

Self-Disclosure, Para-Social Relationship, Ambivalent Attitude towards Purchase Intention

Luochu Chen^{1, 2}, Hon-Tat Huam³, Sai-Keong Chan⁴

¹*Faculty of Business, Information & Human Sciences, Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, De Centrum City, Kajang, 43000, Selangor, Malaysia*

²*Jingchu University of Technology, Xiangshan Avenue 33, Jingmen 448000, Hubei, China*

³*Putra Business School, Serdang 43400, Selangor, Malaysia*

⁴*Infrastructure University Kuala Lumpur, De Centrum City, Kajang, 43000, Selangor, Malaysia*

Keywords: Self-Disclosure, Para-Social Relationship, Ambivalent Attitude towards Purchase Intention

Abstract: This study investigates the impact of self-disclosure by social media influencers (SMIs) in native advertisements on consumer purchase intentions, with a particular focus on the mediating roles of para-social relationships and ambivalent attitudes. Through surveys and statistical analysis, the study tests related hypotheses and finds that influencer self-disclosure significantly enhances consumer purchase intentions by fostering stronger para-social relationships and eliciting ambivalent attitudes. The results reveal that both personal self-disclosure and product review self-disclosure by influencers positively influence consumer purchase intentions. Para-social relationships mediate the effects of both personal and product review self-disclosure on purchase intentions, while ambivalent attitudes act as dual mediators in these relationships. Additionally, gender does not significantly moderate these effects. Based on the study, brands should emphasize genuine self-disclosure and relationship building to boost consumer purchase intentions.

1. Introduction

The rise of social media has transformed how people interact and communicate, providing marketers with greater opportunities to connect with their target customers. Recently, influencer marketing has rapidly expanded on social media, becoming an effective channel for brands to convey their messages. In China, platforms such as WeChat, TikTok, and Kuaishou have become crucial tools for brand content marketing, attracting many active users. Traditional media brand marketing can no longer satisfy the increasingly sophisticated mental needs of consumers. This

study focuses on the impact of influencer marketing on consumer purchase intentions, especially in short video and live streaming contexts. Self-disclosure, as a key factor influencing consumer emotions and purchase intentions, requires more in-depth theoretical and empirical research.

The research adopts an empirical approach, using surveys and statistical analysis to test hypotheses. It specifically examines the mediating roles of para-social relationships and ambivalent emotions in the relationship between self-disclosure and purchase intentions. Key findings reveal that influencer self-disclosure positively affects purchase intentions, mediated by para-social relationships and ambivalent attitudes. Brands should emphasize genuine self-disclosure and relationship building to enhance consumer purchase intentions.

In conclusion, self-disclosure significantly influences purchase intentions through para-social relationships and ambivalent attitudes. This provides new insights into understanding consumer behavior in social media marketing. Marketers should focus on authenticity and relationship building, while future research should explore other mediating factors and extend the study to different cultural contexts.

The study investigates how personal and product review self-disclosures by social media influencers (SMIs) affect followers' purchase intentions. It also examines the mediating roles of para-social relationships and ambivalent attitudes and the moderating effect of gender.

2. Literature Review

Personal self-disclosure refers to an individual's willingness to share information about themselves, including thoughts, feelings, and experiences, with others (Shih, Lai, & Cheng, 2018). SMIs, who are seen as a mix between friends and salespeople, use personal self-disclosure to build connections with followers, fostering friendships or para-social relationships through their content (De Jans et al., 2018; Taillon et al., 2020). Such disclosure has been shown to increase trust and positive attitudes, as seen in a study involving student restaurant blogs (Huang, 2015). When SMIs disclose more information related to product review, their posts become more detailed and useful, satisfying consumers' information motivation and enhancing their trust (Huang & Chou, 2008). When users' information needs are satisfied, they perceive the post as valuable, and Hamby (2015) found that containing users' reviews in the form of narratives based on the aftermath of product use increases consumers' perceived value, which in turn increases positive attitudes toward the review information and product purchase intention. Subsequently, Shin et al (2017) also argued that when the disclosure contains more information about the product review based on the user's experience posted, the more truthful and insightful the reviews, the lower the risk perceived by the consumer, and the greater the attitude towards the products. Zhang et al. (2018) also found that consumers feel that the product reviews and recommendations provided by key opinion leaders (KOLs) who disclose more product experiences are professionally backed thereby reducing their shopping risk perception.

