

***Follow, Like and Share the Leader:  
Examining SMI Marketing through the Lense  
of Personality Cults***

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# *Follow, Like and Share the Leader: Examining SMI Marketing through the Lense of Personality Cults*

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## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** As marketing campaigns are using social media influencers (SMI) more and more, this thesis examines if the psychological underpinnings in the follower-leader dynamic in cults of personality (CoP) can help explain the behaviour of those who follow SMIs and if this leads to better marketing performance.

**Method:** This report utilizes a quantitative, survey-based approach to test a wide spectrum of social media users. Utilizing both CFA and SEM testing, this report seeks to see the common ground between both SMIs and CoPs as well as their effects on purchase intention and brand perception.

**Findings:** This report provides evidence that SMIs who exhibit features commonly associated with many CoP will command higher purchase intention and brand perception in a marketing campaign.

**Conclusion:** This report indicates that there is a positive relationship between aspects of personality cults and SMIs. Marketers who understand this dynamic will be better suited to select appropriate SMIs and communities to conduct activities as the SMI field is still new and fragmented.

**Limitations:** Sample size is the biggest limitation of this report as although it has a good response rate, the number of respondents makes it difficult to properly extrapolate the findings to the general population.

**Originality:** This work expands on the work done by Cocker & Cronin (2017) by operationalizing CoP as a usable scale to evaluate SMIs and their effect on consumer perceptions.

**Key words:** Social Media Influencer, Cult of Personality, SMI marketing, Digital Cults of Personality

In 2020 the world was plunged into uncertainty with the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments across the world closed their borders, their economies and enforced lockdown procedures. Consumers turned to entertainment to help pass the time. A television series that gained viral popularity during this time was *Tiger King*, a Netflix-produced docu-series chronicling the legal dispute between American animal keepers. The show gained popularity due to the outlandish characters that were featured and how they ran their animal “sanctuaries”. These organizations had all the appearances of cults of personalities (CoP): larger than life charismatic figureheads, a large group of followers with undivided devotion towards the figure or mission and some mechanisms in place to test and ensure continued loyalty. However, in contrast to many commonly known cults of personality, these personas were built up through an online presence involving online shows or video blogs. One character, Carol Baskin, remarked that every 2 weeks Facebook pays her, and that the most recent cheques were for over \$23k USD (Tiger King, 2020). She also has over 200M views on her Youtube channel and millions of followers on her other social media platforms (Ibid). This presence online has helped her reach wide appeal, with some visitors to her site calling her a “hero” and led her to appear in the US Senate on behalf of animal rights (Ibid). It has raised questions about how influential these figures can be and how these charismatic figures utilize social media to their advantage and cultivate larger follower bases. This type of behaviour is also very typical for cults of personalities, in which they actively create commercial opportunities for their figurehead (Luqiu, 2016). The intersection between the commercial opportunities and the characteristics of cults of personalities is an intriguing space and opens the door for the possibilities of social media influencers (SMIs) operating at this intercept.

In this day and age, consumers are being bombarded with larger than life figures that wield considerable amounts of influence, be it politicians, celebrities or the rise of influencers on the ever present social-media platforms. Their messaging comes from tailored personalities that seem enticing or friendly with the end goal to cultivate a larger follower base (Stubb et al., 2019). However, as these bases grow over time, brands have pushed marketing content to these influencers to reach the base (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). One of the primary reasons for this is because these SMIs provide new mechanisms to access tough-to-reach or even new demographics (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). From a marketing perspective, the content created by influencers has a more authentic and down-to-earth feel in contrast to traditional advertising campaigns (Ibid). This stems from the fact that the influencer’s initial social media content was not commercial in purpose: rather they are content-creators creating content for entertainment or self-expression purposes (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This is what draws in viewers and followers. Eventually, this follower-base grows and the figure gains higher levels of credibility and “reach vast online communities” (Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018 p.10). Equally, as their online persona grows it becomes “co-created” by the community which leads to a deeper connection with the figure as they feel partly responsible for their growth (Cocker &

Cronin, 2017). This leads to higher credibility for these types of endorsers than traditional celebrities (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). This parallels some of the recent shifts seen within CoPs wherein modern versions of especially political personality cults are utilizing social media as a platform to cultivate their base, express their views and overall generate legitimacy for their position or mission by making them a source of attraction (Luqiu, 2016; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). The common intricacies between both modern CoP and SMIs in their relation with their followers could be intertwined, creating what could be called a “*Digital CoP*” leading to a better understanding of the SMI phenomenon for marketers.

## Purpose, Aim and Research Questions

This report will strive to expand marketing literature by examining social media influencers (SMI) from a new perspective: one of a cult of personality. As social media becomes a more integral part of everyday life, understanding the psychological underpinnings of the figure-consumer relationship is critical to marketers as more and more firms move into the social media environment for their campaigns (Labreque, 2014; Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). Cults of Personality (CoP) include an engaged and adulant following that supports the figure, which echoes the personality creation of SMIs (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). This report’s *modus operandi* will be to operationalize the theory surrounding both historical and modern versions of CoP and test its foundational components in the SMI environment by creating a new *Digital CoP* construct. This thesis’s aim is to also ground this concept in marketing theory by examining how it affects consumer behaviour. This thesis will therefore be focused surrounding the following research questions:

**RQ1: Is there a link between CoPs and SMIs?**

**RQ2: How does this Digital CoP affect marketing campaigns?**

With this, key marketing concepts such as brand perception and purchase intention can be evaluated to see if SMIs not only demonstrate CoP characteristics, but also if they affect marketing campaigns. This thesis will expand on the work done by Cocker & Cronin (2017) who qualitatively examined the CoP aspects of Youtuber communities by quantitatively examining this phenomenon but throughout social media platforms in general. The final results and conclusions should help develop SMI literature while simultaneously digitalizing and quantifying CoP literature into a scale that can be utilized in future research.

## Literature review

The structure of this review will be as follows. To begin, cults of personality will be introduced in both historical and modern contexts. This will be done to ensure that the contextualization of these phenomena will be sufficient to bridge this theory with the influencer research. Research of

social media influencers will then be presented before bridging both concepts with certain central themes that will be built upon to serve as constructs for the model being tested.

## Cult of Personality: An Introduction

It is important to start with a working definition of what consists of a cult of personality. Pittman (2017) posits that a cult of personality can be identified as a “phenomena in which a particular individual leader of a movement/party comes to be identified, more or less indissolubly, with the program, identity, and fate of that movement” (Pittman, 2017 p.536). Essentially, it involves a singled-out individual at the head of a movement whose characteristics or personality are highlighted in order to reinforce “symbolic or affective attachment” within the following (Ibid; Cassidy & Johnson, 2010 p.685). It can be said that this focal lens can be curated by said leader or close associates to resemble pro-leader propaganda with the end goal of invoking personal worship, flattery or praise from the masses (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Márquez, 2018; Schreiner, 2016). These messages, delivered through mass media, therefore “form an idealized image of the usually charismatic subject” in order to mobilize popular support and lend legitimacy to them (Luqiu, 2016; Schreiner, 2016 p.2). In the end, these cults of personality are nothing without their follower base as the base is the foundation of the power/influence that these leaders build upon (Luqiu, 2016). Due to this, the relationship is not one directional: rather, in exchange for legitimacy and adulation, the leader must routinely appease and acknowledge the base (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Luqiu, 2016). This is especially true in today’s internet age, where followers “demand more direct, personal relations with their leader, to know what kind of person he is” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.21). Without the base, the followers can disavow the leader and his cause as “the cult is undermined by the people” (Luqiu, 2016 p.300). This contextualization is important due to the history of these cults. These cults have existed since the dawn of time, with primal iterations following charismatic individuals deemed with “magical powers, whether of prophets, persons with a reputation for therapeutic or legal wisdom, leaders in the hunt, or heroes in war” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Pittman, 2017; Weber, [1922]1978 p.241). However, the concept of “cults of personality” or “personality cults” was first brought into the mainstream by Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev during his “secret speech” in which he denounced the cult put in place by Stalin (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Luqiu, 2016; Pittman, 2017). Stalin had tailored his public perception to “elicit not only enthusiasm, but also fear from the country’s populace” (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010 p.694). Due to this, as well as being henceforth associated with all authoritarian leaders, the concept of cults of personality tend to have a negative connotation (ibid). Leaders such as Lenin, Ho Chi Min and elected contemporaries such as Putin, Erdogan and even Trump have all been viewed as having a personality cult to engage their devoted base (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Schreiner, 2016). One of the most looked-at individuals for this reason is Chinese leader Xi, in which the Chinese Communist Party utilized the censored media to build up his charisma by “demonstrating and creating a versatile and extraordinary leader”

(Luqiu, 2016 p.297). He represents a more thought-of example of personality cults as he is the authoritarian leader of China. His followers have taken very public steps to show their devotion and loyalty to him on state-sponsored media (Ibid). Another way in which he is a modernized iteration of personality cults is his interactions with younger demographics which has gained him positive feedback over the internet (Lu & Soboleva, 2014).

