“LIKE ONE OF US”: EXAMINING THE AUTHENTICITY, PARASOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND INFLUENCE OF STAND-UP COMEDIAN PODCAST HOSTS

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this thesis:

PSI - Parasocial Interaction

PSR - Parasocial Relationship

RSS - Really Simple Syndication

Abstract

Podcasting is a medium that has received insufficient academic attention despite being on the rise with recent increases in both audience numbers and advertising revenue. This thesis utilizes mixed method research to investigate the perceived authenticity, parasocial relationships (PSRs) and perceived influence of stand-up comedian podcast hosts. Whilst research on podcasting has recently started to include studies that examine PSRs between podcast hosts and users, the role of perceived authenticity has scarcely been examined. Previous research exploring how podcast hosts can influence their users is also rare and does not cover a wide-range of media effects. This kind of research is especially important because podcasts do not fall within the scope of local media regulations and can be distributed by anyone without having to pass through any editorial filters. This thesis is comprised of three separate studies situated within an interpretivist paradigm, informed by a social constructivist epistemology. These studies take the form of an autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and a web-based survey. An autoethnographic account of the researcher's own experience with stand-up comedian hosts revealed different ways in which he was influenced and suggested that hosts have to be perceived as authentic, for users to think that they know them and harbour feelings of friendship towards them. Semi-structured interviews with 10 podcast users revealed the presence of certain markers of authenticity (ordinariness, immediacy, similarity, freedom, spontaneity, imperfection and confessions) podcast users associated with their favourite hosts and highlighted how these markers can relate to PSRs. Ordinariness, immediacy and similarity were viewed as being able to contribute to PSRs by creating a feeling of friendship whilst freedom, spontaneity

and imperfection were viewed as being able to contribute by creating a feeling of knowing them. This study also identified that podcast hosts can influence users via affective, cognitive, behavioural, physiological, belief and attitudinal effects. Finally, a web-based survey of 400 podcast users, revealed positive associations between PSRs and perceived influence, consumer behaviour and perceived authenticity, as well as, perceived authenticity and consumer behaviour. When taken together these findings suggest that podcast hosts can become parasocial opinion leaders who influence their users via different individual-level media effects. Appearing to be authentic is important for podcast hosts who want to build a close relationship with their audience and there is also economic value in appearing to be authentic.

Keywords: Parasocial relationships, stand-up comedian hosted podcasts, perceived authenticity, perceived influence, consumer behaviour

Chapter 1 – Introduction

According to IT consulting company Demand Sage, there were a total of 2.4 million podcasts in August 2022 (Ruby, 2022), and perhaps none were more popular than the *Joe Rogan Experience* (Rogan, 2009 - present) which boasted an average of 11 million listeners per episode (Starling, 2022). Its stand-up comedian host Joe Rogan had a rough start to the year, when he got widely criticized for his views on COVID-19 and a compilation video of him using racial slurs on previous episodes emerged (Dickson, 2022; Lenthang, 2022). People who claimed that Rogan was spreading misinformation about coronavirus, argued that the words of a podcast host could be potentially life-threatening to others. Whilst Rogan apologized for his use of racially insensitive language (Lenthang, 2022) and stated that he would be happy to have *Spotify* add advisory disclaimers on COVID-19 to his podcasts (O'Kane, 2022), questions remained regarding how podcast hosts can impact their users. This issue is even more important when we remember that in many countries podcasts are not covered by the scope of local media regulations (Tennant, 2023) and can be distributed without having to pass through any kind of editorial filters (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Hancock & McMurtry, 2017; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; Millette, 2012). This thesis utilizes the concept of parasocial relationships (PSRs); which can be defined as a feeling of intimacy and a sense of relationship with media figures, that continues outside the context of a particular media exposure situation (Tukachinsky et al., 2020), like a friendship that exists between two people beyond their face-to face communication sequences (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008); to examine the relationships between stand-up podcast hosts and users. By doing so, it

hopes to gain a better understanding about the impact the former can have on the latter, as well as, the role of perceived authenticity in these relationships.

1. 1 Background & Rationale

At the beginning of this thesis, I had a personal experience that I wanted to understand more fully (Adams et al., 2015) and that was my relationships with stand-up comedian podcast hosts. Whilst I didn't have a particular question or problem to examine, I decided to follow Adams et al.'s (2015) recommendation to trust my intuition and to write about different events from my life that were related to this experience. The reason for this was the impact that podcasts had on my life in a relatively short amount of time.

Back in 2014, I didn't even know what a podcast was, so if you had told me that six years later I would be writing my PhD thesis on podcasts, it would be somewhat of an understatement to say that I would be surprised. However, a lot has changed since 2014. In the time that has passed, I have listened to hours of podcast material, watched the rise of some of my favourite podcast hosts and followed the controversy that later surrounded them. In 2018, I attended a live stand-up show of one of my favourite podcast hosts (Iliza Shlesinger) at the Southbank Centre in London, and in 2020, I started a podcast of my own, which would later be featured in the Cypriot daily newspaper *Yenidüzen,* as an example of the podcast movement emerging from the north of the island (Baykallı, 2021).

Whilst there is no denying my love for the medium, this love is not something that is unique to me. Research has shown that podcasting is gaining familiarity, whilst being accessed increasingly by a substantial amount of media users, some of whom consume podcasts more than any other source of media (Bratcher, 2020).

Podcasts hosted by stand-up comedians such as those examined in this thesis have featured all sorts of guest including high-profile figures such as then United States of America President Barack Obama who appeared on Marc Maron's *WTF* (Maron, 2009 - present) (Llinares et al., 2018; Symons, 2017) and tech entrepreneur Elon Musk who made headlines for smoking marijuana on *The Joe Rogan Experience* (Neate & Wong, 2018). The reach of podcasts hosted by stand-up comedians should also not be underestimated. In the book *Tangentially Reading* which features the transcripts of conversations from his podcast *Tangentially Speaking* (Ryan, 2012 - present), Chris Ryan (2017) indicates that within a few days of releasing an episode the equivalent of a stadium full of people are listening to his conversations and the equivalent of entire towns or cities of people are listening to the podcasts of stand-up comedians such as Joe Rogan and Duncan Trussell.

Despite being "an integral part of the digital media landscape in the early years of the new millennium" (Bottomley, 2015b, p. 165) and "an important feature of the Internet experience" (Alegi, 2012, p. 208) numerous scholars have stated that the amount of academic research on podcasting is insufficient (Boling et al., 2019; Bottomley, 2015b; Bratcher, 2020; Freire et al., 2008; Heeremans, 2018; Lindgren, 2016; Llinares et al., 2018; Markman, 2012, 2015; Millette, 2012; Pavelko & Myrick, 2020; Pérez, 2012; Ritter & Cho, 2009; Samuel-Azran et al., 2019; Smith, 2019). Some aspects such as hosts (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) and audiences have received even less attention than others such as the educational uses of podcasting (Bottomley, 2015b; Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020; Pérez, 2012) and the comedy podcast remains a largely unexplored subgenre of contemporary comedy (Marx, 2015). Therefore, the rationale of this study was to contribute to the limited academic

research on podcasts (especially in the comedy genre) whilst focusing on the under researched area of relationships between hosts and users.

By starting my research with the examination of my own personal experiences, I hoped to identify an area of these relationships that required further academic attention (Dhoest, 2014). After identifying this area, I came-up with the aims and objectives of the thesis which are presented in the next section of this chapter and later addressed via the analysis of data collected from semi-structured interviews and a web-based survey of other stand-up comedian hosted podcast users.

1.2 Aims & Objectives

As mentioned in the previous section of the chapter, the aims and objectives of this thesis, emerged after my analysis of the texts I produced for the autoethnography. Once the autoethnography was complete the aim of the thesis became:

To examine the perceived authenticity of stand-up comedian podcast hosts, as well as, their PSRs with users and their perceived influence.

In order to meet this aim, the objectives of the thesis were identified as:

- Exploring which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts.
- Investigating how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs.
- Examining how podcast hosts can influence their users.

1.3 Significance

Whilst research on podcasting has recently started to include studies that examine PSRs between podcast hosts and users, the role of perceived authenticity has scarcely been examined. Therefore, this thesis contributes to existing literature by shedding light on which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts and how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs.

Previous research examining how podcast hosts can influence their users is also rare and does not cover a wide-range of media effects. Another contribution of this thesis is that it examines a wide range of media effects in order to paint a more comprehensive picture of how podcast hosts can influence their users.

The findings of this study are of interest to podcast hosts who want to appear authentic in order to form strong bonds with their users, to advertisers who want to gain insight about the consumer behaviour of people accessing podcasts, to podcast users who want to become more critical consumers in order to maximize the positives and minimize the negatives of the medium and to legislators who want more information when considering whether or not the inherent freedom of the medium should undergo changes or continue as it is currently.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

In order to meet the specified aims and objectives, the following chapters of the thesis carry out the roles indicated below:

Chapter 2 – This chapter of the thesis is the first of three theoretical chapters. It is concerned with previous research on podcasting and examines different ways in which podcast have been defined, as well as the development of the medium, its relationship with radio, the freedom it provides and stand-up comedian podcast hosts.

Chapter 3 – This chapter of the thesis is the second of three theoretical chapters, and is concerned with previous research on parasocial theory. It examines the definitions and backgrounds of concepts, competing approaches to PSR development, impression formation, characteristics that influence parasocial phenomena, its associations with other reception phenomena, its relationship with influence, consumer behaviour and authenticity and previous research related to podcasts.

Chapter 4 – This chapter of the thesis is the third of three theoretical chapters. It provides a theoretical framework for the research which includes a number of different concepts and models including PSRs (Horton & Wohl, 1956), mediated authenticity (Enli, 2014) parasocial opinion leadership (Stehr et al., 2015) and individual-level media effects (Potter, 2012). The end of the chapter also includes a conclusion for the theoretical chapters of the thesis.

Chapter 5 – This chapter of the thesis focuses on its research paradigm and methods. It outlines how the three studies are situated within an interpretivist paradigm, informed by a social constructivist epistemology, and presents the

purpose of each study along with the practices used to enhance the overall quality of the research.

Chapter 6 – This chapter of the thesis uses autoethnography to present a highly personalized account of the researcher's experiences as a podcast user in order to examine the complexities of relationships between stand-up comedian hosts and users.

Chapter 7 –. This chapter of the thesis uses semi-structured interviews to examine which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts, how these markers can relate to PSRs and in what ways podcast hosts can influence their users.

Chapter 8 – This chapter of the thesis uses a web-based survey to examine the strength of PSRs between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and users. It also tests the hypotheses that there will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence, consumer behaviour and perceived authenticity as well as, perceived authenticity and consumer behaviour.

Chapter 9 - This chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the results obtained from the qualitative and quantitative strands of the research which had the main aim of examining the perceived authenticity of stand-up comedian podcast hosts, as well as, their PSRs with users and their perceived influence. It outlines the implications of the findings for different parties such as podcast hosts, advertisers, podcast users and legislators. In addition, it indicates the general

limitations of the thesis and provides suggestions for areas of possible future research.

Chapter 2 – Podcasting

2.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis looks at previous research on podcasting and is comprised of 7separate sections. The first section of the chapter following the introduction (2.2) touches upon different definitions of podcasts before highlighting the definition that will be used in this thesis. The next section (2.3) looks at the development of podcasts, beginning with the conception of the word itself and moving on to the 'second age of podcasting' (Bonini, 2015). The fourth section (2.4) is concerned with the relationship between podcasting and radio, and touches upon certain similarities as well as differences between the two mediums. The fifth section (2.5) focuses on the freedom of the medium as well as the positives and negatives of this freedom. The penultimate section (2.6) is concerned with stand-up comedian podcast hosts and the final section (2.7) provides a short summary of the chapter.

2.2 Definitions of Podcasting

As highlighted by Bottomley (2015b) definitions of podcasts vary in the work of different academics. *Guardian* journalist Ben Hammersley (2004) who initially coined the term referred to podcasting broadly as any downloadable radio which is distributed via the internet. According to certain scholars this definition is not adequate because it doesn't limit podcasting to content distributed with RSS or Really Simple Syndication. (Berry, 2006; Bottomley, 2015b; Markman, 2012; Menduni, 2007; Nyre & Ala-Fossi, 2008; Pérez, 2012; Scholz et al., 2008). RSS allows content providers to create feeds for users with a program called an

aggregator (Hargis et al., 2008). Subscribing to an RSS feed enables podcast users to automatically receive new episodes to their devices whenever they are uploaded by the podcast producers (Bottomley, 2015b). The podcast users "…simply subscribe to the content, and the aggregator presents it ready for consumption" (Hargis et al., 2008, p. 34). As noted by Markman and Sawyer (2014) the definitions of podcasting which emphasize automation through an RSS feed focus on framing podcasting as a delivery mechanism. Definitions of other scholars suggest that a distinction which limits podcasts to content distributed by RSS is not necessary (Haygood, 2007; Perks & Turner, 2019; Ritter & Cho, 2009).

Examining different definitions of podcasts also leads to noticing contention on whether podcasts can take the form of digital video files. Whilst some scholars indicate that podcasts can be digital audio or video files (Chan-Olmsted & Wang, 2020; Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2010; Haygood, 2007; Kang & Gretzel, 2012; Koo et al., 2015; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Mou & Lin, 2015; Ritter & Cho, 2009) other definitions describe podcasts as only digital audio files (Bottomley, 2015b; Bratcher, 2020; Macdougall, 2011; Markman, 2012; Menduni, 2007; Perks & Turner, 2019; Scholz et al., 2008).

To further complicate things, the definitions of some scholars emphasize that podcasts allow users to time-shift and place-shift as a defining characteristic, which means that they can access podcasts whenever and wherever they desire (Freire et al., 2008; Haygood, 2007; McClung & Johnson, 2010). However, as highlighted by Bottomley (2015b) content doesn't need to be distributed by an RSS feed for time-shifting and place-shifting to occur.

For the purpose of this thesis, podcasts are digital audio or video files (Chadha et al., 2012; Haygood, 2007; Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014;

McClung & Johnson, 2010; Samuel-Azran et al., 2019) that can allow users to time-shift and place-shift (Freire et al., 2008; Haygood, 2007; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Sullivan, 2018) whilst being played on computers, iPods or other portable media devices (Berry, 2006; Boling & Hull, 2018; Cuffe, 2019; Haygood, 2007; Markman, 2012; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Meserko, 2014) either without being downloaded when connected to the internet or after being "…downloaded from the internet…manually from a website or automatically via software applications" (Berry, 2006, p. 144). Unlike certain definitions (Berry, 2006; Bottomley, 2015b; Markman, 2012) this one doesn't frame podcasting as a delivery mechanism but as digital content.

As the definition of podcasts used in this thesis acknowledges that digital video files can be podcasts as well as digital audio files, the term "podcast user" is utilized when describing people who access the medium, because using the term "podcast listener" would exclude people who access video podcasts.

2.3 Development of the Medium

Scholars have stated that the word podcast is a combination of the words "iPod" (a brand of portable media player produced by Apple) and "broadcast" (Bottomley, 2015b; Freire et al., 2008; Haygood, 2007; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Perks & Turner, 2019; Pérez, 2012; Samuel-Azran et al., 2019; Wrather, 2016). The term podcasting was initially used by *Guardian* journalist Ben Hammersley back in 2004 as one of the possible answers to his question regarding what the emerging practice of amateur radio should be named. Hammersley who was reporting on the growth of downloadable MP3 format audio content offered no definitive answer to his query and never referred to podcasting or the other terms he suggested again,

however podcasting caught on as the label for the new media platform and was in regular use within a year (Berry, 2006, 2015, 2016a; Clark & McLean, 2020; Freire et al., 2008; Sullivan, 2018).

Podcasting as we know it today was made possible because of a long trend of developments in audio related hardware and software programs (Freire et al., 2008). The phenomenon of podcasting developed in the early 2000s and is often attributed to internet entrepreneur and former *Music Television (MTV)* Video Jockey (VJ) Adam Curry along with internet developer and RSS feed creator Dave Winer (Berry, 2006; Boling & Hull, 2018; Haygood, 2007; Markman, 2012; Marx, 2015; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Sullivan, 2018). “Frustrated with the time it took to manually download audio files from the Internet, Curry turned to RSS as a means for automating the process” (McClung & Johnson, 2010, p. 83). After Winer modified RSS 2.0, podcasts could now be available to any user if the content creator made their content available to download (Haygood, 2007). The program was offered to open-source developers to use, borrow and improve (Berry, 2006; McClung & Johnson, 2010). “The idea resonated with people who then began purchasing MP3 players and learning about RSS feed. Podcasting started to take hold” (Haygood, 2007, p. 518).

Describing the development of podcasting Berry (2018) states that early excitement surrounding the medium was followed by a period of slow growth and stagnation because of the technical challenges it presented in terms of finding, accessing and consuming content. Opportunities to access podcasts on the move were also limited for those who didn’t own an iPod or similar device (Berry, 2018). The development of the smartphone and other integrations led to a more fluid system and the arrival of the ‘second age of podcasting’ (Bonini, 2015). “This is

where the development of the smartphone, in particular, the iPhone, proved to be so important in carrying podcasting…into the wider markets of casual media consumers" (Berry, 2018, p. 23). In this time period there was an increase in streaming technologies as well as a proliferation of podcast applications and automatic downloads (Craig et al., 2021). It is also in the second age of podcasting where the political economy of the most successful podcasts moved towards crowd funding, sponsors and advertising (i.e. economic systems alternative to public services). Podcast studios and networks emerged with financial models that were able to support them, production values increased and content became more exquisite (Bonini, 2015).

Today podcasts vary greatly in terms of content, form, address and presentation (Hancock & McMurtry, 2017). "They may be factual or fictional, multi-part series or stand-alone episodes, narrative-driven, interviews or recorded lectures, and they may be a program designed solely as a podcast or an on-demand version of a radio broadcast" (Cuffe, 2019, p. 554). They are produced by a wide range of individuals and organizations such as amateurs and independent podcast hosts (both with and without backgrounds in different forms of media) as well as media professionals, mainstream media companies, public service broadcasters and non-media organizations (Haygood, 2007; Markman, 2012; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; McClung & Johnson, 2010; Pérez, 2012; Samuel-Azran et al., 2019).

2.4 Podcasting vs. Radio

Since the popularization of the podcasting medium, a number of scholars have drawn parallels between podcasting and radio (Berry, 2006; Bottomley, 2015a; Cwynar, 2015; Freire et al., 2008; García-Marín, 2020; Marx, 2015). Freire et al.

(2008) note that podcasting is often linked to radio because they are both audio broadcasts (unless the podcast is made available in video form). For this reason, podcasting can be said to have adopted the language of radio (García-Marín, 2020). Marx (2015) indicates that like podcasts, early radio was driven by amateurs experimenting with available communication technologies to make personalized programming for their peers and a number of scholars have argued that podcasts are not divorced from radio, but are a refashioning which pays homage via the remediation of forms, techniques and styles (Berry, 2006; Bottomley, 2015b; Cwynar, 2015).

However despite certain similarities between radio and podcasting, differences do exist and it is these differences that are especially important for scholars such as Millette (2012) who highlight the subversive potential of podcasting as an alternative practice to traditional and institutional radio. “Understanding podcasting as distinct from radio initially lies in the technological and distributive shift from the broadcast signal to the digital dissemination of…files situated on an internet host site and sent out to podcast-catcher software” (Llinares, 2018, p. 125). A cumbersome stereo or wave receiving device is not required to listen to podcasts as they can be downloaded in a digital audio format and then accessed while travelling or in remote locations (Yeates, 2020). Unlike traditional radio which was ephemeral and fleeting, podcasts can be paused, replayed or repeated in order to allow users to fully grasp more complex discussions or plots (Berry, 2016b; Hancock & McMurtry, 2018; Lundström & Lundström, 2020; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

Llinares et al. (2018) define podcasting as a more radical and culturally urgent medium than radio because of its flexibility of listening, relative lack of editorial and formal scrutiny as well as technological specifics that result in conversational,

informal, personal and supportive atmospheres. For Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2020) it is no longer appropriate to regard podcasts as a digital, mobile and on-demand extension of radio because they are diverging in terms of audience base, platforms and producers. Despite initially profiling podcasting as radio, Berry (2016a) later changed his stance to state that whilst podcasting has developed alongside radio, it is distinct from it because of certain definitive features such as notably different aesthetics. “Many podcasts….demonstrate content that defies our previous experiences of radio or presents formats that would not meet the economic, political or legal standards that many broadcast systems demand” (Berry, 2018, p. 26).

Unlike radio users who can encounter certain programs by chance podcast users need to actively search for content and cannot simply tune-in by coincidence or accident (Berry, 2016a; Sharon & John, 2019; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Zuraikat, 2020). Discovering a podcast requires being more proactive than accessing traditional radio as greater technological literacy is needed (García-Marín, 2020). A common experience of a podcast user could include downloading a podcatcher, searching for programs (by name or topic), subscribing to a show, constantly updating the podcatcher application and habitually listening to content on a smartphone or other digital devices (García-Marín, 2020).

Berry (2016a) classifies podcasting as a “hyper-intimate medium” based off Crisell’s (1994) description of radio as an “intimate medium”. Radio was described as an intimate medium because the messages it delivers can only fully be realized inside the listeners head in a process where the role of imagination is greater than when consuming other media such as television. In addition, as a result of radio sets being incorporated into motor vehicles the intimate form of communication which is human-speech started to reach users in circumstances of solitude and privacy,

accompanying them in an unprecedented range of places and activities by being assimilated into the media user's daily existence more than other media (Crisell, 1994).

Podcasting takes the intimacy of radio one step-further when users opt for the predominant method of consumption which is listening to episodes via headphones (Berry, 2016b; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Zuraikat, 2020). This is because headphones form an aural cocoon that sonically insulates users from their surroundings by creating a privatized and personalized bubble (Berry, 2016a; Bull, 2007; Florini, 2015).Another reason that Berry (2016a) describes podcasts as a hyper-intimate medium is that they are often hosted by people from the podcast user's own community of interest (Berry, 2016a), ethnicity, culture, social group or geographical background (Berry, 2006). They can also be hosted by people who the podcast user already has a connection with via social media (Berry, 2016a). On top of all of these reasons, podcasts are often recorded in home-like settings such as the personal or domestic spaces of hosts, which adds a further dimension to their intimacy (Berry, 2016a; Meserko, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Smith, 2019; Symons, 2017; Wrather, 2016). One example of such a setting often provided in academic literature is Marc Maron's garage where he records the *WTF* podcast (Collins, 2018; Meserko, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Smith, 2019; Symons, 2017). Another example is Jamie Morton's kitchen where he records the podcast *My Dad Wrote a Porno* (Morton, Cooper & Levine, 2015 – 2022) with college friends James Cooper and Alice Levine (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Unlike sonically controlled studio environments that could sterilize mutual rapport between those engaging in a conversation, settings like these help to provide "a sense of trust and intimacy" (Meserko, 2015a) which is then relayed to the podcast user.

2.5 Freedom of the Medium

As it is today, there is a certain amount of freedom in the podcast medium. One of the reasons for this freedom is its accessibility, which makes the shift from podcast user to podcast producer relatively easy. Unlike traditional broadcasts which required studios, expensive equipment and licensing, podcasts can be created by virtually anyone with a minimum amount of equipment and technical knowledge (Berry, 2006; Sullivan, 2018; Wrather, 2016). The medium is also largely free from constraints. Therefore, independent content creators are presented the opportunity to distribute projects without having to pass through institutionalized settings with gatekeepers and editorial filters from regulatory boards, sponsors, company executives etc… (Dowling & Miller, 2019; Hancock & McMurtry, 2017; Markman & Sawyer, 2014; Millette, 2012). In many countries such as the US, UK and New Zealand, media laws and regulatory bodies remain broadcast and legacy media-focused. As a result, podcasts fall outside of the scope of local media regulations (Tennant, 2023). With this freedom comes a range of both advantages and disadvantages.

The first advantage of this freedom is related to flexibility in terms of formatting and the content that is created. Podcast episodes can be any length and released at any time (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Unlike with more traditional forms of media, content doesn't have to fit into a certain schedule, with other programs preceding and succeeding it (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The lack of gatekeeping and editing also provides the opportunity to utilize the medium's subversive potential (Millette, 2012) and produce alternative content to traditional media. The content of podcasts can also diverge from traditional media (Markman & Sawyer, 2014) because the rise of "do-it-yourself media" has led to what Anderson (2004) describes

as the “long tail” of online content distribution. Today we are faced with a seemingly endless choice of online media because of how cheap and easy it is to produce and distribute content. In the long tail, a small number of programs or media content may still attract a majority of the attention, but the unlimited shelf-space of the internet can accommodate a wide variety of specialty products, targeting tastes that are under or un-represented in traditional media (Markman, 2012). This can be viewed as a positive, because it allows for the distribution of content, which for a number of different reasons would not be able to appear on traditional media platforms. As traditional media carried out broadcasting in the oldest and truest sense of the word, it needed to be more inclusive than podcasting, by not offending users and appealing to the widest segment of the population (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Those involved in podcasting have the luxury of being able to carve out devoted niche or hyper-niche audiences by using highly specific references and terminology that no one outside of the target audience will understand (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The final advantage of the freedom of the podcast medium, is its perceived authenticity. According to Florini (2015) many podcasters assert that their listeners consider their content to be less contrived and more authentic because they are not constrained by corporate gatekeepers and are actually producing the content which they want to create (Spinelli & Dann, 2019):

> There is an implied contract between the independent podcaster and their listener, an understanding that they are saying what they are saying, because they chose to. No one else has paid them, asked them, or made them say the words that they speak (p. 212).

However, as well as the positives mentioned above, the freedom of the podcast medium can also have its disadvantages. Because virtually anyone can

create a podcast and distribute it without having to pass through any checks or filters, podcasting's greatest assets of aural intimacy, perceived authenticity and expressive power through the human voice can also be exploited (Lindgren, 2016). Podcast hosts can manipulate the trust of their users, to sell merchandise or products which they know are useless or even harmful. Ideologies that include hate towards certain individuals and groups, or advocate violence can be pushed. Journalism can be ideologically hijacked by partisan actors (Dowling et al., 2022). Accidental or deliberate misinformation can be spread which users can take at face value to form opinions or take action based on falsities which they believe to be true. Shows that are presented as news podcasts can amplify the element of opinion and relegate news to a secondary concern behind emotional impact (Nee & Santana, 2022). Finally, further problems can occur when podcasts contribute to the larger cultural phenomenon of the triumph of experience over expertise (Collins, 2018). According to Karr (2015) while formerly sacred sources of truth like history and statistics have lost ground, the subjective tale has garnered new territory. Because of this modern trend, when podcast hosts speak about topics that do not fall within their areas of expertise, it is their perspective and experiences that are of value to podcast users (Collins, 2018). Whilst, there is no doubt that these perspectives and experiences can be useful, they also have the potential to be dangerous. By definition, experts are people who are specialists in their field (Goodman, 1987), and are very knowledgeable about a specific subject (Davidson et al., 1997). For this reason, at times what they have to say can be more important or more correct than what lay people have to say, especially when it comes to more complex and technical issues.

2.6 Stand-Up Comedian Hosts

Seventy-six per cent of monthly podcast users who participated in a study conducted by Edison Research (2019) agreed that they enjoyed listening to podcasts because of a particular host, which supports the notion that hosts often play a prominent role in the success of podcasts (Fauteux, 2015). As indicated by Heiselberg and Have (2023) hosts are not only responsible for what is being said (the semantic level of linguistic meaning), but also for how it is being said (vocal expressions, affective and social meaning). In a moderate paraphrasing of Marshall McLuhan's (1964) famous statement "The medium is the message", they are not just messengers, but also an important part of the message itself (Heiselberg & Have, 2023).

Whilst podcasts are being hosted by all sorts of different people, as highlighted by Meserko(2015b), they have become highly popular amongst stand-up comedians (Meserko, 2015b), i.e. individuals who perform routines on stage, in front of an audience, equipped with a microphone (Dylewski, 2021) and the specific intention of making people laugh (Double, 2013). "Stand-up comedy is arguably the oldest, most universal, basic, and deeply significant form of humorous expression (excluding perhaps spontaneous, informal social joking and teasing)" (Mintz, 1985, p. 71). Those who perform it confront virtually all aspects of our culture and society, whilst playing an important role in the expression of shared beliefs and behaviour as well as changing social roles and expectations (Mintz, 1985).

