

Influencer Advertising on Body Care and Diet: How Admiration and Parasocial Relationships Influence Peruvian Adolescents

Publicidad de *influencers* sobre alimentación y cuidado del cuerpo: cómo influyen la admiración y las relaciones parasociales en los adolescentes peruanos

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ABSTRACT

Parasocial relationships are a psychological phenomenon that creates a sense of closeness to real or fictional figures who are accessible only through media platforms, without any real reciprocity. This mechanism, along with admiration, is widely used by influencers for persuasive purposes. However, there is uncertainty regarding adolescents' ability to recognize the persuasive intent behind these messages. This study uses a representative survey to analyze the impact of admiration and parasocial relationships on the dispositional ability of Peruvian adolescents aged 11 to 17 ($N = 1020$) to identify persuasive intent in

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sponsored content by influencers on body care and diet. The results show high levels of admiration and parasocial interaction, accompanied by a self-perceived ability to recognize persuasive intent. However, this awareness appears to be more dispositional than critical, reflecting a normalization of commercial content rather than a genuine evaluative understanding.

KEYWORDS

Influencer advertising, social media, admiration, parasocial relationships, adolescents, Peru

RESUMEN

Las relaciones parasociales son un fenómeno psicológico que provoca una sensación de cercanía hacia figuras reales o ficticias que únicamente son accesibles a través de plataformas mediáticas, sin reciprocidad real. Este mecanismo y la admiración son ampliamente usados por los *influencers* con fines persuasivos. Sin embargo, hay incertidumbre sobre la capacidad del adolescente para reconocer la intencionalidad persuasiva detrás de estos mensajes. Este estudio aplica una encuesta representativa para analizar el impacto de la admiración y las relaciones parasociales en la capacidad disposicional del adolescente peruano de 11 a 17 años ($N = 1020$) al identificar el intento persuasivo en contenidos patrocinados de *influencers* sobre cuerpo y dieta. Los resultados evidencian elevados niveles de admiración e interacción parasocial, acompañados de una capacidad autopercebida para reconocer la intención persuasiva. Sin embargo, esta conciencia parece más disposicional que crítica, lo que refleja una normalización del contenido comercial más que una comprensión evaluativa genuina.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Publicidad de *influencers*, medios sociales, admiración, relaciones parasociales, adolescentes, Perú

Introduction

Advertising strategies—particularly on social media—have become the focus of debate over the past decade (Aw and Chuah, 2021; De Veirman et al., 2017). In a context where consumers tend to prefer peer recommendations over traditional marketing (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2024),

influencers have positioned themselves as seemingly close figures who deliver authentic testimonials; however, they often conceal commercial intentions and sponsored content (Breves et al., 2021). This native advertising blends seamlessly with the influencer's editorial content to promote products in a non-intrusive way (Pur Damayanti et al., 2024). As a result, it lacks the appearance of advertising, subtly and organically embedding persuasive intent within the content (Núñez-Cansado et al., 2021). This makes it increasingly difficult for audiences to identify and distinguish advertising from other types of content (Janssen et al., 2022; Kim and Kim, 2021; Martins et al., 2023).

Evidence shows that adolescents are particularly susceptible to such strategies due to the way these figures connect with their followers (De Veirman et al., 2019; Zaki et al., 2025). Influencers have become a key source of advice and information (Leung et al., 2022). Furthermore, the developmental stage adolescents are in reveals their limited ability to recognize the persuasive intent in this advertising (Zozaya Durazo et al., 2022), as well as a strong desire for social acceptance—which they associate with their physical appearance (Fundación MAPFRE, 2023). That is why content related to nutrition and personal care is so relevant to this audience. In this context, admiration—especially among adolescents—functions as a powerful persuasive mechanism leveraged by social media influencers, including those with body image and diet, to enhance trust in their content and increase the effectiveness of their persuasive activity (De Jans et al., 2022; Ferreira et al., 2024). One of the resulting effects is that admiration influences adolescents' perception of the credibility of sponsored content on body care and diet, turning these influencers into a symbolic model to imitate (Zozaya-Durazo et al., 2023b). This effect is reinforced by the parasocial relationships followers develop with these influencers, intensified by intimate and authentic content (Bizjak Zabukovec and Faganel, 2024). The influencer's verbal and physical engagement—such as direct eye contact with the camera—creates in the audience the feeling of a personal, direct, intimate, and reciprocal relationship, even though it is a temporary illusion sustained only during exposure (Bizjak Zabukovec and Faganel, 2024). Thus, when influencers, diet and body care included, share personal aspects of their daily routines, they foster a strong sense of intimacy and psychological connection with consumers, even without any real-life interaction (Aw and Chuah, 2021).

