the opportunistic leveraging of the actual-ideal disparity prevailing in the target demographic may be the solution to overcoming any barrier to intention presented by the dominance of ATTB. Accordingly, the influencer's message would be tailored to describe the product in terms that talk to the presumed ideal self of the Generation X female, potentially closing any product-self congruity gap that might exist.

This option may be enhanced by the outcome of testing H5 which showed a predictive relationship between YII and ATTB. Focus on the achievement of an ideal self may lead to acceptance of its realisation by dermal filler treatment with the consequent improvement in the match between consumer

and product. It may be that any exploitation of the opportunity presented by YII would be best targeted toward the amendment of unfavourable attitudes to the behaviour rather than on behavioural intention directly. Hence, directing the consumer to 'consider how dermal fillers could help you look as young as you feel' may be a better use of the influencer's credibility than the more direct 'click here to book a treatment'. Taking this approach allows for the finding that YII contributes little to the variance of Booking Intention (4.0%) compared to ATTB (35.5%), reminiscent of the output of the first research phase where open acceptance of YII by some interviewees did not necessarily translate into tolerance for dermal filler treatment (see section 5.3.4).

Although it was not unexpected that ATTB would out-perform YII in terms of impact on Booking Intention based on the findings of Dehdari *et al.* (2015) demonstrating no correlation between subjective norms and intention to have cosmetic surgery, no estimate of the relative strength of these variables has so far been made in this thesis, other than to point out, based on existing knowledge, the likelihood that it would probably be unequal, i.e., either attitude or belief could be the dominant force (see section 3.2). This research has demonstrated the dominance of attitude over belief in terms of impact on behavioural intention in this context and shown that although Youth-Ideal Internalisation does act as a positive motivation for Booking Intention it does not outweigh the effect of any established viewpoint regarding dermal filler treatment. This finding is important for two reasons. Firstly, evidence of the discrete impact of Youth-Ideal on intention further corroborates its existence and internalisation by UK-resident, Generation X women. Secondly, the importance of understanding the nature of followers' pre-existing attitudes to an endorsed product is reinforced by the observation that the desire to look younger does not appear to counter any hesitancy relating to the use of dermal filler treatment as a means of making that wish come true.

In terms of variables reflecting the respondent's attitude to the influencer, only one, Perceived Credibility (H4e), had a positive effect on Booking Intention, for which it was shown to act as a significant predictor ($p < 0.001$). This reflects findings already reported in the influencer literature (e.g.,

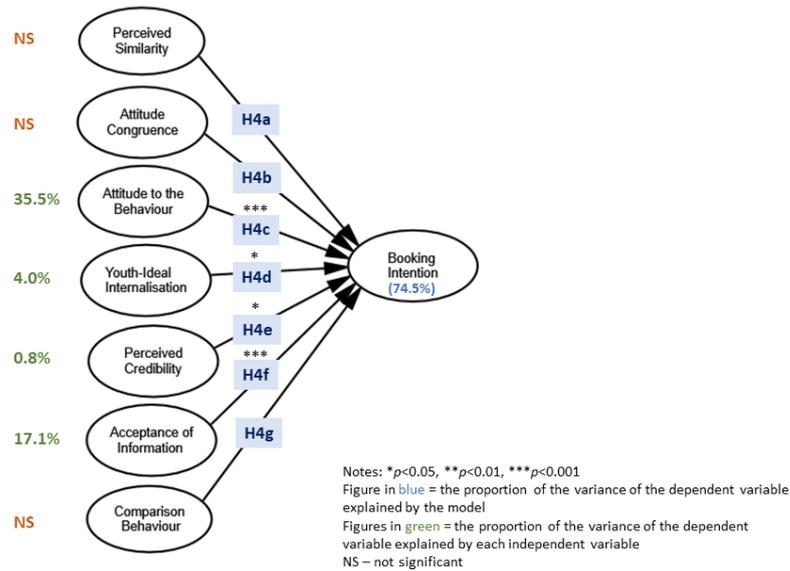
Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Lim *et al.*, 2017; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). However, this research goes further and contributes to existing knowledge by demonstrating that Perceived Credibility makes a small contribution to the variance of Booking Intention (0.8%) in comparison with ATTB (35.5%), suggesting that the selection of an influencer based solely on their credibility without consideration of followers' attitude to the endorsed product is not necessarily a means to achieve an effective endorsement. Simply, being credible cannot overcome the impact of the consumer's attitude toward the endorsed product, and its use by the endorser.

As stated earlier in this chapter, a cursory assessment of the fictitious influencer's Source Credibility scale scores in comparison to those reported for a real-life influencer (Breves *et al.*, 2019) suggests the survey participants perceived her to be credible. So, this finding is assumed to not simply reflect a lack of credibility but the relative supremacy of Attitude to the Behaviour as a determinant of Booking Intention. Interestingly, linear regression analysis shows that, although all three domains of credibility make a significant contribution to Booking Intention, trustworthiness has the least effect ($\beta = 0.115$, $p=0.048$), compared with attractiveness ($\beta = 0.177$, $p=0.001$) and expertise ($\beta = 0.179$, $p<0.001$), possibly reflecting the use of a fictitious influencer in whom confidence had not yet built. Nevertheless, there was sufficient belief in her to be satisfied that these results are an accurate indication that credibility may not be the most important aspect of an influencer's endorsement armoury.

The final variable shown to predict Booking Intention was Acceptance of Information (H4f: $p<0.001$), in agreement with the Information Acceptance Model (Erkan and Evans, 2016) and the subsequent influencer research reported by Nunes *et al.* (2018). Again, this research extends knowledge by demonstrating the importance of AOI relative to other variables, based on Coefficient of Determination data (see Table 6.27). AOI had a greater effect on Booking Intention (17.1%) than either YII or Perceived Credibility but still accounted for less than half the impact of ATTB. Moreover, in the measurement model (see Figure 6.2) AOI showed a large correlation with ATTB ($r = 0.672$) indicating that those with a favourable attitude to the

behaviour/product are more likely to accept the influencer’s message. AOI is, therefore, an important marker of influencer effectiveness, although, again, it is subordinate to ATTB. The results of testing H4 are displayed in graphic form in Figure 7.4.

Figure 7.4 Summary of the Results of Testing H4



In summary, two of the impact variables (Attitude to the Behaviour and Youth-Ideal Internalisation) plus two effectiveness measures (Acceptance of Information and Perceived Credibility) were shown to predict behavioural intention. Hence, both followers’ pre-existing mindsets and their reaction to the influencer determine the ultimate success of an endorsement. That said, three further variables reflecting attitude to the influencer (Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence and Comparison Behaviour) were shown to not affect booking intention. The possible reasons for these findings will now be reviewed.

Firstly, to consider Perceived Similarity, which, based on the outcome of testing H1a, H2a and H3a, appeared to be an influencer marketing imperative, as well as a feature that previous research had demonstrated to be a key differentiating factor distinguishing influencers from other types of endorsers, e.g., celebrities (Gräve, 2017). Here, the results of hypothesis testing demonstrate the contribution of perceptions of similarity to persuasiveness, in the shape of its contribution to Perceived Credibility and

Acceptance of Information, yet H4a is not supported ($p=0.733$) indicating that it does not contribute to the ultimate measure of persuasiveness, intending to behave in the way suggested by another.

The first reason for this result could be that the respondents found nothing to aspire to in the profile of the fictitious influencer, and this may be what is being signalled by the finding that the mean Dissimilarity Scale score was higher than the mean Similarity Scale score (9.32 ± 2.80 vs 8.55 ± 2.86). However, all that can be said about this finding is that similarity may be how influencers initially encourage people to follow them by provoking a superficial closeness, through which lens they appear credible. Indeed, similarity has been shown to give rise to parasocial interactions but failed to have a direct impact on product interest (Lou and Yuan, 2020), suggesting that a sense of connection based on likeness does not guarantee endorsement effectiveness. Thus, some degree of similarity is necessary for communication to be received and accepted, but not, it appears, to be acted upon. Here, it was expected that the respondents would express feelings of similarity with the fictitious influencer as she was matched with them in age and gender, and was described as an 'influencer, beauty obsessive, mother, working woman' (see Appendix 8) to deliberately engineer that duality of accessible and aspirational described by Balaban and Mustăţea (2019). Yet, there was an element to the profile with which the respondents did not connect indicating similarity is not always appealing (Duck and Barnes, 1992).

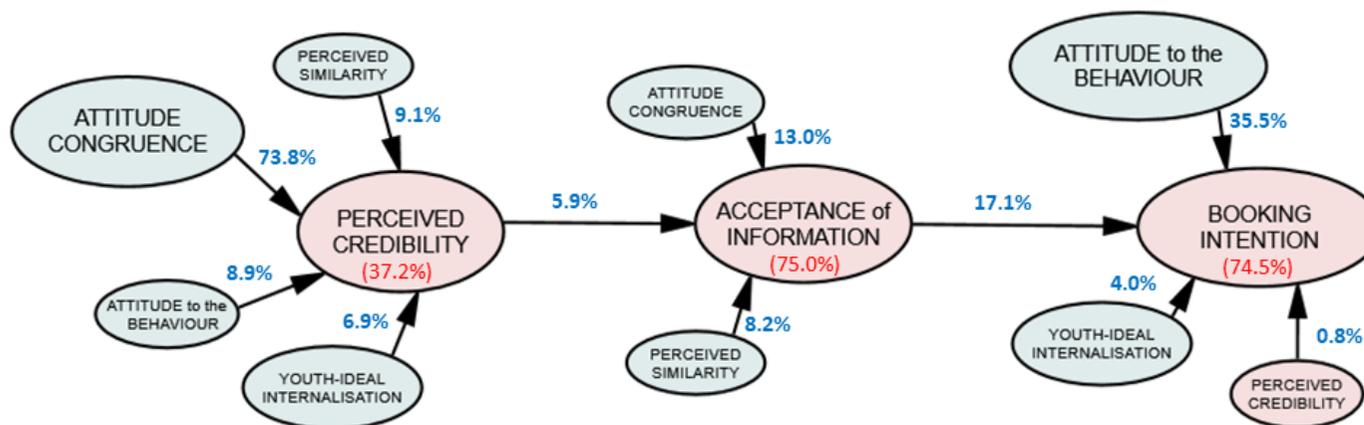
Interestingly, both influencer studies that have reported a direct and positive relationship between similarity and purchase intention (i.e., Djafarova and Rushworth, 2017; Wright, 2017) employed qualitative rather than quantitative methods, which may account for their disparity with this research. It may be that similarity is a process where layers of time, interactions, intimacy and other aspects gradually build to form true closeness, and what has been reported in the influencer literature to date is a series of discrete snapshots taken over the course of its construction. Here, potentially due to the use of a fictitious influencer, the results may only reflect the effect of superficial similarity since a more deep-seated connection had not been established.

A comparable set of results emerged when Attitude Congruence was tested as a predictor of Booking Intention. Just like Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence had a significant effect on Perceived Credibility and Acceptance of Information yet failed to do the same with Booking Intention (H4b: $p=0.122$). Previously it was suggested that Attitude Congruence would exert a strong effect on the endorsement at the centre of this research because of the greater meaning attributed to sharing values with another person. However, true homophily on this basis surely also needs time to assemble, providing a potential rationale for the finding of H4b as it did for H4a. An exception to this, an instance where attitude homophily was shown to have a significant, direct impact on purchase intention in an advertising study, is found in the work of Simpson (2000) where there was racial congruity between the endorser of a frozen meal product and the respondents. Yet, in another study, where race was not a component of the research, shared interests and mindset between the respondents and a YouTube vlogger did not predict purchase intention for beauty products (Mazzini Muda, 2020). It may be, then, that some aspects of shared life experience do engender a more immediate feeling of close connection, yet, in this research, it is clear that even though survey participants believed themselves to be similar to the influencer both based on superficial likenesses and concordant beliefs and values, those feelings were not sufficient to affect their intended behaviour. Finally, in this section, Comparison Behaviour was shown not to predict Booking Intention ($p=0.064$), hence, H4g was not supported. This is despite the earlier discussion concerning the relationships between Perceived Similarity and Perceived Credibility and Comparison Behaviour, suggesting that respondents did compare themselves with the influencer. It also contradicts other studies that implied that comparison with highly attractive models in advertisements is predictive of purchase intention, although much of this research aimed primarily to understand the psychological aspects of the effect (e.g., Richins, 1991; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004). Yet, as suggested earlier, it was also apparent that the respondents here thought that the influencer was attractive, a factor that may have led to the positive outcome of H3c (PC → CB) but there was no indication of a desire to be like

her. So, Comparison Behaviour may simply be an automatic or inherent reaction to meeting, in a digital sense, a similar other. Festinger's Social Comparison Theory says that humans have an inherent drive to evaluate their performance, and, in the absence of an objective means to do so, they compare themselves with similar others. Any action resulting from that comparison will be to reduce any discrepancy detected if it is considered to signal that others are doing better, and the remediation is within the individual's grasp (Festinger, 1954). On reflection, it seems that for comparison to predict behavioural intention in this scenario, respondents had to have thought of the influencer as outperforming them on the attribute in question, appearance, and consequently, the absence of significance in this study calls into question whether they believed such a disparity to exist. Perhaps, then, this finding is pointing out the lack of upward comparison with the influencer due to the absence of aspiration to be like her. Comparison in this instance may have been for self-evaluation as predicted by Festinger (1954) but either no discrepancy was detected, or the means to correct it was intolerable.

In totality, the results of hypotheses testing suggest a cascade of events take place on review of an influencer-led endorsement that follows a route determined by both the followers' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and their emergent attitudes toward the endorser. The suggested route of this flow is shown in Figure 7.5.

Figure 7.5 The Proposed Cascade Initiated by the Endorsement
 (Showing the relative importance of the predictive variables)



Notes: Figures in red = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by the model
 Figures in blue = the proportion of the variance of the dependent variable explained by each independent variable

NB: Original in Colour

Firstly, the assessment of source credibility is chiefly motivated by followers' perception of their resemblance with the influencer, in terms of superficial attributes, such as age, gender, lifestyle etc. (Perceived Similarity), and, to a greater extent, their more deep-seated values, principles and conduct (Attitude Congruence). At this point, also, the impact of the endorsed product has a bearing, both in terms of follower attitudes toward its use (Attitude to the Behaviour) and whether and how it resonates with their beliefs concerning the management of their ageing appearance (Youth-Ideal Internalisation). Although source credibility is often identified as a key component of persuasive endorsement (Ohanian, 1990; Pornikapptan, 2004), it is not a given but is a potentially fragile asset that can seemingly be marred by the influencer's profile and actions. The second stage of this cascade flows directly from the establishment of credibility and is the acceptance of the information provided by the influencer as true, appropriate and valuable. This decision is made without reference to what followers already know about the product, or whether it at all resonates with their beliefs. Rather, the assessment involves reference to followers' evaluation of the influencer and, once again, the impact of the degree of attitudinal similarity between them is noteworthy. Thirdly, the intention to behave in the way prescribed or suggested by the influencer flows logically from information acceptance. At this point, the effect of perceived credibility, which initiated this cascade, appears to wane as it is shown to have little impact on behavioural intention. In contrast, followers' pre-existing perspectives on the product and its use appear powerful, most specifically their attitude to the behaviour being endorsed.

In summary, to be effective as a product endorser an influencer must possess the attributes capable of fuelling the communication cascade as described above. These attributes include credibility, similarity and attitude congruence, all of which influence acceptance of the information within the endorsement campaign messaging. Although being perceived as credible and successfully sharing content are both markers of the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement as defined here, it appears that the ultimate measure of success, the extent to which their followers adopt and use the

endorsed product, is largely out of their hands due to the substantial shadow cast by followers' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. As discussed earlier, in circumstances where these factors limit the possibility of a successful endorsement the influencer can leverage other aspects within the cascade in an attempt to dilute the potency of any attitudinal roadblock.

The following section will group the findings described here by impact variable as a means of summarising what has been learnt about how they each contribute to influencer effectiveness.

7.3.5 The Impact Variables and Endorsement Effectiveness

This research concerned an investigation into the effectiveness of an influencer-led product endorsement and was based on evaluating the actions of four so-called impact variables inspired by the components of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) that were derived from existing literature. Hence, these variables concerned attitudes and beliefs thought likely to determine the outcome of the endorsement. Three related to attitudes, one pre-existing that focused on the product and its use by the influencer (Attitude to the Behaviour), and two emergent, concerning followers' view of the influencer (Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence). The fourth impact variable related to the internalisation of a belief system, Youth-Ideal and was also categorised as pre-existent.

