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THE IMPACT OF INFLUENCER'S REPUTATION AND MENTAL SIMULATION ON BRAND EVALUATION

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the reputation of Internet influencers affects consumers' evaluation of brands and purchase intention. Furthermore, it examines whether consumers' brand evaluation or intention depends on the type of mental simulation and level of need for cognition. The ripple effects of the internet influencers' reputations were identified by constructing a 2x2x2 experimental design factoring the degree of influencer reputation, mental simulation, and need for cognition. The results revealed that the brand evaluation or purchase intention differed depending on the degree of influencer reputation and type of mental simulation. Consumers believe that influencers' reputations are an important factor to evaluate a product or brand. In process simulation, brand evaluation and purchase were also higher. For outcome simulations, the product may have been evaluated focusing on realistic benefits or direct desires. Consumers who enjoy cognitive efforts make careful decisions when evaluating brands and demonstrate higher willingness to purchase. The two-way interaction between mental simulation and need for cognition has a significant impact on brand evaluation and purchase intention. Additionally, the differences in psychological simulation effects of consumers" internal factors when evaluating or purchasing new products are studied. The study has practical importance for marketing professionals as it establishes the impact of individual need for cognition on the simulation effect.

Keywords: *Internet Influencer, Reputation, Mental Simulation, Need for Cognition, Brand Evaluation, Purchase Intention*

1. INTRODUCTION

Many companies use social media as a brand marketing platform to communicate with consumers and provide products and services. They receive attention and clicks from consumers by introducing the characteristics of their brand and products on social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, and YouTube. A strategy is to invite internet influencers to utilize the real-time, high-frequency, and two-way characteristics of social media platforms and stimulate consumers watching live broadcasts through real-time image marketing, product information dissemination, and brand introductions. In addition, the recommended products are showcased to consumers completely and realistically through a new exhibition method. This affects consumers' awareness of the brand and their willingness to purchase online [1] [2] [3] [4].

More and more companies market their brands and products on social network platforms through internet influencers. However, influencer marketing theory research on corporate brands is still in its infancy; therefore, there may be cognitive errors, blindness, and excess in marketing practices [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]. Research on mental simulation in marketing using influencers is scattered, and lacks an integrated interpretation of research results. Overall, the theory that companies adopt a psychological simulation of their corporate brands through cyber influencers needs to be integrated and, ultimately, provide scientific and professional guidance on corporate brand marketing practices.

In these modern times, influencers are on the rise since social media has become common. Therefore, this phenomenon is researched academically as it is important to predict how influencers' reputations differ depending on their intrinsic propensity when consumers accept

products. Cognitive desire is a personal internal factor that can affect product acceptance or brand evaluation. In addition to consumers' inherent factors, marketers stimulate consumers' purchase intentions through advertising or promotions that mimics the purchase situation. People's imagination of such a virtual or hypothetical situation is called "mental simulation" [6], and it is important to find the factors that affect them as results differ according to factors.

This study aims to verify how the mental simulation effect differs according to the consumer's intrinsic characteristics, such as need for cognition. Therefore, this study investigates the effects of influencers' reputations and consumers' need for cognition on mental simulation results. Furthermore, the study attempts to demonstrate the differential effects of process- and outcome-focused thinking generated by influencer's reputation and need for cognition (NFC). In addition, we investigate the effect of the two- and three-way interaction between the influencer's reputation, mental simulation, and NFC as factors affecting the consumer's purchase intention and brand evaluation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Internet Influencer

In the 19th century, the concept of "celebrity" in brand marketing first emerged during democratic culture, public domain discourse, cultural industries, and the rise of the public (Marshall, 1997). With the development of technology, the Internet is widely used daily for work and life by people. The Internet provides a comfortable social place for people who seek distinct characteristics from traditional society such as freedom, openness, and relative independence. New technology mediums enable new social interactions and change or resolve the old form of interaction, thereby creating a new focus and place for actions and interactions and rebuilding social relationships [7]. Consequently, the dissemination of information between people has also changed from one-way to two-way or multi-directional communication. The Internet enables people to use words, pictures and video to spread their talents and values. More people have access to the Internet, and its convenience empowers people to show themselves in a number of ways making them the focus of attention. Advances in internet technology have established a powerful platform for the emergence of influencers [2] [3] [4] [5].