In Peru, influencers represent an emerging market, with investment of 22.39 million U.S. dollars in 2023 (We Are Social and Meltwater, 2023). This sector shows broad growth potential, as influencer advertising accounts for 30% of total investment in social media marketing (We Are Social and

Meltwater, 2024). Furthermore, it has been documented that these figures exert greater influence at earlier ages (IAB Perú, 2022). In addition, a Latin American study that includes Peru suggests that the decline in adolescents' physical and mental health may be linked to potentially harmful environments to which they are exposed during their development (Unicef América Latina y el Caribe, 2023). These include body care and diet, as they are believed to influence adolescents' well-being and would be also pervasive in their daily lives (Sádaba, 2024), especially given the high penetration of mobile phones among this age group in Peru (INEI, 2024). Therefore, this study aims to analyze how body care and diet influencers and their strategies—specifically, admiration and the development of parasocial relationships—influence adolescents' ability to recognize persuasive intent. Thus, this article provides a broad theoretical and empirical contribution to the understanding of the persuasive mechanisms under study in the field of influencer advertising on body care and diet among minors. And by extension, to adolescents' advertising literacy. This approach is particularly relevant in a country like Peru, where empirical evidence of the impact of influencer advertising related to body care and diet on adolescents remains limited. In addition, signs of deteriorating health among Peruvian adolescents have begun to emerge. Such knowledge is crucial for all stakeholders involved in the advertising relationship between these influencers and adolescents, as it promotes a better understanding of the phenomenon and supports the development of improved practices in self-regulation, formal regulation, and parental mediation.

Literature Review

Admiration for the Influencer

According to Enke and Borchers (2021), influencers are third-party communicators who, through their online content, interactions, and self-presentation, cultivate significant relational networks that confer them persuasive power. This figure is highly valued in marketing, advertising, and strategic communication (Lou, 2022). However, when it comes to sponsored content on body care and diet, influencers can reinforce beauty standards that shape body image and weight-control behaviors among adolescents (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2024). This poses a significant risk and underscores the importance of focusing this analysis on these categories of content. One of the tools most commonly employed by influencers is generating admiration. From a philosophical standpoint, however, excessive trust may negatively affect individuals' critical capacity to evaluate the messages they receive (Kaftanski, 2024). This becomes evident when

content published by influencers is received critically by non-followers but favorably by their followers (Martínez and Olsson, 2019).

Admiration is considered an emotion in which an object is perceived as distinctively good, motivating one to emulate it (Zagzebski, 2015). The desire or motivation to imitate is therefore seen as a defining characteristic (Protasi, 2021). This view is central to emulative theories of admiration (Zagzebski, 2015), which have subsequently been questioned by scholars who conceptualize admiration as a feeling of awe, wonder, or surprise toward something deemed worthy of appreciation, but not necessarily of imitation (Irwin, 2015; Kaftanski, 2024). In this regard, Brunning (2025) argues that sometimes it is not possible to emulate the admired person, or that there may simply be no desire to do so. Nevertheless, these difficulties are addressed by the *value-promotion theory*, according to which, as Archer (2019) explains:

to admire something is to want to promote its value, and there are many ways of doing so. Emulation is one of them, but so are applauding it, encouraging it, supporting the practice in which it excels, and so on.

For adolescents, influencers can serve as role models worth emulating (Zozaya-Durazo et al., 2023b). The relevance of the body care and diet content among Peruvian minors, in creation and consumption (Anastacio-Coello and Atarama-Rojas, 2025; Londoño-Moreno et al., 2025) suggests a certain degree of admiration.

In the field of influencer marketing, admiration is understood as an other-oriented emotion directed toward individuals for their outstanding virtues and abilities—qualities that can be explained, aspired to, and even surpassed (De Jans et al., 2020). Admiration may be experienced toward someone considered praiseworthy and reflects the respect, appreciation, and esteem felt toward that person (Ferreira et al., 2024; De Jans et al., 2020). For this reason, brands leverage the admiration and trust influencers, body care and diet included, generate among their audiences to build visibility and foster brand loyalty (Hani et al., 2024; Nadanyiova et al., 2020). To achieve this, influencers promote content about their personal and intimate lives on social media, reaching high levels of attention, admiration, and engagement (Archer and Robb, 2024; De Jans et al., 2020). Evidence also suggests that adolescents tend to perceive influencers as superior due to the privileges and benefits they appear to enjoy—often seen as difficult to attain—leading adolescents to emulate their attitudes, beliefs, and lifestyles (Tian et al., 2023; De Jans et al., 2022; De Veirman et al., 2019). Thus, influencer advertising on body care and diet, this could

lead minors to turn to extremely restrictive diets in an effort to achieve an idealized body image, one associated with slim, toned bodies disseminated by influencers (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the literature leads to the following hypotheses:

H1. A high level of admiration for influencers in the fields of body care and diet among adolescents is associated with greater trust in the content they promote.

H2 A high level of admiration for influencers in the fields of body care and diet among adolescents reduces their ability to recognize the persuasive intent of sponsored content.

