

The Effect of Facebook on Parasocial Interaction in Local News

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ABSTRACT

News agencies' ratings often hinge on the relationships their anchors build with viewers. Strong feelings of parasocial interaction, or these on-sided "relationships" audiences feel with on-screen media figures, have been found to be a strong predictor of media use. Local news stations have long been challenged with ways to encourage these feelings of parasocial interaction. With local news ratings consistently falling, news agencies must consider new ways to gain untapped markets and have begun reaching out to young adults. One way news agencies are attempting to do so is by utilizing social media websites like Facebook. The current study aims to explore the effects of Facebook on college-aged participants ($N = 143$) viewing a local newscast. Specifically, this study examines whether a brief exposure to a news anchor's Facebook profile can increase feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchor. Results indicate that while brief exposure to an anchor's Facebook page does not influence feelings of parasocial interaction, strong feelings of interpersonal attraction play a significant role in developing parasocial relationships. Future research and implications are also discussed.

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Introduction

Over the past thirty years, the rise of large 24-hour cable news networks has steadily and increasingly challenged locally-originating television news. While local television remains the most popular source of news in the nation, with more than half of Americans reported to watch local TV news (Potter, Matsa & Mitchell, 2011), studies reveal that ratings steadily continued to decline throughout the past decade, including during the 2008 election year (“Local TV News Reports,” 2009). Local news affiliates may currently reign over cable news networks, but their ratings are falling rapidly and, if they continue to fall at the current rates, local television will not sustain their top billing much longer.

The Younger Demographic

For instance, in 2010, affiliates of the four major networks (ABC, CBS, Fox, and NBC) witnessed a decline in audience size in the three key news time slots: morning, early evening, and late night. In particular, prime-time evening news lost more than 2.1 million viewers, or 8.5% of their audience, over the past four years (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2011).

News corporations constantly work to develop new ways to maintain their grasp of traditional audiences, and increase the frequency with which traditional audiences tune in to watch the news. News stations struggle to gain new audiences in an increasingly diverse and specialized media landscape. Traditionally, the young adult demographic, 18- to 34-year-olds, is the most elusive for television news (Potter, Matsa, & Mitchell, 2011), and the unique features of the current generation of which this demographic is comprised calls for even more special consideration from news organizations. This demographic is comprised mostly of the generation known as the Millennials. Defined as those born between the 1980s and the mid-1990s, the Millennial generation is distinguished as the first generation to have “grown up wired” (O’Reilly & Vella-Zarb, 2000). This generation is not only comfortable with technology, but they expect it. Millennials are characterized as mobile and always connected; they socialize online and keep in touch with friends and current events through social networking and live data feeds. Seventy-five percent of Millennials report having a Facebook profile, compared with 41 percent of Americans overall (“The Millennials,” 2010). Growing up with the internet, cell phones, and text messaging, this generation is also famously noted as having shorter attention spans and easy

access to everything (Elam, Stratten, & Gibson, 2007). This generation knows their worth and expects to be catered to, earning the alternate title of “the entitled generation” (Menkes, 2010).

However, catering to them is certainly a good idea for media organizations, as this generation is made up more than 50 million individuals (Hilton, 2010), and their spending habits seem to be rising to an all-time high influencing over \$170 billion in spending power annually (“Culture of Millennials,” 2011). Gaining this audience would be lucrative for local news agencies in terms of advertising revenue and would help reverse falling revenue and ratings.

However, research also suggests that making gains in the young adult audience will be a significant challenge. Young adults often cite two main reasons for news disengagement: lack of time and feelings that local news is not relevant to their lives (Campbell, 2007). However, while young adults cite time constraints for reduced news viewing, research shows that they spend as much time as older people engaging in a variety of other media activities (“Older Adults,” 2010).

Studies show that young adults devote about as much time as older consumers to watching entertainment TV and reading books and magazines. They spend more time using computers, while spending notably less time following news on TV or in the newspapers (“Internet Gains,” 2011). Therefore, one solution to the youth’s lack of engagement problem could be found in social media. News enterprises may not be effectively utilizing the more popular media channels in which this young adult demographic is involved, especially social media websites such as Facebook.

Social Media and News

Social media is a broad term encompassing all web-based technologies that are highly interactive and that allow media users to create and modify user-generated content (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 2011). The social media phenomenon has challenged many organizations to rethink the ways they have traditionally reached out to their stakeholders. In a recent analysis, Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy and Silvestre (2011), found that all types of groups, from the Catholic Press Association to governors to organic farmers, are actively working to capitalize on social media.

The news world is no exception. In 2009, *The New York Times* appointed its first “social media editor” to keep abreast of the vast amount of social media content affecting the organization (Nolan, 2009). While other news organizations may not have an employee with

that official title, they are sure to remain up-to-date and active on their social media pages. They use social media to not only communicate with audiences, but also to monitor feedback from a customer relations standpoint.

News directors say it is an effective way to remain connected with viewers. For example, as of April 9, 2012, Los Angeles' KABC was leading one of the country's top markets in the social media world with 344,145 Facebook fans and 78,056 Twitter followers (Knox, 2012). In a recent online interview, news director Cheryl Fair touts the importance of a strong online presence, saying, "As a news organization, we see social media as a way for our viewers to talk to us, and not just as a way for us to talk to them. Listening is important" (Knox, 2012). Fair goes on to say that interactivity is important and the news station has made a strong commitment to replying to questions and comments posted by viewers on the station's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

However, not all news outlets have quite figured out how to navigate the social media world. Some news organizations are attempting to capitalize on the interactivity offered by the internet by developing less traditional news broadcasts, but have yet to prove successful. In 2009 Roanoke, Virginia, NBC affiliate WSLN launched a seven o'clock interactive-style newscast that featured live chat and interaction with Facebook and Twitter users. According to program host Meagan Farley, this new style of format was targeted directly to the younger demographic. However, in early 2011 the broadcast was terminated due to low ratings. In order to benefit from the many offerings of social media and gain new viewers, news organizations must explore the uses of social websites like Facebook, and take time to pinpoint what does (and does not) work.

An example of such a benefit can be seen in the approach of national news network CNN. While local news viewership continues to drop, in 2011 both CNN and MSNBC saw an increase in ratings (Weprin, 2012). CNN has become increasingly known for its participation in and emphasis of social media use. In a recent online interview, CNN's senior digital producer Steve Krakauer acknowledges that the link between higher ratings and high social media use does not prove causation, but he notes that "on some big events there's a correlation" ("*CNN Takes Social Media Crown*," 2012).

Social media affords new opportunities to engage audiences in a variety of different ways. In addition to traditional websites, local news affiliates can create company profiles on Facebook to highlight feature stories, allow their communities to upload their own personal

photographs, and even comment on news reports of the day. News anchors also can create their own Facebook profile, allowing their target audience a chance to interact with them online by sending them messages or writing on their discussion walls.

As research shows that time constraints are not the deciding factor on the young adult audience's decreasing news consumption, media outlets must be proactive in engaging this demographic in their programming. One way local news channels can do so is to actively foster relationships with this audience. If young adult audience members feel connected to the news anchor, they are more likely to tune in regularly (Giles, 2002). It is incumbent upon local news channels to present newscasters in a way that appeals to young people.

Parasocial Interaction and Social Media

Research shows that one of the most powerful way to gain – and retain – viewers is to foster a *parasocial interaction* between the newscaster and audience members (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Giles, 2002; Rubin & Perse, 1987). Parasocial interaction (PSI) is a term used to describe one-sided, pseudo-interpersonal relationships between media personalities and audience members (Horton & Wohl, 1956). Even though these “friendships” are unilateral and not based on any actual social interaction between the audience and the character, they create real bonds in the minds of the viewers. The viewer feels that the figure on the screen is communicating directly to them, even though the media personality has no knowledge of their fan's existence. This feeling of connection is strong and, according to Rubin and Perse (1987), regular soap opera viewers have reported feel “nearly as emotionally connected to the characters on their favorite television show as they do with their friends.” Other media consumers report feeling strong attachments to their favorite athletes (Brown, Basil & Bocarnea, 2003), actors (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner 1993), and TV shopping hosts (Grant, Guthrie, & Ball-Rokeach, 1991). Parasocial interaction is studied in a variety of media contexts and proves to be a great predictor of media use (Conway & Rubin, 1991).

