MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS – TECHNOLOGIES, POLICIES AND CHALLENGES

REALITY TELEVISION – MERGING THE GLOBAL AND THE LOCAL

AMIR HETSRONI
EDITOR

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Chapter 2

REALITY TELEVISION AND COMPUTER-MEDIATED IDENTITY: OFFLINE EXPOSURE AND ONLINE BEHAVIOR

Michael A. Stefanone(1), Derek Lackaff (2) and Devan Rosen(3)

1. State University of New York at Buffalo
2. University of Texas at Austin, USA
3. University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA

> Life on the screen makes it very easy to present oneself as other than one is in real life. And although some people think that representing oneself as other than one is always a deception, many people turn to online life with the intention of playing it in precisely this way. (Turkle, 1995, p. 228.)

In her now-classic work *Life on the Screen*, sociologist Sherry Turkle (1995) effectively captured the radical zeitgeist of the early public internet: absent physical cues in the text-based medium, individuals were free to construct and deconstruct identity as they saw fit. Gender, race, and ability only became a component of social exchange to the degree that individuals chose to introduce it. "We are creating a world that all may enter without privilege or prejudice accorded by race, economic power, military force, or station of birth," optimistically declared another early commentator (Barlow, 1996). Significant amounts of subsequent research energy have been devoted to exploring how computer mediation affects personal identity construction and social interaction (e.g. Donath, 1999; Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, 2006; Walther, 2007).

A key challenge to such efforts is the fact that the quantity and quality of nonverbal (or nontextual) social cues available to computer-mediated communication (CMC) participants has changed continuously since scholars first began examining them. Where Turkle (1995) explored a low-bandwidth textual social landscape comprised of multi-user dungeons (MUDs) and newsgroups, today's CMC users have options like utilizing voice chat to coordinate raids in the stunningly-rendered World of Warcraft, and participation in asynchronous video discussions via YouTube. Rather than allowing users to experiment and play with their identity, many of today's CMC technologies tie users ever closer to their offline, physical selves. For example, Stefanone and Jang (2007) found that people with large

offline social networks adopt blogs with the intent to maintain these relationships. Here, CMC tools were leveraged to reduce the costs associated with maintaining large strong tie social networks. Further, social network sites (SNSs) such as Facebook introduce new types of personal information into social interaction and have become central platforms for interpersonal and group communication. Technological platforms are increasingly likely to mediate interpersonal communication as they diffuse throughout a population, and navigating social environments comprised of mediated identities has become an important communication skill.

In some regards contemporary societies have long been accustomed to interacting with completely "mediated" identities. Although relatively few Americans have had any direct interpersonal interaction with Britney Spears, Brad Pitt, or Kelly Clarkson, many could claim intimate knowledge of these individuals' daily lives. Many people may see photos of Gisele Bündchen and Heidi Klum more frequently than photos of distant friends or family members. Further, celebrity fans are using communication technologies to interact with their idols in many new ways. Manhattanites, for example, are encouraged to plot celebrity "sightings" on the online map available at Gawker Stalker (http://gawker.com/stalker).

Celebrity, of the type enjoyed or endured by actors, models, and athletes, was both a consequence and generator of the mass audience, and resulted in an informational flow that was primarily unidirectional. While the glamour of celebrity was something that mass audiences were encouraged to aspire to (generally by participating in fashionable consumption of advertisers' products) (McCraken, 1989), the world of celebrities was fundamentally removed from the comparatively mundane world of the audience. We argue that the normative and behavioral distinction between the celebrity world and the everyday world is being eroded, and that the dissolution of this boundary is observable in two distinct trends: the development and explosive popularity so-called "reality television," and the concomitant adoption of "Web 2.0" technologies like SNSs that allow individuals to potentially be identified by and communicate with mass-scale audiences.

Reality television has become a dominating component of the contemporary television environment. Reality television focuses on the (purportedly) unscripted interaction of nonprofessional actors who are often framed as "ordinary people" (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004). The transformation of "regular people" into "celebrities" whose every move is worthy of a mass audience's attention was a powerful concept. This media programming model turned out to be hugely popular, immensely profitable, and changed the overall media landscape in significant ways. While the specific components of reality television shows do vary, it is possible to identify broad generic values that generalize to the bulk of content in reality television programming. For example, actors on these shows regularly engage in "confessions," where they ritualistically disclose their private thoughts and feelings to the broadcast audience. This is analogous to the non-directed self disclosure of a specific Web 2.0 application—personal-journal style blogging—as discussed by Stefanone and Jang (2008). Blogs and other easily-accessible communication platforms have enabled an increasingly large population to publish their thoughts, photos, and videos on the Web, and are an example of how new CMC tools are appropriated for social, interpersonal goals (Stefanone and Jang, 2007).

Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2005) refers to a changing orientation between online content producers, consumers, and web technologies. While the utility of this particular term remains questionable (e.g., Berners-Lee, 2006) it does serve to highlight the increasing prevalence of

user-created and user-focused online content and the development of media sharing sites. People without special technical skills are now able to interact with mass audiences via platforms such as blogs, media sharing sites like YouTube, and SNSs like Facebook.