The developments in economy, culture, and technology have changed the original form of communication and brought a wide range of convenient platforms that allow people to use free and complete formats of text, pictures, videos, and other media [2] [3] [4] [5]. Consumers can express their opinions carefully and completely. In this situation, celebrity implications have richer content in terms of media communication format, public goals, and celebrity industry type. As celebrities have become a common phenomenon, Gamson further classifies modern celebrities by their background: traditional celebrities, real celebrities, and internet celebrities. Unlike traditional celebrities, real celebrities and Internet influencer are characterized as new celebrities [8].

Influencers, as a new concept, emerged with the development of network technology. Academia has yet to agree on the definition of this concept but many terms exist, such as "internet celebrity" "cyber star," and "social network influencer." In this study, influencer refers to an individual or group who is well-known online in the internet era [9]. These individuals or groups are recognized for sharing their creations on social media platforms. For example, food bloggers, beauty bloggers, and internet celebrity anchors can gradually build a huge fan base, which can have a great impact online and in real life. They provide information that reaches their audiences quickly and easily, can be spread virally, is not recognized as commercial content or advertising, is easily trusted by fans, and has natural marketing advantages. Influencers are a new celebrity concept in modern society that enrich and expand the inner circle of celebrity theory [9].

2.2 Mental Simulation

Since the 1980s, the concept of "psychological simulation" has been developed by several psychologists through experimental research. Kahneman et al. propose the concept of heuristic simulation [10]. Mental simulation is a kind of communication, which companies widely use in the process of brand marketing, to induce target customers to buy advertised products. In marketing, consumers are willing to broadcast their imagined ideas related to certain products based on marketing communication information. For example, people use language, such as "Imagine you..." and "If you...," which unconsciously induces the brain to generate imagery that contains advertising products and simulates consumer experiences. Through these

psychological activities, the audience actively receives product information and feedback on product recognition and evaluation [11]. Psychological simulation is defined as an individual's simulated psychological expression of an event or a series of events [6]. As a unique psychological activity, simulations can be voluntarily generated by individuals or guided by the outside world to review simulation studies in new product marketing [6]. Simulations increase the likelihood that an individual will participate in or execute an imagined activity. Ultimately, it can transform people's thoughts into actual actions. The concept of cognitive analysis explains the internal meaning of mental simulation and emphasizes that the core of self-control behavior is mental simulation. Mental simulation is not only a simple cognitive process but often accompanies stronger emotional reactions. [6] [12]. In many behavioral studies, psychological simulations have been used to manipulate the subject's emotions. Conversely, mental simulation manages emotions in an individual's self-regulation process [13]. At an individual's microscopic level, mental simulation can form and influence an individual's perception, attitude, and behavior. The most common classification of mental simulation is "process simulation" and "result simulation" [14]. There are several different classification methods in the relevant literature, for example, based on the protagonist, the psychological simulation is divided into two types: "self-related psychological simulation" and "mind simulation related to others" [15], and "imaginary simulation based on imagination" and "memory" [14] 16] [17].

Process simulation is to imagine a specific process or step that people must implement to achieve a specific goal. Results simulation is to encourage people to imagine the results and returns obtained from achieving their goals [14] 16] [17]. Some scholar states that process simulation and result simulation focus on the "how" and "why" thinking modes, respectively, by embodying various aspects of new product adoption decisions [18]. Therefore, accompanies benefit from helping consumers cope with uncertainties related to new products, especially at different time distances. When product adoption behavior is expected to occur in the distant future, people are more concerned with the uncertainty and symbolic benefits of the product function, and the resulting simulation is more effective in reducing uncertainty in new products and strengthening positive emotions and purchase intentions. Conversely, thereafter, people are more concerned about uncertainty and emotional losses in product replacement. Process simulation is an effective marketing communication strategy that can reduce the psychological and emotional uncertainty of transition and promote tension reduction and usage behavior.

