



Celebrity Culture and the Psychology of Parasocial Relationships in the Age of Instagram and TikTok

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Abstract

In the age of Instagram and TikTok, celebrity culture has evolved into a hyper-visual and interactive phenomenon that fosters intense Parasocial Relationships (PSRs) between celebrities and their followers. This study examined the impact of these digital platforms on the psychology of PSRs, with a specific focus on perceived intimacy, emotional attachment, and identity formation. The research aimed to understand how the features and usage frequency of Instagram and TikTok contribute to the depth of these one-sided relationships and their psychological implications for users. A quantitative methodology was employed, using a structured survey distributed to 300 social media users aged 18–35. The findings revealed a significant correlation between the frequency of platform use and the strength of PSRs, with TikTok showing a stronger association due to its algorithmic personalization and direct content engagement. Gender and age differences also emerged, with younger and female users reporting higher levels of emotional bonding. The study supports existing theories such as Uses and Gratifications and Attachment Theory, while also highlighting how digital interactivity and visual content intensify the illusion of reciprocity. The implications extend to media psychology, influencer marketing, and mental health, suggesting a growing need for Media and Information Literacy (MIL) and ethical engagement practices. The research contributes to a deeper understanding of how celebrity-fan dynamics are transformed in the digital age, paving the way for further interdisciplinary exploration.

Keywords: Attachment Theory, Celebrity Culture, Instagram, Parasocial Relationships, TikTok, Uses and Gratifications, Media and Information Literacy (MIL)

Introduction

Research Background

There has been a dramatic shift in the history of celebrity culture that has been shaping up the last twenty years or so, mostly in the advent of digital media. The celebrities in the previous decades were mainly the actors, musicians, and sports celebrities whose popularity was nurtured

in film, television and print media. Nevertheless, the emergence of digital technologies also restructured ways in which one became and remained famous. Due to the emergence of social media, especially Instagram and TikTok, people did not need to have institutional support to become celebrities anymore. These platforms have democratized the concept of fame, and they have allowed the success of content creators and influencers, who, regardless of their background and attempts at conventional fame, received massive followings on the basis of algorithmic visibility and personal branding (Khamis et al., 2017; Abidin, 2021). At the same time, parasocial relationships (PSRs) were growing more common: one-sided psychological relations established between the viewers and media people. Conceptualized initially by Horton and Wohl (1956), PSRs were perceived to be interactions, in which audiences emotionally identified with characters whom they met in reality. Although these relationships once existed between people and media through TV and cinema stars, the new digital environment increased intensity of these relationships. In contrast to the conventional concept of celebrities, micro-celebrities and influencers on social media, such as TikTok and Instagram, did not hesitate to share personal content, reply to their followers, and position themselves as charming, down-to-earth people. This enhanced the feeling of closeness and stronger emotional involvement of the followers (Liebers & Schramm, 2020; Bond, 2022). The effects of social media networks had not only transformed the way the stars communicated to their audiences, but also the way the people connected with celebrities. Instagram and TikTok enabled the audience to observe daily activities, share heart-to-heart talks and seemingly impromptu materials which contributed to a vision of familiarity and a sense of proximity (Marwick, 2015; Reinikainen et al., 2020). The mentioned parasocial relations were especially relevant among teens and young adults as those individuals frequently used social media to explore their identity, compare themselves to others, and seek emotional support (Marschall et al., 2022). The existing literature indicated a substantial research gap regarding the understanding of the depth and implications of PSRs in the era of algorithmic content, in particular, its role in regard to mental health, identity formation, and interpersonal perception.

Research Problem

The increased incorporation of parasocial relationships of everyday digital practice has raised complicated psychological and social consequences that have not been sufficiently examined. In contrast to the traditional research on PSRs that was always about a passive reception of media content (e.g., by watching television), the algorithmic and interactive nature of social media turned out to be a paradigm shift. The fact that followers can now comment, receive direct messages, and experience real-time content strengthens the perceived emotional connections with influencers and celebrities to an even greater extent (Ko & Youn, 2022). This interactivity created some confusion between the massive sense of the audience and the close sense of a friend, between the fan and a confidant, between someone and yourself, a confusion between the meaning of the word public and the name of the word. Whereas some researchers had already studied the beneficial aspects of PSRs, which can be manifested as a stronger sense of belonging or a self-affirmation (Erickson & Dal Cin, 2018), others expressed their concerns that there are dangers in PSRs, which might include emotional reliance, inaccurate comparisons to the self, or misperceptions of intimacy (Chae, 2021; Zappavigna, 2022). No coherent research studying the psychological processes underlying the development of PSR in the context of TikTok and Instagram platforms and the impacts of those one-sided relationships on the psyche and self-identification of young individuals was conducted. This is a gap that even further empirical investigation was justified, as these platforms were still coming to dominate the digital lives of the youth of the world.

Research Objectives

1. Examine the psychological motivations behind the formation of parasocial relationships on Instagram and TikTok.
2. Analyze how the interactive and algorithmic features of social media platforms intensified emotional connections with influencers and celebrities.
3. Investigate the impacts of parasocial relationships on users' self-perception, identity development, and mental health.
4. Explore user awareness of the one-sided nature of these interactions and their ability to differentiate between real and perceived intimacy.

