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Moving from Theorizing to Application: Predicting Audience Enjoyment of TV Formats

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T he rapidly evolving media environment is intensifying the pace of experimentation with new TV program formats. After decades of a stable "quiet life" of oligopolistic

competition—which saw a handful of formats dominate network fare (e.g., Litman, 1994)—programmers began diversifying their program menus after 1990 (Adams, 1993; Grant, 1994; Lin, 1994; 1995a. 1995b; Mittell, 2004; Newcomb, 2007). These "changing menus" have been stimulated, in part, by the rapid growth in channels and the volume of time which must be "filled" (e.g., Abelman & Atkin, 2000, 2010). Competition dictates need, but the larger menu also allows for professional creativity.

Communication scholars face theoretical as well as practical considerations when examining the media forms that emerge in this new environment. Where do television formats come from? A sociological answer is found in the "production of culture" literature (e.g., Custen, 1986; Tuchman, 1983), but that tradition often bypasses the role of audiences, which is important for an explanation from a communication perspective. A long history of film scholarship situates the development of genres in a tacit relationship between audience interests and predictable content forms (Gehring, 1988; Grant, 1977; Schatz, 1981). While genre films have been the target of scholarly debate and even prejudice (Braudy, 2002; Derrida, 1980), they invoke past contents that provide a comfort zone for viewers, answering to their past experiences and meeting certain expectations for viewing.[2] When audiences confront "new" forms, they use cues introducing the program to make inferences about the setting, topic and structure, activating inferences based on past experience. As more examples of a new format appear, audiences develop stronger and clearer expectations that direct their viewing and selection (e.g., Lin, 1996). Formats from the past appear new when recast with current popular culture, problems and language (White, 1985).[3] This processing activity by audiences has been linked to the uses and gratifications that are delivered by the viewing and sought in subsequent viewing across time; thus, content and form are linked to the sustaining functions from the format. Beliefs about media are important in expectancy value theory for gratifications research (Palmgreen & Rayburn, 1985), where gratifications are strongly related to beliefs about media attributes.

One area ripe for this application lies in predicting audience media behaviors, such as their enjoyment of television formats. As a "practical target," such investigation makes great sense because of its economic ramifications. Although media behaviors can be instrumental as well as expressive, for the most part we can view media behaviors as optional uses of free time that fulfill particular uses and gratifications. And it is this functional theory that offers

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[2]The concept of a metaphorical "contract" between media producers and spectators extends beyond film to genres in television (Kaminsky with Mahan, 1985) and other cultural products (Berger, 1992).

[3]Creative professionals in communication respond as well to audiences and their peers, copying, changing and evolving formats that solidify a core "definition" or blur the boundaries with other formats. Over time, formats represent successful compromises between creative producers (the collection of encoders — writers, directors, producers) and public expectations. New formats generally represent combinations of older formats, or subtle changes in the elements associated with an existing one (e.g., Wood, 2004).

the most promise. Even though media forms are constantly changing, most options available to audiences today have been around for many years and carry with them considerable history for the audience (e.g., Gehring, 1988; Newcomb, 2007). When novel forms do appear, the clarity with which they are defined by audiences and their establishment as forms provide an opportunity to "predict" audience use. The present study explores model building predicting audience enjoyment of the currently popular TV format, "reality TV."

Predicting Audience Enjoyment of Reality TV

Work on social cognition suggests that audiences find content more meaningful if it is relevant to preexisting mental structures that render the information interpretable, whether it be in the form of a TV program (e.g., Liebes & Katz, 1990) or movie (Shively, 1992). The resulting audience schemas are particularly salient for contents that reflect collective preoccupations (or "chronically activated mental structures," in psychological parlance) (DiMaggio, 1997, p. 263).

The "reality TV" format emerged in one form in the late 1970s, with programs that featured people engaging in individual activities that were novel, or attempts at setting records for the sake of audience enjoyment (Rushdie, 2001). Although "non-fiction" programming, the format disappeared and differs from the one that assumed the same label in recent years with the advent of "Survivor," a program so successful in generating audiences that imitators followed and the evolution of a new format began. Programs to follow kept the ingredients of exotic locales and competition amongst a cast of "real people" (non-actors), e.g., "The Amazing Race," as well as those that used more mundane locations and created contests in confined quarters, e.g., "Big Brother" (Civitillo, 2001). The rewards grew as contestants sought a job with one of Donald Trump's companies in "The Apprentice." As creativity flowed with new wrinkles on the form, competition shifted from solely monetary rewards to personal relationships ("The Bachelor" and "Average Joe") and actors replaced "real people" in some versions ("Celebrity Mole"). MTV produced its own set of "reality TV" programs (Newcomb, 2007), targeting younger audiences with programs featuring young singles living together ("Real World") and competing in a survival contest ("Road Rules"), as cable targeted teens with a survivor format ("Endurance").[4]

Clearly, the academy has made a distinction based on a competitive dimension. One

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[4]As the format has grown, it has merged with other formats, generally with the competitive element center stage: talent competitions (e.g., "American Idol"), modeling and fashion (e.g., "Project Runway"), dancing competitions (e.g., "Dancing with the Stars"), and weight loss (e.g., "The Biggest Loser"). The American Academy of Television Arts and Sciences took notice and added several categories to the Emmy competition, giving awards to the "outstanding reality-competition program," the "outstanding reality program," and "outstanding host of a reality or reality-competition program."

