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WHEN DOES PARASOCIAL INTERACTION MAKE INFLUENCERS MORE INFLUENTIAL?

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Abstract: *Consumers who experience higher parasocial interaction (PSI) with influencers are more likely to try an option that the influencer recommends. Are consumers with high PSI also more likely to follow an influencer's recommendation not to try an option? We predicted that PSI would matter more when the influencer encourages consumers to try an option than when she discourages them from trying it. Inconsistent with our prediction, consumers were more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation when the influencer encouraged them and when the influencer attempted to create high PSI with consumers, but these effects were independent.*

Keywords: *parasocial interaction, social media influencers, consumer behavior, persuasion, experimental research*

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INTRODUCTION

Bloggers, YouTubers, Instagram celebrities, and other social media influencers play a significant role in people's lives. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Finnish government used social media influencers to spread reliable information about the coronavirus to citizens (Pöyry et al., 2022). Influencers can also affect consumers' purchase intentions (Reinikainen et al., 2020), guide purchase behavior (Djafarova & Rushworth, 2017), and shape consumers' brand attitudes (Nafees et al., 2021). For instance, Kim Kardashian recently started promoting Guinness Irish beer, leading especially young consumers to want it so much that pubs almost ran out of Guinness (Hutchison, 2024).

Why do influencers, who most consumers have never met, hold such sway over consumers? One reason is because consumers experience parasocial interactions (PSI) with influencers. PSI refers to a consumer's illusionary experience of being engaged in social interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) with, for example, social media influencers. Although the relationship is one-sided, audience members may sense that the influencer is aware of them, pays attention to them, or reacts to their behavior (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Prior research has shown that influencers' verbal (e.g., saying "you" to the audience) and bodily (e.g., looking directly at the camera) addressing lead consumers to experience PSI (Cummins & Cui, 2014, Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016).

PSI with influencers often produces positive outcomes. For example, consumers can cope with their loneliness by experiencing PSI with celebrities because PSI makes viewers feel closer and more related to the celebrities (Aw & Labreque, 2020). Also, when influencers engaged in more PSI, consumers had higher purchase intentions toward products the influencers promote (Lee & Lee, 2021). Moreover, consumers who had higher PSI with other users (including celebrities) on the social commerce platform (Mogujie) had higher impulsive buying tendencies on that platform (Xiang et al., 2016).

Prior research has mainly focused on how PSI increases the likelihood that consumers follow a positive recommendation (Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Gong et al., 2025; Gopakumar & Dananjayan, 2024; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Xiang et al., 2016); it has not looked at whether PSI increases whether consumers are more likely to follow a recommendation to avoid an option. Social media influencers cannot only encourage their followers to try an option (i.e., positive persuasion), they can also discourage them from trying it (i.e., negative persuasion (Shadijanova, 2023). However, research has paid little, if any, attention to how consumers respond when influencers discourage them from trying an option. Additionally, it remains unclear whether consumers who experience higher PSI are also more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation to not try an option. The present study addresses this research gap by comparing the role of PSI in consumers' decision to listen to a recently published song when the influencer either recommends listening to it or discourages participants from listening to it.

Research shows that negative information (i.e., discourage to listen to a song this) is generally more persuasive than positive information (i.e., encourage to listen to a song) (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Therefore, if negative information is more effective than positive, one could argue that PSI should make negative messages particularly persuasive. On the other hand, when an influencer discourages consumers from

trying an option, the effect of a negative message might be so powerful that PSI no longer increases its effectiveness (see. ceiling effect) (Garin, 2014).

The present study addresses this research gap by conducting a between-subjects experiment to compare the role of PSI and addressing in consumers' decisions to listen to a recently published song when the influencer either recommends or discourages them from listening to it. We examine this topic from the perspective of young consumers, since they are the most active followers of influencers and appear to be the most susceptible to their influence (Auxier & Anderson, 2021; Stok et al., 2016).