Modern iterations of political cults of personality have evolved from historical versions in many ways. Even though there is a thought that only authoritarians can have personality cults, new research has demonstrated that there is a shift towards more “person-centred modern symbolic politics” which allows the concept to be applied to a wider net of personas, from Western democratic leaders to non-politicians alike (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.1). The biggest and the most apparent change has evolved from the boom of technology, wherein mass media (social media in particular) has been able to generate and sustain world-wide worship therefore creating the personality cult (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). Social media has permitted heads of state to “capitalize on their intangible assets and brand” themselves in order to influence followers internally and externally (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019 p.1). Erdogan of Turkey utilizes this to “elevate [his] personal brand and to communicate its soft power resources to foreign publics” which is of particular importance to his foreign followers (Ibid p.2). Turkey, as of 2018, had over 3 million expatriates across the globe and almost half of it in Germany (Hill, 2018). Although most democratic nations have absentee voting, Erdogan knows how vital this foreign base is for him (63% of German-Turks supported his cause in the 2017 referendum) so he utilizes mass media to push his image to these potential voters (Ibid). This involves the tactic of campaigning in foreign states. When countries such as Germany and the Netherlands refused to allow it, he cited these governments as “Nazis” (Fraser, 2019). He still held rallies in other countries, such as Bosnia, where “busloads” of supporters came to support him from the continent (Hill, 2018). In terms of the usage of social media, Uysal & Schroeder (2019) in particular examined how Turkey utilizes its various Twitter accounts to motivate his follower base and conduct more open (but still curated) diplomacy. This is in line with classical cults utilizing mass media to inform the base. They identified that Turkey’s Twitter accounts act in 2 manners: they create a cult of personality by pushing him as a “strong, charismatic leader” while at the same time pushing “good vs evil” content to show how Erdogan stands up for Turkish principles on the international stage (ibid). This compliments the CoP he cultivates outside of the digital realm, where he is known to “spark outrage abroad by making controversial statements about foreign countries, particularly during pre-election periods to stir up nationalist sentiment and consolidate his support base” and then patching the relation up behind the scene after he gets the result (Fraser, 2019 p.1).

Another modern example of this is Putin, whose popularity is very much in line with the Russian/Soviet head-of-state personality cult (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Ventsel, 2011). A

good way of telling this was the disparity between his high approval ratings and the abysmal view of the current government and its policies (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010). It shows how effective his cult is in that even if the government he controls is viewed negatively, he is still immensely popular. His cult is built upon being “a strong and tough leader can defend Russia's national interests, hold the multinational state together and provide economic stability” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.14). He utilizes “both visual and textual media” in mass media to promote his persona to the public, in which he pushes his “sexual, political and physical prowess but repudiates vices traditionally associated with masculinity in Russian culture” (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.14). Another way in which this cult is modernized is through consumption. His followers can adorn their houses with a multitude of objects bearing his resemblance from clothes to art and even foods (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010). This is vastly different from previous cults, especially Soviet ones, in which the cult can be commercialized and adored at such a scale (ibid).

It is very important to note that these cults are in no way limited to political leaders with executive authority. Famous figures in history such as Joseph Smith (founder of Mormonism) have cults around them that are known to portray them as charismatic or simply in a positive light (Weber, [1922]1978). Bringing this concept into the marketing and business world, business leaders have also been seen to have cult-like followings and personas. A good example of this is Henry Ford, who created the Ford Motor Company under the cult of personality premise including a strong, unquestionable CEO and an extremely loyal following and employees (Davis, 2003). A more contemporary example can be seen in Warren Buffet, who's personality cult resonates throughout the business world which has titled him the “Oracle of Omaha” (Stone, 2004). His company, Berkshire Hathaway Inc, is similarly built to Ford's: it is built around one man's ability to deliver investment results which in return sees him worshipped as a “hero” (Gaspar et al., 2013; Hadas, 2017). Even though his financial prowess has dipped in more recent times, his follower base is not fazed and still flock en masse to “Buffettpalooza” (the company's annual meeting) (Arends, 2019; Hadas, 2017). Another famous cult was built around Steve Jobs. Jobs, while at the head and as the face of Apple, was always seen as a charismatic leader by Apple users (Edwards, 1998). His persona was romanticized by the base, and he is largely remembered for being a visionary rather than his tangible product developments (Dailey, 2011). Interestingly enough, similar to Warren Buffett, the business community doubted that the firms would be able to continue without their charismatic leader at the head (Arends, 2019; Edwards, 1998; Hadas, 2017; Ibid; Smith, 2011). Although cults of personality give legitimacy to politicians and nations, it has been argued in research that that some charismatic leaders in “mainstream creative industries” have surpassed political leaders in terms of creating an image of themselves to be worshipped or idealized (Hackley at al., 2012; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). This could be due to their utilization of mass media, especially social media, to enhance their persona and cultivate their following.

## Social Media Influencers

Social media is an ever-present commodity in today's society. With more consumers utilizing it every day, it seems only natural that certain members within the community attract a larger following (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019; Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Another aspect of social media is that users can post and follow topics that are important to them, be it their friends or "ordinary" people with resounding characters (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard., 2018; Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). Consumers create and post their content on various social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, etc.) and with this, gain followings by reaching a larger online community (Grave & Graeve, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). Their content can be anything related to self-expression from their opinions, sharing their expertise in certain fields or experiences from their personal lives (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard., 2018; Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). Their content, at first, was not made for the purpose of being commercialized or influential but rather a vehicle of self-expression by an ordinary person (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). As these people grow in followers and content portfolios, they become influencers as they gain "micro-celebrity" and can push for social advocacy (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019; Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). Their persuasiveness comes from their position with their followers, as they are seen to be credible, knowledgeable and entertaining (Ki & Kim, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Therefore, this report will define a social media influencer (SMI) as a social media user that, through their self-created content, has positioned themselves at the head of a large following which allows them to influence said followings' decisions.

Seeing as these people are capable of reaching a vast amount of online users, it makes sense that marketing firms and brands have started to utilize them for their position (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019; Lou & Yuan, 2019). Another strong reasoning for SMI marketing is that the consumers are engaging and consuming the content instead of actively avoiding it (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). This type of engagement is beginning to affect consumption patterns as well, as social media users are more and more seeking to emulate their go-to social media figures (Ki & Kim, 2019). In consuming this type of media, the followers leave a multitude of data which can provide serious data to brands in terms of tastes and preferences in the shape of "subscribing, (dis)liking, sharing, and commenting" (Grave & Graeve, 2019 p.2). These also leave impressions on other users who can see these interactions and can see them as calls-to-action (Ibid; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). As these SMIs are specialists within their own fields, brands can very accurately insert themselves within target demographics that may be harder to reach with traditional marketing campaigns (Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). By utilizing SMIs, brands can lend credibility to their products and therefore gain a more positive



perception on behalf of the consumers who see the brands as not only supporting their SMI, but also may have a product that is advantageous to them (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). This is an important aspect to keep in mind when using SMIs for marketing purposes. Although it may seem contradictory, the SMI with the most followers might not be the best suited for a marketing campaign. Instead, “the new digital era seems to be associated more with consumers’ instantaneous decision-making derived from their hedonic need to be more like someone who inspires them” (Ki & Kim, 2019 p.919). This echoes the inspirational/charismatic underpinning that followers value from CoPs as well.

More importantly for marketers, this inspirational link is further present as they attempt to mimic the SMI in question, including “brand choices intentionally to be more like the SMI” or even through brands in which they simply endorse (Ibid p.918). As these SMIs are seen as more authentic and trustworthy within their community, especially in contrast to other celebrity messages, ad campaigns pushed through these SMIs should lead to better brand perception and even purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2019). Therefore, these marketing concepts will be evaluated in relation to the CoP construct with an SMI context.

## Social Media Influencers as Cults of Personalities

To some, attempting to merge a concept readily associated with dictators to people who post on social media might seem like a stretch. However, if one were to examine both concepts from a theoretical level, there are a lot of similarities. Although they are typically always seen as a negative trait, there is more and more evidence that cults “could be tolerated, regarded ambivalently, and even taken as necessary in particular circumstances” (Pittman, 2017 p.542). This report argues that SMIs fall under this categorization. If we examine both working definitions being utilized in this paper (for both CoP and SMI) there are some parallel components that emerge. Lu and Soboleva (2014) state that modern iterations of personality cults have four main components: the existence of followers, a clear “mission” to build towards, institutionalization of the cult and finally patrimonialism. This will provide a canvas in which to paint the comparisons.

### **Following**

Dissecting the concepts, the first similarity comes in the form of the following. Both definitions refer to having a swath of followers who idolize and more importantly legitimize their position (Luqiu, 2016; Ki & Kim, 2019). The leader-follower dynamic exists in the same way for both concepts as well. For SMIs, the interaction with their following is crucial to their growth and stability (Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). Without this interaction the base would lose interest and cease to support them (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019; Harding, 2010). In fact, for some this

interactivity with the SMI is the reason they flock to them in the first place (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). This is very similar to that of the CoPs where the leaders have to cultivate and satiate the base with devotion, charisma and acknowledgement (Lu & Soboleva, 2014; Luqiu, 2016). Weber ([1922] 1976), father of modern sociology and cornerstone for cult of personality theory, echoes this sentiment when he states that “what is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his "followers" (Weber ([1922] 1976 p.242). The base is the key to both concepts, and if the leader fails to provide benefits to those who follow them, they can undermine the figurehead (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019; Luqiu, 2016; Weber, [1922] 1976). A historical example of this would be Stalin, who solidified his cult by shifting to a more devoted base as his reign shifted from revolutionary to post-revolutionary (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). Steve Jobs knew how important the base was for Apple so he would take time to personally answer emails from customers to maintain his friendly persona (Daily, 2011). In contrast, Harding (2010) demonstrates an SMI who utilizes their base to sustain their life by circumventing traditional institutions and appealing directly to them. This creates a more “intimate” relationship between the SMI and the base as it becomes more active due to the perceived “co-creation” of the personality (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Harding, 2010). Of course, there are nuances between both examples mentioned. The most glaring one being the SMIs personality and appeal is “built up” by the followers who elevated them to their status and CoP’s personality or charisma is curated and imposed by the state, company, etc (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard., 2018; Cassidy & Johnson, 2010; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Therefore, the two-way communication flows between the followers and the figure are critical to the CoP construct.

