

Antecedents of Parasocial Relationships and Their Association with Brand Attitudes in YouTube Influencer Marketing: A Balance Theory Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Parasocial relationships (PSR) have received increasing attention in influencer marketing research, but questions remain about the characteristics of these relationships and their relevance to followers' evaluations of endorsed brands. Drawing on balance theory, this study examines the associations of self-disclosure and physical, social, and task attractiveness with PSR, as well as the association between PSR and attitudes towards endorsed brands. Data were collected through an online survey of 333 YouTube influencer followers in Malaysia and analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Social attractiveness had the strongest positive association with PSR, followed by physical attractiveness and self-disclosure. Task attractiveness was not significantly associated with PSR. PSR was positively associated with attitudes towards endorsed brands, while age and gender, included as demographic controls, were not significantly associated with PSR. The findings show that the three dimensions of interpersonal attraction are differently associated with PSR and identify social attractiveness as the most prominent antecedent in the model. They also support the application of balance theory to the association between followers' PSRs with influencers and their attitudes towards endorsed brands.

Keywords: Parasocial relationships, Influencer marketing, Social media, Digital marketing, Balance theory

INTRODUCTION

Social media influencers have become increasingly important to brands as marketing partners and as a means of developing relationships with consumers (Azhar et al., 2025a). Their ability to engage audiences has supported longer-term collaborations with businesses across promotional and sales activities (Nor et al., 2025). Reflecting the industry's growth, the global influencer marketing market was estimated to reach approximately \$33 billion in 2025 (Statista, 2024). Influencers can also shape consumers' purchasing behavior, reinforcing their relevance to contemporary marketing strategies (Abid Azhar et al., 2026). These developments have generated growing scholarly interest in influencer marketing and in the relationships that influencers establish with their followers.

Before the rise of social media, celebrity endorsement was already an established marketing strategy, with celebrities commonly used to promote products and services through print and broadcast media (Cheah et al., 2024). Their visibility and perceived influence could shape consumers' evaluations and purchasing decisions (Ao et al., 2023). Audiences may also develop parasocial relationships (PSR) with media figures, characterized by a sense of familiarity and connection despite the absence of a reciprocal interpersonal relationship (Horton & Richard Wohl, 1956). Rubin and McHugh (1987) subsequently examined the role of physical, social, and task attraction in PSRs.

Social media provides a distinct environment in which such relationships can develop. Compared with traditional celebrity endorsement, influencer marketing is more interactive and content-driven, allowing followers to engage with influencers through features such as comments and responses (Ashraf et al., 2023). Although these features introduce opportunities for two-way communication, interaction between influencers and individual followers remains limited compared with reciprocal interpersonal relationships. At the same time, repeated exposure to influencer content gives followers continuing access to influencers' opinions, experiences, and everyday lives. These characteristics make PSRs particularly relevant to understanding how followers respond to social media influencers and their commercial endorsements.

Previous research has examined PSRs in influencer marketing in contexts such as fashion, travel, and fitness influencers (Cheng & Wang, 2025; Edwards et al., 2026; Liu et al., 2023). This literature has identified a range of factors associated with PSR and documented its relevance to consumer responses. Less attention, however, has been given to how self-disclosure and the three dimensions of interpersonal attraction—

physical, social, and task attractiveness—operate within the same PSR model, as well as to the relationship between PSR and attitudes towards endorsed brands. Examining these relationships jointly allows the relative contribution of the proposed antecedents to be assessed while locating PSR within the follower–influencer–brand relationship. Accordingly, this study examines these relationships among followers of YouTube influencers in Malaysia. Specifically, it aims to: (i) examine the associations of self-disclosure and physical, social, and task attractiveness with PSR; and (ii) examine the association between PSR and followers’ attitudes towards endorsed brands.

The study contributes to influencer marketing research by examining multiple antecedents of PSR and its relationship to endorsed-brand attitudes within a single model. In doing so, it distinguishes self-disclosure from the physical, social, and task dimensions of interpersonal attraction and examines the associations of each with PSR. It also considers whether followers’ PSRs with influencers are associated with their evaluations of the brands those influencers endorse. From a practical perspective, the findings provide insight into the influencer attributes and communication practices associated with PSR and may inform the selection of influencers for brand endorsements.

