

FOLLOWING CELEBRITIES ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:  
THE ROLE OF PARASOCIAL INTERACTION, SELF-DISCLOSURE,  
TRUSTWORTHINESS, AND TIME SPENT ON SNS

by

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## THESIS ABSTRACT

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Title: Following Celebrities on Social Networking Sites: The Role of Parasocial Interaction, Self-disclosure, Trustworthiness, and Time Spent on SNS

This study examines the relationships between celebrities and their followers through social networking sites (SNS). A total of 239 participants completed the survey through MTurk. The results show that celebrities' self-disclosure on SNS increases their Parasocial Interaction (PI) with fans. In addition, when a celebrity is perceived as trustworthy, s/he would have a higher PI with fans. Meanwhile, celebrities' self-disclosure was not associated with trustworthiness. Furthermore, time spent on SNS was also not associated with PI.

This study also found that type of celebrity does not determine the degree of influence they have on the followers. People have almost same parasocial interaction with their favorite celebrity whether the celebrity is a singer, athlete, actor, or other. Additionally, there is no specific social networking site on which people have a stronger PI with celebrities. PI with celebrities on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and the other platforms is almost the same.

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To my mom, Fatima. At the age 70, she decided to return to school, sending a strong message that age doesn't limit the pursuit of knowledge.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

The world that we live in is strongly associated with social networking sites (SNS). Billions of people are on these platforms. For example, the number of Facebook active users is 2.2 billion, YouTube 1.5 billion, WhatsApp 1.5 billion, WeChat 980 million, Instagram 813 million, Tumbler 794 million, Twitter 330 million, and Snapchat 255 million (Statista.com, 2018). The ability to access the Internet is growing. For example, in the U.S, around nine-in-ten American adults use the Internet, reaching the highest percentage since the creation of the Internet (Pew Research Center, 2018a).

Another significant phenomenon related to SNS is the number of fans who follow celebrities. Some public figures have millions of followers. For example, on Twitter, Katy Perry has 110 million followers, Justin Bieber 106 million, and Barack Obama 103 million. Those celebrities affect and change people's thoughts and attitudes. As a result, SNS and celebrities is an interesting area to explore for media scholars.

An early perspective examining the relationships between celebrities and their fans is parasocial interaction (PI). This perspective examines the audiences' feeling and attitudes toward celebrities. Lots of people have idols in their life. In one study around 58% of people said that their idols had influenced their beliefs and attitudes (Boon & Lomore, 2001).

Some studies have explored the use of social media between celebrities and fans. The current thesis examines how celebrities' self-disclosure on social networking sites affects fans' PI with celebrities.

Another aspect of this thesis is to examine the relationship between celebrities' self-disclosure and trustworthiness with fans. The correlation between these two variables was debatable between scholars. However, some studies of the Internet and SNS found a relationship between trust in social media and self-disclosure (e.g., Mesch, 2012; Chen & Sharma, 2013). In general, the previous studies have looked at the correlation between self-disclosure and trust on the Internet. This thesis will examine a new aspect, which is celebrities' self-disclosure and trustworthiness. Additionally, trustworthiness will be examined with PI to see whether they related to each other.

Moreover, Time spent on SNS is an important aspect to examine the usage of social media. This thesis tries to put some effort of investigating the correlation between PI and Time spent on SNS.

Some research questions will be examined. The majority of PI studies on SNS have focused on Twitter (e.g., Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Stever & Lawson, 2013). However, this thesis will not look at a specific platform. Instead, it will look at all the major SNS to find out which platforms mediate the strongest parasocial interaction with fans.

Another research question is to know which type of celebrities influence the audience. Today, the most followed accounts on SNS are those of singers. For example, five of top six followed accounts on Twitter are singers. An important question to answer here is, therefore, be if people have a stronger PI with singers than other types of celebrities.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### **1-Parasocial Interaction**

An early work examined the relationship between celebrities and the audience's parasocial interaction perspective (PI). Horton and Wohl (1956) described the relationship between audience members and characters called "Personae" as an illusion of face-to-face relationship with the performer in mass media - theatre, radio, television, and movies.

The scholars believed that the fans' response was more than just observing. The audience was participating and interacting with the performer. The more professional the performer is in the performance, the more the audience tends to make the response anticipated. In time, the devotee – the fan – considers that he knows the persona (public figure, or celebrity) more intimately and deeply than others do, understands and appreciates the values and motives of the "persona". However, the relationship is an illusion of intimacy with "persona" because the communication between the persona and any member of the audience is inevitably one-sided. Through PI, the audience sees celebrities as friends and this bond of intimacy offers fans emotional and social gratification, which leads them to seek out more interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

The scholars also argued that the leaders of entertainment industry apply the PI strategy in order to increase viewership, develop viewer loyalty, increase product sales, and generate revenue. The industry uses different persuasion tools to form PI in hopes of gaining sponsorships and advertising. For example, using media dissemination of information about the public figures and using different ways of presentation styles on

television and radio shows. Moreover, the entertainment industry uses public figures to influence the audience to buy products that mimic celebrities. These include soaps, clothes, and makeup. Buying celebrity-endorsed products is another strategy for the audience to form PI with celebrities (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

It is important that the relationship between fans and fictional persons must demonstrate sympathy, sociability, and intimacy to create PI. Fans must perceive the information as realistic and credible. To do this, media demonstrates that celebrities and people have similarities. A celebrity's actions have to be similar to how people act in their everyday lives (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

There was a little significant interest in examining PI until 1970s with the advent of uses and gratifications approach to mass communication research (McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972). Most subsequent PI research has been conducted in the psychometric tradition of uses and gratifications approach, where PI has been entered beside other behavioral variables into models predicting media use (Giles, 2002).

The early studies of PI were focused on television exposure, especially television news (e.g., Levy, 1979; Palmgreen et al, 1980). In 1985, Rubin, Perse, and Powell created the *Parasocial Interaction (PSI) Scale*. They identified a 20-item scale after they had studied local television news. Their findings support the importance of frequent content with the character to have PI. The results found that viewers are more likely to develop stronger PI when they frequently watch the show. Local news generally emphasizes the “natural, down-to-earth person” news personality and their local community involvement. Newscasters often become celebrities in the broadcast market,

appearing with various interview programs, making personal appearances, and local print news discuss what they say (Rubin et al, 1985).

