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The Influence of Celebrities on OTT Platforms: Impact of Telepresence and Parasocial Interaction on National Image and Visit Intentions

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Keywords: OTT, parasocial relationship, national image, visit intention, telepresence, celebrity involvement

The emergence of over-the-top (OTT) platforms has not only revolutionized the landscape of production and consumption of media content (Afilipoaie et al., 2021; Jang et al., 2023), but is also reshaping the way individuals interact with the content (Pilipets, 2019). The influence of these OTT platforms has expanded beyond the media industry to various industrial industries. In particular, in the tourism sector, the effect of increasing the intention to visit countries where OTT content is a background is remarkable (Zerva, 2021). As a prime example, the image of Korea has improved and the number of people who want to visit Korea has increased as "Squid Game" streamed on Netflix has gained huge popularity worldwide (Huang, 2022).

The overall image of a country is one of the main factors that greatly influence the intention to visit the country, and the overall image of the country is influenced by the cognitive and emotional image of the country. Previous studies mainly focused on how TV programs or movies affect the cognitive and emotional images of the country, and studied how the formed image of the country acts on individual behavior and decision-making, such as the intention to visit the country or actual visits (Stylos et al., 2016). However, reflecting recent changes in the media environment, studies on the effects of the characteristics of content provided by the development of OTT technology and the changed psychological relationship between actors

and viewers on the formation of national images or the intention to visit the country are insufficient.

In particular, OTT is more likely than traditional media to increase immersion in actors or situations in OTT content because it is possible to watch content according to the needs of viewers at a desired time or follow-up. Through a high sense of immersion, viewers are more likely to form closer psychological emotions with the characters in the content. This study will discuss this from the perspective of parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship refers to a unilateral and continuous emotional bond or connection formed between a media user and a media person (e.g., characters, celebrities, virtual characters, etc. of a TV show) (Dibble et al., 2016). In addition, OTT services, which provide content through streaming technology in the form of on-demand services, are investing a lot of technology in the constant delivery of high-quality content through broadband networks. From this point of view, improving the clarity or sound quality of the screen consequently enables vivid transmission of characters or backgrounds appearing in the content. Therefore, in this study, we tried to present a research model with the viewer's psychological response derived from these technical characteristics as a sense of telepresence.

In this context, the purpose of this study is to examine the impact of OTT content on the

formation of the national image or the intention to visit. In particular, this study focuses on the psychological connection between the viewer and the entertainers who appear in OTT content, that is, the parasocial relationship, to explore how these relationships lead to the intention to visit the country. The purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of the technical characteristics of OTT content and the degree of involvement an individual's in a cast on a parasocial relationship, and to analyze the impact of how these relationships shape the national image. Therefore, the research problems of this study are as follows.

- Research Question 1. What are the characteristics of OTT content that affect the national image, and how much is its influence?
- Research Question 2. What are individual psychological characteristics of OTT actors that affect the national image, and what is their influence?

In order to answer this research question, this study aims to analyze the survey data collected from 222 participants using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). The contributions of this study are as follows. The purpose of this study is not only to investigate the effect of viewers' involvement with actors on the telepresence of OTT content and the parasocial relationship with actors, but also to explore the relationship between telepresence, parasocial relationships, and the cognitive and emotional dimensions of national image. Specifically, we want to discuss how the strategy of steadily securing high-definition or excellent audio quality content on OTT platforms and strengthening telepresence by providing streaming services with high video resolution changes the influence of OTT content. In addition, the purpose of this study is to verify how viewers' involvement in actors affects the degree of perception of telepresence or parasocial relationships felt in OTT content, and how individual psychological characteristics

change the influence of these OTT contents. The results of this study are important for understanding the psychological factors acting on the relationship between viewers and actors, and also for revealing the complex relationship between the technical characteristics of OTT content and the process by which the national image forms the intention to visit.

In order to verify the research model presented in this study, an online survey was conducted for 10 days from August 9 to August 16, 2023, through an online survey company (Entrust Survey) for male and female aged 20 or older across the country who have watched overseas content served on the OTT platform. In order to investigate the effect of overseas content served on the OTT platform, which is the purpose of this study, on the national image and the intention to visit the country, the scope of overseas content served on the OTT platform was screened by limiting the scope of the survey to content that is set in a specific foreign country that actually exists and starring a favorite entertainer. Of the 230 collected questionnaire responses, a total of 222 valid responses were used for the final analysis, excluding those that had unfaithful responses, responses with multiple missing values, and responses that failed to pass screening questions.

The samples were evenly distributed by gender and age group, and about 75.3% of the education level was bachelor's or higher, and about 71.6% of the occupations were workers. In addition to demographic characteristics, about 77% of the viewing OTT platform, which may be related to the subject of this study, had the experience of watching OTT content abroad through Netflix. In addition, about 67.1% were found to have more than one overseas travel experience in the last three years.

The operational definition of the seven variables of the research model (celebrity involvement, telepresence, parasocial relationship, cognitive national image, emotional national image, overall national image, and intention to visit the country) was revised and supplemented to

suit the scope of this study by referring to previous studies. Measurement items with proven reliability and validity in previous studies were referenced as much as possible, and measurement items according to the operational definition were developed and measured on a 7-point Likert scale from 'not at all (1)' to 'very much so (7)'.

