ALL EYES ON RAFAH: UNDERSTANDING THE INDONESIAN BOYCOTT MOVEMENT THROUGH THE LENS OF PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS WITH SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi bagaimana hubungan parasosial dengan influencer media sosial membentuk niat konsumen untuk melakukan boikot terhadap produk yang terkait dengan konflik Palestina-Israel. Dengan mengacu teori *emotional contagion*, studi ini menempatkan interaksi parasosial sebagai kekuatan potensial dalam menggerakkan konsumerisme politik digital. Tujuan penelitian adalah untuk menguji apakah perasaan permusuhan memediasi pengaruh hubungan parasosial terhadap niat boikot. Menggunakan metode kuantitatif, data dikumpulkan dari 169 partisipan dan dianalisis dengan Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Penelitian ini mengukur sejumlah konstruk utama seperti identifikasi diri, interaksi imajiner, sikap, permusuhan, dan niat boikot. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa hubungan parasosial memengaruhi niat boikot melalui dua jalur: secara langsung dari hubungan parasosial ke niat boikot, dan secara tidak langsung melalui mediasi perasaan permusuhan terhadap Israel. Temuan ini mengungkap mekanisme psikologis di balik bagaimana hubungan yang dimediasi dengan influencer dapat mendorong tindakan politik di dunia nyata. Studi ini menekankan peran penting keterikatan emosional dalam mendorong perilaku konsumsi politik dan memberikan wawasan baru mengenai bagaimana keterlibatan daring dapat mendorong aksi kolektif dalam masyarakat digital masa kini.

Keywords: boikot; hubungan parasosial; pemengaruh

Abstract

This study explores how parasocial relationships with social media influencers shape consumers' boycott intentions toward products linked to the Palestine-Israel conflict. Drawing on emotional contagion theory, the study situates parasocial interaction as a potential mobilizing force in digital political consumerism. The research aims to examine whether animosity mediate the influence of parasocial bonds on boycott intentions. Employing a quantitative method, data were collected from 169 participants and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The study measured key constructs such as self-identification, imagined interaction, attitudes, animosity, and boycott intention. Results indicate that parasocial relationships predict boycott intentions through two distinct pathways: a direct effect from parasocial relationships to boycott intention, and an indirect effect mediated by feelings of animosity toward Israel. These findings highlight the psychological mechanism through which mediated relationships with influencers may contribute to real-world political actions. The study underscores the broader role of affective ties in driving political consumer behavior and offers new insights into how online engagements can foster collective action in contemporary digital societies.

Keywords: boikot; parasocial relationship; influencer

INTRODUCTION

The boycott movement against products affiliated with Israel gained significant traction among the Indonesian public following Israel's military assault on Rafah, Palestine. This public outcry manifested in the form of boycotts, amplified by the viral hashtag #AllEyesOnRafah, which symbolized both solidarity and condemnation (Tempo, 2024). Far from being merely symbolic, this digital wave has also had tangible economic repercussions. According to the Comprehensive Price and Analytics System (Compas), sales of 206 brands allegedly affiliated

with Israel dropped by as much as 3%, with Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) experiencing the sharpest decline of 7% (Tempo, 2024b).

Yet a fundamental question remains insufficiently explored: what truly motivates individuals to participate in such boycott actions? Previous studies on boycotts in Indonesia have primarily emphasized religiosity and normative influences. Traditionally, boycott participation has often been attributed to the religious commitment of individuals, with the assumption that higher religiosity naturally translates into greater willingness to avoid products affiliated with Israel. Some evidence indeed supports this link, suggesting that religiosity may foster religiously driven animosity that, in turn, predicts boycott participation (Widyarso & Suwanda, 2021). However, the broader literature presents mixed findings. For instance, while certain studies affirm a direct effect of religiosity on boycott intention (Al-Serhan, 2016; Dekhil et al., 2017), others find the relationship to be weak or nonsignificant (Abdul-Talib et al., 2016). In the Indonesian context, Munandar et al. (2023) found that the Indonesian Ulema Council's fatwa did not significantly increase online discussions or actual boycott practices, while Sari and Games (2024) showed that religiosity did not moderate the relationship between psychological variables and boycott intention. These findings suggest that religiosity alone cannot sufficiently account for boycott engagement, and that alternative explanations are needed.

