Entrepreneurs as influencers: the impact of parasocial interactions on communication outcomes

Rudeloff, Christian; Damms, Julius

Postprint / Postprint
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

gesis
Leibniz-Institut
für Sozialwissenschaften

Mitglied der
Leibniz-Gemeinschaft

Entrepreneurs as Influencers: The Impact of Parasocial Interactions on Communication Outcomes

Abstract

Purpose: Drawing on the example of car manufacturer Tesla and its early investor Elon Musk, this paper explores the connection between the personal communication activities of influential entrepreneurs on social media, the emergence of parasocial interactions, and the related communication outcomes for the company.

Design/methodology/approach: We conducted an online survey, recruiting 207 participants via purposive sampling. Partial least square path modeling (PLS-PM) and an independent t-test were conducted to test hypotheses.

Findings: The results show that following entrepreneurs' personal social media activities amplifies parasocial interactions (PSI), which in turn positively impact the company's communication outcomes. Organization-public relationships (OPR) and purchase intentions are improved by PSI.

Originality: This is one of the first studies that connects the personal and the organizational level in exploring entrepreneurial marketing. The results show that Elon Musk acts as an influential entrepreneur to effectively promote communication outcomes for Tesla. The study illuminates the potential of entrepreneurs' personal social media activities to support the success of their ventures.

Keywords: parasocial interactions, organization-public relationship, purchase intentions, communication outcomes, influencer marketing, social media influencers, digital entrepreneurship

Introduction

Due to the rise of social media networks, which have radically transformed how firms interact with consumers, a phenomenon called social media influencers (SMI) has emerged. SMI can be understood as social media users who, due to their reach on social media networks, act as third-party endorsers for brands (Ki & Kim, 2019). The collaboration between brands and influencers to promote the success of the company is called influencer marketing (Vronti *et al.,* 2021). Once a niche movement, influencer marketing is estimated to be a $16.4 billion industry in 2022. More than 75% of advertisers intend to dedicate a budget to influencer marketing in 2023 (Influencermarketinghub, 2022). In 2019, approximately 50% of internet users followed at least one influencer account on social media and 40% indicated that they had bought a product after seeing it on Instagram or YouTube (Vronti *et al.,* 2021). The phenomenon of SMI is also salient in the start-up and entrepreneurial world. Start-ups, like established corporations, collaborate with SMI to stimulate brand awareness, brand image, and sales (Sharma & Singh, 2022).

On the other hand, many company founders also engage personally on social media networks to influence their followers and promote their businesses. For instance, Ryan Holmes, founder of the Hootsuite app, has over 50,800 Twitter followers and regularly writes about trends in tech and social media. Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, informs his 12.6 million Twitter followers every day about his private life as well as his companies' developments. And, most prominently, Elon Musk, early investor of Tesla and founder of PayPal and SpaceX, intensively engages with his approximately 100 million followers on Twitter, and even announced his intention to buy the social media company in April 2022.

In contrast to SMI, these entrepreneurs do not act as third-party actors for other brands, but share content in order to enhance the success of their own company, while maintaining a significant reach on social media. To clarify this distinction, Guiñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021) have coined the terms entrepreneurial influencers and influential entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs have an even more prominent function for the organization than CEOs of established companies (Fauchart and Gruber, 2010). The personal networks of entrepreneurs have been linked directly to a company's performance (Hernández-Carrión *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, prior studies have examined entrepreneurs' online social media behavior (Turan and Kara, 2018; Chen *et al.* 2021). Also, in the context of start-up CEO communication, the creation of employee-organization relationships through entrepreneurial leadership communication has been investigated (Men, 2021). However, influential entrepreneurs who may impact the perceptions and attitudes of external stakeholders, such as customers, via social media have not been explored.

By answering the research question "How do the personal social media communication activities of an influential entrepreneur relate to the success of the company?" this paper aims

to shed empirical light on the personal external communication of entrepreneurs and its effect on communication outcomes. We understand personal communication as the content distributed via an entrepreneur's personal channels in social media, in contrast to content distributed via the company's corporate accounts.

Drawing on parasocial interaction (PSI) and organization-public-relationship (OPR) theory, we propose a conceptual model to examine how influential entrepreneurs can contribute to a company's success by positively influencing perceptions among stakeholders. We expect that an influential entrepreneur's communication activities on social media networks foster the emergence of PSI. We also assume that PSI, given its interpersonal character, will in turn facilitate OPR between the company and its stakeholders and positively influence further communication outcomes such as purchase intentions.

We intend to contribute to the literature in several ways with this study: Firstly, we aim to enrich the literature on entrepreneurial marketing as well as the nascent digital entrepreneurship literature (Fernandes *et al*., 2022) by extending the research on SMI into the specific context of influential entrepreneurs. Secondly, we want to add a perspective of external communication to the existing studies on CEO and leadership communication in the context of creating employee-organization relationships, by focusing on the impact of the entrepreneur's personal communication activities on OPR. Finally, we aim to derive practical implications for how entrepreneurs can make use of social media to enhance the success of their ventures.

Theoretical Foundation

Social Media Influencers and Influential Entrepreneurs

Social media networks can be defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections" (Boyd and Ellison, 2007, p. 211). As social media networks allow fast, cost-effective communication between companies and consumers, it is not surprising that they are nowadays perceived by entrepreneurs as more important than other channels such as media relations, fairs, and events (Pakura and Rudeloff, 2020).

In the context of social media networks, the phenomenon of SMI has evolved. SMI can be conceptualized as "independent third-party endorsers who have developed sizeable social networks by sharing details about their personal lives, experiences, and opinions publicly through texts, pictures, videos, hashtags, location check-ins, etc." (Ki & Kim, 2019, p. 905).

Drawing on social capital theory, Leung *et al.* (2022) suggest that SMI dispose of structural, relational, and cognitive resources (e.g., their follower network, follower trust, unique content)

that can be mobilized by firms to enhance their marketing effectiveness. Consequently, they define influencer marketing as a strategy in which companies assign SMI "to engage their followers on social media in an attempt to leverage these influencers' unique resources to promote the firm's offerings, with the ultimate goal of enhancing firm performance" (Leung *et al.*, 2022, p. 228). The impact of SMI on consumers' perceptions of brands has been studied intensively and several success factors have been revealed, such as perceived authenticity (Lee *et al.* (2022), perceived credibility (Sokolova and Kefi, 2020), trustworthiness (Martínez-López *et al.,* 2020), as well as a high number of followers (De Veirman *et al.* (2017). Regarding psychological-related influential factors, Ki *et al.* (2020) demonstrated that the power of SMIs comes from the emotional bond they build with their followers. Similarly, Hu *et al.* (2020) showed that PSI with the influencer is essential in the formation of followers' connection to the influencer.

From an entrepreneurship perspective, SMI can be understood as *entrepreneurial influencers:* Social media users whose business model has evolved due to their popularity on social networks and the market request of companies that engage in influencer marketing (Guiñez-Cabrera & Aqueveque, 2021; Gustafsson & Khan, 2017; Lee & Theokary, 2021). On the other hand, *influential entrepreneurs* are traditional entrepreneurs and at the same time social media users with a significant reach who are motivated to share content as they wish to enhance the success of their own companies. Their posts will at least in part rely on their professional expertise, their business area, and the products and services of their company (Guiñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque, 2021).