Self- and others-related mental simulation are classified according to the difference between their main characters. Many studies have shown that consumers are more likely to purchase products when they imagine their use. Nevertheless, the effect may be different when faced with a new product [15]. Imagination- and memory-based mental simulations are classified according to the source of simulation content. The imagination-based simulation content is mainly derived from an individual's imagination and often creates new perceptions; the memory-based simulation content is extracted from an individual's memory, therefore, most have old perceptions. Relatively speaking, memory simulation is consuming fewer cognitive resources than imaginary simulation [11] [17].

2.3 Need for Cognition

NFC is a set of characteristics that determine an individual's perceptual and cognitive behaviors. NFC varies with the individual differences in the tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activity [19]. As mentioned above, mental simulation is a process that involves cognitive effort. Individual degrees of NFC are closely related to the effectiveness of mental simulation.

Individual characteristics, such as knowledge, technical skill, and previous experience, are defined as factors that determine an individual's learning in special circumstances [20]. Such individual characteristics are directly involved in the decision-making process [21] [22]. As an aspect of personal style, NFC plays an important role in the endurance of behavioral tendencies and the suppression of ambivalent attitudes [23], p. 264). More generally, NFC denotes the extent to which people enjoy performing tasks or solving problems that require cognitive activities or rational thinking. That is, those who rank high for NFC tend to enjoy challenging tasks that require cognitively strenuous activities whereas those who rank low struggle to think and act accordingly [19].

Specifically, NFC is defined as an innate individual tendency to engage in information

processing, providing an important motivation for processing cognitive information [19]. People with high NFC enjoy the process of thinking with abstract intelligence and theoretical concepts, whereas those with low NFC try to avoid effortful cognitive activities and tend to dislike complex problem-solving and theoretical thinking. High-NFC individuals exert greater effort to elaborate on linguistic messages than visual information [19]. They enjoy complex tasks that require them to emphasize persuasive messages and take the central route to process the complex information conveyed by such messages. When more information is needed to solve a problem, individuals with a high NFC actively seek information compared to low-NFC individuals [24]. Low-NFC individuals process information and formulate their attitudes peripherally [19] by relying more on peripheral cues than on explicit information [25] [26].

3. HYPOTHESES

Many scholars have investigated how influencers affect consumers' willingness to purchase certain brand products and defined an internal mechanism for brand evaluation. One of them is a theoretical model based on stimulation, organization, and response (S-O-R), which explains the effect of e-commerce anchors with influencers or opinion leaders on consumers' purchase intentions. The effect of certain aspects of influencers on consumers' purchase intentions was studied [2] [3] [5] [9]. The impact of influencers on consumers' willingness to purchase online is not created by a single force but by various factors. Influencers strongly export product information by stimulating consumers watching live broadcasts through scenario marketing and high frequency interactive communication. In addition, as influencers rely on the advantages of an attractive appearance or imagination to hold consumers' attention and show them recommended products in a comprehensive and realistic manner through a novel display method, consumers recognize and trust the product. This affects the consumers' willingness to purchase online [9].

Online media influencers exert significant influence on general consumers' attitudes towards new products. The studies mentioned above show that an influencer's reputation can be considered as a process variable that affects consumers when accepting and purchasing new products or services. Consumers with a strong need for cognition tend to enjoy new experiences, such as finding mental stimuli and solving difficult problems or riddles. Therefore, the new mental-simulation effect is expected to be more effective than the process simulation [11] [17] [18]. In the case of innovative new products with high uncertainty, mental simulation has a positive effect on product evaluation. In addition, a more positive evaluation appears in the result simulation than in the process [17] [18].

