

# How Japanese Consumers Respond to Corporate Twitter Accounts: The Role of Perceived Personality and Parasocial Relationship

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## Abstract

Social media has changed the way corporations communicate and engage with consumers and connect consumers with brands, leading to essential changes in the advertising process. Despite the growing importance of social media as a corporate communication channel, little is known about how consumers respond to them and what factors influence following corporate Twitter accounts in the Japanese context. This study explores what motivates consumers to follow corporate Twitter accounts and what kinds of personality and parasocial relationships consumers perceive with these accounts. Furthermore, the study looks at the relationship between the perceived personality of corporate Twitter accounts, the parasocial relationship with the account, and the outcomes of the account following, such as brand liking and information sharing. The study conducted an online survey of Japanese followers of the corporate Twitter account. The findings revealed a set of perceived account personalities, including cheerfulness, competence, sophistication, reservedness, and sincerity, as well as two dimensions of parasocial relationships, such as identification and affective relationship. The mediation analysis revealed that the parasocial relationship mediated the relationship between the perceived account personality and the outcomes of the account following.

**Keywords:** corporate Twitter account, perceived account personality, parasocial relationship

## Introduction

Corporate communication in mass media has often been one-way and directed

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at developing relationships with consumers, primarily for the utilitarian purposes, including corporate information sharing and trust building (Han, Min, & Lee, 2016). Social media has changed how corporations communicate and interact with consumers, brought consumers closer to corporations and brands, and led to significant changes in the advertising process. Based on a content analysis focusing on the Twitter use of 44 global brands, Kwon and Sung (2011) highlighted the corporation's strategy to exhibit human personalities on their Twitter accounts through human representatives and verbal expressions to build relationships with consumers.

Japanese companies also seek to build brand personality and foster consumer engagement on Twitter, in addition to fully launched advertising campaigns. Amusing and entertaining corporate accounts by "a person inside" that humanizes and personifies the brand are winning followers. One of the most popular corporate accounts, a Japanese electronics company, has attracted followers, showing that corporate Twitter accounts can serve as significant corporate communication channels. Interestingly, online interaction, like friends among popular corporate accounts, has also garnered attention on Twitter. Although advertising and marketing information are being avoided on social media mainly due to the skepticism toward advertising in the online environment (Kelly, Kerr, & Drennan, 2010), brands that act more like human individuals would foster consumer engagement with brands (Vargo, 2016).

The current study explores how consumers engage with brands through the experience and consumption of corporate tweets. Despite the popularity of social media as a corporate communication channel, few studies have been conducted to examine consumers' responses to the social media account of corporations and brands in the Japanese context. This study brings together insights from the brand personality of marketing literature and the parasocial relationship of media research to explore the consumer-brand relationship in the online environment. The study explores what motivates consumers to follow corporate Twitter accounts and what types of personality and parasocial relationships consumers perceive towards such accounts. Furthermore, the study investigates the relationship between the perceived personality of a corporate Twitter account (hereafter perceived account personality), the parasocial relationship with the account, and the outcomes of following such accounts. The study could provide valuable insight into understanding online consumer-brand relationships by focusing on the role of perceived account personality and parasocial relationships.

## Literature Review

### *Parasocial Interaction/ Relationship*

Parasocial interaction refers to audience relationships and "illusionary

experience” (Labrecque, 2014, p.135) with media characters such as newscasters, celebrities, or characters. Since Horton and Wohl (1956) introduced the notion of parasocial interaction, the “illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the performer” (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215), the concept has gained much attention in the field of media and communication. The traditional parasocial interaction scale developed by Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) has been used widely in different programming. Auter and Palmgreen (2000) argued that the scale only reflected one univariate dimension of identification with the viewer’s favorite character and suggested a multidimensional measure of parasocial interaction including ‘identification with a favorite character,’ ‘interest in favorite character,’ ‘group identification/ interaction,’ and ‘favorite character’s problem-solving ability.’

Parasocial interaction research has spilled over to online communication and social media, including active relationships between consumers and mediated personas such as brands and celebrities (Labrecque, 2014; Stever & Lawson, 2013). Those studies indicated that online users and consumers develop parasocial interactions like traditional mass media. Labrecque (2014) revealed that “perceived interactivity,” such as responsiveness and listening, and “openness in communication,” which includes the persona’s self-disclosure, are related to the development of parasocial interaction. The study also showed the mediating role of parasocial interaction in the relationship between message cues and consumer responses, such as loyalty and willingness to provide information.

