



Impact of Fanship and Parasocial Interaction on Parasocial Relationship Between Users and Social Media Influencers

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ABSTRACT

With an evolving trend of social networking in Pakistan, people spend an ample amount of time on various platforms. The progressive dynamics of interaction and communication between people are now reaching their peak, and social media influencers (SMIs) are getting attention from users. They are being followed by a large number of individuals who admire the posted content and engage through the regular updates. Over time, users develop psychological bonds with influencers. Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the impact of fanship on parasocial interaction and the relationship between users and influencers. The population of this study comprises 6 public and private sector universities from Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad in five common departments, including males and females, whose age range from 18-44 years, following at least one influencer on any social networking platform. A total of 372 participants have responded to a survey, selected through a simple random sampling technique. The findings revealed that fanship played a significant role in developing parasocial interactions and relationships between users and social media influencers. The impact of parasocial interaction was also found to be positive on parasocial relationship, which reflects that through repetitive exposure, people develop a one-sided relationship beyond the media exposure time, which also remains unknown to influencers. The results offer insights into digital fan behavior and call for further studies on how different platforms and cultures shape these relationships.



Introduction

In the age of computer-mediated communication (CMC), the dominance of traditional media platforms is minimized to a greater extent, and a large number of individuals have shifted to new media platforms to seek information, entertainment, and maintain relationships in virtual communities (Hair, Clark & Shapiro, 2010). The dynamics of information sharing and exchange have evolved progressively, and the reliance on social networking sites (hereafter SNS) has provided people with quicker access to connect with others, facilitating the formation of strong ties among them (Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2017). The evolving nature of new media platforms is spreading across various communities, and a range of outlets have become accessible to people, including WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube (Kapoor, Tamilmani, Rana, Patil, Dwivedi, & Nerur, 2017). Similar to real-life relationships with friends, SNS allow people to be a part of a community having common interests in the virtual world. The formation of this relationship is not limited to people but also between companies and consumers. This aspect makes SNS an influential marketing medium, as it connects people and makes mutual-interest communities in the landscape of online media (Carlson & Lee, 2015; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2010; Tang & Koh, 2017).

The role of influencers or micro celebrities in the online media is significant. Social media influencers (hereafter SMIs) are recreating the ways people buy something, as most people rely on the information about the products transmitted by the influencers in their posts instead of traditional advertisements (SlickText, 2021). People consider these posts more authentic and credible than the information provided by conventional advertisements (IZEA, 2022). Indeed, SMIs serve as content creators, community guides, and peer consumers by offering the values in both the practical (i.e., product details) and emotional (i.e., personal connection) spheres (Campbell & Farrell, 2020; García-Rapp, 2016). These SMIs are viewed by the followers as distant friends and trustworthy sources of information with whom they develop emotional attachment and bond (Berryman & Kavka, 2017; Lou, 2021), which gets stronger over time. It is often argued that a significant difference exists between the content presented by influencers and that of traditional celebrities (Abidin, 2016). SMIs have their fan base across various platforms that vary in numbers. The influencers who are followed by a large number of individuals are considered likable concerning the provided content and association with it, and their messages seem to be different than traditional advertisements (De Vries, Gensler & LeeFlang, 2012). The content posted by the influencers gets appreciated and accepted by the followers, despite being labelled as sponsored or even if it is presented less professionally. This thing creates a competition among the SMIs communities, which also decides their content's popularity later among consumers. Although scholars suggest that in-depth studies should be conducted to measure the impact created by the SMIs' content on the followers (Hautz, Füller, Hutter & Thürridl, 2014; Muller, Mattke & Maier, 2018).

It is also noticed that influencers and their followers remain engaged in two-way communication (Tsai & Men, 2013), which makes it different from mainstream media celebrities. Second, micro-celebrities are more concerned with increasing fan base since they survive in the virtual communities where competition is too high to get fame and personal branding (Uzunoğlu & Kip, 2014). Apart from other areas, SMIs endorsement is considered effective in online marketing communication, in which meaningful information is transmitted by influencers to their followers, which impacts attitude and leads to positive persuasion (Van Norel et al., 2014). That is why the popularity of SMIs reaches its peak in the community of online platform users, and they keep observing updated consumer trends; this observation helps them to fulfill consumer needs efficiently (Aldhaheri & Bach, 2013; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017).