### **Mission**

The next important indicator for digital CoP is the introduction of a clear “mission”. For CoP, these missions can be multitude in nature depending on their context. For the most part, these cults are tools to add legitimacy and credibility to their cause by creating an image that stirs up emotional and symbolic attachment towards the leader when policies and accomplishments are non-existent (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Luqiu, 2016; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). Schreiner (2016) demonstrated this while looking at the differences between authoritarians Ho Chi Min of Vietnam and Aung San of then Burma (now Myanmar). He states that Ho Chi Min fits into the definition of CoP, wherein he “became popular because of his charismatic personality and the tactics he used to create an idealized image” (Schreiner, 2016 p.2). This has led to a perception of “Uncle Ho” and a face to the revolutionary movement in the country while leaving out the “ruthless and deceptive side of the man” (Ibid p.9). In contrast, Aung San stood for democratic policies and “revolves around the desire for the implementation of the policies for which he stood” as well as him publicly denouncing any cult forming around him (Ibid).

For most personality cults, the mission is always to portray the leader in a positive light and mitigate any negative perceptions that may come their way (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011; Pittman, 2017). Warren Buffet, for example, is still referred to as the “Oracle of Omaha” and his yearly convention named after him continues to grow stronger and stronger even though his investing prowess has diminished (Arends, 2019; Hadas, 2017). Steve Jobs was extremely secretive of his personal life and views which only translated to his only publicly visible persona to be very visionary and successful (Dailey, 2011). In both cases here, the mission for the leaders is financial prowess and success which made followers flock to them to be swept away in their current. In a political point of view, a classic example of this is Lenin whose cult revolves around the revolution and the struggle of the common worker (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011).

For SMIs, the mission is not seen as one that is as rigid or overwhelming as power over a nation or company. Similar to Buffet and Jobs, it could be argued that SMIs are seeking financial success and opportunities due to their position (Lou & Yuan, 2019). This could lead to what Weber ([1922] 1976) referred to as “routinized charisma” wherein he states that charisma is dissolved into more every day seeking of capital to not only add security to their position but also for “economic advantages enjoyed by the followers and sympathizers of the leader” which leads back to them supporting the leader even more (Weber, ([1922] 1976 p.252).

When referencing the mission of SMIs, it is important to be conscious of their initial goal: content creation (Lou & Yuan, 2019). For CoP, there has been much debate where followers “commit themselves to the leader because of the leader’s personal charm, or because of the stirring content of the mission the leader represents” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.5). The mission for SMIs is the content they create, as Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard (2018) puts it: “SMI production may be not only simply a means to an end (i.e., to please followers or marketers, to obtain financial compensation, etc.) but also the mean in itself” (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018 p.3). These users originally created content by “sharing details about their personal lives, experiences, and opinions publicly through texts, pictures, videos, hashtags, location check-ins, etc” not inherently because they were searching financial stability, but because of “their love for the topic and their activity (e.g., creating and sharing content, discussing their interests with others)” in an amateur, non-professional and non-commercial setting (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Moulard, 2018 p.3; Grave & Graeve, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019 p.905; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). That has always been their first preoccupation, however as they increase their online portfolio of content (be it their personal opinion or otherwise) they “then gain more and more credibility and eventually reach vast online communities” (Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018 p.10). After they hit this point in the social media poster gradient, they then can become an SMI and can influence this large following because they “are still seen as authentic and trustworthy within their communities” (Ibid p.10). An example of this can be seen through Swedish Youtuber *Pewdiepie* who, through a

“remarkably active” video schedule and platform presence, has moved him from normal video game player to Guinness World Record holder and millionaire (Beers Fägersten, 2017 p. 2). The mission for him was not inherently to be profitable or famous but through his mission of posting content he achieved this (Ibid.).

Therefore, the mission for the SMI base could be to engage in this content for entertainment or informational purposes depending on their knowledge and expertise of the field (Lou & Yuan, 2019). A good indication of this phenomenon can be seen in previous works, such as when Childers, Lemon & Hoy (2019) highlighted information from Smith and Anderson (2018) indicating that 69% of adult users in the US utilize social media for entertainment and informational purposes as a backdrop to explain the efficiency of SMIs from a marketing perspective. As the mission for both SMIs and CoP differ in their end goals, the fact that both utilize their positions to an end in which followers converge onto them helps tie both of these groups together. Therefore, having a clear mission is another critical component of a CoP construct.

### **Institutionalization**

The next part of the modern cult of personality is the institutionalizational aspect of these cults. This refers to the implementation of mechanisms in which the adulation of the CoP becomes codified and routine (Lu & Soboleva, 2014). The purpose is to insert the cult into the cultural and social systems the followers live in, forcing them to constantly reaffirm their adulation (ibid). Weber ([1922]1976) was the first to introduce the concept of industrialization of charisma, also referred to as “routinization of charisma”. In sum, institutionalization and routinization of charisma amount to practical synonyms wherein the “transitory” nature of charismatic authority becomes an everyday occurrence (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). Institutionalizing the leader as the centerpoint of all state-related action is a bid to maintain power and add legitimacy (Ibid). This, especially in terms of modern CoP, becomes “an inevitable phase in the development of a personality cult” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.6). Weber ([1922]1976) also makes a point to comment that this phenomenon happens in large part due to “material interests” on behalf of the leader but also its followers, administrators and enforcers. The main focus on the institutionalization of CoP revolves around solidifying the position and laying the foundation for permanent power structures (Luqiu, 2016).

There exists a few ways in which this is done. For example, the leader’s image or story can be routinized through ceremonies or rites. This can be seen throughout classical and modern iterations of CoP. Stalin, for example, was able to utilize his birthdate as a national day of celebration, on par with religious celebrations (Lu & Soboleva, 2014). With large images of himself side by side with the communist fathers before him and reinforcing him as the “defender of the state”, he was able to implement himself in the lives of everyday soviet people who viewed this as one of the most important days of the year (Ibid p.11; Strong & Killingsworth,

2011 p.404). Stalin also utilized mass media to further his image, including the radio and the state-controlled newspaper *Pravda*, always displaying the leader in a god-like status (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). Mao equally utilized propaganda to institutionalize his cult, as well as such posters and badges proudly worn by his supporters to demonstrate their following (Lu & Soboleva, 2014). Mao's most famous institutionalization comes in his famous "Red Book of Treasure" which was used to "indoctrinate the population with Mao's preaching" (Ibid p.19). Both cults were also supplemented by supporting party members being encouraged to publicly praise and continuously demonstrate their loyalty to the leader (Luqiu, 2016). Modern iterations vary slightly, in that consumption has become a key component of the institutionalization of the cults. With consumers literally buying into the cult, for example with chocolate calendars with Putin's resemblance, micro-rites of adulation are abound, propelled even further by the internet (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010). Another example of this is the *Make America Great Again (MAGA)* red hats utilized by Trump supporters. The followers purchase the hats and wear them as badges of honor, being able to relate with other supporters in public spaces similarly to Mao's badges during the cultural revolution.

This concept of institutionalization, and the routinization of charisma, also applies to SMIs but in perhaps a different manner. The world is filled with social media users who utilize different platforms for different purposes (Grave & Graeve, 2019). For the majority of users, it could be as simple as sharing their "day to day actions, thoughts and opinions; purchases and experiences; and interactions with others" (Cocker & Cronin, 2017 p.457). At some point, once they have enough clout, they make the transition towards "social media celebrities" and can therefore become influencers (Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). These SMIs then utilize their platforms as a springboard for financial returns (Stubbs, Nyström & Colliander, 2019). In doing so, they routinize their charisma by posting more frequently, selling merchandise and then doing sponsored posts for brands (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016). This has some effects on their community: for example, Cocker & Cronin (2017) demonstrated that, similarly to cults of personality, "the relationships between YouTubers' personalities and audiences' allegiance are repeatedly articulated, disarticulated and rearticulated" (Cocker & Cronin, 2017 p.462). This allows the followers of these SMIs to express their adulation to their SMI within the community. There also exists the other calls-to-action that SMIs utilize to routinize their charisma. For example, the utilization of nicknames by members of the community help develop the fellowship around the leader and "serves to maintain the self-admiration of a united charismatic community" (Cocker & Cronin, 2017 p.462; Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). A more consumption-based call-to-action could be seen in SMI-focused merchandise such as T-shirts with their faces or community-related humour. For example, Harding (2010) describes how calls-to-action and merchandise sales on Twitter can help propel the career of a music-based SMI (Harding, 2010). In this way, the followers can take a real part in the co-creation of the personality by actively

financially supporting it all the while wearing these “badges of honor” in public to show their participation in the community.

However, it must be said for both CoP and SMI that this institutionalization of their cults often leads to wavering amongst the base. Weber ([1922] 1976) was especially interested in this aspect of CoP. From a Weberian perspective, because charismatic authority can only exist *in statu nascendi*, he states that the “traditional or rational everyday economizing, the attainment of a regular income by continuous economic activity” is despised (Weber, [1922] 1976 p.244). He concludes by saying that “it is the fate of charisma, however, to recede with the development of permanent institutional structures” (Ibid). This force also can be a challenge for Xi of China, as “commercialism, which has deep roots in Chinese culture, is another force that threatens the success of the cult of personality” (Luqiu, 2016 p.301). For SMIs this is especially the case, as most users do not consume social media for sponsored content or ads (Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019).

As entities and institutions guide the SMI towards financial security, the natural result becomes the dissipation of charisma and “the loss of appeal and vigour” from the original followers (Cocker & Cronin, 2017 p.466). From a marketing perspective this could be problematic as the appeal of the SMI in the first place was exactly that: the devoted and engaged following of the SMIs heeding to the calls-to-action and engaging with the brand. Even though the sponsored content itself can be very informative, users can become weary, annoyed or even confused of the financial motivations behind these posts and have a negative impact for the campaign and brand (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019). Finding that space between being profitable and financial viable as well as maintaining the authenticity and atmosphere of genuinity of an SMI is one that brands will have to strike to have continued success in this field, especially as more and more users attempt to make the jump on the gradient from normal user to influencers (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019). In sum, the concept of institutionalization is a foundational component of CoP which can have repercussions on how marketing campaigns are perceived by their followers.