While influential entrepreneurs could potentially also act as SMI, usually they operate as "self-sponsored" influencers, meaning that they conduct "influencer marketing activities only for their own business" (Guiñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque, 2021, p. 243). In this regard, Hesse *et al.* (2021) also differentiate between SMI as external entities and corporate influencers as members of a company, mostly employees. While corporate influencers normally act on behalf of a single brand, it is common for influential entrepreneurs to promote several companies they are involved in. For instance, Elon Musk not only promotes Tesla, but also SpaceX, on his Twitter account.

The phenomenon of influential entrepreneurs can be situated within the context of digital entrepreneurship (Fernandes *et al.*, 2022). Scholars of digital entrepreneurship examine the impact of digital technologies on entrepreneurial activities and have particularly recognized the role of digital technologies for the creation of new opportunities. According to Sahut *et al.* (2021), digital entrepreneurship is how entrepreneurs create value by "acquiring, processing, and distributing digital information" (p. 1159). Against this background, our paper aims to contribute to a better understanding of the impact of influential entrepreneurs – as distributers of digital information – on the success of their companies.

Entrepreneur's Social Media Communication and Parasocial Interactions

The term parasocial interaction (PSI) describes a one-sided and mediated type of social interaction between media recipients and characters (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). At the heart of the theory lies the assumption that PSI is like face-to-face interaction "except that it lacks mutuality while real social interactions feature bidirectional communication" (Liebers & Schramm, 2019, p. 4).

The theory finds its origin in the paper "Observation on Intimacy at a Distance" (Horton and Wohl, 1956). Horton and Wohl (1956) were concerned with the effects of mass-media, especially radio, television, and cinema. The media characters shown ("personas") seemed to subtly integrate viewers and listeners into the internal social relations of the radio, television show, or motion picture, so that the recipients had the illusion of an interaction characterized by reciprocal communication, which, however, was in fact controlled by the media figures (Horton and Wohl, 1956). According to Horton and Wohl (1956), the emergence of a PSI (or parasocial relationship) is based on the idea that the (real or fictional) persona succeeds in creating a pseudo-intimacy. The recipients register and interpret both the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the persona. They see the idiosyncrasies of this persona in different situations and thus develop the assumption that they know him or her in a way that one might know a good friend (Horton and Wohl, 1956). The persona offers continuous interactions that can be integrated into the everyday lives of the recipients due to their regularity. Over time, the recipients (seemingly) experience excerpts from the persona's life. This gives recipients the impression that they share experiences with the media figure, which potentially creates a sense of familiarity and closeness (Horton and Wohl, 1956).

Various approaches have been proposed to examine PSI empirically. While the proposition of Rubin *et al.* (1985) in particular has long been established in studying PSI with mass media personas, Tsay and Bodine (2012) have developed a different approach that aims to better account for the multidimensionality of PSI phenomena. Their approach involves the dimensions of guidance, face-to-face-desire, and intimacy, representing the cognitive, behavioral, and affective levels intertwined in PSI. *Guidance* refers, on the cognitive level, to the media persona as a role model and guide. *Face-to-face desire* relates to the desire to make direct contact with the persona (behavioral level). *Intimacy* relates to the degree of connection a consumer can feel to the persona (affective level). In contrast to other approaches, Tsay and Bodine (2012) emphasize the relevance of the behavioral components of PSI, which are crucial for studying PSI in a social media context, as the tendency towards behavioral participation has become more salient in social media, due to its reciprocal nature (Tsay & Bodine, 2012).

While in the past the focus of PSI research was primarily on traditional audiovisual media such as radio, TV, and cinema, there are now many studies that relate the concept to digital media. These studies illustrate that PSI can also arise in the context of social media, where celebrities (Stever, 2013), influencers (Lou and Kim, 2019), and even avatars (Jin and Park, 2009) act as personas to their followers and can induce PSI. In the context of this research, we propose that influential entrepreneurs may also be perceived as personas and can therefore induce PSI through their public social media activities, provided that they communicate in a personal way, e.g., via accounts on social media networks such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. Following Tsai and Men (2017), we argue that the emergence of PSI through an entrepreneur's communication activities in a digital media environment is supported by "the personal nature of social media" that serves to humanize the persona. This brings them "closer to the public, and thus may engender stronger PSI" (p. 1852), while at the same time the entrepreneur remains a mediated persona, as his or her connections with stakeholders is transmitted solely in a mediatized way. Furthermore, the opportunity for the entrepreneur to directly address his or her followers and initiate interpersonal conversations on social media will promote the development of PSI (Tsai and Men, 2017).

In the context of social-media-induced PSI, an influential entrepreneur can act as a *friend* to better blend into their followers' social networks (Tsai and Men, 2017). Followers may directly observe how the entrepreneur interacts with other users via public posts and hence get to know the persona regularly as an identifiable personality. Using the first-person voice and personal narratives, as opposed to a corporate tone, increases perception of social presence and interactivity (Park and Cameron, 2014). Due to their personal character, the entrepreneur's social media activities are also perceived as more authentic than the official communication of the company, which tends to be anonymous (Tsai and Men, 2017). Authenticity (Tsay-Vogel and Schwartz, 2014) and "social realism" (Rosaen and Dibble, 2008) have been identified as factors favoring the development of PSI. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1: Entrepreneurs' followers will report higher levels of PSI with an entrepreneur than non-followers.

Parasocial Interactions and Organization-Public-Relationships

The underlying assumption of the theory of Organization-Public-Relationships (OPR) is the interdependency between an organization and its strategic publics. In the OPR literature, this interdependency has been derived mainly from systems theory and ecological theory (Monge & Poole, 2008; Young & Taylor, 2014). Following Hung (2005), the interdependency between organizations and its publics results in consequences for each other that organizations need

to manage (2005). But the definitions of OPR offered so far have been inconsistent (Cheng, 2018). Broom *et al.* (2000), for example, emphasize the *process of* OPR as "the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics" (p. 18). Other researchers conceptualize OPR as an *outcome,* as "the degree that the organization and its public trust, agree on, commit, and feel favorably toward each other" (Cheng, 2018, p. 3). In the following, we define OPR as a communication outcome.

Hon and Grunig (1999) describe several key dimensions of OPR that have been widely adopted in the literature to study OPR as a communication outcome: *Trust* as "one party's level of confidence in and willingness to open oneself to the other party" (p. 3), *commitment* as "the extent to which each party believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote" (p. 3), *satisfaction* as "the extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (p. 3).

OPR have been examined in a multitude of different organizational and cultural contexts (Flora Hung, 2004; Ni and Wang, 2011; Cheng, 2018). At the same time, there is also a growing body of literature on OPR and communication management in an entrepreneurial context (Men *et al.*, 2017; Pakura and Rudeloff, 2020). Nonetheless, only a few papers specifically consider the role of the entrepreneur in the context of OPR. Men *et al.* (2017) explore how entrepreneurs in China cultivate relationships with strategically chosen groups. They conclude that employees and customers are the most important stakeholders for relationship strategies for entrepreneurs, and identify several specific strategies to build quality relationships (Men *et al.,* 2017). Also, Bammens and Collewaert (2014) focused on the effect of perceived trust between angel investors and entrepreneurs as one dimension of OPR. Their results indicate that angel investors evaluate portfolio company performance more positively when they perceive high trust towards the entrepreneur (Bammens and Collewaert, 2014). Nonetheless, how the personal communications of entrepreneurs on social media may contribute to building qualitative OPR has not yet been investigated.

