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Examining the Relationship between Parasocial Relationships and Personality Traits Among Emerging Adults

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Abstract: Parasocial relationships (PSR) encompass deep-seated, one-sided interactions and intimate connections, individuals form with media figures where the latter is not aware of the former. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between personality traits, Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism and PSRs among emerging adults (18-29 years), while also exploring the possible gender differences in the intensity of forming PSR. A sample of 222 participants were selected, with 57 males and 165 females. Data was collected using the Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale by Bocarnea & Brown (CPPI; 2007) and Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised Short Form by Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett (EPQR-S; 1985). The findings revealed that PSR has significant but weak positive relationship with psychoticism, and none with extraversion and neuroticism. Gender differences were also observed with males having higher PSR than females.

Keywords: *Parasocial Relationships, Personality Traits, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Psychoticism, Emerging Adults*

1. Introduction

Termed by Horton and Wohl (1956), parasocial relationships (PSR) “encompass deep-seated, one-sided interactions and intimate connections, individuals form with media figures/personas, including celebrities, fictional characters, and influencers, where the latter is not aware of the former” (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Horton & Wohl, 1956). These relationships range from momentary parasocial interactions (PSI) to long-term emotional bonds.

Rubin and McHugh (1987) stated that PSI, which refers to certain “interactions,” the viewers may experience with a persona, sparks interest in them, and these repeated “interactions” can eventually foster a deeper connection with that persona, i.e., form Parasocial Relationships (Chung & Cho, 2017). PSRs provide not just emotional connection but also a sense of companionship, often compensating for real-world social deficits (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Horton & Wohl, 1956; McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002).

PSRs have been studied predominantly within the domains of media and communication since their introduction in the 1950s (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957). Despite their relevance to psychological well-being and social behaviour, PSRs remain underexplored in the field of psychology (Mehta & Bapu, 2023). Recent technological shifts, such as the rise of social networking sites (SNS) like Instagram, YouTube, X and Twitch, have transformed the nature and intensity of PSRs, making them more interactive (Kowert & Daniel Jr, 2021).

The term, ‘Emerging Adults,’ was first coined by Prof. Arnett in his book, "Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from the Late Teens Through the Twenties" (Oxford University Press, 2004). Often referred to as the “in-between stage”, Emerging Adulthood encompasses the ages of 18 to 29, with individuals experiencing significant changes in their emotional, physical, social, cognitive, personal, and interpersonal domains of life (Arnett, 2000, 2023; Munsey, 2006; Wood et al., 2018).

During this period, individuals undergo profound changes shaped by their environment and the critical life choices they make, which ultimately influence their personal identities and social roles (Arnett, 2000; Wood et al., 2018). Arnett (2023) mentioned the strong engagement of emerging adults not only with traditional forms of entertainment, such as television broadcasting and movies, but also with the emerging digital and social media platforms.

Parasocial relationships, once limited to television personas, now extend to social media ‘influencers’, online gamers, vloggers as well as bloggers (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.). Originally, reality T.V. shows and now, with the 24 hour access to

various media platforms, viewers can have a more intimate glimpse into the lives of such media personas, fostering greater interaction and strengthening these one-sided connections (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.).

The Absorption-Addiction Model (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002) explains how individuals engage in PSRs to fulfil unmet social and emotional needs. The two-step model states that, individuals often indulge into PSR to gain a sense of satisfaction, compensating shortcomings like lack of social and adjustment skills in real life, bringing more excitement and purpose into their lives (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). The two-steps include, Absorption-step 1-where individuals become psychologically involved with the media figures, devoting their time and energy to derive satisfaction and purpose, which further develops into Addiction-step 2-where increasing levels of PSR intensity may develop to sustain this satisfaction (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). If not controlled the increasing intensity of PSRs can eventually lead to unhealthy connections and negative consequences (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002).

All PSRs are unique and differ from each other in intensity. Based on this, Giles & Maltby (2006), gave three levels of PSR (with each level the intensity increases):

- a) *Environment-social*: Light-hearted interactions involving a sense of entertainment.
- b) *Intense-personal*: This level is characterized by intense feelings for a celebrity. These involve a deeper attachment and may start to affect real-life social interactions.
- c) *Borderline-pathological*: These are the most extreme types of parasocial relationships and is characterized by uncontrollable fantasies and behaviors about a celebrity, which may border on delusion and can lead to behaviours such as stalking or violence.

As mentioned earlier, since their introduction in the 1950s, parasocial relationships (PSRs) have been widely explored in media and communication research (Horton & Strauss, 1957; Horton & Wohl, 1956). However, research exploring the psychological underpinnings of PSRs, particularly their relationship with personality traits, remains limited. This gap underscores the need for further investigation into how individual differences shape PSR tendencies.

