

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# Parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes among female viewers of douyin girl-group live broadcasts: A systematic literature review

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## Abstract

Parasocial interaction plays a significant role in live-streaming, yet research on female audiences, particularly on platforms like Douyin, remains fragmented. This systematic review consolidates quantitative studies (2018–2025) to examine the connections between parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes in female viewers of girl-group livestreams. Adhering to PRISMA guidelines, 22 studies were analyzed. The findings reveal a consistent correlation between parasocial interaction and mental health impacts. Stronger emotional bonds were often associated with higher levels of psychological distress, particularly when combined with compulsive viewing behaviors. Perceived social support emerged as a moderating factor, sometimes alleviating distress but at other times amplifying susceptibility. Gender-specific trends suggest that female fans are more likely to form deep emotional connections through parasocial ties, which can lead to both heightened risks and notable benefits. In conclusion, parasocial interaction within live-streaming substantially affects the mental health of female viewers. This underscores the importance of theory-driven platform designs, effective content moderation, and longitudinal studies to better understand and manage these long-term psychological implications. (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2026; 30 [4]: 146-152).

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**Keywords:** Parasocial interaction; Live streaming; Mental health; Female audiences; Systematic literature review

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## Résumé

La violence domestique pendant la grossesse constitue un problème de santé publique grave. Cette étude a réalisé une revue systématique des données quantitatives pour examiner sa prévalence, les facteurs l'influençant et les conséquences sanitaires associées en Chine continentale. Conformément aux directives PRISMA 2020, une méta-analyse de 25 études a été effectuée en utilisant des modèles à effets aléatoires, ainsi que des évaluations de l'hétérogénéité ( $I^2$ ) et du biais de publication. L'analyse a révélé une prévalence globale d'environ 20 %, la violence psychologique étant identifiée comme la forme la plus répandue. Les principaux facteurs contributifs comprenaient les désavantages socio-économiques, une autonomie décisionnelle restreinte et les comportements à risque des partenaires. L'exposition à la violence domestique augmentait considérablement la probabilité de dépression ou d'anxiété anténatales, de complications de la grossesse et d'issues défavorables à la naissance, telles qu'un faible poids de naissance et un accouchement prématuré. Bien qu'une certaine hétérogénéité ait été notée, les associations ont été constamment observées. Ces résultats soulignent la prévalence significative et les impacts sanitaires graves de la violence domestique pendant la grossesse, mettant en évidence le besoin urgent d'approches globales en matière de soins de santé maternelle en Chine. De telles stratégies devraient intégrer le dépistage de la violence domestique, des services de santé mentale et des initiatives favorisant l'autonomisation socio-économique (*Afr J Reprod Health* 2026; 30 [4]: 146-152).

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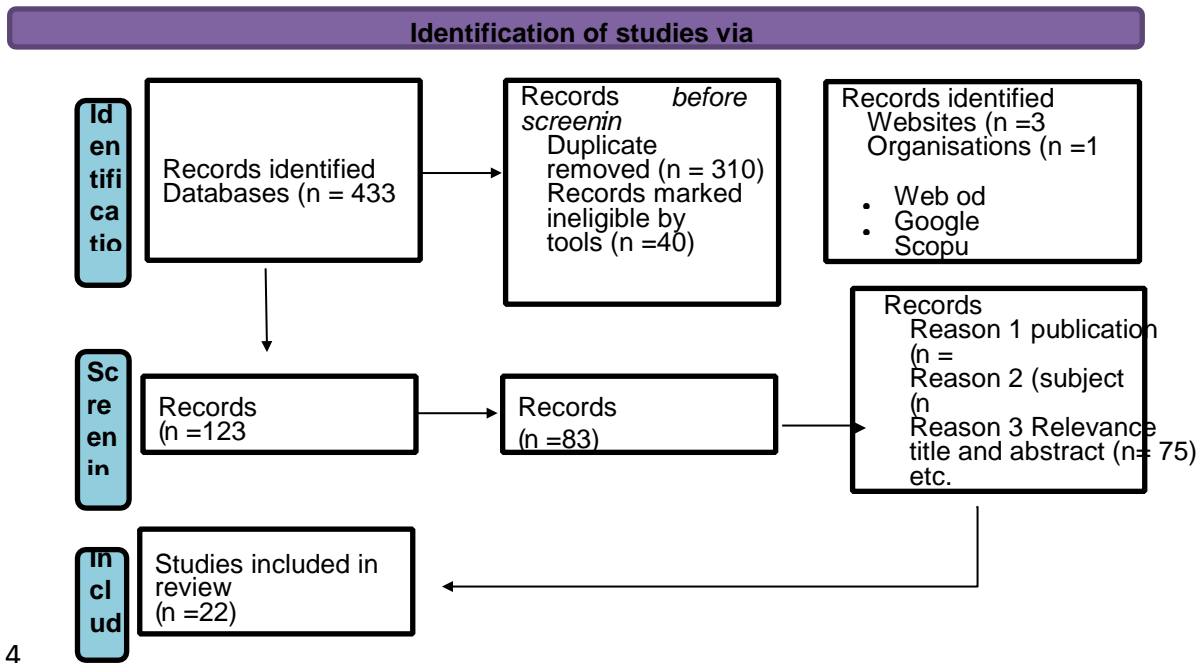
**Mots-clés:** Violence domestique, Grossesse, Santé mentale maternelle, Issues défavorables à la naissance, Méta-analyse

