

An Analysis of Parasocial Interaction Patterns between Travel Micro-influencers and Viewers on YouTube

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Abstract - Advances in communication technology and social media have significantly transformed the travel industry, particularly through the emergence of travel influencers on a variety of social media platforms. Specifically, this study aims to identify the patterns of parasocial interactions between travel micro-influencers and their viewers on YouTube. Parasocial interaction is defined as one-sided interaction with media personalities during media exposure. The data were collected from YouTube's travel videos about Yogyakarta as one of the most visited cities in Indonesia, which were produced by five Indonesian travel micro-influencers who have followers under 100.000. Using qualitative content analysis, the video content and comments were coded and examined. The findings reveal that micro-influencers create parasocial interaction patterns through several key aspects, including physical attractiveness, interpersonal communication skills, information sharing, destination appeal, production techniques, and confirmation. Meanwhile, the viewers engage in a parasocial manner through expressions of admiration and appreciation, active involvement, interaction, emotional bonds, inspiration, and practical influence. Although the established interaction is primarily one-way, some of these interactions are reciprocal, such as when the influencers reply to the viewer's comments. This pattern of interaction demonstrates that YouTube serves as a platform for creating and maintaining parasocial interactions between viewers and influencers in addition to operating as a platform for content distribution.

Keywords: Destination; Influence; Parasocial interaction; Travelling; YouTube

Introduction

The rapid advancement of digital technology and the widespread use of social media have transformed how people consume and share information, including travel-related content (Chu et al., 2020). This shift has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon: the rise of travel influencers. Through various social media platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, travel influencers create a variety of content that displays tourist destinations, culinary experiences, and travel recommendations (Ay et al., 2019; Le & Hancer, 2021; Xu et al., 2021; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021). This phenomenon is strengthened by the rising number of travel influencers and the increasing preference of the younger generation to obtain travel references through influencers on social media, compared to information from traditional travel agencies. (Pusparisa, 2024; Strovink et al., 2024).

Travel influencers have become significant figures in shaping contemporary society's travel trends and travel decisions (Han & Chen, 2022; Kapoor et al., 2022; Magno & Cassia, 2018). Moreover, travel influencers offer a more personal and relevant perspective through an interactive presentation (Dewantara et al., 2023; Vargo & Lusch, 2015). In addition to sharing information about the destination, travel influencers also carry out several strategies in building community and creating a more intimate relationship with the viewers through various forms of digital interaction, such as live streaming, meeting the fans, giveaways, challenges, and so on. In general, the presence of travel influencers has brought a new approach, especially in the digital tourism industry.

The travel influencers consistently share personal moments during the journey, creating the illusion of intimacy with the viewers. This closeness gives rise to a psychological phenomenon in the form of parasocial interaction, where there is a one-way emotional connection from the viewers to the travel influencers. In addition, when this interaction occurs repeatedly and continues beyond media exposure, it can develop into a deeper parasocial relationship (Forster, 2023; Hartmann, 2017; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The increasing trends in travel influencers on social media have significantly caught the attention of researchers in recent years. Various studies have confirmed the strategic role of travel influencers as a credible source of information in the tourism decision-making process (Dabija et al., 2018; Gretzel & Necklace by Mendonça, 2019). Meanwhile, Magno and Cassia (2018) reveals two key factors that have a significant impact on viewers' intention to adopt travel recommendations: content quality and credibility influence. The presentation of accurate and high-quality information has been proven to strengthen the motivation of the viewers in planning a tourist trip. In addition, when the viewers perceive influencers as a trusted figure, the viewers show a higher tendency to carry out the travel suggestions given. Trust itself is proven to have a positive relationship with all stages of the tourism decision-making process, starting from the emergence of the desire to travel, followed by the search and evaluation of information, to the final stage which includes decision-making, experience evaluation, and travel story sharing activities (Pop et al., 2022).

In addition, other studies have also tested and compared the intensity of several types of influencers based on the number of followers. The results of these studies agree that micro-influencers are more persuasive than mega-influencers with a larger number of followers (Conde & Casais, 2023; Jin & Muqaddam, 2021). Although micro-influencers have fewer followers than mega-influencers, micro-influencers are considered to understand their fans and have high engagement (Solis et al., 2016).

Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted to study travel influencers, there have been few studies that have examined the patterns of parasocial interactions carried out by both travel influencers and viewers. A previous study has already examined the patterns of parasocial interaction of travel influencers but only used well-known influencers, those with more than 200,000 followers or referred as mid-tier influencers (Dewantara et al., 2023). Other types of influencers that have a smaller number of followers, such as micro-influencers, could potentially have different patterns. In addition, prior study has not fully captured the interaction patterns of the viewers (Zafina et al., 2024). This is important because social media has been equipped with features that allow the viewers to interact, even if not directly.

