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THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION IN INFLUENCER MARKETING AND CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTIONS WITHIN THE TPB FRAMEWORK

Annie Yong Ing Ing^{1*}, Zahir Osman², Irene Yong Ley Mui³

¹ Faculty of Business & Management, Open University Malaysia

 inging1986@oum.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-4288-1718>

² Faculty of Business & Management, Open University Malaysia

 zahir_osman@oum.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8443-3062>

³ Faculty of Business & Management, Open University Malaysia

 irene5565@oum.edu.my

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2159-190X>

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract:

This study aims to examine the mediating role of parasocial interaction (PSI) in the relationship between media figure characteristics and consumer behavioral intentions within the framework of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). With the growing influence of social media personalities and brand ambassadors, the research investigates how variables such as media figure credibility, attractiveness, interaction frequency, and emotional connection foster strong parasocial bonds with consumers. These bonds are hypothesized to influence key TPB components—attitudes toward purchasing or endorsing a product, subjective norms related to brand perception, and perceived behavioral control—ultimately affecting consumers' purchase intentions and behaviors. The proposed model emphasizes the mediating role of PSI in translating media-driven relationships into consumer decision-making processes. Data will be collected from social media users through a structured survey and analysed using structural equation modeling (SEM). This integration aims to enhance understanding of how influencer marketing and parasocial bonds can effectively shape consumer behavior and brand loyalty. The findings provide valuable insights for business managers and marketers, suggesting that cultivating meaningful parasocial connections with influencers can strengthen brand engagement and drive purchasing actions. Overall, this study contributes to the literature on media psychology and consumer behavior by integrating parasocial interaction into the TPB

framework as a mechanism explaining how influencer relationships shape purchase intention.

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Attractiveness, Behavioral Intentions, Emotional Connection, Interaction Frequency, Media Figure Credibility, Parasocial Interaction,



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Introduction

The sheer advancement of digital media has completely changed the nature of marketing whereby a one-way communication channel has been replaced with a way of interaction and personalization. Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube and Facebook are all social media platforms that have democratised the content creation process, enabling everyday people to become a powerful figure with a large fan base. This development has spawned the influencer marketing, which is a strategic technique that involves use of social media personalities, also known as influencers or media figures, to influence consumer perception, attitude, and buying habits (Kumar et al., 2022).

In contrast to traditional advertising, influencer marketing builds on perceived authenticity, credibility, and relatability of influencers, which can be more emotional to the followers. The effectiveness of such campaigns greatly relies on the character of the influencer-follower relationship, especially the formation of parasocial relations one-sided emotional relationships that the followers form with the influencers, which in many cases resemble real social connection (Lee et al., 2023).

The notion of parasocial relationships was first proposed by Horton and Wohl (1956) to explain the process of audiences becoming attached to media personalities, feeling intimacy, familiarity, and trust towards the personalities, even though there is no actual interaction. This has been visible with the emergence of social media, where influencers now interact directly with their audiences through comments, live, and personalized content, establishing the feeling of intimacy and emotional connection. These relationships are being discussed as the key factors of consumer confidence, loyalty, and behavioral intentions in influencer marketing. It is based on these dynamics that modern studies have shifted to an emphasis on how parasocial

interaction (PSI) mediates the connection between the character of media figures and consumer behaviour especially as a part of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). The integration is aimed at explaining the psychological processes, which lie behind the power of influencer marketing on the intentions to buy, offer a more precise viewpoint that goes beyond the classical models of consumer decision-making process.

The significance of the current study is enhanced by the fact that the social media influencers have grown and are playing an increasing role in consumer behavior in various markets. With brands demanding more and more authentic and relatable ways to engage with them, it is necessary to learn how parasocial bonds develop and influence them. Not only do these bonds impact risky attitudes towards products and brand images but care about subjective norms and perceived behavioral control, which are fundamental elements of the TPB, and these factors play a leading role in eliciting consumers to purchase intention and behavior (Chen and Wang, 2022). This paper seeks to understand how the credibility of media figures, attractiveness, frequency of interaction and emotional attachment stimulate parasocial bonds and how these bonds are converted into behavioral intentions in the TPB paradigm.