Together these four variables provided the means to extend influencer marketing knowledge by building an understanding of the impact of both pre-existing and emergent aspects of followers' mindsets on the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers. A summary of the effect of each of these factors follows.

Perceived Similarity is said to distinguish influencers from other types of endorsers (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack and Zahid, 2018); however, the results of this research suggest it has a limited impact on endorsement effectiveness, possibly due to its relative superficiality. When considered as an amorphous sense of likeness, based on attributes such as age, gender or lifestyle, that is felt for another person with whom there is only a one-sided rather than a reciprocal relationship, it seems reasonable that Perceived

Similarity would act as the spark that ignites the fire rather than the fuel that sustains it. And so, finding that it has an impact only at the initial stages of the proposed communication cascade appears logical. That it does not determine behavioural intention identifies it more as an antecedent rather than a component of credibility, to answer the question posed in section 7.3.1. If it was a component, surely it would have predicted Booking Intention, as was the case for Perceived Credibility and each of its constituent domains (trustworthiness, expertise and attractiveness). In contrast, the shallowness of similarity is apparent from its inability to bring about behavioural intention, possibly the ultimate signal that an endorsement initiative has been effective. Indeed, feeling similar to the influencer cannot be assumed to be a reliable indicator of agreement with their behaviour or approval of the product being endorsed. Without the associated aspiration to be similar, evidence of which was lacking here, there seems little reason to follow the influencer's recommendation.

More unexpected was the realisation that Attitude Congruence followed the same pattern as more general perceptions of similarity. It too has its greatest impact early in the proposed communication cascade and does not determine behavioural intention. In this sense, then, general similarity is the same as shared values, although as explained earlier their relative contributions to perceptions of credibility and acceptance of information are quite different. Perhaps the impact of attitude congruence is attenuated here by the one-sided nature of the follower: influencer relationship, a finding that is analogous to critics' suggestion that previous research on similarity was flawed because his experimental subjects never met (Duck and Barnes, 1992). Possibly, then, the true power of having shared values cannot be felt online, simply because the feeling needs time and two-way communication to flourish. If true, this would suggest there is reason to believe that attitude congruence would be more dominant in an offline setting, such as face-to-face sales. Here, though, it is more of a scene-setter rather than a major contributor to influencer effectiveness.

In all, this research has demonstrated that the roles of the two impact variables that relate to emergent attitudes to the influencer are concerned

with the initial stages of persuasion. That said, they are important aspects of the evaluation process conducted by followers and, if present, enhance belief in the influencer's credibility and acceptance of their information.

The final two impact variables, Attitude to the Behaviour and Youth-Ideal Internalisation, are, in a sense, the lenses through which followers examine the endorsement. As such they represent sizeable determinants of behavioural intention, both separately and in concert. When considered individually, Attitude to the Behaviour is by far the more dominant of the two (see Table 6.27). In circumstances where the perceived disadvantages of performing a behaviour outweigh its perceived advantages, the potency of the resultant negative attitude cannot be expected to be overcome by the force of the influencer's credibility, resemblance to, or congruence with their followers. Youth-Ideal internalisation, on the other hand, although predictive of behavioural intention, is less forceful.

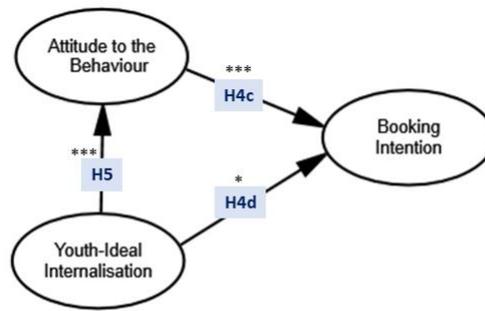
This research has also empirically demonstrated that, as stated by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), beliefs cause attitudes, through the observed relationship between the subjective norm component (Youth-Ideal Internalisation) and Attitude to the Behaviour, a connection that does not tend to feature in descriptions of the foundation theory in the literature (e.g., Hale, Householder and Greene, 2002). A link between attitude and subjective norm components, assuming they address the same focal object (age concealment/dermal filler treatment), has been described by Ajzen and Fishbein (2005) as a correlation arising from their shared derivation from the same information. There is no direct reference to norms predicting attitude, yet it seems logical based on the beliefs – attitudes – intentions causal flow proposed by Fishbein (1963). The point at which beliefs intersect with attitude formation is via the cognitive component of the tripartite attitude construct (Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960), so those myriad thoughts about the consequences of ageing on Generation X women, expressed by interviewees during the first phase of the research, will directly nourish the development of an attitude toward the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment.

Here, this is reflected in the significance of H5, showing that Youth-Ideal Internalisation is predictive of Attitude to the Behaviour ($p < 0.001$).

Consequently, belief in the drive to look younger directly corresponds to an openness to the use of dermal filler treatment to diminish the signs of ageing on the face. Importantly, this finding also supports the premise that YII is a salient belief for this behaviour, as beliefs are only predictive of attitudes to which they are relevant (Fishbein, 1963). Linear regression analysis to investigate the relationships between ATTB and the components of YII indicated that social norms, i.e., the impact of the perceptions of other people's opinions on an individual's behaviour, are more impactful than descriptive norms, that is, the actual behaviour of other people (see section 6.5.6). Social pressure, therefore, is more predictive of behaviour than the actions of others, e.g., celebrities, social media personalities or role models, indicating that even in an individualistic society like the UK women are still paying a lot of attention to what other people think. This is reminiscent of insight from the first phase that gave rise to the suggestion that the use of dermal filler treatment by UK-resident Generation X women had not yet become sufficiently accepted or adopted within the population to be considered normative behaviour.

Yet still, although there is reason to believe that YII is exerting an influence over behaviour, the outcome of testing H4d (YII→BI) revealed a weak subjective norm–intention relationship, often cited as a criticism of the TRA (Ham, Jeger and Frajman Ivković, 2015). That YII is making a small contribution may reflect the duality of its effect, i.e., that it is having both a direct and indirect effect on intention, and evidence of this is the predictive relationship between YII and ATTB. YII is therefore a determinant of both ATTB and BI, but it exerts a greater impact on the former than it does on the latter. This is illustrated in Figure 7.6.

Figure 7.6 The Duality of the Effect of Youth-Ideal Internalisation



Notes: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Hence, the apparent weakness of the subjective norm, YII, in terms of its direct impact on intention may be accounted for by its highly significant ($p < 0.001$) effect on ATTB, signalling that much of the information contained within the YII variable is already represented in ATTB. In short, belief in the desirability of looking younger is already present within a follower's stance on the use of dermal filler treatment to address the signs of ageing on her face. Of course, while both ATTB and YII are strongly related to intention, the fact that the path between them is stronger still exposes the lack of distinction between the attitudinal and normative components advocated by Fishbein and Ajzen (1981) in this model. That said, others have demonstrated a significant relationship between attitudinal and normative components of the TRA where, as here, attitude mediates, to some degree, the path between subjective norm and intention (e.g., Greene, Hale and Rubin, 1997) have argued that it is not possible to distinguish between personal and social influences. Indeed, it follows based on the beliefs cause attitudes edict (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) mentioned earlier (see section 2.3.2) that social pressures (the essence of the subjective norm component) influence an individual's attitudes, which in turn influence intentions. That a strong predictive relationship exists between YII and ATTB fits within the context of this research, such that belief in the benefits of a youthful appearance influences women's interest in dermal filler treatment for age concealment.

In summary, Youth-Ideal Internalisation has dual effects via direct and positive relationships with ATTB and Booking Intention, although it makes a much greater contribution to the variance of the former (68.7%) than to the

latter (4.0%). Further, the significant indirect relationship of H4d (YII→BI) via ATTB ($p=0.002$) confirms the belief – attitude – intention flow and demonstrates that the impact of Attitude to the Behaviour is being intensified by belief in Youth-Ideal, or more simply, that followers' internalisation of belief in the drive to look younger is being manifest as acceptance of dermal filler treatment.

Overall, these data confirm the premise of the foundation theory, that intention to perform a behaviour can be predicted from attitude to the behaviour and subjective norm and demonstrate the disproportionate influence of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs in determining behavioural intention.

7.3.6 The Influence of Covariates

As described in section 6.5.7, eight characteristics of the respondent sample were investigated in terms of their ability to change the outcome of the study. They were age, employment status, relationship status, parenthood status (both having children and having daughters), involvement, likelihood to have dermal filler treatment and whether following influencers. Interestingly, only four of these eight characteristics evaluated here have been featured in the literature in terms of the extent to which they influence an individual's desire for cosmetic surgery or other appearance modification procedure. They are age (Swami *et al.*, 2009), employment status (Al-Yahya *et al.*, 2020), relationship status (Honigman and Castle, 2006) and social media usage (Walker *et al.*, 2021).

Here, six characteristics (relationship status, parenthood status (both having children and having daughters), involvement, likelihood to have dermal filler treatment and whether following influencers) were subsequently determined to generate significantly different structural models and hence were identified as covariates (see Table 6.32). All eight factors will now be reviewed, starting with the two characteristics that did not generate a significant result: age and employment status.

7.3.6.1 Age

Concerning age, the predominant interpretation of midlife women's narratives is that interest in appearance wanes over time (e.g., Halliwell and Dittmar, 2003; Hurd Clarke, 2017; Thompson, 1998; Scott, 2021; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004). Although the inference taken from the first phase of this research was that women at the younger end of the Generation X cohort appeared to be more likely to exhibit YII (see section 5.3.4.3), this could equally be considered as an indication that women at the older end of the cohort were less likely to do so. And so, those findings could be said to be directionally consistent with existing literature. However, analysis of the quantitative data clearly showed that age was not acting as a covariate ($p=0.845$), and so the proposed structural model applies to UK-resident women across the Generation X cohort, which is at odds with those other reports.

7.3.6.2 Employment Status

Employment status and workplace pressures are identified in the literature as motivations behind a woman's decision to seek or embark upon appearance modification (Hurd Clarke, 2017). This chimed with interviewees' concerns that facial manifestations of ageing would limit or harm their chances of success at work (see section 5.3.3), although there was a clear contrast between those adamant affirmations of endemic ageism in the workplace and the absence of evidence within their transcripts of first-hand experience of it (see section 7.2.2.2). Indeed, there was a similar lack of evidence of employment acting as a covariate in the quantitative data ($p=0.786$), which appears to reinforce that there is little rational support for the fear of work-based discrimination that has become fixed in the minds of UK-resident Generation X women.

7.3.6.3 Relationship Status

The literature is not clear on whether it is being single or within a relationship that encourages women to want to have cosmetic procedures. For example, Hurd Clarke (2017) refers to the practice of altering the appearance as being

for both the purpose of '*attracting new partners*' and '*maintaining the attentions of current mates*' (p.107). This research showed a marginally significant effect ($p=0.049$) for being in a relationship, i.e., that keeping an existing partner's interest is more likely to encourage a woman to intend to have dermal filler treatment than the desire to find a new companion. That said, independent sample t-tests showed that none of the variables included within the structural model produced a moderate or large effect due to relationship status. Hence, the covariate effect observed by comparing structural models for those in a relationship, versus those who are not, is probably inconsequential.

7.3.6.4 Parenthood Status

Another inference that emerged from the first research phase was the seeming heightened aversion to the use of dermal filler treatment expressed by respondents who were mothers of daughters compared to the responses of other interviewees. This was not about ageing, but, rather, the potential effects of communication focused on the achievement of a prescribed standard of attractiveness advocated by Kylie Jenner (Ward, Ward and Paskhover, 2018) and others. Hence, two multigroup analyses were conducted (daughters/no daughters and children/no children) to investigate the possibility that arose from the findings of the first phase and to broaden the evaluation beyond the consideration of daughters to enable the assessment of the effect of parenthood. The significant effect achieved for both ($p=0.002$ and $p=0.027$ respectively) was unexpectedly in opposition to the anticipated result. Having children appears to increase behavioural intention, as does having female children. However, for the former finding, independent samples t-tests did not identify a moderate or large effect for any of the variables in the model. In contrast, having daughters was seen to have a moderate effect on Attitude to the Behaviour, with 6.4% of the variance of ATTB being determined by having female children ($p<0.001$).

A potential explanation for this finding could be related to the earlier discussion (see section 7.2.3) concerning the effect of a perceived difference between one's actual appearance and that considered ideal, equated, in this

context, with appearing youthful. It seems reasonable to suggest that women's use of both normative and extreme anti-ageing procedures enables them to create a '*younger self*' (Schoemann and Branscombe, 2011, p.86) even a version of *their* younger self. So, what better yardstick for a woman to use as a reminder of how she looked previously than her daughter? Rather than discouraging the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment having a daughter appears to increase a woman's tendency to believe in the benefits of looking younger, and more like her female offspring. Indeed, whilst one observation from the first phase interviews was the lack of clarity around the goal to 'look younger', it may even be that, for some women with daughters, there is a constant embodiment of it in their very household.

7.3.6.5 Involvement

Unsurprisingly, involvement, in this context interest in beauty products and one's appearance, made a significant difference to the results of the quantitative phase of this research ($p < 0.001$). Moreover, this characteristic exerted a large effect on Attitude to the Behaviour, accounting for 18.3% of its variance (see Table 6.32), and moderate effects on Perceived Similarity, Attitude Congruence, Perceived Credibility, Youth-Ideal Internalisation, Acceptance of information and Booking Intention. Involvement relating to beauty and appearance-related matters, therefore, predisposes followers to be more likely to accept the influencer's endorsement of dermal filler treatment, in agreement with Milfelner and Kikel (2016) who described involvement as an '*important differentiation factor concerning women's attitudes to cosmetic services*' (p.42). Indeed, the effect of respondents having a vested interest in the attitude object has been cited as a criticism of the Theory of Reasoned Action because it is assumed to improve the prediction of the related behavioural intention (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005). However, to offer some perspective on its impact here, the Coefficient of Determination for involvement, in terms of contribution to the variance of ATTB, was much smaller than the comparable data point for Youth-Ideal Internalisation (18.3% vs 68.7%) suggesting that issue involvement is not having an overwhelming effect on the attitude object. Similarly, for Booking

Intention, the contribution of involvement (11.5%) is less than that of ATTB (35.5%).

Two other interactions of involvement are noteworthy. Firstly, its effect on Acceptance of Information (12.5%) is comparable to that of Attitude Congruence (13.0%), which had the largest effect of any of the tested variables (see Figure 7.2) signalling the true consequence of involvement in this model. Secondly, it could be supposed that involvement and Youth-Ideal Internalisation are somehow synonymous. They both concern belief in the importance of appearance-related convictions. However, involvement contributes only 9.5% to the variance of YII, which may indicate a degree of overlap but does not immediately suggest that involvement and YII are equivalent. There is no evidence, therefore, to suggest that involvement, although a covariate in this study, is having a detrimental effect on the quality of the results.

7.3.6.6 Following Influencers

Of the sample of 733 UK-resident Generation X women, 499 (68.1%) were not following any influencers at the time they completed the survey. Yet still, a significant difference was observed when comparing the structural model for 'following' versus 'not following' respondents ($p=0.003$). Hence, as might be expected, a respondent's engagement with social media in this way affects this study. Moderate effect sizes were observed for five of the variables included in the model – Attitude to the Behaviour, Attitude Congruence, Booking Intention, Perceived Similarity and Youth-Ideal Internalisation. So, not following influencers leads respondents to be significantly less likely to internalise belief in Youth-Ideal, feel similar or attitudinally congruent to the influencer featured here, and accept and/or intend to use dermal filler treatment for age concealment.

This divergence of response could be attributed to the act of following influencers, in that their behaviour is perceived as normative behaviour, hence it contributes to determining followers' actions (Ting *et al.*, 2015). Observed norms are likely to have more impact when they come from salient and important reference groups (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005), into which

category the influencer could fall for some of these norms. It seems logical, then, to assume that the use of social media, specifically following influencers, affects followers' perception of normative behaviour leading to the modification of their conduct (Kim, Lee and Joon, 2015). It is also feasible that the events could occur in reverse and the use of social media in this way is an attempt to find a group of like-minded individuals. Rather than views being developed by social media as suggested by Ting *et al.* (2015), existing attitudes and beliefs are potentially encouraging the use of social media and the following of influencers who support the behaviour being contemplated. Of course, with the data available here, it is difficult to truly know which came first, interest in the behaviour or connection with those engaging in it. However, in an attempt to uncover any indicators in the dataset, assessments of the relationships between ATTB and YII and following influencers were conducted using linear regression analysis. The results showed that YII ($\beta=0.258$, $p<0.001$) but not ATTB ($\beta=0.086$, $p=0.059$) predicted the number of influencers followed, meaning that belief in Youth-Ideal is a determinant of this behaviour. This finding is suggestive of the search for an ingroup on social media, and in circumstances where social identity defines the self, as might be imagined for the woman who seeks to look younger than she is to realise or maintain successful aspects of her life, be they romantic or employment-related, group norms will guide her behaviour (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005).

