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Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts


Parasocial Relationships and Social Media Usage

by

Christine E. Phelps


*A Thesis Submitted*

in partial fulfillment of the Master of Science degree

in Communication & Media Technologies


Degree Awarded:

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my loving and supportive parents, Daniel and Louise Phelps.

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PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

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## Abstract

This study investigates the use of social networking sites by media figures, celebrities and

celebrity brands and how consumers use and participate in brand communities on these sites.

The concept of parasocial relationships has been applied to this medium and studied as a

marketing tool to reach consumers and maintain relationships with them.  Consumers' use of

social networking sites, their participation with celebrity brands via social networking sites, and

their feelings toward that celebrity brand and online community are explored.  The relationship

between consumers' time spent and usage of social networking sites is compared to factors of

parasocial relationships as well as perceptions of celebrity brands.

*Keywords*: parasocial relationship, interaction, social media, networking

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SOCIAL MEDIA USAGE

Media today make celebrities and pop culture figures more accessible than ever. Thanks to the Internet and social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, people can be instantly connected with their favorite celebrity or media figure. Consumers' participation in social media is especially important for artists and celebrities these days (Concepcion & Peters, 2010).  No longer are social networking sites (SNS) used strictly to stay in touch with personal acquaintances; today these sites play a major role in celebrity advertising and promotion.  SNS are used to engage consumers and fans, not only getting them interested in a celebrity brand, but actively interacting with the brand and with one another, thus creating brand loyalty (Concepcion & Peters, 2010).

Media often focus their content on celebrities and their personal lives and careers; we see this not only in television, movies and magazines, but also in the news.  As if people's overexposure to celebrities is not enough, social media reinforce parasocial relationships in a way that no medium has done before.

In 1956, Horton and Wohl studied parasocial interactions for the first time, describing them as the illusion of a "face-to-face relationship" with celebrities and performers as a result of mass media usage (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215).  For Horton and Wohl, mainstream media did not include the Internet but rather radio, television, and film.  They studied parasocial relationships looking mostly at fictional radio and television personalities (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Today, celebrity brands seek to foster relationships with consumers through both mediated interactivity and the use of parasocial relationships.  In 2010, Liodice referred to social

media as a technology that "marketers can't live without" (Liodice, 2010, para. 3). He describes social media websites as a channel that turns consumers into advertisers through dialogue and interactions with the consumer that traditional forms of media could not provide (Liodice, 2010). Because of SNS, media consumers can feel intimately connected to celebrities, media figures, and pop culture icons, support them, and perhaps even believe they know the celebrities personally. This imaginary relationship with a celebrity that the consumer has never met mirrors Horton and Wohl's idea of a parasocial relationship. The Internet may strengthen parasocial relationships and make parasocial interactions more common.

## Research Questions

RQ1. What is the relationship between the level of a consumer's participation in SNS and their self-reported level of parasocial relationships?

RQ2. What is the relationship between the level of a consumer's participation in SNS and their perception of the celebrity's personal brand?

## Rationale

Applying Horton and Wohl's idea of parasocial relationships from the 1950s to the technologically advanced media of today honors the genius of Horton and Wohl. This study applies the concept of parasocial relationships and interactions to the SNS of modern times.

To understand parasocial relationships and the effects that these perceived relationships have on consumers and consumption patterns means understanding how to effectively reach consumers in a way that generates interest and encourages participation. This study provides insight into the ways in which celebrity brands are most effectively gaining consumer interest. SNS should continue to be viewed as a tool for marketers and celebrity brands to communicate

successfully with consumers. The fostering of parasocial relationships should be viewed as a marketing strategy and should be adopted by brands for promotional purposes.

## Review of Literature

### Parasocial Relationships

Horton and Wohl describe parasocial interactions as the illusion of a "face-to-face relationship" with celebrities and performers through mass media usage (Horton & Wohl, 1956 p. 215). They state that when the performer (or celebrity) seems to directly address the viewer as if the conversation were private or intimate, the viewer responds as if the received message is personal. The relationship is one-way, without obligation on behalf of the viewer, and controlled by the celebrity (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Through parasocial relationships, a performer or celebrity can achieve some form of intimate relationship with large numbers of audience members. This relationship is strengthened through repeated appearances, especially when they can be planned for and expected (Horton & Wohl, 1956). When viewers begin to learn not only about the performer professionally, but also about pieces of the celebrity's private life it only makes the parasocial bond stronger (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Some ways in which a celebrity might enhance an intimate parasocial relationship include making messages casual, conversational, and by including body language when applicable to mimic a casual interpersonal interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In addition, the celebrities might try to blur the lines between themselves (and their performance) and their audience (viewers and fans). They may also try to step away from the "stage" and actually interact with and be among the audience members, participating with viewers and consumers

(Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.218). SNS are a popular and effective way for celebrities to do just that. Celebrities and media figures are able to use SNS to directly interact with many consumers at one time.

