

CELEBRIFICATION IN PHILIPPINE POLITICS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CELEBRITY ENDORSERS' PARASOCIABILITY AND THE PUBLIC'S VOTING BEHAVIOR

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Abstract

This article looks at the voting behavior of individuals as a correlate of Parasocial Interaction (PSI)—a ‘mediated rapport’ or ‘illusion of intimacy’ with TV personae. A non-random sample of those who voted during the May 2007 Philippine Senatorial Elections in Metro Manila and Bulacan were surveyed and asked to assess celebrity endorsers of senatorial candidates using the PSI Scale. Results showed that respondents have higher PSI with celebrity endorsers of candidates they voted for. Demographic variables were also tested as to whether they might be indicators of PSI. The survey tends to suggest that celebrity endorsers who have higher parasociability invoke positive action and behavior (i.e., voting for their candidates). This means that they are also somehow indirect agents of change similar to significant others, when they endorse politicians who are possible leaders of the country, although the findings also show that there are exceptions to this. The paper concludes by turning to Symbolic Interactionism (wherein celebrities are perceived to be ‘significant others’ who may affect individuals’ attitudes and behaviors), and notes the advertising implications of ‘celebrification’.

Keywords: *Parasocial interaction, Celebrity endorsers, Voting behavior, National elections*

Background: Defining “Celebrification”

“Celebrification”, or for others, “celebritification”, is a word coined by several writers to refer to the infusion and intrusion of the celebrity factor on behavior, and on the perception by an individual of a person, an idea, or a product, as an effect of the ‘parasocial’ interaction with the personalities of popular entertainment media. A few scholarly articles have mentioned this buzzword, implicating the similar connotation in differing contexts. ‘Celebritification’ was attributed to stalking as crime, when one party (usually the spectator) feels a relationship with the persona (the one being stalked), and sometimes a sense of being wronged and seeks some kind of retribution. Or

when the stalker, who is most often a stranger to the (celebrity) victim, deludedly thinks that there is a romantic bond between them (Wykes, 2007). Rich (2007) identifies a number of trends relating to the quality of politicians emerging in Pacific Asia of which one quality is attributed to the “celebritification” of politics: mixing the element of showbiz.¹

The ‘celebritification’ of ordinary people (transforming a relatively unknown individual into a famous one) is posited as an effect of “remarkable transmogrifications in television production, supply, and consumption” which have generated increased visibility and protagonism (expressions of positive perception) (Hartley, 2008).

Celebrities, unbound by political constraints, bring new perspectives which expand the range of ideas represented in our national dialogue. The celebrification of culture is a phenomenon that has been observed over the last 75 years. However, a system based on ‘celebrityhood’ risks the glorification of fame and fortune, such that there will be more superficiality and less substance in our society. West (2007) asserts that society is now the in the “Age of Celebrity”, where

(g)lamorous movie stars run for elective office and win. Former politicians play fictional characters on television shows. Rock stars and actresses raise money for a variety of humanitarian causes. Musicians, athletes, and artists speak out on issues of hunger, stem cell research, international development, and foreign policy (pp.1-2).

‘Celebrification’ is also the word suggested by the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism to describe a phenomenon seemingly rampant in the Philippine political landscape during elections—celebrities help politicians to be more popular, celebrities endorse candidates during election campaigning, and celebrities themselves become politicians wanting to *serve* the country (PCIJ, 2007). This has happened even before the 2004 national elections and suggests that the phenomenon will only become more and more prominent in Philippine politics as media plays a bigger role in the Filipino audiences’ everyday life.

Some examples of this phenomenon: the former Department of Trade and Industry Secretary Mar Roxas was elected senator when at that time he was romantically involved with Korina Sanchez, a well-known TV broadcast journalist. (They wed in 2009, timed to a year before the May 2010 Presidential Elections where Roxas became a vice-presidential candidate.) Celebrification also happened when then President Gloria Arroyo was endorsed by popular talk

show host Boy Abunda for the 2004 presidential elections. PCIJ asserts that the most popular among these celebrification instances was when the then unknown candidate Maria Ana Consuelo “Jamby” Madrigal overwhelmingly won seemingly because of the endorsement of actress Judy Ann Santos who joined Madrigal in her campaign rallies (Beronilla, 2007).

The role of celebrity endorsers does heighten the receptivity of the voters to the advertisements of political candidates. As Mangahas (2007) stated in a Social Weather Stations (SWS) press release two months before the May 2007 elections, “receptivity to political ads definitely matters... it matters differently to different senatorial candidates”. As part of the marketing mix in advertising endeavors, the interaction that celebrities have with their audiences during elections is a factor that affects the voters’ perceptions and actions.