Dibble, Hartmann, and Rosaen (2016) argue that it is necessary to distinguish parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship; parasocial interaction is referred to as “a faux sense of mutual awareness that can only occur during viewing” (p.25), while parasocial relationship is defined as “a longer-term association that may begin to develop during viewing, but also extends beyond the media exposure situation” (p.25). The study focuses on parasocial relationships, considering that a longer-term relationship developed in the context of corporate Twitter account following.

### ***Brand Personality***

Previous research on brand personality has provided an understanding of the symbolic use of brands (Aaker, 1997; Aaker, Yeronica & Jordy, 2001). Aaker (1997) defined brand personality as “a set of human-like attributes associated with a particular brand” (p.342) and developed multidimensional measures of brand personality, including ‘sincerity,’ ‘excitement,’ ‘competence,’ ‘sophistication,’ and ‘ruggedness.’ Geuens, Weijters, and Wulf (2009) suggested a shorter version of brand personality measurement, such as ‘responsibility,’ ‘activity,’ ‘aggressiveness,’ ‘simplicity,’ and ‘emotionality,’ which is considered effective in some cultures.

Based on the brand personality scale in the US context, Aaker, Yeronica, and Jordy (2001) compared brand personality between the US, Spain, and Japan. The study showed that ‘sincerity,’ ‘excitement,’ ‘competence,’ and ‘sophistication’ are

common in the US and Japan. It was also revealed that ‘peacefulness’ in Japan and ‘ruggedness’ in the US as culture-specific brand personalities. ‘Sincerity,’ ‘excitement,’ and ‘sophistication’ were shared dimensions in Spain and the US, whereas culture-specific dimensions included ‘passion’ in Spain and ‘competence’ and ‘ruggedness’ in the US. Aaker, Yeronica, and Jordy (2001) noted that peacefulness was a common dimension in Spain and Japan, which shows harmony-oriented values in East Asian and Latin cultures. Matsuda (2003) also showed dimensions of brand personality in Japan, including ‘competence,’ ‘cheerfulness,’ ‘reservedness,’ ‘sophistication,’ and ‘masculinity’. Interestingly, the ‘reservedness’ dimension was confirmed, which reflects the introversion and reservedness valued in Japan.

## Research Questions and Hypotheses

### *Motives of the Corporate Twitter Following*

As mentioned above, although marketing-related information tends to be avoided in social media, what motivates consumers to follow corporate Twitter accounts? That is our first research question (RQ1).

RQ1 What motivates consumers to follow the corporate Twitter account?

As some consumers may be more motivated to follow the corporate Twitter account, this study focuses on market mavenism and consumers’ attitudes toward advertising as consumer factors. Feick and Price (1987) suggested that a market maven is “an influencer characterized by general marketplace expertise” (p.85). The concept is further defined as “individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places to shop, and other facets of markets, and initiate discussions with consumers and respond to requests from consumers for market information” (Feick & Price, 1987, p.85). Given the characteristics of market mavens in terms of market information, this study proposes that market mavenism is positively associated with motivations to follow the corporate Twitter account(H1).

Regarding the attitude toward advertising, Pollay and Mittal (1993) proposed a model composed of three personal utility factors: product information, social image information, and hedonic amusement. In addition, socioeconomic factors of advertising attitude include good for the economy, fostering materialism, corruption values, and falsity/ non-sense. Considering the main characteristics of corporate Twitter accounts, the study focuses on the personal utility aspects, including product information, social image information, and hedonic amusement. The study predicted that consumers’ attitudes toward advertising would be positively associated with motivations to follow the corporate Twitter account.

H1 Market mavenism is positively related to the motivations to follow the corporate Twitter account.

H2 Attitude toward advertising is positively related to the motivations to follow the corporate Twitter account.

***Perceived Account Personality and the Parasocial Relationship***

Next, the study investigates the perceived account personality (RQ2) and the parasocial relationship with the account (RQ3). Additionally, this study explores the relationship between perceived account personality, parasocial relationships, and the outcomes of the account following. Colliander and Dahlén (2011) showed that parasocial interaction positively affects brand attitude and purchase intention regarding the relationship between parasocial relationships and the outcomes of the account following.

RQ2 What types of personalities do consumers perceive from the corporate Twitter account?

RQ3 What types of parasocial relationships do consumers develop with the corporate Twitter account?

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Labrecque (2014) found that parasocial interaction mediates the relationship between perceived interactivity and the openness of social media and consumers' behavior, including willingness to share information and loyalty. Similarly, in a study on social commerce platforms, Xiang et al. (2016) highlighted the mediating role of parasocial interaction between perceived similarity, expertise, and likability of other users and online impulse buying tendencies. Lee and Lee (2017) identified that feelings of parasocial interaction could also explain the positive effect of brand-related responses.