Evolution of Influencer Marketing and the Social Media Ecosystem

The development of influencer marketing is considered in line with the overall technological trends that democratized the flow of information and transferred the power of the traditional mass media to social media. Social media has empowered users with everyday followers who have built a large following on the basis of authenticity, niche expertise, or relatable content, which undermines the conventional influence of celebrities that have historically been dependent on mass tools of communication (Smith and Johnson, 2021). Influencers have since become the mediators between brands and consumers as more personalised, engaging, and believable recommendations. Most recent reports indicate that the effects of influencer marketing are enormous; businesses state that the engagement rates and the return on investment (ROI) are much higher than with standard advertising mediums (Li et al., 2023). This change can be explained by the fact that influencers are more credible and authentic and, in particular, engage in direct communication and share personal experiences with followers.

According to the literature, the success of influencer marketing depends on a number of important attributes such as the perceived credibility, attractiveness, and the quality of interpersonal relationships formed with followers (Khan et al., 2022). The social media environment allows continuous interaction, which allows influencers to answer posts, engage in live chats and post content behind the scenes. These functionalities create a feeling of belonging and emotional intimacy, which plays a crucial role in creating parasocial relationships. The more followers perceive influencers as reasonable and familiar, the more influence of these personalities' spreads beyond the exposure, with their attitudes, perceived social norms, and intentions to act being influenced (Zhao et al., 2024). It is also important to note that recent studies have shown that consumers tend to believe and respond to the recommendation of influencers that are in a strong parasocial relationship with them, and therefore the relationships have become a strategic asset that is being used by brands to engage consumers more deeply (Martinez & Garcia, 2025).

Moreover, authentic relationships have become even more important due to the emergence of micro- and nano-influencers, who usually have more dedicated and more niche audiences (De Vries et al., 2022). Such influencers are likely to cultivate closer relationships by frequent

interaction and common values which enhances parasocial relationship that may be a big factor in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions. Because of this, the modern trends in influencer marketing are developing to become more about building real relationships, as opposed to just maximising reach, in line with larger trends toward authenticity and emotional connection in branding.

Conceptualizing Parasocial Relationships and Interactions

The nature of parasocial relationships is intimacy and emotional connection with media personalities which viewers feel but are not responded to. Originally, these are bonds that Horton and Wohl (1956) called pseudo-relationship, where the viewers attribute qualities on the media personalities, which leads to a feeling of familiarity and trust. These relations within the framework of the traditional mass media were usually reduced to television or radio personalities. Social media platforms have however changed this by allowing individuals to communicate directly, provide feedback in real-time, and personalized content, which has only fueled parasocial bonds (Chen et al., 2022).

According to recent research, perceived attractiveness, credibility, and the frequency of interactions are some of the factors that affect the formation and intensity of parasocial bonds (Shah and Ahmed, 2023). As an example, the perceived credibility of an influencer (a degree to which his or her followers are confident in the knowledge and the honesty of the influencer) may contribute to the increase in the level of emotional attachment and their trust in the influencer and authenticity. On the same note, attractiveness and likability elicit positive affect, which also strengthens parasocial ties.

The emotional connection as a significant aspect of PSI is the sense of warmth, empathy, and identification with the person who influences, which may affect the attitude of followers towards the products and their readiness to do purchase behaviors. Increased and convincing, loyalty, and behavioral compliance have been associated with the emotional depth and perceived intimacy of parasocial bonds (Liu et al., 2024). The followers are more responsive to recommendations and more genuine endorsements when they are emotionally attached to an influencer, and they tend to commit to purchasing behaviors. This observation impounds the relevance of learning the antecedents and consequences of PSI in the context of influencer marketing both psychologically but also strategically brand management.