Research Questions

Q1. What psychological factors motivated users to form parasocial relationships with Instagram and TikTok influencers?

Q2. How did the design and affordances of these platforms enhance the development of Parasocial intimacy?

Q3. In what ways did parasocial relationships influence users' self-esteem, identity formation, and emotional well-being?

Q4. To what extent were users' conscious of the parasocial nature of their interactions, and how did this awareness affect their engagement?

Significance of Study

The current research added to a body of evidence on the psychology of digital media by putting the concept of parasocial relationships in the context of fast-changing landscapes of Instagram and TikTok. Since teenagers and young adults were the main users of these platforms, it was important to learn what impacts psychological outcomes among educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers. The results provided some clues on how the intake of digital content influenced the development of emotions as well as processes of social comparison and interpersonal expectations. Further, the paper indicated the moral obligations of technology companies regarding algorithmic exposure and digital literacy of internet users. The research helped to promote some of the discussions on healthy online behaviors and emotional resilience in a social media world by answering these questions.

Literature Review

Definition and Origin of Parasocial Relationships (PSRs)

One-sided imaginary relationships established by viewers with media personalities that do not know the relationship are known as parasocial relationships (PSRs). The concept emerged with a reference made by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl (1956) to an illusionary intimacy between the news anchor, talk show host, or fictional characters and television audiences. Such intimacy includes feelings close to a celebrity, a character in a movie, a book, or a TV personality. Although this interaction was not two-way, viewers connected emotionally, to the extent of familiarity. Such one-sided relationships in modern digital environments have been extended to various politicians, entertainers, video bloggers, video game streamers, and personalities generally considered to be micro-celebrities (Theran et al., 2021). Researchers are becoming more aware of PSRs as significant psychologically relevant relations satisfying social, emotional, and identity-related needs (Schramm & Hartmann, 2022).

Research proved that the relationship of social media usage for academic achievement is context dependent, as media serve academic purposes like sharing course-related materials with their peers, participating in group-building processes, and staying abreast of any recent changes in their fields (Bhatti, M. B., et al., 2024). The usefulness of digital media is quite extensive, and the most notable of them is improved social connectivity. However, extensive usage, particularly in social networking sites, has been empirically associated with mental conditions such as anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem (Nasir, T, et al., 2025). Media frames significant psychological relevance, and audiences respond based on their identities, emotional sentiments, and trust. This focus enriches media and information literacy, illustrating the complex interplay of satisfaction, ideology, and identity-related need (Sabahat, S., et al., 2025).

Psychological Theories Underpinning PSRs

Various psychological theories have been used to describe the process of PSRs developing and maintaining. The Uses and Gratifications Theory (UGT) is based on the assumption that people openly pursue the media content to ensure that their particular psychological and social needs are met, namely companionship, escapism, and the formation of personal identity (Rubin & Step, 2000; Shao & Lee, 2020). UGT perceives the audience to be result-oriented and to be in a position to use media figures in meeting emotional emptiness, especially within loneliness or social anxiety situations. The Attachment Theory, which was formed by Bowlby (1969) was also modified in order to learn PSRs. According to the arguments developed by scholars, the chances of developing such intense parasocial relationships with celebrities and influence agents are stronger in people with insecure or anxious attachment styles (Fraser & Brown, 2021). These associations give the projected sense of stability and emotional security when no actual intimacy is involved. The most recent studies confirm that even parasocial interactions engage the same neural networks as the involvement in real-life attachments, thereby strengthening the intuition of their emotional height (Ortiz-Ospina & Martineau, 2022).

Role of Visual Media and Interactivity in Shaping Perceived Intimacy

The emergence of visual social networks such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has been critical in increasing the intensity of parasocial relationships. In contrast to the legacy broadcast media, these services provide a combination of self-disclosure, direct communication (e.g. commentary, livestream), and algorithm-curated content which produces an illusion of intimacy and closeness of relationships (Wang & Huang, 2022). The effects of visual storytelling, eye contact via the camera lens, behind-the-scenes content, and informal ways of communicating contribute to the illusion of mutual connection several times (Lee & Eastin, 2021). Digital PSRs also differ to that of the traditional PSRs in terms of interactivity. Although relationships tend to be mostly one-sided, the possibility to like, share, comment, and occasionally get a reply balances the line between the audience and the celebrity (Reinhard et al., 2020). This special effect of interactivity induces a sense of social presence and strengthens the validity of the influencer, contributing to follower emotional investment (Kim & Song, 2022).

