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PARASOCIAL LANGUAGE IN INFLUENCER MARKETING: EFFECTS ON EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT AND PURCHASE INTENTION

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Abstract:

In the evolving landscape of digital marketing, influencers have emerged as powerful intermediaries between brands and consumers, often using parasocial language an informal, conversational style of communication to engage audiences on a more personal level. Despite its widespread use, limited research has examined how parasocial language specifically affects emotional engagement and purchase intention, particularly within the Malaysian context. This study addresses this gap by proposing a conceptual framework that investigates the effects of parasocial language used by influencers on consumers' emotional engagement and subsequent intention to purchase endorsed products. The primary aim is to explore the psychological mechanisms through which influencer communication strategies impact consumer behavior. Employing a quantitative research design, the study proposes the use of a structured questionnaire survey targeting Malaysian social media users aged 18–40. Data is intended to be analyzed using SPSS for preliminary testing and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to examine the measurement and structural models. Preliminary insights from the proposed framework suggest that parasocial language enhances emotional engagement, which in turn positively influences purchase intention. The findings offer both theoretical and practical contributions by extending the application of parasocial interaction theory to marketing communication and by guiding marketers and influencers on how to craft more effective, emotionally resonant messages. However, as a conceptual paper, it is limited by the absence of empirical data, and future studies are encouraged to validate the model using real-world samples and to explore additional variables such as influencer credibility and platform type.

Keywords:Parasocial Language, Emotional Engagement, Purchase Intention, And
Influencer Marketing**Introduction**

In the era of digital communication, influencer marketing has become a dominant force in shaping consumer behavior. With the proliferation of social media platforms, influencers have emerged as trusted voices, often blurring the lines between marketing and personal storytelling. Among the various communication strategies used by influencers, parasocial language, a conversational and emotionally engaging style of communication has garnered increasing attention for its effectiveness in cultivating audience trust and loyalty (Labrecque, 2014). This language simulates interpersonal interactions, allowing followers to perceive a sense of closeness and intimacy with influencers, despite the one-sided nature of the relationship. As brands increasingly leverage these connections to promote products and services, understanding how parasocial language influences consumer decision-making becomes vital.

Prior research has highlighted the role of parasocial relationships in building emotional engagement and enhancing brand perception (Kim & Song, 2016; Frederick et al., 2012). Studies show that audiences who feel a personal connection with influencers are more likely to experience trust, empathy, and emotional resonance, which may ultimately influence their purchasing behavior (Schouten et al., 2020). Furthermore, the authenticity projected through parasocial cues has been linked to greater brand loyalty and message effectiveness, particularly among younger, digitally savvy audiences (Sokolova & Perez, 2021). However, much of the existing literature has focused on Western contexts, with limited investigation into how parasocial language operates in diverse cultural settings such as Malaysia.

This study addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining the effects of parasocial language on emotional engagement and purchase intention among Malaysian social media users. Despite the increasing popularity of influencer marketing in Malaysia, there is a lack of empirical research exploring how linguistic strategies shape consumer responses. By proposing a conceptual framework that links parasocial language, emotional engagement, and purchase intention, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of digital consumer psychology in a local context. The framework integrates key psychological and marketing constructs to assess how emotionally charged influencer communication influences consumer behavior.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform more effective marketing strategies for both local and global brands operating in Malaysia. Understanding how parasocial language influences consumer attitudes can help marketers and influencers tailor their communication to foster stronger connections with audiences. This study also offers academic value by extending existing theories of parasocial interaction into a new cultural and geographical setting. Practically, the findings may provide guidelines for influencer collaborations, campaign design, and content development that align with Malaysian consumers' emotional expectations and preferences.

This research is guided by the Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), which explains how audiences form imagined relationships with media personas. The theory is used to interpret how language choices simulate real-life social interactions and how this impacts emotional and behavioral responses.

Table 1: Summary Of Previous Studies On Parasocial On Purchase Intention.

| Author | Variable | Sample | Method |
|--|--|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| Labrecque, L. I. (2014). Fostering consumer–brand relationships in social media environments: The role of parasocial interaction. | Social media message cues (perceived interactivity and openness in communication), loyalty and willingness to provide information. | Social media users. | Multi-method approach. |
| Schouten, A. P., Janssen, L., & Verspaget, M. (2020). Celebrity vs. influencer endorsements in advertising: The role of identification, credibility, and product-endorser fit. | Perceived similarity and wishful identification, trustworthiness and expertise, attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the product, and purchase intention. | Beauty and fashion consumers. | Survey questionnaire. |
| Sokolova, K., & Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. | Credibility of the influencers (attitude homophily, physical attractiveness), social attractiveness, purchase Intention. | YouTube & Instagram users. | Survey questionnaire. |

