Assessing Parasocial Interactions and Relationships in Real Time

Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree Master of Arts in the Graduate School of the Ohio State University

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The Ohio State University
2013

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Abstract

Parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships refer to the connections people form with media characters, particularly through watching television. Transportation is a term used to explain narrative absorption. These concepts have been studied extensively in communication, particularly in laboratory settings. However, the influx of technology has changed the ways in which people watch TV. The two studies presented in this work encompass both old and new methodologies for studying parasocial interaction, capturing data on both parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships. In Study 1, participants use the social networking site Twitter to log their thoughts while watching an unfamiliar television show. In Study 2, more traditional laboratory methods were employed, using more common thought listing techniques. Participants in both studies filled out measures of parasocial interaction in survey data collected after viewing periods. PSR was found to have no relationship to thought sharing, whereas transportation was found to be positively related to the amount of thoughts shared during a narrative. Additionally, multitasking was found to significantly negatively affect the development of PSI and transportation, while enjoyment was higher when participants simultaneously used multiple media.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my friends, family, and everyone who pushed me to finish. Thank you to my committee members for their help and support. I would also like to express my gratitude to Katie Dale and Jim Collier, without whose help I would not have been able to write this thesis.

I especially would like to thank Alex Bolander, who provided tremendous support throughout this process.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

It has long been acknowledged that people form connections with media characters. Originally, it was thought that these connections served to supplement real social interactions for those who were unable to form such relationships. However, research has shown that connecting with characters is an extension of such social relationships and is a normal part of engagement with a narrative.

Though many scholars have examined the relationships between audiences and mediated figures, few studies have been able to capture this phenomenon as it occurs in a natural setting. Additionally, participants in this area of research were often required to watch shows that had little cultural relevance to their own lives; either the shows were very old or were from foreign countries. Additionally, there is very little literature that concerns the role that narrative transportation plays in the development of parasocial relationships.

This paper attempts to address these significant gaps in parasocial interaction literature by looking at parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships that develop in real time during and after exposure to unfamiliar, culturally relevant narratives. The two studies presented in this work employ both old and new methodologies for studying parasocial interaction, parasocial relationships, and narrative transportation.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Foundations of Parasocial Interaction

The term parasocial interaction (PSI) originally referred to a relationship between a spectator and performer that is “one-sided, nondialectical, controlled by the performer, and not susceptible of mutual development” (Horton and Wohl, 1956, p. 215). Horton and Wohl (1956) proposed that PSI was most likely to develop between spectators and a “persona” (p. 216), a type of media figure which refers to interviewers, talk show hosts, and any other figure that directly addresses its audience. Though there is an “illusion of intimacy” (p. 216) in these relationships, true intimacy can never be achieved since the relationship is almost entirely in the mind of the spectator. Horton and Wohl (1956) and Horton and Strauss (1957) argue that PSI is most greatly effective through television because of the repetitive nature of the medium and the increased possibility for character development.

Horton and Strauss (1957) further specified that the true experience of PSI is only possible when a figure directly addresses its audience. In fact, the figure does not even need to be mediated. For instance, a member of a very large audience at a speech can experience PSI with the speaker. The pseudo-interaction only occurs when the audience member perceives the figure as speaking to him or her alone. Modern communication scholarship disregards this more rigid definition of PSI, however. Presently, PSI refers to
a more all-encompassing spectator-performer relationship that does not necessarily involve direct address. This broader conceptualization of PSI mirrors what Horton and Strauss (1957) referred to instead as “vicarious interaction” (p. 579), in which the audience member is not directly addressed or acknowledged as present by the performer and follows the action without being directly engaged in it.

The idea that audience members connect with mediated figures did not spring forth fully formed from the heads of Horton and colleagues. Though most scholars do not look beyond Horton and Wohl (1956) there are significant theoretical links to earlier communication research that greatly informed the development of the concept. Symbolic interactionism, particularly the concept of the social self (Mead, 1934), is crucial to understanding PSI. Horton and Wohl (1956) also make references to early media identification literature as influential to PSI.

Symbolic interactionism is a foundational paradigm of the social sciences developed within the Chicago school of sociology in the early 20th century. The founding fathers of this ideology—Cooley (1922) and Mead (1934)—proposed that the idea of the self is most salient when encountered by others who aid in the formation of self. Most germane to PSI is the work of Mead (1934), whose writings in Mind, Self and Society served as the basis for much of Horton and colleagues’ work.

According to Mead (1934) the “self”—or what modern scholars might term “identity”—is constructed through encounters with social others. This human interaction has two basic levels: “the conversation of gestures,” or non-symbolic interaction, and the “use of significant symbols,” or symbolic interaction (Mead, 1934, Blumer, 1986, p. 8).
Through interactions with social others, humans learn a variety of roles that can be played within society. However, humans only take on the role which is required of them; they learn a variety of roles throughout their lives, and many go unused. According to Mead (1934), in role-taking one completely takes over the role, or attitude, of the other.

Coutu (1949) challenges Mead’s (1934) ideology of role taking in its original form, arguing that the extremes present in Mead’s theory limit its usefulness. Errors in perception, lack of ability, and inaccurate understandings of roles and attitudes may interfere in our ability to take particular roles. Additionally, Coutu considers Mead’s (1934) proposal that once a role is taken, it is taken “for keeps” (1949, p. 296) to be mistaken. If this is true, argues Coutu, then there would be no difference in attitudes or personalities. Coutu instead claims that attitudes may be taken and changed according to the personal responses of the individual.

Ellis, Streeter, and Engelbrecht (1983) build on this idea, explaining that media figures’ attitudes, or roles, may be tried on for fit, terming this “vicarious role taking” (p. 379). Ellis et al. (1983) connect this concept to taking the roles of mediated figures, arguing that vicarious role taking throughout a spectator’s life is important for the development of self-identity. These authors claim that though the practice occurs in unmediated relationships, mediated relationships provide observational feedback on the effectiveness of portraying that role in everyday life without the possibility of immediate repercussions.

The importance of role-taking to PSI is readily apparent in Horton and Wohl’s (1956) writing. Horton and Wohl (1956) argue that both performer and spectator play
roles in the experience of PSI, and that these roles are multifunctional. For instance, the performer plays the role of vicarious other, as well as the role of the character he or she is portraying. Horton and Strauss (1957) argue further that the persona deliberately takes on this role of vicarious interactant in order to foster the parasocial relationship (PSR) with the audience. It is essential for he or she to create that feeling of intimacy, to take into account the invisible audiences he or she must address. The spectator, meanwhile, must accept the role of parasocial other that is being offered to him or her by the performer. If the spectator does not fully accept the terms of this interaction, the possibility for dissatisfaction is much greater and the spectator may reject the parasocial relationship (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Interaction versus Relationship

One major limitation in PSI literature is the failure to distinguish between the interaction and the relationship, which should be two distinct experiences. These concepts are inherently linked, but parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships are not identical (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). This lack of clarification may be traced back to Horton and Wohl’s (1956) original conceptualization, wherein they define these pseudo-interactions as “relationships” (p. 217), their interest being primarily in the resulting relationships and not the interactions. Only recently has there been a call to differentiate these as two separate experiences and to clearly define which is being examined (e.g., Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006).

Klimmt et al. (2006) argue there are cultural and paradigmatic differences in the literature which account for the lack of clarification. These authors note that researchers
who take a uses and gratifications approach to studying PSI (e.g., Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985) consider the term “PSI” to be an all encompassing term that refers to a continuum of interaction and relationship which exists during and beyond exposure to media. However, researchers who examine the concept through the lenses of symbolic interactionism or media psychology (e.g., Schramm & Hartmann, 2008; Giles, 2002) view PSI and PSR as distinct from one another.

