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# Parasocial Relationship via Reality TV and Social Media: Its Implications for Celebrity Endorsement

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore the ways in which audiences build parasocial relationships with media characters via reality TV and social media, and its implications for celebrity endorsement and purchase intentions. Using an online survey, this study collected 401 responses from the Korean Wave fans in Singapore. The results showed that reality TV viewing and SNS use to interact with media characters were positively associated with parasocial relationships between media characters and viewers. Parasocial relationships, in turn, were positively associated with the viewers' perception of endorser and brand credibility, and purchase intention of the brand endorsed by favorite media characters. The results also indicated that self-disclosure played an important role in forming parasocial relationships and in mediating the effectiveness of celebrity endorsement. This study specifies the links between an emerging media genre, a communication technology, and audiences' interaction with the mediated world.

## Author Keywords

Reality TV, Social Media, Parasocial Relationship, Celebrity Endorsement, Credibility, Purchase Intention.

## ACM Classification Keywords

J.4 [Social and Behavioral Sciences]: Psychology

## INTRODUCTION

Recently, there have been two interesting media phenomena that change the way people interact with their favorite media characters. Reality TV and social media have enabled TV audience to relate to celebrities in a highly intimate and personal way. They have also narrowed the distance between the audience and celebrities and altered the role of audiences from spectators and admirers to active participants in media experience and friends of celebrities.

With *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and other shows in the early 2000s being early pioneers, the phenomenon of reality TV quickly made its way into homes of TV audiences. Reality

TV shows have, in general, “the voyeuristic focus on unguarded, unscripted, and intimate experiences of other people, whether ordinary people or celebrities, from unseen, unacknowledged vantage points” [1, p.7]. While some express concerns about the exhibitionism and voyeurism nature of reality TV [2], viewers welcome reality TV because it is more realistic and engaging than conventional programs, and reality TV shows are more popular than ever [3].

Social networking sites (SNSs), such as Facebook and Twitter, are also changing the dynamics of the audience-media character relationship. In the past, such a relationship was uninteractive, unreciprocal, and highly controlled by media characters or celebrity management companies. Interaction with audience was limited and carefully planned for publicity and promotion. However, SNSs have changed this one-sided relationship to a more interactive and reciprocal one. On SNSs, media characters willingly share seemingly personal information with the audience. In response, audiences ‘follow’ their favorite celebrities 24/7, peering into their private lives and getting to know them up close and personal. Using SNSs, viewers can now feel intimately connected to media characters and believe they know the celebrities personally. This type of relationship that people make with celebrities or media characters is called a parasocial relationship [4].

Despite the popularity of reality TV shows and the unprecedentedly rapid adoption of SNSs, surprisingly little is known as to whether or how this changing media environment affects parasocial relationships. Previous research on parasocial relationships was studied in a scripted, non-interactive media setting. Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the process and outcome of parasocial relationships in this new media environment may be qualitatively different. Furthermore, it would be interesting to explore what economic impacts these new media phenomena have, particularly on celebrity endorsement. Since celebrity endorsement is considered as an effective tool in marketing, the interplay among reality TV, SNSs, and celebrity endorsement must be of great interest to researchers and marketers.

In specific, this paper seeks to investigate 1) the ways in which SNSs and reality TV are linked to parasocial relationships between media personality and audiences and 2) the extent to which parasocial relationships are related to the effectiveness of a media personality as a brand endorser.

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To address these research topics we used empirical data from an online survey of 401 fans of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) in Singapore. This study presents the results of our hypothesis testing using structural equation modeling (SEM), and concludes with a discussion of the findings and implications for future research and practice.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Definition of Parasocial Relationship

Parasocial relationship is a "simulacrum of conversational give and take" [4, p.215] between an audience and a media character which is created due to the mode of direct address, personal, and private conversational style of the media character. Horton and Wohl argued that using a direct and personal conversation style media characters, "personae", can create powerful intimacy with television viewers. At the opposite site, through repeated viewing, media viewers would feel this bond of intimacy with the media characters and engage in more "ritualistic viewing" of episodes and develop loyalty toward the media characters [5]. Parasocial relationships resemble interpersonal, face-to-face relationships among people, yet they are typically one-sided and unreciprocal as media characters would neither know the existence of nor have the obligation to maintain such a relationship with media viewers [6,7].