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Social Media Influencers and Parasocial Interaction

Social media influencers are independent (third-party) endorsers who shape their followers' attitudes on social media (Freberg et al., 2011). Influencers such as YouTubers and Instagram influencers typically promote or share their experiences of products on social media platforms with other users through images and videos (Sokolova & Kefi, 2019). Influencers can be categorized into groups based on the number of their followers. Celebrities and mega-influencers have over 1 million followers, macro-influencers 100,000 – 1 million, micro-influencers 10,000-100,000, and nano-influencers have less than 10,000 followers (Park et al., 2021).

Since influencers have a lot of followers, companies form strategic partnerships with influencers to reach different consumer groups (Borchers & Enke, 2021). This practice is also known as influencer marketing (De Veirman et al., 2019). Influencer marketing is a practice in which influencers can promote a company's products and services for financial compensation (Reinikainen, 2022). Influencer marketing has become a crucial part of companies' marketing strategies intending to increase the company's performance (Leung et al., 2022). The fact that the influencer marketing market size has vastly expanded globally (Statista, 2023) also illustrates the potential that influencers must help companies reach and persuade consumers.

One reason for influencers' effectiveness as endorsers is that audiences can experience parasocial interaction (PSI) with them. To illustrate, when the viewers watch influencers' videos, they might experience that the influencer reacted to what they said or did, or was aware of them (Dibble et al., 2016). Interestingly, scholars have often incorrectly used the term PSI to refer to parasocial relationships (PSR). While parasocial interactions (PSI) can only occur during an exposure condition (i.e., during viewing), parasocial relationships (PSR) refer to longer-term, one-sided relationships with influencers that may develop during exposure but extend beyond it (Dibble et al., 2016). This study focuses exclusively on PSI.

Researchers have attempted to create a parasocial experience by showing participants a short video in which the influencer addresses the audience bodily (e.g., looking directly at the camera) and verbally (e.g., saying "you" to the audience) (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Influencers can also make the video feel more interactive by using the pronoun "you" and asking viewers to leave their comments in the video's comment section (Penttinen et al., 2022). Some studies have also shown how self-disclosure (e.g., when the

influencer reveals personal details) can make the audience feel that the influencer is socially present, which subsequently increases the audience's parasocial experience (Kim & Song, 2016).

Studies have shown that consumers' perceived PSI increases consumers' purchase intentions (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Lee & Lee, 2022; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Shen et al., 2022). Also, participants who experienced higher PSI with the influencer were more likely to have higher purchase intentions toward products that the influencer promoted (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In the same vein, Aw and Labrecque (2020) revealed that PSI can make young adults feel more attached to celebrities, which in turn leads to higher purchase intentions. Another study demonstrated how consumers' perceived PSI with YouTubers helped consumers evaluate and understand products, reducing their perceived risk and consequently increasing their purchase intentions (Lee & Lee, 2022). Research suggests that consumers who experience PSI with influencers are more likely to follow the recommendation of an influencer because PSI increases their confidence, especially when consumers are uncertain about their preferences (Penttinen et al., 2022).

Social Media Influencers and Deinfluencing

While influencers can persuade their audiences to buy a product, they can also discourage consumers: The new rising "deinfluencing" trend reveals that influencers have started to tell consumers what products and services they should avoid (Shadijanova, 2023). For example, a video entitled *"Please do not Buy This Car (Unless You're a Mechanic)"* uploaded by American YouTuber #Scottykilmer has been viewed nearly a million times. Likewise, a famous YouTuber, #Mrwhosetheboss, published *"Don't buy this smartphone,"* a video review viewed by 4.4 million people in which he described the weaknesses of a certain smartphone model. The timeliness of the *"deinfluencing"* trend becomes apparent in TikTok statistics: while the hashtag #deinfluencing had approximately 264 million views at the beginning of 2023 (Bainotti, 2023), the number of views in 2024 is over 1.5 billion (Scott, 2024).

