

# Effect of Parasocial Commitment and Breakup with a Fictional Character on Purchase Intention

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## Abstract

**Purpose :** To mitigate the danger of non-fictional character transgression, this study used the investment model and research on fictional character endorsement. Furthermore, it attempted to investigate how parasocial breakup (PSB) mediated the relationship between commitment to parasocial relationships (PSR) and purchase intention (PI) for the fictional character.

**Design/Methodology/Approach :** A mixed-methods approach was employed in the subject selection process. The states and districts were chosen using a random sampling process based on a lottery system. Additionally, the quota for each chosen state and district was fixed using a quota sampling technique. The current study selected five states from 29 states, as well as five districts within each state, using the lottery method of random sampling technique. Furthermore, the quota for each chosen state was determined using the quota sampling approach.

**Findings :** The present study's findings showed a positive relationship between commitment to PSR with a fictional character and PI. However, PSB appeared to negatively mediate the relationship between commitment to PSR and PI concerning the fictional character.

**Practical Implications :** Fictional characters could serve as a potent marketing tool capable of effectively promoting consumer parasocial commitment and PI. Therefore, companies should contemplate incorporating fictional characters in their marketing strategies, particularly in product categories where consumers exhibit low involvement and require a relationship-building experience with the brand.

**Originality/Value :** As far as we know, this is the first study to analyze the interplay between commitment in a PSR, PSR breakup, and PI.

**Keywords :** fictional character, parasocial relationship (PSR), parasocial breakup (PSB), purchase intention (PI), endorsement, investment model

**JEL Classification Codes :** D64, E22, M30, M37

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Advertising has been the most prominent form of marketing communication since 1980 (Belch et al., 2013; Ravichandran, 2023), emphasizing the significance of strategic marketing communication for commercial success. The global advertising industry is expected to reach \$792 billion by 2027, while the Indian advertising industry has grown dramatically over the last decade, reaching \$8.35 billion in 2019 and

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increasing at an 11.83% CAGR to \$16.33 billion by 2025 (Dentsu Aegis Network, 2020). Marketers can choose a spokesperson from fictional characters (mascots, movie media characters, animation or cartoon characters, human-based characters, etc.) or non-fictional characters (actors, models, sports athletes, social influencers, pop stars, businessmen, politicians, etc.) (Kewalramani & Sandeep, 2012; Khatri, 2006).

The existing literature suggests that celebrity endorsement increases the effectiveness of advertisements (Aldridge et al., 2009). To avoid the risk of celebrity transgression (Anwer, 2015; Knittel & Stango, 2014; Salinas, 2018), the use of a fictional character for endorsement purposes seems like a better choice. Fictional characters are more powerful in terms of establishing recognition and credibility for the media message, and they are as well-known as other celebrities like movie actors, athletes, or musicians (Born, 2021; Mathur et al., 2024). Many well-known brands have used fictional endorsers such as media/movie characters (Hulk, the Hollywood movie character in the Band-Aid advertisement; Munna Bhai, the Bollywood movie character in the Flipkart advertisement) or animated/imaginary characters (Top Cat, the American animated character used in Halifax, and the Chacha Chaudhary comic character used as Brand Ambassador for the Namami Gange Project) (Ministry of Jal Shakti, 2020; Van der Walde et al., 2009).

When a viewer develops a parasocial connection to the character or celebrity, the endorsement is most effective. The continuation of this association is uncertain (Brunick et al., 2016). Relationships require commitment, which shapes attitudes and behaviors (Johnson, 2021; Rusbult, 1980). This applies to organizational commitment (Hakimian et al., 2016), policy change (Baraldi et al., 2010), safety enhancement (Zwetsloot et al., 2017), etc. The literature on marketing and consumer behavior has examined parasocial relationships (PSR) with actors (Hu, 2016), online community members (Ballantine & Martin, 2005), and influencers (Lou & Kim, 2019). As a result of the current trend toward digitalization, a new type of influencer has emerged: the virtual/fictional influencer. This type of influencer is a CGI or animated digital character that exists solely in a fictional space or on the internet and is constantly changing the traditional influencer profession (Bringe, 2022). Therefore, there exists a need for more research examining the commitment to PSR with fictional/virtual characters in endorsement contexts and the impact of this commitment on consumer purchase intention (PI). A notable deficiency within the realm of fictional character endorsement research pertains to parasocial breakup (PSB). The reasons for a breakup can be different, but the parasocial relationship can also feel the heat of a breakup like a real-world relationship (Cohen, 1997, 2003; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Hu, 2016). Therefore, it is crucial to address the significant gaps in the literature regarding the behavioral outcomes associated with commitment to a parasocial relationship and the phenomenon of the PSB with a fictional character.

