

However, since Swift's online dispute with Kanye West and Kim Kardashian, Swift's social media persona shifted in 2017 from a relatable girl-next-door to a successful business savvy (Fogarty & Arnold, 2021) and she also spent less time on social media (Théberge, 2021).

This study explores how fans' motivation and a celebrity's social media persona play a role in developing parasocial relationships between them. This study examines the experience of Swift's fans, also known as Swifties (Driessen, 2022), between the ages of 21 to 30 who have been actively supporting Swift online for at least seven years. Ten such Swifties were selectively chosen for hour-long in-depth interviews having their long-term active fan role. This study purposefully limits the number of interviews to get deeper into the exploration of Swiftie's personal experiences, and motivations in utilising social media for fan-related activities and in understanding the appeals of Swift's social media persona to her fans.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXTUALIZING CELEBRITY-FAN RELATIONSHIPS

The study places the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of public identity and uses and gratification in social media space, as the foundational grounding to examine the parasocial relationship between celebrities and fans.

2.1 Public Identity

Identity is a way of perceiving the self in the context of representations, self-presentation, distinctions of identity categories, links between self and behavioural traits, and approaches to and understanding of "being" in our daily lives (Cover, 2015). Building a public identity is a social process in which an individual attempts to present themselves following their expectations of how others would react and respond, usually guided by deliberate attempts to provoke desired responses in others (Cohen, 1975). Hence, individuals may consciously or unconsciously perform identities that are different from their true selves to fit in or gain acceptance from others.

In his seminal work of 1956 on identity creation – *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* – sociologist Erving Goffman employs the imagery of theatre to elaborate on how people create their identities through human interaction. To him, the performance of the self is a deliberate act carried and performed by the individual, requiring meticulous staging to preserve the self; a composed and norm-driven construction of character and performance (Goffman, 1956). Celebrity identity studies have a prominent place in the study of public identity, as the whole world looks up to them and how they present themselves. For celebrities, establishing and performing their public identities are important since their lives are under public scrutiny, also they need to be able to sell their products, such as their songs, movies, clothing, or others. Celebrities self-produce their identities while also being heavily reliant on a complex and powerful media culture (Marshall et al., 2019). Since celebrities have no control over how the media portrays their image and actions, nor how the public receives them (O’Neill, 2015), they often utilise social media as a way to gain control over how they perform their identity to the public. A study on Thai celebrities found that celebrities use Instagram as a tool for self-presentation, where they take a role in telling their side of the story to the general public (Chatchaiyan, 2017).

Since the emergence of social networking sites, there has been a shift in the ways individuals present themselves and the way they are perceived by others online. Social networking sites serve as a platform for apparent identity performance (Cover, 2015), which users utilise to present a better version of themselves than they truly are (Schwartz & Halegoua, 2014), this also applies to celebrities who use social media platforms for self-promotion and self-presentation needs. Social networking sites become a self-branding tool for celebrities to increase the value of their persona (Jung, 2011). The conceptual understanding of public identity in online spaces guided the researcher in decoding Swift’s online persona creation.

2.2 Uses and Gratification Theory

A more recent take on the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT) and its extension to social media adds valuable inputs on how individuals use different social media platforms to fulfil their psychological and social needs. The theory, originally proposed by Blumler and Katz (1974) in the context of traditional mass media focuses on the motivations and needs that drive individuals to use different media platforms. In relation to social media, Whiting and Williams (2013) found that there are five most popular functions served by social media platforms for individuals which are social interaction, information seeking, passing the time, entertainment, and relaxation.

In the context of celebrity-fan relationships, social media platforms are utilised by celebrities to build their personal brands and meet their demands for self-expression and recognition, while also meeting their fan's needs for social interaction and entertainment (Khamis et al., 2016). Celebrity fans and followers' motivation to use social media platforms vary from information seeking, social-interpersonal, and entertainment needs (Schubert & Seyffert, 2017; Kim et al., 2019). Social media allows celebrities to share information about themselves that fans usually seek which also fulfils their entertainment needs. Moreover, it allows fans to interact with their favourite celebrities, also with other fans, which fulfil their social-interpersonal needs. The understanding of fans' social media uses and gratifications guided the researchers in identifying fans' motivation in attempting to interact with Swift to fulfil their personal needs.

2.3 Parasocial Interactions and Parasocial Relationships

The term parasocial relationship was first coined by theorists Horton and Wohl in 1956 as they examined how a one-sided relationship is formed between traditional media stars and their audience. The basis for understanding how fans might develop attachments to celebrities from online interactions comes from parasocial theory, which studies one-sided interpersonal interactions and relationships in which one person knows more about the other (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). The connections can feel as real and engaging as face-to-face interactions that include elements of

friendship and understanding, despite the fact that these relationships tend to be one-sided. (Chung & Cho, 2017; Aw & Labrecque, 2020). The study of parasocial interaction focuses on examining interactions between well-known celebrities and their fans, who are known, if at all, by celebrities. A parasocial interaction can then evolve into a parasocial relationship (Lawson & Stever, 2013). A parasocial relationship can be characterised as one-sided media-created illusions of friendships and companionships between audience and celebrities that include emotional connections and have similar characteristics to social relationships (Claessens & Van de Bulk, 2015; Widiastuti et al., 2019).