This is surprising, given that prior studies analyzing social media users' PSI with public figures show that such interactions are perceived as serious, meaningful, and appear to be impactful for users (Stever and Lawson, 2013). Sung and Kim (2014) show that companies' interpersonal approaches to communication on social networking sites promote the formation of OPR. Similarly, Tsai and Men (2017) propose that social media's potential for fostering OPR lies in its power to enable and encourage interpersonal interactions. Also, Men and Tsai (2015), as well as Verčič and Verčič (2007), indicate that corporate characters' engagement on social networks may effectively enhance organizational reputation and companies' relationships with stakeholders via interpersonal communication. Ingenhoff and Sommer (2010) show that organizational trust (in the company) and interpersonal trust (e.g., in the CEO) are closely related. Most importantly, Tsai and Men (2017) demonstrate that PSI with CEOs on social

media contributes to high quality OPR. Public interactions with CEOs in social media were found to have a broad, favorable impact on stakeholders' trust and satisfaction with the company. Although their study does not relate to the specifics of the behavior of influential entrepreneurs, their findings provide the first empirical evidence for the impacts of PSI on OPR. In line with these results, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: PSI with the entrepreneur is a predictor of OPR.

Parasocial Interactions and Purchase Intentions

As Tsai and Men (2017) state, the influence of PSI on other important perceptual outcomes beyond OPR is still unexplored in CEO communication. They therefore call for future endeavors that will connect CEOs' social media communication to outcomes such as purchase behavior (Tsai and Men, 2017). In line with this call, one of the purposes of this paper is to investigate whether PSI positively influence purchase intentions in an entrepreneurial context. Purchase intentions are highly relevant for companies, due to their direct impact on business growth (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001; LeBrasseur *et al.* 2003).

Prior studies come to the conclusion that PSI have the potential to positively influence brand evaluations as stakeholders form attachments to personas through PSI and tend to align their attitudes with those of the personas (Yuan *et al.,* 2016). It is therefore unsurprising that PSI can also support consumers' willingness to buy, as Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found from examining beauty and fashion bloggers in France. As Yuksel and Labrecque (2016) indicate, student-athletes' messages on Twitter can also direct and inspire both online and offline actions such as product purchases through PSI. Similarly, Lin *et al.* (2021) and Kim (2020) show that PSI with influencers on both Instagram and YouTube are significantly related to purchase intentions. Lee and Lee (2022) conclude that strengthening PSI is key to making marketing more effective. Their study of YouTube beauty channels provides evidence for the applicability of PSI as a theoretical framework to explain consumer perceptions and their impacts on consumers' purchase decision processes. Thus, the following hypothesis can be formulated:

H3: PSI with the entrepreneur is a predictor of purchase intentions.

Figure I summarizes the proposed hypotheses and shows the conceptual model of the study.

Please insert Figure I about here.

Methods

Focal Entrepreneur

We selected Elon Musk, the CEO and early investor of car manufacturer Tesla, as the entrepreneur focus of this study. Musk was chosen because he is an entrepreneur as well as a social media user with a significant reach. It can be assumed that Musk's motivation to use social media lies primarily in boosting the success of his own companies, including Tesla. He has – to our knowledge – not been engaged as a professional third-party endorser for other brands. His social media content includes posts about his professional expertise, his business field, and the products and services of his companies (Ante, 2021; Huynh, 2022). Therefore, Musk fits the definition of an influential entrepreneur formulated by Guiñez-Cabrera and Aqueveque (2021).

Definitions of the term entrepreneur can be separated into two broad fields: Personality studies of individuals and behavioral studies into what entrepreneurs do (Stokes, 2000; Bird and Schjoedt, 2017). Based on behavioral studies, an entrepreneur is characterized in the literature as "an agent of change, as someone who does not seek to perfect, or optimize existing ways of doing things" (Stokes, 2000, p. 4), but instead seeks innovations. According to Forbes, one of the most well-known business magazines, Tesla is the fourth most innovative company in the world (Forbes, 2018). Kim (2020) argues that Tesla's electric cars are fundamentally different to those of other automakers as they are built around the car's battery, while other automobile companies rely on their mechanical fuel engines. Due to its "highly innovative and pro-active venture team that has leveraged its entrepreneurial experience", Tesla has also been mentioned in the literature as an excellent case for entrepreneurial marketing (Morish *et al.*, 2010, p. 305). Beyond Tesla, Musk has a strong background as a serial entrepreneur, as he also co-founded the financial technology company PayPal and the aerospace manufacturer SpaceX.

With Musk as CEO, Tesla offers an ideal opportunity to study the impact of the entrepreneur's social media communication on their companies' communication outcomes. Musk regularly uses his social media presence to communicate on various topics. He has around 100 million Twitter followers (June 2022), while at the same time Tesla implements a $0 advertising policy and has not had a public relations department since 2020. In April 2022, Musk attempted to purchase Twitter for $43 billion, after previously acquiring 9.1% of the company's stock, becoming its largest shareholder. Reactions to the proposed buyout have been mixed.

Survey Design

We conducted a quantitative cross-sectional study using a survey method. To measure PSI, we adopted the approach of Tsai and Men (2017), who use a condensed and adapted version

of the scale created by Tsay and Bodine (2012). Accordingly, we implemented six items on guidance (e.g. "I see Elon Musk as a role model", "I like to learn from Elon Musk"), four items on face-to-face desire (e.g., "I would love to meet Elon Musk sometime", "If I met Elon Musk on the street, I would approach him") and four items on intimacy (e.g., "I trust Elon Musk as I would a good friend", "I think Elon Musk and I could be good friends"). For operationalizing OPR, we adopted the approach of Tsai and Men (2017), who use a condensed and adapted version of Hon and Grunig (1999). Accordingly, we implemented four items on trust (e.g., "Tesla can be trusted to deliver on its promises", "I believe Tesla treats its customers fairly and equitably") and two items for satisfaction ("I am satisfied with the Tesla company", "I am satisfied with the relationship between me and the Tesla company"). Furthermore, to extend the assessment of OPR, we included two items on commitment following Hon and Grunig (1999): ("I feel like I'm part of the Tesla family", "Tesla as a company has a lot of personal meaning to me").

Going beyond Tsai and Men's study (2017), we also added an item on purchase intentions as implemented by Fetscherin (2014): "How likely are you to buy a Tesla brand car in the next 5 years?"

All items were measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1 "strongly agree" to 7 "strongly disagree"), except for the item on purchase intentions, which was measured with an 11-point scale ranging from 0 ("very unlikely") to 11 ("very likely").

Furthermore, the socio-demographic variables of age and gender were assessed. Given the expected homogeneity of our sample due to the recruitment procedure and to increase the completion rate of the survey, we did not include further sociodemographic variables beyond age and gender in the questionnaire. In particular, we did not ask for the household income of the participants, as prior studies did not find that income affected the relationship between PSI and purchase intentions (Lou & Kim, 2019; Yang & Ha, 2021). Due to the small market share of Tesla at the time of data collection and given that we did not investigate brand loyalty as a dependent variable, we also did not ask whether respondents already had a purchasing history with Tesla.

The questionnaire was pre-tested on ten individuals who were recruited via convenience sampling. This resulted in minor modifications to the structure and wording of the questions.