This research seeks to bridge this gap by examining the correlation between PSRs and personality traits, drawing on Eysenck's (1985), Three-Factor Model, which identifies Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism as fundamental dimensions of personality. According to Eysenck (1985), Extraversion determines sociability and engagement with the external world; Neuroticism is linked to emotional instability and susceptibility to experience

negative emotions, including feeling anxious, moody, irritable, etc; Psychoticism is associated with traits like lack of empathy, aggression and unconventional behaviour and thinking.

By exploring these associations, this study aims to enhance the understanding of the relationship between personality traits and PSRs, offering insights into the psychological aspects of PSRs and their potential links to individual personality differences.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Digital Evolution and Parasocial Relationships

Earlier, PSRs were majorly observed with television stars/celebrities (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.), but with the introduction of social media, streaming services, and the internet, television broadcasting has gone through a drastic evolution in the digital age, resulting in significant shifts in the creation, delivery, and consumption of information (Dhiman, 2023). Now, it's being increasingly reported that these PSRs are being formed with vloggers, gamers, and other social media influencers as well (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.). Digitalization has allowed increased interactivity and engagement for the viewers with 24/7 access to content, enabling constant connection with media figures, personalized experiences, real-time interactions across various digital platforms, and stay informed with worldwide events, resulting in stronger PSRs (Ali, 2024; National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.).

Social media is a competitive space with multiple individuals competing for the viewer's attention, and actively participating in building their online personas (Frank, 2019). Media personalities frequently use a variety of strategies to give their audiences the impression that they are in a "parasocial relationship" (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Some of these strategies may include, facing audience as if speaking directly to them, narratives and monologues, changing their word choice and voice tone, displaying empathy, so on (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Levy, 1979).

Bennett (2024) stated that the viewers tend to invest emotionally and psychologically in these media personas, spending more and more of their time and energy which has only increased in the past couple years with the emergence of various SNS like Instagram, Youtube, Twitch etc. While PSR is still found to be one-sided, these apps/sites have evolved PSR by providing more dynamic and interactive settings for both the viewer and the streamer (Kowert & Daniel Jr, 2021).

The internet has seen a drastic rise in video streaming platforms (Ali, 2024), like Youtube, and Twitch, where users/creators can post video content as well as take part in online

livestreaming, which allows viewers to have more intimate interactions with these creators, thus resulting in strengthened PSRs (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.). This is because these platforms enable viewers to actively engage with online media celebrities whom they might otherwise have no opportunity to interact with in real life (O'Neil-Hart & Blumenstein, 2016).

Britannica Dictionary (n.d.), defined podcasts “as essentially an audio based programs similar to radio but available for download on the internet”. It is often listened to people while traveling or when video based content is not feasible to consume, playing a major role in the parasocial evolution (MacDougall, 2012). It is said that podcast adds on to the personalized feelings for the listeners (MacDougall, 2012). There is a level of comfort and friendship a listener may feel with podcasters, who often seem more relatable than influencers/creators on other media platforms due to their accessibility and portrayed “normality” in terms of their backgrounds, humour and interests (Williams, 2019).

2.2 Parasocial Relationships with Fictional Characters

In the world of OTT platforms, consuming and bingeing media has become much more common with easier accessibility to viewers (Gannon, 2018). Some individuals who like certain characters a lot often “cosplay” them at conventions and/or during Halloween (Gannon, 2018).

Liebers and Schramm (2019), noted that due to feeling completely immersed in fictional world, the intensity of PSRs individuals feel, is often more with fictional characters as compared to nonfictional personas. Gannon (2018) suggested that individuals may develop strong connections with certain fictional characters due to shared experiences or a deep admiration for specific character traits. When a PSR ends, it is often referred to as a parasocial breakup (Cohen, 2003; Cuddy, 2023). The fear of experiencing a parasocial breakup (PSB) with fictional character(s) due to the character's death has been observed to have a bigger impact than experiencing PSB with a real-life persona, like a celebrity (Cohen, 2003).

External and narrative realism play a prominent role in deepening this connection with the characters (Eder, Jannidis & Schneider, 2010) by forming a bond with them over feelings of camaraderie (Ingram & Lockett, 2019). Bonding with the characters also helped build empathy towards the character's experiences and struggles, prompting the viewers/readers to imagine what the characters might be feeling or thinking during certain scenes (Gerace, 2024).

Due to these deep attachments formed, parasocial breakups (PSBs) with such characters also comes with certain emotional weight (Cohen, 2004; Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Cuddy, 2023). PSBs can occur due to death of the character, the character being written off, ending or

discontinuation of a show, viewer's/reader's own choice, etc. Cohen (2004), conducted a study in which he asked the participants to note down their emotions after imagining the sudden separation from their favourite "Friends" character due to prompt removal from the show. The findings revealed that while the participants indeed experienced significant distress, their reported levels resembled closely-though weaker- than those felt after the end of a real-life relationship (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Regardless, the findings did support the notion that PSR and real-life interpersonal relationships share many similarities, not only in how they form but also in how they end (Cohen, 2004; Cuddy, 2023). Stronger PSR and greater affinity for viewing TV, was observed to have a direct impact on the intensity of distress due to PSB with the character (Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011).

