

Moving from attraction to intentions: Examining the role of parasocial relationships, argument quality and perceived credibility in social media travel intention marketing

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study explores how the interpersonal attraction of tourist influencers impact parasocial relationships, which in turn affects fans' perceptions and behaviours in the context of tourism social media. The framework considers three types of attractions namely, task, physical, and social as prime drivers of parasocial relationships. Moreover, parasocial relationships impacts argument quality, source credibility, and travel intentions. Online comments may influence the impact of parasocial relationships on argument quality and the impact of credibility on travel intentions.

Study design/methodology/approach: This research seeks to explore the interplay of various factors of attraction on Parasocial relationships leading to the formation of travel intentions. The primary data was collected online using questionnaire. The data was analysed using the SEM method to test the hypothesised relationships. A final data of 491 respondents was included for the further analysis.

Findings: The results show that physical attraction and social attraction are the dominant factors driving the parasocial relationship. Notably, parasocial relationships play a significant role as a mediator promoting argument quality and perceived credibility, thereby enhancing the individual's travel intentions behaviour. Furthermore, online comments significantly moderate the relationships between parasocial relationships and argument quality and between parasocial relationships and perceived credibility.

Originality/value: This research adds to the literature on tourism marketing as it provides a detailed model that integrates interpersonal attraction and parasocial relationships to understand the intentions of people to travel, drawing on the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) and Source Credibility Theory (SCT). The study is unique in showing how the effects of parasocial relationships are moderated by the online audience comments and offers novel information on the interactive relationships of social media platforms.

Keywords: Argument quality, Tourist Influencers, Para-social relationship, perceived credibility, social media, travel intentions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of Internet and social media have become a part and parcel of our daily lives (Santesteban-Echarri et al., 2017), with over 5.2 billion individuals across the world having access to the social platforms and this figure keeps increasing every year. These platforms have changed how travel information is sought, destinations reviewed and consumed decisions because now users can access real time experience based content with high visual richness (Tan et al., 2024). In this context, the social media influencers (SMIs) have become one of the most influential opinion leaders, who produce content related to traveling, share their experiences and communicate directly with their subscribers, sometimes more efficiently than traditional advertising platforms (Abdinur et al., 2024; Dahnili et al., 2014). Being constantly fed on the content by the influencers, the followers can form long-lasting parasocial relationships, one-sided but emotionally meaningful bonds that determine their attitudes (Bangwal et al., 2025; Zia, 2026), trust and intentions towards the promoted destinations and service (Breves & Liebers, 2022).

Social media is currently serving as one of the main platforms of brand communication with influencer marketing spending being higher than most traditional media formats and taking centre stage as the focus of tourism promotional strategies (Vilkaite-Vaitone, 2024; Vrontis et al., 2021). Empirical research has continually recorded that SMIs have the capacity to influence the attitudes, purchase intentions and destination selections of consumers considerably due to the provision of entertaining, educational and recognizable contents (Ki & Kim, 2019). Previous research based on the parasocial relationships (Auter, 1992; Giles, 2002) states that as followers repeatedly read posts, stories, and live streams of influencers, they tend to feel that they are getting a friendship and intimacy similar to real social contacts, despite the fact that the communication process is unidirectional. Such parasocial relationship in the context of tourism has been associated with better destination attitudes, increased loyalty to the influencer, and readiness to take advice on travels (Kim, 2023; Lusianingrum et al., 2024). Research has also indicated that variables concerning the messages like the quality of arguments and perceived credibility of online reviews or travelling material significantly influence the visit intention and the decision of making a booking (Haobin Ye et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2024).

Modern reports show that consumers communicate with brands and influencers on various platforms, such as Instagram, Tik Tok, YouTube, and marketers focus more on those platforms to address travel-oriented audiences (Haobin Ye et al., 2021; Kim, 2023). The influencer marketing benchmark data indicate that a significant percentage of marketers consider social media influencers (Kim, 2023; Meng et al., 2024) to be a very powerful promotional tool, across the categories that are primarily visual such as the travel and lifestyle categories. This is shown in the descriptive data that a significant proportion of internet users are currently engaging with the following influencers and shows that interactions between influencers are no longer peripheral but a standard form of digital activity. The more users watch vlogs, reels, and live streams about influencers and their daily lives, and so behind the scenes of travelling, and personal experiences (Haobin Ye et al., 2021), the more they learn about their preferences and personalities, but at the same time, influencers do not know much about their individual followers, which is the asymmetry at the core of parasocial relationships (Meng et al., 2024).

Despite the fact that the tourism and marketing literature acknowledges the effectiveness of the use of social media influencers in influencing attitudes and behavioral intentions using the parasocial mechanisms (Haobin Ye et al., 2021; Kim, 2023), there are critical questions that are not answered. First, a significant portion of the literature has generalized the concept of influencer attributes (e.g., attractiveness) or social attraction (Fatina et al., 2026) in the development of parasocial relationships; these are task attraction (Alnoor et al., 2026; Fatina et al., 2026), social attraction, and physical attraction (visual appeal) (Chen et al., 2026; Li et al., 2025). Second, although previous studies have determined that the quality of information and credibility of electronic word-of-mouth are the main predictors of travel intentions

(Kieanwatana & Vongvit, 2024), the mechanisms through which parasocial relationships do modify how the followers process the message arguments and the credibility evaluation are yet to be investigated in the tourism context. Third, the literature on the topic rarely addresses the ways in which the cues provided by the larger online contexts (e.g. the comments and feedback of other users) could influence the impact of parasocial relationships on message judgments despite the fact that social proof and responses of the community have become the primary aspects of social media (Alnoor et al., 2026; Tan et al., 2025).

The gaps are especially relevant to the demand to research further into the emotional and psychological processes that allow followers to establish and sustain the parasocial relationships with the influencers, particularly with regard to travel and tourism scenarios where the most important dimension is the experiential content. Showing the cause and effects of parasocial relationships with travel social media influencers can thus have a theoretical contribution but also teaching implications on destination marketers, tourism boards and hospitality providers who are increasingly relying on influencer-led campaigns. In response to these deficiencies, the current paper is going to formulate and empirically test an in-depth model that is used to explain how interpersonal attraction to travel social media influencers can be transformed into travel intentions via parasocial relationships.

Research questions that guide the study are as follows:

RQ1: What are the factors impacting parasocial relationships within the tourism industry?

RQ2: How parasocial relationships impact the quality arguments and perceived credibility by the influencer?

RQ3: How do the parasocial relationships directly affect the travel intention?

RQ4: What is the role of the online comments when impacting parasocial relationships in the travel and tourism?

2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

This study is based on the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM) as proposed by Chaiken (1980) and the Source Credibility Theory (SCT) as proposed by Hovland et al. (1953). HSM describes the tendency of individuals to use easy cues in cases when their motivation or information processing capacity are not high. Collectively, these theories provide basis of the role of influencer attraction, parasocial relationship, and credibility judgment in travel intentions.

According to HSM, people tend to use simple cues or heuristics where their motivation or ability to process information is low. Task attraction, physical attraction, and social attraction, in the framework of social media influencer marketing, are heuristic information that immediately catches attention, lowers resistance, and creates preliminary relational interaction with the influencer. The interpersonal attractions may trigger the feeling of connection prior to the occurrence of cognitive evaluation, and thus HSM is very applicable in describing how parasocial relationships are formed. In this regard, the dimension of attraction is likely to be influential in determining the nature of the parasocial relationship that the followers develop towards the travel influencers.