Over the past few years, the Pakistani society has progressed significantly with a rapid adoption of information and communication technologies (ICTs), and the SMIs trend has similarly increased across SNS (Khan, 2019). Most of the followers of these influencers comprise the young generation community, which is attracted to the SMIs' post or their content. The influencer-follower attraction converts into a psychological binding as a result of the prolonged interaction (Taillon, Mueller, Kowalczyk & Jones, 2020). Most of the followers remain in one-sided interactions with their SMIs, and their reactions are thoroughly observed by the media users, which makes it a parasocial interaction (hereafter PSI) between viewers and SMIs. By the time this interaction is transformed into a psychological and emotional bond after repeated exposure to SMIs, it extends beyond the viewing situation that becomes a parasocial relationship (hereafter PSR) between consumers and SMIs (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Dibble, Hartmann & Rosaen, 2015; Vinney, 2018).

When it comes to academic research, multiple studies have been conducted in general and specific to Pakistan related to SMIs and PSR. For example, Safwan and Ali (2024) investigate the impact of PSR on online buying intentions and behaviors. Self-disclosure of celebrities is also argued to impact both PSI and PSR (Audrezet, de Kerviler & Guidry Moulard, 2018; Kim and Song, 2010). Concerning Fanship, which is an essential determinant of PSR, limited attention is given from the perspective of SMIs. A qualitative study presents some insights about the Fanship impact on PSR (O'Donovan, 2016), while another scholarship discusses the impact of Fanship on PSR from the context of gaming streamers, but no attention was given to measuring the quantitative impact of Fanship on PSI and then PSR. In an attempt to present the research gap, the present study intends to examine the impact of cognitive factors on developing PSR between consumers and SMIs in the Pakistani context. Another gap is related to the theoretical dimension as the study will investigate the phenomenon in the context of the attachment theory, along with an application of the concept of PSI or PSR, which is also evident. Similarly, the study will use systematic extraction of the sample as various studies utilize non-systematic procedures evident in the literature (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Tafheem et al., 2022).

Literature Review

Fanship is defined as an individual's personal connection and enthusiasm for something or someone. Any individual who is an enthusiastic and loyal admirer of someone can be considered a fan (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Being a fan persuades individuals to develop stronger relationships and interactions with their SMIs. Of course, multiple reasons can cause people to develop PSI and PSR with SMIs in different ways. There have been several studies in which authors have discovered that psychological determinants predict PSI or PSR between consumers and SMIs. Loneliness has been investigated as the strongest predictor of PSI, as increased loneliness was directly linked with developing parasocial interaction (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2008). The dependency of individuals on PSI provided them an emotional support and companionship while filling the vacuum of their real-world relationships. The fans who encounter social rejection and isolation have been more active on SNS. However, the Fanship-related activities can boost or down the feelings of loneliness. Because people with their deeper involvement in the fan culture seek comfort and connection in the fan base to cope with the isolation. It was argued that such people feel more lonely because of the lack of their real-life relationships (Smith, Fisher & Cole, 2007). Therefore, they were found to be involved in fandom activities on SNS. A qualitative study was conducted by O'Donovan (2016) in which he found that more social contact made them feel more attached to celebrities. The fans considered the immediate updates by celebrities as direct conversation, which also made them feel closer.

When it comes to SNS, scholars have tried to investigate the phenomenon between athletes and their followers. For instance, Frederick, Lim, Clavio, and Walsh (2012) examined the role that the attitude of fans plays in interacting with athletes. It was found that the social status of athletes has strongly influenced the followers' PSI, and a few produced a desire to have a close relationship. The underlying factors of PSI on traditional media also apply to SNS. A few scholars have investigated the PSI of fans in the context of traditional media. Perse and Rubin (1989) divulged that PSI increases when uncertainty about the celebrity decreases among fans. Turner (1993) argued that this effect is significantly increased by the shared sentiments. Hence, these relationships show that the factors which were applied in conventional media settings also apply to the digital media outlets in terms of PSI, because it provides followers a new way to interact with SMIs. Individuals who remain engaged in having one-sided interaction with media personae are said to have PSI with the media character (Kassing & Sanderson, 2010). Despite being one-sided, such interactions leave an emotional and personal impact on individuals. In another study, the role of motivation as a factor was discussed as it impacts the way people communicate with athletes on SNS (Frederick et al., 2012), which further highlights the part Fanship plays in promoting PSI. The enthusiasm and admiration that are developed by fans for SMIs may lead to the development of PSR between users and social media influencers.

