

# The role of parasocial relationships and social media interaction in shaping relational quality: exploring the mediating effect of brand connection and the moderating power of influencers



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**Abstract** This research discusses the phenomenon of relational quality in the context of social media usage, where social media influencers play an important role as a strategic tool to build relationships with consumers. The focus of the research is on the relationship between millennial consumers, marketing activities on social media and social media influencers, moreover, how relational quality can be formed in the context of today's rampant use of social media. The close relationship between millennials, social media and social media influencers is identified as a key factor that can shape relational quality. This research also explores the role of parasocial relationships in shaping relational quality, considering the imaginary relationship that may be created between consumers and influencers and their positive impact on brands used by an influencer. Then, this concept is also linked to the formation of brand connection in shaping relational quality. This study will analyze whether the parasocial relationship between millennial consumers and influencers can influence the formation of relational quality, considering the mediation by brand connection. Data from 253 respondents, collected through an online survey, were used to test the hypotheses using the SEM-PLS method. The results of the study show that social media interactions with influencers, and parasocial relationships built by influencers in skin care products have a significant influence on the formation of brand connections and relational quality, both directly and indirectly.

**Keywords:** brand connection, relational quality, parasocial relationship, social media interaction, social media influencer

## 1. Introduction

The advent of the internet and technological advancements has significantly heightened competition within the digital marketplace. In Indonesia, digital market revenue surged by 32% in 2021, contributing 29% to global e-commerce revenue (ecommerceDB, 2021). This competitive landscape is not limited to overall market dynamics but extends to brand competition, particularly among micro, small-, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). In 2020, Indonesia boasted approximately 64.1 million MSMEs and over 10,632 registered brands across diverse product categories (Catriana, 2020). The competitive environment in business is intricately linked to trademark competition, necessitating the need for brands to establish distinct identities and consumer connections.

Among various product sectors, the skincare category in Indonesia has experienced remarkable growth, with increases of 5.59% in 2020 and 7% in 2021 (Rizaty, 2021). This sector is characterized by intense competition among top-selling brands, where relational quality emerges as a vital factor in brand success. Consumers who form emotional attachments to brands or influencers are more likely to advocate for them, indicating the crucial role of these relationships in shaping brand perception. This dynamic highlights the importance of how brands engage with consumers, especially influencers, to cultivate a positive brand image. In today's market, leveraging social media to enhance relational quality has become an essential aspect of marketing strategies.

To delve deeper into the interactions between consumers and influencers, this research included interviews with an influencer and a skincare product retailer. The findings revealed that influencers significantly shape the brand images of the products they represent, with followers often defending these brands. Such psychological and emotional ties foster strong brand connections, underscoring the importance of relational quality in consumer-brand dynamics.

In support of this, Kunsman (2021) noted that while influencer endorsements may not rival the persuasive power of personal recommendations from friends and family, the rise of digital technology and social media offers fresh opportunities for marketers to sway consumer choices. In Indonesia, the digital landscape is rapidly evolving, with internet penetration



reaching 73.7% of the population and active social media users reaching 170 million in 2021. This transformation is particularly pronounced in the skincare industry, where platforms such as Instagram foster communities that facilitate the sharing of skincare advice and experiences, creating valuable marketing opportunities for brands.

The surge in online businesses has further altered marketing approaches in Indonesia. Since the onset of the pandemic in 2020, many companies have pivoted to online marketing to fuel growth. As a result, digital branding and communication strategies have become vital for maintaining brand continuity and engaging with target consumers through various digital channels, including e-commerce and social media. The evidence indicates that traditional media, such as television, has led to a decline in advertising revenue, prompting businesses to prioritize online marketing strategies (Pink, 2020).

This shift toward digital marketing has also influenced consumer behavior, as individuals increasingly engage with online content and social media. Research shows that influencer marketing has proven to be more effective than celebrity endorsements, with an ROI that is 89% faster than that of traditional media (Wulandari, 2018). Influencers generate content that resonates with their expertise, utilizing platforms for both live and recorded interactions. This engaging content not only shapes follower attitudes but also influences purchasing decisions, reinforcing the significance of influencers in contemporary marketing strategies (Freberg et al., 2011; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

A study highlighted by Tech Insider revealed that 73% of teenagers and young adults have stronger connections with social media influencers than with traditional celebrities do (Droesch, 2020). Furthermore, a Forbes survey revealed that 92% of consumers trust influencers more than they do in conventional advertisements do (Geysler, 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019). This trend can be attributed to the perceived authenticity with which influencers convey marketing messages, making their endorsements more relatable and impactful for millennial consumers.

