Understanding Human Acceptance and Use of Self-Media: An Integrative Review and Research Framework

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Abstract

Creator-led social media has expanded opportunities for people to encounter information, maintain relationships, express identities and produce content for others. Yet research on adoption, engagement, influencer persuasion, algorithmic curation and creator labour often develops in separate conversations, making it difficult to explain how an individual becomes, remains or ceases to be a user. This integrative review synthesizes selected peer-reviewed research published from 2020 to 2024 and proposes a human–platform–creator framework. It distinguishes initial acceptance from consumption, interaction, content creation and continued or discontinued use, and treats these activities as related but not inevitable stages. The framework links individual motivations and capabilities with social relationships, creator credibility, platform affordances, algorithmic exposure and institutional conditions. Trust operates at several levels: users may trust a creator, a particular claim or the platform to different degrees. Benefits, including information, belonging and creative opportunity, coexist with misinformation, privacy loss, unequal visibility, fatigue and commercial pressure. Evidence from different methods does not support a single causal account: survey associations, experimental interventions and qualitative creator accounts answer different questions. The review recommends longitudinal and comparative research, activity-specific behavioural measures, transparent study of recommendation systems and inclusive attention to underrepresented users. Its practical contribution is to explain why acceptance and use should be assessed by meaningful participation, user agency and verifiable outcomes rather than engagement counts alone.

Keywords: creator-led social media; user-generated content; technology acceptance; user engagement; trust; algorithmic curation; creator economy; digital well-being

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I. INTRODUCTION

Social media has changed the relationship between people who produce information and people who receive it. An individual can publish a short video, respond to a viewer, recommend a product, correct another user's claim and seek an audience without owning a conventional media organization. Conversely, another individual may use the same service only to read, watch or maintain a small private network. The umbrella expression “self-media” captures a meaningful development: people can create and distribute media under their own identities or channels. It also hides diversity. Individual creators differ from institutional news organizations, and a user who encounters a creator's post differs from one who becomes a regular contributor. An explanation of acceptance must therefore address both access to a platform and the social practices that make its use worthwhile.

Research has generated valuable, but fragmented, explanations. Studies of technology continuance emphasize expectations, satisfaction and habit; engagement research distinguishes cognitive, emotional and behavioural participation; influencer studies investigate perceived authenticity, credibility and parasocial relationships; and platform studies consider recommendation, governance and economic dependence [Yan et al., 2021; Trunfio & Rossi, 2021; Cheung et al., 2022; Bleier et al., 2024]. These literatures do not always use the same outcome. A favourable attitude toward a creator, an intention to open an application, a comment on a post and an independently verified purchase are distinct observations. Treating them as interchangeable can

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make evidence appear more consistent than it is and can make an attractive platform feature look like proof of beneficial use.

The term acceptance itself needs clarification. Initial acceptance refers here to an individual's willingness to encounter, join or try a creator-led social media service. It is related to, but not identical with, trust in a particular content producer or belief in a particular claim. Use refers to observable or reported activities performed through the service, from reading and watching to commenting, remixing, publishing and monetizing. Continuance refers to repeated use over time; it may reflect satisfaction but may also reflect habit, social dependence, obligations or a lack of alternatives. Discontinuance is not necessarily a failure: reducing exposure, changing settings or leaving a service may be an intentional response to costs.

This review asks three questions. First, which individual, social and technological conditions influence acceptance of creator-led media? Second, how do people move among consumption, interaction and creation, and what distinguishes intended from actual behaviour? Third, how do trust, algorithmic governance and perceived benefits and risks shape continuing, changing or stopping participation? The aim is not to identify one universal factor or claim that all platforms have the same effects. Instead, the review brings together evidence about human decision-making and platform organization in a framework that can be tested across contexts.

The contribution is threefold. The review separates platform acceptance, content credibility and creator trust; it connects audience activity with the conditions under which creators make content; and it treats well-being and agency as outcomes that may differ from retention or advertising conversion. The resulting framework is conceptual rather than a statistically estimated model. Its proposed relationships are informed by selected studies, but the review does not present a new dataset, a meta-analysis or causal estimates of its own.

II. REVIEW SCOPE AND APPROACH

A. Defining the field

For this review, creator-led social media refers to platform-mediated environments in which identifiable individuals or small groups regularly publish material for audiences and can receive feedback, build relationships or obtain economic returns. Examples include video-sharing services, livestreaming, blogging, personal public accounts and creator communities. The definition emphasizes practices and relationships rather than any one brand. It includes professional creators and occasional contributors, while recognizing that production capacity, audience size and commercial incentives vary widely. Institutional accounts and private interpersonal messaging provide relevant comparison contexts, but they are not presumed to operate like independent creator channels.

The review uses “self-media” as a broad label, not as a claim that media production is independent of platforms. Hosts design interfaces, recommend content, set access rules, moderate speech, collect data and distribute revenue. Creator autonomy is therefore conditional. A person can choose a topic while depending on infrastructure, visibility rankings and payment arrangements that the individual does not control. The creator-economy literature makes this dependence visible by examining platforms as intermediaries that connect creators, audiences and advertisers, organize creation tools and enable monetization [Bleier et al., 2024]. Research on content creators similarly shows adaptation to changes in platform features and audience expectations [Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020].

