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An Investigation into the Impact of Influencers Producing Technological Content on Instagram on Customers' Purchasing Decisions



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Abstract

Nowadays, social media influencers play a significant role in the world of marketing. Social media influencers reach large audiences by producing content on social media platforms, and they exert considerable impact on these audiences. The literature suggests that social media users form parasocial relationships, and these relationships develop based on the influencer's characteristics, such as attractiveness, expertise, credibility, and similarity. It has also been proven in various studies that social media influencers have a strong effect on increasing the purchasing intentions of their followers. In this study, the effects of social media influencers on parasocial relationships and the purchasing intentions of their followers were examined. The research was conducted among Instagram users in Turkey, and the data were collected using a survey method. The survey included statements aimed at measuring elements such as parasocial relationships, attractiveness, expertise, credibility, and similarity. Because of the data analysis, it was found that characteristics such as influencers' attractiveness and expertise strengthen parasocial relationships, and these relationships positively influence followers' purchasing intentions. Additionally, the perception of fairness also had a significant impact on these relationships. These findings suggest that social media influencers can be an effective tool in marketing strategies.

Keywords

Social Media Influencers • Purchase Intention • Social Media Communication



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Introduction

Thanks to advances in information and communication technologies, "ordinary people" can become "social media influencers" by creating and sharing content on social media. A social media influencer is someone who has a loyal social following and exerts social influence over such followers (Yuan & Lou, 2019). In today's marketing world, influencer marketing has rapidly gained importance as a powerful strategy (Bastrygina & Lim, 2023). Brands are increasingly investing in this area because they recognize its vast potential (Koay et al., 2023).

Popularity has a significant impact on marketing, and this effect can be enhanced by influencer-product compatibility (Çelik & Taş, 2021; Kim & Kim, 2021). Many studies have highlighted the role of parasocial relationships, which are emotionally-based connections formed with social media influencers (Vrontis et al., 2021). Internet users with large numbers of followers on social media are often seen as well-known micro-influencers whose behaviors and attitudes do not influence large-scale attitudes. Whether online or offline, these individuals are trusted, and followers frequently seek their advice, underscoring the importance of social media influencers. People also view them as trendsetters in one or more fields and are particularly influential over individuals who share specific interests (De Veirman et al., 2017). In many cases, this influence triggers consumers' desire to emulate them by narrating their personal lives, lifestyles, and choices through user-generated content, both textually and visually, or through electronic word-of-mouth communication (Ki & Kim, 2019). In addition to product promotion, influencers also endorse certain lifestyles and behaviors. In this regard, similar to traditional media, influencers can shape their followers' attitudes and behaviors beyond purchasing decisions. However, studies examining the role of social media influencers in promoting positive behavioral changes outside purchasing decisions are rare (Casaló et al., 2020).

The importance of influencer marketing continues to grow, making it an indispensable component of integrated marketing communications (Childers et al., 2019). Brand managers increasingly rely on social media influencers, also known as "micro-celebrities," to promote their products. According to one study, approximately 49% of followers trust an influencer's recommendations, and approximately 40% purchase products endorsed by social media influencers (Delbaere et al., 2021). The widespread use of social-media platforms has enabled certain accounts to reach large audiences, turning these accounts into social-media influencers. Influencers have attracted the attention of marketing researchers due to their ability to influence their followers' purchasing intentions (Cabeza-Ramírez et al., 2022). The mechanism by which followers develop loyalty to social media influencers remains unclear. Loyalty to social media influencers differs from loyalty to websites, and these differences stem from the essence of various interpersonal interactions. According to social contagion theory, emotions are highly contagious among people. Interactions between followers and social media influencers can trigger psychological responses in followers (Yuan & Dennis, 2019).

Parasocial relationships are derived from parasocial interaction theory and consider the connection between individuals and influencers in terms of self-compatibility, language and interest similarity, interaction frequency, and the perception of friendship, in relation to physical attractiveness and credibility. Parasocial relationships are supported by shared content that fosters perceptions of intimacy, access to influencers' personal lives, and the presence of a dialog, thus validating the idea that parasocial relationships in the context of social networks can be seen as a form of advertising (Lueck, 2015). Social media provides influencers with the opportunity to build parasocial relationships by engaging in two-way communication with followers, sharing authentic and valuable content, responding to followers' questions, and offering

giveaways to encourage interaction and engagement. However, this relationship is not perfect, as it is largely controlled by the social media influencers themselves (Lou, 2022).

