

The Impact of Perceived Similarity in Travel Vlogs on Forwarding Intention: A Parallel Mediation Model

Jiapeng Sun*, Huanran Liu

Hainan Vocational University of Science and Technology, Haikou 571126, Hainan, China

**Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.*

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Abstract: This study develops and tests a structural equation model based on the similarity-attraction theory, with perceived similarity as the independent variable, parasocial interaction and social presence as parallel mediating variables, and forwarding intention as the dependent variable, to examine the psychological mechanism underlying the forwarding behavior of travel vlog viewers. A total of 502 valid questionnaires were collected via an online survey platform, and confirmatory factor analysis and Bootstrap-based mediation analysis were used to verify the hypotheses. The results demonstrate that perceived similarity not only directly and positively influences forwarding intention but also exerts a partial mediating effect through two pathways: parasocial interaction and social presence, with the indirect effect accounting for 62.9% of the total effect. The model demonstrates a good fit, and all hypotheses are supported. This study reveals the parallel psychological pathways of “relational” and “experiential” aspects in travel vlog content diffusion, providing theoretical foundations and practical implications for content creators to optimize their dissemination strategies.

Keywords: Travel vlog; Perceived similarity; Parasocial interaction; Social presence; Forwarding intention

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1. Introduction

Travel vlogs are a form of video recording centered on a first-person perspective, where creators transform their travel experiences into narrative and emotional content through participation, filming, and editing^[1]. Compared to traditional travel promotions, travel vlogs emphasize “presence” and “experientiality”, allowing viewers to immerse themselves in the depicted environment (context/scenario) as surrogate participants^[2-3]. This format enhances authenticity, reduces commercial distance, and increases the “accessibility” of destinations^[4]. Additionally, by integrating social media with individual expression, vlogs have become an important mode of travel content production amidst technological proliferation^[5-6].

In terms of dissemination mechanisms, travel vlogs prioritize personalized expression^[7]. Creators serve as

both information transmitters and meaning constructors, shaping a distinct “persona” through their emotions and values ^[8]. This leads viewers to shift their focus from the “destination” to the “experiencer”, fostering a quasi-familiar emotional connection ^[9]. The combination of personalization and authenticity further enhances content credibility and resonance, thereby stimulating identification, empathy, and sharing intentions beyond information delivery, constituting a key mechanism that distinguishes travel vlogs from traditional travel media.

Building on this, this paper explores the forwarding mechanism of travel vlogs from the perspective of viewer psychology. Starting with perceived similarity, it explains how the psychological connection between viewers and vloggers translates into motivation to share content. Unlike existing studies that examine perceived similarity and parasocial interaction in isolation, this paper emphasizes their hierarchical relationship, namely, that perceived similarity influences forwarding intention by stimulating parasocial interaction. Simultaneously, social presence is introduced to examine whether it is also influenced by perceived similarity, is also driven by similarity, and affects forwarding behavior. Thus, a parallel mediation model of “perceived similarity → (parasocial interaction, social presence) → forwarding intention” is developed to refine the psychological mechanism of travel vlog dissemination.

At the practical level, this study addresses the question of “under what conditions do viewers actively disseminate content” amidst content homogenization and attention competition, providing creators with a pathway: enhancing perceived similarity and improving interaction and presence experiences to strengthen diffusion capabilities ^[10].

At the theoretical level, the main contributions of this paper are as follows: First, it constructs a hierarchical mechanism with perceived similarity as the antecedent, deepening the understanding of parasocial interaction and social presence. Second, it shifts from a consumption-oriented to a dissemination-oriented perspective, making up for the gap in research on diffusion behavior. Third, it introduces the similarity-attraction theory to explain the formation mechanism of the psychological connection between vloggers and viewers, thereby promoting the integrated development of travel vlog research in terms of variable structure, research perspective, and mechanism explanation.