Balance theory provides the theoretical basis for examining the relationship between PSR and attitudes towards endorsed brands. Applied to influencer marketing, the theory suggests that a favorable relationship with an influencer may be associated with a more favorable evaluation of a brand positively associated with that influencer. This study applies balance theory to examine the relationship between PSR and attitudes towards endorsed brands in the context of YouTube influencer marketing in Malaysia. The theoretical foundations underlying these relationships are developed further in the literature review.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Influencer Marketing

Influencer marketing has become an established form of social media marketing in which individuals with an online following promote brands, products, and services (Azhar et al., 2025b). Unlike conventional celebrity endorsers, social media influencers typically develop their visibility through the regular production of platform-specific content and sustained engagement with their audiences (Anselmo et al., 2026). Commercial endorsements are therefore embedded within the broader stream of content through which followers become familiar with an influencer (Durau et al., 2024). Consequently, influencer marketing operates within an environment where promotional communication and ongoing follower–influencer relationships can coexist (Alkan et al., 2025).

The effectiveness of influencer marketing depends on more than exposure to promotional content. Research on social media marketing has shown that consumers' responses can be shaped by factors such as trust in information and the circulation of brand-related information through electronic word of mouth (Li et al., 2024). In influencer marketing, promotional information is communicated through an identifiable individual whose content followers may encounter repeatedly (Wang et al., 2024). The relationship followers develop with that individual may therefore influence how they receive and evaluate endorsements, distinguishing influencer marketing from forms of digital advertising in which the promotional message is less closely connected to a recognizable media figure (Sheng et al., 2024). This relational dimension is particularly important when considering how evaluations of an influencer may become connected with evaluations of an endorsed brand.

Social Media Influencer Characteristics

Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure refers to the communication of personal information, thoughts, feelings, and experiences to others and is an important feature of social media communication (Jia et al., 2024). Social media influencers may disclose their interests, opinions, personal experiences, successes, and difficulties through the content they share with followers (Karagür et al., 2022). Such disclosure gives audiences access to aspects of an influencer's life beyond explicitly promotional content and can contribute to perceptions of transparency, trust, and accessibility (Boerman, 2020).

Self-disclosure also has a relational function in mediated communication. Audiences can develop psychological connections with media figures despite limited direct interaction (Gupta & Verma, 2025), and access to personal information can contribute to perceptions of intimacy and relational closeness. Information typically associated with closer relationships may be interpreted as a signal of trust, while receiving personal disclosure can itself function as a social reward (Calhoun & Gold, 2020). In the social media context, where followers may encounter both personal and promotional content from influencers over time, self-disclosure is therefore relevant to understanding the relational environment in which follower–influencer connections develop.

Interpersonal Attraction

Interpersonal attraction concerns the evaluations through which individuals perceive others as desirable interaction or relationship partners. McCroskey and McCain (1974) conceptualized interpersonal attraction as a multi-dimensional construct comprising physical, social, and task attraction. Physical attraction concerns evaluations

of another person's appearance; social attraction reflects the desirability of social interaction with that person; and task attraction concerns the perceived desirability of working with or completing activities with them. This distinction is important because individuals may find another person appealing on one dimension without evaluating them similarly on the others.

The framework was subsequently extended to mediated relationships by Rubin and McHugh (1987), who examined physical, social, and task attraction in relation to PSRs with television performers. Interpersonal attraction is therefore relevant beyond direct interpersonal encounters, as audiences can form differentiated evaluations of media figures whom they know primarily through mediated exposure. In social media environments, followers similarly encounter influencers repeatedly through their content and can develop perceptions of their appearance, interpersonal appeal, and task-related capabilities. The present study accordingly treats physical, social, and task attractiveness as distinct dimensions rather than as a single measure of influencer attractiveness.

Physical attractiveness refers to the extent to which another person is evaluated favorably based on physical appearance. In mediated settings, visual presentation provides audiences with cues through which such evaluations can develop even in the absence of direct interaction. Physical attractiveness has consequently been examined as one dimension of audience attraction to media personalities, including in research on PSRs.

