THE EFFECT OF ENGAGEMENT IN ONLINE SOCIAL NETWORK ON SUSCEPTIBILITY TO INFLUENCE

IIS P. TUSSYADIAH
Washington State University Vancouver
DEVI ROZA KAUSAR
Pancasila University
PRIMIDYA K. M. SOESILO
Bina Nusantara University

The effect of consumer participation in online social networking activities on their susceptibility to influence is investigated in a context of restaurant consumption. This research identified a positive relationship between consumers engagement in social networking sites (SNS) on their susceptibility to global consumption influence, which is a multidimensional factor consisting of conformity to trend, social prestige, and quality perception. Furthermore, consumer engagement in SNS and susceptibility to global consumption influence positively affect social influence on SNS. That is, consumers with higher participation in SNS are more prone to global consumer convergence and peer influence on SNS. As implications for tourism and hospitality businesses, strategies to manage consumer-to-consumer communication on social media are suggested.

KEYWORDS: *social network; social influence; susceptibility; social media*

INTRODUCTION

The development of social network platforms on the Internet has brought a tremendous impact to the facilitation of global social interconnections. The so-called social media offers unparalleled constant connectivity for their users, allowing them to share, collaborate, and establish an online community. Consumers are using these media to share information, exchange opinions and recommendations, and display certain consumption behavior. In that, they disseminate positive and negative word-of-mouth (WOM) on various products and services (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008), influencing the behavior of many others. Discussions and sentiments about products and services are found extensively on consumer opinion platforms, blogs and microblogs, online communities, and social networking sites (SNS; Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdhury, 2009; Schmallegger & Carson, 2008; Xiang & Gretzel, 2010). Consequently, it is

suggested that online social network has the ability to significantly affect reputation, sales, and even survival of product and service providers (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy, & Silvestre, 2011), particularly for service and experience providers such as tourism and hospitality businesses (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2008; Pantelidis, 2010).

Indeed, social network influence has been recognized as an important factor in shaping consumer behavior. WOM communication, which is an informal person-to-person communication among noncommercial communicators and receivers about products and services, is believed to be a powerful tool for advertising and promotion (Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2004; Harrison-Walker, 2001; Westbrook, 1987). Consequently, marketing concepts based on referral within social networks, such as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) marketing, relationship marketing, and viral marketing, are considered a relevant strategy in the social media era (De Bruyn & Lilien, 2008; Ferguson, 2008; Helm, 2010; Kozinets, De Valck, Wojnicki, & Wilner, 2010). The approach to these marketing concepts suggests that marketers can leverage the power of interpersonal networks to promote their products and services by transforming the communication networks into influence networks (i.e., using social networks for referral marketing). In hospitality and tourism context, many scholars confirm the strategic role of social media for service providers not only in terms of reaching a global audience to disseminate promotional information but also in encouraging consumers to generate and share content relevant to product and services and, in turn, inform and influence others to make purchase decisions (Akehurst, 2009; Huang, 2011; Hudson & Hudson, 2013; Kim & Hardin, 2010; Leung, Law, van Hoof, & Buhalis, 2013; Pantelidis, 2010; Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008).

Harris and Rae (2009) argue that social network channels play a key role in the future of marketing not only because they assist businesses in fostering customer engagement but also because they transform businesses to be more open and collaborative, an approach that is considered more advantageous in the modern business environment. However, while the important role of online social networks is widely understood and hospitality businesses have successfully exploited the opportunities offered by SNS for marketing and management (e.g., O'Connor, 2011), many have yet to fully use social media channels for their benefits. For example, based on their analysis of social media marketing among Hong Kong hotel industry, Chan and Denizci Guillet (2011) suggest that hotels generally have a poor performance in using social media to learn about their customers. Furthermore, Hays, Page and Buhalis (2013) suggest that social media usage among top destination marketing organizations is still in its experimental stage with a high degree of variation in terms of their strategies. Therefore, for tourism and hospitality businesses to be more strategic in stimulating social influence through SNS, it is important to explore and understand the conditions that facilitate the conversion of SNS engagement (i.e., conversation, collaboration, sharing, etc.) into social influence. A better understanding of what makes consumers more susceptible to social influence will allow tourism and hospitality businesses to make better strategic decisions in using social network channels for marketing. Hence, the goal of this study is to investigate how engagement and interaction on SNS influences consumers' susceptibility to social influence and how it manifests in

behavioral intention (i.e., purchase, patronage, etc.). This research is applied in the context of restaurant consumption because of its relevance as a widespread consumption behavior that integrates well with online social network activities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tuten and Solomon (2013) propose that social networks or social communities are an element of social media marketing zones where the focus is building and maintaining strong relationships with consumers accomplished through encouragement of conversation, collaboration, and the sharing of experiences and resources among SNS members. The vehicles for this social media marketing zone are SNS and discussion forums where businesses can leverage the power of information exchange and discussions among consumers with similar interests (Sun, Youn, Wu, & Kuntaraporn, 2006). O'Connor (2011) proposes that the reaction of tourism and hospitality businesses to the growing importance of online social networks is twofold: those who create their own brand communities and those who participate in existing social networks to develop relationships with their customers. As an example of the former strategy, Kim and Hardin (2010) propose how hospitality industry can deliver virtual social networking opportunities to create positive e-WOM through improved customer-to-business interaction and customer participation in the servicescape. Many hospitality businesses apply the latter strategy by leveraging the relationship building opportunities through SNS such as Facebook (e.g., among hotels [O'Connor, 2011; Phelan, Chen, & Haney, 2013], among restaurants [Dholakia & Durham, 2010; Kwok & Yu, 2013]) by becoming "friends" with their customers.