Sample selection

We adopted the purposive sampling technique, which is appropriate in conditions where only a limited population possesses the required information (Etikan, 2016). Tesla was still in its very early development at the time of our study. In June 2021, the brand held a market share in Germany of only 1.6% (Merano, 2021). The questionnaire was targeted at social media

users in Germany who were familiar with Musk and the Tesla brand. Therefore, the survey link was shared on different social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and Twitter). Furthermore, we posted the survey link in online discussion boards with a thematic reference to the automotive sector (e.g., appropriate Facebook groups). This served to increase the likelihood that we could sample consumers who were already familiar with the brand, despite its small market share. To ensure that all participants fit our selection criteria, we included prescreening questions on the first page of the questionnaire ("Do you know the Tesla car brand?" and "Do you know the CEO of Tesla, Elon Musk?") and only the respondents that gave two positive answers were included in the survey results. In the next step, we asked if the survey participants follow Musk on social media.

Sample

We obtained a total of 280 respondents, 73 were removed from the analysis via the screening questions. Therefore, our sample consists of 207 participants, of which 110 (53.14%) reported being male, 93 female (44.93%), and 4 diverse (1.93%). The average age of the sample was 28.9 years. 78 participants (37.7%) indicated that they followed Elon Musk's content on social media. Table I depicts the distribution of the sociodemographic variables in the sample.

Please insert Table I about here.

Overall, respondents reported moderate to high levels of PSI with Elon Musk (M = 4.61, SD = 1.54) as well as OPR (M = 3.7, SD = 0.66) with Tesla. The respondents also showed moderate purchase intentions (M = 4.69, SD = 3.52) towards Tesla.

Analysis and Results

Data analysis involved partial least square path modeling (PLS-PM) and an independent t-test. PLS-PM is an approach to structural equation modeling that has been increasingly adopted in marketing and management research. The method provides certain advantages over covariance-based SEM analysis, as it is better suited to estimate path models involving latent constructs that are indirectly observed by multiple indicators. In contrast to covariance-based SEM, PLS-PM is not constrained by the assumption of normality and has also been demonstrated to be effective for smaller sample sizes (Hair *et al.,* 2019).

PLS-PM involves testing two sub-models: The measurement model and the structural model. In the measurement model the relationships between latent variables and its block of indicators are tested. In the structural model the relationships between the latent variables are

investigated. In the following, the PLS-PM procedure, as developed by Sanchez (2013) and recently implemented by Troise *et al.* (2021), was used with the pls package for R.

Evaluation of the measurement model

The measurement model specifies the relationships between observed indicator variables and the underlying latent constructs PSI and OPR. To test the fit of the measurement model, the loadings of the individual items on their constructs were calculated. Following Sanchez (2013), loadings greater than 0.7 can be considered safe. Therefore, indicators below this threshold were removed, which included three OPR items (Trust 4, Satisfaction 2, Commitment 1), resulting in all PSI and OPR indicators exceeding 0.70.

Besides examining the loadings of the indicators on their own latent constructs, we also checked cross-loadings to assess discriminant validity. Indicator loadings and cross-loadings for both latent constructs are shown in Table II.

Please insert Table II about here.

In the next step, the average variance extracted (AVE), Dillon-Goldstein's rho, and Cronbach's alpha were calculated to ensure convergent validity and uni-dimensionality. The AVE for the constructs PSI (0.64) and OPR (0.73) are well above 0.5, which indicates sufficient convergent validity (Hair *et al.,* 2011). The lowest value for Dillon-Goldstein's rho is 0.96, thereby exceeding the threshold of 0.7, which is considered necessary to demonstrate the uni-dimensionality of the latent constructs (Sanchez, 2013). Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha values are above the threshold of 0.7 (Sanchez, 2013). All values are shown in Table III.

Please insert Table III about here.

Overall, the measurement model exhibits high quality and can be assessed as suitable for further analysis.

Evaluation of the structural model

In the next step, path modeling was performed. The corresponding results can be found in Table IV.

Please insert Table IV about here.

As the path coefficients indicate, the structural model demonstrates significant positive relationships between the latent constructs PSI as independent variable and OPR, as well as purchase intentions as dependent variables. Furthermore, given the R^2 values, it can be concluded that the variance of the independent variables is partially explained by the independent variable.

To measure the quality of both the measurement as well as the structural model, the Goodness-of-Fit (GoF) index as proposed by Sanchez (2013) was calculated. GoF assesses the overall prediction performance of the model (Sanchez, 2013). The GoF value of 0.5470299 can be interpreted as a prediction power of the model of 54.7%.

Hypotheses Testing

To establish whether followers report higher levels of PSI than non-followers (H1), an independent t-test was conducted. Results show significant differences between followers and non-followers of Elon Musk (t = -13.138, df = 111.74, p < 0.001). Overall, followers (M = 5.47) reported significantly stronger PSI than non-followers (M = 3.19). Therefore, H1 can be confirmed.

Regarding PSI as a predictor of OPR (H2) and purchase intentions (H3) the path coefficients indicate a significant positive influence of PSI on OPR (beta = 0.7468, p < 0.001) as well as on purchase intentions (beta = 0.5819, p < 0.001). At the same time, the R^2 values of OPR (R2 = 0.5577) and purchase intentions (R2 = 0.3386) indicate that 55.77% of the variability in OPR and 33.86% of the variability in purchase intentions are predicted by PSI. Therefore, H2 and H3 can be confirmed.

Discussion

Theoretical Implications

Regarding H1, the data showed a relatively high degree of PSI in our sample overall, which may be explained by the data collection procedure. At the same time, our results demonstrate that the level of PSI was significantly enhanced in the participants who stated they actively followed Musk on social media. This is in line with recent findings and can be understood by the assumption that PSI can gradually develop into parasocial relationships (Breves *et al.*, 2021). Four stages in the development from PSI to parasocial relationships can be differentiated: Initiation, experimentation, intensification, and integration/bonding (Tuchinsky and Stever, 2019). When followers subscribe to an entrepreneur's social media channel, they

will potentially engage more frequently with the entrepreneur than non-followers. This will enhance the impression of a two-sided interaction (Breves *et al.,* 2021) and therefore intensify parasocial relationships. Accordingly, it can be assumed that followers are in the later stages of relationship formation (e.g., intensification or integration), while non-followers are still in the first stage (initiation) and therefore indicate lower levels of PSI (Breves et al. 2021).

With respect to H2, we showed that PSI are a significant predictor of OPR. As we measured OPR with the dimensions trust, commitment, and satisfaction, it can be concluded that PSI with the entrepreneur have a positive impact on stakeholders' trust in the company. This is relevant, given the important role of trust for the long-term success of companies (Ingenhoff and Sommer, 2010). Building trusting relationships is essential to securing the "license to operate" for companies (Zerfass and Volk, 2018, p. 400).

In sum, our study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, we enrich the growing body of research on CEO and leadership communication, as we replicate prior studies revealing the positive impact of personal social media communication and PSI on OPR (Tsai and Men, 2017; Men and Tsai, 2013). Our analysis demonstrates that this impact also holds true in a specific entrepreneurial context. Furthermore, regarding H3, we show that other communication outcomes beyond OPR are also impacted positively by PSI, thereby confirming prior studies (Sokolova and Kefi 2020; Lin *et al.,* 2021; Kim 2020). As our data shows, PSI induced by an influential entrepreneur's personal communication can also enhance purchase intentions. Therefore, it can be concluded that PSI may not only induce positive perceptual as well as attitudinal, but also behavioral outcomes.

In the past, research on the social media communication of start-ups has been focused on the organizational level of the communication (Olanrewaju et al., 2020; Pakura and Rudeloff, 2020; Pakura et al., 2020; Rudeloff et al., 2021, Rudeloff et al., 2022), while the examination of the personal communication activities of entrepreneurs has been limited to internal relationships (e.g. Men *et al.,* 2021; Men *et al.,* 2021). We close this research gap by providing the first quantitative evidence for the positive impact of an influential entrepreneur's external communication on OPR and further communication outcomes with external stakeholders.