Few studies have examined de-influencing. One exception is a recent study by Kilic and Polat (2024), which defined de-influencing through content analysis as social media influencers raising awareness against excessive and unnecessary consumption. They identified several deinfluencing tactics, such as highlighting overpriced destinations or sharing better alternative options for travel. Moreover, Bainotti (2023) analyzed deinfluencing content on TikTok and revealed three key categories: 1) resistance, where consumers resist aspirational lifestyles and consumerism; 2) consumerist reappropriation, involving the authentic promotion of affordable consumer goods by reliable brands; and 3) trend-surfing, where consumers utilize the visibility of the deinfluencing trend to promote themselves. This rising trend of de-influencing is important because it can be more effective than influencing. For example, experiments have shown that de-influencing reduces purchase intentions more significantly than influencing increases them (Wallbaum, 2023).

Negative experiences, negative emotions, and negative information typically have a stronger impact than positive experiences, emotions, and information (Baumeister et al., 2001). Human brains respond more to bad than to good things and negative information evokes more thorough processing than positive information (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin &

Royzman, 2001), and when people make decisions, they attach more importance to the negative aspects than positive aspects (Vaish et al., 2008). Likewise, when people meet someone for the first time and form the first impression, new people's negative aspects weigh much more compared with positive aspects (Baumeister et al., 2001). People also tend to perceive negative information as more truthful than positive (Hilbig, 2009). It has also been shown that negative reviews are more powerful than positive reviews (Chevalier & Mayzlin, 2006).

Research shows that negative information demands more cognitive processing, which makes the information more persuasive (Hilbig, 2009). Because negative information is more persuasive generally, consumers might be more likely to follow the advice of an influencer who recommends avoiding an option, regardless of whether they have had PSI.

Parasocial Interaction and Negative Information

It is plausible that consumers who have PSI with influencers would be also more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation to avoid an option. On the other hand, research shows that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001), which could result in negative recommendations being influential regardless of whether consumers have PSI with an influencer. However, regardless that influencers are increasingly *"deinfluencing"* on social media, studies have exclusively examined whether consumers who experience PSI with influencers are more likely to follow the influencer's positive recommendation (e.g., purchase intentions) (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Garg & Bakshi, 2024; Gong et al., 2025; Gopakumar & Dananjayan, 2024; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Xiang et al., 2016). Studies have not investigated whether PSI increases the consumers' likelihood to follow an influencer's recommendation to avoid an option. However, it can also be that when an influencer discourages consumers from trying an option, the effect of a negative message is so powerful that PSI no longer increases its effectiveness (see. ceiling effect) (Garin, 2014). Thus, we predict that PSI will be less likely to increase the extent to which consumer follow an influencer's recommendation when the influencer discourages (negative) consumers from trying an option than when she encourages (positive) consumers to try the option.

H1. Consumers will be more likely to follow the recommendation of an influencer with high compared to low PSI when the influencer makes a positive recommendation than a negative recommendation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants and Study Design

Data were collected in Fall 2022 from US citizens aged 18–35 years recruited from Amazon Mechanical Turk (total n = 401). The participants were assigned to a condition in a 2 (Addressing: high, low) × 2 (Recommendation: positive, negative) between-subjects experimental design. We pre-registered the hypothesis of this study (https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=YBW_49J). The following link also includes the used

attention checks such as *"What is your favourite color? Regardless of your favourite color, choose blue"* and realism check such as *"When watching the video, I felt I could come across this kind of video on social media".*

Research Ethics

We followed the ethical guidelines of the Ethics Committee of the University. According to the guidelines of the Ethics Committee, the present study did not require an ethical review. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants were able to refuse to participate or cancel their participation at any time without any consequences. Research participants were informed about the study, and they needed to give their consent before entering the research. We did not collect any personal information including indirect identifiers. Also, this study did not include sensitive or harmful content that could be seen as ethically questionable.

