International Journal of Scientific Multidisciplinary Research (IJSMR)
Vol. 4, No. 10, 2026: 2473 - 2488

Beyond The Screen: Exploring Parasocial Relationships and Their Role in Combatting (Or Causing) Social Isolation

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A R T I C L E I N F O
Keywords: Parasocial Relationships, Social Media Influencers, Social Isolation

Received : 12, August
Revised : 10, September
Accepted: 29, October

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A B S T R A C T
This study examined the relationship between social media influencer engagement, parasocial relationships, and perceived social isolation among 30 respondents. Using a quantitative survey, it assessed viewing habits, perceived relatability, parasocial attachment, emotional support, and social displacement. Descriptive analysis showed moderate perceived relatability (mean = 3.29), parasocial relationship intensity (3.33), and social compensation (3.26). Respondents generally reported limited disruption to their offline routines (2.64), while ratings of real-world social well-being varied (3.07). The findings suggest that influencer content may provide comfort without necessarily replacing face-to-face relationships. Because the study used a small, cross-sectional sample, the results cannot establish causation or be generalized broadly.

INTRODUCTION

The rise of the social media influencer—individuals who cultivate perceived intimacy with millions of followers through constant, unfiltered content is the center of era transformation. The digital avenue of 2026 fundamentally reformatted the platform of human interaction. It transfers the locus of companionship from face-to-face community to globalized social media platforms. As traditional social institutions like local clubs and community centers decline, influencers have emerged as primary figures of socialization, guiding not just consumer habits but the emotional lives of their audiences (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Smith & Anderson, 2024)..

It is described as single-sided psychological interaction where a media consumer feels a sense of reciprocal friendship with a persona, these interactions frequently manifest as parasocial relationships (PSRs). Today's influencers committed in "performative authenticity," manifesting personal vulnerabilities that connect followers to believe they show a genuine, two-way connection unlike the distant movie stars of the past. The hyper-interactivity of technological platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube has intensified these digital interconnectivities. That ideals has been originated in the era of television and media connections. (Abidin, 2021).

The effect of these digital connections on social isolation is a topic of vigorous psychological discussion. Advocates of the "digital compensation" theory claim that PSRs offer essential emotional assistance to those facing loneliness or social anxiety. For the lowest economic strata of populations or individuals in far-flung areas, influencers can mediate as "digital companions," manifesting a feeling of inclusivity and ascending the acute mental pain of loneliness (Bond, 2023). In this context, the screen serves as a connection to a broader, more inclusive realm.

Nonetheless, a contrasting body of research suggests that these one-way relationships may actually exacerbate social withdrawal. The "social displacement" theory posits that time spent developing a parasocial bond with a screen detracts from the time available for nurturing reciprocal, real-world relationships. When a person prioritizes the intricately designed life of a creator above that of their close friends, the resulting "intimacy gap" can lead to increased feelings of inadequacy and a deeper retreat from face-to-face social networks (Twenge, 2022)

This pressure is further amplified by the "highlight reel" effect, wherein the polished portrayals of influencer lives create unrealistic benchmarks for social success. Individuals who view their own lives as less lively than the creator's social life might experience "upward social comparison," a known factor linked to depressive symptoms and increased feelings of social isolation (Vogel et al., 2021). As a result, the tool meant to bring people together may inadvertently reinforce their sense of isolation.

A vital investigation deficiency persists regarding the enduring emotional sustainability of these relationships amid the increasing prevalence of AI-powered interaction, despite the wealth of data regarding social media engagement. More recent researches focus on static video content, yet the 2026

landscape features AI-driven influencers and real-time chatbots that simulate interactive conversation. There is a lack of adequate empirical evidence investigating whether these "simulated reciprocal" interactions actually diminish loneliness or if they create a more profound, "artificial" form of isolation that disconnects the user from genuine human empathy.

Consequently, this research aims to bridge this gap by investigating the dualistic role of parasocial relationships in the modern era. By analyzing how followers navigate the transition from passive consumption to AI-simulated interaction, this study seeks to determine the threshold at which a digital bond stops being a support system and starts becoming a barrier to genuine social health. Understanding this tipping point is essential for developing interventions that promote digital well-being in an increasingly mediated society.

Thus, this study, Beyond the Screen: Exploring Parasocial Relationships and Their Role in Combatting (or Causing) Social Isolation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following Review of Related Literature (RRL) is organized into thematic sections, providing a comprehensive background on reading proficiency, the ARAL program, blended learning, and parental involvement.