In general, consumers with weak NFC tend to demand less effort to think, while consumers with high NFC tend to focus more on the functional and symbolic benefits of purchasing than on the uncertainty of accepting innovative new products. Therefore, consumers can expect a difference between the result simulation and the process simulation in brand evaluation or purchase intention.

H1.1. Assuming that all conditions are the same, consumers exposed to stimuli from an influencer with a high reputation will differ in brand evaluation and purchase intention.
H1.2. Assuming that all conditions are the same, consumers will show more positive brand evaluations and purchase intentions in the result-focused simulation than in the process-focused simulation.
H1.3. Assuming that all conditions are the same, the group with low and high cognitive needs will differ in brand evaluation and purchase intention

Consumers with high NFC tend to prefer structure and process; focus on explanations, facts, or how things work; and learn to do new things. Cognitive innovators learn causal relationships about events, think a lot, and enjoy mental activities [26]. Consumers with high levels of NFC tendencies seek to find and evaluate information on new products or understand how they work and use them. For new products, studies argue that the attitudes of consumers with high NFC can be predicted according to their cognitive responses but not for low-NFC consumers [26], as the effect of the degree of cognitive response on attitudes is significant. Consumers with high NFC and high tendency to innovate gain comfort by trying to learn through the purchase and use of new products to utilize their cognitive abilities [27]. Therefore, cognitive innovation propensity can be assumed to have a positive effect on purchase intention of new products or attitude toward brands.

Based on the above, mental simulation is

an activity that requires cognitive effort. The mental simulation effect is expected to decrease because people with low cognitive needs avoid activities that require cognitive effort [28] [29].

The perceived risk to a product decreases when the brand reputation and reliability are high, as consumer's judge [27]. Summarily, no difference is expected between process simulation and result simulation regardless of the level of innovation of the new product. Consumers with high NFC actively accept newly updated brand applications, and focus on the benefits of the purchase because they want to be recognized for their economic and social status through acceptance. Therefore, it is expected that the mental simulation effect will be lowered in a situation where consumers with high NFC imagine purchasing products and evaluate the brand through process simulation. Conversely, people with high NFC are likely to actively seek new product-related information and conduct mental simulations that require cognitive effort, therefore, the results are expected to be similar to the following hypothesis.

H2.1. The interaction between influencer reputation and mental simulation will affect brand evaluation and purchase intention.
H2.2 The interaction between influencer reputation and cognitive needs will affect brand evaluation and purchase intention.
H2.3. The interaction between mental simulation and cognitive needs will affect brand evaluation and purchase intention.
H2.4. The interaction between influencer reputation, cognitive needs, and mental simulation will affect brand evaluation and purchase intention.

4.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Experimental Design and Procedure

The purpose of this study is to explore how an influencer's reputation and mental simulation relate to consumers' brand evaluation and purchase intention, and how the brand evaluation and purchase intention differ depending on the degree of consumers' cognitive needs. The study attempts to understand the ripple effect of influencers' reputations. This study was set as 2x2x2 (the degree of reputation x mental simulation x need for cognition) experimental design.

In the pre-test, to check the experiment procedure, questionnaire composition, document editing status, and information content, 84 undergraduate students studying business administration and marketing participated. For the experiment, an influencer and a non-influencer active on the Internet and social media were selected. The two selected influencers took images introducing the functionality and usability of new electronic products, such as a new cell phone with improved performance and specifications.

The influencer reputation of 84 business administration students was measured through a preliminary survey of their attractiveness, product conformity, and expertise. The attractiveness-of-influencer-reputation item was defined as "Internet influencer has a good reputation", consistency as "Image of influencer fits the product", and the item of expertise was measured using a five-point Likert scale from "not at all" to "very much" (Cronbach=0.823). The results of the preliminary investigation of the stimulation of influencer are as follows. The value of high influencer reputation was 3.75, and the average value of non-celebrity influencer reputation was 2.57, indicating that the stimulus was suitable as the experimental stimulus in this study. In this study, a bias of the sample may occur because an experimental design was conducted on real influencers who are active. For the equivalence of experimental manipulations between groups, the recognition of influencers was performed in the pre-test and subjects with extreme evaluation were removed in advance. Exogenous variables have been removed because the recognition of the corresponding influencers in this experiment may affect the results. All three question items of the influencers were on a five-point scale. Subjects with the lowest score of one and the highest score of five were removed.