website devoted to the format lists more than 400 programs — using a liberal definition — and counts seasons as unique (http://www.realityshows.com). Mass communication scholars focusing on content structures have expanded our understanding of the ingredients that make up what is called "reality TV" in the popular press. Drawing on results of a focus group, Hall (2003) found six dimensions on which reality programs were evaluated: plausibility, typicality, factuality, emotional involvement, narrative consistency and perceptual persuasiveness. Nabi et al. (2003) conducted a Q-sort among 38 city residents, finding that they distinguished reality-based TV shows from most other major programming formats. In a second study using a survey, the authors questioned the role of voyeurism as an appeal for watching reality television shows and also found that regular viewers receive different and more varied gratifications from their viewing than do periodic viewers. They recommend investigating dimensions distinguishing different types of reality-based programming. Jones (2003) observed that viewers of "Big Brother" in the United Kingdom have "personalized reality contracts" with the show. Andrejevic (2002) suggests that the same program represents the "democratization of celebrity" status for viewers. Fetveit (1999) suggests that the proliferation of reality TV expresses a longing for a lost touch with reality.[5]

Despite the extensive scholarly attention paid to the evolution of media forms, Biocca (1991) and others have criticized the dearth of theory in this area. Borrowing from film tradition and its use of "genre" to refer to a predetermined structure (e.g., Hall, 2006), we can identify television formats as following a "form" that has prior significance to audiences. This is significant because it means viewers have expectations guiding their media seeking and selection.

Relatively few studies have looked at audience perceptions of film or TV forms (e.g.,

[5]The list of programs that fit comfortably into the "reality TV" format continues to grow and the ingredients that help audiences to identify the form are becoming clearer. We conducted a focus group composed largely of those in the target audience for reality television programs, age 18-30. Although not all of the participants watched reality TV programs regularly, all were familiar with current programs and had opinions and sufficient information about their content to participate. The following characteristics emerged in a collective definition, several of which are consistent with results of the research cited above: *competition—for participation in a game of attrition, for "end-game" prizes; *unscripted but planned behavior—participants follow rules but their words are not scripted in the sense that "fictional" media are; *participants are non-actors—most participants are drawn from a pool of "real" people considered by producers. In some versions, all participants are youthful, to be consistent with the program's competitive theme (e.g., "Average Joe"), but an effort to achieve diversity is made on most, allowing for more of the audience to find targets of identification; *limited rather than open-ended time frames—although the length of programs varies, each is a limited run, generally a matter of weeks or months. The format thus entails only a modest time commitment on the part of audiences, allows for non-actors to participate without disrupting their lives inordinately, and it allows for a tempo of competition that sustains novelty in competition and relationships. This also means that "seasons" are self-contained, with subsequent years featuring new locales, new participants, and new activities and rewards.

Austin & Gordon, 1987; Glass & Waterman, 1988; Hall, 2003, 2006). Jeffres, Neuendorf and Giles (1990) found that a broad range of college students varied in their agreement with critics on what constituted popular film genre and television formats. Their study showed that audiences can articulate their expectations but they do not conform to some uniform critical standard. Although the number and nature of formats varies across studies — and is theoretically unlimited — most academic studies identify between six and twenty categories (Abelman & Atkin, 2010; Lin, 1995a). These formats are not simply a taxonomic device for researchers and practitioners, however, as studies show that audiences can identify distinct attributes associated with a given category (e.g., situation comedy vs. action-adventure). Nabi et al. (2003) also supports this notion with the television reality format, the consumption of which we address in the context of audience viewing motivations.

USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

Although uses and gratifications theory also figures prominently in effects studies, the functional approach is one of two that focus on media behaviors as dependent variables, the target of explanation and prediction. Accordingly, people engage in media use for particular uses and gratifications derived. Traditionally, uses and gratifications can be traced to an individual's need structure, available media and alternative non-media sources of need satisfaction (Dimmick, McCain, & Bolton, 1979; Perse & Rubin, 1990).

The uses and gratifications literature identifies several dimensions. McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) offer a typology of gratifications: diversion (emotional release and escape from the daily routine and problems), personal relationships (including parasocial companionship and social utility, which includes family viewing, viewing to meet the standards of a group and viewing for ideas, topics, things that feed into interpersonal conversations), personal identity (e.g., self evaluation), reality exploration (for ideas about personal concerns), value reinforcement, and surveillance (McDonald & Glynn, 1984). Dobos and Dimmick (1988) provide a thorough summary of the dimensions of gratifications which have emerged from studies: surveillance—to keep in touch with international, national, state and local events; knowledge—to get information about events, issues, the government, things affecting one's family, to help make decisions; escape/diversion—to fill time, for relief from boredom, to divert attention from personal problems; excitement—for stimulation; interpersonal utility—for things to talk about and material to influence others.

Since we're focusing on non-instrumental uses of the media, we need to pay attention to alternative sources of satisfaction and leisure-time interests; similar dimensions have been identified as underlying motivations for leisure—self-expression/achievement, education/ information, interpersonal companionship, relaxation/diversion, physiological/health, sophistication/ intellectual, and beauty/aesthetic (see Beard & Ragheb, 1980; Bishop, 1970; McKechnie, 1974; Pierce, 1980; Witt, 1971). In general, studies have used the full range of uses and gratifications to predict media behaviors. Following this tradition, we will ask the

following research question:

RQ1: What uses and gratifications predict enjoyment of reality TV programs and other formats?

Uses and Gratifications and Media Formats

Particularly popular in the 1970s and 1980s, the substantial literature on TV uses and gratifications drew fewer contributions after 1990 (see Kang & Atkin, 1999; Lin, 1996). With a body of results showing the utility of uses and gratifications, scholars moved on to other important social concerns—e.g., new media uses, or media effects in various domains. Since the same content could fulfill different uses and gratifications for different people and different content could perform the same uses (functional equivalence), inquiry seemed to have no solid anchor within the theory (Lin et al., 2002). Nonetheless, scholars have tried to link uses and gratifications to specific media content or formats. Wicks (1989) found that five dimensions of uses and gratifications explained viewing television news (also see Henningham, 1985; Levy, 1979), Livingstone (1988) linked escapism and other gratifications to watching soap operas, Brown, Campbell and Fischer (1986) found teenagers watching music videos for excitement and mood control, and Duncan and Brummett (1989) linked voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism gratifications to watching sports.