2. Literature review and hypotheses

Perceived similarity refers to the degree to which individuals subjectively perceive similarities in values, interests, or lifestyles with media figures upon exposure ^[11]. According to the similarity-attraction theory, people are more inclined to develop positive feelings and identification toward objects that are similar to themselves and are more willing to approach and support these objects ^[12]. In media contexts, this perception of similarity not only influences audience attitudes toward information but also further affects their behavioral responses.

During the viewing of travel vlogs, viewers often engage in psychological comparisons between their own lifestyles and those of the vloggers, thereby forming perceived similarity ^[13]. This psychological comparison strengthens viewers’ identification with the content, making them more inclined to express their attitudes and identity through forwarding behavior ^[14]. As a low-cost form of social expression, forwarding not only reflects users’ approval of the content but also embodies their process of self-presentation ^[14]. Therefore, the following hypothesis 1 is proposed:

H1: Perceived similarity positively influences forwarding intention.

Parasocial interaction refers to a one-sided, quasi-socialized interpersonal relationship that viewers

form with communicators in media contexts ^[4]. In travel vlogs centered on personal expression, vloggers use camera language and narrative techniques to create an atmosphere of “face-to-face communication”, fostering a sense of companionship and interaction among viewers ^[15].

Existing research indicates that perceived similarity is an important antecedent variable that promotes the formation of parasocial interaction. When viewers perceive vloggers as similar to themselves, they are more likely to regard them as potential social partners, thereby enhancing their sense of interaction and emotional attachment ^[16]. Furthermore, a strong parasocial interaction relationship can increase users’ level of engagement with the content and enhance their willingness to actively disseminate it.

H2: Perceived similarity positively influences parasocial interaction.

H3: Parasocial interaction positively influences forwarding intention.

H4: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived similarity and forwarding intention.

3. The mediating role of social presence

Social presence refers to the degree to which an individual perceives the “real presence” of others in a media environment and is an important concept for measuring media interaction experiences. In the context of short videos, camera language, first-person perspectives, and emotional expressions all contribute to enhancing viewers’ sense of presence and immersive experience ^[17-18].

From a mechanistic perspective, perceived similarity not only strengthens psychological connections between individuals but may also enhance individuals’ perception of others’ existence. When viewers perceive vloggers as similar to themselves, they are more likely to regard them as “real others”, thereby increasing social presence. Furthermore, a higher level of social presence can enhance users’ sense of participation and immersion, subsequently increasing their willingness to disseminate content.

Although existing research has confirmed the positive role of social presence in brand communication, its role in the context of travel vlog dissemination remains to be examined ^[10]. Therefore, this study incorporates it into the model for empirical testing (**Figure 1**).

H5: Perceived similarity positively influences social presence.

H6: Social presence positively influences forwarding intention.

H7: Social presence mediates the relationship between perceived similarity and forwarding intention.

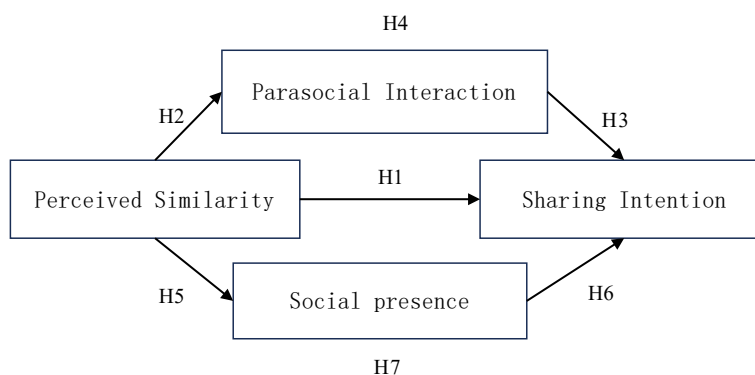


Figure 1. Research model diagram

4. Questionnaire design and variable measurement

4.1. Participants

This study distributed an online questionnaire via an online survey platform, which was open for completion, targeting users interested in travel vlogs. Participants took part voluntarily, and measures such as attention-screening questions and response time control (to eliminate excessively short or long questionnaires) were implemented to ensure data quality. To enhance sample diversity, the questionnaire was simultaneously distributed through multiple social media channels related to travel vlogs. In total, 520 questionnaires were collected, and after removing invalid samples, 502 valid samples were obtained.

