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Research Paper

An integrated systematic review and bibliometric analysis of parasocial interaction from social media influencers' perspective in the hospitality industry

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Abstract

Parasocial interaction (PSI) has become a key concept in explaining how social media influencers (SMIs) shape consumer decision-making in the hospitality industry. Despite its growing significance, existing research remains fragmented, with PSI and SMI often examined separately in the context of marketing and communication. This paper combines the bibliometric mapping with a systematic review by using the PRISMA protocol to provide a consolidated view of PSI in terms of the SMI perspective in the hospitality industry. Overall, 139 studies related to SMI / PSI were mapped on the thematic evolution framework, and a critical synthesis of 36 studies related to the relation between PSI and SMI took place. Results indicate that influencer characteristics like attractiveness, expertise, trustworthiness, and relatability are always associated with the activation of PSI, which in turn drives the results of trust, booking intention, eWOM, loyalty, and long-term customer value. Based on the plotted domain theories of Source Credibility, PSI, and Social Learning, the paper generates a single framework and suggests platform-specific PSI values in the Asian markets, thus connecting the metrics of interactions with their actual performance results.

Keywords: Parasocial interaction, Social media influencers, Bibliometric analysis, Hospitality industry, PSI-SMI research, SLR.

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Introduction

The intensive evolution of social media and digital technologies over the last ten years has significantly changed everyday life, working, and leisure (Hassanzadeh et al., 2023; Kim and Kim, 2021; Kim and Tussyadiah, 2013). Social media platforms (SMPs) have made media production democratic, and anyone can produce content and affect others, which has led to the emergence of a powerful new industry (Chung and Cho, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). They can even become SMIs (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2024), who can shape the attitudes and actions of others through their stories and messages. Individuals can interact with SMIs through SMPs by expressing admiration, leaving comments, and sharing (Li et al., 2023) or creating content (Kaur et al., 2019). The users, however, engage with content differently in an inconsistent manner, and every person has different response patterns. Thus, evaluating the effectiveness of captivating content in promoting a brand has become a central topic of academic discussion. Broad online interaction will support personal needs and has been central to the development of the digital economy, unlocking new possibilities for businesses and individuals (Rana et al., 2024). SMIs have the ability to build close relationships with their followers through sharing personal content and interacting regularly. They can be celebrities, experts in a specific field, or ordinary people who can create attractive content and interact strongly with the community (Li et al., 2024). The hospitality industry is closely linked to SMIs (Bastrygina et al., 2024), as travel-related SMIs often document their experiences before, during, and after their trips, creating authentic stories (Pop et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2023). With the help of these real-time experience-sharing platforms, hospitality and tourism marketers have the opportunity to build mutually beneficial alliances with digital influencers, which is highly effective. Due to the widespread popularity of SMPs, SMIs' profiles with many followers have become indispensable resources for those needing travel. These profiles help enhance tourism destinations' digital footprint and serve as invaluable media for marketing campaigns (Ge and Gretzel, 2018). Given the growing importance of influencer marketing (IM) and its crucial relationship to social media interaction, much research has been conducted in SMIs (Fauzi et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2023; Polat et al., 2023, 2024; Pradhan et al., 2023). Vrontis et al. (2021) conducted a thematic analysis of influencer marketing literature, addressing themes such as influencer characteristics, psychological factors, and content attributes. Pradhan et al. (2023) performed a bibliometric study on the trends of IM, including brand value and influencer practices, whereas Polat et al. (2023) performed a machine learning-based systematic review to investigate the trends of IM and user-generated video in the hospitality and tourism industry. Even though the research on SMIs in the hospitality industry has gained momentum (Chang et al., 2023; Javed et al., 2025), most studies were conducted on the traits of the influencers, purchases of consumers, and brand success, paying minimal attention to the psychological processes that motivate such relationships. Therefore, it will be necessary to comprehend the aspects that enable these relationships to be fulfilling and joyful (Joshi et al., 2023).

In contrast, numerous studies figured out PSI and PSR in the context of communication and marketing. The discussion of PSI and PSR (Tukachinsky et al., 2020; Sheng, 2025) has few mentions of the realities of hotel services. Furthermore, there is a tendency of researchers to confuse PSI and PSR, which results in the bias in the operationalization and measurement of these constructs (Lu et al., 2023; Youn and Cho, 2023). Combined with the independent research on SMIs and PSI presented

above, this fragmentation has shown that there is a distinct gap in the literature: there are studies on SMIs and studies on PSI, but there is no systematic review studying PSI as the mediating variable of influencer marketing in the hospitality setting, in particular, in Asian markets, where digitalization and mobile-first consumerism tendencies are rapidly driving influencer usage (Horng et al., 2024). Addressing this gap is crucial for advancing theory and improving managerial practice, as it clarifies how social media indicators cultivate trust, loyalty, and lasting consumer–brand relationships in the hospitality industry. Accordingly, the current study outlines a series of research questions that will examine the mediating role of the PSI as a mechanism linking SMIs in online hotel-reservation settings.

RQ1: What are the key attributes of SMIs that trigger PSI in the hospitality context?

RQ2: What theoretical frameworks have been applied to explain the SMI–PSI nexus, and how can they be integrated to strengthen both conceptual clarity and practical implications for hospitality businesses?

RQ3: How does PSI mechanize (construct) the relationship between SMIs, brand, and consumer outcomes in hospitality contexts?