A further clue that may shed light on the importance of the observed behaviour was found in the involvement scores of those following at least one influencer compared with those who followed none. As was discussed in the previous section, involvement acts as a covariate and so can be described as a differentiating characteristic of UK-resident Generation X women. Indeed, being interested in one's appearance may be life-long pursuit (Öberg and Tornstam, 1999) and therefore any indication of a relationship between involvement and following influencers in the dataset would suggest the former predisposes the latter, i.e., that following influencers is a behaviour that results from a keen interest in appearance-related matters. Firstly, an independent samples t-test showed a significant

difference ($p < 0.001$) between the mean Involvement scale scores of following and not following groups, and then linear regression analysis revealed that involvement predicts the number of influencers followed ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.001$). These additional findings can be viewed as supportive, in this instance, of the position that an individual's beliefs and interests take them to social media.

In summary, following influencers is a covariate in this study. The data suggest that pre-existing beliefs and interest encourages people to follow influencers, a finding that speaks to the essence of this developing category of endorsers, their role as leaders of an ingroup.

7.3.6.7 Likelihood to Have Dermal Filler Treatment

That an individual's likelihood to utilise the endorsed product was determined to be a covariate in a study of the effectiveness of that endorsement is unsurprising. Equally, the large effect sizes observed for ATTB, Booking Intention and Attitude Congruence (see Table 6.32) were not unexpected. What is interesting about this finding is that it makes clear the importance of attitude change in this context. The ultimate test of persuasive communication is whether it can bring about attitude change (Cacioppo *et al.*, 1986), yet there are no clear indicators in the existing literature on whether an influencer can affect a change in attitude that would lead to the usage of an endorsed product by a previously sceptical or uncertain consumer. That said, in this research the prospect that Tess McGill, the fictitious influencer, could encourage attitude change appeared low considering that of the 609 respondents who stated the direction of their interest in having dermal filler treatment in the future, 415 (68.1%) said they were unlikely to do so (NB: the remaining 124 respondents answered 'neither likely nor unlikely'). Nevertheless, if one bears in mind the importance of attitude change to endorsement effectiveness, it seemed appropriate to conduct an *a posteriori* search for any evidence of attitude change caused by the intervention of the influencer's endorsement.

Firstly, it is important to highlight that so far in this thesis a prediction relating to attitude change has not been featured. Yet, with the knowledge of both the

outcome of the covariate analysis as well as the discrepancy in the sizes of the 'likely' and 'unlikely' groups of respondents, concerning their potential future use of dermal filler treatment, the need to achieve some degree of understanding of the effect of this endorsement on attitude change became increasingly necessary.

As the main aim of this study was not to evaluate attitude change, the question concerning the likelihood to undergo dermal filler treatment was not repeated post-intervention. So, taking the guidance of Bryman (2004) that a research issue can be investigated using '*two contrasting scales*' (p.3) to measure a single variable (e.g., Brotheridge and Grandey's (2002) evaluation of emotional labour) and bearing in mind that this exercise is simply looking for nascent signals of attitude change, the pre-intervention 'likelihood to have dermal fillers' score was computed with the post-intervention Booking Intention scale score. That said, using two different scales in this way also avoids the possibility of participant manipulation of their responses through the use of the same measurement scale twice in a short time. Practically, standardised scores were computed for each measurement so that they could be compared, and then a paired-samples t-test was conducted. The resulting p value showed a significant difference between the pre- and post-intervention scores ($p < 0.001$), and hence inferred a change in attitude towards the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment resulting from the influencer's endorsement.

Although preliminary, this finding provides a degree of reassurance concerning the persuasiveness of influencers, even in circumstances where there may be resistance to the endorsed product.

7.3.7 Summary of the Section

This section focused on a thorough review of the findings resulting from hypothesis testing. A communication cascade was proposed to take place following receipt of the influencer's endorsement message, starting with the formation of a series of attitudes to the influencer including perceived similarity and attitude congruence from which perceptions of credibility develop. This leads to content review and the decision whether to accept the

information within it and finally, to the intention to behave in the manner suggested by the endorser. At the beginning and end of this process, the effects of pre-existing attitudes and beliefs are felt, although this is most acute latterly as both factors predict intention. Hence, it is the followers' reaction to the influencer that is dominant initially while the effects of their pre-existing mindset contribute greatly to behavioural intention.

During the development of this proposed communication cascade other interesting or novel findings emerged. This includes the action of all four impact variables as antecedents of source credibility, the power of the ATTB variable as a predictor of intention, relative to that of YII, and the direct effect the subjective norm (YII) has on attitude to the behaviour. Also, although there was evidence of peripheral processing of the endorsement message this did not appear to prevent at least an indication that attitude change had resulted from the influencer's intervention.

In summary, the second phase of this research has found that both followers' salient pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and their emergent attitudes to the influencer predict influencer effectiveness. Although at the outset four independent measures of effectiveness were to be assessed so that the influence of the impact variables on each of them could be determined, it appears likely that they are interdependent, flowing from one to another to bring about the desired consumer behaviour.

Finally, the choice to use the Theory of Reasoned Action as the foundation theory will be briefly reviewed.

7.4 Review of the Foundation Theory

The rationale supporting the choice to use the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) as the foundation of this research was described in detail in Chapter 3. It is centred around the synchronicity between the structure of the theory, where attitudes and beliefs have a direct impact on behavioural intention, and the purpose of the study to evaluate corresponding relationships within the framework of an influencer-led endorsement of a product associated with largely negative

attitudinal and belief-related preconceptions. It is true, though, that the theory is not without its critics (Hale, Householder and Greene, 2002) and so, it is appropriate to consider whether, in retrospect, the choice of the TRA was a wise one. To do so, the major points of contention highlighted by Hale, Householder and Greene (2002) in their summary of the theory will be considered. They are 1) the relationship between attitudes and subjective norms, 2) sufficiency, 3) the impact of previous behaviour and 4) rationality and the background effects of emotions. Each will be assessed in turn.

7.4.1 The Relationship between Attitudes and Subjective Norms

A potential criticism of the TRA is that subjective norms tend to have a weak or non-existent association with behavioural intention (Ham, Jeger and Frajman Ivković, 2015), and so, to be confident that Youth-Ideal was a viable belief system and ensure any such finding reflected the true power of the normative component of the foundation theory rather than its irrelevance, it was important to include verification of the compatibility of Youth-Ideal in the context of this research. This is crucial for the faithful utilisation of the theory due to its structural reliance on the premise that beliefs determine attitudes. Hence, a means of demonstrating that Youth-Ideal was truly salient to the endorsement of dermal filler treatment was a necessary inclusion in this research, corresponding to the evaluation of its connectivity to the specific attitude to the behaviour considered here, stance on the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment. Practically, this was achieved through the inclusion within the Structural Model (see Figure 6.3) of a path between Youth-Ideal Internalisation (YII) and Attitude to the Behaviour (ATTB), and the formation of Hypothesis 5 (YII → ATTB, see section 6.5.3). The data showed a significant relationship between YII and ATTB, confirming the premise of the TRA and supporting H5 ($\beta = 0.829$, critical ratio = 17.088, $p < 0.001$). That YII *predicts* ATTB in this context increases confidence in the legitimacy of Youth-Ideal as the subjective norm.

Although the theory proposes that attitudes and subjective norms will have separate and distinct effects on behavioural intention, it has been suggested that the subjective norm component only has an indirect impact on intention

and acts as a determinant of attitude (Ham, Jeger and Frajman Ivković, 2015). Indeed, this research also found a predictive relationship between Youth-Ideal Internalisation and Attitude to the Behaviour and this finding, that YII is a determinant of ATTB, was used to explain the weak relationship observed between norms and behavioural intention. Yet still, YII has a clear effect on intention, as evidenced by both the strength of the prediction ($p=0.019$) and the contribution it makes to the variance of Booking Intention (see Table 6.27). Also, that YII and ATTB are independent was apparent in the first phase where interviewees who self-declared as the former were still unprepared to accept the use of dermal filler treatment as an age concealment option for themselves or others. Further, it could be imagined that changing someone's attitude toward the product would not necessarily change their perspective on the value of looking younger than their chronological age. Consequently, this research has obeyed a key tenet of the Theory of Reasoned Action by demonstrating the direct influence of the subjective norm on behavioural intention.

7.4.2 Sufficiency

Whether the components of the TRA are sufficient predictors of behavioural intention is important, not only because confirmation verifies the potency of the theory but also because it affirms that all three elements, attitude to the behaviour, subjective norm and behavioural intention, are compatible. The principle of compatibility states that specific behaviours (e.g., booking a consultation with a medically qualified person to discuss dermal filler treatment) can be predicted only if compatible measures of the prognostic variables are used and they each have the same target, action, context and time (Ajzen and Fishbein, 2005).

In this research, ATTB and YII together accounted for 39.5% (35.5% + 4.0% respectively) of the variance of Booking Intention. This is within the range found in the meta-analyses reviewed by Hale, Householder and Greene (2002), which spanned from 19% (Sheeran and Orbell, 1998) to 50% (Ajzen, 1991), and so, rather than debating whether the theory is sufficient, this

thesis will be content with stating only that the results achieved here are, by this measure, quite typical.

That said, it has been suggested that the theory does not account for behaviour that results from the impact of other norms, beyond social and behavioural. For example, personal norms, i.e., people's judgement about whether they should perform a given behaviour, particularly about moral obligations (Shaw, Shiu and Clarke, 2000). Sometimes this possibility is dismissed on the basis that the behaviour under scrutiny entirely depends on social pressures, referent others' actions and the individual's motivation to comply. However, in this research there appeared to be a strong personal compulsion within the concept of Youth-Ideal Internalisation (see section 5.3.3), and this was included as the 'myself' component within the adaptations made to the Perceived Sociocultural Pressures Scale (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) (see section 5.3.5). The original version of the scale did not include reference to the self, so it is not possible to evaluate the results in comparison with those of other researchers to determine if the change was appropriate, or whether using another scale specifically designed to evaluate this aspect of the origins of behaviour would have been better. Nevertheless, what can be said is that of the four pressures (myself, people at work, society and the media) included in the amended version of the chosen measurement instrument, 'myself' had the strongest relationship with intention. However, as suggested in section 7.2.2, the sense of the inner voice directing one's behaviour is likely an amalgam of the various external sources of information received daily, and so, it is assumed that the same principle applies here as was proposed for the treatment of personal norms, i.e., that they are consequences of social and descriptive norms and therefore already accounted for within the subjective norm component. As a result, the findings of this research support the sufficiency of the TRA in this context as ATTB and YII predict Booking Intention to a comparable extent to that reported in the literature.

7.4.3 The Impact of Previous Behaviour

Having done something in the past has been shown to affect behavioural intention (Sommer, 2011). However, it is important to determine whether this behaviour is habitual rather than occasional, as tendencies that are automatic or resulting from a compulsion without control are not causal antecedents of behavioural intention. The TRA, after all, concerns volitional behaviour, not that over which the individual has little or no control.

In the context of appearance modification, the habitual use of dermal filler treatment, other non-surgical cosmetic procedures (NSCPs) or even cosmetic surgery could signal body dysmorphic disorder (BDD), associated with the concentrated focus on perceived defects or flaws in the appearance and their impact on daily life. BDD is not within the scope of this research and will not be considered further. However, a significant difference ($p < 0.001$) was observed when the structural model was applied to those with ($N = 146$) and without ($N = 587$) experience of NSCPs including dermal filler treatment, seeming to confirm the impact of previous behaviour. Yet, it needs to be borne in mind that this treatment is temporary, lasting between 3 and 18 months approximately (Go, Frost and Friedman, 2021), and hence some repetition is to be expected. Interestingly, in the population who had previously had NSCPs, Youth-Ideal Internalisation was a weaker variable within the model and no longer had a significant impact on either Perceived Credibility (H1d: $p = 0.172$ (NSCPs group) vs $p = 0.033$ (Total Sample)) or Booking Intention (H4d: $p = 0.217$ (NSCPs group) vs $p = 0.019$ (Total Sample)). However, the significant impact of YII on ATTB was maintained ($p < 0.001$) and it accounted for more of the variance of ATTB than was noted for the entire sample (72.6% vs 68.7%). This suggests that, when taking into account previous behaviour in this context, the subjective norm is entirely acting as a determinant of attitude, and no longer has any influence over intention. This could signal that YII encourages the first encounter with appearance modification but thereafter the intention to repeat the behaviour is entirely based on an individual's personal experience and how it shaped their attitude toward this product category.

In summary, previous behaviour appeared to have an impact on this research by changing the influence of the subjective norm.

7.4.4 Rationality and Affect

There is nothing in the TRA that presumes individuals act rationally, indeed, attitudes and beliefs can be inaccurate, biased or misrepresentative. The theory talks only to behaviour that is reasoned because it results from those attitudes and beliefs, not that it is reasonable. The formation of beliefs and attitudes is entwined with social influences, and inevitably emotions will also be a contributing ingredient. This was all too apparent in the emotive and passionate narratives of interviewees in the first phase, particularly when they were asked to comment on women who underwent dermal filler treatment in an attempt to look younger (see section 5.3.4). And it must not be forgotten that appearance can be hugely important to women (Clarke, 2018; Öberg and Tornstam, 1999), and of particular note in this context is the often-asserted comment that any attempt to restore a youthful countenance is more likely to fail than succeed, resulting in embarrassment and regrets. Unlike the consequences of the overconsumption of alcohol which might be felt the morning after, the consequences of a bad dermal filler treatment are likely to last for weeks or months due to the semi-permanence of the treatment. Hence, anticipated, largely negative, emotions are of particular relevance here and must be taken into account as potential disruptors of the foundation theory. In short, with matters concerning such a potentially sensitive topic as appearance, emotions may have a significant impact on behavioural intention. However, thinking of the frequent use of the word 'natural' by the interviewees concerning how they looked, it seems reasonable to assume that these emotions commonly arise from their attitude to the product and its use in the way described here. Consequently, they should already be accounted for within the attitude to the behaviour component of the theory, including through the incorporation of 'outcomes evaluation'.

In summary, the absence of rationality from the TRA is a reflection of the same absence in some behaviours and is consequently not given credence

as a flaw of the theory here, considering the nature of the actions and justifications being considered. Also, the assumption that emotions are intrinsic to the intention to undergo dermal filler treatment seems reasonable, given the insights generated by the first phase, yet the parameters of the attitude to the behaviour component of the theory should encompass their effects.

7.4.5 Summary of the Section

In summary, the outcomes of this review support the decision to use the Theory of Reasoned Action as the foundation of this research. The findings show that it acted as a sufficient predictor of behavioural intention and that the premise that beliefs cause attitudes was upheld. Although there was evidence of the impact of previous behaviour on the results of this study, it did not appear to be of great concern. Similarly, although concerned with a subject where emotions may be strong and irrational, sentiments seemed to converge on the use of the endorsed product, and hence were assumed to be captured within the Attitude to the Behaviour variable.

7.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has discussed the results presented in Chapters 5 and 6 to provide a coherent summary of this research into the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of influencers as product endorsers. To that end, the adopted Pragmatic approach allowed the selection of research methods to be based on the needs of each of the two research questions, which together provided the means to achieve the objective of this endeavour. Hence, the use of a two-phase research design encompassed an exploration of the perspectives of UK-resident Generation X women concerning the singular reality of physical ageing, followed by the quantitative assessment of hypothesised consequences of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment for age concealment to that same target consumer.

The outcome of the first phase, a series of 19 interviews, confirmed both the existence and omnipresent awareness of the proposed Youth-Ideal archetype that, if internalised, can shape how UK-resident Generation X females respond to the emergence of the facial signs of ageing. Although the inevitability of human ageing was acknowledged, it was clear from interviewee narratives that various viewpoints of that singular reality exist in this population, relating to whether and how it should be managed. Concerns were primarily focused on the appropriateness of actively addressing the hallmarks of facial maturation e.g., wrinkles, fine lines etc., and the selection of the anti-ageing practices to adopt. Choices were personal but appeared to correlate to the internalisation of Youth-Ideal, confirming it as an appearance ideal that decrees that facial ageing can be managed or even avoided, and to do so is a worthwhile and necessary undertaking. Those who adopt this perspective tend to pursue the goal of looking younger than their chronological age.

