The New Face of Mimicry Consumption Behavior

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From the perspective of social science, mimicry behavior plays an important role as a social glue to aid in understanding communication (Lakin, Jefferis, Cheng, & Chartrand, 2003). Previous research demonstrated that consumers often mimic others' consumption behaviors and such mimicking behavior can further affect one's preferences toward the consumed items (Tanner, Ferraro, Chartrand, Bettman, & Baaren, 2007). Typically, a role model has been widely considered as the representative object of mimicry, which limited to superstars, actors, or mothers in previous research. However, Bandrua (1986) stated that a role model can be anyone with whom the individual comes into contact, either directly or indirectly, who potentially can affect his or her decisions or behaviors. With the explosive growth of social media, people prefer to spend most of their time online and interact with people using social media as a replacement of in-person interaction. Thus, the definition of social environment has been expanded from in-person to online interactions by providing opportunities to interact, directly and instantaneously with not only peers and family but also influencers and marketers. This environmental change significantly affects consumers' decision-making processes. According to Smith (2018), 72% of Instagram users make purchasing decisions based on the posts they saw while browsing Instagram, which implies social media can be seen as a trigger for mimicry consumption. Given the extended multimedia interfaces, mimicry consumption behavior today has become more prominent than ever before. It should not be treated simply as incomplete or impulse buying behavior driven by irrational states. Researchers asserted that one of the major psychological states behind mimicry consumption is Subjective Wellbeing Life Satisfaction (SWLS). This is defined as a cognitive judgmental process of a person's quality of life (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985; Shin & Johnson, 1978). Andreasen (1984) noted that changes in consumer life status strongly affect their brand preferences, overall product satisfaction, and service purchases. Also, Silvera, Lacavk, and Kropp (2008) demonstrated that SWLS is negatively related to cognitive impulse buying tendencies. Xiao and Kim (2009) supported the relationship between consumer life satisfaction and foreign brand purchasing. As such, life satisfaction is deeply related to consumers' buying behavior. Lee, Lee, and Kwon (2011) suggested that the size of the social network has a positive relationship with life satisfaction or subjective well-being. Thus, this study aims to investigate how consumers' SWLS is related to the mimicry consumption and examine the mediating role of Instagram activities: interaction, browsing, and broadcasting, in consumers' mimicry consumption behavior. Among the various social media platforms, this study focused on Instagram because it has been the fastest growing social media platform among young people (Statista, 2018).

The doppelganger effect and social comparison theory served as a theoretical framework of the study. *The doppelganger effect* defined by Rovio, Gavish, and Shoham (2013) supports the idea of

intentional mimicry consumption behavior. The doppelganger effect can be either unidirectional or bidirectional. Unidirectional mimicry can occur in a situation when the consumer has no interaction or relationship with the figure that he or she wants to mimic. On the other hand, bidirectional mimicry happens when consumers do interact directly with those whom they want to mimic (Bargh & Chartrand, 1999; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Both concepts were adopted in this study. Because social media provides opportunities for consumers to reach not only those who surround them directly but also strangers with whom they have no direct relationship. Based on the *social comparison theory,* consumers consistently compare themselves to members within their groups or those in other groups to construct social identities (Hogg, 2000). The ubiquity of the Internet and social media has expanded the spaces in which people can engage in social comparisons. Furthermore, social comparison causes a positive or negative impact on consumer behavior. To sum up, social comparison theory supports the tendency of people to compare themselves with others, and this comparison affects their life or behavior.

The sample population of the study included both of male and female consumers who are Instagram users. The participants were 18 to 38 years old which are in the Millennial and Generation Z cohort. The structured online survey was distributed through the Survey Sampling International company (SSI) to obtain a sufficient number of participants. All the items in the survey used a five-point Likert scale, using 1 to represent "not at all" and 5 to represent "very much." A total of 233 participants answered the questions about their demographic information, subjective well-being life satisfaction, Instagram usage, and mimicry consumption behavior. The majority of the respondents were female (72.5%) and age between 25 and 38 (76%). The reliability coefficient of Cronbach's α was examined to ensure an acceptable level of internal consistency of each scale. The Cronbach's α for each variable revealed that .94 for SWLS ($\underline{m}$ = 3.42), .90 for mimicry consumption ($\underline{m}$ = 2.82), .80 for interaction on Instagram ($\underline{m}$ = 3.28), .63 for browsing on Instagram ($\underline{m}$ = 3.82), and .61 for broadcasting on Instagram ($\underline{m}$ = 3.31), respectively. Hypothesis 1 predicted that SWLS would significantly affect intentional mimicry consumption. The bivariate regression was used to test hypothesis 1. The overall regression model was significant, ($R^2 = 0.226$), F (1,231) = 67.414, p<.001. The results revealed that SWLS ($\beta = 0.475, p < 0.001$) were found to be a significant predictor of intentional mimicry consumption behavior. Hypothesis 2 predicted that Instagram activities-interaction, browsing, and broadcasting would have a significant mediating effect on the relationship between consumer SWLS and mimicry consumption behavior. A mediation analysis was performed to test *Hypothesis 2*, using Hayes' PROCESS macro with 'Model 4' using the parallel multiple mediator model (Hayes, 2017). The macro practices a bootstrap technique to test the mediation hypotheses, which is a reliable method for testing the statistical significance of indirect effects (Hayes, 2017). The direct effect of the SWLS on the mimicry consumption was found to be statistically significant, *Coeff.* = 0.365, Boot SE = 0.063, 95% Boot LLCI = 0.241, 95% Boot ULCI = 0.489. The total indirect effects ($a_1b_1 + a_2b_2 + a_3b_3$) of the set of three mediators was found to be statistically significant, *Coeff.* = 0.145, Boot SE = 0.038, 95% Boot LLCI = 0.077, 95% Boot ULCI = 0.224. The specific indirect effects are a_1b_1 =.128 (through interaction), a_2b_2 =.001 (through browsing), a_3b_3=.016 (through broadcasting). Of the potential mediators examined, the interaction was the only

significant mediator among the three activities, presenting the bootstrap confidence interval between 0.059 (BootLLCI) and 0.205 (BootULCI). The total effect (*c*) was significant, *Coeff.* = 0.51, $t(232) = 8.21$, $p < .001$.

The result of this study revealed that participants' level of subjective well-being life satisfaction was positively related to their mimicry consumption behavior: that is, the higher level of life satisfaction people had, the more intentional mimicry consumption they performed. This result is contradictory to the previous studies suggesting mimicry consumption as a negative side of consumer behavior (Moses, 2000; Sim, 2006). Our study suggests mimicry consumption occurs in a positive state of mind. The result of the mediation analysis showed that interaction on Instagram had a significant effect on consumers' mimicry consumption. Despite the visual nature of Instagram, communication with other users through Instagram plays a significant role in mimicry consumption. The findings from our study propose new insight into mimicry as an outcome of positive psychological state and add the importance of understanding the role of social influence in consumption behavior through Instagram activity. Our study inspires subsequent research questions and ideas in mimicry consumption behavior.

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