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Social Media Influencers: Examining the Mediating Effect of Parasocial Interaction and the Moderating Effect of Online Comments on Purchase Intention

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Abstract: *This study investigates the role of influencers' characteristics in shaping parasocial interaction on social media platforms and how this interaction subsequently impacts consumers' purchase intention. Additionally, it examines how parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between influencers' characteristics and purchase intention, while also exploring how online comments moderate this relationship within the framework. Drawing on Horton and Wohl's parasocial interaction theory (1956), this study developed and analyzed a model illustrating the direct and indirect relationships between the three independent factors - influencers' attributes, parasocial interaction, online comments and the dependent factor- consumers' purchase intention in Bangladesh. Additionally, several interpersonal attraction attributes of influencers were selected based on McCroskey and McCain's (1974) recommendations, alongside attitude homophily. Using the purposive sampling method, data were collected from 244 samples of Bangladesh who watched product related contents of various social media influencers. For data collection, a structured questionnaire was developed where the five-point Likert scale was used. Using SmartPLS 4, data were analyzed through applying PLS-SEM. Results discovered that task attractiveness and attitude homophily are two important influencer attributes that generate parasocial interaction in social media. Besides, these two attributes further affect consumers' purchase intention through the mediating effect of parasocial interaction. The study recommends that marketers prioritize task attractiveness and attitude homophily of influencers. Additionally, it highlights the role of parasocial interaction with social media influencers, which affects consumers' purchase intentions both directly and indirectly.*

Keywords: *Parasocial interaction, online comments, purchase intention, social media, influencer marketing.*

1. Introduction

According to DataReportal (2025), the global internet users reached 5.56 billion at the beginning of 2025. Social media is used by 5.24 billion people worldwide,

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accounting for 63.9 percent of the world's population. In 2024, USD 4.12 trillion was spent on online consumer goods purchases, representing a 14.6% increase in worldwide e-commerce spending over 2023. With the increasing usage of social media, marketers are interacting with this important audience through newer marketing methods (Hayes & Carr, 2015). According to Veirman et al., (2017), influencers and brands have partnered to promote products through 'influencer marketing', a new type of marketing strategy, made possible by the popularity of bloggers and their user-generated content(s). It promotes brands to target customers by selecting relevant personalities with an extensive following on social media (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Influencers refer to individuals with a significant presence on social media who promote brands by engaging actively with their followers (Jaitly & Gautam, 2021). Vloggers on Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube frequently share their thoughts about the products they have utilized. Consequently, video blogs or vlogs are regarded as a powerful marketing platform that allows businesses to interact with big audiences in the light of influencer marketing (Lee & Watkins, 2016). From food and fashion to community engagement and entertainment, their influence continues to grow rapidly. Their content spans a wide range of categories, e.g., well-being and mental health, food and nutrition, fashion and beauty, travel and lifestyle, cooking and recipes, music and performance, sports and fitness, creative writing, comedy, dance and choreography, community engagement, photography and digital storytelling, entrepreneurship and next-gen business.

Dencheva (2024) reported that the value of worldwide influencer marketing industry increased over three times since 2019, reaching a total of 24 billion US dollars in 2024. Following the global trend, Bangladesh has experienced a rise in the number of content creators and social media influencers in recent years. According to the market projection by Statista (2025), advertising expenditure in Bangladesh's influencer marketing sector is projected to reach USD 35.23 million by 2025. The estimated compound annual growth rate (from 2025 to 2030) for advertising spending is 8.03%, resulting in a forecasted market volume of USD 51.85 million by 2030 (Statista, 2025). Nabi (2022) found that Bangladesh's online grocery stores, Chaldal.com and Sheba.xyz, utilize social media influencers and promo codes for promotion. HypeScout, an influencer marketing platform in Bangladesh, is developing a database of micro and nano influencers to help businesses enhance their influencer marketing efforts.

Researchers noted that content generated by influencers tends to be more authentic and effective in engaging target audiences than company-generated content (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that influencers can influence audience choices and enhance purchase intentions by fostering strong relationships with their followers, primarily through parasocial interaction. Parasocial interaction is the one-way emotional attachments that viewers develop with social media influencers (Aw & Labrecque, 2020), which significantly influence their purchase intention (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

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To date, several studies (Su et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lee & Watkins, 2016) were conducted to identify the factors influencing parasocial interaction and purchase intention. But the reasons for customers' enthusiasm for this new marketing strategy are not well understood by the Bangladeshi companies. Specifically, studies examining the effect of influencers' traits on parasocial interaction and purchase intention is exceptional in Bangladesh. Thus, the discussions above have highlighted a number of research gaps. Firstly, Bangladesh currently lacks sufficient study on the critical variables affecting the parasocial interaction in social media that develop purchase intention. Secondly, the indirect effect of any potential mediator that affect purchase intention are not yet discovered in Bangladesh. Lee and Watkins (2016) and Ashraf et al. (2023) suggested that influencer characteristics may have a favorable indirect impact on consumers' purchase intention through parasocial interactions. So, there is a need to test the impact of potential mediators between the relationships of influencers' traits and purchase intention. Thirdly, it is also necessary to evaluate the role of any potential moderator (e.g., online comments) between the relationship of parasocial interaction and purchase intention.

The three specific objectives of this study are: First, to investigate how influencers' characteristics affect parasocial interaction and consumers' purchase intentions. Second, it has analyzed the influence of parasocial interaction on purchase intentions. Third, it has uncovered the mediating role of parasocial interaction and the moderating role of online comments within the study projected.