As social media influencers (SMIs) continue to gain traction, their ability to share personal narratives enhances their appeal, fostering trust with followers (De Veirman et al., 2017). This authenticity marks influencer marketing as a potent form of advertising, where influencers leverage their profiles to promote brands effectively (Breves et al., 2021; Wojdyski & Evans, 2016). The role of SMIs in marketing is crucial, as they serve as primary content creators who attract substantial followings through distinctive content that resonates with audiences.

Moreover, millennials tend to trust SMIs more readily due to their approachable nature, which contrasts with the often distant personas of traditional celebrities. This relationship-building capacity positions SMIs as partners or friends with their followers, enhancing the impact of their marketing efforts. Breves et al. (2019) described the relationships between SMIs and their followers as parasocial relationships (PSRs), where followers perceive influencers as social partners. These PSRs significantly influence the effectiveness of influencer marketing campaigns, establishing a foundation for further exploration into how these dynamics shape consumer behavior.

Influencer marketing targeting millennials is highly effective because of their ability to foster long-term relationships with followers over an extended period. Social media influencers (SMIs) can position themselves as partners or friends, providing casual, authentic, and entertaining content that maintains communication with followers or potential consumers. This approach allows SMIs to build closer relationships with their audience.

The relationship between SMIs and their followers can be referred to as a parasocial relationship (PSR), which describes the extent to which media users perceive media personas as social partners with whom they can communicate intimately. Research findings indicate that this parasocial relationship significantly impacts the persuasive effects of marketing conducted by social media influencers.

Parasocial relationships (PSRs) can expand the concept of cross-situational relationships between media personas and media users. They explain how followers build relationships that seem real and personal with influencers, even though these relationships are one-sided and do not involve direct interaction. Over time, the relationship between an SMI and its followers (millennial consumers) becomes stronger, fostering a deeper sense of trust and closeness with social media influencers. Tukachinsky & Stever (2019) argued that the impact of persuasive communication can be enhanced by building a parasocial relationship (PSR). An effective PSR can be realized if it is well built, especially on the basis of the closeness of character between SMIs and their followers (millennial consumers). Millennial consumers tend to trust SMIs that have similar characteristics, which in turn can increase the credibility of the SMI. The role of parasocial relationships in marketing, particularly in the context of social media and its relationship with social media influencers, has not been fully explored. Exploring how the PSR functions in the context of influencers may provide new insights into how these relationships influence marketing and advertising in the digital age.

This study specifically examines how millennials' views of social media interactions and influencers on these platforms can form parasocial relationships. This study also analyzes how the parasocial relationships formed are related to relational quality built on trust and satisfaction. Furthermore, this study examines the relationship between parasocial relationships and brand connections, which is how consumers identify with brands.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Rational Quality

The concept of relational quality proposed by Dorsch et al. (1998) includes the level of trust, commitment, and satisfaction with a company or seller in the context of this research. Berkman (2020) defines relational quality as a higher-order factor with seven factors representing aspects of affective and real conflict: honesty and benevolence, trust, commitment, continuity, and the willingness to invest in the relationship. Satisfaction and trust are two popular constructs that are widely explored and used by researchers for their influence on repurchase intentions in the context of online consumer behavior.

According to Rousseau et al. (1998), trust is a psychological area that reflects a person's acceptance of others on the basis of expectations of good behavior. Consumer trust is defined as the readiness of one party to take risks from the actions of another party on the basis of the belief that the other party will act in an important way for the party who trusts him, without the ability to monitor and control the actions of the trusted party (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust refers to an individual's belief in the positive behavior of another party on the basis of their assessment of that party's behavior in ethically acceptable social exchanges, such as avoiding opportunistic behavior and uncertainty.

This research considers online customers' trust as their belief in retailers, including retailers' benevolence, competence, and integrity (Zhang et al., 2011). On the basis of previous research, relational quality can be defined as the quality of the relationship that consumers have with a company that can be formed on the basis of trust, commitment, satisfaction, and willingness to invest in the relationship (Berkman, 2020; Dorsch et al., 1998).