One promising avenue lies in the role of parasocial relationships with social media influencers, which increasingly shape public perceptions and emotional responses in digital societies. Unlike traditional religious authorities, influencers communicate in highly personalized, affect-laden ways that encourage followers to perceive them as close, trusted figures. Through these one-sided yet enduring bonds, audiences become more receptive not only to influencers' opinions but also to their emotions. Emotional Contagion Theory (Hatfield et al., 1994; 2018) helps explain this process: anger, empathy, or moral outrage expressed by influencers can spread to followers, creating shared affective states that motivate action. In the case of boycotts related to the Israel–Palestine conflict, parasocial relationships thus provide a crucial mechanism through which individual emotions are amplified into collective animosity.

This study therefore contributes a novel perspective by integrating parasocial relationships with Emotional Contagion Theory to explain how public figures' emotional expressions are transmitted to audiences, thereby fostering animosity toward Israel. This mechanism distinguishes the present research from prior boycott studies in Indonesia, as it highlights the role of digitally mediated emotions—rather than religiosity—as a key driver of collective boycott participation.

In this context, boycotts can be seen as emotional expressions fueled by perceived injustice, anger, or disappointment toward an aggressor. Boycott intentions, therefore, may not stem solely from rational calculations or normative beliefs, but also from complex affective dynamics. A potential source of such animosity in digital societies lies in parasocial relationships with public figures, particularly non-religious social media influencers. The concept of parasocial relationships refers to emotionally charged, one-sided connections between individuals and media figures who do not know them personally, but with whom they feel emotionally engaged through expressions, opinions, and narratives (Boyd et al., 2022). With the rise of social media, these relationships have become more intense and deceptively reciprocal. Influencers who voice support for Palestine, for instance, can evoke strong emotional resonance among their followers.

In media and communication studies, it is important to distinguish between parasocial interaction (PSI) and parasocial relationship (PSR). Parasocial interaction refers to the momentary illusion of direct engagement with a media figure, such as when viewers feel as though an influencer is speaking directly to them during a livestream Sheng, J., Kostyk, A., & Chatzipanagiotou, K. (2025). These interactions are temporary, situational, and tend to dissolve once media exposure ends. By contrast, a parasocial relationship is a more enduring emotional bond that resembles friendship, even though it is one-sided. Individuals feel close to, understand, and even trust a media figure who does not actually know them personally (Boyd et al., 2022). The present study focuses on parasocial relationships, as it is this more stable emotional attachment that is expected to shape animosity and subsequent boycott intentions.

To account for how emotions are transmitted from influencers to their audiences, this study draws on Emotional Contagion Theory (Hatfield et al., 1994; 2018). The theory posits that emotions can spread through automatic processes of affective mimicry and physiological feedback. In digital environments, even in the absence of face-to-face interaction, the emotional expressions of public figures can produce a contagion effect on audiences. In this way, anger, empathy, or moral outrage expressed by influencers may be absorbed and internalized by followers, fostering a sense of shared emotional solidarity that can mobilize collective responses such as boycotts.

H1: Individuals' parasocial relationships with social media influencers positively predict levels of animosity toward Israel.

Moreover, theories and research on collective action have shown that emotions—particularly anger or animosity—play a central role in mobilizing engagement (van Zomeren et al., 2008). The Social Identity Model of Collective Action (SIMCA), for example, highlights moral anger over injustice as a key catalyst for collective action intention. In this context, animosity may serve as a mediator between emotional connection to public figures and the decision to participate in boycotts as a form of collective response. While alternative frameworks such as the Extended Model of Social Identity and Collective Action (EMSICA; Thomas et al., 2012) also emphasize the role of identity, efficacy, and emotions, SIMCA provides a more parsimonious and widely applied framework to explain collective behavior. EMSICA is particularly suited for studying long-term empowerment processes in disadvantaged groups and gradual identity change within sustained social movements. In contrast, the present study focuses on the immediate influence of social media influencers in shaping consumers' boycott intentions in the context of the Israel–Palestine conflict. In such cases, emotions such as animosity and processes of social identification are central mechanisms through which parasocial connections translate into action.

H2: Animosity mediates the relationship between parasocial relationships and boycott intention.

In sum, this study seeks to offer a new understanding of the emotional dimensions embedded within boycott motivations. Beyond normative beliefs or rational deliberations, emotional involvement—transmitted through social media—can mobilize collective responses such as boycotts.

