

## Parasocial Interaction as a Mediator: Unraveling the Influence of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intentions

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### ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the influence of social media influencers on the purchase intention of online shopping application users in Indonesia, by including parasocial interactions as a mediator. There were 200 respondents obtained through purposive sampling technique. Using PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling), the research results reveal that (1) social media influencers have a positive and significant direct influence on purchase intention; and (2) the influence of influencers is not only direct but also through mediated parasocial interactions. These findings become valuable insights for marketers in increasing the effectiveness of marketing strategies through collaboration with influencers. Overall, this research underscores the critical role of social media influencers in shaping purchase intention among online shopping application users in Indonesia, emphasizing the significance of emotional connections and engagement in influencing consumer behavior. In summary, the study results underscore the notable impact of social media influencers on the intention to purchase among users of online shopping platforms in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** E-Commerce; Parasocial Interactions; PLS-SEM; Purchase Intention; Social Media Influencer

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the digital era and the rapid development of information technology, the role of social media influencers in the world of marketing and entertainment has become increasingly significant (Dwivedi et al., 2021). Social media influencers have the ability to entertain their audiences through creative and persuasive content (Hudders et al., 2021). This makes promotional messages conveyed by influencers well-received by their audience (De Veirman et al., 2017). This phenomenon gives rise to the belief that social media influencers have a positive influence on purchase intention, namely the tendency of consumers to buy products or services promoted by influencers (Hermenda et al., 2019). However, debate regarding the extent to which this influence is significant still continues. Some studies show results supporting the positive influence of influencers (Chetioui et al., 2020; Dalangin et al., 2021), while other studies show conflicting results (Botelho, 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019). To overcome the inconsistencies in the results of this study, several researchers tried to modify the model by including parasocial interaction variables (Lin et al., 2021; Ashraf et al., 2023) as mediators which might be able to explain the influence of influencers on purchase intention. This research aims to dig deeper into this phenomenon and explore whether the existence of parasocial interactions between influencers and audiences can explain the role of influencers in influencing purchase intention.

Along with the development of the internet and social media, the phenomenon of social media influencers has grown exponentially. Social media influencers, who often have thousands to millions of followers on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok, have the ability to create entertaining and insightful content (Hudders et al., 2021). They often have unique and compelling creativity, thereby successfully attracting the attention and entertaining of their audience (Hudders et al., 2021). The content presented by influencers is often varied, including product reviews, personal vlogs, travel, fashion, culinary, and even lifestyle advice. Audiences feel connected to the influencer because they can experience the influencer's life through their screens. This content is often persuasive, motivating the audience to try the product or service promoted by the influencer (Lou & Yuan, 2019). In this way, influencers have become a source of inspiration and reference for many people, especially the younger generation. However, it is important to consider whether the positive influence of these influencers actually has a positive impact on consumer purchasing decisions.

Although many believe that social media influencers have a positive influence on purchase intention, conflicting research results have created inconsistencies in the academic literature. Several studies have found a positive relationship between product promotion by influencers and consumers' propensity to purchase the promoted product or service (Chetioui et al., 2020; Dalangin et al., 2021). However, a number of other studies have found that the influence of influencers on purchase intention is not significant (Botelho, 2019; Nurhandayani et al., 2019). These inconsistencies can be influenced by various factors, such as the type of product being promoted, the influencer's personality, and audience demographics. Additionally, differences in research methodology can also play an important role in producing different results. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is needed to overcome the inconsistencies in the results of this research and to dig deeper into the role of influencers in influencing consumer purchasing decisions. One approach that can be used is to modify the model used in this research, by considering mediator variables that may play an important role in explaining the relationship between influencers and purchase intention.

