

**The Dynamics of Parasocial Relationships in the Age of Social Media:  
A Systematic Review and Future Research Agenda**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Examining the evolving dynamics of parasocial relationships (PSRs) in social media, this in-depth systematic literature review utilizes the TCM framework to analyze 40 articles. The goal is to evaluate the influences on the development and persistence of PSRs and the one-sided bonds individuals create with media personalities. The importance of source credibility, attractiveness, and interactivity in promoting PSRs is emphasized in the research findings. These factors can influence consumer behaviors, brand attitudes, and psychological well-being. Quantitative methods were mainly used in the research, and the most studied platform was Instagram, while the most widely used framework was the source credibility theory. The review underscores the need for further research to explore the long-term implications of PSRs, the impact of emerging technologies, and ethical considerations in influencer marketing, advocating for a multi-method approach to understand the complexities of PSRs in the digital age.*

**Keywords: Parasocial Relationships; Social Media; Influencer Marketing; Consumer Behaviour; Source Credibility**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Social media has revolutionized how individuals interact with media personalities, blurring the lines between the real and the virtual. This shift has led to an increased interest in parasocial relationships (PSRs), and one-sided psychological bonds formed with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). While initially studied in the context of traditional media (e.g., television, radio), PSRs have gained prominence in the digital age, particularly on social media platforms where interactions between users and social media influencers (SMIs), celebrities, and brands are frequent and dynamic (Chung & Cho, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). The interactive nature of social media platforms allows for a sense of intimacy and reciprocity that was impossible in traditional media, making PSRs in the digital age a distinct phenomenon.

Social media platforms have become fertile ground for the cultivation of PSRs due to their affordances for self-disclosure, interaction, and engagement. Users can follow the daily lives of their favorite SMIs, celebrities, or brands, gaining insights into their personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Even though it is only a one-sided relationship, this situation can create connectedness and a sense of familiarity (Leite & Baptista, 2022). The ability to like, comment, and share content further enhances the illusion of reciprocity, making users feel like they are actively participating in a relationship with the media figure (Reinikainen et al., 2020). This perceived intimacy and connection can lead to various outcomes, such as increased trust, loyalty, and purchase intention towards the influencer or the brands they endorse.

Understanding PSRs in social media is crucial for both academics and practitioners. For scholars, it offers insights into the psychological and social processes underlying these relationships and their impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors. Research in this area has explored the antecedents of PSRs, such as source credibility, attractiveness, and homophily (the tendency to form connections with others who are similar to oneself) (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Liu & Zheng, 2024). Additionally, studies have investigated the consequences of PSRs, including increased purchase intention, brand loyalty, and positive brand attitudes (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Rungruangjit, 2022).

For marketers and brand managers, understanding PSRs can inform effective influencer marketing strategies and enhance consumer engagement (Leite & Baptista, 2022). By leveraging the power of PSRs, brands can build stronger connections with their target market, raise brand recognition, and stimulate sales. However, numerous elements, including the kind of influencer, the nature of the product or service being advertised, and the degree of audience involvement, can affect how effective influencer marketing is (Liu & Zheng, 2024).

Furthermore, policymakers can benefit from this knowledge to develop guidelines and regulations for ethical and transparent influencer marketing practices. As PSRs can significantly influence consumer behavior, it is essential to ensure that influencers disclose any sponsored content and that their marketing practices are transparent and ethical.

This systematic literature review intends to address an expanding corpus of studies on PSRs in social media by mapping the evolution of research trends. It will examine the growth of research over time, identify the most frequently studied social media platforms, and analyze the types of media figures that are the focus of PSR investigations. By

synthesizing existing knowledge, this review will provide a comprehensive overview of the field, highlight key findings, and identify areas for future research. Specifically, this review seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. How has research on PSRs in social media evolved?

RQ2. What types of media figures (influencers, celebrities, brands) are predominantly examined in PSR research on social media?

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Theories of Parasocial Relationships (PSRs)**

The theoretical underpinnings of PSR research have evolved, reflecting the changing media landscape and the increasing prominence of social media. Early research on PSRs was primarily based on the framework of uses and gratifications, which posits that people look to the media to satisfy various needs, including interaction and social companionship (Rubin et al., 1985; Rubin & Step, 2000). This perspective led to the substitution hypothesis, suggesting that PSRs serve as a compensatory mechanism for those who find it difficult to establish genuine relationships in real life (Tsao, 1996). However, this hypothesis has received limited empirical support, with many studies finding that PSR intensity and social impairments do not significantly correlate (Tukachinsky et al., 2021). In contrast, the Panksepp-Jakobson hypothesis proposes that PSRs are not a substitute for real-life relationships but rather an extension of them (Stever, 2023). This hypothesis suggests that the same psychological processes involved in social relationships are also recruited when processing mediated relationships. This perspective is supported by research demonstrating that elements that promote interpersonal relationships, such as perceived homophily (similarity) and attractiveness, are also strongly associated with PSR intensity (Tukachinsky et al., 2021).