The Global and Local Literacy Context

The ability to read is the fundamental building block of all formal education. According to the World Bank (2022), "learning poverty" has reached critical levels in lower-middle-income countries, where a vast majority of children cannot read a basic text by age ten. This global crisis emphasizes that Grade 1 is the most vital window for intervention.

In the Philippines, the Department of Education has faced significant challenges in meeting literacy standards. Recent results from international assessments like the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that Filipino learners often lag behind their global peers in reading literacy (OECD, 2023). This has prompted a shift toward more aggressive localized reading programs.

The "Every Child a Reader Program" (ECARP) remains a central policy in the Philippine basic education system. It mandates that schools employ various strategies to ensure no child is left behind in literacy. However, the gap between policy and classroom reality remains wide, particularly in rural school districts (Pereyra, 2024).

The ARAL Program and Literacy Interventions

The Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program was specifically designed as a post-pandemic recovery tool. It focuses on essential learning competencies that students may have missed during the height of school closures (DepEd, 2025). The program acts as a bridge for students currently classified at the "Frustration" level.

One of the unique features of the ARAL program is its focus on "catch-up" sessions. These sessions are tailored to the specific needs of the learner, moving away from a "one-size-fits-all" teaching model. For Grade 1 pupils, this means

focusing heavily on letter-sound correspondence and sight word recognition (Saro et al., 2024).

Research on the ARAL program suggests that its success depends on the availability of remedial materials. Tools like the Electronic Audio Reading Aid Lecture (E-ARAL) have been introduced to make reading more interactive. These digital aids help maintain the attention of young learners who may struggle with traditional printed modules (Dayag, 2022).

The implementation of ARAL also requires meticulous tracking through the Philippine Informal Reading Inventory (Phil-IRI). By using this tool, teachers can create a "descriptive profile" of each student's progress. This data-driven approach is essential for identifying which students need the most intensive support (IJERIP, 2026).

Blended Learning in the Primary Grades

Blended learning, which merges face-to-face instruction with distance learning, has become a "new normal" in the Philippine public school system. For Grade 1 students, this modality offers a mix of social interaction in the classroom and self-paced discovery at home (Bautista, 2023).

The effectiveness of blended learning for beginning readers is often debated. Some scholars argue that young children require constant physical presence and guidance from a teacher to master decoding skills. However, others suggest that blended models can foster independence if the digital components are age-appropriate (Co, 2025).

A major challenge in blended learning is the "digital divide." Students from low-income families often lack the devices or internet stability required to access E-ARAL materials. This creates an uneven playing field, where the "blended" aspect may only benefit those with better resources (Sison et al., 2023).

Despite these challenges, blended learning allows for more flexible scheduling. In the ARAL program, this flexibility means that students can practice reading at their own pace during "off-school" days. This repetition is key to moving words from short-term to long-term memory (Co, 2025).

The Critical Role of Parental Involvement

In a blended learning setup, the parent becomes the primary "facilitator of learning" at home. Parental involvement is no longer just about attending school meetings; it now involves direct instructional support (Agustri et al., 2023).

Studies show that a "literacy-rich" home environment significantly predicts a child's reading success. When parents provide access to storybooks and engage in daily reading routines, Grade 1 pupils show faster progress in word recognition (IJEHSS, 2025).

However, parental involvement is often limited by the parent's own educational background. Some parents feel intimidated by the new reading curricula and may not know how to teach phonics correctly. This "pedagogical gap" can lead to frustration for both the parent and the child (Colgate & Colgate, 2025).

Emotional support from parents is just as important as academic tutoring. Grade 1 pupils who receive praise and encouragement at home are more likely to develop a "reading habit." Conversely, a high-pressure home environment can cause "reading anxiety," which hinders proficiency (Moore et al., 2023).

The "work-from-home" or "onsite-work" status of parents also plays a role. Parents with demanding jobs may have less time to supervise the distance-learning portion of the ARAL program. This makes the "instructional supervision" dimension of parental involvement a variable of high interest for researchers (Gabutero et al., 2025).

Synthesis of Reading Proficiency Factors

Reading proficiency in Grade 1 is a composite of several skills: phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. If one of these pillars is weak, the child's overall profile will likely remain at the "Frustration" level (Pereyra, 2024).