Taking a different perspective, this research specifically aims to understand the patterns of interaction of the viewers and travel influencers on YouTube who have fewer followers, i.e., under 100,000 followers or referred to as micro-influencers. Although having a smaller number of followers, the influencers are considered able to maintain consistently high-quality content productivity (Grau, 2022). YouTube was chosen for this study because of its popularity among viewers to seek information about travel (IDN Research Institute, 2024; Prambadi, 2024; We Are Social & Meltwater, 2025). The parasocial interaction patterns discussed in this study will be reviewed in 2 parts: the first part will identify the parasocial interaction patterns shown by the travel micro-influencers based on the attributes shown by the influencers. The second part will display the analysis of the pattern of parasocial interaction shown by the viewers.

Theoretical Framework

The development of communication and information technology (CIT) has presented a fundamental change in the digital media landscape, significantly changing the pattern of interaction

between viewers and media figures. Before the era of social media, the interaction between fans and idolized public figures was very limited, such as through fan letters and fan meetings (Giles, 2023; Kowert & Daniel, 2021). Meanwhile, the increasingly widespread use of social media, supported by the gradual addition of complex interactive features, has created a more dynamic and personal interaction between the viewers and media personas. In addition, the increasing use of social media has generated a new type of celebrity known as influencers or micro-celebrities, changing the dynamics of the relationship between viewers and conventional celebrities (Borchers, 2023; Leban & Voyer, 2021).

Some researchers define *influencers* as a support type or endorser that can influence a group through specific content (Grau, 2022; Leung et al., 2022). Moreover, *influencers* are considered to have the ability to influence opinions (Magno & Cassia, 2018). Based on the number of followers, Solis et al. (2016) and Grau (2022) grouped *influencers* into several categories, namely nano-influencers with less than 5,000 followers, offering a personal touch that resonates with their viewers. Micro-influencers, with follower counts ranging from 5,000 to 100,000, are known for their engaged communities, allowing for meaningful interactions. Mid-tier influencers fall between 100,000 and 500,000 followers, effectively balancing reach and authenticity. Macro-influencers, boasting between 500,000 and 1 million followers, command significant influence, while mega-influencers, with over 1 million followers, shape trends on a global scale.

Regardless of the number of followers, in general, to increase *engagement*, identity, and popularity, the *influencers* create and distribute content with a specific theme on different social media platforms (Grau, 2022). Sometimes, influencers combine multiple themes to expand the reach of the viewers. The distinct content topics used—beauty, fitness, gaming, family, and travel, among many others—have led to the emergence of several popular terms, including beauty influencer, health influencer, and travel influencer.

One of the content themes that is now increasingly popular is travel-related content. In this context, content creators are known as travel influencers, i.e., individuals or groups of individuals who create travel-related content and promote destinations, services, and products traveling on social media. The content about the trip includes, among others, local culture, monuments, food, people, places to live, and so on (Bhalla et al., 2021). At present, the number of travel influencers is growing rapidly along with the increasing use of social media such as Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok as platforms for sharing travel experiences. The travel influencers are not only sharing travel-related photos or videos but also providing in-depth information about tips for trips, recommendations for lesser-known tourist attractions, and practical guidance on budgeting and trip planning (Bento et al., 2020; Dewantara et al., 2023). Influencers have also changed the way people plan vacations by using influencers' content as the main reference in choosing tourist destinations.

Several attributes possessed by media figures have been found to foster parasocial interaction between the viewers and media figures, for example, first, physical attraction, which includes facial appearance, body proportions, and dress style (Le & Hancer, 2021; Lee & Watkins, 2016); Second, social attraction, which includes the ability to present oneself and interact with the environment, where influence shows concern for local traditions and norms (Dewantara et al., 2023); Third, task attractiveness presents the willingness of influencers to share travel-related information, whereas attitude similarity indicates the shared values and experiences between influencers and their viewers (Bento et al., 2020; Fu et al., 2017).

Three additional important attributes are destination attractiveness, credibility, and technological skill. Tourism attractiveness includes natural resources, culture, infrastructure, and the presence of lesser-known tourist attractions (hidden gems) (Dewantara et al., 2023). Meanwhile, influencers' credibility is identified through travel experience, engagement on social media, and professional background. According to Yılmazdoğan et al. (2021), credibility significantly affects the viewers' intention to travel. Finally, the technological skill was demonstrated through influencers' ability to create high-quality content, emphasizing shooting, lighting, and editing techniques that make content presentation more efficient, interactive, and authentic than traditional media (Cyr et al., 2009; He et al., 2022).