This article comprises five sections. The first section is the introduction, followed by the methodology in section two. The third section presents the study findings and discussion. The fourth section provides the conclusion and limitations. The final section deals with practical implications for Asian businesses.

Methodology

The purpose of the present study was a systematic literature review that included a bibliometric analysis to explore the phenomenon of PSI applied to SMIs in the hospitality industry. The bibliometric methodology, which is widespread in the literature, simplifies identifying research gaps, current trends, and emerging trends (Joshi et al., 2023; Pradhan et al., 2023; Vrontis et al., 2021). The current review has included peer-reviewed articles published to 15 August 2025 to adhere to the PRISMA protocol to ensure methodological transparency and reproducibility.

First, two main bibliographic databases, namely Web of Science (WoS) and Scopus, were chosen to define relevant studies due to their all-inclusive peer-reviewed content. The retrieval strings were based on the Boolean and were designed to search for existing research on the topics of SMIs, PSI, and hospitality environments. In the WoS database, the query *("Social media influencer" OR "Parasocial Interaction" AND "hospitality industry")* was applied to restrict the search to titles, abstracts, and keywords. A similar query using *"hospitality industry"* was employed in Scopus, with the search likewise limited to titles, abstracts, and keywords. The initial search and screening gave 2,452 documents (see Table 1).

During the screening stage, Scopus exports in CSV format provided all the metadata, whereas WoS exports in Excel retained cited references and keywords with a higher level of accuracy (guided by Lim et al. (2024)). Bibliometrix (an R package with convert and mergeDbSources functions) and VOSviewer in RStudio were then used

to harmonize and merge the two datasets. Deduplication was done in two steps, namely, the elimination of 747 records with the same DOIs and 471 records with identical titles, two retracted articles, and records do not present in the ABS list, respectively. The total corpus was 1328 different records, which is the foundation of the subsequent bibliometric study.

To further amend the dataset, a thesaurus file was created to standardize terminology by combining terms that are synonymous and correcting orthographic conflicts. The data were further cleaned and converted into formats that are compatible with VOSviewer, thus supporting the visualization of the frequency of the keywords, conceptual frameworks, and theme groups. Bibliometrix and VOSviewer were used simultaneously to provide multidimensional bibliometric insight, which identified the intellectual framework, new trends, and gaps in knowledge about PSI and SMIs within the hospitality sector.

At the eligibility step, the abstracts were read to find out their relevance to the hospitality industry. Out of 1,189 records, 798 were excluded due to being irrelevant to the hospitality industry, whereas 391 were removed due to having no specific relevance to SMIs or PSI. This narrowing down produced 139 eligible articles.

Table 1: Identification, screening and eligibility criteria flowchart

Stages	Details	Records
Identification	*First search string*: WoS: 2084; Scopus: 2073. WoS: 920 (Categories include Business, Management, Communication, Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism with n=1041; With Articles n=949; Included SSCI, ESCI, SCI-Expanded, A&HCI with n=930, and include English language with n=920) Scopus: 1532 (with Social Sciences, Business Management and Accounting, Art and Humanities n=2014; with Articles n=1635, with English language n=1604; Time: 2014 to present n=1532)	4157
	Total after initial filtering	2452
Screening	747 duplicate records based on DOI, 4 duplicate records based on title similarity, 2 retracted records, 371 records not listed in ABS and removed from early access.	
	Remaining after screening	1328
Eligibility	Not relevant to Hospitality industry with n = 798 (based on abstract, title) Not explicitly focused on SMI or PSI with n =391 (based on abstract, title)	530
	Remaining eligible	139
Inclusion	Records were screened by full-text (the keyword is *"SMI" AND "PSI" AND "Hospitality industry"*)	36

(Source: Authors, 2025)

At the last stage, inclusion, the full-text filtering stage used keywords such as *"Social Media Influencers" AND "Parasocial Interaction" AND "Hospitality industry"* ensure alignment with this research scope. Finally, 36 most relevant articles are

chosen to proceed with the further work of this study.

Results and Discussion

RQ1. What are the key attributes of SMIs that trigger PSI in hospitality context?

A review of 36 key studies on PSI–SMI in hospitality shows that credibility and expertise are the most frequently reported features (Akhtar and Siddiqi, 2024; Horng et al., 2024; Yousaf, 2022) (see Table 2). Past research shows that more influential personalities who can be perceived as well-informed, open, and trustworthy (Ong et al., 2024) will encourage higher PSI (Sheng et al., 2025), which, in turn, will raise the engagement and booking intentions (Akhtar et al., 2024; Le and Hancer, 2021).

It is further evidenced that there is a strong correlation of the outcomes in the hospitality industry with both physical and social attractiveness of SMIs. Over fifty-five percent of the reviewed studies show that attractiveness positively influences the relatability and appeal, which are important aspects of PSI formation (Le and Hancer, 2021). Specifically, Jang et al. (2021) and Pham et al. (2024) identified that the perceived society and value of information were substantially boosted by the attractiveness of influencers. Personalized visuals, such as vlogs and short videos reflecting the influencer's travel experiences, were found to enhance PSI through engaging storytelling and both hedonic and utilitarian content (Mainolfi et al., 2022).