The social media phenomenon is still relatively new and there is still much to be explored. A review of recent literature indicates the rapidly growing importance of social media in a variety of different aspects of relationship building. Initial research focuses on personal relationships in regards to social media. People are beginning to spend more of their social lives

online, creating a need to define new relationships and develop new protocols. Though once they carried connotations of stigma, online dating sites are now commonplace and have become an acceptable avenue to meeting new people (Brown, 2011). The business of creating and fostering online relationships grew to a nearly billion-dollar industry in the United States in 2011 (Brown, 2011). Young adults, especially, are using social media to stay connected, and recent studies show that it can strengthen family ties by offering a constantly connected experience. The Millennial generation reports feeling closer to their parents than their older siblings did at the same ages, possibly due to more avenues of access through online networking sites (“The Millennials,” 2010). The implications of online social relationships extend into the business world and create an environment in which businesses have no choice but to adapt (Brown, 2011).

Organizations such as restaurants, retail stores and nonprofits are utilizing social networking to maintain relationships with their customers (Neff, 2010; Briones, Kuch, Lu & Jin, 2011). As audience relationships are extremely important in the broadcast world, news agencies are beginning to integrate social media into newscasts. For the young audience, this is especially vital. For many companies, Facebook fan bases have become their largest web presence, outnumbering visitors to the official company website as more consumers are migrating to social media and more commercials and print ads direct people toward their Facebook profile (Neff, 2010). As research has shown that 86 percent of young adults log onto Facebook as frequently as ten times a day (Hogg, 2009), it seems clear that regardless of whether consumers are using the social media website in place of, or as a supplement to, their internet traffic on local news sites, these profiles are inarguably an integral part of the changing media landscape.

Additionally, young people connect to social media sites globally, using not only “traditional” desktop and laptop computers, but also emerging tablet and smartphone technologies which are advancing at a tremendous rate, offering perpetual, untethered connectivity. Due to the instant awareness of what is new and newsworthy, the Millennial Generation will demand services offered by companies to keep up with their fast-paced expectations (Zogby, 2008).

As relationships increasingly take place in the virtual realm, they afford news agencies more opportunities for engagement. The limitations of a definitive time constraint have vanished. Audiences are no longer tied to a news anchor only during the hour he or she appears on air, allowing more time and greater prospect for connection.

The proliferation of social media into social customs and business practices is still a very new phenomenon and needs to be better understood in order to maximize any possible benefits it may extend to the news world. While earlier studies focused on the concept of parasocial interaction with news anchors, as yet none have extended parasocial theory with respect to the social media phenomenon. New research will update this theory by bridging the gap between parasocial interaction and social media. With this goal in mind, this study will attempt to identify whether viewing a local news personality's Facebook profile will enhance feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchor, thus leading to enhanced perception of enjoyment of local broadcast news. As research outlined below will show, strong feelings of parasocial interaction and enjoyment often lead to desire to watch the program, and this study's implications will likely be of particular interest for local news organizations.

To control for the desired variables, the researcher conducted a 2 X 2 between-subjects factorial experiment to explore a series of hypotheses. In order to examine the effect of the news anchor's Facebook page on parasocial interaction, the study compared two conditions presenting a pre-recorded news broadcast, with the experimental condition viewing a brief newscast followed by a review of the anchor's Facebook page, and the control condition viewing the newscast only, unaugmented by social media. Two anchors, one male and one female, of similar ages were selected. This helped to determine whether the role of the Facebook profile, rather than the anchor's gender, is the most important factor influencing parasocial feelings in audience members viewing the newscasters. The results may suggest more effective methods to actively engage audience members in light of a changing media landscape: data seen as vitally important to the future of local broadcast news.

Literature Review

Local News on the Decline

When the staggering decline in local news ratings first became evident in 1996, studies by the Pew Research Center found that declines in television viewing were likely related to the increasing use of personal computers, which began to grow markedly during that time period, particularly among younger people (“TV News Viewership,” 1996). At this point in time, online services and the internet, especially the World Wide Web, were just beginning to make an impact on the personal computing world.

Today, the internet is still gaining in popularity and continues to close in on television as Americans’ main source of national and international news. Even though television remains the most widely used source for national and international news, the number of people who say they use it as their main news source is down 16 percent from 2002. More than 40 percent of Americans say they get most of their news from the internet, which is 17 points higher than in 2007 (“Internet Gains,” 2011). Young people are increasingly citing alternative media outlets to obtain information and are abandoning traditional sources of news (Tsubata, 2001). Despite these new challenges, local news has been an important form of media for years and researchers have long sought to understand how and why audience members consume television news.

Local News and Audiences

Previous research indicates many important factors that contribute to local news viewing. An audience member’s motivation behind local news consumption is an important factor in viewing. Audiences may be motivated by either informational or entertainment needs when deciding to watch any television program (Perse, 1990). As local news provides a mixture of both “hard news” stories (such as politics, crime and economic reports) as well as upbeat local human interest stories, both of these viewing motives are often met in local newscasts. Viewers who watch local news programs for both informational and entertainment purposes are likely to experience higher levels of news affinity and more cognitive involvement with the newscast (Perse, 1990). When viewers are motivated more by informational reasons, studies have shown that they experience more knowledge gains (Perse, 1990).

Additionally, research has shown that audiences' orientations may motivate them to consume news for different reasons. A person may be characterized by either ritualized or instrumental orientations (Rubin & Step, 2000). An audience member with a ritualized orientation consumes news out of habit, often as a means to kill time, while a person with an instrumental orientation watches the news for informational purposes. Those with instrumental orientations are more involved in the news and more likely to regard the figure delivering the news as an important source of information (Rubin & Step, 2000).

According to Perse (1990), involvement, or "the degree in which an audience member interacts psychologically with a medium or its messages" is also an important factor in news viewing (p. 18). The more cognitive involvement, or information processing, required when viewing local news has been shown to be linked to higher levels of news comprehension. Since the goal of news programs is to inform their audiences, this is an important consideration for news organizations. However, while audience members' orientations and motivations have been considered by researchers, the anchors who actually deliver the news also play an important part in the news process. Newscasters find themselves forced to adjust and reexamine their roles and to take a more active role in their organizations' efforts to gain new viewers.

Parasocial Interaction

While parasocial interaction is now identified within the realm of the Communication discipline, the term was first introduced in the field of psychology by Horton and Wohl (1956) to explain ways in which the interaction between media consumers and media figures can produce a sort of relationship in which the viewer responds as though in a typical social relationship. According to the researchers, the beginnings of a parasocial relationship begin merely from watching a television show. When the television program is over, the viewers are left to evaluate the role and will "accept, reject or further interpret the proposition of parasocial interaction with the persona" (Horton & Wohl, 1956). If the audience member does, in fact, accept the relationship, he or she is very likely to view the program again. As the viewer continues to watch the program, the parasocial bond increases.

Horton and Wohl focused heavily on television due to its novelty at the time. They noted that the "new mass media—radio, television, and the movies--...give the illusion of face-to-face

relationship[s] with the performer” (1956). Since such a relationship had not existed before these new media, Horton and Wohl gave it the name “para-social relationship.” While the original article examined popular television stars, their key concepts outlined are broadly applicable, and have since been applied to a variety of concepts.

However, initially the concept did not receive much attention until it gained traction in mass media research in the early 1970s, when McQuail, Blumler and Brown found many of the characteristics described by parasocial interaction in audience responses to soap opera characters (1972). Studies confirmed that viewers felt some of the same connections with characters on television that they did with friends in their own lives.

Research soon moved beyond soap operas to apply these findings to a broader scale, most notably in relation to the uses and gratifications approach. Researchers of the uses and gratifications approach with regards to mass communication argued that media serve as an alternative when viewers struggle with interpersonal communication in their daily lives (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Peplau & Perlman, 1982). Initial investigations pointed to the idea that this may bolster parasocial interaction as well, noting that in order to meet their interpersonal needs, lonely people often use the mass media (Rubin & Perse, 1987).

However, when older adults were interviewed in a study of their specific demographic and local news, analysis indicated that their parasocial relationships with local television news anchors did not correlate to feelings of loneliness (Levy, 1979). Subsequent research found that feelings of PSI are not reserved for introverted or lonely people, and that outgoing people are just as likely to engage in parasocial relationships. Significantly, this suggests that these relationships are not only applicable to a certain, socially deficient section of the population, but are instead powerful indicators of media use across all types of people (Giles, 2002). Another important finding from Levy’s study confirmed that increased exposure to television news led to greater levels of parasocial interaction and those who experienced high levels of parasocial interaction were more likely to watch the news program. This revealed that parasocial interaction and level of exposure are closely related, and this relationship works in both directions. Within his study, Levy offered seven propositions regarding parasocial interaction, which laid the groundwork for a scale to test the concept.

