THE ILLUSION OF CLOSENESS: HOW CREDIBILITY AND INTIMATE SELF-DISCLOSURE SHAPE IMITATION INTENTION IN INDONESIAN BEAUTY INFLUENCERS

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ABSTRACT

Social media influencers have become central to consumer behavior in Indonesia's beauty industry, yet existing influencer marketing literature has given disproportionate attention to purchase intention while overlooking imitation intention. This study examines how perceived credibility and intimate self-disclosure influence imitation intention among beauty influencer followers in Indonesia, with parasocial relationship as a mediating mechanism. Grounded in Social Learning Theory, Source Credibility Theory, and Parasocial Relationship Theory, the model was tested using PLS-SEM with data from 220 users following beauty influencers specializing in skincare content. Parasocial relationship was modeled as a higher-order construct comprising proximity, similarity, and attraction. Six of seven hypotheses were supported. Perceived credibility positively influenced parasocial relationship and imitation intention, while intimate self-disclosure positively influenced parasocial relationship but showed no significant direct effect on imitation intention. Parasocial relationship partially mediated the credibility–imitation relationship and fully mediated the self-disclosure–imitation relationship. These findings reveal a meaningful asymmetry: credibility operates through both relational and non-relational pathways, whereas self-disclosure achieves behavioral influence entirely through parasocial relationship. The results extend parasocial relationship theory to imitation as a distinct behavioral outcome beyond purchase and offer actionable implications for influencer selection and content strategy in Indonesia's beauty market.

Keywords: perceived credibility; intimate self-disclosure; parasocial relationship; imitation intention; influencer marketing

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1. INTRODUCTION

Social media has become a primary channel for brands to reach consumers in Indonesia, where 143 million social media users and 212 million internet users, representing 74.6% of the population, spend over three hours daily on social media (DataReportal, 2025). Indonesia's beauty industry has expanded in parallel, with cosmetics businesses growing 78% from 726 to 1,292 between 2020 and 2024 and projected annual growth of 4.33% through 2030 (Kementerian Perindustrian RI, 2025). Within this environment, beauty influencers, defined as content creators specializing in skincare, makeup, and personal care, have become key intermediaries between brands and consumers, shaping perceptions and behaviors through reviews, tutorials, and personal experiences (Hassan et al., 2021; Amelia et al., 2023).

Prior research highlights credibility and intimate self-disclosure (ISD) as key influencer attributes. Perceived credibility (PC) refers to the overall judgment of an influencer as a reliable and competent source of information (Ohanian, 1990; Koay et al., 2024), which determines how persuasively followers perceive influencer content. Meanwhile, intimate self-disclosure refers to the voluntary sharing of personal and emotionally meaningful information that enhances perceptions of authenticity and emotional closeness (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Koay et al., 2023). Both attributes foster parasocial relationships (PSR), namely the one-sided yet emotionally meaningful bonds followers develop with influencers (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Koay et al., 2024), which in turn shape behavioral outcomes.

While most influencer marketing studies focus on purchase intention, imitation intention (II), defined as individuals' willingness to replicate influencers' behaviors, consumption patterns, and lifestyle practices (Ampornklinkaew, 2025), deserves greater attention. In the beauty industry, followers imitate skincare routines, makeup styles, and self-presentation practices beyond product purchase, suggesting purchase intention alone underestimates influencer impact (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) provides a relevant lens, as individuals acquire behavioral patterns through observation of credible and admired models, and parasocial relationships amplify this by positioning influencers as aspirational role models (Sokolova et al., 2024).

Despite growing interest in influencer marketing, several research gaps remain. First, research findings on the effects of intimate self-disclosure are inconsistent. Some studies report positive effects on parasocial relationships and behavioral intentions (Koay et al., 2023; Leite & Baptista, 2022), while others show that sharing too much damages source credibility (Leite et al., 2022), pointing to relational mechanisms that have not yet been examined. Second, the dominant focus on purchase intention potentially underestimates broader influencer impact (Liu & Zheng, 2024). Third, no prior study has simultaneously examined perceived credibility and intimate self-disclosure as parallel antecedents of parasocial relationship in predicting imitation intention; existing research investigates these separately, focuses on purchase-related outcomes, or treats parasocial relationship as a direct predictor (Koay et al., 2023; Leite & Baptista, 2022; Sokolova et al., 2024). This gap is particularly relevant in Indonesia given its high social media engagement and rapidly expanding beauty market (Fitriati et al., 2023; Tjhin et al., 2024).