The present analysis incorporates another format—reality television — to the list, one that is evolving but has been around long enough for us to view the "defining process" and link enjoyment of the format to the larger uses and gratifications literature. We argue that one reason that the uses and gratification literature has been insufficient in predicting audience media behavior patterns is the rather stationary level of theorizing. Scholars need to move down from the major uses and gratifications dimensions to more specific functions tied to the format structure. Although Nabi et al. (2003) question the importance of "voyeurism" as an appeal for watching reality programming, other commentators (e.g., Civitillo, 2001; Shugart, 2006) suggest the contrary, that the current "reality" format appeals to the audiences' voyeuristic interest in seeing how personal relationships endure in competitive situations where drama magnified.

Such competition involves audiences, non-actors that allow for identification with participants, and unscripted behavior that could be vicariously acted out by viewers (e.g. Newcomb, 2007; Lundy, Ruth, & Park, 2008). Hall (2006) found that a key audience appeal for reality programs was the perception that a cast member's behavior was a reflection of (1) their own will and personality which, in turn, have consequences for the show's outcome. This is naturally linked to a more specific subset of uses and gratifications theory, parasocial communication, which says that people often establish personal relationships with the strangers they encounter on the screen. The illusion by audience members that they are engaged in a face-to-face relationship with someone in the media (Horton & Wohl, 1956;

Houlberg, 1984; Rubin & McHugh, 1987) is more easily linked to viewing reality TV shows than watching programs with actors (Wang, Fink, & Cai, 2008). While people may fantasize that they know celebrities, there is an enormous status gap, but the non-actors in "Survivor" or "Big Brother" are drawn from the audience and are more accessible for relationships. Indeed, the use of the Internet for audiences to pose questions reinforces that opportunity for audience interaction with program personalities. We thus posit that:

H1: Parasocial uses and gratifications will be positively related to enjoyment of reality fare.

Other television formats that share some of the defining ingredients of reality TV also may be linked to parasocial communication, e.g., news (Houlberg, 1984; Levy, 1979; Rubin & McHugh, 1987). Thus, we pose the following:

RQ2: What television formats will be positively related to parasocial uses and gratifications?

Hall (2006) found that humor and unpredictability were key appeals of reality fare, which contribute to greater audience suspense and to greater involvement as well as perceived realism. Given that reality programs like *Survivor* have been likened to a form of gladiatorial combat, where audience interest is piqued by the realism of dramatic conflicts (e.g., Rushdie, 2001), then perceptual dimensions may also determine other entertainment gratifications sought.

Presence

A relatively new concept in the mass communication literature is the notion of presence, which says that audiences in some situations view programming as a non-mediated experience or as an illusion of nonmediation (Lombard & Ditton, 1997). Dupagne (1999), for instance, posited a link between a desire for realism (e.g., nature programs) and adoption of video technologies that are rich in presence (i.e., high definition television). This notion was supported by Authors (in press), who found that viewers who reported experiencing a higher level of presence were more likely to report desiring larger televisions. More recently, changes in TV pacing interacted with screen size to impact viewers' experiences of presence with larger screens and slower-paced content. leading to higher levels of presence being reported (author, in press). Additionally, levels of presence sensations have been tied to media content (Dillon, Keogh, Freeman, & Davidoff, 2000) and to content preference (Author, 2004). There is a clear potential for those who experience "virtual" relationships with the non-actors in reality programming (i.e., para-social communication) to also experience the viewing as a non-mediated, or "real" experience. Across these gratifications, we posit:

H2:   Reporting a sensation of presence will be positively related to enjoyment of reality fare.

For various other formats in question, we ask whether audiences who are more likely to engage in such non-mediated viewing are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV; in particular:

RQ3: What other formats will be positively related to presence?

Building a Path Model

Efforts to predict enjoyment of a particular form of media content must take into account the larger context (see Figure 1). As noted above, influences on people's uses and gratification include alternative leisure options and the media available, which we posit will be positively related to social status. These also have been linked to different patterns of needs, which will not be built into the model employed here. One's media environment is often viewed as merely the size of the menu (access via cable/satellite to a broader selection), but it also includes one's affinity for the medium in question, television. These attributes will be related to uses and gratifications fulfilled by TV viewing which, in turn, predict the presence experience and specific parasocial gratifications obtained. Parasocial gratifications are worthy of separate consideration because they've been extensively linked to enjoyment of reality TV—given its interactive nature — and we expect that to be the case here as well

METHOD

A survey was conducted in a major metropolitan region of the Midwest, using a probability sample of residents and interviews conducted with a CATI (computer-aided telephone interviewing) system. Telephone numbers were selected through random-digit dialing procedures. The I.R.B.-approved survey was presented as a general poll with an emphasis on entertainment. A total of 314 interviews were completed, with a cooperation rate of about 40 percent. Variables were operationalized as follows.