Based on several references (Reynolds, 2022; Balaban et al., 2022; Bhattacharya, 2023), it can be explained that parasocial interaction, rooted in communication theory, is a unique relationship dynamic between media consumers and figures they encounter through various media channels, particularly social media platforms. This concept underscores the asymmetrical nature of the connection, wherein individuals perceive a sense of closeness and attachment to media personalities despite the absence of reciprocal interaction. In the digital age, parasocial interaction assumes heightened significance due to the pervasive influence of social media platforms. Audiences avidly consume content produced by influencers, ranging from lifestyle vlogs to product reviews, fostering a sense of intimacy and familiarity with the influencer's persona. This perceived connection is cultivated through the influencer's curated content, relatable storytelling, and interactive engagement strategies, such as responding to comments or hosting live Question and Answer (Q&A) sessions. The implications of parasocial interaction extend beyond mere entertainment value, shaping individuals' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors. Followers may develop a sense of trust, loyalty, and emotional investment in the influencer, viewing them as a source of inspiration, guidance, or companionship in their daily lives. Consequently, parasocial interaction serves as a catalyst for various outcomes, including heightened brand affinity, increased purchase intention, and amplified social influence among followers. Recognizing the potency of parasocial interaction is imperative for marketers seeking to harness the power of influencer marketing. By understanding how audiences form parasocial bonds with influencers, marketers can tailor their strategies to foster genuine connections, drive authentic engagement, and cultivate lasting brand-consumer relationships in the dynamic landscape of social media.

This research explains whether parasocial interaction can explain the positive influence of social media influencers on purchase intention and whether this relationship is influenced by various factors, such as trust, affinity, and identification with the influencer. Through comprehensive analysis, this research is expected to provide a better understanding of the role of influencers in the world of digital marketing and entertainment.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Role of Social Media Influencers**

Social media influencers are individuals who have loyal followers on social media platforms and have the ability to influence the behavior and preferences of their audience (Hudders et al., 2021). Lin et al. (2021) explained that social media influencers wield significant influence over their audiences, often serving as trusted sources of information and guidance in a crowded digital landscape. Their status as "opinion leaders" is rooted in their perceived expertise, authenticity, and relatability, which enable them to shape consumer perceptions and preferences effectively. Through curated content and personalized engagement strategies, influencers foster genuine connections with their followers, thereby cultivating a sense of trust and loyalty that transcends traditional advertising tactics.

In a marketing context, the role of social media influencers is pivotal due to their unparalleled reach and engagement capabilities. With the ability to captivate large audiences, influencers possess the power to amplify brand messages, endorse products, and drive consumer behavior. Their influence is particularly potent within specific target demographics, where they can leverage their niche expertise and cultural relevance to resonate with audiences on a deeper level.

Furthermore, social media influencers serve as conduits for authentic brand storytelling, injecting personality and authenticity into marketing campaigns. By aligning with influencers whose values align with those of the brand, companies can tap into their influencer's credibility and authenticity, thereby enhancing brand perception and fostering meaningful connections with consumers. As such, harnessing the influence of social media influencers has become an indispensable strategy for brands seeking to effectively engage with today's digital-savvy consumers and navigate the complexities of modern marketing landscapes.

They can also provide personalized and authentic content, which is often more engaging than traditional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019). One of the reasons why social media influencers can influence the audience is because the audience feels emotionally connected or has an affinity with the influencer. Audiences often feel that influencers are trustworthy and authentic, so the product or service recommendations they provide are considered more convincing (De Veirman et al., 2017). Social media influencers also often have success stories or personal experiences that make their audience feel inspired and want to follow in their footsteps. Therefore, the role of social media influencers in influencing purchase intention is very important in the context of modern marketing (Hudders et al., 2021).

One aspect that makes social media influencers so effective in influencing purchase intention is the persuasive nature of the content they present. Content created by influencers is often personal, creative, and authentic. They can present a product or service in the context of their daily lives, explain its benefits, and how it meets their needs or wants. This makes influencer content more relevant and compelling than conventional advertising (Lou & Yuan, 2019).

Additionally, social media influencers often have very diverse audiences, so they can accommodate different types of products or services. They can also interact directly with their audience, answering questions, providing additional recommendations, and building strong relationships. This provides an additional advantage in influencing purchase intention because the audience feels that they are getting personal attention and support from the influencer.