Based on the previous studies and discussions, it can be predicted that the perceived account personality would be significantly related to a greater parasocial relationship with the account and, in turn, would be associated with the outcomes of the account following. Specifically, this study posits the following two hypotheses (H3, H4) regarding the mediating role of the parasocial relationship between the perceived personality of the account and the outcomes of the account following, such as brand liking and brand information sharing.

H3 Parasocial relationship mediates the relationship between perceived account personality and brand liking.

H4 Parasocial relationship mediates the relationship between perceived account

personality and brand information sharing.

## Methods

### *Sample*

The data were collected from an online survey using a panel from a major survey company in February 2018. The sample was 346 Twitter users who followed commercial corporation Twitter accounts, including 167 males (48.3%) and 179 females (51.7%). The ages ranged from 20 to 59 years, with an average age of 39.43( $SD=10.87$ ). The range of age includes the following: 9.5% ( $n=33$ ) were between the ages of 20 and 24, 13.6% ( $n=47$ ) were between 25 and 29, 14.5% ( $n=50$ ) were between 30 and 34, 12.7% ( $n=44$ ) were between 35 and 39, 14.2% ( $n=49$ ) were between 40 and 44, 11.6% ( $n=40$ ) were between 45 and 49, 13.6% ( $n=47$ ) were between 50 and 54, and 10.4% ( $n=36$ ) were between 55 and 59.

### *Measures*

*Motives for following the corporate Twitter account.* Respondents were asked to choose the most favorite and important corporate account from the accounts they are following on Twitter and their agreement with each of the thirteen statements of reasons for following their favorite corporate Twitter account (i.e., “I want to be connected with the corporation/ products/ services”) (See Table 2). Regarding brands and company types, convenience stores (10.7%) topped the list of accounts and followed by brewer and brand (10.1%), PC and household appliances (9.8%), game makers and brands (7.7%), food companies and brands (7.5%), fashion brand and maker (5.5%), telecommunication company and service (5.2%).

*Perceived account personality.* Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived personality of the corporate Twitter account with thirty-six items on a five-point scale using the brand personality scale by Aaker, Yeronica, and Jordy (2001) (see Table 3).

*Parasocial relationship.* The parasocial relationship was measured based on respondents' responses to twelve items on a five-point scale that assessed Twitter-based parasocial relationships, including nine items based on Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) and three items from Auter and Palmgreen (2000). Some items were slightly altered to suit the study context (see Table 4).

*Outcomes of the account following.* Respondents responded to two items, “I came to like the corporation/ product/ service more since I followed the account” and “I retweet the account's tweet and talk about it,” on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

*Attitude toward advertising.* The attitude toward advertising scale was adapted from Pollay and Mittal (1993), which was designed to assess personal utility factors, such as product information, social image information, and hedonic amusement, and

four socioeconomic factors, including good for the economy, fostering materialism, corruption values, and falsity/ non-sense. Focusing on the characteristics of corporate Twitter accounts, this study used nine items of advertising attitude relating to personal utility aspects, including product information, social image information, and hedonic amusement (i.e., “I like reading and watching advertising,” See Table 1). Respondents answered the extent to which they agreed with each statement on a five-point scale. The study confirmed two factors from a factor analysis using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation. Six items of the first factor were combined into the product information and amusement scale ( $\alpha = .883$ ), and three items of the second factor into the social image information scale ( $\alpha = .862$ ).

*Market mavenism.* The study measured market mavenism using the Japanese version of the market maven scale by Suh (2006) based on Feick and Price (1987). Respondents rated six items on a five-point rating scale the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with such statements as: “I like introducing new brands and products to my friends,” “I like helping people by providing them with information about many kinds of products,” “People ask me for information about products, places to shop, or sales,” and “My friends think of me as a good source of information when it comes to new products or sales.” The study combined the six items into the market maven scale ( $\alpha = .899$ ).