Defining Reality Television

Respondents were told the following: "In the past couple years a TV format called 'reality shows' has become popular. Examples include: "Survivor," "The Amazing Race," "Big Brother," "Paradise Hotel," and "Temptation Island." "If you had to describe what these programs have in common to someone else, what would you say?" Interviewers probed twice.
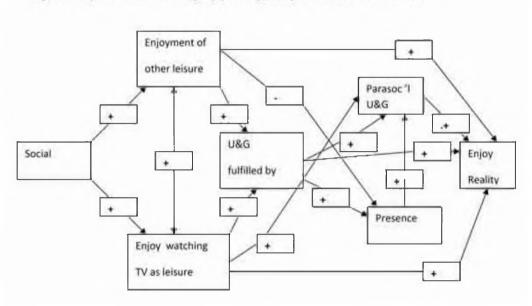
Figure 1: *Proposed Model Predicting Enjoyment of Reality TV in a Leisure Environment*

Enjoy Watching Reality Television Programs and Other Formats

Respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale to indicate how much they enjoy watching different types of TV shows, where 0 means one dislikes it very much, 5 is neutral and 10 means one likes it very much. The formats were assessed in the following order: situation comedies, game shows, crime dramas, medical dramas, news magazine shows, reality TV shows, sports programs, movies, science fiction programs, afternoon soaps or serials, talk shows, cartoons, musical programs, regular local news, and national TV news.

Parasocial Uses and Gratifications

After the item asking respondents what the reality shows have in common, they were told the following: "Now I'm going to read a few statements about these types of programs and I'd like you to use a 0-10 scale to tell me how much you agree with each one, where 0 means you completely disagree, 5 is neutral or you don't know, and 10 means you completely agree." The statements were: "People who participate in these shows seem like real folks, not actors; I can relate to the people in these shows;" "Eventually I feel like I'd know these folks personally if I ran into them somewhere;" "It's fun watching people cope or compete naturally, without a script; I look forward to watching my favorite reality programs and try to figure out who's going to win." Responses to all five items were

standardized and the scores summed up for a measure of parasocial uses and gratifications derived from watching reality television programs (Parasocial U&G alpha = .85). The items are modeled after those used in a parasocial interaction scale designed to fit news broadcasts (see Rubin, Palmgreen, & Sypher, 1994, pp. 273-277).

Presence Viewing Experience

Respondents were asked to use the same 0-10 scale to tell how much they agreed with two items tapping the viewing experience as "non-mediated" reality. The items were: "When I watch reality TV shows, I felt like I came back to the "real world" after a journey;" "When I watch reality shows the TV creates a new world for me, and that world suddenly disappears when the broadcast ends." Respondents were then asked to use a slightly different 0-10 scale for four other items. Respondents were told: "Now, I'd like you to use a 0 to 10 scale to tell how often each of these statements applies to you when you watch reality TV shows, with 0 meaning never and 10 meaning always." The four items were: "I feel like I'm in the world television has created;" "I feel like my body is in the room but my mind is inside the world created by television;" "The TV-generated world seems more real or present for me than the real world;" "The TV-generated world seems like something I saw rather than somewhere I visited." Responses to all six items were standardized and the scores summed up for a measure of presence (Presence alpha = .80; see Lombard and Ditton, 2001).

Uses and gratifications sought for television viewing

Items used in past studies were selected to tap each of the dimensions identified by scholars that include McQuail, Blumler and Brown (1972) and Dobos and Dimmick (1988). Scored on a 0-10 scale, the items measuring uses and gratifications can be found in Table 1; responses were standardized and summed for a scale (TV U&G alpha = .85).

Enjoyment of Leisure Options

Respondents were asked to use a 0-10 scale to tell "how much you enjoy doing each of a series of leisure-time activities, including watching television, where 0 means you completely dislike doing this, 5 is neutral and 10 means you like doing this very much." The leisure options included the following: "going out to see movies in a theater;" "going to plays presented on stage at the [City] Playhouse," "in [downtown theater district] or elsewhere in [City];" "going to professional sporting events such as the [professional football team]," "[professional baseball team]", or "[professional basketball team];" "going to local festivals or public events such as the air show, rib fest, and the Grand Prix;" "going to concerts and musical events at [the orchestra] Hall," "[summer orchestra outdoor

Table 1: *Relationships between Enjoyment of TV Formats and Uses and Gratifications*

	Sitcoms	Game Shows	Crime dramas	Medical Dramas	Movies	Science Fiction	Soaps/ Serials	Cartoons	Musicals	Reality TV Shows	News mag Shows	TV talk Shows	Local TV News	National TV News	TV sports Programs
Surveillance:															
Keep in touch w/what's Going on	.02	.14*	.10#	.13*	-.04	.06	-.01	.01	.18***	.10#	.29***	.15**	.37***	.38***	-.02
Knowledge:															
To find out what's going on in the world	.05	.15**	.08	.14*	.01	.05	.02	-.06	.19***	.16**	.43***	.26***	.51***	.50***	.09
To help make a decision or Learn something	.02	.08	.00	.04	.00	.08	.10#	.08	.08	.14*	.13*	.12*	.16**	.21***	.03
Interpersonal Utility:															
For facts, opinions that Interest others	.07	.22***	.16**	.27***	.08	.26***	.21***	.03	.15**	.16**	.26***	.24***	.29***	.34***	.08
To socialize, spend time w/people also watching	.34***	.30***	.20***	.30***	.21***	.14*	.16**	.27***	.18**	.24***	.04	.18**	.01	.05	.22***
For things to talk about	.21***	.20***	.21***	.26***	.16**	.14*	.18**	.14*	.05	.31***	.18**	.35***	.19***	.19***	.17**
Escape/Diversion:															
To fill time	.17**	.00	.27***	.18***	.24***	.13*	.05	.17**	.00	.18***	.03	.12*	.02	-.03	.27***
To change my mood	.20***	.10#	.30***	.25***	.25***	.15**	.17**	.19***	.08	.23***	.11#	.20***	.14*	.12*	.14*
To cope with stress	.23***	.10#	.25***	.29***	.27***	.13*	.28***	.21***	.06	.25***	.11*	.22***	.08	.09	.18***
To escape from personal Problems	.10#	.06	.25***	.21***	.19***	.10#	.27***	.19***	.04	.22***	.00	.14*	-.01	-.02	.09
For relief from boredom	.27***	.15**	.23***	.18***	.30***	.15**	.14*	.18**	-.01	.20***	.11#	.15**	.01	.00	.24***
Excitement:															
For stimulation, excitement	.22***	.07	.23***	.16**	.26***	.11#	.18**	.08	-.03	.20***	.02	.11*	-.02	.04	.12*
Personal Identity/Self Evaluation:															
To challenge me, make me think	.11#	.20***	.06	.16**	.07	.08	.14*	.12*	.10#	.18***	.17**	.15**	.22***	.18**	.06

