Lurking on Social Media: A multi-method investigation into its conceptualisation and measurement, to explore alternative explanations through a study of UK skincare consumers

MARKETING, STRATEGY, & INNOVATION

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

Bournemouth University
November 2024

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Dedication

To my late grandmother, Arma.
On my journey to becoming half the woman you are.

Abstract

Engagement strategies within online communities must be accountable for its investment and deliver measurable outcomes. Common measurement metrics used are typically active- and visible behaviours focused include posting frequency, views, comments, active users, followers, likes, and shares. They together represent active engagement. Targeting users' lack of active engagement can be seen as unfruitful and ineffective use of resources. Less active or non-engaging users known as lurkers, make up the majority of consumer base within online communities and are often treated as homogeneous and undesirable. This research challenges the conventional wisdom of lurkers by questioning whether passive, less visible, engagement, such as reading and digesting content, should be considered unproductive. By applying social learning theory, it seeks to provide alternative explanations for lurking on social media and so revise our understanding of user engagement.

This research employs a mixed methods design to target the UK skincare sector specifically. Utilising a sample of skincare users aged 18-74 years old, who are consumers and online browsers of skincare products, 19 semi-structured interviews were conducted, followed by an online survey (n=630). Results identify a new concept that exhibits a strong utility to profile lurking and related drivers and outcomes across a continuum rather than as a binary behaviour. This concept has been termed ‘lurking orientation’. It recognises that there are different ‘types’ of lurkers hence taking a ‘one size fits all approach’ to targeting these consumers is likely to be ineffective and inefficient for brands and organisations. This research is timely and original where it: 1) presents lurking as an inherent continuum behaviour (high/low) instead of a binary behaviour (present/absent), which this research labels as lurking orientation; 2) establishes the relevance of social learning theory to studying online lurking; 3) demonstrates the lurking orientation’s utility in segmenting and proposing a typology of lurkers; 4) identifies lurking orientation is influenced by online users’ personalities and motivations; and, 5) indicates lurking orientation, although exists online, can drive offline engagement behaviours (i.e. finding, purchasing, recommending products, etc.). These findings are informative to both academics and business practitioners alike.

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List of Acronyms

- BFI-10 – Big Five Inventory- 10 items scale
- Conservation of Resources Theory - COR theory
- Consumer Engagement - CE
- Lack of Community and Disconnection - LCD
- Lack of Entertainment and Relevance – LOER
- Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement - LIKE
- Lack of Passion and Interest - LPI
- Lurking Orientation – LO
- Online Communities - OC
- Online Communities of Interest – COI
- Participant Agreement Form - PAF
- Participant Information Sheet - PIS
- Perceived Low Priority and Benefit - PLPB
- Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience - PRI
- Preference for Passive Participation - PPP
- Research Ethics Panel – REP
- Research Objectives- ROs
- Self-Determination Theory - SDT
- Social Learning – SL
- Social Learning Theory - SLT
- Social Media - SM
- Social Networking Sites – SNS
- Uses and Gratifications Theory - U&G

Acknowledgement

I would firstly like to thank my supervisors: Professor Juliet Memery, Dr. Jason Sit, and Dr. Elvira Bolat, for their constant support, time, patience, guidance, and professionalism throughout this long, challenging but rewarding process. They have always believed in me and my potential even during times when I did not even believe in myself and wanted to give up numerous times. They have also been such an enormous part of my doctoral journey, and I cannot thank them enough for all they have done for me inside and outside of academia. I would not be able to have made it this far without them. Thank you for being such brilliant, kind, smart, and inspiring mentors, and also, a friend. Thank you for always for always wanting the best for me and not giving up on me. If only I could have an ounce of all of your skills, then I would consider myself to be extremely lucky. Blessed, is an understatement to have crossed paths with such amazing supervisors. I hope I have made you proud even by just a little bit.

I would also like to thank all the kind interviewees, and survey participants for taking time off to help this student out. The completion of this thesis would not be possible without their highly valuable responses. I am ever so grateful for all their help and involvement. I hope that this thesis can in some way help others, like others have helped me.

To my dearest family, I cannot thank you enough for all your endless love and support. Specially, my dad, thank you for giving me this greatest opportunity in life. My sweet sister Sana, who is always there for me when I need her- ready to share her knowledge and help out. Prof. Kritsda Khajarern for checking my reference list. My Arma, who I looked up to dearly and had promised to show off this PhD to her- I hope you are proudly celebrating this thesis with me up there. My most beloved mother, thank you for all you do. Finally, the Richards family, thank you for being my second family. I am forever blessed to have such an amazing support system. You all already know how much I value and love each and every one of you.

God bless everyone. Thank-you millions!

Author's declaration

This thesis has been composed by myself, Reem Albuhameed, and has not been submitted in any previous degree applications or any other awards. All quotations and contributions from other researchers and studies have been referenced and acknowledged along with their respective sources.

Any ethical clearance for this thesis has been approved by the Ethics Committee at Bournemouth University prior to any data collection. Participants that have participated in my research have all consented to take part and signed a participant agreement form having read a participant information sheet.

My supervisors, Professor Juliet Memery, Dr. Jason Sit, and Dr. Elvira Bolat all have agreed that this thesis may be submitted.

Research outputs

This research has been presented at the following conferences:

8TH COLLOQUIUM ON EUROPEAN RESEARCH IN RETAILING. 21-23 June 2023, University of Portsmouth; United Kingdom.

Albuhameed, R., Sit, J., and Memery, J., 2023. An Exploratory Study on Online Lurkers. *In:* M. Nieto Garcia, D. Acuti, J. Sit and X. Brusset, eds. *8th Colloquium on European Research in Retailing, 8,* Portsmouth, 21-23 June 2023. Portsmouth: University of Portsmouth. 2-6, ISBN 978-1-86137-678-7.

ACADEMY OF MARKETING SCIENCE 24th WORLD MARKETING CONGRESS, 11-14 July 2023. University of Kent; United Kingdom.

Albuhameed, R., Sit, J., Memery, J., and Bolat, E., 2023. A Qualitative Study on Lurkers and their Fear Motivations (Accepted for Publication). *In: Proceedings from the Academy of Marketing Science 24th World Marketing Congress*, 11-14 July 2023. Springer, Cham.

20TH EUROPEAN ASSOCIATION FOR EDUCATION AND RESEARCH IN COMMERCIAL DISTRIBUTION, 2-4 July 2019. Universidad Zaragoza; Spain.

Albuhameed, R., Bolat, E., Sit, J., and Memery, J., 2020. Effective consumer engagement with one social media platform: insights from O.K. Beauty. *In: European Association for Education and Research in Commercial Distribution, ed. 20th Retailing Challenges in the 2020s,* 2-4 July 2019. Zaragoza: Universidad Zaragoza.

FACULTY OF MANAGEMENT POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE, 26 June 2019. Bournemouth University; United Kingdom.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Background

Online communities (hereafter OCs) are one of the most powerful digital sources used by businesses to analyse online users' behavioural data (Santos et al. 2022; Akar and Mardikyan 2018). The emergence of Web 2.0 and Social Networking Services (SNS) also known as social media encapsulates various forms of online communities formed by social media users (Jin et al. 2023). These communities represented a turning point in online consumer behaviour, revolutionising the way customers interact and communicate with each other and with brands (Dolan et al. 2019). Enabling users to create, modify, transfer, and discuss content in these digital environments (Zhu and Dawson 2022; Akar and Mardikyan 2018). Central to this turning point is the concept of consumer engagement (hereafter CE) which recognises that consumers co-create value through these interactions.

OCs can be categorised in various ways. For example, Plant (2004) partition it into four areas: Communities of Interest, Communities of Relationship, Communities of Fantasy, and Communities of Transaction. Whilst Stanoevska-Slabeva (2002) identifed four types of communities: discussion or conversation communities, task and goal-oriented communities, virtual worlds, and hybrid communities. This research in particular focuses on the study of communities of interest (hereafter COI) within social media (hereafter SM). COI constitutes of members of online communities with common interests grouped together virtually. These members often create their own COI for non-commercial purposes (Li, Hoffman, and Zhu 2022). In this research case, the common ground of interest is Skincare. Within SM platforms such as Reddit, Facebook, etc. exists COI skincare groups where members communicate and discuss about all things related to the topic.

Like any marketing strategy, a social media strategy needs to be accountable for its investment and to deliver measurable outcomes. Brands have typically used CE as a benchmark tool to gauge the effectiveness of their social media strategies or campaigns for more than a decade (Hollebeek et al. 2021; Ashley and Tuten 2015). Metrics are currently widely used to measure investment and outcomes, such as sales,

brand referrals, brand attachment, brand loyalty, conversion rates, new revenue, shifts in traffic, and share of voice, with focus on the active behavioural engagement of target users (Barari et al. 2021; Dimitriu and Guesalaga 2017; Appleby 2016; Effing and Spil 2016). CE is expressed through three types of occurrences: affective, cognitive, and behavioural, which constitute the “dimensions” of CE (Schreiner, Fischer, and Riedl 2021; Brodie et al. 2011). However, despite consumer engagement being widely used and measured by practitioners, “there is still a limited consensus on the conceptualisations and scales used to measure the construct, the different contexts where the concept is applied, and the different actors involved” (Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro 2020, p.168). This has been the case for several years, as previously observed in Stathopoulou et al.’s (2017) study.

Brands tend to rely on consumers’ behavioural contributions for commercial success (i.e. number of follows, views, etc.) (Fernandes and Castrol 2020; Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2016). Behavioural engagement involves the frequency and recency of activities and interactions from social media users. These activities and interactions include comments, questions, likes, responses, visitors, followers, and friends, whilst interaction involves registration, email subscription, reposts, mentions, content contribution, virality, sentiment, reviews, and recommendations (Schee, Peltier, and Dahl 2020; Dolan et al. 2019; Appleby 2016; Effing and Spil 2016; Ashley and Tuten 2015). In other words, target users' lack of active behavioural engagement is considered a strategic failure and unproductive use of resources in a social media strategy. This is because active, successful online participation and engagement has been defined mainly by visible participation, so negative approaches to other forms of passive (lurking) behaviour will hamper the way online spaces are understood (Santos et al. 2022; Riva, Wiederhold, and Cipresso 2016).

Whilst past approaches have some benefits and exhibit strong conceptual foundations, collectively, they still present indistinct views and measurement of engagement that lack comprehension and are inoperative. Additionally, research offers limited conceptualisation of social media engagement behaviour as they are entirely based on the frequency of behavioural activities (Shahbaznezhad, Dolan, and Rashidirad 2020). Marketers need to comprehend their audiences, including lurkers, to target them effectively and drive success (Santos et al. 2022; Hollebeek et al. 2021).

Underscoring the significance of engaging with all user types including lurkers is what this study aims to tackle. Some thought-provoking questions are worth exploring because the answers may expand (revise) our notion of user-engagement with a social media strategy. For example, 'Are online users unproductive when they do not engage with the posted content behaviourally? What if they merely read and digest the posted content - are these behaviours considered unproductive?'.

Within the typical treatment of users' lack of active behavioural engagement, many scholars (e.g., Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Edelmann 2017; Tagarelli and Interdonato 2013) and practitioners have the tendency to treat the activity as undesirable and the individuals undertaking the behaviour, i.e., lurkers, as homogeneous. Despite the emphasis on active engagement metrics, the significance of lurking behaviour remains poorly understood and often overlooked (Zhu and Dawson 2023). Therefore, this research aims to understand and communicate the significance of lurking behaviour. Given that, lurkers, form a substantial portion of online community users based on the 90-9-1 rule – that is, 90% of online users will just read content (lurkers), 9% may alter content, and 1% actively contribute new content (posters) (Garfield 2020).

Treating lurkers as a homogeneous group and their behaviour as undesirable is rather blinkered as recent research suggests that both visible and invisible forms of engagement contribute positively to brand loyalty (Farhat et al. 2022). Additionally, there is typical conceptualisation and measurement of consumer engagement from a behavioural perspective, with lurkers classified as social media users who are less interactive behaviourally than posters and contributors (Zhu and Dawson 2023; Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2016). For this reason, companies are striving to convert lurkers into active content providers and academics are focused on compiling 'de-lurking' strategies to covert lurkers into more 'active roles', posters or 'doners' (Katikaridi 2023; Mousavi and Roper 2023; Hong and Li 2020; Tagarelli et al. 2018). The current study thus aims to address these shortcomings by investigating lurking behaviour, the extent to which it is highly unproductive to brands and, if not, the extent to which it is productive to brands and how.

Engagement within social media can also occur through discrete levels of behavioural intensities that fall on a continuum, including lower intensity and more passive

engagement behaviours (i.e., consuming - viewing, listening, reading, etc.), moderately active engagement behaviours (i.e., contributing - rating, liking, sharing, tagging, etc.), and highly active engagement behaviours (i.e., creating - uploading, commenting, publishing) (Dolan et al. 2019). This raises the question: 'If online users are categorised as one of two extremes (i.e., lurkers and posters), is there a continuum between these levels of engagement (passive-moderate-high)?'. This study will go beyond the behavioural elements of likes, comments, shares, etc. to study lurking behaviour which to date, has not yet been explored. This research embraces both forms of active and passive participation, in order to understand online lurking behaviour. Marketers and practitioners can also benefit from their understanding through the development of effective, tailored marketing strategies that resonates with all consumers. Which can in turn enhance the respective online community and improve consumer engagement and loyalty.

Moreover, this research will build an understanding of why the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of lurkers exists or, in other words, the drivers of lurking behaviour, and whether their (lurkers') engagement can be positively conceptualised and measured differently (non-behaviourally) when an alternative perspective is considered. To date, lurkers impact on engagement and community dynamics is underexplored (Santos et al. 2021). The current research is crucial for marketers and practitioners seeking to optimize their understanding of online consumer behaviour and enhance online strategies. Recognizing the value of lurkers and addressing their needs can improve engagement, drive revenue, and maintain a competitive edge in the digital landscape (Santos et al. 2021). Moreover, insights from this study contribute to academic research by deepening understanding of online participation and engagement patterns, informing future studies and theories in the field.

1.2 Research Gaps

To summarise and build on the aforementioned discussion, there are several research gaps this study will focus on tackling. First being the limited conceptualisation of engagement behaviour. Whilst existing research emphasizes the importance of CE on social media, it primarily focuses on observable and measurable behaviours such as likes, comments, and shares (Zhu and Dawson 2023; Santos et al. 2021; Dolan et al. 2019). So, there is a need to broaden the conceptualisation of engagement behaviour to include both active and passive forms of engagement. Passive engagement, such as lurking, where online users known as lurkers, consume content without actively participating (Zhu and Dawson 2024). It makes sense to study lurking behaviour since lurkers represent a silent majority within online communities (Garfield 2020). Their engagement although generally deemed as passive, can indicate trends, preferences, and emerging interests that active participation might not fully capture. This study therefore focuses on understanding lurking behaviour, why a user may lurk (psychological and behavioural factors), and their subsequent impact on online engagement.

Second, the underestimation of lurking behaviour which is often overlooked and considered undesirable by both academics and practitioners. There is a gap in understanding the significance and potential value of lurking behaviour (Santos et al. 2021). This research will embrace all forms of activities whether passive or active to delve deeper into understanding lurking behaviour. Moreover, multiple researchers (e.g., Zhu and Dawson 2023; Zhu and Dawson 2023b; Mousavi and Roper 2023; Santos et al. 2021) agree that more studies are needed to develop existing knowledge of lurking behaviour and the different types of activities a lurker may execute online. Similarly, there is a gap in understanding the psychological influences behind the behaviour which gives rise to the third gap. Researchers have called for further exploration into the psychological factors and motivations that prevents lurkers from engaging actively across social media platforms (Le et al. 2022; Fernandes and Castro 2020).

This research is timely and essential, benefitting platform developers, moderators, community managers, learning facilitators, marketers, and social media analysts as platforms can be designed more effectively to account for both posters and lurkers.

Inclusivity can be promoted, strategies and policies can be effectively devised to encourage participation, and similarly with content and engagement tactics ensuring that the silent majority is not overlooked (Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt 2024).

The fourth and final gap exists where the existing homogenous treatment of lurkers, that is also treated as an unbeneficial and undesirable behaviour due to researchers and practitioners prioritising other active forms of behaviours. This research will address whether there is a continuum between levels of engagement performed by lurkers and posters (passive-moderate-high).

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Having discussed the research gaps, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, no studies have explored the questions they raise, such as: When or under what circumstances the users' lack of active behavioural engagement can be desirable? Are the users that are inactive with behavioural engagement truly homogeneous? If the answer is "no", how can the users with inactive behavioural engagement be segmented and profiled more heterogeneously? Therefore, the main aim of this research is:

To challenge the conventional conceptualisation and measurement of lurking on social media and explore whether different types of lurkers exist.

This research aim translates into four specific objectives:

1. To critically review the extant conceptualisation and measurement of lurking behaviour in online communities of interest on social media
2. To explore the roles of personality and motivational factors in explaining lurking behaviour on social media
3. To explore whether online lurking behaviour influences offline engagement behaviours
4. To establish whether online lurking behaviour is a singular or plural in nature, and whether different types of lurkers exist based on objective 1, 2, and 3.

These objectives ensure that the study follows a sequential exploratory design, where qualitative findings inform the subsequent quantitative phase, leading to the identification and analysis of distinct lurker segments through cluster analysis.

1.4 Expected Contributions

Based on the research aim and objectives developed above, and in line with the research gaps presented earlier, this study expects to contribute to the study of online consumer engagement, lurking behaviour, and social media literature in five major ways.

Firstly, this research will contribute to the theoretical understanding of lurking by challenging the traditional definitions and measurements. When it comes to the term 'lurkers', past research has presented negative conceptualisations, with them often being described as, "online parasites", "passive users", "free riders", "read-only participants", or even "selfish" in some cases (Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Rheingold 2000; Edelmann 2013; Kollock and Smith 1999; Morris and Ogan 1996;). These negative connotations may have arisen due to past studies generally looking at lurking from a behavioural perspective. Hence, this research focuses on conceptualising and measuring lurking through a non-behavioural lens and exploring whether alternative conceptualisations can be derived. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes lurking on social media, moving beyond simplistic or pejorative views of homogeneity.

Secondly, this research challenges the typical homogeneity of lurkers and aims to identify and develop a typology of lurkers. By identifying distinct types or segments of lurkers, the research will introduce a new typology framework that categorises lurkers based on their behaviours, motivations, and personality traits. This typology can serve as a foundation for future studies in the field.

Thirdly, the research will contribute to existing literature by uncovering and explaining the connections between online lurking and offline engagement. This will help bridge the gap between online behaviour studies and more traditional offline behaviour research. As far as the researcher is aware, no studies to date have addressed this gap.

Fourthly, the research will provide further insights into both user motivation and personality combined. By exploring how personality traits and motivations influence lurking, the research will contribute to the broader understanding of social media use from a psychological and behavioural perspective. This could have implications for how we understand the social dynamics of online communities.

Finally, the findings will be beneficial for researchers who wish to explore the construct further as well as for practitioners. It will be beneficial because it enables the understanding of online community dynamics and the factors that influence lurking behaviour. In summation, by examining why individuals choose to lurk instead of actively participating in online communities, researchers can correctly target individuals, identify barriers to engagement, and develop strategies to further encourage participation. Moreover, studying lurking can provide insights into the motivations and behaviours of different types of users, including those hesitant to participate in online communities. This can help platform designers and community managers create more inclusive and welcoming environments that encourage engagement from a diverse range of users. In other words, the research contributes towards improved social media strategies, tailored content and engagement strategies, and policy implications related to user engagement ensuring inclusivity of various user behaviours.

1.6 Research Context

The focal context and community of interest for this research is the UK skincare consumers within social media. Skincare in a nutshell, refers to “the use of cosmetics to care for the skin” (Oxford dictionary 2020, p.1). The skincare market is the top performing sector within the overall beauty industry even after the COVID-19 pandemic (Malone 2022). The beauty industry consists of five sectors, namely: skincare, haircare, colour (make-up), fragrances, and toiletries (bath and shower products) (Sender 2020). Of the five sectors, the skincare sector is chosen as the focal context of this study for three main reasons.

Firstly, skincare has become increasingly popular and important in modern society as individuals are more conscious of their appearance, self-care, and maintaining healthy skin (Choi et al. 2019). Therefore, researching the skincare sector helps to identify emerging trends, consumer preferences, and market opportunities. The skincare sector's economic importance and influence on consumer behaviour, self-expression, and societal norms are underscored by the prevailing societal trends of pursuing perfection and self-care through beauty products (Ceron 2023; Choi et al. 2019).
Secondly, it is an industry where brands actively and frequently use social media to engage with their consumers (Tiseo 2019) and social media is ranked as one of the top platforms enabling its discovery (Malone 2022). Likewise, Perera and Gunathilake (2020) note how the beauty industry moves forward in utilising technology in the successful marketing of beauty products.
Thirdly, the UK beauty industry is large, currently projected at £12.85bn as of 2024 and expected to further expand annually by 2.29% up until 2028 (Statista Market Insights 2024). This continued growth is due to increased interest, especially amongst modern women, and is considered to be the most representative part of 'appearance management' proven by the investment of time and money (Choi et al. 2019). The large market size, influence, and value makes researching the field worthwhile. As online skincare communities continue to develop, literature concerning the relationship between social media and skincare grows more important (Reddy 2021).

Additionally, based on the premise that COI can be formed online on social media (Li, Hoffman, and Zhu 2022), platforms such as SNSs (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, X, etc.), search engines and online forums are chosen as the context of investigation for this study. Utilising social media (SM) can be advantageous for skincare brands for several reasons: 1) social media can reach out to and influence large user groups, 2) it can create demand for beauty products, 3) it can raise awareness of the brand, 4) it can enhance the audience reach, 5) it can reinforce brand loyalty, and 6) SM can facilitate interactions, collaborations, and the sharing of content (Kim and Ko 2012; Shen and Bissell 2013).

Fenty beauty is one of the most popular beauty, cosmetics, and skincare brand that launched in 2017, gained over 1.4 million followers within just four days (Gilliland 2021) and now has more than 13.1 million followers on Instagram as of November 2024

(Fenty Beauty 2024). This is because the social media approach of Fenty Beauty extends beyond simply exhibiting its products and promoting new releases. It incorporates various kinds of material, including product evaluations, makeup tutorials, behind-the-scenes content, and content generated by users, in order to interact and bond with customers, thereby boosting loyalty, commitment, and trust. By utilising these channels (Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, and X (formely Twitter)), Fenty Beauty creates a distinctive and individualised connection with its supporters and is built based on a 'beauty for all' concept, which is their brand's slogan (Fenty Beauty 2024). Additionally, one COI is r/SkincareAddiction, an online forum of over 3.8 million members on Reddit depicts how popular skincare content can be across social media platforms.

The choice to focus solely on the UK skincare sector in this research is supported by the numerous positive factors associated with this market, as discussed earlier. This chosen research context is further discussed in Chapter 5.6. Additionally, brands can leverage social media to target consumers effectively, enhance brand awareness, facilitate product discovery, drive sales growth, and foster customer loyalty. The benefits support that exploring the skincare sector of the beauty industry for this research is worthwhile. Moreover, existing literature that conceptualises social media engagement in the skincare sector is quite narrow and predominantly behaviourally focused (engagement measured in terms of the frequency of measurable online activities, i.e., posts/comments/shares etc.), despite it growing commercially through social media deployment. Therefore, further studies are required (Faraoni et al. 2017; Kefi et al. 2016; Shen and Bisell 2013).

1.7 Thesis Structure

Following this initial chapter, to achieve its intended contributions, this research addresses the above-mentioned aim and objectives outlined in section 1.3, following a series of steps delineated in the following chapters.

Chapters 2 to 4 provide the literature review. Chapter 2 discusses social media engagement and the popular conceptualisations surrounding consumer engagement. Chapter 3 explores the drivers of lurking behaviour and how lurking has been conceptualised behaviourally in research as a form of passive engagement. Whilst Chapter 4 details the psychological and behavioural factors associated with lurking. These chapters present a review of the different key factors (motivation, personality, online and offline engagement behaviour) that may drive or influence one's lurking behaviour. Different theories, research areas, and literature will be investigated to identify any gaps that could be filled and key elements that will be discussed in this thesis. Moreover, the chapters will also address some current limitations of popular studies.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology for this research and introduces and explains the chosen research design for this research. It looks at the chosen research philosophy, approach, strategy, choices, techniques and procedures, and time horizon. This chapter is extremely important in order to successfully achieve the research's aim and objectives. It discusses and focuses on a mixed methods (sequential qualitative-quantitative) approach, detailing the process and design undertaken for both phases of data collection and analysis. Additionally, the chapter also further discusses the chosen research context of focus (the UK skincare sector).

Chapters 6 (qualitative analysis) and 7 (quantitative analysis) respectively share the analytical processes followed in each stage of data collection and reports the key results and findings obtained from their analysis.

Chapter 8 is the integrated discussion chapter where both qualitative and quantitative findings are discussed from the previous chapters whilst reflecting on the literature review to draw key findings, significant insights, and new contributions, in-line with the

research's aims and objectives. This chapter explores and evaluates how this investigation has achieved the proposed research aim and objectives.

Finally, Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter to this thesis which summarises the key findings and unique contributions obtained from this research, as well as discussing the theoretical contribution, managerial implications, limitations and areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL MEDIA ENGAGEMENT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines and discusses the theoretical foundations guiding this research, examines the gaps existent in relevant literature and thus determines the rationale for the research. The focus of this chapter is to understand online social media engagement as it forms the basis of conceptualising one's lurking behaviour and outcomes resulting from one's online behaviour regardless of the platform. It consists of several key sections, focusing on areas such as: online consumer engagement (CE), popular conceptualisations of CE, online CE present in online communities (particularly social media), and how communities of interest (COI) can be formed within these communities by social media users, the dimensions of CE, the antecedents and outcomes of CE, and the traditional form of CE (offline CE). Additionally, this chapter will initiate the building of the research framework for this thesis, aimed at improving overall understanding and communication of lurking behaviour.

2.2 Conceptualising Online Consumer Engagement

Online consumer engagement (hereafter, CE) attracts significant and growing attention from both academics and marketing practitioners (Hollebeek et al. 2021; So, Li and Kim 2020). Over the past 15 years, there has been a surge in the number of publications surrounding engagement highlighting the rapid growth of CE. This rise in numbers reflect the increasing recognition of CE as a critical concept in marketing and business strategy (Hollebeek et al. 2021). One of the emerging trends found in CE research, is the increasing focus on digital and social media engagement (Hollebeek et al. 2021). This is no surprise as consumers increasingly gained access to digital and social media platforms as a means of communication and interaction with others Santini et al. 2020). Despite the growth, CE can be regarded as a complex topic due to the lack of consensus on the conceptualisations and scales to measure the construct, the different contexts where the concept is applied, and the different actors involved (Martinek 2021; Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro 2020). Several authors (e.g.

Hollebeek et al. 2021; Martinek 2021) call for continued exploration of this multifaceted, complex construct due to its relevance in modern marketing.

Part of CE being a complex construct is due to its various theoretical underpinnings which include different perspectives on its definition and scope (Hollebeek et al. 2021). As an example, within marketing research, the terms ‘customer engagement’ and ‘consumer engagement’ are used interchangeably by multiple authors (e.g., Hollebeek et al. 2023; Eslami, Ghasemaghaei, and Hassanein 2022; Rosado-Pito and Loureiro 2020; Brodie et al. 2013).

Definitions wise, consumer engagement is seen as “a psychological state that occurs by interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object (e.g. a brand) in focal service relationships” (Bilro and Loureiro 2020, p.292; Santos et al. 2022). Whilst customer engagement is the intensity of an individual’s participation and connection with the organisation’s offerings and activities initiated by either the customer themselves or the organisation (Bilro and Loureiro 2020; Vivek et al. 2012). Additionally, Bilro and Loureiro (2020) and Vivek et al. (2012) differentiates the two, with customer engagement being the level of a customer’s physical, emotional, and cognitive presence in his/her relationship with a service organisation. There are also various conceptualisations and measurements to customer engagement, but it can be divided into four main perspectives: intrinsic motivation, psychological mind states, customer activities, or contributions to firms (Santini et al. 2020).

For consistency purposes, the researcher will utilise the term ‘consumer engagement’ instead of customer engagement and utilising both terms synonymously. With awareness of many researchers referring to the two terms interchangeably, the decision to differentiate both terms is made to ensure that all literature in the field is specifically covered. Upon analysing 15 years’ worth of literature on CE, Hollebeek et al. (2021) emphasises the need for more unified and generalizable insights in CE research to address the growing fragmentation in the field. By providing a holistic understanding of the construct, it will enable the identification of future research area as well as help consolidate findings across different contexts and methodologies.

In light of the discussion presented earlier, this research adopts Brodie et al. (2013) as the working definition of online consumer engagement:

> *"Consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand, and/or other members of the community. Consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterised by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes. Consumer engagement is a multi-dimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange where other relational concepts are engagement antecedents and/or consequences in iterative engagement processes within the brand community"* (p.107).

This research's rationale for choosing Brodie et al.'s (2013) working definition includes: 1) frequent use in marketing research- even as of now in 2024; this definition is similar to that of Hollebeek et al. (2023). Hollebeek et al. (2023) identifies three main characteristics of CE as its: i) interactive nature, ii) resource investment in brand interactions, and iii) multidimensionality. 2) comprehensive scope: it encompasses various aspects of consumer engagement, including specific interactive experiences, various dimensions, and its role in relational exchange within the brand community; 3) contextual relevance: it considers how engagement levels and experiences can vary based on the specific virtual brand community and; 4) inclusiveness: the definition acknowledges that consumer engagement can involve interactions not only with the brand but also with other community members. Overall, this definition provides a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of consumer engagement in online communities, considering its contextual nature, psychological aspects, iterative processes, and relational implications.

2.3 Social Media Consumer Engagement

With the existence of social media (SM), marketers are increasingly using the platform to connect and engage with consumers, facilitate product and brand information exchange, and nurture consumer-brand relationships (Carlson et al. 2021). SM is also defined as an "online means of communication, conveyance, collaboration, and cultivation among interconnected and interdependent networks of people, communities, and organisations enhanced by technological capabilities and mobility" (Tuten and Solomon 2018, p.4). For these reasons, SM can be beneficial across various processes, from customer service to product innovation (Muninger, Mahr, and Hammedi 2022). Therefore, SM is known as an ideal tool to establish CE because it gives consumers the ability to connect, share, and engage online with other brands and consumers (Martínek, Caliandro and Denegri-Knott 2022). Similar to the conceptualisations of CE, CE in social media also comprises a "multiplicity of definitions, conceptualisations and foci, authors have felt the need to compare and summarise the research on consumer engagement in social media" (Santos et al. 2022, p.2).

CE on social media can occur through three engagement levels: i) consumption which includes passive activities like reading and watching, ii) contribution which involves interactions such as commenting and sharing, and iii) creation which relates to active content creation through posts and images (Cao et al. 2021). Trunfio and Rossi (2021) confirm how engagement within social media is polysemic and multi-dimensional and the levels can be classified utilising the COBRA model. Despite the significant increase in publications surrounding social media engagement, the field is still considered relatively young. Calls have been made for future research to develop a more nuanced understanding and measurement of the construct especially for evaluating engagement across various social media platforms (Trunfio and Rossi 2021).

CE can be measured based on one's participation in social media channels (Moran et al. 2020; Ashley and Tuten 2015). It can be understood as users' behavioural responses in the form of clicks, likes/reactions, shares, and comments (Moran et al. 2020; Swani and Labrecque 2020). In addition to these, Dimitriu and Guesalaga (2017, p.583) state that participation also involves but is not limited to:

- *“Looking for brand coupons and discounts.*
- *Actively searching brand-related information.*
- *Getting brand information from others.*
- *Using social media as a channel to directly communicate with the brand.*
- *Engaging with brand interactive content (e.g., games, apps, lotteries, contests, videos, etc.).*
- *Commenting positively on the brand.*
- *Commenting negatively on the brand.*
- *Displaying information (e.g., written posts, pictures, videos) about own-brand experiences.*
- *Getting involved in discussions/threads about the brand.*
- *Visiting brand fan page(s).*
- *Following the brand news and updates (i.e., reading, liking, commenting on them).*
- *“Liking” or following the brand.*
- *Sharing information about the brand”.*

The extent of engagement differs from ‘simple’ types of engagement (e.g. likes) to higher forms of engagement linked to co-creation activities (e.g. posting reviews) (Shahbaznezhad et al. 2021). Since CE is context-specific, social media was chosen as a focus area because its utilisation is powerful in building intimate relationships with consumers, due to its popularity, interactivity, and ability to facilitate consumer networks more effectively and efficiently when compared to the use of traditional media (Eslami et al. 2022; Shawky et al. 2018). Moreover, consumers are gaining more power through social media and are now taking control of the marketing communication process. Consequently, consumers are becoming message creators, collaborators, and commentators (Li et al. 2020). Therefore, since social media has become ever more important strategically for marketers to gain a competitive advantage and improve performance, it is crucial to understand consumer engagement. It becomes increasingly important to study CE in social contexts that go beyond just purchases and involve social interactions (Morgan-Thomas et al. 2020). For these reasons, social media platforms serve as the context for this research.

CE in social media has been conceptualised both uni-dimensionally and multi-dimensionally based on three approaches: consumer motivation to interact with the community, known as motivational CE, consumer attitude towards the community, known as attitudinal CE, and consumer practices within the community, known as behavioural CE (Santos et al. 2020). The first approach is based on uses and gratifications theory, whereby consumers' motives to engage are influenced by the benefits they expect to receive from engaging in the community, resulting from the interaction with the brand and other participants (Santos et al. 2022). Many quantitative studies were found to utilise this approach to measure CE, as reported by Santos et al. (2022).

The second approach is broader and is used to conceptualise community engagement, as it involves consumers' psychological state of mind based on cognitive, affective, and behavioural aspects. The measurement scales developed by this approach reflect emotions, brand attention, and enthusiastic participation, factors not directly related to specific benefits coming from the brand (Dessart et al. 2020).

The third approach is based on consumer behaviour within the community also utilising U&G theory and media uses where engagement scales are developed to support consumers' activities" (Santos et al. 2022, p.8). The current research is a blend of all the approaches as it will be investigating lurkers' motives behind their participation rates and the influencing psychological and behavioural influences behind lurkers' participation.

Despite the multiple benefits of utilising social media, as mentioned previously, consumer engagement within the medium is rather complex. Its complexities continue to be an issue for social media users and marketers. For example, a recent news article reported on how six in ten businesses still do not know how to use social media effectively to boost their customer base with 40% even completely unaware of how to advertise their business using the platform (Mirreh 2021). There is still an engagement gap when it comes to conceptualising engagement on social media, which has been evident for more than half a decade (Santos et al. 2022; Barger, Peltier, and Schultz 2016). This engagement gap has arisen due to:

- Lack of understanding and inconsistencies of how engagement can be created, tracked, and measured.

- Social media comprises a variety of platforms and formats, making it a complicated process for companies to track and coordinate their efforts across the fragmented medium. Moreover, content saturation across the channels has cognitively influenced consumers by forcing them to either ignore or become more selective in the content they view and process.
- Social media is over-relied on by marketers for short-term sales gains to deliver promotions to consumers. This continues to have a negative effect on brand equity.

2.3.1 Communities of Interest on Social Media

Communities of Interest (hereafter COI) has been defined as groups of individuals/members of online communities that form around shared interests, hobbies, goals, or causes (Malinen 2015; Bishop 2007; Ridings and Gefen 2004). The concept emphasizes the voluntary nature of participation and the importance of shared goals in online communities. Various forms of activities including digital learning can occur within COI. Dalsgaard and Ryberg (2023) explains that there are three main learning activities occurring within digital spaces such as COI. The activities are: i) inquiry which involves the process of asking questions and seeking answers, ii) construction where learners create or build knowledge or artifacts, and iii) communication where interaction and dialogue within various social forms (i.e. social learning).

Research has shown the increasing influence of social media on shared interests such as dermatology or skincare for example (Reddy 2021). Online communities of interest like r/SkincareAddiction with over 3.8 million members enable discussion of skincare. These platforms often function as support groups, and information aggregators, collecting content across various social media platforms, which can in turn influence the decision-making and purchase intentions of individuals seeking skincare advice and recommendations (Mandasari 2024; Reddy 2021). Mandasari et al. (2024) explained the importance for skincare brands to build social media communities that resonate emotionally with consumers in order to enhance brand affection, and purchase intentions. These outcomes are influenced by engaging social media content and community-building activities. The above is an example of

how increased online engagement can influence offline sales, especially for products that can be purchased offline like skincare. Bar-Gill and Reichman (2021) explain this level and influence and suggests that managers consider the need to balance both online and offline engagement strategies. Studying lurking behaviour in communities of interest offers a deeper understanding of online engagement. It uncovers valuable yet hidden participation, and supports more inclusive and effective community management strategies, which is where this research comes in.

2.4 Dimensions of Consumer Engagement

Additionally, various definitions and explanations of CE on social media exist. Santos et al. (2022) comprehensively reviewed existing research surrounding CE in social media brand communities and noted how CE is often conceptualized as a psychological state encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. Similarly, Hollebeek et al.'s (2023) study uncovered 28 key articles that propose CE scales, emphasizing that most consider CE as a multi-dimensional concept through encompassing these three dimensions (e.g., Schee et al. 2020). Some studies (e.g., Schreiner, Fischer, and Riedl 2021) look at CE as a behaviour-based construct extending beyond brand purchase and with a brand or firm focus, whilst other key studies look at CE as a psychological and motivational concept (e.g., Dessart et al. 2020).

On the other hand, various studies examine CE in a social media context as a uni-dimensional concept and treat engagement purely as a behaviour-based construct-involving the activities of likes/reactions, comments, and shares (Eslami et al. 2022; Moran et al. 2020; Swani and Labrecque 2020). Building on the activity-related perspective, CE often links to engaged, "active" consumers, or posters who participate in these behavioural forms of activities on social media. Based on these behaviour-based explanations, CE studies seem to champion active rather than passive participation (e.g. Veloutsou and Black 2020). From this, the current research recognises that engagement can manifest in various ways multi-dimensionally. By adopting a multi-dimensional approach to CE, it will allow for a more comprehensive understanding of engagement. As explained in the introduction chapter, this research conceptualises lurking behaviour from a non-behavioural perspective because lurking

has been viewed previously in a uni-dimensional (behavioural) manner that yielded negative conceptualisations of the term. Scales that simplify CE into uni-dimensional constructs may miss important aspects of engagement and overlook its interactive nature which is critical for a more accurate conceptualization (Hollebeek et al. 2023).

2.4.1 Uni-dimensionality versus multi-dimensionality

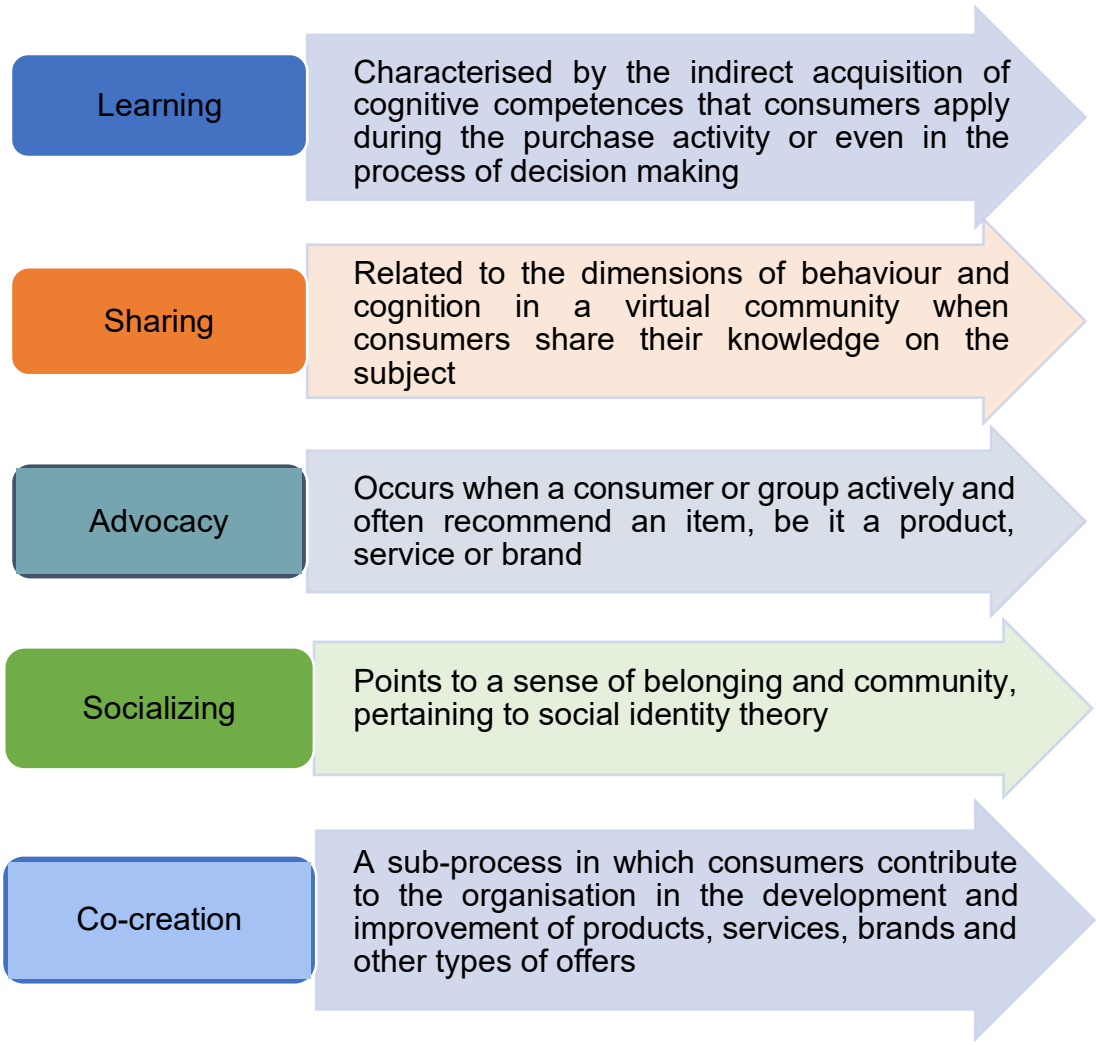
The behavioural dimension of CE is particularly significant in the context of social media where consumer actions such as likes/reactions, shares, and comments represent active participation (Santos et al. 2022; Algharabat et al. 2020). The behavioural dimension of engagement looks at engagement as an observable behaviour which refers to any interaction or interactive experience between a consumer and a firm/brand, and/or other members of the community that goes beyond the pure purchase or servicing process. It arises in quantifiable actions or engagement behaviours, such as the number of followers, posts, likes/reactions, comments and shares on social media, as well as consumer referrals and influence, word-of-mouth (WOM), consumer knowledge and reviews (Wies et al. 2023; Santos et al. 2022).

Santos et al. (2022) analysed 132 articles surrounding CE on social media and found how a substantial portion of the literature views CE uni-dimensionally through a behavioural lens. Behavioural engagement is viewed as a strong indicator of engagement as it leads to various positive outcomes for brands, including increased brand loyalty, positive word-of-mouth, and enhanced brand trust (Santos et al. 2022). Behavioural CE is manifested via social media through several ways. It focuses on the actions consumers take within brand communities, such as content consumption (passive engagement), contribution (active engagement like commenting or sharing), and creation (user-generated content) (Schee et al. 2020). Additionally, this could be through learning, sharing, and endorsing (Dessart et al. 2015).

Understanding all levels to CE and not just the behavioural dimension helps maximize brand engagement and loyalty (Schee et al. 2020). Therefore, this research adopts a comprehensive multi-dimensional view to CE when studying lurking behaviour as it allows for a more nuanced and insightful understanding of the construct, its motivations, context-specific factors, psychological implications, and potential for engagement. “When a consumer recognises a need to solve a specific problem or satisfy a want, performs a search, identifies a specific online community, and begins an interactive relationship with the community by posting a comment” (Brodie et al. 2013, p.111). These triggers lead to the interplay of the five consumer-engagement sub-processes (Lima et al. 2019).

The five sub-processes of engagement occur in an iterative, dynamic manner, and do not occur in any particular sequential order (see Figure 1). These sub-processes demonstrate multi-dimensionality of affective, cognitive, and behavioural qualities which can lead to performance outcomes, such as brand referrals, sales growth, co-creation, and profitability, which can help predict future business performance and sustain competitive advantage (Santos et al. 2022).

Figure 1: Five sub-processes of online consumer engagement (multi-dimensional). (Adapted from: Lima, Irigaray, and Lourenco 2019, p.19).



Having discussed both uni- and multi-dimensionality views of CE, Table 1 lists the researcher's understanding of the differences between the two. Based on these differences, studying lurking behaviour from a uni-dimensional perspective will yield a limited study. This is because of its inability to capture a wider range of consumer experiences and behaviours than when studying it from a multi-dimensional perspective. Therefore, as mentioned earlier, this research adopts the multi-dimensional view of CE because it allows for a deeper understanding of the various factors that contribute to lurking behaviour. Considering multi-dimensionality provides insights into the underlying processes and motivations that will influence lurking behaviour. Uni-dimensional engagement, while useful for examining specific aspects, may not capture the full picture or provide as much insight into the consumer's engagement experience.

Table 1: Differences between uni- and multi-dimensional CE.

	Uni-dimensional CE	**Multi-dimensional CE**
Scope	Focuses on a single aspect or dimension of engagement (i.e., behavioural factor only).	Focuses on multiple dimensions simultaneously (i.e., cognitive, emotional, and behavioural factors).
Measurement	Employs measures that assess engagement within a specific dimension. Example: employing a survey that only assesses behavioural elements, such as the frequency of certain activities (i.e., How many times do you comment on a post?).	Employs multiple indicators across different dimensions, providing a more comprehensive assessment of engagement.
Complexity	Simplified by focusing on a single dimension of CE.	Recognises that CE is complex.

Source: Developed for this research by the researcher.

2.5 Antecedents and Outcomes of Social Media Consumer Engagement

Behavioural engagement is driven by various key factors such as community interactivity, content relevance, and consumer motivations (Santos et al. 2022). However, CE within social media is complex and goes beyond the type of motivational behaviour that influences it. Consumer status, consumer disposition, the type of online community and its context all play a strong role in one's user behaviour (Schee et al. 2020; Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2015).

Similarly, personality is a leading factor that determines why people behave the way they do in both online and offline settings and is described by traits (Schee et al. 2020). For example, Lampropoulos et al. (2022) emphasises the need to understand the role of personality traits in shaping social media behaviour. They identified openness and extraversion as the most positive predictors of social media engagement and use upon comparing findings from various research. Putting personality into context, extraverted individuals, for instance, are more likely to engage in behaviours such as commenting, liking, and sharing content, reflecting their need for social interaction and visibility (Lampropoulos et al. 2022). Lampropoulos et al. (2022) calls for further research on how different personality traits influence specific types of social media engagement and to examine these effects across different platforms which is what this research will consider.

Building on the above discussion, Table 2 lists some of the key potential antecedents, outcomes, and components of consumer engagement on social media as of recent years. The table captures a comprehensive view of how consumers engage with brands on social media, from what motivates them to engage, to the different forms their engagement takes, and the resulting benefits for brands and consumers alike. This research follows Santos et al. (2022) recommendation of exploring how passive participants are involved in online communities in order to close existing research gap.

Table 2: Antecedents, Outcomes, Components of CE on Social Media.

Category	Elements	References
Antecedents	**Intrinsic Motivation**: enjoyment, satisfaction, interest, trust, emotional appeal, personality traits	Lampropoulos et al. (2022), Schee, Peltier, and Dahl (2020), Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro (2020), Deng et al. (2021), Santini et al. (2020), Barari et al. (2020)
	Extrinsic Motivation: rewards, incentives, recognition, benefits	Arghashi and Yuksel (2023), Chadoulos, Koutsopoulos, and Polyzos (2020), Schee, Peltier, and Dahl (2020); Bilro and Loureiro (2020)
	Perceived Brand Value: quality, reputation, self-expressive brands, involvement, participation	Santos et al. (2022), Barari et al. (2020); Li, Larimo, and Leonidou (2021)
	Social Influence: peer interaction, social proof, WOM	Saikia and Bhattacharjee (2024), Rasool, Shah, and Islam (2020), Barari et al. (2020), Santini et al. (2020)
	Platform Affordances: ease of use, features, content characteristics, interactivity.	Hollebeek et al. (2022), Deng et al. (2021), Voorveld et al. (2018), Carlson, Rahman, and De Vries (2018)
	Community Participation: sense of belonging	Hollebeek et al. (2021), Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2021)

Outcomes	**Brand Loyalty**: repeat engagement, advocacy	Santos et al. (2022), Hollebeek et al. (2021), Barari et al., (2020)
	Brand Awareness/Associations	Santos et al. (2022), Barari et al., (2020)
	Customer Satisfaction: fulfilment of expectations	Li et al. (2020), Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro (2020)
	Purchase Intention: intention to buy or recommend	Santos et al. (2022), Onofrei, Filieri, and Kennedy (2022), He, Li, and Xue (2022), Rasool, Shah, and Islam (2020)
	User-Generated Content: creation of brand-related content	Muntinga et al. (2021), Rosado-Pinto and Loureiro (2020), Schee, Peltier, and Dahl (2020)
	Trust and Commitment: confidence in the brand	Hollebeek et al. (2021)
	Word-of-Mouth (WOM)	Barari et al., (2020)
Components	**Cognitive Engagement**: focus, interest in content	Santos et al. (2022), Algharabat et al. (2020), Li et al. (2020), Hollebeek et al. (2021), Vivek et al. (2020)
	Enduring Engagement: long-term loyalty, brand advocacy	Algharabat et al. (2020), Vivek et al. (2020)
	Behavioural Engagement: likes, comments, shares	Santos et al. (2022), Barari et al., (2020), Deng et al. (2021), Lampropoulos et al. (2022)
	Emotional Engagement: inspiration, attachment	Santos et al. (2022), Barari et al., (2020)

2.6 Traditional Offline Consumer Engagement

CE also exists in offline contexts in the form of offline engagement behaviour (Dolan 2019). Upon establishing how lurkers may engage in online CE, this section shares how CE can extend beyond online premises.

For instance, in the online context, consumers are likely to engage with focal objects through mobile devices, apps, social media and websites. Whilst in the offline setting, consumers can physically engage with the servicescape via store attributes, products, the service store personnel, or through store trials (Ng, Sweeney and Plewa 2020). Both forms of engagement can occur simultaneously in the same setting. Understanding these two types of behaviour and the inter-influence of online and offline engagement is important, since they facilitate contribution, communication, and collaboration. Moreover, when both forms of engagement are understood properly, it allows effective cross-channel customer engagement strategies to be devised (Ng, Sweeney and Plewa 2020; Zhang et al. 2011). From a scholarly point of view, existing research does not expand on how online engagement can potentially influence online and/or offline behaviour either directly or indirectly, especially from a lurking context, which is where this research comes in.

Various studies demonstrate that traditional offline CE is useful (Lim and Rasul 2022). Traditional offline CE process relies on one-way or linear communication enabling brands to engage with consumers but not the other way round which is where a multi-way or non-linear online CE strategy comes in (Lim and Rasul 2022). Offline behaviours are the engagement activities individuals take when interacting with others or content in the real physical world. Examples of offline engagement behaviours relate to purchase and communications that take place in offline channels or in-store, such as through traditional media, referrals, reviews, or word-of-mouth (Bartschat, Cziehso, and Hennig-Thurau 2022; Greve 2014). Further examples include attending a social event, participating in a face-to-face discussion, purchasing a product, or sharing products with others. Offline actions and brand-related consequences are commonly reported in the online community by posts and can be prompted by online engagement on social media brand pages (i.e., e-WOM and purchase intentions) (Piehler et al. 2019).

Additionally, CE can differ in the online and offline context (Barari et al. 2020). However, Barari et al. (2020) found how a face-to-face context is more effective for developing attitudinal engagement, but the online context is more suitable for behavioural engagement. Each to their own benefits, emotional bonds can be created more effectively through offline face to face interaction whilst social media can empower the consumer to participate in online engagement behaviours- thus both setting complement each other (Barari et al. 2020). On a similar note, Mousavi et al. (2017) explain how silence within the online community does not necessarily mean silence outside as well. Therefore, based on these facts, the researcher gained inspiration to study offline engagement behaviour of lurkers as well. Likewise, inspiration is also gained from showrooming and webrooming concepts.

Showrooming and webrooming are two distinct consumer behaviours related to the integration of online and offline shopping experiences, detailing how some consumers visit a physical store to examine and evaluate products in person but then make their actual purchase online (showrooming); meanwhile, others research products and gather information online before making a purchase in a physical store (webrooming) (Aw 2019; Sahu, Khan and Gupta 2021; Flavian, Gurrea, and Orus 2020). The information-rich context present online should provide lurkers with much positive WOM material offline, which is a form of offline engagement. Lurkers can be one of the following, based on their actions within and outside of the community:

- "The *'active lurker as propagator'*, who propagates information or knowledge gained from an online community to others outside it.
- The *'active lurker as practitioner',* who uses such information or knowledge in their own or organisational activities.
- The *'active lurker candidate',* where the online community affects the lurker's thought.
- The *'persistent lurker',* where the online community does not affect the lurker's thought" (Edelmann et al. 2017, p.89).

> *"Lurkers not only use the information or knowledge gained from a network for their own personal or work-related activities, but can act as indirect contributors, propagating topics to others who are not members of the community; thus, having a strong and wide influence that goes beyond the perimeters of an online community, a community of practice, initiative, network or other online initiative"* (Edelmann et al. 2017, p.89).

Whilst Edelmann, Krimmer and Parycek (2017) established these classifications of lurkers, they have not identified the offline engagement activities that the lurkers may take part in.

Understanding lurking and non-visible offline behaviours can be beneficial, as "offline activities help members develop a sense of belonging, strengthen relationships with one another, and improve mutual understanding and trust" (Lai and Chen 2014, p.299). Lai and Chen (2014) hypothesised that offline activities, such as face-to-face meetings and social events, can have a positive effect on members' intentions to share knowledge online, regardless of whether they are active posters or lurkers. Similarly, if members have positive offline interactions with each other, they are more likely to participate in online community activities, either by posting or lurking. Offline interactions can help members form stronger relationships with each other, which can lead to increased trust and identification with the online community. By strengthening these relationships and building trust offline, members may feel more comfortable participating in online discussions and contributing to the community's knowledge sharing. Through offline interactions and physical product inspection, uncertainty can be reduced, and purchase probability can be increased (Bar-Gill and Reichman 2021).

In relation to offline communications, existing studies have not considered if online lurkers communicate about what they have 'engaged' with online in offline settings through, for example, word-of-mouth, which is a major limitation of such studies. If these lurkers do communicate and recommend products/brands offline, they are still engaging and participating. Afterall, in 2024, 66% of conversations around products, services, and brands take place offline (e.g., WOM marketing, face-to-face interactions, phone conversations) and an astonishing 91% of B2B buyers trust and depend on word-of-mouth recommendations (Wisernotify 2024). Therefore, brands

and businesses should place equal efforts into understanding and facilitating offline and online engagement behaviours to not miss out on potential opportunities/benefits.

In summary, studying the offline behaviour of online lurkers can be beneficial for three reasons. First, offline communications can enhance the solidarity and cohesiveness of a community (Lai and Chen 2014). Second, offline communications can strengthen links between members and increase their sense of belonging to the community, which may encourage a lurker to become more active or engaged (Lai and Chen 2014). Third, it sustains and strengthens the relationship-building process in online communities (Lin 2007). All these findings have potential implications for marketers, especially those that rely on measurable engagement activities as outliers to performance indicators and targets. Currently, there remains a lack of research available where online lurking is studied in conjunction with offline engagement. This research provides a starting point for its consideration and study.

2.7 Chapter Summary

Summarising this chapter on social media consumer engagement, it is clear that this subject is complex as CE can exist in both offline and online settings. This complexity helps explain why marketers are struggling to boost their engagement factor amongst their consumers and why existing scales are narrow and based on the frequency of measurable activities, such as the number of posts, likes/reactions, comments, and shares. This chapter has explored existing literature around online consumer engagement on social media, it's current conceptualisations, communities of interest, dimensions of CE, the uni- and multi-dimensionality of CE and their differences, the antecedents and outcomes of CE. It discusses how the understanding of active engagement provides a foundation for exploring less visible forms of participation, like lurking. Building on the insights gained from this chapter, the following chapter discusses lurking behaviour in detail. Through understanding lurking behaviour, the full spectrum of consumer interactions on social media can be better understood and embraced.

This research will contribute to the rather narrow existing measurements around CE, which measures lurking behaviour based on a uni-dimensional (i.e., behavioural)

approach, which previously yielded negative conceptualisations to the term, along with lack of insights into motivation, difficulty in measuring the depth of engagement, bias data, and lack of context. Therefore, exploring lurking behaviour from a multi-dimensional approach will combat most of these said shortcomings. Additionally, although there are more than 134 articles surrounding CE in social media (Santos et al. 2022), not one has studied lurkers or “passive users”, as most studies calls them, from a multi-dimensional approach. Additionally, research have not explored how these lurkers are involved in online communities, the spectrum of activities they may be involved in, despite constituting most online community users (90%) (Garfield 2020). This research addresses this gap and the growing phenomenon of lurkers. Having understood CE in social media, the following chapter explores the conceptualisation behind online lurking behaviour.