Parasocial interaction is a process that forms through viewers' psychological responses to media figures. Over time, this interaction leads to the development of parasocial relationships. The one-way relationships established between media figures and viewers make viewers feel as though they are in a close relationship with the characters. Viewers develop bonds with characters similar to the one they form with their friends and are influenced by their behavior. Social media influencers can also unknowingly initiate parasocial interaction processes through the bonds they establish with their followers (Akdeniz & Uyar, 2021). The concept of parasocial interaction was first used in the 1950s to describe one-way communication between media audiences and media figures. However, the development of mass communication tools over time has required a reevaluation of the interaction between media audiences and media figures. In particular, media figures now acknowledge and respond to viewers' emotions and reactions through social media. This interaction is related to how viewers perceive media figures and can result in internal or behavioral responses. With the innovations brought by technology, the dimension of parasocial interaction has changed, and individuals with high social anxiety try to resolve this interaction with imaginary media characters. A close relationship between parasocial interaction and psychological health has also been identified (Keskin, 2020).

The marketing opportunities provided by Instagram have enabled businesses operating in the technology sector to establish a presence on this platform (Çelik & Bora, 2021). Companies have exploited the opportunity to promote their products by collaborating with influencers to create technology-related content. This study investigates the impact of the following technology-focused influencers on users' intentions to purchase such products. Thus, this research aims to contribute to both theoretical and practical knowledge in the literature. Additionally, it seeks to inform businesses about the variables that they should focus on when developing their Instagram marketing strategies.

The study explored and evaluate the influence of Instagram influencers who produce technological content on customers' purchasing decisions. Specifically, this study aims to understand how the credibility, engagement, and perceived expertise of these influencers affect consumer behavior, brand perception, and product selection in the technological sector. By examining the relationship between influencer content and customer decision-making, this research aims to identify key factors that drive consumer trust and the role that influencer marketing plays in shaping purchase intentions within a digital platform. Additionally, the study provides insights into how companies in the technology industry can collaborate strategically with influencers to enhance their marketing effectiveness and drive sales.

Literature Review

Current studies on social media influencer marketing have focused on how viewers perceive the alignment between their own image and the perceived image of the influencer (personality-based self-image congruence) and how the influencer's image aligns with the image of the brand or destination that they endorse (brand-based congruence) (Xu & Pratt, 2018). When a social media influencer follows the personal brand sales model, they generate income by directly selling products to their followers. Influencers attract audiences by showcasing their personal tastes on social media (McQuarrie, Miller, & Phillips, 2013), and if followers appreciate the esthetic taste of an influencer, that influencer gains leadership in taste and

is considered a consumption role model (Ki & Kim, 2019). After acquiring the power to influence target consumers, influencers profit by selling personalized products that align with their image to their followers.

Evidence shows that the persuasive power of social media influencers (SMIs) is a significant factor and argument quality should be seen as just as important as source credibility in predicting the effectiveness of SMI marketing campaigns. In the context of social commerce platforms, users are more likely to engage with other users who are professionals in a particular field. As experts, social media influencers create communities around themselves in niche markets and become specialty experts within these targeted communities (Xiang et al., 2016). Research conducted on a social-media platform revealed that users prefer to use the application for entertainment and to gain knowledge about their interests, and they find the influencers they follow convincing. A study on mom influencers found that these influencers guide brand preferences and influence followers' purchasing behavior. Furthermore, sincerity was identified as the top trait followers seek in influencers (Akdeniz & Uyar, 2021).

If customers spend an unusually long time on a preferred site, their likelihood of purchasing increases, as does their exposure to advertisements (Koh, Kim, & Kim, 2014). Existing literature reveals that psychological and personal factors, such as social norms, self-identity, social marketing, environmental concern, intrinsic awareness, consumer value, and emotional intelligence, influence sustainable attitudes and consumption (Dhandra, 2019). Changing public consumption behavior is difficult because many other situational and psychological factors also come into play (Joshi & Rahman, 2019). Environmental factors on social media (e.g., parasocial relationships, celebrity endorsements, product advertisements, bundle deals, online reviews, and time pressure) trigger users' desire to purchase (Chen et al., 2016).

