

NEW MEDIA LITERACY:
CELEBRITY WORSHIP, INSTAGRAM, AND SELF-ESTEEM

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Abstract
of
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Research participants were recruited for a cross-sectional survey and asked to complete a questionnaire on new media literacy, social media, celebrity worship, and self-esteem. The results indicated that as celebrity worship increases self-esteem decreases. The research also found that as the components for celebrity worship increase self-esteem decreases. Results indicated that as celebrity worship, intense personal celebrity worship, and borderline pathological celebrity worship increase there is a decrease in the critical consumption component of new media literacy. The results reported that as celebrity worship increases, the critical prosumption component of new media literacy increases. Also as entertainment social and borderline pathological celebrity worship increased, the critical prosumption component of new media literacy increased. Results indicated that those who did not follow their favorite celebrity on Instagram had higher new media literacy skill scores than those who did follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram. This result is consistent through the uses and gratifications theory. Results are discussed in the context of implications and future studies.

Key words: new media literacy, social media, celebrity worship, self-esteem

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | Page |
|--|------|
| Acknowledgements | vi |
| List of Figures | viii |
| Chapter | |
| 1. INTRODUCTION..... | 1 |
| 2. LITERATURE REVIEW..... | 6 |
| New Media and New Media Literacy | 6 |
| Development of Web 2.0 | 11 |
| Social Media and the Celebrity | 12 |
| Instagram and the Celebrity | 15 |
| Self-Esteem and Loneliness in the New Media Age..... | 17 |
| Celebrity Worship and Self-Esteem..... | 19 |
| Uses and Gratifications Theory..... | 22 |
| 3. METHODOLOGY..... | 26 |
| 4. RESULTS | 29 |
| 5. DISCUSSION | 32 |
| 6. CONCLUSIONS..... | 38 |
| Appendix A. Informed Consent | 42 |
| Appendix B. New Media Literacy Scale..... | 43 |
| Appendix C. Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale | 44 |
| Appendix D. Instagram Usage | 45 |
| Appendix E. The Celebrity Attitude Scale | 46 |
| References | 51 |

LIST OF FIGURES

| Figures | Page |
|------------------|------|
| 1. Figure 1..... | 47 |
| 2. Figure 2..... | 48 |
| 3. Figure 3..... | 49 |
| 4. Figure 4..... | 50 |

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the development of new media literacy and its relationship to social media, celebrity worship, and self-esteem by assessing levels of new media literacy, celebrity worship, and self-esteem in users and non-users of Instagram. Technologies that support social media are ubiquitous in today's society. This ubiquity makes the use of such media a fundamental part of everyday life. This study hypothesizes that new media literacy provides social media users with the tools necessary to critically evaluate the ways in which social media can impact the self-esteem of those who engage in high levels of celebrity worship.

As new technologies emerge, fresh channels for obtaining information become available to users. Modern technology has increased individuals' reliance on online services and influenced the way people communicate with one another and live their everyday lives (Williamson & Parolin, 2013). For instance, it has become increasingly simple for individuals to access information on the Internet. A significant amount of present-day Internet use is dedicated to social media, as this tool allows users to communicate with one another through online channels.

The original aim of social media was to facilitate communication between individuals. Static personal profiles were once a characteristic of these sites, but today, interactivity has shifted the focus to higher levels of user engagement (Liebler & Chaney, 2014). Social media has also become an environment for marketing and advertising. Today, social media is defined as a platform that utilizes both mobile and web-based technologies to create a high-functioning, interactive virtual space in which individuals and advertisers create and share user-generated content (Ariel & Avidar, 2015).

Interactivity is a focus of social media; this concept includes status updates, public content streams, and paid advertising available to both individuals and companies (Liebler &

Chaney, 2014). For this reason, increasing numbers of marketing and advertising professionals have begun to use social media as a space to promote brands. Even individuals have begun to use these sites as spaces to build professional public identities or “personal brands” to promote a range of products (Liebler & Chaney, 2014).

Individual use is particularly beneficial because users can manage their profiles and have control over the products they are marketing. Celebrities use their fame on social media to market their products. For example, Kylie Jenner used her Jenner-Kardashian family fame to become the world’s youngest self-made billionaire. Jenner uses social media to endorse products such as Puma shoes and PacSun clothing. Additionally, Jenner sells her makeup line on her Instagram account that has 110 million followers. This allows Jenner to interact with her consumer base through being a social media trendsetter (Ward, Brittany, Ward, Max, & Paskhover, 2018).

Social media is driven by users who produce content and interact with others; examples of such interactions include liking posts on Facebook or building professional profiles on Instagram. Such actions allow people to directly interact with peers and the public. At the time of writing, six types of social media can be found on the Internet: blogs, collaborative projects, content communities, social networking sites, virtual game worlds, and virtual social worlds (Campbell, Martin, & Fabos, 2017). The current study focuses on celebrities’ use of the social media site Instagram to interact with their users

Advertisers often use Instagram in an effort to humanize their brands. Humanizing a brand provides a relatable personality to consumers (Wood & Muñoz, 2017). Clothing companies often humanize their brands on social media by sharing photos of people wearing brand products. For example, department store Lord & Taylor once hired 50 bloggers to take pictures of themselves wearing a Lord & Taylor dress and to post the photos on Instagram with captioned statements (Wood & Muñoz, 2017).

Instagram is an interactive space that is continually developing. A key reason that people are attracted to newer social media platforms is that these platforms incorporate high user engagement by providing advanced, interactive features that are continually updated. The interactive platform of Instagram has given companies an opportunity to build new relationships with consumers (Ott, Vafeiadis, Kumble, & Waddell, 2016).

Instagram is not only an interactive platform; it is also user-controlled. Varnali and Toker (2015) note that individuals and advertisers control social media platforms. Advertisers' primary motivation for using Instagram to market their brands is to sell products on Instagram. As Instagram's primary user base has grown over the years, it has become increasingly important for advertisers to be strategic and resourceful in their use of the platform to connect with consumers and promote products (Ott et al., 2016).

Advertising and marketing on social media is used to develop lasting relationships with consumers and cultivate a trustworthy image. The involvement of famous personalities in advertising is an effective strategy that has been used to build likeability and prestige on online. Appearances by celebrities such as Kendall Jenner and Selena Gomez can provide a company with a return on investment approximately 12 times greater than that which would have been generated with standard figure digital marketing such as television commercials (Wood & Muñoz, 2017). Using an image of a known and attractive celebrity may increase the influence of a social media advertisement.

Consumers of celebrities' social media content aspire to emulate their favorite personalities. Research by Roy and Mishra (2018) indicates that this desire prompts consumers to try to become involved in activities that build a perceived relationship with the famous person. Such behavior may lead to celebrity worship, a concept that is often classified as a disorder falling into one of the following classifications of celebrity worship: entertainment-social,

intense-personal, and borderline-pathological worship (North, Sheridan, Maltby, & Gillet, 2007). New media literacy can help users understand how Instagram use impacts self-esteem as well as how both Instagram use and self-esteem are affected by the adoration of well-known personalities.

When users view images of famous people on social media platforms, these viewers may become vulnerable to the desire to emulate the images they see. This desire is often transformed into celebrity worship and can negatively influence self-esteem (Swami, Taylor, & Varvalho, 2011). Longing to conform to an idealized image can lead to the development of a negative body image when the ideal is not achieved. Platforms may impair self-esteem because the images displayed on these platforms have a significant impact on standards of beauty presented within society in the United States (Campbell et al., 2017).

For instance, on Instagram advertisers use celebrities to send targeted advertisements. Famous women define popular beauty standards on the platform, and the use of celebrities effectively promotes a style of attractiveness that other women are encouraged to achieve (Campbell et al., 2017). For example, when Kylie Jenner posted a photo of her new lips on Instagram, they grabbed user attention. Average interest in lip fillers increased drastically after Jenner announced that she had received lip injections (Ward et al., 2018). Kowalczyk and Roynce (2013) state that when a star markets a particular image, consumers create positive associations that result in a more positive evaluation of a brand or image.

Another celebrity who is actively engaged in advertising and branding is reality television star Kim Kardashian. In *Keeping Up with the Kardashians* (*KUWTK*), media mogul Kim is portrayed as a celebrity who markets her sex appeal and reinvents the norms of female sexuality. Kim uses television, social media, and other media to present herself and her family. The

objectified images presented are unrealistic beauty standards that may lower a person's self-esteem.

The following chapters explore the relationship between celebrity worship, following a favorite celebrity through Instagram, new media literacy and self-esteem. This paper also evaluates the effects of the medium – or in this case, the new media – on the message. Later sections of the project illustrate the importance of developing new media literacy skills, particularly during adolescence. Finally, this study analyzes the effects of social media use, new media literacy, and self-esteem in the context of celebrity worship.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following chapter outlines several concepts that illustrate links between celebrity worship, self-esteem, new media literacy, and the practice of following famous people's Instagram accounts. This chapter also identifies the key components of new media literacy and celebrity worship. Research on the relationship between celebrity worship and self-esteem is highlighted. These concepts are then assessed through the lens of uses and gratifications theory.

New Media and New Media Literacy

A medium affects the way information is transferred which is a reason why the characteristics of a particular medium must be studied to understand its influence on the surrounding environment. Strate (2017) theorizes that the distinct components of a given medium are linked with one another in a transactional system. Each unique medium has its own set of rules, conventions, and symbolic systems of communication (Lee, Chen, Li, & Lin, 2015). The content transmitted through a medium, the motivations for using the medium, and the perceived gratification of users are all distinct characteristics of the transactional system of a medium.

It is important to understand the characteristics of social media platforms in today's advancing media environment. Contemporary media is thought of as constituting a transformative communication system for users (Kylmälä, 2013). With the progression of technology, media has become more than the mere propagation and transportation of messages. In the current age, media is no longer a one-way communication transportation system. Research by McGuigan and Murdock (2015) indicates that the one-way nature of media communication has changed primarily because of the way technology has reorganized social relations to allow the creation of new media realms in which individuals present themselves and participate. Individual

participation is one way in which modern technology impacts the day-to-day lives of users. Given the extent to which technology has exposed its users to a variety of mediated messages, it is important to understand how the manner in which a message is presented can influence a person's reception of the message.