CHAPTER 3: UNDERSTANDING ONLINE LURKING BEHAVIOUR

3.1 Introduction

Social media has revolutionized the way people communicate, interact and share information. Whilst many users actively contribute to discussions, post content, and engage with others (posters), a substantial proportion (90%) remains passive (Garfield 2020). These passive users are often referred to as lurkers who observe, read, and consume content without contributing visibly (Woodford et al. 2023). Lurking has become a significant behaviour in social media, influencing everything from community engagement to information dissemination. This chapter aims to understand lurking behaviour on social media platforms through evaluating existing literature, conceptualisations, measurements, their segmentation utility, and identifying the gaps that remain. The review sets the stage for exploring the psychological underpinnings of lurking in the subsequent chapter.

3.2 Defining Lurking: Conceptual Ambiguity

Members of online communities (i.e., social media) have been categorised into two groups in past literature: posters (who actively contribute) and lurkers (who observe without contributing) (Nguyen et al. 2022; Woodford et al. 2023). Lurking, the subsequent behaviour of a lurker is commonly defined as passive activity through consuming content without visible participation (Zhu and Dawson 2024). Yet, like consumer engagement, lurking is a complex and multi-faceted behaviour extending beyond mere passivity. As witnessed in Table 3, early research often portrayed lurkers as "free-riders", abusers of common goods, etc. (Kollock and Smith 1996; Nonnecke and Preece 2000), thus considering lurking as an undesirable behaviour that weakens online communities. However, recent studies have shifted toward a more nuanced understanding, recognizing the active, purposeful, and sometimes constructive roles lurkers play online (Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023; Woodford, Southcott, and Gindidis 2023).

Table 3 presents various definitions to the term “lurkers” and their subsequent behaviour “lurking” when conducting the literature review. The table is organised in chronological order.

Table 3: Definitions of lurkers in business, *STEM* or psychology literature.

Authors	Definition
Kollock and Smith (1996)	Lurkers are labelled abusers of common goods.
McKenna and Bargh (1998, p.684)	"Newsgroups are composed of two types of members, those who post, providing reading material for others, and those who 'lurk', simply reading the material posted by others"
Nonnecke and Preece (2001); Nonnecke et al. (2006)	No posts posted in a 3-month period or never posted in an online community before.
Takahashi, Masakazu, and Yamasaki (2003, p.1); Bruggen et al. (2022)	"Participants called lurkers do not post any messages in an online community, such as interactive mailing lists and bulletin board systems".
Rafaeli et al. (2004, p.1)	"Passive participation – regular visits to the community, but reticence or very seldom posting is often called lurking"
Schlosser (2005, p.260); Marett and Joshi (2009)	Lurkers are "those who expect to read others' postings without anticipating communication". In other terms, lurkers read knowledge shared by knowledgeable posters who actively share in online communities but rarely share knowledge themselves.
Ridings et al. (2006, p.331)	"Visiting a community on a regular basis, but not posting or posting very infrequently"
Yeow et al. (2006, p.967)	"Lurkers are participants who persistently demure from engaging in the core activities that sustain a virtual community"

Fuller et al. (2007)	Lurkers are registered members who rarely contribute, passively observe communication to gather information, read interesting discussions, and do not hold social ties with other users.
Tagarelli and Interdonato (2013, p. 215)	“They belong to a community but remain quite unnoticed while watching, reading or, in general, benefiting from others’ information or services without significantly giving back to the community”
Gong, Lim, and Zhu (2015, p.140); Katikaridi (2023)	“Silent users often constitute a significant proportion of an online user-generated content system. In the context of social media, such as Twitter, users can opt to be silent all or most of the time. They are often called the invisible participants or lurkers”.
Javarone, Interdonato, and Tagarelli (2016, p.227)	“Lurking is a complex user-behavioural phenomenon that occurs in all large-scale online communities and social networks… users that benefit from the information produced by others in the community without actively contributing back to the production of social content”.
Edelmann (2017, p.282)	“Lurking is also defined in terms of social loafing, a phenomenon common to many collective action problems, and describes the tendency to avoid contributing while benefiting from others' effort”
Honeychurch et al. (2017); Daradkeh (2022); Sah and Peng (2023)	Lurkers are “known as silent learners, observers, browsers, read-only participants, vicarious learners, free-riders, witness learners, or legitimate peripheral participants” (p.191).
Popovac and Fullwood (2019, P.285)	“Lurking, or passive online participation, is often defined as non-participation or minimal participation in online groups or communities”.

Hong and Li (2020); Loria, Pirker, and Nacke (2021); Brunton et al. (2022); Daradkeh (2022); McLaughlin, Haverila, and Haverila (2022); Nguyen, Ngo and Paramita (2022); Hong, Hu, and Zhao (2023); Martinek et al. (2023); Mousavi and Roper (2023); Sohn and Choi (2023); Woodford, Southcott, and Gindidis (2023); Sipley (2024); Datt (2024); Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt (2024); Zhu and Dawson (2024)	Lurkers are those who consistently consume, read, or observe content without active participation or contributing.
Fu et al. (2021)	Lurkers are users who hesitate to spread or propagate information immediately, preferring to wait before participating.
Bu, Lou, and Koh (2021, p.421); Hao and Gu (2024)	“Users who produce little or no content and perform other activities (e.g., reading) quietly are called lurkers and their behaviour is called lurking”.
Hicks and Sinkinson (2021, p.757)	“Lurkers have been labelled free riders and a barrier to the monetisation of content, as well as inhibited, needing to be managed, or having untapped potential”.

Cheng and Chen (2022); Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2023); Woodford, Southcott, and Gindidis (2023)	Lurking as a purposeful, legitimate, informal, needs-based activity.
Mousavi and Roper (2020)	Lurkers contribute to brand value by consuming content and spreading information outside of the community, even though they do not actively engage.
Bu and Koh (2023, p.16)	“Users who actively obtain desired information from the internet but largely do not contribute as “online parasites”.
Solverson (2024)	Lurkers are active spectators. They represent thoughtful observation and learning.

The definitions in Table 3 show a trend regarding lurkers and their online engagement activities (i.e., frequency of postings or measurable engagement activity); however, the majority fail to include the “active” perception of the term. Instead, the negative labels of lurkers being free-riders/free-loaders, invisible/silent users, passive users, and social loafing is noted. This is concerning considering lurkers constitute 90% of online communities’ but are generally dismissed and their value not recognised as beneficial when compared to “active posters”. This may give business practitioners and future researchers the false impression that lurkers need to be converted or “de-lurked” (Katikaridi 2023; Tagarelli and Interdonato 2018) into posters to gain strategic advantages and ‘make use’ of their skills (Katikaridi et al. 2021). The negative conceptualisation is most likely due to the uni-dimensional view of lurking from a behavioural perspective, as detailed in the provided definitions.

Additionally, although researchers are starting to acknowledge lurkers more positively (e.g. Solverson 2024; Bu and Koh 2023) as of recent years, they are still categorised homogenously and uni-dimensionally. The next section highlights the drawbacks to this binary conceptualisation of lurkers.

3.2.1 Shortcomings of Extant Lurking Conceptualisations

The definitions listed earlier in Table 3 tend to focus narrowly on the behavioural, visible actions (or lack thereof) of users within online communities, identifying lurkers primarily as those who consume content and do not post or actively contribute. However, this uni-dimensional view presents several commonalities:

- Most definitions focus solely on non-contributory behaviours without considering the motivational, psychological, or social factors that drive individuals to lurk. Recent studies have identified that lurking can indeed be purposeful and strategic through activities such as learning, information gathering, etc. (Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023; Woodford et al. 2023) rather than a simple failure to contribute (Edelmann 2017).

- Although some studies have acknowledged that lurking can be beneficial, they still provide emphasis on how to convert or “de-lurk” these lurkers into posters to be deemed as beneficial (Yang et al. 2022; Katikaridi 2023; Tagarelli and Interdonato 2018). Thus, further discounting the fact that lurkers can still

contribute to the community in other ways that does not require them to post, comment, or perform other visible forms of behavioural participation (for e.g. through cognitively learning content).

- The negative connotation of lurkers as passive observers or free-riders (e.g. Hicks and Sinkinson 2021) overlooks the fact that some communities benefit from lurkers who maintain high content consumption and support the community without visible interaction. Additionally, do not account for the potential value that lurkers may bring outside of the online community such as by sharing information, word-of-mouth, purchases, etc. For instance, lurking allows individuals to engage in "silent participation," where their consumption of content supports the community by maintaining viewership and engagement metrics, even without direct contributions (Sipley 2022). Moreover, lurkers can play a role in sharing or spreading information, knowledge, and resources beyond the online platform, within their offline social networks (Nguyen et al. 2023; Mousavi and Roper 2020). In this sense, lurkers act as "silent contributors," helping to sustain the community by absorbing and redistributing valuable information. This reframing of lurking challenges the assumption that visible behavioural participation is the only meaningful form of engagement.

- Failure to account for the psychological and social reasons behind lurking such as fear of judgement, anxiety, emotional exhaustion (Zhu et al. 2023). Individuals may conserve psychological resources by lurking especially in stressful environments or communities which lacks anonymity or privacy as noted in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory by Hobfall (2011). Additionally, social learning theories suggest that lurking is indeed part of a legitimate learning process for individuals who need to observe before engaging actively (Honeychurch et al. 2017), yet not much research consider this constructive function of lurking.

- The uni-dimensional view does not recognize temporal shifts in participation. Individuals may lurk temporarily before transitioning into active roles or may participate actively in certain contexts but lurk in others (Martinek et al. 2023).

Lurking, therefore, should be seen as part of a dynamic process rather than a static behaviour. In other terms, lurking is seen as a homogenous behaviour and members are classed between two extremes of either a lurker or a poster. This homogeneity overlooks the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the behaviour.

- Lurking is not a binary behaviour. Studies show that lurkers can be highly engaged with content in ways that aren't visible, such as internalizing knowledge or sharing it offline. Bozkurt et al. (2020) emphasise that lurkers often transition between being peripheral participants and active contributors, depending on the context and their readiness

- The majority of definitions do not explore how cultural or contextual factors that influence lurking behaviour. Lurking can vary across different social media platforms and online communities. For instance, health-related communities may see more lurkers due to privacy concerns and the sensitive nature of discussions (Nguyen et al. 2023), whereas brand communities may attract lurkers focused on gathering information about products without contributing to discussions (Bauer and Brunton 2022).

- The behavioural, uni-dimensional view of lurking predominantly frames it as a failure to contribute, overlooking the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the behaviour. By failing to account for intentions, social context, psychological factors, and the dynamic nature of participation, the traditional view of lurking misses' key aspects of why and how people engage in this behaviour. Additionally, there appears to be a cycle of conversion as it is known that posters and newcomers tend to start as lurkers, suggesting lurking is the first step to contributing (Seering 2020; Matyas 2017). As these users continue to get involved and explore the brand community and its rules, their self-efficiency increases along with their contribution, and they cease to be lurkers (Speily et al. 2020).

Given this limited insight, the current research will explore the degree to which the categorisation of lurkers and posters may not be mutually exclusive or clear-cut.

Rather, they exist on a continuum where individuals may move between these two categories, depending on certain factors, which this research will also explore. As a way to move forward, a more holistic and multi-dimensional approach will be adopted - one that recognises the value of lurking as a legitimate and purposeful behaviour in many online environments. Several authors (e.g., Brunton et al. 2023; Nguyen et al. 2023; Gong et al. 2015; Munzel and Kunz 2014) have concluded that understanding and targeting both lurkers and posters is increasingly important for businesses utilising social media, as both posters and lurkers can help drive a strong customer-brand relationship and contribute added value or social capital to an online community (Sipley 2022; Kefi and Maar 2018). Therefore, understanding the different perspectives of lurkers and lurking in general is important, as well as how to keep them engaged, the activities they engage in, and how to enhance their engagement.

3.2.2 Re-defining Lurking

Considering the substantial number of lurkers attached to a social medium, a more positive conceptualisation and labelling of the term is needed, rather than normalising this so-called negative consumer behaviour. In order to do so, the researcher compiled a list of online engagement activities lurkers were found to participate in based on existing studies are:

- *Third-party observers*, who read posts and make their own judgments and decisions based on observations without publicly expressing what they think (Hong and Li 2020; Rosen and Kelly 2023).
- *Lurkers are often listeners*, as a conventional mass media audience, making them the target for certain online activities, such as commerce or advertising (Edelmann et al. 2017).
- *Visitors of other members' profiles* (Edelmann et al. 2017).
- *Social readers* where reading is not a solitary, unconnected, unproductive action but rather a social activity that occurs in a social context involving other people (Edelmann et al. 2017).
- *Side-posters or contactors* contacting individuals directly instead, engaging in prosocial and thoughtful altruistic behaviour (Edelmann et al. 2017).

- *Peripheral, observational and/or vicarious learners* (Rosen and Kelly 2023; Daradkeh 2022; Mousavi et al. 2017).
- *Community integrators*: Lurkers are focused on gaining a general understanding for the community (Zhu and Dawson 2023; McLaughlin et al. 2022). This behaviour aids in acclimating to the online community gradually.

On that note, the researcher also re-considered Table 3 with a 'glass half full' rather than a 'glass half empty' approach and derived certain online engagement activities that can positively contribute towards overall engagement. Although these terms have been used in negative conceptualisations, positive activities, although passive, can still be considered as contributions, such as:

- Lurkers as learners (e.g. Solverson 2024; Sah and Peng 2023)
- Lurkers as readers (e.g. Bu, Lou, and Koh 2021; Loria et al. 2021)
- Lurkers as listeners (e.g. Sah and Peng 2023; Daradkeh 2022)
- Lurkers as browsers (e.g. Sah and Peng 2023; Daradkeh 2022)
- Lurkers as observers (e.g. Mousavi and Roper 2023; Hong and Li 2022)
- Lurkers as spectators (e.g. Solverson 2024; Javarone et al. 2016)
- Lurkers as contributors (e.g. Hicks and Sinkinson 2020; Mousavi and Roper 2020)
- Lurkers as knowledge or information propagators (e.g. Fu et al. 2021; Mousavi and Roper 2020)
- Lurkers as goal drivers (strategic behaviour) (e.g. Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023; Bu and Koh 2023; Cheng and Chen 2022)
- Active lurkers (e.g. Solverson 2024; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021)

Having considered all the existing definitions of lurkers, the researcher asserts that lurkers do not deserve the negative conceptualisations given, as they are still participating and contributing through immeasurable forms of engagement activities. Therefore, this study proposes a new definition of lurkers as:

> Lurkers are users who visit an online community on a regular basis but do not necessarily perform measurable activities, such as posting, commenting, reacting (i.e., likes) or sharing online. They do however still participate through other immeasurable activities, such as learning, consuming, observing, reading, listening, spectating, and browsing, either casually or strategically.

In summary, having explored existing definitions of lurking earlier (refer to Table 3), a list of the online engagement activities that both lurkers and posters participate in are discussed in this chapter and shown in Table 4 for comparison and understanding purposes. Given this, the current study argues that both lurkers and posters can make valuable contributions to an online community through performing a variety of different activities that may overlap to some extent. However, the level and type of engagement can differ between the two groups.

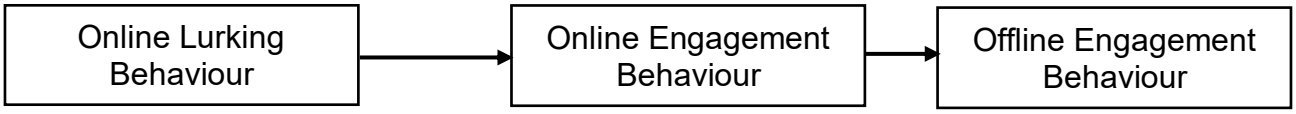
Table 4: Comparison Between Posters and Lurkers Online Engagement Activities.

Posters	**Lurkers**
● Sharing their knowledge and experiences ● Asking and answering questions ● Participating in discussions and debates ● Providing feedback and support to other members ● Creating and sharing content, such as posts, articles, videos, and images ● Connecting with other members and building relationships.	● Reading posts and comments ● Searching for information ● Learning from the experiences of others ● Following discussions and debates ● Observing the norms and practices of the community ● Consuming content ● Sharing content they find valuable with others outside the community.

To continue conceptualising lurkers, this research aims to investigate what a lurker may 'lurk' for and why, and whether lurking is confined to the online platform (i.e., social media) or if it may extend to and even evolve differently in offline platforms like a physical store. Current literature has not provided ample knowledge around these

issues. Given the focus of this research is on conceptualising lurkers and understanding online lurking behaviour and whether or not the engagement is transferred offline or not- the initial part of the research's framework is proposed and shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Initiation of the research's framework



3.2.3 Reasons Behind Lurking

To further understand lurking, the reasons behind lurking will be explored. There are various legitimate reasons behind lurking which may vary across the online platforms, product categories, and brands. Whilst past studies have looked at reasons why users lurk, there is no single answer to why lurkers lurk" and there can be a variety of factors (e.g., type of community, personality, motivation, etc.) that will influence the extent to which users participate in online communities as shown in Table 5. For decades, researchers continue to identify additional factors and reasons why an individual may lurk online depicting its complex, multi-faceted nature. Lurking behaviour will vary amongst people and may be influenced differently by each factor. Although there is an increasing number of studies that have explored reasons behind lurking, Sun, Rau and Ma (2014) used a motivation model and classified these reasons into four categories:

1. Environmental influence determined by the online community
2. Personal preference linking to an individuals' personality
3. The user-community relationship (fear of commitment)
4. Security consideration (preserving privacy and safety)

These four categories provided a foundation for classifying literature surrounding why an individual may lurk online as shown in Table 5. The terms "lurkers" and "lurking" yielded 22 documents from Scopus over the years 2020-2024 and was analysed to classify and categorise reasons behind lurking.

Table 5: Categories and reasons behind lurking.

Category	Reason	Description	Reference(s)
Environmental influence determined by the online community / Group characteristics / External constraints (Sun et al. 2014; Nonnecke and Preece 2001)	Community Environmental Factors	Factors such as the perceived culture, reciprocity, content richness, and supportive moderators influence lurking behaviour.	Cheng and Chen (2022); Le, McConney and Maor (2022); Badreddine and Blount (2021); Nguyen (2020)
	Moderator Enthusiasm	Active and supportive moderators boost participation and reduce lurking.	Badreddine and Blount (2021); Nguyen (2020)
	Content Richness	High-quality and relevant content encourages lurking for information consumption.	Badreddine and Blount (2021); Kefi and Maar (2020); Nguyen (2020)
	Ease of Use	Ease of navigation encourages lurking rather than active participation.	Badreddine and Blount (2021); Nguyen (2020)
	Perceived Unfriendliness	Unfriendly or hostile community environments lead to lurking to avoid negative interactions.	Cheng and Chen (2022); Nguyen (2020)
	Time available	Depending on time available, lurking behaviour is affected. Less time= higher lurking.	Amichai-hamburger et al. (2016)
Personal preference linking to an individuals'	Mastery-Avoidance Goals	Avoiding mistakes or incompetence by not participating actively.	Cheng and Chen (2022); Martinek, Caliandro, and Denegri-Knot (2023)

personality / Member's character (Sun et al. 2014; Nonnecke and Preece 2001)	Performance-Avoidance Goals	Fear of negative judgments or comparisons with others.	Cheng and Chen (2022); Ali et al. (2024); Brunton et al. (2022)
	Lack of Confidence	Feeling inadequate to contribute meaningfully.	Cheng and Chen (2022)
	Psychosocial Well-being	Emotional and psychological states influencing participation decisions.	Badreddine and Blount (2021); Ali et al. (2024)
	Observational Learning	Learning by observing others rather than active engagement.	Daradkeh (2022); Sipley (2024); Sah and Peng (2023); Sohn and Choi (2023); Yang et al. (2024)
	Cognitive Dissonance	Unmet expectations leading to cognitive dissonance, resolved by lurking.	Cheng and Chen (2022)
	Need for gratification	The need to fulfil a desire or goal.	Amichai-hamburger et al. (2016); Daradkeh (2022); Sipley (2024)
	Personality dispositions	Linked to personality trait(s) that influence an individual's behaviour.	Badreddine and Blount (2021); Amichai-hamburger et al. (2016)
	Self-efficiency	Belief in ability to complete a task or achieve a goal or in other terms, a person's confidence.	Nguyen (2020); Amichai-hamburger et al. (2016)
The user-community relationship / Stage of membership	Fear of Negative Judgment	Fear of being judged negatively by others leads to lurking.	Sun, Rau and Ma (2014); Cheng and Chen (2022); Brunton et al. (2022); Ali, Wang, Gong, and

(Sun et al. 2014; Nonnecke and Preece 2001)			Mehmood (2024); Sah and Peng (2023); Yang et al. (2024)
	Fear of Social Interaction	Avoidance of social interactions due to discomfort or anxiety	Ali, Wang, Gong, and Mehmood (2024); Jensen and Schwartz (2021); Yang et al. (2024)
	Fear of commitment	Avoidance of engagement or participation due to fear of commitment or failure.	Sun, Rau and Ma (2014); Daradkeh (2022); Le, McConney and Maor (2022); Brunton et al. (2022); Sah and Peng (2023); Sohn and Choi (2023); Yang et al. (2024)
	Imposter syndrome	Avoidance of engagement due to perceived self-doubt, lacking confidence to contribute online.	Brunton et al. (2022)
	Trust and social ties	User's relationship with other community members. Weak ties or negative social experiences can discourage active participation.	Nguyen (2020)
Security consideration (preserving privacy and safety) (Sun et al. 2014)	Privacy Concerns	Concerns over privacy and information security.	Martinek, Caliandro, and Denegri-Knott (2023); Ali et al. (2024); Jensen and Schwartz (2021); Sipley (2024); Le,

			McConney and Maor (2022); Sah and Peng (2023)
	Avoidance	Desire to avoid the effort required for active participation.	Martinek, Caliandro, and Denegri-Knott (2023); Ali et al. (2024); Jensen and Schwartz (2021); Sohn and Choi (2023); Yang et al. (2024)
	Anonymity	Providing anonymity functionalities and options make it easier for members to participate.	Nguyen (2020)

Similarly, Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2016) who are leading publishers in the field of lurking found four individual factors to be relevant in influencing participation rates in online communities, especially for lurking, which are: 1) need for gratification levels; 2) personality dispositions; 3) time available, and 4) self-efficiency. These factors can also be classified under the four categories of motivational reasons (see Table 5). Likewise, Nguyen (2020) categorised the reasons why lurkers lurk into four different categories linked to individual factors, social factors, organizational factors, and technological factors. Similarly, Nonnecke and Preece (2001, p.7) categorised the reasons why lurkers lurk into four different categories:

1. *Member's character or individual factors*: includes personal reasons, which generally reflect a desire to reduce public exposure; relationship to group, which describes how individuals see themselves in relation to the group either socially or informally. This affects their public participation or reduces the need to participate, and intention from outset. Personal reasons include wanting "to remain anonymous, and/or preserve privacy and safety, self-efficacy/confidence, shy about posting publicly, can't offend while lurking; i.e., safe from retaliation, difficulties with English language". Relationship to the group reasons include: "not part of the group; i.e., new to group and thus learning about the group, have nothing to offer; i.e., group is very knowledgeable, lack expertise to respond, but able to ask questions, know others' queries will be answered so don't need to ask". Intention from the outset reasons include: "never intended to post from the outset, no specific need to post, not motivated to post, reduce involvement/commitment; i.e., posting is a form of commitment to the group" (p.7).

2. *Group characteristics or Organisational factors*: this covers a wide range of attributes that affect whether an individual lurks related to group characteristics or community management as per Nguyen's (2020) study. Reasons include "either a low or high volume of messages, poor quality of messages; e.g., off topic, type of group, e.g., cannot post to distribution lists, no posting requirement in the rules, poor user interface (UI) for interaction, intrusiveness and style of moderation, quiet periods between spikes of intense activity, response of group to delurking process, lack of response to questions, delay in

response, e.g., 24 hours was unacceptable" (p.7). Additionally, Strong management and clear, friendly protocols can encourage participation, whereas poor management often results in increased lurking (Nguyen 2020).

3. *Stage of membership*: articulates two specific periods in which lurking was likely to take place over the period of membership. First, when they are getting to know the group and second, when leaving the group. Reasons include: "while leaving the group, e.g., waning of interest and involvement with the group, and while getting to know the group" (p.7). This can also link to social factors which focus on the user's relationship with other community members, such as trust and social ties. Where weak ties or negative social experiences, can discourage active participation (Nguyen 2020).

4. *External constraints*: constraints relating to time and work issues (i.e., work-related conditions and insufficient time).

The studies mentioned above all have one common factor, which is the individual's personal preference, personality, or member's character. Therefore, the current study will include user personality in the research framework to explore the extent to which it influences consumers' lurking behaviour. Similarly, the research framework will also include user motivation having considered Sun, Rau and Ma's (2014) four categories of reasons why lurkers lurk, discussed at section 3.2.2. Moreover, to not over-complicate the study, instead of adding all the other factors as a construct within the research framework, they might be considered as control factors, depending on the results of data collection and analysis, instead of completely being disregarded.

3.3 Segmentation Utility of Lurking

In order to understand lurkers better, this study considers the rationale behind market segmentation, which is “to allow businesses to focus on their consumers’ behaviours and purchasing patterns. If done effectively, marketing segmentation allows an organisation to achieve its highest return on investment (ROI) in turn for its marketing and sales expenses. If an organisation markets its products or services to a consumer or business, it should focus on the various types of segmentation” (Martin 2011, p.15). Since lurking has been measured homogeneously in the past, utilising market segmentation can help segment these consumers (i.e., lurkers) into groups who share similar characteristics, based on geographic, demographic, psychographic, and behavioural information (Haverila et al. 2021; Martin 2011).

Consumer market segmentation is applied in various marketing strategies, such as product/brand positioning, as well as strategies related to promotions, distribution, and price (Jaiswal et al. 2021; Rosario and Raimundo 2021). To date, there is lack of research that seeks to go beyond the simplistic binary categorization of community members as “lurkers” or “posters” in online communities. Haverila et al. (2021) attempted this on members in online brand communities and emphasized the importance of identifying different segments based on engagement, attitudes, and identification with the brand. Haverila et al. (2021) segmented and identified brand community members into two distinct segments simply titled Segment 1 and Segment 2 based on their behaviour (posting or lurking), identification with the brand community, loyalty, and the benefits members gain from membership. Their findings confirmed that members of brand communities are not homogeneous and that they should be segmented and approached based on more than just their posting behaviour. Although Haverila et al’s (2021) study was a good starting point, their paper did not fully tackle the homogeneity of lurkers nor looked at their engagement on social media in detail. These findings are still rather vague.

When it comes to understanding these consumer segments within a broader segmentation framework, the researcher gained inspiration from additional factors, such as shopping orientation and conspicuous consumption orientation. Both orientation scales may inform market segmentation efforts by providing insights into consumer preferences and behaviours that can influence their purchasing decisions and consumption patterns. The researcher believes that lurkers can be segmented similarly especially since several attempts had been made to categorise lurkers.

Although still measured behaviourally, McLaughlin, Haverila and Arora (2021), Walker (2010) and Willett et al. (1998) have all considered lurking in terms of “active lurkers” and “passive lurkers”, where active lurkers are those who make direct contact with posters in an interactive environment, propagating information or knowledge gained; while, passive lurkers read for their own use only. Similarly, Brodie et al. (2013) explained how CE is conceptualized as a continuum ranging from active participation (posting) to passive consumption (lurking). The framework highlights the dynamic nature of engagement, where consumers can shift between posting and lurking based on various factors.

All of the above findings act as a first step to advancing the measurement of lurkers because they suggest there may be different profiles of lurkers. However, there are no studies to date that explore the potential heterogeneous nature of lurkers. This research takes this a step further and attempts to profile and segment lurkers.

On the other hand, within the poster segment, social media studies have devoted attention to identifying the heterogeneity amongst posters, as evidenced by the sub-segments of 'contributors,' 'sharers,' 'likers, 'commenters’, ‘questioner’, ‘responder’, ‘visitors’, ‘followers’, and ‘friend requester’, ‘registrant’, ‘re-posters’, ‘mentioners’, ‘reviewers’, and ‘recommendations suggester’, to name a few (Dolan et al. 2019; Appleby 2016; Effing and Spil 2016; Ashley and Tuten 2015). Previous studies have paid more attention to posters because they easily perform most or all the activities related to these sub-segments and because “they generate content and contribute to the pool of knowledge that benefits all members” (Nguyen et al. 2022, p.829). Additionally, researchers who champion posters have argued that the contribution of

posters is easily traceable through their performance of engaging in online activities, unlike the ‘invisible’ lurkers.

It is unsurprising that social media studies have awarded minuscule attention to the lurker segment’s heterogeneity and continue supporting a highly questionable notion. That is, lurking is a deliberate act, and online users that undertake this act are inherently and homogeneously ‘non-engaging’ ‘free-riders’. Just because it may seem a lot simpler to focus on the traceable posters, does not mean that it is the right way to understand the phenomenon. The widely accepted notion of lurkers' homogeneity contained in the social media engagement literature is flawed because a variety of factors (e.g., motivation and psychological factors) can influence lurking behaviour (Haverila et al. 2022; McLaughlin et al. 2021), There is variability among lurkers regarding intents, participation levels, lurking patterns, and the roles they play within social media. Treating all lurkers uniformly ignores these unique characteristics and prevents a thorough understanding of lurking behaviour. When viewing lurkers as homogenous, the researcher overlooks several possibilities and assumptions of:

- *Influencing factors*: like posters, lurkers also have different influencing factors that encourage their behaviour such as motivational and psychological drivers (Haverila et al. 2022; McLaughlin et al. 2021). Understanding the diverse influences behind lurking is crucial for tailoring community strategies and interventions.
- *Engagement levels*: treating all lurkers as the same neglects any variation in engagement levels and fails to acknowledge the potential for different levels of involvement. For example: some lurkers may lurk occasionally whilst others are more frequent or sporadic (Chen et al. 2022).
- *Lurking patterns*: may vary and understanding this pattern helps to understand the dynamics of lurking behaviour and its implications for community interactions (Chen et al. 2022).
- *Roles*: of lurkers can be distinctive online. Some may serve as silent observers, while others may contribute indirectly by sharing content or influencing discussions outside of direct participation Solverson (2024).

Identifying and understanding these roles is essential for comprehending the overall community dynamics and the potential value that lurkers bring.

To gain a more accurate and insightful understanding of online lurking behaviour, it is essential to acknowledge and account for any heterogeneity among lurkers. Considering individual motivations, engagement levels, lurking patterns, roles, and contextual factors helps to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of online lurking behaviour. In summary, this research identifies the optimal level of engagement that can be used as the cut-off for the classification of lurkers and investigates the moderating role of motivational and psychological (personality) influences on this relationship. From a managerial perspective, this research provides a conceptual taxonomy that can be used by marketing practitioners to better segment online lurkers who comprise most online community members. In other words, this research relaxes the restrictive assumption of within-segment homogeneity of lurkers and accounts for the heterogeneity in online lurking behaviour.

3.4 Theoretical Perspectives on Lurking Behaviour

Existing approaches to lurking tend to rely upon behavioural and individualist lenses and are dependent on measurable, visible activities, such as the frequency of postings the participants contribute or are associated with cognitive science accounts of external representation (Bu et al. 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). Much research focuses on learners as individuals whilst disregarding the collaborative environment in which the learners engage or the “invisible participation” behaviours (Honeychurch et al. 2017). These studies are those that solely focus on why these participants do not contribute and how they steal knowledge by observing silently in the forum (Bu and Koh 2023). Moreover, they are under the assumption that “contribution” equates with posting and is the only distinction between said lurkers and posters or learning and posting. In other words, despite most of the research around lurking, most studies rely on frequency of postings as a measure of participation and identification of “posters”, whilst ignoring other aspects of participation, therefore leading to a negative perception of the term ‘lurking’ that continues to remain predetermined.

Theories considered by the researcher that could help emphasise the importance of passive activities, such as consumption, observing and learning in online engagement, are:

- *Observational learning theory*: also known as modelling theory. It focuses on how individuals learn by observing and imitating the behaviours of others (Greer, Dudek-Singer, and Gautreaux 2006). Originally proposed by Bandura (1977), this theory emphasises the cognitive processes involved in learning through observation, attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. Its relevance to lurking is because lurkers may observe interactions, behaviours and norms within online communities to internalize acceptable practices without actively participating (Zhu and Dawson 2024). Additionally, the theory is relevant when learning new skills or understanding community dynamics prior to engaging.

- *Social learning (cognitive) theory*: also rooted in Bandura (1977) work, integrates behaviourism and cognitive psychology, proposing that learning occurs through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. It emphasises the role of cognitive processes, such as attention, memory, and self-regulation, utilised in learning (Gibson 2004). This theory is relevant to lurkers in online communities because they often engage cognitively by reading, consuming, and observing content without taking direct action (Sah and Peng 2023; Daradkeh 2022; Honeychurch et al. 2017). The theory emphasises that learning involves both observation and internal cognitive processing, making it particularly suited to explain lurking.

- *Social constructivism*: attributed to theorists like Vygotsky (2018), posits that learning is a social and cultural process that occurs through interactions with others and through the construction of knowledge and meaning within a social context. “Social constructivists view learning as a social process. It does not take place only within an individual, nor is it a passive development of behaviours that are shaped by external forces” (Kim 2001, p.3). Its relevancy to lurking is because lurkers may engage in meaning-making by observing

social interactions in online communities (Daradkeh 2022). Although not actively participating, they learn from the construction of knowledge occurring within the community context (Sah and Peng 2023). Lurkers can still gain valuable insights by passively engaging in social learning environments.

- *Social identity theory*: attributed to theorists like Tajfel and Turner (1985) proposes that individuals derive their sense of self from their membership in social groups. This membership influences their attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs, and explains how individuals categorize themselves and others based on group memberships, leading to in-group and out-group dynamics (Hogg 2016). Its relevance to lurking because lurkers may use observation as a means of solidifying their social identity within a community (Sah and Peng 2023). Although not actively participating, they identify with certain group norms and attitudes, which influences how they eventually behave within that community (Daradkeh 2022).

From these considered theories, social learning (cognitive) theory (SLT) stood out as the most appropriate for studying lurking behaviour. SLT emphasises the cognitive processes involved in the roles of observation and learning without immediate engagement (Gibson 2004). Therefore, it stands out as the most appropriate for studying lurking behaviour in online communities. Lurkers may observe and learn from the behaviours of active contributors, and their decision to lurk instead of actively participating may be influenced by their perceptions of the social norms and practices of the community. Therefore, fits well with the social learning model unlike social constructivism, which focuses more on active participation, social learning theory accounts for passive learning through observation (Bandura 1986). In other words, social learning views immeasurable activities (e.g., learning, observing, etc.) as beneficial and lurking may then be conceptualised as a more positive form of engagement activity that is part of one's engagement cycle rather than negative if, say, a behavioural lens were to be applied again.

3.4.1 Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory incorporates attention, memory, and self-regulation, which are essential in explaining how lurkers engage cognitively without participating visibly (Bandura 1977). It is relevant because lurkers often observe community interactions, store knowledge, and regulate their own behaviour based on what they learn through observation and consumption of online content (Sipley 2024; Sohn and Choi 2023). Through utilising SLT, lurking is no longer conceptualised negatively in the sense of passive, free-riding, abusers of common goods, social-loafers, etc. (as interpreted in past research and discussed in section 3.2) but rather as an active cognitive behaviour interpreted in the context of collective learning. Within SLT, social constructivists identify learning as a social process that is neither simply an individual process nor a passive process (Pritchard and Wollard 2020). In other words, this research shifts the conceptualisation of lurking from a negative passive behaviour to an active cognitive behaviour associated with collective learning. It emphasises the importance of SLT in informing this alternative perspective and acknowledges the social nature of learning in the context of lurking.

Early research conceptualised social learning as individual learning that takes place in a social context and is hence influenced by social norms (Reed et al. 2010). There are various definitions and conceptualisations of the term, but social learning refers to societal learning in general and has been defined “as a cognitive process that produces responses to social contextual stimuli and explains the mechanisms of the way humans shape and influence their behaviour through social learning” (Daradkeh 2022, p.8). The theory basically explains how one’s understanding of content is socially constructed through conversations and grounded interactions with others around problems or actions (Daradkeh 2022; Shum and Ferguson 2012). Online social learning can occur when individuals are able to:

- Clarify their intention through learning rather than browsing
- Ground their learning by defining their question/problem and experimenting
- Engage in learning conversations to increase their understanding (Shum and Ferguson 2012).

Moreover, social learning theorists describe the way in which social interaction with those around us, regardless of what the precise relationship might be, has a profound effect on one's learning (Pritchard and Wollard 2020). Social learning may also occur in the absence of any planned participatory process although it usually occurs from peer-to-peer via social networks, which can be initiated through mass media or other non-participatory means (Reed et al. 2010). Two key underlying social learning theories that can also be applied are Bandura's social learning theory (1977) and Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory (1990) since "both of those theories stress that learning occurs in the relationship between people and their environment and in full participation within communities of practice and utilisation of resources" (Kafai et al. 2012, p.129). However, Bandura (1977) states knowledge is acquired through observation of the environment and social interaction which, in turn, leads to modelling or mirroring.

Situated learning (Lave and Wenger 1990) involves observation and concerns the effect the environment has on the individual rather than that of other people. In most cases, "situated learning is unintentional rather than deliberate, as in Bandura's concept of observational learning" (Kafai et al. 2012, p.129). In other words, "no trial" learning is also possible; that is, one could learn simply by watching or observing what others do and by watching the consequences of other people's actions.

When lurking behaviour is viewed through a social learning lens, lurking, and contributing (through reading, observing, learning, etc.) are seen as developmental stages of membership within a community, in which a person learns about the community and eventually develops enough understanding over time to begin to contribute (Zhu and Dawson 2023). The roles of observation and participation are also means of learning, which are activities a lurker performs online (Sohn and Choi 2023; Sipley 2024).

Recent research (e.g. Zhu and Dawson 2023; Daradkeh 2022); Bozkurt et al. 2020) classifies lurking as a type of learning since learning can happen in a variety of ways, although they can be deemed as less visible than other learning and therefore, more difficult to identify and track. Social learning theory suggests that new members of a community will begin with relatively little or no contributions as a lurker and will develop over time with knowledge and confidence that will, in turn, lead to contributions (Liu et

al. 2020). Several papers (e.g., Cheng and Chen 2022; Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023; Woodford et al. 2023) agree that lurkers tend to be strategic when it comes to participating in online communities, spending substantial time learning about those communities, consuming content, listening to conversations, and tracking conversations prior to making any decision to participate and join into conversations.

Effective and lasting learning occurs when an individual is engaged in social activity with others when in a social context, as well as when a new or repeated sensory input (e.g., words, pictures, stories, etc.) is related to pre-existing knowledge and understanding (Pritchard and Wollard 2020). Therefore, the current study considers it incorrect to label lurkers as “passive”, “dis-engaged” and “uninvolved”, or that lurking is an “inactive” form of participation in online communities considering they can be actively learning and consuming content.

Whilst SLT has been widely discussed in student learning literature, it has received little consideration in the online engagement literature. Given that popular social media platforms and networking sites have evolved into online social environments enabling social learning, this appears to be an omission. These online social environments provide simple-to-learn collaborative spaces where individuals can publish user-generated content and media, communicate, and engage with each other in a safe and secure environment, especially for social learning purposes (Santos et al. 2022).

It has been shown that lurkers can be active in the form of learners, readers, listeners, and browsers and this is where social learning comes into play because lurkers can actively engage in learning conversations and by observing/watching content to build their understanding around the subject area. For this reason, when viewed from a social learning perspective, lurkers who are socially learning can yield positive potential outcomes, such as “improved management of social-ecological systems, enhanced trust, adaptive capacity, attitudinal and behavioural change, stakeholder empowerment, strengthening of social networks, and so on” (Shum and Ferguson 2012, p.2).

In summary, SLT provides a robust framework for understanding lurking behaviour because it accounts for both the observational and cognitive processes that drive passive engagement. It explains how individuals can learn and internalize knowledge

through observation, even in the absence of direct participation, making it well-suited for studying the nuanced behaviour of lurkers in online communities.

3.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored existing literature surrounding the behavioural conceptualisation of lurking, shortcomings of extant lurking conceptualisations, the reasons behind lurking, and the segmentation utility of lurking, as well as suggesting an alternative theory for the study of lurkers (i.e. social learning theory). This research will contribute to the rather narrow existing measurements around CE which measure lurking based on a uni-dimensional (behavioural) approach.

The present study deviates its focus from the common behavioural approach for several reasons. Understanding lurking from a behavioural approach yield: 1) further negative conceptualisations; 2) lack of insights into motivation and potential psychological influences; 3) difficulties in measuring the depth of engagement due to classifying lurking as a homogenous behaviour; 4) bias data; and 5) lack of context.

Moreover, this research argues the existing conventional wisdom of lurker's categorisation is the result of the restrictive assumption of within-segment homogeneity and accounts for the heterogeneity in online lurking behaviour. In order to achieve heterogeneity and to combat the aforementioned risks of the behavioural approach, this research aims to explore lurking through a more positive lens (i.e., social learning theory). Lurking behaviour on social media is a complex, and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by individual motivations, community dynamics, and psychological factors. While recent studies have shed light on some of the active role that lurkers can play (i.e. learning, consuming), they still provide emphasis on their conversion into more valuable users or posters.

Additionally, much remains to be understood about the psychological underpinnings of this behaviour. The following chapter will delve deeper into the psychological and behavioural factors associated with lurking, examining the role of motivation, and personality traits, in shaping why individuals choose to lurk rather than actively participate online.

CHAPTER 4: PSYCHOLOGICAL AND BEHAVIOURAL FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH LURKING

4.1 Introduction

Following the initial identification of various reasons as to why an individual may lurk (Chapter 3.2.3), this chapter further explores the conceptual frameworks and measures related to two psychological and behavioural constructs- **personality** and **motivation**- which influence social media usage and lurking behaviour. Research consistently shows that users' engagement varies based on individual personality traits and underlying motivations (Kircaburun et al. 2020). Personality encompasses attitudinal aspects of individuals, such as cognition, emotion, and behaviour (Alzeer and Benmerabet 2023). Numerous studies have demonstrated how personality traits such as extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness significantly affect user behaviour both online and offline (Karlsson and Kajonius 2022). For instance, Karlsson and Kajonius (2022) found that extraverted individuals are more likely to engage actively, while introverts may prefer lurking. Personality-based approaches thus offer valuable insights into user profiling and the design of targeted social media strategies.

Equally important is motivation, which significantly drives user participation and interaction in online communities (Buzeta, Pelsmacker, and Dens 2020). Motivations, including information-seeking, entertainment, and social connection, help explain variations in lurking behaviour (McLaughlin, Haverila, and Haverila 2022; Tseng et al. 2017). By understanding user motivations, platforms can design more engaging environments that cater to users' passive or active needs, improving user retention and loyalty. Understanding how personality and motivation interplay provides critical insights into lurking behaviour. This research, therefore, aims to investigate how these constructs interact to influence social media lurking, providing a more nuanced understanding of passive online behaviours.

4.2 Online User Personality

Personality, as conceptualized by Hogan (1987), refers to enduring patterns of thought, feelings, and behaviours expressed across various situations. Its relevance to understanding lurking behaviour lies in its ability to explain individual differences in online participation. Social media usage is inherently influenced by these personality traits, which shape both active and passive behaviours (Badreddine and Blount 2021).

Personality has been extensively studied across various forms of engagement, including work engagement (Woods and Sofat 2013), political participation (Russo and Amna 2016), and online learning (Quigley et al. 2022). While such studies demonstrate the influence of personality on user behaviour, few focus specifically on lurking. Research into personality and lurking behaviour shows conflicting results regarding which traits are most influential. Loria, Pirker, and Nacke (2021) found that agreeableness plays a significant role in driving lurking behaviour, while Badreddine (2019) reports the opposite, suggesting the trait has little influence. Furthermore, Omar and Dequan (2020) emphasize that motivational factors outweigh personality in predicting lurking. The lack of consensus points to the complexity of personality's role in shaping online behaviour.

Authors, who studied reasons why lurkers may lurk online (as discussed in chapter 3.2.2), have made the first step of finding that an individual’s personality, personality dispositions, or member’s character all play a role in influencing lurking behaviour (e.g., Badreddine and Blount 2021; Amichai-hamburger et al. 2016). Meanwhile, some personality traits link to different motivations to become active members of online communities (Loria, Nacke, and Pirker 2021). These authors, however, have focussed on studying the overall contextual factors causing a lurker to lurk online and have not dedicated their study to studying personality specifically. Consequently, their findings surrounding which particular personal trait(s) are significant when it comes to studying lurking have not been generalised or expanded further. This may be because studies that have examined the influence of personality on online behaviour have found that various individuals with different personalities will behave differently in online communities (Badreddine 2023; Siegfried-Speller and Lankfort 2018), making it a rather complex area.

Personality traits represent characteristics of individuals which are more likely to reflect one's personal motives, needs, values and attributes (Omar and Dequan 2020). Therefore, personality also link to motivations for becoming active in online communities.

For example, Table 6 overviews studies on user personality and lurking behaviour. The authors displayed in Table 6 were chosen based on relevancy to the studied subject areas of social media usage and lurking behaviour. Additionally, through a search on "lurker" or "lurking" and "personality" on Scopus yielded 17 documents published from 2020-2024, from which the most relevant ones were inserted into the table. Notably, the subject is not limited to the authors specified in the tables, which are used as examples to demonstrate the existing contextual focus to the constructs.

Table 6: Studies on Personality and Online Lurking Behaviour.

Author(s)	Personality trait(s) associated with lurking
Rahardjo et al. (2023); Yuan and Liu (2022); Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2016); Ross et al. (2009)	Neuroticism
Loria, Pirker, and Nacke (2021); Badreddine (2019); Seigfried-Spellar and Lankford (2018); Sun, Rau, and Ma (2014)	Agreeableness
Yuan and Liu (2022); Zhong et al. (2022); Badreddine (2019); Gazit et al. (2018); Kim (2018); Sun, Rau, and Ma (2014); Ross et al. (2009); Nonnecke and Preece (2004)	Introversion
Yuan and Liu (2022); Badreddine, Blount, and Quilter (2022); Loria, Pirker, and Nacke (2021); Badreddine (2019); Siegfried-Speller and Lankfort (2018); Gazit et al. (2018); Sun, Rau, and Ma (2014);	Conscientiousness
AlAfnan (2022); Yuan and Liu (2022); Badreddine (2019); Amichai-Hamburger et al. (2016); Seidman (2013)	Openness
Gazit et al. (2018); Seidman (2013)	Extraversion
Badreddine (2019)	Emotional instability
Karlsson and Kajonius (2020)	Machiavellianism
Loria, Pirker, and Nacke (2021)	High moral values
Omar and Dequan (2020); Morrison, Cheong, and McMillan (2013)	No significance influence
Rahardjo et al. (2023)	Fear of losing face
Gazit et al. (2018)	Self-efficacy

Looking at Table 6, a significant challenge arises due to the inconsistency of findings across studies regarding the role of personality in influencing both lurking and active participation. The literature presents varying conclusions about which traits are most influential, as personality factors appear to affect lurking differently based on context. For instance, traits like conscientiousness have been identified as a key differentiator between lurkers and posters in some studies (Yuan and Liu 2022; Badreddine, Blount and Quilter 2022), while other traits—such as openness and introversion—are shown to be more context-dependent, with their influence shaped by platform characteristics, community norms, and individual motivations. This variability underscores the limitations of existing research, where platform-specific studies (e.g., Rahardjo et al. 2023; Omar and Dequan 2020) focus narrowly on platforms like WhatsApp or TikTok, leaving a substantial gap in understanding how personality influences lurking across different social media platforms. This inconsistency raises the question of whether lurkers should be examined through a broader lens that integrates non-behavioural perspectives, including cognitive and emotional factors, which may yield more consistent findings.

Additionally, there is a clear inability to generalize which particular traits most influence lurking behaviour. Different studies present conflicting findings on traits such as conscientiousness, introversion, agreeableness, and openness. For example, Loria, Pirker and Nacke (2021) suggest that agreeableness significantly influences lurking, while Badreddine (2019) reports the opposite. Similarly, Omar and Dequan (2020) found that motivational factors rather than personality traits play a more significant role in determining lurking behaviour. The inconsistent findings across studies suggest that personality traits alone may not fully explain why individuals lurk, and a broader approach that incorporates cognitive and emotional drivers may be needed. This research seeks to explore these inconsistencies further by testing the significance of personality in relation to lurking behaviour. By considering both behavioural and non-behavioural factors, the current study will aim to determine whether personality is a decisive factor in influencing online lurking behaviour.

Understanding the role of personality in lurking holds significant potential for platform design and community management strategies. Lurkers constitute a large, often overlooked portion of online communities, and platforms could benefit greatly from

designing environments that cater to their preferences. The traditional emphasis on converting lurkers into active posters (Tagarelli and Interdonato 2018) may overlook the fact that lurking can be a legitimate form of engagement. Designing for lurkers, as well as posters, requires a deep understanding of personality-driven preferences.

For instance, lurkers driven by traits like conscientiousness or introversion may prefer content that allows for private learning, information gathering, and low-risk interaction. In contrast, more extraverted or open individuals may seek features that allow for social exploration while still offering the option to remain passive. Platforms that recognize these preferences can create inclusive, engaging environments that allow both posters and lurkers to thrive, enhancing overall user satisfaction and engagement. This personalized approach to platform design could result in a more balanced and sustainable online community where lurkers are seen as valuable contributors rather than passive observers (Badreddine, Blount and Quilter 2022).

In summary, while personality is widely recognized as a key factor in understanding social media usage, its application to lurking behaviour remains underexplored and often inconsistent across studies. The current research aims to address these gaps, building on the understanding of engagement and lurking discussed in previous chapters. This examination of personality and its impact on lurking behaviour will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of passive online participation and inform future strategies for user engagement. Additionally, by understanding the personality traits that drive lurking, this research will shed light on the underlying motivations and preferences of lurkers, demonstrating that they can be valuable members of an online community even if they do not actively post. In doing so, it lays the groundwork for the following chapter, which will outline the methodology for investigating these complex interactions. By investigating the interplay between personality and lurking behaviour, the current study seeks to uncover deeper motivations that guide passive engagement and highlight the diversity of user engagement in social media. The next section will focus on understanding the frameworks utilised in the study of personality.

4.2.1 Personality Theories and Social Media Users

Personality has been a significant focus in understanding both active and passive online engagement, with two dominant frameworks shaping research: Jung's theory of personality types (Jung, 1971) and the Five Factor Model (FFM), or "Big Five" (Costa and McCrae, 1985). These models provide comprehensive tools for profiling online users. However, in the context of lurking behaviour, where users observe rather than participate, the relevance of each theory must be critically examined.

- *Big Five Inventory (BFI) or the "Big Five"*: categorises traits into extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness, has been the primary framework applied to understand online behaviour (Bazkiaei et al. 2020; Seidman 2013). Several studies (Loria, Pirker, and Nacke 2021; Badreddine 2019) have utilized the BFI to examine lurkers, highlighting key personality profiles. For instance, neuroticism and introversion are strongly linked to lurking, as these individuals may avoid interaction due to anxiety or a preference for passive observation (Amichai-Hamburger et al., 2016).

  However, while the Big Five provides a useful taxonomy for understanding personality in broad terms, it is largely descriptive, capturing general tendencies without delving into the underlying motivations driving passive engagement (Anglim and O'Connor, 2019). Lurking behaviour, which involves both cognitive processing and emotional regulation, may not be fully captured by the Big Five, which lacks depth in these areas. Furthermore, self-assessment bias in personality questionnaires may limit the accuracy of findings (Zajenkowski et al. 2020), particularly in online environments where users may perceive their traits differently.
  Table 7 shows the Big Five's different personality traits and their corresponding characteristics and definition.

Table 7: The Big Five Personality Traits (Adapted from: Costa and Mccrae 1985).

Personality Traits	Characteristics	Definition
1. Extraversion	● Highly engaging ● Sociable ● Assertive ● Energetic and emotionally expressive	"Having an energetic approach toward the social and material world" (Aidt and Rauh 2018, p.4).
2. Neuroticism	● Opposite of the extraverted type ● Display negative and anxious behaviours ● Self-consciousness and negative affect	"Having negative emotionality and being emotionally unstable rather than being even-tempered" (Aidt and Rauh 2018, p.4).
3. Conscientiousness	● Organised ● Goal-directed and thoughtfulness ● High control over emotions and impulses	"Having socially proscribed impulse control that facilitates task- and goal-directed behaviour" (Aidt and Rauh 2018, p.4).
4. Agreeableness	● Trust ● Consideration ● Caring and affectionate ● Altruistic	"Having a pro-social and communal attitude toward others rather than being antagonistic" (Aidt and Rauh 2018, p.4).
5. Openness	● Intellectualism ● Creative ● Open to trying new things	"The breath, depth, originality and complexity of an individual's mental and experiential life" (Aidt and Rauh 2018, p.4).

- *The HEXACO model*: (Ashton and Lee 2007) expands upon the Big Five by adding the dimension of honesty-humility, offering a more nuanced view of personality, particularly in cross-cultural settings. This model's inclusion of altruism and emotional stability offers potential for understanding why some lurkers may refrain from engaging due to ethical concerns or fear of emotional vulnerability. However, the HEXACO model has been underutilized in the context of online lurking, with few studies (e.g., Yuan and Liu 2022) exploring how honesty-humility may prevent or promote passive engagement. The limited application of HEXACO suggests an area for further research, particularly in understanding how these traits manifest in global online communities.

- *Dark triad of personality*: constituting of machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy—has garnered attention for its role in antisocial online behaviours (Paulhus and Williams 2002). However, its relevance to lurking is more tenuous. While Machiavellianism and psychopathy might be linked to manipulative passive observation, the Dark Triad's focus on exploitative behaviours may not align with the more passive, non-confrontational nature of lurking (Karlsson and Kajonius 2020). Therefore, while studies (e.g., Amichai-Hamburger et al. 2016) have linked certain Dark Triad traits to lurking, the framework may not offer substantial insights into the motivational aspects of why typical lurkers choose to observe rather than engage.

- *Need for cognition (NFC) scale*: is a 34-item scale that became the definitive tool for measuring an individual's tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive activities or information processing (i.e., thinking) (Lord and Putrevu 2005). Lurkers may engage in cognitive activities like critical thinking or content evaluation without posting. However, as NFC primarily measures active cognitive engagement, its relevance to the more passive nature of lurking remains limited (Zajenkowski et al. 2020). The focus of NFC on effortful cognitive activities may not fully account

for the observational nature of lurking, suggesting a need to combine NFC with more passive cognitive models.

Lurking behaviour, as a more passive and observational form of engagement, may align more closely with traits captured by the Big Five, rather than the more specific or negative traits emphasised in other frameworks, such as the Dark Triad. Considering the frameworks mentioned, the Big Five stands out as the most applicable for studying a lurker's personality and is adopted for this research because it:

1) Offers comprehensive scope for broad personality traits offering a broad and encompassing view of individual differences that is well studied. Additionally, it is widely recognised, and it has been validated across different cultures and populations (Qu, Sun and Ge 2021; Bazkiaei et al. 2020). It allows for a nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour in relation to different personality dimensions.
2) Facilitates the evaluation of an individual's internal belief which, in turn, allows researchers to draw comparisons and generalise findings across different samples and settings, thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the research (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003).
3) It is useful when applied to online marketing and advertising since individuals can be successfully profiled and advertisements can be tailored automatically based on personality to attract individuals (Badreddine, Blount and Quilter 2023; Azucar et al. 2018).
4) It is a relatively stable scale, providing consistent measurements of personality traits (John, John, and Rao 2020; Cobb-Clark and Schurer 2012). This allows for examination of long-term relationships between personality and lurking behaviour.

The major drawback of the BFI is that its dimensions remain mainly descriptive and so may limit its potential to build a fundamental model of personality structure (Anglim and O'Connor 2019). Expanding on this particular drawback, the Big Five may not accurately depict the complexities and nuances of lurking behaviour and does not encompass all facets of personality. It also might not take into account other important personality traits or certain motivational drivers and preferences linked to lurking, such as self-esteem, perfectionism, etc. However, with its descriptive nature, this drawback

can also be advantageous since it provides a comprehensive taxonomy of personality traits (Bazkiaei et al. 2020; Şahin, Karadağ and Tuncer 2019). Moreover, by utilising the scale, the researcher also risks oversimplification since reducing personality to five broad dimensions may not completely highlight the complex nature of individual differences (Zajenkowski et al. 2020). Likewise, if individuals are given Big Five questionnaires to answer, they may not always accurately assess their own personality traits, which leads to potential measurement errors and bias.

Despite its limitations, the Big Five model remains the most comprehensive and widely validated framework for understanding personality in online behaviour (Bazkiaei et al. 2020; Cobb-Clark and Schurer 2012). Its broad scope allows for comparisons across studies and populations, offering a standardized approach to investigating lurking behaviour. Moreover, its application to online marketing (Azucar, Marengo and Settanni 2018) provides practical insights into how lurkers can be profiled and targeted, especially in tailoring content based on personality.

Overall, while the Big Five personality scale offers numerous advantages in studying lurking behaviour, researchers should also consider its limitations and supplement the findings with additional measures and approaches to gain a more comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour and its relationship with personality. In the case of this research, the findings obtained from the personality measure will be supplemented with another influential factor (i.e., online user motivation) to an individual's overall online engagement, which is discussed later in this chapter. Additionally, applying the measure to study lurking behaviour can reveal if utilising the Big Five model is sufficient to study a lurker's personality and, if insufficient, what other personality traits can drive consumers' lurking behaviour, and the extent of that influence. The next section discusses the Big Five model in-depth.

