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Understanding the Nature, Uses, and Gratifications of Social Television: Implications for Developing Viewer Engagement and Network Loyalty

Jhih-Syuan Lin, Kuan-Ju Chen, and Yongjun Sung

This study employed an online survey (N = 310) to explore how viewers' motivations for social TV participation influence their involvement in social TV activities, their program commitment, and network loyalty. Findings show that social infotainment and social companionship are the primary motivations of social TV participation. However, only social infotainment significantly predicts the intensity of viewers' social TV usage, which has a positive influence on program commitment and network loyalty. Additionally, the relationship between social TV usage and network loyalty is partially mediated by program commitment. These findings demonstrate the value of social TV to broadcasters and provide directions for initiating and maintaining long-term relationships with viewers.

The proliferation of digital platforms and portable devices has transformed the traditional TV viewing experience. According to Nielsen (2016), about 60% of smartphone and tablet users turn to their devices as second screens while watching TV several times a week or more. Nearly one-quarter of multiscreeners' device activities are program related, including socializing or performing searches related to programs, watching or sharing program-related video clips, and participating in program-related activities and discussions on social media (IAB, 2015).

This emerging phenomenon, known as social TV, describes "the increasing integration of television and computer technology to support sociable, computer-

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mediated group viewing experiences" (Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore, & Nickell, 2006, p. 251). Such a multiscreen, multitasking consumption environment has encouraged viewers to watch TV live, to interact with other viewers in real time, and to turn TV viewing into online events (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). In light of that, content providers, including major broadcasting networks (e.g., ABC, Fox, NBC, and CBS) and streaming Web sites (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, Amazon), have embraced social components as a means of helping promote shows, attract new viewers, engage fan bases, and leverage the influence of those viewers (Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012; Larsson, 2013).

Considering that digital channels have a discernible presence among viewers wishing to socialize about programming, some industrial and academic research suggests that viewers' social TV participation may provide both broadcasters and advertisers opportunities to monitor, engage, and target audiences more effectively (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014; Manjoo, 2015; Nielsen, 2015). For example, Lim, Hwang, Kim, and Biocca (2015) proposed three dimensions of social TV engagement (i.e., functional, emotional, and communal engagement) and examined the relationships between social TV engagement and sports events viewers' tendencies to remain loyal in viewing a current channel. Lee and Andrejevic (2014) discussed how social TV conversations across screens might help amplify content awareness, shape viewing behavior, and effectively link TV content to ad exposure and consumption behavior. Nagy and Midha's (2014) empirical findings showed that social TV conversations with brand mentions are significant for brand sponsors to earn additional impressions, drive brand awareness among the earned audience, and inspire the audience to learn more about and engage with the brands.

Despite the growing attention that has been paid to the phenomenon of social TV, more research endeavors are needed to further assess its nature and impact. To that end, the goal of this research is twofold. First, the research aims to provide a better understanding of the drivers of viewers' social TV activities. Second, the research attempts to examine the consequences of viewers' social TV participation. Specifically, this research builds on the uses and gratifications (U&G) framework, the literature on TV network branding, and the relationship paradigm to investigate viewers' motivations of their social TV usage, the extent to which they participate in social TV activities, the resulting psychological mechanism underlying viewers' devotion to shows, and behavioral tendencies regarding their future program choices. The findings of this study will not only contribute to a theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of social TV strategies, but also will help TV broadcasters unlock the full capacity of these strategies.

Theoretical Framework

TV Branding and Social TV

With ever increasing market competition and audience fragmentation, building a strong media brand that provides competitive advantages in the market is becoming more essential for success (Chan-Olmsted, 2011; Lis & Post, 2013). As viewership and revenue have become challenging for broadcasters, they have tried to exploit distinct brand images and brand personalities to combat fierce competition (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008), consequently leading to stronger associations between networks' brand communication and that of the programs they schedule (Drinkwater & Uncles, 2007). Evolving alongside social media communication, broadcasters have utilized social TV strategies to attract and maintain viewers, hoping to increase viewership and advertising revenue (Cha, 2016; Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). In particular, broadcasters have employed social media platforms to promote their shows, keep viewers' attention, provide a virtual group-viewing experience, and capitalize on real-time conversations around their shows, tactics that are implemented to help sustain and enhance viewer engagement and drive on-air ratings (Gross, Fetter, & Paul-Stueve, 2008; Manjoo, 2015).

As such, social media have been coupled with programs by broadcasters aiming to add connections to their audiences (Gross et al., 2008). Based on previous research, social TV is conceived as a computer-mediated interface that capitalizes on the simultaneity of viewers' multiscreening activities (IAB, 2015; Lim et al., 2015; Shin, 2013). Social TV applications add an interactive layer to TV viewing experiences by providing spaces for viewers to socialize, bond over the shows they love, and enjoy the collective knowledge and information shared by a larger community of viewers (Gross et al., 2008; Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). Owing to shared affiliation and social interactions between viewers around a program, they are able to experience a sense of togetherness based on the exchange of program-related information (Miller, 2009; Shin, 2013) and, in turn, increase their emotional investment (Pagani & Mirabello, 2011). Such a synched second screen phenomenon helps develop meaningful relationships among viewers of the same TV program (Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008) and expands opportunities that viewers may have for monitoring information about other viewers' reactions (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014).

Additionally, social TV activities may function as "social glue" and represent ritualistic characteristics to viewers within the program network, thereby adding profound symbolic meanings beyond the program content (Lee & Lee, 1995). Lim and associates (2015) discovered that viewers' functional and communal engagement via social TV leads to a sense of co-presence of other viewers. While viewers' communal engagement is directly related to channel loyalty, the relationship between their emotional engagement and channel loyalty is mediated by channel commitment. The researchers suggest that each dimension of social TV engagement contributes uniquely to strengthening the emotional bond between broadcasters and

viewers, and helps transform viewers into the most avid fans. Considering the value and importance of engaging viewers via social TV activities, we applied the U&G approach to explore the motivations underlying viewers' social TV participation.

Uses and Gratifications of Social TV Activities

The U&G approach suggests that media users are goal directed and actively involved in media usage to gratify their needs and wants (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The approach has been used to explore "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences" (Katz et al., 1974, p. 20). In line with that, Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch (1973) assembled a list of social and psychological needs by which individuals may render a medium more or less satisfactory, given that different media may offer a unique combination of attributes, characteristic content, and social and physical contexts. As individuals today have more and more media choices owing to the advances in media-related technology (Ruggiero, 2000), researchers have applied this theoretical approach to examining motivations for Internet usage (e.g., Lin & Cho, 2010). For instance, Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) identified seven gratification factors of Internet use and suggested that individuals use the Internet for reasons beyond information retrieval. While Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identified five primary motives for using the Internet (interpersonal utility, pastime, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment), Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) classified four motivational dimensions (information, convenience, entertainment, and social interaction) of Internet usage.

Because social networking sites provide users with opportunities for diversification of integrated communication and media use behaviors (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Park & Lee, 2014), much research attention has been devoted to understanding the types of gratification sought from social media usage. For example, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) examined how motives and social-psychological traits influence the use of Facebook and other social network related outcomes. In their study, the motives of habitual pastime and relaxing entertainment emerged from the analysis as prevalent motives for Facebook usage, whereas escapism and companionship were also found to be moderately salient motives. Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) discovered that college students used Facebook Groups to fulfill socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information-related needs. Similarly, Park and Lee (2014) noted that entertainment, relationship maintenance, self-expression, and communication motivations were significantly related to Facebook use intensity.

Because viewers consume programs and actively engage in program-related discussions and activities on social media (Nagy & Midha, 2014), the U&G approach, when applied to the current context, helps explain how viewers engage

in social TV activities to gratify different needs, understand motivations for social TV participation, and identify psychological and behavioral consequences following these needs (Katz et al., 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). Research to discover viewers' motives for social TV participation across screens has investigated how program-related perceptions (i.e., program affinity, involvement, and genre preference), social media characteristics (i.e., compatibility, perceived ease of use, and social presence), and audience attributes (i.e., user motivations, innovativeness, and social characteristics) predict social TV viewing (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). Ten motivations of viewers' use of social media to engage with TV content: relaxation, companionship, passing time, entertainment, information, arousal, escape, access, learning, and interpersonal utility were identified; however, only passing time was a significant motivation, and viewers who were driven by this motive were found less likely to engage in social TV activities (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). More recently, Cha (2016) conducted four focus group sessions and found that viewers' social TV seeking behaviors are driven by interpersonal communication (i.e., a sense of community, social bonding with existing networks, and information sharing), self-presentation driven (i.e., reinforcement of online persona, entertainment, self-documentation, and expression of attachment to TV shows), and benefit driven (i.e., incentives and supporting social movements). To provide further empirical and objective observations that help advance the understanding of social TV, we first explore motivations for social TV usage and then examine how viewers' different motivations drive actual social TV activities.

RQ_1: What are viewers' motivations for engaging in social TV activities?

RQ_2: How do viewers' varied motivations affect social TV usage?

Consequences of Social TV Activities

TV Program Commitment. As a vital construct in the context of consumer-brand relationships, commitment represents the degree to which a consumer experiences a long-term orientation and attitudinal disposition toward a brand within a product class (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). The literature shows that committed consumers in brand relationships can resist attitude change and continue to show preference toward the product or brand that they are committed to (Sung & Choi, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Some researchers have examined a wide range of antecedents of brand commitment, including product involvement (e.g., Mittal & Lee, 1989), brand trust and affect (e.g., Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002), a brand's self-relevance (e.g., Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010), and more. In addition, empirical studies have revealed how consumers' virtual experiences with a brand may lead to brand

commitment and escalating engagement (e.g., Chan & Li, 2010; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013).

In this research, we believe the same logic may apply to the increasingly crowded broadcast environment, where the facilitation of bonding relationships with viewers and the build-up of engagement are key determinants for the success of TV branding (Lim et al., 2015). By analogy, commitment is applied to characterize the intensity of viewer engagement in viewer-program relationships. In that sense, TV program commitment is defined as "a viewer's long-term attitudinal disposition toward a program, often reflecting emotional or psychological attachment to the program" (Lin, Sung, & Chen, 2016, p. 172). Thus, we hypothesize that social TV participation may increase viewers' commitment to the program (Lim et al., 2015). Social TV activities allow viewers to interact with broadcasters, create and share program-related content, and connect with other like-minded viewers (Nielsen, 2014). These active viewers are likely to be devoted to their beloved programs and draw out rituals associated with their program viewing for as long as possible (Gantz, Wang, Paul, & Potter, 2006). Their commitment level may, therefore, emerge as a consequence of increasing dependence in the viewer-program relationship (Lin et al., 2016; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). In the multiscreen world, committed viewers are likely to be those "who become particularly attached to certain programs or stars within the context of a relatively heavy media use" (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 138). That is, the more viewers become involved in social TV activities, the more likely they will be to engage with the programs as they develop a strong sense of familiarity and commitment to them. Hence, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H_1: Viewers' social TV usage will be positively associated with TV program commitment.

Network Loyalty. Brand loyalty, "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior" (Oliver, 1997, p. 392), is among the most important outcomes sought by marketers for sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 1992; Oliver, 1999). In the competitive media marketplace, loyalty has been studied with regard to channels/networks, types of programs, and particular programs (Brosius, Wober, & Weimann, 1992). Specifically, network loyalty has been defined as "the extent to which viewers tend to view programs from one channel rather than distributing their viewing time equally among different channels" (Cohen, 2002, p. 206). Although technological advances and channel availability have been found to decrease network loyalty among viewers, it is still considered important for maintaining and enhancing viewership (Brosius et al., 1992). In fact, while TV broadcasters strive for differentiation in the viewers' minds, the need to develop a familiar and positive brand image has become even more important (Chan-Olmsted, 2011; Lyn, Atkin, &

Abelman, 2002). For broadcasters, their branding efforts are intended to establish brand equity, create network loyalty and station identification among viewers, and generate viewer inertia and the resulting inheritance effects (Lyn et al., 2002; McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). Prior research suggests that programs with high ratings are likely to cultivate proportionately greater liking and repeat viewing among viewers than less popular programs (Barwise, 1986; McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). Therefore, broadcasters seek to maintain viewers' channel viewing consistency and thereby obtain a steady base of viewers.

As Lewin, Rajamma, and Paswan (2015) suggested, viewers' involvement, which is defined as activities and behaviors surrounding a program that satisfy viewers' personal interests and provide affective rewards (Funk, Beaton, & Alexandris, 2012), is positively related to their loyalty toward the program. Therefore, it seems plausible that viewers' involvement in social TV will be positively related to their loyalty toward the programs that, in turn, lead to loyalty toward the broadcasters who air the programs (Sharp, Beal, & Collins, 2009). In addition, Ha and Chan-Olmsted (2004) revealed that features on TV Web sites inform viewers about the media content, facilitate their participation in the production process, and help develop brand loyalty. Broadcasters today have recognized the importance of online communication; they have incorporated social TV strategies that offer them opportunities to service viewers with information and interact with them, while also helping to enhance viewer loyalty to the network (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Viewers that engage in social TV activities are likely to become loyal toward those broadcasters that interact with them. Additionally, viewers' social TV participation may provide them with opportunities to observe, feel part of, and share experiences with other viewers within the virtual community (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). Their integration and engagement within such a community may therefore help maintain and enhance loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Taken together, H_2 is:

H_2: Viewers' social TV usage will be positively associated with network loyalty.

As the literature suggests, strong commitment makes individuals more likely to remain in relationships with their partners (Rusbult, 1983; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999) and promotes a variety of relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997). In the branding context, consumer commitment is a central construct in the development and maintenance of brand relationships and an important antecedent to brand loyalty (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, it is logical to assume that once viewers are committed and emotionally attached to a particular TV program, their positive feelings can be transferred from the program to the broadcaster wherein their particular program is produced and branded. Such positive attitudes toward a broadcaster will exert an influence on their repeated viewing behaviors, reflecting a conscious decision to continue choosing programs from the same channel. In an effort to test the relationship between TV program commitment and network loyalty

to ascertain whether the relationships identified in previous branding studies can be supported in the current context, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H_3: Viewers' TV program commitment will be positively associated with network loyalty.

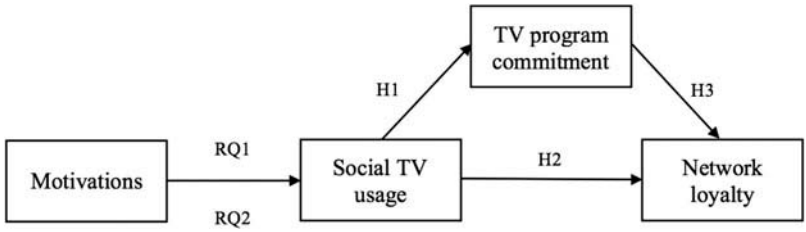
Method

Participants and Procedures

To investigate the antecedents and consequences of viewers' social TV participation (see Figure 1), a survey was employed to answer the proposed research questions and test the hypotheses. The survey was administered on Qualtrics, an online survey software and platform. The participants were recruited via Qualtrics Panel services in mid-2014. A random sample of 2,000 participants, between 18 and 49 years of age, who had previously participated in social TV activities, received an invitation email with a link to the survey questionnaire. A total of 345 participants completed the survey (17.25% response rate) and were compensated with various rewards through Qualtrics.

In the survey questionnaire, participants were first asked to indicate a TV program they liked and the amount of time they had spent watching the program. They were then asked to indicate the device they used most frequently to watch the program. In reference to the self-selected program, participants responded to questions pertaining to the social TV platforms they used; program-related activities they participated in; motivations, frequency, and duration of their social TV usage; TV program commitment; and network loyalty. Finally, participants provided demographic information.

Figure 1
Proposed Conceptual Model



Measures

Social TV Usage. In order to identify participants' social TV usage, a series of questions was included. Participants were asked to indicate their program-related social TV usage across platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, program's official Web site or blog) and to select specific social TV activities from a predetermined list (e.g., watch program-related videos, check program-related updates, participate in program-related discussions). They were also asked to report the frequency and duration of their weekly use of social TV activities on a seven-point scale. An index score was calculated by multiplying the frequency and duration to determine participants' social TV usage following Paek, Hove, Jung, and Cole's (2013) procedure.

Motivations of Social TV Usage. To measure motivations for social TV usage, Papacharissi and Mendelson's (2011) and Park and associates' (2009) instruments were adopted to construct four a priori categories: social (α = .94, M = 3.76, SD = 1.59), companionship (α = .91, M = 3.03, SD = 1.59), entertainment (α = .91, M = 4.33, SD = 1.66), and information (α = .91, M = 4.11, SD = 1.65). The 12 items included: "I want to meet interesting people," "It makes me feel less lonely," "It is entertaining," "I want to get more information about the show," among others (see Table 2). As with each of the scales discussed below, the items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, anchored by *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7).

TV Program Commitment. The commitment measure was adopted from Rusbult's (1983) and Sung and Choi's (2010) studies, and modified to measure viewers' commitment level toward their self-selected programs. The items used included: "I feel more attached to this broadcast network over other broadcast networks," "I pay more attention to this broadcast network over other broadcast networks," and "I am more interested in this broadcast network over other broadcast networks" (α = .94, M = 4.53, SD = 1.45).

Network Loyalty. The measurement items of network loyalty were adopted and modified from Yi and Jeon's (2003) and Yoo and Donthu's (2001) studies. The final seven-item measurement included: "It is very important for me to choose TV program content from this broadcast network," "I always find myself consistently choosing TV program content from this broadcast network," "I am a loyal viewer of this broadcast network," and more (α = .93, M = 4.73, SD = 1.21).

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 310 responses (49.4% female, M_{age} = 36.0, SD_{age} = 8.53) were used for data analysis after eliminating cases that took less than one-third of the median time to answer and respondents who exhibited extreme and consistent rating patterns. Approximately 82.6% were Caucasian, 6.8% were African-American, 5.5% were Asian, 2.6% were Hispanic, and 2.6% were multiracial or "other." See Table 1 for demographic information.

On average, participants had watched the program of their choice for about 3.65 years (SD = 3.81). They watched program content most frequently on TV (81.9%), followed by computer or laptop (13.9%), and tablet or smartphone (4.2%). Most participants (42.6%) watched the program while it was on air, 32.3% watched at later dates, and 25.2% spent about equal time watching on air and at

Table 1
Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 310)

Demographic variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	157	50.6
Female	153	49.4
18–29	78	25.1
30–39	109	35.2
40–49	123	39.7
Caucasian	256	82.6
African-American	21	6.8
Asian	17	5.5
Hispanic	8	2.6
Multiracial	4	1.3
Others	4	1.3
Less than high school	3	1.0
High school or equivalent	66	21.3
Some college	79	25.5
2-year college degree	30	9.7
4-year college degree	96	31.0
Master's degree	33	10.6
Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)	3	1.0
Single	83	26.8
Married	166	53.5
Divorced	18	5.8
Living with someone	34	11.0
Separated	6	1.9
Widowed	3	1.0

Table 2
Exploratory Factor Analysis (N = 310)

	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Factor 1: Social infotainment		
I participate in social TV activities because:		
It is entertaining.	.902	
It is funny.	.859	
It is exciting.	.841	
I want to learn what others think about the show.	.810	
I want to talk about the show with other viewers.	.804	
I want to get more information about the show.	.759	
I want to get useful information to make predictions of the show.	.739	
I want to meet interesting people.	.625	
Factor 2: Social companionship		
I don't want to be alone.		.912
It makes me feel less lonely.		.899
There is no one else to talk to when I watch the show.		.793
I want to feel like I belong to a community.		.634
Eigenvalue	*8.05*	*1.37*
Cronbach's Alpha	*.95*	*.91*

later dates. Of the participants (57.5%) who had watched the TV program at later dates, 31.0% reported watching on DVR, 16.5% on Netflix, 12.9% on network Web sites, 4.8% on Hulu, 4.2% on YouTube, and 4.8% on Amazon. Regarding participants' selection of social TV platforms, Facebook (49%) was used most frequently, followed by YouTube (33.9%), the program's official Web site or blog (22.9%), and Twitter (17.7%). Participants reported engaging in the following social TV activities more often than others: Checking in to the program (37.1%), watching program-related videos (37.1%), checking program-related updates (32.3%), seeing program-related photos (31.3%), and finding out what other people think about the program (26.5%).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

To answer RQ_1, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principle components extraction and varimax rotation was employed to identify what motivations for social TV usage might exist. An eigenvalue greater than 1.0 was required to retain a factor (Table 2). The EFA yielded two interpretable factors. The first factor was relabeled social infotainment (α = .79, M = 4.13, SD = 1.53), which accounted for 47.52% of

Table 3
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	*M*	*SD*
1. Social infotainment	1	.73**	.61**	.33**	.37**	4.13	1.53
2. Social companionship		1	.47**	.36**	.33**	3.18	1.54
3. Social TV usage			1	.33**	.37**	9.70	9.71
4. TV program commitment				1	.83**	4.53	1.45
5. Network loyalty					1	4.73	1.21

Note. **$p < .01$ (2-tailed).

the variance after rotation. It combined items of entertainment, social, and information motivations, indicating the need to be entertained, to exchange information concerning the program, and to connect with other like-minded viewers. The second factor was social companionship ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.54$), which accounted for 31.03% of the variance after rotation. It suggested the tendency to satisfy needs for belonging and be members of a community through engagement in social TV activities. Responses to the retained items were summed and averaged to form the scales representing each factor for the following analyses.

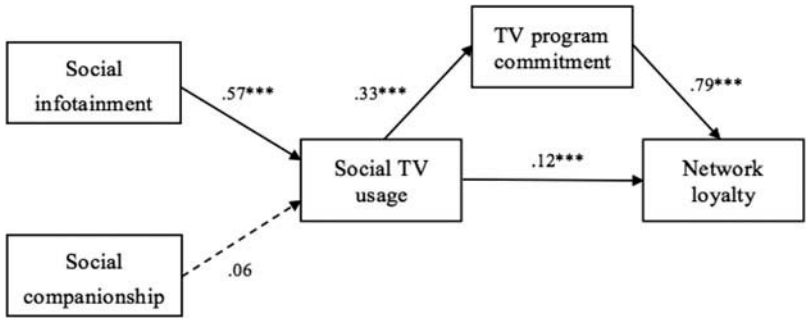
Path Analysis

A correlation analysis of all variables included in the proposed conceptual model was conducted (Table 3). All correlation coefficients of pairwise associations were positive and significant ($p < .01$).

A path analysis was conducted to examine the proposed RQ_2 and hypotheses. The results showed good goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 23.91$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$, GFI = .97, TLI = .94, NFI = .97, CFI = .98, SRMR = .08), indicating that the model was valid and acceptable. Specific to RQ_2, the results (Figure 2) showed that social infotainment motivation was significantly and positively associated with social TV usage ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$). However, the association between social companionship and social TV usage was not significant ($\beta = .06$, $p = .39$). As for the proposed hypotheses, viewers' social TV usage was found to be positively associated with TV program commitment ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and network loyalty ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$). The significant results suggest that the more viewers engage in social TV activities, the higher their commitment level toward the program and their network loyalty. Therefore, H_1 and H_2 were supported. In addition, the findings revealed a significant positive association between TV program commitment and network loyalty ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$), providing clear support for H_3.

With the validated model, additional analysis was performed to evaluate the mediation of TV program commitment on the relationship between social TV

Figure 2
Path Coefficients of the Conceptual Model



Note. ***$p < .001$. Dotted line indicates non-significant path.

usage and network loyalty. A formal test of mediation analysis using a bootstrap procedure (N = 2,000 samples) showed that the direct effect of social TV usage on network loyalty was .12, with a bootstrap standard error of .03 (95% CI:.06,.18, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of social TV usage on network loyalty through TV program commitment was .26, with a bootstrap standard error of .04 (95% CI:.18,.33, $p < .01$). Taken together, the significant direct and indirect effects suggested that TV program commitment partially mediated the relationship between social TV usage and network loyalty.

Discussion

This study is one of the first empirical attempts to understand the uses and gratifications of viewers' social TV participation and to examine how social TV strategies contribute to the development of audience engagement and network loyalty through the lens of viewer-program relationships. Today, more and more real-time conversations around programming take place in digital channels across screens; viewers like to watch live programming more when there are social TV components involved (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014; Nielsen, 2015). Our findings indicate that participants interacted with programs and other viewers on social media and program-related Web sites as an extension of their viewing experience. While the literature has shown the important role of programs' official Web sites for TV branding (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004), the empirical findings here give further evidence that social media platforms have garnered mainstream appeal. Considering that the complicated media marketplace is now filled with infinite

content, broadcasters need to make sure their social TV strategies are synergistic across platforms and are responsive to viewers' needs and expectations.

Building on the previously discussed U&G studies, social infotainment and social companionship emerged from the a priori categories as the primary motivations of social TV use. The social infotainment motive comprises items related to entertainment, social interaction, and exchange of information, while the social companionship motive comprises items related to companionship and need for belonging. Although Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) noted that social TV participation is more likely driven by instrumental than ritualized needs, our findings suggest that these two orientations are not dichotomous but are more likely interrelated (Rubin, 1984).

While the motivations that emerged consisted of items similar to Guo and Chan-Olmsted's (2015) and Cha's (2016) results, our findings provide additional insights into the predictive power of motivations behind social TV usage in explaining active viewers' multiscreen, multitasking media consumption and expectations. The positive relationship between social infotainment motive and social TV participation suggests that the more viewers are driven by social, entertainment, and information-related gratifications, the more frequently they engage in social TV activities and spend more time on them. Indeed, social TV provides a gateway for viewers to express or receive messages that are favorable to the programs they follow or how they relate to other fellow viewers (Cha, 2016; Lim et al., 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). Such selective exposure (i.e., demassification) to tailored messages regarding specific programs results in habitual social TV usage and brings pleasure (i.e., entertainment) to the viewers (Shin, 2013). Moreover, as Cohen and Lancaster (2014) suggested, social TV supports the group-viewing experience as it permits viewers to exchange program-related information and monitor information about other viewers' emotional states. The information gathered on social TV can serve as a recommendation system that satisfies viewers' motivations for information seeking when choosing programs or channels. Thus, the momentum of social TV is likely to influence viewers' program and network choices. Our findings also show that participants demonstrated a need for company and need to belong and, therefore, engaged in social TV activities to feel part of a larger community of viewers (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). However, the social companionship motive did not emerge as a significant predictor of viewers' social TV use intensity. Interpreted further, the frequency and duration of viewers' social TV usage is driven by program-related amusement, information-seeking, and program-induced social connections among viewers, not by their sense of belonging or feelings of mediated co-viewing while being physically alone. Therefore, the social infotainment value of social TV activities should be made salient to viewers.

This study further sheds light on the psychological and behavioral consequences of social TV participation. Drawing on the consumer-brand relationships and TV branding literature, TV program commitment is conceptualized and measured to understand viewers' psychological disposition toward programs. This psychological attempt draws on different theoretical origins to study media users' internal states toward media content and brands. Our findings reveal a positive influence of social

TV participation on escalating viewers' commitment toward programs. This implies that social TV strategies provide broadcasters with abundant touchpoints to initiate and maintain relationships with viewers and guarantee favorable branding outcomes. Lin and colleagues (2016) provide an additional explanation for the observed relationship. In reference to the investment model (Rusbult, 1980), they found that the more viewers actively participate in social TV activities, the greater their satisfaction and investment in the programs they watch. Although viewers may still perceive other programs as attractive, their satisfaction, investment, and perceptions toward alternative programs following social TV participation are predictive in determining their program commitment level. Therefore, our findings correspond with the literature and conclude that viewers' commitment level increases as a consequence of increasing dependence in viewer-program relationships (Rusbult et al., 1998). In addition, our findings reveal that TV program commitment is an important antecedent to network loyalty. By connecting different streams of research, TV program commitment is useful for both broadcasters and academic researchers in understanding how viewers' psychological attachment to programs promotes persistence and relationship maintenance behaviors.

Our findings confirm that social TV participation is positively related to network loyalty (Lewin et al., 2015). Participants who were actively involved in creating and sharing content online showed greater loyalty and advocacy; such a value cocreation process played an integral role in the development of committed relationships (Turri et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for broadcasters to cultivate a community of viewers through social TV strategies thereby increasing network loyalty (Holland & Baker, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). In addition, Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) suggested that network loyalty not only contributes to repeated viewing of the channels but also to the potential acquisition of new audiences through favorable word-of-mouth communication. By this token, broadcasters should capitalize on social TV to enhance viewer engagement and transform viewers to ambassadors; in turn, this can help maintain viewing consistency and earn market-winning audience shares (McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). This study is further evidence that the relationship between social TV participation and network loyalty is partially mediated by TV program commitment. The underlying mechanism of loyalty development observed provides important implications for broadcasters' brand management. Although trends such as audience fragmentation, channel proliferation, and technological advances might diminish the value of a program to its network brand (Chan-Olmsted, 2011), our study supports an enhancement association between the two and shows how social TV may contribute to the differential effects of brand equity on viewer behavior (Keller, 1993). Broadcasters should try to optimize viewers' social TV experience, and strategically promote the emotional dimension of such experience across platforms to generate and consolidate affective bonds with viewers; doing so may ultimately lead to loyalty toward the network brand.

This study explores the antecedents and consequences of social TV participation, providing empirical evidence that adds to the existing knowledge of TV branding

and theory development. Although it makes important contributions to understanding social TV, it is not without limitations. While the survey sample was appropriate for studying viewers' multi-platform, multiscreen TV content consumption, the reasoning behind the observed social TV usage may be difficult to generalize to the overall population (Ruggiero, 2000) because of the nature of self-reported data. Future scholars will benefit from gathering information from different viewer groups. In addition, qualitative interviewing and ethnographic study of virtual communities of social TV participants would help to uncover more complex motivations and the social/psychological antecedents that drive viewer behavior. Moreover, our data were cross-sectional in nature; therefore, no causal relationships could be established among motivations, social TV usage, and TV branding outcomes. More thoughtful designs (e.g., field experiments) should be implemented to confirm the causal relationships assumed in the U&G approach. Future research could also examine the effect of specific social TV strategies on viewers' attitudinal and behavioral responses to determine whether such effects vary across different social TV platforms, how different platforms might best complement each other in responding to viewers' media use habits, and what marketing opportunities exist for broadcasters working with advertisers. It would also be valuable to focus on social TV strategies for specific programs or subgenres, given that different types of programming may lead to diverse motivations for social TV participation and result in the development of different types of viewer-program relationships.

In sum, this study has important theoretical and managerial implications. While social TV strategies have been widely adopted for TV branding, this study extends the existing theoretical underpinnings and offers a conceptual framework to examine the utility of social TV. The framework also provides insight into the mechanism through which viewers' psychological attachment and loyalty toward broadcasters and programs may be developed in the multiscreen world. The findings empirically demonstrate the value of social TV to broadcasters and provide directions to proactively encourage social TV participation, to immerse viewers beyond their viewing experience through social TV strategies, and to build long-term relationships with viewers.

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Shared Entertainment, Shared Opinions: The Influence of Social TV Comments on the Evaluation of Talent Shows

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Shared Entertainment, Shared Opinions: The Influence of Social TV Comments on the Evaluation of Talent Shows

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The present research investigated whether co-viewer comments in social TV interactions are able to enhance or weaken media effects. With the example of talent shows, the valence of co-viewer comments (pro/contra/none) as well as the type of content (antisocial behavior vs. conventional performance) were varied in an experiment (N = 117). Results showed that participants' own comments and their private attitudes about the judges varied in line with comment valence. Findings suggest that social TV viewers are prone to social influence of their co-viewers, which might amplify problems regarding the portrayal of antisocial behavior in reality TV.

While watching TV, viewers increasingly use a second screen such as their notebook computer or their mobile phone to communicate with others, for instance by expressing their opinion on the content of a specific show or by reading comments written by friends or unknown peers. This phenomenon has been termed social TV (e.g., Cesar & Geerts, 2011) and recognized as one of the emerging trends in current media consumption (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014). When people send tweets, read Facebook messages or chat via instant-messaging services during the consumption of "classic" television, social TV can be regarded as a new

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representation of the ongoing convergence between mass and interpersonal communication (Perloff, 2015) that has been fueled by the development of new technologies and social media.

Initial studies in this context mainly focused on the motives and personality characteristics of social TV users (e.g., Cohen & Lancaster, 2014; Han & Lee, 2014) and the TV-related contents that are posted on various platforms (e.g., Wohn & Na, 2011). These initial studies suggest that the frequency of social TV usage is related to the dispositional need to belong (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014) and serves motives such as information-seeking, communication, and entertainment (Han & Lee, 2014; Krämer, Winter, Benninghoff, & Gallus, 2015). Furthermore, live events such as talent shows or sports events appear to be particularly popular formats for social TV (Buschow et al., 2014; Wohn & Na, 2011). However, less is known about the *effects* of social TV usage (see Valkenburg, Peter, & Walther, 2016). How does reading comments generated by other viewers (and the act of responding to them) affect one's own evaluation of TV content and one's judgments about the protagonists and the topics of the show? The present research aims to fill this gap by examining the social influence that can be exerted by other commenters (Kim & Holingshead, 2015) and by identifying the conditions under which social TV settings lead to different media effects than watching the same content on one's own. Due to the simultaneous perception of others' opinions, social TV interactions are likely to strengthen the role of social variables in media reception (Konijn, Veldhuis, & Plaisier, 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013), which may fundamentally alter the way in which media effects develop.

In the present study, we focus on social TV in the context of talent shows (such as the *Got Talent* series), which exemplify an area of media entertainment that may elicit effects that are undesirable from a normative perspective (Wilson, Robinson, & Callister, 2012). Specifically, we aim to examine how pro or contra comments toward TV shows with antisocial or non-questionable behavior shape viewers' attitudes toward the content and the protagonists.

Social Influence in Media Effects Research

Research on social influence has a rich tradition in psychology (see Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) and has shown that people are likely to adapt their own judgements on the basis of others' opinions in situations of uncertainty and ambiguity (Kim & Holingshead, 2015). Deutsch and Gerard (1955) distinguish between normative social influence (to publicly conform to a group norm to avoid negative reactions) and informational social influence (which occurs when a person interprets others' reactions as a meaningful cue to make sense of an ambiguous situation), both of which can independently affect individuals' behavior and judgment but frequently co-occur (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004).

Clearly, social influence is also capable of affecting media use and media effects. For instance, people frequently select media content that is popular among their family and friends (McDonald, 2009). In the phase of reception, responses by physically present co-viewers have been shown to shape one's own media experience through emotional

contagion (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). According to Valkenburg and Peter's model of differential susceptibility to media effects (2013), social variables can also serve as a moderator of media effects: Their context-content convergence hypothesis posits that "media effects are amplified if the messages converge with the opinions, values, and norms in the social environment of the media user" (p. 234). For instance, if a viewer has the impression that her/his environment approves of aggression, media content that depicts or promotes such behavior would have a stronger impact (similar to the assumptions of the resonance mechanism in cultivation theory; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, & Signorielli, 1980; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). On the contrary, media effects would become weaker if the content or the portrayed behavior is criticized by the environment.

While the consumption of media content and the perception of the norms of the social environment have been separate stages in the usage of (traditional) television, social TV blurs the boundaries between these two processes. That is, the opinions and norms of (parts of) the social environment are already visible during the phase of reception, which may fundamentally alter viewers' experience and the occurrence of media effects. Considering this juxtaposition of multiple information sources that can be found in interactive settings, Konijn, Veldhuis, Plaisier, Spekman, and den Hamer (2015) argue that media effects in contemporary formats such as online videos on YouTube (and possibly even more so in social TV settings) should be conceptualized as interactions of media content and peer reactions. In the following, we will review empirical evidence on the influence of peer reactions in the context of media usage and discuss their potential effects in social TV settings in combination with the specifics of Reality TV.

Effects of Peer Comments on Viewers' Attitude Formation and Expression

The relevance of social influence in offline co-viewing settings has been demonstrated by Fein, Goethals, and Kugler (2007, Study 4): Participants watched a TV debate of presidential candidates with co-viewers that either showed positive reactions (applause and cheering) toward Bill Clinton and disapproved statements by George Bush or vice versa. Results showed strong effects of the other viewers' behavior on participants' own evaluation of the candidates' performance. The authors argue that the evaluation of a (political) TV show is a situation in which others' opinions are a helpful source to interpret ambiguous events, which makes the setting of co-viewing a "fertile ground for informational social influence" (Fein et al., 2007, p. 165). Similar effects were also shown for real-time response measures that are displayed on the screen and (ostensibly) indicate the evaluations of other viewers: Studies demonstrated effects of these "worm graphics" on viewers' perception of election debates (Davis, Bowers, & Memon, 2011) as well as of performances in the *Pop Idol* talent show (Weaver, Huck, & Brosius, 2009).

In the context of new media environments, the visibility of others' opinions has increased (Kim & Holingshead, 2015) and is not dependent on the physical presence of co-viewers any more. Research on user-generated content, albeit not yet focused on

social TV, has largely shown that people tend to see other users' statements as valuable (Metzger, Flanagin, & Medders, 2010), even though the expertise or trustworthiness of the people who publish content is not always clear. However, less is known about the theoretical mechanisms that drive these effects (see Kim & Hollingshead, 2015). For the area of audiovisual content, initial studies showed effects of the valence of YouTube comments (the degree to which they express favorable or unfavorable evaluations of the target) on the evaluation of public service announcements against smoking (Shi, Messari, & Cappella, 2014) and marijuana consumption (Walther, DeAndrea, Kim, & Anthony, 2010), while the effects on viewers' attitudes toward the topic and the proposed behavior depended on prior attitudes (readiness to quit smoking; Shi et al., 2014) and the identification with the commenters (Walther et al., 2010). The latter finding has been related to the social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE; Reicher, Spears, & Postmes, 1995) that more specifically focuses on social influence in computer-mediated communication. The model holds that people identify themselves with online groups and are susceptible to their social influence if interaction partners are visually anonymous, which masks individual differences, and if group norms are salient but people are less interested in future interactions. Since the environment of YouTube comments matches these descriptions, the SIDE model would predict a generally high level of identification with the commenters. However, the study by Walther, DeAndrea and colleagues (2010) showed a substantial variability in identification, possibly due to varying levels of familiarity with the platform or assumptions about the commenters. Only those who identified strongly with the commenters were affected in their attitude about the topic.