Material and Methodology

This research employs a qualitative content analysis (QCA), which aims to systematically articulate the meaning inherent in the data (Schreier, 2012). To obtain the research data, researchers specifically search for content on YouTube using the keyword "travel vlog ke Yogyakarta". The city of Yogyakarta was chosen considering that the city is one of the 10 most favorite tourist destination cities in Indonesia in 2024 (Azzahra, 2024). Additionally, the criteria for the sample are content created by travel micro-influencers with 5,000 to 100,000 followers, who are individuals or groups from Indonesia and have more than 5000 views. The analyzed content focuses on personal travel documentation, excluding materials created by government agencies, marketing teams, or private companies. It must meet the criterion of being uploaded no more than one year before November 2024, and should discuss tourist destinations in Yogyakarta. After obtaining relevant content, the researcher will analyze it in order, starting from the interaction pattern of micro-influencers to viewers.

To analyze parasocial interaction patterns from the perspective of micro-influencers, the data were sourced from travel videos uploaded by micro-influencers who met the established sampling criteria. The researchers transcribed the videos in their entirety to capture both verbal and non-verbal elements. The unit of analysis comprised the full textual content of the videos as well as non-textual cues, including the micro-influencers' facial expressions, gestures, body language, and more. After conducting an in-depth review of the collected data, the researcher employed a deductive approach to develop a coding frame, categorized the data accordingly, and generated interpretive insights. Some examples of pre-defined categories include: when micro-influencers highlight the aesthetic appeal of a destination, the content is categorized under 'attraction of the destination'; when they incorporate sound effects and creative editing techniques to enhance viewer engagement, this is categorized as 'production techniques.' If any data segments do not align with the existing categories, new categories will be created to accurately capture emerging patterns.

Meanwhile, to analyze the patterns of viewers' parasocial interaction, the data were collected from user comments posted in the comment sections of the selected videos. All comments were documented, and only comments containing complete sentences, rather than standalone emojis or symbols, were included in the analysis. After gathering and thoroughly reading the entire dataset, the researchers employed an inductive approach to develop categories, grouped the categories accordingly, and explored the relationships among them to uncover meaningful interaction patterns (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

To validate the data, researchers compare data from other sources (such as observations on other traveling contents on YouTube), and take time for an extended engagement in the field to develop a deeper understanding of the context and reduce the risk of premature or inaccurate interpretations (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023).

Result and Discussion

Using the above keywords and sample criteria, on November 11th, 2024, the researchers searched YouTube and discovered 5 travel micro-influencers creating content about traveling to Yogyakarta. which includes Kelana Saka (V1) (Saka, 2024), Zara Zetira (V2) (Zetira, 2024), Yuniar Paramita (V3) (Paramita, 2024), Tata Titiana (V4) (Titiana, 2024), and Sheila Lim (V5) (Table 1) (Lim, 2024).

Table 1. Contents from Travel Micro-Influencers

Code	Video Title & Uploading Date	Subscribers	Views	Likes	Comments
V1	Itinerary Liburan Jogja & Solo Kelana Saka (20 September 2024)	9,08 thousand	17,264	2.2 thousand	83
V2	Trip Yogyakarta 4 hari 3 Malam! Rute, Budget, Hotel, Tempat Wisata, Kuliner (27 Februari 2024)	12,9 thousand	16,107	155	40
V3	Trip Jogja 6 hari 5 hotel 2024 5 hotel puluhan wisata (18 Oktober 2024)	33,1 thousand	19,400	244	98
V4	Itinerary Liburan ke Jogjakarta 4 hari 3 malam!! Rekomendasi tempat wisata di	6,54 thousand	6,682	497	48

	Jogja (16 Juni 2024)				
V5	Jogja, kamu cantik sekali..□ (27 Juli 2024)	12,4 thousand	56,881	2.9 thousand	78

Regarding the travel micro-influencers' patterns of parasocial interaction, the results indicate that these patterns center on several aspects, including physical attractiveness, interpersonal communication strategies, information provision, destination appeal, production techniques, and confirmation.

To emphasize physical appearance, the micro-influencers appear attractive with their friends, family members, and partners by wearing trendy clothes, fresh makeup, and accessories such as necklaces and glasses. The influencer's appearance is further enhanced by a neat and attractive hairstyle. On some occasions, they are also seen wearing traditional local clothing, such as the Yogyakarta kebaya and Surjan, complemented by a “blangkon”, which adds a touch of local culture to their content. In addition to their physical appearance, travel micro-influencers focus on other visual elements, such as using clean, well-maintained modes of transportation like trains. This finding supports prior research that stated that physical attraction fosters viewers' enjoyment, thereby naturally drawing new subscribers (Chen et al., 2023; Le & Hancer, 2021; Zheng et al., 2022).

