

# Chapter 11

## Leader–Follower Parasocial Interaction Scale

**William J. Brown**

*Regent University, USA*

**Mihai C. Bocarnea**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1889-1177>

*Regent University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*In the ubiquitous mediated world in which we live, we daily encounter organizational leaders through mediated communication. New communication technology and the age of the COVID-19 pandemic have made these mediated encounters even more pronounced, leading to more opportunities for parasocial interaction with organizational leaders by various publics. This chapter provides a theoretical model and quantitative measurement for assessing parasocial interaction in the social scientific tradition of middle range analysis. The leader-follower parasocial interaction scale provided here is a useful tool for assessing the persuasive influence of leaders on those who follow them.*

### INTRODUCTION

The rapid diffusion of new communication technology within organizations and the expanded need for mediated organizational communication brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic has expanded the development of mediated relationships in organizations seeking to effectively serve their customers (Oyeniran, Jayesimi, Ogundele, & Oyeniran, 2020). Leaders of both large corporate entities and of medium-sized businesses have had to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships with their employees, customers, and service providers through computer-mediated communication and internet-based media platforms. Interpersonal communication today with national, organizational, and community leaders is primarily mediated through some form of communication technology. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a theoretical framework for understanding these mediated interactions and a research tool for measuring them.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-7665-6.ch011

## BACKGROUND

Organizational leaders in the 21st century have increasingly shifted their concern and organizational resources to building and maintaining good relationship with their employees, customers, and various publics (Schweitzer & Lyons, 2008; Tjosvold & Wong, 2000). Research on organization-public relationships (OPRs) situated within an interpersonal relationship context has been proliferating (Swart, 2012). One negative Twitter message chain, or errant Facebook post, or unflattering Instagram picture, can send an organization's reputation and stock value into a tailspin. Ledingham and Brunig (1998) describe an organization-public relationship (OPR) as "the state which exists between an organization and its key publics, in which the actions of either can impact the economic, social, cultural, or political well-being of the other." Other organizational scholars have expanded their discussion of OPRs to include the exchange of resources between organizations in order to achieve mutual benefit, leading to the development of a theory of relationship management (Broom, Casey & Ritchey, 1997; El-Kasim & Iddid, 2017).

Relationship management theorists are concerned with how organizations strategically interact with their publics (Huang, 2009). The study of communication outputs from organizations is insufficient for understanding interpersonal communication with organizational leaders and building relationships with them, which also should include the measurement of behavioral outcomes (Broom & Dozier, 1990). Relational goals are now a primary concern of organizations seeking to build symmetry with stakeholders (Ledingham & Brunig, 2000) and create loyalty by meeting the needs of their publics (Ledingham, 2003) in a highly mediated environment.

Walther's (1996) hyperpersonal model of computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides a useful theoretical framework to study how CMC may facilitate relational intimacy. Extensions and revisions to the model during the past 20 years have extended its application into the study of online organizational relationships, providing both conceptual and empirical contributions that reveal the important role these relationships have in leader-follower online communication (Walther, 2011). Walther and his colleagues argue that four concurrent routines explain how CMC's support of relationships produces a high degree of desirability and intimacy (Walter, Van Der Heide, Ramirez, Burgoon, & Peña, 2015).

Inadequate understanding of the powerful mediated relationships that organizations are establishing with their publics is a serious threat to the health and success of any organization. Relational management necessitates a proper perspective of how organizational leaders develop relationships with customers, employees, and other stakeholders through mediated forms of communication. Such relationships begin with inducing the involvement of various publics with organizational leaders. We will consider how involvement takes place in mediated communication contexts and how mediated interaction takes place between organizational leaders and their followers.

## INVOLVEMENT WITH LEADERS

Involvement is a fundamental conceptual and measured variable in communication study (Wirth, 2006) that is multidimensional and complex (Salmon, 1986). The concept of *involvement* has a rich history in social science research and is closely related to the theoretical variables of *engagement*, *absorption*, and *presence*. Definitions of involvement in communication study commonly focus on both cognitive and emotional responses to a message, person, or media persona. Broadly defined, involvement is "the degree of psychological response of a person to a mediated message or persona" and "is a dynamic

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