### **Parasocial Relationships in the Digital Age**

The notion of parasocial relationships (PSRs) was initially introduced by Horton & Wohl (1956) to describe the one-sided psychological bonds that individuals form with media figures. While originally studied in the context of traditional media, such as television and radio, PSRs have gained prominence in the digital age, particularly on social media platforms. The interactive nature of social media has transformed the dynamics of PSRs, allowing for a greater sense of intimacy and reciprocity between users and influencers (Chung & Cho, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This has led to a surge in research exploring the antecedents and consequences of PSRs in the context of social media influencers (SMIs). The unique characteristics of social media, such as the ability to interact with influencers in real time, leave comments, and share content, have created new avenues for the development and maintenance of PSRs (Labrecque, 2014).

### **Antecedents of Parasocial Relationships**

Several factors have been identified as antecedents of PSRs in social media. One of the most prominent factors is the perceived attractiveness of the influencer, which

encompasses physical attractiveness, personality, and lifestyle (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Rungruangjit, 2022). This is consistent with the source attractiveness model, which posits that attractive sources are more persuasive and influential. Additionally, source credibility, which includes expertise, trustworthiness, and goodwill, has been found to be a significant predictor of PSRs (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Liu & Zheng, 2024). This aligns with the source credibility model, it highlights how crucial the communicator's perceived expertise and trustworthiness in influencing attitudes and behaviors (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Other factors, such as perceived similarity or homophily between the influencer and the follower, as well as the influencer's interactivity and self-disclosure, have also been shown to play a role in the formation of PSRs (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Liu & Zheng, 2024).

### **Consequences of Parasocial Relationships**

PSRs have been linked to various consumer behaviors and attitudes. One of the most significant consequences is the increased purchase intention towards products or services endorsed by the influencer (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Bi & Zhang, 2023; Rungruangjit, 2022). This is because consumers who have developed a PSR with an influencer are more likely to trust their recommendations and view them as credible sources of information (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Additionally, PSRs have been associated with increased brand loyalty and positive brand attitudes (Lacap et al., 2024). This is in line with the concept of brand credibility, which suggests that a brand's trustworthiness and expertise can lead to increased consumer loyalty (Erdem & Swait, 2004).

### **The Role of Parasocial Relationships in Influencer Marketing**

PSRs play an important part in the effectiveness of influencer marketing. When consumers form strong PSRs with influencers, they are more likely to be persuaded by their endorsements and recommendations (Breves et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2024). This is because PSRs create a sense of trust and intimacy, making consumers more receptive to the influencer's message. Furthermore, PSRs can enhance the perceived authenticity of the influencer, which is a critical factor in influencer marketing (Aw & Chuah, 2021). The perceived authenticity of influencers can be further strengthened by their self-disclosure and interactive communication with their followers (Aw & Chuah, 2021; Lacap et al., 2024).

### **Moderating Factors**

Several factors can moderate the relationship between PSRs and their outcomes. One such factor is self-esteem, which has been found to influence the impact of PSRs on purchase intention (Bi & Zhang, 2023). Individuals with lower self-esteem may be more likely to purchase products endorsed by influencers they have a PSR with, as a way to compensate for their lack of self-worth. Additionally, the type of product being endorsed and the level of congruence between the influencer and the product can also moderate the effects of PSRs (Liu et al., 2024). For example, the effect of PSRs on purchase intention may be stronger for hedonic products (those that provide pleasure and enjoyment) than for utilitarian products (those that serve a practical purpose).

## **Emerging Trends and Future Directions**

The research on PSRs in social media is constantly evolving. Using machine learning and artificial intelligence to recognize and evaluate influencer marketing campaigns is one of the emerging trends (Liu et al., 2024). Additionally, there is a growing interest in understanding the ethical implications of influencer marketing and the role of disclosure in maintaining transparency and trust (Breves et al., 2021). Future studies should investigate the complex dynamics of PSRs in social media and their impact on consumer behavior. This includes investigating the role of different social media platforms, the impact of various types of influencers (e.g., mega-influencers, micro-influencers), and the long-term effects of PSRs on consumer behavior.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

To ascertain the current state of knowledge, assess the body of literature, and pinpoint potential future research avenues in the area of parasocial relationships in social media, we carried out an extensive systematic literature review (SLR) in this study. The study topics, search strategy, eligibility requirements, data extraction procedure, and synthesis techniques were all outlined in a thorough review protocol that was constructed (Mengist et al., 2020). This systematic literature review adheres to the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines (Page et al., 2021) to guarantee thorough and honest reporting of the review procedure. Furthermore, an SLR method is a useful tool for synthesizing research since it rigorously follows established guidelines and transparent, reproducible scientific protocols (Paul & Criado, 2020).