Procedure

After consenting to participate in the study, participants read that they would watch a short video in which a nano-influencer, a native English speaker named "Julia", recommends listening, or not listening, to a song. We created four versions of the video to manipulate whether the influencer addresses the participant (which should create a high vs. Low PSI) and whether the influencer recommended listening (positive recommendation) or not listening (negative recommendation) to the focal song.

We attempted to manipulate PSI by varying whether the influencer addressed participants with her body (bodily addressing) and voice (verbally addressing). Scholars have used bodily addressing (e.g., eye contact) and verbal addressing (e.g., tone of voice) to manipulate participants' PSI experience (Cummins & Cui, 2014; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016). Additionally, previous studies have demonstrated that PSI can be effectively manipulated using short video stimuli (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). That is, participants who were bodily and verbally addressed by the influencer experienced significantly higher PSI than when not verbally and bodily addressed (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

Bodily addressing occurs when an influencer looks directly at the camera rather than looking to the side. Research suggests that eye-gaze triggers automatic mindreading (inferring others' mental state) (Malle & Hodges, 2005), leading to a parasocial experience (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Smiling can similarly produce automatic mindreading (Malle & Hodges, 2005). When two people interact, their bodily gestures (e.g., smiling) begin to synchronize because when one person shows their mental state with, for instance, facial expression, the other tends to automatically imitate their behavior (Malle & Hodges, 2005, pp. 36–37). This bodily addressing, in turn, should create PSI (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Smiling also signals expressers' cooperative social motives (affiliative smiles) (Niedenthal et al., 2010), and people typically perceive a smile as an invitation for reciprocal smiling and cooperative behavior (Horstmann, 2003). Thus, the influencer smiled and spoke directly to participants in the high PSI condition, but did not smile and looked away from participants in the low PSI condition (see Figure 1). This procedure has been validated in previous studies (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011).

We manipulated verbal addressing by having the influencer speak directly to viewers by using the "you" pronoun, welcoming viewers back to the channel, and saying, "Thanks for watching. If you liked the video give it a thumbs up. See you next time." The influencer did not say these things in the low PSI condition. This procedure has been an established approach in previous studies (Cummins & Cu, 2014; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016; Penttinen et al., 2022).

Figure 1. An illustration of bodily addressing

Note 1. The upper image illustrates low bodily addressing while the image below illustrates high bodily addressing.

The study included four videos: one in which the influencer endorsed a song by recording artist Left Vessel titled "This Year Be" with high addressing, a second in which the influencer endorsed the same song with low addressing, a third in which the influencer criticized "This Year Be" with high addressing, and a fourth in which the influencer criticized the same song with low addressing (see table 1).

After watching the video, participants chose whether they wanted to listen to "This Year Be" or "Eclipse" a song by the band Wages that the influencer did not discuss. We varied the prior views of each song to give participants a reason to not necessarily follow the influencer's recommendation. Specifically, we described "This Year Be" as having fewer views than "Eclipse" when the influencer encouraged participants to listen to "This Year Be" but more views than "Eclipse" when the influencer discouraged participants from listening to "This Year Be".

Next, participants reported their level of parasocial interaction with an established EPSI scale (α =. 95; e.g., "while watching the video clip, I had the feeling that the speaker was

aware of me;" 1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree; (Dibble et al., 2016; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Finally, participants completed exploratory measures and reported their demographic information (see the appendix).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics

Video	Persuasion	Addressing	Behavioral outcome (Mean)	N	Standard Deviation
1	Positive	High	1.61	97	.491
2	Positive	Low	1.42	96	.496
3	Negative	High	1.48	107	.502
4	Negative	Low	1.31	100	.465

Note 1. Behavioral outcome = complying with the influencer's recommendation (1 = did not comply, 2 = complied).

RESULTS

ANOVA revealed that the addressing manipulation did not have the predicted effect on perceived experience of PSI. That is, participants reported a similar level of PSI regardless of whether the influencer addressed them (M = 5.25 vs. 5.12; F (1, 202) = .39, p = .53) or not; (M = 5.03 vs. 5.24; F (1, 195) = .76, p = .38). Addressing failed to increase perceived PSI regardless of whether the influencer recommended listening to "This Year Be" (M = 5.25 vs. 5.03; F (1, 192) = .86, p = .35) or not listening to "This Year Be" (M = 5.12 vs. 5.24; F (1, 205) = .32, p = .57).