In order for viewers to accept the parasocial relationship, the celebrity or performer must build his or her performance and interactions with the audience based on the audience's response to that performer (Horton & Wohl, 1956). The celebrity needs to relate to the viewer so that the parasocial relationship compliments normal, everyday social life (Horton & Wohl, 1956). "Most characteristic is the attempt of the persona to duplicate the gestures, conversational style, and milieu of an informal face-to-face gathering" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 217).

Horton and Wohl (1956) argue that the best practice is for celebrities to make their private lives somewhat public as they interest the viewer, but the image portrayed should be carefully chosen and monitored just as their public and performing life should be. The fascination with celebrity private lives could be based on a variety of factors. The viewer or audience member may relate to the performer, live vicariously through performers, and idolize them and their success stories. They may simply be interested in the celebrity's private life because it makes the parasocial relationship that much stronger when the viewer feels as if they know the celebrity on a much more personal level (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Rubin and McHugh (1987) argued that, based on past uses-and-gratifications research, a viewer will have great kinship with a performer that the viewer follows as well as the medium through which they feel connected to that performer. They argue that more common interaction with the performer means that the formation of a parasocial relationship is more likely to take place. Also, greater exposure to the performer makes the performer much more attractive to the

viewer. Both exposure and appeal make a parasocial relationship more likely and, they argue, play a major role in its development (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Parasocial relationships that develop on the basis of attraction (not necessarily physically, but social too) are especially rewarding for the viewer (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

In 2005, Ballantine and Martin looked at the formation of parasocial relationships as they relate to and are formed through online communities. They conducted this study from a marketing standpoint and focused on "how parasocial interaction can affect the consumption behavior of online community users" (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 197). They view online communities as an opportunity for brands and companies to build relationships with consumers. Online communities and SNS allow for the consumers' support of the brand to be seen by other consumers, who may be influenced to participate. These communities are a channel through which the marketer or brand manager can study the consumer and trends that are happening with the target market (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Opinion leaders are a very important part of promoting brand image. These online communities are easy ways to reach these opinion leaders and in turn influence those that follow them (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Regarding to how these parasocial relationships form in online community settings, Ballantine and Martin consider three theories in addition to the uses-and-gratifications theory that is commonly used. They first discuss uncertainty reduction theory in the development of relationships, arguing that when uncertainty is reduced, attraction and predictability cause the formation of parasocial relationships (Ballantine & Martin, 2005). Second, they mention personal construct theory which holds that consumers or viewers form ideas and knowledge of a performer or celebrity by applying "interpersonal constructs" to the parasocial circumstance (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p.

199). The third theory they mention is social exchange theory which makes clear the way

parasocial relationships form by "connecting intimacy and relationship importance to a cost and

reward assessment" and the parasocial relationship with a favorite celebrity would rank high in

rewarding value with very little cost to the viewer (Ballantine & Martin, 2005, p. 199).

## Relationship Marketing

Casalo, Flavian & Guinaliu (2008) looked at consumers' participation in virtual brand

communities on the Internet. They researched consumer participation and engaging the

consumer for the long-term. They call this "relationship marketing" which plays off the idea of

the imagined relationships and parasocial interaction (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2008, p. 19).

These researchers explored what consumers need from this type of relationship in order to

become involved with a brand through an online community. Studies have shown that trust in a

virtual community is an important factor in consumer involvement, as well as satisfaction and

communication because communication brings the community together (Casalo, Flavian, &

Guinaliu, 2008; Motion, 2008). They concluded that when these factors are provided to

consumers they will not only participate, but they will also return to the brand and maintain their

relationship with that virtual brand community. Just as importantly, they will promote that brand

to others (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2008).

## Celebrity as a Brand

Creation of an image or brand means developing a unique style and name (Schroeder,

2005). Celebrities and artists can be considered brands, as they strive to promote and market

themselves as a product (Schroeder, 2005). Brands are an important part of our society and they

become an aspect of our culture (Schroeder, 2009). How a culture reflects a brand and how

consumers respond to that brand is how brands create value (Schroeder, 2009). Celebrity brands often influence culture including styles, trends, and social norms. Brands can be powerful and significant players in defining a culture (Schroeder, 2009).

The consumer plays a very important role in the creation and promotion of a celebrity brand. The concept of co-creation and consumer involvement in brand management was first discussed by Prahalad and Ramaswamy in 2000. They credit the Internet with increased involvement of consumers in brands saying that the Internet allows for dialogue between the consumer and the manufacturer or brand manager (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Unlike the past, when consumers were a passive audience, they are now participants in the production and shaping of brands, including celebrity brands. Brand managers and consumers not only have two-way communication now, but active participation in ongoing communications (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000). Brands now take advantage of this on-going dialogue, word-of-mouth, form of communication and refer to it as "viral marketing" (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000, p.83). Co-creation is about creating both value and experience (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Brands, including celebrity brands, reach out to consumers in a variety of ways (Schroeder, 2005). Schroeder (2005) observed that recent branding research shows a shift in the process, emphasizing consumer response rather than the producers of the brand. Consumers use brand cultures to assist in creating self-image and identity (Schroeder, 2005). This means that cultural codes play a leading role in brand creation and meaning (Schroeder, 2005). Consumers have the ability to interact with, define, and co-produce brands and images. When consumers are

given the opportunity to co-produce, it creates greater value than usual exchanges (Prahalad &

Ramaswamy, 2000; Wikstrom, 1996).