In (1987), Rubin and Perse studied parasocial interaction with soap opera characters. They found a connection and correlations between parasocial interaction and perceived realism, passing time, viewing motivation, intention, and attention. The researchers reported that parasocial interaction was related to watching for voyeurism, information, and escape.

In television context, later studies have examined PI in different subjects. For example, in an experimental study, two groups of people were watched a comedy show; one group was shown a full version of the show with commercials and breaks (29 minutes), the second group was shown approximately 17 minutes of plotted situation comedy. PI was higher among respondents who saw the intimate program (17 minutes version) (Autter, 1992).

In an exploration of the psychological origins of media gratifications, PI was an aspect of media gratification along with television affinity and exposure (Conway & Rubin, 1991). Turner (1993), stressed that there is much more to why a person develops a parasocial relationship than merely because viewing a television for a long period of time, instead at least part of person's psychological make up may be responsible for having PI with certain types of television performers.

In addition to traditional media research, many parasocial behavior topics have examined by scholars. In blogs, the publicity effectiveness of blogs is higher than online magazines (Colliander & Dahler, 2011). In sports, fans tended to connect with their favorite athletes more than to their favorite team, both psychologically and behaviorally

(Sun, 2010). In blogs of political candidates, the opportunity to interact with candidate encouraged a sense of intimacy between participants and candidates, generating a facsimile of an interpersonal relationship (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). In avatars, people with high individuals view of self, experience closer PI with a recommendation Avatar and feel stronger social presence (Jin, 2010). In Internet, communication technologies through Internet have shifted the nature of PI from one-sided and passive to an approximation of actual social interaction and confirm that fans readily interact parasocially with athletes. (Kassing & Sanderson, 2009).

To conclude, the process of parasocial interaction can be understood as a connection between media figures and the recipients of their messages, which happens during media exposure (Schramm & Hartmaan, 2008).

### ***Parasocial Interaction with Celebrities on Social Networking Sites***

SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, and Myspace provide mediated social relationships allowing users to share their ideas with friends, restore old relationships with acquaintances, and make online friendships without offline encounters (Boyd & Ellison, 2008). The easy access to SNS increased the popularity of these platforms. Celebrities used to deliver their messages to audiences through traditional media (e.g., television, radio, and newspaper). However, SNS have enabled direct communication between people. Consequently, celebrities established their own channels on the various platforms to communicate personally with their fans and share information about their thoughts and activities.

Several studies have examined PI and social media in the context of celebrities. Kassing and Sanderson (2010) applied PI in a qualitative analysis of athletes' content

during Giro d'Italia. Three themes were found: sharing commentary and opinion, fostering interactivity, and cultivating insider perspectives.

Stever and Lawson (2013) examined the relationship between celebrities and their fans by doing a content analysis of 12 celebrity tweets. They found that celebrity communication on Twitter had three main aspects: social communication, marketing, and parasocial. The authors claimed that “Twitter gives one the sense of actually ‘being there’ with the celebrity and, as such, is possibly the most intimate form of media communication used to date by celebrities to connect with their fans” (Stever & Lawson, 2013, p.351).

The more social an athlete is on Twitter the more media users may feel as if they are involved in a normal social connection with that athlete, which could lead to stronger PI development (Frederick et al, 2012).

Parasocial relationships may be chiefly meaningful for those who experience obstacles developing real-life social bonds (Bond, 2018). In a comparison study between LGB adolescents and heterosexual adolescents, LGB adolescents were more likely to choose LGB media personae as their favorite, especially if they lacked real life. Additionally, LGB reported that their favorite media personae as an important source of information on a range of issues related to socialization (Bond, 2018). It is common that people follow/watch celebrities that share similar values and attitudes with them.

On YouTube, beauty celebrity and viewer, and celebrity influence has been examined. In a study, participants reported feeling of knowing and familiarity with YouTubers, thus revealing the occurrence of PI (Rasmussen, 2018). YouTube celebrities were also seen as credible sources and who were trustworthy (Rasmussen, 2018).



Some studies looked at fans' motivations and causes for following celebrities on social media platforms from a uses and gratifications perspective. Hargittai and Litt (2011), found that interest in celebrity and entertainment news is an important predictor of Twitter use mediating the effect of race among a varied group of young adults. In an examination of fan motivations for following athletes, most are for interactivity, information-gathering, personality, and entertainment purposes (Frederich et al, 2012).

## **2-Self-disclosure**

In a simple definition, self-disclosure is revealing personal information about ourselves to others. However, self-disclosure is a very wide concept that many features and items can be included in it. Scholars have investigated various types of self-disclosure. A major theory of examining self-disclosure is Social Penetration Theory (SPT). Atman and Tylor (1973) clarify that human relationship improves via revealing the self, and this happens when people disclose personal information about themselves to others such as expressing their thoughts, believes, values, and feelings. According to Altman and Taylor, self-disclosure plays a significant role in building and upholding intimate relationships. Social Penetration may occur in various contexts, including romantic relationships, friendships, social groups (such as religious groups or football clubs), and work relationships (Carppenter & Greene, 2015)

A majority of the SPT scholars focus on two dimensions of self-disclosure: breadth and depth (Kim & Song, 2016). Breadth refers to the different topics of self-disclosure, for instance, topics related to a particular job or work can be seen as professional self-disclosure, and topics related to family, friends related issues, or personal thoughts can be seen as personal self-disclosure (Kim & Song, 2016). Depth

refers to the degree of disclosure in a particular area of an individual's life, depending on how deep an individual discloses himself/herself about a specific subject (Kim & Song, 2016).

There is evidence for the link between self-disclosure and liking. In a meta-analysis study, (1) people who disclose more tend to be liked more than people who disclose at lower levels, (2) people disclose more to those whom they originally like, (3) people like others because they disclosed to them (Collins & Miller, 1994). Self-disclosure frequently facilitates understanding, boosts liking, and invites reciprocation between conversation partners (Atman & Tylor, 1973).