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## Introduction

The rapid expansion of short form video and live streaming platforms has transformed contemporary media consumption and social interaction, particularly among young women. In China, Douyin has emerged as a dominant digital platform where entertainment, social connection, and emotional engagement converge<sup>1</sup>. Among the most

popular content formats on Douyin are girl group live broadcasts, which combine musical performance, real time interaction, fandom culture, and audience participation. While these broadcasts provide entertainment and social gratification, increasing evidence suggests that sustained engagement may also have implications for viewers' mental health, particularly through the development of parasocial interaction<sup>1,3</sup>.



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Parasocial interaction refers to the one sided sense of intimacy that audiences develop with media figures despite the absence of reciprocal personal relationships. Initially conceptualized in the context of television and celebrity culture, parasocial interaction has become increasingly salient in interactive digital environments where streamers respond to comments, acknowledge viewers by name, and perform emotional labor in real time<sup>3,4</sup>. Live streaming platforms such as Douyin intensify parasocial dynamics by blurring the boundary between mediated communication and interpersonal interaction, thereby creating a strong sense of closeness and emotional connection<sup>5,6</sup>. Girl group live broadcasts are particularly effective in cultivating parasocial bonds through synchronized performances, collective identity, and continuous audience feedback.

Recent empirical research has begun to examine the relationship between parasocial interaction on short form video and live streaming platforms and mental health outcomes. Existing studies suggest that parasocial engagement may generate both positive and negative psychological effects. On the one hand, parasocial relationships can provide emotional comfort, perceived social support, and temporary relief from stress or loneliness<sup>7,8</sup>. On the other hand, strong parasocial

bonds have been associated with compulsive media use, emotional dependency, anxiety, and depressive symptoms, particularly when online engagement replaces offline social interaction<sup>2,9,10</sup>. These findings indicate that parasocial interaction operates as a complex psychological mechanism rather than a uniformly beneficial or harmful process.

Female viewers appear to be especially susceptible to parasocial dynamics in live streaming environments. Prior research indicates that women are more likely to form emotionally intense parasocial relationships with influencers, idols, and performers, particularly in fandom oriented contexts that emphasize identification, perceived similarity, and relational closeness<sup>5,11,12</sup>. Girl group live broadcasts on Douyin frequently target female audiences by emphasizing shared gender identity, aspirational narratives, and emotional companionship. As a result, parasocial engagement in these contexts may play a significant role in shaping female viewers' emotional wellbeing and psychological health<sup>7,8</sup>.

Despite the growing literature on parasocial interaction and mental health, several gaps remain. Much of the existing research focuses on Western platforms such as YouTube and Twitch, with limited attention to Douyin specific live streaming

environments. In addition, few studies have explicitly examined parasocial interaction as a central psychological mechanism linking live stream engagement to mental health outcomes. Gender focused analyses, particularly those examining female viewers of girl group live broadcasts, also remain underdeveloped despite evidence that gender moderates parasocial engagement and emotional outcomes<sup>5, 11</sup>.