Parasocial relationships start when the audience think media characters "as if they were in the circles of their peers" [4]. Rubin and McHugh [8] found that this anticipated friendship was a more important factor in developing a parasocial relationship than physical attraction. Through repeated viewing and interpretation of media characters' performance, audiences think that they "know" media characters like they know their close friends. Knowledge about the media characters, including their style, personality, preferences, and personal life, is accumulated, and interpretation and understanding of meanings of characters' behaviors (on stage) become more accurate. Viewers think that they really "understand" the media characters.

Intimacy is frequently mentioned and emphasized by Horton and Wohl. They suggested that media characters, through "undisturbed" intimacy, can create such an "influential" and "satisfying" relationship with the audience that the audience wishes to receive advice from the media characters and buy the products that the media characters recommend. Just as people rely on close others for important information, advice, and approval for various behavioral decisions [9], audiences in a parasocial relationship with media characters often seek important and useful information from media characters [10,11,12]. This implies that media characters who have successfully established a strong parasocial relationship with audiences can become effective brand endorsers.

### Reality Television

Reality Television is defined as "programs that film real people as they live out events in their lives, contrived or otherwise, as they occur" [13]. It provides unscripted, unrehearsed actions and interactions among participants. Reality TV has enjoyed highest ratings among other TV genres since its arrival. Ordinary people who appeared on reality TV shows have gained instant, though may be temporal, popularity. Reality TV shows hosting stars are also popular (e.g., *The Simple Life*, *The Osbournes*, *Newlyweds: Nick and Jessica*, etc.), and they provide media characters with an opportunity to rebrand personalities and propel careers. For example, T.I. a rapper, who is infamous for his violence and crime, shows his unknown fatherly side in a reality TV show called *T.I. & Tiny: The Family Hustle* and Tia and Tamara are enjoying their second peak in their entertainment career after a long pause thanks to the success of *Tia & Tamara*.

### Perceived Reality in Television

Numerous studies have reported that the realistically perceived television content has an effect on beliefs and attitudes of viewers [14,15,16]. Busselle and Greenberg [17] stated that individuals who judge television as more realistic are more likely to be influenced by that content. Perceived reality is the success factor of reality TV programs. Papacharissi and Mendelson [18] found that the majority of reality TV viewers perceived the interactions on the shows as real. Other studies reported that the perceived reality of the reality shows was the number one reason for viewing [19,20]. The widely accepted format of reality TV shows is a narrative or conversational style and close surveillance on characters. In this setting, the cast on the shows is made to show unrehearsed, impromptu, and seemingly honest reactions and behaviors in front of cameras. Smart camera techniques such as close up shots and deep focus, selective editing (i.e., cherry-picking scenes, frankenbiting), and frequent interviews with the characters also enhance reality and make the audience feel as though they are watching real life events and real characters. Hence, we predicted the following:

H1: Reality TV Viewing and perceived TV reality are positively associated.

Perceived reality in television content has been reported to influence parasocial relationship. Horton and Wohl [4] argued that when media characters seem "real," rapport between the characters and audience is easily created. They also suggested that when a TV character acts in a "vivid and arresting way" (p. 215), viewers feel that these remote and hard-to-reach stars are closer as if they were acquaintances or friends. Parasocial interaction is more likely to occur when media characters use a conversational style, inviting responses from audience members [21,22]. Rubin, Perse, and Power [21] reported that perceived realism of media characters was important for forming a parasocial relationship. Hence, we predicted the following:

H2: Perceived reality of television is positively associated with parasocial relationship.

The prospect of connecting to and engaging in conversation with famous people is exciting for audiences. As media characters appear more realistic and down-to-earth, audiences would feel that these stars are more approachable and thus, would be more motivated to contact them directly. Leet, Becker, and Giles [23] found that desire for seeking information (often personal) about celebrities and opportunity for face-to-face meetings or friendship were top motivations to contact celebrities. To contact and communicate with media characters, viewers these days use SNSs because finding and contacting media characters are easier with SNSs than with fan mails or phone calls. Hence, we predicted the following:

H3: Perceived TV reality and SNS use are positively associated.