Taken together, reality television and Web 2.0 set the stage for a major shift in the way individuals perceive their role in the media environment. Rather than simply being the target of mediated messages, they can see themselves as protagonists of mediated narratives, and can integrate themselves into a complex media ecosystem. The media tools and strategies employed by celebrities and their handlers – airbrushed photos, carefully coordinated social interactions, strategic selection and maintenance of the entourage – are now in a sense available to everyone, and are increasingly employed in everyday interpersonal interaction. Today, much CMC is thus marked by an increasing emphasis on existing offline relationships, physical and nonverbal communication cues, and their manipulation.

In this paper, Bandura's social cognitive theory (Bandura and Walters, 1977; Bandura, 1986; 2001) frames an analysis of the relationship between reality television consumption and online behavior with Web 2.0 tools like SNSs. Consistent with social cognitive theory, viewers are operationalized as active processors of television content who learn and model behavior portrayed on television programming. Five broad categories of television viewing are analyzed, and used to predict a range of SNS user behavior. Results suggest that social behaviors commonly associated with mediated celebrity are now being enacted by non-celebrities in an increasingly mediated social environment. Andy Warhol predicted in 1968 that everyone would receive fifteen minutes of fame, and contemporary observers such as David Weinberger (2001) suggest that internet technologies such as weblogs will make everyone famous to fifteen people. Reality television, however, demonstrates to viewers that anyone can become famous to an audience of millions, and Web 2.0 tools and applications put that potential within reach.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Reality Television and Affect TV

The relationship between the content of mass media and cultural attitudes is among the most-examined issues in mass communication research. Previous studies have explored the impacts of mass media upon attitudes towards violence (Dominick, 1984), sex (McGee and Frueh, 1980), and smoking (Shanahan, Scheufele, Yang and Hizi, 2004; Wakefield, Flay, Nichter and Giovino, 2003) among many additional topics. One trend observed in the last two decades is the relative increase of reality-framed television programming. Reality television makes the personal thoughts, behaviors, and interactions of its characters the main focus of audience attention. Bente and Feist (2000) refer to this genre as *affect TV,* which presents viewers with "the most private stories of non-prominent people to a mass audience, crossing traditional borders of privacy and intimacy" (p. 114). As the term is used here, the defining characteristic of reality television is that ordinary people (not professional actors) serve as the main characters (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004), and includes programs such as *Survivor*, *The Bachelor,* and *Blind Date* among many others.

Recently, Ferris, Smith, Greenberg and Smith (2007) conducted a content analysis of reality dating television and found that watching these shows was related to perceptions of dating relationships consistent with those modeled on television. The authors used social cognitive theory to explain the connection between television viewing and subsequent attitudes. The current study, however, differs in that reality television is conceptualized more broadly as described below.

Big Brother and Temptation Island

Calvert (2000) refers to reality television's realignment of the private and the public as "mediated voyeurism," and suggests that this is becoming endemic to the culture at large. This culture of mediated voyeurism may have real impacts on those who are most involved in it, and specific personality traits may also exacerbate these effects. For example, previous research has found links between personality traits and media use, such as aggressiveness with violent media use (Slater, Henry, Swaim and Anderson, 2003) and openness to experience and television consumption (Finn, 1997).

As early as 1922, Lippman suggested that we live in a mediated "pseudo-environment," while a host of later cultural scholars have debated the nature of the "spectacle" and the "simulation" of the media-saturated culture. The present focus of mass media research is "social constructivism" which recognizes that media exert influence upon audiences' structuring of social reality (cf. Shanahan and Morgan, 1999). This influence is moderated by discourse about media, as peer groups negotiate meanings among themselves. While revealing statistically meaningful media effects is difficult, it is reasonable to hypothesize that heavy consumers of specific media genres, such as reality television, may be influenced by its messages (Shrum, Wyer and O'Guinn, 1998).

Previous researchers have suggested that the symbolic world portrayed in the media (particularly television) may differ from the "real world" in important ways – the televised world is more violent (Gerbner et al. 1980a), more youthful (Gerbner et al., 1980b) offers employment that is high-status but requires low effort (Signorelli, 1990b), and over-represents traditional gender roles and stereotypes (Morgan, 1983; Rothschild, 1984). The cultivation perspective of media effects (Gerbner, et al., 1982; Shanahan and Morgan, 1999) suggests that television viewers attempt to align their attitudes and beliefs with those observed in television programming. Cultivation theory has been criticized, however, for being overly broad and unable to account for underlying contextual factors of attitude formation (Rubin, Perse, and Taylor, 1988, Shanahan and Morgan, 1999) and insufficient methodological rigor (Schrum, 2007). Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory allows for the integration of social contextual factors into the effects model, and provides a useful framework for discussing the effects of celebrity culture and mediated voyeurism.

