

# *A Study on the Consumption Behavior and Psychological Motivation of Fans' Celebrity Endorsement*

*--Based on the Perspective of Parasocial Relationships*

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**Abstract:** With the emergence and popularization of social media, the influence of celebrities, especially entertainment stars, has penetrated every aspect of daily life, and the fan culture derived from the phenomenon of “star chasing” has increasingly penetrated ordinary people. Compared with the market in Western Europe, consumers are also more rational, but in China’s social media platforms, advertisements and other content endorsed by celebrities occupy a large part of each platform. By using the Likert scale, the research conducted an online questionnaire survey to analyze whether the three major factors of relationship identification, emotional needs, and fan support had a positive correlation with netizens’ purchase of celebrity endorsements. The results showed that “Relationship Identity (RI)” “Emotional needs (EN)” and “Entertainment support from fans (ESFF)” are positively correlated with each other. Thus, relationship identity, emotional needs, and entertainment support all had a positive effect on fans’ purchase intentions, celebrity endorsement ads could be targeted to platforms where fans congregate, and celebrities who endorsed products could establish an emotional bond with their fans during the endorsement.

**Keywords:** parasocial relationship, relationship identity, emotional needs, entertainment support, purchase intention

## 1. Introduction

With the advent and proliferation of social media, the influence of celebrities, particularly entertainment stars, has permeated all aspects of daily life. This impact extends beyond their direct fanbase, that is, the culture catalyzed by the “chase-star culture” phenomenon increasingly infiltrates the general populace.

In recent years, there have been many social media software in China, and they have rapidly gained a large number of users. Weibo has emerged as one of the most popular social platforms. On this platform, endorsements by celebrities constitute a large fraction of its content. With the popularization of the Internet and mobile phones, the pervasiveness of Weibo, China’s social media software which has further enlarged the influence of fan culture. This phenomenon, colloquially referenced as

“enclosure itself” in terms of the scope and user base, is garnering increasing attention from researchers.

Celebrity endorsements, a more gentle and trustworthy marketing method, have led more and more consumers to use social platforms to learn about new products. At the same time, this kind of positive feedback will further expand the influence of the celebrity generation [1]. On the bridge built by social media, fans and celebrities have become more connected, and interactions have become more frequent and convenient [2]. The purchasing power of fans has become the main force of consumption that can not be ignored in all walks of life. A burgeoning of literature has elaborated on the definition and generation of the star-chasing phenomenon, but they did not focus on the internal tendency of fans that produces this phenomenon and the influences on social media users. By reading some literature, it is found that there are parasocial relationships between stars and fans [3]. This relationship acts as an intermediate variable to trigger different parasocial interactions of fans. This different parasocial interactions will have different impacts on users on Weibo, such as the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements on Weibo users [4]. Therefore, this article aims to integrate the theory of parasocial relationships with celebrities on social media to discuss the behavior of fans buying celebrity-endorsed products and its impact from a new perspective.

The current study conducts an online survey to investigate how fans construct self-concept, seek identity, and obtain self-needs through purchasing and consumption behaviors. The purpose of this study is to deepen people’s understanding of the motivations and effects of fans’ purchasing behavior, thereby shedding light on the influence of emotional factors and psychological needs on the star perception relationship.

## 2. Research Process

### 2.1. Method

The study uses the form of an online questionnaire, it uses the Likert scale type. This is a research method combining observation, and qualitative and quantitative data. This research aims to the endorsement consumption behavior and psychological motivation of stars or idols. Among them, based on the theory of parasocial relation, the independent variable is divided into three dimensions including relational identity, emotional needs, and fan support which comes from the theory. Also, the dependent variable is consumption motivation. According to this theory, the study have established three hypotheses. On one hand, the three dimensions of relationship identification, emotional needs, and fan support are positively correlated with the purchase of products endorsed by stars. On the other hand, the higher the degree of identity, the more it can stimulate fans’ entertainment support behavior for stars. Meanwhile, the degree of identity is positively correlated with idolaters’ emotional needs, and the higher their emotional needs, the more it can stimulate their entertainment support behavior for stars.

In 1956, Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl published their seminal article in the journal *Psychiatry*, which introduced the concept of parasocial relationships [5]. It shows that media users can build parasocial relationships with celebrities, live-action fiction characters, social media influencers, animated characters, and any other characters they encounter through media through movies, TV shows, podcasts, radio, or social media platforms such as Weibo, TikTok and so on, this is the sources of parasocial relationships. According this, the research focuses on the positive friendship bonds between media users on Weibo based on the existing theoretical basis and objective reality, the dimension is divided into three aspects: relationship identity, emotional needs, and fan support, from the perspective of parasocial relations, the problem of fans’ motivation to buy idol endorsement is analyzed.

A total of 264 valid questionnaires were collected by Snowball sampling. The respondents were all star-obsessed fans, mostly women and young people. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions, including 20 scale questions and 5 basic information surveys. At the same time, in the questionnaire, researchers emphasized the confidentiality of this study, so that respondents would not have concerns during the filling process, to ensure the accuracy of the questionnaire.