2. Literature Review & Hypothesis Development

2.1 Theoretical Background

Parasocial Interaction and Social Media User

Horton and Wohl (1956) introduced the concept of parasocial interaction, which explains how media personalities engage with their audience through the media. Parasocial interaction might resemble the interaction that occurs between online influencers and social media users in certain aspects. According to Stever and Lawson (2013), although social media platforms give followers increased access to the private lives of celebrities, the celebrities nonetheless maintain control over the reciprocity of their relationships. According to Frederick et al. (2012), influencers' relations with social media users is compatible with parasocial interaction as the interaction is primarily one-sided. Vloggers are therefore comparable to celebrities in conventional media. Thus, parasocial interaction appears to be a genuine, bidirectional friendship between a vlogger and a follower, however, is actually more of a psychological illusion than a real relationship (Lee & Watkins, 2016). The same logic that Stever and Lawson (2013) showed about parasocial interaction being a suitable theoretical framework for examining the one-way connection between celebrities and followers may then be used for vloggers. Interpersonal attraction is regarded as the precursor to parasocial interaction. As stated by McCroskey and McCain

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(1974), interpersonal attraction is evaluating whether we like someone else or feel comfortable with them. Interpersonal attraction is multifaceted, comprising three dimensions: task, social, and physical attraction. Sokolova and Kefi (2020) also considered attitude homophily as a predictor of parasocial interaction.

2.2 Hypothesis Development

2.2.1 Determinants of Parasocial Interaction

Media influencers can help viewers learn important and effective information to complete tasks associated with business and society (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Task attraction thus raises audiences' understanding which allows them to get more insightful knowledge from media characters. Su et al. (2021) identified task attractiveness as a significant factor influencing the formation of parasocial interactions between social media influencers and their audiences. Consequently, the subsequent hypothesis is proposed:

H1a: Task attractiveness influences parasocial interaction.

When viewers identify the traits, they share with media personalities, social attraction develops which strengthen their parasocial interaction with those characters (Pettigrew, 1998). The association between social attractiveness and parasocial interaction has been found in various earlier studies (Su et al., 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Thus, this study hypothesized:

H1b: Social attractiveness influences parasocial interaction.

Physical attraction increases viewers' appreciation of influencers' face features and physical attributes on social media (Karandashev & Fata, 2014), which in turn raises viewers' positive feelings and contributes to the development of parasocial interaction (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). Physical attractiveness is recognized as a key factor influencing parasocial interaction in several previous studies (Su et al., 2021; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Therefore, the present study formulates the subsequent hypothesis:

H1c: Physical attractiveness influences parasocial interaction.

The degree of equality that is felt between the viewers and the influencers determines the amount of interaction that occurs on social media, and attitude homophily is one factor that influences this (Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Hence, the next hypothesis is formulated:

H1d: Attitude homophily influences parasocial interaction.

2.2.2 Relationship of Parasocial Interaction and Purchase Intention

Purchase intention, as defined by Kotler and Keller (2012), is the innate desire to buy products to satisfy needs. The perceived closeness between the influencer and the follower can be conceptualized in terms of parasocial interaction, which is documented in the literature as a precursor to purchase intention. As a result, the follower may feel more connected to the influencer and be more inclined to buy a product (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Lee & Watkins, 2016). Thus, the next hypothesis is developed:

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H2: Parasocial interaction influences purchase intention.

2.2.3 Determinants of Purchase Intention

Task attraction might reveal whether the purchasing task would be easy to complete if social media influencers suggested it (Han & Yang, 2018). According to Wiedmann and Mettenheim (2020), the high level of perceived attractiveness is positively correlated with purchase intention. Consequently, the next hypothesis is formulated:

H3a: Task attractiveness influences purchase intention.

The level of closeness between media personalities and the communication readiness of audiences are reflected in social attraction (McCroskey & McCain, 1974). Lou and Yuan (2019) discovered that socially attractive influencers are more successful in building brand confidence among customers, which in turn increases consumers' intention to purchase. Thus, it is proposed that:

H3b: Social attractiveness influences purchase intention.

According to Lee and Watkins (2016), an influencers' physical attributes are evaluating factors that help them attract and hold the attention of more viewers. Therefore, the degree of the endorser's attractiveness determines how well the endorsements influence customers' purchase intention (Lou & Yuan, 2019). Thus, the next hypothesis is formulated:

H3c: Physical attractiveness influences purchase intention.

According to Eyal and Rubin (2003), homophily is the tendency of an individual to associate with others who share their values, level of education and social standing. The study of Xu et al. (2021) revealed the positive effect of homophily on purchase intention. Consequently, it is hypothesized that:

H3d: Attitude homophily influences purchase intention.

2.2.4 Mediating Role of Parasocial Interaction

Following the suggestion of Lee and Watkins (2016), Xie and Feng (2022) and Sutiono et al. (2024) examined the mediation impact of parasocial interaction between social media influencers' characteristics and purchase intention. Their results revealed that parasocial interaction serves as a mediator in the relationship between social media influencers' characteristics and purchase intention. This recommends that influencers' effects on consumers' purchase intentions are not just direct; they also result from users' emotional connections and affinity with influencers. Particularly, the findings of Ashraf et al. (2023) suggested that attractiveness may have a favorable indirect impact on consumers' purchasing intentions through parasocial interactions. The study of Xu et al. (2021) also demonstrated the mediating role of parasocial interactions between homophily and purchase intention. Hence, the subsequent hypotheses are put forth:

H4: Parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between (a) task attractiveness and purchase intention; (b) social attractiveness and purchase intention; (c) physical attractiveness and purchase intention and (d) attitude homophily and purchase intention.