4.2. Measures

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire. Screening questions were included to ensure that participants had viewed travel vlogs within the past 30 days. To reduce common method bias, the questionnaire included reverse-scored items, and abnormal responses were removed during the data processing stage to improve reliability.

The study encompassed four core variables (**Figure 1**), all of which were adapted from established scales and tailored to the context of travel vlogs: Perceived similarity and parasocial interaction were measured using scales developed by Lai Jiayi ($\alpha = 0.895, 0.900$), social presence was measured using a scale developed by Chen and Liao ($\alpha = 0.896$), and forwarding intention was measured using a scale developed by Zhao ($\alpha = 0.904$)^[8, 19–20]. All items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

5. Results

5.1. Common method bias test

This study implemented procedural control measures during the questionnaire design stage, including anonymous completion and reverse-scored items, to mitigate the potential impact of common method bias. First, a preliminary assessment of common method variance was conducted using Harman's single-factor test. Exploratory factor analysis without rotation extracted four factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, with the maximum variance explained by a single factor being 51.69%, slightly exceeding 50%, suggesting the presence of a certain degree of common method bias in the study.

To further evaluate the potential impact of common method bias on the study results, a single-factor test using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted. Specifically, all measurement items were loaded onto a single latent variable to form a single-factor model, and fit indices were calculated. The results indicated poor fit for the single-factor model (CMIN/DF = 31.550; NFI = 0.607, RFI = 0.519, IFI = 0.614, TLI = 0.527, CFI = 0.613), significantly below commonly used fit criteria, suggesting that the single factor did not adequately explain the questionnaire items. Therefore, the impact of common method bias on the study results was not significant.

5.2. Construct reliability, validity, and discriminant validity tests

This study conducted reliability and validity tests on the measurement model. The results showed that the composite reliability (CR) of each latent variable ranged from 0.893 to 0.901, all exceeding 0.7,

indicating good internal consistency of the scales (**Table 1**). The average variance extracted (AVE) of each latent variable ranged from 0.737 to 0.753, all exceeding 0.5, suggesting good convergent validity of the measurement model. Additionally, the square roots of the AVE for each latent variable were all greater than the correlation coefficients between it and other variables, indicating good discriminant validity among the constructs.

Table 1. Construct reliability, validity, and discriminant validity tests

Variable	CR	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$
Perceived Similarity	0.893	0.737	0.858
Parasocial Interaction	0.900	0.751	0.866
Social Presence	0.895	0.739	0.860
Forwarding Intention	0.901	0.753	0.868

5.3. Correlation analysis

As shown in **Table 2**, there are significant correlations between perceived similarity, parasocial interaction, social presence, and reposting intention. Specifically, perceived similarity exhibits a significant positive correlation with parasocial interaction ($r = 0.506$), social presence ($r = 0.484$), and reposting intention ($r = 0.460$). Similarly, parasocial interaction shows a significant positive correlation with social presence ($r = 0.520$) and reposting intention ($r = 0.509$). Additionally, social presence also demonstrates a significant positive correlation with reposting intention ($r = 0.490$). All the aforementioned correlation coefficients reach the significance level of 0.01 (two-tailed), indicating good correlations among the variables and providing a basis for subsequent hypothesis testing.