New media thrives on transformation rather than transportation. Marshall McLuhan, who is famous for coining the phrase "the medium is the message" (Fishman, 2006), was an influential communications theorist in the study of transformative media and technology. McLuhan emphasized the importance of the way a message is presented to the end user. This importance is illustrated in an organization's choice of mediums, such as social media channels, to market its brand. Thus, the term prosumer is not a new term (Garcia-Ruiz, Ramirez-Garcia, & Rodriguez-Rosell, 2014). The dimensions of prosumerism have been evolving and have reached the era of new media, particularly social media. A prosumer is an active participant that both engages and interacts with digital media content according to their needs (Lomborg & Mortensen, 2017).

The medium being the message is heavily seen in branding and marketing. Hearn (2008) defines branding as a marketing practice that intentionally links products and services to particular narratives and images. The medium through which a brand is presented is crucial to an audience's reception of the narrative or image. A brand might be presented through clothing, a social media account, or television, and each medium impacts audiences in a different way. The brand image transfers from the brand to the consumer's memory through various new media marketing communication channels (Zauner, Koller, & Fink, 2012).

The term "new media" refers to computer and communication technologies that enable individuals to become co-creators in meaning-making processes. Individuals become co-creators by being able to consume, to produce, and to share information with one-another (Ariel & Avidar, 2015). Thus, new media is highly interactive because it permits these forms of communication.

The collaborative nature of new media has provided individuals, as co-creators of new media content, with more opportunities to establish relationships with others. Interactivity is defined as the degree to which users are eager to communicate and to network with others in a community, and this interaction typically involves active engagement in the Web 2.0 realm (Yang & Coffey, 2014). Given the growth of media, there is a need for growth in new media literacy.

New media literacy (NML) refers to the ability to collectively create innovative media content, interact socially, and actively participate and engage with new media platforms (Koc & Barut, 2016). To actively participate in new media, a person must be a prosumer. Prosumerism stresses the importance of agency in a person's interactions with new media. A prosumer curates, shares, comments on, and creates digital media content according to his or her unique needs (Lomborg & Mortensen, 2017).

Prosumers are an active audience and partners in the production of content distributed through new media. As prosumers have more control over media than consumers in past eras, control has become beneficial to advertisers who use social media. Mobile computing and Internet services have established prosumption as a central marketing principle and operationalized it on a large scale (McGuigan & Macguigan, 1996). Thus, becoming a prosumer is key in establishing higher levels of NML for users.

Koc and Barut (2016) have defined four components of NML: functional consuming, critical consuming, functional prosuming, and critical prosuming. Functional consuming is defined as the ability to access produced media content and understand the productions textual meaning (Koc & Barut, 2016). This process might involve, for example, accessing an application on a smart device and having a general understanding of the application's functions. Critical consuming is defined as the ability to analyze and interpret the socio-cultural, economic, and political consequences of the media content one creates (Koc & Barut, 2016). This ability might

involve, for instance, knowing not to post malicious content about an employer on Instagram due to the possible consequences of this action. Many users of social media consume content rather than generating it and at times consider that sharing content created by others is a form of generating new content (Martínez & Alonso, 2015).

Functional prosuming is defined as the ability to participate in the production of new media content on media platforms (Koc & Barut, 2016). Functional prosuming incorporates various skills, such as the ability to take a photo on a smart device, edit the photo using an application, and post the photo onto Instagram. The final component of NML is critical prosuming; critical prosumers convey their beliefs, negotiate with others' ideas, and consider the potential impact of the media they produce and in which they participate (Koc & Barut, 2016). One example of a critical prosumer is a fashion blogger who writes about current trends and uses Instagram to market his or her blog. Each of the four components of NML are subdivided into more basic skills that are outlined below.

To distinguish between a prosumer and a consumer, a prosumer is an active participant in the new media environment whereas a consumer is a receiver of the content. A functional consumer can access produced media content and understand its textual meaning (Koc & Barut, 2016). To understand content, a functional consumer must have knowledge about consuming and understanding. The ability to consume media content requires a series of technical skills (Lin, Li, Deng, and Lee, 2013), such as the ability to turn on a computer, open a browser, find the search bar, type the information sought, and click the search button to locate the information. Understanding refers to an individual's ability to grasp the meaning of media content on a literal level (Lin et al., 2013). For example, individuals must understand that the term "lol" stands for "laugh out loud" and that emojis are small picture representations of facial expressions used to communicate emotions in social media and text messages.

Critical consumers analyze and interpret the consequences of media. The interpretation of these consequences has three important components: analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Koc & Barut, 2016). Analysis refers to an individual's ability to comprehend media messages and includes skills such as the ability to read different forms of media, including social media messaging and blogs. Synthesis is an individual's ability to reconstruct media messages and reorganize media content by integrating personal viewpoints and understanding that media can be presented through different mediums (Lin et al., 2013). Finally, evaluation is an individual's ability to question, criticize, and challenge the credibility of media content.

Koc and Barut (2016) state that a functional prosumer can participate in the production of new media content. More specifically, a functional prosumer must be able to produce content across various media platforms, and this ability requires three main skills: prosuming, distribution, and production (Lin et al., 2013). Prosuming skills are the set of technical skills necessary for the production of various types of media content (Lin et al., 2013).

Distribution skills entail an individual's ability to disseminate information across various new media (Lin et al., 2013), and this process might require the ability to post a photo on both Instagram and Facebook. Production skills refer to the ability to duplicate or mix different media content (Lin et al., 2013). For instance, creating a video, editing it using software, and uploading it to YouTube requires production skills.

Critical prosumers can convey their beliefs, negotiate with others' ideas, and consider the impact of their own media production and participation (Koc & Barut, 2016). Such individuals must be able to both participate in and create new media environments. One example of a prosuming is an instructor creating a personal website for students to access as a resource. When critical prosumers create new media content, they do so with a critical understanding of the socio-

cultural values and ideologies embedded in such content (Lin et al., 2013). Another example of critical prosumers is YouTubers who create their own video content.

New media literacy can act as a moderator between users and the media they consume, providing the user with the knowledge necessary to have greater control over their relationship with new media. As a result, NML can empower individuals to become more critical and informed users of media. It is possible that users with higher NML are more aware of the shallowness of celebrity advertisements. As researchers have found, that those with higher levels of academic attainment are associated with a tendency not to worship celebrities (McCutcheon, Aruguete, Griffith, & Haight, 2012). This means that individuals must have a certain level of exposure to new media and an understanding of various media to achieve higher levels of NML. The understanding of various media to reach higher levels of NML may be due to the fact that those with higher NML are not simply passive receivers of media messages (Sundar and Limperos, 2013).

Development of Web 2.0

Web 2.0 refers to a space on the World Wide Web that allows for more user-generated content and makes people more than passive receivers of information as it was in Web 1.0 (Boikos, Moutsoulas, & Tsekeris, 2014). Web 2.0 users consume content through various platforms and actively participate within online networks. Users have greater influence over the circulation of information through online platforms (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013) than they did in Web 1.0 environments. The shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 has had effects on how the Internet is accessed and used. Some researchers theorize that the Internet is a space that users passively browse while others consider it to be a social platform (Jenkins & Purushotma, 2009). People engage in unique activities on Web 2.0 and are seemingly no longer defined by the media they

consume. Instead, users are more defined by the interactive role they perform in the creation and transmission of new media (Lomborg & Mortensen, 2017).

Since the development of Web 2.0, companies have relinquished some control over the production and distribution of product brands and given this control to users. Granting control of production to users makes them co-creators of marketing content and services (Jenkins et al., 2013). For example, Kylie Jenner markets and sells her makeup brand on Instagram. The ways in which new media operates through Web 2.0 technologies make it possible for people to interact and collaborate in such processes on social media. Jaffari and Hunjra (2017) state that celebrities and brands work in synergy in order to have a better impact on their customers.

Teaching people to navigate a media environment characterized by passive consumption is no longer sufficient in the Web 2.0 realm. The concept of media literacy has evolved with the development of new media and Web 2.0; users exercise power in their use of media technology (Lee, et al., 2015). However, it should not be assumed that users in the Web 2.0 realm are new media literate simply because they possess such technology (Jenkins & Purushotma, 2009). Possessing the tools to participate in new media is one component of achieving higher levels of NML.

Social Media and the Celebrity

Strate (2017) argues that technology mediates the relationship between individuals and the world in which they perform. Particularly, smartphone technology supports various media like social media. Since social media is a prevalent form of media in contemporary society, this research focuses on this media. The widespread enthusiasm that social media has generated has changed the way society has functioned over the past two decades primarily due to its interactive nature. The degree of activity that social media entails has led to the labelling of people who engage with online platforms as “users” rather than “audience members” (Sundar & Limperos,

2013). These platforms were originally developed to allow people to connect with a community. Over time, social media has developed into powerful tools for sharing and accessing information disseminated across media platforms. Users' role has been effectively transformed from that of a media consumer to that of a producer (Rui & Stefanone, 2016).

The rise of social media has brought advantages and disadvantages. An advantage is that social media has low-cost, immediate access to information. This feature offers a direct method of communication (Noor Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012) that is tailored to users' needs and interests. Social media also brings various disadvantages including a lack of control over the spread of information, the possibility of false information being published, and the prevalence of abusive speech directed toward other users (Noor Al-Deen & Hendricks, 2012).

The practice of creating profiles on social media has created an environment in which disclosing personal information is a norm. The act of revealing personal information to others is known as self-disclosure (Varnali & Toker, 2015). Self-disclosure is important for developing relationships with others. Varnali and Toker (2015) have found that people's tendency to self-disclose on social media is predicted by the desire to be popular with other users. By disclosing information online, account holders create familiarity between themselves and those who view the information (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015). For example, disclosing personal information is a way for celebrities or prosumers to increase the popularity of their social media accounts. This form of exposure creates intimacy and produces a virtual relationship between celebrities and their fans that inspires appreciation (Tal-Or & Hershman-Shitrit, 2015). Social media has made society's obsession with famous people apparent. New era stars have transformed fame into an enterprise by forming their own multimillion-dollar corporations into products endorsed online (Kowalczyk & Royne, 2013).

Regarding product endorsements, the identity of the individual endorsing a product affects consumers. For example, more credible endorsers may deliver more persuasive messages to consumers. Credible figures are likely to stimulate more immediate changes in the consumer's attitude (Tran & Strutton, 2014). An endorser's physical attractiveness increases his or her credibility regardless of the product endorsed.

Celebrities assist in shaping the opinions of the masses using social media. Through their online presence, celebrities often encourage parasocial interactions that increase their likeability and credibility. In the current context, parasocial interactions can be defined as users' perceptions of having interpersonal relationships with the corporations and celebrities on their social media feeds (Ledbetter & Redd, 2016). Parasocial interactions cause people to feel that they have an interpersonal relationship with a celebrity.