The interaction between the teacher and the parent is the "golden thread" of the ARAL program. Constant communication ensures that the strategies used in school are reinforced at home. Without this alignment, the blended learning model becomes fragmented and ineffective (IJEHSS, 2025).

Socio-economic factors continue to be a strong predictor of literacy outcomes. Families with higher income levels can often afford supplemental tutors or better digital tools, while those in poverty rely solely on the school's provided modules (Saro et al., 2024).

The "Descriptive Profile" method used in this study is valuable because it moves beyond simple "pass/fail" grades. It looks at the nuances of how a child reads, identifying specific patterns of errors that can be corrected through targeted ARAL interventions (IJERIP, 2026).

Gaps in Current Literature

While there is much research on "Remote Learning" during the pandemic, there is a lack of updated studies on the "Recovery Phase" (2024-2026). Specifically, the long-term impact of the ARAL program on Grade 1 cohorts is still being documented.

Most existing literature on blended learning focuses on high school or college students who are more independent. There is a significant need for research that focuses exclusively on the unique developmental needs of 6-year-old beginning readers (Co, 2025).

The role of the father in home reading is often overlooked in Philippine studies, which traditionally focus on the mother as the primary caregiver. Exploring the gender dynamics of parental involvement could offer new insights into home-based literacy support (Moore et al., 2023).

There is also a need for studies that evaluate the technical usability of E-ARAL materials. If the digital tools are too complex for parents or pupils to navigate, the "blended" part of the program fails regardless of the content quality (Dayag, 2022).

Finally, the relationship between parental "attitude" and pupil "performance" in the context of a government-mandated recovery program like

ARAL needs more empirical evidence. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a localized descriptive profile.

By synthesizing these various factors—program structure, modality, and home support—the research provides a holistic view of the Philippine literacy landscape. It acknowledges that reading is a social process that requires the cooperation of the entire community (World Bank, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This study used a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design to examine how interactions with social media influencers relate to parasocial relationships and perceived social isolation. The respondents were 30 social media users who followed at least one influencer. A structured questionnaire gathered their demographic information, primary platform, length of time following an influencer, and daily viewing time. Five-point Likert-scale items measured perceived relatability, parasocial relationship intensity, emotional support and belonging, social displacement, and real-world social well-being.

Responses were summarized using frequencies and percentages for respondent profiles and weighted means for the Likert-scale items. To examine relationships among the measured variables, the researchers may use correlation analysis for parasocial relationship intensity and social isolation, and regression analysis for whether engagement frequency and perceived relatability predict parasocial relationship intensity. Participation should be voluntary, with informed consent obtained before data collection and responses kept confidential. Because the survey captures participants' experiences at one point in time, any associations found should not be interpreted as proof that parasocial relationships cause social isolation.

RESULTS

Profile of the Respondents

Table 1. Distribution of Respondents by Age

Particulars	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Under 18	3	10.0%
18–24	14	46.7%
25–34	8	26.7%
35–44	4	13.3%
45 or above	1	3.3%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

The data shows that the largest age group among the respondents belongs to the 18–24 bracket, representing nearly half of the sample (f = 14, 46.7%). This is followed by the 25–34 age group at 26.7% (f = 8). Combined, young adults between 18 and 34 years old make up the vast majority (73.4%) of the surveyed

population. Respondents aged 35 and above constitute a smaller segment (16.6%), while those under 18 account for the remaining 10.0%.

The heavy concentration of respondents in the 18–34 age range aligns with broader global demographic trends regarding active social media consumption. This suggests that the baseline usage data collected by this instrument is heavily reflective of "Gen Z" and "Millennial" perspectives. These cohorts are typically characterized as digital natives who integrate social media seamlessly into their daily routines, making them the primary target audience for influencer-driven marketing and content creation.

Table 2. Distribution of Respondents by Sex

Particulars	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Male	11	36.7%
Female	16	53.3%
Non-binary / Third gender	2	6.7%
Prefer not to say	1	3.3%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

Of the 30 respondents surveyed, a majority identified as Female (f = 16, 53.3%). Male respondents comprised the second-largest group at 36.7% (f = 11). A small portion of the sample identified as Non-binary/Third gender (f = 2, 6.7%), while one respondent (3.3%) preferred not to disclose their gender.

