

Research Article | Araştırma Makalesi

# A Quantitative Research on Video Streaming Series and Audiences' Forms of Parasocial Interaction

## Dijital Platform Dizileri ve İzleyicilerin Parasosyal Etkileşim Kurma Biçimleri Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma

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### Abstract

The concept of parasocial interaction describes viewers' one-sided bonds with media figures. Since 1956, it has been extensively studied in psychology, sociology, communication sciences, and especially psychiatry. This study was carried out to examine with the aim of investigating the interaction of young individuals with the characters in video streaming series by taking into account the viewing tendencies. Four different scales including parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived attributes of the favorite character (PAFC) and perceived attributes of the least desired character (PALDC) scale were applied to male and female video streaming services users (n=381) aged 18-27; IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 software was used for statistical procedures. It was observed that the participants mostly preferred foreign video streaming series over domestic ones, had more parasocial interactions with foreign video streaming series characters, female participants scored more on all scales compared to male participants, and their viewing time was higher. It was concluded that male participants tended more to have parasocial interactions with 'strong' and 'physically attractive' characters, while female participants tended more to have parasocial interactions with 'strong' and 'positive social behaviour' characters. Male participants described the characters they disliked as 'cunning', 'repulsive' and 'ruthless', while female participants described them as 'selfish', 'repulsive' and 'ruthless'. Parasocial breakups were observed when characters with whom participants had established parasocial interactions left the series. Through the data obtained, issues related to the character creation process were discussed, and it was predicted that the results would contribute positively to the competition of domestic productions with global productions.

**Keywords:** Parasocial Interaction, Parasocial Breakup, Most Liked And Most Disliked Characters, Audience, Digital Culture.

### Öz

İzleyicilerin medya figürleri ile tek yönlü bağlar kurduğunu açıklayan parasosyal etkileşim kavramı; 1956 yılıyla birlikte psikiyatri başta olmak üzere psikoloji, sosyoloji, iletişim bilimlerinin öncülüğünde tartışmaya açılmıştır. Bu çalışma, güncel izleme eğilimlerini göz önüne alarak genç bireylerin dijital platform dizilerinde yer alan karakterler ile kurdukları etkileşim biçimlerini sorgulamak amacıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. 18-27 yaş arasında bulunan, kadın ve erkek dijital platform kullanıcılarına (n=381) parasosyal etkileşim (PSI), parasosyal ayrılık (PBS), en sevilen karakterin algılanan nitelikleri (PAFC) ve en sevilmeyen karakterin algılanan nitelikleri (PALDC) olmak üzere dört farklı ölçek uygulanmış, istatistikî prosedürlerde IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 programı kullanılmıştır. Katılımcıların yerli dizileri izlemek yerine çoğunlukla yabancı dizileri izlemeyi tercih ettikleri, yabancı dizi karakterleri ile daha yoğun parasosyal etkileşim kurdukları tespit edilmiştir. Kadın katılımcıların erkek katılımcılara oranla tüm ölçeklerden yüksek puan aldığı ve izleme sürelerinin yüksek olduğu görülmüştür. Erkek katılımcıların "güçlü" ve "fiziksel olarak çekici" olan karakterlerle; kadın katılımcıların ise "güçlü" ve "olumlu sosyal davranış" sergileyen karakterlerle parasosyal etkileşim kurma eğiliminin fazla olduğu bulgulanmıştır. Erkek katılımcılar sevmedikleri karakterleri sırasıyla "kurnaz", "itici" ve "acımasız" ifadeleriyle, kadın katılımcılar ise sırasıyla "bencil", "itici" ve "acımasız" ifadeleriyle tanımlamıştır. Parasosyal etkileşim kurulan karakterlerin diziden ayrılması veya dizinin sonlanmasıyla parasosyal ayrılık yaşandığı saptanmıştır. Elde edilen veriler aracılığıyla karakter oluşturma sürecine ilişkin hususlar tartışılmış, sonuçların yerli yapımların küresel yapımlarla rekabetine olumlu katkı sağlayacağı öngörülmüştür.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Parasosyal Etkileşim, Parasosyal Ayrılık, En Sevilen Ve En Sevilmeyen Karakterler, İzleyici, Dijital Kültür.



## Introduction

Television broadcasting, which is one of the important sources of information and entertainment consumption in social life, is undergoing various transformations, even though it maintains its importance. These transformation processes, in which internet technology is the main actor, change the face of the act of watching, and the migration of television's loyal audience to video streaming services undoubtedly points to many innovations. Conventional television broadcasting has a mechanism that offers a limited stream, is subject to control by public authorities, and acts on the principle of broadcast flow instead of considering the audience's tastes. Broadcasting services provided by video on demand platforms, on the other hand, offer an unlimited flow of content, are relatively free from control by public authorities, and act on a broadcasting principle closely related to audience tastes. While viewers consume content through video streaming services, at the same time the platforms record the viewers' experiences and use them to offer customised interfaces. Undoubtedly, this situation is quite innovative compared to television broadcasting and shows that an irreversible process has begun.

Many studies in the field indicate that traditional broadcasting is losing power and that especially young people and young adults are moving away from traditional broadcasting. Today, televisions are still important as a medium for households and are rapidly being integrated with the internet. Although this situation shows that the contents offered by both traditional broadcasting and VOD platforms are consumed together, national channels have also started to deliver their broadcasts via the internet by opening their streaming channels. These considerations show that video streaming services will definitely win the competition between television and video streaming services shortly and audience research should take this fact into account.

The concept of parasocial interaction, which was first mentioned in the study titled 'Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance' written by Horton & Wohl (1956), was opened to discussion under the leadership of psychiatry science. Since the subject attracts attention and is important in determining viewing tendencies, the fields of psychology, sociology and communication sciences have also carried out various studies. Audience and content interaction has been one of the most important areas of discussion in communication sciences, and qualified studies were carried out by leading researchers until the 1980s (Gerbner, 1969; Blumler and Katz, 1974). Especially in communication sciences, studies aiming to understand the nature of the interaction between media figures and audiences have expanded the subject by questioning audience experiences towards characters with whom parasocial interaction is established.

This research takes into account the triumph of video streaming services in the viewing activity of teenagers and young adults in Turkey and aims to discuss an issue that has been analysed from the perspective of television in the past from the perspective of video streaming services. The study is considered important in terms of defining the one-way interactions that young people, who are the viewers of video streaming services in Türkiye, establish with media figures. Participants between the ages of 18-27 (n=381) with various demographic characteristics were invited to the study through Whatsapp groups and asked to fill out the questionnaire form created through Google Forms. Four different scales were applied parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived attributes of the most liked character (PAFC) and perceived attributes of the

least liked character (PALDC) scales. The survey data were analysed with IBM SPSS Statistics software and the results were presented.

### **On Generations and the Digital Youth of Today**

Carrying out studies on generations makes it possible to provide an insight into different life patterns and to make reasonable inferences about the future. Important issues such as the realities underlying current problems, the effects of past traumas on daily life and the future gain visibility by explaining the life practices of generations (Turner, 2015, p. 111). Social consensus, which is based on the acceptance that people live in a social context, is expressed as '*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*' by Adler and has been used as 'Social Interest' in Turkish literature. According to Adler, individuals gain the awareness of being a member of a community and exhibit specific behaviours while living in the social world. The distinctive feature of Adler's theory (1964) is the emphasis on the concept of '*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*', which is the sense of co-operation with people, the sense of belonging and participation in the common good, and humanity has become the winner on earth in the 21st century with this urge for togetherness. Analysing different generations is important for all business fields as well as for social media trying to engage with them. The incompatibilities between generations are not only a fault in the rhythm of nature, but also related to the inability of individuals to define generations correctly (Turner, 2015).