Based on the study above, this research puts forward the following hypotheses.

H1: The effectiveness of social media influencers significantly and positively influences purchase intention among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

H2: The effectiveness of social media influencers significantly and positively influences parasocial interaction among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

### **The Implications of Purchase Intention**

Purchase intention refers to a person's intention or desire to buy a product or service (Nazarani & Suparna, 2021; Imran et al., 2024). When consumers show a high level of interest in buying a particular product or brand, they are more likely to proceed with making the actual purchase (Hu et al., 2024). In the context of the influence of social media influencers, purchase intention can be influenced by a number of factors. First, is the extent to which the audience feels confident and trusts the recommendations given by the influencer. If the audience feels that the influencer is a trustworthy source and the recommended product or service has value, they are more likely to have high purchase intention (Li & Peng, 2021). Second, purchase intention can also be influenced by factors

such as price, product quality, and availability (Immanuel & H. S., 2021). Lin et al. (2021) explained that while social media influencers hold significant sway over consumer behavior, it is essential to recognize that their influence represents just one facet of the complex decision-making process leading to a purchase.

While influencers can effectively persuade audiences to consider a particular product or service, several other factors come into play when consumers make their final purchasing decisions. One crucial consideration is the alignment between the influencer's endorsement and the actual product or service experience. While influencers may successfully generate interest and desire for a product, consumers' perceptions and expectations may evolve upon closer scrutiny or actual usage. If the product fails to meet these expectations or falls short of delivering the promised benefits, consumers may hesitate or reconsider their purchase intentions.

Additionally, external factors such as peer recommendations, online reviews, pricing, and brand reputation also influence consumers' final purchase decisions. Consumers may seek validation from multiple sources, including friends, family, and online communities, before committing to a purchase. Therefore, while influencers play a vital role in shaping consumer perceptions and initial interest, their impact must be viewed within the broader context of the consumer journey. Effective marketing strategies should consider these multifaceted dynamics and prioritize delivering consistent value and quality to ensure positive post-purchase experiences and foster long-term customer satisfaction and loyalty.

### **Parasocial Interaction as a Mediator**

To explain the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention (Wei et al., 2023), there is the concept of parasocial interaction which might be able to explain this mechanism. Parasocial interaction is a term used to describe the relationship that is built between viewers and media figures, such as influencers, even though this relationship is one-way (Rasmussen, 2018). Viewers feel emotionally involved and have an affinity with the media figure, even though they have no direct interaction.

Lin et al. (2021) explained that parasocial interaction refers to the one-sided, quasi-social relationship between media consumers and the personas they encounter through various media channels, including social media platforms. Within the realm of social media influencers, parasocial interaction elucidates how followers develop a sense of closeness and attachment to the influencer despite the lack of direct interpersonal interaction. This perceived connection arises from the influencer's curated online persona, relatable content, and consistent engagement with followers.

The bond formed through parasocial interaction fosters feelings of trust, familiarity, and emotional attachment among followers. As followers immerse themselves in the influencer's content, they develop a sense of intimacy and identification, viewing the influencer as a trusted confidant or role model. Consequently, this sense of closeness influences followers' perceptions and attitudes toward the influencer's recommendations and endorsements. In the context of purchase intention, the trust and emotional attachment cultivated through parasocial interaction play a pivotal role. Followers are more likely to align their purchasing decisions with the recommendations of influencers they perceive as trustworthy and relatable. The emotional bond forged through parasocial interaction can amplify the influencer's persuasive impact, leading to heightened purchase intention among followers.



Understanding the dynamics of parasocial interaction is crucial for brands and marketers seeking to leverage influencer marketing effectively. By recognizing the role of parasocial relationships in shaping consumer behavior, marketers can devise strategies to harness the power of influencer-follower connections and cultivate genuine engagement that resonates with target audiences. When audiences feel that they have a strong relationship with the influencer, they are more likely to follow recommendations and purchase the recommended product or service (Oh et al., 2014).

