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# How social capital impacts the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigated how social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital influence the consumer's purchase intention of sustainable fashion products in the fashion YouTube context. We surveyed 230 YouTube users from South Korea to investigate the effects of social power on parasocial interaction, the effects of parasocial interaction on social capital, and the effects of social capital on purchase intention. The results confirm that social capital is a strong influential variable for the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products. Thus, fashion marketers should consider social capital management in the fashion YouTube context when tailoring their brand communications. This study helps clarify the relationships between social capital and the purchase intention for sustainable fashion products. It also contributes to the theoretical foundation of and has implications for sustainable fashion marketing and management.

## 1. Introduction

Sustainability refers to a business goal that seeks to make a positive environmental, social, and economic impact (Chabowski, Mena, & Gonzalez-Padron, 2011; Elkington, 1998). Thus, sustainability has a triple bottom-line impact touching not only economic performance but also environmental and social outcomes (Sheth, Sethia, & Srinivas, 2011). Sustainability has now become a vital business goal for many stakeholders of organizations (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2009; Pfeffer, 2010; Sheth et al., 2011). In the fashion industry, the business of achieving success in sustainability is particularly important (Ko, Hwang, & Kim, 2013). This study focuses on the concept of sustainability related to sustainable fashion products using social media. Specifically, we present a framework delineating the use of social capital in the social media context, such as fashion YouTube, to affect sustainability marketing.

Social media, particularly YouTube, presents the potential for social interactions and a more balanced relationship between media personalities and media users (Jung & Kim, 2016; Stever & Lawson, 2013). YouTube has altered the way people communicate, collaborate, and connect with media personalities, celebrities, and others (Lee & Watkins, 2016). In fact, YouTube has become a key to parasocial interaction on social media. Parasocial interaction refers to how audiences relate to and develop interactions with media personalities and

celebrities (Jin & Park, 2009; Lee & Watkins, 2016). In these interactions, users feel interpersonal involvement and act as if they are friends with media personalities (e.g., presenters, celebrities, and characters), imagining they are part of their favorite programs (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985). Such interaction involves an illusionary experience where consumers interact as if they are present and engaged in a reciprocal relationship (Labrecque, 2014). For example, viewers create a strong bond and intimacy with the vlogger personalities while watching vlogger channels as the experience enables them to feel close to these media personalities (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Lee & Watkins, 2016). In addition, research has shown that through parasocial interactions, YouTube users have a higher propensity to reciprocate and create social relationships in this social media context than in an offline setting (Giles, 2002; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

YouTube also allows fans more access to the personal life of a media personality while the personality still controls the reciprocation in the relationship (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Stever & Lawson, 2013). This means that the personality determines how much information he or she shares with fans. The emergence of media personalities connecting through social networks has generated widespread parasocial interaction. Such parasocial interactions enable a growing connection with the personal brands of the personalities, resulting in increased brand loyalty and a willingness to share personal information with the brands to help boost their social capital

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(Labrecque, 2014). Further, the power of this platform will continue to grow since the number of global YouTube viewers, at 1.47 billion in 2017, is expected to increase to 1.86 billion by 2021 (Statista, 2018).

Social capital refers to “resources embedded in a social structure that are accessed and/or mobilized in purposive action” (Lin, 2001, p. 29). Distinct from other forms of capital, social capital is embedded in the social domain. Thus, social capital is inherent in the framework of relationships between individuals and in their connections in their networks and/or communities, whereas other forms of capital are based on assets or individuals (Putnam, 1995). Social capital involves social networks and their associated norms of reciprocity (Putnam, 2000), indicating both the network and the outcome of the network. It also involves the relationship between providing access to resources possessed by associates and the nature and amount of those resources (Portes, 1998).

Based on social capital, sustainable marketing is achieved when relationships are trusted and valued. Social capital can be used to influence various sustainable results in terms of social and environmental acts (Fussell, Harrison-Rexrode, Kennan, & Hazleton, 2006) through parasocial interactions. As a crucial social media channel, YouTube supports parasocial interactions that encourage audiences to interact with media personalities and celebrities (Jin & Park, 2009; Lee & Watkins, 2016). However, there are some general knowledge gaps regarding parasocial interaction and social capital, and some specifically in the fashion YouTube context. First, while some studies have pointed out that the closeness quality of social media has a positive effect on social capital, which is crucial for social networking sites (Chen & Li, 2017; Sun, Liu, Peng, Dong, & Barnes, 2014), specific research on the relationship between parasocial interaction and social capital is limited. Second, in the fashion YouTube context, there is almost no research that addresses the relationship in this setting. Thus, the relationship between parasocial interaction and social capital needs to be clarified further in this context.