Social attractiveness concerns the extent to which another person is perceived as someone with whom social interaction or friendship would be desirable (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). It therefore captures interpersonal appeal rather than physical appearance. Rubin and McHugh (1987) incorporated social attraction into their examination of audience relationships with media personalities, making the construct particularly relevant to parasocial contexts. For social media influencers, social attractiveness reflects followers' evaluations of the influencer as a potentially desirable social partner despite the limited reciprocity of the actual follower–influencer relationship.

Task attractiveness refers to the extent to which another person is perceived as desirable to work with or engage with in accomplishing a task (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Unlike physical and social attractiveness, it centers on task-related evaluations rather than appearance or social companionship. Rubin and McHugh (1987) extended this dimension to mediated relationships by examining attraction to television performers. Within influencer contexts, task attractiveness is relevant to followers' perceptions of an influencer's desirability in relation to task-oriented interaction, providing a conceptually distinct dimension of interpersonal attraction.

Parasocial Relationships

Parasocial relationships describe the perceived interpersonal connections that audiences develop with media figures despite the absence of a fully reciprocal relationship. Horton and Richard Wohl (1956) introduced the concept to explain how audiences could experience a sense of intimacy with media performers through repeated mediated encounters. In traditional mass media, this relationship was largely one-sided: audiences became familiar with performers and their personalities, while performers had little or no knowledge of individual audience members. Such familiarity could nevertheless produce perceptions of closeness and interpersonal connection that resemble aspects of social relationships (Bhattacharya, 2023).

Research on parasocial phenomena initially centered on traditional media, particularly television and film (Siegenthaler et al., 2023). Social media has extended the concept to a communication environment in which the distinction between mediated and interpersonal interaction is less clear. Studies have documented PSRs between social media users and influencers across online contexts (Agnihotri et al., 2023; Aw et al., 2023; Du et al., 2023). Unlike audiences of traditional mass media, social media followers can encounter influencers frequently and engage with their content through comments and other platform features. These opportunities introduce limited reciprocity while retaining the asymmetry characteristic of PSRs, as most followers do not develop equivalent interpersonal relationships with the influencers they follow (Wong & Wei, 2023).

The influencer context is particularly relevant to PSR because followers are repeatedly exposed to both personal and commercial content from the same media figure. Access to influencers' experiences and everyday communication can contribute to a sense of familiarity, even when direct interaction remains limited (Koay et al., 2023). Consequently, brand endorsements occur within a relational context in which followers may already hold established perceptions of, and connections with, the influencer. PSR therefore provides an important construct for examining how follower–influencer relationships are associated with responses to influencer endorsements.

Attitude Towards Endorsed Brands

Attitude towards an endorsed brand refers to a consumer's overall evaluation of a brand promoted by an endorser (Spears & Singh, 2004). Brand attitudes are particularly relevant in endorsement contexts because consumers encounter the brand associated with an identifiable individual, allowing their perceptions of the endorser to influence their evaluation of the endorsed brand. Research on celebrity endorsement has long demonstrated that endorsers can shape consumers' evaluations of the brands with which

they are associated.

The relational nature of influencer marketing adds an important dimension to these evaluations. Unlike endorsements encountered as isolated advertising messages, influencer endorsements can appear within content produced by individuals whom followers already know and follow. Research on influencer marketing has consequently examined how followers' perceptions of and relationships with influencers are associated with responses to promoted products and brands (Han & Balabanis, 2024). Attitudes towards endorsed brands therefore provide a relevant outcome for examining whether followers' evaluations extend beyond the influencer to the brands associated with that influencer. In the present study, attitude towards the endorsed brand represents followers' overall evaluation of brands promoted by the YouTube influencers they follow.

Balance Theory

Balance theory originated in the work of social psychologist Fritz Heider (1946) and was developed further in *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (Heider, 1958). Heider proposed that individuals seek consistency in their perceptions of people, objects, and their relationships, whereas inconsistent configurations can create psychological tension. The basic formulation comprises three elements: a focal person (P), another person (O), and an object, issue, or entity (X). Relations among these elements may be positive or negative, with balance determined by whether the overall configuration is psychologically consistent from the focal person's perspective.