Sources: Self-development

Literature Review

Parasocial Language

Research in influencer marketing shows that when influencers use parasocial language a warm, conversational tone, speaking directly to the audience, and sharing personal details it helps followers feel a sense of closeness and trust (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Labrecque, 2014). This style of communication can make interactions feel like a friendship, even though the relationship is one-sided. For example, Sokolova and Kefi (2019) found that such language can reduce psychological resistance and make influencer messages seem more credible, encouraging followers to be more open and engaged. While studies worldwide have highlighted how parasocial language strengthens these bonds, there is still little focus on the exact linguistic cues used, or how these might differ across cultures especially in Southeast Asian contexts like Malaysia.

Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement is often seen as the bridge between parasocial language and how people respond to it. When vloggers tap into pathos appealing to emotions like warmth, sympathy, or excitement they spark feelings that deepen the sense of connection and make their messages more persuasive (Ghazani, 2016). For instance, research on hotel livestreaming found that

emotional engagement born from parasocial interaction had a strong impact on viewers' willingness to book or buy. In the same vein, Frontiers et al. (2022) showed that influencers' emotional appeals work through these parasocial connections to boost consumers' purchase intentions, highlighting emotional engagement as a psychological catalyst that turns language into action.

Purchase Intention

Scholars widely agree that parasocial relationships positively affect purchase intention, often through mediating variables like trust, credibility, or brand recall. Studies across various cultural contexts (e.g., Indonesia, Europe, luxury goods markets) consistently show that influencers' personal connection and credibility drive purchase behaviors (Sutiono et al., 2023; Maryanto et al., 2024; Trisnawati et al., 2025). For example, PLS-SEM analyses confirm that stronger parasocial bonds translate to higher purchase intention, particularly when trust and product-fit align. Moreover, experimental research highlights that parasocial interaction enhances brand recall and subsequent purchase intentions, especially for relatable micro-influencers and overt product placement. Nonetheless, few studies disentangle the direct role of parasocial language style from broader parasocial relationship dynamics in affecting purchase intention, particularly in Asian markets.

Discussion

The Linkages Between Parasocial Language and Emotional Engagement

Parasocial language marked by an informal tone, personal pronouns, and emotionally rich storytelling plays a powerful role in drawing followers closer to influencers. This style of communication helps create a feeling of intimacy and perceived closeness, making audiences feel as though they share a genuine relationship with the influencer (Labrecque, 2014; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Research shows that when influencers speak in a personalized and relatable way, their followers are more likely to respond with empathy, attachment, and emotional involvement (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lim et al., 2022). Such emotional engagement is a strong predictor of consumer loyalty, sustained attention, and openness to marketing messages. In the fast-paced world of social media, these parasocial cues often stand in for face-to-face interaction, triggering meaningful emotional responses (Schouten et al., 2020). In this way, parasocial language is not just a stylistic choice it is a deliberate strategy for deepening emotional bonds and boosting consumer receptivity.

The Linkages Between Parasocial Language and Purchase Intention

Parasocial language using a casual tone, speaking directly to the audience, and expressing emotion has gained increasing attention for its role in shaping consumers' purchase intentions in influencer marketing. By communicating in a way that feels personal and relatable, influencers can close the gap between themselves and their followers, making their endorsements seem more genuine and authentic (Labrecque, 2014; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). This sense of authenticity and closeness is vital for building trust, which is often a key step before consumers act on promotional messages. Studies show that parasocial interactions sparked by such language can improve consumer attitudes, enhance brand perceptions, and ultimately increase the likelihood of purchasing endorsed products (Lim et al., 2022; Trisnawati et al., 2025). In cultures like Malaysia where interpersonal connection and credibility hold significant value personalized communication styles can greatly strengthen an

influencer's persuasive impact. In this way, parasocial language not only nurtures emotional engagement but also plays a direct role in shaping consumer behavior.

The Linkages Between Emotional Engagement and Purchase Intention

Emotional engagement defined as the depth of emotional connection a consumer feels toward an influencer is a powerful driver of purchase intention in influencer marketing. When influencers use emotionally charged language or narratives (*pathos*) that resonate with their audience, they can spark feelings of trust, affection, and closeness. Research shows these positive emotions can significantly increase the likelihood of a purchase (Gardner, 1985; Yi & Jai, 2020). According to parasocial interaction theory, the illusion of a face-to-face relationship helps lower skepticism and makes audiences more open to the message, further strengthening the bond and paving the way to behavioral intent (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Levy, 1979). Empirical studies confirm that this emotional connection built through parasocial bonds positively influences followers' intention to buy endorsed products (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019; Lin et al., 2021). These insights also align with the Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that attitudes shaped by emotional engagement directly influence a person's intention to act (Ajzen, 1991).

