



Silver Influencers on the Rise: How Source Influences and Parasocial Interaction Affect Consumer Purchase Intention

Chuyao Huang¹ and Fei Qiao²(✉)

¹ Customer Business Development Department at Proctor & Gamble, Guangzhou, China
chuyaohuang@foxmail.com

² School of Journalism and Communication, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies,
Guangzhou 510006, China
Jennifer.qf@gmail.com

Abstract. Using social media to disseminate audio-visual information, silver influencers have gained a big number of youthful audiences. Live streaming with commodities and advertising placement of videos are the primary commercial channel used by silver influencers while the effect of which has not been studied in previous research. The current research explores the relationship between source influences and consumer purchase intention, with parasocial interaction serving as the mediator, using S-O-R model as a starting point. The findings indicate that the information influence, emotional influence, and value influence of silver influencers have a significant positive impact on the parasocial interaction of consumers, resulting in their positive purchase intention of products incorporated in live streaming videos.

Keywords: silver influencers · purchase intention · parasocial interaction · commercial realization

1 Introduction

Anyone may serve as an information distributor on the Internet. Web celebrity economics has become an integral aspect of the media environment's diversification; "silver web celebrities", the elderly web celebrities who use the Internet as their primary avenue to seek public attention, are rising power. By disseminating information on websites like Douyin and Kuaishou, it has made enormous efforts to break down age stereotypes about online celebrities and the way of life of senior citizens [1], demonstrating the cultural characteristics of silver web celebrities. In the current study, we define silver influencers as "elderly web celebrities who gain users' attention through content creation and live broadcasting."

"Silver influencers" make use of age and experience gaps to provide a variety of media images, having a big effect on today's homogenized media landscape. The primary division of silver influencers concentrates on vertical issues and has a specialization in the spread of more in-depth information. Some of them use their life experiences to

inspire others, some use comedy to make others laugh, while yet others utilize skills and talents that are connected to cultural traditions to draw in new followers. For example, I'm Tian Laolao and Grandma Wang exclusively wears high heels, and young consumers are attracted to Uncle Beihai who dresses in suits. In addition to creating live and video content to draw in a particular number of followers, they also employ the traditional monetization strategy. According to available statistics, Grandma Wang's first live broadcast on March 25, 2020, generated \$4.7 million in sales, with the OSM mask alone accounting for almost 800,000 of those purchases and emerging as the most popular product [2].

Due to the different aesthetic requirements of diverse groups, silver influencers still need to investigate monetization methods in comparison to young web celebrities in terms of their performance and effectiveness. They should be aware of and constantly look into the problem of how to go over the barrier of economically feasible development and find additional value. Our study, which is based on the source credibility theory, examines how different source influence types impact consumers' propensity to acquire the products promoted in the live commercial broadcasts of silver influencers. To give strategic and useful implications to the silver influencers for their future monetization methods, we specifically investigate the impact of information, emotional, and value influencers on customer purchase intention via parasocial interaction.

2 Concept Definitions and Research Hypothesis

2.1 Information Influence

A large number of studies have confirmed that the characteristics of web celebrities have a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention. Beatty and Smith (1987) find that consumers' purchasing involvement, purchasing attitude, product knowledge and actively searching behavior for relevant information can affect consumers' purchasing decisions [3]. Kamins et al. find that the higher the matching degree of spokesperson characteristics and products, the higher the credibility of spokespersons [4]. As information receivers, consumers need to evaluate the authenticity and reliability of information before making purchasing decisions. Establishing a trustworthy relationship with consumers requires web celebrities to be credible and competent. Professionalism necessitates that web celebrities possess product knowledge and deliver accurate information. Credibility indicates that web celebrities help consumers feel reliable and trustworthy. In the context of this study, information influence is defined as the capacity of web celebrities to be knowledgeable about and deliver product or service information in a way that makes consumers feel credible and trustworthy. Information influence measures consumer perceptions of credibility, professionalism, and product consistency.

H1a: The information influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention.

2.2 Emotional Influence

Influencers' use of positive symbols can build an emotional connection with consumers and impact their behavior to some extent. The positive symbols include personal charisma, physical attractiveness, media engagement, and other major emotional

qualities that could generate favorable sentiments, such as intimacy, which shortens the distance between influencers and customers and provides a pleasant emotional experience. The positive emotional features could be transferred to consumers' attitudes toward the products, resulting in a favorable purchase intention. This study defines emotional influence as the power of web celebrities to attract their fans' attention with positive symbols, pique their curiosity, and form emotional bonds.