Social networks such as Twitter and Facebook facilitate increased parasocial interaction between media audiences and media figures today. When popular individuals/groups or celebrities respond to their followers on social media, this strengthens the parasocial interaction/relationship between the media audience and the media figure. One study pointed out that the positive direction of the relationship between fans and celebrities on Twitter, where reciprocal interaction is prominent, strengthens parasocial relationships (Pennington et al., 2016: 69). Another study found that when celebrities share various posts on Twitter, their fans perceive celebrities as social beings and feel as though these social beings are part of their own lives. Recognizing celebrities as social entities increases the positive direction of parasocial interaction. Fans tend to develop interpersonal relationships with celebrities as if they were friends in real life (Kim & Song, 2016, p. 574).

Studies have revealed that admiration for media figures may stem from psychological needs that are lacking in social life (Çelik, 2021; Batıgün & Sunal, 2017). The transformation of sociability, a fundamental topic in sociology, is revealed through the changes in the scope of interaction that individuals experience as they transition from social life to social networks. Since the 2000s, the increasing use of the internet and the resulting changes and transformations in social relationships have shown that the definition of sociability has begun to evolve with digitalization (Keskin, 2020).

Because consumers can communicate directly with people on social media and evaluate their lives as though they are friends, social media is an excellent platform for developing meaningful and intimate social relationships between media celebrities and audiences (Chung & Cho, 2017). In their study of luxury brands' video blogs on YouTube, it was found that the social attractiveness and physical attractiveness of video bloggers increased parasocial interaction (Lee & Watkins, 2016). They also found that the antecedents of parasocial interaction consist of physical attractiveness, social attractiveness, motivation for entertainment,

and motivation for relationship building (Liu et al., 2019). Parasocial interaction between video bloggers and their viewers helps viewers develop positive attitudes and behaviors (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Conceptual Model

Studies in the literature have revealed that the time social media users spend on social media and their personality traits impact the degree of parasocial relationships. Attractiveness refers to the appearance and physical beauty of the source in terms of facial features and other physical characteristics (Ismagilova et al., 2020). Many studies have concluded that communication effectiveness is achieved through factors such as attractiveness, expertise, similarity, and credibility, and it is predicted that well-known individuals on social media will establish parasocial interaction with their followers (Munnukka et al., 2016; Yuan & Lou, 2020).

Viewers can engage in parasocial interaction with a character in a program or TV series that impacts them. The character's charm and attractiveness are important factors in this interaction (Keskin, 2020). The concept of social attractiveness, which refers to having positive feelings toward the character with whom one interacts socially, is considered a strong element in many studies in the field of social media, particularly in examining individuals' behaviors (Zheng et al., 2019). Expertise is related to the knowledge that well-known individuals on social media have about the products they promote and the domain of these products (Xiao et al., 2018). Expertise is an important factor in encouraging parasocial communication among followers of well-known social media figures (Aw & Chuah, 2021). The expertise of the source from which the message is received has always been considered an important element from the consumer's perspective. Expertise is also closely related to credibility, which is defined as the degree of credibility. Studies in the literature have shown that expertise has a positive impact on both attitude and purchase intention (Akdeniz & Uyar, 2021). Credibility is related to the honesty and accuracy of a source when conveying a message (Jin et al., 2019). Studies on the characteristics of media personalities suggest that their credibility is a crucial factor in determining the persuasiveness of their messages (Ecker & Antonio, 2021). The more trust the target audience has in the media figure, the stronger their parasocial interaction. Another key component of the relationship between the media figure and the audience, similar to interpersonal interaction, is the extent to which the audience can form judgments about the person with whom they are interacting (Aytulun & Sunal, 2020). Similarity is defined as the common qualities between well-known individuals on social media and their target audience (Schiappa et al., 2007). The concept of similarity is concerned with shared values, education, social status, beliefs, and attitudes between the source and receiver. The perceived similarity of users with a media character positively influences parasocial interaction (Akdeniz & Uyar, 2021). Similarity enhances the credibility of influencers with their target audience and increases the persuasiveness of messages (the Yuan & Lou, 2020). Based on this information, the following hypotheses are formulated:

- H1: Attractiveness has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.
- H2: Expertise has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.
- H3: Credibility has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.
- H4: Similarity has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.

