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Parasocial Relationships Among Film Consumers: Can Film Celebrities Influence Purchase Intentions?

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Abstract

This thesis explored how film celebrities and the parasocial relationships they form with their fan bases influences the purchase intentions of consumers. Specifically, this research looked at parasocial relationships' influence on box office revenue and streaming service subscriptions. This thesis also explored social media and how film celebrities' usage influences parasocial relationships with audiences. The results of this study found that parasocial relationships had a significant influence on the survey participants' purchase intentions. The goal was to help marketing and public relations professionals understand how parasocial relationships can benefit celebrity clients they may acquire or film studios they may represent.

PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AMONG

FILM CONSUMERS: CAN FILM

CELEBRITIES INFLUENCE PURCHASE

INTENTIONS?

by

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Introduction

The term "celebrity" was defined by Boorstin (1962) as "a person who is known for [one's] well-knownness" (p. 57). For the purposes of this thesis, the term "film" is defined as a medium of art used to convey stories through moving images (Cloete, 2017). Film celebrities, based on these definitions, are people who are known for their work in cinematic storytelling. Since the Kinetoscope was made in 1891, moving pictures have evolved into a worldwide industry (National Science and Media Museum, 2011).

Film celebrities can be used to influence the purchase intentions of audiences by being the faces of cinematic features (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). Films are products produced and sold to the general public by film studios, known as the "brands" of the industry. Film studios, as brands, can use celebrities as a way to endorse their products to their target audiences (Ilicic & Webster, 2011).

With this in mind, the purchase intentions of film consumers can be based around the trustworthiness audiences feel towards a film celebrity (Ilicic & Webster, 2011). For example, if a celebrity has been in several poorly reviewed films, audiences will be less likely to see future films starring that particular celebrity. Film studios must think critically about which celebrities they will hire for upcoming films, as celebrities may influence audience purchase intentions.

Film celebrities can increase audience relationships through a term called parasocial interaction. Coined in 1956 by researchers Horton and Wohl, parasocial relationships and interactions are pseudo-social relationships formed between audience members and personas who appear in films, on television, and other creative mediums. These relationships continuously mold to our ever-changing technological environment.

Alongside parasocial relationships are parasocial interactions. The term parasocial interaction was introduced by Horton and Wohl in 1956. Throughout history, the terms parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship have often been confused together due to their similarities. A parasocial interaction has been defined as "an illusory user experience that takes place in an exposure situation" (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2015, p. 23). Whereas, a parasocial relationship qualifies as a "more enduring, long-term, and usually positive, one-sided intimacy at a distance that users develop toward media performers, based on repeated encounters" (Dibble et al., 2015, p.24).

To summarize the difference, a "parasocial interaction is restricted to the viewing episode, [while] a parasocial relationship can extend beyond any single viewing episode" (Dibble et al., 2015, p.21). This thesis focused specifically on parasocial relationships. There have been studies conducted on parasocial interaction and relationships, such as how parasocial interactions influence how audiences feel about their favorite television character leaving a series (Cohen, 2004), how parasocial relationships fans develop with sports figures can be used by sports teams and arenas to increase revenue (Thompson, 2019), and how parasocial relationships form with YouTube content creators (Ferchaud, Grzelso, Orme, & LaGroue, 2017). Research has also been conducted on how readers form parasocial relationships with characters in romance novels (Burnettt & Beto, 2000), and on how parasocial interaction occurs between audiences and aggressive television characters (Eyal & Rubin, 2003).

Literature written prior has looked at different parts of the entertainment industry, such as television, novels, sports, and films. Specific film celebrities (Kosenko, Binder, & Hurley, 2016) and franchises (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011) have been studied under the framework of parasocial

interactions and relationships. However, these were about specific films and celebrities and were not greatly concerned with the general understanding of film celebrities and how these practices pertain to box office revenue and streaming service subscriptions. A study conducted on film and film celebrity buzz (Karniouchina, 2008) looks at how initial consumer buzz can boost box office revenue. However, this study did not look at parasocial relationships and film celebrities, specifically.

This thesis looked at how public relations professionals can use parasocial relationships to understand purchase intentions among consumers as it relates to box office revenue and streaming service subscriptions. Little prior research has been conducted on this theoretical framework's impact on the film industry's top markets. Streaming services and movie theaters explored in this research paper to understand how film celebrities can boost sales for these different markets.

This thesis has been organized into several chapters. First, a literature review which looked at parasocial relationships and film celebrities, parasocial relationships and consumers, parasocial relationships and social media, parasocial relationships and streaming services, and parasocial relationships and the box office. The following chapter discussed the methodology used to measure parasocial relationships between film celebrities and audiences to better understand audience purchase intentions. The results chapter analyzed and discussed the findings from the research conducted. The discussion and conclusion chapter summarized the overall findings of this thesis and assessed what conclusions can be made based on this research. The limitations and suggested research chapter explained any limitations within this study and how future scholars can build further studies off of this research.

<center>**Literature Review**</center>

Parasocial Relationships & Film Celebrities

From Charlie Chaplin to Bradley Cooper, actors from every generation have been adored by fans around the world for their work in film. Scholars throughout the years have looked into the relationships that fans develop with these celebrities. In 1956, Horton and Wohl published their famous findings on a phenomenon they label as "para-social interactions." These scholars found that audience members feel an "illusion" of a connection with personas who appear in mediums such as film (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

Through this connection, audience members begin to rely on the para-social interaction that becomes "a regular and dependable event, to be counted on, planned for, and integrated into the routines of daily life" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.216). The reason that this interaction is described as an "illusion" is due to the actor's lack of authentic reciprocity towards the relationship the audience member has built. The suggested companionship the audience member feels is how s/he develops a parasocial relationship with the actor (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

One of the motivations that leads most audience members to create and maintain these parasocial relationships is through their desire for a connection so ideal that it could most likely never be achieved in real life (Horton & Wohl, 1956). An audience member does not need to know every move the actor makes in order to feel connected to him or her; however, there is a strong fascination in our society with celebrities' daily lives. An audience member who is in a parasocial relationship with an actor would not mind knowing if the actor is married or divorced; however, the concept of celebrities as "modern 'heroes'" is the main appeal that makes audiences invested in these relationships (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.226). At times when the

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audience member feels as though the relationship is dwindling, s/he will either resort to "elaborating the image" of the actor or attempt to "transcend the illusion by making some kind of actual contact" (Horton & Wohl, 1956, p.226).

It is easy for audience members to elaborate the image of an actor and make him or her more than they may actually be in real life when the actor is in films filled with adventure and action. Superhero movies commonly have a strong fanbase, with individuals transporting themselves into worlds that do not actually exist.

Another strong fanbase lies within films that depict the magical world of "Harry Potter." In a study conducted by Schmid and Klimmt, scholars look into how fans have created parasocial relationships with the beloved "Harry Potter" characters from the popular franchise. In this particular fanbase, researchers found that practically all members hold some type of "strong parasocial relationships with the protagonist" (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011, p.265). The protagonist, Harry Potter, is a courageous and heroic idol whose image has only grown more elaborate and powerful since the first book in the franchise was published in 1997.

Besides an elaboration of the actor's or character's image, fans of all films are equipped with social media and are able to contact celebrities any time they please. This tool does not necessarily guarantee that the actor will respond; however, fans are still eager to tweet, direct message, and comment on an actor's posts.

In one study on athletes and their use of social media, it was found that "the more social an athlete is on Twitter the more media users may feel as if they are engaged in a normal social relationship with that athlete, which could lead to stronger PSI development" (Frederick, Lim, Clavio, & Walsh, 2012, p.493). This same perspective can be used for film actors. The more an

actor uses social media, the easier it is for audience members to curate a stronger parasocial relationship with them.

Celebrities, in general, have also been studied as "human brands" (Centeno & Wang, 2016). In this sense, celebrities can "co-create" with consumers and advertisers to form the overall "human brand identity" a celebrity forms (Centeno & Wang, 2016, p.136). With this in mind, "when celebrity human brand identities are successful both socially and economically over time, they satisfy the celebrities themselves, consumers, and the industry actors who have stakes in the co-created identity as a resource" (Centeno & Wang, 2016, p.135).

These economic and social relations revolve around a celebrity's ability to form parasocial relationships with consumers. Without this exchange, the celebrity may have a working relationship with a talent agency or advertiser, but the consumers will not be involved in benefiting the celebrity or the company the celebrity is involved with. For example, when a film actor is promoting a film, there needs to be a working relationship between the film company, the film actor, and the film consumers in order for all parties to benefit. When all parties work cohesively, successful relationships are built.

Parasocial Relationships & Consumers

When actors become more personable, the audience member can "come to know and relate to the media personality in relatively the same manner as he or she would to a real life friend and hence, possibly have several functions of companionship fulfilled through the media figure" (Cole & Leets, 1999, p.496). In research conducted by Cole and Leets in 1999,

researchers categorize three types of participants: Anxious-ambivalent, Secure, and Avoidant participants.

Based on their research, a majority of an audience member's ability to form a parasocial bond is based on his or her attachment beliefs (Cole & Leets, 1999). When looking at participants and how they formed relationships with their favorite television personalities, it was found that Anxious-ambivalent individuals were the most likely participants to form the strongest parasocial bonds with these personas (Cole & Leets, 1999). The scholars assume that these bonds were formed due to Anxious-ambivalent participants using the television character as a way to compensate for real life "unmet relational needs" (Cole & Leets, 1999, p.507). This work gives a similar result to the findings of Horton and Wohl. Many people find parasocial relationships as a form of escape from their real-life situations.

Another study was conducted to understand parasocial relationships and low self-esteem within consumers, looking into how these relationships form and what the relationships mean (Derrick, Gabriel, & Tippin, 2008). The researchers propose that "[parasocial relationships] can provide a safe route for people who have a difficult time with real interpersonal relationships…to view themselves more positively with very little risk of rejection" (Derrick et al., 2008, p.261). Ways people cope with low self-esteem can be through "personifying" an "ideal self" that is the essence of "everything they wish they could be" (Derrick, et al., 2008, p.263).

Through analysis of their study and studies done prior, researchers found that "even though parasocial relationships are not real insofar as the two individuals involved actually know one another and interact, the psychological effects of them could be quite real" (Derrick et al., 2008, p.276). When comparing consumers with parasocial relationships and self-esteem,

researchers found that these relationships are "multifaceted" and can be understood better through further exploration (Derrick et al., 2008).

However, one important factor is that not all people who experience parasocial relationships have low self-esteem. Researchers found that people do not need to "choose between real and parasocial relationships," rather, some people may experience parasocial relationships and "have social networks as large as people who do not experience parasocial relationships" (Derrick et al, 2008, p.277). It is important to understand all consumers and relationship types in order to achieve the maximum benefits from a parasocial relationship.

Consumers of film come from a variety of backgrounds, depending on upbringing, gender, race, and other factors that help form a consumer's decision making. A study conducted at the University of Nevada looks into how parasocial relationships with celebrities differentiate based on gender, race, ethnicity, and other factors (Laken, 2009). In this study, Laken (2009) suggests that "audiences chose celebrities and have parasocial interactions based on perceived similarity and not identity" (p.41).

Laken (2009) concludes that "audiences may select and experience entertainment not by how they identify themselves within society, but based on a shared experience within the celebrity" (p.41). Therefore, if an audience member views a film, the consumer may develop a parasocial relationship with a particular actor within the film based on a shared experience occurring on the screen. It may have nothing to do with the film actor's appearances or how they identify, but all to do with what the consumer observes of the actor's experiences on-screen and in real life.

Within the realm of understanding audience motivations behind watching films, a study by Flynn (2018) was conducted at Elon University on this specific topic. Flynn (2018) looked at box office films over time and made comparisons across how audiences have been drawn into movies theaters over the years. In other words, what motivates consumers to go to the movie theater when they could just stay at home? Research found that modern consumers are more likely to attend opening weekends based on their access to technology and desire to "remain part of the conversation in real time" without knowing spoilers (Flynn, 2018, p.101). Consumers like being involved and building connections, whether it is in real life or through a screen.

Parasocial Relationships & Social Media

As the cinema has entered this new digital era, a lot has changed in the way movie studios have been marketing their products. No longer is it possible not to rely on technology in order for people to bring themselves into the movie theaters. Streaming services also rely on social media to engage with loyal users, as well as using platforms to recruit new consumers. In the age of "like," "comment" and "subscribe," movie studios and streaming services have gotten savvier in how they approach target audiences with their upcoming releases.

In a study on the power of prerelease "likes" and box office performance, it was found that a "1% increase in the number of "likes" in the one week prior to release is associated with an increase of the opening week box office by about 0.2%" (Ding, Cheng, Duan, & Jin, 2017, p.77). With a variety of online platforms, such as Twitter and Instagram, studios have the power to promote movies like never before (Ding et al., 2017).