## Brand Culture and Community

The nature of brands is social. Consumers form brand communities even more so than

brand managers form them. These brand communities are in no way geographically based.

They consist of the relationships and interactions that consumers and followers of a brand share.

Muniz and O'Guinn argue that brand communities, just like any other community, display

"shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility" (Muniz &

O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412).

Brand culture perspective looks at the importance of brands in the context of society. It

emphasizes the importance of consumers' interactions and involvement with brands. Brands

have become such an important aspect of culture that they shape and influence how consumers

dress, talk, act and even think. How cultures respond to and reflect brands ultimately creates

brand value (Schroeder, 2009). Brands and cultures are so strongly intertwined that they reflect

and influence each other indefinitely. Brand culture also refers to the images, myths, and other

cultural codes that give brands meaning for consumers. Brand culture is how brand identity

(what brand managers mean to portray) is interpreted and decoded to form a brand image (how

consumers view brands) (Schroeder, 2005).

In the same way that radio fostered parasocial relationships in the 1950s, so too do the

SNS of today. However, the power of the media to create these relationships may be amplified

by the use of the Internet. This study will examine the idea of parasocial relationships as they

apply to the new medium of SNS, investigate the relationship between participation in brand

communities on SNS and the self-reported level of parasocial relationships, and ascertain how these factors affect a consumers' perception of that celebrity brand.

## Method

This study investigates the extent to which parasocial relationships are formed with celebrity brands through people's use of SNS. A survey (see Appendix B) was used to gauge respondents' feelings toward and perceptions of their favorite celebrity (FC) or media figure, as well as their perceived relationships with them. The survey also determined how often the subjects use SNS and which sites they favor and frequent.

The population studied is comprised of participants of college-age and older who use SNS to follow celebrities and celebrity brands. College students are appropriate subjects for this survey research because they are commonly users of SNS as well as heavy media consumers. The accessibility of these college students to the researcher is another reason they were used as participants in this study. In order to remain unbiased and to gather a population that is more representative of SNS users, outside of just college students, a snowball sampling technique has been used. The researcher contacted students in the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) College of Liberal Arts and the E. Philip Saunders College of Business at RIT through their RIT email accounts. A link to the survey was included in the email along with a letter to the participant (see Appendix A). Email was chosen as an effective way to reach this large number of college students. The letter to the participant explained that if they chose to do so they could be entered in a drawing to win one of twenty $10 Amazon gift cards after completing the survey. The letter also explained that the participant who referred the most friends to the survey would

receive a $50 Amazon gift card.  This was meant to encourage participants to pass the survey on to people outside of the RIT community which would help reduce sampling bias.

In the survey, participants were given an introduction explaining the purpose of the survey and asking for their agreement to participate in the research.  The link to the survey was sent to RIT students in College of Liberal Arts and the E. Philip Saunders College of Business at RIT and then resent as a reminder within a week's time.  Participants were not required to be RIT students in order to participate.  Qualtrics online survey software was used to build and distribute the questionnaire.

After agreeing to participate in the survey, participants were first asked to name a favorite celebrity (FC) or media figure that they follow on SNS. The following questions in the survey were all based on participants' perceptions of their FC as well as their use of SNS to follow and be updated on that FC.  The first seven questions helped the researcher to understand who the participant's FC is, what they are like, and which SNS the participant preferred to use in order to follow their FC.  This section was comprised of multiple choice and open-ended questions.

The next section of the survey (question 8) was a series of 22 questions that were adapted from Auter and Palmgreen's Audience-Persona Interaction Scale which is a modern measurement of parasocial interaction (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000).  These questions were presented to the participant in a Likert style scale asking them to either strongly agree (SA), agree (A), neither agree nor disagree (N), disagree (D), or strongly disagree (SD) in response to statements such as "FC reminds me of myself" and "I would like to be more like FC."

In the same Likert style, participants were then asked 11 questions that had been adapted from Thomson, MacInnis & Park's survey on "consumers' emotional attachments to brands"

(2005). These questions (question 9) were used to determine what kind of feelings participants

had toward their favorite celebrity (FC) brand that they follow using SNS. The participants were

asked to rate the brand on qualities such as Friendly, Captivating, and Obligated (Thomson,

MacInnis, & Park, 2005).

The next section of the survey asked participants to answer questions about themselves

and their use of SNS. Participants were presented with a series of multiple choice questions to

determine how often they log on to their favorite SNS as well as how often they interact with,

check up on, and get responses from the FC that they previously named.