The present study fills these gaps by testing perceived credibility and intimate self-disclosure as two parallel antecedents of parasocial relationship in a mediation framework predicting imitation intention. The findings reveal an asymmetry: credibility operates through both direct and relational pathways, while self-disclosure operates only through the parasocial bond. The model integrates Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which explains how individuals acquire behavioral patterns by observing and replicating the actions of credible and admired models; Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), which explains how communicator credibility shapes audience receptiveness and behavioral influence; and Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which explains how one-sided yet emotionally meaningful bonds develop between audiences and media figures, creating the relational conditions for behavioral alignment. The resulting conceptual framework, comprising seven hypotheses, is illustrated in Figure 1.

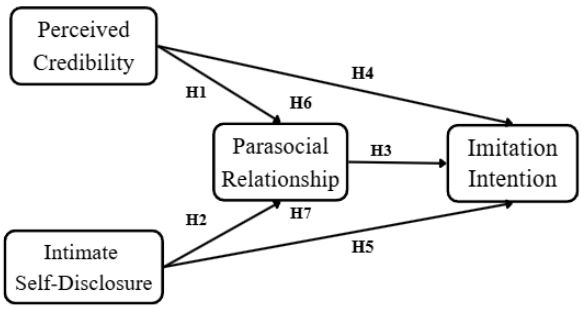


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Building on this framework, perceived credibility contributes to audiences' perception of influencers as trustworthy and authoritative figures (Ohanian, 1990; Ampornklinkaew, 2025). Reinikainen et al. (2020) found that credibility significantly predicted parasocial bond depth through perceived trustworthiness, extended by Su et al. (2021) who showed expertise-based credibility strengthens parasocial relationships, and confirmed in an Indonesian TikTok context by Lawrence and Meivitawanli (2023). Koay et al. (2024) further demonstrated that trust and identification, both products of credibility perceptions, progressively deepen parasocial relationships, consistent with Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953) and Parasocial Interaction Theory (Omeish et al., 2025; Yáñez-Valdés & Arias-Ramírez, 2025), a framework closely related to Parasocial Relationship Theory that extends the original formulation to digital influencer contexts.

H1. Perceived credibility positively influences parasocial relationship.

Intimate self-disclosure reduces psychological distance by making the one-sided relationship feel emotionally reciprocal. Leite and Baptista (2022) established that self-disclosure significantly strengthens parasocial relationships through enhanced interpersonal liking, corroborated in a livestreaming context by Lu et al. (2023). Zhang (2025) demonstrated that emotional self-disclosure produces the strongest parasocial relationship effects by activating empathic responses, with audience-influencer congruence further amplifying this effect (Koay et al., 2023).

H2. Intimate self-disclosure positively influences parasocial relationship.

Parasocial relationships represent a motivational precondition for behavioral alignment, as followers internalize the influencer's identity as a personally relevant reference point. Lee and Kim (2025) demonstrated parasocial relationship intensity significantly predicted imitation intention, confirmed in an Indonesian beauty context by Lawrence and Meivitawanli (2023). Sokolova et al. (2024) showed parasocial relationships facilitate vicarious learning, elevating imitation tendencies, consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

H3. Parasocial relationships positively influence imitation intention.

Perceived credibility also exerts a direct influence on imitation intention, independent of relational mechanisms. Ampornklinkaew (2025) identified it as a significant positive predictor of imitation willingness, and Cheng et al. (2021) showed it fosters consumer mimicry by reducing skepticism. Schneewind and Sharkasi (2022) further demonstrated that credibility and relational variables interact to produce compounded behavioral effects, confirming concurrent direct and indirect pathways.

H4. Perceived credibility positively influences imitation intention.

The relationship between intimate self-disclosure and imitation intention is theoretically compelling but empirically contested. Kim et al. (2024) found personal disclosure significantly increases persuasion effectiveness, and Zheng et al. (2024) showed it activates heuristic processing pathways leading to behavioral compliance. However, Leite et al. (2022) established that excessive disclosure damages source credibility, and Leite et al. (2024) further showed that only the competence dimension of credibility partially absorbs these negative effects. These contingent findings suggest self-disclosure's influence is likely positive under authentic conditions but may be reversed when perceived as performative.

H5. Intimate self-disclosure positively influences imitation intention.

Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 3 together establish a plausible indirect pathway in which credibility enhances parasocial relationships, which in turn motivates imitation intention. Koay et al. (2024) provided direct evidence of this mediation, replicated in an Indonesian cosmetics context by Lawrence and Meivitawanli (2023). Tripopsakul and

Hoonsopon (2025) further showed that parasocial relationship-mediated credibility effects generalize across behavioral outcomes, grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977).

H6. Parasocial relationships mediate the relationship between perceived credibility and imitation intention.

A parallel mediation pathway operates for intimate self-disclosure, as self-disclosure deepens parasocial relationships (Hypothesis 2), which in turn motivates imitation intention (Hypothesis 3). Lu et al. (2023) demonstrated that self-disclosure's behavioral effects were substantially mediated by parasocial interaction, with direct effects attenuating when the relational pathway was accounted for. Koay et al. (2024) confirmed this across parallel mediation models, while Saini and Bansal (2025) showed self-disclosure effects operate primarily through relational attachment rather than direct persuasion.