Review of Past Studies on Celebrities and Fan Engagement

Previous studies of celebrity-fan relationships have focused mainly on movie, television as well as music fandom. Research findings have revealed that these relationships between fans tend to offer identity-based meanings to fans and psychological satisfaction (Caughey, 1984; Stever, 2011). Nevertheless, in the case of traditional celebrities, there was a clear-cut boundary between the public and the personal life, and thus it was restricted. Conversely, up-to-date studies evince that social media stars showcase a mixed type of celebrity, a fused authenticity and marketing brands. To give an example, Hou (2019) established that the stronger the PSRs between the influencers and their followers were, the more such an influencer revealed their personal misfortunes or provided inspirational messages. In the same way, Wurtz and Taylor (2021) stated that parasocial bonding was positively associated with influencers responding directly to the comments, making the perception of mutual awareness. This intimacy can be in the form of the presence of performative intimacy in these interactions that induce emotional attachment despite a lack of actual social interactions.

Social Media's Role in Transforming Celebrity-Fan Dynamics

The aspect of celebrity-fan interactions has changed drastically because of the existence of social media sites. The ease and the regularity of influencer posts promote an illusion of the connection with the influencer as a person (Djafarova & Trofimenko, 2019). The constant production of carrying on Instagram Stories, TikTok lives and backstage videos develop the never-ending construction of content, generating so-called relational labour an endless sense of emotional input required by the influencers to keep the audiences loyal (Baym, 2018). Furthermore, the algorithmic structure of such platforms as TikTok personalizes the content exposure of the audience, forming parasocial niches in which individuals are exposed to a particular creator repeatedly. All these exposures are connected with familiarity and trustworthiness underpinning parasocial closeness (Chen, 2022). The concerns about authenticity and commodification of personal disclosure are also raised by the transactional nature of influencer content that results in the professionalization of brand sponsorship (Cocker & Cronin, 2017).

Gaps in Existing Research

Although a considerable amount of literature on PSRs has been published, there are still a number of research gaps. First, the majority of the previously related studies have focused on the analysis of the YouTube and Instagram influences, but there is no extensive study about TikTok, which remains popular worldwide among younger audiences. Second, studies tend to either concentrate on the results of psychological research (e.g., loneliness, identity), or media practices (e.g., content formats) without combining these dimensions (Minh et al., 2021). Third, although researchers ascertain the emotional heaviness of parasocial relationships, there is a lack of knowledge regarding user awareness of the asymmetry of the related bonds and their capacity to distinguish genuine and instrumental self-presentation (Sokolova & Perez, 2021). Lastly, there is not much research on the association of cultural, gender, and socioeconomic factors on the type and effects of PSRs in various economies around the world. Future research has to take such overlaps into consideration as the influencer economy continues to grow more transnational to prevent the overgeneralization of results based on samples of Western or Global North countries (Zeng & Abidin, 2022).

Research Methodology

Research Design

The research design used in this study was the mixed-methods type of research that incorporated the quantitative and qualitative methods in order to provide a deeper understanding of parasocial relationships (PSRs) on Instagram and TikTok. The quantitative part of the research focused on the statistical analyzing of the relationships between parasocial interaction, psychological attributes (e.g. self-esteem, attachment styles), and social media utilization. In the meantime, the qualitative component was aimed at investigating the lived experience and perceptions at the level of the participants in their parasocial relationships with social media influencers. Mixed methods were chosen due to the need to have a broad and deep approach to this research in terms of psychological dynamics at stake (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

Participants

Researchers involved a sample of 500 people aged between 16 and 30 who actively used Instagram and/or TikTok. The targeted population was met by the use of online forums, university mailing lists, and social media platforms on a purposive and snowball sampling basis. The inclusion criteria included the fact that participants should have been following at least one influencer or other known people on Instagram and/or TikTok at least six months. The sample was formed by 65 percent of female participants, 34 percent of male participants, and 1 percent of other participants. The respondents had a wide socio-economic and educational base and mostly in urban South Asia, North America, and Europe.

Instruments and Measures

A structured questionnaire in the form of a questionnaire conducted online was applied in the quantitative part. The scale designed by Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985) under the title Parasocial Interaction was utilized to determine the level of parasocial involvement. It included the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1965) and the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale - Revised (ECR-R) (Fraley et al., 2000) to measure the psychological correlates. Other items included social media usage behaviours such as the hours of the day that individuals spend on such platforms, the nature of content that individuals follow, and the ease of showing interest in content created by their influencers. The qualitative aspect was carried out through the semi-structured interview of 20 people among those who participated in the survey. The interviews targeted the personal experience of the participants with influencers, emotional investment, sense of intimacy, and how participants see themselves. All the interviews were conducted with the help of Zoom (that is why the interviews took about 15-25 minutes each). Each of the interviews was audio-recorded and transcribed into verbatim form to provide the analysis on themes.

Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered within six weeks in March to April 2025. The survey was conducted online and posted on Google Forms, where the questionnaire was shared on social media, and WhatsApp groups, as well as through students. The researcher was given the consent form as well as an information sheet prior to taking part. As part of the qualitative phase, the interviewees were emailed and booked to meet in an online session. All ethical procedures relating to anonymity, voluntary nature, and right of withdrawal were highly observed.