The trend of stand-up comedians hosting podcasts started in the mid-2000s, with pioneers like Ricky Gervais and Adam Carolla (Meserko, 2014). Since early 2010 scores of amateur comedians have taken to podcasting simply as a way to be heard, while other more established performers have used it to energize their

careers (Marx, 2015). The stand-up comedian podcast often takes the form of unstructured interviews between hosts and guests (as in Marc Maron's *WTF*), unstructured conversations between two or more hosts (as in Greg Behrendt and Dave Anthony's *Walking the Room*) (Behrendt & Anthony, 2010 – 2017) or the monologues of single comedians (as in Bill Burr's *Monday Morning Podcast*) (Burr, 2011 – present) (Piper, 2015).

In general, stand-up comedians can be seen as well-suited for podcasting because they are used to perpetually creating new material, well-versed in verbal expression and comfortable speaking extemporaneously (Collins, 2018). Their involvement in podcasting can lead to an increase in their popularity as well as the success of their stand-up comedy or other projects they are involved in (Piper, 2015). Because of the medium's freedom from constraints mentioned in the previous section, there is a lot of flexibility in terms of the content that they create (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). As a result of this flexible nature, podcasts can allow stand-up comedians to self-reflexively dissect their craft and business, to comment on their experiences and place within the industry (Piper, 2015), to relay revealing and personal messages, to tell stories of obstacles not yet overcome, to mediate interpersonal disputes (Meserko, 2014, 2015b; Symons, 2017), and to even participate in a form of media psychology via the discussion of topics such as rejection, suicide, tormented family relationships and mental health (Collins, 2018).

According to Collins (2018) the surge in the popularity of comedy podcasts can be attributed to a confessional culture, the triumph of experience over expertise and accessible technology. When podcast hosts speak about topics that do not fall within their areas of expertise, it is their perspective and experiences that are of value to podcast users (Collins, 2018). According to Clark and McLean (2020), these

types of podcasts rely upon a connection between a dynamic host and their users. Whether users want to access these podcasts depends on whether or not they want to hang-out with the host for the duration of the show:

> "For some listeners two-plus hours with Joe Rogan, a bombastic comedian and mixed martial arts commentator, might feel like getting trapped by a loudmouth at the end of the bar. However, his wide-ranging interests, celebrity guests, and contrarian opinions transform him into a friend or smart acquaintance (at least for some) who comes to visit each week" (p. 224).

For individuals who identify strongly enough with the presence and personality of opinionated hosts such as Joe Rogan, their connection is enhanced by the hyper-intimacy of the medium (Berry, 2016a). For others who do not identify with the hosts, these podcasts may not be so appealing.

2.7 Summary

In summary, this chapter provided the definition of podcasts for the purpose of this thesis as digital audio or video files that can allow users to time-shift and place-shift whilst being played on computers, iPods or other portable media devices, either without being downloaded when connected to the internet or after being downloaded from the internet, manually from a website or automatically via software applications. Amongst other things, the chapter also touched upon certain similarities between podcasting and radio such as their language and audio format, before focusing on differences, including but not limited to distribution, intimacy and formal scrutiny. The freedom of podcasting that emerged from a lack of formal scrutiny was also discussed in terms of its positives such as accessibility and flexibility, as well as, its potential negatives including the manipulation and exploitation of users. The final

section of the chapter was concerned with stand-up comedians who have gravitated towards the medium. In order to gain greater insight about the relationships between these hosts and people who access their podcasts, the next theoretical chapter focuses on parasocial theory, which is used in this thesis to examine relationships between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and their users.

Chapter 3 – Parasocial Theory

3.1 Introduction

Whilst the previous chapter of the thesis explored academic literature on podcasting, this chapter is comprised of 12 separate sections concerned with parasocial theory. The first section of the chapter following the introduction (3.2) is concerned with the definitions and backgrounds of concepts such as parasocial interaction (PSI) and PSRs. The next section (3.3) outlines the two competing approaches to PSR development. The fourth section (3.4) talks about impression formation and what happens after impression formation, if PSRs are going to develop. The next two sections examine how media users' (3.5) and media figures' characteristics (3.6) can influence parasocial phenomena. The seventh section (3.7) focuses on associations between other reception phenomena and PSI/PSRs. The eight section (3.8) looks at studies concerned with how parasocial phenomena can influence media users and the ninth section (3.9) touches upon studies that examine the relationship between parasocial phenomena and consumer behaviour. The next section (3.10) looks at academic research that connects parasocial phenomena and authenticity. The eleventh section (3.11) focuses on theoretical and empirical work on PSRs between podcast hosts and users. The penultimate section (3.12) looks at how authenticity appears in the studies mentioned in the previous section and the final section (3.13) provides a short summary of the chapter.

3.2 Parasocial Interaction & Relationships

Academic interest in the concepts of PSI and PSRs can be traced back to Horton and Wohl's (1956) essay titled *Mass Communication and Parasocial Interaction: Observations on Intimacy at a Distance*. In this essay Horton and Wohl (1956) used the concepts to describe one-sided communication between audience members and characters they were in contact with via different forms of media such as radio and television. Unfortunately as pointed out by Hakim (2018) in the following years the terms PSI and PSR were often used interchangeably which led to certain scholars (Dibble et al., 2016; Giles, 2002; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008) proposing clear distinctions between the two terms which are closely associated but theoretically different in a number of important ways.

Both PSI and PSRs are a type of mediated communication because they involve the transmission of messages through media instead of face-to-face communication (Hardey, 2004). They are also both a type of one-sided communication, because whilst the media figure's action is observed by the media user, the media user's reaction cannot be observed (but only anticipated) by the media figure (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

PSI is a sense of a mutual interaction with a media figure during a media exposure situation (Tukachinsky et al., 2020), which can include behaviour such as talking to a media figure (Dibble & Rosaen, 2011) or the subjective feeling that a media figure is aware of you (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). PSRs on the other hand, refer to a feeling of intimacy and a sense of relationship that media users continue experiencing outside the context of a particular media exposure situation (Tukachinsky et al., 2020), like a friendship that exists between two people beyond their face-to face communication sequences (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

Whilst some scholars have argued that PSRs develop through repeated PSIs such that both the amount and the quality of PSIs strengthen PSRs (Klimmt et al., 2006; Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019), others have argued that they can be treated as orthogonal constructs (Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016). The argument here is that media users can experience strong PSRs even in the absence of a PSI, and can engage in a PSI with a media figure they do not have a strong PSR with (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

As indicated by Giles (2002) PSIs and PSRs can take place with real people, fictional characters or even cartoon characters. According to Horton and Wohl (1956) PSRs are experienced much like real-world social relationships. In both types of relationships greater intimacy, understanding and appreciation is developed for the other person as uncertainty is reduced (Horton & Wohl, 1956). In other words, in both types of relationships as an individual is exposed to a person more frequently and over a longer period of time, they develop more confidence in their attribution of how the person will behave and there is less uncertainty in the relationship (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Both parasocially and in real-life putting forth time and commitment leads to an increased connection with the person whom one is in a relationship with (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). In their meta-analysis which synthesized the results of four decades of research on PSRs, Tukachinsky et al. (2020) found that PSR intensity was moderately associated with the amount of exposure to media figures. However, as highlighted by the authors, the correlational nature of the studies examined meant that it was not possible to establish the cause-and-effect direction between variables. Therefore, although it was assumed that PSRs developed over time through repeated exposure to a media figure, the opposite process could also have occurred

such that initial PSRs with media figures led to further exposure to content featuring these individuals (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

As PSRs involve strong emotional responses (Levy, 1979) and media figures can be perceived as friends who are part of the media user's social world (Rubin et al., 1985) parasocial breakups outside of the control of the media user (such as a breakup with a character after the termination of a television program) can leave viewers experiencing a loss similar to that found in real-life breakups (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). On the other hand however, audience members are free to withdraw from PSRs at any given moment because of their one-sided nature (Horton & Wohl, 1956).

A number of scholars have drawn attention to the fact that PSI and PSRs can be negative experiences (Hartmann et al., 2008; Jennings & Alper, 2016; Klimmt et al., 2006; Liebers & Schramm, 2019; Schramm & Hartmann, 2008) as well as the traditionally accepted positive experiences characterised by amicable feelings towards media figures. Negative PSRs are grounded in antipathy rather than friendship (Jennings & Alper, 2016; Klimmt et al., 2006) and include the sense of unfriendly feelings or even outright hostility towards a media figure (Hartmann et al., 2008). Whilst it must be acknowledged that PSRs can be negative as well as positive, this thesis is only concerned with positive PSRs.

3.3 Theories of PSR development

According to Tukachinsky et al. (2020) there are two competing approaches to PSR development: the substitution hypothesis and the Panksepp– Jakobson hypothesis. Initially, interest in PSRs was rooted in the uses and gratifications

framework, which maintained that individuals seek media to satisfy different emotional, cognitive, social and sociopsychological needs (Ruggiero, 2000). PSRs were presumed to serve as a motivational driver, directing people's media choices in pursuit of companionship and social gratifications such as a comforting sense of belonging (Rubin et al., 1985; Rubin & Step, 2000). This line of thinking gave rise to the substitution hypothesis which is also dubbed the compensation or deficiency hypothesis (Tukachinsky et al., 2020). This hypothesis dominated PSR research for decades (Levy, 1979; Rubin et al., 1985; Tsao, 1996) with the general premise that illusionary, one-sided relationships offer social experiences without the risk of rejection and the need for polished social skills. Therefore, it was thought that individuals who struggle to form meaningful real-life relationships may instead bond with media figures as a compensatory mechanism (Tsao, 1996).

However, despite its initial appeal, the substitution hypothesis only generated limited empirical support (Tukachinsky et al., 2020) and many scholars have concluded that rather than serving as a substitution for unsatisfying social relationships, PSRs constitute an extension of one's social circle (Hartmann, 2016). In other words, these scholars think that individuals who seek social bonds in real life (securely attached individuals and those who fear rejection) are also more prone to forming PSRs with media figures, whilst those who shy away from relating to others in real life (individuals with avoidant attachment) also do not relate as meaningfully to media figures (Tukachinsky et al., 2020). According to the Panksepp–Jakobson hypothesis, evolution has not had enough time to adapt to the existence of media and the human brain has not developed neural structures specific for processing symbolic and artistic representations (Panksepp, 1998). Instead it utilizes "ancient emotion circuits" (Jacobs & Willems, 2018) and responds to media figures as if they

were real people in one's actual environment (Stever, 2017). This is not to say that people fail to differentiate between reality and media representations of reality, but rather that their neural infrastructure processing social relationships are also recruited when processing mediated relationships, which suggests that the same psychological processes are involved in both parasocial and social experiences (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

In their meta-analysis which synthesized the results of four decades of research on PSRs, Tukachinsky et al. (2020) tested the main propositions of the two competing theoretical views of PSR development. In line with scepticism towards the traditional view of PSRs as a substitution for real life relationships (Hartmann, 2016), the findings demonstrated that PSR intensity was not related to social deficiencies, with the exception of anxious attachment style. The findings also provided support for the Panksepp–Jakobson hypothesis by suggesting that PSRs mirror non-mediated relationships (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

3.4 From Impression Formation to PSRs

Connections between media figures and media users can occur in various ways including PSI and PSRs, but their foundation rests on the overall impression media users hold of media figures (Sanders, 2010). In other words, media users need to form impressions about media figures before parasocial connections can take place (Klimmt et al., 2006). Parasocial connections build upon an initial impression formation process comparable to that of interpersonal encounters. When meeting a new person, a unified impression is quickly and effortlessly formed as a result of traits being processed in an organized and structured way, with some traits having a greater impact on the overall impression than others (Asch, 1946). This

process is thought to be mostly unconscious and automatic, and results in a schema-like characterization of the encountered individual (Fiske et al., 1999). Klimmt et al. (2006) assume that perceived media figure attractiveness plays a key role in the initial categorization process. Specifically, they suggest that media figures are initially categorized as being either attractive or unattractive. Attractiveness can refer to a person's outer appearance (physical attractiveness), a person's inner appearance or personality (social attractiveness) and a person's success in accomplishing tasks (task-related attractiveness) (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

First impressions are formed based on information from various sources including faces (Willis & Todorov, 2006) and body language (Furley et al., 2012). However, as demonstrated by Allport and Cantril's (1934) seminal work, people do make judgments about others such as radio hosts based on voice alone. For example, research has shown that sports broadcasters with higher-pitched voices are perceived to be more authoritative than their lower-pitched counterparts (Etling et al., 2011). Female voices with higher frequencies are rated as being more attractive by men (Collins & Missing, 2003) and characteristics such as unpleasantness, callousness and unfriendliness are related to creaky voices (Lukkarila et al., 2012).

Regardless of how impressions are formed and whether they are correct, we know that they are strongly influenced by both media figure and media user variables (Klimmt et al., 2006). When certain processes follow initial impression formation, different outcomes such as PSRs can emerge. According to Tukachinsky and Stever (2019), impressions are formed about a media figure in the initiation stage of the evolution of PSRs. In this stage, on a cognitive level, uncertainty is high, as is the attention of media users and their critical evaluation of media figures.

Mental shortcuts such as social stereotypes can be applied to scrutinize media figures and they can be critically evaluated via social comparisons between media users and themselves. On an affective level, individuals can feel physical attraction to media figures based on characteristics that can be easily ascertained during a first encounter. This can result in a behavioural intention to seek further exposure to a media figure in order to reduce uncertainty and predict the desirability of a prospective relationship. The initiation stage can be relatively brief as it only entails superficial communication. The next stage of the evolution of PSRs is experimentation (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). In this stage, additional information is acquired about media figures and it is integrated into a more expansive mental model. The main relational goal is reducing uncertainty and gathering information forecasting relational outcomes. To this end, media users seek-out additional encounters with media figures, with emphasis being placed on breadth rather than depth, because the media user is driven by curiosity. Individuals use various information gathering strategies to check for consistency across sources, thus informing the relational schema and reducing uncertainty. Multiple interactions and comparison for consistency across contexts, as well as gathering sufficient information to form positive relational expectations enables media users to acquire greater knowledge about the media figure and develop stronger opinions, beliefs and emotions (including social attraction, liking, and sympathy). The stage at which the PSR is cemented is the intensification stage (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). Here, media users seek intimacy with media figures as they intensify and maintain their relationship, which falls within stable dyadic patterns (for example turning to them for encouragement or amusement) based on previously acquired certainty about the figure. On a cognitive level, the PSR extends beyond the context of media exposure

as media users think about media figures more often during their day-to-day lives. On the affective level, media users develop stronger feelings towards media figures including friend-like, romantic or parental feelings (Stever, 2009). Finally, on a behavioural level, PSRs can manifest in re-watching or listening to media content, seeking additional context for deeper encounters (such as by following the media figure on social media) and discussing the media figures with others (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019).

One of the assumptions behind this model is that interpersonal relationships are comparable to PSRs, because it was developed from Knapp's model of interpersonal relationships (Knapp, 1978; Knapp et al., 2014). Its limitations are that negative PSRs and parasocial break-ups do not fall within its scope. As highlighted by Dibble et al. (2023) this model still awaits empirical examination and there could be value in questioning its assumption that PSRs grow and evolve over time with repeated exposure to media figures. Tukachinsky Forster et al. (2023) emphasize that some recent studies have put this assumption to test, with not all providing empirical support. Whilst Bond (2020) found an effect of repeated exposure on PSR intensity when examining heterosexual viewers' PSRs with gay characters in the serial drama Queer as Folk over a period of ten weeks, Siegenthaler et al. (2021) did not detect change in the PSR intensity of viewers with contestants on The Biggest Loser during their five week study. Similarly, in a panel survey, Kühne and Opree (2020) found that adolescents reported nearly identical levels of PSRs with characters from MTV reality shows when measured six months apart. Thus, these studies suggest that although PSRs may develop over time they do not necessarily do so, or at least not in a measurable way (Tukachinsky Forster et al., 2023). This has led scholars such as Dibble et al. (2023) to state that the empirical success of

this model is mixed and that , there is no clear definition of how PSRs grow from one step to another, which makes it difficult to operationalize PSRs as repeated exposure. Tukachinsky and Stever's (2019) postulation that PSRs slowly develop from initiation, morphing into deeper, more meaningful relationships that, for some people, escalate into fandom is also not without opposition. According to another perspective PSRs and fandom of media figures are completely distinct and even mutually exclusive. This perspective argues that the fandom of a media figure is based on a sense of distance, while PSRs are an experience of intimacy (Cohen, 2014). Hence, this contradicts Tukachinsky and Stever's (2019) model which sees the two constructs as inherently overlapping with one being the subset of the other (Tukachinsky Forster, 2023a). This thesis is not concerned with the fandom of podcast users, only their PSRs. However, it does not focus on the development of these relationships, and instead examines them in relation to perceived authenticity and influence. Hence sections 3.8 and 3.10 look at existing research on parasocial phenomena and these concepts.

3.5 Influence of Media Users' Characteristics on Parasocial Phenomena

At times, different research has been interested in ascertaining whether and which characteristics of media users can influence parasocial phenomena, with the aim of gaining insight into whether certain people are more susceptible to parasocial experiences than others.

In some studies, women have reported stronger parasocial attachments than men (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Cohen, 2003, 2004; Eyal & Rubin, 2003; Perse, 1990) and in others no gender differences have emerged (Cole & Leets, 1999;

Gleich, 1997). In one study where women reported stronger parasocial attachments than men, Cohen (2003) asked respondents from two samples (one comprised of 381 adults and one of 82 teenagers) to report on their PSRs with their favourite media figures/ characters by completing Rubin et al.'s (1985) PSR scale. The respondents were then asked how they would respond if the media figures/characters were taken off-air. This approach did not rely on reconstructing old experiences from memory, nor did it limit the media figures/characters that participants could select (Cohen, 2003). As hypothesized, women developed stronger PSRs than men, however they did not react differently to expected break-up (Cohen, 2003). Therefore, the author concluded that "despite the substantial association between PSRs and parasocial breakup, the intensity of a relationship is not always a direct indication of the impact of the breakup of such relationship" (Cohen, 2003, p. 200). The correlation between PSRs and breakup was greater for men, than for women suggesting that for men, strong relationships indicate dependency more than for women. A study where no gender differences emerged was conducted by Cole and Leets (1999). The aim of this research was to investigate whether attachment styles influence the extent to which individuals engage in PSI. 115 undergraduate students from a large urban university completed a questionnaire during class. Amongst other things, the study identified no sex differences in terms of PSI (Cole & Leets, 1999). In Tukachinsky et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, which included 120 studies on the antecedents and effects of PSRs, on average women reported more intense PSRs than men (r=0.5). This difference has been explained by the greater empathic capacity and emotionality of women (Eyal & Cohen, 2006). Previous research has also found that women tend to experience interpersonal friendships that are more intimate and supportive than men (Bank &

Hansford, 2000). Possible explanations for this include emotional restraint and homophobia towards gay men (Bank & Hansford, 2000). Therefore, it seems possible that the PSRs of men mirror their interpersonal friendships, which for a number of different reasons, including social ones, are less intimate and supportive than the friendships of women.

When it comes to age, some studies have found a positive relationship between age and parasocial attachment strength (Gleich, 1997; Levy, 1979; Perse, 1990), some a negative one (Auter et al., 2005; Centeno, 2010) and others none at all (Cohen, 2003). For example, in his study which included focus group interviews and a survey of adults living in New York, Levy (1979) investigated the PSIs television viewers had with their favourite newscasters and found that although the correlation between respondent's age and parasocial index scores were weak, they were statistically significant. According to the author, older viewers (and particularly those who were housebound) were often faced with decreasing opportunities for social interaction. Therefore, news figures could provide them with the opportunity for surrogate friendships and the possibility to retain some vicarious ties with a world in which they had a declining role (Levy, 1979). In a different study, Auter et al. (2005) surveyed over 5300 users of the satellite news channel *Al-Jazeera* during a two week period in 2002. Whilst, participants fell in an age range between 18 and over-65, the findings of the study suggested that the strongest PSIs were with audience members who were 18–24 years old (Auter et al., 2005).Therefore, this study suggested that there was a negative relationship between age and parasocial attachment. Finally, in Cohen's (2003) aforementioned study, the author hypothesised that teens would report stronger PSRs with their favourite television characters, however this hypothesis was not supported. Therefore, no relationship

was ascertained between parasocial attachment strength and age. However, the amount of time that has passed alone makes comparisons between the studies mentioned above difficult. According to Liebers and Schramm's (2019) inventory of the last 60 years of research on parasocial phenomena, where they structurally collected and analysed the metadata of more than 250 studies, overall the probability and intensity of parasocial phenomena seems to increase with age. However, the duo highlight that this is actually related to various other factors associated with age, such as high television consumption (Grant et al., 1991) and the progressive loss of social contacts, activities and/or health (Eggermont & Vandebosch, 2001). Adolescents have also been identified as showing very strong PSI and PSRs (Maltby et al., 2005), which researchers assume relate to puberty and the discovery of one's sexuality and identity, which in turn is often associated with a profound euphoria surrounding media stars, accompanied by fandom and idolization (Giles & Maltby, 2004).

According to Liebers and Schramm (2019), some studies have also supported the alleged compensational function of parasocial phenomena, which researchers explain by deficits in the personality structure of media users (Tsao, 1996). The less agreeable (Tsay & Bodine, 2012), more shy (Vorderer & Knobloch, 1996) and neurotic (Sun, 2010) media users are, studies have found the more pronounced their PSIs and PSRs. PSI and PSRs also appear to be more distinct in people with low education levels and incomes (Auter et al., 2005), which could be explained by research which shows that dissatisfaction and hopelessness increases the intensity of parasocial contacts (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005).

Although they highlight that the findings regarding loneliness are mixed, Liebers and Schramm (2019) do draw attention to some studies that indicate PSRs

with media figures increase with loneliness (Greenwood & Long, 2009), not being in a relationship (Greenwood & Long, 2011), the perceived cost of real relationships (Adam & Sizemore, 2013) and unattractive relationship alternatives (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). However, other studies have failed to find associations between parasocial phenomena and loneliness (Chory-Assad & Yanen, 2005; Rubin et al., 1985). In Tuckachinsky et al.'s (2020) aforementioned meta-analysis, no significant relationship emerged between loneliness and PSRs. When taken together the results of Tuckachinsky et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis and the other studies mentioned above demonstrate that understanding the relationship between loneliness and parasocial phenomena is complicated. There could be a number of different explanations for this, one being imprecise measurements (Greenwood & Aldoukhov, 2023). For example, early work by Rubin et al. (1985) found that loneliness and PSI were not directly associated with each other, among a predominantly female young adult sample of television viewers. However, both variables did predict increased television reliance i.e. the likelihood of using television when lonely. Thus, television viewing provided a potential strategy for offsetting current feelings of loneliness, perhaps indirectly due to parasocial phenomena that accompanied it. (Greenwood & Aldoukhov, 2023). Another reason for the confusing set-of results regarding loneliness could be a lack of distinction between temporary and more chronically experienced loneliness (Greenwood & Aldoukhov, 2023). Moreover, particular groups of lonely individuals could be turning to PSRs more than others, for reasons such as identity validation or the community that they provide (Greenwood & Aldoukhov, 2023). For example, recent research found that loneliness was associated with PSRs for lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) youth, but not for heterosexual youth (Bond, 2018). LGB youth were also more likely

to choose media figures who shared their sexual identity. Hence, the researcher argued that LGB youth may be strategically engaging in PSRs to compensate for a lack of real-life support (Bond, 2018).

When taken together, the studies touched upon in this section of the chapter reveal that there are some inconsistencies in the findings of studies that examined which characteristics of media users influence parasocial phenomena. However, researchers have reliably found evidence of parasocial phenomena among diverse samples such as Americans, Arabs, Germans, Indians, and Israelis (Auter et al., 2005; Cohen, 2004; Gleich, 1997; Papa et al., 2000; Rubin et al., 1985).

3.6 Influence of Media Figures' Characteristics on Parasocial Phenomena

The traits and aspects of media figures that influence the nature and intensity of parasocial phenomena also appear to be diverse because media users turn to them with different needs, motives and preferences (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). Therefore, similarly to real life we can say that every Jack has his Jill (Liebers & Schramm, 2019).

This being said, some studies have shown that the strength of parasocial phenomena increases when media figures use a high level of personal address (Schramm & Wirth, 2010) and interactivity (Thorson & Rodgers, 2006). According to Liebers and Schramm (2019), in most cases, the intensity of parasocial phenomena increases when people perceive media figures to be humorous (Kronewald, 2008), intelligent (Hoffner, 1996) and credible (Baeßler, 2009). Additionally, Knoll et al.(2015) point out that the strength of parasocial phenomena is reinforced by a high level of physical, social, or task related attractiveness. Where attraction is defined as

liking or a positive feelings towards another, social attraction depends on the personality and agreeableness of an individual, physical attraction depends on the appearance of an individual and task attraction depends on the competence and success of an individual (McCroskey & McCain, 1974).

Some scholars have also underlined the importance of distinguishing between different types of PSRs (Tukachinsky, 2010) where media users are likely to have different motivations for being attracted to media figures (Schmid & Klimmt, 2011). For example a PSR between a female supermodel and male adolescent is likely to be driven by physical attraction (Giles, 2002; Klimmt et al., 2006) and as demonstrated by Tukachinsky (2010) parasocial love has a strong physical attraction component.

Tukachinsky et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis also found that PSRs were strongly correlated with audience members' perceived homophily to media figures (Tukachinsky et al., 2020), where perceived homophily was the degree to which they perceived media figures to be similar to themselves in different ways such as beliefs, education, social status etc… (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). Once again, the correlational nature of the studies examined meant that the direction of the relationship between PSRs and perceived homophily could not be ascertained. Just as perceived homophily could have initiated PSRs, it is also possible that PSRs matured a sense of kinship, which in turn fostered perceived homophily (Tukachinsky et al., 2020).

When taken together, these studies show that just like it is difficult to make definitive statements about what characteristics of media users influence parasocial phenomena it is also difficult to make definitive statements about what characteristics of media figures influence parasocial phenomena.

3.7 Reception Phenomena Accompanying Parasocial Phenomena

According to Liebers and Schramm (2019) interactions and relationships between media users and media figures also show associations to other reception phenomena, with high attention (Rubin & McHugh, 1987), more intensive information processing (Calvert et al., 2014) and stronger emotional experiences (Hartmann et al., 2008) being typical side-effects of parasocial phenomena.

Some previous research has also demonstrated that intensified PSI could correlate with high relaxation and decreased emotional stress (Madison & Porter, 2015). In this study which looked at the relationship between television characters and 276 students enrolled in mass communication courses, the researchers found that high levels of PSI functioned as a means of catharsis -which is an effect that gives viewers release from their own aggressive drives when they vicariously participate in the violence that they see in drama (Madison & Porter, 2015). Whilst the scholars stated that catharsis may be better measured using physiological means, self-reports in their survey indicated that those with greater PSIs are more apt to use PSRs for relieving tension and stress (Madison & Porter, 2015).

Strong PSI is often also associated with a high level of presence, (the feeling of being completely present in a media world) (Chung & Kim, 2009). Tukachinsky et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis also found strong correlations between PSRs and identification (which involves a temporary suspension of one's own self-concept while merging with a media figure). When a media user identifies with a media figure they experience the media reality from that media figure's perspective (Cohen, 2001).

When taken together, these studies show that parasocial connections to media figures are also related to a range of other reception phenomena.

3.8 Parasocial Phenomena & Influence of Media Users

In their meta-analysis of four decades of research, Tukachinsky et al. (2020) found that PSR intensity was moderate to strongly associated with persuasive outcomes including message consistent (a) attitudes, (b) behavioural intention and (c) behaviour. As highlighted by Liebers and Schramm (2019) a number of studies have demonstrated that PSI and PSRs can influence the opinions, attitudes and behaviour of media users (Bond, 2020; Centeno, 2010; Hoffner & Cohen, 2012; Papa et al., 2000; Quintero Johnson & Patnoe-Woodley, 2016; Rubin & Step, 2000; Schiappa et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2017).