As the characteristics of social TV interactions, where users can chat with a potentially unrestricted number of peers, are consistent with the general conditions of SIDE effects, it can be assumed that these co-viewers elicit similar or even stronger effects than the asynchronous commenters on video-sharing platforms. However, social TV chat platforms might also have additional implications, since they include more direct affordances to interact with others. This might be connected to stronger relational goals than in asynchronous comment sections (that is, people might feel a stronger desire to create a positive relationship with the others). Walther, van der Heide, Ramirez, Burgoon, and Pena (2015) argued that expressing an attitude that is similar to the interaction partners' attitude can be used as a strategy to increase interpersonal liking in computer-mediated communication (to a stronger extent than in face-to-face communication, where affinity can be expressed more easily with nonverbal communication). Prior studies with chat dyads showed that participants expressed more similar opinions about the topic of the discussion if they were prompted with the goal to increase liking (Walther, van der Heide, Tong, Carr, & Atkin, 2010). Given that social TV usage is also related to goals of communication, exchange, and relationship development with co-viewers (Han & Lee, 2014; Krämer et al., 2015), we argue that people who chat on social TV platforms are likely to base the content of their postings on the visible opinion climate, unless the personal relevance of a specific topic is so pronounced that they aim to convince others of their own opinion.

Based on these considerations, it can be expected that social TV viewers that encounter co-viewers who express a relatively uniform opinion climate are influenced

in their private attitudes (via informational social influence (Fein et al., 2007) by visually anonymous peers (Reicher et al., 1995)) as well as in their public expression attitude expression (via normative influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) or relational goals (Walther et al., 2010)). Both of these influences can be interrelated, since expression usually depends on the valence of the private attitude and the act of expression (even if mainly based on social pressures) can also lead to internalization, in that people tend to believe what they have said to others (Pingree, 2007). We next discuss the potential outcomes of these effects for the case of reality TV.

Interactions of Peer Comments and Reality TV Content

As mentioned above, media effects in contemporary environments can be conceptualized as interactions of media content and peer reactions (Konijn et al., 2015). As one example, Konijn and colleagues (2013) showed that YouTube comments which describe pictures of extremely thin models as almost normal can reduce body satisfaction among adolescents. In this setting, peer reactions have amplified a media effect that has also been observed in exposure settings without co-viewers (Dittmar & Howard, 2004). In this case, the direction of this interaction will most likely be interpreted as undesirable but, of course, the audience might also act as a corrective if the majority of co-viewers criticizes biased or misleading media content. The outcome of the interaction then depends on the norms that are salient in the group of commenters. In this line, there might be positive opportunities of increased deliberation and critical thinking, but due to the occurrence of incivility or flaming (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014), the scenario of inadequate comments also has to be considered.

The genre of reality TV featuring "ordinary people engaged in unscripted action and interaction" (Nabi, 2007, p. 373) includes popular formats (Chalaby, 2015) such as dating shows (*The Bachelor*), game shows (*Survivor*), or talent shows (*Pop Idol* or the *Got Talent* series). Concerning the reasons for the immense popularity of the new genre, Hill (2002, 2005) argued that the audience is looking for moments of authenticity when "real" people act in unreal environments, which is not necessarily voyeuristic but could also consider general questions of social relationships and morality. At the same time, reality TV has widely been criticized for the portrayal of questionable values and antisocial behavior (see Potter et al., 1997). A content analysis showed a high frequency of antisocial acts in *Survivor*, particularly indirect and verbal aggression, that are partly rewarded by success in the show (Wilson et al., 2012). One consequence could be that prolonged exposure to such content might cultivate beliefs (Gerbner et al., 1980) and lead to a greater acceptance of such behavior (Bandura, 2002; Wilson et al., 2012). In the setting of talent and competition shows, the exhibition of extremely untalented candidates (who may be naive toward the mechanisms of these shows) and insulting comments by judges can be described as morally questionable and antisocial.

Given the potential of social influence in social TV environments, the undesirable effects of this content might be amplified, for instance, if commenters describe antisocial behavior as funny, whereas negative comments might also enhance a

critical discussion of these formats. Based on the theoretical considerations above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H_1: The valence of social TV comments will affect the content of viewers' own (public) comments.

H_2: The valence of social TV comments will affect viewers' (private) evaluation of the show and its protagonists.

With regard to interactions with the main content, the social influence is likely to be particularly striking for reality TV content with antisocial behavior. Thus, we expect:

H_3: Pro comments about antisocial behavior will lead to a more positive evaluation of the person responsible and to a more negative evaluation of the "victim" of such behavior than contra comments.

Based on the SIDE model (Reicher et al., 1995), we assume that these persuasive effects are particularly pronounced for individuals who highly identify with their co-viewers:

H_4: The effects of comment valence on viewers' evaluations of the show and the protagonists are moderated by identification with the commenters.

Method

We conducted a laboratory experiment in which participants were asked to watch a talent show and interact in a social TV environment. The study employed a 2 × 3 between-subjects design: The content of the clip (antisocial behavior vs. conventional performance) and the valence of the ostensible co-viewer comments (pro vs. contra vs. no comments) were systematically varied. Our investigation focuses on the exchange with (unknown) peers (as opposed to the one-to-one exchange with friends on instant messaging services), which represents a common scenario in co-viewing apps, social media sites or official social TV channels (Han & Lee, 2014).

Sample

A total of 120 participants were recruited at a large European university. Three datasets were excluded due to technical problems with the TV and the tablet that occurred during the experiment. The final sample consisted of 117 subjects (59 female) with an average age of 22.85 years (SD = 4.15).

Procedure

As a cover story, the study was announced as a test of a new social TV application. Participants in the experimental comment conditions were told that students of other universities would simultaneously take part in the study. The clip was shown on a flat-screen TV—for the social TV interaction, participants received a tablet computer as a second screen. After watching the clip, a questionnaire assessed participants' enjoyment, their evaluation of the show and the protagonists, as well as their perception of how others evaluated the content.

Independent Variables

Content of Clip. The video material was taken from the German version of the *Got Talent* show (*Das Supertalent*). Both clips were about 10 minutes long and featured the performance of a male candidate and the evaluation by the judges. The clip with antisocial behavior showed a candidate who tried to perform a self-composed song, while the audience and one of the judges made fun of his accent, his outfit, and his singing out of tune. The conventional clip (without morally questionable behavior) showed the performance of an opera singer who received standing ovations while the same judge was moved to tears.

Type of Comments. The displayed comments by the ostensible co-viewers were either positive (pro) or negative (contra) toward the show. A third condition (control) did not include any comments. Pro comments expressed a favorable evaluation of the clip and the portrayal of the candidates that is intended by the show. That is, pro comments followed the given tone in that they were positive toward the singer in the conventional clip and positive toward the ridicule of the candidate in the antisocial clip. On the contrary, contra comments expressed an unfavorable evaluation and criticized the interpretation that is suggested by the show: Comments were negative toward the singer of the conventional clip, whereas in the antisocial clips, comments were negative toward the ridicule of the candidate (see Table 1 for examples). During the clip, nine comments by the ostensible co-viewers (with common nicknames) were shown on the screen. In the control condition, the screen displayed inserts with neutral information about the Web site and tickets for the show.

Measures

Analysis of Participants' Own Comments. The comments that were entered by the participants during the social TV interaction were saved for analysis. Three independent coders rated the tone of the comments and which position was expressed regarding the evaluation of the show, the judges, and the candidate (for each target, a 7-point scale between −3 [*very negative*] to +3 [*very positive*] was

used). Interrater agreement was acceptable (evaluation of the show: Cronbach's α = .82; judges: α = .85; candidate: α = .77). Therefore, the evaluations of the three raters were averaged for each dimension.

Evaluation of the Show. Participants' general evaluation of the show *Das Supertalent* was measured with a semantic differential with nine adjective pairs (e.g., "boring–exciting," "not interesting–interesting," 7-point scale, α = .93, M = 2.87; SD = 1.24).

Evaluation of the Judge. The evaluation of the primary judge was assessed with 15 adjective pairs, which were rated on a 7-point scale. To summarize these items, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The empirical eigenvalues of a principal axis analysis with Varimax rotation and a parallel analysis (Horn, 1965) suggested a two-factor solution. Following the procedure outlined by Horn (1965), we subsequently conducted a second factor analysis (principal axis, Promax rotation) with the fixed number of two factors. Five items with low main loadings or high parallel loadings were excluded. The first factor of the final solution includes seven items such as "unfriendly–friendly" and "dismissive–gentle" and represents participants' evaluation of the judge's respectfulness (α = .91; M = 4.82; SD = 1.31). The second factor comprises three items regarding the judge's competence ("subjective–objective," "competent–incompetent," "uncongenial–congenial," α = .65; M = 3.57; SD = 1.24).

Evaluation of the Candidate. Participants indicated their perception of the candidate with 13 item pairs on a 7-point scale. Following the same scheme as above, exploratory factor analysis and parallel analysis yielded a two-factor solution. After excluding three items with low main or high double loadings, two factors representing the candidate's likeability (5 items, e.g., "unfriendly–friendly," "dishonest–honest;" α = .81; M = 5.06; SD = 1.00) and his confidence (5 items, e.g., "aimless–determined," "untalented–talented;" α = .86; M = 4.74; SD = 1.38) emerged.

Enjoyment of the Clip. Viewers' enjoyment of the clip was assessed with an adaptation of the Media Enjoyment Scale (Krcmar & Renfro, 2005) with 8 items (rated on a 5-point scale) such as "I really enjoyed viewing the clip" (α = .77; M = 2.35; SD = 0.72).

Identification with the Commenters. The degree to which participants identified with their co-viewers was measured with 6 items (on a 5-point scale) that were based on SIDE research (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Lee, 2004), including items such as "It was easy to identify with the people who have commented the show" (α = .93; M = 2.32; SD = 1.01).

Manipulation Check. Participants in the comments conditions were asked if the commenters' opinions were positive, neutral, or negative toward the show. The vast majority (87%) evaluated the comments in line with the intended manipulation.

Table 1
Examples of Displayed Comments

Condition	Conventional clip	Antisocial clip
Pro comments (positive comments toward the show and the portrayal of the candidate)	"I love the show!" "Great voice, I'm surprised"	"I love the show!" "What a freak! OMG!"
Contra comments (negative comments toward the show and the portrayal of the candidate)	"I hate this show!" "Oh God, what an arrogant guy"	"I hate this show!" "He doesn't deserve that people make fun of him"

Results

Participants' Public Comments

H_1 predicted that the valence of the displayed comments would affect viewers' own comments that they enter on their second screen. During the experiment, participants in the comments conditions wrote 1 to 14 comments, only six participants did not write anything. The comments included own evaluations such as "i hate trash tv" or "that was really great!" as well as opinions about the portrayal of the candidates (e.g., "that's disrespectful … he's a good guy" or "haha if you want to make a fool of yourself, that's the right show" about the antisocial clip). To test whether the tone of participants' public opinion expressions was influenced by the co-viewer comments, we conducted analyses of variance (ANOVA) with comment valence and clip type as fixed factors and coders' assessments of participants' comments as dependent variables. For the evaluation of the judges, a significant effect of comment valence (F (1, 73) = 6.75; p = .011; η_p^2 = .09) emerged: In line with H_1, participants wrote more positive (albeit still quite critical) comments about the judges if co-viewers expressed a positive evaluation of the show (pro comments: M = –0.11; SD = 0.87/contra comments: M = –0.62; SD = 0.87). However, there were no significant effects for the expressed evaluation of the show and the candidate.

Participants' Evaluations of the Content and the Protagonists

As tests of H_2 and H_3, we analyzed participants' (private) evaluations of the content and the protagonists that they indicated in the questionnaire after watching the clip. Again, ANOVAs with clip type and comment valence as fixed factors were

conducted. For the dependent measure of the general evaluation of the show, no significant effects emerged. Participants' evaluation of the main judge's respectfulness was affected by significant effects of clip type (F (1, 111) = 96.05; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .46$) and comment valence (F (2, 111) = 4.52; $p = .013$; $\eta_p^2 = .08$). Mean values show that the judge was perceived as most respectful if pro comments toward the show were displayed ($M = 5.18$; $SD = 1.15$). According to post-hoc comparisons (LSD), this evaluation was significantly higher than in the control group ($M = 4.62$; $SD = 1.35/SE = .215$; $p = .009$) and in the condition with contra comments ($M = 4.65$; $SD = 1.38/SE = .218$; $p = .013$), while the latter two conditions did not differ from each other. Additionally, the judge was perceived as more respectful in the clip with the conventional performance ($M = 5.68$; $SD = 0.58$) and judged more negatively in the clip with antisocial behavior ($M = 3.96$; $SD = 1.27$).

Similarly, the perception of the judge's competence was influenced by comment valence (F (2, 111) = 5.50; $p = .005$; $\eta_p^2 = .09$), clip type (F (1, 111) = 4.30; $p = .041$; $\eta_p^2 = .04$), and a marginal interaction of the two factors (F (2, 111) = 2.72; $p = .070$; $\eta_p^2 = .05$). According to the mean values (see Table 2), participants perceived the judge as more competent in the conventional clip than in the antisocial clip, and contra comments led to a more negative evaluation than pro comments ($SE = .264$; $p = .003$). The control group significantly differed from the condition with contra comments ($SE = .263$; $p = .008$) but not from the pro comments. That is, comment valence was able to exert a derisive but not a supportive effect on the perception of the judge's competence. Furthermore, the effect of comment valence tended to be more pronounced in the clip with antisocial behavior.

The perception of the candidate's confidence was only affected by clip type (F (1, 111) = 233.61; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .68$), with higher ratings for the singer in the conventional clip ($M = 5.88$; $SD = 0.65$ vs. $M = 3.63$, $SD = 0.91$), but not by comment valence. For the evaluation of the candidates' likability, significant effects of comment valence (F (2, 111) = 3.68; $p = .028$; $\eta_p^2 = .06$), clip type (F (1, 111) = 16.91; $p < .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .13$), and an interaction between the two factors (F (2, 111) = 6.43; $p = .002$; $\eta_p^2 = .10$) occurred. The candidate in the antisocial clip was evaluated as more likeable than the candidate in the conventional clip. Subsequent analyses show that comment valence only had an effect in the subsample of the conventional clip (F (2, 55) = 8.36; $p = .001$; $\eta_p^2 = .23$): In this group, viewers' evaluations varied in line with comment valence (with significant post-hoc differences between contra and pro comments ($SE = .301$; $p < .001$) as well as between contra comments and the control group ($SE = .298$; $p = .003$)). However, there was no significant effect of comment valence among viewers who saw the antisocial clip.

These findings partly support H_2 by demonstrating that viewers' private opinions toward the judges were affected by the tone of co-viewer comments, while the opinions toward the candidate were less prone to social influence. In line with H_3, pro (vs. contra) comments toward the show particularly led to a more positive evaluation of the person responsible for antisocial behavior (in this case: the judge). However, against expectations, participants did not evaluate the "victim" of such behavior (the candidate) more negatively if the co-viewers also made fun of him.

Moderating Effects of Identification

To test the expected moderation effect of identification with the commenters, we conducted moderated regression analyses (in the subsample of the comment conditions). The following (centralized) variables were added in a hierarchical model: (1) comment valence, (2) identification with commenters, (3) interaction of comment valence and identification. For the criterion of the evaluation of the show, the interaction term emerged as a significant predictor (β = .400; $p < .001$) in the final model (F (3, 73) = 6.27; p = .001; R^2 = .205). According to simple slope analyses, individuals who highly identified with the other commenters evaluated the show in line with comment valence (b = 0.68; SE = 0.18; t = 3.76; $p < .001$) (see Figure 1), while this was not the case when the level of identification was low. Furthermore, regression analysis showed a marginal effect of the interaction term on the perception of candidates' likability (β = .207; p = .065; F (3, 73) = 3.11; p = .031; R^2 = .113): Viewers with high levels of identification evaluated the candidate more negatively if the opinion climate was negative (b = 0.49; SE = 0.17; t = 2.92; p = .005), but less among viewers with low levels of identification. This partly supports H_4; however, there were no further interactions with regard to the evaluation of the judge.

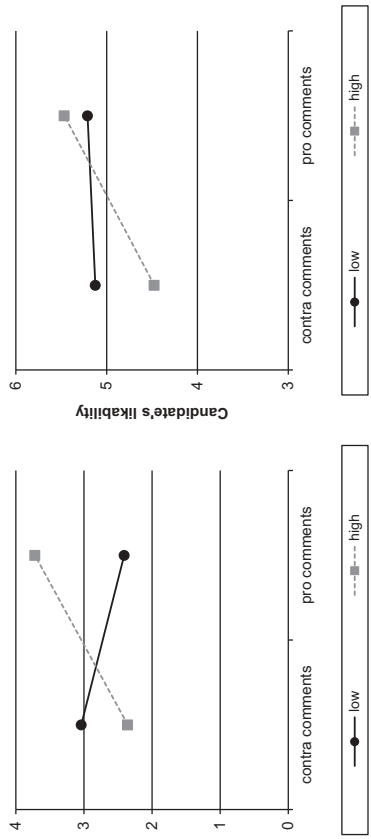
Participants' Enjoyment of the Show

In an additional analysis, ANOVA showed that viewers' enjoyment was significantly affected by clip type, F (1, 111) = 5.92; p = .017; η_p^2 = .05 (with higher enjoyment for the conventional clip: M = 2.51; SD = 0.67/antisocial clip: M = 2.20; SD = 0.75), and type of comments, F (2, 111) = 4.18; p = .018; η_p^2 = .07. Pro comments led to highest enjoyment ratings (M = 2.62; SD = 0.81) that significantly differed from contra comments (M = 2.24; SD = 0.69/SE = .159; p = .018), and the

Table 2
Effects of Comment Valence and Clip Type on Viewers' Perception of the Judge's Competence and the Candidate's Likability (Means and Standard Deviations)

Clip type	Comment valence	Judge's competence	Candidate's likability
Conventional clip	Contra comments	3.53 (1.04)	4.02 (1.30)
	No comments	4.10 (1.26)	4.96 (0.66)
	Pro comments	3.74 (1.26)	5.18 (0.69)
Antisocial clip	Contra comments	2.60 (0.98)	5.53 (0.68)
	No comments	3.45 (1.17)	5.19 (0.96)
	Pro comments	3.98 (1.21)	5.46 (0.84)

Figure 1
Simple Slopes: Interaction Effect between Comment Valence and Identification with the Commenters on Viewers' Evaluation of the Show and the Candidate's Likability



control condition (M = 2.21; SD = 0.60/SE = .157; p = .011), both of which did not differ from each other.

Discussion

The goal of the present study was to examine the social influence that is elicited by social TV co-viewers as well as its consequences in the domain of reality TV and to explore the mechanisms that drive these effects. Results showed that social TV viewers use the information on their co-viewers' opinions as cues to interpret what they saw on their screen, even though they could have formed an independent impression of the content on their own (Davis et al., 2011). As others' opinions become more and more visible in new media environments (Kim & Hollingshead, 2015) and the range of potential co-viewers is much larger, one could argue that the phenomenon of co-viewer influence is now of even greater significance than in the days of traditional media usage.

The social influence was visible in participants' public opinion expression as well as in their private evaluations of the content. In the public comments that they wrote, the evaluation of the judges varied in line with the valence of the opinion climate that was conveyed: The comments about the jury were more positive if others' comments were also positive toward the show. This can be explained by normative social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955) since the expression of contrary opinions might lead to negative reactions. The chat scenario might create a high affordance of communicating with the co-viewers (to a stronger degree than in asynchronous settings) and relating to each other (Han & Lee, 2014). In this regard, the expression of a likeminded opinion might have been used as a strategy to enhance interpersonal liking (Walther et al., 2015). However, the effects of comment valence on opinion expression in the present study were limited as the expressed evaluation of the show and the candidate remained unaffected.

While the public opinion expressions may also be an adaptation to the social context (without an internalization of these views), the patterns of social influence were also visible in the private attitudes reported after watching the clip. The evaluation of the main judge's respectfulness and competence was affected by the tone of co-viewer comments. Viewers found the judge to be more respectful when pro comments were displayed (in comparison to contra comments and the control group), and he was seen as less competent when contra comments were shown (compared to pro comments and the control group). Additionally, the perception of the candidate in the conventional clip was influenced by comment valence. These effects on viewers' opinions are in line with research on the influence of asynchronous comments (Walther et al., 2010) and the SIDE model (Reicher et al., 1995) that posits a strong influence in anonymous group interactions. As a central moderating variable, viewers' identification with the commenters emerged in that high levels of identification amplified the effect of comment valence on the evaluation of candidate's likability. Similarly, people who highly identified with the commenters also

based their general evaluation of the show on the others' views (an effect that did not occur in the whole sample). While the SIDE model would predict high and relatively uniform levels of identification in an anonymous scenario, there was a substantial variability of identification in the present setting (similar to findings by Walther et al., 2010), which may be due to different assumptions about the peers. In the present study, co-viewers were described as students from other universities. Future research could test how information about the co-viewers (similar vs. other age groups or demographics, language style of the comments, or viewers' initial congruence with the others' opinions) strengthen or attenuate identification.

The observed influence of peer reactions has to be interpreted in combination with the content of the main messages (Konijn et al., 2015; Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). The present investigation focused on reality TV, which is a popular genre for social TV (Buschow et al., 2014) and has been criticized due to the depiction of antisocial behavior (Wilson et al., 2012). In the clip that was used as stimulus material, the judge and the studio audience made fun of an extremely untalented candidate. Peer comments approving this behavior might amplify media effects that are undesirable from a normative point of view (see Konijn et al., 2013). Indeed, the impact of comment valence on the perception of the judge's competence tended to be more pronounced in the antisocial clip. The judge was evaluated as more respectful and more competent if the ostensible co-viewers expressed positive opinions toward the show. This suggests that individuals are more tolerant toward a person who is responsible for antisocial behavior if they get the impression that such a behavior is approved by peers. Prolonged exposure to such content and approving comments might therefore lead to a greater tolerance of such behavior. However, it has to be noted that the evaluation of the candidate (the "victim" of antisocial behavior) was relatively independent of the opinion climate: Viewers did not "degrade" him to a greater degree if the co-viewers also made fun of him, which may temper fears that reality TV in combination with peer comments leads to a decline of moral values. Nevertheless, the results for the evaluation of the judge underline potential undesirable media effects. These effects, however, are not inevitable and depend on the opinions that are conveyed by social TV audiences (as negative comments to antisocial behavior are also able to weaken these effects).

On a theoretical level, the results are in line with the context-content convergence hypothesis of the differential susceptibility model (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013) and extend the scope of this assumption to the realm of social TV. Due to the juxtaposition of mass media content and peer reactions (Konijn et al., 2013), the formerly separate stages of consuming media content and assessing social norms in one's environment are blurred, and the tone of visible co-viewer comments can directly enhance or weaken effects of the media content. On the micro level, the social influence may occur through both informational and normative social influence (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004)—informational, as others' reactions are interpreted as a helpful cue in an ambiguous situation (strengthened by identification with the commenters; Reicher et al., 1995), and normative, if people aim to build a positive relationship with the other commenters (Walther

et al., 2015). While the observed effects in the present study are most likely due to both patterns that are interrelated, future research could try to disentangle these two paths. How does the act of expressing an opinion (even if it was only expressed due to social pressures) strengthen the private opinion? Which users do not conform to the opinion climate and engage in counter-arguing, and under which conditions? These questions may be answered with the help of theories of opinion formation and expression (Pingree, 2007) and experiments that compare active social TV users with passive viewers. With regard to the desirable or undesirable direction of media effects, future research is needed to test the impact of prolonged exposure to juxtapositions of content and peer reactions on the salience of moral intuitions (see Eden et al., 2014).

The present study is limited by a relatively small sample that mainly consisted of students and a somewhat artificial laboratory scenario: Although we believe that the setting of simultaneously chatting with other participants matches many characteristics of common social TV settings, the scripted comments may not fully represent the diversity of "real-world" interactions. While the present work intentionally focused on interactions with unknown peers, as they occur on many platforms, the observed patterns may change in interactions with friends—the consideration of relationship strength or interaction goals in this realm could be an interesting avenue for further research. With regard to the interactions with conventional vs. antisocial content, it has to be noted that only two clips from a specific show were used, which limits the generalizability of the results.

In summary, our findings demonstrate that social TV viewers are susceptible to social influence of their mediated co-viewers: Their public opinion expression as well as their private attitudes are shaped by the general opinion climate, especially if viewers identify with other commenters. Thereby, peer comments can directly reinforce or weaken media effects—which happens more immediately than the perception of norms in viewers' environments, as included in models of traditional media effects (Gerbner et al., 1980; see Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). These interactions between content and peer reactions (Konijn et al., 2013) may amplify the problems that are connected to the portrayal of antisocial behavior in Reality TV (Wilson et al., 2012), depending on the quality of discussions in social TV environments and the expressed norms. Future research is needed to specify the desirable and undesirable effects of co-viewing in different genres and to clarify the theoretical mechanisms of social influence in the increasingly popular phenomenon of social TV.

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Parasocial Breakup and Twitter: The Firing of Barb Abney

Peter B. Gregg

Audiences can and do form parasocial relationships with media personalities. Media personalities, programs, and stations can use social media to enhance this relationship. More and more stations and programs are using social media to cultivate parasocial relations, but the consequences of this cultivation are largely understudied in terms of parasocial responses. This paper examines the fallout on social media of the loss of a parasocial relationship (called "parasocial breakup") with a large market radio DJ who is removed from the air. The results confirm the presence of a parasocial relationship, feelings of parasocial breakup, and the consequences of these parasocial disruptions on station brand identity.

On January 27, 2015 Barb Abney, a popular DJ of the Minneapolis-St. Paul radio station The Current, was fired as a "programming decision made by The Current's management" (Riemenschneider, 2015b, p. B5). Normally the firing of a DJ, even in a market the size of the Twin Cities, goes largely unnoticed, but in this case, a firestorm of local social media upheaval followed in its wake. Due to circumstances and contexts regarding the station and its brand, the firing of Abney is particularly well-suited to explore ways that audience relationships with on-air personalities are fostered, cultivated, and potentially destroyed. Specifically, we can examine the ways responses on Twitter suggest feelings of parasocial breakup (Cohen, 2003) and the complications that arise when station branding and parasocial interaction (Horton & Wohl, 1956) intersect.

History and Context

In the months leading up to its first on-air broadcast in January 2005, Minnesota Public Radio (MPR) branded its new station KCMP (known as 89.3 The Current) as the bringer of musical diversity to the Twin Cities radio scene (Minnesota Public Radio, 2005).

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Because it is a public radio station, The Current is capable of introducing non-traditional programming and format strategies. In announcing the new station, MPR's president Bill Kling said the station will make "important contributions . . . to music in Minnesota." The station would "establish deep ties to the local music community and will serve as a positive force in building the creative economy of Minnesota." (Minnesota Public Radio, 2005, para 3). As with most major markets, Twin Cities DJs normally do not select the musical tracks they would play, do not play minor-label or unsigned acts, and do not contribute actively to the local music scene. As Riemenschneider (2006) notes, "The Current changed all that . . . the 'antiformat' station unquestionably marked a seismic shift in Twin Cities radio options" (1F). Where before, stations' DJs were rarely heard, The Current put their DJs up-front. Each had a distinct personality and musical taste, and listeners engaged with them via social media and at local shows, where the on-air personalities were either in attendance or there to introduce the acts.

The challenge for Minnesota Public Radio is that as a publicly funded station, it depends largely on listener support. Consistently, the station's brand identity emphasized to the listeners that this was "your station," where the individual and idiosyncratic tastes of the audience could find a home and where music came first, with the DJ and his or her personality at the vanguard. A listener could hear dance music followed by shoe-gaze followed by Billie Holiday, and this eclectic mix was frequently connected to individual DJ's tastes. Instead of wall-to-wall music and commercials, a single hour would be punctuated by DJ breaks where they would talk about some of the selections and each track played would be credited on air by noting the artist and the song name.

Within its first year, the station had more than 780,000 listeners and 88,000 members (PR Newswire, 2006). Despite being a smaller, more niche station, The Current has a clearly recognized brand identity in the Twin Cities market that is far stronger than stations with a similar audience size, in part due to its activity in the local music scene. In the local popular press, it has won numerous accolades, including winning the Twin Cities' indie newspaper *The City Pages*' "Best Station" three times in the last five years ("Best radio station," 2014). The station created a live event called "Policy and a Pint" where DJs and community members discuss key political issues, and the station's live concert program "Rock the Garden" has become "one of the Twin Cities' biggest and hippest music festivals" (Riemenschneider, 2015d, para. 3).

Barb Abney came to The Current in 2006 from WOXY.com, an alternative, independent radio station based out of Cincinnati. In the press release announcing her hire, Minnesota Public Radio emphasized that she "served as a daily on-air host, where she picked all her own music and interviewed countless bands . . . Barb has more than a decade of radio experience at one of the best independent radio stations in the country" (PR Newswire, 2006, para. 2–3). She started in the prime 9 a.m. to noon spot at The Current, which eventually grew to a 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. slot, where she was known for "Cover 2 Cover" and "Tonal Recall" segments (Riemenschneider, 2015b, p. B5). For the next eight and a half years, in addition to her on-air involvement, she was active in the Twin Cities music scene and could be seen at shows and

concerts, even travelling with some bands to their shows out of town (Abney, 2010; Riemenschneider, 2015b).

The station continued to grow in audience share, but nearing its tenth anniversary in January 2015, it saw a new station called "Go 96.3" come into the Twin Cities radio market, targeting the same demographics as The Current. Unlike The Current, this station was owned by a corporate conglomerate, and since it played a similar format to The Current, it was seen as in many ways competing directly against The Current (Riemenschneider, 2015a). In an effort to both shore up listener support and to celebrate its tenth anniversary, in early 2015 The Current hosted a number of on-air and community events, including two sold out concerts at First Avenue, where Abney was featured, and at the Fitzgerald Theatre, where she was the host for a tribute to Prince (Riemenschneider, 2015b).

Three days later, Abney tweeted, "I loved my job" (Abney, 2015) and an MPR publicist said that Abney's firing was "a programming decision made by The Current's management" (Riemenschneider, 2015b, para 4). A social media frenzy in support of Abney and highly critical of The Current followed.

Parasocial Interaction, Parasocial Breakup, and Station Branding

Because the station's brand encouraged audience engagement with the on-air personalities, this moment acts as a crystallization of concepts regarding parasocial interaction and responses (Horton & Wohl, 1956; Schiappa, Gregg, & Hewes, 2005), particularly feelings of parasocial breakup (Cohen, 2003, 2004), and in this paper I will explore how a particular conjunction of station brand identity and parasocial interaction with Barb Abney explains this reaction. I hypothesize that as a result of (para)social networking and parasocial interaction, the audience members' feelings of parasocial breakup from Abney should be expressed in part through tweets directed at the station or Abney and potentially should be connecting to elements of the station's brand as they pertain to parasocial interaction.

Horton and Wohl (1956) coined the term "parasocial interaction" to explain the feelings of imagined interpersonal interaction felt by audiences toward media personalities, a sense of interpersonal exchange and communication. Much of this initial theorizing emphasizes parasocial interaction with radio and television personalities in what they call the "personality program" like a talk show or game show (p. 218). They argue that specific qualities of the mass media allow for this feeling of interpersonal interaction. Direct address, where the persona talks directly to the camera, gives the illusion of the persona talking directly to the audience in their homes. A personal style, where the persona reveals her feelings or comes across as fallible (e.g. cracking up or coughing), enhances the impression that this person is "real." A sense or illusion of interaction through responding to letters or in-studio audience members on air or incorporating non-broadcasted feedback into the program gives the persona a life beyond the confines of their time on the screen.

Rubin, Perse, and Powell (1985) found that parasocial interaction results in seeking guidance from the personality and even hoping to meet that personality in a face-to-

face situation. Giles (2002) noted that over time, audience members may feel they have a genuine relationship with media personalities, experiencing the ups and downs in the persona or character's life and reacting as if they knew this person intimately, and audiences eventually experience strong feelings of parasocial attachment to the celebrity (Stever, 2013). Going to the extreme, Radford and Bloch (2012) found that media audiences experience intense feelings of loss with the death of a celebrity with whom they only had parasocial contact.

Media effects scholars have applied concepts from uses and gratifications theories to include instrumental aspects like enjoying hearing the person's voice in audience members' homes or feeling less lonely when the persona is on air. Parasocial interaction is also connected to motivated media consumption, like seeking out particular personalities or programs (Conway & Rubin, 1991). A meta-analysis performed by Schiappa, Allen, and Gregg (2007) found that social attractiveness or likeability, perceived realism, and perceived homophily (or similarity) strongly affected the formation of parasocial relationships.

The techniques that foster parasocial interaction are exactly what The Current's DJs do, including (or especially) Abney while she was there. Unlike most modern stations where the DJ is largely a non-entity, The Current's DJs directly address the listeners, frequently framing their introductions to songs (or reactions to them) personally, noting things like the first time they heard that song or how important the album was for them. DJs read and offer commentary on emails from listeners. They run specific-themed programs like "My Three Songs" (which, as of this writing, still lists Abney as the host), "Rock and Roll Radio" and "Time Machine Tuesday," often linked with the DJ's personality or background (like Gen-Xer Jacquie Fuller hosting "Teenage Kicks" playing music from her formative years) and with listeners providing suggestions and DJs responding to choices. DJs are branded according to this "personal style," and some DJs even become known for particular eccentricities in their performance, as with Abney sneezing or coughing on-air. While not a "personality program" in the initial sense of Horton and Wohl's perspective, The Current's DJs employ the classic approaches of those programs in developing parasocial relationships. Abney's personality in the press was described as "warm, unpretentious, and enthusiastic" (Raihala, 2015), and as a single mother of two teenagers, who talked about her family on-air, Abney offered insights in to her everyday, off-air life. Moreover, communication directed toward the audience comes in the form of social media interaction, like commentary on songs, live shows, and musical sets.

Parasocial responses also include feeling a sense of belonging to a shared community (Greenwood & Long, 2009; Moyer-Guse, 2008). A media character or personality does not deliver mere content to isolated individuals, but by means of their (parasocial) attributes and persona, a community of engaged audience members forms and has a shared experience. The Current as an organization and brand fosters a sense of belonging through this parasocial interaction. The station's identification tags and branding discourse include framing the station as being "member supported," "local," and a "community." As noted earlier, DJs are frequently hosting or introducing concerts or musical events, and numerous concerts in the area are

sponsored or organized by the station each month, and the station's "Policy and a Pint" event allows audience members to watch DJs discuss community issues at a local bar. There are multiple ways online to submit song requests or even submit personally written music, and during pledge drives listener messages are read aloud.

Cohen (2003, 2004) theorized that since parasocial relationships are similar to interpersonal relationships, the elimination of a parasocial relationship, like the persona going off the air, would have negative psychological effects, a phenomenon he called "parasocial breakup," a blanket term that encompasses the feelings of sadness, anger, frustration, grief, mourning, and loneliness that occur when a parasocial relationship ends. Cohen argued that like interpersonal breakup, parasocial breakup would show itself in many different forms, including missing the personality, feeling like they lost a close friend, expressing anger, loneliness, or disappointment, trying to meet the media personality in another way, losing interest in the medium, trying to change the situation by doing things like contacting the station, or seeking out the personality on another station. Further scholarship has continued to find support for these feelings in audiences at the end of a parasocial relationship (Eyal & Cohen, 2006; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011).

As Humphreys, Gill, Krishnamurthy, and Newbury (2013) note, "Twitter is a popular microblogging service that allows people to share updates, news, and information (known as "tweets") with people in their Twitter network and beyond." (p. 413). Twitter, like other social media, is situated in a way to facilitate parasocial (and even some social) interaction (Humphreys et al., 2013). Parasocial interaction and its iterations have largely been used in quantitative studies since the 1970s (Giles, 2002). Current research has not given much attention to the connections among media usage, social media, and parasocial interaction as Stever and Lawson (2013) point out, with Twitter offering particularly interesting opportunities. Their findings confirmed that Twitter use can enhance the enjoyment of a parasocial relationship.

While theoretically the media persona can answer tweets directed at them, largely they do not, and so like television or radio with letter-writing, Twitter has a high degree of one-way or non-responsive communication. Stever and Lawson (2013) note that the public sharing of life "may contribute to the social bonds between people and communities" (p. 414), and so Twitter users are situated in a way to facilitate parasocial and social interaction.

This parasocial interaction on Twitter frequently comes in the form of tweets directed "at" the media personality, and Bazarova and Choi (2014) have argued that the diversity of network connections afforded by Twitter suggests that users tend to make more disclosures for social validation and self-expression of personal perspectives. Lee and Jang (2013) found that with Twitter, the lack of gatekeepers and other forms of information control give the illusion of direct communication between followers and media personalities, fostering a sense of immediate social presence.

Labrecque (2014) argues that parasocial interaction can be used to explain a brand's success on Twitter due to a sense of perceived interactivity and openness in communication. She found that the clearer the sense of human engagement and sense of who the persona is via Twitter, the stronger the parasocial relationship. Panek., Nardis, and

Konrahth (2013) found that Twitter is used mainly by individuals as an information-gathering and connection maintaining tool, not for a user's self-promotion.

At a broader perspective, non-profit organizations like The Current are "embracing social media as a means of cultivating new online relationships. Social media ... engage existing and prospective supporters" and can "strengthen donor relationships" (Smitko, 2012, p. 633). For The Current, Twitter is used to strengthen audience (donor) relationships to maintain financial viability. Viewed in this way, DJ branding and Twitter presence are not just ways to foster and cultivate particular parasocial responses, but a way to render those parasocial responses into a social group that generates particular financial actions (or transactions) like donations and attending sponsored events.