### **Patrimonialism**

The final key aspect of a modern CoP is patrimonialism. Patrimonialism, or neopatrimonialism, can be defined in multiple different ways. However, there are certain main characteristics that are consistent. The first is that this form of governance appears after the institutionalization of the cult, and is one of the operating mechanisms within it in relation to ruling (Weber [1922] 1976). It is based on the conditions that “authority is based on ties of personal loyalty and personal dependency between a leader (patron) and his administrative staff (clients)” (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.6). The concept of patronage is front and centre in this type of administration, wherein positions are given to subordinates based on ties of personal loyalty rather than merit or

experience (Aspinall, 2010). It is important to note that the subordinates therefore no longer are subjugated by the office or position but rather the leader themselves (Gorlizki, 2002). The leader's authority and therefore legitimacy is therefore reduced to the vassals/clients implied faithfulness and loyalty (Weber [1922] 1976). Neopatrimonialism works essentially in the same sense, wherein "power, material resources and rents are distributed personally by the leader as if they were his/her private property" (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.6). The officials put into position of power based on their loyalty to the figure, and they subsequently have many benefits to this informal or off the record engagements: vast discretion about how to enforce their position as well as receive kickbacks for preferential treatment (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002; Gorlizki, 2002).

The classical CoP demonstration of patrimonialism is Stalin because he not only benefited from it to make his way through the Soviet party, but also benefited from it while he was its leader (Gorlizki, 2002; Lu & Soboleva, 2014). Stalin was under the patronage of Lenin as his protégé, being given a high position due to this and his involvement in the revolutionary movement (Lu & Soboleva, 2014). However, even at this early part of his career he filled his subordinate positions with people loyal and supportive to him (ibid). When Stalin became head of the Soviet state, he made tactical moves to ensure that he maintained loyalty and control over every facet of soviet life, for example by reorganizing the Soviet Politburo with "membership, agendas, and working rhythms determined entirely by the leader" (Gorlizki, 2002 p.704). The closeness of the supporting officers to Stalin can be further demonstrated in several ways. Due to their extensive loyalty and closeness to him, some Politburo meetings and Soviet policy was conducted in late night dinners in Stalin's residence (ibid). In other instances, subordinate members would use their connection to Stalin to appeal directly to him to further their ends instead of their superiors (Ibid). It is clear that Stalin represented patrimonialism to its core, as his rule was "marked by hierarchical chains of personal dependence between party leaders and their underlings" where loyalty was the main connecting link (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002 p.8). When the loyalty was questioned or if Stalin perceived a mis-step, "members of the ruling group were given to demonstrations of filial piety toward the master of the household" (Gorlizki, 2002). Being close to Stalin was central to the running of the Politburo during his reign, but even his closest supporters had to show their adulation and commitment to ensure perceived loyalty.

Even in post-soviet Russia neopatrimonialism exists under Putin with oligarchs close to the president being awarded senior government positions due to their connection to him (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002). Trump divulges into this phenomenon as well, seeing as how his White House staff members are his direct family, friends or children of loyal cabinet members such as US Attorney General William Barr (McCarthy, 2020). He has also appointed loyal donors to key positions within his administration, such as part of his transition team or even as ambassadors (Arnsdorf, 2016). Trump's CoP is institutionalized through the presidency, and he uses personal

loyalty (and scare tactics through Twitter) to ensure the continued support of his appointed members of government.

SIMs also have effects of patrimonialism and neopatrimonialism within them. After the SIM moves through the gradient and becomes an influencer, they may seek to surround themselves with a supporting cast to help them continue to grow their influence such as editors or business consultants (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Some SIMs have looked towards MCNs (Multi-Channel Networks) to act as “brand managers” to lead them towards their financial security (Ibid). However, even then there are still ways that SIMs can partake in patrimonialistic actions. For example, certain members of the followers could be elevated to higher statuses within the community. On most social media platforms, the SIM can go through the comments and interact with those that push the agency that they are looking for (Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). As the interactions help shape the community's view of the figure, by routinely interacting with certain members the figure can elevate them to a higher status within the follower community. Another example can be found on the social media platform Twitch, where the SIM hand selects the moderators of the chat interface. These moderators are chosen due to their connection to the leader, be it friends or otherwise, and this position “equips them with special system privileges” (Taylor, 2018 p.248). This elevates them to higher positions within the community (with their own badges to differentiate themselves) and allows them to “set the tone” in the community through subjective actions such as jokes or reinforcing the verbatim platform rules (ibid). This echoes the previous description of patrimonialism, wherein the supporting followers utilize their positions in arbitrary fashion (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002). In sum, since both CoP and SIM utilize patrimonialism within their communities after they become institutionalized, this report posits that patrimonialism becomes a part of an overarching CoP scale.

## Marketing Metrics

In the quest to understand how these affect marketing campaigns, it is important to explicitly define how that latter part is formed. By examining both brand perception and purchase intention, the effect that these figures have on the viability of the marketing campaign can be seen and tested. For SIMs especially, both brand perception and purchase intention are affected by this dynamic which makes both of those concepts interesting to evaluate whether their CoP-like qualities have an effect (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Ki & Kim, 2019; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2019).

*Brand Perception* can be defined in many ways and is related to many different concepts. Brand perception is linked to other brand-related sentiments such as brand image, brand evaluation and brand attitude (Koll & Von Wallpach, 2009). For the context of this report, brand perception will be defined as the evaluation a consumer makes in regards to a brand based on their own internal



criteria (Koll & Von Wallpach, 2009; Berger, J., Draganska, M. & Simonson, I., 2007; Morton, 1994). These are subjective to the consumer and can contain a multitude of different factors. Jung & Kim (2015) defined brand perception as being made up of both personal factors (brand knowledge and perceived quality) as well as social factors (symbolism and brand status) (Jung & Kim, 2015 p. 2). As brand perception is indicative of predicting purchase intention, it is important to evaluate if the SMI with CoP characteristics has any effect on increasing the perception of the brand at play (Morton, 1994). However, although this entails a relationship between both marketing concepts, this report examines both concepts individually. The reasoning behind this is if an SMI is sponsored by a brand, the purpose is to examine if the followers will have a better perception of that brand regardless if they would purchase a product from them. As the followers helped the figure reach this stage of their “career”, they could be appreciative of the recognition their figure receives from brands and therefore entails a better perception, even if on a micro-level that follower would not purchase the product (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). An example of this could be a gaming-focused SMI pushing non-gaming related brands could instill a dissonance in their followers, but the followers would still perceive the brand more positively as they are “helping” the figure (Ki & Kim, 2019).

In contrast, *Purchase Intention* is defined as the likelihood of a consumer making a purchase (Chang & Wildt, 1994; Kim & Ko, 2010). This concept has been instrumental in marketing research and practice in the past because it entails a desire or indication of future consumption of the brand or product in question (Kim & Ko, 2010). This purchase intention could stem from a myriad of different factors, such as past experiences, brand attitude and quality (Kim & Chung, 2011). In the same vein as above, this report strives to examine this concept independently from brand perception. Here, the reasoning is straight forwards: if a SMI is demonstrating CoP-like qualities, would their follower purchase the product feature in an ad regardless if they have prior knowledge or need of the brand before in an act of micro-adulation (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010)? It is important to note that in the majority of marketing literature, the concept of brand perception is an antecedent to purchase intention as these concepts are related (Morton, 1994). However, as this thesis is focused on the identification of the link between CoPs and SMIs, thereby creating the Digital CoP construct (RQ1) as a primary purpose and then evaluate how this constructs affects brand perception and purchase intention individually (RQ2), these constructs will be kept separate to focus on the effects of the Digital CoP have on them rather than their inter-relationship.

## Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

As per the first research question, this report will examine the link between the leader-follower dynamic of both CoPs and SMIs, creating a hybrid “*Digital CoP*” concept. This concept will be defined as the measurement of how much an SMI incorporates CoP-like characteristics.

Thereafter, this Digital CoP construct will be tested to see how it affects marketing campaigns through brand perception and purchase intention in an attempt to answer the second research question. This will demonstrate how the SMI's following views the advertising as successful and credible, but potentially hinders the perception of the figure through the institutionalization of their CoP (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Lou & Yuan, 2019). To answer the second research question, two main hypotheses were developed to help guide this thesis towards an answer. They are:

**H1: Higher CoP will lead to higher Purchase Intentions**

**H2: Higher CoP will lead to higher Brand Perception**

In terms of this paper, a theoretical model has been produced to test the effects of CoP on brands conducting marketing campaigns, especially purchase intention and brand perception. The testing model, based on what was discussed in the literature review, can be presented as such:

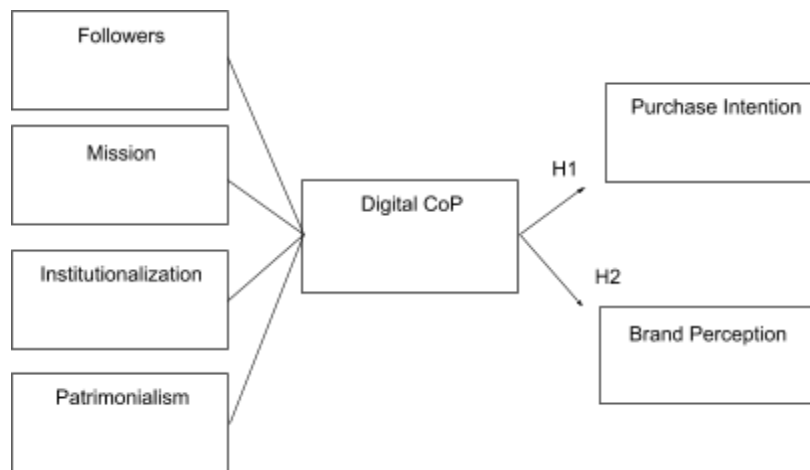


Diagram 1: Theoretical Model and Hypotheses

In this way, we can see that Digital CoP is the latent variable, being measured by the same four constructs that Lu & Soboleva (2014) identified. To help in the construction of the latent variable, certain scales were modified to help concentrate the impact of the constructs. Certain scales were taken from qualitative studies and the reason for this is because there is no true scale for cults of personality as the overwhelming majority of literature surrounding this concept is qualitative in nature. There is no “CoP” scale, even less one that encompasses the new age CoPs. There are lots of theories and scales in both social sciences and business literature for charisma and even charismatic management in businesses (see Conger & Kanungo, 1994), but they tend to be more focused on charismatic actions rather than evaluate the perceptions of the figure. Even charismatic behaviour or leadership is scarce for qualitative indicators. Therefore, one must be created to be able to test both hypotheses.