H7. Parasocial relationships mediate the relationship between intimate self-disclosure and imitation intention.

2. METHOD

This study employed a cross-sectional research design conducted in Indonesia, where social media growth and the growing influence of beauty influencers have shaped consumer behavior in the skincare domain.

Data were collected via an online survey. Purposive sampling was employed, given that no sampling frame exists for beauty influencer followers in Indonesia and random selection from the general internet population would yield a high proportion of respondents without the experiential basis required to respond meaningfully to the constructs measured. The sole inclusion criterion was prior exposure to beauty influencer content recommending skincare products on social media, verified through a screening question at the start of the questionnaire. Participants were recruited through WhatsApp, Instagram, and Telegram.

Data were collected from 13 March to 15 April 2026. Of 227 responses received, seven were excluded for failing the screening criterion, yielding a final sample of 220 respondents. The minimum sample size was determined using G*Power 3.1.9.7 (linear multiple regression, three predictors, F tests, fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero; $f^2 = 0.10$, $\alpha = 0.05$, $1-\beta = 0.95$), indicating a minimum of 176 respondents; the final sample of 220 exceeded this threshold (actual power = 0.9504) (Cohen, 1988). The effect size of $f^2 = 0.10$ was adopted following prior influencer marketing studies reporting small-to-medium effects in behavioral intention models (Hair et al., 2022).

All constructs were measured using established scales from prior research, with item wording adjusted for the beauty influencer context in the skincare domain. Perceived credibility was measured using five items from Belanche et al. (2021) and Chetioui et al. (2020), covering trustworthiness, honesty, expertise, and reliability. Intimate self-disclosure was measured using nine items from Lu et al. (2023), measuring how much influencers share personal information, emotions, and experiences with their followers. Parasocial relationship was operationalized as a reflective-reflective higher-order construct (HOC) with three lower-order components (LOC): proximity, similarity, and attraction, based on Yuan et al. (2016). This specification was chosen because each dimension theoretically reflects the same overall parasocial bond between followers and influencers, so a change in the overall construct is expected to show up consistently across all three dimensions (Sarstedt et al., 2019). Imitation intention was measured using four items from Belanche et al. (2021), covering how willing individuals are to replicate influencer behaviors and recommendations. All measurement items are listed in Table 1. Items were rated on a five-point Likert scale from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree"). The questionnaire was delivered in Bahasa Indonesia to ensure clarity and contextual relevance. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and respondent anonymity was maintained throughout.

Table 1. Questionnaire constructs and items

Label	Item
Perceived Credibility (PC)	
PC1	The beauty influencer is trustworthy
PC2	The beauty influencer is honest
PC3	The beauty influencer is experienced
PC4	The beauty influencer is an expert on the topic
PC5	The beauty influencer is a good reference
Intimate Self-Disclosure (ISD)	
ISD1	The beauty influencer shares information about themselves in skincare content
ISD2	The beauty influencer talks about their behaviors or routines in skincare
ISD3	The beauty influencer shares their feelings about using skincare products
ISD4	The beauty influencer expresses their emotions while trying or reviewing skincare products
ISD5	The beauty influencer shares their desires or skincare goals (e.g., glowing skin, acne-free skin)
ISD6	The beauty influencer talks about their mood while creating skincare content
ISD 7	The beauty influencer shares their thoughts about skincare trends or products
ISD 8	The beauty influencer expresses their opinions about specific skincare products or brands
ISD 9	The beauty influencer shares their beliefs about skincare (e.g., ingredients, skincare methods, etc.)
Parasocial Relationship (PSR)	
Proximity (PRO)	
PRO1	The beauty influencer personalizes skincare product information
PRO2	The beauty influencer communicates skincare product information clearly
PRO3	The beauty influencer makes skincare content feel more relatable
PRO4	The beauty influencer makes me feel like part of their community
Similarity (SI)	
SI1	The beauty influencer provides skincare information that suits my personal style
SI2	The beauty influencer shares skincare content that reflects my purchase decisions
SI3	The beauty influencer provides skincare information that matches my interests
SI4	The beauty influencer presents skincare products that align with my preferences or hobbies
SI5	I find the beauty influencer to be a good way to learn about skincare products
Attraction (ATR)	
ATR1	The beauty influencer provides new skincare information effectively
ATR2	I can get more messages or insights from the beauty influencer
ATR3	I can get more information about new skincare products through the beauty influencer
ATR4	The beauty influencer increases my satisfaction with skincare product information
ATR5	The beauty influencer makes me more satisfied with skincare-related services or recommendations
ATR6	The beauty influencer helps me form a more positive attitude toward a skincare brand compared to other media
ATR7	I would recommend this beauty influencer's skincare content to others
ATR8	I like to purchase skincare products when this beauty influencer recommends them
Imitation Intention (II)	
II1	I would feel comfortable experiencing the same things as influencers did
II2	I would not hesitate to consider the suggestions from the influencers
II3	I would feel secure in following the suggestions of the influencers
II4	I would rely on the recommendations of the influencers

