



Research Paper

Psychological Effects of Celebrity Interview Programs on YouTube: A Qualitative Study of Sri Lankan University Students

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of YouTube as a platform for long-form celebrity interview programs has significantly reshaped contemporary media consumption patterns, particularly among young adults. This study examines the psychological effects experienced by Sri Lankan university students after watching celebrity interview programs on YouTube, focusing on motivations, self-perception, emotional connection, identity reflection, and psychological reassurance. Employing a qualitative research design, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with undergraduate students from the Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal that celebrity interviews function as emotionally influential and psychologically meaningful media texts rather than mere entertainment. Participants reported increased motivation, normalization of failure, enhanced self-confidence, emotional comfort, parasocial bonding, and identity reflection. Cultural resonance further intensified these psychological effects. However, selective engagement also emerged, with some viewers reporting limited impact. This study contributes to international scholarship on digital media and celebrity culture by providing context-specific insights from Sri Lanka.

Keywords: YouTube, celebrity interviews, psychological effects, parasocial interaction, motivation, Sri Lanka

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I. Introduction

Digital media platforms have fundamentally reshaped how individuals access information, interact with public figures, and construct meaning in everyday life. Among these platforms, YouTube has emerged as one of the most influential spaces for long-form audiovisual content, particularly celebrity interview programs. Unlike traditional broadcast interviews, YouTube interviews are characterized by extended duration, conversational tone, emotional openness, and minimal institutional mediation. These affordances enable celebrities to narrate personal experiences in detail, fostering intimacy and perceived authenticity.

In Sri Lanka, YouTube-based celebrity interview programs such as *Talk with Chathura* and *Stand By with Lahiru* (Hari TV) have gained widespread popularity across linguistic and demographic groups. These programs feature celebrities from cinema, music, sports, politics, and entrepreneurship discussing personal struggles, failures, mental health challenges, family life, and success trajectories. University students constitute a particularly significant audience segment due to their high engagement with digital media and their transitional life stage, marked by identity formation, academic pressure, and psychological vulnerability.

Despite the popularity of such content, scholarly attention to the psychological effects of YouTube celebrity interview programs remains limited, particularly within South Asian contexts. Existing research on celebrity culture has largely focused on Western media environments, short-form content, or social media influencers. This study addresses this gap by exploring how Sri Lankan university students psychologically respond to celebrity interview programs on YouTube.

II. Literature Review

Celebrity culture has long been recognized as a powerful social and psychological phenomenon. Celebrities function as symbolic figures through whom audiences negotiate values, aspirations, and identity (Allen et al., 2016). Boon and Lomore (2001) describe admirer–celebrity relationships as parasocial interactions in which audiences form emotionally meaningful but one-sided bonds with media figures. Such relationships can influence self-concept, emotional regulation, and aspirational thinking.

Parasocial interaction theory posits that repeated media exposure can create an illusion of intimacy and friendship between audiences and media personalities. Horton and Wohl’s foundational work highlights that conversational media formats intensify parasocial bonds. On YouTube, the informal style, emotional disclosures, and extended narratives of celebrity interview programs are particularly conducive to such engagement, enabling viewers to perceive celebrities as relatable and trustworthy.

YouTube’s affordances, such as algorithmic personalization, long-form storytelling, and interactive comment features, facilitate emotional immersion. Strangelove (2010) argues that YouTube fosters participatory culture and perceived closeness between content creators and audiences. Dale et al. (2017) demonstrate that narrative-driven YouTube content can evoke self-transcendent emotions such as hope, empathy, and inspiration. Likewise, Balcombe and De Leo (2023) emphasize YouTube’s role as a source of emotional support, especially for young people experiencing loneliness or stress.

Research on celebrity narratives suggests that stories of struggle and resilience often serve as motivational frameworks for audiences (Benson & Adinlewa, 2022). However, scholars also warn of potential negative effects, such as unrealistic social comparison and emotional dissatisfaction (Moradi et al., 2024). Despite these insights, non-Western audience perspectives remain underrepresented in the literature, highlighting the need for context-specific studies like the present one.

III. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research design to explore participants’ subjective psychological experiences related to YouTube celebrity interview programs. A qualitative approach was chosen due to its suitability for examining internal perceptions, emotions, and meaning-making processes.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

Eighteen third-year undergraduate students from the Trincomalee Campus of the Eastern University of Sri Lanka participated in the study. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure regular viewership of celebrity interview programs on YouTube. The sample included students from various faculties, including Business and Communication Studies, Applied Sciences, and Siddha Medicine.

3.3 Data Collection

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted, each lasting between 20 and 40 minutes. Interviews took place in participants’ preferred language, were audio-recorded with informed consent, and were transcribed verbatim. Questions addressed YouTube viewing habits, emotional reactions to celebrity interviews, perceived motivational influences, and psychological effects.

3.4 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework, was used to identify patterns and interpretive themes within the data. The process involved coding transcripts, identifying themes, reviewing themes against the dataset, and developing a thematic map.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant academic authority. Participants provided informed consent, and their confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process.

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Motivational Reinforcement and Goal Reorientation

A dominant theme was motivational reinforcement. Participants reported heightened motivation after watching celebrity interview programs, particularly when celebrities shared stories of persistence and delayed success. These narratives encouraged viewers to reframe personal challenges as temporary and surmountable. This finding aligns with Social Learning Theory, which posits that individuals learn attitudes and behaviors through observing role models.

4.2 Normalization of Failure and Reduction of Psychological Distress

Many participants emphasized the psychological relief they experienced when celebrities openly discussed failure, rejection, and setbacks. Such disclosures helped normalize students' own academic and personal struggles, fostering emotional reassurance and reducing feelings of isolation. In the Sri Lankan context, where success is often highly valorized, these narratives served as counter-stories that challenged rigid achievement norms.

4.3 Enhancement of Self-Confidence and Self-Efficacy

Exposure to celebrity vulnerability enhanced participants' self-confidence and perceived self-efficacy. Students reported that recognizing successful individuals' struggles allowed them to reassess their own capabilities more compassionately. This contributed to healthier self-evaluation and reduced fear of failure.

4.4 Emotional Intimacy and Parasocial Bonding

Extended conversational formats facilitated strong emotional bonds. Participants described celebrities as emotionally supportive figures who provided companionship during stressful or lonely periods. These parasocial connections, while one-sided, carried genuine emotional consequences, reinforcing the psychological influence of the interview programs.

4.5 Identity Reflection and Aspirational Comparison

Celebrity narratives prompted reflection on personal identity, self-worth, and aspirational goals. While many participants found these narratives inspiring, a minority experienced mild self-doubt, particularly when comparing themselves to exceptionally resilient or talented celebrities. This dual effect underscores the complex nature of celebrity influence.

4.6 Emotional Regulation and Therapeutic Media Use

Participants also reported using celebrity interviews as coping mechanisms during emotional distress, such as anxiety or uncertainty. The interviews provided comfort and emotional regulation, indicating that YouTube interview content can function as a quasi-therapeutic media resource, especially in contexts with limited access to formal mental health services.

4.7 Cultural Resonance and Moral Alignment

Cultural resonance emerged as an important factor shaping psychological impact. Participants reported stronger emotional connections to celebrities whose narratives emphasized values such as humility, perseverance, and family responsibility. These values are deeply rooted in Sri Lankan cultural norms, enhancing credibility and emotional engagement.

4.8 Audience Agency and Selective Interpretation

Despite the significant psychological influence reported, some participants engaged with interview content primarily for entertainment and felt minimal psychological impact. These responses reflect audience agency and selective interpretation, suggesting that individual motivations and context influence the degree of psychological effect.

4.9 Theoretical and Scholarly Integration

The findings reinforce existing research on parasocial interaction, exemplar motivation, and emotional media effects while extending scholarship through culturally grounded insights. The long-form interview format on YouTube appears to amplify authenticity, emotional depth, and viewer resonance beyond other forms of celebrity media.

V. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that YouTube celebrity interview programs exert significant psychological influence on young Sri Lankan viewers. Through authentic storytelling and emotional accessibility, celebrities act as informal motivational and psychological resources. While psychological effects vary across individuals, most participants reported enhanced motivation, emotional reassurance, and identity reflection. By situating these findings within a non-Western context, this study contributes to international media and communication scholarship. Future research may adopt mixed-methods designs or cross-cultural comparisons to further investigate the psychological implications of long-form digital interview content.

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