Justice concerns what and how people perceive fairness. This perception can affect attitudes and behaviors (Dahanayake et al., 2018). Many studies have mentioned that justice is an important factor in increasing the effectiveness of online brands (Hernández Soto et al., 2021). Distributive justice refers to the fair distribution of rewards and resources (Uwa, 2022). Interpersonal justice refers to being treated with respect and dignity (Brockner et al., 2021). Interpersonal justice has been identified as a key precursor to parasocial

interactions with well-known individuals on social media (the Yuan & Lou, 2020). Procedural fairness is concerned with the fairness of the overall decision-making process (Choi et al., 2022). Justice strengthens personal bonds among members of online brand communities and creates a positive perception of the brand (Usoro & Majewski, 2011). Informational justice is concerned with how well information is communicated (Brockner et al., 2021). Justice fosters participation among members of online brand communities and leads to deeper brand understanding (Majewski et al., 2011). Considering this information, the following hypotheses are formulated:

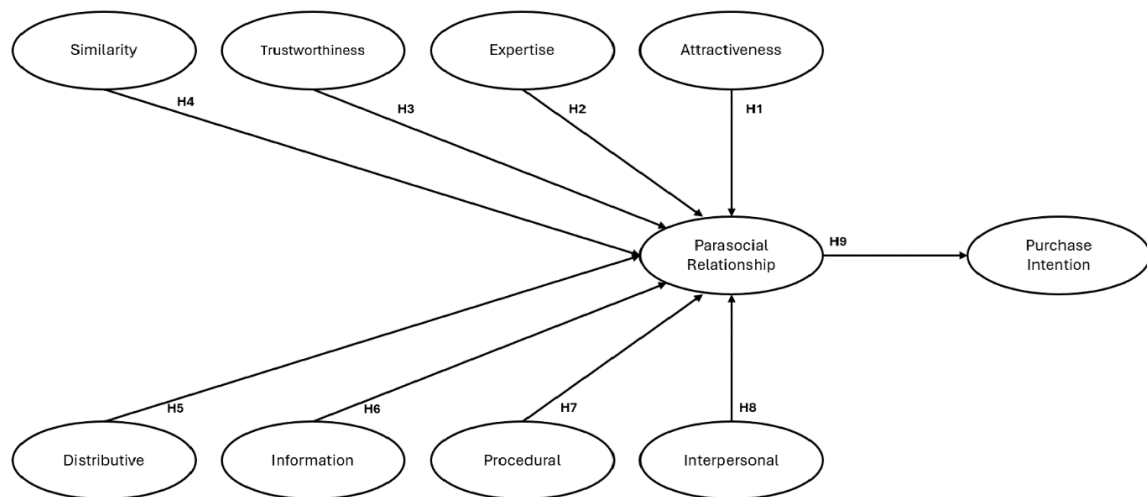
- H5: Distributive justice has significant and positive effects on parasocial relationships.
- H6: Interpersonal justice has significant and positive effects on parasocial relationships.
- H7: Procedural fairness has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.
- H8: Informational justice has a significant and positive effect on parasocial relationships.

Marketing companies have been interested in whether the money spent on social media influencers yields results and whether influencers increase their followers' purchase intentions. Marketing-related outcomes are important indicators for measuring the success of marketing efforts (Leite & Baptista, 2021). Social media influencers are different from celebrities because their communication with followers is stronger (Lou & Kim, 2019). Numerous studies have been conducted on marketing activities conducted through social media (De Veirman et al., 2017; Hughes et al., 2019; Lou & Kim, 2019). There are also studies on the parasocial relationships of social media influencers and their impact on followers' purchase intentions (Farivar et al., 2021). Accordingly, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- H9: Parasocial relationships have a significant and positive effect on purchase intention.