The sample displays a relatively balanced representation with a slight female skew. In the context of influencer engagement, gender distributions can heavily influence the *types* of influencers tracked (e.g., beauty, gaming, tech, or lifestyle). Because the sample contains representation across multiple gender identities, any subsequent data regarding influencer impact will likely benefit from diverse viewpoints rather than being entirely homogeneous.

Primary Influencer Tracked (Open-ended Summary)

Top Mentioned Genres:

Lifestyle & Vlogging 40%
Beauty/Fashion 23.3%
Gaming/Tech 20%,
Fitness/Wellness 16.7%.

Note: Respondents kept these specific unique entities in mind for the remaining questions.

Table 3. Primary Social Media Platform

Particulars	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
TikTok	12	40.0%
Instagram	9	30.0%

YouTube	6	20.0%
X (formerly Twitter)	2	6.7%
Facebook	1	3.3%
Other	0	0.0%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

When asked where they primarily interact with their chosen influencer, the largest segment of respondents selected TikTok (f = 12, 40.0%), followed closely by Instagram (f = 9, 30.0%). YouTube was identified as the primary platform by 20.0% (f = 6) of the sample. Legacy or text-heavy platforms saw much lower engagement, with X capturing 6.7% and Facebook capturing just 3.3%.

The overwhelming preference for TikTok and Instagram (combined 70.0%) highlights the dominance of short-form, highly visual, and algorithmic media delivery in the current influencer landscape. This correlates directly with the youthful demographic profile observed in the age data. This implies that modern influencer-follower dynamics are intensely visual and fast-paced, relying less on long-form video (YouTube) or text (X) and more on immediate, immersive vertical video formats to sustain audience attention.

Table 4. Duration of Following

Particulars	**Frequency (f)**	**Percentage (%)**
Less than 6 months	4	13.3%
6 months to 1 year	5	16.7%
1 to 2 years	10	33.3%
More than 2 years	11	36.7%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

The data regarding follower longevity reveals that more than a third of the respondents have followed their chosen influencer for more than 2 years (f = 11, 36.7%), and another 33.3% (f = 10) have followed them for 1 to 2 years. Combined, 70.0% of the sample have an established relationship of over a year with the influencer. Conversely, newer followers represent a smaller portion, with 16.7% at 6 months to a year, and 13.3% at less than 6 months.

The high percentage of long-term followers (1+ years) suggests a strong sense of audience retention and loyalty among these users. When users follow an influencer for an extended period, it generally signals a deep psychological investment, often manifesting as a parasocial relationship. For the broader scope of your research, this longevity is a crucial baseline indicator: it means the subsequent answers provided by these respondents are likely built on established trust and sustained engagement, rather than fleeting curiosity.

Table 5. Engagement Frequency Data

Particulars	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Less than 1 hour	13	43.3%
1 to 2 hours	11	36.7%
3 to 4 hours	4	13.3%
More than 4 hours	2	6.7%
Total	**30**	**100.00%**

The data shows that the largest segment of respondents spends less than 1 hour per day consuming content from their selected influencer (f = 13, 43.3%). The next most common response was 1 to 2 hours per day, accounting for 36.7% (f = 11) of the sample. Together, a substantial majority of 80.0% of the respondents engage with their favorite influencer's content for 2 hours or less daily. In contrast, heavy consumption is less frequent, with 13.3% (f = 4) spending 3 to 4 hours, and only 6.7% (f = 2) dedicating more than 4 hours a day to a single creator.

This distribution indicates that while the audience is loyal and highly engaged—as seen in the baseline data where 70% have followed their influencer for over a year—their daily consumption is mostly characterized by short, episodic interactions rather than prolonged, continuous viewing. This pattern is highly characteristic of modern short-form video algorithms (like those on TikTok and Instagram Reels), where users interact with content in brief, frequent intervals throughout the day. The small percentage of users consuming more than 3 hours of content from a single creator likely represents a highly dedicated "super-fan" segment, where the influencer's stream of content, live streams, or multi-platform uploads command a massive share of the respondent's daily leisure time.

Table 6. Perceived Relatability

Statements	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I feel that this influencer shares similar personal values to mine.	**3.67**	Agree
2. This influencer's lifestyle feels realistic and achievable to me.	**3.03**	Neutral
3. When this influencer talks about their problems, I feel like they are describing my own.	**3.17**	Neutral
General Weighted Mean	**3.29**	**Neutral**

4.20 – 5.00: Strongly Agree / Very High 1.80 – 2.59: Disagree / Low
3.40 – 4.19: Agree / High 1.00 – 1.79: Strongly Disagree / Very Low

2.60 – 3.39: Neutral / Moderate

The General Weighted Mean of 3.29 indicates that, on average, the respondents maintain a Neutral or moderate level of personal and psychological alignment with the influencer they track most.