Note: #=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001

entertainment venue]," "[downtown theater district]," "in the [downtown entertainment district] or at local clubs;" "visiting local museums; going out to dinner or having drinks with family or friends; getting together and socializing with friends;" "reading books and magazines; listening to music on the radio, records, CDs or tapes;" "relaxing while watching television; actively playing sports with other people, such as golf, basketball, baseball;" "other sports such as fishing, swimming, hiking; jogging, walking or exercising for leisure;" "playing games on the Internet or Xbox, Nintendo, or Playstation; surfing the Internet for leisure;" "going to local theme parks; shopping on a weekend afternoon for leisure;" "traveling outside the area." The item for watching television was separated out as a measure of affinity for television as a leisure-time activity and the standardized score used as a variable (Affinity for TV). Responses to the other leisure options were standardized and summed up for a measure of enjoyment of other leisure options (Other Leisure alpha = .80).

Social Categories

Conventional measures were used to measure age, education, household income, gender, marital status and ethnicity (see Table 2).

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

An open-ended question asked respondents to describe what reality shows have in common. Responses showed that the collective audience identified three of the four key ingredients of the format: competition, unscripted but planned behavior, and the use of non-actors. They failed to mention limited rather than open-ended time frames as a characteristic, perhaps because subsequent "seasons" of "Survivor" or "Big Brother" and frequent reruns of programs such as "Road Rules" obscured this factor. In some instances, the number of original installments of reality shows comes close to those of other formats.

Responses included substantial numbers who said they had not watched the programs and didn't know (13 percent of the sample), while a fourth of the sample merely stated their dislike of the format using various terms. And 12 percent used the format's defining term for a reverse characterization—saying the programs were unrealistic. These findings speak to the dimensions of plausibility, typicality and factuality that Hall's (2003) focus group used to evaluate such fare.

Of the remaining 155 respondents who offered features, 34 percent mentioned competition of one sort or another, many citing money, challenges, survival contests, and

Table 2: *Relationships between Enjoyment of TV Formats and Parasocial Uses and Gratifications and Presence Viewing*

Format Enjoyed:	Parasocial Uses & Gratifications	Presence Viewing
Reality TV shows	.68***	.41***
News magazines	.06	.02
TV talk shows	.36***	.14*
Local TV news	.14*	.06
National TV news	.12*	.08
TV sports programs	.04	.02
Situation comedies	.23***	.06
Game shows	.32***	.17**
Crime dramas	.20***	.13*
Medical dramas	.23***	.16**
Movies	.25***	.18**
Science fiction	.19***	.15**
Soaps/serials	.26***	.22***
Cartoons	.10#	.04
Musicals	.17**	.07

Note: #=p<.10; *=p<.05; **=p<.01; ***=p<.001

people taking chances or making fools of themselves to win prizes.[6] Some 20 percent gave responses indicating the programs represented unscripted but planned though often natural behavior. The third defining characteristic—use of non-actors as participants—was cited by 16 percent, including comments that shows featured "regular people," although some mentioned diversity and an emphasis on youth.[7]

The sample also saw other features as common to reality television programs. Some five percent or more mentioned an emphasis on relationships and friendships, including fighting and strategizing. An equal number cited an emphasis on sex, love and vulgarity, with several references to low morals. Smaller numbers cited the following: the programs are dramatic, suspenseful; the programs are funny; the programs are mean spirited, exploitative and degrading to participants; the programs try to shock, act crazy; the programs are inexpensive to produce; the programs become predictable, with repetitive patterns of behavior.

The first research question asked what uses and gratifications predict enjoyment of reality TV programs and other television formats. As Table 1 shows, the uses and

[6]One respondent said people acted "like gladiators" while another noted that features portrayed were generally just "everyday life."

[7]One respondent took note of the locales, saying that the shows placed "real people in unreal situations," perhaps a nod to the "Fear Factor" or the "Amazing Race," which have contests in exotic or what appear to be dangerous situations.

gratifications sustaining enjoyment of particular formats are consistent with the literature (see Jeffres, 1994; Rubin et al., 1994), with surveillance, knowledge and interpersonal utility uses being fulfilled by "actuality" programming—news magazines, talk shows, local and national TV news. Formats representing "fiction" are enjoyed for escape and diversion, excitement and personal identity. There are some deviations from these patterns: musicals attract audiences for surveillance, knowledge and interpersonal utility but not escape, excitement or personal identity, and sports programming serve all functions except surveillance and knowledge. And the format that is the focus of this project provided the strongest pattern of correlations between enjoyment and uses and gratifications, suggesting that reality TV cuts across all gratifying dimensions and uses.