According to SOR theory, behavioral intentions are influenced by cognitive and affective states, with external factors impacting these intentions through cognition and emotion. Para-social relationships (PSRs), which measure consumers' affective states, mediate the impact of social media influencers' (SMIs) self-disclosure on purchase intention (Insin & Joonhyeong, 2017; Xiang & Zheng, 2016; Jihyun & Hayeon, 2016). Melzner et al. (2023) found that the amount and similarity of personal self-disclosure enhance consumers' purchase intentions by strengthening PSRs. When SMIs share their attitudes and evaluations of products, viewers may feel a greater sense of similarity and connection with them, enhancing the PSR (Tukachinsky et al., 2020; Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). Wahab et al. (2022) found that SMIs indirectly influence purchase intentions through PSR and identification, moderated by social media platform usage.

Personal self-disclosure by SMIs aims to build emotional bonds and trust with the audience, reducing information uncertainty (Cao, Luo, & Hu, 2023; Nemeč Zlatolas et al., 2019). This process helps mitigate consumers' ambivalent attitudes. Jin & Villegas (2007) noted that in less interactive environments, consumers often avoid online ads or develop ambivalent attitudes toward them. In contrast, frequent and deep interactions, facilitated by SMIs' self-disclosure, promote better understanding and reduce ambivalence, enhancing purchase intentions. Consumers' ambivalent attitudes arise when their behaviors or attitudes differ from those of a reference group. When SMIs act as a reference group, detailed and professional product reviews increase the perceived credibility of their opinions, reducing consumers' perceived risk (Turel & Qahri-Saremi, 2023). Comprehensive product reviews by SMIs enhance trustworthiness, reduce negative emotions, and lower ambivalent attitudes, thus fostering positive attitudes toward the products.

Consumers' gender characteristics significantly influence their responses to influencers' native advertisements, shaped by different information processing styles and emotional needs (Tjokrosoeharto & Paramita, 2021; Xue et al., 2020). According to Gender Roles Theory, men tend to approach advertisements rationally, focusing on information relevance and reliability. In contrast, women engage more emotionally, seeking personal connection and resonance with influencers' disclosures (Papyrina, 2019). In native advertisements, the comprehensiveness and perceived usefulness of product review disclosures affect consumer perceptions differently based on gender roles. Males, known for their efficiency-focused decision-making, value product utility and practical information conveyed in SMIs' reviews. If the product review is thorough and addresses their utilitarian concerns, it boosts their confidence in the product's value and stimulates purchase intentions.

Based on the above analysis, the following hypothesis is developed:

H1: There is a significant positive relationship between the SMIs' personal self-disclosure and consumer's purchase intention.

H2: There is a significant positive relationship between product review self-disclosure and consumer's purchase intention.

H3: Para-social relationship mediates the effect of personal self-disclosure on purchase intention

H4: Para-social relationship mediates the relationship between product review self-disclosure and consumer purchase intention.

H5: Ambivalent attitude mediates the effect of personal self-disclosure on consumers purchase intention;

H6: Ambivalent attitude mediates the effect of product review self-disclosure on consumer purchase intention;

H7: Gender role moderates the relationship between personal self-disclosure and purchase intention. The personal self-disclosures in SMIs native advertisements affect female consumers' purchase intention more strongly relative to male consumers.

H8: Gender role moderates the relationship between product review self-disclosure and purchase intention. product review self-disclosure in SMIs native advertisements has a stronger effect on male consumers' purchase intention relative to female consumers.

