

Beyond Content: The Impact of Parasocial Relationships on Self-media User Loyalty in the Creator Economy

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of digital video platforms has catalyzed the growth of self-media, making it a focal point for contemporary academic inquiry. Within the creator economy, these independent content producers act as pivotal stakeholders who generate commercial value through strategic brand alliances and audience engagement. Nevertheless, existing literature offers limited insights into the underlying drivers of user loyalty, particularly regarding the psychological mechanisms that transcend functional service quality. To bridge this gap, the current study extends the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM) by incorporating “perceived value” and “parasocial relationships” to model the determinants of loyalty toward self-media creators. This conceptual framework was empirically validated using survey data from 768 Taiwanese users. The results demonstrate that while satisfaction serves as a primary driver for basic subscription intentions, parasocial relationships emerge as a more robust and comprehensive predictor of loyalty. Specifically, parasocial relationships significantly influence not only subscription intentions but also high-commitment behaviors, including paid memberships and endorsed-product purchases. This highlights that while perceived value and satisfaction provide a functional foundation, emotional and relational bonds are more critical in securing deep economic support within the creator economy. These findings provide actionable insights for marketing strategies and relationship management, offering a blueprint for designing creator-centric service models in the evolving digital landscape.

Keywords: Self-media, Expectation Confirmation Model, Perceived value, Parasocial relationships, Loyalty

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超越內容：擬社會關係在創作者經濟中 對自媒體使用者忠誠度的影響

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摘 要

網路視訊串流平台的興起，帶動了自媒體產業的蓬勃擴張，使其成為學術界探究數位傳播的重要領域。在創作者經濟的架構下，自媒體製作者扮演著價值創造的核心角色，藉由深化社群互動及品牌協作，為商業生態系貢獻顯著收益。然而，現有文獻對於驅動用戶忠誠度的因素探討仍顯不足，尤其是超越技術功能性指標、探究深層心理機制的實證研究較為不足。鑒於此，本研究擴充了「期望確認模式」（ECM），將「知覺價值」與「擬社會關係」納入理論框架，旨在探測影響自媒體受眾忠誠度的前因。本研究透過768份針對台灣自媒體使用者的有效樣本進行量化分析。實證結果指出，滿意度雖是基本訂閱意圖的主要驅動力，但卻難以有效預測高承諾行為。相較之下，擬社會關係展現出更為穩健且全面的預測力，不僅顯著影響訂閱意圖，更是驅動付費會員與購買代言產品之高承諾忠誠行為，這證實雖然知覺價值與滿意度提供功能性基礎，但在創作者經濟中，情感與關係紐帶對於鞏固深層經濟支持更至關重要。本研究釐清了建構自媒體忠誠度的關鍵機制，並為行銷策略、粉絲關係經營及創作者導向服務的優化設計提供了具體的實務參考。

關鍵詞：自媒體、期望確認模式、知覺價值、擬社會關係、忠誠度

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I. Introduction

In contrast to conventional broadcasting or print media, social networking platforms empower individuals to curate and disseminate content to a global viewership. This technological advancement provides novel avenues for interpersonal engagement and self-expression. Such an evolution has facilitated the emergence of “self-media” which is a specific category of user-generated content where creators operate as autonomous entities to manage private channels and develop unique personal identities. Through digital environments like YouTube, these independent producers can cater to specialized niches, foster audience devotion, and secure financial returns via diverse streams including advertising revenue, brand partnerships, and subscription-based models. As the bond between viewers and content producers shifts toward deeper socio-emotional ties, identifying the determinants of audience loyalty has become a critical focal point for both academic inquiry and industrial application. Previous literature highlights that digital social environments offer a robust foundation for personal branding and cross-sector influence (Khamis et al., 2017; Hou, 2019). On platforms such as YouTube, creators often transition from mere content providers into prominent digital personalities and aspirational figures. The massive subscriber bases commanded by many channels have elevated these individuals to the status of digital opinion leaders or influencers. These creators frequently leverage their digital presence as a fundamental or auxiliary revenue source by utilizing monetization tools ranging from traditional advertising to Super Chats and merchandise commerce (Postigo, 2016; Joseph and Bishop, 2024). To maintain high production standards, high-traffic channels often allocate resources toward professional-grade equipment and specialized personnel. Consequently, YouTube has matured into a pivotal arena for influencer-led affiliate programs (Schwemmer and Ziewiecki, 2018). This progression has culminated in a self-media ecosystem where individual branding, consumer involvement, and economic value are profoundly integrated. As a representative platform for this self-media ecosystem, YouTube provides a robust research context through its unique infrastructure of long-form content, recommendation systems, and fan-funding mechanisms, all of which facilitate the transition from functional consumption to deep emotional attachment.

Practitioner reports indicate that the business model of retailers collaborating with YouTubers or content creators can generate significant returns on investment (ROI). For example, the Japanese household goods brand Yamazaki Home achieved an ROI of 15:1 through its long-term collaboration with YouTubers (Impact.com, 2025). Additionally, statistics from Amra and Elma (2025) show that YouTube influencer marketing yields an average ROI of approximately \$6.50 for every \$1 invested. These findings demonstrate that

retailers can obtain substantial short-term and long-term commercial value by partnering with creators for product recommendations, placements, and affiliate marketing. From an academic perspective, Libai et al. (2024) developed a model of the “creator economy” that illustrates how influencers, including YouTubers, generate customer equity through fan interactions and the dynamic value exchange among platforms, brands, and creators. This research not only confirms the commercial value of retailer–creator collaborations, particularly in terms of ROI, but also highlights the deeper psychological mechanisms and ecosystem structures underlying influencer marketing.

The expanding presence and economic weight of self-media have garnered substantial interest within the academic community. Scholarly inquiry has increasingly focused on the dynamics of user-creator interaction and the subsequent impact of parasocial relationships (PSR) on audience conduct. For instance, empirical evidence suggests that users experiencing social anxiety may develop emotional dependencies on influencers, which can escalate into compulsive consumption patterns (Bérail et al., 2019). Furthermore, existing literature has investigated how the strategic use of self-disclosure, coupled with high production standards and specific content attributes, reinforces the parasocial bonds formed between viewers and YouTubers (Ferchaud et al., 2018; Sokolova and Perez, 2021). Specifically, Aw et al. (2023) further highlighted that content prestige and interactivity are critical in cultivating such parasocial relationships, while Reinikainen et al. (2020) demonstrated that audience engagement through comments can significantly strengthen the link between parasocial relationships and influencer credibility. Beyond these factors, variables such as the perceived credibility of the source, flow experiences, and specific influencer traits have been identified as key drivers of user engagement, satisfaction, and buying behavior (Miranda et al., 2021; Kim, 2022; Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, Lee and Lee (2022) found that parasocial relationships on YouTube promote vicarious experiences that reduce perceived risk, and Conde and Casais (2023) argued that these emotional bonds can be more persuasive than mere follower counts in driving audience adoption of recommendations. Collectively, these findings underscore the transformative power of parasocial relationships in modulating both affective and behavioral reactions to digital content. However, while previous research provides a solid foundation for understanding immediate engagement, there remains a noticeable scarcity of studies addressing the mechanisms that foster enduring loyalty toward individual creators. In the competitive landscape of the creator economy, loyalty serves as a vital metric of success. It is typically manifested through concrete actions such as channel subscriptions, participation in premium memberships, and the active promotion of endorsed products. Consequently, there is a pressing need for both marketers and creators to decode the elements that sustain these long-

term connections. To fulfill this objective, the present study seeks to fill this research gap by explicitly clarifying the role of emotional bonding mechanisms in contrast to purely rational-cognitive evaluations. The study examines the drivers of YouTuber loyalty by incorporating parasocial relationship theory into a broadened Expectation Confirmation Model.