In one of these studies, Centeno (2010) distributed questionnaires to 229 people who voted in the 2007 Philippine Senatorial Election. The questionnaires that assessed the celebrity endorsers of senatorial candidates revealed that the respondents had higher PSI with celebrity endorsers of the candidates they voted for than with the celebrity endorsers of the candidates they did not vote for. These findings were not generalizable to the whole population because purposive sampling was used, however, they suggest that celebrities with higher parasociability can influence media user's voting decisions (Centeno, 2010).

In their study focusing on radio users, Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley (2016) found that both PSRs and experiences of PSI impacted the perception that their favourite radio personalities influenced their general opinions and perspectives (Quintero Johnson & Patnoe-Woodley, 2016). However, it must be noted that the cross-sectional nature of the survey limits the generalizability of the study.

Similar findings were obtained in an earlier study by Rubin and Step (2000) who administered questionnaires to 235 listeners of public affairs talk radio. The study's findings revealed that parasocially interacting with a host predicted treating the host as an important source of information and feeling that the host influenced attitudes and actions relating to societal issues (Rubin & Step, 2000).

In another study, Papa et al. (2000) examined the effects of the Indian radio soap opera *Tinka Tinka Sukh (Happiness Lies in Small Pleasures)* via an observational case study of the village of Lutsaan. In their study, the authors revealed that behavioural change in response to media exposure can be facilitated by PSRs between audience members and characters that appear in radio soap operas. The study also suggested that PSRs with radio soap opera characters can lead to changes in the thinking and behaviour of listeners which in turn can lead to societal change via community-based social learning and collective action (Papa et al., 2000).

In addition to the research mentioned above, studies have shown that PSI and PSRs can reduce prejudice and negative stereotypes towards minority groups (Bond, 2020; Hoffner & Cohen, 2012; Schiappa et al., 2006; Wong et al., 2017). As part of one such study, 245 university students were delivered questionnaires to examine whether exposure to gay characters on the sitcom *Will & Grace* could influence their attitudes towards gay men in general (Schiappa et al., 2006). Despite the study's limitations such as reliance on correlation data and a non-random sample, results indicated that viewing frequency and PSI predicted lower levels of sexual prejudice towards gay men (Schiappa et al., 2006).

As part of different study, 112 heterosexual students recruited from an introductory course at an American university were exposed to the television series

Queer as Folk for a period of 10 weeks (Bond, 2020). Although the findings of this study cannot be generalized to include other minority groups and were based on a single television program, the pre and post-tests of the study demonstrated that heterosexual participants developed PSRs with gay characters that significantly grew over time and that PSRs predicted reduction in prejudice towards homosexuals (Bond, 2020).

In another study, Hoffner and Cohen (2012) explored responses to *Monk,* a television series about a detective with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). As part of the study 142 *Monk* fans completed an online survey after following an invitation placed on one of eight online fan message boards (Hoffner & Cohen, 2012). Despite a relatively small sample size and cross-sectional data which could not demonstrate causality, a stronger PSR with the detective was associated with lower OCD stereotypes and less desired social distance from people with OCD (Hoffner & Cohen, 2012).

Finally, as part of a study conducted by Wong et al. (2017) 594 undergraduate students from two American universities participated in an online experiment which revealed that social distance and negative stereotypes of people with bipolar disorder reduced significantly following exposure to actress and recording-artist Demi Lovato's disclosure about the disease via TV or magazine interviews. The study found that the greater the attachment to Demi Lovato via PSI or PSR, the lower the perceived negative stereotype towards other individuals with bipolar disorder (Wong et al., 2017). As with all research projects, this study also had some limitations. The results of the study aren't generalizable to the wider population as the study used a convenience sample which consisted primarily of younger people and included significantly more female participants than male (Wong et al., 2017).

In summary, the studies touched upon in this section of the literature review reveal that media users can be influenced by PSI and PSRs with different media figures. Together, they reveal that there is value in examining the influence of stand-up comedian podcast hosts on their users. Examining this is important because as mentioned previously, stand-up comedians provide valuable insight into society and culture (Mintz, 1985) and reach a large number of people (Ryan, 2017) via the many podcasts that they host (Marx, 2015).

3.9 Parasocial Phenomena & Consumer Behaviour of Media Users

A number of studies have also demonstrated that PSI and PSRs can also affect the consumer behaviour of media users (Hwang & Zhang, 2018; Lee & Watkins, 2016; Quintero Johnson & Patnoe-Woodley, 2016; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

In one such study, Sokolova and Kefi (2020) found that PSI with beauty and fashion influencers on *YouTube* and *Instagram* had a significant positive effect on young French adults' purchase intentions of products introduced by the influencers. However, the study focused on a fully female audience in the beauty and fashion sector, which could restrict the generalization of its results to other audiences and sectors (Sokolova & Kefi, 2020).

As part of a different study, Hwang and Zhang (2018) administered an online survey to 389 users of the Chinese social media site *Weibo*, who followed digital celebrities that advertised products via the platform. The authors found that PSRs positively affected purchase intention as well as the intention of telling others positive things about the products. Although this study provides interesting empirical findings, it has several limitations such the use of judgment sampling as a convenience

sample and not investigating cultural differences as a result of only focusing on China (Hwang & Zhang, 2018).

In their study that examined how video blogs (vlogs) influence consumer perceptions of luxury brands, Lee and Watkins (2016) found that consumers' PSI with vloggers had a positive impact on their perception of luxury brands which in turn had a positive effect on their purchase intentions. Since the study used actual *YouTube* videos created by a selected *YouTube* vlogger, confounding effects of other variables may have occurred (such as product type and vlog content) that this study was not able to control (Lee & Watkins, 2016).

In their previously mentioned study, Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley (2016) also found that PSRs and experiences of PSI predicted positive perceptions about, the recall of, and purchasing of brands, products, and services recommended by listeners' favourite radio personalities.

In summary, the studies touched upon in this section of the literature review reveal that the consumer behaviour of media users can be influenced by PSI and PSRs with different media figures. Together, they reveal that there is value in examining whether stand-up comedian podcast hosts influence the consumer behaviour of their users.

3.10 Parasocial Phenomena & Authenticity

Whilst, Tsay-Vogel and Schwartz (2014) state that there has been consistent support for authenticity being a significant predictor of PSI (Alperstein, 1991; Rosaen & Dibble, 2008; Rubin & Perse, 1987; Rubin et al., 1985), a closer look at these studies reveal that authenticity has been used interchangeably with perceived realism which has been defined as "how likely a show's characters and events are to

occur in the real world" (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008, p. 147), "how true-to-life respondents perceived their favourite daytime television serials to be" (Rubin & Perse, 1987, p. 253) and "how true-to-life respondents perceived local television news presentations" (Rubin et al., 1985, p. 166).

In their study which involved 328 daytime soap opera viewers, Rubin and Perse (1987) found that the perceived authenticity/realism of soap opera content was positively correlated with PSI. In their survey of children aged 5-12, Rosaen and Dibble (2008) identified authenticity/social realism as being positively associated to PSI with their favourite television characters. Finally, in their examination of 329 local television news viewers, Rubin et al. (1985) identified perceived news authenticity/realism as a salient predictor of PSI. Rosaen and Dibble (2008) state that a limitation of their study could be that the number of characters selected by participants might have placed a sort of "restriction in range" constraint on the analysis, meaning that it narrowed the variation observed in the study, which in turn could have impacted the generalizability of its findings. The fact that an overwhelming proportion of children selected completely unreal characters further contributed to this limitation. However, because restriction in range is typically viewed to be problematic for non-significant results, whereas the majority of the results in this study were significant, the authors were not too concerned about this issue (Rosaen & Dibble, 2008). An advantage of this study was that children were not forced to select a character from a list that was developed prior to the research, as has been the case with some other studies (Eyal & Rubin, 2003). This is advantageous, because it allows participants to answer questions about media figures/characters to which they actually have strong bonds with.

When Giles (2002) developed his original model of PSI, he also considered the issue of media figure authenticity/realism. According to this model parasocial encounters are distinguished by the means of the nature of media figures and the relationship that is theoretically possible with them based on their authenticity/realism. These can be broadly identified across three levels of PSI. First-order PSI refers to when media figures appear to be fully authentic. For example with a news broadcaster or podcast host, the communication is parasocial but there is a chance of actually meeting the person. Second order PSI refers to when media figures are to some degree inauthentic. For example, with a soap opera character portrayed by an actor, the character is fictional but one could make face-to-face contact with the actor who is the physical counterpart of the character they are in a PSR with. Finally, third-order PSI concerns encounters with fantasy or cartoon figures who have no real-life counterpart, hence they are distinguished from first- and second order encounters because a social relationship with the figure is impossible.

When taken together, the studies mentioned in this subsection of the literature review demonstrate that authenticity/realism is a significant predictor of parasocial phenomena. In Giles's (2002) model of PSI, stand-up comedian podcast hosts (who are the focus of this thesis) belong to the first-order, because they appear to be fully authentic (or high in realism). Although when accessing a podcast, the communication that is taking place is parasocial, there is actually a chance of meeting the host in real-life. They do not appear to be portraying a character like an actor and they are not like a cartoon figure that has no real life counterpart. However, whilst this thesis is concerned with the concept of authenticity, it takes it to mean something different to the studies mentioned in this section of the chapter. The theory of authenticity used in this thesis will be described under the Theoretical

Framework chapter (i.e. Chapter 4) which will also compare it to the understanding of authenticity in the studies outlined here. But first, the next section of this chapter will examine research at the intersection of podcasting and parasocial theory.

3.11 Parasocial Relationships in Podcasts

Since the conception of PSRs, research on the phenomenon has been extensive. The empirical examination of the experience has grown exponentially across disciplines included but not limited to communication, psychology and marketing (Tukachinsky et al., 2020). Nonetheless, more than half of the empirical studies focused on parasocial phenomena have been concerned with the media of film and television (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). However, at least theoretically, podcasts seem to be an ideal medium for the development of PSRs.

Hosts' informal, conversational and relaxed personal style (Lindgren, 2016) can trigger PSRs (Horton & Wohl, 1956), whilst the medium's hyper-intimacy (Macdougall, 2011; Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020) and perceived authenticity can bolster their illusion. Together with back catalogues that allow easy access to old episodes (Vickery & Ventrano, 2020), new episodes released in a predictable and consistent manner (Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020) can allow for repetitive interactions between hosts and users (Dibble et al., 2016). The lack of reliance on a formal structure with pre-established time slots and constant advertising interruptions can prevent breaks in the relationship that could remind users' of their one-sided nature (Zuraikat, 2020).

Whilst scholars like Piper (2015), Macdougall (2011) and Zuraikat (2020) have convincingly argued that podcasts may present a great opportunity for the development of PSRs, there is a lack of research to substantiate and strengthen

these ideas by providing empirical evidence. This being said, there have been a few studies that have empirically examined PSRs and podcasts.

In one of the studies which focused on PSRs and podcasts, Boling et al. (2019) examined PSRs between American fitness instructor and actor Richard Simmons and his fans, via textual analysis of the six episodes of Dan Taberski's *Missing Richard Simmons* podcast. The textual analysis of the podcast revealed that Simmons's fans (including Taberski) felt like they knew Simmons on a deeply personal level despite their experiences with him being almost exclusively parasocial. The study revealed that after Simmons's abrupt decision to "disappear" or retreat from the public eye, his fans were left feeling grief and loss similar to that which is felt when a celebrity or real-life acquaintance passes away (Boling et al., 2019). Whilst this study was important in terms of using qualitative methodology to examine parasocial phenomena as advocated by Perks and Turner (2019) it did not investigate PSRs between podcast hosts and users because Richard Simmons was not a podcast host. Whilst providing important insight on PSRs and parasocial break-up via the examination of people's feelings expressed through a podcast, the PSRs examined were not formed as a result of podcast consumption.

One study that does provide empirical evidence about PSRs formed via podcasts was conducted by Pavelko and Myrick (2020) who analysed what drew listeners with a mental illness diagnosis to the *My Favorite Murder* (Kilgariff & Hardstark, 2016 – present) podcast. After distributing an online survey to 541 members of the podcast's Facebook group, the duo found that podcast users' PSRs and identification with hosts Georgia Hardstark and Karen Kilgariff (respectively), predicted how much users perceived themselves as benefiting from the podcast both

socially and mentally. Whilst this study was primarily concerned with a podcast, PSRs were not its main focus.

Conversely, another study conducted by Vickery and Ventrano (2020) was primarily concerned with PSRs between media hosts and users, without making podcasts the centre of their attention. In their study which investigated how listening style preferences relate to the development of PSRs with hosts of different types of media including podcasts, Vickery and Ventrano (2020) found that relational listening had the greatest impact on reported PSRs with media persona. A survey of 149 undergraduate students in the USA revealed that relational listening (the motivation to attend to speakers' feelings and emotions) drove the development of PSRs more than analytical listening (the motivation to focus on the full message of a speaker before forming a judgement about content or meaning), critical listening (the motivation to assess messages for consistency and accuracy) and task-oriented listening (the motivation to focus on the amount of time spent listening, with a desire for speakers to present focused messages) (Vickery & Ventrano, 2020). Therefore, this study showed that the motivation to focus on media hosts' qualities and experiences drives the development of PSRs more than any other motivation.

A Uses & Gratifications study by Perks and Turner (2019) included five focus groups comprised of people who more often than not listened to at least one podcast episode every week. The central assumption of this theoretical and methodological framework is that audience members are motivated to actively, freely and knowingly make their own media choices in order to meet their self-identified needs (Katz et al., 1973). Despite Perks and Turner's (2019) focus groups being limited in both size and diversity in terms of the respondents' race, ethnicity and level of education, the study identified 'feeling parasocial connections with podcast hosts' as an important

motivation for podcast use. According to Perks and Turner (2019), many of the focus group participants used language which signified PSRs whilst describing their relationships with podcast hosts. The participants considered their relationships with hosts to be like friendship and it was observed that PSRs were a driving force in their decisions about what to listen to (Perks & Turner, 2019). Their connections to hosts were even powerful enough to keep them listening to episodes where specific topics did not appeal to them (Perks & Turner, 2019). This also supports Vickery and Ventrano's (2020) findings which suggest that audience members often listen to media hosts for emotions, understanding and connection rather than specifically the content they are presenting. In addition to providing evidence of their PSRs, participants in Perks and Turner's (2019) study were able to provide explanations for why these relationships were formed. The themes that arose most frequently were similarities between hosts and themselves, the conversational nature of the podcasts, the frequency of contact (including opportunities for engagement with hosts via social media), and the hosts' willingness to share personal information (Perks & Turner, 2019).

In a study of their own, Schlütz and Hedder (2021) administered an exploratory online survey to 804 German podcast users. This study was specifically interested in examining which characteristics of podcast hosts promote PSRs and whether podcast hosts can have a persuasive effect on users they are in a PSR with (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Despite certain limitations such as a correlational design and the general restrictions of a non-probability sample, the results of the study show that in general podcasts tend to lend themselves to the construction of PSRs and that these relationships can foster persuasive effects (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Neither the gender or age of podcast users were identified as significantly influencing

the strength of PSRs, however, respondents who reported greater PSRs used podcasts more frequently and vice versa (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). According to the study, the more a podcast host demonstrated PSI behaviour (which included showing an interest in users and sharing details about his or her own life) and the more unpredictable, authentic and competent the host was perceived to be, the more extensive their PSR with podcast users (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). The study also revealed that PSRs with a podcast host had strong positive effects on user's attitudes and behaviours (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Once PSRs were established, the host could provide food for thought for podcast users, put certain topics on their agenda and influence their attitudes or future actions (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). This finding supported McGuire's (1985) theory that closeness can increase the power of persuasion.

Via six small-group interviews with a total of 18 participants, Soto-Vásquez et al. (2022) examined the use of podcasts amongst a sample of young, primarily Latina/o/x users, during the COVID-19 pandemic. The scholars found that as participants developed deeply personal connections with the shows and their content, hosts morphed into personal friends through one-sided, yet, beneficial PSRs. Most participants missed the ability to spend time with their interpersonal friends and podcast hosts stepped in, to fill this void. Participants imagined that they would get on well with the hosts in person, doing activities that interpersonal friends would do such as grabbing a bite to eat, getting a drink or going to karaoke (Soto-Vásquez et al., 2022).

Heiselberg and Have (2023) empirically identified and conceptualized what podcast users expect from hosts via 20 online focus groups with a total of 89 Danish participants and found that in addition to knowledge and storytelling, listeners

expected PSRs with hosts who have an attractive personality, are engaged and passionate, make self-disclosures, use every day language and have a mood that is constant.

Via the data collected from 321 podcast users in Taiwan that was analysed by using a structural equation model, Chen and Keng (2023) investigated why podcast users are willing to pay and keep subscriptions to digital podcast platforms. Their results found that PSRs had a direct and positive influence on podcast users' identification with hosts which in turn was positively associated with their willingness to keep subscriptions.

In their 2 × 2 experimental study of qualitative nature, which investigated the open-ended survey responses of 330 podcast users, Brinson and Lemon (2022) found that being in a PSR with hosts impacted whether or not users expressed trust in what they had to say, including their delivery of promotional messages for a sponsor's product or service. In conditions where PSRs were not present, host-read ads were found to be less credible and brand recall was diminished.

When taken together, these studies suggest that forming PSRs with podcast hosts is a motivation for podcast use (Perks & Turner, 2019) and that PSRs can have strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behaviours (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). Whilst they provide explanations for why PSRs are formed between podcast hosts and users (Perks & Turner, 2019) as well as outline what users expect from hosts they form PSRs with (Heiselberg & Have, 2023), the concept of authenticity remains on the periphery occasionally making, a more often than not, fleeting appearance.

Hence, the next section of the chapter is concerned with how the concept of authenticity appears in studies concerned with PSRs between podcast hosts and users.

3.12 Authenticity & Parasocial Relationships in Podcasts

In the research mentioned above relating to PSRs with podcasts hosts, references to the concept of authenticity were few and far between. In the study by Boling et al. (2019) the authors stated that Richard Simmons seemingly blurred the lines between his public and private persona, creating a celebrity construct (Van Den Bulck, 2017) which his followers viewed as authentic. The study provided no definition for authenticity and whilst it was hinted that it might relate to PSRs because his followers thought that they knew "the real" Richard Simmons as a result of the celebrity construct he created, no further elaboration was provided about how and why that might be. In any case, as mentioned in the previous section of the literature review, Richard Simmons was not a podcast host before his disappearance from the public eye.

The participants in Soto-Vásquez et al's (2022) study described authenticity as an important aspect of their interest in podcasts. Although once again the concept was not fully defined, the article stated that participants found hosts relatable and appreciated their openness especially when mental health issues were discussed during the height of the pandemic, which was a time when many felt deeply anxious. The fact that podcasts did not appear to be highly produced like movies and television also made hosts seem more relatable, even though some of the listeners were fully aware of the fact that authenticity can be staged. In spontaneous and unsolicited comments relating to advertising, host authenticity was also often

mentioned as being a direct path to purchasing products or further content promoted by the hosts.

In Heiselberg and Have's (2023) study, participants highlighted that it is important for podcast hosts to be generous with their personality and that they take comfort in those who provide self-disclosure by showing vulnerability, authenticity, and humour. Whilst it was not clear exactly what was meant by authenticity, this information was presented under PSRs which was one of the categories of expectations users had of podcasts hosts.

Brinson and Lemon (2022) examined whether podcast users in a PSR associated any or all of Nunes et al.'s (2021) six components of authenticity (accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency) to brands advertised by their preferred host and found that all six judgments influenced their perceptions of the brand's authenticity when a PSR was present.

Finally, as mentioned in passing in the previous section of the chapter, Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study found that the more authentic podcast users perceived hosts to be, the more extensive were their PSRs. To evaluate hosts' attractiveness the study used Baeßler's (2009) 25 items scale that contained aspects of social, behavioural and physical attractiveness. An exploratory factor analysis was performed which showed that the scale could be split into six factors including authenticity (which in turn included being affable, credible, open, down-to-earth and sensitive). According to the scholars the authentic DIY-character of the medium fosters parasociality. This characteristic was described as emerging because of podcasting's background including its emergence from grassroots movements within the open access community, its thriving in a democratic environment devoid of gatekeeping institutions restricting access, as well as its flexible, democratic,

hierarchically flat, and institutionally independent production processes of do-it - yourself media. According to the duo, despite the recent professionalization of the podcasting landscape, authenticity is still a defining characteristic of the medium.

When taken together, these studies suggest that authenticity is an important part of interest towards podcasts (Soto-Vásquez et al., 2022). Users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic (Heiselberg & Have, 2023) and the more authentic hosts are perceived to be the more extensive these PSRs (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). However, these studies do not shed light on why podcast hosts are perceived to be authentic. The six characteristics of authenticity used in Brinson and Lemon's (2022) study are related to brands rather than podcast hosts and in Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study it is not clear why the decision was made to label certain factors of Baeßler's (2009) scale as authenticity. Most of the studies are also imprecise about what is meant by authenticity, although it is clear that it is not synonymous with realism like it was in the studies described in section 3.10.

3.13 Summary

In summary, this chapter focused on the background, definitions and understanding of concepts relating to parasocial theory. Among other things, it demonstrated how research has found positive connections between parasocial phenomena and the influence of media users, their consumer behaviour and their perceptions of media figures' authenticity (albeit when understood as perceived realism). The chapter then zoomed in onto work specifically concerned with PSRs and podcasts, whilst also focusing on hosts' perceived authenticity (which in this context was not synonymous with perceived realism). The chapter also highlighted some insight produced from these studies including the fact that PSRs with hosts

who are perceived to be authentic can be a motivation for podcast use, and that these relationships can have strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behaviours. In light of previous research outlined in this and the previous chapter, the next chapter concludes the theoretical part of the thesis by presenting its framework which includes a number of different concepts and models that are used in its three studies.

Chapter 4 – Theoretical Framework

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a theoretical framework for the thesis. As indicated by Kivunja (2018) a theoretical framework is a structure that summarizes concepts and theories, which a researcher develops from previously tested and published knowledge, in order to create a synthesis that helps their research have a theoretical background, or basis for data analysis and the interpretation of data. The theoretical framework chapter of this thesis is divided into 6 separate sections. The first section following the introduction (4.2) focuses on PSRs. This is followed by sections that respectively focus on mediated authenticity (4.3), parasocial opinion leadership (4.4) and individual-level media effects (4.5). The chapter is then drawn to a close, with a final section (4.6) that provides a conclusion to the theoretical chapters of this thesis.

4.2 Parasocial Relationships

As highlighted by Brewer (2011), the role of media psychology is to monitor the positive and negative impacts of the media we consume on both individuals, and society as a whole. The freedom of the podcasting medium discussed in Chapter 2 makes monitoring the positive and negative impacts of podcasting even more pressing. It is for this reason that the thesis is primarily concerned with gaining a better understanding about the relationship between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and users. PSRs is the core theory used in this thesis when investigating this relationship. As emphasized in Chapter 3, PSRs is a theoretical concept which has been used to talk about relationships between different kinds of media figures and

media users, since its conception in 1956. Whilst, the majority of the studies utilizing this concept focus on film and television (Liebers & Schramm, 2019), only a few have focused on podcasting. Hence, placing this concept at the core of this research was important, in order to allow podcast studies to benefit from the insight it has produced (and continues to produce) in other media. Unlike some of the previous research carried out using parasocial theory, this thesis follows the recommendations of scholars such as Schramm and Hartmann (2008), Dibble et al. (2016) and Giles (2002) to clearly distinguish between the concepts of PSI and PSRs. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, PSRs are defined as long-term, one-sided relationships between podcast hosts and users. Based on the findings of Tukachinsky et al.'s (2020) meta-analysis, PSRs are not seen as a compensatory mechanism (Tsao, 1996) but rather as an extension of one's social circle (Hartmann, 2016) in line with the Panksepp–Jakobson hypothesis.

4.3 Mediated Authenticity

As discussed in section 3.10, previous research that focused on the relationship between the perceived authenticity of media figures and parasocial phenomena, took authenticity as being synonymous with realism. However, this thesis uses Enli's (2014) theory of mediated authenticity which sees the concept quite differently. It is not concerned with how realistic media characters or representations are perceived to be. Instead it is concerned with how real or genuine podcast hosts are perceived to be, because this is something that is important for podcast users and hence for podcast hosts and producers also (Soto-Vásquez et al., 2022; Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

According to Enli (2014) the authenticity of media figures can be seen as paradoxical, because by definition media texts are constructed, manipulated or outright faked versions of reality. However, that does not change the fact that mediated authenticity is a social construct that can be achieved through an interplay between on the one hand, audience expectations and preconceptions about what determines a sense of the real, and on the other, media producers' success in delivering content that corresponds to these notions (Enli, 2014). Mediated authenticity is a social construct because it is an agreement reached through social processes (Vos, 2015). It is not an absolute or intrinsic characteristic of a text or exchange (Gilpin et al., 2010).

Based on the theoretical discussion and case studies in her book *Mediated Authenticity: How the Media Constructs Reality*, Enli (2014) outlines certain markers that can contribute to the assessment of a media figure or text being authentic. In this context, markers of authenticity refer to characteristics or indicators which suggest that a media figure or text is authentic. Whilst acknowledging that her list is by no means exhaustive, the seven markers mentioned by Enli (2014) are as follows:

1. Predictability
2. Spontaneity
3. Immediacy
4. Confessions
5. Ordinariness
6. Ambivalence
7. Imperfection

(1) Predictability refers to how mediated authenticity is crafted via a consistent use of genre features and conventions for mediated communication and the trustworthiness of mediated content is often evaluated on the basis of previous experiences with the media. (2) Media figures who seem improvised and spontaneous come across as more personal, engaged and emotionally driven. Therefore, they seem more authentic than calculated and strategic. (3) Immediacy is closely related to liveness and imparts a sense of togetherness where the media figure and user are connected in a shared now where they construct meaning as well as authenticity. (4) When media figures make confessions and disclose personal secrets or details about themselves they seem more relatable and authentic. (5) The more mundane or ordinary a media figure appears to be, the more authentic and representative of "the people" he or she seems. Ordinariness is seen as authentic because it contradicts the glamorously mediated. (6) Ambivalent media figures who are hesitant to reveal "the truth" seem more authentic than unambiguous and confident performers who claim to be authentic in mediated communication. (7) Finally, a media text lacking even a minor flaw or mistake can be seen as too perfect and hence inauthentic (Enli, 2014).

Because of the concept's intangible and unmeasurable nature (Spinelli & Dann, 2019) whether a media figure is authentic ultimately depends on the subjective evaluation of each user (Gilpin et al., 2010).The fact that a podcast user identifies a marker of authenticity in a host does not mean that they will necessarily arrive at the conclusion that they are authentic. This is the case because assessing the authenticity of a media figure often involves a combination of these markers and users may prioritize certain factors based on their own values and perspectives. As the authenticity of a media figure is subjective, this thesis is not concerned with

establishing whether or not podcast hosts are authentic. Instead, it is concerned with exploring which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts and how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs. Both of these issues are addressed in Chapter 7. For the purpose of this thesis, authenticity is taken as being connected with and expressive of the core of one's personality (Ferrara, 2002) or the opposition to whatever is fake, unreal or false (Enli, 2014). Mediated authenticity is not seen as paradoxical (Enli, 2014), unless that is the position of podcast users.

4.4 Parasocial Opinion Leadership

Because this thesis is also concerned with how podcast hosts can influence their users, and how PSRs play a part in this influence, Stehr et al.'s (2015) model of parasocial opinion leadership is also a part of its theoretical framework. According to this model, media figures can ascribe certain attributes to media figures based on their PSRs with them, which in turn can lead to different kinds of influence, as a result of them becoming parasocial opinion leaders (Schafer & Taddicken, 2015).

The concept of opinion leadership first appeared as part of the two-step flow of communication theory. In their book titled *People's Choice*, Lazarsfeld et al. (1948) focused on voter decision making processes during a U.S presidential election campaign and suggested that ideas often flow from the media to opinion leaders and from these opinion leaders to less active sections of the population. The book *Personal Influence* later published by Lazarsfeld and Katz (1955) further developed the two-step flow of communication theory. According to this theory, the information which moves from the media to opinion leaders (who pay close attention to the media) is then passed on to members of the opinion leader's social group (family, friends,

professional and religious associates) with the added interpretations of the opinion leader. These interpretations are in turn viewed as influencing decision making-processes.

