The Effects of the Parasocial Relationship with Celebrity YouTubers Towards Thai Middle Aged Viewers' Purchase Intentions: The Role of Self-disclosure, Self-brand Connection, and Brand Trust

ความสัมพันธ์แบบชื่นชมเพียงข้างเดียวของกลุ่มผู้รับชมวัยกลางคนในประเทศไทย ที่มีต่อดารายูทูปเบอร์ ที่ส่งผลต่อการตัดสินใจเลือกซื้อแบรนด์สินค้า ผ่านบทบาทของตัวแปรในเรื่องความรู้สึกของผู้รับชมถึงการเปิดเผยตัวตน ความเป็นส่วนตัวของดารายูทูปเบอร์ ความรู้สึกเชื่อมโยงของผู้รับชมกับแบรนด์ และความเชื่อมั่นต่อแบรนด์ที่ถูกพูดถึงในช่องยูทูปของดารา

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Abstract

The change in the current digital marketing environment and consumer lifestyle have been driving companies to alter their platforms of communications creating a better connectivity with the target consumers in terms of social media platforms. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of viewers' perceptions of celebrities' self-disclosure as a moderator on the relationships among parasocial relationship and the self-brand connection and brand trust. Those will lead viewers to desire to purchase the sponsorship brands presented in product placement context by celebrity YouTubers. The data were collected online from 238 respondents who aged between 45-64 years old and experienced in watching the selected YouTube programs. PROCESS Macro was conducted for testing the proposed hypotheses. The results found that parasosical relationship between Thai middle-aged viewers and celebrity YouTubers can both directly and indirectly affect viewers' intentions to purchase the same brands as celebrities. Further, parasocial relationships indirectly influenced purchase intentions via the increase of perceptiveness of self-brand connection and brand trust. Moreover, the result indicated a significant interaction between celebrities' self-disclosure and parasocial relationship toward self-brand connection and brand trust. The study provides implications in understanding that the use of celebrities as for the company's brand influencer in the product placement context is still usable. The outcomes of this present study suggest that content creation with the use of product placements in YouTube platform can be the company's greatest asset if they carefully manage the contents that attract the interest of middle-aged consumers. Especially, when these viewers perceive that YouTube celebrities are more open with their personal life and opinions that consequently motivates them to develop the feeling of brand connections and brand trust towards the brand content presented by the YouTube celebrities.

Keywords: Parasocial Relationship, Self-brand Connection, Brand Trust, Self-disclosure, Product Placemen

บทคัดย่อ

การเปลี่ยนแปลงสภาพแวดล้อมทางการตลาดดิจิทัล และสไตล์การใช้ชีวิตของผู้บริโภคในปัจจุบันได้ผลักดันให้บริษัทต่างๆ ปรับเปลี่ยนแพลตฟอร์มการสื่อสารของตนแก่ผู้บริโภคให้มาอยู่บนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ เพื่อให้เข้าถึงกลุ่มลูกค้าเป้าหมายได้มากขึ้น การศึกษานี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อศึกษาประสิทธิผลของการรับรู้ของกลุ่มผู้ชมยูทูปในช่วงวัยกลางคน ซึ่งมีแนวโน้มที่จะเป็นประชากรที่มีจำนวนเพิ่มขึ้นในอนาคตเกี่ยวกับการเปิดเผยตัวตนของดาราผู้มีชื่อเสียง ความรู้สึกถึงความเกี่ยวข้องกับตนเองและแบรนด์ที่นำเสนอในช่องยูทูป และความมั่นใจในตัวแบรนด์สินค้าที่รับชมบนช่องรายการยูทูป บนบริบทของความสัมพันธ์แบบข้างเดียวที่ผู้รับชมมีต่อดาราที่ชื่นชอบ ที่จะส่งผลทำให้ผู้รับชมปรารถนาที่จะซื้อแบรนด์สินค้า ที่นำเสนอในรูปแบบโฆษณาแฝงไปกับเนื้อหาของรายการ ข้อมูลในการศึกษานี้รวบรวมจากผู้ตอบแบบสอบถาม 238 คนผู้มีประสบการณ์ในการรับชมรายการยูทูปในกลุ่มอายุช่วงวัยกลางคน ซึ่งมีอายุระหว่าง 45-64 ปี โดยใช้โปรแกรม PROCESS Macro ในการวิเคราะห์ข้อมูลเพื่อทดสอบสมมติฐาน ผลการวิจัยพบว่าความสัมพันธ์ความสัมพันธ์แบบชื่นชมเพียงข้างเดียวของผู้รับชมวัยกลางคนชาวไทยที่มีต่อดารายูทูบเบอร์ที่มีชื่อเสียง สามารถส่งผลทั้งทางตรงและทางอ้อมต่อความตั้งใจของผู้ชมในการซื้อแบรนด์เดียวกันกับดารา โดยความสัมพันธ์ในรูปแบบความสัมพันธ์แบบข้างเดียวยังมีอิทธิพลทางอ้อมต่อความตั้งใจในการซื้อผ่านการรับรู้เพิ่มขึ้นของการรู้สึกเกี่ยวข้องและความไว้วางใจในแบรนด์สินค้าที่ถูกนำเสนอโดยดารายูทูบเบอร์ นอกจากนี้ผลการวิจัยยังชี้ให้เห็นว่าการเปิดเผยตัวตน เรื่องส่วนตัว และความคิดเห็นของดารายูทูบเบอร์ให้ผู้รับชมรับทราบนั้นจะยิ่งส่งผลต่อความรู้สึกเกี่ยวข้องและความไว้วางใจในแบรนด์สินค้าของผู้รับชม และทำให้มีความตั้งใจที่จะเลือกซื้อสินค้าแบรนด์นั้นๆตามดารายูทูปเบอร์มากยิ่งขึ้น ผลการศึกษานี้สะท้อนให้เห็นถึงการใช้ดาราผู้มีชื่อเสียงมาเป็นยูทูปเบอร์ในฐานะผู้มีอิทธิพลต่อแบรนด์ของบริษัท ในบริบทของการโฆษณาแฝงสามารถนำมาใช้ได้ ส่งผลต่อประสิทธิผลเมื่อใช้แพลตฟอร์มบนสื่อสังคมออนไลน์ใหม่ เช่น ยูทูป แพลตฟอร์มนี้เป็นแหล่งข้อมูลที่น่าเชื่อถือเพื่อให้ความรู้แก่ผู้ชมโดยเฉพาะในกลุ่มวัยกลางคนให้พวกเขาเลือกซื้อแบรนด์ที่ถูกแนะนำ