Lastly, about fifteen percent of the analyzed articles revealed an increased initial attraction based on remarks and likes, whereas the use of communication influenced higher perceived support strength and devotion to the brand (Akhtar and Siddiqui, 2024; Akhtar et al., 2024). Similarly, congruence in the lifestyle, interests, and values can also contribute to strengthening the parasocial bond and make the endorsement of hospitality by influencers more convincing (Yousef, 2022; Pham et al., 2024). All of the characteristics provide unique information on the dynamics of how SMIs operate and their adjustment tactics in their respective fields (Yuan and Lou, 2020). As Table 2 reveals, studies do not focus on the same characteristics; some studies focus on specific traits, whereas others explore a wider range of characteristics.

Table 2: Characteristics of SMI related to the follower behavior in the hospitality

Characteristics of SMI	Exemplary studies
Credibility/ Trustworthiness	Horng et al. (2024); Le and Hancer, (2021); Ki et al. (2022); Yousaf (2022); Reinikainen et al. (2020); Zhang et al. (2024); Akhtar et al. (2024); Akhtar and Siddiqi, (2024); Nguyen et al. (2025); Jang et al. (2021); Mainolfi et al. (2022); Pham et al. (2024)
Expertise	Bhattacharya (2023); Schouten et al. (2020); Aw and Chuah (2021); Yousaf (2022); Agnihotri et al. (2023); Olfat et al. (2024); Horng et al. (2024); Nguyen et al. (2025); Jang et al. (2021); Pham et al. (2024); Le and Hancer, (2021)
Attractiveness	Le and Hancer, (2021); Bhattacharya (2023), Sokolova and Kefi (2020), Ki et al. (2022), Aw and Chuah (2021), Hassanzadeh et al. (2023), Zhang et al. (2024); Jang et al. (2021); Pham et al. (2024)

Characteristics of SMI	Exemplary studies
Similarity/ Homophily	Schouten et al. (2020); Hassanzadeh et al. (2023); Lou and Yuan (2019); Yousaf (2022); Pham et al. (2024)
Perceived Interactivity	Akhtar et al. (2024), Aw and Chuah (2021), Ki et al. (2022); Akhtar and Siddiqi, (2024)
Informativeness	Soltani et al. (2021); Horng et al. (2024)
Perceived Unique	Agnihotri et al. (2023)

(Source: Authors, 2025)

RQ2. What theories can be employed to conceptualize and analyze the relationship between PSI-SMI in the hospitality context?

The analysis revealed that the 36 articles most relevant to the topic of SMIs and PSI in the hospitality context employed a total of 28 different theories (Table 3). Among these, *Parasocial Interaction Theory* emerged as the most frequently used, appearing in 12 articles. Other theories, such as *Source Credibility Theory, Social Learning Theory, Use and Gratification Theory, Social Cognitive Theory, and Dual-process Theory of Cognitive Reasoning*, were also commonly utilized ($n \geq 3$).

The PSI Theory (Horton and Wohl, 1956) states that people form unidirectional yet emotionally salient relations with media personalities, which has been especially relevant in the analysis of SMI in the hospitality industry. In this respect, the followers often view the influencers as friends and thus develop confidence and loyalty amidst the hotel guests (Sheng et al., 2025). This phenomenon has also shed more light on complementary theoretical frameworks. The Source Credibility Theory holds that effective persuasion depends on the perceived authority and credibility of an influencer and boosts the frequency of interaction and intentions to behave in specific ways (Mainolfi et al., 2022). The Social Learning Theory argues that followers follow the behaviors of influencers, which are supported by PSI processes (Le and Hancer, 2021; Soltani et al., 2021). The Uses and Gratifications Theory states that audiences are active, informational, entertaining, and socially connected, thus achieving the feeling of proximity with PSI (Horng et al., 2024). Lastly, Dual-Process Theory distinguishes between central routes, which focus on content, and peripheral routes, which focus on attractiveness and popularity, both enhanced with PSI (Tao et al., 2024). SMI-PSI research is multidimensional, as also demonstrated by the various theoretical frameworks that are used to explain the relationships between SMIs and their followers, such as Social Comparison Theory, Social Exchange Theory, Social Presence Theory, Social Identity Theory, and Social Influence Theory. Those theories that deal with the communicative and technological aspects are the media-centered theories: the Technology Attraction Model, the Source Effect Theory, and the Social Media Influencer Value Model.

Table 3: Theoretical foundations employed in publications on SMI and PSI in the hospitality context

No.	Theoretical foundations	No documents	Exemplary studies
1	PSI Theory	11	Reinikainen et al. (2020); Zhang et al. (2024); Wellman (2021); Zheng et al. (2020); Rasmussen (2018); Bhattacharya