Web 2.0

Recent studies indicate that many concepts behind Web 2.0 are more than just marketing hype, and that younger people are increasingly engaged with these social technologies. Over half of all internet-using teens, for example, are "content creators" who create websites or

blogs, share original media such as photos and videos, or remix content into new creations (Lenhart and Madden, 2005). SNSs such as MySpace (http://myspace.com) and Facebook (http://facebook.com) are often a cornerstone of this information space, with many recent surveys finding that 95% or more of college students have active profiles (e.g., PACS survey, 2007).

There appears to be substantial congruence between Web 2.0's culture of personal self-disclosure and the "reality culture" that has come to dominate some segments of the television market. Recent research on blogging, for example, operationalizes disclosures via personal-journal style blogs as non-directed in nature (Stefanone and Jang, 2007), analogous to behavior typified by the reality television genre wherein characters engage in "confessional" style disclosures to viewers. In the current paper, two social web behaviors that enable individuals to emulate mediated celebrity are discussed: SNS use and digital photo sharing.

Social Network Sites

The explosion in popularity of SNSs represents one of the fastest uptakes of a communication technology since the web was developed in the early 1990s. As of February 2008, three of the top 10 most popular websites worldwide were SNSs: Facebook, Myspace, and Orkut (Alexa Top Sites, http://alexa.com). Academic research on SNSs is growing, and has focused on a range of issues including privacy (Gross, Aquisti, and Heinz, 2005), identity and reputation (boyd and Heer, 2006; Walther et al. 2008), and the role these sites play relationship maintenance and the accumulation of resources like social capital (Choi, 2006; Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2007). These sites typically allow an individual to connect their personal profile to the profiles of other users, resulting in a public display of one's entire (online) social network. Adding someone else to one's social network, or "friending," results in a publicly-displayed affiliation between the two individuals. On a technical level, becoming a "friend" requires only a few clicks of the mouse, rather than any investment in conversation or social support. This has resulted in a diversity of approaches and understanding of SNS "friendship." Further, these "friends" cover a wide range of tie strengths, including strong ties which offer social support and increasingly instrumental weak ties (Ellison, Steinfeld, and Lampe, 2007).

Many analyses of social networks focus on groups as a whole, while others focus on abstractions of relationships centered on an individual. Social network structures centered on individuals are known as ego-centered networks and include social relationships of all kinds (Mitchell, 1969). Every individual is the focal actor of an ego-centric network, a social structure which is explicitly reproduced by SNSs like Facebook. In pursuing an ego-centric approach to network analysis, the breadth and intensity of social relationships are typically measured, resulting in a collection of ego networks for a group of participants. The networks of relationships manifest on SNSs are thus readily conceptualized as ego networks.

The "intensity" of SNS use has been operationalized in multiple ways. For example, Ellison, Steinfeld and Lampe (2007) combined number of SNS friends and time spent online to create a "Facebook Intensity Scale." As the current study seeks to measure behaviors that may be influenced by reality television, further refinement of this construct was required. Previous research has found that some SNS users will only link their profile to those of individuals they know in another context, while other users will link relatively

indiscriminately (Donath and boyd, 2004). If an individual's SNS network contains "friends" with whom one has no external relationship, then an individual must have motivations for creating the public connection other than affirming friendship.

Photo Sharing

Digital devices have radically transformed the social landscape of photography. Digital cameras began to outsell film cameras in 2004 (Musgrove, 2006), while camera-enabled mobile phones began to outsell digital cameras just a year later (Sharma, 2005). The profusion of digital cameras and camera devices suggest that digital photography, like other new media practices, is an increasingly "banalized" activity (Graham, 2004) that may play a subtle but important role in social relationships. A host of web services such as Flickr (http://flickr.com) and Snapfish (http://snapfish.com) have emerged to support the storage, organization and sharing of digital photos, while general social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace include photo-sharing as a key functionality.

Photography has a long and social history. As Americans grew increasingly mobile in recent decades, photos helped keep distant family members and friends in close emotional proximity. In many cases, the digitalization of photography just made these sharing processes faster and more convenient. The web has also enabled relatively new forms of interaction through photos. Miller and Edwards (2007) note that two relatively distinct modes of photo sharing can be observed online – both the traditional sharing of photos with an existing social network of friends and family, and an emergent form of public sharing with strangers and online acquaintances. These two groups are perhaps better understood as representing ends of a spectrum of sharing behaviors, as the boundaries of intimacy are increasingly blurred by technological affordances. However, it is reasonable to assume that a primary goal of digital photo sharing, like analog photo sharing, is the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships.

Social Cognitive Theory

People's adoption and use of Internet-based communication tools and applications have been studied from a wide range of perspectives including the diffusion of innovations (Moore and Benbasat, 1991), the technology acceptance model (Davis, Bagozzi, and Warshaw, 1989; Lee, Cho, Gay, Davidson, and Ingraffea, 2003), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive theory (formerly social learning theory) attempts to explain how and why people acquire and maintain certain behavioral patterns. Human functioning is explained as the product of the dynamic interaction of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences. Personal influences include cognitive, affective, and biological factors. Environmental factors include social context and the informational environment. Finally, Bandura includes behavior as a component of function because individuals can reflect on the effects of their own behavior. This tripartite construct is thus dynamic and highly contextual.