H1b: The emotional influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumers' purchase intention.

2.3 Value Influence

In this dimension, consumers frequently demonstrate a high level of recognition of social positive values. When web celebrities and their own value intersect, it can result in value identification, hence increasing the popularity of online celebrities and influencing consumers' purchase intention. This study defines value influence as the capacity of web celebrities to achieve consumer recognition and encourage their imitation through the display of their own excellent value symbols.

H1c: The value influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumption intention.

2.4 Parasocial Interaction

One-sided intimacy is referred to as parasocial interaction [4]. According to the theory of parasocial interaction, people prefer to evaluate media figures in a manner comparable to how they perceive people in real life. The features of media figures are relevant to study. The source influences the quality of parasocial interaction to some degree. The greater users perceive the likeness and attractiveness of the media personality to themselves or their network, the more likely they are to interact with the media personality [5]. Previous studies show that parasocial interaction correlates to the adoption of media characters, brand identity, perceived attractiveness, interactivity, professionalism, and other factors. Rubin (1987) find that the three elements of interpersonal communication, namely appearance attraction, social attraction, and task attraction, have a significant impact on parasocial interaction [6]. Using television characters as their research subject, Tian Q. and Hoffner C.A. (2010) discover that audience perceptions of similarity are highly connect with identification and parasocial interaction [7]. The level of one's identity can affect the quality of one's parasocial interactions.

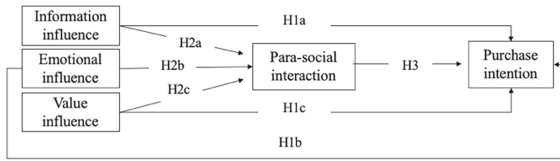
H2a: The informational influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on parasocial interaction.

H2b: The emotional influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on parasocial interaction.

H2c: The value influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on parasocial interaction.

A great number of empirical investigations have demonstrated the positive association between parasocial interaction and purchasing behavior, brand attitude, and brand relationship. The attributes of web celebrities (appearance attractiveness, professionalism, and similarity) and the attributes of Weibo information have a significant positive

Table 1. Research model of source influences of silver influencers on purchase intention



impact on fans’ perception and parasocial interaction, leading to impulsive shopping behavior and expanding the application of parasocial interaction theory.

H3a: The information influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention through parasocial interaction.

H3b: The emotional influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention through parasocial interaction.

H3c: The value influence of silver influencers has a positive effect on consumer purchase intention through parasocial interaction (Table 1).

3 Study Design and Questionnaire Measurement

3.1 Scale Design and Questionnaire Distribution

The research model of this study is based on the S-O-R (stimulus-body-response) theory proposed by Hovland in the 1950s in accordance with Watson’s stimulus-response theory. Three independent variables (information influence, emotional influence, and value influence), one mediator (parasocial interaction), and one dependent variable (purchase intention) are examined in the current study. All scales use a five-point Likert scale, with 1–5 indicating totally disagree to totally agree. The control variables include gender, age, educational background, income, and occupation. Information influence is constructed on professionalism and reliability. Emotional influence is measured by attractiveness. Value influence includes both social identification and value identity. Since “silver influencers” are more likely to evoke young customers’ recollections and feelings for their elders, paying attention to them will typically make them feel psychologically satisfied. In the dimension of value influence, problems concerning societal respect for the elderly-supported norms are posed.

This research gathered 451 questionnaires. Through screening and selection of important items, a total of 250 valid questionnaires were obtained for this investigation, yielding a recovery rate of 55.43%. In terms of gender distribution, males comprised 46% of the population while females comprised 54%; the proportions were relatively balanced. In terms of age distribution, 5.2% were below 18 years old (excluding 18-year-olds), 70.8% were between 18 years old, and 24.2% were over 25 years old (excluding 25-year-olds), with a greater concentration of 18–25-year-olds, which is consistent with the online buying age range. In conclusion, the samples are reasonable and largely satisfy the requirements of study and research (Table 2).