#### **Social Networking Sites (SNSs)**

Celebrities these days use various SNSs such as Facebook and Twitter to engage in a constant conversation with their fans. For example, Snoop Dogg tweeted to his fans to "keep pimpn" and Mariah Carey sent direct messages to her fans using Twitter. Celebrities like Lady Gaga, Katy Perry, and Justin Bieber have more than 60 million fans following them on Twitter or Facebook. Celebrities use SNSs to keep their fans updated with upcoming events such as concerts and movie premiers, to write about personal projects, and to promote charity events. But the most obvious reason for using SNSs is to create a sense of closeness and connectedness with their fans by disclosing their thoughts and emotions. The use of first-person voice, highly opinionated statements on controversial topics, photos taken by celebrities themselves, 'insider' information such as backstage happenings or feuds between other celebrities, and spelling and grammatical errors in messages make SNS messages from celebrities feel personal, intimate, and inviting [24], thus "eras[ing] for the moment the line which separates persona and spectator" [4, p.218].

SNSs are particularly effective in fostering parasocial relationship in many ways. First, using SNSs, audiences can engage in real conversations with their favorite celebrities. People can direct their messages to celebrities using @reply on Twitter or write on the celebrities' Facebook walls and celebrities reply to their fans [24]. Communication via SNSs tends to be frequent and ongoing. This constant communication helps enhancing the feeling of intimacy and bonding, thus deepening the parasocial relationship. More importantly, SNS messages are often self-disclosing and confessional. Horton and Wohl [4] argued that media characters who are "personally and privately" conversing with the audience make the audience more response anticipated, and thus, can create parasocial relationships easily. This "strategically managed self-disclosure"[24] can create "digital intimacy" [25] and may actually provide the audience with the possibility of a substantial and

meaningful interactions with celebrities whom the audience cannot meet in person. As information about the media characters increases and uncertainty about them decreases, audiences would feel that they understand the celebrities. As a result, the parasocial relationship with the media characters will deepen. Hence, we predicted the following:

H4: Fans' SNS use and parasocial relationship are positively associated.

#### **Endorser Credibility, Brand credibility, and Purchase Intention**

To assess the degree to which parasocial relationships via reality TV and SNS use have a commercial impact, this study explored celebrity endorsement. Celebrity endorsement is considered an effective way to gain attention from and maintaining relationships with consumers. About 20% of U.S. advertisements feature celebrities and this figure is much higher in other countries, such as India (24%) and Taiwan (45%) [26]. Celebrity endorsement is believed to increase attention to advertisements, product recall purchase intention, and brand loyalty [27,28,29,30,31]

A review of relevant literature revealed that one of the most important factors for the effectiveness of endorser is credibility [32]. Expertise and trustworthiness are two major components of credibility. Expertise is defined as the extent to which the endorser is perceived as a valid source of information about the product, and it refers to the knowledge, experience, and skills possessed by the endorser [33]. Trustworthiness refers to the endorser's honesty, believability, and integrity [34]. When consumers evaluate the objectiveness of the endorser to present the information highly, the endorser will be viewed as trustworthy and can be a highly credible source [35].

Marketers always try to capitalize on celebrities who have a high level of persuasive power. It is plausible to think that fans that are in a personal relationship with their favorite celebrities are more likely to think that the celebrities are credible. A high level of intimacy, friendship, and understanding fans have acquired through the parasocial relationship would make the celebrities' claims more appear credible and believable. Therefore, our hypothesis is posited as follows:

H5: Parasocial relationship is positively associated with endorser credibility.

Similarly to endorser credibility, brand credibility refers to the willingness of firms to deliver what they claim (trustworthiness) and the ability to deliver what they promised (expertise) [36]. Brand credibility can be created and shaped by cumulative impact of all previous marketing strategies such as advertising and promotions [37]. Therefore, source appeals in advertisements are expected to have an influence on the perception of brand. Highly credible endorsers are able to transfer their credibility to the brands they endorse [38]. Therefore, the hypothesis is posited as follows:

H6: Endorser credibility and brand credibility are positively associated.