4.2 Measurements

Existing measurement items were used to confirm whether the scenario of mental simulation was properly executed [28]. Each of the two questions measuring the process and result simulation were revised to include a total of four questions. The questions are as follows. Four items were measured: "I mainly thought about the process of using a new product," "I mainly thought about how to use a new product," "I mainly thought about why I would use this product," and "I thought about the benefits I could get from this product."

The NFC was also classified into high and low using 18 items from relevant studies [19]. After measuring cognitive needs, indices for NFC items were obtained and then separated into groups

with low NFC and high NFC based on the median-split method of the index.

Brand evaluation refers to the degree to which the brand is liked [30], and in this study, it is manipulated to the extent of the willingness to use the brand. In this study, a total of four items were composed and measured by constructing an equal scale of five Likert points. "This brand is important to me," "I think this brand will be useful to me," "I think this brand will be highly related to me," and "This brand will be valuable to me." Purchasing intention was reconstructed to fit this study by MacInnis & Park [30]. "I am willing to use this brand," "I will recommend this brand to others," and "I am planning to purchase this brand."

5. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

5.1 Manipulation Checks

The manipulation checks of the reputation measure consisted of two items to determine the extent to which the participants responded to the stimuli. Independent sample t-tests were performed for the manipulation of the degree of influencer reputation. A *t*-test indicated that the intended manipulation was successful. Thus, participants perceived the difference between high and low reputation (Mean $_{high}$=3.67, Mean $_{low}$=2.80, t=9.726, p<0.001).

A manipulation check was performed by analyzing the mean value of the three items that measured outcome-focused thinking. The mean value was significantly higher in the group that was exposed to the outcome-focused simulation instruction (M=4.05) than in the group that was exposed to the process-focused simulation instruction (M=3.06, t=8.091, p<0.001). In the analysis of the two items measuring process-focused thoughts, we also found a significantly higher mean value in the group that was exposed to the process-focused simulation instruction (M=3.98) than in the other group that was exposed to the outcome-focused simulation instruction (M=3.01, t=7.532, p<.001). Thus, simulation was successfully manipulated as intended. The manipulation checks of the NFC measure consisted of three items used to determine the extent to which participants responded to the stimuli. For the manipulation of the degree of NFC, independent sample t-tests were performed. A *t*-test indicated that the intended manipulation was successful. Thus, participants perceived the difference between low and high NFC (Mean $_{low}$=2.81, Mean $_{high}$=3.75, t=21.52, p<0.05). The inter-item total-correlation coefficient value among the nine items for a priori attitude towards the brand ranged from 0.67 to 0.90 (p<0.05).

5.2 Hypotheses Tests

The differential effects of influencer reputation, mental simulation, and NFC on the dependent variables were analyzed. Tables 1 and 2 present the MANOVA and ANOVA results, including means, standard deviations, and Wilks' lambda.