The STC theory states that the perceived credibility and argument quality of the source are the factors that determine the persuasiveness of a message. SCT explanation the impact of parasocial relationships on the quality of argument, perceived credibility and intention to travel. Followers who become part of a parasocial relationship with an influencer tend to believe that the travel messages of the influencer are credible, well-argued and use their judgments to make travel intentions (Gao et al., 2025; Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Online comments also support or undermine these credibility

judgments, as they are external social cues, which influence the quality of message interpretation (Karahan, 2025; Xiang & Utami, 2025).

Thus, the combination of HSM and SCT provides an all-inclusive explanation of how attraction related cues trigger parasocial relationships and how the credibility related judgments convert into travel related intentions.

2.1 TASK ATTRACTION AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Task attraction is a fundamental dimension that is in the interpersonal attraction, and is considered as perceptions about the competence, expertise and usefulness of another person to help in achieving the goals of that individual. One is more likely to be persuaded to keep following, consulting, and forming mental connections with communicators that offer accurate and instrumental information that assists the user to solve problems or make improved choices. Research on influencers and virtual agents (Zhang et al., 2025) demonstrates that higher the audience feels the level of task attraction (e.g., informed advice or tips and tricks), higher they are inclined to pay attention and feel more satisfied and specify higher levels of parasocial interaction and relationships (Luo et al., 2023; Muhsina Jannat & Nayeema Ahmed, 2025). In the tourism sector, perceived task competence is particularly salient with followers usually depending on social media influencers to get information about their destinations, itinerary, and information to minimize risks (Kieanwatana & Vongvit, 2024; Su et al., 2021). The studies of celebrity endorsers and travel influencers show that the perceived expertise and the value of the information amplify trust and relational intimacy, which are the key characteristics of the parasocial relationships (Muhsina Jannat & Nayeema Ahmed, 2025; Tan et al., 2025). Therefore, the more a travel influencer is perceived to be very competent in providing high-quality and problem-solving travel content, the more followers are likely to maintain and build parasocial relationships with the influencer. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H1: There is a significant impact of task attraction on parasocial relationship in the context of travel and tourism.

2.2 PHYSICAL ATTRACTION AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Physical attraction is that which is seen as a visual attractiveness and beauty of the other individual and a well-developed aspect of interpersonal attraction (Yayun et al., 2024). The visuals are very influential in creating first impressions in the media setting; appealing communicators tend to be listened to more, rated in a favorable way and are believed to be more compelling to listen to than their counterparts who are not appealing (Bleakley et al., 2025; Xu & Deng, 2025). Physical attractiveness, on its part, has been found to be an antecedent of inter-personal attraction in influencer environment (M. Kumar et al., 2026; Zia, 2025) and a precursor to first parasocial interaction, particularly in platforms that are visually oriented, like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube (Azhar et al., 2025; Kurtin et al., 2018). Tourism advertising is extremely visual and physically attractive social media influencers may enhance destination content more attractive and shareable, which leads to a higher repeated exposure and a feeling of intimacy (Nazwa et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). The current empirical evidence on the role of celebrity endorsers in tourism demonstrates that physical attractiveness has positive role and enhances the perceived relationship between the follower and the endorser, which subsequently influences destination perception and intentions to visit. To this end, the increase in physical attraction to a travel influencer is likely to result in the establishment of stronger parasocial relationships between followers. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H2: There is a significant impact of physical attraction on parasocial relationship in the context of travel and tourism.

2.3 SOCIAL ATTRACTION AND PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Social attraction is the degree to which an individual is liked as a prospective friend or companion with a focus on warmth, friendliness, and personability more than competence or appearance (Zhang et al., 2025). According to media and communication research, perceived similarity, humor, responsiveness and authenticity increase the social attraction, and prompt audiences to feel they know the media persona, increasing parasocial interaction (Birtch et al., 2016; Sashi, 2012). In the event of intimate self-disclosure by influencers, response, and relatable lifestyles, audiences tend to develop parasocial relationships that are perceived to be based on friendship and emotional intimacy (Jain et al., 2018; Karahan, 2025; Sarkis et al., 2024). Travel influencers usually post personal accounts, feelings, and behind-the-scenes of experiences during travels, and this may increase social appeal in the tourism environment. Social media travel influencer research suggests emotional engagement, value congruence, and perceived similarity as each being associated with stronger parasocial relationships that further affect brand trust and travel intentions. Hence, increased social liking of the influencer is likely to substantially boost the establishment of parasocial relationships in travel and tourism. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H3: There is a significant impact of social attraction on parasocial relationship in the context of travel and tourism.

2.4 PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIP, ARGUMENT QUALITY, PERCEIVED CREDIBILITY AND TRAVEL INTENTIONS

Intimacy and trust are created by parasocial relationships which influence the way audiences interpret and analyze messages (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Roy et al., 2024). The more the viewers are attached to an influencer, the more they will be willing to pay closer attention to what they share, expound on the facts, and put information into a positive perspective. The research on digital tourism and livestreaming indicates (Cohen et al., 2022; Karahan, 2025; Lou & Kim, 2019) that parasocial relationships, in turn, enhance cognitive involvement in information about the destination and perceived informativeness of the message. The quality of the argument is indicative of how well message claims were perceived as logical, detailed and supported. Relational closeness may result in a bias in the context of eWOM and influencers where the followers process even rather weak arguments as more persuasive due to the trust and the identification with the sender (Alnoor et al., 2026; Fatina et al., 2026). Therefore, the more intense the parasocial relationships with travel influencers, the more the followers will have a feeling that the argument quality in travel recommendations and narratives offered by influencers is higher. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H4: There is a significant impact of parasocial relationship on argument quality in the context of travel and tourism.

Perceived credibility typically includes it as judgments regarding the trustworthiness and expertise of the source of the message and the message itself (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Cohen et al., 2022). The studies of parasocial relationships demonstrate that the closer the audience is emotionally attached to their media personality, the more that persona will seem sincere, loving and wise, which raises the perceived credibility (Lou & Kim, 2019; Yuen et al., 2023). Closer parasocial relationships (Auter, 1992; Giles, 2002; Su et al., 2021), in the context of influencer marketing, have been associated with an increase in the degree of credibility of the sources and acceptance of endorsements in different categories of products (Syarif et al., 2025). In the context of tourism, research on celebrity and influencer marketing suggests that parasocial relationship influences the effectiveness of endorser characteristics on the judgment of trust and credibility, which in turn influence destination attitudes and final intentions

(Azhar et al., 2025; Lusianingrum et al., 2024). With the followers having the feeling that they know the travel influencer personally, they tend to trust their travel experiences, reviews and suggestions more and hence make the travel products or services of the influencer and the information being provided more credible. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H5: There is a significant impact of parasocial relationship on perceived credibility in the context of travel and tourism.