In this research, the researchers explore the concept of parasocial interaction as a mediator in the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention. It tested whether the level of parasocial interaction influences the extent of the positive influence of social media influencers on purchase intention. Studies by Garg & Bakshi (2024), Bhattacharya (2023), and Iqbal et al. (2023) highlight the importance of parasocial interaction in influencing purchase decisions. This research provides deeper insight into the mechanisms behind the influence of social media influencers in the context of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

Based on the studies above, this research puts forward the following hypotheses.

H3: Parasocial interaction significantly and positively influences purchase intention among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

H4: Parasocial interaction plays a mediating role in the positive influence of the effectiveness of social media influencers on purchase intentions among online shopping application users in Indonesia.

Based on several references (Aw et al., 2023; Balaban et al., 2022; Lin et al., 2021), it can be explained that this theoretical review delves into the pivotal role of social media influencers in shaping purchase intention, a fundamental aspect of consumer behavior in contemporary digital marketing landscapes. In recent years, the emergence of social media platforms has revolutionized traditional marketing paradigms, offering a unique avenue for brands to engage with their target audiences through influential personalities. Understanding the mechanisms through which social media influencers impact consumer decisions is paramount for businesses striving to navigate the dynamic realm of online commerce effectively. By examining the persuasive strategies employed by influencers, the nuanced dynamics of parasocial interaction, and its potential mediation role in the influencer-purchase intention nexus, this review aims to provide comprehensive insights into the intricate interplay between digital influencers and consumer behavior. Through an in-depth exploration of these concepts, this study endeavors to contribute to the existing body of knowledge in digital marketing and consumer psychology, offering valuable implications for marketers and researchers alike.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This research employs a quantitative approach, focusing on the collection and analysis of data that can be measured numerically. In the context of this study, a quantitative approach is utilized to allow for robust statistical analysis of the relationships between the observed variables, namely social media influencer, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention. The quantitative approach enables this research to gain a deeper understanding of the relationships between social media influencers, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention by facilitating precise statistical analysis. It also allows

for the generalization of research findings to a broader population since quantitative approaches tend to utilize larger and more representative samples. Thus, it enables researchers to systematically, measurably, and statistically answer research questions and provides a strong foundation for the conclusions and practical implications of research findings.

### **Population and Sampling**

The approach used in selecting the population and sample for this study is as follows.

#### ***Characteristics of the Population***

The population under study comprises users of online shopping applications in Indonesia. However, due to its continuously evolving nature, making it difficult to ascertain its size, the characteristics of this population are challenging to accurately determine.

#### ***Non-Random Sampling Approach***

Due to the difficulty in directly accessing and ensuring a balanced representation of the population, this study utilizes a non-random sampling approach. This means not all members of the population have an equal chance of being selected as samples. The approach used is purposive sampling, where samples are selected based on specific criteria, i.e., users of online shopping applications who have experience with social media influencers.

#### ***Sample Size***

A sample of 200 respondents is chosen based on the predetermined criteria. They are invited to participate in the study by sending a link to a questionnaire in the form of a Google Form.

#### ***Distribution of Participation Invitations***

Participation invitations are disseminated through various social media platforms and online community groups related to online shopping applications. This is done to reach as many relevant respondents as possible.

#### ***Voluntary Sample***

Respondents who are willing to complete the questionnaire become the research sample. This means their participation in the study is voluntary.

By employing this approach, the research aims to obtain a sample relevant to the research topic, although it does not ensure a balanced representation of the overall population. This approach allows the research to proceed despite the constraints in accessing the population under study.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis used in the study and the techniques applied to understand the relationships between the observed variables can be further explained as follows.

#### ***PLS-SEM Data Processing Application (SmartPLS)***

The research employs the PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling) application, or SmartPLS, to analyze data. PLS-SEM is a statistical method used to analyze relationships between variables in a structural model. SmartPLS is one of the popular software for conducting PLS-SEM analysis.