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was applied to analyze the data using SmartPLS 3.0. This method was selected because it is well-suited to prediction-oriented research and can handle complex models with multiple constructs, mediation effects, and higher-order constructs at moderate sample sizes (Hair et al., 2022). To estimate the parasocial relationship higher-order construct, the disjoint two-stage approach was applied following the recommendation of Sarstedt et al. (2019). In stage one, the measurement models of the three lower-order components, namely proximity, similarity, and attraction, were assessed separately without the HOC in the model, and the latent variable scores were

saved. In stage two, these saved scores were used as reflective indicators of the HOC, and the full structural model was estimated. This approach was chosen because it allows all structural model assessment criteria to be applied in stage two and avoids the $R^2=1$ problem that the repeated indicators approach creates when the HOC is an endogenous construct in the path model (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

The analysis was carried out in two sequential phases. The first phase evaluated the measurement model under the disjoint two-stage approach. Indicator reliability was checked through outer loadings, with a minimum threshold of 0.708 following Hair et al. (2022). Composite reliability (CR) was used to assess internal consistency reliability against a minimum threshold of 0.70, and average variance extracted (AVE) was used to assess convergent validity against a minimum threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022). For the parasocial relationship higher-order construct, AVE and CR were calculated by hand from the loadings of the lower-order components on the HOC, following the procedure in Sarstedt et al. (2019). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion following Henseler et al. (2015), with an upper threshold of 0.90 applied to constructs that share conceptual proximity (Henseler et al., 2015).

The second phase assessed the structural model through bootstrapping with 5,000 subsamples to obtain path coefficients (β, original sample), t-statistics, and p-values, with $\alpha = 0.05$ as the significance threshold. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to evaluate explanatory power, with a moderate benchmark of 0.50 (Hair et al., 2022). Predictive relevance (Q^2) was obtained through the blindfolding procedure, with values above zero indicating adequate predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2022). Effect sizes (f^2) were interpreted using the benchmarks from Cohen (1988), where 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 correspond to small, medium, and large effects. The potential threat of common method bias was examined through a full collinearity assessment following Kock (2015), with all inner VIF values checked against a conservative threshold of 3.3. Mediation hypotheses (hypotheses 6 and 7) were tested through the indirect effects procedure via bootstrapping, with a significant indirect effect taken as confirmation of mediation (Hair et al., 2022).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

A total of 220 valid responses were obtained for this study. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female (78.2%, n = 172), with male respondents comprising 21.8% (n = 48), reflecting the predominantly female demographic of beauty influencer followers in Indonesia. Regarding age, the largest group consisted of respondents aged 18–25 years (59.5%, n = 131), followed by those aged above 41 years (19.1%, n = 42), 26–33 years (12.3%, n = 27), and 34–41 years (9.1%, n = 20), with no respondents below 18 years of age recorded.

In terms of occupation, respondents were primarily students (54.1%, n = 119), followed by private sector employees (20.5%, n = 45), civil servants (11.4%, n = 25), entrepreneurs and housewives (each 5.0%, n = 11), freelancers (2.3%, n = 5), and other occupations (1.8%, n = 4). With respect to social media platform usage, TikTok was the most frequently used (45.5%, n = 100), followed by Instagram (41.8%, n = 92), YouTube (7.7%, n = 17), Facebook and Threads (each 2.3%, n = 5), and Shopee (0.5%, n = 1).

3.1.1 Measurement Model

Evaluation of the measurement model followed the disjoint two-stage approach. Table 2 shows that at Stage 1, all constructs met the requirements for indicator reliability, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability. All retained indicators had outer loadings above the minimum threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2022), except ISD2 (0.686) and ISD6 (0.604). Both were kept because removing them did not produce meaningful gains in AVE or CR beyond the minimum thresholds, and their importance in covering the emotional and mood-related aspects of self-disclosure as defined by Lu et al. (2023) supported retention (Hair et al., 2022). AVE values across all constructs ranged from 0.539 to 0.779, all above the minimum of 0.50, and CR values ranged from 0.815 to 0.913, all above the minimum of 0.70, confirming convergent validity and internal consistency reliability. Indicators falling below the acceptable threshold were removed in the Stage 1 purification process:

PRO3 and PRO4 from proximity, SI5 from similarity, five indicators from attraction, and II1 from imitation intention. Following re-estimation in Stage 2, II2 was additionally excluded to achieve acceptable discriminant validity. The three retained items (ATR3, ATR7, ATR8) reflect the utility-driven dimension of attraction as conceptualized by Yuan et al. (2016) in a social media context, wherein attraction encompasses followers' positive orientation toward influencer content, including perceived information value and willingness to act on influencer cues. This operationalization is consistent with their social media influencer framework, and all retained indicators satisfied the minimum psychometric criteria recommended by Hair et al. (2022): outer loadings above 0.708, AVE = 0.729, and CR = 0.889. The substantial reduction in item coverage is nonetheless acknowledged as a limitation, and future research should employ the full indicator set to verify construct stability.