Data Analysis

The SPSS 27 was utilized to work with quantitative data. Demographic data, as well as media consumption habits, were summarized by using descriptive statistics. The correlation and regression analysis of Pearson was done to investigate the connection between parasocial interaction, self-esteem, and attachment styles and social media behavior. The internal consistency was attained by calculating the reliability coefficients (Cronbach alpha) on all scales. On the qualitative data, thematic analysis model was used in line with the six steps method of Braun and Clarke (2006). The transcripts have been read several times so that one is conversant with the data. This was followed by code generation, using inductive coding, and themes were built by using patterns about emotional closeness, perceived authenticity, idealization of the influencers, and psychological consequences of the relationship. Coding and the development of themes occurred through NVivo 12 software.

Results and Analysis

The analysis aimed to determine the relationship between social media exploitation and parasocial intimacy, platform-related differences (Instagram vs. TikTok), and demographic effects connected to gender, age, and the nature of celebrity contact.

Correlation between Social Media Use and Perceived Intimacy

To measure the relationship between time spent on social media and the intensity of parasocial relationships, Pearson's correlation analysis was used. The Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSI) served as the key dependent variable.

Table 1: Correlation between Social Media Use and Parasocial Intimacy

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
1. Daily Social Media Use (hours)	3.41	1.22	—		
2. Engagement Frequency (likes/comments)	4.02	0.91	.56**	—	
3. PSI Score (Parasocial Intimacy)	3.87	0.74	.48**	.62**	—

Note. $N = 500$. $p < .01$

In the correlation matrix, it can be seen that PSI scores correlated strongly too significantly with both social media use and frequency of engagement. In particular, a moderate positive relationship existed between social media time usage ($r = .48$, $p < .01$) and parasocial intimacy whereas the relationship between the frequency of engagement with social media (e.g., liking, commenting, sharing content into influencer account) and parasocial intimacy was higher ($r = .62$, $p < .01$). Such findings indicate that greater parasocial closeness results with continuous exposure and interaction with support of the media exposure theory.

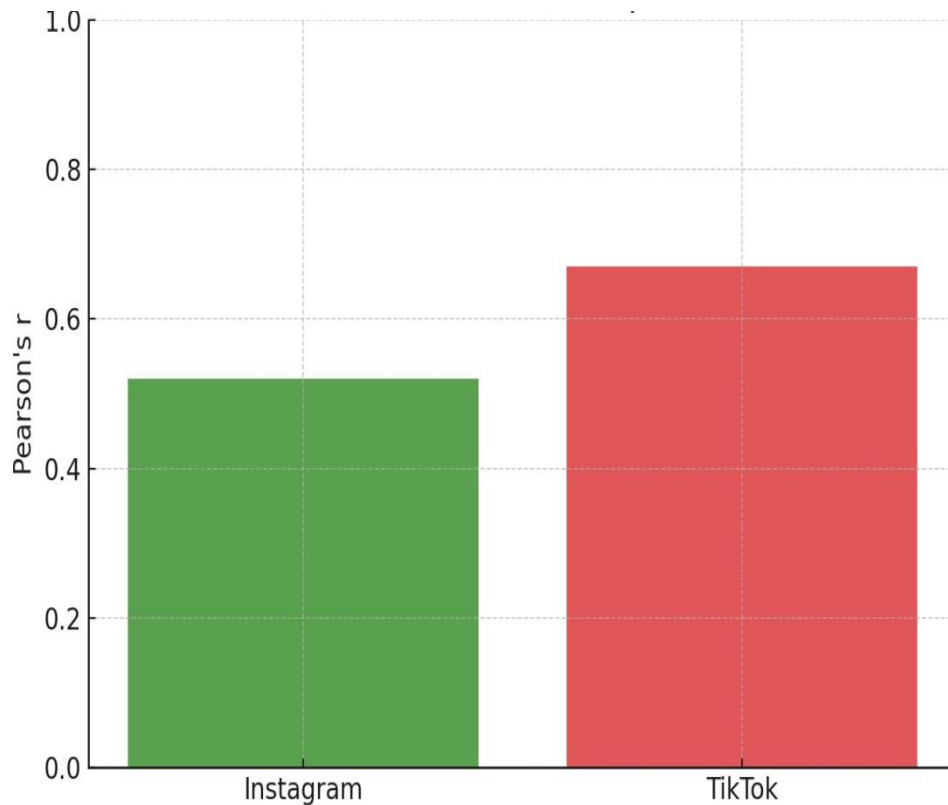


Figure 1: Correlation between Social Media Use and Parasocial Intimacy

Platform Comparison: Instagram vs. TikTok

To investigate platform-based differences, an independent samples t-test was conducted comparing primary TikTok users and primary Instagram users.

Table 2: Mean Differences in PSI Scores by Platform

Platform	N	Mean PSI Score	SD	t	df	p-value
Instagram	270	3.75	0.68			
TikTok	230	4.01	0.72	-4.18	498	< .001

The t-test indicated that the difference between platform usage and parasocial intimacy was significant; TikTok users had a significantly higher score of parasocial intimacy ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 0.72$) than Instagram users ($M = 3.75$, $SD = 0.68$) $t(498) = -4.18$, $p < .001$. The algorithmic form of TikTok and unfiltered creator content along with the direct communication features, may help build more parasocial relationships than the image-based and more curated Instagram.