Social cognitive theory uses the term *modeling* to characterize the process through which an individual observes others, interprets the observed behavior, and adjusts their own behavior in response. Such observational learning may be the intended outcome of a given

behavioral process, such as teaching a child to feed itself. However, Bandura (1986) notes that modeling may occur in many other contexts, indeed wherever an individual is able to observe others' behavior. The development of television is viewed by Bandura as an especially important source of behavior models, enabling people to "transcend the bounds of their immediate social life" (1986, p. 55). In comparison to the quantity of information about the world available in daily life, the amount of environmental information provided via media is vast. To the extent that one's images of reality are mediated and vicarious rather than directly experiential and experimental, the greater the impact of the media (Bandura, 1986). Bandura is careful to show that modeling is a more complex process than simple mimicry or imitation, and identifies several specific functions of the process.

The observational learning process requires a model, a learnable attitude or behavior, and a conducive personal/behavioral/ environmental context. In the present study, the characters in reality television programming serve as models and the Web 2.0 environment provides a new context for enacting observed behavior. The wide adoption of platforms such as SNSs among the largest demographic of reality television viewers – young adults (Hill, 2005) – suggest significant potential for interrelated media behavior.

Reality Television: Models, Attention and Retention

As reality television programming can be considered a coherent genre, its characters may serve as symbolic models for behavior. While previous discussions of the genre have included shows such as COPS, where some participants (the "suspects") are ostensibly unwilling, this discussion is limited to socially rewarding reality television with participants who willingly disclose their private selves.

Bandura (1986) identifies four subprocesses of the observational learning process: attentional processes, retention processes, (re)production processes, and motivational processes. The attentional process addresses the models ability to attract the observer's attention, as well as the observer's ability to cognitively attend to the model. People are more likely to pay attention to models that are perceived as similar to the self (Bandura, 1994; Eyal and Rubin, 2003), and a major component of reality television characters' appeal is that they are "ordinary," like the viewing audience (Reiss and Wiltz, 2004).

In order for learning to occur, observed behavior must be retained in some form by the individual. Bandura (1986) argues that the human mind retains abstractions of modeled events, rather than historical mental pictures: "As a result of repeated exposure to modeled events, observers extract distinctive features and form composite, enduring images of behavior patterns" (p. 56). One of reality television's strongest messages regards *non-directed self-disclosure,* where personal revelations are not targeted toward specific, individual others, but rather targeted to an abstract audience. As the personal thoughts of the characters are not (yet) directly accessible to the viewing audience, the narrative structure of many reality television shows requires the characters to transgress traditional boundaries of privacy, a sacrifice they are happy to make. Characters are subject to high levels of surveillance, and are often required to present their motivations and private thoughts to a camera in the format of confessionals. Further, high levels of surveillance and disclosure are presented as necessary and fundamentally normal. Reality television participants are rewarded for this behavior with celebrity status and financial gain in the form of prize money (Andrejevic, 2003, Hill, 2005).

Many participants parley their fame into advertising or entertainment careers. For example, after appearing as a contestant on the second season of *Survivor*, Amber Brkich appeared in a subsequent *Survivor* series, then in two seasons of *The Amazing Race*, then in a short-lived series focused on her and her husband (also a reality television show participant) titled *Rob and Amber: Against the Odds*. The couple is currently developing their own reality series (http://amber-brkick.com). Such developments are chronicled in detail in celebrity magazines, entertainment talk shows, and celebrity and gossip blogs.

The primary argument lies in the final two sub-processes of the observational learning theory: productive and motivational processes. The ability of individuals to participate in the mediated environment as pseudo-celebrities is now entirely feasible via the web.

Web 2.0: Production and Motivation

A production process is the enactment of an observed behavior, while a motivation process refers to the fact that the enactment of any behavior is subject to contextual incentives and disincentives. These two sub-processes will be discussed in tandem as they are related to the emergence of Web 2.0 technologies.

SNSs provide a unique platform for the *re*production of behavior observed in and modeled by reality television programming. For most of its history, "the media" was the domain of those who were, by definition, celebrities. With the wide scale adoption of media sharing, blogging, and SNSs, a much broader range of people now have the capability of creating mediated identities. The creation of a SNS profile allows a user to become a mediated character to others. While probably few SNS users would compare their Facebook profile to a talk-show appearance by a movie star, the SNS platform both enables and encourages activities that have been traditional associated with celebrity, such as the primacy of image and appearance in social interaction.

One behavior which may result from reality television modeling is what we term "promiscuous friending." While many users have articulated SNSs that map closely to their own external social networks, other users have SNS friend networks that contain many people who they have not actually met or have no external relationship with. Promiscuous frienders may be reproducing the fame-seeking behavior that is modeled by reality television characters. Having a large social network on a SNS site can been construed as a sign of popularity (being at the center of a large social network) and conversely as a sign of superficiality (e.g. "whores," [boyd, 2006] who are blatant status-seekers). In either case, a large "friends" list implies a large number of social connections, even if many of those connections have little social value in the traditional sense of friendship. In this scenario, users are actively competing for attention via expansive social networks.