4.2.1.1 The Big Five Inventory (BFI) versus NEO-PI-R

The Big Five along with their corollaries are listed in Table 8. The NEO Personality Inventory, revised (NEO-PI-R), developed by Costa and McCrae (1992), is a widely used tool for assessing the Big Five dimensions. However, its extensive length of 240 items poses challenges for research purposes, as it can be time-consuming and may lead to participant fatigue or lack of engagement. In response to these limitations, Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003) introduced the BFI-10, a shorter version of the Big Five assessment. Whilst the BFI-10 is considered psychometrically superior and more practical due to its brevity, it is important to note that reducing the number of items may sacrifice the comprehensiveness and depth of personality assessment. In order to carefully consider the trade-off between measurement efficiency and capturing the full complexity of personality traits when choosing between these instruments, the researcher compared and summarised both models in Table 9.

Table 8: Big five inventory personality traits and characteristics (adapted from Zell and Lesick 2021; Amichai-Hamburger and Vinitzky 2010; McCrae and John 1992; Chowdhury 2006, p.2).

Personality traits	**Characteristics**	**Corollaries**
Extraversion	Active, bold, assertive, exciting, stimulating, sociable, ability to experience positive emotions, warmth, and gregariousness	Introversion
Conscientiousness	Organised, exacting, self-disciplined, diligent, dependable, methodical, achievement-striving, purposeful, and scrupulous.	Indirectness
Neuroticism	Anxiety, hostility, depression, self-conscious, vulnerability, fear, sadness, embarrassment, disgust, anger, psychological distress, and sensitivity to danger	Stability
Agreeableness	Selflessness, good-natured, gentle, cooperative, flexible, tolerance, generous, sympathetic, courteous, striving for common understanding, maintaining social affiliations, kindness, unselfishness, generosity, compliance, modesty, altruism, fairness, and trusting.	Disagreeableness, Antagonism
Openness	Imaginative, innovative, rule breaking, creative, sophisticated, resourcefulness, curious, willingness, and enjoy artistic pursuits.	Non-openness

Table 9: Comparison between NEO-PI-R and BFI-10. Adapted from Costa and McCrae (1992) and Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann (2003).

Model	**NEO-PI-R**	**BFI-10**
Length	Long 210-item scale. Slow completion time, less convenient for larger scale studies	Shorter 10-item scale. Faster completion time, more convenient for larger scale studies
Comprehensiveness	Comprehensive and detailed assessment	General assessment which is not as detailed
Psychometric properties	Robust psychometric properties	Displays superior psychometric properties for a short scale
Application	The NEO-PI-R is commonly used in research contexts that require in-depth personality assessment, such as personality research, clinical psychology, and organisational psychology.	Large-scale studies or situations where a quick and general assessment of the Big Five traits is sufficient.

Having considered both scales and keeping time constraints and participant fatigue in mind for this research, BFI-10 will be used to measure personality because of its benefits, such as its stronger convergent validity, by capturing the core dimensions of the Big Five, better discriminant validity by effectively differentiating between traits, and robust predictive validity, by accurately predicting various outcomes associated with personality traits. In other words, "the psychometric properties of the BFI-10 are also sound in terms of reliability, construct validity and criterion validity" (Huang 2022, p.748). The BFI-10 has previously demonstrated acceptable levels of reliability and validity in comparison to the full-length version (Pallson et al. 2023; Ludeke and Larsen 2017). Its psychometric superiority over other short instruments contributes to its overall stronger validity, making it a valuable tool for assessing personality traits efficiently without sacrificing measurement quality.

Additionally, since this research will involve large-scale surveys, a shorter instrument is ideal to gain maximum responses from participants (Courtois et al. 2020). Courtois

et al. (2020) validated the French version of the BFI-10 and found it captures the core aspects of the Big Five, providing satisfactory reliability and broad bandwidth. Additionally, multiple studies surrounding social media usage have utilised the BFI-10 (e.g., Roos 2023; Huang 2022; Indira and Maharani 2021; Satici et al. 2022; Fagan et al. 2021; Quaglieri et al. 2021). Moreover, since this research will require participants to rate themselves based on the scale, they will profit from the use of a shorter scale that is faster to complete. When it comes to short instruments, the BFI-10, although brief, is considered psychometrically superior, can be used for latent variable modelling, and allows researchers to assess for acquiescence bias and to check for errors (Pallson et al. 2020).

4.3 Online User Motivation

Motivation, like personality, plays a significant role in shaping online behaviour, including lurking (Martinek, Caliandro and Denegri-Knott 2022). A comprehensive understanding of lurking requires integrating both constructs to grasp how motivational drivers influence passive participation in online spaces. Personality traits previously discussed (e.g., introversion, conscientiousness, etc.) often interact with specific motivational factors to determine whether individuals engage actively or prefer to lurk. Consumer engagement in social media communities is often based on three approaches, consumer attitude towards the community, consumer practices within the community, and consumer motivation to interact with the community (Santos et al. 2022). This section focuses on consumer motivation.

Human action can stem from many motives; hence, to fully explore online engagement, the motivational factors having most significance on it need to be identified (Foxall et al. 1998). Consumer motivation is defined by many authors as ”*consumer’s intrinsic motivation to interact and cooperate with community members”* (Santos et al. 2022, p.3). The definition highlights the role of motivation in influencing individuals' engagement and behaviours in online communities. To unify the conceptualisation of CE, Bilro and Loureiro (2020, p.291) argue that it is a *“motivational and relational state (comprising cognitive, emotional, and behavioural aspects) that may occur between two agents, one being the consumer(s), and the other a brand, firm, or organisation, which can operate online, offline or both”.* Therefore, motivation itself is a highly dynamic concept, influenced by various factors,

including personal life experiences, environmental circumstances that shape wants and needs, social interactions, and an individual's state of being (Megicks, Memery, and Williams, 2008).

Studies focusing on motivations behind social media engagement have widely used Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (e.g. Garibaldi et al. 2022). Whilst U&G assumes that individuals utilise SM to fulfil psychological needs, these needs are not well explicated. SDT of motivation comes in handy here, as it takes over here as it explains the underlying mechanism by which SM affects various measures of psychological well-being (Garibaldi et al. 2022). Lurkers may fulfil psychological needs for autonomy or competence by observing rather than contributing, as suggested by SDT. Whilst U&G proposes that gratifications like information acquisition or escape can be satisfied passively (Veirman et al. 2016), explaining why lurkers may refrain from posting. So, both theories can be beneficial in order to understand lurker's engagement online which is what this research aims to tackle. Additionally, since research specific to lurking has been sparse, with existing literature primarily focusing on active participation motives, it is beneficial to understand lurker's use motivations.

The contextual focus of motivation on lurking involves examining how lurking motivations may vary across different online platforms, communities, and specific contexts (Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2022). It explores the situational factors that influence individual's motives for lurking in specific online environments. A search of "lurking" or "lurker" and "motivation" on Scopus yielded 30 documents over 2020-2024. In addition to these, relevant studies on lurking motivations are compiled to form Table 10 which is organised from most recent to older publications.

Table 2: Previous Studies on Lurking Motivations.

Reference	Contextual focus	Theoretical context	Findings focus	Research Gaps
Liu et al. (2024)	Lurking behaviour on WeChat	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations (social comparison, privacy concerns, overloads) lead to lurking through anxiety and social media fatigue. Social media fatigue also influences anxiety, which in turn contributes to lurking.	Focus on a singular dimension of lurking, neglecting the holistic impact of psychological and external influences on lurking behaviour.
Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2023)	To probe the relationship between listening and lurking.	Phenomenological approach and extended active-passive model	Provides a tentative framework for studying online lurking by bringing to bear listening theory and by reasoning that lurking is a needs-based activity that has purpose embedded within it.	Purely qualitative research conducted on only 12 individuals.
Rahardjo et al. (2023)	Motivational drivers in WhatsApp and TikTok communities.	Social Identity Theory	Found varying motives of lurking depending on the platform and its communal expectations. Privacy concerns and social norms strongly affect lurking behaviour.	Lack of comprehensive studies combining motivations across diverse platforms.

Rungruangjit, et al. (2023)	Explores how Facebook pages of cosmetic products engage millennials and transform them into brand evangelists	Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory	Informational content stimulates active lurkers and passive participants, entertaining content influences only active participants, and social interaction value motivates active and passive participants. Identification and special treatment benefits drive both active and lurking participation.	The study identifies a gap in understanding the role of passive participants and lurkers in brand communities, which are often overlooked despite their significant contribution to brand loyalty and evangelism.
Badreddine et al. (2022)	Motivations behind lurking in knowledge-sharing environments.	Self-efficacy, Social Exchange Theory.	Lack of self-efficacy and concern over inadequate rewards reduce lurkers' contribution levels. Posters tend to be motivated by reciprocity and feedback from the community.	Focuses mainly on organizational environments, not broader social media contexts.
Cheng and Chen (2022)	Motivations behind lurking in online forums focused on motorcycle modification	Achievement Goal Theory and Cognitive Dissonance Theory	Users with mastery goals (focused on improving skills or knowledge) are more likely to actively participate, whereas those with avoidance goals (focused on avoiding incompetence or failure) may be more prone to lurking. Lurkers often gather information to improve their competence without the risk of failure associated with posting. Lurking can be a strategy to reduce the discomfort (cognitive	Viewed lurkers homogenously. Focused only on achievement goals and cognitive dissonance.

			dissonance) that arises when users encounter conflicting information or social dynamics in the community.	
Martínek et al. (2022)	Investigate the drivers of social media engagement behaviour and their impact on loyalty-related outcomes.	Adopted U&G framework to explore functional (informational), or hedonic (entertainment) motivations.	Lurkers' motives to engage on social media include: the need for information, entertainment needs, identification. The only negative predictor is social needs.	Focuses only on a single platform (Facebook). Did not explore personality traits, which could influence the study's results. Lurkers are measured homogeneously. Tested on a selected, limited number of motivations
Menon (2022)	Usage behaviours associated with Instagram Reels, focusing on motives, contextual age,	Uses and Gratifications (U&G) theory	Seven key motives for using Instagram Reels were identified: socially rewarding self-promotion, entertainment, escape, surveillance, novelty, documentation, and trendiness.	Did not focus on lurkers motives.

	and narcissism in an Indian context.			
Nguyen et al. (2022)	Active lurking in organizational online knowledge-sharing (OKS) environments, specifically within the banking sector.	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	The perceived importance of knowledge positively influences both active lurking and knowledge collecting behaviours in both public and private sectors. On the other hand, perceived negative reputation affects active lurking positively but has a mixed or negative effect on knowledge collecting.	Limited research on the specific motivations that drive active lurking behaviour in organizations, especially regarding its relationship to innovation capability.
Swirsky et al. (2022)	Adolescent social media behaviours, specifically self-disclosure, lurking, and social monitoring.	Interpersonal theory and social goals	Popularity and acceptance goals influence lurking, particularly among early developers and girls. Puberty impacts lurking behaviour.	Limited cross-sectional design; did not differentiate platforms or other dimensions of social media use.

McLaughlin et al. (2021)	examines online brand communities and the motivations of lurkers and posters.	Uses and gratifications (U&G) theory	lurkers have lower expectations (i.e., gratifications sought) and tend to receive fewer gratifications than posters.	Gap in understanding lurkers choose not to post despite achieving gratifications. The study emphasizes the need for further exploration of the psychological barriers or other factors that contribute to lurking behaviour beyond satisfaction.
Nguyen et al. (2020)	Online knowledge sharing in organizations.	Theory of Planned Behaviour, Intrinsic/Extrinsic motivation.	Self-enjoyment significantly drives lurking intentions, with lesser impacts from self-efficacy and rewards. Posters driven by reciprocity and rewards.	Needs further exploration of different motivational factors in organizational settings, not just self-efficacy and enjoyment.
Omar and Dequan (2020)	Lurking behaviour on social media platforms	Uses and Gratifications Theory	Motivational factors (e.g., privacy, fear of judgement) play a more significant role than personality traits in lurking behaviour.	Lack of exploration of platform-specific lurking motives and other contextual influences.

Zheng et al. (2020)	Lurkers and active users in social QandA communities	Media System Dependency (MSD) Theory	Understanding attachments, dependency relations to the platform and content creators.	Data was only collected from Zhihu users (QandA platform in china). Excludes the frequency of postings to differentiate lurkers from active users.
Veirman et al. (2016)	Motivations for lurking and posting on Facebook brand pages.	Develops six categories of motivations: information, entertainment, social interaction, self-presentation, remuneration and empowerment.	Both lurking and posting are driven by the need for social interaction. Lurkers are also (but to a lesser extent) motivated by the need for entertainment whilst posters are motivated by empowerment.	Lurkers are measured homogeneously. Only found entertainment as a factor to explain lurking behaviour.
Alarifi et al. (2015)	To identify key reasons that drive Enterprise Service Network (ESN) members to either post or lurk.	Developed a theory based on the existing model of knowledge contribution to identify salient motivations for user participation, categorised into: extrinsic benefits, extrinsic costs, intrinsic benefits and intrinsic costs.	Lurking is motivated by high levels of perceived extrinsic and intrinsic cost, whereas posters are motivated by high levels of perceived extrinsic and intrinsic benefits.	Lurkers are measured homogeneously. Did not compose a complete model with all the possible explanatory factors of lurking and posting behaviours.

Hung et al. (2015)	Expectancy Theory, Uses and Gratifications	Lurkers gather information without contributing due to lack of perceived reciprocity and reward incentives. Posters motivated by personal enjoyment and reciprocity expectations.	Future studies needed on motivations for sustained lurking beyond simple information gathering	Future studies needed on motivations for sustained lurking beyond simple information gathering
Sun et al. (2014)	To identify reasons for lurking	Intrinsic motivation (Self-determination theory)	Lurkers are motivated by information gathering and personal satisfaction. Lack of self-efficacy deters knowledge-sharing behaviour.	Requested further exploration of psychological and sociological influence of lurking behaviour. Lurkers are measured homogeneously.

Most studies in Table 10 highlight an attempt to understand the motivational factors behind lurking or engagement behaviour on social media from different contexts, through utilising different frameworks. Summarising the table, Lurkers are primarily intrinsically motivated by information gathering, self-enjoyment, and personal satisfaction and are de-motivated by extrinsic motives such as lack of reciprocity, reward incentives, or social feedback.

Additionally, Adjin-Tettey and Garman (2023) argue that lurking is a needs-based activity, grounded in listening theory, where individuals purposefully consume content to satisfy specific needs. This view aligns with the findings of Alarifi et al. (2015), who suggest that both extrinsic (e.g., fear of negative consequences) and intrinsic (e.g., self-regulation) costs play a significant role in discouraging active participation, while encouraging lurking behaviour. These costs are not merely social or reputational but extend to cognitive and emotional investments that users weigh before choosing whether to post or merely observe. Supporting Martínek et al. (2022) findings that lurking is less motivated by social recognition and more by hedonic or cognitive factors, such as entertainment and self-monitoring. This diverges from findings on posters, who tend to value the social benefits of sharing content. McLaughlin, Haverila, and Haverila (2022) further extend this by noting that lurkers are motivated by a combination of social integration, entertainment, and identification, although the desire for social enhancement is not as strong as it is for posters.

In summary, the findings suggest that lurking motivations can vary, depending on various factors linked to individual preferences, environmental influences, social factors, technological factors and the perceived costs and benefits associated with active participation (Nguyen 2020). This research challenges the assumption that motivations for posting and lurking are dichotomous by examining the nuances of passive engagement. Lurking is more complex than a mere lack of posting and should be examined in terms of cognitive motivations (e.g., self-monitoring, perfectionism) and emotional factors (e.g., fear of judgment). By analysing these underlying motivations in conjunction with personality, the current study will extend previous findings and provide a more comprehensive model of lurking behaviour. This is beneficial since an existing observed research gap is existing literature predominantly

focuses on active engagement and overlooks the value of lurking behaviours in virtual communities (Rungruangjit et al. 2023).

4.3.1 Theoretical and Measurement Focus of Motivation

As earlier discussed, previous studies on social media motivation tend to focus heavily on active engagement, leaving a gap in understanding 'passive' behaviours like lurking. Baldus et al. (2020) listed intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as factors leading to consumer engagement. These motives include closure, cognition, information, socialization, social influence (intrinsic), and entertainment, rewards, and money (extrinsic). Yet the distinction between what drives posters versus lurkers remains unclear. Additionally, many studies on the topic of motivation and SM only address Facebook use but motives may vary across SM platforms (Garibaldi et al. 2023). By considering all these different types of motivation behind online engagement, researchers and practitioners can gain a deeper understanding of lurking behaviour and design strategies that align with users' needs and desires.

In section 3.2.2, we discussed various motives and reasons as to why a lurker may lurk online. This section focuses on further understanding the frameworks used to study the motives behind social media use. To advance the understanding of lurking, this research incorporates both SDT and U&G frameworks to explore the specific internal and external drivers of passive engagement.

The review carried out in this research identified several measurements used to study SM use motivation. Some measurements do not have a known set of fixed dimensions, but they all provide emphasis and focus on at least 3 concepts, making them multi-dimensional. Several prominent psychological theories, such as Self-Determination Theory (SDT), Uses and Gratifications Theory (U&G), Balance Theory, and Distributive Justice Theory, have been previously employed to conceptualize and measure online engagement motivations. These frameworks are not only useful for identifying basic motivational factors but also for understanding the deeper psychological processes that drive user behaviour on social media platforms.

For instance, SDT emphasizes the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in driving user behaviour, focusing on fulfilling basic psychological needs like autonomy,

competence, and relatedness (Garibaldi et al. 2023). This theory has proven effective in explaining why some users, including lurkers, may engage passively with content, as they seek to meet these psychological needs without active participation (Bazi et al. 2020). Conversely, U&G theory, widely applied in media studies, posits that users engage with media to satisfy specific needs such as entertainment, information-seeking, and social interaction (Garibaldi et al. 2023). It provides a more consumer-centric perspective by emphasizing the gratification users seek from their media engagement, which aligns with the lurking behaviours observed on social media platforms.

Two of the major theories, U&G theory and SDT, will be used to conceptualise lurkers' motives on social media usage. This is because they offer broader perspectives that can be applied to understand lurking behaviour in various online contexts. Both U&G and SDT provide frameworks that focus on individual motivations and the gratifications or psychological needs individuals seek through their media or online activities. Therefore, both will provide specific insights into the motivations and behaviours of individuals in online environments and offer a more nuanced understanding of the factors influencing lurking behaviour and the gratifications individuals seek through their online activities. Later sections will explain more about these chosen theories.

4.3.1.1 Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

SDT explains that individuals are likely to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfilment (Deci and Ryan 1985). It has been used to explain motivational dynamics, motivational behaviour (Huang et al. 2015), goal-oriented behaviours and well-being (Deci and Ryan 1985). Moreover, it has been successfully applied across domains, including parenting, education, healthcare, sports and physical activity, psychotherapy, virtual worlds, work motivation, and management (Deci and Ryan 1985). The theory suggests three factors that, when satisfied, yield enhanced self-motivation, which are the needs for competence (feeling competent and effective), relatedness (feeling connected, loved, interacted), and autonomy (feeling self-governed and self-endorsed) (Chiu 2022). Moreover, when these three psychological needs are met, individuals will also experience greater psychological well-being and avoid feelings of isolation and fragmentation (Chiu 2022), and reactiveness. SDT

therefore differentiates the types of motivation and maintains they all have functionally different catalysts, concomitants, and consequences (Deci et al. 2017).

SDT distinguishes between amotivation (lack of motivation and motivation), autonomous motivation, and controlled motivation. “Amotivation involves not having an intention to act whereas motivation involves intentionally” (Gagne and Deci 2005, p.340). “Autonomous motivation includes intrinsic motivation and well-internalised extrinsic motivation” (Gangne and Deci 2005, p.340), meaning that one is motivated by one’s own interest in an activity (intrinsic motivation) or/and because “the value and regulation of the activity have been integrated within oneself (integrated extrinsic motivation)” (Gangne and Deci 2005, p.340). Meanwhile, controlled motivation consists of external regulation or extrinsic motivation, meaning that “one’s controlled motivation reflects the degree to which one feels coerced or seduced by external contingencies or by their introjected counterpart” (Gangne and Deci 2005, p.340). All the concepts of motivation, whether autonomous, controlled, or amotivation, concern a person’s relation to an activity or set of activities.

When studying lurking behaviour, SDT can help in exploring the psychological factors that drive individuals to engage in passive observation, rather than active participation. For example, lurkers may value their autonomy in freely choosing their level of involvement, or they may seek a sense of competence by gaining knowledge and insights from observing others. SDT helps researchers understand the underlying psychological needs and motivations that influence lurking behaviour.

4.3.1.2 Uses and Gratifications (U&G) Theory

Uses and Gratification (U&G) theory asserts that individuals use media both selectively and actively and it is regarded as a crucial strategy for investigating how people use the internet and social networking sites, both of which necessitate active engagement (Eighmey 1997). The U&G framework has been widely applied by consumer-motivation studies focusing on the online environment and media use. In regard to SM specifically, researchers have identified three underlying dimensions of SM use motivations using the U&G framework: friendship, connect, and, information (Garibaldi et al. 2022, p.435).

In other terms, U&G theory postulates that individuals seek out media that fulfil their needs, which leads to ultimate gratification (Lariscy et al. 2017). When utilising U&G theory, several assumptions have been made regarding one's behaviour. Firstly, the audience is considered active, and his/her media usage is goal directed (Blumler 1979). This means that motivations are considered as being gratifications sought (Dichter 1966). Secondly, the media competes with other sources, such as interpersonal communication, personal experiences, or other forms of entertainment, for an individual's need for satisfaction (Blumler 1979). Lastly, users are aware of their media usage, interest, and motives and, therefore, can provide researchers with an overview (Blumler 1979).

Multiple researchers (e.g. Hsieh et al. 2024; Saleem and Iglesias 2020) express the importance and usefulness of Uses and Gratifications theory in social media research in order to explain the many and varied reasons behind social media engagement. U&G theory is relevant when it comes to studying one's lurking behaviour because it suggests that individuals engage in media use, including online engagement, to satisfy certain needs or desires. For example, lurkers may choose to lurk in online communities because it satisfies their need for information or social connection without requiring them to actively participate or contribute. Moreover, by applying U&G, researchers can examine the gratifications sought by lurkers and understand how these motivations influence their lurking behaviour.

4.3.1.3 Strengths, Weaknesses, and Research Gaps Surrounding SDT and U&G

Having discussed each theory for measuring online motivation, Table 11 summarises the strengths, weaknesses, and research gaps associated with both frameworks. Combining insights from multiple theories and considering the specific context and research objectives can provide a more comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour and tackle each of the theory's individual weaknesses.

Table 11: Strengths, weaknesses, and research gaps of SDT, and U&G. Adapted from Buzeta, Pelsmacker, and Dens (2020); Chiu (2022); Deci, Olafsen, and Ryan (2017); Lariscy et al. (2017).

Theory	Strengths	Weaknesses	Research gaps
SDT	● Focuses on intrinsic motivation and psychological needs ● Emphasises the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness ● Framework for understanding the impact of social contexts on motivation and behaviour.	● May not fully capture the complexity and diversity of human motivations ● Relies on self-report measures ● Limited guidance on the role of external factors and environmental influences in shaping motivation and behaviour.	● Further exploration of how different types of motivation (e.g., intrinsic, extrinsic) relate to lurking behaviour. ● Investigation into the interplay between psychological needs and lurking behaviour ● Examination of the influence of social contexts, such as virtual communities, on motivation and lurking behaviour.
U&G	● Focuses on the active role of individuals in selecting and using media to fulfil specific needs. ● Comprehensive framework for understanding the diverse motivations behind media use, including lurking behaviour. ● Provides insights into the gratifications sought by individuals through lurking and how these gratifications contribute to their overall media experiences.	● Relies on self-report measures ● Limited guidance on the interplay between different gratifications and their impact on behaviour. ● May not fully capture the complex dynamics between motivations, media use, and outcomes.	● Investigation of the specific gratifications sought through lurking behaviour and their impact on subsequent behaviours or outcomes. ● Exploration of the role of individual differences in motivations and how they relate to lurking behaviour. ● Examination of the influence of cultural or contextual factors on motivations and lurking behaviour.

4.3.1.4 Dimensionality Focus of Motivation

The number of dimensionalities across motivational frameworks differ, for example, SDT proposes three basic psychological needs that drive intrinsic motivation and self-regulation (autonomy, competence, and relatedness). However, U&G theory does not explicitly define a set number of dimensions, but common dimensions identified in U&G include information-seeking, entertainment, social interaction, and personal identity.

Like the other constructs being studied (i.e. CE, personality), online motivation is complex and multi-dimensional. Individuals engage with social media platforms for a variety of reasons. These motivations range from fulfilling personal psychological needs to achieving external goals, and they offer insight into why people participate in online environments in different ways (Omar and Dequan 2020). By looking at the different dimensions of online motivation, we can better understand how various psychological factors influence user behaviour.

One key dimension is the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is internally driven, meaning that people engage with social media because they find it personally rewarding whether that's due to enjoyment, interest, or a sense of personal fulfilment (Ghaisani et al. 2017). In contrast, extrinsic motivation comes from external factors, such as rewards, recognition, or incentives. These external drivers encourage users to behave in certain ways in order to achieve specific goals or gain approval from others. For instance, someone might post frequently on social media to gain likes or followers, driven by a desire for external validation.

Hedonic and utilitarian motivation represent another important pair of dimensions. Hedonic motivation is all about pleasure and emotional gratification people engage with social media to be entertained, to have fun, or to experience some form of enjoyment (Mainolfi et al. 2022). This type of motivation is focused on creating a positive, enjoyable experience. On the other hand, utilitarian motivation is more practical and goal oriented. Users driven by utilitarian motives are looking to achieve something concrete, such as gathering useful information or completing a specific task

online. While hedonic motivations are about the emotional rewards of engagement, utilitarian motivations prioritize efficiency and functionality.

Social versus personal motivation is another dimension to consider. Social motivation revolves around the desire to connect with others. It involves engaging with social media to meet new people, build relationships, or feel part of a community (Hilvert-Bruce et al., 2018). This is the motivation behind activities like socializing, networking, and forming connections. In contrast, personal motivation is more individualistic, focusing on self-expression and managing one's own identity or reputation online. People motivated by personal goals may be more interested in how they present themselves, their achievements, or their personal fulfilment (Zhang et al. 2022). Motivational labels for social motivation are socialising, networking, relationship-building, and personal motivation, which includes individual goals, reputation, and personal fulfilment.

Other motives include information-seeking, entertainment, self-presentation, and psychological needs motivation. Information-seeking motivation is about the pursuit of knowledge and advice. Users often turn to social media to answer questions, solve problems, or stay informed (Alwi and Murad 2018). This dimension reflects the role of social media as a resource for acquiring information, whether it's about current events, personal interests, or practical advice.

Entertainment motivation covers everything from seeking amusement to using social media as a way to escape from daily stress (Sung et al. 2018). This is common in users who turn to social media for leisure, whether that's by watching videos, reading funny posts, or interacting with entertaining content.

Self-presentation motivation is about managing one's online identity. Social media provides users with a platform to shape how they are perceived by others. This motivation reflects the desire for impression management and self-expression, as individuals carefully curate the content they share to construct an identity that aligns with their personal or social goals.

Lastly, there are psychological needs motivations, which tie back to fundamental human needs. Based on Self-Determination Theory, these include the need for autonomy (feeling free to make choices), competence (achieving mastery or success), and relatedness (feeling connected to others) (Bovermann and Bastiaens

2020). It includes motivational labels linked to “(1) autonomy, which refers to the need for freedom and having meaningful choices; (2) competence, which considers the desire to gain mastery and achievements; and (3) relatedness, which is the need to interact and to be connected to others” (Bovermann and Bastiaens 2020, p.3).

These needs explain why people use social media not just for entertainment or information but also to feel more in control of their lives, to achieve personal goals, and to build meaningful social connections. Although there are various distinct motives, it is important to remember that motives are nuanced and frequently interact or overlap with one another. The prominence of various motives can change, depending on the setting, individual differences, specific online behaviours, and people can have many motivations at once. Therefore, this research considers all seven motives to provide a comprehensive understanding of the motives linked to lurking behaviour instead of limiting the study to one or a few motives. Additionally, by understanding these dimensions of motivation, we gain a clearer picture of why people engage with social media in such diverse ways and can provide valuable insights into how we can better cater to users’ needs.

4.4 Research Gaps

Despite the extensive research on social media motivations discussed earlier, studies often overlook the heterogeneity of lurkers and fail to distinguish between their varying behaviours and motivations. Moreover, existing literature failed to understand the multidimensional nature of lurking, which is influenced by both personality traits and external motivations. Studies that do investigate motives behind lurking behaviours (e.g. Liu et al. 2024; Omar and Dequan 2020), have limited scope by focusing primarily on individual motivations or platform-specific behaviour, leaving cross-platform influences unexplored.

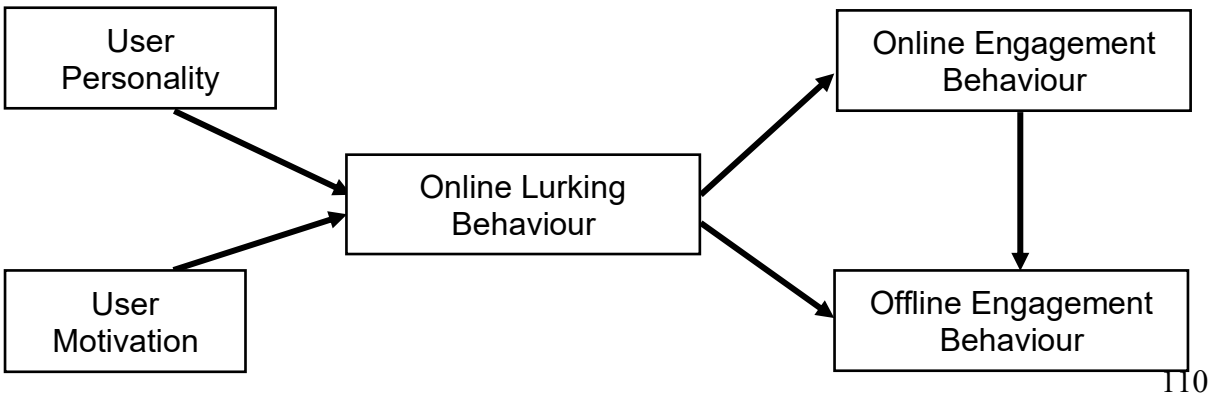
Referring to Table 11 (see section 4.3.1.3) and previous discussion enclosed within this chapter, the research gaps highlight the need for more empirical studies to validate and expand upon the proposed frameworks, explore the specific factors and mechanisms that drive motivations, and consider the contextual factors that may influence lurking behaviour on social media.

This research addresses the gaps mentioned by i) studying both motivations and personality influences behind lurking behaviour, ii) measuring lurkers non-behaviourally and heterogeneously, iii) not being limited to a single social media platform as was the case with other studies, and iv) adopting a mixed methods research design to build a nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour. In summary, despite considerable research of online motivations, some research gaps include the need for more comprehensive and context-specific measurement scales, further exploration of new and emerging social media platforms, and a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual and contextual factors in shaping a lurker's motivations. Whilst the research on motivations behind lurking behaviour is still evolving, further studies are needed to deepen our understanding of specific motivations, their interplay, and the contextual factors that influence online lurking behaviour.

4.5 Chapter Summary

To summarise, this chapter has explored how personality and motivation are both key factors influencing online behaviours, especially within the context of lurking. It has also discussed the outcomes of lurking behaviour and its influence on online and offline engagement. Like consumer engagement, motivation and personality are complex, multifaceted constructs, each involving a range of factors that underpin an individual's behaviour online. Personality traits and motivations often vary significantly from person to person, and this variability can be observed in both online and offline interactions. Therefore, the chapter has focused on how these two factors- personality and motivation influences online CE, particularly, lurking behaviour. Having explained these constructs, Figure 3 demonstrates the proposed research framework.

Figure 3: Research Framework.



There is currently a lack of research that has studied both the effects of personality and motivation on online lurking behaviour. Studying motivation helps researchers understand why some individuals choose to monitor online activities without contributing actively, while studying personality reveals patterns in how specific traits may influence this passive engagement. By investigating both factors, researchers can develop strategies, interventions, or even platform designs that better align with users' motivations and promote engagement across different personality types. This dual focus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour in online environments.

In conclusion, this research seeks to fill the gap in existing literature by exploring the influence of both personality and motivation on online lurking behaviour and subsequently, to explore whether this behaviour is transferred offline as a form of offline engagement. This chapter has laid the theoretical groundwork for this exploration, and the next chapter will outline the research methodology and the chosen industry focus for the study.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

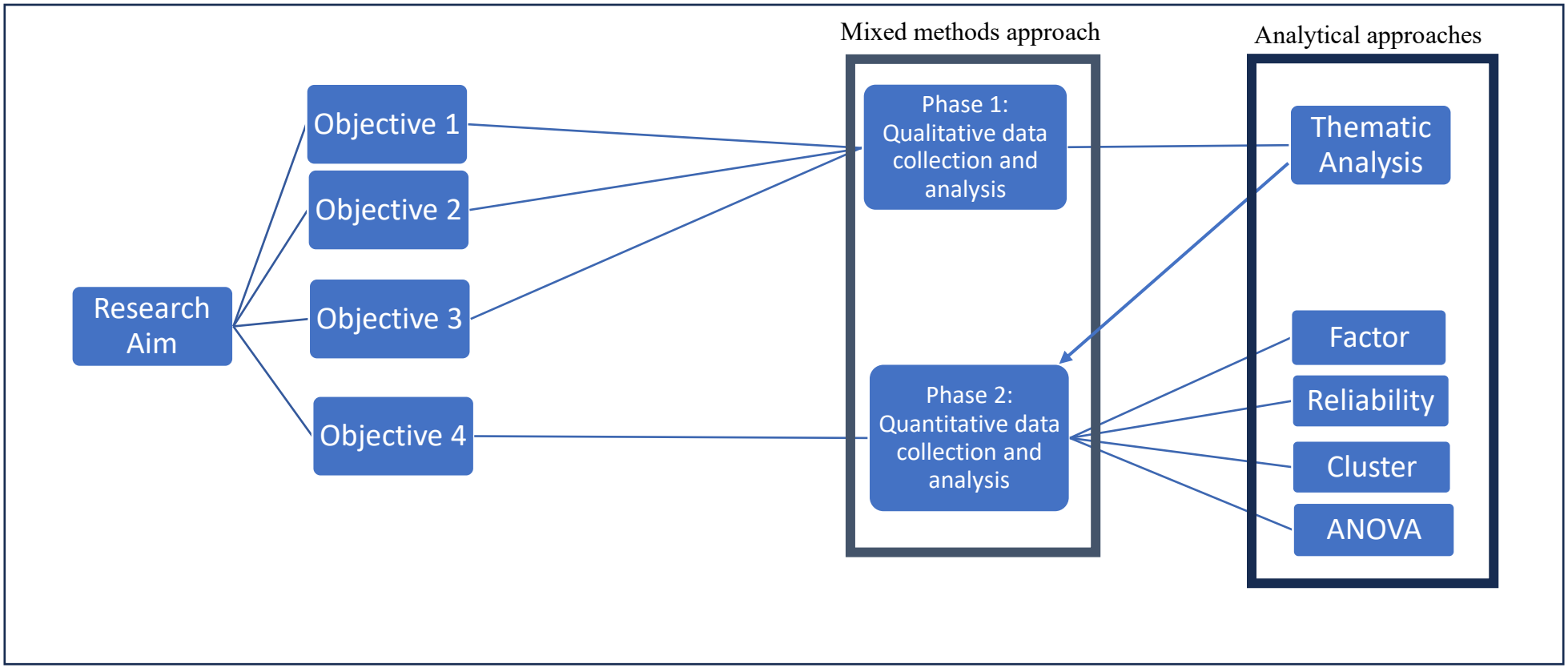
5.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research design and methodology adopted to achieve the objectives of the current study. The research employed a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. It outlines the rationale for the chosen methodology, data collection tools, sampling strategies, and analysis methods utilised in both phases of the study. Having an effective research design acts as a blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Iovino and Tsitsianis 2020; Creswell 2017) and is key to achieving the overall research's aim and objectives. The selection of appropriate methods and data collection techniques will ensure maximum validity, reliability, and ethical conduct of the research findings.

5.2 Research Overview

This research employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, where qualitative data collected in phase 1 informed the development of the quantitative phase (phase 2). For ease of understanding, Figure 4 demonstrates the entire planned research overview. To achieve the research aim, four research objectives were developed. Research Objectives (ROs) 1 to 3 was explored through a qualitative study (phase 1), whilst RO4 was established through quantitative research (phase 2). The researcher analysed qualitative data using thematic analysis which then feeds into the design of the quantitative phase. Quantitative data was then analysed using factor, reliability, cluster, and ANOVA analysis. Therefore, making the study- sequential mixed methods research.

Figure 4: Research Overview.



Target Audience:

1. Were UK residents
2. Were aged between 18 and 74 years of age
3. Self-identified as regular consumers of skincare products
4. Self-identified as online browsers or searchers of skincare products.

Research aim:

To challenge the conventional conceptualisation and measurement of lurking on social media and explore whether different types of lurkers exist.

Research Objectives (RO):

1. To critically review the extant conceptualisation and measurement of lurking behaviour in online communities of interest on social media
2. To explore the roles of personality and motivational factors in explaining lurking behaviour online
3. To explore whether online lurking behaviour influences offline engagement behaviours
4. To establish whether online lurking behaviour is a singular or plural in nature, and whether different types of lurkers exist based on objective 1, 2, and 3.

5.2.1 Research Philosophy

The development of knowledge, research strategy, and research methods used by a researcher are driven by the research philosophy, according to Saunders et al. (2018). In other words, it refers to the researcher's understanding of the world and how it is investigated, which can be quite complex (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). There are four components of a research paradigm to consider when selecting the philosophical stance to follow (i.e., positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, etc., as identified in Saunders' framework). These components are known as the ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological approaches (Guba and Lincoln 1994). Understanding of these components is crucial for the explanation and justification of research process decisions and can make a major difference to the research methodological choices.

1. **Ontology:** is the study of "being" and the question of "what is", or the assumptions we make about the kind and nature of reality and what exists, i.e., the social world (Crotty 1998; Richards 2003). In other terms, the question to be asked from an ontological assumption is 'what is the nature of reality?' Creswell (2007) explains that with ontology, reality is subjective and multiple, as seen by participants in the study.

   For the current study, the assumption is that reality is not fixed but varies depending on individual perspectives, particularly when investigating subjective behaviours like lurking in online communities. Therefore, the approach aligns with **relativism**, where multiple realities exist based on different individuals' experiences, motivations, personality, and online consumer engagement in the qualitative phase (Gura 1992).

2. **Epistemology**: in general, is the assumptions made about the kind or nature of knowledge (Richards 2003). According to Crotty (1998), it is a way of making sense of the world whilst looking at it. Epistemology deals with the nature of knowledge and an understanding of what that knowledge involves, which includes the knowledge's possibility, scope, and legitimacy, as well as how that knowledge can be obtained and communicated to others (Al-Saadi 2014).

In this mixed methods study, a **pragmatic epistemology** is appropriate. Pragmatism allows for the combination of interpretivist perspectives (qualitative phase) to explore how and why individuals lurk in online communities, and positivist perspectives (quantitative phase) to validate findings through measurable and observable data. Knowledge is thus seen as constructed from both subjective experiences and objective facts.

3. **Methodology:** like epistemology, methodology deals with investigating realities from a philosophical view (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008). It refers to the practical ways of investigating the world's reality influenced by the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions (Silverman 2009).

   This research's chosen methodology is **mixed methods.** Creswell and Plano Clark (2011, p.5) defined mixed methods research as:

   > *"A research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collecting, analysing, and mixing both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone".*

   Utilising a mixed methods approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour on social media through addressing the multifaceted nature of online lurking behaviour. It follows a sequential exploratory design involving: Qualitative research first to explore the complex, subjective experiences of lurking behaviour (interpretivist and inductive approach). Followed by quantitative research to confirm and generalize the initial qualitative findings and identifying patterns across larger populations (positivist and deductive approach). The rationale behind this chosen methodology will be discussed later on in this chapter (see section 5.3).

4. **Axiology:** *"addresses questions related to what is valued and what is considered to be desirable or good for humans and society"* (Biedenbach and Jacobsson 2016, p.140). The main question here is 'what is the role of values?' An example is when the *"researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes his or her own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretations of participants"* (Yilmaz 2013, p.316).

   This research's axiology is about value **neutrality with reflexivity**. In the current study, the researcher's values may influence the qualitative phase, particularly in how themes and patterns are interpreted. However, the researcher aims for value-neutrality in the quantitative phase to ensure objectivity. The researcher also practices reflexivity, being aware of how personal biases and values might shape the interpretation of qualitative findings while striving to remain neutral in data collection and analysis.

5.2.2 Research Approach

Building on the earlier discussion of the epistemological focus chosen by this research, this section discusses the subsequent research approach it employed. Naturally, it considered and integrated both deductive and inductive approaches.

- *Deductive approach*: or "bottom up", is where a theory is developed and then a research strategy is designed accordingly utilising empirical data (Saunders et al. 2012)
- *Inductive approach*: or "top down", is where data is collected and theory is then developed as part of its analysis (Morris 2010; Saunders et al. 2012).

These two approaches guided the researcher in choosing the most appropriate strategy, choices, time horizons, and techniques and procedures used within the current study. To suit the aims and objectives, this research will start by following an inductive approach with the aim of informing or expanding existing theoretical constructs to explain one's lurking behaviour. The inductive approach is chosen first because it enables flexibility in the research process by reviewing all existing literature to identify any gaps and where contributions can be made to existing knowledge in the area. This flexibility allows for any changes to the research emphasis as the research

progresses (Saunders at al. 2012). Data is then analysed and interpreted in an iterative manner to guide the final results. The inductive approach attempts to develop patterns, consistency and meaning from the collected data, as well as establish a close understanding of the research context (Gray 2013; Saunders et al. 2012).

Upon completion of the inductive stage or qualitative study, the research will then transition into a deductive approach to validate the findings or theories derived from the initial qualitative analysis. This stage involves conducting a quantitative study and is known as confirmatory research (Gilgun 2019). The quantitative study will help to explain causal relationships between the constructs; that is, what can influence or affect lurking behaviour, to ensure validity of the data and generalise conclusions.

In summary, the current study follows an **abductive approach**. The research moves between theory and data. The study starts with qualitative data to generate initial insights (inductive reasoning) and then moves to quantitative data to test and confirm the findings (deductive reasoning). This is particularly useful for objectives that begin with exploration and move toward validation. The next section discusses the research strategy used for each of these approaches.

5.3 Rationale for Research Choices, Techniques, and Procedures

Linking back to the methodological approach discussed, mixed methods approach combines strength of both qualitative and quantitative methods and allows for the triangulation of data. Whilst the term mixed methods are used to refer to the methodological approach, triangulation is used to describe the purpose of combination. Triangulation increases accuracy, scope, depth, and consistency of the phenomenon under study (Carins, Rundle-Thiele, and Fidock 2016). Additionally, triangulation promotes rigour of the qualitative phase and helps the researcher to further develop a more robust and enhanced understanding of lurking behaviour and the factors influencing it. The rationale for opting for a mixed methods approach is because of its vast benefits, which are:

- Enables a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study, lurking behaviour (McKim 2017) by integrating qualitative and quantitative methods. Qualitative methods can provide in-depth insights, uncovering nuances and alternative perspectives on lurking behaviour, while quantitative methods can help quantify patterns, relationships, and the prevalence of different lurking behaviours. In other words, qualitative methods can help uncover underlying motivations, experiences, and contextual factors, while quantitative methods provide statistical analysis and numerical trends. By combining these approaches, the researcher can gain a more holistic perspective on lurking behaviour and the factors contributing to it.

- Enhances accuracy, flexibility, reliability and validity of the research (Almeida 2018; Carins, Rundle-Thiele, and Fidock 2016) through providing a triangulation of findings, which refers “to the use of different data collection methods within one study in order to ensure that the data are telling you what you think they are telling you (Saunders et al. 2012, p.99). The findings from one method can be cross-validated or complemented by the findings from the other method, enhancing the overall validity and reliability of the study.

In summary, adopting a mixed methods approach for this research is advantageous as it i) facilitates comprehensive exploration, ii) allows for triangulation of findings, iii) supports critical review and identification of alternative explanations, iv) enables examination of individual factors and engagement behaviours, and v) aids in identifying varied lurking behaviours and potential lurker segments.

With benefits also come a handful of drawbacks. The first disadvantage of using mixed methods relates to the need for the researcher to be proficient and competent in both qualitative and quantitative methods, therefore making it a complex approach to carry out (Cameron 2011; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities 2020). “The second disadvantage is the extensive data collection and resources needed to undertake a mixed methods study”, such as time and money (Cameron 2011, p.104; Office for Health Improvement and Disparities 2020). However, despite these

drawbacks, mixed methods can be a powerful approach for studying lurking behaviour due to its comprehensive ability to achieve the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foci discussed earlier. To optimise the advantages of mixed methods research, careful preparation, reliable data analysis tools, and thorough interpretation will be necessary for the research.

5.3.1 Time Horizon

Time horizon refers to “a specific period of time that is covered by a study, alongside the time that data were collected and related analysis was conducted” (Alturki 2021, p.6). Cross-sectional time horizon was adopted for five reasons:

1) By implementing a cross-sectional time horizon, “it is more cost-effective to resample many new subjects than to repeatedly sample from the same group of subjects; moreover, enough new subjects are recruited to compensate for the loss in statistical power” (Yee and Niemeier 1996, p.6). In other words, since the study recruits and reaches out to online lurkers from online communities of interest on social media (i.e., online skincare groups, forums) where lurkers are likely to be present, it can be a cost-effective approach. Additionally, the reach of cross-sectional designs is large, making it easier to collect data from lurkers and data are collected efficiently over a shorter period.

2) Cross-sectional studies can explore the relationship between variables. Subjects are often grouped according to different variables (i.e., personality and motivation) where the researcher is then able to examine their behaviour, which helps interpret the role of these variables in lurking behaviour (Wei and Moyer 2008). This advantage is relevant to the objective of determining whether the individual factors of personality and motivation influence lurking behaviour.

3) Increased statistical robustness and replicability, as the amount of data increases; that is, it is possible to make statistically robust generalisations and claims (Wei and Moyer 2008, p.91). This advantage aligns with the research objectives as it allows for robust generalisations based on a larger amount of data.

4) Linking back to point number 1, by collecting data from a diverse sample at a single point in time, cross-sectional studies can provide broader understanding of lurking behaviour across different populations, platforms, or contexts.

5) Cross-sectional studies can serve as an initial exploration of lurking behaviour, allowing researchers to identify patterns, correlations, or factors associated with lurking in a particular time frame.

This research did not opt for the longitudinal time horizon for several reasons: 1) its long study span, which is dependent on consistency and frequent monitoring over time. 2) high costs to run, 3) smaller number of samples, which risks high drop-outs, 4) lack of statistical robustness and vulnerability to missing data or chance of errors (Wei and Moyer 2008). A cross-sectional design addresses these concerns by providing a more feasible, cost-effective, and robust approach to achieve the research aim and objectives.

5.4 Phase 1: Qualitative Data Collection

5.4.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are chosen as the first stage of data collection for this research, as opposed to unstructured and structured, for several reasons that will be outlined in this section. Semi-structured interviews are defined by Longhurst (2003, p.143) as:

> *"A verbal interchange where one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information from another person by asking questions. Although the interviewer prepares a list of predetermined questions, semi-structured interviews unfold in a conversational manner offering participants the chance to explore issues they feel are important".*

There are multiple benefits to conducting semi-structured interviews, which is why this method was chosen. Firstly, it is one of the most common methods for qualitative data collection and it is known to be flexible and powerful when it comes to capturing voices and the ways people make meaning of their experience (Bryman and Bell 2011; Rabionet 2011). This flexibility and probing are useful because some topics can be

quite complex (Burgiel 2013). Semi-structured interviews allow participants to freely express their perceptions and experiences related to online lurking. The flexibility of the approach enables probing and follow-up questions to delve deeper into participants' perspectives, allowing for rich and nuanced data.

Secondly, interviews enable reciprocity between the interviewer and interviewee/participant allowing the interviewer to improvise follow-up questions based on the interviewee's response, as well as granting space for the interviewee's individual verbal expressions (Dreessen et al. 2020; Kallio et al. 2016). Through these follow-up questions, participants can elaborate on the perceived differences in activities between posters and lurkers, providing nuanced insights into their behaviours.

Thirdly, the open nature of interview questions aims to encourage depth and vitality and to allow new concepts to emerge (Shackleton et al. 2021). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity for participants to describe and explain the specific activities they consider meaningful in the context of online lurking. Additionally, it allows the researcher to explore participants' individual factors, such as personality traits and motivations, and how they relate to online lurking behaviour. By engaging in open-ended conversations, the researcher can probe participants' motivations, thoughts, and experiences, providing insights into the role of these individual factors.

Being a reflective researcher, it is important to recapture experiences, think about it, and evaluate it. In other terms, reflection is a constant process and continued throughout the data analysis (Husband 2020). An example of this is, the "action" stage of the study, which involves the researcher in conducting semi-structured interviews with participants and requires the researcher to constantly reflect "in action" as interview skills are developed area (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021). Any verbal or non-verbal cues, including expressions or emotions from the participants, were noted down and continuously questioned if emerging issues contributed to existing categories or required any further probing and exploration. After the interview, the researcher also reflected on the recordings and would ask questions, such as if any new concepts emerged, if a probe was made appropriately and sufficiently, or if any important questions were avoided (Dearnley 2005). The use of semi-structured

interviews assisted the researcher in understanding the interviewee's views, perceptions, opinions, preference, and experiences surrounding lurking behaviour. It enabled participants to share their stories informally and to share experiences, which further enriches the researcher's views and findings on the topic area (Adeoye-Olatunde and Olenik 2021).

5.4.2 Interview Guide Development

In any qualitative study, major effort should be devoted to developing a systemic, well-developed, data-collection protocol in the design phase (Ranney et al. 2015). An interview guide is an "outline of planned topics and questions to be addressed arrayed in their tentative order" (Adams 2015, p.371), which is expected to be subjected to change and is considered a work in progress. Adams (2015) recommends that "enough time should be budgeted to carefully draft, edit, pre-test, and polish the interview questions and guides, allowing time for several iterations and feedback from colleagues" (p.371), and, where possible, run pilot tests with a few intended participants.

After achieving ethical clearance (refer to 5.7 for further details), the researcher made sure to do this and ran a pilot test with five participants prior to conducting the main study (further discussed in 5.4.4). However, immediately after the first interview, the researcher assessed everything around what works well, what needs to be modified, what questions may need to be added or subtracted, expanded, or condensed, and recast or reordered. From there, the initial set of questions did change slightly but not drastically, as the researcher found the pilot test rather inciteful.

The interview guide structure (see Appendix H) lists a set of predetermined semi-structured questions for the researcher to use as a guide when conducting the interviews. It consisted of 14 questions, supported by sub-questions, where the first 7 questions served as an icebreaker, asking participants about their favourite facial-care brands, choice criteria, association with any skincare online communities/groups, and reasons for joining the communities/groups. Moreover, an introductory 'ice-breaker' question can be quite helpful to start the interview process, as it is easy and non-controversial and eases the participant into comfortably sharing information, as well as building slight trust and facilitating disclosure (Miller and Mandryk 2021; Ranney et

al. 2015). The icebreaker questions are then followed by topic headings, each of which contains an opening question, main questions, follow-up questions and probes. The questions were divided according to themes (e.g., background related, online engagement behaviour, motivations, etc.). Follow-up probing questions were also asked depending on the interviewee's response.

As a result, the average length per interview was around twenty minutes per participant (total of nineteen participants), 157 pages of transcripts with a word count of 65,000 words (using Arial 12, 1.5 spaced). Turner (2010, p.757) listed eight key principles of the preparation stage of interviewing which the researcher has followed and addressed all eight principles within the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and Participant Agreement Form (PAF). The eight key principles are:

1. Choose an interview setting with few distractions; for this research, the participants chose the most convenient application for the interview to be conducted (i.e. Skype, Facetime).
2. Explain the purpose of the interview.
3. Address terms of confidentiality.
4. Explain the format of the interview.
5. Indicate the interview duration and how long it would take to complete.
6. Tell participants how to get in touch with the interviewer later if they need to.
7. Ask participants if they have any questions before the interview process initiates.
8. The interviewer must not rely only on their memory to recall any of the participant's answers.

5.4.3 Selection of participants

Having designed the semi-structured interviews, the next step is selecting the participants and conducting the interview itself. There are multiple ways to record interviews, however, Rabionet (2011) recommends audio recording above all the other methods. Therefore, the researcher decided to choose this method for the study, along with notes written after each interview to act as a summary of any initial findings. The researcher proceeded with the process by purchasing a portable audio recording device (first and main device) to record all the interviews. In addition, the interviews

were also recorded on the researcher's personal laptop (secondary device) just in case the first device failed for any reason (e.g., low battery). This way no audio was missing, since the backup ensures there will be another recording on standby ready for analysis.

Selecting and recruiting participants is vitally important and people are usually chosen based on their experience related to the research topic (Longhurst 2003). The main filtering participant criteria adopted for the selection process are that participants:

1. Were UK residents
2. Were aged between 18 and 74 years of age
3. Self-identified as regular consumers of skincare products
4. Self-identified as online browsers or searchers of skincare products.

Since this research has a set list of criteria when it comes to selecting participants, two types of methods were used to gain participants:

1. *Purposeful/theoretical samples*: Involves selecting a participant according to the needs of the study. The researcher may choose to interview participants "with a broad, general knowledge of the topic or those who have undergone the experience and whose experience is considered typical" (Morse 1990, p.129).
2. *Nominated samples*: This is also known as network or snowball sampling and is a common method of obtaining a qualitative sample. It is obtained by eliciting the support and assistance of a single participant already in the study to assist with the selection of another participant. The second participant can be approached via the researcher herself or through using the first participant as a reference on the researcher's behalf (Morse 1990).

Purposive sampling is first used to create initial contacts with participants (Morse 1990, p.129). This was then followed by nominated sampling or snowball sampling, since the research will investigate skincare consumers in online communities (i.e., social media). The recruitment phase was initiated through the creation of a social media post posted on communities of interest groups on social media (i.e. 5 UK skincare-related forums/groups (Facebook in particular)) inviting participants who are part of the group to participate in the interviewing process, having secured permissions from the group's administrators. The administrators then later 'snowballed' additional

interested participants to help achieve the researcher's target. Facebook was used because the platform had 2.9 billion monthly active users in January 2023, and it is the world's most 'active' social media platform (Dixon 2023). Moreover, Facebook is known to be one of the most preferred social media platforms for consumers to engage with brands and is the leading platform used by marketers worldwide (Dencheva 2022). Participation in this research will be through self-selection or volunteering, where interested participants are invited to email the researcher.

Regarding the rationale behind the number of participants, the researcher considered how large the sample should be. Wutich, Beeresford, and Bernard (2024) recommends at least 9-17 interviews to be conducted for theme analysis in order to hit theme saturation (9 interviews). The researcher obtained 19 interviewees. If the data set is any larger (i.e., 50 interviews for example), then the data would start to become complicated for the researcher to manage, thereby also reducing the data's quality, which impacts the depth of the analysis (Ritchie et al. 2008). It is explained that, in the qualitative world, "failure to reach data saturation has an impact on the quality of the research conducted and hampers content validity" (Fusch and Ness 2015, p.1408). Data saturation is usually said to be reached when:

- There is enough information to replicate the study
- The ability to obtain additional new information has been attained
- Further coding is no longer feasible (Fusch and Ness 2015).

The number necessary to reach data saturation differs across studies and is a concept that is hard to define, which is why there is no universal standard, one-size-fits-all method to reach data saturation (Fusch and Ness 2015). Additionally, Bernard (2012) stated that the number for data saturation is not quantifiable but that the researcher should accept what he/she can get. However, multiple authors have agreed on a relatively small sample size within qualitative research and do not require the researcher to have a larger sample size, such as those found in quantitative methods and studies (Ritchie et al 2008; Morse 2015).

5.4.3.1 Participants' profile

In compliance with the participant filtering criteria discussed earlier, Table 12 presents an overview of the nineteen participants' characteristics that took part in the interview process. Around two thirds of the participants were females and expressed that they frequently use smartphones to shop online, as well as their laptops. Additionally, most participants stated they have been using skincare products for more than 15 years.