Within the domains of marketing and information systems, the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM) is frequently employed to clarify the mechanisms of sustained user engagement across diverse digital environments, such as social networking, e-commerce, and mobile applications (Hsu & Lin, 2015; Wang & Liu, 2024). A systematic review of existing ECM research indicates that most studies predominantly focus on identifying cognitive and functional factors, such as system quality, information quality, and perceived usefulness, as the primary antecedents to continuance intention. These findings consistently demonstrate that users persist with a service when their functional expectations are met; however, this “system-as-tool” perspective often overlooks the relational complexity of the creator economy. In the specific realm of self-media platforms like YouTube, continuous engagement is shaped by a combination of functional utility and the social or emotional experiences inherent in the media consumption process. Scholars have noted that the explanatory capability of the ECM is significantly enhanced when augmented with variables such as emotional involvement and perceived value, particularly in settings characterized by high levels of social interaction (Huang, 2019; Chiu et al., 2021). Building upon these prior insights, this research integrates the concept of parasocial relationships into the ECM structure to better represent the affective and social facets of the YouTube experience. Parasocial relationships refer to the one-sided psychological bonds that audiences form with media personas, a phenomenon that is especially prevalent in the landscape of user-generated content. YouTubers often utilize informal and direct communication techniques that cultivate a feeling of closeness and simulated friendship with their viewers (Labrecque, 2014). Such emotional ties are anticipated to impact user contentment and long-term loyalty beyond the mere practical benefits of the content. By blending parasocial relationship theory with the ECM, this study offers a more holistic perspective on the cognitive and emotional drivers of loyalty toward self-media producers. This integration moves beyond the traditional ‘system-as-tool’ view of the ECM by addressing the ‘human-centric’ nature of self-media. It articulates that in the creator economy, loyalty is driven not just by functional confirmation, but by the emotional affirmation of the bond between creator and audience, thereby extending the ECM’s explanatory power to relational dynamics.

This investigation provides both theoretical and practical contributions by broadening the scope of the ECM and delivering strategic guidance for creators aiming to strengthen audience

participation and establish viable commercial models. The subsequent sections of this article are structured as follows. Section 2 summarizes relevant academic works. Section 3 outlines the conceptual model and hypothesis development. Section 4 details the methodological approach, while Section 5 presents the results of the empirical analysis. Finally, Section 6 discusses the core findings and their implications for both researchers and industry practitioners.

II. Literature Review

A. Expectation confirmation model

A substantial body of research concerning consumer satisfaction has utilized Expectation-Confirmation Theory (ECT), originally developed by Oliver (1980), to analyze various aspects of consumer behavior (Susarla et al., 2003; Jun et al., 2018; Han et al., 2020). This theoretical framework posits that individuals evaluate their level of contentment with a service or product by measuring their initial expectations against the actual perceived performance after consumption. The resulting sense of confirmation then serves as a critical benchmark for determining future repurchase intentions or the desire to persist in using the service. Although ECT has been extensively applied, it is not without its scholarly critiques. Bhattacharjee (2001) points out that the original model fails to account for the dynamic shifts in user expectations that often occur during the actual experience of a product. Drawing from self-perception theory, it is argued that while pre-consumption expectations are typically shaped by external factors such as advertising, social circles, or mass media, post-consumption expectations are predominantly driven by firsthand interaction. In the specific context of viewing YouTube content, for instance, a viewer might recalibrate their initial assumptions after the first encounter. When the actual viewing experience surpasses these early expectations, the user's post-exposure expectations are further strengthened. Furthermore, the conceptualization of satisfaction within ECT remains a subject of academic debate. Scholars often vary in their definitions, treating satisfaction either as a cognitive attitude or a purely affective reaction. Bhattacharjee observes that even if a user maintains a favorable attitude toward a service, they may experience dissatisfaction if the practical experience fails to align with their expectations. Additionally, the inconsistent conceptualization of "expectations" across different studies has led to fragmented research findings. To resolve these theoretical discrepancies, Bhattacharjee introduced the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM) as a refined framework for understanding and predicting the continued adoption of information systems (IS). As illustrated in Figure 1, the ECM simplifies the original ECT components into four distinct post-usage dimensions which include confirmation, perceived usefulness, satisfaction, and IS continuance intention. According to this model, the decision to continue using an information

system is primarily dictated by satisfaction and perceived usefulness resulting from previous experiences. Within this structure, satisfaction is a product of both confirmation and perceived usefulness, while the level of confirmation also directly impacts perceived usefulness.

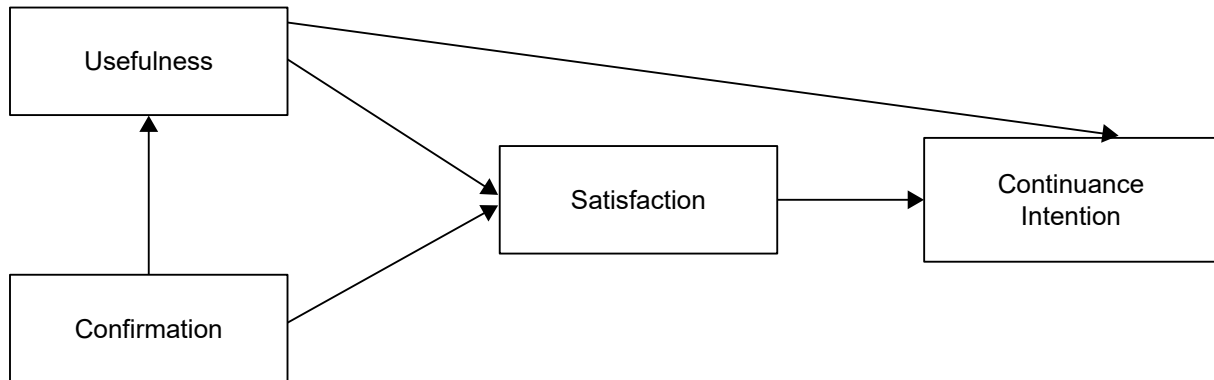


Figure 1. Expectation Confirmation Model

While the ECM was initially designed to clarify the sustained adoption of general information systems, its applicability has since transcended its original scope. Although Bhattacharjee empirically confirmed the model's robust explanatory capacity through a study of online banking services, the framework itself is versatile and not limited to any single technological context. Consequently, a multitude of subsequent investigations have adopted or refined the ECM to explore continuance behavior across a wide array of digital environments, the details of which are consolidated in Table 1. Based on the systematic overview in Table 1, it is evident that previous ECM extensions have predominantly identified cognitive predictors such as perceived usefulness and confirmation as the primary drivers of continuance intention. However, these studies typically conceptualize the technology as a functional tool within contexts like e-learning or mobile payments. Our synthesis of this literature reveals a critical research gap where the transition from system-centric continuance to person-centric loyalty remains under-explored. Specifically, there is a lack of evidence regarding how affective mechanisms like parasocial relationships drive high-commitment behaviors such as paid memberships in the creator economy. Traditional ECM focuses on cognitive confirmation of functional utility, which is sufficient to explain routine usage (e.g., subscription), but insufficient to account for high-commitment economic behaviors (e.g., paid membership). In the creator economy, where content is inseparable from the creator, this limitation creates a gap between satisfaction and monetization. Parasocial relationships address this limitation by introducing a relational mechanism that enables the transition to financially committed support. To better capture the nuances of user loyalty within the specific landscape of self-media, the present study introduces several strategic modifications to the foundational research model.

Within the classic ECM framework, perceived usefulness is defined as the user's conviction that utilizing a system will yield functional advantages, such as enhanced productivity or task efficiency. However, this study contends that the rewards derived from self-media consumption extend far beyond utilitarian or task-driven gains. Instead, the benefits often encompass hedonic and social dimensions, including increased personal enjoyment and a heightened sense of community through shared interests with peers. To encapsulate this multifaceted value, the construct of perceived usefulness is substituted with "perceived value" in this study, thereby offering a more holistic assessment of the incentives driving self-media engagement. Under this modified ECM, the factors governing social media loyalty are theorized to include both satisfaction and perceived value. Furthermore, this research posits that additional critical determinants, most notably parasocial relationships, play a significant role in fostering loyalty. This study also empirically evaluates how a YouTuber's professional expertise, source credibility, and physical or social attractiveness contribute to the cultivation of these parasocial bonds. Finally, to align the research more closely with industry practices, the traditional concept of "continuance intention" is replaced by "loyalty." In this context, loyalty is conceptualized as a set of related but distinct behavioral outcomes rather than a single homogeneous construct. This approach explicitly distinguishes between lower-commitment behavior (the intention to subscribe) and higher-commitment behaviors (the intention to join a paid membership and the intention to purchase endorsed products), which differ in their associated costs and risks. These outcomes are modeled separately to reflect their potentially different nomological patterns.