**PSI.** Schramm and Hartmann (2008) assert that a parasocial interaction only occurs simultaneously with media exposure, linking it to a term called parasocial processing. Parasocial processing is experienced during exposure to media and can be demonstrated via behavioral, emotional, and cognitive responses to mediated figures during exposure to these figures (Vorderer, Klimmt, & Ritterfeld, 2004; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). To measure this, Schramm and Hartmann (2008) created the PSI-Process Scales which analyzes what happens in the moment of exposure to media content. This conceptual definition serves as the basis for the understanding of PSI as presented in this paper.

**PSR.** The experience of interaction differs from a parasocial relationship, which extends past the time of exposure and is similar to the experience of an interpersonal relationship (Cohen, 2003). This relationship can become an ongoing bond between the figure and spectator that exists between viewings (Vorderer et al., 2004). Giles (2002) proposes that a PSR is initiated by the experience of PSI, and that PSRs will develop over time through multiple instances of exposure to the characters. Cohen (2003) elaborates that PSRs can be strongly felt and can result in the viewer feeling that they would like to
meet the character in real life. Tian and Hoffner (2010) agree that a PSR is an emotional bond that persists beyond media exposure. For the purposes of this study, PSR is considered to be a distinct experience from PSI, characterized as a relationship that exists apart from media exposure.

**Characteristics of PSI and PSR**

As Giles (2002) notes, one important question asked by PSI researchers is how the concept is connected to interpersonal interactions. Thus, this area of research has often been characterized by a comparison to interpersonal communication research. Though there has been some headway in this line of research, the connection between PSI and interpersonal communication theories is considered by some to be tenuous. Klimmt et al. (2006) argue that, though there is an abundance of social psychological research on interpersonal relationships and interactions, little has been done to formally connect these theories to PSI.

**Motivations.** Though its roots may lie within symbolic interactionism, PSI is often explored using the uses and gratifications approach (Klimmt et al., 2006). PSI researchers initially assumed that people who were not particularly adept at forming true social relationships would actively turn to the media in order to fulfill that void, forming relationships with characters to fill a need for intimacy and companionship (Cole & Leets, 1999) or as a way to combat loneliness (Rubin et al., 1985). Scholars such as Tsao (1996), Rubin (1983), Rubin et al. (1985), and Rubin and Perse (1987) hypothesized that the development of PSR is a motivation for media use, and that PSI may serve as a replacement for real social interaction.
The experience of PSI and PSR is not inherently pathological. It is important to note that many researchers (e.g., Giles, 2002; Greenwood, Pietromonaco, & Long, 2008) suggest that PSI and PSR are natural extensions of social interactions. Audiences make value judgments about other people in their lives and naturally do the same for media characters. Giles (2002) proposes that audiences will respond to media characters as if they were actually sharing physical space, experiencing the same psychological reactions as if they were interacting with real people. Rubin and Perse (1987) found that social attraction was a significant predictor of PSI—that is, that PSI was more likely to occur when audiences thought about characters as people they would be friends with in real life.

**Interpersonal connections.** It is thought that parasocial relationships are experienced similarly to true interpersonal relationships and that the skills required to develop PSRs are the same as those required for true interpersonal relationships (Cohen, 2004). Furthermore, personality traits associated with high sociability, such as empathy and extraversion, have been found to be predictors for PSI (Tsao, 1996). Thus, PSI is not necessarily a replacement for “real” human interaction, but instead is complementary to it (Caughey, 1984).

Though PSI and PSR have long been associated with similarity to interpersonal relationships, PSI and PSR research has not extensively examined how parasocial relationships affect real interpersonal relationships. McQuillen (2003) posited that PSI and PSR may negatively affect interpersonal relationships because viewers might either interpret the “perfection” exhibited by characters to be the norm and hold real individuals
to the same standards, or viewers might fulfill their needs for interpersonal involvement through vicarious involvement with television characters.

Recent scholars (e.g., Cohen, 1997, 2003, 2004; Cole & Leets, 1999; Greenwood et al., 2008) have evaluated relational attachment theory to causally evaluate the relationship between attachment styles in personal relationships and their effects on PSI and PSR. Briefly, attachment theory proposes that there are different ways adults relate to others based on two dimensions: anxiousness about personal relationships and avoidance of personal relationships. These dimensions are then mixed and matched to develop four different styles of attachment. Though attachment theory was developed to understand interactions and relationships between two people, researchers have found that the tenets of the theory hold true for developing parasocial relationships. For instance, Cohen (1997) discovered that men in relationships who were more anxious about their current partner had stronger PSR with fictional characters, while women typically had stronger PSR when they were more secure with their current partners. Additionally, Cole and Leets (1999) found that television characters can provide a sense of intimacy to anxious-ambivalent individuals (i.e., individuals who fear abandonment but crave intimacy), allowing them relationships that are difficult to hold in real life. Greenwood et al. (2008) found that young women who reported an anxious attachment style were more likely to parasocially connect with female characters they idealized.

Predictors. One important predictor of PSI and PSR is perceived similarity, also called homophily, which is the idea that one’s self is similar to another. Turner (1993) purported that “people are attracted to others who share similar attitudes, values, and
beliefs” (p. 444). This concept has been conceptualized as a predecessor for affinity, as well as for PSI. McDonald and Chakroff (2006) argue that the social self is important to understanding motivations for PSI and favorite character choice. Viewers watch the mediated other and experience themselves as playing that role; thus, if the mediated role they take is similar to one they have already performed, viewers feel more affinity and similarity with that character, and the character is more likely to be chosen as a favorite. The stronger the perceived similarity between the viewer and character, the more the viewer will continue to perceive the character as similar to him or herself, and the PSR between the viewer and the character will be stronger.

Perceived realism has been found to be a strong predictor for PSI (Rubin & Perse, 1987). Also positively related to PSI are the amount of time spent viewing television and television dependency (Giles, 2002). Vorderer et al. (2004) claim audiences seek to maintain and strengthen the real bonds they feel with mediated characters, thereby increasing their media consumption.

Though no longer considered inherent to the conceptual definition, direct address is also considered an important predictor of PSI. Horton and Wohl’s (1956) original conceptualization purported that direct address is an integral component of PSI; direct address in this case refers to a mediated figure who is talking to the camera or is speaking to his or her audience. Auter (1992) tested whether audience members experience stronger PSI with characters who “break the fourth wall” during the program (directly address audience members). He found that participants in the direct address condition rated significantly higher on the Rubin and Perse (1987) PSI scale. Hartmann and
Goldhoorn (2011) found that people experience higher PSI when the performer both bodily and verbally addresses audience members.

Enjoyment is another important concept related to PSI and PS. Research has demonstrated that PSI and PSR can increase viewer enjoyment of narratives (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011; Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Konijn and Hoorn (2005) found that the valance of parasocial interactions can influence the way viewers think about character outcomes.

**Dimensions of PSI and PSR**

Schiappa, Gregg and Hewes (2005) argue that PSI and PSR has been too often measured uni-dimensionally though the concept is, according to these authors, inherently multi-dimensional. Auter and Palmgreen (2001) address four dimensions of character involvement the authors believed to be necessary to measure PSI and PSR: identification with favorite character, interest in favorite character, group identification/interaction, and favorite character’s problem solving ability. They used these dimensions to develop the Audience-Persona Interaction (API) scale, collecting qualitative surveys in which the authors inquired about the quality of relationship between respondents and their favorite characters; questions were then selected that fit these answers.