In this study, I am returning to Horton and Wohl's (1956) original observation that parasocial interaction can be examined by particular, specific parasocial responses, including analysis of letter writing and other specific forms of audience-persona engagement. Few studies have addressed parasocial interaction in this way (e.g., Papa et al., 2000), opting instead to focus on parasocial interaction in exclusively quantitative ways. As Greer and Ferguson (2011) point out, research on social networks tends to focus on traditional interpersonal communication, and historically parasocial interaction has been studied using survey-style research methods. As newly developed communication technology, scholars have only now begun to look at Twitter or other forms of social media to develop our understanding of parasocial interaction. Social media offers a new, intriguing way to explore these parasocial responses, not just quantitatively but also qualitatively, building on Highfield, Harrington, and Bruns' (2013) argument that "research into the uses of Twitter must address the full range of these diverse genres by taking into account their specific cultural and communicative contexts" (p. 316). Moreover, by looking at actual communication practices by audiences at historical moments, we can see parasocial interaction crystallized and manifest as a real-life consequence of mediated communication. Importantly, the convergence of media and digital technologies complicates earlier understandings of parasocial interaction, and so additional research fusing the two would add to our understanding of media(ted) relationships.

Method

For the purposes of this research, I examined tweets directed at Abney in response to her initial tweet and subsequent tweets directed at Abney or The Current regarding Abney being fired, as well as tweets about news articles that discussed Abney's firing and the fallout. Initial data collection concerned searching Twitter for hashtags, quotations, tweets or retweets of articles, and direct hailing of Abney, and then I used Topsy.com, a Twitter-focused search engine, with the addition of that search including responses directly in-line with the original tweets. I omitted tweets that were simple "retweets" of text content, unless the retweet modified the original tweet in some way.

All told, this entailed 203 tweets made between January 27, 2015 and the following two weeks. While this number and timespan may seem small given the potential world-wide reach of Twitter, it is worth noting that this volume was described as forming the major part of the audience's backlash (Lambert, 2015), constituted the organization's "most troubled week" (Riemenschneider, 2015c) and was frequently commented on in local news coverage of the firing, including articles written specifically about the Twitter response or heavily featuring it (Hunt, 2015; LaMaack, 2015; Lindberg, 2015; Raihala, 2015; Riemenschneider, 2015b; Rupar, 2015). The *Star-Tribune*'s main article discussing Abney's firing (Riemenschneider, 2015b) was the most read and shared article for the day.

As a way of comparison with the 203 tweets in this pool, I found that most DJs or the station's tweets in that timeframe got anywhere from zero to five tweeted responses. Abney's original tweet had an activity lifespan of about 5 days, which is very unusual for tweets outside the most viral content (ENitiate, 2015), where a tweet's activity tails off after about 18 minutes.

A co-rater and I independently coded the tweets. We looked at each tweet for signs of parasocial breakup, using the specific criteria and categories from Cohen (2003). We coded tweets for individuals indicating they missed Abney, feeling like they lost a close friend with her departure, expressing anger, loneliness, or disappointment, trying to meet Abney in another way, losing interest in the medium or station, trying to change the situation by doing things like contacting the station, or seeking Abney out on another station. We used a principle of parsimony when examining the tweets, only coding as "yes" those tweets that were clearly expressing parasocial breakup.

To test interrater agreement, I compared the extent to which we found any parasocial breakup expressed in a tweet. We found 86.2% agreement and a Cohen's kappa of .708 (406 decisions) for tweets indicating any form of parasocial breakup, both of which are generally regarded as substantial. We did not make judgments about the "strength" of the feeling, and I did not test the extent to which specific parasocial responses corresponded. In the results section, I report only those cases in which both raters agreed.

Results

Of the 203 tweets, 110 (54.2%) expressed some degree of parasocial breakup, with numerous tweets accounting for multiple categories of feelings associated with it. The most commonly expressed feeling was disappointment (45 times), with individuals tweeting things like, "What a huge disappointment that @BarbAbney is no longer @TheCurrent!" and "Here's an everyday @BarbAbney listener from Chicago who is seriously annoyed and dissappointed *(sic)*." Forty expressions of missing the personality were tweeted, including comments like "we already miss you!!" "you will be missed," and "We will miss you so damn much." Individuals tweeted about hoping to see her at shows, to buy her a drink in real life, and that they

Table 1
Expressions of Parasocial Breakup

Expression	N	Percentage
Any PSB reaction	110	55.2
Expressing disappointment	45	22.2
Missing the personality	40	19.7
Expressing anger	17	8.4
Seeking out personality at another station	12	5.9
Trying to meet the media personality in another way	10	4.9
Trying to change the situation, contacting the station	10	4.9
Losing interest in the medium/station	8	3.4
Expressing loneliness	1	0.5

would miss hearing her voice or hearing about her. No tweets discussed staying in contact with her through Twitter or social media, with the comments focusing on finding her on air somewhere else. The complete results are described in Table 1.

In addition to the expressions of parasocial breakup, 25 tweets (12.3%) indicated some sort of anger directed at the station or its brand, including membership cancellations and an expectation for a better explanation of Abney's firing than the stations original, brief press release. A number of individuals commented on how firing a single mother in such a way was insulting. Perhaps surprisingly, there were no "trolling" or negative tweets directed at Abney. It is also worth noting that Abney did not respond to anyone's tweets directed at her, although an examination of her Twitter activity suggests that is not unusual for her.

Limitations

The limitations of the study include the sample size (for Twitter). Methodologically, there is a degree of self-selection, since people who don't care about Abney's firing aren't likely to tweet about it. The fact that Twitter has a character limit means that expressions needed to be succinct, which may have prevented people from elaborating on their feelings or engaging in a discussion with each other or Abney. Nearly all of the tweets used clear language to articulate the individuals' feelings, without any significant need to interpret what was meant or implied, but as noted earlier it is difficult to assess the "strength" of the feelings each person had in comparison to a baseline.

It is worth acknowledging that as with research in most kinds of textual exploration (particularly computer mediated communication), with this method researchers cannot be certain that individuals' tweets are a genuine self-expression of feelings or motivated by something else. In this case, it is possible that instead of parasocial loss explaining the tweets, the chance remains that a need for social validation motivated responses to Abney's firing.

Conclusions

Taking these limitations into consideration, there is still considerable support for some level of parasocial interaction and parasocial breakup, particularly as manifest in social media. As Panek and colleagues (2013) discuss, given the greater anonymity and tweet length limits, users are more likely to use Twitter for maintaining virtual connections than for other reasons. Although the possibility remains that social validation caused people to tweet parasocial breakup-like feelings that were not genuine, Abney did not socially validate those feelings by retweeting or responding to any tweets directed at her, and Bazarova and Choi (2014) note that tweets directed at familiar targets tend to be explained by parasocial relational development.

The results confirm the presence of a parasocial relationship mediated in part by Twitter. Audience members openly communicated to Abney, with Abney not responding, similar to fan letters and the other correspondence discussed by Horton and Wohl (1956). Tweets like "You were one of my favorites in the Twin Cities," "Sending lots of vibes your way!" and "Take care of yourself" are representative of the general feedback people sent her. Interestingly, the firing of Abney also created a space for people to find common ground, with a "Je suis Barb Abney" illustration (in the vein of the then recent "Je suis Charlie Hebdo" campaign) garnering retweets. The earliest tweets about Abney's firing were heavily "favorited" and retweeted by many others outside the data pool.

The results show widespread feelings of loss. With her firing people expressed distress, confusion, and frustration, and they felt those feelings strongly enough to express them in a public forum. The tweets frequently focus on their feelings about Abney's firing and the way she affected their lives, with clear feelings of parasocial loss. As noted earlier, their responses on Twitter drew the attention of the local media, which framed the outcry as significant.

This instance also provides the opportunity to discuss the degree to which connections between parasocial interaction and station branding can be a double-edged sword. The overlap between station brand and its handling of Abney's firing shows the consequences of parasocial breakup in the real world. Unlike with many programs where viewers may be upset when a show is cancelled but then get on with their lives by watching other shows on the same channel, a publicly funded radio station that places its DJs at the axis of music and community runs a substantial risk of backlash that affects not just its brand, but its bottom line. As Abney's example shows, the listeners of The Current had a particular image of the station that did not align with its treatment of Abney, and many listeners claimed to be leaving the station as a result. Tweets like, "Just emailed @thecurrent to cancel my membership. Small protest, but @BarbAbney was THE reason I found, listened to & supported that station," "Firing Barb Abney is terrible idea. Giant FU to supporters mere hours after 10th Anniv. Canceling sustaining membership," and "After all the pledge drive rhetoric distinguishing itself from corporate radio, @TheCurrent bid a mighty corporate farewell to @BarbAbney" epitomize the general frustration about her firing.

Abney's departure ultimately acted as a galvanizing moment for what were already feelings of frustration regarding the direction of the station, which listeners seemed to be a loss of the "personal connection" (Raihala, 2015) and a tone-deaf response to the listener outrage.

The findings support Labreque's (2014) analysis that brand identity is connected to social media activity and presence. The "psychological underpinnings of customer relationships becomes increasingly vital (p. 145) as organizations focus on brand identity cultivated online. As an "ideal playform for generating feelings of PSI [parasocial interaction]," (p. 145) the online presence of a station like The Current that uses parasocial relationships can find it a double-edged sword when those relationships falter or dissolve.

This study addresses the concerns by Stever and Lawson (2013) and Brown (2015) that scholars need to explore the impact of social media on parasocial interaction. It applies concepts of parasocial breakup to social media, and confirms the existence of parasocial relationships and feelings of loss. The results reaffirm Horton and Wohl's (1956) original observation that parasocial relationships form with radio personalities and affirms their original application of parasocial interaction by examining artifacts of communication about or directed at media personalities. Even with a theoretically more media literate audience and less on-air time for DJs, parasocial relationships can and do form.

The results confirm assumptions about DJ identity or personality and station brand as well, with audience members' feelings about the DJ shaping their perception of the station as a whole. The results suggest that stations that construct their identity through their DJs have an additional consideration when hiring or firing that individual. By building connections to audience members and connecting brand identity to parasocial interaction, The Current's handling of Abney's firing caused audiences to experience parasocial breakup and called into question their feelings about the station.

With that in mind, there are some forms of anecdotal support for attitudes toward the station yielding changes in listening behavior in the Twin Cities. A few weeks after Abney left The Current, she was hired by one of The Current's major competitors, Go 96.3. Between January and February 2015, the Arbitron PPM ratings for the stations showed a decrease share of .1 for The Current and an increase for Go 96.3 by .3 (ratings.radio-online.com/cgi-bin/rol.exe/arb027). The City Pages awarded "Best Station" for 2015 to Radio K, a non-commercial, student-run radio station at the University of Minnesota, after The Current won in 2014, noting "The rest of the Twin Cities stations can talk a good game, but the raw, unpolished power of real college radio has no equal.. . . The K supports local and national musicians with a flow of in-studio performances, and embraces what's on the artistic horizon" (Best radio station, 2015). While the changes in listener behavior and prestige awards are not inherently directly related to Abney's firing, they do suggest that changes in listener preference have begun.

This study reveals the need for further research on social media and parasocial interaction. It is possible that in cases where the media personality is actively responsive to messages from audience members that the relationship moves somewhat closer to a more traditional (but mediated) interpersonal relationship. What's not clear at this stage

is the extent to which that shift might influence parasocial responses like breakup or changing attitudes toward out-group members like Schiappa and colleagues' parasocial contact hypothesis (2005). Additional research could explore the motivations for expressions of parasocial breakup on social media, exploring the communication goals or social needs that doing so addresses. Further scholarship could examine the strength of parasocial responses over time as a media personality goes on air, cultivates parasocial relationships, and ultimately leaves the air.

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A Uses and Gratifications Approach to Exploring Antecedents to Facebook Dependency

Amber L. Ferris and Erin E. Hollenbaugh

The purpose of this study was to explore the variables that impact participants' dependency upon Facebook to achieve communication goals from a uses and gratifications (U&G) perspective. In support of U&G, all five Facebook motives played an important role in dependency outcomes. Participants motivated by virtual community, or meeting new people online, were most dependent on the medium. Big 5 personality traits, self-esteem, and social cohesion were examined and partially supported a social compensation perspective. Results are discussed in light of existing U&G and dependency research with respect to functional alternatives. Limitations and directions for future research are also offered.

In 2014, Facebook celebrated its 10-year anniversary, and user statistics show that the world's most popular social network site is still thriving. In a recent study by the Pew Research Center, 72% of surveyed U.S. adults who use the Internet have a Facebook account (Duggan, 2015). This number is staggering when compared to adults who indicated that they use other social networking sites like LinkedIn (25%), Pinterest (31%), Twitter (23%), and Instagram (28%). While previous research has shown that 42% of adults are using multiple social networks (Duggan & Smith, 2013), it is clear that Facebook is a staple for social network users. Given this site's popularity and dominance in the social networking realm, it is important to continue to examine how people interact with this technology.

One potential effect of Facebook use is dependency. Dependency is conceptually different from addiction. Dependency is defined as one's use of a medium to achieve goals (Ball-Rokeach, 1985). According to Park, Kim, Shon, and Shim (2013), "dependency means that a medium becomes an indispensable tool for one's everyday life" (p. 1769), whereas addiction reflects an inability to control one's use (Satici, Saricali,

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Satici, & Eraslan Capan, 2014). While addiction is considered a negative effect, dependency does not necessarily lead to negative outcomes. Dependency can, however, play an important role in various cognitive, affective, and behavior media effects (Rubin & Windahl, 1986).

To date, few studies have explored dependency on social media. Papacharissi (2008) cites the need to further explore new technologies to discover how dependency relates to potential media effects, as well as to further advance uses and gratifications (U&G) research. The goal of this study is to test the U&G model by examining how individual characteristics impact motives for using Facebook in order to determine one's dependency upon Facebook to obtain specific goal outcomes.

Literature Review

U&G is a user-centered approach that emphasizes the role of the media consumer in relation to potential media effects (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974). U&G is also a psychological approach to media effects, in that individuals are assumed to be capable of determining their needs and making purposeful choices in fulfilling those needs (Rubin, 2002). As an active-user perspective, U&G is particularly relevant to the social media environment (Sundar & Limperos, 2014). Although it is certainly possible to be more passive and observational on social media, the interactive capabilities of sites like Facebook offer increased opportunities for engagement. Social media users are not merely observers of content; they are content creators. Individuals make choices about who and what is in their network. Additionally, individuals have the ability to interact with and influence others' experiences while using social media. These factors align with the active-user perspective proposed by U&G.

One key component of U&G is discovering and applying one's motives for using a medium. According to Katz, Blumler, and Gurevitch (1973), needs are derived from an individual's social and psychological characteristics, which motivate the individual to seek ways to fulfill those needs with the intention of achieving a specific outcome. Much of the early U&G research on Facebook has centered on discovering motives. These studies often combine interpersonal and media motives in an attempt to capture the interactive and complex nature of how we use social media (e.g., Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011; Sheldon, 2008).

Several motives capitalize on the relational capabilities of the medium. For example, relationship maintenance, virtual community (establishing new relationships), and companionship (compensating for a lack of relationships) have been found in several studies to be primary Facebook motives (Park & Lee, 2014; Sheldon, 2008; Yang & Brown, 2013). Traditional media motives of entertainment and passing time are also present in Facebook motives research (Park & Lee, 2014; Sheldon, 2008; Sundar & Limperos, 2014).

One potential effect that may result from the motives we have for using a medium is dependency. According to Rubin (2002), one's motivations for using a medium

can be related to the degree to which someone is dependent upon that medium. As research on Facebook and social media has progressed, recent work has linked motives to dependency variables.

Motives and Dependency

The relationship between dependency and motives has often been applied to traditional media (see Papacharissi, 2008, for a review of representative studies), yet recent research in new technologies has just begun to more fully explore this connection. For example, Sun, Rubin, and Haridakis (2008) found that those who used the Internet to relieve their boredom, to seek information, to have control over others (i.e., tell them what to do), and to interact with others were more likely to be dependent on the Internet to achieve goals. However, the convenience motive was unrelated to Internet dependency. With respect to smartphone use, Park et al. (2013) used more broadly defined motives to examine dependency: social inclusion and instrumental purposes. The results of this study found that those who were motivated to use their phones for both purposes were more dependent on their phones.

Some existing research has examined dependency with respect to Facebook specifically. Sheldon (2008) found that motives predicted the degree to which users were satisfied with how Facebook helps them achieve goals. Specifically, those who were more likely to use Facebook for entertainment, passing time, and relationship maintenance were more likely to feel satisfied with Facebook. However, dependence on Facebook was unrelated to other motives of virtual community, coolness, and companionship (Sheldon, 2008).

According to U&G, an individual's motivations for using media will be related to dependency. The previous research shows that many motives have the potential to be significantly related to Facebook dependency. However, the literature has not yet shown a clear and distinct pattern of which motives will produce this relationship. Therefore, the following research question is proposed:

RQ_1: How will Facebook motives relate to Facebook dependency?

Individual Characteristics and Dependency

According to Rubin (2002), an individual's social and psychological characteristics directly relate to one's dependency on media to fulfill goals. Characteristics such as personality traits, self-esteem, and perceived connection to others are likely to affect one's ability to seek out and obtain communicative functional alternatives, resulting in increased media use (Rubin, 2002). There are two hypotheses related to how individual characteristics impact social media use: social enhancement and social compensation. While there is still some debate over which hypothesis more

correctly represents social media users (Sheldon, 2015), both hypotheses have the potential for dependency outcomes.

Social Enhancement Hypothesis. The social enhancement hypothesis states that those who are more social and connected to face-to-face networks are more likely to reap the benefits of social media (Sheldon, 2015). Two personality traits related to sociability that have been linked to increased engagement on Facebook are extraversion and agreeableness. Research has found that those who are more extraverted are more likely to update their status more frequently (Lee, Ahn, & Kim, 2014; Marshall, Lefringhausen, & Ferenczi, 2015), as well as interact with others by posting and commenting on others' walls (Seidman, 2013). Those who are more agreeable were found to be more socially active on Facebook (Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Seidman, 2013), use it to seek out information (Ryan & Xenos, 2011), and use it to seek acceptance from and maintain connection with others (Seidman, 2013).

In addition to personality traits, self-esteem is related to social enhancement. Those with higher self-esteem are more likely to feel that Facebook allowed them more opportunities to connect with others and see the medium as having advantages over face-to-face interactions with respect to obtaining support and attention (Forest & Wood, 2012). Zwicka and Danowski (2008) found that those who were extraverted, with higher self-esteem, and were more popular in their face-to-face lives were also more likely to be popular on Facebook.

In direct relation to the social enhancement hypothesis is social cohesion. According to Yamamoto (2011), social cohesion is the "system of bonds, relations, beliefs, and integration that connects different individuals to a large collective unit" (p. 22). Previous research has shown that those with stronger social cohesion are more likely to use Facebook. Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) found that those with stronger social ties, who were socially active, used Facebook to increase connections with others. Additionally, results have shown that Facebook use increases one's sense of connection and engagement with others both on- and offline (Aubrey & Rill, 2013; Brandtzaeg, 2012; Valenzuela, Park, & Kee, 2009).

The social enhancement hypothesis may be related to one's dependency upon Facebook to fulfill goals. According to Sun et al. (2008), when an individual finds a medium to be helpful in multiple ways in achieving goals, that person becomes more dependent. Facebook allows users to express themselves to hundreds of connections in one post, play games, chat, get the news, and look at videos and photos, among many other functions; this feat cannot be easily achieved using any other one channel. Even other social networks like Twitter and Instagram do not offer as many functions. This level of connectivity and interactivity may therefore restrict the availability of functional alternatives and increase need fulfillment for those who are highly social. Therefore, the following hypothesis is offered to test the role of dependency with respect to the social enhancement hypothesis:

H_1: Extraversion, agreeableness, self-esteem, and social cohesion will be positively related to Facebook dependency.

Social Compensation Hypothesis. In contrast to the social enhancement hypothesis, those who are deemed as less social may turn to the media to fulfill their social needs (Zwicka & Danowski, 2008). This proposition is also supported by U&G. Rubin (2002) stated that the effects of dependency on the media are most pronounced for those with less ability to seek out and utilize various sources of goal attainment. Research has also shown support for this concept.

With respect to Facebook use, Zwicka and Danowski (2008) found that those who were more introverted, had lower self-esteem, and were less popular offline were more likely to feel that it was important to be popular on Facebook and strived to be perceived that way. In addition to introversion, neuroticism has been found to be related to less connection with others (Malone, Pillow, & Osman, 2012). When specifically examining personality traits, those who are neurotic have been found to be more active communicators on Facebook (i.e., commenting on walls, posting status updates, etc.) (Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Seidman, 2013) and use the site for information seeking (Seidman, 2013).

In their 4-year longitudinal study of adolescents' social support systems and self-esteem, Marshall, Parker, Ciarrochi, and Heaven (2014) found that those with less self-esteem had a smaller social support network than those with higher self-esteem. In relation to Facebook use, Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe (2007) found that students with lower self-esteem were more likely to use Facebook to feel more connected to their college community and to meet new people. Additionally, Tazghini and Siedlecki (2013) found that participants with lower self-esteem were more likely to feel connected to Facebook as well as indicate that they found it easier to communicate via Facebook. These results show that those with less connection to real-life ties may find they have fewer alternatives to achieving their goals, and would therefore be more drawn to social media.

In order to test the social compensation hypothesis in relation to dependency, the following hypothesis is offered:

H_2: Introversion, neuroticism, lower self-esteem, and lower social cohesion will be positively related to Facebook dependency.

Testing the Uses and Gratifications Model. According to U&G, individual characteristics impact one's motives for use, which will produce various effects (Rubin, 2002). The goal of this study is to determine how this model explains Facebook dependency. Several studies have examined the role of individual factors on Facebook motives. The "Big Five" personality traits are often considered in U&G research as being important individual differences (Papacharissi, 2008). These traits include extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, openness, and

agreeableness (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). While several studies have included personality traits in their analysis of social media motives (e.g., Jackson & Wang, 2013; Krishnan & Atkin, 2014; Marshall et al., 2015), few studies have examined all five in the same study despite the fact that all five have exhibited significant correlations with social media motives.

With respect to self-esteem and social cohesion concepts, research has also shown connections to motives. Increased self-esteem has been found to be positively related to the use of Facebook and social media for self-expression (Marshall et al., 2015), as well as for social surveillance, recognition, emotional support, network extension, entertainment, and network maintenance (Zhang, Tang, & Leung, 2011). Additionally, Park and Lee (2014) found that one's sense of belonging (social cohesion) was positively related to entertainment motives, yet unrelated to all other motives examined in the study.

While these studies show potential connections between individuality and motives, this model has not yet been tested with respect to Facebook dependency. Beyond examining the individual relationships of these variables with their outcomes, as tested in the study hypotheses, a research question is proposed to test the total model, according to U&G:

RQ_2: In what ways do individual characteristics and motives for Facebook use predict dependency on Facebook to fulfill goals?

Methods

To test the study's hypotheses and research questions, a cross-sectional survey design was employed.

Participants

Participants were English-speaking, adult Facebook users who reported posting on their Facebook page at least once per month. The researchers did not dictate whether participants must have a personal, group, or organization page. After a failed attempt at random sampling through Facebook's "People" directory, which resulted in being reported as SPAM and blocked from further messaging, participants were ultimately recruited through a convenience sampling method. The authors created a Facebook event for the online survey, which they shared with their networks. The researchers asked their own Facebook connections not to take the survey but instead to share it with their networks; however, it cannot be guaranteed that the sample is socially distant from the researchers. The authors also invited their students to participate in the study and share the event with their Facebook friends. Finally, an invitation to participate in and share the study was posted on relevant listservs, such as faculty

listservs at the authors' home institutions and professional listservs (e.g., Communication, Research, and Theory Network [CRTNET]).

Completed surveys were collected from 301 Facebook users between the ages of 18 and 68 (M = 31.85, SD = 12.92), which is representative of the age diversity on Facebook (Hoelzel, 2015). Like the Facebook population of users in the United States (Hoelzel, 2015; Koh, 2014), the study sample was largely Caucasian (n = 276, 91.7%) women (n = 232, 77.1%; men n = 68, 22.6%). Participants used Facebook an average 1.83 hours (SD = 2.09) per day.

Procedures

Following informed consent, participants took an online survey measuring personality characteristics, Facebook motives, Facebook dependency, as well as demographic and descriptive information. The data analyzed in the present study are a part of a larger data set.

Measures

Big Five Personality Traits. The "Big Five" personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness were measured with John et al.'s (1991) Big Five Inventory. This 44-item instrument is well established in previous research (see John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008, for a review). Participants indicate how much they agree with each item on a 5-point, Likert-type scale. Reliabilities for each scale were considered to be good: conscientiousness (α = .79), extraversion (α = .89), agreeableness (α = .80), neuroticism (α = .83), and openness (α = .84).

Self-Esteem. Rosenberg's (1979) New York Self-Esteem Scale was administered to measure trait self-esteem. This scale is commonly used in communication research to measure self-esteem (e.g., Forest & Wood, 2012; Lee, Moore, Park, & Park, 2012). Half of the 10 items on this 5-point, Likert-type scale were reverse-coded, and resulting scores were averaged, with higher scores signifying higher self-esteem (M = 3.94, SD = .68, α = .88).

Social Cohesion. The Malone et al. (2012) General Belongingness Scale applied in Yamamoto's (2011) study on social cohesion and media use was used in this study. Half of the 10 items on this 5-point, Likert-type scale were reverse-coded, and averaged scores indicate how much participants feel they belong to a social group offline (M = 3.89, SD = .73). Scale reliability was strong (α = .94).

Facebook Motives. The Facebook motives measure utilized in this study was a 5-factor model that included commonly utilized motives (Sheldon, 2008) as well as

additional items from underrepresented motives (virtual community and companionship, Barker & Ota, 2011; exhibitionism, Hollenbaugh, 2011) (see Hollenbaugh & Ferris, 2014, for further information regarding index development). The 5 motives in this study were virtual community, companionship, exhibitionism, relationship maintenance, and passing time. The index's 24 items were measured on a 5-point scale on the likelihood of using Facebook for each motive, ranging from 1 (*very unlikely*) to 5 (*very likely*).

The virtual community motive consisted of 7 items that measured people's need to use Facebook to develop new relationships with others ($M = 2.02$, $SD = .92$, $\alpha = .89$). The companionship motive consisted of 5 items and encompasses one's use of Facebook to relieve loneliness ($M = 1.93$, $SD = 1.07$, $\alpha = .94$). Exhibitionism is a 5-item measure that determines participants' desire to get attention from others through their behavior on Facebook ($M = 2.01$, $SD = 1.00$, $\alpha = .90$). The relationship maintenance motive (5 items) is one's motivation to communicate with existing friends ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .72$, $\alpha = .87$). The last factor, passing time (2 items), reflects one's motivation to use Facebook to relieve boredom ($M = 4.05$, $SD = .92$, $r = .66$, $p < .001$).

Facebook Dependency. To measure Facebook dependency, Sun et al.'s (2008) Total Internet Dependency Scale was modified to fit the context of Facebook. Participants rated how helpful they felt Facebook was in completing several tasks on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*not at all helpful*) to 5 (*extremely helpful*). This method of measuring dependency has been found to be validated across mediums (see Grant, 1996). The scale consisted of 18 items ($M = 2.70$, $SD = .82$, $\alpha = .92$).

Previous research has shown the potential for sub-scales of the total dependency measure to be important in further explaining dependency outcomes. Lowrey (2004) combined items from the total dependency measure related to social understanding and action orientations as more specified categories of dependency. These subscales were found to relate to both individual factors (age of participants) and effects (perceived threat of a terrorist attack). Given the exploratory nature of this study, as well as the potential for sub-measures of dependency to have effects related to Facebook, this technique was utilized in the current study.

To determine these variables, a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation was conducted on the 18-item dependency scale. The 60/40 rule was used to determine which items cleanly loaded on a factor. Factors with Eigenvalues of at least 1.0 were considered in the final solution. The final analysis revealed a 3-factor structure, accounting for 68.54% of the variance. Items that loaded together were then summed and averaged to form three composite measures of dependency.

Factor one encompasses goals related to personal understanding ($M = 2.19$, $SD = .98$, $\alpha = .85$). This measure consists of 5 items relating to how helpful Facebook is in gaining understanding of oneself. Items in this measure include "gaining insight into why I do some of the things I do" and to "think about how to act with my friends, relatives, or people I work with." The second factor that emerged regarding dependency was social information ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.14$, $\alpha = .82$). This

factor consisted of 3 items that reflected one's information seeking behavior regarding one's community, country, and the world. An example of an item in this factor is, "Facebook helps me to stay on top of what's happening in the community." The last factor, entertainment (M = 3.36, SD = 1.06, α = .80), consists of items related to relieving boredom. This factor includes 3 items. Sample items include to "relax when I'm by myself" and to "unwind after a hard day or week."

Demographics and Total Media Use. Participants reported age, sex, and ethnicity for descriptive and control purposes. Facebook use was also measured by asking respondents, "how much time, in hours and minutes, do you spend on Facebook on a typical day?"

Results

Motives and Dependency

RQ_1 was proposed to determine the relationship between Facebook motives and dependency. To answer this question, a series of Pearson product-moment correlations were conducted. The five Facebook motives were each found to be significantly correlated with all measures of Facebook dependency, including total dependency and the three dimensions of personal understanding, social information, and entertainment (see Table 1). Using Cohen's (1988) rules of thumb, virtual community was the only motive exhibiting strong correlations (i.e., $r \geq .50$) with Facebook dependency. This motive was related to total dependency and personal understanding.

Table 1
Correlations Among Facebook Motives and Dependency

	Total Dependency	Personal Understanding Dependency	Social Information Dependency	Entertainment Dependency
Virtual community	.53***	.54***	.35***	.41***
Companionship	.34***	40***	.18**	.31***
Exhibitionism	.40***	.42***	.25***	.32***
Relationship maintenance	.44***	.26***	.34***	.47***
Passing time	.37***	.23***	.27***	.46***

N = 301. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Individual Characteristics and Dependency

H_1 was proposed to test the social enhancement hypothesis. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to test the relationship between dependency and the characteristics of extraversion, agreeableness, self-esteem, and social cohesion. This hypothesis was not supported. Those who were extraverted, agreeable, had higher self-esteem, or had stronger connections to others were not more likely to be dependent on Facebook to achieve goals.

H_2 examined the social compensation hypothesis. This hypothesis proposed that those who were introverted, neurotic, lower in self-esteem, or had less social cohesion would be more dependent upon Facebook to achieve goals. Pearson correlations were used to test the relationships between these variables and each dependency measure. This hypothesis was marginally supported. Although no individual characteristics were found to be significantly correlated with total Facebook dependency, social information dependency, or entertainment dependency, significant relationships were found between personal understanding dependency, self-esteem, and social cohesion. Those with less connection to others (r = -.14, $p < .05$) and lower self-esteem (r = -.20, $p < .01$) were more likely to rely on Facebook to understand themselves.

Model Testing

To test the model posed in the second research question, path analyses with regression were conducted on total Facebook dependency and each of the three dependency measures, in accordance with prior U&G research (e.g., Haridakis & Rubin, 2005). This statistical method involved two steps. First, five regressions were conducted to determine which individual characteristics significantly predict each Facebook motive, controlling for age, sex, and time spent on Facebook in minutes (see Table 2). Second, a hierarchical regression for total dependency and each of the three dimensions of Facebook dependency was completed, with controls entered in the first step, individual characteristics (Big 5 personality traits, social cohesion, and self-esteem) entered in the second step, and Facebook motives entered on the third step (see Table 3). A post-hoc statistical power analysis showed each test was sufficiently powered. Examining the significant standardized beta coefficients allows one to determine indirect (via motives) and direct predictors of Facebook dependency. For clarity, Figure 1 reports only significant beta coefficients in the model testing.

Total Dependency. The total model (controls, individual characteristics, and motives) explained 44% of the variance in the unidimensional dependency measure, $F(15, 284) = 14.89$, $p < .001$. After controls were accounted for, individual characteristics did not contribute a significant amount of variance, F

Table 2
Regressing Facebook Motives on Individual Characteristics

Predictors	Virtual Community Final β	Companion-ship Final β	Exhibitionism Final β	Relationship Maintenance Final β	Passing Time Final β
Step 1					
Age	−.06	−.03	−.02	−.01	−.25***
Sex	−.11	−.04	−.03	.11	.10
Time spent on FB	.25***	.23***	.22***	.21***	.20***
Step 2					
Extraversion	.05	−.01	−.02	−.12	−.06
Agreeableness	.15*	.02	−.15*	.02	.05
Conscientiousness	−.17*	−.12*	−.16*	.00	−.11
Neuroticism	−.06	.12*	.06	.06	.04
Openness	.09	.15**	.15**	.15*	.06
Social cohesion	−.13	−.37***	−.18*	.15	.08
Self-esteem	−.04	−.08	.09	.07	.03
Step 2 R^2 *change*	.06***	.30***	.13***	.05*	.02

Note. All betas are standardized betas. $N = 301$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

Table 3
Regressing Dependency on Individual Characteristics and Motives

Predictors	Total Dependency β	Personal Understanding β	Social Information B	Entertainment β
Step 1				
Age	−.06	−.09	−.04	−.01
Sex	.09	.05	.09	.02
Time spent on FB	.05	.06	.06	.02
Step 2				
Extraversion	.06	.08	−.02	.02
Agreeableness	.06	.11*	−.01	−.03
Conscientiousness	.09	.01	.15*	.15**
Neuroticism	−.05	−.08	.05	−.02
Openness	.01	.05	−.01	.02
Social cohesion	.06	.02	.09	.01
Self-esteem	−.09	−.18***	−.02	.03
Step 3				
Virtual community	.34***	.35***	.27***	.24***
Companionship	.07	.10	−.02	.14
Exhibitionism	.16**	.18**	.10	.03
Relationship maintenance	.21***	.08	.16**	.24***
Passing time	.12*	.00	.10	.28***

Note. All betas are final standardized betas on the last step of the regression. $N = 301$.
*$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

change(7, 289) = 1.19, $p = .31$. However, motives entered on the final step added 33.7% of unique variance to the model, *F change*(5, 284) = 34.16, $p < .001$.

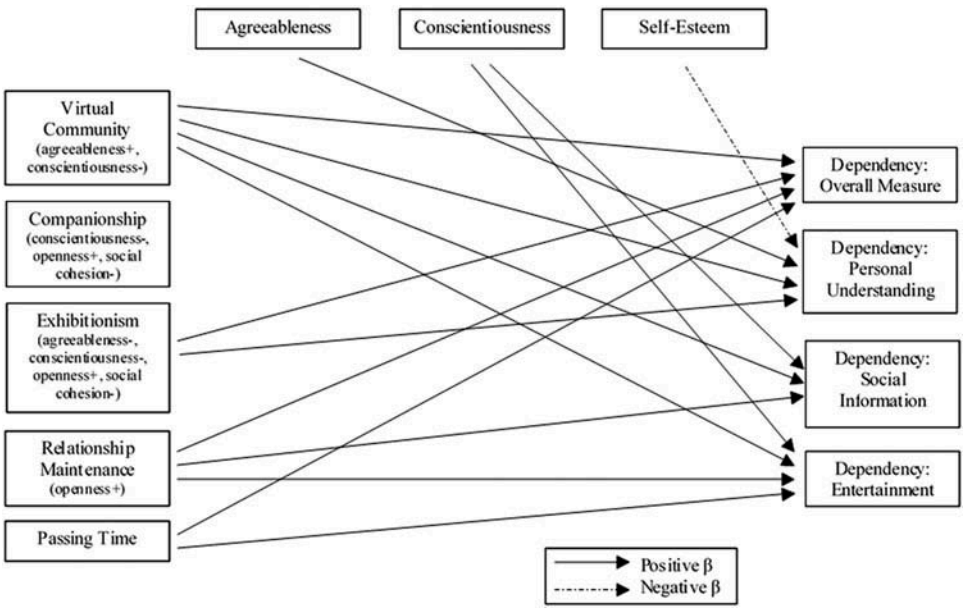
An examination of the final beta coefficients showed that four of the five motives were significant predictors of total dependency (see Table 3). Facebook users motivated by virtual community, exhibitionism, relationship maintenance, and passing time were more dependent on Facebook overall. There were also several indirect predictors in the model, mediated by virtual community, exhibitionism, and relationship maintenance (see Table 2). Agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and social cohesion had varying effects on total dependency when mediated through motives.

Participants with more agreeable and less conscientious personalities motivated to use Facebook to establish a virtual community were more dependent on the medium overall. Additionally, those motivated by exhibitionism who were less agreeable, less conscientious, more open to experiences, and with less social cohesion with offline

Figure 1

Model of Significant Indirect and Direct Predictors of Facebook Dependency

Note. Significant predictors of each Facebook motive are listed in the box in parentheses. See Table 3 for beta weights.



networks had more dependency. Openness was also an indirect predictor when mediated by the relationship maintenance motive.

Personal Understanding. The total model explained 38.6% of the variance in the social knowledge dimension of Facebook dependency, $F(15, 284) = 11.89$, $p < .001$. Individual characteristics contributed 6.7%, $F\ change(7, 289) = 3.20$, $p < .01$, and motives added another 24.5% of the variance in personal understanding dependency, $F\ change(5, 284) = 22.62$, $p < .001$.

Four variables—agreeableness, self-esteem, virtual community motive, and exhibitionism motive—were direct predictors of social understanding (see Table 3). Participants who were dependent on Facebook for social knowledge tended to be more agreeable and have less self-esteem; they were also motivated to use Facebook to establish a virtual community and to gain fame or attention.

The path analysis showed several indirect predictors, mediated through the significant motives (see Table 2). Namely, participants motivated by virtual community who were more agreeable and less conscientious were more dependent on Facebook to gain understanding of themselves and others. Also, participants who were less agreeable, less conscientious, less connected to an offline social network, and more open who were motivated by exhibitionism were more dependent on Facebook for personal understanding.