This structure can be extended to social media influencer marketing, with the follower representing the consumer (P), the influencer representing the endorser (O), and the endorsed brand representing the object (X). The context is particularly relevant because followers may develop PSRs with influencers through repeated mediated exposure. An endorsement establishes an association between the influencer and the brand, allowing the follower–influencer relationship to be considered alongside the follower's evaluation of the endorsed brand. Balance theory therefore provides a basis for examining whether stronger PSR with an influencer is associated with more favorable attitudes towards brands endorsed by that influencer.

In the present study, balance theory provides the theoretical foundation specifically for the proposed relationship between PSR and attitudes towards endorsed brands. The proposed antecedents of PSR—self-disclosure and physical, social, and task attractiveness—are grounded in research on mediated relationships and interpersonal attraction, respectively.

HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Self-disclosure can foster perceived intimacy by giving followers access to an influencer's personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences. In social media environments, repeated exposure to such disclosures can increase followers' sense of familiarity with an influencer and create perceptions of closeness despite limited direct interaction. Influencers can further reinforce this sense of familiarity by sharing personal experiences and aspects of their everyday lives with their followers.

This perceived access to personal information provides a basis for expecting a positive association between self-disclosure and PSR. Disclosure that followers perceive as personal or intimate can signal relational openness and strengthen feelings of connection with the influencer. As these perceptions of familiarity and closeness are central to PSR, greater self-disclosure is expected to be associated with stronger PSR. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Self-disclosure is positively associated with parasocial relationships.

Physical attractiveness has been associated with PSRs across different mediated contexts. Lee and Watkins (2016) found that perceptions of physical attractiveness were relevant to PSRs with online personalities in the context of luxury brand marketing, while Lou and Kim (2019) reported a positive association between physical attractiveness and PSRs among adolescent social media users. These findings suggest that favorable perceptions of an influencer's appearance can contribute to interpersonal appeal, thereby fostering parasocial connections.

Evidence, however, has not been consistent across influencer contexts. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) reported a negative association between physical attractiveness and parasocial interaction among followers of fashion influencers. This contrasting finding suggests that physical attractiveness may operate differently depending on the audience and influencer context. Given the positive associations reported in other mediated settings, the present study examines whether physical attractiveness is positively associated with PSRs among followers of YouTube influencers in Malaysia. Accordingly:

H2: Physical attractiveness is positively associated with parasocial relationships.

Social attractiveness is particularly relevant to PSRs because it reflects a media figure's interpersonal appeal and the extent to which audiences perceive that person as someone with whom they would like to interact. Rubin and McHugh (1987) found social attraction associated with PSRs involving television personalities, suggesting that perceived social appeal can contribute to the relational connection audiences form with

media figures.

Similar associations have been reported in social media contexts. Lee and Watkins (2016) found that the social attractiveness of online personalities was positively associated with PSRs among female participants. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) likewise reported a positive association between social attractiveness and parasocial interaction among followers of fashion influencers on Instagram and YouTube. However, the relationship was weaker among Generation Z participants. Together, these findings support the expectation that followers who perceive an influencer as more socially attractive will report stronger PSRs. Accordingly:

H3: Social attractiveness is positively associated with parasocial relationships.

Task attractiveness may contribute to PSRs when followers perceive an influencer as capable of providing useful information, advice, or guidance relevant to their interests. Rubin and McHugh (1987) examined task attraction in relation to audiences' connections with media personalities, providing an early basis for considering task-oriented evaluations in PSRs.

Evidence from digital environments further supports this relationship. Zheng et al. (2020) found that task attraction was associated with parasocial interaction in a social shopping context, while Su et al. (2021) reported a positive relationship between task attraction towards social media influencers and PSRs among Instagram users in Taiwan. These findings suggest that perceiving an influencer as useful and capable in areas valued by followers may contribute to the relational connection they develop with that influencer. Accordingly:

H4: Task attractiveness is positively associated **with** parasocial relationships.

PSRs can influence how followers respond to the commercial endorsements of social media influencers. Previous research has linked stronger PSRs with favorable consumer responses in social media contexts, including attitudes towards social networking sites and responses to influencer-generated content (Atta et al., 2025; Babu et al., 2024). Because endorsements associate an influencer with a particular brand, followers' existing relationship with that influencer may also influence how they evaluate the endorsed brand.