In his multi-dimensional conceptualization of PSI and PSR, Giles (2002) distinguished three orders within the phenomenon, in which the possibility of true interaction with that figure acted as the differentiating characteristic. In the first order of PSI, audiences interact with the types of media figures described by Horton and Wohl (1956) as personae. Personae are the types of media figures who are “function[s] of the
media themselves” (p. 216), such as talk show hosts and interviewers; in effect these are pure celebrities with no fictional counterpart. These types of figures, Giles argues, are actually able to have a true social relationship with the viewer so the PSR is actually stronger. Second order PSI encompasses those figures who are “to some degree inauthentic” (Giles, 2002, p. 294). These are characters portrayed by actors whose fictional counterpart is considered to be a “real person” (p. 294); though viewers may enter into relationships with the actor, they will never be able to truly encounter the character itself. Finally, the third order of PSI encompasses fictional characters with no true human counterpart with whom viewers have no chance of interaction, such as cartoon characters.

Identification is an important dimension of PSI. Horton and Wohl (1956) clearly reference this concept in their initial discussion of PSI. Derived from Freudian psychology, identification refers to a shared perspective between two people whereby an individual loses a sense of his or her own identity and becomes similar to the other person (Freud, 1922). Media scholars adapted this construct to study how audiences form relationships with mediated figures.

Interestingly, though Horton and Wohl (1956) explicitly claim that identification with the figure is only intermittent in the experience of PSI, there is still disagreement regarding whether or not the two concepts should be considered parts of a whole. Some scholars consider identification and PSI to be entirely separate (e.g., Cohen, 2001; Giles, 2002; Greenwood et al., 2008), while others argue that identification with the character is in fact a large part of PSI (Rubin & Perse, 1987; Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Kassing &
Sanderson, 2009). Cohen (2001) claims that true identification requires the spectator to lose his or her own identity and become fully immersed in the text, whereas engaging in PSI does not require this loss of self. Tian and Hoffner (2010) found evidence to support that identification with a character is a predictor of strong PSR. However, Auter and Palmgreen (2000) do argue that PSI must involve identification, as explained within the dimensions of the concept in their interpretation of Horton and Wohl’s (1956) original conceptualization.

An important contribution of Giles’ (2002) model of PSI is that it acknowledges that instead of forming parasocial relationships, one might instead identify with the character and exhibit similar behaviors to a PSR. He also addresses the possibility that the two types of relationships might connect—one might identify with and interact with a character. Previous research had either considered the two to be part of the same process or wholly separate events. Linking them together potentially offers a more comprehensive understanding of the experience wherein one can both like and be like a character.

**Liked and disliked characters.** Most studies on PSI and PSR have focused on PSI and PSR being associated with positive feelings toward a media character. Affinity has been found to be a positive predictor for PSI and PSR (Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Recent research has pushed back on this, claiming that focusing on friendship feelings is limiting (Dibble & Rosaen, 2011). Tian and Hoffner (2010) and Dibble and Rosaen (2011) have found that relationships with disliked characters is possible, though connecting with liked characters engenders stronger parasocial relationships.
Still, “characters as friends” is the focus of the vast amount of PSI and PSR. Indeed, the most widely used measurement tool in this line of research is designed to test these friend-like relationships. The PSI Scale developed by Rubin et al. (1985) originally consisted of twenty statements designed to test the level of interaction between the audience member and newscaster. It was revised and reduced to ten statements by A. M. Rubin & Perse (1987) to test PSI and soap operas. The scale touches on the different processes of PSI, including “interaction, identification, and long-term identification” (Rubin et al., 1985, p. 156).

Though it has been extensively tested for reliability and validity, there are some limitations to the scale. Schramm and Hartmann (2008) noted that it is not “clear what the Parasocial-Interaction-Scale exactly measures” (p. 391). They propose that it only tests the level of PSR a media user experiences; thus, contrary to the intentions of its creators, interaction remains unmeasured. McDonald and Chakroff (2005) agree, claiming that the scale merely measures “relationship maintenance” (p. 3). And, because it was originally worded to understand PSI and PSR with newscasters, the scale must be reworded for each subsequent study. The lack of clarity in measurement may be due to previous unclear conceptualizations of PSI and PSR found in much of the literature. Schramm and Hartmann (2008) note that the PSI Scale only measures positive feelings about characters, which they believe is limiting to PSI research (see also Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Thus, Schramm and Hartmann (2008) attempted to devise a scale that did not necessarily require the user to feel positively for the media figure.

Self-Expression of PSI and PSR

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PSI and PSR is most often studied through self-report measures. Sometimes the viewer is asked to reflect on a favorite character; other times the viewer is exposed to an unfamiliar stimulus and is asked to report their experience. Rarely, however, is the audience member asked to actively consider their relationship and comment on it using his or her own words (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000).

Two somewhat non-traditional examinations of PSI and PSR analyzed unsolicited expressions of PSI and PSR written by viewers directly to a media figure. Sood and Rogers (2000) examined textual representations of PSI and PSR in their analysis of letters written to a popular Indian soap opera, analyzing a number of PSI and PSR indicators, such as learning, liking, respect, desire to have a regular relationship with a character, and talking to a character while watching. Kassing and Sanderson (2009) analyzed an online fan forum in which fans expressed their support for athlete Floyd Landis. They found that fans expressed PSR in a variety of ways, including expressions of support, advice-giving, expressions of emotional attachment, play, and identification. In both of the previous cases, audience members behaved as if they were truly interacting with the figure, though there was no explicit evidence that they were actually able to do so.

While the previous studies were relatively exceptional within PSI and PSR literature, traditional research has also briefly examined self-expression of PSI and PSR. Auter and Palmgreen (2000) issued four open ended response questions to participants based on a favorite television sitcom thereby developing their Audience-Persona Interaction Scale. Dibble and Rosaen (2011) also assessed verbal PSI by prompting their
respondents to consider how they had reacted to their favorite character in the past. They specifically were interested in active responses that the viewers might have used if they were actually in the same room as the character.

It is unknown whether talking about characters while watching a program will affect PSI and the development parasocial relationships. It is possible that because audience members who express many thoughts are distracted from narrative, they will not be able to develop strong relationships with the characters. However, it could also be the case that audience members who repeatedly talk about the characters may strengthen their attitudes about characters and thus develop stronger relationships.

Transportation

Transportation, also known as narrative involvement, narrative absorption, or narrative engagement, is conceptualized as the level of immersion within a narrative (Green & Brock, 2000). Green and Brock (2000) based their conceptualization on an analogy by Gerrig (1993) to physical travel, wherein a person finds him or herself “traveling” to a distant world (i.e., a narrative), losing him or herself in that world, and is changed by the experience upon return to the real world.

Transportation involves a particular process that melds “attention, imagery, and feelings” (Green & Brock, 2000 p. 701). A person who is transported can lose access to real-world knowledge and events in order to immerse themselves more fully in the narrative. Additionally, strong emotions and motivations can result from being transported, although the transporter person is aware that the narrative world is not reality. Green and Brock (2000) argue that full transportation can only occur when the
viewer experiences a total loss of self. Other researchers argue that it is possible to be involved in a narrative without losing one’s own sense of identity (Baumgartner, Sujan, & Bettman, 1992; Escalas, 2007). Buselle and Bilandzic (2008) argue that narratives will be experienced as true by default, but that instead of accepting the reality of a narrative as one’s own reality, the narrative builds mental models as the person “flow[s]” through it (p. 263).

Transportation is often studied in connection to attitude change, as in narrative persuasion (e.g., Moyer-Gusé, 2008). Researchers argue that if a person is exposed to a persuasive message while fully immersed in a narrative, counter-arguing will be reduced and attitude change is more likely to occur. Green and Brock (2000) thought this effect might be due to the fact that transportation transforms a narrative into a simulation of a direct, personal experience, which has been found to be important to persuasion (Fazio & Zanna, 1981).