The aim of this study is to focus on how social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital influence the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products in the fashion YouTube context. Specifically, the study investigates the effects of social power on parasocial interaction, the effects of parasocial interaction on social capital, and the effects of social capital on the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products along with the implications for sustainable fashion marketing and management.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical underpinnings discussed here include the relationship between social power and parasocial interaction, the relationship between parasocial interaction and social capital, and the relationship between social capital and purchase intention in the context of sustainable fashion products.

### 2.1. Relationship between social power and parasocial interaction

Social media provides multiple platforms for consumer interactions such as writing reviews, posting opinions, and sharing experiences with others. In this context, YouTube is one platform that connects a network of consumers and assists in such interactions by encouraging relationships such as friendships, professional liaisons, and romantic connections. Consumers post comments and material or repost others' comments and material or just view or observe YouTube content (Munzel & Kunz, 2014; Pagani, Hofacker, & Goldsmith, 2011) while, at the same time, these parasocial interactions are being influenced by various types of social power. Social power refers to the type of power that can be employed to exert influence on another. In this context, social power influences consumer interactions that might be either two- or one-sided. The following five social power types (French & Raven, 1959) can be categorized in terms of perceived influence.

*Expert power* refers to someone who is perceived as an expert with expert knowledge or special information (French & Raven, 1959). When people in power have knowledge and skills that enable them to understand a situation, suggest solutions, use solid judgment, and generally outperform others, people listen to, trust, and respect what they say. The ideas from such people will have value and others look to them for leadership in the subject matter.

*Legitimate power* relates to someone who is perceived to have a legitimate right to impose behavioral requirements (French & Raven, 1959). Organizational structure, social hierarchies, cultural norms, and electoral mandates offer the basis for legitimate power. For example, a CEO, a president, or a prime minister has legitimate power. The scope of legitimate power is limited to situations in which others believe they have a right to wield control.

*Referent power* is associated with someone who one personally identifies with. Referent power comes from one person liking, respecting, and identifying with that other person in some way (French & Raven, 1959). Celebrities often have referent power, which is why they can influence consumer decisions like what they buy and which politician they elect. In the workplace, a person with referent power often makes others feel good, so he or she tends to have significant influence.

*Reward power* refers to someone who is perceived to have the ability to reward. People with reward power can control and offer rewards such as promotions, desirable assignments, training opportunities, raises, and compliments (French & Raven, 1959). When others expect people in power to reward them for something, there is a high probability that they will do it.

*Coercive power* refers to someone who is perceived to have the capability to punish (French & Raven, 1959). Threats and punishments are common coercive tools. This can cause dissatisfaction or resentment among people on the receiving end. For example, teens often perceive parents or peers as having the ability to punish them.

In the case of a fashion YouTuber, consumers can unsubscribe to fashion YouTube channels and/or stop watching the channels whenever they choose. Therefore, consumers usually do not perceive vloggers as having the ability to confer punishment. As coercive power that confers punishment is not relevant among fashion vloggers' social power in the YouTube context, this study focuses only on four types of social power: expert power, legitimate power, referent power, and reward power.

In the social media context, there are examples of all four types of social power. In terms of expert power, fashion YouTubers are seen as fashion experts with the knowledge to offer specialized fashion information to subscribers. For example, Zoella is a global fashion vlogger with almost 4.9 million *MoreZoella* subscribers on YouTube (O'Connor, 2017). With fashion expert knowledge and special fashion information, Zoella offers fashion and beauty information on new products and expert knowledge on fashion, beauty, and lifestyle. Zoella's expert power has a strong impact on shopping attitudes and influences behavior and, as a fashion vlogger, has legitimate power to impose fashion behavior requirements. For example, Zoella imposes her own ways of organizing and designing fashion, beauty, and lifestyle choices. In general, consumers personally identify with vloggers and seek information from vloggers who they feel similar to (O'Connor, 2017), which suggests the importance of vlogger referent power. Consumers also tend to follow Zoella's personal references on fashion, beauty, and lifestyle based on her beauty tutorials. Consumers also perceive vloggers as having the ability to confer rewards. Subscribers of Zoella believe she has the ability to reward them.