The term "parasocial interactions" was coined to describe one-sided relationships in which one party knows a great deal about the other party (Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001). For example, it is typical for television viewers to have one-sided relationships with celebrities. Television executives often encourage these relationships by insisting that celebrities address audiences in a familiar way. In fact, actors and spokespeople are often chosen for television for their ability to project friendliness (Ashe & McCutcheon, 2001). On social media, parasocial interactions function as a form of advertising.

Famous people embed products and brands into seemingly natural depictions of their lifestyles. Though such depictions are advertisements, the endorsements are perceived as a secondary aspect. Celebrity endorsers appear to be ordinary people discussing their luxurious lifestyles rather than brand promoters (Lueck, 2015). Comments that celebrities make about the brands they use provide glimpses into their lifestyles and seem natural to followers. For example, Instagram users welcome brand recommendations from trusted sources that can help in the effort

to adopt a lifestyle that will lead to greater social acceptance. Thus, understanding parasocial interactions is important in grasping the how social media can be used to have an effect in the daily life of its users.

Instagram and the Celebrity

Instagram is a powerful social media platform founded by Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger in 2010 (Arslan 2017). Instagram's primary function is that it allows users to share images and videos instantaneously. On average, people post 55 million photos every day and like photos 1.2 billion times a day (Zulli, 2017). People can both take and upload photos or videos to Instagram the instant they decide to. The instantaneous nature of Instagram was the original goal, to create a platform that was fast, efficient, and a continuous cycle of posting and glancing of images or videos (Zulli, 2017).

The platform's users include organizations, celebrities, and news outlets. Instagram is attractive because it encourages a high level of participation and engagement, uses a unique visual medium, and creates an appealing environment. To achieve exposure on Instagram, people must create visually pleasing images that they can present to others on the platform (Zulli, 2017). Users must consistently share their life experiences on the platform and know their audiences well to achieve high levels of engagement.

Since its launch, Instagram has acquired 400 million active users and 0.2 million active advertisers (Bashir, Wen, Kim, & Morris, 2018). Thus, Instagram is a useful platform for brands to showcase their products. Approximately 80 million photos are posted each day on Instagram, with approximately 3.5 billion daily likes given to posts (Bashir et al., 2018). As a result of its rise in popularity, Instagram has become a regular platform choice for advertisers looking to promote their businesses.

Instagram is unique because it functions similarly to a Polaroid camera by creating an instantaneous snapshot to be shared with users. Images are emphasized on the platform. People can take or upload photos and write descriptive captions; through this process users create a visually oriented culture within the application (Lee et al., 2015). While people on Facebook create online profiles, those on Instagram are limited to posting photos and videos.

When people open the Instagram application, they are taken directly to a homepage on which they see live “stories” consisting of photos and videos that can be viewed for up to 24 hours (Zulli, 2017). The homepage also displays photos or videos shared by friends, and the images fit the size of the users’ screens. People can view a seemingly endless array of photos (Zulli, 2017) and comment on, like, or share any image.

Users manage their profiles by adding photos and videos to which filters can be applied to enhance the quality of images and create sophisticated or professional visual effects (Zulli, 2017). For example, users typically aim to make their photos resemble those found in a professional magazine. Instagram filters transform ordinary photos into artistic shots that are more aesthetically pleasing to viewers, which is a major draw of the application (Zulli, 2017).

Advertisers use celebrities to promote products on Instagram because these celebrities typically appeal to a large audience base. Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack, and Zahid (2018) relate Instagram as a platform that engages branded storytelling where people place brands in the plot similar to characters in a movie. Thus, the most-followed Instagram accounts typically belong to famous individuals. Many people view celebrities as authority figures and are influenced by these stars in their everyday lives (Furedi, 2010).

Celebrity endorsements are currently one of Instagram’s most successful marketing communication tools. A well-known endorser can positively affect consumers’ attitudes toward brands, increase the credibility of advertisements, influence purchase intentions, and increase

brand recall and recognition (Roy & Mishra, 2018). Within the culture of social media, an image or an action is at times not considered as beautiful until a famous person is attached to it making the image more credible. Lis and Post (2013) have defined celebrity credibility as the extent to which a celebrity is seen as having expertise applicable to a particular topic and the ability to communicate a reliable and objective view on the topic.

Research done by Yoo and Jin (2015) found that attractive celebrities are seen to be more effective in endorsing products that are used to enhance attractiveness for consumers. Celebrity credibility has been seen on media, for example, attractiveness is the driving force behind successful television shows such as *KUWTK* (Lueck, 2015). Kim Kardashian has used her social media and reality television show to market her body in order to sell products. The actions of celebrities perceived as admirable due to their beauty can be extremely consequential for enthusiastic young followers on social media. Research has revealed that Instagram has become an empowering medium for self-presentation (Lee et al., 2015).

Users have access to celebrities allowing for more connections to be formed though this access does have a downside. For users, trying to live up to the idealized images of celebrities seen in advertisements on social media can produce unanticipated self-esteem issues. People who suffer negative thoughts use social media as an escape mechanism to avoid perceived difficulties (Zeng, Ye, Hu, & Ma, 2016). Online platforms compensate for consumers' real-world needs by making these people feel that the virtual world of Instagram is real life.

Self-Esteem and Loneliness in the New Media Age

Loneliness is a prevalent issue in contemporary society particularly with the growth of new media. Research has shown that lonely narcissists, for example, are more likely to engage in like-seeking behaviors on Instagram in order to receive validation from others (Jin & Ryu, 2018). Ashe and McCutcheon (2001) define loneliness as a feeling of isolation that progresses

throughout the life of an individual. This feeling of isolation has an effect on social skills that allow people to build lasting relationships. Individuals whose social relations do not fulfill their needs experience loneliness, and this is why lonely individuals frequently use media to socialize (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008).

Recent studies have reported that self-esteem, depression, and loneliness are connected (Varghese & Pistole, 2017). Those with low self-esteem were seen to disclose and exaggerate more personal information online in order to gain approval (Varghese & Pistole, 2017). Feelings of isolation have an effect on building relationships and maintaining self-esteem. Self-esteem is defined as an individual's positive or negative evaluation of self-worth (Stapleton, Luiz, & Chatwin, 2017), and it is shaped by the standards by which a person may evaluate himself or herself. Research has indicated that more compulsive Internet use is connected to low self-esteem (Zeng et al., 2016).

A prevalent theme in discussions of self-esteem and social media is body dissatisfaction. Body dissatisfaction is defined as a person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body (Manwaring, 2011). Within the Web 2.0 platforms are allowed to make more social comparisons than would otherwise be possible in everyday life (Stronge, Greaves, Milojev, West-Newman, Barlow, & Sibley, 2015). Social media grants people the opportunity to make comparisons to their own lives. Stapleton et al. have demonstrated that social comparisons frequently take place on online platforms which may lead to lower self-esteem (2017).

New media platforms facilitate the sharing of large amounts of content. Research has indicated that social media lowers body satisfaction more so than traditional media because users internalize the content being presented (Stronge et al., 2015). Online platforms allow people to portray themselves in the way they desire, and research suggests that individuals view others as happier and more successful on social media than these people are in real life (Stapleton et al.,

2017). Social comparisons are often used as explanations as to why social media may be related to well-being issues (Holmgren & Coyne, 2017). Research by Holmgren and Coyne (2017) indicates that users often make upward social comparisons, meaning that they compare themselves to those who they view as having a better life. Such social comparisons may negatively impact self-esteem.

Not much research has been done on the psychological effects of Instagram usage. Instagram may put people at risk because users share content without considering the negative consequences of content such as depression (Lup, Trub, & Rosenthal, 2015). The negative consequences may be due to the unrealistic polished lifestyle images presented on Instagram. Instagram use has been linked to high levels of depressive symptoms with social comparison being the mediator (Lup et al., 2015). Consequently, on Instagram the most followed accounts are celebrities, this puts users at higher risk of comparing oneself to celebrity images.

Celebrity Worship and Self-Esteem

The term “fan” is often used to describe celebrity adoration. A fans’ attention can range from the lowest point of casual to the higher point of obsessive (Stever, 2011). Appreciation progresses along a continuum that starts with interest in celebrities for entertainment and social value but can progress to intense personal worship and borderline pathological behavior (Stever, 2011).

Many instances of celebrity worship have been documented throughout history. In 1926, film actor Rudolph Valentino died while undergoing surgery; his death provoked extreme reactions from his fans, many of whom fainted, cried, and kissed his casket during his funeral (Ward, 2011). This behavior was astonishing to members of the public, who thought these reactions might represent some form of religion or psychological pathology (Ward, 2011). It was

thought that Mr. Valentino was merely an actor, but in reality, Valentino was a celebrity whose significance extended far beyond his professional career.

In current day, celebrity worship has become a global phenomenon (Roy & Mishra, 2018). Celebrities are typically entertainers who appear on social media or television. Instagram, in particular, offers a platform that encourages adoration of famous people because it allows for its users to interact with celebrities by allowing them to be a part of their everyday lives. Celebrity worshippers are extreme fans whose support falls into one of three categories: entertainment-social, intense-personal, or borderline-pathological worship (North et al., 2007).

Entertainment-social worship constitutes the lower level of worship (Maltby, Giles, Barber, and McCutcheon, 2005); it is considered to be the “normal” level of interest a person shows to his or her favorite star. Entertainment-social celebrity worshipers often enjoy reading about a particular personality in magazines or on the Internet and discussing recent news about the person within their social circles. Such followers are interested in their favorite celebrity because the person entertains them or captures their attention (North et al., 2007). The majority of celebrity worshipers initially are attracted to their favorite celebrities largely for the entertainment and social value that they provide (Reyes, Santiago, Domingo, Lichingyao, Onglengco, & Mccutcheon, 2016).

Intense-personal celebrity worship is a moderate form of appreciation, and it occurs when an individual feels a strong personal or spiritual bond with a star (North et al., 2007). Such adoration has been found to lead to health issues. Though intense-personal worship is considered moderate, this form has been found to be associated with depression (North et al., 2007).

The most severe form of celebrity worship is borderline-pathological worship, and it occurs when individuals hold strange beliefs about a particular star, such as a conviction that the person is all-powerful (North et al., 2007). Another belief typical among borderline-pathological

people is the expectation that a celebrity would come to a follower's rescue if he or she were in danger. Research has demonstrated that borderline-pathological worship is associated with poor mental health (particularly low self-esteem) and poor general health (North et al., 2007).