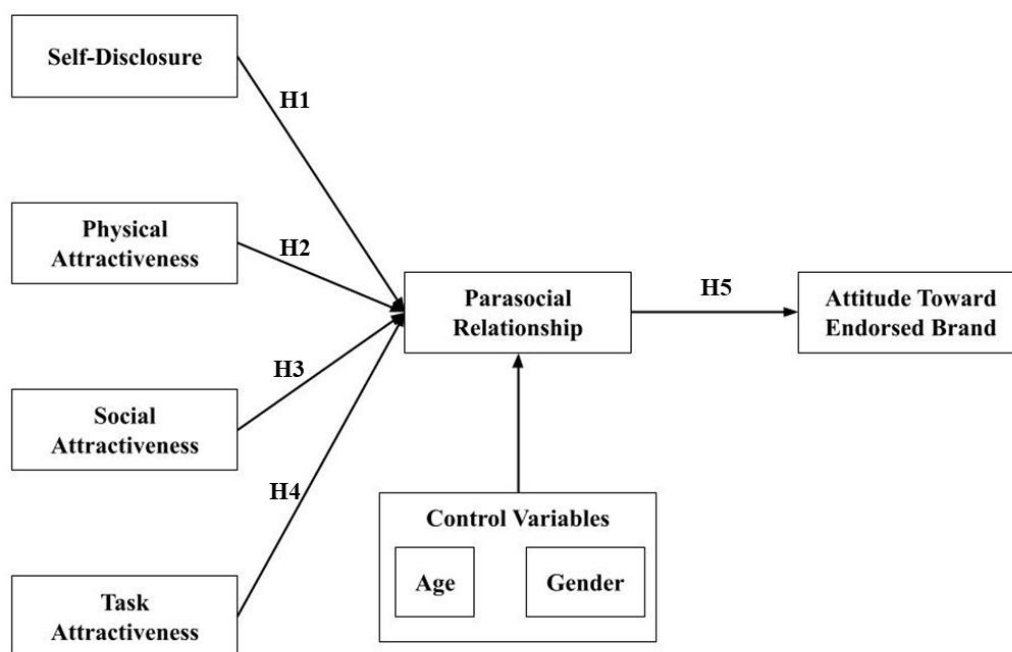
Balance theory provides the theoretical basis for this expected relationship. Applied to influencer marketing, the theory suggests that followers seek consistency between their relationship with an influencer and their evaluation of a brand positively associated with that influencer (Chiang et al., 2020). A follower who has developed a

favorable PSR with an influencer may therefore be more likely to evaluate the influencer's endorsed brand positively, maintaining consistency within the follower–influencer–brand relationship. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H5: Parasocial relationships with social media influencers are positively associated with attitudes towards endorsed brands.

Figure 1 visualizes the conceptual model of the study.

Figure 1 *Research Framework*



RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to collect data from respondents in Malaysia. Measurement items for the study constructs were adapted from established scales used in prior research and reworded as necessary to reflect the social media influencer context. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Before the main data collection, the questionnaire was pilot-tested with 15 graduate students from a private institution in Malaysia to assess the clarity and suitability of the adapted items. Table 1 presents the measurement items used for each construct and their respective sources.

Table 1 *Questionnaire Measures*

Construct	Item	Measures
Self-Disclosure (Kim & Song, 2016)	SD1	He/she shares information about himself/herself.
	SD2	He/she shares his/her feelings.
	SD3	He/she shares his/her beliefs.
	SD4	He/she shares his/her emotions.
Physical attractiveness (Duran & Kelly, 1988)	PH1	I think he/she is handsome/pretty.
	PH2	He/she is attractive.
	PH3	He/she is elegant.
	PH4	He/she is very attractive physically.
Social attractiveness (Duran & Kelly, 1988)	SC1	I think he/she and I can become friends.
	SC2	I want to have a friendly chat with him/her.
	SC3	He/she will be pleasant to be with.
	SC4	He/she could fit into my circle of 6 friends.
Task attractiveness (McCroskey & McCain, 1974)	TS1	He/she is multi-talented.
	TS2	I believe I can count on him/her to get the job done.
	TS3	He/she can be considered a problem-solver.
	PR1	He/she is just like a friend to me.
Parasocial Relationships (Rubin & Perse, 1987)	PR2	He/she is a down-to-earth and natural person.
	PR3	I am always eager to watch his/her next video.
	PR4	I will follow his/her updates, even on other social media channels.
	PR5	He/she understands what I want to know.
	PR6	If I saw a story about him/her on TV or in a newspaper, I will watch/read it.
	PR7	I miss his/her videos when he/she is taking a break.
	PR8	I wish I could meet him/her.
	PR9	I feel bad when others criticize him/her.
	PR10	I have attempted to meet him/her in person.
	AT1	I have a favorable opinion of the brands endorsed by him/her.
Attitude towards endorsed brand (Sengupta & Johar, 2002)	AT 2	I believe that brands endorsed by him/her deliver on their promises.
	AT3	I believe that brands endorsed by him/her can be trusted.