No.	Theoretical foundations	No documents	Exemplary studies
			(2023); Jin and Ryu (2020); Chen et al. (2022); Dewantara et al. (2023); Horng et al. (2024); Liu et al. (2024).
2	Source Credibility Theory	5	Mainolfi et al., (2022); Le and Hancer (2021); Nguyen et al., (2025); Pham et al., (2024); Le and Ryu (2023)
3	Social Learning Theory	4	Le and Hancer (2021); Soltani et al. (2021); Yousaf (2022); Olfat et al. (2024).
4	Dual-process Theory	4	Han and Zhang (2023); Tao et al. (2024); Kapoor et al. (2024); Jang et al. (2021).
5	U&G Theory	3	Horng et al. (2024); Tao et al. (2024); Mainolfi et al., (2022).
6	Social Cognitive Theory	3	Shan et al. (2020), Olfat et al. (2024), Aw et al. (2021).
7	S-O-R Theory	2	Aw et al. (2021); Yousaf (2022).
8	Social Influence Theory	2	Agnihotri et al. (2023), Akhtar et al. (2024)
9	Persuasion Knowledge Model	2	Pfeuffer et al. (2021), Lou et al. (2019)
10	Social Comparison Theory	2	Hassanzadeh et al. (2023), Jin and Ryu (2020)
11	Social Exchange Theory	2	Touni et al. (2022), Kim and Kim (2021)
12	Meaning Transfer Model	2	Agnihotri et al. (2023), Aw et al. (2021)
13	Social Presence Theory	1	Jin et al. (2019)
14	Social Defaults Theory	1	Ki et al. (2022)
15	Source Effect Theory	1	Zhang et al. (2024)
16	Social Identity Theory	1	Zhang et al. (2024)
17	Self-Congruity Theory	1	Xu (Rinka) and Pratt (2018)
18	Attribution Theory	1	Aw and Chuah (2021)
19	Media Richness Theory	1	Van der Harst and Angelopoulos (2024)
20	Celebrity Influence Model	1	Wahab et al. (2022)
21	Theory of Reasoned Action	1	Olfat et al. (2024)
22	Cognitive Fit Theory	1	Liu et al. (2024)
23	Construal Level Theory	1	Liu et al. (2024)
24	Celebrity Endorsement Theory	1	Chung and Cho (2017)
25	Customer Journey Theory	1	Pop et al. (2022)
26	Customer Inspiration Theory	1	Ki et al. (2022)
27	Expectancy Violations Theory	1	Pfeuffer et al. (2021)
28	SMI Value Model	1	Lou and Yuan (2019)
	Total	**57**	

(Source: Authors, 2024)

RQ3: How does PSI mechanize (construct) the relationship between SMIs, brand, and consumer outcomes in hospitality contexts?

RQ3 aims to identify the constructs that effectively explain PSI from the perspective of SMIs in hospitality marketing. These constructs are organized into testable

categories, as illustrated in Figure 1 with keyword co-occurrence and bibliographic coupling analysis. The categories of antecedents (Table 5), mediators and moderators (Table 6), and outcomes (Table 7) are subdivided according to thematic groupings (see Appendix). The subcategories, such as customer-, brand-, content-, influencer-, and technology-related, are intuitively named to reflect their respective themes. Most hospitality research on SMI and PSI examines how SMI strategies shape emotional, behavioral, and cognitive aspects of PSI and the mechanisms that mediate or moderate these effects. As seen in Figure 1, these interrelated dynamics are quite comprehensive.

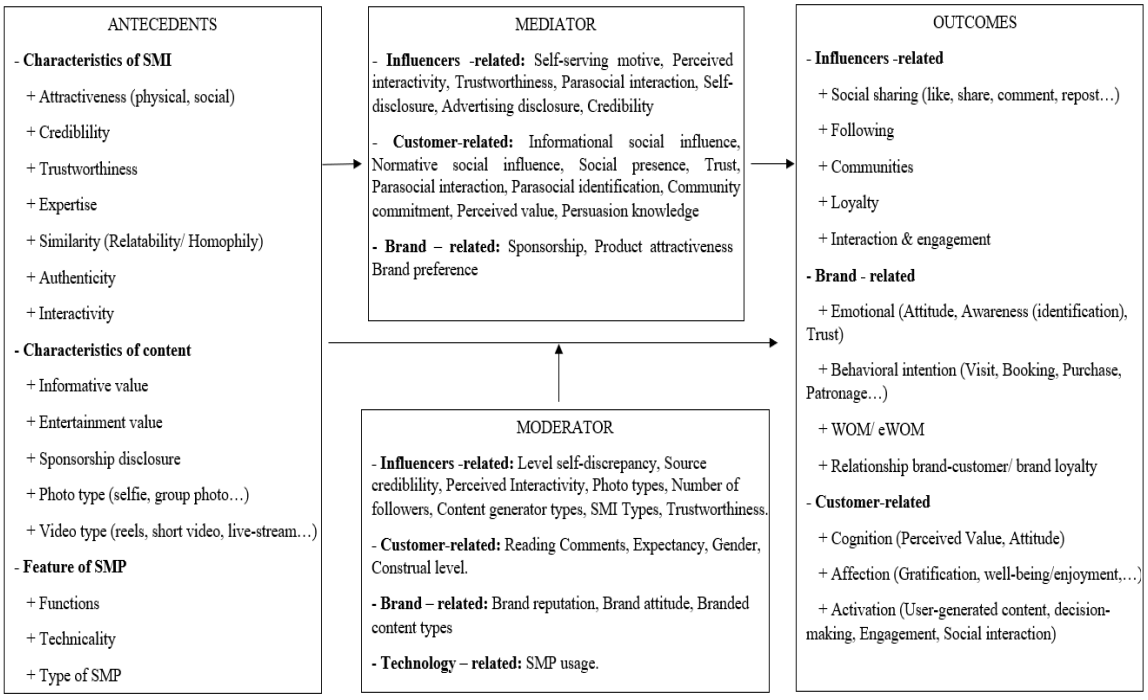
As regards antecedents, Figure 1 displays fifteen PSI constructs that are grouped into three clusters: SMI-related, content-related, and SMP-related. While this breadth suggests a well-established research domain, the distribution of constructs reveals uneven emphasis. First, within the SMI-related category, credibility (n=101) overwhelmingly dominates, followed by perceived authenticity (n=34) and attractiveness (n=32, both physical and social dimensions). In comparison, less well-explored constructs include similarity/homophily (n=11) and involvement (n=21), although relational closeness and shared identity could be the root cause of greater audience engagement levels with some influencers than with others. This shows a possibility of widening the credibility-authenticity paradigm and investigating relational and motivational elements that can also be considered quite significant, as they are not thoroughly researched. Second, the content-related antecedents are also evident, although they seem to be on a narrower side, with the head of the list being the entertainment (n=24). The presence of opportunities in the field of entertainment-related research reflects a larger trend toward the dominance of emotions, hedonic strategies, and focusing on engaging, entertaining content as a stimulus of PSI. However, informativeness (n=7) and sponsorship (n=6) are just secondary, and therefore it seems that there is a research bias leading to emotional appeal instead of cognitive processing. Such an imbalance would create the risk of neglecting the role of the utilitarian content, as it might be vital in the case of hospitality, where the customer will base his bookings on convenient and credible information. Third, the SMP-related antecedents connote the structural opportunities of platforms, and Twitter (n=29), YouTube (n=23), and Facebook (n=23) were prevalent. Such recent trends as Instagram and TikTok, which are gaining more and more dominance in the travel and hospitality sector, do not show up, suggesting a temporal difference between the travel and academic industries.