The last section of the survey asked participants to share information about SNS

accounts, Smartphone usage and habits (if they own one), as well as demographic information.

These questions were mostly multiple choice but some were open-ended questions. The

questions in this part of the survey addressed the relationship between participants' use of SNS

and the parasocial relationships formed with their favorite celebrities, as well as their perceptions

of the celebrity they follow.

## Results

### Sample

Through a snowball sampling technique, 324 responses were received and analyzed. Of

the 324 respondents, the majority of participants identified themselves as female (62.1%). The

respondents ranged in age from 18 to 80 with a mean age of 25 and a mode of 21. Most of the

participants that responded to the survey followed celebrities on SNS (77.4%). The largest group

(35.8%) of celebrities that were identified as FC by respondents was described as

"singer/musician," followed by "actor" (19.9%), and "comedian" (19.5%). Another popular

celebrity group was "news/talk show host/reality TV personality" (18.3%). Other notable

identifiers were "athlete" (13.5%), "author/journalist" (9.1%), and "fashion" (8.7%). Other less

popular categories included "famous for being famous" (6.3%), "business mogul" (5.1%), "chef"

(2.7%), "fine arts" (1.1%), "engineer/tech/futurist" (0.7%), and 36 "others" which included

various different claims to fame, often in addition to the above identifiers (see Table C1).

Almost half of all respondents used Facebook most often to follow their FC (47.8%) and

almost as many participants preferred Twitter (43.4%). Facebook and Twitter are likely to be

preferable to respondents due to the instantaneous access to celebrities through these SNS.

Through these SNS, consumers can know each thought, see each photo, and monitor every

activity that their FC shares with them. YouTube, which was preferred by only 6.4% of

participants, offers an instant connection more often between consumers and among brand

communities and less often between consumers and their FC directly. This intimacy made

possible through Facebook and Twitter makes them most appealing to consumers who have

parasocial relationships with celebrities and media figures. With 16.7% of respondents checking

in on their FC daily, 18.3% checking in once a month, and 24.7% checking 2-3 times a week, we

can assume that the majority of respondents had genuine interest and curiosity in what their FC is

doing and saying. Those who check in less often are likely to have less of a connection with

their FC and those who check in more often may only be checking out of habit rather than out of

interest.

Research Question 1 - *What is the relationship between the level of a consumer's participation in SNS and their self-reported level of parasocial relationships?*

A stepwise regression analysis was used in order to determine if a relationship exists between consumers' self-reported levels of parasocial relationship and their participation in SNS. When comparing the variables associated with parasocial relationships with how often consumers check SNS for updates from their FC a significant regression equation was found. Of the four variables of parasocial relationships "interest" ($R^2 = .090$, $F=24.213$, $p = .000$) and "problem" ($R^2 = .105$, $F = 14.37$, $p = .041$) were the two that predicted how often a consumer would check for updates. Some examples of reasons that respondents check in with their FC on SNS were that they care about, felt loyal to, and would like to be more like that celebrity. This also means that the way a FC handles problems and opinions that the celebrity has about certain issues influences consumers to check their favorite SNS for updates. These variables identified as "interest" and "problem" have the strongest drawing power when it comes to checking in to SNS.

When the four variables (interest, identify, problem, and group) were compared to the number of times consumers have tried to interact with their FC on SNS, "interest" ($R^2 = .071$, $F= 18.87$, $p = .000$) and "group" ($R^2$ of .089) ($F= 12.03$, $p = .028$) were significantly related. The effect that interest has on the number of times a consumer would try to interact with a FC is not difficult to understand. As previously stated, how interested a consumer is in a FC is determined by a consumer's level of caring, loyalty, and desire to be more like their FC. It is interesting that "group" is another strong predictor in how many times a consumer tries to interact with a FC. This is determined by feelings of inclusion in the online/brand community and how relatable the FC's interactions with friends and family are. This may mean that the feeling of inclusion and the ability to relate to the interactions between the FC and their friends and family make that FC

seem more approachable. The group dynamic and the interactions that the FC has with others must make interacting with the FC more appealing to consumers.

A regression analysis indicated that there were no predictors or significant results when comparing factors of parasocial relationships with how many hours a day consumers spend on SNS. However, when comparing the four factors with how long consumers could go without checking their favorite SNS "interest" was a strong predictor ($R^2 = .051$, $F=13.19$, $p = .000$) (see Table C2).