The study focused on Malaysian followers of social media influencers on YouTube. Data were collected through an online survey administered to respondents in Malaysia. The questionnaire was distributed electronically via a web-based survey link, allowing eligible participants to complete it online. Eligibility was assessed through screening questions presented at the beginning of the questionnaire. Respondents were required to indicate that they regularly used YouTube to follow influencer content, subscribed to a YouTube channel, and had previously purchased a product after watching a YouTuber's video. Only respondents who met all three criteria were permitted to proceed with the survey. Following screening and data collection, 333 responses were included in the analysis. The data were analyzed using SPSS version 27 for descriptive analysis, and the demographic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *Respondent's Profile*

Characteristics	Frequency	%Age
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	183	55%
Female	150	45%
<i>Age</i>		
Below 18	52	16%
18-25	144	43%
26-35	78	23%
36-50	42	13%
Above 50	17	5%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	202	61%
Married	131	39%
<i>Education</i>		
Secondary Education	18	5%
Diploma	51	16%
Bachelors	152	46%
Masters	88	26%
Postgraduate	24	7%

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Indicator reliability was examined using the outer loadings, while internal consistency reliability was assessed

using Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability. Convergent validity was evaluated through the average variance extracted (AVE), and discriminant validity was assessed using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT).

As shown in Table 3, all indicator loadings exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.70. Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .736 to .920, while composite reliability values were .885 or higher, indicating satisfactory internal consistency reliability across the constructs. All AVE values exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.50, supporting convergent validity. Discriminant validity was also established, as the HTMT values reported in Table 4 were below the 0.90 threshold.

Prior to evaluating the structural model, collinearity among the predictor constructs was assessed using the variance inflation factor (VIF). All VIF values were below the 5 threshold, indicating that collinearity was not a concern in the structural model.

Table 3 *Measurement Model Analysis*

Construct	Cronbach α	CR	AVE	Item	Outer Loading	VIF
Self-Disclosure	.880	.920	.740	HM1	.835	2.360
				HM2	.875	2.779
				HM3	.860	2.260
				HM4	.859	2.139
Physical Attractiveness	.830	.885	.660	PH1	.835	1.860
				PH2	.830	1.649
				PH3	.779	1.780
				PH4	.799	1.850
Social Attractiveness	.880	.920	.736	SC1	.860	2.305
				SC2	.880	2.649
				SC3	.879	2.659
				SC4	.810	1.729
Task Attractiveness	.859	.920	.784	TS1	.870	2.140
				TS2	.920	2.700
				TS3	.869	2.090
				PR1	.749	1.889
Parasocial Relationships	.920	.930	.570	PR2	.795	1.819
				PR3	.710	2.160
				PR4	.766	2.380
				PR5	.789	2.040
				PR6	.729	1.780
				PR7	.720	2.589
				PR8	.769	2.670
				PR9	.749	2.019
				PR10	.749	2.319
				AT1	.889	1.539
Attitude Towards Endorsed Brand	.744	.890	.792	AT2	.890	1.541
				AT3	.891	1.542

Table 4 *Assessment of Discriminant Validity Using HTMT*

	SD	PH	SC	TS	PR	AT
Self-Disclosure (SD)						
Physical Attractiveness (PH)	.789					
Social Attractiveness (SC)	.862	.800				
Task Attractiveness (TS)	.660	.670	.799			
Parasocial Relationship (PSR)	.802	.862	.898	.689		
Attitude Towards Endorsed Brand (AT)	.649	.690	.767	.770	.835	