Months before the May 2010 national elections, the Philippine Commission on Elections (Comelec) issued a resolution (Resolution 8758 to implement the ‘Fair Elections Act’ or Republic Act 9006) directing celebrity endorsers of political candidates to either go on leave or resign from their current media undertakings. In response, loud opinions against the said act were heard especially from the media practitioners and celebrities themselves, who asserted that the resolution violates their free speech rights and rights as citizens to support the candidates they like. The issue was hyped in the news and different networks, both TV and radio. Finally, the Comelec en banc lifted the resolution, saying that celebrity endorsers of political candidates are not required to resign or go on leave and it was left to the discretion of the network or the person involved (Business World, 2010). Celebrities are thus seen to play extremely significant roles during the time when citizens select whose name they will blacken in the election ballots.

Discussions on the concept of ‘celebrification/celebritification’ all describe the influence and power of celebrities across cultures today, although inquiry into why people have ‘halo’ perceptions of celebrities, and to explain the emergence of the culture of celebrification, is still lacking. Mass media and interpersonal relationships are the communication elements that play vital roles in celebrification; such is the unique effect of mass media on individuals that it can bear a resemblance to social interaction, affecting sensitive political affairs and informing the interaction between celebrity endorsers and the voting public. This paper draws on cybernetic and socio-psychological paradigms of the hybridity of mass communication and interpersonal communication to examine the phenomenon of celebrification in recent Philippine elections. The query focuses on the concept of some sort of mediated rapport, or the “illusion of intimacy”, which has been termed *parasocial interaction* between TV personae and the viewers.

Parasocial Interaction. Mass media and interpersonal communication are generally seen as two entirely different and extreme contexts of communication, but researchers have identified the phenomenon that binds these two contexts together: *parasocial interaction* (PSI) is an *atypical* consequence of television viewing when people process mass-mediated communication in a manner similar to interpersonal interaction; as opposed to the typical consequences of media as for merely knowledge and information (Rubin, 1994; Schiappa, 2005). Years after Horton and Wohl (1956) conceptualized this idea, PSI has been tagged as an imaginary, one-sided friendship and other intimate relationship a viewer has with a mass communication “persona” or character (Houlberg, 1984; Levy 1979; Perse & Rubin, 1990; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985; Sood & Rogers, 2000). Persona are the characters frequently seen on TV such as newscasters, soap opera actors and actresses portraying roles, and all other sorts of personalities on TV. Though the relationship is limited by the vicarious interaction of the persona and the viewer, the latter feels that s/he knows and understands the persona in the same way s/he knows and understands flesh-and-blood friends and intimate fellows; the TV personalities are “like other people in the viewers’ social circle” (Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985, p. 189).

Levy (1979) has explored the intricacies of parasocial interaction with TV newscasters in a study. His overall finding strongly suggests that parasocial interaction with news personae is a common feature of the audience experience with television news². The most general indicator of the parasocial relationship is Proposition 1 in Levy’s study—*almost like friends one sees every day*. From the focus group transcripts of the study, it is clear that few, if any, viewers confuse the newscasters with their actual friends. But many do relate to the broadcasters as ‘special’ people in their lives.

People who watch television news engage in varying degrees of parasocial interaction with the news personae. Those viewers who find the parasocial relationship particularly attractive or gratifying increase their exposure in order to increase their “contact” with the news personae (Levy, 1979, p.7). While it is possible that there is a threshold of exposure beyond which individuals will not increase their viewing in order to increase their parasocial interactions, it is also likely that establishing and maintaining parasocial interaction with the news personae is an important determinant of how much television news some people will watch (Levy, 1979).

Perse and Rubin (1989) examined parasocial interaction in the case of soap opera viewers³. Their analysis concluded that similar to social relationships, parasocial relationships with favorite soap opera characters were based, to some extent, on reduction of uncertainty and the ability to predict accurately the

feelings and attitudes of the persona. Perse and Rubin's study highlighted the utility of applying interpersonal frameworks to media contexts. Furthermore, their study implies that construct systems about real people and soap opera characters were linearly related; the link between social and parasocial complexity suggests that viewers are using a significant percentage of their interpersonal constructs when they describe soap opera characters (which is not surprising, given the emphasis of soap opera content on interpersonal relationships). Perse and Rubin's study indicates that people constitute a construct domain that may be sufficiently permeable to include both interpersonal and television contexts.

Koenig and Lessan (1985) investigated the relationship between television viewers and some television personalities. The survey measured the semantic space between the concepts: *self* and *best friend*, *acquaintance*, and *favorite television personality*.⁴ Results of their study revealed that television characters "hold an intermediate position between friend and acquaintance" (1985, p.264). The authors suggested the term "quasi-friend" as appropriate in describing the relationship between the viewer and a favorite television character.