Some of the behavioral outcomes that have been greatly associated to parasocial relationships include purchase, sharing and loyalty intentions (Lusianingrum et al., 2024). The meta-analyses and recent empirical studies shows that the willingness of the followers towards influencers, imitating their actions, and responding to their advice is greater when a stronger parasocial bonds are involved (Kim, 2023). In tourist research, the parasocial relations with the destination and travel influencers were found to have a positive impact on the destination attitude and destination visit intentions, and usually influences credibility or attractiveness (Haobin Ye et al., 2021; Meng et al., 2024). Since travel is experiential and in most cases high-risk, tourists seek reliable person whose experience they can vicariously follow (Karahana, 2025; Lusianingrum et al., 2024). In cases where the followers are emotionally intimate with a travel influencer, they can convey their affection by planning to go to the same locations, book into suggested hotels or visit other related destinations. It follows that, the better the quality of parasocial relationships, the greater the travel intentions that tourists would have. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H6: There is a significant impact of parasocial relationship on travel intentions.

The quality of arguments is the key construct in persuasion paradigms and a concept that describes the extent to which a message is logical, specific and evidence-based (Haobin Ye et al., 2021). The quality of the arguments has always proved to make people more likely to buy or visit in the context of online review and eWOM (Nofal et al., 2022; Ummah, 2019). According to tourism scholars (Buhalis, 2020; Kim, 2023; Solakis et al., 2024), informative and properly designed reviews and destination descriptions can go a long way in enhancing the confidence and desire to travelers towards a destination or service. Due to the complexity and volume of information inherent in travel decisions, tourists tend to use powerful arguments to minimize uncertainty, including the elaboration of an itinerary, cost benefit analysis and risk information (Solakis et al., 2024). Research on eWOM quality shows that when online travel messages are perceived by the traveler to be of high quality of argument, then chances are high that they will develop positive attitudes and translate the attitude to actual visit intentions. Thus, perceived quality of argument in content created by influencers is likely to have a positive effect as a driving force to the traveling decisions. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H7: There is a significant impact of argument quality on travel intentions.

There has been long recognition that, perceived credibility is regarded as an important predictor of persuasive effectiveness in marketing and communication studies (Bogoevska-Gavrilova & Ciunova-Shuleska, 2022; Roy et al., 2024). Trustworthiness and expertise in tourism are the two elements involved in source credibility, which has a high power in determining how tourists use destination information and recommendations (Lou & Kim, 2019; Yuen et al., 2023). Empirical evidence demonstrates that the presence of credible travel influencers or reviewers has a considerable impact on travel intentions and behaviour of tourists both directly and indirectly through attitude formation (D'Oria et al., 2025). Since travel impacts are both financial and experiential, tourists are particularly concerned with online information sources, credibility. The more the followers feel that a travel influencer is truthful, learned, and

objective, the more they tend to believe the destinations being recommended and proceed with the recommendations (Boerman & van Reijmersdal, 2020). Therefore, the increased perceived credibility of the influencer and his or her travel content is likely to have a strong positive influence on travel intentions. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H8: There is a significant impact of perceived credibility on travel intentions.

The credibility and quality of message influence the relational factors and behavioural intentions, which is highly confirmed in the literature of digital marketing (Allil & Zia, 2024; Kannan & Li, 2016). The studies have shown that the presence of parasocial relationships among the audiences affects the interpretation and evaluation of the information thereby increasing the perceptions of the quality of information and credibility of the source in question, which in turn influences behavioural response like intentions of purchasing or visiting the business (Mahadin et al., 2020; Seyfi et al., 2025). Credibility and content quality have been found to influence the effects of the attributes of celebrity endorser and Parasocial process on destination attitude and visit intention in tourism (Higham et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2025). Using this rationale, the influence of parasocial relationships on both emotional and cognitive appraisal of the content of travel influencers is predictable. Related followers can find travel accounts of an influencer as more coherent, informative, a more trustworthy and expert influencer, which consequently embodies travel intentions (Higham et al. 2016; Sarkis et al. 2024). That is why, the quality of arguments and the perceived credibility of the arguments is likely to influence of the parasocial relationships on the travel intentions, converting the relational bonds into specific behavioural intentions in the context of travelling and tourism. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H9: (a) Argument quality, (b) perceived credibility mediates the impact of parasocial relationship on travel intentions.

2.5 ONLINE COMMENTS

The quality of the arguments and perceived credibility can be greatly influenced by the comments of the audience as to how parasocial relationships turn into an assessment (Morris et al., 2021; Winstone et al., 2022). When the followers see mostly positive, elaborative, and supportive comments under the content of a travel influencer, these comments serve as social evidence that confirms the belief that the messages of this influencer are well-reasoned and trustworthy, and the positive influence of an established parasocial bond on the quality of argumentation and credibility is achieved (Delgadillo et al., 2025; Wang et al., 2024). On the other hand, when the comment section is saturated with scepticism, criticism, or an account of inconsistent experiences (Allil et al., 2024; Alzahrani & Zia, 2025), it may cause the followers to evaluate the claims made more critically by the influencer, undermining the degree to which a strong parasocial relationship spontaneously results in positive judgments of the strength of messages and credibility (Gao et al., 2025; Rihl & Wegener, 2019). Therefore, the audience remarks act as a cue. It may decrease or increase the effect of parasocial relationships on the quality of the travel argumentation made by the influencer, and the credibility of the information presented by the influencer. So to test this relationship, following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis H10: online comments moderates the impact of parasocial relationship on (a) Argument quality, (b) perceived credibility.

3. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework that will guide the study and states that the attraction of the social media travel influencers by tourists is expressed in terms of task, physical, and social attraction which serves as the primary antecedent of the parasocial relationships. It is suggested that these parasocial relationships influence the argument quality and perceived credibility, which directly stimulates the intentions to travel (Agrawal et al., 2023; S. Kumar et al., 2023; Zia & Kalia, 2023). Lastly, the model uses online comments as a form of mediating force that could reinforce or undermine the degree to which parasocial interactions are translated into greater perceived argument quality and credibility.