Table 1. Previous ECM studies

Authors (Year)	Context	Extended perceived variables	Result
Khahar et al. (2025)	Personal cloud computing services	Subjective norm (SN), Self- efficacy (SE), Behavioural adaptation (ADP), Trust	PU, CON, SAT, SN, and SE → CI Trust plays a moderating role in the link of ADP-CI
Obeid et al. (2024)	E-learning	Perceived enjoyment (PENJ), social interactivity (INT), social influences (SI), computer self-efficacy (CSE)	PENJ, CON, INT, CS, SI --> PU; CON --> PENJ, CON, PU, INT, SI --> SA PEN, SAT, INT, SO, CSE, PU → CI

Authors (Year)	Context	Extended perceived variables	Result
Ghazali et al. (2024)	AI-based voice assistants	Intelligence (IN), information quality (IQ), system quality (SQ), brand trustworthiness (BT), brand expertise (BE), Anthropomorphism (AN)	CON → IN, IQ, SQ, AN; AN, SQ → BT; AN, IQ → BE; CON, BT, BE → SAT; SAT → CI
Mao et al. (2023)	Government mobile applications	Information Quality (IQ), System Quality (SQ), Service Quality (Ser Q)	IQ, SQ, Ser Q → CON; CON → PU; PU and CON → SAT; PU and SAT → CI
Al Amin et al. (2023)	mobile payment application	Trust, Information Quality (IQ), System Quality (SQ), Service Quality (Ser Q)	IQ, SQ, Ser Q, CON → SAT; CON → PU, SAT, CON → CI
Chiu et al., (2021)	fitness and health apps:	Investment size (INS), quality alternative, commitment (COM)	CON → PU, SAT, INS; SAT, INS → COM; PU, SAT, COM → CI
Rahi et al. (2021)	Internet bank	Trust, intrinsic regulation (INR), identified regulation (IDR), introjected regulation (IJR), external regulation (EXR)	trust, INR, EXR, IDR, IJR, CON → CI
Hsu and Lin (2020)	Online to Offline (O2O)	Production information intensity (PII), Transaction cost (TC), utilitarian benefits (UB), hedonic benefits (HB)	PII → TC; CON, HB → SAT; TC, UB → CI

Confirmation (CON), Perceived usefulness (PU), Satisfaction (SAT), Continuance intention (CI)

B. Perceived value

Throughout the decision-making process, individuals assess the potential worth they expect to derive from a product, a calculation that acts as a fundamental determinant of their consumption patterns (Yang & Peterson, 2004; Lin & Wang, 2006). In a similar vein, users on platforms like YouTube anticipate acquiring specific forms of value when engaging with video content. Contemporary research has established that perceived value is a primary driver of purchase intentions within the short-form video industry (Hewei, 2022; Fan et al., 2024). As a subjective appraisal, perceived value functions as a benchmark for consumer choices. This evaluative standard is derived from a comparison between the multifaceted advantages gained from a product and the various sacrifices made by the user (Zeithaml, 1988). Both the rewards

and the costs associated with consumption can manifest in either physical or psychological forms. For instance, utilitarian benefits might encompass improvements in professional efficiency or task performance, whereas hedonic advantages may relate to emotional uplift or improved psychological well-being. Conversely, the investment made by consumers can include financial expenses as well as the expenditure of time and cognitive effort. Drawing from the Theory of Consumption Value as articulated by Sheth et al. (1991), purchase decisions are shaped by a multifaceted array of value dimensions that reflect the diverse demands of consumers. These dimensions typically encompass social, emotional, functional, epistemic, and conditional values. While Sheth's model provides a broad framework, scholars have argued that in the context of video-sharing platforms, users' primary gratifications are derived from content utility, emotional stimulation, and interpersonal connection. Consequently, within the specific sphere of social media, users generally experience several distinct categories of value, most notably informational, hedonic, and social values (Yang et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). These three dimensions are selected for this study because they comprehensively capture the utilitarian, affective, and relational motivations that drive self-media consumption. First, informational value is defined as the degree to which users expect to acquire practical knowledge or useful information from media content to resolve specific challenges. This construct evaluates the functional advantages of content consumption based on quality assessments and performance expectations. It is intrinsically linked to utilitarian and performance-based values, which have been consistently demonstrated to bolster both user satisfaction and behavioral intentions (Hsu and Lin, 2020; Faruq et al., 2023). Second, entertainment value refers to the potential of video content to stimulate positive emotional responses and enjoyable experiences. Often equated with hedonic value, this dimension captures the sensory and emotional gratification derived from viewing, which serves as a critical factor influencing user contentment and the drive to engage with content (Saygılı and Yalçıntekin, 2021; Yum and Kim, 2024). Finally, social value pertains to the subjective sense of fulfillment regarding self-esteem and the reinforcement of social identity through platform interactions. In digital environments, constructive interactions yield social recognition, which subsequently enhances an individual's self-worth and communal standing. While scholars have operationalized this construct through various lenses such as sociability gratification or social networking value, it fundamentally reflects the relational benefits derived from the self-media community. For instance, Zhang et al. (2022) observed that social networking value serves as a positive antecedent to trust, while Hsu and Lin (2023) established that sociability gratification is a significant predictor of the intent to persist with platforms. The distinction between these dimensions is theoretically significant for the creator economy: informational value functions as a cognitive-utilitarian driver focused on content utility, whereas hedonic and social values

serve as affective-relational drivers rooted in emotional resonance. Distinguishing these values allows for a nuanced analysis of how rational assessments of usefulness contrast with emotional experiences of connection in shaping user behavior. Beyond these cognitive assessments, users may also cultivate parasocial bonds with YouTubers, a concept explored in depth in the subsequent section. From a managerial standpoint, decoding the drivers of these perceived values can empower creators to formulate superior marketing strategies and cultivate enduring audience loyalty.

C. Parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships are characterized as enduring psychological attachments that develop between media consumers and performers. This theoretical construct was initially formulated to explain the unidirectional bonds formed by audiences with figures in television, radio, and cinema (Horton and Wohl, 1956). In subsequent years, scholars have broadened the scope of this concept to encompass social media environments, specifically investigating the dynamics between viewers and digital content creators (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Yuan and Lou, 2020). For instance, the rapport established between influencers and their followers on social networking platforms represents a contemporary form of parasocial relationship. Unlike traditional media, digital platforms allow creators to engage with their audience in ways that foster the growth of lasting socio-emotional ties (Bond, 2016; Kurtin et al., 2018). Existing research indicates that social media users are inclined to develop these parasocial bonds with digital celebrities, a process that mirrors the way audiences traditionally bonded with characters from their favorite television series (Chung and Cho, 2017). As a prominent social media platform, YouTube offers enhanced potential for users to cultivate parasocial bonds with content producers due to its inherently interactive and transparent architecture (Labrecque, 2014). Specific functionalities, including comment sections and real-time live streaming, provide a supportive framework for the development of these emotional attachments. Even peripheral interactions between viewers and YouTubers have been shown to nurture a perceived sense of friendship (Lueck, 2015). Empirical data further suggests that users may develop lasting feelings of intimacy even after relatively brief exposure to media figures (Bond, 2018). This psychological tie, often termed “pseudo-friendship,” is characterized as a unilateral bond established by the consumer toward a media celebrity or persona (Rubin and Step, 2000; Hartmann et al., 2008).