Studies on social network in tourism and hospitality focus on either business-to-consumer (e.g., Chan & Denizci Guillet, 2011; Kwok & Yu, 2013; O'Connor, 2011) or consumer-to-consumer communication (e.g., Litvin et al., 2008; Yoo & Gretzel, 2011). Studies focusing on business-to-consumer communication propose various strategies to drive consumer engagement; such as the types of messages (i.e., sales or conversational, texts, or images) that would draw more "likes" and comments on Facebook (Kwok & Yu, 2013; Phelan et al., 2013), the time to post messages that would result in maximum exposure and impacts (Cooper, 2013), among others. On the other hand, the interest of studies focusing on consumer-to-consumer communication lies in how information spreads throughout the many layers of social networks and how it influences the consumption behavior of the social network members (i.e., interpersonal influence). From a business point of view, it involves identifying what prompts consumers to share information about and experience with products and services (i.e., understanding the influencers or opinion leaders [e.g., Yoo & Gretzel, 2011]) and what triggers consumers to follow others' recommendations (i.e., understanding the influenced or opinion seekers [e.g., Tussyadiah, Park, & Fesenmaier, 2010]), both rooted in the fundamental understanding of the behavioral dynamics of social ecosystems. While understanding how to best communicate with consumers via SNS is important, it is also critical for tourism and hospitality businesses to leverage the interpersonal influence resulting from consumer-to-consumer communication on SNS. This is especially because of prevalent research results suggesting that

when making purchase decision, consumers tend to rely more on information provided by other consumers rather than companies' persuasive messages (Litvin et al., 2008; Ong, 2012; Pantelidis, 2010) and that information shared by other consumers are perceived more trustworthy than those provided by marketers (Feick & Price, 1987).

Social Network, Comparison, and Influence

SNS enables consumers to actively involve in e-WOM propagation by freely generating and disseminating information about products and services, largely based on their personal consumption experience, within their established social network composed of friends, coworkers, and other acquaintances (Vollmer & Precourt, 2008). Through SNS, consumers voluntarily display their brand preference (e.g., by "liking" a brand on Facebook, by "checking-in" at hospitality establishments using location-based services), which can engender e-WOM communication (Chu & Kim, 2011). Due to the unique characteristic of the Internet to provide multidirectional communication, SNS also offers dynamic and interactive e-WOM where consumers can take on multiple roles as information providers, seekers, and transmitters and the boundaries between these roles are increasingly blurred (Chu & Kim, 2011). When in need of making a purchase decision, consumers may turn to SNS to seek for information from friends they perceive trustworthy and then pass the information on to help others. That way, consumers' desire to establish and maintain social relationships with their network allows them to facilitate the flow of information and the spread of e-WOM. Therefore, it can be argued that understanding the social dynamics to explain the behavior of opinion leaders, seekers, and transmitters is of equal importance.

For opinion seekers, the high level of social presence and self-disclosure in SNS (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) allows them to refer to their social network for acceptable behavior and good judgment. This can be explained by social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954), which is the idea that there is a drive within individuals to look to outside images in order to evaluate their own opinions and abilities. Wilton, Páez, and Scott (2011) confirm that when presented with a choice people refer to the experiences of others to make informed decisions. Likewise, Leenders (2002) suggests the term *social contagion* to explain how people are appropriately taking into account the opinions and behaviors displayed by others, combined with the considerations of other constraints and opportunities, to establish their own opinion and behavior. The effect of social comparison on consumer behavior exists due to the fact that people are concerned or care about reactions of others as reference groups (Bearden & Rose, 1990). The theory of self-concept (Grubb & Grathwohl, 1967) indicates that consumers value consumption that results in recognition and reinforces reactions from the social network so as to strengthen the conception about themselves.

When comparing themselves with others, people tend to select a person or a group to serve as a point of comparison or a reference group (Khan & Khan, 2005; Schiffman & Kanuk, 2000). Tussyadiah et al. (2010), for example, suggest that travel consumers tend to follow recommendation from people who

share similar characteristics with them (i.e., "people like me"). With regard to reference groups, Leenders (2002) identifies two distinct processes that lead to social contagion: (1) communication, when people use others with whom they are directly tied as their frame of reference and (2) comparison, when people use others they feel similar to as their frame of reference (Leenders, 2002). Communication implies direct contacts between people and their influencers, such as consumers having discussions with their friends on SNS about certain products or services by direct posting and commenting. On the other hand, comparison entails people using each other as a reference frame through indirect communication, such as consumers seeking cues from others' displayed behavior on SNS (e.g., by observing other people's statuses, pictures, etc.). Consumers who are well connected with others on SNS will refer to their friends for recommendations to follow and display behaviors to compare themselves to.

Therefore, building on social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) and the concept of social contagion (Leenders, 2002), it is hypothesized that a high level of SNS engagement, which entails a high level of involvement in direct and indirect communication with peers on SNS, will result in consumption behavior that follows the shared or displayed behavior of others. That is, the more consumers are engaged with their peers and exposed to consumption cues on SNS the more likely they are to refer to those cues when making consumption decisions.