Research Question 2 - *What is the relationship between the level of a consumer's participation in SNS and their perception of the celebrity's personal brand?*

A regression analysis was again used in order to determine if a relationship exists between the self-reported level of parasocial relationship with their FC and their perception of that celebrity's personal brand. When comparing factors of celebrity brand perception with the number of hours a day a consumer spent on SNS, how "bonded" with consumers the celebrity was perceived to be was a strong predictor of how many hours a day the consumer spent on SNS ($R^2 = .021$, $F = 5.205$, $p = .023$ ). "Bonded" was also found to be significantly related to how often consumers will check in to see if their FC has updated their SNS ($R^2 = .041$, $F = 10.46$, $p = .001$). This means that if a consumer perceives a celebrity to have a strong bond with their consumers and their brand/online community, that consumer is more likely to check in on SNS and to spend time on SNS following the FC. The fact that the belief that a consumer is bonded to a celebrity is the strongest predictor of a consumer spending time on SNS and checking often shows the importance of the illusion of an intimate relationship with that celebrity. The

perception of being bonded with a celebrity has a much stronger appeal to a consumer than

perceptions of friendliness, peacefulness, affection, and passion among others.

Significant results were also found when the factors of celebrity brand perception were

compared to how long consumers could go without checking their favorite SNS. A regression

analysis indicated that how "friendly" a FC was perceived to be was significantly related to how

long a consumer would wait before checking in ($R^2 = .023$, $F = 5.73$, $p = .017$). When

comparing perception of celebrity brands with how many times a consumer tried to interact with

their FC on SNS, a regression analysis indicated that the most significant predictor was the

perception of the celebrity brand as "captivating" ( $R^2 = .044$, $F = 11.47$, $p = .001$) (see Table

C3).

## Discussion

Overall, the level of interest a consumer had with a FC was the aspect of parasocial

relationships that most strongly determined their level of participation in SNS. The illusion of a

relationship, or the perception of a celebrity being "bonded" with consumers, was also a strong

factor in determining a consumer's level of participation in SNS.

In the research done by Horton & Wohl (1956) before the introduction of the Internet, the

relationships were very much controlled by the celebrity. The communication was mostly, if not

all, one-way. Today with SNS consumers have the ability to interact with their FC. They

perceive celebrities to be "bonded" with their fans in a way that was never possible through just

radio and/or television. A look into the private life of a celebrity was always known to

strengthen parasocial relationships and connect consumers with their FC in the 1950s, and with

the SNS of today, consumers can almost look right into the minds and hearts of celebrities and truly believe that they feel a bond (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Interest, the strongest predictor in determining social media usage, has always been a factor in the development of a parasocial relationship, but the interaction that is now possible and the group dynamic that is provided through SNS adds a new, modern dimension to the phenomenon.  The existence of an online brand community and the ability to observe a FC's interactions with others strengthen and support parasocial interaction.  As Casalo, Flavian, and Guinaliu (2008) argued, interaction with and trust in an online community will keep consumers interested and loyal to the brand, and in this case, to the celebrity brand.

## Conclusion

This study does include some limitations due to the method of research.  A convenience sample of students was used, so the respondents were not randomly selected.  Additionally, this study was based on survey data and voluntary participation, so the results were based on the self-reported data of the participants as well as the willingness of the participants asked to participate.  Self-reported data such as this may always include error or deception on behalf of the participants.  The results of this study may not apply to all forms of SNS that currently exist or in years to come.

In the future, research might be conducted on this topic to investigate whether or not these parasocial relationships (through SNS) are actually replacing and becoming a priority over other interpersonal relationships in the lives of consumers.  Researchers could explore the topic of anxiety toward interpersonal relationships and whether or not parasocial relationships fostered by SNS serve as alternatives to interpersonal relationships, or if they help reduce the anxiety due

to their resemblance to interpersonal relationships. Future research might also include the effect of parasocial relationships on celebrity endorsements and marketing products with the use of celebrity brands.

Celebrities and media figures are made far more accessible today than they ever have been before. Not only are social networking sites bringing celebrities and their fans (consumers) closer together, but they are bringing consumers closer to one another based on their shared interest in a particular celebrity. Trust and participation in an online community such as this may be tied to brand loyalty, stronger consumer interest, and parasocial relationships with these media figures.

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Appendix A

Email to participants

Subject: Quick Survey, Win Amazon Gift Card

Liberal Arts Student,

My name is Christine Phelps and I am a graduate student in the Communication and Media Technologies program here at RIT.  My thesis work focuses on the use of social networking sites by media figures, celebrities and celebrity brands and how consumers use these sites.  I will be looking at consumers' use of social networking sites, their participation with celebrity brands via social networking site and their feelings of trust and loyalty to that brand.  You are included in a sample of students that I hope will share your time and your personal knowledge of this topic with me.

This survey should take less than ten minutes.  I can guarantee your privacy.  The surveys themselves will be seen only by me and my thesis committee.  Although results of the survey may be published and/or presented with my research, no names will be included. For helping us out, you can be entered into a drawing for one of twenty $10 Amazon gift cards.  Additionally, the participant who refers the most friends to this survey wins a $50 Amazon gift card.

Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any point, if you so choose.  If you feel at all uncomfortable or bothered by this survey you may contact RIT's counseling center at (585) 475-2261.

You may feel free to contact me at any time with questions or concerns about this survey or my research at cep3581@rit.edu

You can find the survey here: http://bit.ly/pl93GL

Thank you for assisting me with the completion of my thesis work.