Rubin, Perse and Powell (1985), developed a scale used for measuring parasocial interaction, which was grounded in uses and gratifications research and tested in Auter’s (1992)

study. Auter study verified and further validated the scale, noting that the scale had become the most common instrument for measuring parasocial interaction.

Once the foundation was established, most subsequent research on PSI has been used to predict media use. Studies have used variations on the Rubin scale to measure a wide variety of genres, including soap opera characters (Rubin & Perse, 1987; McQuail, Blumler & Brown 1972), athletes (Auter, 1992), and favorite television personalities in general (Rubin & McHugh, 1987; Turner 1993). Research has even focused on television shopping (e.g. QVC, Home Shopping Network), finding that those with strong dependencies on home shopping foster parasocial relationships with the hosts, leading to further shopping dependencies (Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach, 1991; Skumanich & Kintsfather, 1998).

The breadth of this research indicates that parasocial interaction is an important component of televised media. Conway and Rubin (1991) underscore this importance, noting that parasocial interaction is a better predictor of television use than many other behavioral measures, arguing that PSI may be a more important viewing motivation than program content itself (Conway & Rubin, 1991).

Rubin and Perse (1987) argued that PSI may arise from a natural instinct to form attachments with other human beings, regardless of whether or not they are even in the same room. According to Rubin and Perse, viewers evaluate media personalities with the same criteria they use with people they physically encounter in their daily lives (Rubin Perse & Powell, 1985; Rubin & Perse 1987; Rubin & Mchugh, 1987).

Scholars have found it important to note a distinction between parasocial interaction and identification. While PSI was originally theorized as feeling involved with a media figure (Horton & Wohl, 1956), Brown, Basil, and Bocarnea (2003) noted that unlike identification, parasocial interaction does not require adopting another person's attitudes, values or behaviors, but is rather merely a perception and feeling of friendship with the personality. Once parasocial interaction was found to be a significant predictor of use in entertainment media, mass media scholars recognized its potential attempted to replicate findings to local news anchors.

Parasocial Interaction in News

While television shows in general serve as useful tools for examining how PSI functions, news shows offer unique characteristics that allow for further investigations. For example, as

news programs are broadcast every day, often more than once, viewers are given many opportunities to view the same show with recurrent news casters and consistent presentation styles (Bogart, 1980).

Additionally, unlike actors playing a character, news anchors portray their “real” selves, allowing viewers to engage in a connection with a real-life person that they might potentially bump into on the street. According to Giles (2002) this is particularly important since, although the relationship is entirely one-sided, parasocially interactive viewers believe this connection as genuine and report a desire to chat with the personality face-to-face, which is not something fans can actually do with a fictional character. Also, newscasters are often trusted due to their supposed knowledge of important local, national and international issues (Cook, 1993).

Consequently, studies have found that parasocial interaction is related to increased listening and viewing (Hofstetter & Gianos, 1997; Rubin & Step 2000). As such, television executives have actively attempted to find ways to increase parasocial relationships. To foster these feelings, news figures have adapted their delivery styles, moving away from the talking heads of older times. Anchors now attempt to present news as a “one-on-one” interaction with the audience, by addressing them directly and conversationally.

Expected Causes

The vast amount research on parasocial interaction has provided a wide range of results. Eyal and Rubin (2003) found that simply increased viewing may lead to liking of the character. The authors also claim that parasocial interaction is related to attitude similarity, attraction, and identification with a television character (Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

Studies have explored many characteristics of the viewer that likely result in strong parasocial interactions. Consistently, television use has been a predictor of PSI in local news. The more television a person watches and, more significantly, the more local television news watched, is strongly related to high PSI among viewers and newscasters (Gleich, 1997; Grant, Guthrie & Ball-Rokeach 1991; Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Vorderer 1996).

Certain personality traits or characteristics of the audience have also been linked to parasocial interaction. For example, a viewer’s cognitive empathy (Ellis, Streeter & Engelbrecht, 1983; Tsao, 1996; Davis, Hull, Young & Warren, 1987), as well as feelings of closeness to family members (Greenwood, Pietromonaco, & Long, 2008), were shown to be

related to their feelings of parasocial interaction with various media figures. However, as these are internal to audience members, news organizations cannot do much to manipulate feelings of PSI. Fortunately, there are external factors that can be controlled and used to an organization's advantage. For example, external factors that promote PSI in news include frequency and consistency of appearance by the personality, behavioral and conversational styles of the anchor, and effective use of the formal features of television (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985).

For the viewer, interpersonal attraction (i.e., feeling as though the media figure could be a close friend of the viewer) has been shown to be a substantial antecedent factor leading to parasocial interaction (Cole & Leets, 1999; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Turner, 1993). Interpersonal attraction is, basically, the "liking" of another person and has been defined as an "individual's tendency to evaluate another person in a positive ways" (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Research has examined attraction on three separate dimensions: interpersonal attraction, physical attraction, and task attraction. Interpersonal attraction, as noted above, relates to a person's perceived sociability; physical attraction relates to a person's physical appearance, and task attraction is based upon a person's perceived abilities to help complete tasks (Tardy, 1988). When evaluating favorite television characters on the three dimensions of attraction, interpersonal attraction was found to be the most important motivating factor in developing strong feelings of parasocial interaction (Rubin & McHugh, 1987).

While interpersonal attraction has been shown to significantly correlate to, or even in some cases to predict parasocial relationships, in these cases that have been explored, high feelings of parasocial interaction already exist between the viewer and the media figure. In order to better understand the relationship between the two constructs, the following research question will be explored:

Research Question 1: Is interpersonal attraction associated with parasocial interaction following exposure to an unknown news anchor?

Physical attractiveness of the media figure has also been shown to affect PSI. The more physically attractive the figure is perceived to be by viewers, the higher the feelings of PSI (Greenwood, Pietromonaco, & Long, 2008). In a study of females' identification with their favorite female characters, Greenwood, Pietromonaco, and Long (2008), researchers assert that

participants “may consider the physical attractiveness of their favorite female media personas part and parcel of their overall affinity for that character.” Since physical attractiveness has been shown to be an important factor in liking and identification with characters, the first hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis One: *Participants who rate the anchor at the highest levels of physical attractiveness will report stronger feelings of enjoyment than participants who rate the anchor at the lowest level of physical attractiveness.*

Since there has not been an empirical explanation of the effects of a newscaster’s gender on young audience members, the next step is to examine and compare feelings of parasocial interaction amongst viewers and anchors of differing genders. Although parasocial interaction has not typically been examined *solely* in terms of participants’ gender, some research suggests that the gender of the media personality interacts with gender of viewers. For example, studies show that people prefer to engage in news content when dealing with people who are similar to them. Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall (2006) found that when reading a variety of news stories, people prefer reading news stories featuring people that are their same gender and close to their age. In a related example, Steinke, Applegate, Lapinski, Ryan, and Long, (2012) found that when adolescents view characters on television, boys indicated that they wished to be like the male characters on the show, while girls desired to be like the female characters. Similarly, studies have found that feelings of PSI increase when viewers feel that they share similarities between themselves and the media figure (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985), so it makes sense that viewers prefer to watch, and feel more parasocial interaction with, an anchor of the same gender.

As research has shown that similarity and relatability are strong predictors of PSI, the following hypotheses can be stated:

Hypothesis Two: *Female viewers exposed to the female anchor will experience higher levels of parasocial interaction than females exposed to the male anchor.*

Hypothesis Three: *Male viewers exposed to the male anchor will experience higher levels of parasocial interaction than males exposed to the male anchor.*

Based on research findings, newscasters have been known to employ certain tactics to encourage PSI. In American society, newscasters must consciously adapt mannerisms to break down distance between themselves and viewers; to appear more personal, friendly and informal, as opposed to more formal presentation styles in others cultures (Holm, 2006; Thussu, 2005).

Studies have suggested that the use of gestures replicating interpersonal communication in a face-to-face setting have increased viewers' feelings of PSI (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985). Addressing the camera straight-on (or direct bodily addressing) is an important factor for increased connection (Mancini, 1988). Also important for PSI are elements such conversational styles, rhetorical questions, and humor, which have been utilized successfully by anchors to increase PSI (Degnan, 1995; Fields, 1988).