Other studies have examined how parasocial interaction theory might be used to understand consumers' participation in online communities. Ballantine and Martin (2005) posit that for online community dependency to occur, an individual must have a pre-existing dependency on (and usage of) the Internet. Dependency on an online community is then predicted to lead to increased parasocial interaction, which then leads to increased usage of that community. The mediating role of parasocial interaction is reinforced by the inclusion of a direct path from online community dependency to online community usage. Moreover, and similar to Kozinets' (1999) proposition, a direct path flows from Internet usage to the usage of online communities. Finally, online community usage may lead to consumption-related behavior (e.g., a non-participative online community user may decide what product to purchase, decide to switch to another brand advocated by active members of an online community, and the like). A feedback loop is also included, indicating that subsequent to some type of consumption-related behavior occurring, an online community member will then return to the community.

Measuring Parasocial Interaction. How can parasocial interaction be measured then? The Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSIS) is a tool constructed by Rubin, Perse, and Powell in 1985; it was later modified by Allen (1988). PSIS has four psychological constructs which Allen has labeled as the following: (1) perceived similarity or idea coherence where the viewer shares the TV persona's beliefs and ideas, (2) physical attraction, (3) empathy or passive bonding, (4) empathic action or active bonding which requires overt viewer action to complete.

This 20-item PSIS proved to be reliable in this paper's utilization (Cronbach alpha = .89). It uses a 5-point Likert scale where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral/don't know, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Since Horton and Wohl's delineation of PSI, correlates and non-correlates have been identified in various empirical investigations to develop Parasocial Interaction Theory.⁵ Levy (1979) has found a positive correlation between age and PSI ($r = .24, p < .01$); older people have higher PSI with TV personae. He also discovered that education could be inversely linked to PSI ($r = -.52, p < .01$), less educated people have higher PSI with the TV personalities. Amount of time spent watching TV also has a moderate correlation with PSI in Levy's (1979) research ($r = .21, p < .05$); the idea is supported by Rubin and McHugh (1987) ($r = .12, p < .05$). The latter also found that when the TV persona is perceived to be physically attractive by the viewer, higher PSI could be exhibited by this viewer ($r = .33, p < .01$). Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) concluded that PSI could be slightly linked with relationship importance ($r = .16, p < .01$) wherein individuals who say relationships are important to them manifest higher PSI with TV personalities. Finally, Allen (1988) overwhelmingly discovered a very high correlation between ratings of TV newscasts and PSI with the newscasters ($r = .98, p < .01$)⁶. Aside from these findings, Rubin (1983) has also reported correlations between parasocial interaction and dependency on media sources for fulfilling particular social interactions needs (in Gregg, 1971). For some individuals, parasocial interaction is a functional alternative to interpersonal relationships (Rosengreen & Windahl, 1972; Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Rubin & Rubin, 1985).

Celebrity Endorsements. A celebrity endorser as defined by McCracken (1989), is "any individual who enjoys public recognition and who uses this recognition on behalf of a consumer good by appearing with it in an advertisement" (p.34). This public recognition can be due to the frequent appearances of these personalities on TV programs such as soap operas, variety shows, talk shows, and motion pictures, where they are able to project certain images that could impact on viewers, creating parasocial relationships between audience members and these celebrities. The endorsement by celebrities of a product or a service in an advertisement is similar to opinion leadership by significant others. Ohanian (1991) asserts that the popularity of celebrity advertising is explained by the advertisers' belief that messages delivered by well-known personalities achieve a high degree of attention and recall for some consumers. Highly credible sources such as celebrities have been found to produce more positive attitude changes toward the position advocated, and to induce more behavioral changes than less credible sources (Craig & McCann, 1978; Woodside & Davenport, 1974).

Advertising professor and practitioner Eleanor Agulto, describes the parallelism between commercial advertisements and political advertisements in an interview with *Philippine Journalism Reports* (PJR, 2007, in Junio & Laurio, 2007)— she emphasizes that, as compared to a product being endorsed, a candidate is also being sold in a political advertisement. More parallelism indicators are manifested in both types of advertisements: “...most TV (political) ads use the same devices in product advertisements – jingles, slogans, and testimonies, among other things...” (Junio & Laurio, 2007, p.20).

Jay Bautista, executive director of Nielsen Media Research Philippines (NMRP), a TV research agency, says that “selling an unknown candidate (is) like selling a new product” (Bautista, 2007, p.16; in Junio & Laurio, 2007).⁷ Brand identity to a political figure, combined with recall and ambassadorship of image, are the concepts considered by Filipino advertising strategists when looking for a celebrity endorser to bring a desirable effect to election campaigns. Parasocial interaction with the celebrity endorser may be subconsciously involved in how the public would opt to vote for a particular candidate.

The research questions of this study, which examines the relationship of parasocial interaction with the publics’ voting behavior during the May 2007 Senatorial Elections in the Philippines, are: What can be observed in the PSI of the voting individuals with celebrity endorsers of political candidates? Is there a correlation between the public’s voting behavior towards a celebrity endorsed-candidate and the PSI scores of these publics? Does PSI differ across various demographic variables (i.e., age, gender, annual family income, place of origin, and educational attainment) of the voting publics?