“The apparent difference between interpersonal opinion leadership...and parasocial opinion leadership is that with the former, the influence on another individual is based on an immediate personal relationship between two communication partners.” (Stehr et al., 2015, p. 986). In parasocial opinion leadership there is no immediate personal relationship. A media figure cannot be described as a parasocial opinion leader every time that a PSR is formed between themselves and an audience member, however, the establishment of a PSR is one of the prerequisites of parasocial opinion leadership (Stehr et al., 2015). According to this model, media users can turn towards media figures that they consider to be competent and have built up trust in the course of a PSR and become influenced by them in a number of different ways (Stehr et al., 2015).

In order to examine how podcast users can be influenced by stand-up comedian hosts, this thesis uses Potter’s (2012) classification of ways in which media users can be affected by the media they consume. Hence, this classification is explained in greater detail in the following section of the chapter.

4.5 Individual – Level Media Effects

According to Potter (2012) there are six categories of individual-level media effects:

1. Cognitive Effects
2. Belief Effects
3. Attitudinal Effects

4. Affective Effects
5. Physiological Effects
6. Behavioural Effects

(1) A cognitive effect is when a media figure exercises an influence on an individual's mental processes or the product of those mental processes. An example of this could be the acquisition of factual information from the news. (2) A belief effect is when a media figure exercises an influence on an individual's perception that an object or event is associated with a given attribute, and hence is real or true. An example of this could be a belief that someone mentioned by a podcast host exists, despite never actually meeting him. (3) An attitudinal effect is when a media figure exercises an influence on an individual's evaluative judgments by providing them with elements to evaluate, or by shaping standards of evaluation. An example of this could be making judgments about a TV character's attractiveness, hero status, likeability etc… (4) An affective effect is when a media figure exercises an influence on an individual's feelings such as emotions or mood. An example of this could be becoming calm when listening to a certain musical artist (5). A physiological effect is when a media figure exercises an influence on an individual's automatic bodily responses to stimuli. An example of this could be an increase in blood pressure when watching an action movie. (6) Finally, a behavioural effect is when a media exposure exercises an influence on an individual's actions (Potter, 2012). An example of this could be purchasing a product which was recommended by an influencer.

Numerous other studies have also examined one or more of Potter's (2012) six categories of individual-level media effects. For example, Hill and Nelson's (2011)

study which found that video podcasts were effective in supporting learning and teaching about exotic ecosystems was concerned with cognitive effects. Allington et al.'s (2021) study which found a positive relationship between COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs and use of social media as a source of information, was concerned with belief effects. Russell and Stern's (2006) study which found that consumers align their attitudes toward products that appear in sitcoms, with the attitudes of the characters that they have a positive attachment to, was concerned with attitudinal effects. O'Dea and Campbell's (2011) study which found a negative correlation between the time adolescents spend on social networks and their mental distress, was concerned with affective effects. Carnagey et al.'s (2007) study which found that people showed less physiological arousal to violence in the real world after exposure to video game violence, was concerned with physiological effects (such as heart rate and galvanic skin response), and Collins et al.'s study (2004) which found that watching sex on television predicts adolescent initiation of sexual behaviour, was concerned with behavioural effects.

This thesis is particularly interested in the individual-level media effects felt by podcast users in order to examine how they are influenced by stand-up comedian hosts.

4.6 Conclusion of Theoretical Chapters

Chapter 2, which was the first of the three theoretical chapters started by defining podcasts for the purpose of this thesis, before providing a historical background and touching upon issues such as the medium's development, its comparisons to radio, the freedom it provides and stand-up comedian podcast hosts. Examining stand-up comedian hosts was seen as important because of their

involvement in a profession that can provide valuable insight into society and culture (Mintz, 1985), as well as because of the large number of people that they reach via podcasts (Ryan, 2017), and the large number of podcasts that they host (Marx, 2015).

The second theoretical chapter (i.e. Chapter 3) started by focusing on parasocial phenomena in media excluding podcasts. Amongst other things it outlined previous research which revealed that media users' can be influenced by PSI and PSRs with different media figures. This was viewed as being indicative that there is value in examining whether stand-up comedian podcast hosts influence their users. The last two sections of this chapter were specifically concerned with research that brought together parasocial theory and podcasting. Unfortunately, such research is limited and empirical evidence scarce. Whilst an exploratory study by Schlütz and Hedder (2021) found that PSRs are linked to percieved influence, the authors state that due to the exploratory nature of their study, these results are merely tentative. Therefore, this thesis will investigate whether these results are supported or contradicted by the experiences of the author, as well as the information provided by other stand-up comedian hosted podcast users.

This thesis will also investigate some things outside the scope of Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study. Whilst the duo suggest that relationships with podcast hosts could be used to sell advertising and to add to a show's revenue, they did not empirically examine the link between PSRs and consumer behaviour. This thesis will examine this link, as well as the connection between the perceived authenticity of a host and the consumer behaviour of podcast users. In terms of consumer behavior, Brinson and Lemon (2022) found that being in a PSR with hosts impacted whether or not users expressed trust in what they had to say, including promotional messages

for a sponsor's product or service. This thesis also examines other kinds of consumer behaviour including but not limited to purchasing products and recommending them to others.

The second theoretical chapter also looked at how authenticity appears in studies that examine PSRs in podcasts. Because authenticity remains on the periphery of these studies only occasionally making a quick appearance, this thesis uses Enli's (2014) theory of Mediated Authenticity to establish which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts and how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs. Hence, Enli's (2014) theory of mediated authenticity was covered in the final theoretical chapter (i.e. Chapter 4), which outlined the theoretical framework of the study. According to this framework, after forming PSRs with their users (Horton & Wohl, 1956), podcast hosts can become parasocial opinion leaders (Stehr et al., 2015) who influence their users via different individual-level media effects (Potter, 2012).

As indicated by Chan-Olmsted and Wang (2020), developing a greater understanding about how podcast users interact with podcast hosts will help further our comprehension of podcast audiences as well as the conceptual tradition of PSRs. Therefore, this thesis is comprised of three studies that aim to increase this understanding, which are outlined in the following chapter.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.1 Introduction

The methodology chapter of this thesis is divided into 9 sections including the introduction and conclusion. The first section following the introduction (5.2) outlines how the thesis is situated within an interpretivist paradigm, informed by a social constructivist epistemology. The following section (5.3) describes how it is comprised of qualitative and quantitative studies, as well as, how they are combined to carry out mixed methods research. The next three sections elaborate on the methods of autoethnography (5.4), semi-structured interviews (5.5) and web-based surveys (5.6) which were used in this thesis. The seventh section (5.7) touches upon the purpose of each study, as well as their research questions and hypotheses. The penultimate section (5.8) outlines the practices that were used to enhance the quality of the research. The final section (5.9) wraps up the methodology with a brief summary of what was presented in the chapter.

5.2 Research Paradigm

According to McChesney & Aldridge (2019) the term paradigm was originated by Kuhn (1970) who described it as an epistemological stance that determines the types of questions that are asked and understood. Most commonly however, it has been used to describe “a worldview, together with the various philosophical assumptions associated with that point of view’” (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p. 84). This thesis also uses this description of the term. According to this description, researchers’ worldviews or paradigms determine the kind of questions that they ask,

how these questions are understood, what data is collected and how research results are interpreted to derive answers to these questions (Bergman, 2010).

There are a number of widely recognized paradigms in social research (Shannon-Baker, 2016) and whether consciously or otherwise, all research is situated within one or more of the paradigms that articulate underlying assumptions about knowledge, truth and reality (Kuhn, 1970; Willis, 2007). By explicitly acknowledging the paradigm (or paradigms) in which their work is situated, researchers enhance the validity of their work by allowing its assumptions, decisions, methods and conclusions to be examined and critiqued (Maxwell, 2013). Therefore, this section of the chapter identifies the research paradigm that underpins the thesis, whilst summarizing how key features of the paradigm were reflected in its studies.

Citing the philosophical differences between quantitative and qualitative research, some scholars (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011; Greene & Caracelli, 1997; Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) have chosen to take what McChesney & Aldridge (2019) describe as a binary stance to the relationship between research methods and paradigms. According to these scholars, quantitative and qualitative methods are each situated within particular paradigms; with the former “belonging” to objectivist, positivist or post-positivist paradigms and the latter “belonging” to subjectivist, constructivist, interpretivist or other associated paradigms (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

However, this is not the stance of the author who takes his place amongst other scholars who argue that although research procedures and methods have been typically linked to certain paradigms, this linkage is neither sacrosanct nor necessary (Bergman, 2010; Crotty, 1998; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Whilst, scholars who subscribe to this idea can take a number of varying stances, the stance

the author takes in this thesis is a holistic or single-paradigm approach. According to this approach, both qualitative and quantitative methods can be accommodated within a mixed methods study using a single overarching paradigm (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019), which in the case of this thesis is interpretivism.

According to an interpretivist worldview, external reality does exist however it cannot be objectively captured through scientific research (Willis, 2007). Therefore, the goal of interpretivist research is to "understand the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it" (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221). Because interpretivist research is socially constructed, the reality it tells us about is also socially constructed (Willis, 2007). For this reason, the knowledge that is gained from interpretivist research is integrally linked to its participants and the context of the research, which means that it cannot produce universally applicable theories or laws but, rather, rich and contextually situated understandings (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

The interpretivist paradigm of this thesis meant that the author focused on understanding podcast users' experiences regarding their relationships with stand-up comedian hosts, whilst recognizing that both qualitative and quantitative data were subjective constructions of reality. In particular working with the interpretivist paradigm meant that:

- The verbs chosen for the research objectives (to investigate, examine and explore) all offered space for both quantitative and qualitative data, as well as, the exploration of podcast users' experiences and perceptions (Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007). Verbs such as to measure and evaluate were deliberately avoided, as they may be interpreted as having more post-positivist and deterministic connotations (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

- As podcast users' experiences and perceptions formed the focus of the thesis, all data was collected from podcast users. Their views were not verified or evaluated with data from other stakeholders or sources (such as podcast hosts, industry executives etc…) and were accepted as reflecting their constructions of reality rather than absolute truth (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019).

- The research objectives were intended to acknowledge that podcast users were likely to have different experiences and perceptions regarding their relationships with podcast hosts. As such, the objectives were consistent with the constructivist ontology and epistemology associated with interpretivist research (Willis 2007).

- Research did not begin with a pre-determined hypothesis and maintained a stance of openness. The qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted separately in an attempt to allow the author to 'listen' to each data set (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). The indications of these analyses were then brought together to allow holistic conclusions to be drawn in relation to the aim of the thesis (Bryman, 2012).

- Quality considerations appropriate for interpretivist research were used, (and are described further in section 5.8).

- In line with interpretivist principle, understanding the experiences of podcast users was the fundamental aim of the research, rather than explaining, generalizing or critiquing them (Willis, 2007).

5.3 Methods

Methods refer to the collection of specific techniques used to study select cases, by measuring and observing social life as well as gathering, refining and analysing data. (Neuman, 2014). The two broad research methods in social and scientific research are qualitative and quantitative research. In quantitative research, phenomena are

investigated using numerical data which is analysed via mathematical methods (Yilmaz, 2013). In qualitative research non-numerical data such as words and pictures are used to convey what the researcher has learnt about a phenomena in a

richly descriptive manner (Neuman, 2014). Quantitative studies generally look at a large group of people and measure a limited amount of features whilst qualitative studies focus only on one or a few cases (Neuman, 2014). Quantitative studies follow a linear path with a fixed sequence of steps whilst qualitative studies can follow a more non-linear path where movement can be backwards and sideways as well as forward (Neuman, 2014).This thesis is comprised of mixed method research as it integrates qualitative and quantitative studies within a single project (Bryman, 2012).

For this thesis qualitative data was collected via an autoethnography and semi-structured interviews, whilst quantitative data was collected from a web-based survey. The purpose of combining these methods was to obtain a better understanding of the complex research phenomena than could be derived by using just one of the methods alone (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). In other words, using the methods to complement each other allowed for a more complete picture to be obtained (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009) regarding the perceived authenticity, PSRs and perceived influence of stand-up comedian podcast hosts.

The data collected from the autoethnography and semi-structured interviews allowed for a more in-depth investigation than that allowed by the analysis of simply quantitative data, whilst the web-based survey allowed the author to examine the experiences of a large group of podcast users from all over the world, which could not be done in the qualitative studies as they focused on only a few different cases, but all be it, in greater depth (Neuman, 2014).

At the end of the research, the insights produced from both the qualitative and quantitative studies of the thesis were used to fulfil its aim of investigating the perceived authenticity, PSRs and perceived influence of stand-up comedian podcast

hosts, allowing for the strengths of each strategy, to be combined in a complementary manner, with the strengths of the other (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2009).

In their inventory of the last 60 years of research on parasocial phenomena, Liebers and Schramm (2019) found that the majority of publications investigating parasocial phenomena utilized a purely quantitative approach. Whilst conspicuously fewer utilized a purely qualitative approach (13.7%) only a small fraction (5.0%) of the total studies combined quantitative and qualitative research. The authors state that this is logical considering that this research took place primarily in the area of communication studies where quantitative empirical research dominates (Liebers & Schramm, 2019). This being said there have been a number of scholars who have taken a qualitative approach to get more in-depth answers regarding PSI and PSRs. For example, Sanderson (2009) explored relational maintenance within the context of PSRs by carrying out a thematic analysis of audience blog posts on the website of the pop group New Kids on The Block, after their reformation in 2008, at the end of a 14 year hiatus. Pitout (1998) held focus group interviews to investigate the parasocial and social aspects of soap opera viewing, and other qualitative research has studied the affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of PSI (Papa et al., 2000; Sood & Rogers, 2000). In addition to those mentioned above, a number of studies have developed different measures starting with qualitative data in order to enhance the probability that their scales accurately reflect the dimensions of parasocial processes (Auter & Palmgreen, 2000; Levy, 1979; Tukachinsky, 2010). Qualitative studies such as these have allowed us to uncover the rich details and nuances of parasocial phenomena (Brinson & Lemon, 2022) and a number of

scholars have called for further qualitative interrogation (Perks & Turner, 2019) in order to understand other complexities of parasocial phenomena (Giles, 2002).

However, by highlighting the value of qualitative research in parasocial phenomena, the author does not wish to downplay the contributions of quantitative research which has also provided us with a great deal of valuable insight. The development of tools to examine parasocial experiences has been one of the major milestones in the expansion of the research field since its conception (Tukachinsky Forster, 2023b). By using scales such as Rubin et al.'s (1985) PSI Scale, Auter and Palmgreen's (2000) Audience-Persona Interaction Scale and Schramm and Hartmann's (2008) PSI- Process Scales, numerous scholars have been able to test different models, as well as, examine relationships between parasocial phenomena and other variables (such as influence, authenticity and consumer behaviour which have been covered in Chapter 3 of this thesis).

In light of the fact that only a small fraction of the total research on parasocial phenomena utilizes a mixed method approach, this thesis is valuable as it hopes to contribute to the field by increasing the amount of this kind of research (which has distinct advantages that were touched upon earlier in this section).

5.4 Autoethnography

The first study of this thesis takes the form of an autoethnography. As a qualitative method, autoethnography is "both process and product" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). It seeks to describe and systematically analyse (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand larger cultural phenomena (ethno) (Ellis et al., 2011).

The decision to carry out autoethnographic research stemmed from wanting to examine my own personal experiences as well as the larger cultural phenomenon (Adams et al., 2015) of being a regular podcast user, in order to contribute to existing theory and research (Dhoest, 2014). Behind this study lies the assumption that stories are important for us because human beings are fundamentally story telling creatures and are, in fact, the only storytellers we know (Fisher, 1985). However, as suggested by Dhoest (2014) the observations and life stories revealed in this text, are not presented in isolation but are connected to theory and research.

As highlighted by Ellis et al. (2011) there are different forms of autoethnographies. Indigenous/native ethnographies develop from colonized or economically subordinated people, and are used to address and disrupt power in research (Ellis et al., 2011). Narrative ethnographies are presented in the form of stories that incorporate researchers' experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others (Ellis et al., 2011). Reflexive, dyadic interviews focus on interactively produced meanings and the emotional dynamics of interviews (Ellis et al., 2011). Reflexive ethnographies document ways in which researchers change as a result of doing fieldwork (Ellis et al., 2011). Layered accounts weave the various voices and perspectives of researchers into a text with multiple layers, in order to examine how these layers connect (Ellis et al., 2011). Interactive interviews are collaborative endeavours between researchers and participants, who are positioned as one and the same, and in conversation probe into issues that transpire about particular topics (Ellis et al., 2011). Community autoethnographies use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular sociocultural issues (Ellis et al., 2011). Co-constructed narratives illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope

with the ambiguities, uncertainties and contradictions of being friends, family members, partners etc…(Ellis et al., 2011)

This autoethnography takes the form of a personal narrative. Authors of personal narratives see themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative accounts of stories from their own academic and/or personal lives (Ellis et al., 2011). By using this type of autoethnography, the author hopes to understand a particular aspect of his life as it intersects with a broader cultural context (Ellis et al., 2011). This type of autoethnography also acts as an invitation for readers to enter the world of the researcher and to use what is relayed to reflect on, understand and cope with issues they may experience in their own lives (Ellis, 2004).

The inclusion of autoethnography in the thesis follows Dhoest's (2014) recommendation of using it to complement and inform more classical methods of audience research, to better understand the complexity and contextual nature of media use and to ascertain possible areas of further research. Autoethnography is well suited for the purpose of examining everyday practices relating to media (such as regular podcast consumption) which have a tendency to become invisible due to their repetitive and mundane nature (Uotinen, 2012).

However, whilst autoethnography is on the rise as it is being utilized in more and more academic articles, regularly becoming the topic of new books and featuring in annual conferences (Dunn & Myers, 2020) the method still occupies a peripheral position in the field of media and communications (Adams, 2012) and is almost non-existent in research on podcasts. In some of the few studies that utilized the method, Lowe et al., (2021) used a collaborative autoethnography to explore their experiences of using a podcasting project to engage with research, Lambert et al. (2022) challenged a particular kind of hegemonic reproduction of physical education

they heard on a podcast and Moore et al. (2023) focused on their development of a podcast with the aim of mobilizing clinical supervision knowledge. Whilst these articles were in the fields of clinical supervision, physical education and educational action research, the autoethnography in this thesis is more concerned with relationships between comedy podcast hosts and users. By utilizing autoethnography, the thesis hopes to capitalize on the possibilities that it provides in order to help expand the boundaries of podcast studies and contribute to the formation of a body of research that approaches the relatively new medium from many different angles.

5.5 Semi-Structured Interviews

The second study of this thesis used in-depth, semi-structured interviews. At the root of interviewing lies an interest in understanding the lived experiences of others (Seidman, 2006). The author acknowledges that in addition to his own stories presented in the autoethnography, the stories of other people are also important (Seidman, 2006). That is why the decision was made to also include interviews with other stand-up comedian hosted podcast users. This decision was made to enable the researcher to explore the respondents' complex social worlds by eliciting vivid pictures of their perspectives, opinions, feelings and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) relating to their PSRs with podcast hosts.

Despite considering the use of focus groups where participants would be interviewed in a group setting (Neuman, 2014), one to one interviews were eventually preferred. This was the case because although focus groups can produce more 'surface' data than individual interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995), individual interviews can produce more detail than focus groups, therefore offering greater

insight into each respondent's personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Morgan, 1998). In addition, because listening to episodes via headphones is the predominant method of consuming podcasts (Berry, 2016b; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Zuraikat, 2020), users are often in a privatized and personalized bubble, sonically insulated from their surroundings (Berry, 2016a; Bull, 2007; Florini, 2015). Therefore, one to one interviews seemed more appropriate because their solitary nature matched the predominant experience of podcast consumption.

5.6 Web-Based Survey

The third and final study of this thesis took the form of a web-based survey. Surveys are the most widely used technique for gathering data in social sciences (Neuman, 2014) and they produce information that is inherently statistical in nature (Groves, 1996). Questionnaire surveys allow researchers to ask many people numerous questions in a short period of time before summarizing the answers into percentages, tables or graphs in order to paint a picture about what they report doing (Neuman, 2014). They are appropriate for asking questions to people about their past or present behaviour, beliefs, opinions or characteristics and they allow researchers to measure different variables in order to test hypotheses (Neuman, 2014).

As indicated by Evans and Mathur (2005) there are certain advantages of carrying out web-based surveys which played a role in the decision to utilize them in this thesis. One advantage is their global reach. Carrying out a web-based survey allowed the study to include podcast users from all over the world as the internet provides access to groups and individuals that would otherwise be difficult or impossible to reach (Wright, 2005). Another advantage of web-based surveys is their

speed and timeliness. By using online questionnaires the author could minimize the time required for data collection (Evans & Mathur, 2005). Whilst making the decision to use online questionnaires for data collection the respondents' convenience was also taken into consideration. Online questionnaires were viewed as being more convenient for respondents because they could be completed at any time that was best for them and each individual question could be answered at any pace that they desired (Evans & Mathur, 2005).

5.7 Purpose of Studies

The purpose of the autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and web-based survey can be seen in the table below:

Table 1: Purpose of Studies

Study	Purpose
Autoethnography	Providing a highly personalized account of the researcher's experiences as a podcast user in order to examine the complexities of relationships between stand-up comedian hosts and users.
Semi – Structured Interviews	Endeavouring to answer the following research questions: • Which markers of authenticity do podcast users associate with their favourite hosts?

	• How can these markers of authenticity relate to different aspects of PSRs? • In what ways can podcast users perceive that they are being influenced by hosts?
Web- Based Survey	Endeavouring to answer the following research question and test the following hypotheses: • Do PSRs exist between podcast users and their favourite stand-up comedian hosts? (RQ1) • There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence (H1) • There will be a positive association between PSRs and consumer behavior (H2) • There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived authenticity (H3) • There will be a positive association between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior. (H4)

The researcher wanted to start this thesis by providing a highly personalized account of his experiences as a podcast user in order to examine the complexities of relationships between stand-up comedian hosts and users. Using autoethnography allowed him to cultivate an “epistemology of insiderness” and describe experiences in a way that ‘outside’ researchers could not (Adams et al., 2015). Autoethnography is a valuable method because it can provide insight into social experiences that we

cannot observe directly because they occur in their own time, uninterrupted by the presence of researchers (Adams et al., 2015). Relationships between podcast hosts and users can be long-term, deep-rooted and complex, making them difficult (if not impossible) to recreate in experiments or laboratories. However, autoethnography can allow for their nuance, complexity, emotion and meaning to be captured and described more accurately by individuals who actually live(d) through them (Adams et al., 2015).Therefore, the author thought that this was a good place from which to start his research.

After the autoethnography, the author identified that he wanted to explore the following questions:

- Which markers of authenticity do podcast users associate with their favourite hosts?
- How can these markers of authenticity relate to different aspects of PSRs?
- In what ways can podcast users perceive that they are being influenced by hosts?

Qualitative research is ideal for exploring phenomena before the field has the opportunity to develop strong theories (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2007). Currently, studies on podcasting fail to explain why hosts are perceived to be authentic and how this perception relates to PSRs. Hence qualitative interviews can allow the researcher to capture a broad range of information about this phenomenon (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2007). Qualitative research is also useful when a researcher wants to consider new perspectives on an issue by stepping beyond theoretical perspectives that are currently in place (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2007). Whilst Enli's (2014) theory of Mediated Authenticity outlines certainmarkers of media

figures' authenticity , she highlights that this list is not exhaustive. Hence, in addition to seeing if these markers are mentioned by the interview participants talking about their favourite stand-up comedian podcast hosts, the qualitative nature of the semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to potentially step-beyond current theoretical insights by identifying other markers of mediated authenticity. In terms of influence, there is limited research which demonstrates that PSRs can influence podcast users. Whilst Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study is the only one to examine this influence, it only focused on attitudinal and behavioural effects. By conducting semi-structured interviews the author hopes to move beyond this insight and identify other kinds of media effects that podcast users might be witnessing.

Following the semi-structured interviews, the author wanted to answer the following research question and test the following hypotheses:

- Do PSRs exist between podcast users and their favourite stand-up comedian hosts? (RQ1)
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence (H1).
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and consumer behavior (H2).
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived authenticity. (H3).
- There will be a positive association between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior (H4).

Quantitative research is ideal for providing support (or contradicting) existing theories and ideas (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2007). This is why the author chose to conduct a web-based survey to test the idea that podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs (Macdougall, 2011; Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020). The

quantitative nature of web-based surveys also allowed the researcher to determine whether there are positive associations between pre-determined variables (DeCoster & Lichtenstein, 2007) such as PSRs, perceived influence, consumer behaviour and perceived authenticity. Using qualitative methods would not allow the researcher to search for such associations

5.8 Quality Considerations

According to McChesney & Aldridge (2019) although various quality criteria for mixed methods research do exist, they mostly reflect a post-positivist worldview (Howe, 2012; Torrance, 2012). Therefore, similar to the work of McChesney (2017) this thesis draws upon practical recommendations in the form of specific research practices that Creswell and Miller (2000) and Willis (2007) argue can be used to enhance the quality of interpretivist and social constructivist research. These practices include member checks, extended researcher experience in the research environment, peer review, audit trails, disconfirming evidence and the provision of thick descriptions (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). In the autoethnography chapter, member checks were carried out informally by speaking with family members and friends about incidents described in the narrative account or by reading them the narrative account, in order to ascertain whether they thought it provided an accurate depiction of the events it was portraying (Given, 2008). With the semi-structured interviews, member checks were carried out more formally by sending the analysis produced to participants in order to give them the opportunity to reflect, offer additional insight and generate further data on the topic at hand (Braun & Clarke, 2023). The author had extended experience in the research environment, as a result of being part of the world of podcasting, as an avid fan since 2014 and an

independent podcaster and PhD researcher since 2020. Peer review throughout the research process took a number of different forms, including regular meetings with research supervisors, feedback from other academics within the university at the Interim Assessment and Internal Evaluation, as well as, feedback from researchers outside the university via presentations delivered at conferences organized by universities in three different countries (England, Scotland and Turkey). In terms of audit trails, documentation such as e-mails, analysis spreadsheets and thesis drafts were regularly saved and backed up, with new versions being created each time a document was modified in order to ensure past versions remained available for review (McChesney, 2017). In addition, raw data including questionnaires, data spreadsheets, interview recordings and transcripts were retained and stored (Willis, 2007) in accordance with the University of Salford's Data Management Policy. Analysis (particularly of the qualitative data produced from the semi-structured interviews) included a deliberate search for disconfirming evidence (Creswell & Miller, 2000) for which examples were provided in the presentation of results. This is linked to the concept of authenticity proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989) which, in accordance with constructivist tradition, argues researchers should fairly and faithfully show a range of different realities. Finally, thick descriptions were used in both of the qualitative chapters. Clear justifications were provided for specific methods and how they enabled the collection of rich data (Younas et al., 2023) and in-depth explanations were provided regarding how this data was analysed. In the autoethnography chapter, thick descriptions were used to offer rich detail about the author's experiences in order to conjure vivid images, deep meanings and intense emotions so that connections could be built between his lifeworld and that of the readers (Poulos, 2021). When presenting the analysis of the semi-structured

interviews, details about the participants of the study were presented (age, gender, favourite podcast and host), along with their illustrative and representative (Cristancho et al., 2021) words, phrases and quotes (Younas et al., 2023). The thick descriptions of the author also distinguished between what participants said and how the researcher interpreted their statements, whilst clearly outlining how these interpretations were made (Younas et al., 2023).

5.9 Summary

This chapter commenced by describing how the author did not take a binary stance towards the relationship between research methods and paradigms, by utilizing a holistic or single-paradigm approach to accommodate mixed methods under a single overarching paradigm. This interpretivist paradigm, informed by a social constructivist epistemology was then explained in further detail, along with its key features that were reflected in the studies. The chapter also touched upon the author's decision to carry out mixed methods research by combining qualitative and quantitative studies. Previous research on parasocial phenomena shows that mixed methods studies are few and far between. Hence, it was argued that combining qualitative and quantitative studies can provide a better understanding of the complex phenomenon than either could alone.