Hypothesis 1-1 predicts that subjects who are exposed to stimuli from an influencer with high reputation rather than to an influencer with low reputation are more likely to form a favorable brand evaluation and a strong purchase intention. A subject's familiarity with influencers would therefore better explain the results which show that exposure to an influencer with high reputation has a more positive brand and purchase intention. Hypothesis 1 was supported (F[1, 279]=3.840, p=0.023). The main effect of the degree of reputation (e.g., high or low) was significant on brand evaluation (F[1, 279]=5.462, p=0.020) and purchase intention (F[1, 279]=7.018, p=0.009). Thus, H1.1 was supported. Hypothesis 1.2 predicted that subjects who are exposed to outcome-focused mental simulation rather than to process-focused mental simulation are more likely to form a favorable brand evaluation and a strong purchase intention. A subject's valence of cognitive processes would therefore better explain the results that show that when subjects are exposed to outcome-focused mental simulation have more positive brand evaluation and purchase intention. Hypothesis 1.2 was supported (F[1, 279]=6.396, p<0.05). The main effect of mental simulation (e.g., outcome simulation or process simulation) was significant on brand evaluation (F[1, 279]=11.81, p=0.001) and purchase intention (F[1, 279]=8.887, p=.003). Thus, Hypothesis 1-was supported. Hypothesis 1.3 predicted that subjects with low NFC are more likely than those with high NFC to form a favorable brand evaluation and a strong purchase intention. Hypothesis 1.3 was supported (F[1, 288]=5.715, p=0.004). The main effect of NFC (e.g., high- or low) was significant on brand evaluation (F[1, 279]=9.043, p=0.005) and purchase intention (F[1, 279]=10.496, p=0.001). Thus, H1.3 was supported.

Hypothesis 2.1 predicted a two-way interaction effect between the influencer reputation and mental simulation on the dependent variables. As shown in tables 2 and 3, the interaction effects are significant (Lambda=.977, F(1, 279)=3.243,

p=0.041). The main effect was not significant on brand evaluation (F[1, 279]=1.846, p=0.175) but significant on purchase intention (F[1, 279]=6.392, p=0.012). Hypothesis 2.2 predicted a two-way interaction effect between the influencer reputation and NFC on the dependent variables. As shown in tables 2 and 3, the interaction effects are significant (Lambda=.980, F(1, 279)=2.767, p=0.065 for A*C, marginally significant). The main effect was not significant on brand evaluation (F[1, 279]=5.551, p=0.019) but significant on purchase intention (F[1, 279]=2.429, p=0.120). Thus, H2.1 and H2.2 were supported. However, a two-way interaction effect between influencer reputation and NFC on the dependent variables was not significant (Lambda=.998, F(1, 279)=.269, p=0.765 for B*C). Thus, H2.3 was not supported. Hypothesis 2.4 predicted a three-way interaction effect between the influencer reputation, mental simulation, and NFC on the dependent variables. The degree of influencer reputation, types of mental simulation, and level of NFC were not statistically significant for brand evaluation and purchase intention (Lambda=.998, F(1, 279)=.509, p=.601 for A*B*C). Thus, H2.4 was rejected.

As seen the results, this study found that there was a significant difference in brand evaluation and purchase intention, which are dependent variables. Brand evaluation and purchase intention was higher in the simulation of the result simulation than in the process simulation. Consumers value the benefits received when they use the product. The study found that there were differences in brand evaluation or purchase intention according to the degree of reputation of influencers. Differences in brand evaluation or purchase intention according to the type of mental simulation. Furthermore, differences in brand evaluation and purchase intention according to cognitive needs were predicted.

Table 1: MANOVA Results

Treatments		Wilks's Lambda	F	d.f	p
Influencer Reputation(A)	D.V	.972	3.840	(1,279)	.023
Mental Simulation(B)		.955	6.396		.002
Need for Cognition(C)		.960	5.715		.004
A*B		.977	3.243		.041
A*C		.980	2.767		.065
B*C		.998	.269		.765
A*B*C		.996	.509		.601

Note: Note: Degree of Reputation of Influencer (None versus Influencer) x Mental Simulation (Outcome versus Process) x Degree of Need for Cognition (Low versus High)