และยิ่งไปกว่านั้นการเปิดเผยตัวตน และแสดงความคิดเห็นที่ชัดเจนของดารายูทูเบอร์ถือเป็นปัจจัยสำคัญที่จะกระตุ้นให้ผู้รับ
ชมเลือกซื้อแบรนด์เหล่านั้นมากยิ่งขึ้น ในบริบทของความสัมพันธ์เพียงข้างเดียวนี้

คำสำคัญ: ความสัมพันธ์แบบข้างเดียว ความรู้สึกเกี่ยวข้องกับแบรนด์สินค้า ความเชื่อมั่นที่มีต่อตราสินค้า
การเปิดเผยตัวตน โฆษณาแฝง

Introduction

The digital landscape requires marketers to increase connectivity with their targets. Thus, it has been the challenge of companies to evolve their core marketing essence utilizing human-centric marketing (Kotler al., 2016). Consequently, content marketing has become an important marketing initiative for achieving long-term long-lasting relationships with customers. These contents on social media have come to replace traditional advertising in mass media (Chung & Cho, 2017). Consumers pay attention to good stories that are relevant to their needs and wants (Diamond, 2022) thus leading to the importance of media persons or reference groups, who have become online social media influencers (Miller & Laczniak, 2011; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). Consequently, Thai and marketers worldwide realized the significance of this evolving search behavior of consumers. Social media plays an essential role in consumers' brand searching, especially video content on YouTube, which is ranked second most popular search engine (Kemp, 2021). Social media particularly YouTube has become the power source for creating marketing content in this digital media era, such as online articles, infographics, videos, podcasts, and live streaming (Stever & Lawson, 2013). Previous studies have shown that the effectiveness of communication through this channel depends on how strong the brand drives consumers to pay attention to the key messages that are more applicable to their needs and wants (Chung & Cho, 2014; Sirichareechai et al., 2021). Boateng and Okoe (2015), consumers will trust and eventually lead them to purchase and involve with the brand and product they prefer or love.

The communication via social media allows viewers to form intimate relationship with media persona like celebrities or influencers and develop attachment in relationship with these reference groups as if they have known them (Chung & Cho, 2014). This one-sided relationship is known as parasocial relationship. According to the current lifestyle of most YouTube viewers, they seem to bond a strong connection with YouTube video content creators whom they admire (Kolsquare, 2022). Many producers and brand owners found that this can demonstrate how the product can be used and insert these presentations as parts of the storyline they present (Hackley & Hackley, 2013).

Product placement can either be prominence (intuitive) or subtle in nature of its presentations. To clarify this, the prominent (intuitive) placement means that the product or brand identifier is made very clearly to be seen and have very high visibility to the audiences when viewing the program. Subtle placements refer to those products and brands that shown not very clearly and prominently. In general, the subtle placement aspect, it will show no obvious brand elements on the screen but rather plays as a part of the story line in media channel (Gupta & Lord, 1998).

Previous literature reviews regarding product placement related to the parasocial medium, type of media program, characteristics of brand endorsers, and effectiveness on television, sitcom, movie, online game, advergame, social game channel (Boateng & Okoe, 2015; Vashisht, 2015). Nevertheless, limited numbers of studies concentrated on the relationship of product placement in character representation and self-disclosures in a parasocial relationship as the indirect effects of self-brand connection and brand trust. Hence, this study will examine product placement and self-disclosure via parasocial relationships with celebrities as a key determinant for middled-age viewers' brand purchase intentions.

In addition to this, the research objective is to clarify the understanding of the middle-aged group (aged 45-64 years old) social media behavior, which covers around 43.6 percent of the total population (Kemp, 2021). The reason is that Thailand has become the third country in Asia that enters the category of an "aging society" and a 2017 report declared that the spending of the middle-aged consumers will continue to increase (Bank of Thailand, 2021). As such this age group is very attractive to marketers as they bring opportunities for unique products that fit their lifestyle.

In terms of theoretical contribution, this study examines product placement model (Russell et al., 2006) and parasocial relationship theory. Especially in applying product placement and parasocial relationships in the social media environment. In addition, this study offers helpful information for extending the study of self-brand connection and social identity theory (SIT) between celebrity endorsers and followers in the form of product placement in online video content. Moreover, in terms of managerial implications, it would help in the understanding of how to invest the money on the right communication channel like YouTube, but more specifically to the right brand presenters, content messages, and target audience.

The main objective of this current research is to investigate whether product placement in celebrities' YouTube channels with the parasocial relationship viewers pertaining to celebrities can determine the stronger perception of viewers' self-brand connection and brand trust toward their intentions to purchase or not. In addition, this present study also expected to find the impact of celebrities' self-disclosure as a moderating effect that can increase the higher perceptions of viewers' self-brand connection and brand trust. Therefore, the objectives are listed as follows:

1) To study the influence of viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers on their purchase decisions using product placement on celebrities' YouTube channels.