Celebrity worship has been linked to many negative characteristics. For example, high levels of such adoration have been connected to higher levels of social dysfunction, somatic symptoms, anxiety, and depression (Reeves, Baker, & Truluck, 2012). These negative links cause a sense of emptiness. The emptiness can later be transferred to self-esteem issues and poor relationship with others (Reeves et al., 2012). For example, research has reported that celebrity fan club members in Hong Kong have indicated lower self-esteem than did non-fan club members (Lin & Lin, 2007).

Celebrity worship is also related to symptoms of body image issues and eating disorders. Research has demonstrated a significant relationship between intense-personal celebrity worship and preoccupation with body shape (Swami, Taylor, & Carvalho, 2009). This finding suggests that adoration of famous people is associated with a willingness to change one's physical self to conform to standards set by stars. In 2009, more than 209,000 cosmetic plastic surgery procedures in the US were performed on people ages 13 to 19 (Maltby & Day, 2011).

Research by Ho, Lee, and Liao (2016) indicates that social comparisons are often made to celebrities who are idealized. Unfortunately, the prevalence of social media featuring cosmetic surgery has changed public perceptions of unnatural beauty standards and raised beauty expectations (Abraham & Zuckerman, 2011). Research has also indicated that celebrity worship of an admired individual helps predict the likelihood of cosmetic surgery (Abraham & Zuckerman, 2011). Thus, celebrity worship has been seen to be linked with self-esteem issues and with the growth of Web 2.0 it has become easier to have access to the celebrity.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The connections between social media, celebrity worship, and self-esteem can be partially explained through the uses and gratifications theory. Gudelunas (2012) states that the unique advantage of the uses and gratifications theory is that it explains the role of mass media primarily from the perspective of users. The foundational assumption of uses and gratifications theory is that audiences are aware of their personal needs and the desire to satisfy these needs. The theory is grounded in five assumptions: communication behavior is goal-directed and purposeful, individuals take initiative in selecting and using communication vehicles to satisfy their needs or desires, various social and psychological factors mediate people's communication behavior, forms of media compete with other forms of communication for selection, attention, and use by individuals seeking to gratify needs or wants, and that media is around individuals so often that sometimes viewing the messages is unavoidable (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2007).

Cowles (1989) states that although uses and gratifications theory has been typically applied to mass media it has now shifted focus to new media and technologies as well. Rathnayake and Winter (2018) state that within social media, uses and gratifications are placed into two categories, either user-oriented or platform oriented. User-orientation places importance on user rather than the features of the platform. For example, user-orientated platforms in social media allow users to generate content and socialize. Whereas platform-orientated platforms the focus on features giving gratification to the user (Rathnayake & Winter, 2018). For example, platform-oriented would focus on the ambience of a social media platform that focuses on providing a space that makes the user feel good navigating through. In uses and gratifications theory, the technology of a medium is highly significant.

New media introduces innovative functions that modify how desires are gratified. The ways in which users interact with new media are shaped by the capabilities of the particular

technological medium used (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Content presented in media appeals to consumers' basic senses, including hearing and sight. The MAIN (Modality, Agency, Interactivity, and Navigability) model proposes four uses and gratifications for new media – modality, agency, interactivity, and navigability – each of which has significant psychological consequences (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). The MAIN model states that the four affordances are able to allow for making judgement that better help users make judgements regarding a particular medium (Rathnayake & Winter, 2018).

Sundar and Limperos (2013) focus on modality due to the idea that humans process information from each modality differently. For instance, textual information requires high levels of cognitive effort, audiovisual information tends to be the most entertaining, and purely visual information requires less effort than other types (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Consumers generally perceive visual media as more reliable than text or audiovisual media. For example, Instagram users tend to assume that photographs appearing on the platform must be real, but the same users may be suspicious of the veracity of written content on Facebook (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

New media now allows users to have agency over information whereas in the past there were gatekeepers (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). For example, Instagram users have agency in what sort of content is posted on their personal or business profiles. New media platforms offer a high degree of technological customization that gives people agency over the information others receive about them and how this information is perceived (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Instagram users can freely choose the accounts they follow and the content they wish to see. They can also control how their photos look and write text to describe each photo.

Additionally, the MAIN model refers to interactivity. In reference to new media, interactivity allows users to make immediate changes within a medium (Sundar & Limperos,

2013). When an individual posts a photo on Instagram, he or she assumes that others will see the photo and some people will comment on it. Social media users in general expect responses to their actions and regularly receive responses (Sundar & Limperos, 2013) that provide immediate gratification.

The last point of the MAIN model is navigability. Users see navigability within new media, for example, Instagram is a space rather than a window through which users gaze (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). People freely navigate between various pages. This form of flexibility of movement through the spaces of the medium is another source of gratification for the end user (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Social media platforms compensate for needs that go unmet in the real world by making users feel that the virtual world created by the platform is real. Uses and gratifications theory implies an explanation for similar phenomena, such as the fact that use of social media by women who feel insecure about their appearance may cause an idealized image of beauty. Consuming media in this way can easily prompt an individual to begin making critical comparisons between their lives and those of others.

For this research, the purpose for literacy is to grant a person the agency to evaluate the world on their own and make decisions (Aczel, 2014). Agency is seen within new media since usage involves users to be proactive and take action rather than be passive users. Since some gratifications are obtained by new media are founded on pre-existing needs from the user (Sundar & Limperos, 2013), NML can assist in moderating the effects on self-esteem. To evaluate the notion that developing NML encourages users to adopt a critical perspective on the affordances and limitations of social media platforms, this study poses three research questions:

RQ1: What is the relationship between self-esteem and borderline-pathological celebrity worship, intense-personal celebrity worship, entertainment-social celebrity worship, and overall celebrity worship?

RQ2: What is the relationship between the various levels of NML and total NML, and borderline-pathological celebrity worship, intense-personal celebrity worship, entertainment-social celebrity worship and overall celebrity worship?

RQ3: Do levels of NML, self-esteem, and celebrity worship differ among those who follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram and those who do not?

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative approach was taken to examine differences between and relationships among those who follow celebrities on Instagram and those who do not. The research also focuses on differences and relationships between celebrity worship and self-esteem. A cross-sectional quantitative survey was conducted on NML, self-esteem and celebrity worship. All responses were collected online through a data collection tool secured and provided through the university.

Participants

The study utilizes a convenience sample consisting primarily of students enrolled at a Western public university. Particularly, the research consisted of students in a communication studies department. The participants were recruited by snowball effect. Participants were also recruited through the researcher's social media account. All procedures were approved by the university's Institutional Review Board.

A total of 250 participants completed the survey via the data collection tool Qualtrics. The was analyzed through IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) by conducting a frequency distribution to describe participants' demographics. Of the participants, $N=187$ for females and $N=63$ for males. The ages of the sample were as follows: 81.6% were 17-21, 14.0% were 27-52, and 4.4% were over the age of 52 ($M = 19.90$, $SD = 4.09$). The distribution of ethnic groups was as follows: 40% indicated other, 26% identified as Asian, 25.2% identified as White, 6.8% identified as Black or African American, 1.2 % identified as Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and .8% identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. The education demographic is as follows: high school graduates were 84.4%, associate degree is 10%, professional degree is 2.4%, and master's degree was 3.2%.

Measures

Koc and Barut's (2016) New Media Literacy Scale (NMLS) was used to measure new media literacy. The NML Scale-35 is a 35-item Likert scale questionnaire. The questions were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree); no items were reverse coded. The scores of the 35 questions were added to obtain the final NML score for each participant.

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965) measures self-esteem on a 10-item Likert scale. Previous research has tested predictions from the absorption-addiction model of celebrity worship and the empty self-theory by using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Reeves et al., 2012). The questions were answered on a 4-point scale ranging from 3 (strongly agree) to 0 (strongly disagree). Questions two, five, six, eight, and nine were reverse scored. The self-esteem score was calculated after the items were reverse coded. To obtain the self-esteem score, the question scores were added together.

Instagram usage was assessed through questions created by the researcher. Participants were asked four questions about their social media usage including whether they have an Instagram account and whether they follow celebrities on Instagram. They also were asked how many minutes a day they spend on Instagram and how many minutes are spent on celebrities' pages. Responses are typed into a textbox in Qualtrics.

Celebrity worship was assessed using the Celebrity Attitude Scale (McCutcheon, Lange, & Houran, 2002). Participants were asked 34 questions to determine their views on a famous person. The term "celebrity" was defined by the researcher as an admired famous living or dead person. The questions were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). The three subscales were as follows: entertainment social, intense personal, and borderline pathological (North et al., 2007).

Procedure and Analysis

Students were notified about the study in a message sent by the researcher to instructors. Instructors shared the message regarding the survey via email. The survey was provided to students through a link created using the Qualtrics survey-making tool. SPSS was used to conduct a reliability analysis on the Celebrity Attitude Scale survey and the New Media Literacy survey. Instagram usage, viewing images of celebrities on Instagram, and viewing favorite celebrity images was analyzed by identifying users who spent over 30 minutes on Instagram.

Due to the survey tools for measuring celebrity worship, self-esteem, and NML being used for the first time in a cluster, a reliability analysis was conducted for all measuring tools. Celebrity worship, which was assessed through the Celebrity Attitude Scale, had a high rate of reliability, $\alpha=.94$. The self-esteem questionnaire and New Media Literacy scale both had high levels of reliability, $\alpha=.86$ and $\alpha=.94$, respectively. Reliability was also analyzed for each sub-scale of the New Media Literacy scale. The questions for functional prosumer within the New Media Literacy scale had a high reliability, $\alpha=.95$. As did the questions for critical consumer, functional consumer and critical consumer with reliability measurements of $\alpha=.88$, $\alpha=.93$, and $\alpha=.94$. Collectively, the reliability analysis indicated high rates of reliability across all measurement tools.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

A total of 250 participants were included in this study. Of the Instagram users, 59.2% reported spending over 30 minutes on Instagram a day ($M = 50.25$, $SD = 5.71$). Of those users, 20% spent over 30 minutes viewing images of celebrities on Instagram ($M = 16.86$, $SD = 21.52$). Of those who viewed celebrity images on Instagram, 8.8% reported spending over 30 minutes a day viewing their favorite celebrity images ($M = 8.98$, $SD = 12.66$). Overall, the majority of participants engaged in Instagram use.