B. Evidence selection and interpretation

The article is an integrative narrative review of selected journal research first published or published in an issue between 2020 and 2024. Searches combined terms for social media acceptance, continuance, content creation, engagement, authenticity, algorithmic recommendations, information quality, privacy, fatigue and well-being. Studies were selected for relevance to at least one mechanism in the proposed framework and for verifiable journal and DOI metadata. The evidence includes systematic reviews and meta-analyses, experiments, surveys and qualitative work, allowing comparison of different research designs. Original

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article titles and DOI records were checked against publisher pages or bibliographic records; publications outside the stated period were excluded.

The selection is purposeful rather than exhaustive. It is not presented as a PRISMA systematic review: no predefined comprehensive database search, independent dual screening or complete count of excluded records is claimed. Peer-reviewed research can still contain methodological limitations, and a journal's reputation does not resolve problems of construct validity or sampling bias. Studies addressing general social media, influencer marketing, online health or political information are used when they illuminate relevant mechanisms; their findings should not automatically be generalized to every creator, community or platform. The framework integrates them as propositions that require further testing rather than as pooled effect sizes.

The review organizes evidence by the outcome being explained: initial acceptance, the activity chosen, creator–audience relationships, continuance or withdrawal, and individual or societal consequences. Across these outcomes it distinguishes antecedents from mediators and moderators. A motivation such as entertainment may precede use; perceived enjoyment may mediate a feature's effect on satisfaction; and age, accessibility or commercial disclosure may alter an association. The same variable can occupy different roles in different studies, so a pathway must be specified before it is tested. This organization also avoids assuming that a large number of interactions is equivalent to learning, trust or personal benefit [Trunfio & Rossi, 2021].

III. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK

A. From intention to actual use

Technology-acceptance perspectives ask why a person regards a system as useful, manageable or worth trying. In creator-led media, usefulness can mean practical advice, entertainment, community membership or a chance to reach an audience. Ease of use may arise from an accessible interface, low-cost editing tools, familiar sharing conventions or captions. These perceptions are situated: a simple video tool may be convenient for a confident creator yet difficult for a person with impaired vision or limited connectivity. Acceptance is therefore better understood as a relationship between a person and an activity than as an inherent property of an application.

Intention is an important outcome, but not a substitute for use. A person may intend to publish and never finish a video because editing requires time, because an employer discourages public expression or because exposure to strangers feels risky. Conversely, someone may repeatedly open a service without planning to do so. Research on online continuance shows that psychological, technological, social and behavioural factors affect post-adoption decisions and that intention and behaviour can diverge [Yan et al., 2021]. For empirical work, adoption should be measured separately as registration, first exposure or first purposeful session, and continuance should be defined by a stated period and a specified activity.

Uses-and-gratifications approaches begin from the purposes people pursue. A person may seek advice, relax after work, follow a community or present an identity; several motives can coexist in a single session. A qualitative study of young adults' participation in TikTok challenges identified motives including entertainment, communication, information seeking, social interaction and escape [Falgoust et al., 2022]. Such categories explain why users approach the same affordance differently, but a reported motive can be reconstructed after the fact. The framework therefore treats motivations as dynamic expectations that can change when people experience benefits, disappointments or social consequences.

B. Engagement, relationships and exposure

Engagement is not one behaviour. Reading a post, saving it, sharing it privately, commenting publicly and creating a response entail different effort, visibility and risk. The engagement literature identifies cognitive, affective and behavioural dimensions and shows that measures are often inconsistent across studies [Trunfio & Rossi, 2021]. For creators, a view may register exposure without

comprehension; for users, a “like” may acknowledge a friend rather than indicate persuasion. Engagement counts are meaningful only when the action, audience and analytical purpose are explicit.

Relational perspectives explain why creators can become familiar and influential. Repeated exposure and direct address may produce a sense of connection even when the relationship is asymmetric. However, a parasocial interaction during one video and a parasocial relationship that develops over time are different constructs. Research on creator content characteristics and consumer activities reports pathways involving parasocial relationships and identification [Cheung et al., 2022]; an experimental study of disclosure, perceived authenticity and liking examines message acceptance in a parasocial context [Nah, 2022]. These findings support plausible relational mechanisms, not an assumption that followers always trust or agree with creators.

Algorithmic curation changes the opportunity to form these relationships. A user's feed results from interactions among prior choices, platform ranking, available content and the behaviour of other participants. Exposure is not equivalent to persuasion, and a ranking change may affect time spent without changing attitudes. In large experiments conducted during the 2020 US election, moving participants from algorithmic to chronological feeds changed use patterns but did not detect significant changes in several political attitudes over the study period [Guess et al., 2023]. A related experiment reduced exposure to like-minded sources without measurable changes on specified polarization measures [Nyhan et al., 2023]. These bounded findings caution against attributing every individual outcome to an algorithm alone.

C. The proposed framework

The proposed framework has five connected components. First, individual resources and motives include goals, experience, digital skills, time and personal circumstances. Second, social and creator relations include peers, communities, perceived similarity, creator credibility and commercial relationships. Third, platform arrangements include interface affordances, recommendation, moderation, accessibility and monetization rules. Fourth, people form situated evaluations of expected value, ease, trust, relevance and risk. Fifth, they engage in practices and consequences: consuming, interacting, creating, continuing, reducing or leaving, with effects on knowledge, relationships, well-being and opportunity.