For example, in 2014 the film "Edge of Tomorrow," starring Tom Cruise, was released. The production cost $178 million, and the film "grossed $28.7 million in its opening weekend" (Oh, Roumani, Nwankpa, & Hu, 2017, p.25). During that same weekend, "Fault in Our Stars" was released — "a $12 million budget movie with [a] $48 million opening-weekend revenue" (Oh et al., 2017, p.25).

Not only were these films different in genres, but they also had very different social media trends. With only 444,000 Facebook likes and a 195,000 talk count on release day, "Edge of Tomorrow" looked outnumbered compared to the 4.6 million Facebook likes and 2.4 million talk count that "Fault in Our Stars" held (Oh et al., 2017). As was mentioned in the study, "social media [has] become an important communication tool for businesses and marketers and a crucial factor for influencing consumers' attitudes, opinions, and purchasing behaviors" (Oh et al., 2017, p.26).

Social media has not just taken on the films themselves, but also the actors within the films. With this new amount of intimacy, fans can learn instantaneously about their favorite celebrity's upcoming projects (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016). Kowalczyk and Pounders (2016) studied emotional attachment to a celebrity on social media and how that affects word-of-mouth (WOM) and purchase likelihood. Scholars found that "emotional attachment [has] a significant effect on purchase likelihood" but has no effect on WOM (Kowalczyk & Pounders, 2016, p.353).

However, WOM is still important to the film industry. This form of marketing "involves informal communication among consumers about products and services" (Liu, 2006, p.74). With new promotional tactics being used on social media, WOM is a fundamental part of prerelease anticipation for a film. It is also known that "at least for entertainment goods, such as movies,

WOM communication about a to-be-released new product may not depend on actual experience" (Liu, 2006, p.87).

Although the amount of "likes" on a movie page may help promote WOM, fans "liking" a movie page based on their emotional attachment to a celebrity in the film may offer studios a larger return-on-investment (ROI) during a film's opening weekend. Through celebrity endorsement on social media of a movie, fans will have gained a deeper connection to the actor and to the film. This is a common technique "widely used in marketing because marketers believe that celebrities attract the attention of consumers and the celebrities' positive traits are transferred to the endorsed brands" (Chung & Cho, 2017, p.481).

Movie studios are "brands" that endorse movies, hence the necessity to utilize social media towards marketing efforts. Through research on celebrity endorsements for brands, it was concluded that "consumers' social media exchanges with celebrities facilitate parasocial relationships via perceived self-disclosure, which, in turn, influences source trustworthiness" (Chung & Cho, 2017, p.489). In this digital age, trustworthiness is an important part of how movie studios can fill the seats at movie theaters and gain more monthly streaming service subscribers. Through actors, studios can create trust within consumers that their products are worth investing time and money into.

Parasocial Relationships & Streaming Services

It is no secret that Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Disney + have completely transformed the way the world watches movies. Many people would rather stay at home and watch the latest Netflix original movie then venture to their local movie theater. With this

newfound consumer desire comes a newfound freedom for filmmakers who are eager to explore what the future holds for streaming services.

As humans spend more time focused on entertainment, they are rapidly finding themselves spending that time at home. With so little time outside of work, people are "more reluctant to go out for entertainment" (Silver & McDonnell, 2007, p. 494). Back in 2007, a study found that "the average person now spends 50% more on DVDs than on cinema tickets" (Silver & McDonnell, 2007, p.494). Even large industry names like Steven Spielberg has spoken out on this phenomenon of home entertainment.

Spielberg predicts that "fewer films will make it to the big screen, and more films will find themselves going straight to television through cable networks and Internet streaming services like Netflix" (Tefertiller, 2014, p.1). As a result of this prophecy already unfolding, "films have become files" that are "viewed as a temporary service commodity rather than a physically product with each company attempting to maximize revenues along the distribution chain" (Savage, 2014, p.10).

More people are using their mobile devices than ever before, wanting to stream movies on their handheld screens instead of watching them "by traditional means" (Savage, 2014, p.12). Within just a simple app, consumers can not only watch movies, but also take a look at exciting new television shows such as "Stranger Things" or "The Boys" (Savage, 2014). Now people have alternative entertainment services, rather than only watching blockbuster hits.

Streaming services have piqued the interest of major Hollywood studios as they "are already beginning to provide video-on-demand (VOD) digital distribution of movies over the Internet" (Silver & Alpert, 2003, p.1). Filmmakers are interested in online streaming due to cost

reduction (Silver & Alpert, 2003). Studios have also opted to VOD, as it provides "greater picture quality" and other beneficial "on-screen functions" (Silver & Alpert, 2003, p.14).

With streaming services, even filmmakers who are not a part of the major Hollywood studios can produce and release short films with "special effects worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster" (Silver & Alpert, 2003, p.10). Because of this new technology, "a global release of a movie becomes a real and possibly commercially attractive possibility" (Silver & Alpert, 2003, p.11). Although there are those who want to cling on to Hollywood's initial film print appeal, "industry leaders like George Lucas and Francis Ford Coppola are championing the cause of digitally produced movies to replace film as the industry medium" (Silver & Alpert, 2003, p.24).

The immediacy of entertainment, films, and celebrities offers an interesting new era for parasocial relationships. Now, more than ever, audiences are viewing films anywhere and anytime through various devices. Whether it is a smartphone, iPad, or television screen, audiences are tuning into streaming services all over the world. Further research into streaming service platforms and parasocial relationships can help scholars understand what makes people subscribe to these services and how they can sustain their success.

Parasocial Relationships & The Box Office

The discussion on celebrity contributions to movie ticket sales has been debated for many years. Studios often wonder if the story alone is enough to inspire audiences to walk through their local movie theater doors. As movies have evolved, it has been proven that star power can lead to studio power. In one study conducted by Nelson and Glotfelty (2012), it was found that by "replacing an average star with a top star … revenues [increase] by an average of

$16,618,570, while replacing three average stars with three top stars would increase revenues by an average of $64,410,381" (p.141).

The term "top star" references A-List film celebrities, such as Leonardo DiCaprio or Scarlett Johansson. Despite cases of top stars leading films to successful box office ROI, there are many skeptics arguing whether celebrities are worth the extra dollar. It is no secret that A-List celebrities ask for a large sum of money when joining a film project. Since the film industry is such a guessing game, several scholars have concluded that star power may not be all that powerful. When studios are considering big stars for their next production, studio executives should make sure that the stars they are hiring are not asking for more than they are actually worth (Hofmann, Clement, Völckner, & Hennig-Thurau, 2017).

Unfortunately, there is never a clear answer that all can agree upon when looking at a celebrity's appeal at the box office. Budgeting and hiring celebrities are "a double-edged sword," but studios cannot deny "the global fascination with stars" (Hofmann et al., 2017, p.457). Magazines, such as "People," have also been studied to understand the popularity of actors and how that affects box office success. Through research conducted by Treme and Craig (2013), scholars found a wide range of differences between male and female celebrities' popularity based on age and gender.

The results showed that "male celebrity media exposure can positively impact the success of a movie, whereas female celebrity exposure tends to decrease box office revenues" (Treme & Craig, 2013, p.440). Treme and Craig (2013) conclude that "a high celebrity profile can attract audiences to a movie," although the age and gender of a celebrity does make a difference in how "impactful" the celebrity is to the general population (p.444). However, the coverage of

celebrities is purely based on what writers believe audiences want to read about, whereas talent is something that no amount of exposure of a celebrity can be based upon (Treme & Craig, 2013).

As mentioned previously, press coverage does not imply talent. However, in research conducted by De Vany and Walls, these scholars completely dismiss celebrity talent and place the talent on the film itself. In this situation, "the audience makes a movie a hit and no amount of "star power" or marketing can alter that. The real star is the movie" (De Vany & Walls, 1999, p.285). Researchers emphasize the importance of the audience deciding the films "fate" (De Vany & Walls, 1999). Based on research, it was found that movies with stars did "dominate" the box office, in terms of money, compared to films without star power (De Vany & Walls, 1999, p.296). According to their research, "stars increase the median of the returns distribution much more than the mean; they make the distribution less skewed" (De Vany & Walls, 1999, p.300).

A commonly discussed topic in the movie industry is how a film with big stars can get booked on more screens on its opening weekend than movies without star power. In turn, this screen availability makes people assume that the film is better than it may actually be (De Vany & Walls, 1999). As the weeks go by, a movie with A-List celebrities in the cast will appear in three times as many theaters as films without big Hollywood names (De Vany & Walls, 1999).

In many ways, the reputation of a celebrity dictates the success or failure of a film. It is assumed that bigger celebrities get better budgets, leading to "their chances of appearing in high grossing movies" rising (De Vany & Walls, 1999, p.310). The success of a new movie is estimated by studios based on the success of a celebrity's previous films, hoping that they can repeat the past (De Vany & Walls, 1999). However, De Vany and Walls (1999) note that there are some films, such as "Home Alone" without star power that become success stories, while

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other films with star power, such as "Waterworld," flop at the box office. As many scholars and industry professionals say – a majority of the film industry is a guessing game.

Summary

Due to growing technologies, further research on audiences' parasocial relationships with film celebrities is necessary in order to understand how and to what extent these relationships influence purchase intentions among consumers. Furthermore, little research has been done on the impact of parasocial relationships on box office revenue and streaming service subscriptions. There have been studies on star power and its box office influence (Nelson & Glotfelty, 2012; Hofmann et al., 2017.; De Vany & Walls, 1999), but little has been studied on the relationship between film celebrities and audiences and how these relationships influence both the box office and streaming services.

Within literature, there has been a study on different attachment styles of audiences (Cole & Leets, 1999), but few recently have looked into current consumers' film habits and parasocial relationships. Studies on demographics have been conducted (Laken, 2009; Treme & Craig, 2013); however, studies prior to the rise of streaming services lack research on how these services are impacting specific publics. There have been studies that have looked into athletes parasocial relationships, along with athletes' social media engagement (Frederick et al., 2012); however, this research did not look into how film celebrity engagement plays a role in parasocial relationships with audiences on social media.

Similar to research conducted by Chung and Cho (2017) on trustworthiness, this thesis explored audience trust within a celebrity and how that equates to them spending time and

money on watching a movie with that particular actor in it. This research worked to validate the position Nelson and Glotfelty (2012) took on star power equating to more revenue. This research sought to understand the movie business' mysterious ability to have major successes and major loses. The research conducted reflected back to this literature review and what other studies have done, and what future studies can do.

Unfortunately, the literature the researcher was able to find was not as extensive on the topic of PSR as originally believed. Also, the literature that was able to provide context for this study was not as current as the researcher would have liked. In order to utilize previous studies efficiently, the researcher formulated research questions around different areas of interest that were discussed to some extent in the literature review. As mentioned previously, studies that have been used to examine PSR and film audience purchase intentions looked at star power at the box office and how that attributed to studio revenue (Nelson & Glotfelty, 2012; Hofmann et al., 2017).

This thesis looked into a deeper concept of PSR and how PSR is the main force behind successful box office and streaming service performances. In the study done by Nelson and Glotfelty (2012), researchers looked more statistically at celebrity revenue; whereas, this thesis primarily examined audiences PSR with film celebrities and assessed how that could influence purchase intentions.

Previous research conducted on social media habits looked at how different celebrities' social media presences influenced their PSR with various audiences (Frederick et al., 2012). For example, a study mentioned in the literature review looked into an athlete's Twitter presence

and how overall celebrity social media engagement can strengthen PSR between celebrities and fans (Frederick et al., 2012). Participants' observations of celebrity social media presence have been examined in this thesis.

The last area of research this thesis looked into was demographics. Inspired by Laken's (2009) research, this thesis examined participants' PSR with film celebrities and whether or not these relationships varied based on participant demographic differences. This includes areas such as age, gender, ethnicity, and income. Laken (2009) found that demographic variables did not necessarily influence PSR; rather, audiences were forming these relationships based on shared experiences they have with the actors both in film and in real life. The research within this thesis has used Laken's (2009) findings within its analysis of PSR and demographics.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do parasocial relationships between audiences and film celebrities impact overall consumer purchase intentions?

Rationale

This question considered how relationships between celebrities and their publics translate into money spent on streaming services and in movie theaters. This question looked into whether or not film actors contribute to films being successful on whichever platforms they are being distributed through. Similar to previous studies on the topic of star power at the box office (Nelson & Glotfelty, 2012; Hofmann et al., 2017), this research assessed the "guessing game" of the industry and attempted to debunk how films can gain more of a profit through parasocial relationships.

RQ2: How do parasocial relationships with film celebrities vary based on the celebrity's social media presence?

Rationale

Using this question, the researcher looked at the overall responses from survey participants about their favorite living actors' social media presences. The survey results are based on how users view their favorites celebrities' activity, whether the celebrities are strongly active or inactive on social media. It also used this information in relation to specific prompts on parasocial relationships participants felt with these celebrities through social media. A study done on athletes on Twitter looked into this similar concept of celebrity social media

presence affecting parasocial relationships (Frederick et al., 2012). The research conducted for this thesis looked into film celebrities, rather than athletes.