Method

Respondents. The target information is the publics’ PSI with 12 celebrity endorsers, to determine these publics’ voting behavior towards the candidates that these celebrities have endorsed during the said elections. Data were obtained from PSIS answers of Filipinos who were able to cast votes in the elections. The survey was conducted two months after the 2007 elections and used a purposive nonprobability sampling method. Volunteering-respondents (who answered the survey without any form of incentives) comprised 229 Filipino voters of different demographic backgrounds. The respondents were selected on the basis of specific characteristics until a sample of sufficient size was built up. The respondents are at least 18 years of age. Of these respondents, 42% are males and 58% are females, from urban Metro Manila (48%) and from San Miguel, Bulacan, a rural town in the province of Bulacan (52%)⁸. The respondents have varying socio-economic status as determined by their annual family income.

They also have varying educational attainment which will be discussed later in the results. The sample tended toward younger respondents (if compared for example to SWS 2007 data on the demographic profile of actual voters⁹); this will be discussed further in the section on demographic variables and PSI differences below. Given that the sample is not representative of the population, the study does not generalize but examines patterns of variations by socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the 228 cases and what they indicate with regard to ‘celebrification’. The use of significant tests (t-test, correlation, etc.) is only to emphasize how the purposive study cases differ on the main variable of interest (PSI score) by socio-economic and demographic characteristics.

Instrument. These voter-respondents were asked to answer firstly, a demographic information sheet asking for their age, gender, annual family income, place of residence, and educational attainment. Afterwards, they were asked to choose a name of a politician they had voted for from a list of candidates. Then they rated the celebrity endorser of that candidate using the Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSIS) which was presented to them in either an English or Filipino questionnaire¹⁰. The respondents were then asked again to pick another candidate, this time a candidate who they did not vote for during the elections, and give another PSIS-rating to the celebrity endorser of the “not voted for” candidate. In cases when there was more than one celebrity who endorsed the candidate, the respondent chose only one celebrity to rate. The list of candidates and celebrity endorsers from which the respondents chose is found in Table 1.

Variables. The first variable—*voting behavior*—was represented by respondents’ checking of two names on the given list of candidates. Each respondent was asked to check one name of a person who s/he voted for (positive voting behavior), and in another preceding portion, to check one name who s/he did not vote for (negative voting behavior).

The next variable, Parasocial Interaction (PSI), is consequent to the answer of each respondent to the first variable. Each respondent would determine his/her PSI with the celebrity endorser of the ‘voted for’ candidate, as well as with the celebrity endorser for the ‘not voted for’ candidate. (A list of senatorial candidates was given side-by-side with each candidate’s celebrity endorser.) PSI was then determined by the Parasocial Interaction Scale.

Senatorial Candidate	Celebrity Endorser (TV Persona)
Francis Escudero	Susan Roces
Manny Villar	Jennylyn Mercado Angel Locsin
Francis Pangilinan	Sharon Cuneta Judy Ann Santos
Noynoy Aquino	Kris Aquino
Edgardo Angara	Sarah Geronimo
Koko Pimentel	Angel Locsin
Ralph Recto	Vilma Santos Luis Manzano
Mike Defensor	Boy Abunda
Vic Sotto	Tito Sotto Joey De Leon

Findings

PSI of Celebrity Endorsers and the Voting Behavior of Individuals. Since the design of the instrument asked for two observations from each respondent, the 229 total sample size reflects 458 total observations (229 PSI scores for positive voting behavior [i.e., vote for the candidate], and 229 for negative voting behavior [i.e., not voting for the candidate]). Shown in Table 2, almost all celebrities have higher PSI scores among the respondents who voted for their endorsed candidates, and conversely, lower PSI among those who did not vote for the candidate, except for Vilma Santos who had an inverse effect – lower PSI to positive voting behavior.

Celebrity and Endorsed Candidate	Number of PSI observations			PSI MEAN SCORE ^b	
	Positive Voting Behavior	Negative Voting Behavior	Total Observations	Positive Voting Behavior	Negative Voting Behavior
Susan Roces for Chiz Escudero	35	20	55	65.66	52.3
Jennylyn Mercado for Manny Villar	17	10	27	3.94	48.4
Angel Locsin ^a for Manny Villar	28	9	37	65.71	60.44
Sharon Cuneta for Kiko Pangilinan	24	10	34	67.5	55.8
Judy Ann Santos for Kiko Pangilinan	10	9	19	72.5	0.67
Kris Aquino for Noynoy Aquino	25	16	41	74.76	57.81
Sarah Geronimo for Ed Angara	23	21	44	80.74	61.05
Angel Locsin ^a for Koko Pimentel	16	26	42	71.38	56.81
Vilma Santos for Ralph Recto	7	28	35	56.14	58.32
Luis Manzano for Ralph Recto	12	7	19	62.17	57.86
Boy Abunda for Mike Defensor	16	26	42	68.38	58.09
Vic Sotto for Tito Sotto	10	17	27	79.6	56
Joey De Leon for Tito Sotto	6	30	36	73	55

Notes: (a) Angel Locsin has two endorsements taken in this study: one case is for a winning candidate (Manny Villar), another is for a non-winning candidate (Koko Pimentel). (b) The highest possible score for PSI is 100, lowest is 20.

