

Celebrities online self-disclosure of information reinforces the parasocial relationship.

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores the parasocial, or one-sided, relationships between celebrities and fans through social networking sites (SNS), using Lady Gaga as an example. These relationships occur due to the self-disclosure of information on the platforms. Also, this article uses Twitter and Instagram and different celebrities as examples to analyse how self-disclosure of information helps to reinforce the parasocial relationships between the celebrities and fans. Moreover, it refers to Katz (2014), who suggests that community is the individual who gathers in a space in order to receive their needs through sharing the same interest. Within the community, there are weak ties which help to connect the people with the strong ties. Followed by analysing the concept of online “friends” which associated with the idea of weak ties.

*Keywords:* Parasocial relationship, Community, Weak ties, Online “friends”

In the age of the Internet, social media has become dominant in our everyday lives. With growing accessibility to the Internet, social media plays an important role in providing people networking services, entertainment or online communication support. Social media is more important to celebrities as they mainly use social media sites to interact and communicate with their fans. Moreover, online engagement with fans assists the appearance of parasocial relationships. As Adam and Sizemore (2013, p.14) suggested that parasocial relationships are one-sided relationships which people usually feel strong friendships with the people who they have never met before, especially the celebrities who have an extensive fan base. Hence, celebrities such as Selena Gomez, currently one of the Instagram’s most popular users, actively uses social media sites to interact with her fans and build relationships often occur the parasocial relationships. According to Marwick and Boyd, social media has changed the relationship between the celebrity and fans as there is an expectation of continuous interaction (as cited in Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.366). In fact, in order to adapt this engagement, celebrities mostly decided to disclose their personal information online. Thus, the main argument for this essay will be celebrity’s online self-disclosure of information reinforces the parasocial relationships between the fans through the use of social media. This essay will examine how celebrity’s online disclosure of

information results on the parasocial relationships, followed by the analysis of how social media forms as a whole in constructing a community, as well as examine the weak ties and 'friends' within the community.

### **Background of Social Media with the Celebrities**

Social media networking sites are an online space which people could create a self-descriptive profile as well as building a personal connection through making friends with others (Donath and Boyd, 2004, p.2). Social media networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the social media for those users who seek for friends, and entertainment. Although social media is facilitating the connection between the people, it is used extensively by celebrities. As it could say, social media has broadened the capacity in helping the celebrities to reach out to their fans in an easier way. Instead of promoting their works in person, they could now utilize the social media to promote their latest works or manage their appearance to the public without any limitation. To gain a higher popularity, celebrities tend to update their status through posting their personal information including photo and video on the social media. Having said that, Selena Gomez, who currently has the most followers on Instagram actively uses social media to interact with fans. As same as the other celebrities, Gomez chooses Instagram as a tool to reveals her personality and personal information such as daily life and relationship to the public. As Selena Gomez has already gained a high popularity, her self-presentation on Instagram will be reviewed by the millions of followers. As it could say, Selena Gomez reveal her relationship status through uploading the video of her boyfriend and the selfie of them on the Instagram (Jessica, 2017). Besides, Gomez even unfollowed her ex-boyfriend on the social media platform. The personal information that Selena Gomez has disclosed helps her to gain a higher popularity, as she provides the information which the fans would like to receive. Self-disclosure of personal information attracts the fans to explore more about the celebrity. Moreover, due to self-disclosure of information, a new phenomenon which known as the parasocial relationship has occurred between the celebrities and fans.

### **Parasocial Relationship**

Parasocial relationship refers to an imaginary relationship or imaginary friendship which an "ideal self-image" that the fans wish to discover (Caughey, as cited in Click, Lee,

and Holladay, 2013, p.362). Within the parasocial relationship, the celebrity is expected to play different characteristics such as friend and leader which could provide their fans mentally support, heal their physical wound, or confidence. Thus, fans mainly describe the imaginary relationship with the actual figures such as 'mother' and 'friend'. In other words, a parasocial relationship is conducted by one person who has an illusive face-to-face relationship with the media character. This phenomenon mostly happens between the celebrities and fans. As it could say, social media provides an additional opportunity for the fans to interact and engage with the celebrity. Through the online engagement, fans are able to get closer with the celebrity as they could now access to the latest update from the celebrity within a process. Furthermore, Fraser and William (2002) found that "fans drive to develop relationships with celebrities is 'based on the need to enhance self-esteem through identification with certain values'" (as cited in Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.364). People with low self-esteem will commonly seek for the celebrity who is similar to their ideal selves. The parasocial relationship offers the people an opportunity to experience enhancing self-esteem and feel closer to their actual selves. To describes that, the parasocial relationship provides the fans they do not receive in the real relationship as well as an additional opportunity to feel close to the celebrities. For instance, Lady Gaga uses social the media platform to build a community and play different roles within the parasocial relationships.