Theoretical Foundations and Frameworks

Consumer behavior is commonly studied based on the established psychological theories in social media environments. One of the most influential theories that are used to predict and understand deliberate behavior has been the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), which was developed by Ajzen (1991). TPB suggests that the behavioral intention of an individual is mainly influenced by three factors namely, attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control.

Attitudes are the positive or negative assessments of whether or not to perform the behavior, subjective norms take the perceived social pressures, and perceived behavioral control takes the perceived ease and difficulty of doing the behavior. Though the TPB offers a powerful framework to comprehend the behavioral intentions, it has been criticized due to the lack of emotion and relational factors shaping the decision-making (Hagger and Chatzisarantis, 2022).

This confusion opens an avenue to the inclusion of the parasocial interaction in the framework of TPB, particularly regarding the process of influencer marketing, where the emotional connection and the feeling of intimacy are vital.

Media psychology helps in this integration by focusing on the affective and relational aspects of media consumption. As a form of interaction that is based on emotional connections and the perceived proximity, parasocial interaction presents an opportunity to achieve consumer attitudes and behavioral shifts on the basis of the media figure attributes (Rubin et al., 2023). The formation of strong parasocial relationships can affect the attitude towards the products promoted by the influencers, alter the subjective norms and increase the perceived behavioral control through the augmentation of trust and confidence when the followers form strong parasocial relationships. This form of integration increases the predictive capabilities of the TPB and thus it is very applicable in explaining the consumer reactions to influencer marketing campaigns.

Significance of the Study

The growing number of social media influencers, as well as their integration into the daily life of the consumer, makes it highly necessary to comprehend the psychological processes behind their impact. The identification of parasocial interaction as a mediator variable offers useful insights into the way an attribute of influencers would be converted into consumer attitudes and intentions to purchase. To marketers and brand managers, the process of developing genuine parasocial relationships is a promising means of achieving their goal of creating loyalty, trust, and the desired positive behavior. Academically, this paper advances the literature in media psychology by clearly putting PSI into the concept of the TPB. It contributes to theoretical knowledge by explaining how emotional and relational relationships affect the fundamental elements of the behavioral intention.

Further, it provides a realistic purpose of influencer marketing strategies by focusing on relationship building, emotional resonance, and constant interaction. Moreover, considering the cultural and geographical diversity of the social media users, contextual gaps are also a factor of the consideration of this study, especially in the non-western markets like Malaysia, where social media usage and influencer power is fast expanding. Through such settings, the study increases the applicability of the current theories and offers localized knowledge which is paramount in the success of marketing globally.

Research Gaps

Even though there is an ever-growing interest in influencer marketing and parasocial relationships, there still exist gaps in the literature. Majority of the available literature is inclined to investigate either PSI individually or only discusses the attributes of influencers without observing how the relationship is converted to behavioral intentions using existing psychological theoretical frameworks. Little is also known about the mediating role of PSI in the TPB model, especially in the Asian setting where cultural aspects can be a determinant in relationships.

Moreover, the existing studies tend to focus on shallow measures of engagement (likes and comments) and overlook deeper emotional and psychological aspects of parasocial relationships, which are the motivation to actual purchases. Also, missing in the literature are

thorough models that would include emotional connection and interaction frequency as the antecedents of PSI that are paramount in determining consumer decision-making in social media set-ups. This paper will fill this gap by building an integrated model that examines the role of the features of media figures in creating parasocial ties that subsequently affect the TPB elements and ultimately, buying intentions. This way, it aims to give a more detailed insight into the psychological processes that the influencer marketing is working through, particularly in the cultural context of Malaysia.

Objectives and Contributions

The main purpose of the given study is to examine the mediational effect of parasocial interaction among the features of media figures: credibility, attractiveness, frequency of interaction, emotional connection and consumer behavioral intentions in the TPB context. In particular, the research will focus on investigating the simple impact of such influencer qualities on PSI, and the further impact of PSI on attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control, which results in purchase intentions.