Origins of this drive lie within the expectations of society, the media, and peers, and seemed to be particularly apparent in the workplace, where expectations of age discrimination are seemingly widespread, becoming inevitable aspects of employment for Generation X women in the minds of some. The consequent drive to avoid being labelled as old in these

circumstances was unsurprising, and for many this had evolved into a desire to 'look good for my age' which captured the true essence of Youth-Ideal, avoiding the nebulous goal of looking younger and allowing for individual interpretation. Indeed, that leeway in expression melded well with the individual's desire to realise the characteristics of their ideal self, and so the drive engendered by Youth-Ideal can manifest as many different versions of 'good for my age', tailor-made to suit individual definitions. This, then, is the result of the societal pressure felt by Generation X females, and naturally gives rise to different choices concerning the anti-ageing practices to be employed.

In terms of dermal filler treatment, there is, as reported in the literature (e.g., Milfelner and Kikel, 2016), more negativity than positivity about their use for age concealment. Women appear cautious about the possibility of an unnatural result, which on the surface appeared to be linked to worries about potential health consequences but may have simply been a disguised way of highlighting the fear of embarrassment should their use be detectable.

In summary, the first phase of this research achieved the stated objectives (see section 4.6) which were to confirm the viability of Youth-Ideal Internalisation as a variable for inclusion in the subsequent quantitative hypothesis testing phase and to provide sufficient further understanding of the pressures and desires inherent in Youth-Ideal to guide the changes made to two existing measurement instruments to make them fit to measure YII in a UK-resident, female Generation X sample.

The hypothesis testing phase was carried out following the completion of the first phase and consisted of an online survey that was completed by 733 UK-resident, female Generation X participants. Continuing the theme of exploring reactions to the demonstrable signs of ageing on the face, this phase focused on testing a conceptual model of the actions and effects of a series of variables thought to be involved in determining the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement of dermal filler treatment. The result was the formation of a proposed communication cascade that commences from the point when followers review the endorsement content and the influencer's profile. This initiates a series of events starting with the formation of attitudes

to the influencer related to similarity, sharing of values and credibility, followed by the acceptance of the information within the content and culminating in behavioural intention. Coincidentally, the stimulus affects followers' beliefs salient to the endorsement which inform their attitude to the behaviour being exhibited by the influencer. These factors, already present to varying extents in the individual follower manifest as determinants of credibility and intention. Hence, emergent attitudes to the influencer act as the primary initiators of the cascade and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs principally work to evaluate the endorsement and determine intention. This means that this research has confirmed the role of followers' attitudes and beliefs as antecedents of behaviour, in agreement with the Theory of Reasoned Action, whilst demonstrating that each has a specific and ordinal function dependent on whether they are emergent or pre-existent.

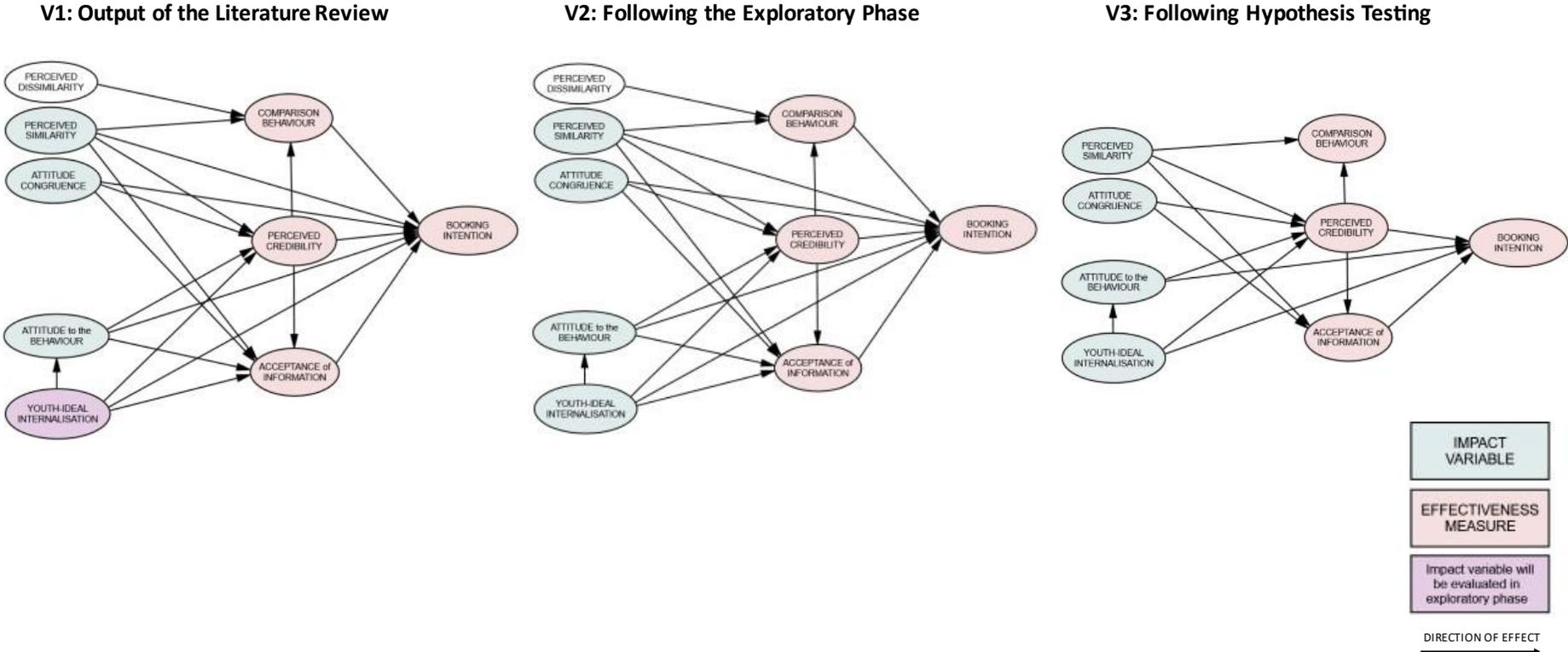
Finally, there remains the question relative to the effectiveness of influencer marketing for Generation X consumers. As stated in section 4.5.2.1, the aim of this research was not to determine efficacy in this age group, nor to compare effectiveness between generational cohorts. However, these data do provide instances of what might be considered to be preliminary evidence supporting influencer marketing viability and should therefore be briefly highlighted. Firstly, the covariate analysis shows a balanced response across the cohort indicating a sustained reaction to influencers across the age group. Of course, this does not say anything about the magnitude of the response, just that it does not wane. Secondly, and conversely, the finding that following influencers did act as a covariate may be interpreted as support for viability. Indeed, for those following at least one influencer the structural model accounted for more of the variance in all four effectiveness measures used here than seen for the total sample: Perceived Credibility (39.9% vs, 37.2%), Comparison Behaviour (53.2% vs. 51.0%), Acceptance of Information (82.0% vs. 75.0%) and Booking Intention (77.4% vs. 74.5%). Again, not definitive support of viability, but an indication, nevertheless. Lastly, attitude change is considered the ultimate marker of persuasion (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986) and so, any signal that an influencer has managed this, as described in section 7.3.6.7 can be considered a positive

hint of viability. All told, these pieces of circumstantial evidence do not provide a definitive answer to the question of whether influencer marketing is viable for the Generation X consumer as this was not the question this thesis aimed to answer, they do, though, provide a reason to believe it is possible.

To close this chapter, Figure 7.6 depicts the three stages through which the conceptual model for this research has evolved. The first, original version shows the hypotheses derived from the literature review assuming the existence and internalisation of the proposed subjective norm, Youth-Ideal. The second version was drawn after the completion of the first phase of the research and confirmation of all variables to be included in the subsequent hypothesis testing phase, and lastly, the final model shows only those paths determined to be significant.

The next chapter puts forward the conclusions of this research.

Figure 7.7 The Evolution of the Conceptual Model



NB: Original in Colour

8 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter concludes this thesis by reviewing the research aims and objectives and highlighting the contributions to knowledge. Thereafter follows a brief evaluation of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on this research, deemed necessary as both data collection exercises were completed during periods of lockdown enforced by the UK government when the possibility of engaging in normal social, community and consumer activities was limited. The chapter ends with an assessment of the practical implications of these findings and proposals related to potential future research endeavours.

8.1 Review of the Aims and Objectives of this Research

The central aim of this research was to extend current knowledge of influencer marketing by evaluating the impact of followers' attitudes and beliefs on the effectiveness of an influencer-led product endorsement endeavour, and in so doing, close an identified gap in the existing literature. Specifically, the *salient* attitudes and beliefs held by followers relating to the demonstration by an influencer of support for the use of dermal filler treatment by Generation X women as a means of age concealment. Dermal filler treatment was selected to provide a stringent test of the influencer as an endorser due to the existence of generally held consumer preconceptions associated with their use.

A thorough review of existing research highlighted the areas where current knowledge could be extended, including:

- Uncovering the antecedents of perceptions of credibility. In short, what makes people believe influencers, and do influencers achieve the goal of appearing to be aspirational experts while still maintaining the appearance of being just like their followers? Although credibility, similarity and attitude congruence (homophily) were known determinants of influencer effectiveness the relationships between these factors had not been considered in detail. Further, broadening understanding of the impact of followers' pre-existing attitudes and

beliefs towards the product on perceptions of credibility would allow a clearer picture of what makes someone credible to emerge.

- In a similar vein, evaluating the same factors as determinants of information acceptance offered another opportunity to build insights. The literature appeared not to feature an assessment of either similarity or attitude congruence as antecedents of information acceptance. Neither were product-related pre-existing attitudes and beliefs.
- As this research had a foothold in appearance-related issues, literature relating to Social Comparison Theory was reviewed and raised the question of whether followers actively compare with influencers, and if so, did this behaviour depend on feelings of similarity. Moreover, if similarity played a role in the formation of perceptions of credibility, would comparison be triggered also by followers' assessment of the influencer's credibility? And conversely, how would feeling dissimilar to the influencer impact comparison. Was it possible to go further than had so far been reported and demonstrate whether Festinger's (1954) prediction that individuals would tend not to compare with a dissimilar other applied in the context of influencer marketing?
- It was clear from the literature review that there is more than one way to define and measure the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement. Each of the parameters mentioned already in this summary (Perceived Credibility, Acceptance of Information, Comparison Behaviour) could be said to be so. However, one factor dominates the literature and resonates most with marketing professionals and that is behavioural intention.

Based on these identified opportunities for further research, a conceptual model was developed built on the premise of the foundation theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, that attitudes and beliefs predict behavioural intention. Hence, the parameters discussed above were each considered to represent an attitudinal perspective of the endorsement, based on the definition provided by Ajzen (1989) and categorised as either emergent or

pre-existing. Emergent attitudes were defined as forming post-intervention, i.e., after the respondent had reviewed the stimulus materials representing the endorsement content. Pre-existing attitudes, on the other hand, had been established previously and were brought into the exercise, if you will, by the participant. A total of 20 hypotheses were postulated based on the literature review and the identified gaps in existing knowledge of influencer marketing. The literature review also encompassed the use of cosmetic procedures, where their utility was to conceal the facial signs of the recipient's chronological age, revealing the following insights:

- That the narrative concerning the use of surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures by midlife women seemed disproportionately negative, directed at both the user and the treatment. This appeared at odds with the reported acceleration of the use of such services over recent years and raised queries relating to the reasons for the disconnect and the truth behind reports of clear abhorrence of these practices within the literature.
- Also, while many studies chronicled disapproval (e.g., Berwick and Humble, 2017; Ehlinger-Martin *et al.*, 2016; Hurd Clarke and Griffin, 2007), the literature contained another vein of commentary concerning ageing and the midlife female relating to the transparent drive of external forces towards the goal of eternal youthfulness. So constant was this message it represented an appearance ideal, which was termed Youth-Ideal by the researcher and proposed as the subjective norm, or belief system, for inclusion in this research.
- Together these two entities – the apparent attitude to the behaviour exhibited by those using dermal filler treatment for age concealment purposes and the internalisation of the Youth-Ideal appearance archetype – represented salient factors of followers' pre-existing mindset. And although the literature identified both parameters concerning the use of dermal filler treatment, the impact of neither on behavioural intention was discussed, thereby providing a further gap for this research to explore.

However, before the inclusion of an unverified variable – Youth-Ideal Internalisation – it was necessary to confirm its existence, origins and effects by gauging the level of awareness in the target demographic, UK-resident Generation X women. Consequently, this research was made up of two streams of data collection each designed to answer a particular research question. The first concerned the proposed pre-existing belief system and the second, the assessment of the impact of the variables outlined above on measures of endorsement effectiveness. The outcomes generated by those two exercises will now be formulated into answers to the research questions posed.

8.2 Research Question 1 - Conclusions

RQ1: Do Generation X women in the UK recognise the concept of ‘Youth-Ideal’ and what factors are involved in its propagation?

As has been mentioned previously in this thesis, Youth-Ideal was known to all 19 respondents in the first phase of this research. It was, therefore, reasoned that awareness would be similarly high in other UK-resident Generation X women, the target consumer demographic for dermal filler treatment. This is the initial report of this appearance ideal and the first of its kind to be manifestly the concern of Generation X women.

This research has also uncovered aspects of Youth-Ideal that were not foreseen, in terms of their absence from the characteristics gleaned from the literature. Firstly, the importance of the self as the source of appearance-related pressure, where the many external declarations originating from both people, e.g., role models and entities, e.g., the media, appear to be informing a louder, or stronger inner voice. In all likelihood what emerges from this processed and assimilated external commentary is the creation of a template of the ideal self, representing how the individual has decided they want to grow old. This tailor-making of an individual approach is reflected in the variability of Youth-Ideal internalisation, and so, the specific design of the ideal self is somehow a customised derivative of the Youth-Ideal archetype. The ideal self is then a personal creation, dependent on what the individual

believes to be 'the right way' to grow old. Consequently, the selection of appropriate anti-ageing methods, products etc., varies as demonstrated in the first phase, likely tempered by possibility, e.g., financial means and access. Hence, personalisation is proposed as a characteristic of Youth-Ideal internalisation.

Secondly, an interesting feature of Youth-Ideal emerged from consideration of the 'motivation to comply' constituent of the subjective norm component of the Theory of Reasoned Action. Based on the interviewees' narratives, a degree of compliance with the tenets of Youth-Ideal appeared to be motivated by the avoidance of discrimination, particularly in the workplace, where belief in the likelihood of ageist treatment seems to be evolving into a certainty. Although none of the interviewees had personal experience of age discrimination orchestrated by an employer, their belief that it could, and probably would happen to them seemed quite fixed in their minds. It is disheartening that Generation X women seem to expect this particular downside to growing older, and therefore the expectation of invisibility or marginalisation at work is offered as a further discriminatory feature of Youth-Ideal internalisation.

And on that point, the final suggested differentiator of Youth-Ideal internalisation emerging from this research relates to the vagueness of the intent. In some ways, this explains the need for an ideal self to be created, but the bigger insight here is that for some Youth-Ideal internalisation can translate to an urge to look younger than their actual age, whereas for others it may be a desire to look no older. For example, in the workplace, the need may be to avoid looking old while in other circumstances, such as the search for a romantic partner, the intention may be to look 'ten years younger'. Hence, Youth-Ideal is a belief system that, when internalised, has more than one viable outcome, each based on individual interpretation and motivation.

The answer to RQ1, therefore, is that Youth-Ideal *is* recognised by UK-resident Generation X women. Moreover, in consideration of the factors involved in its propagation, this research has shown that Generation X women are reacting to prevailing conditions and adjusting their behaviour accordingly. Within this environment, the expectations of society, media and

their peers, including work colleagues and personal role models associate the achievement of happiness and success, as well as the avoidance of discrimination, with appearing youthful through the reduction of demonstrable signs of ageing. Hence, there is considerable momentum encouraging belief in Youth-Ideal and the attendant drive to adopt anti-ageing practices to modify the appearance as prescribed. Yet, subsequent behaviour varies markedly, traversing a broad spectrum of ageing-related activities ranging from passive acceptance to active avoidance. And similarly, the purpose of those behaviours varies. For some, it may be to 'turn back time' and look younger, while for others it is the reverse and 'stopping time' so they don't appear to age, each dependent on the individual's perception of the ideal. Notwithstanding the variability of both internalisation and anti-ageing behaviour adoption, it is likely that demonstrable age-resistant behaviour in the form of the patronage of anti-ageing beauty practices and products by Generation X women contributes to the perceived appearance-related pressure and is in itself a mechanism by which Youth-Ideal is perpetuated.