When we look at modern generation definitions and distinctions, it is seen that especially Karl Mannheim's ideas are utilised and the influence of the thinker is still important in field studies. Written in 1928 by Karl Mannheim and translated into English in 1952, *The Problem of Generations* is seen as one of the important turning points of generational studies (Mannheim, 1952; Mannheim, 2005). Mannheim argues that generations are not a set of communities separated from each other by framing them with certain years, but individuals who are affected by social events and construct identities related to the period they live in. Along with Mannheim, thinkers such as Francois Mentré and José Ortega Y Gasset, who produced pioneering studies in the field, have also shaped generational studies (Spitzer, 1973, p. 1354; Kertzer, 1983, p. 127). Thinkers such as Karl Mannheim, Francois Mentré, José Ortega Y Gasset, who have become the source of reference in generational definitions and research, have stated that generations have a dynamic structure and meet new cultural capitals by establishing non-stop interactions.

William Strauss and Neil Howe (1992) are two thinkers who have had a significant influence on the current form of generational studies. *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, which was written as a result of research with a strong historical and sociological background, became one of the leading works that shaped modern generational studies. According to Strauss and Howe (1992), historical events shape generations, and social phenomena of each period affect people's attitudes and behaviours and create different identities. One of the issues underlined by these thinkers is that intergenerational dynamics shape the course of nations. According to Strauss and Howe (1992, p. 34), important interrelated branches of social sciences have contributed to the development of generational theories. Fields of science such as sociology, anthropology, history and communication sciences have utilised the past to investigate current parameters, and have made distinctions regarding generations by taking into account basic practices such as age, gender, history and geography. Scientists working on generations have stated that past periods have an impact on the lives of individuals, and that developments that spread to the social sphere such as migration, famine, war or

industrial accelerations occurring on a global or regional scale play a role in shaping the thoughts and lifestyles of individuals even centuries later. Each generation has its own rhythm of life and some of these characteristics are passed on to the next generations. Practices that are not passed on to the next generations begin to lose their meaning for new generations and disappear. Situations such as the disappearance of ongoing rituals over time exemplify the explanation in question.

According to Dimock (2019), although generations are generally tried to be separated from each other according to duration criteria, there is no agreed scientific formula for how long this duration should be. Although the origin of generational definitions has a long history, there is no consensus on sharp demarcation, including modern generational definitions. Especially the last thirty years, in which technological advances have increased exponentially, have challenged researchers to clarify the boundaries of generations, and generation classifications have been discussed in a way that they have not been discussed in the past. The table below includes the discussions in the scientific field on generational classifications.

**Table 1.** Generational labels and dates reported in different sources (Oh & Reeves, 2014: 65)

Source	Generational labels and dates				
Howe & Strauss (1992)	Silent generation 1925–1943	Boom generation 1943–1960	13th generation 1961–1981	Millennial generation 1982-2000	
Stillman & Lancaster, (2014)	Traditionalists 1900-1945	Baby boomers 1946-1964	Generation Xers 1965-1980	Millennial generation Echo boomer Generation Y Baby busters Generation next 1981-1999	
Martin & Tulgan (2002)	Silent generation 1925-1942	Baby boomers 1946-1960	Generation X 1965-1977	Millennials 1978-2000	
Oblinger et al., (2005)	Matures <1946	Baby boomers 1947-1964	Gen-Xers 1965-1980	Gen-Y NetGen Millennials 1981-1995	Post-millennials 1995-
Tapscott (2008)		Baby boom generation 1946-1964	Generation X 1965-1975	Digital generation 1976-2000	
Zemke et al., (1999)	Veterans 1922–1943	Baby boomers 1943–1960	Gen-Xers 1960–1980	Nexters 1980–1999	

The Pew Research Centre is an organisation known for its work in the social field on important issues, conducting various mass surveys and discussing current issues. According to Dimock (2019) from the Pew Research Center, factors such as global events, technological, economic and social changes are important in shaping the worldviews of societies and the relationship between generations. However, hesitations related to the classification of generations are also found in their nomenclature. Although names such as Generation Z, iGen, Digital Natives contain close definitions of similar generations, they

have different meanings in many ways. Dictionaries such as Merriam-Webster and Oxford English Dictionary now use Generation Z for the generation following Generation Y, and Google Trends data shows that the keyword 'Generation Z' has surpassed other names in people's information searches.

One of the issues that make it difficult to distinguish Generation Z from other generations is that they were born in the years when the World Wide Web started to become widespread. For this reason, members of the generation were born in the mid-1990s according to some classifications and in the 2000s according to some sources. Generation Z, most of whom are the children of Generation X, may also be the children of the Baby Boomer generation. Generation Z, which has commonalities with Generation Y in various aspects, is characterised as a generation with quite different dynamics in terms of consumption patterns. Members of Generation Z, who have encountered internet technology since the first years they came to the world, have internalised access to entertainment and information from different areas, and have become a generation that sees innovations and technology as more acceptable (Wood, 2013; Fry, 2016; Twenge, 2017). According to Seemiller and Grace (2015), Generation Z members, who are active participants in a digital and online world, will assume roles that will affect the world in a short time, and their decisions will significantly affect the social sphere.

As of 2024, Generation Z, which contributes significantly to the global labour force, is more willing to integrate technological innovations into their workplace (Dolot, 2018, p. 44). Although it remains unknown what consequences a life surrounded by internet technology will lead to in the long term, studies on this subject are being carried out. There are situations that can be considered both worrying and positive for the members of Generation Z, who are faced with the global transformation process in question (Dimock, 2019). With the technological transformations that have taken place in the last thirty years, Generation Z is seen as a generation with different entertainment, consumption and information acquisition practices compared to previous generations. This situation is also important for the field of communication sciences, and studies on this subject are rapidly increasing in Türkiye and the world. The new way of life of Generation Z forces conventional mass media out of daily life and the areas that cannot keep up with the integration with the internet to remain as outdated channels. The power of mass media such as television and radio, which were considered groundbreaking technologies in their era, has weakened and they have had to reconsider their economic models (Başer & Söğütlüler, 2023).

With the internet technology enabling video transmission, the act of watching started to take place over the internet, and especially the fact that mobile devices made the act of watching possible reshaped the audience culture. Twenge (2017), who aims to provide explanations on Generation Z, or 'iGen' as he calls it, by utilising the findings of research conducted on millions of young people and his own field studies, states that the viewing habits of Generation Z have changed drastically. It is seen that internet-based viewing is on the rise among Generation Z members, 60% of the generation members accept the Youtube platform as a TV platform, watching video streaming service content replaces the act of watching television, and that television is not a useful tool for them (Twenge & Campbell, 2018; Dimock, 2019; Akşehirlioğlu & Erkinay, 2023; Söğütlüler & Başer, 2023, p. 814). This situation is undoubtedly important for communication sciences and needs to be examined in order to provide predictions for the future of the field.

## Digital Culture and Contemporary Audiences

The rising dominance of digital culture has necessitated the reshaping of the basic dynamics of social spheres, and an important turning point in the formation of new cultural practices has undoubtedly been the spread of internet technology. The demand for video streaming services has resulted in the act of watching videos taking the first places in global internet traffic, and this situation has mediated the formation of a digital audience culture. The processes of making strategic decisions about what to produce and how to distribute in the traditional film and television industry have also changed. While various telecommunication operators and global companies have acquired some of the VOD companies and introduced them to the society with their own strategies, others have endeavoured to establish their own platforms (Michaux, 2020).