Addressing these gaps is particularly important given the cultural and social significance of Douyin in China, where live streaming has become deeply embedded in everyday digital life. Understanding how parasocial interaction functions within girl group live broadcasts can provide important insights into the psychological processes through which digital entertainment environments influence mental health. Such evidence is essential for advancing parasocial interaction theory and informing platform design, content governance, and mental health awareness initiatives.

The present study investigates the relationship between parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes among female viewers of Douyin girl group live broadcasts using a quantitative research design. Drawing on parasocial interaction theory and empirical findings from short form video and live streaming research, this study examines how parasocial engagement relates to anxiety, depressive symptoms, and psychological distress. By focusing on a gender specific audience within a culturally distinctive platform context, the study seeks to contribute new empirical insights to the literature on digital media, parasocial relationships, and mental health.

## Methods

### *Review design*

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to synthesize empirical evidence on parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes among female viewers of live-streaming and short-form video platforms, with a particular focus on Douyin and fandom-oriented content such as girl-group live broadcasts. The review followed established systematic review principles and was reported in accordance with the

PRISMA guidelines, ensuring transparency, rigor, and reproducibility.

### *Search strategy and data sources*

A comprehensive literature search was conducted across major academic databases, including Web of Science, Scopus, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Searches were performed using predefined combinations of keywords such as parasocial interaction, parasocial relationships, live streaming, short-form video, Douyin, TikTok, mental health, anxiety, depression, psychological distress, and female audiences. Boolean operators and truncation were applied to refine results. Only peer-reviewed journal articles published in English were considered to ensure academic quality and comparability.

### *Inclusion and exclusion criteria*

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: examined parasocial interaction or parasocial relationships as a key construct, focused on live-streaming or short-form video platforms, reported mental health or psychological outcomes, and employed quantitative or mixed-methods empirical designs. Studies were excluded if they were purely theoretical, focused exclusively on traditional media, consisted of conference papers, dissertations, editorials, or were not peer reviewed. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts, 22 empirical studies published between 2018 and 2025 were retained for final analysis.

### *Data extraction and synthesis*

Relevant data were systematically extracted from each included study, including publication year, platform context, sample characteristics, key variables, analytical methods, and principal findings. Due to heterogeneity in research designs, measurement instruments, and outcome variables, a narrative synthesis approach was adopted rather than statistical meta-analysis. The synthesis focused on identifying consistent patterns, explanatory mechanisms, and gender-specific dynamics linking parasocial interaction to mental health outcomes.

## Results

### *Overview of included studies*

The final synthesis comprised 22 peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2018 and 2025 that examined parasocial interaction in live-streaming and short-form video environments. Most studies focused on platforms such as Douyin and TikTok, with samples primarily consisting of adolescents and young adults. Female participants were either overrepresented or explicitly analyzed in a majority of the reviewed studies, particularly those examining fandom-oriented content such as idol or girl-group live streams<sup>5,11,12</sup>. Methodologically, the included studies predominantly employed cross-sectional survey designs, with regression analysis and structural equation modeling as the most commonly used analytical approaches<sup>1,2,9</sup>.

List of articles are shown in table;

### *Parasocial interaction as a core psychological mechanism*

Across the reviewed literature, parasocial interaction consistently emerged as a central psychological construct shaping users' experiences in live-streaming environments. Studies uniformly reported that interactive affordances such as real-time feedback, emotional expressiveness, and perceived accessibility of performers significantly intensified parasocial bonds<sup>3,4,6</sup>. In fandom-oriented contexts, including girl-group live broadcasts, parasocial interaction was found to be particularly strong due to shared identity cues, aspirational narratives, and collective engagement rituals.<sup>5,13</sup>

### *Parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes*

A dominant pattern across the reviewed studies was the association between heightened parasocial interaction and negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety, depressive symptoms, emotional exhaustion, and psychological distress.<sup>1,2,9,10</sup> While several studies acknowledged short-term emotional comfort and perceived social support derived from parasocial engagement<sup>7,8</sup>, the overall evidence suggests that sustained or emotionally intense

parasocial bonds are linked to poorer mental health outcomes, particularly among heavy users of short-form video platforms.<sup>2,10,14</sup>