Table 2. Convergent Validity and Reliability

Items	Outer Loading		AVE & CR	
	Stg. 1	Stg. 2	Stg. 1	Stg. 2
Perceived Credibility (PC)				
PC1	0,838	0,840	0,627 & 0,894	0,627 & 0,894
PC2	0,752	0,753		
PC3	0,764	0,764		
PC4	0,802	0,803		
PC5	0,801	0,798		
Intimate Self-Disclosure (ISD)				
ISD1	0,736	0,734	0,539 & 0,913	0,539 & 0,913
ISD2	0,686	0,683		
ISD3	0,822	0,821		
ISD4	0,735	0,735		
ISD5	0,693	0,696		
ISD6	0,604	0,608		
ISD7	0,791	0,790		
ISD8	0,780	0,780		
ISD9	0,735	0,735		
Parasocial Relationship (PSR)				
PRO	-	0,800	-	0,753 & 0,901
SI	-	0,888		
ATR	-	0,911		
Proximity (PRO)				
PRO1	0,795	-	0,689 & 0,815	-
PRO2	0,863	-		
PRO3	deleted	-		
PRO4	deleted	-		
Similarity (SI)				
SI1	0,866	-		-
SI2	0,799	-		
SI3	0,824	-	0,710 & 0,907	
SI4	0,878	-		
SI5	deleted	-		
Attraction (ATR)				
ATR1	deleted	-	0,729 & 0,889	-
ATR2	deleted	-		
ATR3	0,787	-		
ATR4	deleted	-		
ATR5	deleted	-		
ATR6	deleted	-		
ATR7	0,881	-		
ATR8	0,889	-		
Imitation Intention (II)				
II1	deleted	-	0,779 & 0,913	0,851 & 0,919
II2	0,870	deleted		
II3	0,901	0,930		
II4	0,875	0,915		

In Stage 2, the latent variable scores of the three lower-order components served as reflective indicators of the parasocial relationship HOC. Proximity (0.800), similarity (0.888), and attraction (0.911) all loaded above the minimum threshold of 0.708, confirming indicator reliability at the HOC level. The HOC yielded an AVE of 0.753 and a CR of 0.901, both above the recommended thresholds, confirming convergent validity and internal consistency reliability (Sarstedt et al., 2019).

Discriminant validity was tested using the heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) criterion. HTMT has been shown to be a more accurate measure than the conventional Fornell-Larcker criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). Because the parasocial relationship dimensions are theoretically interrelated, a threshold of 0.90 was applied to constructs sharing conceptual proximity.

Table 3. Discriminant Validity

	HTMT	
	Stg. 1	Stg. 2
PC-ISD	0,649	0,649
PC-PSR	-	0,891
PC-PRO	0,884	-
PC-SI	0,776	-
PC-ATR	0,805	-
PC-II	0,815	0,781
ISD-PSR	-	0,751
ISD-PRO	0,787	-
ISD-SI	0,611	-
ISD-ATR	0,696	-
ISD-II	0,597	0,568

	HTMT	
	Stg. 1	**Stg. 2**
PSR-II	-	0,894
PRO-SI	0,767	-
PRO-ATR	0,874	-
PRO-II	0,827	-
SI-ATR	0,892	-
SI-II	0,800	-
ATR-II	0,883	-

Table 3 shows that all Stage 1 HTMT values were below the threshold of 0.90, ranging from 0.597 (ISD-II) to 0.892 (SI-ATR). A number of ATR-dimension pairs came close to but did not reach the threshold, which is consistent with the conceptual proximity expected among these constructs (Yuan et al., 2016). These results confirm that all constructs in the measurement model are empirically distinct from one another, supporting discriminant validity at Stage 1.

At Stage 2, all six HTMT pairs for the PSR HOC remained below 0.90 (Table 3), including the critical PSR–II value (0.894), confirming discriminant validity across both stages (Henseler et al., 2015).