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2.2.5 Moderating Role of Online Comments

The influencers in social media are eager to be cited by audiences when they can verify through online comments that their viewpoints align with those of others (Walther et al., 2009). Additionally, Hayes and Carr (2015) pointed out that, comparable feedback from other audiences toward social media influencers are interpreted as proof and signals, therefore online comments can successfully minimize ambiguity. Su et al. (2021) revealed that, online comments are essential components that amplify the impact of parasocial interactions. As a result, people develop stronger parasocial interactions with influencers on social media and are more receptive to the content. The study of Su et al. (2021) found that online comments have a moderating influence on parasocial interaction. Hence, the next hypothesis is projected:

H5: Online comments play a moderating role between the relationship of parasocial interaction and purchase intention.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The present study proposes a conceptual model (Figure 1) based on the literature.

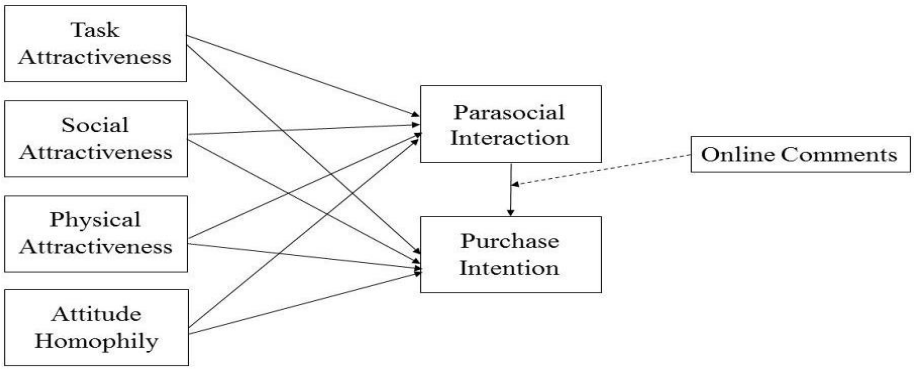

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study

The model hypothesizes that influencers' task attractiveness, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness and attitude homophily directly and indirectly affect purchase intention through parasocial interaction. Additionally, the impact of parasocial interaction on purchase intention is moderated by online comments.

3. Research Method

3.1 Data Collection Method

Through an online survey, data collection was done covering major types of social media users in Bangladesh (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram). According to the statistics published in BBF Digital (2022), the overall count of social media users in Bangladesh was approximately 52.90 million. This growing number of users indicates an increasing trend of social media engagement which often correlates with online purchasing behavior. Among the total social media users, approximately 35% of users had engagement with influencers which

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constituted 18.515 million. Among them, about 10% actually purchased or had intention to purchase a product which constitutes 1.8515 million. Thus, the target population size (N) of this study is approximately 1.8515 million people. Using the formula of Cochran (1977), sample size (n) = (Z^2 * p * (1 - p)) / e^2; the calculated sample size of this study is n ≈ 196 with 95% confidence level. However, data were collected from 244 samples using the purposive sampling method. Ritchie et al., (2014) recommended that, purposive sampling method is more popular in internet-based research that receives a greater response rate since it is very common, simple to use and cost-effective.

Among the respondents, the majority (61.1%) spent less than 1 hour /day, followed by (31.6%) who spent 1-3 hours/day on watching vlogs. Majority (29.9%) of the respondents follow the macro-influencers (having 500K to 1 million followers), followed by 27.9% who follow the mega-influencers (having more than a million followers). The demographic characteristics of the respondents are included in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample profile (n=244)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	111	45.5
	Female	109	44.7
	Prefer not to say	24	9.8
Age	Below 20	13	5.3
	20-30	195	79.9
	30-40	30	12.3
	40-50	5	2
	50-60	1	0.4
	Above 60	0	0
Highest Educational Qualification	Below SSC	1	0.4
	SSC	2	0.8
	HSC	104	42.6
	Bachelor's degree	94	38.5
	Master's degree	43	17.6
	PhD or equivalent degree	0	0
Employment Status	Full-time employment	49	20.1
	Part-time employment	32	13.1
	Unemployed	155	63.5
	Retired	3	1.2
	Other	5	2

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Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percent
Monthly Family Income	No personal income	88	36.1
	Below Tk. 20,000	23	9.4
	Tk. 20,000-30,000	35	14.3
	Tk. 30,000-40,000	23	9.4
	Tk. 40,000-50,000	22	9
	Tk. 50,000-60,000	17	7
	Above Tk. 60,000	36	14.8

3.2 Questionnaire and Measures of the Study

This study used a structured questionnaire including three parts. First, some questions (e.g., whether or not watched vlogs, preferable type of vlog to watch) were added for the study respondents who are the viewers of social media vlogs in Bangladesh. Second, the basic questions by using five-point Likert scale. Last, the demographic questions. Measurement constructs and items with corresponding sources are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Construct Measures

Constructs	Items	Sources
Task Attractiveness	My favorite vloggers on social media are- TA1 knowledgeable in their vlogging TA2 expert in vlogging TA3 dependable about searching options TA4 helpful in comparing prices TA5 reliable TA6 update their content regularly	McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Lee & Watkins, 2016
Social Attractiveness	My favorite vloggers on social media- SA1 would be pleasant to have a friendly chat SA2 could become friend(s) of mine SA3 would be pleasant to be with.	McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Lee & Watkins, 2016
Physical Attractiveness	My favorite vloggers on social media are – PA1 smart PA2 attractive PA3 very charming PA4 quite appealing	McCroskey & McCain, 1974; Lee & Watkins, 2016
Attitude Homophily	My favorite vloggers on social media – AH1 thinks like me AH2 behaves like me AH3 treats people like I do	Lee & Watkins, 2016; Eyal & Rubin, 2003