### *Role of compulsive viewing behavior*

A substantial proportion of the reviewed studies identified compulsive or problematic media use as a key mechanism through which parasocial interaction affects mental health. Evidence consistently showed that stronger parasocial bonds increased the likelihood of excessive viewing, loss of control, and emotional dependence on live-stream content, which in turn contributed to anxiety and depressive symptoms.<sup>2,10,15</sup> This mediating pathway was observed across multiple platforms and cultural contexts, suggesting a robust and recurring mechanism.<sup>1,9</sup>

### *Moderating influence of perceived social support*

The synthesis further revealed that the psychological consequences of parasocial interaction are conditional rather than uniform. Several studies reported that parasocial relationships provided emotional reassurance and a sense of belonging, which moderated the negative effects of parasocial interaction on mental health outcomes.<sup>7,8</sup> However, when parasocial engagement replaced offline social relationships or became emotionally demanding, mental health risks were amplified.<sup>9,14</sup>

### *Gender-specific and cultural patterns*

Gender-focused analyses within the reviewed studies consistently indicated that female users tend to form more emotionally intense parasocial relationships than male users, particularly in fandom-oriented live-streaming environments<sup>5,11,12</sup>. Studies conducted in the Chinese digital context emphasized cultural norms related to emotional labor, community belonging, and aspirational

## Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between parasocial interaction (PSI) and mental health outcomes among female viewers of Douyin

girl-group live broadcasts, with particular attention to the mediating role of compulsive viewing behavior and the moderating role of perceived social support. The findings provide strong empirical support for the proposed conceptual framework and extend existing literature by situating parasocial dynamics within a gender-specific, live-streaming context in China.

First, the results demonstrate a significant positive association between parasocial interaction and negative mental health outcomes, including anxiety and depressive symptoms. This finding aligns with a growing body of research suggesting that while parasocial relationships may offer emotional gratification, intense or sustained parasocial engagement can increase psychological vulnerability<sup>2, 9, 10</sup>. Prior studies on TikTok and short-form video platforms have similarly reported that strong parasocial bonds are associated with emotional dependency, loneliness, and psychological distress, particularly when parasocial engagement substitutes for offline social interaction<sup>1, 14, 22</sup>. The current findings reinforce the argument that parasocial interaction functions as a psychologically powerful but ambivalent mechanism—capable of both emotional comfort and mental strain—especially in highly immersive live-streaming environments.

Second, the strong positive relationship between parasocial interaction and compulsive viewing behavior provides important insight into the behavioral pathway linking digital engagement to mental health. Consistent with earlier work on short-form video addiction and live-streaming engagement<sup>2, 15, 20</sup> the findings suggest that emotional attachment to girl-group performers increases viewers' motivation to remain continuously connected, leading to excessive and uncontrollable viewing patterns. This supports socio-technical perspectives that emphasize the interaction between psychological attachment and platform affordances, such as algorithmic recommendation, real-time interaction, and monetization features in driving compulsive use<sup>9, 21</sup>. By empirically confirming this association in a Douyin live-streaming context, the study extends prior platform-agnostic findings to a culturally specific and rapidly expanding digital ecosystem.

Third, the mediation analysis reveals that compulsive viewing behavior partially explains the relationship between parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes. This finding is consistent with earlier studies demonstrating that parasocial bonds contribute to psychological distress indirectly by fostering maladaptive usage patterns<sup>2, 10</sup>. The partial nature of the mediation suggests that parasocial interaction influences mental health through multiple pathways, including emotional investment, identity attachment, and social comparison, beyond behavioral overuse alone. This nuance advances the literature by highlighting that parasocial interaction is not merely a precursor to compulsive consumption but also an independent emotional process with direct psychological consequences.

The moderation results further enrich the interpretation by demonstrating that perceived social support derived from parasocial engagement can buffer the negative effects of parasocial interaction on mental health. This finding echoes prior research suggesting that parasocial relationships may provide emotional reassurance, companionship, and perceived understanding, particularly for individuals experiencing social isolation or stress<sup>7, 8</sup>. Importantly, the moderating effect observed in this study suggests that parasocial interaction is not uniformly harmful; rather, its psychological impact depends on whether viewers experience parasocial engagement as supportive or as emotionally demanding<sup>17</sup>. This aligns with compensatory social interaction models, which propose that parasocial bonds may function adaptively under certain conditions but become maladaptive when reliance intensifies or expectations remain unmet.