The terms PSI and PSR have been used synonymously and interchanged in many definitions, which potentially causes an ambiguity in the parasocial phenomenon. The term PSI was initially used by Horton and Wohl (1956) to address one-sided interaction of an individual with the media character, with an illusion that they were the actual characters. Over time, the PSR was added to the parasocial contexts, which was argued as an extension beyond media consumption. PSR is developed even with an absence of a person's engagement with the media, with or without repeated exposure, while PSI is at the time of viewing the media character (Hoffner, 2008; Horton & Wohl, 1956). To understand the underlying distinction is important, as PSR refers to a long-term relationship while PSI is confined to the extent of media engagement. It is evident in the literature that the parasocial phenomenon has a significant impact on individuals' attitudes and behaviors in certain ways. For example, consumers were triggered to alter their interests, professions, beliefs, attitudes, and physical appearance to match those of celebrities being followed or observed. These elements were included: liking, perceived resemblance, and parasocial interaction (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Many research studies have investigated the significant impact of parasocial encounters on adults, children, and youth (Agliata & Tantleff-Dunn, 2004; Trampe, Stapel, & Siero, 2007). These studies found that participants perceived problems with their body image, distorted self-perception, and unrealistic expectations. However, it was noted that the parasocial phenomenon can also have a positive impact on individuals. PSI was found to boost social skills, empathy, and attitude toward stereotypical communities among individuals. Hence, authors have argued both positive and negative impacts associated with parasocial encounters by media viewers to media characters (Czaja, 2011; Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes, 2006).

Limited attention was also paid by the scholars to associating PSI with marketing communication. To address this gap, the relationship between PSI and brand love was examined by Fetscherin (2014), who argued that people developed a strong emotional bond with the brand after their parasocial encounter. Fetscherin and Dato-on's (2012) also highlighted that PSI positively impacts consumers' behavior. This aspect presents importance in considering PSI while evaluating the emotional bonds with the brands. Similarly, Gummesson (2008) has also argued that marketers perform as celebrities, which gives brands recognition and prominent visibility by developing fictitious interactions with consumers. A few names were given by the scholar, including Richard Branson, Marks & Spencer, and Twiggy to whom PSI may boost brand awareness as it gains consumers' attention to obtain a status of celebrity. Similarly, some scholars have investigated the

PSI's impact on brand relationships. It was found that consumers get fascinated frequently with media celebrities. This fascination persuades individuals to accept those items that were endorsed by the celebrities, which later enhanced brand reputation among consumers (Choi & Rifon, 2007; McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2010).

A parasocial relationship (PSR) is defined as a one-sided relationship between social media users and social media influencers that is characterized by an illusion of intimacy, which involves aspects of understanding and affection (Aw & Chuah, 2021). Several authors have tried to present the multiple aspects of PSR, which are not limited to understanding, friendship, interaction, problem-solving, and wishful identification. Identification, friendship, and understanding have been argued as three main elements of PSR (Horton & Wohl, 1956). SMIs utilize different techniques to attract followers. The personal and intimate conversation techniques are popular in making friendly connections with social media users. This inclination results in developing PSR between consumers and SMIs (Chung & Cho, 2014). Influencer-generated content plays an essential role in fostering PSR, but it's not always sufficient to form stronger bonds. It was divulged in many research studies that followers were well aware of the fact that an influencer was fond of promoting things or did so for personal benefit as a result of a relationship they had developed with the followers (Farivar, Wang, & Yuan, 2021). According to Woods and Scott (2016), SMIs have always taken the shelter of PSR to endorse the products, and followers were not able to recognize the difference due to its convincing power and realistic appearance. Although these endorsements informed consumers about the products and their utilization but providing insights about the manufacturer could also increase brand awareness. Still, a limited number of studies were found that focused on PSR's positive impact on brand credibility, attractiveness, and buying intention. Safwan and Ali (2024) investigated the impact of PSR on online buying intentions and behaviors from the perspective of smartphones and IT-based products. Because consumers were persuaded by the SMIs, and their power to resist the message was minimized when the message was given by the credible influencers. Another research study has focused on the reliability of SMIs to modify the consumers' behavior. The results highlighted that a positive impact was found because followers considered SMIs as trustworthy in giving the message (Breves, Liebers, Motschenbacher & Reus, 2021). Lee and Watkins (2016) found that PSR with vloggers enhances the brand value endorsed by the influencer, which later creates positive buying intention among consumers, along with the desire to have endorsed products. Such intentions were found to be boosted when people developed stronger PSR with SMIs. Hence, it reflects that the existence of elements, including knowledge, social influence, and credibility, increases the positive impact on buying intention of social media users (Hwang and Zhang, 2018; Knoll Schramm, Schallhorn, & Wynistorf, 2015). These findings were also validated by the research of Sokolova and Kefi (2020) study in which they discovered that PSR significantly boosted the intention level for buying products and concluded that parasocial relationship has kept essential importance in making consumers' decisions.