In the context of this study, parasocial relationship is defined as the enduring, one-sided psychological bond that YouTube users develop with content creators through repeated exposure to their videos. Extensive literature has explored the role of parasocial relationships in modulating the behavioral intentions of social media participants (Lim et al., 2020; Sokolova

and Perez, 2021). In the current investigation, the construct of parasocial relationships is utilized to evaluate user loyalty toward YouTubers. Furthermore, the study examines the specific antecedents of these bonds to offer strategic insights for creators seeking to bolster audience attachment. Prior scholarly works have identified three primary catalysts that drive the formation of parasocial relationships: expertise, credibility, and attractiveness (Miranda et al., 2021; Rungruangjit, 2022). Expertise pertains to the degree to which a content creator demonstrates specialized knowledge or significant experience within their domain (McQuarrie et al., 2013). Audiences in pursuit of substantive information are naturally inclined to gravitate toward creators who exhibit proven proficiency. YouTubers who focus on knowledge-based content often deliver systematically organized and analytical material, which assists viewers in deciphering intricate subjects. Such high-caliber content not only commands sustained attention but also stimulates deeper engagement, thereby reinforcing parasocial ties. Credibility refers to the perceived reliability of an information source and serves as a proxy for the quality of the communication. Information originating from trustworthy sources is viewed as more persuasive, which significantly shapes the attitudes and subsequent behaviors of the audience (Petty and Wegener, 1998). Finally, attractiveness is defined by the user's perception of a creator's visual or aesthetic appeal (Patzner, 1983). Interacting with individuals perceived as attractive often triggers favorable affective states and motivates the pursuit of closer psychological connections (Lemay et al., 2010). For instance, Kim (2022) observed that the physical appeal of fitness-oriented YouTubers notably impacts a viewer's flow experience, which subsequently enhances their commitment to consuming such content. Drawing on these theoretical foundations, the present study empirically tests how expertise, credibility, and attractiveness collectively influence the development of parasocial relationships with YouTubers.

III. Research model and hypothesis

The conceptual framework of this study, which is grounded in the modified ECM, is illustrated in Figure 2. This research systematically aligns with the core logic of the ECM by positioning perceived value and parasocial relationships as the primary antecedents. While the original ECM emphasizes utilitarian expectations, the current model extends this framework by incorporating informational, entertainment, and social values, alongside the affective bond of parasocial relationships, to better reflect the self-media context. This model posits that user loyalty is a multidimensional construct (i.e., intention to subscribe, intention to join a paid membership, and intention to buy endorsed products) influenced by three primary factors including perceived value, parasocial relationships, and satisfaction. This distinction reflects the difference between regular content consumption and more committed forms of audience

support. While subscribing is a fundamental action to stay connected, joining memberships or purchasing products requires a greater willingness to provide tangible support and financial resources. According to the proposed model, perceived value is a construct that integrates informational, hedonic, and social dimensions. Simultaneously, the development of parasocial relationships is theorized to be driven by the expertise, source credibility, and aesthetic attractiveness of the content creator. Within this theoretical structure, satisfaction serves as a critical mediating variable that links perceived value and confirmation to ultimate loyalty outcomes. The following subsections provide formal definitions for each construct, explain the hypothesized network of relationships, and offer a detailed rationale for each proposed path within the model.

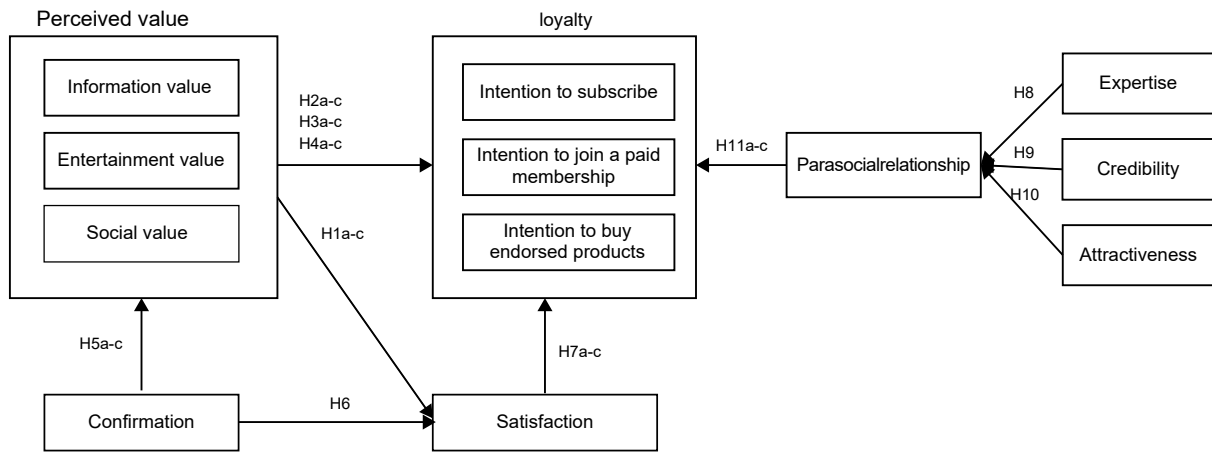


Figure 2. Research model

A. Perceived value, satisfaction and loyalty

Perceived value is a fundamental determinant in modulating consumer conduct, particularly in fostering satisfaction and enduring loyalty. When individuals discern a higher level of worth from a product or service, there is a strong likelihood of a corresponding increase in their contentment and commitment. In this investigation, informational value is characterized as the degree to which audiences anticipate acquiring practical knowledge, facilitating self-improvement, and addressing specific challenges through YouTube content. Concurrently, entertainment value pertains to the intensity of positive emotional responses, such as delight and gratification, derived from interacting with engaging material on the platform. Social value is operationalized as the perceived utility of a YouTuber's channel in bolstering a user's social self-concept and identity. Satisfaction is theorized as a favorable affective condition that emerges from a holistic appraisal of performance, grounded in previous encounters with YouTube videos. Furthermore, loyalty is represented by the strength of a user's intention to subscribe, intention to join a paid member and intention to buy

endorsed products. Extensive empirical research has established that perceived value serves as a positive antecedent to both user satisfaction and various behavioral intentions across a wide range of information system and technology environments (Kim et al., 2013; El-Adly, 2019; Yang and Xia, 2022). Drawing upon these theoretical and empirical foundations, the following research hypotheses are formulated.

Hypothesis 1a-c. (a) Information value, (b) entertainment value, and (c) social value will positively affect user satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2a-c. Information value will positively affect user (a) intention to subscribe, (b) intention to join a paid member, and (c) intention to buy endorsed products.

Hypothesis 3a-c. Entertainment value will positively affect user (a) intention to subscribe, (b) intention to join a paid member, and (c) intention to buy endorsed products.

Hypothesis 4a-c. Social value will positively affect user (a) intention to subscribe, (b) intention to join a paid member, and (c) intention to buy endorsed products.

B. Confirmation, satisfaction and loyalty

Confirmation is operationalized as the extent to which users find that their preliminary expectations regarding YouTube content align with their actual experience during consumption. As the Expectation Confirmation Model (ECM) functions as the foundational framework for this research, the hypothesized paths established by the original model are tested within the specific environment of YouTube video channels. A vast array of empirical evidence has consistently validated the robustness of the ECM in various information system adoption contexts (Thong et al., 2006; Han et al., 2020). In a strategic departure from the original model, the current study substitutes perceived usefulness with the broader construct of perceived value. Prior scholarly inquiries have underscored the pivotal role of perceived value in modulating both user contentment and long-term commitment. For example, Yang and Peterson (2004) identified a statistically significant link connecting perceived value to satisfaction and subsequent loyalty. Furthermore, Turel et al. (2007) observed that the value perceived by consumers in mobile messaging services directly determines their behavioral intention to utilize those services. In a similar vein, Hsu and Lin (2015) established that the perceived value of premium mobile apps acts as a positive antecedent to both user satisfaction and the propensity to pay. Collectively, these empirical insights provide the basis for the following research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 5a-d. Confirmation will positively affect (a) information value, (b) entertainment value, and (c) social value.