In conclusion, although Youth-Ideal is ostensibly a bluntly communicated edict where youthfulness is portrayed as attainable and necessary, internalisation varies markedly across the population. It is further proposed that the degree of acceptance relates to the strength of the motivation to realise the ideal self. Youth-Ideal Internalisation was confirmed as a valid variable, signifying a pre-existing belief salient for this research.

8.3 Research Question 2 – Conclusions

RQ2: How do followers' attitudes and beliefs impact the effectiveness of influencer-led product endorsements?

The findings of the hypothesis testing phase of this research support that both followers' emergent 'attitudes to the influencer' and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs affect the performance of an influencer-led endorsement. However, the power and timing of those effects were shown to vary depending on the particular attitude or belief in question. Hence, a communication cascade was proposed spanning from receipt of endorsement content to confirmation of behavioural intention. Emergent attitudes, those directed towards the influencer, had the greatest impact on the formation of perceptions of credibility and acceptance of information, whereas pre-existing attitudes and beliefs stemming from the nature of the endorsed product had more influence on followers' intended behaviour. To execute an effective endorsement, then, an influencer should be cognisant of certain factors that have a role in determining the success of the endeavour. A summary of each, derived from insights generated by this research, follows.

The first of these concerns the antecedents of credibility. Whereas much had been written about the importance of a credible endorser, which is undoubtedly important in any endorsement or advocacy scenario, this research highlighted that perception of credibility is both subjective and dependent on circumstance. In this particular context, it was contingent on followers' perception of the influencer, in terms of similarity and attitude congruence, and on the characteristics of the endorsed product. Attitudes and beliefs, then, have a direct influence on perceptions of credibility, and consequently, an assessment of the endorser's credibility should take place before embarking on each endeavour of this type.

Secondly, the two-fold criticality of acceptance of information, as an effectiveness indicator and as a determinant of behavioural intention, was demonstrated. Here though, attitude to the influencer reigns supreme as pre-existing attitudes and beliefs appear not to have influence. And here, also,

the uniqueness of the influencer as a thought leader who is just an ordinary person pays dividends as it is perceptions of similarity and attitude congruence that contribute most to information adoption.

That followers compare themselves with the influencer is also clear, providing they are considered similar. Neither comparison nor similarity, though, guarantees positive behavioural intention and this is possibly due to the absence of either aspiration to be more like the influencer, in the case of similarity, or a sufficiently large discrepancy in performance warranting action, in the case of comparison. Hence, both follower activities e.g., checking for similarity and comparing, are potential dead-ends that do not elicit further action without the momentum to be more similar or reach the performance achieved by the influencer.

The key to behavioural intention found here was followers' attitude to the behaviour exhibited by the influencer, particularly in this case where the use of the endorsed product is associated with preconceptions, many of which are negative. This parameter made the greatest contribution to behavioural intention, beyond that of credibility, acceptance of information or salient beliefs, a finding that reinforces that, while an endorsement can be said to be effective on the basis that the influencer is perceived to be credible or that followers accept the information they provide, neither of these should be assumed to be capable of outweighing the impact of followers' attitude towards the endorsed product.

In conclusion, the answer to RQ2 is that followers' attitudes and beliefs have a significant role in determining the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement, whether effectiveness is determined by perceptions of credibility, acceptance of information, or behavioural intention. Emergent and salient pre-existing attitudes and beliefs will be triggered at various stages from the point at which followers become aware of the endorsement, through reading an Instagram post or story for example, to the instant they decide the nature of their resulting intended behaviour. Due to the disproportionate effect of attitude to the behaviour on behavioural intention, any endorsement should consider the presence of any pre-existing partisanship so that content can be shaped accordingly.

8.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This is the first report on the impact of emergent and pre-existing attitudes and beliefs held by followers on the effectiveness of an influencer-led endorsement. By evaluating the endorsement of a product associated with strongly held views, the results of this study help fill gaps in existing influencer marketing knowledge (Voorveld, 2019) by uncovering how the object of the endorsement can impact both followers' perceptions of the influencer and their behavioural intention. Moreover, this research exclusively embraced Generation X participants, a demographic that has not received the same amount of research attention as younger age groups (Nash, 2019) and provided preliminary evidence of the viability of influencer marketing in this cohort. Hence, this research is demonstrably contributing to current knowledge in a valuable and substantial way.

The findings have applicability beyond influencer marketing as they address broader marketing issues such as persuasion, credibility, and comparison behaviour and have provided justification for a novel appearance ideal, Youth-Ideal, that may have relevance within the psychology of consumer behaviour.

The unique contributions to knowledge made by this research can be summarised as follows:

- This doctoral thesis broadens understanding of the origins of perceptions of influencer credibility. Both pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and judgements that are formed about the endorser following review of the endorsement message are used by followers to determine whether the influencer is credible. This has wide-ranging ramifications for endorsers generally as it highlights the role played by similarity when assessing credibility, and while other types of endorsers may not be able to demonstrate generalised likeness to their target consumer, the strength of attitudinal congruence as a determinant of perceived credibility shows that they should make efforts to communicate that their values, morals etc. match. Indeed, this research has further demonstrated that followers' views on the

product and salient pre-existing beliefs both influence the judgement of credibility, something that has not yet been featured in influencer marketing literature.

Individually these findings extend what is known about antecedents of credibility, while in combination they show that disapproval of the endorsed product, evidenced by pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, may be countered if there is sufficient correspondence of principles and standards. Perceived credibility, therefore, varies depending on the precise circumstances of the interaction and an influencer should not be considered to be eternally credible.

- In demonstrating the singular role of attitudes to the influencer in information acceptance this study contributes to knowledge regarding endorsement message evaluation. This builds on the Information Acceptance Model (Erkan and Evans, 2016) by providing a more granular understanding of the impact of attitudes on information adoption. Whereas the IACM posits the contributory role of attitude to the information, these results illustrate that the message is reviewed without reference to established perceptions of the product, or beliefs associated with it, confirming that it is only the information that is judged, rather than the subject it concerns. These findings support that it is followers' reaction to the influencer that is instrumental to information acceptance rather than their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs, even when the latter are salient to the content of the communication. Here then is evidence that interest in the subject will not necessarily mean that the information will be accepted, rather it is those signals of similarity and attitude congruence that will have an effect. Further, this research shows the importance of this parameter through the contribution it makes to behavioural intention, reinforcing again the vital nature of attitude to the influencer.
- The findings of this research also expanded on the tenets of Social Comparison Theory (Festinger, 1954) in two ways. Firstly, by

showing that comparison behaviour was predicted not just by perceived similarity, but also by perceptions of credibility, revealing that followers are more likely to compare with a credible influencer. And then, by revealing the absence of a relationship between dissimilarity and comparison. While Festinger (1954) predicted a reduced tendency to compare with a dissimilar other this study showed that the feeling of contrast prevents comparison in a way that has not been reported in the literature, certainly not concerning its impact on an endorsement. Also, there was evidence that perceptions of dissimilarity are built without the need for a direct comparison with the other person. It may be that a cursory review of the endorsement message provides sufficient certainty of dissimilarity that no actual comparison is required to arrive at that decision.

- There was also an expansion in the understanding of what encourages followers to behave in the way prescribed by the influencer, and what does not. Here, the key contribution made related to the greater importance of followers' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs over attitudes to the influencer, inferring that established views and opinions largely determine behavioural intention in a way that has not been reported to date in the influencer literature. Although still developing as an aspect of digital marketing, this research supports the premise that influencers have broad appeal as endorsers while introducing the need to pay closer attention to the effect of preconceptions concerning the endorsed product in a way that has so far not been described. Also noteworthy are the findings relative to similarity, attitude congruence and comparison behaviour, all of which have been cited as contributing to behavioural intention (Chen, 2020; Kim and Kim, 2018; Sokolova and Kefi, 2020). That contrary findings resulted here may be due to the weight of the impact of product-related considerations, suggesting that similarity, attitude congruence and comparison behaviour may only be

predictive of behavioural intention when the object of the endorsement is not encumbered by strong opinions that focus cognitive effort away from other considerations. The extant literature has so far not reported on the relative weight of such factors, and this may be the first report of the dominance of pre-existing attitudes on behavioural intention. Indeed, perceived credibility, often lauded as a key element of endorsement, is found here to make a minor contribution, when considered against attitude to the behaviour.

- Collectively, these insights shed light on the mechanism of influencer marketing by raising the possibility that demonstrations of general similarity and attitudinal congruence provoke a superficial closeness that attracts people toward them and encourages belief in their credibility. Similarity, then, is acting as an antecedent of credibility rather than a constituent (Munnukka, Uusitalo and Toivonen, 2016). However, this research has raised the possibility that similarity has two facets. On one hand, there is general similarity, typified by a feeling of equivalence, and then there is the aspiration to be more like someone else, where a discrepancy in performance is more likely to directly influence behaviour (Schouten, Janssen and Verspaget, 2019) due to a desire to close the gap between them. Here, the lack of aspiration possibly accounted for the absence of a relationship between similarity and behavioural intention, stressing the difference in the power of similarity and that of aspiration to be similar in a way that expands understanding of persuasion.
- These developments in understanding led to the formation of an original communication cascade (see Figure 7.5) incorporating each of the highlighted advances in influencer marketing knowledge. The cascade moves research in this area forward by proposing a connected series of events initiated by receipt of the endorsement message and following a route to behavioural intention determined

by both followers' pre-existing attitudes and beliefs and their emergent attitudes to the influencer.

- Finally, this research also contributes to knowledge beyond influencer marketing through the origination of an appearance ideal that encourages women to maintain a youthful appearance throughout midlife. Awareness is widespread in the UK, as is an understanding of its inherent edicts that encourage Generation X women to believe in the benefits, or even the necessity, of maintaining or restoring a youthful appearance through the use of anti-ageing products and practices. This research represented the first empirical report of the manifestation of this belief as an appearance ideal, and also the first example of the measurement of its internalisation.

8.5 The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on this Research

Much of this research was conducted during the first half of 2021 when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the population of the United Kingdom was subject to government-imposed restrictions on movement and social connectivity. The Third National Lockdown began in early January 2021 just before the date of the first interview and was still in effect at the end of February when the final interview took place. As required by the University of Brighton to ensure the safety of both the participants and the researcher, all discussions were conducted online, in this instance using videoconferencing. Although restrictions began to ease in March 2021, it was only in July 2021 that the freedom to socialise without limitation was restored. Consequently, the second phase of data collection, from June to July 2021, was also completed during a period when some restrictions were in force. The purpose of this section is to highlight any consequences on this research that might have resulted from this unprecedented set of circumstances.

Firstly, from a positive perspective, the recruitment of interviewees was smoother and faster than had been anticipated. Many of those involved were furloughed from their places of work and so had the bandwidth within their

schedules to accommodate a research interview. In addition, many were delighted to have a chance to 'meet' someone outside their household or support bubble and think about something completely unrelated to the pandemic. Consequently, conversations were quite relaxed and more easily extended beyond an hour if required. That said, qualitative research relies heavily on the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee, and this was more difficult to establish when not meeting in person. However, the design of the interview guide, specifically the use of flashcards and warm-up questions, allowed a degree of rapport to develop and the interviewees were encouraged to be open and candid, and not self-edit themselves however frank their views. Plus, the fact that this part of the research was exploring a concept originated by the researcher was fortuitous in terms of allowing her the freedom to take on the role of maintaining the conversation when the impersonal nature of the technology discouraged interviewee fluency. Fortunately, interviewees agreed to turn their cameras on, so the conversation was conducted as close to face-to-face as feasible, with as much eye contact as possible given the artificial environment. Interviews were recorded for both sound and vision, with the agreement of interviewees, and so, could be watched over again to capture any evident mannerisms, facial expressions or speech patterns that may help with the interpretation of transcripts. So, there were some aspects made possible by the use of videoconferencing that would have been absent if the interview had been conducted in person. And as the interviews were conducted in the UK, internet access was not a problem. The second phase of data collection was conducted online using an established panel of participants and so no changes in execution were required due to COVID-19-related restrictions. Operationally, then, conducting research during a global pandemic offered challenges not usually faced. Fortunately, none presented an unsurmountable hurdle and both phases of data collection were completed without major incident.

Possibly the greater potential impact on this research arose from the concurrent explosion in the use of videoconferencing for work purposes, socialising, and education. As mentioned in section 7.2.2, there has been an

increase in requests for aesthetic services since the start of the pandemic (Pikoos *et al.*, 2021). Analysis and criticism of facial features are consequences of the use of videoconferencing, the so-called 'Zoom effect', with an associated surge in internet searches for cosmetic practitioners and available services to tackle facial wrinkles and fine lines (Derma Institute, 2021).

Indeed, two of the 19 interviewees referenced their dislike of videoconferencing for exactly this reason:

'...now I'm on Teams from 8 till 6 five days a week. So, I'm having to look at myself five days a week, and that is a big change. So, prior to that, you know when I go to work, I work abroad most weeks, I travel, and I'm not looking at myself. You might occasionally pass a ladies' toilet and put some lipstick on and a bit of mascara. But I'm not looking at myself. I'm now looking at myself for 8 or 9 hours a day, every day and that has a real negative impact on my own image.'
(ID:11)

'Sometimes I look in the mirror and think I look shit today and that gives me that mental thing of knowing I've got to sit through five Zoom calls today with my camera on, and I look like utter shit. It's almost that I worry about what other people think about me. It doesn't drive me to do anything or spend a shit load of money. And I don't do anything for myself, to make myself feel better but there are times when I go 'ugh, where have these wrinkles suddenly come from?' and it just feels like I've suddenly got lines on my forehead, and I've suddenly got wrinkles.' (ID:4)

The possibility must therefore be acknowledged that their statements concerning the management of their appearance could have been affected by this heightened awareness of perceived facial flaws. Nevertheless, the central aim of that part of the research was to investigate the proposed appearance ideal, Youth-Ideal, rather than evaluate interest in non-surgical cosmetic procedures and so it seems unlikely that the study was compromised as a result. Of course, the same thoughts and concerns could

also have been part of the mindset of the sample who completed the survey and could therefore have impacted particularly their assessment of ATTB and YII. However, the second phase too did not aim to determine an absolute measure of intention to undergo a dermal filler treatment but was limited to the assessment of relationships between variables and hence the patterns within the data rather than the absolute scores. It is hoped therefore that the design of the statistical evaluation was not unduly impacted by the 'Zoom Effect' consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In summary, changes to the operational execution of this research were mandated by COVID-19 lockdown restrictions without significantly impacting the validity of the data collected. Further, although increasing interest in dermal filler and other aesthetic treatments was reported during and after lockdown periods in the UK, possibly due to an upsurge in the use of videoconferencing, it is not likely to have had an impact on the outcomes of this research.

8.6 Practical Implications

The findings of this study will transcend the boundaries of the academic world and guide marketing professionals to help enhance the effectiveness of influencer-led endorsement campaigns. This is of particular value because, as highlighted in the introduction, the use of influencers as endorsers is increasing in many business sectors including the beauty market. Hence, marketers are looking for ways in which they can optimise their deployment of influencers and the outcomes of this study provide a frame of reference with which to assess the critical elements of an influencer-led endorsement.

Firstly, it helps guide influencer selection by demonstrating the need for the marketer to go further than the straightforward assessment and match of interest area and endorsed product. After confirmation that the target audience for the product to be endorsed corresponds with the influencer's followers, attention should turn to the evaluation of the influencer's capacity to address those potential customers congruently. This research has

demonstrated that complementary attributes are a vital consideration in influencer selection as followers' attitudinal profiles determine their behavioural intention. Understanding the nature, direction and magnitude of the target consumer's attitude toward the endorsed product will help in strategy development in terms of the messaging to be applied, and also will inform the importance of the attitudinal harmony between influencer and follower. In circumstances where negative preconceptions are well established, the opportunity to accentuate other aspects of the influencer's character will be invaluable; likewise for salient beliefs, which this research has also highlighted as important determinants of not just behavioural intention but also attitude to the behaviour. Although a clear understanding of followers' beliefs may be more difficult for the marketer to acquire, this research has shown that they are aligned with motivation. Consequently, the effort made to gain this information will be justified by the clarity it provides in terms of communicating the product in a way that resonates clearly with the target consumer.

Secondly, marketers should be aware that an influencer's credibility exists relative to the circumstances, i.e., the nature of the endorsement. The influencer's demonstration of their similarity and attitudinal congruence to their followers is critical here too, as these attributes contribute significantly to perceptions of credibility. This is particularly important when the endorsed product is controversial as the clear exhibition of kinship with their followers will enable the influencer to be perceived as credible.