Bandura (1986) recognized that not all observed behaviors are ultimately reproduced, and attributes this to motivational processes. The capacity to enact a behavior is insufficient grounds for most people to do so. Motivational processes like positive anticipated outcomes must be entered into the equation. Once again, reality television provides plentiful motivational input. Within the genre of socially rewarding reality television, participants are rewarded with celebrity and cash prizes for their participation. Consistent with Calvert (2000), we suggest the reality television genre demonstrates a value system which equates celebrity status and fame with social prestige and personal value.

In sum, celebrity culture is a real and significant factor in the contemporary media environment. One component of this culture is the development and increasing popularity of so-called reality television programming. Reality television has introduced a new idea into celebrity culture; namely, that the interactions of everyday people are worthy of the attention of broad audiences, and that anyone can become a public celebrity -- special talents, looks, skills, or wealth not required. Further, the development of powerful, accessible tools for self-expression – the platforms of Web 2.0 – now make it possible for individuals to "mediate" themselves, and reach audiences on the same scale as movie stars and fashion models. Taken together, these trends suggest both motivations and predictable outcomes for online behavior. Social cognitive theory provides a framework for understanding how viewers of reality television may enact specific behaviors online.

The following specific hypotheses are proposed:

1) Reality television consumption is positively related to time spent logged into SNS profiles.
2) Reality television consumption is positively related to the size of users' online social networks.
3) Reality television consumption is positively related to the proportion of users' online social networks who have never been met face to face (F2F).
4) Reality television consumption is positively related to sharing photographs via SNSs.

Because reality television is hypothesized to model a specific set of attitudes and behaviors, viewing other categories of television content should not correlate with these behaviors. Earlier effects theories of television considered all television content as having accumulative effect upon viewers (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Gerbner et al, 1986). Like Ferris et al. (2007), we suspect that heavy consumption of particular forms or genres of television content may be differentially associated with online behavior. Thus, we pose the following research question:

RQ1. How Does The Consumption Of News, Fictional, And Educational Television Content Relate To Online Behavior?

Methods

A total of 452 online surveys were completed by a sample of university students from a large, public, American university. Data from this population is ideal for testing the relationship between reality television viewing and online behavior, as it heavily engaged in both activities. Today's college students, part of Generation Y, remain one of reality television's most lucrative and targeted demographics (Hill, 2005) and are considerably more likely than other demographics to participate in social media, including social networking sites (Jones and Fox, 2009). Approximately 58% of the sample was female; the average age of participants was 20.3 years (SD = 2.6). The majority of participants identified their ethnic background as Caucasian (approximately 62%). About 16% were Asian, 6% were African-American, and 3% were Hispanic. The rest (about 13%) identified with a variety of other ethnicities.

Social Network Site Measures

To measure the length of time spent logged into SNSs, participants were asked, "when you typically log into your SNS account, how many hours do you spend online," and "when you typically log into your SNS account, how many minutes do you spend online." Overall, participants reported spending an average of 47.4 (SD = 37.7) minutes per session. Social network sites require users to manage networks in a public manner (Donath and boyd, 2004). Whereas offline social networks may be conceptually amorphous and indistinct (at least until they are examined by curious researchers), SNSs constrain social activity according to their technical design. In general, two SNS users are either "friends," or they have no relationship whatsoever. This particular constraint is articulated by the SNS platform. One question was used to measure how many "friends" participants have connections to via their SNSs, and participants reported an average of 282 friends (SD = 235).

Because of the likelihood that these "friend" connections do not accurately reflect the makeup of user's social networks, participants were asked to estimate the number of these friend connections they have not actually met F2F. The average proportion of network contacts not met was 14 percent (SD = 22), with the majority of respondents indicating they knew all of their SNS contacts. Finally, participants were asked to indicate the number of photographs they have publicly available on their SNS profiles (M = 71.6; SD = 68.2).

Television Viewing Measures

Television viewing was measured using a series of questions addressing five categories of content. Participants were asked "how many hours per day" and "how many days per week" they watched reality television, news, fiction, education, and "other" kinds of content. These items are consistent with Salomon and Cohen (1978) who suggest this is an appropriate approach when measuring time spent viewing television. Reality television consumption was prompted with examples like Real world and American Idol. Fiction shows were prompted with examples like The Simpsons, CSI, etc. Educational content was prompted with examples like The History and Discovery Channels. Overall, participants reported viewing approximately 30 hours of television weekly (SD = 27.8). On average, participants reported watching about 6 hours of reality television (SD = 8.5) and news (SD = 7.3) weekly, 9.3 hours of fiction (SD = 9.7), and 5.4 hours of educational programming (SD = 7.3). The "other" category accounted for 4.7 hours weekly (SD = 7.1).