Hypothesis 6. Confirmation will positively affect user satisfaction.

Hypothesis 7a-c. Satisfaction will positively affect user (a) intention to subscribe, (b) intention to join a paid member, and (c) intention to buy endorsed products.

C. Antecedents of parasocial relationships

The current research identifies three pivotal determinants that are hypothesized to exert a positive influence on the development of parasocial relationships: the expertise, credibility, and attractiveness of the YouTuber. Expertise is characterized as the user's assessment of the creator's specialized proficiency or extensive experience within a particular niche. Specialized knowledge is widely acknowledged as a fundamental component of social interaction (Xiang et al., 2016). For instance, within the realm of social commerce, demonstrated expertise has been proven to nurture stronger parasocial bonds (Aw and Chuah, 2021). Furthermore, empirical evidence from live streaming commerce indicates that the professional competence of a seller significantly enhances the formation of these psychological attachments (Rungruangjit, 2022). Credibility pertains to the extent to which audiences view the information shared by a YouTuber as reliable and honest. Given that parasocial relationships are defined as unilateral, intimate ties that mature through persistent interaction, the integrity of the communicator is paramount. Scholarly works have consistently supported the notion that source credibility serves as a primary driver in the cultivation of these parasocial ties (Chung and Cho, 2017; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Finally, attractiveness involves the user's appraisal of a YouTuber's aesthetic appeal or physical presentation. Literature suggests that viewers are naturally drawn to influencers who exhibit high levels of social or physical allure, a factor that significantly streamlines the development of deeper parasocial connections (Lee and Watkins, 2016; Sokolova and Kefi, 2019). Drawing upon these theoretical and empirical precedents, this study formulates the following research hypotheses.

Hypothesis 8. Expertise will positively affect user parasocial relationships.

Hypothesis 9. Credibility will positively affect user parasocial relationships.

Hypothesis 10. Attractiveness will positively affect user parasocial relationships.

D. Parasocial relationships and loyalty

A significant number of investigations have scrutinized how the parasocial bonds formed between users and specific entities dictate loyalty-related behaviors. For instance, the strength of a social media user's parasocial connection with a particular brand has been identified as a positive driver of brand devotion (Labrecque, 2014). Similarly, evidence from the gaming industry indicates that individuals who maintain robust parasocial ties with streamers exhibit

a higher propensity to persist in viewing live-streamed content (Lim et al., 2020). YouTube's interactive environment creates a fertile landscape for the cultivation of these one-sided relationships between viewers and content producers. Research conducted by Bérail et al. (2019) suggests that these affective bonds with YouTubers can catalyze deeper involvement with the platform's video services. Furthermore, within the niche of fitness content, the existence of parasocial attachments has been shown to significantly modulate a viewer's commitment to consuming fitness-oriented videos (Sokolova and Perez, 2021). Building upon these diverse empirical findings, the current study formulates the following hypothesis regarding the link between parasocial relationships and user loyalty.

Hypothesis 11a-c. Parasocial relationships will positively affect user (a) intention to subscribe, (b) intention to join a paid member, and (c) intention to buy endorsed products.

IV. Research method

A. Data collection

Empirical data for this investigation were gathered through an electronic survey targeted at active YouTube participants. This study employed a multi-channel online recruitment strategy to ensure a broad and diverse reach. To maximize the response rate, recruitment invitations were disseminated across several prominent social media channels in Taiwan, notably Facebook and widely accessed bulletin board systems. The survey link was also circulated via LINE, which remains the leading instant messaging application in the Taiwanese market. This volunteer sampling approach was specifically designed to reach digital-native cohorts who are the primary users of video-sharing platforms. The data collection phase spanned one month and focused exclusively on individuals with established experience in utilizing YouTube's services. As an incentive for participation, respondents were invited to enter a lucky draw for one of twenty gift vouchers valued at NT\$500 each, equivalent to roughly US\$16, for use at local convenience stores. This process yielded a final sample of 768 valid questionnaires. Within this sample, the gender distribution consisted of 42% male and 58% female participants. To ensure sample validity, we verified that over 99% of respondents possess at least one year of YouTube usage experience, with 43% having used the platform for over nine years. This profile, characterized by a high concentration of users aged 21–49 and those with university degrees, aligns with the Taiwan Internet Report (2024), confirming the sample's representativeness of Taiwan's active digital users. The comprehensive descriptive statistics regarding the sample are detailed in Table 2.

Table 2 Demographic profile

Measure	Items	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	325	42
	Female	443	58
Age	Under 20	19	2
	21-29	222	29
	30-39	310	40
	40-49	174	23
	Over 50	43	6
Education	Senior high school or below	121	16
	Bachelor's degree	543	70
	Graduate degree	104	14
Experience in using YouTube	Under 1 year	11	1
	1-3 years	59	8
	3-6 years	170	22
Time spent watching each time	6-9 years	202	26
	Over 9 years	326	43
	Under 10 mins	44	6
	10 mins – under 30 mins	279	36
	30 mins – under 1 hour	237	31
	Over 1 hour	208	27

B. Measures

The measurement instruments for all theoretical constructs in this study were derived from established literature and subsequently modified to align with the specific environment of YouTube. To assess the dimensions of perceived value, the scales for informational, hedonic, and social value were adapted from the frameworks developed by Hsu and Lin (2020, 2023). Regarding the antecedents of social bonds, the indicators for expertise, credibility, and attractiveness were sourced from the research of Miranda et al. (2021) and Su et al. (2021, 2022). Furthermore, the construct of parasocial relationships was operationalized based on the measurement protocols established by Dibble et al. (2015). For the core elements of the Expectation-Confirmation Model, including satisfaction, confirmation, and loyalty, the study utilized standardized scales frequently employed in longitudinal IS research (Bhattacharjee, 2001). Each item was evaluated using a five-point Likert scale, which required participants to rate their level of agreement from ‘disagree strongly’ (1) to ‘agree strongly’ (5). Furthermore,

each item was translated into Chinese following Brislin's (1980) back-translation method. This standardized approach ensures the reliability and comparability of the data across different usage contexts within the self-media ecosystem.

Before initiating the primary data collection phase, a preliminary pilot study was carried out to assess the precision and relevance of the research instrument. The survey underwent a rigorous content review by two professors with expertise in information management, who evaluated the adequacy of the constructs, the clarity of the wording, and the overall structural layout. Subsequently, the questionnaire was distributed to a convenience sample of 50 active social media participants to further refine the measurement items. Based on the feedback from the pilot test, specific wording modifications were made to several items to enhance readability and ensure they resonated with the daily experiences of YouTube viewers. For example, complex academic phrasing was replaced with more direct, colloquial language to reduce the respondents' cognitive load. Additionally, during the full-scale deployment, we implemented digital screening to ensure participants were active YouTube users and utilized IP filtering to prevent duplicate submissions, thereby maintaining the integrity of the data. These preliminary responses were gathered using a digital survey platform. The results from this pilot phase demonstrated satisfactory levels of both reliability and validity, thereby confirming that the instrument was appropriate for broader implementation. This systematic validation process ensured that the final questionnaire was well-suited for capturing accurate data during the full-scale deployment.

V. Results

A. Measurement model

According to the results displayed in Table 3, the factor loadings for all items fell between 0.78 and 0.96. These figures comfortably exceed the widely recognized benchmark of 0.50 (Hair et al., 1995), thereby affirming the reliability of the individual indicators used in this study. Furthermore, the Composite Reliability (CR) scores for every construct surpassed the recommended minimum of 0.60 (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). This outcome confirms that the measurement model possesses satisfactory internal consistency and convergent validity. Additional evidence for the quality of the model is provided in Table 4. The analysis shows that the correlation coefficients between all pairs of constructs remained lower than the square roots of their respective Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values. Such findings provide strong evidence of discriminant validity among the variables. Regarding the overall fit of the measurement model, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.053. Since this value is well below the conservative threshold of 0.10 (Henseler et al., 2016)), the

measurement model demonstrates a high degree of fit with the empirical data.