### *Self-disclosure on social networking sites*

Nowadays, SNS serves as the main platform for communication between people, especially among adolescents and young adults. SNS are generally used to stay in touch with friends and family rather than contacting strangers (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). However, friends on SNS can include acquaintances, classmates, colleagues, teachers, celebrities, and even strangers (Utz & Schmidt, 2012).

The early studies on self-disclosure on SNS found that users often disclosed much public information in their profiles (e.g., Gross & Acquisti, 2005; Thelwall, 2008). A study of 4000 college students shows that Facebook users provide a large amount of personal information in an online social network and a small number of users change the privacy preferences (Gross & Acquisti, 2005). Similarly, a content analysis on Facebook profiles shows that people in their personal profile on average disclose around 25% of the standard information that could be disclosed, revealing highly personal, sensitive, and potentially stigmatizing information such as political opinions, sexual orientation,

religious affiliation, and phone numbers (Nosko, Wood, & Molema, 2010). On other social networking sites, an early study of thousands of MySpace profiles also found that the majority of users disclose information for the public and only 27% had private profiles (Thelwall, 2008).

Some studies have examined high level of self-disclosure in online relationships and established a positive connection between self-disclosure and friendship development (Parks & Floyd, 1996; Valkenburg & Peter, 2009). Positive and entertaining self-disclosure increases the feeling of connection, particularly when reading friends' updates on SNS (Utz, 2015).

### *Celebrities self-disclosure on social networking sites*

Many celebrities through SNS share elements of personal life with fans (Marshall, 2010). Celebrities need the support of their fans for career success. As a result, some celebrities disclose personal information about their projects and activities to promote their work (e.g., new album, new movie) (Kim & Song, 2016). The production of the self is vital for celebrities. To maintain their identities, celebrities disclose aspects of their personal lives in order to increase following and audience (Marshall, 2010).

Stever and Lawson (2013) examined a number of popular celebrities on Twitter and found that one of the major themes of using Twitter was for professional self-disclosure. For instance, Katy Perry, an American singer and song writer, was focusing on sharing tweets about her work-related information. Hambrick et al. (2010) also found that a major theme in sports celebrity tweets was work-related information, including their opinion on their team or game, or sharing non-sport life stories such as dinner menu, favorite restaurants, and movies they want to see. Lady Gaga, an American singer, built a

relationship with fans by her intense engagement with fans and sharing personal life stories through social networking sites (Click, Lee, & Holladay, 2013).

Politicians have also been found to disclose some personal live activities on social networking sites. In the UK, MPs use Twitter as part of their political role to promote their local activities (Jackson & Lilleker, 2011). Similarly, in Canada, Politicians also use Twitter to disclose future political events and personal plans (Small, 2010).

Celebrity self-disclosure on Twitter increases fans' feeling of social presence. So, when celebrities share their life to fans and directly communicate about these experiences, fans develop a feeling that these celebrities are social present in their lives (Kim & Song, 2016). Celebrities disclose both personal stories through social media about family and friends and professional life stories to promote some events and activities (e.g., Hambrick et al., 2010; Kassing & Sanderson, 2010; Stever & Lawson, 2013). Celebrities' perceived openness and willingness to be vulnerable enhance fans' feelings of intimacy and relationship, which results in the creation of parasocial relationships with them (Chung & Cho, 2017). With easy access to direct and interactive relationship with celebrities, fans following celebrities through social media may feel like they know the celebrity. This leads to the development a heightened sense of intimacy and a stronger parasocial relationship (Kim & Song, 2016). Thus, this hypothesis is offered:

**H1:** PI with celebrities increases as self-disclosure of celebrities increases.

### **3-Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a very wide concept. It is defined in a variety of ways. Trustworthiness refers to the honesty of the source, credibility, and integrity (Erdogan,

1999), the degree of confidence in the communicator's intent to communicate the assertions he or she considers most valid (Hovland, Janis, & Kelley, 1953), "a listener's trust in a speaker" (Ohanian, 1990, 41), and "Perceived willingness of the source to make valid assertions" (McCracken, 1989, 311).

Scholars who have examined source credibility found that information from credible sources is perceived to be more valid and persuasive. Thus, these sources positively influence opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors through a process called "internationalization" (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Hovland & Weiss 1951). The assessment of others' trustworthiness requires understanding their personal characters, motivations, preferences, objectives, and values; such an understanding is gotten when people have deep interpersonal relationships with the person under examination (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

Several studies found that there is a connection between trustworthiness and beliefs and attitudes. Miller and Baseheart (1969) examined the impact of source trustworthiness on the persuasibility of the communication. They found that when the communicator was seen as highly trustworthy, an opinionated message was more effective than a non-opinionated communication in producing attitude change. On the other hand, when trustworthiness was low, there was no significant relationship. McGinnis and Ward (1980) investigated the source expertise and trustworthiness to examine the impact of these two components on the communicator's persuasiveness. They found that a source who was perceived to be both expert and trustworthy produces the most opinion change. Priester and Petty (2003) noted that "if a message recipient can be confident that an expert source will be willing to provide accurate information because

of his or her high trustworthiness, they may forgo the effortful task of scrutinizing the message and, instead, unthinkingly accept the conclusion as valid” (p. 409).

Trustworthiness plays a major role in the persuasion of advertising messages because regardless of endorsers’ other qualities, if they are seen as untrustworthy they are perceived to be questionable message sources (Smith, 1973).

Many studies show that trust is a key concept of endorser effectiveness. A meta-analysis study of celebrity endorsement shows that source trustworthiness has a greater weight on changing attitude than source expertise (Amos, Holmes, & Strutton, 2008). In a study that focused on two skater athletes Nancy Kerrigan and Tonya Harding, who were likely to be perceived very differently on the factor of trustworthiness as endorsers of a fictitious roller blade product, the findings indicated that if an endorser was perceived to be highly trustworthy, a consumer may not focus on the message of the ad; unthinkingly the message would be accepted as valid (Priester & Petty, 2003).