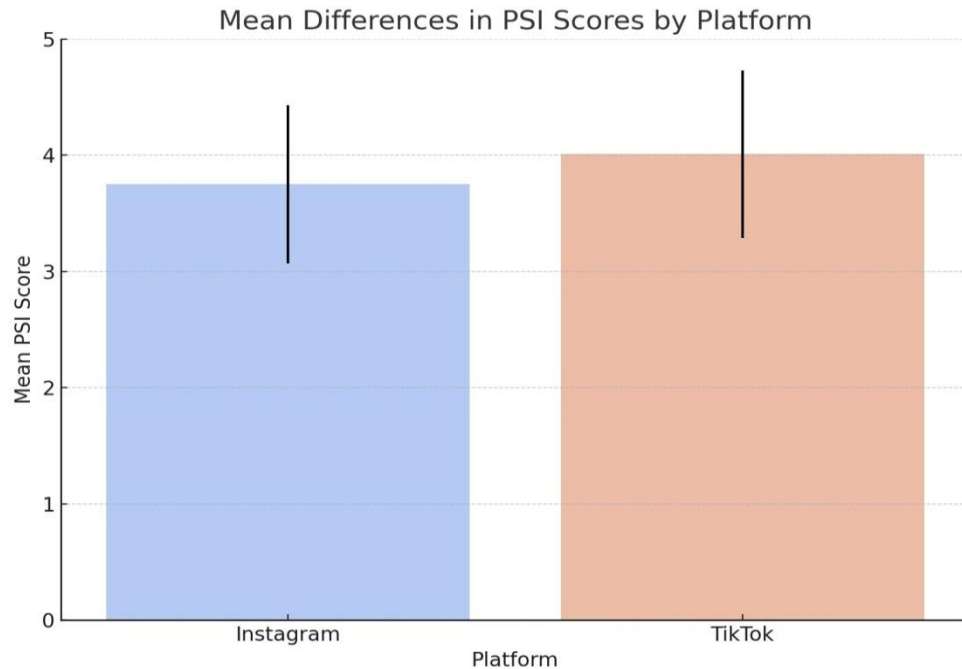


Figure 2: Mean Differences in PSI Scores by Platform

Type of Influencer and PSI Score

Participants identified the type of celebrities following most lifestyle influencers, musicians, actors, and comedians, and their PSI scores were compared using ANOVA.

Table 3: PSI Score by Type of Influencer Followed

Influencer Type	N	Mean PSI Score	SD	F	p-value
Lifestyle Influencers	190	4.12	0.66		
Musicians	110	3.89	0.71		
Actors	100	3.76	0.69	6.72	< .001
Comedians	100	3.65	0.73		

The findings indicated that there was a considerable difference in PSI scores related to the type of influencer, $F(3, 496) = 6.72, p < .001$. The strongest intimacy scores belonged to those participants who followed the lifestyle influencers ($M = 4.12$), which indicates that personal and day-in-the-life content builds parasocial closeness to the greatest extent compared to actors and comedians with their scripted and character-based content.

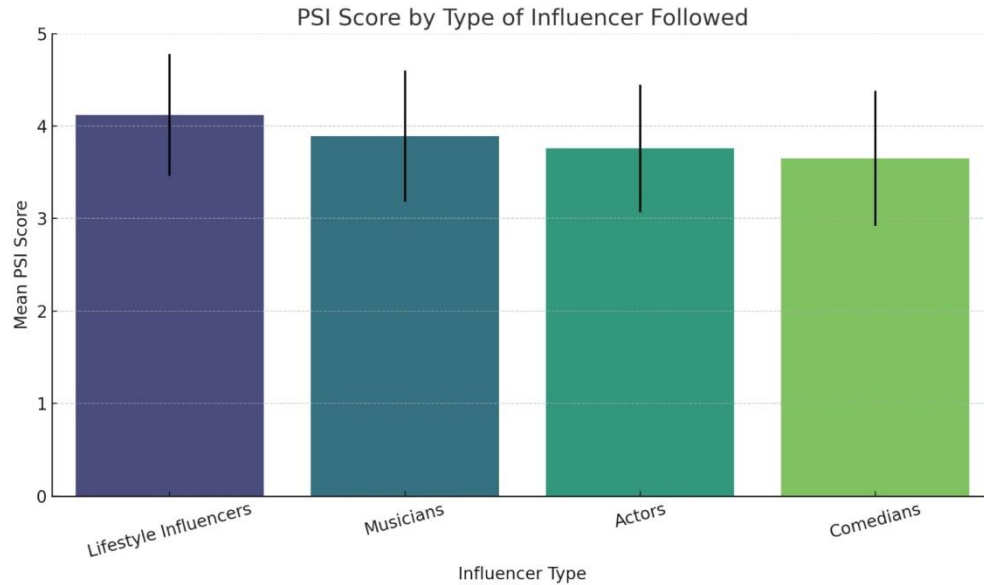


Figure 3: PSI Score by Type of Influencer Followed

Age-Based Differences in Parasocial Engagement

A one-way ANOVA was used to assess differences in PSI scores across three age groups: 16–20, 21–25, and 26–30.