Regarding mediators and moderators, the literature is fragmented, with some studies seeking to get to the underlying mechanisms. The customer-related mediators are informational and normative social influence (Akhtar et al., 2024) and trust (Liu et al., 2024) that reaffirm the importance of the Social Influence Theory. However, brand-related mediators such as sponsorship and brand favoritism are relegated as being peripheral, even though the brand-consumer relationship is central to hospitality. Influencer-related mediators, such as self-disclosure and trustworthiness, show that PSI has an interpersonal component to it, which is consistent with parasocial relationship theory. It is possible to note that the disproportion between categories may indicate that researchers are well able to track cognitive and social mechanisms on the customer side, but brand- and influencer-related pathways remain underdeveloped to provide the comprehensive picture.

Moderators are mixed in terms of diversity; however, it is not applied to the same degree. At the customer level, gender and construal level are examples of demographic and psychological segmentation (Liu et al., 2024), while brand-level moderators are rarely considered. The use of SMPs shows how technology can moderate outcomes. However, limited attention to algorithms and platform controls (Wahab et al., 2022) makes it unclear how they affect content visibility and user interaction.

The outcomes of PSI-SMI are the most developed area, structured into brand-, influencer-, and customer-related consequences. Notably, purchase intention (n=46) and WOM/eWOM (n=43) dominate brand-related outcomes, reflecting the performance-driven orientation of much marketing research. While this emphasis underscores the tangible value of PSI for brands, it also reveals a narrow outcome orientation that prioritizes short-term transactional gains over long-term relational outcomes, such as trust and attachment, which receive comparatively less attention. On the influencer side, engagement (n=29) and loyalty (n=19) highlight the reciprocal nature of PSI, yet follower growth and community-building are underexplored, despite their relevance in hospitality, where peer recommendations are vital. Customer-related outcomes present a greater balance, spanning cognition, affection, and activation. However, constructs like gratification (n=32) and well-being (n=24) dominate, pointing to an affective bias, while more nuanced aspects such as social comparison (n=9) remain marginal.

Figure 1: The constructs of the relationship between SMI and PSI



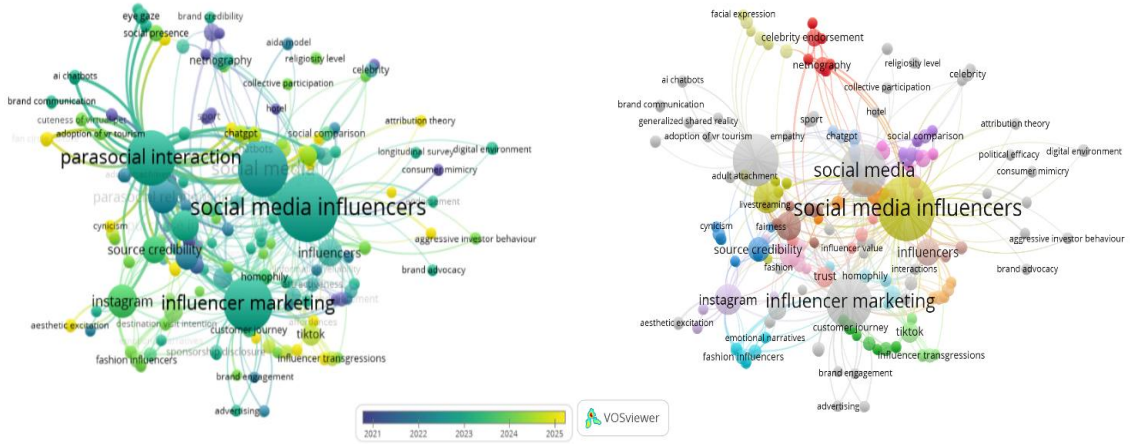
(Source: Authors, 2025)

Thematic Perspectives: Delving into the Data

Co-occurrence analysis was conducted to reveal the main themes in current PSI-SMI research. In this work, thematic clustering of constructs was carried out systematically. First, we employed automated clustering methods with Bibliometrix in R and VOSviewer that identified clusters of keywords and constructs according to co-occurrence and network connections. The analysis included all keywords, encompassing both author-provided and indexed terms, with a minimum threshold of three occurrences per keyword. 491 keywords out of the total of 139 released articles found four distinct clusters as visualized using the network analysis in Figure 2b.