Sincerely,

Christine Phelps
Project Director

Appendix B
Rochester Institute of Technology
Department of Communication
Online Survey

Phelps - Parasocial Relationships on SNS survey

1. Hello,

My name is Christine Phelps and I'm a graduate student at Rochester Institute of Technology. I am collecting data for my thesis focusing on consumers' use of social networking sites, their participation with particular celebrity brands via social networking sites and their feelings toward that celebrity brand. I hope you will take some time to share your personal knowledge on this subject with me. This survey should take less than 15 minutes. I can guarantee that your answers will remain confidential and that the survey responses will be seen only by me and my advisors. Although results of the survey may be published and/or presented with my research, no names, email addresses or any other form of personally-identifying information will be included. Moreover, no personal information will be dealt or sold to a third-party. As an incentive for you, the survey taker, to fill out the survey honestly and completely, qualified subjects will be entered into a raffle for twenty (20) ten-dollar gift cards to Amazon.com. Even better, the person that refers the most OTHER friends to this survey will be awarded with a FIFTY DOLLAR ($50) Amazon gift card. These cards will only be given to those who have completed the survey completely and who have not simply rushed through the survey to get to the final page (we can track that). Also, obviously we only want you to take this survey once (we can track that too).Your participation is voluntary and you may stop at any point if you so choose. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at cep3581@rit.edu or my advisor, Dr. Joseph C. Miller at jcmbbu@rit.edu. Thanks in advance for your help!

 Sincerely,

Christine E. Phelps

Project Director, Rochester Institute of Technology

o I ACCEPT THESE TERMS
o I reject these terms

2. If anyone referred you to this survey, please enter their name (last, first) here.

_____

3. Think for a moment - are there any people that you would consider to be in ANY way "famous"(not just singers or actors, but really ANYONE who has achieved some considerable degree of acclaim) that you have "followed" or "friended" on a social networking service (such as Facebook, Twitter, or YouTube)? PLEASE consider this question CAREFULLY before answering - it is CRITICAL to the study.

❍ Yes
❍ No

4. Oh you do? Excellent! That's what we're looking for!   So TELL us! Please name your favorite celebrity or media figure (JUST ONE please - first one that comes to mind) that you follow on social networking sites (It's okay. We'll be discreet. We won't judge you either.)

_____

5. Oh my! (Favorite Celebrity), huh? Hmmm.... you don't say... (???)Okay, help us out. What is (Favorite Celebrity) famous for? (Yes, we're serious. Don't give us that look.) Please feel free to select all that apply.

❑ Singer/Musician
❑ Actor
❑ Comedian
❑ Author/Journalist
❑ News/Talk Show/Reality TV Personality
❑ Fashion
❑ Business Mogul
❑ Fine Arts
❑ Engineer/Technologist/Futurist
❑ Chef
❑ Athlete/Sports Related
❑ "famous for being famous" - What DO they do? _____
❑ Other _____

6. In your honest estimation, just how big a name IS (Favorite Celebrity)?

○ Small "niche" celebrity with a limited but loyal fan base.
○ Moderate "B-List" celebrity, with a pretty sizeable group of fans.
○ Big "A-List" celebrity, with a large number of fans.
○ Celebrity at the top of the top of the celebrity food chain. Basically. You'd have to be living under a rock or underwater to not have heard of (Favorite Celebrity).

7. Please name the social networking site that you use in order to follow (Favorite Celebrity) (most often).

○ Facebook
○ Twitter
○ YouTube
○ Other _____

8. Okay great! Let's kick off a few questions here about (Favorite Celebrity) that only YOU can answer. Please specify the degree to which you agree with each of the following statements regarding your involvement in following (Favorite Celebrity) on (SNS).

| | Strongly Disagree | Disagree | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Agree | Strongly Agree |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Favorite Celebrity) reminds me of myself | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I have the same qualities as (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I have the same problems as (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I can imagine myself as (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I can identify with (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I would like to meet (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I care about what happens to (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I like hearing the voice of (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I feel included in (Favorite Celebrity)'s online community | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I wish I could handle problems as well as (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I like the way (Favorite Celebrity) handles problems | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I would like to be more like (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I usually agree with (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I feel like I can trust (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I feel like I am loyal to (Favorite Celebrity) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| (Favorite Celebrity)'s interactions with others on (SNS) are similar to mine with my friends. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| (Favorite Celebrity)'s interactions with others on (SNS) are similar to mine with my family. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| My own friends are a lot like others who follow/friend (Favorite Celebrity) on (SNS) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| I would enjoy interacting with others who follow (Favorite Celebrity) on (SNS) | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
| When accessing (SNS) to check up on (Favorite Celebrity), I feel included in the online community. | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |

| I share similar attitudes to the other followers of (Favorite Celebrity) on (SNS) | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ | ❍ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