### 2.3. Brand Connection

Brand connection is the extent to which consumers incorporate a brand into their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). A potential brand connection signifies a deeper level of identification with a brand from a customer's perspective (Dwivedi et al., 2015). The link made by consumers between the brand and their own identity is referred to as brand connection, in which case the brand is considered more important to consumers. Brand connection is a term used for a customer who has a close relationship with a brand and incorporates the brand into their own identity or self-concept (Escalas, 2004). In addition, emotional factors such as brand connection play an important role in increasing the creation of brands (Escalas, 2004).

Referring to some of these definitions, brand connection can be summarized as a close relationship between a consumer and a brand so that it incorporates the brand into their identity or self-concept formed owing to closeness and loyalty to a brand. (Dwivedi et al., 2015; Escalas, 2004).

### 2.4. Parasocial relationships

Currently, millennials are a generation that is very close to social media, which is supported by data from the rapidly growing use of social media. Millennials, as social media users, can interact directly with the personas of social media so that the relationships created between social media users and personas on social media can be created more realistically. With this relationship, social media users sometimes consider the similarities between social media users and personas on social media. As revealed by Eyal & Rubin (2003), media users involved in parasocial relationships tend to consider themselves to have a number of similarities with media personas but still feel a low level of certainty in their interactions.

Brown (2015) revealed that parasocial relationships are imaginary relationships with media personas that begin with spending time through media consumption and are characterized by the development of relationships experienced by media users with media personas. The parasocial relationship that arises from media personas with social media users coupled with the consumption of intense social media by millennials creates an opportunity for marketers to take advantage of these relationships to increase the strength of a brand, which ultimately increases the purchase intention of social media users.

By transferring the positive image and characteristics of a media persona into a brand, marketers aim to trigger consumers' intention to buy or use products and services endorsed by the persona. This is reinforced by Ballantine & Martin (2005), who argue that the stronger the parasocial relationship is, the greater the tendency of audience members to buy products recommended by a media persona.

Factors that can build parasocial relationships include admiration for ambassadors. Admiration is described as an emotion directed at others whose skills or virtues are extraordinary but can still be explained, matched or even surpassed (Schindler et al., 2015). Therefore, for one to admire or look up to someone, that person must be perceived as more successful than the admirer. In the context of celebrity endorsement, Basil (2012) revealed the importance of admiration in explaining advertising effectiveness and showed that admiration is strongly related to identification.

### 2.5. Social Media Interaction

In the context of social media marketing activity (SMMA), interaction refers to the influencer's ability to directly interact with the audience through various social media platforms, such as replying to comments, sending private messages, and engaging in discussions and feedback from followers. These interactions are crucial, as they help build closer and more personalized relationships, which in turn increases audience trust and loyalty. Active and consistent interaction shows that

influencers care about their followers, strengthen their credibility, and make them more relatable in the eyes of the audience. (Yadav & Rahman, 2017).

## 2.6. Social Media influencer

Influencer marketing involves identifying and using opinion leaders who are likely to influence potential consumers, and influencers take part in the marketing activities of a brand through content sponsored by the brand. Influencers emphasize uniqueness, such as credibility and number of followers, and social media influencers consider this uniqueness to be the main reason that their effectiveness is a promotional tool (Scott, 2015; Weismueller et al., 2020).

Influencer marketing is a marketing strategy that uses the influence of an opinion leader to drive consumer brand awareness and influences the purchase intention of a consumer (Preacher & Hayes, 2008; Scott, 2015). As previously stated, influencer marketing is an effective marketing strategy for influencing consumer attitudes toward a brand. Brands promoted by social media influencers will have a greater impact on changing the attitudes of consumers, especially millennial consumers, because millennials are very close to social media; thus, influencers will have a strong influence on millennial consumers.

This research uses three dimensions (expertise, trustworthiness and attractiveness), but with the growth of social media users today, the dimensions of social media influencers have evolved into several dimensions that are more suitable for influencers. According to (Ryu & Han, 2021), the dimensions of SMI currently consist of four dimensions, namely, communication skills, influence, authenticity, and expertise. This research adopts these dimensions to measure SMI variables.