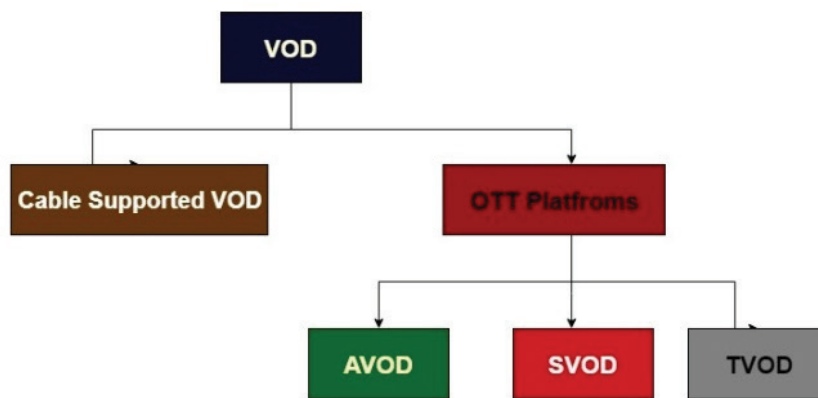
According to Mordor Intelligence (2021), OTT platforms refer to the distribution of video content over a public network. With the proliferation of internet networks and smart devices that enable streaming, the global OTT market reached a value of USD 101.42 billion in 2020 and is expected to reach USD 223.07 billion by 2026. Netflix, one of the most popular OTT platforms, was introduced in various European markets between 2012 and 2014, and although it was seen as a potential competitor of the cinema industry, it was seen to have a positive impact on ticket sales. However, researchers have found that this effect has reversed since 2016, when Netflix released higher quality and localised content. Analysing cinema ticket sales in 19 European countries from 2000 to 2016, Parlow and Wagner (2018) stated that Netflix attracted viewers to the platform with the production of local content, and stated that the negative impact on cinema ticket sales will continue.

An important turning point in the global strengthening of VOD platforms has been the COVID-19 Pandemic. The COVID-19 Pandemic, which put people into social isolation for long periods of time and forced movie theatres to close, dramatically changed the act of watching. VOD platforms have used this effect in their favour (Changsong et al., 2021, p. 1542). With the increase in the number of users of VOD platforms in Türkiye, the academic field has shown interest in the subject and various disciplines have carried out research to provide insight into the field. Studies focussing on viewers' platform viewing patterns and the pleasure they receive have been tried to be determined primarily through the uses and gratifications approach of communication sciences. Undoubtedly, these platforms, which keep the user experience at a high level compared to traditional broadcasting and can meet audience expectations instantly, have started to shape the future of the viewing experience. According to Menon (2022), the ability to navigate easily on OTT platforms, binge-watching, entertainment, relaxation, social interaction, information search and viewing pleasure are the reasons why OTT platforms are preferred by viewers, and platforms influence their viewers at a level that creates addiction. According to Chaudhary et al., (2022) although studies show that excessive viewing is potentially harmful to physical and mental health, the viewing hours of global video streaming services are increasing.

Compared to conventional broadcasting practices, the scientific literature on VOD platforms, which come to the forefront especially for younger generations, is quite new and therefore there are various categorisation problems. While some academic studies focus on the competition between Hollywood and Netflix, others primarily focus on the relationship between Netflix and television. In Türkiye, there are also differences of opinion on which aspect of these platforms should be analysed. Due to this dichotomy, it

is important to examine the issue from a holistic perspective in order to clarify the related issues. In Türkiye, only the field of cinema science or the field of journalism and media studies has difficulty in providing sufficient solutions. Therefore, research on the field in question should be carried out with the holistic perspective of communication sciences (Vielen, 2018; Hadida et al., 2021).

It is also observed that the concepts related to the field are confused with each other in the researches. Undoubtedly, the relative newness of these technologies in the adventure of mass media is the main reason for this confusion. According to Manifold (2023), VOD also refers to video-on-demand services over a cable network, while OTT is a subset of the VOD category. The OTT concept is used for platforms that can deliver content over the internet without requiring users to subscribe to a traditional cable or satellite TV service for a fee (Amazon, 2024). The image below is important for presenting the classifications.



**Figure 1.** Classification of VOD systems (Manifold, 2023).

SVOD (Subscription-based video on demand) is a type of service where you create a subscription and will give you access to the type of service you can watch until you cancel your subscription, which means unlimited viewing. The best example of SVOD service is Netflix. TVOD (pay-per-view video on demand) offers a different streaming service than VOD and SVOD. TVOD does not charge the user to register for the service/create a user profile, but the viewing of the content to be watched is subject to a fee. For broadcasts such as films, TV series, sports events, users consume content by paying a fee, Amazon Prime Video is an example of TVOD. AVOD (Ad-based video on demand) Ad-based VOD is a model that is free to users. Users are free to log in and watch videos in exchange for taking the time to watch adverts. YouTube is the best example of AVOD (Manifold, 2023). A new type of service specified by Amazon is PVOD (Premium Video on Demand). This form of service provision means that the producers of the film offer the first screening of the film. Viewers can watch the film with early access at a higher price. In the study, the theoretical background mentioned above was taken into consideration and the research design was created by considering the monitoring tendencies.

### Information on the Scales Used in the Study and Their Theoretical Background

One of the important features of mass media is that it creates the illusion of a face-to-face relationship with the media figure. Horton and Wohl (1956), who proposed to call this seemingly face-to-face relationship between the media figure and the receiver a para-social relationship, focused on the subject in their article Mass Communication and Para-Social Interaction. The article published in Psychiatry Interpersonal and Biological

Processes has striking results. According to researchers, mass media offer the illusion of an intimate, face-to-face relationship with the audience and the performer. This relationship continues when the media figure appears before the audience in repetitive forms (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 215; Konijn et al., 2008). Although some sources state that the first determinations of parasocial interaction date back to the 1940s, the modern use of the concept corresponds to 1956 (Merton, 1940, p. 560). Horton and Wohl, (1956), who approached the concept of parasocial interaction primarily by considering the world of television, stated that parasocial relationships can sometimes be established with prominent people in the business world, fictional characters, theatre stars and various figures. Parasocial relationships are established with little sense of obligation, effort or responsibility on the part of the audience because the whole process is under the control of the audience. The audience has the freedom to end the relationship while the performer continues to perform. The interaction is characteristically one-sided, non-dialectical, controlled by the audience, although the performer has influence, and not open to mutual development. Although there are ways in which the audience can convey their feelings to the performers and the technicians who design the programmes, these ways are outside the conventional parasocial interaction theme. Since the concept of parasocial interaction emerged at a time when internet technology did not have a place in everyday life, it needs to be re-examined today. In 1956, when the concept of parasocial interaction was defined, the person who did not find the experience satisfactory had only the option to withdraw, and it was very difficult to establish interaction between the performer and the audience. In the digital age, which has reshaped the dynamics of media consumption and social relations, parasocial interaction has been transformed by VOD platforms that allow each individual to become a media figure. Digital culture has created new internet celebrities and allowed viewers to interact with them. This situation has been one of the important factors that enable celebrities and audiences to migrate to the digital space.