This study has a number of important contributions. It elaborates upon the theoretical knowledge of the TPB by introducing emotional and relational aspects, emphasizing the role of parasocial relations in the consumer behavior in online situations. In practice, the results provide ideas to the marketers who want to create more realistic and emotionally appealing influencer campaigns. The stronger parasocial relationships created by the brands through their focus on relationship-building and emotional authenticity can contribute to the presence of positive purchase behaviors.

Lastly, the research also shows to add to the existing literature on media psychology and social influence in non-Western cultures and serve as a contextual background to new markets like Malaysia. Altogether, it attempts to fill the gap between psychological theory, marketing practice, and cultural peculiarities and presents a complete approach to the role of the parasocial interaction in the context of influencer marketing.

Literature Review

Underpinning Theory: Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

The research is based on the psychological construct which is well formulated and predicts deliberate behavior through three central elements which include attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms and the perceived behavior control (Ajzen, 1992). TPB suggests that the intention to commit a certain action is the nearest predictor of the actual behavior and it is conditioned by the personal attitudes, perceived social pressure, and perceived ease or difficulty of doing the action (Ajzen, 2021). TPB is a useful action perspective in the context of consumer behavior in social media settings to make sense of how consumers develop intentions to buy or recommend products in relation to their attitudes, social forces, and perceived ability to control the behavior (Kumar et al., 2023). As an example, the development of positive attitude towards a product following a recommendation of a social media influencer, the feeling of social approval of his or her peer group and the belief in the opportunity to complete the purchase jointly influence the behavioral intentions of a consumer. The theory that will be used to inform this study goes beyond TPB to include the portion of media psychology and parasocial relationship theory. The mediating mechanism that connects media figure

characteristics to TPB components is parasocial interaction (PSI), that is, one-sided and emotionally involving relationships that consumers develop with media figures (Giles, 2022).

In particular, parasocial relationships are developed because of such variables as media figure credibility, attractiveness, frequent interaction and emotional relationship. These relationships give rise to the attitudes of the consumers, by making endorsements more believable and effective, influence the subjective norms owing to the perceived social influence, and boost perceived behavioral control by enhancing consumer confidence and familiarity with the product or brand (Chen and Lin, 2024). The model helps to highlight the effects of the media-based relationships as an intervening factor that causes the transfer of the media figure attributes into the intention of behaving in a certain way by making the parasocial interaction a component of the TPB model. This methodology acknowledges the fact that the psychological anchoring of consumers to influencers can seriously influence their buying behavior and this strategy is in line with the recent trends in media psychology which emphasizes the significance of emotional connection in consumer behavior (Li and Zhao, 2025). TPB discussed in conjunction with the parasocial relationship theory therefore gives a complete picture of the avenues in which influencer marketing affects consumer behavior in the digital era.

Variables

Attitudes toward Purchase are the general assessment of the consumer on whether it is desirable or not desirable to do a certain behavior like purchase of a product or promote a brand (Ajzen, 1995). These are attitudes developed through personal perception of the goodness, value and reliability of the product or message of the endorsement. Consumers that have developed strong emotional connections tend to develop positive attitudes towards products that are endorsed by media personalities in the context of parasocial interactions with them in which they become more convincing and likable (Horton and Wohl, 1956). These positive attitudes enhance the chances of buying or promotion activities.

Subjective Norms entail the perceived social pressure to do or abstain to do an action whereby the views of those considered important like friends, family or societal groupings are taken into account (Ajzen, 1995). When consumers have a sense of attachment to media personalities by experiencing parasocial relationships, they can also feel that by promoting or buying some products, they are acting in a socially appropriate way or increasing their social esteem. Media personalities usually act as powerful role models and influence the perception of consumers on what is socially acceptable or desirable thereby influencing the subjective norms (Labrecque et al., 2013). These norms may heavily affect the intentions of the consumers to perform certain behavior, in particular cases when the consumers think that important people endorse such behavior.