### **Hypothesis Testing**

Data analysis involves hypothesis testing to examine the relationships between the observed variables, namely social media influencer, parasocial interaction, and purchase intention. Hypotheses proposed in this study will be tested for their validity using appropriate statistical techniques.

### **Model Specification**

The first step in data analysis is specifying the model to be tested. This involves determining which variables will be included in the model and how these variables are related to each other.

### **Path Analysis**

Path analysis is used to test the direct relationships between variables in the model. This involves testing the path coefficients between independent and dependent variables in the model.

### **Mediation Analysis**

Mediation analysis is conducted to examine whether the mediator variable, in this case, parasocial interaction, mediates the relationship between the independent variable (social media influencer) and the dependent variable (purchase intention). This helps to understand the mechanism through which the influence of social media influencers operates on purchase intention through parasocial interaction.

### **Bootstrapping**

Bootstrapping is a resampling technique used to estimate the sampling distribution of a statistic. It is used to generate more accurate confidence intervals and p-values in statistical analysis.

### **Model Quality Evaluation**

Model quality evaluation is conducted to assess how well the specified model fits the observed data. This involves using metrics such as R-Square, Q2 Predictive Relevance, and Goodness of Fit (GoF) to evaluate the overall quality of the model.

By employing this series of analysis techniques, the research aims to understand the complex relationships between the observed variables and test the proposed hypotheses. This helps researchers gain a deeper understanding of the factors influencing purchase intention in the context of online shopping application usage in Indonesia.

## **RESULTS**

### **Direct Influence**

The results of the research data processing can be displayed in the following table.

**Table 1.** Path Coefficient

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistic   O/STDEV	p-value
H1	EOSMI → PI	0.308	0.304	0.106	2.901	0.004
H2	EOSMI → PSI	0.703	0.705	0.060	11.750	0.000
H3	PSI → PI	0.600	0.606	0.100	6.019	0.000



***The Direct Influence of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention***

The direct influence of social media influencers (EOSMI) on purchase intention (PI) indicates that when users of online shopping applications in Indonesia are exposed to content shared by influencers, it significantly influences their desire to make purchases. In this context, this influence is seen as a direct effect of the content shared by influencers on users' purchasing decisions. Based on Table 1, coefficient value (O) of 0.308 indicates the magnitude of the direct influence of social media influencers on purchase intention (PI). The higher the coefficient value, the greater the influence. In this case, a positive coefficient value indicates a positive relationship between the social media influencer (EOSMI) variable and the purchase intention (PI) variable. t-statistics are used to assess the significance of coefficients. t-statistic value of 2.901 indicates that the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention (PI) significantly differs from zero. Furthermore, p-value value of 0.004 indicates that this result is statistically significant at a certain level of confidence (typically, p-value <0.05 is considered significant). These findings confirm the significant role played by influencers in influencing the purchasing decisions of users of online shopping applications in Indonesia. This means that influencers have a significant ability to influence consumer behavior in the context of purchasing products or services through the content they share. The more effective an influencer is at influencing their audience, the higher the likelihood that the audience will have a higher intention to make purchases. In other words, when influencers can build strong connections with their audience and have significant influence, this tends to increase the purchase intention (PI) of the audience.