A modern approach to discussing parasocial relationships in online spaces emphasises how audience or media users have become active in the formation of parasocial relationships and does not solely depend on celebrity's actions (Konijn & Hoorn, 2017). The attitudes and behaviours of the fans now have significant effects on the process of building parasocial relationships. There are a few propositions into why audiences still actively engage with celebrities on social media, even when the interactions are usually non-reciprocal. Firstly, Konijn and Hoorn (2017) proposed that humans are predisposed to respond in communicative ways to any human-like representation. Secondly, individuals' emotions are more likely to be stimulated by the need to build a bond and sense of friendship with their favourite celebrities when they experience any type of relevance and likeness with them (Konijn & Hoorn, 2017; Kim & Kim, 2020). Moreover, parasocial relationships are stronger when fans spend longer hours interacting with celebrities online (Tao et al., 2019). The strength of a parasocial relationship is also strongly dependent on fans' interest in celebrity news (Claessens & Van den Bulck, 2015).

Contemporary research on parasocial relationships focuses on interactions between celebrities and fans on social media platforms (Chung & Cho, 2017; Aw & Labrecque, 2020; Kim & Kim, 2020). Understanding parasocial relationships in the social media context follows a different approach as the emergence of social media platforms have changed what used to be a non-reciprocal relationship into a more interactive one (Su et al., 2021). Furthermore, the growing accessibility to interactive

communication tools via social media platforms has allowed fans to interact with celebrities which results in fans experiencing intensified intimacy as if they know the celebrities in person (Kim and Song, 2016). Hence, these interactive tools have also allowed the possibilities of celebrities to reciprocate their fans' interactions. Through platforms such as Bubble, a two-way communication between K-Pop idols and their fans have become possible. With an interactive tool such as a chat feature, fans experience an illusion of having a private conversation with their idols which satisfies fans' needs for intimate relationships (Zhang, 2022).

There are certain characteristics of celebrities that can improve the strength of parasocial relationships with their fans. The frequency of celebrities' appearances is crucial to achieving intimacy with fans (Bond, 2016; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Hence, in today's context, celebrities' social media appearances should be consistent for a connection to exist. For fans of musicians, Krause et al. (2018) found that when musicians participate in social media platforms, it positively affects fans' experience with them and their music. Additionally, celebrities who self-disclose by discussing their personal life are reported to increase closeness and forge close parasocial relationships with fans (Kim & Song, 2016). Celebrity's authenticity is also crucial in building an emotional connection with their fans (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016), thus, celebrities need to appear genuine and true to themselves on social media to maintain the parasocial relationship.

In studying parasocial relationships, previous studies have created scales to assess parasocial relationships between fans and TV stars or characters. One of the studies from Rubin et al. (1985) created the Parasocial Interaction Scale to assess fans' involvement with their favourite TV personality. Another study by Auter and Palmgreen (2000) created Audience-Persona Scale to evaluate the quality between audience and their favourite TV characters. Lastly, a study by Brown and Bocarnea (2007) created a Celebrity-Persona Scale to measure how a media consumer develops identification, in terms of adopting a behaviour or attitude of another individual, with their favourite celebrity or fictional character. These scales helped the researchers in constructing questions for the data collection. However, the quantitative scales have its own limitations in deconstructing emotional appeals of

parasocial relationships; thus to extract deeper insights, the researchers opted for a qualitative approach and prepared in-depth interview guides with open-ended questions.

All in all, the study of parasocial interaction and the relationship between celebrities and fans can help the researchers comprehend fans' experiences with one-sided interactions with celebrities and how emotional connections are formed during the process.

3. METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative, phenomenological technique to acquire an in-depth understanding of social phenomena by looking at them through the eyes of individuals who have lived through them (Teherani et al., 2015), in this case, Indonesian Swifties. To gain a thorough understanding, semi-structured interviews were used in the data collection. Qualitative interviews are characteristically interactive, which allows unexpected themes to develop and be pursued by the researcher (Busetto et al., 2020). In this study, the questions centred on Swifties' background journey in becoming a fan, their personal experience interacting with Swift, and how parasocial relationships are usually formed between them through the process. The questions adopted some ideas from the Parasocial Interaction Scale (Rubin et al., 1985), Audience-Persona Interaction Scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000), and Celebrity-Persona Identification Scale (Brown & Bocarnea, 2007). However, they were reconstructed to suit this study, hence, focusing the inquiries towards social media rather than print media or TV. Moreover, the questions were adjusted to match an interview format with open-ended questions rather than a survey format with close-ended questions. Additionally follow up questions were asked during the interview to get more profound and nuanced responses from the interviewees.

To reach out to the respondents, the snowball sampling method was used where respondents provided the interviewer with another interviewee's name(s) with the desired characteristics. The criteria of respondents was to be Indonesian Swifties, aged 22 to 30, who had been a fan for at least seven years. They must have been fans