A factor analysis of the television uses and gratifications[8] yielded two factors that roughly correspond to an affective dimension (stimulation, escape from personal problems, relief from boredom, to socialize with others, to fill time, to change my mood and to cope with stress) and a cognitive dimension (to keep in touch with what's going on, for facts and opinions interesting others, to find out what's going on in world, to help make a decision or learn something, and to challenge me or make me think; see Table 1). Interestingly, watching television for things to talk about—the interpersonal-mass communication linking use—loaded on both dimensions. When people's factor scores were used as variables to reduce the data, we find additional confirmation of the patterns, with the "affective" uses and gratifications dimension correlating with enjoyment of sitcoms, crime dramas, sports programs, movies, science fiction, afternoon serials, and cartoons. The "cognitive" uses dimension correlated with enjoyment of news magazines, local news, national news and musical programs. And both dimensions correlated with enjoyment of four formats—reality

[8]Principal components analysis, with Varimax rotation, suggested that the affective dimensions: (1) accounted for 29.9% of the variance explained, as compared to 22.3% for the cognitive dimension factor (2). The factors can be summarized as follow (with full information available from the authors):

Rotated Component Matrix (*) Component 1 2

Q68 TVUG to keep in touch w/what's going on .018 .750
Q69 TVUG for stimulation, excitement .651 .125
Q70 TVUG to escape from personal problems .747 .109
Q71 TVUG for relief from boredom .770 -.021
Q72 TVUG for facts, opinions that interest others .324 .650
Q73 TVUG to socialize, spend time w/people also watching .525 .261
Q74 TVUG to find out what's going on in world -.033 .813
Q75 TVUG to help make a decision or learn something .089 .641
Q76 TVUG to fill time .690 -.038
Q77 TVUG for things to talk about .568 .468
Q78 TVUG to change my mood .712 .218
Q79 TVUG to challenge me, make me think .277 .658
Q80 TVUG to cope with stress .731 .209

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax, Kaiser Normalization.
*: Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

TV shows, talk shows, medical dramas and game shows.

The first hypothesis predicted that parasocial uses and gratifications would be positively related to enjoyment of reality television programs. The hypothesis was strongly supported, as the correlation between enjoyment of reality TV and the parasocial scale was .68 (p<.001). The second research question asked whether enjoyment of other television formats would be correlated with parasocial uses and gratifications. As Table 2 shows, the parasocial uses and gratifications scale is positively related to enjoyment of all but three of the television formats: talk shows, local news, national news, sitcoms, game shows, crime dramas, medical dramas, movies, science fiction programs, afternoon soaps/serials, and musicals.

The second hypothesis predicted that presence viewing would be positively related to enjoyment of reality television programs. This too is confirmed (r=.41, p<.001). The third research question asked whether other television formats would be positively related to presence. As Table 2 shows, the pattern of correlations is similar to that for parasocial uses and gratifications, except that presence is unrelated to viewing news, sports programs, cartoons and musicals. Thus, those who experience TV viewing as a "non-mediated" phenomenon are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV programs, talk shows, sitcoms, game shows, movies, crime and medical dramas, science fiction and afternoon serials.

Moving beyond simple bivariate correlations, it's useful to assess the extent to which we can predict enjoyment of viewing reality TV programs and other formats. That is, we need to move beyond finding statistically-significant correlations to accounting for levels of variance in our dependent measures that have practical consequences in applied situations. Thus, we considered regression models to see to what extent we could "predict" enjoyment of reality television programs and other formats. Since social categories are an alternative source of variance in media behavior decisions, those relationships were examined first. Except for gender, there is a pattern of negative relationships between social categories and enjoyment of reality TV, parasocial uses and gratifications and the scale tapping presence. Thus, younger, less educated, less wealthy, unmarried and non-whites are more likely to enjoy watching reality TV programs, are more likely to seek out parasocial uses and gratifications in their viewing, and are more likely to experience a sense of nonmediation while viewing.

Our analysis used hierarchical regression to predict enjoyment of reality TV programs, with social categories entered first (age, education, household income, gender, marital status, ethnicity), then the set of 13 uses and gratifications items for viewing, and then the two scales tapping parasocial uses and gratifications and the presence experience. As Table 3 shows, social categories account for 17.5 percent of the variance in enjoyment of reality TV programs, with TV uses and gratifications explaining an additional 8 percent — and the two parasocial and presence scales another 17.5 percent — for a total of 43 percent of the variance. When the same model is employed but including only the parasocial scale alone in the third step, parasocial uses and gratifications still account for 16.6 percent of the

Table 3: *Predicting Enjoyment of Reality TV Programs*

	R	R Sq. Change	F Change	Standardized Betas
Social categories	.42	.175	8.8 p<.001	Age (-.27***) Ethnicity (-.16**)
TV Uses & Gratifications	.51	.083	2.0 p<.018	Age (-.27***) Ethnicity (-.12#) Find out what's going on (.15#) For things to talk about (.20**)
Parasocial/Presence	.66	.175	36.4 p<.001	Age (-.18**) For opinions, facts (-.14*) To find out what's going on (.13#) Parasocial (.42***) Presence (.12*)
	R=.66, R Sq. =.43, F= 8.56 p<.001			

additional variance (R =.65; R Square = .424; F=8.9, p<.001). And when the social categories are excluded in a subsequent regression model, the 13 TV uses and gratifications items and the two parasocial and presence scales still account for 38.3 percent of the variance (R =.62; R Square =.383, F=10.9, p<.001); in this analysis, the two parasocial and presence scales account for 24.7 percent of the variance beyond the 13.7 percent already accounted for by the 13 TV uses and gratifications.

The analyses to this point suggest a fairly successful application of the uses and gratifications literature — the general dimensions and the more specific parasocial and presence measures — in predicting enjoyment of a novel format. We proceeded to employ the same models to see whether the same pattern would be found in predicting more established TV formats. As Table 4 shows, in only two instances does the amount of variance explained exceed 30 percent, and those are for enjoyment of the two news programs. Most models explain between a fifth and a fourth of the variance in enjoyment of the established formats. A closer examination shows that the set of 13 TV uses and gratifications are as successful or more so in explaining enjoyment of the established formats as they were in accounting for the 8.3 percent of variance in enjoyment of reality TV programs. In a couple instances, particularly the "actuality" formats centering around news, the general uses and gratifications dimensions are more successful, accounting for a fifth of the variance in enjoyment.