It is not surprising that media personalities have proven keen to adopt these mannerisms, as research consistently and unequivocally found that high PSI increases enjoyment, and news shows featuring anchors with whom audiences have formed parasocial relationships receive high ratings (Allen, 1988; Giles, 2002). Broadcast journalists have not taken this phenomenon lightly. They are aware that in our society, people do not just tune in for the news; they often tune in to see their favorite newscaster. And since feelings of PSI last beyond viewing a single program (Rosengren & Windhal, 1972; Hedinsson, 1981; Levy, 1979), anchors consciously manipulate their image by the manner in which they choose to present themselves in order to get – and keep – loyal audiences. Based on this research, the following hypothesis is expected to be consistent with previous studies:

Hypothesis Four: *Participants indicating high levels of parasocial interaction will report higher levels of enjoyment than participants indicating lower levels of parasocial interaction.*

The World Wide Web and Relationships

The growth of the internet has profoundly changed the methods by which business markets itself to the public. Websites allow companies to efficiently reach a wide and varied audience at little cost (White & Raman, 1999). New, diverse audiences have necessitated an upgrade in strategies for marketing and public relations practitioners (Jo & Kim, 2003).

As the internet continued to grow, public relations researchers began to focus significantly on how to use the web for relationship building between the company and the public (Jo & Kim, 2003). They have realized the power of the internet to develop long-term relationships, meaning that their role is no longer to strictly create relationships with products, but to create and foster relationships with the companies as a whole (Jo & Kim, 2003).

In this new form of media, the role of audiences has evolved significantly in the communication process. The characteristically interactive nature of the internet has led to a notable increase in the power and self-awareness of the audience, who are no longer passive viewers of a message. The possibility of two-way communication leads to the prospect of greater relationship-building, as the public is able to respond and react immediately, offering a level of feedback many companies have not previously experienced (Jo & Kim 2003; Kent & Taylor, 1998). As the World Wide Web continued to evolve and create new avenues of communication at the turn of the 21st century, the social media phenomenon emerged and quickly spread worldwide.

Social Media and Relationships

While the internet developed a new set of public relations standards, the parallel development of social media came with its own new set of opportunities and challenges. Social networking may be defined as internet websites driven by user-participation and user-generated content (Tredinnick, 2006). Websites such as MySpace and Friendster were early social media pioneers, but the advent of Facebook in 2004 presaged a fundamental shift in audience preferences. By 2011, Facebook had grown to become the most dominant and influential social media website, with 800 million active users (“Facebook,” 2011).

Fostering relationships is the foundation for social networking sites (Waters, Burnett, Lamm, & Lucas, 2009). With an average of 250,000 people registering to Facebook each day, organizations quickly saw the marketing potential of the social networking phenomenon (“Facebook,” 2011). Initially for the use of college students and then individuals, Facebook allowed organizations to register in 2006, and more than 4,000 organizations joined within two weeks (“Facebook,” 2011).

Trade publications have touted the potential and capabilities of these sites as relationship building tools (Dugan, 2007; “Social Networking,” 2008). Social media websites provide diverse

ways for users to interact with organizations. Some organizations use websites like Facebook to streamline their management goals and objectives; interact with stakeholders, volunteers, and customers; and educate others about their programs and services (Waters et al., 2009). All of these functions are important in not only raising awareness of a company's products or services, but also allow the organization to develop relationships with their target audience (Waters et al., 2009).

Scholars soon saw the need to integrate public relations with online relationship development. Initial researchers called for specific policies to help navigate the changing marketing landscape (Kent & Taylor, 1998). While policies have developed and evolved over time, three key strategies emerged that serve as basic guidelines for relationship-building through social media.

The first strategy involves the organization's level of disclosure (Kelleher, 2006). Marketing and public relations professionals are encouraged to be transparent and open in their online activities, answering the public's demand and expectations of openness in areas of government and business. Organizations are expected to provide a comprehensive history on their social media website, along with links to official sites, logos, and names of individuals who monitor the content (Berman, Abraham, Battino, Shipnuck, & Neus, 2007).

Secondly, social media websites should be useful to the audience (Taylor, Kent & White 2001). Not only should pertinent news content and photos be updated and added regularly; message boards and discussion walls should also be available and actively managed to answer questions and post announcements (Waters et al., 2009; Carrera, Chiu, Pratipwattanawong, Chienwattanasuk, Ahmad, & Murphy, 2008).

Thirdly, social media sites should foster interactivity in order to develop relationships with audience members (Waters et al., 2009). Research has shown that interactivity is an essential part of relationship-building (Jo & Kim, 2003). Social media site administrators should respond promptly to messages and emails, as well as post calendars of events and relevant links (Waters et al., 2009).

Social Media and News

Given the importance of the three strategies noted above and their relevance to news organizations, news anchors at both the local and national level have taken clear notice. News

outlets devote significant time and resources to increase their footprint on the internet and on social media websites (Palser, 2010). While national news networks create Facebook pages at least partly for the benefit of their local affiliates; it is now common, and even expected by their organizations, for the anchors themselves to have a Facebook profile directed toward their target audience. As the faces of their respective networks, anchors who create relationships with their audience are crucial to ratings. As discussed above, while anchors have implemented specific strategies on-air, with social media they are able to expand the extent of public access from the core one-hour broadcast.

This unlimited access is essential to a news anchor's relationship-building toolbox. Studies consistently show that familiarity fosters likeability: "The more we are exposed to someone, the more apt we are to like them" (Swap, 1977). With the advent of smartphones and similar devices that allow for constant connectivity, the potential for exposure seems unlimited.

Furthermore, Facebook provides traditional news organizations with access to younger audiences. The median age of people who click the "Like" button on articles on news Facebook sites is 34, placing nearly half of them in the all-important 18-34 demographic (Palser, 2010).

As research has shown that exposure and interaction has increased feelings of parasocial interaction, the following hypothesis can be stated:

Hypothesis 5: *Participants viewing the anchor's Facebook page in addition to the newscast will report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction than participants not viewing the anchor's Facebook page.*

Methodology

In order to test the outlined hypotheses, the researcher carried out a series of experiments. This section will detail the proposal and review process, the experimental design, and the stimulus materials.

Proposal and Review Process

In order to recruit participants for an experimental study, it was first necessary to obtain approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which performs an oversight function on all university human subject research, ensuring adherence to high ethical standards. Accordingly, the researcher completed and submitted the Institutional Review Board Research Protocol Form. Included in the form was an explanation of the procedures for both the pilot and the main study, the background of the study, and the anticipated findings. Also submitted to the Board were the consent form, the recruitment announcement, the protocol and all measures to be used, and the debriefing statement. All information was submitted to the IRB for review on November 7, 2011. The study was approved on November 8 (Appendix A).

Participants

Two hundred and eight participants from a pool of undergraduate students at a large southeastern university completed a research study for course credit. Sixty-five (53% female) were asked to participate in the pilot study and 143 (51% female) participated in the final experiment. Fewer participants were asked to take part in the pilot study due to constraints on the research pool.

Design and Approach

To test the hypotheses, the researcher conducted a 2 (male news anchor vs. female news anchor) x 2 (with social media vs. without social media) between-subjects factorial experiment. Participants were recruited from the university's Department of Communication research participation pool (see Appendix B). Participants were randomly divided into groups and randomly assigned one of the four conditions prior to arrival at the study site. Upon arrival, participants read and signed a consent form. Participants then watched the assigned video

featuring either a male or female anchor. In some conditions, as participants watched the video, they also viewed a print-out of the anchor's corresponding Facebook profile and wall. After watching the video and viewing the profile, participants were given questionnaires measuring parasocial interaction, interpersonal attraction perceived physical attractiveness, enjoyment, and news consumption. Following completion of the questionnaires, participants were thanked and debriefed (Appendix C).

In order to examine the effect of social media on PSI, the study required comparing feelings of parasocial interaction on participants who watched a newscast and subsequently viewed the anchor's Facebook profile with participants who watched the same newscast without viewing the Facebook profile. The study used both male and female anchors. This was so as to determine whether it social media, not gender, is the important factor influencing parasocial feelings in young adult audience members.

Previous studies have examined existing parasocial relationships with surveys of thoughts toward respondents' favorite news anchor (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin & Mchugh, 1987). However, in an attempt to determine antecedent factors, this study exposed participants to unknown anchors. First, the researcher carried out a pilot study, followed by the main experiment.