Results

Table 1 below summarizes the relationships between variables used in this study. Age was negatively correlated with time spent logged in SNSs, the number of friends participants report having connected to their profiles, and the number of photographs available online. Younger people clearly are investing the most resources into these tools. Social network size and the proportion of friends not met were strongly correlated to each other, and the number

of photographs available correlate with network size, as expected. Also expected was the strong correlation between all of the television viewing variables.

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression was used to test the influence television viewing had on each of four dependent variables related to SNS use: time logged into SNSs, the size of participants social networks, the proportion of these networks not met, and the number of photographs shared on these sites.

Table 2 below summarizes the results from the four regression models. In these models, age, gender, and aggregate television viewing were entered as independent variables and regressed onto the SNS measures to determine how television viewing affects each. This analysis begins with aggregate television viewing to explore its influence before examining each category of television content. Both age (β = -.163) and aggregate television viewing (β = .111) were significant predictors of time spent logged into SNSs. Not surprisingly, younger people spend more time managing their online profiles. Further, the more television participants watch, the more time they spend online. Overall, this model explained approximately 5 percent of the total variance.

In the next model, the size of participant's social networks was entered as the dependent variable. Although television viewing is not significant, younger people tend to have larger network sizes (β = -.167). Age was the only significant predictor of network size, and this model explained about 3 percent of total variance.

When these variables were regressed onto the proportion of network contacts not met F2F, only television viewing (β = .101) was a significant predictor. As participants spent more time watching television, the likelihood that they "friend" people they haven't actually met also increases. The last model presented in table 2 reveals that television consumption did not have a relationship with photo sharing. However, age (β = -.181) and gender (β = -.187) were both significant.

The next series of OLS regression models presented in table 3 were designed to explore the roles specific content categories of television play in terms of influencing online behavior and address the specific hypothesis outlined in this study. In these models five categories of television content were regressed onto the same three dependent variables constituting user behavior on SNSs in an effort to more clearly understand the role television content has on behavior.

In the first model, the only variable which predicted average time logged in to SNSs was frequency of reality television viewing (β = .169). The model was significant, $F(8, 445)= 3.41$, $p < .001$), and explained approximately 6 percent of the variance. The addition of the television content variables moderated the relationship between age and time spent logged in, which was no longer a significant predictor.

Reality television viewing was also significant (β = .147) in the model predicting network size, as was age (β = -.240). The addition of the content variables to this model strengthened the coefficients for. Younger participants who watch more reality television tend to have larger social networks via SNSs. When the proportion of network contacts not met F2F was designated as dependent variable, only reality television viewing emerged as significant (β = .182). Here, reality television viewing alone explained more variance in the model than aggregate television viewing (table 2).

The last model aims to explain the frequency of photo sharing via SNSs. Again, reality television viewing was significant (β = .107). Consistent with earlier analyses, age (β = -.290) and gender (β = -.236) were also significant.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations for variables; means (standard deviations) along the diagonal

	Age	Gender	Time logged	# friends	Prop not met	Photos	Rtv	News	Fiction	Edu	Other	All tv
Age	20.3 (2.7)	0.10*	-0.16**	-0.17**	0.01	-0.18***	-0.06	0.07	0.01	0.11*	0.01	0.03
Gender		-	-0.12*	-0.11*	-0.07	-0.26***	-0.24***	0.08	0.02	0.22***	0.17***	0.06
Time logged in			47.4(37.7)	0.17**	0.20***	0.08	0.22***	0.01	0.05	0.02	0.11*	0.11*
# friends on SNS				282(235)	0.27***	0.47***	0.12*	0.04	-0.02	-0.01	-0.09	-0.01
Proportion not met					.14(.22)	0.18***	0.19***	0.12*	0.05	0.10*	0.05	0.15**
# Photos shared						71.6(68.2)	0.11*	-0.05	-0.02	-0.01	-0.11*	-0.02
Rtv hrs/wk							6.1(8.5)	0.26***	0.49***	0.24***	0.33***	0.70***
News hrs/wk								6.0(7.3)	0.38***	0.38***	0.28***	0.61***
Fiction hrs/wk									9.3(9.7)	0.44***	0.44***	0.82***
Education hrs/wk										5.4(7.3)	0.29***	0.64***
Other hrs/wk											4.7(7.1)	0.65***
All tv hrs/wk												31.28(27.8)

Table 2. Standardized beta coefficients for range of dependent variables, aggregate TV viewing

	Time logged in, session	Size of SNS network	% *not* met F2F	Number of photos shared
Age	-.163***	-.167***	.016	-.181***
Gender	-.101	.071	-.057	-.187***
All TV Viewing	.111*	.061	.101*	-.014
$F(4, 449)$, R^2	6.25***, .049	4.85**, .031	1.77, .006	11.36***, .080

Table 3. Standardized beta coefficients for range of dependent variables, individual categories of TV viewing