Wohl died one year after the pioneering study that laid the foundation for one of the most popular areas of research in reception and affect research. Although Horton conducted further research on PSI and PSR, this research with Wohl seemed to have lost its importance at that time (Hartmann, 2010; Liebers & Schramm, 2019). According to Liebers and Schramm (2019), new theoretical and empirical orientations in the field of communication sciences have shifted the focus from 'what media do to people or how they affect them' to 'what people do with media', and the concept of parasocial interaction has been brought back to the agenda. In the following years, more specific studies emerged, and the subject attracted attention again when Rubin, Perse, Powell developed the Parasocial Interactions (PSI) scale in 1985. The concept has attracted intense interest in various scientific fields and following this process, disciplines such as psychiatry, psychology, communication sciences and sociology have frequently attempted to explain various situations. Some researchers have stated that there is a difference between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship, emphasising that parasocial interaction refers to the perception of a close interaction with a media figure during the act of watching, while parasocial relationship means a more permanent bond that goes beyond the act of watching (Dibble et al., 2016, p. 21). Due to its visual and audio possibilities, the first studies on parasocial interaction focused on television, and Horton and Wohl (1956) likened the process of parasocial interaction to a confrontation between the performer and the audience. The performer is aware of this confrontation and acts accordingly, while the viewer has the illusion that he or she is an active participant in the process rather than merely a passive spectator. The process does not require the



audience to make an effort, the audience is anonymous, and the responsibility lies with the performer and the platform that brings the performer together with the audience.

The full appreciation and understanding of their performances as actors, singers or artists does not depend on knowledge about the lives of media figures off-screen. Most of the viewers enjoy watching the narrative in which the media figure is present without knowing all the details of the media figure's private life such as their houses, children, sports cars, favourite foods, marriages and divorces (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p. 226). Empirical studies have also been conducted indicating that the direct physical or verbal interaction of the media figure with the viewer mediates the establishment of a more intense parasocial interaction<sup>1</sup>. During the course of a programme, direct communication with the audience by making sentences such as 'good evening, dear viewers', 'our viewers probably do not understand why we are doing this' created different levels of interaction.<sup>1</sup> Viewers who were directly addressed by a media figure on a bodily level reported a more intense parasocial experience than viewers who were not addressed on a bodily level (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011, p. 1104).

Contemporary research in communication sciences focuses on human-human interaction (e.g. video chats or multiplayer online role-playing games, MMORPs) and human-computer interaction). While audiences can interact with a large number of media figures thanks to technological advances, some traditional forms of mass communication, notably television and radio, show important similarities with interpersonal communication. The concept of parasocial interaction is one of the first theoretical approaches to link mass communication with interpersonal social environments. Following the parasocial interaction process with media figures, viewers associate the person they see on the TV screen with a closeness as if they were in their living room (Konijn et al., 2008, p. 191; Kavli, 2012, p. 83).

According to Ballantine and Martin (2005), the theory of parasocial interaction is not only about providing insight into content produced for entertainment purposes. It is possible to see the impact of the concept of parasocial interaction in various social areas such as consumption habits, platform usage and voting behaviour. The fact that the audience and the characters with whom they have established parasocial interaction take on a new role in order to have an impact on voting behaviour and perform in order to market a consumer product shows that parasocial interaction is not only for entertainment purposes. It is possible to see the manifestation of this situation in recent Turkish TV series. For example, the characters of Ali Vefa in the popular TV series *Mucize Doktor* and Ateş Hekimoğlu in the TV series *Hekimoğlu* were featured in public service announcements during the COVID-19 Pandemic process and thus tried to raise about pandemic awareness in the social sphere. Due to the increase in the hours of staying at home during COVID 19, viewing times have also changed. Public authorities, using characters from television series in public service announcements, endeavoured to use parasocial interaction for the public good (Söğütöler, 2022, p. 142; Revati Devaki & Babu, 2021). In order to cope with the feeling of quarantine loneliness during the pandemic, viewers established parasocial relationships with the figures on the screen. Studies that parasocial breakup is related to the feeling of loneliness also prove this situation (Jarzyna, 2021).

According to Aguiar et al. (2019), if the process of parasocial interaction lasts long, it becomes a parasocial relationship. The use of these concepts interchangeably sometimes has a negative impact on the comprehensibility of this subject. Current research on the

subject has started to differentiate the concept of parasocial relationship and interaction. According to Tal-Or (2017), the research conducted by Rubin, Perse and Powel in 1985 did not make a clear distinction between the concepts of parasocial relationship and parasocial interaction. In the light of the literature on the subject, it was deemed appropriate to use the concept of parasocial interaction in this study to express the whole process since it covers both parasocial relationship and parasocial breakup. According to Tal-Or (2017), studies conducted on the subject in the 1970s argued that individuals can overcome their deficiencies in socialisation through establishing parasocial relationships. Strong arguments were put forward on this subject, and scale development studies continued rapidly.

The original scale was used by Rubin et al., (1985) to measure parasocial interaction between viewers and their favourite newscasters. This twenty-item scale was found to be internally consistent by the researchers ( $\alpha=.92$ ). In the study conducted by Rubin and McHugh (1987), the scale was modified and used to assess the parasocial interactions of viewers with their favourite television characters. This scale was also found to be internally consistent ( $\alpha=.88$ ). Rubin and Perse (1987) reduced the original scale to ten items and used it to determine parasocial interactions with soap opera characters and found that it had a strong correlation with the original scale ( $r= 0.96, \alpha=.88$ ). Short-item versions of the scale have been used in various studies and the scales were found to be highly reliable in these studies. The research conducted by focused on soap operas and was found to be closely related to this study. In the study conducted by Perse & Rubin (1989), the scale was used to measure the level of soap operas and parasocial interaction ( $\alpha=.88, M=3.34, SD=0.76$ ). In the Turkish adaptation of the scale, some items related to newscasters and soap operas were excluded and some items were rewritten as 'my favourite soap opera character' instead of 'my favourite newscaster' (Arda, 2006, p. 37-38; Arslan, 2013). The scale, which was adapted to Turkish with two pilot studies, consisted of fourteen items and three sub-dimensions (friendship, empathy, and interest). In this study, the parasocial interaction scale consisted of fourteen items and three sub-dimensions.

Studies that stated that parasocial breakups were experienced when the characters with whom a parasocial relationship was established left the series also reported significant results. The research conducted by Cohen (2003) questioned how the participants felt when their favourite character was removed from the programme. This study found that parasocial breakups with real or fictional TV characters are also negative experiences for viewers. The researcher stated that when the character with whom a parasocial relationship was established was removed from the screen, symptoms similar to those that occur after the loss of a friend emerged. The study also stated that these breakups did not affect the audience as much as the end of the content. The study conducted by Eyal & Cohen (2006) on 279 students stated that the intensity of the parasocial relationship with favourite characters was similar to the intensity of parasocial breakup.

A striking example of the parasocial breakup can be seen in the US film and television industry. From 5 November 2007 to 12 February 2008, 12,000 film and television screenwriters affiliated with the Writers Guild of America East (WGAE) and Writers Guild of America West (WGAW) went on strike and many productions were therefore unable to meet their audiences (Handel, 2011). Lather and Moyer-Guse (2011) analyzed the reactions to the temporary parasocial breakup during the television writers' strike between 2007 and 2008. The results of the study showed that participants with stronger

parasocial relationships experienced stronger parasocial breakups when their favourite programmes were taken off the air.

Scale development studies were carried out to determine the nature of parasocial breakups and the Parasocial Breakup Scale was created by Cohen (2003). The Cronbach's alpha values of the scale, which was designed to assess how viewers would react to the removal of their favourite TV character from the air, were  $\alpha=.80$ ,  $\alpha=.85$  and  $\alpha=.85$  in three different samples respectively and were found to be internally consistent. According to Cohen (2003, p. 200), the end of parasocial relationships, like the breakdown of social relationships, is a distressing experience for the viewer and elicits symptoms similar to those following the loss of a friend.