Gender-specific dynamics are central to interpreting these findings. Consistent with earlier research showing that female audiences tend to form more emotionally intense parasocial relationships in fandom-oriented contexts<sup>5, 11</sup>, the present study highlights how girl-group live broadcasts amplify affective engagement through shared gender identity, aspirational narratives, and relational framing. These features may strengthen emotional bonds while simultaneously increasing susceptibility to psychological strain<sup>18</sup>. By focusing

exclusively on female viewers, the study contributes to the literature by demonstrating how parasocial interaction operates differently across audience groups and content genres, an area that has received limited empirical attention<sup>19</sup>.

Taken together, the findings extend existing parasocial interaction theory by situating it within a contemporary live-streaming environment characterized by high interactivity, algorithmic personalization, and monetized emotional exchange. While prior studies have largely examined parasocial relationships in asynchronous or influencer-based contexts, this study shows that real-time, performance-based live streams can intensify both the benefits and risks associated with parasocial engagement. The results underscore the need to conceptualize parasocial interaction not as a uniformly positive or negative phenomenon, but as a context-dependent psychological process shaped by platform design, content genre, and individual viewer characteristics.

## Strengths and limitations

This study has several notable strengths. First, it focuses on a platform-specific and culturally relevant context, namely Douyin girl-group live broadcasts, which have received limited empirical attention despite their popularity. Second, by concentrating on female viewers, the study addresses gender-specific dynamics in parasocial interaction that are often overlooked in mixed-gender analyses. Third, the study employs a theory-driven conceptual framework that integrates parasocial interaction theory with behavioral and psychological mechanisms, allowing for a nuanced examination of both direct and indirect effects. Fourth, the use of validated measurement scales and advanced statistical techniques, including mediation and moderation analysis, enhances the robustness and credibility of the findings. Finally, the study provides practical implications that are directly relevant to digital platform governance, content production, and mental health awareness initiatives.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to draw causal inferences about the relationship

between parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes. Longitudinal research is needed to examine changes in parasocial engagement and psychological well-being over time. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, including social desirability and recall bias. Third, the use of non-probability purposive sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond female Douyin users who actively engage with girl-group live broadcasts. Fourth, the study focuses primarily on negative mental health outcomes, while future research could examine positive psychological effects such as empowerment, motivation, or identity development. Finally, cultural factors specific to China may shape parasocial dynamics in ways that differ from other national contexts, suggesting the need for cross-cultural comparative studies.

## Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between parasocial interaction and mental health outcomes among female viewers of girl-group live broadcasts on Douyin. The findings provide clear evidence that parasocial interaction is a significant psychological mechanism shaping viewers' emotional well-being. Stronger parasocial bonds were associated with higher levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms, and this relationship was partially explained by compulsive viewing behavior. At the same time, perceived social support emerged as an important buffering factor, mitigating some of the negative mental health effects associated with parasocial engagement.

By situating parasocial interaction within a live-streaming and fandom-oriented context, the study extends existing parasocial interaction theory to highly interactive digital environments. The results highlight that parasocial relationships formed through live broadcasts are not passive or symbolic but actively influence viewers' behavioral patterns and psychological states. Focusing on female audiences further advances the literature by shedding light on gender-specific dynamics that have received limited empirical attention, particularly within Chinese digital platforms.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of viewing live-streaming platforms as

socio-emotional environments with tangible mental health implications. As short-form video and live-streaming technologies continue to evolve, understanding the psychological processes underlying parasocial engagement becomes increasingly critical. The findings call for balanced approaches that acknowledge the emotional value of parasocial interaction while addressing its potential risks, thereby contributing to healthier digital engagement and more informed platform governance.

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Completed primary	986 (19.9)
Completed secondary	585 (11.8)

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- Nichols D, Ladipo OA, Paxman JM and Otolorin EO. Sexual behaviour, contraceptive practice, and reproductive health among Nigerian adolescents. *Stud Fam Plann* 1986; 17(2): 100-6.
- Oppong C. Responsible fatherhood and birth planning. In: Oppong C (Ed.). *Sex Roles, Population, and Development in West Africa*. New Hampshire: Heinemann,

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