## 2.7. Research Model Development

Research related to rational quality and its relationship with parasocial relationships has not been widely discussed in previous research. Previous research related to parasocial relationships has discussed the relationship between parasocial relationships and purchase intentions, as stated by Ballantine & Martin (2005), who argue that the stronger the parasocial relationship is, the greater the tendency of audience members to buy products recommended by a media persona. In this study, the persona in question is an influencer.

Social media offers new strategies that can attract a parasocial relationship. Characterized by two-way communication and instant connectivity, social media can open up greater prospects for building parasocial relationships (Farmer, 2012). Through social media, parasocial relationships can be formed by reinforcing reciprocal feelings, creating the illusion of two-way communication, and deepening the relationship between media charms and audiences in ways that traditional media cannot (Lissitsa & Kushnirovich, 2020). In addition, an empirical study on parasocial relationships in new media shows that the interaction properties of digital environments such as Facebook, Instagram, and X can promote parasocial interactions and encourage some users to develop more parasocial relationships than interpersonal relationships (C. P. Chen, 2016; S.-A. A. Jin & Park, 2009).

Relatedly, Hollebeek et al. (2014) reported that consumer involvement can increase the positive relationship between brand connection and brand usage intention through consumer engagement in the context of social media. The interactive features of social media can promote relationships with various parties and reduce doubts about a brand; thus, parasocial relationships are predicted to influence responses related to brands that connect with audiences or consumers. Escalas & Bettman (2017) added that the parasocial relationship formed by consumers with celebrity endorsers can mediate the effect of celebrity endorsement on self-brand connection. This finding is also supported by research conducted by Burnasheva & Suh (2020), who reported that parasocial relationships positively moderate self-brand connection.

Moreover, Eyal & Dailey (2012) reported that the more satisfied a person is with their relationship, the more likely they are to expose themselves to media content and enjoy it. In terms of building commitment, research on the nature of parasocial relationships shows that the nature and quality of the relationship significantly contribute to the strength of the relationship among audiences. Some researchers argue that the impact of persuasive communication can be enhanced only during the later stages of a parasocial relationship. This may be because strong parasocial relationships can be attributed to the characteristics possessed by media fascination (Amos et al., 2008; Breves et al., 2019; Chung & Cho, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017; J. E. Lee & Watkins, 2016; G. S. Stever, 1991).

On the basis of the above findings, this study discusses the relationship between parasocial relationships and brand connection and its influence on rational quality mediated by brand connection. The concept of source credibility refers to communicator expertise (i.e., the extent to which the influencer is believed to be a valid source of information) and trustworthiness (i.e., the perceived trustworthiness and honesty of the social media influencer) and is positively associated with persuasive communication effectiveness (Breves et al., 2019). The tendency of audiences and followers to attribute high levels of source credibility to social media influencers can lead to much stronger parasocial relationships (Chung & Cho, 2017; Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017). The relationships among social media interactions, parasocial relationships, brand connections and relational quality with influencers as moderators are the main focus of discussion in this study.

This research answers how rational quality will arise in the millennial generation by analyzing, from the point of view, that social media interaction can affect the parasocial relationship created between the audience and the influencer, with the relationship built on the basis of the formation of close feelings between the audience and the influencer (brand connection),

which is expected to create a sense of trust and satisfaction with the audience's relationship with the influencer (relational quality) (Figure 1).