The second interaction pattern used by travel micro-influencers is their ability to communicate interpersonally. This strategy is rooted in their self-confidence when sharing travel experiences clearly and engagingly. Prior studies indicate that travel influencers enhance their confidence by modifying their speaking manner, employing touch strategies, improving clarity and articulation (Dewantara et al., 2023; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020)

This study expands upon prior studies by demonstrating that confidence may be cultivated through the use of a naturally flowing storytelling style and casual language.

Additionally, micro-influencers show comfort in interacting with those around them, including friends, family members, and new acquaintances they meet during their travels. They often introduce their travel companions and share funny moments with family or friends. Furthermore, micro-influencers engage in casual conversations with various individuals, such as restaurant owners, street vendors, and batik cloth sellers in the market. These interactions reflect their friendliness, warmth, and ability to blend into their surroundings, which adds value to their image as travel influencers. This conclusion is consistent with previous research that demonstrates external social attraction (Dewantara et al., 2023). When influencers are regarded as socially appealing, their viewers are more likely to have a sense of connection and engagement in parasocial interaction with them (Zheng et al., 2022).

The third interaction pattern demonstrated by travel micro-influencers is providing relevant information that viewers may need when visiting a destination. This information includes various practical aspects, such as hotel accommodations, dining recommendations, tourist attractions, and reviews of local cuisine. Micro-influencers also share operational details, such as opening hours, ticket prices, tour packages, and available food menus. This comprehensive information helps viewers prepare effectively for their trips. Additionally, micro-influencers offer specific recommendations, including the best times to visit, tips for traveling with young children, and contingency plans for potential travel obstacles, such as long queues that could prevent access to main attractions.

Micro-influencers occasionally share contact information for local service providers, such as drivers, photographers, and tour guides. In addition to providing information, they also offer assessments of travel experiences, highlighting both the positive and negative aspects. This approach not only enriches their content but also adds practical value and builds viewers' trust in the information shared. According to Bel et al. (2021), information is a very strong motive for parasocial interaction, especially for young viewers. Besides, viewers who have a curiosity for information about traveling can satisfy their needs by gaining new insights, ideas, or suggestions that are considered relevant (Tsay & Bodine, 2012). These findings are consistent with prior research, which demonstrated that task attraction is associated with an influencer's capacity to fulfill viewers' needs (Steuer & Lawson, 2013). Moreover, Trinh and Nguyen (2019) highlighted that offering practical tips and insights plays a significant role in fostering interaction between travel influencers and their viewers.

Fourth, micro-influencers focus on promoting the appeal of various destinations and their unique atmospheres, such as museums, traditional markets, city parks, coffee shops, and more (Figure

1). They provide detailed descriptions of what makes these places attractive, highlighting aspects like the diversity of food and beverage options, the vibrant ambiance, and the accessibility of the locations. Additionally, they introduce lesser-known spots often called "hidden gems." These influencers showcase the distinctiveness of these destinations, offering experiences that cannot be found elsewhere. By doing so, they inspire their viewers to discover exciting new places. By including food and beverage options, the study's findings build on earlier research showing that natural and cultural attractions, travel amenities, everyday activities, and new hidden gems are all common components of destination appeal. By including food and beverage options, the study's findings build on earlier research showing that natural and cultural attractions, travel amenities, everyday activities, and new hidden gems are all common components of destination appeal (Dewantara et al., 2023; Fadda & Sørensen, 2017; Nasir et al., 2020).



Figure 1. The Atmosphere of Malioboro, Jogjakarta

Source: Sheila Lim's YouTube

Micro-influencers create high-quality and engaging content through a meticulous process that involves various production techniques, from planning to editing. They not only capture travel experiences but also ensure that every detail in the content is presented in an engaging and informative manner. The editing process is a crucial stage, featuring interesting visual elements such as transitions and filter colors that enhance the destination's atmosphere.

Additionally, the arrangement of clips is designed to capture the viewers' attention effectively. In addition, providing relevant sound effects, such as the sounds of a park crowd, soothing musical backgrounds, or natural conversations in a local market, can reinforce the viewers' impression of the displayed atmosphere. By combining quality visual and audio elements, micro-influencers can present a travel experience that is not only visually appealing, but also able to inspire and motivate the viewers to experience a similar experience. The findings extend and confirm previous research by highlighting not only the importance of technological skills and visual quality in enhancing travel vlogs and vlogger attractiveness, but also by introducing the use of natural conversation sounds from local markets as background audio, allowing viewers to immerse themselves and experience a more lifelike atmosphere (Cyr et al., 2009; Dewantara et al., 2023; He et al., 2022).