Table 12: Participant's profile

Pseudonym*	**Gender**	**Age generation (gen.)**	**Preferred online shopping platform(s)**	**User status of beauty products (in years)**
SC1	Female	Gen. Y	Laptop	>=15 years
SC2	Female	Gen. Z	Laptop	>=10 years
SC3	Female	Gen. Z	Laptop, Smartphone	>=30 years
SC4	Female	Baby Boomer (BB)	Laptop, Smartphone	>=30 years
SC5	Female	Gen. Y	Smartphone	>=10 years
SC6	Male	Gen. Y	Smartphone	>=5 years
SC7	Female	Gen. Z	Smartphone	>=10 years
SC8	Female	Baby Boomer (BB)	Smartphone	>=30 years
SC9	Female	Baby Boomer (BB)	Smartphone	>=30 years
SC10	Female	Gen. Y	Laptop, Smartphone	>=10 years
SC11	Female	Gen. X	Laptop, Smartphone	>=30 years
SC12	Female	Gen. X	Smartphone	<= 5 years
SC13	Female	Gen. X	Laptop, Smartphone, Tablet	>=30 years
SC14	Male	Gen. X	Laptop, Smartphone	>=10 years
SC15	Male	Gen. Y	Smartphone	>=10 years
SC16	Male	Gen. Y	Laptop, Smartphone, Personal Computer	<= 10 years

			(PC)	
SC17	Male	Gen. Z	Laptop, Smartphone	>=10 years
SC18	Male	Gen. Y	Tablet	>=20 years
SC19	Male	Baby Boomer (BB)	Smartphone	>=20 years

5.4.4 Pilot Study

It is recommended for researchers to conduct a pilot study before undertaking the final data collection to increase reliability of the process and success for the main study (De Vaus 2001). Therefore, after developing the interview guide, the researcher conducted a pilot study prior to the main study. Doody and Doody (2015, p.1074) define a pilot study as:

"A small-scale version of a planned study, conducted with a small group of participants like those to be recruited later in the larger-scale study. Pilot studies are conducted to allow researchers to practise and to assess the effectiveness of their planned data collection and analysis techniques. They can detect anticipated problems with methods, so changes can be made before the large-scale study is undertaken and answer methodological question(s), guide the development of the research plan to ensure the methods work in practice and assess the feasibility of the proposed research process".

With this understanding in mind, the researcher conducted five pilot interviews for the qualitative stage. There is no set answer for an appropriate number of pilot participants because it can vary depending on the number of items (Tull and Hawkins 1987). The pilot tests were useful to understand any faults from the initial design and if any adjustments or changes needed to be made for the main study to avoid unforeseen complications. Pilot tests enabled the researcher to learn and gain these crucial interview skills (e.g. probing) and conduct subsequent interviews more smoothly and with confidence and success (Brymann 2015). Moreover, it allowed the researcher to uncover ethical and practical issues that could hamper the main study.

5.4.5 Supplementary Personality Test

The qualitative study was complemented with a short complimentary personality questionnaire to gauge participants' personality traits to understand its influence on one's lurking behaviour. The inclusion of closed-ended questionnaires within this qualitative study was used to measure personality and offers a valuable blend of structured data collection and qualitative insights. It was used because of its ability to offer i) structured data collection, making it easier to quantify and analyse responses, ii) efficient comparability to aid in identifying patterns and trends in personality traits, iii) standardisation to maintain consistency and minimise bias, and iv) efficient data processing due to responses being categorical (Bryman 2016; Cresswell and Creswell 2017). This questionnaire complements the broader qualitative research methodology designed for this research. The extent to which participants agree to the personality traits will be used to classify them under the Big Five personality scale. The online questionnaire was based on a Likert scale (rating scale consisting of one to five stars), and included two key questions:

- Q1 - Typically, in the offline and face-to-face context, I will describe myself as... (please answer ALL personality traits, where ☆ = strongly disagree and ☆☆☆☆☆=strongly agree).
- Q2- In the online and non-face-to-face context, I will describe myself as... (please answer ALL personality traits, where ☆ = strongly disagree and ☆☆☆☆☆=strongly agree).

Personality traits were retrieved from Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann's (2003) study in which they explained a brief measure of the big five personality domains. Gosling et al. (2003) listed similar and opposite personality traits under the big five. To measure personality, traits are grouped as shown in Table 13.

Table 13: Brief measure of big five personality domains. Adapted from Gosling et al. (2003).

Personality	**Traits to measure**
Extroversion	Extroverted, enthusiastic Reserved, quiet
Agreeableness	Sympathetic, warm Critical, quarrelsome
Conscientiousness	Dependable, self-disciplined Disorganised, careless
Neuroticism	Anxious, easily upset
Openness to new experiences	Open to new experiences, complex Conventional, uncreative

5.4.6 Qualitative Data Analysis

Having collected the data, the transcribing process follows. Data transcription is defined as “the process of reproducing spoken words” (Halcomb and Davidson 2006, p.38) and includes a written verbatim record of an audio-taped interview and, sometimes, may also record any emotions/expressions of the interviewee. The process can be quite time consuming and taken for granted but it can generate meaningful insights for the researcher (Davidson 2009).

The researcher typed and transcribed all interviews on Microsoft Word, which were later uploaded onto analytical software (NVivo 12) to prepare for the analysis process, as well as to store any relevant information, memos, themes, and patterns. These are also known as data items, which refers to each individual piece of data collected making up a data corpus. Although there are various methods to analyse data, it is believed that there is no better or clear way to perform qualitative analysis (Bryman and Bell 2011).

To maximise the benefits of the current study, thematic analysis is used to analyse qualitative data. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to explore underlying themes, sentiments, and reasons why some individuals prefer to lurk, rather than actively participate online. This method can also provide valuable insights into the

psychological and behavioural aspects of lurking behaviour (Vaismoradi, Turunen and Bondas 2013). Through implementing thematic analysis, the current study can obtain multiple benefits, such as:

- High flexibility, which is customisable, based on the needs of researchers to assess complex qualitative data
- High usefulness for examining the phenomenon from perspectives of different research participants, which can further highlight similarities and differences, and generate unanticipated insights
- Ease of use for summarising key features of a large data set (Sivakumar 2020; Braun and Clark).

For the analysis stage, NVivo 12 was used instead of manual analysis for a variety of reasons. According to Bazeley and Jackson (2013), utilising NVivo, in particular, for qualitative analysis helps to:

- *Manage data and ideas*: For organisational purposes and ease of understanding
- *Query data*: This involves asking simple or complex questions of the data
- *Visualise data*: "To show the content or structure of ideas, cases, concepts, sampling strategies, timeline etc. at various stages of the interpretive process and to visually represent the relationships among these items in a range of (often interactive) displays" (p.3).
- *Report from the data*: Using contents from the qualitative database.

These advantages of using NVivo are not replicated in manual studies and, hence, its use for this research.

The findings are then reported in the qualitative results chapter (Chapter 6), structured base on the themes that emerged from the thematic analysis, as recommended by Ranney et al. (2015). It includes specific quotations representing archetypical or particularly rich descriptions of the themes that emerged.

5.5 Phase 2: Quantitative Data Collection

5.5.1 Survey Design and Development

Surveys can be a very convenient way of collecting useful comparable data from many individuals and can produce valid and meaningful results, especially when the questions are clear and precise and if they are asked consistently across all participants (Mathers et al. 2007). The researcher ensured survey questions were simple, using short questions with straightforward wordings, and terms clearly defined and highlighted in bold. Keeping the survey simple ensures minimum bias, as it is for ease of participants' understanding.

Moreover, fixed-response questions are expected in survey research and were used for two main reasons. First, "the fixed alternatives act as a guide for participants, making it easier to answer questions. Second, the responses are easier to analyse and interpret because they fall into a limited set of categories and can be analysed quantitatively using simple percentages and a variety of statistical techniques" (Clifford et al. 2016, p.132). Responses to this factual kind of fixed-response questions may be numerical or involve checklists, categories, or yes/no answers and are relatively straightforward to answer unless used in complex topics.

"Both research and questionnaire questions can be informed by practice or experience, or by theory or previous research or, as is common with research in practitioner disciplines, a mix of both" (Rowley 2014, p.312). The questionnaire questions were influenced and informed from both the qualitative analysis results and previous research. Additionally, the researcher followed Rowley's (2014) suggestion that questions within the survey are checked to ensure they:

- "Are as short as possible"
- "Are not leading or have implicit assumptions
- Do not include two questions in one
- Only exceptionally invite "yes/no" answers
- Are not too vague or general
- Do not use double negatives
- Are not, in any sense, invasive, or questions that the participant is unlikely to want to answer

- Do not invite participants to breach confidentiality" (p.314).
- Are in a clear, precise order and, perhaps, with questions clustered under theme or section headings.

The researcher ensured all the above recommendations and suggestions were considered when producing the final survey design (Appendix I). By doing so, the average completion time of the survey was 16 minutes and was composed of mainly closed-ended questions and with a few open-ended questions based on the participant's response. Additionally, the design of the survey (see Appendix I) was planned to meet all the five key objectives. Each question in the survey relates to one of the research objectives, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Data Analysis Matrix.

Research Objectives	**Survey questions number(s)**	**Response type**
1. To critically review the extant conceptualisation and measurement of lurking behaviour in online communities of interest on social media	Questions 1 to 20	Multiple choice Matrix table Slider
2. To explore the roles of personality and motivational factors in explaining lurking behaviour online	Questions 1 to 20	Matrix table
3. To explore whether online lurking behaviour influences offline engagement behaviours	Questions 13 to 21b	Matrix table
4. To establish whether online lurking behaviour is a singular or plural in nature, and whether different types of lurkers exist based on objective 1, 2, and 3.	Questions 1 to 21b	Multiple choice Matrix table Slider

Prior to answering the survey, participants viewed an introductory and consent page explaining the purpose of the research, the identity and affiliations of the researchers, details of what participation would entail, and the confirmation of ethics approval by a legitimate review board or ethics committee, as recommended by Ball (2009). This is in line with the PIS form distributed to participants in the qualitative stage. The participant can then read and decide whether they would like to proceed with taking the survey. To ensure the study is ethically conducted, participants were also informed that they could withdraw from participation at any time during the survey and without giving a reason. Participants can quit the survey by closing the browser page or ending the survey in the introductory and consent page. Incomplete responses were not used as part of the analysis process and were deleted from the database.

5.5.2 Scales for Existing Constructs

When it comes to scale adaptation versus scale development, the researcher did not follow scale development which is the creation of entirely new constructs and items typically requiring extensive psychometric validation (Haws, Sample, and Hulland 2023). Instead, scale adaptation, which involves modifying existing, validated scales through "changes to the wording, length, and/or dimensionality of a scale" (Haws, Sample, and Hulland 2023, p.228) was followed. Scale adaptation can also refer to "the addition or deletion of items based on their supposed suitability for a particular research context" (Finn and Kayande 2004, p.37).

Existing established scales surrounding online engagement, personality, and motivations has been utilised within this study. In other words, this study follows an adaptation process, as all scale items originate from previously validated measures, with minimal modifications for contextual relevance. It was done to enhance clarity and ensure items were appropriately contextualized for this specific study's participants.

5.5.2.1 Scale Adaptation/Modification – Mixed-Source Approach

As discussed earlier, the present study does not create new constructs but instead measures well-established engagement and non-engagement dimensions from prior research. Tables 15 to 18 demonstrates the scale items utilised to measure each variable for non-engaging motivation, non-posting motivation, users' personality, and

online engagement behaviour. Majority of items were sourced from one or two main validated scales (e.g. Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone 2015; Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews 2004). Whilst majority of the scale items were taken 'as-if' from validated scales, some of the wordings of some items were adapted for alignment with the study's specific research context (online skincare engagement) with no conceptual changes to their meaning.

Mixed-source approach still qualifies as adaptation and is a common practice in consumer research and does not constitute scale development (Haws, Sample, and Hulland 2023). While items were drawn from multiple sources rather than a single scale, this approach still aligns with best practices in scale adaptation. Additionally, it follows Haws, Sample and Hulland (2023) consideration of multiple options when deploying a multiple scale. Refining and supplementing existing measures without altering the conceptual meaning is part of the adaptation process. It ensures better content validity, relevance to the research context, and consistency with prior research as each item is still based on an existing, validated measure. The items that had been included were carefully selected and integrated to main content validity. In terms of validity, the adapted scales were pretested to check for internal reliability (Cronbach's Alpha), factor-analysed to confirm construct integrity. Convergent and/or discriminant validity is not necessary as "only minor modifications to a validated scale have occurred" (Haws, Sample and Hulland 2023, p.237).

For Table 18, Qualitative findings determine how previous items linked to online engagement (i.e. posting) studied from a non-lurking context can be also applied to lurking context. In other terms, the qualitative findings confirm the initial literature review findings depicting that most items were indeed relevant.

Table 15: Non-Engaging Motivation variables and items.

Variable	**Items**	**Source(s)**
Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement	I do not want to gain information	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	I am not interested in the products	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	I am not interested in reading people's feedback	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	It does not develop my knowledge in the skincare area	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
Lack of Entertainment and Relevance	It is not entertaining	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	It is not fun when I read/browse through posts	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	It does not keep me up to date with the latest news and releases	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	It is not a point of conversation with other people	Qualitative findings
Lack of Community and Disconnection	I do not belong to a group/community with the same interests as mine	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I have not made connections with other people on the site	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	I do not want to interact with other people	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
Reluctance to Contribute or Support	I do not want to influence other people	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	I do not want to share my knowledge with others	Nonnecke, and Andrews (2001)

	I do not want to support the product	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
	I do not think the content is of good value or quality	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)
Negative Feelings and Emotions	It stresses me out	Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2006)
	It gives me negative feelings	Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze (2006)
	I do not have enough spare time	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	It is not of any benefit to me	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I do not feel a sense of belonging to the community	Baldus, Voorhees, and Calantone (2015)

Table 16: Non-Posting Motivation variables and items.

Variables	Items	Source(s)
Preference for Passive Participation	I want to remain anonymous	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I do not want to make a commitment to post	Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	I am shy about posting	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	Just reading/browsing is enough	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I had no intention to post from the outset	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	There is no requirement to engage	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
Imposter syndrome	I am afraid I will get judged	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I do not have the confidence to engage	Qualitative findings
	I do not want to post the wrong content	Qualitative findings
Lack of Passion and Interest	I engage more in other activities outside of skincare	Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	It is not my hobby	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Qualitatiive findings
	I prefer other communities or groups outside of skincare	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)

Perceived Low Priority and Benefit	I do not have enough time	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	It is of no benefit or value to me	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004)
	I do not like the group or community (type of group)	Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience	I am still learning about skincare	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	Others respond the way I would	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)
	I have nothing to offer	Preece, Nonnecke, and Andrews (2004); Nonnecke, and Preece (2001)

Table 17: Users' Personality variables and items.

Variables	Items	Source(s)
Neuroticism	…is concerned over any mistakes made	Frost et al. (1994) - Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism scale
	…ruminates about less than perfect performance	Frost et al. (1994)
	...is pressured to achieve excellence to get other people's approval	Frost et al. (1994)
	…is sensitive to criticism	Frost et al. (1994)
Self-esteem	…wants to gain greater self-esteem	Rosenberg (1989) – Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale
	…tends to seek validation from others	Rosenberg (1989)
	...wants to feel respected	Rosenberg (1989)
	…lacks self-discipline	Rosenberg (1989)
Extraversion	…is outgoing and sociable	Rammstedt and John (2007) - BFI - 10
	…is reserved	Rammstedt and John (2007)

Table 18: Online Engagement Behaviour variables and items.

Variables	Items	Mentioned by past studies (Y/N)	Confirmed by study's findings (Y/N)
Edit, Post, and Motivate	Edit and organise posts	Y	Y
	Post or upload content	Y	Y
	Motivate and encourage others to post or engage	N	Y
Search, Browse, Visit, and Read	Search for content	Y	Y
	Browse through or observe content	Y	Y
	Visit sites	Y	Y
	Read content	Y	Y
Subscribe, Listen, and Share	Subscribing or signing up to content	N	Y
	Listen to content	N	Y
	Share content	Y	Y
Comment, Share, React to	Commenting on a post	Y	Y
	Clicking on the 'share' button	Y	Y
	Reacting to a post (like/love/angry/etc.)	Y	Y
Learn, Observe, Save	Learn or study content	Y	Y
	Observe posts and content	Y	Y
	Clicking 'save' or 'favourite'	Y	Y
Edit and Upload	Edit or change a post	Y	Y
	Uploading or creating a post	Y	Y

5.5.3 Online Platforms: Prolific and Qualtrics

The platform used to recruit participants for the study was Prolific, a third-party application that caters for researchers and combines good recruitment standards with reasonable costs and informs participants of their recruitment (Palan and Schitter 2018). Prolific was used for participant recruitment due to its large, diverse, and well-screened user base. It offers access to a wide variety of participants while ensuring top quality data collection through pre-screening mechanisms at the lowest costs (Douglas, Ewell, and Brauer 2023; Palan and Schitter 2018).

Prolific was used because it "benefits from transparency in several ways. On the one hand, subjects know they are recruited to participate in research, and they are aware of expected payments, treatment, rights, and obligations in such an environment. On the other hand, researchers have higher transparency about the subject pool than on other platforms and can screen it in a range of dimensions before inviting subjects" (Palan and Schitter 2018, p.26). Prolific ensures pre-screening of participants occurs to match the sampling provided. If participants did not match the criteria specified or if their responses were incomplete, they were rejected by the researcher manually. Participants who fully completed the survey were given a small payment in full for their time taken in the study, which was handled directly through Prolific.

Additionally, Qualtrics was selected for survey design, distribution, and data collection due to its user-friendly interface, advanced customization options, and robust analytical tools. The platform allows for seamless integration of complex survey logic and automated data collection. Upon design and development of the survey, it was then imported onto Qualtrics.

5.5.4 Sampling Strategy

The survey was answered by a larger population to help supplement existing results and to achieve the research objectives. When deciding on the sample size, the following criteria, suggested by Cohen et al. (2000), were considered:

- Sample size should not be less than 30 in relational survey design
- 100 samples should be identified for each major sub-group in the population, and 20-50 samples for each minor sub-group

Based on the above criteria, a sample size of 600 was therefore proposed because it can provide for: 1) more precise estimates of population characteristics, and 2) more information for addressing the research questions (Clifford et al. 2006). In this context, closeness in approximating a population value always increases with sample size (Clifford et al. 2006). A total of 630 survey responses was gained via Prolifics (participant recruitment platform). Larger sample sizes are beneficial, since statistics operate more conveniently and safely in large numbers and appear more reliable when a substantial percentage of the population is employed.

Longhurst (2003, p.148) states, when using quantitative methods, “the aim is to often choose a random or representative sample to be ‘objective’ and to be able to replicate the data”. Therefore, the sampling strategy for the quantitative study is the same as the filtering participant selection criteria set for the qualitative study as discussed earlier which were participants must be:

1. UK residents.
2. Aged between 18 and 74 years of age.
3. Self-identified as regular consumers of skincare products.
4. Self-identified as online browsers or searchers of skincare products.

5.5.5 Participants’ profile

The main study initially recruited 500 participants through Prolific. Drawing on the suggestions of Pallant (2020), two of the responses were excluded due to more than 10% missing data and empty case rows. This will be further explained later on in the chapter (data handling section), thereby reducing the final number of usable, completed responses to 498. Table 19 provides a summary of the participants’ characteristics related to the main study. Like the pilot study, the study consisted mostly of female participants (72.9%), aged between 24-40 years old (GenY) (40.6%), who are employed full-time (43.6%) and with a self-reported annual income of £10,000 to £19,999 before tax. However, most of these participants were mostly employed full-time (43.6%) and had an annual income of £10,000 to £19,999 before tax (26.3%).

Table 19: Participants' demographic characteristics (main study).

n= 498			
Gender		**Employment status**	
Female	72.90%	Employed full-time	43.60%
Male	25.90%	Full-time student	21.70%
Non-binary	.60%	Employed part-time	15.50%
Others	.60%	Others	11.00%
		Self-employed	5.40%
		Retired	2.20%
		Part-time student	.60%
Age groups		**Annual income before tax**	
26-40 (GenY)	40.60%	£10,000 - £19,999	26.30%
18-25 (GenZ)	39.80%	£30,000 - £39,999	22.30%
41-55 (GenX)	15.10%	£20,000 - £29,999	21.50%
56-76 (BB)	4.60%	£40,000 to £49,999	16.10%
		£50,000 to £59,999	5.60%
		Others	4.60%
		£60,000 and over	3.60%

5.5.6 Pilot Study

Like with the qualitative study, pilot tests are useful to identify any faults with the initial design and whether any adjustments or changes need to be made prior to the main study to avoid unforeseen complications (Doody and Doody 2015). In other words, running pilot tests to test the survey design helps to 1) establish any issues to be addressed in the main study, 2) check the wording and the order of the questions or range of questions used in the main study for the survey, 3) identify any missing questions in the survey, 4) develop a preliminary understanding of consumer responses to the theoretical factors under study, and 5) test the research process and identify any potential practical problems associated with it; that is, the different ways of distributing and collecting the survey (Teijlingen and Hundley 2001).

For the quantitative stage, the theoretical factors under study were online lurking behaviour, motivation, personality, and online and offline engagement behaviour. A total of 630 responses was collected. However, 156 participants took part in the pilot study prior to conducting the main study. This sample size is 56% more than the initial target sample size of 100 participants. This larger sample size proved helpful to remove unusable responses from further analysis and to further diminish any errors (Yong and Pearce 2013). That is, 23 participants were either excluded due to more than 10% missing data or because participants did not agree to take part in the survey (Pallant 2020). Therefore, the final usable sample size was 132 and was exported on to SPSS Statistics (version 28.0.0.0) for statistical analysis. 132 pilot responses are considered sufficient given the number of items, as Clark and Watson (1995) previously suggested that 100 to 200 tests are a reasonable amount. Additionally, Tull and Hawkins (1987) explained there is no set number of appropriate tests required.

It is to note that although no changes were observed to the main survey design, the quantitative analysis will focus primarily on the data collected from the main study to ensure reliability and validity in drawing conclusions from a larger and more representative sample. Indeed, pilot tests play a vital role in refining the research process and ensuring the validity of the main quantitative study. However, they are kept separate from the main quantitative analysis to maintain methodological rigour, avoid data contamination, and uphold the integrity of the research findings (Van Teijlingen and Hundley 2001).

5.5.7 Quantitative Data Analysis

Data analysis and interpretation usually involves the execution of descriptive statistics on variables, cross-tabulations of variables, preparation of data displays, and determination of recommendations (Cooper and Schindler 2006). The quantitative data for this research were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis, factor and reliability analysis, cluster analysis, and ANOVA, using IBM SPSS Statistics 28. By incorporating all the above tips and recommendations discussed in the previous sections, the average completion time of the survey was 16 minutes, and it was composed of mainly closed-ended questions and a few open-ended questions, based on the participant's response.

In summary, descriptive analysis summarised and provided an overview of the prevalence and characteristic of lurking behaviour by identifying patterns, distributions, and sample characteristics. Factor analysis uncovered the various behavioural and psychological traits that contribute to lurking behaviour. Reliability analysis assessed the consistency and stability of measurement scales used to study lurking behaviour and its antecedents. Cluster analysis assisted in understanding different lurking patterns or identifying factors that differentiate between groups, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon. ANOVA allowed for the comparison of lurking behaviour or antecedents across different groups or conditions, shedding light on factors that influence lurking behaviour. Further sections will explain these choices.

5.5.7.1 Data Handling, Screening, and Cleaning

The Qualtrics (online survey) data were exported into an SPSS file to transform all the data into a single working dataset, facilitating the handling, screening, and subsequent statistical analyses. Pallant (2020) states, before commencing statistical analysis, it is essential that the dataset is free from errors to ensure results are valid and reliable through screening and cleaning of the data. The researcher followed the two-step error checking process recommended by Pallant (2020). It involved:

- *Step 1*: Checking each of the variables for scores and values outside the range of possible values. For example, ensuring the coding of the variable is in sequential order and does not fall outside the predefined range of scores; that is,1= Male, 2= Female, which can be checked from the Minimum and Maximum values displayed on SPSS. The mean score can also be checked to see if the

data makes sense; for example, if a score is 1.5 for gender, some of the data might be incorrect or missing. Other values to check are the Valid and Missing cases, which can be located on the Data Editor window where, if there is an empty case row, it can be directly deleted from the data set. The Frequencies procedure can then be re-run to check and obtain correct values. In the case of this project, the researcher identified some coded variables not in sequential order, along with one empty case row. However, these issues were easily rectified in step 2.

- *Step 2*: Finding and correcting or deleting errors identified in the data file. The issues stated in Step 1 were easily rectified by inspecting the frequencies for each of the variables, manually correcting any coding not in sequential order, and checking that all variables have been correctly added into the dataset. Additionally, missing values within the empty case row were simply deleted from the data editor window because they could not be correct when no values are present. The deletion was performed based on Pallant's (2020) recommendation of deleting extra cases that appear on the bottom of the data file. The researcher corrected around five errors and deleted two errors.

5.5.7.2 Descriptive Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics is the first round of analysis conducted on collected quantitative data. It is a generic term used for statistics that can be used to efficiently and informatively describe variables in a way that is customisable by the researcher (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). It illustrates a univariate summary of statistics for a multitude of variables in a single table and calculates standardised values.

Descriptive analysis is useful for the current study since it allows the researcher to summarise and present key statistics, such as means, medians, standard deviations, and percentages, to describe the central tendency, variability, and distribution of lurking behaviour and related variables (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). This provides a clear and concise snapshot of the data that can help identify trends and patterns in lurking behaviour over time, across different groups, or within specific contexts. Additionally, it enables the exploration of variations, relationships, or differences among variables to gain insights into the prevalence and characteristics of

lurking behaviour. Descriptive analysis focuses on summarising data, identifying patterns, visualising findings, and describing sample characteristics, contributing to the initial exploration; however, it does not provide inferential or causal conclusions. This is where more advanced statistical analysis techniques, such as factor analysis, reliability analysis, cluster analysis, and ANOVA, are required.

5.5.7.3 Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

Factor analysis (FA) and principal component analysis (PCA) are both techniques for identifying clusters of variables (Field 2018). FA is a data reduction technique that takes a large set of variables and looks for ways the data may be reduced or summarised using a smaller set of factors or components by looking for clumps or groups among the intercorrelations of a set of variables (Pallant 2016). This technique is used extensively by researchers involved in the development and evaluation of tests and scales. There are two main approaches to factor analysis, which are exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). EFA may be used in early research stages to "gather information about the interrelationships among a set of variables", whereas CFA is often used in the later stages of the research process "to test or confirm specific hypotheses or theories concerning the structure underlying a set of variables" (Pallant 2020, p.182). To simplify the main uses of FA and PCA, they enable:

- Understanding the structure of a set of variables
- Construction of a survey to measure an underlying variable
- Reduction of a dataset to a more manageable size, while retaining as much of the original information as possible (Field 2018, p.779).

In this research, the researcher will use EFA to identify the underlying constructs or dimensions related to lurking behaviour and its behavioural and psychological antecedents. Meanwhile, reliability analysis is utilised to help determine the extent to which the items or scales used to measure lurking behaviour, and its antecedents produce consistent results over time or across different samples. In other words, reliability analysis assesses the validity and reliability of measurement scales and improves the quality of data analysis and interpretation in this research.

When FA is used to validate a survey, it is useful to check the reliability of the scale (Field 2018). Reliability is “the extent to which a data collection technique or techniques will yield consistent findings, similar observations would be made, or conclusions reached by other researchers or there is transparency in how much sense was made from the raw data” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016, p.726). Whilst there are several reliability statistics available, the one the researcher uses is known as Cronbach’s alpha. Cronbach’s alpha indicates the overall reliability of a survey and values around 0.8 are good or 0.7 for ability tests and similar (Field 2018). When running reliability analysis on the data, the researcher looked for items that would increase the value of the Cronbach alpha and removed them. The researcher only removed an item if the values were greater than the overall reliability; hence, removing that item would improve the overall reliability of the scale. If any item(s) were removed, the factor structure should be rechecked to ensure it still holds (Field 2018).

5.5.7.4 Cluster Analysis

Cluster analysis (CA) is a statistical method for classification and is one of the most common tools used by marketing researchers to “develop empirical groups of persons, products, or occasions which may serve as the basis for further analysis” (Punj and Stewart 1983, p.134). The primary use of cluster analysis has been for market segmentation, and it is “used to identify a group of entities (people, markets, organisations) that share certain common characteristics, such as attitudes, purchase propensities, media habits, etc.” (Punj and Stewart 1983, p.135). Secondly, cluster analysis helps in seeking a better understanding of buyer behaviours by identifying homogeneous groups of buyers (Punj and Stewart 1983). Therefore, it makes sense to conduct CA to identify and segment lurkers, as per the research objectives earlier discussed in the research overview section.

There are several clustering methods, the one chosen for this research is K-means. K-means clustering involves re-assignment of Cases by moving them to the cluster whose centroid is closest to that case. Reassignment then continues until every case is assigned to the cluster with the nearest centroid (Punj and Stewart 1983). This clustering is the most widely chosen technique given its unique advantages, such as its easy implementation, ability to produce tighter clusters than hierarchical clusters,

and it's guaranteed convergence, as well as enabling the researcher to manipulate and examine different cluster solutions separately and thoroughly (Ding and He 2004).

In the context of studying lurking behaviour and its antecedents, K-means cluster analysis is utilised to identify distinct groups of participants who exhibit similar patterns of lurking behaviour or share common antecedents. This approach will help uncover different profiles or subgroups of individuals with specific lurking tendencies or underlying factors that contribute to their lurking behaviour. Moreover, by applying K-means clustering, the research can gain insights into the heterogeneity within a population and identify meaningful patterns or relationships that might exist among lurking behaviour, antecedents, and other relevant variables. It can assist in identifying different types of lurkers or key predictors that may differentiate between clusters. In other words, it allows for a data-driven approach to identify and understand different lurking profiles, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon and achievement of the research aims and objectives.

5.5.7.5 ANOVA

One-way analysis of variance or ANOVA involves one independent variable (factor) which has several different levels corresponding to the different groups or conditions (Pallant 2016). It is called the analysis of variance because it “analyses the variance; that is, the spread of data values, within and between groups of data by comparing means” (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016, p.544) where the F ratio or F statistics represent these differences. A large F ratio (probability of less than 0.05) means the differences between groups occurring by chance alone is low and the result is statistically significant (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016). According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2016, p.544), certain assumptions need to be met before using one-way ANOVA:

- Each data value is independent and does not relate to any other data values.
- The data for each group are normally distributed. This is not particularly important if the number of cases in each group is large (30 or more).
- The data for each group have the same variance (standard deviation squared). If the number of cases in the largest group is not 1.5 times

more than that of the smallest group, it will have very little effect on the test results.

ANOVA is a valuable statistical tool for examining group differences in lurking behaviour and its antecedents. It will aid the researcher in determining if lurking behaviour significantly varies across different groups or conditions, contributing to a better understanding of the factors that may influence lurking behaviour in various contexts. For example, the researcher might compare lurking behaviour among different demographic groups (e.g., age, gender), across different personality traits, or between users with varying levels of social interaction or participation. Post-hoc tests, such as Tukey's HSD, was used to determine which specific group differences are significant and will, therefore, also be included within the analysis. The post-hoc tests will enable the researcher to identify the conditions, groups, or factors that will significantly influence lurking behaviour the most.

To summarise, the survey instrument's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, and construct validity was established through factor analysis.

5.6 Research Context- The UK Skincare Product Consumers

The UK's beauty industry is a complex and dynamic sector that has a profound impact on consumer behaviour, self-expression, and societal norms. It encompasses a diverse range of products, services, and trends, catering to the varied needs and preferences of individuals and plays a significant role in the country's economy. When it comes to discovering new skincare products, social media is ranked as one of the top platforms that enables its discovery (Malone 2022; Cvetkovska 2021). To succeed in this highly competitive environment, marketers in the industry must adapt to shifting consumer preferences, foster innovation, and comprehend the evolving beauty landscape influenced by technology, sustainability, and cultural transformations. This is why studying and understanding lurkers' (non-) engagement is beneficial since they make up most of the consumer base, providing opportunities for marketers and practitioners to adapt to their wants, needs, and preferences and target them more effectively.

The beauty industry comprises several different business or product segments. Lopaciuk and Loboda (2013) describe five segments, which are skincare, haircare, colour (make-up), fragrances, and toiletries (bath and shower products). These segments are complementary and diverse in a way where they are able to satisfy all consumers' needs and expectations. Of all the mentioned segments, the body or skin care segment has been experiencing buoyant performance as research shows three quarters of adults in the UK use certain skincare products on their body (Sender 2020). Despite the economy going through a tough period over the COVID-19 pandemic, skincare remains the best-performing sector within the beauty industry (Villena 2021; Malone 2022). This may be because individuals are incorporating and expanding the number of products used in their skincare routine and research has proven that facial skin health is becoming more important (Malone 2022).

Beauty products within each segment can also be further divided into premium and mass production sub-segments, depending on the brand prestige, price, and distribution channels utilised (Lopaciuk and Loboda 2013). The present study focuses on skincare and toiletries (bath and shower products) in both premium and mass production segments, as these products continue being applied onto the skin for its cleanliness, care, and maintenance. Whilst the terminologies of skincare and cosmetics are used interchangeably, they are subtly different. Skincare refers to "the use of cosmetics to care for the skin", according to Oxford dictionary (2020, p.1); whereas cosmetics are defined as:

> *"Any substance or mixture intended to be placed in contact with the various external parts of the human body (epidermis, hair system, nails, lips and external genital organs) or with the teeth and the mucous membranes of the oral cavity with a view exclusively or mainly to cleaning them, perfuming them, changing their appearance and/or correcting body odours and/or protecting them or keeping them in good condition" (Cosmetic, Toiletry and Perfumery Association 2020, p.1).*

Drawing on these definitions, the present study describes skincare as:

Any product(s) that is used and applied on to the skin for its maintenance, cleanliness, and care, independent of the motive whether it is for cosmetic reasons, general or daily well-being, or other personal reasons.

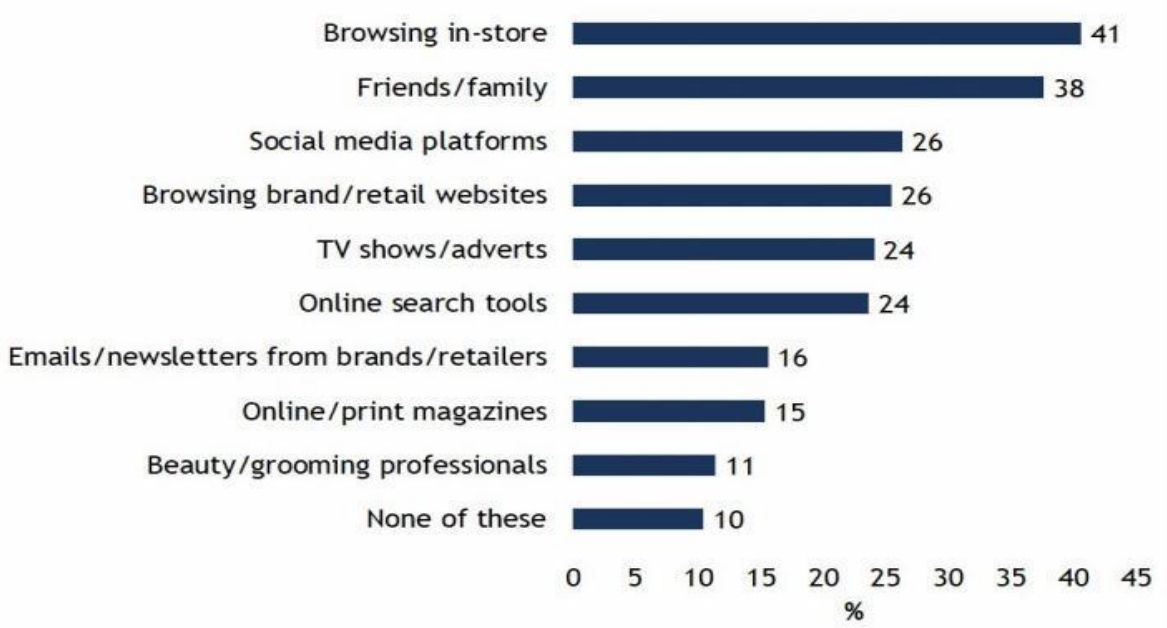
The skincare sector is rather broad and is further divided into sub-sectors, such as facial care, hand, foot, and body care, and sun care. Skincare within this research includes all elements of facial skincare, as well as these sub-sectors, thereby following Fisher's (2019) description of skincare. These products include:

- Moisturisers
- Cleansers, including scrubs, washes, wipes, makeup remover and facial soaps
- Toners
- Masks and treatments
- Specialised products, such as lip salves, eye care and anti-ageing products
- Medicated skincare.
- Hand-care products
- Foot-care products
- Body-care (Body lotions/creams/moisturisers/sprays, body butters, emollients, general-purpose products, body exfoliants/scrubs, anti-cellulite products, bust-firming gels/creams/lotions, fragrance treatment sprays)
- Tanning moisturisers

5.6.1 Skincare Product Consumption and Social Media

Social media platforms are ranked in the top 3 channels for how people discover beauty products, as shown in Figure 5 (Malone 2022a). Over the recent COVID-19 pandemic, increased use of social media (SM) among women changed their skincare habits (Joshi et al. 2022). Joshi et al. (2022) explain that people often search for inspiration and solutions concerning their appearance on social media, with 40.0% of health care consumers currently utilising SM for their healthcare information requirements, including skincare.

Figure 5: Product Discovery Channels (Malone 2022a, p.1).



A growing amount of literature emphasises the evolving relationship between social media and dermatology, and SM is found to be used frequently by patients seeking health advice and support on dermatologic conditions (Reddy 2021). Moreover, when it comes to the initial discovery and utilisation of skincare products and brands, more than 40% of men and women discover new skincare products through offline channels, such as browsing in store rather than online (Malone 2022a; Malone 2022b). This finding is also supported by Ceron (2022), who found that 71% of consumers shop offline in supermarkets and pharmacies (e.g., Boots, Tesco, Asda, Superdrug, Sainsburys), beating popular online retailers, such as Amazon and beauty sites. For this reason, the researcher did not exclude any offline activities from the research and explores the utilisation and browsing of skincare in both online and offline settings.

The latest data shows 55% of beauty product consumers in the UK purchased online in 2022-2023 (Ceron 2023). Product trials have shifted from online to offline channels. Offline channels include pop-up stores so brands can focus on activations that appeal to facial skin care shoppers, such as product demonstrations, consultations with professionals, skincare workshops and personalisation opportunities (Malone 2022a). However, a growing number of female teenagers aged 15-19 years between 2021-2026 signals an opportunity for brands to innovate on social media channels, such as TikTok (a social media platform). As TikTok is video-led, brands can focus on creating

innovative content, aimed to inspire and educate, as well as showcase and sell products directly to consumers (Malone 2022a), either through their website directly or through the TikTok shop.

Beauty brands have the opportunity to initiate social media challenges that inspire consumers to actively participate by sharing beauty tips tailored to their unique skin types, hair, or physical attributes. By collaborating with users who provide the most valuable tips, brands can then engage in co-creation to develop specialised products that cater for the specific needs of these users, making them inclusive and personalised (Ceron 2023). Embracing the latest technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI) and augmented reality (AR) (e.g., virtual try-on and professional consultations), presents opportunities to enhance the in-store and online experience, and can also cater for the growing demand for personalised beauty solutions, ensuring a customised and engaging experience for consumers (Ceron 2023).

Multiple brands, such as L'Oreal and Maybelline, have already incorporated such technologies into their online channels, such as TikTok and Snapchat, where consumers can try-on certain lipstick shades through the use of the custom filter feature on the respective app. Such technological advancements have transformed the industry and reshaped how consumers can discover, purchase, and engage with skincare products and services. In addition, Malone's (2022a) study also found that skincare consumers are driven by enjoyment and curiosity with 71% of female skincare users aged 16-24 years enjoying researching facial skincare products online. This behaviour may be transferable where consumers are researching for products online and then going into stores offline to browse for said researched products. Furthermore, it is not just females increasingly using skincare since more than two-thirds (64%) of men between the ages of 16 and 34 years have bought facial care products within the past year, and there has been a substantial increase in the number of men aged 35 to 54 purchasing facial care products (Ceron 2023).

There is a lack of studies focusing on the lurking behaviour of beauty-product consumers, and several possible reasons contribute to this gap:

- *Emphasis on active participation*: Research in CE often prioritises active participation and behavioural engagement, rather than any forms of passive or immeasurable activities (e.g., observing, reading, browsing etc.).
- *Methodological Challenges*: Understanding that lurking behaviour is difficult to measure and capture directly, since it may not involve measurable forms of participation or engagement activities.
- *Limited Industry Focus*: The skincare industry has seen substantial research attention in various aspects, such as customer loyalty, brand loyalty, product development, marketing, purchase intention, and consumer preferences (Anugrahani and Hartono 2023; Kirana and Wahyudi 2021; Lontoh et al. 2022; Putranto, Suyanto, and Ariadi 2022; Sanny et al. 2020; Shanti and Alversia 2022). However, the specific behaviour of lurking within the context of skincare has received less attention, potentially due to a focus on other aspects deemed more critical by researchers and practitioners.

In summary, this research is expected to delve deeper into the variations in personalities, motivations and lurking behaviour, based on the impact of different product types (in this research case, skincare), which warrants further investigation (Marchowska-Raza 2023; Ghaisani et al. 2017; Hollebeek, Glynn, and Brodie 2014; Shang et al 2006). By directing research attention to the lurking behaviour of skincare consumers, academics and practitioners can gain insights into consumer preferences, segmentation strategies, effective communication, and online community management. This focus allows for a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour and opens opportunities for tailored marketing strategies.

5.7 Research Ethics

Research ethics is defined as “norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour” (Resnik 2015, p.1). The overall ethics goal for this research was to promote honesty, integrity, objectivity, carefulness, openness, respect, confidentiality, responsible publication, competence, legality, etc. (Resnik 2015). Conducting research ethically and protecting the rights, privacy and well-being of participants is naturally the aim of the current study. The researcher made sure to not include any identifiable or personal information obtained from the qualitative or quantitative stages of data collection, apart from age and gender.

At Bournemouth University, all research is subjected to appropriate ethical reflection and review, as it is an integral part of proper scientific conduct to which all staff and students must adhere. An online ethics checklist was completed by the researcher (see Appendix D and E) and forwarded to the Research Ethics Panel (REP) for their review and approval, along with (i) the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix F), (ii) Participant Agreement Form (see Appendix G), (iii) any gate keeper’s permission, (iv) the recruitment advert (in this research case: a quote of the Facebook post that will be posted on the group or community), and (v) the proposed research instruments design and/or plan (interview questions; online questionnaire). Only once approved could any data collection processes commence, including approaches for research participants. The REP ensures that all research activities adhere to the best ethical practice, thereby preventing any potential misconduct.

When conducting the qualitative and quantitative data collection, the researcher faced several ethical issues, including privacy, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, freedom to withdraw, possible deception, and misrepresentation or misinterpretation. These issues were consistent with those discussed by scholars, such as Artal and Rubenfeld (2017), Fischer (2006), Rahman (2017), Saunders et al. (2012), and Vanclay, Baines and Taylor (2013). The following sub-sections detail how these issues were mitigated.

5.7.1 Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

Participants for this research were informed and given the freedom to voluntarily participate, as well as the right to withdraw partially or completely from the process without any coercion, pressure, or any negative consequences (Rahman 2017). The researcher also disclosed all relevant information, including any possible risks of participation and issues around what will happen to the data collected through the Participant Information Sheet (PIS) (see Appendix F). Additionally, within the PAF, there is a section for the specific permission required from the participant giving consent in advance for audio recording. No coercion was taken for this research in the form of payments, gifts, or prizes.

5.7.2 Respect

When conducting research with human subjects, the interviewer must have self-control and respect for everyone. The researcher respects all interactions with participants, including not judging or discrediting them and ensuring that all views are accurately recorded (interviews) and given due consideration in the assessment process. An important dimension of this respect relates to ensuring the privacy and protection of participants (Vanclay, Baines and Taylor 2013). Likewise, the researcher only discussed research-related matters relevant to the issues under research and all enquiries were confined to those issues. By doing so, it implies respect for the personal lives of participants and awareness of what is personal and private. Additionally, the researcher ensured the privacy of both potential and actual participants by safeguarding their personal information and sensitive data. This was achieved through employing adequate measures (i.e., anonymity and removal of identifiable or personal information) to protect participant identities and maintain confidentiality throughout the research process.

5.7.3 Rights

Participants have the right to end participation in the research at any time and also to safeguard integrity (Artal and Rubenfeld 2017; Fischer 2006). The researcher integrated this aspect into the study by seeking informed consent and avoiding any possible deception of participants. For the qualitative stage, consent was first obtained from the gatekeeper (the Facebook group's respective admin(s) and then the participants, through the use of openness and honesty (Saunders et al. 2012), rather than deception, especially when it came to explaining the research being studied and its likely benefits. The gatekeeper granted access and permission to post the recruitment advert on the group within a couple days, having read the PIS, which details all key information about the study being conducted, what is expected, and how the data will be stored. One of the group's gatekeepers posted a call for participants on the group on behalf of the researcher, requesting participants to contact the researcher and directed those interested to the researcher.

As for the quantitative stage, the participants were also made aware of the PIS at the beginning of the survey, for which they needed to consent to continue taking part in the study and submit responses. Like the qualitative study, responses were anonymous and did not contain any personal or identifiable information. Likewise, participants were free to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

5.7.4 Beneficence

Benefits should outweigh the costs or risks through minimising harms and risks and maximising benefits from study participation. The researcher conducted a thorough risk-benefit analysis to ensure that the potential benefits of the research outweigh any potential harm or risks to the participants. Participants were informed within the PIS of the possible risks or harms of taking part in the research. Ethical considerations should include minimising risks, ensuring participant well-being, and maximising the societal value of the research (Fischer 2006).

5.7.5 Protection

Participants should have protection from physical, mental, and emotional harm or adverse consequences because of their participation. The researcher did her utmost to protect the participants from any harm and to ensure, under the principle of informed consent, that the participant was fully apprised of all possible risks from participation (Vanclay, Baines and Taylor 2013). Additionally, the researcher did this by diminishing autonomy and maintaining the confidentiality of data provided by individuals and any identifiable participants through the use of anonymity and removing any sensitive, personal, or identifiable information from collected data (Fischer 2006). Linking back to respect, this means that confidentiality (non-disclosure of information) is accorded to all private or personal matters or views, or when any such undertaking is given (Vanclay, Baines, and Taylor 2013). The researcher protects such confidentiality through preservation of anonymity.

5.7.6 Access

Participants must have access to information regarding the research; therefore, the researcher ensured they had a PIS and contact details of the research team in case a participant wished to obtain more information or clarify any doubts they had about the research. Likewise, the researcher considered the ethical implications of gaining access to participants and research sites by obtaining proper permissions and approvals from relevant authorities, organisations, or individuals who have control over the access to participants or research settings (Fischer 2006). Additionally, the researcher ensured that access was granted in a respectful, transparent, and non-discriminatory manner, adhering to any legal or ethical requirements.

5.8 Chapter Summary

To conclude, this chapter has discussed, in detail, the research's methodological choices along with the ethical process this research underwent. Within the detailed discussion, the researcher demonstrated the choices made, which are as follows:

- Research philosophy - Pragmatism
- Research approach – Adductive approach
- Research strategy – Mixed- method (qualitative to quantitative)
- Time horizon - cross-sectional research
- Research technique and procedures - interviews for phase 1: qualitative data collection, followed by online surveys for the phase 2: quantitative data collection.
- Research analysis – Thematic analysis for phase 1: qualitative analysis and descriptive, factor, cluster analysis, and ANOVA for phase 2: quantitative analysis.

For both phases of data collection, all participants that took part in the study are: i) between the age of 18-74 years old, ii) currently residing in the United Kingdom, iii) consumers/users of skincare products, and iv) browsers of skincare products online.

By incorporating all of the above choices into the research design, the researcher can capture the depth and variety of lurking behaviour online along with its influences, thereby, developing a comprehensive understanding of the behaviour. Additionally, upon reflecting on possible ethical concerns to conducting research on human participants, the researcher mitigated ethical risks through the promotion of honesty, integrity, objectivity, carefulness, openness, respect, confidentiality, responsible publication, competence, legality, etc. (Resnik 2015). The following chapters will present this research's findings upon application of the methodology discussed within this chapter.

CHAPTER 6: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

Thematic analysis was conducted on the 157 pages worth of transcripts. Refer to Chapter 5.4.3.1 for the participant's profiles. This chapter discusses the findings for the first stage of data collection, which is the qualitative study as shown in Figure 6. The results obtained from the current study explores the proposed research framework and underlying relationships and addresses research objectives 1 to 3 (refer chapter 1.3).

Figure 7 demonstrates all of the themes and sub-themes that have emerged following thematic analysis. The findings will be used as a guideline and template for development of the second stage of data collection, i.e.., the quantitative study.

Figure 6: Qualitative Research Process

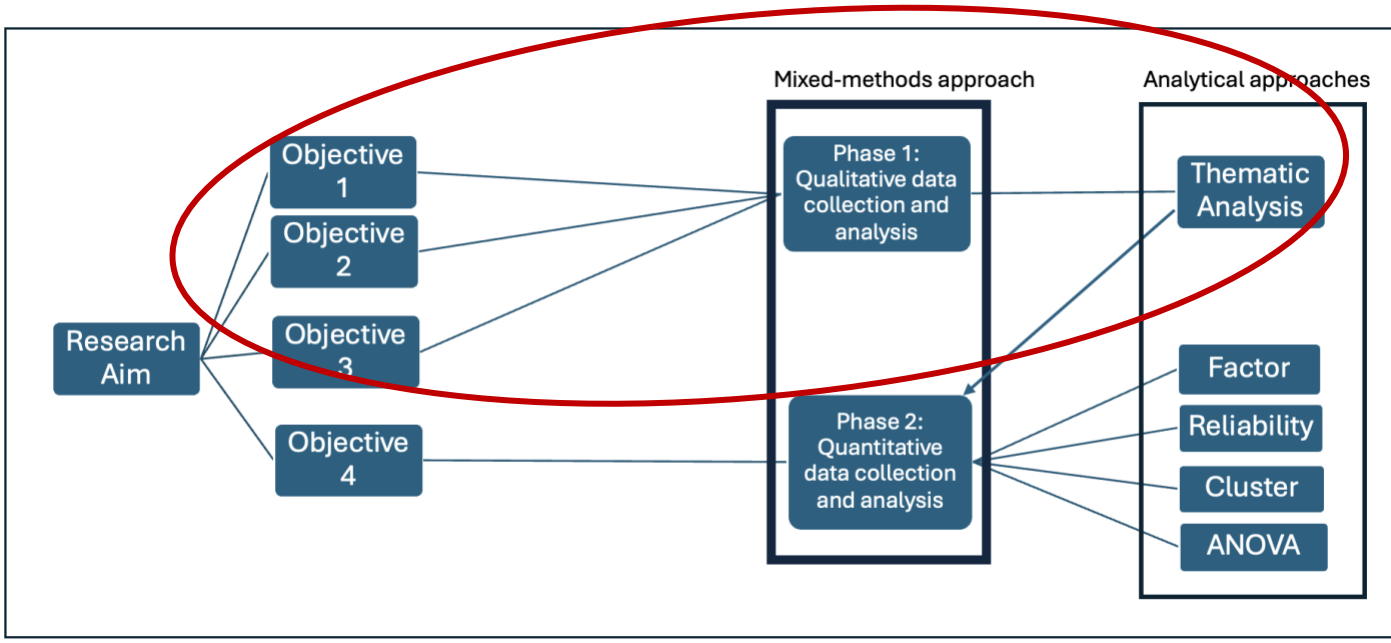
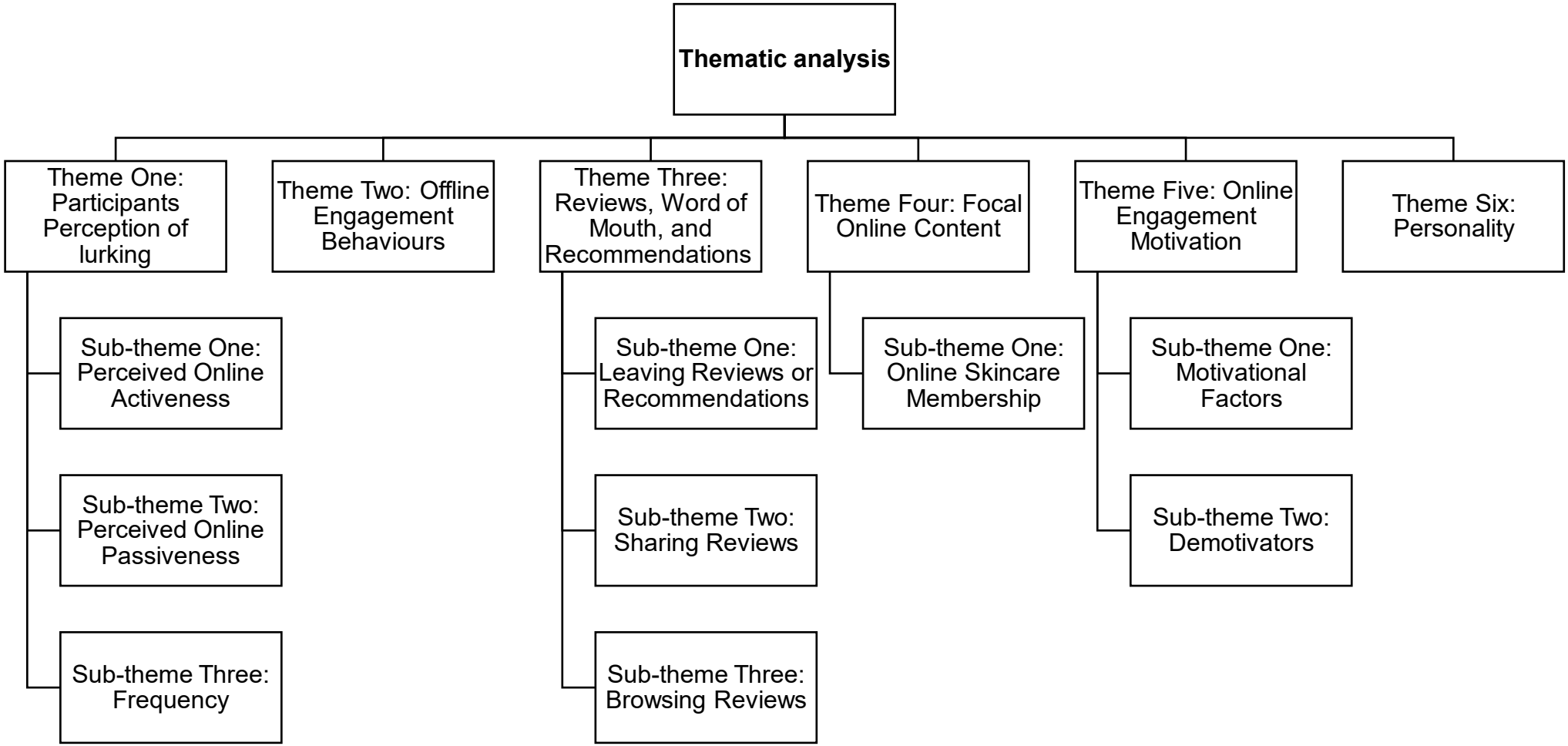


Figure 7: Emerged themes.



6.2 Theme One: Participants' Perception of Lurking

Four questions (including sub-questions) surrounding frequencies of engagement were asked to explore the participants' social media usage. This helped guide the researcher in understanding participants' perception of lurking. Terms, such as 'lurk/lurking', were not used in the interview process to minimise potential biases that could be incorporated into participants' answers because of their known negative connotations (Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). Instead, participants were asked if they considered themselves to be active online, whether by reading, commenting, reacting, posting etc., to illuminate the participants' perception of passive versus active lurking. Jerke et al. (2019) recommended indirect questioning on potentially negative or socially biased topics, which is the case of online lurking.

Responses to the questions yielded 3 main themes linked to: 1) perceived online activeness, 2) perceived online passiveness, and 3) frequency (perceived activeness versus passiveness). The themes established that participants either self-perceived and identified themselves to be active, using direct terms such as 'active', 'contributor', and similarly, 'passive', 'not active', or 'lurker' when they are not active. However, participant's interpretation and understanding of the terms: 'active' and 'not active' differed in terms of the type of activities being performed (e.g. reading, learning, researching, etc.), and the frequency of these activities being performed.

6.2.1 Sub-theme One: Perceived Online Activeness

When participants described themselves as active, the questions revolved around visible behaviour content, such as the number of postings, liking and reacting to content, the frequency of taking part in online conversations, time spent sharing, reading, and responding to online comments posted by other users. The following quotes illustrate some of the participants that perceived themselves as active online users:

"I mean, making a YouTube video will take 4 hours minimum each week. I would say 19 hours a month, that is a lot. Very active" (SC18, Male, GenY).

"I will post, and I will take part, and answer people, I will reply and I will give like eight or nine suggestions… I am quiet but I do like to take part" (SC12, Female, GenX).

"Why am I active online? I like to see what other people are doing; maybe I do it to be motivated by others as well because I am bored and have nothing to do and because I am on it to put my own content out there… I like to show support to other people putting content out there as well" (SC5, Female, GenY).

"...I use Facebook mainly for groups, to basically gain information from other people; I also post in it as well, and then social media I use it more for inspiration, to see what other people are using, and I follow more brands on Instagram, whereas on Facebook I do more of, like, the skincare-related groups. I am more active on Facebook than on other social media, Instagram, I am really more passive and just scroll through" (SC7, Female, GenZ).

A key takeaway from the above statement by SC7 is that lurking will differ across social media platforms. This finding is consistent with multiple studies (Liu et al. 2024; Haverila, McLaughlin, and Haverila 2022; McLaughlin, Haverila, and Arora 2021; Voorveld et al.'s 2018) suggesting that lurking behaviour varies across social media platforms therefore requires further investigation across contexts. In addition to these participants, SC18 also perceived himself to be rather active due to work- and skincare also being hobby-related and an area where he performs press-related content, publishing, and consulting and meeting clients. He explained that:

"I am active… I work in an industry where that is a very big focus on it, I also study beauty therapy so it is also kind of like my big professional side but also its my number one hobby…anything I would do regarding that is only solidifying myself as a key opinion leader and with work and doing press things like being in articles, and meetings, meeting clients, consulting, people from press consulting influencers…" (SC18, Male, GenY).