Figure 1

The Conceptual Model for the Study



Research Methodology

Samples

The empirical part of this study was conducted through a survey in Turkey. An online survey was developed using Google Forms to collect the study data. The survey link was distributed through various channels

such as Instagram, WhatsApp, and email. While determining the sample, specific eligibility criteria were considered, and selection was made in line with demographic targets. Participants were deemed eligible if they used Instagram, and those who followed an influencer were included in the analysis. Individuals who did not follow social media influencers were excluded from the study. Individuals aged 18 years and older were randomly included in the study. The necessary data were gathered from a sample of 765 Instagram users who follow influencers who produce technology-related content on Instagram. To assess the participants' eligibility, a screening question was used to determine whether they were interested in technological products and whether they followed any Instagram influencers who share content related to such products. The first question of the survey was, "Do you follow a social media influencer on Instagram who posts about technological products?" Data from 32 participants who answered "No" to this question were excluded from the analysis. Consequently, data from 733 Instagram users were included in the analysis. Since participants who did not follow influencers producing technology-related content were excluded from the study, our sampling technique can be classified as purposive sampling (Cash et al., 2022). Ethical permission was obtained for this study at the meeting of Gümüşhane University Scientific Publication and Ethics Board dated 20/09/2024 and numbered 2024/7.

Because the study was conducted in Turkey, the scales used in the study were adapted to Turkish. To minimize the effects of cultural and linguistic differences, the survey was translated into Turkish, the official language of Turkey, using Brislin's (1976) back-translation method. Additionally, the Turkish version of the survey was reviewed by two experts specializing in Management Information Systems and Marketing. Furthermore, a pilot study was conducted with 32 undergraduate students at Bartın University, and most participants indicated that the language used in the survey was clear and understandable.

Measures

The survey consists of three sections. The first section provides information about the purpose of the survey and its conduct. Participants were informed that the data obtained from the study would be used for academic purposes and that participation was voluntary. Additionally, information was provided regarding the numerous technology-related accounts currently available on social media platforms.

The second section of the survey included questions that sought to obtain demographic information about the participants. In the third section, statements related to the scales of attractiveness, expertise, credibility, similarity, distributive justice, information justice, procedural justice, interpersonal justice, parasocial relationship, and purchase intention were included. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

The scales for attractiveness, expertise, credibility, and similarity were adapted from Munnukka et al. (2016), while the scales for distributive justice, information justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice were obtained from Yuan and Lou (2020). The parasocial relationship scale was sourced from the study by Yuan and Lou (2020). The purchase intention scale was derived from Liu and Brock (2011).

Data Analysis

Because R is an open-source and free program, it was used for data analysis (Çelik et al., 2018). Initially, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted in R. Following this, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) analysis was performed. The validity and reliability analysis of the data was conducted using R.

Results

The results section begins by providing a preliminary analysis of the demographic statistics. This section presents the two-step structural equation modeling (SEM) adopted to validate the conceptual model and test the related hypotheses. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in the first phase will be presented in Section 4.2, while Section 4.3 will present the results of the structural model, which is the second phase of the SEM.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Individuals Participating in The Study

Characteristic	Measurements	Quantity	(%) Percentage
Gender	Male	325	45
	Female	412	55
Age	17-19	143	20
	19-21	189	26
	21-23	206	28
	23 and more	195	26
	Less than 1 minimum wage	519	71
Monthly income (minimum wage)	Between 1 and 2 minimum wages	123	17
	More than 2 minimum wages	91	12
	Less than 3 years	62	9
How many years have you been using Instagram?	3-6 years	292	40
	7-10 years	278	38
	11 years and more	101	13
	Less than 1 hour	107	15
How many hours a day do you spend on Instagram on average?	1-3 hours	359	49
	4-6 hours	197	27
	7 hours or more	70	9
How many social media influencers do you follow who share posts about technological products on Instagram?	1	214	29
	2-5	356	49
	6-9	125	17
	10 and more	38	5
TOTAL		733	100

As seen in the Table 1, more than half of the 733 participants in the survey were women (55%). The majority of the participants (28%) were in the 21-23 age group, 26% were in the 19-21 age group, another 26% were aged 23 and older, and 20% were in the 17-19 age group. When examining the income level distribution, nearly all participants (71%) reported having a monthly income of less than one minimum wage. Participants were asked how many years they have been using Instagram. 40% reported using Instagram for 3-6 years, 38% for 7-10 years, 13% for more than 11 years, and 9% for less than 3 years. 49% of participants use Instagram for 1-3 hours a day, while 27% spend 4-6 hours on Instagram. Participants were also asked how many social media influencers they followed who shared content related to technological products. 49% of participants reported following between 2 and 5 influencers, 29% followed 1 influencer, 17% followed between 6 and 9 influencers, and 5% followed 10 or more.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

In this section, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the model fit indices. For this purpose, fit indices such as CMIN/DF (Normed Chi-Square), CFI (Comparative Fit Index), RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation), RNI (Relative Non-Centrality), and IFI (Incremental Fit Index). As shown in the table, all goodness-of-fit indices indicated an acceptable level of fit. This suggests that the data obtained are consistent with the proposed research model.