Secondly, our findings illustrate the potential of the PSI concept for a better understanding of the role of the entrepreneur for the company's growth. It has long been established in the literature that entrepreneurial marketing activities are strongly influenced by the personal characteristics and values of the entrepreneur. Morrish *et al.* (2010) state that entrepreneurial marketing firms create superior value propositions by leveraging the unique capabilities of the entrepreneur. They emphasize that "*both* the professional and social persona of the entrepreneur" (p. 309) play a crucial role in entrepreneurial marketing success. Based on our findings, it can be argued that in a social media marketing context, the combination of personal and professional information in entrepreneurs' social media communication is, for example, a

prerequisite for perceived intimacy with the entrepreneur and, ultimately, for the emergence of PSI.

Furthermore, the entrepreneur as "trust-builder" (Bennett, 2014, p. 97) often relies on personal networks to initiate first relations between the company and its stakeholders. To enable further growth of the company, trust must be transferred from the personal to the organizational level (Welter, 2012). As our data shows, the concept of PSI can be seen as a viable theoretical explanation for this process of transferring trust from one level to the next.

Practical Implications

We show that influential entrepreneurs can increase the company's communication outcomes via their personal communication on social media. Therefore, entrepreneurs should understand their potential role as public ambassadors for the company. More precisely, it can be recommended that entrepreneurs aim to build up reach in social media networks and regularly share personal and engaging content with their followers. Based on the results of this study, entrepreneurs should share content on their social media accounts that will foster the PSI dimensions of perceived guidance, intimacy, and face-to-face desire. To foster perceived guidance, entrepreneurs could distribute advice and assessments based on their professional expertise. To foster perceived intimacy, it is advisable to share personal information about, for instance, their hobbies, favorite sports, or cultural events.

In sum, it can be concluded that entrepreneurs' personal social media communication influences the relationship between the company and its stakeholders. This can benefit the company and may facilitate its success in the market. However, negative spillover effects from the personal to the organizational level are also possible. Therefore, personally engaging in social media does not come without risks for entrepreneurs, as negative perceptions may also damage how the company will be perceived.

Limitations and Future Research

Firstly, the sample for this study might be considered a limitation. As we employed non-probability sampling, the data cannot be taken as representative. However, for the purpose of the present study, the creation of a homogeneous pool of highly involved subjects was considered as more important than sample representation.

Secondly, we used the entrepreneur Elon Musk as the focus of our study, although he may differ from most entrepreneurs in that he has a wider reach on social media. Because our analysis is based on a single case, the generalizability of our results is not yet knowable. Therefore, future studies should examine PSI with other less well-known entrepreneurs.

We also limited the study to car manufacturer Tesla. Future studies should consider other product categories, as the category might moderate the relationship between PSI and communication outcomes, especially regarding the variable of purchase intentions. Also, income is a potentially relevant control variable that should be integrated in future studies to assess the influence of PSI on purchase intentions more precisely. Furthermore, as the influence of sociodemographic variables on PSI is not well understood, future studies on entrepreneurs and PSI should incorporate further variables to characterize participants (Claessens & Van den Bulck, 2015).

Thirdly, while all measures have been adopted from established scales, to assess the latent constructs PSI and OPR, we selected those items from the literature that seemed to be especially relevant to our study. For example, we did not measure control mutuality as an OPR dimension, as it has been shown to be especially important in the context of crisis communication, which was not the focus of our study. Future studies should measure PSI und OPR more holistically.

Furthermore, we did not examine the different types of content that were distributed by Elon Musk on social media. As prior studies suggest that different types of content will influence the degree of PSI, further research should integrate content analysis in the study design.

References

Ante, L. (2021) 'How Elon Musk's Twitter Activity Moves Cryptocurrency Markets', *SSRN Electronic Journal* [Preprint]. doi:10.2139/ssrn.3778844.

Bammens, Y. and Collewaert, V. (2014) 'Trust Between Entrepreneurs and Angel Investors: Exploring Positive and Negative Implications for Venture Performance Assessments', *Journal of Management*, 40(7), 1980–2008, doi:10.1177/0149206312463937.

Bennett, C. (2014) 'Entrepreneur as trust-builder: interaction frequency and relationship duration as moderators of the factors of perceived trustworthiness', *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, 14(1), pp. 97–121.

Bird, B., and Schjoedt, L. (2017). *Entrepreneurial behavior: Its nature, scope, recent research, and agenda for future research.* Revisiting the entrepreneurial mind, 379-409.

Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated Communication,* 13(1), 210-230. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1083-6101.2007.00393.x

Breves, P. *et al.* (2021) 'Blind trust? The importance and interplay of parasocial relationships and advertising disclosures in explaining influencers' persuasive effects on their followers', *International Journal of Advertising*, 40(7), pp. 1209–1229. doi:10.1080/02650487.2021.1881237

Broom, G., Casey, S. and Ritchey, J. (2000) 'Concept and theory of organization-public relationships.', in *Public relations as relationship management: A relational approach to the study and practice of public relations*, pp. 3–22.

Chaudhuri, A. and Holbrook, M.B. (2001) 'The Chain of Effects from Brand Trust and Brand Affect to Brand Performance: The Role of Brand Loyalty', *Journal of Marketing*, 65(2), pp. 81–93. doi:10.1509/jmkg.65.2.81.18255

Cheng, Y. (2018) 'Looking back, moving forward: A review and reflection of the organization-public relationship (OPR) research', *Public Relations Review*, 44(1), pp. 120–130. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2017.10.003

Claessens, N., & Van den Bulck, H. (2015). Parasocial relationships with audiences' favorite celebrities: The role of audience and celebrity characteristics in a representative Flemish sample. *Communications*, 40(1), 43-65. https://doi.org/10.1515/commun-2014-0027

De Veirman, M., Cauberghe, V., & Hudders, L. (2017). Marketing through Instagram influencers: the impact of number of followers and product divergence on brand attitude. *International Journal of Advertising,* 36(5), 798-828. https://doi.org/10.1080/02650487.2017.1348035

Durau, J. (2022). *The Relevance of Social Media and Corporate Influencers as Potential Change Agents in Corporate Communications.* In Media and Change Management (pp. 211-229). Springer.

Etikan, I. (2016) 'Comparison of Convenience Sampling and Purposive Sampling', *American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics*, 5(1), p. 1. doi:10.11648/j.ajtas.20160501.11.