### **Lady Gaga Self-disclosure of Information on Twitter Reinforces the Parasocial Relationship**

Twitter is one of the social media platforms that help to tighten the distances between the celebrities and fans. Hence, a majority of celebrities choose to use social media to enlarge their fan base. One of the examples is Lady Gaga uses Twitter to share her personal information and daily life with her fans in order to maintain and strengthen the fan-celebrity relationship. Also, Lady Gaga tends to reply to her fan's post by providing different pieces of advice and encouragement. This interaction makes the fans feel more intimate with Lady Gaga as she uses the strategy of self-disclosure to attract more followers to participate in her personal life (Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.375-376). As it could say, social media enables the fans to participate in the celebrity's daily life through comments and likes on their posts. The fans tend to comments and likes on the celebrity's post although it is not much possible to get the response from the celebrity (Ding and Qiu, 2017,

p.159). However, fans could still experience the feeling of getting closer to the celebrity within the one-sided interaction.

Additionally, the lines between the “real” and “imaginary” relationship have blurred as Lady Gaga utilizes Twitter to self-disclose her personal information reinforces the parasocial relationship (Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.367). Lady Gaga uses social media to communicate rather than promoting her music online. Therefore, fans feel like they really know her as they know her daily schedule. Self-disclosure of information assists the fans to know more about Lady Gaga’s daily routine; Fans feel to be a part of Lady Gaga’s life as they consider they know everything about her. Yet, everything within the parasocial relationship is based on the imaginary. As Jeremy and Jimmy (2009) argued that “although online relationships and conversations between the celebrities and fans remain mediated, fans increasingly experience them as real and authentic, reinforcing their feelings of truly ‘knowing’ celebrities” (as cited in Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.366). Social media allows the fans to communicate with the celebrity and construct a close bond. Therefore, fans believe that they are having a same online space with the celebrities and they truly “know” about them. However, a parasocial relationship is one-way interaction and it is based on the imaginary. Due to the long-term of one-sided interaction, it introduces the concept of parasocial relationship. Social media helps to transform an “imaginary” relationship into a more “real” relationship, thus, fans would feel more “realistic” in the parasocial relationship. On the one hand, social media helps to form a community between the fans and celebrity.

### **Community**

Based on the different interests, fans could have followed different celebrities on the social media. Regarding the followers, the different groups of people build up an online community. As it could say, Morgan (1942) suggested that community is individuals who share the same interests, habits, or custom gather in a group in order to meet their needs (as cited in Katz et al., 2004, p.330). The people who share the same interest mostly follow the similar genre of celebrities on the social media. Using Lady Gaga as the example, within the community, her fans are named as “Little Monsters” and Lady Gaga plays the role of “Mother Monster” in giving support, confidence, and counseling to the fans. In the online

community, Lady Gaga deepens the fan identification by using the name of “little monster” to encourage the fans not to be afraid and avoid being judgmental (Click, Lee, and Holladay, 2013, p.369). According to Click et al., (2013, p.370), they suggested that through involving in the community, Lady Gaga gives the fans a positive point in finding the strength through associated with the other monsters. Moreover, social media connects the members from across the world, who have never met each other in the “real” world into a virtual community (Vitak, 2008, p.40-41). Although the members of the community do not know each other, they gather in an online space to build relationships and exchange the information. Furthermore, community boosts the fans to heal either their physical or mental wound and strengthen the confidence through placing Lady Gaga into the family role, such as “the mother of the community”. Taking the role of the mother figure, Lady Gaga provides the “little monster” a place to strengthen themselves through building up a community.

### **Weak Ties and Friends Online**

Weak ties refer to the members of the network who are able to reach the information with the pathways through the connection of the bridges (Granovetter, 1973, as cited in Vitak, 2008, p.19). As it could say, there are many weak ties within a community which helps to link the members together and form strong ties. The people within the community exist the weak ties as the people might not know each other but they share the same interest. As Wellman (1992) stated that weak ties consider providing the informational resources rather than supporting. Thus, it is more important than strong ties (as cited in Carroll, Kavanaugh, Reese, and Rosson, p.120). Having said that, weak ties would likely do more damage to the network as weak ties are the main bridges that supporting the strong ties. Strong ties will be collapsed once the weak ties are being removed. Moreover, Vitak (2008) stated that “weak ties connect an individual to people with whom he has little in common and would likely not be able to connect with through strong ties, such as high-status individual” (p.19). The people might not know each other’s in real life but they could be “friends” online. In addition to this, Vitak (2008, p.78) suggested that “offline acquaintances consist of weak ties, those people with whom one may consider as friend, but do not reside within one’s inner circle of friends”. Social networking sites allow the acquaintances to update their daily life through online profiles, following use the simple

form of interaction to maintain the connections such as likes and comments. Through the use of social media, everyone is able to become “friends” by pressing the button of “add” or “follow”; The weak ties could also be removed when they choose to “unfriend” and “unfollow”.

### **Conclusion**

The way celebrities disclose their personal information online reinforces the development of a parasocial relationship between the celebrity and fans. Also, through using the social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter to share a celebrity’s daily life and personal information helps to develop an engagement with the fans. The lines between the “real” and “imaginary” relationship have blurred as the fans could now access the information of a celebrity in anytime. Thus, the relationship between the celebrity and fans are more realistic. Yet, a parasocial relationship is based on one-way interaction and it is what the fans wish to explore. Moreover, social media helps to form a virtual community as the followers within the community share the same interest and receive the similar information at the same time. The concept of weak social ties appears between the people which they do not know each other but share the same idea. Also, social media provides an opportunity for everyone to become online “friends”, whereas this is considered as weak ties and it could be removed in anytime. Overall, the social media is facilitating the development of the parasocial relationship and virtual community.

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