Thirdly, practising marketers must realise that any preconceptions related to the endorsed product will not prevent the influencer's content from being accepted as evidence of fact. This is good news for those promoting products that require myths about them to be dispelled or further explanation to be provided as an influencer who is perceived as similar and displays the values that mimic those of their followers may be best placed to overcome those barriers and communicate the necessary information to address those views. Conversely, interest in the endorsed product does not automatically mean acceptance of the information provided and even in an endorsement situation where followers are highly involved the congruence of influencer

and follower must be communicated. This leads to two further learnings from this research, 1) that these aspects of a strong influencer: follower relationship (similarity, attitudinal congruence) are inter-dependent and their relative weight is important, meaning that they both have to be represented and acknowledged or promoted, and 2) the structure and content of the information provided need to be well thought out as this research has shown evidence of peripheral processing potentially due to the dominance of images over text in the influencer's posts. The goal should be to design the content in a way that encourages central processing, possibly through the limited use of copy or the inclusion of video, to achieve attitude change that is robust and long-lasting.

Next, this research has shown that in an endorsement scenario the greatest determinant of behavioural intention, pre-existing attitudes salient to the endorsed product, is already in the mind of the follower before the endorsement is evaluated. It is necessary, then, to understand the strength and direction of these convictions before embarking on a campaign. The marketer should pay close attention here and bear in mind that similarity, attitude congruence and credibility all pale in comparison with product-related considerations.

This research also contributes to influencer marketing practice in respect of the distinction between perceived similarity and aspiration to be similar. Perceptions of likeness between influencer and follower must be maintained, yet there should also be some discrepancy between them so that the follower desires to become more like the influencer and sees the adoption of the endorsed product as a means to achieve that goal. This is a difficult balance. If the discrepancy is extended too far it risks the breakdown of two of the key relationships in influencer marketing, between perceptions of similarity and credibility, and between similarity and acceptance of information. A potential solution is to construct a profile of the target consumer's/follower's ideal self to use as the focus of the endorsement messaging. In this way, the influencer is featured as the embodiment of the ideal, and consequently, the discrepancy is aligned with the follower's ambitions for themselves.

All of this guidance can be gleaned from the communication cascade resulting from this research (see Figure 7.5), which could be reformulated into a checklist for influencer marketers to aid the practical deployment of an influencer-led endorsement campaign.

One final output from this research is noteworthy when considering the efficacy of influencer marketing for Generation X consumers. For 63.6% of survey participants, the social media platform accessed most frequently is FaceBook, whereas Instagram tends to be the preference of influencers (Belanche *et al.*, 2021). This disconnect does not lend itself to effective influencer marketing for this particular demographic. Hence, marketers who wish to utilise an influencer as part of their marketing programme for a product or service targeted to a Generation X consumer must take this into account when formulating their tactical approach.

It is hoped that this research will assist in the development of influencer marketing by enabling the selection of appropriate influencers and assisting in the development of optimal endorsement campaigns.

8.7 Future Research Considerations

Although this research provides clear and valuable contributions to knowledge, additional research could be used to address limitations and further extend learning. Firstly, consideration will be given to three limitations of this research.

For further study of the appearance ideal identified here, Youth-Ideal, to be possible a bespoke measurement scale would be needed. In the absence of such here, two existing scales, the Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996) and the Internalisation Sub-scale of the Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire (SATAQ-INT) (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004), previously developed to evaluate sociocultural pressures and internalisation of appearance ideals, were adapted based on findings from the first phase of the research and subsequently combined. While this 'YII Scale' did indeed allow for the belief system to be assessed in terms of relationships with other

variables, a true estimate of an individual's degree of Youth-Ideal internalisation would require further development.

It is also worth asking whether the choice to use a fictitious influencer was the right one. The rationale for this arose from concerns regarding bias, copyright issues, privacy etc. as explained in section 4.7.2. As the research was conducted within a Pragmatist paradigm where there is connectivity between experience and actions, such that prior experience will dictate future actions, there was the consideration of the necessity of recruiting only those respondents who were following influencers. The difficulty here is in the selection of that influencer, not only because knowledge of the findings of this research may prejudice that choice, but also because of the lack of familiarity with influencers of the target population. Over half of the respondents were not following any influencers, and general awareness of their *raison d'être* in the sample seemed lacking. However, it is possible that measures of similarity, attitude congruence and credibility may have been affected by this choice. Consequently, an option for further research would be to extend the research by carrying out a study focussing on an actual rather than a made-up influencer and requiring that participants conformed to a pre-determined following behaviour profile. Yet still, bearing in mind the characteristics of the population it is hard to know whether using a real influencer or controlling the respondents in the way suggested would have made any difference. This is acknowledged, though, as an area that warrants further investigation.

Although not the intention of this research, the *a posteriori* analysis of survey data did provide a preliminary sign that the influencer's endorsement had succeeded in bringing about attitude change concerning respondents' disposition toward the use of dermal filler treatment for age concealment, notwithstanding that the finding was determined using two different measurement scales, one applied before respondents viewed the stimulus materials and the other post-intervention. Although preliminary, this finding sheds light on an important area of enquiry for influencer marketing researchers, understanding routes to attitude change. What makes this prospect particularly worthy of note is the possibility, raised here, that

followers utilise peripheral processing to evaluate an influencer's content and the suggestion that any attitude change would not endure. Excitingly, the potential to follow up on research suggested by Petty, Cacioppo and Schumann (1983) and evaluate whether the antecedents and consequents that make up the communication cascade proposed here also hold when central, rather than peripheral, message processing is utilised.

Understanding more about the mechanism(s) of true influencer-driven attitude change, which has not yet been substantially investigated, would contribute markedly to confirmation of their persuasiveness, and therefore presents a clear opportunity for future research.

This research also acts as a stimulant for further investigations of influencer marketing. Although it has provided a framework that can be generalised across different influencer-led endorsement evaluations, it would be interesting to explore the communication cascade within a different context, target demographic or location to determine whether any of these parameters have a marked effect on followers' responses. For example, a matrix of different studies could be imagined where variations of the communication cascade are investigated in business sectors other than beauty, e.g., fashion or fitness, with generational cohorts such as millennials or Generation Z and in other endorsement scenarios. Such a rigorous test of the cascade will enable it to develop into a robust guide for influencer marketing specialists, and potentially, for customised variants to arise.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Ethics Committee Approval



University of Brighton

Social Sciences CREC

424 Watts Building
Lewes Road
Brighton
BN2 4GJ

30/09/2020

Ref: 2020-7201-Bowden The Effectiveness of Beauty Influencers as Endorsers of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures

Dear Amanda

Thank you for your resubmission to the Social Sciences CREC at the University of Brighton.

The committee are happy to offer a favourable ethical opinion for this study.

Favourable ethical opinion is given on the basis of a project end date of 30/09/2023. If you need to request an extension, please complete a change request form. Please note that the decisions of the committee are made on the basis of the information provided in your application. The CREC must be informed of any changes to the research process after a favourable ethical opinion has been given. Research that is conducted without having been reviewed by the committee is not covered by the University research insurance cover. If you need to make changes to your proposal please complete and submit a change request form in order that the CREC can determine whether the changes will necessitate any further ethical review.

Once your research has been completed, please could you fill in a brief end of project report form. Finally please could I ask that you flag up any unexpected ethical issues, and report immediately any serious adverse events that arise during the conduct of this study.

We wish you all the best with your research and hope that your research study is successful. If the CREC can be of further assistance with your study please contact us again.

Best wishes

Dr Nichola Khan

Chair, Social Sciences CREC

FLASHCARD 5: Youth-Ideal internalisation statement

FLASHCARD 5

'For many women, including myself, the appearance of the signs of ageing on the face is very unwelcome. We are concerned that appearing old will have a negative impact on us at work, in our relationships with friends and determine whether our partner or prospective partner will be attracted to us. Looking younger than we are is important to us, and we make every effort to defy ageing, including purchasing anti-ageing products in the belief that they will help us achieve that goal'.



University of Brighton

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet

Introduction and Purpose of the Research

This research is being done by Amanda Bowden, a PhD student at the University of Brighton. In this document, Amanda is referred to as 'the researcher' and this research is an important part of her studies. The aim of the research is the evaluation of social media influencer endorsement of facial treatment with dermal fillers (a particular type of cosmetic procedure used by women to modify or enhance their appearance). The results of the research will be used for academic purposes, although some of what is learned may be used in a general sense by marketing professionals in the future.

Invitation to Participate in the Research

You are invited to take part in the research. This document describes what you are being asked to do. Firstly, please read this information sheet carefully before agreeing to participate. Feel free to ask any questions you may have relating to your participation or the purpose of the research. Once you have decided whether you would like to take part, please let the researcher know via email. You'll find her email address at the end of this document. Even if you decide not to take part, please let her know as soon as you have made your decision. You are not under any obligation to participate.

Format of the Research

The research will take place in two stages. Each participant will complete only one stage. Stage One of the research will consist of a series of one-to-one interviews involving the researcher and one participant. Interviews will be conducted online using videoconferencing. Each interview will last around 1 hour. Stage Two of the research will consist of an online survey.

Why have I been invited to participate?

The research concerns beauty practices used by women aged 35 to 55 years. You have primarily been selected based on your age and gender.

Where will the research be conducted?

Both stages of the research will be conducted online.

Do I have to take part?

No, participation in this research is voluntary. Also, you are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and any information you have provided will not be included in the final analysis of the findings.

Will I be recorded?

For Stage One, an audio recording of your conversation with the researcher will be made to enable a detailed review of your feedback after the discussion. No other participants will be present during the interview, and what you say will only be known to the researcher. Your name will not be used in the transcript of the interview or any summary of the findings of

the research. Each participant will be allocated a code (either a word or number) not related to your actual name, and only the researcher will know who you are.

What will happen to the information I provide?

The results from both Stage One and Stage Two of this research will be used to answer questions about social media influencers and the findings will be included in the researcher's final thesis. During the process of analysing the research, it may be necessary to share the data with her PhD supervisors so they can provide help and guidance. At no time during these discussions will you be identified to them, meaning that your identity will be kept confidential at all times.

Will I be paid for taking part?

There is no payment for participation.

What are the potential disadvantages or risks of taking part?

There is no risk involved in your participation in this study. However, you will be asked questions relating to your thoughts about maintaining or improving your appearance, the effects of ageing and your attitudes toward cosmetic procedures. If any of the topics or a particular question causes you discomfort, you can, without hesitation, refuse to answer and the interview will move on to the next section of the discussion. Each participant will be provided with information detailing sources of help or advice relating to concerns that may arise following discussion of appearance or ageing-related topics. That said, the nature of the questions to be asked in both Stage One and Stage Two of this research will be general and not require you to discuss or reveal any personal concerns you may have.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

It is hoped that the outcome of this research will lead to improvements in how cosmetic treatments are promoted via the internet. This will be beneficial both to companies and to women who are looking for correct and responsible information about this type of beauty procedure.

Will my taking part in the research be kept confidential?

As described earlier, if you are participating in Stage One of this research, your identity will be known only to the researcher. All analysis will refer to your input using the code you will be assigned. During the interview, you will not be referred to by your real name. The audio recordings and any documentation of your comments will only be available to the researcher, her supervisors from the university, and the examiners/evaluators of the thesis produced. The data will be stored in a secure, university-approved Cloud-based storage facility. Once completed, the thesis will be archived in the University's repository, and the British Library so it can help future research. Please note, that the data collected for this research will not be re-used and thus, it will be destroyed after the PhD is awarded. Any written documentation will be shredded, and the audio recording will be deleted. Stage Two of the research will use an online survey tool called Qualtrics®. Participation will therefore be anonymous, and no participants will be identifiable by the researcher.

What will happen if I start the research but don't want to finish it?

For both Stage One and Stage Two of the research, you have the freedom to withdraw at any time without giving a reason. If you withdraw during either the interview or completion of the online survey any information you have provided up to the point of your withdrawal will not be included in the subsequent analysis. However, if you decide to withdraw at a later date after your information has already been analysed, it cannot be withdrawn unless strong reasoning for its negative consequence is provided in written form. Please be reassured that all information provided by participants will be anonymised and no comment or feedback will be attributed to an individual.

What will happen to the results of the project?

The results will be published in the form of a PhD thesis and may also form part of academic papers, which will be available online. A copy of any published work can be provided upon request.

Who is organising and funding the research?

The research is organised and paid for by the researcher.

Contact Information:

For any additional queries about the research, please contact the researcher and/or her supervisors via email:

Researcher: Amanda Bowden (Email: a.bowden2@brighton.ac.uk)
Supervisors: Dr Francisca Farache Aureliano Da Silva (Email: F.Farache@brighton.ac.uk)
Dr Nasos Poulis (Email: n.poulis@brighton.ac.uk)

For questions relating to the ethics of this study, or the University's research approval process, please contact either of the following:

Dr Nichola Khan,
Chair of the Ethics Committee,
Social Science Cross-School Research Ethics Committee (CREC)
Email: N.Khan@brighton.ac.uk

Dr Sue Greener
Chair, Brighton Business School Research Ethics Panel
Email: S.L.Greener@brighton.ac.uk

Appendix 4: Interview Guide

Section 1: Beauty and me

- Q1: In general terms, please briefly describe the regular beauty or appearance maintenance activities you do on a daily, weekly, monthly or other basis
- Q2: Please tell me what the phrase 'looking good' means to you

Section 2: Perceptions of social pressures

- Q3a: Are you familiar with these magazines?
If YES – continue
If NO – explain that they are two examples of high-circulation monthly UK lifestyle magazines aimed at women of their age

FLASHCARD 1: MAGAZINE COVERS

- Q3b: Please take a few minutes to scan the covers shown and tell me whether you see any themes in the articles mentioned
- Q3c: In your opinion, what are these magazines trying to do by highlighting those themes?
- Q3c: In your experience, how does the media communicate to women like you about your appearance?
- Q4a: In your opinion, are messages like these affecting women of your age?
- Q4b: Have you ever felt any pressure you have felt relating to how your look?

Section 3: Getting older

- Q5: Please share with me your thoughts and feelings about growing older.
- Q6a: What are your views on women and ageing?
- Q6b: How did you arrive at that opinion?
- Q7a: Does your age or how old you look matter to you?
- Q7b: Does age or how old you look impact women?
PROBE: Have you experienced this personally?
- Q8: When you're asked your age in a social situation (rather than in an official capacity, such as at the doctor's surgery) how do you usually respond?
- Q9: Are you currently using, or have previously used, products that claim to have anti-ageing properties?
- Q10: Do you look for information on anti-ageing or ways to look younger?

FLASHCARD 2/3: CELEBRITY IMAGES

- Q11a: Do you recognise any of these women?
- Q11b: Do they look good?
- Q11c: Are they ageing well?

Q12: Could you now think of a woman between say 35 and 55 years old who you may consider a role model because they are, in your opinion, ageing well? This could be a friend, family member or someone in the public eye.

Please describe to me why you think they are ageing well.

Section 4: My response to ageing

Q13: What would you say is your approach to ageing? How would you like to look in say 10 years?

FLASHCARD 4: DEFINITION OF YOUTH-IDEAL

Q14a: Please look at this statement and consider whether you believe it reflects today's expectations of women in the UK

What are your thoughts after reading this statement?