Social Information. The total model explains 23.6% of the variance in the social information dimension of Facebook dependency, $F(15, 284) = 5.85$, $p < .001$. Individual characteristics contributed no significant variance to the model in step 2, $F\ change(7, 289) = .66$, $p = .71$. However, when motives were added in step 3, 17.3% unique variance was explained by the model, $F\ change(5, 284) = 12.87$, $p < .001$.

Conscientiousness, virtual community motive, and relationship maintenance motives were direct predictors in the model, such that participants who were more conscientious, motivated to establish a virtual social network and/or maintain an existing social network were likely to be dependent on Facebook for social information (see Table 3). Although it served as a direct, positive predictor, conscientiousness was an indirect, negative predictor when mediated through virtual community (see Table 2). In this case, users who were less conscientious and more agreeable, motivated by virtual community were more dependent on Facebook to gain information about the community, country, and world events. Additionally, those who were more open and motivated by relationship maintenance had more social information dependency.

Entertainment. The total model explained 39.7% of the variance in the entertainment dimension of Facebook dependency, $F(15, 283) = 12.41$, $p < .001$. Step 2 of the model, testing the effects of individual characteristics on entertainment dependency, was not significant, $F\ change(7, 288) = .95$, $p = .47$. On the other hand,

motives once again contributed a significant amount of variance, adding 32.8% in this model, F *change*$(5, 283) = 30.78$, $p < .001$.

There were four direct predictors (see Table 3). Facebook users high in conscientiousness were more likely to be dependent on Facebook for entertainment. Additionally, those motivated by virtual community, relationship maintenance, and passing time were more dependent on Facebook for entertainment. Thus, there were several indirect predictors mediated through these motives (see Table 2). Participants higher in agreeableness and lower in conscientiousness, using Facebook for virtual community were more dependent on the medium for entertainment. More open individuals using Facebook for relationship maintenance also reported more entertainment dependency.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to apply U&G in order to explore Facebook dependency. As predicted by U&G, motives for using Facebook were found to be important factors in relation to dependency. When controlling for demographics and daily use, motives contributed significant variance in dependency scores beyond individual characteristics. Additionally, this research has shown that individual characteristics have both direct and indirect relationships with dependency. Results revealed that those with lower self-esteem and social cohesion were more dependent upon Facebook to gain personal understanding, supporting the social compensation hypothesis. When including demographic controls and motives, self-esteem was found to be an indirect predictor of personal understanding dependency through the motives of virtual community and exhibitionism. These results demonstrate the utility of applying U&G as a framework for exploring social media dependency.

Explaining Dependency in Terms of Functional Alternatives

One key factor in the U&G model with respect to dependency is the availability of functional alternatives. Rubin (2002) argues that the media is one method of satisfying one's needs and fulfilling communicative goals, and that when options are limited, dependency is more likely to occur. The findings in the study suggest some support for this assumption.

With respect to total dependency, virtual community, exhibitionism, relationship maintenance, and passing time were all positive predictors. However, companionship was not. This finding makes sense with respect to functional alternatives. If you intend to use social media to meet new people (virtual community), Facebook can provide a nearly endless supply of potential relationships that would be difficult to achieve via any other mode of communication. If you seek attention (exhibitionism), you can instantly gain it through obtaining "likes," comments, or others sharing your posts. Facebook can provide a multitude of ways to relieve boredom (entertainment),

not only by gaming functions, but also through engagement with others, reading one's wall, or watching videos. Many of these functions can be utilized simultaneously. These goals may not be easily obtained to this degree via any other method of communication other than Facebook.

However, with respect to dependency and the need for companionship, there may be many functional alternatives that satisfy this need. Studies have shown that those who are lonely are more likely to use Facebook (Song et al., 2014). However, research has also shown that lonely people use the radio, movies, and television more than non-lonely people (Perse & Rubin, 1990). While media may be a source to seek out companionship, Facebook is only one method in a multitude of possibilities.

In addition to examining motivations related to dependency, this study also sought to investigate dependency using two hypotheses related to social media use: social enhancement and social compensation. This study sheds some light on the debate between these competing hypotheses, though it appears that both can be true for different populations with respect to dependency. Functional alternatives may help explain these results.

In this study, the data revealed stronger support for the social compensation hypothesis, which makes intuitive sense with regard to dependency. Individuals with lower self-esteem who have less connection with their offline communities may perceive fewer functional alternatives to social media. Those with weaker social ties and who feel more negatively about themselves may not have multiple sources in which they can approach others to get feedback about themselves. Research has shown that those with lower self-esteem who care more about what people think are more likely to have more friends on Facebook (Lee et al., 2012). These online friends may be providing information that can't be gained via other sources, thus leading to more dependency.

With respect to the social enhancement hypothesis, functional alternatives may also explain our findings. These results did not show direct support between previously established individual characteristics related to social enhancement and dependency. Given that extraverts use social media as an extension of their face-to-face networks and prefer to engage with others offline (Sheldon, 2015), social individuals may have greater resources for goal attainment than less-social people. The availability of functional alternatives is greater, and therefore dependency would not occur.

However, there does appear to be one aspect of dependency that is related to social people. When examining the total model, the personality trait of agreeableness was an indirect predictor of the virtual community motive related to dependency. Those who relate well to others who use Facebook to meet new people are more likely to be dependent on this medium. Previous research has shown that social people have more friends on Facebook (Chen, 2014). These results show that social people do extend their face-to-face network online. One who has a strong need to relate to others and meet new people may not have many other avenues to achieve those goals on the grand scale that Facebook can provide. While this study

does not close the door on the debate between the social enhancement and social compensation hypotheses, it does provide further evidence regarding how both perspectives can be linked to potential media effects.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this research shows potential in relating dependency to functional alternatives, a limitation of this study is that alternatives were not directly measured. An attempt to encapsulate the concept of functional alternatives was made by measuring personality traits and social cohesion. However, future research should include the availability of both interpersonal and mediated alternatives to fulfill goals to explore this relationship more completely.

Surprisingly, personality traits did not relate to dependency as expected. Extraversion, which has been shown to be related to Facebook use and effects (Marshall et al., 2015; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Zwicka & Danowski, 2008), was not related to motives or dependency in this study. Additionally, agreeableness and conscientiousness were found to be indirect predictors related to the sub-categories of dependency. These results point to the complex concept of sociability, and suggest that future research should expand beyond extraversion to include other personality traits.

Additionally, social cohesion did not exhibit as large an impact as would have been expected in dependency effects. In this study, social cohesion was measured using the General Belongingness Scale. While this measure has been used in previous research (Malone et al., 2012; Yamamoto, 2011), it may not fully encapsulate one's sense of connection to their social networks. Although it was intended to measure offline belongingness, one could feel belonging in various contexts. For example, one could feel highly connected to family, yet feel less connected to peers. Future research should continue to examine the concept of social cohesion given its potential importance with relation to functional alternatives.

A final limitation concerns the representativeness of the study sample. Although the sample is majority Caucasian women like the population of Facebook users (see Hoelzel, 2015; Koh, 2014), the proportion is quite different. For example, 60% of Facebook users are Caucasian (Koh, 2014); our sample was over 90% Caucasian. Therefore, conclusions drawn to the population based on this data should be interpreted with this limitation in mind.

Overall, this study shows that there are multiple facets to one's dependency upon social media to achieve communication goals. In support of U&G, motives were direct predictors of dependency, and one's individual characteristics also had indirect roles in describing the relationships between motives and goals obtained. While Facebook continues to be a dominant force in the social media landscape, future research should continue to explore this medium as well as other modes of social media in order to continue to explain the potential effects on the millions of people who access these sites every day.

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Facebook Use and Its Role in Shaping Access to Social Benefits among Older Adults

Rebecca Ping Yu, Nicole B. Ellison, and Cliff Lampe

Adults who are 65 years or older have increasingly adopted social network sites (SNSs), Facebook in particular. Yet the ramifications of SNS use in this population remain understudied. Using a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults (N = 2,003), this study focuses on Facebook users (N = 1,138) and examines patterns of Facebook use by younger (aged 18–65 years) and older users (aged 65 or older), as well as the social benefits associated with older users' Facebook use. Findings show that older users have different network structures, but the frequency of their visits and engagement in Social Media Relationship Maintenance Behaviors (SMRMB), a measure of perceived likelihood to engage with others via social media, do not significantly differ from those of younger users. Moreover, our results suggest that among older users (N = 98), the number of self-reported "actual" friends on Facebook and SMRMB positively predict perceived support, while SMRMB contributes to perceptions of access to useful information. Overall, the study highlights unique usage patterns and social benefits associated with Facebook use among older adults. As such, its findings provide insights for the future design of technological interventions to help older adults better access social benefits associated with SNS use.

Introduction

While it is widely recognized that social relationships and interactions have a powerful positive impact on older adults' physical and mental health (e.g., Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000), later life can be a time of particular challenges with regard

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to social connectedness due to age-related changes, such as retirement and health declines. This paradox faced by older adults has prompted some to argue that social network sites (SNSs) can help older adults receive social benefits (Nef, Ganea, Müri, & Mosimann, 2013). Indeed, as there is evidence that older SNS users perceive higher levels of support and feelings of connectedness to a network of friendship than older non-users (Yu, McCammon, Ellison, & Langa, 2015), scholars have proposed technological interventions that integrate SNS features to facilitate communication with others and acquisition of related social benefits for older adults. Examples include digital displays of family photos and messages (Cornejo, Tentori, & Favela, 2013) and a health-related telecommunication system using Facebook features (Huang & Hsu, 2014). Meanwhile, online seniors are increasingly adopting SNSs, Facebook in particular. Facebook's adoption rate among online seniors over 65 years has quadrupled from 13% in 2009 to 56% in 2014 (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lenhart, & Madden, 2015). However, as substantial literature on SNS use has focused on younger age groups, relatively little is known about older adults' SNS usage patterns and whether the social benefits associated with SNS use for younger age groups can be made available to older populations.

With a focus on Facebook—the most widely used SNS among all U.S. adults, including older adults (Duggan et al., 2015)—we use a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults from the 2014 Pew Internet and American Life Project to address two important empirical questions. First, drawing on previous work on Facebook use and social capital (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007, 2011; Ellison, Vitak, Gray, & Lampe, 2014), we consider various activities on the platform, including Facebook users' network characteristics (i.e., the number of total friends, perceptions of "actual" friends on the site, and the ratio of "actual" to total friends) and forms of Facebook use (i.e., frequency of Facebook visits and an individual propensity to actively engage with others via social media, called Social Media Relationship Maintenance Behaviors (SMRMB)) and ask: Are there systematic differences in Facebook use between younger (18–65) and older (65+) users? Second, based on the distinctions between bridging social capital (i.e., social benefits associated with weaker ties, such as useful information) and bonding social capital (i.e., social benefits associated with stronger ties, such as social support), we consider two types of social benefits, namely perceptions of support and access to useful information, and ask: How are perceptions of support and access to useful information associated with different Facebook activities in the older population? Overall, our goal is to draw on perspectives from social capital and life course theories to examine unique patterns of Facebook use and associated social benefits, with the hope that our results can help inform technological interventions designed to facilitate the benefits of SNS use for this population.

Facebook Usage Differences between Older and Younger Users

Because prior work has demonstrated that Facebook network characteristics, such as the number of total friends, perceptions of "actual" friends on the site, and the ratio of "actual" to total friends (Chang, Choi, Bazarova, & Löckenhoff, 2015; Ellison

et al., 2011) and forms of Facebook use, such as frequency of Facebook visits and Facebook Relationship Maintenance Behaviors (Ellison et al., 2007, 2014), are associated with increased levels of social benefits, it is important to examine how these activities differ by younger (18–65) and older (65+) age groups. We use age 65 to divide the sample into two groups because "older adults" generally refer to those aged 65 and over (e.g., Ortman, Velkoff, & Hogan, 2014). Furthermore, while prior work has explored how SNS use patterns change over the lifespan among those aged 18 and older (Chang et al., 2015) and how SNS use is associated with access to social capital among younger age groups (e.g., Ellison et al., 2011), relatively little research examines SNS use and its related social benefits among older adults in particular. Thus, we first examine whether and how older adults' Facebook network characteristics and forms of use are different from the rest of the population in order to understand unique SNS usage patterns among older adults. Then, we focus on the older population and investigate how their SNS practices are associated with perceptions of support and access to useful information.

Facebook Network Characteristics

We first examine how Facebook network characteristics, including number of total friends, perceptions of "actual" friends, and ratio of "actual" to total friends, differ by younger and older age groups. As Facebook allows users to create "social supernets," consisting of hundreds or even thousands of friends (Donath, 2007) that range from distant acquaintances to close friends, social capital researchers (Ellison et al., 2011, 2014) often ask survey participants to report both the total number of Facebook friends they have as well as the number of network connections on the site they perceive to be "actual" friends. The number of total friends refers to one's friend count on the site, whereas the number of "actual" friends taps into perceptions regarding stronger connections that may not be truly close ties (Ellison et al., 2011). The distinction between the number of total friends and "actual" friends is important because research shows that the latter is more predictive of access to social capital than the former (Ellison et al., 2011, 2014). Using a college student sample, Ellison et al. (2011) found that the reported median number of total Facebook friends was 300; of this, about 25% or 75 were considered "actual" friends. Given the high number of perceived "actual" friends, Ellison et al. (2011) suggest that "actual" friends may not be truly close or intimate contacts, but are likely to be individuals with whom respondents have a "stronger offline connection" (p. 888). To capture the composition of one's Facebook network, the ratio of "actual" to total friends is the perceived proportion of stronger offline connections in a user's Facebook network. Research evidence shows that there is a negative association between the ratio of "actual" to total friends and loneliness (Chang et al., 2015).

Although Facebook's technical options generally support users to connect with both intimate and distant others (Bakshy, Rosenn, Marlow, & Adamic, 2012), some older adults' Facebook network characteristics may differ from their younger

counterparts as social relationships change over the life course. Since prior work suggests that an individual's offline social network tends to become smaller and narrower as age increases (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Carstensen, 1993), we might expect that older adults would have fewer total Facebook friends but a higher proportion of "actual" friends in the network, compared to younger age groups. A meta-analysis of age-related offline social network changes found that family network size remains stable throughout the lifespan while global and friendship networks expand during young adulthood and decrease during later adulthood (Wrzus, Hänel, Wagner, & Neyer, 2013). The gerontology literature has suggested two perspectives—involuntary and voluntary loss hypotheses—to explain why social network size and composition change with age. Involuntary loss hypothesis suggests that older adults often involuntarily lose weak social contacts and miss opportunities to extend existing networks due to age-related factors, such as mandatory retirement and bereavement (e.g., Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). In contrast, the voluntary loss hypothesis posits that older adults tend to proactively reduce contact with less close others in order to prioritize close relationships that are emotionally rewarding (e.g., Carstensen, 1993). Consistent with these perspectives, prior work on SNS networks also shows that as age increases, number of friends decreases (Barker, 2012), while the proportion of "actual" friends increases (Chang et al., 2015). Thus, we expect that older adults will have a smaller number of total Facebook friends and a higher ratio of "actual" to total friends, compared to younger users.

However, it is not clear whether the number of perceived "actual" friends differs by age groups because prior work (e.g., Chang et al., 2015) does not do such comparisons. Prior gerontology literature suggests two possibilities. On the one hand, older users' perceptions of "actual" friends may not differ from younger users because research suggests that an individual's core social network tends to remain stable across the lifespan (e.g., Wrzus et al., 2013). On the other hand, older users may perceive fewer "actual" friends than younger users, because older users may be more likely to lose stronger ties due to age-related reasons, such as bereavement, than younger users. Based on the above, we pose the following hypotheses and research question:

H_1: Older Facebook users have (a) a smaller number of total Facebook friends and (b) a higher ratio of "actual" to total friends, compared to younger users.

RQ_1: Does the number of "actual" friends on Facebook differ by younger and older age groups?

Forms of Facebook Use

Next, we explore how forms of Facebook use differ by age groups. It is unclear how older adults' practices on the platform, including (1) frequency of Facebook visits and (2) likelihood of engaging in SMRMB, are different from their younger counterparts. First, existing research has provided ambivalent evidence regarding how frequency of

Facebook use differs by age groups. Some research suggests that older adults may be less likely to engage in various Facebook activities, including frequency of use, than younger adults because the ability to perform tasks on the Internet is increasingly determined by physical conditions, such as cognitive ability (Czaja, Sharit, Hernandez, Nair, & Loewenstein, 2010). For example, in a usability test, Brandtzæg, Lüders, and Skjetne (2010) found that compared to younger users, older users were less likely to complete the tasks that involved navigating Facebook's privacy settings. When older users were able to complete the tasks, they took more time to do so. However, other evidence may suggest otherwise. As the proportion of Facebook users who engage with the site daily has significantly increased, from 63% in 2013 to 70% in 2014 (Duggan et al., 2015), older adults may have increasingly integrated Facebook use into their daily life, contributing to the increase in the proportion of daily Facebook users. Indeed, there is evidence that some older adults have integrated SNSs into their daily routines so that they can stay connected with their family and friends (Karimi & Neustaedter, 2011).

Second, it is also unclear whether the likelihood of engaging in Social Media Relationship Maintenance Behaviors (SMRMB), which measures a person's perception of how likely he or she is to engage in interactions that signal attention to the recipient and help to form social bonds and trust with the recipient (Ellison et al., 2014), differs by age groups. Some evidence shows that older adults have high privacy concerns regarding SNS use (Brandtzæg et al., 2010; Xie, Watkins, Golbeck, & Huang, 2012) and feel uncomfortable about sharing their thoughts in front of a broad audience on Facebook (Lehtinen, Näsänen, & Sarvas, 2009). A recent survey study also reveals that as age increases, Facebook users are less likely to engage in self-posting behaviors (Chang et al., 2015). Due to privacy concerns, one may expect that, compared to younger users, older adults may be less likely to engage in SMRMB because some of these actions may be publicly viewable. However, other evidence suggests that older users' likelihood of engaging in SMRMB may not differ from their younger counterparts. In an interview study, Erickson (2011) found that while older users may not feel comfortable broadcasting themselves (e.g., self-posting) on Facebook, they are more willing to provide support to others on Facebook in the form of sending messages (e.g., birthday wishes and get-well-soon messages). Consistent with Erickson's (2011) findings, a recent study using a convenience sample of individuals across a wide range of ages also shows that frequency of commenting on friends' photos and status/posts did not differ across three age groups (18–29, 30–49, and 50+) (Hayes, van Stolk-Cooke, & Muench, 2015). The behaviors (e.g., sending birthday wishes and commenting on friends' posts) described in the studies are generally consistent with activities measured by the SMRMB scale. This literature suggests that older adults may be as likely as their younger counterparts to perform SMRMB.

In summary, given opposing perspectives and expectations regarding older adults' Facebook use, we pose the following research questions:

RQ_2: Do (a) frequency of Facebook visits and (b) likelihood of engaging in SMRMB differ by younger and older age groups?

Facebook Use and Social Benefits among Older Facebook Users

After identifying unique Facebook usage patterns among older adults, we draw on the theoretical framework of social capital to further examine how these usage patterns relate to access to social benefits in the older population. While social capital generally describes resources embedded in social relationships, it is often divided into "bridging" and "bonding" capital based on the types of relationships in which the resources are embedded (Putnam, 2001). Weaker ties are more likely to be bridging ties that connect different clusters in a network and help distribute novel information (Granovetter, 1973), whereas stronger ties typically provide access to substantive forms of capital, such as social support. Using this distinction, we examine how Facebook network characteristics (the number of total Facebook friends, the number of perceived "actual" friends on the site, and the ratio of "actual" to total friends) and forms of Facebook use (frequency of Facebook visits and likelihood of engaging in SMRMB) associate with access to two types of social benefits, namely, perception of support and useful information.

As Facebook's technical and social features generally enable users to connect and interact with their connections on the site, prior work focusing on younger age groups has documented positive relationships between social capital and various Facebook activities, including total Facebook friends, perceived actual friends on the site (Ellison et al., 2011), the ratio of actual to total friends (Chang et al., 2015), and relationship maintenance behaviors (Ellison et al., 2014). However, when comparing the various Facebook activities, some activities are more predictive of social benefits than others. Ellison et al. (2011) found that the number of "actual" friends was significantly associated with increased levels of both bonding and bridging social capital, while the number of total friends was not. Similarly, a recent study employing a representative adult sample found that the proportion of "actual" to total friends was negatively related to loneliness (Chang et al., 2015). These results suggest that the number and the proportion of more meaningful connections (i.e., those perceived to be "actual" friends) in a Facebook network, as opposed to the number of all connections in a network, are more predictive of access to social benefits.

In addition to network characteristics, Ellison et al. (2014) demonstrate that likelihood of engaging in relationship maintenance behaviors on Facebook (e.g., commenting on friends' posts) is associated with increased perceptions of bridging social capital, suggesting that more meaningful social practices, as opposed to generic Facebook use, are more likely to facilitate access to the social benefits associated with one's Facebook network. Integrating results from previous studies, we expect that the number of actual friends, the ratio of actual to total friends, and SMRMB are all positively associated with perceived support and access to useful information on social media among older Facebook users. As previous research primarily focuses on younger or general populations, we extend extant research by focusing on older adults. Thus, we suggest:

H_2: Among older Facebook users, (a) the number of actual friends on Facebook, (b) the ratio of actual to total friends, and (c) SMRMB are all positively associated with users' perceived support.

H_3: Among older Facebook users, (a) the number of actual friends on Facebook, (b) the ratio of actual to total friends, and (c) SMRMB are all positively associated with users' perceived access to useful information.

Methods

Sample

This study employs telephone survey data from the Pew Internet and American Life Project, including a nationally representative sample of 2,003 adults, aged 18 and older, who were residents of the continental United States. A random digit dialing approach that included landline (1,002) and cell phone numbers (1,001) was used. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish between September 11 to 14, 2014 and September 18 to 21, 2014. The median age (*Mdn* = 40; *M* = 46.43; *SD* = 17.55) of the total sample was older than the median age of the U.S. population (*Mdn* = 37.7; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014) because only those who were 18 years old or older were included in the study. Other basic demographics, including gender (Female = 50.82%) and race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic White = 66.47%), of the total sample, are reasonably comparable to the U.S. population (Female = 50.8%; non-Hispanic White = 62.1%; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Because this study focuses on older adults' Facebook use, we only included Facebook users (those who reported using Facebook, *N* = 1,138) in the analyses. The sample sizes for analyses of Facebook use differences and social benefits associated with Facebook use were different. The full sample of Facebook users (*N* = 1,138) was used to investigate how Facebook use patterns differ by age groups. Of these 1,138 respondents, the 98 who were over 65 comprised the sample for analyzing social benefits associated with Facebook use among older adults.

Measures

Facebook Network Characteristics. Following Ellison et al. (2011), participants' total number of Facebook friends was measured in an open-ended question: "Approximately how many total Facebook friends do you have?" (*M* = 342.19; *SD* = 566.55). In addition, to assess number of actual friends on Facebook, we included the item employed by Ellison et al. (2011): "Approximately how many of your TOTAL Facebook friends do you consider actual friends?" (*M* = 116.28; *SD* = 300.07). These two measures were used to compute the ratio between actual and total friends (*M* = .46; *SD* = .36).

Frequency of Facebook Visits. The question about frequency of Facebook visits was framed as: "About how often do you visit or use Facebook?" (M = 3.97; SD = 1.20). The responses ranged from 1 (*less than every few weeks*) to 5 (*several times a day*).

Social Media Relationship Maintenance Behaviors. The three items used to capture SMRMB were adapted from Ellison et al. (2014): "When you see a friend or acquaintance sharing good news on social media, you try to respond," "When you see a friend or acquaintance sharing bad news on social media, you try to respond," and "When you see someone asking a question on social media that you know the answer to, you try to respond." Together, these measures speak to a self-perception users hold about how they use social media for active engagement. The response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*). A composite measure of SMRMB was created by summing the three items, with higher scores representing higher likelihood of engaging in SMRMB (M = 8.85; SD = 2.33; α = .74).

Social Benefits. Consistent with the theoretical framework of bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2001), we assessed two types of social benefits—perceived support and access to useful information. On a 4-point Likert scale (1 = *strongly disagree*; 4 = *strongly agree*), our measure of perceived support was: "You get support from friends on social media" (M = 3.02; SD = .95). To capture access to useful information, respondents were asked to report the extent to which they agreed that they got useful information from social media (M = 3.00; SD = .87).

Web-Use Skills. Our measure of Web-use skills was adapted from Hargittai and Hsieh (2012). This measure was included as a control variable in this study because prior work shows that Web-use skills relate to diversity of Internet use (Hargittai, 2010). On a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *no understanding*; 5 = *full understanding*), respondents were asked to report their familiarity with six Web-related terms: advanced search, PDF, spyware, wiki, cookies, and hashtag. A composite measure of Web-use skills was created by summing scores to the six terms, with higher scores signifying better Web-use skills (M = 19.77; SD = 7.26; α = .89).

Demographics. Demographic measures of Facebook users used for the analyses were age (M = 40.92; SD = 15.80), gender (Female = 55.16%), race/ethnicity (non-Hispanic White = 67.04%), education (*Mdn* = some college), income (*Mdn* = $40,000 to under $50.000), employment status (employed = 62.06%), and cohabitation (cohabited = 82.08%).

Zero-order correlations among all predictors for Facebook users are reported in Table 1. Descriptive statistics of all predictors for the full sample of Facebook users and by age groups are summarized in Table 2.

Table 1
Zero-Order Correlations among All Predictors for Facebook Users

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1	Age												
2	Female	.06[a]											
3	White	.23[c]	.03										
4	Education	.14[c]	−.01	.13[c]									
5	Income	.17[c]	−.08[b]	.25[c]	.39[c]								
6	Employment status	−.22[c]	−.13[c]	.05	.18[c]	.21[c]							
7	Cohabitation	−.08[b]	.00	.08[b]	.02	.23[c]	.06						
8	Web-use skills	−.25[c]	−.09[b]	.13[c]	.30[c]	.31[c]	.21[c]	.13[c]					
9	Total friends (log)	−.43[c]	.05	−.02	.00	.01	.13[c]	.12[c]	.28[c]				
10	Actual friends (log)	−.22[c]	.06	.10[b]	.05	.12[c]	.10[b]	.15[c]	.26[c]	.61[c]			
11	Ratio of actual to total friends	.25[c]	.00	.13[c]	.03	.09[b]	−.04	.05	−.04	−.39[c]	.41[c]		
12	Frequency of visits	−.16[c]	.09[b]	.03	−.04	.01	.07[a]	.10[b]	.12[c]	.30[c]	.29[c]	−.03	
13	SMRMB	−.03	.17[c]	.04	−.03	−.05	−.07[a]	.01	.09[b]	.22[c]	.27[c]	.05	.34[c]

Note. Baseline N = 1,138. Cell entries are Pearson's R correlation coefficients. Variables number 2, 3, 6, and 7 are dichotomous and Pearson's point-biserial correlations are used. [a]$p < .05$, [b]$p < .01$, [c]$p < .001$

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics of All Predictors for Facebook Users

	All		18–65		65+		
	M or %	SD	M or %	SD	M or %	SD	t or χ^2
Age (18–89)	40.92	15.80	38.10	13.36	70.79	5.41	47.67***
Non-Hispanic White (0–1)	67.04	-	64.55	-	90.71	-	27.46***
Female (0–1)	55.16	-	54.63	-	60.74	-	1.58
Education (1–8)	4.62	1.79	4.58	1.77	4.85	1.91	1.42
Income (1–9)	5.06	2.52	5.02	2.56	5.36	2.08	1.37
Web-use skills (6–30)	19.77	7.26	20.17	7.19	15.70	6.61	5.77***
Employed (0–1)	62.06	-	66.57	-	18.30	-	6.77***
Cohabited (0–1)	82.08	-	82.84	-	73.77	-	5.30*
Total friends	342.19	566.55	363.76	576.15	113.89	304.30	2.94**
Actual friends	116.28	300.07	121.11	306.65	57.97	184.37	5.23***
Ratio of actual to total friends (0–1)	0.46	0.36	0.44	0.35	0.65	0.35	5.20***
Frequency of visits (1–5)	3.97	1.20	4.02	1.19	3.60	1.18	3.34**
SMRMB (3–12)	8.85	2.33	8.93	2.30	8.04	2.62	3.12**
Baseline N	1138		1040		98		

Note. Reported means and percentages are weighted. Comparisons made between younger and older age groups, between means (t-test) and percentages (χ^2 test). *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Analytic Procedures

We first used univariate analysis to get a basic understanding of Facebook use differences across younger (18–65) and older age groups (65+). However, because demographic factors (e.g., income) may influence age-group differences in Facebook use and different Facebook activities are inter-related, it is essential to control the influence of demographics, Web-use skills, and other related Facebook activities (e.g., network characteristics) to understand how age groups differ vis-à-vis one particular Facebook activity (Facebook visits, for instance) above and beyond the influence of possible confounding variables. Thus, we used binary logistic regression to examine how different Facebook activities predict whether a Facebook member is above or below the age of 65, while including other demographics and Web-use skills as covariates. Furthermore, we performed ordered logistic regression to examine how different Facebook activities are associated with perceived support and access to useful information among older adults because the two outcome variables were in ordinal measurements.

Results

First, we explore differences in Facebook usage between younger and older users (H_1, RQ_1, and RQ_2). Univariate analysis (Table 2) shows that older users have a smaller number of total and "actual" friends, have a higher proportion of actual to total friends, visit Facebook less frequently, and are less likely to engage in SMRMB than younger users. We use logistic regression analysis to better understand how each Facebook activity is stratified by age group above and beyond the influence of other possible confounding variables. In the binary logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of being in the older age group (Table 3), we include actual friends and the ratio of actual to total friends, because prior work suggests that actual friends (Ellison et al., 2011) and the ratio of actual to total friends (Chang et al., 2015) are more predictive of access to social benefits than total friends. To avoid effects from outliners, a log transformed actual friends measure (M = 1.63; SD = .63; Skewness reduces from 10.31 to -.16; Kurtosis reduces from 141.35 to .12) is used for regression analyses. We first assess how demographics and Web-use skills differ by age groups. As Table 3 shows, those who are non-Hispanic White, unemployed, have higher income, higher education, and lower Web-use skills are more likely to be in the older age group. With regard to Facebook activities, results show that those who have fewer "actual" friends and a higher ratio of "actual" to total friends are more likely to be in the older age group. Overall, findings suggest that older users have fewer total and "actual" friends and a higher proportion of "actual" to total friends than younger users, while frequency of Facebook visits and SMRMB are not statistically different across the two age groups. H_{1a} and H_{1b} are thus supported.

Next, we examine the associations between Facebook usage patterns and social benefits with a focus on the older population (H_2 and H_3). We predict that number of

Table 3
Binary Logistic Regression: Predicting Differences in Facebook Use between Younger (18–65) and Older Users (65+)

	b(se)	exp(b)
Female	−.06(.31)	.94
Non-Hispanic White	1.94(.47)	6.96***
Education	.25(.10)	1.29**
Income	.16(.07)	1.17*
Employed	−2.47(.36)	.09***
Cohabited	−.26(.38)	.77
Web-use skills	−.08(.02)	.92**
Actual friends (log)	−.78(.32)	.46*
Ratio of actual to total friends	1.58(.45)	4.86***
Frequency of visits	.03(.14)	1.03
SMRMB	−.11(.07)	.90
Constant	−2.11(.87)	.12*
Nagelkerke R^2	.37	

Note. $N = 805$. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

"actual" friends (H_{2a}), the ratio of "actual" to total friends (H_{2b}), and SMRMB (H_{2c}) would be positively associated with perceived support. In the ordered logistic regression predicting perceived support (Table 4), frequency of visits is a positive predictor in Model 1. We added the ratio of actual to total friends to Model 2, but frequency of visits remain the only positive predictor. When the number of "actual" friends is added to Model 3, only "actual" friends is positively associated with perceived support. Finally, SMRMB is added to Model 4; both actual friends and SMRMB are positive predictors. Thus, H_{2a} and H_{2c} are supported, while H_{2b} is rejected.

Regarding another type of social benefit, access to useful information, we hypothesize that access to such benefits is positively associated with the number of "actual" friends (H_{3a}), the ratio of "actual" to total friends (H_{3b}), and SMRMB (H_{3c}). In the ordered logistic regression predicting perceived access to useful information (Table 5), frequency of visits is a consistent significant predictor in Models 1 to 3, while the ratio of actual to total friends and actual friends are not significant predictors in Models 2 and/or 3. In Model 4, only SMRMB is significantly associated with increased perception of access to useful information. Thus, H_{3c} is supported while H_{3a} and H_{3b} are rejected.

Discussion

Using a national sample, this study examines Facebook use and its associated social benefits among Americans aged 65 or older, a population that is increasing in size and is rapidly adopting SNSs. The findings advance an understanding of older adults'

Table 4
Ordered Logistic Regression: Predicting Perceived Support among Older Facebook Users (65+)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)
Age	.02(.05)	1.02	.02(.05)	1.02	.02(.05)	1.02	.03(.05)	1.03
Female	.26(.48)	1.29	.07(.50)	1.08	−.07(.51)	.93	−.13(.53)	.88
Non-Hispanic White	−.12(.80)	.89	−.31(.86)	.74	−.45(.88)	.64	−.55(.89)	.58
Education	−.01(.13)	.99	−.01(.14)	.99	.00(.14)	1.00	.02(.14)	1.02
Income	−.24(.15)	.79	−.23(.15)	.80	−.25(.16)	.78	−.22(.16)	.80
Employed	.01(.58)	1.01	.10(.61)	1.11	−.18(.62)	.84	.02(.64)	1.02
Cohabited	.77(.58)	2.17	.80(.59)	2.23	.71(.60)	2.02	.65(.62)	1.91
Web-use skills	.04(.04)	1.04	.04(.04)	1.04	.01(.04)	1.01	.00(.05)	1.00
Frequency of visits	.55(.20)	1.72**	.51(.21)	1.67*	.38(.22)	1.47	.22(.24)	1.25
Ratio of actual to total friends			.76(.72)	2.14	.22(.78)	1.24	.33(.81)	1.39
Actual friends (log)					1.25(.59)	3.50*	1.17(.59)	3.23*
SMRMB							.24(.11)	1.28*
Nagelkerke R^2	.17		.16		.22		.28	
N	73		68		68		65	

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Table 5
Ordered Logistic Regression: Predicting Perceived Access to Useful Information among Older Facebook Users (65+)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)	b(se)	exp(b)
Age	−.02(.05)	.98	−.01(.05)	.99	−.01(.05)	.99	−.02(.05)	.98
Female	.10(.48)	1.11	.44(.51)	1.56	.40(.52)	1.49	.17(.55)	1.18
Non-Hispanic White	−.59(.79)	.56	−.42(.86)	.66	−.41(.86)	.66	−.76(.90)	.47
Education	−.04(.13)	.96	−.03(.14)	.97	−.03(.14)	.97	−.04(.15)	.96
Income	−.35*(.15)	.70	−.31(.16)	.74	−.31(.16)	.74	−.29(.17)	.75
Employed	.41(.58)	1.51	.22(.62)	1.25	.18(.62)	1.20	.28(.66)	1.33
Cohabited	.30(.59)	1.35	.31(.61)	1.36	.27(.61)	1.31	.05(.64)	1.05
Web-use skills	.08(.04)	1.08	.07(.04)	1.07	.06(.04)	1.07	.03(.05)	1.03
Frequency of visits	.69(.21)	2.00**	.73(.22)	2.08**	.69(.24)	1.99**	.48(.25)	1.61
Ratio of actual to total friends			−.93(.74)	.40	−1.10(.79)	.33	−1.10(.82)	.33
Actual friends (log)					.33(.55)	1.39	.12(.58)	1.13
SMRMB							.40(.12)	1.49**
Nagelkerke R^2	.28		.31		.31		.44	
N	76		70		70		68	

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$.

Facebook use and its associated social benefits, which can inform future technological interventions to help older adults better access social benefits via SNS platforms.

First, the examination of differences in Facebook use across younger and older age groups reveals unique Facebook usage patterns among older adults. Regarding Facebook network characteristics, we find that older users have a smaller number of total friends and a higher ratio of actual to total friends, compared to those under the age of 65. The gerontology literature suggests that there are two explanations for these differences. One possible explanation is that older users are more likely to miss opportunities to expand their Facebook network size due to involuntary reasons, such as mandatory retirement, than younger users (e.g., Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987). Another possibility is that older adults may deliberately keep a smaller number of Facebook connections as they increasingly focus only on stronger ties that are more emotionally rewarding (e.g., Carstensen, 1993). Moreover, our analysis further shows that older users consider fewer "actual" friends on Facebook, compared to younger users. Importantly, as prior work shows that self-reported "actual" friends are more likely to provide social benefits, compared to any connections on the site (Ellison et al., 2011, 2014), this pattern of findings suggests that the smaller, stronger-tie networks among older users may limit their ability to acquire related social benefits.

With regard to forms of Facebook use, interestingly, while it is widely recognized that older adults' Internet use tends to be restricted by their limited physical ability (e.g., cognitive declines) (Czaja et al., 2010) and negative attitudes (e.g., privacy concerns) (Xie et al., 2012), our findings show that neither frequency of visits nor engagement in SMRMB significantly differ by age groups above and beyond the influence of demographics, Web-use skills, and other related Facebook activities. As prior work suggests that older adults' SNS adoption is primarily driven by the need to connect with family and close friends (Goode, 2011), it is possible that because older adults' Facebook networks consist of a higher proportion of "actual" friends, they may be more motivated to use the site and engage in SMRMB to maintain these relationships, offsetting their privacy concerns and any technical difficulties they might experience. Overall, our results suggest that older adults' Facebook network seems to mirror their offline ones—that is, older users' Facebook networks are smaller and narrower, with a higher ratio of "actual" to total friends, compared to younger users. Such network structures may motivate older adults to use the site and maintain these relationships as actively as do their younger counterparts.