Pilot

In order to ensure content presented in the newscast and on the Facebook profile did not present information that may cause participants to feel that the content is biased or irrelevant to them--as well as to ensure internal validity of measures--a pilot study preceded the main experiment. In the pilot study, participants read a script featuring the content of the newscast with the anchor's name included. Half of the participants read a script featuring a male anchor named James Graham, while the other half read a script featuring a female anchor named Jenna Graham. The pilot consisted of four conditions. In the first condition, participants read only the male script. In the second condition, participants read the male script and viewed a printout of the male Facebook profile. In the third condition, participants read only the female script, while participants in the fourth condition read the female script and viewed a printout of the female anchor's Facebook profile. After administration of the stimulus materials, participants were given questionnaires measuring parasocial interaction, enjoyment, and news consumption,

detailed below. Participants were asked to list their thoughts about the content of the script and Facebook profile. Participants were also asked if the news content seemed to reflect a bias of the anchor or if the Facebook profile revealed anything about his or her personality. Following completion of the questionnaires, participants were thanked and debriefed. Data from the pilot was analyzed to ensure scale reliability and free response questions were reviewed before the beginning of the main study. Minor alterations were made to stimulus materials prior to the start of the main experiment based on responses that seemed to highlight issues with news or Facebook content, including changing the anchors' noted religion and hometown.

Stimulus Materials

Since perceived realism has been found to be an important factor in PSI (Alperstein, 1991; Rubin et al., 1985; Rubin & Perse, 1987) the stimulus materials consisted of a mock television newscast featuring professional newscasters recorded on an actual news set.

In the experiment, participants watched a short clip recorded from a local news station, one featuring a male anchor and one featuring a female anchor. Each clip contained the same content and, since behavioral and conversational styles of the anchor have been found to influence PSI (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Horton & Wohl, 1956), the featured anchors addressed the camera in a similar manner. The anchors addressed the camera head-on, with the camera at the same angle on both videos. Verbal addressing has also been shown to be a factor in establishing feelings of PSI, meaning that the on-screen figure directly acknowledges on a verbal level with opening statements such as “good evening, ladies and gentlemen” (DeVito, 2001; Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Similarly, in a study of television shows, participants rated video clips as more meaningful and enjoyable when the characters directly addressed the camera (Auter & Davis, 1991). In light of these findings, the anchors in this study began the newscast with “Good evening,” and ended with a call to action for viewers to visit the anchor’s Facebook page.

Additionally, bodily addressing (or the positioning of the character’s body and the angle at which the camera is addressed) has also been shown to influence feelings of parasocial interaction (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). Because of previous research, in videos for this

study, the anchors addressed the camera directly while reading several local news stories. As prior research has found that significant levels of parasocial interaction can be achieved in as little as a six-minute viewing period, the video lasted approximately 10 minutes (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000). This time is further justifiable since, over the course of a traditional local news cast, after reporter stand-ups and commercials, it is approximately the amount of time the anchor appears.

To better ensure that it was the anchors themselves who may influence feelings of parasocial interaction and not some other extraneous variable, the scenery in the two videos was made as similar as possible. The videos were shot on the same set with both of the anchors wearing neutral colors. The anchors both worked at the same news station and were accustomed to delivering the news in the same size market.

The Facebook page featured a variety of information commonly reported on Facebook profiles in order to give participants insight about the anchor. In addition to providing the anchor's work history to show credibility, the anchor's favorite music, movies and activities were listed. The information was specifically chosen to appeal to a young, varied audience. A mock "Wall" was also created to provide further insight about the anchor's personality and to show interactions with other Facebook members. All information was based on content featured on actual local news anchors' Facebook profiles and walls. The male and female profiles were identical, except for the profile picture and name. In order to eliminate some participants clicking on more profile features than others and to ensure that each participant views the same amount of information, the main profile and wall were printed off and presented in hard copy.

Measures

Manipulation check.

A simple manipulation check was administered for the independent variable, social media, by asking the gender of the anchor viewed and whether the participant viewed a Facebook profile. To avoid priming, it was integrated into the enjoyment scale. Also, to ensure that prior knowledge of the anchor was not a mitigating factor, participants were asked whether they had previously watched a newscast featuring the anchor. If they responded affirmatively, their data was not included in the results.

Independent variables.

Two independent variables were examined in this study. The first independent variable examined was the gender of the anchors viewed by participants. Half of the participants viewed a male anchor and half of the participants viewed a female anchor. The second independent variable measured was the social media component. Half of the participants viewed the social media page, while half did not.

Dependent variables.

Dependent variables measured are parasocial interaction, enjoyment, interpersonal attractiveness, and physical attractiveness. Auter and Palmgreen's (2000) audience-persona interaction scale was used to measure PSI (Appendix D). This adaptation of the parasocial interaction scale is the most relevant measure to this study, as participants are not asked questions based on the assumption of prior exposure to, and involvement with, the media personality. As it is assumed participants in this study have no prior experience with the anchor (the experimental anchors, while they are indeed professional newscasters, work in a distant market), they were able to answer the items in the questionnaire based on their brief exposure in the experiment.

The audience-persona interaction (API) scale consists of 22 items measuring four factors. Participants were asked to indicate on a scale of one to five how strongly they agree with the statements. The first factor, identification with the character, states:

1. The anchor reminds me of myself;
2. I have the same qualities as the anchor;
3. I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as the anchor;
4. I have the same problems as the anchor;
5. I can imagine myself as the anchor;
6. I can identify with the anchor.

The second factor, interest in the character, asks participants to indicate their agreement with the following:

1. I would like to meet the anchor;
2. I would watch the anchor on another program;
3. I enjoyed trying to predict what the anchor would do;
4. I hope the anchor achieves his/her goals;
5. I care about what happens to the anchor;
6. I like hearing the voice of the anchor.

The third factor, group identification, asks participants to indicate their agreement with the following:

1. The anchor's interactions are similar to mine with my friends;
2. The anchor's interactions are similar to mine with my family;
3. My friends are like the anchor;
4. I'd enjoy interacting with my friends and the anchor at the same time;
5. I enjoyed the newscast;
6. The anchor seemed close to my age.

Consistent with prior studies, intercoder reliability with the scales in this study met the threshold of reliability (Chronbach's $\alpha = .84$). The final four questions in the "character's problem-solving ability" were excluded due to their irrelevance in non-fiction content.

Interpersonal attraction was measured using ten items, taken from McCroskey and McCain's (1974) Interpersonal Attractiveness Scale (Appendix E). Participants were asked to indicate on a scale of one to seven how strongly they agree with the following statements:

1. It would be difficult to talk to him or her;
2. We could never establish a personal friendship with each other;
3. He (she) is somewhat ugly;
4. I think he (she) could be a friend of mine;
5. I would like to have a friendly chat with him (her);
6. I think he (she) is quite handsome (pretty);
7. I find him (her) very attractive physically;
8. I don't like the way he (she) looks;
9. He (she) just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends;
10. He (she) is very sexy looking.

As with prior studies, intercoder reliability met the threshold of reliability (Chronbach's $\alpha = .84$).

A five-item scale developed by Tauer and Harackiewicz (1999) measured video enjoyment (see Appendix F) and Facebook enjoyment (see Appendix G). Participants were asked to indicate on a scale of one to five how strongly they agree with the following statements:

1. Watching the clip was fun;
2. The clip was very interesting;
3. Watching the clip was a boring activity;
4. Watching the clip was a waste of time;
5. Watching the clip was enjoyable.

As with prior studies, the enjoyment scale met the threshold of intercoder reliability in both the video enjoyment scale (Chronbach's $\alpha = .76$) and the Facebook enjoyment scale (Chronbach's $\alpha = .87$).

Since perceived physical attractiveness has been found to affect feelings of parasocial interaction (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985), the construct was tested by asking participants to rate the anchor's physical attractiveness on a scale from 1 to 10 to determine whether it is the influence of social media, not varying levels of attractiveness, that leads to increases in parasocial interaction.

Participants were also administered a questionnaire measuring overall media consumption, as well as local television news consumption, taken from a range of prior media diet questionnaires (Appendix H).

Results

Hypothesis one stated that participants who rate the anchor at the highest levels of physical attractiveness will report stronger feelings of enjoyment than participants who rate the anchor at the lowest level of physical attractiveness. In order to test this hypothesis, a Pearson product moment correlation using mean scores on anchors' physical attractiveness and the enjoyment scale was performed. Results indicate that physical attractiveness and enjoyment are slightly correlated ($r = .129$). However, this result is not significant at the $p \leq .05$ level.

Hypothesis two stated that female participants ($n=74$) will report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction with the female anchor than with the male anchor. Hypothesis two was tested using a t-test comparing evaluations on the parasocial interaction scale by gender of anchor. Mean scores on parasocial interaction among female participants evaluate the female anchor higher ($M=2.85$, $SD=.60$) than the male anchor ($M=2.54$, $SD=.56$). Overall, results indicated that parasocial interaction was significantly higher among female participants when the anchor was female, $t(72) = 2.32$, $p \leq .011$, thus supporting hypothesis two.