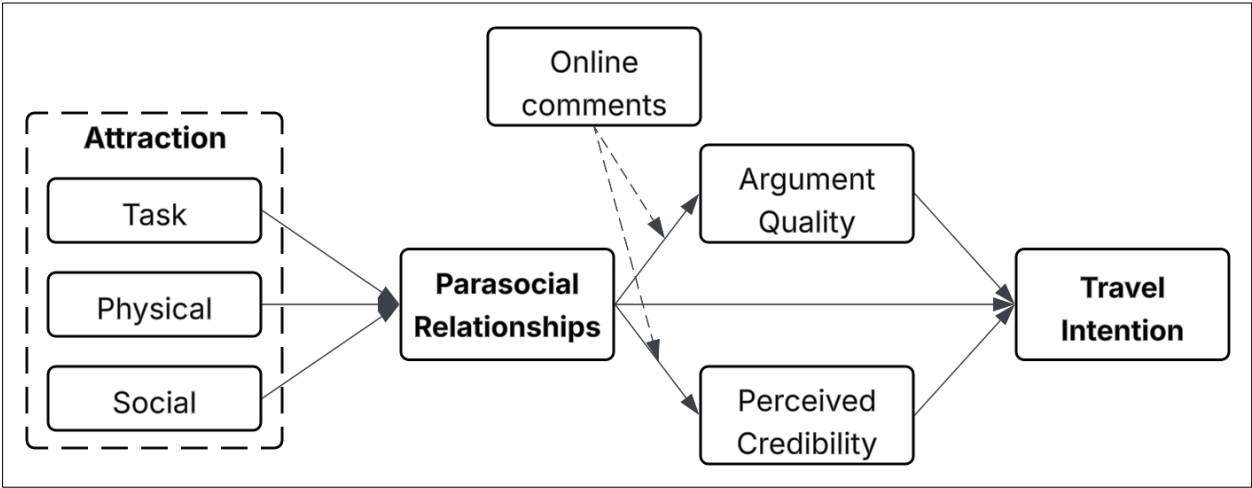


FIGURE 1. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs quantitative research methods, using an online questionnaire and structural equation modelling (SEM), to test the hypothesised relationships within social media tourism communities in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). To address the current research questions, quantitative research was adopted to test the proposed framework (Su et al., 2021) within the context of tourism social media influencer context. The KSA context was chosen for this study because of its rapidly expanding tourism ambitions and the tourism priorities outlined in the 2030 Vision by the KSA government, which are crucial to its economy (Filippi & Mazzetto, 2024). This provides further insights into how social media interactions can influence travel intentions. An online survey of 491 individuals who watch tourism related live stream content was collected using a questionnaire. As the respondents were mainly Arabic speakers, the back translation approach was adopted to translate the questionnaire from English to Arabic.

4.1 DATA COLLECTION AND SAMPLING

Given the cross-sectional nature of the research, the sampling techniques utilised were purposive and snowball (Emerson, 2015; Naderifar et al., 2017). The use of the combination techniques is widely adopted in different research contexts when the population has difficulty reaching certain groups (Alzahrani & Zia, 2025; Liu et al., 2024; She et al., 2025). This combination of sampling techniques enables the capture of rich information and the increase of sample size through referrals (Teddle & Yu, 2007). Purposive sampling was initially used to include qualified, knowledgeable respondents who met the agreed-upon criteria (Etikan et al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015), followed by a snowball sample to maximise information richness and reach a large sample (Noy, 2008). The inclusion criteria for including respondents to complete the online survey were adults aged 18 years or older, active social media users, and those who follow at

least one social media influencer. Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire constructed. During the process of creating the questionnaire, the survey adopted the five phases of the TRAPD model proposed by (Vujcich et al., 2021) to secure the suitability of the linguistic and cultural environment for the Sudia population. The data were collected from the 1st of September 2025 to the 30th of January 2026. The data were gathered from different educational backgrounds and age groups, indicating the richness of the information on the social media tourism interaction context. The online survey was constructed in two parts: the first part includes 35 questions that reflect the conceptual framework, and the second part includes four demographic questions.

The demographic profile of the respondents is presented in Table 1 and it indicates an almost equal distribution of gender with 274 males (55.80%) and 217 females (44.19%). The age structure shows that the sample is largely young to the middle-aged. A significant number of the respondents aged between 18 to 35 years (251 respondents, 51.12%), followed by the respondents aged 36 to 46 years (105 respondents, 21.38%). A moderate number of respondents were 18 to 25 years of age (92 respondents, 18.73%), and the least were in the age of 46 years and above, (43 respondents, 8.75%). This implies that the results are majorly influenced by the opinion of younger and early middle-aged social media users, who are presumably the ones likely to be the active consumers of online travel content and followers of online influencers (Table 1).

TABLE 1.DEMOGRAPHIC SUMMARY

Characteristics of variables	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Gender</i>		
Males	274	55.80
Females	217	44.19
<i>Age</i>		
18 to 25 years	92	18.73
26 to 35 years	251	51.12
36 to 45 years	105	21.38
46 years and above	43	08.75

4.2 VARIABLES AND MEASUREMENT SCALE

All constructs in this study were assessed using multi-item scales derived from validated empirical studies, adapted to the context of tourism social media influencers, and measured on a 7-point Likert scale. All the items for Task attraction (4 items), physical attraction (4 items), online comment (3 items), and social attraction (3 items) were adopted from (Su et al., 2021). Where six items for the parasocial relationship were adopted from (Adam & Sizemore, 2013; Kim & Song, 2016). Furthermore, the seven items of argument quality were derived from (Ong et al., 2022). The five items for perceived credibility were adopted from (Fan et al., 2023). Finally, in the second part of the questionnaire, items were designed to assess participants' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and educational level.

5. MEASUREMENT MODEL RESULTS

Table 2 presents the construct reliability and validity of all the latent variables, confirming that the measurement model is robust and suitable for further analysis. Items with standardized loadings below 0.60 were eliminated to ensure a clear and parsimonious scale structure. The Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability for physical attraction, social

attraction, task attraction, argument quality, online comments, perceived credibility, parasocial relationships, and travel intentions are all above 0.70, indicating high internal consistency. The AVE values for the constructs exceed the recommended threshold of 0.50, demonstrating acceptable convergent validity (Hair et al., 2019).

TABLE 2. CONSTRUCT RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Construct	Items	VIF	Loading	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
AQ	AQ1	3.074	0.862	0.932	0.933	0.945	0.710
	AQ2	2.634	0.833				
	AQ3	2.900	0.856				
	AQ4	2.460	0.824				
	AQ5	2.628	0.839				
	AQ6	3.438	0.886				
	AQ7	2.225	0.795				
OC	OC1r	1.882	0.863	0.782	0.788	0.873	0.698
	OC2r	1.928	0.871				
	OC3r	1.395	0.769				
PA	PA1	3.110	0.904	0.908	0.908	0.936	0.784
	PA2	2.765	0.889				
	PA3	2.398	0.866				
	PA4	2.683	0.882				
PC	PC1	2.309	0.842	0.911	0.912	0.934	0.738
	PC2	2.375	0.848				
	PC3	3.092	0.887				
	PC4	2.827	0.872				
	PC5	2.337	0.844				
PSR	PSR1	3.616	0.835	0.920	0.922	0.938	0.716
	PSR2	4.707	0.888				
	PSR3	2.565	0.832				
	PSR4	2.159	0.770				
	PSR5	3.157	0.878				
	PSR6	3.074	0.867				
SA	SA1	1.869	0.853	0.850	0.851	0.909	0.770
	SA2	2.386	0.900				
	SA3	2.150	0.879				
TA	TA1	2.858	0.883	0.918	0.918	0.942	0.802
	TA2	2.530	0.872				
	TA3	4.043	0.926				
	TA4	3.191	0.900				
TI	TI1	2.148	0.886	0.839	0.839	0.903	0.756
	TI2	1.884	0.858				
	TI3	1.944	0.865				

Note: task attraction (TA), physical attraction (PA), social attraction (SA), Parasocial relationships(PSR), argument quality (AQ), perceived credibility (PC), online comments (OC), travel intentions (TI).

The results of the structural model presented in Tables 3 and 4 show that the constructs are satisfactorily discriminant and empirically independent. The square roots of the AVE on the diagonal in the Fornell-Larcker matrix (Table 3) are consistently greater than the inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct shares more variance with its indicators than with other latent variables. Likewise, the HTMT ratios (Table 4) between any two constructs are below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (well under the more lenient 0.90), confirming discriminant validity. These findings collectively demonstrate that the variables are well differentiated within the structural model, enabling reliable interpretation of the hypothesized relationships.