Significant results were also reported in studies on parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup in Turkey, and scientists emphasised the nature of social life and parasocial relationship. The study conducted by Batıgün and Sunal (2017, p. 52) stated that parasocial interaction is related to women's psychological health and marital satisfaction, and Aytulun and Sunal (2020, p. 494) emphasised the similarity of parasocial interaction with interpersonal relationships. The research conducted by Balcı and Demir (2018, p. 386) stated that there is a significant relationship between loneliness level and parasocial interaction, and stated that as the loneliness level increases, the level of parasocial interaction increases. In another study conducted by In another study conducted by Balcı et al. (2020), it was stated that parasocial interaction has an effect on following celebrities on social media. Güven (2019, p. 956) examined the concept within the framework of sustainability of national culture in the face of global culture, and the research conducted by Keskin (2020, p. 25) stated that there is a strong link between K-Pop fandom and parasocial interaction. The research conducted by Akdeniz and Uyar (2021, p. 1669) stated that parasocial interaction with social media phenomena has a significant and positive effect on purchase intention. The research conducted by Güner (2021) drew attention to the parasocial breakup situation in Turkish TV series with the example of parasocial breakup when the popular characters of the Kurtlar Vadisi series left the series.

Parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived attributes of the favourite character (PAFC) and perceived attributes of the least desired character (PALDC) scales, which were finalised by Arda (2006) and put into scientific use, were used in the study. The original items of the parasocial breakup (Cohen, 2003) scale were translated into Turkish by Arda (2006) In all scales used, the participants were asked to answer the scale items according to a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Participants were asked to rate their favourite characters according to the scale including 21 attributes. They were also allowed to write if the character trait was not included in the 21 items, and the other option was also provided for this situation. Perceived attributes of the favourite character scale consisted of four factors: 'positive social behaviour', 'strength', 'physical attractiveness' and 'humour'. Perceived attributes of the least desired character scale was also used to determine the least desired character in their favourite TV series and to measure the relationship between parasocial interaction and breakup levels. This scale consists of nineteen items. If character traits are not included in these items, a text input section was added for the participants to write. The sub-dimensions of this scale were 'negative social behaviour', 'weakness' and 'physical repulsion'.

## Methodology and Research Design

Demographic Information Form, Viewing Tendencies Information Form, parasocial interaction scale, parasocial breakup scale, perceived attributes of the favorite character and perceived attributes of the least desired character scale form were applied to all participants (n=381) and research hypotheses are stated below.

**H1:** The leading platform in viewing habits is Netflix.

**H2:** The tendency of female participants to establish parasocial relationships and experience parasocial detachment is higher than male participants.

**H3:** The scores of female participants on the scales are higher than those of male participants.

**H4:** The prominent dimension in the sub-dimensions of the parasocial interaction scale coincides with the general definitions of the generation.

**H5:** The most liked character traits and the most disliked character traits are similar between genders.

**H6:** Foreign streaming series are watched more than local streaming series.

**H7:** The tendency to have parasocial interactions with foreign streaming series characters is higher.

**H8:** Perceived attributes of the characters have an effect on parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup

Before the research was carried out, an application was made to Aydın Adnan Menderes University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee. The study was found ethically appropriate with the decision numbered 31906847/050.04.04-10 and the data collection phase started after this process. The sample of the study consisted of Generation Z individuals between the ages of 18-27, which was opened in the theoretical section and is one of the important debates in the field of social sciences. Students of various universities in the age group in question and non-students were reached via Whatsapp. The questionnaire form created through Google Forms was sent and they were asked to fill it out.

The data collection tool of the study was a questionnaire. The final version of the scales was given by Arda (2006) and four scales including parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived attributes of the favourite character (PAFC), perceived attributes of the least desired character (PALDC) were used. After the participants were asked questions to define their demographic characteristics and video streaming service usage patterns respectively, the scales were filled in. Detailed information about the scales is given in the previous section. The questionnaires took approximately six minutes for each respondent to complete and the sample size was deemed sufficient to declare the necessary results.

IBM SPSS Statics 22.0 programme was used for the analyses of the data set of the study. The reliability tests of the scales used in the past were repeated and the scales were found to have sufficient reliability level. According to the results of the Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Analysis, the statements in the parasocial interaction scale  $\alpha=.95$ ; the statements in the parasocial breakup scale  $\alpha=.90$ ; the statements in the perceived attributes of the favorite character scale  $\alpha=.96$ ; the statements in the perceived attributes of the least desired character  $\alpha=.96$  were within the confidence interval. It was tested whether the research data had a normal distribution, and it was seen that the skewness

and kurtosis values were between -1.5 and +1.5, which is accepted in the literature. It was found that the skewness and kurtosis values of the scales used were at the acceptance level and confirmed the normality assumption which is important for the analyses (George, 2010; Tabachnick et al., 2013; Hair et al., 2014). As a result of the nonparametric chi-square analysis (Kavak, 2013; Danacı, 2024) applied to determine whether the differences between the participants and the options were appropriately understood, it was determined that the statements in the scales were perceived appropriately by the participants.

### Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The sample set of the research consisted of individuals from different cities and with different socio-demographic characteristics. Simple random sampling technique was used in sample selection. In the study where all participants were valid (n=381), the number of female participants was 216 (56.7%) and the number of male participants was 165 (43.3%). Participants aged 18 were 22 (5.8%), 19 were 58 (15.2%), 20 were 80 (21%), 21 were 74 (19.4%), 22 were 66 (17.3%), 23 were 45 (11.8%), 24 were 9 (2.4%), 25 were 7 (1.8%), 26 were 2 (0.5%), and 27 were 18 (4.7%).

Regarding the educational status of the participants, 19 (5%) were high school graduates, 27 (7.1%) were university graduates, 329 (86.4%) were university students, and 6 (1.6%) were postgraduate students.

The household income of the participants is 90 (23.6%) between 10,000-20,000 TL, 142 (37.3%) between 20,000-40,000 TL, 88 (23.1%) between 40,000-60,000 TL, 39 (10.2%) between 60,000-80,000 TL, 22 (5.8%) 80,000 TL and above.

The average of the answers to the question of where the participants spend most of their lives was city with 242 (63.5%), metropolitan area (Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir) with 89 (23.4%), town with 26 (6.8%) and village with 24 (6.3%).

### Findings and Discussion

When the duration of video streaming service usage of the participants is analysed, it is seen that the usage between 1-2 hours stands out with 97 (25.5%) less than 1 hour, 171 (44.9%) between 1-2 hours, 87 (22.8%) between 3-5 hours, 21 (5.5%) between 6-8 hours, and 5 (1.3%) 8 hours or more. With 209 (54.9%), Netflix was the leading platform, confirming the first hypothesis. Netflix was followed by Amazon Prime Video, BluTV and Disney+. The table below shows the daily video streaming service usage time of the male and female genders.

**Table 2.** How Many Hours A Day Do You Watch Video Streaming Service Content (Netflix, Amazon Prime, BluTV, etc.)?

		t <1	1-2	3-5	6-8	t >8	Total
Gender	Male	54	75	28	6	2	165
	Female	43	96	59	15	3	216
Total		97	171	87	21	5	381

In the descriptive statistics applied to examine the difference between the means of parasocial interaction levels and parasocial breakup levels of female and male participants, differences between the averages were observed in both of the related scales, and it was found that female participants had higher averages in the parasocial interaction scale and parasocial breakup scale than male participants. This situation confirmed the second

hypothesis and makes it possible to interpret that female participants have a higher tendency to establish parasocial relationships and experience parasocial breakup than male participants.