As presented, when a source is perceived as trustworthy, he or she affects beliefs and attitudes. Thus, the following is hypothesized:

**H2:** PI with celebrities increases as trustworthiness of celebrities increases.

### ***Trustworthiness and self-disclosure***

The early work of examining the relationship between self-disclosure and trust was a debatable topic. Some scholars found that the relationship between trust and self-disclosure does not exist (Cozby, 1973; Pearce & Sharp, 1973). Meanwhile, other results could be interpreted as supporting the notion that increased disclosure generates trust (Ostermeier, 1967; Wheelless, 1973).

However, the recent studies of the Internet and social networking sites found a relationship between trust in social media and self-disclosure. For instance, a secondary data analysis of the 2009 Pew survey in the United States concluded that the level of trust in individuals and organizations was related to the level of trust on the Internet, while trust of the Internet positively predicted one's disclosure of identifiable information online (Mesch, 2012). In a study built on social capital theory, Chen & Sharma, (2013) found that the level of trust in other users of social media was positively connected to the degree of self-disclosure. Another study of three different societies, the U.S, South Korea, and Hong Kong, found that the level of trust of health information sources was positively associated with self-disclosure online (Wan-Ying, Xinzhi, Song, & Omori, 2016). Huang (2015) found a connection between trust and popularity of bloggers with self-disclosure.

Public figures have sought to convey authentic feeling and convey it convincingly so as to have an on-going relationship of trust with their publics and thereby sustain a positive career in the public realm (Nunn & Biressi, 2010). Celebrities who wish to establish a strong intimate relationship with audience should understand that both breadth (the variety of topics) and depth (the personal significance of these topics) of disclosure in their social media messages matter, while celebrities who do not disclose personal information in their social media messages may be seen as not being honest and authentic (Chung & Cho, 2017). These findings indicate that the relationship between celebrity self-disclosure and fan trust. Thus, this hypothesis is offered:

**H3:** Celebrities' self-disclosure increases their trustworthiness with fans.

#### **4-Time Spent on Social Networking Sites**

The way in which people interact with each other has changed dramatically after the advent of social networking sites. The easy access to the Internet, the rising number of smartphone owners, and the free cost of creating accounts on social networking sites have helped these platforms grow up.

Recent statistics of the number of active users on social networking sites show that billions of people use these platforms, Facebook 2.2 billion, YouTube 1.5 billion, WhatsApp 1.5 billion, WeChat 980 million, Instagram 813 million, Tumblr 794 million, Twitter 330 million, and Snapchat 255 million (Statista, 2018). Looking at the U.S specifically, Pew Research Centre (2018) reported that around two thirds of American adults (68%) are Facebook users, three quarters of those users access the social networking site daily. With the exception of the elderly (65+), the majority of U.S. adults across a wide range of demographic groups are on Facebook. YouTube is used by roughly three quarters of American adults, 94% of whom are 18 to 24-years-olds. These statistics also highlight the public's sometimes conflicting attitudes toward social media. For instance, the percentage of people who report these platforms would be hard to give up has increased by 12 percentage points compared by the study conducted in early 2014 (Pew Research Center, 2018).

A major study of PI was done by Rubin et al. (1985) on local television news. Their results support the importance of frequent content with the character on television to have PI. They found that viewers are more likely to develop stronger PI when they frequently watch the show. On YouTube, after repeated exposure to a vlogger, viewers tend to regard the vlogger as a trustworthy information source because frequent exposure



help to create similar feelings of relationship enhancement (Lee & Watkins, 2016). Repeated media exposure, perceived similarity, and attraction were positively associated with parasocial relationship (Bond, 2018). When followers develop parasocial relationship with digital celebrities through repeated exposure to their posts, followers perceive digital celebrities as credible information source (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

After the emergence of digital technologies, many people are connected to their social media world. Some people spend hours on SNS. The following hypothesis is, thus, put forward.

**H4:** PI with celebrities increases as time spent on SNS increases.

### **Research Questions**

Today, there are many types of celebrities (e.g., singers, athletes, comedians, models, and so on). Each type of celebrity uses different tools and strategies to communicate with fans. Singers use video clips and visualization strategies, athletes rely on their expertise in playing sports, and writers focus on the quality of their texts. The work and the mission of celebrities is varying from type to type. Are there a specific type of celebrities that influence the audience more than other types of celebrities? For example, five of the six top followed accounts on Twitter are singers: Katy Perry, Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Taylor Swift, and Lady Gaga. Singers have more followers on SNS, so do fans for example have a stronger PI with singers than the other types of celebrities. Thus, this research question is offered:

**RQ1:** What types of celebrities do fans have the strongest PI with?

Today there are many SNS. Some of these platforms focus on images, for example Instagram and Pinterest; others like Twitter rely on text and opinion, or video

sharing, for example YouTube, or both text and visual media like Facebook. The messages that celebrities send to fans are, therefore, determined by the type of platform. So, the important question to answer here is if there is a specific type of social networking site on which fans have a stronger PI with celebrities. The recent statistics show that there are 2.2 billion active users on Facebook, 1.5 billion on YouTube, 330 million on Twitter, and 255 million on SnapChat (Statista.Ccom, 2018). Facebook and YouTube are remaining the top favorite SNS to Americans (Pew Research Center, 2018). So, do fans who follow/watch celebrities on Facebook and YouTube, for example, have a stronger PI with public figures than those who follow/watch celebrates on Twitter and SnapChat? Thus, this research question is offered:

**RQ2:** What are the leading SNS on which people have the strongest PI with celebrities?

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD

#### *Procedure:*

An online survey was conducted with university licensed survey tool Qualtrics. Subjects were recruited and paid through Amazon's micro-employment website Mechanical Turk. Workers at Mechanical Turk used a link to conduct the survey in Qualtrics. Each participant was offered \$0.50 to participate in the survey. Eligibility was restricted by the following criteria. First, workers must be based in the United States. Second, workers must have successfully completed 50 assignments, at least. Third, workers must have received at least 90% of their prior assignments approved for payment.