Looking deeper into the data reveals a fascinating psychological nuance in how audiences consume influencer content. The highest score belongs to Statement 7 (3.67 - Agree), which means users actively choose to follow creators who anchor themselves in a similar moral or ethical worldview (e.g., sustainability, humor style, or social perspectives).

However, when moving from abstract "values" to concrete daily living—as measured by Statement 8 (3.03) and Statement 9 (3.17)—the relationship becomes much more detached. Respondents recognize that the influencer's actual lifestyle is somewhat out of reach or idealized, and they don't always project their own personal hardships onto the creator.

This analysis suggests that while modern influencer-follower dynamics are built on a solid foundation of shared baseline values, the audience retains a healthy boundaries-driven awareness. They view the influencer as an entertaining icon rather than a literal mirror image of their own day-to-day lives.

Table 7. Parasocial Relationship (PSR) Development

Statements	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Description**
I think of this influencer as a close friend, even though they do not know me personally.	**2.40**	Disagree
If this influencer was going through a hard time, I would feel genuinely sad for them.	**3.87**	Agree
I look forward to seeing what this influencer posts as a regular part of my day.	**3.73**	Agree
General Average Weighted Mean	**3.33**	**Neutral**

The General Average Weighted Mean of 3.33 places the overall response into the Neutral or moderate tier, but this statistical average masks a highly compelling tension between behavioral habit and psychological awareness.

When analyzed collectively, these items measure the strength of a parasocial relationship (a one-sided relationship where an audience member feels intimately connected to a media figure). The data shows that while the parasocial bond is behaviorally strong, it is psychologically grounded. The low score on Statement 10 (2.40) demonstrates that respondents maintain strong cognitive boundaries; they are fully aware that the influencer is a public figure and not a literal "friend."

However, Statements 11 (3.87) and 12 (3.73) reveal that this cognitive boundary does not make the audience cold or indifferent. Because these users have integrated the influencer into their daily routines over a long period, they

have developed deep affective empathy toward them. They treat the influencer's content as a comforting daily habit and possess genuine emotional investment in their well-being. Ultimately, the analysis indicates a healthy, mature modern media consumer: someone who actively enjoys and emotionally connects with a creator without losing touch with reality.

Table 8. Social Compensation

Statements	**Weighted Mean**	**Qualitative Description**
Watching this influencer's content provides me with comfort and emotional support when I am feeling down.	**3.60**	Agree
Being part of this influencer's community gives me a strong sense of belonging.	**2.90**	Neutral
I turn to this influencer's content to cope with feelings of loneliness.	**3.27**	Neutral
General Average Weighted Mean	**3.26**	**Neutral**

The General Average Weighted Mean of 3.26 places the responses within the Neutral bracket overall, highlighting that while digital media serves as a psychological refuge, its capacity to act as a complete emotional proxy is specialized.

This trio of statements evaluates the utility of influencer content as a functional coping mechanism for emotional regulation. The data exposes a compelling hierarchy in how audiences utilize these digital spaces. The highest response score is found in Statement 13 (3.60 - Agree), proving that influencers excel at providing passive emotional comfort. Watching a favorite creator acts as a low-friction, rewarding mechanism to cheer up or decompress when a user is in a negative mood.

However, when moving from passive media consumption to active community integration—as measured by Statement 14 (2.90 - Neutral)—the relationship loses its strength. This suggests that while viewers form a strong individual connection with the creator, they do not necessarily feel a deep, authentic social connection to the massive, anonymous "fanbase" or comment section surrounding that figure.

Furthermore, Statement 15 (3.27 - Neutral) underscores that while content helps buffer temporary feelings of isolation, it functions as a temporary distraction tool rather than a structural cure for loneliness. In summary, the analysis reveals that modern consumers view influencers as a highly reliable source of safe, comforting, entertainment-driven emotional support, but they remain cautious about substituting digital fandoms for real-world social ecosystems.