***The Direct Influence of Social Media Influencers on Parasocial Interaction***

The direct influence of social media influencers (EOSMI) on parasocial interaction (PSI) indicates that when users of online shopping applications in Indonesia are exposed to content shared by influencers, it significantly affects their interaction and emotional engagement with the influencer. Parasocial interaction (PSI) is a type of interaction that occurs between individuals and public figures or celebrities through mass media, where individuals feel connected and have an affinity with the figure even though there is no direct interaction. Based on Table 1, coefficient value (O) of 0.703 indicates the magnitude of the direct influence of social media influencers (EOSMI) on parasocial interaction (PSI). The higher the coefficient value, the greater the influence. In this case, a positive coefficient value indicates a positive relationship between the social media influencer (EOSMI) variable and the parasocial interaction (PSI) variable. High t-statistic and low p-value indicate that the influence of social media influencers (EOSMI) on parasocial interaction significantly differs from zero. High t-statistic value (in this case, 11.750) and p-value approaching zero (0.000) indicate that this result is highly statistically significant. These findings indicate that users of online shopping applications in Indonesia feel connected and have an affinity with the influencers they follow. This reaffirms that the content shared by influencers has a strong appeal, thus able to build emotional relationships and affinity with their audience, even though the interaction is indirect through social media. Thus, these results illustrate the importance of the role of social media influencers (EOSMI) in building parasocial interactions (PSI) with users of online shopping applications in Indonesia. This positive and significant influence demonstrates that influencers have the power to establish close relationships and affinity with their audience, which in turn can influence consumer attitudes and behavior.

***The Direct Influence of Parasocial Interaction on Purchase Intention***

The direct influence of parasocial interaction on purchase intention indicates that the level of emotional engagement and affinity of users with influencers directly affects their desire to make purchases. Parasocial interaction, formed through relationships driven

by influencer content, has a direct impact on user purchasing behavior. The coefficient value (O) of 0.600 indicates the magnitude of the direct influence of parasocial interaction on purchase intention. The higher the coefficient value, the greater the influence. In this case, a positive coefficient value indicates a positive relationship between the parasocial interaction variable and the purchase intention variable. High t-statistic (in this case, 6.019) and p-value approaching zero (0.000) indicate that the direct influence of parasocial interaction on purchase intention significantly differs from zero. This indicates that this result is highly statistically significant. These findings confirm that the higher the level of emotional engagement and affinity of users with influencers, the higher their purchase intention. In other words, strong parasocial interaction between users and influencers reflected in high emotional engagement and affinity, positively influences user tendencies to make purchases. Thus, these results emphasize the importance of parasocial interaction between users and influencers in shaping purchase intention. It indicates that building strong relationships and affinity with users can be an effective strategy for influencers to enhance their influence in influencing user purchasing behavior.

#### Indirect Influence Through Mediation

The results of the research data processing can be displayed in the following table.

**Table 2.** Specific Indirect Effect

Hypothesis		Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	t-statistic   O/STDEV	p-value
H4	EOSMI → PSI → PI	0.422	0.427	0.079	5.316	0.000

Mediation analysis reveals that parasocial interaction (PSI) serves as a mediator between the relationship between social media influencers (EOSMI) and purchase intention. This means that the influence of influencers on purchase intention (PI) does not only occur directly but also through the emotional engagement and affinity built by users with influencers. The coefficient value (O) of 0.422 indicates the magnitude of the indirect influence through parasocial interaction (PSI) on purchase intention (PI). The higher the coefficient value, the greater the influence. In this case, a positive coefficient value indicates a positive relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and purchase intention variables. High t-statistic (in this case, 5.316) and p-value approaching zero (0.000) indicate that the indirect influence through parasocial interaction (PSI) on purchase intention (PI) significantly differs from zero. This indicates that this result is highly statistically significant. These findings confirm that parasocial interaction (PSI) plays a crucial role as a mediator between social media influencers (EOSMI) and purchase intention. It emphasizes that not only the content shared by influencers influences purchase intention (PI), but also the emotional interaction and affinity built between users and influencers. Thus, these results indicate that the influence of influencers on purchase intention (PI) does not only occur directly but also through the emotional engagement and affinity built by users with influencers through parasocial interaction (PSI). This underscores the importance of understanding the dynamics of the relationship between users and influencers in the context of digital marketing, as well as its practical implications in effective marketing strategies.

In evaluating model quality, there are several findings that are also relevant:

### **R-Square**

R-Square measures how well a model can explain variability in the dependent variable. In this research, the parasocial interaction variable has an R-Square of 0.495, while purchase intention has an R-Square of 0.715. This shows that the model has a fairly good ability to explain variability in purchase intention.