The first research question (RQ 1) asked: what is the relationship between self-esteem and borderline-pathological celebrity worship, intense-personal celebrity worship, entertainment-social celebrity worship, and overall celebrity worship? To analyze RQ1 a bivariate correlation was computed to determine whether there was a relationship between self-esteem and celebrity worship, including the different components of celebrity worship: entertainment social, intense personal, and borderline pathological. The results showed that there was a statistically significant negative correlation between self-esteem and celebrity worship, $r(248) = -.158$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 1). As a participant's level of self-esteem increases their level of celebrity worship decreases. There was a significant negative correlation between the different components of celebrity worship and self-esteem: entertainment social, $r(248) = -.145$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 1), intense personal, $r(248) = -.133$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 1), borderline pathological, $r(248) = -.161$, $p < .05$ (see Figure 1). As self-esteem increases the level of entertainment social celebrity worship, intense personal celebrity worship, and borderline pathological celebrity worship decreases.

The second research question (RQ 2) asked: what is the relationship between the various levels of NML or total NML with levels of borderline-pathological celebrity worship, intense-

personal celebrity worship, entertainment-social celebrity worship and overall celebrity worship? RQ2 was analyzed by conducting bivariate correlations to determine whether there was a relationship between the various levels of NML with celebrity worship, including the different components of celebrity worship: entertainment social, intense personal, and borderline pathological. A second set of bivariate correlations were conducted to determine whether there was a relationship between total NML, and these same three components of celebrity worship. Finally, additional correlations were computed to determine the relationship between the different components of celebrity worship (entertainment social, intense personal, and borderline pathological) as well. The results indicated no significant correlation between NML and celebrity worship, $r(248) = -.023, p > .05$. The results also indicated no significant correlation between NML and the components of celebrity worship: entertainment social $r(248) = .023, p > .05$, intense personal $r(248) = -.050, p > .05$, and borderline pathological $r(248) = -.007, p > .05$. The results to RQ2 suggest a participant's level of total NML skills has no relationship with celebrity worship and its subcategories.

The second research question (RQ2) also asked what is the relationship between the subcategories of NML and celebrity worship? First, critical consumption was examined. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between critical consumption and celebrity worship, $r(248) = -.154, p < .05$ (see Figure 2), indicating that as celebrity worship increases the amount of critical consumption decreases. The results also showed a significant correlation between critical consumption and intense personal celebrity worship, $r(248) = -.182, p < .01$ (see Figure 2). As intense personal celebrity worship increases, critical consumption decreases. The results indicated a significant negative correlation between critical consumption and borderline pathological celebrity worship, $r(248) = -.150, p < 0.01$ (see Figure 2), meaning as borderline pathological celebrity worship increases, critical consumption decreases.

Critical prosumption was then examined. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between critical prosumption and celebrity worship, $r(248) = .127, p < .01$ (see Figure 3). As celebrity worship increases, critical prosumption increases as well. The results reported a significant positive correlation between critical prosumption and entertainment social celebrity worship, $r(248) = .156, p < .05$ (see Figure 3). As critical prosumption increases, entertainment social celebrity worship increases. The results indicated a significant positive correlation between critical prosumption and borderline pathological celebrity worship, $r(248) = .798, p < .001$ (see Figure 3); as critical prosumption increases, borderline pathological celebrity worship increases.

Research question three (RQ 3) asked: do levels of NML, self-esteem, and celebrity worship differ among those who follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram and those who do not? RQ3 was analyzed by conducting a t-test to compare if levels of NML, self-esteem, and celebrity worship differ between those who follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram and those who do not. There was a significant difference in Celebrity Worship between those who followed their favorite celebrity on Instagram ($M = 87.56, SD = 20.47$) and those who did not ($M = 67.25, SD = 17.23$), $t(248) = -7.15, p < 0.001$ (see Figure 4). There was no significant difference in scores for NML between those who followed their favorite celebrity on Instagram ($M = 138.52, SD = 26.46$) and those who did not ($M = 138.74, SD = 18.17$), $t(248) = .072, p > .05$ (see Figure 4). Therefore, regardless of how well an individual was able to interact with current web technologies did not relate to whether they followed celebrities on Instagram. Finally, there was no significant difference in self-esteem scores between those who followed their favorite celebrities on Instagram ($M = 17.99, SD = 5.5$) and those who did not ($M = 17.89, SD = 5.41$), $t(248) = -.123, p > .05$ (see Figure 4). This final result suggests that while celebrity worship may impact self-esteem, just engaging in following behavior of a celebrity did not impact or relate to level of self-esteem.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to examine whether a relationship exists between NML, celebrity worship, and self-esteem by assessing these variables in a sample of users and non-users of Instagram. Findings in this research did support that those with higher self-esteem were low on celebrity worship. Also, there was support that higher levels of celebrity worship, specifically intense personal and borderline pathological, correlated with a decrease in critical consumption but an increase in critical prosumption.

Those with high self-esteem have an overall positive attitude. Whether they succeed or fail in life, their self-esteem is fairly resilient (Noser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014). Those with low self-esteem are more vulnerable and require validation; they are more occupied with increasing their self-worth (Noser & Zeigler-Hill, 2014). People who score high on the celebrity worship scale are seen as having lower self-esteem; this relationship may be due to a need to view celebrity images to increase self-worth through external comparison or validation.

The linkage between low self-esteem and celebrity worship could partly be due to the idea that in contemporary society social media users often engage with platforms to receive instant gratification from “likes” made by users with the click of a button. Relying on this sort of validation may place a user’s self-esteem at risk, particularly if he/ she is already vulnerable. Images on media and visibility of social feedback, for example, people liking photos, may be the cause of social comparisons being made (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). In such cases, Instagram may be compensating for needs that are not met off social media; for example, craving attention. When attention is not received in the real world users may begin to engage in online attention-seeking behaviors.

Consuming mediated messages can prompt individuals to make negative comparisons between their lives and others. Celebrity worshippers are prone to forming one-sided relationships with celebrities that may lead to self-esteem issues (Reyes et al., 2016). Users do not typically have physical interactions with celebrities they follow on social media. However, it has been reported that people who worship stars intensely experience more depression and anxiety than those who do not (Reyes et al., 2016).

An example of making comparisons is provided in McLean, Paxton, and Wertheim's (2016) study that found that exposure to idealized thin images indicated body dissatisfaction. Idealizing thin body image, or social comparisons in general, have been linked to psychological and physical well-being issues (Fox & Vendemia, 2016). This may be due to viewers finding a thin body to be more favorable than a larger body. Research by Fox and Vendemia (2016) has shown that women who viewed photos that promoted downward social comparison reported to have higher body satisfaction.

Media literacy can potentially prevent such dissatisfaction. If media users can think critically about the images they view and how these images are presented, the credibility and effects of a message are reduced (McLean et al., 2016). The study found that together media literacy and the ability to think critically moderated the effects. The current research also examined the relationship between various levels of new media literacy and celebrity worship; it investigated the relationship between the different components of celebrity worship (entertainment social, intense personal, and borderline pathological) as well. No correlation was found between new media literacy and celebrity worship. The results also indicated that users level of new media literacy had no association with the components of celebrity worship.

Significant negative correlations were found between overall, intense personal, and borderline pathological celebrity worship and critical consumption. Higher levels of intense

personal, borderline pathological, and overall celebrity worship correspond with less critical consumption of new media literacy. The results indicate that as users engaged in celebrity worship do not consume media content critically. Critical consumption can shed light on the issue of media overload as it involves examining media to find alternative understandings and critical messages (Sholle & Denski, 1995).

People who engage in little critical consumption do not analyze the sociocultural, economic, and political consequences of content. Instead, people who participate in intense personal celebrity worship are more concerned with the strong bond they feel with a celebrity (North et al., 2007). In particular, those who engage high levels of borderline pathological worship are more concerned about the belief that a celebrity is all powerful than the media content related to this celebrity. This belief prevents such users from critically analyzing the messages the star presents.

Engaging in the belief that the celebrity is powerful can be seen when advertisers use celebrities to market. When social media users view celebrity endorsements, a connection is established between celebrity and product (Jaffari & Hunjra, 2017). Celebrities can capture attention on Instagram; such efforts may generate affection for a brand in users who engage in high celebrity worship. Affection for a brand is generated when a user has an attachment to the celebrity advertising it (Jaffari & Hunjra, 2017).

It was found that an increase in celebrity worship corresponds with an increase in the critical prosumption component of new media literacy. Critical prosumers are aware that the media that they produce or participate in may have an impact on the culture. In other words, critical prosumers create new media content with a critical understanding of the sociocultural values and ideologies embedded within media (Lin et al., 2013). The critical understanding is consistent with the assumptions in uses-and-gratifications theory that communication behavior is

purposeful; individuals take the initiative in selecting communication vehicles to satisfy their needs and desires; and various social and psychological factors mediate people's communication behavior.

The critical component of new media literacy assists users in identifying the importance of the various messages with which they come into contact through media. People with critical new media literacy seek connections to identify the authors of media messages. In particular, 47% of people ages 18 to 25 are prosumers (Sánchez Martínez, 2015); it is possible that these young prosumers engage in celebrity worship, and their social commitment leads to them becoming critical prosumers. Sharing information access is part of critical prosumers' social commitment, as this behavior allows them to have influence (Sánchez Martínez, 2015), thus there is a group commitment. Since prosumers choose to share with their social media contacts, prosumers' interactions on various platforms may increase (Sánchez Martínez, 2015)

The current study also found that an increase in entertainment social and borderline pathological celebrity worship corresponds with an increase in the critical presumption component of new media literacy. Entertainment social celebrity worshipers display surface-level interest in their favorite stars. These people are interested in their favorite star because the person entertains or captures their attention (North et al., 2007). The extreme is borderline pathological celebrity worship; individuals with this mindset have strange beliefs about a particular star (North et al., 2007). People who engage in entertainment social and borderline pathological celebrity worship may display higher levels of critical presumption due to the gratification they seek from communication.

It is important to note that new media prosumers also create media content (Garcia-Ruiz et al., 2014). New media is associated with higher levels of interaction, and prosumers are even more important in the new media age due to the exponential interactions available through Web

2.0 tools (Sánchez Martínez, 2015). Research indicates that messages have different impacts on prosumers on platforms such as Instagram (Cowles, 1989). People use Instagram to communicate by creating content to engage other users. Instagram users satisfy their needs through gratification, which in turn determines the impact the medium may have on the user (Cowles, 1989). Critical prosumers' levels of celebrity worship may be high because these users engage with famous people to mimic the results these people receive on social media.