Evidences about the effects of brand credibility have been accumulated in marketing literature. Erdem and Swait [36] suggested that brand credibility increases perceived quality of brand and decreases perceived risk and information costs. Consumers can trust on a credible brand to deliver what it claims to do. When consumers believe that a brand is credible, they repeatedly purchase it, and are even willing to pay higher price for credible brands [39,40]. Hence, Hypothesis 7 is posited as follows:

H7: Brand credibility and purchase intention are positively associated.

## METHOD

### Procedure

An online survey instrument was used to collect data from adult fans (above 18 years old) of the Korean Wave in Singapore. The Korean wave or *Hallyu* refers to the popularity of South Korean culture including music, drama, and movies. Currently it is the most popular pop culture in Asia including Singapore. This study was conducted in Singapore because advertisements endorsed by Korean celebrities are not as widespread in Singapore as in Korea and thus prior exposures to advertisements featuring Korean celebrities were minimal. Respondents were recruited through popular Korean Wave fan sites in Singapore (i.e., soompi.com, sgkwave.com, sgforum.com, etc.), Facebook, Twitter, and word-of-mouth. At the beginning of the survey, respondents were asked to choose one favorite Korean media character. Respondents answered a set of survey questions about the media character whom they chose. After that, they were shown a mock-up advertisement featuring the media character of their choice, and answered questions assessing endorser and brand credibility and purchase intention. A total of 138 mock-up advertisements featuring different celebrities were created for this study. To avoid the effects from the existing brand knowledge or brand loyalty, the mock-up advertisement featured a fictitious juice brand. The survey took about 10-20 minutes to complete. At the end of the survey, respondents were offered a 10-dollar voucher.

### Sample

One hundred and forty of the 541 survey responses returned were incomplete, leaving a sample of 401 completed surveys. Of the sample respondents, 83.0% (N=333) were female and 16.9% (N=68) were male. The majority belonged to the age group of 21-24 (63.4%), followed by 18-20 (18.9%) and 25-29 (11.2%), and the rest were 30 years older (6.5%). Most respondents were Chinese (86%), followed by Malay (6.4%) and Indians (1.5%), and the rest were other Southeast Asians (4.7%). Given the fact that the Korean Wave is especially popular among young female audiences and the major ethnic group in Singapore is

Chinese, this demographic profile of the sample is considered representative of the target population.

### Measurements

A total of 95 questions were created on matters including key variables and demographics. Most survey items were adapted from pre-validated research work to increase the construct validity. Seven-point Likert scales were used to measure parasocial relationship and purchase intention, and five-point Likert scales for perceived TV reality, SNS use, reality TV viewing, endorser credibility, and brand credibility.

*Parasocial relationship:* This scale was adopted from the previous studies [11,12,41], with some items created based on the original definition and description of parasocial relationship by Horton and Wohl [4]. A total of 12 items were employed to assess four sub-constructs of parasocial relationship; namely, friendship, self-disclosure, understanding, and identification. An explorative factor analysis (EFA) with Varimax rotation revealed that understanding and identification can be merged into a single factor (labeled as “understanding”). As such, the concept of parasocial relationship was measured by 3 distinctive factors which included perceived friendship (e.g., “If he/she were not celebrities, we would be good friends”), self-disclosure (e.g., “He/she reveals himself/herself”), and understanding (e.g., “When he/she behaves in a certain way, I know the reasons why”).

*SNS use:* Two-item scale was employed to assess how frequently people use SNSs to follow, or engage in conversation with their favorite celebrity. Based on the popularity and penetration rates, Facebook and Twitter were chosen for this survey.

*Reality TV viewing:* Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they watch Korean reality TV shows by selecting their viewing frequency from “never” to “always” for 21 Korean reality TV shows that were available via network TV, cable TV, or the Internet (i.e., streaming videos or peer-to-peer file sharing sites) at the time of the survey.

*Perceived TV reality:* This variable measured how realistic and true-to-life viewers perceive the depictions of reality TV shows to be. The Perceived Realism Scale was adapted to the context of reality TV [11,12]. A five-item scale was employed in the present study, measuring perceived TV realism (e.g., “In general, these [reality] TV shows present things as they really are in life”).