Despite the insignificant effect of the Addressing manipulation on perceived PSI, we examined the effects of Addressing and Recommendation on whether the participants complied with the influencer's recommendation using logistic regression with contrast coded variables representing the Addressing factor, the Recommendation factor, and their interaction. The data revealed a main effect of Addressing, such that participants were more likely to follow the advice of the influencer with high addressing

(β = .75, OR = 2.12, p < .001, R^2 = 0.06), and a main effect of Recommendation, such that participants were more likely to follow the influencer's suggestion to listen to a song than to not listen to the song (β = .49, OR = 1.64, p < .017, R^2 = 0.06). The interaction, however, was not significant (β = .08, OR = 1.09, p =. *832*, R^2 = 0.06), which suggests that participants were more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation when she addresses them, regardless of whether she encouraged or discouraged them from listening to the song (see table 2).

Table 2. Predictors of complying with the influencer's recommendation

Variable	B	Odds Ratio	df	Wald	S.E.	*p*
Persuasion * Addressing	.08	1.1	1	.045	.41	.83
Persuasion						
Positive	.49	1.64	1	5.71	.21	.017
Negative	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
Addressing						
High	.75	2.12	1	13.23	.21	<.001
Low	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
Constant	-8.24	0.44	1	19.93	0.185	<.001

Note 2. Total n = *401.*

Note 2. Since only 3 participants reported their age as over 35 we did not exclude them from the study.

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to examine whether consumers who experience high PSI with the social media influencer are more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation when the influencer either encourages them to try an option or discourages them from trying it. We hypothesized that consumers are more likely to follow the influencer's recommendation with high compared to low PSI when the influencer gives a positive recommendation than a negative recommendation since negative information is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001). Our hypothesis could not be supported or rejected because participants who watched videos with high addressing versus low addressing did not perceive a different level of PSI. This finding is not in line with Cummins and Cui (2014), Hartmann and Gooldhoorn (2011), and Tukachinsky and Sangalang (2016), who noted that high addressing yields PSI experience and that high and low addressing should yield a variation in the EPSI scale (Dibble et al. 2016), because our videos, which were manipulated to yield low PSI experience, also caused relatively high PSI. This raises the question of how influencers can effectively vary PSI with their followers, as our study suggests that verbal and bodily addressing may not be enough to reliably influence PSI.

Interestingly, we found that consumers are more likely to follow the recommendation of an influencer when the influencer addresses them, even though addressing did not increase perceived PSI. Since the PSI experience did not differ between those who watched low and high addressing videos, we conclude that the verbal (engaging speaking style) and bodily addressing (smiling and eye contact) caused the differences in participants' behavior. Although these results are inconsistent with research that suggests addressing increases PSI (Cummins & Cui, 2014; Hartmann & Gooldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016), it is consistent with research showing that smiling can increase purchase intentions (Trivedi & Teichert, 2019) and that eye contact increases cooperative behavior (Luo et al., 2016).

Theoretical and managerial contributions

Theoretically, this study contributes to the PSI literature. As the addressing manipulation did not have the predicted effect on perceived PSI, this raises questions about the robustness of the conventional methods (i.e., bodily and verbal addressing) used in prior research to yield PSI (Cummins & Cui, 2014; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016). In line with Dibble et al. (2016) we recommend future studies to design more robust and reliable practices to induce greater differences in PSI between low and high addressing groups.