Hypothesis 1: The level of engagement in SNS has a positive effect on the level of social influence on SNS.

SNS and Susceptibility to Global Consumption Influence

The global interpersonal communication on SNS provides individuals with countless direct and indirect social cues from their peers relevant to consumption and usage of products and services. Consumer behavior literature has conceptualized consumers' sensitivity to these social cues as a driving force of social influence (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989; Bearden & Rose, 1990). Explaining social influence at the global level, Dholakia and Talukdar (2004) propose the consumption convergence hypothesis, suggesting that because of globalization there is a tendency toward global consumer culture, in which the cultural symbols typically originated from developed countries are communicated and distributed to consumers in the emerging markets. This represents global social influence that leads consumers around the world to having the tendency toward similar consumption behavior (i.e., consumption practices and level of consumption). Indeed, the increasing connectedness and integration of people across the world made possible by the enhancement of information and communication technology and the intensification of global trade, international tourism, and education expand the collective social behavior and cultural convergence (Valori, Picciolo, Allansdottir, & Garlaschelli, 2012).

Furthermore, in an attempt to conceptualize the susceptibility to global consumer culture, Zhou, Teng, and Poon (2008) developed three sets of scale to measure consumers' desire and tendency for the acquisition and use of

global brands: conformity to consumption trend, quality perception, and social prestige. In their study, global consumer culture is defined as consumers' tendencies toward globally shared consumption-related symbols such as brands, product categories, and consumption activities and events (Holt, Quelch, & Taylor, 2004; Terpstra & David, 1991). In this study, instead of global brands, consumption activities displayed on SNS by users around the world are suggested to serve as a specific case of globally shared consumption symbols among social networks, which indicates the potential application of the dimensions to measure SNS users' susceptibility to embrace consumption influence from their peers online.

Conformity has been tied to social influence since the early social psychological research on suggestibility. Under the condition of normative social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), conformity involves changing an individual's behavior to match others' responses (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Individuals trying to "fit in" will conform to socially accepted behavior as an impression management strategy (Griskevicius, Goldstein, Mortensen, Cialdini, & Kenrick, 2006; Schlosser, 2009). On the other hand, individuals wanting to "stand out" among their peers tend to show nonconformity or counterconformity behavior (Griskevicius et al., 2006; Schlosser, 2009), deviating from the group behavior as a strategy to convey autonomy and uniqueness. Drawing on the consumption convergence hypothesis, CT is defined as consumers' attempt to comply with the convergence of consumption at the global level (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004; Zhou et al., 2008). It can be summarized that displayed consumption and cultural symbols within SNS may influence consumers' willingness to comply with the global consumption culture (i.e., consumption trend communicated through SNS).

Some scholars address the question as to when a social actor is most strongly influenced by their peers; most point out competition as the important mechanism of social influence (Bothner, 2003; Burt, 1987). Indeed, Burt (1982, 1987) argues that social actors compete and, thus, monitor and affect each other's choices. Recently, in the world of global media, individuals attempt to compare themselves to and compete with others by demonstrating their social power and displaying their consumption and possession of material goods that would suggest wealth (Lertwannawit & Mandhachitara, 2012; Roberts & Jones, 2001). In other words, individuals with a tendency toward status consumption found SNS as an avenue for social comparison. Several studies assume the role of social status/prestige in SNS users' reactions to the consumption behavior of their peers. Based on their study among members of SNS, Iyengar, Han, and Gupta (2009) identified that consumers with different attitude toward social status react differently on friends' online purchase. The high-status consumers are well connected, but react negatively to friends' purchase (i.e., they resist influence from others). Indeed, high-status consumers are often characterized with conspicuous consumption (Amaldoss & Jain, 2005; Corneo & Jeanne, 1994), where a display of consumption behavior is seen as a means of attaining and maintaining social status. On the other hand, low-status consumers are not influenced by it (i.e., they are less susceptible to social influence). Midstatus consumers react positively toward friends' influence and exhibit the behavior of "keeping up with Joneses" (Iyengar et al., 2009).

Under the condition of informational social influence (i.e., influence to accept information provided by others that is taken as an evidence of reality; Deutsch & Gerard, 1955), individuals are inclined to consider information from others to judge the quality of certain products or services (Cohen & Golden, 1972), especially those not too straightforward to evaluate (e.g., experience goods, such as in the hospitality sectors). SNS increasingly provide its users with cues of product evaluation from others, which can be used as evidences of product and service quality as well as uniformity of consumption. To that end, SNS can be seen as an avenue where consumers are influenced by others because of their perception on quality. Quality perception, which is defined as consumers' desire to attain certain practical benefits or functions from products (Steenkamp, Batra, & Alden, 2003), is considered another dimension to measure consumers' susceptibility to consumption convergence (Zhou et al., 2008) or global consumption influence. Consumers are prone to accept the influence of global consumption culture and symbols because they perceive that such products, services, or behavior possess superior qualities (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000; Steenkamp et al., 2003).