Second, findings regarding the relationships between older adults' Facebook use and social benefits highlight the specific Facebook practices that are more beneficial to the older population. As expected, we found that SMRMB is positively associated with access to useful information. It is possible that because SMRMB, such as commenting on friends' posts, has the potential to be seen by all members of the recipient's network (not just one's own network, as are reached by a status update), engagement in SMRMB may increase the likelihood of interacting with friends of friends and possibility of accessing useful information from these weak ties. These

findings are consistent with prior work on FRMB and bridging social capital among younger age groups (e.g., Ellison et al., 2014). Moreover, our study extends prior work on FRMB by examining how SMRMB as well as other Facebook practices are associated with the social benefits linked to bonding ties, namely perceived support. Results show that SMRMB and the number of "actual" friends on the site positively predict users' perceived support, while the ratio of "actual" to total friends and frequency of visits are not significant predictors. It may be that the number of quality connections increases the likelihood of receiving meaningful support and that engagement in SMRMB can cultivate social relationships, which, in turn, increases the likelihood of receiving support.

Collectively, we found that older Facebook users' networks consist of fewer total and "actual" friends, and a higher ratio of "actual" to total friends than younger users. Interestingly, although substantial research shows that older adults have more barriers to Internet and SNS use, such as cognitive declines (Czaja et al., 2010) and privacy concerns (Xie et al., 2012), our results show that older adults' Facebook practices, including frequency of visit and likelihood of engagement in SMRMB, do not significantly differ from their younger counterparts. These Facebook practices may be motivated by the higher proportion of "actual" friends in their networks. Furthermore, consistent with prior research on younger age groups (e.g., Ellison et al., 2014), our findings show that older users' access to types of social benefits is not conferred simply by the existence of any connections on Facebook or being on the site. Instead, access to social benefits may depend on the number of quality connections and users' level of engagement in relationship maintenance behaviors such as responding to requests for help.

Limitations and Implications for Future Technological Interventions

This study has some limitations that future work should address. Given the cross-sectional research design, the directionality of the observed relationships is unclear. Further, single-item measures of social support and access to useful information should be replaced with multi-item scales in future work. Finally, future efforts should conduct qualitative research such as interviews with seniors to better describe how and why older adults are and are not using SNSs. Despite these limitations, our findings suggest two important implications for technological interventions that aim to use Facebook or other related platforms to help older adults better access social benefits.

First, as our results show that older users have fewer "actual" friends—connections that may be likely to be stronger offline connections (Ellison et al., 2011)—than younger users and that the number of "actual" friends is associated with increased levels of perceived support among older users, it is important to help older adults expand their quality connections on SNS platforms. When designing technological interventions, scholars have become increasingly aware of older adults' need to communicate with family members. For example, Lindley (2012) proposes lightweight messaging systems that facilitate communication between older adults and their children and grandchildren in particular. However, our results suggest that older adults may perceive more support

via SNS platforms if the interventions can help them to connect not only to family members but also to stronger offline connections. Indeed, prior work shows that both kin and non-kin ties are important for older adults' well-being although they meet different interpersonal needs; kin ties provide substantive forms of support whereas non-kin ties are sources of enjoyment and feelings of autonomy (Larson, Mannell, & Zuzanek, 1986). The technological features supported by SNSs may be well-suited for enhancing older adults' ability to receive social benefits associated with non-kin relations. For example, interviewing middle-aged and older SNS users, Quinn (2013) found that SNSs' technical and social options, such as search features, recommendation algorithms, and visibility of friends' networks, often help these users reconnect with dormant ties or old friends with whom they have lost touch, such as former classmates and colleagues. Likewise, a recent study shows that SNS use is associated with increased feelings of connectedness to a network of friends and the contribution of SNS use to such feelings increases as people become older (Yu et al., 2015). As there is evidence that older adults often develop new social connections (often weak ties) to compensate for the loss of ties due to life transitions, such as retirement and widowhood (Cornwell & Laumann, 2015), SNS use may play an increasingly important role in assisting older adults to cultivate dormant ties as they adapt to the later-life challenges. Thus, rather than solely focusing on the connections with family members, technological interventions may help older adults better connect with quality contacts.

Second, as findings show that SMRMB is associated with increased access to perceived support and useful information, it is important that technological interventions incorporate interaction features and encourage older adults to engage in relationship maintenance behaviors. For example, when Cornejo et al. (2013) redesigned a digital display showing photos from an older adult's family network, altering it from a one-way (i.e., exposing older adults to family updates) to a two-way communication system (i.e., older adults could send feedback), the change strengthened the relationships between the older participants and their weaker ties that were more difficult to meet in person. Brandtzæg (2012) also demonstrated the positive implications of engagement in interactive behaviors on SNSs in a longitudinal study. In particular, he found that *socializers*, those who frequently engage in socializing activities with SNS connections, perceive higher levels of bridging social capital than *lurkers*, those who mainly engage in consumptive behaviors, such as looking at photos and finding information about friends. As SNS's technological features, such as commenting or clicking on the "like" button, allow users to respond to another user easily and explicitly, lowering the cost of maintaining relationships with multiple others, it is essential to encourage older adults to engage in relationship maintenance activities to increase their access to social benefits.

Conclusion

This study uses a nationally representative sample to investigate Facebook use in the older population—an important component of the U.S. population with growing rates of SNS adoption. Results of the study show that older users' Facebook networks are

smaller and narrower than those of younger users, which seems to mirror their offline network structures (Antonucci & Akiyama, 1987; Carstensen, 1993). Further, despite the research evidence that shows that older adults have more barriers to SNS use than younger adults, such as cognitive declines (Czaja et al., 2010) and privacy concerns (Xie et al., 2012), we found that older adults visit the site and engage in SMRMB as frequently as their younger counterparts. It may be that the higher proportion of "actual" friends who are likely to be stronger connections in their networks (Ellison et al., 2011) motivates older adults to visit the site and engage in SMRMB as actively as do their younger counterparts. Further analysis suggests that, as opposed to simply being online or connecting to any social tie, engagement in relationship maintenance behaviors and connection with those considered "actual" friends are more beneficial for older adults' access to social benefits. Together, these findings suggest that technological interventions could help older adults connect to more stronger contacts, and engage in relationship maintenance behaviors more frequently. In doing so, innovative technological interventions may help make older adults' SNS activities more productive, allowing them to use these platforms to acquire support and useful information. Thus, our findings highlight important directions for technological interventions meant to ensure the social benefits associated with SNS use are equally available to older adults as well as the younger demographics that are the focus of most of the marketing attention and academic research.

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Emotional Contagion or Symbolic Cognition? A Social Identity Perspective on Media Events

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Emotional Contagion or Symbolic Cognition? A Social Identity Perspective on Media Events

Xi Cui

This study aims to understand the psychological mechanisms of the generation of viewers' emotional reactions in successful media events and the role of social identity in the process. An online survey was conducted among Chinese viewers shortly after an important national ceremony was broadcast in China. A direct route between viewers' media consumption and emotional arousal and a mediated route between them through cognition of the symbolism in the event were found. However, high-nationalist viewers were only aroused through symbolic cognition, while low-nationalist viewers gained emotions through both the direct and the indirect routes. The findings suggest two psychological mechanisms of ritual communications moderated by social identities and clarify the role of social identity in media ritual theories.

Media event as a theoretical lens has been used to study large-scale mediated rituals in numerous contexts (Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz, 2009; Mitu & Poulakidakos, 2016). Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that media events function to cohere our geographically dispersed modern societies across space, time, and individuals in the same way as Durkheimian totem worships do to tightly knit tribes (Durkheim, 1995).

However, this integrative notion of media events has come under challenge. Katz and Liebes (2007) contend that the socio-cultural and technological conditions necessary for effective media events are fading away. It is inevitable that audiences in our more fragmented contemporary society will pay attention only to disruptive and traumatic breaking news such as disasters or terrorist attacks rather than to the integrative and ceremonial genre of media events. Reasons for this change include the undermined collective experience of broadcasting, people's increased cynicism about social establishments, and their disillusion with the ceremonial genre's awe-inviting power.

If effective social integration through media events rests on monopolized media attention, meaning a shared social experience, and unified identification with the social center represented in the media events, Katz and Liebes' bleak view of media

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events seems to rest on the breaking down of them (Bilić, 2014; Jiménez-Martínez, 2014; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015). However, there have also been research findings on rituals that are successfully celebrated or appropriated by multiple identity groups in a pluralistic society (Baumann, 1992). Even classic media events can still be held successfully in today's world (Cui, 2013; Uimonen, 2015; Widholm, 2016).

Therefore, we must ask whether a strong, pre-existing identification with a certain social center is necessary for a successful media event, which is usually marked by visible collective effervescence. If not, what is the source of the excitement that signals the success of rituals regardless of the degree of identification of the participants?

To tackle this question, this research invokes theories about ritual and social psychology theories to empirically test the psychological mechanisms of Chinese viewers' emotional reactions to the live broadcast of a national ceremony. More importantly, the study seeks to explore the role of social identity in promoting viewers' emotional reactions to media events and the relevancy of media events in our contemporary societies.

The Victory Day Commemoration as a Nationalistic Media Event

On September 3, 2015, the Chinese government held a large-scale ceremony in Beijing to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the victories of the Anti-Japanese War and the World Anti-Fascist War (hereafter, the Commemoration). It was live-broadcast to the entire country on all major national and provincial television channels. The ceremony included playing the national anthem and raising the national flag, a speech given by President Xi Jinping, inspection of the troops by Xi, a military parade consisting of squads of goose-stepping troops, cavalcades of vehicles carrying cutting-edge weaponry, formations of aircraft flyovers, and the release of hundreds of white doves over Tian'anmen Square, the symbolic center of Communist China. Between these scenes, the military chorus sang well-known anti-Japanese War-era songs. The live broadcast of the Commemoration gained a television rating of 26 percent and a share of over 80 percent in almost all demographic groups (TVTV, 2015). China Central Television's reports on social media garnered almost two hundred million page views and six million comments, "likes," and "shares" (CCTV, 2015).

A Media Event of Coronation

The Commemoration is a typical media event (Dayan & Katz, 1992), the high holiday of mass communication that aims to renew people's allegiance to the social collective with a secular, mass media ritual. Dayan and Katz theorized this mass media genre based on their analyses of the live coverage of important events such as JFK's funeral, the moon landing, and the opening ceremonies of the Olympics. Media event theory is firmly rooted in the tradition of Durkheim's (1995) sociology

of religion. It posits that the purposes of these mediated social rituals are to reiterate shared meanings, renew group loyalty, and reassure participants about sacred values and beliefs.

The live broadcast of the Commemoration strictly follows the tripartite formula of media events laid out by Dayan and Katz (1992). First, syntactically, the Commemoration is planned outside the media by the central government. Meanwhile, this 2-hour event interrupts all major television channels' routine programming and is broadcast live. In fact, September 3 has been made an official public holiday called "Victory Day," and the entire country is given a day off. These syntactic arrangements separate this event from banal everyday life and formally announce its significance. Semantically, President Xi Jinping's speech, the news reports, and the narrators repeatedly refer to the event as "historic." The symbolic elements in the ceremony, the national flag, the World War II veterans, the troops and weaponry are "presented with reverence and ceremony" (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 7). Pragmatically, the Commemoration enthralls large audiences and cements the viewers' identification with the sacred center of the society as attested to by the extraordinary media ratings and the enthusiastic responses online. Our survey also shows that viewers of the live broadcast in general experienced a high level of emotional arousal.

Furthermore, the Commemoration is a typical media event of coronation, the subgenre that is specifically oriented toward social integration. Dayan and Katz (1992) distinguished three scripts of media events: contest, conquest, and coronation. "Contests pit evenly matched individuals or teams against each and bid them to compete according to strict rules" (p. 32). Examples include presidential debates and the Olympic Games. Conquests such as the live broadcast of the moon landing are usually one-time events where human beings reach beyond their normal limits through an act of free will and gain charismatic recognition. Coronations are socially integrative in that they follow rules of tradition or custom, and pit ritual (subjunctive reality) against banal reality. The role of television is "reverent" and "priestly" and the role of the audience is to "[renew] contract with the social center" and "[pledge] allegiance" (pp. 34–35). Weddings, funerals, and royal coronations are typical examples. The Commemoration follows the rules of custom, including singing the national anthem, raising the national flag, the president's inspection of the troops, and a spectacular military parade. It invokes the basic narratives of the society, which will be elaborated on later. The purpose is to renew the people's pride in their motherland, or in political observers' words, to strengthen the perceived legitimacy of the Party and President Xi Jinping himself.

Symbolism in the Commemoration Event

Many of the strictly followed customs and traditions in the media event of coronation involve symbolism. By invoking the socially constructed symbolism, rituals including media events articulate, confirm, and renew the participants' sense of connection with and loyalty to the "higher things" such as social meanings, values,

and identities. Some have argued that this large-scale military parade, which is usually held only on every 10th of the National Days, is a deliberate move by the President to present himself as a strongman and to divert the public's attention from a slowing economy through a collective esteem-infused national image (Buckley, 2015).

The meanings of the sacred identity of modern China that saturate the Commemoration ceremony have been constructed throughout the Party's rule since the 1940s. Gries (2006) argues that the Communists have created two major themes to legitimize their rule: 1) pride in the superiority of China's 5,000 years of civilization and 2) elimination of the century-old humiliation arising from the 1840 Opium War and replacing it with pride in the victory of the Anti-Japanese War. The government has been constructing, perpetuating, and capitalizing on these themes through many national rituals. The Commemoration and its military parade are a perfect opportunity for a society-wide ritual that reiterates this national narrative, which has developed a sacred meaning for the society.

There are many symbolic elements in the ceremony that speak directly to the second narrative. The national anthem and the solemn ceremony of raising the national flag are undoubtedly symbolic of national identity, particularly the lyrics of the anthem articulating the Chinese people's struggle under the Party's leadership against colonial invasion by Western countries. Xi's speech spells out the significance of the victory of the Anti-Japanese War as the end of a century of humiliation as well as the Chinese people's contribution to the World Anti-Fascist War. The veterans who fought in the war ride the floats passing the Tian'anmen Tower and reiterate a similar message. President Xi's troop inspection as well as the spectacular parade of cutting-edge weaponry signal that China is now an equal partner, not a humiliated subject (Cui, 2013).

Nationalism as a Social Identity

The military-themed Commemoration adheres to the master narrative of the country's identity construction, and clearly carries a nationalistic undertone. According to Gries (2004), the government recognizes the need to capitalize on the popular nationalistic sentiment, especially among the younger generation who do not identify as strongly with the Party as their parents' generation does. Furthermore, the government also realizes that the sentiment has to be not only accommodated, but also contained. "As China opens up to the world, such unilateral assertions of China's status as a victor in World War II are no longer satisfying to many Chinese, especially those insecure about their nation's victor status" (p. 74). This ceremony, attended by more than 30 foreign leaders and troops from 17 countries, can be seen as a direct appeal to this populist nationalistic sentiment.

Nationalism has been theorized as one of the two dimensions of national identity, the other one being patriotism (Blank, 2003; Schatz & Staub, 1997). National identity describes the perceived closeness with one's own country and the intensity of this

feeling (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). The dimension of patriotism refers to the love of country, sometimes with a critical and constructive component, while nationalism refers to the belief in the superiority and domination of one's own nation over others (Druckman, 1994). Therefore, nationalism is sometimes also called chauvinism or blind patriotism, "a rigid and inflexible attachment to country, characterized by unquestioning positive evaluation" (Schatz, Staub, & Lavine, 1999, p. 153). Nationalism reflects a person's idealization of his or her own nation and its history, which is exactly what the Commemoration as a social ritual is trying to convey.

From Symbolic Cognition to Intensive Emotions

Social solidarity or ideological alignment as a function of any ritual is not achieved through boring indoctrination. Instead, it comes through heightened collective emotional reactions during ritual participations, what Durkheim (1995) calls the collective effervescence.

The collective emotions that audiences feel during media events is the modern day equivalent of the collective effervescence in totemic worship (Dayan & Katz, 1992). In primitive societies, intense feelings about the collectivity are generated through the participants physically enacting rituals together. Possessed by these intense feelings, they experience themselves as sharing the collective identity represented by the symbolism in the rituals. In sophisticated industrial societies, people often participate in rituals through the media. Through the live broadcast of ceremonial events, a geographically dispersed population can be temporally synchronized through the symbolic representation of a higher reality. The intense collective emotions these events generate reinforce social identity (Jiménez-Martínez, 2014; Uimonen, 2015; Widholm, 2016).

Thus, the success of media events in evoking the collective effervescence depends on pre-existing knowledge about the symbols and meanings involved in them, implying a certain level of identification with the sacred center. In other words, the social function of media events is predicated on a homogeneous identification with the social center (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz & Liebes, 2007). However, identity theorists in psychology argue that a collective view of these social rituals, which represent the beliefs and practices of a collective, lacks the ability to explain individual differences in behavior, motivation, and interactions (Stets & Burke, 2005).

In the tradition of social psychology, social identity is defined as "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him of this group membership" (Tajfel, 1972, p. 292). As part of a person's self-concept, social identity is regarded as being based on a specific individual's intergroup social comparisons. People make these comparisons to confirm or establish the distinctiveness of their in-group. Such a goal is driven by the need for self-esteem (Turner, 1975). However, an external group is not always explicitly invoked to articulate in-group identity and solidarity. Such is the case with rituals. Turner and colleagues (Turner, 1985; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, &

Wetherell, 1987) later extended the social identity theory to create the self-categorization theory. Their goal was to identify how a process based on in-group traits can raise the salience of identity and its relevant emotions (also see Glynn & Navis, 2013; Leonardelli & Toh, 2015).

The self-categorization theory contends that people define themselves and others as part of the in-group based on the extent to which they conform to existing in-group prototypes. These prototypes are "a cognitive representation of features that describe and prescribe attributes of the group" (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 123). Prototypes are fuzzy, abstract, and context-dependent. They can be accessed by briefly priming them in the evaluation situation, or they can be chronically cultivated and evoked when the subjects are motivated to enhance their self-concept. Specific situations can trigger certain prototypes to become salient in order to maximize in-group similarity (normative fit) and inter-group differences (comparative fit) (Oakes, Turner, & Haslam, 1991). Due to the perceived similarity, a higher level of identification with the target, not as distinct individuals but as embodiments of the in-group prototype, is achieved. Therefore, social solidarity within the group can be effectively reinforced in contexts such as organizations and media consumption (Chiang, Suen, & Hsiao, 2013; Hogg & Hardie, 1991; Mou, Miller, & Fu, 2015).

The social categorization of the self provides a social identity-based psychological explanation of media events. The consumption of media events is the interactive situation where a ritualistic version of the social reality is presented to the viewers. Because the reality presented in these media events is ritualistic, it is "subjunctive" (Rothenbuhler, 1998, p. 15). In other words, the representation in media events is not meant to reflect what the world is, but rather what the world is supposed to be. By definition, it is the normative fit with the in-group prototype that will lead to the salience of group identity.

Meanwhile, the self-categorization theory also posits that, in certain situations, prototypes are invoked as a tool to explain the social world and legitimize in-group behaviors and attitudes (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994; Tajfel, 1981). A congruity or incongruity between one's self-perception in a specific situation and the identity prototypes can result in various emotional responses. When there is a match between the chronically built identity prototype and the perception of the meanings to the self as relevant in a transient situation, self-verification is achieved and positive emotional arousal occurs (Burke & Stets, 1999; Stets & Serpe, 2013). Meanwhile, the intensity of the emotions in response to identity-related situations is determined by the importance of the identity in a person's identity hierarchy (Cast & Burke, 2002; Stets & Burke, 2014).

The Commemoration as a media event is a transient situation where the viewers with a nationalistic identity consume highly symbolic audio-visual elements. Because of the ritualistic nature of the events, these symbolic representations of the national image are by definition a normative fit with the nationalistic prototypes in the viewers' cognition. Therefore, the match between the symbolic representation in the events and the prototypes should result in self-verification that leads to positive emotional responses. Based on the literature, we posit that:

H_1: The viewers' consumption of national media events should be positively related to their emotional reactions to them.

H_2: The positive relationship between the media consumption and the viewers' emotional reactions (H_1) should be mediated through their cognition of the highly symbolic representations in the events.

Given that these theories are all identity-based, we also expect that the viewers' situation-specific in-group identity, in this case a nationalistic national identity, will moderate the intensity of their emotional responses. Therefore,

H_3: The mediated relationship between watching national media events and the viewers' emotional reactions should be stronger for people who express a higher level of nationalism than for those who express a lower level of nationalism.

Emotional Reactions as a Contagion

The intensive emotional state is a definitive characteristic of rituals, both religious and secular. In some instances, it seems these moments of powerful emotions do not necessarily flow from the symbolic presentations in the rituals or the fit between them and the prototypes. Instead, as anthropologists have noted, it sometimes seems to be a direct result of being in the moment and in the space. It is simply emotional contagion. Durkheim (1995) argues that "[t]he very act of congregating is an exceptionally powerful stimulant.... Every emotion expressed resonates without interference in consciousness that are wide open to external impressions, each one echoing the others" (pp. 217–218). In modern events, even though people do not usually fall into the thrall of complete ecstasy, there is still a high level of enthrallment that is absent in daily life when they watch the live coverage of superhuman events such as the achievements of athletes in the Olympic games or the moon landing of an astronaut. As Durkheim (1995) said, "There are transports of enthusiasm" (p. 217).

By studying the micro-level mechanism of rituals, Randall Collins (2004) provides a model he calls interaction ritual chains to explain the generation and maintenance of rituals and the emotional reactions to them without resorting to a pre-existing identification with the social center. He argues that for a ritual to be successful, participants need to be physically present in a specific situation and engaged in a focused interaction, meaning a mutual focus of attention that can transform a banal co-presence into a full-scale encounter. The mutual focus creates a positive feedback loop with a shared mood. In this process, rhythmic entrainment intensifies the feedback and generates collective effervescence (see a figure of the model in Collins, 2004, p. 231). The theory posits that an individual's mood, although shared with others in a ritual situation, is a transient emotional state. It has to be maintained and intensified through a constant, mutual focus of attention. Rhythms of behavior,

speech, or music help synchronize the ritual participants into a state of entrainment. In fact, Durkheim (1995) alluded to this rhythmic entrainment in his reading of the ethnographic records. He said, "Probably because a collective emotion cannot be expressed collectively without some order that permits harmony and unison of movement, these gestures and cries tend to fall into rhythm and regularity, and from there into songs and dances" (p. 218). Psychologists have empirically confirmed that shared attention in group settings can indeed intensify collective emotions among participants (Shteynberg, 2015; Shteynberg et al., 2014).

The interaction ritual chains differ from Durkheim's ritual formula with regard to the role of sacred symbols and social solidarity. Durkheim and the social identity-based psychology theories reviewed previously seem to assume the participants' knowledge of the symbols as cognitive prototypes before they take part in the rituals. However, Collins' model does not assume any pre-existing knowledge about the sacred meanings that people invoke in the rituals. Instead, he sees the sacralization of objects as the outcome of rituals minted through collective effervescence, providing an explanation of how identification is generated for those who are in a ritual situation but have no pre-existing group identity. Supporting this contention, developmental psychologists have found some evidence of children forming group affiliations simply through practicing behaviors collectively and simultaneously with others (Herrmann, Legare, Harris, & Whitehouse, 2013).

Therefore, following the model of interaction ritual chains, we hypothesize that:

H_4: There is a direct, positive relationship between watching national media events and the intensity of the viewers' emotional reactions.

The interaction ritual chains model assumes no prior social identity in the rituals. Therefore, the emotional reactions in the rituals are theorized to be a result of pure emotional contagion. It is not clear whether people with a certain level of existing identification with the collective will become emotionally elated through this contagion alone or whether this emotional contagion is an element in addition to the mediation of symbolic cognitions. Thus, we also investigate the following question:

RQ_1: Does the level of nationalism of the viewers moderate the direct relationship between watching national media events and their emotional reactions to them?

Methods

Data Collection and Measurements

Given the time-sensitive nature of the study, we used a student sample to ensure that the measurements could be completed in a timely manner. An online survey was distributed to students in two large universities in northern and southern China

within 2 days after the live broadcast. The majority of responses came within a week of the event. A total of 337 valid responses were collected, and 206 respondents watched the Commemoration live. There were 118 male participants and 88 females in the final sample. The average age was 19.7 years (SD = 3.6). The majority of the participants were in college, with only seven studying in graduate schools.

Student samples have been used in studies of the consumption and effects of media that involve the measurement of social identity (e.g., Godlewski & Perse, 2010; Haridakis & Hanson, 2009; Shade, Kornfield, & Oliver, 2015). Investigations of the data demonstrated no differences with regard to the emotional responses across demographic categories including school, age, gender, or educational level. Although this result does not address the issue of the representativeness of the student sample, it at least shows the absence of confounding influences from the demographic characteristics.

For those who had watched the Commemoration, we asked them to rate the attention they gave to the broadcast on a 5-point Likert-scale. Doing so provided more nuanced variations in their viewing behavior. The average level of attentiveness was quite high (M = 3.5, SD = .9).

Emotional reaction was measured with a 3-item scale based on the adjectives of the positive polar of aroused mood (Mackay, Cox, Burrows, & Lazzerini, 1978). The reliability on this scale is .926. We also calculated an average score of the items for each viewer (M = 3.49, SD = .61).

We measured cognition about the symbolic elements by asking viewers about their memory of the most symbolic elements of the Commemoration including: 1) playing the national anthem and raising the national flag, 2) President Xi Jinping giving a speech and inspecting the troops, 3) the military parade and exhibition of weaponry, 4) the parade of veterans, 5) the playing of anti-Japanese war songs and 6) the release of the white doves (Cronbach's α = .776).

We assessed the viewers' level of nationalism with Kosterman and Feshbach's nationalism scale (1989). As an indicator of national identity, it has been used to study issues such as people's political attitudes, consumer decisions, and the use of sports media (e.g. Billings, Brown, & Brown-Devlin, 2015; Kalmoe & Gross, 2016; Tsai, Yoo, & Lee, 2013). Five items from the scale were translated into Chinese and adapted to the expression of nationalism in the Chinese context (Cronbach's α = .778). We then calculated a composite variable for nationalism (M = 2.85, SD = .66) and divided the responses into high nationalism (105 responses, M = 2.35, SD = 0.41) and low nationalism groups (101 responses, M = 3.38, SD = 0.40) using the median score of 2.80. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of the measurements.

Data Analysis

To test H_1, which posited the existence of a relationship between the attentiveness of watching and the viewers' emotional reactions, we conducted a correlation test.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Zero-Order Correlations among the Measurements. ($N_{Low\ Nationalism}$ = 105, $N_{High\ Nationalism}$ = 101)

	Mean	S.D.	2	3	4
1. Attentiveness	3.41/3.65^{+}	.95/.89	.382**/.391**	.432**/.185	.040/.005
2. Memory	3.37/3.60*	.65/.68		.462**/.495**	.261**/.194
3. Emotional reaction	3.60/4.10***	.97/.73			.162/.175
4. Nationalism	2.53/3.52***	.45/.38			

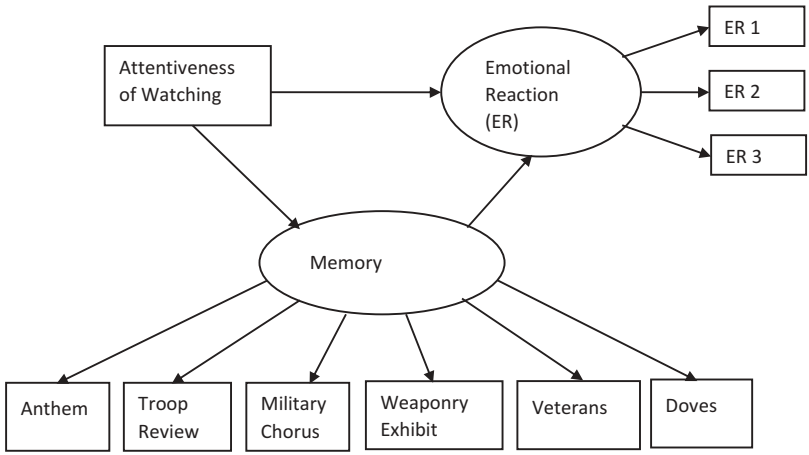
Note. Numbers of the low nationalism group are on the left and high nationalism group on the right; Memory, Emotional Reaction and Nationalism are average scores of the multi-item scales; asterisks in the column of means signal group differences; + $p < .06$, *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

H_2 and H_4 hypothesized mediated and direct relationships between attentiveness and emotional reactions. They were tested with a structural equation model for the entire sample with bootstrapping to calculate both direct- and indirect-effect estimates in Amos 22. H_3 and RQ_1 sought to explain the moderating effect of nationalism on the mediated and the direct relationships. We subjected H_3 and RQ_1 to a multi-group (high and low nationalism) test of the structural equation model derived from H_2 and H_4. Bootstrapping was also performed in the multi-group test. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed model of the psychological mechanisms of the generation of emotional reactions to media events.

The procedures of the multi-group SEM analysis follow the study of Wang, Segev, and Liu (2015) based on the tests of chi-square differences between models with paths constrained and unconstrained across groups. To test for multi-group invariance, we must ensure that the two groups both have a good fit with the proposed model. Therefore, we conducted two separate SEM tests, and both groups demonstrated a good fit (low nationalism: X^2 (df = 31) = 22.690, p = ..860, SRMR = .0364, RMSEA = .00, CFI = 1.00; high nationalism: X^2 (df = 31) 32.825, p = .378, SRMR = .0498, RMSEA = .024; CFI = .994).

To test for group invariance in the proposed model, the two groups need to be invariant on the measurement level. Therefore, we first tested the measurement model with all factor loadings on the latent variables (memory and emotional reaction) allowed to vary in each group. The results showed a good fit with the unconstrained model (X^2 (df = 62) = 55.517, p = .707, SRMR = .0498, RMSEA = .000; CFI = 1.00). Then, we tested the measurement model again with all factor loadings constrained or assumed to be equal in the high and low nationalism groups. The results also showed a good fit (X^2 (df = 69) = 59.715, p = .780, SRMR = .0507, RMSEA = .000; CFI = 1.00). Finally, a chi-square test showed no

Figure 1
Proposed Model of the Psychological Mechanisms of the Generation of Emotional Reactions to Media Event



significant differences between the constrained and unconstrained measurement models (ΔX^2 ($\Delta df = 7$) = 4.198, p = .757).

With the good fit and group invariance of the measurement model confirmed, the structural model was further tested for fit and group invariance. The structural model was first tested with all paths unconstrained. The results showed a good fit for the entire sample with path coefficients changing across groups (X^2 (df = 62) = 55.517, p = .707, SRMR = .0498, RMSEA = .000; CFI = 1.00). Then all paths were constrained to be equal across groups, and a new set of fit indices for the model was generated (X^2 (df = 65) = 64.692, p = .487, SRMR = .0578, RMSEA = .000; CFI = 1.00). The chi-square difference between the unconstrained and constrained structural models was significant (ΔX^2 ($\Delta df = 3$) = 9.175, p = .027), suggesting a significant difference between the high and low nationalism groups in the paths of the structural model. To determine which path(s) created the discrepancy between the groups, we constrained one path at a time to test the structural model's chi-square difference from the unconstrained structural model. Only when the path from attentiveness to emotional reaction was constrained (X^2 (df = 63) = 63.074, p = .474, SRMR = .0573, RMSEA = .002; CFI = 1.00) was the chi-square difference from the unconstrained model significant (ΔX^2 ($\Delta df = 1$) = 7.557, p = .006).

The standardized path coefficients of all of the viewers are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Standardized Coefficients of the Paths in the SEM Model ($N_{Low\ Nationalism} = 105$, $N_{High\ Nationalism} = 101$)

	Low nationalism group	High nationalism group	Groups combined
Attentiveness ->Memory	.395***	.442***	.438***
Memory-> Emotional reaction	.459***	.633***	.552***
Attentiveness -> Emotional Reaction (indirect)	.181**	.280**	.242**
Attentiveness -> Emotional Reaction (direct)	.274**	−.091	.123

Note. *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

Results

H_1 posited that there would be a significant and positive relationship between the attentiveness of watching and the viewers' emotional reactions. The data confirmed a moderate relationship between the two variables (Pearson's $r\,(206) = .399$, $p < .001$). We tested the relationships between the attentiveness of watching the Commemoration and emotional reaction to it, mediated through cognition of the symbolic elements (H_2) and directly (H_4) in one structural equation model with the entire sample of both high and low levels of nationalism (X^2 (df = 31) = 234.866, p = .289, SRMR = .0326, RMSEA = .000, CFI = 1.00). Although the data fit well with the model, the direct relationship between the attentiveness of watching and the emotional arousal was not significant ($p = .08$). Therefore, H_4 was not supported regardless of the level of the viewers' nationalism. However, the relationship between the attentiveness of watching and emotional reaction mediated through memory (H_2) was confirmed for the entire sample (path coefficient of the indirect effect, $\beta = .242$, $p < .01$).

H_3 predicted that the mediated path would be more pronounced for highly nationalistic groups. As the analyses showed, although the changes in the coefficient between the two groups in the mediated paths were consistent with H_3 (see Table 2), they failed to reach a statistically significant level (Attentiveness->Memory constrained: ΔX^2 (Δdf = 1) = .363, p = .547; Memory->Emotional Reaction constrained: ΔX^2 (Δdf = 1) = .059, p = .808). A possible explanation of this result will be provided in the discussion section.

The answer to RQ_1 regarding the difference between the two nationalism groups in the direct relationship between the attentiveness of watching and emotional reaction comes from the significant change in the chi-square between the multi-group SEM model tests with this specific relationship constrained or unconstrained (ΔX^2 (Δdf = 1) = 7.557, p = .006). Specifically, the standardized coefficient of this path moved from .274 ($p < .01$) in the low nationalism group to non-significant in the high

nationalism group. Therefore, nationalism does moderate the direct relationship between the attentiveness of watching and the viewers' emotional reactions. Only those viewers who expressed little nationalistic feeling became excited when watching the Commemoration.

Discussion

This research seeks to identify the mechanisms of collective effervescence among viewers of a successful media event and determine whether a strong pre-existing social identity is a pre-requisite for this elated emotional reaction. Our findings demonstrate that there are two routes to watching a media event and the emotional reaction to it depending on the viewers' level of social identity. The multi-group test of the structural equation model reveals that people who feel very nationalistic become elated only through their recognition and remembrance of the symbolic elements presented in the media event. In contrast, those with little nationalistic sentiment become emotionally elated primarily directly from watching the event live, and, to a marginally less extent, by remembering the symbolic elements of it. The findings suggest several theoretical implications.

Identity from Emotional Contagion or Symbolic Cognition?

The dual-path structure of emotional reactions revealed in this research contributes to our understanding of the mechanisms of social cohesion through media events. Menges and Kilduff (2015) found that sociologists tend to theorize group emotions and, by extension, group cohesion, as a result of institutionalization, or people being introduced to "emotion-producing norms and rituals" (p. 856). This notion corresponds with the direct route that does not assume pre-existing identification with the group but generates group affiliation as an outcome of rituals. In contrast, psychologists tend to theorize group emotion in relation to people's identification, or "the extent they identify with the same group" (p. 862). This idea corresponds to the mediated route where existing cultural knowledge about the group is a pre-requisite. Our findings suggest that both perspectives have some elements of accuracy in them, but they need to be synthesized.

First, the direct route, the pure emotional contagion that does not rely on knowledge about the symbols, runs counter to the central role of symbols in functionalist ritual theories that are indebted to Durkheim's (1995) study of the sociology of religion. The fact that this route is only significant for those with a low level of nationalistic feeling provides a possible explanation of how identification is generated, rather than just reinforced. This path from a shared focus to aroused emotional responses does not assume a pre-existing in-group solidarity or understanding of the symbolic objects. Rather, as Collins (2004) argues, when ritual participants are mutually entrained, the shared mood becomes a barrier to outsiders, and, together

with the intensive feelings, generates group solidarity and symbolic cognitions of the mutually focused objects. These objects symbolize social relationship and become "sacred" as the result of collective effervescence.

The direct route suggests the continued validity of the genre of media events in contemporary societies questioned by Katz and Liebes (2007). In a society of fragmented identities, people with little or no identification with certain groups or causes can succumb to emotional contagion and hence come to identify with these groups or causes by watching media events live. Therefore, media events can still exert the cultural power of cohering the society, just not in the classic Durkheimian way through symbolic cognitions.

The second route from watching the event to emotional reactions is mediated by knowledge about the symbolic elements presented in the event. This mediated path is significant for both low and high nationalistic groups. It is consistent with classic theories about ritual and media events theory in that collective effervescence is achieved through people's recognition of the sacred symbols and the feeling of connection with the higher reality.

This route attests to the central role of symbols in modern rituals and the validity of classic theories about ritual and media events theory. This route is significant for both groups, because the viewers have already been imprinted with a social identity prototype of nationalism by the Chinese government, similar to how Lasswell's "significant symbols" of propaganda work (1927). In our sample, the means of the high and low nationalistic groups are less than two standard deviations apart. Thus, a certain level of nationalism even in the low nationalistic group could have contributed to the significance of the mediated route in that group.

Although the two routes are revealed in the synchronic comparison between the two groups, they can certainly work diachronically on the same population. Therefore, emotional contagion and symbolic cognition in succession can describe the entire process of generating and reinforcing identity through media consumption. In this way, media events theory can avoid functionalism in explaining social solidarity and identity, and incorporate social change and the evolution of identity into its framework.

The Continued Relevance of Integrative Media Events in Contemporary Society

The motivation of this research is rooted in the recent debate around the relevance of media events in today's world both as a media genre and a theory of media sociology. The findings suggest that media events still matter. First, the generally high level of viewing activities and emotional reactions among people regardless of their feelings of nationalism indicate the appeal of the live broadcast of large-scale, spectacular, ceremonial events as a television genre. Even in an environment of proliferating media outlets and fragmented attention, these extraordinary cultural moments can still command tremendous public attention and have an impact on society.