The next three sections of the chapter elaborated on the methods of autoethnography, semi-structured interviews and web-based surveys, before outlining the research questions and hypotheses of each study. The chapter was then concluded by touching upon the practical recommendations that were followed in order to enhance the quality of the interpretivist and social constructivist research.

The next three chapters of the thesis apply the chosen methodology to analyse the data in light of the aims and objectives of the thesis (outlined in Chapter 1). Each of these chapters also has its own Method section that discusses the study's design, purpose, procedure and ethics, as well as, where relevant positionality, sampling and participants.

Chapter 6 – An Autoethnography of a Stand-Up Comedian Hosted Podcast User

6.1 Introduction

The autoethnography chapter of the thesis is divided into 5 sections. The first section following the introduction (6.2) provides information about the method and is comprised of subsections that focus on the design (6.2.1), purpose (6.2.2), procedure (6.2.3) and ethics (6.2.4) of the study, as well as the positionality of the researcher (6.2.5). The subsequent section (6.3) presents the author's personal narrative as the findings of the study. The penultimate section (6.4) touches upon the limitations of the study. The final section (6.5) discusses the insights produced from the narrative account in conjunction with previous research.

6.2 Method

6.2.1 Design

The design of the study was exploratory (Neuman, 2014) because it focused on relationships between podcast hosts and users; which is a topic that we know little about, as it is yet to be explored extensively. Hence, the study aimed to formulate more precise questions that can be addressed in future research (Neuman, 2014) as well as other studies of the thesis. As a result, the design of the study was also non-linear because research proceeded in an iterative or back-and-forth pattern (Neuman, 2014). As described by Learmonth and Humphreys (2012) this process involved the author writing down his recollections relevant to the

purpose of the study, before reading these recollections, writing down further recollections and once again reading them. This process did not result in aimless meandering because it was systematically directed toward the ultimate goal of the study (Heewon, 2013) which is outlined in the following subsection of the chapter. The approach of this study was inductive, because theory did not guide research (Bryman, 2012). Instead, the author discerned patterns from his writing about his relationships with stand-up comedian podcast hosts by identifying repeated feelings, stories and happenings (Ellis et al., 2011). Finally, the data collected in this study was qualitative because it was non-numerical and comprised of text written by the researcher.

6.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to provide a highly personalized account of the researcher's experiences as a podcast user in order to examine the complexities of relationships between stand-up comedian hosts and users.

The following questions were addressed in the narrative account that was produced:

- How did the author come across podcasts?
- What did he like about the podcast hosts?
- How did his relationships with the podcast hosts develop?
- What impact did the relationships with podcast hosts have on him?
- What made him question his relationships with podcast hosts?
- What did he learn from hosting his own podcast?

6.2.3 Procedure

The data used in this chapter of the thesis was collected by the author reflecting on his memories relating to his relationships with stand-up comedian podcast hosts. In order to remember the details of different events he utilized the process of “emotional recall” (Ellis, 1999), to imagine going back to different moments both physically and emotionally. During these reflections, he was particularly interested in identifying what Denzin (1989) refers to as “epiphanies”, which are intense situations whose effects, memories, images and feelings linger long after the incident itself is over (Bochner, 1984). Writing down his recollections from these moments, served as his primary method of inquiry (Poulos, 2021). When writing he refrained from taking "literary license" (Ellis et al., 2011) with the hope of creating a more interesting story at the expense of a truthful account of events. “Thick descriptions” were used to dig beneath surface-level observations (or thin descriptions) and insert commentary, context and interpretation to different events (Poulos, 2021). The author also used member checking as a means of enhancing rigor by following Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) proposition that credibility is inherent in the accurate descriptions of phenomena. As a result, after writing down his recollections concerning different events, he asked other people who were present whether they thought the text produced managed to accurately depict these experiences (Given, 2008). As the autoethnography was approached inductively, there was no theoretical framework before data collection that guided the direction of the inquiry (Hargons et al., 2017). Instead, themes were later identified from the narrative account, which was concluded when the author could not think of any other epiphanies relating to his relationship with stand-up comedian podcast hosts. For the purpose of this study, themes were defined as recurrent and distinct features of the

author's narrative account that characterized his perceptions and experiences (King, 2012).

6.2.4 Ethics

Although autoethnographies often do not fall under the purview of institutional review board (IRB) and approval processes, researchers must consider basic ethical principles when conducting their research (Adams et al., 2015).

As suggested by Poulos (2021) an ethical impulse to do no harm guided the crafting of this study which utilized Andrew's (2017) "intuitionism" (the idea that we already intuitively know what we ought to do) as a philosophical basis for approaching the ethics of autoethnographic writing.

Relational concerns are a crucial dimension of autoethnographic inquiry and must be kept-in mind throughout the research and write-up processes (Ellis, 2007). Whilst exposing oneself is a fundamental part of autoethnographic research, it must be remembered that researchers do not exist in isolation and are connected to social networks that include other people, who often appear in the work we produce (Ellis et al., 2011).

To protect the privacy of the people mentioned in this study, no information was given about their identifying features such as names, ages, races, ethnicities etc… (Adams et al., 2015) In addition, when possible, people who appeared in the autoethnography were presented with texts that were produced and used in the study, in order to allow them to read and comment on how they and different events were represented (Ellis, 2007). Discussing the text led to no objections being voiced about any aspects of this representation.

6.2.5 Positionality

When the author considered his positionality in this study, he realized that he is at the same time both an insider and an outsider. His position as an insider stems from the fact that he is a long time podcast enthusiast who has listened to (and continues to listen to) a multitude of stand-up comedian hosted podcasts.

His position as an outsider stems from the fact that he is a specialist in Media & Communications. This vantage point has allowed him to be familiar with different theories and research that made it possible for him to look back at his relationships with podcast hosts with greater theoretical insight and understanding.

Hence, whilst writing about the relationship between podcast hosts and users, the author took the position of both a participant and a storyteller (Koo & Mathies, 2022) with the goal of sharing his personal narrative by unfolding genuine and vivid stories of his relationships with stand-up comedian podcast hosts.

6.3 Findings

Inspired by Castiello-Gutiérrez (2022), the narrative produced in the manner outlined above is presented as the findings of this study:

As a young undergraduate student, I was sitting in my room in a house I shared with four other students. I would call them friends, but, at this point of our tenancy things were a little bit more complicated. It had previously seemed that there might be some romance brewing between one of my flat mates and me. Eventually things didn't work out between the two of us, and there were some hurt feelings. The others seemed to take the side of my flat mate. Maybe I had made some mistakes, but I never had any

bad intentions. Well, at least that was what I kept telling myself as I sat in my room listening to music. I was hungry, but I didn't want to go into the kitchen. I could hear voices and knew that everybody else was there. I always enjoyed socializing with people and feeling like part of a group but at this stage of our tenancy I felt more like an outsider or a recluse. Maybe the problem was all in my head? People weren't being explicitly horrible to me but I just felt out of place, as if I didn't belong.

As the hours I listened to music in my room increased, I found myself in the catalogue of Kid Cudi, an artist I hadn't listened to in a very long time. The voices in the kitchen died down. Time to make my move! As I started preparing the ingredients for my late night dish, the sound of silence seemed deafening. I went onto *Youtube* to select a video to create some background noise that would hopefully overpower the sound of silence. I clicked on what seemed to be an interview with Kid Cudi. It turns out that the video I clicked on was an episode of the *Joe Rogan Experience* podcast. At this juncture I didn't even know what a podcast was.

That night I finished the interview with Kid Cudi, and in the following days I started listening to more and more episodes. Soon the stand-up comedian host was accompanying me when I was riding my bike to university, working-out, having a shower, doing laundry and lying in bed trying to fall asleep. From this podcast, I was introduced to other hosts who were appearing as guests on the *Joe Rogan Experience*, and before long I was listening to their podcasts as well. The more I listened, the more it felt like I was getting to know them. The more it felt like I was getting to know them, the more I believed that they were authentic individuals who were similar to me in a number of different ways.

The authenticity of hosts was especially important to me because at the time I was questioning the authenticity of my flat mates, who as I stated earlier, were not being explicitly horrible. To the contrary, they were mostly smiley and polite but in a way that seemed to lack sincerity and felt inauthentic. In contrast, the podcast hosts seemed authentic enough to share intimate personal moments. Duncan Trussell revealed that he had been diagnosed with testicular cancer, Nikki Glaser talked about her suicidal thoughts and Ron Funches relayed the difficulties of being a single father with an autistic son.

In terms of their similarity to me, the podcast hosts were people who didn't view the world as black and white. They were open to all sorts of different perspectives and ideas. When joking around, they thought that no topic was off-limits and it was clear that their jokes came from a place of love rather than hate or malice. Unlike the podcast hosts, my flat mates were not very open to different ideas. When I tried to bring contrasting perspectives to the table during some of our discussions, they were quick to dismiss them. Unfortunately (for both me and them), my sense of humour was also not very appreciated. Regardless of the intention, situation, timing and context they thought that some topics should never be joked about. I did not agree. The end result of these differences and others was a negative effect on my psychological well-being, which after a while, the podcasts I listened to managed to improve. My relationships with the hosts led to an epiphany that even though they weren't currently around me, people who shared my sense of humour, values and approach to life did exist. In turn, this epiphany helped me to recognize that the feeling of being an outsider who didn't belong would be temporary, as sooner or later I would meet people who I had more in common with. For now however, I had to make do with the podcast hosts...

Therefore, perhaps not surprisingly podcasts started to comprise a significant amount of my media consumption and my favourite hosts started to have an influence on me. I bought their books, watched their stand-up shows (live in person or via streaming services), purchased podcast merchandise (such as mugs and t-shirts) and tried certain activities mentioned or encouraged by them (such as taking ice baths, meditating and lying in an isolation tank).

I was (and still am) very happy to have podcasts in my life, because in addition to having a positive effect on my psychological well-being they entertain me, introduce me to new concepts and ideas, inform me about current affairs and improve my speaking skills (as a result of constantly exposing me to good conversationalists). However, a number of different incidents have also made me question my relationships with podcast hosts:

The Supplement Incident

During my time as an undergraduate student, family video calls with my sister, mother and father took place in the form of a daily ritual. I would grab my smartphone, find a comfortable position on the bed and get ready for a long discussion about topics ranging from something my cousin had said, to obtaining world peace. Unexpectedly, today's topic was my purchase of a dietary supplement which was advertised and recommended by Joe Rogan who at this point, had already started to feel like an old friend. As a family we had never been a fan of using medicine or supplements unless we absolutely had to, and they were worried that I was being influenced too much by the podcasts I listened to. When my parents asked me questions about the product, I couldn't provide them with the answers they were seeking because I hadn't done my research. I had simply purchased the

product because I trusted Joe Rogan. If he said that it would help strengthen my immune system, then that is what he believed. My friend was knowledgeable, honest and surely he wouldn't be out to trick me? When my parents questioned Joe Rogan, it felt like they were disapproving of a friend...

The Rape Accusations

One summer, I came back home after a tiring day at the beach and checked my phone to see that Bryan Callen, co-host of the podcast *The Fighter and the Kid* (Callen & Schaub, 2015 – present) had been accused of rape in a report published by the *LA Times*. My heart sank. I couldn't believe it. I knew this guy. Surely he couldn't have done it? The accuser must be after something. Revenge, money or maybe even both. I felt guilty. Why did I feel guilty? After thinking about this question, I arrived at the conclusion that my guilt was related to my relationship with Bryan Callen. As a long time listener to *The Fighter and the Kid*, I had felt the full range of emotions when listening to his voice. Callen's jokes had made me laugh, his personal anecdotes had made me cry and his opinions and perspectives had made me question things. Despite not always seeing eye to eye, I regularly listened to the podcast because he was a person that I liked and had a lot in common with. If the accusation made in the *LA Times* article was true, what did that say about me? If we believe that you can tell a lot about a person from their friends, perhaps the *LA Times* article was an indictment of not just Bryan Callen but also me?

The Joke?

My father was never a huge Russell Brand fan and a clip he came across on *Youtube* did not make him anymore sympathetic towards the comedian. After

watching the clip which I myself had not seen, he told me about how when Graham Hancock (a journalist who often criticizes mainstream archaeology) was on the *Stay Free with Russell Brand* (Brand, 2022 – present) podcast, the comedian concluded the episode by saying the next time he sees an archaeologist he is "going to kick them right in the balls". My father seemed to be appalled by this statement but without having even watched the clip, I told him not to make a big deal about it because it was just a joke. I thought that I had the right to make this comment because it was me who had listened to hours of Russell Brand speak and not my dad. Hence, my opinion felt more valuable than his because I was closer to Russell Brand who was my friend and not my dad's.

The Compilation Video

One day, I was walking to a restaurant with a friend I was going to be catching-up with over dinner. After exchanging pleasantries, the first thing she asked me about was my opinion concerning a compilation video that had emerged showing Joe Rogan using the n-word in previous episodes of his podcast. I paused to contemplate exactly what I wanted to say. When I viewed the video, I vividly remember not condoning the language, but I also didn't believe that Joe Rogan was a racist.

After later watching his apology video in which he said even though he did not use the n-word as a derogatory term to insult or abuse others, he now realizes that regardless of the context and circumstance, it was never acceptable for him to use it, my belief was consolidated. After gathering my thoughts, I did my best to explain to my friend that I thought he was rightly being criticized for making a mistake but

wrongly being labelled as something that he was not. When she disagreed I had the urge to defend my other friend and the debate continued…

After a substantial amount of time as an avid podcast listener, I would also have the opportunity to experience what it is like to be the one in front of the microphone, recording a podcast. During the height of the coronavirus pandemic there wasn't much to do. As a long-time fan of podcasts, I had always wondered what it would be like to host one myself. I envied the relaxed, laid-back conversations my favourite podcast hosts had with their guests and I wanted to experience the sensation for myself. With more free time than ever, this seemed like the perfect opportunity for my dream to come true. I convinced my high-school friend to be my co-host and we started discussing what we wanted the podcast to be like. Even before recording a single episode we discussed which terms we used in our everyday lives might be inappropriate for the podcast. Before starting to record our conversation with each guest, we made bullet points about what we would be talking about and asked them if there were any topics that they wanted to stay away from. After recording one episode, we even edited out a short snippet from our conversation because we thought that the discussion became too political. Despite the semi pre-planned nature of our podcast, some of the feedback we received eulogized about how listening to us was like listening to three friends having a casual conversation in a pub or coffee-shop. Therefore, at least for some listeners, we managed to create the impression that we simply contacted our guests, pressed record and started talking about whatever came to our minds. In reality, of course, a lot more work went on behind the scenes. Whilst it is undeniable that if we were not recording our conversations and simply chatting in a pub or coffee-shop we would be

somewhat less careful to not offend anyone, I would make the argument that we didn't stray far away from our "authentic selves". However, my first-hand experience in recording a podcast also led to an epiphany that podcast hosts who seem to be authentically speaking with a friend could indeed be embarking on an act which is more performative than authentic. Therefore, the idea that listening to a podcast host speak could lead to becoming very familiar with that individual could be an illusion. Maybe listening to hosts like Joe Rogan, Bryan Callen and Russell Brand regularly, made me become familiar with their life, characteristics and opinions. However, I can't rule out the possibility that I didn't know the real people who were very different to the characters they started performing when the podcasts started recording.

6.4 Limitations

A limitation of this study was the impossibility of recalling or reporting events in a language that exactly represents how they were lived and felt (Ellis et al., 2011). Because the human memory is fallible, the author acknowledges that people who experience the same event can end-up telling different stories about what actually happened (Tullis Owen et al., 2009). However, even though stories can and do change over time, autoethnographers should strive to make their narrative accounts probable, trustworthy and resonant (Adams et al., 2015). In order to do this, as described earlier in the chapter, the author refrained from taking "literary license" (Ellis et al., 2011) and carried out member checks (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Another limitation of this study, and exploratory research in general is small sample sizes. With autoethnographies this is even more conspicuous because the sample size is one. However, this study is still valuable because it provides insight about the author's own personal experiences and how he makes sense of his relationship with

podcast hosts, whilst alsobringing forward issues to be examined in the next study of this thesis.Some further limitations of this study are also relevant to the other studies of the thesis. Therefore, they are addressed in the General Limitations section of the Conclusion chapter (9.5).

6.5 Discussion

6.5.1 PSRs

The author's narrative account put forward in this chapter presents an example of how podcast users can have PSRs with stand-up comedian podcast hosts. Examining the four incidents that made me question my relationships with the hosts led to identifying a feeling of knowing them as well as a feeling of friendship towards them. In terms of my feeling of knowing the hosts; when Joe Rogan recommended a dietary supplement which he advertised on his podcast, I thought that I knew him well-enough to know that if he was saying the product would help strengthen my immune system that is what he actually believed. When Bryan Callen was accused of rape in a report published by the *LA Times*, I thought that I knew him well-enough to think that he couldn't have done it, and that the accuser must be after something such as money or revenge. When my father told me that he watched a clip of Russell Brand saying that the next time he sees an archaeologist he is "going to kick them right in the balls", despite not having watched the clip, I believed that I knew him well-enough to tell my dad not to make a big deal out of it because it was just a joke. Finally, when a compilation video of Joe Rogan using racial slurs on previous episodes of his podcast surfaced, I condemned the language but thought I knew him well-enough to decide that he was not a racist.

In terms of my feeling of friendship towards the hosts; when my parents questioned Joe Rogan's knowledge and honesty after I purchased the supplement he recommended, it felt like they were disapproving of a friend. When I read the *LA Times* article accusing Bryan Callen of rape, I felt guilty, because I thought that if we believe that you can tell a lot about a person from their friends, maybe the article was an indictment of not just Bryan Callen but also me. When telling my dad not to make a big deal about what Russell Brand said because it was just a joke, I felt like my opinion about what he said was more valuable than my dad's because I was closer to him as he was my friend and not my dad's. Finally, when people called Joe Rogan a racist I felt sorry for my friend, who I had the urge to protect because he was rightly being criticized for making a mistake but wrongly being labelled as something that he was not. Therefore, when we consider the feeling of knowing the hosts as well as the feeling of friendship towards them, my personal experiences revealed in the autoethnography supports scholars like Piper (2015), Macdougall (2011) and Zuraikat (2020) who argued that podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs. However, because autoethnographies focus on the intentions, motivations, emotions, and actions of individuals, my experience cannot be generalized to other stand-up comedian hosted podcast users. This being said, the similarities between some of my sentiments and the sentiments of podcast users who participated in Perks and Turner's (2019) study is striking. The fact that like me, they viewed their favourite podcast hosts as friends supports Dhoest's (2014) claim that although we should not assume that other people are like us, we should also not assume that we (as researchers and/or autoethnographers) are necessarily exceptional or special.

6.5.2 Perceived Influence

In addition to presenting an example of how podcast users can have PSRs with stand-up comedian podcast hosts, the author's narrative account also demonstrates how PSRs can influence podcast users, via five out of six of Potter's (2012) individual-level media effects.

As a result of my PSRs with the hosts, I purchased books, podcast merchandise and supplements. I also tried certain activities encouraged by them such as taking ice baths, meditating and lying in an isolation tank (behavioural effect). The hosts introduced me to new concepts and ideas which affected my thinking (cognitive effect). When my psychological well-being was negatively affected by my relationship with my flatmates, my PSRs with the hosts managed to improve my mood by providing me with a sense of belonging (affective effect). When purchasing the supplements recommended by Joe Rogan without knowing enough about the product, it was the hosts' positive attitude towards it that influenced my attitude towards it (attitudinal effect). Finally, after watching Joe Rogan's apology video, I believed that what he said was true. The fact that I thought that the hosts informed me about current affairs also meant that they influenced my perception about what was real or true (belief effect).

These experiences support the findings of Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) previously mentioned study which established that PSRs with hosts can influence podcast users. However, whilst this study was only concerned with strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behaviours, my autoethnography also provides examples of how podcast users' can witness affective, cognitive and belief media effects. Nevertheless, like Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study my autoethnography also doesn't contain any examples of the physiologal effects of listening to podcasts.

Whilst there is ample research that demonstrates PSI and PSRs can influence other kinds of media users (as presented in section 2.3.2), research that focuses specifically on podcast users is limited, which adds importance to this finding. Whilst Schlütz and Hedder (2021) also predicted that relationships with podcast hosts could be used to sell advertising and to add to a show's revenue, their study did not examine the consumer behaviour of podcast users. Therefore, whilst we know that there is research which demonstrated that PSI and PSRs can also affect the consumer behaviour of media users (as presented in section 2.3.3), we can see that once again research focusing on podcast users is limited. This makes my narrative account which provides an example of how PSRs with podcast hosts can influence users' consumer behaviour valuable. Whilst Brinson and Lemon (2022) found that being in a PSR with hosts impacted whether or not users expressed trust in what they had to say, including promotional messages for a sponsor's product or service, my narrative account demonstrated that this trust can be translated into actually making purchases. Vickery and Ventrano's findings (2020) which identified relational listening as driving the development of PSRs more than analytical listening, critical listening and task-oriented listening also seem to be in line with my PSRs with podcast hosts. When purchasing the supplements recommended by Joe Rogan, it wasn't a "focus on his full-message before forming judgment" or a "motivation to assess his message for consistency and accuracy" that led me to make the purchase. Instead, it was an emotional bond that was formed because of positive feelings towards him.

6.5.2 Perceived Authenticity

On top of presenting an example of how podcast users can have PSRs with stand-up comedian podcast hosts and how these PSRs can influence podcast users, the author's narrative account also provides interesting insight about podcast hosts' perceived authenticity. Firstly, my experiences fit in with Soto-Vásquez et al.'s (2022) claim that authenticity is an important part of interest towards podcasts. In my case, the authenticity of hosts was especially important because I was questioning the authenticity of my flat mates at the time that I was introduced to podcasts. According to Heiselberg and Have (2023) users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic, and that seems to be what happened with me. A closer look at my experiences also reveals an implicit assumption of the hosts' authenticity behind my feeling of knowing and being friends with them. If one believes that listening to a podcast can lead to knowing its hosts, they must also believe that the hosts are their authentic selves whilst the microphones are recording. Otherwise, they would not think that it would be possible to know the hosts because they were more performative than authentic. They would also not feel friendship towards them because inauthenticity is not an admirable characteristic that one searches for in a friend. Whilst this insight is intriguing, my narrative account does not provide sufficient explanations for why myself or other podcast users might think that their favourite hosts are authentic. Therefore, this is explored further in the following chapter, that seeks to examine which characteristics of podcast hosts can contribute to an assessment that they are authentic, as well as, how these markers of authenticity can relate to different aspects of PSRs.

Chapter 7 – Semi-Structured Interviews with Stand-Up Comedian Hosted Podcast Users

7.1 Introduction

The semi-structured interviews chapter of this thesis is divided into 5 sections. The first section following the introduction (7.2) provides information about the method and is comprised of subsections that focus on the design (7.2.1), purpose (7.2.2), sampling (7.2.3), participants (7.2.4), procedure (7.2.5) ethics (7.2.6) and analysis (7.2.7) of the study. The next section (7.3) outlines the findings of the study. The fourth section (7.4) touches on the limitations of the study, and the final section (7.5) discuss its findings in-light of previous research.

7.2 Method

7.2.1 Design

As with the previous study, the design of this one was also exploratory (Neuman, 2014) because it focused on relationships between podcast hosts and users; which is a topic that we know little about, as it is yet to be explored extensively. The design of the study was also non-linear because (as described more extensively in section 7.2.7) analysis progressed through an iterative process of applying, modifying and re-applying an initial template to the data produced from the interviews (King, 2012). The approach of this study was primarily deductive because the author looked for themes and subthemes (Bryman, 2012) that emerged from the inductive analysis carried out in the previous study, as well as, the insight

produced from other research. Based on the findings of the autoethnography, ‘feelings of knowing the hosts’ and ‘feelings of friendship’ were identified as subthemes of PSRs. Enli’s (2014) markers of Mediated Authenticity and Potter’s (2012) categories of individual-level media effects were also subthemes that were looked for in the data. However, in addition to these pre-ordinate subthemes, four new ones were also generated from the data which added an inductive element to the study. As a result, the approach of the study can more accurately be described as hybrid (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Proudfoot, 2023) with its deductive element outweighing the inductive. The data collected in this study was qualitative because it was non-numerical and was comprised of the transcripts of interviews with podcast users. As indicated by Willig (2014) qualitative designs are useful when researches are concerned with the ways in which people make sense of their world and the events they encounter. This study was not concerned with establishing whether or not podcast users’ favourite hosts are authentic, but focused on understanding why podcast users might think that they are. In order to develop this understanding, it was important to try and gain insight about how podcast users make sense of their world, and in particular, their relationship with podcast hosts. Only then could understanding develop regarding different markers of authenticity, how these markers can contribute to PSRs and how podcast hosts can influence their users. Therefore, it made sense that the design of this study would be qualitative.

7.2.2 Purpose

The purpose of this study was to endeavour to answer the following research questions:

- Which markers of authenticity do podcast users associate with their favourite hosts?
- How can these markers of authenticity relate to different aspects of PSRs?
- In what ways can podcast users perceive that they are being influenced by hosts?

7.2.3 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the study. The participants were selected because they met the criteria determined by the researcher as relevant to addressing the research questions of the study (Given, 2008). In order to participate in this study podcast users had to be at least 18 years old and had to access a stand-up comedian hosted podcast at least once a month. This is because PSRs extend beyond a single media exposure situation and are based on repeated encounters with media figures (Dibble et al., 2016) and in this case the podcast hosts.

The saturation of data was used as a guiding principle when deciding the adequacy of the purposive sample (Bryman, 2012; Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Saturation refers to the point in data collection when no additional issues or insights are identified and data begins to repeat (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). As this point was reached further data collection was seen as redundant and the sample size was deemed to be adequate (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). This indicated that the data collected captured the diversity, depth and nuances of the issue being studied (Francis et al., 2010). Reaching saturation is a critical component of qualitative research as it helps make data collection robust and valid (O'Reilly & Parker, 2012) and serves as a guarantee of qualitative rigor (Morse, 2015).

7.2.4 Participants

A total of ten podcast users took part in this study. The age, gender and favourite podcast of each participant can be seen in the following table:

Table 2: Semi – Structured Interview Participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Favourite Podcast
1	Female	27	What's Upset You Now
2	Male	28	Olumlu Dünya
3	Female	28	Monday Morning Podcast
4	Female	25	O Tarz Mı?
5	Male	30	Joe Rogan Experience
6	Male	28	Tim Dillon Show
7	Male	30	Joe Rogan Experience
8	Female	29	O Tarz Mı?
9	Female	32	Ask Iliza Anything
10	Male	27	Joe Rogan Experience

According to Edison Research (2020) users between 25 and 34 years of age accessed podcasts for a minimum of 5 hours per week, more than users in any other age category. Therefore, it is fitting that all of the participants of this study fell within

this category. Further information about the favourite podcast of each participant can be seen in the following table:

Table 3: Participants' Favourite Podcasts

Name	Host(s)	Launch Date	Network	Country
What's Upset You Now?	Seann Walsh & Paul McCaffrey	May 2020	Keep It Light Media	United Kingdom
Olumlu Dünya	Deniz Özturhan	March 2020	Podbee Media	Turkey
Monday Morning Podcast	Bill Burr	January 2011	All Things Comedy	United States
O Tarz Mı?	Bengi Apak, Can Bonomo & Can Temiz (previously Ismail Türküsev)	December 2017	otarzmi	Turkey
Joe Rogan Experience	Joe Rogan	December 2009	Spotify	United States
Ask Iliza Anything	Iliza Shlesinger	October 2018	Earwolf	United States

7.2.5 Procedure

Before data collection commenced, the interview questions were piloted with friends and colleagues to allow the researcher to tighten up and rephrase questions in order to be able to elicit the desired information in the smoothest way possible.

After the interview questions were piloted, an Invitation Letter was shared on the social media platforms *Facebook* and *Instagram*. Information about the inclusion criteria was presented in the Invitation Letter where potential participants were informed that they had to be at least 18 years old to participate in the study. They were also made aware of a second requirement which was that they had to access a podcast hosted by a stand-up comedian at least once a month.