**Table 3.** Differences In Mean Scores Of Parasocial Interaction And Parasocial Breakup Scales Between Male And Female.

Gender		PSI	PBS
Male	N	165	165
	Valid		
	Mean	3.0991	3.0499
	Std. Deviation	1.07472	.83775
Female	N	216	216
	Valid		
	Mean	3.4927	3.1368
	Std. Deviation	.97901	.86936

The averages of the four scales used in the study were compared between genders and it was observed that female participants scored high on all scales. This confirms the third hypothesis. When viewing times were compared between genders, it was observed that the average viewing time of women ( $M=2.25$ ;  $SD=0.90$ ) was higher than the average viewing time of men ( $M=1.95$ ;  $SD=0.86$ ). This predicts the relationship between high scores obtained from the scales and viewing time. Netflix platform stands out in the video streaming service viewing times of both genders, followed by Amazon Prime Video and BluTV, respectively.

A question was asked about how much the participants consume video streaming service content in their daily lives. 171 participants answered between 1-2 hours and this number corresponded to 44.9% of all participants. The fact that female participants scored higher than male participants on both scales and subscales showed that viewing times may have an effect on the levels of parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup. At the same time, it was determined that female participants ( $M=3.13$ ,  $SD=0.86$ ) experienced parasocial breakups more intensely than male participants ( $M=3.04$ ,  $SD=0.83$ ) when the descriptive statistics scores of the parasocial breakup scale were examined.

In the Turkish adaptation of the scales, it was found that the Turkish versions of the parasocial interaction ( $\alpha=.94$ ) and parasocial breakup scales ( $\alpha=.89$ ) were significantly correlated ( $r=.81$ ,  $p<.001$ ) (Arda, 2006). In the same study, consistent with previous findings, individuals' parasocial relationships with their favourite TV series characters were positively correlated with their expected reactions to losing the characters. This situation made it possible to interpret that there is a correlation between the character with whom parasocial interaction is established and the experience of parasocial breakup. In this study, the scales were subjected to correlation test again.

In the studies in the literature on the subject, it has been revealed that viewers with more intense parasocial relationships feel more distress due to 'the thought of losing the relationship' (Cohen, 2003, p. 194). Pearson Correlation Analysis was applied to determine the relationship between parasocial interaction scale, parasocial breakup scale, perceived attributes of the favourite character scale, perceived attributes of the least desired character scale, it was found to be significant and positively correlated. As expected in the study, the correlation between perceived attributes of the least desired character scale and parasocial interaction, parasocial breakup, and perceived attributes of the favourite character scale was significant ( $p<0.01$ ) but at a low level. A moderate

correlation was found between the other scales. The results of the analyses are presented in the table below.

**Table 4.** Correlation Between Scales And Significance Level.

		PSI	PBS	PAFC	PALDC
<b>Parasocial Interaction Scale (PSI)</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	.545**	.571**	.272**
<b>Parasocial Breakup Scale (PBS)</b>	Pearson Correlation	.545**	1	.529**	.268**
<b>Perceived Attributes Of The Favorite Character Scale (PAFC)</b>	Pearson Correlation	.571**	.529**	1	.329**
<b>Perceived Attributes Of The Least Desired Character Scale (PALDC)</b>	Pearson Correlation	.272**	.268**	.329**	1

\*\* Correlation is significant at ( $p < 0.01$ ) level.

There was a significant ( $p < 0.01$ ) relationship between parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup ( $r = 0.545$ ). There was also a significant relationship between perceived attributes of the favourite character and parasocial interaction ( $r = 0.571$ ) and parasocial breakup ( $r = 0.529$ ) levels ( $p < 0.01$ ). Another correlation analysis was conducted between the sub-dimensions of the parasocial interaction scale and the sub-factors of the most perceived attributes of the favourite character scale. According to this analysis, it was observed that there was a moderate correlation in most of the parameters and there was a significant relationship between them ( $p < 0.01$ ). The table below presents descriptive statistical information about the scales.

**Table 5.** Descriptive Statistics Of The Scales

	Min.	Max	Mean	Std. D.	Skewness		Kurtosis	
					Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
<b>PSI</b>	1.00	5.00	3.32	1.03	-.671	.125	-.221	.249
<b>PBS</b>	1.31	5.00	3.09	.85	-.095	.125	-.555	.249
<b>PAFC</b>	1.00	5.00	3.70	.97	-1.079	.125	.806	.249
<b>PALDC</b>	1.00	5.00	3.11	1,08	-.270	.125	-.655	.249

Independent Sample T-Test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference between the sub-dimensions of the parasocial interaction scale in terms of male and female gender. As a result of the T-Test, it was seen that there was a significant difference between genders between the sub-dimensions of empathy and interest ( $p < 0.01$ ) and confirmed the fourth hypothesis. This situation supports the definitions that overlap with the general structure of the generation (Twenge, 2017) and indicates a significant difference between male and female participants. Except for the friendship subscale, the other subscales showed a significant difference between male and female participants ( $p < 0.01$ ). It was observed that female participants had higher averages in the parasocial interaction scale and all of its subscales. Male participants scored an average of  $M = 3.09$ , while female participants scored  $M = 3.49$  on the parasocial interaction scale. For the friendship subscale, male participants scored  $M = 2.88$ , and female participants scored  $M = 3.19$ . On the empathy subscale, male participants scored  $M = 3.16$ , whereas female participants scored  $M = 3.61$ . Lastly, for the interest subscale, male participants scored  $M = 3.20$ , and female participants scored  $M = 3.61$ .

The same analysis was applied for the parasocial breakup scale and as a result of the independent sample T-test, it was seen that female participants had a higher mean of  $M=3.13$  and  $M=3.04$  for experiencing parasocial breakup compared to male participants.

When the descriptive statistics related to the parasocial interaction scale subscales of male and female participants were examined, it was determined that the averages related to the subscale of interest were found to have high scores among both genders (Male,  $M=3.20$ ; Female,  $M=3.61$ ). The empathy subscale ranked second (Male,  $M=3.16$ ; Female,  $M=3.61$ ), while the friendship subscale had a low mean for both genders (Male,  $M=2.88$ ; Female,  $M=3.19$ ).

Perceived attributes of the favourite character scale was subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation by Arda (2006) and as a result of this analysis, the four factors defining the character were 'positive social behaviour', 'power', 'physical attractiveness' and 'humour'. In a study conducted by Cohen (1999, p. 327), young viewers were asked to indicate their favourite character in a popular evening soap opera and the results showed that young viewers were more likely to choose characters of the opposite sex and characters their own age as their favourite. When focussing on the reasons for their choices, it was found that the 'physical attractiveness' and 'personality' of the characters played an important role. The findings in these studies were analysed and a similar analysis was carried out on the data in the study. According to the results of the perceived attributes of the favourite character scale (PAFC), the favourite character traits of both genders were similar and male participants defined their favourite characters as challenger  $M=4.03$ ; determined  $M=3.96$ ; brave  $M=3.92$ ; intelligent  $M=3.91$ , successful  $M=3.80$ , charismatic  $M=3.77$  with high scores, whereas for female participants this order was challenger  $M=4.07$ ; intelligent  $M=3.95$ ; successful  $M=3.94$ ; brave  $M=3.93$ ; kind-hearted  $M=3.91$ , altruistic  $M=3.9$ . It was observed that male participants selected the expression 'charismatic' from the category of 'physical attractiveness' with a high average, especially five items from the 'power' factor. Female participants, on the other hand, selected the expressions 'kind-hearted' and 'altruistic' from the 'positive social behaviour' factor with a high average, especially four items from the 'power' factor. These expressions can be interpreted as having a predictive effect on parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup. It is thought that building the series characters of video streaming services in Türkiye on these qualities will contribute positively to viewing tendencies.