Perceived Behavioral Control is the perception of the individual on his/her capability and means to execute the behavior like the buying of a commodity. This incorporates such factors as financial capabilities, accessibility as well as confidence in making the purchase (Ajzen, 1995). The perceived control may be strengthened by parasocial relationships where they offer information, reassurance, or support by the media figure and that makes the consumer have less uncertainty and more confidence in their capability to perform the behavior (Giles, 2002). Whenever consumers are empowered and assured, they tend to convert intentions into making real purchases.

Purchase Intentions and Behaviors are the end-result of the cognitive and social factors. Purchase intentions are the probability that a consumer intends to or plans to purchase a product or recommend it and this is based on attitudes, perceived norms and perceived control (Ajzen, 1995). The real-world behaviors by consumers are actual purchase behaviors, which portrays commitment and decision-making mechanisms of consumers. The concept of parasocial interactions develops trust and emotional bondage with media personalities that may greatly increase purchase intentions and trigger actual buying or support behaviors (Chung and Zhao, 2018). Such actions are the final results of the interaction between the traits of the media figures, parasocial relationships, and the elements of the Theory of Planned Behavior.

The one-way social interaction perceived and one-sided relationship between consumers and media personalities, i.e., celebrities, influencers, or social media influencers is called Parasocial Interaction (PSI). PSI, unlike other types of social interaction, is also defined with familiarity, intimacy and emotional attachment of consumers to media figures without any real two-way interaction (Horton and Wohl, 1956). This is the case as media celebrities tend to produce content that creates an illusion of intimate interaction, as viewers believe that they are in some sort of a true relationship with them. This can lead to consumers developing trust, admiration and emotional attachment which in turn can affect the attitudes and behaviors of consumers towards the media personality and the related products or endorsements (Giles, 2002).

Credibility, attractiveness, frequency of interaction, and emotional connection are some of the media figure characteristics that contribute greatly to the development of PSI. As an example, the media personalities who are seen to be credible and genuine are more likely to generate a stronger parasocial relationship, increasing the perceived intimacy by the consumers (Cohen, 2004). Equally, appealing and captivating characters that communicate regularly with their followers and particularly via the social networking sites are more apt to develop strong PSI experiences. Emotional attachment is a significant factor, since the richness of personal emotion and closeness with the media personality may contribute to the attraction of the parasocial relationship, and consumers will be more open to endorsement and persuasion messages (Rubin et al., 1985).

The role of parasocial interactions is to mediate the association between the figure traits of media individuals and the behavioral intentions to consumers. They serve as a psychological mediator, which converts the impact of characteristics of media figures into attitudes, norms and perceived control leading to ultimate purchase intentions and behavior (Chung and Zhao, 2018). PSI in a sense increases the persuasive influence of individuals in the media in that they create a sense of intimacy and trust that are capable of deepening the consumer decision making process. Thus, it is critical to understand PSI to determine the impact of the characteristics of the media figures on the consumer behaviors in the current marketing environment.

The importance of Media Figure Credibility is an important feature that determines the perception and reaction of the consumer towards the media figures. Credibility involves the reputed trustworthiness, competence and honesty of the media person (Ohanian, 1996). Media personalities are more likely to be taken seriously and thus their endorsements and recommendations are more likely to be accepted by the consumers thereby increasing their persuasive ability (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). The credibility could be established with the help of the repeated, truthful communication and the displayed knowledge contributing to consumers developing more trust and positive attitude to the promoted goods or messages