RQ 3: How do parasocial relationships with film celebrities vary based on demographic differences (i.e. gender, age, and income)?

Rationale

This question explored how demographics play a part in how publics develop parasocial relationships with film celebrities. Demographics have been studied in other research (Laken, 2009; Treme & Craig, 2013). However, the study conducted by Laken (2009) was done before streaming services became as prevalent as they are in 2020. The study conducted by Treme and Craig (2013) only looked at demographics from one magazine outlet. A more updated and broader understanding of demographics was necessary in order to understand consumer behavior in regard to the film industry.

Methodology

Research Method

This research utilized a quantitative method of analysis to collect data on individuals across the United States who may have had parasocial relationships with a particular film celebrity. Respondents indicated that they used streaming services and/or attended movie theater screenings often. The study involved a survey created through Qualtrics and was distributed through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). By using Amazon MTurk, the survey was be able to reach a wider range of participants and gave this thesis a diverse pool of answers on this topic.

Recruitment Process

Participants were recruited using Amazon MTurk. The researcher offered $0.25 to those wishing to participate in the online, voluntary, 10-minute survey. 116 participants from the United States who were over the age of 18 took the survey and had their responses recorded. In order to take the survey, participants first agreed to a consent form and were then asked a series of questions. Respondents were free to opt-out of the survey at any time. When taking the survey, participants were also asked if they attended movies at the cinema and/or if they were subscribed to a streaming service. In order to continue, the participants had to take part in either or both of these practices.

Data Collection

The data from the survey was collected through Amazon MTurk and Qualtrics. Qualtrics served as the platform for analysis, while Amazon MTurk only served as a survey distribution platform. The services of Qualtrics was provided by Syracuse University.

Respondents were able to access the survey and respond to it through their laptops, desktops, or mobile devices.

Sample

The sample of 116 participants came from Amazon MTurk users located in the United States. All respondents were over 18 years old. At the end of the survey, participants were prompted to fill out a demographics section on their gender, ethnicity, age, income, and education. This sample was both a convenience and volunteer sample. Using Amazon MTurk's services allowed for easy accessibility to a variety of individuals. Respondents volunteered their time towards the study for payment

Instrument

The instrument for this research was a survey made up of six sections. The first section was a consent form. The second section asked four questions about the participant's movie-going habits, streaming service subscriptions, and social media habits. The next section asked the respondent for the name of his or her favorite celebrity. The next two sections involved the participant to respond to two Likert scales that assessed PSR. Each scale had a set of 15 statements related to the participant and the living film actor he or she named in the previous section. The final section asked respondents for their demographic information.

Measures

The measures used in this research were derived from literature works and previous theoretical research based on the topic of parasocial relationships and interactions. The five

measurements used in this research are parallel to previous research conducted by Thompson (2019). The measurements used in this study were parasocial relationships, identification, trust, loyalty, and purchase intention.

In previous research conducted by Schramm and Hartmann (2008), PSI-process scales were used to collect data on "users' responses towards TV persona[s] and underlying parasocial processes" (p.389). Within their data set, researchers analyzed cognitive, affective, and behavioral responses that participants demonstrated during a parasocial interaction (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008, p. 389). Since the data collected within this thesis is specifically for film celebrities and parasocial relationships, rather than interactions, Thompson's (2019) scale was more appropriate to utilize in order to incorporate a more modern and diverse measurement system specific to PSR.

The literature discussed in the previous chapter was also used to frame this research. Purchase intention was measured through a series of questions that asked participants how many times a year they visited movie theaters and what streaming services they were subscribed to. Parasocial relationships, trust, identification, purchase intention, and loyalty were all assessed through two Likert scales that consisted of 15 questions each ('1'= 'Strongly disagree' to '5'= 'Strongly agree').

Validity

This survey was pre-tested several times through Qualtrics' diagnostic feature in order to ensure respondents were able to understand the questions asked of them. The survey was also evaluated by this thesis' advisor, as well as members of the Syracuse University Office of

Research Integrity and Protections to ensure the survey's readability and validity. A group of 10 volunteers also took the survey prior to its distribution to further validify the survey.

Data Analysis

The platform Qualtrics was utilized to analyze the data collected from the survey. Through Qualtrics, various tables and graphs were organized. The data was converted to Microsoft Word, PDF files, and Microsoft Excel sheets for further examination of the information.

<center>**Results**</center>

Answering RQ1-RQ3

The following analysis of the survey responses from this thesis' research will be used to answer the research questions written by the researcher. Tables 1 through 11 (*see Appendix A*) were created to further explain the results found from the research that was conducted.

RQ1: How do parasocial relationships between audiences and film celebrities impact overall consumer purchase intentions?

In order to know participants' purchase intentions, the amount of times participants had visited movie theaters and subscribed to streaming services was first assessed. Out of the 116 respondents, 36.21% visited movie theaters once a month, 27.59% visited several times a year, 18.97% visited once a week, 6.90% visited every day, 6.90% visited once a year, 2.59% visited never, and 0.86% visited "other" (i.e. a few times a year). In other words, 42 out of 116 participants said they visited a movie theater once a month. As for streaming service subscriptions, 36.17% were subscribed to Netflix, 32.77% were subscribed to Amazon Prime, 17.45% were subscribed to Disney+, 12.34% were subscribed to Hulu, 0.85% were subscribed to none, and 0.43% are subscribed to "other" (i.e. Showtime).

Overall, respondents' individual responses to the two Likert scales that each consisted of 15 questions were within the same range of the majority. The majority of responses, 30% of respondents, somewhat agreed to the first Likert scale, while 25% of respondents somewhat disagreed with the first Likert scale. 34% of participants somewhat agreed with the second Likert scale, and 20% strongly agreed with the second Likert scale.

<center>25</center>

For the first prompt within the first Likert scale, 30.17% of respondents said that they somewhat agreed that they often go to the movies, while 25% somewhat disagreed. The next prompt pertaining to streaming services resulted in 34.48% of participants saying that they strongly agreed that they often watch films on their preferred streaming service, while 31.90% somewhat agreed, and only 13.79% somewhat disagreed.

Other prompts that assessed parasocial relationships, specifically, found that a majority of respondents somewhat agreed to the statements about their favorite living film actors. For example, 32.76% of respondents somewhat agreed that they got excited when their favorite living film actors were releasing new films, while 30.17% strongly agreed. When trust was assessed towards the respondents' favorite living film actors, 37.93% of respondents somewhat agreed that they could trust their favorite living actors completely, while 25.86% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 14.66% strongly agreed with the statement.

Respondents were also assessed on their purchase intentions associated with their favorite living film actors. Following one prompt in the second 15-question Likert scale, 32.76% somewhat agreed that they were willing to encourage others to purchase their favorite living actors' movies, products, etc., while 22.41% strongly agreed, and 9.48% strongly disagreed. When asked about whether they intended to see their favorite living film actors in any future films, 36.21% strongly agreed that they intended to, while 32.76% somewhat agreed, and only 2.59% strongly disagreed.

Another prompt about purchase intentions and participants' favorite living film actors involved respondents' box office and streaming service subscriptions habits. The results found that 31.90% of participants somewhat agreed that they were willing to pay extra to see their

favorite living film actors in theaters, while 22.41% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 20.69% strongly agreed. As for streaming services, 29.31% of respondents somewhat agreed that they were willing to purchase a streaming service subscription to see a film that their favorite living actors were in, while 26.72% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 19.83% strongly agreed.

RQ2: How do parasocial relationships with film celebrities vary based on the celebrity's social media presence?

In order to assess parasocial relationships with film celebrities and their correlation to social media tendencies, the first priority for the researcher was to have a general sense of social media users' online habits. Respondents were asked how often they used social media. Results concluded that 75% of participants used social media every day, 12.07% used it several times a week, 7.76% used it once a week, and 5.17% used it once a month. When asked what platforms of social media participants used, 32.02% used Facebook, 25.68% used Instagram, 19.34% used Twitter, 10.57% used TikTok, 9.97% used Snapchat, and 2.42% used other (i.e. Reddit, Tumblr, YouTube).

Respondents reported that 32.76% somewhat agreed that they got excited when their favorite living film actors released a new film, while 30.17% strongly agreed, and 6.90% strongly disagreed. In regards to their favorite film actors promoting a film on social media, 33.62% of survey participants somewhat agreed that they were more likely to see a film when they saw their favorite celebrities promoting it on social media, 29.31% neither agreed nor disagreed with the prompt, 15.52% strongly agreed, and 8.62% strongly disagreed with the statement.

In another survey prompt, 32.76% of respondents somewhat agreed that if they saw their favorite film actors in the news, they were likely to read or watch the content. Other responses included 25.86% of respondents saying that they strongly agreed, and 7.76% strongly disagreed. When asked if survey participants missed their favorite living film actors when they were on hiatus, 34.48% respondents somewhat agreed, 19.83% strongly agreed, and 8.62% disagreed.

Survey participants were also asked if they followed their favorite living actors on social media – 24.14% strongly agreed that they did follow them, 24.14% somewhat agreed, and 24.14% neither agreed nor disagreed. Another prompt asked if the survey participants felt that their favorite living film actors were constantly active on social media, 29.31% of respondents somewhat agreed, 25.86% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 17.24% somewhat disagreed.

When survey participants were asked if they got excited when they saw their favorite living film actors posting often on social media, 28.45% somewhat agreed, 28.45% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 18.10% strongly agreed. Respondents were also prompted to answer whether they felt further connected to their favorite living film actors when these actors posted on social media – 33.62% somewhat agreed that they felt connected, 32.76% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and 12.07% strongly agreed.

Social media users preferred streaming services over movie theater attendance. 40 participants strongly agreed to watching films on their preferred streaming service platforms, and 37 participants who somewhat agreed to this statement. Social media users were less likely to strongly agree with often going to the movies – only 17 participants strongly agreed they went and 35 participants somewhat agreed to the prompt. Overall, social media users' responses were

similar to the majority of responses. Within this survey, technically, all respondents were social media users.

RQ 3: How do parasocial relationships with film celebrities vary based on demographic differences (i.e. gender, age, and income)?

The demographics of respondents, overall, tended to have less of an effect on overall responses than originally predicted. The majority of responses stayed consistent when all demographic answers were evaluated. Participants consisted of 56.90% between the ages 25-34, 14.66% between the ages 18-24, 13.79% between the ages 35-44, 6.90% between the ages 45-54, 5.17% between the ages 55-64, 1.72% between the ages 65-74, 0.86% between the ages 75-84, and 0% were 85 or older. 66 out of 116 respondents were between the ages 25-34, making this age group the majority.

The ethnicities of the respondents were 62.39% White, 30.77% Asian, 3.42% Black or African American, 2.56% American Indian or Alaska Native, 0.85% other (i.e. Hispanic), and 0% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. Respondents' genders consisted of 59.48% male, 39.66% female, and 0.86% other (i.e. non-binary). Survey participants' 2019 cumulative household incomes ranked 17.24% earning between $40,000-$49,999, 13.79% earning between $20,000-$29,999, 9.48% earning between $50,000-$59,999, 8.62% earning between $60,000-$69,999, 8.62% earning between $70,000-$79,999, 7.76% earning between $10,000-$19,999, 6.9% earning between $30,000-$39,999, 6.9% earning between $80,000-$89,999, 6.9% $100,000-$149,999, 6.03% earning between less than $10,000, 5.17% earning between $90,000-$99,999, and 2.59% earning more than $150,000.

Respondents' highest obtained level of education consisted of 68.10% who earned a 4-year college degree, 10.34% went through some college, 8.62% had a professional degree, 6.90% were high school graduates, 5.17% earned a 2-year college degree, 0.86% had a doctorate, and 0% had less than a high school education. 79 out of 116 respondents had a 4-year college degree, which made a bachelor's degree holding respondent the majority. Each demographic followed similar tendencies to the majority of answers, likely due to such a large majority ultimately skewing the final results.

Discussion & Conclusions

The topic that the researcher was interested in studying surrounded the theory of parasocial relationships with film celebrities and how these relationships influenced consumer purchase intentions. Previous literature has looked into star power and box office revenue (Nelson & Glotfelty, 2012), celebrity brands and trustworthiness (Chung & Cho, 2017), athletes on social media (Frederick et al., 2012), and audience demographics (Laken, 2009; Treme & Craig, 2013). The results from this thesis' survey showed that parasocial relationships between audiences and film celebrities had a substantial impact on overall consumer purchase intentions.

A majority of the survey participants visited movie theaters once a month and were subscribed to streaming services, such as Netflix and Amazon Prime. A majority of the survey respondents somewhat agreed with the overall parasocial relationship prompts, formatted through two Likert scales that consisted of 15 statements. Overall, participants were in relatively strong parasocial relationships with their favorite living film actors.