3.1.2 Structural Model

Before testing the hypotheses, a full collinearity test following Kock (2015) was conducted to check for common method bias. All inner VIF values fell between 1.464 and 2.787, well under the conservative threshold of 3.3, indicating that common method bias does not threaten the validity of the structural model estimates. The same VIF values also confirmed that collinearity among predictor constructs was not a concern, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Inner VIF, R^2, and Q^2

	Inner VIF	**R^2**	**Q^2**
II	-	0,579	0,484
PSR	-	0,641	0,478
ISD →II	1,771	-	-
PC→II	2,356	-	-
PSR→II	2,787	-	-
PC→PSR	1,464	-	-
ISD→PSR	1,464	-	-

Model explanatory power was evaluated through the coefficient of determination (R^2). Parasocial relationship yielded an R^2 of 0.641, indicating that perceived credibility and intimate self-disclosure together explain 64.1% of its variance. Imitation intention yielded an R^2 of 0.579, indicating that the predictor constructs explain 57.9% of its variance. Both values exceed the moderate benchmark of 0.50 recommended by Hair et al. (2022), reflecting substantial explanatory power. Predictive relevance was confirmed through Q^2 values from the blindfolding procedure, with parasocial relationship yielding $Q^2 = 0.478$ and imitation intention yielding $Q^2 = 0.484$, both well above zero (Hair et al., 2022). Effect sizes (f^2) were interpreted using the benchmarks from Cohen (1988): 0.02 for small, 0.15 for medium, and 0.35 for large. Hypothesis testing results are presented in Table 5 and illustrated in Figure 2.

Perceived credibility significantly influenced parasocial relationship (H1: $\beta = 0.566$, $t = 10.495$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.609$), representing the strongest exogenous predictor effect in the model, while intimate self-disclosure also positively influenced parasocial relationship (H2: $\beta = 0.332$, $t = 6.179$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.210$), supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. Parasocial relationship significantly influenced imitation intention (H3: $\beta = 0.587$, $t = 7.234$, $p < 0.001$, $f^2 = 0.294$), the most influential direct predictor among the hypothesized relationships, and perceived credibility also exerted a significant direct effect on imitation intention (H4: $\beta = 0.228$, $t = 2.629$, $p = 0.009$, $f^2 = 0.052$), supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. Intimate self-disclosure, however, showed no significant direct effect on imitation intention (H5: $\beta = -0.019$, $t = 0.291$, $p = 0.771$, $f^2 = 0.000$), indicating a complete absence of direct effect; Hypothesis 5 was therefore rejected. For the mediation hypotheses, the indirect effect of perceived credibility on imitation intention via parasocial relationship was significant (H6: $\beta = 0.332$, $t = 5.916$, $p < 0.001$); given the significant direct effect supported in H4, this constitutes partial mediation, supporting Hypothesis 6. The indirect effect of intimate self-disclosure on imitation intention via parasocial relationship was also significant (H7: $\beta = 0.195$, $t = 4.774$, $p < 0.001$); given the non-significant direct effect in H5, this constitutes full mediation, supporting Hypothesis 7. Collectively, six out of seven hypotheses were supported, with the exception of Hypothesis 5.

Table 5. Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	**β**	**t**	**p**	**f^2**
H1. PC→PSR	0,566	10,495	0,000	0,609
H2. ISD→PSR	0,332	6,179	0,000	0,210
H3. PSR→II	0,587	7,234	0,000	0,294

H4. PC→II	0,228	2,629	0,009	0,052
H5. ISD→II	-0,019	0,291	0,771	0,000
H6. PC→ PSR→II	0,332	5,916	0,000	-
H7. ISD→PSR→II	0,195	4,774	0,000	-

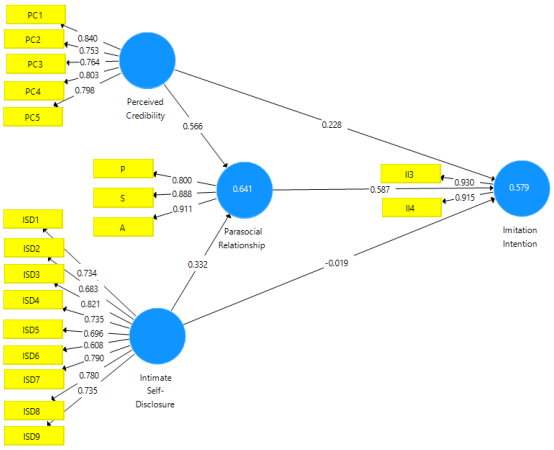


Figure 2. PLS-SEM Results

3.2 Discussion

3.2.1 Perceived Credibility and Parasocial Relationship

Perceived credibility had a positive and significant effect on parasocial relationships between Indonesian beauty influencer followers and influencers, which subsequently mediated imitation intention. This result is consistent with Tripopsakul and Hoonsopon (2025), who demonstrated that higher perceived credibility strengthens parasocial relationships and amplifies consumer behavioral intentions. Lawrence & Meivitawanli (2023) validated a comparable mechanism in the Indonesian TikTok live streaming context, where credibility bridges influencer characteristics and audience behavioral outcomes. Schneewind and Sharkasi (2022) further established that credibility perceptions are shaped by the degree of fit between the influencer and the communicative context. Together, these findings position parasocial relationships as an active transmission mechanism through which perceived credibility converts into imitation tendency, consistent with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), which explains how credible models motivate behavioral replication, and Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), which explains how credibility perceptions enhance audience receptiveness to influencer-generated content.