Fernandes, C., Ferreira, J. J., Veiga, P. M., Kraus, S., & Dabić, M. (2022). Digital entrepreneurship platforms: Mapping the field and looking towards a holistic approach. *Technology in Society.* 70, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.101979

Fetscherin, M. (2014) 'What type of relationship do we have with loved brands?', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 31(6/7), pp. 430–440. doi:10.1108/JCM-05-2014-0969

Flora Hung, C. (2004) 'Cultural influence on relationship cultivation strategies: Multinational companies in China', *Journal of Communication Management*, 8(3), pp. 264–281. doi:10.1108/13632540410807682

Forbes (2018) 'The World's Most Innovative Companies', [Preprint]. *Forbes*

Godey, B., Manthiou, A., Pederzoli, D., Rokka, J., Aiello, G., Donvito, R., and Singh, R. (2016). Social media marketing efforts of luxury brands: Influence on brand equity and consumer behavior. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(12), pp. 5833-5841. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2016.04.181

Guiñez-Cabrera, N. and Aqueveque, C. (2022), "Entrepreneurial influencers and influential entrepreneurs: two sides of the same coin", *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research,* Vol. 28 No. 1, pp. 231-254. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-08-2020-0563

Gustafsson, V. and Khan, M.S. (2017), "Monetising blogs: enterprising behaviour, co-creation of opportunities and social media entrepreneurship", *Journal of Business Venturing Insights*, 7, 26-31, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbvi.2017.01.002

Hair, J.F., Sarstedt, M. and Ringle, C.M. (2019), "Rethinking some of the rethinking of partial least squares", *European Journal of Marketing*, 53(4), 566-584. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-10-2018-0665

Hernández-Carrión, C., Camarero-Izquierdo, C. and Gutiérrez-Cillán, J. (2017) 'Entrepreneurs' Social Capital and the Economic Performance of Small Businesses: The Moderating Role of Competitive Intensity and Entrepreneurs' Experience: Entrepreneurs' Social Capital and Performance of Small Businesses', *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, 11(1), pp. 61–89. doi:10.1002/sej.1228

Hesse, A., Schmidt, H.J., and Baumgarth, C. (2021) 'How a Corporate Influencer Co-creates Brand Meaning: The Case of Pawel Dillinger from Deutsche Telekom', *Corporate Reputation Review*, 24(4), pp. 191–204. doi:10.1057/s41299-020-00103-3

Hon, L.C. and Grunig, J.E. (1999) *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations.* Institute for Public Relations.

Horton, D. and Richard Wohl, R. (1956) 'Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance', *Psychiatry*, 19(3), pp. 215–229. doi:10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049

Hu, L., Min, Q., Han, S., & Liu, Z. (2020). Understanding followers' stickiness to digital influencers: The effect of psychological responses. *International Journal of Information Management,* 54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinf omgt.2020.102169

Hung, C. J. F. (2005). Exploring types of organization–public relationships and their implications for relationship management in public relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 17(4), 393-426. https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjprr1704_4

Huynh, T.L.D. (2022) 'When Elon Musk Changes his Tone, Does Bitcoin Adjust Its Tune?', *Computational Economics* [Preprint]. doi:10.1007/s10614-021-10230-6

Influencermarketinghub (2022). *The State of Influencer Marketing 2022: Benchmark Report.* https://influencermarketinghub.com/influencer-marketing-benchmark-report/

Ingenhoff, D. and Sommer, K. (2010) 'Trust in Companies and in CEOs: A Comparative Study of the Main Influences', *Journal of Business Ethics*, 95(3), pp. 339–355. doi:10.1007/s10551-010-0363-y

Jin, S.-A.A. and Park, N. (2009) 'Parasocial Interaction with My Avatar: Effects of Interdependent Self-Construal and the Mediating Role of Self-Presence in an Avatar-Based Console Game, Wii', *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 12(6), pp. 723–727. doi:10.1089/cpb.2008.0289.

Kang, J.H., Solomon, G.T. and Choi, D.Y. (2015) 'CEOs' Leadership Styles and Managers' Innovative Behaviour: Investigation of Intervening Effects in an Entrepreneurial Context: CEOs' Leadership Styles and Managers' Innovative Behaviour', *Journal of Management Studies*, 52(4), pp. 531–554. doi:10.1111/joms.12125

Ki, C.W.C. and Kim, Y.K. (2019), "The mechanism by which social media influencers persuade consumers: the role of consumers' desire to mimic", *Psychology and Marketing*, 36(10), 905-922, https://doi.org/10.1002/mar.21244

Kim, Hyeonjoo (2020) 'Analysis of How Tesla Creates Core Innovation Capability', *International Journal of Business and Management*, 15(6), p. 42. doi:10.5539/ijbm.v15n6p42

Kim, Hyosun (2020) 'Unpacking Unboxing Video-Viewing Motivations: The Uses and Gratifications Perspective and the Mediating Role of Parasocial Interaction on Purchase Intent', *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 20(3), pp. 196–208. doi:10.1080/15252019.2020.1828202

Kim, J. and Chan-Olmsted, S.M. (2005) 'Comparative Effects of Organization–Public Relationships and Product-related Attributes on Brand Attitude', *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 11(3), pp. 145–170. doi:10.1080/1352726042000317214

Lazarsfeld, P. F., Berelson, B., & Gaudet, H. (1948). *The people's choice: How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign.* Columbia University Press.

LeBrasseur, R., Zanibbi, L. and Zinger, T.J. (2003) 'Growth Momentum in the Early Stages of Small Business Start-Ups', *International Small Business Journal: Researching Entrepreneurship*, 21(3), pp. 315–330. doi:10.1177/02662426030213004

Lee, J. A., Sudarshan, S., Sussman, K. L., Bright, L. F., & Eastin, M. S. (2022). Why are consumers following social media influencers on Instagram? Exploration of consumers' motives for following influencers and the role of materialism. *International Journal of Advertising*, 41(1), 78-100

Lee, M. and Lee, H. (2022) 'Do parasocial interactions and vicarious experiences in the beauty YouTube channels promote consumer purchase intention?', *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 46(1), pp. 235–248. doi:10.1111/ijcs.12667

Lee, M.T. and Theokary, C. (2021), "The superstar social media influencer: exploiting linguistic style and emotional contagion over content?", *Journal of Business Research*, 132, pp. 860-871, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2020.11.014

Lee, Y. (2022) 'Dynamics of symmetrical communication within organizations: The Impacts of channel usage of CEO, managers, and peers', *International Journal of Business Communication*, 59(1), pp. 3–21. doi:10.1177/2329488418803661

Leung, F. F., Gu, F. F., and Palmatier, R. W. (2022). Online influencer marketing. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* 50(2), pp. 226-251. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11747-021-00829-4

Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2019). Parasocial interactions and relationships with media characters–an inventory of 60 years of research. *Communication Research Trends*, 38(2), 4-31.

Lin, C. *et al.* (2021) 'Effects of parasocial interaction with an instafamous influencer on brand attitudes and purchase intentions', *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, 10(1).

Lou, C. and Kim, H.K. (2019) 'Fancying the new rich and famous? Explicating the roles of influencer content, credibility, and parental mediation in adolescents' parasocial

relationship, materialism, and purchase intentions', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, p. 2567. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02567

Martínez-López, F. J., Anaya-Sánchez, R., Esteban-Millat, I., Torrez-Meruvia, H., D'Alessandro, S., and Miles, M. (2020). Influencer marketing: brand control, commercial orientation and post credibility. *Journal of Marketing Management,* 36(17-18), 1805-1831. https://doi.org/10.1080/0267257X.2020.1806906

Merano, M. (2021) 'Tesla sales in Germany grow 431% year-over-year for June',

Teslarati, 7 July. Available at: https://www.teslarati.com/tesla-germany-sales-yoy-2021/ (Accessed: 26 January 2022)

Men, L.R. (2021) 'The impact of startup CEO communication on employee relational and behavioral outcomes: Responsiveness, assertiveness, and authenticity', *Public Relations Review*, 47(4), p. 102078. doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102078

Men, L.R., Chen, Z.F. and Ji, Y.G. (2018) 'Walking the talk: An exploratory examination of executive leadership communication at startups in China', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 30(1–2), pp. 35–56. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2018.1455147