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Constructs	Items	Sources
	AH4 shares my values AH5 have a lot in common with me	
Parasocial Interaction	PSI1 I look forward to watching the videos of my favorite vloggers on his/her channel PSI2 I feel my favorite vlogger is like an old friend PSI3 When I watch the videos of my favorite vlogger(s), I feel as if I am part of their group PSI4 If my favorite vlogger(s) appeared on another platform/channel, I would definitely watch their work PSI5 If there's an article about my favorite vlogger(s) in a newspaper or magazine, I'll read it PSI6 I would like to meet my favorite vlogger(s) in person	Lee & Watkins, 2016
Online Comments	When I watch the videos of my favorite vloggers – OC1 I read the comments posted by other viewers OC2 I follow the suggestions of other viewers OC3 I go by what viewers recommended in the comments section OC4 I agree with the other viewers' opinions	Su et al., 2021
Purchase Intention	PI1 When the vloggers share their views about a product, it helps me in taking decisions regarding purchasing that product PI2 I am willing to purchase products according to the recommendation of my favorite vloggers PI3 I plan to purchase products according to the recommendation of my favorite vloggers in the future PI4 I will encourage people to purchase products based on the recommendation of my favorite vloggers	Lee & Watkins, 2016

4. Data Analysis & Results

PLS-SEM (Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling), a popular model, has been used in this study to evaluate complex models across different fields. It focuses on prediction and works well for examining causal relationships and estimating statistical models, especially when the assumptions required for traditional SEM methods are not satisfied. PLS-SEM is preferable to traditional covariance-based SEM because it can handle complicated structural models with many variables (Urbach & Ahlemann, 2010). In particular, it has received widespread approval for assessing the mediation effect (Ali et al., 2018). SmartPLS 4 was used to evaluate the data utilizing a two-stage process (i.e., evaluating the measurement model and structural model). SmartPLS 4 introduces significant improvements over its predecessor, including an intuitive interface, advanced features and enhanced bootstrapping techniques. These upgrades

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facilitate more precise and efficient SEM, offering users improved visualization and interpretation tools for complex data relationships (Hair et al., 2022).

4.1 Measurement Model

The reliability and validity of the scales were assessed through the measurement model (Figure 2). Cronbach's alpha was employed to determine the scale's reliability, while convergent validity was evaluated using outer loadings, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE).

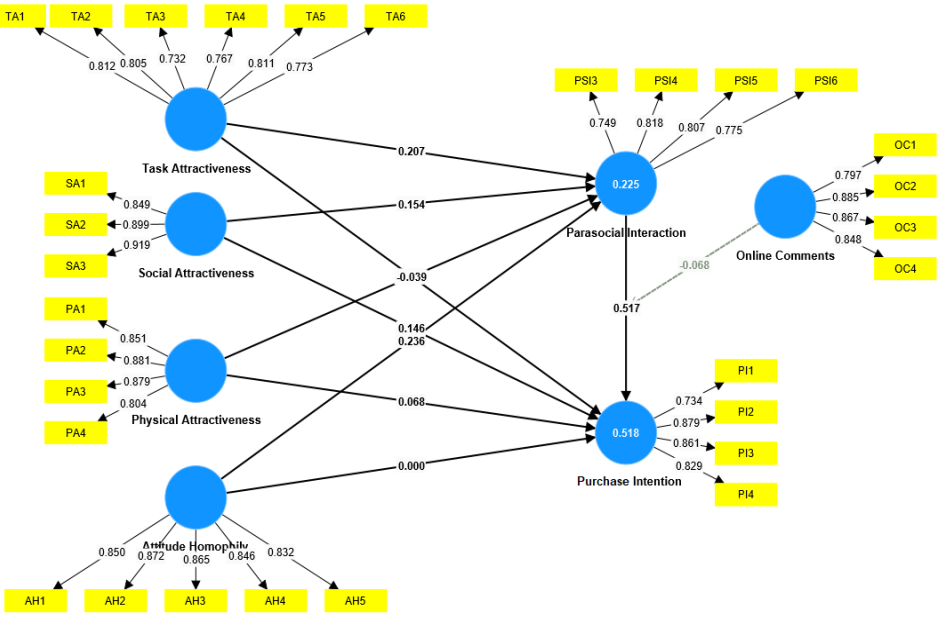

Figure 2: Measurement Model of the Study

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Constructs	Items	Mean (S.D.)
Task Attractiveness (TA)	TA1	3.881 (1.141)
	TA2	3.93 (1.09)
	TA3	3.389 (1.12)
	TA4	3.553 (1.12)
	TA5	3.709 (1.049)
	TA6	3.844 (1.135)
Social Attractiveness (SA)	SA1	3.537 (1.121)
	SA2	3.201 (1.126)
	SA3	3.484 (1.136)
Physical Attractiveness (PA)	PA1	4.02 (0.951)
	PA2	3.836 (0.965)

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Constructs	Items	Mean (S.D.)
	PA3	3.82 (0.996)
	PA4	3.668 (0.988)
Attitude Homophily (AH)	AH1	3.234 (1.173)
	AH2	3.107 (1.066)
	AH3	3.381 (1.051)
	AH4	3.377 (1.007)
	AH5	3.303 (1.115)
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)	PSI1	3.906 (1.121)
	PSI2	3.148 (1.278)
	PSI3	3.41 (1.288)
	PSI4	3.725 (1.146)
	PSI5	3.84 (1.01)
	PSI6	3.795 (1.267)
Online Comments (OC)	OC1	3.41 (1.236)
	OC2	3.189 (1.172)
	OC3	3.02 (1.143)
	OC4	3.143 (1.12)
Purchase Intention (PI)	PI1	3.828 (1.073)
	PI2	3.594 (1.189)
	PI3	3.488 (1.107)
	PI4	3.406 (1.288)

For the measurement model evaluation, at first the convergent validity was assessed. Table 4 shows that outer loadings of the indicators exceeded the suggested value of 0.7 level (Hair et al., 2014). Two items (PSI1, PSI2) were dropped for low factor loadings which were below the prescribed level 0.7. As outlined in the table, both composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) satisfy the recommended thresholds (Chin, 2009). Again, the variance inflation factor (VIF) values were below the threshold value of 5.0 and ranged from 1.459 to 3.390, indicating that collinearity would not be a problem to estimate the partial least square path model (Hair et al., 2017).