Second, media scholars should still pay due attention to integrative media events rather than focusing on disruptive ones. The debate about the relevance of media events centers around its integrative power theorized in the original argument (Dayan & Katz, 1992). Because of the assumed fragmentation of social identity and audience cynicism about social establishments, there is increasing attention given to disruptive disaster marathons (Blondheim & Liebes, 2002), "broken rituals" (Bilić, 2014), and "hijacking" (Price, 2008) in recent studies of media events (Jiménez-Martínez, 2014; Seeck & Rantanen, 2015). However, our study shows that the generation and maintenance of social cohesion is still possible through integrative media events, indicating that studying such events is still theoretically and empirically important, especially when a unified social identity can no longer be taken for granted.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Directions for future research emerge from some limitations of the current study. First, demographically, the sample is relatively homogeneous, making it difficult to differentiate levels of identification. Future studies should examine groups that diverge more in their identification level. It is possible that they will not fit into one model anymore, but the two routes revealed in this study suggest different models for those groups. Second, the entire survey was conducted after the event, so it is a fair critique that the nationalism level should be partly attributed to watching the event, confounding the use of the media and its effect. However, nationalism is a belief system that is usually cultivated over the long term. In contrast, we began the survey 2 days after the event when the short-term media effect should have worn off. Therefore, it is reasonable to use the measurement of nationalism as an indicator of the participants' general ideology. Nevertheless, future studies should conduct pre- and post-exposure measurements to provide a clearer picture.

In general, the study clarifies the ambiguity of the role of social identity in the functioning of media events. The findings suggest that media events can indeed work in the contemporary pluralistic society without assuming a homogenous identification with one sacred social center. In fact, a certain level of identification could be generated through direct affective contagion in collective ritualistic behaviors. Classic ritual theory and media events theory are also correct in noting the role of ritual in cohering society through collective effervescence. Future examination of media events or other social rituals in pluralistic society should take the dimension of social identity into consideration.

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Explaining Media Choice: The Role of Issue-Specific Engagement in Predicting Interest-Based and Partisan Selectivity

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Explaining Media Choice: The Role of Issue-Specific Engagement in Predicting Interest-Based and Partisan Selectivity

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This study analyzes the predictors of 2 types of media selectivity: interest-based (i.e., choice of entertainment over politics) and partisan (i.e., choice of pro-attitudinal over counter-attitudinal or balanced news). Relying on a large survey-based experiment, we find that issue-specific engagement variables, including perceived issue understanding, issue importance, and issue attitude strength, predict interest-based and partisan selectivity above and beyond the influence of general political knowledge, news interest, and strength of political leanings. These results show that the drivers of selectivity are more complex than general political attributes; rather, they are contextual and reflect people's engagement with particular issues.

Although the requirements and limitations of effective citizenship have been debated throughout the history of political thought, many scholars accept that democracies function best when citizens are up-to-date on political events, knowledgeable about the political process, and familiar with multiple viewpoints on relevant issues (e.g., Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). This is because political knowledge is associated with higher rates of electoral participation, democratic values such as tolerance, and political opinions that are more consistent with one's self-interests (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In this view, citizens are expected to gather news and political information, as well as engage with a variety of political perspectives (Mill,

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[1859] 1956). These theoretical expectations, however, are a tall order for average citizens and may not fully reflect the different ways that citizens participate in political and civic life (Schudson, 1998).

This is especially the case in the current media environment, which offers a vast range of choices and requires people's active selection of media content. Where public affairs news is concerned, the primary choice occurs on at least two levels. First, people must choose between news about public affairs and entertainment content. Many people generally prefer the latter (Prior, 2007), and this preference can be labelled *interest-based selectivity*. When people select public affairs news, they face the second level of choice, which involves *partisan selectivity*, namely whether to see content that supports their viewpoint, challenges it, or is balanced (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Stroud, 2008, 2011).

What predicts these choices? Understanding the factors that drive media selectivity is important for assessing the possibilities for effective citizenship in contemporary democracy. Much research to date about predictors of media choice has focused on general political orientations, including political knowledge, interest in news, and strength of political leanings (Garrett, 2009a; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Ksiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010; Prior, 2007; Stroud, 2011). These attributes, however, are relatively stable and imply a certain inevitability about patterns of selectivity: either people orient toward the news or they do not, and either they choose partisan news or they do not. We resist this idea as too simplified, instead proposing that interest-based and partisan selectivity vary contextually, as a function of individuals' level of engagement with specific political issues. Our focus builds on previous work showing that issue attitudes can affect people's selection of political information (Iyengar, Hahn, Krosnick, & Walker, 2008; Kim, 2009; Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). We explore how individuals' engagement with four specific political issues affects both levels of selectivity over and above more stable general political attributes. Our goal is not to produce a theory or typology of issues, but to show the utility and limits of addressing issue-level engagement when studying media choice.

This study provides a more comprehensive picture of the predictors of media choice than has been available so far, in three main ways. First, we build on issue publics research (e.g., Kim, 2009) to demonstrate that political orientations measured at the issue level explain selectivity even after accounting for the contribution of general political attributes. We test the effects of three commonly studied general attributes—political knowledge, political interest, and strength of political leanings—and three closely parallel issue-specific orientations—perceived issue understanding, issue importance, and issue attitude strength—on content choice. Second, we examine both interest-based and partisan selectivity conjointly in a single study. That is, we analyze the extent to which the choice between news and entertainment, and the choice of balanced, pro- or counter-attitudinal news are contingent on individuals' general political attributes versus their level of engagement with the particular issues or topics covered in political news. This is, to our knowledge, the first study to compare the relative importance of general and issue-specific political factors in

predicting the two primary forms of selectivity. Finally, when examining partisan selectivity, we look not only at pro- and counter-attitudinal news preferences, which are a common focus of research, but also consider the selection of balanced articles, which is an important yet understudied aspect of selectivity.

Using a survey-based study with a nationally representative sample, we find that content choice is indeed shaped by issue-specific factors—on top of any effects of stable dispositional traits like generalized knowledge and political leanings—and that these factors work differently for interest-based and partisan selectivity. In what follows, we briefly elaborate on these two levels of content choice and then review prior theory and research relevant to understanding the predictors of interest-based and partisan selectivity.

Two Levels of Selectivity

People tune in to media that satisfy their needs and desires (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1973). Because politics is sometimes perceived as complex or boring, people may opt to avoid politically oriented media. According to Prior (2007), the high-choice media environment has increased attention to entertainment over politics, as people engage in what we term interest-based selectivity. Nearly half of Americans are considered news avoiders (Ksiazek et al., 2010), and when given the opportunity to view news or entertainment, most people choose the latter (Prior, 2007).

Those who choose political news face another choice. They can select content that is congenial to their prior opinions, includes a balance of perspectives, or that challenges their views. Because people prefer messages that support their beliefs (Festinger, 1957) and because they can more easily satisfy this preference when numerous sources are accessible (Mutz & Martin, 2001), mounting research finds that people engage in *partisan selectivity*, selecting pro-attitudinal over counter-attitudinal messages (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Stroud, 2008).

General Political Predictors of Selective Exposure

Research analyzing the predictors of these selection patterns emphasizes the centrality of general political attributes, including political knowledge, news interest, and strength of partisan or ideological leanings. General political knowledge affects individuals' preference for political news generally as well as for congenial news in particular. Cognitive miser theory postulates that people minimize the effort required for information processing and rely on mental shortcuts to form opinions (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Thus, people will avoid complex and cognitively taxing messages, such as political news and counter-attitudinal information, unless they have the cognitive resources necessary for more effortful processing (Redlawsk, 2002). Consistent with this theory, numerous studies show that people with higher levels of political knowledge, as well as education, are more likely to follow news than

those with lower levels (e.g., Ksiazek et al., 2010; Price & Zaller, 1993). Political knowledge also predicts the selection of pro- over counter-attitudinal messages (Stroud, 2011; Taber & Lodge, 2006).

General interest in news and public affairs also affects interest-based and partisan selectivity. When choosing between news and entertainment, those with lower levels of interest in news and public affairs opt for more entertaining options (Prior, 2007). The relationship between political interest and partisan selectivity is less clear. On one hand, individuals with an overall interest in news and politics may see the utility of political information in general, and look to consume diverse types of news as opposed to focusing on pro-attitudinal content (Garrett, Carnahan, & Lynch, 2013). In fact, some studies show that those closely following political news are more likely to select counter-attitudinal information (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). On the other hand, people interested in political news may prefer likeminded sources, especially if such sources are part of their daily news diet. Accordingly, some studies find that the politically interested gravitate toward likeminded political information (Stroud, 2011) and that habitual news exposure positively predicts a preference for attitude-consistent news and negatively predicts a preference for counter-attitudinal news (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009). This pattern may result from variability in how interest and news exposure are measured across studies, or from other factors, such as whether one believes that they could easily refute the information (Albarracín & Mitchell, 2004). Despite mixed findings, political interest is a common variable in models predicting selectivity.

The third general predictor is strength of partisan or ideological beliefs. Strength of general political leanings predicts a preference for news over entertainment (Prior, 2007), as well as exposure to politically likeminded media content (Garrett et al., 2013; Stroud, 2008). Those with stronger partisan identities are more motivated to expend the cognitive energy required to identify and select like-minded media.

The literature on predictors of media choice therefore suggests that politically knowledgeable, interested, and highly partisan citizens will gravitate toward news about public affairs that is likeminded, while their opposites will opt for entertainment. However, few people *always* choose news or *always* choose likeminded content, even if they are knowledgeable and involved partisans. Media choice is known to be contextual; audiences prefer hard news in some instances more than others (Boczkowski & Peer, 2011), and partisan selectivity diminishes when content is useful (Garrett, 2009a; Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012) or comes from credible sources (Westerwick, Kleinman, & Knobloch-Westerwick, 2013). In particular, the political issue covered by news is likely to affect content selection. Selectivity varies with the topic under consideration (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Westerwick et al., 2013; but see Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), and members of "issue publics" choose news about issues of personal concern (Kim, 2009). Building from this research, we propose that interest-based and partisan selectivity also vary contextually, depending on individuals' level of engagement with particular political issues.

Issue-Based Predictors of Selective Exposure

Public opinion theorists have long noted that the general public encompasses loosely organized collectives connected by shared concerns for particular matters (Dewey, 1927). These narrow segments of the public whose members are especially impacted by, or interested in, a political problem are referred to as *issue publics* (Converse & David, 1964). The American electorate consists of numerous issue publics that are particularly concerned about certain political issues but not others (see Iyengar et al., 2008; Krosnick, 1990). An issue is typically defined based on specific government policy questions and includes such concerns as abortion, defense spending, unemployment, health care, or education (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2008; Krosnick, 1990).

Variation in issue-level engagement should, therefore, explain content choice beyond what is accounted for by the general attributes of knowledge, interest, and strength of political leanings. People who are relatively disinterested in government generally may be quite involved with specific issues that reflect their values, interests, or social identities (see Iyengar et al., 2008; Kim, 2009). Also, as the recent conceptualization of "actualizing" citizens suggests, rather than dutifully following all public affairs, some people may engage with particular issues of personal relevance, especially through social networks (Bennett, 2008). Somewhat similarly, the monitorial approach to citizenship argues that citizens should not be expected to rabidly consume all available political content but to instead scan their information environments for issues of concern (Schudson, 1998). Indeed, the growth of digital media, which offer more specialized information, may inspire selective information seeking on the basis of issue-specific variables (Kim, 2012; Peralta, Wojcieszak, Lelkes, & De Vreese, 2016).

A key component of issue public membership is issue importance—that is, how important an issue is to a citizen personally (Kim, 2009; Krosnick, 1990). Beyond importance, researchers also have examined issue-specific knowledge and opinion strength as the basis for distinguishing issue publics (e.g., Peralta et al., 2016; Price, David, Goldthorpe, Roth, & Cappella, 2006). In our analysis, we test whether perceptions of being informed about an issue, ratings of issue importance, and issue-based attitude strength affect both interest-based and partisan selectivity. These indicators constitute issue-specific analogues of the general political attributes that are studied extensively in the literature. This allows for a stringent test as to whether these issue-specific indicators explain interest-based and partisan selectivity above and beyond general political knowledge, political interest, and strength of political leanings. Also, all three indicators are theoretically relevant to selectivity at both levels. We next develop these concepts further.

We conceptualize issue-specific knowledge as one's perceived understanding of an issue, aside from both general political knowledge and an objective test of issue knowledge. This approach follows research on self-perceived knowledge, which finds that how much people think they know is more strongly related to news

media use than objective political knowledge (Hollander, 1995). Our conceptualization is also similar to internal political efficacy (Morrell, 2003) or political information efficacy, which captures an individual's confidence in his or her own knowledge and its sufficiency to engage in politics (Kaid, McKinney, & Tedesco, 2007).

Little previous research has examined the effect of issue-specific knowledge—perceived or actual—on selectivity; however, the same theoretical reasoning that applies to generalized knowledge should apply here as well. Specifically, those who are confident in their understanding of an issue likely see themselves as able to effectively process incoming information about that issue, which should increase their selection of news about the issue over entertainment alternatives.

When it comes to partisan selectivity, those who believe they understand an issue well may not expect counter-attitudinal content to offer any novel or useful information and, in turn, may reject it in favor of attitude-confirming news. People who do not feel well versed about an issue may be more open to counter-attitudinal information as potentially useful, as the information utility perspective suggests (see Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012; Valentino, Banks, Hutchings, & Davis, 2009). Also, knowledge of the existence of unfamiliar counter-attitudinal arguments may create cognitive dissonance, which may be reduced by actual exposure to the counter-attitudinal content (see Sears & Freedman, 1965). When people are confident in their knowledge of opposing perspectives, the motivation to see them dissipates.

We also examine attitudinal attributes, including strength and importance (Krosnick, Boninger, Chuang, Berent, & Carnot, 1993; Peralta et al., 2016). Although attitude strength has been conceptualized variously (Visser, Bizer, & Krosnick, 2006), we use the term to indicate how strongly people feel about an issue, and we define issue importance as how important people feel an issue is to them personally (Boninger, Krosnick, & Berent, 1995). When it comes to interest-based selectivity, attitude strength and its attributes prompt the selection of related political information (Visser et al., 2006). People also seek messages about policies and candidate stances on issues they find personally important (Holbrook, Berent, Krosnick, Visser, & Boninger, 2005; Kim, 2009). Because attitude strength and issue importance reflect the significance a person attaches to an issue, they motivate people to process new information and inspire a search for attitude-relevant messages (Visser et al., 2006). Greater attitude strength and issue importance should thus promote the selection of political news over entertainment.

Attitude strength also should affect partisan selectivity (Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009; Peralta et al., 2016). According to the theory of motivated reasoning (Kunda, 1990), people are driven by accuracy or directional goals, with the former indicating the desire to develop correct opinions, and the latter indicating the desire to protect one's priors. Commitment to one's issue attitude as well as attaching high importance to an issue increase the use of directional goals over accuracy goals when seeking information (Hart et al., 2009). As a result, research shows that people with strong (Taber & Lodge, 2006) and personally important (Westerwick et al., 2013) attitudes prefer like-minded over counter-attitudinal messages.

We expect these issue-specific factors to exert an influence on interest-based and partisan selectivity over and above the influence of general political knowledge, political interest, and strength of political leanings. We propose the following hypotheses, in each case controlling for general political orientations:

H_1: Interest-based selectivity: (a) Perceived issue understanding, (b) issue importance, and (c) attitude strength predict selection of political news over entertainment.

H_2: Partisan selectivity: (a) Perceived issue understanding, (b) issue importance, and (c) attitude strength predict selection of pro-attitudinal over counter-attitudinal news.

In considering partisan selectivity, we also are interested in the predictors of individuals' preference for balanced news (i.e., news that presents different perspectives on an issue). Despite the continued availability of balanced news alongside partisan fare in the contemporary media environment, the selection of balanced news in comparison to pro- and counter-attitudinal news has received little attention in the surge of research on selective exposure (but see Feldman, Stroud, Bimber, & Wojcieszak, 2013; Garrett, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013; Peralta et al., 2016). This oversight is important, as it remains the case, for instance, that the audience for network TV news in the United States—which is generally neutral in orientation—is larger than the partisan cable news audience (Pew Research Center, 2014). Thus, a more complete picture of news choice requires consideration of balanced news alongside partisan news.

The hostile media phenomenon suggests that balanced news can be perceived as counter-attitudinal, particularly by those with greater perceived issue knowledge and stronger attitudinal involvement with an issue (e.g., Matthes, 2013; Vallone, Ross, & Lepper, 1985). As a result, those with high levels of perceived issue understanding, issue importance, and attitude strength may reject or dismiss balanced content, much as they do counter-attitudinal content, in favor of like-minded news. On the other hand, balanced news may not be rejected as strongly as counter-attitudinal content, given that committed voters consume non-partisan sources as well (Garrett, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013), and partisans judge neutral news as less biased than partisan content (Coe et al., 2008). Balanced news, with its commitment to objectivity, represents the dominant tradition in U.S. journalism and therefore may be preferred to partisan news content even among issue-involved citizens. Indeed, research that incorporates balanced political information finds that those with strong and personally important attitudes select more balanced content than pro- or counter-attitudinal content (Peralta et al., 2016). To address these possibilities, we ask:

RQ_1: Do perceived issue understanding, issue importance, and attitude strength predict a preference for pro-attitudinal content over balanced content?

Method

To examine the predictors of interest-based and partisan selectivity, we draw on data from the pretest of a larger pretest-posttest survey-based experiment. The pretest was fielded online during a 3-week period in November and December 2011. The survey and sampling were administered by YouGov, a research organization that maintains an opt-in panel of 1.5 million U.S. residents, recruited via online advertising campaigns, and RDD and mail surveys. Panelists receive incentives through a loyalty program for their participation. YouGov employs sample matching and weighting to construct representative samples from its opt-in panel.

YouGov interviewed 3,325 respondents for the pretest survey, and these respondents were invited to take the posttest survey 3 weeks later—2,848 of whom did so. YouGov then matched these respondents down to a sample of 2,300 to produce the final dataset. The respondents were matched on gender, age, race, education, party identification, ideology, and political interest. The final sample was 54% female, was 73% White, had a mean age of 48.4 (SD = 15.5) and had completed "some college" as their median level of education.

We randomly assigned subjects to one of four issues chosen to elicit different levels of issue understanding, attitude strength, and importance: abortion (n = 569), health care reform (n = 568), teacher funding (n = 592), or gun control (n = 571). Several of these issues have been tested in prior studies, where they have been shown to prompt partisan selectivity (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2011). Random assignment allowed us to control the issue to which participants were exposed while permitting their engagement with that issue to naturally vary. This helped isolate the effect of interest in this study—that is, the influence of issue-level engagement on interest-based and partisan selectivity—by ensuring participants were evenly distributed across issues and avoiding the clustering on one or two higher-salience issues that would likely occur if participants were instead allowed to choose among issues. Although constraining the issue to which subjects were exposed comes at some sacrifice to external validity, by balancing subjects across issues, we can more confidently account for the effects of issue-specific engagement on selectivity.

Dependent Variables

Interest-Based Selectivity. Respondents were asked to choose which article they would most like to read from six different headlines and leads (see Table 1). The options included three entertainment news stories (sports, celebrity, and travel) and three political news stories about their assigned issue. The order of headlines/leads was randomized. Following from Knobloch-Westerwick and Meng (2009), two of the political headlines and leads advocated for different sides of respondents' assigned issue (e.g. either pro-life or pro-choice for abortion) and the third offered a balanced

Table 1
Headlines and Leads for News and Entertainment Articles

	Headline	Lead
Abortion		
Balanced	Abortion Debate Heats Up	There is a heated debate about abortion. Opponents see recent changes as limiting a cruel method of terminating life, while proponents see them as an assault on the freedoms of women.
Pro	Abortion is a Woman's Right	The anti-choice laws that have been proposed are an assault on women's freedoms and overlook what abortion means for real, living women, not for embryos or fetuses.
Con	Cruelty of Pro-Choice	The pro-life laws that have been proposed are important steps towards limiting abortion: A cruel method of easing a person's burden, "playing God" and terminating innocent life.
Healthcare Reform		
Balanced	Healthcare Law Inspires Praise, Criticism	The recent healthcare reform legislation has earned both applause and disapproval as debate heats up over the legality, costs, and benefits of the plan.
Pro	Universal Healthcare Legislation Benefits Millions	The recently passed, impressive healthcare legislation will extend benefits to millions of citizens who are suffering due to the crippling costs of health insurance.
Con	The Expensive, Unconstitutional Healthcare Law	As provisions from the federal healthcare law take effect, Americans realize that the law infringes on states' rights and will increase the federal deficit.
Teacher Funding		
Balanced	Teacher Funding Bill Sparks Debate	Supporters claim that a $10 billion education funding bill has saved thousands of teachers' jobs; opponents call it a special interest bailout

(*continued*)

Table 1
(*Continued*)

	Headline	Lead
Pro	Teacher Funding Bill Rescues States, Saves Jobs	A $10 billion education funding bill has saved thousands of teachers' jobs and helped avert catastrophe in the nation's public schools
Con	Teacher Funding Bill is a Special Interest Bailout	A $10 billion education funding bill is just another costly special interest bailout that will do little to stimulate growth in the economy.
Gun Control		
Balanced	Gun Control Debated Again	Leaders in Washington are debating a ban on assault weapons. Supporters say too many weapons are available to criminals, while opponents say restrictions would only affect law-abiding citizens' rights.
Pro	Assault Weapon Ban Necessary for Public Safety	The nation's weak gun laws are under discussion in the Capitol, and officials are debating whether to eliminate military-style assault weapons, because these pose such a grave threat to our children and to our communities.
Con	Citizens Constitutional Right to Own Guns Attacked Again	Liberals in Washington are again pursuing an assault weapon ban, using biased arguments to support their agenda of taking guns away from law-abiding citizens
Entertainment		
	Homerun Record Still Contested	Baseball purists continue to challenge Barry Bonds' position as Major League Baseball's all time homerun leader, due to allegations of his performance enhancing drug use.
	Madonna and Lady Gaga	The 25-year-old pop princess has admitted to being inspired by the Queen of Pop in the past and many people have compared their styles of music.
	Summer in Barcelona	Barcelona is perfect as a holiday destination, with good beaches, guaranteed sun, cafés, restaurants and nightclubs, first-rate cultural venues, unusual architecture and fashionable shops.

perspective. Although this design is similar to prior studies that provided a fixed choice set regarding a single issue (e.g., Fischer, Jonas, Frey, & Schulz-Hardt, 2005; Garrett, 2009a), we recognize that it does not mimic the experience of seeing news from a single source such as the *New York Times*. It has greater external validity with respect to the experience of news through aggregators such as Google News, where issue-focused stories from multiple sources are shown together, and also the experience of news in some social media contexts, where a feed may include multiple posts with news about the same issue, intermixed with entertainment and social messages.

A pilot test with a sample of undergraduates (N = 241) confirmed that subjects perceived the headlines/leads to have the orientation we intended. In the pilot, each respondent was asked to indicate the direction of perceived bias in three randomly chosen headline/leads; respondents saw no more than one headline/lead about each issue. For each issue, mean levels of perceived bias for the pro, con, and balanced headline/leads were significantly different from each other in the expected direction ($p < .01$).

To assess preferences for entertainment versus political news, we employed a dichotomous variable with a value of 0 for respondents who chose a political article and 1 for those who chose an entertainment article.

Partisan Selectivity. Respondents were asked a subsequent question which confined their choices to the three headlines and leads on their assigned issue, with the entertainment stories excluded. The order of headlines/leads was again randomized.

We categorized respondents' selection as either pro-attitudinal or counter-attitudinal based on their issue attitudes. Respondents were asked to report, on a scale from 1 (strongly oppose) to 4 (neutral) to 7 (strongly favor), how strongly they favor or oppose (a) allowing a woman to get an abortion no matter what the reason (38% oppose, 14% neutral, 48% favor; M = 4.2, SD = 2.2), (b) the national health care reform legislation that was passed by Congress and signed into law in 2010 (46% oppose, 15% neutral, 39% favor; M = 3.6, SD = 2.1), (c) an increase in the use of federal tax dollars to support states' education budgets and fund teachers' jobs (31% oppose, 18% neutral, 51% favor; M = 4.4, SD = 2.0), or (d) a law that bans assault weapons (36% oppose, 11% neutral, 53% favor; M = 4.4, SD = 2.3).

In order to measure news preference, the attitude items were trichotomized into oppose (1–3 on original scale; abortion M = 1.7, SD = .75; health care M = 1.5, SD = .74; teacher M = 1.8, SD = .85; gun control M = 1.7, SD = .79), neutral (4 on original scale), and favor (5–7 on original scale; abortion M = 6.3, SD = .79; health care M = 5.9, SD = .78; teacher M = 6.0, SD = .82; gun control M = 6.4, SD = .78). This step is necessary in order to obtain a categorical variable capturing partisan selectivity, although variation in the continuous attitude measure is lost. Following what others have done (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009), this allows us to classify choices as pro-attitudinal, counter-attitudinal, or neutral. Respondents who favored [opposed] the policy and selected the pro [con] article were coded as

preferring pro-attitudinal news. Those who favored [opposed] the policy and selected the con [pro] article were coded as preferring counter-attitudinal news. Respondents who selected the balanced article were coded as preferring balanced content. Those who reported neutral attitudes (n = 333) were excluded from the analysis.

Independent Variables

General Political Attributes. General political knowledge was measured with eight factual knowledge questions such as "Which party has the most representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives?" or "What job or political office is now held by John Boehner?" Correct answers were summed (α = .76; M = 4.48, SD = 2.27). News interest was assessed by asking respondents how often they follow news and public affairs from 1 = *hardly at all* to 4 = *most of the time* (M = 3.26, SD = 0.91). To measure strength of political leanings, respondents first indicated their political ideology (where 1 = *very liberal* and 5 = *very conservative, M* = 3.13, SD = 1.10) and their political partisanship (where 1 = *strong Democrat* and 5 = *strong Republican, M* = 2.81, SD = 1.41). We employed a folded sum of these two measures that ranged from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates moderate-Independent political leanings and 5 indicates strong conservative-Republican or strong liberal-Democrat leanings (M = 2.91, SD = 1.25).

Issue-Specific Orientations. We examined individuals' perceived understanding of their assigned issue by averaging respondents' agreement (from 1 *strongly disagree* to 7 *strongly agree*) with two statements: "I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the issue" and "Sometimes the issue seems so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on" (reverse coded) (r = .53; M = 5.00, SD = 1.50). To measure issue importance, respondents indicated how important their assigned issue is to them personally on a scale from 1 *very unimportant* to 7 *very important* (M = 5.24, SD = 1.62). Finally, we assessed attitude strength by asking respondents to indicate how strong their opinions are on their assigned issue on a scale from 1 *not strong at all* to 4 *very strong* (M = 3.17, SD = 0.85).

Control Variables. The analyses included demographic controls for age, gender, race, and education. We also controlled for the issue to which subjects were randomly assigned.

Results

Before turning to our hypothesis tests, we examined the inter-item correlations among the general political and issue-specific variables in our model in order to help validate our constructs and assess potential for multicollinearity. As Table 2 shows, there are weak to moderate associations between general political attributes and

Table 2
Inter-Item Correlations among General Political Orientation and Issue-Specific Orientation Variables

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1). Political Knowledge					
(2). News interest	.55***				
(3). Strength of political leanings	.29***	.29***			
(4). Perceived issue understanding	.35***	.39***	.21***		
(5). Issue importance	.13***	.20***	.13***	.17***	
(6). Attitude strength	.19***	.26***	.20***	.34***	.60***

***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

their issue-specific analogues. Perceived issue understanding and general political knowledge were only moderately related ($r = .35$), confirming that these capture different cognitive phenomena (e.g., Hollander, 1995). Political interest and strength of political leanings were only weakly related to attitude importance and attitude strength, respectively ($r = .20$ in both cases), suggesting the distinct nature of the general partisan commitments and the issue-specific indicators of attitudinal engagement. Turning to the inter-item correlations within the general and issue-specific orientations, political knowledge and news interest—both dimensions of general political involvement (Krosnick & Brannon, 1993)—were correlated relatively strongly ($r = .55$). The highest correlation emerged between issue-specific attitude strength and issue importance ($r = .60$), which is unsurprising given that both are facets of attitudinal engagement, albeit with different antecedents and consequences (Visser et al., 2006; Wojcieszak, 2012). The remaining moderate relationships suggest that the items are measuring distinct constructs, albeit with some conceptual overlap.

Predicting Interest-Based Selectivity

The majority of subjects did not engage in interest-based selectivity by choosing entertainment; rather, they demonstrated a clear preference for political news, with 65% choosing one of the political news articles and 35% choosing an entertainment story. Table 3 shows the results of a logistic regression model predicting the likelihood of selecting an entertainment story over political news. Consistent with past research, general political knowledge and news interest decreased interest-based selectivity; however, strength of partisan leanings was unrelated to interest-based selectivity. Above and beyond these general political orientations and demographic controls, issue-specific orientations improved the model fit ($X^2_{(df\ =\ 6)} = 187.43$, $p < .001$). In support of H_{1a-c}, perceived issue understanding, issue importance,

Table 3
Logistic Regression Predicting Interest-Based Selectivity: Preference for Entertainment over Politics

	B(SE)
Issue Condition [A]	
Healthcare reform	−.86 (.16)***
Teacher funding	−.76 (.15)***
Gun control	−.55 (.14)***
Demographics	
Age	−.001 (.003)
Gender (female)	−.13 (.11)
Race (white)	−.03 (.11)
Education	.05 (.04)
General Political Orientations	
Political knowledge	−.08 (.03)**
News interest	−.29 (.07)***
Strength of political leanings	.01 (.04)
Issue-Specific Orientations	
Perceived issue understanding	−.21 (.04)***
Issue importance	−.11 (.04)**
Attitude strength	−.52 (.07)***
−2LL	2452.13
Model X^2 (df = 13)	368.02***
Nagelkerke R^2	.21
N	2,232

Note. [A]Abortion is the reference category.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

and issue attitude strength all were negatively related to interest-based selectivity, increasing the likelihood of selecting news over entertainment.

Predicting Partisan Selectivity

When choices were confined to political news, most (54%) subjects preferred pro-attitudinal content, exhibiting a tendency toward partisan selectivity. Over a third (36%) chose balanced content, and 10% selected content that was counter-attitudinal. We used multinomial logistic regression to test which factors predict partisan selectivity (see Table 4). In addition to the demographic controls used before, we controlled for interest-based selectivity. The model shown in the first column predicts a preference for pro-attitudinal relative to counter-attitudinal news, the second model predicts a preference for pro-attitudinal relative to balanced news, and the third model predicts a preference for counter-attitudinal to balanced news.

Table 4
Multinomial Logistic Regression Predicting Partisan-Based Selectivity

	Pro vs. Counter	Pro vs. Balanced	Counter vs. Balanced
	B (SE)	B (SE)	B (SE)
Issue Condition[A]			
Healthcare reform	.14 (.27)	.35 (.16)*	.21 (.28)
Teacher funding	.20 (.27)	−.06 (.15)	−.26 (.27)
Gun control	−.45 (.24)	.06 (.15)	.52 (.25)*
Demographics			
Age	.005 (.006)	.03 (.004)***	.02 (.006)***
Gender (female)	.12 (.18)	−.39 (.11)***	−.51 (.18)**
Race (white)	.15 (.18)	−.13 (.12)	−.28 (.19)
Education	−.009 (.06)	−.07 (.04)	−.06 (.07)
Preference for entertainment vs. politics	−.10 (.18)	−.0028 (.12)	.09 (.19)
General Political Orientations			
Political knowledge	.15 (.05)**	−.16 (.03)***	−.31 (.05)***
News interest	−.04 (.11)	−.05 (.08)	−.01 (.11)
Strength of political leanings	.16 (.07)*	.21 (.04)***	.05 (.07)
Issue-Specific Orientations			
Perceived issue understanding	.24 (.07)***	.06 (.04)	−.18 (.07)**
Issue importance	.06 (.06)	−.005 (.04)	−.07 (.06)
Attitude strength	.40 (.12)**	.36 (.09)***	−.04 (.13)
Constant	−2.36 (.62)***	−1.70 (.41)***	.66 (.64)
−2LL		3286.83	
Model X^2 (df = 28)		287.39***	
Nagelkerke R^2		.16	
N		1,927	

Note. [A]Abortion is the reference category.
***$p < .001$, **$p < .01$, *$p < .05$.

Of the general political orientations, political knowledge was the only variable to distinguish consistently among all three types of political news choices: Political knowledge predicted a preference for pro- over counter-attitudinal news and also increased the likelihood of selecting balanced over pro- and counter-attitudinal news. News interest was unrelated to partisan selectivity. Strength of political leanings predicted a preference for pro-attitudinal over counter-attitudinal and balanced content.

Above and beyond these general political orientations, issue-specific orientations improved the model fit ($X^2_{(df = 36)} = 64.45$, $p < .01$). In support of H_{2a}, perceived

issue understanding increased the likelihood of choosing pro-attitudinal news relative to counter-attitudinal news. Counter to H_{2b}, issue importance was unrelated to partisan selectivity. As predicted by H_{2c}, people with stronger attitudes preferred pro-attitudinal to counter-attitudinal news. Finally, addressing RQ_1, perceived issue understanding decreased the likelihood of choosing counter-attitudinal news over balanced news but was unrelated to the choice between pro-attitudinal and balanced news. Issue attitude strength predicted a preference for pro-attitudinal over balanced news.

Discussion

The changing media environment, which gives people unprecedented control over media content, has prompted renewed investigations into how people navigate various choices. Building from the premise that people see some political issues as easy to grasp and have strong views on and attachments to some topics but not others (Converse, 1974), we proposed that perceived issue understanding, personal issue importance, and attitude strength influence content selection. Because we tested interest-based and partisan selectivity together in one design, we were able to shed light on the extent to which issue-related engagement matters at the two levels of content choice. Consistent with our expectations, issue engagement predicted both types of selectivity over and above the influence of general attributes such as political knowledge and news interest.

First, individuals who thought they understood an issue well chose political news over entertainment, even after accounting for the positive influence of general political knowledge. Although perceived issue understanding encouraged the selection of political news in general, it discouraged the selection of counter-attitudinal content relative to both pro-attitudinal and balanced news. This may be because citizens who feel sufficiently knowledgeable about an issue perceive messages from the other side as unnecessary or lacking in utility. In a more encouraging sign, however, perceived issue understanding was unrelated to the choice of pro-attitudinal versus balanced news; thus, citizens who feel confident about their issue knowledge are just as likely to choose to expose themselves to diverse perspectives through balanced news as they are to select like-minded content. Still, it is important for scholars and practitioners to recognize that efforts to pull inactive citizens into the political process by increasing their subjective understanding of public affairs (e.g., by explaining complex issues in fairly simple ways and in non-threatening formats) may produce self-efficacious citizens unwilling to consume counter-attitudinal content.

Second, strongly opinionated citizens and those who saw the analyzed issues as personally important were more likely to select political news over entertainment. Notably, issue attitude strength, but not the strength of general political leanings, encouraged the choice of news over entertainment. Those with strong issue attitudes also engaged in partisan selectivity, preferring like-minded over counter-attitudinal

and balanced options. This finding is notable, as it not only confirms fears that strongly opinionated citizens tend to choose content that reinforces their priors (Levendusky, 2013), but it also shows that this comes at the expense of balanced as well as counter-attitudinal news exposure.

Issue-specific attitude importance failed to exert similar effects, and news interest also was unrelated to partisan selectivity. It is possible that individual interest in public affairs as well as the importance one attaches to specific issues signal motivation to consume all information about a related topic, whether balanced, pro- or counter-attitudinal. As a result, individuals may be more indiscriminate about what news they read or are guided by other factors, such as perceived informational utility. Moreover, the divergent results for issue importance and attitude strength point to an important distinction between the two concepts, and highlight the need for future studies that are designed to allow for the disentanglement of these attitudinal attributes.

We also note that there were differences in selectivity patterns based on the particular issue to which participants were exposed. For example, participants chose entertainment most often when political news was about abortion, and least often when it was about healthcare (see Table 3). This may be due in part to the fact that healthcare reform was hotly debated during the time of our study, and thus perceived as novel and relevant. Abortion, in contrast, is a well-worn issue and may inspire less curiosity. An important direction for future research is to explore mediators of these issue differences (which likely include the issue-specific orientations we analyzed here, along with other variables), as well as additional explanatory factors such as an issue's position on the media agenda. Still, when assessing the predictors of selectivity, our analyses controlled for any issue-driven effects. This supports the generalizability of our findings regarding the importance of issue-specific orientations, irrespective of the issue at hand. Moreover, the four issues we examined in this study are not intended to be representative of the whole array of issues or of identifiable classes of issues. We chose them because they have featured in other studies of media choice and public opinion and because we suspected they would be different from one another. It is a question for future study to establish whether a typology of issues could be useful in this kind of research.

In addition to our main results, another noteworthy finding relates to the selection of balanced content. Despite the expected preference for pro-attitudinal stories, the fact that over a third of subjects chose balanced news indicates that having a balanced option is important when studying selectivity. Although estimates of the frequency of real-world selectivity are not appropriately made from experiments like ours where the choice set was artificially constructed to match our theoretical interest, our findings suggest a non-trivial demand for balanced news that is worth academic attention when theorizing about selectivity in the contemporary media environment. Methodologically, it is important to present subjects with a balanced option not only to enhance external validity but also to more accurately estimate individual preferences for various types of political content. News oriented toward balanced views still exists, alongside polarized news from blogs, networks such as

Fox and MSNBC, and other filtered sources. Thus, it is critical to conceptualize news choice in terms of more than the dichotomy between pro- and counter-attitudinal selection (see Feldman et al., 2013; Garrett, 2009b; Garrett et al., 2013; Peralta et al., 2016), as doing so has important implications for how we understand democratic citizenship in a high-choice media environment. For example, our results show that politically knowledgeable citizens are more likely to select pro- over counter-attitudinal news; however, they also are more likely to select balanced content over both types of partisan content. The notion that political knowledge fosters even-handed information selection, even in today's divisive media and political climate, is an encouraging finding that would have been obscured had we not included a balanced option in our design.