The qualitative study also revealed that, as well as the social media platform, group size is an influential factor when it comes to lurking in online communities. The larger the group size, the higher the lurking behaviour. This finding is consistent with multiple studies (e.g. Liu et al. 2024; Hong, Hu, and Zhao 2023; Raos 2011), who found that lurking is influenced by group size, where shy lurkers are more likely to lurk in larger groups due to intimidation due to reasons such as the volume of content, responsibilities, fear of judgement, and social media fatigue.
For example, some participants (e.g. SC10 and SC11) mentioned being lurker in bigger groups but an active participant in smaller groups, through commenting and sharing, and even posting content daily or every couple of days. SC11 said, *"…for skincare, I was quite keen to be an active contributor quite early on rather than being a lurker… I am more likely to lurk in really big groups, so I started in a reasonably small group - so I was, kind of, one of the very early members, so I felt like I was able to contribute for quite an early point in the early stage…" (SC11, Female, GenX)*

Other behaviours participants used to describe their online activeness included: watching online content, digesting or learning content, following brands and other members, creating and editing content (videos), working in the industry, searching for online content, scrolling for content, scanning through content and gaining information (e.g. looking for inspiration (e.g. SC7, GenZ, Female)), showing support, and purchasing products. Therefore, it is evident that the term 'active' varies across participants, as mentioned earlier. Another example, is how a participant (SC13), associates the term with shopping and purchasing products online: "*I am really active online… it is just who I am, it is just I would go shopping for skincare, particularly when I am online, so I just buy things online"* (SC13, Female, GenX). Whereas others (e.g. SC7, SC16) associate the term with simply scrolling through content and groups, which is another immeasurable form of activity. SC16 said: *"…as an individual I am quite active, like, I am more active than I used to be, you don't see anyone else scrolling through skincare groups like I do but it is just me as a person, as a company"* (SC16, Male, GenY).

Additionally, SC13 associated the term with activities linked to researching, digesting, or learning about content to create her own products, as she proceeded to say: *"I struggled with my skin so there was a thirst for knowledge on how to, or to find*

*solutions, for that. It certainly was a lot of research. I think it started with a sort of general interest and curiosity…then digging deeper and deeper and then eventually creating my own products and brand" (*Female, GenX). From this statement, lurkers can also be learners when they read to gain information and build knowledge about a product or subject area. The researcher refers to this act as active lurking because, although immeasurable, lurkers are still actively learning (i.e. social learning).

In brief, participants' perceptions of lurking present six key insights:

- Perceived activity levels: participants expressed their perception of themselves as active online users. They mentioned engaging in various behaviours, such as posting, creating content, taking part in online conversations, responding to comments, sharing content, and actively participating in groups. This indicates that they consider themselves active users.
- Differences across social media platforms: participants highlighted that their level of engagement and lurking behaviour may differ across different social media platforms. For example, some participants mentioned being more active on Facebook, while others mentioned being more passive on Instagram. This suggests that lurking behaviour is influenced by the specific characteristics and purposes of each platform. Several authors also found this to be the case (e.g. Zhu and Dawson 2024; Cao et al. 2021; Shahbaznezhad, Dolan and Rashidirad 2020) and expressed how engagement behaviour may differ across social media platforms.
- Influence of group size: participants mentioned that they are more likely to lurk in larger groups while being active in smaller ones. This finding is consistent with that of Zhu and Dawson (2024) who found that both lurkers and posters had concerns about posting in larger communities. Reasons might be related to inclusivity and sense of belonging, as evidenced by SC10, who said that smaller communities made her feel like she was part of the community.
- Other influential factors: participants attributed their online activity to various factors, such as personal interests, professional pursuits, hobbies, work-related obligations, and the desire to establish themselves as opinion leaders. These factors motivated them to actively participate and contribute to online

communities. Multiple authors have expressed there is not a single reason as to why a lurker may lurk and may be linked to various reasons like personality, lack of time, etc. (Zhu and Dawson 2024; Adjin-Tettey and Garman; Nguyen 2021).

- Varied ‘active’ interpretations: Participants had different interpretations of what it meant to be ‘active’ online but consistently involved visible behaviours, such as posting, commenting, sharing, purchasing products etc. Other participants mentioned different immeasurable activities, such as shopping, reading, digesting, or learning, scanning, and scrolling through content and groups. This highlights the subjective nature of the terminology, and the diverse behaviours associated with online engagement.

The findings shed light on participants' perceptions of online engagement, lurking behaviour, platform preferences, group dynamics, and the factors that influence their level of engagement. Unlike previous studies of online engagement, the qualitative findings of this research revealed that behavioural passiveness co-exists with behavioural activeness, especially when lurking is interpreted from a social learning perspective; therefore, this research embraces both forms of behaviour when it comes to understanding lurking.

6.2.1.1 Active Lurking (Learning)

The previous section showed how several participants (SC4, SC5, SC8, SC12, SC13) perceive digesting content, researching, and learning as a form of online active behaviour. Instead of focusing on productivity, pedagogy scholars (e.g., Zhu and Dawson 2024; Nguyen et al. 2022) promote an understanding of lurking via a social learning lens. Instead of lambasting these activities as unconducive activities, pedagogy scholars characterise them as intellectually active and necessary to facilitate learning in a social environment. For example, Daradkeh (2022), Nguyen et al. (2023), Shum and Ferguson (2012) and Muller (2012) label the behaviour various terms such as ‘cognitive participation’ ‘observational learners’, ‘social reading’ and ‘active lurking’, respectively. Both labels denote that lurking is not a non-participative behaviour but involves a series of information-processing activities depicting that it is still a form of active behaviour via social learning lens.

6.2.1.2 Intention to Post

For participants, who are part of a skincare group or community, a probe question was asked to see if they instantly engaged upon joining or created a post in which majority of participants did not intend to post from the outset.

The rationale for participants who delayed their engagement, was that they choose initially to lurk in skincare groups or communities to understand the dynamics, topics, and expectations of the group. They may also feel more comfortable receiving information and learning from others before actively participating. This is consistent with existing research findings (e.g. Zhu and Dawson 2023; Daradkey 2022). Moreover, participants are clearly reading to gain information rather than to share- SC10 particularly admitted to this motive and felt other users are more knowledgeable than she is, despite utilising skincare products for more than 10 years. For the same reason, most participants seem to exhibit imposter syndrome despite utilising skincare for over 10 years.

Another finding links to how participant's intentions seem to gradually transition from lurking to commenting or posting, which reflects a cautious and selective approach to engagement. This depicts that lurking behaviour is not stationary in nature and exists across a continuum of varying engagement levels which is rather dynamic if anything. McLaughlin and Haverilla (2023) and Fullwood et al. (2019) both expressed how lurking may be best conceptualised as existing on a continuum as well which support this finding. Some responses linked to this finding were:

"*Initially no, probably not… You kind of have to figure out what people post about, what way people go about things. So, I think for, like, the first few weeks or months, I would not have posted. Maybe I would have gotten involved in the comments, but not so much the posts"* (SC7, Female, GenZ).

"Definitely, just lurking and reading other people's things because I prefer to, like, receive the information than give it. So, if I feel, like, it's useful for me to give, I'll give, but for the most part, I just like reading other people's; I think people know a lot more than me, so I don't like to chime in unnecessarily" (SC10, Female, GenY).

"I just waited because, I mean, obviously I needed to or, looking at any information I would try to glean from joining at that time. So, I just look at, react to, and read other people's posts. I do intend to ask people that have put a post out, I comment on their post asking them about the product. I have purchased some items by that route, by recommendations from some people in the group. I made my first post maybe a month or two later" (SC12, Female, GenX).

"I had no intention of posting; it is just a comment that I think I could help… If I see a bargain, or something, I'll post it and I will put that in a group for any fans or someone looking for products…I feel, like, I'll do that" (SC8, Female, BB).

For those who expressed an instant engagement with online posts after becoming a member, findings indicate that some participants had a proactive approach to posting from the beginning, driven by various motivations. Understanding these insights contributes to further uncovering the motivations and behaviours of users choosing to lurk in online communities, which the next section will address more deeply. Some of these motivations included a desire to actively contribute, share information, provide reviews, and network within the community. The preferences for smaller groups, sharing experiences, and enhancing brand awareness demonstrate how these participants saw value in participating and engaging in discussions from the outset. Some responses were:

"*I was quite keen to be an active contributor quite early on rather than being a lurker, um... I am more likely to lurk in big groups, so I started in the first skincare Facebook group which, when I joined, it was still reasonably small. So, I was, kind of, one of the very early members, so it felt like I was able to contribute at quite an early point in the early stage… if I see a conversation, I feel like I can add to, then I might; but you know what it's like with bigger groups, when there's lots of people commenting and posting, you are not as likely to be seen. And the people don't read the comments, and then you get lots of repetitive comments; it is just a bit frustrating for me to be part of something like that, so I kind of, I don't tend to engage with it as much"* (SC11, Female, GenX).

"*I do post sometimes, yes, but I do find it very useful for reviews… I'll post if I found something that I like, I would post about it. And if I find something I don't like, I'll post about it as well. If it doesn't work for me, I'm quite happy to do that. Just sharing information, which I think is good. Because I like it when other people share information"* (SC9, Female, BB).

6.2.1.3 Researching or Learning Goals

Three questions asked whether participants researched a product prior to or after its purchase, along with what kind of content they found themselves researching about. These questions were to evaluate other forms of immeasurable activities that a lurker may perform such as learning, researching, reading, observing, consuming, etc. Most of them replied that they researched a product online prior to purchasing it and seven participants researched only after purchase. These participants consistently explained that researching for content online, such as posts on skincare groups, helped them to learn and understand more about the skincare topics (i.e. ingredients) and/or products of interest.

Some participants (i.e. SC1, SC10, and SC5) further elaborated that the posts they perused helped to inform their purchase decision later through the knowledge gleaned from the learning process. The responses show participants are involved in actively seeking out and consuming information through participating in discussions and activities and applying what has been learned in various contexts without the need to post or comment. Therefore, learning can be classed as active lurking. They are lurking because they are not necessarily posting, creating, or performing measurable behavioural forms of online activities but actively researching for informational content. These findings indicate that whilst participants might not have commented or replied to the online posts they browsed and are therefore notoriously branded as 'lurkers', they had, in fact digested, memorised, and applied the knowledge learnt from their lurking for future purchase decisions.

In brief, the qualitative study highlights a major shortcoming of the extant conceptualisation of lurking, which focuses mainly on immediately visible actions (e.g., contributing and commenting on a post behaviourally after reading) and neglects the

potentially delayed and less visible actions associated with lurking (e.g., digesting and storing information cognitively for a future decision). SC5, for example, said that she would spend more time reading when she wants to learn about a new product prior to purchasing it or if she wants to learn how to use the product(s) she may already have. Additionally, SC1, SC10, and SC5 researched prior to purchasing a product, as illustrated by their comments:

"Whenever I use new products, I definitely do a bit of research" (SC1, Female, GenY).

"I prefer to research it, and not kind of go overboard, but maybe watch, like,… two or three videos and then maybe, like, go and see maybe a couple- two or three of the posts that might be on Facebook groups or whatever" (SC10, Female, GenY).

"...if I am buying something new, then I do a bit of research about it and then buy it" (SC5, Female, GenY).

However, SC12, SC13, and SC17 perform the research online after purchase.
When probed, the research or learning goals participants sought when browsing content online were "price", "ingredients", and "reviews". These replies can be grouped into nine, first-order (apparent) learning goals, as summarised in Table 20. They could be condensed into five, second order (less apparent) goals, which are ingredient awareness and knowledge, review analysis, information gathering, personal preferences and values, company, and brand evaluation.

Overall, the findings highlight the participants' active engagement in research, information gathering, and learning activities related to skincare products. They emphasised the factors of ingredients, user reviews, personal preferences, brand reputation, and product suitability. These interpretations provide insights into the decision-making processes and criteria used by online browsers when exploring and purchasing skincare products online.

Table 20: Learning activities identified from interviews participants.

Learning activities identified from interview participants	Description	Example participants' verbatim quotes
1. Checking the product's ingredients and/or formulation	This activity was about participants researching the product's ingredients and formulation. This activity is especially evident when they have no or limited knowledge about a skincare product, when they are on the lookout for new products, and/or when the product was newly launched by its manufacturer.	*"I also started to read ingredients just to make sure they won't irritate my skin, because my skin's quite allergic" (SC3, Female, GenY).* *"I would look for what kind of ingredients they're using in the product. I do want to try to stick to more natural ingredients…" (SC7, Female, GenZ).* *"I got a dictionary of ingredients, but it is not just about ingredients, it is their formulation as well…." (SC8, Female, BB).*
2. Reading, watching, and looking through respective product reviews and	This activity is about participants reading and checking online reviews prior to purchasing a product. Some reviews are also watchable in the form of	*"Anything really, if it's skincare, it's user reviews, effectiveness, and… I research where it's cheap and if I can put in a promo code" (SC12, Female, GenX)* *"I would look at the overall review, and then I would read some of the comments, and then if there is a really, really bad one, then maybe it will put me a little bit off but... it depends how many bad comments there are. So, if there's, like, one and*

other people's routines	a playback video displaying other users' skincare routines.	*there's like ten really good ones, then I wouldn't mind about that one, I would brush it off. But if there are just negative comments, then I don't really want to buy it" (SC5, Female, GenY).* *"I am such an easily-influenced person by social media, so I would google "skincare routine", and then go on YouTube and then see... girls using it, and then whether their skin looks good or not. I would buy it" (SC5, Female, GenY).*
3. Checking for prices and available promotions for the best possible deals	Involves checking online for the product's best price and promotions/deals across websites.	*"So, I look and see what the claims are, what it will do or how it will perform, I increasingly look at ingredients to see what is in it; I mean, prices are a driver as well" (SC19, Male, BB).* *"...look at the price to make sure I can afford whatever the bits are" (SC5, Female, GenY).*
4. Asking for product recommendations in online communities	Involves posting on an online community group or forum to ask for product recommendations and reviews from others.	*"If I wanted to canvas ideas from the Facebook group then I will post on the group and ask if anyone's used it, how did they find it work for them" (SC12, Female, GenX).*
5. Checking for product availability	Checking if the product is available to purchase in the UK.	*"Availability might be another one if you know it is available in the UK because it is difficult to source some things at the moment if it is not available in the UK" (SC13, Female, GenX).*

6. Checking if the brand or product is cruelty-free	Checking if the brand or product is cruelty-free and/or vegan. Evident in SC who cares about animal welfare or follows veganism.	*"I would check that it was cruelty free. I was going to say I check if it was vegan but I am not vegan so I do not know why that is actually important…" (SC13, Female, GenX).*
7. Checking for the product's skin type suitability and targets	Checking if the product is suitable for the participant's skin type and what the product is manufactured to target. Evident in SC who have sensitive, dry, ageing, or problematic skin.	*"What it actually does, what it is that I'm after; so, for example, if it's, like, more suited to oily skin, that won't suit my skin type as much because I'm kind of drier. Just like actually figuring out whether if it's suitable for my skin and if it's within my price range" (SC7, Female, GenZ).*
8. Researching the product's quality	Researching the product's quality related to ingredients that the SC finds of importance.	*"Quality…" of ingredients, such as avocado oil, cbd oil (SC18, Male, GenY).*
9. Reading about the brand and company affiliated with the product	Relates to general information about the company, and their product catalogue.	*"When I am purchasing, I would see what kind of company I am buying from first of all, then what stuff they have available, what problems they solve, does it meet my criteria of being natural and, you know, have a look at the ingredients cause now I know more about the ingredients, I start questioning why something is added" (SC16, Male, GenY).*

Regarding the question based on what kind of content participants researched about online and on what platform(s). Several participants stated that they mostly found out about the products online through browsing on search engines (i.e., Google), the brand's respective website, and through social media posts (Facebook or Instagram), as shown in the responses below. The findings suggest participants employed a combination of online and offline strategies to gather information about skincare products and do not simply rely on social media to research or learn about skincare products and related information.

"Search engines are fine, but I will do a multiple search for it so when I am really looking at a product, it is only really at the ingredients list that is it… if I can't find that on the packaging" (SC18, Male, GenY).

"Either on their own website or John Lewis or Boots" (SC19, Male, BB).

"I basically look to see what people are talking about most either on Instagram or in the Facebook groups; so, which ones keep repeatedly coming up, the types of people that probably have similar skin type to me in terms of my target market as well" (SC11, Female, GenX).

Social media was used to gauge what products are being discussed and recommended by individuals online with similar skin types, indicating the influence and role of social media platforms in shaping participants' perceptions and preferences regarding skincare products. Other online platforms, such as search engines and trusted retailers, also play a crucial role and were also utilised in accessing product details, prices, and recommendations. Additionally, offline platforms, like retail stores, supermarkets, referrals, and word-of-mouth, also contribute to participants' product awareness and influence their purchase decisions. This indicates the importance of multi-channel information gathering and the influence of various sources in shaping participants' perceptions and decisions related to skincare products. Likewise, it also indicates that if a lurker online, may not also be a lurker offline if they are engaging in activities such as those discussed.

On a similar note, when it comes to offline engagement, participants said that they find out about products and brands through physical presence, such as retail stores and supermarkets, as well as through referrals, and word-of-mouth from family and friends. Responses relating to this are:
"Literally just shops. Like, looking through the shops" (SC7, Female, GenZ).

"I like word-of-mouth as well, so I like other people to recommend. So, I look in magazines and I look online, and I go searching through social media. Um, and again, chemists, supermarkets, and department stores. There is another area where I like to go and have a look. I like to ask staff and see if they can recommend, make any recommendations of different products" (SC4, Female, BB).

"Through the media… through television and through printed media - so newspapers. Friends as well" (SC14, Male, GenX).

6.2.2 Sub-theme Two: Perceived Online Passiveness

Several participants (e.g., SC10, SC14, SC15, SC17), identified themselves as not actively involved and are rather passive in online engagement activities. For example, SC1, SC11 and SC14 particularly, explicitly stated that they did not engage in posting and would consider themselves lurkers (these participants had utilised the direct terms of 'lurk' or 'lurker' in their interview). SC11 added on that she would consider herself a lurker in larger online communities further adding on to our theory discussed earlier on of how group or community size affects online engagement.

Participants explained their limited participation, including their minimal involvement with skincare products is due to busy schedules such as work and family commitments, and perceiving skincare as a secondary aspect of their lives. It is noteworthy that all these participants have been using skincare products for more than a decade, despite their self-identification as 'inactive', or 'passive' online. This finding suggests that their less active engagement with online skincare communities may stem from factors beyond their experience or familiarity with skincare. Some examples of influencing factors include limited interest, competing priorities, and a perceived absence of value or advantages of active online participation. The findings suggest a

diverse range of de-motivational factors among skincare users affecting their involvement in online communities. Participants comments were:

"...I am not like, super actively engaged all the time…" (SC10, Female, GenY).

"I don't consider myself active online simply because of 2 things: it's a product category that I purchase occasionally but not that engaged with and I am just too busy with other things, work and family, and other things; so, it is not something that is a major part of my life. It's a sort of peripheral part of my life; therefore, that's the reason I am not as active online" (SC14, Male, GenX).

"I am not really that active… it is not really that high on my list of things to do" (SC17, Male, GenZ)

"I am not as active in the skincare community online… if I had amazing skin, maybe I would be more likely to. I do not see the point of it really. Maybe if it made my skin 20 times noticeably better, then I would, yeah" (SC15, Male, GenY).

6.2.3 Sub-theme Three: Frequency (of Perceived Activeness versus Passiveness)

When the participants were asked how frequent they engage online regarding skincare products, the findings highlight the diversity in participants' engagement patterns and behaviours related to skincare posts on social media. While most participants consistently read content, there are variations in the frequency and intensity of posting. Some participants actively contribute, spend significant time engaging with comments and discussions, and prioritise daily posting, while others prefer a more passive role and limit their involvement to just reading posts regularly. These differences may be influenced by factors such as personal preferences, availability of time, motivational factors, and their specific goals, such as personal interest, building knowledge, networking, or brand building. These factors can also link to the learning activities discussed previously in Table 20 (e.g., personal preferences can link to the individual's preference for certain product ingredients or formulations, prices, etc.). Similarities and differences highlighted in the responses are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Similarities and differences highlighted from responses relating to frequency of engagement.

Similarities	Differences
Most participants engage in reading skincare-related posts regularly, ranging from daily to multiple times a week. Example verbatim quotes: • *"Watching or reading something maybe once a day, or once every couple of days and listening to people"* SC10, Female, GenY). • "*Posting or reading about skincare online, maybe, like, an hour a day"* (SC7, Female, GenZ). • *"I would say between an hour to 6 hours a day reading"* (SC13, Female, GenX).	Variation in the time spent and frequency of active contribution through posting and commenting. Example verbatim quotes: • "*Posting, maybe, like, once a week"* (SC7, Female, GenZ). • *"Posting, possibly an hour to two hours then"* (SC13, Female, GenX). • *"At least four hours a day I spend on social media and that is not necessarily all me posting, but that is a lot of commenting on people's posts or responding to comments"* (SC11, Female, GenX). • *"With posting or reading... I am doing it like twice or three times per week and let's say, maybe we can say, like, three to four hours per week"* (SC3, Female, GenZ).
Most participants do not post frequently, with some mentioning posting once a week, once every few months, or even less often. Example verbatim quotes: • "*With posting, not very much to be honest. Like, maybe once a month, once every couple of months"* (SC10, Female, GenY).	Some participants actively engage with reactions, comments, respond to DMs, and initiate conversations, while others focus more on reading and less on active discussions and interactions. Example verbatim quotes: • *"If I am just reacting to something then that can also be like maybe three to four times a week split between different platforms and things. It will mostly be "likes" and then occasionally, so maybe if we say like 70% likes, 30% comments?"* (SC10, Female, GenY). • *"I will post, maybe, one every day or every couple of days; I would try to do daily posting…responding to direct messages"* (SC11, Female, GenX).

6.3 Theme Two: Offline Engagement Behaviours

Three questions were asked relating to the participant's offline engagement behaviours and activities to address RO3. Examining offline engagement behaviours enriches this research and can be beneficial for several reasons, including its ability to provide a more holistic understanding of online lurking behaviour, understanding contextual factors that can provide context to lurking, and mitigating bias and misinterpretations that can occur through solely focusing on online engagement behaviour.

The findings demonstrated how offline activities can occur in a variety of forms: purchasing a product offline, talking, or recommending products, attending events, visiting stores, obtaining product samples and gifts, reading content off traditional media, such as magazines, leaflets, newspapers, watching television, etc. Overall, these different offline engagement activities demonstrate the multifaceted nature of participants' involvement in the skincare domain and also, lurking behaviour. Additionally, it also depicts how lurking online does not equate to lurking offline as they may still be engaging in activities offline.

Mostly, when people learn and research content online, it does not mean they are mere passive learners or 'free riders', as the literature frequently suggests (e.g. Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Honeychurch et al. 2017). Instead, the online engagement behaviours can subsequently promote offline engagement behaviours in the form of word-of-mouth, shopping, purchasing products offline, etc. This online search/read and offline visit/shop resonates with webrooming behaviour (Flavián, Gurrea, and Orús 2020) widely discussed in retail marketing literature. Additionally, skincare products are not exempted from online search/read and offline shop/buy. On the contrary, this product type is likely to encourage online/offline engagement behaviour for reasons such as convenience, time factors, trustworthiness, preference, product variety, etc.

Participants shared how they engaged offline, which included:

- Events and presentations

“I mean, I’ve been to a few events, and I found them really interesting and useful” (SC11, Female, GenX).

“Maybe some, like new product presentations or, you know, when, for example, there is, like, a new product in the shop, and you have a little event inside the shop and, like, usually there’s some people or, like, kiddie champaign, something, like, little event but it’s nice. Gifts, I think that's cool, like, offline” (SC3, Generation Z).

- Collecting flyers, samples, and testers

“I think being able to sample something would be a very good idea” (SC7, Female, GenZ).

“Let me have products to test and do with you, do consultations, and if it is a consultation process and if the service is good, if they could offer some flyers to go with it; so, it’s more of an education thing rather than a beauty thing. And if they could get rich with their products by advising how to put things together or use it and those sorts of things. There are so many” (SC8, Female, BB).

- Gaining information through traditional post

“They can send you stuff through the post, you know, that informs you about promotions but also informs you about the virtues of their products as well” (SC13, Female, GenX).

- Word-of-mouth

“I work in that kind of industry so all we talk about is skincare… it is just a topic that is very frequent in my daily life, so it is more appropriate to mention it then” (SC18, Male, GenY).

“Possibly word-of-mouth, I might tell people and say this product is really good or this one is not good… this is something I would engage with the brand” (SC14, Male, GenX).

- Shopping and purchasing products

“I prefer shopping for new products offline because I like to use testers” (SC19, Male, BB).

“I buy skincare products offline” (SC14, Male, GenX).

- Learning

“In store is my preference where you got a bit more time and you got the right atmosphere, and you could learn more about the product. It is easier, to touch and feel and talking to sales assistants” *(SC19, Male, BB).*

6.4 Theme Three: Reviews, Word of Mouth, and Recommendations

Leaving reviews, word-of-mouth (WOM), referrals and recommendations are forms of engagement whether offline or online (Anastasiei, Dospinescu, and Dospinescu 2023; Loureiro, Gorgus, and Kaufmann 2017). Four questions, including sub-questions linked to this, were asked. The findings from these questions also partially address RO3 in identifying online and offline engagement behaviours, and their inter-relationships, which are meaningful to explain online lurking behaviour.

6.4.1 Sub-theme One: Leaving Reviews or Recommendations

Participants were asked if they left product reviews or recommendations. While lurking behaviour typically refers to observing and consuming content without actively participating or contributing (Datt 2024; Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt 2024; Zhu and Dawson 2024), these responses indicate that participants are willing to engage by leaving reviews and recommendations. The participants' willingness to leave reviews and recommendations can be seen as a form of engagement rather than lurking and it is measurable in nature (Anastasiei, Dospinescu, and Dospinescu 2023). They actively contribute to the online community by sharing their opinions and experiences. However, it is worth noting that not all participants consistently leave reviews, and some may only do so when prompted or offered incentives. This suggests that lurking behaviour might still be present to some extent, as not all individuals actively participate in reviewing or sharing their thoughts. Some responses linked to these findings were:

"I think if I felt really strongly about a product and why it didn't work, I might be inclined to leave a review that helped people. I think it depends on the product, like sunscreen, for example, because some people have a really hard time picking sunscreen. I am probably more likely to leave a review in the hope it would help someone that has a similar skin type to me. But for something maybe low-value, or not as fundamental to a skincare routine, then I might not be as likely to. If something really wowed me, and I think it deserves some love, then I'm more likely to leave a review as well" (SC11, Female, GenY).

"I suppose sixty percent of the time I leave a review…." (SC12, Female, GenX).

"I would recommend it, and I would share it with others… hopefully, they would also recommend other products to me… I would message them online and I would probably follow it up with a phone-call to see how they got on" (SC4, Female, BB).

"I would write a review on how to use it or, like, just an explanation on what it is.., I'll just review that once, whether I'd liked it or not… I often only review if I've been sent an email about reviewing, otherwise, I'll forget to do it… And then there must be a compensation as well for that. So, they will be, like, "get 15% off your next order" or something" (SC5, Female, GenY).

6.4.2 Sub-theme Two: Sharing Reviews

Participants were then asked if they would recommend products and in what settings (offline vs online) they find themselves making or sharing recommendations with other individuals more often. These findings add to understanding how some participants engage in both offline and online settings through word-of-mouth and recommendations. Additionally, although most participants are online lurkers, they are still engaging through making and sharing recommendations with other individuals privately and not necessarily through posting or commenting. Additionally, sharing recommendations amongst lurkers is not limited to online platforms; the responses demonstrate how participants can also share or make recommendations offline as well. Overall, the responses suggest there is a diversity of approaches when it comes to sharing recommendations and reviews.

Some individuals found themselves to gravitate more towards offline interactions, as they find them more engaging and conducive to skincare discussions, especially amongst their friends, family and work colleagues. Others prefer online platforms, where they can connect with other like-minded individuals apart from friends, family, and colleagues, and engage in extensive conversations about skincare. The choice between online and offline channels may depend on factors, such as personal preferences, the presence of a supportive community, and the likeliness of conversation about skincare within one's friend group. The responses can be categorised into three preferences, which are online more, offline more, or both.

- Both online and offline recommendations

"Yeah, we like talking about that and like recommending stuff to each other. Yeah, a mix of both…" (SC10, Female, GenY).

"Yeah, for sure. Always, like, honestly, it happens all the time, like, especially with my friends, who know I am crazy with skincare really. I think it's fifty-fifty, both online and offline" (SC3, Female, GenZ).

- Online more

"Yes, I would do, if particularly someone was asking me, I would recommend products from other brands. I would say mostly online. My close friends, I would say, are not as much into skincare as all the skincare enthusiasts that I've met online. I tend to have more conversations with them about skin care than I do with my close friends" (SC11, Female, GenX).

"I recommend things to my friends all the time via Messenger or text messages. I will recommend something in-person as well, yeah, but more online at the moment" (SC12, Female, GenX).

"A hundred percent. I like sharing everything. I think just online actually, I don't tend to talk about... all this stuff in person, like, especially facial products, it wouldn't come up in conversation normally with someone" (SC5, Female, GenY).

- Offline more

"Offline I would say, because it's one of those things where I am not really going to be searching for skincare when I'm with my friends… I am more social offline, like, when I'm with my friends, I just know we are going to be discussing skincare all the time" (SC7, Female, GenZ).

"I recommend just in person really" (SC17, Male, GenZ).

6.4.3 Sub-theme Three: Browsing Reviews

Participants were asked if they look at, browse, and consider reviews, to which all participants admitted to performing these activities. Majority of participants claiming that they trust positive reviews left online. Dong, Li, and Sivakumar (2019) also found this to be the case where positive reviews are more trustworthy than negative reviews. Again, this finding also links to how online engagement behaviour influences offline behaviour. This is because the responses indicated that participants actively search and seek reviews before making purchasing decisions, whether online or offline. Afterall, reviews are ranked among the most influential sources of information for consumers when forming purchase decisions (Thomas, Wirtz, and Weyerer 2019).

In other words, participants leverage the experiences and opinions of others to gather information about products and assess their suitability. This engagement behaviour is the opposite of lurking, as participants actively participate in online discourse by reading, considering, and using reviews to inform their decisions. Since participants utilise the collective wisdom and experiences of others to guide their purchase decisions, they demonstrate a proactive approach to gathering information and engaging with online content in ways other than posting or commenting. These findings are evidenced from the following responses:

"…Depending on, like, if something's been reviewed; if I think it's a good review, then I'll obviously go and buy it, but it's informed purchases and, to learn more about ingredients and stuff" (SC10, Female, GenY).

"I look at both bad and good reviews because it might help you find information that, you know, won't be good for your skin type" (SC15, Male, GenY).

"When I see that they have good reviews and that they work for me, I keep on using them as well. I trust reviews because I feel, like, customers have no reason to lie. They are very honest. I would trust the reviews more than the price because, like I said, customers are honest; so' if a product is pricey but gets lots of high ratings, I'd be inclined to believe that they are worth the price" (SC1, Female, GenY).

"I trust reviews online, yes. I google, you know, the top 10 men's care or acne products or most popular and then it comes up. I will check around, like, a few different ones to see what it is like before I purchase. From salespeople, I will try harder to get their advice because, obviously, they earn commission or what not, so you do not know if they are just being genuine or being told to push that product; so, I think I'd be more wary in a store" (SC15, Male, GenY).

6.5 Theme Four: Focal Online Content

Six questions, not including sub-questions, were asked specifically about the online content that participants browsed to cross check their motivations. These questions relate to their background online skincare membership, along with product and brand-related questions. The findings provided insights into participants' lurking behaviour in skincare groups or communities.

6.5.1 Sub-theme One: Online Skincare Membership

Participants were asked if they are part of any skincare groups or communities, or if they follow any skincare brands. The responses for this question link to online engagement because following a brand is a form of measurable online participation. Responses show that most of the participants already follow brands on social media and are currently members of a skincare group or community.

The odd few participants, not members of groups or followers of brands explained several reasons why not. Factors influencing participants' perception of lurking behaviour include lack of interest in skincare, trust issues with online advertisements,

preference for offline engagement, limited awareness of skincare groups, and perceptions of the communities being too professional or formal, which results in lurking behaviour. These attitudes suggest that lurking behaviour on social media may be influenced by perceptions of the online community and the value placed on active participation.

Participants who preferred not to join skincare groups or follow brands express that they can easily find information elsewhere, such as through word-of-mouth or by directly shopping online or offline. This indicates that they may perceive lurking behaviour as passive information gathering without the need for active engagement in online communities which link back to theme two and three earlier discussed. Their definitions and characterizations of lurking behaviour may emphasise independent information-seeking rather than actively participating in group discussions or interactions. Moreover, this supports the existence of a distinction between active posters and passive lurkers in the context of skincare-related online communities.

The interpretations above were based on these findings:

- Unappealing/not passionate about skincare/not interested. SC6 (Male, GenY) straightforwardly said *"it doesn't interest me that much"*. Similarly, SC17 (Male, GenZ) said it is not a passion of his and he could just purchase the product in stores or order online when he needs it. SC1 (Female, GenY) also stated that she feels skincare groups are too formal and do not appeal to her.

- Trust related issues. SC2 (Female, GenZ), for example, said she does not trust advertisements that occur in skin care groups.

- Can easily find information elsewhere. SC1 confidently said that she can find information on her own well enough without having to join a community. Moreover, participants feel they can just directly shop online and/or offline for products without the need for membership.

- Not aware of skincare groups and communities. SC6, for example, said *"I did not know it was a thing"*.

- Prefer engaging offline. SC1 said she would rather go into a store to ask her own questions to the staff, as that is more specific to her queries than in communities. The participant also proceeded to say that information available online is more general than offline and, therefore, she prefers engaging offline.

- Sticks with WOM and recommendations. SC2 responded “I tend to go by word-of-mouth for things” so she therefore does not feel the need to join a community.

- Already brand and product aware of repeated purchase of products. SC14 (Male, GenX) said he tends to buy brands and products he already knows rather than join a community to find out about other new products.

- Too professional/stern. SC2 specifically said that it comes across too “pushy” or “desperate” when posts are repeated constantly, making her question the product quality. Additionally, SC1 thinks skincare groups are too professional or formal.

Overall, the findings shed light on participants' perceptions of online skincare communities and their engagement preferences, providing a foundation for understanding lurking behaviour in the context of social media.

6.6 Theme Five: Online Engagement Motivation

Four questions linked to motivations were asked to partially address RO2 (to determine whether the individual factors of personality and motivation influence lurking behaviour on social media). Initially based on the collected interview results, nineteen specific reasons were identified for what motivates participants to engage online in the context of skincare, either passively or actively. Individuals can have multiple various motives and are not limited to just one specific motive. The nineteen coded reasons or nodes have then been grouped to find out the top six most popular reasons based on motivation. Motives were:

- To learn or gain information (mentioned by 12 participants) - learning and acquiring knowledge about skincare is a primary motivation for a significant number of participants. They seek out online platforms to gather information, stay updated with the latest trends, and to educate themselves about skincare products, and ingredients.
- To share information - which also involves answering questions (mentioned by 11 participants) - multiple participants also actively engage in sharing their knowledge and experiences with others. They feel compelled to contribute by providing information, answering questions, and offering advice to other skincare users.
- To help and support others (mentioned by 7 participants) - almost half of the participants have a genuine desire to assist and support others in their skincare journeys. They actively seek opportunities to offer guidance, share personal insights, and provide encouragement to individuals who may be struggling with their skincare routines or are facing specific concerns.
- To answer or respond to questions (mentioned by 5 participants) - participants who specifically mentioned answering questions as a motivation demonstrate their willingness to provide solutions and guidance when others seek assistance or have queries regarding skincare-related matters they can provide answers to.
- Simply passionate about skincare and/or view skincare as a hobby (mentioned by 5 participants) - for a subset of participants, skincare is not merely a routine or necessity but a genuine passion or hobby. They engage online to connect

with like-minded individuals, share their enthusiasm, and indulge in discussions centred around their shared interest in skincare out of interest and passion.

- To build their own skincare brand/business (mentioned by 4 participants) - a smaller group of participants mentioned their involvement in the online skincare community to promote and develop their own skincare brands/businesses. They utilise online platforms to connect with potential customers, build brand awareness, and establish their brands/businesses.

These motivational drivers encourage skincare users to engage more online. All the stated reasons and motives may occur at different times, depending on different needs and wants. For instance, like in one of the responses:

"… I would spend more time if I could not find the products I wanted; if I was not very successful at finding, I would spend more than fifteen minutes" (SC4, Female, BB).

The participant above also claims that she is not very active online due to time and lack of confidence. Additionally, when she felt the need to gain more information, having realised she needed to purchase a new skincare product- she would then spend more time during the search process and browsing to gain more information about the product. This basically means that SC4, who generally engages relatively highly in lurking, is influenced by the need to gain information, thereby lowering her lurking levels from high to low, as she becomes more actively involved in searching and reading, which are both forms of engagement. In addition, it is also no surprise that gaining information is one of the most popular reasons as this finding was consistent with previous research (e.g. Daradkeh 2022; Sah and Peng 2023; Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze 2006).

6.6.1 Sub-theme One: Motivational factors (to online engagement)

Moreover, participants were further asked what would encourage them to become more active or what the skincare brand could do to make them more active to study what motivates people to engage and not engage online (i.e., motivation versus demotivation). Multiple responses provide evidence that various motivations linked to enjoyment, honesty, educational content, personalised communication, personal connections and interactions, sense of community, and promotions can all play a role in determining users' online lurking behaviour. Understanding these motivations can help researchers gain insights into how motivation influences a user's online lurking behaviour. The responses include:

- Enjoyment

The participant mentioned that if online communities are more fun and easy-going, they may be more inclined to become active online. In other words, this response suggests that a motivating factor is the enjoyment and relaxed atmosphere of the community.

"I guess if the communities are more fun and easier going" (SC1, Female, GenY).

- Open and Honest

Participants mentioned that they gravitate towards brands that are open and honest about their products and provide informative content. This indicates that the motivation to gather accurate and reliable information can influence users' decision to actively engage online.

"I think it is just about information. I think some brands are a bit more open about telling you about ingredients and, like, what they stand for, and then other brands are a bit less about that. So, I think I gravitate more towards the brands where they're kind of giving you lots of facts. I guess, you know, if there's polls and surveys and that kind of thing, then that makes you more likely to interact because it's quite quick and is interaction. An easy thing" (SC10, Female, GenY).

- Educational and Informative content

Participants expressed that informative posts and educational content can make them more willing to share and re-post such content and encourage them to overcome lurking behaviour and engage more. The finding that participants preferred education and information posts is no surprise as it is consistent with past findings in Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze's (2006) study, who also found that individuals are most motivated to gain access to information if the content is of good quality.

"I think, um, if there are any good educational posts about their products, I would be more likely to share it" (SC5, Female, GenY).

"Having more, informative videos and informative posts. Would probably make me more willing to buy from a product that I've never used before and also, like, reviews from people" (SC7, Female, GenZ).

- Personalised Communication (i.e., through traditional post/mail)

Some of the responses highlight the potential role of personalised and targeted communication in motivating users to become more active online.

"I think there are always things that brands can do, umm, they can target you directly if they have your email, they can send you stuff through the post, you know, that informs you about promotions…the virtues of their products as well. The brand would have to tick all the boxes to start with really" (SC13, Female, GenX).

- Personal and Interactive Connections

Participants expressed the desire for brands to reach out and connect with them on a more personal and interactive level. They mentioned the importance of feeling noticed and valued by brands, which can act as a motivating factor for increased engagement. This highlights the psychological aspect of motivation, where the desire for recognition and connection can drive users to overcome lurking behaviours and actively participate. This finding is also consistent with Ridings, Gefen and Arinze's (2006) study, which explained that individuals join communities to gain emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging and encouragement.

"I think they could probably post more questions to me, kind of reach out on a more, like, understanding level rather than, like, telling. So, maybe a bit more connection, a bit more, quizzes and stuff like that would be stuff to interest me in" (SC16, Male GenY).

"Probably reach out more… I think if companies notices you more and engage with you, you are more likely to engage with them cause you're flattered, you feel kind of like special, unique" (SC18, Male, GenY).

- Sense of Community/Belongingness

Participants mentioned that being part of a supportive and inclusive community is important to them. They expressed a desire for a space where they can connect with others, seek advice, and feel a sense of belonging. This highlights the motivation for social interaction and support as a driving force behind active engagement in online communities. This finding also links to the previous finding through reaching out.

"So, of the two that I'm in, there's a bigger one and a smaller one, and I post more in the smaller one than the bigger one, because it is more of a community. You get your voice heard really in smaller groups and it feels like you need advice, and you are more likely to get it, if you are asking a specific question. With the smaller Facebook communities, it's nice because it kind of makes you feel like you are part of a community" (SC10, Female GenY).

"I just want a supportive group. People are kind and want help. Just a sense of community and belonging, really" (SC8, Female, BB).

- Promotion and Self-Expression

Participants also expressed the desire for a space where individuals can promote their skincare-related activities, such as Instagram pages or blogs. They emphasised the importance of being able to share and discuss their own projects and connect with like-minded individuals. This suggests that the motivation for self-expression and the opportunity to showcase their work can encourage users to engage more.

"I think it is like a really open and honest space, and inclusive. I do not know if it is me that is being, like, slightly selfish, but I would like people to be able to promote… I think that'd be nice, because I really like to enjoy following people on Instagram, and sometimes it's a bit difficult to find people to connect with" (SC7, Female, GenZ).

6.6.2 Sub-theme Two: Demotivators (of Online Engagement Behaviour)

On the other hand, eighteen specific reasons were identified upon analysis on why participants may not engage online or may get demotivated in general. Some of the reasons identified were similar to the reasons for online lurking previously discussed in Chapter 3.2.3. The demotivators were:

- Fear: participants expressed various fears related to judgement, embarrassment, and coming across as pushy or forced. These fears might stem from concerns about how others perceive their contributions and potentially negative consequences of active engagement. The fear of judgement or embarrassment may prevent individuals from sharing their thoughts or opinions publicly, leading them to choose lurking behaviour instead. Some of the fears found were: Fear of judgement, Fear of embarrassment, Fear of being unknowledgeable, Fear of facing confrontation, Fear of being administered, Fear of the unknown, and Fear of being forceful or pushy.

- Lack of passion: Some participants mentioned being active in a different product category area or not finding much to do in the specific online community. They may feel that engaging or posting about the topic is not beneficial or of any interest to them. Additionally, if individuals are not as active online or if it is not a habit for them, they may not feel compelled to actively participate in discussions or to share content. Some of the reasons obtained from responses were: participants are active in a different product category area, not much to do, not of any benefit/use to engage, not of interest to post, not as active online, and not a habit.

- Personal reasons: various personal reasons contribute to individuals' decisions not to engage or post online. These reasons include being anti-social and not desiring to chat with others; having problematic skin that may affect their confidence in participating; preference to gain and receive information rather than actively contribute; lacking confidence in their own knowledge or content to post about; perceiving a lack of time or knowledge as barriers to engagement; gender-based perceptions that may influence their comfort level in participating; and a preference for gaining or receiving information rather than actively sharing it.

These three demotivator reasons can be further classified into four segments, which are member's character and personal reasons, group characteristics, stage of membership, and external constraints (see section 3.2.3). Overall, the obtained responses highlight some of the factors such as lack of confidence, preference for receiving information, limited passion or interest, fears, generational perspectives, and gender-based perceptions that contribute to lurking behaviours in online skincare communities. These demotivators provide insights into why individuals may choose to lurk rather than actively participate in discussions and sharing within these communities. Depending on the severity of these demotivators, a user may be heavily oriented towards lurking than other users. When the participants were asked why they may not engage online, some of the reasons related to the participant's:

- Preference towards gaining and receiving information, learning, and lack of confidence

Participants expressed a preference for reading and receiving information rather than actively contributing or sharing their own experiences. They highlighted the value of learning from others who they perceive to be more knowledgeable or qualified in skincare matters. They consider themselves consumers rather than contributors in these online communities. Relatedly, participants also expressed concerns about their level of knowledge compared to others and the possibility of being wrong or facing disagreement. This lack of confidence serves as a barrier to active participation. Example verbatim comments linked to this were:

"I'd probably like to gain information more than sharing. I think it's just probably a lack of time and confidence that I have about products; I wouldn't be as knowledgeable as other people. So, it is probably my lack of knowledge that would prevent me from doing it. So, I will happily read away, but then I would be more cautious about 'Liking'… Not as comfortable as others. I think that's a lack of product knowledge, so that's probably the main reason I wouldn't because, if I was wrong about something or if people disagreed with me, it would make me feel uncomfortable. I would rather not get into a difficult situation" (SC4, Female, BB).

"Just lurking and reading other people's things because, I prefer to receive information than give it. So, if I feel like it's useful for me to give, I'll give, but for the most part, I just like reading other people's posts, as they know a lot more than me, so I don't like to chime in unnecessarily... I think it is just a confidence thing or like wanting to respect the people that know more… I think for the two reasons we said; so, because I think there are people that are way more qualified than me that I like listening to, and I guess because it's not like a big part of my life in terms of, like... what I'm passionate about sharing online" (SC10, Female, GenY).

- Passion and gender-based perceptions

Some male participants (SC6, SC19) expressed a belief that skincare is more associated with women and, therefore, they do not feel inclined to actively participate in skincare discussions. This perception limits their motivation to engage in skincare-related activities. Additionally, participants also mentioned that skincare is not a significant passion or interest in their lives. They prioritise other aspects and activities over active engagement in skincare-related discussions. They do not feel compelled to share or post about skincare products unless they have a strong personal attachment or experience to share.

"I just mainly read. I don't really post on social media that much anyways… I have a few friends, not skincare brands, but they have their own businesses and stuff and I will sometimes post about those and share stuff… 100% if I was more passionate about skin care then I would post more" (SC17, Male, GenZ).

"I do not really devote a huge amount of time to it, there are more important things in my life. I am not passionate about it, as there's many more things I'm far more passionate about that I would engage with more. I am a man so I do not think men should be overactive in skincare, I think that is more for women" (SC19, Male, BB).

6.7 Theme Six: Personality

The qualitative study was complemented with a short complimentary personality questionnaire to gauge participants' personality traits to understand its influence on one's lurking behaviour (see Appendix A) as discussed in Chapter 5.4.5. The analysis process included personality traits rated three stars and over by participants. Based on the questionnaire results, Table 22 displays the personality traits displayed by participants and their respective personality observed from the Big Five measure.

Table 22: Top Personality Traits Observed by Participants.

Context	**Personality Trait(s) Displayed**	**Personality Observed**
Offline and face-to-face	• Openness to new experiences/complex • Sympathetic/warm • Extroverted/enthusiastic • Dependable/self-disciplined	• Openness • Agreeableness • Extraversion • Conscientiousness
Online	• Openness to new experiences/complex • Sympathetic/warm • Extraverted/enthusiastic • Dependable/self-disciplined	• Openness • Agreeableness • Extraversion • Conscientiousness

The findings obtained from both offline and online personality results are exactly replicated where four out of five of the big five personalities were observed. In both contexts, neuroticism was not as prevalent among the participants. Regardless of looking at lurking from a behavioural or social learning perspective, the analysis yielded the same results showing four out of five of the big five personality traits being

obtained (except neuroticism). Additionally, participants who rated traits associated with neuroticism also rated the same traits in both online and offline contexts.

These findings support the notion that individual personality factors play a role in determining lurking behaviour on social media (RO2). Skincare users with certain personality traits may be more inclined to engage actively, while others may prefer to observe and consume information without actively participating in discussions. The absence of neuroticism as a prominent trait among participants indicates that individuals with a more calm and positive emotional disposition may be more likely to engage in lurking behaviour. Additionally, these findings also demonstrate that regardless of the platform (online or offline), participants did not display different personalities.

6.8 Lurking Orientation (LO)

Considering the qualitative findings for online engagement behaviour and motivation, resultant offline engagement behaviour and online users' personalities, the present study challenges the conventional wisdom and homogenous conceptualisations of lurking behaviour provided by extant lurking literature (e.g. Datt 2024; Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt 2024; Zhu and Dawson 2024). First, lurking is not a free-riding, passive, or inactive online behaviour (e.g. Daradkeh 2022; Sah and Peng 2023, Popovac and Fullwood 2019). It is, instead, an active and diverse online behaviour, potentially involving the activities of reading posts, seeking information, and learning from other users' comments. Hence, when online users are not actively sharing, commenting, or posting, it does not necessarily mean that they are passive, lazy, and not involved with a brand community. They may use the knowledge learnt from the mentioned activities to inform their purchase decisions and offline engagement behaviour, such as shopping, purchasing, word-of-mouth, etc. This is reflected in the qualitative analysis.

Second, lurking should not be considered a homogenous online behaviour as extant literature suggested in Chapter 3.2. It is much more complex and heterogenous in nature as there are varied underlying activities, personalities, and varied motivations driving the online behaviour as witnessed in this chapter. Example motivations the qualitative study has identified include actively reading or digesting posts, seeking for information, and learning from the online community or, in other terms, still consuming

content. This finding suggests lurking offers greater utility in understanding online user behaviour when it is considered as a continuum (more versus less apparent) instead of a dichotomous (presence versus absence) concept. The qualitative study clearly indicated lurking (i.e., social learning) as an inherent or common part of any online engagement behaviour, but its nature and potency will vary by users' motivations and personalities. Hence the present study introduces an original concept to help better diagnose and understand lurking behaviour, namely, lurking orientation (LO).

Orientation broadly refers to "the action of orienting someone or something relative to the points of a compass or other specified positions" (Macik 2018, p.152). A psychological construct shows established utility in studying varied forms of consumer behaviour, such as shopping orientation (Gehrt et al. 2007), consumption orientation (Sherman et al. 2001) and web-use orientation (Rains and Karmikel 2009). Orientation is related to but different from similar concepts, such as tendency, proneness, and susceptibility (Dweck 2013). Depending on the level of influence of factors discussed earlier linked to online engagement activities, motivations, and personalities - a lurker can be highly orientated towards lurking where engagement is minimal or lowly orientated towards lurking, where engagement is much higher. LO in this research is defined as:

A social learning inclination of online lurking behaviour that is based on a continuum and can be high or low. LO consists of varied focused (e.g., researching about products, searching, reading etc.) and unfocused (e.g., browsing, visiting sites, scrolling, observing, digesting, etc.) learning activities that users can partake in both online and offline contexts.

Focused learning, also known as directed learning or deliberate learning, is a targeted, systematic, and intentional process of learning a certain set of skills or knowledge. It entails focusing on a certain topic or task, frequently under the direction of a clear learning target or goal (Anderson, Reder, and Simon 1996). Unfocused learning or incidental or informal learning on the other hand occurs without a clear objective or detailed plan. It entails picking up new knowledge or abilities when the opportunity arises as a consequence of inquiry, curiosity, or ordinary experiences (Eraut 2004). Posters can be considered to have a low LO- meaning they are not highly oriented to lurking online. The qualitative findings will inform the subsequent quantitative study

which will further explore each element. The proposal of lurking orientation construct will help illuminate the heterogeneity of lurking behaviour, and LO will provide a new and fruitful direction for the topic. The quantitative findings will further expand on the qualitative findings and stabilise the new, proposed construct of LO.

6.9 Chapter Summary

The qualitative findings obtained shed light on participants' perceptions of online engagement and the heterogeneous nature of lurking behaviour, platform preferences, group dynamics, and the factors influencing their level of engagement. These insights inform the subsequent quantitative design through the identification of six key themes linked to understanding lurking behaviour. Participants highlighted that their level of engagement and lurking behaviour may differ across different social media platforms, suggesting that lurking behaviour is influenced by the specific characteristics and purposes of each platform, indicating that engagement patterns vary based on platform preferences. Additionally, participants also shared that they are more likely to lurk in larger groups while being active in smaller ones due to reasons linked to inclusivity and a sense of belonging, which are both influencing motivational factors for online engagement behaviour.

Participants employ a combination of online and offline strategies to gather information about skincare products, utilising platforms, such as search engines and websites by trusted retailers, as well as offline sources like retail stores, referrals, and word-of-mouth. This finding means that participants do not limit their information-seeking activities to just social media and lurking online does not necessarily equate to lurking offline. Additionally, participants actively search for and seek reviews before making purchasing decisions, leveraging the experiences and opinions of others to inform their choices without needing to post online. These purchase decisions can also be classed as an active form of engagement as it yields purchases.

Further motivations for lurking behaviour include learning, sharing information, helping, and supporting others, passion, and hobby of skincare, and building personal skincare brands or businesses. On the contrary, several demotivators exist that may further influence a user to be more oriented towards lurking than the others. These demotivators include fear, limited passion or interest, personal reasons, lack of

confidence, preference for receiving information, and a preference for learning. The study also found correlations between participants' offline and online personality traits, with certain personalities (openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness, and extroversion) influencing their likelihood to engage actively or prefer lurking behaviour on social media.

In summary, the findings highlight the complexity and heterogenous nature of online engagement, including perceptions, activities, personality traits, and motivations related to lurking behaviour. The study successfully addressed all three research objectives, and the concept of Lurking Orientation (LO) was proposed to feed into the subsequent quantitative chapter.

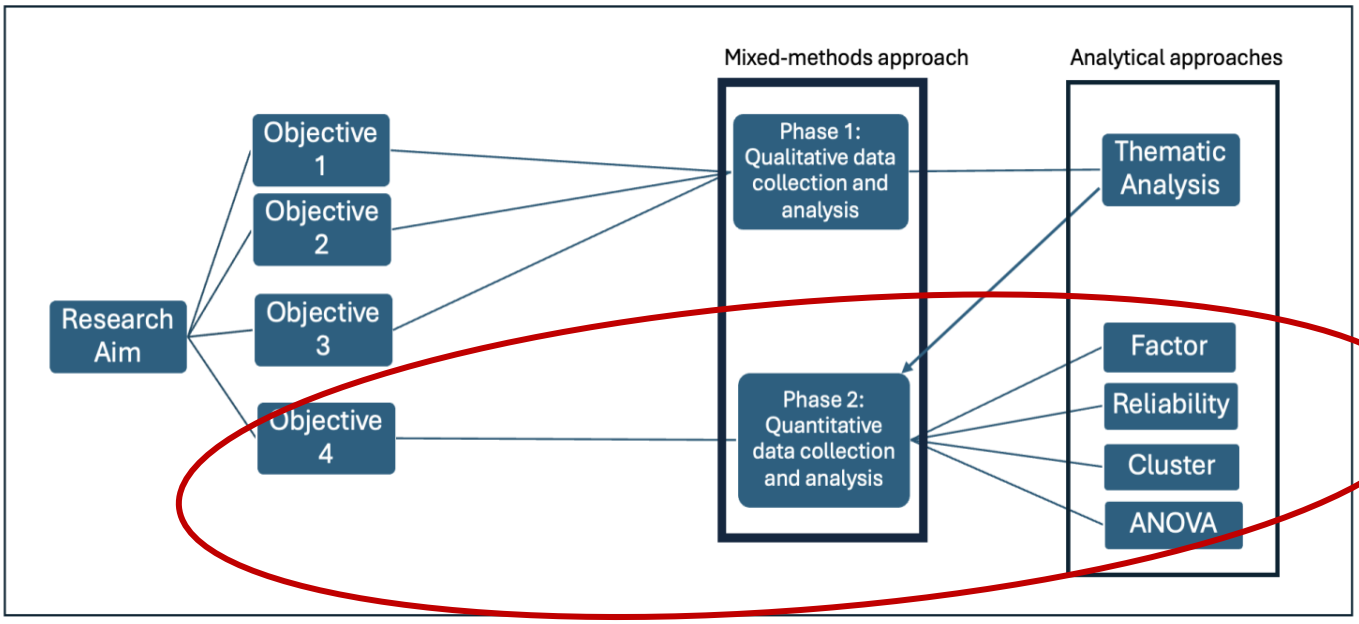
CHAPTER 7: QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results gathered from the online survey with skincare users, which represented the second phase of data collection. The findings obtained from the qualitative analysis initially targeted ROs 1-3 and were used to inform key constructs in this quantitative stage. The quantitative study aims to address all four of the research's objectives through the collection of statistical evidence as shown in Figure 8.

Following data collection through online surveys, analysis began with descriptive statistics of the sampled population, including demographics, skincare usage, online social media usage and behaviour. Confirmatory factor and reliability analysis was then executed on the survey data. By doing so, meaningful components for the theoretical factors under study were extracted and transformed into aggregate variables. The results of which were then subjected to cluster analysis to discern distinctive lurker segments to confirm the newfound concept of lurking orientation discussed previously (see Chapter 6.8) and answer RO4. To conclude the analysis, ANOVA was conducted to establish the psychographic and behavioural profiles of the identified segments.

Figure 8: Quantitative Research Process



7.2 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics conducted for the current study will involve frequency distribution (mode, median, mean, and standard deviation) and normality testing.