Parasocial interaction includes an illusionary experience in which consumers interact with personas, including mediated representations of presenters, celebrities, or characters, as if they were present and engaged in a reciprocal interaction (Labrecque, 2014). Parasocial interaction is defined as the interpersonal involvement of the media user with what he or she consumes. This parasocial interaction includes seeking advice from media personalities as if they were friends and imagining being part of a favorite program (Rubin et al., 1985).

Parasocial interaction focuses on the way audiences relate to and develop interactions with celebrities (Jin & Park, 2009; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Consumers create a strong bond and intimacy with a celebrity while viewing media channels, such as TV programs, and social media where they feel closer to the celebrity (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Such interactions have a higher propensity to become reciprocal and turn into interaction in the social context than in the offline setting (Giles, 2002; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

As shown in the Zoella example, in the YouTube context, consumers are influenced by various types of social power—expert, referent, legitimate, and reward—related to socially networked interactions with other consumers. Social behavior involves social interactions based on reciprocity between active consumers (Cohen, 2004; Heider, 1958), while parasocial behavior can be one-sided interaction involving passive consumption (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Horton & Wohl, 1956).

YouTubers, vloggers, and celebrities have extensive social power and the unique opportunity to have a big impact on society. Many YouTubers, exercising great social power, have inspired people through extensive parasocial interactions (Lueck, 2012; McMaster, 2017).

While social power and depth of parasocial interactions have been explored from the perspective of marketing practitioners, academic research on social power and depth of parasocial interactions is still limited. Parasocial interactions are mediated interactions that involve a medium (e.g., TV, radio, Internet) (Cohen, 2004; Rubin et al., 1985) and are part of the social media-media context such as YouTube (Giles, 2002). Recent studies confirm that social power influences the presence of parasocial interaction in the social media environment (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011; Munzel & Kunz, 2014; Pagani et al., 2011). This type of interaction involves exchange between media personalities and media users (Frederick et al., 2012; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Jin & Park, 2009).

Specifically, social power (i.e., expert, legitimate, referent, and reward power) and the depth of parasocial interactions can be discussed in detail with examples in the YouTube context. YouTube creators curate the depth of the parasocial interactions along with personal appeals to like, subscribe, or otherwise participate in the community surrounding the YouTuber. Social power and the depth of their parasocial interactions are ways in which YouTube creators, relatively amateur performers, become celebrities through user-generated content on YouTube (Kim & Johns, 2016). Contrary to the ways in which celebrity status develops with movie stars or famous singers, YouTube celebrity status seems to come from the blurring of the lines between the YouTuber's private and public life along with his/her social power (expert, legitimate, referent, and reward power) and a sense of authenticity that arises from perceived amateur status (Jerslev, 2016).

In the social media context, there are notable examples of the relationship between the four types of social powers and the depth of parasocial interaction. For example, a fashion vlogger as a fashion expert offers news updates on fashion information to subscribers and satisfies viewers' curiosity about fashion trends and information. The updates from the vlogger accentuate the viewers' impressions that they know the vlogger (Christine, 2010; Wood & Burkhalter, 2013). Increased expert social power of vloggers tends to accelerate the instant comment and responses that make the fans feel they can directly interact with the vlogger (Christine, 2010; Gong & Li, 2017; Wood & Burkhalter, 2013). For legitimate power, fashion vloggers impose fashion standards and requirements in terms of the vloggers' own method of organizing and designing their fashion, beauty, and lifestyle. Increased legitimate power makes the viewers feel that they are interacting directly with the vloggers and, thus, they are willing to follow the vloggers' fashion directions (Christine, 2010; Gong & Li, 2017; Wood & Burkhalter, 2013). Through the vloggers' referent power, viewers personally identify with them and seek their recommendation. Consumers tend to interact with vloggers and follow vloggers' personal preferences in fashion, beauty, and lifestyle choices based on vlogger tutorials. In terms of reward power, consumers interact with vloggers and perceive them as having the ability to offer them rewards.

Similar to how celebrities in traditional media formats strategically cultivate parasocial interaction with their audiences (Horton & Wohl, 1956), vloggers as YouTube creators consciously attempt to build and sustain parasocial interactions with their viewers. Berryman and Kavka (2017) articulated the importance of intimate access to the YouTuber's life and the careful curation of the YouTube persona in facilitating parasocial interaction with the audience. To expand on the existing findings, this study searched for evidence of vloggers' social power supporting parasocial interaction in the content of several YouTube creators. The heightened social power of the YouTube creator tends to increase their viewers treating the adored YouTuber celebrity like a close friend. The following of the celebrity's updates may enhance their parasocial interactions with intimate illusions of their relationship with the YouTuber celebrity.