This study used SPSS to analyze the recovered questionnaire data, including reliability and validity analysis and correlation analysis, testing the correlation between three dimensions and dependent variables, to study the influence of fans' star-chasing behavior on their three consumption motives, namely relational identity, emotional needs, and fans' supports, from the perspective of parasocial relationship.

## 2.2. Hypotheses

To have a better understanding of the problem, Three hypotheses are proposed for the relationship between the three variables:

H1: A higher degree of identity stimulates fans' entertainment support behavior towards celebrities. Relational identity will positively influence fans' consumption intentions.

H2: The degree of identity is positively correlated with fans' emotional needs. Emotional needs will positively influence fans' consumption intentions.

H3: The higher the fans' emotional needs are, the more likely they are to motivate fans' entertainment support behavior towards celebrities. Fan support will positively influence fans' consumption intentions.

## 3. Data Analysis

### 3.1. Result

Cronbach's alpha reliability was first analyzed for the three main factors examined in the scale questions. The alpha sizes of the three factors, namely, Parasocial Relationships (Relationship identity), Emotional needs, and entertainment support, ranged from 0.901 to 0.933. 0.933, as shown in table 1. Therefore, the scale has sufficient reliability and validity.

61.11% of the participants who filled out the questionnaire were 18-25 years old, which is more than half of the number of people surveyed. The number of people who think that celebrity endorsement does not influence consumer decision-making is only 20.24%.

Table 1: Questionnaire reliability analysis.

Reliability statistics				
	Cronbach Alpha	Normalized Clone Bach Alpha	Term-Based	item count
Relationship identity(PSR)	0.928	0.928		7
Emotional needs	0.933	0.933		5
entertainment support from fans	0.901	0.902		8

Conduct correlation analyses of the scale questions within the three dimensions. Thirteen questions were extracted for data processing and the questions were as follows:

Q13: I believe that buying celebrity-endorsed products improves my social status and sense of identity

Q14: Focusing on celebrities makes me feel accompanied

Q15: I think buying a celebrity-endorsed product satisfies my emotional needs

Q16: When I'm depressed, buying products endorsed by my idols makes me feel better.

Q17: Buying products endorsed by my idols will give me encouragement and emotional support.

Q18: I would watch entertainment commercials endorsed by my idols.

Q19: I think buying a product endorsed by a celebrity is also an interaction with the celebrity (act of solidarity)

Q20: If my idol tweets about a product, I will buy the same product.

Q21: I will purchase items endorsed by my favorite celebrities that do not match my consumer philosophy.

Q22: I will buy non-essential but entertainment-oriented items endorsed by my favorite celebrities.

Q23: I won't buy goods endorsed by my favorite celebrities when there is negative news about them.

Q24: When a favorite celebrity shows me how she/he feels about a product, it helps me make my judgment about it.

Q25: I'll buy from the crowd the "hot" items endorsed by my favorite celebrities.

The correlations between all three motives were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The correlation between the three motives was significant ( $p < 0.01$ ), and the correlation coefficients were all greater than zero, meaning they were positively correlated with each other.

As an example, the relationship between emotional needs and supportiveness is shown in Table 2. Three of the values exceeded 0.7, indicating a significant correlation. The maximum value of 0.776 represents the strength of the relationship between Q15 and Q20. The correlation between Q23, which represents "supportive behavior," and the five questions with emotional needs as the independent variable is less than 0.4, while not less than 0.29, which does not have a salient impact on the general correlation.

Table 2: Correlation test between "EN" and "ESFF".

Pearson Correlation								
	Q18	Q19	Q20	Q21	Q22	Q23	Q24	Q25
Q13	.506**	.532**	.617**	.519**	.419**	.290**	.541**	.543**
Q14	.601**	.618**	.645**	.497**	.550**	.398**	.588**	.528**
Q15	.622**	.648**	.751**	.541**	.676**	.310**	.613**	.620**
Q16	.602**	.664**	.776**	.627**	.651**	.340**	.605**	.620**
Q17	.623**	.683**	.729**	.550**	.656**	.399**	.638**	.623**

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

### 3.2. Results Analysis

From the above data results, "Relationship Identity (RI)" "Emotional needs (EN)" and "Entertainment support from fans (ESFF)" are positively correlated with each other.

In measuring the relationship between RI and ESFF, the highest correlation was found between the set of questions "My favorite celebrity makes me feel comfortable and like I'm with a friend" and the set of questions "Favorite celebrities presenting a product helps me make judgments". That is, fans will find celebrity recommendations more persuasive because of their sense of their own identity. Additionally, this relationship will motivate fans to pay attention to idol-related messages, including advertisements and endorsements. H1 is supported.

Second, from the perspective of RI and EN, there is a moderate correlation between the data. Recognition in the PSR creates an emotional bond between the fans and the celebrities. H2 is supported.

As shown in Table 1, when fans feel lonely, the desire for companionship may drive them to fulfill their emotional needs by interacting with celebrities. H2 is supported. This interaction includes the purchase of products endorsed by celebrities. Fans will see it as an act of solidarity (a concept in fan

culture). They are satisfying their inner emotional needs and at the same time they are supporting their favorite celebrities.