7.2.1 Participants' Demographic Characteristics

The findings presented in the main study are representative of certain aspects of the skincare industry, social media industry, and the UK population, to some extent, and are as follows

- Gender: the majority of participants are female (72.9%), which aligns with the fact that the skincare industry tends to have a predominantly female consumer base, as reported in Petruzzi's (2022) report mentioned earlier. Skincare products and routines are also often marketed and targeted towards women, which could explain the higher representation of female participants in the current study (Malone 2022).
- Generational / Age Groups: the study captured the perspectives and behaviours of individuals within various age groups. However, a significant proportion of participants fall within the GenY group. This may also be because the GenY groups are heavily involved with interacting with beauty and skincare brands on social media (Attest 2022).
- Employment Status: the high percentage of participants employed full-time (43.6%) reflects the fact that the study included individuals who are actively

working. This is relevant because employment status can influence factors, such as disposable income, purchase decisions, and the amount of time available for skincare routines or online engagement (Kalla 2022). The qualitative study found such personal reasons and time to be demotivators to online engagement.

- Annual Income: The self-reported annual income of £10,000 to £19,999 before tax for most participants (26.3%) suggests that a significant segment of the population that can afford or have some disposable income to spend on skincare products due to inflation in recent years.

7.2.2 Participants' Behavioural Characteristics

Table 23 lists the main study's participants' behavioural characteristics related to skincare. Fourteen questions were asked about participants' online engagement behaviour linked to skincare. Questions in this section relates to participants' online membership status, timespan of utilising and searching for skincare, familiarity, and confidence in communicating about skincare. One question was whether participants were professionally associated with skincare in any way (e.g., working in the skincare sector, associated with a skincare brand or company, a brand ambassador, influencer). As also presented in Table 23, 96% of participants were not associated with a skincare brand, which brings benefits to these quantitative findings. Drawing on the attachment theory (Dewitte et al. 2007), this non-association finding can be appreciated as a positive condition, suggesting participants' lesser bias towards the topic under study and their responses being potentially more objective.

Additionally, 42.6% of participants claimed to have been using skincare for more than 10 years, but only 32.5% (online) and 36.9% (offline) participants expressed "somewhat confident" to communicate skincare products to others, whilst being "somewhat familiar" with skincare products in general (34.5%). Whilst the notion will require further testing, anecdotally there appears to be a poor association between participants' usage experience and their confidence to disseminate or share knowledge with others. This notion is both interesting and reassuring, after learning that nearly half of the participants (49%) have been searching for skincare products for 2 to 5 years and at least once a month (29.5%). The two findings together strongly

support the existence of online lurking amongst skincare users and reinforce the research direction of the present study.

When it comes to recommendations made, both online and offline, participants responded they “rarely” make recommendations online (25.7%), and “sometimes” make recommendations offline (28.3%). Although only slightly, participants are still more likely to recommend offline. Reasons may link to more offline connections (friends and family), and being “somewhat” more confident in communicating offline (36.9%) etc. Additionally, when participants were asked under what circumstances were they likely to share feedback or reviews about skincare products online, 55.2% replied when "I have a negative experience with a product”, 51.6% when "I have a positive experience with a product”, 36.5% when "I have some spare time", 34.7% when "I receive benefits or rewards", and 24.3% when “I have learnt that the product is harmful to other people”. These percentages consistently indicate that participants are in engaged in both online and offline contexts through sharing feedback or reviews and also, sharing recommendations. Participant’s sharing behaviour was functional and self-seeking, aiming to air a negative experience or gloat about one's positive experience on a public platform, to escape from boredom or to receive tangible benefits.

Table 23: Participants' behavioural characteristics related to skincare.

n = 498		
	Frequency	**Percent (%)**
Timespan of using skincare		
Less than 6 months	6	1.2
6 months to 1 year	35	7.0
2 to 5 years	137	27.5
6 to 10 years	108	21.7
More than 10 years	212	42.6
Timespan of searching skincare online		
Less than 6 months	21	4.2
6 months to 1 year	86	17.3
2 to 5 years	244	49.0
6 to 10 years	98	19.7
More than 10 years	49	9.8
Familiarity with skincare products (1= Not at all familiar – 7= Very Familiar)		
1	3	0.6
2	27	5.4
3	52	10.4
4	109	21.9
5	172	34.5
6	104	20.9
7	31	6.2
Confidence in communicating about skincare to others ONLINE		
Not at all confident	13	2.6
Somewhat unconfident	81	16.3
Neutral	93	18.7
Somewhat confident	162	32.5
Very confident	20	4.0
Unconfident	50	10.0
Confident	79	15.9
Professional association with skincare		
Work in the skincare sector	4	0.8
Associated with any skincare brand	3	0.6

Associated with any skincare companies	3	0.6
A brand ambassador	1	0.2
A social media influencer	9	1.8
None of the above	478	96

7.2.3 Online Engagement Behaviour Activities

Two questions were asked in the survey linked to frequencies of the engagement activities that participants performed online. These questions were asked to gauge the dynamic nature of engagement levels and the engagement activities a lurker may partake in online. To begin with, participants were asked what social media platforms they utilise the most for general purposes versus the platforms used to search/look for skincare products online (please refer to Appendix K for these results). Instagram was the most used platform for general purposes (mean=5.03, std. dev=1.99), whilst search engine was the most used platform to search for skincare products (mean=5.06, std. dev=1.55). The finding how search engines was the most frequently used platform is of no surprise as it provides access to a wide range of informational sources (various websites, blogs, forums, reports, publications, etc.), and the ability to perform advanced searches enabling precision of search results, flexibility, fast and free information that is easily accessible etc. (JavaTpoint 2023).

Additionally, the descriptive statistics showed that participants chose and utilise various social media platforms to perform different online activities (i.e. when searching information for skincare products versus for general purposes). Therefore, limiting the study to just a singular social media platform to understand lurking like past research has done (e.g. Sipley 2024; Woodford, Southcott, and Gindidis 2023; Nguyen 2021) is not ideal, and does not provide for a holistic and nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour. Appendix K demonstrates these findings.

Having understood what social media platforms participants utilised, Table 24 shows the online activities undertaken by participants with regards to skincare products online, ranging from the most undertaken activity (browsing and observing content) to the least (motivating or encouraging others to post/engage). This table measures one's online engagement behaviour and is, therefore, a major contributing element to

evaluate one's lurking orientation. Table 25 then further expands on the above table and looks into the frequencies of how often the participants engage in the online activities. Two highlights (demonstrating insights and trends) to take away from Tables 18 and 19 is that:

- Majority of participants are consuming skincare related content rather than actively contributing to it through activities linked to browsing/observing Content (Mean = 4.82, Std. Dev = 1.99), visiting sites (Mean = 4.80, Std. Dev = 1.86), reading content (Mean = 4.77, Std. Dev = 2.13), and searching for content (Mean = 4.69, Std. Dev = 2.02). Observing, and reading are the most dominant behaviours which have been deemed as "passive" forms of activities in the past (e.g. Martinek et al. 2023; Mousavi and Roper 2023; Sohn and Choi 2023). Possible reasons for these findings based on past findings obtained from the qualitative study include preference towards information gathering and gaining information, lack of confidence, time constraints, demotivators (i.e., fear), large size of online community, gender-based perceptions etc.
- The less frequent activities performed were editing/organizing posts (Mean = 2.49, Std. Dev = 2.46), and posting/uploading Content (Mean = 2.86, Std. Dev = 2.68). These findings indicate low levels of "active" participation, suggesting that participants were mostly lurkers. In a nutshell, the findings highlight a strong preference for passive consumption of skincare content, with limited active participation.

Table 24: Mean scores of online engagement activities undertaken.

n= 498			
Online engagement activities undertaken	**Mean (std. dev)[1]**		**Mean (std. dev)[1]**
Browse through or observe content	4.82 (1.99)	**Subscribing or signing up to content**	3.77(2.79)
Visit sites	4.80 (1.86)	**Share content**	3.24 (2.74)
Read content	4.77 (2.13)	**Post or upload content**	2.86 (2.68)
Search for content	4.69 (2.02)	**Edit and organise posts**	2.49 (2.46)
Learn/study content	3.95 (2.65)	**Motivate or encourage others to post or engage**	2.26 (2.24)
Listen to content	3.90 (2.61)		

Table 25: Frequencies of online engagement activities undertaken.

n = 498		
	Frequency	**Percent (%)**
Frequency of reading skincare content online		
Never	27	5.4
Once every 4-5 months	40	8.0
Once a month	110	22.1
Once a fortnight	70	14.1
Once a week	64	12.9
Daily	42	8.4
Once every 2-3 months	74	14.9
Once every 6 months or less	70	14.3
Frequency of browsing or observing skincare content online		
Never	22	4.4
Once every 4-5 months	33	6.6
Once a month	96	19.3
Once a fortnight	79	15.9
Once a week	87	17.5
Daily	49	9.8
Once every 2-3 months	75	15.1
Once every 6 months or less	57	11.4
Frequency of searching skincare content products online		
Never	19	3.8
Once every 4-5 months	43	8.6
Once a month	121	24.3
Once a fortnight	61	12.2
Once a week	87	17.5
Daily	33	6.6
Once every 2-3 months	81	16.3
Once every 6 months or less	53	10.6
Frequency of visiting skincare sites online		
Never	12	2.4

Once every 4-5 months	32	6.4
Once a month	105	21.1
Once a fortnight	82	16.5
Once a week	97	19.5
Daily	46	9.2
Once every 2-3 months	81	16.3
Once every 6 months or less	43	8.6
Frequency of editing and organising skincare posts online		
Never	325	65.3
Once every 4-5 months	25	5.0
Once a month	33	6.6
Once a fortnight	14	2.8
Once a week	18	3.6
Daily	9	1.8
Once every 2-3 months	24	4.8
Once every 6 months or less	50	10
Frequency of posting or uploading skincare content online		
Never	292	58.6
Once every 4-5 months	29	5.8
Once a month	35	6.8
Once a fortnight	18	3.6
Once a week	20	4.0
Daily	9	1.8
Once every 2-3 months	23	4.6
Once every 6 months or less	73	14.7
Frequency of learning or studying skincare content online		
Never	144	28.9
Once every 4-5 months	53	10.6
Once a month	63	12.7
Once a fortnight	42	8.4
Once a week	35	7.0
Daily	21	4.2

Once every 2-3 months	62	12.4
Once every 6 months or less	78	15.7
Frequency of sharing skincare content online		
Never	243	48.8
Once every 4-5 months	39	7.8
Once a month	38	7.6
Once a fortnight	26	5.2
Once a week	25	5.0
Daily	13	2.6
Once every 2-3 months	38	7.6
Once every 6 months or less	76	15.3
Frequency of listening to skincare content online		
Never	161	32.3
Once every 4-5 months	34	6.8
Once a month	55	11.0
Once a fortnight	45	9.0
Once a week	40	8.0
Daily	40	8.0
Once every 2-3 months	58	11.6
Once every 6 months or less	68	13.1
Frequency of motivating and encouraging others to post or engage online		
Never	337	67.7
Once every 4-5 months	31	6.2
Once a month	30	6.0
Once a fortnight	23	4.6
Once a week	11	2.2
Daily	11	2.2
Once every 2-3 months	17	3.4
Once every 6 months or less	38	7.6
Frequency of subscribing or signing up to skincare content online		
Never	174	34.9
Once every 4-5 months	53	10.6

Once a month	64	12.9
Once a fortnight	32	6.4
Once a week	15	3.0
Daily	11	2.2
Once every 2-3 months	57	11.4
Once every 6 months or less	92	18.5
Frequency of reacting (like/love/wow/angry/etc.) skincare posts online		
Never	145	29.0
Once every 4-5 months	29	5.8
Once every 2-3 months	52	10.4
Once a month	69	13.9
Once a fortnight	50	10.0
Once a week	54	10.8
Daily	42	8.4
Once every 6 months or less	57	11.4
Frequency of commenting on skincare posts online		
Never	204	41.0
Once every 4-5 months	38	7.6
Once every 2-3 months	50	10
Once a month	42	8.4
Once a fortnight	23	4.6
Once a week	32	6.4
Daily	17	3.4
Once every 6 months or less	92	18.5
Frequency of saving/favouriting skincare posts online		
Never	96	19.3
Once every 4-5 months	41	8.2
Once every 2-3 months	66	13.3
Once a month	69	13.9
Once a fortnight	49	9.8
Once a week	70	14.1
Daily	49	9.8

Once every 6 months or less	58	11.6
Frequency of recommending skincare products to others online		
Never	118	23.7
Rarely	128	25.7
Occasionally	73	14.7
Often	53	10.6
Most times	12	2.4
Sometimes	106	21.3
Every time	8	1.6

7.2.4 Offline Engagement Behaviour Activities

Two questions linked to offline engagement behaviour activities (i.e. confidence and frequency) was asked to gauge if the behaviour mirrors a user's online engagement behaviour. Table 26 reveals the findings. The table reveals insights into how individuals interact with skincare-related activities in physical environments. It establishes that:

- Physical store environments remain relevant for exploring skincare products as a significant portion of participants engage in browsing skincare products in stores.
- Traditional media is still a touchpoint, although its influence is waning compared to online media.
- Participants still engage in word-of-mouth participation offline suggesting active levels of engagement behaviour.
- Offline engagement primarily revolves around individual exploration (e.g., browsing stores or reading content) rather than active participation in social or structured activities (e.g., events or discussions).

Table 26: Activities linked to offline engagement behaviour.

n = 498		
	Frequency	**Percent (%)**
Confidence in communicating about skincare to others OFFLINE		
Not at all confident	10	2.0
Somewhat unconfident	60	12.0
Neutral	86	17.3
Somewhat confident	184	36.9
Very confident	30	6.0
Unconfident	33	6.6
Confident	95	19.1
Frequency of visiting shop(s) to check out skincare products offline		
Never	13	2.6
Rarely	65	13.1
Occasionally	107	21.5
Sometimes	147	29.5
Often	107	21.5
Most times	50	10.0
Every time	9	1.8
Frequency of visiting shop(s) and asking for skincare samples offline		
Never	140	28.1
Rarely	159	31.9
Occasionally	74	14.9
Sometimes	62	12.4
Often	33	6.6
Most times	23	4.6
Every time	7	1.4
Frequency of recommending skincare products offline		
Never	35	7.0
Rarely	72	14.5
Occasionally	89	17.9
Sometimes	141	28.3
Often	108	21.7
Most times	37	7.4
Every time	16	3.2

Frequency of attending skincare events/conventions offline		
Never	370	74.3
Rarely	88	17.7
Occasionally	14	2.8
Sometimes	7	1.4
Often	7	1.4
Most times	7	1.4
Every time	5	1.0
Frequency of asking of recommendations offline		
Never	139	27.9
Rarely	118	23.7
Occasionally	96	19.3
Sometimes	60	12.0
Often	45	9.0
Most times	26	5.2
Every time	14	2.8
Frequency of making offline skincare purchases		
Never	5	1.0
Rarely	43	8.6
Occasionally	90	18.1
Sometimes	173	34.7
Often	99	19.9
Most times	75	15.1
Every time	13	2.6
Frequency of reading about skincare content offline (traditional media)		
Never	130	26.1
Rarely	105	21.1
Occasionally	92	18.5
Sometimes	70	14.1
Often	54	10.8
Most times	29	5.8
Every time	18	3.6
Frequency of watching skincare shows/programmes offline		
Never	267	53.6
Rarely	116	23.3

Occasionally	39	7.8
Sometimes	30	6.0
Often	26	5.2
Most times	14	2.8
Every time	6	1.2
Frequency of browsing for skincare products offline (in-store)		
Never	34	6.8
Rarely	59	11.8
Occasionally	89	17.9
Sometimes	126	25.3
Often	91	18.3
Most times	71	14.3
Every time	28	5.6

7.2.5 Users' Motivation

Four questions were included in the survey to gauge participants' non-posting and non-engaging motivation. The distinction between the two motivation categories lies in: reasons why participants do not post online (non-posting motivation) and reasons why participants do not engage online (non-engaging motivation). Both de-motivating categories are used to gauge the reasons why a participant may decide to lurk online instead of actively participating or engaging online. Additionally, since there were a variety of motives that could influence lurking behaviour based on existing scales and qualitative findings- the set of questions was split into two parts of non-posting and non-engaging motives.

7.2.5.1 Non-Posting Motivation

All of the non-posting motives found within the current study are displayed in Table 27. The table is listed in sequential order from the most influencing non-posting motive to the least. For non-posting motivation, the top primary motives were 'just reading/browsing is enough' (mean= 5.17, std. dev= 5.61), 'I had no intention to post from the outset' (mean= 5.08, std. dev= 1.79), 'I want to remain anonymous' (mean= 4.91, std. dev= 1.73), 'I am shy about posting' (mean= 4.77, std. dev= 1.82), and 'I do not want to make a commitment to post' (mean = 4.60, std. dev= 1.80). On the contrary, some of the lower agreement motives were: 'I do not have enough time' (mean=3.19, std. dev=1.81), 'I do not want to post the wrong content' (mean=3.10, std. dev=1.86) and 'I do not know much about skincare' (mean=3.00, std. dev=1.79).

These above findings present three interesting insights. First, participants' passive consumption preference ('just reading/browsing is enough') suggests that a significant number of participants find satisfaction in consuming content passively. This indicates that they perceive value in observing and absorbing the content created by others without actively contributing themselves. Second, participants' lack of intention to post from the outset indicates that many participants never intended to engage in posting or uploading content in the first place. This suggests that their primary goal is to consume and gather information rather than actively participate. Third, participants' desire for anonymity suggests that some individuals prefer not to reveal their identity or personal information when engaging online. The findings support Preece, Nonnecke and Andrews' (2004) findings which listed the top five reasons for lurking

as did not need to post, needed to find out about the group, thought they were being helpful by not posting, do not know how to post, and did not like the group. From the table, it is clear the top reason for non-posting is just reading/browsing is enough (Mean= 5.17), which matches the top 1 reason lurkers lurk in Preece, Nonnecke and Andrews' (2004) study.

In other words, some reasons to user's non-posting behaviour are linked to:

- Dominant barriers: most participants feel that passive engagement (reading or browsing) is sufficient (mean = 5.17) and lack of initial intent to post and the desire for anonymity are major reasons for non-posting.
- Moderate Barriers: Shyness, perceived lack of value to contribute, and unfamiliarity with posting discourage a moderate number of users.
- Lesser Barriers: Judgement fears, time constraints, and lack of skincare knowledge are less significant factors.

Table 27: Non-posting motives.

n= 498			
Non-posting motives	**Mean (std. dev)[1]**		**Mean (std. dev)[1]**
Just reading/browsing is enough	5.17 (1.61)	**It is not my hobby**	3.53 (1.86)
I had no intention to post from the outset	5.08 (1.79)	**I engage more in other activities outside of skincare**	3.52 (1.91)
I want to remain anonymous	4.91 (1.73)	**I do not like the group or community**	3.50 (2.25)
I am shy about posting	4.77 (1.82)	**There is no requirement to engage**	3.44 (1.92)
I do not want to make a commitment to post	4.60 (1.80)	**I am afraid I will get judged**	3.43 (1.94)
I have nothing to offer	4.18 (1.74)	**I do not have the confidence to engage**	3.40 (1.86)
I do not know how to	4.06 (2.08)	**It is of no benefit or value to me**	3.32 (1.86)
There is too much content already	3.98 (1.54)	**I do not have enough time**	3.19 (1.81)
I am still learning about skincare	3.94 (1.58)	**I do not want to post the wrong content**	3.10 (1.86)
I prefer other communities or groups outside of skincare	3.89 (1.70)	**I do not know much about skincare**	3.00 (1.79)
Others respond the way I would	3.75 (1.42)		
Notes: [1]7-point frequency scale, where 1=Completely disagree, 3= Somewhat disagree, 7= Completely agree			

7.2.5.2 Non-Engaging Motivation

The ratings for the non-engaging motives are lower than the non-posting motives due to a different set of motives, which are presented in Table 28. Although still influential, they are not as influential as the motives from Table 27. The top three non-engaging motives were 'I do not have enough spare time' (mean=3.86, std. dev=1.71), 'It is not of any benefit to me' (mean=3.86, std. dev=1.72) and 'I have not made connections with other people on the site' (mean=3.84, std. dev=1.73). The three lower scoring motives were 'I do not want to support the product' (mean=2.98, std. dev=1.68), 'I do not want to gain information' (mean=3.18, std. dev=1.90) and 'I am not interested in the products' (mean=3.00, std. dev=1.79). The non-engaging motives shed further light on why individuals choose not to actively engage on social media platforms.

These findings present four insights. First, 'participant's time constraints' make an appearance again when it comes to demotivation, which indicates that many participants perceive a lack of spare time as a barrier to engaging actively on social media- this is also found in the qualitative analysis. This suggests individuals prioritise other activities or commitments over spending time engaging on social media platforms. Second, 'participant's perceived lack of benefit' suggests that some individuals do not see personal value or utility in actively engaging on social media platforms within the skincare context. In other words, if users find content lacking in quality, knowledge-building, or practical benefit, they are less inclined to engage. Third is lack of social ties, sense of belonging, or shared interests with the community significantly reduces engagement. Fourth, emotional factors such as stress, negative feelings, or disinterest in entertainment value can also discourage active participation. By addressing these motives through targeted strategies to combat them, platforms can create more compelling and meaningful experiences to overcome barriers and encourage greater participation from online users.

Table 28: Non-engaging motives.

n= 498			
Non-engaging motives	**Mean (std. dev)[1]**		**Mean (std. dev)[1]**
I do not have enough spare time	3.86 (1.70)	**It gives me negative feelings**	3.37 (2.00)
It is not of any benefit to me	3.86 (1.72)	**It does not develop my knowledge in the skincare area**	3.35 (1.69)
I have not made connections with other people on the site	3.84 (1.73)	**It does not keep me up to date with the latest news and releases**	3.33 (1.57)
I do not want to interact with other people	3.81 (1.74)	**I do not want to influence other people**	3.28 (1.66)
I do not belong to a group/community with the same interests as mine	3.76 (1.74)	**I am not interested in reading people's feedback**	3.26 (1.91)
It is not entertaining	3.74 (1.77)	**I do not want to share my knowledge with others**	3.24 (1.81)
I do not feel a sense of belonging to the community	3.70 (1.68)	**I do not think the content is of good value or quality**	3.22 (1.60)
It is not a point of conversation with other people	3.61 (1.623)	**I am not interested in the products**	3.19 (1.66)
It stresses me out	3.51 (1.923)	**I do not want to gain information**	3.18 (1.90)
It is not fun when I read/browse through posts	3.40 (1.752)	**I do not want to support the product**	3.10 (1.86)
Notes: [1]7-point frequency scale, where 1=Completely disagree, 3= Somewhat disagree, 7= Completely agree			

7.2.6 Users' Personality

Two questions were asked to gauge skincare users' personalities, and were adapted from the BFI-10 scale (Rammstedt and John 2007). Descriptive statistics showed the 5 most agreed personality items were 'does a thorough job' (mean=4.82, std. dev=1.25), 'is generally trusting' (mean=4.78, std. dev=1.31), 'wants to gain greater self-esteem' (mean=4.58, std. dev=1.64), 'wants to feel respected' (mean=4.54, std. dev=1.35), and 'has an active imagination' (mean=4.54, std. dev=1.35). These items are related to a higher-order personality factor of Conscientiousness ('Does a thorough job'), Agreeableness (Is generally trusting), Extraversion: 'Wants to gain greater self-esteem' (mean=4.58, std. dev=1.64) indicating a desire for self-esteem and self-assurance. Again, as found in the qualitative study, participants displayed four out of five of the personalities from the big-five scale (except neuroticism).

Conversely, the 5 least agreed personality traits were 'lacks self-discipline' (mean=3.18, std. dev=1.70), 'tends to seek validation from others' (mean=3.74, std. dev=1.53), 'pressured to achieve excellence to get other people's approval' (mean=3.76, std. dev=1.74), 'tends to find fault with others' (mean=3.85, std. dev=1.71), and 'has few artistic interests' (mean=3.86, std. dev=1.83). These traits are seemingly related to the higher-order factors of low agreeableness, low consciousness, and low openness to experience, thereby also partially confirming the above finding of personalities linked to lurking behaviour, where Neuroticism is not an influential personality trait.

Table 29 shows a list of personality statements where participants had to score how much they agree with a particular statement, based on a 7-point frequency (Likert) scale. The table is listed in order from the most scored personality statement ("…does a thorough job"; Mean= 4.82) to the least scored statement ("…lacks self-discipline"; Mean= 3.18). Although the other scores are relatively close and high, there is a range of personalities involved in the mix. This is expected as users' will all have different and varying personality traits. The BFI-10 is not entirely suitable for measuring a lurker's personality and other theories will need to be added to the original model for its measure. This is because some of the scale items are linked more to self-esteem (i.e. "wants to gain greater self-esteem", and "…wants to feel respected") are not in the BFI scale mix. Self-esteem relates more to self-esteem theory (Amirazodi and

Amirazodi 2011; Robins et al. 2001) and being “pressured to achieve excellence to get other people’s approval” links more to perfectionism (Rice, Ashby, and Slaney 2007). All of these insights can help design user-focused strategies to enhance online participation by aligning platform features with prevalent personality traits.

Table 29: Users’ personality traits.

n= 498			
Personality	**Mean (std. dev)[1]**		**Mean (std. dev)[1]**
...does a thorough job	4.82 (1.25)	**...is relaxed and handles stress well**	4.23 (1.65)
…is generally trusting	4.78 (1.31)	**...ruminates about less than perfect performance**	4.05 (1.57)
...wants to gain greater self-esteem	4.58 (1.64)	**…is sensitive to criticism**	4.01 (1.58)
...wants to feel respected	4.54 (1.35)	**…tends to be lazy**	3.88 (1.75)
...has an active imagination	4.54 (1.52)	**...has few artistic interests**	3.86 (1.83)
...gets nervous easily	4.45 (1.62)	**...tends to find fault with others**	3.85 (1.71)
… is reserved	4.39 (1.43)	**...is pressured to achieve excellence to get other people’s approval**	3.76 (1.74)
...is concerned over any mistakes made	4.38 (1.52)	**...tends to seek validation from others**	3.74 (1.53)
...is outgoing and sociable	4.27 (1.51)	**…lacks self-discipline**	3.18 (1.70)
Notes: [1]7-point frequency scale, where 1=Completely disagree, 3= Somewhat disagree, 7= Completely agree			

7.3 Factor and Reliability Analysis

7.3.1 Users' Motivation: Non-Engaging Motives

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the 17 related non-engaging motive items to assess their dimensionality, factor structure, and measurement properties. The overall KMO value is 0.82 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significance is 0.00, meaning that the data is relatively significant and suggests suitability of factor analysis. A varimax rotated (principal component analysis method) factor analysis was conducted where inter-item correlations ranged from 0.505 to 0.877, which fall under Robinson et al.'s (1991) recommendation of a minimum value of 0.30 (inter-item correlations) and 0.50 (item-total correlations).

Additionally, the reliability analysis conducted on each component generated a relatively high Cronbach's Alpha score for all the components used to measure non-engagement motives. If all are rounded up, the Cronbach value is between 0.70 and 0.80. Table 30 shows all the various non-engagement motives. variables contributing were identified based on factor loadings of 0.40 (Pandey, Chawla, and Venkatesh 2015; Hair et al. 2010). Expanding on these, Table 31 then demonstrates the factor loadings on a component transformation matrix. Based on content validity, inputs from marketing academics and researchers, five variables were finalised:

- Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement: items such as 'I do not want to gain information', 'I am not interested in the products', 'I am not interested in reading people's feedback' and 'It does not develop my knowledge in the skincare area', reflects the lack of curiosity and connection with skincare content.

- Lack of Entertainment and Relevance: items such as 'It is not entertaining', 'it is not fun when I read or browse posts', etc. in this variable, highlights the dual factors of low enjoyment and lack of topical significance.

- Lack of Community and Disconnection: items such as 'I do not belong to a group/community with the same interests as mine', 'I have not made connections with other people on the site', and so on, represents a sense of disconnection and lack of engagement with others on the site, including not

belonging to a group or community with similar interests, not having made connections with others, and not wanting to interact with people.

- Reluctance to Contribute or Support: reflects a lack of desire to influence or share knowledge with others, a reluctance to support the product, and a perception that the content lacks value or quality. It focuses on the absence of social ties and interaction.

- Negative Feelings and Emotions: items such as: ‘It stresses me out’ and ‘It gives me negative feelings’ captures the emotional toll linked to engagement.

Table 30: Non-engaging variables extracted with items and Cronbach's Alpha.

Variables	Items	Item loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement	I do not want to gain information	.750	0.74
	I am not interested in the products	.701	
	I am not interested in reading people's feedback	.680	
	It does not develop my knowledge in the skincare area	.555	
Lack of Entertainment and Relevance	It is not entertaining	.780	0.75
	It is not fun when I read/browse through posts	.805	
	It does not keep me up to date with the latest news and releases	.550	
	It is not a point of conversation with other people	.505	
Lack of Community and Disconnection	I do not belong to a group/community with the same interests as mine	.780	0.54
	I have not made connections with other people on the site	.773	
	I do not want to interact with other people	.686	
Reluctance to Contribute or Support	I do not want to influence other people	.770	0.54
	I do not want to share my knowledge with others	.649	
	I do not want to support the product	.628	
	I do not think the content is of good value or quality	.560	
Negative Feelings and Emotions	It stresses me out	.877	0.50
	It gives me negative feelings	.827	

Table 31: Component Transformation Matrix for non-engaging motives.

Component Transformation Matrix					
Component	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	.750	.185	.212	.138	.097
2	.102	.780	.194	.113	.156
3	.187	.190	.790	.127	.162
4	.139	.157	.142	.780	.792
5	.111	.137	.154	.197	.770
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					

7.3.2 Users' Motivation: Non-Posting Motives

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the 18 related non-posting motive items to assess their dimensionality, factor structure, and measurement properties. The KMO value is 0.80 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significance is 0.000 meaning that the data is relatively significant and appropriate for FA. A varimax rotated (principal component analysis method) factor analysis was done where inter-item correlations ranged from 0.506 to 0.768, all of which exceed the minimum values of 0.30 (inter-item correlations) and 0.50 (item-total correlations) as suggested by Robinson et al. (1991). Given these results no purification of the scale was required. The reliability analysis conducted on each component generated Cronbach's alpha scores between 0.50 and 0.74 for all components. Table 32 shows more non-posting motives affecting why an individual may not post or create content online about skincare products. Table 33 demonstrates the factor loadings on a component transformation matrix. Five variables were finalised, namely:

- Preference for Passive Participation: items such as 'I want to remain anonymous' and 'I do not want to make a commitment to post' reflect a preference for anonymity, a reluctance to commit to posting, and a preference for passive activities, like reading and browsing, rather than active engagement, such as posting or interacting with others.
- Imposter syndrome: items like 'I am afraid I will get judged' and 'I do not have the confidence to engage', link to a sense of fear of being judged and lack of confidence. The title "imposter syndrome" was given to reflect these fears of

errors or criticism, despite most participants having utilised skincare products for more than 10 years.

- Lack of Passion and Interest: items such as: ‘I engage more in other activities outside of skincare’ and ‘It is not my hobby’ link to participants' interests outside of the skincare sector and their lack of passion and disinterest in the topic. It suggests that users’ engage more in other activities that they are passionate about.
- Perceived Low Priority and Benefits: as the name suggests, it links to the items: ‘I do not have enough time’ and ‘It is of no benefit or value to me’, portraying that participants simply do not engage because of lack of time and value received.
- Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience: depicts that information and content is readily available online for participants to learn about and that other users may have already responded to posts the way they would. Users’ therefore feel like they have nothing further to offer to the poster and/or community. The variable reflects feelings of redundancy and insufficient expertise. Findings link to items such as: ‘I am still learning about skincare’, ‘Others respond the way I would’, and ‘I have nothing to offer’.

Table 32: Non-posting variables extracted with items and Cronbach's Alpha.

Variables	Items	Item loading	Cronbach's Alpha
Preference for Passive Participation	I want to remain anonymous	.730	0.74
	I do not want to make a commitment to post	.646	
	I am shy about posting	.628	
	Just reading/browsing is enough	.595	
	I had no intention to post from the outset	.569	
	There is no requirement to engage	.528	
Imposter syndrome	I am afraid I will get judged	.750	0.71
	I do not have the confidence to engage	.776	
	I do not want to post the wrong content	.629	
Lack of Passion and Interest	I engage more in other activities outside of skincare	.760	0.54
	It is not my hobby	.579	
	I prefer other communities or groups outside of skincare	.516	
Perceived Low Priority and Benefit	I do not have enough time	.768	0.54
	It is of no benefit or value to me	.690	
	I do not like the group or community	.510	
Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience	I am still learning about skincare	.715	0.50
	Others respond the way I would	.558	
	I have nothing to offer	.506	

Table 33: Component Transformation Matrix for non-posting motives.

Component Transformation Matrix					
Component	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	.730	.217	.208	.141	.152
2	.121	.750	.175	.203	.140
3	.167	.192	.760	.137	.120
4	.143	.129	.142	.740	.145
5	.108	.136	.177	.166	.770
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					

7.3.3 Users' Personality

10 items/statements were entered into the analysis to measure personality. When it came to conducting a factor analysis on personality, the researcher was faced with reliability issues (low Cronbach alpha scores) when using principal components and varimax. Therefore, maximum likelihood and direct oblimin were used as the rotation approach because the KMO value of 0.83 suggests a higher suitability for FA, as shown in Table 34. Accordingly, these aggregated variables are used for cluster analysis. Moreover, all 3 components are significant, with a score of <.001 and Cronbach's alpha scores between 0.62 and 0.78. Three variables were extracted:

- Neuroticism: contains the items '…is concerned over any mistakes made', '…ruminates about less than perfect performance', and so on. Neuroticism is characterised by a tendency to experience negative emotions, such as anxiety, worry, and self-doubt; therefore, individuals high in neuroticism may be more concerned about making mistakes, ruminate over past failures, feel pressure to achieve perfection for approval from others, and be sensitive to criticism.

- Self-esteem: links to items such as: '…wants to gain greater self-esteem' and '…tends to seek validation from others', which are not part of the big five and the traits do not directly link to any of the big five personality factors. This links to other theories relating to self-esteem, through seeking to gain validation, approval, and respect from others to boost this self-esteem factor.

- Extraversion: links to the item '…is outgoing and sociable'. The other item '…is reserved' displayed a negative item loading score, meaning it is the opposite outcome of that item and therefore links back to outgoing and sociable factors.

Table 34: Personality variables extracted with items and Cronbach's Alpha.

Variables	**Items**	**Item loading**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Neuroticism	…is concerned over any mistakes made	.820	0.78
	…ruminates about less than perfect performance	.810	
	...is pressured to achieve excellence to get other people's approval	.520	
	…is sensitive to criticism	.510	
Self-esteem	…wants to gain greater self-esteem	.610	0.62
	…tends to seek validation from others	.610	
	...wants to feel respected	.520	
	…lacks self-discipline	.431	
Extraversion	…is outgoing and sociable	.530	-0.65
	…is reserved	-.480	

Table 35: Component transformation matrix for Personality.

Component Transformation Matrix			
Component	**1**	**2**	**3**
1	.823	.215	.178
2	.173	.610	.135
3	.145	.123	.530
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			

7.3.4 Online Engagement Behaviour

18 items were entered into the analysis to measure Online Engagement Behaviour, which includes both online engagement behaviour activities and online activities undertaken by participants post-searching. Utilising principal components and varimax, the observed KMO value was 0.732 (online engagement behaviour activities) and 0.860 (online activities undertaken post-searching) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significance is <.001 and <.000, meaning the data is relatively significant for FA. Additionally, as witnessed in Table 36, the inter-item correlations are demonstrated and Cronbach's alpha scores are between 0.53 and 0.72, exceeding the values suggested by Robinson et al. (1991). Moreover, Table 37 demonstrates the factor loadings on a component transformation matrix. Through Varimax- six variables were extracted:

- Edit, Post, and Motivate: are those who not only post or upload content but also encourage others to engage along with them. Items are linked to: 'Edit and organise posts', 'Post or upload content', and 'Motivate and encourage others to post or engage'
- Search, Browse, Visit, and Read: includes those who search and browse for components through visiting sites and read content available online. Involves activities linked to items such as 'Search for content', 'Browse through or observe content', 'Visit sites', and 'Read content'.
- Subscribe, Listen, and Share: this relates to participants who are subscribing members and who listen to content available online, and share it. As explained, they are linked to the items: 'Subscribing or signing up to content' and 'Listen to content', as well as 'share' content.

- Comment, Share, and React: this is usually done to show support to the original poster through the linked items: ‘commenting on a post’, ‘Clicking on the 'share' button’, and ‘Reacting to a post (like/love/angry/etc.)’
- Learn, Observe, and Save: is linked to items like ‘Learn or study content’, ‘Observe posts and content’, and ‘Clicking 'save' or 'favourite'. Denotes participants who are learners who observe posts and contents and saves or favours the posts for future reference to further learn or access later.
- Edit and Upload: includes those who ‘Edit or change a post’ and ‘Upload or create a post’.

Table 36: Online engagement behaviour variables.

Variables	**Items**	**Item loading**	**Cronbach’s Alpha**
Edit, Post, and Motivate	Edit and organise posts	.800	0.72
	Post or upload content	.790	
	Motivate and encourage others to post or engage	.676	
Search, Browse, Visit, and Read	Search for content	.740	0.68
	Browse through or observe content	.709	
	Visit sites	.698	
	Read content	.667	
Subscribe, Listen, and Share	Subscribing or signing up to content	.765	0.53
	Listen to content	.709	
	Share content	.542	
Comment, Share, React	Commenting on a post	.789	0.68
	Clicking on the 'share' button	.730	
	Reacting to a post (like/love/angry/etc.)	.714	
Learn, Observe, Save	Learn or study content	.764	0.62
	Observe posts and content	.759	
	Clicking 'save' or 'favourite'	.646	
Edit and Upload	Edit or change a post	.888	0.79
	Uploading or creating a post	.860	

Table 37: Component transformation matrix for online engagement behaviour.

Component Transformation Matrix					
Component	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**
1	.740	.193	.207	.145	.147
2	.125	.770	.191	.152	.148
3	.159	.171	.780	.145	.112
4	.143	.118	.136	.750	.149
5	.130	.143	.125	.160	.790
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.					

7.3.5 Offline Engagement Behaviour

10 items were entered into the analysis to measure Online Engagement Behaviour, which includes both online engagement behaviour activities and online activities undertaken by participants post-searching. Through utilising principal components and varimax, the observed KMO value being 0.860 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity significance is 0.000, illustrating that the data is significant for FA. Additionally, inter-item correlations range from 0.525 to 0.841 (refer to Table 38) and Cronbach's Alpha scores between 0.66 and 0.83 exceed the values suggested by Robinson et al. (1991). Moreover, Table 39 demonstrates the factor loadings on a component transformation matrix. Two variables were finalised and extracted:

- Find, Browse, Ask, Purchase, and Recommend (Skincare shopper): contains items linked to 'I go to the shop and check out the skincare product(s)', 'I browse for skincare products in-store', and so on. Items reflect the participants' behaviour of actively visiting the shop, browsing for skincare products, making purchases, seeking recommendations from store staff, asking for samples, and actively sharing their experiences and recommendations with others. This shows the participant is an enthusiastic and active skincare shopper who is actively engaged in a wide range of offline behaviour engagement activities.

- Attend, Watch, and Read (Knowledge seeker): links to items like: 'I attend skincare events/conventions', I watch television shows on skincare/skincare products' and 'others'. These two items capture participants' engagement in

attending skincare events/conventions, watching television programmes on skincare, actively reading about the product through magazines or newspapers, and being open to other sources of information and experiences to gain further information and knowledge about skincare products.

Table 38: Offline Engagement Behaviour Variables Extracted with Items and Cronbach's Alpha.

Variables	**Items**	**Item loading**	**Cronbach's Alpha**
Find, Browse, Ask, Purchase, and Recommend (Skincare shopper)	I go to the shop and check out the skincare product(s)	.841	0.72
	I browse for skincare products in-store	.786	
	I purchase the product	.716	
	I ask for recommendations from store staff about the skincare product(s)	.596	
	I go to the shop and ask for samples of the skincare product(s) to try out	.589	
	I tell/recommend the skincare product to other people	.556	
Attend, Watch, and Read (Knowledge seeker)	I attend skincare events/conventions	.748	0.66
	I watch television shows on skincare / skincare products	.703	
	I read about the product (magazines, newspapers, etc.)	.653	
	Others	.525	

Table 39: Component transformation matrix for offline engagement behaviour.

Component Transformation Matrix		
Component	**1**	**2**
1	.800	.215
2	.192	.800
Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.		

7.4 Cluster Analysis and ANOVA

Following the exploratory factor analysis (EFA), which identified and refined the underlying dimensions of online engagement and lurking behaviours, the study proceeds to cluster analysis. K-means Cluster analysis was used to identify and profile/demist the different lurker segments. Factor scores derived from the above analysis were used to derive lurker segments and identify distinct behavioural patterns or profiles among users (Pandey, Chawla, and Venkatesh 2015). By leveraging the factor structure established through EFA, the clustering process provides a more nuanced understanding of how various lurking and engagement traits intertwine to form meaningful subgroups.

Once clusters are identified, analysis of variance (ANOVA) is employed to further validate these groupings by examining differences in demographic characteristics, personality traits, and engagement levels across clusters. ANOVA allows for the statistical testing of whether the identified groups exhibit significant variations on key variables, offering insights into how individual and contextual factors contribute to the heterogeneity of lurking and engagement behaviours. ANOVA also checks for data significance across the different clusters (must be less than 0.005). The goal of cluster analysis and ANOVA is to establish the theoretical validity of lurking orientation and identify significant factors influencing online lurking behaviour or lurking orientation.

7.4.1 Cluster Analysis: Online Engagement Behaviour

The cluster analysis identifies four distinct groups of online engagement behaviours, each representing a unique lurking orientation and levels of engagement. All the online activities, except searching, observing, and reading, scored a significance of <0.001. Referring to Table 40, search, browse, visit, and read is a baseline activity performed across all the clusters as the scores for these activities are relatively high.

Cluster 4 scored high on all activities; therefore, Cluster 4 is called the “Uploading or Influencing lurker”, who can also be known as a “poster”. Cluster 1 is called the “ultimate lurker” and is the exact opposite of Cluster 4 (uploading/influencing lurker), scoring low on all activities. Cluster 2 is the “learning lurker” as it scored high on learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, and read, which mostly links to learning and gaining knowledge/information. Learning and gaining knowledge can be achieved through searching, browsing, visiting, reading, and saving information from content available online. Cluster 3 is the “Reciprocating lurker” with scores high across most of the activities, which demonstrates high levels of engagement in most activities, except upload, edit, and motivating others. To simplify, these are the activities each cluster of lurkers perform:

- Ultimate Lurker: the largest group of lurkers (n=147), who engage in online activities linked to searching, browsing, visiting, and reading. Their engagement is primarily information-seeking and avoid actions requiring direct interaction (e.g. commenting, sharing, etc.)
- Learning Lurker: second largest group of lurkers (n=131), who engage in online activities linked to learning, observing, saving, searching, browsing, visiting, and reading. They are knowledge-driven, focusing on strategically consuming content to gain information or skills.
- Reciprocating Lurker (n=108): this cluster shows moderate engagement levels. Activities performed are: subscribing, listening, sharing, searching, browsing, visiting, reading, commenting, reacting, learning, observing, and saving. The reciprocating lurker engage with the community by amplifying content (sharing and commenting) rather than originating it. This lurker group represents a transitional phase between passive and active contribution.

- Upload Lurker/Poster (n=112): scores high on all the above activities (comment, share, react, learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, read, subscribe, listen, share) and, also activities linked to uploading, editing, and motivating other users to post and engage online. This lurker group is the most active group of users and aligns with traditional "poster" roles- contributing to the dynamism of online social media platforms.

Additionally, the number of cases in each cluster (also shown in Table 40) is relatively evenly distributed across all four clusters. This demonstrates that when measuring lurking orientation, there is, in fact, continuum of lurker groups that exists on a spectrum based on the level of engagement activities performed. From minimal passive consumption (Ultimate lurker) to highly active engagement (Uploading lurker). Therefore, there is a need to demystify lurkers to calculate one's lurking orientation. In this research, there is the highest number of cases of ultimate lurkers. Likewise, the results support the notion that lurking is not a homogenous behaviour (i.e. present/absent), as it ranges from goal-oriented learning to active participation and content creation.

Table 40: Centroids for each cluster (Online Engagement Behaviour).

Activity	Cluster			
	1 "Ultimate lurker" (n= 147)	**2 "Learning Lurker" (n= 131)**	**3 "Reciprocating lurker" (n= 108)**	**4 "Uploading/ Influencing Lurker" (Poster) (n= 112)**
Comment, Share, React	1.65	3.20	4.69	5.11
Learn, Observe, Save	2.23	5.20	4.26	5.32
Upload, Edit	1.05	1.17	1.45	5.58
Motivate, Upload, Edit	1.36	1.32	3.49	4.58
Search, Browse, Visit, Read	4.61	4.90	4.72	4.88
Subscribe, Listen, Share	1.98	3.15	5.40	4.68

(Notes: highlighted number = high mean scores)

7.4.2 ANOVA: Personality, Offline Engagement Behaviour, Demographics, and Non-Engagement Motives

One-way ANOVA was conducted to establish the personality profile, offline engagement behaviour, demographics, and non-engagement motives of the four identified lurker clusters. Table 41 lists all the ANOVA results obtained across the four constructs and their influence on the four clusters of lurkers respectively. The key observations by cluster are:

1. Ultimate Lurker:
    - Lowest scores in personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, self-esteem, extraversion). This indicates a passive and less socially driven engagement.
    - Minimal offline engagement behaviours (e.g., purchasing, attending events).
    - High preference for passive participation and demotivators such as lack of interest or community connection.
    - Skews slightly lower in gender diversity and annual income compared to other clusters.

2. Learning Lurker:
    - Higher scores in neuroticism and self-esteem, reflecting a more purposeful learning orientation. It also demonstrates a more purposeful engagement approach.
    - Moderate offline engagement but still lower than Reciprocating or Uploading Lurkers mainly focused on seeking information rather than active participation.
    - Moderate lack of passion and interest but high motivation for knowledge acquisition.
    - More balanced gender representation and higher income than Ultimate Lurker.

3. Reciprocating Lurker:
    - Balanced scores across personality and engagement categories. This indicates a socially interactive and moderately confident lurker group.
    - More active offline behaviours compared to Ultimate and Learning Lurkers. Active behaviours, such as asking questions or recommending products, show their community-oriented tendencies.

- Lower demotivators (e.g., perceived redundancy), indicating a stronger connection to the community and willingness to engage or participate.
- Higher income and diverse gender representation compared to the other groups.

4. Uploading Lurker:
    - High extraversion and self-esteem, reflecting confidence and active social behaviour
    - Highest scores in offline engagement behaviours, showing a strong integration of online and offline engagement activities.
    - Lowest scores in demotivators like lack of passion, reflecting strong active and purposeful engagement.
    - Highest gender diversity and income levels, supporting their active roles in both online and offline contexts.

Each cluster represents a unique blend of personality traits, offline engagement behaviours, and demotivators, providing a comprehensive view of the lurking spectrum. Some of the key similarities are: i) Ultimate and Learning lurker share a high preference for passivity, reflecting minimal interaction and content creation. ii) both Ultimate and Learning Lurker report high scores for feeling disconnected, suggesting barriers to deeper engagement (i.e. lack of community).
On the other hand, key differences are: i) Ultimate Lurker are more male-skewed and have moderate income, while Uploading Lurkers are more gender-diverse and report higher income. ii) Offline engagement behaviours progressively increase from Ultimate to Uploading Lurker, with Uploading Lurker showing the highest activity. Iii) Learning Lurker demonstrate high neuroticism and self-esteem, reflecting a learning-oriented personality, while Ultimate Lurker show the lowest self-esteem and extraversion.

Table 41: ANOVA on personality, offline engagement behaviour, demographics, and non-engagement motives.

Personality	**Mean (std. deviation)**			
	Cluster 1 "Ultimate lurker" (n=147)	**Cluster 2 "Learning lurker" (n=131)**	**Cluster 3 "Reciprocating Lurker" (n=108)**	**Cluster 4 "Uploading lurker" (n=112)**
Neuroticism (Sig .023)	3.88 (1.28)	4.33 (1.26)	4.01 (1.24)	4.00 (1.12)
Self-Esteem (Sig .010)	3.84 (1.08)	4.26 (1.08)	4.00 (1.07)	3.96 (0.97)
Extraversion (Sig .004)	4.16 (0.89)	4.55 (0.90)	4.29 (0.87)	4.32 (0.93)
Offline Engagement Behaviour				
Find, browse, ask, purchase, and recommend (Sig <.001)	2.93 (0.92)	3.40 (1.06)	3.70 (0.96)	4.05 (1.15)
Attend, watch, and read (Sig <.001)	1.55 (0.63)	1.76 (0.76)	2.13 (0.89)	2.55 (1.27)
Demotivators				
Preference for Passive Participation (Sig <.001)	5.03 (1.08)	5.03 (1.10)	4.41 (1.17)	4.66 (1.18)
Lack of Passion and Interest (Sig <.001)	4.00 (1.39)	3.74 (1.29)	3.29 (1.18)	3.41 (1.25)
Perceived Low Priority and Benefit (Sig .044)	3.20 (1.36)	3.60 (1.45)	3.16 (1.21)	3.38 (1.64)
Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience (Sig .003)	4.12 (1.94)	4.06 (1.65)	3.93 (1.31)	3.64 (1.71)

Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement (Sig .009)	3.28 (1.94)	3.37 (1.65)	2.87 (1.31)	3.42 (1.71)
Lack of Entertainment and Relevance (Sig <.001)	3.85 (1.94)	3.69 (1.65)	3.06 (1.31)	3.44 (1.70)
Lack of Community and Disconnection (Sig <.001)	4.00 (1.94)	4.06 (1.65)	3.49 (1.31)	3.54 (1.71)
Demographics				
Gender (Sig .003)	1.65 (0.52)	1.82 (0.44)	1.75 (0.46)	1.85 (0.45)
Annual Income before tax (Sig .047)	3.92 (1.94)	4.02 (1.65)	3.44 (1.31)	3.94 (1.70)

7.5 Chapter Summary

In summary, this quantitative study marks the second (and final) part of data collection. Informed by the qualitative phase- the findings achieved all four of the ROs. A mixture of descriptive analysis, factor analysis, reliability analysis, cluster analysis, and ANOVA was executed on the data obtained from Prolific on SPSS 28. This quantitative study confirmed the concept of lurking orientation and segmentation of lurkers, as observed from the qualitative study. Lurking orientation (LO) is a developed, proposed concept for studying lurking behaviour and was devised by the researcher. The quantitative analysis found that lurkers can be segmented into four meaningful lurker groups: namely, Ultimate lurker, Learning lurker, Sharing/Reciprocating lurker, and Uploading lurker (Poster). These various types of lurkers can be placed on different levels of the LO continuum, depending on their level of activity. For example, ultimate lurkers are highly oriented or committed towards lurking, placing them higher on the continuum, followed by the learning lurker, sharing lurker and, finally, the uploading lurker, who is low on the orientation levels. Key findings were:

- Personality traits linked to neuroticism, self-esteem, and extraversion were found to positively significantly influence online lurking behaviour
- Demotivators that may discourage a user to engage or post online are Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement, Lack of Entertainment and Relevance, Lack of Community and Disconnection, Reluctance to Contribute or Support, Negative Feelings and Emotions, Preference for Passive Participation, Imposter syndrome, Lack of Passion and Interest, Perceived Low Priority and Benefits, and Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience.
- The various online activities are grouped as: 1) Comment, Share, React, 2) Learn, Observe, Save, 3) Upload, Edit, 4) Motivate, Upload, Edit, 5) Search, Browse, Visit, Read, and 6) Subscribe, Listen, Share.
- The two significant offline engagement activities performed by online lurkers are: 1) Find, browse, ask, purchase, and recommend and 2) Attend, watch, and read. Therefore, in linkage with these two offline activities, we propose that lurkers can indeed be skincare enthusiasts/shoppers and knowledge seekers. Additionally, the offline behaviour observed by participants seem to reflect their online engagement behaviour where all the observations, learning, studying,

and saving of content initially take place online, resulting in the two significant groups of offline engagement activities.

- Each lurker group performs various activities as follows:

    - Ultimate Lurker: search, browse, visit, and read
    - Learning Lurker: learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, and read
    - Sharing/Reciprocating Lurker: Subscribe, listen, share, search, browse, visit, read, comment, react, learn, observe, and save
    - Uploading Lurker/ Poster: all the above activities (comment, share, react, learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, read, subscribe, listen, share) and upload, edit, and motivate others to post.

In conclusion, the cluster analysis reveals distinct patterns of online engagement behaviour and lurking orientation across the four groups. Ultimate Lurkers are the least active, with minimal offline engagement and a preference for passive participation, while Learning Lurkers exhibit reflective, goal-driven behaviour with high self-esteem and neuroticism but limited offline activity. Reciprocating Lurkers display balanced traits, engaging moderately across online and offline spaces, with strong social tendencies like extraversion. Finally, Uploading Lurkers are the most active, combining high offline engagement, community connection, and content creation with low demotivators. These findings underscore the heterogeneity of lurking behaviour and the influence of demographics, personality traits, and motivational factors on engagement patterns.

CHAPTER 8: INTEGRATED DISCUSSION

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents an integrated discussion and implications of the results presented in both the qualitative, and quantitative findings (Chapters 6 and 7). It structured based on the four research objectives discussed in Chapter 1 (section 1.3). Firstly, it opens with a reminder of the four research objectives, which translates into the research's aim, how they have been achieved, and the implications related to each of these results considering the existing literature. The findings will focus on challenging the conventional wisdom about lurking and discusses the utility of the social learning perspective to study online lurking behaviour. This is achieved through proposing a typology of lurkers of varying engagement levels (based on a continuum) and sharing how lurking behaviour is in fact, a heterogenous behaviour.

Secondly, the new proposed concept of lurking orientation is addressed, and the discussion will show how the concept can be used to understand online lurking behaviour. Additionally, how lurking orientation further deepens the meaning of existing conceptualisations of lurking behaviour and advance its measurement.

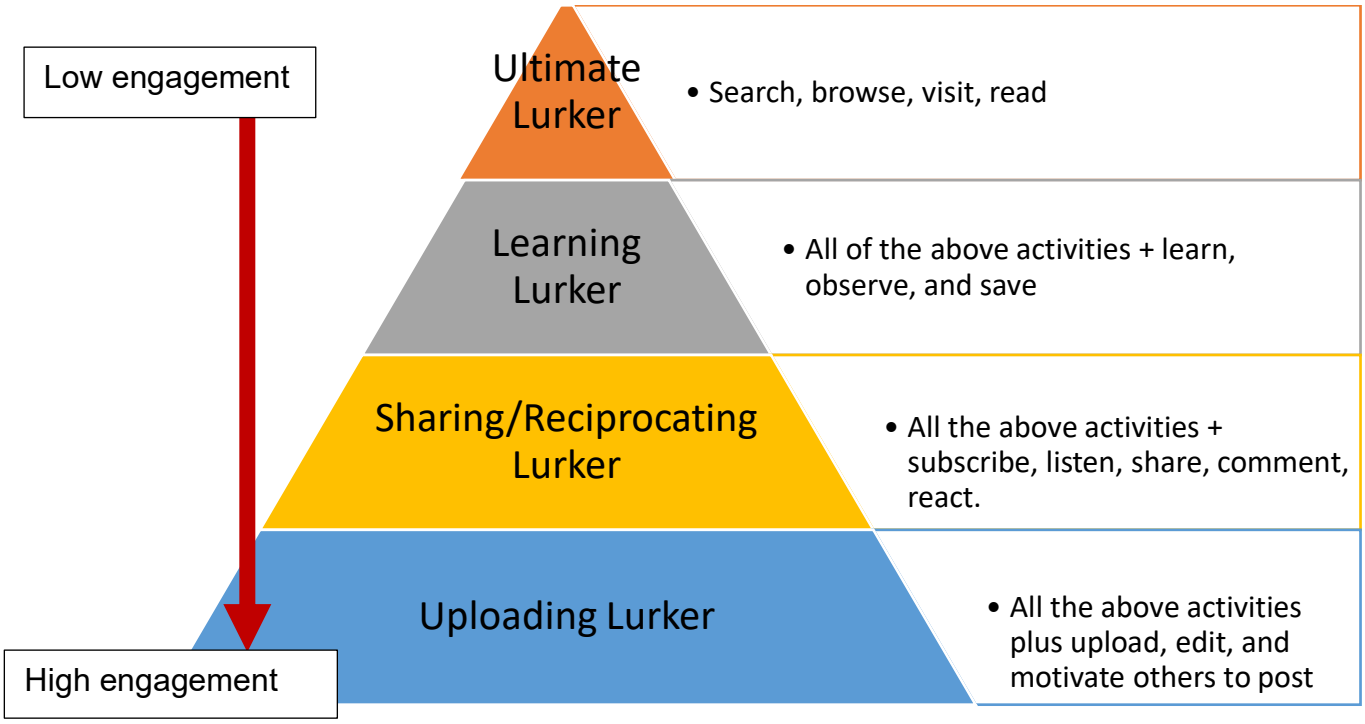
8.2 Conceptualisation and Measure of Lurking Behaviour (RO1)

RO1 was set to critically review the extant conceptualisation and measurement of lurking behaviour in online communities of interest on social media. The literature review established how lurking has been conceptualised negatively and measured homogeneously through a uni-dimensional (behavioural) lens (e.g., Sipley 2024; Datt 2024; Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt 2024; Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). This research has effectively challenged this conventional wisdom of lurking in numerous ways. Firstly, it takes the first step to identify lurking as an orientation (continuum) and inherent behaviour of online users, which involves varied natures and intensities. Past studies have mainly treated lurking as a binary (present versus absent) or optional behaviour that online users choose to undertake (or not undertake) and is not considered as a pathway to content posting or creation (Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Gong, Lim, and Zhu 2015).