The structural path analysis of the proposed framework is shown in Figure 2a. It visually illustrates the hypothesised relationships among the constructs. The path analysis results indicate that social attraction has the strongest impact on parasocial relationships, followed by physical attraction, and task attraction has the least impact. Parasocial relationships influence travel intentions both directly and indirectly, via argument quality and perceived credibility. Additionally, online comments enhance argument quality and perceived credibility, both subsequently shape travel behaviour. Overall, Figure 2a provides insight into the direction and significance of the structural interactions that were studied in this research.

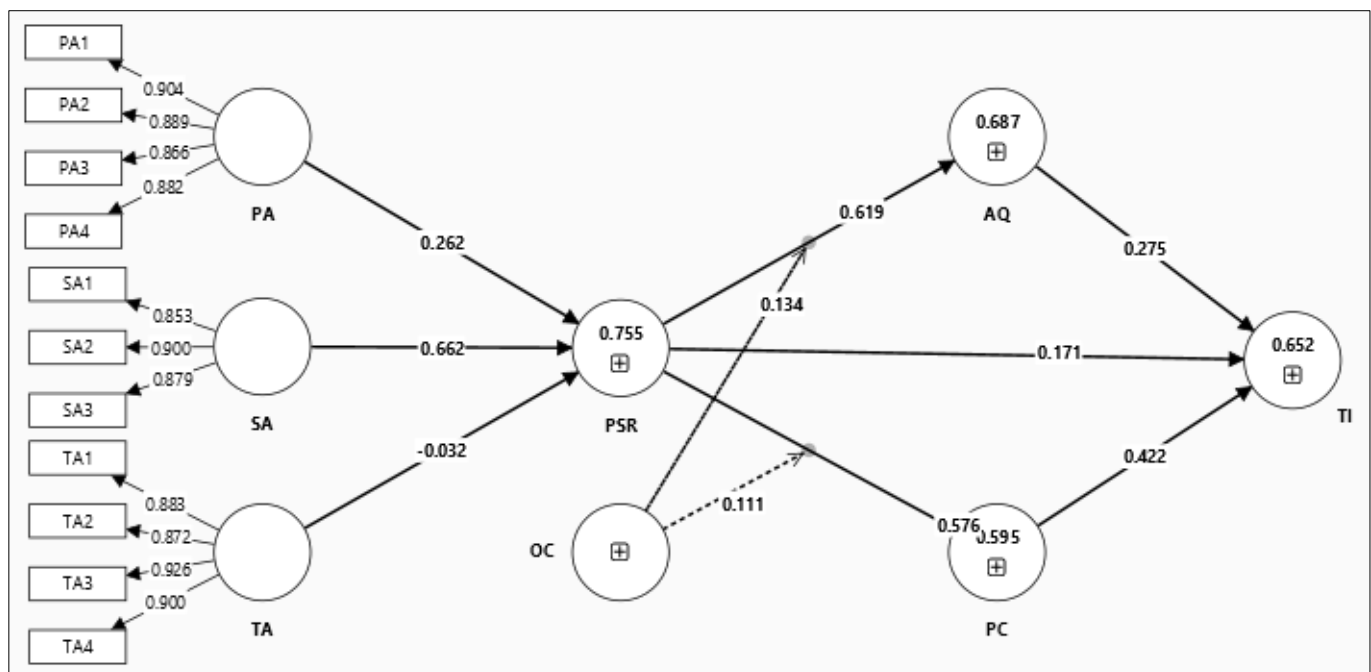
The bootstrapping results for the structural model, including path coefficients and significance levels, are presented in Figure 2b. These results demonstrate that social and physical attraction significantly influence parasocial relationships, while task attraction does not. Parasocial relationships play a key role in shaping argument quality, perceived credibility, and travel intentions. Moreover, argument quality and perceived credibility have significant positive effects on travel intentions. The bootstrapping analysis also reveals that online comments strongly influence both argument quality and perceived credibility. Overall, Figure 2b provides empirical evidence of the direct paths within the framework and enhances understanding of the proposed relationships.

TABLE 3. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY (FORNELL-LARCKER)

Variables	AQ	OC	PA	PC	PSR	SA	TA	TI
AQ	0.843	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OC	-0.553	0.835	-	-	-	-	-	-
PA	0.686	-0.515	0.885	-	-	-	-	-
PC	0.608	-0.528	0.607	0.859	-	-	-	-
PSR	0.597	-0.536	0.699	0.742	0.846	-	-	-
SA	0.536	-0.531	0.648	0.613	0.858	0.877	-	-
TA	0.505	-0.505	0.564	0.664	0.606	0.613	0.896	-
TI	0.652	-0.582	0.653	0.571	0.603	0.624	0.610	0.870

TABLE 4. DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY (HTMT)

Variables	AQ	OC	PA	PC	PSR	SA	TA	TI
AQ	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
OC	0.649	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
PA	0.855	0.612	-	-	-	-	-	-
PC	0.878	0.625	0.778	-	-	-	-	-
PSR	0.861	0.633	0.872	0.811	-	-	-	-
SA	0.742	0.654	0.866	0.813	0.769	-	-	-
TA	0.870	0.597	0.836	0.728	0.766	0.821	-	-
TI	0.852	0.718	0.749	0.883	0.799	0.859	0.810	-