The following research questions were used to structure this study and perhaps fill the void in the existing literature:

- **RQ1** : What predisposes individuals to commit to PSR with the fictional character?
- **RQ2** : How can parasocial commitment and PSB in relationships with fictional characters affect a consumer's purchase propensity?
- **RQ3** : How does the breakup of a PSR impact the relationship between commitment to the PSR and PI?

## Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

### *Commitment to Parasocial Relationships*

Interactions with television characters and other celebrities are essential to many people's social lives, even though PSR are sometimes considered less intense than close social relationships (Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998). PSR with character in advertisement leads to a positive attitude toward endorsement (Chung & Cho, 2017),

higher purchase satisfaction (Lim & Kim, 2011), a positive product attitude (Knoll et al., 2015), and a more likely intention to buy a product (Kim et al., 2015). A propensity to prolong a relationship that includes both psychological and behavioral facets is a component of commitment (Deshpande & Chakraborty, 2023a). Various other research has a more analytical and logical perspective on commitment (e.g., Leibner et al., 2009), and when it comes to “cognitive commitment,” people weigh the benefits and costs of keeping a relationship alive. Highly committed people have a greater propensity to engage in ways that increase the longevity of relationships (Chandel et al., 2023).

### ***Familiarity and Commitment to Parasocial Relationships***

Brockner and Swap (1976) found that when people are exposed to stimuli on a frequent basis, they are more likely to display stronger affiliation and likeability for the stimulus. Familiarity not only reduces uncertainty in relationships, but it has also developed a sense of intimacy in the relationship (Chung & Cho, 2017). PSI refers to the psychological relationship that viewers of mass media have with media performers, in which audiences feel connected to media personae even though they have few opportunities to interact with them (Horton & Wohl, 1956). One of the antecedents of building a strong PSR is familiarity (Hall, 2019). People are more attracted to familiar stimuli (Stever, 2017), and for PSI to become PSR, more exposure, i.e., familiarity, is required.

✦ **H1** : Familiarity with the fictional character has a significant influence on a commitment to the parasocial relationship.

### ***Satisfaction, Investment Size, Alternatives, and Commitment to Parasocial Relationships***

Commitment to a relationship stands on three pillars, i.e., (a) how satisfied an individual is with the relationship, (b) what alternatives are available for the existing relationship, and (c) how much investment has been made in the relationship as per the investment model (Rusbult, 1983). In this research, the parasocial relationship commitment was evaluated along the dimensions of satisfaction, investment, and alternatives from the investment model. The study further used an additional variable, i.e., familiarity. In the study of psychological interactions, familiarity refers to the influence of mere exposure, commonly known as the familiarity principle. A parasocial interaction requires repeated exposure. For example, when a human or animal has been asked to choose something in an unrestricted situation, it will prefer a familiar stimulus over a non-familiar one (Zajonc, 1968). Apart from testing the investment model on interpersonal relationships, it has also been used on non-relational commitment levels such as job commitment, business interactions, college student commitment, sports commitment, and many more (Deshpande & Chakraborty, 2023b; Roshan & Mehta, 2022; Rusbult et al., 2012). Branch et al. (2013) demonstrated that the parasocial relationship is not different from a real relationship, and commitment to PSR can be achieved with investment model variables. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

✦ **H2**: Satisfaction in watching the fictional character has a significant influence on a commitment to the parasocial relationship.

✦ **H3**: The amount invested in observing the imaginary character has a substantial impact on commitment to the parasocial relationship.

✦ **H4**: The alternatives offered to the fictitious character have a considerable influence on the commitment to the parasocial relationship.