The concept is also important to the study of enjoyment, the argument being that immersion in a narrative can increase the enjoyment of a narrative (Green & Brock, 2004). Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004) theorized that narratives are enjoyable for many people because they allow for new and exciting experiences one might not otherwise be able to experience. They also suggest that narrative involvement is gratifying as a mood management tool, allowing one to escape from the stresses of every day life.

**Multitasking**
Multitasking, such as using multiple media at once, is very prevalent today, particularly among youths (Vahlberg, 2010). Smartphones, laptops, television, and tablets are often used in conjunction with one another, displacing attention and cognitive resources (Ophir, Nass, & Wagner, 2009). Studies of transportation, PSI, and PSR have rarely taken this into account, instead setting the studies in laboratories and controlling for outside distracters and influences. However, this is not how most people engage with media.

By its nature, Study One of this paper encourages multitasking while engaging with the television show. Participants are asked to use Twitter to share thoughts as they watch television. However, it remains to be seen whether this will be beneficial or harmful to learning about how people really watch and connect to television narratives and characters.

Few studies have examined the connections between multitasking and engaging with characters and narratives. Papper, Holmes, and Popovich (2004) and Meng and McDonald (2009) argue that when using other media along with watching TV, television will take the primary focus. However, Ross (2011) found that multitasking had significant effects on narrative absorption. However, as the proliferation of multiple media multitasking is a relatively recent phenomenon, few studies have been found to corroborate these results.

The Present Study

The present study seeks to understand how people watch and talk about television. More specifically, the study examines how PSI occurs in real time and how
PSRs may develop from those interactions. To test this, participants were instructed to watch new television shows that were premiering in the US. The characters in the television shows included in this study were all included in Giles (2002) second order of PSI. Participants were asked to share their thoughts about a narrative while watching it for the first time. These thoughts were coded as instances of parasocial interaction. Additionally, participants were measured using a more traditional survey measure to evaluate the resulting parasocial relationship.

Because individuals in this study were asked to voice their opinions on unfamiliar shows, it could be that attitudes about characters were formed purely by the behavior of talking about these characters. Additionally, the reiteration of these characters as discussion points could reinforce a newly developing positive or negative relationship with the character. Transportation theory would argue that excessive talking about characters precludes the ability to become immersed in the narrative—resulting in less interaction with the characters—and would hinder the subsequent parasocial relationships from fully forming. It could also be that there is no relationship between talking about characters and PSI or PSR. Thus, the following research question was developed:

RQ1: Is the amount of thoughts expressed during exposure to a narrative related to parasocial relationships with characters?

In addition to the research question, a number of hypotheses were formed based on the preexisting literature on transportation and parasocial interaction.

H1: Measures of PSR associated with liked characters will be higher overall than those associated with disliked characters
H2: Transportation will be positively correlated with PSI.

H3: Transportation will be positively correlated with enjoyment.

H4: Transportation will be positively correlated with thoughts about the story world.

The terms “requested” and “unrequested” thoughts here refer to thoughts that were prompted by the researcher (requested) or were shared unprompted (unrequested).

H5: Highly transported people who share unrequested thoughts will have stronger levels of PSI than PSR, whereas:

H6: Highly transported people who do not share unrequested thoughts will report stronger levels of PSR than PSI.

H7: Transportation will be negatively correlated with the number of unrelated thoughts.
Chapter 3: Methods and Measures

The data collected for this project spans two separate studies conducted in the Winter, Spring, and Autumn of 2012. Study 1 was conducted remotely via an online survey hosted by Qualtrics.com as well as through Twitter. Study 2 was conducted in a more traditional laboratory setting. However, though the procedures were different, the same measures and stimuli were used for both studies.

**Study 1: Twitter**

Participants were undergraduate communication students at The Ohio State University who were offered extra credit for their participation in this research. Study 1 was conducted in the Winter and Spring of 2012. During this time, three new television shows premiered on the three major networks: *Smash* (NBC), *The River* (ABC), and *NYC 22* (CBS). *Smash* and *The River* premiered in February 2012, while *NYC 22* premiered in April 2012.

To participate in this study, participants filled out an initial baseline questionnaire through which they were assigned to watch to the first three hours of one of these unfamiliar television shows. Each participant was assigned to watch one show based on their schedule availability. If they had open availability, they were randomly assigned by the survey software to one of the shows. For *Smash* and *NYC 22*, this required participants to watch the first three episodes of each show. *The River* had a two hour
premiere episode, so participants assigned to watch this show only participated for two weeks. In this way all participants were exposed to three full hours of television.

Participants were required to watch the show as it aired on television in real time. During their exposure to these shows, they were required to use a privately created Twitter account to express their thoughts about the show as they watched from home. A researcher used a separate Twitter account to prompt participants to share what they were thinking at each commercial break. At the end of each episode, the participants were provided a link to a short questionnaire, and after the final assigned episode, they were guided to longer survey.

For *Smash*, a total of 34 participants completed all three weeks, while 1 participant completed 2 weeks. There were 304 thoughts for week one, 386 thoughts for week two, and 359 thoughts for week three. For *The River*, a total of 36 participants completed all three hours (over two weeks), while 4 participants completed two hours (1 week). There were a total of 617 thoughts for week one, and 277 thoughts for week two. For *NYC 22*, a total of 44 participants completed all three weeks, 5 completed two weeks, and 1 completed one week. There were 473 thoughts for week one, 460 thoughts for week two, and 413 thoughts for week three. Collectively, there were a total of 3,289 thoughts included in this data set.

**Twitter.** Twitter is a microblogging website that allows users to send short (140 character) messages to a list of people to whom they are connected (called followers). These messages are known as tweets. Study 1 involved participants actively using Twitter to tweet their thoughts about a television show as they were watching it. They
created new, private accounts to thought from which will only be able to be read by the researcher. During commercial breaks, participants were prompted to share their thoughts with the phrase “What are you thinking?” to remind them to keep tweeting. Participants were free to tweet as often as they liked during the show, though it was not required.

Twitter was been chosen over other forms of thought-recording for several reasons. First, the interactive nature of Twitter allowed the researcher to easily and quickly prompt all participants at each commercial break. Also, Twitter automatically assigns a time and date stamp to each thought, keeping participants accountable for thoughting at the requested time. Finally, Twitter easily affords privacy to participants to say exactly what they are thinking without repercussion; other social media, such as Facebook, make privacy much more difficult to achieve.

**Study 2: Laboratory**

Study 2 was conducted in the Spring and Autumn of 2012. Participants in Study 2 were also undergraduate students in the School of Communication at The Ohio State University and were offered extra credit for their participation. Study 2 differs from Study 1 in that it was conducted in a laboratory setting. There were two sessions of laboratory data collection using only one of the three shows featured in Study 1: *NYC 22*.

Participants were required to fill out the same online baseline questionnaire that was provided in Study 1. This was the only online portion of this study. To increase ecological validity and make the date more comparable to the data in Study 1, participants were required to attend a screening of one episode a week for three weeks, simulating the broadcast schedule. The participants were given a hard copy of each of the
short questionnaires which included space for them to share their thoughts during breaks. The commercials that were aired during the original broadcasts were edited out. Instead, a blank screen was inserted at all commercial breaks to allow participants to list their thoughts. At the end of the final episode, participants were given a hard copy of the final questionnaire to fill out in the laboratory space.

After the data were consolidated and cleaned, a total of 159 participants were included in the final analyses (Lab, n=58; Twitter, n=101).

Measures

Coding. All thoughts from both studies (n=5463) were coded into six categories. The categories were not mutually exclusive as each listed thought could contain references to more than one category (this was particularly true for Study 1). To clean and clarify the coding scheme, two coders independently coded approximately 10% of the sample (Krippendorff’s α=.86). The author then coded the remainder of the thoughts. Once all of the thoughts were coded, the categories were aggregated across episodes for each participant. A sum of the thoughts in all categories was taken to measure the total number of thoughts shared during the study.