The components interact rather than operate in a fixed sequence. A platform may prompt initial exposure before a person has consciously accepted a creator; a comment can change how that creator is perceived; and a privacy incident can change future posting choices. Feedback from an audience can encourage further creation or make a user more cautious. The framework therefore depicts a recurring cycle: encounter and appraisal lead to action; experience produces learning and consequences; those consequences reshape later opportunities and evaluations. It does not imply that every user moves from passive viewing to professional content creation.

Three cross-cutting distinctions structure the framework. The first is the unit of trust: trust in a platform's data practices differs from trust in a creator's expertise and confidence in a specific claim. The second is the unit of behaviour: viewing, responding and publishing require separate measures. The third is the distribution of consequences: a recommendation system may improve discovery for some users while exposing other creators to opaque visibility or unequal burdens [Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Zeng & Kaye, 2022]. Researchers should examine these distinctions instead of treating “social media use” as a single cause or outcome.

IV. WHY PEOPLE ACCEPT CREATOR-LED MEDIA

A. Utility, enjoyment and access

People initially encounter creator-led media through personal recommendations, search, embedded links or platform-curated feeds. Early evaluation is often practical: can the user quickly locate useful material, understand the interface and control what happens next? Information utility can involve a product demonstration, a local alert, a skill tutorial or a personal account of a health experience.

Utility is not the same as correctness. A vivid explanation may feel useful even when its evidence is incomplete, so acceptance should be separated from independent assessment of content quality.

Entertainment is another route into use. Short videos, humour, music and live interaction provide immediate rewards that may require little prior knowledge. Research on TikTok user experiences indicates that platform affordances and the experience of discovery contribute to its appeal, although qualitative findings should be interpreted in relation to the studied users and period [Schellewald, 2023]. Enjoyment can coexist with instrumental goals: a person may watch an entertaining explanation while learning about an unfamiliar issue. A design that makes a topic approachable can lower participation barriers, but it can also reward dramatic simplification when attention is limited.

Accessibility shapes whether expected value can be realized. Captioning, text alternatives, screen-reader compatibility, language choice, data costs and interface complexity affect participation before any creator relationship forms. A public account may be technically available while its content is not practically accessible to a person with a disability, an older device or limited bandwidth. Digital skills also matter: finding a creator, distinguishing an advertisement, changing a privacy setting and evaluating an unfamiliar claim are different capabilities. A simple acceptance question that asks whether a person “uses social media” cannot capture these differences.

Perceived ease also has a social dimension. People may feel that a platform is easy to navigate but difficult to inhabit because unfamiliar norms make posting embarrassing or risky. The apparent informality of creator-led content does not remove the need to learn how to address an audience, attribute a source or recognize a joke. For new creators, basic production tools can reduce technical costs, yet a decision to publish may remain constrained by fear of criticism or uncertainty about intellectual-property rules. Research should therefore measure ease of task execution and confidence in managing its social consequences separately.

B. Social influence and identity

People rarely decide about platforms in isolation. A friend may send a video that creates the first encounter; a school community may coordinate through a service; or a professional network may make an account valuable. Social influence can supply information about what others find worthwhile, but it can also create pressure to participate. A person who joins to remain reachable is not necessarily persuaded that the platform is desirable. Distinguishing voluntary interest from perceived obligation helps explain why acceptance can coexist with ambivalence.

Identity affects the type of participation that feels safe and rewarding. A user may prefer a pseudonym for political discussion, a public professional identity for career development and a private account for family communication. These choices are not merely privacy preferences: they determine which audiences can recognize the user and which forms of participation are possible. An identity that supports credibility in one setting may create vulnerability in another. Researchers should avoid assuming that public posting reflects confidence or that silent reading reflects indifference; silence may be a rational choice under unequal social risk.

Creator similarity can make content accessible through a shared language, background or experience. Yet perceived similarity should not be confused with representativeness or expertise. A familiar creator may provide emotional support while lacking relevant professional training; an expert may be trustworthy on one subject but not on another. Evidence from influencer research links source credibility and perceived relational closeness to travel and consumer intentions in specific settings [Balaban et al., 2022; Yılmazdoğan et al., 2021]. The appropriate inference is conditional: similarity and credibility may help explain acceptance when the topic, audience and relationship make them relevant.

C. Anticipated risks and initial trust

Prospective users consider potential costs, even if those concerns are not always articulated. Data collection, unwanted messages, misleading content, public criticism and reputational consequences can discourage participation. A potential creator must

also weigh the possible reuse of images or words beyond the original audience. Initial trust is therefore multidimensional. A user might trust a creator's motives but not the platform's handling of personal data, or trust a platform's security while doubting the accuracy of an influencer's product claims.

Disclosing commercial relationships is a concrete test of trust. An endorsement can provide useful information, but a viewer may interpret a paid recommendation differently from an unsolicited personal opinion. Research on social-media endorsements examines how disclosure and source credibility relate to purchase intentions [Weismueller et al., 2020]. Its relevance extends beyond shopping: visibility of incentives helps a viewer understand why a message was produced. At the same time, a disclosure label does not independently verify a claim, and a creator's prior disclosure does not remove the need to assess the substance of a new recommendation.

V. HOW PEOPLE USE AND CREATE SELF-MEDIA

A. Consumption and interpretation

Consumption includes more than passive screen time. Users scan headlines, watch videos, listen to streams, save instructions and compare creators. These actions differ in attention, intention and consequences. A user can watch a health video for entertainment, revisit it for advice or show it to a family member; each use creates a different path from exposure to possible action. Methods that record only total minutes erase those distinctions and risk attributing outcomes to a platform when content type or social situation is the more relevant factor.