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Coefficients

	Perceived Similarity	Parasocial Interaction	Social Presence	Forwarding Intention
Perceived Similarity	1			
Parasocial Interaction	.506**	1		
Social Presence	.484**	.520**	1	
Forwarding Intention	.460**	.509**	.490**	1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

5.4. Gender differences in perceived similarity, parasocial interaction, social presence, and forwarding intention

To examine gender differences, this study conducted independent-samples t-tests on each variable. The results showed no significant differences between males and females in terms of perceived similarity ($t = 0.060$, $P = 0.953$), parasocial interaction ($t = -0.029$, $P = 0.977$), social presence ($t = 0.528$, $P = 0.598$), and forwarding intention ($t = 0.213$, $P = 0.831$) (**Table 3**).

The results of Levene's tests all met the assumption of homogeneity of variances ($P > 0.05$), so the results under the assumption of equal variances were adopted. Overall, gender did not have a significant impact on any of the research variables.

Table 3. Independent-samples t-test

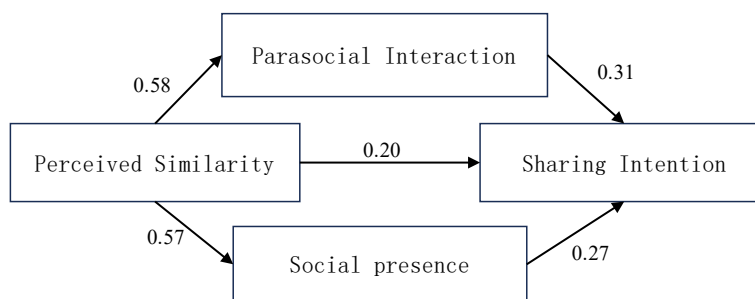
Variable	Male (N=280)	Female (N=222)	t
	M ± SD	M ± SD	
Perceived Similarity	3.102 ± 1.139	3.096 ± 1.217	0.06
Parasocial Interaction	3.402 ± 1.154	3.405 ± 1.129	-0.029
Social Presence	3.137 ± 1.176	3.081 ± 1.179	0.528
Forwarding Intention	3.195 ± 1.212	3.173 ± 1.131	0.213

5.5. Structural model

Based on a sample size of 502, this study constructed a structural equation model to examine the relationships among variables. The measurement model was evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which demonstrated a good fit: CMIN/DF = 2.058 (<3), NFI = 0.977, RFI = 0.969, IFI = 0.988, TLI = 0.984, CFI = 0.988 (all >0.90), and RMSEA = 0.046 (<0.08), indicating that the model has good structural validity.

Structural path analysis revealed that perceived similarity significantly and positively influenced parasocial interaction ($\beta = 0.584$) and social presence ($\beta = 0.567$). In terms of outcome variables, both parasocial interaction ($\beta = 0.309$) and social presence ($\beta = 0.273$) significantly and positively influenced reposting intention. Additionally, perceived similarity still had a significant direct impact on reposting intention ($\beta = 0.198$).

In summary, perceived similarity not only directly influences reposting intention but also exerts indirect effects through parasocial interaction and social presence, thereby validating the mediating roles of these two variables.

**Figure 2.** Path coefficients

5.6. Mediation effect test

This study employed a parallel mediation model combined with the Bootstrap method to examine the mediation effects in the pathway “perceived similarity → parasocial interaction/social presence → reposting intention.” The results showed that the 95% confidence intervals for the total effect, direct effect, and each indirect effect did not include 0, indicating that all paths were significant.

Specifically, the indirect effect mediated through parasocial interaction was 0.18 (95% CI [0.122, 0.26]), and the indirect effect mediated through social presence was 0.155 (95% CI [0.094, 0.228]), suggesting that the parallel mediation effects were established. The direct effect of perceived similarity on reposting intention was 0.198 (95% CI [0.073, 0.319]), and the total effect was 0.533 (95% CI [0.453, 0.608]).

The indirect effects accounted for 62.9% of the total effect, indicating that parasocial interaction and social presence play a partial mediating role in the relationship between perceived similarity and reposting intention.