The cross-loading values are included in Table 5 indicating the degree to which individual items relate to their corresponding constructs as well as possible correlations with other constructs. The cross-loading values show that there is a stronger association between each item and its intended construct than there is with other constructs. This pattern implies that the measurement items successfully capture the unique features of each construct, supporting the discriminant validity of the constructs.

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Table 4: Convergent Validity and Multicollinearity Statistics

Constructs	Items	Loadings	VIF
Task Attractiveness (TA) CR (rho_a) = 0.879; CR (rho_c) = 0.905; AVE = 0.615	TA1	0.812	2.599
	TA2	0.805	2.732
	TA3	0.732	1.646
	TA4	0.767	1.779
	TA5	0.811	2.026
	TA6	0.773	1.967
Social Attractiveness (SA) CR (rho_a) = 0.875; CR (rho_c) = 0.919; AVE = 0.791	SA1	0.849	1.885
	SA2	0.899	2.643
	SA3	0.919	2.780
Physical Attractiveness (PA) CR (rho_a) = 0.879; CR (rho_c) = 0.915; AVE = 0.730	PA1	0.851	2.595
	PA2	0.881	2.881
	PA3	0.879	2.479
	PA4	0.804	1.703
Attitude Homophily (AH) CR (rho_a) = 0.907; CR (rho_c) = 0.930; AVE = 0.728	AH1	0.850	3.036
	AH2	0.872	3.390
	AH3	0.865	2.720
	AH4	0.846	2.455
	AH5	0.832	2.256
Parasocial Interaction (PSI)* CR (rho_a) = 0.797; CR (rho_c) = 0.867; AVE = 0.620	PSI3	0.749	1.459
	PSI4	0.818	1.781
	PSI5	0.807	1.795
	PSI6	0.775	1.574
Online Comments (OC) CR (rho_a) = 0.874; CR (rho_c) = 0.912; AVE = 0.722	OC1	0.797	1.993
	OC2	0.885	2.780
	OC3	0.867	2.623
	OC4	0.848	2.220
Purchase Intention (PI) CR (rho_a) = 0.849; CR (rho_c) = 0.897 AVE = 0.685	PI1	0.734	1.628
	PI2	0.879	2.397
	PI3	0.861	2.559
	PI4	0.829	2.391

Note.

CR = Composite Reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted

** Two items (PSI1, PSI2) were dropped for low factor loadings*

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Table 5: Cross loadings

	AH	PI	OC	PA	PSI	SA	TA
AH1	**0.850**	0.334	0.279	0.449	0.354	0.572	0.366
AH2	**0.872**	0.345	0.282	0.469	0.385	0.592	0.374
AH3	**0.865**	0.390	0.341	0.563	0.322	0.648	0.398
AH4	**0.846**	0.365	0.284	0.455	0.376	0.569	0.396
AH5	**0.832**	0.355	0.303	0.535	0.327	0.613	0.362
PI1	0.293	**0.734**	0.250	0.392	0.523	0.358	0.415
PI2	0.409	**0.879**	0.386	0.364	0.578	0.395	0.361
PI3	0.311	**0.861**	0.324	0.234	0.572	0.358	0.248
PI4	0.369	**0.829**	0.376	0.266	0.526	0.401	0.270
OC1	0.205	0.316	**0.797**	0.238	0.247	0.219	0.340
OC2	0.327	0.354	**0.885**	0.312	0.279	0.307	0.306
OC3	0.346	0.350	**0.867**	0.269	0.289	0.338	0.312
OC4	0.299	0.358	**0.848**	0.322	0.253	0.367	0.354
PA1	0.452	0.265	0.290	**0.851**	0.263	0.449	0.585
PA2	0.499	0.316	0.319	**0.881**	0.275	0.464	0.568
PA3	0.524	0.329	0.292	**0.879**	0.278	0.516	0.553
PA4	0.494	0.371	0.252	**0.804**	0.270	0.503	0.497
PSI3	0.404	0.481	0.236	0.175	**0.749**	0.327	0.275
PSI4	0.331	0.565	0.258	0.290	**0.818**	0.321	0.330
PSI5	0.255	0.563	0.220	0.295	**0.807**	0.243	0.278
PSI6	0.314	0.481	0.277	0.240	**0.775**	0.398	0.276
SA1	0.558	0.401	0.300	0.530	0.317	**0.849**	0.511
SA2	0.645	0.387	0.347	0.453	0.352	**0.899**	0.411
SA3	0.664	0.431	0.326	0.532	0.413	**0.919**	0.500
TA1	0.330	0.244	0.293	0.580	0.281	0.408	**0.812**
TA2	0.337	0.215	0.276	0.610	0.236	0.450	**0.805**
TA3	0.324	0.317	0.205	0.418	0.309	0.410	**0.732**
TA4	0.408	0.342	0.380	0.458	0.279	0.403	**0.767**
TA5	0.325	0.372	0.316	0.488	0.315	0.394	**0.811**
TA6	0.360	0.299	0.328	0.509	0.293	0.451	**0.773**

Note.