**FIGURE 2A. PATH ANALYSIS**

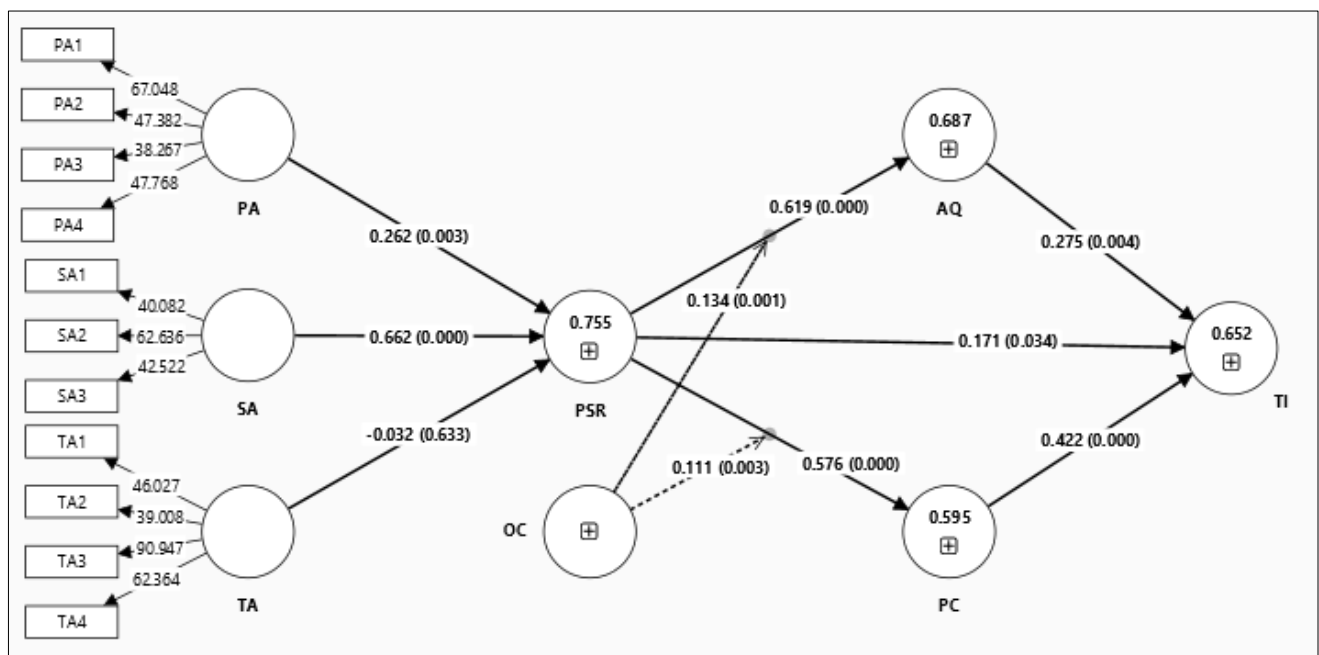


FIGURE 2B. BOOTSTRAPPING RESULTS SHOWING PATH COEFFICIENT AND SIGNIFICANT VALUES

6. STRUCTURAL MODEL RESULTS

To test the impact of variables, path coefficient values were computed using SmartPLS-4 software (Figure 2). The results obtained shows that the effect of argument quality on travel intention is 0.271 (β -value) and has a p-value of 0.005; the impact on parasocial relationship caused by physical attraction is 0.262 (β -value) with a p-value of 0.005; the impact of the perceived credibility on travel intention is 0.406 (β -value) and the p-value of 0.000; the impact of parasocial relationship on argument quality is 0.619 (β -value) and p value is 0.000; the impact of parasocial relationship on perceived credibility is 0.576 (β -value) with p value of 0.000; the direct effect of parasocial relationship on travel intention is 0.171 (β -value) and the p value of 0.034; the impact of the social attraction on the parasocial relationship is 0.662 (β -value) and the p value is 0.000 and the effect of tasks attraction on parasocial relationship is 0.352 (β -value) and the p-value is 0.003. These results shows that the impact of task attraction of parasocial relationship and the direct impact of parasocial relationship on travel intentions were significant, rest all the tested relationships were significant. The model explains a significant percentage of variance in the endogenous construct, and the R square has the values of 0.755, 0.687, 0.595, and 0.680 of parasocial relationships, argument quality, perceived credibility, and travel intentions, respectively, indicating moderate to high predictive power of the proposed model.

7. MEDIATION AND MODERATION

The indirect effect of the parasocial relationship through argument quality in predicting travel intention (PSR - AQ - TI) is 0.168 (β -value) and a p-value of 0.013. The moderation of online comments (OC x PSR) on the argument quality is 0.134 (β -value) and p-value of 0.001; online comments (OC x PSR) on the perceived credibility is 0.111 (β -value) and the p-value is 0.003.

In Figure 3, the interaction of OC x PSR → PC, the simple slope plot indicates that the relationship between parasocial relationship and perceived credibility is positively correlated at all levels of online comments. Increasing the perceived credibility under less favourable conditions of commenting the slope tends to become steepest at the case of low OC (+1 SD) which suggests that the increases in Parasocial relationships will result in more substantial gains in

perceived credibility. The slopes are also positive at mean and high levels of OC (+1 SD), but they are slightly lower indicating that as online comments are already more positive, further increment of Parasocial relationships is associated with relatively smaller increments in the perceived credibility. Therefore, the figure shows the moderating online comments position that shows that Parasocial relationships is the most important to enhance credibility where comment cues are of lower strength or less facilitating.

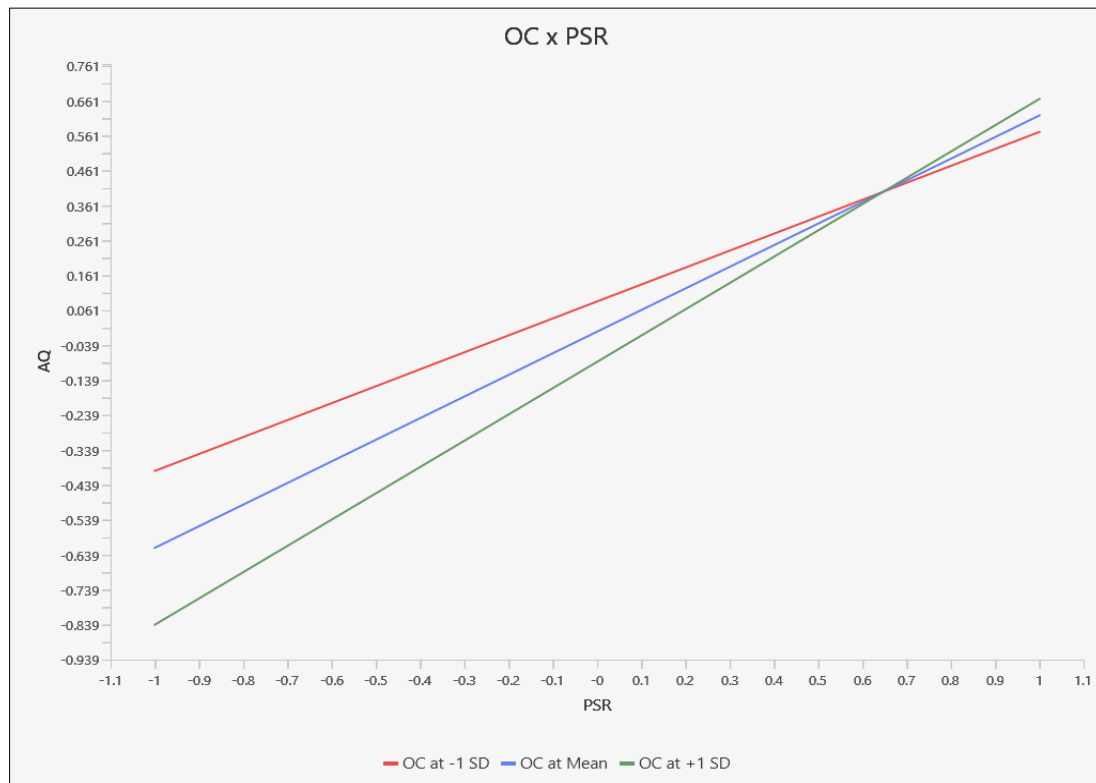


FIGURE 3. INTERACTION PLOT FOR OC X PSR → PC

In Figure 4, the interaction of OC x PSR → AQ, the simple slope analysis shows that Parasocial relationships has a positive influence on perceived argument quality both at low, mean and high levels of online comments, however the steepness of these slopes vary with the Parasocial relationships range. With increased Parasocial relationships the lines however converge and at some point cross over so that at a lower Parasocial relationships level, argument quality is a little more positive as online comments is more positive, as a result of a reinforcing effect between strong parasocial bonds and positive comment cues. This number thereby demonstrates a subtle moderating trend whereby online comments influences the manner in which Parasocial relationships is converted into source of argument strength particularly at the various levels of parasocial relationship.

