

TRUSTWORTHINESS, ATTRACTIVENESS, PRESTIGE AND BFI WITH PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP: A MEDIATION ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – The goal of this research is to look at influence of trustworthiness, attractiveness, prestige and BFI on parasocial relationship. A mediation impact of prestige on relationship between trustworthiness and parasocial relationship was also analysed.

Design/methodology/approach – Data were collected by sending questionnaires online in Delhi-NCR and a usable sample of total 147 respondents were collected from the people who follow social media influencers on any social media website.

Findings – Trustworthiness, attractiveness, prestige and BFI influences parasocial relationship. Additionally, mediation effect of prestige was also found on relationship between trustworthiness and parasocial relationship.

Research limitations/implications – The study is limited to the people who reside in Delhi-NCR only. The study did not focus that parasocial relationship is more with males and females.

Practical implications –The findings can be used different small or medium enterprises, if they want to market their product with slightly low budget.

Originality/value - There has been limited research on the subject of parasocial relationship with BFI. Combined effect of trustworthiness, attractiveness, prestige and BFI on parasocial relationship is rarely reviewed.

Keywords: Trustworthiness, Attractiveness, Prestige, Parasocial Relationship, Bfi and Hayes Process Macro.

INTRODUCTION

People these days are keen to purchase products which are advised or claimed to be used by social media influencers. Although, these social media influencers are not celebrity, but they tend to attract and gain attention from various followers of them. So, the social media marketing opens up the plethora of marketing research opportunities. Social media has replaced all the other media of mass communication like T.V., radio and newspaper. According to Cheung et al. (2020) and Koay et al. (2020), nowadays, marketers opt for social media influencers to promote their product and provide all the product related information to the best of their ability to reach out to the consumers.

In addition to the available literature, there are certain statistics related to influencer marketing which throw light on its importance in this new era. 90% of the marketers believe that the effective marketing strategy nowadays is influencer marketing (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). Moreover, 67% of marketers use Instagram for influencer marketing but there is a huge uptick in Tik Tok influencer marketing also (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2021). Hew et al. (2017) laid down that it was earlier that celebrities were given first priority for marketing, as these days,

with the rise in usage of social media, ordinary public, who use the product, are employed to spread the good word-of-mouth for the product and reach out to the public.

As consumers are influenced by the social media influencers, it may depict that they are inclined towards the personality of the influencers. People examine the relative warmth of the and competence of the individuals and human groups Fiske et al. (2018). McCrae et al. (2005) has laid down the Big Five or five-factor theory, which consist of Personality's five factors namely, openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. Additionally, personality is something which provides an understanding, to a certain extent, that a person should behave.

As, social media influencers are rising day-by-day, it is important to know the outcome of personality on parasocial relationships (PR). Parasocial relationships, according to Aw & Chuah (2021), "*are the one-sided relationships that individuals form with mediated personas*". The study enhances the literature available in marketing domain by investigating the impact of trust, attractiveness, expertise and personality traits on parasocial relationships Aw et al. (2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past few years, it has been seen an increment in social media users, as a result the influencer marketing landscape has got new status and many ordinary people working or non-working who are having good connect with people becoming social media influencers Cheng Si et al. (2022). Many everyday people are becoming social media influencers these days, and corporations are approaching them to advertise their products. Influencer marketing is the process of creating and implementing marketing plans and activities with the assistance of people who have the impact on current and latent customers Brown & Hayes (2008). In the era of social media, influencers are defined by their level and type of connection with a firm, as well as their capability to inspire others Gretzel & Yoo (2014).

A social media influencer connects with their audience through a medium. They establish a personal bond with their audience by providing details about their daily lives and other topics. This unique connection with their audience is referred to as parasocial contact or public parasocial relationship. In a nutshell, a parasocial interaction occurs when a user believes they are in shared social contact with another atmosphere but are actually in a one-sided non-reversible situation; traditionally, this strategy has focused on television which is known as non-interactive media. Initially, it was originated to define interaction of audience and artists who is performing in television, radio, film. Influencers found on various social media platforms have applied this concept recently Colliander & Dahlén (2011); Lueck (2015); Lee & Watkins (2016); Yuan & Lou (2020). A sort of emotional programme participation connected with a personal focus on the physical attraction of the characters, a sense that the programmes are authentic, and higher levels of attention to the programme is parasocial interaction with soap opera characters A.M. Rubin & Perse (1987). The persistent and artificial intimacy that the media audience may develop via frequent interactions with the media persona, whether vocally or physically, was defined by Horton & Richard Wohl (1956).