METHOD

Participants

This study involved 169 participants who met the inclusion criteria: being at least 18 years old and having an admired public figure known to support the boycott of Israel-affiliated products. The sample consisted of 123 women and 46 men, with ages ranging from 18 to 44 years (M = 26.12; SD = 5.48). Data were collected online using incidental sampling via Google Forms. Most participants were university students and young professionals, residing in major cities across Indonesia. All participants confirmed that they followed posts by their admired figures who promoted the boycott and reported emotional involvement in the form of parasocial relationships. With 169 participants, the dataset meets the minimum threshold required for Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis, particularly within the latent variable modeling framework, in line with methodological recommendations (Hair et al., 2019).

Although the sample was adequate for SEM analysis, two characteristics warrant consideration. First, the gender distribution was uneven, with substantially more women than men. This imbalance may limit generalizability across genders, yet it also reflects a substantive pattern in digital behaviour: women are often more active in following influencers. Second, the age range of participants (18–44 years) indicates that parasocial influence is not confined to adolescents or young adults but extends into later adulthood. While most respondents were students and young professionals in their twenties, the inclusion of older participants suggests that influencer-driven boycott engagement resonates beyond a single age cohort. Nonetheless, the concentration of younger respondents means that findings should be interpreted with some caution when applied to broader populations.

Instruments

The instruments used in this study comprised three key constructs: parasocial relationship, animosity toward Israel, and boycott intention. All instruments were adapted into Bahasa Indonesia following established procedures for cultural and linguistic adaptation (Beaton et al., 2000). First, a bilingual researcher conducted the forward translation of the original English items into Bahasa Indonesia, ensuring conceptual rather than literal equivalence. A separate bilingual expert then performed a back-translation into English to check for semantic consistency with the original scales. Discrepancies were discussed and resolved through consensus among the research team, with minor modifications made to enhance clarity and cultural appropriateness. For example, idiomatic expressions were adjusted into more natural Indonesian phrasing without altering the underlying meaning. The pre-final version was pilot tested with 25 participants representative of the target population, who provided feedback on item clarity and comprehension. Based on their input, minor wording revisions were made before finalizing the questionnaire. This multi-step process ensured that the adapted scales maintained both linguistic accuracy and cultural relevance while preserving the psychometric integrity of the original instruments.

The animosity scale was adapted from Kim et al. (2022) and included three items, one of which read, "I feel angry about what Israel has done to Palestine." The boycott intention scale, also adapted from Kim et al. (2022), consisted of three items after removing one poorly performing item (Item 3: "I have the desire to boycott products from companies affiliated with Israel"). An example item from this scale is, "I will boycott products from companies affiliated with Israel."

The parasocial relationship scale was adapted from Boyd et al. (2022) and captured four dimensions—interest, knowledge, identification, and interaction—with a total of 20 items after

excluding two low-loading items (Knowledge 4: "I know personal details about my favorite influencer's life," and Identification 6: "I like the way my favorite influencer deals with problems"). An example item is, "I hope my favorite influencer achieves the dreams they aspire to." All instruments were translated into Bahasa Indonesia and used a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to assess the construct validity of each scale. The parasocial relationship construct demonstrated an acceptable model fit, with CFI = 0.908, TLI = 0.892, and RMSEA = 0.097 (90% CI: 0.085–0.109). All retained items showed standardized loadings ranging from 0.522 to 0.961 and were significant at p < .001. Internal reliability was high, with Cronbach's alpha values of 0.914 for interest, 0.908 for knowledge, and 0.882 for identification; omega values were 0.910 for knowledge and 0.885 for identification. The overall alpha for the parasocial relationship scale was 0.960.

The animosity construct had standardized loadings ranging from 0.539 to 0.575, all significant at p < .001. As a just-identified model, it yielded perfect fit indices (CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000). Nevertheless, evaluation focused on indicator strength and theoretical alignment. Reliability was acceptable, with Cronbach's alpha of 0.767 and omega of 0.816. The boycott intention construct, composed of three items, had standardized loadings ranging from 0.627 to 0.735, all significant at p < .001. Like the animosity construct, it was a just-identified model with perfect fit indices (CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000). The reliability of the scale was excellent, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.929 and omega of 0.931. In conclusion, all three constructs demonstrated adequate validity and reliability, and are suitable for use in subsequent structural model testing.