9. Oh wow, that is pretty interesting! Heck, because of what YOU said, we might have to start following (Favorite Celebrity) too! Before we do that, though, we have to ask you about the kind of person YOU perceive that (Favorite Celebrity) really is, you know? So if you don't mind... Please indicate how well each of the following words describes your feelings about (Favorite Celebrity) when you experience this celebrity on (SNS).

| | Describes (Favorite Celebrity)'s presence on (SNS) Poorly | . | . | . | Describes (Favorite Celebrity)'s presence on (SNS) Very Well |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Affectionate (toward followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Friendly (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Loved (by followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Peaceful (with followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Passionate (toward followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Delightful (with followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Captivating (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Connected (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Bonded (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Attached (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |
| Obligated (to followers) | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ | ◯ |

10.  How often do you check (Favorite Celebrity)'s updates, status, tweets etc.?

○ Less than Once a Month
○ Once a Month
○ 2-3 Times a Month
○ Once a Week
○ 2-3 Times a Week
○ Daily
○ More than once per day

11.  How many times have you tried to interact with (Favorite Celebrity) on (SNS)(left a comment for, sent a message to, left a video response to, etc.)?

○ never
○ a few times
○ many
○ I consistently do

12. Awesome! Hey, you're almost home free! We just need to ask you a few one-off questions about your usage patterns and yourself, and then we'll cut you loose. Okay, big finish! Which of the following social networking websites do you currently have an active account with?

❑ Facebook
❑ MySpace
❑ Twitter
❑ LinkedIn
❑ Live Journal
❑ Blogster
❑ YouTube
❑ Tumblr
❑ Google+
❑ Other

13.  Do you own a smartphone? If so, which?

❍  iPhone
❍  Blackberry
❍  Android
❍  Windows
❍  Palm
❍  Other _____
❍  No Smart Phone


14.  What percentage of the time that you access your social networks is done through your smartphone? (Click on the graph to access the slider)

Smartphone 0_____50_____100


15. What percentage of the time that you check up on what (Favorite Celebrity) is up to on (SNS) is done through your smartphone? (Click on the graph to access the slider)

Smartphone 0_____50_____100


16. When you sleep, where is your smartphone? (Select the response that characterizes you best.)

❍  Nowhere near where I sleep
❍  With me in the bedroom
❍  Near my bed, on a nightstand/table
❍  In the bed with me


17.  Do you check/update your social network after you go to bed? (Select the response that characterizes you best.)

❍  Yes, any time I wake up during the night
❍  Yes, sometimes when I wake up during the night
❍  Yes, as soon as I wake up in the morning
❍  No, never

18.  Do you check/update your social network first thing in the morning? (Select the response that characterizes you best.)

❍  Yes, before I get out of bed
❍  Yes, before I turn on the television
❍  Yes, this is how I actually get my morning "news"
❍  No, never


19.  Generally. how many hours do you spend actively using social networking services per day?

❍  Less than one hour
❍  1-2 hours
❍  2-4 hours
❍  4-8 hours
❍  more than 8 hours

20.  How long can you go without checking your favorite social media service?

❍  A couple of hours
❍  I need to check in a few times a day
❍  I need to check in once a day
❍  I can go a long time without checking in


21. Almost there! Let's just get these demographic questions out of the way. What is your gender?

❍  Male
❍  Female


22. How old were you on your last birthday?

_____


23. Think about the place that you think of when you think of "home." It may not be the place that you currently live, and it may not be the place where you're originally from, but when you think of "home" THIS PLACE is what you think of.  What is the 5-digit zip code or postal code of this place that you call home?

_____

24. How would you characterize your highest degree of education?

❍ less than a high school diploma
❍ high school diploma
❍ some college
❍ associate's degree
❍ bachelor's degree
❍ some graduate school
❍ master's degree
❍ professional degree
❍ Ph.D.

25. With which of these ethnic descriptions do you most identify yourself?

❍ American Indian or Alaskan Native
❍ Asian
❍ Black or African-American
❍ Hispanic
❍ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
❍ White
❍ Mixed Race/Other _____

26. Are there any other comments or ideas about social networking sites and celebrity brands that you feel the researcher should know?

27. That's about it! Thanks so much for your participation!!  As we mentioned before, we're going to be randomly raffling off 20 $10 Amazon gift cards. To participate in this drawing, we'll need to ask you for your e-mail address. Again, let us assure you, we WILL NOT use your email address for any other purpose than the awarding of these gift cards. We are NOT about to sell our participants' email addresses to ANY organizations (shady or otherwise), and in fact, the very idea of that makes us shudder. Don't worry. So, if you want one of those Amazon gift cards, what is your email address?