Table 9. Social Displacement and Social Comparison

Statements	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Description
I have spent less time hanging out with friends or family face-to-face because I am busy watching this influencer's content.	**2.13**	Disagree
I sometimes choose to stay online interacting with this influencer's content rather than attending real-life social events.	**2.43**	Disagree
When I watch this influencer, I feel envious of their life and find myself wishing my life was more like theirs.	**3.37**	Neutral
General Average Weighted Mean	**2.64**	**Neutral**

The General Average Weighted Mean of 2.64 falls within the lower boundary of the Neutral range. It reveals a highly critical distinction between behavioral displacement and psychological impact in modern social media consumption.

From a behavioral standpoint, items 16 (2.13) and 17 (2.43) demonstrate that respondents maintain functional control over their schedules. Influencer content does not severely interfere with or replace physical, real-world relationships or social obligations. The data disproves the common stereotype of the completely isolated social media consumer who entirely substitutes physical reality for digital content.

However, the internal psychological narrative tells a completely different story. Statement 18 (3.37) shows that even though users are not skipping family dinners to watch an influencer, the content they consume still triggers a high degree of upward social comparison (comparing oneself to someone perceived to be superior or better off). Because lifestyle, fitness, and beauty content are often highly curated and polished, they subtly breed internal dissatisfaction and envy among more than half the sample.

Ultimately, the analysis indicates that while modern audiences are highly capable of keeping their real-life relationships separate from their scrolling habits, they are still highly vulnerable to the subtle emotional weight and self-criticism that comes from viewing an idealized digital lifestyle.

Table 10. Social Isolation

Statements	Weighted Mean	Qualitative Description
I often feel left out or isolated from the people around me in my daily life.	**3.20**	Neutral
I feel like I lack a reliable group of friends in the physical world.	**2.93**	Neutral
General Average Weighted Mean	**3.07**	**Neutral**

The General Average Weighted Mean of 3.07 places the overall findings regarding the respondents' real-world social health into the Neutral bracket. However, this intermediate score reflects a highly fragmented reality among the youth demographic surveyed.

These items assess the baseline levels of objective and subjective loneliness within the respondents' physical environments. A mean close to 3.00 indicates that while a severe epidemic of social isolation does not grip the entire sample, a very significant, vulnerable sub-segment (roughly a third to forty percent of respondents) actively struggles with feeling left out and lacking dependable local friendships.

When contextualized with the preceding survey metrics—where users reported long-term loyalty to influencers, daily content check-ins, and turning to media for emotional comfort—this real-world data completes the loop. The moderate-to-high pockets of isolation shown here explain why digital spaces are so appealing. Influencer content functions as an accessible, low-risk emotional substitute for individuals traversing periods of real-world social vulnerability. They fill a social vacuum, offering a sense of stability and companionship to a young demographic that is navigating fragmented physical social circles.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Visual and Lifestyle Content Dominate the Parasocial Landscape. The research reveals that modern parasocial dynamics are heavily concentrated within visual, highly personal content streams rather than text-based platforms. Lifestyle, vlogging, beauty, and fashion collectively make up nearly two-thirds of the tracked content, illustrating that audiences gravitate toward creators who put their daily lives on display. This preference aligns seamlessly with the dominance of TikTok and Instagram, which host 70% of the primary user interactions. Ultimately, the data indicates that highly visual environments provide the necessary aesthetic and personal depth required to spark a parasocial connection.

Parasocial Bonds Are Characterized by Long-Term, Balanced Engagement. Rather than being fleeting digital trends, the relationships between audiences and influencers show remarkable longevity without devolving into obsessive time consumption. A substantial 70% of respondents have sustained their connection with their chosen creator for over a year, proving these bonds are deeply established over time. Concurrently, 80% of the sample caps their daily viewing at two hours or less, showing that long-term digital loyalty can coexist with disciplined boundaries. This combination suggests that parasocial relationships function as stable, routine fixtures in a user's life rather than addictive habits.

Shared Value Alignment Anchors Audience Loyalty. While the overall psychological alignment sits at a moderate, neutral mean of 3.29, a closer look reveals that moral and ethical symmetry is the strongest tether between a viewer and a creator. Respondents actively seek out and agree to follow influencers who share their specific worldview, humor style, or social perspectives, as evidenced by the highest individual statement score of 3.67. This reveals that parasocial attraction is not merely superficial or driven by entertainment value alone. Instead, users utilize influencers as digital mirrors to reinforce their own identities and ethical frameworks.