The second Likert scale consisted of prompts that dealt with specific purchase intentions. In this section, more respondents somewhat agreed to strongly agreed with these statements, compared to the first Likert scale. This helped confirm the prediction that participants would be more likely to purchase box office tickets and streaming service subscriptions because of the parasocial relationships they had with their favorite living film actors. This validated the work Nelson and Glotfelty (2012) did on star power equating to box office revenue. Survey participants confirmed that they would be overall more likely to purchase something because their favorite film celebrity was involved.

Respondents somewhat agreed that they trusted their favorite film celebrity completely, and that they would likely encourage others to purchase products pertaining to their favorite film celebrity. These results further validated the work done by Chung and Cho (2017) on celebrities making something more "marketable" due to the trustworthiness audiences have with their favorite celebrity. By believing in their favorite film actors' brands, respondents confirmed that their beliefs would lead to others purchasing products based on this unified trust.

Participants strongly agreed that they would likely see films featuring their favorite film actors in the future. This finding tied well with De Vany and Walls' (1999) research on how studios have estimated the success of a new movie based on an actor's previous films. If people have liked an actor in previous movies, they are likely to go to a new movie starring that actor because they are confident that they will like it, due to past success. Respondents also somewhat agreed that they were willing to pay extra to see films starring their favorite actors at the box office, and that they were willing to purchase a streaming service subscription in order to see films their favorite actors were in.

This thesis' findings highlight Silver and McDonnell's (2007) research on audiences being less inclined to experience entertainment at a movie theater. A majority of this study's participants favored streaming services over movie theaters. Respondents were inclined to use streaming services more often and were more likely to host parasocial interactions with film celebrities through these services. With a majority of respondents somewhat to strongly agreeing with the overall parasocial relationships prompts, the parasocial relationships formed also correlated with these participants' purchase intentions for streaming services.

As for parasocial relationships and social media, all of the survey respondents were on social media. None of the respondents reported not using social media. As mentioned in the literature review, social media is an excellent tool to reach audiences unlike ever before (Ding, et al. 2017). Social media users somewhat agreed that their favorite living film actors were constantly active on social media. Participants, overall, seemed to have mirrored answers based on how active the celebrities were. For instance, users somewhat agreed that they would see films their favorite actors promoted on social media; however, participants, as mentioned before, somewhat agreed that their favorite actors were constantly active on social media.

Most participants used social media every day, and most users followed their favorite celebrities on various platforms. Although a majority of users reported being active every day, they only somewhat agreed that they were excited to see their favorite celebrities posting on social media. Based on previous studies on social media and film audiences (Oh et al., 2017) along with these new findings, it could be said that if celebrities were more active on social media, users would be more likely to feel more connected with the celebrity over social media. Most users, based on the survey responses, had fairly strong parasocial relationships with their favorite celebrities. These could likely be deepened if film celebrities had a more consistent and active social media presence.

This confirmed a similar finding found in research on athletes' social media presences (Frederick et al., 2012). This previous research found that athletes who were more active on Twitter would have a deeper parasocial relationship with audiences. This same theory can be applied to film actors. The more active a film actor is on social media; the more likely audiences will feel connected and supportive of the film actor's work.

The majority of this thesis' survey respondents were male, white, between 25-34 years old, had a bachelor's degree, and had an income between $40,000-$49,999. This demographic influenced the majority of responses. When the researcher looked at different aspects of demographics, respondents' answers were relatively consistent with the majority. Nothing was deeply outstanding between the other survey participants based on demographics. These findings are consistent with Laken's (2009) results of audiences not necessarily forming parasocial relationships based on their outward demographic standing, but rather forming these relationships based on shared experiences on-screen and off-screen.

This study's results concluded that consumer purchase intentions are influenced by film celebrities. These intentions form through a strong, consistent parasocial relationship. Access to technology in the United States is high, with a majority of demographics being able to form these relationships in meaningful ways, regardless of economic or educational backgrounds. Social media has proven to be a key tool in shaping and navigating these relationships.

Star power does exist in the box office and on streaming platforms, and it is highly influential in consumer purchase behavior. Film celebrities, representatives, scholars, organizations and agencies alike should take this information and mobilize marketing and PR campaigns around the bond's audiences share with their favorite celebrities. This will help produce more high-quality, consistent, reliable, and successful campaigns in the future. Investing in these practices will make the best use of valuable creativity, time, and money.

Limitations & Suggested Research

The biggest limitations were the short amount of time this research was done in and the sample size. This thesis had to be done within the span of a few months. This shortened time period was also hindered by COVID-19. These unforeseen circumstances took many of the resources and time necessary away that could have been spent on further analysis. Without access to certain analytics software, participants, libraries, and other resources, the researcher worked with the limited tools she had to complete this thesis within the time span allotted.

As for the sample size, Amazon MTurk and Qualtrics recorded a total of 222 participants taking the survey; however, only 116 responses were actually usable for the final analysis. This was a result of some users not filling out the survey completely or properly, respondents spamming the server, and/or participants not living with the United States. Although responses from around the world are important, this particular thesis specifically targeted the United States' film market.

Increasing the sample size would have increased the value of this research because having more participants in this study would have made the results more applicable to the entire population. Having only 116 responses does not give this study the strength it needs to represent all of society. This data is useful, but it cannot be assumed that the opinions and feelings within this respondent pool can be applied to everyone. In a larger sample size, overall societal PSR can be soundly predicted.

Overall, a larger, more reliable research participant pool would have been helpful in making this research more applicable to all audiences. A similar limitation also involved the diversity within respondents' demographics. Although Amazon MTurk has a wide variety of

users, the demographics for this research were not as balanced or representative as the researcher would have preferred. In a sense, a lot of other important voices were not as prevalent. The researcher would have liked to see a more realistic representation of minority populations within this study in order to make it as representative of all audiences as possible.

Another limitation was only using Amazon MTurk and Qualtrics to distribute one survey. To get the full scope of audiences' parasocial relationships with film celebrities and what that means for purchase intentions, a deeper analysis and a narrower search would have been insightful. Other forms of analyses, such as focus groups or a trend analysis on Crimson Hexagon would have made the survey this thesis distributed more reliable. This thesis also had a wide range of topics to cover, therefore a narrower search would give more time and effort into a single cause.

Engaging in multiple research methods, such as focus groups and Crimson Hexagon searches, would have added more value to this research. Sending out one survey does not encompass the ideas and beliefs of all individuals. Utilizing multiple surveys, focus groups, and online research services would have given this thesis a stronger variety of results. Focus groups would have engaged more participants, adding necessary qualitative analysis on top of the initial Qualtrics survey. To analyze social media, Crimson Hexagon would have been a great tool for navigating different film celebrity profiles and trends. This would have led to more thorough and practical results.

Another limitation within this research was the missing correlation between the research questions and the results demonstrating statistical significance. Statistically speaking, the results distributed from the Qualtrics survey were not enough to make grounded conclusions for the research questions. The lack of statistical significance is a limitation, similar to the lack

of participants, that makes this data unable to represent the entire population. However, the researcher hopes that this thesis can serve as a starting point for future scholars to look more closely at this topic.

In the future, researchers are encouraged to use this thesis to produce more works based on parasocial relationships and film celebrities. This research is a part of one of the few studies used to look at public relations and marketing coupled with parasocial relationships and film celebrities. More studies on these particular sectors would help allocate resources more wisely and provide further credibility to a variety of professions. A potential area for future research can include looking at how, and to what extent, do parasocial relationships affect a celebrity's brand. Research can also look at how and why a celebrity's brand matters, if it even does matter, and how it affects casting, studios, and a celebrity's overall fanbase. It is recommended that further research has more quantitative and qualitative methods (i.e. different types of surveys, focus groups, etc.) and a more specified overall research topic.

Appendix

Appendix A

Table 1

How often do you visit a movie theater?
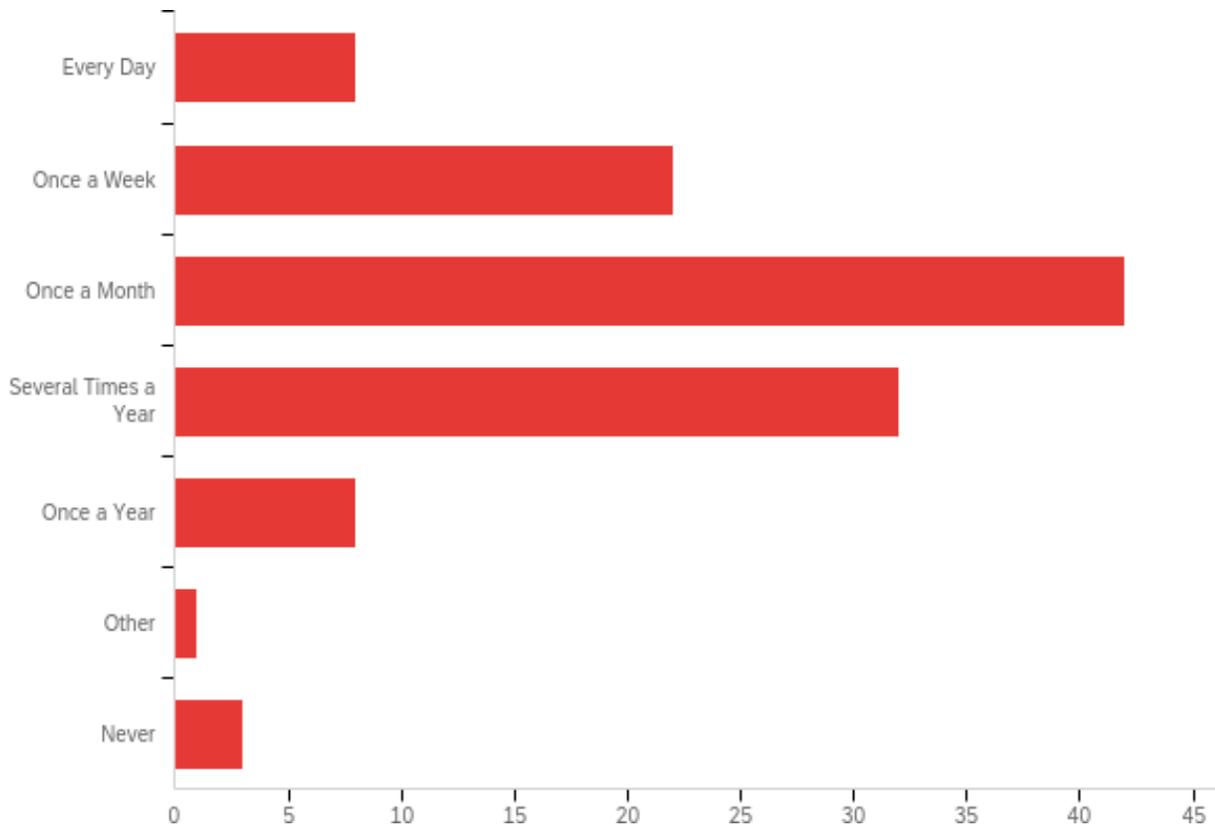
Q3_6_TEXT - Other

Other - Text

a few times a year

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How often do you visit a movie theater? - Selected Choice	1.00	7.00	3.22	1.21	1.46	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Every Day	6.90%	8
2	Once a Week	18.97%	22
3	Once a Month	36.21%	42
4	Several Times a Year	27.59%	32
5	Once a Year	6.90%	8
6	Other	0.86%	1
7	Never	2.59%	3
	Total	100%	116

Table 2

Are you subscribed to any streaming services? If so, please select all of the services that you are subscribed to.
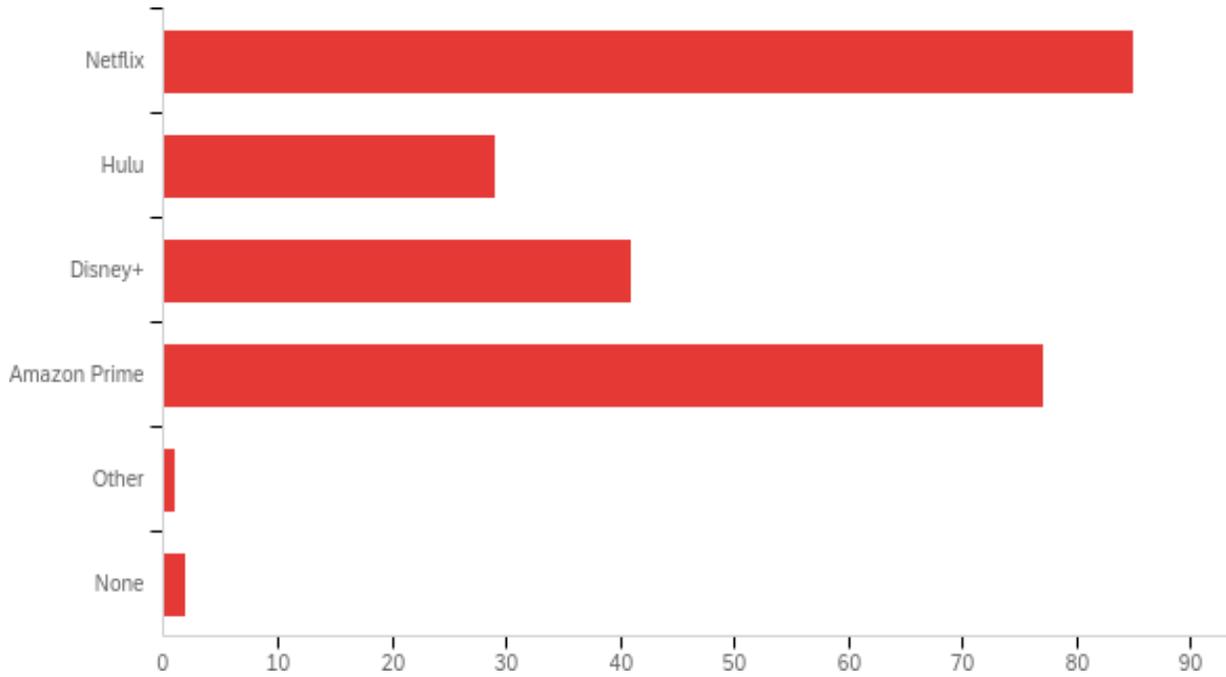
Q4_5_TEXT - Other