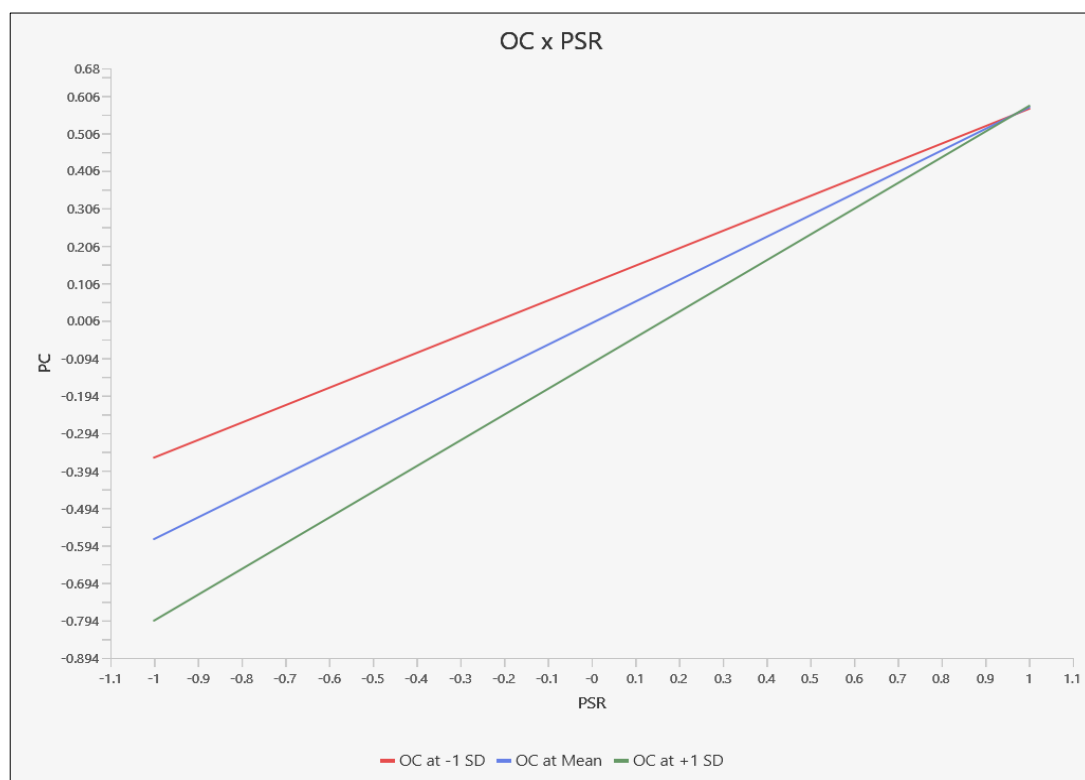


FIGURE 4. INTERACTION PLOT FOR OC X PSR → AQ

8. DISCUSSION

Digital marketing literature has indicated that social media platforms are continuing to change the mechanism of the relationship between influencers and their followers (Ferreira et al., 2024; Fong et al., 2023; Sheng et al., 2025). Now, the social media era has transformed the one-sided relationship into a more interactive and reciprocal one. Therefore, the understanding of how changes in interaction affect the parasocial relationship remains unclear, as these new media platforms may differ. Consequently, it is essential to identify and define the key factors related to attractions and Parasocial relationships within social media influencers and their impact on information travel intention. First, the results indicate that both variables, physical attraction and social attraction (H2, H3), have played a significant positive role in driving Parasocial relationships, confirming that followers form innate parasocial relationships with the tourism influencer on social media when they perceive them as physically and socially attractive. Specifically, social attraction has been shown to have a much larger effect size on Parasocial relationships, with a β -value of 0.662, compared to physical attraction, with a β -value of 0.2620. This result was consistent with Su et al. (2021), Saad et al. (2025) and Rubin and McHugh (1987).

The second focus of this study investigates the mechanisms through which parasocial relationships influence the quality of arguments (H4) and the perceived credibility of the influencer (H5). The study results contribute to maximising the understanding of the parasocial heuristic on virtual platforms (Tripopsakul & Hoonsopon, 2025), consistent with the recent literature in the social media influencers context (P. A. Lestari & N. A. Islami, 2024; Saad et al., 2025). The study findings confirm that Parasocial relationships is a key factor influencing argument quality ($\beta = 0.619$) and perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.576$). The findings shows that Parasocial relationships considerably influences the quality of arguments, indicating that individuals depend on their emotional rapport with their particular influencer to assess the credibility of destination assertions. The Parasocial relationships directly and indirectly impact intention; consequently, H6 was supported.

The study confirmed that argument quality significantly impacts travel intention, with $\beta = 0.271$ and $P = 0.005$ (H7). Travel influencers should therefore deliver high-quality, relevant, and persuasive content to increase followers' travel intention. This finding was consistent with (Ahmad et al., 2023; Ben Arbia et al., 2025). Furthermore, the study findings confirmed that perceived credibility significantly influences travel intention (H8) with $\beta = 0.406$ and $P = 0.001$, thereby accepting hypothesis 8. This finding was consistent with the recent influencer era (Liu & Zheng, 2024; Tripopsakul & Hoonsoapon, 2025), which highlighted that high-involvement decisions affect travel intentions among social media influencers who actively assess cognitive trust. In simple terms, audiences might like social media influencers, but they will only plan trips to destinations if they receive reliable information from them (V. Kumar et al., 2022; Zia, 2020a).

Furthermore, the current study highlights a dual mediation role (perceived credibility H9a and argument quality H9b) between Parasocial relationships and travel intention, reflecting the shift from engagement to visit intentions in social media tourism; however, the direct relationship was also supported H6. The indirect effects with H9a through perceived credibility were $\beta = 0.234$ and $P = 0.001$, and for H9b through argument quality were $\beta = 0.234$ and $P = 0.013$, which are significant. This consistent with (Chaihanchai et al., 2026; Tripopsakul & Hoonsoapon, 2025) which indicates that Parasocial relationships underpin the process and confirms the social media influencer's reputation. Specifically, it enables influencers to provide trustworthy information and present valid, well-reasoned arguments that increase travel intentions.

Finally, the current study found a positive moderating effect of online comments on the relationship between Parasocial relationships and argument quality, with $\beta = 0.134$ and $P = 0.001$; therefore, H10a was accepted. Additionally, a positive moderating effect between Parasocial relationships and perceived credibility was observed ($\beta = 0.111$, $P = 0.001$); hence, H10b was accepted. Online comments amplify the influencer's message, making it more robust. This aligns with the P. Lestari and N. Islami (2024) which confirms that when audiences see a comment that aligns with their Parasocial relationships towards the influencer, it reinforces the high-quality argument in the influencer's content.

The results of the structural model are presented in Table 5 using the original path coefficients (O), bootstrap sample means (M), standard deviations (STDEV), T-statistics, and p-values for each hypothesized relationship. These findings establish a robust empirical basis for evaluating the proposed conceptual framework.

In all twelve hypotheses were tested and eleven hypotheses support the relationships established in the conceptual model. One Hypothesis (H1), proposing a positive relationship between task attractiveness (TA) and parasocial relationships (PSR) was not supported ($\beta = -0.032$, $p = 0.633$). Conversely, both physical attractiveness ($\beta = 0.262$, $p = 0.003$) and social attractiveness ($\beta = 0.662$, $p < 0.001$) significant impact on parasocial relationship.