The PSI associated with positive voting behavior is found to be higher than with negative voting behavior. Susan Roces was rated by 35 respondents who voted for Chiz Escudero, giving her a PSI mean score of 65.66. Her PSI mean score among those who did not vote for Escudero (N = 20) is 52.3. Jennylyn Mercado, who endorsed Manny Villar in the 2007 senatorial elections had a PSI score of 73.94 for positive voting behavior and 48.4 PSI for non-voting behavior. Angel Locsin, who also endorsed Manny Villar, acquired PSI scores higher among those who voted for Villar compared to those who did not vote for Villar (65.71 and 60.44 respectively). Sharon Cuneta, who endorsed husband Kiko Pangilinan, gained 67.5 mean PSI for positive voting behavior and 55.8 for negative voting behavior.

Judy Ann Santos' PSI for voters of Kiko Pangilinan is 72.5, higher than among those who did not vote for Pangilinan (50.67). This is the same with Kris Aquino who endorsed brother Noytoy Aquino, with PSI for positive voting behavior of 74.76, and 57.81 for negative voting behavior. The pattern also applies to celebrity endorsers Sarah Geronimo for Ed Angara (80.74 for Angara's voters, 61.05 for non-voters), Luis Manzano for father-in-law Ralph Recto (62.17 for positive voting behavior, 57.86 for negative voting behavior), Boy Abunda endorsing Mike Defensor (68.38 for Defensor's voters, and 58.09 for non-voters), Vic Sotto endorsing brother Tito Sotto (79.6 for Sotto's voters, and 56.0 for non-voters), and Joey de Leon endorsing Tito Sotto as well (73.0 for positive voting behavior, and 55.0 for negative voting behavior).

Angel Locsin's case is a special concern in this study as she was to be rated by PSI Scale for two endorsements—Villar (a winning candidate) and Pimentel (a non-winning candidate)—to find out if there is any difference in the way she is rated by people who voted and did not vote for Villar and Pimentel. For her endorsement of Pimentel, Angel acquired 42 respondents. Sixteen of them reported positive voting behavior for Pimentel. The average PSI they gave Angel Locsin was 71.38. The other 26 respondents had negative voting behavior for Pimentel. The average PSI score for Angel Locsin among them was 56.81. At this point, it can be also observed that, in the case of positive voting behavior, Angel Locsin has higher PSI among Pimentel voters than among Villar's voters. However, Angel has lower PSI among Pimentel's non-voters than Villar's non-voters. This might be an indicator of the contribution of Angel Locsin's celebrity endorsement to the winning outcome of Villar and non-winning result of Pimentel's candidacy.

Vilma Santos endorsed her husband Ralph Recto. A total of 35 respondents rated Vilma. Of these, seven respondents reported positive voting behavior for Recto. The average PSI score Vilma Santos had among them was

56.14. The other 28 respondents said they have negative voting behavior for Recto. These respondents gave Vilma Santos an average PSI score of 58.32. As compared to other endorsements, Vilma Santos is the only celebrity who got PSI scores marginally higher among those with negative voting behavior than those with positive voting behavior towards Recto. It might suggest that Vilma Santos is not a significant factor in the considerations of the public when choosing Recto, given the relatively low PSI scores she received. Or it can be that, Vilma Santos' celebrity endorsement has a neutral to negative effect on Recto. Table 2 provides the complete tabulation of PSI mean scores along with the total observations for each case.

With regard to the possible correlation of the two variables – *PSI* and *voting behavior* – Point Biserial Correlation¹¹ reveals a moderate positive correlation between the two variables ($r = .421, p < .01$). The fair degree of relationship means that the two variables – celebrity PSI and *voting behavior* – coincide with each other.

Demographic variables and PSI differences. The following are the findings on the differences of PSI across different demographic variables:

Age. The *Age* demographic variable was divided into three clusters when respondents answered the survey. Of the 229 sample size, 84 respondents are 18-21 years old or 36.7% of sample size; 80 respondents belong to the 22-30 years old age group (34.9% of the sample size), and 65 are aged 31 and above (28.4%). This has skewed the results toward the significance of PSI among the younger voters in the population¹².