Influencers and Parasocial Relationships

The concept of parasocial relationship was originally defined by Horton and Wohl (1956), in the era of radio and television, as a phenomenon in which a viewer develops long-term, one-sided, illusory, and intimate relationships with media figures from a distance. It is a non-face-to-face psychological relationship, developed unilaterally by an audience toward a media personality, leading them to believe that they share deep intimacy, identification, and friendship with that figure (Aw and Chuah, 2021; Bizjak Zabukovec and Faganel, 2024). Today, due to their inherently interactive nature and the illusion of closeness they generate, social media platforms have become ideal environments for fostering such relationships (Audrezet et al., 2020; Aw and Chuah, 2021). An environment in which sponsored content on body care and diet is also prevalent among Peruvian adolescents (Anastacio-Coello and Atarama-Rojas, 2025; Londoño-Moreno et al., 2025). Although the concept reveals the asymmetrical nature of the influencer-audience relationship, some researchers have criticized its application to social media, arguing that it fails to account for the interactive and reciprocal dynamics of these platforms (Lou, 2022).

Nonetheless, social media posts allow followers to access the influencer's personal and/or professional life (Conde and Casais, 2023). Followers often respond with «likes» and/or messages that take an intimate, confessional tone (Du et al., 2023; Gómez Lacap et al., 2024). According to Conde and Casais (2023), these interactions develop through messages that encourage perceptions of intimacy. Through ongoing engagement with followers, influencers build this sense of closeness by involving audiences in their daily routines and granting them access to both personal and professional aspects of their lives (De Veirman et al., 2017). In self-disclosure, influencers present themselves as ordinary, approachable, and relatable individuals (Du et al., 2023). In doing so, they share emotions, feelings, and personal or professional information, while followers identify

with them and tend to believe that they are forming a genuine relationship (Gómez Lacap et al., 2024; Um, 2023). This is how these social media influencers could shape teenagers' perceptions of body image and eating habits (Fundación MAPFRE, 2023).

Among adolescents, the literature shows that parasocial relationships can be even more meaningful than interpersonal ones (Sedmak and Svetina, 2024). Therefore, influencers' sponsored content on body care and diet can have great persuasive power since the literature suggests that influencers' content may be perceived as «a genuine suggestion from a friend» (Audrezet et al., 2020). This would increase adolescents' receptivity to sponsored content (Aw et al., 2023; Breves et al., 2021) and reduce their critical evaluation of the influencer's commercial activities (Audrezet et al., 2020). It is therefore unsurprising that influencer advertising tends to perform better on social media (Liu and Zheng, 2024), as it enhances audience trust and credibility (Du et al., 2023; Gómez Lacap et al., 2024; Reinikainen et al., 2020). This dynamic contributes to increased brand credibility (Gómez Lacap et al., 2024), purchase intention (Conde and Casais, 2023), and willingness to pay a higher price for a product (Fazli-Salehi et al., 2022).

Accordingly, the literature supports the following hypotheses:

H3 The development of a parasocial relationship between an adolescent and influencers in the fields of body care and diet increases the adolescent's trust in the influencer's content.

H4 The development of a parasocial relationship between an adolescent and influencers in the fields of body care and diet reduces the adolescent's ability to recognize the persuasive intent of sponsored content.

Advertising Literacy

One of the main strategies to enhance influencers' persuasive effectiveness, including those focusing body care and diet, is the hybridization of advertising and entertainment (Cambronero et al., 2024). This involves appealing to entertainment to attract audiences and foster positive attitudes toward the sponsored product (Ahn et al., 2024). As a result, adolescents may engage in a low-effort cognitive process, meaning that when processing such content, they may focus solely on the pleasant experience without critically analyzing its message (Buijzen et al., 2010). Moreover, this age group is particularly vulnerable to advertising (Sádaba, 2024), as children begin to develop an understanding of persuasive intent only between the ages of 8 and 12 (Buijzen et al., 2010; Rozendaal et al., 2016).

Evidence from South American countries suggests that these challenges are also present among children in that region (Feijoo et al., 2023a).

Although advertising literacy—understood as the consumer's ability to critically evaluate persuasive attempts (Friestad and Wright, 1994)—was originally applied to traditional mass media advertising, the urgency of fostering this competence among minors has increased in the past two decades due to the rise of digital environments and the omnipresence of commercial activity within them (Cheng and Anderson, 2021). This includes sponsored content by influencers on body care and diet, which can have health implications (Cambronero et al., 2024). According to Sánchez-Reina et al. (2023), in these environments, minors inhabit a symbolic space centered on body image cult and embody various identities that reenact narratives disseminated by the media. To assess advertising literacy among children aged 8 to 12, Rozendaal et al. (2016) developed a validated instrument grounded in the multidimensional conceptualization model (Rozendaal et al., 2011), which surpassed the unidimensional model that dominated earlier literacy studies.

Traditional studies often evaluated only the *conceptual* dimension of advertising literacy—assumed sufficient for processing advertising messages (Zozaya Durazo et al., 2022). However, critiques of the unidimensional model have emphasized that evaluating only the conceptual dimension is insufficient, particularly when facing new formats in which persuasive intent is less overt (Feijoo et al., 2023b; Van Dam and Van Reijmersdal, 2019) including influencer advertising related to body care and diet. Moreover, the ability to recognize persuasive intent does not always translate into the ability to question or critically interpret content (Feijoo et al., 2023b; Rozendaal et al., 2019). A qualitative study with adolescents aged 9 to 15 revealed the internal conflict between recognizing advertising and adopting a critical stance toward it (Borchers, 2022). This suggests that even when adolescents identify persuasive intent, the motivation to analyze content critically may not be activated. Adolescents understand the commercial relationship between influencers and brands—and have even normalized it—yet they are often unable to recognize advertising unless it is explicitly labeled as such (Zozaya Durazo et al., 2022, 2023a). While assessing the conceptual dimension is necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure that minors adequately process digital advertising formats; hence, the *attitudinal* and *performance* dimensions were added to the model (Rozendaal et al., 2011).