Sixth, the pattern of parasocial interaction is also displayed when the micro-influencers actively engage their viewers by asking questions or seeking confirmation about their visits to destinations or the use of specific services. This creates an illusion of a reciprocal relationship, which in turn strengthens the emotional connection with the viewers. This can be seen in the statement of the V3 influencer, "hayo siapa yang udah sering ke jogja terus jalan-jalannya sama pak Santoso? Cepetan komen soalnya aku udah banyak nih terima laporan dari Pak Santoso katanya *subscriber* dan penonton aku banyak yang jalan-jalan ke Jogja bareng beliau, gimana happy nggak?" (Translation: "Who has been to Jogja and traveled with Mr. Santoso? Hurry up and comment because I've received many reports from Mr. Santoso that many of my subscribers and viewers have traveled to Jogja with him, how happy are you?"). According to Abbati (2019), open questions in social media spaces are most suitable for fostering opportunities for discussion, idea exchange, criticism, and suggestions.

This study confirms that when *influencers* address viewers with questions, viewers feel their presence is acknowledged (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Pimienta, 2023).

Regarding the viewers' parasocial interaction patterns, the results show several categories, namely, admiration and appreciation, engagement and active interaction, emotional connection, inspiration, and practical influence. The first category includes admiration and appreciation expressed in comments that highlight the influencer's appearance (both physical and communication skills), destination, and production techniques, as well as appreciation for the content created. The viewers' admiration for the influencer's physical appearance is reflected in comments such as:

"Beautifful ka kelana cantik dan menarik natural" (V1_32) (Translation: ka Kelana beautiful and naturally attractive)

"kelana kamu memiliki pesona wajah yang cantik manis dan kawaii banget" (V1_67) (Translation: kelana you have a beautiful sweet and kawaii face)

"Makin cantik mbak zara 🥰🥰" (V2_22) (Translation: you're getting prettier mbak zara)

In addition to physical performances, the viewers also show their admiration for the micro-influencers' communication and presentation skills in providing explanations related to the destinations visited, as seen in the comments;

"suaranya bagus kaya penyiar radio, tapi dengan gaya bahasa formal jadi berasa nonton reportase di tv" (V1_46) (Translation: her voice is beautiful like a radio announcer's, but with a formal language style so it feels like watching a reportage on tv)

"Seruuu kak... Intonasi dan kata2nya good😊" (V1_56) (Translation: Intonation and words are good😊)

There are also comments from viewers who show enthusiasm and admiration for the destinations shown. Many of the viewers shared their amazement at the beauty of the destination, the stunning scenery, interesting photo spots, unique local culture, and inspiring atmosphere;

"Memang asyik kalo jalan2 ke Malioboro..selain bnyk hiburan nya, bnyk jg oleh2 khas Jogja nya.." (V4_14) (Translation: It's fun to go to Malioboro...apart from lots of entertainment, there are also lots of typical Jogjakarta souvenirs...)

"Hehee asli jogja cantik bgt☺" (V5_55) (Translation: Hehee Jogja is originally beautiful)

"Yang di jembatan viewnya bagus banget buat spot foto" (V3_49) (Translation: The one on the bridge view is really good for photo spots)

"Tempat yang ramai sekali kk, asik banget pokok e" (V4_38) (Translation: A very crowded place, it's really cool)

The technical aspects of content production are also a significant focus for the viewers, as reflected in their comments. They expressed a strong interest in various elements of the content creation process, including the type of camera used, the cinematography techniques applied, and the editing process involved in visual production. This interaction highlights the importance of production techniques, creativity, and technology in creating high-quality content.

"This is so calming and lovely. Aku orang jogja but after watching your vlog i think i want to explore the city i'm living in much more. Love your vlogs cinematography sm ❤️" (V5_34) (Translation: This is so calming and lovely. I'm from Jogja, but after watching your vlog I think I want to explore the city I'm living in much more. Love your vlog cinematography so much)

"kakakk videonya pun tak kalah cantikkk!! COOL i love this kind of editing its so comforting :D" (V5_49) (Translation: Sis, the video is also beautiful!!! COOL i love this kind of editing, it's so comforting :D)

Some viewers left supportive comments to express their appreciation for the influencer's efforts in presenting inspiring stories and attractive visuals. Many gave encouragement, praise, and gratitude for valuable destination recommendations, such as the following comments;

“Terima kasih, Kelana Saka! Jadi nggak bingung lagi Sabtu besok mau ngapain aja di Solo” (V1_55) (Translation: Thank you, Kelana Saka! I’m no longer confused of what to do on next Saturday)