Men, L.R., Chen, Z.F. and Ji, Y.G. (2021) 'Cultivating Relationships with Startup Employees: The Role of Entrepreneurs' Leadership Communication', *Management Communication Quarterly*, 35(4), pp. 518–545. doi:10.1177/08933189211017918

Men, L.R., Ji, Y.G. and Chen, Z.F. (2017) 'Dialogues with entrepreneurs in China: How start-up companies cultivate relationships with strategic publics', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 29(2–3), pp. 90–113. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2017.1329736

Men, L.R., Qin, Y.S. and Mitson, R. (2021) 'Engaging Startup Employees via Charismatic Leadership Communication: The Importance of Communicating "Vision, Passion, and Care"', *International Journal of Business Communication*, p. 232948842110204. doi:10.1177/23294884211020488

Men, L. R., & Tsai, W. H. S. (2015). Infusing social media with humanity: Corporate character, public engagement, and relational outcomes. *Public Relations Review,* 41(3), 395-403. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.02.005

Men, L.R. and Tsai, W.-H.S. (2013) 'Toward an Integrated Model of Public Engagement on Corporate Social Networking Sites: Antecedents, the Process, and Relational Outcomes', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 7(4), pp. 257–273.

doi:10.1080/1553118X.2013.822373

Moldovan, S., Muller, E., Richter, Y., and Yom-Tov, E. (2017). Opinion leadership in small groups. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 34(2), 536–552. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijres mar.2016.11.004

Monge, P., & Poole, M. S. (2008). The evolution of organizational communication. *Journal of Communication*, 58(4), 679-692. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00408.x

Morrish, S. C., Miles, M. P., & Deacon, J. H. (2010). Entrepreneurial marketing: acknowledging the entrepreneur and customer-centric interrelationship. *Journal of strategic marketing,* 18(4), 303-316. https://doi.org/10.1080/09652541003768087

Ni, L. and Wang, Q. (2011) 'Anxiety and Uncertainty Management in an Intercultural Setting: The Impact on Organization–Public Relationships', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 23(3), pp. 269–301. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2011.582205

Olanrewaju, A. S. T., Hossain, M. A., Whiteside, N., and Mercieca, P. (2020). Social media and entrepreneurship research: A literature review. *International Journal of Information Management,* 50, 90-110. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2019.05.011

Pakura, S., Rudeloff, C., Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, S., and Eggers, F. (2020) 'Communication management of start-ups: an empirical analysis of entrepreneurs' communication and networking success on Facebook', *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing*, 12(5), pp. 459-489. doi:10.1504/IJEV.2020.111538

Pakura, S. and Rudeloff, C. (2020) 'How entrepreneurs build brands and reputation with social media PR: empirical insights from start-ups in Germany', *Journal of Small Business & Entrepreneurship*, pp. 1–28. doi:10.1080/08276331.2020.1728490

Park, H. and Cameron, G.T. (2014) 'Keeping It Real: Exploring the Roles of Conversational Human Voice and Source Credibility in Crisis Communication via Blogs', *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*, 91(3), pp. 487–507. doi:10.1177/1077699014538827

Rahal, A. (2020, January 10). Is influencer marketing worth it in 2020? Forbes. https://www.forbes.com/sites/ theye c/2020/01/10/is-influencer-marketing-worth-it-in-2020/

Rosaen, S.F. and Dibble, J.L. (2008) 'Investigating the Relationships Among Child's Age, Parasocial Interactions, and the Social Realism of Favorite Television Characters', *Communication Research Reports*, 25(2), pp. 145–154.

doi:10.1080/08824090802021806

Rubin, A.M., Perse, E.M. and Powell, R.A. (1985) 'LONELINESS, PARASOCIAL INTERACTION, AND LOCAL TELEVISION NEWS VIEWING', *Human Communication Research*, 12(2), pp. 155–180. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2958.1985.tb00071.x

Rudeloff, C. *et al.* (2021) 'It takes two to tango: the interplay between decision logics, communication strategies and social media engagement in start-ups', *Review of Managerial Science* [Preprint]. doi:10.1007/s11846-021-00464-x

Rudeloff, C. *et al.* (2022) 'Conditions of One-Way and Two-Way Approaches in Strategic Start-Up Communication: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA)', *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 16(2), pp. 157–181. doi:10.1080/1553118X.2021.1994408

Sahut, J. M., Iandoli, L., & Teulon, F. (2021). *The age of digital entrepreneurship. Small Business Economics*, 56(3), 1159-1169. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00260-8

Sanchez, G. (2013) *PLS Path Modeling with R.* Trowchez Editions. Berkeley, 2013. http://www.gastonsanchez.com/PLS Path Modeling with R.pdf

Sokolova, K., and Kefi, H. (2020). Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services,* 53, 101742. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011

Schramm, H. (2008) 'Parasocial Interactions and Relationships', in Donsbach, W. (ed.) *The International Encyclopedia of Communication*. Chichester, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, p. wbiecp006. doi:10.1002/9781405186407.wbiecp006

Sharma, M., & Singh, V. K. (2022). Using Influencers as Sales Professionals: A Strategy for SMEs & Start-ups. In L. P. Dana, N. Sharma, & V. K. Singh (Eds.). *Managing Human Resources in SMEs and Start-ups: International Challenges and Solutions* (pp. 283-299). https://doi.org/10.1142/9789811239212_0013

Sokolova, K. and Kefi, H. (2020) 'Instagram and YouTube bloggers promote it, why should I buy? How credibility and parasocial interaction influence purchase intentions', *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 53, p. 101742. doi:10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.01.011

Stever, G. (2013) 'Twitter as a way for celebrities to communicate with fans: implications for

the study of parasocial interaction.', *North American Journal of Psychology*, 15(2), pp. 339–354

Stokes, D. (2000) 'Putting Entrepreneurship into Marketing: The Processes of Entrepreneurial Marketing', *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 2(1), pp. 1–16. doi:10.1108/14715200080001536

Sung, K.-H. and Kim, S. (2014) 'I Want to Be Your Friend: The Effects of Organizations' Interpersonal Approaches on Social Networking Sites', *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 26(3), pp. 235–255. doi:10.1080/1062726X.2014.908718

Troise, C., Dana, L.P., Tani, M. and Lee, K.Y. (2022), "Social media and entrepreneurship: exploring the impact of social media use of start-ups on their entrepreneurial orientation and opportunities", *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*, 29(1), 47-73. https://doi.org/10.1108/JSBED-01-2021-0041

Tsai, W.-H.S. and Men, L.R. (2017) 'Social CEOs: The effects of CEOs' communication styles and parasocial interaction on social networking sites', *New Media & Society*, 19(11), pp. 1848–1867. doi:10.1177/1461444816643922

Tsay, M. and Bodine, B.M. (2012) 'Exploring parasocial interaction in college students as a multidimensional construct: Do personality, interpersonal need, and television motive predict their relationships with media characters?', *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 1(3), pp. 185–200. doi:10.1037/a0028120

Tsay-Vogel, M. and Schwartz, M.L. (2014) 'Theorizing parasocial interactions based on authenticity: The development of a media figure classification scheme.', *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 3(2), pp. 66–78. doi:10.1037/a0034615

Tukachinsky, R. and Stever, G. (2019) 'Theorizing Development of Parasocial Engagement', *Communication Theory*, 29(3), pp. 209–230. doi:10.1093/ct/qty032