Interpretation depends on the interaction between content and prior knowledge. Users may judge a creator by apparent competence, production quality, consistency or comments from others. These cues are imperfect. Professional editing can increase perceived quality without increasing factual accuracy; a low-budget video can offer reliable first-hand knowledge. Meaning is also co-produced by audience comments, captions, editing and platform labels. A creator's statement can be understood differently when a viewer sees an explanatory discussion than when the same excerpt circulates without context.

Consumption can support learning when viewers compare sources, apply information and receive feedback. It can also support community membership when a person recognizes shared experiences without posting. But the cognitive effort required varies with the task. Following a recipe and evaluating a medical claim demand different kinds of evidence. Reviews of influencer health research show that effects depend on the intervention and outcome studied; for example, evidence on food promotion cannot be converted into a general estimate of effects on all health decisions [Powell & Pring, 2024]. The framework therefore distinguishes perceived usefulness, knowledge gained and verified behaviour.

B. Interaction, sharing and community

Interaction includes liking, reacting, commenting, forwarding, joining live chat and responding to other users. Each action has a distinct social visibility. A private share may support a trusted relationship, whereas a public comment can expose a user to a much wider audience. Sharing can also signal identity or group membership rather than agreement with every detail of a post. Consequently, counts of reposts should not automatically be interpreted as the number of people who have read, believed or endorsed a claim.

The decision to share information may be affected by whether accuracy is salient at the moment of choice. Experimental research has shown that accuracy-focused prompts can improve the quality of shared news in studied settings [Pennycook et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2022]. This finding does not imply that all misinformation is accidental or that one prompt can replace platform governance. It suggests an actionable distinction between what a person would judge accurate when asked and what the person is likely to share while attending to other goals, such as entertainment or signalling. Effects, persistence and unintended consequences must still be tested in each context.

Interactions also create social resources. A reply may provide support, correct an error or connect a

user with others who share a problem. A community can make specialized information easier to understand through practical examples, while its norms can discourage some questions or dissent. Researchers should distinguish the existence of interaction from its quality: a long thread may contain collaborative explanation, harassment or repetitive promotion. An integrated assessment needs measures of civility, responsiveness, perceived safety and opportunity to leave, not only interaction volume.

C. Creation, production and monetization

Creation includes writing, recording, editing, remixing, curating and moderating one's own audience. Not every contributor seeks to become a paid influencer. Some document daily life or exchange advice with a small community; others treat content production as part of professional identity or a source of income. Entering creation requires capabilities that differ from those required for viewing: producing a video entails equipment, time, consent decisions and choices about how to respond to feedback. Monetization adds commercial arrangements, contractual obligations and the possibility that income depends on platform decisions.

Creators also learn through experimentation. They may adjust titles, timing, format or cross-platform distribution after observing audience response. A study of creator sharing frequency and engagement takes a creator-centred perspective on how posting behaviour and user responses interact [Tafesse & Dayan, 2023]. Such associations are useful for understanding production, but they do not establish that frequent posting always causes audience growth: existing popularity, resources, platform changes and content quality can affect both frequency and engagement. Practical guidance should therefore encourage experiments and transparent measurement rather than universal posting rules.

Platform affordances are resources and constraints at the same time. Livestreaming permits immediate interaction, but it also requires real-time moderation and can make personal boundaries harder to maintain. Research on participatory branding describes how creator and audience activity jointly shape live-streaming practices [Meisner & Ledbetter, 2022]. Cross-platform creation can diversify access to audiences, yet it requires repeated editing, community management and adaptation to different rules. The capability to distribute independently should not be mistaken for independence from infrastructure, audience metrics or advertising markets.

VI. TRUST, AUTHENTICITY AND ALGORITHMIC CURATION

A. Three levels of trust

Platform trust concerns the service's reliability, security, moderation and data governance. Creator trust concerns the perceived honesty, competence and responsiveness of a person or channel. Content trust concerns whether a specific statement is supported by appropriate evidence. These evaluations can reinforce one another but should not be collapsed. A platform can host a reliable expert alongside misleading content; a trusted creator can make an incorrect statement; and a sound claim can appear in a post whose sponsor is not transparent. The framework expects each level to influence different actions, such as registering, following, sharing or acting on advice.

Perceived authenticity is particularly important in creator settings because audiences often value signs of sincerity, distinctive voice and disclosure of personal experiences. Scale-development research treats influencer authenticity as multidimensional rather than a single visual style [Lee & Eastin, 2021]. However, authenticity is a perception, not proof that every recommendation is impartial. A creator may be personally sincere and still have limited expertise or a financial incentive. For researchers, authenticity and factual accuracy should be measured independently; for users, a credible presentation should invite verification rather than replace it.

Parasocial relationships can strengthen attention and identification, but they also complicate the interpretation of consent and influence. A viewer may feel close to a creator who does not know the viewer personally; the creator, meanwhile, may experience pressure to be continually available.

Studies of influencer persuasion find associations between relational closeness, credibility and purchase-related outcomes in specific samples [Balaban et al., 2022; Hess et al., 2022; Masuda et al., 2022]. The strength and direction of these associations can depend on topic and audience. A review should not assume that every close relationship is manipulative or that every sponsored recommendation is untrustworthy.