Secondly, the present study introduces the social learning perspective and establishes its utility to diagnose lurking and reveal new insights. Specifically, the social learning perspective reveals that observing, reading, and digesting information online can help develop one's knowledge about a topic, clarify ambiguities about a product, and then, gear them up for a purchase decision via boosted knowledge and confidence (Pritchard and Wollard 2020; Shum and Ferguson 2012; Reed et al 2010). Lurking is not an idle and unproductive behaviour that past studies have theorised. It is, instead, a constructive and productive behaviour, cognitively.

Thirdly, the present study demonstrates the segmentation utility of lurking when it is construed as an orientation (continuum). It advances the notion of online lurking behaviour through refining the conceptual meaning of lurking behaviour and proposing a new concept known as Lurking Orientation (LO). The findings also established four typologies of lurker groups: Ultimate Lurker, Learning Lurker, Sharing/Reciprocating Lurker, and Uploading Lurker/Poster. As far as the researcher is aware, this research is the first study to have measured lurkers heterogeneously through identifying the various typologies of lurkers that exist online. This was achieved through challenging their existing conventional wisdom and measurement as discussed earlier. In this way, the study offers conceptual and methodological advancement to current literature as well as building on a nuanced understanding of the construct. The quantitative study establishes how the four types of lurkers will engage in various online engagement activities as demonstrated in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Lurker types and online engagement activities.



The above is discussed more in detail later in this chapter (section 8.5) as per RO4. Through critically reviewing existing conceptualisations and measurements surrounding lurking behaviour on social media in Chapter 3, it has been found that: 1) there has been a negative notion surrounding existing conceptualisations of the term (e.g., Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Edelmann 2017); 2) lurking behaviour tends to be measured and conceptualised from a uni-dimensional perspective (behaviourally action perspective) (e.g. Datt 2024; Scholz et al. 2024; Sipley 2024); and 3) lurkers are profiled as one homogenous group and their behaviour is viewed categorically (Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Pritchard and Wollard 2020). Instead of viewing any immeasurable forms of passive activities a lurker may perform from a negative lens, this research embraces both forms of active and passive online engagement behaviours through viewing the behaviour from a social learning lens.

8.2.1 Negative Conceptualisations of Lurkers and Lurking

Looking at the above points more in depth, this research started by addressing existing negative conceptualisations of terms linked to 'lurking' and 'lurkers'. Upon conducting a literature search for conceptualising the term 'lurkers', there is a definite trend regarding lurkers and their associated online engagement activities (frequency of postings or measurable engagement activity), all of which fail to include "active" perception of the term and their behaviour (lurking). Moreover, there is also a wide range of negative labels for the term 'lurkers', such as free-riders/free-loaders, invisible/silent users, passive users, and social loafing, to name a few (Bu et al. 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Edelmann 2017). This can be concerning considering lurkers form an astonishing number of 90% of online communities' users, according to 90-1-1 rule (Garfield 2020). Lurkers are also, often dismissed, and their value is not recognised as beneficial, compared to that of active posters due to these negative conceptualisations. The definitions discussed in Chapter 3 highlighted several commonalities and thus served as the rationale for the conceptualisation adopted in this research.

Lurkers in this research are defined as *users who visit an online community on a regular basis but do not necessarily perform measurable activities, such as posting, commenting, reacting (i.e., likes) or sharing online. They do, however, still participate through other forms of immeasurable activities, such as learning, observing, reading, listening, and browsing, either casually or strategically.*

8.2.2 Lurking from a Behavioural Perspective

Conceptually, lurking has mainly been measured and conceptualised from a *behavioural action (productivity) perspective.* Viewing lurkers from this perspective often characterises them as passive and non-interactive members (e.g. Mousavi and Roper 2023; Daradkeh 2022; McLaughlin et al. 2022). Negative conceptualisation initially stemmed from benchmarking lurkers with posters or active contributors, who are characterised as behaviourally active or interactive members (Mousavi and Roper 2023). When active, it takes the form of community interactions, communication, and part-taking in measurable forms of activities and value-building through knowledge sharing (Ngyuen et al. 2021). These measurable forms of activities are mainly viewed

as the frequency of posts or comments posted in a three-month period. The behaviour approach is rather limited since the study of all forms of non-measurable activities, such as reading, observing, learning, etc., are not considered when it comes to determining one's level of activeness. In fact, studies have gone as far as explaining how to convert lurkers (i.e., how to de-lurk users) into actual posters, as they have viewed lurkers and their subsequent behaviour negatively, even classifying these users as non-beneficial "read-only participants" (Sah and Peng 2023; Daradkeh 2022; Bu et al. 2021; Honeychurch et al. 2017;).

Other than the negative conceptualisations to the term lurkers and lurking, the reason for existing literature to champion posters is understandable as it is rooted in the productive labour or productive economy concept. Gough (1972) explains how productive labour refers to activities that create value, generate income, and contribute to economic growth. In the context of the digital age and social media, posting or contributing content is seen as a form of productive labour because it involves actively creating and sharing information, ideas, and experiences, thereby contributing to the online community (Mousavi and Roper 2023). Additionally, only considering lurking from a measurable, behavioural perspective may oversimplify the dynamics of online engagement in the sense that it fails to regard its heterogeneity and complexities surrounding the range of activities that can occur (e.g., learning, digesting, reading, etc.).

Lurking behaviour can have its own value and benefits as proven in the current study's qualitative and quantitative findings. In short, lurkers may still learn or digest content, gain knowledge and inspiration from the content they consume, and they may also engage in other ways, such as sharing recommendations, reviews, or engaging offline through purchases and word-of-mouth. Additionally, some individuals may choose to lurk initially to understand the dynamics, topics, and expectations of a community before actively participating (see qualitative findings Chapter 6). This research therefore recognizes how both active and passive engagement behaviours can have their own significance and contribute to the richness of online communities.

8.2.3 Lurking from a Social Learning Perspective

The present study proposes that a more positive conceptualisation of lurking can be achieved via social learning theory (SLT). SLT broadly refers to users' deviant behaviour that can be attributed to two types of social learning processes: observational learning and reinforcement learning (Gong et al. 2020). The present study adopts SLT to study online lurking behaviour for three reasons:

1) Learning is viewed as a form of active social participation in the practices of a community, which emphasises the dynamic interaction between people and the environment in the construction of meaning and identity or through observational learning and spectating (Solverson 2024; Reed et al. 2010); therefore, lurkers are considered active instead of passive.
2) Lurking is seen as development stages of membership in communities, in which a person starts off by learning about the community until she/he develops enough understanding to begin to contribute (McNeil 2020; Muller 2012). These contributions grow over time as the person "develops enough knowledge and reputation among the other members of the community" (Muller 2012, p.254).
3) Lurking can be recast as active mental or learning behaviour instead of an inactive participatory behaviour (Pritchard and Wollard 2020). This casting provides us with a more positive mindset and approach to understanding lurking in terms of its underlying activities and resultant outcomes.

Extant lurking literature mainly offers negative conceptualisation and measurement as discussed earlier in section 8.2.1 and 8.2.2 (Mousavi and Roper 2023; Ngyuen et al. 2021). In other words, viewing online lurking behaviour through a social learning lens can be beneficial because it allows us to understand the role of observation and passive engagement (i.e., digesting content) in the learning process. The qualitative and quantitative findings shared how individuals can acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviours through observing others' activities and interactions online. This perspective helps us recognize that lurking can be a valid and valuable form of active learning, as individuals may gain insights, information, and inspiration by simply observing and absorbing content without actively participating or posting. It also highlights the importance of social influence, role models, and community dynamics in shaping online behaviours and engagement patterns. By adopting a social learning

lens, this research allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics and motivations behind lurking behaviour, contributing to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of online participation and engagement.

8.3 Individual Factors of Personality and Motivation (RO2)

RO2 was set to explore the roles of personality and motivational factors in explaining lurking behaviour online. Lurking orientation or behaviour is, indeed, significantly influenced by individual factors of personality (e.g. Pirker, and Nacke 2021; Amichai-Rahman and Hollebeek 2017) and motivation (e.g. Martinek et al. 2022; Omar and Dequan 2020).

8.3.1 Influence of User's Personality on Lurking

The present study's findings support the notion that individual personality factors play a role in determining lurking behaviour on social media and indicates how users with certain personality traits may be more inclined to engage actively, while others may prefer to observe and consume information without actively participating in discussions. The three personality traits that were significantly linked to one's lurking orientation include: neuroticism, self-esteem, and extraversion. This finding suggests that only two out of five of the big five personal traits are significant when it comes to measuring online lurking behaviour or orientation. Therefore, the big five is not sufficient solely for its measurement and additional scales relating to self-esteem, such as Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (SES), can be added to the measure.

SES is which is one of the most widely used scales to measure self-esteem, consisting of 10 items that assess general feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance (Błachnio et al. 2016). The fact that self-esteem is an additional trait is of no surprise since several authors have explored how self-esteem plays a critical role in shaping personality processes and social media usage (e.g. Uram and Skalski 2022; Wang, Xu, and He 2021).

The reason for self-esteem being an additional significant personality trait may be because users also displayed various non-engagement motives linked to fears, personal reasons, lack of confidence, preference for receiving information, and

preference for learning, as observed from the qualitative findings. These non-engagement reasons portray users' lack of self-esteem as follows:

- Fear: users with low self-esteem may have a heightened fear of negative judgement from others. They may worry about embarrassing themselves, making mistakes, or saying something incorrect in online interactions, which makes them fear judgement. Such fears can discourage them from actively participating and lead them to prefer lurking as a safer option to avoid facing such fears (Honeychurch et al. 2017; Bishop 2011).

- Lack of confidence: users with low self-esteem may feel less confident about expressing their opinions or participating actively in online discussions. They may fear judgement or rejection from others, leading them to prefer lurking instead of contributing (Nguyen et al. 2021). Lurking allows them to gather information and observe without the need for posting or commenting and exposing themselves to potential criticism.

- Preference for receiving information (information-seeking), and learning (Bu and Koh 2023): users with low self-esteem may engage in lurking behaviour as a means of seeking information and learning (Honeychurch et al. 2017). They may perceive lurking as a less intrusive way of acquiring knowledge without having to actively engage with others. Findings also found how users lurk due to Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience (PRI) of the online community because information and content is already readily available in vast quantities, making acquiring knowledge easy; therefore, lurkers have a preference for information seeking and learning (Sah and Peng 2023). This consumption of information can help boost their confidence and competence as they learn more about the online community and/or skin care product(s).

- Personal reasons (Sun et al. 2014): links to all the above non-engagement reasons and also de-motivators (further discussed in section 8.3.2). Such demotivators can contribute to lower self-esteem among lurkers as they may perceive themselves as less capable, valuable, or connected within the online community. Individual reasons and motivations can vary and will be discussed

in the sections still to come. So, the relationship between these factors and self-esteem can also differ among individuals.

Despite the big five personality scale being widely used to study online lurking behaviour, some authors have also believed this is the case. For example, Oliveira et al. (2020) agreed that the utilisation of the big five scale is insufficient and stated that despite the vast literature on the topic of sharing content on social media, there is poor empirical support to combine the different behaviours of lurkers and posters on social media, as well as the impact of a user's personality onto one single model. Additionally, Tan (2011) suggested other theories, such as the social-inhibited personality and social intention theory, to explain posting and lurking behaviour (i.e., shyness, introversion, lack of confidence) instead of the Big Five. This research supports these authors' findings and expands on the fact that utilisation of the Big Five scale solely is not adequate for studying lurking behaviour.

8.3.2 Influence of User's Motivation on Lurking

The literature review then revealed how exploring the personality construct on its own is not sufficient as one must also take the environment into consideration when studying online lurking behaviour. This is because different personality traits are also associated with different motivations to become active members of the community (i.e. Badreddine 2022; Omar and Dequan 2020). Authors have conceptualised online users in several ways based on their motivations for participation in online communities (e.g. Santos et al. 2022; Omar and Dequan 2020; Gazit et al. 2018). However, studies that have explored reasons behind lurking tend to view the behaviour uni-dimensionally and homogenously.

This research utilises U&G theory and SDT to conceptualise lurkers motives on their online engagement as both theories has been extensively used by researchers to understand user's motivation (Garibaldi et al. 2023). Additionally, existing research surrounding social media engagement places limited focus on lurking as they tend to focus primarily on active participation and overlook the behaviour (e.g. Santos et al. 2022). Consequently, there is a scarcity of research specifically dedicated to understanding the motivations behind lurking and a lack of comprehensive exploration

surrounding the two constructs. Therefore, this research bridges this gap and explores both constructs conjunctively to provide a more holistic understanding of lurking motivations and helps identify common themes or underlying constructs that drive this behaviour.

The current study's findings identified several influential factors for one's lurking behaviour, such as: one's desire to learn, share information, help others, and build, and promote personal brands, as well as a passion for skincare, personal interests, professional pursuits, hobbies, work-related obligations, desires, fears, and platform characteristics. These motives can be classified based on multiple studies such as Nguyen's (2021), Sun et al.'s (2014) study who both built an integrated model of motivational factors behind online behaviour. Both models consisting of four categories, which are individual factors, social factors, organizational factors, and technological factors (Nguyen 2021) or environmental influence, personal preference, individual-group relationship, and security consideration (Sun et al. 2014). A major limitation of both Nguyen (2021) and Sun et al.'s (2014) study relates to its generalizability since its findings are only based on one type of lurker group and their motivations, so it may not apply to other lurkers or online community users. Additionally, different online platforms, communities, and user demographics can exhibit diverse lurking behaviours and motivations, which is what this mixed methods study has accomplished through the proposal of LO.

Various motivational factors were found to influence lurking behaviour positively. Users explained how they would be positively influenced by 1) personal and interactive connections; 2) personalised communication (i.e., through traditional post/mail); 3) educational and informative content; 4) open and honest; 5) enjoyment; and 6) sense of community/belongingness. These six factors were observed from the qualitative study and all fall under the personal preference or individual factors category under Nguyen (2020) model. Additionally, environmental influence, such as time, and individual-group relationship, such as users' preference towards smaller online communities or groups, also plays a significant role in their lurking behaviour.

On the contrary, several demotivators also exist that may significantly discourage a user to engage or post online, which confirms the qualitative findings. The narrowed

down significant de-motivators were Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement, Lack of Entertainment and Relevance, Lack of Community and Disconnection, Reluctance to Contribute or Support, Negative Feelings and Emotions, Preference for Passive Participation, Imposter syndrome, Lack of Passion and Interest, Perceived Low Priority and Benefits, and Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience. This research has taken Nguyen's (2021) and Sun et al.'s (2014) model up a notch through investigating additional individual factors within each category across the four types of lurker groups across various social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, X (formerly Twitter), Pinterest, TikTok, etc.). These quantitative findings fit in the four types of lurking reasons as shown in Table 42.

Table 42: Classified reasons for lurking.

Influence	**Variables**
Environmental influence	• Lack of Entertainment and Relevance • Perceived Low Priority and Benefits • Negative Feelings and Emotions
Personal preference	• Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement • Lack of Passion and Interest • Preference for Passive Participation
Individual-group relationship	• Lack of Community and Disconnection • Reluctance to Contribute or Support • Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience
Security consideration	• Imposter Syndrome

In summary, like personality, motivation does have a significant effect on lurking behaviour. Both psychological influences play a major role in determining one's LO levels. For example, the ultimate lurker is highly influenced by all the non-engaging reasons; therefore, making them highly orientated towards lurking than the other three lurker groups. It is valuable to explore and integrate multiple perspectives and factors to capture the complexity and diversity of motivations behind lurking, which is what this research has done. It has expanded and added to existing said theories around motivation behind lurkers.

8.4 Online and Offline Engagement Behaviour (RO3)

RO3 was set to explore whether online lurking behaviour influences offline engagement behaviours. The qualitative study established how participants had different perceptions of the term ‘active’, which also reflects on the activities these social media users would identify as lurking. The study’s findings also suggest how users engage in various forms of online engagement activities, such as posting, commenting, sharing content, and actively participating in groups, while also taking part in immeasurable activities, like reading, learning, and scanning through content. The quantitative study subsequently established how the four types of lurker groups discussed earlier in section 8.2 will engage in different various online activities. The various online activities are grouped as: 1) comment, share, react; 2) learn, observe, save; 3) edit and upload; 4) edit, post, and motivate; 5) search, browse, visit, and read; and 6) subscribe, listen, share.

The two significant offline activities performed by online lurkers are 1) find, browse, ask, purchase, and recommend; and 2) attend, watch, and read. Therefore, in linkage with these two offline activities, we propose that online lurkers can still be very active, offline users in the form of skincare enthusiasts/shoppers (engaging in the first grouped offline engagement activities) and knowledge seekers (participating in the second grouped offline engagement activities). This is consistent with Mousavi and Roper (2020) findings suggesting that Lurkers contribute to brand value by consuming content and spreading information outside of the community, even though they do not actively engage. Online lurking behaviour therefore does have a significant direct effect on offline engagement behaviour.

8.5 Lurking Behaviour as a Segmentation Variable (RO4)

RO4 was set to establish whether online lurking behaviour is a singular or plural in nature, and whether different types of lurkers exist based on objectives 1, 2, and 3. As discussed in the first objective, lurking has been measured heterogeneously within this research via social learning lens. The research presents four distinct meaningful lurker segments, highlighting the potential fallacy of treating lurkers as one homogenous group. The four lurker segments are referred to as ultimate (non-responsive) lurker, learning lurker, sharing/reciprocating lurker, and uploading/Influencing lurker as earlier discussed in section 8.2.

All the lurker groups engage in baseline online activities linked to searching, browsing, visiting, and reading. These four activities (grouped as one) are performed together and is a baseline set of activities performed across all four types of lurkers. Therefore, this makes all of them productive in nature, despite their orientation levels as opposed to past research, which refers to lurking behaviour as unproductive or unbeneficial (e.g. Bu et al. 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). These four lurker groups participate in various forms of online engagement activities as follows:

1) Ultimate (non-responsive) lurker. The largest lurker membership segment (n=147), which is highly oriented towards lurking and frequently engages in activities linked to searching, browsing, visiting sites and pages, and reading, but less frequently in all of the other activities.

2) Learning lurker. The second largest membership (n=131), that participates in activities linked to learning, observing, saving, searching, browsing, visiting, and reading more often than any of the other activities. The learning lurkers are like the ultimate lurkers but they also learn, observe, and save content to gain further knowledge.

3) Sharing/reciprocating lurker. represents the fourth largest segment (n=108) which participates in subscribing, listening, sharing, searching, browsing, visiting, reading, commenting, reacting, learning, observing, and saving. The sharing/reciprocating

lurker scored high scores in most of the online activities, except uploading content and motivating other uploaders.

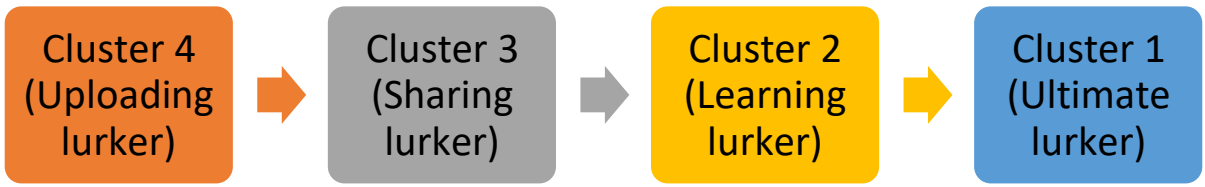
4) Uploading/influencing lurker (poster). The third largest segment (n=112), which is the opposite of ultimate (non-responsive) lurker when it comes to participation in online activities. They are the lurker group least orientated towards lurking than the other 3 lurker groups. The uploading/influencing lurker can also be known as a poster as they engage in all the above-mentioned activities (comment, share, react, learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, read, subscribe, listen, share) and, uploading, editing, and motivating others to post.

For ease of understanding, the researcher illustrates these four lurker groups on a roller coaster diagram (see Figure 10) where the uploading lurker performing the highest level of engagement activities is placed on the highest point of the coaster track and ultimate lurkers performing the least level of engagement is on the bottom of the track. Just like a rollercoaster, engagement levels of lurkers are based on a continuum, and are not stationary in nature; it is a rather rapid and spontaneous process with highs and lows, and twists and turns. Depending on a wide range of influential factors, such as motivation, personality, users' demographics etc., levels may fluctuate from high to low or vice versa over time.

Figure 10: 4 lurker groups on a roller coaster (developed by the researcher).

For both online engagement behaviour and offline engagement behaviour, the quantitative findings revealed how Uploading/Influencing lurker (cluster 4) is the most active user segment compared to the other three segments, as they are more likely to engage in both forms of offline engagement activities. Followed by cluster 3 (Sharing/Reciprocating lurker), cluster 2 (Learning lurker), and, finally, cluster 1 (Ultimate lurker). In other words, ultimate lurkers are least likely to perform any of the online or offline engagement activities and the uploading lurkers are the most likely to perform any of the online or offline engagement activities, which is expected and unsurprising. Figure 11 shows the order of the lurker groups who are most likely to engage in both forms of offline and online engagement activities.

Figure 11: Most likely-least likely to engage in offline engagement activities.



8.6 Demographic Characteristics of Lurker Segments

When looking at demographics across the four typologies of lurkers, the quantitative findings established that only gender and annual income before tax are significant across the lurker groups. Looking back at the participant profiles from both qualitative and quantitative studies, most of the participants were female. Therefore, the findings of gender influencing lurking behaviour is not surprising since female consumers tend to dominate the skincare sector, as supported in Malone's (2022) study. Additionally, upon running ANOVA analysis on gender, the four observed clusters of lurkers, cluster 1 (ultimate lurker) and cluster 3 (sharing/reciprocating lurker) are less influenced by gender than cluster 2 (learning lurker) and cluster 4 (uploading/influencing lurker) suggesting that the lurking behaviours, preferences, or characteristics of the individuals in that group do not significantly vary based on their gender. It does not imply that the group is exclusively male or female.

Another interesting finding is how annual income before tax highly influences all four lurker groups (all scoring mean scores >=3.44). Possible reasons might be:

- Access to resources: individuals with higher incomes may have greater disposable income to spend on skincare, technology, internet connectivity, and devices that enable online engagement. Conversely, those with lower incomes may have limited access to such resources, which can affect their ability to actively engage in online communities or purchase skincare products. Keeping in mind data collection took place over the COVID-19 pandemic, participants may have lacked certain resources than in normal and usual circumstances due to inflation and other external factors. This disparity in access can contribute to differences in lurking behaviour.

- Time availability: this is another top non-engaging reason individuals may lurk online, as experienced from qualitative and quantitative results which is also consistent with other studies (e.g. Hong et al. 2023; Fullwood et al. 2019). Higher income individuals may have more financial stability and flexibility, potentially allowing them to allocate more time for online activities. On the other hand, individuals with lower incomes may have to prioritise work, have multiple jobs, or other responsibilities, leaving them with limited time to actively participate in online communities. Such time constraints may lead to a higher lurking orientation level.

- Self-perception: as experienced in qualitative studies, individuals have various kinds of self-perception when it comes to attitudes and lurking behaviour. Similarly, income can also possibly influence individuals' self-perception and social identity. Those with higher incomes may perceive themselves as having more resources or disposable income, which may motivate them to actively engage and share their opinions or experiences online. Conversely, individuals with lower incomes may experience feelings of social exclusion or inadequacy, which can lead to a greater tendency to observe rather than actively participate.

8.7 Chapter Summary

Through a social learning lens, this present study established how lurkers are, in fact, learners of available content online, consistent with recent research findings (e.g. Solverson 2024; Sah and Peng 2023; Daradkeh 2022) who enjoy gaining information and knowledge (Bu and Koh 2023). They are also all actively engaged in activities linked to searching, browsing, visiting sites and communities, and reading available content. Moreover, these lurkers also go on to share their knowledge outside of social media through making recommendations in both online and offline platforms with other members, friends, and family, which past research has not explored deeply. Therefore, lurkers are not "passive" in nature as research suggest (i.e. Bu et al. 2021; Popovac and Fullwood 2019).

Therefore, the present study consistently argues how it would be entirely unfair to label lurkers as "passive", "dis-engaged", "uninvolved", or "inactive" forms of participation in online communities or base lurkers entirely on their behavioural forms of engagement as per extant research (Bu et al. 2021; Edelmann 2017; Hicks and Sinkinson 2017). Additionally, findings also proved how lurking behaviour can indeed vary depending on different influential factors, such as various motives (Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023; Omar and Dequan 2020), user's personality (Pirker and Nacke 2021; Tagarelli and Interdonato 2018), and demographic characteristics like gender and annual income before tax. Depending on these influential factors, findings demonstrated observable segmentation and proposes four typology of lurker groups that can be placed on a continuum concept known as lurking orientation (LO). The four lurker groups engage in various online activities as follows:

- Ultimate lurker: search, browse, visit, and read
- Learning lurker: learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, and read
- Sharing/reciprocating lurker: Subscribe, listen, share, search, browse, visit, read, comment, react, learn, observe, and save
- Uploading/influencing lurker (poster): all the above activities (comment, share, react, learn, observe, save, search, browse, visit, read, subscribe, listen, share), as well as upload, edit, and motivate others to post.

Finally, the findings have achieved all four research objectives discussed in section 1.3, and the main research aim.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Introduction

To achieve the research's main aim of challenging the conventional conceptualisation and measurement of lurking on social media and exploring whether different types of lurkers exist- this research is guided by a social learning perspective. Accordingly, the research also reshaped our understanding of online consumer engagement and lurking behaviour through the proposal of a new concept known as Lurking Orientation. It contributes to the field of online user engagement by exploring lurking behaviour across various communities of interest on social media platforms. Achieved through the advancement of the understanding of lurking behaviour, the study proposes a typology of four lurker groups based on a continuum. Additionally, the study highlights the influence and roles of user's personality and user's motivations on shaping one's online engagement behaviour. Which can in turn influence offline engagement behaviour.

This final chapter consists of 11 sub-sections and reiterates several key conclusion points (discoveries) that are original to the present research and serve as the scope of its theoretical and practical implications on both academics and business practitioners alike. It will also detail several limitations that can provide meaningful directions for future research and further validate the insightful findings obtained from this research.

9.2 Key Conclusion Points

The unit of analysis targeted for the research was the UK skincare consumer base. The skincare sector was chosen for three reasons: 1) When it comes to discovering new skincare products, social media is ranked as one of the top platforms to enable its discovery (Malone 2022); 2) skincare has become increasingly popular and important in modern society as individuals are more conscious of their appearance, self-care, and maintaining healthy skin (Choi et al. 2019); and 3) the UK beauty industry is large, currently projected at £12.85bn as of 2024 and expected to further expand annually by 2.29% up until 2028 (Statista Market Insights 2024). The qualitative and quantitative research findings consistently show that skincare users do

not perceive lurking as a dichotomous (presence/absence) behaviour but a continuum behaviour. It naturally exists for any online behaviour, but its nature (underlying activities) and intensity (high/low frequency) may vary between skincare users, depending on their personality (e.g. Badreddine 2023; Loria et al. 2021) and motivation (e.g. Martinek et al. 2022; Nguyen 2021).

This research introduces and labels lurking's continuum treatment as 'lurking orientation' (LO). LO is defined in this research as: *a social learning inclination of online lurking behaviour that is based on a continuum and can be high or low. LO consists of varied focused (e.g., researching about products, searching, reading etc.) and unfocused (e.g., browsing, visiting sites, scrolling, observing, digesting, etc.) learning activities that users can partake in online.*

This research offers a comprehensive examination of lurking behaviour in online communities, specifically challenging traditional views of lurkers as passive or unproductive members. By redefining lurking behaviour via social learning, the current study could significantly advance understanding within both academic and practical realms of social media and online communities. LO is a proposed, new concept based on a continuum, constituting of four lurker groups performing varying types of online engagement activities dynamically. The theoretical utility of LO in explaining online user behaviours can be supported by other established concepts like shopping orientation (Gehrt et al. 2007), consumption orientation (Sherman et al. 2001) and web-use orientation (Rains and Karmikel 2009). This research then establishes the LO's practical utility by using it to segment and profile skincare users, a practice widely endorsed by digital marketing scholars (Wiid, Mullern, and Berndt 2023; Teng et al. 2018). The research objectives, and, in turn, research aim, contributes towards existing studies as follows:

- RO1: allowed for an evaluation of existing approaches to understanding lurking behaviour, its conceptualisations, and existing measures. By critically reviewing conceptualisation and measurement methods, the researcher was able to identify limitations or gaps in the current understanding and propose improvements or alternative perspectives. Traditionally, lurking has been considered a passive, undesirable behaviour. This research suggests that

lurkers play various roles beyond passive observation, it adds depth to studies on user engagement and participation in online communities.

- RO2: understanding how individual factors of user's personality and motivation influence lurking behaviour is important because they are determinants of one's online engagement behaviour (e.g. Martinek et al. 2022; Nguyen 2021). By examining the impact of personality and motivational factors on lurking, the current study addresses a key gap in existing research, which often overlooks these influences. Understanding the psychological and motivational profiles of lurkers can provide a more individualized view of engagement, showing that lurking is not necessarily negative, or passive, but can be strategic, goal or interest driven. This objective helped shed light on the underlying drivers of lurking and provided alternative explanations beyond traditional perspectives. It contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour and its relationship with said individual differences.

- RO3: is valuable in exploring the broader context of lurking behaviour. By examining both online (Sigurdsson et al. 2020) and offline engagement behaviours (Ng, Sweeney and Plewa 2020; Lim and Rasul 2022), the researcher was able to uncover meaningful connections and interactions that contribute to a more holistic understanding of lurking behaviour and its implications beyond online context. Additionally, exploring whether online lurking affects offline behaviours could reveal new insights into digital influence on real-world actions (i.e. purchase decisions). This is especially relevant for studies on social media's impact, where online communities often shape offline engagement behaviours (i.e. purchases, WOM), or even community participation (Bartschat, Cziehso, and Hennig-Thurau 2022).

- RO4: recognises that lurking behaviour is not the homogeneous phenomenon as extant research has conceptualised it to be (Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). By examining whether lurking behaviour is plural (i.e., different types of lurkers exist), the research challenges the oversimplification of online participation and binary nature of lurking (present/absent). This could

lay the groundwork for typologies of lurkers, distinguishing between lurker types and their subsequent online engagement behaviour. The four lurker groups identified within this research are: ultimate lurker, learning lurker, sharing/reciprocating lurker, and uploading/influencing lurker (poster).

The Ultimate lurker is positioned at the highest point of the continuum, depicting high lurking orientation levels (i.e., unfocused learning (Eraut 2004)) and the Uploading/Influencing lurker is placed at the lowest point of the continuum, depicting their low orientation level towards lurking (i.e., focused learning (Anderson et al. 1996). All lurker groups are still productive as they are still engaged, to a certain extent, through both forms of focused and unfocused learning. This is consistent with recent research suggesting that lurkers perform thoughtful and observational learning (Solverson 2023). Additionally, lurkers are still contributing to a certain extent because they all actively participate in online activities linked to searching, browsing, visiting sites/groups, and reading content (Zhu and Dawson 2023). The recognition of LO emphasises the need to move away from a one-size-fits-all approach when targeting lurkers.

Additionally, by identifying the existence of varied lurking behaviours and segments, the researcher was able to refine the understanding the complex and diverse nature of lurking and behaviour propose alternative positive conceptualisations.

9.3 Conventional Treatment of Lurking

Prior to this thesis, lurking has been conceptualised behaviourally, as discussed in chapter 3 (section 3.2). Lurkers are measured behaviourally in terms of frequency of postings, visits, or other forms of measurable engagement activity (likes, comments, shares, etc.) (e.g. Bu et al. 2021; Nguyen 2021). Measuring lurkers behaviourally poses several strengths and weaknesses, as shown in Table 43, where the weaknesses overpower the strengths. Overall, while the shared conceptualisations capture certain aspects of lurking behaviour (i.e., reading, observing, visiting sites), they also exhibit limitations in terms of negative connotations, lack of differentiation, limited understanding of motivations, and inconsistent terminology. The weaknesses limited our novel or extended understanding of lurking. This research addressed these weaknesses through providing a more comprehensive and nuanced conceptualisation of lurking that considers a range of motivations, personality traits, online and offline engagement activities associated with this online lurking behaviour. Enabled through viewing the phenomenon from a social learning perspective, lurkers in this research are defined as:

> *Lurkers are users who visit an online community on a regular basis but do not necessarily perform measurable activities, such as posting, commenting, reacting (i.e., likes) or sharing online. They do, however, still participate through other immeasurable activities, such as learning, observing, reading, listening, and browsing, either casually or strategically.*

Table 43: Strengths and weaknesses of the behavioural action conceptualisation.

Behavioural action conceptualisation	
Strengths	**Weaknesses**
● Recognition of passive behaviour: many of the conceptualisations acknowledge that lurkers engage in passive behaviour, such as reading or observing, without actively contributing content (e.g. Datt 2024; Scholz et al. 2024; Zhu and Dawson 2024; Bu et al. 2021). ● Descriptive terminologies: conceptualisations provide descriptive labels for lurkers, such as "silent learners", "invisible participants", or "vicarious learners," which helps portray their roles in online communities (Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021).	● Negative connotations: most conceptualisations associate lurkers with negative terms like “non-interactive”, "non-beneficial", "free riders", "abusers of common goods", “online parasites” etc. (e.g. Bu and Koh 2023; Honeychurch et al. 2017) These terms may carry a judgmental tone and fail to recognize the potential value of lurking behaviour. ● Lack of differentiation: conceptualisations fail to differentiate between lurkers who passively observe for personal knowledge and those who actively engage by consuming information or participating indirectly (e.g. Popovac and Fullwood 2019; Honeychurch et al. 2017). ● Limited understanding of lurking motivations: conceptualisations generally focus on the observed and measurable behaviour of lurking without considering the underlying motivations

	that influence individuals to lurk (Nguyen 2021). This limit understanding of the diversity and complexity of lurking motivations. ● Inconsistent terminology: conceptualisations vary in their terminology, using different labels and phrases (e.g. Bu et al. 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021). ● Lack of context: utilising behavioural data alone is insufficient to comprehend lurking behaviour. ● Lack of heterogeneity: lurking is viewed as a binary behaviour that is either present/absent, failing to consider their heterogeneous nature (e.g. Bu et al. 2021; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021).

9.4 Lurking Orientation and Segmentation Utility

Building on the discussion presented earlier, the present research proposes a new conceptualisation of lurking based on a continuum via SL - namely, lurking orientation (LO). Through SL, both forms of passive and active behaviours, and all online users are embraced, instead of championing one or the either (Pritchard and Wollard 2020). SLT highlights the importance of passive activities, such as observing and learning in online engagement (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Pritchard and Wollard 2020; Muller 2012). LO proposes several unique advantages in comparison to the traditional behavioural conceptualisation identified in marketing literature. Advantages of LO are:

- Improved segmentation utility: through its presentation of four lurker typologies, having challenged previous conventional wisdom of lurkers.
- Enhanced flexibility: engagement and participation levels of lurkers are viewed across a continuum that is dynamic in nature rather than stable. LO considers the heterogeneous nature of lurking.
- Enhanced scope of online activities: LO considers both forms of active and passive online activities performed by lurker groups through viewing them from a social learning lens. Both forms of online activities can be classified under focused (e.g., researching about products, searching, reading etc.) and unfocused (e.g., browsing, visiting sites, scrolling, observing, digesting, etc.) learning activities.
- Multi-dimensional: LO adopted a comprehensive multi-dimensional view to consumer engagement when studying lurking behaviour, thereby also improving the context of the study. In addition to behavioural data, LO also considers users' motivations, and personalities associated with lurking behaviour, context-specific factors (e.g., lurking perceptions, demographic factors), and potential for engagement.
- More nuanced and insightful: in terms of understanding online lurking behaviour, its influences, and associated outcomes for both online and offline engagement behaviour.
- Positive connotation: that deviates from the negative conceptualisations discussed (e.g., Bu et al. 2021; Honeychurch et al. 2017) previously through arguing that lurkers are still actively engaged cognitively and in online activities linked to focused and unfocused learning.

- Consideration of offline engagement behaviour: as far as the researcher is aware, this is the first study to have explored how online lurking behaviour significantly also influences offline engagement behaviour. Lurker groups were found to still actively participate in various offline activities linked to finding products, browsing for products, asking about products, purchasing, recommending, attending events, watching television shows, and reading traditional media content. Therefore, lurkers online do not equate to lurkers offline as well. This finding is consistent with Mousavi and Roper (2020) findings suggesting that lurkers may spread information outside of the community, even though they do not actively engage. Their study, however, did not further investigate offline engagement behaviour.
- Enhanced differentiation: through understanding the various online activities performed by various lurker groups.
- Increased measure across a range of social media platforms: the researcher did not limit the study of LO to just a single platform. Platforms included in the study are Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, YouTube, Pinterest, and others (participants/participants were allowed to freely mention any other platforms they utilise).

9.5 Partial utility of The Big Five

Many online marketing or online engagement studies have championed the utility of the Big Five in profiling online users. The Big Five personality framework is suitable for studying the personality of lurkers due to its comprehensive scope, recognition, and validation across cultures and populations (e.g. Qu et al. 2021; Bazkiaei et al. 2020). The strengths of its utility lie in 1) allowing for nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour in relation to different personality dimensions; 2) facilitating the evaluation of internal beliefs, enabling researchers to draw comparisons and generalise findings across various samples and settings; 3) thereby increasing the reliability and validity of the research (Azoulay and Kapferer 2003); and 4) the stability of the scale allows for the examination of long-term relationships between personality and lurking behaviour (Nguyen 2021).

Due to the above benefits, it is understandable why the Big Five framework is relatively popular in online engagement literature. Additionally, its practical applications in online marketing and advertising, enables successful profiling of individuals and customised advertisement strategies based on personality traits (Azucar et al. 2018). However, a major drawback of the Big Five framework is that its dimensions primarily provide descriptive information and may not capture the complexities and nuances of lurking behaviour or encompass all facets of personality (Anglim and O'Connor 2019). While the descriptive nature of the Big Five can be advantageous in providing a comprehensive taxonomy of traits (Bazkiaei et al. 2020; Şahin et al. 2019), researchers should be cautious about oversimplification and potential measurement errors and bias (Zajenkowski et al. 2020).

To tackle the above limitation and improve this research's study utility for lurking, the researcher supplemented the Big Five framework with additional influential factors of online lurking behaviour (i.e., online user motivation, online user personality). Through studying both users' personality and motivation, the research was able to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the lurking phenomenon and related online engagement behaviours.

Upon execution of both qualitative and quantitative studies, it is found that the Big Five is insufficient to measure online lurking behaviour due to its partial utility. This finding supports Anglim and O'Connor (2019) finding explaining how the Big Five may not entirely capture the complexities of lurking behaviour. Findings obtained found that only two out of five personality traits from the Big Five framework are significant when it comes to understanding lurking behaviour: namely, neuroticism and extraversion. In addition to these two traits, users' self-esteem is another personality trait outside of the Big Five framework that was also found to be significant. The reason for self-esteem being an additional significant personality trait is not surprising because users were also found to have various non-engagement reasons linked to fears, personal reasons, lack of confidence and self-efficacy, preference for receiving information, and preference for learning, all of which plays a part in their self-esteem, and in turn, lurking behaviour. Past research may not have captured these findings because, unlike this research, they have not explored both users' personality and motivation in conjunction with one another to build a more nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour.

9.6 Challenges to Measuring Online User Motivation

As a reminder of Chapter 4 (section 4.3), this research studies motivation for five reasons:

1. Understanding contextual variations: examining the motivations for lurking across different online platforms, communities, and specific contexts provides insights into how lurking behaviours may differ based on the situational factors at play (Martinek et al. 2022; Nguyen 2021; Tseng et al. 2017). This research delves into the specific online communities within the skincare sector and explores the factors that influence individuals' motives for lurking in those skincare contexts.

2. Motivational factors as determinants: numerous studies in online engagement literature have investigated the motivational factors behind lurking and engagement behaviours on social media. Motives, such as the need for entertainment, information, and identification, have been consistently found across multiple studies (Farhat et al. 2022; Martínek et al. 2022; Nguyen 2021). These findings confirm that motivation plays a significant role in shaping lurking behaviour.

3. Expanding on existing research: this research expands on the findings of previous studies by exploring the influences of both motivations and personality traits on lurking behaviour. By considering the joint impact of these factors, a more comprehensive understanding of lurking behaviour can be achieved.

4. Building a heterogeneous view of lurking: Unlike many existing studies that treat lurking as a homogenous behaviour (e.g. Farhat et al. 2022; Martínek et al. 2022; Veirman et al. 2016), this research takes a heterogeneous perspective. By recognizing the various types of lurkers present in online communities and investigating the influences behind their behaviour, a more holistic and in-depth understanding of lurking behaviour can be attained.

5. Filling research gaps: this research addressed several gaps identified in previous studies discussed in Chapter 4 (section 4.4). The gaps were addressed through i) the exploration of motivations and personality influences behind lurking behaviour; ii) measuring lurking in a non-behavioural and heterogeneous manner; iii) encompassing multiple social media platforms instead of focusing on one; and iv) adopting a mixed methods research design to build a nuanced understanding of lurking behaviour.

This research considers the study of various motives obtained from multiple research projects, such as the eleven motivations linked to how consumers engage with online communities, which are brand influence, brand passion, connecting, helping, like-minded discussion, hedonic and utilitarian rewards, seeking assistance, self-expression, up-to- date information, and validation, identified by Baldus et al. (2015).

Additionally, enjoyment (Farhan et al. 2022), information seeking (Martínek et al. 2022), altruism (Yesiloglu et al. 2021), external rewards (Yesiloglu et al. 2021), seeking compensation (Hocutt et al. 2006), and other intrinsic motivation, such as socialising (Yesiloglu et al. 2021) have been studied and most of these motivations can be categorised under Nguyen (2021) and Sun et al.'s (2014) four classifications of motivation linked to individual factors, social factors, organisational factors, and technological factors (Nguyen 2021) and environmental influences, personal preference, individual-group relationships and security considerations (Sun et al. 2014).

Upon conducting qualitative and quantitative studies, this research found additional motivational factors that could be classified under the models discussed above. Motivational factors include a user's preference towards learning, sharing information, helping others, passion for skincare, and building and promoting personal brands. Additionally, other demotivators influencing their behaviour are linked to limited passion or interest, personal reasons, lack of confidence, preference for receiving information, and preference for learning prevents a user from engaging online Depending on the severity of these demotivators, a user may be more oriented towards lurking than the others.

On a similar note, the quantitative study further expanded on these findings as it found several significant demotivator reasons that may discourage a user to engage or post online. The findings of these de-motivational motives are expected to be the opposite of the motivational factors found in the qualitative study. The de-motivational factors are Lack of Interest in Knowledge and Engagement, Lack of Entertainment and Relevance, Lack of Community and Disconnection, Reluctance to Contribute or Support, Negative Feelings and Emotions, Preference for Passive Participation, Imposter syndrome, Lack of Passion and Interest, Perceived Low Priority and Benefits, and Perceived Redundancy and Inexperience.

9.7 Limited Attention to Lurkers' Offline Engagement Behaviours

It is not common for past studies on lurking to consider offline engagement behaviour. Possible reasons for this are the excess focus on behaviourally studying lurkers online, and the championing of posters (e.g. Sipley 2024; Datt 2024; Scholz, Kolb, and Neidhardt 2024). The current study highlights importance of considering both online and offline dimensions of engagement to fully understand the role of lurking behaviour in community dynamics and to inform how lurking online does not equate to lurking offline. While there is currently limited research in this area, the current study offers a starting point for consideration and exploration of online lurking in conjunction with their offline engagement behaviour. Especially since Mousavi and Roper (2020) findings suggests how lurkers may spread information gained online, outside of the community, even though they do not actively engage.

The inspiration to consider offline engagement behaviours was gained from the literature review process surrounding online consumer engagement and the multichannel shopping phenomenon like search online, buy in-store (webrooming) or search in-store, buy online (showrooming) (Aw 2019). These 'hybrid' shopping behaviours suggest that consumers are increasingly using a combination of channels for shopping or customer services due to the convenience and flexibility it offers contributing to an overall more satisfying shopping experience (Flavián et al. 2020). Similar hybrid consumer behaviours exist in online brand communities for reasons such as information gathering, recommendations, loyalty and engagement, cross-channel shopping, and customer support (Belk 2013; Vivek et al. 2012). Existing studies discussed how online brand communities can also be formed in offline environments, known as offline brand communities, bound either physically or geographically (Munjal et al. 2019). Additionally, silence within the online community does not necessarily mean silence outside as well (Mousavi and Roper 2020)

Studying lurkers' offline engagement behaviour in addition to their online engagement behaviour is beneficial for the three reasons: 1) the researcher can understand how lurking behaviour may manifest outside of the online context and how these offline brand communities contribute to overall engagement and community dynamics; 2) Insights into the influence and impact of lurking behaviour beyond the online community can be gained (i.e., through word-of-mouth, offline purchases, etc.); 3) A

comprehensive understanding can be gained of the multifaceted nature of lurking behaviour, not only from an online context but outside of it as well (Mousavi and Roper 2020). The present research produced new and unique insights into online lurking behaviour through its inclusion.

The quantitative study established the two significant offline engagement (grouped) activities performed by online lurkers. The first grouped set of offline activities are *find, browse, ask, purchase, and recommend*. The second grouped set of offline activities are *attend, watch, and read*. Therefore, in linkage with these two offline activities, the research findings established how online lurkers, even ones with the highest LO (ultimate lurker), can still be very active offline users. The four lurker groups can be engaged offline in the form of skincare enthusiasts/shoppers (engaging in the first group of offline engagement activities) and knowledge seekers (engaging in the second group of offline engagement activities). Online lurking behaviour, therefore, does also influence one's offline engagement behaviour.

9.8 Theoretical Contribution

The present findings have identified several limitations associated with the binary behavioural conceptualisation of lurking. These include failing to consider 1) the fluidity and multifaceted nature of lurking, 2) the comprehensiveness of online engagement activities linked to lurking, 3) the lack of combined focus of motivational and psychological influences behind lurking, 4) the influence of lurking behaviour on offline engagement behaviour, and 5) context-specific factors (e.g., demographics, social media infrastructures). The present research provides three key contributions to the lurking and online engagement literature.

Lurking orientation (LO) is the first and major contribution of this research discovered during the research analysis process. LO is a comprehensive advancement and re-conceptualisation of lurking behaviour initially observed in the qualitative stage and later confirmed in the quantitative stage. Comprehensive because of its ability to diagnose lurking from a social learning perspective through embracing both forms of active and passive participation (Bozkurt et al. 2020; Pritchard and Wollard 2020) linked to focused and unfocused learning, with consideration of influences such as motivation and personality.

LO proposes that there are different degrees and levels to lurking, known as lurking orientation, as there is no clear-cut distinction between two extremes of one being a lurker and two being a poster. The theoretical value of this continuum conceptualisation lies in its utility to identify the extent to which varied lurking behaviours exist and the extent to which varied lurker segments can be identified; in other words, LO's utility to measure and profile lurking behaviours. This finding supports the notion that lurking is heterogeneous in nature and not homogenous, as past research has conceptualised it to be (e.g., Bu and Koh 2023; Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Gong et al. 2015; Honeychurch et al. 2017). Within the lurker user group four other different forms of lurker segments exist as shown in Table 44.

Table 44: Lurker type and level of LO.

Lurker type	Level of Lurking Orientation (LO)
Ultimate lurker	High
Learning Lurker	High-to-Moderate
Sharing/Reciprocating Lurker	Moderate-to-Low
Uploading/Influencing Lurker	Low

The second significant contribution relates to the comprehensive advancement and re-conceptualisation of the term 'lurking' from a more positive perspective (i.e., social learning). Lurking in this research is defined as *users who visit an online community on a regular basis but do not necessarily perform measurable activities, such as posting, commenting, reacting (i.e., likes) or sharing online. They do however still participate through other immeasurable activities, such as learning, observing, reading, listening, and browsing, either casually or strategically.* This definition has advanced and evolved from negative past conceptualisation of the term defining lurkers as behaviourally passive, non-beneficial, social-loafers, and non-interactive members (e.g. Bu and Koh 2023; Edellman 2017). This research has deviated from these negative conceptualisations through embracing both forms of passive and active engagement behaviours and utilising the social learning perspective to study lurking.

The third contribution recognises the identification and validation of influences and outcomes of lurking behaviour or LO. Previous studies surrounding posters and lurkers in the formation of social identity and motivations for sharing knowledge in online communities have previously established that social identity, drivers, formation, and consequences may vary between the two groups (Mousavi et al. 2017). The current study further expands on the theory. Analyses obtained from the current study have proven several influences exist that significantly affect LO**.** The first influence relates to non-engagement motives, which include but is not limited to seven demotivators. These reasons are anonymity and lack of commitment (ALC), lack of passion (LOP), lack of time and value (LTV), content saturation (CS), lack of interest (LOI), lack of entertainment (LOE), and lack of community (LOC). These non-engagement motives would influence a lurker to be more oriented towards lurking. Secondly, another influence is personality and how it also directly impacts LO. Findings displayed that three significant personality traits exist that will negatively influence lurking behaviour, which are i) extraversion, ii) self-esteem, and iii) neuroticism.

9.9 Managerial Implications

The present study also provides skincare brands and online marketers with five practical insights to consider.

- **Encourage change of mindset about lurking:** viewing it as a social learning and not a free-riding behaviour (Hicks and Sinkinson 2021; Pritchard and Wollard 2020). This new and positive mindset will reveal several activities that practitioners can leverage to design and deliver online content and engage with their target customers more effectively. Managers should change their view of active lurkers in a positive way as misunderstanding lurkers can lead to negative policies in an online community towards lurkers (Nguyen et al. 2022). This research provides a starting point for more positive research surrounding lurking behaviour due to their perceived benefits, and engagement behaviour that varies based on one's LO.

- **Adoption of a broader mindset when considering lurking:** not as a binary (present/absent) (Hicks and Sinkinson 2021) but as a continuum behaviour as every online user lurks to some degree. The present study presents a valid instrument that practitioners can use to diagnose their online users' lurking orientation.

- **Targeting all lurker segments:** to provide for a more inclusive environment for all users, regardless of their lurking orientation levels. After all, lurkers constitute 90% of online community users (Garfield 2020) and their LO levels are dynamic in nature, depending on various motivational and psychological influences as witnessed in the current study's findings.

- **Recognition that lurking behaviour is a part of the overall consumer engagement process** (Martinek 2021; Fernandes and Castro 2020). Lurking behaviour may not immediately result in visible actions or measurable outcomes, but it contributes to the overall engagement process. Brands should understand that engagement and relationship building take time and persistence. This aligns with the nature of lurking behaviour, which is often characterised by prolonged observation and information gathering before active participation (Sah and Peng 2023). It involves recognising lurking as a legitimate form of participation and valuing the contributions of both active participants and lurkers in the community.

- **Recognise the importance of various motivations in ensuring members commitment.** Practically, with increasing competition amongst online communities, community managers must update their knowledge for maintaining and developing member commitment. *"Online community managers and facilitators should consider creating a better means of recognizing members' contribution and perceived freedom of expression in the community to sustain the membership"* (Yang et al. 2017, p.163).

In summary, through all the above implications, businesses and practitioners can gain enhanced customer insights, build effective community management strategies tailored to cater for all user groups (including the largest user group- the lurkers, build targeted content strategies, and gain improved analysis of social media engagement through recognising lurker groups.

9.10 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current investigation is not without limitations, and additional research is necessary to explore the interesting world of online lurking behaviours on social media. Despite the significant and insightful contributions, the current study makes through its theoretical and empirical findings, it requires further validation due to several limitations. Limitations include those imposed by the conceptual scope of the study, as well as those related to the type of data gathered, sampling, and generalizability of conclusions. To positively advance research in this newly emerging field, several recommendations are presented.

9.10.1 Theoretical direction

Theoretical direction. Although this research has adopted a multi-dimensional view to CE and considered both behavioural and cognitive aspects, it did not include any emotional aspects (Yuan and Liu 2023; Harrigan et al. 2018). This is because the research focus is to conceptualise and measure lurking behaviour online differently, challenge the conventional wisdom of ranking online users as passive versus active and to identify if there are different types of lurkers. If this research were to include the emotional aspects, it would distract the author from achieving these main research focuses, since the focus is not linked to how or what lurkers feel but rather to what lurking is and what the behaviour involves. Hence, future research should look at the emotional aspects of CE in conjunction with both behavioural and cognitive elements to complete an overall multi-dimensional approach to CE and provide for a more holistic view when studying online lurking behaviour. Likewise, building on the findings on this research, future studies can consider scale development to guide and supplement/enhance present study results.

Additionally, since the present study focuses mainly on the social learning perspective only for diagnosing online lurking behaviour, other relevant theoretical perspectives

may be available to consider. Moreover, a single perspective may not be sufficient to capture the full or comprehensive meaning of lurking; therefore, future research can consider the use of multiple perspectives in a study. By incorporating multiple other theories into research, scholars can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the motivations, preferences, and psychological processes underlying lurking behaviour. Some other perspectives that can be considered are Social Presence Theory (Lowenthal 2010), Social Identity Theory (Hogg 2016), etc.

Re-evaluating the research framework is another way to extend the current study further. The conceptual framework proposed in this research was built and generated out of literature review surrounding online consumer engagement. Since there is only a limited number of antecedents, more influences, and consequences of consumer participation in online communities may need to be investigated in future studies. There are numerous potential linkages between consumer engagement and other relational and social variables that have been revealed by conceptual research in the field (e.g. Hollebeek 2011). Engagement and social media academics should work to further validate the connections that connect consumer engagement to other constructs because empirical research trying to establish these links is still in its early stages and viewed behaviourally. This research is the first to view lurking behaviour from a non-behavioural approach and is conducted via a social-learning lens to gain a more positive outlook on the construct.

9.10.2 Sampling direction

One of the first sampling shortcomings relates to the overall scope of the current study. Although the findings provide for a newly established conceptual framework of lurking orientation, it is recognised that this is purely and entirely a United Kingdom based study, exploring consumers residing in different areas of the country. The findings therefore cannot be seen as a generalised indication of online (non)engagement behaviour across different countries and regions (e.g., Australia, United States, etc.).

Sampling size and approach represents the second sampling shortcoming of the current study. The population's characteristics and the nature of the investigation precluded the collection of a probabilistic random sample, which is an inherent issue

in research relating to online communities where studies of single communities still prevail (e.g. Sipley 2024; Rahardjo et al. 2023). The non-probabilistic study sample has implications for the generalizability of the results, even though the large sample size mitigates the danger of bias. It is also possible that bias resulted from the inability to estimate a response rate. No control was gained once the survey was published online onto Prolific to ensure that the participants were genuine consumers and browsers of skincare products online. Additionally, follow-up studies can consider a larger sample size, with more diverse demographic backgrounds, such as males versus females, and younger versus older generations. Cultural differences and their impact on lurking orientation can also be considered.

The present study has focused mainly on the UK, which is individualistic, masculine, and highly indulgent (Hofstede Insights 2023). Do online users lurk differently when considering a national culture opposite to the UK, such as Thailand, which is a more collectivistic, more feminine, and less indulgent country? In short, further studies may try to elevate these issues through methodological advances, employing even larger sample sizes, and with more diverse demographic backgrounds and cultures.

Beyond sampling, there are other strategies to improve the study's generalizability. This research focused on lurking behaviour across communities of interest on various social media platforms (i.e. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, search engines, Forums, etc.); one way to extend the current study’s findings and enhance its generalisability would be to consider specific social media platforms, groups, or forums for a more in-depth study. Different platforms offer various interactive features, which could have an impact on how customer involvement is carried out (Adjin-Tettey and Garman 2023). As social media platforms are rapidly evolving and expanding in terms of functionality, features, and marketing applications, it is expected that consumer engagement will vary accordingly and grow exponentially.

9.10.3 Contextual direction

Since the present study has focused predominantly on the UK skincare consumers on social media- future research should consider other skincare product types (i.e., luxury skincare, medicated skincare, etc.), as well as non-skincare product types, including services like travel, hospitality, and education. The main reason for this is that online users may lurk differently in other non-skincare contexts. As witnessed in the study's findings, lack of passion and interest was one of the non-engaging reasons why a lurker may decide to lurk online; studying lurking from a different product category or skincare may yield different results and different LO levels.

9.10.4 Research-design direction

Future research can consider a longitudinal design by examining the extent to which online users' lurking orientation shifts over time or a cross-cultural design by establishing the extent to which the same set of lurker segments is prevalent in different cultures or countries, as online consumer behaviour is dynamic and not static (Rishi and Tiwari 2024; Tanrikulu 2023). By doing so, we can gain a better gauge of lurkers' learning orientation, and their subsequent online and offline behaviours. The present study has mainly employed a cross-sectional design by collecting data in one temporal period from one online user group. The limitations of this cross-sectional research design include its difficulty to identify causal inference because it is *"only a snapshot and the situation may provide differing results if another timeframe had been chosen. This is called prevalence-incidence bias"*, which is also known as Neyman bias (Levin 2006, p.25). Therefore, to tackle said causalities more explicitly, a longitudinal study enables researchers to fully understand the causal relationships between online lurking behaviour, its antecedents, and outcomes.