When the participants accessed the survey, they were asked to read and acknowledge the informed consent prior to completing the survey. In the beginning, they were asked to think of one favorite celebrity that they follow/watch on SNS and provide the celebrity's name and his/her primary occupation. A celebrity was identified as "a person who receives popular fame and public attention on social media, for example a celebrity can be actor, singer, politician, activist, athlete, preacher, comedian, model, poet, intellectual, and so on." Some celebrities have many occupations such as actor and comedian at the same time, so they were asked to choose the most common one. Then, participants were asked to identify what platform they follow/watch this celebrity on. Then, participants were asked some questions about their favorite celebrity that they had chosen.

The survey was separated into sections to answer the following variables: PI with celebrities, celebrities' self-disclosure, trustworthiness, time spent on SNS, and personal information.

***Measures:***

PI (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .841$ ) was assessed with ten items from Rubin et al. (1985) and slightly modified for the context of this study. For example, participants were asked to select statements such as: "This celebrity makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend," "I look forward to watching this celebrity in his/her new works and activities," and "I miss seeing this celebrity when he or she does not appear on social media"). The participants' response was measured on a 7-point Likert-Type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

To date, the Parasocial Interaction Scale is the most widely applied tool in the field. It can be applied in either the 20-item version (Rubin et al., 1985) or the 10-item short version (Rubin & Perse, 1987); generally, the short version is more popular than the long one (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016).

Celebrities' self-disclosure (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .748$ ) was assessed by three items. Two items were adopted from Kim and Song (2016) ("this celebrity often discloses personal things about himself/herself on social media," and "this celebrity often talks about his/her personal habits) and one item was developed for the study: "this celebrity often talks about his/her events and activities." The participants' responses were measured on a 7-point Likert-Type scale (1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree).

Celebrities' trustworthiness (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .909$ ) was assessed by three items adopted from (Ohanian, 1990) ("this celebrity is untrustworthy, trustworthy,"

“...unreliable, reliable,” and “...dishonest, honest.” The participants’ responses were measured on a 5-point semantic scale.

Time spent on SNS was assessed by answering this question: “on average, how long do you spend on social media daily?”. Three options were offered (less than 1 hour and half/day, between 1:30 to 3 hours/day, and more than 3 hours/day).

The hypotheses (H1 to H3) were tested by Pearson Correlation Coefficient. H4 was tested on one-way ANOVA between three categories of time spent on social media and PI. The first and second research questions were tested by one-way ANOVA between 15 types of celebrities with PI (RQ1), and seven social networking sites with PI (RQ2).

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

An online survey was developed using Qualtrics and distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk. A total of 266 participants took part in the survey. Some participants have not passed the security question and thus their responses were deleted. This created a sample of 238 participants. There were (n = 122: 51.3% females) and (n = 116: 48.7% males). The average age of participants was 37. The majority of the participants were White (n = 183: 76.7%) followed by Black/African American (n = 23: 9.7%), Asian (n=11: 4.6%), Hispanic (n = 9: 3.8%), Native (n = 4: 1.7%), 2 + races (n = 6: 2.5%), and other (n = 2: 0.8%).

On average, participants spent 1.5-3 hours (n = 160: 48.7%), per day on SNS followed by less than 1 hour and half (n = 95: 39.9%), and more than 3 hours (n = 26: 10.9%).

The majority of the participants reported that their favorite celebrity on SNS was actor (n = 94: 39.5%), followed by singer (n = 55: 23.1%), comedian (n = 20: 8.49%), athlete (n = 17: 7.1%), politician (n = 14: 5.9), model (n =10: 4.2%), musician (n = 5: 2.1%), intellectual (n = 3: 1.3%), and other (n = 20: 8.2%).

Also, most of the participants followed/watched their favorite celebrity on Facebook (n = 67: 28.2%), Twitter (n = 63: 26.5%), Instagram (n = 61: 25.6%), YouTube (n = 33: 13.9%), Google+ (n = 3: 1.3%), and other (n = 16: 6.8%).

In an open-ended question, participants have named their favorite celebrity they followed/watched on SNS. The top favorite celebrities for the participants are Chrissy Teigen (n = 7: 2.9%); followed by Donald Trump (n = 6: 2.5%); Barack Obama, Chris

Pratt, Beyonce, and Ellen Degeneres (n = 5: 2.1%); Taylor Swift, Brad Pitt, Jennifer Aniston, Rayan Roynolds, The Rock, and Will Smith (n = 4: 1.7%); Britney Spears, Kanye West, Kate Middelton, Leonardo Dicaprio, Tom Brady, and Tom Hanks (n = 3: 1.3%).

To test **H1**, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was calculated for the relationship between PI and celebrities' self-disclosure. A positive moderate relation was found ( $r(236) = .301, P < .001$ ), indicating a linear relationship between the two variables. Increasing the PI was correlated to the increases in celebrities' self-disclosure. Thus, the hypothesis was supported.

To test **H2**, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was computed for the relationship between PI and Trustworthiness with the celebrity. A positive moderate relation was found ( $r(236) = .544, P < .001$ ). The results suggest that when a celebrity is identified as a trusted source, fans will have higher PI with the celebrity. Thus, the hypothesis was supported.

To test **H3**, a Pearson Correlation Coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between celebrities' self-disclosure and trustworthiness. A weak correlation that was not significant was found ( $r(238) = .070, P > .05$ ). Celebrities self-disclosure was not related to their trustworthiness with fans. Thus, the hypothesis was not supported.

To test **H4**, a one-way ANOVA was computed comparing 3 categories of time spent on SNS and PI to find whether people who spent more time on SNS would have higher PI with celebrities. There was not a significant difference among the three categories and PI ( $F(2, 232) = 0.20, P > .05$ ).

People who spent more than three hours on SNS had a mean score of 54.61 (sd = 10.72), followed by people who spent between 1:30 to 3 hours with a mean score of 54.28 (sd = 8.02), and those who spent less than 1:30, a mean score of 53.58 (sd = 9.93). PI was not related to time spent on SNS. So, the hypothesis was not supported.

To test **RQ1**, a one-way ANOVA was computed comparing 15 types of celebrities and PI to find whether a certain type of celebrity had a stronger PI with fans than the other types. There was no significant difference among the types of celebrities and PI ( $F(15, 220) = 1.23, P > .05$ ).