A comprehensive search was conducted in the Scopus electronic database, which is the largest transdisciplinary database of peer-reviewed literature for studies in social science and is frequently employed by sophisticated systematic reviews. The search strategy include a controlled combination of keywords and vocabulary terms related to parasocial relationships, social media, influencers, celebrities, streaming platforms, and virtual reality (Brereton et al., 2007). The Boolean operators AND, OR used for the selected search query were; ("parasocial relationship" AND "social media" OR "streaming platform" OR "virtual reality" OR "live streaming commerce" OR "social media influencers"). A total of 216 documents were obtained, with the "Scopus-Analyze-Year", showing an increasing trend of research documents in the field of parasocial relationships on social media shows an increase from the year (2024 up to July), as seen in Figure 1. The figure indicates a significant surge in research on parasocial relations on social media, particularly from 2020 onwards. This sharp increase suggests a growing academic interest in the phenomenon, possibly fueled by the heightened use of social media during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Search for literature articles is restricted to the year of publication from 2014 to 2024 on July 7, 2024. The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the first phase of the data search were determined using the relevant scientific articles' research, in accordance with earlier systematic studies in the field of marketing. To narrow down the search, we excluded conference paper, book chapter, review, erratum, data paper, conference review, book and only included articles in English. This is because research published in peer-reviewed journals continues to have a significant impact and is regarded as established knowledge

(Mihalache & Mihalache, 2016). Using the identified procedure described, 175 ready-to-use papers for the next step were collected during the initial phase of the PRISMA guidelines.

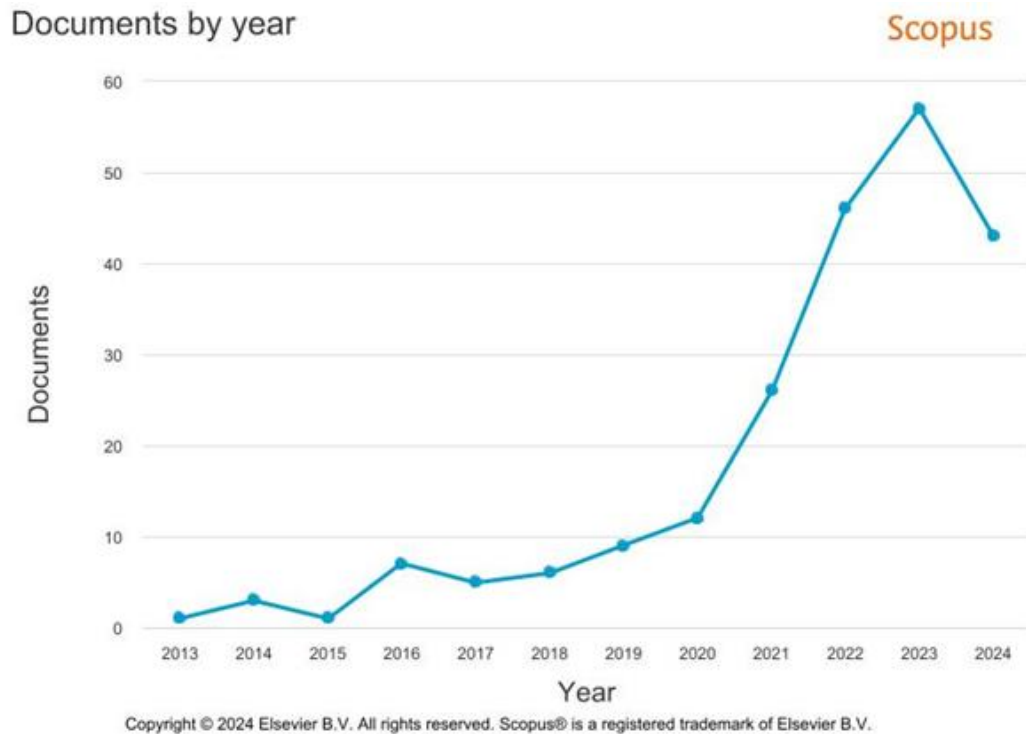


Figure 1. Scopus-Analyze-Years.

The screening process, as outlined in the PRISMA 2020 statement, involves evaluating identified records (titles and abstracts) against predefined eligibility criteria. The goal is to reduce the initial pool of studies to a manageable set for further full-text review in the eligibility phase. The PRISMA 2020 statement recommends that authors specify the methods used to decide if a study met the inclusion criteria, including the number of reviewers who screened each record and full-text report, whether they worked independently, and any automation tools used in the process (Page et al., 2021). During the screening process, 112 publications were disqualified based on the titles, keywords, and abstracts that were reviewed. We also removed twenty-three more items because the report could not be retrieved or was excluded for some other reason. Ultimately, 40 articles are prepared for use in research that aligns with the social media environment of PSRs. A domain that includes forty publications or more suggests that it is mature enough for review, allowing systematic literature studies to significantly advance that topic (Paul et al., 2021).