“hai kaka, terimakasih sudah membagikan hal hal yang kaka kenang, disini aku mulai mencintai setiap rekaman yang kaka bagi 🌸” (V5_16) (Translation: Hai Sis, thank you for sharing the moments you cherish, I start to love every recording you share 🌸)

The second category is active engagement and interaction presented by providing recommendations, suggestions, and travel-related questions for the influencers. The viewers not only play a passive role, but also actively contribute in the form of recommendations related to destinations, transportation, and cuisine. In addition, there are also suggestions related to technical issues for content improvement. These responses can be seen in the following comments;

“Cobain naik Gajah wong kelas Priority setiap hari jumat pagi dari satsiun senen. Harga gak jauh dari Taksaka di Gambir” (V3_10) (Translation: Try riding the Gajah Priority Class every Friday morning from the Station Senen. The price is not too different from Taksaka in Gambir)

“Kuliah dan kerja di jogja ampir 7 tahun baru denger juga nama tempatnya sebagian 🗺️ ullen sentalu sama prawirotan mah terkenal kaka, emng secantik itu 😍 love your video kak 🗺️ kalau kunjung lagi Jogja bisa ke Kotagede kk, gak kalah cantik juga disana 😍” (VV5_27) (Translation: Studying and working in Jogja for almost 7 years, I have just known few of places 🗺️ ullen sentalu and prawirotan are famous, and beautiful 😍 love your video sis 🗺️ if you visit Jogja again, you can go to Kotagede sis, it's also beautiful there 😍)

“Cobain sate kere. Sate dr lemak minyak.. enak bgt tuh..” (V2_20) (Try young lamb satay, made from fat oil... It's delicious)

“kakak saran terlalu bnyak kata tuhh” (V3_34) (Translation: suggestion, too many words, sis)

Through the comment column, the viewers also showed great curiosity for the details of the trip presented, as seen in the comments that contained questions related to hotel facilities, timing, rental drivers, transit places, technological equipment used to produce content, and so on. These comments include;

“share budget juga kak totally habis berapa kl disana selama 4 hari” (V4_18) (Translation: sis, please share the total budget spent for 4 days)

“Ka itu supir nya brp byr nya/12jam” (V3_33) (Translation: how much does it cost for a driver’s fee for 12 hours)

“kak recordd pake apaa inii? effectnya bisa kaya vibes vintage gitu yaa📺” (V5_9) (Translation: what do you use for recording? The effect gives a vintage vibe 📺)

Meanwhile, the third category of parasocial interaction patterns is emotional connections that are made by sharing personal stories and waiting for the next content. Through the comments section, viewers share their experiences, heartfelt thoughts, or memories, both positive and negative, connected to the discussed destination or topic.

“Such a slow, meaningful and wholesome trip. I personally wonder, how does it actually feels like to be in a slow pace with somebody especially, when you are having a partner. It's just because that, these days, society seems to be always up on doing something more productive and active. Like whenever I see my friends's IG posts, they'll be like either going on a hike or concert. And I simply feels like, to be attractive or to be acceptable by anyone, you should be more outgoing in life. But

upon seeing your video which is really relaxing and just going with the flow, i realised that not all people are the same. I mean, with the right person, everything else that you wish to do, is acceptable and they will follow along. Such a beautiful things to be realised. Anyway, i hope i can find my own person too soon. Until then, have fun always sis ♥” (V5_31)

“Aseli, Jogja dijamin sekarang gak se-seru dan gak se-nyaman dulu, sekarang sih Jogja sama aja kaya Jakarta, panas, macet, penuh, ramai, sumpek. Malah jauh lebih panas dari Jakarta. Gak nyaman karena terlalu banyak pengunjung dimana mana jadi gak tenang” (V3_26) (Translation: Jogja nowadays is not as exciting and not as comfortable as before, now Jogja is just like Jakarta, hot, congested, full, crowded, and stuffy. In fact, it is much hotter than Jakarta. It's uncomfortable because there are too many visitors everywhere so it's not calm)

Some comments also show how content is not merely entertainment, but also triggers a deep emotional connection, making viewers feel immersed and connected personally and emotionally to the content created. This can be seen in the following comments;

Sukaa lihat kelana saka , jadi serasa ikut jalan2 ♥😊” (V1_16) (Translation: I love seeing you wandering around, it feels like I'm going for a walk ♥😊)

“bener-bener kayak liburan online...penyajianya sangat komplit dan jelas (maasyaa Allah)” (V3_23) (Translation: It's really like an online holiday...the presentation is very complete and clear (MasyaAllah))

The pattern of parasocial interaction in this category involves waiting for upcoming content. Due to the bond between the viewers and the influencer, the viewers expressed their anticipation and enthusiasm for the next release.