3.2.2 Intimate Self-Disclosure and Parasocial Relationship

Intimate self-disclosure by Indonesian beauty influencers had a positive and significant effect on parasocial relationships with their followers, which subsequently mediated imitation intention. When influencers share personal, emotionally resonant content, audiences develop stronger one-sided affective bonds that feel close to real relationships (Leite & Baptista, 2022; Lu et al., 2023). This mechanism operates through enhanced perceptions of authenticity and social presence, as self-disclosure signals genuineness, increasing interpersonal liking and perceived trustworthiness foundational to parasocial bond formation (Nah, 2022; Kim & Song, 2016). Zhang (2025) further distinguished personal from professional self-disclosure, finding that personal disclosure exerts stronger positive effects on parasocial relationships. Koay et al. (2023) demonstrated that this relationship is moderated by congruence between the influencer, the consumer, and the product. Leite and Baptista (2022) confirmed that parasocial relationships carry the downstream effects of self-disclosure on behavioral intentions, showing that intimate self-disclosure works through the relational bond it creates rather than through direct behavioral influence. Taken together, these findings position intimate self-disclosure as a structurally important antecedent of parasocial relationship, extending this mechanism to imitation intention beyond purchase intention.

3.2.3 Parasocial Relationship and Imitation Intention

Parasocial relationships had a positive and significant effect on the imitation intention of Indonesian beauty influencer followers, supporting the view that one-sided affective bonds between audiences and influencers lead to behavioral replication tendencies. Lee and Kim (2025) demonstrated that parasocial relationships directly enhance imitation intention, with anthropomorphism and homophily serving as structural enablers. Sokolova et al. (2024) further showed that parasocial bonds function as behavioral transmission channels across diverse content domains. Yang et al. (2025) confirmed that parasocial relationships foster trust in social

commerce environments, and trust itself has been identified as a reinforcing pathway between parasocial bonds and imitation behavior (Lee & Kim, 2025). In the Indonesian beauty influencer context, high social media engagement and strong identity investment in personal care amplify followers' motivation to replicate influencer practices, giving this trust-mediated imitation pathway particular explanatory force. These results position parasocial relationships as a key proximal driver of imitation intention, consistent with Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

3.2.4 Perceived Credibility and Imitation Intention

Perceived credibility also had a positive and significant direct effect on imitation intention among Indonesian beauty influencer followers, independently of the parasocial relationship mediation pathway. Ampornklinkaew (2025) established that influencer credibility meaningfully drives followers' imitation intentions, consistent with Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), wherein credibility perceptions signal that an influencer's behaviors are worth emulating. De Araujo et al. (2024) corroborated this in a sports influencer context, demonstrating that trustworthiness functions as a key driver of consumer mimicry. Cheng et al. (2021) extended this logic to a CSR endorsement context, finding that influencer credibility directly stimulates consumer desire to emulate influencer behaviors. Schneewind and Sharkasi (2022) further reinforced the credibility-behavior pathway, demonstrating that parasocial familiarity moderates and strengthens the effect of perceived credibility on behavioral intentions. These findings confirm that perceived credibility influences imitation intention through both direct and relational routes, and that reliability and competence drive behavioral replication tendencies beyond the parasocial pathway.

3.2.5 Intimate Self-Disclosure and Imitation Intention

Contrary to the hypothesis, intimate self-disclosure did not show a significant direct positive effect on imitation intention, with its influence depending entirely on the parasocial relationship rather than acting as a standalone behavioral driver. This null effect is theoretically coherent: prior research consistently positions intimate self-disclosure as an antecedent of relational outcomes that subsequently translate into behavioral intentions, rather than a direct driver. Leite and Baptista (2022) showed that self-disclosure affects behavioral intentions only through parasocial relationship and brand trust mediation, not independently. Similarly, Koay et al. (2023) found that intimate self-disclosure affects purchase intentions through parasocial relationships and congruence as conditional pathways, showing that disclosure content on its own is not enough to drive behavioral replication without the relational context. The lack of a direct effect may also be partly explained by the nature of imitation intention, which calls for a deeper sense of identification and aspirational alignment than the informational cues sufficient for purchase intention (Zheng et al., 2024). Kim et al. (2024) further cautioned that sensitive or incongruent self-disclosure can undermine persuasive impact, weakening its direct statistical detectability. Taken together, intimate self-disclosure functions as a relational catalyst rather than a direct behavioral trigger, with its influence channeled entirely through the parasocial bond.