Hypothesis three stated that male participants will report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction with the male anchor than with the female anchor. Similar to Hypothesis two, this hypothesis was tested using a t-test comparing parasocial interaction scores by gender of anchor. However, men ($n=69$) indicated significantly higher parasocial interaction with the female anchor. Mean scores on parasocial interaction reveal the female anchor ($M=2.95$, $SD=.59$) scored higher than the male anchor ($M=2.67$, $SD=.60$). Hypothesis three was not supported, but the results of parasocial interaction scale indicate that males were significantly more likely to report parasocial interaction with the female anchor $t(67) = 1.91$, $p = .03$.

Hypothesis four stated that participants indicating high levels of parasocial interaction will report higher levels of enjoyment than participants indicating lower levels of parasocial interaction. Hypothesis four was tested with a Pearson product moment correlation comparing parasocial interaction and enjoyment mean scores. Results indicate that parasocial interaction is correlated with enjoyment ($r = .137$, $p \leq .052$). This result, while not significant at the $p \leq .05$ level, demonstrates a clear, but modest, relationship between these two constructs.

Hypothesis five stated that participants viewing the anchor's Facebook page in addition to the newscast will report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction than participants not viewing the anchor's Facebook page. In order to test Hypothesis five, a t-test was performed

comparing parasocial interaction scale scores among participants viewing the newscast only (n=79) and those viewing the newscast and the anchor's Facebook page (n=64). Results demonstrate no significant difference in evaluations of parasocial interaction between these two groups, $t(141) = -1.94, p = .846$. In fact, the parasocial interaction ratings were nearly identical between these two groups ($M=2.75$ for newscast only and $M=2.77$ for newscast and Facebook groups).

Analysis of the interpersonal attraction scale demonstrated marked differences between conditions, which prompted further analysis of interactions of interpersonal attraction with parasocial interaction and enjoyment. Pearson correlation tests indicate that interpersonal attraction was significantly correlated to parasocial interaction, $r = .65, p \leq .001$. Interpersonal attraction was also significantly correlated to overall enjoyment, with $r = .30, p \leq .02$. Interestingly, there was a significant difference in female and male participants' evaluation of the anchors. Overall, female participants rated both anchors lower on the interpersonal attraction scale than did male participants. Perhaps most interesting is the parasocial correlation result demonstrating a strong a significant correlation between interpersonal attraction and parasocial interaction, $r = .55, p \leq .001$. This finding suggests that parasocial interaction is highly reliant on interpersonal attraction.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of social media on constructs that foster relationship-building in young news audiences. Results offer many insights into the complex relationships between news anchors and their viewers and offer many practical insights for news organizations.

Hypothesis one predicted that participants who rated the anchors as more physically attractive would report stronger feelings of enjoyment/PSI. Results were not significant, but did indicate a slight correlation. These findings do provide additional support for Greenwood, Pietromonaco, and Long's (2008) assertion that a media figure's physical attractiveness affects feelings of parasocial interaction, in that the female anchor, who was rated overall as slightly more physically attractive than the male anchor (5.5 versus 4.5, respectively, out of a possible 10 points), scored significantly higher on feelings of parasocial interactions among all participants. However, while previous research has indicated that physical attraction is a factor in high levels of parasocial interaction, lack of significant results in this study suggests that it may not be quite as important factor as previously thought. This is particularly interesting in the news world, as major cable news networks have noticeably begun to hire news anchors that coincide with the emphasis of physical attractiveness in media figures. Recently, talk has begun to surface of cable news networks that have begun to receive attention, and from many, criticism, for stacking their newscasts with women who are extremely good-looking (Casserly, 2011). In hopes of beating stiff competition, cable news organizations (most notably Fox, CNN, and CNBC) have been attempting to boost ratings by making channel-surfers come to a halt on their bombshell anchors. However, findings from this study indicate that while this may work momentarily, looks alone are not sufficient enough to retain these viewers and foster the meaningful relationship between viewers and anchors that keep them coming back.

Both Hypothesis two and Hypothesis three relate to gender, predicting that participants would report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchor of their gender. Hypothesis two, which predicted that females would report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction with the female anchor, found this was the case, and results supported the hypothesis. However, hypothesis three, which predicted that male participants would report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction with the male anchor, was not supported. Surprisingly, results found that men reported significantly higher feelings of parasocial interaction with the female anchor.

While similarities between the audience and the media personality have been said to be an important element in developing feelings of parasocial interaction, the factor of gender may be able to be ignored. Interestingly, this is contrary to previous research indicating that media consumers prefer to view information about subjects who are similar to their own demographics (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006; Steinke et al., 2012). Despite Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall's (2006) assertion that people prefer reading news content dealing with people who are their same age and close to their gender, and contrary to research from Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) which suggests that viewers feel more parasocial interaction with an anchor of their same gender, results from this study find that both female and male participants felt significantly higher feelings of parasocial interaction with the female anchor.

Based on findings from Hypothesis two and Hypothesis three, the overall preference for the female anchor over the male anchor was explored. Upon examination of open-ended responses, both male and female participants frequently noted an affinity for the female anchor due to her frequent smiling and apparent friendliness. The typical response is exemplified in the participant who noted, "She [the anchor] seemed upbeat and personable. She smiled often and seemed friendly." Many other participants felt the same way about the female anchor, while considerably fewer participants noted perceived personality traits of the male anchor. These findings suggest that even though an anchor may not feature some of the same characteristics as a target audience, which previous research has indicated as an important factor (Rubin, Perse & Powell, 1985; Knobloch-Westerwick & Hastall, 2006; Steinke et al., 2012), there are many other ways viewers can relate to the news personality. Males can clearly be more drawn to a female anchor who they feel reveals positive personality attributes in her delivery. This is good news for news organizations, whose target audiences consist of a diverse range of demographics, making it impossible to cater to them all. These findings indicate that, for audiences, it is more important for the anchor to exhibit warm and friendly qualities than to merely possess some of the same physical characteristics.

Hypothesis four predicted that participants indicating high levels of parasocial interaction would report higher levels of enjoyment than participants indicating lower levels of parasocial interaction. While not significant, results did indicate a clear correlation between the two, providing additional support for prior research (Allen, 1988; Giles, 2002) which asserts that

respondents reporting higher feelings of parasocial interaction also indicate stronger feelings of enjoyment. It seems logical that the more connected a viewer feels to the media figure, the more they seem to enjoy the program, however, and the correlation supported prior research, but the fact that results were not significant was surprising. The lack of significance is likely due to the unusual format of the stimulus materials. The newscast was created to ensure direct exposure to identical content between the two anchors, resulting in a video that was slightly different than a traditional newscast, void of the usual stand-ups and background images. The formatting seemed to confuse or distract some viewers, which likely affected overall enjoyment. The enjoyment ratings of the videos were, overall, relatively lower than expected, thus, though not significant, the correlating results in this study do support previous research which states that higher levels of parasocial interaction lead to greater feelings of enjoyment.

Hypothesis five stated that participants viewing the anchor's Facebook page in addition to the newscast would report stronger feelings of parasocial interaction than participants not viewing the anchor's Facebook page. Data analysis revealed that the Facebook profile was shown to have no effect on feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchors. Despite the expectation that increased opportunities to learn about the personality of an anchor would lead to an increase in feelings of parasocial interaction, this was not the case in this experiment. At the very least, since previous research indicates that extended exposure has been found to increase feelings of parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Rubin & Mchugh, 1987; Rubin & Perse, 1987) it was expected that adding a second medium in which participants were able view the anchors would increase feelings of PSI. Results show that this was not the case.

The researcher also expected that when participants were provided with personal information that would offer a glimpse of the anchors' true personalities, rather than only viewing a managed and scripted video revealing nothing about the anchors' true selves, participants would feel more connected and parasocially attracted. Again, results indicated that this was not the case. Surprisingly, results were inconsistent with Giles' (2002) assertion that when viewers feel connected to a real person on television (such as a news anchor), rather than an actor playing a role, they report higher levels of parasocial interaction and are more likely to view the figure again. However, when participants were presented with additional, personal information from the anchors themselves that was specifically designed to encourage a connection with participants (including personal photographs and interests), there was no

evidence that this helped them feel more parasocially attracted to the anchor. Even when participants indicated specific interests that they shared in common with the anchor (for example, a favorite movie or musician), there was no significant correlation to increased feelings of parasocial interaction. Some participants indicated that they enjoyed reading the interactions on the Facebook walls between the anchors and the public but, even still, there was no evidence to suggest an effect on feelings of parasocial interaction. These findings indicate that using social media to enhance PSI, at minimum, requires more than one exposure and, at the maximum, has no effect. Future research should explore the effects of repeated exposure of an anchor's Facebook profile on parasocial interaction.