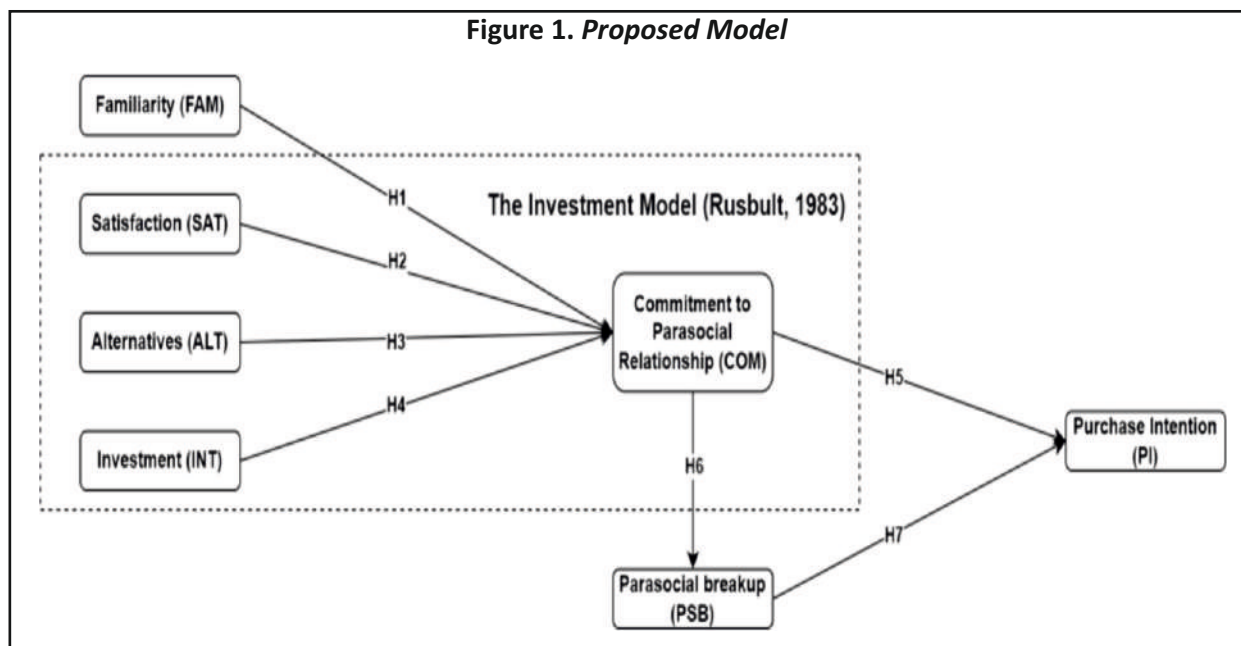
### ***Commitment to Parasocial Relationships and Purchase Intention***

PSR, in which viewers form a unidirectional bond with a fictional media character, is analogous to more conventional types of interpersonal connections (Horton & Wohl, 1956). PSR not only induces emotional attachment but also influences an individual's perspective and perception of things like whom to vote for, what and how much to donate, and the intent to purchase a product (Bakshi & Verma, 2023; Liebers & Schramm, 2019). For example, it has been identified that even when a consumer is not in desperate need of a product, they can still purchase it due to the influence of a parasocial relationship with the persona (Lacap et al., 2024). When people have an emotional connection with a popular figure on social media, they are more inclined to listen to their recommendations and buy what they recommend (Leite & Baptista, 2021). In light of what has been said above, we propose the following hypothesis:

⇒ **H5** : Commitment to the parasocial relationship with the fictional character has a significant influence on PI.