“bawaan nya happy mulu kalo nonton kelana sakaaa 😊 gas ga siiii upload tiap hari😊” (V1_53) (Translation: Watching your video makes me happy, why don't you post content on a daily basis)

“Nggak sabar deh sama episode 2 nya” (V1_21) (Translation: Can't wait for episode 2)

“Found your videos on my reccomendation and i really love it!! Please post more videoss” (V5_42)

The last category is inspiration and practical influence, indicated by the viewers' statements to utilize the content as a reference to take a journey. For example, comments that mention that the information provided is helpful or that the viewers are inspired to visit the same location or use the same products and services indicate an emotional connection and trust that is established even without direct interaction.

“Kalau mau holiday pasti lihat youtube ini dlu buat referensi. Makasihhh dan semangat terus” (V3_1) (Translation: When I want to go on holiday, I watch this channel for reference)

“Kalo k jogja ga cukup 1x ya kak . Sking bnyk nya kuliner + wisata nya . Aku udh 3x dan masi rencana lagi liburan kesana . Yg pasti nya selalu dpt infonya dr chanel nya kak yuniar ♥♥” (V3_6) (Translation: Visiting Jogja once is not enough. Many options of culinary and places. I have been there 3 times and still plan to go there. I definitely get the information from kak yuniar's channel ♥♥)

“Gara2 cenel ini ku jadi ngikut klo liburan tiap hari pindah hotel, biar punya experience banyak hotel, beda klo dulu liburan 5 hari, selalu dihotel yg sama karena ga mau ribet pindah2 , thx ide nya😊” (V3_41) (Translation: Because of this channel, I started following it by changing hotels every day when I'm on vacation, so I can experience many hotels, unlike when I used to have a 5 day vacation, always staying at the same hotel because I didn't want the hassle of moving around, thanks for the idea😊)

“Haaai kak Mita 🤝 salam kenal ya,aku pas akhir september pk jasa pak Santoso,thx rekomendasiny kak! Makin Jatuh cinta bgt sm Jogja liat tripny Kak Mita, baru plg z dah kangen pgn balik lg” (V3_24) (Translation: Hi Sis Mita 🤝 nice to meet you, at the end of September I used Mr Santoso's

services, thanks for the recommendation sis! I'm really falling in love with Jogja when I see Sis Mita's trip, I've just come home and I'm already missing coming back again)

Meanwhile, a practical influence can be observed from the comments of viewers expressing their desire to follow in the footsteps of influencers visiting the destinations shown, indicating the creation of behavioral intentions as a result of content exposure.

“A beautiful girl in a beautiful city. Aku mau ke Jogja juga ahh abis nonton ini :)” (V5_50) (Translation: A beautiful girl in a beautiful city. I want to go to Jogja to after watching this video)

“Gassss senin ambil cuti puas2in dijogja ☺” (V3_38) (Translation: soon taking leave on Monday and have fun in Jogja)

“Saya jadi pingin ke jogja kota yg mempesona beutifull” (V4_23) (Translation: I want to visit Jogja, a beautiful and enchanting city)

Figure 2 illustrates the pattern of parasocial interaction between travel micro-influencers and their viewers. This study confirms that parasocial interaction predominantly remains one-way, consistent with findings by Lee and Watkins (2016). The interaction pattern is shown by arrows flowing from left to right, indicating that the micro-influencer primarily initiates the interaction as the media performer (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). This study expands on prior research by providing a more comprehensive understanding of parasocial interaction patterns from both the micro-influencers' and viewers' perspectives (Dewantara et al., 2023; Rachel Kowert & Daniel, 2021).

Overall, a notable pattern match exists between influencer production strategies and viewers' responses, which significantly fosters parasocial interactions. When influencers showcase advanced production skills, such as cinematography, editing, and lighting, viewers often express explicit appreciation and interest in these techniques. This resonance deepens emotional bonds and enhances the influencer's perceived expertise. Similarly, efforts to optimize personal and functional appeal, through physical attractiveness, engaging self-presentation, and informative content, are positively received. Viewers actively engage through admiration, comments, and suggestions. This alignment not only enhances the viewing experience but also cultivates trust, emotional connection, and stronger parasocial relationships.