Table 2: Results of Between-Subjects Analysis by Condition

Treatment(mean/S.D)			D.V	MS	F	p
Influencer Reputation (A)	None(2.99/.10)		Brand	3,374	5.462	.020
	Influence(3.27/.09)					
	None(3.09/.09)		PI	3.882	7.018	.009
	Influence(3.44/.09)					
Mental Simulation (B)	Process(2.87/.07)		Brand	7.299	11.81	.001
	Outcome(3.35/.18)					
	Process(3.07/.07)		PI	4.915	8.887	.003
	Outcome(3.46/.11)					
Need for Cognition (C)	Low(2.91/.12)		Brand	4.969	8.043	.005
	High(3.31/.06)					
	Low(3.01/.11)		PI	5.805	10.496	.001
	High(3.48/.06)					
Influencer Reputation x Mental Simulation (A*B)	None	Process(2.80/.07)	Brand	1.141	1.846	.175
		Outcome(3.09/.19)				
	Influence	Process(2.91/.12)				
		Outcome(3.60/.13)				
	None	Process(3.06/.07)	PI	3.535	6.392	.012
		Outcome(3.12/.18)				
	Influence	Process(3.07/.12)				

		Outcome(3.80/.12)				
Influencer Reputation x Need for Cognition (A*C)	None	Low(2.58/.18)	Brand	3.429	5.551	.019
		High(3.31/.09)				
	Influence	Low(3.24/.16)				
		High(3.31/.08)				
	None	Low(2.77/.17)	PI	1.344	2.429	.120
		High(3.40/.08)				
	Influence	Low(3.32/.16)				
		High(3.55/.08)				
Mental Simulation x Need for Cognition (B*C)	Process	Low(2.63/.13)	Brand	.178	.289	.591
		High(3.10/.06)				
	Outcome	Low(3.17/.20)				
		High(3.51/.10)				
	Process	Low(2.58/.13)	PI	.001	.002	.969
		High(3.28/.06)				
	Outcome	Low(3.24/.19)				
		High(3.67/.09)				

Table 3 (Conti.)

Treatment(mean/s.d/n)				D.V	MS	F	*p*
Influencer Reputation x Mental Simulation x Need for Cognition (A*B*C)	Outcome	Early	Low (2.43/.11/47)	Brand	.128	.207	.646
			High (3.17/.08/84)				
		Late	Low (2.73/.35/5)				
			High (3.44/.16/24)				
	Process	Early	Low (2.83/.24/52)				
			High (3.03/.10/108)				
		Late	Low (3.64/.22/10)				
			High (3.57/.12/61)				
	Outcome	Early	Low (2.81/.10/12)	PI	.536	.970	.326
			High (3.31/.08/37)				
		Late	Low (2.73/.33/22)				
			High (3.50/.15/98)				
	Process	Early	Low (2.90/.23/57)				
			High (3.25/.09/145)				
		Late	Low (3.75/.21/17)				
			High (3.85/.12/61)				

Note: Note: Degree of Reputation of Influencer (None versus Influencer) x Mental Simulation (Outcome versus Process) x Degree of Need for Cognition (Low versus High) Scales for mean scores are from 1 to 5 with 5 being most positive. n=279. *p<.1, ** p<.05, ***p<.01

6. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study is to explore how an influencer's reputation and mental simulation affect consumers' brand evaluation and purchase intention and how the brand evaluation and purchase intention differ depending on the degree of NFC. The study also attempts to understand the ripple effect of influencer's reputation. This study was set as 2x2x2 (degree of reputation x mental simulation x cognitive needs) experimental design.

The research hypotheses predicted that there would be differences in brand evaluation or purchase intention according to the degree of reputation of influencers. Differences in brand evaluation or purchase intention according to the type of mental simulation. Furthermore, differences in brand evaluation and purchase intention according to cognitive needs were predicted.

As a result of analyzing the differences in influencer reputation groups, mental simulation types, and the NFC for dependent variables, there was a significant difference in brand evaluation and purchase intention, which are dependent variables. Consumers believe that the reputation of influencers is an important factor to consider when

evaluating a product or brand. When purchasing a product, the purchase decision considers the expertise, reliability, and attractiveness of the influencer. Brand evaluation and purchase intention was higher in the simulation of the result simulation than in the process simulation. Consumers value the benefits received when they use the product. The findings from the result simulation, show that it is highly likely that the product was evaluated by focusing on the realistic benefits or direct winds from the results. When evaluating brands, consumers who enjoy cognitive efforts showed higher intention to make careful decisions for purchase.