Banks and Bowen (2016), stated that the PSR formed while playing video games is often more intense than with other media personas as the player is more actively involved in shaping the character's plot, carry out actions, suffer consequences when the in-game character is injured instead of simply watching it from a third person's point of view like in movies, shows or certain books (Gannon, 2018). In a study, Banks and Bowen (2016) studied the intensity of the PSR based on the pronouns the player has assigned to the character, which helped them understand whether the player viewed the character as an object, as themselves in the game or as a third person/character (Gannon, 2018). These findings are especially impactful when studying the effects of FPS games.

Recent technological advancements, VR, i.e., Virtual reality, AR, i.e., Augmented Reality, and Artificial Intelligence, i.e., AI are being increasingly explored and used to create content catering to a more personalized experience to engage audiences especially in the gaming world (Ali, 2024). VR completely immerses players in digitally created environments, providing multisensory experience via various visuals, sounds as well as haptic feedback (Madison, 2034). In a study involving Pokémon Go, a popular mobile AR system or MARS, Chen (n.d.), noted that players developed a sense of connection with not just the other players on the platform, but also the game characters like Pokémon. Always being "accompanied" by them, MARS blurred the lines between real and virtual interactions, as well as media and real-life relationships.

2.3 Factors influencing Parasocial Relationships

Multiple factors can influence forming PSRs. First and foremost, higher engagement in PSI has a direct positive correlation with forming PSRs and their intensity (Jana, 2024). As social distancing became more prominent during pandemic, online interactions and digital engagement increased and with that, increased intensity of PSRs was also noted (Bond, 2021).

Higher tendency to watch news, belief in its realism, and motivation for watching news for information were key factors in predicting one-sided engagement with a preferred local TV news anchor (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985).

Similar political ideologies can have a positive impact in forming PSRs with certain political figures (Paravati et al., 2020). In the same study it was stated that having PSR with certain political figure can strengthen one's political ideologies that are similar to that figure (Paravati et al., 2020). Another study highlighted that attachment styles also played a role in forming PSRs, with Anxious-Avoidant being most prone to forming PSRs and Avoidant types being the least inclined (Cole & Leets, 1999). Secure individuals fell in between, with those who were more distrustful displaying a slight inclination toward engaging and forming PSRs (Cole & Leets, 1999).

Gender was observed to influence the type of personas one would be likely to form a PSR with (Gleason, Theran & Newberg, 2017). A study on adolescents showcased that, boys typically forming PSRs sportsmen, whereas teenage girls are more drawn to famous figures like singers or movie stars (Gleason, Theran & Newberg, 2017). Jana (2024), investigated influence of social media on development of parasocial relationships with celebrities, among teenagers. Using a mixed-method approach, the research finds that early parental rejection increases social anxiety in teenagers, leading to stronger emotional attachment to celebrities, especially through social media (Jana, 2024). During live streams, a streamer's traits largely determine the development of both PSIs and PSRs, and by adjusting their content, streamers can foster these connections with viewers (McLaughlin & Wohn, 2021).

2.4 Impact of Parasocial Relationships

A generalized view of PSRs has predominantly been mostly negative in nature, but recent studies have identified that PSRs can have both potential benefits and result in adverse outcomes (Hoffner & Bond, 2022). PSRs can foster healthy behaviours and reduce stigma while also posing risks to mental health through negative social comparisons, highlighting nuanced role PSRs play in shaping psychological outcomes (Hoffner & Bond, 2022).

2.4.1 Positive Impact

PSRs have been studied predominantly within the domains of media and communication since their introduction in the 1950s (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Horton & Strauss, 1957) which has given way to numerous studies stating that, PSRs with mediated figures are successfully being utilized for celebrity endorsements (Chung & Cho, 2017). Engaging in PSIs and forming PSRs on social media, positively impacts boosting of celebrity endorsements as it increases the user's trust in the celebrity which in-turn positively impacts the PSR and increases

their purchase intention (Chung & Cho, 2017). In a recent study, Maxwell, Tefertiller & Neese (2025), explored the relationships between PSR, fear of missing out (FoMO) in both trait-state forms and individual's behaviours in the real-world, including buying the selected celebrity's concert tickets and products. The findings revealed that there was positive relationship present between all the variables, with both high PSR and inherently heightened FoMO having heavy influence on the individual's behaviours, like attending the celebrity's concert and/or attending the theatre viewing of the concert (Maxwell, Tefertiller & Neese; 2025).