Q14b: Please identify any words or sentences or parts of sentences that reflect your opinion of beauty and ageing in the 21st Century

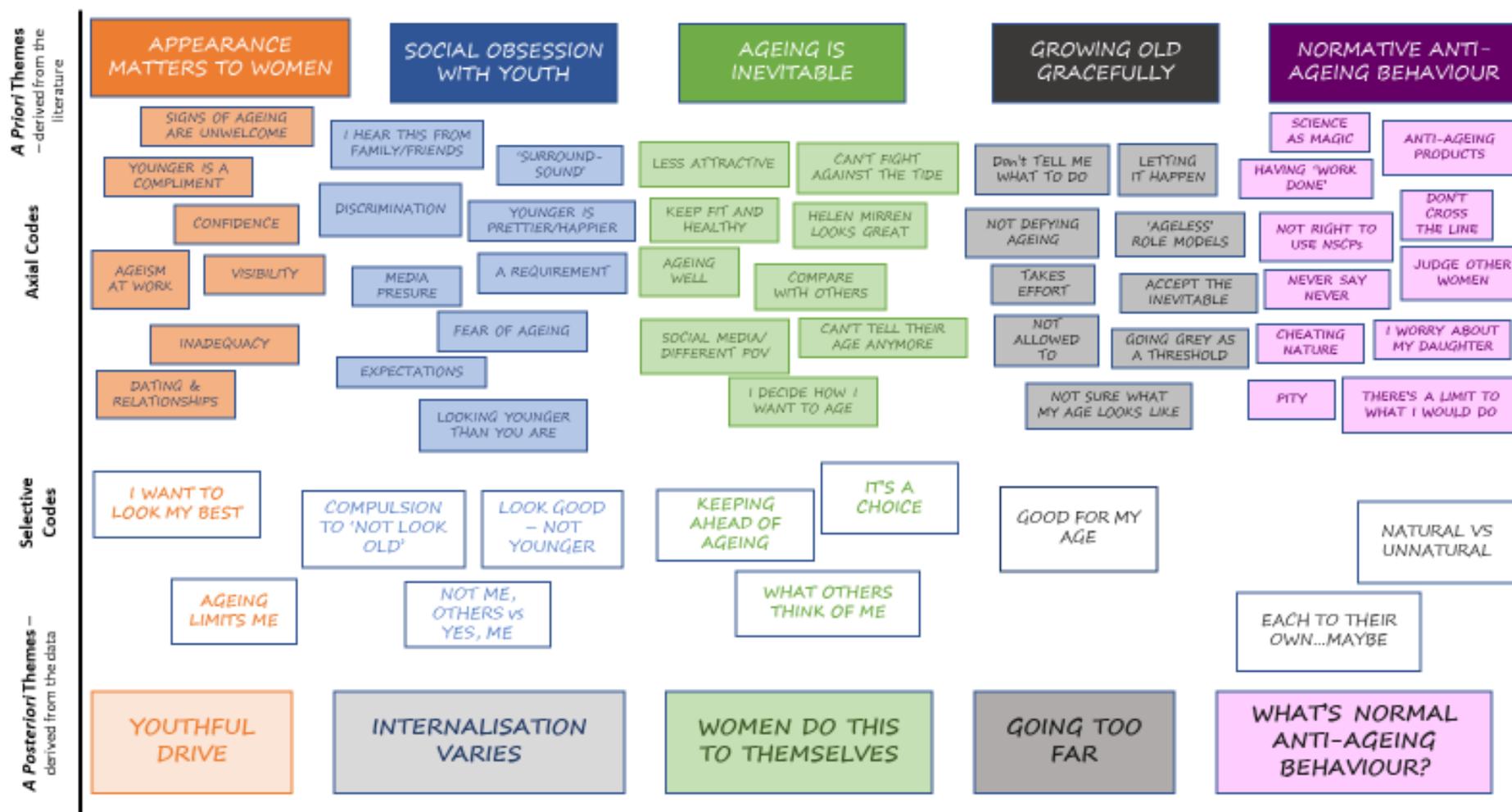
FLASHCARD 5: DEFINITION OF YOUTH-IDEAL INTERNALISATION

Q15a: What are your thoughts after reading this statement? Please consider whether you believe it reflects your approach to ageing

Q15b: Please identify any words or sentences or parts of sentences that you think particularly describe you

Q16: Overall, what is your attitude toward women of a similar age to yourself who have non-surgical cosmetic procedures

Appendix 5: First Phase Coding Process



Appendix 6: Quantitative Survey

Section 1: Demographic Information

What year were you born?

[N.B. As this research predominantly aims to collect data from Generation X women, only those who were born between 1965 and 1980 will be invited to continue completing the questionnaire]

What gender do you identify as?

Female Male Other Prefer Not to Say

[N.B. As this research aims to collect data from women, only those who answer 'Female' will be invited to continue completing the questionnaire]

Do you currently live in the United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Northern Ireland or Wales)?

Yes No

[N.B. As this research aims to collect data only from participants who live in the UK, those who answer 'No' will be exited from the rest of the questionnaire]

Please state your primary (main) employment status – tick one only

Employed – Full-time Employed – Part-time Unemployed - Retired - Student
Volunteer - Carer - Full-time Parent - Self-Employed - Other

Approximately, what is the average annual income of your household?

Less than £20,000 £20,001-£50,000 £50,001-£100,000 £100,001-
£150,000

More than £150,000

What is your highest degree or level of education?

Secondary School (O-level/GCSE) Secondary School (A-level)
College (BTech/HND/NVQ or equivalent) Undergraduate Degree (BA/BSc)
Graduate (Masters) Graduate (PhD) Other None

What is your current relationship status?

In a Relationship Married Single Widowed Prefer Not to Say

Do you have children?

Yes – I have a son(s) Yes – I have a daughter(s) Yes – I have both son(s) and
daughter(s)

No – I do not have children Prefer Not to Say

Section 2: Social Media Usage

Do you use social media? ('use' can mean just browsing or actively participating, e.g., posting information/content)

YES NO Prefer Not to Say

On average, approximately how much time do you spend on social media (e.g., browsing, posting, or commenting on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn etc) per day?

Less than 10 minutes More than 10 minutes but less than an hour

More than an hour but less than 2 hours More than 2 hours I don't know

I don't use social media

Which social media platform do you access most often (tick one only)?

Facebook Instagram Twitter TikTok SnapChat
LinkedIn YouTube MumsNet Other – please state
which

Are you familiar with social media influencers?
Not at all Slightly Somewhat Moderately
Extremely

Do you follow any social media influencers?
NO - I don't follow any YES – I follow one influencer YES – I follow 2-5 influencers
YES – I follow 5-10 influencers YES – I follow more than 10

What topics do the social media influencers you follow focus on? (mark all that apply)
Travel Fitness Food Fashion Parenting Hobbies
Sports Beauty Media (films/TV/books etc) Other
I don't follow any social media influencers

Please list the names (or handles or usernames) of the social media influencers you are currently following. If you are unsure, please write 'don't know' in the box below. If you are not currently following any influencers, write 'none' in the box below.

Section 3: Focus on appearance-related activities

Which of the following appearance-related activities do you regularly use? (Assume regular means at least once a year, and only consider activities provided by a professional hairdresser or beautician. Mark all that apply)

Hair Cut/Style Hair Colour (Dye/Tint etc) Facial treatment (skin treatment, eyebrows or lash treatments) Hair removal (laser/waxing/threading etc)
Make-Up Application (temporary) Manicure (all types) Pedicure None of these

Do you dye your hair to cover grey? (This can be either at home or in a salon)
No – I don't have any grey hair No – I do have grey hair, but don't cover it up
Yes – that's the only reason I dye my hair Yes – but I'd dye my hair anyway

Have you ever had a non-surgical cosmetic procedure (defined as a procedure carried out to modify or enhance the appearance, not requiring general anaesthetic, e.g., BOTOX, dermal filler treatment, skin peels etc.)?

YES NO Prefer Not to Say

Which of the following non-surgical cosmetic procedures have you ever had? (Mark all that apply)

Dermal Fillers (all types) BOTOX® /wrinkle relaxing treatments
Microdermabrasion Skin Peels Permanent Make-Up Laser Skin Treatment
Microblading CoolSculpting™ or another fat reduction process
Other injectable facial treatments Don't Know Something else Prefer Not to Say
I have never had a non-surgical cosmetic procedure

Assuming cost is not a limitation, and thinking ONLY about non-surgical cosmetic procedures (e.g., dermal fillers), how likely are you to have treatment in the future?

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Moderately Extremely

The previous question asked about your interest in all types of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures. Now, please consider dermal filler treatment only. In case you are not aware, dermal fillers are used to replace lost volume in the face and reduce the impact of fine lines. Again, assuming cost is not a limitation, how likely are you to have a dermal filler treatment in the future?

Not at all Slightly Somewhat Moderately Extremely

Have you ever had cosmetic surgery (defined as a procedure carried out by a doctor or surgeon, usually requiring general anaesthetic for modifying or correcting a part of your body, e.g., breast enlargement, liposuction, etc.)?

YES NO Prefer Not to Say

Please state the procedure(s) you had. (Mark all that apply)

Breast augmentation ('boob job') Rhinoplasty ('nose job') Blepharoplasty (eyelid surgery)
 Breast reduction Face/Neck Lift (including thread lifts) Liposuction (all areas)
 Otoplasty (ear correction) Other Prefer Not to Say I have never had cosmetic surgery

Have you ever purchased a product, including creams and lotions, because it claims to have 'anti-ageing' properties?

Definitely Not Probably Not Might or Might Not Probably Yes Definitely Yes

Section 4: Appearance Investment/Involvement

The following questions ask about how you take care of your appearance. Please consider your facial, rather than your overall appearance when answering these questions. And consider all the treatments or products that you may employ to maintain or improve how you look. Use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

	1	2	3	4	5
My appearance is a significant part of my life					
I am very much involved in my appearance					
I would say my appearance is central to my identity as a person					
I pay a lot of attention to my appearance					

Please Note:

Some of the questions in the following sections ask you to think about a particular beauty treatment that uses dermal fillers. In case you are not familiar, dermal fillers are gels, usually made from a naturally occurring substance called hyaluronic acid. They are injected under the skin, into areas of the face to restore or create volume and can be used to reduce the signs of ageing such as sagginess, fine lines, and loss of volume in the cheek area. Please answer these questions using whatever knowledge of dermal filler treatment you currently have. You don't need to have had treatment yourself as you will not be asked about your personal experience.

Section 5: How you feel about getting older

Getting older is something we all experience. The following questions ask you to think about what you believe is the right way to take care of yourself as the years go by.

Assume the cost of any treatment mentioned in the questions is within your financial means, i.e., you can afford them without causing financial issues to you or your family.

Please use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
ATTITUDES ABOUT AGEING SCALE	I am quite satisfied with my appearance (R)					
	I am worried about the effect of ageing on my appearance					
	Having dermal filler treatment is one sure way to keep looking younger					
	I would look younger if I had dermal filler treatment					
	Having young-looking skin is a prerequisite to looking good					
	I try very hard to prevent my face from ageing					

Section 6: Acceptance of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures

As before, when considering each statement please assume the cost of treatment is within your means.

Please use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale	It makes sense to have treatment with dermal fillers rather than spend years feeling bad about the way you look					
	Dermal filler treatments are good things because they can help people feel better about themselves					
	People who are very unhappy with their physical appearance should consider having a dermal filler treatment as one option					
	If a dermal filler treatment can make someone happier with the way they look they should try it					
	Having a dermal filler treatment can be a big benefit to people's self-image					
	I would seriously consider having a dermal filler treatment if a partner thought it was a good idea					
	I would think about having a dermal filler treatment to keep young looking					
	If it would benefit my career, I would think about having a dermal filler treatment					
	I would seriously consider having a dermal filler treatment if I thought a partner would find me more attractive					
	If a simple dermal filler procedure would make me more attractive to others, I would think about having treatment					
	In the future, I could end up having some kind of dermal filler treatment					
	If I could have treatment done for free, I would consider trying a dermal filler treatment					
	If I knew there would be no negative side effects or pain, I would like to try a dermal filler treatment					
	I have sometimes thought about having a dermal filler treatment					
	I would never have any kind of dermal filler treatment (R)					

Section 7: My Appearance Goals

The following statements relate to your personal appearance goals and what you think makes a woman attractive. When considering each statement please focus on aspects that are truly important to you now, without taking into account financial or time constraints that may limit your ability to achieve your ideal appearance.

In each situation, please ONLY consider individuals who you know or believe are a similar age to yourself. As before, focus on your facial appearance.

Please use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
SATAQ Internalisation Sub-Scale	I <u>do not</u> care if I look like women who are on TV(R)					
	I compare how I look to women who are on TV					
	I would like to look like the women who appear on social media					
	I would like to look like women who are my role models					
	I <u>do not</u> compare how I look to that of women who appear on social media (R)					
	I wish I looked like my role models					
	I compare my appearance to the appearance of women on social media					
	I do not try to look like women I see on TV					
Perceived Sociocultural Pressure Scale	I put pressure on myself to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance					
	I've noticed a strong desire from within to look younger than I am					
	I've felt pressure from people I work with to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance					
	I've noticed a strong message from people I work with to look younger than I am					
	I've felt pressure from society to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance					
	I've noticed a strong societal message that I should look younger than I am					
	I've felt pressure from the media (e.g., TV, magazines, social media) to use anti-ageing products					
	I've noticed a strong message from the media to look younger than I am					

Section 8: Review of Influencer Biography and Social Media Posts

Tess McGill is a social media influencer specialising in beauty, including her experiences with non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Please read Tess's biography now, before continuing with the rest of the questionnaire.

[Tess McGill biography]

I have read and understood the influencer's biography. [Agree]

Tess regularly posts on Instagram regarding new treatments and products that she believes her followers will be interested in. Sometimes the companies who provide those treatments or make those products pay Tess to talk about them, more often, though, she posts based on what she has used or seen without sponsor involvement. The following posts, created by Tess, concern dermal filler treatment based on her own experiences and for which she has not been paid by any company. For that reason, Tess's posts do not mention a particular brand of dermal filler. Please read Tess's posts now, before continuing with the rest of the questionnaire.

[Tess McGill posts relating to dermal filler treatment]

I have read and understood the influencer's posts. [Agree]

Section 9: Your Assessment of Tess

Based on the information you have been given about Tess and her posts about dermal filler treatment, please consider the following statements about her performance as a beauty influencer:

Please consider the following pairs of adjectives and decide which of them best reflects your perspective of Tess as an influencer who promotes dermal filler treatment. For each pair, tick the box that you think offers the best assessment of Tess:

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	
Source Credibility Scale	ATTRACTIVE						UNATTRACTIVE
	CLASSY						NOT CLASSY
	BEAUTIFUL						UGLY
	NATURAL						UNNATURAL
	SEXY						NOT SEXY
	DEPENDABLE						NOT DEPENDABLE
	HONEST						DISHONEST
	RELIABLE						UNRELIABLE
	SINCERE						INSINCERE
	TRUSTWORTHY						UNTRUSTWORTHY
	EXPERT						NOT AN EXPERT
	EXPERIENCED						INEXPERIENCED
	KNOWLEDGEABLE						NOT KNOWLEDGEABLE
	QUALIFIED						UNQUALIFIED
SKILLED						UNSKILLED	

Section 10: Comparing Yourself to Tess

When you reviewed Tess's biography and Instagram posts, did you compare yourself to her? Please consider this as you rate your actions using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
State Appearance Comparison Scale	I thought about my appearance when viewing the influencer's posts					
	I compared my overall appearance with that of the influencer					
	I compared my face with that of the influencer					

Section 11: Is Tess Like You?

Based on what you know about Tess (the influencer) do you think you're likely to have anything in common with her?

Please use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
PERCEIVED CONGRUENCE SCALE	I am compatible with the influencer					
	My personality matches that of the influencer					
	The influencer's posts are relevant to my personal beliefs and lifestyle					
ATTITUDE HOMOPHILY SCALE	The Influencer thinks like me					
	The influencer doesn't behave like me (R)					
	The influencer is different from me (R)					
	The influencer shares my values					
	The influencer is like me					
	The influencer treats people like I do					
	The influencer doesn't think like me (R)					
	The influencer is similar to me					
	The influencer doesn't share my values (R)					
	The influencer behaves like me					
	The influencer is unlike me (R)					
	The influencer doesn't treat people like I do (R)					
	The influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine					
	The influencer expresses attitudes different from mine (R)					
The influencer has a lot in common with me						

Taking into account the information in Tess's biography, her Instagram posts about dermal filler treatment and your assumptions about Tess as a person, please rate how similar you believe you are to her:

		1	2	3	4	5
Similarity/ Dissimilarity Scales	I can easily identify with the influencer					
	The influencer and I are a lot alike					
	The influencer and I have a lot in common					
	I cannot identify with the influencer					
	I am nothing like the influencer					
	I am nothing in common with the influencer					

Section 12: Your Impression of Tess's Posts

Now that you've read Tess's posts on dermal filler treatment, how likely are you to accept the information she has provided?

Please use the following scale to rate your perspective of the following statements:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
Acceptance of Information Scale	To what extent do you agree with the posts provided by the influencer					
	Information from these posts contributed to my knowledge of dermal filler treatment					
	These posts have made it easier for me to make a purchase decision (e.g., purchase/not purchase)					
	These posts have enhanced my effectiveness in making a purchase decision					
	These posts have motivated me to make a purchase decision					

Section 13: Your Next Steps

Treatments using dermal fillers must only be done by a qualified medical professional (doctor, dentist, or nurse) following an in-depth consultation to determine if a treatment could be the right option for you. Details of appropriately qualified practitioners in your area are readily available online. There is no obligation to have treatment following a consultation, and a practitioner will usually advise a 14-day cooling-off period before carrying out any procedure.