Appendix C

Tables

Table C1

*Favorite Celebrities*

**Favorite Celebrities**

| Category | Value |
|---|---|
| Athlete/Sports Related | 34 |
| Chef | 7 |
| Engineer/Technologist/Futurist | 2 |
| Fine Arts | 3 |
| Business Mogul | 13 |
| Fashion | 22 |
| News/Talk Show/Reality TV Personality | 46 |
| Author/Journalist | 23 |
| Comedian | 49 |
| Actor | 50 |
| Singer/Musician | 90 |
| "Famous for being Famous" | 17 |
| Other | 36 |

■ Favorite Celebrities
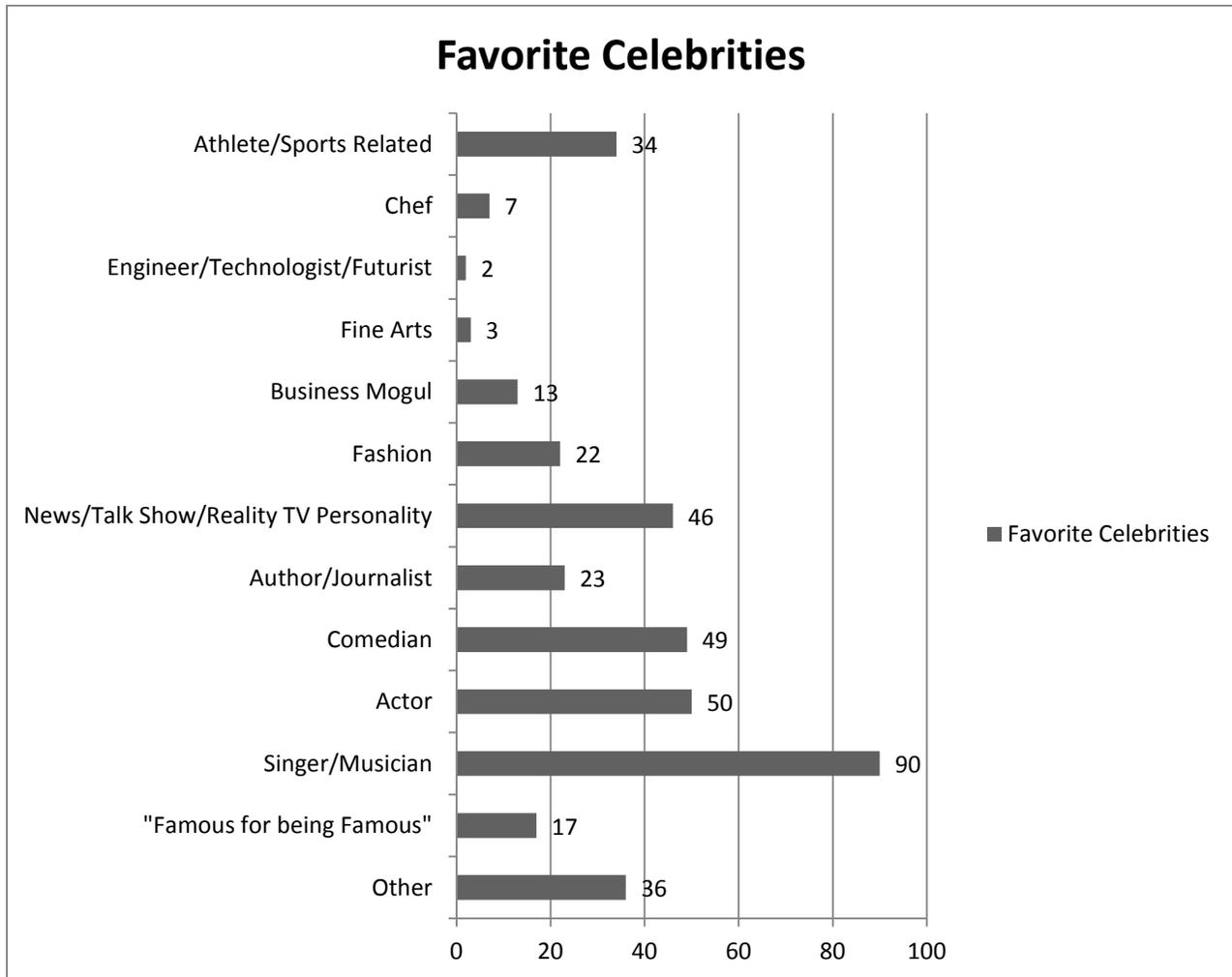
Table C2

*Research Question 1 Results*

| Dependent Variable | Variable Entered | $R^2$ | F | *P*- Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Often | Interest | .090 | 24.21 | .000 |
| | Problem | .105 | 14.37 | .041 |
| Tried | Interest | .071 | 18.87 | .000 |
| | Group | .089 | 12.03 | .028 |
| How Long | Interest | .051 | 13.19 | .000 |

Table C3

*Research Question 2 Results*

| Dependent Variable | Variable Entered | $R^2$ | F | *P*- Value |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Often | Bonded | .041 | 10.46 | .001 |
| Tried | Captivating | .044 | 11.47 | .001 |
| How Long | Friendly | .023 | 5.73 | .017 |
| Hrs/Day | Bonded | .021 | 5.205 | .023 |