Procedure
Participants accessed the Google Form link provided by the researcher. On the initial page, they were asked to read and agree to an informed consent form, which stated that their participation was voluntary, that they were free to withdraw at any time without any consequences, and that they authorized the researcher to use the data anonymously and exclusively for academic purposes. Upon agreeing to the informed consent, participants were asked to complete demographic information. They were then prompted to identify a favorite public figure and complete a scale measuring the degree of their parasocial relationship with that figure. This was followed by the animosity scale measuring negative affect toward Israel, and finally, the boycott intention scale measuring their willingness to boycott Israel-affiliated products. At the end of the survey, participants were directed to a debriefing page that provided a more detailed explanation of the study's purpose. The researcher concluded the data collection process with an expression of gratitude for their participation.

Data Analysis
The collected data were analyzed using R and the summarytools package to describe the characteristics of the respondents. Hypothesis testing was conducted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), which allowed the researcher to simultaneously model and estimate complex relationships among the studied variables (Hair et al., 2021). SEM analysis was conducted using R with the lavaan package.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations

Normality testing was conducted to ensure data quality. The evaluation of data normality employed the skewness method (Appelbaum et al., 2018), with data considered normally distributed if the skewness values ranged between -3 and 3 (Heidary et al., 2021). The analysis indicated varied results (Table 1), yet each variable demonstrated a normal distribution. In addition, the correlation analysis revealed that all dimensions of parasocial relationships were strongly and significantly correlated with one another ($r = 0.651$ to 0.838, $p < .001$), supporting the conceptualization of parasocial relationships as a coherent multidimensional construct. Each dimension also showed significant positive correlations with boycott intention, with the highest correlation observed for the interaction dimension ($r = 0.406$, $p < .001$). This suggests that the more intense an individual's imagined interaction with their admired figure, the higher their intention to engage in boycott actions. Meanwhile, the correlations between parasocial relationship dimensions and animosity were generally lower but remained significant. Interest showed the highest correlation with animosity ($r = 0.299$, $p < .001$), followed by interaction ($r = 0.209$, $p < .01$). These findings suggest that emotional involvement within parasocial relationships contributes to heightened hostility toward the target of the boycott.

Table 1.
Correlation Between Variables

Variable	M	SD	Skew	1	2	3	4	5	6
Interaction	4.17	0.717	-0.759	—					
Knowledge	3.89	0.905	-0.514	0.838***	—				
Identification	3.94	0.749	-0.632	0.691***	0.685***	—			
Interaction	3.79	0.903	-0.481	0.716***	0.715***	0.651***	—		
Animocity	4.67	0.639	-2.710	0.299***	0.185*	0.236**	0.209**	—	
Intention	4.55	0.673	-1.428	0.406***	0.283***	0.354***	0.315***	0.489***	—

Notes: *$p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, ***$p < .001$

Furthermore, the correlation between animosity and boycott intention was moderately strong and statistically significant ($r = 0.489$, $p < .001$), supporting the assumption that negative emotions toward Israel serve as a key driver of collective action intentions such as boycotting. This correlation also reinforces the mediating role of animosity found in the earlier SEM analysis. Overall, these findings support the initial hypothesis that parasocial relationships contribute to the development of animosity, which in turn strengthens individuals' intentions to boycott products associated with Israel.

Hypothesis testing using structural equation modeling (SEM)

The analysis using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) revealed that the proposed model demonstrated an acceptable level of fit to the empirical data. The chi-square value was 642.604 with 292 degrees of freedom (df) and a p-value < .001, indicating that the model did not achieve perfect fit in a statistical sense—an outcome commonly observed in large samples and complex model structures. Nonetheless, other fit indices offered more encouraging results.

The Comparative Fit Index (CFI) value of 0.910 and the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) value of 0.899 were very close to the conventional threshold of 0.90, which is generally regarded as indicative of good model fit. Additionally, the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was 0.067, with a 90% confidence interval ranging from 0.058 to 0.075, suggesting an adequate model fit. This value falls within the "acceptable fit" category (RMSEA < 0.08), according to widely used criteria. Furthermore, the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual

(SRMR) was 0.063, which is below the recommended cutoff of 0.08, indicating a small discrepancy between the observed and predicted covariance matrices. Taken together, these model fit indices—particularly CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR—suggest that the proposed structural model is generally consistent with the data. The model can therefore be considered suitable for testing and confirming causal relationships among the latent variables as formulated in the study's hypotheses.

