Look What You Made Me Do: The Perceived Identity Threat on Destructive Criticism among the Swifties

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Abstract: Identity threat is alluded to as the existence of a social identity, aligning oneself with an environmental influence. The researchers aimed to study perceived identity threat in the forms of constructive and destructive criticism and its effects on the negative affect by exploring the fan culture of the Swifties community. This study predicted that destructive criticisms will evoke greater negative emotions than constructive criticisms, and this relationship is affected by the level of parasocial relationships (low, average, high). A total of 38 conveniently sampled self-identified Swifties from De La Salle University participated in this study. A mixed factorial design was employed to record the emotional responses of the participants toward the criticisms of Taylor Swift across common controversial issues using the PANAS (Positive and Negative Affect Schedule) scale to assess their negative affect. The researchers conducted paired samples t-test and mixed factorial analysis of variance to analyze the main and interaction effects of identity threat and parasocial relationship to negative affect. Greater reports of negative affect were observed in the destructive criticism condition compared to constructive criticism, and these scores were subject to the parasocial relationship level, indicating a significant interaction effect. The researchers recommend conducting similar studies to explore other fanbases and assess other reactions to identity threat.

Key Words: Identity Threat; Parasocial Relationship, Fan Culture

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital age advancement through social media developed interaction with trends, people, and figures. This way, people could connect and build relationships with the figures they admired and followed Pan (2021). Through this perspective of adoration, it is common for fans to react disproportionately to issues related to their idols because of the self-identification that helps them escape reality by forming social interactions with a celebrity.

Criticism can cause identity threat, with different types impacting the degree. Criticism has two forms: constructive criticism, which involves kind delivery with mentions of improvement, strengths, and weaknesses (Fong et al., 2016), and destructive, which is inconsiderate and overly personal negative feedback without any mention of improvement (Raver et al., 2011).

Focusing on the Swiftie community, this research studied the effects of the perceived identity threats. The researchers hypothesized that identity threat would be triggered when Swifties with a strong parasocial interaction encounter destructive criticism by feeling more intense negative affect than those with a weak parasocial interaction.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

The study employed a mixed factorial design to explore the emotional responses of individuals toward identity threat with parasocial interaction level as the between-subject quasi-variable.

2.2 Instruments

Swifties ages 19-26 (M = 20.7, SD = 1.53) from De La Salle University were conveniently sampled (N = 38), with 26 females and 12 males. For each constructive or destructive criticism surrounding Taylor Swift, their distress and irritability were measured to assess perceived identity threat, conditioned as constructive and destructive criticism, using Watson et al.'s (1988) PANAS scale (1 = very slightly/not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = moderately, 4 = quite a bit, 5 = extremely). Lastly, their parasocial interaction was measured using Bocarnea & Brown's (2007) Celebrity-Persona Parasocial Interaction Scale (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the paired samples t-test revealed a greater negative affect for destructive condition (M = 3.05, SD = 1.184) than constructive (M = 2.16, SD = 0.936), $t(37)$ = 05.16, p < 0.001, with a large effect size (Cohen's d of -0.837), confirming the researchers' first hypothesis.

Using mixed factorial analysis of variance, the interaction effects were significant, $F(2,35)$ = 11.54, p < 0.001, η^2 = 0.096, confirming that parasocial level was a factor that further explains the effects of identity threat on negative affect. The direct effects of identity threat and parasocial interaction are significant, $F(1,35)$ = 6.71, p = 0.028, and $F(2,35)$ = 3.74, p = 0.034, respectively.
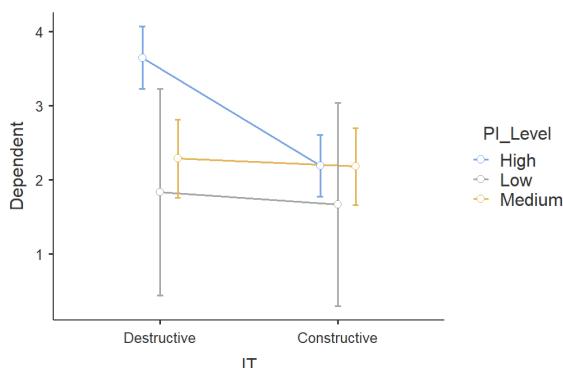

Fig. 1. Marginal Means Plot of Identity Threat and Parasocial Interaction Level

The destructive condition with high parasocial levels reported a statistically greater negative affect than that of medium parasocial levels, $t(35)$ = 4.112, p = 0.003. Meanwhile, high parasocial interaction reported a stronger negative affect for the destructive condition than those with average parasocial interaction of the same condition, $t(35)$ = 4.475, p = 0.001. Lastly, the reported negative affect of the destructive condition with a high parasocial interaction is higher than that of constructive, $t(35)$ = -8.035, p < 0.001.

As predicted, when participants were exposed to both constructive and destructive criticism, they generally reported greater negative affect toward the destructive than the constructive criticism. The trend revealed higher levels of negative affect among Swifties with high parasocial interaction amidst different forms of criticism.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Statistical support provided evidence that perceived identity threats could trigger negative affect (Sanderson, 2013), and the source of the perceived identity threat, being criticism in this study, can affect the level of negative affect a person reports (Evangelista, 2019).

This study recognized limitations with the specificity of the icon associated with parasocial relationships. Studying other fanbases would add greater significance to the hypotheses if replicated with similar results in different communities.

The researchers recommend investigating other effects of identity threat on fan communities, as this study was limited to assessing reports of distress and irritability using PANAS. Exploring other areas will provide a more nuanced understanding of fan culture.

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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