3.2.6 The Mediating Role of Parasocial Relationship

This study confirms that parasocial relationships mediate both the credibility–imitation intention and self-disclosure–imitation intention pathways among Indonesian beauty influencer followers: credibility operates through both direct and relational channels, while self-disclosure effects are channeled entirely through the parasocial bond. This dual mediation is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), and Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956), which collectively position relational bonds as the mechanism through which influencer perceptions motivate behavioral alignment. Muhmin et al. (2026) validated this within the Indonesian beauty influencer context, confirming parasocial relationships as a critical intermediary between influencer characteristics and follower behavioral outcomes. Lawrence and Meivitawanli (2023) corroborated this in the Indonesian cosmetics industry, showing that

credibility jointly constructs parasocial relationships that bridge influencer characteristics and consumer behavioral outcomes. Koay et al. (2024) further demonstrated a mediation chain in which influencer perceptions shape parasocial relationships that subsequently drive behavioral intentions. Li et al. (2026) reinforced that parasocial relationships function as mediators between antecedent influencer perceptions and downstream behavioral intentions, while Su et al. (2021) established that parasocial relationships amplify the persuasive weight of influencer credibility.

Regarding intimate self-disclosure, Leite and Baptista (2022) established that the effect of influencer self-disclosure on behavioral intentions operates through parasocial relationships and brand trust as mediating mechanisms, confirming that disclosure content reaches behavioral outcomes only when it first succeeds in deepening relational closeness. Lu et al. (2023) corroborated this in a live streaming context, showing that intimate self-disclosure shapes behavioral responses through parasocial interaction as the critical intervening variable. Zhang (2025) further distinguished personal from professional self-disclosure, finding that personal disclosure generates stronger parasocial relationships that in turn drive follower behavioral intentions. Koay et al. (2023) demonstrated that the intimacy-to-behavior pathway is conditional on the relational bond, while Koay et al. (2024) extended this by showing that mediation chains involving parasocial relationships are robust across varied antecedents and behavioral outcomes. Taken together, these findings confirm that the parasocial relationship mediation pathway is structurally robust across both influencer attributes: credibility reaches imitation tendency through the relational bond it constructs, while self-disclosure creates conditions of relational identification through which imitation becomes a natural expression of parasocial engagement.

4. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the influence of perceived credibility and intimate self-disclosure on imitation intention among Indonesian beauty influencer followers, with parasocial relationship as a mediating mechanism. Six of seven hypotheses were supported, with the exception of the direct path from intimate self-disclosure to imitation intention, which was fully absorbed by the mediation of parasocial relationships.

4.1 Theoretical and Practical Implication

Theoretically, the findings extend Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), Source Credibility Theory (Hovland et al., 1953), and Parasocial Relationship Theory (Horton & Wohl, 1956) to imitation intention as a behavioral outcome beyond purchase intention, revealing an asymmetry in which perceived credibility operates through both direct and relational pathways while intimate self-disclosure operates exclusively through the relational channel. This asymmetry clarifies that self-disclosure requires relational legitimacy, not mere exposure, to produce behavioral consequences.

The findings carry direct operational implications for three practitioner groups. For brand managers and campaign planners, credibility is the primary persuasion asset, operating through both direct and relational pathways. Influencer selection should prioritize demonstrable trustworthiness and domain expertise over follower count. Credibility audits and campaign KPIs should be expanded to cover content accuracy, audience trust indicators, and imitation-focused metrics such as routine replication, style adoption, and aesthetic alignment in follower-generated content.

For content creators and influencer managers, the full mediation of self-disclosure's effect indicates that personal disclosure functions as a relational investment rather than a direct persuasion tool. Content calendars should balance credibility-building content, such as expertise demonstrations and product reviews, with relational content designed to deepen parasocial bonds over time.

For digital marketing practitioners, parasocial relationship depth is the proximal driver of imitation behavior. Standard reach and engagement metrics are insufficient proxies for relational depth; practitioners should incorporate comment sentiment, repeat engagement patterns, and content-sharing rates as indicators of parasocial bond strength and imitation potential.

4.2 Limitations and Future Research

Several limitations of this study point to directions for future research. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish causal direction, since parasocial relationships build up through repeated influencer exposure over time. Longitudinal designs would be better suited to tracking how the credibility–parasocial relationship–imitation pathway develops. Second, purposive sampling in one national context limits how far the findings can be generalized, particularly given the sample's concentration among young Indonesian women (78.2% female, 59.5% aged 18–25). Cross-cultural studies would help define the boundary conditions of the model. Third, the study did not separate respondents by influencer tier (nano, micro, macro, and mega) or platform (Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube). Future research could examine whether these factors lead to differences in how parasocial relationships and imitation intention form. Finally, reliance on self-reported behavioral intentions rather than observed behavior limits the construct validity of imitation intention as an outcome measure.

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