In general, our results—consistent with the issue publics thesis—suggest that selectivity is contextual and varies with individual engagement with specific sociopolitical issues. People not only have general orientations toward news versus entertainment or partisan as opposed to balanced news; they also have specific orientations associated with particular issues. This issue-specific engagement is relevant to explaining interest-based as well as partisan selectivity. Thus, although subjects' overall preference for political news over entertainment reflects the norm of the informed citizen, the fact that this preference varies according to one's engagement with a given issue suggests that news consumption in the contemporary era is also in line with actualizing (Bennett, 2008) or monitorial (Schudson, 1998) perspectives on citizenship, whereby people engage around issues of particular interest to them or when issues seem especially pressing. In turn, our results raise questions about the normative consequences of these styles of citizenship, given, for example, that perceived issue understanding discouraged the selection of counter-attitudinal news.

We expect that factors in addition to issue-specific orientations are at work in explaining selectivity, such as the motivations underlying choice (Westerwick et al., 2013) and emotions (Valentino et al., 2009), along with methodological variables such as the amount of information that people can select (Fischer et al., 2005) or the time people have to choose the content (Knobloch-Westerwick & Kleinman, 2012). Examining how these factors interact with indicators of citizens' issue engagement to influence interest-based and partisan selectivity represents an important direction for future research.

It also is important to acknowledge some limitations of our methodological approach. Any experimental study of news is subject to external validity constraints. This has become truer over time, because people now consume news in so many disparate ways, from watching evening network news as they did decades ago, to using customized news aggregation services and relying on news filtered through social media. No one experimental design could capture this heterogeneity in the news experience. When studying selectivity in experimental settings, choice sets must be constrained, and various design decisions affect the probability of selective exposure (Feldman et al., 2013). In this study, the options provided included three entertainment stories and three political stories. This design was intended to offer

subjects opportunities to avoid political news if they chose; however, in order to also provide opportunities for partisan selectivity, all three options for political news were about the same political issue. This may have made our interest in political news clear to participants, and social desirability may have led to inflated estimates of preference for politics over entertainment. The fact that the entertainment options were still news rather than comedy, sports or drama also may have produced inflated estimates of preference for politics over entertainment. Some recent experimental designs more closely reflect real-world news selection, by offering pure entertainment options (e.g., Arceneaux, Johnson, & Murphy, 2012) or multiple political issues (e.g., Knobloch-Westerwick & Meng, 2009, 2011). Future research that accounts for these and other factors conjointly in one model would shed additional light on the more nuanced selection patterns in the real world at both selectivity levels.

Our results, while awaiting further validation, suggest that the dynamics of selectivity are more complex than depicted in the familiar stereotype of many citizens tuning out politics in favor of entertainment, while the rest seek content that reinforces their biases. The two forms of selectivity are not simple dispositional characteristics. The ways in which people navigate the overwhelming array of media choices is a function of individual involvement with specific issues present on the media agenda, and it is this issue-specific engagement that not only brings people to current affairs, but also motivates their choice of perspective in political news. Attending more closely to these issue-specific factors may reestablish faith in ordinary citizens who—while not meeting all of the theoretical expectations of a politically interested and informed public—sometimes do prioritize public affairs over sports and celebrity life, and sometimes consciously tune into balanced information. It is the research that explores the context-specific ways in which citizens engage with political information that is best suited to comprehensively describe the nuances of citizen choice in the increasingly complex, rich, and fragmented media environment.

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Producing Popular Politics: The Infotainment Strategies of American Campaign Consultants

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Producing Popular Politics: The Infotainment Strategies of American Campaign Consultants

Michael Serazio

Popular culture is increasingly intertwined with U.S. political communication; this research studies this intersection from the perspectives and practices of professionals who work behind the scenes on campaigns. Drawing upon dozens of interviews with these elite operatives, this research examines their roles in and attitudes toward the venues and values necessary to popularize politics. The findings demonstrate how consultants seek to re-position political narratives from traditional media formats to more pleasurable genres (particularly comedic) by scripting campaigns and messages with attentiveness to visual stunts, personal appearance, and pop culture and social media opportunities.

In recent years, American politics and popular culture have increasingly seen former boundaries blur. Hollywood stars have pursued (and sometimes captured) political office, while more entertainment-oriented outlets cover elections and public affairs. The ascension of business mogul-turned-reality TV star Donald Trump to the top of Republican polling during the 2016 primaries offered but the latest—and most outlandish—example of this trend. While media pundits and political insiders from "the establishment" expressed astonishment at Trump's rise (Serazio, 2016), the view from backstage suggests his success might be a more natural evolution of pre-existing political communication designs on infotainment.

This research examines those designs—specifically, the perspectives and practices of those professionals who work behind the scenes on campaigns. Drawing upon dozens of interviews with elite operatives, this work looks at their roles in and attitudes toward the venues and values necessary to popularize U.S. politics (e.g., stagecraft, late-night comedy, social media, etc.). The study positions these storytelling adaptations within wider transformations in news and political information. Ultimately, a portrait emerges of a professional ideology that takes a rather dim view of the attentiveness of citizens. Consultants seek to re-contextualize political messaging into more accessible, compelling texts and genre forms. Thus, Trump might be seen not as an aberration but as a confirmation of norms that reward (and are rewarded by) entertainment ambitions.

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Literature Review

The logic and use of show business has abounded throughout U.S. political history. With the advent of television, "image" came to the forefront, as did the assessment of leaders' "performances"—with "celebrities… stepping into the role of politicians and politicians … being packaged and presented as celebrities" (Louw, 2005, pp. 20, 143; Weiskel, 2005, p. 397). Professional wrestler Jesse Ventura, actor Arnold Schwarzenegger, comedian Al Franken, and of course Trump himself have all pursued the political spotlight.

U.S. politicians have similarly turned to popular culture's potentially powerful influence in their efforts to reach and persuade citizens. Liesbet Van Zoonen (2005) argues that, because such entertainment genres offer "the dominant cultural framework" to make sense of politics—and a "much-needed shortcut" for citizens "to make political judgments" amidst complexity—leaders have to engage these contexts to maintain their relevance to constituents (p. 69). As presidential appearances on late-night shows surge, candidates apparently see these programs as opportunities to "address hard-to-reach audiences, show their more 'human' side… while typically experiencing an interview that steers clear of controversial matters and … tough questioning" (Jones, 2010, p. 11). Such assumptions about campaign strategy have, however, been inferred theoretically more often than documented empirically.

Simultaneously, concerns about "infotainment" trends in journalism and politics have emerged worldwide. Daya Thussu (2007) defines this category as "an explicit genre-mix of 'information' and 'entertainment' in news and current affairs programming," with an emphasis on "personalities, style, storytelling skills, and spectacles," that is largely the product of ratings-driven market forces (pp. 3, 8). Pop culture is therefore clearly playing a more significant role in mediating American campaigns, yet scholarship has rarely explored those tasked with supplying the political content to put on the "show."

Nevertheless, research interest in the popularization of politics has grown of late, but largely through "effects-oriented articles from mass communication or those that are critical/cultural in approach" (Young & Gray, 2013, p. 553). Scholarship on political comedy, in particular, has tended to either qualitatively analyze its rhetorical features, ideological orientations, and public culture ideals or quantitatively tally its impact on knowledge, attitudes, and participation (Becker & Waisanen, 2013).

Implicit in much of this work—and contrary to infotainment laments—is the hope that such non-traditional political discourse could invite more participants into the democratic process. Matthew Baum (2002), for example, argues that because soft news informs an otherwise inattentive public, it broadens access to political issues. Jeffrey Jones (2010) demonstrates how pop "humanizes, simplifies, and embodies complex issues, concepts, and ideas" in ways that are politically beneficial and perhaps even necessary (p. 38). And Geoffrey Baym (2005) champions *The Daily Show* as a model for critical journalism that mocks TV news' aversion to complexity and politics' attraction to triviality—a prospect born out in research showing Jon

Stewart's program to be as substantive as its broadcast counterparts during election season (Fox, Koloen, & Sahin, 2007). However, scholarship has not yet tackled how campaigns scheme that soft news and political comedy.

For Eric Louw (2005) concludes, "Celebrity politicians are culture industry products—they are manufactured," which means that there is an opportunity to investigate that production as conscious, tactical, and adaptive (p. 183). It is the task here to therefore examine how the conditions of contemporary popular culture are molding political "drama, story lines, and personalities," and how "politicians are presented as the characters in a script sometimes written by themselves, but more often by their advisors, the infamous spin doctors" (Van Zoonen, 2005, pp. 7, 29).

Indeed, to appreciate the script that is performed—in the form of speeches, advertisements, and media appearances—one must understand the work of those spin doctors who strategize that popularization, particularly as "power is ever more concentrated in the hands of a few who stage-manage pseudoevents from behind the scenes" (Weiskel, 2005, p. 394). Larry Sabato (1981) calls these communication professionals, "stage managers," which is an apt term, given this project's focus on their role in strategizing and mobilizing theatrical components toward political ends. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as party bosses declined in power in the United States, these consultants rose to prominence and, with longer campaign cycles and more donor money flooding in, consulting promises to be increasingly central—and lucrative—to American politics for the foreseeable future (Friedenberg, 1997, pp. 200–1).

To date, however, we know relatively little about the activities involved in campaign consulting and less still about its orientation to popular culture (Thurber, 2000). Clearly, there is political information showing up in entertainment programming as politicians emerge from and embrace popular contexts; some find this a positive development, while others fear the deleterious potential of infotainment. This research sidesteps the normative or empirical question of effects in favor of querying how these ambitions are articulated and executed by those "producing" this political content. It seeks to contextualize these visible phenomena—pop culture appearances, attention-grabbing stunts, comedic discourse, and social media output—within the professional logic and actions of consultants who engineer them into existence.

RQ: How are American consultants strategizing and utilizing popular culture and entertainment venues and values in the service of contemporary political communication?

Methodology

During the peak of the 2012 U.S. election season (June–December), I contacted 108 potential interviewees. These individuals were selected through purposive and snowball sampling. This outreach generated 38 one-on-one, in-depth interviews running, on average, 37 minutes each (see also Serazio, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017).[1] A diversity of professional perspectives (equally Republicans and Democrats) was deliberately

assembled—including nine self-described general consultants, eight digital strategists, seven press secretaries or communication directors, and seven advertising producers, not to mention other, even more specific roles like speechwriting, media buying, opposition research, and blogging. A large number of interviewees called Washington DC home and most worked at the higher echelons of campaigning and political communication on behalf of both national parties and individual candidates. Conversations naturally emphasized more national (particularly presidential) contests, as pop culture generally only avails itself of higher-profile campaigns.

Findings and Analysis

Re-Contextualizing and Resuscitating Political Genres

Campaign consultants work in the service of generating and managing narratives; this runs true whether their output takes shape as a speech, an advertisement, or a story pitch to reporters. Alas, for their purposes, the fundamental product they have to sell—politics—seems to have a genre problem: Traditional genres of political communication retard accessibility and inhibit interest. The first challenge therefore lies in repositioning those narratives within formats that might appear more audience friendly. Perhaps because the typical political genre is seen as serious, even dull—befitting a civic *duty* rather than a pleasure—and features characters often eliciting cynicism, entertainment techniques and venues lend themselves as a helpful resource in that recontextualization. In that way, politics, seemingly inherently grave, necessitates its antithetical—those genre forms that might come across as more playful. The director of a political advertising agency explained this impediment:

> One thing I try to impress upon candidates is … what an infinitesimal interest people have in politics. Especially if you're not like a month before the election. It's so easy in our business to get swept up in the excitement and energy of it all and we're reading the paper every day and seeing clips and make sure we see everything that's written about our guy or the other guy. And the real people in this country—really just don't pay attention.… They got better things to do.

For such operatives, the challenge is one of "elites" reaching "outsiders"—that is, "elites" who live within the Beltway whirlwind and might mistakenly assume that "real" people share their enthusiasm and captivation. One ad agency head summarized the problem thus: "Most people would much rather look at Paris Hilton gallivanting around than C-SPAN." He phrased this contrast emblematically—soporific political genres like C-SPAN are always and ever in competition with sexier fare, which galvanizes consultants' efforts to emulate that alternative. In the attention span economy, politics is but one competitor of many and, unless translated, a feeble one at that.

Several interviewees agreed that one of the biggest obstacles to this goal was the default insipidness of political advertising (this being the platform for cultural

production a campaign could most control—as opposed to, say, news content, which requires a reporter intermediary): It is seen as a cheap, slapdash, repellent genre of storytelling. As one member of a presidential campaign's advertising team confided: "Political advertising largely sucks—it's largely junk.… It's shameful, to be honest with you—it's very poor advertising that's insulting to the viewer." Part of the reason political advertising stands out as second-rate is that it's positioned in an unenviable contrast with more lush, sleeker commercial advertising (not to mention, entertainment programming content): "You're going to be competing with the McDonalds ad that they spent $3 million on production of and you're not going to spend $3 million producing your ad," a direct mail agency president pointed out. "You just can't—you got to spend most of it on the [media] buy, so you're going to do sort of low-production things."

Thus, we find that one major limitation in producing compelling narratives and re-contextualizing politics more pleasurably is the financial resources required to achieve popular culture parity—an ironic constraint, post-*Citizens United*, given the incredible sums of campaign cash pouring into super-PAC coffers and the like (Vogel, 2014). Interestingly, more than one interviewee suggested that the solution to the problem of voter apathy toward political information was to concoct advertising that did not, at least initially, look like advertising, if only to make it past those perceived audience filters; such an obstacle—and subsequent "guerrilla" solution—can be found in commercial advertising as well (Serazio, 2013). As a political advertising agency's president described it:

> People aren't in the market for what we have to sell… When McDonalds is on the air or Burger King, they actually have something that there's a consumer desire to have. People want hamburgers. We don't have that luxury. So we start with the premise that—more than anything else, in the first five seconds of an ad, let's find a way not to be perceived as a political ad, so people don't check out and ignore it. So we like to try to come up with creative concepts or kind of things that lure people in so they don't feel like they're watching a political ad.

Similarly, another political advertising agency president expressed the ambition for his 30-second spots to avoid "telegraphing the fact that you were a commercial [and…], in essence, driving away your audience," such that, ideally, "the person wouldn't even know what they were watching until the 20 or 22-second point." With direct mail, similar gimmicks to efface the obviousness of the genre have included putting celebrity names on the return address, employing phrases and aesthetics to emphasize urgency, and faking a "handwritten" appearance (Johnson, 2001, pp. 155–156). As the direct mail agency president stressed:

> [Appearing] political means it will be thrown away: "This is a political mailer—I don't want to look at it!" So you've got to engage them in some way that kind of tricks them into seeing it and then they see, "Oh, yeah, that's witty, that's cute," and it sticks in their brain and makes them help remember it in some way.

Co-Opting Pop Resources

The drab predictability of political genres and alienating complexity of issues portrayed therein further motivate the consultant to utilize more playful pop resources. Some of these borrow, quite explicitly, from entertainment legacies—trading on the lighthearted and familiar to elicit engagement with (what would be) otherwise uninspiring appeals. To consultants, then, pop functions as a kind of cultural catalogue within which to embed political topics.

For instance, to grab attention for a long-shot's presidential campaign, one political advertising agency president created a parody of the popular MasterCard "Priceless" spots "to tap into a zeitgeist that already existed in popular culture." In another example, the media consultant at a digital strategy firm produced an online attack ad against an incumbent ("500 Days of [Incumbent]") riffing on a popular film title at that time—a trick that garnered news media attention, though, as he cautioned, "the danger with the popular culture thing is that most voters are older and they just don't get a lot of these [references]." Another young ad-maker whose "signature style" of "shaky camera shots, flash cuts, [and] action movie pacing" *GQ* identified in some of the "most iconic" spots of 2012 reportedly appropriates "elements of popular directors and composers … to make political ads that appeal to people who don't like political ads" (Cogan, 2012).

These are, to be clear, exceptions that prove the rule—examples that display rebelliousness toward generic formulas that have dominated for years. As the president of a media-consulting firm summarized:

> Pop culture is easily identifiable and is easily and well-understood … [A] movie or show or whatever it might be—we know what the emotional chord is with that. We know what people will think when they see that and what we're trying to do is we're trying to drum that up without having to explain it.… Different types of Hollywood themes or motifs becomes just another tool in the arsenal for trying to, again, establish some type of reaction or some type of emotional impact.

Thus, for consultants, the adaptation of politics to more entertaining genres is simply a means of "making do"—a set of storytelling resources with which to encode the message in a kind of pop vernacular. Perhaps because politics stereotypically exists and operates in comparatively arid narrative spaces (e.g., C-SPAN hearings, white papers, briefing rooms, etc.), featuring often humorless and cynicism-inducing characters debating tedious subjects, comedy entices most indulgently as a vehicle for resituating attentiveness.

Consultants, moreover, sometimes borrow from those comedic motifs to reawaken (what they assume to be) an otherwise listless citizen audience—adapting that civic duty to more playful means of messaging. Several examples of this emerged in conversations with interviewees. The chief creative officer at a media consultancy reported inserting a moose, somewhat ridiculously, in the background of a

prescription drug importation ad put out by a U.S. senator; he also crafted a VH1-style Pop Up Video spoof for his presidential candidate client: "Instead of making it very sort of policy-oriented, we put a little bit of issue stuff in it," but focused more on "fun facts" about his family. One executive at a social media firm that handled youth outreach for a presidential campaign hired HBO star Lena Dunham to impishly engage a "first-time" voting-sex double entendre as a means of rallying a generation "brought up on irony." And in a prank perhaps worthy of Stephen Colbert himself, one opposition research firm's president bought the domain name, newtgingrich.org, and had it redirect visitors to Tiffany's and Fannie Mae websites during a stretch involving those Gingrich scandals.

Again, such mischievous techniques are far from the norm in politics, but in their transgression, they reveal much. For a genre of narrative too often plagued by ennui, pop culture and comedy offer creative "hooks" with which to bait the attention of citizens. These practices seem to signal consultants' exhaustion and frustration with the narrative opportunities that traditional speeches, advertisements, and news articles afford. Such carnivalesque playfulness is inherently atypical; indeed, its appeal derives from the contrast it can establish with the sobriety of mainstream political communication. Yet as those traditional venues like newspapers and network news decline, the more these entertainment values and venues might entice consultants who work as narrative producers and need to find ways to stay relevant. Moreover, comedy, in particular, offers both "inputs" and "outputs" for high-level U.S. campaigns: delivering to elites insight into an outsider's understanding of politics and also a means of reformatting toward humorous and, therefore, more accessible messages.

Polling Comedy

During a campaign and then again at the White House, one press secretary would scour the monologue transcripts from Jay Leno and David Letterman every day for political jokes and religiously tuned into *The Daily Show*:

> I don't think that sort of comedy does much to shape public opinion, but I think it does reflect public opinion. And it's a good way to measure sort of how the culture is thinking about my candidate and it's just something to be aware of and if there's a real problem out there, it's a great source of feedback. So, like, if your candidate has a real problem with tax returns, if he's the butt of a lot of jokes on comedy shows for that—then it shows that it's breaking through to the general public. But if they're only talking about it on the Sunday morning talk shows, then it isn't a problem.

Broadly, then, we can see how pop culture represents a kind of "feedback loop" for consultants hoping to gauge the state of political issues. It retransmits political subjects more "nakedly" and "simplistically" to inside players—that is, often devoid of the pretense and nuance that traditional genres might use to cover up an emperor's lack of

clothing. Yet the power of comedic genres, in consultants' estimation, also shouldn't be overstated. Late-night comedy shows are really more of a "lagging indicator, not a leading indicator," as one U.S. senate campaign manager phrased it, in that "before [*Saturday Night Live*] portrayed Sarah Palin as an idiot, I think the narrative had already taken"—"like, everyone was already laughing about that before it popularized it and spread it to a wider audience." One member of a presidential campaign's ad team referred to late-night comedy in that sense as a "sort of focus group":

> We'd do a lot of focus groups, but I thought [*SNL*] was a really interesting focus group and a really interesting filter and a great bullshit detector, because the things they were making fun of [we] knew [we] weren't making progress on as a legitimate issue. Like, Big Bird and dog on the roof of the car and all this kind of crazy stuff. Yeah, we absolutely watched it. Did we have meetings about it? No. Does it filter in at some level as a focus group data point? Yeah.

As one congressional press secretary clarified, however, it's not typically the finer points of, say, economic data or foreign policy that these shows target; rather, "they're looking for hypocrisy or people making fools of themselves." As such, one congressional communications director explained, programs like *Saturday Night Live* and *The Daily Show* are key in "figuring out what actual, real America thinks" about politics. This, she added, makes them "incredibly important," because "it's hard when you're inside the Beltway to get an accurate read on what the American public actually thinks."

In an age of proliferating (and, moreover, fragmenting) information sources and an exasperating amount of "Big Data" that a campaign might take into account (Serazio, 2014), the simplicity of a late-night jester's satire helps the consultant cut through to the marrow of a race or issue; comedy is, then, a genre that, in its unconventional treatment of politics, can actually *clarify* conventional wisdom. The "Sunday morning talk shows" might still have powerful agenda-setting implications for insiders, but those pale in relevance to the late-night conversation that "real America" tunes into. For this reason, the campaign manager follows not only political journalists on Twitter, but also comedy writers: "You can start to see when an issue is really penetrating deeply—when it's not just a political journalist … it's people in other professions who are opinion leaders on Twitter."

It is important, however, to distinguish between the breadth and depth of programs like *The Daily Show, Politically Incorrect*, and *Late Night with John Oliver* and that of the late-night network offerings like Jimmy Fallon or *SNL*. The latter tend to critique politics at a comparatively superficial level (e.g., the aforementioned "dog on the roof of the car" story about Mitt Romney), while the former might satirize the nuanced particularities of, say, Romney's trade plan. No doubt this is due to the presumed sophistication of viewership—elite niche versus pedestrian mass—as one congressional communications director clarified:

> So often, *The Daily Show* commentary—their interpretation of what we're doing here in Washington—really does become the generally accepted view of that

> demographic: the 18-to-34-year-old demographic who's kind of politically engaged but not really. Like, they're politically engaged in a way that they like the comedic, editorial commentary, but they're not necessarily hyper-engaged in politics.

Scripting Political Image(s)

Obviously, a large part of the storytelling process conducted by political consultants revolves around the construction and management of image. Yet this might be understood in a dual sense: both literally in the sense that sets and stunts have to be thought through, above all, visually and also in the sense that, to compete with and within popular culture, candidates are conceptualized and crafted through celebrity credentials. Both represent a task of identifiability: making a candidate identifiable in terms of standing out amidst clutter and identifiable in terms of being likeable. The former is meant to capture attention through unexpected spectacle; the latter seeks to benefit from existing attention directed toward non-political venues.

For in that noisy contemporary media environment, political narrative seems to travel swiftest—and therefore resonates most powerfully—through appearances. Through these appearances, a political actor—otherwise alien to the average citizen or inducing reflexive cynicism—can seem familiar and appealing, even as he or she operates in an inherently rarefied sphere. Much as we saw comedy "resuscitating" the political genre in the last section by making the serious playful (and therefore accessible), imagery offers similar accessibility in making the abstract and platitudinous more intimate and human.

Stunts and Spectacles. Interviewees think about the performance of politics in fairly explicit theatrical terms. As one congressional communications director reported:

> Everything we do is very—or, we intend for it to be very highly produced. You know, very much like show business where you have your script that is just the words on the page that you're trying to produce and then you think about: What is the choreography? What is the blocking? What is the set design look like? You know, how do we bring this script to life? … [With] the website, there are not only facts, there are pictures—there are nice, like, professional-done pictures … You know, people don't read—if we put up a 20-page white paper, nobody would read that. So, we're trying to use the visuals … to try and illustrate the narrative.

Indeed, like policy itself, a "20-page white paper" is usually devoid of narrative in its inherent form; to best animate the story for contemporary culture, consultants turn principally to visuals. To that end, stunts, some suggest, can grab attention and punctuate lackluster legislative deliberations, as one congressional press secretary confirmed: "You're not going to change minds if people don't see what you're doing

and people aren't going to see what you're doing, say, on TV unless it's good TV." He explained further, "We would think about for big debates: What is the boss gonna do that's gonna get on TV?… There's definitely a theatrical or show business aspect to trying to figure out a way … to get some attention." For his representative, this included, in one heated instance, deliberately throwing a 3,000-page bill on the House floor to "startle everybody" with its noisy boom.

Part of this challenge, again, stems from the competitive media environment that operatives face. "What you're selling is a visual to a [TV] producer," explained one deputy communications director for a national party committee. He has, variously, ginned up "good TV" by getting his caucus to pose with bright red umbrellas outside the state legislature on a sunny day to protest the depletion of a rainy day fund—"every television station in [the region] led with it." On another occasion, he sent a man in a dolphin suit to shadow John Kerry at events during the 2004 Bush campaign:

> If I have a person in a dolphin suit waving and holding a sign that says, "I'm a flip-flopper, too," the chance of a television station putting that on the air are quite a bit better than if we were to say, "Come by the state party headquarters and interview our chairman." … So if they're going to cover 12 seconds of audio from the speech of that person, I can't expect that our response is going to merit the same, but, knock on wood, they might show the dolphin for two seconds.

Ironically, these "subversive" tactics—deployed by powerful insiders within the political establishment—are not far removed from those popularized by the social movements and guerrilla activism of *outsiders* to catch the attention of the mainstream news media. As chronicled by John Downing (2001), such "street theater" represents "forms of radical media whose communicative thrust depends not on closely argued forms of logic but on their aesthetically conceived and concentrated force" (p. 52).

In a similar way, one direct mail specialist reported, "We use very high production value content that really screams at you in the mailbox because, you know, you have 10 seconds between the person's mailbox and the garbage can when they throw you away." He added, "It's got to have high-visual, sometimes shock impact that compels the person to look at it in a glance, get the message, and be able to move them in some way." Clearly, then, the speed of information processed by audiences drives the consultant to seek out iconic overtures to attract them—the visual equivalent of scripting for soundbites that is as true in newer media spaces as in traditional (i.e., TV) formats (Serazio, 2015). Similarly, Daniel Kreiss (2016) has shown how campaign staffers use Twitter to steer the news agenda—displaying such "performative power" over other actors at "well-timed, emotionally resonant, and rhetorically effective" moments to frame events, spin debates, and drum up donations (p. 13).

The associate manager for policy at a social media company confirmed that much the same "visualization of news" tends to drive virally popular content online: "Just putting words out there anymore isn't going to work as well." To that end, one U.S. senate press secretary emphasized the importance of advance scouts seeking

out those photogenic sets and opportunities: "Whether you're giving a speech in front a great image … or a great seemingly spontaneous scene where he goes out for ice cream in a town or goes into a sports bar to watch football with the guys," he said, "you're always looking for … moments like that." This ranges from "well-designed graphics on the bus" to the "backdrops of family farms and small business to create a storyline of what [a candidate] is for and utilizing those," the press secretary for a former U.S. senate leader illustrated. In a *New York Times* profile, the Romney campaign's director of advance—tasked with "producing Hollywood-caliber events with a fraction of a film director's time and budget"—explained that "he often watches [those events] with the mute button on, testing if the campaign's message is clear to a voter just glancing at the screen" (Parker, 2012). This echoed the comments of one congressional communications director:

> I wouldn't say [my boss] is like a very attractive man, but for a member of Congress, he has really good hair—so, like, what are the visuals that we can use to build this brand … And, so, even if he's on TV and the volume is off—it's not that I don't care what he's saying, but I try to take into account where we can put him and in what manner, what he is wearing—that kind of thing. So the people that are on the treadmill at the gym that may not be listening to what he's saying see him and think: "You know, what? That guy looks like a real nice guy." There are plenty of politicians that you put them on and they just look like nasty people.

The national political convention is, of course, the apotheosis of such show business machinations—"the ultimate in political theater," as the former U.S. senate leader's press secretary pointed out, with Obama's 2008 convention speech in Denver being "literally Greek theater" in its use of classical columns. As one member of a presidential campaign's advertising team summarized: "They're 3-day musicals. They have fabulous sets; they have a huge cast of characters come onstage and go offstage in a very carefully choreographed way.… You need that theater as part of that brand."

The Infrastructure of Celebrity. This use of the language of "branding" is revealing here—like Nike or Apple, that construction of the candidate as a political brand is partly a challenge of condensing wider storylines into simplified symbols and evocative settings (Serazio, 2017). It is made more challenging by the cynicism that usually greets political figures and, thus, the need to generate warmth once more lends itself to campaigning *through* popular culture. The president of a political advertising agency boasted:

> I took [our presidential candidate] on Jay Leno; I took him on David Letterman … [And] we encouraged humor and wit and interest as opposed to what had always been a very dry, dull presidential appearance.… What it did was it began to shape a new brand for [him] … a guy you'd like to have over for a beer.… I usually use the term "rock star"—that they need to be a rock star. In other words, if you were at a restaurant and David Lee Roth or Elton John or

> Steven Tyler walked in, the room would get quiet. And I think that a politician, because of the honor of their role and the importance of their role in shaping what I pay in taxes and how my family lives, I think they should have that same kind of awe-inspiring respect.

For him, achieving celebrity for a political client is both the means and the end in a campaign—and, in the estimation of some consultants, a crucible of style as critical as substance in determining election outcomes. "In the olden days, you know, a Calvin Coolidge or a Woodrow Wilson could win by standing up and being the smartest guy in the room," said the member of a presidential campaign's advertising team. "And that just doesn't work anymore—you have got to be a smart person and just as charismatic. You've got to get that attention and you've got to captivate people and fascinate people." Perhaps for that reason, in the 2012 presidential campaign, Mitt Romney offered interviews to Leno, Letterman, *People* magazine, and *Live! with Kelly and Michael*, and Barack Obama went six months without holding a formal news conference, but made time for Leno, Letterman, Jimmy Fallon, *People, Entertainment Tonight*, and *The View* (Milbank, 2012). A congressional deputy chief of staff groused that such patterns were evidence that "so much of campaigns and even Capitol Hill to some extent has really become reality TV." Four years later, Trump would prove him more accurate than he knew at the time.

Lastly, social media has increasingly become a battlefield, alongside traditional TV, for those ambitions to craft political celebrity by showcasing lifestyle (without gatekeeper intervention) (Serazio, 2015, 2017). In 2012, hoping to drum up attention from otherwise disengaged (and often younger) potential voters, presidential campaigns were seen "sharing song playlists on Spotify, adding frosted pumpkin bread recipes to Pinterest, and posting the candidates' moments at home with the children on Instagram"—apparently believing that "it's important for people to know whether or not a huge political figure shares the same taste as me.… And creating a playlist on Spotify is part of what makes them seem more human" (Wortham, 2012). Similarly, as the associate manager for policy at a social networking company noted, candidates are increasingly being encouraged to share in those spaces if "they like certain sports teams and they have interests just outside of being an elected official"—"really branding yourself and showing both the human side and your official side." The most widely shared photo in Facebook history, she added, was simply a photo of Barack and Michelle Obama hugging on election day and, during the campaign, "their most popular posts were actually ones that are more about his family or him" rather than offering policy or reacting to news.

Much of the success of these endeavors hinges, again, on being able to script this humanization and identifiability visually. "To the extent that he can introduce non-political aspects of his life into a political forum, that's a good thing," said one U.S. senate press secretary. "It's making sure that when he's going into a diner for a seemingly spontaneous cup of coffee … that the surroundings complement the message or the brand you're trying to put out there." For one presidential candidate's press secretary, seeing George W. Bush appear on a fishing TV show epitomized this trend:

> Like, everyone thought it would be beneath him—previously, it would be like, "You're the President of the United States, what are you doing on a fucking bass show?" Well, they realized that like, if you're running for president and the idea or the best question is: "Would you like to have a beer with them?" Well, then it's not too far a stretch to go from: "I want to have to a beer with them" to "[I want to] see them on the shows that I actually watch."

Conclusions

To date, most research on the intersection of politics and entertainment has either attended to content analyses and critical readings of texts or quantitative outcomes on audiences (Becker & Waisanen, 2013; Young & Gray, 2013). Approaching this intersection through the lens of cultural production represents a somewhat novel approach, but an important qualification should once more be lodged: This research neither assumes nor implies that consultants have definitive effect on or power over voters; rather, this has inquired into consultants' effect on or power over a media environment that increasingly blurs the popular with the political and, cyclically, how that environment conditions their strategies and practices. In this telling, entertainment represents a resource that might be effectively mobilized: both in the sense of the prized values that inform campaign production and optimal venues with which to engage otherwise indifferent audiences.

As discussed in the literature review, a variety of scholars retain hope that the popularization of politics holds out democratic promise—incentivizing an inattentive public to engage with complex public issues. Interestingly, in the many perspectives and examples illustrated here, I have shown that elite operatives seem to share much the same vantage point on politics and citizens; this became evident in the frequent reference to "real America" (and its pop preferences) that exist outside of politically obsessed Beltway insiders and their information channels.

In part, this is a testimony to the degree to which the consultant class has itself become untethered—socially, financially, geographically—from "everyday citizens" (Davis, 2010). Because traditional political genres can be seen as the disaffecting province of elites, consultants turn to more entertaining means to try to connect with voters. Whether this takes shape as an appearance on late-night comedy or imagery produced for social media spaces, consultants seek to reposition candidates and elected officials within genres that meet citizens where they are. The consultants depicted here are both reacting to and being proactive about former boundaries of news and entertainment tumbling down (Williams & Delli Carpini, 2012). At a moment when political communication as a "genre" is less stable and rule-bound than ever before, adapting narratives to the circumstances of contemporary storytelling seems critical. In that sense, the existing scholarship on popular politics' positive potential would find much approve of here.

The cynicism also evident in consultants' assessments (and their activities) suggests, however, that it might be less voter education and citizen empowerment as the

ultimate aim of these efforts as much as the creation of sideshows. On balance, interviewees constructed the audiences they targeted as rather childish: apathetic toward public affairs, incapable of handling complexity, and easily titillated by flashy visual and emotional devices. Once again, to be clear, I am not endorsing these characterizations as empirically true about the American citizenry; rather, I have tried to show how this "truth" (i.e., the conventional wisdom of campaign professionals) conveniently serves the purpose of concocting the "circuses" on display.

This assessment of an uninterested electorate seems to be based on an elitist view of the gap between the Beltway and "real America," given the frequent reference to the latter (and, by extension, the implied inauthenticity of the former). Future research might well explore if actual data (e.g., surveys, focus groups) are used to back up what seemed here to be consultants' instinctive and off-hand characterizations to that end (e.g., noting encounters with friends and family outside the business, citing perennially low voting turnouts). (We cannot know, given follow-up questions unasked in this inquiry, whether this assessment is simply convenient or also in fact empirically accurate.)

Scholarly critics of "infotainment" trends might therefore argue that these strategists seem to be pursuing a "politics of distraction"—"shifting the public's attention from the essential to the superficial" and seeking to manufacture consent via spectacle (Weiskel, 2005, p. 396). This seems too patronizing, one-dimensional, and redolent of Frankfurt School critiques of yesteryear. Undoubtedly, we are seeing a growing sophistication of popular culture: the many theoretical defenses (and accompanying empirical evidence) on behalf of Jon Stewart and his ilk do signal an enriching, savvy approach to political information (Baym, 2005; Jones, 2010). Not all pop culture, however, is created alike (and the savviest pop doesn't necessarily draw the biggest audiences): Stewart might be a thoughtful, cunning interviewer, but Jimmy Fallon is not; John Oliver might be a sophisticated deconstructionist of esoteric policy matters, but that doesn't mean that *People* magazine or *The View* achieves the same depth.

Indeed, many of the techniques used to popularize politics—scripting sensational stunts and hollow imagery and sculpting personality over policy—do not seem intended to engage a rational, thoughtful voter that Stewart or Oliver pine for. To issue this modest critique is not to mourn a bygone era and normative ideal that, admittedly, never existed in practice, nor is it to dismiss the critical and informational value of the aforementioned satirists. What this research does show, rather, is how *consultants* scheme toward the simplicity and superficiality that those satirists often lament; their efforts aim for a public sphere reducible to dolphin suits and Spotify lists. And the more that politicians recognize the advantage of a family photo posted to Facebook or the lure of jokey late-night interview, the less they might be willing to subject themselves to traditional journalistic scrutiny. Behind the scenes, it has been shown how strategists are already making these cynical calculations and trade-offs.

Democracy is not served best by assessing representatives with "the TV volume off," for attractiveness is no proxy for competence; yet the interviewees here seem to have oriented themselves toward that substitution as a crucible for electoral success. This study has thus shown, empirically, how the production of entertaining politics seeks to substitute iconicity for depth in our contemporary media environment and

how competition with popular culture for the attention of constituents drives operatives to adopt those values and adapt to those venues.

Note

1. Participants have been stripped of identifying information to protect their anonymity. See (Serazio, 2014) for a more detailed listing of interviewees' individual jobs.

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Global News Broadcasting in the Pre-Television Era: A Cross-National Comparative Analysis of World War II Newsreel Coverage

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Although largely forgotten, the newsreel industry was the first news broadcasting system to convey visual news reports to a worldwide audience. This study presents the first systematic, cross-national comparison of the news content delivered through this broadcasting system. Our analysis confirms that similar news content was internationally distributed and editorially "glocalized" to fit local audience tastes. Contrary to their reputation for being light and frivolous, newsreels during World War II were usually descriptive and straightforward. We conclude that the global newsreel system should be seen as a rudimentary precursor to today's satellite news channels.

Introduction

Standard accounts of global news broadcasting identify CNN's rise in the 1980s as ushering in a new era of globalized visual news (e.g., Whittemore, 1990). In 1991, CNN's groundbreaking coverage of the Gulf War presented a global audience with simultaneous English-language news coverage of the conflict (e.g., Gilboa, 2005). Soon after, industry leaders like CNN and BBC World realized they could expand their global audiences by developing country-specific news products. Today, this "glocalized" business model has been adapted by a broad range of satellite broadcasters who draw from a common pool of visual imagery to produce regional or country-specific news products voiced in local languages and selected for appeal to local tastes (e.g., Chang, 2003; Groshek, 2008; Lee, 2005; Sinclair, 1997).