The results consistently demonstrate that PSR is an essential component in shaping consumer attitudes. PSR had significant and strong impacts on attitude quality ($\beta = 0.619$, $p < 0.001$) and perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.576$, $p < 0.001$), and insignificant direct impact on travel intention ($\beta = 0.171$, $p = 0.034$). Argument quality and perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.271$, $p = 0.005$; $\beta = 0.406$, $p < 0.001$), both have significant impact on PSR.

This sequential mechanism is further supported by mediation analyses. Both indirect effects of PSR on travel intention via perceived credibility ($\beta = 0.234$, $p < 0.001$) and via argument quality ($\beta = 0.168$, $p = 0.013$) were significant, indicating a correlation within the PSR intention pathway. Finally, the moderation results indicate that online comments significantly strengthen the effects of PSR on argument quality ($\beta = 0.134$, $p = 0.001$) and perceived credibility

($\beta = 0.111$, $p = 0.003$), suggesting that those with a stronger sense of commitment to the online feedback are more influenced by the parasocial relationship they develop with social media influencers.

TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF HYPOTHESIS TESTING RESULTS

Hypothesis no	Variables	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P-values
H1	TA →PSR	-0.032	-0.030	0.068	0.478	0.633
H2	PA →PSR	0.262	0.266	0.088	2.966	0.003
H3	SA →PSR	0.662	0.656	0.080	8.256	0.000
H4	PSR →AQ	0.619	0.627	0.069	9.017	0.000
H5	PSR →PC	0.576	0.577	0.063	9.143	0.000
H6	PSR →TI	0.171	0.139	0.078	1.816	0.034
H7	AQ →TI	0.271	0.273	0.097	2.802	0.005
H8	PC →TI	0.406	0.403	0.074	5.497	0.000
H9a	PSR → PC →TI	0.234	0.234	0.053	4.398	0.000
H9b	PSR → AQ →TI	0.168	0.172	0.068	2.481	0.013
H10a	OC x PSR →AQ	0.134	0.130	0.039	3.392	0.001
H10b	OC x PSR →PC	0.111	0.108	0.037	3.012	0.003

9. CONCLUSION

To answer the four research questions, the current study highlights three distinct contributions to the literature on influencer marketing and individual behaviour in social media tourism. These are outlined in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6: SUMMARY

Research questions no	Dominant findings	Hypotheses no
RQ1: Dimensions drive PSR.	Physical and social attraction serve as the hooks.	H1 contradiction H2, H3 supported
RQ2: PSR's role over Argument Quality (AQ) and Perceived Credibility (PC).	PSR is a significant driver of AQ and PC.	H4, H5 supported
RQ3: PSR on Travel Intention (TI)	PSR shows a significant direct and indirect effect through the mediating roles (AC and PC) with TI.	H6 (supported), H7, H8 and H9a/b (supported)
RQ4: The Role of Online Comments (Moderation Factor)	Online comments function as a validation factor.	H10a (+), H10b (+) (supported)

This study offers robust empirical validation across the proposed relationships within the social media influencer within tourism paradigm. The results confirmed that physical and social attraction primary influence the parasocial relationships (H2, H3). Moreover, parasocial relationships exhibited a direct positive impact on both argument quality and perceived credibility (H4, H5) suggesting that more robust connections with influencers improve followers' assessment of information and reasoning. Additionally, both argument quality and perceived credibility directly affect travel intention (H7, H8), where perceived credibility is identified as the most significant predictor. These findings collectively illustrate that trust based relationships and high quality, credible content are the essential catalysts for persuasion and behavioural intention in digital tourism contexts (Kalia et al., 2023; Zia, 2020b).

Conversely, certain hypotheses lacked sufficient support to provide significant theoretical insights. Task attraction did not have a significant effect on parasocial relationships (H1), indicating that the functional or performance-based characteristics of celebrities are not primary factors in the formation of parasocial relationships in digital tourism settings. Additionally, the impact of the direct relationship among parasocial relationships and travel intention proved to be significant (H6), demonstrating that although parasocial relationships shows engagement and trust, it does not autonomously convert into behavioural intention. These results confirmed that emotional connection alone is not enough to make travel decisions where the psychological processes like credibility (Zia & Alotaibi, 2024) and argument quality must also be considered (Chen et al., 2021).

Finally, the study demonstrates the significant mediation and moderation for the impact of parasocial relationships on travel intention. The findings of this study confirm the dual mediation effects of perceived credibility (H9a) and argument quality (H9b), showing that parasocial relationships affects travel intention indirectly by improving the trustworthiness and persuasiveness of information. This corresponds with the Heuristic-Systematic Model, which asserts that individuals employ both heuristic cues (e.g., source credibility) and systematic processing (e.g., argument quality) in decision-making (e.g., Chaiken, 1980; further elaborated in Yang et al. (2025)). Moreover, online comments were found to have a strong moderating effect. Specifically, comments improved how people perceived the quality of arguments (H10a), influenced their need for validation and how credible they seemed (H10b).

10. MANAGERIAL AND PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study are intended for tourist marketers, destination managers, and social media campaign designers interested in leveraging the growing potential of influencer marketing. The findings demonstrate that successful digital influencer marketing relies more on informative content that genuinely educates, persuades, and connects with the audience than simply focus on aesthetic appeal (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Drawing on the Heuristic-Systematic Model (HSM), which shows that audiences are not passive consumers of content but active evaluators who consider the usefulness, clarity, and relevance of the information presented to them (Chaiken, 1980). Therefore, tourism managers should go beyond simple promotional content and encourage influencers to create detailed, experience-focused stories that spark their audiences' curiosity and travel interest.

The study also shows that credibility and authenticity are key factors in selecting influencers, aligning with the Source Credibility Theory (SCT), as these attributes significantly enhance the persuasive impact of tourism information (Hovland et al., 1953). In addition to content and authenticity, tourism brands should prioritise influencers who cultivate genuine parasocial relationships with their followers, fostering closeness that naturally promotes the intention to travel. Additionally, actively monitoring online comments, genuinely engaging in discussions, and offering credible feedback can boost engagement and message effectiveness, which in turn increases the chances that potential visitors will choose the promoted destinations (Zhou et al., 2024).

11. LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

The current study offers a unique model for the social media influencer in the tourism industry; however, several limitations are worth mentioning in future research. Firstly, this study employed a cross-sectional research design to assess interactions between influencers' and followers' intentions at a single time. Future research could consider using longitudinal designs to evaluate how interactions influence actual travel behaviour over multiple periods. Furthermore, the study indicated a direct significant impact on Parasocial relationships on travel intentions, whereas the mediated paths in H9a and H9b were significant. Future research should investigate whether Parasocial relationships exert a

substantial influence in low-cost, spontaneous travel scenarios. Additionally, future studies should consider multigroup analysis to highlight differences between Generation Z and older age groups. Another point is that the current study reflects the cultural background of KSA; future research might replicate the proposed framework in other geographical contexts, such as the Middle East or Asia, to assess cross-cultural differences.

DECLARATIONS

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ETHICAL APPROVAL

Ethical approval for this research was granted by the Research Ethics Committee at Al-Baha University (Approval No: 47106389, dated 29/09/2025).

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