PSRs are often viewed negatively but research has shown that forming PSRs have been relatively common and are partly formed to fulfill one's need to belong or feel accepted (Knowles, 2007). Rubin, Perse & Powell (1985), in their research revealed that PSI and the intensity of PSRs, have no relationship with loneliness (National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.). In fact, PSRs have been observed to be supportive in some cases, offering companionship and expanding connections for those in need (Cole & Leets, 1999; National Register of Health Service Psychologists, n.d.).

According to Rosengren & Windahl (1986), as humans are social beings and in-person interactions like talking face-to-face can curb this need (Madison, Porter & Greule, 2016). The lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic set an unprecedented stage for social disruption, forcing a decline in in-person interactions due to isolation and distancing measures, leading people to find refuge in digital media (Bond, 2021; Jarzyna, 2021). In a study, Jarzyna (2021), aimed to explore how the COVID-19 quarantine influenced the rise of parasocial interactions leading to parasocial relationships through digital media as individuals sought alternative ways to meet their social needs during physical isolation. The study highlights the significant role digital platforms played in compensating for the loss of in-person interactions, emphasizing their importance as a social substitute during periods of disruption (Jarzyna, 2021). It supported previous findings, stating individuals often indulge into PSR to gain a sense of satisfaction, compensating shortcomings like lack of social and adjustment skills in real life, bringing more excitement and purpose into their lives (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). Bennett (2024) mentioned that even after the COVID-19 lockdown has ended, its effects and the surge in PSRs still persist as humans continue seeking connections.

Derrick, Gabriel & Tippin (2008), did a 3 study research on public university students in the USA and the findings revealed that individuals who had low self-esteem formed PSRs with celebrities who resembled more with their ideal selves and with greater exposure, these individuals became/behaved more like their preferred celebrity, thus growing closer to their

ideal selves. Strong PSRs helped viewers open up more, increase empathy, and cope with rejection and stress (Knowles, 2007).

An Indian study done by Kakarla & Aiswarya (2024), highlighted how PSRs can serve as a mechanism for emotional regulation, stress relief, and escapism, fostering self-discovery and cultural identification. The findings underscore the significant impact of PSRs on emotional well-being, social bonding, and community belonging within one's fandom (Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Kakarla & Aiswarya, 2024). Another positive impact of PSRs has been noted by Schiappa, Gregg & Hewes (2005) in their study, highlighting the Parasocial Contact Hypothesis which refers to the lowered prejudices against minority groups due to forming PSRs with individuals/figures from such minority groups.

Additionally, in a study done by Young, Gabriel & Hollar (2013), it was found that PSR played role in mediating the effects of exposing college students to superheroes who were muscular. If PSR with the superhero was not present then it resulted in poor BI (body image), whereas presence of PSR with the superhero eliminated the negative effects on one's body image (Young, Gabriel & Hollar, 2013). PSR had a positive relationship with wishful thinking and encouraged individuals to exercise (Li et al., 2023)

Individuals tend to enter PSR as there tends to be no danger of rejection on the part of the mediated figure/performer but only the possibility of parasocial breakups and/or decided by the user, providing them a sense of freedom (Tan & Kapadia, 2022). Indulging into PSRs also helps them gain a sense of satisfaction, compensating shortcomings like lack of social and adjustment skills in real life, bringing more excitement and purpose into their lives (McCutcheon, Lange & Houran, 2002). Furthermore, during early years of childhood PSR has been observed to play a part in building knowledge as well (Richards & Calvert, 2017; Bond & Calvert, 2014). Brunick et al., (2016) did a study indicating that kids are better able to understand topics if explained by a character or persona they have formed PSRs with.

2.4.2 Negative Impact

Along with its benefits, PSRs also have significant negative impact on users/viewers. PSRs can blur the lines between genuine and superficial connections, making it difficult for individuals to navigate real-life interactions (Jana, 2024). Relying on PSRs on media platforms is found to have a positive relationship with loneliness and SNS addiction, and negative relationship with distrust (Baek, Bae & Jang; 2013; Baek, Cho & Kim; 2014; De Bérail, Guillon & Bungener, 2019). While it's still a debatable concept, "Parasocial Compensation Hypothesis," suggests that individuals with strong needs to belong, feel/are socially isolated, have poor social skills and consistent social anxiety, are more prone to form intense PSRs (De

Bérail, Guillon & Bungener, 2019; Hartmann, 2016; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Intense PSR (i.e., “celebrity worshiping”) is further linked to developing unhealthy social patterns and adverse impacts on personal well-being (De Bérail, Guillon & Bungener, 2019; Maltby et al., 2004; Maltby et al., 2001; McCutcheon et al., 2002).