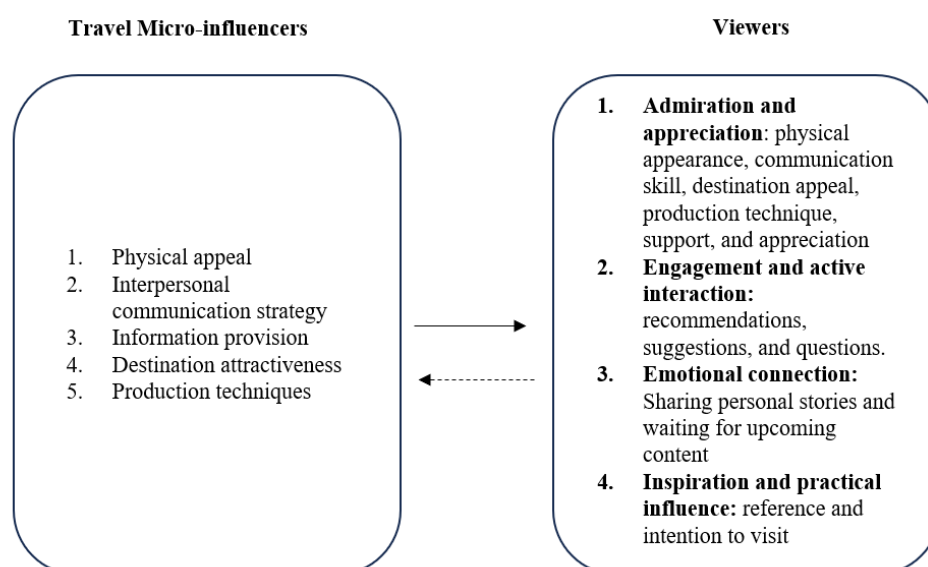


Figure 2. The Pattern of Parasocial Interaction between Travel Micro-influencers and Viewers on YouTube

Regarding micro-influencers' parasocial interaction strategies, this study aligns with previous findings that emphasize the importance of physical appeal, communication style, informative content, destination attractiveness, and production techniques in fostering connections (Dewantara et al., 2023; Fadda & Sørensen, 2017; Le & Hancer, 2021).

Physical appearance emerges as a key factor in attracting viewers' attention, especially on visual platforms like YouTube, where it helps capture initial interest and encourages engagement. This aligns with studies that highlight the significant role of physical appearance in parasocial interactions (Chen et al., 2023; Zheng et al., 2022). Though some research suggests its influence may not always be significant (Zhang et al., 2021). Nevertheless, viewers' responses, such as compliments in comment sections, indicate that physical appearance does elicit admiration.

Micro-influencers also build trust through strong interpersonal communication skills, including confidence, storytelling, and casual language when sharing experiences. Positive social interactions featured in their content further enhance their image as approachable and authentic, which fosters viewers' trust and emotional engagement, activating parasocial interaction mechanisms (Dewantara et al., 2023; Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Additionally, influencers showcase visually and emotionally appealing destinations while providing useful travel advice, enhancing viewer trust and engagement. Professional production techniques such as quality lighting, editing, and cinematography improve the immersive experience. Interactive elements, such as posing and responding to questions, simulate reciprocal communication and strengthen parasocial dynamics. Together, these elements can create a sense of intimacy and presence, deepening the viewers' parasocial connection.

From the viewer's perspective, parasocial interactions manifest as admiration, active engagement, emotional connection, and inspiration. Initially driven by admiration for influencers' traits and content, these interactions evolve into active participation through questions and suggestions, and deepen as viewers share personal experiences and anticipate new content. Ultimately, parasocial interaction influences viewers' behavior by inspiring decisions, such as travel intentions, demonstrating how virtual relationships can generate meaningful emotional and practical impacts in real life.

This study provides valuable insights for travel micro-influencers and marketers on how to strategically foster parasocial interactions with their viewers. Key content elements, such as physical attractiveness, interpersonal communication, informative content, destination appeal, and high-quality production, can enhance perceived connection and trust. Understanding viewers' response patterns, including admiration, engagement, emotional connection, and practical influence, allows for more targeted and effective interaction strategies. These findings can guide influencer marketing efforts and content development to build deeper relationships and drive desired behavioral outcomes in the travel sector.

Conclusions

These research findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of parasocial interaction patterns from two perspectives: travel micro-influencer and viewers. Travel micro-influencers create parasocial interactions through various aspects, such as physical attractiveness, interpersonal communication skills, information delivery, destination attractiveness, production techniques, and interactions in the form of confirmations. Meanwhile, the viewers form parasocial interactions by using patterns, such as, admiration and appreciation, engagement and active interaction, emotional connection, and inspiration and practical influence.

Further research can use influencers from different contexts, such as health, fitness, beauty, and others. Parasocial interaction patterns that occur may be different from those found in this study. In addition, future research can also use other social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, X, and others. The feature differences in each digital platform may lead to different interaction patterns.

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