## Methodology

Now that the theoretical case has been made for exploring this digital iteration of CoP, it came time to evaluate the legitimacy of the claims. To do so, this thesis conducted a quantitative analysis in the form of a survey. Although a qualitative study may provide “more insight or a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation”, this report attempts to “count occurrences, volumes, or the size of the associations” between CoPs and SMIs, it falls under the purview of quantitative analysis (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007 p.65; Gelo, Braakmann & Benetka, 2008 p. 268). Furthermore, a quantitative analysis would be appropriate for this report due to the fact that it attempts to validate and confirm whether both concepts, be it CoP and SMIs, are similar in their dynamics (Carson & Coviello, 1996). In sum, this thesis strives to objectively connect and evaluate this link without personal bias or inclinations, leading to a quantitative approach being selected (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002).

The first step in this quantitative analysis was scale creation based on previously used scales and theory. Shamir et al. (1998) examined charismatic leadership behaviour within units in the Israeli military. In their examination, they evaluate the effects of charismatic leadership on several levels. The first level is at the leader level, in which they wanted to examine charismatic behaviour and tangible actions rather than theoretical attributes of charisma (Shamir et al., 1998). Within this level, 2 main constructs were modified to be included in the latent variable. The first scale measure used was titled “ Supportive Behaviours” and is used to describe the dissolution of power distance between the leader (cult figure) and soldiers/staff (followers) by demonstrating “openness toward soldiers, showing sensitivity to their needs and feelings, treating them as friends, supporting them, and giving them autonomy” (Ibid p.393). This scale is critical to the development of the CoP scale as it evaluates the leader-side of the dynamic continuum, wherein the leader must demonstrate “devotion, charisma and acknowledgement” towards their followers for them to remain dedicated and supportive of the leader (Lu & Soboleva, 2014 p.5). For this reason, it was suitable to evaluate that aspect of a *Followers* measure in this report’s scale.

The other leader-related measure that will be modified from this report is called “Emphasizing collective identity”. This measure is used in their study to measure how much the leader is able to cultivate an identity within the unit through actions and symbols to differentiate themselves from other units (Shamir et al., 1998). This identity creation and expression of uniqueness simulates actions by cult leaders to create symbols to identify themselves in public spaces, therefore institutionalizing their adulation (Luqiu, 2016). Therefore, this scale was used as a foundation for a scale called *Institutionalization*.

The last scale utilized from this report comes from an individual-level measure. Titled “Identification with the Leader”, this measure examines the follower’s “perceptions of and attitudes toward the leader rather than the leader's behaviour” (Shamir et al., 1998 p.393). This distinction is important because cults of personality are used to inflate and propagate a charismatic image of the leader, especially since some cult leaders can be uncharismatic themselves (Luqiu, 2016; Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). Therefore, it is deemed more important to measure how the followers feel towards the leader to evaluate the other aspect of a *Followers* measure. This modified scale, in addition to the previously modified “Supportive Behaviour” scale, will comprise the entirety of the new *Followers* scale.

Another key source for the CoP scale was Conger & Kanungo (1994). In their research into perceived charismatic leadership in business organizations, they created a scale (referred to as the C-K scale) based on previous literature on organizational behaviour and charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1994). On this scale, one of the measures is called “Vision and Articulation”, in which it measures “the ability of a leader to devise an inspirational vision and to be an effective communicator” (Ibid p.443). This fits with the concept of *Mission* discussed previously, wherein cult leaders utilize a mission or purpose as the glue which keeps followers interested in the movement such as Lenin and the struggle of the common worker (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). Therefore, there is a suitable congruence between these items within the C-K scale and the novel *Mission* measure.

The final scale that will be utilized in the construction of a CoP measurement scale is *Patrimonialism*. Seeing as there exists no quantitative scale for this concept, a list of items was created based off of theoretical works and underpinnings. Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith (2002), as an example, examine the concept of patrimonialism and contrast it to clientelism and democratic governance models. In their work, they define the key elements of what constitutes a patrimonialistic system and how it operates in both historical and modern contexts. A modified list of their work will be the foundation of the CoP *Patrimonialism* scale, based on their assertions of what constitutes patrimonialism.

With this, the CoP scale is complete. There are 23 questions in the scale that will measure the level of CoP within any figure, be it political, business or for this report’s purpose SMIs. From this point, these figures that will be named in the questionnaire will have their levels of SMI evaluated against how their followers view them participating in marketing activities. The first marketing activity will be purchase intention. This is critical to this report as this link is being evaluated to see whether a figure has a higher CoP will it lead to a higher purchase intention. The scale utilized for this is modified from Evans et al. (2017) where they evaluated the purchase intention from SMI marketing. Therefore, it is congruent to the type of insights this report is searching for. This will make up the *Purchase Intention* scale. The other measurement for

marketing activities will be brand awareness. Although brand awareness and perception are bound to increase with marketing activity, this report seeks specific insight into this concept, be it whether the partnership with the CoP increases the brand value. To create these items, Bengesson & Servais (2005) was used as a reference frame and modified to better fit the parameters of this study. In their study, they examined how 2 brands marketing together would improve both their individual brands but also against their competition. This was modified to utilize the marketing cooperation with the CoP to see whether it would have the same effects. This becomes the final measurement scale used in this report, be it *Brand Awareness*. Table 1 below summarizes the scales and their sources.

Scale Name	Source	Reliability from Source
Followers	“ <i>Supportive Behaviours</i> ” and “ <i>Identification with the Leader</i> ” from <b>Shamir et al., 1998</b>	$\alpha = .92$ and $.90$
Mission	“ <i>Vision and Articulation</i> ” from <b>Conger &amp; Kanungo, 1994</b>	$\alpha = .89$
Institutionalization	“ <i>Emphasizing Collective Identity</i> ” from <b>Sharmis et al., 1998</b>	$\alpha = .88$
Patrimonialism	<b>Brinkerhoff &amp; Goldsmith, 2002</b>	None
Purchase Intention	<b>Evans et al., 2017</b>	$\alpha = .902$
Brand Awareness	<b>Bengesson &amp; Servais, 2005</b>	None

*Table 1: Construct Sources and Metrics*

With the 35-question survey now in place (which can be seen in Appendix 1), it is now ready to be sent to the sample population. The survey was web based because it offered many advantages such as “shorter administration time, lower costs and fewer data-entry errors” (Porter, 2004 p.9). With social media becoming a more and more commonplace environment, the sample chosen needed to be aware of the necessary context to answer SMI related questions. For the sake of this report, and to ensure continuous and reliable results, the sample population was chosen to be students at the University of Gothenburg. There will be a two-pronged approach for sample selection. These surveys were firstly sent out through the university’s graduate student administration and can be done online through both mobile and desktop forms through the survey creation website *Webropol*. The second group was a Bachelor-level marketing class and

was done through sending a working link to their student email. Although these 2 student groups may raise some limitations in regards to the random sampling process, this will ensure workable results as these respondents have. To further ensure that the respondents are aware, the survey will end if they indicate on the survey that they do not participate in social media whatsoever. All information collected in the survey was guaranteed to be anonymous and required no personal information on behalf of the respondent.

For the data analysis component of this thesis, it was decided that both a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and a structural equation modeling (SEM) were required. In the pursuit to answer RQ1, a confirmatory factor analysis was chosen because it “can assess the contribution of each scale item as well as incorporate how well the scale measures the concept” (Hair et al., 2014 p.20). Since RQ1 amounts to the development of a new *Digital CoP* scale including many different items, it was deemed as appropriate for this application. Furthermore, to answer RQ2 an SEM approach was deemed as preferable over others, including another CFA, as it specifies fewer relationships between the constructs which is optimal to test the independent *Digital CoP* construct with the dependent *Brand Perception* and *Purchase Intention* items (Ibid). Therefore, both methods in tandem allowed for the data collected from the surveys to be properly analyzed and the hypotheses to be properly tested.

## Data Collection

With the survey being sent out to a total of 902 students, the survey observed a response rate of 11.08% (101/902). This number may appear low, but it is in line with many other findings within the social science realm. There are a few reasons for this: firstly, web surveys tend to have lower response rates than other forms of surveys (Van Mol, 2017; Porter, 2004; Fan & Yan, 2010). In their analysis, Van Mol (2017) found that it is common to see response rates below 10% for web-based surveys and, in addition, that it is common for student-based surveys to have rates below 20% (Van Mol, 2017). Fan & Yan (2010) determine in their study that web based surveys will see a 10-11% lower response rate than paper-based surveys as well (Fan & Yan, 2010). Another potential reason why the response rate was very low was due to what Van Mol (2017) defines as “student fatigue”. Students during the data collection period of this report were sent many emails asking for their participation in various surveys which can lead to fatigue and unwillingness to answer the surveys, further hindering the response rate (Van Mol, 2017). Therefore, the response rate of 11% was deemed valid to continue with the analysis of the data.