Moreover, increased interactions during the lockdown resulted in blurring of the line between real-world social interactions and these digital parasocial interactions, especially when the interaction between friends and personas individuals had formed PSRs with, began to overlap (Bond, 2021; Jarzyna, 2021). Often times, individuals compare themselves with the seemingly “unrealistic” lifestyles and personalities portrayed on social media platforms by (internet) personas they have PSRs with potentially leading to negative views about their own lifestyles (Hoffner & Bond, 2022).

Individuals who are inherently aggressive in nature tend to identify and form PSRs with characters that also present aggressive or violent tendencies, which was observed to be even more debilitating for children as they learnt from such characters and started acting similarly (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). This research was grounded in Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1969, 2002). Moreover, parasocial breakups are known to cause extreme emotional turmoil depending on the intensity of the PSR (Eyal & Cohen, 2006).

2.5 Parasocial Relationships and Personality Traits

Very limited studies have been done in relation to PSRs and personality traits. While vastly different from one another, a few studies exploring the relationship between PSR and personality traits are as follows.

2.5.1 Fictional Characters

Rarity, Leitao and Rutchick (2022), conducted a research to understand the relationship between identifying with a character one is in a PSR with and their personality traits, using self-reported surveys. In the selected show, each character symbolized a different personality trait. The findings revealed that the viewer presented similar traits as the character they identified and had formed PSRs with (Rarity, Leitao & Rutchick, 2022). The study further stated that this may either be due to an existing similarity or through modelling of the characters hoping to align more closely with them (Rarity, Leitao & Rutchick, 2022).

Brodie and Ingram (2021) suggested that PSR formation with comic book characters may be shaped by self-focused traits, particularly a grandiose self-view. The findings from the study revealed that those who identified with heroic characters exhibited higher narcissism and were more likely to seek guidance, desire face-to-face interaction, and feel a sense of intimacy with their favourite character (Brodie & Ingram, 2021). However, for villain fans, narcissism

played a moderating role—higher narcissism significantly increased their desire for direct interaction with the villain (Brodie & Ingram, 2021). This suggests that while both groups show strong PSRs influenced by narcissism, hero fans tend to seek guidance and connection, whereas villain fans, particularly those high in narcissism, develop a stronger desire for personal interaction with the character (Brodie & Ingram, 2021).

2.5.1 Sports Celebrities

Sun and Wu (2012) examined how personality traits influence parasocial relationships (PSRs) with sports celebrities using the 3M Model. The findings revealed that materialism increased PSRs, while higher self-esteem reduced them (Sun & Wu, 2012). Additionally, it was stated that people who enjoy watching sports are more likely to build PSRs with sports celebrities (Sun & Wu, 2012). The study provides insights for both researchers and marketers on how personality traits shape fan-celebrity relationships (Sun & Wu, 2012).

2.5.2 Celebrity Endorsement

Yang and Sanchi (2022), aimed to explore how celebrity and audience traits shape parasocial interactions (PSI) and influence consumer behaviour online. Results showed that a celebrity's charm and reliability encouraged PSI, while viewers with greater empathy and lower confidence were more likely to engage in these one-sided connections (Yang & Sanchi, 2022). Stronger PSI, in turn, increased both the likelihood of purchasing celebrity-endorsed products and sharing positive feedback online (Yang & Sanchi, 2022). The study suggests that aligning celebrity and audience traits can enhance PSI and improve marketing effectiveness on social platforms (Yang & Sanchi, 2022).

2.5.3 Impact on Development of Pathological Personality Traits

Kaayo (2019) studied how young adults form connections with media figures and how these relationships relate to unhealthy personality traits. The research found that people engaged more in parasocial interactions (PSIs) with media figures rather than directly identifying with them (Kaayo, 2019). There was a moderate link between engaging in PSIs, identification, and pathological personality traits, suggesting that media figures may influence personality development (Kaayo, 2019). The study also found differences between genders, showing that media interactions affect individuals in different ways (Kaayo, 2019).

2.6 Rationale for the research

Despite extensive research on parasocial relationships (PSRs) in media and communication, their psychological underpinnings, particularly their relationship with personality traits, remain underexplored. Existing studies have linked various factors influencing PSRs, such as level of parasocial interaction (Jana, 2024), political ideologies

(Paravati et al., 2020), attachment styles (Cole & Leets, 1999), parental rejection, and social anxiety (Jana, 2024), but none have specifically examined how personality traits could relate to forming PSRs. Additionally, most research is Western-centric, with little to no focus on the Indian population or emerging adults (18-29 years), a group undergoing significant social, emotional, and cognitive transitions (Arnett, 2000, 2023; Munsey, 2006; Wood et al., 2018) that may influence PSRs. Given the post-pandemic surge in PSRs and the increasing role of digital media (Bennett, 2024; Jarzyna, 2021), this study aims to bridge these gaps by investigating the relationship between personality traits—Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism and PSRs among emerging adults, while also exploring the possible gender differences in the intensity of forming PSR.