Podcast users who read the Invitation Letter and volunteered to be interviewed, were asked to contact the researcher via e-mail or the social media site where they viewed the Invitation Letter. The researcher and interviewee then arranged a mutually acceptable time for the interview to take place and the interviewee was provided with the necessary details about how to join the interview. All interviews were conducted online via the video conferencing software *Microsoft Teams* or *Zoom*.

The in-depth, semi-structured interviews took the form of dialogues between the researcher and participants. They were guided by a flexible interview schedule and supplemented by follow-up questions, probes and comments (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). The interview schedule used during data collection can be seen in the appendix section of the thesis. Whilst it contains a fairly specific list of questions, participants were given leeway in how to reply. Despite interviews not always moving forward in a specific order, and on occasion including questions not found on the

interview schedule, by and large, all questions were asked to all participants with similar wording (Bryman, 2012).

7.2.6 Ethics

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Salford's Ethics Committee and the study adhered strictly to the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2021).

Everyone participating in the study consented to do so freely and on the basis of adequate information. The Invitation Letter informed participants that the information they provided during the interviews would be presented in a way that ensured their anonymity and that they were free to withdraw from the study any time before or during the interview process. It also made them aware that the interviews were going to be recorded as the researcher could not write fast enough to capture all of their answers. The ability to listen to the recordings after the interviews were over, allowed the researcher to produce more accurate transcripts with the added benefit of being able to concentrate on what participants were saying and forming better connections with them during the interview process. However, participants were also assured that no one would have access to the recordings apart from the researcher and his two supervisors.

The Invitation Letter also informed them about what would happen with the information they provided during the interviews, by outlining that it would be used in the researcher's PhD thesis (and possibly in an article published in a relevant academic journal).

Finally, the participants were notified that they could contact the researcher, his supervisors or the Ethics Chair for the School if they had concerns or complaints about any aspect of the study. The necessary contact information was also provided.

Before the interviews commenced each participant was asked if they read and understood the Invitation Letter and confirmation was provided regarding consenting to participating in the study.

7.2.7 Analysis

Upon the completion of the interviewing process, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyse and report patterns (themes) within the data that was collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are different approaches to thematic analysis and researchers often fail to fully delineate the approach they have taken, either by mislabelling the type of thematic analysis they have used or by drawing from a number of different approaches which are not compatible (Braun & Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2022). In an attempt to resolve this confusion, Braun and Clarke (2019) have differentiated between three principal approaches to thematic analysis which are coding reliability approaches, codebook approaches and the reflexive approach.

Coding reliability approaches, such as those espoused by Boyatzis (1998) and Joffe (2012), use techniques of qualitative data collection and analysis within a positivist or post-positivist framework (Braun & Clarke, 2023). They accentuate procedures for ensuring objectivity, accuracy and reliability, in a way that often involves the use of a structured codebook and a degree of consensus among multiple coders (Byrne, 2022). Themes are typically understood to constitute ‘domain summaries’, which are summaries of what participants said in relation to a particular topic or question (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

Codebook approaches, such as Smith and Firth's (2011) framework analysis or King's (2012) template analysis, sit somewhere in between coding reliability approaches and the reflexive approach (Byrne, 2022). Like with coding reliability approaches, they use a structured codebook and conceptualise themes as domain summaries (Braun & Clarke, 2023). However, they lack a positivist concern for measuring coding reliability. Instead, these approaches are shaped by pragmatic concerns such as facilitating team-work and helping people with no prior experience of qualitative research. In line with this concern, codebooks are used to map and chart developing analyses, as well as, to guide the coding of data (Braun & Clarke, 2019).

As with codebook approaches, the reflexive approach typically forgoes positivist conceptions of coding reliability and instead recognizes the interpretive nature of data coding (Byrne, 2022). However, codebooks are not a part of this approach, in which coding is more flexible, organic and ever-evolving (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Coding is viewed as an active and reflexive process that inescapably bears the mark of the researcher, and themes are not understood as domain summaries but rather patterns of shared meaning underpinned by a central organising concept (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

The approach to thematic analysis used in this study is template analysis, which is one of the codebook approaches according to Braun and Clarke's (2019) classification. "Template analysis is a style of thematic analysis that balances a relatively high degree of structure in the process of analysing textual data with the flexibility to adapt it to the needs of a particular study" (King, 2012, p. 426). Developing a coding template is central to this technique. The coding template is usually developed on the basis of a subset of the data. It is then applied to further

data, revised and re-applied. This approach to thematic analysis is very flexible regarding the style and format of the template that is produced and unlike some other approaches it does not suggest in advance a set sequence of coding levels (King, 2012). It also does not insist on explicit distinction between descriptive and interpretive themes (King, 2012).

Template analysis is a technique rather than a distinct methodology, and it can be used within a range of epistemological positions (King, 2012). Whilst it can be used in realist qualitative work that accepts much of the conventional positivist positions of mainstream quantitative social science, that is not the way it is used in this study because the author is not concerned with discovering the underlying causes of human action and does not seek researcher objectivity or the demonstration of coding reliability (King, 2012). Instead, this study fits within the use of template analysis for researchers who occupy a constructivist position, because for the author of this study there are always multiple interpretations to be made of any phenomenon, which depends on the position of the researcher and the context of his or her research (King, 2012). Hence, concerns about coding reliability are irrelevant; and emphasis is placed on the reflexivity of the researcher, the attempt to approach the topic from differing perspectives and the richness of the descriptions produced (King, 2012).The first step of my analysis was defining priori themes and subthemes (i.e., themes and subthemes that were determined in advance of coding) (King, 2012). For the purpose of this study, themes were recurrent and distinctive features of interviews with participants that characterize their experiences relevant to the research questions of the study and subthemes were smaller and more specific categories that fell under the broader themes of the coding template (King, 2012). The three priori themes of the template analysis were PSRs, Perceived Authenticity

and Perceived Influence. Based on the findings of the autoethnography, ‘feelings of knowing the hosts’ and ‘feelings of friendship’ were identified as priori subthemes of PSRs. Based on Enli’s (2014) markers of Mediated Authenticity ‘predictability’, ‘spontaneity’, ‘immediacy’, ‘confessions’, ‘ordinariness’, ‘ambivalence’ and ‘imperfection’ were identified as priori subthemes of Perceived Authenticity. Finally, based on Potter’s (2012) categorization of individual-level media effects ‘cognitive’, ‘belief’, ‘attitudinal’, ‘affective’, ‘physiological’ and ‘behavioural effects’ were identified as priori subthemes of Perceived Influence.

Next, recordings of the interviews were transcribed (King, 2012). The speech to text transcription application Otter.ai was used to speed-up this process. However, the transcripts produced were not a hundred per cent accurate, so the researcher went over each transcript making amendments in order to correct minor errors. Following the completion of this process, each transcript was read thoroughly in order to become familiar with them (King, 2012).

This was followed by the initial coding of the data. Parts of the transcripts relevant to the research questions (i.e. codes) were identified (King, 2012). If they were encompassed by one of the priori subthemes the codes were attached to the identified section (King, 2012). When there was no relevant subthemes for codes to be attached to, new ones were devised (King, 2012). This led to the emergence of two new subthemes relating to Perceived Authenticity which were ‘similarity’ and ‘freedom’. The perception that participants’ favourite hosts are similar to them in different ways (including views, sense of humour, characteristics and interests) was seen as adding to the perception of the hosts’ authenticity, because of a belief that if they are authentic about whatever they think is a similarity, then so is the host. The perception of podcast hosts being free as a result of the medium they operate in was

also seen as adding to perception of hosts' authenticity, because it created the impression that they were talking about what they want to talk about in the way that they want to talk about it, because of a lack of outside interference.

After the completion of the process described in the previous paragraph, the initial template was produced. This took place after only a subset of the transcripts had been coded (King, 2012). The template was then developed by applying it to the full data set (King, 2012). New subthemes were inserted and existing ones deleted when they seem redundant (King, 2012). The subthemes 'sadness if podcast ends' and 'continuing relationship in some other way' were also added to PSRs, whereas the subthemes of 'ambivalence' and 'predictability' were removed from Perceived Authenticity.

It was decided that the template was final when there were no substantial sections of the data clearly relevant to the research questions that could not be coded and placed within a subtheme (King, 2012). The final template was then used to help interpret and write up the findings of the analysis (King, 2012).

Whilst the author had certain themes and subthemes in mind whilst reading the transcripts of interviews (including those that emerged from the previous study and Enli's (2014) markers of mediated authenticity) he did not limit himself to these and searched for others that were also present in the text. This allowed the final themes and subthemes that emerged to be linked closely to the words and meaning produced by the podcast users that were interviewed, rather than preconceived notions. Whilst considering the frequency of certain codes, Galletta & Cross's (2013) advice to also take those that appear to be outliers seriously rather than simply discarding them, was followed. Because qualitative research is more concerned with the meaning generated by data, than the quantity of data, each code was recorded

and studied for its relationship to the research question and other emerging considerations in the analysis (Galletta & Cross, 2013).

7.3 Findings

This section of the chapter presents the three main themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews:

- PSRs
- Perceived Authenticity
- Perceived Influence

7.3.1 PSRs

Eight out of ten participants used language that indicated PSRs with their favourite stand-up comedian podcast hosts and the following four subthemes emerged under PSRs:

- Feeling of Knowing the Host
- Feeling of Friendship
- Sadness if Podcast Ends
- Continuing Relationship in Some Other Way

7.3.1.1 Feeling of Knowing the Host

Six out of ten participants used language that indicated a feeling of knowing the hosts. Touching upon Seann Walsh and Paul McCaffrey Interviewee 1 (woman, 27) stated:

> At first I couldn't really differentiate which one is which, because it's two voices and I've never listened [to] them individually. I'm like “Okay, which one’s saying that?” and then from their laughter I can recognize which one. They have very distinct laughter, and [a] very distinct way of talking and arguing. It's great. You get to know about what they're like, [what] they don't like, what their lives are like, [and] even what their internet provider is.

Hence, for this participant it was possible to get to know a lot about the characteristics and lives of hosts (who initially could not even be distinguished by voice) as a result of listening to their podcast. Similarly, Interviewee 3 (woman, 28) thought that by listening to Bill Burr’s podcast, she was able to know about the host’s views, insights, analysis and day-to-day life. Therefore, for this participant it was also possible to become familiar with a person she had never met, just by listening to their podcast. Touching upon why Joe Rogan hosts his podcast, Interviewee 10 (man, 27) stated: “I think…he does…it not for any money or anything, but just to learn”. Whether correct or incorrect, this assertion reveals that the participant thinks that he knows the host well-enough to be able to speculate about why he is podcasting.

7.3.1.2 Feeling of Friendship

Six out of ten participants used language that indicated they had a feeling of friendship towards their favourite hosts. For Interviewee 9 (woman, 32) Iliza Schlesinger occupied the role of a particular kind of friend i.e. the friend who doesn’t just tell you what you want to hear, but who tells you what you need. For Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) Bengi Apak was a substitute for interpersonal friends during a time when she was having anxiety issues and wasn’t able to hang out with them. Describing his relationship with Tim Dillon, Interviewee 6 (man, 28) stated:

> You almost feel like…he's a friend, someone you'd want to hang out with, go for a beer with…You almost imagine in your mind the kind of conversations you'd have with the host if you met them. And you think he'd be a fun person to hang out with.

Hence, for this participant the feeling of friendship also led to envisioning what it would be like if he and the host were actually talking and spending time together.

7.3.1.3 Sadness if Podcast Ends

Seven out of ten participants indicated that they would feel sadness if the relationship with their favourite host had to change or end as a result of them no longer podcasting. If such a scenario was to occur participants stated that they "would be really…heartbroken" (Interviewee 1, woman, 27), as well as "curious and upset" (Interviewee 5, man, 30). Because they had "become emotionally attached" (Interviewee 6, man, 28) participants also expected to feel a certain "emptiness" and anxiety (Interviewee 7, man, 30). The favourite podcast of one participant was actually suspended because of a major earthquake in Turkey. Describing her feelings about this situation Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) stated:

> It's upsetting to not know when they're going to post new episodes, but it's quite understandable because of the situation. But yes, them posting a new episode would be pleasing and them not posting any podcast episodes forever would be upsetting.

Hence, for this participant the situation of her favourite podcast stopping was not hypothetical. If their favourite podcast was to end, three participants speculated that they would listen to old episodes "again and again" (Interviewee 9, woman, 32) whilst another considered writing a comment like "don't do this" (Interviewee 4, woman,

25). Only one participant stated that “he wouldn’t be sad” if his favourite host stopped podcasting (Interviewee 10, man, 27) and noted that there are so many other podcasts that he listens to.

7.3.1.4 Continuing Relationships in Some Other Way

Eight out of ten participants indicated that they would continue their relationship with their favourite host in some other way if their podcast came to an end. For some participants like Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) this meant doing more of what they were already doing:

> Each day [I’m] watching her stories and following her continuously, so I wouldn’t change that.

Hence, for this participant social media also played a role in the relationship with her favourite host and would continue to do so if the podcast was to end. For other participants, continuing the relationship with their favourite host would require something new like starting to follow them on social media (Interviewee 5, man, 30), chasing “other performances and whatever they do next” (Interviewee 1, woman, 27) or trying to get to their live stand-up shows (Interviewee 8, woman, 29). Only one participant stated that he couldn’t see himself caring for his favourite host if it wasn’t related to podcasting. This was because he felt like the host was “a lot stronger on his podcast than when he just does pure stand-up” (Interviewee 6, man, 28). As a result, this participant felt that the medium of podcasting was paramount to his relationship with the host.

7.3.2 Perceived Authenticity

Six out of ten participants used language that indicated they perceived their favourite hosts to be authentic. The hosts were often described as being “honest” (Interviewee 1, woman, 27), “genuine” (Interviewee 3, woman, 28) and “natural” (Interviewee 4, woman, 25) which were characteristics that were appreciated even when participants did not agree with what they were saying (Interviewee 1, woman, 27). Despite sometimes having “opposite opinions” (Interviewee 4, woman, 25) with their co-hosts they were described as just saying what they think (Interviewee 4, woman, 25) and being themselves in every way (Interviewee 8, woman, 29). They were also perceived as being authentic when advertising because they didn’t talk about products “that are clearly being pumped out to…every… podcast” and “didn’t come across as…genuinely being like ‘Oh my god. I use this product every day. I swear buy it’” (Interviewee 3, woman, 28). At times, the language used by participants when speaking about their favourite hosts also indicated that they perceived them as being authentic. For example, when touching upon Bengi Apak, Interviewee 8 (woman 28) stated that the host is like her because they both suffer from anxiety. The fact that the participant said Bengi Apak is like her rather than ‘appears’ or ‘seems’ to be like her indicates that she perceives her as being authentic. When speaking about their favourite hosts, all of the participants brought up at least one of the following seven markers of Perceived Authenticity:

- Ordinariness
- Immediacy
- Similarity
- Freedom

- Spontaneity
- Imperfection
- Confessions

7.3.2.1 Ordinariness

Eight out of ten participants used language that indicated the ordinariness of their favourite host(s). For example, Joe Rogan was described as being a “really common guy”, “an ordinary guy who just wants to learn” (Interviewee 10, man, 27) and “a plain American guy from Boston” (Interviewee 5, man, 30). Whilst some participants thought that the topics their favourite hosts talked about were “really common” (Interviewee 9, woman, 32) and “things that you can relate to” (Interviewee 1, woman, 27) others stated that the questions they asked were similar to the questions that they would ask if they were talking to the guests themselves. Hosts were also described as being “one of us” (Interviewee 10, man, 27) and “not pretentious” (Interviewee 3, woman, 28). To most of the interview participants, the hosts did not seem glamorously mediated as they told “sexual jokes” (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), touched upon “annoying” (Interviewee 1, woman, 27) things that happened in their daily lives and had “their own vocabulary” that they used in certain situations” (Interviewee 8, woman, 29). In relation to Bengi Apak, Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) recollected:

> She mentioned that she has some skin concerns, which make her uncomfortable, in front of cameras and in front of people. And that made me…feel similar because most of the time…every woman has issues about their appearance.

The fact that one participant stated that his favourite host was “not a scientist or an academician” (Interviewee 5, man, 30) also suggests that certain people can seem disconnected from the core of their personalities simply as a result of their profession. The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of hosts being ordinary can add to podcast users’ feeling of friendship towards them. For example, the sexual jokes told by İsmail Türküsev made Interviewee 4 (woman, 25) feel like part of “a friend group” rather than an “established podcast” and the fact that Bengi Apak and her co-hosts used their own vocabulary in certain situations made Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) feel like “part of their team” once she started understanding it. Throughout the interviews, only one participant used language that suggested he did not view ordinariness as a characteristic of his favourite host. Touching upon how he thought it would go if he met Tim Dillon, Interviewee 6 (man, 28) stated:

> He’s gotten very famous now, so in my head I probably think he’d be…disinterested or bored or annoyed with meeting all of the people who listen to his podcast.

Hence, in the eyes of this participant the host was not seen as being ordinary and representative of the people.

7.3.2.2 Immediacy

Six out of ten participants used language that indicated a sense of immediacy. Whilst listening to the podcasts, participants felt like they were “in the conversation” (Interviewee 5, man, 30) and “meeting up with” hosts (Interviewee 3, woman, 28). Describing *O Tarz Mı?* (Apak, Bonomo & Temiz, 2017 - present), Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) stated:

> It gives that feeling that you're part of them. You're not someone from [the] outside.

Hence, for this participant there was a feeling of being directly involved with the podcast and her favourite host. A sense of “liveness” was also touched upon by participants who noted that Tim Dillon was using “up-to-date humour” to reflect on “things that had just happened” (Interviewee 6, man, 28) and that Deniz Özturhan was “picking trendy topics” that made you feel “in it” (Interviewee 2, man, 28). The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of immediacy can add to podcast users’ feeling of friendship towards the hosts. The fact that Interviewee 2 (man, 28) felt like he was “in the conversation” made him feel like he was “in the chat with his friends”. Similarly, the fact that Interviewee 4 (woman, 25) felt like “one of the group” made the hosts of her favourite podcast “feel like friends”.

7.3.2.3 Similarity

Nine out of ten participants indicated that they had similarities with their favourite host. Speaking about İsmail Türküsev, Interviewee 4 (woman, 25) commented:

> I mean, in my friend group I am the one [who] generally also like[s] making these provocative jokes. Let's say... [who] doesn't care what people think. I just say what I think and also… when…outside with friends, I really don't act like “Oh yeah, I need to behave”…I just go with the flow and I think he's like this too.

Other perceived similarities between participants and hosts included being “humble” (Interviewee 5, man, 30), liking “to stretch the boundaries of imagination” (Interviewee 6, man, 28) and putting one’s “physical and mental mind into stress (Interviewee 10, man, 27). Interviewee 7 (man, 30) stated that

he liked Joe Rogan because they had a “similar interest in some topics” and Interviewee 5 (man, 28) noted that if some people considered the host to be “a bit [of a] right winger” then he could also be considered “a bit [of a] right winger”. The interviews also demonstrated how the perception that participants’ favourite hosts are similar to them can add to a feeling of friendship. For example, Interviewee 2 (man, 28) stated that he felt “really close to” Deniz Özturhan because she was a “female version” of himself and Interviewee 8 (woman, 30) felt “closer” to Bengi Apak because they were both women who represented the “masculinity and femininity inside [of] them”. When asked whether they thought they would get on well with the hosts if they were to meet in person, participants pointed to similarities when answering yes. For example, Interviewee 10 (man, 27) thought that he would “become friends” with Joe Rogan because there were a lot of things that they both liked, whilst Interviewee 2 (man, 28) believed that Deniz Özturhan and himself would become “good friends” because they both liked sarcasm. These sentiments of the participants are also supported by research which highlights that there is a tendency for friendships to form between those who are alike in some designated respect" (Lazarsfeld & Merton, 1954, p. 23) such as attributes, beliefs, values, educational background and social status (Rogers & Bhowmik, 1970).

7.3.2.4 Freedom

Four out of ten participants used language that indicated the freedom enjoyed by their favourite host. Discussing how Bill Burr can talk about whatever he likes on the podcast, one participant stated: “If he wants to talk about humus he will talk about humus” (Interviewee 3, woman, 28). Another participant highlighted that İsmail

Türküsev and his co-hosts have freedom regarding when they record and release new episodes, as well as which hosts are present (Interviewee 4, woman, 25). Interviewee 10 (man, 27) contrasted his favourite podcast hosts with actors who he described as “puppets”, implying that unlike other celebrities, podcast hosts are free because they are not being controlled by others. This was explained in more detail by Interviewee 6 (man, 28), who focused on why Tim Dillon had great freedom because of the medium he operates in:

> I like the medium of podcasting, in it gives a huge creative freedom to the artist, to the comedian. They're not… beholden to… producers and advertisers in the same way. I mean, he has *Patreon* subscribers so he is beholden to his listeners. And there's that intimate relationship. He was the first person I really saw with a huge volume of paid subscribers. So I was like “Wow, this guy has financial freedom and creative freedom through podcasting, how amazing is that?” He doesn't have a boss. And he's able to make a great living, and also do and say what he wants. So it just made me... think about how much creative and financial freedom can come from podcasting if you... smash it.

The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of hosts being free can add to podcast users’ feeling of getting to know them. The fact that Bill Burr talked about whatever he wanted made Interviewee 3 (woman, 28) think that she was learning “his perspective on things” whilst the fact that Tim Dillon had “free rein” to talk about what he wanted made his podcast feel “very personal” (Interviewee, man, 28).

7.3.2.5 Spontaneity

Four out of ten participants referred to the spontaneity of their favourite hosts. Regarding Iliza Schlesinger, Interviewer 9 (woman, 32) noted:

> She's a human being she's just talking...She's asking…questions to other women. They're just sharing a question with her and she's just answering.

Other participants also thought that their favourite hosts just said what was on their mind (Interviewee 3, woman, 28) and what they think (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), directly reflecting how they were feeling (Interviewee 8, woman, 29). When hosts advertised products this also came across as spontaneous, rather than pre-planned and strategic. For example, one participant stated that her favourite host just shared her experience about products rather than "pushing, pushing, pushing" them (Interviewee 9, woman, 32). The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of hosts' spontaneity can add to podcast users' feeling of knowing them. For example, the fact that İsmail Türküsev just said "what he thinks and doesn't really care if it is a podcast or not" made Interviewee 4 (woman, 25) think that she knew about his opinions and the fact that Bill Burr just "felt like he was having a conversation" made Interviewee 3 (woman, 28) feel like she knew what he cared about. Only two participants used language that questioned the spontaneity of their favourite hosts. Interviewee 6 (man, 28) stated that it is difficult to "know how much...is a character versus…their actually personality" whilst Interviewee 1 (woman, 27) wondered whether they are "performing because basically that is their job. They're trying to earn money from it".

7.3.2.6 Imperfection

Seven out of ten participants indicated that their favourite hosts were imperfect. For example, touching upon Bill Burr, Interviewee 3 (woman, 28) stated:

> Sometimes he really rambles and goes on and on about something that's not really a big issue to me.

Similarly, Interviewee 2 (man, 28) thought that Deniz Öztürhan could take too long talking about small subjects, whilst Interviewee 10 (man, 27) thought that the way Joe Rogan talked could be “really exaggerated”. The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of the hosts and their podcasts being imperfect can add to podcast users’ feeling of getting to know them as people rather than media figures worried about delivering a perfect presentation. For example, Interviewee 9 (woman, 32) thought that Iliza Schlesinger being “kind of messy” and a “bit silly” made her “really human” whilst Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) noted Bengi Apak and her co-hosts were "more free” to be themselves as they weren’t aiming to be perfect.

7.3.2.7 Confessions

Four out of ten participants used language that indicated confessions from their favourite hosts. For example, regarding Bengi Apek, Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) commented:

> You can see her someday…she's upset or she's not well motivated. She directly reflects that…She directly shares everything about her feelings.

In addition to making confessions about their negative feelings, the hosts also spoke about being “bullied in high school” (Interviewee 5, man, 30), suffering from anxiety and being uncomfortable about their appearance (Interviewee 8, women, 29). The interviews also demonstrated how confessions from hosts can add to podcast users’ feeling of getting to know them. For example, Interviewee 1 (woman, 27) stated that confessions about what upset Seann Walsh & Paul

McCaffrey, allowed her to “get to know them” whilst Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) thought that she “got to know” Bengi Apak “better” as a result of her confessions on the podcast.

7.3.3 Perceived Influence

9 out of 10 participants used language that indicated they were in some way influenced by their favourite stand-up comedian podcast hosts. The following six subthemes emerged under Perceived Influence:

- Affective Effects
- Cognition Effects
- Behavioural Effects
- Physiological Effects
- Belief Effects
- Attitudinal Effects

7.3.3.1 Affective Effects

Five out of ten participants indicated that their feelings, emotions or mood have been influenced by their favourite hosts. Listening to their podcasts helped when participants were feeling stressed, anxious, down, upset or depressed and made them feel more calm, less alone, more supported and less anxious. Touching upon Bengi Apak, Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) stated:

> She's kind of like me because she has anxiety problems, as well. So, she directly shares her day which has…lots of anxiety and the next day she can be very happy. I think that makes … me feel more accepted and more normal.

Hence, for this participant her perceived similarity with the host provided a feeling of acceptance and normality, as a result of seeing that the host also struggles with similar problems to herself.

7.3.3.2 Cognitive Effects

Nine out of ten participants indicated that their mental processes or thinking have been influenced by their favourite hosts. For example, as a result of listening to Deniz Özturhan, Interviewee 2 (man, 28) now thinks that it is possible to find positives in even the worst situations. Interviewee 10 (man, 27) had the following to say about Joe Rogan influencing his thinking:

> Being wrong is actually a good thing…I think I've learned this from [the] podcast, as well. We were taught … [from] education…that being wrong is not something good. But actually it is pretty good. Because if you're wrong, and you know you're wrong, that means you just learned something new. So, I think this ideology came to me after I started listening [to] more podcasts and…seeing people …making Joe Rogan… let's say, making his ideas wrong. And it's like he's learning something new at the [same] time. I think that's how he changed my... perspective as well.

Therefore, by seeing from his interactions with guests that Joe Rogan is open-minded and susceptible to new ideas, the participant stopped thinking that being wrong was something bad and started seeing it as an opportunity to learn something new. Finally, subsequently to becoming a listener of *What's Upset You Now?* (Walsh & McCaffrey, 2020 – present), which is a podcast she describes as being "very encouraging to speak your voice", Interviewee 1 (woman, 27) believes that she can always defend her opinion when discussing things with other people.

7.3.3.3 Behavioural Effects

Six out of ten participants indicated that their actions or behaviour have been influenced by their favourite hosts. For example, touching on Iliza Schlesinger, Interviewee 9 (woman, 32) stated:

> Sometimes [she's] just giving…advice…like "If you have…PMS pain, you can drink that tea and it's really helpful."…So you know… "Okay, it's helpful, I can try that" and I did.

In addition to this example, other participants tried recipes provided by their favourite hosts (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), downloaded an app which they spoke about on their podcast (Interviewee 6, man, 28), listened to a playlist which they made for listeners (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), looked into a crypto currency conference they were attending (Interviewee 6, man, 28) and tried different activities such as going to the gym in the morning (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), taking cold showers (Interviewee 4, woman, 25), and practicing breathing techniques (Interviewee 7, man, 30). During our conversation about Joe Rogan, Interviewee 5 (man, 30) stated: "I know that he smokes cigars and sometimes it makes me want to smoke a cigarette". This extract exemplifies, how just witnessing or knowing about the behaviour of podcast hosts can be enough to influence the behaviour of their users.

7.3.3.4 Physiological Effects

Five out of ten participants indicated that they have had automatic bodily responses to listening to their favourite podcast hosts. Participants stated that they would start laughing out loud whilst listening to podcasts when carrying out different activities such as walking down the street (Interviewee 1, woman, 27) or conducting experiments in a laboratory (Interviewee 4, woman, 25). For Interviewee 8 (woman,

29), the physiological effect of listening to Bengi Apak and her *O Tarz Mı?* (Apak, Bonomo & Temiz, 2017 - present) co-hosts, was felt during her anxiety attacks where accessing the podcast gave her "space to breathe". For Interviewee 7 (man, 30) the physiological effect of listening to *Joe Rogan Experience* was felt early in the day:

> In the mornings…it gives…waking-up signals…so… it kind of …starts your…brain…I think it…stimulate[s] some…nerves to…fire [up]…different ideas.