Table 3 Scale items of constructs, factor loading weight values, composite reliability and average variance extracted (AVE).

Construct	Measure	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Information value	It helps me to store useful information	0.78	0.85	0.66
	It is easy to retrieve information when I need it	0.82		
	It helps me keep up to date on the latest news and events	0.83		
Entertainment value	Watching YouTube helps me pass time	0.85	0.89	0.72
	Watching YouTube helps me combat boredom	0.87		
	YouTube is entertaining.	0.82		
Social value	The fact I watch YouTube videos makes a good impression on other people.	0.87	0.93	0.83
	Watching YouTube videos brings me social approval.	0.93		
	Watching YouTube videos helps me feel accepted.	0.92		
Confirmation	My experience with watching YouTube videos was better than I expected.	0.84	0.88	0.72
	The service level or function provided by YouTube videos was better than I expected.	0.86		
	Overall, most of my expectations from using YouTube videos were confirmed.	0.84		
Expertise	This YouTuber is experienced.	0.85	0.86	0.68
	This YouTuber provides knowledgeable content.	0.82		
	This YouTuber is qualified to provide the content he provides.	0.81		

Construct	Measure	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Credibility	This YouTuber is dependable.	0.87	0.92	0.75
	This YouTuber is honest.	0.85		
	This YouTuber is reliable.	0.87		
	This YouTuber is trustworthy.	0.88		
Attractiveness	If there is a chance to meet, I think I can be friends with this YouTuber.	0.86	0.88	0.71
	I want to share mutual interests with this YouTuber.	0.88		
	If this YouTuber was on someone else's channel, I would watch that video.	0.79		
	I could have a warm relationship with the influencers I watch most frequently on YouTube.	0.80		
Parasocial relationship	The YouTubers I watch most frequently on YouTube talk about their personal habits.	0.83	0.89	0.67
	While watching videos of my favorite YouTubers, I could feel their emotions.	0.79		
	During viewing the YouTuber who I approach most frequently on YouTube, I feel I could really get inside their head.	0.85		
	Watching YouTube videos makes me feel very satisfied.	0.84		
Satisfaction	Watching YouTube videos gives me a sense of enjoyment.	0.84	0.91	0.71
	Watching YouTube videos makes me feel very contented.	0.83		
	Watching YouTube videos makes me feel very delighted.	0.85		
	I would recommend other watch this YouTuber's videos	0.89		
Intention to subscribe	I find subscribing to this YouTube channel to be worthwhile.	0.90	0.89	0.81

Construct	Measure	Factor loading	Composite reliability	Average variance extracted
Intention to join a paid membership	This YouTuber's videos are worth paying for.	0.95	0.95	0.90
	I will continue to pay to watch this YouTuber's member videos in the future.	0.95		
Intention to buy endorsed products	I am willing to pay to purchase products recommended (or endorsed) by this YouTuber.	0.95	0.96	0.92
	Paying to purchase products recommended (or endorsed) by this YouTuber is worth it.	0.96		

Table 4. Discriminant validity

	IV	EV	SV	CON	SAT	PS	ES	CR	AT	BI1	BI2	BI3
IV	0.81											
EV	0.47	0.85										
SV	0.18	0.15	0.91									
CON	0.58	0.51	0.21	0.85								
SAT	0.46	0.51	0.26	0.68	0.84							
PS	0.33	0.28	0.54	0.48	0.45	0.82						
ES	0.54	0.44	0.25	0.67	0.62	0.39	0.82					
CR	0.46	0.85	0.34	0.64	0.61	0.52	0.65	0.87				
AT	0.27	0.19	0.57	0.37	0.43	0.70	0.34	0.53	0.78			
BI1	0.44	0.46	0.28	0.68	0.60	0.54	0.57	0.55	0.44	0.90		
BI2	0.28	0.17	0.48	0.32	0.27	0.60	0.30	0.40	0.52	0.40	0.95	
BI3	0.28	0.21	0.46	0.40	0.28	0.59	0.35	0.40	0.49	0.44	0.74	0.96

Note(s): The diagonals represent the square roots of AVE (average variance extracted). Below the diagonal elements are the correlations between the construct values. All correlations between a specific construct and the others are smaller than its square roots of AVE IV: Information value; EV: Entertainment value; SV: Social value; CON: Confirmation; SAT: satisfaction; PS: Parasocial relationship; ES: Expertise; CR: Credibility; AT: attractiveness; BI1: Intention to subscribe; BI2: Intention to join a paid membership; BI3: Intention to buy endorsed products

B. Model testing results

To estimate the path coefficients and their significance, we conducted bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples, and the results are presented in Fig. 3 and Table 5, Informational value

exerted a significant positive influence on various loyalty indicators, including the intention to subscribe, the intention to join a paid membership, and the intention to purchase endorsed goods ($b = 0.12, p < 0.01$; $b = 0.10, p < 0.01$; $b = 0.12, p < 0.01$). Consequently, hypotheses H2a, H2b, and H2c were empirically supported. Contrary to expectations, however, informational value did not demonstrate a direct impact on user satisfaction, leading to the rejection of H1a. Regarding hedonic aspects, entertainment value significantly predicted both satisfaction and the intent to buy endorsed products ($b = 0.20, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.15, p < 0.001$), thereby providing support for H1b and H3c. Nevertheless, entertainment value failed to show a direct effect on either paid membership or subscription intentions, meaning H3a and H3b were not supported. Social value was found to have a significant impact on satisfaction, the intention to buy endorsed products, and the intention to join a paid membership ($b = 0.11, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.19, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.22, p < 0.001$). These findings confirm H1c, H4a, and H4b, although the hypothesized link between social value and subscription intention (H4c) was not statistically significant. Furthermore, confirmation was identified as a powerful antecedent for all dimensions of perceived value and satisfaction, specifically affecting information value, entertainment value, social value, and satisfaction ($b = 0.59, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.51, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.21, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.54, p < 0.001$). This evidence robustly supports hypotheses H5a through H5c and H6. Together, these paths accounted for 51.2% of the satisfaction variance. While satisfaction significantly bolstered the intention to subscribe ($b = 0.33, p < 0.001$), thus supporting H7a, it did not significantly influence the intention to join a paid membership and the intention to buy endorsed products, resulting in the rejection of H7b and H7c. Additionally, the expertise, credibility, and attractiveness of YouTubers each demonstrated a substantial impact on the formation of parasocial relationships, with path coefficients recorded at 0.09 ($p < 0.05$), 0.14 ($p < 0.001$), and 0.60 ($p < 0.001$), respectively. These results validate hypotheses H8, H9, and H10. These three antecedents collectively explained 53.5% of the variance in parasocial relationships. As predicted, parasocial relationships played a vital role in driving the intention to subscribe, the intention to join a paid membership, and the intention to buy endorsed products ($b = 0.47, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.46, p < 0.001$; $b = 0.32, p < 0.001$), providing full support for H11a, H11b, and H11c. Finally, the proposed model accounted for 51% of the variance in satisfaction, 38% in purchase intention, 39% in paid membership intention, and 48% in subscription intention. Overall, the structural model accounted for 48.8% of the variance for subscription intention, 39.9% for paid membership intention, and 38.6% for purchase endorsed products intention. All f^2 effect sizes and Q^2 values (via PLSpredict) were assessed and found to meet the recommended thresholds, confirming the model's predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022; Shmueli et al., 2019). Furthermore, a full collinearity VIF test was conducted to assess potential bias, and all VIF values were below the threshold of 3.3,

indicating the absence of significant multicollinearity and common method bias (Kock, 2015). For the structural model, the SRMR (0.053) was also evaluated to assess the global model fit. Consistent with the criteria suggested by Henseler et al. (2016), this value confirms that the hypothesized structural framework aligns well with the observed data. Finally, discriminant validity was confirmed via the HTMT ratio, where the ratio between Attractiveness and PSI was 0.88, which remains within the acceptable limit of 0.90, ensuring that these constructs are conceptually and statistically distinct (Hair et al., 2022).