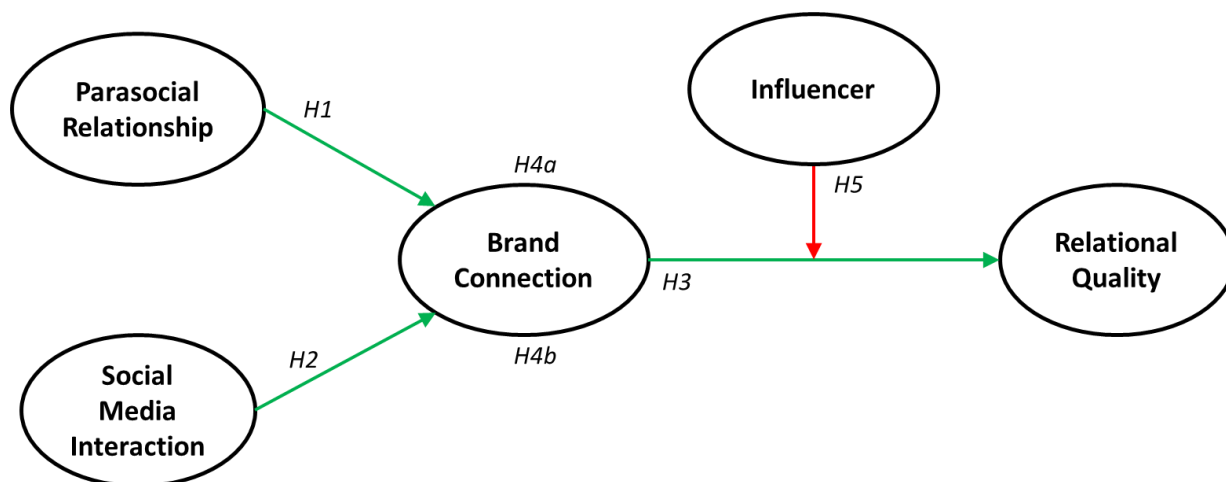


Figure 1 Research Model.

### 3. Methodology

The researchers used an associative research approach to investigate the relationships among the variables in this study, using a quantitative research method to collect and analyze the data. The units of analysis were individuals who were millennials (born between 1981 and 1996) and who had used social media (such as YouTube, Instagram, Tiktok, Facebook, WhatsApp, WeChat, etc.). have influencer identities who have reviewed skincare products and become consumers of skincare products. The study used a cross-sectional time horizon, and data were collected through a questionnaire that was administered only once to each respondent. The study focused on three groups of variables: independent, dependent, and mediating. Two sources of data were collected, including primary data obtained through distributing questionnaires and secondary data obtained from journals, articles, previous research, e-books, and other online sources.

The main target population in this study is millennial consumers who purchased skincare products because they see influencers they like on social media with an age range of 27 years to 41 years in 2023 or who were born between 1981 and 1996. In SEM, sample size plays an important role in the estimation and interpretation of results (Hair et al., 2019). This study uses the formula proposed by Hair to calculate the sample size. The minimum sample size for SEM according to (Hair et al., 2019) is as follows: (number of indicators) × (5 to 10 times). On the basis of these guidelines and the number of indicators on the questionnaire used in this study, the estimate is as follows: Sample = 48 × 5 = 240 respondents, and this number may change depending on the results of the pretest or instrument test conducted at a later stage.

The researchers used simple random sampling, which is a method where each member of the population has an equal probability of being selected as part of the sample. In this technique, each individual or element in the population has an equal chance of being selected, and the selection of one element does not affect the probability of selecting another element (Malhotra et al., 2017). Afterwards, questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants through an online survey via Google Forms. The collected data were then analyzed via the structural equation modeling-partial least squares (SEM-PLS) method with the SmartPLS version 3.0 software program to determine the relationships between the independent and dependent variables.

The measurement model's validity was evaluated through testing convergent and discriminant validity. The results demonstrated that the questionnaire possessed adequate convergent and discriminant validity. The reliability of the indicators was assessed via Cronbach's alpha, and values exceeding 0.70 indicated that all the indicators were reliable. The average variance extracted (AVE) was equal to or greater than 0.5, which indicates that all the variables and indicators are valid and reliable.

The path coefficient is a measure that can describe the strength and direction of the relationship between independent variables (exogenous) and dependent variables (endogenous) in a research model. The path coefficient can measure how much a change in an exogenous variable will result in a change in an endogenous variable, taking into account the effects of other variables in the model. In this study, seven hypotheses are tested, and they can be classified into two categories of relationships: five hypotheses describe direct relationships, whereas two hypotheses describe indirect relationships.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The development of online businesses and e-commerce is currently the impact of the rapid growth of the internet. This change has changed the business process from what was originally carried out face-to-face (offline) to more of an online



method (Aryanto, 2020). This condition makes millennial consumers the main target in marketing because they are exposed to many stimuli from various platforms on the internet, especially social media.

Currently, Indonesian society has adapted to the rapid development of technology and the internet. In 2021, there were 170 million active social media users in Indonesia, approximately 61.8% of the total population, and this number will continue to increase (Novianty, 2021). At this time, social media has also become a relevant promotional tool for businesses, especially for those who want to use it to promote their products and brands.