Singers had a mean score of 56.01 (sd = 7.06), followed by comedians, with a mean score of 55.45 (sd = 9.82), politicians, with a mean score of 54.50 (sd = 11.94), actors, with a mean score of 53.27 (sd = 8.96), athletes, with a mean score of 52.70 (sd = 9.08), models, with a mean score of 49.00 (sd = 7.81). Other types of celebrities had 5 responses or less. The results suggest that all types of celebrities almost have a similar PI with the fans. There was no one type of celebrity that influenced fans more than others.

To test **RQ2**, a one-way ANOVA was computed comparing seven SNS and PI. The goal was to see whether fans on a certain type of media platform had a stronger PI with celebrities compared to other media platforms. There was not a significant difference among the types of media platforms (seven SNS) and PI ( $F(7, 227) = .111, P > .05$ ).

Instagram had a mean score of 56.28 (sd = 8.68), followed by YouTube, with a mean score of 53.69 (sd = 9.31), Facebook, with a mean score of 53.50 (sd = 8.41), Twitter, with a mean score of 52.30 (sd = 9.83), and the other SNS did not have more than five responses. The results suggest that fans did not have a stronger PI with



celebrities in a specific social networking site. Celebrities had PI almost equally in all the SNS.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The goal of this thesis is to assess the relationship between fans and celebrities through PI, celebrities' self-disclosure, trustworthiness, and time spending on SNS. Additionally, to discover which type of celebrities influence the fans more than the other types, and to see on what platforms fans had a stronger PI with celebrities compared to the other types.

#### *Research findings and Implications*

This study would make several contributions and have few implications for research. The first contribution to the expansion of SNS studies in the PI context. Social media use in PI has received less attention from scholars despite the growth of celebrity culture in everyday life.

Moreover, the findings of the study add valuable insights to the current literature on PI with celebrities and self-disclosure. H1 looked at the relationship between PI and celebrities' self-disclosure. These two variables are associated with each other. When celebrities disclose personal information about themselves or disclose professional information about their projects and activities, fans will have a stronger PI with these celebrities. One of the previous studies has looked at professional self-disclosure, and found that one of the main strategies that celebrities use on SNS is discussing and talking about their projects and events (Stever & Lawson, 2013). Another study has looked at personal self-disclosure, it found that when celebrities share their life and habits to fans, it enhances fans' feelings of social presence (Kim & Song, 2016). This study looked at the combination of personal self-disclosure and professional self-disclosure. The findings

support the idea that self-disclosure increases the intimacy and relationship with celebrities.

The current study also contributes to the overall self-disclosure research. While the previous studies focus on the context of interpersonal relationships in which reciprocity is expected like romantic or student teacher relationships, this study suggests that self-disclosure need to be investigated in further studies in a celebrity-fan relationship.

Second, the results of the study add valuable insights to the current literature on PI and trustworthiness. H2 has examined the relationships between these two variables. PI and trustworthiness are related to each other in the context of SNS. The findings provide evidence that trust is essential to build and develop PI with fans. When a celebrity identified as a trusted source, the popularity and the fame of this celebrity will increase. The results of this study support the findings of some of the previous studies. Information from credible sources is perceived to be more valid and more persuasive. When a source is trustworthy, the opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors of the receivers will positively be influenced by the source” (Dholakia & Sternthal, 1977; Hovland & Weiss 1951).

Third, H3 assessed the relationship between celebrities’ self-disclosure and trustworthiness. This is a new area of study. While previous studies have examined the relationship between self-disclosure and trust, this study introduces the celebrity self-disclosure aspect. It becomes apparent from the findings that the relationship between celebrities’ self-disclosure and trust is more complicated than initially expected. In general, trust and self-disclosure is a debatable topic by scholars. Several early studies

denied the existence of the connection between trust and self-disclosure (e.g., Cozby, 1973; Pearce & Sharp, 1973). However, the studies that indicated there is some connection between these two variables have not provided a clear evidence of this connection either. The result of this study supports the concept that self-disclosure and trust are not associated with each other.

Fourth, H4 explored the relationship between time spent on SNS and PI. There was no correlation between time spent on SNS and PI. It becomes apparent from the findings that the connection between these two variables is more complicated than initially expected. Spending time on SNS might relate to other variables such as pornography or video games not with PI with celebrities. Moreover, individuals' psychological make-up is an aspect to have PI with media character, while time spend on media may have a small effect of having PI with media characters (Turner, 1993).

Fifth, RQ1 wondered whether certain types of celebrities influence the audience more than others. The result suggests that all types of celebrities influence the audience almost at the same level. The finding seems to indicate that people have a strong relationship with their favorite celebrities whether the celebrity is singer, an athlete, a comedian, or an actor. Moreover, the number of followers is not an indicator of having a higher PI. It was predicted that singers would have higher PI than other types of celebrities because the most followed accounts on SNS are for singers.

Sixth, RQ2 wondered whether the fans of a specific social network site would have a stronger PI than those on other SNS. There was no difference between platforms. It was expected that celebrities on Facebook and YouTube would have higher PI than the other platforms because these two networks are used by billions of people. However,

people do not use a platform that they do not like. If a person follow a celebrity on Instagram, s/he would be related to this platform. If another person follow a celebrity on Facebook s/he would be also related to this platform. Thus, the platform type is not an aspect to have stronger PI with celebrities.

### ***Limitations and future research***

There are some limitations of this study and some suggestions for future research. The average age of participants was 37. Today, teens and young adults constitute most of the SNS consumers. The average age of the participants of this study did not give the latest trends in using SNS. For example, there are many new celebrities on SNS that emerged currently, such as YouTube vloggers and Instagram comedians. Future studies should only examine young adults in order to know the latest trends in the world of SNS.

The participants of this study are located in the U.S., which means that the vast majority of them are Americans. There are tremendous studies on the American population. Other cultures and countries should be examined in future research. Karimi et al. (2014) found that there are differences in how media platforms are used between countries. A simple example is that the most followed accounts in the U.S are singers, while the most followed accounts in the Middle East are preachers. Comparison studies between various countries and cultures are needed for future research.