B. Exposure, ranking and agency

Recommendation systems select and order a subset of available material. They may use previous views, inferred interests, engagement signals and other information that users cannot fully observe. Discovery benefits can be substantial: a new user may find a small creator without knowing the creator's name, and a specialist community may reach people beyond its existing network. Yet recommendation can also concentrate attention, reduce opportunities for some creators or make people uncertain about why they see particular content. A study of a change in Twitter's news ranking found advantages for already prominent outlets in its setting, illustrating that distribution effects can be uneven [Dujeancourt & Garz, 2023].

The existence of ranking does not mean that user choice disappears. People choose whom to follow, which posts to ignore and whether to search outside a feed. Nor does the absence of an observed effect in one experiment establish that all algorithms are harmless. The US election experiments provide unusually strong evidence about particular interventions, populations and time horizons; their null results for measured political attitudes should be interpreted within those boundaries [Nyhan et al., 2023; Guess et al., 2023]. Other outcomes, groups, languages and longer exposure periods require separate study. A well-designed evaluation reports both what was changed and what remained unchanged.

For creators, uncertainty about visibility can affect behaviour before the outcome is measurable. Interviews with creators describe effort devoted to interpreting rules, sustaining publication and negotiating perceived suppression [Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020; Duffy & Meisner, 2023; Zeng & Kaye, 2022]. Such accounts reveal lived experience; they do not by themselves prove the internal operation of a platform's ranking system. Users need meaningful options to understand and contest decisions, while researchers need methods that combine creator accounts with audits, trace data and independent tests where access is lawful and ethical.

C. Advertising and the creator economy

The creator economy connects audiences, creators, platforms, advertisers and other intermediaries. Revenue can support expertise and make sustained content possible, but paid arrangements also affect what is promoted and what is left unsaid. A commercial relationship can be visible through a sponsorship label, affiliate link or direct sale; it can also be difficult for audiences to interpret. The analytical question is not whether monetization is inherently incompatible with authenticity, but how incentives, disclosure, editorial control and evidence affect trust over time.

Meta-analytic research on influencers suggests that characteristics of creators and audiences have measurable relationships with marketing outcomes, while also documenting substantial variation across studies [Han & Balabanis, 2024; Lee et al., 2024]. Purchase intention is common in this literature, but it is not the same as an observed transaction, long-term product satisfaction or an informed consumer decision. A platform or brand that evaluates a campaign only by immediate clicks may overlook audience confusion, reputational harm or the unequal compensation of smaller creators. More informative designs follow outcomes beyond the first interaction and report sponsorship arrangements.

VII. BENEFITS, RISKS AND UNEQUAL CONSEQUENCES

A. Information, participation and support

Creator-led media can make specialized information easier to encounter. Independent educators explain unfamiliar concepts, practitioners demonstrate tools, and people with lived experience describe problems that formal institutions may overlook. Their value often lies in translation: a creator turns a technical report into an accessible example, or a community gathers practical questions

that an institution has not answered. The quality of this translation varies. A responsible account distinguishes a personal experience from evidence that an outcome will occur for everyone, and identifies when professional or local advice is needed.

Participation can also provide opportunities for expression and recognition. Users with geographically dispersed interests can form communities, and creators can reach audiences that traditional gatekeepers might not have served. Public conversation can generate corrections, shared resources and collective action. These opportunities are conditional on moderation, accessibility, language and social norms. A participant facing hostile replies may withdraw even when content is nominally open to everyone; another may safely participate through private sharing or pseudonymous accounts. Successful participation should therefore be assessed through meaningful choice and perceived safety, rather than volume alone.

Health communication illustrates both promise and risk. Influencers can draw attention to support services or explain unfamiliar experiences, but users may encounter promotional claims, selective evidence or advice outside the creator's competence. A systematic review of influencer interventions reports differing effects across outcomes and contexts [Powell & Pring, 2024]. In a separate systematic review, social media exposure and youth health-risk behaviours were studied across heterogeneous observational literature [Purba et al., 2023]. Neither body of work justifies treating all health content as harmful or assuming that popular health content is medically reliable. Source expertise, commercial interest, population and outcome must be specified.

B. Privacy, context collapse and safety

Self-disclosure can generate connection, yet it also creates records that may outlast the situation in which they were produced. A post intended for friends may reach employers, strangers or future audiences; a comment may be copied into a different discussion. This change of audience can alter the perceived cost of participation. The issue is not merely how much information a person shares, but whether they understand who can access it, how it can be reused and what recourse exists when expectations are violated. Privacy is therefore a condition of meaningful choice as well as a perceived risk.

Privacy decisions are dynamic and relational. Sharing a photograph may expose other people; tagging a friend may reveal a relationship; a creator may disclose family information while pursuing a professional audience. Consent by the account holder does not automatically mean that all affected people have consented. Users may also have limited capacity to assess technical data collection, while privacy settings can change over time. Studies should examine actual settings, disclosures and experiences alongside surveys of concern, and avoid interpreting continued use as unconditional acceptance of every data practice.

Creators face safety concerns that are not captured by ordinary consumer models. Public visibility may bring harassment, identity-based abuse, impersonation or unwanted contact. Research on creator precarity and algorithmic visibility describes the uncertainty experienced by people who depend on platforms for reach or income [Duffy et al., 2021; Duffy & Meisner, 2023]. These qualitative accounts identify mechanisms and perceived harms; they do not establish a population prevalence rate. Platform responses should offer accessible reporting, clear explanations and meaningful appeal while protecting the rights of users who are moderated.