The theoretical underpinning of the study is based on the concept of parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship given by Horton and Wohl (1956) and the attachment theory, which was developed by Bowlby (1969). PSI or PSR theory pinpoints how one-sided relationships are formed by individuals with media influencers or celebrities. Such relationships feel real, and influencers remain unaware of them. A strong connection with influencers or fanship results in emotional investment and repeated exposure that turns to foster a parasocial relationship between consumers with SMIs. Other hand, attachment theory facilitates describing an emotional connection that forms over time. The theory proposes that individuals seek connectivity and security in relationships. Through emotional independence, trust, and loyalty, fans feel psychologically attached to SMIs and behave similarly to them. Collectively, these theories describe how fanship

impacts parasocial interaction along with how both foster parasocial relationships between consumers and SMIs. This framework helps understand the emotional and psychological factors behind online follower–influencer relationships, especially in the context of social media.

Research Questions

1. Does fanship impact parasocial interaction (PSI) between users and SMIs?
2. Does fanship impact parasocial relationship (PSR) between users and SMIs?
3. Does parasocial interaction (PSI) impact parasocial relationship (PSR) between users and SMIs?

Hypothesis

1. Fanship significantly impacts parasocial interaction (PSI) between users and SMIs.
2. Fanship positively impacts the parasocial relationship (PSR) between users and SMIs.
3. Parasocial interaction (PSI) significantly impacts parasocial relationship (PSR) between users and SMIs.

Research Design and Method

A research design comprises a roadmap for doing a study. As per the nature of the study, a quantitative research design fits well and is adopted in the study, which is particularly focused on investigating the cause-and-effect direct relationship between variables. A survey research method was used to obtain the responses of the participants concerning fanship and its impact on developing PSI and PSR between users and SMIs.

Population

The population of the study was students from public and private sector universities from the capitals (Lahore & Karachi) of 2 provinces (Punjab and Sindh) and ICT (Islamabad Capital Territory). These universities were included: University of the Punjab, University of Central Punjab, University of Karachi, SZABIST Karachi, IIUI, and Riphah International University, Islamabad. A total of five common departments were considered in the population from these six universities, which were computer science/IT, business administration, commerce, media and communication studies, and psychology. These departments were considered due to the nature of the study. The age group was considered 18-44 years, including both males and females.

Sample Size and Technique

A sampling frame was measured after getting a population count of the students from these universities. From the sampling frame, the systematic extraction of the sample was done by using the “Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size calculation formula,” which facilitated the process on scientific grounds to generalize the findings. Using a simple random sampling technique, a total of (n=372) participants were taken as a sample.

Tool for Data Collection

The questionnaire was used as an instrument of data collection from the participants. This was distributed through online and physical modes to facilitate the data collection process according to the circumstances at different times. However, it was ensured that data was collected by following the standards of scientific procedures. To approach the right participant, a filter question was used at the start of a questionnaire to determine if the particular participant follows any SMIs on any social networking platform. As per the variables in the study, the 12 items for the fanship were

adapted from the study of Reysen and Branscombe (2010), 6 items of PSI were adapted from Bond and Calvert (2014), and 11 items of PSR were adapted from the study of Rosaen and Dibble (2015), responses of participants on all of the items were examined by using 5-point Likert scale which comprised from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Data Analysis