The research conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

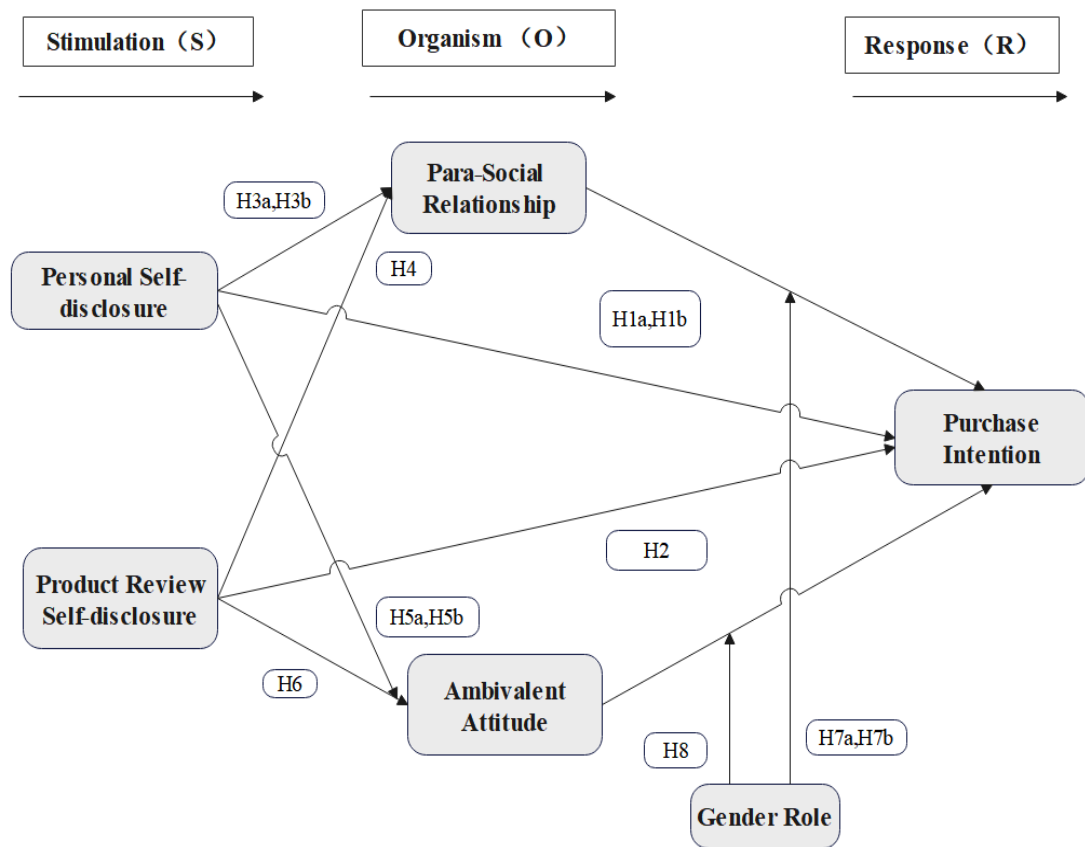


Figure 1: Research Conceptual Framework

3. Methodology

Positivism philosophy provides a distinct lens through which to study the relationship between self-disclosure and consumer purchase intention, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between personal disclosure, consumer attitudes, and decision-making processes. Thus, the study applies positivism.

This research endeavors to investigate the mediating roles of para-social relationships and ambivalent emotions within the context of the association between self-disclosure in native advertisements by Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and consumers' purchase intentions (Audrezet, de Kerviler, & Moulard, 2018; Onofrei et al., 2022). The primary focus of the study is to examine the relationship between self-disclosure in SMI native advertisements (as the independent variable) and consumers' purchase intentions (as the dependent variable). Concurrently, para-social relationship and ambivalent emotions are conceptualized as mediating variables, potentially facilitating the intricate causal mechanisms underlying this relationship. Consequently, a deductive approach is employed to construct the theoretical model delineating the impact of self-disclosure on consumer purchase intentions, and to subsequently verify the validity of related theoretical hypotheses (Luo & Hancock, 2020).