Using Tukey HSD Analysis of Variance, there are three findings from the survey: firstly, there is no significant difference in the PSI mean scores between the 18-21 (PSI Mean score = 71.23) and 22-30 (PSI mean score = 72.61) age groups (mean difference = 1.38, $p < .802$); second, there is no significant difference between PSI mean score given by age groups 18-21 (PSI mean score = 71.23) and 31above (PSI mean score = 65.89) (mean difference = 5.34, $p < .57$); and finally, there is a significant difference on the mean scores given by age groups 22-30 (PSI mean score = 72.61) and 31-above (PSI mean score = 65.89) (mean difference = 6.72, $p < .01$). In other words, the age groups 22-30 years old respondents and 31above respondents differ significantly in rating the celebrities with the Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSIS). Young adults (22-30) may have a higher receptivity to ads.

Generally, the 'young adults' have significantly higher PSI than older people. This finding is in general alignment with the SWS pre-election survey in 2007,

wherein more younger voters surveyed said that they paid attention to information from political ads (only 17-18% of the respondents age 44 and younger reported that ads were “no help” to them compared with the surveyed voters of age 45 and up wherein 23-28% said ads were of “no help” to them) (Mangahas, 2007).

Gender. A total of 96 males (42%) and 133 females (58%) participated in the survey. The T-test showed that there is a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the PSI mean scores given by male (PSI mean score = 65.61) and female (PSI mean score = 73.53) respondents to those celebrity endorsers of candidates they voted for Senator. Meanwhile, there is no significant difference ($p < .974$) in the PSI mean scores of male (PSI mean score = 56.82) and female (PSI mean score = 56.89) respondents toward those celebrity endorsers of the candidate whom they did not vote for. Seemingly, females rate higher (PSI = 73.53) than males (PSI = 65.61) in terms of PSI. This is in the case of celebrity endorsers of voted candidates only, wherein the difference between male and female PSI is highly significant (mean difference = 7.92, $p = .000$).

The observation of higher PSI scores among females than among males might be attributed to the nature of the TV personality to whom males feel closest, since in this study, there was no newscaster who acted as celebrity endorser. As Koenig and Lessan (1985) found in their study on PSI, male viewers are closest first to newscasters, then to talk show hosts, and to sitcom characters, whereas females do not differentiate among the three types of TV personalities (females can have high PSI with all of them). Another explanation could be that women are ‘very high frequency’ viewers of TV—per the statistics released by Business Mirror (2007), women spend more time watching TV. Rubin and McHugh (1987) termed this as ‘viewing tenure’. They found that the longer the exposure of a person to TV, the higher PSI s/he may have to a TV personality. Unfortunately, viewing tenure was not a variable included in the survey conducted.

Annual Family Income. This demographic information is based on a bracketing scheme identifying a range of annual family income of Filipinos. Initially, a 9-bracket scale taken from the University of the Philippines Socialized Tuition Fee Assistance Program as of 2007 (*STFAP Bulletin*, 2007) was used to determine the respondent’s annual family income as a measure of socio-economic status. The distribution of respondents according to their estimated annual income were: 37 or 16% of the sample population belonging to Bracket 1/Php 0-45,000; 15 or 6.6% to Bracket 2/Php45,001-55,000; 25 or 10.9% to Bracket 3/Php55,001-65,000; 14 or 6.1% to Bracket 4/Php65,001-80,000; 25 or 10.9% to Bracket 5/Php80,001-130,000; 13 or 5.7% to Bracket 6/Php130,001-

170,000; 25 or 10.9% to Bracket 7/Php170,001-210,000); 21 or 9.2% to Bracket 8/Php210,001-250,000; and 54 or 23.6% to Bracket 9/Php250,001 and above. The 9-bracket scale was then collapsed into two binary groups: Brackets 1-5 and Brackets 6-9 to signify two extremes of socio-economic status: those who are relatively poor (Brackets 1-5) and those who are relatively rich (Brackets 6-9).¹³

The T-test shows that there is no significant difference in the PSI mean scores given by respondents who belong to Brackets 1-5 (PSI mean score = 69.54) and Brackets 6-9 (PSI mean score = 70.87) with celebrity endorsers of ‘voted’ candidates ($p < .483$). On the other hand, there is a significant difference between the PSI scores given by respondents who belong to Brackets 1-5 (PSI mean score = 58.41) and Brackets 6-9 (PSI mean score = 54.42) with those celebrity endorsers of the candidate for whom they did not vote ($p < .05$). In other words, those respondents who belong to the lower income set have higher PSI than those who are relatively richer, which is a finding consistent with an SWS nationwide survey on voters’ receptivity to ads (Mangahas, 2007).

Place of Residence. To look at possible implications of PSI, the types of place of residence in this study were classified between rural and urban. There were respondents from Metro Manila (a graduate students’ dorm in Quezon City, a distributing firm in Makati, and a bakery plant in its commissary division in Libis, Quezon City), and respondents from Bulacan (town of San Miguel), a rural area. One hundred nine (109) of the respondents were from Metro Manila (47.6%) and 120 were from Bulacan (52.4%).