*Endorser credibility:* This variable was measured with a scale developed by Ohanian [32]. Respondents were presented with a mock-up advertisement featuring their selected celebrity and asked to indicate how they felt about the celebrity in the advertisement. Six items were presented in a 5-item semantic differential scale measuring *expert, knowledgeable, qualified, honest, reliable* and *trustworthy*.

	Alpha	AVE	$\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Reality TV viewing	.899	n/a	n/a	-								
2. Perceived TV Reality	.831	.510	.714	.143	-							
3. SNS use	.799	n/a	n/a	.296	.198	-						
4. Self-disclosure	.893	.740	.860	.227	.373	.305	-					
5. Friendship	.928	.541	.735	.197	.243	.251	.541	-				
6. Understanding	.934	.684	.827	.302	.287	.415	.612	.572	-			
7. Endorser Credibility	.942	.763	.874	.147	.340	.143	.447	.340	.351	-		
8. Brand Credibility	.887	.623	.790	.145	.293	.143	.372	.329	.374	.547	-	
9. Purchase Intention	.741	.565	.751	.128	.271	.179	.360	.338	.332	.442	.481	-

**Table 1. Evaluation of the Measurement Model**

*Brand credibility:* This variable was measured with the scale developed by Erdem and Swait [36] with two items removed due to the length of the survey. The measure included 5 items such as “*This brand has the ability to deliver what it promises*” and “*This brand has a name you can trust.*”

*Purchase intention:* Respondents were asked how likely they would consider purchasing the product featured in the advertisement in the future. This is a 3-item measure and used a 7-point Likert scale ranging from *very unlikely* to *very likely* (e.g., “*How likely is it that you consider purchasing the product shown in the advertisement above?*”).

## RESULTS

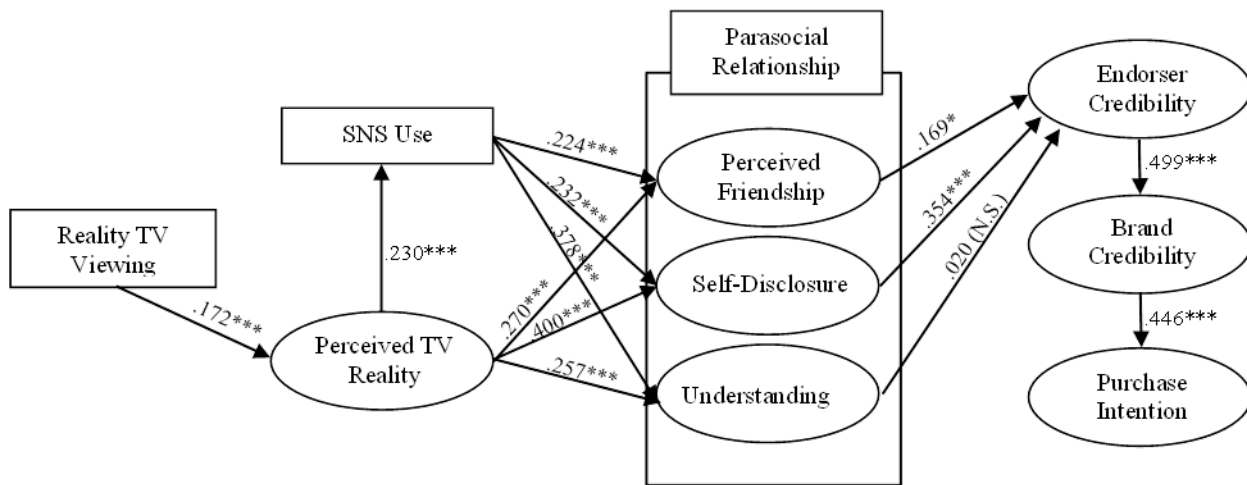
We examined the measurement model, the structure of the research model, and each hypothesized path using structural equation modeling (SEM). We used AMOS 21, which allows researchers to perform path-analytic modeling with latent variables. Figure 1 shows the research model and the results of SEM analyses. As Figure 1 shows, all factors in the model were latent variables except for two media use factors. Specifically, reality TV viewing and SNS use were treated as a composite variable since the number of items employed to assess those two factors were either too large (21 items for Reality TV Viewing) or small (2 items for SNS use), which is inappropriate to create a latent variable [42]. Note that we allowed covariance between three subordinate constructs of parasocial relationship. Though the results of EFA indicated the distinctiveness of three parasocial relationship factors, they referred to the same higher-order construct (i.e., parasocial relationship). Also, preliminary analyses showed that the overall model fit was significantly better when three parasocial relationship factors were treated as separate but positively correlated variables ( $\chi^2(642) = 1330.244, p < .001$ ) than being uncorrelated ones ( $\chi^2(645) = 1566.725, p < .001$ ;  $\chi^2_{diff}(3) = 236.481, p < .001$ ).