Perceived attributes of the least desired character scale was subjected to principal component analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation in the study conducted by Arda (2006) and as a result of this analysis, three main factors describing the character were determined. The main factors were 'negative social behaviour', 'weakness' and 'physical repulsion'. When we look at the situation between male and female participants regarding the scale items, male participants defined the characters they disliked with the expressions of cunning  $M=3.50$ ; repulsive  $M=3.41$ ; ruthless  $M=3.41$ ; sneaky  $M=3.42$ ; hypocritical  $M=3.21$ ; liar  $M=3.21$  in the top six. When the qualities of the most disliked characters of the female participants were examined, selfish  $M=3.43$ ; repulsive  $M=3.43$ ; ruthless  $M=3.38$ ; unlikeable  $M=3.35$ ; cunning  $M=3.32$ ; aggressive  $M=3.31$  respectively. This situation shows that these characteristics should not be included in the characters desired for the audience to establish parasocial interaction and confirms the fifth hypothesis. At the same time, if unlikable characters need to be created as an element of conflict, it has been observed that these characteristics are important and the characters should have these characteristics.



All participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they liked domestic and foreign streaming series broadcast on video streaming services and T-Test was applied to the data. It was observed that male participants liked domestic series with an average of  $M=2.96$  ( $SD=1.03$ ) and foreign series with an average of  $M=4.00$  ( $SD=0.81$ ). This confirmed the sixth hypothesis. It was observed that female participants liked domestic series with an average of  $M=3.47$  ( $SD=0.85$ ) and foreign series with an average of  $M=4.09$  ( $SD=0.77$ ). This situation has made it possible to interpret that the participants have a higher tendency to watch foreign series on video streaming services than domestic series. The following T-Test result is considered important in terms of showing the averages and standard deviations of the liking levels of domestic and foreign series.

**Table 6.** T-Test Result, The Averages Of Liking Levels Of Domestic And Foreign Streaming Platform Series According To Gender.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
<b>How Much Do You Enjoy Watching Domestic Series of Video streaming services?</b>	Male	165	2.97	1.03	.08
	Female	216	3.47	.85	.05
<b>How Much Do You Enjoy Watching Foreign Series of Video streaming services?</b>	Male	165	4.00	.81	.06
	Female	216	4.09	.77	.05

ANOVA test was applied on the parasocial interaction scale and the liking of foreign series on video streaming services. It was observed that parasocial interaction a significant relationship with the liking of foreign series on video streaming services ( $p<0.05$ ) and the seventh hypothesis was confirmed. When the Hochberg's GT2 post hoc test multiple comparisons for parasocial interaction were examined, a significant relationship was observed in the expressions 'I like a lot' and 'I like' ( $p< 0.05$ ). This situation predicts the increase in the tendency of the participants who like or enjoy watching foreign series to experience parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup with the series characters.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to predict the parasocial interaction scale using the factors of perceived attributes of the favourite character scale. In the analysis process, the problem of multicollinearity did not occur, and the reference values in the sources accepted in the literature were observed in the research parameters. Accordingly, VIF value was 5 and multicollinearity was below .80 (Craney & Surles, 2002; Berry and Feldman, 2011). Perceived attributes of the favourite character scale was found to explain 34% of Parasocial Interaction. As a result of the analysis, a significant regression model emerged  $F(4.357)=147.65$ ,  $p<0.01$ . Significance was observed between all factors except the humour factor in the Perceived attributes of the favorite character scale. Positive social behaviour factor positively and significantly predicted parasocial interaction  $\beta=.17$ ,  $t(357)=3.11$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ; power factor positively and significantly predicted parasocial interaction  $\beta=.17$ ,  $t(357)=3.04$ ,  $p<0.05$ ; physical attractiveness factor predicted parasocial interaction  $\beta=.33$ ,  $t(357)=6.79$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; humour factor predicted parasocial interaction  $\beta=.25$ ,  $t(357)=5.62$ ,  $p<0.01$ . Multiple regression analysis was also performed to predict the Parasocial breakup variable by using the factors of Perceived attributes of the favourite character scale, no multicollinearity problem occurred, and the values in the sources accepted in the literature were taken as reference. VIF value was 5 and multicollinearity was found below .80 (Craney & Surles, 2002; Berry & Feldman, 2011). In addition to parasocial interaction, according to the results of multiple regression analysis, perceived attributes of the favourite character factors explained 35% of parasocial breakup. This situations is confirmed the eighth hypothesis. This finding indicates that the qualities of

favourite characters play a role in the establishment of parasocial interaction and predicts parasocial breakup.

### **Conclusion**

In the past, studies questioning the interaction between media figures and audience, especially television broadcasting, have undoubtedly addressed an important issue and expanded the boundaries of the concept of parasocial interaction. These initiatives, which started under the leadership of psychiatry, have been joined by important branches of social sciences and questioned the interaction of audience and content. The adoption of digital content consumption by young individuals, including the loyal audience of television broadcasting, has necessitated the examination of the concept of parasocial interaction in a way to cover video streaming services. It has been observed that the characters with whom parasocial interaction is established are re-presented to undertake various missions in the social field and can direct social perception for different purposes. For this reason, the concept of parasocial interaction should not only be considered within the framework of the media figure and entertainment relationship, but should be seen as the definition of the character-viewer interaction process that has an impact in the social field.

The study was deemed important due to its observation of these requirements and aimed to question the interactions of streaming series characters and viewers. In this context, the literature on the classification of youth and generations was defined, and a relationship was established with the concept of parasocial interaction by stating that digital viewing trends lead to the formation of a digital culture. An application was made to Aydın Adnan Menderes University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee for the data collection phase. The study was found ethically appropriate with the decision numbered 31906847/050.04.04-10.

The scale studies developed to examine the concept of parasocial interaction were carefully examined, and it was seen that four scales would define the ways in which young people in Türkiye interact parasocially with streaming series. The scales were found to have a positive correlation and a significant relationship with each other. Participants were sent a questionnaire form created through Google Forms via Whatsapp groups and asked to fill it out. Since the form could not be sent without ticking any of the questions, there were no unticked answers. Participants (n=381) consisted of individuals between the ages of 18-27 with various demographic characteristics.

Most of the research participants stated that they prefer to watch foreign streaming series instead of watching domestic streaming series. Female participants scored higher on all scales than male participants. The mean ranking of parasocial interaction sub-dimensions in female and male participants was 'interest', 'empathy' and 'friendship' dimensions, respectively. It was determined that the friendship subdimension ranked last in both genders. This led to the conclusion that the level of parasocial interaction with the characters they were interested in was high for both male and female characters. In addition, it was also observed that parasocial breakups (PBS) were experienced with the characters with whom parasocial interaction was established. The descriptive statistics scores of female participants in the parasocial breakup scale were higher than male participants, as in other scales. This showed that women experienced parasocial breakups at a more intense level.

According to the results of the perceived attributes of the favourite character scale (PAFC), male participants defined their favourite characters by giving high scores to the expressions 'challenger', 'determined', 'brave', 'intelligent', 'successful', 'charismatic', whereas this order was 'challenger', 'intelligent', 'successful', 'brave', 'kind-hearted', 'altruistic' for female participants.