Other - Text
showtime

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Netflix	36.17%	85
2	Hulu	12.34%	29
3	Disney+	17.45%	41
4	Amazon Prime	32.77%	77
5	Other	0.43%	1
6	None	0.85%	2
	Total	100%	235

Table 3

How often do you use social media?
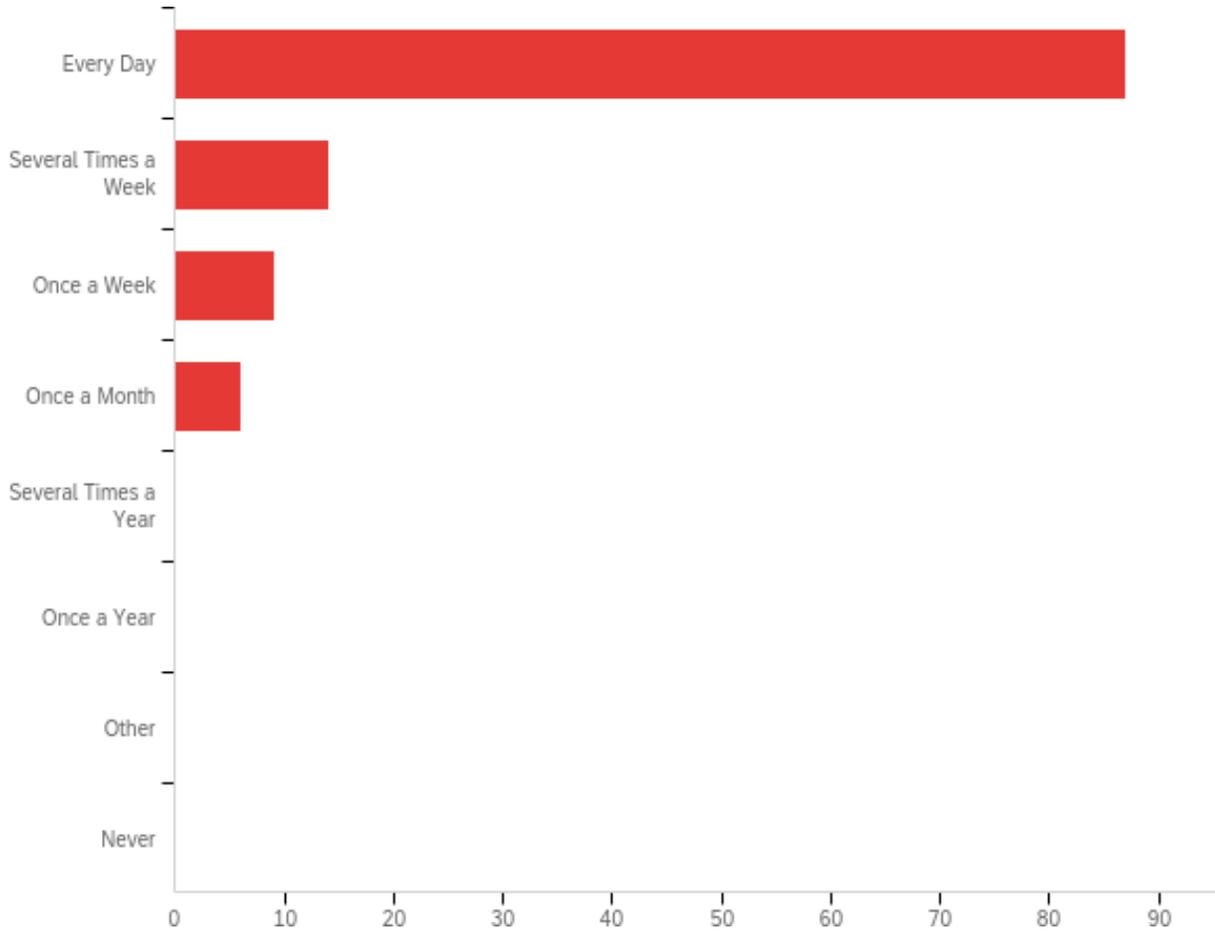
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How often do you use social media? - Selected Choice	1.00	4.00	1.43	0.84	0.71	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Every Day	75.00%	87
2	Several Times a Week	12.07%	14
3	Once a Week	7.76%	9
4	Once a Month	5.17%	6

5		Several Times a Year	0.00%	0
6		Once a Year	0.00%	0
7		Other	0.00%	0
8		Never	0.00%	0
		Total	100%	116

Table 4

What platforms of social media do you use? Please select all that apply.
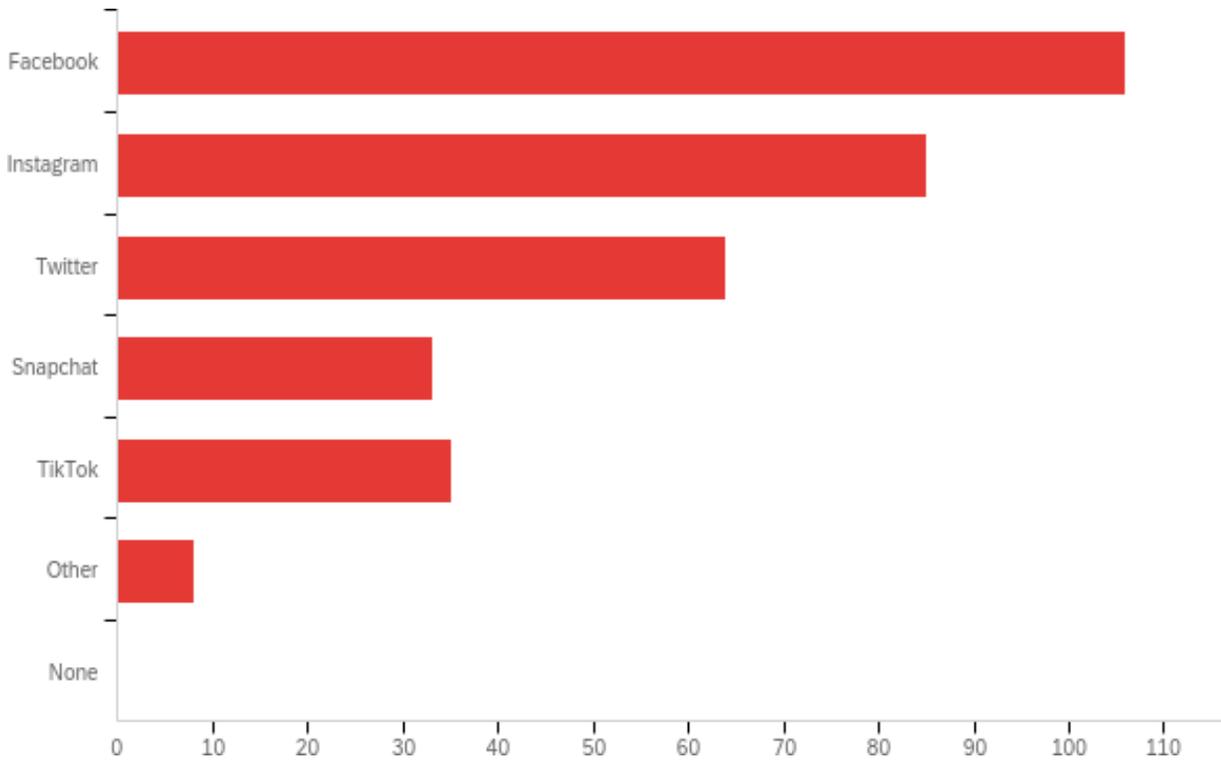
Q6_6_TEXT - Other

Other - Text
Reddit
WHATSAPP
Tumblr
minds, youtube
redditt
youtube
YouTube
Reddit

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Facebook	32.02%	106
2	Instagram	25.68%	85
3	Twitter	19.34%	64
4	Snapchat	9.97%	33
5	TikTok	10.57%	35
6	Other	2.42%	8
7	None	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	331

Table 5

Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following 15 statements related to yourself and the living film actor or actress you named on the previous page:
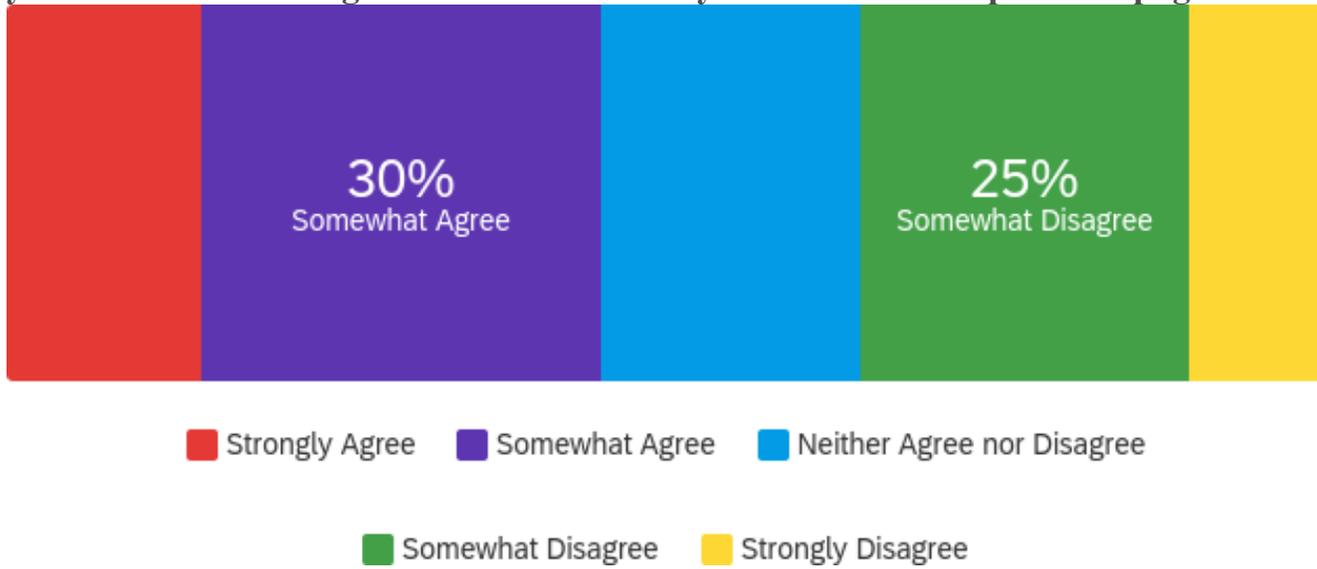
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I often go to the movies.	1.00	5.00	2.86	1.24	1.53	116
2	I often watch films on my preferred streaming service.	1.00	5.00	2.25	1.23	1.52	116
3	I often follow film news.	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.18	1.40	116
4	I often watch movie trailers.	1.00	5.00	2.49	1.19	1.42	116
5	I follow films on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.84	1.33	1.77	116
6	I get excited when my favorite living actor/actress is releasing a new film.	1.00	5.00	2.32	1.21	1.46	116
7	I relate to many of the characters my favorite living film actor/actress has played.	1.00	5.00	2.65	1.08	1.16	116
8	If I see my favorite living film actor/actress in the news, I read or watch the content.	1.00	5.00	2.43	1.21	1.47	116
9	I feel sympathy for my favorite living film actor/actress when they are in crisis.	1.00	5.00	2.38	1.18	1.39	116
10	When I watch a movie with my favorite living film actor/actress in it, I feel like I am part of their friend group.	1.00	5.00	2.72	1.33	1.77	116

| #	Question					
11	I like to compare my thoughts with my favorite living film actor's or actress's.	1.00	5.00	2.92	1.23	1.50	116
12	I will sometimes talk to my favorite living film actor/actress through the screen while watching a movie.	1.00	5.00	3.22	1.38	1.91	116
13	I would like to meet my favorite living film actor/actress in person.	1.00	5.00	2.43	1.22	1.49	116
14	I think of my favorite living film actor/actress as an old friend.	1.00	5.00	3.00	1.40	1.97	116
15	I find my favorite living film actor/actress attractive.	1.00	5.00	2.43	1.15	1.31	116