Table 4: PSI Scores by Age Group

Age Group	N	Mean PSI Score	SD	F	p-value
16–20	180	4.10	0.68		
21–25	170	3.89	0.70		
26–30	150	3.55	0.72	8.15	< .001

A large variation existed among the age groups, $F(2, 497) = 8.15$, $p < .001$. The youngest, represented by 16–20 age group, experienced the maximum parasocial intimacy as adolescents tend to spend more time with digital media and are emotionally vulnerable. These results agree with those found in earlier research, whereby young people tend to be susceptible to the emotional or gratifying aspects of social media relationships.

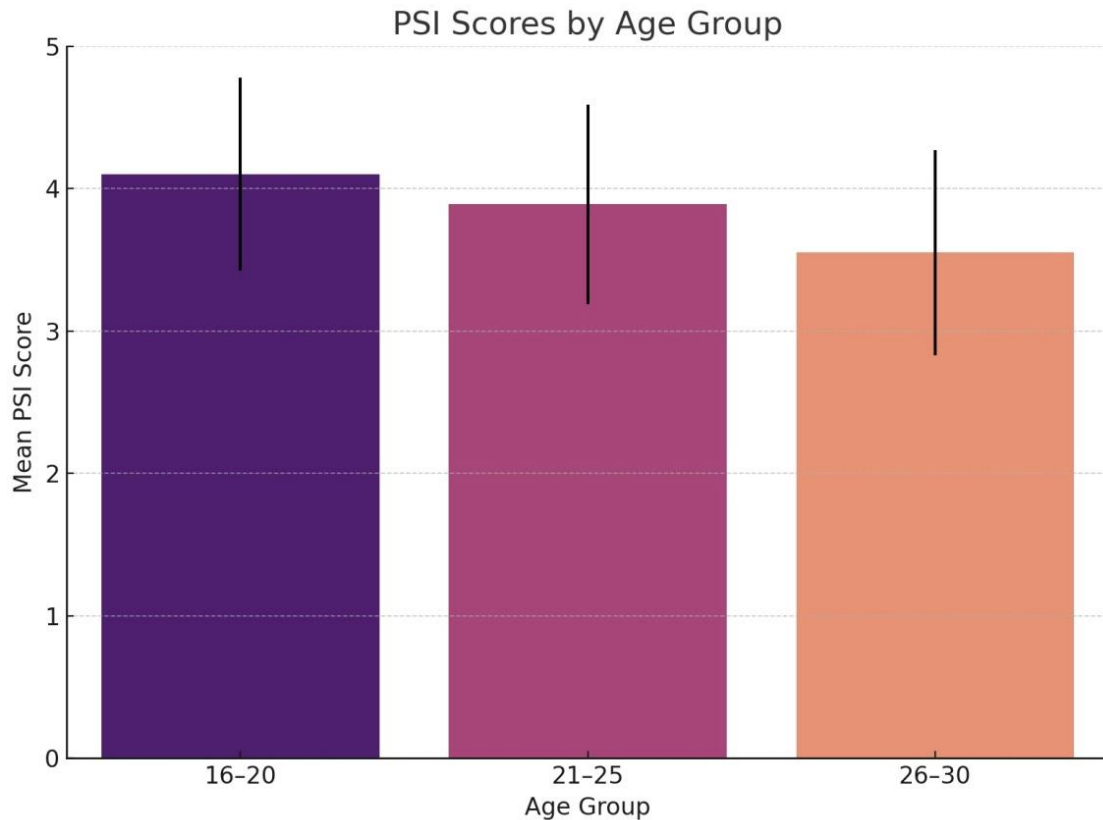


Figure 4: PSI Scores by Age Group

Gender Differences in Parasocial Attachment

Independent sample t-tests were used to examine gender differences in PSI scores.

Table 5: PSI Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Mean PSI Score	SD	t	df	p-value
Male	240	3.61	0.74			
Female	260	4.05	0.69	-5.10	498	< .001

Indeed, this was done on ejaculating male and female participants, where the differences between the total scores were found to be significant, with the sum scores of females (4.05) being higher than those of the males (3.61), $t(498) = -5.10$, $p < .001$. This possibly indicates the fact that women have less display of their emotions and have a tendency to find emotional satisfaction in mediated relationships.