TA = Task Attractiveness, SA= Social Attractiveness, PA=Physical Attractiveness, AH= Attitude Homophily, PSI=Parasocial Interaction, OC=Online Comments and PI = Purchase Intention

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Table 6 demonstrates that all Cronbach's alpha values exceed the threshold of 0.70, confirming satisfactory construct reliability for the measurement model (Hair et al., 2011). Discriminant validity was evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio, adhering to a benchmark of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2011; 2017). Additionally, the Fornell-Larcker criterion was applied, ensuring that the square root of the AVE for each construct (presented on the diagonals) is greater than the corresponding off-diagonal values, thereby establishing sufficient discriminant validity. Also, the reliability and validity values of the measurement model confirm that the constructs are suitably fit for evaluating the structural model.

Table 6: Discriminant Validity

Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)								
	Alpha	TA	SA	PA	AH	PSI	OC	PI
TA	**0.875**							
SA	**0.868**	0.613						
PA	**0.876**	0.745	0.648					
AH	**0.907**	0.497	0.790	0.647				
PSI	**0.795**	0.435	0.490	0.379	0.487			
OC	**0.871**	0.439	0.417	0.385	0.390	0.378		
PI	**0.845**	0.444	0.534	0.437	0.478	0.810	0.471	
Fornell-Larcker criterion								
		TA	SA	PA	AH	PSI	OC	PI
TA		**0.784**						
SA		0.533	**0.889**					
PA		0.643	0.568	**0.854**				
AH		0.445	0.702	0.579	**0.853**			
PSI		0.369	0.408	0.318	0.414	**0.788**		
OC		0.385	0.365	0.337	0.349	0.315	**0.850**	
PI		0.390	0.457	0.379	0.419	0.665	0.406	**0.828**

Note.

TA = Task Attractiveness, SA= Social Attractiveness, PA=Physical Attractiveness, AH= Attitude Homophily, PSI=Parasocial Interaction, OC=Online Comments and PI = Purchase Intention

4.2 Structural Model

This study utilized partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with 5,000 iterations using SmartPLS 4 to construct and analyze the model's input-output variables. Bootstrapping with 5000 iterations in SmartPLS enhances the precision and reliability of statistical estimates. It reduces standard errors and

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improves confidence interval accuracy, ensuring robust significance testing, especially in complex models (Hair et al., 2022).

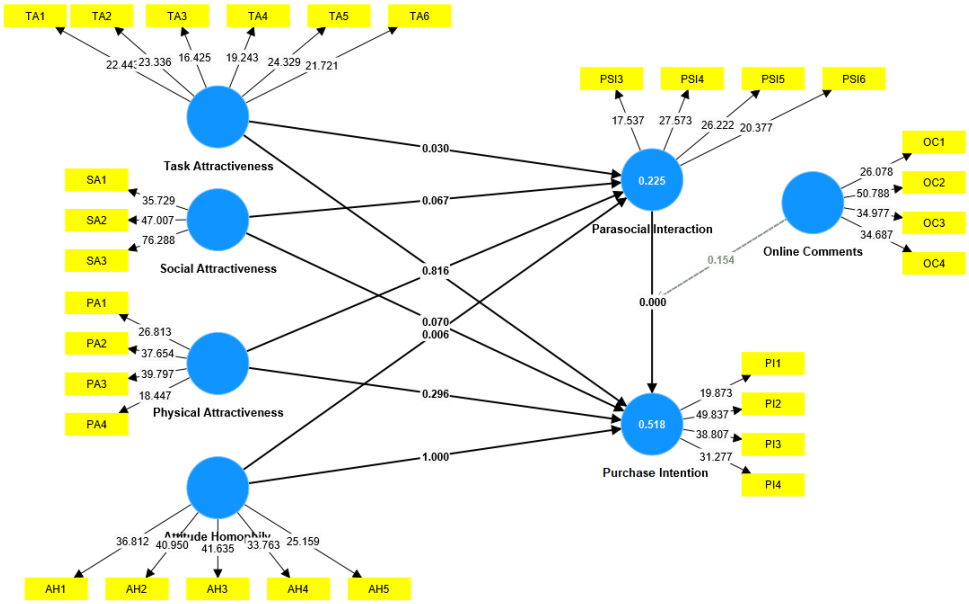

Figure 3: Structural Model of the Study

Table 7 presents various model fit indices. To minimize the risk of model misspecification, Henseler et al. (2014) recommended the SRMR as a measure of goodness of fit for PLS-SEM. A value below 0.10, or 0.08 for a more conservative approach, is deemed indicative of a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The model of the present study shows SRMR value of 0.064, demonstrating adequate model fit. The Normed Fit Index (NFI) value obtained, 0.771, is below the widely recognized threshold of 0.90. However, recent recommendations indicate that strict adherence to this standard is not always required in PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2017; Henseler et al., 2016). Considering the complexity of the model, alternative fit measures like SRMR and R^2 offered a comprehensive assessment of model fit and predictive relevance, reinforcing the adequacy of the findings (Chin, 1998).

Table 7: Model Fit, Coefficient of Determination (R^2) & Predictive Relevance (Q^2)

Model Fit	**SRMR**	0.064
	NFI	0.771
R^2	**PSI**	**PI**
	0.225	0.518
Q^2	0.175	0.235

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Following Cohen's (1988) principle, R^2 values for endogenous variables are classified as substantial (0.26), moderate (0.13) and weak (0.02). For parasocial interaction, the R^2 is 0.225, suggesting that approximately 22.5% of the variance in parasocial interactions is explained by the predictors. For purchase intention, the R^2 is 0.518, indicating that 51.8% of the variance in purchase intention is explained by the predictors. Hence, the dependent variables are largely explained by the independent variables.