The following six categories were developed to resemble a continuum of involvement in the narrative. The first and second categories (Unrelated thoughts and TV program thoughts) are those who were not very involved in the show at all. The third category (Storyworld thoughts) is for involvement in the story, but not the characters. The last three categories (Character Description, Emotional Response, and Direct Address) concern thoughts about characters, including thoughts directed at characters. The coding
scheme for the final three categories was partially informed by Schramm and Hartmann’s (2008) PSI Process Scales. The coding categories were as follows:

**Unrelated thoughts.** As the name suggests, this category included all thoughts that were not related to the television show (n=401). Common examples of thoughts in this category include thoughts about the commercials airing during the show; thoughts about being sleepy or hungry; thoughts about schoolwork, as well as questions about how to use Twitter. An example of a thought in this category would be, “I have a lot of geography homework to do tonight.”

**TV program thoughts.** This category primarily included thoughts about the show as a fictional construction, such as the use of actors’ names; opinions on the level of acting; words like “episode,” “plot,” or “story,” or any thought that did not accept the reality of the show. These thoughts also questioned the believability of plot and character actions. A quarter of the sample was included in this category (n=1364). Examples of this category include, “I'm really impressed by Katherine McPhee, I was a little iffy about her acting but I think she's doing a great job.”

**Storyworld thoughts.** Thoughts included in this category accepted the reality of the story world within the show and contained the most thoughts, over 55% of the sample (n=3053). These thoughts referred to the plot and actions of the characters as if they were real. The category included thoughts about past and future events in the show as well as commentary about and reactions to the story. This category was considered to be a proxy for narrative involvement as it included thoughts that considered the events of the story as
real. For example, “The cops should be doing their jobs and not sitting around,” and, “I really hope they decide to adopt that baby.”

**Character description.** This category \((n=426)\) encompassed thoughts describing the characters’ attributes, both physical and mental. This category does not include the actions that characters take within the story. Here, the focus is on who the character is, not what the character does. This category corresponds with the cognitive dimension of PSI outlined in the PSI Process Scale (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008). Examples of thoughts in this category include, “Emmit [sic] is a badass,” as well as, “Her boyfriend is so sweet and supportive.”

**Emotional response.** Thoughts in this category \((n=469)\) were emotional reactions to the characters, including expressing likes and dislikes, fear for the characters, and sympathy for the characters. This category corresponds to the affective response dimension of PSI explained by Hartmann and Schramm (2008). Examples include, “I feel really bad for T’s sister,” and, “I still don’t like that creepy guy, he’s so annoying.”

**Direct address.** The smallest category \((n=107)\), it included all thoughts in which participants seemed to be speaking directly to a character on screen. This category corresponds to the behavioral response dimension of PSI (Hartmann & Schramm, 2008). Examples of these thoughts include, “Ugh. Jerry. Go to hell, please?” and “Give her back!”

**Requested vs. unrequested thoughts.** This measurement concerned whether the thought was was shared during the commercial breaks (requested) or was shared during
the action of the show (unrequested). Unrequested thoughts were only present in Study 1 and comprised 16% of the total sample ($n=882$).

**Parasocial interaction.** To measure PSI, the number of thoughts in the final three categories across episodes were added and the sum was considered a measure of PSI for each participant. Thus, the more thoughts shared in those categories resulted in a higher score of PSI ($M=6.28; SD=6.08$). These are considered incidences of interacting with the character because they were shared during exposure to the narrative.

**Parasocial relationships.** PSR was measured using the Audience Persona Interaction (API) scale (Auter & Palmgreen, 2002). The survey measures were measured using a 7-item Likert scale ranging from Completely Do Not Agree to Completely Agree ($\alpha=.98$). The scale includes items such as, “I can identify with CHAR,” “CHAR reminds me of myself,” “I enjoyed trying to predict what CHAR would do,” where CHAR refers to the liked or disliked character chosen by the participant.

**Liked and disliked characters.** Participants were asked to list the names of three characters they liked and three they disliked. Though they were asked to list three of each, they were only required to list one. The participants then filled out PSR measures for each listed character. Due to the fact that many participants did not respond beyond their first liked and disliked characters, the measures used in the analyses were PSR for the primary liked character ($M=4.40, SD=1.95$) and the primary disliked characters ($M=2.09, SD=1.37$).
**Transportation.** Transportation was measured using a 12-item scale developed by McDonald, Schumaker, Anderegg, and Quenette (2010). Alpha for this scale was .86 ($M=4.29$, $SD=1.32$).

**Enjoyment.** Participants were asked to indicate their enjoyment of the series using a single item, 7-point scale ($M=3.61$, $SD=2.48$).
Chapter 4: Results

The initial question that was raised in this study was whether there was a relationship between sharing thoughts during a television show and developing parasocial relationships with characters. However, analysis suggests that there is no evidence that the amount of thoughts shared during a narrative has any relationship to PSR with liked characters ($r=-.04, \text{n.s.}$) or to PSR with disliked characters ($r=-.09, \text{n.s.}$). Analyzing the Twitter and Lab conditions separately did not alter the results, as those tests were insignificant as well. There is not sufficient evidence to support that PSR and thought sharing have any relationship.

The first hypothesis concerned the relationship between PSR with liked and disliked characters, predicting that PSR with liked characters would be higher overall than relationships with disliked characters. A paired t-test revealed that on average, PSR with liked characters ($M=4.40, SD=1.95$) is significantly higher than PSR with disliked characters ($M=2.09, SD=1.37$), $t(158)=15.93, p<.000$, a finding that was consistent with previous research.

Both correlations and regression analyses were used to test the following hypotheses. Table 1 illustrates the correlations for all of the major variables in the analysis. The variables were standardized for the analyses and the reported statistics reflect that standardization. Hypothesis two predicted that there would be a positive
relationship between narrative transportation and PSI. The analysis revealed that there is a small but significant relationship between these two variables ($r=.183, p<.000$).

Regression analysis revealed that after controlling for gender, the particular show watched by the participant, and the source of the data (Study 1 vs. Study 2), transportation is not a significant predictor for PSI ($\beta=.114, \text{n.s.}$).

Table 1

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*Standardized Variables

**$p<.05$ level.

Hypothesis three predicted that participants high in narrative transportation would report more enjoyment of the program. Consistent with previous transportation research and the hypothesis, transportation was found to be positively correlated with enjoyment ($r=.26, p<.01$). Regression analysis supported this finding as transportation was found to account for 12% of the variance in enjoyment ($R^2=.12, F(4,147) = 11.43, p<.01$) serving as a significant predictor after controlling for show, data source, and gender ($\beta=.26, p<.01$).
The fourth hypothesis proposed that highly transported people would share more thoughts about the story world of each television program. The relationship between transportation and story world thoughts was statistically significant, so H4 was supported ($r=.27, p<.01$).

Hypotheses five and six concerned highly transported people sharing unrequested thoughts and whether that act would affect PSI and PSR. Hypothesis five argued that PSI would be higher than PSR in those who do share unrequested thoughts, whereas hypothesis six proposed that PSR would be higher than PSI in those who do not share unrequested thoughts. To test this, a mean split was used to assess those participants who reported being highly transported—a score of 4.29 or above. The data set was then split by those who did share unrequested thoughts and those who did not. Because PSI and PSR were assessed on different scales of measurement, the variables were standardized and a paired t-test was used to determine whether there was a difference between those who did and did not share unrequested thoughts.