Results of the T-test on the mean scores given by respondents from the two places of residence show that there is a significant difference between the PSI scores given by the respondents from Metro Manila (PSI average = 66.91) and Bulacan (PSI average = 73.21) to those celebrity endorsers of ‘voted’ candidates (mean difference = 6.3, $p < .001$). There is also a significant difference in the PSI scores given by the respondents from Metro Manila (PSI average = 54.02) and Bulacan (PSI average = 59.45) to celebrity endorsers of candidates for whom they did not vote (mean difference = 5.43, $p < .013$).

Rural and urban people therefore (as represented by our respondents’ PSI scores), appear to differ in their parasocial interaction with celebrities. The rural respondents apparently feel more “intimacy” with celebrities than the urban respondents. This finding is consistent with the findings of related surveys.¹⁴ It could be inferred that perhaps people in the metropolis appreciate celebrities to have lesser influence, and lesser ‘friends-like’ projection. The given zones (Metro Manila and Bulacan) would differ in their cultures of distance. Para-

proxemics (or distance established between two people when they interact) varies in the two given spheres. It may be that differences in the viewers' exposure to TV is a factor. In the province, a culture of interconnection encompasses TV personalities whom they can see almost every day. San Miguel, Bulacan (particularly in the surveyed barangays – Buga, Salacot, and Ilog-Bulo) has a population deriving livelihood primarily from agriculture, where many are farmers and vendors. However, most residents are very exposed to TV, perhaps because of lack of other activities.

Education. For the *Educational attainment* demographic variable, the gathered data indicating highest educational attainment were nonnormal – the distribution lacks fairly close counts. Hence, the researcher divided the highest educational attainment into two for the statistical significance analysis.¹⁵ Fifty-five respondents (24% of the total sample) are part of the *No Formal Schooling – High School Graduate* educational attainment cluster. One hundred seventy-four respondents (76% of the total sample) have *Some Vocational to Graduate Studies* education.

Respondents who have *No formal schooling up to High School Graduate* education gave an average PSI score of 70.0 to celebrity endorsers of a 'voted' candidate. Those respondents who have *Some Vocational up to Graduate Studies* for highest educational attainment had a PSI mean score of 70.26 given to the celebrity endorsers of a 'voted' candidate. These two means have no significant difference ($p < .907$)¹⁶.

Respondents who have *No formal schooling - High School Graduate* had a mean PSI score of 60.31 toward the celebrity endorsers of a 'not voted' candidate, while those respondents who have *Some Vocational up to Graduate Studies* had a mean PSI score of 55.21 toward the celebrity endorsers of a not voted candidate. These two mean scores have a significant difference ($p < .033$), unlike the mean scores given to the celebrities that endorsed a voted candidate, for which there was no significant difference between these two groupings. Seemingly, all of the respondents regardless of their educational attainment agree on the PSI given to celebrity endorsers of a voted for candidate. But they differ in the way they interact with celebrity-endorsers of not voted candidates.

Conclusion

Parasocial interaction transforms celebrities (or the *TV personae* in Horton and Wohl's [1956] words), into what Symbolic Interactionism suggests are '*significant others*' (or 'orientational others'), people who have an influence on an individual's attitudes and behaviors via their mediated 'friendship' or rapport

with the viewing public. When the public sees celebrities as friends, acquaintances, neighbors, or even lovers, symbolic interaction (Popkin, 1991) with such TV personae takes place. Celebrity endorsers may thus become influential in the voting decision of the audiences.

This study has made some empirical findings on parasocial interaction and the phenomenon of ‘celebrification’ in Philippine politics in the context of political advertising in the 2007 elections among respondents from Metro Manila and San Miguel, Bulacan. Albeit inconclusive as it is a non-random sample, the celebrity endorser PSI scores in the sample of 228 respondents tend to show that younger respondents have higher parasocial interaction than the older respondents; that lower-income respondents tend to have higher PSI than high-income respondents; and that rural-dweller respondents tend to have higher PSI than urban respondents. The survey also indicates that female respondents tend to have higher PSI than males, and that PSI scores do not vary with educational attainment. Different kinds of people in the sample maintain varying degrees of PSI with various personae. In particular, respondents classified as ‘young adults’ (age 22-30) had higher PSI than older people (which contrasts with Levy’s findings in 1979). Gender may be potentially an indicator of PSI as the female respondents tended to have higher PSI than the males (consistent with Koenig and Lessan’s [1985] conclusions). Mass media audiences from the rural areas may have higher PSI towards celebrities than urbanites. There are no observations with regard to education as a demographic factor, however, since this study lacked normal distribution regarding the *education* variable.

Endnotes

¹Other qualities mentioned include decline in military figures, the growing role of women, and the struggle against the gangsterization of politics (Rich, 2007).