2) To study the influence of viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers on viewers' perceptions of self-brand connection and brand trust.

3) To understand the effect of self-brand connection and brand trust on viewers' purchase intentions.

4) To examine the effect of self-disclosure on self-brand connection in the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intentions.

5) To examine the effect of self-disclosure on brand trust in the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intentions.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

The application of parasocial theory on product and brand placement includes brand exposure, awareness, brand recall, and improving brand attitude and desire to purchase the product/ service brand that the media characters they admire used and presented in the media program. Therefore, the parasocial theory is being used together with the product placement in this research. It is found that viewers have a positive attitude toward the media characters or celebrities or influencers and the brand or product if they could expose more knowledge about their personal life, lifestyle, and similar personality. Moreover, they will develop more trust and self-brand connection and extend the parasocial relationship with them when they perceived these people on the media program as if their friends and family members in their circle life (Russell 2002; Naderer et al., 2018). (Lee & Lee, 2017; Williams et al, 2011). Thus, parasocial relationship between social media users and celebrities who endorse brand online is lead the viewers to have purchase intentions (Kim et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019).

Hypotheses 1: Viewers' parasocial relationship (PSR) with celebrity YouTubers
positively influence on viewers' purchase intentions (PI).

According to social identity theory, people will be induced to form attachment to those who share similar value and preferences as them (Jacobson, 1979). The theory indicates that consumers buy brands as in the part of their personalities to demonstrate their self-concept, in order to identify who are they (Escalas, 2004). Many researchers used social identity in different context of reference groups to further explain how these group influence self-brand connection (Escalas 2004; White & Dahl, 2007).

The way that brand information is generalized into the story of the brand that consumers can effortlessly relate with will likely raise the intention to buy product brands rather than those brands that show no brand connection (Escalas, 2004; Ren et al., 2012; Harrigan et al., 2018). They are seen as the aspirational groups that portray dynamic ranges of brand symbolism, in which later bring desires for consumers to purchase product brands (Dwivedi et al., 2015). Thus, the brand strengthens parasocial relationship through the media persona with its customers, will enhance self-brand connection and intention to consume the products or services will be by its nature of the relationship. (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Lee & Lee, 2017).

Hypotheses 2: The viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers positively influence on viewers' self-brand connections (SBC).

According to Berens and Van Reil (2004), the fundamental thought of the effects used for assessing corporate branding or reputation is a social expectation, trust, and personality. Especially when media characters or celebrities or influencers have gained credibility in consumers' perception of their trustworthiness and expertise, the one-side relationship will be developed and have more confidence on brand's reliability when media character explores more on their persona (Cohen, 2018; Erdem & Swait, 2004). This is in accordance with the balance model of Russell et al., (2006), which clarifying the level of relationship between audience and media characters through the placement used in sitcom that associating with the attractiveness, trust worthiness, and affective of media characters audiences perceived. Essentially, trust in person and brand require tremendous of information for consumption, especially needs messages to be repeated over time through the celebrity endorsers (Chung & Cho, 2017).

Hypothesis 3: The viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers positively influence on viewers' brand trusts (BT).

Previous research indicated that parasocial relationship was influenced by customers' attitudes and behaviors, especially toward the brand that reference groups adopt in real life (Kim et al., 2020; Hwang & Zhang, 2018). Once customers feel they have a brand-related response with the firm, they were likely to have self-brand connections. Based on the self-concept theory, brands are the symbolic meanings that signify the self-identities (Belk, 1988; Dwivedi et al., 2015). In particular, self-concept is a vital part of social identity theory as it occurs in the consequence of perceiving as a membership of social groups (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Self-brand connections are being mentioned as the way that customers develop connections between their self-concepts or brand personality and brands (Escalas & Bettman, 2003).

Power et al. (2008) found that the positive image and non-negative brand personality relevant to brand trust can dominate the sense of self-connectedness with the brand. This is also relevant with the self-concept that discusses a person can form any two types of this concept, namely, actual, and ideal concept (Jin, 2018). Brand trust is projected to become successful when consumers view the brand as relevant to their personalities and think positively about it. It is likely to be found that consumers will feel more closely to the brand when they notice that the brand is link to themselves in some ways (Escalas, 2004; Harrigan et al., 2018). Once consumers perceive the linkage between a brand and their identities are more important, it is expected to be pointed out as their self-brand connections.

Hypothesis 4: Viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers exhibit positive relationship with viewers' purchase intentions via the increased in their self-brand connection (SBC).

Hypothesis 5: Viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers exhibit positive relationship with viewers' purchase intentions via the increased in their brand trust (BT).

Self-disclosure refers to a person will gradually reveal personal information to others through interpersonal relationships. (Chung & Cho, 2017). At present, both consumers and influencers tend to expose more about their personal information through the media content created, like taking a photo with products and writing something about their daily life experiences. In addition, self-disclosure is a fundamental form of privacy behavior of individuals whom will disclose themselves on social network site (SNS) to begin or maintain relationships with others in coping with the situations or events, or experiences that point out their characteristics and identity (Masur & Masur, 2019).

According to the social penetration theory, self-disclosure is crucial in using for growing the parasocial relationship. When consumers perceive self-disclosure as used by celebrities, the enhancement of parasocial relationships will occur as consumers will be more familiar with the branded product and form a higher level of trust with the celebrity endorsers (Kim & Song, 2016). As such, people will perceive trust in brand when they perceive that the influencers or message senders engage more in their self-disclosure. Moreover, interpersonal trust is a factor that determine the level of self-disclosure. This is supported by the study of Wheeless and Grotz (1977), who indicated that interpersonal trust is a strong predictor of self-disclosure.

Hypothesis 6: Through the indirect relationship of viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers with viewers' purchase intentions, the perception of celebrities' self-disclosures (SD) moderates the viewers' parasocial relationship toward their perceptions of self-brand connections (SBC).