Table 1. Advertising Attitude: Factor Loadings

	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>
I like reading and watching advertising	.773	.288
I like advertising	.768	.334
Quite often advertising is amusing and entertaining	.751	.344
Advertising is a valuable source of information about products and services	.644	.174
Advertising helps me keep up to date about products and services	.598	.244
Sometimes advertisements are even more enjoyable than other media content	.546	.493
Advertising helps me know which products and services will reflect the sort of person I am	.340	.837
Advertising tells me what people with lifestyles similar to mine are buying and using	.200	.796
From advertising, I learn about the trends and about what to buy to impress others	.529	.616

Table 2. Motives for Following the Corporate Twitter Account:  
Factor Loadings

	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>	<i>F3</i>
The tweets are amusing	.807	.340	-.125
The tweets make a good story	.732	.002	.149
Reading the tweets is fun	.691	.516	-.102
I can get information that I can tell people	.659	.129	.267
I can get information to which I can relate other than products/ services	.618	.312	.268
I can get information that I cannot learn from advertising	.521	.250	.462
I want to be connected with the corporation/products/services	.466	.350	.379
I am interested in the corporation/products/services	.276	.782	.249
The product/ service suits my taste	.177	.740	.218
I like the corporation/ product/ service	.360	.715	.191
I want to get information about the product/service	.044	.643	.382
I want to get information about the corporation	.331	.394	.524
I want to get information about the coupon campaign	.013	.116	.353

## Findings

### *Motives for Following the Corporate Twitter Account*

The study explored motives for following the corporate Twitter account (RQ1). A factor analysis using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation was conducted for the thirteen motives for following the corporate Twitter account (Table 2).

The result identified three significant motives for following the corporate Twitter account: ‘entertainment,’ ‘brand attachment,’ and ‘information.’ The entertainment dimension refers to the seeking of exciting and enjoyable entertainment, and brand attachment describes brand liking. The information dimension depicts an instrumental seeking of information about the corporation and brand, coupon campaigns relating to brands, and the information they cannot get from the usual advertising. The information dimension, the third factor, had a low-reliability coefficient, and the reliability coefficient of the first and second factors was high enough, respectively. For the subsequent analyses, the study combined the seven items of the first factor into the enjoyment scale ( $\alpha = .877$ ), and three items of the second factor were combined into brand attachment ( $\alpha = .873$ ).

Next, this study analyzed how market mavenism and advertising attitude are related to the motives for the account following. As shown in Table 6, female respondents showed a slightly stronger brand attachment motive for following account than men ( $r = -.143, p < .01$ ). Age was not related to any motive dimension of following account. Two dimensions of advertising attitude were moderately correlated with the consumer’s perception that the account is cheerful (Information and amusement:  $r = .395, p < .01$ , Social image information:  $r = .376, p < .01$ ) and



brand attachment motive for following account (Information and amusement:  $r = .349, p < .01$ , Social image information:  $r = .202, p < .01$ ). The degree of market mavenism was moderately correlated with the entertainment motive for following account ( $r = .279, p < .01$ ) and slightly correlated with the brand attachment motive for following account ( $r = .168, p < .01$ ).

Overall, the results showed that the two significant motivations for following the corporate Twitter account, entertainment, and brand attachment, were positively related to market mavenism, advertising attitude in regard to information and amusement, and social image information.

Table 3. Perceived Personality of the Account: Factor Loadings

	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>	<i>F3</i>	<i>F4</i>	<i>F5</i>
funny	.901	-.159	-.059	.141	.052
free	.851	-.058	.018	.050	-.041
energetic	.748	.036	-.026	-.214	.062
spirited	.705	.147	-.030	-.013	.025
positive	.676	.157	.054	-.085	-.069
talkative	.635	.097	-.156	.224	.150
likable	.635	.060	-.015	-.042	.308
contemporary	.622	.102	.100	-.164	-.128
friendly	.621	.009	-.115	.127	.316
youthful	.591	-.058	.258	.014	.000
optimistic	.493	-.146	.053	.235	.297
happy	.468	.157	-.031	-.014	.379
peaceful	.449	.142	-.045	-.079	.402
confident	.436	.202	.294	-.080	-.110
dignified	.436	.278	.217	-.080	-.098
responsible	-.046	.813	-.012	-.080	.100
reliable	.148	.650	-.023	-.128	.085
patient	.022	.583	.011	.402	-.091
consistent	.258	.579	-.014	-.072	-.018
thoughtful	.209	.491	.004	.034	.187
tenacious	.155	.467	.041	.314	-.009
determined	.411	.436	.072	-.002	-.126
masculine	.254	.396	-.160	.343	-.384
stylish	.248	-.329	.863	-.030	.042
extravagant	-.175	.229	.645	.131	.058
romantic	.011	-.081	.602	.251	.194
elegant	-.245	.358	.584	.042	.203
sophisticated	.177	.185	.559	-.004	-.199
smooth	.325	.045	.460	-.145	.176
dependent	-.078	.087	.044	.773	-.032
shy	-.324	.109	.101	.720	.086
childlike	.345	-.305	-.038	.643	.020
naive	-.032	.104	.055	.616	.075
warm	.323	.157	.041	-.004	.493
mildmannered	.049	-.138	.139	.372	.470
kind	.261	.284	.069	-.081	.439