A significant difference was found in the brand evaluation and purchase intention for the interaction between influencer reputation and mental simulation type. was Additionally, a significant difference was found in the brand evaluation and purchase intention for the interaction between influencer reputation and cognitive desire propensity. However, no difference was found in the brand evaluation and purchase intention for the interaction between mental simulation type and cognitive desire tendency. No difference was found in brand evaluation and purchase intention for the interaction between influencer reputation, the mental simulation type, and the degree of NFC.

The research results are summarized as follows. The research hypothesis that consumers exposed to high influencer reputation showed a more positive brand evaluation or purchase intention tendency in the result simulation than in the process simulation for the lower consumer group. Furthermore, it was found that the interaction between influencer reputation and simulation had a significant effect on brand evaluation and purchase intention. Consumers exposed to influencer reputation showed a more positive brand evaluation or purchase intention tendency in the consumer group with higher cognitive needs than in the consumer group with lower NFC.

In this study, it was found that there was no difference between the result simulation and process simulation in the brand evaluation and purchase intention of the group with high and low cognitive needs. Moreover, the interaction between NFC and simulations had a meaningless effect on brand evaluation or purchase intention.

The originality of this study is that it has been confirmed that the causal relationship between the type of mental simulation and task performance may vary depending on people and tasks. This study is meaningful as it investigates the effect of individual NFC on the simulation effect and lays the foundation for its application in marketing as a study on the psychological simulation effect in which the consumer's internal factors discriminate when accepting innovative new products.

In other words, the application of the psychological simulation theory was expanded and the study proved its validity by considering the internal propensity of individuals, which is an important factor in accepting new types of products or services. In addition, based on the results of the study, companies that release new products should deliver messages in consideration of consumer characteristics, and it will be more effective to present simulations that emphasize the strengths, characteristics, and benefits of the product to consumers.

This study verifies the results of consumers' mental simulation of accepting new types of brand applications through experiments focusing on individual internal factors but has several limitations. First, the limitation of this study is to exclude the degree of involvement in the brand used in the experimental stimulus. It is necessary to first select a brand in consideration of consumers' lifestyle and brand involvement.

There was no interaction related to brand evaluation and purchase intention between NFC and simulation, which are characteristics of individuals. This phenomenon may have been caused by the characteristics of the brand used in the experimental stimulus. There is a limit to measuring consumers' NFC, such as the functions, characteristics, and benefits included in the product used in this study. Fewer obstacles are expected when a technology product or brand is used to measure the influence of consumers' NFC.

Since two men are highly involved in high-tech products and may have a more positive attitude towards innovative new products than other generations, there is a limit to generalizing the research results of this study, which includes men.

Including male and female in their 20s in the study limits the validity of broader generalizations. It is necessary to change the manipulation of mental simulation scenarios. In this study, mental simulation of the target influencer and product was manipulated. In future research, it is necessary to apply other types of methods suggested by other scholars.

In subsequent studies, using of virtual brands to test the effect of mental simulation and reducing the mixed effect of brands will contribute to generalizing the results. Finally, it was not

possible to investigate the relationship between salience and mental simulation of information on the stimulus presented. The theoretical background shows that the vividness of information on stimuli seen in the process and result simulation affects the consumer's information process. From this point of view, follow-up studies also need to verify the mental simulation effect according to the degree of salience of this information.

In this study, it was not possible to grasp the dimensions of consumer risk, perception, and functional and social risk and relationship between variables that affect consumers' purchase decisions. Existing studies suggest various dimensions of risk in the purchase of new products and suggest that each dimension is a different concept, therefore more diverse risk dimensions need to be addressed in follow-up studies.

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