Turan, M. and Kara, A. (2018) 'Online social media usage behavior of entrepreneurs in an emerging market: Reasons, expected benefits and intentions', *Journal of Research in Marketing and Entrepreneurship*, 20(2), pp. 273–291. doi:10.1108/JRME-09-2016-0034

Verčič, A. T., & Verčič, D. (2007). Reputation as matching identities and images: Extending Davies and Chun's research on gaps between the Internal and external perceptions of the corporate brand. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 13(4), 277-290. https://doi.org/10.1080/13527260701300151

Vrontis, D., Makrides, A., Christofi, M., & Thrassou, A. (2021). Social media influencer marketing: A systematic review, integrative framework and future research agenda. *International Journal of Consumer Studies,* 45(4), pp. 617-644. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12647

Whalen, M., Khin-Maung-Gyi, F. and Smithwick, D. (2004) 'Leadership style and values chart the course for an entrepreneurial journey', *Journal of Organizational Excellence*, 23(2), pp. 43–50. doi:10.1002/npr.20004

Yang, S. and Grunig, J.E. (2005) 'Decomposing organisational reputation: The effects of organisation–public relationship outcomes on cognitive representations of organisations and evaluations of organisational performance', *Journal of Communication Management*, 9(4), pp. 305–325. doi:10.1108/13632540510621623

Yang, A., & Taylor, M. (2014). Looking over, looking out, and moving forward: A network ecology framework to position public relations in communication theory. *Communication Theory*, 1–25. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/comt.12049

Yuan, C.L., Kim, J. and Kim, S.J. (2016) 'Parasocial relationship effects on customer equity in the social media context', *Journal of Business Research*, 69(9), pp. 3795–3803. doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.12.071

Yue, C.A. *et al.* (2019) 'How do CEOs communicate on Twitter? A comparative study between Fortune 200 companies and top startup companies', *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 24(3), pp. 532–552. doi:10.1108/CCIJ-03-2019-0031

Yuksel, M. and Labrecque, L.I. (2016) '"Digital buddies": parasocial interactions in social media', *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing*, 10(4), pp. 305–320. doi:10.1108/JRIM-03-2016-0023

Zerfass, A. and Volk, S.C. (2018) 'How communication departments contribute to corporate success: The communications contributions framework', *Journal of Communication Management*, 22(4), pp. 397–415. doi:10.1108/JCOM-12-2017-0146
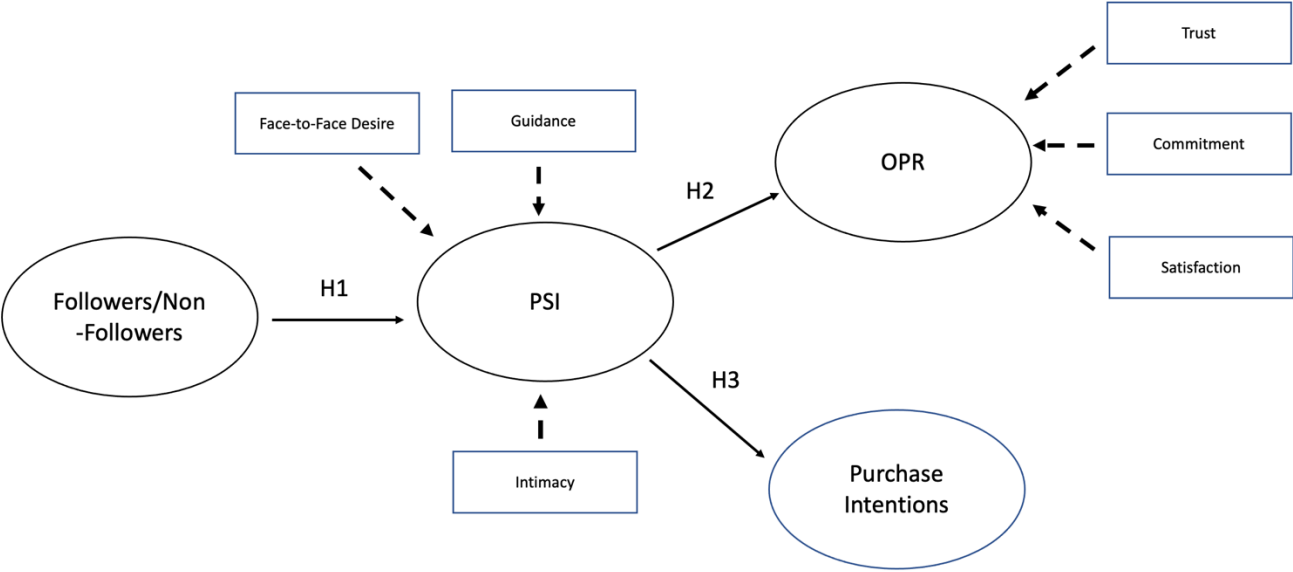
Figure and Tables

Figure I: *Conceptual model*

Figure I: *Conceptual model*

Table I

Sample characteristics

	Followers (n=78)				Non-Followers (n=129)				Full Sample			
	N	%	mean	SD	N	%	mean	SD	n	%	mean	SD
Gender												
Male	46	59			64	49.6			110	53.1		
Female	32	41			61	47.3			93	44.9		
Diverse	0	0			4	3.1			4	1.9		
Age			31.1	13			27.5	8.2			28.9	10.36

Table II

Factor loadings (italized) and crossloadings

		PSI	OPR	Purchase_Int
## Item 1	Guidance 1	*0.8437584*	0.6384362	0.5239592
## Item 2	Guidance 2	*0.8285338*	0.5902275	0.4296223
## Item 3	Guidance 3	*0.8553462*	0.6119499	0.5146760
## Item 4	Guidance 4	*0.8071341*	0.6612451	0.5341466
## Item 5	Guidance 5	*0.8548001*	0.6411358	0.4946870
## Item 6	Guidance 6	*0.8188339*	0.6279356	0.5128272
## Item 7	F2F1	*0.7308230*	0.5304501	0.4346255
## Item 8	F2F2	*0.7464265*	0.5398801	0.3509567
## Item 9	F2F3	*0.7662594*	0.5785827	0.4502428
## Item 10	F2F4	*0.8041527*	0.5187065	0.4413105
## Item 11	Intimacy 1	*0.7879093*	0.5801117	0.4862723
## Item 12	Intimacy 2	*0.8385336*	0.6453201	0.4251830
## Item 13	Intimacy 3	*0.8235723*	0.6585543	0.5376813
## 1tem 14	Intimacy 4	*0.7095779*	0.5255415	0.3374263
## Item 15	Trust 1	0.6054756	*0.8784332*	0.4125154
## Item 16	Trust 2	0.5833159	*0.8667890*	0.4080698
## Item 17	Trust 3	0.5754749	*0.8720488*	0.3971646
## Item 18	Commitment 2	0.7408115	*0.7784348*	0.5979379
## Item 19	Satisfaction 1	0.6510270	*0.8855417*	0.5205389
## Item 20	Purchase Int	0.5819189	0.5564342	*1.0000000*

Table III

Measurement model assessment

Latent construct	AVE	DG rho	Cronbach's alpha
PSI	0.6438166	0.9619277	0.9572039
OPR	0.7347164	0.9331607	0.9094994

Table IV

Structural model assessment

path	beta	Std.Error	t-value	Pr(>|t|)	R2
PSI -> OPR	0.7467634	0.03206182	1.607606e+01	3.640458e-38	0.5576556
PSI -> Purchase Int	0.5819189	0.04848531	1.024512e+01	3.734669e-20	0.3386296