Table 4. Parasocial Relationship with the Corporate Twitter Account:  
Factor Loadings

	<i>F1</i>	<i>F2</i>
When I read postings on the corporate Twitter account, I felt I included in the group	.715	.426
The corporate Twitter account makes me feel comfortable, as if I am with friends	.710	.427
I seem to have the same beliefs or opinions as the <i>person inside</i> of the corporate Twitter account	.706	.334
I like to compare my ideas with what the corporate Twitter account says	.680	.307
When I read the corporate Twitter account, I feel as if it keeps me company.	.675	.466
I would like to meet <i>the person inside</i> of the corporate Twitter account in person	.655	.247
The corporate Twitter account shows me what <i>person inside</i> is like	.576	.359
When the corporate Twitter account includes jokes, it makes the tweets easier to read	.551	.130
I feel sorry for the corporate Twitter account when it makes a mistake	.545	.251
I look forward to reading new postings of the corporate Twitter account	.190	.835
I sometimes relate to the tweets of the corporate Twitter account	.465	.628
I miss reading the corporate Twitter account when it does not renew for a while	.402	.577

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Motives for following account</i>		
Entertainment	3.212	0.828
Brand Attachment	3.716	0.938
<i>Perceived personality of the account</i>		
Cheerfulness	3.446	0.702
Competence	3.162	0.671
Sophistication	3.195	0.755
Reservedness	2.451	0.766
Sincerity	3.199	0.738
<i>Parasocial relationship with the account</i>		
Identification	2.879	0.759
Affective Relationship	3.299	0.852

*Note.* Scale scores are the mean of items on each scale.

### ***Perceived Account Personality***

The second research question was about what types of personalities consumers perceive from the corporate Twitter account. Five factors were extracted from a factor analysis using principal axis factoring and promax rotation on the condition that the eigenvalues were above 1, as shown in Table 3. Based on the results of brand personality by Aaker, Yeronica, and Jordy (2001) and Matsuda (2003), the study interpreted the five factors as ‘cheerfulness,’ ‘competence,’ ‘sophistication,’ ‘reservedness,’ and ‘sincerity.’ The dimensions of cheerfulness, competence, sophistication, and sincerity were similar personalities to those found in the

consumer-brand relationship by Aaker, Yeronica, and Jordy (2001). It is also worth noting that ‘reservedness,’ a dimension of perceived personality often revealed as Japanese brand personality, was confirmed in this study.

Items of each factor were combined into the cheerfulness scale ( $\alpha = .942$ ), the competence scale ( $\alpha = .867$ ), the sophistication scale ( $\alpha = .868$ ), the reservedness scale ( $\alpha = .786$ ), and the sincerity scale ( $\alpha = .724$ ) for the subsequent analyses.

### ***Parasocial Relationship with the Account***

Research question 3 analyzed what types of parasocial relationships consumers develop with the corporate Twitter account. A factor analysis using principal axis factoring and varimax rotation was conducted for the twelve items of parasocial relationship with the corporate Twitter account (See Table 4). Based on the results of previous research (e.g., Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008), two factors were labeled as ‘identification’ and ‘affective relationship.’ Identification consisted of nine items such as “When I read postings on the corporate Twitter account, I felt I included in the group,” “The corporate Twitter account makes me feel comfortable as if I am with friends,” “I seem to have the same beliefs or opinions as to the person inside of the corporate Twitter account,” “I like to compare my ideas with what the corporate Twitter account says” and so on. Affective relationship comprises three items, including “I look forward to reading new postings of the corporate Twitter account,” “I sometimes relate to the postings of the corporate Twitter account,” and “I miss reading the corporate Twitter account when it does not renew for a while.” This study combined the nine items of the first factor into the identification scale ( $\alpha = .908$ ), and three items of the second factor were combined into the affective relationship scale ( $\alpha = .802$ ).

### ***Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among Variables***

In regard to the perceived personality of the corporate Twitter account, parasocial relationship with the account, and the outcomes of the account following, all variables were intercorrelated with each other with two exceptions: the correlation between the perceived reservedness of the account and affective relationship and the correlation between the perceived reservedness of the account and brand liking (Table 7). Overall, the results provide initial support for the following hypotheses.