In addition, the participants of this study are Mechanical Turk workers. The requirements of this study were: workers must have successfully completed 50 assignments at least and they must have received 90% at least of their prior assignments approved for payment. Twenty-nine participants were excluded from this study because they did not qualify. Future research should have stronger criteria. For example, workers

must have received 95% of the previous assignments and must have successfully completed 500 assignments. This will lead to having more reliable answers.

APPENDIX A

TABLES

1- Correlation Between Variables (H1, H2, and H3)

**Correlations**

		Plscale	SDscale	TRUSTscale
Plscale	Pearson Correlation	1	.319**	.544**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
	N	236	236	236
SDscale	Pearson Correlation	.319**	1	.070
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.284
	N	236	238	238
TRUSTscale	Pearson Correlation	.544**	.070	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.284	
	N	236	238	238

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

2- Participants' favorite celebrities that have been chosen twice or more

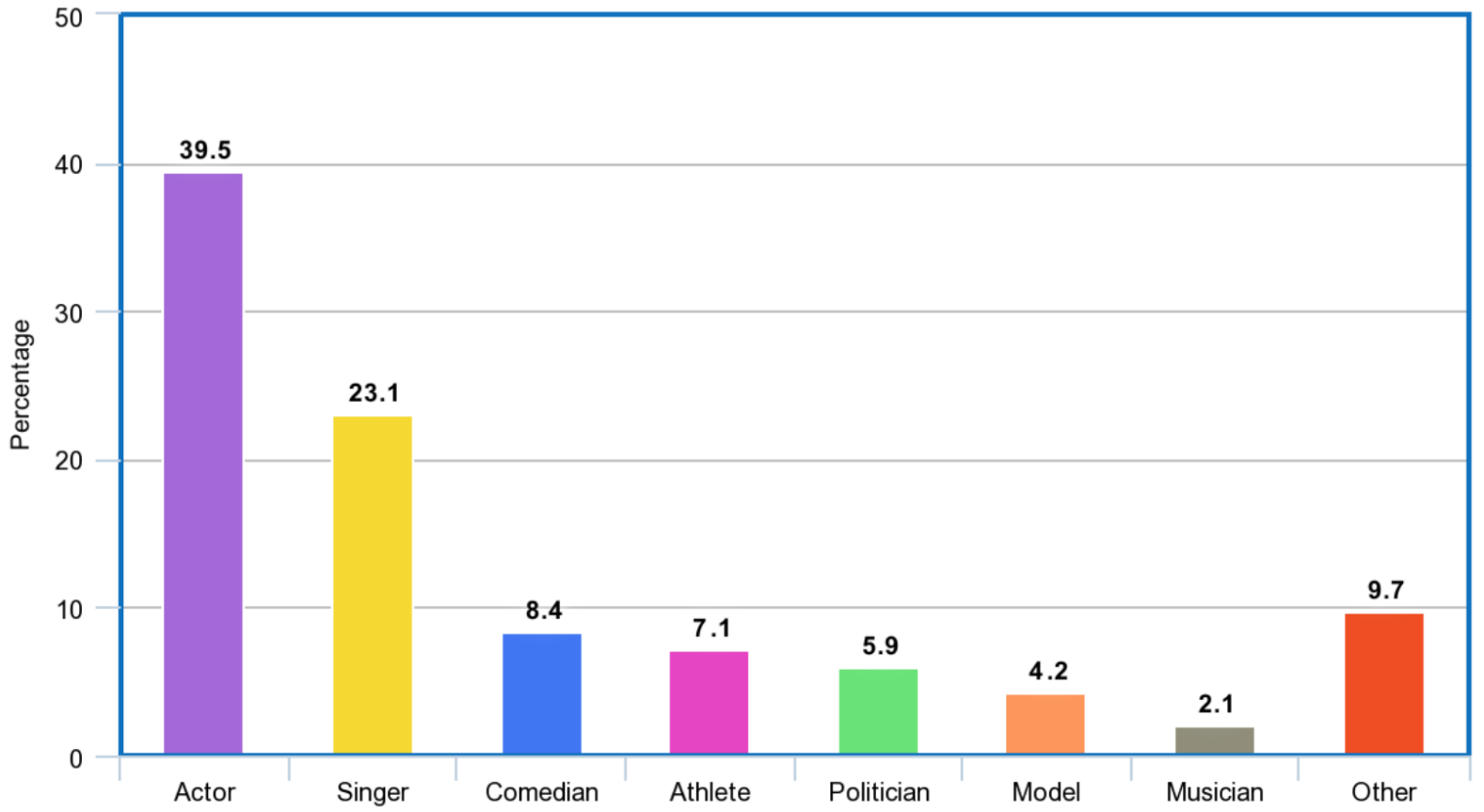
Celebrity Name	Frequency	Percentage
Chrissy Teigen	7	2.9%
Donald Trump	6	2.5%
Chris Pratt	5	2.1%
Barack Obama	5	2.1%
Beyonce	5	2.1%
Ellen Degeneres	5	2.1%
Taylor Swift	4	1.7%
Ryan Reynolds	4	1.7%
The Rock	4	1.7%
Brad Pitt	4	1.7%
Will Smith	4	1.7%
Jennifer Aniston	4	1.7%
Tom Hanks	3	1.3%
Rihanna	3	1.3%
Tom Brady	3	1.3%
Kate Middleton	3	1.3%
Britney Spears	3	1.3%
Leonardo Dicaprio	3	1.3%
Kanye West	3	1.3%
William Shatner	2	0.8%
Tim Allen	2	0.8%
Jennifer Garner	2	0.8%
Lady Gaga	2	0.8%
Angelina Jolie	2	0.8%
Lebron James	2	0.8%
Sia	2	0.8%
Harry Styles	2	0.8%
Jennifer Lopez	2	0.8%
Melissa McCarthy	2	0.8%
Justin Bieber	2	0.8%
Nicholas cage	2	0.8%
Cristiano Ronaldo	2	0.8%
Hugh Jackman	2	0.8%
Kevin Hart	2	0.8%
Dwayne Johnson	2	0.8%