Hypothesis 7: Through the indirect relationship of viewers' parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers with viewers' purchase intentions, the perception of celebrities' self-disclosures (SD) moderates the viewers' parasocial relationship toward their perceptions of brand trust (BT).

This study examines the mediating effect of SBC and BT to apply in this research, in order to explain the relationship between PSR and PI. Therefore, this leads to the development of the conceptual framework of the study (See Figure 1).
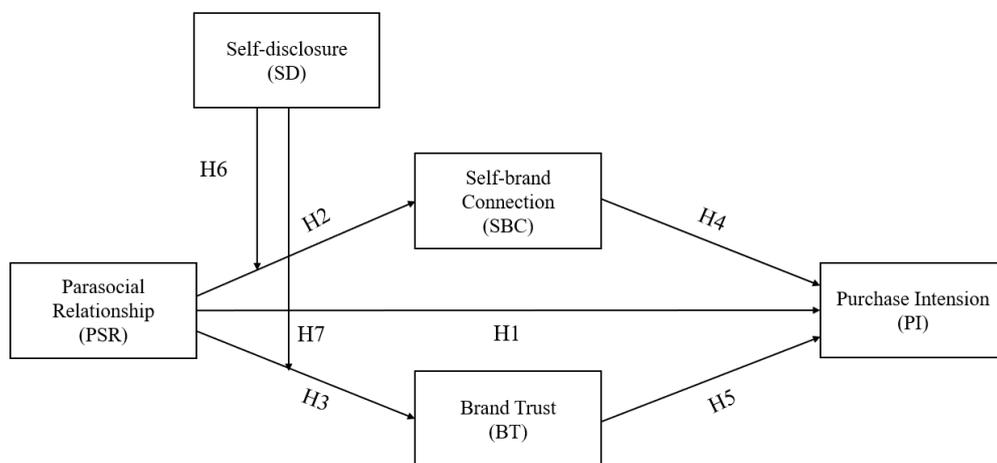

Figure 1: The conceptual model of the study

Research Methodology

In previous research studies of parasocial relationships and product placement, most of the studies used quantitative design by using the survey method for their studies (Kishiya, 2018; Evans, 2020), which was also applied to this study. In order to reduce the errors of questionnaire development and ensure the reliability of the questions used match measurement scale, the back-translation was used to confirm the validity of the content used for designing the questionnaire and the accuracy of the translation questions from English to Thai (Malhotra, 2010; Churchill et al., 2010). The item-object congruity (IOC) was applied.

The YouTube channels were selected for displaying the same sponsorship that were known brands for more than 5 episodes within the past 12 months. The YouTube channels had to have more than 10,000 subscribers. The product placements shown in the video content should be the brands that can be referred to consumers' identities and related lifestyles. The respondents of this present study were chosen based on their knowledge and lifestyle. These target group are fans and viewers who habitually watch the chosen three programs that displays most lifestyle shopping product placement where the companies aim to signal the sense of consumers' identities through their admired celebrity YouTuber. These video contents consist of a vast variety of activities that are consistent with consumers' newly daily routines during the uncertain time of Covid-19 pandemic. The selected programs hosted by Thai celebrities are: Wanlamuan, Bebe Fit Routine, and Jeebnoonoi. All of them hosted by a Thai famous singer, Oat-Pramote and actress, Bebe-Thanchanok. Thus, it has been deemed that these YouTube channels are appropriate for this present study. For instance, the program about film and digital photography provides guidance and tips for the viewers who are fond of taking pictures. The channel about workout videos, triathlon training and running activity also provides new ideas for viewers to keep themselves healthy and get away from boredom.

The respondents had to watch at least three episodes in the last three months and they were subscribers to the celebrities' YouTube channel. So that, the suitable method for recruiting respondents is purposive sampling. It is the type of non-probability method that randomly selects the population members that consistent with the above criteria (Dörnyei, 2007; Etikan et al., 2016). Hair et al., (2009) suggested that the sample size should be at least between five to ten times the number of total variables used in the research analysis. Thus, there are 23 measurement items in this study, which means that the sample size employed in the research must be at least 115 (23 x 5) to respond with a 95% confidence interval. The data collected between August to November, 2021, in order to reach those target respondents whom already viewed at least 3 episodes of the chosen program. The estimation of the YouTube video production Upon distributing the questionnaire link a total of 238 were eligible for hypothesis testing and analysis, which fit the criteria. A total of 149 (62.6%) were female, whereby 89 (37.4%) were female. Among this cohort, the middle age group whose ages ranged between 45 and 64 years old, 45.4% belong to 51-55 age range, 42.4% belong to 46-50 age range, 7.1% belong to 56-60 age range and 5% belong to those who are 60-64 years old. Most of the respondents work as private company employees (52.1%) and some of them have their own business (31.1%). Most of them have a monthly income above 55,001 Thai Baht (50.8%). Besides this, most of them have earned bachelor's degree (46.2%) and the respondents' marital status, most of them are married (62.2%).

Results

The model Chi-square, RMSEA, CFI, and SRMR are used to measure Goodness of Fit (Kline, 2005). GFI and RMSEA are frequently used as a complement to the chi-square measure. To assess model fit, GFI compares the model to no other model at all, implying that a GFI value near 1 indicates strong model fit (Ho, 2013; Rao et al., 2014). The RSMEA value should range from 0 to 1 where the small value of RMSEA implying the model fit. However, the acceptable model fit must have RMSEA value of 0.06 or less (Hu & Bentler, 1999). Tucker-Lewin Index (TLI), Normed Fit Index (NFI), Relative Fit Index (RFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) are the incremental fit measurements that should be examined (Ho, 2013). The acceptable level of these incremental fit measures was suggested to be greater than 0.90 (Hair et al., 2014). The cutoff values must be taken as consideration for the interpretation of the fit of structural equation model (Marsh et al., 2004; Ho, 2013) (See Table 1).