It was found that on average highly transported viewers who share unrequested thoughts will be significantly higher in their measurement of PSR ($M=.55, SD=.10$) than on their measurement of PSI ($M=.02, SD=.15$), $t(35)=-3.70, p<.01$. Thus, the result was directly opposite to the predicted outcome and H5 was not supported. Further analysis revealed that those who were highly transported and did not share unrequested thoughts did not have significant differences in PSI ($M=.35, SD=.20$) and PSR ($M=.16, SD=.18$), $t(41)=-.79, n.s.$ Thus, H6 was also not supported. To ensure the reliability of these tests,
correlations between variables were also tested which provided the same results, supporting neither hypothesis.

The seventh hypothesis also concerned the relationship between narrative transportation and thought sharing, positing that transportation would be negatively associated with the sharing of unrelated thoughts—that is, any thought that does not concern the show. In fact, there is a small but positive significant relationship between transportation and unrelated thoughts (r=.25, p<.01). Thus, H7 was not supported.

**Exploratory Analysis**

Further exploration of the data did indicate that there is a significant relationship between enjoyment of the series and PSR with liked characters (r=.41, p<.000) as well as PSR with disliked characters (r=.23, p<.01). Indeed, regression analysis showed that—after controlling for show, data source and gender—combined PSR with both liked and disliked characters accounts for 25.4% of the variance in enjoyment (R²=.254, F(2,145) = 19.73, p<.000). Separate analysis revealed PSR with liked characters was found to be a significant predictor of enjoyment (β=.479, p<.000), while PSR with disliked characters was not a significant predictor (β=.098, n.s.).

Additionally, there is no significant relationship between PSI and PSR with either type of character (Liked: r=.11, n.s.; Disliked: r=-.09, n.s.). This could be because measures of PSR were only taken for characters selected by the participant, and may not have corresponded with the characters they chose to share thoughts about. This would strengthen the case that PSI and PSR are two distinct experiences.
Another interesting finding was the negative relationship between transportation and the sharing of unrequested thoughts ($r=-.27$, $p<.01$). Yet, the relationship between transportation and the total amount of thoughts shared is significantly positive ($r=.41$, $p<.000$). This may imply that people who did not feel involved in the show were more willing to share thoughts, possibly about their disinterest in the show. However, people who were more involved in the story would not share thoughts during the action of the show, but when requested to do so were more likely to talk.

Because the two studies were so different in methodology, further analyses were performed to determine whether there was a difference between the lab and Twitter conditions. It could be argued that the lab condition does not have the same issues with multitasking that the Twitter condition might have. Independent samples t-tests were performed to assess whether there was a difference in PSR, PSI, enjoyment and transportation. The tests showed strong significant differences in all variables except PSR, (Twitter: $M=4.40$, $SD=1.17$; lab: $M=4.39$, $SD=2.86$), $t(157)=-.061$, n.s.

Enjoyment of the narrative was found to differ significantly between the two studies, where those who participated on Twitter reported significantly higher enjoyment of the series ($M=4.18$, $SD=2.00$) than those who participated in the lab study ($M=2.62$, $SD=2.93$), $t(157)=-3.99$, $p<.000$. Enjoyment was the only variable on which those in the Twitter condition were measured higher.

Participants in the lab condition ($M=8.36$, $SD=6.37$) had significantly higher levels of PSI than did those who watched the show from home ($M=5.10$, $SD=5.60$), $t(157)=3.37$, $p<.001$. Additionally, lab participants reported higher transportation
(M=5.03, SD=1.32) than did those who participated via Twitter (M=3.87, SD=1.11),
$t(157)=5.86, p<.000)$. 
Chapter 5: Discussion, Limitations, and Conclusion

Discussion

One particular aim of this paper was to analyze both PSI and PSR, not merely one or the other as most previous studies have done. The analysis was built upon the idea that the two experiences are distinctly different, as proposed by numerous researchers (e.g., Giles, 2002; Hartmann & Schramm, 2008). This idea was strongly supported as analysis revealed that there was no significant relationship between parasocial interaction and parasocial relationships. This could point to the fact that PSI and PSR are less linked than previous research has determined. Instead of PSI being a precursor to the development of a relationship, the two could be completely independent from one another. This is very different from previous research which has proposed that the two are intrinsically linked, or are even the same experience.

However, it is possible that the discrepancy is due to a limitation in the design. Interaction with characters may be a more internal or personal process than would be measured through this method. Though the coding scheme did address the dimensions of PSI explicated by Hartmann and Schramm (2008), more direct prompts that were character-related might have produced stronger data for these analyses. Thus, though the findings should be approached cautiously, there is evidence to support the separation of these two experiences. However, if the PSI measure is indeed a valid one, the findings
present a very different view of the concepts than presented in the past sixty years of PSI and PSR research.

Additionally, it was found that sharing thoughts has no bearing on the development of PSR. Though people talked about characters and stories, the conversation did not affect how they related to characters. These results were not altogether surprising. Perhaps the attitude towards characters was not strengthened through discussion, or stronger transportation did in fact disallow for relationships to be formed. Additionally, it may be that the majority of thoughts were shared about the plot or television show, instead of characters. Further exploration of this relationship would be necessary to make any significant evaluations of this research question, but the present evidence hints that there just is no relationship between sharing thoughts and developing character relationships. In a similar vein, it would be interesting to observe whether the number of words shared in a thought has any bearing on the PSI.

Perhaps the amount of thoughts shared is an inaccurate representation of how people are talking about the television shows. For example, multiple independent thoughts may have been shared within one Tweet in Study One, whereas in Study Two, participants may have felt obligated to share multiple thoughts but did not share as many relevant or character-related thoughts. This may be a potential avenue for future research.

This study also found support that thoughts shared about the events of the plot and story world were related to transportation, though the effect was weak. The story world thoughts were dependent on the acceptance of the story as real; thus, it is logical that those thoughts would correspond to the level of transportation a participant reports. The
small effect size may be due to the fact that sharing thoughts kept the participants from fully immersing themselves in the narrative.

Though a number of hypotheses were tested, the data offered a large variety of analyses that had not been anticipated by the researcher. Thus, a number of exploratory analyses were performed to understand some of the other possible relationships within the data. Arguably, these analyses provided some of the more interesting findings of the study.

Primarily, the exploratory analyses opened up the question of whether multitasking affects PSI, PSR, transportation or enjoyment of the narrative. Though the study did not originally set out to understand the effects of multitasking on parasocial relationships, the results show that there are significant differences between those who watched the shows from home and those who watched the shows in the lab.

Also important is the finding that PSI and transportation are significantly higher when multitasking is reduced. Participants connected more with the story and characters when they were not distracted by sharing thoughts during the narrative. This holds with the small amount of pre-existing literature on the topic. Not using Twitter—along with whatever else participants were doing at home—allowed the lab participants to immerse themselves more fully in the narrative. Other explanations for this discrepancy may be the environment of the lab itself. Participants in Study 2 watched the show on a large screen in a dimly lit room—similar to a movie theater. The screen size and film conditions may have contributed to the increased narrative transportation and interaction with the characters.
This immersion, however, did not increase the enjoyment of the show for lab participants or the relationships that viewers were able to form with the characters. This is directly opposed to the finding that overall transportation measures taken from both studies was significantly related to the enjoyment of the program. Further analysis is necessary to understand the nuances of these questions.

It is interesting that home viewers reported more enjoyment of the series than did lab viewers. Possibly, the experience of watching from the comfort of one’s own home—in the way that one might typically watch TV—leads people to enjoy the show more. Also, participants were not actively restricted from watching the show with others, eating during the show, or participating in other activities. All of these may have contributed to higher reported enjoyment of the show.