Table 6. Correlations Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Gender						
2. Age	.030					
3. Market maven	.072	-.074				
4. Ad Attitude: Info & Amuse	-.123 *	-.029	.439 **			
5. Ad Attitude: Social Image Info	.026	-.067	.595 **	.679 **		
6. Motive: Entertainment	-.076	.044	.279 **	.395 **	.376 **	
7. Motive: Brand Attachment	-.143 **	-.024	.168 **	.349 **	.202 **	.592 **

\*\*  $p < .01$  \*  $p < .05$

Note. Gender was coded: female=0, male=1

Table 7. Correlations Among Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender										
2. Age	.030									
3. PAP: Cheerfulness	-.233 **	-.084								
4. PAP: Competence	.018	.017	.743 **							
5. PAP: Sophistication	-.086	.007	.657 **	.632 **						
6. PAP: Reservedness	.124 *	-.057	.098	.268 **	.155 **					
7. PAP: Sincerity	-.149 **	-.077	.690 **	.574 **	.609 **	.296 **				
8. PSR: Identification	-.015	.084	.579 **	.579 **	.430 **	.311 **	.508 **			
9. PSR: Affective	-.131 *	.014	.583 **	.527 **	.441 **	.030	.444 **	.701 **		
10. Brand liking	-.128 *	-.060	.564 **	.413 **	.414 **	-.024	.442 **	.480 **	.669 **	
11. Sharing	.012	-.021	.346 **	.357 **	.266 **	.191 **	.269 **	.504 **	.362 **	.379 **

\*\*  $p < .01$  \*  $p < .05$

Note. Gender was coded: female=0, male=1

PAP: Parasocial relationship, PSR: Perceived account personality

### ***The Mediating Role of Parasocial Relationship***

The study analyzes to determine whether the parasocial relationship has mediating roles between the perceived personalities of the corporate Twitter account and the outcomes of the account following, including brand liking (H1) and brand information sharing (H2). To test the serial mediation model, this study used Hayes's (2013) SPSS PROCESS macro (Model 4) with five dimensions of the perceived personality of the corporate account that served as the predictor, both brand liking and brand information sharing served as the outcome variables, and two dimensions of the parasocial relationship served as mediators. Two thousand bootstrap samples were used to create a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (CI) to test the significance of the indirect effects. The effects are considered statistically significant at  $p < .05$  if the CI does not include zero. This study included gender and age as

control variables. Since the results for the four dimensions of the perceived personality of the corporate account showed similar patterns other than reservedness, the study presents the two main perceived personalities of the account: cheerfulness and competence. The mediation analysis results for brand liking are displayed in Figures 1 and 2.

As shown in Figure 1, in testing the mediating role of the parasocial relationship in the association between cheerful personality and brand liking, cheerful personality was found to influence brand liking ( $\beta = .56, p < .001$ ). This association was diminished when the parasocial relationship was included in the model ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect of cheerful personality on brand liking through the affective relationship with the corporate account was significant (Effect size = .33,  $SE = .04$ , 95%  $CI [.25, .41]$ ), while the indirect effect of cheerful personality on brand liking through identification with the corporate account was insignificant.

Figure 2 shows that perceived competent personality significantly influences brand liking ( $\beta = .42, p < .001$ ). This relationship became non-significant when the parasocial relationship was included in the model ( $\beta = .09, n.s.$ ). The indirect effect of the competent personality on brand liking through identification with the corporate account was insignificant. However, the indirect effect of the competent personality on brand liking through the affective relationship with the corporate account was significant (Effect size = .33,  $SE = .04$ , 95%  $CI [.25, .41]$ ).

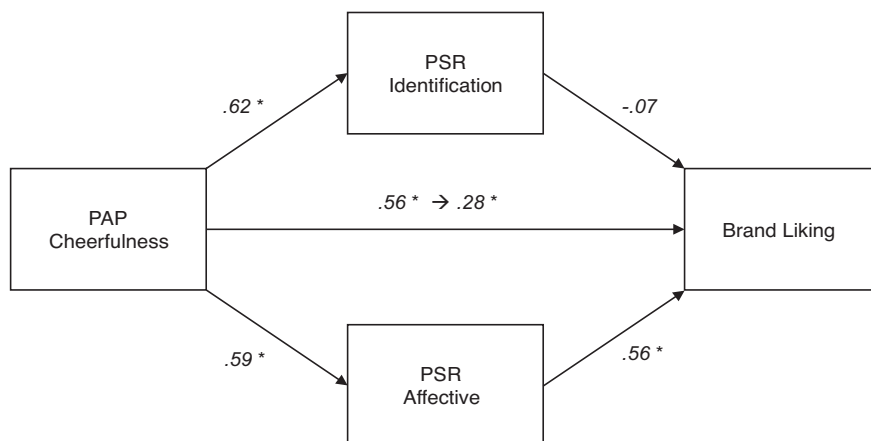


Figure 1. Mediation Model Showing Mediating Effects of Parasocial Relationship on the Association between Cheerful Personality and Brand Liking

\* $p < .001$

Note: Values shown are standardized coefficients( $\beta$ ). Gender and age were controlled.