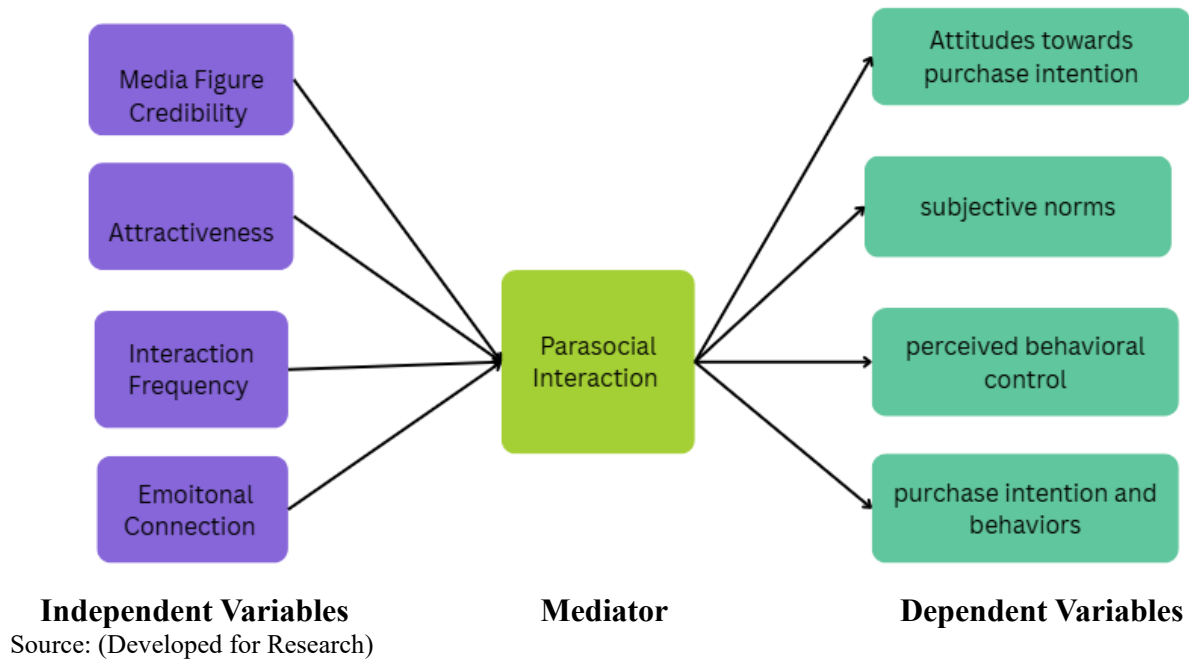
(Metzinger et al., 2010). Subsequently, believable numbers are more perfect in influencing the consumer intentions of behavior like buying or recommending products.

Media Figure Attractiveness is the physical looks, the charisma and the general attractiveness of the media figure. The attractiveness is also effective in influencing the consumer perceptions because it enhances attention and involvement of the figure and their messages (McGuire, 1985). Beautiful media personalities are likely to generate favorable emotional reactions and may produce a favorable attitude towards the promoted product just by being appealing to the eyes (Ohanian, 1990). This feature is particularly powerful in the context of advertising, as attractiveness may increase the rates of persuasion and brand memory (Erdogan, 1999). Parasocial bonds can also be caused by the attractiveness of media personalities, who will be more susceptible to messages delivered by the consumers.

Interaction Frequency relates to the level of interaction or engagement consumers have with the media figures, in terms of comments on social media, or messages or passive exposure. The interaction frequency can make the bond between the consumer and the media personality stronger as the familiarity will rise, and people will feel closer (Hoeffner et al., 2018). More frequent interactions can result in the formation of stronger parasocial relationships, because consumers develop more personal relations and interaction with the figure (Chung & Zhao, 2018). This variable has a bearing on the intensity of the parasocial interactions that have an impact on attitude and behavioral intentions of consumers.

Emotional Connection explains the emotional attachment that forms between the consumer and the media personality. This relationship is defined by attachment, admiration, and empathy towards the figure which is most commonly developed through regular, relatable, and authentic interactions (Caughey & Stryker, 2016). Psychological attachment increases parasocial relationships and will lead to consumers becoming more credible and identified towards the media figure that in turn can greatly affect the attitudes and behavioral reactions (Giles, 2002). The ability to bond with people emotionally can help to make the endorsements more convincing and create loyalty, which will eventually influence the consumer behavior.