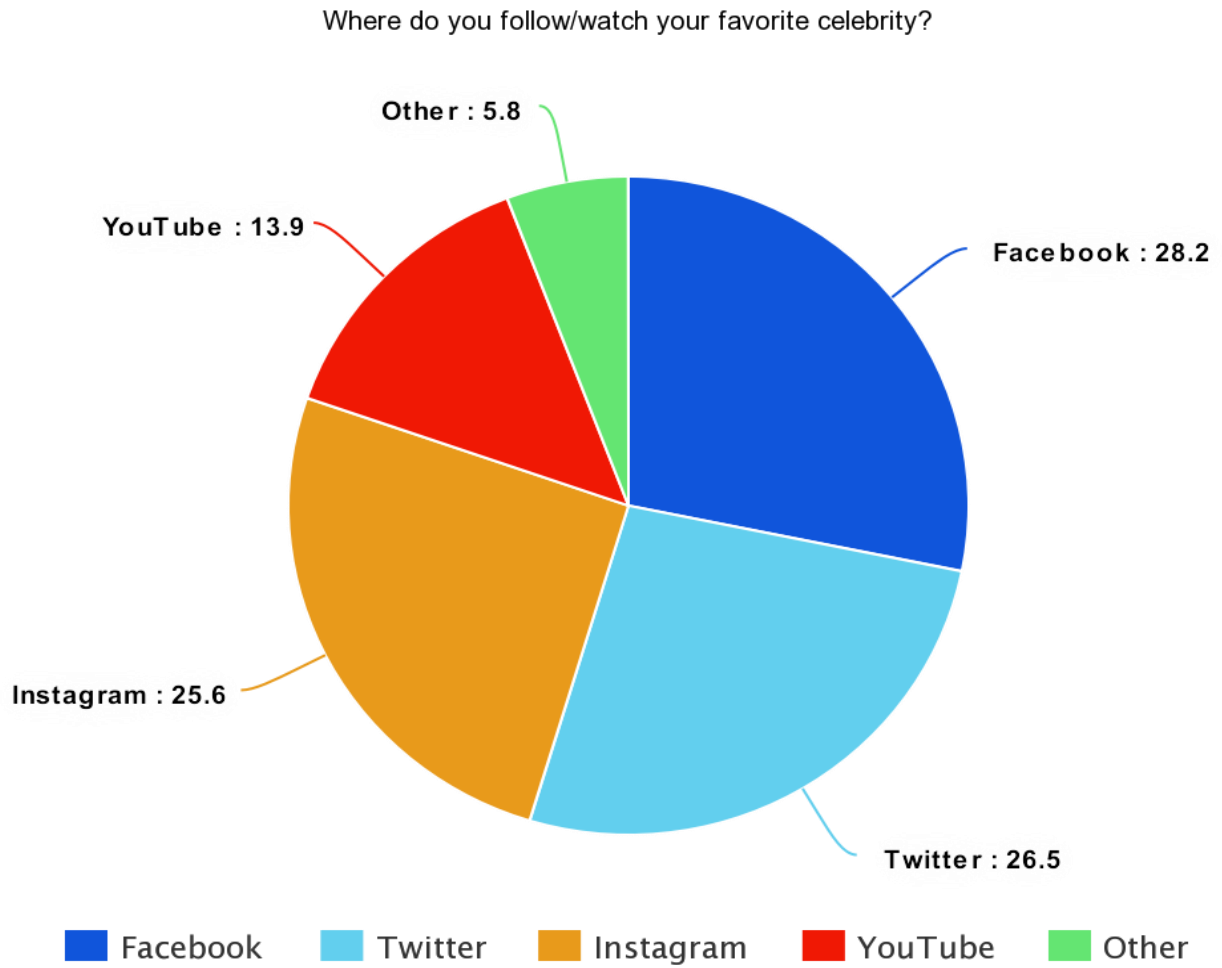
APPENDIX B

FIGURES

1-Primary occupation of participants' favorite celebrities



2-Media platforms on which participants follow/watch their favorite celebrity (in percentage)



meta-chart.com

APPENDIX C

SURVEY ITEMS

- Name your favorite celebrity.....
- What’s his/her primary occupation (list of 15 types of celebrities)
- Where do you follow/watch this celebrity (list of several SNS)

**Parasocial Interaction:**

(7-point Likert Scale: 1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly disagree)

- 1- This celebrity makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with a friend.
- 2- I see this celebrity as a natural, down-to-earth person.
- 3- I look forward to watching this celebrity in his/her new works and projects.
- 4- I like to compare my ideas with what this celebrity says.
- 5- This celebrity seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.
- 6- If there is a story about this celebrity in a newspaper or online, I would watch or read it.
- 7- I miss seeing this celebrity when he or she does not appear on social media.
- 8- I would like to meet this celebrity in person.
- 9- I feel sorry for this celebrity when he or she makes a mistake.
- 10- I sometimes discuss what this celebrity says with my friends.

**Self-disclosure**

(5-point Likert Scale: 1 = Never; 5 = Always)

- 11- This celebrity often discloses personal things about himself/herself on social media.
- 12- This celebrity often talks about his/her personal habits
- 13- This celebrity often talks about his/her events and activities

**Trustworthiness**

(5 items semantic scale)

- 14- This celebrity is  
Untrustworthy 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Trustworthy
- 15- This celebrity is  
Unreliable 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Reliable
- 16- This celebrity is  
Dishonest 1-----2-----3-----4-----5 Honest

## Time Spent on SNS

17- How often do you visit these social networking sites on daily basis?

	0 time	1 time	2 times	3 times	4 times	5 times or more
Facebook						
Instagram						
Twitter						
WhatsApp						
SnapChat						
YouTube						
Google+						
Tumblr						
LinkedIn						
Reddit						
Other _____						

18- How long do you usually spend on social media sites each time you visit?

- 1- Less than 15 minutes
- 2- Between 15 to 30 minutes
- 3- More than 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 4- More than 1 hour to 2 hours
- 5- More than 2 hours

19- On average, how long do you spend on social media daily?

- 1- Less than 1 hour and half/day
- 2- Between 1:30 to 3 hours/day
- 3- More than 3 hours/day

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