The significance of the hypothesized relationships was assessed using a bootstrapping procedure with 1,000 subsamples in SmartPLS 3. The path coefficients and significance levels are presented in Table 5. Four of the five hypotheses were supported. Among the proposed antecedents of PSRs, social attractiveness showed the strongest positive association with PSR ($\beta = .450$, $p < .001$), followed by physical attractiveness ($\beta = .359$, $p < .001$) and self-disclosure ($\beta = .145$, $p = .008$). Task attractiveness was not significantly associated with PSR ($\beta = .062$, $p = .422$); therefore, H4 was not supported. PSRs were positively associated with attitudes towards endorsed brands ($\beta = .389$, $p < .001$), supporting H5.

The explanatory power and predictive relevance of the structural model were assessed using the coefficient of determination (R^2) and Stone–Geisser’s Q^2 , respectively. As shown in Table 6, the model explained 73.9% of the variance in PSRs ($R^2 = .739$; adjusted $R^2 = .738$) and 52.1% of the variance in attitudes towards endorsed brands ($R^2 = .521$; adjusted $R^2 = .520$). The Q^2 values for PSRs (.420) and attitudes towards endorsed brands (.401) were both above zero, supporting the model's predictive relevance for the endogenous constructs.

Table 5 *Results of Structural Model Assessment*

	Structural Path	β	p-value	Result
H1	Self-disclosure $\rightarrow$ Parasocial Relationships	.145	.008	Supported
H2	Physical Attractiveness $\rightarrow$ Parasocial Relationships	.359	<.001	Supported
H3	Social Attractiveness $\rightarrow$ Parasocial Relationships	.450	<.001	Supported
H4	Task Attractiveness $\rightarrow$ Parasocial Relationships	.062	.422	Not Supported
H5	Parasocial Relationships $\rightarrow$ Attitude towards endorsed brand	.389	<.001	Supported

Table 6 R^2 , R^2 Adjusted, Q^2

	R^2	R^2 Adjusted	Q^2
Attitude towards endorsed brand	.521	.520	.401
Parasocial Relationships	.739	.738	.420

Age and gender were included as control variables to account for potential demographic variation in PSRs. The control-variable paths were assessed using the PLS-SEM bootstrapping procedure, with the results presented in Table 7. None of the estimated paths was statistically significant ($p > .05$), indicating that the demographic control variables were not significantly associated with PSRs in the present model.

Table 7 *Model Comparison of Parasocial Relationships by Dummy Variables*

Control Variable	β	<i>p</i> -value
Female	.040	.155
Age: Below 18	-.002	.950
Age: 26–35	-.040	.229
Age: 36–50	.029	.070
Age: Above 50	-.025	.389

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The findings point to a distinctly relational pattern in the development of PSR with YouTube influencers. Social attractiveness was the strongest predictor, followed by physical attractiveness and self-disclosure, while task attractiveness was not significant. PSR, in turn, was positively associated with attitudes towards endorsed brands. The model therefore suggests that followers' relational evaluations of influencers are particularly relevant to PSR and that this relationship extends to the commercial context in which influencers endorse brands.

The association between PSR and endorsed-brand attitudes is consistent with balance theory. Within the follower–influencer–brand triad, a favorable relationship with the influencer is compatible with a favorable evaluation of a brand positively associated with that influencer. The significance of PSR in the model, therefore, lies in its position between the social relationships surrounding the influencer and the evaluation of the endorsed brand. This complements earlier evidence linking PSRs to consumer responses to influencers (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020) and demonstrates this relationship specifically for brand attitudes among YouTube influencer followers.

Social attractiveness provides the clearest insight into how PSR operates in this setting. Its stronger association with PSR than physical attractiveness or self-disclosure

indicates that followers' perceptions of an influencer as a desirable social partner are particularly relevant to parasocial connection. This accords with McCroskey and McCain's (1974) conceptualization of social attraction and with prior evidence linking social attraction to PSRs (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). Physical attractiveness was also significant, consistent with Lee and Watkins (2016) and Lou and Kim (2019), although this differs from Sokolova and Kefi's (2020) findings for fashion influencers. The inconsistency across studies cautions against assuming that visual appeal is equally relevant to PSR across influencer contexts.