This study employs quantitative research methodologies to facilitate data collection, employing correlation analysis as a pivotal means to investigate the intricate mechanism underpinning the impact of self-disclosure within social media influencers' (SMIs) native advertising on consumers' purchase intention. The rationale underlying the preference for quantitative methods over

qualitative and mixed methods emanates from the well-established suitability of quantitative techniques for the systematic numerical scrutiny and analysis of data (Creswell, 2018). The study's participant pool is derived from the user base of Chinese social media platforms, specifically *xiǎohóngshū* and *dǒu yīn*.

Non-probability sampling is cost-effective and quicker to execute, making it suitable for qualitative research, preliminary studies, or when random sampling is impractical (Pfeffermann & Citro, 2019). However, it may result in biased and less representative findings. Judgmental sampling is particularly useful when targeting a specific subset, such as Social Media Influencers (SMIs) and their audiences. This study uses judgmental sampling to explore how SMIs' self-disclosure in native advertisements affects consumer purchase intentions.

Considering potential incomplete responses, 100 questionnaires were distributed for the pilot study, and 350 for the main study. A total of 350 questionnaires were distributed, and 318 valid responses were collected, yielding a response rate of 90.86%.

4. Descriptive Analysis

The study explores the impact of self-disclosure, para-social relationships, and ambivalent attitudes on purchase intention within the context of social media marketing and social media influencers (SMIs) on Chinese platforms such as *dǒu yīn*, *kuàishǒu*, Bilibili, and *xiǎohóngshū*; The descriptive analysis results are as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Descriptive analysis results

Latent Variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	M	SD	Interpenetration
Personal Self-disclosure	318	1.00	5.00	3.523	1.055	Average
Product Review Self-disclosure	318	1.00	5.00	3.493	1.071	Moderately high
Para-Social Relationship	318	1.0.	5.00	3.371	1.079	Moderately high
Attitude ambivalence	318	0.50	14	7.05	2.527	Moderately high
Purchase Intention	318	1.00	5.00	3.440	1.088	Moderately high

Personal Self-Disclosure has a mean score of 3.523 and a standard deviation of 1.055, which is interpreted as average. This variable measures the extent to which influencers share personal information about themselves, unrelated to product reviews.

The mean score for Product Review Self-Disclosure is 3.493 with a standard deviation of 1.071. This variable measures the extent to which social media influencers disclose personal reviews about products. The score is interpreted as moderately high, indicating that influencers frequently share personal experiences and opinions about products.

The Para-Social Relationship variable has a mean score of 3.371 with a standard deviation of 1.079, interpreted as moderately high. This variable measures the one-sided relationships that followers develop with influencers.

Given the score of 7.05, and considering the range (with the maximum score given as 14 in the table): A score of 7.05 suggests a moderate to high level of ambivalence. It indicates that participants hold both positive and negative attitudes towards the influencer or product in a relatively balanced manner. Since the maximum possible score is 14, a score of 7.05 is

approximately halfway, indicating significant conflicting attitudes. It's not extremely high but suggests a noteworthy level of ambivalence.

The mean score for Purchase Intention is 3.440 with a standard deviation of 1.088, also interpreted as moderately high. This variable indicates the likelihood that followers will purchase products recommended by influencers. High purchase intention is a key indicator of effective influencer marketing.

5. Discussion of Findings

Table 2: Results of reliability and validity tests

Latent variables	CA	ρ_A	CR	AVE
Ambivalent Attitude	0.910	0.910	0.937	0.787
Para-Social Relationship	0.939	0.940	0.950	0.732
Personal Self-disclosure	0.914	0.916	0.935	0.743
Product Review Self-disclosure	0.900	0.900	0.930	0.769
Purchase Intention	0.901	0.902	0.931	0.771