### ***Commitment to Parasocial Relationships, Parasocial Breakup, and Purchase Intention***

A relationship breakdown in a close relationship can cause stressful events in an individual's life and can result in a diverse array of negative emotions such as anger, bitterness, depression disorder, and anxiety (Liu et al., 2024). Though the intensity of break-up in a parasocial relationship is not as intense as in a real relationship, it is still distressing when a favorite character disappears for any reason (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Holladay and Edgar (2019) deciphered that admirers develop an emotional association with characters and TV shows. After the conclusion of the TV series, fans settled the closure of these PSRs in a personal way, which is known as the “parasocial breakup.” Jones et al. (2022) introduced the term “para love shock” to characterize the emotional suffering some fans feel after the end of their parasocial connections. The breakup affects the likelihood that a consumer will get back together with a brand, and the reasons that consumers choose to break their relationship with a brand are not always very unfavorable marketing efforts; rather, they might be neutral or even positive (Lopez, 2021). Thus, we formulate:



- ✦ **H6** : The commitment to a parasocial relationship with the fictional character has a significant influence on the PSB distress.
- ✦ **H7** : The PSB with the fictional character has a significant influence on PI.
- ✦ **H8** : PSB mediates the relationship between commitment to the PSR and PI.

Thus, in pursuit of its research objectives, the study presents a conceptual model (refer to Figure 1) that incorporates the investment model with parasocial interactions and breakups for fictional characters.

## Research Method

### *Study Frame*

The research commenced with preliminary investigations aimed at identifying a fictional character suitable for the data collection process. A total of 106 postgraduate individuals from the most reputable business schools in India were approached and asked to name their favorite fictional character from advertisements, movies, or any other field, along with the product associated with the character. Among the most widely recognized and respected personalities, the Amul girl stood out as a popular and beloved figure known for her humorous one-liners (Bharucha, 2018). The Amul girl's success can be attributed not only to her cheerful disposition and plump physique but also to her sharp sense of humor and astute observations of current events in the country. However, these 106 participants were excluded from the final analysis.

### *Construction of Instrument and Data Collection*

A standardized questionnaire, developed with the use of previously validated measuring scales, was used to compile the data. The SAT, INT, ALT, and commitment scales were drawn from the original investment model scale developed by Rusbult et al. (1998). Familiarity was measured using five items from the developed scale (Al-Adwan & Kokash, 2019). PI was measured using a scale by Jain (2023) and Mishra et al. (2023), and the PSR break-up was studied using the Cohen (2003) scale. A 7-point Likert scale was used to measure each item.

### *Sampling*

A mixed-methods approach was employed in the subject selection process. The states and districts were chosen using a random sampling process based on a lottery system. Additionally, the quota for each chosen state and district was fixed using a quota sampling technique. The current study selected five states from a total of 29 states, as well as five districts within each selected state, using the lottery method of random sampling technique. Furthermore, the quota for each chosen state was determined using the quota sampling approach. Finally, respondents were approached using a purposive sampling method. The study's target population was individuals 18 years or older who watched media content featuring fictional characters. Further screening questions were asked to filter the respondents required as per the study's objective. To begin the screening process, we asked participants to please answer the following questions:

- ✦ Have you watched or read any media content featuring fictional characters in the past six months?
- ✦ Have you purchased any merchandise related to fictional characters in the past six months?
- ✦ How often do you discuss fictional characters with friends or family?

Respondents who met the selection criteria were filtered based on their responses to the screening questions. Only those who had watched or read media content featuring fictional characters in the past six months were selected for the study. The respondents were asked to give responses while keeping the AMUL girl endorsements in mind. A total of 477 valid responses were gathered during May and June 2023. About 41% of the sample was under the age of 21, 46% were between the ages of 21 and 30, 9% were between the ages of 30 and 40, 3% were between the ages of 40 and 50, and fewer than 1% were over the age of 50 ; 65% were men ( $N = 312$ ), and 35% were women ( $N = 165$ ). Unmarried people accounted for 87% ( $N = 414$ ) of the population, while married people accounted for 13% ( $N = 63$ ).

## Data Analysis and Results

The data was analyzed using AMOS. The analysis of data was divided into two parts. First, the measurement model was used, which represents all the constructs and their indicators' assessment. Second, SEM was used to test the hypotheses.

### Measurement Model

In this study, the analysis procedures consisted of different stages so that the measurement model could be analyzed. Every factor loading was higher than the 0.7 threshold limit that was specified, which was the minimum acceptable value. The findings demonstrated that the construct measures were reliable, and as a result, they could be applied to the evaluation of each of the seven (7) components that make up the conceptual model. Table 1 depicts the indicator loadings, CR, and AVE.