Self-disclosure showed a smaller but significant association with PSR. Personal disclosure can give followers access to experiences and feelings ordinarily associated with greater interpersonal familiarity (Kim & Song, 2016). Its comparatively weaker coefficient, however, indicates that greater disclosure should not be treated as equivalent to stronger parasocial connection. Within this model, how socially appealing followers perceived the influencer to be was more closely associated with PSR than the extent of personal disclosure.

The non-significant result for task attractiveness is particularly informative. The construct was measured reliably, yet it did not explain a significant amount of variation in PSR after accounting for the other antecedents. This differs from the positive relationships reported by Rubin and McHugh (1987) and Su et al. (2021). More importantly, the contrast between social and task attractiveness shows why the three dimensions of interpersonal attraction should remain conceptually separate: attraction grounded in the prospect of social affiliation was strongly associated with PSR, whereas task-oriented attraction was not. The findings therefore do not support treating an influencer's different forms of interpersonal appeal as interchangeable sources of parasocial connection.

Age and gender did not explain significant variation in PSR when included as demographic controls. These null paths should be interpreted in light of their limited role in the model rather than as evidence that PSR is invariant across demographic groups. Establishing demographic differences would require a design that examines such differences as focal relationships.

Overall, the results sharpen the model's relational explanation of influencer marketing. PSR was associated more strongly with socially and physically oriented evaluations of the influencer than with task attraction, and stronger PSR was associated with more favorable attitudes towards endorsed brands. This pattern links the interpersonal basis of follower–influencer relationships to the follower–influencer–brand structure described by balance theory, while showing that the different antecedents of PSR make distinct contributions rather than functioning as a single set

of influencer attributes.

Managerial Implications

The findings have implications for how brands select influencers for YouTube campaigns. Social attractiveness had the strongest association with PSR, while task attractiveness was not significant. This suggests that choosing an influencer primarily for perceived competence may be less relevant when the campaign depends on followers' relationship with the influencer. Marketers should also consider how followers perceive the influencer socially and the extent to which an established connection with the audience is evident.

Physical attractiveness and self-disclosure were also associated with PSR, although their associations were weaker than that of social attractiveness. These findings caution against selecting influencers based on any single attribute. Of greater practical relevance is the finding that PSR was positively associated with attitudes towards endorsed brands. Before entering an endorsement partnership, brands should therefore consider the existing follower–influencer relationship alongside standard measures such as reach and engagement, particularly when the campaign objective is to develop favorable brand attitudes.

Limitations

The cross-sectional design limits the interpretation of the relationships identified in the model. PSR develops through continued exposure to a media figure, yet the data capture respondents' perceptions at one point in time. Longitudinal research would provide a better account of how these relationships develop and whether changes in attitudes towards endorsed brands

accompany changes in PSR.

The sample and research context also bound the findings. Participants were Malaysian YouTube users who met the study's screening criteria, including having made a prior purchase after exposure to YouTuber content. Generalization beyond this group therefore requires caution. Replication in other populations and national settings would help establish the model's consistency. Research on other social media platforms is also warranted, particularly where patterns of content consumption and follower interaction differ from those on YouTube.

The absence of a significant relationship between task attractiveness and PSR deserves closer examination. Given the construct's satisfactory measurement properties, the result raises questions about the conditions under which task attraction is relevant to PSRs. Studies involving influencers in knowledge-intensive or specialist domains could establish whether the importance of task attractiveness varies with content type

and the reasons followers seek out particular influencers.

The study is further limited to attitudes towards endorsed brands as the marketing outcome. Examining subsequent outcomes, including purchase intention and purchasing behavior, would show how far the relationships identified in the model extend into consumer decision-making. Experimental and longitudinal studies would be particularly useful for establishing the sequence and stability of these relationships.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work, the author(s) used ChatGPT in order to proofread and improve the language. After using this tool/service, the author(s) reviewed and edited the content as needed and take(s) full responsibility for the content of the publication.

Declaration

There was no funding received by any authors for this paper.

There was no conflict of interest.

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