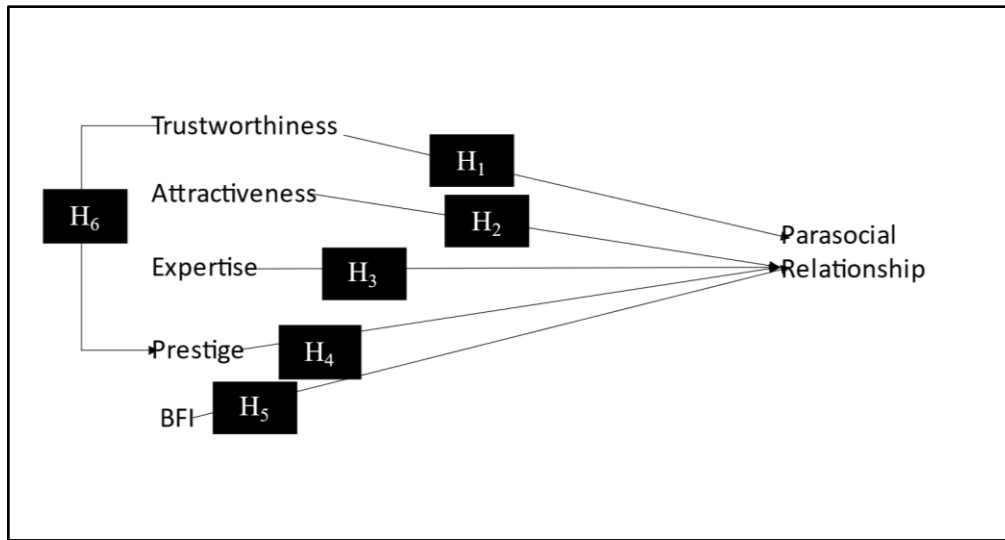
Many studies have been conducted on parasocial interaction to determine its impact on various parameters. In this regard, a study on parasocial contact was conducted during the pandemic Purwanto (2021). The study's findings showed that parasocial relationships positively influenced possession envy and consumer buy intent, and that possession envy positively influenced consumer purchase intent. Furthermore, Rubin & McHugh (2009) believed in their study a path which is followed by parasocial relationship development known as social and task

attraction which is further generated through various parasocial engagement. When we talk about interpersonal interaction attraction comes as an important factor. In prior studies, several aspects of attraction have been explored which includes social, physical and task attraction. The thought behind mentioned dimensions of attraction and parasocial interaction has not been explored on social networking sites which offers purchasing platforms for consumers. Also, previous findings suggested that parasocial interactions are positively impacted by social and task interest. On the other hand, in person or face to face appeal has an indirect impact on the parasocial activities of users through social and task attraction. According to (men et al., 2020), parasocial contact influences users' social commerce intentions. Self-discrepancy moderates influence attempts and parasocial connections.

Thus, with the help of above gathered data, researcher have hypothesized the following hypotheses, for the present study:

Based on the above discussion it is hypothesized Figure 1:

- H₁: Trustworthiness has parasocial interactions have a substantial favorable influence.*
- H₂: Parasocial connections are positively associated to attractiveness.*
- H₃: Expertise positively influences parasocial relationships.*
- H₄: Prestige has positive effect on parasocial relationship.*
- H₅: Personality traits are positively related to parasocial relationships*
- H₆: Prestige mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and parasocial relationship.*



**FIGURE 1
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES**

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Sampling Technique

The data collected was through online sources only. The present study consists of sample frame which follow atleast one social media influencer. So, according to Sekaran & Bougie (2016), the study where required information is available with only a limited population, in that study purposive sampling should be adopted. Hence, purposive sampling technique is used in the present study for Delhi-NCR.

The questionnaire was administered and floated to the respondents on the basis of personal contacts, via online platforms i.e., Facebook and Instagram. At the very first stage respondents were asked that whether they follow atleast any one social media influencer or not. Those who responded no were deleted at the time of the analysis. After removing all the irrelevant responses from the study, 147 usable responses were deemed to be fit for the study.

Majority i.e., 58% of the participants were female and were students. Moreover, most of them (65% approx.) were between 15-25 years of age group. Additionally, 57% of the respondents follow social media users through Instagram, followed by Facebook (28%) and Youtube (15%) Zheng et al. (2020).

Measures

In the current study, a five-point Likert scale where 1 stand for strongly disagree and 5 stands for strongly agree. Reliability of the scale was checked and accepted at 0.838, as recommended by the Nunnally et al., (1967) that reliability exceeding the value 0.70 is acceptable. The measures were adopted from previously developed scales Baron & Kenny (1986).

Source Credibility: The present study measures four dimensions of source credibility and each dimension is measured with three or four items Munnukka et al. (2016). A sample item of Expertise is “*I feel [influencer name] knows a lot of his/her area.*” Attractiveness was measured by using items like “*I consider [influencer name] very stylish.*” Trustworthiness was measured and a sample item includes “*I feel [influencer name] is honest.*”

Prestige: Three items of prestige were considered for the present study which were developed by Ki & Kim (2019) and a sample item is “*I find that (influencer name)’s social media contents are prestigious.*”

BFI: The study adopted scale of John & Srivastava (1999) to measure personality traits. One sample item is “*[influencer name] is original and comes up with new ideas.*”

Parasocial relationship: To measure parasocial relationship, a scale developed by Chung & Cho (2017) was adopted. The sample item consists of “*[influencer name] makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.*”

DATA ANALYSIS AND DATA FINDINGS

In order to test H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 multiple regression was used with parasocial relationship as dependent variable and trustworthiness, attractiveness, expertise, prestige and BFI as predictors. The model explains 30.8% (R²) (see Table 1) of the total variance and that the model was significant predictor of parasocial relationship, $F(2,145) = 32.223$, $p = .000$ for $p < 0.005$ (see Table 2) Table 1.

| | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | |
|---|--------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|------|------|--------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | Df 1 | Df 2 | Sig F Change |
| 1 | 0.555 _a | 0.308 | 0.298 | 3.126 | 0.308 | 32.223 | 2 | 145 | 0.000 |

- a. Predictors: (Constant), Trust, Attractive, Expert, Prestige, BFI
- b. Dependent Variable: Parasocial Relationship

The model suggests that H1, H2, H3, H4 and H5 are accepted. It shows that trust, attractiveness, expert, prestige and BFI are relevant in explaining parasocial relationship. According to the study, attractiveness is the strongest predictor of parasocial relationship Hartmann (2016).

To test hypothesis H6, Hayes Process Macro was used Nunally (1978).

According to the research hypotheses, namely H1 and H5, trustworthiness and BFI have a positive and significant effect on parasocial relationship. Table 2 indicates that trustworthiness and BFI positively predict parasocial relationship Table 2.

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 | | | | | |
| Regression | 629.953 | 2 | 314.976 | 32.223 | .000 ^b |
| Residual | 1417.372 | 145 | 9.775 | | |
| Total | 2047.324 | 147 | | | |

- a. Dependent Variable: Parasocial Relationship
- b. Predictors: (Constant), Trustworthiness, BFI

Results show that prestige mediates the relationship between trustworthiness and parasocial relationship. Moreover, a significant impact of prestige was observed on parasocial relationship. To test H6, model 4 of Hayes Process Macro was used. Researcher adopted Barron and Kenny (1986) approach for mediation Table 3.

| | Coeff | SE | t | p-value | LLCI | ULCI |
|--|-------|-------|---------|---------|-------|-------|
| (A path) Trustworthiness ---> Prestige | .4831 | .0279 | 17.2969 | .0000 | .4283 | .5379 |
| (B path) Prestige ---> Parasocial Relationship | .1473 | .0155 | 9.4882 | .0000 | .1169 | .1778 |
| (C path) Trustworthiness ---> Parasocial Relationship | .4142 | .0248 | 16.6944 | .0000 | .3655 | .4628 |
| (C' path) Trustworthiness ---> Parasocial Relationship | .3430 | .0256 | 13.4021 | .0000 | .2928 | .3932 |

According to the findings of the present study, it was analysed that trustworthiness significantly impacts prestige (Path A), which is the first condition needed to be fulfilled according to Barron and Kenny (1986). Further, it was observed that Path B is also significant i.e., prestige significantly influences parasocial relationship. Moreover, the direct and total effect of trustworthiness on parasocial relationship (Path C and C' respectively) is also significant. This depicts that as prestige enters in the relationship between trustworthiness and parasocial relationship, coefficient reduces to .3430 from .4142 (see Table 3), which lays down that there is presence of mediation impact of prestige on trustworthiness and parasocial relationship.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this era of social media influencers endorsement through influencers is trending these days. These influencers are having large numbers of followers as they are appreciated by general

public, as a result new brands are approaching for the promotion of their new product or services. Despite this promotion technique being popular, academic research on social media influencers marketing broadly focused on old method of endorsement through celebrities (Ki & Kim, 2019). This is a notable problem for marketers, because of a lack of understanding of how social media influencer marketing is regulated, the impact of endorsements might be limited.

The association of trustworthiness, beauty, knowledge, and BFI with parasocial relationships with a mediating influence of prestige was investigated in this article. In general, prestige is described as a social media influencer's worth or reach. To conduct this survey, respondents were initially asked which social media sites they utilise, and the respondent's selection criteria were based on that. Five hypotheses were generated for this investigation. Multiple regression was used to examine the hypothesis of a link between trustworthiness and parasocial relationships. It was shown that there is a strong favourable effect on parasocial relationships. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that prestige plays a role in mediating the link between the variables. Similarly, all of the predictors have a significant positive effect on the dependent variable (PR), with prestige acting as a mediating factor.

Finally, the study identifies some key traits that can aid in the creation of a parasocial attachment. Public relations are sometimes depicted as a one-sided relationship in which one party expends emotional energy, attention, and effort while the other, the persona, is utterly unconscious of their existence. Celebrities are more likely to have these kinds of relationships because they have a connection with their audience. Ordinary people, employed or not, are now using social media sites such as YouTube, and others are quickly following them. These individuals have become social media influencers in recent years, winning people's trust and earning repo as a result of which marketers are asking them to sell their products.

Though various studies have been conducted in the past to examine the impact of parasocial relationships on a customer's purchase intent, none of them have adequately justified what characteristics are most useful in building this relationship. As a result, the current research aims to close this gap. Also, previous research has shown that there is a need-to-know what component is genuinely beneficial in forming the relationship, hence prestige of an influencer is employed as a mediating variable in this study. According to the findings, (trust, attractiveness, knowledge, and personality qualities) are contributing variables in the formation of parasocial relationships, with the prestige of an influencer serving as a mediating component.

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