A high level of engagement in SNS is associated with an increased connectedness and a faster propagation of information, which could lead to the phenomenon of consumption convergence (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004). Akin to this suggestion, Wagner, Mitter, Körner, and Strohmaier (2012) identified that SNS users who are more open and communicate with many different SNS users tend to be more susceptible. Hence, it can be argued that the more consumers are exposed to what other people are consuming and purchasing, the more they are susceptible to consumption convergence (i.e., global consumption influence). Furthermore, the more they are susceptible to global social influence, the more likely they are to mimic the shared or displayed behavior of others on SNS. This is based on theories suggesting that susceptibility to influence is indeed the main trait that drives social contagion (Aral & Walker, 2012; Granovetter, 1978; Watts & Dodds, 2007). Hence, the following hypotheses are suggested:

Hypothesis 2: The level of engagement in SNS has a positive effect on the level of susceptibility to global consumption influence.
Hypothesis 3: The level of susceptibility to global consumption influence has a positive effect on the level of social influence on SNS.

METHOD

The main purpose of this study is to measure the effect of SNS engagement on susceptibility to social influence by estimating the relationships between the level of engagement on SNS, the level of susceptibility to global consumption influence, and the level of social influence on SNS. The theoretical framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1. The latent variable of SNS engagement (SE) was measured using four items based on the dimensions of communication and social connection on SNS participation level suggested by Parent, Plangger and Bal (2011). Following Zhou et al. (2008), susceptibility to global consumption influence (SG) was estimated as a multidimensional second-order variable consisting of three first-order factors: Conformity to

Trend (CT), Social Prestige (SP), and Quality Perception (QP). Adapted from Zhou et al.'s (2008) scale and modified to fit the restaurant consumption context, Conformity to Consumption Trend was measured by four items, Social Prestige by four items, and Quality Perception by three items. Social Influence on SNS was measured by three items developed in a larger study on social media. The measurement items were developed following an extensive literature review, four focus group discussions with 20 SNS users from a major city in the northeastern coast of the United States who responded to an invitation posted on a research community's Facebook page, and a consultation with four experts in tourism and information technology. These items were then tested using exploratory factor analysis (i.e., data from these activities are not included in this research). All items were presented in a 7-point Likert-type scale with *Agree–Disagree* anchor statements (see the appendix).

This theoretical framework was tested in the context of online interactions among members of SNS and its influence on restaurant selection. Dining out is a widespread consumption behavior; a significant proportion of eating and drinking across the globe is indeed facilitated by foodservice outlets (Jaeger, Danaher, & Brodie, 2010; Jaeger, Marshall, & Dawson, 2009). Importantly, as trendy gastronomic establishments offering menus and atmosphere that cater to consumers' needs for culinary exploration have mushroomed, dining out has become more than a satisfier of physiological needs for food and social needs of having a good time with friends. It has become a symbol of contemporary lifestyle. Indeed, recent studies on attitude to restaurant brands differentiate the hedonic values of restaurant consumption from their utilitarian value of merely satisfying consumers' hunger (Hwang & Ok 2013). Dining-out behavior, which may include restaurant selection, frequency of dining out, and so on, to some sense communicate an individual's position in the society so as to compare his or her lifestyle with that of others.

Figure 1
The Theoretical Model
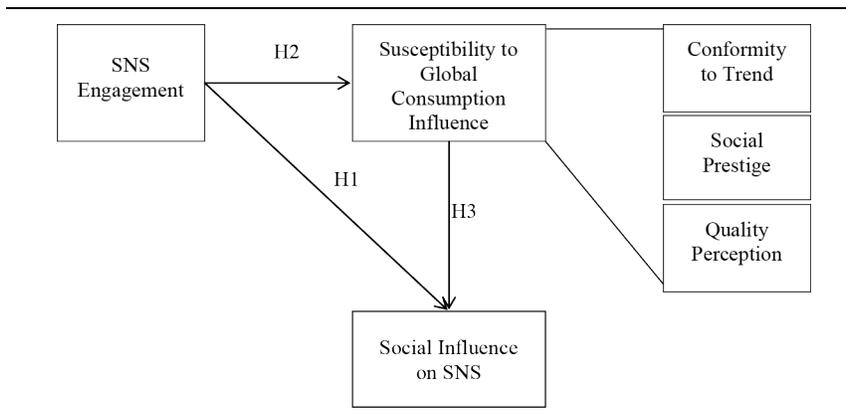
In the social media era, specifically with the ubiquity of mobile technology, posting and sharing dining-out experiences are easier than ever. Using a smartphone, food pictures and its evaluation can be posted instantly on Twitter, Facebook, or Swarm while consumers are enjoying it. To that end, displayed

dining-out behavior on SNS can provide references for social comparison and, in turn, trigger social contagion. Recent research has identified social influence as a result of food consumption posting on SNS. For example, Wang (2011) identified the influence of gastronomy bloggers on readers' intention to taste. Therefore, it is relevant to test the hypotheses proposed in this study in the context of dining out, due to consumers' proneness to social influence in restaurant consumption and the ubiquity of SNS postings on dining-out experiences.