**Table 1. Measurement Model**

Factor	Indicator	Statements	Factor Loadings	CR	AVE
<b>If the Amul girl character would be taken off the air, I would:</b>					
<b>Parasocial</b>	<i>PSB1</i>	Feel like I lost a close friend/ bosom buddy/ homegirl.	0.720	0.849	0.530
<b>Breakup</b>	<i>PSB2</i>	Look for information about my favorite personality in other places (e.g., newspapers, Internet, etc.).	0.711		
	<i>PSB3</i>	Try to do something to change the situation. (e.g., write a letter to the broadcaster or stop purchasing Amul products).	0.711		
	<i>PSB4</i>	Miss my favorite Amul girl character.	0.748		
	<i>PSB5</i>	Feel disappointed.	0.748		
<b>Familiarity</b>	<i>FAM1</i>	I am quite familiarised with Amul Girl's character (looks).	0.796	0.906	0.658
	<i>FAM2</i>	Compared with other characters, I think I am quite familiar with Amul Girl's character (looks).	0.799		
	<i>FAM3</i>	I am quite familiarized with the products advertised by Amul Girl.	0.817		
	<i>FAM4</i>	I am quite familiarised with other characters who are advertised for similar products.	0.834		
	<i>FAM5</i>	I usually consume products advertised by Amul Girl.	0.810		
<b>Satisfaction</b>	<i>SAT1</i>	I feel satisfied while watching this character.	0.821	0.874	0.698
	<i>SAT2</i>	Watching this character is much better than any other character (like: Chintamani character of ICICI Prudential).	0.860		



<b>Alternatives</b>	<i>SAT3</i>	Amul Girl is close to ideal/ perfect.	0.824	0.929	0.725
	<i>ALT1</i>	My alternatives are attractive to me (like: Chintamani character of ICICI Prudential).	0.846		
	<i>ALT2</i>	My alternatives to following this character, such as watching a different character, are close to ideal/perfect.	0.829		
	<i>ALT3</i>	My alternatives to following this character, such as watching a different character, are attractive.	0.863		
	<i>ALT4</i>	If I do not see Amul Girl in the latest issues, I will do fine. I would find another appealing character.	0.846		
<b>Investment</b>	<i>ALT5</i>	The media characters (like Chintamani's character of ICICI Prudential) other than Amul Girl are very appealing.	0.872	0.847	0.648
	<i>INT1</i>	I have invested a great deal of time in watching the Amul girl character memes/tweets/posts/advertisements.	0.806		
	<i>INT2</i>	I have invested a great deal of time and energy into following this character, which I would lose if I could not watch him/her any longer.	0.803		
	<i>INT3</i>	Compared to other people I know, I have invested a great deal of time in watching the Amul girl character.	0.806		
	<i>COM1</i>	I want to be able to watch the Amul Girl character for a very long time.	0.881		
<b>Commitment to Parasocial Relationship</b>	<i>COM2</i>	I am committed to watching the Amul Girl character for a very long time.	0.835	0.945	0.743
	<i>COM3</i>	I feel very attached to watching this character – very strongly linked to the Amul Girl character.	0.815		
	<i>COM4</i>	I will likely watch/admire some other character than Amul's girl character within the next year. (–)	0.873		
	<i>COM5</i>	I would not feel very upset if I'm not able to see Amul character in the near future. (–)	0.886		
	<i>COM6</i>	I want to watch Amul's girl character forever.	0.878		
<b>Purchase Intention</b>	<i>PI1</i>	Likely to buy certain products because of their posts.	0.884	0.928	0.811
	<i>PI2</i>	Possible that I will visit some online stores or actual stores because of their posts.	0.894		
	<i>PI3</i>	Probable that I may purchase the products/brands that they have promoted if I happen to need one.	0.924		