PSR: Parasocial relationship, PAP: Perceived account personality

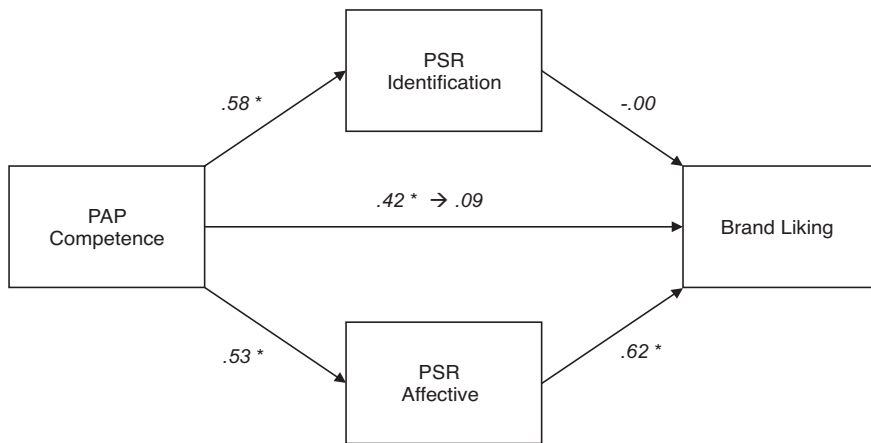


Figure 2. Mediation Model Showing the Mediating Effects of Parasocial Relationship on the Association between Competent Personality and Brand Liking

\* $p < .001$

Note: Values shown are standardized coefficients( $\beta$ ). Gender and age were controlled.

PSR: Parasocial relationship, PAP: Perceived account personality

In regard to brand information sharing, a different mediating role of parasocial relationship was observed. As presented in Figure 3, the cheerful personality significantly predicted brand information sharing ( $\beta = .37, p < .001$ ). This relationship became non-significant when the parasocial relationship was included in the model ( $\beta = .09, n.s.$ ). The indirect effect of the cheerful personality on brand information sharing through identification with the corporate account was significant (Effect size = .29,  $SE = .05$ , 95%  $CI [.18, .39]$ ). In contrast, the indirect effect of the cheerful personality on brand information sharing through the affective relationship with the corporate account was insignificant.

Figure 4 shows that competent personality significantly predicts brand information sharing ( $\beta = .36, p < .001$ ). This relationship became non-significant when the parasocial relationship was included in the model ( $\beta = .10, n.s.$ ). The indirect effect of the competent personality on brand information sharing through identification with the corporate account was significant (Effect size = .27,  $SE = .05$ , 95%  $CI [.17, .37]$ ). In contrast, the indirect effect of perceived account competence on brand information sharing through the affective relationship was insignificant.

Overall, the results show the mediating role of the parasocial relationship between the perceived personality of the corporate account and the outcomes of the account following. Interestingly, the influence of perceived account personality on brand liking is mediated by the affective relationship with the account. In contrast, the influence of perceived account personality on brand information sharing is mediated by identification with the account.

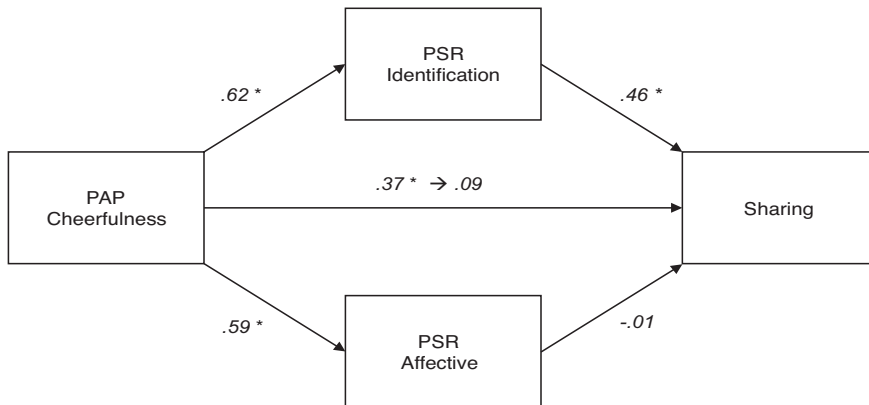


Figure 3. Mediation Model Showing Mediating Effects of Parasocial Relationship on the Association between Cheerful Personality and Brand Information Sharing

\*  $p < .001$

Note: Values shown are standardized coefficients( $\beta$ ). Gender and age were controlled.