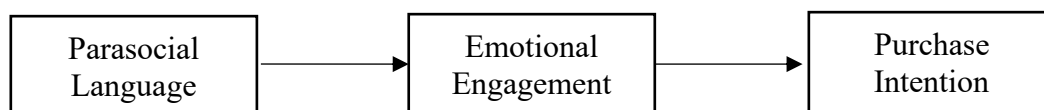


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Self-Development

As shown in Figure 1, this study conceptualizes the relationship between parasocial language, emotional engagement, and purchase intention. The conceptual framework of this study proposes that parasocial language positively influences emotional engagement, which in turn enhances consumers' purchase intention. Parasocial language refers to communication strategies that simulate intimate and friendly relationships between media figures and audiences, often used by influencers to build perceived closeness and trust (Frederick et al., 2012). This language, characterized by personal pronouns, emotional tone, and conversational style, fosters a sense of connection that mimics real-life relationships. As a result, audiences may develop stronger emotional engagement defined as the affective bond or attachment felt toward the influencer or brand (Labrecque, 2014). This emotional engagement plays a mediating role, as emotionally connected consumers are more likely to internalize the influencer's messages and exhibit positive behavioral responses, such as increased purchase intention (Lim et al., 2017). Thus, the framework suggests that parasocial communication enhances emotional engagement, which subsequently drives consumers' willingness to purchase the endorsed products.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research design to explore the relationships between parasocial language, emotional engagement, and purchase intention within the context of influencer marketing. As this is a conceptual paper, the proposed framework is grounded in established theories such as Parasocial Interaction Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) and the Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), with the intent to guide future empirical validation. The methodology outlined here provides a blueprint for testing the proposed model using a structured questionnaire survey.

The questionnaire will be designed to measure key constructs identified in the conceptual framework, namely parasocial language, emotional engagement, and purchase intention. All items will be adapted from previously validated scales to ensure content validity and reliability. Responses will be recorded using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." A pilot test is recommended prior to full deployment to ensure clarity and consistency of items.

The target population for the future study comprises Malaysian social media users who actively follow at least one influencer on platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, or TikTok. Respondents will be selected using a non-probability purposive sampling technique, focusing on individuals aged 18–40, who are likely to engage in digital content consumption and online shopping. A minimum sample size of 200–300 is recommended, in line with guidelines for Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) (Hair et al., 2019). PLS-SEM is proposed as the primary data analysis technique due to its suitability for exploratory models and complex relationships among latent constructs.

Additionally, SPSS will be used for preliminary data analysis, including descriptive statistics, reliability testing (e.g., Cronbach's alpha), and basic correlation analysis. PLS-SEM will then be employed to assess the measurement model (validity and reliability of constructs) and the structural model (hypothesized relationships). Model fit, path coefficients, and R^2 values will be evaluated to determine the strength and significance of the relationships. As this is a conceptual paper, the emphasis is on outlining a rigorous and replicable methodological approach for future empirical research.

Conclusions

This study highlights the significant role of parasocial language in influencing emotional engagement and purchase intention within the context of influencer marketing. By proposing a conceptual framework, the study underscores how personalized, emotionally driven communication strategies can enhance consumer connection and drive behavioral outcomes. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on parasocial interaction by integrating language use as a key variable, while practically, it offers valuable insights for marketers and influencers aiming to build trust and drive consumer actions through authentic engagement.

Future Research

However, as a conceptual paper, the study is limited by the absence of empirical validation, future research should focus on empirically testing the proposed conceptual framework through large-scale quantitative studies involving diverse demographic groups and social media platforms. Researchers are encouraged to explore the moderating effects of variables such as influencer credibility, content type (e.g., video vs. text), and platform characteristics (e.g., Instagram vs. TikTok) to better understand the nuances of parasocial language effectiveness. Additionally, longitudinal studies could provide insights into how parasocial interactions evolve over time and their long-term impact on brand loyalty and consumer behavior. Incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or focus groups may also offer deeper understanding of the emotional and cognitive processes underlying parasocial relationships. Finally, cross-cultural comparisons could reveal how cultural values and communication norms influence the reception and impact of parasocial language, especially in non-Western contexts like Southeast Asia.

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