According to Zozaya Durazo et al. (2022), the conceptual dimension explores a minor's ability to understand persuasive intent and the strategies used to achieve it, while the attitudinal dimension assesses their

ability to regulate the emotions evoked by advertising. The performance dimension assesses a minor's ability to retrieve and apply previously acquired advertising knowledge when exposed to an ad (Rozendaal et al., 2016). Furthermore, it notes that these dimensions can be used jointly or independently. Recently, an additional *ethical dimension* has been incorporated into the model, acknowledging its growing relevance in advertising literacy (Livingstone and Rahali, 2021; Sweeney et al., 2022). Although the multidimensional model suggests that it is difficult to assess adolescents' ability to cope with less obvious advertising tactics, this task is unavoidable, since studies in Latin America have examined the influence of the media on body image and appearance ideals (Andres et al., 2024), but not specifically in the case of influencer advertising related to body care and diet.

Finally, advertising literacy can be assessed from two perspectives: *dispositional*—referring to the general knowledge and skills developed about advertising phenomena—and *situational*, which refers to the application of those skills and concepts when processing a specific advertisement (Hudders et al., 2017). It is not uncommon for these two to diverge (Hudders et al., 2017). Thus, an adolescent may possess conceptual dispositional knowledge, yet their situational application may be hindered by factors such as the subtle nature of persuasive strategies (Van Dam and Van Reijmersdal, 2019). The significant challenges posed by influencer advertising targeting minors underscore the importance of focusing this analysis on content related to body care and diet, as such content can reinforce beauty standards and affect body image and weight control among adolescents (Vizcaíno-Verdú et al., 2024).

Accordingly, the literature supports the following hypothesis:

H5 The dispositional ability of adolescents to recognize the persuasive intent of content published by influencers on body care and diet may be negatively affected by their level of admiration and parasocial relationship with those influencers.

Methodology

This study examines the incidence of admiration and parasocial relationships on the dispositional ability of Peruvian adolescents aged 11 to 17 (N = 1,020) to recognize the persuasive intent of sponsored content produced by influencers on social media. The topic of body care and diet was selected due to the potential influence such content can have on minors' physical and mental well-being, particularly during adolescence—a developmental stage marked by heightened sensitivity to social acceptance and body image (Sádaba, 2024). These types of content are also

associated with reduced physical activity (WHO, 2022), increased calorie intake (Boyland et al., 2022), and growing appearance-related pressure and dissatisfaction resulting from the reinforcement of unattainable beauty ideals (Milmo and Skopeliti, 2021), among other factors.

For the design, a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional approach was adopted. Thus, the chosen quantitative design enables the collection of data to describe the phenomenon at the national level, incorporating variables such as gender and age. Moreover, this approach allows for comparison with findings from other contexts, contributing to the international consolidation of knowledge on the topic.

The sampling procedure followed a multistage design, including population stratification by three strata—gender, age, and departments—and proportional allocation of the sample. These procedures ensured that the sample reflected the population's composition. The sampling frame was based on data from the *Registro Nacional de Identificación y Estado Civil* (National Registry of Identification and Civil Status), accessed in September 2023, which compiles demographic information on the Peruvian population from birth. The survey sample size was set at 1,020 participants to achieve a 95% confidence level and a $\pm 3\%$ margin of error. The analysis units correspond to a probabilistic and stratified sample.

Participants were selected using a stratified random sampling design, which included the following layers: gender, age, and regions of Peru. This study complied with the ethical guidelines established for research involving human subjects and was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of International University of La Rioja. Thus, the procedures were conducted in accordance with ethical standards consistent with the Declaration of Helsinki. All surveyed adolescents and their parents and/or legal guardians provided their written informed consent after receiving clear information about the study's objectives, the use of their data, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences. The confidentiality of the participants was ensured through the anonymization of their personal data. The information collected was used exclusively for academic and publication purposes, respecting the privacy and integrity of the participants at all times. Furthermore, the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles previously described in the reference document, including respect for autonomy, non-maleficence, and justice. The Ethics Committee's approval code was PI:065/2023, issued on November 20, 2023. The online questionnaire was administered to adolescents between November and December 2023 via an online platform, which ensured participant anonymity and the secure storage of personal

data. To examine the relationship between adolescents and their favorite influencers of body care and diet, three analytical variables were used.