C. Fatigue, well-being and discontinuance

Frequent connection can produce benefits and burdens at the same time. Information overload, demands to respond and the pressure to remain visible may be experienced as fatigue. Research has developed measures that distinguish cognitive, emotional and behavioural aspects of social-media fatigue [Zhang et al., 2021]. In a study of young UK users during pandemic lockdown, perceived information overload was associated with fatigue and discontinuance intention [Liu et al., 2021]. Because that setting was unusual and the measures were not an experiment on platform shutdown, it should not be generalized into a universal causal effect of all social-media use.

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Well-being evidence also requires careful interpretation. An umbrella review reports that reviews of social media and well-being reach different conclusions, partly because they use different concepts, measures and designs [Valkenburg, 2022]. Meta-analytic evidence concerning problematic use and mental health [Huang, 2022] addresses a narrower construct than ordinary participation. Time spent, passive viewing, social support, harmful exposure and compulsive use should not be treated as identical. For individuals, average associations may conceal differences across context and personal vulnerability; for researchers, reverse causality and confounding remain central concerns.

Reducing use is one possible form of agency. People can mute accounts, remove notifications, take breaks, change platforms or stop publishing while continuing to read. These responses may improve control, but they can also entail costs if work, friendships or public services depend on a particular platform. A continuance study should therefore examine the attractiveness of available alternatives and the reasons for staying, not assume that retention signals satisfaction. Equally, withdrawal should not automatically be framed as a negative outcome for the user.

D. Inequality and differentiated participation

The capacity to accept and use self-media is unevenly distributed. Access to a device and connection is only the first requirement; language, disability accommodations, digital skills, time, income, education and social support shape what a person can actually do. People also differ in the consequences of visibility. A public profile may provide professional opportunity for one creator while increasing safety risks for another. Inequality can thus occur at the point of access, during participation and in the distribution of rewards.

Age is relevant but should not function as a substitute for individual capability. Research on older adults' technology intentions highlights heterogeneity in attitudes, perceived usefulness and barriers [Zhao et al., 2021]. Assuming that all older users are reluctant or that all younger users are skilled overlooks training, health, prior experience and the role of support. Comparative work should examine specific tasks—for example, finding reliable information or changing an audience setting—and consider how family, community and institutional assistance shape outcomes.

Creators in marginalized communities can face additional uncertainty about visibility and moderation. In interview research, creators described experiences and interpretations of algorithmic invisibility in relation to identity or content category [Duffy & Meisner, 2023]. Their accounts make unequal participation a question that requires investigation, including possible differences in both automated ranking and human moderation. Robust analysis should combine qualitative evidence with comparable observations, recognize that platforms disclose only partial information and avoid claiming discrimination from an individual decline in views alone.

VIII. AN INTEGRATED EXPLANATION OF ACCEPTANCE AND USE

A. A cyclical account

The framework begins with a situation rather than a platform. A person has a goal, faces a need or receives a social invitation; the platform offers a set of possible actions; and a creator or piece of content becomes visible through search, recommendation or a social connection. Initial acceptance depends on the expected value of an activity relative to its effort and perceived costs. A user can accept the service while remaining sceptical of a creator, or trust a creator while disliking the service's privacy practices. These distinctions help identify where an intervention should operate.

Use then generates experiences that can confirm or revise expectations. A useful tutorial can strengthen perceived value; an inaccurate recommendation can weaken content trust; a hostile response can alter willingness to post. The same experience can have different implications for different people. Rapid feedback may motivate a professional creator who has moderation support, yet overwhelm a newcomer. Consequently, “satisfaction” should be measured with a specific object and time horizon: satisfaction

with a video, interaction, creator relationship or platform is not necessarily interchangeable.

Feedback influences future opportunities as well as individual evaluations. A platform may use prior activity to select later content, while creators adjust material in response to audience signals. This creates a cycle in which the user influences exposure and exposure shapes subsequent choices. The cycle need not be stable: a user can deliberately search for a new source, remove a recommendation, follow a different creator or leave. The framework treats user agency as constrained but real, and platform influence as important but not the only source of behaviour.

B. Proposed mechanisms and boundaries

The first proposition is that perceived value and manageable effort are likely to support initial use when the service gives access to a goal the person values. The proposition is conditional on access and on the credibility of the expected benefit. Researchers can test it by comparing task-specific expectations before exposure with observed first-use behaviour, while measuring devices, skills and social encouragement. A cross-sectional association between perceived usefulness and intention is compatible with this proposition but cannot establish the direction of influence.

The second proposition is that creator credibility and perceived authenticity can encourage engagement when the creator's topic and disclosures are relevant to the viewer. The mechanism may involve perceived expertise, identification or a parasocial relationship, but these pathways should be tested separately [Cheung et al., 2022; Nah, 2022; Lee & Eastin, 2021]. A trustworthy presentation is not a substitute for source verification. Research designs should compare commercial and non-commercial material, record what users actually saw and avoid inferring product knowledge from familiarity with a creator.

The third proposition is that platform curation affects the opportunities for consumption and creation, with outcomes moderated by user choice and governance. For example, a recommendation may help a newcomer discover educational material while concentrating views among established accounts. A feed experiment can estimate the effect of a particular ranking change on specified outcomes, but it cannot reveal the effect of every platform feature or a lifetime of prior exposure [Nyhan et al., 2023; Guess et al., 2023]. Evaluation should include creators whose content is shown less often as well as users whose feeds change.