Further analysis revealed that parasocial relationship had a positive and significant effect on animosity toward Israel ($\beta = 0.288$, $p < .05$). This finding indicates that the more emotionally connected individuals are with social media figures who advocate for the boycott of Israel-affiliated companies, the more likely they are to experience anger or hostility toward Israel. This result supports Hypothesis 1 (H1), which posited that parasocial relationships can trigger emotional reactions—specifically animosity—toward the perceived perpetrator of injustice highlighted by the admired public figure. In addition, animosity was found to have a positive and significant effect on boycott intention ($\beta = 0.474$, $p < .05$). In other words, the stronger an individual's hostile feelings toward Israel, the greater their tendency to engage in collective action through boycotting products associated with the entity. This supports Hypothesis 2 (H2), which argued that animosity could serve as a driver of collective behavioral intentions.

Interestingly, parasocial relationship also exerted a direct, positive, and significant effect on boycott intention ($\beta = 0.255$, $p < .01$), suggesting that emotional attachment to social media figures not only fuels negative emotions toward a third party (in this case, Israel) but also directly encourages individuals to engage in concrete actions such as boycotts. Thus, parasocial relationships play a dual role—both directly and through emotional mediation—in shaping collective behavior. Overall, the three hypothesized paths tested in the structural model yielded results consistent with the proposed theoretical framework, particularly in explaining how emotional bonds with public figures on social media can shape intentions to participate in morally and politically motivated collective actions. These findings highlight the critical role of social media and affective dynamics in mobilizing public engagement with transnational humanitarian issues.

Figure 1. The structural equation model tested in this study
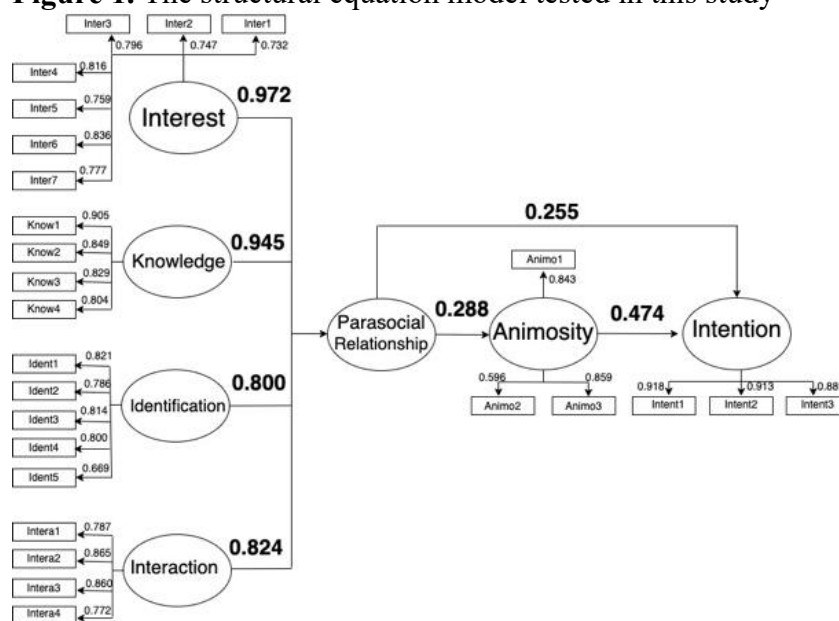
Note. The SEM diagram illustrates that parasocial relationship influences boycott intention both directly and indirectly through animosity. The values on the arrows represent standardized path coefficients; all paths are statistically significant at $p < .05$

This study makes a significant contribution to advancing our understanding of parasocial dynamics and the role of emotions in driving collective behavior, particularly in the context of boycotts targeting products associated with political conflict. The main findings indicate that parasocial relationships with social media influencers positively predict boycott intention, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of animosity toward Israel. These findings directly confirm that the emotional bonds formed in parasocial relationships have the capacity to transmit collective affect to audiences. In line with emotional contagion theory (Hatfield et al., 1994; Barsade & Gibson, 1998), emotion is not an isolated internal experience, but rather something that can spread within social networks—even in one-sided relationships. In the context of social media, when influencers express anger, frustration, or sympathy regarding the Palestinian issue, audiences may implicitly absorb those emotions through mimicry, affective feedback, and emotional resonance (Hatfield et al., 2014). Thus, parasocial ties serve as a critical channel through which political affect circulates in digital society.