In contrast, the lab conditions are not particularly comfortable and attending lab sessions may have felt like a burden, which may have affected the participants’ enjoyment of the narrative. Also, lab participants may have been more compelled to think critically about the series as they may have felt that the study was somewhat more “official” than did those who watched from home. These findings may be important to improving the validity of future research in this area, especially as multitasking becomes a much more prevalent way of life.

**Limitations**

One limitation of the study is the method of ascribing meaning to the number of thoughts shared, which may have been affected by a number of factors. This methodology greatly affected the PSI measure. The measure was entirely dependent on
counting the shared thoughts which may not have captured the entirety of the PSI experience. It is possible that participants who did not share as thoughts were in fact experiencing interactions with characters which simply were not measured by this coding strategy.

Similarly, it is possible that the characters listed as liked and disliked were not related to the characters that were talked about in the thoughts. As discussed, most PSI and PSR research assumes that people feel positively towards characters. Though it was not quantitatively evaluated, preliminary analysis of the thoughts demonstrated that a large portion of the thoughts were very negative. Additionally, most character-related thoughts indicated that participants actively disliked these characters. It could be that PSI is primarily an interaction with disliked characters. Previous research would not have been able to determine this due to the previously mentioned positive bias. Future analysis of the data set could reveal exactly which character was being discussed during the show, and comparing the discussed characters with the characters they listed as liked or disliked post hoc..

Another important limitation to address is the use of Twitter in Study One and its potential effect on the results. It is possible that the students were familiar with using social media, and shared thoughts because they were conditioned to do so. Future research should include a control variable about Twitter use to determine how familiarity with the platform affected the shared thoughts. Another potential limitation of Twitter was the 140 character limit. However, many participants would share thoughts across
multiple thoughts, so the limitation may not have affected how participants shared thoughts.

While the use of a natural setting in Study One was a useful strategy for achieving high ecological validity, there are significant limitations to that design that must be addressed. First, the lack of experimental control may have greatly affected the type of thoughts shared by participants. Additionally, participants may have been multitasking beyond the use of Twitter and television. Finally, it is likely that many participants viewed the shows in the company of others, which may have affected the number shared thoughts. All of these may have had some effect on the data, which therefore must be interpreted with caution.

The shows that were used as stimuli in this study were current, relevant television shows that premiered on major American networks. However, all four shows were categorized as TV dramas and, as of this study, three of the four shows have been cancelled, the exception being NBC’s *Smash*. Though it is difficult to predict the popularity of new shows, the fact that the majority of the these were not renewed speaks to the relatively unpopularity these programs faced. The results of this study may have been wildly different if the stimuli had been comedies or even well-liked.

Additionally, though the study did control for previous viewings of the four shows, there was no control for whether the participant had seen advertisements or previews for each of these shows. Expectations may have played a large role in the types of thoughts that were shared.

**Conclusion**
This paper explored how people form connections to characters and narratives while watching new and unfamiliar television shows. It is important to highlight the contributions that this study offers the area of PSI and PSR research, particularly the use of natural setting. So few studies have looked at how people talk about—and to—characters. This paper explores a relatively popular topic in a unique way, offering a novel lens through which to view PSI and PSR and challenging the ways in which some of these concepts should be viewed. The results both challenged and supported previous work, opening up a variety of avenues for future research.
References


Appendix A: Project Information and Consent Form

Research Study:
Development of Audience Interaction
Recruitment Script (Repeated online prior to the consent form)

This is a study about your use and experience with television. We are attempting to understand how people process entertainment information, what they think about, and how their reactions relates to their own sense of self and their enjoyment of stories. To do so, this project will ask you to fill out some questions in an online questionnaire, watch some television programs and report your thoughts while viewing the programs. After viewing, you will also need to provide information about how you reacted to the programs.

There are two ways to participate, in a lab or in ‘real time’ by watching at home.

**Participation involves these steps:**

1. Reading instructions and filling out a very short baseline questionnaire online.
2. Being assigned to watch either a comedy program for 3 weeks in a row or drama program for two weeks in a row, depending on the schedule you provide for us. The comedy program will last 30 minutes each week; the drama program will last one hour each week.

If you participate in the “real time” portion:

3. Signing up for a “Twitter” account so that you can provide your thoughts to us while viewing. We will provide those instructions.
4. During the program, you will provide your thoughts to us via Twitter.
5. After each program, you will answer a short online questionnaire.

If participate in the lab portion:

3. Sign up for attendance at a time in which the program will be shown in the lab setting.
4. During the program, provide your thoughts to us via a paper questionnaire.
5. After the program, answer a short paper questionnaire.

**Requirements for participation:**

To participate in the “real time” portion of the study, you will need to have access to a working TV set (that can receive the major networks: ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox) and access to Twitter at the same time, either through a laptop or through a smartphone.

To participate in the lab portion, you will need to attend a lab presentation at the appropriate time and have a pencil with you.

**Viewing Requirements:**

The programs that are likely to be assigned are all programs from this season being broadcast on the main commercial networks. Several programs may be available for the study, but we will not know until the exact schedules are announced. Some may have debuted in January of this year, while others will debut during this study.

**Please read through these instructions very carefully so that you understand what will happen.**

1. First, you will need to read this overview of the study and agree to participate in the study by accepting the consent form that will be linked below. If you do not wish to participate, you may simply leave the website, or you may check ‘No’ on the consent form. If you do not wish to participate, you may elect to complete a research paper that will involve approximately the same length of time and receive the same amount of credit. Please contact Dr. McDonald (mcdonald.221@osu.edu) for information about this alternative form of participation.

2. If you agree to participate in the study, you will be assigned an ID via email.

3. After you receive the ID, you will need to remember it for use in the study (so that we can assign credit correctly), and you will be provided with a link to a short questionnaire. You will then enter your assigned ID and fill out some background questions about you and your thoughts about a number of different things. You will also be able to indicate which days, nights and times are best for your participation, and whether you wish to participate in the “real time” or “lab” version of the study.
For those participating in the “real time” study:
3. When you have finished the questionnaire, you will be told which programs you will need to watch and the times they will be broadcast. You will also be given instructions about signing up for a Twitter account. You will need to sign up for the Twitter account at least 24 hours before the first program is scheduled to be broadcast. This is so that we can be certain that you are signed up correctly.
4. Each night your program is broadcast, you will need to log on to your Twitter account at least five minutes before the program begins. During the program, you will receive thoughts at regular intervals, asking what you are thinking. You will simply respond to the thought. At the end of the episode, you will be provided a link to a short online survey that you will need to complete so that you can obtain full credit. After the last episode in the study, there will be a slightly more detailed questionnaire.

For those participating in the “lab” study:
3. You will be given the room number and time for participation.
4. At the lab, you will be provided with a questionnaire on which you will write your thoughts when the video turns black (at preselected times). At the end of the episode, you will be provided a link to a short online survey that you will need to complete so that you can obtain full credit. After the last episode in the study, there will be a slightly more detailed questionnaire.

Whether you are in the “lab” session or the “real time” session:
5. Credit will be awarded based on the amount of participation, assigned based on the number of activities. For those participating in comedy viewing, there are 3 programs, a baseline and a final questionnaire, as well as two questionnaires following each episode. Credit will be assigned as follows: baseline questionnaire: 5%, each episode with thoughts, 25% (total 75%), questionnaire after each episode, 5% each (total 10%), questionnaire after 3rd (final) episode, 10%.
Those assigned to the drama program will receive credit as follows: baseline questionnaire, 5%, 1st episode with thoughts, 35%, second episode with thoughts, 45%), first post-episode questionnaire, 5%, questionnaire following final episode, 10% for a total of 145 minutes.
6. We expect the full study to take a total of 145 minutes, including viewing the episodes and completing questionnaires. We will provide a list of all of those who participated within one week of the final episode you are scheduled to watch. Those who participated less than the full time will receive partial credit for their participation, as indicated in 5 above.