Data Collection

A web-based survey was administered for data collection in this study. The survey questions consist of four sections: (1) respondents' typical use of SNS, which include the types of SNS applications, devices used and venues for using SNS, (2) respondents' engagement in SNS, (3) respondents' dining-out behavior, which includes tendency to select restaurants due to influence from peers on SNS, and (4) demographic characteristics. As a pilot study, an invitation to participate in the online survey was sent in August 2011 to 5,000 Americans randomly selected from a tourism e-mail list consisting of individuals who requested travel information about the U.S. Midwestern states over the past 3 years. An incentive to win a $100 or one of two $50 or one of two $25 dining certificates from *restaurant.com* was provided. Following three reminders, 232 responses were collected. A total of 159 complete responses were included in the preliminary analysis to test the measurement model. Following the pilot study, a final reminder was sent in February 2012 to the same e-mail list, resulting in 151 responses (i.e., 8% response rate), 120 of which were complete (a total of 279 respondents). To ensure that this research captures the current patterns of consumer behavior in terms of SNS use and restaurant consumption activities, an additional data collection was conducted in November 2014 by distributing an online survey through Amazon Mechanical Turk (mturk.com) to capture responses from social media users residing in the United States who have dined out at a restaurant. On completion of the survey, all participants received $0.40 (40 cents) as a compensation (i.e., comparable to a $4.00 per hour task). This effort resulted in 291 complete responses.

The comparison between the two groups of respondents (i.e., from 2012 and 2014 surveys) in terms of their demographic characteristics is presented in Table 1. Significant differences were found in terms of gender (i.e., 2012 respondents were predominantly female, 2014 male), age (i.e., 2012 respondents were mostly older, 2014 younger), and income (i.e., 2012 respondents reported higher levels of annual income, 2014 lower). No significant difference was found in terms of level of education; most respondents are highly educated, with more than 60% holding at least a bachelor's degree.

Respondents are highly engaged in SNS; most reported that they access Facebook every day (88% from 2012, 89% from 2014). About 42% respondents from 2014 reported accessing Twitter every day, while only 15% of respondents from 2012 did. Respondents were also asked about the places where they typically access SNS. While most of them access SNS at home

(about 99%), some respondents also access SNS while on the move (32% from 2012, 54% from 2014), such as commuting and traveling, and at public places (28% from 2012, 59% from 2014). In terms of devices, most respondents (96%) use personal computers/laptops to access SNS. Additionally, respondents use mobile devices such as mobile phones (40% from 2012, 74% from 2014) and tablets (13% from 2012, 33% from 2014). The locations and devices used for SNS activities consistently show that respondents from 2014 are more mobile in terms of SNS access.

Data Analysis

To test the hypothesized relationships as presented in the theoretical model, structural equation modeling was performed using MPlus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2013). First, the combination of responses from 2012 and 2014 data were included in the analysis to test the hypotheses. To ensure normality of the data, skew and kurtosis of all variables were consulted. Cases with standard scores (z-value) higher than the absolute value of 3.00 were considered outliers and, thus, removed from the data set. The effort resulted in a total of 543 usable responses. Next, in order to count for the variations in the data, the model was also tested separately with the two groups of respondents (i.e., from 2012 and 2014 surveys) to identify possible differences in the relationships among latent variables, leading to the support or rejection of hypotheses.

Table 1
Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

	2012 ($N = 279$)		2014 ($N = 291$)		Chi-Square Tests	Total ($N = 570$)	
	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	$\chi^2(df)$	Count	Percent
Gender					39.84* ($df = 2$)		
Male	129	46	209	72		338	59
Female	149	53	81	28		230	40
Age (years)					256.30* ($df = 6$)		
18-24	10	4	73	25		83	15
25-34	32	11	136	47		168	29
35-44	46	16	51	18		97	17
45-54	76	27	21	7		97	17
55-64	71	25	9	3		80	14
≥65	44	16	1	0		45	8
Education					ns		
High school	19	7	19	7		38	7
Some college	60	22	64	22		124	22
Associate degree	23	8	23	8		46	8
Bachelor degree	83	30	87	30		170	30
Graduate degree	87	31	91	31		178	31
Income ($)					129.03* ($df = 7$)		
<50,000	60	22	176	60		236	41
50,000-75,000	57	20	41	14		98	17
75,000-100,000	43	15	47	16		90	16
100,000-125,000	32	11	16	5		48	8
125,000-150,000	17	6	5	2		22	4
>150,000	20	7	6	2		26	5

*Significant at $p < .001$.

Several criteria were used to determine the rigor and model fit. To test how measurement items relate to the latent variables (i.e., measurement model), goodness-of-fit criteria were consulted: comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) of .90 or higher (Hu & Bentler, 1999), root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of up to .08 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988; MacCallum, Browne, & Sugawara, 1996) and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of up to .08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999) to indicate acceptable model fit. Furthermore, several criteria for construct validity were consulted: factor loadings of .70 or higher and average variance extracted (AVE) of .50 or higher to indicate convergence validity, AVE higher than the squared interconstruct correlations, and construct reliability of .70 or higher to indicate discriminant validity. To test the structural model, in addition to the goodness-of-fit indices, the significance and size of parameter estimates were evaluated to accept or reject the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To test the measurement model, item-to-construct loadings, the constructs' composite reliabilities (CRs), and the AVE were calculated to assess internal consistency, reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the construct measurements. According to Chin (1998), CR score of .70 is a benchmark for acceptable reliability. As seen in Table 2, CR scores for every construct are well above .70. As indication of convergent validity (Dillon & Goldstein, 1984; Fornell & Larcker, 1981), the AVEs of all constructs are also above the cutoff point of .50. The square roots of AVEs that appear in the diagonal in Table 3 are larger than any correlation between the associated construct and any other construct, suggesting that the measurement model displays discriminant validity (Chin, 1998). All but one item-to-construct loading is at .70 or above with t-statistic significant at $p \leq .01$ (see Figure 2). Because of a factor loading lower than the cutoff criteria of .40, item QP1 was excluded from the model. The goodness-of-fit indices demonstrate a good model fit (i.e., CFI = .98, TLI = .97, RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .04). These results show that the measurement model displays both internal consistency reliability and convergent validity.

