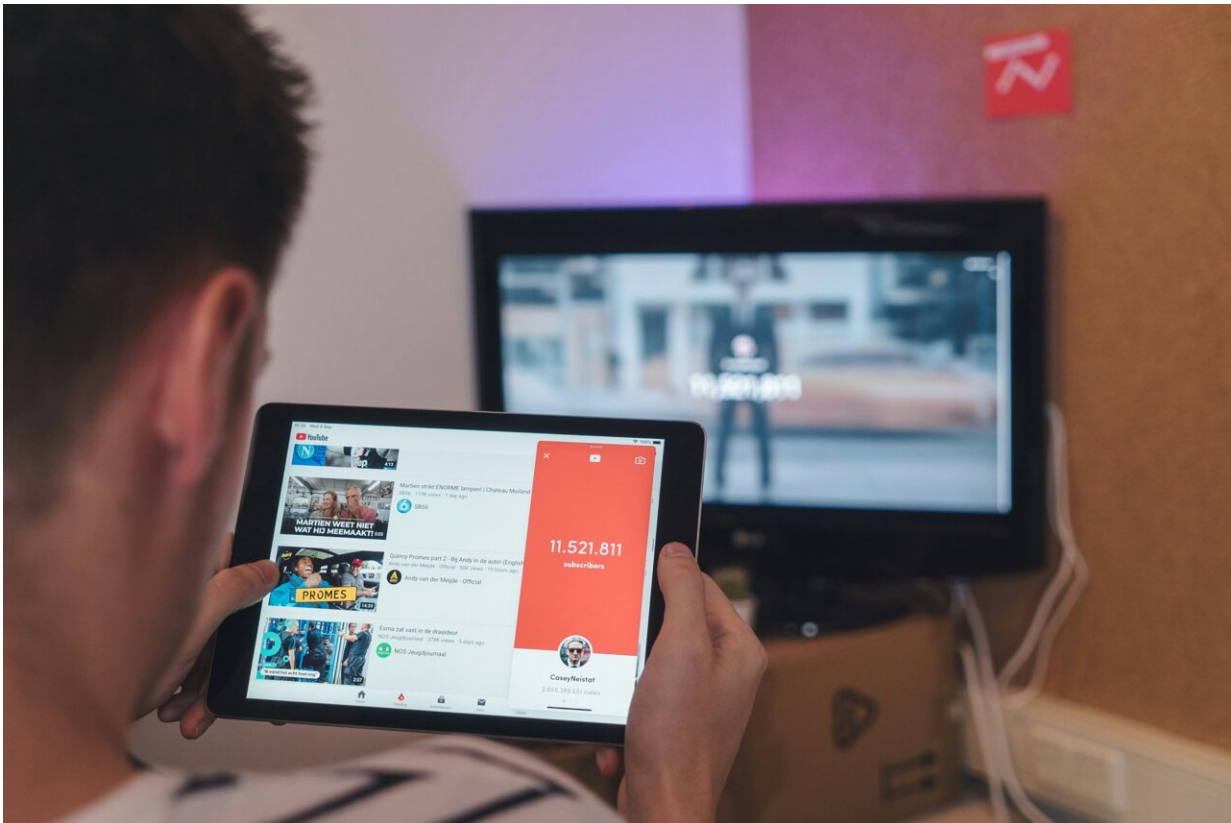


Study suggests YouTubers cheer people up more than casual friends

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One-sided relationships with YouTubers are more emotionally fulfilling than talking to casual friends, a new study suggests. The University of Essex research discovered people feel watching online stars like Zoella,

KSI and PewDiePie can cheer them up more than weak-tie acquaintances—like neighbors or co-workers.

Dr. Veronica Lamarche, from the Department of Psychology, also found people feel liked, respected and understood by [fictional characters](#). The study suggests watching online celebrities offers [positive reinforcement](#)—despite them not being able to respond.

Dr. Lamarche hopes the research—[published](#) in *Scientific Reports*—will shine a light on the role these relationships, known as parasocial, play in society, as [social media](#) evolves.

"Parasocial relationships are an important part of our psychological toolbox when it comes to feeling like we have people out there who are able to validate and support us in times of need, even if we can never actually meet with them in reality," said Dr. Lamarche.

"This isn't a last resort for very young or lonely among us—in our studies, people of all ages reported feeling like they had a strong connection to at least one fictional character, celebrity or online personality that they've never met."

Across three studies, more than 1,080 people were studied to judge how they perceived parasocial relationships. Most participants—52%—said they have a strong parasocial relationship, with 36% saying they felt close to a Youtuber.

It looked at people with an average age of 36 in Britain and America and found they believe "one-sided" friendships can fulfill emotional needs in ways that mirror traditional relationships.

These imagined relationships with someone they have never met or a fictional character were seen as more effective at fulfilling their

emotional needs than acquaintances or similar weak ties.

However, strong two-sided relationships—such as a [romantic relationship](#) or very close friendship—were consistently seen as the most effective connection for fulfilling emotional needs.

Dr. Lamarche added, "People naturally believe their closest relationships are the best way of fulfilling their emotional needs. However, when people were asked to think about a recent time where a close other had hurt their feelings, some people became even more confident that their parasocial ties would be able to respond to their needs."

More information: Shaaba Lotun et al, People perceive parasocial relationships to be effective at fulfilling emotional needs, *Scientific Reports* (2024). [DOI: 10.1038/s41598-024-58069-9](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-024-58069-9)

Provided by University of Essex

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