Table 1: The Verification of Model's Validity

Criteria Index	Model Fit Criteria	Estimate
CMIN/DF	≤ 3 (Kline, 1998)	1.927
RMSEA	< 0.05 (Collier, 2020)	0.047
GFI	> 0.90 (Collier, 2020)	0.930
AGFI	> 0.80 (Segars and Grover, 1993)	0.868
CFI	> 0.90 (Collier, 2020)	0.976
NFI	> 0.90 (Collier, 2020)	0.951
TLI	> 0.90 (Collier, 2020)	0.971

The standardized regression weights (factor loadings) should be at least 0.50, or preferably 0.70 in order to ensure convergent validity, meaning that the measurement items within the same factor are adequately correlated to represent that factor (latent construct) (Hair et al, 2014). The factor loading of latent variable parasocial relationships range from 0.696 - 0.907, Self-disclosure range from 0.506 – 0.930, Self-brand Connections range from 0.770 – 0.925, Brand Trust range from 0.771 – 0.909, and Purchase Intention range from 0.800 – 0.920. which indicated that those items represented latent variables.

Convergent validity was assessed by Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and factor loading in this study (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Convergent validity shows how the items relate to the underlying constructs (Churchill et al., 2010). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity is achieved when the square root of the construct's AVE is greater than the correlation coefficient between the construct and the other constructs. The CR, AVE, and discriminant analysis value that composite reliability of the construct range from 0.973 – 0.991. All these composite reliability over the threshold of 0.70, indicating the acceptable level of construct reliability (Hair et al., 2014). The AVE value showed that each construct is greater than the criterion at 0.5. Moreover, the square root of AVE is all greater than correlation coefficients with other constructs, indicating that discriminant validity was achieved for these five constructs (See Table 2).

In accordance with the previous KMO and Bartlett tests for all five primary constructs, revealed that all indexes were acceptable and above the standard criterion of 0.5 at significance level of 0.0000 showing no multicollinearity. The results of the Cronbach's Alpha test for reliability for all five constructs ranges from 0.788 to 0.924, which is acceptable (Hair et al., 2014; Maholtra, 2010).

Table 2: Model Validity Measure

	CR	AVE	PSR	SD	SBC	BT	PI
PSR	0.991	0.686	0.828				
SD	0.973	0.610	0.392**	0.781			
SBC	0.990	0.681	0.452**	0.322**	0.825		
BT	0.991	0.690	0.402**	0.253**	0.642**	0.831	
PI	0.988	0.712	0.260**	0.198**	0.401**	0.554**	0.844

The measurement model presented a good fit model, all values are exceeding the thresholds suggested by the previous researchers (Kline, 1998; Collier, 2020). The results revealed that the model was well fitted as CMIN/df = 1.927, RMSEA = 0.047, GFI =0.93, AGFI = 0.868, CFI = 0.976, RFI = 0.925, IFI = 0.973, NFI = 0.951, and TLI = 0.971 (See Table 1). Thus, it was found that this model had good construct validity and associated with the empirical data because all the estimated parameters of model fit indices are above the suggested threshold. Regarding the absolute fit measures, CMIN/DF = 1.927, GFI = 0.93, and AGFI = 0.868 are all above the recommended value. Furthermore, the incremental fit indices presented below evince that NFI, RFI, IFI, TLI and CFI range from 0.925-0.973, in which exceed the 0.9, the guidelines for the acceptable fit of the model. The other additional indices like CFI are found to be close to 1, due to the association in 90% confidence interval, RMSEA used for evaluating the complexity of the model was also less than 0.05, and CMIN/df was lower than 3 (Kline, 1998; Collier, 2020) (See Table 1).

The PROCESS Macro Model 7 was used as recommended by Hayes (2013), which establishes causal effects in the relationship with the multiple moderators and mediators. The proposed model accounts for the indirect effects of each mediator and the moderator that play as the mechanisms that simultaneously strengthen the relationship. The indirect effects of the independent variables and conditional indirect effects on the dependent variable were estimated using bias-corrected bootstrap point estimates along with standard errors at the 95 percent confidence interval and 5,000 bootstrap samples. The overall results of the seven hypotheses tested that shows direct effect, indirect effect, and total effect of parasocial relationship on purchase intention of viewers are explained in the next section. Moreover, the researcher performed the test of the hypotheses for both mediators, namely, self-brand connection (SBC) and brand trust (BT) in separated models.

In table 3 above, the total effect of parasocial relationship (PSR) in the test of the interaction between parasocial relationship and self-brand connection (SBC) through self-disclosure (SD) on the outcome of purchase intention (PI) was at a significant level (β = 0.089, SE = 0.022, t = 3.933, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.044, 0.134]). Whereas, the total effect of parasocial relationship in the test of the interaction between parasocial relationship and brand trust through self-disclosure on the outcome of purchase intention was also significant (β = 0.047, SE = 0.025, t = 1.907, p < 0.05, 95% CI [0.009, 0.097]). In additional to this, the direct effects of parasocial relationship on purchase intention in the test of moderate mediated effect of self-disclosure and self-brand connection was found significant (β = 0.737, SE = 0.075, t = 9.723, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.587, 0.886]) and the direct effects of parasocial relationship on purchase intention in the test of moderate mediated effect of self-disclosure and brand trust was also found significant (β = 0.737, SE = 0.075, t = 9.288, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.644, 0.991]). Therefore, hypothesis 1 was support.