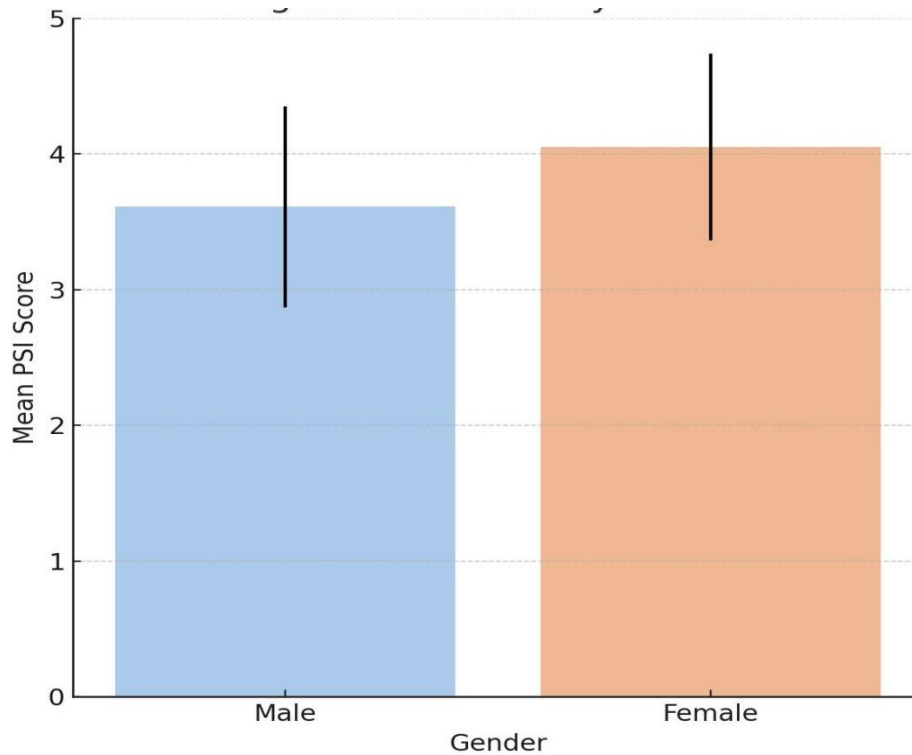


Figure 5: PSI Scores by Gender

Predictors of Parasocial Intimacy (Regression Model)

To assess the combined predictive power of key variables (platform, gender, age, time on social media, engagement frequency), a multiple linear regression analysis was performed.

Table 6: Multiple Regression Predicting Parasocial Intimacy

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p-value
TikTok Usage (vs. IG)	0.22	0.07	.18	3.14	.002
Female (vs. Male)	0.29	0.08	.21	3.63	< .001
Age	-0.11	0.04	-.17	-2.91	.004
Daily Time (hrs)	0.13	0.06	.14	2.17	.031
Engagement Frequency	0.27	0.05	.26	4.87	< .001

$$R^2 = 0.42, F(5, 494) = 29.82, p < .001$$

The regression model was significant with 42 percent of the variance as indicated in the scores of parasocial intimacy ($R^2 = 0.42$). The most powerful predictors were the engagement frequency (26) and the gender (21), and then education, TikTok, and the daily time spent on social media. Age was inversely correlated with parasocial intimacy as a younger age was found to have parasocial intimacy.

Discussion

The results of the work provide a complex explanation of parasocial relationships (PSRs) in the era of Instagram and TikTok. Its findings confirm, exceed, and even contest current psychological and media concepts and theories, especially where repackaged social media usage in increasing the connection of intimacy by celebrities. The researcher explains below the findings with regard to the superordinate thematic dimensions and the existing literature.

Interpretation of Results in Relation to Existing Theories

The relationship between social media use, particularly Instagram and Tik Tok, and an increased perception of intimacy with celebrities confirms that what individuals seek in the use of media is in accordance with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, which holds that people use media to satisfy psychological desires, including companionship and identity acceptance (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Participants in this paper with increased involvement in the content with celebrity reported higher PSRs, which confirms the notion that social sites are being actively used as self-representation and emotional affiliation instruments (Whiting & Williams, 2013). In findings of the study, researchers support Attachment Theory. The association was also demonstrated because the individuals with anxious attachment styles reported stronger PSRs, which implies that researcher might transfer their attachment to emotional needs to celebrities who were considered always accessible behind curated, algorithm-enhanced content (Stever & Lawson, 2013; Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

Celebrity Culture on Instagram/TikTok Intensifies PSRs

Data indicated that young homies using TikTok have a moderately higher level of perceived intimacy as compared to Instagram users. One of the reasons behind this can be the design of TikTok which prefers raw, short, and frequently changing video content that resembles immediate personal communication (Bhandari & Bimo, 2023). Compared to the fans-actor barriers, the mechanism of algorithmic intimacy provided by the platforms enhances the perception of mutuality, which Horton and Wohl (1956) initially meant as the illusion of face-to-face communication. Furthermore, the subculture of involvement of TikTok (in the form of duets, stitches, comments) makes it an interactive cycle, reinforcing the understanding of accessibility and relatability of celebrities as a real phenomenon (Abidin, 2021). This coincides with the argument by Marwick and boyd (2011) who explain that social media has thinned celebrity culture, and as a result, micro-celebrities could form a deep-seated PSRs at a massive scale.