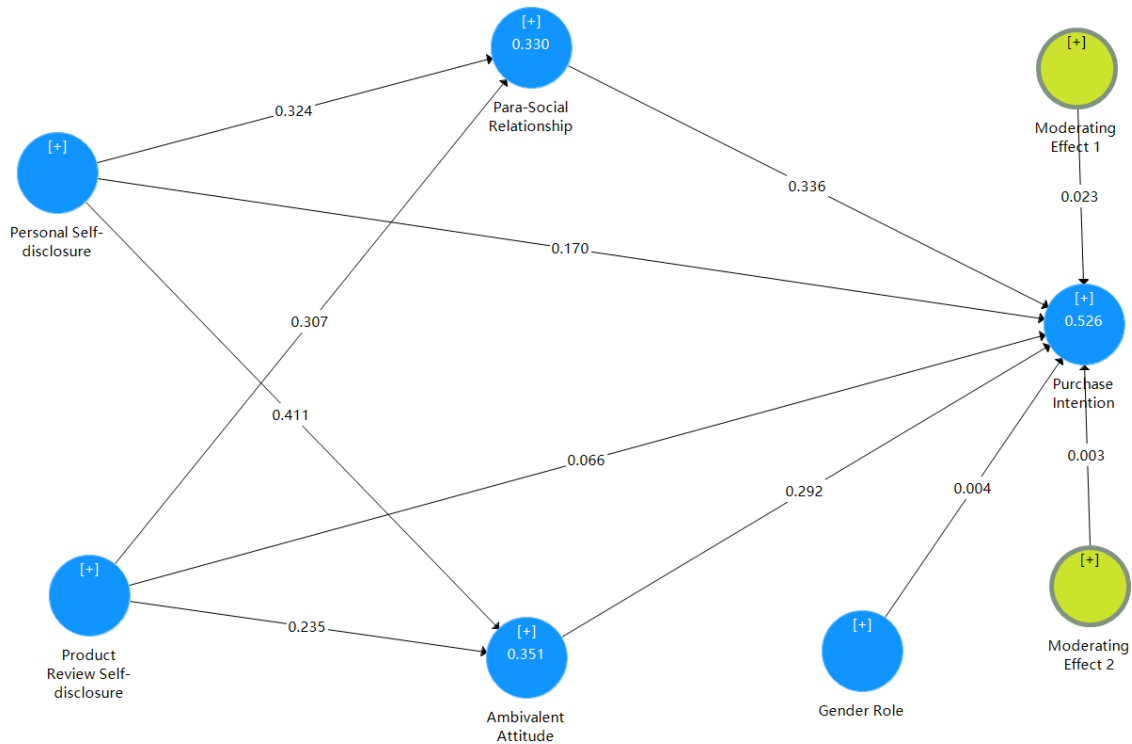


Figure 2: Results of reliability and validity tests

Table 3: Results of a path analysis evaluating the direct effects of various factors on Purchase Intention

Path	M	SD	T	P	Results
Personal Self-disclosure -> Purchase Intention	0.167	0.082	2.058	0.040	H1 supported
Product Review Self-disclosure -> Purchase Intention	0.064	0.067	0.980	0.327	H2 doesn't support
Personal Self-disclosure -> Para-Social Relationship	0.328	0.074	4.373	0.000	
Product Review Self-disclosure -> Para-Social Relationship	0.303	0.076	4.054	0.000	
Personal Self-disclosure -> Ambivalent Attitude	0.412	0.072	5.677	0.000	
Product Review Self-disclosure -> Ambivalent Attitude	0.233	0.074	3.201	0.001	
Moderating Effect 1 -> Purchase Intention	0.025	0.066	0.350	0.726	H7 doesn't support
Moderating Effect 2 -> Purchase Intention	-0.001	0.068	0.046	0.963	H8 doesn't support
Ambivalent Attitude -> Purchase Intention	0.296	0.077	3.790	0.000	
Para-Social Relationship -> Purchase Intention	0.335	0.070	4.795	0.000	
Gender Role -> Purchase Intention	0.005	0.041	0.096	0.924	

The table displays the results of a path analysis evaluating the direct effects of various factors on Purchase Intention, including Personal Self-Disclosure

The significant path coefficient (0.167) suggests that higher levels of Personal Self-Disclosure by social media influencers are associated with higher purchase intentions among their followers.

The t-value of 2.058, which exceeds the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, further substantiates the robustness of this relationship. The p-value of 0.040 indicates that there is less than a 5% probability that this result is due to random chance, thus confirming the reliability of the effect observed.