The first hypothesis examines the effect of viewers' parasocial relationship on their intentions to purchase the brands endorsed by celebrities in their YouTube channels. The result reveals that viewers' parasocial relationship (PSR) with celebrity YouTubers positively influence on their purchase intentions (PI). The results showed that the PSR between celebrity YouTubers and this age group can significantly affect the viewers' buying decisions. This is probably because the respondents in this present study were the middle-aged group who intentionally and repeatedly watched the YouTube program of those celebrities. Unlike some previous studies, they concentrated more on the other types of social media platforms, not YouTube and most of the brands displayed belong to the category of convenience goods (Chung & Cho, 2014).

Table 3: The Hypotheses Test: The Result of Regression Analysis (The Direct Effect of Self-brand Connection, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention)

Hypotheses	Variable	Product of Coefficients		Bootstrapping 95% Confident interval		Results
		Point Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	
	Predicted Purchase Intention (R² = 0.559)					
H1:	Parasocial Relationship	0.737***	0.075	0.587	0.886	Accepted
	Self-brand Connection	0.308***	0.072	0.165	0.451	Accepted
	Predicted Purchase Intension (R2 = 0.76)					
	Parasocial Relationship	0.818***	0.088	0.644	0.991	Accepted
	Brand Trust	0.36***	0.059	0.242	0.478	Accepted
H2:	Parasocial Relationship	0.867***	0.057	0.754	0.981	Accepted
	Parasocial Relationship X Self-disclosure	0.089***	0.022	0.044	0.134	
	Predicting Brand Trust (R2 = 0.624)					

Table 3: The Hypotheses Test: The Result of Regression Analysis (The Direct Effect of Self-brand Connection, Brand Trust, and Purchase Intention) Con't

Hypotheses	Variable	Product of Coefficients		Bootstrapping 95% Confident interval		Results
		Point Estimate	SE	Lower	Upper	
H3:	Parasocial Relationship	1.045***	0.067	0.912	1.178	Accepted
	Parasocial Relationship X Self-disclosure	0.086**	0.026	0.033	0.138	

Additionally, the direct effect of parasocial relationship on self-brand connection (β = 0.867, SE = 0.057, t = 15.093, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.754, 0.981]), and brand trust (β = 1.045, SE = 0.067, t = 15.461, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.912, 1.178]) were all found at significant levels (See Table 3). Consequently, Hypothesis 1, 2, and 3 were supported. For the second hypothesis, the researchers examined the relationship between viewer's' parasocial relationships and their operationalization of self-brand connections in which the brands presented on YouTube channels that incorporate extending their self-concept (Escalas, 2004; Escalas & Bettman, 2003). In this case, it manifested that viewer's' parasocial relationship had direct influence on their self-brand connections in which made viewers satisfied with some certain psychological needs like showing identities and strengthening self-identity (Moliner et al., 2018). Thus, the PSR that viewers experienced and confined with celebrity YouTubers since this enduring relationship can improve viewers' brand response and their self-concept. The result of the third hypothesis also disclosed that the viewers' parasocial relationship had significant influence on their perceptions of trust with the brand shown in the program, through the insertion of product placement in collaboration with the brand promotion by celebrity YouTubers. Despite the inconsistent findings from precursory study (Reinikainen et al., 2019), the findings of this present study supported the enduring one-sided parasocial relationship that viewers developed towards the celebrity YouTubers

The direct effect of self-brand connection toward purchase intention was found (β = 0.308, SE = 0.072, t = 4.028, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.165, 0.451]) and also the positive significant relationship between brand trust and purchase intention (β = 0.36, SE = 0.059, t = 6.009, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.242, 0.478]). In corresponding with the theory of Plan Behavior (TPB), the researchers further conducted an analysis of the mediating effects of both self-brand connection and brand trust on the relationship between viewers' parasocial relationship and their purchase intentions by using PROCESS Macro Model no. 7. The indirect relationship of both mediating effects was found at significant levels (SBC, β = 0.266, SE = 0.086, t = 2.965, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.101, 0.441] and BT, β = 0.376, SE = 0.091, t = 4.131, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.231, 0.59]). Consequently, both mediating variables were noticed to mediate the relationship between parasocial relationship and purchase intention. Thus, hypothesis 4 and 5 were supported (See Table 4).

Thus, hypothesis 4 was supported. This outcome gave evidence that the perceptiveness of self-brand connection among middle-aged viewers is essential in constructing the stronger degree of purchase intentions towards the brand promoted by celebrity YouTubers. This suggest that parasocial relationship can effectively influence those middle-aged fans to purchase the same brands or products as their favorite celebrities, their intention to buy will only increase when they feel that the brand have certain associations with their self-concept and lifestyle, which are extrapolated by endorsement of the celebrity YouTubers. Moreover, hypothesis 5 was also supported. Brand trust had both direct and indirect effect on viewers' purchase intensions and entailed its role as a full mediator in this relationship. The results supported that brand trust through the presentation of product placement on celebrities' YouTube channel led viewers' strong intention to purchase those brands (See Table 4).

Table 4: The Hypotheses Test of the Indirect Effect Analysis

Hypotheses	Total Indirect Effect	Point Estimate	SE	Bootstrapping 95% Confident interval		Results
				Lower	Upper	
H4:	PSR→SBC→PI	0.266**	0.086	0.101	0.441	Accepted
H5:	PSR→BT→PI	0.376***	0.091	0.231	0.59	Accepted
				Self-Disclosure		
		Index of moderate mediation	Low (-1SD)	Average	High (+1SD)	Results
H6:	PSR→SBC→PI	0.027***	0.009	0.266	0.064	Accepted
H7:	PSR→BT→PI	0.031***	0.008	0.376	0.081	Accepted

*Notes: n = 238, k = 5,000. **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001, ns = not significant. PSR = Parasocial Relationship; SBC = Self-brand connection; BT = Brand Trust; PI = Purchase Intension.*

The inspection of the conditional effects of moderating variables revealed the relationship between parasocial relationship and self-brand connection and parasocial relationship and brand trust showed both statistically significant (SBC, β = 0.089, SE = 0.022, t = 3.993, p < 0.001, 95% CI [0.044, 0.134] and BT, β = 0.086, SE = 0.026, t = 3.23, p < 0.05, 95% CI [0.033, 0.138]) (See table 4). Therefore, self-disclosure was found to moderate the direct effect of parasocial relationship on self-brand connection and brand trust. Specifically, the high in viewers' perceptions of celebrities' self-disclosure, the more likely they perceive in self-brand connection and brand trust through the vital of these parasocial relationships they have with celebrity YouTubers.