This information reveals important considerations for news organizations. Analysis of open-ended responses from participants indicates that the interactive social media component seems to have little positive effect on new viewers. While there was not much in the way of negative comments, few participants noted positive things about the social media content. The participants seemed indifferent to the profiles, instead focusing on the characteristics of the news anchor and the formatting and content of the news stories. These findings cue local news agencies that, when attempting to recruit new viewers, their energy and resources may be better served by focusing on developing relatable anchors and identifying content viewers deem relevant.

However, lack of significant results for this hypothesis should not rule out Facebook as a useful tool for news organizations. While the social media website may not play a role in creating feelings of parasocial interaction, it is likely helpful to foster already-existing relationships between viewers and news anchors. As is evident by the vast amounts of activity on local news anchors' profiles, committed viewers use Facebook as a way to communicate with their favorite news personalities. While, as this study shows, a single exposure to an anchor's Facebook wall may not be a way to effectively obtain new viewers, it is clearly an invaluable tool for existing fans.

Despite the lack of results for the main hypothesis, there were several notable findings in the analysis relating to the research question. The research question sought to explore the relationship between interpersonal attraction and parasocial interaction. Results indicated that the role of interpersonal attraction was shown to be highly significant, which supports prior research indicating the importance of the construct (Cole & Leets, 1999; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Turner,

1993). The perceived level of *physical* attractiveness of the anchors had no significant effect on parasocial interaction, but levels of interpersonal attraction were shown to significantly correlate to this connection. This provides additional support to Rubin and McHugh's (1987) research which suggests that, of the three dimensions of attraction, interpersonal attraction is the most important motivating factor in developing strong feelings of parasocial interaction. This is of particular note, and has great implications in the news world, as these findings indicate that in order to create meaningful connections with viewers, anchors should be selected based more on their potential for relatability, rather than for their physical appearances. While physical attraction was slightly correlated to parasocial interaction, it is clear that young viewers want to feel connected to local news anchors on a more personal level. Interpersonal attraction was also felt to correlate with feelings of enjoyment. The more interpersonal attraction felt by viewers, the higher they reported their levels of enjoyment of the newscast. Again, this correlation is of note to news organizations. The interpersonal attraction scale deals solely with questions about the anchor, be it his or her physical qualities or perceived personality characteristics, as judged by the participant; none of the measures on the interpersonal attraction scale deal with the style of reporting or the news content. These findings suggest that no matter the content or style of the newscast, feeling interpersonally attracted to a news anchor can cause audiences to feel as though they enjoyed the newscast, thus highlighting even further the need for news organizations to carefully select anchors that seem friendly and personable.

Future Research and Limitations

Although using manufactured footage and staged anchors can be preferred over existing video content, it also can be a limitation. Although the clips were created to ensure parallel content and presentation styles between the male and female anchors, and the video was created in a professional and realistic setting, all of the variances cannot be accounted for and may produce alternate explanations. For example, even with identical content and camera angles, the male and female anchors still brought their own inherent personality and traits to their delivery. These differences, although subtle, seemed to be noticed by at least some participants and likely factored into the findings. Future research may capitalize on this by purposely manipulating facial expressions and attempting to convey different moods or mannerisms in an anchor. Since unconscious differences seemed to at least cause a small effect, purposeful manipulations would likely provide significant results, which would likely reveal the most effective movements or characteristics of news anchors.

Also, since the content features only the anchor and is void of traditional newscast elements like stand-ups and videos, it lacks some of the realism of an actual newscast. Even though the settings were actual news sets used in local newscasts and the anchors were both professionals, they were still missing some key elements in an actual newscast. This was purposeful, as the stimulus materials were designed to allow participants to focus solely on the anchor and content and not to be distracted by extraneous variances. However, the lack of the expected features seemed to serve as even more of a distraction and the participants seemed confused by their absence. Future studies may incorporate videos or graphics in a manufactured news cast, or may use an existing newscast, featuring the anchor and stand-ups from reporters in order to show the most realistic example possible.

To attempt to allow participants to develop feelings of parasocial interaction during the video, the Facebook pages were administered during the video. However, this may have been a distraction to some participants. Future research may test the differences of order effects by allowing participants in different conditions to view the Facebook information before, during, and after the newscast to see if feelings of parasocial interaction increase depending the order the information is viewed.

In an attempt to focus on antecedent, rather than existing feelings of PSI, the clips used featured relatively unknown anchors, with whom participants held no preconceived feelings of

PSI. However, a limitation of this method is the brevity of one single news clip. Future research may benefit from a longitudinal study asking participants to view the same unknown anchor over a period of time. As participants become familiar with the anchor over time, they are likely to increase in feelings of parasocial interaction in at least small increments based solely on repeat exposure. As parasocial relationships increase, researchers may be able to get a better idea of additional, more specific factors that lead to stronger feelings of parasocial interaction.

Another way to determine these more specific factors may be to capitalize on the multidimensional aspects of the API scale used to measure parasocial interaction in this study. Future researchers may use the identified dimensions in this scale to isolate different factors (group identification, interest in character, and identification with character) and assess ways in which they interact with feelings of parasocial interaction.

Regardless of the findings of the experiment, this study has important implications for news organizations. As broadcasts and anchors are attempting to integrate social media into their day-to-day actions, it is important that the implications are understood.

First of all, data from this study indicate that, at least, in the first exposure of participants to an anchor and his or her Facebook page, social media has no effect on feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchor. However, this does not mean that social media is not an important tool for news organizations to utilize. While the results do indicate that Facebook may not be effective at drawing in viewers and establishing initial connections, it is still a useful tool to communicate with already-loyal viewers. Future research could seek out viewers who are already “friends” with an anchor on Facebook and compare their connection with the anchor to other purported viewers of the channel who may not be connected with the same anchor via the social media site.

Conclusion

This study examined the effects of social media on feelings of parasocial interaction with local news anchors amongst a college-aged audience. Despite the limitations, this study offers insight on new media and the changing media landscape. Perhaps the most important finding in this study was Facebook's lack of contribution to establishing feelings of parasocial interaction with the anchors. While surprising, this isn't necessarily bad news for news organizations. The younger demographic has come of age with websites like Facebook and Twitter and do not look at them as sites in a vacuum, but as media that is integrated into their daily lives. Young adults are virtually dependent on new media and social networking in addition to traditional media like television. An effective approach to gain younger viewers may be to more consciously integrate Facebook and social media with every other form of media used by news organizations, via a link on the station's website and an out-loud mention on each newscast. Similarly, as discussed earlier, this generation of Millennials expects to be catered to and wants information on their own time, at their own convenience. Traditional 6:00 pm timeslots may not be what they deem the most convenient and it may be beneficial to carve out a time slot when they would be more apt to watch. Similarly, overall enjoyment of the newscasts were rated surprisingly low. While this was undoubtedly in part due to the unusual formatting of the videos used in the study, it is also likely due to a general disinterest of young people in local news. Based on open-ended comments from participants claiming they weren't interested in many of the community-related stories, it is clear that they crave news stories they feel are more relevant to their lives. In order for local newscasts to be relevant to young audiences, which is critical to their long-term survival, producers must take pains to appeal to this demographic.

While it seems clear that the future is set on new media and that social media and new technologies must be combined and utilized effectively with traditional formats, this study shows that it is still the anchors themselves who are the heart of the news organizations and the key to gaining new viewers. This study reveals that cultivating anchors who are relatable, approachable, and relevant is the key to initiating positive associations with a local news organization. However, technology is certain to continue to evolve and new organizations must find ways to utilize these new technologies in conjunction with effective news personalities.

Also, while Facebook alone may not be an effective way to gain young viewers, it should certainly not be written off as an effective tool for news organizations. Perhaps Facebook's most

effective function may not be to gain new viewers but to retain existing ones. Local news anchors use their personal Facebook pages to communicate directly with fans by answering viewer posts and commenting on fans' photos. Some anchors have so many Facebook friends interested in the information being posted that they choose to switch from a personal page to a "Fan" page, much like a business would use, which allows a larger number of fans to "like" the personality and keep up with their posts. This constant interaction with existing fans undoubtedly helps strengthen and reinforce positive relationships.