The process technique is shown in Figure 2 to provide a more thorough and in-depth description of our search strategy utilizing the "PRISMA 2020 guidelines".

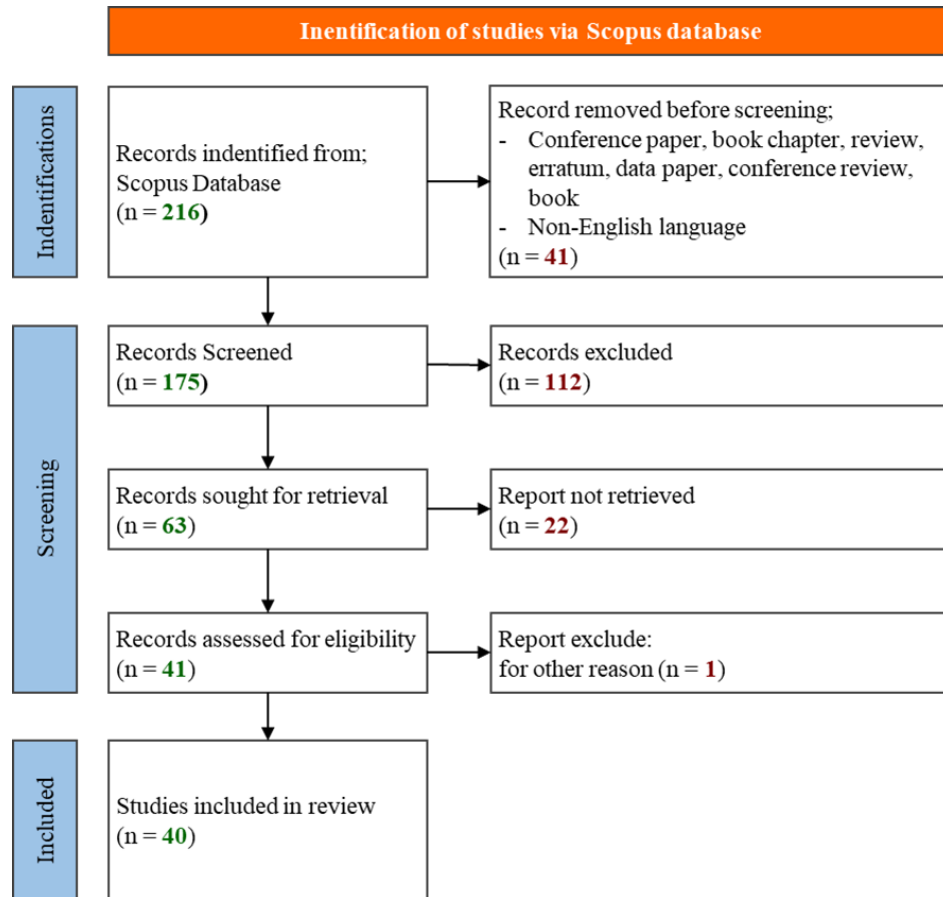


Figure 2. Search strategy using the PRISMA 2020 guidelines

The next action was reading each article through to the very end to find material relevant to our theme. Every single article was coded using; author(s), title, publication year, source title, theory applied, research design (qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods), research method (survey, experimental, observations, interviews), sample size, constructs, context, finding, and future research. The code makes it simpler to document conclusions about the technical specifics of the articles that have been reviewed (e.g., publication year, theory applied, and methods applied) which are an essential first step in understanding the extent of this field of study and identifying any gaps that may require more research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Source of Parasocial Relationships in Social Media Studies

Exploring parasocial relationships in social media, a psychological phenomenon where individuals develop one-sided emotional bonds with public figures like celebrities, fictional characters, or influencers, often feeling a sense of intimacy and familiarity despite the lack of reciprocal interaction. This phenomenon attracts the interest of various disciplines due to its complexity and implications in everyday life. This general picture can be seen from research on the topic of parasocial relationships published in a large number

of publications from various disciplines, as depicted in Table 1 sources of parasocial relationships in social media.

**Table 1. Sources of Parasocial Relationships in Social Media**

Source Title	TP	Source Title	TP
Journal of Business Research	4	International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	1
Frontiers in Psychology	2	Journal of Consumer Behavior	1
Heliyon	2	Journal of Data and Information Science	1
International Journal of Customer Relationship Marketing and Management	2	Journal of Internet Commerce	1
Spanish Journal of Marketing - ESIC	2	Journal of Marketing Communications	1
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	1	Journal of Marketing Management	1
Asian Journal of Communication	1	Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice	1
Chinese Journal of Communication	1	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing	1
Communication Research Reports	1	PLoS ONE	1
Communication Studies	1	Psychology and Marketing	1
Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking	1	Psychology Research and Behavior Management	1
Emerging Science Journal	1	Revista Brasileira de Marketing	1
Environmental Communication	1	Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations	1
Humanities and Social Sciences Communications	1	SAGE Open	1
Information Technology and People	1	Social Sciences	1
International Journal of Advertising	1	Sustainability (Switzerland)	1
International Journal of Applied Economics, Finance and Accounting	1	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>40</b>