Once the data was collected, the next process was to examine the data and see if any data cleaning was necessary. One case in particular was missing over 20% of answers and was a candidate for deletion. Normally, this would signal an automatic removal. However, one of the major limitations of this report is the low volume of respondents. This means that even the

removal of just one respondent can significantly affect a model’s reliability and predictiveness of the larger population (Hair et al., 2014). However, it was deemed necessary for the removal of this variable because in a situation with a sample size such as this one a respondent such as this can significantly weigh down the results. This resulted in a final sample size of 100 respondents. After this was completed, the remaining dataset had some missing responses (which fell underneath the acceptable 10% threshold). Utilizing the MCAR test to identify the randomness of missing data, it was found that the data were not in fact missing completely at random (MCAR) due to the test resulting in a .032 significance. To remedy this issue, the method that was used was the E/M (Expectation/Maximization) method. This specific method is utilized for both MAR and NMAR and consists of a two step approach. Firstly, the expectation part refers to the function in which expectations of what the data should be, based on observed values and current estimates parameters, are computed in place of the missing data (IBM Knowledge Centre, n.d.). Subsequently, the next step involves computing the maximum likelihood estimates with the data being filled in (Ibid). Since there were very few missing responses within the dataset, the effect on the overall dataset is minimal. After the completion of this, the dataset was complete and the next part of the analysis could proceed.

## Findings

Upon completing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), some issues arose that indicated that some changes had to be made to the model. The first place where this was apparent was in the standardized regression weights. Some variables had extremely low regression weights that fell well below the .5 cutoff for suitable models (Hair et al., 2014). The table labelled “*Appendix 2*” demonstrates variables that were removed due to this reason. That table also indicates that the entirety of the “Patrimonialism” construct was removed from the model. Although this was an initial pillar to the model and fully supported on a theoretical level, it was found that it had negative path correlations with the other major components of the CoP scale as well as low correlations with both dependent variables. The further reasoning for this will follow in the analysis, but ultimately the construct was removed from the model. With these changes, the model’s fit and components were reevaluated and showed to be within the acceptable cutoffs as seen in table below (Hair et al., 2014).

<b>Metric</b>	<b>Cutoffs</b>	<b>Before Removal</b>	<b>After Removal</b>
<b>CMIN/DF</b>	>2	1.662	1.512
<b>CFI</b>	<.9 is suitable, <.95 is excellent fit	.823	.927
<b>RMSEA</b>	>.08	0.082	.072

*Table 2: CFA Model Fit*

From this point, the next step in the CFA analysis is to look at the validity and reliability of the model. The first part of this is the convergent validity to examine the common variance between the measured variables. There are two major components to this type of test: construct reliability and the average variance extracted (CR and AVE respectively). As one can see in table 3, the construct reliabilities are all very strong, indicating convergent validity. Furthermore, the AVE of the constructs are mostly above the cutoff of .5 indicating strong variance being represented by the latent variables in the model (Hair et al., 2014). The AVE for *DigitalCoP* is below the .5 threshold however which raises some limitations with the construct’s validity. However, it is important to note that all cut-offs are definite, final limits. For example, Malholtra & Dash (2011) have worked extensively to uncover that the AVE as a metric that is too restrictive, and that construct reliability (CR) alone is what sets up a model’s reliability (Malholtra & Dash, 2011). Therefore, these constructs will continue to be used with that potential limitation in mind.

Constructs	CR	AVE
Cutoff	Between .6 and .7 is acceptable; >.7 indicates good reliability	Below .5 indicates issue
Digital CoP	0.723	0.485
Purchase Intention	0.912	0.723
Brand Perception	0.865	0.682

**Table 3: Convergent Validity Testing**

From here, the next step is to complete a discriminatory analysis to ensure that the constructs are measuring explicitly different topics. To do this, one must look at the squared multiple correlations and the AVE. Here are there limits with the model, wherein there are instances of failed discriminant validity between the constructs *Digital CoP* and *Brand Perception*. This becomes a limitation for the model as both these constructs share a lot of variance between them. From a theoretical and nomological perspective both of these constructs measure different things. *Digital CoP* is the foundational latent variable of this report and measures the extent in which a figure represents CoP-like qualities. In contrast, the *Brand Perception* item purely measures the perception of the brand conducting a marketing campaign through the eyes of the followers. There is enough nuance between the constructs to continue to utilize them for this report, with the understanding that this is a clear limitation in the measurement model.



## SEM

SEM is best used to explain the relationship between exogenous (independent) and endogenous (dependent) variables. In contrast to the CFA, the SEM specifies fewer relationships (Hair et al., 2014). It is also utilized to complete hypothesis testing, which is what was done for this report. In Appendix 3 one can see the graphical representation of the model. In the table 4 below, the model fit was good with only the RMSEA being on the cusp of the traditional cutoff range. However, with SEM models, there is no single value cutoff for these models (Ibid). There is no single value that will make the differential between a strong model and a poor model and therefore, since the value is extremely close but still on the good side of the suggested cut-off (0.079 vs 0.08 cut-off) this report argues that it is still acceptable to continue as the rest of the model represents a good fit.

<b>Metric</b>	<b>CMIN/DF</b>	<b>CFI</b>	<b>RMSEA</b>
<b>Values</b>	1.621	0.911	0.079

*Table 4: SEM Model Fit*

Examining the regression weights significance, it can be seen whether these characteristics constitute an accepted or rejected hypothesis. In table 5, it becomes apparent that the newly created *Digital CoP* construct is significant with 99% confidence that it will positively affect both *Purchase Intention* and *Brand Perception*. Therefore, we can say that both **H<sub>1</sub>** and **H<sub>2</sub>** are accepted, indicating that the more an SMI has in common with CoP, the higher marketing metrics will be. This is in terms of the followers' likelihood of purchasing the product irregardless of what it is as well as having a more positive brand perception for working with the figure in question.

<b>Metrics</b>	<b>Regression Weights</b>	<b>P-Significance</b>	<b>Accept/Reject</b>
PI ← CoP	.659	0.0001	Accept
BP ← CoP	.802	0.0001	Accept

*Table 5: SEM Regression Weights and Hypothesis Testing*

## Analysis

There are many takeaways from this study that shed light onto potential connections between the very theoretical concept of cults of personality and social media influencers. The SEM model was able to properly test both of the hypotheses in the context of the Digital CoP construct with

its 3 foundational variables (*Followers, Mission and Institutionalization*) and both marketing-related endogenous variables of *Purchase Intention* and *Brand Perception*. The final Digital CoP scale can be seen in Appendix 4. Both hypotheses were accepted, indicating that the more a CoP can be found in an SMI, the more their followers would be responsive to marketing campaigns. Although this is a novel interpretation of SMI and SMI marketing, there could be many indicators in current academia pointing to these conclusions.

### Importance of Followers in a Digital CoP construct

One such way of thinking could be due to both modern CoP and SMI utilizing their social media platforms as incubators for mass support and legitimacy (Luqiu, 2016; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Followers are the base of both concepts and the use of mass-media, in this case being social media, ensures that the figure can create an intimate relationship between themselves and their followers boosting their adulation (Luqiu, 2016; Pittman, 2017; Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). Proof of this type of behaviour can be seen within the data. Respondents indicated the depth of their connection with their chosen figure, responding in the majority that they have similar values to the figure as well as agreed in some capacity that they trust the judgement and decisions of the figure completely. The bond and the connection with their followers is what propels these figures forth, and the deeper the connection is made the more they are willing to support them (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Lou & Yuan, 2019). The figure who is able to build that connection with their base will be able to have more success in relation to marketing campaigns. Moreover, both SMI and CoP literature identify that the figures are “made or created” by the following themselves, offering them a degree of agency which leads followers to feel and indicate in the results that the values of their figure are congruent to their own (Uysal, N. & Schroeder, J., 2019; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). For this reason, these figures are seen as more credible and relatable, leading to followers trusting their judgment and opinions which can be translated into business opportunities (Lou & Yuan, 2019; Jin, Muqaddam & Ryu, 2019). The followers then can have a higher sense of purchase intention and brand perception because they not only support what the SMI is advocating for, but also because they want to support them and the purchase of a sponsored product becomes a form of micro-adulation (Harding, C., 2010; Cassiday & Johnson, 2010).

### Importance of Institutionalization in a Digital CoP construct

Social media also acts as another mechanism for these followers to participate in the act of devotion and loyalty to the leader. The ability for users to like, share and follow the figure makes an outwardly demonstration of their support (Luqiu, L., 2016; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019; Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019). For both CoP and SMIs, the online engagements reach vast networks of interconnected users which can be brought into the community’s fold (Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019; Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). Followers indicated that the figures in

question utilized many different tactics to institutionalize their following, be it through nicknames (48%), objects such as apparel (41%), through the figure's differentiation (36%) or a combination of these methods. Although this seems extremely in-line with SMIs it is also very much apparent in modern CoPs as well. Examples include low-ranking members of the Chinese Communist Party utilize social media to share videos of "writing out the CPC Constitution on one's wedding night" (Luqiu, 2016) or Turkey's government-connected Twitter accounts who "elevate Erdogan's personal brand and to communicate its soft power resources to foreign publics" (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019 p.2). In contrast, it is very common for CoP to have badges or material objects to demonstrate their loyalty and devotion to the leader such as paintings of Soviet leaders on their wall or even T-shirts of figures such as Putin or business-related CoP such as Warren Buffet (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010; Arends, 2019).