Finally, those who did not follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram had higher new media literacy skill scores than those who did. No significant difference was found in the celebrity worship scores of those who followed their favorite celebrities on Instagram and those who did not. Additionally, no significant difference was found in the self-esteem scores of those who followed their favorite stars on Instagram and those who did not. It is possible that users who do not follow their favorite celebrities on Instagram gain gratification through the Instagram application. Users have a high degree of control within the application; they can freely choose the accounts they want to follow and the content they wish to see. New media platforms offer a high degree of technological customization that gives people agency over the information others receive about them and how this information is perceived (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Navigation is a component of new media that attracts many users. Sundar and Limperos (2013) distinguish Instagram as a space where users work and not only a window for viewing images. Having this freedom to navigate between pages may increase users' new media literacy. Thus, the flexibility to navigate is a source of gratification for the user (Sundar & Limperos, 2013).

Some aspects for further consideration is that the majority of the sample was comprised of women. Research indicates that media has a greater influence on women than men. Women are more likely to idealize images of the physical attractiveness of female celebrities. Women around

the world are motivated to conform to the Western ideal of beauty displayed in magazines, television, social media, and advertisements.

Another limitation is the small sample size; having a larger sample of participants with a diverse age range would have increased generalizability and narrowed the confidence interval. Another limitation is that this study also relied on self-reported measures, as biases such as social desirability may have compromised the reliability of results. The setting in which participants took the surveys was not controlled, and this is another limitation. Lastly, participants were primarily recruited from one university and one department; this limitation makes the data ungeneralizable to the public at large.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

In the current study, the development of new media literacy and its relationship to social media, celebrity worship, and self-esteem were explored through an assessment of the levels of new media literacy, celebrity worship, and self-esteem of users and non-users of Instagram. The research supports the idea that new media literacy provides users of platforms such as Instagram with the tools necessary to critically evaluate how social media can impact the self-esteem of people who engage in high levels of celebrity worship. New media literacy can motivate online consumers to become critical prosumers of the messages they receive. It can also help users understand the reasons a message is delivered and how it is intended to impact an audience.

Though users are becoming more adept in using media as a place to seek information, they are not learning to critically examine what they are viewing and the way in which it is being presented. A goal of new media literacy is to encourage users to think critically about choices made on the Web 2.0 platform (Jenkins & Purushotma, 2009). Cramer (2015) found that new media literacy is represented in curriculum but we see it diminish past K-12 education. Incorporating new media literacy into the communication studies discipline at the undergraduate level would provide an advantage to students. Due to technological advances, new media literacy skills must be enhanced and taught after grade 12.

A component of media literacy is the ability to identify why and how media influences people. As a result of advances in social media, users are overwhelmingly receiving content from the media culture that affects how they think, feel, and behave (Cramer, 2015). Students should also work to understand why they have chosen to use a specific medium. This skill includes the ability to identify why a particular organization opted to present a celebrity narrative on Instagram and how this medium affects people's understanding of the message.

Future research should explore how new media literacy may be critical to adolescents' transition into adulthood. As adolescents form their adult identities, they begin to form attachments to figures around them (Lin & Lin, 2007). Identity formation between adolescence and adulthood is a critical reason to focus on celebrity worship. Adolescents' identity is partly developed through interactions with media and celebrities (Lin et al., 2017), especially those interactions that occur through readily available new media.

Additional future research could examine the association between self-esteem and narcissism. According to Jin and Ryu (2018), as of January 2018, people had published more than 343 million Instagram posts that included the hashtag #me and over 331 million posts that contained the hashtag #selfie. This increase in selfies on social media is symbolic of people's recent obsession with presenting themselves to social media audiences. Research indicates that self-esteem overlaps with narcissism since both constructs involve positive self-evaluations (Orth, Robins, Meier, & Conger, 2016).

Narcissism is defined as a lavish presentation of one's self (Barry, Doucette, Loflin, Rivera-Hudson, & Herrington, 2015), and it may impact how some individuals approach social media. It is possible that narcissism allows social media users to play an overly active role on social media platforms. For example, these individuals may be highly interested in cultivating a positive image of themselves on social media, and they may be involved in high levels of social media activity (Barry et al., 2015). These social media accounts are easy to locate due to the amount of content posted on them.

Hyman and Sierra's (2010) findings indicate that narcissism and celebrity worship are positively correlated. Celebrity worshippers often view themselves as extensions of their favorite celebrities. Seeing themselves this way allows celebrity worshippers to feel as if they should be adored as stars are (Hyman & Sierra, 2010). This finding is consistent with research that states

people with an excessive need for attention suffer from low self-esteem. Those with narcissism also struggle to maintain healthy relationships; they instead maintain parasocial relationships through social media that assist them in obtaining fulfillment (Hyman & Sierra, 2010).

Self-esteem and narcissism have been associated with displays of self-promotion on social media platforms such as Facebook. More narcissistic individuals tend to post more photos that reveal more about themselves (Barry et al, 2015). Research also suggests that narcissism is associated with more attention-seeking posts on Facebook (Barry et al, 2015). Individuals with lower self-esteem are more likely to remove unflattering pictures of themselves (Barry et al, 2015).

Another way to increase new media literacy may be to teach through new media. Jenkins and Purushotma's (2008) research suggests people learn just as much information through popular cultural as they do through traditional educational settings. It is important to note that conventional learning settings are limited, and popular culture provides more opportunities because of the presence of more interactivity. Social media provides users with a sense of comfort since it is so easy to access in the palm of their hands (Jenkins & Purushotma, 2009).

Entertainment does not need to be purposeless; entertainment education is defined as "the prosocial messages that are embedded into popular entertainment content" (Moyer-Gusé, 2008, p. 408). Entertainment education theory argues that the best way to deliver knowledge is through media messages. This type of entertainment is seen as a captivating form of persuasion due to its seamless narrative structure (Quintero Johnson, Harrison, & Quick 2012). In line with new medium theory, entertainment education asserts that a message is defined by the way it is devised. Research supports this claim, especially regarding the use of entertainment education to deliver health-related messages (Moyer-Gus, 2008).

A primary aim of entertainment education is to deliver health-related messages to a captive audience effectively. The strategy involves using popular entertainment media to increase awareness of a health topic (Moyer-Gus, 2008). Shen and Han (2014) states that educational entertainment influences a person's psychological state through knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, behavioral intentions, and actual behaviors. By embedding messages within a narrative, entertainment education can create a cultural shift. The specific characters are crucial for crafting entertainment education promotions (Literat & Chen, 2014). Another way to facilitate a narrative effectively is to incorporate a character and especially one with a celebrity platform.

Celebrities have significant power in health-related conversations within society. Entertainment education argues that people begin to identify with the character in a narrative by emotionally and cognitively taking on his or her point of view (Moyer-Gus, 2008). Identification encompasses many different features that the receiver of a message equates with the character (or celebrity). Through narratives embedded in television, social media, and the news, entertainment education has increased awareness and knowledge. As a result, this entertainment has influenced people's intentions and behaviors (Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010).

Media is constantly working to drive an agenda in society and establish societal norms. Developing new media literacy skills can help people become aware of messages and advocate for change within society (Cramer, 2015). In a sense, new media literacy creates empowerment by helping users develop the skills needed to identify the voice or author of a piece of media. New media literacy skills make people aware of the power of media, and these skills empower people to be advocates by using and creating on new media channels (Cramer, 2015). This research supports that new media users can be empowered prosumers and avoid engaging in harmful levels of celebrity worship that can reduce self-esteem.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research study which will focus on new media literacy, self-esteem, celebrity worship and Instagram. My name is Anaida Stepanyan, and I am a graduate student at Sac State's Communication Studies department.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to fill out a series of questions about new media literacy, self-esteem, celebrity attitude and Instagram. Your participation in this study will last 10 to 15 minutes. Risks associated with this study are not anticipated to be greater than those risks encountered in daily life.

Your participation in this project is voluntary. You have the right not to participate at all or to leave the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. There is no incentive for participating in this research.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. Measures to insure your confidentiality are a confidential database that can only be accessed with the proper credentials. The data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked location for a period of three years after the study is completed.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please contact me at anaida.stepanyan@csus.edu or my faculty advisor Dr. Gerri Smith at smithg@csus.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project please call the Office of Research Affairs, California State University, Sacramento, (916) 278-5674, or email irb@csus.edu.

Your participation in this study indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above.

___ Yes

___ No

Appendix B: New Media Literacy Scale

1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree/disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree

Functional Consumption (FC)

1. I know how to use searching tools to get information needed in the media.
2. I am good at catching up with the changes in the media.
3. It is easy for me to make use of various media environments to reach information.
4. I realize explicit and implicit media messages.
5. I notice media contents containing mobbing and violence.
6. I understand political, economical and social dimensions of media contents.
7. I perceive different opinions and thoughts in the media.

Critical consumption (CC)

8. I can distinguish different functions of media (communication, entertainment, etc.).
9. I am able to determine whether or not media contents have commercial messages.
10. I manage to classify media messages based on their producers, types, purposes and so on.
11. I can compare news and information across different media environments.
12. I can combine media messages with my own opinions.
13. I consider media rating symbols to choose which media contents to use.
14. It is easy for me to make decision about the accuracy of media messages.
15. I am able to analyze positive and negative effects of media contents on individuals.
16. I can evaluate media in terms of legal and ethical rules (copyright, human rights, etc.).
17. I can assess media in terms of credibility, reliability, objectivity and currency.
18. I manage to fend myself from the risks and consequences caused by media contents.

Functional prosumption (FP)

19. It is easy for me to create user accounts and profiles in media environments.
20. I can use hardware necessary for developing media contents (text, image, video, etc.).
21. I am able to use software necessary for developing media contents (text, image, video, etc.).
22. I can use basic operating tools (button, hyperlinks, file transfer etc) in the media.
23. I am good at sharing digital media contents and messages on the Internet.
24. I can make contribution or comments to media contents shared by others.
25. I am able to rate or review media contents based on my personal interests and liking.

Critical prosumption (CP)

26. I manage to influence others' opinions by participating to social media environments.
27. I can make contribution to media by reviewing current matters from different perspectives (social, economical, ideological etc.).
28. I am able to collaborate and interact with diverse media users towards a common purpose.
29. It is easy for me to construct online identity consistent with real personal characteristics
30. I can make discussions and comments to inform or direct people in the media.
31. I am skilled at designing media contents that reflect critical thinking of certain matters.
32. I am good at producing opposite or alternative media contents.
33. I produce media contents respectful to people's different ideas and private lives.
34. It is important for me to create media contents that comply with legal and ethical rules.
35. I am able to develop original visual and textual media contents (video clips, web page, etc.)