7.3.3.5 Belief Effects

Five out of ten participants used language that indicated their favourite hosts have influenced their perception that an object or event is associated with a given attribute, and hence is real or true. For example when speaking about Joe Rogan, Interviewee 5 (man, 30) stated that he knew the host "was bullied in high school" before "he picked-up…martial arts and …developed himself". Here we see that the participant's relationship with Joe Rogan, has led to a belief regarding what happened in the host's past. Despite not witnessing what he is describing, he still believes that it is real. Similarly, thanks to her relationship with Seann Walsh & Paul McCaffrey, Interviewee 1 (woman, 27) believed that she knows the troubles car owners in London face, despite not owning a car herself. Finally, as a result of listening to the *Joe Rogan Experience,* Interviewee 7 (man, 30), questioned his beliefs about the history of civilization:

> That actually impacted me quite a lot to … think "Oh what is the reality? What … [happened] in the past and what are we missing in terms of information?"

7.3.3.6 Attitudinal Effects

Two out of ten participants stated that their favourite hosts can influence (or have influenced) their evaluative judgments. Touching upon the hosts of *O Tarz Mı?,* Interviewee 4 (woman, 25) stated:

> If they say… "There's this beauty product, I just used this and it was shit". I wouldn't take it.

This sentence reveals how in the hypothetical scenario, the participant's attitude towards the product would be negative, because of the hosts' negative attitude towards the product. An extract from another participant demonstrates how the opposite can also be possible. Touching upon her attitude towards a fizzy drink advertised on *O Tarz Mı?*, Interviewee 8 (woman, 29) stated:

> I'm not drinking any fizzy drinks so after the show I didn't drink *Sprite*, but I felt like a tiny bit of sympathy…towards the company I'd say.

Hence in this example, the participant's attitude towards the product was positively influenced by her favourite host, despite the fact that she did not consume the product.

7.4 Limitations

As with the autoethnography, the insight produced from the interviews required the self-assessments of podcast users. A limitation of studies that require self-assessment is that sometimes people cannot accurately recall information about their media use which can lead to understatements or overstatements in self-

reported data (Neuman, 2014). Another limitation of this study, was that because it took the form of exploratory research it included a small sample size. However, the insight produced from the participants is valuable as it allows us to gain understanding about how they make sense of their world, and in particular, their relationship with podcast hosts. Whilst crafting the interview schedule the author did not include leading questions that would encourage participants to give the information he wanted, rather than the information that they wanted to share (Brennen, 2017). Hence questions did not explicitly ask about whether participants thought that their favourite hosts were authentic. As a result, when participants talked about the authenticity of their hosts, it was on their own volition. Whilst this prevented the researcher potentially putting words in the mouths of his participants it did come with the downside of yielding less information about why podcast user's thought that their favourite hosts were (or were not) authentic. In addition, whilst this study did identify different markers of mediated authenticity, it cannot claim that when podcast users mentioned them this meant that they automatically perceived their favourite host to be authentic. As was the case with the autoethnography, some further limitations of this study are also relevant to the other studies of the thesis. Therefore, they are addressed in the General Limitations section of the Conclusion chapter (9.5).

7.5 Discussion

Similar to my personal experiences relayed in the autoethnography, this study identified that most podcast users had a feeling of knowing their favourite stand-up comedian hosts as well as a feeling of friendship towards them. In addition, it also revealed that most podcast users would feel sadness if their favourite podcast was to

end, and that they would try to continue their relationship with the hosts in some other way if this was to happen. Therefore, as most participants appeared to have PSRs with the hosts, this study supported scholars like Piper (2015), Macdougall (2011) and Zuraikat (2020) who argued that podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs.

Once more, like in the autoethnography, this study revealed that podcast hosts can influence their users, also supporting Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) aforementioned work which revealed that they can have strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behaviours. Like the autoethnography, this study also provided different examples of how podcast users' can witness affective, cognitive, and belief effects. Unlike the autoethnography it also provided examples of how the physiology of podcast users can also be affected. As a result, this study provided examples of all six of Potter's (2012) individual-level media effects.

The fact that most of the participants touched upon the authenticity of their favourite hosts without being explicitly asked about it seems to support Soto-Vásquez et al. (2022) who found that authenticity is an important part of interest towards podcasts. Whilst the autoethnography demonstrated that hosts need to be perceived as authentic for users to think that they know them and to harbour feelings of friendship towards them, it did not provide any explanations for why this would be the case. This chapter identified ordinariness, immediacy, similarity, freedom, spontaneity, imperfection and confessions as markers of mediated authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts and highlighted how they can relate to PSRs. It was revealed that out of these markers, ordinariness, immediacy and similarity can contribute to PSRs by creating a feeling of friendship whilst freedom, spontaneity and imperfection can contribute by creating a feeling of

knowing the hosts. Therefore, whilst Heiselberg and Have (2023) had previously noted that users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic, this finding sheds light on how markers of mediated authenticity can actually contribute to the formation of PSRs.

4 out of 7 of Enli's (2014) markers of mediated authenticity were mentioned by numerous participants (ordinariness, immediacy, spontaneity and imperfection) when speaking about their favourite hosts. In addition to these markers, two new ones were also identified (freedom andsimilarity), further contributing to the concept of Mediated Authenticity. When speaking about their favourite hosts, all of the participants brought up at least one of the markers listed above, and many brought up more. However, as noted previously the fact that participants identified a marker (or markers) of authenticity in their favourite host does not necessarily mean that they think they are authentic.

As mentioned above, whilst this chapter outlined different ways in which podcast users can be influenced by podcast hosts, it did not identify whether PSRs significantly predict influence, and only presented insight on the experiences of a handful of podcast users. Therefore, the next chapter further explores this relationship, by quantitatively surveying a wide range of subjects from widespread locations. It also examines the specific relationship between PSRs and consumer behaviour, in a manner not done in this study. Whilst questions regarding advertising were directed towards the interview participants, enough information could not be obtained for reasons such as the participants not being in the target audience or products not being available in the locations that they were situated in.

Chapter 8 – A Web-Based Survey of Stand-Up Comedian Hosted Podcast Users

8.1 Introduction

The web-based survey chapter of this thesis is divided into 6 sections. The first section following the introduction (8.2) provides information about the method and is comprised of subsections that focus on the design (8.2.1), sampling (8.2.2), participants (8.2.3), procedure (8.2.4), ethics (8.2.5) and scales (8.2.6) of the study. The next section (8.3) includes a brief explanation of how the research question and hypotheses were developed. The fourth section (8.4) provides information about the internal consistency of the scales (8.4.1), the demographic data of the participants (8.4.2) and the outcomes of hypotheses testing (8.4.3). The penultimate section touches upon the limitations of the study (8.5) and the final section (8.6) discusses its findings in-light of previous research.

8.2 Method

8.2.1 Design

The research design of this study was cross-sectional in nature. As highlighted by Bryman (2012) there are a number of key elements of cross-sectional designs. They entail the collection of data from more than one case at a single point in time, in order to gather a body of quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables, which are then examined to detect patterns of association (Bryman, 2012). As part of this study, data was collected from 400 stand-up comedian hosted podcast users in

early 2021. Consequently, quantifiable data was produced in connection to the following variables:

- Gender
- Age Group
- Listening Frequency
- Parasocial Relationships
- Perceived Influence
- Perceived Authenticity

The correlational design of the study, then led to the assessment of the strength and direction of the relationship between these variables (Bryman, 2012).. Unlike the previous two studies of this thesis, the design of this one was linear because research proceeded in a clear, logical and step-by-step straight line (Neuman, 2014). The approach of this study was deductive because hypotheses were surmised after examining existing theory and the data that emerged from previous sections of the thesis (Bryman, 2012). These hypotheses were then tested by being held up to empirical scrutiny (Bryman, 2012; Greener, 2008). Finally, the data collected was quantitative because it was numerical and analysed via mathematical methods. As highlighted by Willis (2007), interpretivist researchers do not have to abandon the rules of scientific method, if they accept that whatever standards used are subjective and potentially fallible rather than objective and universal. Interpretivists accept almost all types of quantitative methods used by positivists (such as the one used in this study), but differ in terms of how results are interpreted (Willis, 2007). Therefore, in line with the interpretivist worldview of the author, the results of the web-based

survey were used to understand the perceptions podcast users had about their experiences, rather than generalizing explaining or critiquing them (Willis, 2007).

8.2.2 Sampling

A combination of purposive and snowball sampling was used to recruit participants for the study. Purposive sampling was used because stand-up comedian hosted podcast users are a highly specific population who are difficult to locate (Neuman, 2014) because there is no specific list or directory from which they can be drawn. Using purposive sampling allowed the researcher to sample participants strategically in order to ensure that they were relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2012). Personal judgment was important because it was the researcher who specified the criteria which determined who could be included in the study (Salkind, 2012). As in the previous study, podcast users had to be at least 18 years old and access a stand-up comedian hosted podcast at least once a month to participate in this study. Snowball sampling was also used in order to find participants. Initial respondents were asked to refer the study to other eligible respondents who then continued this process of referral to identify other respondents and increase the sample size (Fricker, 2008; Greener, 2008; Neuman, 2014). The researcher was able to sample participants strategically and view his personal judgement as being important because of his interpretivist worldview which stood in opposition to the approaches of those who think that they are doing positivist science.

8.2.3 Participants

The online questionnaire of this study was completed by 400 podcast users. This includes 16 more people than the number established by using Cochran's (1977) formula for calculating sample sizes of infinite populations:

$N_o = z^2 pq / e^2$

where, N_o is the sample size, z is the selected critical value of desired confidence level, p is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population, q= p −1 and e is the desired level of precision (Cochran, 1977). By assuming the maximum variability, which is equal to 50% (p =0.5) and taking a 95% confidence level with ±5% precision, the sample size of this study was identified as 384 after performing the following calculation:

p= 0.5 q=1-0.5= 0.5 e= 0.05 z=1.96

Therefore;

$N_o = (1.96)^2 (0.5) (0.5) / (0.05)^2 = 384.16 = 384$

An extra 16 online questionnaires were distributed foreseeing that some questionnaires may have to be excluded from the data analysis. After closer examination, 7 questionnaires were deemed to be ineligible because the podcast hosts named were not stand-up comedians. An additional 3 questionnaires were excluded because participants indicated (in the comments section of the questionnaire) that the podcasts they chose did not include any mention or

recommendation of brands, products or services. Therefore, they were excluded because they could not be used to gain information about participants' consumer behaviour. After the exclusions a total of 390 online questionnaires were used in the data analysis of this study.

8.2.4 Procedure

Before data collection commenced, a group of 10 podcast users from the author's circle participated in a pilot study to give feedback about the wording and clarity of the questionnaire. The recruitment of participants commenced following the questionnaire being deemed ready for distribution after the completion of the pilot study.

Several people shared the URL link of the web-based survey on their timelines and different groups on social media sites such as *Facebook*. Podcast users who saw the URL link and wished to participate in the project clicked on the link and were re-directed to the research project website.

Whilst completing the questionnaire, each respondent was asked to answer the questions by thinking of their favourite stand-up comedian podcast host. This decision was made because of the sheer magnitude of available podcasts and the lack of clarity around podcast data (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The fact that download numbers do not necessarily equate to listens or listeners as the same podcast user can download an episode multiple times or perhaps not listen to an episode they have downloaded (Davies, 2014) makes it very difficult to identify an accurate measure of the most successful stand-up comedian podcasts and things are further complicated by the possibility of podcast producers buying downloads through click farms (Spinelli & Dann, 2019) and the ability of podcast users to access content from

numerous different platforms (Davies, 2014). On *iTunes*, one of the major platforms for accessing podcasts, *Apple* is not forthcoming about how they decide which podcasts to feature on their front page or how their podcast charts are calculated (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Even if more accurate data was available the fact that 2.4 million podcasts were reported to exist in August 2022 (Ruby, 2022) demonstrates that it is unnecessary to limit the scope of this study to only a handful of podcasts and stand-up comedian podcast hosts.

8.2.5 Ethics

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Salford's Ethics Committee and the study adhered strictly to the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2021).

Everyone participating in the study consented to do so freely and on the basis of adequate information. Before accessing the questionnaires, podcast users were required to read the Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form which informed them that all the questionnaires would be completed anonymously and that as a result, no one (including the researcher) would know their identity. In addition, it informed them that participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the survey at any time they desired.

If they accepted that the information they provided would be used in conjunction with the information provided by other participants in the PhD dissertation of the researcher, participants consented to take part in the study and were moved on to Section 1 of the questionnaire.

8.2.6 Scales

The questionnaires completed by the podcast users were comprised of a number of different scales such as Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley's (2016) PSR scale adapted from Rubin and Perse (1987). No changes were made to this scale except for substituting the words "my favourite DJ/radio personality" with the words "my favourite podcast host". As a result, the scale was comprised of 10 statements for which the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale (I see the podcast host as a natural, down-to-earth person, I would like to meet the podcast host in person etc…).

Participants were also asked to complete Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley's (2016) perceived attitudinal and informational influence scale. Once again, no changes were made to the scale except for substituting the words "my favourite DJ/radio personality" with the words "my favourite podcast host". As a result, the scale was comprised of 5 statements for which the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale (The podcast host frequently influences my opinion, the podcast host teaches me things etc…).

Each respondent was also asked to complete a consumer behaviour scale which was comprised of 5 Yes/No questions from Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley's (2016) study (Have you ever looked for more information about a product or service recommended by the podcast host, have you ever purchased products or services based on the recommendation of the podcast host etc…) Once more, no changes were made to the scale except for substituting the words "my favourite DJ/radio personality" with the words "my favourite podcast host".

Finally, each respondent was asked to complete a scale comprised of 3 statements regarding their perceived authenticity of the hosts, for which the participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement on a 7-point Likert scale (I believe that the host personally uses the products or services recommended, I trust what the host says about the products or services recommended etc…)

8.3 Research Question & Hypotheses

As indicated in the literature review section of this thesis a number of scholars have argued that podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs (Macdougall, 2011; Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020). These arguments were later supported by Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) exploratory study as well as the exploratory studies of this thesis. RQ1 was established with the aim of adding to limited empirical evidence on this topic by supporting or contradicting Macdougall (2011), Piper (2015) & Zuraikat's (2020) assumptions:

RQ1. Do PSRs exist between podcast users and their favourite stand-up comedian hosts?

Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) exploratory study found that PSRs with a podcast host can result in strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behaviours. Participants in the semi-structured interviews also spoke about how podcast hosts influenced them in a number of different ways. Therefore H1 predicts that:

H1. There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence.

Whilst Schlütz and Hedder (2021) suggested that relationships with podcast hosts could be used to sell advertising and to add to a podcast's revenue, they did not empirically examine the link between PSRs and consumer behaviour. However, Brinson and Lemon's (2022) study found that when PSRs were present host-read ads were found to be more credible and brand recall increased. My experiences relayed in the autoethnography also show how PSRs can have an impact on consumer behaviour. Therefore H2 anticipates that:

H2. There will be a positive association between PSRs and consumer behaviour.

Previous research suggest that users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic (Heiselberg & Have, 2023) and the more authentic hosts are perceived to be, the more extensive their PSRs (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). In addition, my experiences relayed in the autoethnography reveal an implicit assumption of the hosts' authenticity behind my feeling of knowing and being friends with them. Therefore, H3 predicts that:

H3. There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived authenticity.

In spontaneous and unsolicited comments during Soto-Vásquez et al.'s (2022) study, participants often mentioned host authenticity as directly leading to the purchase of products promoted by podcast hosts. My experiences relayed in the autoethnography also show how perceived authenticity can be important when purchasing products recommended by hosts. Therefore H4 anticipates that:

H4. There will be a positive association between perceived authenticity and consumer behaviour.

8.4 Findings

8.4.1 Internal Consistency of Scales

Cronbach's coefficient alpha (α) was used to measure the internal consistency of the scales, i.e. the degree to which the items of the scales all measured the same underlying attributes (Pallant, 2010). Cronbach's alpha scores can range between 0 and 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency. For the purpose of this study a Cronbach's alpha between .80 and .90 was considered to be very good. A Cronbach's alpha between .70 and .80 was considered respectable. A Cronbach's alpha between .65 and .70 was considered to be minimally acceptable. A Cronbach's alpha between .60 and .65 was considered to be undesirable and a Cronbach's alpha lower than .60 was considered unacceptable (DeVellis, 1991). Based on this information all of the scales in the study were deemed to have an acceptable internal consistency.

In their study, Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley (2016) reported the PSR scale as having a very good internal consistency (α = .87). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale was lower but still respectable (α = .78). In the same study, Quintero Johnson and Patnoe-Woodley (2016) reported the perceived influence scale as having a very good internal consistency (α = .90). In the current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of this scale was lower but also very

good (α = .80). The Cronbach's alpha scores of each of the other scales can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: Internal Consistency of Scales

Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
PSR	.78
Perceived Influence	.80
Perceived Authenticity	.84
Consumer Behaviour	.71

8.4.2 Demographic Data

Out of all the respondents (N=390) who participated in the study, 56.4% described their gender as male (n=220), 42.3% as female (n=165) and 1.3% as other (n=5). The most common age group was 35-44 with 37.9% of participants (n=148) falling into this category. This was followed by 25-34 with 29.5% of participants (n=115), 45-54 with 16.4% of participants (n=64), 55 and above with 11% of participants (n=43) and 18-24 with 5.1% of participants (n=20).

Table 5: Age of Participants

Age Category	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
18-24	20	5.1%
25-34	115	29.5%
35-44	148	37.9%
45-54	64	16.4%
≥ 55	43	11.0%
Total	390	100.0%

In terms of frequency, 39.2% of participants (n=153) indicated that they listened to their favourite stand-up comedian hosted podcast a few times a week. A close second was once a week with 38.2% of participants (n=149). This was

followed by a few times a month with 11.8% of participants (n=46), every day with 7.9% of participants (n=31) and once a month with 2.8% of participants (n=11).

Table 6: Frequency of Listening to Favourite Podcast

Listening Frequency	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
Every day	31	7.9%
Few times a week	153	39.2%
Once a week	149	38.2%
Few times a month	46	11.8%
Once a month	11	2.8%
Total	390	100.0%

Respondents' favourite stand-up comedian hosted podcasts varied greatly and the names of many different podcasts came-up. The most commonly mentioned podcast was Marc Maron's *WTF.* However, *WTF* was only the favourite stand-up comedian hosted podcast of 19.2% of the respondents' (n=75).

A total of 102 different names appeared on the list of respondents' favourite stand-up comedian podcast host of which 79.4% were male (n=81) and 20.6% female (n=21). The amount of times each of the 102 names were mentioned differed however, and some respondents indicated that they had more than one favourite stand-up comedian podcast host. This resulted in a total of 418 different mentions of podcast hosts of which 90.9 % were male (n=380) and 9.1% female (n=38).

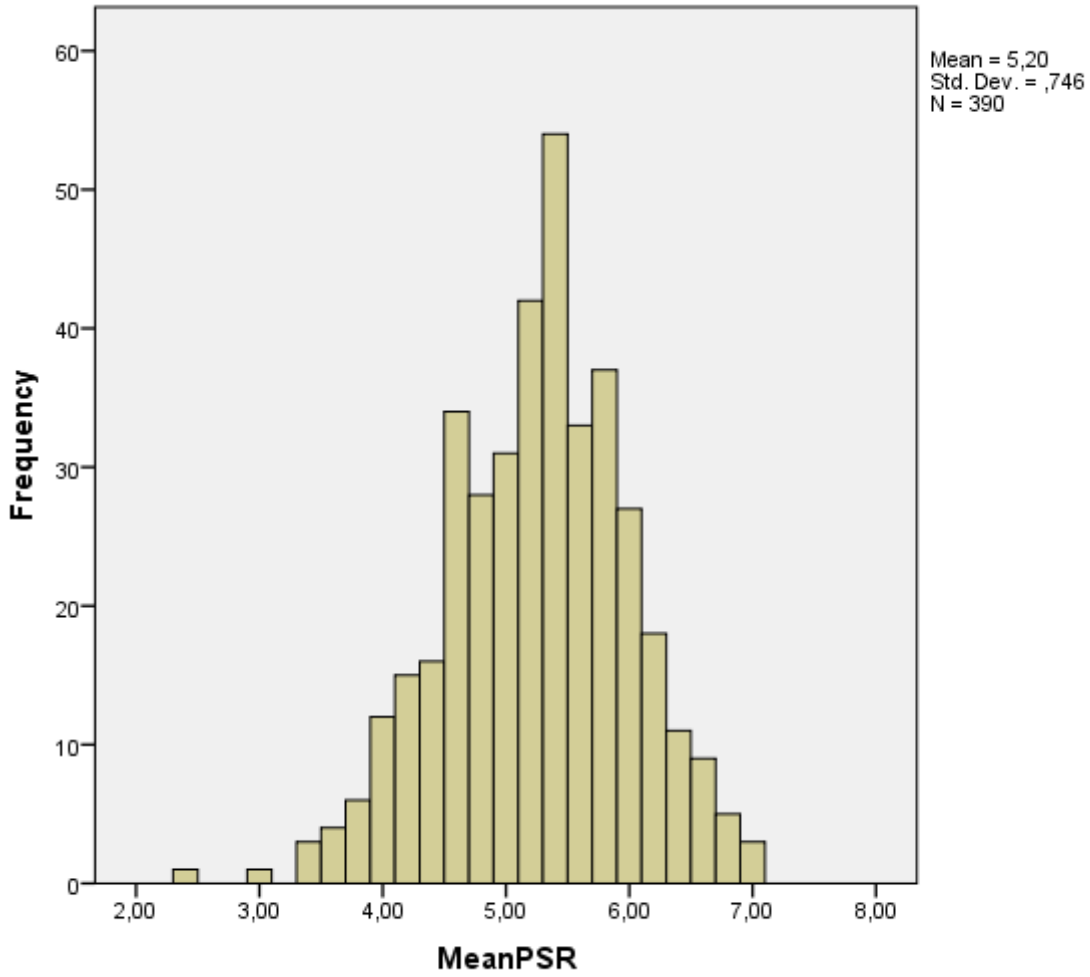
A total of 95.1 % (n = 371) of the respondents recalled their favourite stand-up comedian podcast host recommending brands, products, or services, and 85.4% recalled a particular brand, product, or service being recommended (n = 333). Overall 66.4% (n = 259) of respondents indicated that they searched for more information about a product or service recommended by the host, 41.3% (n = 161) that they purchased products or services based on the recommendation of the host

and 37.9% (n = 148) that they recommended a product or service which they heard about from the host to someone else.

8.4.3 Hypotheses Testing

RQ1 was concerned with whether PSRs exist between podcast users and their favourite stand-up comedian hosts. Each participant's PSR score was calculated by adding together the numbers corresponding to the answer given to each item on the PSR scale and dividing the outcome by 10 so that the possible scores could range between 1 and 7. Scores above 4 were accepted as strong PSRs. Scores below 4 were accepted as weak PSRs and scores of 4 were accepted as neutral PSRs. The mean PSR score (M = 5.20, SD = 0.75, range = 2.4–7) was then used to answer RQ1 and establish that on average, podcast users had strong PSRs with their favourite hosts.

Figure 1: Distribution of Participants' Mean PSR Scores



A Shapiro-Wilk's Test ($p<0.05$) and a visual inspection of histograms showed that consumer behaviour, perceived authenticity and perceived influence were not normally distributed. Therefore, bootstrapping was carried out to provide more accurate inferences as a result of the assumptions of normality being violated (Fox, 2015). "Bootstrapping is a nonparametric approach to statistical inference that substitutes computation for more traditional distributional assumptions and asymptotic results" (Fox, 2015, p. 587). The confidence interval level of the bootstrap was 95% and the number of samples was 2000.

H1 predicted that there would be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence. A simple linear regression was used to test if PSRs significantly

predicted perceived influence. The fitted regression model was: Perceived Influence = 2.284 + .438 * (PSR). The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2 = .105, F (1,388) = 45.742, p <.000). It was found that PSRs significantly predicted perceived influence (β = .438, p < .000). Therefore, H1 was supported.

H2 predicted that there would be a positive association between PSRs and consumer behaviour. A simple linear regression was used to test if PSRs significantly predicted consumer behaviour. The fitted regression model was: Consumer Behaviour = 1.942 + .254 * (PSR). The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2 = 0.18, F (1, 388) = 6.988, p = .009). It was found PSRs significantly predicted consumer behaviour (β = .254, p = .009). Hence, H2 was supported.

H3 predicted that there would be a positive association PSRs and perceived authenticity. A simple linear regression was used to test if PSRs significantly predicted perceived authenticity. The fitted regression model was: Perceived Authenticity = 1.256 + .444 * (PSR). The overall regression was statistically significant (R^2 = .080, F (1,388) = 33.928, p <.000). It was found PSRs significantly predicted perceived authenticity (β = .444, p < .000). Therefore, H3 was supported.

H4 predicted that there would be a positive association between perceived authenticity and consumer behaviour. A simple linear regression was used to test it perceived authenticity significantly predicted consumer behaviour. The fitted regression model was: Consumer Behaviour = 1.783 + .414 * (Perceived Authenticity). The overall regression was statistically significant. (R^2 = .116, F (1, 388) = 50.870, p <.000). It was found that perceived authenticity significantly predicted consumer behaviour (β = .414, p <.000). As a result, H4 was supported.

8.5 Limitations

The correlational design of the web-based survey means that it is impossible to establish the cause-and-effect direction between the different variables. In other words, whilst this study could determine an association between different variables it could not predict causation. At any rate, the idea of a single, objective cause and effect relationship would not fit within the author's interpretivist worldview, which sees human behaviour and social processes as being embedded in specific social, cultural and historical contexts, therefore making it superfluous to try and establish universal and deterministic causal relationships that hold across diverse situations. Hence, a more important limitation of this study was that the scale used to examine the influence of stand-up comedian podcast hosts, only included items relating to cognitive media effects. Therefore, this means that attitudinal, behavioural, belief, physiological and affective media effects could not be explored. Some other limitations of the study are shared with the autoethnography and semi-structured interviews. Therefore, they are addressed in the General Limitations section of the Conclusion chapter (9.5).

8.6 Discussion

As this study revealed strong PSRs between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and users, it is in line with the findings of the autoethnography and semi-structured interviews and supports the claim of scholars that theoretically argue podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs (Macdougall, 2011; Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020).

Because PSRs significantly predicted perceived influence the findings of this thesis are also in line with Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) exploratory study which found that PSRs with a podcast host can influence users. Whilst Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study was concerned with attitudinal and behavioural media effects, this study was concerned with cognitive effects as it focused on their opinions and perspectives.

Whilst Schlütz and Hedder (2021) also suggested that relationships with podcast hosts could be used to sell advertising and to add to a show's revenue, they did not empirically examine the link between PSRs and consumer behaviour. This study did and the findings reveal that PSRs significantly predicted consumer behaviour. Whilst Brinson and Lemon (2022) found that being in a PSR impacted trust in what hosts had to say, including promotional messages for sponsors' products or services, the scale of consumer behaviour used in this study also included other kinds of consumer behaviour including but not limited to purchasing products and recommending them to others. Previous research suggested that users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic (Heiselberg & Have, 2023) and the more authentic hosts are perceived to be, the more extensive their PSRs (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021). The findings of this study supported this research as it found PSRs significantly predicted perceived authenticity.

Participants in Soto-Vásquez et al.'s (2022) study, mentioned host authenticity as directly leading to the purchase of products promoted by podcast hosts. Because this study found that perceived authenticity significantly predicted consumer behaviour it supports the comments of Soto-Vásquez et al.'s (2022) participants.

Chapter 9 – General Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

This chapter of the thesis is comprised of five separate sections. The first section following the introduction (9.2) provides a summary of the findings of the three studies that make-up the thesis. The next section (9.3) focuses on how these findings fit in with existing literature. The fourth section (9.4) outlines the implications of the findings for different parties such as podcast hosts, advertisers, podcast users and legislators. The penultimate section (9.5) indicates the general limitations of the thesis and the final section (9.6) provides suggestions for where research can go from here.