Since television viewing is generally an expressive behavior that competes with alternative leisure options, we proceeded to consider a path model that incorporates leisure options as well as an individual's affinity for television as such a leisure-time activity (see Fig. 1). In the overall model, social categories influence affinity for television as a leisure option as well as enjoyment of other leisure options, but there is no direct path to enjoyment of reality television from the demographic factors. Enjoyment of TV is correlated with the other leisure options (beta= .19, p<.01) and both of these have positive paths to the mean

Table 4: *Predicting Enjoyment of Other TV Formats*

	R	R Sq. Change	F Change
Situation Comedies	R=.52; R Square=.267 F=4.08, p<.001		
Social categories	.38	.14	7.00 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.51	.11	2.76 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.52	.01	1.71 n.s.
Game Shows	R=.48; R Square=.233 F=3.40, p<.001		
Social categories	.25	.06	2.84 p<.02
TV Uses & Gratifications	.43	.12	2.64 p<.01
Parasocial/Presence	.48	.05	7.80 p<.001
Crime Dramas	R=.46; R Square=.203 F=2.95, p<.001		
Social categories	.32	.10	4.83 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.45	.10	2.27 p<.01
Parasocial/Presence	.46	.01	.80 n.s.
Medical Dramas	R=.46; R Square=.214 F=3.04, p<.001		
Social categories	.28	.08	3.46 p<.003
TV Uses & Gratifications	.45	.13	3.97 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.46	.01	1.14 n.s.
Movies	R=.46; R Square=.215 F=3.06, p<.001		
Social categories	.37	.13	6.45 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.46	.08	1.79 p<.05
Parasocial/Presence	.46	.00	.52 n.s.
Science Fiction Programs	R=.48; R Square=.23 F=3.40, p<.001		
Social categories	.39	.16	7.67 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.47	.07	1.64 p<.075
Parasocial/Presence	.48	.01	1.25 n.s.
Afternoon Soaps/Serials	R=.51; R Square=.264 F=4.02, p<.001		
Social categories	.38	.14	7.04 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.50	.10	2.55 p<.003
Parasocial/Presence	.51	.02	2.35 p<.10
Musicals	R=.41; R Square=.168 F=2.26, p<.002		
Social categories	.28	.08	3.55 p<.002
TV Uses & Gratifications	.39	.07	1.50 n.s.
Parasocial/Presence	.41	.02	2.75 p<.07
Cartoons	R=.50; R Square=.25, F=3.81, p<.001		
Social categories	.42	.18	9.03 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.49	.07	1.59 p<.089
Parasocial/Presence	.50	.01	1.40 n.s.
Sports Programs	R=.54; R Square=.295 F=4.69, p<.001		
Social categories	.42	.17	8.68 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.54	.12	2.98 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.54	.01	1.09 n.s.
News Magazine Programs	R=.49; R Square=.238 F=3.49, p<.001		
Social categories	.20	.04	1.65 n.s.
TV Uses & Gratifications	.48	.20	4.70 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.49	.00	.38 n.s.
Talk Shows	R=.52; R Square=.269 F=4.11, p<.001		
Social categories	.30	.09	4.02 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.49	.15	3.52 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.52	.03	5.29 p<.006
National TV News	R=.61; R Square=.367 F=6.50, p<.001		
Social categories	.39	.15	7.41 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.60	.21	6.15 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.61	.00	.38 n.s.
Local TV News	R=.60; R Square=.367 F=6.43, p<.001		
Social categories	.41	.16	8.24 p<.001
TV Uses & Gratifications	.60	.19	5.47 p<.001
Parasocial/Presence	.60	.01	1.31 n.s.

uses and gratifications derived from viewing television (betas = .23 and .30, p<.001).

Those who like watching TV are more likely to rate higher on the parasocial scale (beta= .11, p<.05). The TV uses and gratifications scale — tapping the extent to which TV gratifies viewers across all 13 dimensions — has direct paths to both of the parasocial (beta= .21, p<.001) and presence scales (beta= .15, p<.001). Those who enjoy other leisure options are less likely to experience TV viewing as nonmediated (beta = -.20, p<.001). Only three direct paths lead to enjoyment of the reality television format: enjoyment of other leisure options (beta=.11, p<.05), parasocial uses and gratifications (beta = .54, p<.001) and the overall TV uses and gratifications scale (beta=.34, p<.001). The path from affinity for television as a leisure activity to enjoyment of reality television programs approaches statistical significance (beta=.10, p<.10). Clearly, this places reality television as an expressive behavior in a leisure context where it's quite compatible with enjoyment of other options.

DISCUSSION

In the emergent multi-channel environment, the networks have been among the most content-diversified programmers, owing to their strategy of casting a wide net by offering many forms of common denominator programming (Abelman & Atkin, 2010; Grant, 1994; Litman et al., 1994). And with the emergence of new networks like Fox, we've seen the development of new formats like reality TV, the patronage dimensions of which were established by the present study. On balance, study results demonstrate the utility of applying new and traditional uses and gratifications measures, alongside presence, to explain audience enjoyment of reality fare.

The dimensions of audience appeal for newer formats uncovered here helps update and expand work on audience uses and gratifications for television, as the relative explanatory power of our models compares favorably with past work. Seeking a more efficient ratings yield for the programming dollar, the networks have embraced the relatively inexpensive reality programs, with program decisions increasingly dictated by financial considerations (e.g., Newcomb, 2007). The utility of the models used here suggests that programmers could draw from the academic literature in mass communication to understand what uses and gratifications and other factors sustain viewing patterns of novel formats.