The cross-validated redundancy (Q^2) assesses the model's predictive relevance. It demonstrates how accurately the values are reconstructed inside the model. According to Hair et al. (2013), predictive relevance is categorized as weak (0.02), moderate (0.15), and high (0.35). In this study, the Q^2 value of 0.175 for parasocial interaction implies that the model has a moderate level of predictive relevance for parasocial interaction. For purchase intention, the Q^2 value is 0.235, suggesting approximately strong level of predictive relevance for purchase intention.

Hypothesis Test

For the structural model, t statistics and p values were used to determine the effect sizes and the significance levels of the stated relationships.

Table 8: Hypotheses Test Results

Hypothesis	Relationship	t value	p value	Result
		Direct Effect		
H1a	TA – PSI	2.170	0.030*	Supported
H1b	SA – PSI	1.829	0.067	Not Supported
H1c	PA – PSI	0.390	0.697	Not Supported
H1d	AH – PSI	2.725	0.006**	Supported
H2	PSI – PI	8.202	0.000***	Supported
H3a	TA – PI	0.233	0.816	Not Supported
H3b	SA – PI	1.811	0.070	Not Supported
H3c	PA – PI	1.045	0.296	Not Supported
H3d	AH – PI	0.000	1.000	Not Supported
		Mediation Effect		
H4a	TA – PSI – PI	2.203	0.028*	Supported
H4b	SA – PSI – PI	1.747	0.081	Not Supported
H4c	PA – PSI – PI	0.390	0.697	Not Supported
H4d	AH – PSI –PI	2.608	0.009**	Supported
		Moderation Effect		
H5	OC * PSI - PI	1.427	0.154	Not supported

Note.
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

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Direct effect

The effect of task attractiveness on parasocial interaction is positive and significant, (t =2.170, p <0.05), supporting H1a. The effect of social attractiveness on parasocial interaction is insignificant (t =1.829, p>0.05), not supporting H1b. The effect of physical attractiveness on parasocial interaction is insignificant (t =0.390, p>0.05), not supporting H1c. The effect of attitude homophily to parasocial interaction is positive and significant, (t =2.725, p <0.05), supporting H1d. So, it is proved that task attractiveness and attitude homophily are two important determinants of parasocial interaction.

Next, the path from parasocial interaction to purchase intention is positive and significant, (t =8.202, p < 0.001), thus supporting H2. This indicates that parasocial interaction positively impacts purchase intention.

Moreover, the effect of task attractiveness on purchase intention is insignificant (t =0.233, p>0.05), not supporting H3a. Besides, the effect of social attractiveness on purchase intention is insignificant (t =1.811, p>0.05), not supporting H3b. Similarly, physical attractiveness does not have a significant effect on purchase intention (t =1.045, p>0.05), not supporting H3c. Likewise, the effect of attitude homophily on purchase intention is insignificant (t =0.000, p>0.05), not supporting H3d. So, in this study it is established that the four independent factors (task attractiveness, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily) did not have direct effect on purchase intention.

Mediation effect

The findings of the mediation test are illustrated in Table 8. As stated by Zhao et al. (2010), if a direct effect is insignificant and the specific indirect effect is significant, then mediation effect exists. In the direct relationship results, study already found that none of the direct effects of the independent constructs (task attractiveness, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily) on purchase intention are significant in this study. Now the indirect effect results showed that, the specific indirect effect of parasocial interaction between task attractiveness and purchase intention was significant (t =2.203, p <0.05), thus supporting H4a. Next, H4b and H4c were not supported in this study because the specific indirect effects were found to be insignificant (p>0.05). Lastly, the specific indirect effect of parasocial interaction between attitude homophily and purchase intention was significant (t =2.608, p <0.05), thus supporting H4d.

Table 9: Calculation of VAF

Hypothesis	Total effect (Coefficient)	Indirect effect (Coefficient)	Mediation Effect	VAF	Mediation (%)
H4a	0.121	0.107	Yes	0.884	88.4%
H4b	0.226	0.080	No	-	-
H4c	0.048	-0.020	No	-	-
H4d	0.122	0.122	Yes	1.00	100%

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Additionally, this study employed the variance accounted for (VAF) to quantify the proportion of the indirect effect relative to the total effect (Hair et al., 2014). VAF indicates complete mediation if the value is more than 80%, partial mediation if they range from 20% to 80%, and no mediation effect, if VAF value is less than 20% (Merli et al., 2019). As illustrated in Table 9, parasocial interaction fully mediates (88.4%) the relationship between task attractiveness and purchase intention. Besides, parasocial interaction fully mediates (100%) the relationship between attitude homophily and purchase intention.

Moderation effect

The results presented in Table 8, illustrates the moderating impact of online comments. It was found that, online comments showed no moderating effect on the relationship between parasocial interaction and purchase intention. ($t = 1.427$, $p > 0.05$), thus negating the H5. Hence, the effect of parasocial interaction on purchase intention is not contingent upon online comments. The parallel slope of the lines in figure 4 demonstrates that the relationship between parasocial interaction and purchase intention is not changeable due to online comments.