In addition to what has been said about the direct effects of all mediating variables on the purchase intention, expressly, self-brand connection and brand trust, both mediating variables were observed to mediate the relationship. Moreover, the moderator effects, namely, self-disclosure was found to moderate the effect of viewers' parasocial relationship toward self-brand connection and brand trust. However, the interaction effect should be concurrently commenced into the equation, in order to test the overall moderated mediation relationship. In this consequence, the discussion of the indices of moderated mediation that confirmed the moderating effects of self-disclosure on the indirection relationship of purchase intention via self-brand connection and brand trust is presented in the next part. While this can be expounded for this sample group of viewers, rather than the interaction of their parasocial relationship with celebrity YouTubers can influence their purchase intention but the moderating effect, self-disclosure through the indirect relationship of self-brand connection and brand trust can drive their intentions to be stronger in their decisions to consume the brands displayed as part of product placement in celebrities' YouTube content.

The indices of moderated mediation of the indirect effect of viewers' parasocial relationship on purchase intention through self-brand connection by self-disclosure as a moderator was significant (β = 0.027, SE = 0.013, 95% CI [0.009, 0.064]). Moreover, the indices of moderated mediation of the indirect effect of viewers' parasocial relationship on purchase intention through brand trust by self-disclosure as a moderator was also found significant (β = 0.031, SE = 0.018, 95% CI [0.008, 0.081]) (See table 4). As a result, both proposed hypothesis 6 and 7 were supported. The description of the relationship between the indirect effect of parasocial relationship and self-brand connection and parasocial relationship and brand trust with the moderating effect of self-disclosure explained by the inference of the moderated mediation indices come from a bootstrap CI when using 5,000 bootstrap samples. As the CI for the index of self-brand connection moderated mediation by self-disclosure is totally below zero, this indicated that the conditional indirect effect of self-brand connection manifested the indirect effect low at low self-disclosure (β = 0.238), increased at average self-disclosure (β = 0.266), and further increased at higher self-disclosure (β = 0.302).

Whereby, the CI for the index of brand trust moderated mediation by self-disclosure indicated that the conditional indirect effect of brand trust exhibited the indirect effect low at low self-disclosure (β = 0.342), increased at average self-disclosure (β = 0.376), and further increased at higher self-disclosure (β = 0.41). As an overall of the conditional indirect effects of both self-brand connection and brand trust were significant at all three levels. To explicate the interactions between self-brand connection and self-disclosure, and brand trust and self-disclosure on the viewers' purchase intentions, the results illustrated that there were the enhanced effects of viewers' purchase intentions to buy the same brands as the celebrity ensued from the interaction between self-brand connection and self-disclosure, and brand trust and self-disclosure. The positive relationships of both self-brand connection and brand trust are stronger when the perceived self-disclosure of celebrities is high. This means that the celebrities' gesture of revealing their personal and professional life to the viewers make an impact towards the middle-aged viewers such that it enriches their relationship with them and develop trust to the brand endorsed. These advantages in the PSR relationship will more likely increase the intention of viewers to make brand purchase as recommended by the celebrity YouTubers.

The results of all hypotheses testing showed that all of them were supported. The variation in purchase intention in the hypothesized model is explained by all latent variables by 55.9% for the moderated mediation model of SBC and 76% for the moderated mediation model of BT, 72.5% for SBC, and BT at 62.4%. Whereby the unexplained in the model were leaving for purchase intention (SBC), purchase intention (BT), self-brand connection, and brand trust variables, accordingly, 44.1%, 24%, 27.5%, and 37.6% (See figure 1 and figure 2). These results designated the variance explained proportion was adopted can determine the most and least measurement error of the hypothesized model in which consistent with the other model fit indices results that proved to pass all the required threshold.
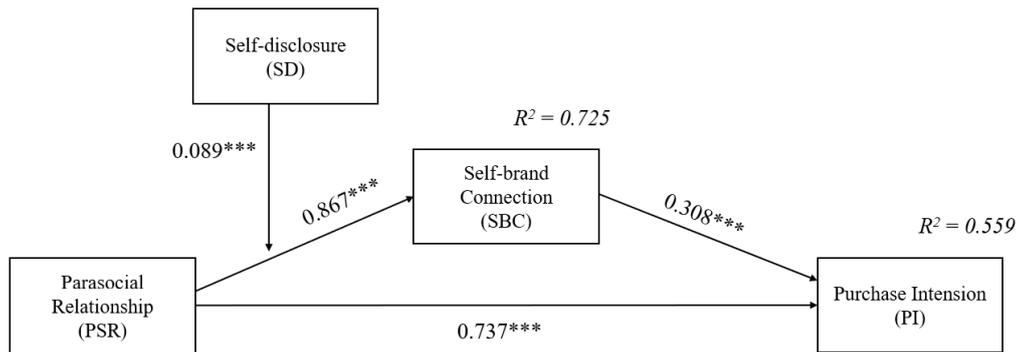
Notes: n = 238, k = 5,000. **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001, ns = not significant.