Although this satellite news system is usually seen as an unprecedented development, a recent study claims that the first global broadcasting system may have been created by the international newsreel industry, which existed from World War I through the beginning of the television era (Althaus, 2010). Not only was this cinema-based news delivery system fully operational nearly seven decades before CNN's first broadcast, but the newsreel system reached a global audience far larger than any of today's satellite channels and created a news net rivaling today's satellite broadcasters. For example, in 2011 CNN International had bureaus in 33 countries (CNN Press Room, 2011), while in the 1930s and 1940s Fox's *Movietone News* had cameras stationed in 51 countries (Fielding, 1972).

This provocative claim that newsreels formed the first worldwide visual news broadcasting system has been advanced largely on the basis of historical accounts and circumstantial evidence. Empirically testing whether newsreels can be considered the first worldwide visual news system is an important undertaking for at least two reasons. First, although various historical accounts suggest that the same footage was shown all over the world during the era of the newsreel (e.g., Baechlin & Muller-Strauss, 1952; Fielding, 1972; Hiley & McKernan, 2001), no study to date has offered more than anecdotal evidence that the newsreel system exposed audiences in different countries to comparable news content. As a result, there is no obvious way to tell how similar coverage might have been across countries, or to what extent

this content sharing took place within or across each of the globally distributed newsreel brands.

Second, if newsreels are empirically confirmed to be the first visually oriented global news broadcasting system, then communication scholars have been missing an important part of the story of news media evolution. However, if newsreels were as frivolous and spectacular as they are commonly remembered, then communication history may not be missing much by their omission. Addressing this point requires analyzing whether newsreels tended to present public affairs topics in a lighthearted "soft news" frame or in a more straightforward descriptive tone.

To more systematically evaluate the claim that "newsreels were there first," we present the first cross-national comparison of news content delivered through this international newsreel system, comparing newsreel coverage distributed by British and American affiliates of *Movietone News*. The following sections present a brief description of the history and mechanics of the newsreel system that clarifies how newsreels operated as a global information medium. We then present our hypotheses before describing the data and methodological approach used in the analysis. After presenting the results of our analysis, the study offers concluding remarks about the implications of these findings.

The Newsreel as a Global News Medium

Documentary film shorts about "actualities" first appeared in the 1890s, around the same time that photographs were beginning to appear in newspapers. By 1911, the popularity of these film shorts had given rise to an international newsreel system that would soon become dominated by a small number of multinational firms. In the 1930s, the 20th Century Fox Corporation's *Movietone News*—the subject of our empirical analysis—would become one of the most broadly distributed and widely viewed newsreels in the world (Baechlin & Muller-Strauss, 1952; Fielding, 1972; McKernan, 2002). The international newsreel system would remain a prominent mass medium until eventually being supplanted by domestic television news broadcasting in the 1950s for the United States and in the 1960s for the United Kingdom. The last American newsreel folded in 1967, while the last British newsreel was issued in 1979 (Fielding, 1972; McKernan, 2002).

Although a full treatment of the economic models, audience structures, and production characteristics of the newsreel medium is beyond the scope of this study, a brief overview of these topics can nonetheless aid readers in appreciating the general characteristics of this forgotten medium. Newsreels were shown in movie theaters around the world as a key element of the short-subjects reel that accompanied every feature film. Young or old, in Boise or Berlin, every person who went to the movies was shown a newsreel, and the high levels of incidental exposure to public affairs information accounts for the newsreel's importance as a communication medium in the pre-television era. One historian claims that because newsreels were so widely seen, and because they were uniquely positioned as the only moving

image news medium in the pre-television era, by the 1930s "newsreels had joined the newspapers as suppliers of the sum of information and the range of interpretation upon which public opinion formed itself" (Pronay, 1972, p. 411).

Since movie-going was such a popular activity during the early and middle 20th century, most newsreel companies released two issues per week. Today, we would call them "broadcasts." Film companies producing newsreels wanted to make sure frequent audience members had fresh content to see. The typical newsreel issue was a unified 10-minute package of stories consisting of 5–10 items. Most newsreel issues contained a mix of topics ranging from local happenings to international events, including news about celebrities, sports, death-defying exploits, and the latest fashion trends.

Newsreels are widely remembered (and often dismissed) as frivolous and flip in orientation, more likely—it is thought—to feature airplane crashes and stilt racing contests than serious matters of public concern. Because they were presented as part of an entertainment program, the newsreels generally avoided controversial topics that might divide cinema audiences coming to the movies for escape rather than enlightenment. They were also firmly within the documentary film tradition, rather than anything that might be recognized today as professional reporting (Katz & Katz, 1948; Meltzer, 1947). With its ever-present musical score and melodramatic narration style, the newsreel privileged a form of visual storytelling that showed the viewer what happened rather than explained what it meant.

Yet the newsreel's style evolved over the course of the 1920s and 1930s. As society became more engrossed with social conflict, war, and economic disaster, so did the newsreel. By the start of World War II, newsreels had become a more sober and mature informational medium that focused on international topics and public affairs (Baechlin & Muller-Strauss, 1952). Once the war was underway, the mood of the world grew somber in response to the conflict's human costs, and the purpose of newsreel stories shifted from solely providing entertainment to raising awareness about the war (Sanger, 1946).

Besides becoming more somber in tone, historical accounts suggest that newsreels became increasingly internationalized and globally homogenous over the course of the 1930s (e.g., Cumming, 1967; McKernan, 2002). This shift was out of economic necessity rather than design. Although newsreel audiences came to expect coverage of the latest overseas developments, the operating margins for the industry were so thin that none of the major domestic newsreel companies could afford to independently field a sufficiently large number of cameramen to cover all the important stories occurring around the world. To reduce the cost of newsgathering, the major newsreel brands relied heavily on reciprocity agreements within their subsidiaries to supply the needed footage at an affordable price. For example, film shot by British *Movietone* would be shared with American *Movietone* and all the other *Movietone* operations around the world, who could choose to reedit the film with local narration for distribution to their domestic audiences (Althaus, 2010, p. 207).

This practice evolved into an international system of film exchanges, where film shot by one company was traded or sold to others. Although "exclusives" brought

prestige to the newsreels, exchanges were more financially lucrative. Additionally, the scarcity of film stock during World War II led newsreel companies to pool their cameramen in "rota" systems (what we could call "press pools" today). Within the rota arrangement, any film shot by one company's cameras was made available without charge to all the other companies contributing to the rota. As footage sharing became the norm in the 1930s and 1940s, many observers of the newsreel industry began to lament the lack of competition and resulting homogeneity of newsreel coverage across different companies and countries. Because the main competitors in the international newsreel system were, like *Movietone*, either American-owned or subsidiaries of American companies, observers also began to talk openly of American hegemony in the global newsreel industry (e.g., Baechlin & Muller-Strauss, 1952).

The apparent footage-sharing practices of the industry, and the alleged homogeneity of newsreel imagery across countries and competing rivals, are the basis for the claim that the newsreel system functioned as a rudimentary medium for global news broadcasting (Althaus, 2010). However, no previous study has systematically analyzed newsreel content from this global system to see whether these expectations survive empirical scrutiny.

Research Question and Hypotheses

Evaluating historical claims about content homogeneity requires a cross-national comparison of newsreel content that controls for as many confounding factors as possible. Ideally, this would involve comparing newsreels distributed in different countries by the same corporation during identical time periods. Given the historical evolution of the newsreel industry's content-sharing practices, analyzing cross-national comparative data from the 1940s—particularly during the rota period for war-related coverage imposed by World War II—would provide a "best case" test for assessing the degree of content homogeneity across countries within the newsreel system.

This study reports such a test. Although the video record of newsreel coverage from this period is incomplete and often difficult to access, we were able to obtain a complete record of story-level summaries for Fox's American-owned *Movietone News* and its subsidiary British *Movietone* spanning the entire period of American involvement in World War II. Although such a comparison captures only a fraction of the global information flow within this system—the *Movietone* franchise alone produced "glocalized" newsreels in 47 countries during the 1940s (Lawrenson, 1946)—the close relationship between the franchise operations in these two countries makes this pairing a nearly ideal comparison for establishing the upper boundary for how similar newsreel content might be within the global newsreel system. Considering the cultural similarities between these two countries and the footage sharing practices suggested by historical accounts, if we do not observe content

homogeneity here, then we would not likely observe it between any other two countries.

Historical accounts suggest similarity in newsreel content between these two countries. Baechlin and Muller-Strauss (1952) in particular noted that due to the rota system's common footage pool, only a limited number of international stories were in circulation during this period. They concluded that any discernible differences in coverage among companies and countries were due to slight variations in cutting and editing. This leads us to our first expectation:

H_1: Internationally distributed newsreels drew heavily from a common pool of news footage.

If footage sharing was as common as the historical accounts suggest, then even if country-specific editorial teams produced customized newsreel products out of this common footage pool, reliance on shared resources should produce homogeneity in the topics and geographic areas covered by different newsreels. However, even though we expect *Movietone* newsreels in Britain and America to report on similar topics and areas of the world, we do not expect these distributions to be identical. The "glocalized" editing process for newsreels encouraged the adaptation of shared footage rather than merely its reproduction. We therefore expect that newsreel topics and areas of geographic focus will differ somewhat by country:

H_2: The topical distribution and geographic focus of newsreel stories should vary according to country-specific patterns of audience interest.

Audience interest in specific topics is difficult to surmise seven decades later, but World War II provides a fortuitous opportunity to infer levels of popular interest in news from the two major combat theaters. The United States was equidistant from the European and Pacific theaters, while the United Kingdom was within the European theater of combat. Additionally, although both countries sent military forces to both theaters, the United States had a heavier investment in the Pacific (Ellis, 1993: Table 10, p. 229). Of the 5.4 million American Army personnel serving overseas when Germany surrendered, 28% were stationed in the Pacific and the rest were in Europe. Of the 2.6 million British military personnel serving overseas during the entire war, 15% served in the Pacific and the rest served in Europe. Thus, we expect that while newsreels in both countries should primarily emphasize war news from the European theater, the difference in personnel allocated to the Pacific theater should lead the British edition of *Movietone* to focus less attention on the Pacific front than the American edition.

Finally, we expect that newsreels from the World War II period should tend to present news items in a straightforward, descriptive manner. Historical accounts suggest that the slapstick days of newsreel content had passed long before the start of World War II, and that a growing sobriety had taken hold of newsreel coverage in the 1930s and 1940s. Much as modern-day broadcasters treat military conflict with

special care, newsreel personnel took war seriously. We therefore expect that "soft news" stories (Baum, 2003) will be the exception rather than the rule for wartime newsreel coverage in both countries:

H_3: "Soft news" presentations of public affairs content will be relatively uncommon in both American and British newsreel stories from this period.

Method

Data Sources

Content data for newsreel coverage in American *Movietone* newsreels comes from the World War II Paper Records for the Fox *Movietone* Newsreel Collection at the Library of Congress.[1] This collection includes one-page summaries of all stories contained in each newsreel issue, called continuity sheets. Since video of the American *Movietone* newsreel must be accessed on-site at multiple archives and is both incomplete and difficult to study, continuity sheet summaries provide the content data analyzed in our study. Although it would be ideal to have access to the full text or video content for these newsreels, the degree of information provided by these summaries is sufficient for the coding scheme described in the following section. Content data for British *Movietone* newsreel stories come from the "News on Screen" database maintained by the British Universities Video and Film Council.[2] This database contains content descriptions for each newsreel story that include both continuity sheet summaries and "shotlist" descriptions written by later archivists to document the scenes that were shown in each story. These British records are therefore directly comparable to the information provided by the continuity sheets in the American sample.

The Library of Congress' record of the American *Movietone* continuity sheets begins in September 1941. Starting then and continuing until the end of the war, we selected every other week and analyzed every newsreel issue that appeared during each sampled week. Typically this meant two sampled issues per week, each containing a full set of stories. Our final sample week began on August 16, 1945, right before Japan's surrender on September 2, 1945. All *Movietone* stories that were issued in the United States or the United Kingdom on any day of the selected weeks were included in the analysis. This sampling procedure yields nine weeks from 1941, twenty-six weeks each from 1942, 1943, and 1944, and seventeen weeks from 1945, containing half of all newsreel issues distributed by *Movietone* in each country during the period of interest.

To give the reader a better sense of what these data sources contain, Table 1 presents continuity sheet contents for the American *Movietone* issue from August 30th, 1943, and story summaries for the British *Movietone* issue from August 31, 1943. Both sets of stories are mainly descriptive summaries of recent events. Only

Table 1
Comparison of American and British Movietone Issues for August 30–31, 1943

American *Movietone* August 31, 1943	British *Movietone* August 30, 1943
War News by Russell Muth and Lowell Thomas	1. Berlin's First Big Dose MOVIETONE CARD TITLE: Berlin Gets First Dose. DESCRIPTION: Although Berlin has previously received a 900 ton attack, the recent raid is being called their first big dose. According to German sources the battle of Berlin has now begun.
1. AIR RAID OVER FRANCE—Boston medium bombers raid German naval supply center—flying at high speed and low level, bombers devastate Nazi submarine supply depot.	
2. CAPTURE OF MUNDA—As U.S. troops advance, an amphibious force of Marines flanks Jap air base—tanks and dive bombers pound enemy position – and airfield is taken.	2. Churchill in Canada (First Pictures) MOVIETONE CARD TITLE: Churchill in Canada (First Pictures). DESCRIPTION: Mrs Churchill and daughter Mary accompanied the Premier to Quebec where they were welcomed by Mr Mackenzie King. Whilst his wife and daughter stayed in Quebec, Mr Churchill paid a visit to President Roosevelt.
3. YANKS RELAX IN EGYPT—American soldiers are the guests of King Farouk who sends his royal dancers, in first public appearance, to entertain.	3. Lord Louis—C-In-C SE Asia MOVIETONE CARD TITLE: Lord Louis - C-in-C SE Asia. DESCRIPTION: Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten has been appointed Supreme Commander-in-Chief, South East Asia.
4. WARSHIP FOR GREECE—Tank-landing ships are commissioned into Greek navy at New Orleans. Reverend Bouterakos presides at ceremony (Only: New Orleans). ***EXCLUSIVE	4. Navy Clears Eastern Sicily MOVIETONE CARD TITLE: Navy Clears Eastern Sicily. DESCRIPTION: Combined operations were the watch word of the Sicily campaign and the Navy's part was not only to land the troops but to bombard the shore.

(*continued*)

Table 1
(*Continued*)

American *Movietone* August 31, 1943	British *Movietone* August 30, 1943
5. SOUTHEAST ASIA COMMANDER—Lord Louis Mountbatten to lead United Nations forces against the Japs. He arrives in Washington to discuss plans with military leaders.	5. Messina—Italy Next MOVIETONE CARD TITLE: Messina Occupied. DESCRIPTION: Our aircraft continued to strafe Messina and the Straits as the Eighth Army continued to move up. The Americans were actually the first into Messina and found many civilians in the now famous "tunnel" shelter.
6. LEST WE FORGET—ON ATTU—U.S. soldiers hold memorial services for war dead of the Aleutian campaign. The men pay their final tribute to their fallen comrades.	
The President Warns Hitler to Surrender	
7. The Quebec Conference over, President Roosevelt talks to Canadian Parliament at Ottawa—he says if Hitler and his generals knew our plans, they'd realize that "surrender would pay them better now than later"—Allies will break up the Nazi gang and eliminate international gangsterism.	
Down on the Farm with England's Royal Family by Louis Tetunic and Helen Claire.	
8. British King, Queen, and Princess visit the Sandringham Palace estate where wartime food is being grown. Queen Elizabeth drives her own cart. King George and his two daughters pedal along on bicycles. Royalty goes rural!	
Water Sports by Al Brick and Ed Thorgersen	
9. For the first time, a girl wins the La Jolla rough water swim. Her name is Muriel Mellon and only 15 years old!	

the Mountbatten story appears simultaneously in both newsreels (American story 5, British story 3). Other stories are offset in time by a week or more, reflecting delays in transporting film across the Atlantic. For example, while the British newsreel announces the opening of the Quebec Conference that was held from August 17–24, the American newsreel from the same week shows pictures from after its conclusion (American story 7, British story 2). Likewise, the lead story in the American newsreel had been shown a week earlier on British screens, while the American story about England's royal family on the farm had been shown on British screens two weeks earlier.[3] In the American newsreel, it is also notable that Story 4 was produced for viewing in the New Orleans area only—an indication of content specialization for local viewing markets within the United States—and also that it is prominently marked as an exclusive *Movietone* story, in contrast to the all of the other stories on this particular continuity sheet.

Besides the title and description fields, which correspond to the continuity sheet descriptions from the American newsreel, the British *Movietone* records also contain additional notes not shown in Table 1. These "Shotlist" descriptions were made by later archivists describing specific images shown, and are often quite detailed. For example, the shotlist field for the first British story in Table 1 includes the following detail: "Shots of incendiaries being stacked on aerodrome, also being loaded into containers, background aerodrome, some of the fellows stripped to the waist. Ducks [sic] shots of engines starting, also dusk shots of Lancasters taking off. Over Berlin fires burning, through which you can see bombs & incendiaries falling. Pan of fires in Berlin." Only the British newsreel records contain this additional shotlist information.

As with any proxy for "full text" content, using continuity sheets and summary descriptions as the basis of our analysis raises concerns regarding the validity of conclusions drawn about the newsreel content actually shown on screens. Such proxies have been widely used by communication scholars, most notably abstracts from the *Vanderbilt Television News Archive* describing network news broadcasts in the United States. Mindful of the methodological pitfalls and limitations that accompany proxy data like Vanderbilt abstracts (e.g., Althaus, Edy, & Phalen, 2002; Edy, Althaus, & Phalen, 2005), we designed our coding scheme to capture only that information likely to be accurately conveyed in the brief textual descriptions provided by story summaries: story topic, story location, and "soft news" framing.

Coding Scheme

Coders were instructed to look for content related to three variables: story location, primary topic, and news angle. Story location was classified as one of seven possible categories. The United States excludes Alaska, Hawaii, and the Aleutian Islands, which are considered part of the Pacific Theater category because they experienced combat directly. Canada includes that country's land area only. The British Isles includes England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. To simplify the geographic structure of a complex war fought on air, land, and sea, we divide the war-fighting areas into

two theaters: the European Theater, including North Africa, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and any location in or around the Atlantic Ocean excluding the British Isles; and the Pacific Theater, including India, Burma, China, New Guinea, and Australia as well as any location in or around the Pacific Ocean including Alaska, Hawaii, and the Aleutian Islands, but excluding the continental United States. Finally, if the story location did not fit with the aforementioned categories, it was classified as Elsewhere, and if the location could not be determined, it was classified as Unknown.

Each story's primary topic was classified into one of six categories. The first two categories, War in Europe and War in the Pacific, consist of any story describing recent developments in the war's progress, mentioning territorial advances, or documenting appearances by celebrities and political leaders in combat zones. The third category, War-Related Activities, covers all other war-related stories from war zones and from domestic locations, and could feature military personnel or civilians engaged in efforts supporting the war. This category includes stories about military training and preparation, rest and recreation, interviews and awards, and technological advancements related to the war, as well as stories about domestic war activities such as war bond drives, victory gardens, civil defense and public service announcements. These first three topical categories together capture all stories directly addressing the war abroad or at home. The fourth category, Politics, includes speeches by leaders made outside of combat zones, and any other political stories unrelated to the war effort. Sports and Recreation includes stories about sporting events and recreational activities occurring in places other than the two major combat theaters. Finally, a catchall Other category includes topics addressing economics, agriculture, fashions, animals, major disasters, accidents unrelated to war, and the like.

Coders were also instructed to record the story's angle or tone. If the story description had a light-hearted tone, focusing on humor or novelty, it was coded as "soft news." Examples of a soft news angle include stories that make jokes about a serious event, focus on peculiar or extreme happenings such as world records, or focus on the lifestyles of celebrities independent of war-related activities. As long as a story contained even one hint of a soft news angle, it was coded as such, even if the story related to a wartime activity. However, stories about combat, casualties, or other depressing realities of war were not considered soft news, even if they contained some lighthearted diction to dampen the grimness of the footage shown.

For interested readers, the content analysis codebook is included as an online appendix.

Coding Procedure and Intercoder Reliability

Eight coders carried out the content analysis after extensive training and reliability testing. Two coders independently analyzed every story in each assigned newsreel issue. Coders using the British *Movietone* records were allowed to use all data fields

that might yield information on categories of interest, including shotlist descriptions. Coders using the American *Movietone* records were able to use the continuity sheet summaries only. Reliability scores were computed on the full set of double-coded stories (N = 2,510 total stories: 807 from British *Movietone* and 1,703 from American *Movietone*), and acceptable levels of intercoder reliability were confirmed: 82.8% agreement for primary topic (Coefficient S = .80, Krippendorff's alpha = .77), 76.1% agreement for story location (Coefficient S = .71, Krippendorff's alpha = .69), and 90.9% agreement for soft news framing (Coefficient S = .82, Krippendorff's alpha = .51).[4] All disagreements were subsequently resolved by sending them to pairs of trained coders who reconciled the best coding for each disagreement. The final data set used in the analysis has been fully reconciled and contains no disagreements.

Results

Few Original Newsreel Stories

Our first hypothesis is that newsreel stories consisted primarily of repackaged footage from a common pool of imagery. The existing record of continuity sheets for American *Movietone* provide no clear indication about the source of footage shown, but fortunately, the British records contain a "footage source" field that offers the first direct evidence of footage-sharing practices used by major newsreel companies like *Movietone*. Table 2 lists footage sources for all of the British newsreel stories in our sample (N = 807). We organized the named sources into three main categories, in descending order of frequency—other newsreel companies, government or military sources, other countries—with catchall categories for all other sources and records having no listed source. The first column shows the percentage of all stories listing each source category, the second shows the number of stories for each source category, the third shows the percentage of total minutes broadcast in all newsreel issues that originated from each source,[5] and the fourth column shows the total number of minutes supplied by each source.

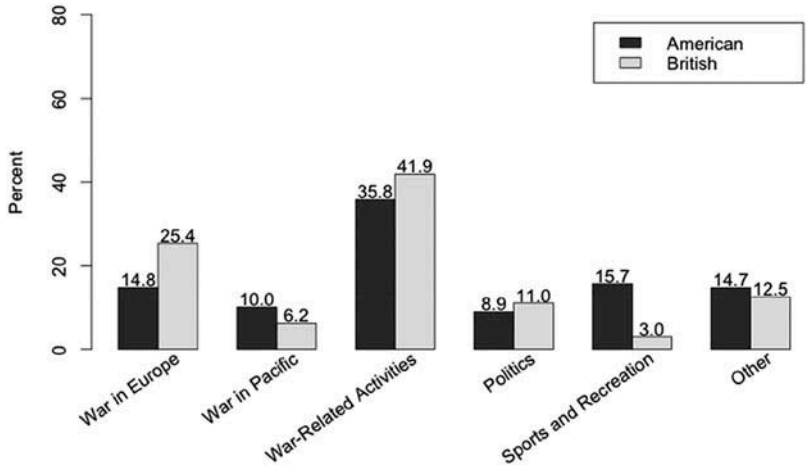
Table 2 confirms that British *Movietone* stories drew from a variety of common sources: 44% used film credited to other newsreel companies, 31% used film from government or military sources, 9% listed country-specific sources, and another 1% listed other sources. Finally, 15% listed no footage source at all. Further analysis revealed that two-thirds of these "no source listed" stories were located in the British Isles while none came from the United States, Canada, or any other identifiable location outside of combat theaters. This leads us to conclude that "no source listed" stories represent original footage produced by British *Movietone* for its own domestic newsreel issues. In contrast, nearly half of stories tagged as "Movietone" in the Other Newsreel Companies category featured locations in the United States, leading us to conclude that this "Movietone" category represents footage originally produced by *Movietone* franchises in other countries.

Taken together, these results suggest that 85% of stories issued by British *Movietone* and 87% of the total minutes aired in this newsreel used footage from a

Table 2
Footage Sources for British Movietone Newsreels

	Stories		Time	
	%	*n*	%	Minutes
Other Newsreel Companies				
Pathe	11.4	92	10.1	115
British Paramount	9.4	76	9.7	110
Gaumont	8.1	65	8.2	93
Movietone	4.6	37	3.7	42
Library	3.7	30	4.1	47
Universal	1.7	14	1.2	14
Scottish Films	1.7	14	0.6	7
Rota	1.5	12	3.9	45
United	1.2	10	0.8	9
Other	0.6	5	0.8	9
Total	44.0	355	43.0	489
Government or Military Sources				
Ministry of Information	12.3	99	11.0	125
Army	7.3	59	10.0	114
Royal Air Force	4.2	34	6.4	73
APS	1.9	15	2.1	24
Canadian Film Unit	1.4	11	1.9	22
United States Marines	0.9	7	0.8	9
USAAF	0.7	6	1.7	20
War Office	0.6	5	0.4	5
War Office Film Unit	0.5	4	0.9	11
8th USAAF	0.4	3	0.5	6
Office of War Information	0.2	2	0.3	4
Other	0.5	4	0.7	9
Total	30.9	249	36.9	420
Country-Specific Sources				
United States	4.5	36	2.3	26
Great Britain	3.1	25	2.1	24
Australia	1.1	9	1.4	15
Russia	0.4	3	0.4	4
Scotland	0.2	2	0.0	1
India	0.1	1	0.2	2
Total	9.4	76	6.3	72
All Other Sources	1.0	8	0.7	8
No Source Listed	14.7	119	13.1	149
Total	100	807	100	1138

Figure 1
Distribution of Primary Topics in American and British Movietone Stories.



Note. For t-tests and X^2 statistics, consult the Appendix. n = 1,703 American stories, n = 807 British stories.

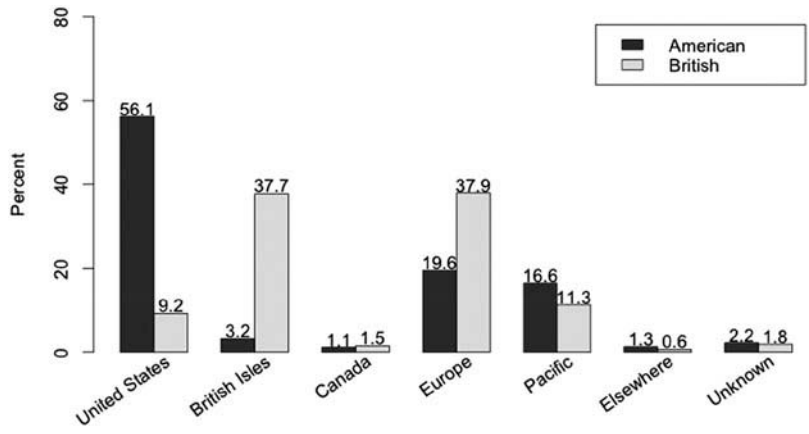
common film pool produced by sources outside the British *Movietone* company. These results offer strong support for our first hypothesis.

Glocalized Content in British and American Newsreels

Our second hypothesis anticipates topical and geographical differences in coverage between American and British newsreels. Figure 1 displays the topical distributions of stories appearing in the two newsreels, which are significantly different from one another (χ^2 = 129, df = 5, $p < .001$).[6] As predicted, both countries emphasized the European theater more than the Pacific theater, but American *Movietone* gave more attention to the Pacific theater than did its British counterpart. Updates about the War in Europe were presented in 25.4% of British stories, compared to just 14.8% of stories in the American sample ($p < .001$). In contrast, 10.0% of American stories featured updates about the War in the Pacific, compared to only 6.2% of stories in the United Kingdom ($p < .001$). Consistent with our second hypothesis, this pattern suggests that newsreel editors in each country assumed audience interest in those aspects of the war that hit closer to home.

When the percentage of stories on War-Related Activities is added to that for War in Europe and War in Pacific, another difference emerges: war coverage occupied a greater proportion of British stories (73.5% of all stories) than American stories (60.6%). The British

Figure 2
Locations Depicted in American and British Movietone Stories

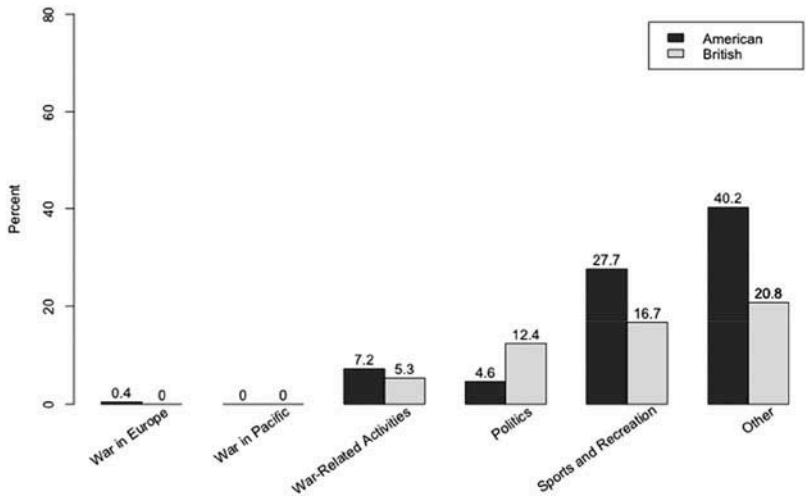


Note. For t-tests and X^2 statistics, consult the Appendix. n = 1,703 American stories, n = 807 British stories.

and American newsreels were more alike in their attention to non-war topics. Political stories about government, campaigns, and elections were infrequently shown in both countries (8.9% of American stories, 11.0% of British), perhaps owing to the newsreels' tendency to avoid controversy. Likewise, both newsreels had similar proportions of "other" stories, a category that contains most of the oddball stories and dramatic spectacles like car crashes and epic disasters for which newsreels are famous. The biggest difference between the two newsreels is for stories about Sports and Recreation, which occupied 15.7% of stories in the American reels but only 3.0% of British stories ($p < .001$).

Thus far, the topical distributions of American and British stories confirm a substantial degree of customization in newsreel content. An even clearer illustration of glocalization tendencies is shown in Figure 2, which presents findings for story location. Newsreels in both countries paid greater attention to domestic stories than foreign ones: 56.1% of the American stories took place in the United States, while 37.7% of the British stories took place in the British Isles. Conversely, only 9.2% of British stories focused on American locations, and just 3.2% of American stories presented items from the British Isles. British stories focused nearly twice as much on locations in the European theater as the American stories, while American stories originating in war theaters were divided fairly evenly between Europe and the Pacific. This is consistent with the tendency for global news exchange systems to "domesticate the foreign" (Gurevitch, Levy, & Roeh, 1991).

Figure 3
The Primary Topic Distribution of Soft News Stories



Note. For t-tests and X^2 statistics, consult the Appendix. n = 1,703 American stories, n = 807 British stories.

In short, British and American *Movietone* issues selectively reported from a common pool of footage to create country-specific offerings with distinctive content characteristics. These findings provide strong support for our second hypothesis.

Less Soft Than Their Reputation Suggests

Only two comprehensive histories of the American newsreel system have been written: one by a film historian who characterized the newsreels as largely frivolous and overblown in their treatment of current events (Fielding, 1972), and the other by a former newsreel personality who argued that the industry evolved into a fairly informative medium resembling early television newscasts (Cumming, 1967). Our analysis of soft news framing in newsreel coverage reveals that the latter characterization may be more accurate, at least for the World War II period. Only 13.3% of American stories and 6.7% of British stories were classified as soft news based on story summary descriptions ($p < .001$).

Figure 3 presents the percentage of stories in each topic category coded as "soft" in tone, and the overall difference between countries is marginally significant ($\chi 2 = 8.8$, df = 4, $p = .06$). The distribution of "soft" stories varied somewhat across

countries: American *Movietone* was significantly softer than the British edition for the Other ($p < .001$) category, while British *Movietone* was significantly softer than the American edition on Politics stories ($p < .05$). There were no soft news stories providing updates about the War in the Pacific, and hardly any about the War in Europe. When discussing other War-Related Activities, the newsreels were only slightly more likely to take on a light-hearted tone: 5.3% of British stories about war-related activities adopted a soft-news angle, as did 7.2% of American stories on this topic, but this difference was not significant. In general, as predicted by our third hypothesis, sobriety in tone was the order of the day during World War II.

Discussion

This study supports the claim that the international newsreel system functioned as a rudimentary global broadcast system for distributing a common set of visual news subjects to popular audiences around the world. These international newsreel corporations "glocalized" their worldwide news products more than a half century before satellite broadcasters would utilize this programming strategy (e.g., Cohen, 2002; Lee, 2005; Robertson, 1995).

Our analysis of American and British *Movietone* newsreels from World War II revealed strong support for our three hypotheses. First, international newsreel companies drew from a common pool of current events footage. Although we were unable to examine the footage sources used in American editions, our analysis of British footage confirmed that few stories aired by British *Movietone* were filmed using its own camera crews. Instead, most footage came from third parties and was likely available to all interested newsreel companies. Second, despite drawing from a common pool of footage, country-specific newsreels within a larger international franchise "glocalized" their content to suit local tastes and interests. Although the British and American editions of *Movietone News* both focused most of their attention on the war effort, the allocation of specific topics and story locations varied predictably according to likely patterns of audience interest. And third, contrary to the medium's reputation, our analysis indicates that relatively few stories were framed in a lighthearted or humorous way. This is at least partly a function of the war: most newsreel stories of this era addressed a serious topic that affected the lives of nearly all citizens in both countries.

There are three important limitations related to the broader conclusions that can be drawn from our findings. First, although the newsreel was primarily a visual, storytelling medium, the content data available to us consists of brief textual summaries. Our coding scheme was designed to capture the aspects of newsreels that could be reliably extracted from these story summaries, but the findings obviously ignore the audio and visual dimensions that made the newsreel such a distinctive public affairs medium. The summaries used in our analysis do not reveal all of the subtle wordplays, editing choices, and visual cues that might have conveyed humor and irony.

As a result, our findings could make the newsreel look more serious than it actually was.

Second, our decision to compare two such culturally similar countries places important restrictions on conclusions that can be drawn about the global newsreel system more generally. If the data existed to extend this analysis to a broader range of countries, it is likely that less content homogeneity would be found. How much less remains an open question.

A third limitation arises from focusing on newsreel coverage during World War II. This time in newsreel history was selected for its extreme reliance on rota systems and exchanges, which should maximize the tendency for newsreels to rely on non-exclusive footage when reporting on domestic and international events. Historical accounts suggest that World War II marked an enduring turning point in the style of newsreel coverage given to public affairs. We are confident that the general tendencies revealed in our findings extended through the post-war period until the medium's demise. When these tendencies emerged prior to World War II remains unclear. Therefore, the findings of our study cannot speak to patterns in newsreel content prior to the war.

Supplemental Data

Supplemental data for this article can be accessed at https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1375500

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Notes

1. The Library of Congress's "Fox Movietone Newsreel Collection: World War II Paper Records" collection is maintained by the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division and detailed in the following Permalink: https://lccn.loc.gov/2007641041.
2. The News on Screen database is available at http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen. Further details on the BUFVC collection are available at: http://bufvc.ac.uk/newsonscreen/about/history.

3. Story 1 in the American newsreel corresponds to "News on Screen" story 12809 in the British newsreel, issued August 23, 1943, while story 8 in the American newsreel corresponds to "News on Screen" story 12801, issued August 19, 1943.
4. The lower alpha score for soft news framing stems from the rarity of soft news stories: The 91% agreement score shows that coders were quite successful at identifying when there was no soft news framing in a story.
5. The British *Movietone* data records include shot lengths in feet. We converted these shot lengths into time using the standard formula recommended by the Editors Guild Magazine (http://www.editorsguild.com/v2/magazine/Newsletter/JanFeb03/tip_math.html): multiply the shot length in feet by 16 to derive the total number of frames, and then divide the total number of frames by 1,440 to get total minutes.
6. More detailed significance testing for this and the other figures is reported in the Appendix.

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Appendix

T-Tests and Chi-Squared Statistics

	M_1	M_2	M_1-M_2	χ^2	t	df	p
Primary Topic				129.0		5	.00
War in Europe	14.8	25.4	–10.6	–	–6.0	1331.3	.00
War in the Pacific	10.0	6.2	3.8	–	3.4	1933.1	.00
War Activities	35.8	41.9	–6.1	–	–2.9	1542.1	.00
Politics	8.9	11.0	–2.1	–	–1.6	1456.3	.11
Sports	15.7	3.0	12.7	–	11.9	2507.6	.00
Other	14.7	12.5	2.2	–	1.5	1684.6	.12
Story Location				837.2		6	.00
United States	56.1	9.2	46.9	–	29.8	2407.8	.00
British Isles	3.2	37.7	–34.5	–	–19.6	907.3	.00
Canada	1.1	1.5	–0.4	–	–0.8	1399.2	.45
Europe	19.6	37.9	–18.3	–	–9.4	1333.6	.00
Pacific	16.6	11.3	5.3	–	3.7	1833.6	.00
Elsewhere	1.3	0.6	0.7	–	1.7	2172.6	.08
Unknown	2.2	1.8	0.4	–	0.5	1696.3	.60
Soft News Angle				8.8		4	.06
War in Europe	0.4	0.0	0.4	–	1.0	251.0	.32
War in the Pacific	0.0	0.0	0.0	–	–	–	–
War Activities	7.2	5.3	1.8	–	1.2	780.8	.24
Politics	4.6	12.4	–7.8	–	–2.0	130.3	.05
Sports	27.7	16.7	11.0	–	1.3	29.1	.19
Other	40.2	20.8	19.4	–	3.8	220.8	.00

Note. The entries for M_1 are the percentages of stories in each sub-category for American *Movietone*; the entries for M_2 are for British *Movietone*. The χ^2 statistics were calculated by comparing the proportions of stories in each category, between the two newsreel companies. T-statistics, degrees of freedom, and associated *p*-values were calculated using Welch's unequal variances t-tests in the *R* statistical package. T-tests for primary topic and story location compare the percentage of stories about each topic and each location across newsreel companies. For soft news angle, we compare the percentage of stories with a soft news angle within each topic.