PSR: Parasocial relationship, PAP: Perceived account personality

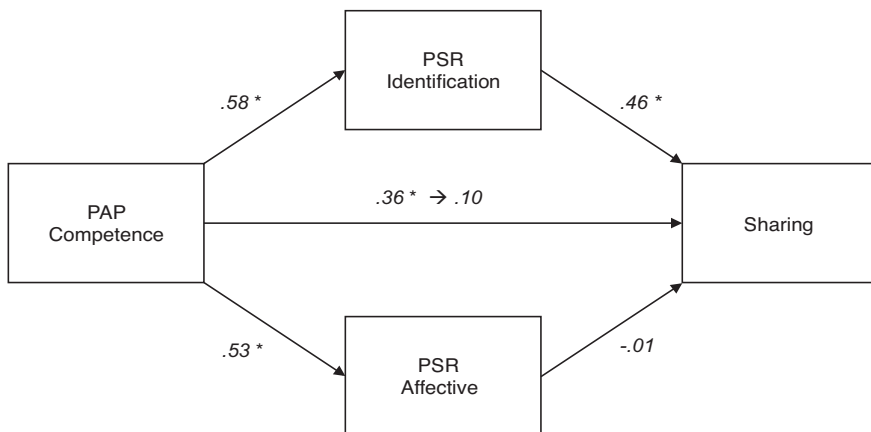


Figure 4. Mediation Model Showing Mediating Effects of Parasocial Relationship on the Association between Competent Personality and Brand Information Sharing

\*  $p < .001$

Note: Values shown are standardized coefficients( $\beta$ ). Gender and age were controlled.

PSR: Parasocial relationship, PAP: Perceived account personality

## Discussion

The study explored the engagement of consumers with the corporate Twitter account by focusing on the perceived personality of the account and the feeling of parasocial relationship with the account. The findings showed two major motivations for following the corporate Twitter account: entertainment and brand attachment. Entertainment refers to the seeking of exciting and enjoyable entertainment, while brand attachment depicts consumers' favorable sentiments toward the brand. The study also revealed a set of perceived personalities of the corporate Twitter account, including cheerfulness, competence, sophistication, reservedness, and sincerity. The cheerful personality represents the characteristics of so-called "soft" accounts with witty and loose tweets in Japan. It is noteworthy that reservedness, a dimension of perceived personality often identified as a Japanese brand personality, was confirmed in this study. In addition, two dimensions of the parasocial relationship, identification, and affective relationship with the account, were confirmed.

This study also investigated the underlying mechanism of consumers' responses to corporate Twitter accounts and the outcomes of the account following. Although brand personality has been researched as a positive predictor of the effects of advertising and corporate communication, few studies have been conducted to explore the underlying mechanism for this relationship. The results revealed that the perceived personality of the corporate account was related to the outcomes of the account following, but the parasocial relationship mediated this association. It is also worth noting that the study showed contrasting results according to the type of the following outcomes: while the influence of the perceived personality of the corporate account and brand liking was mediated by the affective relationship with the account, the influence of perceived account personality on brand information sharing was mediated by identification with the account. To summarize, the results highlighted the importance of the parasocial relationship that mediates between the perceived personality of corporate Twitter and the outcome of the account following, such as brand liking and information sharing. In other words, the positive effects of corporate social media-related responses could be explained by feelings of parasocial relationships. Consumers who perceive the cheerful and competent personality in the corporate Twitter accounts respond positively to the brand and share the branded message. This relationship may be due to an increased feeling of the parasocial relationship.

Overall, the findings have important implications for understanding the mechanisms that underlie the association of the perceived personality of the corporate Twitter account and the outcomes of the account following. Additionally, the results of this study, based mainly on marketing studies of brand personality and the parasocial relationship in communication literature, could provide theoretical contributions and a greater understanding of the corporate-consumer relationship in



the online environment. Further study is necessary to examine how consumers' responses to corporate Twitter accounts vary according to brand and corporation type.

## Note

An early version of this paper was presented at the International Association for Media and Communication Research 2019.

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