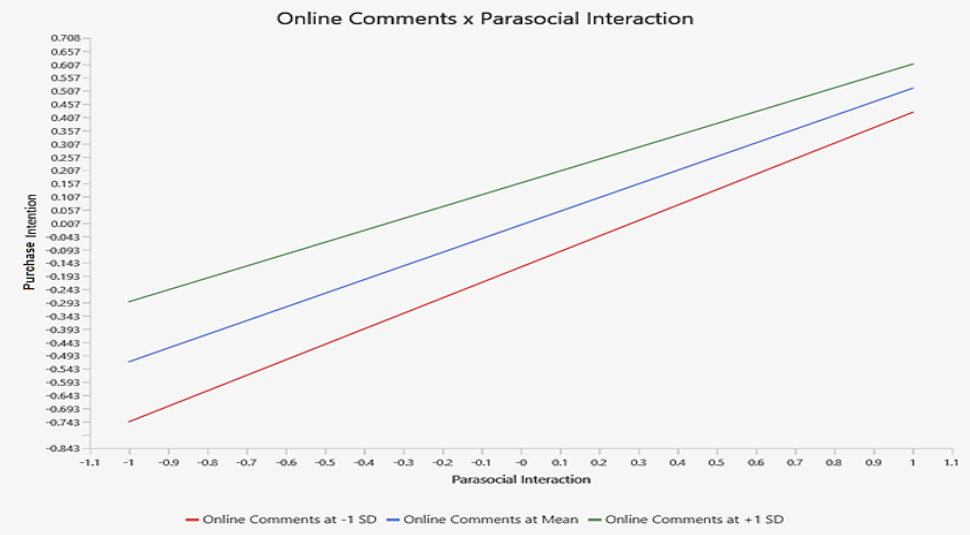

Figure 4: Moderation Effect of Online Comments

5. Discussions

Firstly, it is evident from the results that task attractiveness and attitude homophily are two important determinants of parasocial interaction. That means, if consumers' find the social media influencers to be knowledgeable, reliable and expert for having information about the required task, the parasocial interaction with that influencer will develop. Besides, when consumers think that the influencers have similar feelings and values with them, their parasocial interaction with that influencer will accelerate. Regarding task attractiveness, the current finding is similar to the findings of McCroskey and McCain (1974) and

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Su et al. (2021). Regarding attitude homophily, the current finding is similar to previous findings (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Lee & Watkins, 2016). The remaining two influencer characteristics (social attractiveness and physical attractiveness) did not have a significant impact on parasocial interaction. This finding is contrary to the earlier findings (Su et al., 2021; Lee & Watkins, 2016) but similar to Sokolova and Kefi (2020) who also found that physical attraction did not have significant effect on parasocial interaction.

Secondly, present study revealed that parasocial interaction has positive effect on purchase intention. That means, the psychological connections that viewers have with social media influencers will have an effect on their decision making regarding a product purchase. The current finding is similar to the results of past researches (Lee & Watkins, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

Next, this study also examined the impacts of influencers' characteristics (i.e., task attractiveness, social attractiveness, physical attractiveness, attitude homophily) on purchase intention. The results found that none of the influencers' characteristics had direct influence on purchase intention. This result is consistent with the finding of Özbölük and Akdogan (2022) and contrary to the finding of Xu et al. (2021).

Furthermore, results indicated that parasocial interaction fully mediates the relationship between task attractiveness and purchase intention. Besides, parasocial interaction fully mediates the relationship between attitude homophily and purchase intention. The results are thus similar to the findings of earlier studies (Xie & Feng, 2022; Xu et al., 2021). This is an interesting finding because task attractiveness and attitude homophily did not affect the purchase intention directly. But through the parasocial interaction these relationships became significant. That means, in order to influence the product purchase, influencers as well as the marketers who employed the influencers should focus on task attractiveness and attitude homophily in social media.

Lastly, finding implies that online comments did not have any moderation effect in shaping purchase intention through the parasocial interactions. This result implies that, when parasocial interaction occurs, other consumers' online comments do not have any effect to change its influence on purchase intention. This finding is contrary to the finding of Su et al. (2021).

6. Implications of the Study

In Bangladesh, specific studies examining the effect of influencers' characteristics on parasocial interaction and purchase intention is exceptional. Some exploratory studies (i.e., Morshed et al., 2022; Akter, 2023; Mazumder, 2023) were conducted to understand the circumstance of influencer marketing in Bangladesh. Hence, this study is an attempt in Bangladesh to understand how influencers' attributes affect the parasocial interaction and purchase intention in social media. Moreover, it is also a novel study in Bangladesh on the aspect of testing the mediating effect of parasocial interaction and moderating effect of online comments through proposing a multifaceted model.

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The results of the study have significant suggestions for Bangladeshi marketers who want to use influencer content in their marketing communications. Study results show that social media influencers might affect viewers' purchase intentions through task attractiveness, attitude homophily and parasocial interaction. As a result, Bangladeshi marketers need to consider the influencer's personal attributes carefully. Marketers should evaluate influencers' task attractiveness when developing product related communication materials. This will help audiences to believe that influencers are more dependable and knowledgeable about the purchasing task. Besides, marketers and influencers of Bangladesh should focus on creating interactive content that will share similar feelings and values with the consumers. It will improve the attitude homophily which is another important factor to affect purchase intention through parasocial interaction.

7. Limitations & Scope for Future Research

Though this is the comprehensive investigation of social media influencers' parasocial interaction, some limitations do exist that suggest scope for future research. Present study considered samples from only one country (i.e., Bangladesh). Thus, future studies could verify the proposed model in a cross-cultural context. Besides, the present study concentrated on influencers in general without considering the variations in content type. Future research may explore how content-specific influencers (e.g., well-being and mental health, food and nutrition, fashion and beauty, travel and lifestyle, photography and digital storytelling) differently impact parasocial interaction and purchase intention. Furthermore, respondents who are mostly students and unemployed were selected using the purposive sampling method. So, future research might adopt a larger sample size using a random sampling technique and focusing on different age and income categories. Lastly, this study tested the mediating role of parasocial interaction and the moderating role of online comments. Future studies can consider other important mediating variables (e.g., attitude, wishful identification, social presence) and moderating variables (e.g., age, gender, income) in the proposed model.

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