The first variable assessed *the adolescents' level of admiration toward the influencers in the body image and diet sectors*. The question was worded as follows: «Rate your level of agreement with the following statements about your favorite body care and diet influencers»: (1) I admire my favorite influencer; (2) My favorite influencer is a role model in life; (3) I enjoy viewing photos or videos of my favorite influencer. The variable and the question were based on prior studies in other regions (De Jans et al., 2020, 2021, 2022).

The second variable examined *adolescents' parasocial relationship with the influencer*. The exact wording of the first question was used in the second, participants rated their level of agreement with the following five statements: (1) When I see my favorite influencer, I feel as if they are my friend; (2) I would like to meet my favorite influencer in person; (3) If I saw news about my favorite influencer in a newspaper or online, I would read it; (4) My favorite influencer makes me feel comfortable, as if I were among friends; (5) When my favorite influencer gives an opinion about a brand, it helps me decide to buy it. The variable and the question were inspired by previous international studies (Bizjak Zabukovec and Faganel, 2024).

The third variable evaluated *adolescents' ability to recognize the persuasive intent behind sponsored content* related to body care and diet. The wording of the third question was «Rate your level of agreement with the following statements regarding posts in which your favorite *influencer* showcases products to improve your physical appearance or food brands»: (1) They make you want to have the advertised products; (2) They want me to buy the advertised product; (3) They collaborate with brands that I like; (4) They are trustworthy. This variable and the question were developed based on prior studies in the field (Rozendaal et al., 2016, 2019) and was assessed dispositionally, without exposure to a specific advertising stimulus (Hudders et al., 2017). All variables were measured using a five-point bipolar semantic scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. All scales demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding ($\alpha > .80$).

For data analysis, the statistical software SPSS v.30 was used. Means were calculated to determine trends in the data, while ANOVA tests were applied to detect significant differences by gender and age. In addition, Spearman's Rho correlation coefficient was used to identify associations between the study's analytical variables. Table 1 shows the composition of the sample.

TABLE 1. Percentage distribution of the sample

	11 - 12 years		13 - 15 years		16 - 17 years		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	
Lima	4.20%	4.04%	6.25%	6.03%	4.11%	3.96%	28.59%
Piura	1.01%	0.97%	1.48%	1.43%	0.94%	0.92%	6.74%
La Libertad	0.91%	0.88%	1.36%	1.33%	0.88%	0.86%	6.22%
Cajamarca	0.73%	0.71%	1.11%	1.08%	0.74%	0.72%	5.09%
Loreto	0.70%	0.67%	1.05%	1.02%	0.64%	0.62%	4.70%
Cusco	0.62%	0.59%	0.91%	0.89%	0.64%	0.62%	4.27%
Junín	0.60%	0.57%	0.94%	0.90%	0.63%	0.61%	4.25%
Lambayeque	0.61%	0.59%	0.90%	0.85%	0.58%	0.56%	4.09%
Arequipa	0.60%	0.57%	0.89%	0.84%	0.56%	0.55%	4.02%
Áncash	0.52%	0.51%	0.79%	0.77%	0.53%	0.51%	3.64%
Puno	0.52%	0.50%	0.78%	0.75%	0.52%	0.50%	3.58%
San Martín	0.49%	0.48%	0.71%	0.69%	0.47%	0.45%	3.29%
Callao	0.47%	0.45%	0.70%	0.67%	0.45%	0.43%	3.16%
Ica	0.41%	0.40%	0.62%	0.60%	0.39%	0.38%	2.79%
Huánuco	0.39%	0.37%	0.59%	0.58%	0.43%	0.41%	2.75%
Ucayali	0.35%	0.34%	0.54%	0.51%	0.32%	0.31%	2.36%
Ayacucho	0.30%	0.29%	0.46%	0.44%	0.33%	0.31%	2.15%
Amazonas	0.25%	0.25%	0.37%	0.35%	0.24%	0.23%	1.69%
Apurímac	0.19%	0.19%	0.31%	0.31%	0.22%	0.21%	1.43%
Huancavelica	0.18%	0.18%	0.29%	0.28%	0.21%	0.21%	1.35%
Tacna	0.15%	0.14%	0.22%	0.21%	0.14%	0.14%	1.00%
Paíco	0.14%	0.13%	0.20%	0.20%	0.13%	0.13%	0.93%
Tumbes	0.12%	0.12%	0.17%	0.17%	0.11%	0.10%	0.80%
Madre de Dios	0.09%	0.09%	0.13%	0.13%	0.08%	0.08%	0.60%
Moquegua	0.07%	0.07%	0.11%	0.11%	0.07%	0.07%	0.51%
Total	14.62%	14.08%	21.90%	21.14%	14.38%	13.88%	100.00%

Results

The variable *admiration* (Table 2) reveals that Peruvian adolescents show a clear tendency to somewhat agree or agree with the three statements assessed. In all three cases analyzed, the mean scores fell between the third and fourth categories of the scale, ranging from 3 to 4 points. These findings suggest that the relationship between Peruvian adolescents and influencers of body care and diet appears to be characterized by admiration and manifests itself in a receptive attitude and the influencers' role model status. The latter, in particular, may lead adolescents to emulate them.