Table 2

Results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis to Test Hypotheses' Validity

Goodness of fit values	Good Fit	Acceptable Compliance	Value	Conclusion
CMIN/DF	<3	<5	2895.760/657=4.4	Acceptable fit
CFI	>0.95	>0.90	0.901	Acceptable fit
RMSEA	<0.050	<0.080	0.068	Acceptable fit
RNI	>0.95	>0.90	0.901	Acceptable fit
IFI	>0.95	>0.90	0.901	Acceptable fit

According to Table 2, all goodness-of-fit indices were within acceptable fit levels. The results indicate that the model exhibits a satisfactory fit to the data. Therefore, the fit indices confirmed the adequacy of the proposed measurement model.

Validity and Reliability Analysis

Table 3

Correlation matrix and Validity and Reliability analysis

	α	AVE	CR	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1-AT	.80	.53	.81	(.72)									
2-EX	.91	.72	.91	.47*	(.84)								
3-TR	.91	.74	.92	.48*	.76*	(.86)							
4-SM	.85	.66	.85	.52*	.51*	.63*	(.81)						
5-DI	.87	.70	.87	.46*	.70*	.75*	.65*	(.83)					
6-INT	.87	.69	.86	.47*	.57*	.67*	.66*	.69*	(.83)				
7-PRO	.80	.57	.80	.41*	.51*	.55*	.61*	.58*	.64*	(.75)			
8-INF	.86	.68	.86	.44*	.70*	.77*	.62*	.78*	.68*	.63*	(.82)		
9-PR	.89	.58	.89	.51*	.61*	.72*	.67*	.70*	.69*	.62*	.75*	(.76)	
10-PI	.89	.60	.90	.51*	.50*	.56*	.63*	.59*	.62*	.58*	.59*	.70*	(.77)

α : Cronbach's Alpha Confidence Coefficient; CR: Construct Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; Values in parentheses are the square root of AVE values; AT: Attractiveness; EX: Expertise; TR: Credibility; SM: Similarity; DI: Distributive justice; INT: Interpersonal justice; PRO: Procedural fairness; INF: Informational justice; PR: Parasocial relationships; PI: Purchase intention; *, $p < 0.01$

Table 3 presents the correlation matrix for each scale along with the Average Variance Extracted (AVE), Composite Reliability (CR), and Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient. The results indicate that Cronbach's Alpha coefficients for all scales ranges between 0.80 and 0.91. To ensure the reliability of the scales, Cronbach's Alpha should exceed 0.7 (Iacobucci & Duhachek, 2003; Nunnally, 1978). The findings suggest that the scales exhibit a high level of reliability.

CR should be higher than AVE, and for convergent validity, AVE should be greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010; Fornell & Larcker, 1981). Table 3 shows that all AVE values exceeded 0.5, confirming the validity of the constructs. Additionally, the CR values for all scales surpass the AVE values, further supporting the validity of the scales. Discriminant validity was also examined. The square root of the AVE should be greater than the correlation coefficients between the respective variables and other variables to establish discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010). Table 3 demonstrates that for each scale, the square root of the AVE is higher than the inter-component correlation.

A correlation analysis was conducted to examine how the variables are related to each other. The results indicate that all variables exhibit a significant ($p < .01$) positive relationship. Among the constructs, informational justice and distributive justice showed the highest correlation ($r = 0.78$, $p < .01$), whereas attractiveness and procedural fairness exhibited the lowest correlation ($r = 0.41$, $p < .01$).

Following the recommendation of Podsakoff et al. (2023), Harman's single-factor test was employed to assess common method variance (CMV). Accordingly, an unrotated exploratory factor analysis was performed for all variables. As indicated by the single-factor solution explaining 47% of the variance, no dominant component was present in the study, which is below the 50% threshold. Based on the results of Harman's single-factor test, common method variance was not a concern.