After assessing the measurement model, the structural model was assessed by evaluating the path estimates between latent variables in the model. First, Susceptibility to Global Consumption Influence (SG) is conceptualized as a multidimensional latent variable (second-order factor) consisting of three latent variables (first-order factors): Conformity to Trend (CT), Social Prestige (SP), and Quality Perception (QP). The paths from SG to its indicators are significant at $p < .001$ with estimates of .99 to CT, .83 to SP, and .26 to QP. This indicates that the second-order factor of SG was identified with the three first-order factors. In comparison, the second-order model in Zhou et al.'s (2008) study yielded path estimates of .85, .88, and .64 for CT, SP, and QP, respectively among their Chinese respondents. Comparably, the path coefficient to QP is weaker than the other two factors, even though it is still well above .50 in their study. The R^2 value of each first-order factor indicates the variance explained by the second-order factor. As represented in Figure 2, SG explains 99% of variance in CT (significant at $p < .001$), 69% variance in SP (significant at $p < .001$), and 6% variance in QP (significant at $p < .01$). While a high portion in variance of conformity to trend and

social prestige can be explained by susceptibility to global consumption influence, a large portion of variance in quality perception remains unexplained by susceptibility to global consumption influence. No R^2 values were reported in Zhou et al.'s (2008) study.

Table 2
Composite Reliability (CR) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE), *N* = 543

Construct	Number of Item	Mean (*SD*)	CR	AVE
SNS Engagement (SE)	5	4.67 (1.43)	.92	.71
Conformity to Trend (CT)	4	3.70 (1.40)	.89	.67
Social Prestige (SP)	4	3.04 (1.52)	.94	.81
Quality Perception (QP)	2	5.63 (0.86)	.73	.57
Social Influence on SNS (SI)	3	5.11 (1.15)	.85	.66

Table 3
Correlations and Square Roots of Average Variance Extracted (*N* = 543)

Construct	1	2	3	4	5
1. SNS Engagement (SE)	(0.84)				
2. Conformity to Trend (CT)	0.35	(0.82)			
3. Social Prestige (SP)	0.29	0.75	(0.90)		
4. Quality Perception (QP)	0.09	0.27	0.22	(0.75)	
5. Social Influence on SNS (SI)	0.56	0.47	0.39	0.12	(0.81)

Note: Square roots of average variance extracted are shown on the diagonal. All correlations are significant at $p < .001$.

Figure 2
The Structural Model
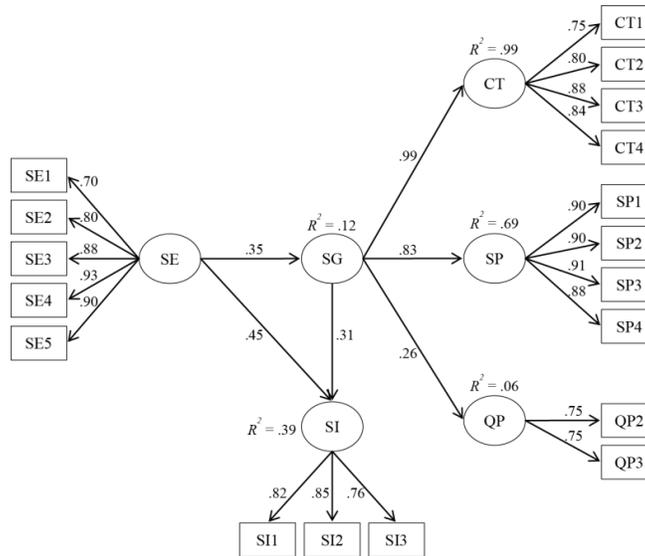
Note: χ^2 = 260.65, *df* = 129, *p* = .00, comparative fit index (CFI) = .98, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = .97, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .05, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) = .04, *N* = 543. All parameter estimates are significant at *p* < .01. SE = SNS Engagement; CT = Conformity to Trend; SP = Social Prestige; QP = Quality Perception; SI = Social Influence on SNS.

The small path coefficient and R^2 value in quality perception in this research may result from the context of the study and the construct measurement. While several studies have confirmed that "quality" is the main consideration in restaurant selection by consumers in general (e.g., Cullen, 2005; Heung, 2002), when online social networks are involved, consumers may find it more important to select restaurants that would place them as equivalent with (i.e., "keeping up with the Joneses" behavior) or above their peers. Therefore, in line with social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954; Leenders, 2002), consumers in social media era may converge to consumption that draws positive reactions from others. In that, it may be easier to have others notice the images of trendy and/or conspicuous consumption through pictures or status updates on SNS rather than evidence of quality (i.e., food quality and attentiveness are harder to evaluate by others). As a result, when compared with conformity to trend and social prestige, quality perception is a less prominent indicator of global consumption convergence through online social network. Additionally, this study focuses on consumption activities (i.e., "dining out at a restaurant") instead of restaurant brands as a context. While restaurant brands might carry the image of quality that can be easily communicated through SNS, quality perception might be harder to convey from the general activities of dining out. This limitation presents opportunities for further research.