Note: TP: Total Publications

Despite the fact that Table 1 shows that research on parasocial relationships in social media is almost evenly distributed across 36 publication source titles, it is implicitly clear that business marketing, communication, and psychology are the disciplines that dominate this field of study. Combined with Figure 1. Scopus-Analyze-Years, illustrates that the topic of parasocial relationships in social media, especially the constructs of parasocial relationships, has quite interesting prospects to be used as a research topic, especially for the discipline of business marketing. On the other hand, this phenomenon has implications for business practitioners to pay attention to the variables of parasocial relationships in

developing business strategies, in particular within the marketing area, to pay more attention to and even prioritize the elements of parasocial relationships in terms of marketing policies.

### TCM Framework Studies

In this comprehensive literature review, the body of research on parasocial relationships in social media is examined and compiled using the TCM (Theories, Contexts, and Methods) framework. The TCM framework provides a structured approach to examine the theoretical underpinnings, contextual factors, and methodological approaches that have shaped the research landscape in this field (Paul et al., 2021).

#### *Theories Used of Parasocial Relationships in Social Media Studies*

The 'Theories' component of the TCM framework serves as the foundation for this systematic literature review, aiming to identify and critically evaluate the dominant theoretical perspectives that have been employed to understand parasocial relationships in social media. By examining the evolution and application of these theories, this review seeks to uncover their strengths, limitations, and potential for further development in explaining the complexities of the field (Paul et al., 2021).

To facilitate conversation and enhance the presentation, parasocial relationship theory and parasocial interaction theory are not displayed in the table since practically all of the research publications examined in this study make use of both theories, or at least have discussed both theories in passing. On the other hand, of the 47 theories, models, and frameworks used as research references for the 40 articles, not all of them are shown in Table 2 frequently applied theories on parasocial relationships in social media. On the other hand, not all of the 47 theories, models, and frameworks that were cited in the 40 publications' study are displayed.

**Table 2 Frequently Applied Theories on Parasocial Relationships in Social Media**

Theories	Author	TA
Source Credibility Theory	Wahab et al. (2024), Bi & Zhang (2023), (Hess et al. 2022), Rungruangjit (2022), Silva & Costa (2021), Reinikainen et al. (2020), Gong & Li (2019), Chung & Cho (2017), Yuan et al. (2016)	9
Attribution Theory	Du et al. (2023), Breves et al. (2021), Aw & Chuah (2021)	3
Match-up Theory	Liu et al. (2024), Rungruangjit (2022), Thelwall et al. (2022)	3
Social Comparison Theory	Bi & Zhang (2023), Garcia et al. (2022), Lou & Kim (2019)	3
Social Exchange Theory	Zheng et al. (2022), Yuan et al. (2021) Zhong et al. (2021)	3
Stimulus-organism-response Theory	Aw et al. (2023), Burnasheva & Suh (2022), Taher et al. (2022)	3
Elaboration Likelihood Model	Liu & Zheng (2024), Sulaiti & Mimoun (2023)	2
Meaning Transfer Model	Aw et al. (2023), Leite & Baptista (2022)	2
Persuasion Knowledge Theory	Bi & Zhang (2023), Breves et al. (2021)	2
Self-disclosure theory	Leite & Baptista (2022), Chung & Cho (2017)	2

Theories	Author	TA
Social Cognitive Theory	Ahmed et al. (2024), Aw et al. (2023)	2
Source Models	Lacap et al. (2024), Liu et al. (2024)	2
Uncertainty Reduction Theory	Zheng et al. (2022), Leite & Baptista (2022)	2

Note: TA: Total Articles

Table 2 illustrates how the article expands upon the most widely used theories in research on parasocial relationships in social media. The prominence of Source Credibility Theory underscores the importance of the perceived credibility of media figures in fostering parasocial relationships. The more credible a figure is perceived to be, the more likely the audience is to develop a parasocial relationship with them. This highlights how perceptions of expertise, trustworthiness, and attractiveness of media figures can influence audience engagement.

Attribution Theory focuses on how individuals explain the behavior of others, including media figures. In the context of parasocial relationships, this theory can help understand how audiences interpret the actions and motives of media figures, which in turn shapes their perceptions and feelings toward them.

Match-up Theory suggests that the congruence between a media figure and the product or brand they represent can influence communication effectiveness and the formation of parasocial relationships. It emphasizes the importance of selecting media figures who align with the brand's image and values to establish stronger connections with the audience.

Social Comparison Theory posits that individuals tend to compare themselves with others, including media figures, for self-evaluation. In the context of parasocial relationships, these comparisons can impact the audience's self-esteem and psychological well-being, especially if they idealize the media figure.