After collecting the responses of the participants, the data were entered into SPSS to measure the reliability of the scales. The frequencies of sample demographics and descriptive statistics were calculated for the variables, and their mean scores have been presented in the tables. Lastly, the regression analysis was applied to measure the cause-and-effect direct relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Table 1: Sample demographics

Variables	Male (n=193)		Female (n=179)		Total (n=372)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
Age group						
18-25	97	26.1	101	27.2	198	53.2
25-35	71	19.1	62	16.7	133	35.8
35-45	25	6.7	16	4.3	41	11.0
Department						
Business Administration	54	14.5	42	11.3	96	25.8
Psychology	36	9.7	21	5.6	57	15.3
Communication/Media Studies	37	9.9	44	11.8	81	21.8
Computer Science/IT	45	12.1	37	9.9	82	22.0
Commerce	21	5.6	35	9.4	56	15.1

The above table presents the demographics of the participants. A total of 372 participants were there, of whom 193 were males and 179 were females. More than one-third majority of the participants belong to the age group of 18-35, followed by almost one-third majority of 25-35 years. Only 41 (11.0%) participants were from the age group of 35-45 years. Department-wise, more participants were related to the business administration, and computer science/IT was the second regarding the participation of respondents. 21.8% of the total sample belonged to the communication/media studies, followed by psychology and commerce, with ratios of 15.3% and 15.1% respectively.

Table 2: Reliability statistics

Variables	Measurement	Items	Cronbach α
Fanship	5-Point Likert Scale	11	0.84
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	5-Point Likert Scale	6	0.91
Parasocial Relationship (PSR)	5-Point Likert Scale	11	0.85

The reliability of scales was measured. The variables of fanship and PSR were measured with 11 items, while PSI comprises 6 items. Note that the scales were taken from credible sources. As per the calculated values, all scales were in the acceptable range. Hence, there was no significant concern regarding their reliability.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of fanship among users with SMIs

Items	Mean	SD
Reschedule work to accommodate watching my favorite SMI	2.99	1.17
Emotional connection with my favorite SMI	2.78	1.39
Spending a considerable amount of money to watch my SMI	3.08	1.24
Devotion of energy to my favorite SMI	2.74	1.43
Devotion of time to my favorite SMI if I could	2.95	1.39
Devastated feeling I could not watch my favorite SMI	2.66	1.37
I can strongly identify my favorite SMI	3.04	1.38
Feels great when my favorite SMI gets popular	2.78	1.41
Feels like my favorite SMI is a part of me	2.73	1.41
I want to tell you I am connected to my favorite SMI	2.91	1.16
Willing to have a friendship with people who like my favorite SMI	2.75	1.43

n=372, SD= Std. deviation

Table 3 presents the descriptives about the variable of fanship. The variable was measured on a 5-point Likert scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree. It can be seen that all responses were on the agreed side. Participant responded that they can reschedule their work to watch their SMI on SNS. Even they were ready to spend their time, money, and energy watching their SMIs. The emotional bond of the participants was strong enough, and they were devastated if unable to watch their SMI for some reason. Participants have responded, showing a personal connection with SMI, which is psychological. The majority of individuals agreed that they feel great if their followed influencer gets popular. They were even willing to be friends with people who like the SMI they follow on their SNS accounts.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of PSI of users with SMIs

Items	Mean	SD
Feeling of being watched by my SMI during exposure	2.50	0.83
Feeling of being heard by my SMI	2.99	1.41
Feeling of being interacted with by my SMI	3.07	1.45
Feelings to answer greetings of my SMI	2.88	1.01
Feeling of talking to my SMI	2.68	1.15
Follow the instructions to watch and follow my SMI page/channel	2.64	1.51

n=372, SD= Std. deviation

The above table describes the responses of individuals in the shape of average mean scores on the variable of PSI. It was found that people had stronger feelings in the one-sided psychological connection with their SMIs during the exposure. They feel watched or heard by their SMI when view his/her content on SNS. Also, many participants feel that they answer the greetings of their SMI and talk directly with them or follow their instructions in real-time when the SMI asks them to watch their full content or follow them across various social media platforms.