Figure 1: The Research Model for Viewers' Purchase Intentions to Buy the Brands Endorsed by Celebrity YouTubers. The Analyses of moderated mediation model with Self-brand Connection as a Mediating Effect.
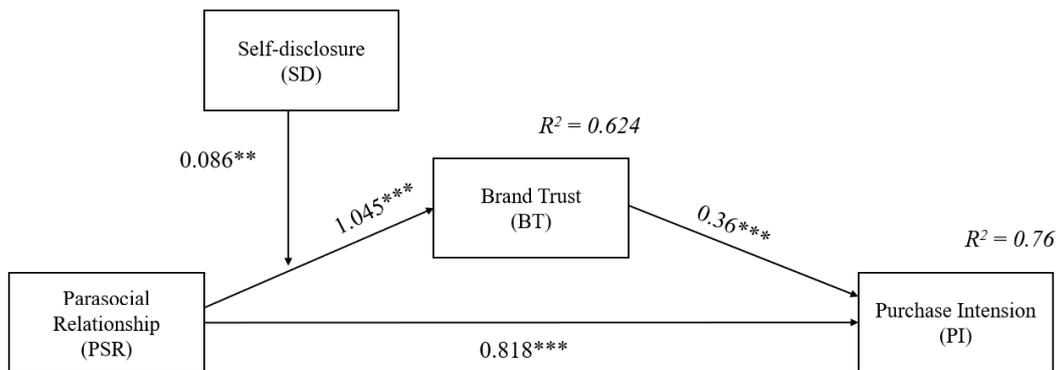
Notes: n = 238, k = 5,000. **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.001, ns = not significant.

Figure 2 The Research Model for Viewers' Purchase Intentions to Buy the Brands Endorsed by Celebrity YouTubers. The Analyses of moderated mediation model with Brand Trust as a Mediating Effect.

Discussion

The study demonstrates the development of a comprehensive model exploring the mediating effects of self-brand connection and brand trust on the relationship between viewers and the celebrity YouTubers parasocial relationship (PSR) and the viewers' purchasing intention. Moreover, this comprehensive investigation was included the viewers' perception of celebrity YouTubers' self-disclosure as the moderating effect in the relationship between parasocial relationship and self-brand connection, parasocial relationship, and brand trust. More specifically, the existing literatures on the effect of parasocial relationship did not include the theory building on self-disclosure as the moderating effect in the relationship with celebrity influencers. In additional to this, the proposed model in our empirical study applied self-disclosure as the moderator to investigate the impact of viewers' parasocial relationship on the brand purchases through the brand evaluations of viewers' self-brand connection and brand trust.

Past studies indicated that self-disclosure and parasocial relationship are found to be relevant in customer relationships and basically implemented self-disclosure as a mediator (Chung & Cho, 2014; 2017; Kim & Song, 2016). Contrastingly, this study embraces self-disclosure as the moderating effect to predict whether parasocial relationship and viewers' self-brand connection, parasocial relationship, and viewers' brand trust are fit well across the degree of perceptiveness of celebrities' disclosure. The current study found significantly moderating effect of celebrities' self-disclosure that project the ability in increasing the stronger connection with the brand and the perception of brand trust in parasocial relationship model. Beside this, the perception of viewers towards the celebrities' self-disclosure is found to be a mechanism underlines the observed relationship between parasocial relationship and viewers' self-brand connection, and parasocial relationship and viewers' brand trust. This in turn influences their intentions to copy the behaviors of those celebrities as well as purchasing those brands broadcasted in the video content.

Managerial Implications for Practitioners

This study suggested marketing practitioners to adopt product placement in this new digital media channel but need to be well integrated the product placement as a part of brand storytelling content repeatedly in long-term collaboration with YouTube celebrities, in order to maintain parasocial relationship in balance and stimulate them to reciprocate the behaviors like purchasing the same brands like the celebrity Youtubers.

The same brand of product placement should be exposed in agreement schedule, more than three episodes to increase the ability of brand recognition that ultimately guide fans to construct brand trust and self-brand connection. Thus, the product placement of sponsorship brands should be in both forms of creative and on-set. It means that celebrities should wear or use brand sponsorship products and put them as a prop in the scene of their video content to trickery the viewers' touchpoints in adopting those observed brands in the future.

Moreover, YouTube celebrities who provide lifestyle content, reveal their self-disclosure (sharing their personal life), and have reach high number of followers is an effective source of credibility that can heighten the feeling of viewers' self-brand connection as well as the expressive value of brand trust viewers attain on this social media platform. Thus, YouTube celebrities can help companies manage their brand lifecycle marketing properly through many episodes present on this platform.

Limitation of the study

However, this study also possesses some limitations. Firstly, the possibility of selection bias as the research criteria only includes viewers who had the chance to view the selected YouTube program. Thus, they were more likely to adopt brands for promoting their personalities and interests to others. Secondly, the type of influencer adopted in the study. Basically, general branding principles contribute to the use of famous celebrities as influencers, however, what may change are the perceptions of social media viewers these days. Some of them not only seems to form trust and belief to the well-known person on media channel like celebrities, but also other influencer who seem so real and organic to them like everyday influencers, nano-influencer, professional category influencer, micro-influencer (Diamond, 2022; Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019). Moreover, the study did not test other factors in terms of celebrity's social media characteristics such as the durations of video content and the established year that celebrities have become the YouTubers.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study used self-disclosure as the moderating effect for observing the relationship between parasocial relationship and self-brand connection, and parasocial relationship and brand trust. Future research examining parasocial relationship content can use other variables as the moderators in this condition of the relationship. Therefore, product placement can be employed as a brand communication options through the parasocial relationship between celebrity influencers and viewers. Thus, the mode of product placement presentation (visual, audio, or both) can be applied as the moderating effect to test and comparing the degree of its presentation.

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