Bearing that in mind, please consider the following statements relating to booking a consultation and rate them according to your perspective, using the following scale:

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Agree (4)

Strongly Agree (5)

		1	2	3	4	5
Booking Intention Scale	In the future, I am likely to book a consultation for a dermal filler treatment such as those endorsed or posted about by the influencer					
	In the future, and based on the recommendation provided by the influencer, I am likely to book a consultation to discuss whether dermal filler treatment is right for me					
	I will book a consultation about dermal filler treatment based on the recommendation from the influencer					

Appendix 7: Measurement Scales

(R) = reversed scoring

APPEARANCE INVOLVEMENT SCALE (Sun and Guo, 2017 – adapted from O’Cass, 2000)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
Fashion clothing is a significant part of my life	My appearance is a significant part of my life	0.72 (Sun and Guo, 2017)
I am very much involved in fashion clothing	I am very much involved in my appearance	
I would say that fashion clothing is central to my identity as a person	I would say my appearance is central to my identity as a person	
I pay a lot of attention to fashion clothing	I pay a lot of attention to my appearance	

ATTITUDE ABOUT AGEING SCALE (Gupta and Schork, 1993)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I am quite satisfied with my physical appearance	I am quite satisfied with my appearance	0.85 (Thompson and Bardone-Cone, 2019)
I am worried about the effect of aging upon my appearance	I am worried about the effect of ageing on my appearance	
Losing weight is one sure way to keep looking younger	Using dermal filler treatment is one sure way to keep looking younger	
I look younger when I lose weight	I would look younger if I had dermal filler treatment	
Having young looking skin is a prerequisite to good looks	Having young looking skin is a prerequisite to looking good	
I try very hard to prevent my body from aging	I try very hard to prevent my face from ageing	

ACCEPTANCE OF COSMETIC SURGERY SCALE (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005)		
INTRAPERSONAL SUB-SCALE		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
It makes sense to have cosmetic surgery rather than spend years feeling bad about the way you look	It makes sense to have treatment with dermal fillers rather than spend years feeling bad about the way you look	Intrapersonal 0.88-0.91 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005)
Cosmetic surgery is a good thing because it can help people feel better about themselves	Dermal filler treatments are good things because they can help people feel better about themselves	
People who are very unhappy with their physical appearance should consider cosmetic surgery as one option	People who are very unhappy with their physical appearance should consider having a dermal filler treatment as one option	
If cosmetic surgery can make someone happier with the way they look they should try it	If a dermal filler treatment can make someone happier with the way they look they should try it	
Cosmetic surgery can be a big benefit to people's self-image	Having a dermal filler treatment can be a big benefit to people's self-image	
SOCIAL SUB-SCALE		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I would seriously consider having cosmetic surgery if my partner thought it was a good idea	I would seriously consider having a dermal filler treatment if a partner thought it was a good idea	Social 0.84-0.88 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005)
I would think about having cosmetic surgery in order to keep young looking	I would think about having a dermal filler treatment in order to keep young looking	
If it would benefit my career, I would think about having plastic surgery	If it would benefit my career, I would think about having a dermal filler treatment	

I would seriously consider having cosmetic surgery if I thought my partner would find me more attractive	I would seriously consider having a dermal filler treatment if I thought a partner would find me more attractive	
If a simple cosmetic surgery procedure would make me more attractive to others, I would think about trying it	If a simple dermal filler treatment would make me more attractive to others, I would think about trying it	
CONSIDER SUB-SCALE		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
In the future, I could end up having some kind of cosmetic surgery	In the future, I could end up having some kind of dermal filler treatment	Consider 0.86-0.92 (Henderson-King and Henderson-King, 2005)
If I could have a surgical procedure done for free, I would consider trying cosmetic surgery	If I could have a procedure done for free, I would consider trying a dermal filler treatment	
If I knew there would be no negative side effects or pain, I would like to try cosmetic surgery	If I knew there would be no negative side effects or pain, I would like to try a dermal filler treatment	Consider 0.87 (Nerini et al., 2014)
I have sometimes thought about having cosmetic surgery	I have sometimes thought about having a dermal filler treatment	
I would never have any kind of plastic surgery (R)	I would never have any kind of dermal filler treatment	

INTERNALISATION SUB-SCALE OF THE SOCIOCULTURAL ATTITUDES TO APPEARANCE QUESTIONNAIRE (Heinberg, Thompson and Stormer, 1995; Thompson *et al.*, 2004)

Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I <u>do not</u> care if my body looks like the body of people who are on TV (R)	I <u>do not</u> care if I look like women who are on TV	0.92 (Vartanian and Dey, 2013)
I compare my body to the bodies of people who are on TV	I compare how I look to women who are on TV	
I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines	I would like to look like the models who appear on social media	
I would like my body to look like people who are in movies	I would like to look like women who are my role models	
I <u>do not</u> compare my body to the bodies of people who appear in magazines (R)	I <u>do not</u> compare my appearance to that of women who appear on social media	
I wish I looked like the models in music videos	I wish I looked like women I work with	
I compare my appearance to the appearance of people in magazines	I compare my appearance to the appearance of women on social media	
I <u>do not</u> try to look like the people on TV (R)	I do not try to look like women I see on TV	

PERCEIVED SOCIOCULTURAL PRESSURE SCALE (PSPS) (Stice, Nemeroff and Shaw, 1996)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I've felt pressure from my friends to lose weight	I put pressure on myself to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance	0.87 for the full 8-item scale, 0.91 for the family subscale, 0.72 for the friends subscale, 0.92 for the partners subscale, and 0.73 for the media subscale (Stice et al., 1996)
I've noticed a strong message from my friends to have a thin body	I've noticed a strong desire from within to look younger than I am	
I've felt pressure from my family to lose weight	I've felt pressure from people I work with to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance	
I've noticed a strong message from my family to have a thin body	I've noticed a strong message from people I work with to look younger than I am	
I've felt pressure from people I've dated to lose weight	I've felt pressure from society to remove the signs of ageing from my appearance	
I've noticed a strong message from people I've dated to have a thin body	I've noticed a strong societal message that I should look younger than I am	
I've felt pressure from the media (e.g., TV, magazines) to lose weight	I've felt pressure from the media (e.g., TV, magazines, social media) to use anti-ageing products	
I've noticed a strong message from the media to have a thin body	I've noticed a strong message from the media to look younger than I am	

SOURCE CREDIBILITY scale (Ohanian, 1990)		
Original Question – Attractiveness Sub-Scale	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
Attractive – Unattractive Classy – Not Classy Beautiful – Ugly Elegant – Plain Sexy – Not Sexy	As is except... Natural - Unnatural	>0.8 (Ohanian, 1990)
Original Question – Trustworthiness Sub-Scale	Survey Version	
Dependable – Undependable Honest – Dishonest Reliable – Unreliable Sincere – Insincere Trustworthy - Untrustworthy	No changes	
Original question – Expertise Sub-Scale	Survey Version	
Expert – Not an Expert Experienced – Inexperienced Knowledgeable – Unknowledgeable Qualified – Unqualified Skilled - Unskilled	No changes	

STATE APPEARANCE COMPARISON Scale (Tendency to make comparisons) (Schaefer and Thompson, 2014; Tiggemann and McGill, 2004)		
Original Question	Amended Text	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I thought about my appearance when viewing magazine advertisements	I thought about my appearance when viewing the influencer's posts	0.91 (Tiggemann and McGill, 2004)
I compared my overall appearance with those of the women in the magazine advertisements	I compared my overall appearance with that of the influencer	
I compared my [body part] with those of the women in the magazine advertisements	I compared my face with that of the influencer	

PERCEIVED CONGRUENCE Scale (From Chetioui, Benlafqih and Lebdaoui, 2020 - based on Xu (Rinka) and Pratt, 2018)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
How do you perceive the compatibility between you and your preferred fashion influencers	I am compatible with the influencer	>0.7 (Chetioui et al, 2019)
How do you perceive the level of match between your personality and your preferred fashion influencers	My personality matches that of the influencer	
How do you assess the relevance of your preferred fashion influencers' publications regarding your personal beliefs and life mode	The influencer's posts are relevant to my personal beliefs and lifestyle	
ATTITUDE HOMOPHILY Scale (From McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond, 2006)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
This person thinks like me	The influencer thinks like me	

This person doesn't behave like me (R)	The influencer doesn't behave like me	0.92 (McCroskey, McCroskey and Richmond, 2006)
This person is different from me (R)	The influencer is different from me	
This person shares my values	The influencer shares my values	
This person is like me	The influencer is like me	
This person treats people like I do	The influencer treats people like I do	
This person doesn't think like me (R)	The influencer doesn't think like me	
This person is similar to me	The influencer is similar to me	
This person doesn't share my values (R)	The influencer doesn't share my values	
This person behaves like me	The influencer behaves like me	
This person is unlike me (R)	The influencer is unlike me	
This person doesn't treat people like I do (R)	The influencer doesn't treat people like I do	
This person has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine	The influencer has thoughts and ideas that are similar to mine	
This person expresses attitudes different from mine (R)	The influencer expresses attitudes different from mine	
This person has a lot in common with me	The influencer has a lot in common with me	

SIMILARITY/DISSIMILARITY SCALE (Yuan and Lou, 2020)		Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
I can easily identify with the influencer		0.92 (Yuan and Lou, 2020)
The influencer and I are a lot alike		
The influencer and I have a lot in common		
I cannot identify with the influencer		
I am nothing like the influencer		
I am nothing in common with the influencer		

ACCEPTANCE OF INFORMATION Scale (Cheung et al., 2009)		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach Alpha (Ref)
To what extent do you agree with the review?	To what extent do you agree with the posts provided by the influencer?	0.772 (Cheung et al., 2009) 0.85 (Erkan and Evans, 2016) 0.775 (Teng et al., 2014)
I am likely to accept these online reviews/comments	I am likely to accept these posts	
Information from the review contributed to my knowledge of discussed product/service	Information from these posts contributed to my knowledge of dermal filler treatment	
The review has made it easier for me to make purchase decisions (e.g., purchase/not purchase)	These posts have made it easier for me to make a purchase decision (e.g., purchase/not purchase)	
The review has enhanced my effectiveness in making a purchase decision	These posts have enhanced my effectiveness in making a purchase decision	
Review motivated me to make a purchase decision	These posts have motivated me to make a purchase decision	

BOOKING INTENTION Scale (Adapted from Jimenez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019; Ki and Kim, 2019).		
Original Question	Survey Version	Cronbach's Alpha
In the future, I am likely to try one of the same products that [influencer] endorsed or posted on their Instagram	In the future, I am likely to book a consultation for a dermal filler treatment such as those endorsed or posted about by the influencer	0.92 (Jiménez-Castillo and Sánchez-Fernández, 2019) 0.912 (Ki and Kim, 2019)
In the future, I will purchase the products or brand recommended by the influencers that I follow	In the future, and based on the recommendation provided by the influencer, I am likely to book a consultation to discuss whether dermal filler treatment is right for me	
I would follow brand recommendations from the influencers that I follow	I will book a consultation about dermal filler treatment based on the recommendation from the influencer	

Appendix 8: Stimulus Materials (Quantitative Survey)

NB: TESS MCGILL IS A FICTITIOUS BEAUTY INFLUENCER CREATED BY THE RESEARCHER FOR THE PURPOSES OF DATA COLLECTION

Tess McGill – influencer, beauty obsessive, mother, working woman

@therealtessmcgill

BIOGRAPHY

Tess McGill's interest in all things beauty started when she was around 5 years old and regularly 'helped' her mother apply make-up for a night out. As you can imagine, her skills with eyeshadow, lipstick and foundation have improved over the years! In fact, for the last 20 years Tess has worked in the beauty industry, mainly in marketing and public relations, so she knows a thing or two about how to look good!

Tess regularly volunteers to trial new products and treatments as her philosophy is never to believe in something if she hasn't seen it in action on her own face! Her particular area of interest is non-surgical cosmetic treatments such as those using dermal fillers, lasers and wrinkle relaxants, and as part of her goal to learn about the latest technologies she attends aesthetics conferences all over the country and spends a lot of time catching up with the medical professionals and others that are helping to shape the rapidly-expanding world of beauty and wellbeing.

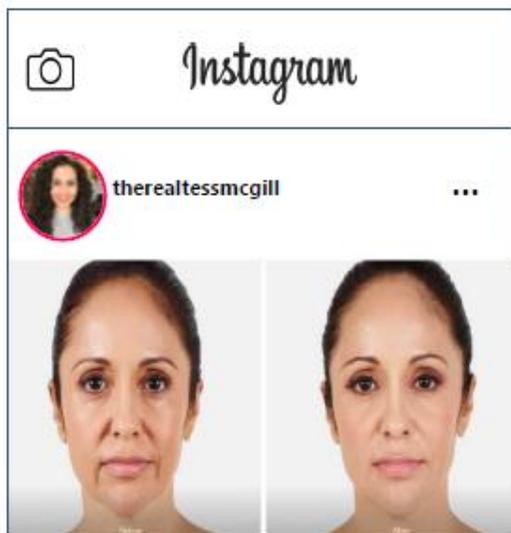
Her enthusiasm for bringing beauty tips and secrets to women like her led to her 'part-time career' as a beauty influencer. Tess regularly posts on Instagram and isn't shy about talking about her own beauty worries, including the dreaded 'A' word (ageing!). Her goal is to give women the facts so they can decide what's right for them. Although she's sometimes sponsored to talk about a beauty product on social media, she never does so unless she's tried it and thinks other women would like it too.

Tess lives in Yorkshire, a short drive from the countryside (without being too far from the shops!) with her husband, two teenage children and a yappy Yorkiepoo.

'We're not all born to be supermodels, so let's make the most of what we have'

[Instagram stats as at 31/12/20: 21,107 followers, following 1,294]

Stimulus Materials (Quantitative Survey)



Instagram

therealtessmcgill

2,930 likes

therealtessmcgill Thought you might be interested to see the before and after images from my recent dermal filler treatment. Ageing gracefully seems like a good idea but the reality is anything but. Jaw lines lose definition, eye bags emerge and the skin sags and wrinkles. All perfectly natural effects of ageing. Well, I'm fighting it all the way and dermal fillers can be a great weapon for women! I've had treatment to the lines around my mouth – parentheses and marionette lines, no thank you! – hope you can see the difference? The treatment took around 30 minutes and wasn't uncomfortable once the numbing cream had a chance to work. I certainly feel better when I look in the mirror. Goodbye old and tired looking! Don't forget you should only get a filler treatment from someone who is medically qualified, which means a doctor, dentist or nurse, never a beautician!



Instagram

therealtessmcgill

2,930 likes

therealtessmcgill My cosmetic doctor provided this image of one half of my face before I had dermal filler treatment, and the other half after. Can you see the difference? The toll of life on my face was pretty clear to see. And it was starting to bring me down. Choosing a filler treatment isn't everyone's first thought but look at what they can do to the appearance! I had hyaluronic acid fillers – they use a naturally occurring substance to put back the volume that's lost as we age. The effects last for around a year and you can start with treatment to one area to see how you like it. And don't confuse fillers with wrinkle treatments that freeze the face. Even though I've had fillers around my mouth I can still move it as normal! Think about what fillers could do for you, but remember always talk to a medical professional, not a beautician about this type of treatment. Why not book a consultation – there's no harm in asking, right?

Appendix 9: Participant Consent Forms

1. First Phase/Interviews



University of Brighton

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – S1 (Interviews)

Research Study: The Effectiveness of Beauty Influencers as Endorsers of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures

Researcher: Amanda Bowden

Please read this form carefully and place a tick in the boxes to indicate your agreement with each statement.

I confirm, I am over 18 years old.

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.

The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and any possible risks involved.

I am aware that I will be required to take part in an interview with the researcher.

I am aware that the interview will be audio recorded.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

I understand how the information I provide will be used, and that it will be seen only by the researcher, supervisors and those involved in evaluating the researcher's thesis. Other than these mentioned parties, my information will not be revealed to anyone else.

I understand the researcher will keep my identity confidential at all times.

I agree to take part in the above study.

.....
Name of Participant, Date, Signature

.....
Name of Researcher, Date, Signature

2. Second Phase/Survey



University of Brighton

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM – S2 (Online Survey)

Research Study: The Effectiveness of Beauty Influencers as Endorsers of Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures

Researcher: Amanda Bowden

Please read this form carefully and place a tick in the boxes to indicate your agreement with each statement.

I confirm, I am over 18 years old.

I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions.

The researcher has explained to my satisfaction the purpose, principles and procedures of the study and any possible risks involved.

I am aware that I will be required to complete an online survey.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without incurring consequences from doing so.

I understand how the information I provide will be used, and that it will be seen only by the researcher, supervisors and those involved in evaluating the researcher's thesis. Other than these mentioned parties, my information will not be revealed to anyone else.

I understand that my identity will be confidential at all times.

I agree to take part in the above study.

.....
Name of Participant, Date, Signature

.....
Name of Researcher, Date, Signature