3. Methodology

This highlights the research design, sample and sampling method, the various tools used, and the statistical methods applied in this research to understand the relationship between the selected variables.

3.1 Aim

To examine the relationship between personality traits (Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism) and parasocial relationships among emerging adults aged 18-29 years.

3.2 Research Objectives

- a) To assess the relationship between specific personality traits and the tendency to engage in PSRs among emerging adults.
- b) To explore gender differences in the intensity of PSRs among emerging adults.

3.3 Hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between Extraversion and PSRs.
2. There is no significant relationship between Neuroticism and PSRs.
3. There is no significant relationship between Psychoticism and PSRs.
4. There are no significant gender differences in the intensity of PSRs.

3.4 Research Design

This study employs a quantitative research design. Correlational study was done to examine the relationship between personality traits—Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism—and the tendency to engage in parasocial relationships (PSRs) among emerging adults aged 18-29 years. A correlational design is appropriate as it allows for the measurement of relationships between variables without manipulation, ensuring an objective and systematic analysis.

3.5 Sample and Sample Selection

265 participants aged 18-29 years, were selected using convenience sampling, a widely used sampling technique in psychological research. After data screening, 43 out of 265 responses were removed: 2 for falling outside the 18–29 age range and the remaining 41 for scoring exceptionally high (9–12) on the Lie subscale of the EPQR-S. The final sample comprised of 222 responses, with (n=57) male and (n=165) female responses. Convenience sampling was chosen due to its feasibility in reaching a sufficient number of emerging adults efficiently. Participants were chosen based on their availability and willingness to participate. Although this method may limit generalizability, is particularly suitable given the study's time constraints and resource limitations, allowing for rapid data collection.

3.5.1 Inclusion Criteria

1. Participants aged 18–29 years, aligning with the definition of emerging adulthood.
2. Participants who are Indian citizens.
3. Participants with significant exposure to media personalities or their content, ensuring relevance to parasocial relationships (PSRs).
4. Participants fluent in the language used in the questionnaires (English) to ensure accurate comprehension and responses.

3.5.2 Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants younger than 18 or older than 29 years, as they fall outside the targeted emerging adulthood range.
2. Participants with limited or no exposure to media personalities or their content, as their responses would not contribute meaningfully to PSR analysis.
3. Participants who scored high on the Lie scale of the EPQR-S (a score of 9-12).

3.6 Tools Used

Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (CPPI; Bocarnea & Brown, 2007; Appendix 1) was used to measure the intensity of the PSR between media consumers and their respective personas (Shabahang & McCutcheon, 2022). The self-report scale reports a single-factor and consists of 20 items with 5 level likert type scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. The scores could range from 20-100. It's reported Cronbach alpha value across multiple studies, ranged from .80 – .90 (Bocarnea & Brown, 2007; Shabahang & McCutcheon, 2022). Additionally, with strong reliability, the scale also demonstrates satisfactory criterion-related and construct validity (Bocarnea & Brown, 2007; Shabahang & McCutcheon, 2022).

Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised Short Form (EPQR-S; Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985; Appendix 2), a 48-item self-report measure was used to assess personality across four dimensions: Extraversion (E), Neuroticism (N), Psychoticism (P), and a Lie (L) scale, which evaluates social desirability (Tiwari, Singh & Singh, 2009). Each dimension consists of 12 items with binary 'Yes/No' responses (Tiwari, Singh & Singh, 2009). Each response is scored dichotomously, assigning either 0 or 1 point per item (Tiwari, Singh & Singh, 2009). As a result, the total score for each dimension ranges from 0 to 12. The scale has demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values typically ranging from 0.61 to 0.88 across different dimensions (Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985). Additionally, the EPQR-S has been validated across various populations through cross-cultural studies, showing satisfactory criterion-related and construct validity (Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985).

3.7 Procedure

For the present research, a synopsis presentation was first prepared, providing a brief overview of the study to the university assigned guide and their approval was taken. 265 participants aged 18-29 years, were selected using convenience sampling. Confidentiality measures were explained, and informed consent was obtained from each participant. They were then asked for some demographic details and completed the CPPI and the EPQR-S. In this process, they were asked to think about their favourite persona (celebrity, public figure, or fictional characters), whom they are familiar with and feel some level of personal connection with, before responding to the provided scales. After data screening, 43 out of 265 responses were removed: 2 for falling outside the 18–29 age range and the remaining 41 for scoring exceptionally high (9–12) on the Lie subscale of the EPQR-S.

3.8 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Correlation analyses were conducted to determine the relationships between personality traits and intensity of PSRs. Additionally, independent samples t-tests were used to examine gender differences in the intensity of PSRs. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ to test the hypotheses effectively.