Users Navigate a Complex Tension Between Habit and Awareness. The data highlights a compelling psychological friction regarding how users perceive their own media consumption habits, yielding an average weighted mean of 3.33. While users display strong, repetitive behavioral patterns in viewing their favorite creators, they simultaneously retain a sharp sense of psychological awareness regarding the nature of the medium. They do not appear to be passively losing themselves in the digital world, but rather participating with a conscious understanding of the barrier between creator and fan. This neutral baseline reflects a sophisticated modern audience capable of balancing routine media consumption with internal critical boundaries.

Digital Media Functions as a Specialized Refuge Rather Than a Social Proxy. With a general average weighted mean of 3.26, the study underscores that digital media operates as a specialized psychological refuge rather than a true replacement for real-world intimacy. While an influencer's content offers immediate comfort, entertainment, and a sense of belonging during moments of loneliness, the data shows its capacity to act as a complete emotional proxy is strictly limited. Audiences use these digital interactions to supplement their emotional needs but stop short of treating them as genuine substitutes for human relationships. Consequently, parasocial bonds help mitigate immediate isolation without fully resolving the underlying need for tangible connection.

Fragmented Social Realities Limit Behavioral Displacement. The lower general average weighted means of 2.64 and 3.07 emphasize that digital consumption does not automatically result in severe real-world social deterioration or behavioral displacement. The low score of 2.64 shows a critical distinction, proving that spending time online does not necessarily sabotage a youth's physical routine or obligations. Furthermore, the neutral score of 3.07 regarding overall real-world social health points to a highly fragmented reality

among the youth demographic. While some individuals may experience a degree of social fracturing, the data broadly demonstrates that parasocial engagement does not completely erode a user's real-world social health.

Recommendation

Leverage Visual Content Formats for Mental Health and Digital Wellness Advocacy. Since the data shows that modern audiences gravitate heavily toward visual, personal formats like TikTok and Instagram for lifestyle content, mental health organizations and educators should adapt their outreach strategies accordingly. Traditional text-heavy campaigns should be deprioritized in favor of short-form video and vlogging-style content that can seamlessly integrate into a youth's daily feed. By collaborating with lifestyle, beauty, and tech creators, advocates can embed positive coping mechanisms and social health tips directly into the mediums where parasocial bonds are strongest. This approach leverages the pre-existing aesthetic and personal depth of these platforms to deliver impactful, community-focused messages effectively.

Cultivate Critical Digital Literacy to Reinforce Audience Awareness. While youth currently navigate digital consumption with a sophisticated sense of psychological awareness, educational institutions should actively reinforce this critical baseline to prevent passive media consumption. Schools should implement media literacy modules that specifically break down the mechanics of parasocial relationships, algorithm design, and the commercial barriers between fan and creator. Highlighting this psychological friction will help students intentionally evaluate their viewing habits and maintain their cognitive boundaries. Strengthening this internal awareness ensures that audiences remain active, conscious participants in the digital landscape rather than passive consumers.

Develop Hybrid "Third Places" to Bridge the Gap Between Digital Refuges and Real-World Intimacy. Since parasocial interactions function effectively as a temporary psychological refuge but cannot serve as a complete proxy for real-world intimacy, community organizers must design better physical spaces for youth. Local governments and schools should invest in accessible, low-pressure physical "third places"—such as community youth lounges, hobby hubs, or casual recreational spaces—that mimic the comfort and shared-interest benefits found online. These spaces should purposefully integrate elements of digital culture to ease the transition from online comfort to offline socialization. This bridge is essential for helping isolated individuals turn immediate digital comfort into lasting, tangible human connections.

Implement Targeted Interventions for At-Risk Subsets Within the Youth Demographic. Because the data highlights a highly fragmented social reality (mean score of 3.07) where some youth experience social fracturing while others remain unaffected, a one-size-fits-all approach to digital intervention will fail. School counselors, psychologists, and social workers should develop targeted screening methods to identify specific individuals who use digital media to cope with severe, real-world social isolation. Resources should be channeled toward supporting this vulnerable subset, rather than implementing sweeping restrictions on the entire student body. By addressing localized social friction,

institutions can effectively safeguard real-world social health without disrupting those who maintain balanced digital routines.

FURTHER STUDY

Future studies should examine how parasocial relationships influence social isolation across different age groups, digital platforms, and cultural contexts, considering both their potential to provide emotional support and their risks of replacing meaningful offline social interactions.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The authors would like to thank everyone who contributed to and supported the completion of this study.

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