To fully understand the market impact, it is imperative to study the relationships between social power, expert, referent, legitimate, and reward power, and the depth of parasocial interactions of consumers in a social media context to examine their influence on important consumer behavior outcomes. Thus, this study proposed the following hypotheses:

- H1.1.** Expert social power positively influences parasocial interaction.
- H1.2.** Referent social power positively influences parasocial interaction.
- H1.3.** Legitimate social power positively influences parasocial interaction.
- H1.4.** Reward social power positively influences parasocial interaction.

## 2.2. Relationship between parasocial interaction and social capital

Parasocial interaction explains the immediate, personal, and reciprocal interactions between media personalities and media users (Frederick et al., 2012; Jin & Park, 2009). Parasocial interaction involves a friendship with a media personality in ways similar to interpersonal friendships (Ballantine & Brett, 2005; Perse & Rubin, 1989). Media users seek guidance from media personalities, consider media personalities as friends, and desire to meet media performers (Ballantine & Brett, 2005; Rubin et al., 1985). Parasocial interaction involves developing companionship that allows media users to decrease ambiguity and to perceive similarities with the media personality (Ballantine & Brett, 2005; Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

Social media has the potential for two-way communication and a more balanced interaction between media personalities and media users (Stever & Lawson, 2013; Tsiotsou, 2015). Specifically, YouTube as a social site provides fans more access to the personal lives of the media personalities (Frederick et al., 2012; Stever & Lawson, 2013). YouTube personalities or vloggers tend to facilitate one-sided parasocial interactions between celebrities and fans (Stever & Lawson, 2013). Fans feel as if they are intimate with celebrities through their exposure in the media (Tsiotsou, 2015). As the interactions continue to develop through repeated exposure to a vlogger, the viewer starts to trust the vlogger as a source of information and looks for his/her guidance (Rubin et al., 1985).

The emergence of connections with media personalities through social networks has generated parasocial interaction research related to social capital (e.g., Labrecque, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2015). For example, parasocial interaction sparks growing feelings of connection with brands, resulting in increased brand loyalty and a willingness to share personal information with the brands that helps in boosting social capital (Labrecque, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2015).

Social capital refers to “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). It involves the relationship between providing access to resources possessed by

individuals and the nature and amount of those resources (Portes, 1998). Social capital can be clarified as an intangible force that binds society together by transforming self-seeking individuals into members of a community with shared interests, shared assumptions about social relations, and a sense of the common good (Etzioni, 1996).

In the social media context, social capital has been categorized into bonding capital and bridging capital, reflecting the relational resources of social networks (Putnam, 2000). The two types of social capital involve the degree of tie strength and type of resource provided. Bonding capital refers to resources from strong ties, including family members and close friends, which are characterized by higher levels of trust and intimacy. These are well-defined groups with small-scale interactions. Thus, people are likely to get greater emotional support and voluntary help from bonding capital. Bridging capital refers to resources from weak ties that connect different user groups within a network, such as acquaintances with a common interest but little intimacy and closeness. As weak ties help connect relationships in different groups and create a pathway to close structural holes between two originally unconnected groups, they provide access to new information and allow flexibility and the diffusion of information (Burt, 1992).

Considering social capital, parasocial interaction includes group identification with a media character and generates respect for the media character's problem-solving ability (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Kassing & Sanderson, 2009). Parasocial interaction boosts feelings of connection and increases the sharing of information, resulting in increased social capital that helps bind consumers together and the sharing of resources possessed by the associates and the nature and amount of those resources (Labrecque, 2014; Tsiotsou, 2015). Parasocial interaction may remain one-sided, but this does not necessarily equate to passivity and can lead to active behavior that resembles social capital.