In particular, this study demonstrates that we can contribute to this understanding if we move beyond the general uses and gratifications dimensions toward more targeted uses (e.g., Lin, 1994). Here, we found that enjoyment of the reality TV format was positively related to more uses and gratifications dimensions than to any of the more established formats. However, it is the addition of the more focused, parasocial uses and gratifications that allows us to more accurately gauge our target, enjoyment of reality television programming. The difference in the overall models is the added explanation provided by the

more specialized parasocial and presence scales, confirming our argument that we need to move beyond the general dimensions represented in the literature to uses and gratifications that more closely target the format and the experiences derived from viewing (e.g., Hall, 2003). As new sub-formats have emerged, each has tended to provide more footage of off-stage behaviors of participants, as well as profiles that are shot to give audiences more opportunities for identifying with contestants.

Although our focus is on a rather new and variegated format, the results offer some suggestions for how to approach enjoyment of other formats as well. One of the most competitive arenas in television is the local evening news. And, while stations compete with "entertainment" graphics and pacing that glosses over facts and details, our models suggest that an opposite approach might be more successful. Enjoyment of local TV news is related to knowledge and surveillance functions, as well as interpersonal utility and personal identity/self evaluation, but not to stimulation, excitement or boredom gratifications. Neither of the parasocial or presence scales explained additional variance, but this should be expected. These scales thus fail to enhance our targeting ability in applying the relevant uses and gratifications dimensions, at least as operationalized in this study. We still might employ the parasocial notion in measuring relationships with on-air news personalities, since it has been established in earlier work (e.g., Rubin & McHugh, 1987). However, it's also useful to conceptualize applied uses and gratifications sub-dimensions of surveillance, knowledge, interpersonal utility and personal identity that might lead broadcast journalists to consider "non-entertainment" elements of news.

The symbiotic goals of our study can be served by a fuller consideration of implications for format development, which has been accelerated by the fractionalization of audience accompanying new cable, satellite and broadcast programmers. As commentators (e.g., Abelman & Atkin, 2010, p. 206) note, "network programming in the last few decades has been characterized by soaring program costs, lower program cancellation thresholds and rising program realignment rates that should have increased network program diversity." Litman et al. (1994) further suggest that, rather than emulating cable with a fragmentation in format offerings, the networks have instead responded to new competition by providing general interest formats. Since the networks have neither the desire nor the ability to match the depth of formatting offered on a specialized cable service, they focus instead on general, common denominator programming that embraces less costly formats (e.g., game shows, reality programming), hoping to realize a greater ratings bang for their programming buck. And given that enjoyment of the reality TV format is sustained by the widest array of uses and gratifications, relative to other formats, this choice turned out to be a sound one for the networks. One of the distinguishing features of this relatively new format involves the blurring of boundaries between audiences and "actors"/participants in the reality programs themselves.

Bearing these distinctive format attributes in mind, this study focused on people's enjoyment of reality television and other formats while employing uses and gratifications,

parasocial and presence literatures. But there's a larger lesson suggested. Much of our literature focuses on pieces of the mass communication puzzle. Uses and gratifications links media behavior patterns to people's needs. The effects literature links media exposure patterns to audience behaviors. Separate literatures focus on media organizations and how messages are constructed. One of the missing links is content theory—how patterns of media content evolve and through what process — which can show how changes in media content patterns, changes in audience exposure patterns, and message construction patterns are linked. If uses and gratifications can provide the match between content perceptions and message construction, we are a step closer to mapping the complex set of relationships that make up a mass communication system. The emergence of novel forms provides an opportunity for such research because audience perceptions are forming.

The same might also apply in creative processes. Producers of a situation comedy know what's expected, what ingredients are necessary and likely to be successful. When the "first" reality television program received high ratings, producers could not be certain of what audiences were reacting to, and experimentation followed. This study does not document how creative people in the industry take into account audience reactions (e.g., the ratings) in their work, and that is a missing piece of the puzzle. As for the presence dimension, most studies measure it directly after the media experience. Perhaps this more general inquiry about the audience feelings about programming lessened the level of presence reported.

With broadcasters now offering up to five digital channels per station under the recent government mandated conversion to digital formats—including a move to higher definition formats commanding greater audience presence (e.g., Lombard & Ditton, 1997) — it will be important to repeat this work over time. The predictive role played by presence variables in our models establishes the utility of this concept in the larger context of audience uses and gratifications. Later work should investigate the relative audience utility for reality shows as reruns for local stations, where industry wisdom suggests that reality shows seldom perform well in syndication, long a realm dominated by situation comedies (Flint, 2004).

More generally, uses and gratifications theory suggests that audiences seek out media for particular uses and gratifications that also could be fulfilled with non-media options. In the case of parasocial uses, people use media to develop personal relationships, which also could be fulfilled with face-to-face interactions that occur during other leisure activities. Reality programs present an option for people with more limited social skills and unattractive non-media leisure options in their environment. Others may watch reality shows with groups of friends, using the TV programs as an opportunity to reinforce personal relationships. In addition to other leisure interests, other competitors for fulfilling people's uses and gratifications might include interpersonal communication and mediated point-to-point communication, e.g., seeking interaction through Facebook and social networking sites, chat-rooms, or going to coffee shops (e.g., Atkin et al., 2005). By focusing more precisely and targeting behaviors, we move away from such grand theory building in the

short run but enhance the utility of our work, providing support for Einstein's oft-cited aphorism: "There's nothing so practical as a good theory."

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