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of PSR of users with SMIs

Items	Mean	SD
I look forward to seeing my SMI posts	2.90	1.09
I see my SMI as a natural, down-to-earth person	2.56	1.22
If my SMI starts another social media channel/page, I will follow	2.83	1.07
My SMI seems to understand the kind of thing I want to know	2.62	1.26
If I see a story about my SMI in other places, I will read it	2.95	1.07

I miss seeing my SMI when he/she does not post in time	3.06	1.08
I would like to meet my SMI in person	2.93	1.08
If something happens to my SMI, I will feel sad	3.02	1.05
I would like to enjoy or hang out with my SMI	2.92	1.06
If my SMI lived in my neighbourhood, we would be friends	3.02	1.06
My SMI would fit well in my group of friends	3.07	1.07

n=372, SD= Std. deviation

Table 5 demonstrates the responses of participants on the items related to PSR with social media influencers. Participants answered that they look forward to seeing their SMIs' posts and follow him/her on all social media platforms. They miss seeing the SMI if he/she does not post in time. Due to such attachment, it was found that people feel sad if something happens to their SMI. Similarly, participants reflected a desire to meet their SMI in person. They would be even friends if SMI lived in their neighborhood, as they would like to enjoy or hang out with them. The participants also think that their SMI can fit well in their friends' circle if this can happen in reality.

Table 6: Impact of fanship on PSI between users and social media influencers

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.801	.177		15.836	.000
Fanship	.030	.016	.013	.021	.029

Dependent variable: PSI, $F=1.991$, $R^2=0.054$

The regression analysis in Table 6 revealed that fanship impacts the PSI of users with SMIs significantly, as the independent variable (fanship) caused a change of 50% on the dependent variable (PSI). The findings divulged that fanship positively impacted PSI of users with their influencers, the value was calculated as ($\beta=.030$, $P<0.05$, $t=.021$), which supported hypothesis 1 of the study.

Table 7: Impact of fanship on PSR between users and social media influencers

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	3.022	.114		26.626	.000
Fanship	.035	.021	.046	.892	.033

Dependent variable: PSR, $F=0.795$, $R^2=0.201$

Table 7 demonstrates that fanship plays a significant role in the formation of PSR, and the independent variable has caused a 20% change in the dependent variable (PSR). This means that fanship positively impacted PSR and the value was calculated as ($\beta=.035$, $P<0.05$, $t=.892$), which supported hypothesis 2 in the study.

Table 8: Impact of PSI on PSR between users and social media influencers

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1 (Constant)	2.968	.095		31.259	.000
PSI	.016	.013	.025	.485	.028

Dependent variable: PSR, $F=0.235$, $R^2=0.250$

The above table presents the results of the regression analysis, which show that parasocial interaction between users and SMIs causes a change of 25% in the formation of PSR. Thus, PSI

positively impacts PSR between users and SMIs, and the value was calculated as ($\beta=.016$, $P<0.05$, $t=.485$), which supported hypothesis 3 in the study.

Discussion

These days, social media consumption trends have increased to a greater extent and are growing continuously. In the context of Pakistan, the scenario is not different from the rest of the world, where people are rapidly adopting new technologies, and the influencer trend is reaching its peak with vlogging on multiple aspects across various social networking sites. People watch these influencers to gather information about various aspects of life and develop a psychological attachment to them, which keeps them bound to their updates on social media. This study demonstrates that fanship has a significant effect on parasocial interactions and the relationship between users and SMIs. Influencers are often closely followed, their content is interacted with, and a sense of connection is formed. The Parasocial Interaction or relationship theory, which describes how viewers develop one-sided relationships with media personalities, is supported by this. According to the findings, emotional intimacy can grow even in the absence of direct contact, which is consistent with attachment theory. Fanship and parasocial relationships are linked by parasocial engagement. It demonstrates how a passing admiration can develop into a deep emotional bond.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes how crucial fanship is for creating parasocial bonds with influencers. Repeated exposure from fanship promotes parasocial interaction. This exchange becomes more intense over time, leading to a strong physiological relationship. The study demonstrates that the formation of these relationships is explained by both attachment theory and parasocial relationship theory. After initially showing interest and admiration, fans eventually develop an emotional bond with influencers. These findings are useful for understanding social media behavior and digital relationships also help marketers and content creators to better connect with their audience through trust, familiarity, and emotional engagement. This study adds to digital media research; future studies can explore cultural differences and platform-specific effects on parasocial relationships.

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