The variable «parasocial relationship» (Table 2) also reveals a clear tendency among Peruvian adolescents to develop this type of psychological bond with their favorite influencer in the areas of body care and diet. In all five cases analyzed, the mean scores fell between the third and fourth categories on the scale, ranging from 3 to 4 points, as is also the case with the admiration variable. As with the first variable, the results indicate that Peruvian adolescents have developed a parasocial relationship with their favorite influencers in these content categories. Given the results of both analysis variables, it is reasonable to think that, during adolescence, influencers of body care and diet could become a social role model. This is especially true because, in their quest for social acceptance, physical

appearance plays a key role for adolescents. The evidence suggests a certain degree of vulnerability towards these influencers among adolescents, as admiration promotes parasocial relationship development and both could induce overconfidence and negatively affect their interpretation of persuasive content.

TABLE 2. Level of Admiration and Parasocial Relationship Among Adolescents, by Gender

Items		Men (519)		Women (501)		Total (1020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
		M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	
V1	Q1.1.	3.730	.861	3.770	.877	3.750	.869	.496
	Q1.2.	3.130	1.046	3.190	.987	3.160	1.015	.466
	Q1.3.	3.260	.980	3.460	.956	3.360	.972	.005
V2	Q2.1.	2.980	1.058	2.860	1.086	2.920	1.074	.127
	Q2.2.	4.140	.871	3.960	.956	4.040	.920	.008
	Q2.3.	3.820	.869	3.850	.901	3.840	.885	.647
	Q2.4.	3.510	.981	3.450	.975	3.480	.978	.387
	Q2.5.	3.040	1.048	3.140	.995	3.090	1.021	.180

Notes. M. = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation.

Values in bold indicate all cases where significant differences are observed.

The results also revealed significant differences by gender and age across both analytical variables (Tables 2 and 3). According to gender (Table 2), in the *admiration* variable, female adolescents showed a greater inclination to be receptive to influencer content. In contrast, regarding *parasocial relationships*, male adolescents demonstrated a stronger tendency to want to meet the social media figure in person.

With respect to age (Table 3), in both analytical variables, adolescents aged 11 to 12 showed a greater propensity than participants from other age groups to develop admiration and parasocial relationships with their favorite influencers of body care and diet. Therefore, this age group would be particularly vulnerable to these influencers.

TABLE 3. Level of Admiration and Parasocial Relationship Among Adolescents, by Age

Items	11 to 12 (294)		13 to 15 (438)		16 to 17 (288)		Total (1020)		ANOVA Test Sig.	
	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.		
V1	Q1.1.	3.910	.914	3.680	.867	3.710	.816	3.750	.869	.010
	Q1.2.	3.310	1.110	3.080	.975	3.150	.975	3.160	1.015	.037
	Q1.3.	3.630	.968	3.210	1.010	3.360	.863	3.360	.972	<.001

	Q2.1.	3.180	1.159	2.780	1.057	2.880	.977	2.920	1.074	<.001
	Q2.2.	4.200	.941	3.950	.919	4.040	.888	4.040	.920	.012
V2	Q2.3.	4.030	.856	3.760	.925	3.790	.825	3.840	.885	.002
	Q2.4.	3.740	.952	3.350	1.018	3.450	.895	3.480	.978	<.001
	Q2.5.	3.200	1.066	2.930	1.010	3.240	.965	3.090	1.021	<.001

Notes. M. = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation.

Values in bold indicate all cases where significant differences are observed.

The variable measuring adolescents' ability to recognize the persuasive intent of sponsored content related to body care and diet (Table 4) shows that Peruvian adolescents tend to somewhat agree or agree with the four statements assessed. In all cases, mean scores fell between the third and fourth categories of the scale, ranging from three to four points. This reflects a generally positive self-assessment among adolescents regarding their dispositional ability to recognize persuasive intent in sponsored content of body care and diet. Overall, Peruvian adolescents' perception of their dispositional ability to recognize persuasive intent appears more favorable at the conceptual level than at the attitudinal level. The first two statements, which assess the conceptual level of the skill, generally show relatively higher performance than the last two statements, which assess the attitudinal level of the skill.

TABLE 4. Ability to Recognize Persuasive Intent by Gender

Items		Men (519)		Women (501)		Total (1020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
		M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	
V3	Q3.1.	3.050	1.051	3.280	1.041	3.160	1.052	.001
	Q3.2.	3.150	1.130	3.370	1.040	3.260	1.092	.002
	Q3.3.	3.350	.968	3.460	.940	3.400	.955	.081
	Q3.4.	3.170	.892	3.130	.850	3.150	.871	.506

Notes. M. = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation.

Values in bold indicate all cases where significant differences are observed.

Results disaggregated by gender and age (Tables 4 and 5) indicate significant differences ($p < .05$). According to gender (Table 4), female adolescents showed a stronger tendency than males to agree with the first two statements. This suggests that females exhibit fewer difficulties than males in recognizing the persuasive intent of these sponsored content. Accordingly, they are more likely to agree with statements that conceptually explore the commercial purposes of sponsored content of body care and diet.