With the growth of social media, social capital has become a key element in the successful practice of collaboration in the social networking context. Greater parasocial interaction boosts the commitment to collective action creating social capital including bonding or bridging capital (Chang & Zhu, 2012). Parasocial interaction has a considerable influence on social capital and plays a motivational role in knowledge sharing (Chang & Zhu, 2012; He, Qiao, & Wei, 2009; Kankanhalli, Tan, & Wei, 2005). Thus, this study proposed the following:

**H2.** Parasocial interaction positively influences social capital (bonding and bridging).

### 2.3. Relationship between social capital and purchase intention for sustainable fashion products

Social capital as a multifaceted concept explains elements of social life that support community life (Putnam, 2000) as well as resources accumulated through personal relationships (Lin, Cook, & Burt, 2001). Social capital assumes that an individual draws on resources from other members of his or her network (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Chia (2011) defined social capital and its relationship with sustainable practice and situated social capital within the communication context and roles essential to its effective development.

As social capital is important to organizations and to community sustainability, it is important to understand what that means and how it can be developed. Social capital develops in the relations among people as actors and those relationships can either be within an organization (bonding capital) or external (bridging capital) (Putnam, 1995). Social capital, including bonding and bridging, develops relationships that are essential to sustainability in terms of an organization's viability. Beneficial partnerships are developed that support ongoing business and community exchanges, thus enabling sustainable long-term programs to become part of business and community engagement.

Sustainability incorporates three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social (Sheth et al., 2011). Sustainability transforms into a

triple bottom-line impact with the assumption that business outcomes should be based not only on economic performance but also on their environmental and social influence. Environmental and social demands from various stakeholders contribute to the pressure on businesses to reflect sustainability. This study focused on environmental and social perspectives as sustainable marketing practices. We investigated effective sustainability measurements involving consumer purchase intention for sustainable products, especially emphasizing social and environmental performance.

The ability to achieve sustainable goals through social capital reflects how social capital development can affect social and environmental benefits as well as economic sustainability (Ferragina, 2010; Lin, 2001). Sustainable marketing is also more successful when relationships are trusting and valued. Social capital in terms of the presence of social interaction can, thus facilitate many sustainable outcomes, including how social and environmental performance is accomplished (Fussell et al., 2006). Therefore, organizations need to drive strategic management approaches to build social capital by developing meaningful social interactions as part of their sustainable practice (Chia, 2011).

The fashion industry is a leader in effective sustainable marketing initiatives involving environmental and social sustainability. For example, Patagonia succeeded in marketing its environmental and social sustainability practices by showing a positive step toward a more sustainable system. Consumers can return any Patagonia product and Patagonia will reuse the returns and recycle them into new fabrics or turn them into new products. Since 1985, Patagonia has donated 1% of sales to the preservation and restoration of the natural environment (Patagonia, 2018). In addition, Patagonia has granted \$89 million to domestic and international grassroots environmental groups striving to make a difference in their local communities (Patagonia, 2018). Thus, the fashion industry and its products provide an appropriate venue for investigating the involvement of environmental and social sustainability. This study focuses on sustainable fashion products to that end. Concentrating on the effects of social capital on the purchase intention of sustainable products, this study tested the following hypothesis:

**H3.** Social capital positively influences the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products (environmentally and socially sustainable fashion products).

### 3. Methods

This study used a survey to investigate key questions about the relationships among social power, parasocial interaction, social capital, and purchase intention for sustainable fashion products. The respondents were 230 fashion YouTube users from South Korea recruited by a professional survey company. In the screening, participants were asked first whether they were YouTube users, specifically of fashion. Only fashion YouTube users were asked to respond to all the questions. Of the 230 participants, 40 were men (17.4%) and 190 were women (82.6%), with ages ranging from 20 to 39 years (mean = 29.43 years).

The social power of the fashion YouTuber (e.g., vlogger) was measured through an existing social power scale including expert, referent, legitimate, and reward measures that elicited user responses to 14 items (Goodrich & Mangleburg, 2010). Parasocial interaction was measured on the basis of user responses to six items on an existing five-point scale that assessed parasocial interaction (Jin & Park, 2009). Social capital was measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree), adapted from an existing Internet social capital scale (Williams, 2006). The study focused on social capital in the YouTube context forming the presence of networks. Creating the presence of networks is vital in the online context because it is the causal mechanism in the formation of social capital (Norris, 2002; Putnam, 2000). Social capital in the YouTube context here corresponds to the online environment rather than traditional media and/or offline



context. Two focus group interviews (FGI) were conducted to adapt the Internet social capital scale (Williams, 2006) to the YouTube context. Twenty-four college students were selected to participate in the FGI after pre-screening for whether they were fashion YouTube users; after the FGI, words and phrases were revised and adapted to fit the YouTube context.