Second, this study contributes to the limited literature on de-influencing and responds to the call by Kilic & Polat (2024), who stated that, as a new concept, de-influencing requires further research and understanding. We found that participants were more likely to follow the influencer's suggestion to listen to a song than to not listen to the song. This contrasts with experiments showing that de-influencing is more effective than influencing (Wallbaum, 2023). However, our findings suggest that bodily and verbal addressing styles also increase the effectiveness of negative persuasion. Thus, given that the new *"de-influencing"* trend is becoming more prevalent on social media (Kilic & Polat, 2024; Shadijanova, 2023) our findings suggest that influencers should smile, make eye contact with the audience and

engage them verbally (e.g., welcoming to the video) to increase the effectiveness of their criticism. Furthermore, as participants were more likely to follow the influencer's suggestion to listen to a song than to not listen to the song, our findings do not support the negativity bias, which suggest that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001; Rozin & Royzman, 2001). Rather, our findings support the notion that bad is not always necessarily stronger than good (Wu, 2013). For instance, consumers were more willing to buy second-hand clothes when exposed to a positively framed message (i.e., you can help protect the environment by buying second-hand) than negatively framed (i.e., you can help stop the collapse of the environment by buying second-hand) (Grappi et al., 2024). Also, the question of whether bad is stronger than good likely depends on the individual characteristics of the message receiver. For instance, a study by Li et al. (2021) showed that consumers with a higher personal sense of power (i.e., a perceived ability to influence others) were more persuaded by positively framed advertisements than by negatively framed ones. This is because consumers with a higher sense of power are more likely to focus on potential gains, whereas those with a lower sense of power tend to focus on potential threats (Li et al., 2021).

From a managerial perspective, our findings highlight the effectiveness of influencers' addressing styles in shaping consumer behavior. This can be important for companies who collaborate with influencers. That is, if a company uses an influencer to promote its products and services, the company should ensure that the influencer addresses their audience in the videos with a smile, eye contact, and an engaging communication style to increase the effectiveness of the message.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Because the addressing manipulation did not influence PSI, our research was not able to test the causal effects of PSI on participants' decisions. We hope that future research will continue to explore this important question. Also, as our results did not show a negativity bias, future studies would benefit from incorporating high-involvement decisions where participants have a higher stake in the outcome, and thus, negativity bias is more likely to occur (Rozin & Royzman, 2001). In general, research reveals that consumers are highly influenced by loss aversion – losses are twice as impactful for consumers as gains, meaning that losing 500 euros feels as significant for consumers as gaining 1000 euros (Baumeister & Finkel, 2010). However, as this study did not include scenarios with serious potential losses (e.g., losing money), consumers might have acted against the recommendation purely out of curiosity. To address this, we recommend that future studies design scenarios where consumers face greater potential losses, which would also reduce the influence of curiosity. For example, people are presumably more likely to listen to a criticized song out of curiosity than to watch a criticized movie, as a movie involves greater sacrifices (e.g., time, effort, or emotional investment) compared to listening to a short song.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that influencers are more effective persuaders when they address their audiences, regardless of whether they encourage or discourage their followers from trying an

option. Further, the addressing increases influence independent of PSI. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first study that shows the effectiveness of addressing when an influencer recommends avoiding an option.

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Appendix

Measured pre-covariates

Conformity

As we assumed that some participants would be more unwilling to follow anyone's recommendations than others (nonconformists), which would result in noise problems, we included an 11-item Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree) adopted from Mehrabian and Stefl (1959).

Other measurements

The following sociodemographic characteristics were measured: age, education, and gender identity. All the measured scales and sociodemographic characteristics were almost evenly distributed between conditions (adequate balance).

Manipulation check

We included the following manipulation check variable *"I felt that the influencer (Julia) was looking at me"* in the questionnaire adopted from Hartmann and Goldhoorn (2011). The participants did not differ in this variable between conditions; they felt that Julia was looking at them even when she was not. However, as this variable underlined the participants' subjective feeling of whether they "felt" that the influencer was looking at them, not whether the influencer actually had eye contact with them, this variable might not be applicable for the manipulation check. Rather, this measure can further explain why PSI did not yield variation in the EPSI scale; it might be that the mere existence of the influencer was enough to yield the PSI experience.