Appendix C: Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale

Instructions:

Below is a list of statements dealing with your general feelings about yourself. If you strongly agree, circle SA. If you agree with the statement, circle A. If you disagree, circle D. If you strongly disagree, circle SD.

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself.
2. *At times, I think I am no good at all.
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities.
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people.
5. *I feel I do not have much to be proud of.
6. *I certainly feel useless at times.
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
8. *I wish I could have more respect for myself.
9. *All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure.
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself.

Scoring:

SA=3, A=2, D=1, SD=0.

Items with an asterisk are reverse scored, that is, SA=0, A=1, D=2, SD=3.

Sum the scores for the 10 items.

The higher the score, the higher the self-esteem.

Appendix D: Instagram Usage

1. Please indicate *yes* or *no*:
 - a. Do you have an active Instagram account?
 - b. Do you follow celebrities on Instagram?
 - c. Do you follow your favorite celebrity on Instagram?
2. Please state:
 - a. Who is your favorite celebrity?
3. Indicate how often you engage with the following using the following scale:

Time in minutes:

 - a. Approximately how many minutes a day do you spend on Instagram?
 - b. Of the minutes you spend on Instagram, how much of that time is spent viewing celebrity images on Instagram?
 - c. How many of those minutes are spent viewing your favorite celebrities images?

Appendix E: The Celebrity Attitude Scale

The purpose of this survey is to identify your views about famous persons. The responses you give are confidential. There are no right or wrong answers, so please answer as openly and thoughtfully as you can. For purposes of the survey we are defining the term “celebrity” as a famous living person (or one who died during your lifetime) that you greatly admire. Who is your favorite celebrity? (Please choose one famous person, as defined above).

MFC (My Favorite Celebrity)

5 = Strongly Agree; 4 = Agree; 3= Uncertain or neutral; 2 = Disagree; 1 = Strongly Disagree

1. If I were to meet MFC in person, he/she would already somehow know that I am his/her biggest fan.
2. One of the main reasons I maintain an interest in MFC is that doing so gives me a temporary escape from life's problems.
3. MFC is practically perfect in every way.
4. I share with MFC a special bond that cannot be described in words.
5. To know MFC is to love him/her.
6. When something bad happens to MFC I feel like it happened to me.
7. When MFC fails or loses at something I feel like a failure myself.
8. The successes of MFC are my successes too.
9. I consider MFC to be my soul mate.
10. When MFC dies (or died) I will feel (or I felt) like dying too.
11. If someone gave me several thousand dollars to do with as I please, I would consider spending it on a personal possession (like a napkin or paper plate) once used by MFC.
12. When something good happens to MFC I feel like it happened to me.
13. I am obsessed by details of MFC's life.
14. I have pictures and/or souvenirs of MFC which I always keep in exactly the same place.
15. I love to talk with others who admire MFC.
16. Keeping up with news about MFC is an entertaining pastime.
17. It is enjoyable just to be with others who like MFC.
18. I enjoy watching, reading, or listening to MFC because it means a good time.
19. Learning the life story of MFC is a lot of fun .
20. I like watching and hearing about MFC when I am with a large group of people.
21. My friends and I like to discuss what MFC has done .
22. I would gladly die in order to save the life of MFC.
23. If I were lucky enough to meet MFC, and he/she asked me to do something illegal as a favor, I would probably do it.
24. If I walked through the door of MFC's home without an invitation she or he would be happy to see me.
25. I have frequent thoughts about my celebrity, even when I don't want to.
26. I often feel compelled to learn the personal habits of MFC.
27. MFC would immediately come to my rescue if I needed help.
28. MFC and I have our own code so we can communicate with each other secretly (such as over the TV or special words on the radio) .
29. If MFC was accused of committing a crime that accusation would have to be false.
30. If MFC endorsed a legal but possibly unsafe drug designed to make someone feel good, I would try it.
31. News about my celebrity is a pleasant break from a harsh world.
32. If MFC found me sitting in his/her car, he or she would be upset.
33. It would be great if MFC and I were locked in a room for a few days.
34. If MFC saw me in a restaurant, he/she would ask me to sit down and talk.

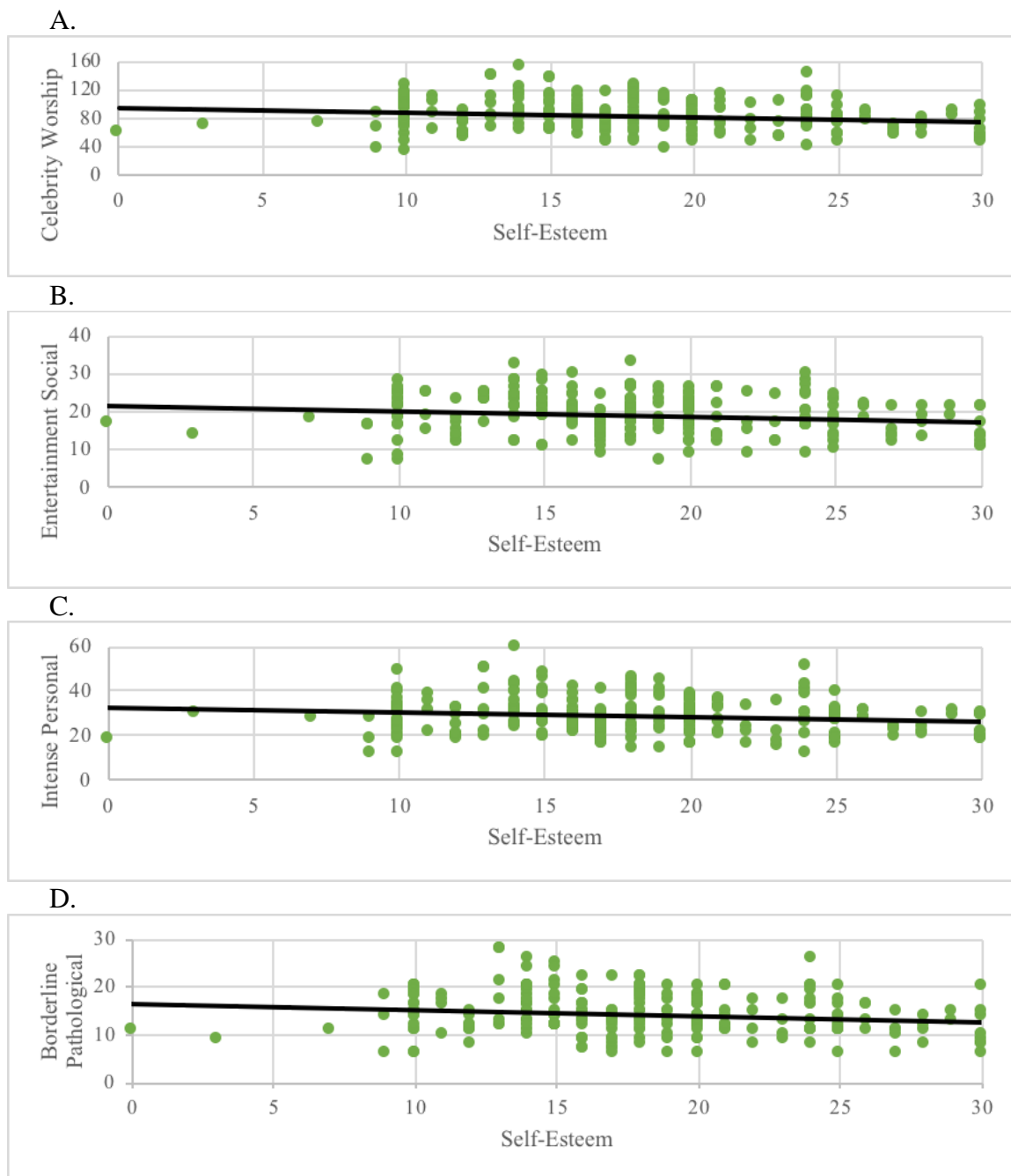


Figure 1. Significant negative correlation between self-esteem and celebrity worship. *A.* Significant negative correlation between self-esteem and a subcategory of celebrity worship, entertainment social celebrity worship. *B.* Significant negative correlation between self-esteem and a subcategory of celebrity worship, intense personal celebrity worship. *C.* Significant negative correlation between self-esteem and a subcategory of celebrity worship, intense personal celebrity worship. *D.* Significant negative correlation between self-esteem and a subcategory of celebrity worship, borderline pathological celebrity worship.