Research from Statista Advertising shows that in 2020, traditional television stations experienced a 6% decline in advertising revenue globally. In contrast, streaming service providers recorded an 11% increase in revenue in the same year (Pink, 2020). This information explains how companies are now starting to shift to online marketing strategies.

Changes in digital marketing also affect consumer habits. Today, consumers spend more time accessing the internet and social media (Arianto, 2020). The increase in marketing through social media as a promotional tool has also resulted in some interesting facts about influencers as one of the influencer methods. A study reported by Tech Insider reported that 73% of teens and young adults feel a greater sense of connection with influencers than with conventional celebrities or movie stars (Droesch, 2020). In addition, a survey from Forbes magazine revealed that 92% of consumers trust influencers more than traditional advertisements or endorsements by celebrities do. One of the reasons for this growing trend is that influencers are considered trendsetters who connect with millennial consumers rather than with traditional celebrities, as influencers are considered to be able to spread the message of an advertisement to their audience in a more authentic and natural way (Geysler, 2022; Lou & Yuan, 2019).

The relationships that influencers build with their followers have significant marketing implications for influencers. Over time, the relationship between influencers and their followers (millennial consumers) will grow stronger, which in turn will build trust and closeness with the influencer (S. V. Jin et al., 2019). The relationships created between influencers and millennial consumers increase consumer trust and closeness to influencers. A study by Tukachinsky & Stever (2019) revealed that the impact of persuasive communication can be enhanced by building parasocial relationships. This situation can occur if a parasocial relationship is well built where an effective parasocial relationship is built on the basis of the closeness of character and between the influencer and his/her followers (millennial consumers).

By understanding this relationship, the skincare business and influencer in Indonesia can effectively use these marketing strategies to increase relational quality to lead to real purchases. This research can provide valuable insights for Indonesia skincare companies to effectively target Generation Z consumers in Indonesia and increase sales. The results of the hypothesis analysis based on the path coefficient are as follows:

The results of the path coefficient test in Table 1 indicate that several relationships have a significant effect, including Hypothesis 1 (H1), namely, parasocial relationships have a significant effect on brand connection, which can be seen on the basis of the t statistic value (5.065 > 1.96) and p value (0.000 < 0.05), namely, social media interaction, has a relationship with brand connection, which can be seen on the basis of the t statistics (8.263 > 1.96) and p values (0.000 < 0.05). Hypothesis 3 (H3), namely, brand connection, has a relationship with relational quality, which can be seen on the basis of the t statistics (5.735 > 1.96) and p values (0.000 < 0.05).

**Table 1** Coefficient determination (P value) results of the direct effect.

Hypotheses	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Remarks
Parasocial Relationship -> Brand Connection (H1)	0.334	0.343	0.066	5.065	0.000	Accept
Social Media Interaction -> Brand Connection (H2)	0.537	0.530	0.065	8.263	0.000	Accept
Brand Connection -> Relational Quality (H3)	0.249	0.250	0.043	5.735	0.000	Accept
(Influencer as moderating effect) on Brand Connection -> Relational Quality (H5)	0.032	0.032	0.029	1.076	0.283	Reject

The results of this path coefficient indicate that there is one hypothesis that has no effect, namely, Hypothesis 5 (H5), namely, that the influencer has a moderating effect on brand connection and relational quality, with a t statistic value of 1.076 < 1.96 and p value of 0.283 > 0.05.

On the basis of the results of the path coefficient test in Table 2, several relationships have a significant effect, including Hypothesis 1 (H1), namely, parasocial relationships have a significant effect on brand connection. This can be seen on the basis of the t statistic value (5.065 > 1.96) and p value (0.000 < 0.05), namely, social media interaction, has a relationship with brand connection, which can be seen on the basis of the t statistics (8.263 > 1.96) and p values (0.000 < 0.05). Hypothesis 3 (H3), namely, brand connection, has a relationship with relational quality, which can be seen on the basis of the t statistics (5.735 > 1.96) and p values (0.000 < 0.05).