### **Q-Squared Predictive Relevance**

Q-Squared Predictive Relevance measures a model's ability to make predictions. The results show that the model is able to predict well, with a Q-Squared of 0.480 for parasocial interaction and 0.518 for purchase intention.

### **Goodness of Fit Model (GoF)**

Goodness of Fit Model is a measure of the degree to which the model fits the empirical data. The GoF result of 0.659 indicates that the model used in this research has a good level of agreement with the observed data.

The results of this research provide a deeper understanding of the complex relationship between social media influencers, parasocial interactions, and purchase intention. These findings highlight the important role of influencers in shaping the purchase intentions of online shopping app users in Indonesia through the emotional connections they build with their audiences. The practical implication is that companies can utilize influencers effectively in their marketing strategies, by understanding the importance of building emotional engagement between the influencer and the audience. In addition, this research also contributes to the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon and paves the way for further research in this field.

## **DISCUSSION**

The research results obtained through PLS-SEM analysis provide a deep understanding of the relationship between social media influencers, parasocial interactions, and purchase intention among online shopping application users in Indonesia. Discussion of the results of this research will outline the main findings, practical implications, theoretical contributions, and research limitations.

### **Key Findings**

#### ***Direct Influence of Social Media Influencers on Purchase Intention***

Influencers often share personal success stories or experiences that inspire their followers, driving them to emulate their behavior. In this context, the direct influence of social media influencers on purchase intention (PI) among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia is substantial. The coefficient value in Table 1 signifies the magnitude of this influence, with higher values indicating greater impact. The positive coefficient suggests a favorable relationship between social media influencer (EOSMI) and purchase intention (PI). These findings underscore the crucial role of influencers in shaping purchasing decisions among Indonesian online shoppers.

It is imperative to note that effective influencer marketing can significantly enhance brand visibility and consumer engagement. Building strong connections with audiences and wielding substantial influence can markedly increase purchase intention (PI). This aligns with previous research highlighting the persuasive power of influencers in driving consumer behavior (Hudders et al., 2021). Therefore, integrating influencer collaborations into marketing strategies can offer significant advantages in navigating the

dynamic landscape of modern marketing, especially within the context of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

#### ***Direct Influence of Social Media Influencers on Parasocial Interactions***

The research conducted by Gröner and Hedderich (2022), Bhattacharya (2023), and Iqbal et al. (2023) collectively demonstrates that the effectiveness of social media influencers significantly and positively influences parasocial interaction (PSI). Their findings highlight the substantial impact influencers have on fostering emotional engagement and affinity with their audience. The direct influence of social media influencers (EOSMI) on parasocial interaction (PSI) among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia is evident.

These results underscore that Indonesian online shopping app users feel emotionally connected to the influencers they follow, emphasizing the compelling nature of influencer content in building parasocial relationships. This highlights the crucial role of influencers in shaping parasocial interactions with their audience, ultimately influencing consumer attitudes and behavior. The emotional appeal and engagement fostered by influencer content are pivotal in driving purchase intent among users.

In the context of relevant previous research, these findings align with prior studies emphasizing the influential role of social media influencers in shaping consumer behavior and fostering emotional connections with their audience (Gröner & Hedderich, 2022; Bhattacharya, 2023; Iqbal et al., 2023). They reinforce the notion that influencers possess the power to establish strong emotional bonds with their followers, thereby influencing purchase intention and consumer decision-making processes.

#### ***Direct Influence of Parasocial Interactions on Purchase Intention***

The findings of this research show the magnitude of the direct influence of parasocial interaction (PSI) on purchase intention (PI), with a higher value indicating a greater influence. The positive coefficient value underlines the good relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and purchase intention (PI). Moreover, the statistical significance of this direct effect further emphasizes the robustness of the findings.