Social Exchange Theory views social relationships, including parasocial ones, as reciprocal exchanges between individuals. Audiences engage in parasocial relationships when they perceive the benefits they receive, such as entertainment, information, or a sense of belonging, to outweigh the costs they incur.

Stimulus-Organism-Response (S-O-R) Theory explains how stimuli from the environment (e.g., social media content) influence individuals (organisms) and lead to specific responses (e.g., the formation of parasocial relationships). It underscores the role of environmental factors and individual cognitive processes in shaping parasocial relationships.

Other theories mentioned in the table, such as the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Self-disclosure Theory, and Social Cognitive Theory, also offer valuable insights into various aspects of parasocial relationships in social media. Overall, the utilization of these diverse theories demonstrates the complexity of the parasocial relationship phenomenon and the importance of considering multiple theoretical perspectives to fully comprehend the dynamics of these relationships in the ever-evolving social media landscape.

### *Contexts of Parasocial Relationships in Social Media*

The 'Contexts' section of this systematic literature review, guided by the TCM framework, will delve into the diverse settings and conditions under which parasocial relationships have been investigated in the context of social media. The examination of various contexts, such as different social media platforms, cultural backgrounds, and user demographics, aims to uncover the nuanced ways in which these factors shape the formation, maintenance, and impact of parasocial relationships in the digital age (Paul et al., 2021).

The media platform utilized for the research was distributed as indicated in Table 3 among the 40 articles that are the subject of this systematic literature review.

**Table 3. Media Platform Distribution**

Media Platform	Author
Instagram	Wahab et al. (2024); Lacap et al. (2024); Bismo et al. (2023), Sulaiti & Mimoun (2023), Conde & Casais (2023), Du et al. (2023), Hess et al. (2022), Leite & Baptista (2022), Tafheem et al. (2022), Um (2022), Breves & Liebers (2022), Burnasheva & Suh (2022), Silva & da Costa (2021)), Aw & Chuah (2021), Su et al. (2021)
Multiple Social Media Platforms	Liu & Zheng (2024), Ahmed et al. (2024); Aw et al. (2023), Garcia et al. (2022), Taher et al. (2022), Lou & Kim (2019), Chung & Cho (2017), Yuan et al. (2016), Jennings & Alper (2016)
YouTube	Bi & Zhang (2023); Silaban et al. (2023), Conde & Casais (2023), Du et al. (2023), Tafheem et al. (2022), Thelwall et al. (2022), Reinikainen et al. (2020), Bond (2016)
Weibo	Zheng et al. (2022), Zhao et al. (2022), Shen (2020), Gong & Li (2019)
e-Commerce Platforms	Liu et al. (2024), Du et al. (2023), Rungruangit (2022)
Social Networking Sites (SNS)	Canduela et al. (2024), Yuan et al. (2021)

The data highlights that Instagram was the most frequently studied platform, suggesting its prominence in parasocial relationship research. The table also reveals a significant number of studies that examined multiple social media platforms, indicating a growing recognition of the interconnected nature of social media usage and its impact on parasocial relationships. YouTube, while less frequently studied than Instagram, still holds a significant presence in the research landscape. Additionally, the table includes less frequently studied platforms like Weibo, e-commerce platforms, and general social networking sites, demonstrating the diversity of platforms being explored in this field of research. The data in the table emphasizes how dynamic and complex parasocial relationships are in the digital age, emphasizing the need for more study on a variety of platforms to completely comprehend this phenomenon.

The dynamic and interactive features of social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping parasocial relationships. The affordances of platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and Bilibili, which enable direct communication, self-disclosure, and real-time interaction, foster a sense of intimacy and connection that can significantly strengthen parasocial bonds (Conde & Casais, 2023; Lacap et al., 2024; Liu et al., 2024; Um, 2022; Wahab et al., 2024;

Zhao et al., 2022). The immediacy and presence afforded by live-streaming platforms further amplify this sense of connection, making influencers appear more accessible and relatable (Rungruangjit, 2022).

Cultural backgrounds also play a crucial role in shaping parasocial relationships. The research emphasizes the importance of considering cultural contexts, particularly in understanding how parasocial relationships are formed and expressed in different cultures. For instance, the concept of "cuteness" has a unique role in fostering parasocial relationships with luxury brands in the Chinese market (Shen, 2020). Moreover, collectivistic cultures, with their emphasis on group harmony and social connections, may foster stronger parasocial bonds compared to individualistic cultures (Du et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2022).

User demographics, particularly age and gender, also significantly influence parasocial relationships. The digital native generation, having grown up in a media-saturated environment, is particularly adept at forming and maintaining online relationships, including parasocial ones. Additionally, gender dynamics play a role, with women often reporting stronger parasocial relationships than men (Conde & Casais, 2023; Silva & Costa, 2021). The research also highlights the impact of parasocial relationships on adolescents, shaping their consumption behaviors and attitudes (Bond, 2016; Lou & Kim, 2019).