Regarding age (Table 5), adolescents aged 11 to 12 showed lower agreement with the first and fourth statements than those aged 16 to 17. This indicates that younger adolescents (11-12 years old) have lower conceptual abilities to recognize persuasive intent and display less trust in sponsored content.

TABLE 5. Ability to Recognize Persuasive Intent by Age

Items		11 to 12 (249)		13 to 15 (438)		16 to 17 (288)		Total (1020)		ANOVA Test Sig.
		M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	M.	S.D.	
V3	Q3.1.	3.130	1.087	3.090	1.063	3.320	.983	3.160	1.052	.022
	Q3.2.	3.250	1.172	3.220	1.085	3.320	1.016	3.260	1.092	.537
	Q3.3.	3.410	1.018	3.370	.950	3.440	.897	3.400	.955	.694
	Q3.4.	3.110	.915	3.100	.878	3.270	.803	3.150	.871	.035

Notes. M. = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation.
Values in bold indicate all cases where significant differences are observed.

The correlational analysis (Table 6) shows that there is a direct, generally highly significant relationship between admiration and parasocial interaction, and the dispositional ability to recognize the persuasive intent of these sponsored content. All aspects of admiration are positively correlated with all items of the *attitudinal dimension* of the ability to recognize persuasive intent—that is, the last two statements. In addition, every aspect of admiration is correlated with the first item of the *conceptual dimension*. Finally, only the receptive-attitude component of admiration correlates positively with the second conceptual item.

Similarly, all components of the parasocial relationship are positively related to the third and fourth items of the attitudinal dimension of the ability to recognize persuasive intent. Moreover, all aspects of the parasocial relationship are directly associated with the first item of the conceptual dimension. Only the third and fifth components of the parasocial relationship are correlated with the second conceptual item. Overall, the strongest correlations are concentrated in the attitudinal dimension of adolescents' ability to recognize the persuasive intent of these sponsored content.

TABLE 6. Correlational Analysis Among the Study Variables

Spearman's Rho		Q3.1.	Q3.2.	Q3.3.	Q3.4.
Q1.1.	Correlation Coefficient	.173**	0.053	.227**	.246**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	0.155	<.001	<.001

Q1.2.	Correlation Coefficient	.196**	0.015	.207**	.304**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	0.684	<.001	<.001
Q1.3.	Correlation Coefficient	.209**	.145**	.199**	.163**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Q2.1.	Correlation Coefficient	.171**	0.018	.187**	.249**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	0.625	<.001	<.001
Q2.2.	Correlation Coefficient	.190**	0.018	.213**	.151**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	0.62	<.001	<.001
Q2.3.	Correlation Coefficient	.229**	.126**	.229**	.143**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Q2.4.	Correlation Coefficient	.128**	0.006	.172**	.218**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	0.878	<.001	<.001
Q2.5.	Correlation Coefficient	.335**	.204**	.249**	.223**
	Sig. (bilateral)	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed). * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

Values in bold indicate all cases where a significant relationship exists between the variables analyzed.

Discussion and conclusions

Overall, gender and age differences suggest that female adolescent tend to develop more admiration than males, while males are more inclined to form a parasocial relationship. Furthermore, adolescents aged 11 to 12 are more likely to develop admiration and parasocial relationships, whereas both males and younger participants showed greater difficulty in recognizing advertising. This evidence constitutes a key contribution of this study, as it allows for the comparison and consolidation of knowledge in this region.

The results also show that admiration is positively and significantly correlated with indicators of the attitudinal dimension of the adolescent's capacity, whose items assess trust in and liking of sponsored content related to body care and diet. This is consistent with H1, confirming that admiration is associated with trust in and liking of this content. The positive relationship between admiration and the attitudinal dimension of persuasive recognition suggests that admiration functions as a mechanism that reinforces credibility and emotional engagement. Therefore, a high level of admiration among adolescents for these influencers is associated with greater trust in the content they promote.

Regarding H2, which proposed a negative relationship between admiration and persuasive awareness, the correlational results indicate the

opposite: admiration is positively related to the adolescent's perceived ability to recognize persuasive intent. This suggests that adolescents who admire influencers may feel more competent in identifying advertising cues, though this competence likely reflects dispositional perception rather than genuine critical literacy. These findings apparently run counter to the philosophical perspective about the admiration: excessive trust may negatively affect individuals' critical capacity to evaluate the messages they receive (Kaftanski, 2024). However, this discrepancy could be attributed to the dispositional approach, as suggested by a previous study (Van Dam and Van Reijmersdal, 2019). In other words, admiration normalizes commercial intent rather than diminishing it, as adolescents appear to understand sponsorship as a natural part of the influencer's identity, which may give the illusion of awareness without actual critical distance. The study suggests that Peruvian adolescents perceive themselves as having a greater ability to recognize persuasive attempts than they actually do. To confirm this finding, it would be appropriate to conduct an experimental study that addresses the limitations inherent in relying on self-reported data from this study.