4. Result

After data screenings, a final sample of 222 responses was considered which comprised of 74.3% females ($n=165$), and 25.7% males ($n=57$) of ages 18-29 years ($Mean = 21.79$, $SD = 2.22$). Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the selected sample.

Table 1: *Socio-demographic and other characteristics of the sample*

Gender	n	Mean Age (Yr.)	SD Age (Yr.)
Females	165	21.88	2.73
Males	57	21.54	2.02

Note. $N=222$, SD = standard deviation

Table 2: *Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality of the variables*

Variables	n	Normality Sig. (p)
PSR	222	.016
Psychoticism	222	.000
Extraversion	222	.000
Neuroticism	222	.000

Note. $*p > .05$ (Data is normally distributed) $p \leq .05$ (Data is not normally distributed), PSR = Parasocial Relationship. All p values for normality were below .05, indicating that the data is not normally distributed.

Table 2 shows the values of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of Normality done for all the variables, which includes, PSR, and Eysenck's (1985) personality traits—Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism. Here PSR stands for Parasocial Relationship. For the selected sample size of 222 responses, value of p (normality significance) is less than 0.05 level, for each of the four variables. Thus, correlational analysis between Parasocial Relationship, and Eysenck's (1985) personality traits—Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism is done using Spearman Correlation Method (see Table 3).

Table 3: *Means, standard deviations, and correlations between variables*

Variables	M	SD	PSR
1. PSR	68.36	11.22	—
2. Psychoticism	3.38	1.78	.039*

3. Extraversion	6.51	3.34	.970
4. Neuroticism	8.39	2.96	.949

Note. * = $p < .05$ (Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level), N = 222, PSR = Parasocial Relationship

M, SD and PSR are used to represent Mean, Standard Deviation and Parasocial Relationship, respectively.

A subsample of 55 males and 55 females (N=110) was selected from a total sample of 222 responses, which was predominantly females (n=165, 74.3%) and 25.7% males (n=57). This was done to assess possible gender differences in the intensity of PSRs among emerging adults (18-29 years). The data shows higher mean of PSR intensity among males as compared to females, with significant value of p .

Table 4. *Gender Differences in the intensity of Parasocial Relationship among Emerging Adults*

Variables	Male ^a		Female ^b		<i>t</i> (108)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
PSR	71.36	10.11	66.62	10.24	2.45	.016*

Note. * = $p < .05$ (the differences are statistically significant)

n^a = 55, n^b = 55

N= 110, M= mean, SD= standard deviation, PSR = Parasocial Relationship

4.1 Discussion of Results

Parasocial relationships (PSR) are deep-seated, one-sided interactions and intimate connections, individuals form with media figures/personas, including celebrities, fictional characters, and influencers, where the latter is not aware of the former (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Horton & Wohl, 1956). Individuals tend to invest their time, emotional energy, and even resources into the media persona, often to have prolonged parasocial interactions (PSI) and more intimate engagement with the persona, thus intensifying their PSRs (Hoffner & Bond, 2022; Jana, 2024). Often referred to as the “in-between stage”, Emerging Adulthood encompasses the ages of 18 to 29, and these individuals undergo profound changes shaped by their environment and the critical life choices they make, which ultimately influence their personal identities and social roles (Arnett, 2000; Wood et al., 2018). Despite extensive research on parasocial relationships (PSRs) in media and communication, their psychological underpinnings, particularly their relationship with personality traits, remain underexplored.

Given the post-pandemic surge in PSRs and the increasing role of digital media (Bennett, 2024; Jarzyna, 2021), this study aimed to bridge these gaps by investigating the relationship between Eysenck's (1985) personality traits—Extraversion, Neuroticism, and Psychoticism and PSRs among emerging adults, while also exploring the possible gender differences in the intensity of forming PSR. For the purpose of the study, a sample of 265 emerging adults were selected through convenience sampling, which was chosen due to time constraints and feasibility, despite its limitations in generalizability.

The study utilized the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised Short Form (EPQR-S; Eysenck, Eysenck & Barrett, 1985) to assess personality traits and the Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (CPPI; Bocarnea & Brown, 2007) to measure PSR engagement. After data screening, a final sample of 222 responses was selected—two were removed for being outside the 18–29 age range and 41 for scoring exceptionally high (9–12) on the EPQR-S Lie subscale. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS, with correlation analyses examining the relationships between personality traits and PSRs, and independent samples *t*-tests assessing gender differences in PSR intensity. Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test of normality was done for the final sample of 222 responses, which revealed that the data was not normally distributed, suggesting the use of spearman correlation analysis (King & Eckersley, 2019).