To measure purchase intention for environmentally sustainable products, participants were asked about their intention to purchase when fashion vloggers showed environmentally friendly fashion products (e.g., eco-friendly fashion products and green fashion items) in their YouTube videos. To measure purchase intention for socially sustainable products, participants were asked about their intention to purchase the social friendly fashion products when fashion vloggers showed socially friendly products related to social activities and social responsibility in the YouTube videos. Purchase intention was measured using three seven-point semantic differential scales (likely/unlikely, probable/improbable, and possible/impossible) (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986).

#### 4. Results

The overall goodness-of-fit for the structural model was acceptable (Chi-square 1236.138,  $df = 680$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $chi/df = 1.818$ ,  $TLI = 0.900$ ,  $CFI = 0.913$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.060$ ). The reliability coefficients of all 14 social power measures, including expert, referent, legitimate, and reward, were 0.871, 0.782, 0.657, and 0.865, respectively. The reliability coefficient of all six parasocial interaction measures was 0.873. The reliability coefficients of all social capital measures were 0.684 for bonding factors and 0.899 for bridging factors. The reliability coefficients of the purchase intention of environmentally and socially sustainable product measures were 0.921 and 0.947, respectively. All of the coefficients indicate acceptable reliability of these measures (see Table 1).

This study used partial least squares (PLS) for structural equation modeling, which has good statistical power for samples. Social power, including referent ( $\beta = 0.147$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) and reward ( $\beta = 0.359$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), showed statistically positive effects on parasocial interaction. However, expert power and legitimate power did not show positive effects on parasocial interaction. Thus, the results supported Hypotheses 1.2 and 1.4 while they did not support Hypotheses 1.1 and 1.3.

Parasocial interaction showed statistically positive effects on social capital, bonding ( $\beta = 0.578$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and bridging ( $\beta = 0.651$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, the results supported Hypothesis 2. Regarding social capital, bridging showed statistically positive effects on the purchase intention of environmentally ( $\beta = 0.233$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and socially ( $\beta = 0.284$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) sustainable products, while bonding social capital showed no significant effects on purchase intention. Thus, the results partially supported Hypothesis 3 (see Table 2, Fig. 1).

Specifically, social power, including referent and reward, positively influenced parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction had positive effects on social capital. In turn, social capital positively influenced purchase intention for sustainable fashion products.

#### 5. Discussion

This study helps clarify the concept of social capital and determine the relationships between social capital and purchase intention for sustainable fashion products in the social media context. It also contributes to the theoretical foundation and the implications of social capital and sustainability.

This study offers overarching theoretical implications on how social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital influence consumer purchase intention of sustainable fashion products. The theoretical underpinnings were including the effects of social power on parasocial interaction, the effects of parasocial interaction on social capital, and

the effects of social capital on purchase intention for sustainable fashion products.

Social power was investigated regarding types of power that exert influence on others. The social powers identified in the social media context, expert, reward, referent, and legitimate (French & Raven, 1959), were categorized in terms of perceived influence. According to the findings, social power, including referent and reward power, positively influenced parasocial interaction. Referent power involves vloggers' abilities to make viewers feel valued, approved, and more personally accepted when they buy products the vloggers like. Reward power involves motivating viewers to buy a product because the vloggers might provide something or do something for the viewers in return. In terms of social power, referent and reward power positively influenced parasocial interactions, whereas expert power and legitimate power did not. YouTube viewers' parasocial interactions tend to be influenced by vloggers' social power as referent and reward power.

Parasocial interaction focuses on the way viewers relate to and develop interactions with media personalities such as vloggers (Gong & Li, 2017). Parasocial interaction reflects that a vlogger makes someone feel comfortable and like a friend (Ferchaud, Grzeslo, Orme, & LaGroue, 2018; Gong & Li, 2017). When interacting with a vlogger, a viewer could feel included, relate to the vlogger, like hearing what the vlogger has to say, care about what happens to the vlogger, and hope the vlogger achieves his/her goals.

Parasocial interaction also has positive effects on social capital. Social capital was categorized into bonding and bridging capital reflecting the relational degree of tie strength and type of resources in the social networks (Putnam, 2000). Bonding capital involves resources from strong ties, including family members and close friends, characterized by higher levels of trust and intimacy. Bridging capital involves resources from weak ties connecting different user groups within a network such as acquaintances with little intimacy and closeness.