The non-significant path coefficient (0.064) suggests that the extent to which influencers disclose their personal opinions, emotions, thoughts, and feelings in product reviews does not have a substantial direct impact on their followers' purchase intentions.

The t-value of 0.980, which is below the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, further reinforces the lack of a significant effect. The high p-value of 0.327 suggests that the observed effect is likely due to random chance rather than a true underlying relationship.

The significant path coefficient (0.328) suggests that higher levels of Personal Self-Disclosure by social media influencers are strongly associated with stronger para-social relationships among their followers.

The significant path coefficient (0.303) suggests that higher levels of Product Review Self-Disclosure by social media influencers are strongly associated with stronger para-social relationships among their followers. This finding aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of self-disclosure in building emotional connections and trust between influencers and their audience. For instance, Colliander and Dahlén (2011) found that personal and authentic product

reviews by influencers significantly enhance followers' perceived closeness and trust, which in turn fosters a stronger para-social relationship. Para-social relationships are one-sided, yet emotionally significant, relationships that followers feel with influencers (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The t-value of 4.054, which is well above the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, further substantiates the robustness of this relationship. The p-value of less than 0.000 indicates a highly reliable effect, with virtually no chance that the observed relationship is due to random variation.

The path coefficient (M) for Personal Self-Disclosure's effect on Ambivalent Attitude is 0.412, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.072, a t-value (T) of 5.677, and a p-value (P) of less than 0.000. These results indicate a statistically significant and positive relationship between Personal Self-Disclosure and Ambivalent Attitude, supporting that increased personal self-disclosure by influencers enhances followers' ambivalent attitudes towards them.

The significant path coefficient (0.412) suggests that higher levels of Personal Self-Disclosure by social media influencers are strongly associated with stronger ambivalent attitudes among their followers.

The t-value of 5.677, which is significantly above the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, further substantiates the robustness of this relationship. The p-value of less than 0.000 indicates a highly reliable effect, with virtually no chance that the observed relationship is due to random variation.

The t-value of 0.350, which is below the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, further supports the lack of a significant moderating effect. The high p-value of 0.726 suggests that the observed effect is likely due to random chance rather than a true underlying relationship.

The path coefficient (M) for the moderating effect of gender is -0.001, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.068, a t-value (T) of 0.046, and a p-value (P) of 0.963. These results indicate that the moderating effect of gender on the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure and Purchase Intention is not statistically significant, as evidenced by the p-value well above the 0.05 threshold, thus leading to the rejection of the corresponding hypothesis (H8) that product review self-disclosure in social media influencers' (SMIs) native advertisements has a stronger effect on male consumers' purchase intention relative to female consumers. The non-significant path coefficient (-0.001) suggests that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure by influencers and their followers' Purchase Intention.

The table presents the results of mediation analysis conducted using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). Mediation analysis is used to understand the mechanism through which an independent variable influences a dependent variable via a mediator variable.

Table 4: Mediation Analysis

Path	Coefficient	p-value	95% CI	
			LL	UL
Personal Self-disclosure -> Para-Social Relationship -> Purchase Intention	0.110	0.002	0.048	0.185
Personal Self-disclosure -> Ambivalent Attitude -> Purchase Intention	0.123	0.004	0.054	0.216
Product Review Self-disclosure -> Ambivalent Attitude -> Purchase Intention	0.069	0.015	0.021	0.133
Product Review Self-disclosure -> Para-Social Relationship -> Purchase Intention	0.102	0.002	0.043	0.176

The path coefficient (M) for this mediation effect is 0.102, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.033, a t-value (T) of 3.087, and a p-value (P) of 0.002. The 95% confidence interval (CI) ranges from 0.043 to 0.176. These results indicate that the mediation effect of Para-Social Relationship on the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure and Purchase Intention is statistically significant.