The fourth proposition is that persistent use depends on the balance between experienced benefits, switching costs and accumulating burdens. Enjoyment and social support may encourage return; privacy concerns, overload or negative interaction may encourage selective withdrawal [Yan et al., 2021; Liu et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2021; Mehrabioun, 2024]. The expected association may differ by activity. Someone may stop public posting while continuing to watch educational videos, or reduce recreational use while retaining a work account. This makes activity-specific measures essential for a theory of continuance.

The fifth proposition is that consequences are distributed unevenly across people and contexts. A design that increases average engagement can still reduce accessibility, privacy or safety for a subgroup. Conversely, an intervention that reduces time on a platform may improve one outcome while limiting a person's access to support. The propositions are intentionally falsifiable: researchers should state the relevant population, time, platform and outcome in advance, and report null or adverse findings as well as supportive results.

IX. RESEARCH AGENDA

A. Improve concepts and measurement

Future studies should describe the media practice under investigation. “Self-media” can refer to independent creators, ordinary user-generated content or platform-mediated communication more broadly; each definition implies a different sampling frame. Researchers should identify the actor, content type, distribution channel, visibility and commercial relationship. They should also distinguish first encounter, registration, regular consumption, contribution and professional creation. A clear definition makes studies comparable and prevents

conclusions about influencers from being transferred without qualification to all users.

Outcome measures should separate attitudes from behaviour. Intention scales can indicate motivation, but they do not show whether a person watched a video, checked a source or bought a product. Behavioural data can add detail, but a click does not reveal comprehension or consent. Researchers can combine transparent surveys, consented platform traces and interviews, reporting how the measures relate and where they conflict. Engagement instruments should identify cognitive, emotional and behavioural dimensions and evaluate whether they measure the same construct across populations [Trunfio & Rossi, 2021].

Trust measures need similar precision. A single statement such as “I trust social media” conflates trust in an application, a creator, a community and a particular claim. Studies should ask what the user expects, who is responsible and which action follows. A test of advertising disclosure should record whether the participant noticed and understood the disclosure, not merely whether a label was present. Perceived authenticity should be separated from independent evidence of accuracy and expertise [Lee & Eastin, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020]. These distinctions would improve both theoretical interpretation and practical design.

B. Strengthen causal and longitudinal evidence

Longitudinal studies can track how expectations change before and after joining, following or publishing. Designs should measure prior well-being, social support and skills where relevant, because these factors can influence both use and outcomes. Repeated measures can reduce reliance on a single retrospective report, but they do not automatically eliminate confounding. A credible analysis states its assumed causal structure, handles missing observations and tests whether results depend on how use and non-use are defined.

Experiments can identify effects of specific features, such as an accuracy reminder, a disclosure label or a feed-ranking change. The studies on accuracy prompts demonstrate the value of clearly defined interventions and outcomes [Pennycook et al., 2021; Pennycook & Rand, 2022], while the feed experiments show that changes in exposure and use do not necessarily produce detectable changes in every attitude [Nyhan et al., 2023; Guess et al., 2023]. Future experiments should consider duration, spillovers between users, adverse effects and the difference between laboratory choices and everyday behaviour. Platform partnership can enable scale, but independence, disclosure of access constraints and reproducible analysis are essential.

Comparative research should examine multiple platforms and settings without presuming equivalence. A like on one service, a paid subscription on another and a private message on a third have different meanings and levels of visibility. Cross-national comparison also requires attention to language, local media systems, regulation and the availability of creator income. Instruments should be translated and tested for measurement equivalence rather than merely administered in different countries. Results from a single group of young users cannot establish a universal model of human behaviour.

Measurement also needs to account for the difference between an opportunity and a choice. A person cannot engage with a creator who never appears in a feed, and the creator cannot choose the platform's internal ranking rules. Studies that only analyze likes among exposed posts leave this prior selection process unobserved. Whenever ethically and technically feasible, researchers should document the set of posts offered to participants, the options available to them and the way the platform assigned those options. A change in the number of likes can then be interpreted alongside changes in exposure, rather than presented as an unconditional change in preference.

Independent replication is particularly important for a field in which platforms frequently change interface features and policy. Researchers should preserve the study period, relevant interface descriptions, sampling procedures and analysis code, while recognizing that private ranking systems may not be reproducible outside the original access agreement. Comparisons across time should state whether a feature, an audience or a measurement rule

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changed. Null results are informative when the intervention was delivered as intended and the study had adequate sensitivity; they should not be recast as proof that every possible intervention lacks an effect. These standards help distinguish a durable behavioural finding from a result tied to a particular platform configuration.

C. Bring creators and audiences into the same design

Creator and audience studies are often conducted separately even though their decisions are interdependent. An audience survey can measure why viewers follow a creator, while interviews can reveal the creator's production decisions and commercial constraints. Combining these approaches would allow a study to examine whether a creator's intended disclosure is noticed, how different audiences interpret it and whether feedback changes subsequent content. Such a design must protect privacy and avoid assuming that every audience member consents to having a public comment treated as research data.

Attention to creator work is especially important when a platform rewards frequency and responsiveness. A creator's decision to post can reflect a mix of personal expression, platform incentives and financial necessity [Tafesse & Dayan, 2023; Duffy et al., 2021]. An audience's demand for authenticity may create additional pressure to disclose intimate details or to appear constantly available. The experience of creators with different resources should be compared, including those who create for local communities, those with disabilities and those whose work is not monetized. A narrowly commercial sample may exaggerate the relevance of purchase intention and miss educational or civic uses.