SMIs also work in this way as well, as the purchasing and wearing of figure-branded "merch" contributes to an everyday fandom and adulation of the figure (Harding, C., 2010). Respondents indicated that the figures in question looked towards either physical means (merchandising) or symbolic means (such as nicknames) to outwardly demonstrate their support. Both online and analogue outwardly demonstrations of support represent a routinization of the figure's charisma which lies at the very definition of *Institutionalization*. It can be seen through this lense that followers are willing to listen and support the figure in question indicating that the act of routinization of charisma demonstrates a financial capability and willingness to support the leader. This leads to the followers consuming and acting on calls-to-action regarding marketing campaigns in which the followers consume the brand in order to support their leader even further.

### Importance of Mission in a Digital CoP construct

This willingness to support the leader in both CoPs and SMIs comes from the ability to keep their followers' bases engaged and focused on the mission at hand (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016; Luqiu., 2016). As these bases or the nucleus, being able to properly demonstrate the path ahead helps the bases stay focused and stay loyal to the figures (Ledbetter & Redd; Ki & Kim, 2019). Respondents demonstrated that this Digital CoP is perfectly in line with that theoretical line of thought, as the majority reported their figures having vision and able to set strategic goals or a clear mission. The figure's ability to articulate effectively the mission is vital to the new construct as it keeps the followers motivated to champion and support the figure. For CoPs, this clearly defined mission or goal can take multiple forms. Political CoPs can be placed in these positions to bring about political change, such as the promise Putin can take Russia out of danger and insecurity even though his "regime whose claims to increasing stability and democracy are contradicted by many of its actions" (Cassiday & Johnson, 2010 p.685). In business CoPs, investors are still motivated by Warren Buffet's investing prowess to follow his investment

strategies even though his prowess has wavered (Arends, 2019). SMIs also fall into this category, where their calls-to-action and relationship with their followers keeps their audiences attentive and loyal (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Grave & Graeve, 2019). Even with some followers beginning to question the motives behind these SMI-branded posts, the base is still mobilized to support, mimic and follow “their” content creators (Ki & Kim, 2019; Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Being able to motivate the base into actions through foresight and a clear mission is a key aspect of both CoP and SMI concepts which translate into a better understanding of the dynamic between follower and figure.

## Understanding the shortcomings

It is also important to discuss the shortcomings of the model and the possible theoretical underpinnings as to why certain concepts did not work. Firstly, part of the *Followers* construct was removed, more specifically the part taken from the *Supportive Behaviours* scale of Shamir et al. (1998). This specific set of questions were in place to evaluate the nature of the two-sided nature of personality cults: the leader acknowledging and supporting the base while the base follows and supports the leader (Luqiu, 2016). Naturally, these should have been a strong support for the construct but there could be an issue in the language utilized in the questions themselves. All of the questions at play for that construct (as well as the removed question from *Mission*) referred to the social media figure’s community. This community is the basis of both cult of personalities as well as the base which launches a social media user further down the gradient, moving them from simple poster to influencer (Weber,[1922]1978; Taylor, 2018; Cocker & Cronin, 2017). Having said that, the reason why this could be a detriment to these variables is due to involvement. Brech et al. (2017) made this point about social media communities in that a larger community will have detrimental effects on the individuals within the community, specifically in regards to their engagement and involvement. When the respondents were asked about answering the survey with their favorite SMI, naturally the respondents will gravitate towards SMIs with extremely large bases such as Pewdiepie, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, etc. Therefore, if the community is too large the respondents can feel as if they are not included or have no intimate link and therefore be turned away by the idea that they are part of said community.

In that same vein, there could be instances of low-involvement on behalf of the users in which they truly do not feel as if they are part of the community. This would go against the CoP literature that stipulates that an “organized group subject to charismatic authority will be called a charismatic community” (Weber, [1922]1978 p.243). As involvement and engagement are almost synonymous terms for social media figures, low involvement with the figure can lead to issues affecting consumer perceived information credibility as well as connection with the figure themselves (Childers, Lemon & Hoy, 2019; Xiao, Wang & Chan-Olmsted, 2018). As traditional

cults of personality are forced or coerced upon their subjects, the new age political cults of personality utilize social media to their advantage by engaging and creating that intimate connection with their followers, allowing for the community to receive that adulation needed (Strong & Killingsworth, 2011). These figures, as do SMIs, do not have the automatic subjugation of their followers, rather the followers make “elective contact” with the figure at their own volition and their involvement will vary based on their willingness to deepen their connection with the figure (Cocker & Cronin, 2017). This effect can be further exacerbated with the non-commercialized origins of the platforms, which mean that when the SMI starts making branded posts they can lose some of that involvement as users “feel annoyed and confused by the subtle character of sponsored posts” (Stubb, Nyström & Colliander, 2019 p.110). In combination, both SMIs and CoP require the involvement of the followers to be high to gain the needed effects on both their stability at the head of their movements, but also in terms of marketing efforts as evaluated in the model above. If the respondents do not feel that they need to be more involved in the community, or flat out refuse to acknowledge the fact that they are in the community in the first place, this could have led to the results seen in the model.

Possibly adding to this is the platform biases, wherein different platforms have different fragmented community types with some, such as Twitch and Youtube, having very active communities and hubs while more static platforms such as Instagram might have difficulty in catalyzing their followers into being more involved (Cocker & Cronin, 2017; Taylor, 2018; Grave & Graeve, 2019). In sum, from a marketing perspective, even though the results from this model indicated the removal of the items including the word “community” in it, it still helps contribute to the marketing, SMI and CoP literature.

Furthermore, the decision to completely remove the *Patrimonialism* construct demonstrates some of the difficulties in applying some CoP concepts to SMIs. Patrimonialism is a component of CoP literature in regards to the administration of the cult and how the leader delegates that authority to loyal and personal connections (Lu & Soboleva, 2014). However, for certain platforms it may be more difficult for social media users to have the key knowledge or involvement to be able to see this in action. As previously mentioned, the live-streaming platform Twitch serves as a “gold-standard” to see this type of behaviour because the supporting staff such as moderators are very explicitly stated which makes evaluating this concept easier for the respondents (Taylor, 2018). In contrast, someone who only uses Twitter or Instagram might not see the administrative machination behind the posts: they simply see the figure in question and not the editors or moderators. This suggests that social media platforms engaging in more fluid platforms with higher figure-user interaction such as Twitch and Youtube could exhibit more features of a traditional CoP than static platforms such as Twitter and Instagram (Schwemmer & Ziewieckie, 2018). The data supports this with an overwhelming majority of respondents indicating that they could not agree or disagree with many of the statements

regarding support staff. In support of this train of thought, with almost 60% of the respondents in the survey indicating that their figure is based primarily on Instagram, one can begin to see why the respondents had difficulty in actualizing these questions. Their personal knowledge/experience gap led to negative path correlations between this item and most others. From a CoP perspective, the public in general knew about the key figures in the administration as well as the personal connection between figure and administrator (Uysal & Schroeder, 2019). Contemporary personality cults work in the same way, the key difference is that the rise of social media has made accessing these administrators easier as well making it easier for these administrators to display the required loyalty and devotion to keep their position (Ibid). From a marketer's perspective, what can be extrapolated by the survey results indicate that the way the SMI administrates their community does not influence the purchase behaviour of the followers as much as what the leader says and does do. Therefore, while in traditional patrimonialism these administrators would be receiving preferred treatment or even kickbacks for access to the figure, marketers must complete their research and evaluate whether that is the proper environment in which they want to market their product (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2002). As with any business decision, understanding the inner-workings of a potential partner's firm can ensure the success of the partnership. This is also the case for these SMIs, wherein understanding the team surrounding the figure is as important as the community size.

## Conclusion

The merger of both CoP and SMI literature has paved a new path in understanding the psychological dynamics in the follower-SMI dynamic. By taking what seemingly are two vastly unrelated concepts, this report has shown that social media has not only bridged the gap but created intercepts between them. Both hypothesized effects of CoP like SMIs have been fully accepted, leading to the conclusion that there are parallels between SMIs and CoP, in both historical and modern forms. This thesis has also answered both of its primary research questions. It has found the link and identified the pillars of what a Digital CoP should consist of (R1) as well as demonstrated that this Digital CoP has a positive effect on marketing related items (R2). In doing so, it allows for a new potential way of comprehending the follower-leader dynamic in SMIs which can be immensely vital into understanding the psychological motivations in these communities. This report builds on work done by Cocker & Cronin (2017) by taking the examination into the quantitative realm by building a CoP scale based off of the cult of personality pillars laid out by Lu and Soboleva (2014). In doing so, this report has developed a scale that measures the level of personality cult that exists within a particular SMI. This report also develops a plausible psychological rationale explaining Schwemmer & Ziewieckie's (2018) results indicating that a third of respondents aged 20-29 (and half of those aged 14-19) have made purchases based off of either an SMI or other prominent person. This thesis' findings will become more important as the SMI space develops, especially as CoPs in

“creative industries” surpass traditional CoPs by “creating an image of themselves to be worshipped or idealized” (Hackley et al., 2012; Cocker & Cronin, 2017 p.456). As consumers look to replicate their favourite SMI, this will include consuming brands that these Digital CoPs endorse (Ki & Kim, 2019). Equally, the results of the data analysis show that there is promise of using SMIs as sectors of marketing campaigns and that the special connection they have with their community can be financially profitable. However, understanding that SMI communities operate similarly to CoP communities requires a proper understanding of the potential partner CoP. Marketers should ensure that they truly understand the SMI that they are working with before utilizing them for their campaigns, as well as understanding the age old expression that the more followers the SMI has does not equate to higher brand perception or purchase intention.

## Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to this thesis report. First and foremost is the sample pool. As argued above, the response rate to the survey is good but the actual respondent pool of only about 100 respondents is quite low. This has several implications. This means that the model itself is not as representative of the general population as it could be, as well as leading to potential reliability/validity issues. Equally, this small sample size makes cleaning data and removing respondents more difficult as they represent a sizable percentage of the overall response pool and variance. The *Digital CoP* scale should therefore be tested with more representative samples as well as look to remove potential platform bias. An argument can also be made that the new construct’s AVE is too low, but this could potentially be remedied by a larger and more representative sample. One last limitation in terms of sample could be that only students were sampled, meaning there are some limitations of these results representing the larger population. There is also the low AVE seen for the Digital CoP construct during the validity testing, which resulted in a future discriminant issue. Understanding that these issues have trickle-down effects through the rest of the findings, including the SME, is important to keep in mind while examining the results.

Although this report indicates a possible strong path to follow in the future of SMI marketing, further research should be done to validate the claims and operationalize this information. Academics within the personality cult circles should look at modernizing their research and apply them further to opinion leaders and celebrities. Marketing researchers should further attempt to understand the psychology behind the success of SMI marketing to better understand the future marketing channels and potential new digital opportunities. By utilizing larger and more representative samples, this thesis can be used as a stepping stone into this new perspective of digital marketing. Equally, the concepts of patrimonialism should be evaluated further in CoP to see if more links exist between CoP and SMI. The concept should be brought into more

operationalized environments: turning this very theoretical concept into usable data that can be extrapolated further.

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## Appendix

### Appendix 1: Full Survey sent to Respondents

**All non-demographic questions are evaluated on a 7-point Likert scale**

Construct	Source	Questions	Metrics
Demographic	N/A	1. How old are you 2. Gender 3. Please indicate your SMI of choice 4. Please indicate their most popular platform 5. What is your social media usage? (Everyday, Once every few days, Once a week, Once a month, Never)	N/A
	“Leader Behaviour” from <b>Shamir et al., 1998</b>	6. Maintains distance from followers (R) 7. Talks to followers like a friend of theirs 8. Gives members autonomy and freedom of action 9. When talking with followers always refers to “us”	M= 3.19 SD= .77 A= .92

	<p>“Identification/Trust in the Leader” from <b>Shamir et al., 1998</b></p>	<p>10. I respect him</p> <p>11. I am proud to be in his community</p> <p>12. I trust his judgement and his decisions completely</p> <p>13. My values are similar to his values</p> <p>14. He is a model to follow</p>	<p>M= 3.32</p> <p>SD= 1.02</p> <p>A= .90</p>
<p>Mission (7-point Likert scale)</p>	<p>“Vision/Articulation” from <b>Conger &amp; Kanungo, 1994</b></p>	<p>15. Inspirational, able to motivate by articulating effectively the importance of what the organization are doing</p> <p>16. Has vision, often brings up ideas about possibilities for the future</p> <p>17. Provides inspiring strategic and organizational goals</p> <p>18. Consistently generates new ideas for the future of the community</p>	<p>M= 27.14</p> <p>SD= 4.89</p> <p>A= .84</p>
<p>Institutionalization (7-point Likert scale)</p>	<p>“Emphasizing collective identity” by <b>Shamir et al., 1998</b></p>	<p>19. Emphasises the differences between the community and other communities</p> <p>20. Uses slogans/nicknames that are special to our communities</p> <p>21. Emphasizes the uniqueness of the community</p>	<p>M=3.32</p> <p>SD= .86</p> <p>A= .88</p>

		22. Encourage the development of symbols for the community (Hymns, Tshirts)	
Patrimonialism (7-point Likert scale)	Modified from <b>Brinkerhoff &amp; Goldsmith, 2002</b>	<p>23. Support staff are chosen/selected due to their personal connection to the figure</p> <p>24. There is an unspoken hierarchy in the community</p> <p>25. Support staff's actions can be arbitrary, based on subjective reasoning</p> <p>26. Guidelines are not applied equally, with some members getting preferred treatment</p> <p>27. The figure only loosely controls the actions of support staff</p> <p>28. Community members have little or no way of communication poor service</p>	EFA required
<p>For the next set of questions, think of a recent sponsored post or ad that your figure has done. These questions will be in relation to that.</p>			
Purchase intention	<b>Evans et al., 2017</b>	<p>29. I would like to try this brand</p> <p>30. I would buy other products of this brand</p> <p>31. I would buy this product if I happened to see the brand</p>	<p>M=2.53</p> <p>SD= 1.26</p> <p>A= .902</p>



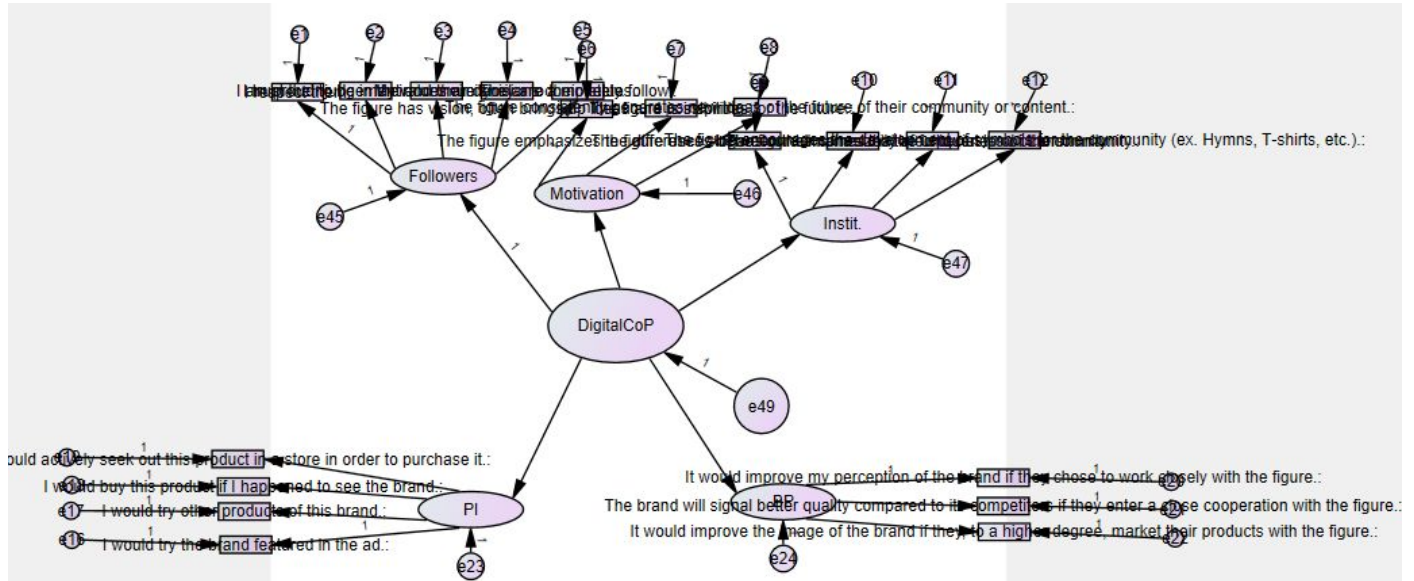
		32. I would actively seek out this product in a store in order to purchase it	
Brand Perception (7-point Likert scale)	<b>Bengasson &amp; Servais, 2005</b>	<p>33. It will improve my perception of BRAND if they choose to enter close cooperation with the figure</p> <p>34. It will signal better quality of BRAND compared to its competitors if they enter a close cooperation with the figure</p> <p>35. It would improve the image of BRAND if they, to a higher degree, market their products with the figure</p>	EFA required

## Appendix 2: CFA variable removal

<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Reason for Removal</b>	<b>Value</b>
The figure maintains distance from their community members (for example: does not interact with fans, does not listen to wants of the community, etc).:	Low Regression Weight	.153
The figure talks to community members like a friend of theirs.:	Low Regression Weight	.196
The figure gives members within the community autonomy and freedom of actions (for example commenting on posts).:	Low Regression Weight	.234
When talking with community members, the figure refers to "us" or "we".	Low Regression Weight	.309
The figure is able to motivate their followers by articulating effectively what the community is doing.:	Low Regression Weight	.475
Support staff (ex. editors, publishers, community moderators) are selected due to personal connection to the figure.:	Negative/ Low Path Correlations	Followers-Patri= -.132 Mission-Patri= -.089 Institutionalization- Patri=.556 PI-Patri=.288 BP-Patri=.266
There is an unspoken hierarchy in the community.:	Negative/ Low Path Correlations	
Support staff's actions are based on subjective reasoning.:	Negative/ Low Path Correlations	
Community guidelines are	Negative/ Low Path	

not applied equally.:	Correlations	
The figure only loosely controls the actions of the support staff.:	Low Regression Weight	.418
Community members have little to now way of communicating poor treatment or service.:	Low Regression Weight	.451

# Appendix 3: SEM Model



#### Appendix 4: Final CoP Scale variables

Metric	Source Construct
<b>I respect him</b>	Followers
<b>I am proud to be in his community</b>	
<b>I trust his judgement and his decisions completely</b>	
<b>My values are similar to his values</b>	
<b>He is a model to follow</b>	
<b>Has vision, often brings up ideas about possibilities for the future</b>	Mission
<b>Provides inspiring strategic and organizational goals</b>	
<b>Consistently generates new ideas for the future of the community</b>	
<b>Emphasises the differences between the community and other communities</b>	Institutionalization
<b>Uses slogans/nicknames that are special to our communities</b>	
<b>Emphasizes the uniqueness of the community</b>	
<b>Encourage the development of symbols for the community (Hymns, Tshirts)</b>	