Psychological Effects on Followers: Identity, Loneliness, Aspiration

This research affirmed the psychological influence of parasocial interaction, especially when it comes to self-construction, social comparison, and even in aspiration behaviors. Teenagers and young adults said that modeled their behavior and desires after the people they most admire which was along the lines of the social learning theory manifested by Bandura (2001). The given effect was stronger in the case of TikTok users, possibly because of the perceived relatability of the content creators. The researcher also found stronger PSRs among participants who reported

increased level of loneliness, repeating the result of Greenwood and Long (2011) but with an additional idea that offline interaction can be replaced by constant content presence. Nevertheless, many such relations can still be asymmetrical, and in this case, such one-way love can provoke emotional discontent due to the inability to get returned love (Lee & Chae, 2017)

Comparison with Traditional Media PSRs

In contrast to a parasocial attachment to the television or film stars, where the connection is usually one-sided and rather restricted (as a person may not even be able to see them closely), the PSRs on Instagram and TikTok are distinguished by the mutuality of illusion. Users do not consume, they comment, share, and even get direct replies. This greatly changes the balance of power and the sense of familiarity (Giles, 2018). Moreover, social media has the very particular feature that all media is always open to all followers at any time, which further enhances the emotional commitment of the followers, simulating a kind of friendship that would never have existed in the traditional media (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Nevertheless, it also confuses the line between reality and performance, calling into question emotional authenticity and digital burnout both parties of the interaction.

Unexpected Findings or Contradictions

It was an eye-opener when it was seen that the age factor did not play a significant role in PSR strength as was anticipated. Though the younger users were supposed to possess a stronger connection, the middle-aged people also achieved high scores of PSR, especially with lifestyle influencers as well as wellness advocates. It means the extension of the demographic appeal of PSRs beyond Gen Z (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). Also, in spite of the fact that Instagram was theorized to be more hospitable when it comes to visual intimacy, the video-based structure of TikTok had a marginally better correlation to emotional engagement. This cancels expectations that image-driven channels are more effective and gives way to more engaging types of digital presence.

Limitations of the Study

The study is limited, although it has made some contributions. To begin with, the sample was biased by university students and young adults, which restricts the possibility of generalizing it on the older population. Secondly, the cross-sectional research limits the ability to interpret the results in terms of causation; the finding shows a correlation between platform use and PSRs, but researchers do not know in which direction the causality lies or what kind of long-term psychological effects can be caused by the former. More so, a social desirability bias can arise in self-report variables, especially on how close a fan feels to their celebrity. Lastly, the cultural environment was not studied in depth, which previous studies indicate that the level of PSR may differ across cultural environments (Liebers & Schramm, 2017).

Conclusion

The study explored the relations of parasocial relationships (PSRs) within the current celebrity culture as presented via Instagram and TikTok. The results showed that the high occurrence of

social media use was associated with an increase in the perceptions of intimacy with the celebrities, most of all in younger users and in those who are more exposed to the interaction tools, such as Stories, Lives, and comment sections. TikTok was found to be the platform that is further linked with emotional bonding, most probably because its short-form, algorithm-based content makes people feel permanently exposed and that is being reciprocated by respective platforms.

Based on psychological theories like Uses and Gratifications Theory and Attachment Theory, the findings indicate that followers interact on these platforms in fulfilling personal needs that include exploration of personal identity, emotional companionship, and escapism. Unlike the traditional media, where PSRs could be characterized as mostly one-sided and slow to develop, Instagram and TikTok present a pseudo-interactive setting in which the boundaries between actual and fictional relationships are blurred. Such results have important implications to the meaning of identity and emotional dependencies in the digital era.

Recommendations

The findings of this study suggest that various recommendations can be proposed to the media professionals, educators, mental health professionals, and to future researchers. The first one would be to introduce a form of Media and Information Literacy campaign by social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok to make adolescents and young adults more conscious of the psychological effects of parasocial relationships (PSRs) and how the spectrum may disappear between media entertainment and reality. Content creators and influencers are also advised to be ethically transparent in recognizing that their online characters are a performance in an attempt to prevent unrealistic expectations of their followers. Schools ought to train the process of addressing PSRs and media influence, through existing curricula linked to courses in psychology, communication, and social media, denying their ability to persuade. Resource: The awareness of PSRs may be adopted by mental health practitioners to treat patients concerning loneliness, identity formation, or low self-esteem when dealing with clients extensively interacting with celebrity content. Lastly, scholars in the area are recommended to address further longitudinal impacts of PSRs, cross-cultural variation in fan behavior, as well as the additional complications induced by new technologies such as virtual influencers and AI avatars into the relationship between celebrities and fans. These attempts would lead to a more complex insight into the psychological, social, and cultural effects of the increasingly parasocial context of media.

Future Directions

The future studies should take into consideration the longitudinal studies that would provide the answers to the way in which PSRs form and develop with time, especially passing through various ages and cultural backgrounds. A more detailed analysis of PSR mechanisms on platforms may be provided through comparative studies with other services such as YouTube, Snapchat, or Threads. Moreover, it would be interesting to look into the role of algorithms in emotions and identity construction in the digital world, which is a sphere in need of investigation

but is, at the same time, essential. Incorporation of qualitative methods like interviews or diary studies can also give a greater insight into the subjective experience of PSRs than quantitative surveys.

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