According to the results of the Perceived attributes of the least desired character scale (PALDC), male participants defined the characters they disliked by giving high scores to the expressions 'cunning', 'repulsive', 'ruthless', 'sneaky', 'hypocritical', 'liar' respectively. When the qualities of the characters that the female participants disliked the most were examined, they were 'selfish', 'repulsive', 'ruthless', 'unlikeable', 'cunning', 'agressive' respectively. These results are important in terms of the creation of opposing characters against the character with whom parasocial interaction is established. These issues are considered important for domestic streaming series broadcasted on video streaming services to compete with foreign series. In order to increase the interest of young people in domestic series, it should be taken into consideration by professionals in character creation processes.

It is thought that it would be useful for future studies to investigate parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup on different age groups. Differences between streaming series and films on parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup and distinctions regarding genres have not been sufficiently made. Carrying out new studies by making these distinctions will contribute to the literature.

## Notes

1 The levels of parasocial interaction differ with the breaking of the fourth wall in cinema and television. Auer (1992, 173), who conducted an empirical study on this subject, reported that a higher level of parasocial interaction is established with the media figure who interacts with the audience.

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# A Quantitative Research on Streaming Series and Audiences' Forms of Parasocial Interaction

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## Extended Abstract

In the world and in Türkiye, the act of watching has become one of the important sources of entertainment, and especially young people and young adults have abandoned traditional practices in content consumption and turned to the digital sphere. These transformations, which mediate the formation of a digital culture, have required scientific studies questioning the content-audience interaction to focus on the field. While health and science sciences have focused on topics such as screen usage, robotic surgery, digital disease management and support systems, data security, big data, machine learning, bioinformatics, simulations, social-humanities have focused on topics such as digital culture, new media tools, digital socialisation, digital activism, popular culture, e-commerce, video streaming services and audience. Practices related to the phenomenon of the audience have been investigated by the deep-rooted traditions of the social sciences, and communication sciences have taken a leading role in research to determine the position of the audience in the field of cinema and television.

Although the concept of para-social interaction, which opens the interaction of media figures and viewers to discussion in the scientific field, is associated with the science of psychiatry, it has been observed that various fields of science have contributed to the current literature on the subject. The study titled 'Mass Communication and Para-social Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance', written by Donald Horton and Richard Wohl (1956), was the pioneering study that attempted to explain that viewers establish a one-way relationship with media figures by focusing on the relationship in question. After the publication of the article written by Horton and Wohl in the journal 'Psychiatry Interpersonal and Biological Processes', the subject attracted attention in scientific fields, especially in health sciences; the concept of parasocial interaction was elaborated, scale development research was conducted, the concept of parasocial breakup was defined, and with all these, interest in understanding the nature of the interaction process between audience and content increased. Undoubtedly, all these efforts have contributed to the development of the concept of parasocial interaction and have been instrumental in increasing the number of studies focusing on examining the one-way relationship structure between the audience and the media figure.

With the increasing interest in the concept of parasocial interaction, the change in broadcasting practices has necessitated a focus on the field by considering current conditions. The migration of viewers, including the loyal audience of television broadcasting, to video streaming services has mediated the formation of a digital culture, and audience research has turned its studies to digital fields. The process of changing viewing trends, in which internet technology is the main actor, has necessitated the updating of studies that focused on television in the past with video streaming services. In this context, the research is conducted from a perspective that recognises the dominance and future global potential of VOD platforms. It did not aim to explain the relationship of VOD platforms with young audiences within the framework of the concept of parasocial interaction.

Although the concept of parasocial interaction was mainly focussed on television broadcasting in the years when it was opened to discussion, the boundaries of the concept have been expanded with scale adaptation studies (news announcers, soap opera characters, etc.) and various studies. This study, on the other hand, aims to make a contribution to the structure of the concept of parasocial interaction in Türkiye and uses the relevant scales developed to analyse video streaming series. Before the data collection process, an application was made to Aydın Adnan Menderes University Social and Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee and the study was found ethically appropriate with the decision numbered 31906847/050.04.04-10. Within the scope of the study, four different scales that have passed through various stages have been used, these scales are parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived qualities of the most liked character (PAFC), perceived qualities of the most disliked character (PALDC). It was determined that the scales had a positive and statistically significant relationship with each other.

The sample group was determined by taking into consideration the generational studies conducted in the scientific field. In this context, individuals between the ages of 18-27, who are the important audience of video streaming services in Türkiye, constituted the participant group (n=381). It was stated in a clear text that the study aimed to define the way young people interact with the characters of video streaming series, and the questionnaire forms were sent via Whatsapp groups together with the purpose text. Participants were asked to fill in the questionnaire form created through Google Forms, and it was not possible to complete the form if there were any questions left blank. In this way, it was ensured that all participants were included in the sample without missing data. The participants were administered a demographic information form, a viewing tendencies information form and four scales. IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 programme was used in the data analysis phase and statistical procedures were carried out within the framework of expert opinions.

In the study, it was observed that the tendency to watch foreign video streaming series instead of domestic video streaming series was high, female participants scored higher than male participants in all scales including parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial breakup (PBS), perceived qualities of the most liked character (PAFC), perceived qualities of the most disliked character (PALDC). It was concluded that a high level of parasocial interaction was established with the 'of interest' and "empathised" characters, and parasocial breakup was experienced when the characters with whom parasocial interaction was established left the series. According to the results of the perceived qualities of the most favourite character (PAFC) scale, it was determined that male participants had a high tendency to establish parasocial interaction with 'challenger', 'determined', 'brave', 'intelligent', 'successful', 'charismatic' characters and female participants had a high tendency to establish parasocial interaction with 'challenger', 'intelligent', 'successful', 'brave', 'kind-hearted', 'altruistic' characters. According to the results of the perceived attributes of the most disliked character (PALDC) scale, it was observed that male participants disliked 'cunning', 'repulsive', 'ruthless', 'sneaky', 'hypocritical', 'liar' characters respectively, while female participants disliked 'selfish', 'repulsive', 'ruthless', 'unlikeable', 'cunning', 'agressive' characters. It is thought that these findings are important in terms of getting rid of the hegemony of foreign video streaming

series. It is thought that the consideration of the research results by content producing professionals will contribute positively to the viewing rates of domestic video streaming series.

**Keywords:** Parasocial Interaction, Parasocial Breakup, Most Liked And Most Disliked Characters, Audience, Digital Culture.

Bu makale **intihal tespit yazılımlarıyla** taranmıştır. İntihal tespit edilmemiştir.

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Bu çalışmada “**Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi**” kapsamında uyulması belirtilen kurallara uyulmuştur.

In this study, the rules stated in the “**Higher Education Institutions Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Directive**” were followed.

Araştırma tek bir yazar tarafından yürütülmüştür.

The research was conducted by a single author.

Çalışma kapsamında herhangi bir kurum veya kişi ile **çıkarcı çatışması** bulunmamaktadır.

There is no **conflict of interest** with any institution or person within the scope of the study.

#### **Etik Kurul İzni | Ethics Committee Permission**

Within the framework of the decision taken during the meeting by Aydın Adnan Menderes University Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Committee dated 29/05/2024 and numbered 14/24; the study does not contain any ethical issues.

Aydın Adnan Menderes Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Araştırmaları Etik Kurulu'nun 29/05/2024 tarihli toplantısında alınan 14/24; sayılı kararı çerçevesinde çalışma etik açıdan bir sakınca içermemektedir.