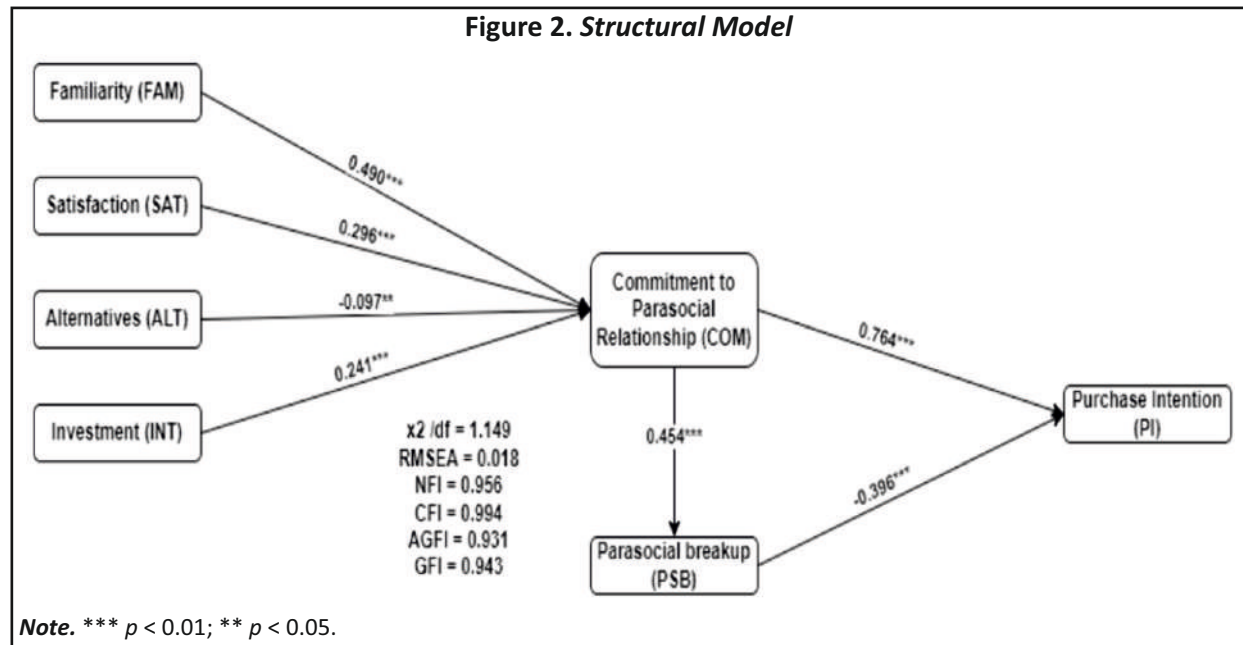
**Table 2. Discriminant Validity**

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>PSB</b>	<b>FAM</b>	<b>SAT</b>	<b>ALT</b>	<b>INT</b>	<b>COM</b>	<b>PI</b>
Parasocial Breakup ( <i>PSB</i> )	<b>0.728</b>						
Familiarity ( <i>FAM</i> )	0.225	<b>0.811</b>					
Satisfaction ( <i>SAT</i> )	0.122	0.013	<b>0.835</b>				
Alternatives ( <i>ALT</i> )	–0.1	–0.068	–0.103	<b>0.851</b>			
Investment ( <i>INT</i> )	0.081	0.053	0.017	–0.129	<b>0.805</b>		
Commitment to the Parasocial Relationship ( <i>COM</i> )	0.455	0.51	0.312	–0.193	0.289	<b>0.862</b>	
Purchase Intention ( <i>PI</i> )	–0.049	0.348	0.258	–0.087	0.128	0.581	<b>0.901</b>

The discriminant and convergent validity concerns are evaluated to establish the validity of the model's constructs. The composite reliability test is performed using the validity master tab of the stats tools package (Gaskin, 2016), and the results exceeded the required limit value of 0.7 (refer to Table 2).

### Structural Model and Hypothesis Testing

For estimating the parameters, a structural equation modeling analysis is conducted on commitment in a PSR, breakup in a PSR, and PI. The findings of structural equation modeling show a satisfactory model fit. As illustrated in Figure 2, the  $X^2/df$  is  $441.191/384 = 1.149$ , the CFI is 0.994, and the NFI is 0.956. According to the values provided in Figure 2, all of the constructs contribute significantly to explaining the suggested model.