By analyzing the interaction of these three endogenous factors, the influence of the independent variable on fans' purchase intentions is evident. The stronger the fan identification, the more favorable the perception of the celebrity. This leads to greater adoption of the values and behaviors promoted by the celebrity [6].

People who identify themselves as fans of a certain celebrity will accept the settings and expectations of their identity to support the celebrity, and internalize it into their behavioral standards, such as watching performances and buying products endorsed by the celebrity [7]. Take "When my idol posts a tweet about a product, I'll go buy the same product." as an example, The positive correlation between RI and this problem can be used to support H1. The positive correlation between EN and this question suggests that the purchase of products endorsed by idols has a positive effect on fans' emotions so that EN in turn promotes purchase. H2 is supported. Finally, when fans view the purchase of celebrity-endorsed products as an act of solidarity, fans will spontaneously purchase those products. Hypothesis 3 holds.

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1. Cause Analysis

From the user portrait, the age level of this questionnaire is mainly concentrated in 18-25, mostly young people, especially college students, and the average monthly living expenses and wages are concentrated at 1000-3000 yuan. The main reason is that young people have a stronger ability for information dissemination and information collection, and they want to gain recognition of the circle. Because they are still completing their studies or just working, their living standard is not particularly high, so celebrity endorsement will only affect consumption to a certain extent.

From the perspective of motivation, necessities of life in the survey group have the greatest impact on the purchase of products endorsed by stars, followed by entertainment needs and brand effect. This shows that consumer purchase is affected by fan-following psychology and circle identification, because of the star effect, consumers' good impression of the star will turn into a good impression of the product to a certain extent. However, some consumers still measure whether to buy a product based on its practicality and follow their consumption concept. And with the development of social media, consumers' access to product information has become more diversified. They will pay more attention to the performance, quality, and function of the product itself, rather than relying solely on celebrity endorsement to make decisions. When fan-favorite stars face negative events and controversies, it will not only affect business and brand benefits but also affect consumer decisions.

From the parasocial relationships, first of all, star-chasing is an important social behavior, through which people can know more peers, generate more communication and interaction, and pursue a sense of identity and resonance. Consumers appropriate brand symbolism that comes from celebrity endorsements to construct and communicate their self-concepts [8]. Secondly, the life and career of stars are very wonderful and colorful, and fans tend to pay more attention to the relevant news of stars, such as daily Posting, endorsement advertising, etc., and get a strong sense of stimulation from the attention. Similarly, the star, as a person with a distinct personality and values, can make the fans obtain psychological satisfaction, and they will regard each other as a person of longing or a friend. Fans like stars, in essence, emotional projection, and stars are also specific carriers of emotional projection. Fans will project their emotions to the star's similarities with their own, to see a more perfect version of themselves, or their shortcomings, to make up for their dreams or regrets that they have not completed. Many fans will project the emotional needs of love on the stars, such as girlfriend fans and boyfriend fans [9]. Finally, star-chasing and celebrity endorsement can satisfy part of

curiosity. As public figures, stars' lives and emotional states attract the attention of fans, who are willing to get more stories and secrets about stars [10]. It can be seen from the results of the questionnaire that many people hope to meet themselves in real life, which reflects people's desire and pursuit of the stars' lives.

## 4.2. Suggestion

First, standardize star endorsement and adhere to the right direction. The relevant government can issue regulations to regulate the advertising and endorsement activities of stars, strengthen the self-restraint of stars, maintain the field of star endorsement, and improve safety. Second, consumers and fans should consume rationally, avoid impulsive consumption, be vigilant about consumption, purchase in combination with their own economic strength and product quality, and maintain the safety of their property. In addition, from a consumption promotion perspective, brands can stimulate consumption through the effect of celebrity endorsements on fans. Corporate brands should use celebrity endorsements carefully and appropriately. Before choosing a product endorsement star, enterprises should fully understand the employment situation and personal credit of the star, and resist the use of unethical artists as spokespersons [2]. Look for charismatic celebrities and people with expertise. Their image should match the company product image. What's more, in order to increase the reliability and persuasiveness of endorsement ads, celebrities need to stand in the shoes of product users, and ads need to look real enough [11].

## 5. Conclusions

In summary, relationship identity, emotional needs, and entertainment support all have a positive effect on fans' purchase intentions. Therefore, some suggestions can be made from these three dimensions. First, celebrity endorsement ads can be targeted to platforms where fans congregate, such as Weibo. This is because media users as fans are more likely to be persuaded by celebrity endorsements. Second, celebrities who endorse products can establish an emotional bond with their fans during the endorsement. The content of the advertisement can be more empathetic to the fans. Based on the above research, the emotional orientation of fans is one of the key influences on their purchase intention. Therefore, these ads can be more humanistic, put themselves in the consumers' shoes, and provide them with some emotional comfort. This will increase the fans' willingness to buy. Finally, the endorsement of a product should ideally reflect the value that the celebrity embodies in it, otherwise, it will be difficult for fans to pay for the product. This study provides researchers with a new perspective: to analyze purchase motivation from the perspective of fan culture, which is an extension of the study of fan culture.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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