Table 2. Items in the questionnaire scale

variable	coding	source
Informational influence	In1	Ohanian (1991) [9]
	In2	
	In3	
	In4	
Affective influence	Em1	Ohanian and Roobina (1990) [10]
	Em2	
	Em3	
	Em4	
	Em5	
	Em6	
	Em7	
Value influence	Va1	Park and Lessig (1977) [11]
	Va2	
	Va3	
	Va4	
	Va5	
Quasi social interaction	PSI1	Rubin (1987) [7]
	PSI2	Ge Jinping (2017) [12]
	PSI3	
	PSI4	
	PSI5	
	PSI6	
	PSI7	
	PSI8	
Purchase intention	Will1	Zheng Chundong (2015) [13]
	Will2	
	Will3	

3.2 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire

In this study, Cronbach's coefficient was employed to determine the questionnaire's inherent reliability. The reliability of the five dimensions generated in this study varied from 0.856 to 0.921, with a total of 0.964–0.964, which was good or better. All CR values were more than 0.7, meeting the threshold provided by Chin [14]. Therefore, the dependability of the measurement model was high. Regarding validity, SPSSAU was utilized for confirmatory factor analysis to examine the AVR value and the correlation

Table 3. Data analysis and statistics

variable	AVE	CR	Cronbach's Alpha
Information influence	0.646	0.879	0.879
Emotional influence	0.600	0.913	0.913
Value influence	0.572	0.869	0.866
Parasocial interaction	0.596	0.921	0.921
Purchase intention	0.667	0.857	0.856

coefficient of each variable. The fact that the degrees of AVR value was more significant than 0.5 and the average extraction and combination reliability CR values were all greater than 0.7 indicates that the analysis data has a high degree of convergent validity (Table 3).

4 Model Analysis and Results

4.1 Correlation Analysis

According to Pearson's correlation coefficient, there was a positive correlation between information influence, emotional influence, value influence, parasocial interaction and purchase intention ($P < 0.001$). Variance inflation factor VIF and tolerance TOL for multivariate collinearity among variables were examined. It showed that there was no obvious multivariate collinearity issue.

4.2 Linear Regression Analysis

With purchase intention as the dependent variable and information influence, emotional influence, and value influence as the independent variables, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. Independent variables information influence ($\beta = 0.852$, $p < 0.001$), emotional influence ($\beta = 0.855$, $p < 0.001$), value influence ($\beta = 0.895$, $P < 0.001$) and parasocial interaction, the mediator ($\beta = 0.921$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on purchase intention, supporting H1a, H1b and H1c. The independent variables information influence ($\beta = 0.821$, $p < 0.001$), emotional influence ($\beta = 0.887$, $p < 0.001$) and value influence ($\beta = 0.867$, $p < 0.001$) had significant positive effects on the parasocial interaction, supporting H2a, H2b, and H2c.

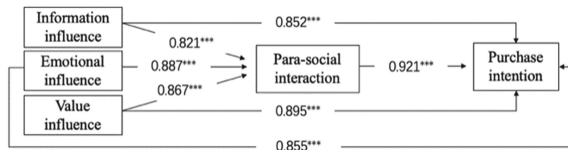
4.3 Mediation Results

Subsequently, the bootstrap method was used to test the mediation effect again, with a confidence interval of 95%. In the first pathway, its Bootstrap 95% confidence interval was [0.3884, 0.6525], excluding 0, indicating significant mediation effect. In the second pathway, its Bootstrap 95% confidence interval was [0.5278, 0.8502], excluding 0, indicating a significant mediation effect. In the third action path, its Bootstrap 95% confidence interval was [0.3775, 0.6628], excluding 0, indicating that the mediation effect

Table 4. Bootstrap test of the mediating effect of parasocial interaction (sample size: 5000)

	Effect	Estimate	SE	95%	
				Lower	Upper
X → M → Y	Total	0.8518	0.0401	0.7727	0.9305
	Indirect	0.5157	0.0678	0.3884	0.6525
	Direct	0.3361	0.0673	0.2075	0.4646
X → M → Y	Total	0.8575	0.000	0.7664	0.9436
	Indirect	0.6846	0.0824	0.5278	0.8502
	Direct	0.1729	0.0768	0.0217	0.3241
X → M → Y	Total	0.8946	0.000	0.8145	0.9747
	Indirect	0.5185	0.0733	0.3775	0.6628
	Direct	0.3761	0.0694	0.2394	0.5128

Table 5. Path coefficient diagram of the theoretical model of this study¹



* P < 0.1, ** P < 0.05, *** P < 0.01, n = insignificant

was significant. Therefore, the mediating effects of parasocial interaction were tested by Bootstrap and three-step regression method, supporting H3a, H3b, and H3c (Tables 4 and 5).