#	Question	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
1	I often go to the movies.	14.66%	17	30.17%	35	19.83%	23	25.00%	29	10.34%	12	116
2	I often watch films on my preferred streaming service.	34.48%	40	31.90%	37	13.79%	16	13.79%	16	6.03%	7	116
3	I often follow film news.	19.83%	23	28.45%	33	26.72%	31	18.10%	21	6.90%	8	116
4	I often watch movie trailers.	20.69%	24	39.66%	46	17.24%	20	14.66%	17	7.76%	9	116
5	I follow films on social media.	18.97%	22	25.86%	30	21.55%	25	18.97%	22	14.66%	17	116
6	I get excited when my favorite living actor/actress is releasing a new film.	30.17%	35	32.76%	38	18.97%	22	11.21%	13	6.90%	8	116
7	I relate to many of the characters my favorite living film	14.66%	17	33.62%	39	28.45%	33	18.97%	22	4.31%	5	116

	actor/actress has played.									
8	If I see my favorite living film actor/actress in the news, I read or watch the content.	25.86%	30	32.76%	38	21.55%	25	12.07%	14	7.76%	9	116
9	I feel sympathy for my favorite living film actor/actress when they are in crisis.	26.72%	31	33.62%	39	20.69%	24	12.93%	15	6.03%	7	116
10	When I watch a movie with my favorite living film actor/actress in it, I feel like I am part of their friend group.	18.10%	21	35.34%	41	18.97%	22	11.21%	13	16.38%	19	116
11	I like to compare my thoughts with my favorite living film actor's or actress's.	15.52%	18	21.55%	25	29.31%	34	22.41%	26	11.21%	13	116
12	I will sometimes talk to my favorite living film actor/actress through the screen while watching a movie.	13.79%	16	18.97%	22	25.86%	30	14.66%	17	26.72%	31	116
13	I would like to meet my favorite living film	25.00%	29	37.07%	43	14.66%	17	16.38%	19	6.90%	8	116

	actor/actress in person.									
14	I think of my favorite living film actor/actress as an old friend.	18.97%	22	19.83%	23	25.00%	29	14.66%	17	21.55%	25	116
15	I find my favorite living film actor/actress attractive.	24.14%	28	31.90%	37	26.72%	31	11.21%	13	6.03%	7	116

Table 6

Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following 15 statements related to yourself and the living film actor or actress you named on the previous page:
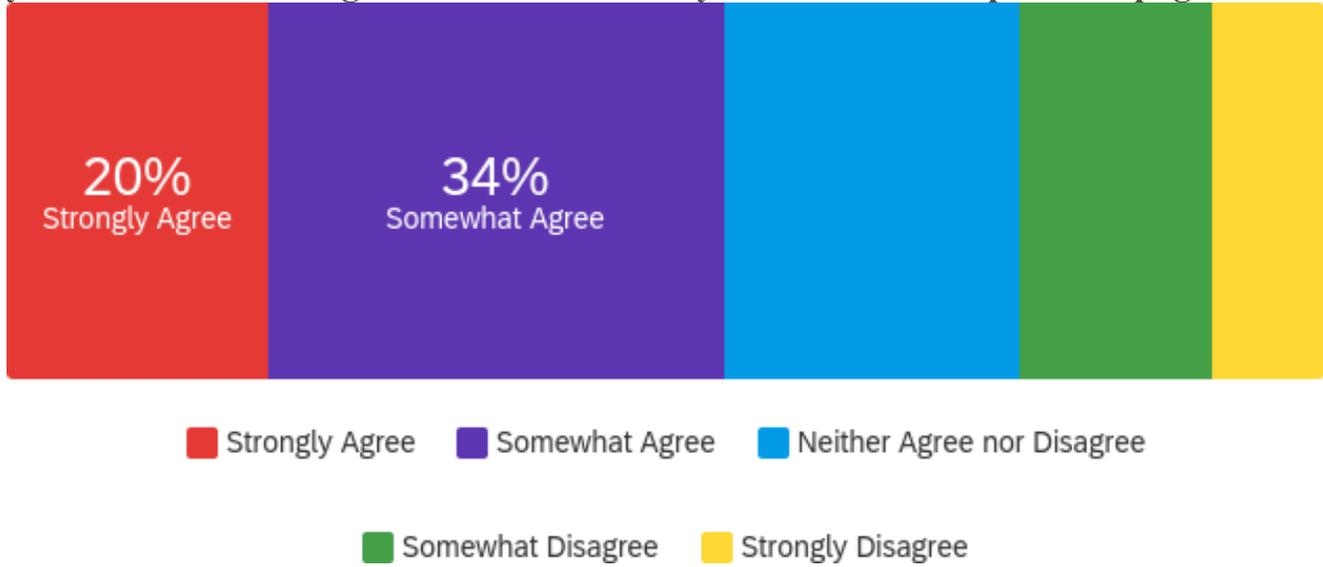
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	I miss my favorite living film actor/actress when they are on hiatus.	1.00	5.00	2.58	1.20	1.45	116
2	My favorite living film actor/actress reminds me of myself.	1.00	5.00	2.96	1.36	1.85	116
3	I wish I could be more like my favorite living film actor/actress.	1.00	5.00	2.70	1.15	1.31	116
4	I feel like I can trust my favorite living film actor/actress completely.	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.18	1.40	116
5	I willingly say positive things about my favorite living film actor/actress to others.	1.00	5.00	2.23	1.09	1.18	116
6	I am willing to encourage others to purchase my favorite living film actor's or actress's movies, products, etc.	1.00	5.00	2.55	1.24	1.54	116
7	I intend to watch future films featuring my favorite living film actor/actress.	1.00	5.00	2.10	1.09	1.18	116
8	I would be willing to pay extra to see my favorite living film actor/actress in theaters.	1.00	5.00	2.64	1.28	1.63	116
9	I would purchase a streaming service subscription to see my favorite living film actor/actress in a film.	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.23	1.52	116

| 10 | The long-term success of my favorite living film actor/actress is important to me. | 1.00 | 5.00 | 2.43 | 1.05 | 1.11 | 116 |
11	I follow my favorite living film actor/actress on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.29	1.67	116
12	My favorite living film actor/actress is constantly active on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.84	1.24	1.54	116
13	I get excited when I see my favorite living film actor/actress posting often on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.71	1.22	1.48	116
14	I feel further connected to my favorite living film actor/actress when they post on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.73	1.12	1.25	116
15	I am more likely to see a film when I see that my favorite living film actor/actress is promoting it on social media.	1.00	5.00	2.66	1.15	1.31	116

#	Question	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Total
1	I miss my favorite living film actor/actress when they are on hiatus.	19.83%	23	34.48%	40	22.41%	26	14.66%	17	8.62%	10	116
2	My favorite living film actor/actress reminds me of myself.	18.10%	21	22.41%	26	23.28%	27	18.10%	21	18.10%	21	116
3	I wish I could be more like my favorite living film actor/actress.	12.93%	15	37.93%	44	24.14%	28	16.38%	19	8.62%	10	116
4	I feel like I can trust my favorite living film actor/actress completely.	14.66%	17	37.93%	44	25.86%	30	10.34%	12	11.21%	13	116

5	I willingly say positive things about my favorite living film actor/actress to others.	30.17%	35	32.76%	38	24.14%	28	9.48%	11	3.45%	4	116
6	I am willing to encourage others to purchase my favorite living film actor's or actress's movies, products, etc.	22.41%	26	32.76%	38	21.55%	25	13.79%	16	9.48%	11	116
7	I intend to watch future films featuring my favorite living film actor/actress.	36.21%	42	32.76%	38	18.10%	21	10.34%	12	2.59%	3	116
8	I would be willing to pay extra to see my favorite living film actor/actress in theaters.	20.69%	24	31.90%	37	22.41%	26	12.93%	15	12.07%	14	116
9	I would purchase a streaming service subscription to see my favorite living film actor/actress in a film.	19.83%	23	29.31%	34	26.72%	31	13.79%	16	10.34%	12	116
10	The long-term success of my favorite living film actor/actress	21.55%	25	31.03%	36	34.48%	40	8.62%	10	4.31%	5	116

	is important to me.									
11	I follow my favorite living film actor/actress on social media.	24.14%	28	24.14%	28	24.14%	28	17.24%	20	10.34%	12	116
12	My favorite living film actor/actress is constantly active on social media.	14.66%	17	29.31%	34	25.86%	30	17.24%	20	12.93%	15	116
13	I get excited when I see my favorite living film actor/actress posting often on social media.	18.10%	21	28.45%	33	28.45%	33	14.66%	17	10.34%	12	116
14	I feel further connected to my favorite living film actor/actress when they post on social media.	12.07%	14	33.62%	39	32.76%	38	12.07%	14	9.48%	11	116
15	I am more likely to see a film when I see that my favorite living film actor/actress is promoting it on social media.	15.52%	18	33.62%	39	29.31%	34	12.93%	15	8.62%	10	116

Table 7

What is your age range?
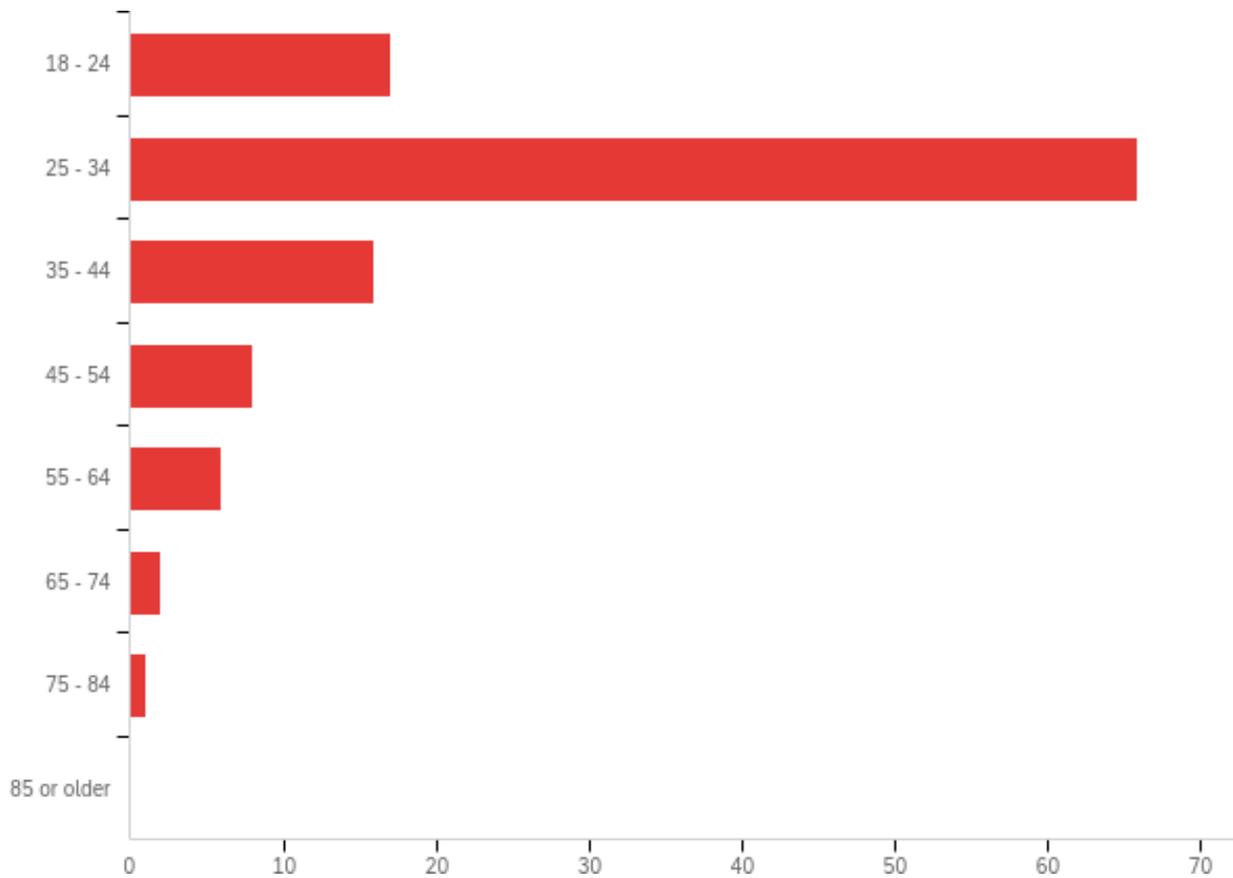
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your age range?	1.00	7.00	2.40	1.17	1.36	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	18 - 24	14.66%	17
2	25 - 34	56.90%	66
3	35 - 44	13.79%	16
4	45 - 54	6.90%	8
5	55 - 64	5.17%	6
6	65 - 74	1.72%	2