Structural Model

Table 3 presents the results of the structural equation model analysis, including the standardized β values, p-values, and the status of hypothesis support or rejection. Accordingly, H1, H4, H6, H8, and H9 were supported, whereas H2, H3, H5, and H7 were rejected.

The analysis revealed that the R^2 value for the parasocial relationship variable was 0.829. This indicates that the variables used in the study explain 83% of the parasocial relationships. Additionally, it was found that the purchase intention variable is explained by the related variable at a rate of 62%. The 83% explanation of the parasocial relationship variable indicates that a strong model has been established, whereas the 62% explanation of purchase intention suggests that consumer behavior is also influenced by other variables.

Table 4

Acceptance and Rejection Distributions of The Hypotheses

Hypotheses	Std. BETA	p	Accept/Reject
H1	0.112	.001	Accept
H2	-0.041	.427	Reject
H3	0.073	.299	Reject
H4	0.209	.000	Accept
H5	-0.095	.297	Reject
H6	0.145	.008	Accept
H7	0.056	.319	Reject
H8	0.562	.000	Accept
H9	0.786	.000	Accept

Because of the structural equation model analysis, H1, H4, H6, H8, and H9 were accepted, whereas H2, H3, H5, and H7 were rejected.

The analysis revealed that the R^2 value for the parasocial relationship variable was 0.829. This indicates that the variables used in the study explain 83% of the parasocial relationships. Additionally, it was found that the purchase intention variable is explained by the related variable at a rate of 62%.

Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the results of the structural equation model analysis, variables influencing parasocial relationships and purchase intentions were evaluated. The analysis supported H1, H4, H6, H8, and H9, whereas H2, H3, H5, and H7 were rejected. These findings indicate that some variables have a statistically significant effect on parasocial relationships and purchase intentions, whereas others do not have the expected impact.

The R^2 value obtained for the parasocial relationship variable was 0.829, indicating that the variables used explained 83% of the parasocial relationship. This finding suggests that the parasocial relationships were largely explained by the variables included in the model. Furthermore, the fact that the purchase intention variable is explained at a rate of 62% indicates that the factors influencing this intention are adequately represented within the model.

The findings from the structural equation model (SEM) analysis reveal significant results regarding parasocial relationships and purchase intentions. Acceptance of some hypotheses indicates that certain variables have a meaningful impact on these relationships, whereas rejection of other hypotheses suggests that those variables do not have the expected effect. This indicates that parasocial relationships and purchase intentions are complex constructs, and understanding them fully requires considering more factors and variables (Brown, 2019; Smith, 2020).

Studies on parasocial relationships have revealed that these relationships are defined as one-sided social bonds that individuals form with media figures (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The R^2 value of 83% in this study suggests that parasocial relationships can be largely explained. This high percentage confirms that influencers, especially those producing technology-focused content on social media platforms, can establish strong parasocial relationships with their followers, and these relationships can significantly impact consumer behavior (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2018; Lee & Watkins, 2016).

Moreover, the fact that purchase intentions are explained by 62% of respondents indicates that the factors influencing these intentions are largely well-represented. In the marketing of technology products, the role of influencers emerges as a key factor that influences purchase decisions (Freberg et al., 2011). However, the rejection of some hypotheses suggests that not all variables have the expected effect, and further research is needed on this topic (Park & Lee, 2021). For instance, factors such as social interaction and content quality may have a different impact on parasocial relationships than expected, and these aspects should be examined more deeply in future studies. Rejection of H2 and H3; the lack of the expected impact of the "expertise" and "credibility" variables on parasocial relationships may be due to users perceiving technology influencers not as sources of information but rather as sources of entertainment and inspiration. While previous research (e.g., Yuan & Lou, 2020) has emphasized the effect of expertise, the characteristics of the sample group in this study (such as age and duration of social media use) may have led to different results. Rejection of H5 and H7; the lack of an effect of distributive justice and procedural justice on parasocial relationships suggests that users place less importance on perceptions of justice in their relationships with influencers. Individual consumer experiences and influencers' marketing strategies may particularly influence this outcome.

In conclusion, this study makes a significant contribution to the literature on understanding the effects of social media influencers on parasocial relationships and purchase intentions. However, the rejection of some hypotheses indicates that more variables and factors need to be considered to fully comprehend influencer effects (Smith, 2020). Future research focusing on different social media platforms and product categories may help to better understand these relationships in a broader context.