These results underscore the pivotal role of parasocial interaction (PSI) in driving user purchasing behavior, emphasizing the importance of emotional connections fostered through influencer content. They align with prior research, highlighting the influential power of parasocial interactions in shaping consumer attitudes and purchase decisions.

The findings of this research highlight the important role of parasocial interactions in shaping user purchasing behavior. Apart from that, research by Bhattacharya (2023), Iqbal et al. (2023), and Garg & Bakshi (2024) have established the direct impact of parasocial interactions on purchase intentions, providing further support for the importance of this relationship.

In summary, the findings contribute to our understanding of the mechanisms underlying the influence of social media influencers on purchase intention, emphasizing the significant role played by parasocial interactions. They underscore the need for marketers to consider the emotional impact of influencer content in driving consumer behavior and suggest avenues for future research to explore the nuances of this relationship further.

### ***Indirect Influence Through Parasocial Interactions***

The research investigates whether the level of parasocial interaction mediates the positive influence of social media influencers on purchase intention, as suggested by Lee and Watkins (2016). Bhattacharya (2023), Iqbal et al. (2023), and Garg & Bakshi (2024) highlight the importance of PSI in influencing purchase decisions. Mediation analysis reveals that parasocial interaction (PSI) indeed serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media influencers (EOSMI) and purchase intention (PI). This implies that the impact of influencers on purchase intention does not solely occur directly but also through the emotional engagement and affinity users develop with influencers.

In summary, the research findings underscore the mediating role of parasocial interaction in the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention among online shopping application users in Indonesia. This aligns with Lee and Watkins' (2016) assertion that the level of parasocial interaction moderates the positive influence of influencers on purchase intention. This highlights the importance of emotional engagement and affinity with influencers in shaping consumer behavior, offering valuable insights for marketers seeking to harness the power of influencer marketing effectively. Further research could delve deeper into the mechanisms underlying parasocial interactions and their impact on consumer decision-making processes

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the research findings highlight the significant influence of social media influencers on purchase intention among users of online shopping applications in Indonesia. The study reveals that the effectiveness of social media influencers positively impacts both parasocial interaction and purchase intention. Moreover, parasocial interaction acts as a mediator in the relationship between social media influencers and purchase intention, indicating the importance of emotional engagement and affinity with influencers in shaping consumer behavior.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on influencer marketing by elucidating the mechanisms through which social media influencers influence consumer behavior. It underscores the pivotal role of emotional connections with influencers in driving purchase intentions, emphasizing the need for marketers to cultivate authentic relationships with influencers and their audiences.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that businesses operating in the online shopping sector leverage the power of social media influencers to enhance their marketing strategies. Marketers should focus on identifying influencers who resonate with their target audience and collaborate with them to create authentic and engaging content. Additionally, fostering parasocial interactions through meaningful engagement with influencers can further strengthen brand-consumer relationships and drive purchase intentions.

Overall, this research underscores the significance of influencer marketing in the digital era and provides valuable insights for businesses seeking to capitalize on this powerful marketing strategy to drive consumer engagement and purchase behavior.

### **LIMITATION**

While this research offers valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge several limitations. Firstly, the issue of sample representativeness arises due to the heterogeneous nature of the population of online shopping application users in



Indonesia. The research sample may not adequately reflect the diversity within this population, cautioning against generalizing findings. Secondly, although Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) is a robust method, it has its limitations. Future studies could explore alternative methods or employ mixed-method approaches to corroborate the findings. Lastly, external factors, such as economic or social circumstances, which can significantly influence purchase intention, are not thoroughly considered in this research. Accounting for these factors could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics at play in shaping consumer behavior in the context of online shopping applications in Indonesia.

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#### DECLARATION OF CONFLICTING INTERESTS

The authors, Heru Tri Sutiono & Aruna Kintamani Hayumurti, declare that we understand and always maintain objectivity and integrity in research. We affirm that this statement accurately represents the circumstances surrounding the research and is without any potential conflict of interest.

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