Next, the significance and size of the paths between SE, SG, and SI were evaluated to determine the support for the hypotheses. The path estimate from SE to SI is significant at .45 ($p < .001$), indicating that when SE goes up by one standard deviation, SI goes up by .45 standard deviations. The path denotes the positive effect of SI, in that the more consumers are engaged in SNS activities (e.g., higher level of peer-to-peer interactions with members of social networks online), the more they are influenced by the consumption of their peers communicated through SNS (*Hypothesis 1* is supported). The path estimate from SE to SG is .35, indicating that a change by 1 standard deviation in SE will result in a change in SG by .35 standard deviations. This also supports the positive effect of SE on SG, in that the more consumers interact with their peers on SNS the more susceptible they are to global consumption convergence (*Hypothesis 2* is supported). Finally, the path from SG to SI is significant at .31 ($p < .001$). In other words, a change by one standard deviation in SG would result in .31 standard deviation changes in SI. Hence, it is supported that the more susceptible consumers are to global consumption influence, the more they are willing to follow the consumption patterns of their peers as communicated via SNS (*Hypothesis 3* is supported).

Furthermore, based on the R^2 values, 12% of variance in SG is explained by consumers' engagement in SNS ($R^2 = .12$, $p < .001$), indicating that although SE is a significant predictor of consumers' SG, a large portion of variance in SG remains unexplained in this model. Since SG construct applies to consumption convergence due to the phenomenon of globalization in general (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004; Zhou et al., 2008), information pertaining to global consumer culture from mass media such as television, magazines, and news websites may contribute to consumers being more susceptible to global consumption influence. On the other hand, 39% variance of social influence in

SNS is explained by SE and SG (R^2 = .39, p < .001). This result confirms that engagement on SNS and SG are significant predictors of SI.

To identify possible differences between the two groups of respondents in terms of support for the hypotheses that can be attributable to variations in the characteristics of the respondents and the time lag between the surveys, the model was tested separately with the two groups. As presented in Table 4, the hypotheses were supported in all cases (i.e., using 2012 respondents, 2014 respondents, and all respondents) with significant paths identified from SE to SI (*Hypothesis 1*), SE to SG (*Hypothesis 2*) and SG to SI (*Hypothesis 3*). Therefore, the variations in the characteristics of respondents and the time lag between the two surveys did not yield in any problems with the support of all hypotheses. However, differences were observed in the magnitude of the paths with the 2014 model showing lower path coefficients from SE to SI (i.e., .50 from 2012, .37 from 2014) and from SE to SG (i.e., .40 from 2012, .26 from 2014), indicating that the variations in engagement in SNS explains slightly less variations in social influence and susceptibility to global consumption convergence among 2014 respondents. This presents opportunities for further research to clarify additional effects from demographic characteristics and/or changes in the patterns of SE (i.e., due to changes in technological and social features of SNS the past 2 years) on social influence.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

This study explores if the facilitation of global interpersonal communications and connectivity on social media would result in social influence among consumers. Specifically, this study investigates how consumers' engagement in SNS and the level of connectedness with their peers lead to a higher susceptibility to global consumption influence and to social influence from peers in the context of restaurant consumption. First, the results confirmed the applicability of susceptibility to global consumption influence as second-order factor with three dimensions: conformity to trend, social prestige, and quality perception, in the context of hospitality, which provided support for a previous study by Zhou et al. (2008). These results confirmed consumers' desire to select restaurants that make them feel good in their social group, signify their social status, and of high quality as good indicators of global consumption convergence. Hence, it can be suggested that in online social network era, consumers are susceptible to interpersonal influence largely because of their normative concern to conform to global standards (i.e., trends) and their perceived value of consumption to symbolize their social status. Furthermore, this research supports previous studies suggesting that conformity to one source on one issue, which oftentimes means changing one's behavior to follow those accepted by the social group in order to "fit in" (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Schlosser, 2009), will likely translate in conformity to other sources on other issues (Bearden et al., 1989), leading to global consumption convergence. It also supports previous studies that as social actors, consumers monitor and affect each other's choices (Burt, 1982, 1987) and, thus, they are prone to consumption that can suggest social power. However, while still significant, quality perception is less prominent an indicator of susceptibility to global consumption influence in this research.

This could be due to the research context and the generic nature of measurement items explaining the construct. Future research should address this issue by applying the model to different contexts where quality perception might be better represented in consumption decision and online communication, such as using restaurant brands (e.g., celebrity chef–owned restaurants) or categories of restaurants (e.g., fine dining, farm-to-table restaurants) instead of general dining-out activities. Future research should also apply the model with respondents from different cultural contexts (e.g., different nationalities) to explain the global social influence from a cross-cultural perspective.

Table 4
Hypotheses Testing With 2012 and 2014 Respondents

Hypotheses	2012 Respondents	2014 Respondents	All Respondents
Hypothesis 1: SE → SI	.50 (.00)—Supported	.37 (.00)—Supported	.45 (.00)—Supported
Hypothesis 2: SE → SG	.40 (.00)—Supported	.26 (.00)—supported	.35 (.00)—Supported
Hypothesis 3: SG → SI	.30 (.00)—Supported	.33 (.00)—Supported	.31 (.00)—Supported
Model fit	χ^2 = 232.11 (129)	χ^2 = 236.07 (129)	χ^2 = 290.65 (129)
	CFI = .97	CFI = .97	CFI = .98
	TLI = .97	TLI = .96	TLI = .97
	RMSEA = .06	RMSEA = .05	RMSEA = .05
	SRMR = .04	SRMR = .06	SRMR = .04
	N = 259	N = 284	N = 543

Note: CFI = comparative fit index; TLI = Tucker–Lewis Index; RMSEA= root mean square error of approximation; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual; SE = SNS Engagement; SG = Susceptibility to Global Consumption Influence; SI = Social Influence on SNS.