First, we evaluated the validity of the measured constructs by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The results are presented in Table 1. As shown, all latent variables had good convergent validity ( $\text{AVE} > .50$ ,

Cronbach’s  $\alpha > .70$ ) and good discriminant validity (square root of AVE larger than the factor correlation).

Second, we evaluated the research model’s goodness-of-fit. The results showed that the chi-square statistics were significant for the research model ( $\chi^2(642) = 1330.244, p < .001$ ), indicating that the fit of the data to the hypothesized model was not entirely adequate. However, the appropriateness of the chi-square test for assessing the overall model fit has been routinely questioned owing to its sensitivity to sample size and model complexity [43]. As such, alternative model fit indices have been proposed (e.g., RMSEA, CFI, TLI) to test a model’s approximate fit [43]. For our model, these indices revealed an acceptable approximate fit for the research model:  $RMSEA = .052$ ,  $CFI = .938$ ,  $IFI = .939$ ,  $TLI = .933$ , and a ratio of chi-square to degrees of freedom  $\chi^2/df = 2.07$ .

The final step in the model estimation was to examine the significance of each hypothesized path. As Figure 1 shows, all the paths in the research model were significant at either the .001 or .05 level. More specifically, reality TV viewing had a positive association with perceived TV reality ( $\beta = .172, p < .001$ ), which, in turn, had a positive relationship with all subordinate factors of parasocial relationship such as self-disclosure ( $\beta = .400, p < .001$ ), friendship ( $\beta = .270, p < .001$ ), and understanding ( $\beta = .257, p < .001$ ). Hence, H1 and H2 were supported. Perceived TV reality was positively associated with SNS use ( $\beta = .230, p < .001$ ), which in turn had a positive relationship with self-disclosure ( $\beta = .232, p < .001$ ), friendship ( $\beta = .224, p < .001$ ), and understanding ( $\beta = .378, p < .001$ ). Hence, the results supported H3 and H4. Parasocial relationship had a positive relationship with endorser credibility to the extent that self-disclosure ( $\beta = .354, p < .001$ ) and friendship ( $\beta = .169, p < .05$ ) were positively associated with endorser credibility. However, another parasocial relationship factor, understanding, was not significantly associated with endorser credibility ( $\beta = .020, p = .787$ ). Hence, H5 was partially supported. Finally, endorser credibility had a positive association with brand credibility ( $\beta = .499, p < .001$ ), which, in turn, had a positive relationship with purchase intention ( $\beta = .446, p < .001$ ). Hence, H6 and H7 were supported.



\*  $p < 0.05$   
 \*\*  $p < 0.01$   
 \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

Note: For visual clarity, covariances among the sub-factors of parasocial relationship are omitted in this diagram

Figure 1. Results of SEM Analysis

Overall, the results supported our research model in that reality TV viewing and SNS use led to higher levels of parasocial relationship. Increased parasocial relationship had a significant economic value to the extent that it led to higher levels of endorser credibility, which, in turn, had a positive association with purchase intention via brand credibility. Implications of the results for research and practice are discussed below.