The *grey cluster* shows the central position of PSI in the scenario of SMIs in the marketing of hospitality. Whereas SMIs offer critical antecedents (trustworthiness, credibility, attractiveness, and quality of content), PSI is the psychological process that converts the above-mentioned features into intimacy and relational proximity to followers. In its turn, influencer marketing gives the actual background where PSI can be converted into practical results, such as booking intention, brand engagement, word-of-mouth, and customer loyalty. This mediatory role highlights that PSI is not an artificial creation by media and psychology research but a key intermediary, which elucidates how the influence of the persuasiveness of SMIs can be translated into quantifiable business benefit. Incorporating PSI into influencer marketing models is crucial in the hospitality context, where trust, emotions, and service experience are of utmost importance, to capture the behavioral and psychological aspects of consumer decisions. The *red cluster is* labeled "Credibility and Endorsement." This construct focuses on credibility and legitimacy, including credible sources, brand credibility, and celebrity endorsements. It is grounded in the AIDA model and related concepts such as religiosity and social comparison. Consumers' perceptions of reliability and value alignment have the strongest influence on how they assess influencer credibility. This cluster emphasizes the importance of credibility-based antecedents in creating effective PSI in marketing hospitality and tourism. Next, the *Green Cluster* is named Influencer Marketing and Brand Engagement. The second group focused on influencer marketing and brand interaction. The keywords are central to social media influencers, influencer marketing, customer journey, brand engagement, and advertising, and platforms such as TikTok and Instagram are often mentioned. This stream underscores that influencer-led campaigns directly impact consumer behaviors like brand advocacy and purchase intentions. In addition, it recognizes the possible dangers, including influencer offenses, that can harm both parasocial bonds and brand image. This thematic cluster indicates that PSI is essential to consumer involvement and loyalty within the hospitality industry. Next, *the Purple Cluster* named PSI/PSR and Behaviors in Hospitality and Tourism. The third thematic cluster links PSI and PSR to travel/hotel-related outcomes. The appearance of keywords such as 'travel intention', 'destination visit intention', 'Instagram', and 'fashion influencers' indicates that PSI is applicable in determining the tourism choices of consumers. The studies in this cluster indicate that greater PSI could be converted into tangible behavioral consequences, such as booking intentions and visiting a destination. Having incorporated PSI/PSR into the context of hospitality and tourism, this cluster expands the application of the parasocial theories to media research, demonstrating that they can apply to influencing real-life travel/accommodation practices.

Figure 2: Visualization on PSI-SMI research



2a: Overlay Visualization **2b: Network Visualization**

(Source: Analyze from VOS Viewer of Authors, 2025)

Based on the overlay visualization of the 2025 outlook (nodes with yellow highlights, Figure 2a), the number of emerging themes can be identified, which can expand the scope of PSI-SMI research in the hospitality industry. 'AI chatbots' and 'virtual influencers' are keywords that suggest an increased focus on how the use of artificial intelligence as an engagement tool is redefining PSR, which is not limited to traditional human influencers but also to virtual and hybrid ones. Likewise, the appeal of virtual pets and the VR tourism adoption show that the concept of immersive and non-human experiential cues is becoming an important potential antecedent of PSI, which can be used to develop an emotional attachment to consumers. Consumer mimicry, digital environments, and aggressive investor behavior are other areas that capture how behavioral economics and digital psychology have been incorporated in the analysis of influencer marketing. Concurrently, with growing worries over sponsorship disclosure and influencer wrongdoing, hospitality brands have been prompted to focus on ethics, transparency, and risk management in their business dealings with influencers. Also, more nuanced constructs such as homophily, empathy, and trust are being given more focus as mediating factors that enhance PSI, taking the field beyond the superficial traits of credibility or appearance to more in-depth and relational/emotional roots

Contributions and Limitations

This study explores PSI from the SMI perspective in hospitality, fundamentally redefining the landscape of influencer marketing in the industry. As far as we can understand, this study is one of the first thorough reviews intended to compile the research on PSI-SMI and to implement it to make direct reference to a specific area of hospitality. In earlier studies, researchers have focused either solely on SMIs (Javed et al., 2025; Polat et al., 2024; Fauzi et al., 2024; Joshi et al., 2023) or have considered PSI in the context of the digital environment overall (Sheng et al., 2025; Breves et al., 2021). Therefore, the research placed both PSI and SMI within the context of the hospitality industry.

Dissecting PSI as a sub-construct of SMI dynamics in the hotel industry, the review related the main antecedents, causation factors, and the outcomes thereof, as well as the gaps in the literature regarding the adoption of the influencer, cross-cultural aspects, the relationship between the content strategies and PSI, and the PSI-linked key performance indicators, as claimed by Olfat et al. (2024) and Javed et al. (2025). Such contributions provide a basis for subsequent research and offer action narratives to both academia and practitioners. The review incorporates discontinuous portions of the literature in the areas of marketing, communication, and hospitality in establishing PSI as a key mechanism by which SMIs influence consumer decision-making. In the previous literature, it is common to focus on SMI features (expertise, attractiveness) or PSI in isolation, but rarely in combination (Aw et al., 2023; Breves et al., 2021). Through the synthesis of these views, the review identifies the way in which PSI operates as a relational mediator between influencer cues and hospitality outcomes in the form of booking intention and trust.