7	75 - 84	0.86%	1
8	85 or older	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	116

Table 8

What is your ethnicity? Please select all in which you identify.
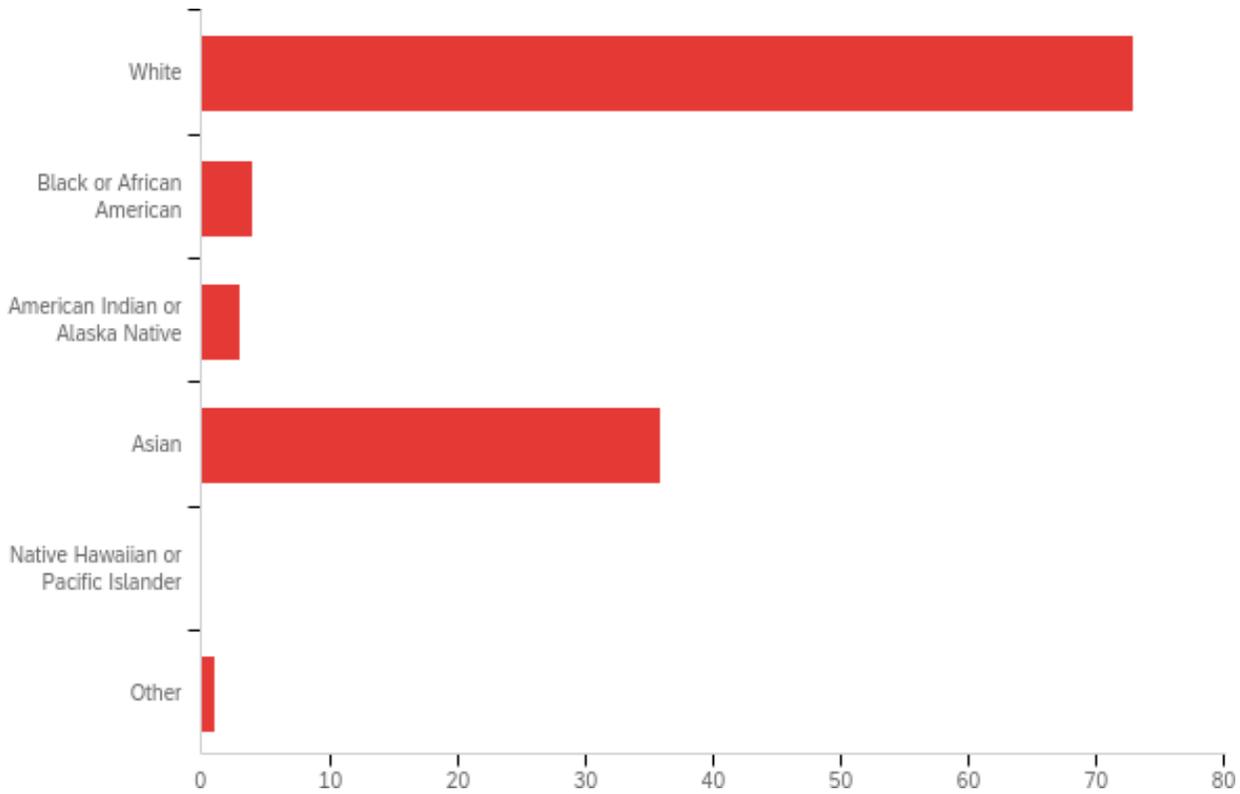
Q10_6_TEXT - Other

Other - Text
Hispanic

#	Answer	%	Count
1	White	62.39%	73
2	Black or African American	3.42%	4
3	American Indian or Alaska Native	2.56%	3
4	Asian	30.77%	36
5	Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.00%	0
6	Other	0.85%	1
	Total	100%	117

Table 9

What is your gender?
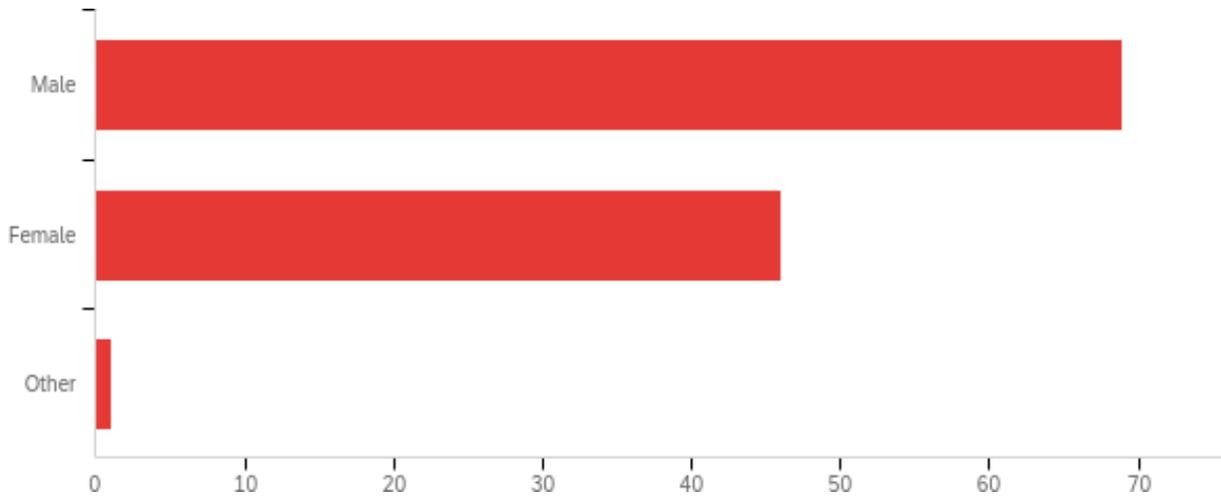
Q11_3_TEXT - Other

Other - Text
non-binary

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is your gender? - Selected Choice	1.00	3.00	1.41	0.51	0.26	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	59.48%	69
2	Female	39.66%	46
3	Other	0.86%	1
	Total	100%	116

Table 10

In 2019, what was your cumulative household income?
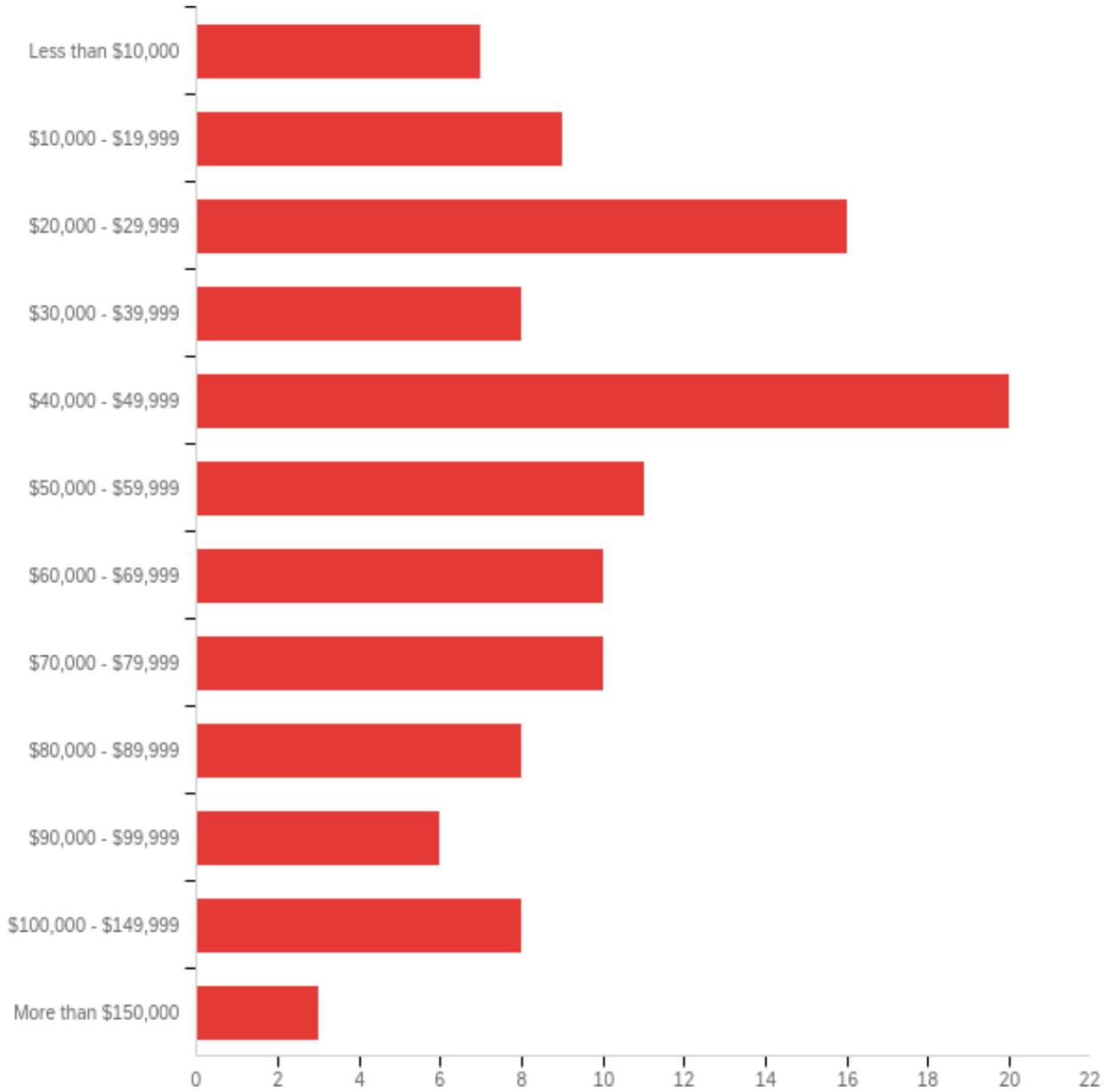
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	In 2019, what was your cumulative household income?	1.00	12.00	5.84	2.99	8.95	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Less than $10,000	6.03%	7
2	$10,000 - $19,999	7.76%	9
3	$20,000 - $29,999	13.79%	16
4	$30,000 - $39,999	6.90%	8
5	$40,000 - $49,999	17.24%	20
6	$50,000 - $59,999	9.48%	11
7	$60,000 - $69,999	8.62%	10
8	$70,000 - $79,999	8.62%	10
9	$80,000 - $89,999	6.90%	8
10	$90,000 - $99,999	5.17%	6
11	$100,000 - $149,999	6.90%	8
12	More than $150,000	2.59%	3
	Total	100%	116

Table 11

What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
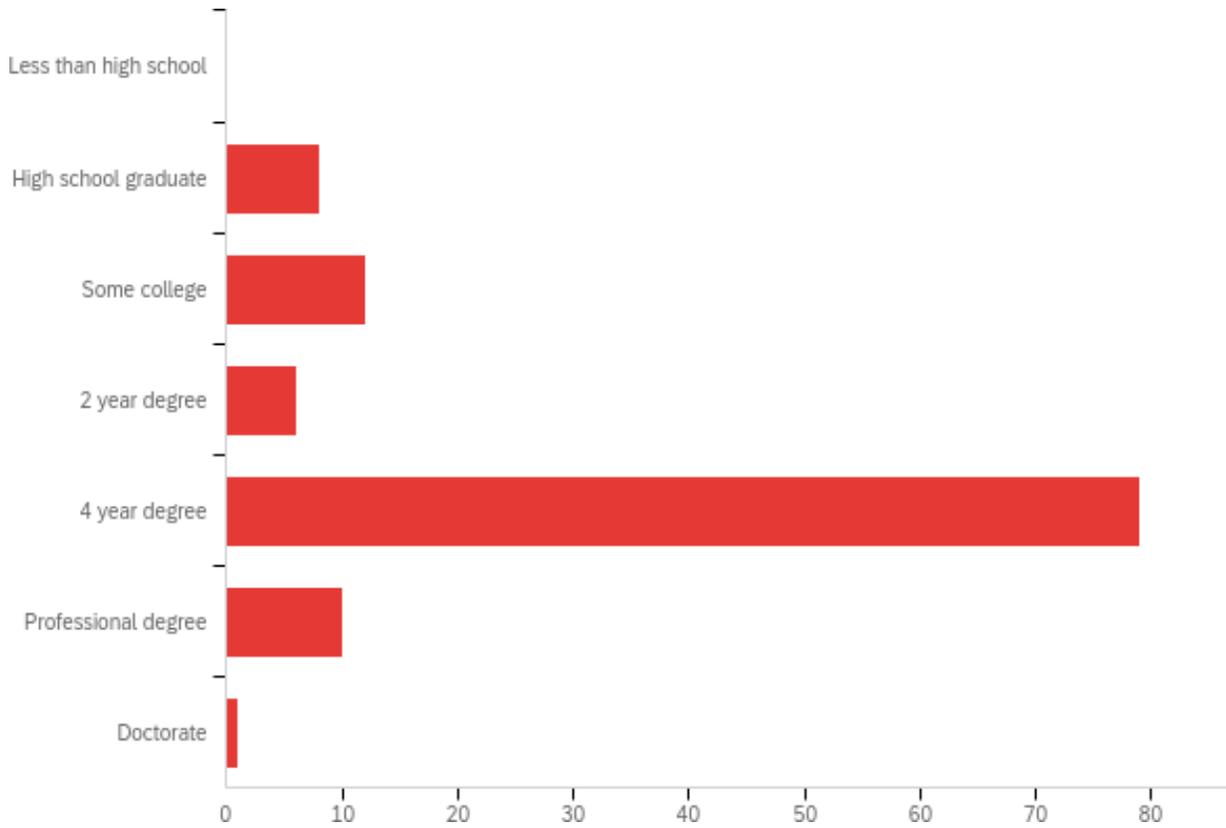
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is the highest level of education you have obtained?	2.00	7.00	4.64	1.04	1.08	116