YouTube mainly creates bridging capital as a way to diffuse information and fill gaps between originally uncoupled groups that can gain access to new information. Social capital was shown to have a positive influence on the purchase intention of sustainable fashion products. Of the two categories of social capital, only bridging positively influenced the purchase intention of environmentally and socially sustainable products. This study confirms the effects of social capital on consumer purchase intentions for sustainable fashion products in the fashion YouTube context.

##### 5.1. Managerial implications

For managerial implications, this study suggests that marketers should understand the best practices for building parasocial interaction with consumers through YouTube based on the popularity of the channel as a crucial platform. The findings suggest some guidelines for engaging with consumers through carefully deliberated parasocial interaction to foster and generate social capital.

By recognizing that parasocial interaction affects social capital, the study has substantive marketing and managerial implications. Marketing practitioners must highlight referent and reward social power to heighten parasocial interaction, which then increases social capital. When marketers develop YouTube videos that allow consumers to perceive referent and reward social power, they enhance parasocial interaction and improve purchase intention of sustainable products.

This study suggests that social capital is a strong influential variable for purchase intention regarding sustainable fashion products. Thus, fashion marketers should consider social capital management in the fashion YouTube context while tailoring their brand communications to enhance their sustainable fashion marketing and management.

##### 5.2. Limitations and future research directions

In terms of sustainability that involves business goal that makes a

**Table 1**  
Descriptive statistics, reliability, and validity indices.

Factors	Measurement items	Mean	SD	Reliability/ CR/ AVE	
Social power	Expert	Vloggers have a lot of experience with this type of product.	4.24	1.003	0.871/
		Vloggers know best about purchasing this type of product.	4.30	0.915	0.678/
		Vloggers are experts about this type of product.	3.82	1.029	0.893
	Referent	Vloggers know more about this type of product than other people do.	4.24	0.985	
		Vloggers can make me feel valued when I buy products they like.	3.99	1.028	0.782/
		Vloggers can make me feel approval when I buy products they like.	3.37	1.151	0.687
	Legitimate	Vloggers can make me feel more personally accepted when I buy products they like.	3.45	1.096	0.867/
		Vloggers have the right to influence my purchase of this type of product.	4.31	0.942	0.657/
		I should accept my vloggers' recommendations on what products to buy.	3.37	1.108	0.581/
	Reward	I should listen to vloggers when they tell me what they want me to buy.	3.07	1.184	0.791
		The reason I bought this product is that my vloggers might provide me with something nice in return.	3.46	1.203	0.865/ 0.724/
		When I bought this product, I thought that my vloggers might do something for me in return.	2.71	1.340	0.911
If I buy a product that my vloggers like, they are more likely to be nicer to me.		2.58	1.341		
If I buy a product that my vloggers do not like, they are more likely to be mean to me.		2.49	1.334		
Vloggers make me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.		3.02	0.854	0.873/	
Parasocial interaction	When I interact with vloggers, I feel included.	2.59	1.061	0.615/	
	I can relate to vloggers.	2.43	1.070	0.905	
	I like hearing what vloggers have to say.	3.07	0.882		
	I care about what happens to vloggers.	2.67	1.034		
	I hope vloggers can achieve their goals.	3.05	0.917		
	There are several people on YouTube I trust to help solve my problems.	2.38	0.777	0.684/	
Social capital	Bonding	There is someone on YouTube I can turn to for advice about making very important decisions.	2.56	0.756	0.515/ 0.808
		When I feel lonely, there are several people on YouTube I can talk to.	2.04	0.903	
		The people I interact with on YouTube would be good job references for me.	2.42	0.798	
		Interacting with people on YouTube makes me interested in things that happen outside of my town.	2.45	0.738	0.899/ 0.525/
		Interacting with people on YouTube makes me want to try new things.	2.48	0.746	0.917
		Interacting with people on YouTube makes me interested in what people unlike me are thinking.	2.57	0.719	
	Bridging	Talking with people on YouTube makes me curious about other places in the world.	2.62	0.772	
		Interacting with people on YouTube makes me feel part of a larger community.	2.14	0.766	
		Interacting with people on YouTube makes me feel connected to the bigger picture.	2.12	0.767	
		Interacting with people on YouTube reminds me that everyone in the world is connected.	2.30	0.822	
		I am willing to spend time to support in general YouTube community activities.	2.12	0.795	
		Interacting with people on YouTube offers me new people to talk to.	2.33	0.767	
Purchase intention	Environmental sustainable products	On YouTube, I come in contact with new people all the time.	2.30	0.787	
		Likely/unlikely	4.84	1.033	0.921/
		Probable/improbable	4.76	1.153	0.863/
	Social sustainable products	Possible/impossible	4.78	1.163	0.950
		Likely/unlikely	4.83	1.172	0.947/
		Probable/improbable	4.78	1.231	0.904/
	Possible/impossible	4.82	1.233	0.966	