This study conducted a partial least-squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) as a smart PLS (4.0.9.0 version) as a research methodology to verify the reliability and validity of the research model and measurement tool. PLS-SEM is a modeling technique that considers both the best variable and the structural model at the same time, and has a feature that can be effectively analyzed even when there are no normal distribution constraints on residuals and small sample sizes or large number of measurement variables. In addition, the statistical significance of model parameters can be evaluated by calculating the confidence interval of the estimation parameters through bootstrapping (Gefen & Straub, 2005; Ringle et al., 2005).

To verify the reliability of the measurement tools, the values of Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE), and Cronbach's α were measured. All variables in the research model were found to be measurement tools with reliability greater than or equal to CR 0.7, AVE greater than or equal to 0.5 and Cronbach's α greater than or equal to 0.6 (Hair et al., 2019).

Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to verify the centralized validity of the measurement tool. In this study, some items with low factor loading were deleted, and a total of 5 items out of 12 items were used as celebrity involvement measurement indicators. As a result, it was confirmed that the factor loading of the measurement tools for each component was 0.7 or more, and the factor loading of the measurement tools belonging to the component was larger than the cross-factor loading value of the measurement tools belonging to other components, confirming that the centralized validity was secured (Gefen &

Straub, 2005). In addition, it was confirmed that the heterogeneous characteristic-single characteristic correlation ratio (Heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations: HTMT) value was 0.9 or less in all components, and the discriminant validity of the measurement tool was secured (Henseler et al., 2015). In addition, as a result of measuring the VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) value between all variables, it was confirmed that the risk of multicollinearity was not high as it did not exceed the reference value of 5.0 with a minimum value of 1.3 and a maximum value of 4.089 (Martinez & Cervantes, 2021).

In order to verify the overall fitness of the proposed research model, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value was calculated, and the result value was calculated as 0.058, confirming that the fitness of the research model was very high because it was less than 0.08 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As a result of measuring the R² value for each endogenous variable for the evaluation of the path model for each endogenous variable of the research model, the adjusted R² value of the intention to visit the country was 0.578, and the adjusted R² value of the overall national image was 0.26 or more, so the fitness of this research model can be said to be very suitable (Gefen & Straub, 2005). Finally, 500 subsampling and bootstrapping with a reliability level of 0.05 were performed.

The overall national image was found to have a positive effect on the intention to visit the country ($\beta = 0.719$, $t = 0.055$, $p < .001$). And in the overall national image, the cognitive national image ($\beta = 0.574$, $t = 0.066$, $p < .001$) and the emotional national image ($\beta = 0.277$, $t = 0.055$, $p < .001$) were found to have a positive effect on parasocial relationships ($\beta = 0.243$, $t = 0.085$, $p < .01$). The sense of telepresence was found to have a positive effect on the cognitive national image ($\beta = 0.356$, $t = 0.073$, $p < .001$). However, the effect on the emotional national image was not significant ($\beta = 0.068$, $t = 0.089$, $p = 0.459$). It seems that the sense of telepresence did not

always have a positive effect on the emotional national image because the characteristics of the city expressed by the telepresence can show positive or negative images depending on the movie. It was found that parasocial relationships positively affected cognitive national images ($\beta = 0.168$, $t = 0.070$, $p < .01$) and emotional national images ($\beta = 0.016$, $t = 0.075$, $p < .01$), respectively. Finally, celebrity involvement was found to have a positive effect on telepresence ($\beta = 0.610$, $t = 0.044$, $p < .001$) and parasocial relationships ($\beta = 0.434$, $t = 0.079$, $p < .001$), respectively.

The emergence of the OTT platform has changed the way media content is consumed, allowing individual viewers to autonomously control the time and amount of content provided, and OTT content is having a significant impact not only on the media industry but also on other industries. Against this background, this paper investigated the impact of OTT content's spill-over effect on the intention to visit countries in the background of OTT content. Specifically, attention was paid to the parasocial relationship between viewers and actors appearing in OTT content, which is more strengthened than the existing media due to the technological development of the OTT platform, and the telepresence of the content and the high-quality production through the technical characteristics of OTT content. In addition, it was analyzed how individual celebrity involvement affects the formation of parasocial relationships and the telepresence of OTT content, and how this affects the national image and the intention to visit. As a result of the analysis, parasocial relationships and telepresence affected cognitive and emotional images, which had a positive effect on the intention to visit by mediating the overall image. In addition, the involvement of actors appearing in OTT content, which is an individual's psychological characteristic, had a significant impact on the parasocial relationship and telepresence. In other words, it was revealed that the relationship between viewers and performing entertainers was strengthened by the

characteristics and technological advances of OTT content consumption, which had a significant impact on the formation of the national image and the intention to visit the country. However, the telepresence did not have a significant impact on the emotional national image, which is because the characteristics of the city presented in the content are vividly conveyed by the telepresence. It is estimated that even if the telepresence is high, it will not necessarily affect the emotional image. This can be interpreted as a phenomenon because it is a destination image formed in a situation where there may be basic information about the country of an actor who has a parasocial relationship. These findings are important for understanding the psychological factors between viewers and performing entertainers and for deeply exploring the relationship between the technical characteristics of OTT content and the formation of the national image.

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