Conceptual Framework



Research Methodology

The research design and approach will consist of descriptive research techniques designed to gather data regarding the occurrence of pressure ulcers at the hospital in question.

Research Design and Approach

The research design and approach will involve descriptive research methods aimed at collecting information about the prevalence of pressure ulcers in the targeted hospital. The proposed study will take a quantitative research methodology to investigate the connection between media figure characteristics, parasocial interaction (PSI) and behavioral intentions of consumers. Quantitative approaches are competent to test the theoretical models and hypotheses using the numerical data (Creswell and Creswell, 2021). In particular, the study will use Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with SMARTPLS, a variance-based SEM method that is particularly convenient in dealing with complex models and small to medium sample sizes (Henseler et al., 2016). Application of SMARTPLS enables both measurement models and structural relationships to be evaluated simultaneously and strong understanding of the mediating effect of PSI in the suggested framework is reduced (Hair et al., 2022).

Sampling Method

A non-probability purposive sampling method will be employed to sample the respondents as active social media users and exposed to influencer marketing. Such a specific way of selection makes the participants relevant to the context of the study because they are more prone to the formation of parasocial relations with media personalities (Etikan et al., 2016). The issue of determining proper sample size is very important when analyzing SEM. According to recent methodological recommendations (Kock, 2021), PLS-SEM cannot be applied to fewer than 200 respondents since such a sample size can guarantee adequate statistical power and model

stability (Hair et al., 2022). The sample size will be increased to about 250 respondents to take into consideration the possibility of data attrition or incomplete response.

Data Collection Procedure

The recruiting will be carried out online, mainly using social media, including Facebook, Instagram, and Tik Tok where influencer marketing is widespread. The participants will be invited to fill in a structured questionnaire that will be posted on a survey tool such as Google Forms. In order to increase response rates, incentives in the form of gift cards or social media shoutouts could be provided. To ensure that the participants are actively involved in social media influencers and know the concept of parasocial relationships, the survey will incorporate a screening aspect to verify that the participants are involved in the influencers.

Measurement and Development of Instruments

That questionnaire will consist of tested scales based on prior research that will test credibility of media figures, attractiveness, frequency of interaction, emotional connection, PSI, and behavioral intentions. All questions will use a Likert-type that goes between 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Pre-test will be done to give readability and reliability of items.

3.5 Data Analysis The data will be gathered and analyzed with the help of SmartPLS 4.0. The analysis will be conducted in two stages: the measurement model will be tested regarding the measures of reliability and validity (composite reliability, AVE, discriminant validity), and structural model testing will be conducted to test proposed hypotheses, including the mediating role of PSI (Henseler et al., 2019). To know whether path coefficients are significant, bootstrapping using 5000 resamples will be utilized.

Conclusion

To sum up, this work offers great information about how characteristics of media figures and parasocial interaction determine the consumer behavioral intentions in influencer marketing context. Using the SmartPLS SEM, the study provides a substantial analysis framework to comprehend the direct and indirect association among the variables, which include the mediating role of PSI. The results are valuable to the current body of knowledge through highlighting the relevance of media personality qualities like credibility and attractiveness in promoting a high-quality parasocial relationship that has an effect on consumer attitudes and buying behaviors. In practice, the findings provide marketers with strategic advice to choose and manage influencers to improve their engagement and can induce behavioral change. In theory, the research contributes to the literature regarding the concepts of the psychological mechanisms underlying consumer reactions to social media influencers, closing the gaps in the literature regarding the mediating power of parasocial interactions. In general, this study can help both the academic and practical fields of marketing by clarifying the relationship between influencer personality and parasocial relationship and consumer behavior and eventually serve to create more influential influencer marketing techniques.

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- Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this paper. Annie Yong Ing Ing was responsible for the conceptualization and overall supervision of the study. Zahir bin Osman handled literature review. Irene Yong Ley Mui contributed to the methodology and critical revision of the paper. All authors read and approved the final version of the paper prior to submission.
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