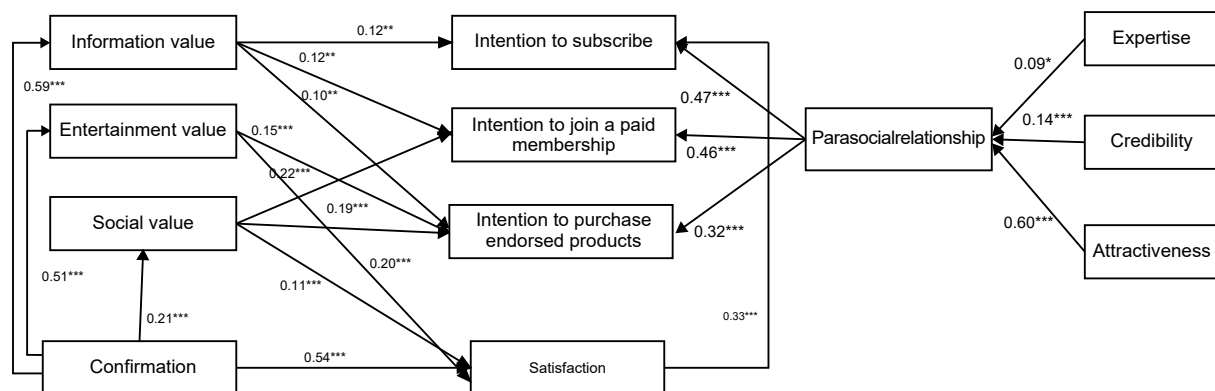


Figure 3. Results of structural modeling analysis (full sample, $n = 768$).

******, *******Significant at the $p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.001$ levels, respectively.

Table 5. Summary of Structural Model Testing Results

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Result
H1a	IV $\rightarrow$ SAT	-	0.7618	0.4466	Not Supported
H1b	EV $\rightarrow$ SAT	0.20	5.5995	0.0000	Supported
H1c	SV $\rightarrow$ SAT	0.11	3.5656	0.0004	Supported
H2a	IV $\rightarrow$ BI1	0.12	3.2825	0.0011	Supported
H2b	IV $\rightarrow$ BI2	0.10	3.1227	0.0019	Supported
H2c	IV $\rightarrow$ BI3	0.12	2.5886	0.0099	Supported
H3a	EV $\rightarrow$ BI2	-	0.9214	0.3573	Not Supported
H3b	EV $\rightarrow$ BI1	-	4.1391	0.0000	Not Supported
H3c	EV $\rightarrow$ BI3	0.15	0.9663	0.3344	Supported
H4a	SV $\rightarrow$ BI3	0.19	4.5791	0.0000	Supported
H4b	SV $\rightarrow$ BI2	0.22	5.1127	0.0000	Supported
H4c	SV $\rightarrow$ BI1	-	1.0510	0.2937	Not Supported
H5a	CON $\rightarrow$ IV	0.59	21.4123	0.0000	Supported
H5b	CON $\rightarrow$ EV	0.51	16.7794	0.0000	Supported

Hypothesis	Path	Coefficient	T-value	P-value	Result
H5c	CON → SV	0.21	5.6357	0.0000	Supported
H6	CON → SAT	0.54	15.4749	0.0000	Supported
H7a	SAT → BI1	0.33	7.3864	0.0000	Supported
H7b	SAT → BI2	-	0.7615	0.4467	Not Supported
H7c	SAT → BI3	-	1.2305	0.2191	Not Supported
H8	ES → PS	0.09	3.5743	0.0004	Supported
H9	CR → PS	0.14	3.1852	0.0015	Supported
H10	AT → PS	0.60	20.3642	0.0000	Supported
H11a	PS → BI1	0.47	8.5057	0.0000	Supported
H11b	PS → BI2	0.46	10.7329	0.0000	Supported
H11c	PS → BI3	0.32	10.8165	0.0000	Supported

Note: IV: Information value; EV: Entertainment value; SV: Social value; CON: Confirmation; SAT: Satisfaction; PS: Parasocial relationship; ES: Expertise; CR: Credibility; AT: Attractiveness; BI1: Intention to subscribe; BI2: Intention to join a paid membership; BI3: Intention to buy endorsed products.

VI. Discussion and Conclusion

A. Discussion

The findings of this research illustrate that user loyalty within the self-media landscape can be comprehensively elucidated through an expanded version of the Expectation-Confirmation Model. The empirical evidence suggests that confirmation acts as a fundamental driver of satisfaction and various perceived values, specifically informational, hedonic, and social dimensions. These results offer several critical insights for both theoretical understanding and practical application. This finding suggests a potential boundary of the ECM in the creator economy, indicating a possible decoupling between cognitive utility and affective evaluation. First, it was observed that informational value exerts a substantial and direct influence on multiple facets of loyalty, including the willingness to subscribe to a channel, enroll in premium memberships, and acquire products promoted by creators. This discovery underscores that audiences who regard the content as being of high utility and caliber are predisposed toward loyal behaviors. Interestingly, however, informational value did not yield a statistically significant impact on user satisfaction. In the mature YouTube market, informational value has evolved into a “hygiene factor,” meaning that while audiences expect high-quality information as a baseline, its presence merely prevents dissatisfaction rather than actively cultivating a sense of affective satisfaction. Since purely functional

information is utilitarian and impersonal, satisfaction within the ECM framework remains an affective evaluation that stems more from emotional resonance and the pleasure derived during the consumption process. This finding points toward a potential discrepancy between the functional information users anticipate and the actual affective satisfaction they derive, suggesting that while informational content drives commitment, elements such as emotional amusement or interpersonal social engagement are more influential in determining the overall level of user contentment. In essence, informational value may act as a rational driver of behavioral intentions without necessarily triggering affective responses, highlighting the value of incorporating relational constructs such as the parasocial relationship into the ECM framework. Second, the analysis reveals that entertainment value significantly shapes a user's inclination to acquire endorsed products, yet it fails to influence the decision to subscribe or enroll in memberships. This pattern suggests that hedonic value predominantly captures the immediate gratification and pleasure derived from media consumption, which can trigger impulsive purchasing decisions through transient emotional arousal. Conversely, the choice to subscribe or commit to a membership involves a more complex set of considerations, such as the perceived quality of information and rational expectations of functional utility. Because subscriptions and memberships represent an enduring commitment of attention and emotion rather than just a momentary transaction, they may be less sensitive to the fleeting emotional uplift associated with entertainment. Such a distinction clarifies why entertainment value may not directly translate into long-term formal affiliations with a channel. Third, social value was found to impact specific facets of loyalty, most notably the intention to participate in paid memberships and the purchase of endorsed goods. This relationship can be linked to the user's social self-concept, as these specific actions allow individuals to affirm their identity or elevate their perceived social standing. By accessing exclusive content or publicly supporting a favored brand, users find tangible opportunities to demonstrate their devotion while simultaneously reinforcing their self-image. Interestingly, social value did not yield a significant effect on subscription intentions. This discrepancy may be explained by signaling theory (Spence, 1973), which suggests that actions must involve observable commitment or cost to function as credible signals. Although users may utilize purchases and premium memberships to project a certain social image, they might perceive the act of subscribing as a more personal or private endeavor with low social visibility. Therefore, audiences appear to be selective in how they express their social identity, choosing specific commercial interactions rather than utilizing all available loyalty channels to signal their affiliation. This nuance highlights the strategic way in which self-media users manage their digital personas through varied loyalty behaviors. Fourth, satisfaction had no significant effect on high-commitment loyal behaviors, such as the intention to join a paid membership