This phenomenon becomes even more salient when parasocial relationships are understood as a multidimensional construct, as described by Boyd et al. (2022). Such relationships go beyond passive admiration and encompass at least four dimensions: interest, knowledge, identification, and interaction. Interest reflects emotional attraction to the figure; knowledge involves actively seeking information about their life or social stances; identification signifies alignment with the figure's values or moral position; and interaction refers to imagined communication, as if a real relationship were occurring. These four dimensions collectively foster strong emotional closeness—not only at the affective level but also in guiding moral decision-making. In this study, the contribution of each dimension was validated through robust construct measurement, highlighting their relevance in explaining individual participation in collective action such as boycotts.

Interestingly, the findings suggest that parasocial relationships do not merely generate boycott intentions through negative emotions like anger, but also shift individual motivations from hostility to solidarity and moral responsibility. This aligns with prior research (Halimi et al., 2017; Korchia et al., 2012) indicating that initial emotions such as animosity may act as triggers, but sustained collective actions are more likely when individuals undergo affective transformation toward empathy and identification with victims of injustice. On the other hand, although the direct effect of parasocial relationships on boycott intention was confirmed, its predictive strength was lower than that of the mediated pathway via animosity. This implies that attachment to an influencer does not automatically translate into political consumer behavior unless accompanied by targeted emotional activation. This supports Hoffmann's (2013) argument that successful political consumerism requires strong moral and emotional resonance, not merely celebrity preference or identification.

These findings carry important implications. In the digital political communication ecosystem, affect possesses a powerful mobilizing force, and social media has become a catalyst for the widespread diffusion of political emotions. As highlighted in recent scholarship (Langner et al., 2022), collective mobilization in the digital age is heavily influenced by the quality and intensity of circulating emotions—especially those conveyed by non-state actors such as influencers. Therefore, this study not only provides empirical support for the relevance of emotional contagion theory in the context of collective action but also emphasizes the need to view political consumer behavior as the result of a complex interplay between technologically mediated social ties, moral intention, and affective dynamics. Support for boycott actions is

not solely driven by ideological instructions or religious affiliations, but also by exposure to resonant public affect transmitted through trusted and admired digital figures.

Despite these contributions, it is important to recognize that the observed relationships may not fully capture the complexity of boycott behavior. While the present findings are consistent with an emotional-contagion account, several competing explanations merit consideration. First, a selection or reverse-causality process is plausible: individuals who already harbor animosity toward Israel may self-select into following pro-Palestine influencers and therefore appear to have stronger parasocial ties. Second, influencers may function primarily as amplifiers of pre-existing communal sentiment rather than as originators of animosity; in such a case the influencer-to-follower path reflects acceleration and crystallization of audience affect. Third, omitted confounders (e.g., political ideology, religiosity, prior activism, or platform usage patterns) could drive both parasocial engagement and boycott propensity. Fourth, alternative psychological pathways—such as perceived efficacy of boycotts, moral obligation, or identification with victims—may mediate the link between parasocial relationships and boycott intention either alongside or instead of animosity. Finally, measurement and method considerations (self-report, single-source data) could inflate observed associations. Acknowledging these alternative accounts tempers causal claims and designs that can distinguish mechanism from mere association.

To adjudicate among these explanations, future research should combine design and analytic remedies. More decisively, longitudinal cross-lagged designs and randomized exposure experiments (manipulating influencer emotional tone) would permit stronger causal inference. Addressing these avenues will sharpen our understanding of when influencers generate versus merely reflect political affect, and will delineate the boundary conditions of the pathway from parasocial relationships to animosity and subsequently to boycott intention. In this way, future work can move beyond association to causation, clarifying whether parasocial relationships are genuine engines of political consumerism or primarily mirrors of broader socio-political sentiment.

CONCLUSION

This study found that parasocial relationships with social media influencers significantly influence boycott intentions, both directly and indirectly through the mediation of hostile emotions toward Israel. This suggests that emotional attachment to digital public figures can foster value-based collective behavior, particularly when these figures are engaged in social or political issues. These findings reinforce the relevance of emotional contagion theory, wherein emotions expressed by influencers may be transmitted to their followers through processes of imitation and affective resonance. Dimensions of parasocial relationships—such as identification and imagined interaction—play a critical role in transmitting political affect and shaping attitudes toward global issues. Practically, this study highlights the strategic role of influencers in shaping public opinion and mobilizing collective action through affective channels. In the digital age, mobilization is no longer driven solely by ideological narratives but also by strong emotional attachment and moral resonance, constructed through technologically mediated social relationships.

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