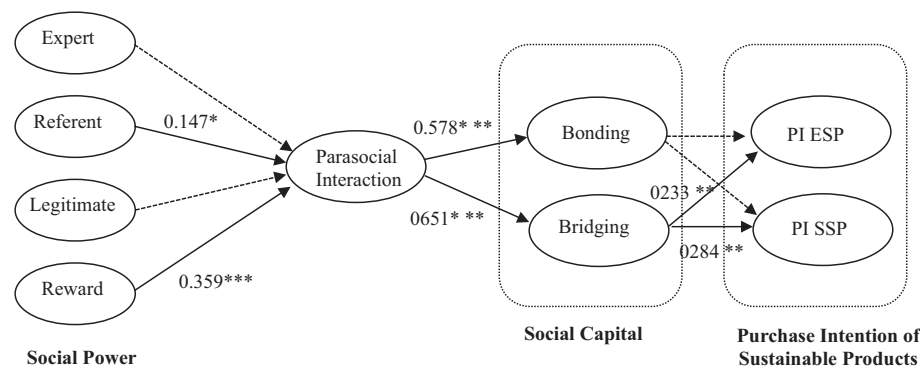
positive environmental, social, and economic impact (Chabowski et al., 2011; Elkington, 1998), the purchase intention for environmental and social fashion products is influenced by social capital that is developed through positive parasocial interactions. However, sustainability success also involves environmental and social performance that occurs over time (Sheth et al., 2011). In this study, the focus on sustainability was limited to purchase intention of environmental and social fashion

products. In dealing with the achievement of sustainability, the fashion industry seeks a positive environmental, social, and economic impact (Chabowski et al., 2011; Elkington, 1998; Ko et al., 2013). Future research could approach sustainability from a broader perspective, including environmental, social, and economic sustainability over longer periods of time.

Other limitations stem from using a survey based in general on the

**Table 2**  
Model estimates.

Path	Coefficients	Standard deviation	T	P values
Social power: expert → parasocial interaction	0.018	0.064	0.279	0.780
Social power: referent → parasocial interaction	0.147	0.070	2.092	0.037
Social power: legitimate → parasocial interaction	0.124	0.078	1.582	0.114
Social power: reward → parasocial interaction	0.359	0.075	4.823	0.000
Parasocial interaction → social capital: bonding	0.578	0.054	10.666	0.000
Parasocial interaction → social capital: bridging	0.651	0.046	14.286	0.000
Social capital: bonding → purchase intention of environmental sustainable products	0.163	0.097	1.693	0.091
Social capital: bonding → purchase intention of social sustainable products	0.132	0.099	1.330	0.184
Social capital: bridging → purchase intention of environmental sustainable products	0.233	0.081	2.889	0.004
Social capital: bridging → purchase intention of social sustainable products	0.284	0.082	3.475	0.001



\*PI ESP: purchase intention of environmentally sustainable products  
 PI SSP: purchase intention of socially sustainable products

Fig. 1. Structural equation model.

participants' own fashion YouTube usage. Future research could examine experiments with vloggers related to specific types of sustainable fashion products to determine whether and how such products lead to particular recommendations to enhance sustainable marketing and management strategies.

This study illuminated the relationship between social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital in the fashion YouTube context involving YouTube vloggers. Future research could be expanded to other social media contexts in various cultures in terms of the influence of social capital on sustainable products purchase intention.

The rise of emerging markets has an unsettling impact on sustainable marketing practice (Nkamnebe, 2011). The steep size of consumer markets in countries such as China and India has affected the emerging market impact (Nkamnebe, 2011). This study used a sample of fashion YouTube users in South Korea. Future surveys should include a more diverse population. Social media contexts in the emerging markets might expand insights for sustainability theory and practice in terms of social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital and sustainability.

Sustainability is a crucial business challenge today. This study presents a framework delineating the use of social capital in driving sustainability. Through this approach, positive sustainability outcomes are achieved through social power, parasocial interaction, and social capital as positive outcomes in fashion marketing and management.

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