Correlational analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between parasocial connection and the attitudinal dimension of persuasive recognition. Thus, data show that adolescents with stronger parasocial relationships exhibit greater trust and more positive attitudes toward influencer content. Although the level of parasocial relationship is slightly lower than that of admiration, this study demonstrates that it can positively influence the processing of this sponsored content related to body care and diet (Aw et al., 2023). This indicates that adolescents who feel closer to influencers perceive their content as more credible and trustworthy, aligning with prior findings (Audrezet et al., 2020; Breves et al., 2021; Reinikainen et al., 2020). Thus, H3 is confirmed.

Although theory suggested that parasocial ties would reduce adolescents' critical awareness, the data show otherwise: admiration and parasocial relationships correlate positively (and significantly) with both the conceptual and attitudinal components of persuasive recognition. This means adolescents who admire or feel connected to influencers actually perceive themselves as more capable of identifying persuasive intent. The study interprets this as a «naturalization» of commercial relationships rather than genuine critical awareness—adolescents believe they understand persuasion because they normalize advertising in influencer content. Therefore, H4 is not supported, as the correlation is positive rather than negative; adolescents' perceived recognition increases alongside admiration but likely reflects dispositional familiarity rather than true

critical literacy. In that regard, a study in Chile found that teenagers do not dislike this type of advertising, nor do they avoid it. However, this is due to their difficulty in recognizing the persuasive intent behind it in the practice (Feijoo et al., 2023a). This suggests that, in reality, the adolescent faces more difficulties than he or she realizes.

Regarding H5, the adolescent's dispositional ability to recognize the persuasive intent of content published by these influencers may be negatively affected by the level of admiration and parasocial relationship, is partially supported. The results reveal that both admiration and parasocial relationships are positively correlated with the adolescent's dispositional ability to recognize persuasive intent (Table 6). This means that adolescents who admire or feel emotionally connected to influencers also report greater perceived awareness of persuasive strategies. However, interpreting this finding requires nuance. Although the correlation is statistically significant and positive, it does not necessarily indicate a genuine improvement in advertising literacy. Rather, it suggests a process of normalization—adolescents become familiar with the commercial nature of influencer content and believe they can recognize it, without necessarily applying a critical or ethical evaluation. In dispositional terms, admiration and parasocial engagement foster a sense of recognition, but in situational terms, when facing real advertising, these mechanisms could still reduce critical resistance. In this regard, Hudders et al. (2017) noted that the complexity for minors is not the same when they are faced with a dispositional study as it is with a situational one. This suggests that it would not be surprising if the results of the two approaches did not match; therefore, it is recommended that these results be validated in the future through a situational study.

This study concludes that Peruvian adolescents display high levels of admiration and parasocial relationships toward their favorite influencers of body care and diet. The inclination to develop admiration is notably stronger than that to develop parasocial relationships. However, this may be associated with the greater complexity and less overt nature of the latter mechanism. Moreover, the findings confirm that both admiration and parasocial relationships positively influence the conceptual and attitudinal dimensions of adolescents' dispositional ability to recognize the persuasive intent of these sponsored content. Furthermore, the normalization of commercial relationships between influencers and brands among adolescents leads them to perceive themselves dispositionally as having a greater ability to identify persuasive intent. However, as discussed, it is necessary to complement this analysis with a situational approach to more accurately determine adolescents' actual capacity. Therefore, future

research should incorporate a situational approach to achieve a more precise understanding of this capacity.

Finally, as the theory suggests, both persuasive mechanisms, admiration and parasocial relationships, can lead adolescents to want to imitate their favorite influencers' habits and behaviors regarding body care and diet. This poses a clear risk, as the theory, the normalization of influencers' commercial activities, and the limitations of the dispositional study suggest that adolescents with high levels of admiration and parasocial relationships might approach this content with excessive trust and even suspend their critical judgment.

This concern arises from the fact that these influencers are often not professional experts in the field, and their recommendations could affect adolescents' well-being. Furthermore, they are associated with foods that are potentially harmful to health, which could lead to increased calorie intake or restrictive eating habits. Furthermore, these influencers frequently promote idealized body images and embody the body pressures they themselves disseminate. All of this has cultural implications, as it contributes to the dissemination and internalization of idealized body standards, generally of a globalized nature, that tend to homogenize aesthetic references and engage in a complex dialogue with the bodily and cultural diversity of the Peruvian context. Not only are pressures regarding appearance reinforced, but shared social frameworks are established in which the body becomes a central axis of acceptance. Consequently, emulating these influencers without a critical and ethical attitude, a result of excessive trust, could not only lead adolescents to adopt habits that jeopardize their well-being but would also have troubling cultural implications.

Contribución de autoría

Álvaro Montúfar-Calle: conceptualización, curación de datos, análisis de datos, investigación, metodología, administración de proyecto, *software*, visualización, redacción del borrador original, y redacción, revisión y edición.

Beatriz Feijoo: conceptualización, curación de datos, análisis de datos, metodología, supervisión, validación, visualización, redacción del borrador original, y redacción, revisión y edición.

Isabel Pavez: conceptualización, análisis de datos, supervisión, validación, visualización, redacción del borrador original, y redacción, revisión y edición

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