The significant path coefficient (0.102) suggests that Para-Social Relationship partially mediates the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure by influencers and their followers' Purchase Intention. This finding aligns with existing literature that emphasizes the role of para-social relationships in enhancing the effectiveness of influencer marketing. The mediation effect implies that when influencers engage in self-disclosure during product reviews, it not only directly impacts followers' purchase intentions but also indirectly does so by strengthening the para-social relationships between the influencers and their followers.

The t-value of 3.087, which is above the critical value of 1.96 for a two-tailed test at the 0.05 significance level, substantiates the robustness of this mediation effect. The p-value of 0.002 indicates that there is a very low probability that the observed mediation effect is due to random chance. Additionally, the 95% confidence interval (0.043 to 0.176) does not include zero, further confirming the statistical significance of this mediation effect.

The path coefficient (M) for this mediation effect is 0.069, with a standard deviation (SD) of 0.021, a t-value (T) of 3.290, and a p-value (P) of 0.001. The 95% confidence interval (CI) ranges from 0.021 to 0.133. These results indicate that the mediation effect of Ambivalent Attitude on the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure and Purchase Intention is statistically significant. The significant path coefficient (0.069) suggests that Ambivalent Attitude positively mediates the relationship between Product Review Self-Disclosure by influencers and their followers' Purchase Intention.

Table 5: Research Hypotheses and Results of This Study

Effect	RQ code	Research question	Hypothesis	Results
Direct relationship	RQ1	1. Is there significant (and positive/negative) relationship between personal self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H1	Supported
	RQ2	2. Is there significant (and positive/negative) relationship between product review self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H2	Supported
Mediation	RQ3	3. Does para-social relationship mediate the relationship between personal self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H3	Supported
	RQ4	4. Does para-social relationship mediate the relationship between product review self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H4	Supported
	RQ5	5. Does ambivalent attitude mediate the relationship between personal self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H5	Supported

	RQ6	6.Does ambivalent attitude mediate the relationship between product review self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H6	Supported
Moderation	RQ7	7.Does gender role moderate the relationship between personal self-disclosure and purchase intention?	H7	Not Supported
	RQ8	8.Gender role moderates the relationship between product review self-disclosure and purchase intention. product review self-disclosure in SMIs native advertisements has a stronger effect on male consumers' purchase intention relative to female consumers.	H8	Not supported

6. Conclusions

This study offers a comprehensive exploration of the intricate relationships between self-disclosure, para-social relationships, ambivalent attitudes, and purchase intentions within the realm of influencer marketing. The findings reveal several critical insights.

Firstly, personal self-disclosure by influencers, where they share personal insights, emotions, and experiences, significantly enhances followers' purchase intentions. This type of self-disclosure helps humanize the influencer, fostering trust and relatability, which are essential for influencing consumer behavior. When influencers openly share their personal lives, they become more approachable and trustworthy in the eyes of their followers, making followers more likely to consider their product recommendations.

Secondly, product review self-disclosure, involving detailed and personal evaluations of products, plays a pivotal role, albeit indirectly. While such disclosures do not directly impact purchase intentions, they significantly influence other factors like para-social relationships and ambivalent attitudes. When influencers provide balanced and honest reviews, they build credibility and trust, enhancing their overall relationship with their followers. This credibility is crucial in forming a strong para-social relationship, which subsequently affects purchase intentions.

The role of para-social relationships is highlighted as a significant mediator in the effects of both personal and product review self-disclosures on purchase intentions. Influencers who engage in self-disclosure strengthen the emotional bonds and perceived intimacy with their followers, leading to a higher likelihood of followers making purchases based on the influencers' recommendations. This finding underscores the importance of creating and maintaining strong emotional connections between influencers and their audience.

Moreover, ambivalent attitudes, characterized by mixed feelings towards the influencer and the promoted products, play a dual role. On one hand, positive ambivalence, where followers have both positive and negative evaluations, can stimulate critical thinking and lead to more deliberate purchase decisions. On the other hand, negative ambivalence, marked by more pronounced negative feelings, can hinder purchase intentions. Therefore, influencers must manage their disclosures carefully to minimize negative ambivalence and promote positive perceptions.

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