In conclusion, the exploration of various contexts reveals the intricate interplay of social media platforms, cultural backgrounds, and user demographics in shaping parasocial relationships. These relationships are not static or uniform but are instead molded by the dynamic and multifaceted digital landscape. Understanding these nuanced dynamics is crucial for comprehending the impact of social media on individuals' connections with media personalities and its broader implications for various fields, including marketing, psychology, and communication studies.

### *Methods of Parasocial Relationships in Social Media*

The 'Methods' section of this systematic literature review, in line with the TCM framework, will provide a critical analysis of the methodological approaches employed in the study of parasocial relationships within social media. The examination of diverse research designs, data collection techniques, and analytical methods will highlight the methodological strengths and limitations of the existing literature, thereby informing future research endeavors and promoting methodological rigor in this evolving field (Paul et al., 2021).

A table that presents the research design, research methodology, and data collecting (statistical analysis) strategies utilized by the 40 articles in the systematic literature review helps to enrich the presentation and promote discussion.

**Table 4. Methods**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>Statistical analysis</b>
Chen et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	PLS-SEM
Canduela et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	Factor Analysis, Binary Logistic Regression
Wahab et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	SEM using SmartPLS 4, SPSS
Lacap et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	PLS path modeling
Liu et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Online questionnaires	SmartPLS 3.0
Ahmed et al. (2024)	Quantitative	Self-administered online surveys	SEM using SmartPLS 4
Bi & Zhang (2023)	Quantitative	Online survey	Sequential mediation model and Hayes PROCESS customized mediation
Bismo et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Online survey	Path analysis using SMART PLS
Aw et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Online questionnaire survey	PLS-SEM, fsQCA
Silaban et al. (2023)	Quantitative	Online survey	SEM using Smart-PLS 3.0 and fsQCA
Sulaiti & Mimoun (2023)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	SmartPLS4, SPSS 28, Process Macro v4.2
Conde & Casais (2023)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	PROCESS macro for SPSS
Du et al. (2023)	Experimental	Online experiment & Questionnaires	SPSS 24 and PROCESS macro
Zhao et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Online questionnaire survey	PLS-SEM
Zheng et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	PLS-SEM
Garcia et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	EFA, CFA, SEM
Um (2022)	Quantitative	Online survey & Questionnaires	Path analysis via SPSS AMOS 21.0

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Research Methods</b>	<b>Statistical analysis</b>
(Hess et al. 2022)	Quantitative	Online experiments	Bootstrapping Techniques
Leite & Baptista (2022)	Survey, Cross-sectional	Survey & Questionnaires	SEM software IBM SPSS Amos®
Tafheem et al. (2022)	Quantitative	Online questionnaires	CFA, MMR
Breves & Liebers (2022)	Experimental	Online study & Questionnaires	ANCOVA, Hayes PROCESS customized mediation
Rungruangjit (2022)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	PLS-SEM
Burnasheva & Suh (2022)	Quantitative	Online survey & Questionnaires	SEM and multi-group methods
Taher et al. (2022)	Survey	Online questionnaires	SPSS
Thelwall et al. (2022)	Mixed methods	YouTube comments, Content analysis of videos	Spearman correlations, Qualitative analysis (content analysis)
Breves et al. (2021)	Experimental	Online study & Questionnaires	ANCOVA, Hayes PROCESS customized mediation
Yuan et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Questionnaires	SPSS 21.0 and AMOS 21.0, CFA, SEM
Aw & Chuah (2021)	Survey, Cross-sectional	Questionnaires	Partial Least Squares SEM
Silva & Costa (2021)	Quantitative	Online survey	Multiple Linear Regression and Hayes PROCESS customized mediation
Zhong et al. (2021)	Survey	Electronic survey	PLS
Su et al. (2021)	Quantitative	Online questionnaires	Regression analysis, hierarchical moderated regression analysis
Shen (2020)	Experimental	Pretests, main experiment with non-student sample	Independent samples t-tests, ANOVA, serial mediation analysis

Authors	Research Design	Research Methods	Statistical analysis
Reinikainen et al. (2020)	Experimental	Online Survey	CFA, Interaction effect analysis
Gong & Li (2019)	Quantitative	Online survey	SEM
Lou & Kim (2019)	Quantitative	Online survey via Qualtrics panel	PLS-SEM, fsQCA
Chung & Cho (2017)	Quantitative	Online survey	SEM
(Rosaen & Dibble, 2017)	Quantitative	Internet-based survey	Correlations, Multiple regression, ANOVA
Bond (2016)	Quantitative	Online survey	Linear regression analysis
Yuan et al. (2016)	Quantitative	Survey of social media users	SEM
Jennings & Alper (2016)	Mixed methods	Interviews	Chi-square tests, ANOVA

The methodological approaches employed in the 40 articles reviewed reveal a strong inclination toward quantitative research designs. The necessity of monitoring and quantifying parasocial relationships in the context of social media has been emphasized by the frequent usage of surveys and questionnaires as data collection methods (Canduela et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024; Wahab et al., 2024). The popularity of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), particularly through software like PLS-SEM and SmartPLS, further highlights the focus on examining complex relationships and testing theoretical models within this research domain (Lacap et al., 2024; Liu & Zheng, 2024; Wahab shenet al., 2024).

