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## Effect of Follower Engagement and Wellbeing on Parasocial Relations in a Social Media Context

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### ABSTRACT

Research in Parasocial Relationships (PSR) have studied the behaviour of followers following celebrities in unidirectional-traditional media. With the increased use and ease of connectivity on social media, the traditional PSR model needs further investigation. Moreover, social media research in business management tends to inflate a concept of positivity in the use of such platforms. However, newer research in Information Systems and Psychology informs us that excessive reliance on social media has its darker side. The purpose of this research is to address this gap by investigating how social media platforms can influence parasocial interactions and relationships in the macro context of social media.

### Keywords

Social media, parasocial interaction, personality traits, wellbeing.

### EXTENDED ABSTRACT FOR RAPID RESEARCH ROUNDTABLE AT PRE-HCI 2020

#### Brief Literature Review

Authors have identified the major motivations behind increasing social media use as an increased need for information, entertainment and socializing (De Vries, et al 2012). *Social media* (SM) includes online communication like blogs, reviews, with a focus on followers sharing and acquiring information from others. *Social media platform* (SMPs), on the other hand, are the tools that facilitate such online activities, ex-Facebook, YouTube, etc. According to Hanna et al (2011), developing any media communication strategy should integrate multiple dimensions of social media tools; because consumers use them as part of an ecosystem. This research will take a macro level view of SMPs to enhance the current understanding of PSI/PSR in this ecosystem. *Parasocial Interactions* (PSI) is defined as a sense of faux mutual awareness that lasts only during the viewing of a program/content (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016). On the other hand, *Parasocial Relationship* (PSR) extends beyond the exposure and incites a desire to meet said persona (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016). Thus, in light of PSI in the SM ecosystem, connectivity to a celebrity should increase due to active engagement across different SMPs. As such, due to an increased use and exposure to celebrity contents across different platforms simultaneously, the followers should feel an increased connectivity. As the authors point out, an increased sense of connectivity leads to a stronger sense of PSI (Kim & Song, 2016). However, research on negative impacts of social media has shown that social media can be addictive with negative behavioural symptoms such as mood modification, withdrawal symptoms (Kuss & Griffiths, 2011), and increased dependence (Hawi & Samaha, 2017), and hamper wellbeing by increasing anxiety and loneliness (Ingram, Kelly, Deane, Baker, & K.,

2018). These behavioural outcomes also work as antecedents to increase SM dependence, creating a negative behavioural cycle. For the proposed research model, we will investigate how use of SMPs might create a dependency on the celebrities and the negative impact it might have on the wellbeing and PSI/PSR.

### Theory, Hypotheses and conceptual model

We borrow from *motivational theory* and *identity theory* to integrate them in our research model. In this context, two factors of motivation theory are applied-information and entertainment values. Also, self-identity theory is utilized as this research is focused on an individual follower; rather than a follower-as-part-of-a-community. Control Variables that are used for this model are- demographics (age and gender), anxiety, loneliness, envy, compulsive use, and frequency and magnitude of SM use.



Figure 1: Conceptual model

*H1 & (H2)*: Motivation behind follower engagement in SMPs to gather information (for entertainment) is positively associated with each PSI component (cognitive, affective and behavioural)

*H3 & (H4)*: Active (Passive) engagement of SMPs will have a positive (weak) association with the three components of parasocial interactions

Cognitive (*H5*), affective (*H6*), and behavioural (*H7*) components of PSI will be positively associated with PSR.

### Contribution and Future Directions

A unique contribution of this research is looking at the engagement level as an antecedent in determining the magnitude of its impact on PSI/PSR. Of particular interest are any unrealistic celebrity expectations that might result due to an unhealthy dependence on SMPs and the resulting negative effect on PSR. As a result, companies implementing endorsement and branding strategies, as they closely relate to PSI/PSR, might compromise their brand reputation in the long run. Currently the authors are in the process of collecting data. As a follow up to the current research, in the second part of this research, the impact of group influence on PSI/PSR relation in the social media ecosystem construct will be forthcoming.

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