Additionally, this research has utilised Prolific for participant recruitment when it comes to the online survey participants. Although it can be particularly beneficial in terms of accessing a diverse and reliable pool of participants, there are some limitations that researchers should consider. First links to participants engagement levels- Since Prolific participants are compensated, there can be variability in engagement levels, with some participants focusing on completion speed rather than thoughtful responses. Although Prolific has quality control measures, the focus on

task completion can sometimes lead to higher attrition rates or less engagement in tasks that require prolonged attention (Palan and Schitter 2018). Second links to participant experience and response validity. Since many Prolific users participate in multiple studies, sometimes leading to "professional participant" bias, where individuals might respond based on their experience rather than genuine reactions to the study's content. This can reduce the validity of responses, particularly if participants develop expectations about study types or outcomes (Stanton et al. 2022). Future researchers can consider alternative platforms to Prolific for recruiting research participants such as CloudResearch, as research has shown its ability to also provide high quality data similar to that of Prolific, at low costs, and high response rates (Douglas et al. 2023).

9.11 Chapter Summary

This research makes significant contributions to the fields of online engagement and lurking behaviour in terms of methodology, theory, and practical insights. It introduces the concept of Lurking Orientation (LO), suggesting that lurking exists on a continuum rather than as a binary distinction. Four distinct lurker segments are identified, which are ultimate lurker, sharing/reciprocating lurker, learning lurker, and uploading/influencing lurker, each engaging in various online activities (i.e., searching, browsing, visiting sites/groups, and reading, etc.) at different LO levels.

Despite lurking's negative connotations, all lurker groups actively participate in various forms of online engagement activities, demonstrating their productivity within online communities. LO is influenced by various motivational factors, such as fear, confidence, preferences, and personality traits like extraversion, self-esteem, and neuroticism. Additionally, this research also establishes that LO can spill over into offline engagement behaviours (i.e., finding, reading, purchasing, recommending products, watching shows, attending events, etc.).

In summary, this research advances understanding of lurking as a continuum behaviour, offers a typology of lurkers, and emphasises the need to view lurking more positively from a social learning perspective. In addition to contributing, the current study advances the growing and important research areas of online consumer engagement on social media and lurking behaviour.

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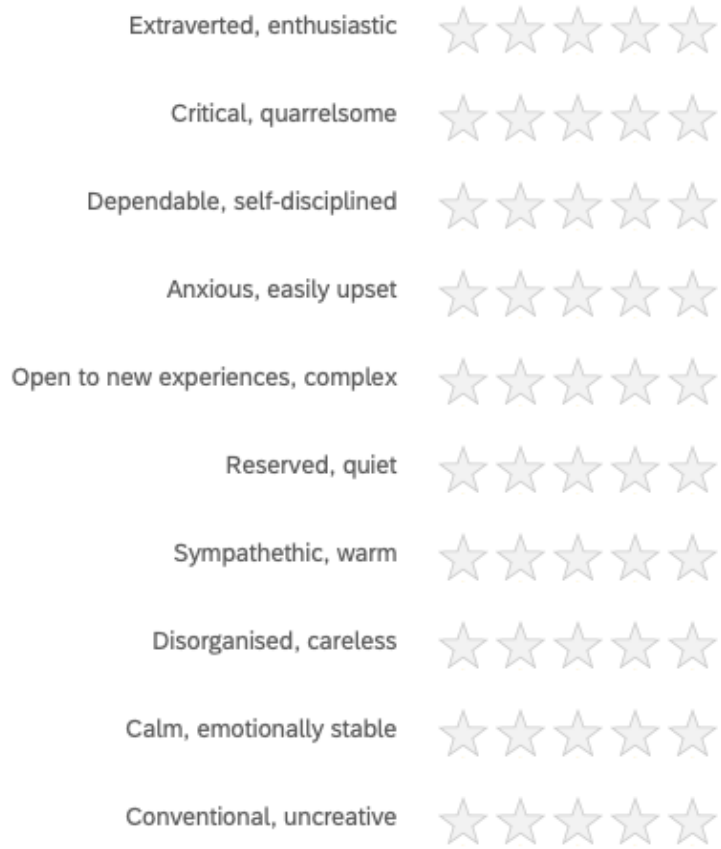
Appendices

Appendix A: Personality questionnaire

Ten personality traits supplied within personality questionnaire



Participants can score themselves between 1 to 5 stars for the ten personality traits. Traits scoring 3 or more stars are included for analysis.

Appendix B: Big Five Inventory (BFI)

The Big Five Inventory–2 (BFI-2)

Here are a number of characteristics that may or may not apply to you. For example, do you agree that you are someone who *likes to spend time with others?* Please write a number next to each statement to indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with that statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neutral; no opinion	Agree a little	Agree strongly

I am someone who...

1. ___ Is outgoing, sociable.
2. ___ Is compassionate, has a soft heart.
3. ___ Tends to be disorganized.
4. ___ Is relaxed, handles stress well.
5. ___ Has few artistic interests.
6. ___ Has an assertive personality.
7. ___ Is respectful, treats others with respect.
8. ___ Tends to be lazy.
9. ___ Stays optimistic after experiencing a setback.
10. ___ Is curious about many different things.
11. ___ Rarely feels excited or eager.
12. ___ Tends to find fault with others.
13. ___ Is dependable, steady.
14. ___ Is moody, has up and down mood swings.
15. ___ Is inventive, finds clever ways to do things.
16. ___ Tends to be quiet.
17. ___ Feels little sympathy for others.
18. ___ Is systematic, likes to keep things in order.
19. ___ Can be tense.
20. ___ Is fascinated by art, music, or literature.
21. ___ Is dominant, acts as a leader.
22. ___ Starts arguments with others.
23. ___ Has difficulty getting started on tasks.
24. ___ Feels secure, comfortable with self.
25. ___ Avoids intellectual, philosophical discussions.
26. ___ Is less active than other people.
27. ___ Has a forgiving nature.
28. ___ Can be somewhat careless.
29. ___ Is emotionally stable, not easily upset.
30. ___ Has little creativity.
31. ___ Is sometimes shy, introverted.
32. ___ Is helpful and unselfish with others.
33. ___ Keeps things neat and tidy.
34. ___ Worries a lot.
35. ___ Values art and beauty.
36. ___ Finds it hard to influence people.
37. ___ Is sometimes rude to others.
38. ___ Is efficient, gets things done.
39. ___ Often feels sad.
40. ___ Is complex, a deep thinker.
41. ___ Is full of energy.
42. ___ Is suspicious of others' intentions.
43. ___ Is reliable, can always be counted on.
44. ___ Keeps their emotions under control.
45. ___ Has difficulty imagining things.
46. ___ Is talkative.
47. ___ Can be cold and uncaring.
48. ___ Leaves a mess, doesn't clean up.
49. ___ Rarely feels anxious or afraid.
50. ___ Thinks poetry and plays are boring.
51. ___ Prefers to have others take charge.
52. ___ Is polite, courteous to others.
53. ___ Is persistent, works until the task is finished.
54. ___ Tends to feel depressed, blue.
55. ___ Has little interest in abstract ideas.
56. ___ Shows a lot of enthusiasm.
57. ___ Assumes the best about people.
58. ___ Sometimes behaves irresponsibly.
59. ___ Is temperamental, gets emotional easily.
60. ___ Is original, comes up with new ideas.

Scoring key

Item numbers for the BFI-2 domain and facet scales are listed below. Reverse-keyed items are denoted by "R."

Domain Scales

Extraversion: 1, 6, 11R, 16R, 21, 26R, 31R, 36R, 41, 46, 51R, 56
Agreeableness: 2, 7, 12R, 17R, 22R, 27, 32, 37R, 42R, 47R, 52, 57
Conscientiousness: 3R, 8R, 13, 18, 23R, 28R, 33, 38, 43, 48R, 53, 58R
Negative Emotionality: 4R, 9R, 14, 19, 24R, 29R, 34, 39, 44R, 49R, 54, 59
Open-Mindedness: 5R, 10, 15, 20, 25R, 30R, 35, 40, 45R, 50R, 55R, 60

Facet Scales
Sociability: 1, 16R, 31R, 46
Assertiveness: 6, 21, 36R, 51R
Energy Level: 11R, 26R, 41, 56
Compassion: 2, 17R, 32, 47R
Respectfulness: 7, 22R, 37R, 52
Trust: 12R, 27, 42R, 57
Organisation: 3R, 18, 33, 48R
Productiveness: 8R, 23R, 38, 53
Responsibility: 13, 28R, 43, 58R
Anxiety: 4R, 19, 34, 49R
Depression: 9R, 24R, 39, 54
Emotional Volatility: 14, 29R, 44R, 59
Intellectual Curiosity: 10, 25R, 40, 55R
Aesthetic Sensitivity: 5R, 20, 35, 50R
Creative Imagination: 15, 30R, 45R, 60

Source: Soto, C. J., and John, O. P., 2017. The next Big Five Inventory (BFI-2): Developing and accessing a hierarchical model with 15 facets to enhance bandwidth, fidelity, and predictive power. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 113*, 117-143.

Appendix C: Brief version of BFI (BFI-10)

Instruction: How well do the following statements describe your personality?

I see myself as someone who ...	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly
... is reserved	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... is generally trusting	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... tends to be lazy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... is relaxed, handles stress well	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... has few artistic interests	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... is outgoing, sociable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... tends to find fault with others	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... does a thorough job	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... gets nervous easily	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
... has an active imagination	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Scoring the BFI-10 scales (R = item is reverse-scored):
Extraversion: 1R, 5
Agreeableness: 2, 7R
Conscientiousness: 3R, 8
Neuroticism: 4R, 9
Openness to Experience:5R, 10

Source: Rammstedt, B., and John, O. P., 2007. Measuring personality in one minute or less: A 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory in English and German. *Journal of research in Personality, 41(1)*, 203-212.

Appendix D: Research Ethics Checklist (Stage1 Data Collection - Interviews)

Research Ethics Checklist

About Your Checklist	
Ethics ID	31551
Date Created	05/03/2020 10:52:16
Status	Approved
Date Approved	05/05/2020 09:47:34
Date Submitted	15/04/2020 16:02:15
Risk	High

Researcher Details	
Name	Reem Albuhameed
Faculty	BU Business School
Status	Postgraduate Research (MRes, MPhil, PhD, DProf, EngD, EdD)
Course	Postgraduate Research - BUBS
Have you received funding to support this research project?	No

Project Details	
Title	Exploring the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of lurkers on social media: Stage 1 data collection
Start Date of Project	05/03/2020
End Date of Project	31/12/2020
Proposed Start Date of Data Collection	22/04/2020
Original Supervisor	Juliet Memery
Approver	Research Ethics Panel

Summary - no more than 600 words (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)
This application is intended primarily for the qualitative data collection (stage 1) of the above research title. When it comes to devising digital marketing and engagement strategies, active social media users or posters have always been a focal point. This may be why marketers are struggling to answer what social media engagement tactics are the most effective and failing to know how to engage with their audience effectively, especially those that are less active in posting. There is a diverse range of audience online who display a variety of behaviour so the engagement behaviour is complex and not limited to just active posters. One of which are Lurkers who make up the majority of online community users than any other user groups (posters and contributors) and according to the 90-9-1 rule, 90% of these lurkers do not actively participate in online discussions. Brands rely on consumer's active postings to promote brand-consumer interaction will be impacted by the high percentage of lurkers' because of their non-posting behaviour. There is therefore wide interest to understand how lurkers behave and what would make them more active users/posters. Focusing primarily on the skincare sector, this research aims to explore a new concept called "lurking orientation" in terms of its utility to profile lurkers versus posters, and the drivers and outcomes associated this orientation. Methodologically, this research will investigate skincare brands on social media groups. Having secured permissions from the group's administrators, a post will be posted on skincare groups inviting participants to participate in the interviewing process, targeting 16 self-selected and consented participants of varying age groups (over 18 years old). These participants must be users of skincare brands and browse through skincare products online. All interviews will conducted online, audio recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed and analysed for reporting. Following the interviews, the participants will be given a supplementary short personality test to answer. This research is timely and unique because it seeks to 1) conceptualise lurking as a behaviour that exists on an orientation or continuum (high vs low) as opposed to that simply arises on binary categories (yes vs no), 2) explore whether a typology of lurkers can be developed, 3) establish whether this behavioural orientation is influenced by consumers' personalities and motivations, and 4) identify the effects of this behavioural orientation on subsequent online and offline behaviours. The knowledge provided these objectives will be informative to academics and business practitioners alike.

Filter Question: Does your study involve Human Participants?

Participants	
Describe the number of participants and specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used	
It is intended to recruit 16 participants for interviews.All participants, males and females residing in the UK, must be over 18 years old. These participants must also be consumers of skincare brands, use skincare products, and look at skincare products online. They will only be interviewed if they give consent to do so.	
Do your participants include minors (under 16)?	No
Are your participants considered adults who are competent to give consent but considered vulnerable?	No
Is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check required for the research activity?	No

Recruitment	
Please provide details on intended recruitment methods, include copies of any advertisements.	
An invitation to participate will be posted on 5 skincare related forums/groups on social media. This participation will be self selection or volunteering nature where interested participants are invited to email me and I will then reply with a copy of the participant information sheet and agreement for their perusal. A follow-up email will be sent to the interested participants to confirm their willingness to partake in the interview and also to return a copy of the signed consent form. The post I am intending to post on the group: Hi! I am a PhD student from Bournemouth University (UK) and I am looking for 16 people (must be over 18 years old) residing in the UK to get involved in my research project. My research is about skincare products and brand engagement on social media. If you are interested in being interviewed and chatting all things skincare and social media, please email me on s5086411@bournemouth.ac.uk or private message me on facebook so I can send you more information.	
Do you need a Gatekeeper to access your participants?	Yes
Please provide details, including their roles and any relationship between Gatekeepers and participant(s) (e.g. nursing home manager and residents)	

Data Collection Activity	
Will the research involve questionnaire/online survey? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the questionnaire/survey or sample of questions.	No
Will the research involve interviews? If Yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the interview questions or sample of questions	Yes
Please provide details e.g. where will the interviews take place. Will you be conducting the interviews or someone else?	
Given the UK is currently in lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic. All interviews will be be conducted by myself and done online on a chosen convenient application (e.g. Skype, FaceTime, Zoom, etc.). This online interviewing approach is more convenient for both the interviewer and interviewee but it is also safer for both and complies with the government guidelines about social distancing and essential travel only.	
Will the research involve a focus group? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the focus group questions or sample of questions.	No
Will the research involve the collection of audio materials?	Yes
Will your research involve the collection of photographic materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of video materials/film?	No
Will any audio recordings (or non-anonymised transcript), photographs, video recordings or film be used in any outputs or otherwise made publicly available?	No
Will the study involve discussions of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	No
Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) be administered to the participants?	No
Will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potential harmful procedures of any kind?	No

Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants or researchers (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	No
Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No

The administrators (who manage the group, group's members, and group's posts) of all the four groups have already granted me access to their groups. The admins also allowed me to post an open invitation for members to participate in my project after I have received the favourable opinion of my ethics form. This information will also included in the open invitation and the post posted on the group will also mention that the participants will remain anonymous and any information that identifies them will not be disclosed in my project. The five groups are titled: 1. Natural Beauty UK-Natural, Cruelty Free, Vegan Skincare and Cosmetics2. Makeup and Beauty for Beginners3.Beauty Bloggers' Squad4. Penn Smith Skincare Community5. Skincare - Cosmetics buy, sell and swap! UK

Consent

Describe the process that you will be using to obtain valid consent for participation in the research activities. If consent is not to be obtained explain why.

Prior to the interview, all participants will be emailed a copy of the participant information sheet and consent form for their perusal. A follow-up email will be sent to interested participants to confirm their willingness to partake in the project and also to return a copy of the signed consent form.

Do your participants include adults who lack/may lack capacity to give consent (at any point in the study)?	No
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent?	No

Participant Withdrawal

At what point and how will it be possible for participants to exercise their rights to withdraw from the study?

Participants will be able to withdraw from the study up at any stage of the interviewing process, up to the point that their data has been included in the analysis. All participants will be made aware of this in the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Agreement Form.

If a participant withdraws from the study, what will be done with their data?

Data that has not been included in the data analysis will be deleted from the database as explained in the Participant Information Sheet.

Participant Compensation

Will participants receive financial compensation (or course credits) for their participation?	No
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No

Research Data	
Will identifiable personal information be collected, i.e. at an individualised level in a form that identifies or could enable identification of the participant?	Yes
Please give details of the types of information to be collected, e.g. personal characteristics, education, work role, opinions or experiences	
E-mails are going to be collected as a means of contacting the participant, sending and receiving the required information as well as any signed and completed forms (these include the participant information sheet and participant agreement form).Audio clips that will be recorded from interviews will also be collected.	
Will the personal data collected include any special category data, or any information about actual or alleged criminal activity or criminal convictions which are not already in the public domain?	No
Will the information be anonymised/de-identified at any stage during the study?	Yes
Will research outputs include any identifiable personal information i.e. data at an individualised level in a form which identifies or could enable identification of the individual?	No

Storage, Access and Disposal of Research Data	
During the study, what data relating to the participants will be stored and where?	All the data collect will be stored electronically on the BU password protected secure network where held electronically. The data will also be kept separate from each other. Email addresses will be stored separate from the audio recordings which again is stored separate from the demographic data collected from interviews.
How long will the data relating to participants be stored?	The data will be stored for as long as necessary and most likely until the end of the project (estimated to be completed by July 2022).
During the study, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	Only the project team will be allowed access to the data. Data will also not be shared with third parties.
After the study has finished, what data relating to participants will be stored and where? Please indicate whether data will be retained in identifiable form.	Demographic data collected may be used in anonymous form to support future research projects and will be stored on the BU's online Research Data Repository and access to it in this form will not be restricted.
After the study has finished, how long will data relating to participants be stored?	After the study has finished upon successful completion of the project's viva-voce, all identifiable data (e-mails and audio recordings) will be securely destroyed as soon as possible.
After the study has finished, who will have access to the data relating to participants?	The project team will have access to any remaining anonymised data as per usual after the study has finished. All other identifiable data will be destroyed after the project's completion.
Will any identifiable participant data be transferred outside of the European Economic Area (EEA)?	No

How and when will the data relating to participants be deleted/destroyed?	The data will be securely destroyed after the project is completed with consultation from BU's IT services.
Once your project completes, will any anonymised research data be stored on BU's Online Research Data Repository "BORDaR"?	Yes

Dissemination Plans	
How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study?	
Other Publication,Other	
If Other, please provide details.	
Academic papers and outputs	
Will you inform participants of the results?	Yes
If Yes or No, please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so	
The participants would have already been informed in the Participant Information Sheet and Participant Agreement Form that the results may be used in academic papers and outputs and the thesis would later be available in the BU library.	

Final Review	
Are there any other ethical considerations relating to your project which have not been covered above?	No

Risk Assessment	
Have you undertaken an appropriate Risk Assessment?	Yes

Attached documents
personality test.docx - attached on 13/04/2020 23:00:11
interview sample questions.docx - attached on 13/04/2020 23:05:56
Participant Agreement Form.docx - attached on 14/04/2020 13:36:04
Participant Information Sheet Template STAFF_PGR (Published).docx - attached on 15/04/2020 16:02:09
Personality_Test-4.docx - attached on 04/01/2021 20:54:04

Approved Amendments	
Message	Notification of Amendment:To run a pilot study with 4 additional participants before the start of the main study. This is for practice purposes and also, to help critique the interview questions. If the data is useful or of good quality it will be included in the main study, which will be made clear to Participants. The participants will be chosen through personal contacts.
Date Submitted	13/05/2020 19:54
Comment	
Date Approved	21/05/2020 09:27
Approved By	Sarah Bell

Approved Amendments	
Message	Re-phrased the question for clarity. 'offline' or 'online' had not been explained, so these terms have been added. An additional question (no 2) has been added to the personality test for clarification purposes.
Date Submitted	04/01/2021 20:54
Comment	Reviewed and approved by Chairs Action (Prof J Parker, Chair SSH REP)

Date Approved	07/01/2021 10:14
Approved By	Sarah Bell

Appendix E: Research Ethics Checklist (Stage 2 Data Collection - Online Survey)

Research Ethics Checklist

About Your Checklist	
Ethics ID	38050
Date Created	23/04/2021 21:53:11
Status	Approved
Date Approved	10/06/2021 13:00:47
Date Submitted	28/04/2021 02:25:05
Risk	Low

Researcher Details	
Name	Reem Albuhameed
Faculty	BU Business School
Status	Postgraduate Research (MRes, MPhil, PhD, DProf, EngD, EdD)
Course	Postgraduate Research - BUBS
Have you received funding to support this research project?	No

Project Details	
Title	Exploring the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of lurkers on social media: Stage 2 data collection
Start Date of Project	16/04/2018
End Date of Project	16/02/2023
Proposed Start Date of Data Collection	03/05/2021
Original Supervisor	Juliet Memery
Approver	Philip Ryland

Summary - no more than 600 words (including detail on background methodology, sample, outcomes, etc.)

This application is intended primarily for the quantitative data collection (stage 2) of the above research title. When it comes to devising digital marketing and engagement strategies, active social media users or posters have always been a focal point. This may be why marketers are struggling to answer what social media engagement tactics are the most effective and failing to know how to engage with their audience effectively, especially those that are less active in posting. There is a diverse range of audience online who display a variety of behaviour so the engagement behaviour is complex and not limited to just active posters. One of which are Lurkers who make up the majority of online community users than any other user groups (posters and contributors) and according to the 90-9-1 rule, 90% of these lurkers do not actively participate in online discussions. Brands rely on consumer's active postings to promote brand-consumer interaction will be impacted by the high percentage of lurkers' because of their non-posting behaviour. There is therefore wide interest to understand how lurkers behave and what would make them more active users/posters.

This research is timely and unique because it seeks to 1) conceptualise lurking as a behaviour that exists on an orientation or continuum

(high vs low) as opposed to that simply arises on binary categories (yes vs no), 2) explore whether a typology of lurkers can be developed, 3) establish whether this behavioural orientation is influenced by consumers' personalities and motivations, and 4) identify the effects of this behavioural orientation on subsequent online and offline behaviours. The knowledge provided these objectives will be informative to academics and business practitioners alike.

A qualitative stage consisting of interviews with 19 research participants has already been completed as the first part of my PhD study. This second stage, is an online survey will be answered by 600 participants to help supplement and achieve the objectives mentioned earlier. Participants are required to be users of skincare products and/or browse through skincare products online. This project aims to be completed by July 2022.

Filter Question: Does your study involve Human Participants?

Participants	
Describe the number of participants and specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used	
This survey will be answered by approximately 600 participants.All participants residing in the UK, must be aged between 18-74 years old. These participants must also be consumers of skincare brands, use skincare products, and look at skincare products online.	
Do your participants include minors (under 16)?	No
Are your participants considered adults who are competent to give consent but considered vulnerable?	No
Is a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check required for the research activity?	No

Recruitment	
Please provide details on intended recruitment methods, include copies of any advertisements.	
Prolific (a third party application) will be used to recruit 600 online participants for the survey. Prolific will filter and scan participants based on the criteria specified or target audience as well as the participants' interests. These eligible participants will be informed of the study through a participant information sheet prior to their participation. Participation is completely voluntary and it is completely up to the participant if they wish to participate (their consent will be asked at the start of the survey).	
Do you need a Gatekeeper to access your participants?	No

Data Collection Activity	
Will the research involve questionnaire/online survey? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the questionnaire/survey or sample of questions.	Yes
How do you intend to distribute the questionnaire?	
online	
If online, do you intend to use a survey company to host and collect responses?	Yes
If yes, please provide details of survey company.	
Prolific which is an online participant recruitment website. Prolific will launch my study instantly to participants once I had signed up to the website and provided them with my survey link and target audience.	
Will the research involve interviews? If Yes, don’t forget to attach a copy of the interview questions or sample of questions	No
Will the research involve a focus group? If yes, don't forget to attach a copy of the focus group questions or sample of questions.	No

Will the research involve the collection of audio materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of photographic materials?	No
Will your research involve the collection of video materials/film?	No
Will the study involve discussions of sensitive topics (e.g. sexual activity, drug use, criminal activity)?	No
Will any drugs, placebos or other substances (e.g. food substances, vitamins) be administered to the participants?	No
Will the study involve invasive, intrusive or potential harmful procedures of any kind?	No
Could your research induce psychological stress or anxiety, cause harm or have negative consequences for the participants or researchers (beyond the risks encountered in normal life)?	No
Will your research involve prolonged or repetitive testing?	No

Consent
Describe the process that you will be using to obtain valid consent for participation in the research activities. If consent is not to be obtained explain why.
Participation in the survey is voluntary and participants will be asked at the start of the survey to provide electronic consent to participate in the survey (they will need to tick an agreement section that they want to participate). Only if they have provided consent and checked the necessary boxes can they take part in the research and proceed on to the next part of the survey and provide responses. Prior to entering the survey, participants will be informed of the study through a participation information sheet to make sure they understand what the study is about, why they had been selected, what is expected, and if they are happy to take part.

Do your participants include adults who lack/may lack capacity to give consent (at any point in the study)?	No
Will it be necessary for participants to take part in your study without their knowledge and consent?	No

Participant Withdrawal
At what point and how will it be possible for participants to exercise their rights to withdraw from the study?
Participants can withdraw from participation at any time and without giving a reason, simply by closing the browser page. All participants will be made aware of this in the Participant Information Sheet and are informed about how they can withdraw in both the participation information sheet and at the start of the questionnaire.
If a participant withdraws from the study, what will be done with their data?
Data that has not been included in the data analysis will be deleted from the database. Once the survey responses had been completed and submitted, we are unable to remove any anonymised responses from the study.

Participant Compensation	
Will participants receive financial compensation (or course credits) for their participation?	Yes
Please provide details	
As the survey is hosted by Prolific and uses their panel, respondents will receive a small amount of compensation from Prolific for completing the survey. This will come out of the overall fee that I will pay to Prolific.	
Will financial or other inducements (other than reasonable expenses) be offered to participants?	No
If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?	

Prolific will not pay participants who do not successfully complete the survey. If participants do not provide consent at the start of the survey to take part in the research, they will automatically be directly to the end of survey or they can simply close their browser- these participants will not get paid.

Research Data	
Will identifiable personal information be collected, i.e. at an individualised level in a form that identifies or could enable identification of the participant?	No
Will research outputs include any identifiable personal information i.e. data at an individualised level in a form which identifies or could enable identification of the individual?	No

Storage, Access and Disposal of Research Data	
Where will your research data be stored and who will have access during and after the study has finished.	
All the data collect will be stored electronically on the BU password protected secure network where held electronically. Other than myself and my supervisors who have access to the research data, prolific will hold all of the survey responses.	
Once your project completes, will any anonymised research data be stored on BU's Online Research Data Repository "BORDaR"?	Yes

Dissemination Plans	
How do you intend to report and disseminate the results of the study?	
Other Publication,Other	
If Other, please provide details.	
Research paper	
Will you inform participants of the results?	No

If Yes or No, please give details of how you will inform participants or justify if not doing so
The participants would have already been informed in the Participant Information Sheet that their responses will be used for research study/project and associated activities such as a research audit.

Final Review	
Are there any other ethical considerations relating to your project which have not been covered above?	No

Risk Assessment	
Have you undertaken an appropriate Risk Assessment?	Yes

Attached documents
Questionnairesample pdf.pdf - attached on 24/04/2021 01:33:47
PIS_QUESTIONNAIRE.docx - attached on 24/04/2021 01:34:02

Appendix F: Participant Information Sheet (PIS)

Bournemouth University

Participant Information Sheet

The title of the research project

Exploring the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of lurkers on social media

Invitation to take part

I am Reem, a PhD researcher from Bournemouth University. You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the project?

Marketers are struggling to answer what social media engagement tactics are the most effective and failing to know how to engage with their audience effectively. This may be because there is a diverse range of audience online who display a variety of behaviour. These audience include: posters are defined as those who actively consume, participate and create content, and Lurkers are those who observe content without actively participating. According to research, Lurkers make up the majority of online community users making them equally and highly as important as posters. Brands who rely on consumer's contribution for their sustainability will be impacted by lurkers high non-participation rates and are seeking ways to enhance participation with their brand. There is therefore wide interest to understand how lurkers behave and what would make them more active users/posters- this project aims to answer this.

Focusing primarily on the skincare sector, this research aims to explore a new concept called "lurking orientation" in order to profile lurkers versus posters, including the drivers and outcomes related to this orientation. This research will investigate skincare brands on social media groups. Having secured permissions from the group's administrators, a post will be posted on skincare groups inviting participants to participate in the interviewing process,

targeting 20 self-selected and consented participants of varying age groups (over 18 years old). These participants must be users of skincare brands and browse through skincare products online. All interviews will be conducted online, audio recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed and analysed for reporting. This project aims to be completed before July 2022.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in an online interview session on video skype/facetime because you reside in the UK and use skincare products and/or look at skincare products online. You have also shown interest in participating in my project by contacting me, the researcher, in response to my post posted on the online skincare group. You are also over 18 years old and fall under any of these four age groups: Generation Z (18-25), Y (26-40 years old), X (41-55 years old), and Baby Boomers (56-74 years old).

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part, it is entirely voluntary. Refusal to agree to participate will involve no penalty or loss to you. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a participant agreement form. We want you to understand what participation involves, before you make a decision on whether to participate.

If you or any family member have an on-going relationship with BU or the research team, e.g. as a member of staff, as student or other service user, your decision on whether to take part (or continue to take part) will not affect this relationship in any way. Similarly, your relationship with any of the skincare community members or the brand will also not be affected in any way.

Can I change my mind about taking part?

Yes, you can stop participating in the project's activities at any time and without giving a reason.

If I change my mind, what happens to my information?

After you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any further information from or about you.

As regards to information we have already collected before this point, your rights to access, change or move that information are limited. This is because we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. Further explanation about this is in the Personal Information section below. However, we can withdraw up to the point that your data has been included in the analysis if you choose to withdraw during the study.

Any identifiable data which identifies you will not be included in the research outputs.

What would taking part involve?

You will be asked to answer a series of questions in an individual interview session regarding your motivations (personality, skincare brands and products), as well as your online and offline activity and engagement around the brand. The interview will last no longer than an hour and can be done online through your preferred application (video Skype/FaceTime/Zoom/etc.). At the end of the interview, you will be given a short personality test to answer in your spare time which is supplementary to the interview and completely optional. The personality test will contain a few statements regarding different personality traits and characteristics that may or may not apply to you. You just have to indicate whether you agree or disagree with that statement.

What are the advantages and possible disadvantages or risks of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits to you participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will enable academics and practitioners to engage with and understand their customers better and provide them with benefits and value. You can also receive a summary of the findings of this research if you request for it from the researcher. There are no anticipated harms or risks to you in this project.

What type of information will be sought from me and why is the collection of this information relevant for achieving the research project's objectives?

Information regarding usage of skincare brands and your online activity which includes how often you engage and post on the forums, how often you read posts, how often you refer a friend to the brand or product, as well as exploring your motivations and personality for these activities will be sought from you. Your email address will be retained only for a specific purpose and in order to contact you when necessary. These email addresses will be kept only for as long as the project duration and be held separately from the research data and then securely destroyed. Other than this, you will not be asked for identifiable data that will enable you to be identified but we will ask for your age and gender for analysis purposes. However, you have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) if you feel

uncomfortable. The answers to these questions will be transcribed and analysed to spot out trends, patterns, and behaviours to achieve the research project's objectives.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

The interview will be audio recorded. The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will only be used for examination, analysis and the transcription of the recording(s) for illustration in conference presentations and lectures. These recordings will be kept until the end of the project and will be held separately from the interview data. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside of the project team will be allowed access to the original recordings.

How will my information be managed?

Bournemouth University (BU) is the organisation with overall responsibility for this study and the Data Controller of your personal information, which means that we are responsible for looking after your information and using it appropriately. Research is a task that we perform in the public interest, as part of our core function as a university.

Undertaking this research study involves collecting and/or generating information about you. We manage research data strictly in accordance with:

- Ethical requirements; and
- Current data protection laws. These control use of information about identifiable individuals, but do not apply to anonymous research data: "anonymous" means that we have either removed or not collected any pieces of data or links to other data which identify a specific person as the subject or source of a research result.

BU's Research Participant Privacy Notice sets out more information about how we fulfil our responsibilities as a data controller and about your rights as an individual under the data protection legislation. We ask you to read this Notice so that you can fully understand the basis on which we will process your personal information.

Research data will be used only for the purposes of the study or related uses identified in the Privacy Notice or this Information Sheet. To safeguard your rights in relation to your personal information, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible and control access to that data as described below.

Publication

You will not be able to be identified in any external reports or publications about the research without your specific consent. Otherwise your information will only be included in these materials in an anonymous form, i.e. you will not be identifiable.

Research results will be published in my final PhD thesis when I graduate by the end of the year 2022 and the thesis will most likely be accessible from the library of Bournemouth University.

Security and access controls
BU will hold the information we collect about you in hard copy in a secure location and on a BU password protected secure network where held electronically.

Personal information which has not been anonymised will be accessed and used only by appropriate, authorised individuals and when this is necessary for the purposes of the research or another purpose identified in the Privacy Notice. This may include giving access to BU staff or others responsible for monitoring and/or audit of the study, who need to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations.

Sharing your personal information with third parties
We will not share your personal information with third parties.

Further use of your information
The information collected about you may be used in an anonymous form to support other research projects in the future and access to it in this form will not be restricted. It will not be possible for you to be identified from this data. To enable this use, anonymised data will be added to BU's online Research Data Repository: this is a central location where data is stored, which is accessible to the public.

Keeping your information if you withdraw from the study
If you withdraw from active participation in the study we will destroy any data collected from you up until the point where it has been anonymised.
You can find out more about your rights in relation to your data and how to raise queries or complaints in our Privacy Notice.

Retention of research data

Project governance documentation, including copies of signed **participant agreements**: we keep this documentation for a long period after completion of the research, so that we have records of how we conducted the research and who took part. The only personal information in this documentation will be your name and signature, and we will not be able to link this to any anonymised research results.

Research results:

As described above, during the course of the study we will anonymise the information we have collected about you as an individual. This means that we will not hold your personal information in identifiable form after we have completed the research activities.

You can find more specific information about retention periods for personal information in our Privacy Notice.

We keep anonymised research data indefinitely, so that it can be used for other research as described above.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact any of the research team members below:

Reem Albuhameed, ralbuhameed@bournemouth.ac.uk
Juliet Memery, jmemery@bournemouth.ac.uk
Elvira Bolat, ebolat@bournemouth.ac.uk
Jason Sit, jason.sit@port.ac.uk

In case of complaints

Any concerns about the study should be directed to any of the research team members above. If your concerns have not been answered by the research team, you should contact Professor Mike Silk, Deputy Dean Research and Professional Practice, Faculty of Management, Bournemouth University by email to researchgovernance@bournemouth.ac.uk.

Finally,

If you decide to take part, you will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed participant agreement form to keep.

Thank you for considering taking part in this research project.

Appendix G: Participant Agreement Form (PAF)

Bournemouth University

Participant Agreement Form

Full title of project: Exploring the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of lurkers on social media

Name, position and contact details of researcher: Reem Albuhameed, PhD researcher, ralbuhameed@bournemouth.ac.uk

Name, position and contact details of supervisors:

Juliet Memery, Professor In Marketing, jmemery@bournemouth.ac.uk

Elvira Bolat, Principal Academic in Marketing, ebolat@bournemouth.ac.uk

Jason Sit, Senior Lecturer in Marketing, Jason.sit@port.ac.uk

To be completed prior to data collection activity

Section A: Agreement to participate in the study

You should only agree to participate in the study if you agree with all of the statements in this table and accept that participating will involve the listed activities.

I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet (PISInterviews01) and have been given access to the BU Research Participant Privacy Notice which sets out how we collect and use personal information (https://www1.bournemouth.ac.uk/about/governance/access-information/data-protection-privacy).	
I have had an opportunity to ask questions.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can stop participating in research activities at any time without giving a reason and I am free to decline to answer any particular question(s).	
I understand that taking part in the research will include the following activity/activities as part of the research:	
• being audio recorded during the project	
• my words will be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs without using my real name	
I understand that, if I withdraw from the study, I will also be able to withdraw my data from further use in the study **except** where my data has been anonymised (as I cannot be identified) or it will be harmful to the project to have my data removed.	
I understand that my data may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.	
I understand that my data may be used in an anonymised form by the research team to support other research projects in the future, including future publications, reports or presentations.	
	Initial box to agree

I consent to take part in the project on the basis set out above (Section A)	

	I confirm my agreement to take part in the project on the basis set out above.			
Name of participant (BLOCK CAPITALS)		Date (dd/mm/yyyy)		Signature
Name of researcher (BLOCK CAPITALS)		Date (dd/mm/yyyy)		Signature

Once a Participant has signed, **please sign 1 copy** and take 2 photocopies:

- Original kept in the local investigator's file
- 1 copy to be kept by the participant (including a copy of PI Sheet)

Appendix H: Interview guide

Reference of outline of interview guide for semi-structured interviews.

Section	Purpose
Introduction	Introduce yourself, establish the ground rules for the discussion (no interruptions, respect each other), reiterate privacy and confidentiality, allow questions.
Main topics • Opening questions	Simple, straightforward, non-sensitive question to get participants talking and overcome awkwardness and aid them adjust to the "narrative" (vs. survey) style of inquiry.
• Main questions	Introduce the major topics of the research project. Often more controversial topics come later so as not to induce early participant discomfort.
• Follow-up questions/prompts	Moves conversation from the main question to a deeper level, asking for more detail, usually within pre-planned areas of inquiry.
Probes	Conversational tools that invite further discussion or elaboration. Probes may steer participants to specific areas, ask for more depth or context, or clarify earlier statements.
Summary	Closing statement summarising some of the key points and allowing an opportunity for participants to clarify these key points or add additional pertinent data. Summaries can occur at the end of brief interviews or after each major topic
Debrief	Research staff records impressions of sessions, clarifies ambiguous data, and records data not captured in notes/recordings.

Table adapted from Ranney et al. (2015, p. 1104).

Interview Start

Introductory to ease the participant into the interview process. Let the interviewee know when you have started recording.

1. Can you confirm which age generation you fall under? Generation Z (18-25), Y (26-40 years old), X (41-55 years old), or Baby Boomers (56-74 years old)?

Background questions:

2. What device do you often use to go online? Smartphones/ laptops/tablets?
3. Are you currently a member/follower of the skincare community? What platforms?
    a. If not, why not?
    b. Have you previously been involved in the skincare community?
        i. What are your reasons for leaving the online community?

Product-related questions:

4. How long have you been using skincare products?
5. What are your favourite skincare products?
    a. How did you come about this product? Where do you get information?
    b. Do you often purchase this product? Why?
    c. Do you research about the product first or do you purchase the product first then research about it?
    d. What do you research about?
    e. Do you research this online?
6. Would you recommend products from the brand to your friends?
    a. Do you recommend them in person offline or online? Or both?
    b. Do you read or leave reviews?

Brand-related questions:

7. Do you stick with the same brand or switch between brands? Why?

Online engagement behaviour questions:

8. Did you intend to post when you joined the community? If so, why? If not, why not?

9. How many hours do you spend posting or reading posts online?
10. How often do you post online and engage with posts?
    a. How do you engage with these posts? (like/share/comment/read)
    b. What are your reasons for engaging and posting? (eg. sharing content, gaining information/knowledge, helping others?)
    c. Do you prefer posts with pictures, videos, interactive posts?
    d. What do you post about?
    e. If you do not consider yourself active, why are you not as active online?
        i. Are there any reasons for not posting and engaging?

Offline engagement behaviour questions:

11. Would you say your online behaviour is similar offline as well? Do you engage with the brand both offline and online (for example: purchasing it)
    a. Why do you prefer engaging online than offline? / why do you prefer engaging offline than online?
12. What would encourage you to become more active online?
13. Is there anything the brand can do to make you more active online?
14. Is there anything the skincare group can do to make you more active online?

Thank-you for answering my questions, it's now your turn to ask me any questions you have in mind.

End of interview

Appendix I: Final copy of questionnaire

Questionnaire - Copy

Start of Block: Engagement on social media questionnaire

Welcome! I am Reem, a PhD student from Bournemouth University (BU). You are being invited to take part in my research project which is exploring the engagement/non-engagement behaviour of consumers of skincare products online via social media. Participation is entirely voluntary, and you can freely decide whether or not to take part. You can withdraw from participation at any time and without giving a reason, simply by closing the browser page. Deciding whether or not to take part will not impact upon you, or where relevant your relationship with BU. Throughout this study you will remain anonymous and your privacy will be protected as the survey does not ask for personal identifiable information. Data collected will only be stored, analysed and reported in academic work. The research is being undertaken by Bournemouth University and no information will be shared with third parties. It has received a favourable ethics opinion from the University. If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact me via email: ralbuhameed@bournemouth.ac.uk or my supervisor- Juliet Memery: jmemery@bournemouth.ac.uk. Completing this questionnaire will take around 12 minutes.

Consent to Participate: Please indicate that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for this research project and that you consent to take part in this questionnaire before continuing:

- ○ I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and consent to take part in this questionnaire (1)
- ○ I do not consent to take part in this questionnaire (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Consent to Participate: Please indicate that you have read and understood the Participant Infor... = I do not consent to take part in this questionnaire

Please indicate your agreement for the Research Team to access and use your recorded responses to this questionnaire before continuing:
I give permission for members of the Research Team to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my anonymised responses may be reproduced in reports, academic publications and presentations but I will not be identified or identifiable. I also understand that my data may be included in an anonymised form within a dataset to be archived at BU's Online Research Data Repository.

- ○ Agree (2)
- ○ Disagree (5)

Skip To: End of Survey If Please indicate your agreement for the Research Team to access and use your recorded responses to... = Disagree

Page Break

Are you between 18-74 years of age?

- Yes (1)
- No (5)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you between 18-74 years of age? = No

Are you currently living in the United Kingdom?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you currently living in the United Kingdom? = No

For the purposes of this study the term skincare products is defined as the use of cosmetics to care for the skin and includes all facial skincare as well as body, hand, and footcare products.Do you use skincare products?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Do you look at or browse for skincare products **online**?

- Yes (1)
- No (4)

Skip To: End of Survey If Do you look at or browse for skincare products online? = No

Please enter your Prolific ID:

_____

Page Break

Q1a How long ago did you start using skincare products?

- ○ Less than 6 months (1)
- ○ 6 months to 1 year (2)
- ○ 2 to 5 years (3)
- ○ 6 to 10 years (4)
- ○ More than 10 years (5)
- ○ Never (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If How long ago did you start using skincare products? = Never

Q1b How long ago did you start searching for skincare products online?

- ○ Less than 6 months (1)
- ○ 6 months to 1 year (2)
- ○ 2 to 5 years (3)
- ○ 6 to 10 years (4)
- ○ More than 10 years (5)
- ○ Never (6)

Skip To: End of Survey If How long ago did you start searching for skincare products online? = Never

Page Break

Q2 How often do you search for skincare products online?

- ○ Daily (1)
- ○ 2-3 times a week (2)
- ○ Once a week (3)
- ○ Once a fortnight (4)
- ○ Once a month (9)
- ○ Once every 2-3 months (5)
- ○ Once every 4-5 months (6)
- ○ Once every 6 months or less (7)

Q3 Which of the following skincare product area(s) do you search for online? (Please tick all that apply to you).

- ☐ Ingredients (e.g. natural/organic, hypoallergenic, etc.) (1)
- ☐ Product prices (2)
- ☐ Products suitable for my skin type (3)
- ☐ How to apply or use the products (4)
- ☐ Who manufactures the product and their values (5)
- ☐ Not tested on animals or cruelty-free products (6)
- ☐ Promotions and offers (9)
- ☐ Product reviews (10)
- ☐ Other (please write in) (11) _____

Page Break

Q4 How familiar do you consider yourself to be about skincare products?

	1 (1)	2 (2)	3 (3)	4 (4)	5 (5)	(6)	(7)	
Not at all familiar	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	Very familiar

Page Break

Q5 How confident are you to **communicate** about skincare products to other people online and offline?

	Not at all confident (1)	Unconfident (9)	Somewhat unconfident (2)	Neutral (6)	Somewhat confident (7)	Confident (10)	Very confident (8)
Online (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Offline (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Q6 How often do you **recommend** skincare products to other people online and offline?

	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Occasionally (3)	Sometimes (6)	Often (4)	Most times (5)	Every time (7)
Online (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Offline (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q7 How often do you leave reviews/ratings/feedback about skincare products online?

- ○ Daily (1)
- ○ 2-3 times a week (2)
- ○ Once a week (3)
- ○ Once a fortnight (4)
- ○ Once a month (10)
- ○ Once every 2-3 months (5)
- ○ Once every 4-5 months (6)
- ○ Once every 6-11 months (7)
- ○ Once a year or less (8)
- ○ Never (9)

Q8 I am likely to share feedback or reviews **online** about skincare products when... (Please tick all that apply).

- [ ] I have a negative experience with a product (1)
- [ ] I have a positive experience with a product (2)
- [ ] I have learnt that the product is harmful to other people (3)
- [ ] I receive benefits or rewards (e.g. discount codes, samples, free product) (4)
- [ ] I have some spare time (5)
- [ ] Other (please write in) (6) _____

Page Break

Q9 How often do you visit the following platforms, in general, regardless of the purposes?

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Frequently	Usually	Every time
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Facebook ()							
Instagram ()							
Pinterest ()							
TikTok ()							
Twitter ()							
Youtube ()							
Other (please write in) ()							

Page Break

Q10 Are you part of any skincare groups or communities online?

- ○ Yes (1)
- ○ No (2)

Skip To: Q12 If Are you part of any skincare groups or communities online? = No

Q11 On which of the following platforms do the skincare groups or communities you belong to exist? (Please tick all that apply to you).

- ☐ Facebook (1)
- ☐ Instagram (2)
- ☐ Pinterest (5)
- ☐ TikTok (3)
- ☐ Twitter (4)
- ☐ Youtube (6)
- ☐ Other (please write in) (8)

_____

Page Break

Q12 If you are reading this question, please select 3 as the answer

- ○ 3 (1)
- ○ 6 (2)
- ○ 9 (3)

Q13 How often do you undertake the following activities **online** with regards to skincare?

	Never (1)	Once every 6 months or less (9)	Once every 4-5 months (2)	Once every 2-3 months (8)	Once a month (3)	Once a fortnight (4)	Once a week (5)	Daily (6)
Read content (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Browse through or observe content (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Search for content (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Visit sites (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Edit and organise posts (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Post or upload content (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Learn/study content (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Share content (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Listen to content (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Motivate and encourage others to post or engage (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Subscribing or signing up to content (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q14 How often do you use the following online platforms to **look or search** for skincare products?

	Never (2)	Rarely (3)	Occasionally (4)	Sometimes (5)	Often (6)	Most times (7)	Every time (8)
Facebook (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Instagram (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Pinterest (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.) (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
TikTok (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Twitter (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
YouTube (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Other (please write in) (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q15 How often do you undertake the following activities **after searching** for skincare products online:

	Never (1)	Once every 6 months or less (8)	Once every 4-5 months (2)	Once every 2-3 months (3)	Once a month (4)	Once a fortnight (5)	Once a week (6)	Daily (7)
Reacting to a post (like/love/angry/etc.) (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Clicking on the 'share' button (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Commenting on a post (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Clicking 'save' or 'favourite' (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Re-tweeting or quoting the post (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Uploading or creating a post (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Edit or change a post (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Observe posts and content (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Learn or study content (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q16 **After searching** for skincare products online, how often do you engage in the following **offline activities?**

	Never	Rarely	Occasionally	Sometimes	Often	Most times	Every time
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I go to the shop and check out the skincare product(s) ()							
I go to the shop and ask for samples of the skincare product(s) to try out ()							
I tell/recommend the skincare product to other people ()							
I attend skincare events/conventions ()							
I ask for recommendations from store staff about the skincare product(s) ()							
I purchase the product ()							
I read about the product (magazines, newspapers, etc.) ()							
I watch television shows on skincare / skincare products ()							
I browse for skincare products in-store ()							
Other (please write in) ()							

Page Break

Q17a Please indicate how much you agree with the following statements.
I **do not** post / create content **online** about skincare products because...

	Completely disagree (6)	Mostly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Mostly agree (5)	Completely agree (7)
Just reading/browsing is enough (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I want to remain anonymous (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am shy about posting (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Others respond the way I would (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I had no intention to post from the outset (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to make a commitment to post (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have nothing to offer (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I prefer other communities or groups outside of skincare (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not know how to (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am still learning about skincare (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
There is too much content already (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q17b I **do not** post or create content **online** about skincare because...

	Completely disagree (7)	Mostly disagree (5)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Neither agree nor disagree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Mostly agree (3)	Completely agree (6)
There is no requirement to engage (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not like the group or community (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not have enough time (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is of no benefit or value to me (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to post the wrong content (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not have the confidence to engage (17)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not know much about skincare (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am afraid I will get judged (19)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is not my hobby (20)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I engage more in other activities outside of skincare (21)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q18 If you are reading this question, please select 6 as the answer.

- ○ 3 (1)
- ○ 6 (2)
- ○ 9 (3)

Q19a I **do not** engage with skincare related post(s) on social networking sites (e.g. likes/reaction, shares, comments, favourite, retweet) because…

	Completely disagree (6)	Mostly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Mostly agree (5)	Completely agree (7)
It is not entertaining (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is not fun when I read/browse through posts (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It stresses me out (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It gives me negative feelings (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is not a point of conversation with other people (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It does not keep me up to date with the latest news and releases (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It does not develop my knowledge in the skincare area (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am not interested in the products (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to gain information (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I am not interested in reading people's feedback (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

I do not have enough spare time (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q19b I **do not** engage with skincare related post(s) on social networking sites (e.g. likes/reaction, shares, comments, favourite, retweet) because…

	Completely disagree (6)	Mostly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Mostly agree (5)	Completely agree (7)
I do not want to interact with other people (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not belong to a group/community with the same interests as mine (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I have not made connections with other people on the site (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to share my knowledge with others (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to influence other people (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not want to support the product (17)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
It is not of any benefit to me (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not feel a sense of belonging to the community (19)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
I do not think the content is of good value or quality (20)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q20 Which of the following factors / information would influence you to **engage more online** with regards to skincare products? (Please tick all that apply to you).

- [ ] A good product (1)
- [ ] Ambassador/ influencer programme and partnerships (2)
- [ ] Animal cruelty free or vegan products (3)
- [ ] Diversity in products for different skin types (4)
- [ ] New products and updates (5)
- [ ] Samples, discounts, or gifts (6)
- [ ] More inclusivity and interactions (7)
- [ ] Emails and newsletters (8)
- [ ] Requests to engage (9)
- [ ] Smaller skincare groups or communities (10)
- [ ] Straight-forward, quick posts (11)
- [ ] More product reviews (12)
- [ ] Educational posts and how-to's (13)
- [ ] Rewards and loyalty schemes (14)

Page Break

Q21a I see myself as someone who...

	Completely disagree (1)	Mostly disagree (2)	Somewhat disagree (6)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Mostly agree (5)	Completely agree (7)
... is reserved (1)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...is generally trusting (2)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...tends to be lazy (3)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...is relaxed and handles stress well (4)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...has few artistic interests (5)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...is outgoing and sociable (6)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...tends to find fault with others (7)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...does a thorough job (8)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...gets nervous easily (9)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q21b I see myself as someone who...

	Completely disagree (6)	Mostly disagree (1)	Somewhat disagree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat agree (4)	Mostly agree (5)	Completely agree (7)
...has an active imagination (10)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...tends to seek validation from others (11)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
…is sensitive to criticism (12)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...ruminates about less than perfect performance (13)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...is concerned over any mistakes made (14)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...is pressured to achieve excellence to get other people's approval (15)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
…lacks self-discipline (16)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...wants to feel respected (17)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
...wants to gain greater self-esteem (18)	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q22 Please indicate the age group you fall within.

- ○ 18-25 years old (1)
- ○ 26-40 years old (2)
- ○ 41-55 years old (3)
- ○ 56-74 years old (4)

Page Break

Q23 Do you / are you (please tick all that apply)...

- ○ Work in the skincare sector (1)
- ○ Associated with any skincare brand (2)
- ○ Associated with any skincare companies (3)
- ○ A brand ambassador (4)
- ○ A social media influencer (5)
- ○ None of the above (6)

Q24 Please indicate your gender.

- ○ Male (1)
- ○ Female (2)
- ○ Non-binary / third gender (3)
- ○ Other (please write in) (4) _____

Q25 Which of the following best describes your current employment status?

- ○ Employed full-time (1)
- ○ Employed part-time (2)
- ○ Self-employed (3)
- ○ Part-time student (4)
- ○ Full-time student (5)
- ○ Retired (6)
- ○ Other (please write in) (8) _____

Q26 Please indicate which of the following best describes your **annual individual income before tax.**

- ○ £0-£9,999 (2)
- ○ £10,000 to £19,999 (3)
- ○ £20,000 to £29,999 (4)
- ○ £30,000 and £39,999 (5)
- ○ £40,000 to £49,999 (6)
- ○ £50,000 to £59,999 (7)
- ○ £60,000 and over (8)
- ○ Other (please write in) (9) _____

End of Block: Engagement on social media questionnaire

Appendix J: Coding template

	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	**Sub-Themes**	**Sub-categories;**	**References to:**	**Determined by:**		**Definition**
2	Personality	Big Five	Varied attitudinal aspects of individuals such as cognition, emotion and behaviour	Personality traits such as:	Extraversion	Outgoing, socially confident person
3					Neurotic	Depressed, strange or an anxious person
4					Conscientiousness	A painstaking, diligent individual
5					Agreebleness	A kind, sympathetic, cooperative, warm, and considerate person
6					Openness	A person who is open to experiences, attentiveness, preferences, imaginations, and intellectual curiosity
7						
8				Characteristics like:	Organised	Arranged accordingly to a particular system
9					Creative	Imaginative and original creations
10					sociable	Talkative
11					trust	Confidence, belief, faith in something or someone
12					confident, etc.	
13						
14	Lurking orientation and online behaviour	Posting Habits	A form of engagement. Posting can be categorised as comments, status updates, photos, albums, links, events, or videos posted onto a social media page	Content	Posts, reviews, comments	Ideas that are published online in the form of posts/reviews/comments/hashtags.
15				Frequency	How often do they post?	How often does the participant post and engage with a post.
16				Personality	Its in their personality to post? Passion?	Characteristics or qualities of an individual that influences them to post.
17				Motives	Like to help others, gain information, etc.	Reason(s) for posting something online
18						
19		Reading Habits	A form of engagement and refers to reading of social media posts or information available online.	Content	What do they often read/research about?	Ideas, posts, sites or articles that the individual often finds themselves reading about.
20				Frequency	How often do they read/observe/research?	How often does the participant look or observe something online
21				Personality	Maybe they prefer to read than post?	Characteristics or qualities of an individual that influences the individual to read
22				Motives	What motivates them to read?	Reason(s) for reading something online
23						
24		Sharing Habits	A form of engagement and interaction of posts which includes sharing of social media posts and hashtags.	Content	What content do they share more about?	Ideas or posts that the individual shares about.
25				Frequency	How often?	How often does the individual share something
26				Personality	Why do they prefer sharing?	Characteristics or qualities of an individual that influences the individual to share something.
27				Motives	What motivates them to share?	Reasons for sharing something
28				Method of sharing	Post, WOM, online OR offline OR both	Way in which the individual shares something (eg. posts, reviews, word of mouth, offline)
29						
30	Lurking orientation and offline behaviour	Offline Habits	Refers to purchases and communications that take place offline or in-store such as referrals, reviews, or word-of-mouth	Preference	Online vs offline	Individual's favorite method of engagement.
31				Behaviours	Offline purchases, WOM, events, retail shopping	Way in which the individual engages offline (eg. Offline purchases, word-of-mouth, events/conventions/shows, retail shopping)
32				Personality	Maybe they prefer socializing and engaging offline?	Characteristics or qualities of an individual that influences them to engage offline
33				Frequency	Engaging more in the activities above offline than online	How often the individual engages offline
34				Motives	Why offline?	Reasons for engaging with the brand offline
35						
36	Motivation	Motives	Refers to a drive that influences people's participation and interaction behaviours in online communities	Hedonic needs	Motives such as: amusement, entertaining, interests	Reasons for engaging in search for happiness, fantasy, awakening, sensuality, and enjoyment
37				Utilitarian needs	Motives such as: goal-oriented and rational behaviours	Reasons for engaging in response to a task or mission and the aquired benefit depends on whether its been completed or not.
38						

Appendix K: Social media platforms usage

n= 498			
Social media platform used for general purposes	**Mean (std. dev)[1]**	**Social media platform used to search/look for skincare products**	
Instagram	5.03 (1.99)	**Search engines (Google, Yahoo, etc.)**	5.06 (1.55)
YouTube	4.78 (1.80)	**YouTube**	3.32 (1.96)
Facebook	4.65 (2.02)	**Instagram**	2.94 (1.79)
Twitter	3.32 (2.10)	**Twitter**	2.25 (.89)
TikTok	3.13 (2.37)	**Facebook**	2.20 (1.56)
Pinterest	2.84 (1.60)	**TikTok**	1.92 (1.61)
Others	2.53 (2.30)	**Others**	1.79 (1.63)
		Pinterest	1.77 (1.29)