According to the results presented in Figure 2, the construct familiarity exhibits the strongest positive association with a commitment to the parasocial relationship [H1 is accepted] ( $\beta = 0.490, p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, satisfaction [H2 is accepted] ( $\beta = 0.296, p < 0.001$ ) demonstrates a positive association with commitment to the parasocial relationship; whereas, the availability of alternative characters [H3 is accepted] exhibits a significant inverse relationship with commitment to the parasocial relationship ( $\beta = -0.097, p < 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the positive relationship between investment size and commitment to the parasocial relationship is supported [H4 is accepted] ( $\beta = 0.241, p < 0.001$ ). Moreover, the findings indicate that the data support the hypotheses [H5 is accepted] and [H6 is accepted] as there is a positive association between commitment to the parasocial relationship and PI ( $\beta = 0.764, p < 0.001$ ) and PSB ( $\beta = 0.454, p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, the PSB is significantly and negatively associated with PI [H7 is accepted] ( $\beta = -0.396, p < 0.001$ ).

### Mediation Analysis

To test the indirect effects of commitment in the parasocial relationship on PI and to help us evaluate the mediation hypotheses, we implemented a mechanism called bootstrapping. The proposed mediation effect has a substantial impact, as represented in Table 3. There are significant direct and indirect effects of commitment to the PSR on PI.



**Table 3. Mediation Test**

Hypothesis	Relationship	Total Effect	Indirect Effect	VAF	Decision
H8	<i>COM</i> → <i>PSB</i> → <i>PI</i>	0.584	-0.18	-0.308219178	Supported

**Notes.** *COM*: Commitment to Parasocial Relationship, *PSB*: Parasocial Breakup, *PI*: Purchase Intention.

Hypothesis 8 (accepted) is also supported by the fact that there are partial mediations between commitment to the parasocial relationship and PI (Hair Jr. et al., 2014).

## Discussion

In this research, we developed a new framework by fusing the investment model with three pertinent constructs, namely familiarity (FAM), PSB, and PI, to investigate the influence of a fictional character. The results of this study are mixed, with some factors having a significant positive impact on commitment while others have a negative. One of the most important findings is the relationship between FAM and commitment to the parasocial relationship. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that familiarity with media characters can reduce relationship uncertainty (Chung & Cho, 2017) and strengthen relationships (Hall, 2019). In other words, individuals more familiar with media characters are more likely to develop a sense of commitment to the parasocial relationship. Another significant finding is the relationship between satisfaction of watching the character and commitment to the parasocial relationship. The hypothesis is supported by this finding, which shows that satisfaction is necessary for any successful relationship. Additionally, satisfaction indicates an individual's involvement in a relationship, reflecting positive versus negative relationship experiences (Rusbult et al., 2012).

The level of investment in a relationship is significant because people tend to stay committed when they have invested a significant amount of time, energy, money, or other resources. This is because they fear losing out on their investments if the relationship ends, and as such, the fear of losing out serves as a catalyst to keep the relationship going (Rhatigan & Axsom, 2006). Interestingly, investment size is a crucial determinant not only in romantic or love relationships but also in abusive relationships. Even in abusive relationships, individuals remain engaged due to their enormous commitment to the relationship while knowing the harm it causes. This highlights the significant impact that investment size has on commitment levels in a parasocial relationship.

On the other hand, the availability of alternatives to a parasocial relationship has an inverse relationship with commitment levels. In any relationship, including parasocial ones, the level of commitment can be significantly reduced if there are numerous alternatives available to the said relationship (Rusbult, 1983). However, unlike real-life relationships, alternatives are not considered a stronger predictor of PSR. In a parasocial relationship, the availability of alternatives does not lower the level of relational commitment (Eyal & Dailey, 2012).