In addition, the review also addresses theoretical tensions. While Source Credibility Theory focuses on cognitive analysis of experience and trustworthiness (Arora et al., 2019), and PSI Theory is based on emotional proximity and believed intimacy (Schouten et al., 2020). Simultaneously, Social Influence Theory (Akhtar et al., 2024) and the SOR framework can be used to explain the internalization of external influencer stimulus in consumers and its conversion into behavioral reactions in a complementary way (Javed et al., 2025). The comparison and linking of these frameworks allow the review to enhance the theoretical knowledge of PSI in hospitality.

From a review perspective, there are two important limitations in this study that future reviews can consider: First, this research provides rich and methodologically rigorous observations without an impact analysis. Future reviews might investigate this space, comparing article performance in terms of theoretical versus non-theoretical papers, empirical versus non-empirical methods (Joshi et al., 2023), or thematic and methodological classifications, and thereby shed insights into the field. Second, the review uses only a qualitative method to assess constructs in PSI and SMI studies. To extend these results, future research may include meta-analyses of antecedents, mediators, moderators, and consequences identified in either this review or future reviews. Moreover, if the review is restricted to journal publications, other sources such as conference proceedings, books, book chapters, editorials, and white/gray papers may have an impact on the overall quality of the review (Fauzi et al., 2024).

Practical Implications for Asian Business

For IM to be effective, it must be in close harmony with the target audience's preferences and behaviors. As can be seen in Figure 1, PSI is revealed as a multi-dimensional construct that reflects the complexity of audience-influencer relationships in the social media marketing ecosystem.

When PSI is a mechanism, it is essential in the association of SMIs, brands, and customers. It connects the influencer's impact on consumer behavior to measurable brand outcomes. It enhances the emotional attachment between the consumer and the brand, which increases the success of an influencer marketing campaign. The distinct features of the SMI that have appeal, professionalism, integrity, and familiarity

greatly provoke PSI. These characteristics foster a sense of intimacy with the influencer, which in turn drives the consumer's emotional engagement with the advertised brand. Acting as a mediating variable, PSI can fill the gap between how the influencer influences and what the customer desires (Hassanzadeh et al., 2023; Horng et al., 2024), including higher brand awareness, brand loyalty, and intention to purchase. By doing so, PSI does not merely facilitate engagement but is a powerful mediator that leads to favorable brand effects and reinforces the overall effects of influencer marketing campaigns. Notably, Asian countries' governments (such as China and Vietnam) push for digitalization, and the widespread adoption of smartphones has also contributed to the growth of influencer marketing. Businesses in these countries facilitate the leverage of local influencers to reach the country's tech-savvy population and build a network of micro-influencers from specific niches (sustainable living, local cuisine, luxury travel) (Cohen et al., 2022) to create targeted campaigns that resonate deeply with segmented audiences or provide an appropriate opportunity to examine consumer engagement and purchase in the social commerce community like Xiaohongshu (Wang and Huang, 2023). In other facets, PSI is crucial in establishing emotional bonds between influencers and followers, mainly through scenario content shared on SMPs. Brands exploit these platforms' reach and engagement to connect with their target demographic. The intricate nature of consumers' behavioral responses to SMIs and how they influence their decision to engage or formulate a connection is often unnoticed (Pradhan et al., 2023). Since PSI is the initial key point of interaction where trust is achieved, it is vital to continuous communication between the individual influencer and his or her adherents. In the course of time, this mutual interaction can enable uninterrupted interaction and value co-creation (Cheung et al., 2021), transforming passive followers into active members of the ecosystem of the influencer. Hospitality brands can leverage the influence of SMIs on a community of loyal fans by providing them with exclusive promotions, establishing long-term partnerships, and enabling the freedom of creativity to uphold authenticity. Conversely, social media crises are uncontrollable in nature, and hospitality brands that do not react fast can suffer a disastrous reputational and financial loss. The belief in influencer endorsements currently is more questionable than ever because previous scandals as well as misleading advertisements have been observed, leading to a loss of trust (Belanche et al., 2021). SMPs in Asia are highly interactive and have many functions, and a negative review or controversy can escalate rapidly. A brand can face overnight reputational damage due to the fast-paced nature of digital conversations (as seen in the MascaraGate scandal (Rynarzewska et al., 2024), which occurred when an SMI collaborated with a multinational company to promote a brand's product on TikTok). Thus, beyond careful SMI selection, hospitality brands must implement proactive crisis management strategies, including continuously monitoring social media sentiment, establishing guidelines for influencer partnerships, and responding swiftly and transparently when controversies arise.