7. This study is being conducted by Dr. McDonald in the School of Communication, as well as graduate students James Collier, Katie Dale and Kaitlyn Jones. If you have any questions before you agree to participate, you may contact Dr. McDonald at mcdonald.221@osu.edu.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in research titled:

Development of Audience Interaction

Dr. Daniel G. McDonald., Principal Investigator, or one of his authorized representative, Jim Collier, Katie Dale or Kaitlyn Jones, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures. I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

By typing my information and clicking below, I indicate that I am doing so freely and voluntarily. At my email request, a copy of this form will be given to me by the study investigators.

Date ________________________________ (fill in)

Name __________________________________ (fill in)

Email address ___________________________ (fill in)

Course Number for which you wish to receive credit:
____________________________________ (fill in)

By clicking “yes” below I am indicating that I consent to participate in the study. I understand that I will receive an ID via email. That email will also have a link to complete the baseline questionnaire.

Yes – I agree to participate in the research

No – I do not want to participate in the research

Email to be sent to “real time” participants:
Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study, called “The Development of Audience Interaction.” Your assigned ID is ____________.

Please keep this ID in a secure place. You will need to have access to it at various parts of the study.

To participate, you will need to complete the baseline questionnaire first. Please complete it at least 24 hours before your assigned program begins.

The questionnaire can be accessed at _(link)________________.

After completing the baseline questionnaire, the next step will be to set up a Twitter account. Detailed instructions about setting up that account will be available at the end of the baseline questionnaire.

**Email to be sent to “lab” participants:**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in our study, called “The Development of Audience Interaction.” Your assigned ID is ____________.

Please keep this ID in a secure place. You will need to have access to it at various parts of the study.

To participate, you will need to complete the baseline questionnaire first. Please complete it at least 24 hours before your assigned program begins.

The questionnaire can be accessed at _(link)________________.

After completing the baseline questionnaire, detailed instructions about the time and location of the viewing portion of the study will be provided to you.
Appendix B: Twitter Information and Instructions

TWITTER INSTRUCTIONS HANDOUT for Study on “Development of Audience Interactions”
(Real time only)

Check-list for Twitter experience:
- Set up Twitter account
- Follow (investigator Twitter ID)
- Approve (investigator ID)’s request to follow your account
- Watch (Assigned Program) on Network on Date/Time.
- Thought your thoughts during each commercial break

How to set up a Twitter account:
1. Go to www.twitter.com and enter your name and e-mail address. You will need to enter a real e-mail address. They will send you a confirmation e-mail with a link to activate your account.
2. Follow the instructions for setting up an account. You need to use your Assigned ID for the account name.
3. Twitter will prompt you to follow other accounts. You can click “skip this step” at the bottom of the screen.
4. In the search box, search Investigator ID to find the study account.
5. Click “Follow” next to the account. This will allow the thoughts we send out to show up in your “timeline.”
6. On the top right hand side of the screen, click your username and then click “settings” to bring up the settings page.
7. In the settings page, click “Protect my thoughts.” Make sure to click “save” at the bottom of the screen. This will set your thoughts to private so that only those who follow you will be able to see them.
8. Check your e-mail, and confirm your e-mail address by clicking the link sent from Twitter.
9. You will receive a request to be followed by Investigator ID. Approve this request.
10. Once you have approved this request, send out your first thought. For your first thought type: @Investigator ID Hello from your
assigned ID. (for example, a thought from me would say “@Investigator ID Hello assigned ID”).

Since you have set your thoughts to be protected, only the people you approve to follow you will have access to this information.

11. Watch assigned program, network, day and time. Just before the show starts, you’ll get a thought from me to remind you about it.

12. When the show cuts to a commercial break, you’ll get a thought from me asking you what you were thinking when the show cut to the commercial.

13. Thought back to me using “@Investigator ID” whatever thoughts you had when you received the thought. After each thought from Investigator ID, you have two minutes to thought back. You may use more than one thought, as necessary. There are no wrong or right answers. Please don’t guess what we want to hear – just whatever you were thinking.

If you’d prefer to do this with your smartphone, there are instructions on the twitter website about how to do that. Just make sure you follow the instructions above to maintain privacy.

If you have any questions about setting up an account or the process of thoughting during the show, please e-mail investigators’ emails.
Email Message the day of program broadcast:

Please don’t forget to watch the program you’ve been assigned for the “Development of Audience Interaction” study.
Or
Please don’t forget that you have signed up for participation in the lab study today at ____ pm in ____.

Twitter Messages during the broadcasts:
1. (approximately 5 minutes before the program begins)
   You should be set up for the program now.

2. (at each commercial break)
   What are you thinking right now? You can use more than one thought to explain.

3. (at the end of the program)
   Please log in to _______ (website) and complete the survey for this episode. Make certain you enter your ID.
   Thank you for your participation!
Appendix C: Final Questionnaire

Final Questionnaire

Assigned ID ______________

First, please indicate how you are feeling right now. For this group of adjective pairs, circle the number that is closest to where you would put yourself right now, based on the two adjectives on each line:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Displeased</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>Pleased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sleepy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Awake</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Active</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Glad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depressed</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dull</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Peppy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Now, using the 1 to 9 scale, with 1 = strongly disagree, and 9 = strongly agree with the statement, please tell us how much you agree with the following statements about your experience with the episode.

| I felt like I was going through what the characters were going through. |
| I could picture myself in some of the scenes in the show. |
| It felt like the events were happening to me. |
| While watching, I was thinking of things I could have been doing instead of watching. |
And now, please indicate below how much you enjoyed the episode by circling the number that comes closest to matching your opinion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Did not</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Enjoys at</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Very</td>
<td>Enjoyment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Here are some questions about the series and the characters in the series.

1. Do you think you will watch an episode of this series again?

   Yes _____ No
2. Considering the characters that comprise the main cast. Some viewers tend to like one particular character, whereas others like various aspects of several characters within a cast. How about you? Please identify the character(s) you like.

a. ______________
b. ______________
c. ______________

3. Now consider any characters you don’t like. Please list them below.

a. ______________
b. ______________
c. ______________

4. For each of the characters you listed above, please indicate how much each statement applies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reminds me of myself</th>
<th>Name from above</th>
<th>Name from above</th>
<th>Name from above</th>
<th>Name from above</th>
<th>Name from above</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has many of the same qualities I have</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have many of the same beliefs as the character</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can imagine myself as being the character</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can identify with the character</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d like to meet the actor who plays the character</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’d watch the actor on a different program</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoyed trying to predict what the character would do</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I hoped the character would achieve his/her goals</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I care about what happens to the character</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like hearing the character’s voice</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I interact with my friends in a way that is similar to the character and</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
<td>Name from above</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
his/her friends

I interact with my family in a way that is similar to the character and his/her family

My friends are like the character

I’d enjoy interacting with the character and my friends at the same time.

While watching the show, I felt as if I were part of the group.

I can relate to the character’s attitudes.

I wish I could handle problems as well as the character.

I liked the way the character handled his/her problems.

I’d like to be more like the characters.

I usually agreed with the character.

I usually would have done the same thing as the character.

For this section, using a scale of 1 to 9, with 1 not applying at all and 9 applying very much, please indicate how much each trait applies to each character.
Please indicate below how much you enjoyed the series overall by circling the number that comes closest to matching your opinion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did not Enjoy at All</td>
<td>Moderate Enjoyment</td>
<td>Enjoyed Very Much</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the last bit of information, please provide your gender and ethnicity or racial identification (check one):

Gender: Male Female

Ethnicity/Racial Identification: African-American Asian Caucasian Hispanic Other Mixed

Thank you very much for your help with our study.