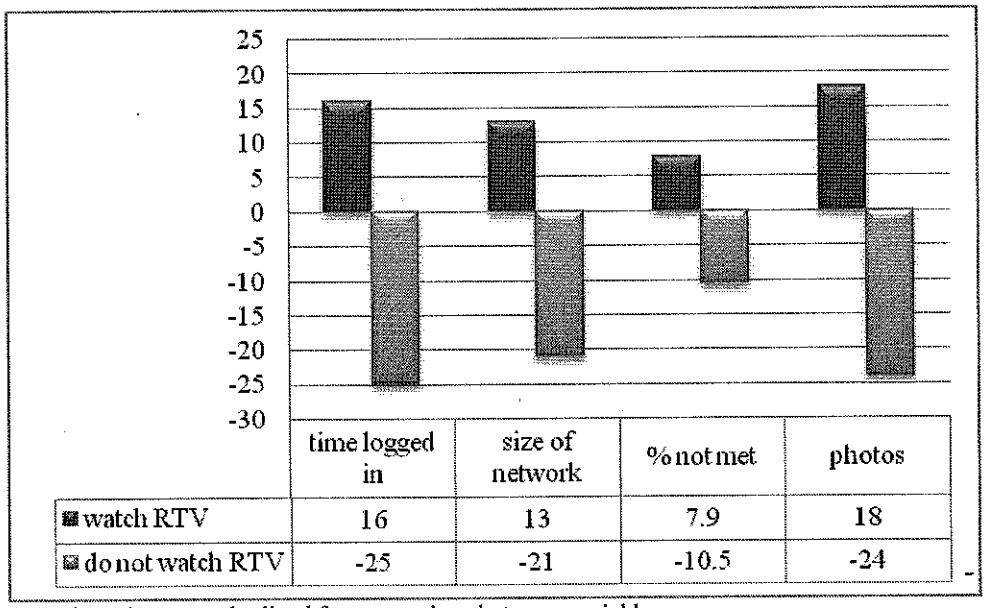
	Time logged in, daily	Size of network	% *not* met F2F	Number of photos shared
Age	-.077	-.229***	0.43	-.269***
Gender	-.073	-.061	-.030	-.239***
RTV hrs/week	.169**	.147*	.182**	.110*
News hrs/week	-.021	.059	.076	-.040
Fiction hrs/week	-.097	-.122	-.052	-.065
Education hrs/week	.049	.031	.040	.059
Other hrs/week	.091	-.071	-.029	-.091
$F(8, 445)$, R^2	3.41**, .058	3.01**, .047	2.29*, .024	8.89***, .130

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

Reality television viewing was the only significant television viewing category significant in all four models; none of the other content categories were significant. Together, these results support the hypotheses presented above.

To further highlight the trend in these analyses, Figure 1, above, was created to show the significance of reality television viewing in terms of each dependent variable. Because the scale varies between these variables, the data was first standardized before comparing differences in mean values for each. As Figure 1 shows, there are systematic differences between viewers and non-viewers of reality television in terms of the behavior indices used in

these analyses. ANOVA analyses confirm that the between group differences are all statistically significant at greater than $p < .01$.



	time logged in	size of network	% not met	photos
watch RTV	16	13	7.9	18
do not watch RTV	-25	-21	-10.5	-24

Note: data have been standardized for comparison between variables.

Figure 1.Systematic differences between viewers and non-viewers of reality television.

DISCUSSION

This research is founded on the premise that the confluence of the rising popularity of both reality television and Web2.0 applications has resulted in a fundamental shift regarding people's roles as media content consumers and producers. The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between the increasing popularity of reality television and people's behavior on SNSs like Facebook. The evidence presented herein suggests that behavior traditionally associated with celebrities is being adopted en mass as people's interpersonal communication becomes increasingly mediated.

Utilizing social cognitive theory as the theoretical foundation, a positive relationship was expected between the amount of reality television young people consume and a range of online behavior in the context of SNSs including time spent logged in, online social network size, the proportion of network contacts not met F2F, and the number of photos shared online. These behaviors are believed to reflect the systematic processing of messages and behavior broadly modeled within the genera of reality television. Recall that the critical change in people's media diets over the past fifteen years lies in a shift from consumption to production. Internet users are faced with low time and financial costs as they enthusiastically contribute to the production of "mass media." This study adds a unique perspective to people's motivations to participate with the social web, and several valuable insights are revealed.

First, aggregate television viewing was used in an attempt to explain the three dependent variables highlighting relevant user behavior on SNSs. The dependent variables used in these

analyses are believed to represent a range of generalizable behaviors users regularly engage in when using SNSs, which also correlate with behavior modeled in reality television programming. For example, if people believe that being the object of others attention is positive (as portrayed by socially rewarding reality television) then they should be more likely to engage in promiscuous friending. Concomitantly, viewers of reality television should also be increasingly comfortable with digital images of themselves publicly available via the internet, hence should share more photos via these sites. Reality television viewing should also affect the length of time people spend online managing their profiles and the overall size of their networks.

Overall, respondents indicated they watched approximately 31 hours of television weekly, and exposure to television generally was a significant predictor of the time people spent logged into their SNS accounts. This evidence is consistent with Gerbner et al's (1986) cultivation theory, and partially explains user motivation for spending time online managing social networks.