The diversity of statistical methods employed, including regression analysis, factor analysis, and ANOVA, reflects the multifaceted nature of parasocial relationship research and the adaptability of researchers in selecting appropriate analytical tools (Du et al., 2023; Lacap et al., 2024; Shen, 2020). Even though they are not as common, the inclusion of experimental designs indicate an increasing fascination with determining causality and understanding how influenced variables impact parasocial interactions (Du et al., 2023; Reinikainen et al., 2020; Shen, 2020).

While the quantitative approaches dominate the landscape, the limited use of qualitative methods, such as interviews or content analysis, suggests a potential avenue for future research to delve deeper into the subjective experiences and nuances of parasocial relationships (Jennings & Alper, 2016; Thelwall et al., 2022). Incorporating qualitative research could yield a deeper understanding of the viewpoints and experiences of those involved in these connections.

In conclusion, the methodological landscape of parasocial relationship research in social media strongly emphasizes quantitative approaches and theory testing. The diversity of statistical methods and the inclusion of experimental designs demonstrate the adaptability and rigor of researchers in this field. However, the limited use of qualitative

methods highlights a potential area for future exploration, offering opportunities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and nuances of parasocial relationships in the digital age.

## **FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA**

The future research agenda on parasocial relationships in social media opens up a world full of opportunities, encouraging researchers to be more granular and explore the layers of these otherwise one-directional connections online. By using longitudinal studies, an emerging area of study and a major strength of the causative lens approach to parasocial relationships, researchers can follow changes in these relationships over time which will shed light on how they affect people for good or bad. Given the rapidly changing nature of social media, continued research on parasocial relationships is warranted to keep up with new developments and issues in this area. Additionally, the rise of virtual reality and augmented reality is set to take parasocial experiences to an even deeper level making it near impossible to distinguish what is real from what's not. The impact of these technologies on the formation, maintenance, and consequences of parasocial relationships warrants further investigation.

The study of cross-cultural differences is important for understanding how cultural norms and values affect parasocial relationships in different international settings. As the world becomes more interconnected through social media, it is crucial to have a nuanced understanding of how cultural factors influence parasocial interactions. Future research should investigate how parasocial relationships impact vulnerable populations, such as individuals with low self-esteem or those who are prone to social comparison. It is also important to further explore the potential negative consequences of parasocial relationships, such as obsessive behaviors and stalking, in order to develop effective interventions and support mechanisms.

The impact of different types of influencers, such as mega-influencers, micro-influencers, and virtual influencers, on parasocial relationships needs further investigation. The emergence of virtual influencers, in particular, brings new challenges and opportunities for understanding the boundaries between the real and the virtual in parasocial interactions. On the other hand, the ethical implications of influencer marketing and the role of disclosure in maintaining transparency and trust are also crucial areas for future research. As social media continues to evolve, it is essential to establish ethical guidelines and regulations that protect consumers and ensure the authenticity and integrity of influencer marketing practices.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of parasocial relationships in the digital era, researchers should employ a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as innovative data collection and analysis techniques. This integrated approach will provide a more comprehensive insight into the complexities of these relationships. Additionally, it is crucial to further investigate the potential of interventions and educational programs aimed at promoting healthy parasocial relationships and mitigating potential negative consequences. Equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate parasocial interactions can contribute to fostering a safer and more positive online environment.

## CONCLUSION

The comprehensive literature review on parasocial relationships in social media has uncovered a burgeoning field of research that delves into the intricate dynamics of one-sided bonds formed with media personalities in the digital age. The review has underscored the significant influence of social media platforms, cultural contexts, and user demographics on the formation, maintenance, and consequences of parasocial relationships. The predominance of quantitative research designs and the use of diverse theoretical frameworks highlight the growing academic interest in understanding this phenomenon. The findings emphasize the importance of source credibility, perceived attractiveness, and interactivity in fostering parasocial relationships, which in turn can impact consumer behaviors, brand attitudes, and psychological well-being. The review also underscores the need for further research to explore the long-term implications of parasocial relationships, the impact of emerging technologies, and the ethical considerations surrounding influencer marketing. The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, along with cross-cultural studies and investigations into vulnerable populations, will enrich our understanding of the complexities and nuances of parasocial relationships in the ever-evolving social media landscape.

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