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Less than high school	0.00%	0
2	High school graduate	6.90%	8
3	Some college	10.34%	12
4	2 year degree	5.17%	6
5	4 year degree	68.10%	79
6	Professional degree	8.62%	10

7	Doctorate	0.86%	1
	Total	100%	116

Appendix B

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

TO: Michael Meath
DATE: February 25, 2020
SUBJECT: **Determination of Exemption from Regulations**
IRB #: 20-047
TITLE: *Parasocial Relationships and Film Celebrities*

The above referenced application, submitted for consideration as exempt from federal regulations as defined in 45 C.F.R. 46, has been evaluated by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the following:

1. determination that it falls within one or more of the eight exempt categories allowed by the organization;
2. determination that the research meets the organization's ethical standards.

It has been determined by the IRB this protocol qualifies for exemption and has been assigned to category **2**. This authorization will remain active for a period of five years from **February 25, 2020** until **February 24, 2025**.

CHANGES TO PROTOCOL: Proposed changes to this protocol during the period for which IRB authorization has already been given, cannot be initiated without additional IRB review. If there is a change in your research, you should notify the IRB immediately to determine whether your research protocol continues to qualify for exemption or if submission of an expedited or full board IRB protocol is required. Information about the University's human participants protection program can be found at: http://researchintegrity.syr.edu/human-research/. Protocol changes are requested on an amendment application available on the IRB web site; please reference your IRB number and attach any documents that are being amended.

STUDY COMPLETION: Study completion is when all research activities are complete or when a study is closed to enrollment and only data analysis remains on data that have been de-identified. A Study Closure Form should be completed and submitted to the IRB for review (Study Closure Form).

Thank you for your cooperation in our shared efforts to assure that the rights and welfare of people participating in research are protected.

Tracy J. Cromp
Tracy Cromp, M.S.W.
Director

DEPT: Public Relations, Newhouse III – Rm. 318E   **STUDENT:** Melissa Tucker

Appendix C

Thesis Research: Parasocial Relationships and Film Celebrities

Q1 Consent Form:

My name is Melissa Tucker, and I am a public relations graduate student at S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University.

I am conducting a research project as part of my thesis to examine how parasocial relationships between film celebrities and audiences influence box office sales and streaming service subscriptions. I am inviting you to participate in this research study. You will be asked to take an online survey that contains questions regarding your social media usage, your cinematic experiences, and your favorite living film actor or actress. Involvement in the study is completely voluntary. This means you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

This survey will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. All information will be kept confidential. This means that your name will not appear anywhere, and your specific answers will not be linked to your name in any way. You will be given $0.25 after the completion of this study as compensation via Amazon Mechanical Turk.

Whenever one works with email or the internet; there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Your confidentiality will be maintained to the greatest degree possible by closely controlling the information received and the technology being used. It is important for you to understand that no guarantees can be made regarding the interception of data sent via the internet by third parties.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research please contact my thesis supervisor, Michael Meath, M.S. Chair and Professor of Public Relations; or me, Melissa Tucker, M.S.; at S.I. Newhouse School of Communications – Syracuse University 215 University Place, Syracuse, NY 13210 or by email at mfmeath@syr.edu; mtucke04@syr.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, have questions, concerns, or complaints that you wish to address to someone other than the investigator, or if you cannot

reach the investigator contact the Syracuse University Institutional Review Board at (315) 443-3013.

Please print a copy of this consent form for your records.

By continuing this survey, you are indicating the following: All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study.

Q2 All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate in this research study.

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If All of my questions have been answered, I am 18 years of age or older, and I wish to participate... = No

Page Break

Q3 How often do you visit a movie theater?

○ Every Day (1)

○ Once a Week (2)

○ Once a Month (3)

○ Several Times a Year (4)

○ Once a Year (5)

○ Other (6) _____

○ Never (7)

Q4 Are you subscribed to any streaming services? If so, please select all of the services that you are subscribed to.

☐ Netflix (1)

☐ Hulu (2)

☐ Disney+ (3)

☐ Amazon Prime (4)

☐ Other (5) _____

☐ None (6)

Q5 How often do you use social media?

○ Every Day (1)

○ Several Times a Week (2)

○ Once a Week (3)

○ Once a Month (4)

○ Several Times a Year (5)

○ Once a Year (6)

○ Other (7) _____

○ Never (8)

Q6 What platforms of social media do you use? Please select all that apply.

☐ Facebook (1)

☐ Instagram (2)

☐ Twitter (3)

☐ Snapchat (4)

☐ TikTok (5)

☐   Other (6) _____

☐   None (7)

Q7 Who is your favorite living film actor or actress? Please write his/her/their name below.

_____

Q8 Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following 15 statements related to yourself and the living film actor or actress you named on the previous page:

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat Agree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
I often go to the movies. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
I often watch films on my preferred streaming service. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I often follow film news. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I often watch movie trailers. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I follow films on social media. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I get excited when my favorite living actor/actress is releasing a new film. (6)	○	○	○	○	○
I relate to many of the characters my favorite living film actor/actress has played. (7)	○	○	○	○	○
If I see my favorite living film actor/actress in the news, I read or watch the content. (8)	○	○	○	○	○

I feel sympathy for my favorite living film actor/actress when they are in crisis. (9)	○	○	○	○	○
When I watch a movie with my favorite living film actor/actress in it, I feel like I am part of their friend group. (10)	○	○	○	○	○
I like to compare my thoughts with my favorite living film actor's or actress's. (11)	○	○	○	○	○
I will sometimes talk to my favorite living film actor/actress through the screen while watching a movie. (12)	○	○	○	○	○
I would like to meet my favorite living film actor/actress in person. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
I think of my favorite living film actor/actress as an old friend. (14)	○	○	○	○	○

I find my favorite living film actor/actress attractive. (15)

○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Page Break

Q9 Please select how much you agree or disagree with the following 15 statements related to yourself and the living film actor or actress you named on the previous page:

	Strongly Agree (1)	Somewhat Agree (2)	Neither Agree nor Disagree (3)	Somewhat Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
I miss my favorite living film actor/actress when they are on hiatus. (1)	○	○	○	○	○
My favorite living film actor/actress reminds me of myself. (2)	○	○	○	○	○
I wish I could be more like my favorite living film actor/actress. (3)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel like I can trust my favorite living film actor/actress completely. (4)	○	○	○	○	○
I willingly say positive things about my favorite living film actor/actress to others. (5)	○	○	○	○	○
I am willing to encourage others to purchase my favorite living film actor's or actress's movies, products, etc. (6)	○	○	○	○	○

| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
I intend to watch future films featuring my favorite living film actor/actress. (7)

| | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ | ○ |
I would be willing to pay extra to see my favorite living film actor/actress in theaters. (8)

I would purchase a streaming service subscription to see my favorite living film actor/actress in a film. (9)

The long-term success of my favorite living film actor/actress is important to me. (10)

I follow my favorite living film actor/actress on social media. (11)

My favorite living film actor/actress is constantly active on social media. (12)

I get excited when I see my favorite living film actor/actress posting often on social media. (13)	○	○	○	○	○
I feel further connected to my favorite living film actor/actress when they post on social media. (14)	○	○	○	○	○
I am more likely to see a film when I see that my favorite living film actor/actress is promoting it on social media. (15)	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

Q10 What is your age range?

○ 18-24 (1)

○ 25-34 (2)

○ 35-44 (3)

○ 45-54 (4)

○ 55-64 (5)

○ 65-74 (6)

○ 75-84 (7)

○ 85 or older (8)

Q11 What is your ethnicity? Please select all in which you identify.

☐ White (1)

☐ Black or African American (2)

☐ American Indian or Alaska Native (3)

☐ Asian (4)

☐ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (5)

☐ Other (6) _____

Q12 What is your gender?

○ Male (1)

○ Female (2)

○ Other (3) _____

Q13 In 2019, what was your cumulative household income?

○ Less than $10,000 (1)

○ $10,000 - $19,999 (2)

○ $20,000 - $29,999 (3)

○ $30,000 - $39,999 (4)

○ $40,000 - $49,999 (5)

○ $50,000 - $59,999 (6)

○ $60,000 - $69,999 (7)

○ $70,000 - $79,999 (8)

○ $80,000 - $89,999 (9)

○ $90,000 - $99,999 (10)

○ $100,000-$149,999 (11)

○ More than $150,000 (12)

Q14 What is the highest level of education you have obtained?

○ Less than high school (1)

○ High school graduate (2)

○ Some college (3)

○ 2 year degree (4)

○ 4 year degree (5)

○ Professional degree (6)

○ Doctorate (7)

Q15 Below is your Amazon MTurk survey code:

PSRThesis2020

End of Block: Default Question Block

Appendix D

Who is your favorite living film actor or actress? Please write his/her/their name below.

1. Al Pacino
2. Alan Rickman
3. Angelina Jolie
4. Anthony Edward
5. Anthony Hopkins
6. Betty White
7. Betty White
8. Brad Pitt
9. Brad Pitt
10. Brad pitt
11. Brad Pitt
12. Bradley Cooper
13. Bruce Lee
14. Bruce Lee
15. Bruce Lee
16. Bruce Lee
17. Cate Blanchett
18. Chris Evans
19. Chris Hemsworth
20. Colin Farrel
21. Daniel Craig
22. Denzel Washington
23. Dwayne Johnson
24. Dwayne Johnson
25. Dwayne Johnson
26. Dwayne Johnson
27. Dwayne Johnson
28. Edward Norton
29. Emma Stone
30. Emma Stone
31. Ernest Borgnine
32. Eva Green
33. Florence Pugh
34. Fran Kranz
35. Freddy Highmore
36. Honor Blackman

37. Honor Blackman
38. Jackie Chan
39. Jackie Chan
40. James Franco
41. Jason Momoa
42. Jason Stathem
43. Jason Stathem
44. Jennifer Lopez
45. Jeremy Irons
46. Jim Carrey
47. Joaquin Phoenix
48. Joel McHale
49. John Travolta
50. Johnny Depp
51. Johnny Depp
52. Johnny Depp
53. Johnny Depp
54. Johnny Depp
55. Johnny Depp
56. Johnny Depp
57. Johnny Depp
58. Johnny Depp
59. Johnny Depp
60. Johnny Depp
61. Johnny Depp
62. Julia Roberts
63. Kamal Hassan
64. Kate Winslet
65. Keanu Reeves
66. Keanu Reeves
67. Keanu Reeves
68. Kevin Spacey
69. Kevin Spacey
70. Kiera Knightly
71. Kristen Stewart
72. Leonardo DiCaprio
73. Leonardo DiCaprio
74. Leonardo DiCaprio
75. Leonardo DiCaprio
76. Leonardo DiCaprio

77. Leonardo DiCaprio
78. Liv Tyler
79. lQ Jones
80. Mark Walburg
81. Mary Pickford
82. Megan Fox
83. Meryl Streep
84. Meryl Streep
85. Michael B. Jordan
86. Morgan Freeman
87. Nicholas Cage
88. Penn Badgley
89. Priyanka Chopra
90. Robert De Niro
91. Robert Downey
92. Robert Downey Jr
93. Robert Downey Jr.
94. Robert Loggia
95. Robert Pattinson
96. Ryan Reynolds
97. Sandra Bullock
98. Sean Connery
99. Tobey Maguire
100. Tom Cruise
101. Tom Cruise
102. Tom Cruise
103. Tom Cruise
104. Tom Cruise
105. Tom Cruise
106. Tom Hanks
107. Tom Hanks
108. Tom Hanks
109. Tom Hardy
110. Vin Diesel
111. Vin Diesel
112. Will Smith
113. Will Smith
114. Will Smith
115. Will Smith
116. Zooey Deschanel

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