

PARASOCIAL INTERACTION ON SOCIAL MEDIA:
HOW SOURCE IDENTIFICATION AFFECTS BRAND TRUST

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of source identification on parasocial interaction and brand trust on social media by comparing perceptions of marketer-generated social media content from brand accounts with no identified author to content from the accounts of the brand's CEO. Guided by the theory of parasocial interaction, the study used a 2 (identity) x 3 (social media channel) mixed factorial experiment. Identity was a within-subjects factor and social media channel was a between-subjects factor.

This quantitative online survey experiment of 104 university student participants found that, while there was a significant positive correlation between parasocial interaction and brand trust, $r(204)=0.581$, $p<0.001$, and a significant difference between levels of parasocial interaction and brand trust between the two source types, $F(1, 208)=8.976$, $p=0.003$ and $F(1, 208)=7.27$, $p=0.008$, higher levels of parasocial interaction and brand trust were perceived in the content from the brand account with no identified author, ($M=25.615$, $SD=5.885$), than from the CEO, ($M=23.612$, $SD=6.059$). This result is opposite of what was predicted based on a review of the literature: that the content from the CEO's account would have higher levels of brand trust and parasocial interaction. The findings of this study can inform practical decisions on using CEOs in social media marketing.