The study's findings provided considerable light on the relationship between commitment in para-social interactions and consumer behavior. It suggests that an individual's level of commitment to a fictional character in a para-social relationship can impact not only their likelihood to purchase products associated with that character (Wang et al., 2013) but also their vulnerability to experiencing distress upon the character's departure from the media (Hu, 2016). Furthermore, the study reveals that a PSB with a fictional character could negatively affect PI, which aligns with previous research on this topic (Park et al., 2005). According to the findings, people are more prone to experience fear of losing a fictional character in a PSB than they are to fear losing a real-life relationship. This fear is similar to the sadness experienced in a close relationship break-up, but not in the context of a traumatic experience (Cohen, 2003).

# Implications

## *Implications for Researchers*

This study has important theoretical implications for understanding PSR and the psychological processes that underlie fictional character engagement. These findings illuminate parasocial interactions and provide a foundation for future research. There has been a significant uptick in interest in studying parasocial connections (Gong & Li, 2019). Despite this field's growing literature, commitment to parasocial interactions with fictional characters remains unexplored.

The present study draws upon the well-established theoretical framework of the investment model, which has a rich history in the field of media and communication research. This investigation expands upon the existing literature by exploring the antecedents of commitment within the investment model and incorporating the construct of FAM. Furthermore, the study extends the framework of the investment model to examine the relationship between commitment and two additional constructs: PSB and PI. The results of this study demonstrate the significance of the relationships established through this extended framework of the investment model.

This study further examines the mediating influence of PSB on the connection between parasocial commitment and intention to buy. The results indicate that PSB exerts a negative influence on this relationship. Therefore, the occurrence of a PSB with an endorser may negatively impact an individual's PI. These findings are essential to the expanding body of research that highlights the significance of PSR and its impact on consumer behavior. Moreover, the results of this study have important theoretical implications for the study of PSR and the investment model. Expanding the theoretical framework has significantly broadened the scope of previous studies within the endorsement literature, providing a foundation for future research exploring the interplay between commitment to PSRs, PI, and PSB. These developments offer a unique opportunity to build upon existing knowledge and advance our understanding of these complex interrelationships.

## *Implications for Practitioners*

Fictional characters can serve as a potent marketing tool, effectively promoting consumer parasocial commitment and PI. The efficacy of fictional characters in marketing campaigns is contingent on their FAM and relatability with the target audience. This can be achieved by consistently representing the fictional character across different marketing platforms, such as advertisements, social media, and packaging. Advertising agencies can leverage various strategies, such as social media and product placement, to augment FAM and emotional connection with the fictional character. Companies should contemplate the incorporation of fictional characters in their marketing strategies, particularly in product categories where consumers exhibit low involvement and require a relationship-building experience with the brand.

Satisfaction is a critical factor contributing to robust parasocial commitment development. This can be accomplished by creating well-written and thought-provoking digital content, such as short films, webcomics, or other forms of digital media. Marketers can also leverage social media communities and s-commerce online platforms to cultivate a community of fans around the fictional character, encouraging engagement and sharing of character-related content to boost satisfaction with fictional characters. To mitigate the risk of PSB, marketers must be mindful of the image they are projecting through their character and ensure consistency and adherence to established personality traits. Additionally, they must be cautious in the representation of the fictional character and avoid actions that may be perceived as offensive or inconsistent with the values of the target audience. This study provides ample evidence that using fictional characters in advertising can lead to increased commitment and PI, making it a valuable marketing strategy to consider.

## Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

Although this study has several limitations, they do provide room for further study. First, we tested the hypothesis that FAM significantly affects commitment in PSR with fictional characters like the Amul girl. Future research can examine how familiar versus non-known personalities affect PSR commitment. Exploring additional commitment antecedents would help comprehend the complexity of PSR commitment. Second, this study examines how PSB mediation affects purchasing intention. However, future research should examine how this mediation affects other dependent variables. Finally, we studied a famous fictional character to grasp PSR commitment dynamics better. Further research can involve a wider spectrum of fictional characters and newly adopted digital characters to understand such ties in popular culture better. Investigating the varying levels of commitment in PSR across different fictional characters could also provide insights into which factors may be more influential in each case. Comparative examinations of PSR may yield critical insights that may advance advertising and marketing studies.

## Authors' Contribution

Abhay Grover was responsible for the conception of the idea and design, data collection, analysis, and writing of the manuscript. Nilesh Arora reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

## Conflict of Interest

The authors certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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