Table 4: PSI-based Metrics and Hospitality KPIs across Asian Social Platforms

Platform	PSI-related Metric	Hospitality KPI
WeChat/Weibo (China)	% of followers joining influencer-created hotel groups (Akhtar et al., 2024); Positive sentiment in comments showing trust (I	Hashtag reach & trending rank; Booking via mini-program referral codes; group retention rate; repeat purchase ratio

Platform	PSI-related Metric	Hospitality KPI
	believe you or I'll try) (Li et al., 2023); repost rate of influencer's personal stories (Wang and Huang, 2023)	
TikTok/Douyin (China, Vietnam)	Average watch time of influencer videos (Lou et al., 2023); booking-related comment/questions (van der Harst and Angelopoulos, 2024)	Click-Through Rate from TikTok Shop/affiliate links; bookings from livestream; follower growth of brand account
KakaoTalk (Korea)	Attendance in influencer live streams, number of Q&A interactions post-video, and giveaways (Park and Kim, 2024)	Bookings via Kakao booking widget; % of customers joining membership.
Agoda/ Booking.com/ Traveloka (OTA)	% click-throughs on influencer OTA links (trust); customer reviews mentioning "found hotel via influencer" (Carmo et al., 2025)	Referral booking volume; average review rating; rebooking rate from influencer-driven customers

(Source: Authors, 2025)

In the case of a hotel business, this means that standard measurements like impressions and followers are not enough to estimate the worth of the partnership with the influencer. Rather, performance evaluation needs to become a more holistic KPI that embraces a quantitative and qualitative aspect. Some of the quantitative measures that the hotels should take into consideration are the reach, the engagement rate (likes, comments, shares, saves) (Li et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2024), the level of click-through to the booking sites, and the actual conversion rate via the links or discount codes, which are linked to the influencers (Wang and Huang, 2023) (see Table 4). The metrics will keep track of the collaboration with reference to real bookings and measurable results, whereas the qualitative components, such as brand alignment, content sincerity, and influencer responsiveness, need equal attention (Park and Kim, 2024). It is important to note that, once an upload is complete, the follower engagement is yet to be enhanced; the follower engagement rates achieved through the delivery of comments, question and answer sessions, and even responses to direct messages are essential variables that further increase PSI and thereby shape consumer trust and emotional engagement with the hotel brand. By adding soft KPIs (interaction quality, authenticity, and brand storytelling) to hard KPIs (reach, engagement, and conversions), hotels will be able to measure the influence more accurately and optimize the spending (Carmo et al., 2025). A well-balanced KPI strategy will improve campaign results and help influencer marketing build consumer loyalty and long-term brand relationships in the competitive hospitality industry

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Appendix

Table 5: Antecedents from SMIs

Antecedents	Occurrences (n)	Antecedents	Occurrences (n)
credibility	101	trustworthiness	14
communication	96	transparency	13
identification	58	social attractiveness	12
trust	56	attractiveness	12
source credibility	41	intimacy	12

Antecedents	Occurrences (n)	Antecedents	Occurrences (n)
disclosure	36	personality	11
authenticity	34	social influence	11
product	25	commitment	9
sponsorship disclosure	23	self-disclosure	8
involvement	21	Information quality	7
celebrity endorsements	21	attachment	6
physical attractiveness	20	popularity	6
knowledge	20	sponsored content	6
motivations	20	self-congruity	6
attitude	19	similarity	6
technology	18	social presence	6
congruence	17	interactivity	5
expertise	16	homophily	5

(Source: Authors, 2025)

Table 6: Mediators and moderators factor in the PSI and SMI research

Exemplary studies	MEDIATOR			MODERATOR			
	Influencers - related	***Customer-related***	***Brand – related***	***Influencers - related***	***Customer-related***	***Brand – related***	***Technology-related***
Aw and Chuah (2021)	Self-serving motive			Self-discrepancy			
Akhtar et al. (2024)		-Informational social influence -Normative social influence		-Perceived interactivity -Source credibility			
Schouten et al. (2020)	Perceived interactivity Trustworthiness	Wishful identification					
Yuan and Lou (2020)	Parasocial relationship						
Jin et al. (2019)		Social presence		Self-discrepancy			
Jin and Ryu (2020)				-Photo types -Content generator types	- Gender	- Branded content types	
Kim and Kim (2021)		Trust		Relationship strength			
Labrecque, L. (2014).	Parasocial interaction						
Van der Harst and Angelopoulos (2024)				Number of Followers			
Liu et al. (2024).		Trust			Construal level		
Bhattacharya (2023)			Brand preference				
Chung and Cho (2017)	Self-disclosure Parasocial relationships						
Breves et al. (2021)	Advertising disclosure						
Horng et al. (2024)	Parasocial interaction	Community commitment		Trustworthiness			
Shan et al. (2020)		Parasocial identification					
Pfeuffer et al. (2021)		Persuasion knowledge			Expectancy		
Touni et al. (2022)		Perceived value				Brand reputation	
Wahab et al. (2022)							SMP usage

Exemplary studies	MEDIATOR			MODERATOR			
	Influencers - related	*Customer-related*	*Brand – related*	*Influencers - related*	*Customer-related*	*Brand – related*	*Technology-related*
Hassanzadeh et al., (2023)	Parasocial interaction						
Zhang et al. (2024)	Parasocial interaction			SMI Types			
Reinikainen et al. (2020)	Credibility				Reading comments		

(Source: Authors, 2024)

Table 7: Outcomes of PSI from SMIs

Antecedents	Occurrences (n)	Antecedents	Occurrences (n)
communication	96	celebrity endorsements	19
identification	58	congruence	17
trust	56	value co-creation	15
para-social relationship	47	commitment	15
purchase intentions	46	brand engagement	14
word-of-mouth	43	communities	11
perceptions	41	decision-making	9
followers	38	brand loyalty	9
social interaction	37	destination image	8
satisfaction	33	brand trust	7
gratifications	32	brand attitude	7
engagement	31	brand attachment	7
intentions	29	brand credibility	6
emotion	29	behavioral intentions	5
brand	19		

(Source: Authors, 2025)

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