The results for this population indicated a significant but weak positive correlation between PSR and psychoticism, suggesting that individuals with more stronger PSR may display higher psychoticism. There haven't been any prominent studies done in the past decade to directly support or contradict current findings. But in a previous research, done to find correlation between Eysenck's personality traits and Dark Triad (narcissism, machiavellianism and psychopathy) the findings revealed that psychopathy has positive correlation with psychoticism and is negatively correlated to extraversion, and narcissism was found to be strongly correlated to extraversion (Galán et al., 2023). Considering this correlation, the current research's findings aligns with the past research, stating that individuals with psychopathic tendencies were more prone to developing PSRs (Liebers & Schramm, 2022). Celebrity worship, a type of intense PSR, is positively associated with psychoticism (Maltby, Houran & McCutcheon, 2003).

Furthermore, in line with our hypothesis, extraversion and neuroticism were found to not have a statistically significant relationship with PSR. Again, taking into account, the correlation between dark triad and Eysenck's personality traits, these findings contradict past research which states that individuals with narcissistic traits were prone to develop PSR (Liebers & Schramm, 2022), positively correlating narcissism with PSR formed with

hero/villain characters (Brodie & Ingram, 2021). Apart from different constructs, another possible explanation for these inconsistencies could be sample differences; while past research mostly focused on either adolescents or adult population in general, the current study instead examined emerging adults, the “in-between stage,” who may have different media consumption habits, while already undergoing profound changes as shaped by the environment, influencing one’s self-identity and role in society (Arnett, 2000; Wood et al., 2018).

Moreover, to examine whether there was a significant gender difference in the intensity of PSRs among emerging adults, a subsample of 110 responses (*Males* = 55, *Females* = 55) were randomly selected from a bigger sample which predominantly had females (74.3%) and then males (25.7%). The findings revealed that there exists significant gender difference in the intensity of forming PSRs among emerging adults ($p < .05$), which is consistent with the past research (eg, Laken, 2009). However, it contradicted the findings of Cole & Leets’ (2009) study which included TV personas as well as Spitzberg & Cupack’s (2007) study about celebrity worship, which revealed no significant gender differences with PSI. Furthermore, in the current research, males were found to have higher intensity of PSR ($M_{\text{male}} = 71.36$) as compared to females ($M_{\text{female}} = 66.62$). This aligns with a past study done with a sample of early adolescents, where higher PSR was found among the boys as compared to the girls (Gleason, Theran & Newberg, 2017). On the other hand, there have also been significant past researches done, proving otherwise, i.e., girls were observed to develop stronger PSR than males (Cohen, 2003; Laken, 2009; Maltby et al., 2005). One of the possible explanation for males to have stronger PSR, could have been due to the fact that traditionally, men are often discouraged from expressing their emotions more freely as compared to women, often “keeping them inside” (Buck, 1997; Chaplin, 2015). To compensate for such unfulfilled interpersonal needs, PSR is often found to act as a common alternative (Wang, Fink & Cai, 2008). A study done by Wang, Fink & Cai (2008), revealed that men experiencing chronic loneliness were more prone to developing stronger loneliness as compared to women. These gender differences could possibly exist due to different expectations of both the genders from the persona and the content being consumed, social and cultural factors, relationship status, etc. In a past research males who were dating, but were facing anxiety involving their current partners, were found to have stronger PSR, whereas, females who felt more secure in their present relationships were observed to have stronger PSR (Cohen, 1997). Further research is needed to explore the underlying reasons for gender differences in the formation of PSR, as well as the additional factors that may influence which gender develops stronger PSR.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine (1) the relationship between personality traits and parasocial relationships (PSRs) and (2) whether significant gender differences exist in the formation of PSRs among emerging adults. The results indicated a significant but weak positive correlation between PSR and psychoticism, suggesting that individuals with stronger PSR may display higher psychoticism. However, extraversion and neuroticism were found to not have a statistically significant relationship with PSR. Additionally, significant gender differences were observed, with males having stronger PSRs, highlighting the role of gender in influencing PSR. Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on personality and media engagement.

A key strength of this study is its focus on emerging adults, a demographic often overlooked in parasocial relationship research. Additionally, the use of the EPQR-S and CPPI, both validated instruments, enhances the study's methodological rigor. By analyzing the interplay between personality and PSRs as well as gender differences, this study provides valuable insights into individual differences in media engagement. From a practical perspective, the study's insights can inform media literacy programs and psychological interventions for individuals who develop excessive attachments to media figures.

Despite these contributions, some limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not be fully representative of the broader emerging adult population. Future studies should aim to use randomized or stratified sampling to improve external validity. Second, the study relied on self-report measures, while responses with high lie scores were removed from the final sample, incorporating behavioural measures or qualitative interviews could provide deeper insights into the nature of parasocial relationships. Finally, since this study did not include regression analysis, future research could explore whether personality traits predict parasocial relationships after controlling for other factors such as media consumption frequency and attachment styles. Further investigations into the underlying psychological mechanisms behind gender differences in PSRs would also be valuable.

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