In conclusion, the accepted hypotheses in the structural equation model analysis provide significant contributions to understanding parasocial relationships and purchase intentions, whereas the rejected hypotheses suggest the need for further examination of the model with different variables. The findings of this study offer a solid foundation for future research into consumer behavior and parasocial relationships.

Theoretical contributions and practical implications

Given the purpose of this study, important relationships among the variables were identified as a result of the analyses. According to these results, the existence of individuals' parasocial interactions and purchase decisions was confirmed. From this perspective, the ease of access provided by social media influences people's behaviors. Overall, this study contributes to theoretical and practical knowledge in the literature and complements the results of other studies. Additionally, it can guide businesses, individuals, and potential entrepreneurs toward developing better marketing strategies.

This research theoretically extends the impact of social media influencers on individual purchase intentions. According to the results, the standardized regression weights for all statements related to the structures are above 0.50 and are consistent with the values suggested by Hair et al. (2010). This study contributes to a new approach that emphasizes the importance of information shared by social media influencers with their followers. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for all structures were above 0.50 and were consistent with those suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The findings of this study can help companies actively promoting products on social media by identifying information that aids in understanding consumer purchasing behavior and controlling the content of online reviews.

Businesses must be meticulous in selecting the right influencers to optimize their influencer marketing strategies. Factors such as the influencer's content type, alignment with the target audience, and engagement rate should be carefully evaluated. Rather than focusing solely on follower count, brands should analyze the influencer's relationship with their audience, credibility, and content style before making collaboration decisions. Micro-influencers, despite having smaller followings, can be valuable for brands due to their high engagement rates and strong credibility among their audience.

The content strategy should also be well-planned in influencer collaborations. It is crucial to present advertising content organically to capture followers' interest. Rather than seeing direct promotional messages, followers tend to find influencer-led, experience-based product introductions more trustworthy. Therefore, storytelling and user experience-driven content can generate higher engagement. Additionally, actively using video formats such as Instagram Reels, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts can enhance audience interaction with the content. Campaigns that encourage user-generated content can further expand a brand's reach and engagement levels.

Building marketing strategies that build trust and credibility is of utmost importance. Because transparency directly impacts consumer trust in a brand, influencers should explicitly disclose their sponsorship agreements in promotional content. When followers perceive that influencers share honest opinions about a product, their trust in the brand increases. At the same time, businesses should avoid collaborating with



influencers who have fake followers or low engagement rates. Engagement metrics and genuine audience reach should be among the top criteria when selecting influencers.

Limitations and future research

Participants in the study generally come from a specific demographic profile. This situation may limit the generalizability of the findings to the general population. For instance, a study conducted only with users from a specific age group or geographical area may struggle to represent the overall social media users. Online shopping is often subject to individuals' subjective approaches and attitudes. Assessing participants' personal experiences, expectations, and shopping habits can be challenging. Social media platforms are subject to rapidly changing features and algorithmic updates. Users are often selective when sharing information on social media platforms. Differences between actual shopping behaviors and what is shared on social media can affect the results of this study. There are various independent variables that influence online shopping experience. It may be challenging to exert complete control over these factors, which could affect the process of establishing accurate causal relationships. Understanding these limitations and being cautious regarding the mentioned constraints is crucial for interpreting the study findings.

The results indicate that parasocial interactions alter or influence individuals' purchasing behaviors. Future research could investigate different scenarios to broaden our understanding of the effects of parasocial interactions on people. Encouraging influencers to share their experiences may provide significant advantages for both large and small brands. Therefore, future research could explore how businesses using social media as a tool for promoting their products can use parasocial communication more effectively.



Ethics Committee Approval

Ethics committee approval was received for this study from the ethics committee of Gümüşhane University (Date: 20.09.2024, Number: 2024/7).

Informed Consent

Written informed consent was obtained from all participants who participated in this study.

Peer Review

Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions

Conception/Design of Study- A.T.; Data Acquisition- K.Ç.; Data Analysis/Interpretation- A.T., K.Ç.; Drafting Manuscript- A.T., K.Ç.; Critical Revision of Manuscript- A.T., K.Ç.; Final Approval and Accountability- A.T., K.Ç.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

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