Digital Buddies: Parasocial Interactions and Relationships in Social Media Communities

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Abstract Social media communities provide its members to connect socially and parasocially. Whereas social interactions and relationships require reciprocity, parasocial interactions and relationships are one-sided in nature and create an illusion of intimacy at a distance (Horton and Wohl 1956). Nevertheless, they share the same characteristics as social interactions and are considered to be an extension of real social behavior rather than replacing them (Cohen 2004, 2009; Giles 2002; Klimmt et al. 2006). This study focuses its inquiries on these parasocial interactions and relationships (PSI/PSR) in social media communities. Although PSI/PSR is a widely studied area in communication and psychology literatures, the concepts have not attracted much attention from marketing scholars (cf. Labrecque 2014). This study contributes to the marketing literature on social media communities by investigating online personal accounts in reference to PSI/PSR research. For this, the study adopts a grounded theory methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967) triangulating netnographic data (Kozinets 2002) with data from in-depth interviews. For the systematic organization, analysis, and interpretation of the triangulated data, the study utilizes Cohen's (1999) BASIC IDS framework for dimensional qualitative research (DQR), which was introduced as a sophisticated psychological research tool for qualitative marketing studies. This results in an integrative framework that theorizes PSI/PSR in social media communities, crafting an empirical exploration of PSI/PSR in relation to their dynamics in online personal accounts. Furthermore, in relation to methodological advancement, it contributes to the application of DQR in marketing studies by extending it to bridge with netnography principles.

References available upon request.

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