5 Discussion

5.1 The Source Influences Positively Affect Purchase Intention

As an emerging group of web celebrities, silver influencers rely on Internet video platforms to create their own public impact and enrich the content, introducing new aesthetic options and viewpoints to the consumers. The results show that its information influence, emotional influence, and value influence are considerably positively connected with purchase intent. The correlation between information influence (P[information influence] = 0.825) and purchase intention and value influence (P[information influence] = 0.822) and purchase intention is greater than that between emotional influence (P[information influence] = 0.781) and purchase intention. The silver influencers should invest more experience in order to boost their expertise in product selection. Also, they should consider the degree of matching between consumers' image and product choices. At the same time, social norms and traditions can be used to enhance the content value influence.

The sequence of source influences of silver influencers, the three independent variables and the parasocial interaction, the mediator, on purchase intention can be determined by linear regression analysis. Results show that parasocial interaction > value influence > emotional influence > information influence ($\beta = 0.852$, $p = 0.001$). It suggests that for silver influencers, their information influence (professionalism and product consistency) is not the primary determinant of their economic success, but rather their value influence. In the current situation of age disparity between the influencer and the consumers, social value norms such as “respecting and loving the elderly” as well as the value recognition brought by the contrast between their age and their personal characteristics can more effectively generate consumer purchase intention, and consequently, leading to their commercialization. The emotional gratification offered by silver influencers is more valuable than their professionalism, as seen by the discrepancy between the attractiveness of the image of senior people and the sense of affinity with elders, etc.

This study concludes that the influence of silver influencers (information influence, emotional influence, and value influence) has a positive, considerable effect on consumer purchase intention via parasocial interaction, generating significant mediating effects.

Improving emotional influence and value influence, followed by information value, is the top aim for silver influencers seeking monetization. For silver influencers, they may use age as identification and mix it with the cultural values of the 18–39 age range to generate content that is more emotionally engaging, intriguing, and valuable, thereby producing differentiation benefits. In addition, silver influencers could better enhance their product selection skills. Also, for a better reputation, product quality, safety, and legitimacy must be considered.

5.2 The Source Influences Positively Affect the Quality of Parasocial Interaction

The results show that the three dimensions of source influences are highly correlated with parasocial interaction ($p[\text{information influence}] = 0.863$, $p[\text{emotional influence}] = 0.877$, $p[\text{value influence}] = 0.870$), among which the correlation of information influence is weaker than the other two.

Results reveal that emotional influence and value influence are more effective than information influence in improving parasocial interaction. The order of influence of the three independent variables was determined by linear regression analysis as follows: emotional influence ($\beta = 0.887$, $p < 0.001$) > value influence ($\beta = 0.867$, $p < 0.001$) > information influence ($\beta = 0.821$, $p < 0.001$). It demonstrates that, among the three independent variables, emotional influence has the greatest impact on parasocial interaction. Silver influencers should cultivate their emotional influence in order to establish higher-quality parasocial relationships with their consumers.

5.3 The Source Influences Positively Affect Purchase Intention Through Parasocial Interaction

The nature of parasocial interaction fosters an emotional connection. The dimension of parasocial interaction consists of three components, cognition, emotion, and behavior, which have a combined effect on purchasing intention. Source influences on purchasing intention are mediated by parasocial interaction via different mechanisms. Based on

the mediation analysis results, parasocial interaction plays a partial mediating role in the relationship between all three source influences and consumer purchase intention. Among them, the partial mediating effect of parasocial interaction ($\beta = 0.171$, $p < 0.05$) has a relatively significant impact on the path between emotional influence and purchase intention, indicating the importance of constructing the emotional influence of silver influencers and cultivating interactions with fans.

6 Conclusion

Results show that silver influencers make good use of video and broadcast in the process of content production. Information, emotional and value influences have positive effects on purchase intention, with parasocial interaction as the mediator; the greater the degree of the parasocial interaction, the stronger the consumer's purchase intention.

Silver influencers still have huge commercial potential. Affected by the epidemic, consumers' daily purchase activities has shifted to online platforms. Lives broadcasting e-commerce and consumption of short video content have become major channels of shopping, while the combination of short video and lives broadcasting is gaining power for brand marketing. Although the web celebrity economy is mature and the competition is fierce, silver influencers are expected to use their differentiation to obtain an advantage in the blue ocean market.

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