**DISCUSSION**

Overall, the findings show that reality TV leads to people’s perception that media characters are more real and approachable, which helps breaking the wall between the media characters and viewers. This motivates people to use more SNSs to connect with favorite TV characters, leading to strengthened parasocial relationships with them. More specifically, viewers believe that TV personae whom they watch on reality TV shows and they communicate with on SNSs are more personal, friendly, and understandable. The findings also show that this emerging form of media experience has a substantial economic impact and practical implications in that parasocial relationship has a positive association with celebrity endorsement. The multifaceted implications of the findings for research and practice are discussed as follows.

First, the findings extend our knowledge about the process and outcomes of viewers’ bonding with media characters. Though claims about rapidly changing media environments are abundant, many of them have yet to be examined empirically. The present study tested empirically the implications of emerging media technologies (SNSs) and TV genre (reality TV) for a specific dimension of media experience, parasocial relationship, and specified its relationship with celebrity endorsement.

Second, this study contributes to media studies by (a) providing a more thoroughly defined conceptual and operational definition of parasocial relationship; and (b) specifying its relationship with other theoretical concepts such as perceived TV reality, media use, and celebrity endorsement. Though self-disclosure was often discussed in the original work of parasocial relationship by Horton and Wohl [4], it has rarely been incorporated in the measurement models and empirical tests of parasocial relationship. The findings reveal that self-disclosure is a central element of parasocial relationships and further show that it is not only a distinct subordinate factor of parasocial relationships but also has a significant relationship with media consumption behavior and a perception about celebrities as brand endorsers. It is worthwhile to note that both perceived TV reality and SNS use had a stronger association with self-disclosure than with the other two types of parasocial relationship such as friendship and understanding. Similarly, self-disclosure had the strongest association with endorser credibility among the three parasocial relationship sub-concepts. We suggest that future studies of parasocial relationship or celebrity endorsement should incorporate the concept of self-disclosure in order to a reveal more complete and precise picture of the way in which the audience engage with media characters and its implications in modern media environments.

Third, the findings show that reality TV and SNS use have positive associations with parasocial relationship and celebrity endorsement. Consistent with previous research [14,15,16,17], more realistic and interactive media characters can effectively form valuable relationships with viewers. This has important implications for content production and celebrity management. Producers and broadcast companies should endeavor to make reality TV

shows more realistic, true-to-life, and without distortion or dramatization. This principle of honest depictions of characters and events can be applied to other TV formats such as talk shows and news programs. Likewise, media characters should understand the changed expectations and norms of communication with the audience. Instead of using SNSs for promotion of a personal brand and publicity, they should maintain intimacy, honesty, and interactivity in their communication with viewers.

#### LIMITATION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Some research limitations of this study are worth noting. First of all, this study employed a voluntary response sample of media viewers who identified themselves as fans of a media character. Voluntary response samples tend to oversample people who have strong opinions and particular attitudes, thus they may not be representative of the study population. Additionally, the present study is limited in that data were gathered using an online survey. Although our study represents a sufficient sample size, the external validity of online samples remains a problem. Since there are no central registries of fans to create a reliable sampling frame, this limitation might be unavoidable. However, findings of the present study should be further validated by research employing various sampling strategies and frames. Second, this study was conducted in Singapore because we wanted to avoid the effects of overexposure to celebrity endorsements. Therefore, the generalization of findings from this study may be limited to Singaporean population. Nonetheless, given that the Korean Wave is a transnational socio-cultural phenomenon, similar findings can be expected from other study settings where the popularity of Korean celebrities is high. However, future studies may be conducted in other countries for empirical validation of the findings of the present study. Finally, the study is based on cross-sectional data. Though we employed an SEM technique, a causal modeling approach, the findings are based on correlational analyses, making it difficult to establish causality. Also, the significant associations between variables observed in this study can be attributable to common-method bias, since all variables in this study were measured using a single source [44]. Hence, we suggest that future studies should employ different research designs, such as a longitudinal study and experimental research, or a multi-method approach in order to further validate the findings of this study.

#### CONCLUSION

Our media environment is rapidly changing in the direction where the distinction between mediated and non-mediated worlds becomes blurry, and the roles and effects of media characters and fans are switched and expanded. As such parasocial relationships will become more central to the audience' interaction with media characters. With more revolutionary changes in media technologies and genres coming to our way, scholars and practitioners should make

continuous efforts in predicting and controlling the influence of television in our lives.

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