**Table 2** Coefficient determination (P value) results of the indirect effect.

Hypotheses	Original Sample (O)	Sample Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (STDEV)	T Statistics ( O/STDEV )	P Values	Remarks
Parasocial Relationship -> Brand Connection -> Relational Quality (H4a)	0.083	0.086	0.022	3.717	0.000	Accept
Social Media Interaction -> Brand Connection -> Relational Quality (H4b)	0.134	0.133	0.030	4.481	0.000	Accept

The results of this path coefficient indicate that there is one hypothesis that has no effect, namely, Hypothesis 5 (H5), namely, that the influencer has a moderating effect on brand connection and relational quality, with a t statistic value of (1.076 < 1.96) and p value of 0.283 > 0.05.

The results of testing the hypothesis that parasocial relationships affect brand connection show that the p value < the level of significance. This means that there is a positive and significant influence on the relationship between parasocial relationships and brand connection. The interpretation of this result is that the existence of parasocial relationships between consumers and an entity, such as a brand or character, positively and significantly affects the level of personal connection or consumer self-identification with the brand (brand connection). In other words, the stronger the parasocial relationship is, the greater the level of consumer personal connection to the brand or character. This result indicates that the existence of parasocial relationships can be a key factor in building a deep personal connection between consumers and brands, which can then have a positive effect on consumers' self-identification with the brand.

The study revealed a significant positive influence of social media interaction on parasocial relationships, which was in line with the findings of Su et al. (2021), who explored the relationship between social media influencer interaction and parasocial relationships. Su et al.'s research highlighted a number of important aspects, including the physical attractiveness of the influencer character and similarity with the media character's personality, as factors that enhance parasocial relationships. Through this, companies can consider how the interaction, traits, characteristics and physical attractiveness of influencers approach the brand or product image to build brand linkages with audiences more appropriately.

The interpretation of these results is that parasocial relationships built between consumers and an entity, such as a brand or public figure, have a significant positive effect on relational quality. That is, the stronger the parasocial relationship is, the better the relational quality formed between the consumer and the entity. This result is in line with the understanding that perceptions of familiarity and emotional involvement in parasocial relationships can enrich and strengthen the relational quality between consumers and the brand or figure that is the object of their parasocial relationship. Thus, satisfaction with professionalism, understanding expectations, credibility and trust are intertwined in shaping the relational quality between millennial consumers and influencers or brands. These findings provide valuable guidance for marketing practitioners to improve their strategies by paying attention to these elements, ensuring that the relationships built with millennial consumers through parasocial relationships can achieve optimal levels of relational quality.

## 5. Conclusions

Research has led to several conclusions related to the influence of social media interactions with influencers, and the parasocial relationship that is built with influencers in skincare products has a significant influence on the formation of brand connections and relational quality, either directly or indirectly. Influencer interaction with audiences on social media platforms significantly influences parasocial real-time directly and relational quality indirectly through brand connections. Moreover, there was a significant impact of parasocial relationships on brand connection directly and of relational quality indirectly through brand connection. Moreover, brand connection has also been proven to directly impact the formation of relational quality, but the influencer was not a concrete moderator of this relationship.

On the basis of these findings, researchers suggest that in the skincare industry, marketing strategies can be improved by working with influencers who have physical attractiveness and personalities that are in line with the brand. In addition, to improve the quality of relationships with consumers, brands should create social media content that is informative, creative and easily accessible. Influencers' credibility, ability to understand the audience, and ease of access to information through their social media accounts are important factors in building strong relationships with consumers, which ultimately increases brand purchase rates.

Although this study makes a significant contribution to understanding the relationships among social media interactions, parasocial relationships and consumer behavior related to skincare brands, there are some weaknesses that need to be acknowledged. First, this study may be limited to a specific context, namely, skincare brands, so generalization of the findings to other contexts is necessary. In addressing this, future research can expand the scope of different industries or brands to ensure the applicability of the findings. Second, the measurement of certain variables, such as social media interaction, can be subjective and depends on individual perceptions. Research can develop more objective measurement methods or a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gain more comprehensive insights. In addition, research could involve more in-depth analysis techniques, such as sentiment analysis of content generated by influencers. Future research could also

explore the long-term impact of parasocial relationships with social media influencers on brands. For example, how the sustainability of these relationships may affect consumer loyalty or how changes in influencer content may affect relationship dynamics.

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### Ethical considerations

This research was built by upholding ethical values, the confidentiality of voluntary participants was maintained.

### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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