Although age had a strong negative relationship to the size of people's networks and the number of photos they share, aggregate television viewing did not. Younger people clearly had larger SNS networks, but watching television did not impact this variable. However, when the percentage of network contacts *not met* was considered, results suggest that television viewing was influential. After controlling for the size of people's online networks, there was positive and significant relationship between the amount of television consumed and the likelihood that these network contacts are relative strangers. Extant research shows that people use networking sites to connect to others with whom they share off line connections (Ellison et al., 2007). For example, students typically friend others with whom they have shared a class, lived together with, or met F2F at a social event. While this may be the case most of the time, the results presented herein suggest that television viewing is associated with increased promiscuity in "friending" behavior online.

Aggregate television viewing did not have a significant relationship with photo sharing frequency. Age and gender combined to explain the most variance compared to the other three models and younger female respondents were the most heavily engaged in this practice; these results are clear. It may be surprising that given the limited range in age among participants that this variable was consistently significant in the models. However, this indicates an interesting trend: it seems that as more reality television programming becomes available over time, younger people experience greater levels of exposure to the messages embedded in these programs. As such, they are more likely to engage in the behaviors examined in this study. Future research should focus on this trend because the results presented herein suggest that tomorrow's college freshmen will manifest these behaviors with greater intensity.

Perhaps there are gender differences inherent in this behavior that should be considered in conjunction with media use, as well. For example, French and Raven (1959) differentiate between reward, coercive and legitimate power, and Johnson (1976) discussed gender differences in the utilization of these bases of power suggesting that men are more likely to exhibit reward and coercive power, but *referent* power should be more strongly associated with women due to the interpersonal nature of referent power. Simply, referent power is a function of a person's social attractiveness to others, and *power* derives from association with desirable others. Although the findings in the current research begin to clarify the connection between reality television, the drive for celebrity, and SNSs, many questions remain. If

stereotypical gender differences in power persist online, then future research should address in greater detail women's motivations to share photos online.

Although these models generally did not explain a great deal of variance (on average about 5.5 percent), overall the models were significant. If one considers the multitude of stimuli people are exposed to day after day, it is not surprising that television viewing explained relatively small portions of behavior. This is consistent with a wealth of extant research on media effects.

Next, aggregate television viewing was parsed into 5 broad content categories, and these genres were then regressed onto the same four dependent variables used earlier. This was done in an attempt to further delineate the relative influence each content category has on people's behavior in the context of SNSs and to address the research question regarding reality television consumption. Recall that television viewing was measured by prompting respondents to indicate how many hours per day and days per week they viewed reality television, news, fiction, educational and "other" kinds of programming. Each of these variables was then regressed onto the four SNS behavior variables. The results point to a consistent, positive, and significant relationship between reality television consumption and each of the dependent variables. In other words, exposure to reality television programming which models a range of behavior promoting non-directed self-disclosure and positive outcomes associated with celebrity status had a strong and positive relationship with each of the dependent variables used in this study. It is also important to note that the lone reality television consumption variable explains more variance in every model than the aggregate viewing variable used in the first series of analyses.

While many issues and questions remain, the current study shows that motivations for SNS use can be explained in part by traditional mass media consumption. It is clear that Web 2.0 tools allow people to build and maintain extensive social networks and encourage activity traditionally associated with celebrity. These tools reinforce the central position image and appearance hold in social interaction, regardless of the mediated nature of communication today. Foster (2004), in an analysis of the online fan communities of the *Survivor* series, found that the fractious interactions of fans mirrored the competitive nature of the show. In comparison to the fan communities of other "cult" television series, "in reality TV (. . .) the fan isn't drawn into the simulation of a 'fantastic' world as much as offered the chance to participate in one that is meant to be already familiar" (Foster, 2004, p. 274). The reality television industry itself has not been slow to take advantage of these parallels, by setting up discussion forums for particular shows, allowing fans to create detailed personal profiles on these sites, and targeting marketing to social network sites like Facebook and MySpace. The *American Idol* presence on Facebook, for example, includes a fan page (532,803 fans at the time of this writing), a multitude of "widgets" that display *American Idol* branded content on users' profiles, and several message boards where fans discuss and debate the show's current contenders.

Finally, the reality television industry is poised to fully integrate itself with its surrounding online fan culture through direct interaction with fan-created media: the reality series *Iron Brides* encouraged potential participants to audition by uploading YouTube videos for judging – and all audition tapes are of course publicly viewable on YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/ironbrides). With the proliferation of SNSs and the aggregation and documentation of comprehensive "social networks," future research should address how the contemporary definition of "friend" is changing. One way to begin this investigation is to

explore the utility and accessibility of resources embedded in SNS-mediated social networks. As the debate about whether Internet-based communication tools are enhancing our social lives or restricting them continues (see McPherson et al., 2006 for recent discussion), additional research is needed to explore people's *motivations* to connect and ultimately whether these connects have instrumental utility for users. Perhaps these tools are simply the latest platform on which people compete for attention.

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