or buy endorsed products. One possible explanation for this result is that satisfaction with past content does not inherently translate into financial commitment because these actions represent high-commitment behaviors driven more by relational attachment than by functional contentment. While many users are satisfied with free content, they often remain free riders until they develop a psychological bond such as a sense of belonging or a desire to support the creator, which serves as the necessary emotional catalyst to cross the payment threshold. Fifth, as a direct reflection of this emotional investment, the research reveals that parasocial relationships function as more potent predictors of user loyalty. These psychological bonds involve sustained and substantive connections between audiences and YouTubers, which appear to cultivate loyalty more profoundly than the relatively transient experiences of utilitarian value or contentment. Individuals frequently devote significant time and emotional energy to these relationships, and such investment serves as a compelling catalyst for persistent engagement. Furthermore, parasocial ties are intimately interwoven with a user's self-identity, rendering them a core component of the individual's self-concept. Existing literature suggests that identifying with influencers or brands fortifies consumer devotion by ensuring that consumption remains consistent with one's personal identity (Coelho et al., 2018; Xi et al., 2022). The trust and confidence placed in a YouTuber further consolidate this loyalty, as viewers regard the shared knowledge and endorsements as highly dependable (Lacap et al., 2023). Finally, the investigation established that the impact of attractiveness on the development of parasocial relationships is more significant than the effects of expertise or credibility. This finding suggests that the parasocial relationship is primarily an affective bond rooted in emotional identification rather than a purely cognitive evaluation of functional traits. Given the inherently visual nature of the YouTube platform, users are frequently first captivated by the physical appearance and overall aesthetic presentation of creators. A charismatic persona or a polished production style not only secures audience attention but also directly modulates their emotional responses and behavioral tendencies, serving as a potent hedonic trigger that lowers psychological barriers and streamlines the formation of parasocial bonds. It is important to note that attractiveness in this context extends beyond mere physical traits; it also encompasses a YouTuber's personality, affective expression, and level of emotional sincerity. A charismatic and relatable content creator can forge a more intimate rapport with their audience, facilitating a sense of psychological proximity that expertise alone cannot achieve. This deepens the user's emotional identification with the creator, which in turn reinforces the strength and longevity of the parasocial relationship.

B. Implications for Research

The findings of this investigation offer several substantive contributions to the academic

literature. First, this research extends the ECM by shifting from a “system-as-tool” view to a “human-centric” perspective that fits the self-media ecosystem. While previous ECM research predominantly focuses on cognitive and functional factors like system quality, our study integrates constructs that capture the social and affective characteristics of contemporary media. By categorizing perceived value into informational, hedonic, and social dimensions, the study broadens the prevailing understanding of post-adoption behavior. The results indicate that sustained engagement in self-media contexts is shaped by a multifaceted array of value perceptions, rather than being limited to functional usefulness. This provides strong theoretical justification for applying the ECM to interactive platforms where emotional experiences are as significant as utilitarian benefits. Second, the study advances the conceptualization of ECM outcomes by substituting continuance intention with the more comprehensive construct of user loyalty. In the self-media context, loyalty encompasses a wider spectrum of behaviors, such as subscribing to channels, transitioning to paid memberships, and acquiring endorsed products. This methodological shift effectively bridges information systems research with marketing theories focused on relationship cultivation and maintenance. It underscores that long-term engagement on social media platforms should be interpreted as an enduring relational commitment and a vital metric of success in the creator economy, rather than a mere continuation of technology use. Third, the integration of parasocial relationships into the expanded ECM reveals an emotional mechanism that profoundly influences user loyalty. The findings suggest that an individual’s affective attachment to content creators is a primary factor in driving long-term participation, thereby addressing the noticeable scarcity of studies on enduring loyalty within the creator economy. Consequently, cognitive appraisals alone may be insufficient to fully explain loyalty within self-media environments. By incorporating parasocial bonds, this research adds a critical emotional perspective to the ECM and supports a dual-process understanding of human behavior by accounting for both rational evaluations and affective influences. Finally, this study expands the theoretical boundaries of the ECM and establishes a foundation for future academic inquiries. The refined model provides a versatile framework that can be adapted to various digital platforms to explore how emotional and relational factors function across different technological and cultural landscapes. Future investigations might further enhance the explanatory power of the ECM by incorporating additional constructs, such as social presence or perceived authenticity, to better reflect the dynamic nature of social media ecosystems and the evolving value exchange between creators and their audiences.

C. Implications for practice

The empirical findings of this research provide several actionable insights for YouTubers

and digital content creators. First, practitioners can bolster audience devotion by prioritizing the production of high-caliber, substantive content while simultaneously cultivating active engagement. Timely responses to audience inquiries and comments can significantly increase a user's propensity to subscribe, enroll in premium memberships, and purchase promoted goods. Furthermore, diversifying content themes to align with the specific needs of various audience segments can help expand the subscriber base and ensure sustained viewership. Second, regarding the cultivation of hedonic value, creators should maintain audience interest and contentment by designing immersive and pleasurable content across multiple formats. This may include the strategic use of short-form videos, live broadcasts, gamified challenges, and collaborative activities. Integrating endorsed products through narrative storytelling, sharing the heritage of a brand, or emphasizing unique product attributes can effectively elevate brand awareness and stimulate consumer purchasing intent. Third, creators are encouraged to focus on reinforcing the social self-concept of their audience. Organizing live streams, hosting offline gatherings, and creating other interactive touchpoints where fans can connect with both the creator and each other can solidify the bond with the channel. Such initiatives foster community solidarity, which subsequently enhances user satisfaction and motivates the acquisition of suggested products or premium services. Fourth, because confirmation dictates all dimensions of perceived value and overall satisfaction, creators must ensure that their content remains strictly aligned with video titles and descriptions. This consistency is vital for meeting user expectations. Actively soliciting audience feedback and providing prompt replies can empower creators to better decode audience preferences, allowing for agile adjustments in content strategy that ultimately drive higher satisfaction levels. Finally, given the profound impact of parasocial relationships on loyalty, creators should deliberately cultivate their expertise, credibility, and aesthetic appeal. Developing a visually captivating presence involves more than just technical high-definition quality; it requires careful attention to set design, lighting, and cinematography. A professional image and consistent brand identity, including personal fashion and on-screen charisma, can significantly enhance a creator's attractiveness. Additionally, the dissemination of accurate data, the citation of authoritative sources, the demonstration of problem-solving proficiency, and the maintenance of radical authenticity are essential for establishing enduring trust and credibility with the audience.

D. Limitations and future research

Several limitations inherent in this research warrant careful consideration when interpreting the results. First, the reliance on a self-selected sample may have introduced a degree of participation bias, which should be acknowledged. Second, since the participants were recruited exclusively from Taiwan, the generalizability of these findings may be

constrained by regional cultural norms and lifestyle patterns that uniquely influence digital consumption. Consequently, future investigations should strive to incorporate a more diverse array of participants from various geographical and cultural backgrounds to bolster the external validity of the model. Furthermore, the theoretical scope of the current analysis is necessarily focused. While this study successfully utilized the Expectation-Confirmation Model (ECM) to examine how parasocial relationships function as a primary driver of loyalty, it did not account for all potential influencers. Subsequent research could integrate additional variables to offer an even more holistic perspective on user behavior in social media environments. Exploring other dimensions of the ECM, as well as emerging psychological constructs, may yield deeper insights into the complexities of self-media devotion. Third, while this study utilizes YouTube as a representative self-media platform, its specific technical infrastructure such as unique recommendation algorithms and interaction norms may influence the mechanisms of ECM and PSR. Future research should examine the generalizability of the current model across diverse platforms like TikTok or Twitch to account for varying system-specific effects on audience loyalty. Finally, this study focuses on general YouTube creators without distinguishing among specific creator types (i.e., information-oriented, entertainment, and lifestyle/influencer creators). Future research could examine how value mechanisms and monetization logics vary across creator categories using segmentation or multi-group analysis, thereby providing more nuanced and practically relevant implications. Moreover, future studies could explore different categories of self-media services (e.g., professional knowledge, leisure hobbies, and lifestyle aesthetics) to better understand how content genres shape user engagement and long-term loyalty. Such efforts would offer more actionable insights for both content creators and platform administrators in the evolving digital ecosystem

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