Importantly, the key contribution of this research is the theoretical explanation (derived from theories in psychology, sociology, management, and marketing) and empirical evidence supporting the positive effects of consumers' engagement in SNS on social influence in hospitality. First, it was identified that SNS engagement is a significant predictor of susceptibility to global consumption influence (Hypothesis 2). In that, the more consumers interact with their peers in SNS, the more susceptible they are to global consumer culture and consumption convergence. That is, as brands, product categories, and consumption activities are communicated through online social networks, active users of SNS would gain much exposure to these trends and, hence, become more susceptible to global consumption influence. This is in line with previous studies confirming that active users of social media are more susceptible to influence (Dholakia & Talukdar, 2004; Wagner et al., 2012). Second, the direct positive effect of SNS engagement on social influence on SNS was identified (Hypothesis 1 was supported). This demonstrates that active users of SNS are prone to interpersonal influence and are willing to make consumption decisions following their peers' recommendation and past behavior as disclosed and shared on SNS. This result further suggests that interpersonal communication among consumers on SNS (i.e., consumer-to-consumer interactions) has the capacity to trigger and shape consumption decisions and, in turn, spread social contagion. Third, this study shows that susceptibility to global consumption influence has a positive effect on social influence (*Hypothesis 3* was supported). That is, the more susceptible consumers are to global consumer culture, the more they are prone to follow recommendations from their peers. This result is in line with theories in

sociology suggesting that susceptibility to influence is the key driver of social contagion (Granovetter, 1978; Watts & Dodds, 2007). As consumers connect and interact with others through SNS, they become more susceptible to influence from global consumer culture as well as from their peers.

The findings from this study provide some implications for tourism and hospitality businesses, especially the restaurant industry, for the integration and sustenance of social community in their social media marketing strategies. Notably, this study provides empirical support to confirm the importance of consumer-to-consumer interactions in social media to leverage their business as the findings from previous studies on the importance of online recommendation and WOM in marketing and consumer behavior (Dellarocas, 2003; Hennig-Thurau & Walsh, 2004; Litvin et al., 2008) was confirmed. Consumer-to-consumer interactions on SNS are key to a wider diffusion of information about products and services and, thus, need to be nurtured by tourism and hospitality businesses. The organic nature of consumer-to-consumer communication online can make it difficult to manage, but businesses can apply direct and indirect strategies to influence and control consumers' conversations on SNS. To encourage social contagion, businesses can offer incentives (e.g., rewards, discounts, privileges) to consumers who share information about their products on SNS (e.g., restaurants may suggest the most *Instagram*-able dishes to patrons). Business can also impose a certain level of control to consumers' communication by providing specific topics of conversation through, for example, a *Hashtag* campaign or other informational cues pushed to the consumers. This way, businesses are not only encouraging consumers to talk about them and share information about their products, they are giving consumers directions to enhance certain positive features of their products and services. In turn, keeping consumers-to-consumers communication alive (i.e., allowing consumers' active participation in SNS) will result in more social network members following each other (i.e., consumption convergence).

APPENDIX

Measurement Items

SNS Engagement (SE)

SE1: I follow my friends' updates (e.g., statuses, photos, etc.) regularly on SNS.
SE2: I share my experiences regularly on SNS.
SE3: My friends and I converse regularly on SNS.
SE4: My friends and I comment on each other's experiences regularly on SNS.
SE5: My friends and I are well connected on SNS.

Conformity to Trend (CT)

I select restaurants that . . .

CT1: . . . make me feel good in my social group.
CT2: . . . give me the sense of global belonging.
CT3: . . . make me have good impression on others.

CT4: . . . make me feel closer to contemporary lifestyle.

Social Prestige (SP)

I select restaurants that . . .

SP1: . . . signify my trendy image.
SP2: . . . represent the latest lifestyle.
SP3: . . . symbolize my social status.
SP4: . . . are associated with the symbol of prestige.

Quality Perception (QP)

I select restaurants . . .

QP2: . . . with an attentive, reliable service.
QP3: . . . with an exceptional quality.

Social Influence on SNS (SI)

SI1: I would try a new restaurant if my friends posted on SNS that they have been there.
SI2: I would try a new restaurant if my friends positively raved about it on SNS.
SI3: I would frequent a particular restaurant if my friends kept posting on SNS that they do so.

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Iis P. Tussyadiah, PhD (e-mail: iis.tussyadiah@wsu.edu), is an associate clinical professor in the School of Hospitality Business Management, Carson College of Business at Washington State University, Vancouver, Washington. **Devi Roza Kausar**, PhD (e-mail: devikausar@univpancasila.ac.id), is the dean of the Faculty of Tourism at Pancasila University, Jakarta, Indonesia. **Primidya K. M. Soesilo**, PhD (e-mail: pksoesilo@gmail.com), is with the Binus Business School at Bina Nusantara University, Jakarta, Indonesia.