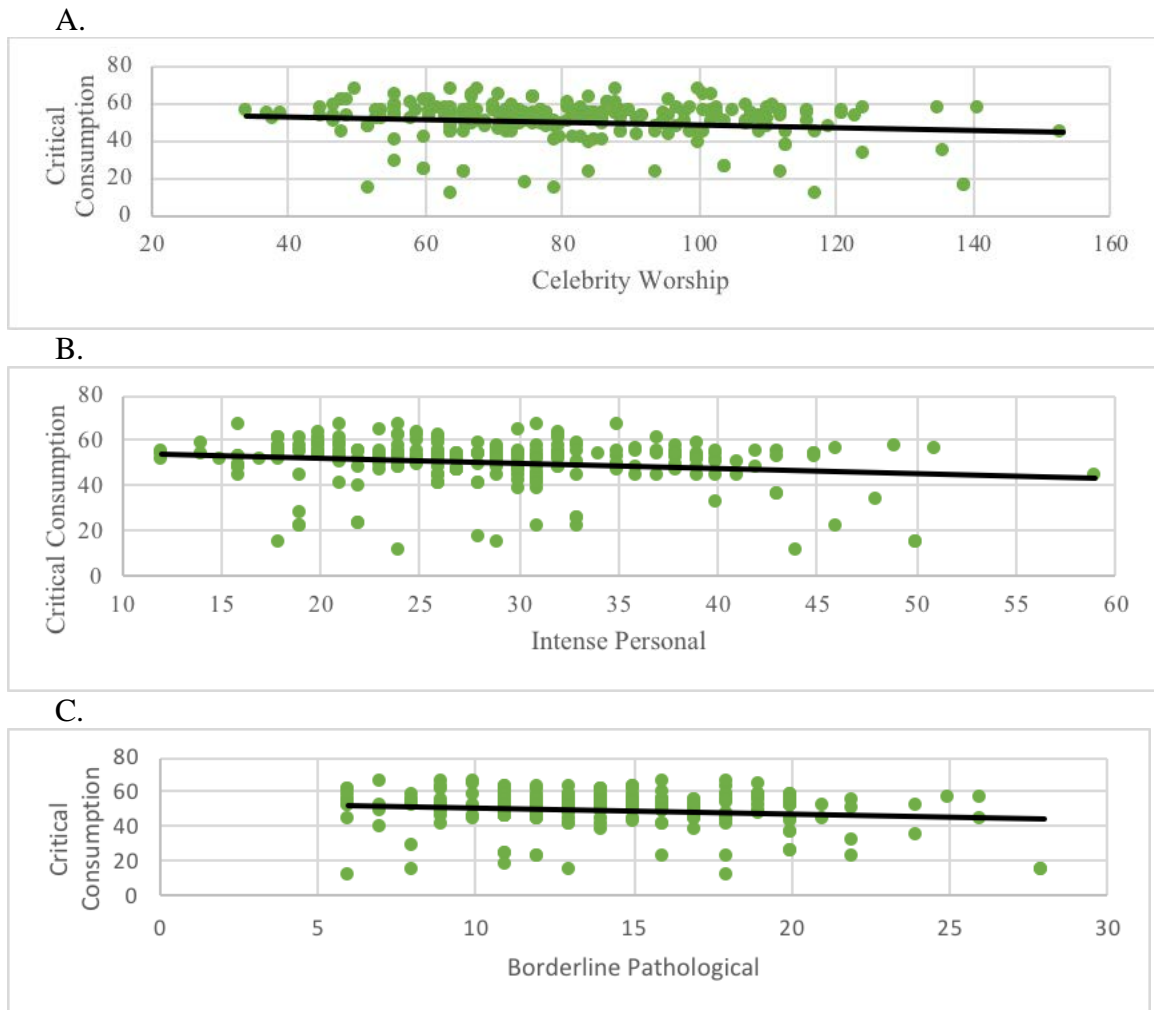


Figure 2. A. Negative correlation between critical consumption and celebrity worship. B. Negative correlation between critical consumption and intense personal celebrity worship. C. Negative correlation between critical consumption and borderline pathological worship.

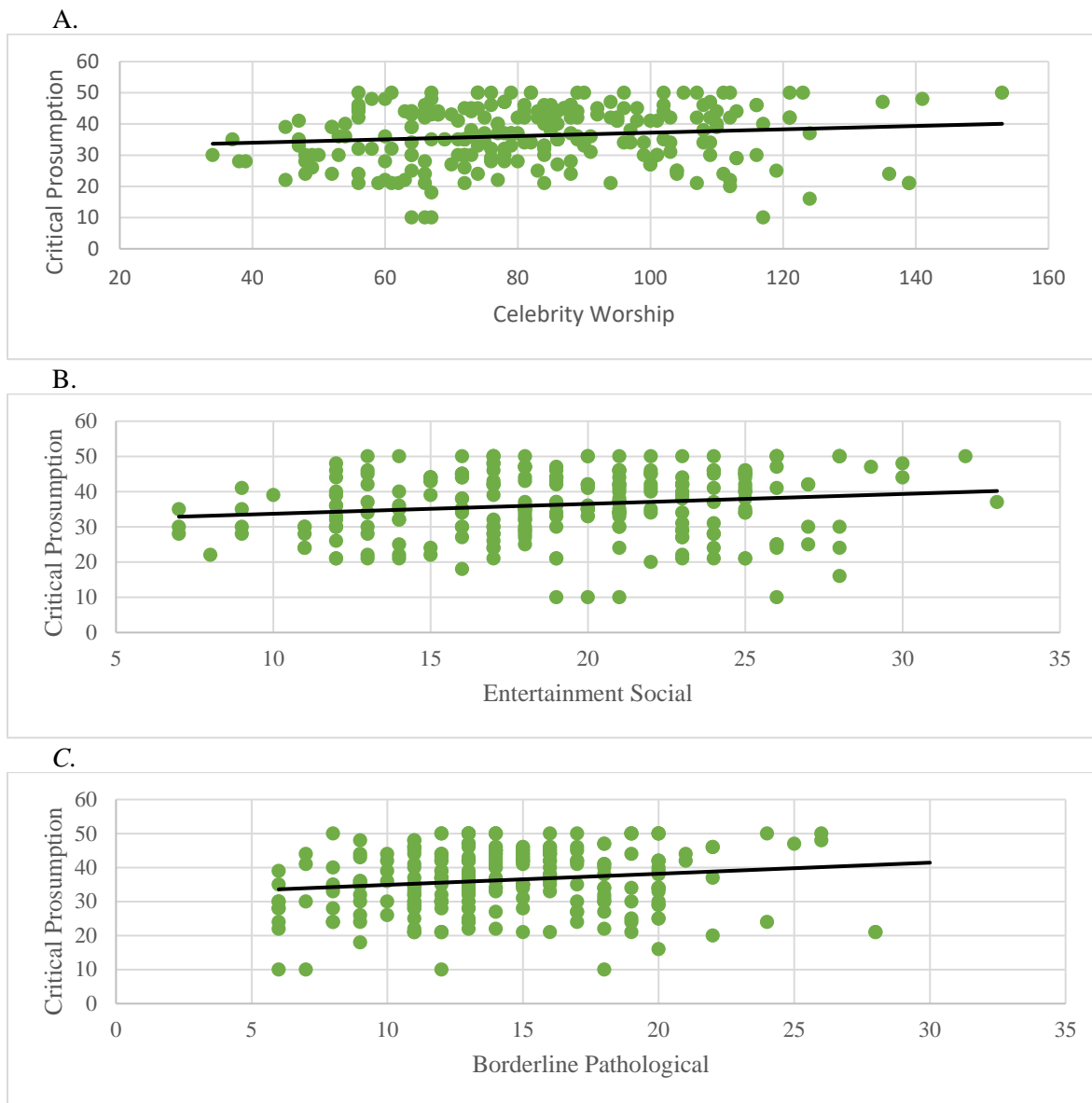
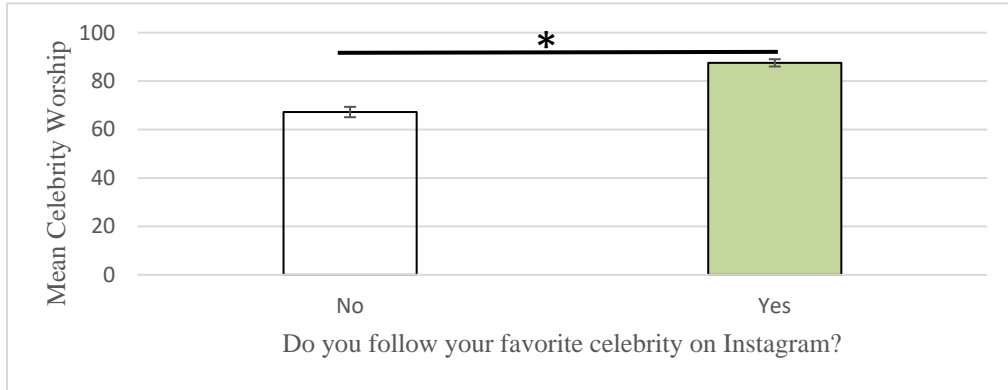
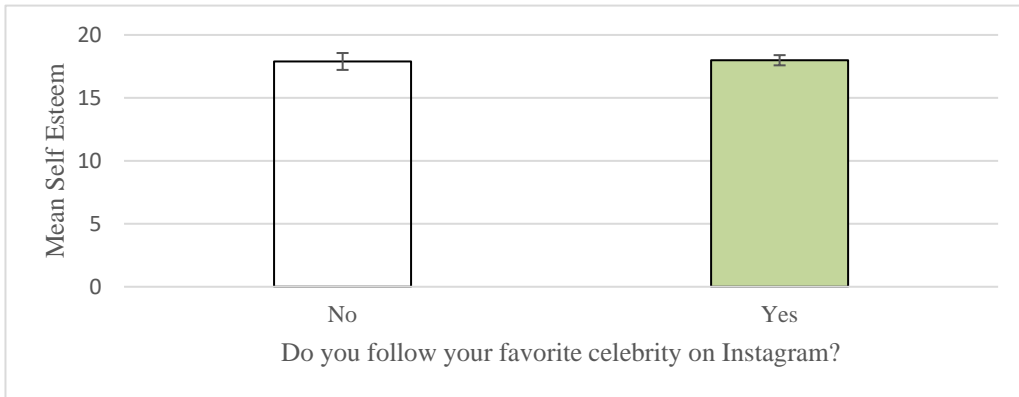


Figure 3. A. Positive correlation between critical prosumption and celebrity worship. B. Positive correlation between critical prosumption and entertainment social worship. C. Positive correlation between critical prosumption and borderline pathological worship.

A.



B.



C.

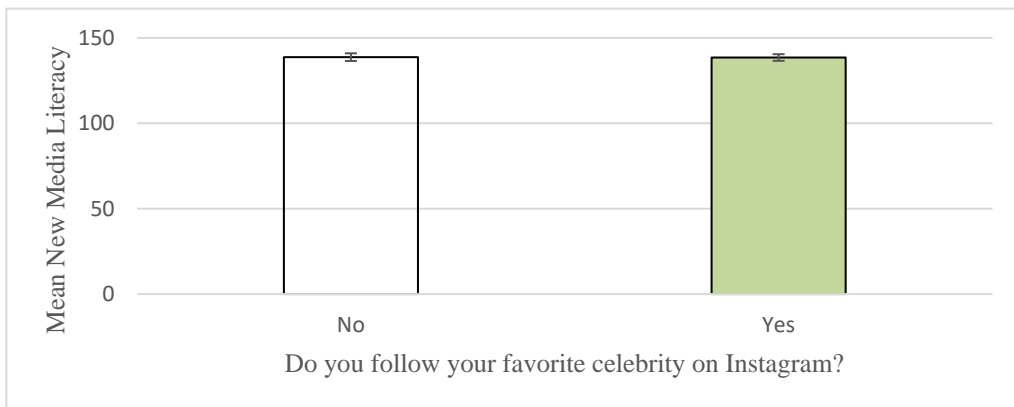


Figure 4. Mean difference in celebrity worship, self-esteem, and new media literacy between those who followed their favorite celebrity on Instagram and those who did not.

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