Finally, it is important to note that the changing media landscape also means a change in traditional ideas behind parasocial interaction. When the term was first coined in the 1950s, parasocial interactions were truly one-way and the likelihood of a fan meeting his or her beloved media personality was very small. Viewers idealized celebrities from afar and only dreamed of a real conversation with them. However, with today's social media, fans and viewers often have direct access to famous personalities and can send them direct messages via Twitter or write notes for them to view on their Facebook walls. Certain celebrities are known for answering back and have even agreed to go to important events with fans because of new media, for example actress Mila Kunis' acceptance of an invitation to a military ball via YouTube and musician Taylor Swift's response to a Facebook campaign to attend one highschooler's prom. While an exception to the rule, it is no longer taken for granted that these parasocial relationships must remain completely one-sided. The future of these relationships is sure to continue to evolve and the line between viewer and media will undoubtedly continue to blur, making this a rich area for future study.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter



VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
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540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: November 8, 2011

TO: John C. Tedesco, Whitney Farmer

FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires May 31, 2014)

PROTOCOL TITLE: News Anchor Relationships

IRB NUMBER: 11-918

Effective November 8, 2011, the Virginia Tech IRB Administrator, Carmen T. Green, approved the new protocol for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm> (please review before the commencement of your research).

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved as: Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 7

Protocol Approval Date: 11/8/2011

Protocol Expiration Date: 11/7/2012

Continuing Review Due Date*: 10/24/2012

*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals / work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

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An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Appendix B

Recruitment Announcement

The purpose of this study is to investigate young adults' perceptions of media. Participants will read a short passage and/or view a short video, read information, and complete several paper and pencil questionnaires.

This study will take place in Shanks 043. Participation time will not exceed one hour. After completing the study, one hour of research credit will be allotted to each participant. Information on how to obtain study results will be given to each participant after completion of the study. Sessions will be scheduled frequently for about the next two weeks until the number of needed participants has been obtained, which is about 200 .

Be sure to arrive at the scheduled room (Shanks 043) on time as the door will be locked after the study has begun. Once the study has begun, you will not be allowed admittance. All participants' privacy will be protected. No individuals will be identified in reports of the research and all information used in the study will be anonymous. Emotional discomfort, if any, is minor and would not be greater than that experienced in everyday life. Students under the age of 18 are allowed to participate in this study.

Appendix C

Debriefing Statement

Thank you for participating in this study. In it we are comparing the effects of social media on young television news audiences.

A video featuring news content is being presented to randomly assigned groups. The name of the anchor listed served only as to give you means as a point of reference. In another condition, groups view a clip featuring the content you just read and/or a Facebook profile of a news anchor. The questionnaire completed after viewing the video allows us to determine if social media affects enjoyment and desire to watch the program again.

We do request that you not share any information about this study with fellow students until the study is complete as doing so could compromise our findings. While there are no risks beyond those typically experienced by viewing the news and completing questions about the experience, we understand that perceptions of the news vary greatly among college students.

Thank you very much for your participation. If you have any questions concerning our study or its results, please contact Whitney Farmer (Email: wlfarmer@vt.edu).

Appendix D

Parasocial Interaction Scale

From Auter, P.J. & Palmgreen, P. (2000). Development and validation of parasocial interaction measure: The Audience-Persona Interaction Scale. *Communication Research Reports*, 17, 79-89.

Please read each state carefully. If you do not feel as though the question is relevant, or if you do not feel you are in a position to answer, please circle 3 (Neutral).

1. The anchor reminds me of myself.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. I have the same qualities as the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. I seem to have the same beliefs or attitudes as the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. I have the same problems as the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. I can imagine myself as the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix D

6. I can identify with the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

7. I would like to meet the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I would watch the anchor on another program.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

9. I enjoyed trying to predict what the anchor would do.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

10. I hope the anchor achieved his/her goals.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix D

11. I care about what happens to the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

12. I like hearing the voice of the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

13. The anchor's interactions are similar to mine with friends.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

14. The anchor's interactions similar to mine with family.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

15. My friends are like the anchor.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

16. I'd enjoy interacting with the anchor and my friends at the same time.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix D

17. I enjoyed the newscast.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly

18. The anchor seemed close to my age

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly

Appendix E Interpersonal Attraction Scale

From McCroskey, J. C. & McCain, T. A. (1974). The measurement of interpersonal attraction.
Speech Monographs, 41, 261-266.

Instructions: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements as they apply to the newscaster you just watched.

Use the following scale and write one number before each statement to indicate your feelings.

7 = Strongly agree; 6 = Moderately agree; 5 = Slightly agree; 4 = Undecided; 3 = Slightly disagree;
2 = Moderately disagree; 1 = Strongly disagree

- _____ 1. It would be difficult to meet and talk with him (her).
- _____ 2. We could never establish a personal friendship with each other.
- _____ 3. He (she) is somewhat ugly.
- _____ 4. I think he (she) could be a friend of mine.
- _____ 5. I would like to have a friendly chat with him (her).
- _____ 6. I think he (she) is quite handsome (pretty).
- _____ 7. I find him (her) very attractive physically.
- _____ 8. I don't like the way he (she) looks.
- _____ 9. He (she) just wouldn't fit into my circle of friends.
- _____ 10. He (she) is very sexy looking.

- _____ 11. On a scale of 1 – 10, with one being not attractive at all and 10 being very attractive, please indicate how attractive you find this anchor.

Appendix F

Video Enjoyment Scale

From Tauer, J., & Harackiewicz, J. (1999). Winning isn't everything: Competition, achievement orientation, and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 209- 238.

1. Watching the clip was fun

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. The clip was very interesting.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Watching the clip was a boring activity.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Watching the clip was a waste of time.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Watching the clip was enjoyable.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix F

6. Have you previously watched a newscast featuring the anchor you just saw? YES NO

7. Would you watch a newscast featuring this anchor again? YES NO

8. Did you view the anchor's Facebook page? YES NO

9. What was the gender of the anchor you watched? MALE FEMALE

10. Please provide us your thoughts about the news content provided by the anchor.

11. Does the anchor's delivery style or content choice reveal to you anything about his/her beliefs or personality? If so, what?

12. Please share any thoughts about the anchor you just viewed or the content of the stories you just heard about.

Appendix G

Facebook Enjoyment Scale

From Tauer, J., & Harackiewicz, J. (1999). Winning isn't everything: Competition, achievement orientation, and intrinsic motivation. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 35, 209- 238.

1. Viewing the Facebook page was fun

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. The Facebook page was very interesting.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. Viewing the Facebook page was a boring activity.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. Viewing the Facebook page was a waste of time.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Viewing the Facebook page was enjoyable.

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree

Appendix G

13. Please provide us your thoughts about the content provided by the anchor's Facebook profile.

14. Did you feel that any of the information on the anchor's Facebook profile page or wall related to or interested you? If so, what?

15. Does the anchor's profile reveal to you anything about his/her beliefs or personality? If so, what?

16. Is there anything about the Facebook profile's content you just read we didn't ask that you would like to share?

17. Would you visit the Facebook page featuring this anchor again? YES NO

18. What was the gender of the anchor in the Facebook page you viewed? MALE FEMALE

Appendix H Media Diet Questionnaire

Different people use different sources to get news. Listed below are several sources from which people may gather news. Please indicate **how many days a week you use each of the sources** below to get news.

Local television news

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

National television news (e.g., Nightly News with Tom Brokaw, CNN Headline News)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

3. Television talk shows (e.g., Meet the Press, Face the Nation, Crossfire, The Mitchell Report, Equal Time)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

4. Television late night shows (e.g., Jay Leno, David Letterman, Conan O'Brien, Daily Show, Crenshaw Report)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

5. Morning television shows (e.g., Good Morning America, Today, This Morning, Fox and Friends)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

6. Newspapers (e.g., local newspaper, The Wall Street Journal, USA Today)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

7. News magazines (e.g., Time, Newsweek, US News and World Report)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Appendix H

8. Internet new sites (e.g., CNN.com, FoxNews.com)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

9. Social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, MySpace)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

10. Radio news (e.g., local news on the radio, national news briefs given on the hour or half hour)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

11. Political talk shows (e.g., Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, Jim Hightower, NPR)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7

12. Speaking with others (e.g., family, friends, co-workers)

Days per week used to get news: 1 2 3 4 5 6 7