Researchers should also investigate how people respond when a creator is virtual or assisted by automated tools. Experiments comparing human and virtual influencers suggest that perceived similarity and human-likeness may matter to parasocial interaction [Stein et al., 2024]. These studies should not be interpreted as showing that a virtual creator is interchangeable with a human or that a viewer can always identify automated production. Future work can test clear disclosure, audience understanding and accountability for factual claims. The review's time boundary means that later developments require separate evaluation rather than being treated as established by 2020–2024 research.

D. Include underserved populations and protect participants

Studies should recruit people who are often absent from convenience samples, including older adults, people with disabilities, users of minority languages and those with intermittent access. The relevant comparison is not simply whether one group uses a platform more often, but whether people can pursue a chosen goal safely and effectively. Accessibility features, community support and the cost of access should be measured directly. Where samples are small, researchers can use careful qualitative or participatory methods without presenting the findings as representative population estimates.

Research ethics require more than removing names from a dataset. Public posts can be searchable, photographs can identify people and a quoted phrase can reconnect an anonymized participant to an account. Researchers should consider consent, contextual expectations, the potential consequences of reidentification and rules governing platform data. For vulnerable groups and creators discussing harassment, the decision to publish verbatim examples deserves particular care. Data sharing and reproducibility should be balanced with protection of people whose content and relationships are being studied.

X. IMPLICATIONS FOR USERS, CREATORS AND PLATFORM DESIGN

For users, the framework suggests a practical distinction between enjoying content and relying on it. A viewer can appreciate a creator's style while checking important claims against independent sources. For health, financial or safety decisions, source qualifications, date, evidence and commercial incentives matter more than popularity. Users can also adjust their own participation through notification settings, audience controls and breaks, although the effectiveness of these tools depends on platform design. Digital literacy is not a demand that

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individuals solve every structural problem themselves; it is one component of a wider system of responsibility.

For creators, trust is sustained through clarity about experience, evidence and incentives. A creator can identify a personal opinion, link to a source, correct a mistake and explain a sponsorship without claiming expertise beyond their competence. The best communication practice depends on the subject and audience. A product demonstration may require clear information about the commercial relationship; a personal health account may require a clear boundary between experience and general medical advice. Research on source credibility and disclosure supports examining these distinctions, while avoiding a simple equation between authenticity and factual truth [Lee & Eastin, 2021; Weismueller et al., 2020].

For platforms, the central design question is how to support discovery without making engagement the sole objective. Meaningful controls can include accessible privacy settings, understandable advertising labels, reporting and appeal processes, and ways to adjust recommendations. Their effectiveness should be evaluated through user understanding and actual outcomes, not merely whether a control exists. Experiments, audits and independent access to appropriately protected data can help distinguish intended from realized effects. In particular, an increase in views is not sufficient evidence that users have learned more, made better decisions or experienced improved well-being.

For educators, civil society and policymakers, the framework supports complementary responsibilities. Education can build the skills to compare sources, recognize incentives and manage audiences; public-interest institutions can make reliable material easier to find; and governance can require accountable processes while protecting freedom of expression and privacy. There is no single intervention appropriate to all communities. Stronger moderation may protect some users while raising concerns about errors or unequal enforcement, so transparent appeals and evaluation of distributional effects are necessary.

A further priority is to study how participants judge the value of an interaction after its immediate appeal has faded. A useful recommendation might save time but lead to regretted disclosure; a compelling discussion might improve a person's sense of belonging while exposing others to hostility. Evaluation should therefore include follow-up measures chosen with the affected community, such as whether a person found a reliable resource, achieved a learning goal or could correct an unwanted disclosure. These measures do not replace platform logs, but they give those logs a purpose beyond maximizing attention. They also make it possible to identify when a popular feature fails to serve the needs of the people most affected by it.

The relationship between an individual's choice and a collective outcome deserves the same care. A person who shares a post with good intentions cannot control every subsequent use of that material. Conversely, a platform can alter the reach of content without changing the intention of the creator who produced it. Effective interventions can therefore work at several points: clearer source information for viewers, practical editing and disclosure tools for creators, and accountable distribution rules for platforms. Comparing these levels helps avoid blaming users alone for risks that they cannot reasonably observe or control.

XI. LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This review has several limitations. Its selected literature is confined to 2020–2024, and it is a narrative integration rather than an exhaustive systematic review. The evidence base is uneven across countries, languages, age groups and platforms; many studies focus on commercial influencers or specific political and health contexts. Survey measures often emphasize intentions, while experiments test particular interventions over limited periods. The proposed framework therefore offers a structured research agenda rather than a validated universal model. Its relationships may change as platform design, regulation and social practices evolve.

Human acceptance and use of self-media emerge from the interaction of motives, capabilities, social

relationships, creator practices and platform arrangements. Initial adoption, watching, interacting, publishing and discontinuing are related but distinct behaviours. Trust must be located in a platform, creator or claim; benefits must be assessed alongside risk and unequal participation; and observed engagement must not be confused with knowledge, well-being or evidence of influence. The strongest way forward is to connect credible creator and audience research with transparent platform evaluation and meaningful protection of users. By examining these relationships together, future studies can explain not only why people use creator-led media, but when and for whom that use becomes valuable, difficult or harmful.

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