²He used a focus group discussion with two dozen adults living in the greater Albany Country, New York region. The focus group participants were selected from a variety of social backgrounds and all watched television news regularly. Transcripts of each hour-long discussion were analyzed for viewer attitudes toward television news programs and a propositional inventory of 42 uses and gratifications items was prepared from this analysis. Based on the discussion of parasocial interaction, seven propositions were selected as possible indicators of parasocial interaction. The results showed that on the average, more than half (53%) of respondents agreed with the parasocial interaction propositions, with support for the measures ranging from a low of 31% to a high of 80% (Levy, 1979).

³One hundred five soap opera-viewing college students completed questionnaires constructed from the theories to be tested (i.e., Uncertainty Reduction, Personal Construct). Personal Construct Theory (PCT) illustrated that soap opera viewers may extend the range of their interpersonal construct systems to form impressions of television characters. Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) pointed out that reduced uncertainty about characters partially explains the development of parasocial relationships (Perse & Rubin, 1989). Their discussion focuses on implications of these findings for uncertainty reduction theory and personal construct theory.

⁴Students enrolled in an undergraduate social psychology class at a Southern university were instructed to give a questionnaire to their parents or any other male and female adult non-students of their acquaintance. Data were obtained from 195 adults. Male viewers' responses in the study indicated newscasters were the closest to the self in semantic space, followed by talk show hosts, and sitcom characters. Female viewers, however, did not differentiate among the three types of program characters.

⁵Auter and Palmgreen (1992) found a moderate positive correlation ($r = .33, p = .0008$) between television viewer's 'parasociability' and parasocial interaction with television characters in a sitcom viewed in their study. The researchers altered a scale designed by Rubin and Perse (1987) to measure parasociability or "a subject's parasocial relationship with his or her favorite TV character" (p. 60). Furthermore, parasociability was found to be positively correlated with three of the four Audience-Persona Interaction (measure of PSI by Auter & Palmgreen) subscales: Interest in Favorite Character ($r = .29, p = .0034$), Favorite Character's Problem Solving Ability ($r = .35, p = .0005$), and Group Identification/Interaction ($r = .22, p = .02$). Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) found positive correlations between PSI and identification with favorite character ($r = .18, p = .04$); perceived realism ($r = .24, p = .01$).

⁶The study was replicated by Cook (1993) resulting in an almost exact finding that parasocial scores of TV newscasters and TV news industry ratings are correlated (r is .96 for 6pm local news, and .98 for 11pm news).

⁷He further emphasizes,

... If there's a new product not known to anyone, TV or mass media allows you to introduce the product and make people aware of it. Similar to a political candidate who is not a national figure, mass media allows him to be seen and heard and make the voters aware that he is running. (Junio & Laurio, 2007, p.21).

⁸For Metro Manila areas, most of the respondents were associated with two private organizations and one public institution, namely: the Red Ribbon Bakeshop with main office located in Libis, Quezon City; RYCO corporation located in Makati City; and a graduate residence hall in UP Diliman, Quezon City. The Bulacan respondents came from selected areas of the town of San Miguel: there were respondents from selected households of neighboring barangays of Salacot, Buga, and Ilog-Bulo. Lastly, there were a number of respondents from the Bulacan Polytechnic College.

⁹Note: Given the non-randomness of the sample, the present study does not aim to confirm or negate findings of the SWS, which are based on representative sample.

¹⁰Both have reliability values (Cronbach's alpha = .89 and .87 respectively).

¹¹Point Biserial Correlation considers a special combination of variables where one is interval (PSI scores 20-100) and the other is dichotomous – voting behavior – ‘voted for’ (coded as 1) and ‘not voted’ (coded as 0).

¹²According to SWS in their March 15-18, 2007 pre-election survey, less than 9% of voters belonged to the 18-24 age bracket; around 23% are aged 25-34, 25% are 35-44; 20% are 45-54, and the remaining 23% belongs to 55+ (SWS, 2007).

¹³This sample is not representative of the actual income distribution of voters in the Philippine population. In the SWS report, only 7% of actual voters belong to the dwelling class ABC, 68% are considered class C, and 26% belong to class D (Mangahas, 2007).

¹⁴In terms of the rural and urban dwellers' receptivity to ads, SWS says in their survey, that those voters who live in the rural areas have more receptivity to political ads (18% of rural respondents said ads were “no help”) than those who were in the urban (25% said ads were “no help”) (Mangahas, 2007).

¹⁵For comparison, SWS reported that 16% of voters in 2007 have ‘No/Some Elementary education’, 29% are ‘Elementary graduate/Some High School’, 42% are ‘High School Grad/some college’, and 13% are ‘College graduates’. (Mangahas, 2007)

¹⁶SWS also found in their 2007 survey that the receptivity to political ads does not vary by education (along with gender) (Mangahas, 2007).

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