Table 4. Mediation effect test

Path	Symbol	Meaning	Effect Size	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	Standard Error
Perceived Similarity → Parasocial Interaction → Forwarding Intention	a_1b_1	Indirect Effect 1	0.18	0.122	0.26	0.037
Perceived Similarity → Social Presence → Forwarding Intention	a_2b_2	Indirect Effect 2	0.155	0.094	0.228	0.033
Total Indirect Effect	Σab	Total Indirect Effect	0.335	0.26	0.429	0.043
Perceived Similarity → Forwarding Intention	c'	Direct Effect	0.198	0.073	0.319	0.061
Perceived Similarity → Forwarding Intention	c	Total Effect	0.533	0.453	0.608	0.04

6. Discussion

This study, grounded in the similarity-attraction theory, develops and tests a structural equation model of “perceived similarity → parasocial interaction/social presence → forwarding intention” to uncover the psychological mechanisms underlying the forwarding behavior of tourism vlogs. The results demonstrate that perceived similarity not only directly and positively influences forwarding intention but also exerts an indirect effect through two mediating pathways, thereby validating the parallel mediation model.

Specifically, the direct impact of perceived similarity on forwarding intention is significant (H1), suggesting that when viewers perceive similarity with the vlogger, they are more likely to develop identification and engage in self-expression through forwarding. Parasocial interaction plays a significant mediating role (H2–H4), indicating that perceived similarity can stimulate a quasi-social relationship between viewers and the vlogger, thereby enhancing forwarding intention, with this mechanism being particularly prominent in highly personalized tourism vlogs.

Meanwhile, social presence also exhibits a significant mediating effect (H5–H7), demonstrating that perceived similarity helps strengthen viewers’ perception of the vlogger’s “real presence”, enhances immersion experiences, and promotes forwarding behavior, thereby extending its applicability in short videos and tourism contexts.

Both mediating pathways are significant and exhibit similar effects, indicating that they operate in parallel within the “cognition-relationship-experience” mechanism, addressing the fragmentation in existing research of existing research. Additionally, gender differences are not significant, suggesting that this mechanism demonstrates good group stability and generalizability.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the influence mechanism of perceived similarity on forwarding intention in tourism vlogs from the perspective of viewer psychology, focusing on the parallel mediating roles of parasocial

interaction and social presence. The results show that perceived similarity significantly and positively influences forwarding intention and exerts an indirect effect through parasocial interaction and social presence; the two mediating pathways coexist with comparable effects, revealing a “relationship-based” and “experience-based” parallel dissemination mechanism. Theoretically, this study constructs and validates a parallel mediation model, extending the research perspective from consumption-oriented to dissemination-oriented and providing a new perspective for applying similarity-attraction theory in the field of tourism vlogs. Practically, it suggests that creators should enhance viewers’ psychological connections and engagement through personalized expression, authentic emotions, and immersive camera language. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer clear implications for tourism vlog content creators: creators should focus on establishing perceived similarity with viewers through personalized expression, authentic emotional presentation, and immersive camera language to enhance viewers’ parasocial interaction experiences and social presence, thereby enhancing content diffusion and user engagement.

8. Limitations

Despite certain progress in theoretical construction and empirical testing, this study still has the following limitations.

First, in terms of sample representativeness, the study primarily relies on online platforms for data collection, which may introduce self-selection bias. Future research could enhance external validity by employing offline surveys or random sampling methods. Second, regarding research design, cross-sectional data make it difficult to strictly infer causal relationships. Future studies could further validate the dynamic relationships between variables through longitudinal designs or experimental methods. Third, concerning the theoretical model, the study focuses solely on perceived similarity as an antecedent variable and does not incorporate factors such as content quality and vlogger credibility. Subsequent research could introduce more contextual and individual variables to refine the model. Fourth, regarding the generalizability of the research context, whether the conclusions apply to other types of vlogs remains to be verified. Future research could conduct cross-type comparative studies.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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