9.2 Consolidation of Work

The purpose of the autoethnography study of this thesis was to provide a highly personalized account of the researcher's experiences as a podcast user in order to examine the complexities of relationships between stand-up comedian hosts and users. By examining the author's past experiences, this study identified a feeling of knowing stand-up comedian podcast hosts, as well as a feeling of friendship towards them. Whilst this was seen as being indicative of PSRs, the study also argued that hosts have to be perceived as authentic for users to think that they know them and to harbour feelings of friendship towards them. However, this study did not provide explanations for why this could be the case.

After the autoethnography, the aim of the thesis became to examine the perceived authenticity of stand-up comedian podcast hosts, as well as, their PSRs

with users and their perceived influence. In order to meet this aim, the objectives of the thesis were identified as:

- Exploring which markers of authenticity podcast users associate with their favourite hosts.
- Investigating how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs.
- Examining how podcast hosts can influence their users.

The next study of the thesis after the autoethnography included semi-structured interviews with 10 stand-up comedian hosted podcast users. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

- Which markers of authenticity do podcast users associate with their favourite hosts?
- How can these markers of authenticity relate to different aspects of PSRs?
- In what ways can podcast users perceive that they are being influenced by hosts?

In line with this purpose, the study found certain markers of authenticity that podcast users associate with their favourite hosts (ordinariness, immediacy, similarity, freedom, spontaneity, imperfection and confessions). Out of these markers, ordinariness, immediacy and similarity were viewed as contributing to PSRs by creating a feeling of friendship whilst freedom, spontaneity and imperfection were viewed as contributing by creating a feeling of knowing the hosts. In addition, this study also outlined different ways in which podcast users can be influenced by

podcast hosts by providing examples of attitudinal, behavioural, affective, cognitive, belief and physiological media effects.

Figure 2: Markers of Mediated Authenticity

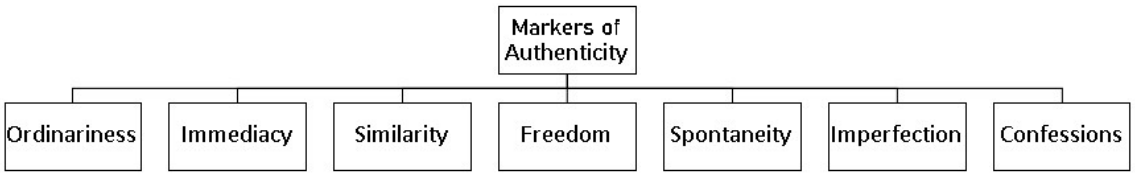
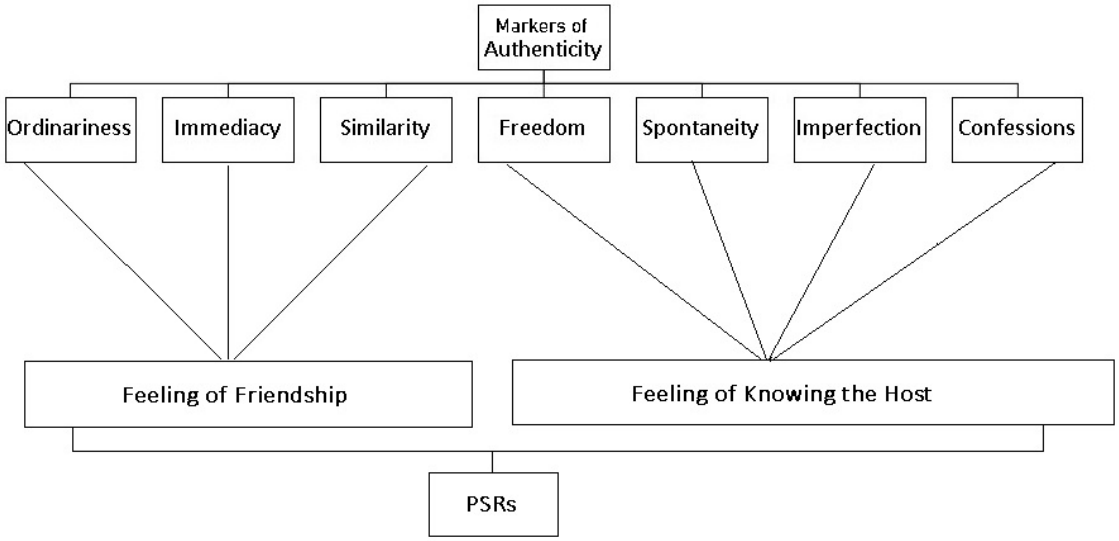


Figure 3: Markers of Mediated Authenticity and PSRs



The final study of the thesis was a web-based survey of 400 podcast users. The purpose of this study was to answer the following research question and test the following hypotheses:

- Do PSRs exist between podcast users and their favourite stand-up comedian hosts? (RQ1)
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived influence (H1).
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and consumer behavior (H2).
- There will be a positive association between PSRs and perceived authenticity (H3).
- There will be a positive association between perceived authenticity and consumer behavior (H4).

In line with this purpose, the study revealed strong PSRs between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and users. Positive associations were found between PSRs and perceived influence, PSRs and consumer behaviour, PSRs and perceived authenticity and perceived authenticity and consumer behaviour.

9.3 Relationship with Previous Research

To this day no one has followed the trajectory of this research, which moved from an autoethnography to semi-structured interviews and a web-based survey. Before this research commenced, a number of scholars had argued that podcasts are an ideal medium for the development of PSRs (Macdougall, 2011; Piper, 2015; Zuraikat, 2020), but there was a lack of empirical evidence to support this claim. Therefore, this research set-out to investigate this assertion and the findings of all three studies of the thesis, lent it support. In the autoethnography, the experiences of the author revealed a feeling of knowing the hosts as well as a feeling of friendship

towards them. These feelings were viewed as being indicative of PSRs and were also present amongst other stand-up comedian hosted podcast users who participated in the interviews. These participants also talked about how they would be sad if their favourite podcast was to end and how they would continue their relationships with the hosts in different ways if this was to happen. In the web based survey, mean PSR scores were used to identify the strength of PSRs between stand-up comedian podcast hosts and their users. At the end of this process strong PSRs were identified between podcast users and their favourite hosts.

Before this thesis, there was also limited research on the influence that podcast hosts can have on their users. Whilst Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) exploratory study did examine this influence, it only focused on attitudinal and behavioural effects. The autoethnography chapter, provides an example of how stand-up comedian podcast hosts can influence not just the attitudes and behavior, but also the beliefs, thinking, and feelings of podcast users. In addition to these influences, the semi-structured interviews also provide an example of how stand-up comedian hosted podcast users' physiology can be affected by their favourite hosts. The web-based survey chapter of this thesis found that PSRs significantly predicted perceived influence. This finding was also in line with Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) exploratory study which found that PSRs with a podcast host can influence users. However, as mentioned earlier, whilst Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study was concerned with attitudinal and behavioural media effects, this study was concerned with cognitive effects as it focused on podcast users' opinions and perspectives. In terms of consumer behaviour, Schlütz and Hedder (2021) had suggested that relationships with podcast hosts could be used to sell advertising and to add to a show's revenue, but this suggestion was not investigated. The autoethnography

chapter of the thesis, provided an example of how stand-up comedian podcast hosts can affect the consumer behaviour of their users and the web-based survey established that PSRs significantly predicted consumer behaviour The semi-structured interviews did not provide any valuable insight regarding consumer behaviour, for reasons such as the participants not being in the target audience or products not being available in the locations that they were situated in.

One of the unique contributions of this thesis is that it is the first body of work to examine all of Potter's (2012) individual-level media effects on podcast users. The fact that it shows that podcast users think that hosts influence them via affective, cognitive, behavioural, physiological, belief and attitudinal effects, supports the idea that podcast hosts can become parasocial opinion leaders (Stehr et al., 2015) who influence their users via different individual-level media effects (Potter, 2012). Therefore, the thesis also provides support for the theoretical concept of parasocial opinion leaders (Stehr et al., 2015).

This thesis is also the first body of work to examine why podcast hosts are perceived to be authentic. Whilst previous research suggested that authenticity is an important part of interest towards podcasts (Soto-Vásquez et al., 2022), that users expect to form PSRs with hosts who they perceive to be authentic (Heiselberg & Have, 2023) and that the more authentic hosts are perceived to be the more extensive their PSRs (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021), it did not shed light on why podcast hosts are perceived to be authentic. Insight produced from the semi-structured interviews allowed this thesis to build on previous research by identifying markers of mediated authenticity podcast users associated with their favourite hosts and connecting them to different aspects of PSRs. This study also advanced Enli's (2014) theory of Mediated Authenticity, by identifying two new markers of authenticity

that can contribute to the assessment of a media figure or text being authentic (freedom and similarity).

Previously, in a study by Soto-Vásquez et al.'s (2022), participants had mentioned host authenticity as leading to the purchase of products promoted by podcast hosts during unsolicited comments. These comments were supported by the findings of the web-based survey in which perceived authenticity significantly predicted consumer behaviour and PSRs significantly predicted perceived authenticity.

9.4 Implications

The findings of the thesis suggest that for podcast hosts who want to build a close relationship with their audience, being authentic (or at the very least appearing authentic) is of key importance. The fact that users who thought their favourite podcast hosts were authentic reported a high level of consumer behaviour also implies that there is economic value in podcast hosts being (or appearing to be) authentic.

When we look at the data about the consumer behaviour of the podcast users who participated in the web-based survey, the implication for advertisers is that podcasts appear to be a good medium for promoting their brands, products and services. This result also strengthens the hand of podcast hosts who are looking for potential advertisers to generate revenue for their podcasts.

As touched upon by the author in the autoethnography, as well as, some participants during the semi-structured interviews, relationships with podcast hosts can certainly have their advantages. They can make users feel less anxious, less lonely and more supported. They can also lead to them becoming more informed,

making positive changes in the way they think and trying new activities which they come to appreciate. However, there are also potential pitfalls of such relationships. The fact that users with strong PSRs reported a high level of perceived influence provides an important reminder that the words of podcast hosts can have real life consequences when they influence their users. The recent controversy regarding whether Joe Rogan was spreading misinformation about COVID-19, led some parties to highlight how the words of a podcast host could be potentially life-threatening to others (Finnis, 2022). Perhaps this is even more alarming, when we remember that Vickery and Ventrano (2020) found that relational listening (the motivation to attend to speakers' feelings and emotions) had the greatest impact on PSRs; more than analytic listening (the motivation to focus on the full message of a speaker before forming a judgement about content or meaning) or critical listening (the motivation to assess messages for consistency and accuracy). Because the medium is largely free from constraints, podcast hosts can say virtually anything, and if users are not careful, podcasting's greatest assets of aural intimacy, perceived authenticity and expressive power through the human voice can be exploited (Lindgren, 2016) in a number of different ways such as by manipulating the trust of their users to sell products which they know are useless or harmful, pushing hateful ideologies and trying to spread deliberate or accidental misinformation. Therefore, the biggest take away from this study for podcast users is that being critical about what they consume and what they hear will help them maximize the positives of podcast consumption whilst minimizing the negatives. The idea that listening to a podcast host speak could lead to becoming familiar with the individual could be an illusion, because there is at least always the potential for podcast hosts to sacrifice authenticity for different reasons that could include staying away from controversy,

building a bigger audience, selling more products or pushing a certain ideology. Therefore, podcast users should remember that their perception of a host being authentic may not reflect reality as they have a lot to gain from being perceived to be authentic. Maybe listening to our favourite podcast hosts regularly, makes us become familiar with their lives, characteristics and opinions. However, we can't rule out the possibility that we don't know the real podcast hosts who are very different to the characters they perform when their podcasts are being recorded.

Finally, for legislators the question becomes do podcast hosts have a great responsibility about what they say because the growth of the podcast medium and the sheer number of people who access their content? If the answer to this question is yes, then who is to decide what should and shouldn't be said? Should the medium's freedom from constraints be jeopardized and what would the consequences be in terms of perceived authenticity if the laid-back informal nature of the medium was to change as a shift from grassroots to a more traditional gate-kept media continues?

9.5 General Limitations

In addition to the separate limitations of each study, there are also general limitations that are relevant to the whole thesis. One of these limitations is that the thesis only focused on stand-up comedian hosted podcasts. However, podcasts vary greatly in terms of content, form, address and presentation.

Another limitation is that this thesis does not consider that the PSRs between podcasts users and the stand-up comedian hosts could have been impacted by other endeavours of the hosts such as television programs and stand-up comedy

performances. Viewing and/or listening to the hosts on a number of different mediums could have potentially impacted the podcast users' PSRs.

The thesis also does not consider the possible roles of the producers of stand-up comedian hosted podcasts. We can't necessarily know how many decisions are made by hosts and how many are made by producers who might be working behind the scenes. Assuming that hosts are the sole creators and decision makers regarding content that reaches the ears of podcast users could have led to an incomplete assessment of the actual situation with certain podcasts.

Finally, this thesis hasn't distinguished between different types of PSRs. A compelling argument was made by Tukachinsky (2010) who wondered whether the use of the term PSRs has often been too generic. As social relationships can vary greatly from people being mere acquaintances to lovers, it is reasonable to assume that using PSRs as an umbrella term might not capture the diverse nature of the phenomenon (Tukachinsky, 2010). However, this thesis did not differentiate between different types of PSRs.

9.6 Recommendations for Future Research

Whilst this thesis and the work of a number of other scholars have revealed that PSRs can occur amongst podcast hosts and users, there is still a lot that can be investigated about these relationships. For example, further research could provide clarification about whether there is a difference in the strength of PSRs established by users of purely audio podcasts and those that also incorporate a video element.

Research could also compare the PSRs established in podcasting to those established in other mediums. This could be done by comparing the strength of individuals' PSRs with their favourite podcast hosts, to the strength of their PSRs

with their favourite radio host, television personality etc… The same PSR scale should be used in order to obtain truly comparable results.

Whilst this thesis establishes some interesting information about the consumer behaviour of podcast users, it does not differentiate between the placement (before, after or during the podcast) and type (sponsorship model, traditional or native advertising etc…) of advertisements. Further studies that consider these differences would be of interest for advertisers and podcast hosts alike.

Negative PSRs were not considered in this thesis, and to date no studies have examined negative PSRs with podcast hosts. Negative PSRs may be more likely to be established in podcasts with more than one host where users keep accessing the podcast because they really like one of the co-hosts, but are hostile towards the other. Future research could investigate this phenomenon and help to provide a more complete picture of PSRs in podcasting.

This thesis only focused on a particular type of podcast, i.e. those hosted by stand-up comedians. As mentioned previously, there are many different types of podcasts including both fictional and non-fictional podcasts with different structures that efface hosts entirely. These type of podcasts may not have the same impact as intimate, moderate production value podcasts, such as those hosted by many stand-up comedians. However, this contention needs to be examined further. As highlighted by Giles (2002) PSI and PSRs can take place with fictional characters as well as real people. Therefore, there is value in examining PSRs in all formats of podcasts including fictional dramas where there isn't a specific host and the characters are not real people.

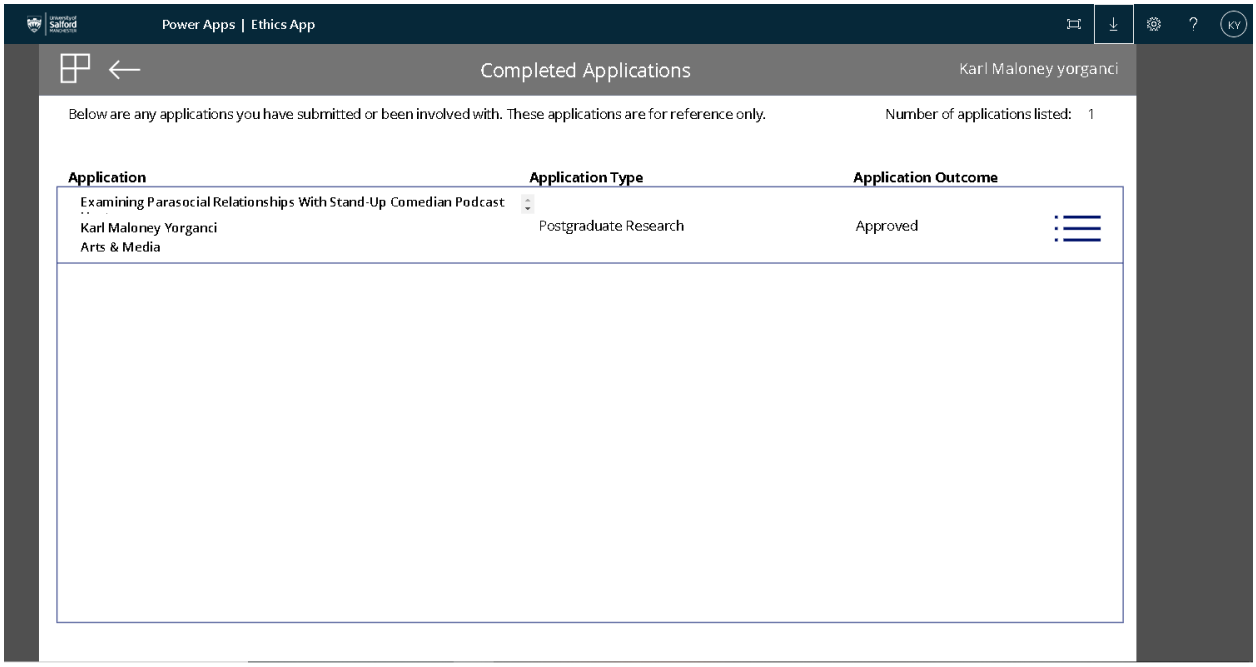
As mentioned in the previous section, this thesis did not distinguish between different types of PSRs. Whilst her study which led to the development and assessment of a Multiple Parasocial Relationships Scale focused on two specific types of PSRs (parasocial friendship and parasocial love), Tukachinsky (2010) highlights the likelihood of many others also existing. Future work that helps us understand the diverse nature of PSRs, would be useful in leading us towards more complete understanding of the relationships between media figures and users.

Future studies could also focus more on each kind of media effect, through which podcast hosts who become parasocial opinion leaders can influence their users. This would be useful as it would create more in-depth information about each type of media effect, rather than providing a little insight about each. For example, the physiological effects of communication with podcast hosts could be measured via objective measures such (as heart rate, blood pressure etc...), rather than subjective self-report data such as that obtained from the interviews. A look at existing literature reveals that there is a lack of research that measures the physiological effects of PSI and PSRs with media figures. This could also be a direction for future research.

Finally, this thesis identified certain markers of the authenticity of podcast hosts. However, as this study was only exploratory there are most likely further markers waiting to be identified. Therefore, future research could focus on testing the existing markers (on a larger sample of podcast users) as well as searching for additional markers. Research which provides insight on how different markers of authenticity contribute to the overall assessment of a podcast host being authentic would also be valuable.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval



Ethics Application: Panel Decision

This message was sent with Low importance

ethics
Tue 19/01/2021 00:25
To: Karl Maloney Yorganci

The Ethics Panel has reviewed your application: Examining Parasocial Relationships With Stand-Up Comedian Podcast Hosts
Application ID: 255

The decision is: Application Approved.

The Chair of the Panel made these comments:

Second review.

Approval is granted.

The (acting) Chair. 19.01.2021

Appendix 2: Invitation Letter for Interviews

Dear potential participant,

As part of my PhD research in Media & Cultural Studies, I am looking to interview a small number of stand-up comedian hosted podcast users about their relationships with their favorite hosts.

Contributions will be of the utmost value in terms of developing a greater understanding about our ever changing media landscape.

By volunteering to participate you will be helping to expand academic literature on podcasting (and more specifically comedy podcasts) which are areas that have been highlighted by numerous scholars as receiving insufficient academic attention.

Who can take part in the study?

The only requirements for participation in this study is that you are at least 18 years old and access a podcast hosted by a stand-up comedian at least once a month.

How long will the interview last?

Whilst the answer to this question will vary for each participant, on average the interview is likely to last somewhere between half an hour to an hour.

If I agree to participate, can I later change my mind?

Yes. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be free to withdraw any time before or during the interview process.

Will I remain anonymous?

Yes, the information you provide during the interview will be presented in a way that ensures your anonymity.

Who developed the interview schedule?

The interview schedule was developed by Karl Turgut Maloney Yorganci, a Media & Cultural Studies PhD student at the University of Salford in England. It has since been reviewed and approved by the University of Salford's Ethics Committee.

Where will the interviews take place?

All of the interviews will be conducted online, via Zoom.

Will the interviews be recorded?

For data analysis purposes the interviews will be recorded, as the interviewer cannot write fast enough to get down all of your answers. However, as mentioned before you will remain anonymous in all the work produced by the researcher. Following the interviews, no one will have access to the recordings apart from the interviewer and his two university supervisors.

How can I participate in the study?

If you would like to participate in the study please contact me via Facebook or email at K.T.Maloneyyorganci@edu.salford.ac.uk. We will then arrange a mutually acceptable time for the interview and you will be provided with the necessary details about how to join on Zoom.

What will happen before the interview commences?

Before the interview commences you will be asked if you have read and understood the Invitation Letter and whether you consent to participating in the study.

What will happen with the information you provide?

Information from the interviews will be included in the researcher's PhD thesis and possibly an article published in a relevant academic journal.

What if there is a problem?

If you have further queries or a concern about any aspect of this study, you can contact the researcher (K.T.Maloneyyorganci@edu.salford.ac.uk) or his supervisors via the following emails: Dr. Sharon Coen (s.coen@salford.ac.uk)
Dr. Leslie McMurtry (l.g.mcmurtry@salford.ac.uk)

Following this, if any issues and complaints still remain, you can contact Dr. Jack Wilson, Ethics Chair for the School of Arts, Media & Creative Technologies via the email ethics@salford.ac.uk.

Thank you for your interest in participating and taking the time to read this document!

Karl Turgut Maloney Yorganci, PhD researcher
School of Arts, Media and Creative Technology,
New Adelphi Building,
University of Salford M5 4BR,
United Kingdom.

Appendix 3: Interview Schedule

INTRODUCTION

- Hi, I'm Karl and today we will be talking about your favourite stand-up comedian podcast host and their podcast.
- After reading the invitation letter, do you consent to participating in this study?
- Do you have any questions for me before we commence the interview?
- If at any point you don't understand a question, just let me know.
- Thank you very much for volunteering to participate in the study
- If you are ready we can now begin the interview!

QUESTIONS

- **What is your favourite stand-up comedian hosted podcast and how did you start listening to it?**

- How did you come across the podcast?
- What were your thoughts after listening to it for the first time?
- What made you want to listen to more episodes?
- Has your relationship with the podcast changed over time?

- **Why is this podcast your favourite?**

- What in particular do you like about this podcast?
- What separates this podcast from others?
- Does the host play an important role in your fondness of the podcast?

- **What are your feelings and thoughts about the podcast host?**

- What characteristics do you like or dislike?
- What are the similarities and differences between you and the host?
- Do you think you would get on well if you were to meet in person?

- **What role do the podcast and host occupy in your life?**

- WHEN, WHERE and HOW do you listen to the podcast?
- What does the podcast add to your life?
- If you knew the host personally, what kind of a figure do you think they would be in your life?

- **Could you please talk about whether listening to the podcast has impacted you in any way?**

- Has it changed the way you FEEL, THINK or ACT about certain issues?
- Have you tried any activities or products recommended by the podcast host?
- What is your opinion about the advertising on the podcast?

- **How would you feel if the podcast host went a while without posting an episode or stopped podcasting?**

- Would you feel like something is missing from your life?
- Would you try and keep up with the host in a different way?

CONCLUSION

- Thank you very much, it was great to hear about your thoughts and experiences.
- Before we conclude the interview is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 3: Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form for Survey

Dear respondent,

Thank you for volunteering to participate in this study on podcasting. Your contributions are of the utmost value in terms of developing a greater understanding about relationships between podcast hosts and users. Before continuing to the questionnaire please read the rest of the information presented and provide your consent if you wish to participate in the study.

What is the purpose of the study?

By examining the relationship between hosts and users of the Joe Rogan Experience, Duncan Trussell Family Hour and Whiskey Ginger podcasts, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of our ever changing media landscape. The researcher hopes to add to academic literature on podcasting and more specifically comedy podcasts which are areas that have been highlighted by scholars as receiving insufficient academic attention.

Who can take part in the study?

The only requirements for participation in this study is that you are at least 18 years old and access one of the three podcasts mentioned above at least once a month.

Who developed this questionnaire?

This questionnaire has been developed by Karl Turgut Maloney Yorganci, a Media & Cultural Studies PhD student at the University of Salford in England. The questionnaire has been reviewed and approved by the University of Salford's Ethics Committee.

If I agree to complete a questionnaire now, can I change my mind?

Yes you are able to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time throughout completion. Simply do not submit the questionnaire and shut down your web browser. You free to return and complete the questionnaire at any time.

Will I remain anonymous?

All questionnaires will be completed anonymously and as a result the researcher will not know who has completed each questionnaire. The questionnaire does not ask for names or any other information that can be used to identify respondents.

How will I be able to get in touch with the researcher?

The researcher can be contacted via email at K.T.Maloneyyorganci@edu.salford.ac.uk. Please feel free to contact the researcher if you have any further queries about the questionnaire or study.

Providing consent

You must be at least 18 years of age to give consent to participate in the research. By giving consent:

• You confirm that you have read and understand information about the study, provided in the Participant Information Sheet.

• You understand that participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

• You recognize that all information provided in this questionnaire will remain anonymous and confidential.

•You accept that the information you provided will be used in conjunction with the information provided by other participants in the PhD dissertation of the researcher.

I agree to participate in the study and would like to continue to the questionnaire.

Appendix 4: Sample Questionnaire

SECTION 1

Please select one answer for each of the questions below.

What age group are you in?

- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55 or above

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

Who is your favourite stand-up comedian podcast host?

What is the name of their podcast?

How often do you listen to the podcast?

- Every day
- Few times a week
- Once a week
- Few times a month
- Once a month

SECTION 2

Please select Yes or No for each of the following questions.

Do you recall the podcast host talking about any brands, products, or services?

- Yes
- No

Are there any particular brands, products, or services that you remember the podcast host recommending?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever recommended a product or service to anyone that you heard about from the podcast host?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever looked for more information about a product or service recommended by the podcast host?

- Yes
- No

Have you ever purchased products or services based on the recommendation of the podcast host?

- Yes
- No

SECTION 3

Please select one of the answers for each of the questions below.

Based on anything the podcast host may have said, do you typically think that he/she has personally used those products or services?

Never | Occasionally | Sometimes | Frequently | Usually | Every time

Do you typically trust what the podcast host says about the products or services he/she recommends?

Never | Occasionally | Sometimes | Frequently | Usually | Every time

When the podcast host recommends a product or service, does it add to your perception of the value of the product or service?

Never | Occasionally | Sometimes | Frequently | Usually | Every time

SECTION 4

Please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement with each of the statements below.

The podcast host frequently influences my opinion.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neutral | Somewhat agree | Agree | Strongly agree

The podcast host frequently changes my perspective on issues.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neutral | Somewhat agree | Agree | Strongly agree

The podcast host teaches me things.

Strongly disagree | Disagree | Somewhat disagree | Neutral | Somewhat agree | Agree | Strongly agree

The podcast host influences the way I feel about certain issues.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

The podcast host encourages me to try new products and brands.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

SECTION 5

I see the podcast host as a natural, down-to-earth person.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

I would like to meet the podcast host in person.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

If the podcast host appeared on another program, I would listen to that program.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

If I saw the podcast host in a newspaper or magazine, I would read it.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

The podcast host makes me feel comfortable.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

Whenever I am unable to listen to the podcast host, I miss him/her.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

I look forward to listening to the podcast host's program.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

The podcast host seems to understand the kinds of things I want to know.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

I feel sorry for the podcast host when he/she makes a mistake.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

I find the podcast host attractive.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral
Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree	

You have reached the end of the questionnaire. Thank you for the valuable information you have provided. If you have any other comments about the study please leave them in the section below.

Appendix 5: List of Favourite Podcast Hosts Put Forward in Survey

Host	Frequency
Adam Buxton	3
Adam Carolla	1
Adam Conover	1
Alice Wetterlund	1
Amy Schumer	1
Andrew Santino	1
Andrew Schulz	2
Andy Daly	1
Andy Zaltzman	2
Ari Shaffir	1
Ben van der Velde	1
Benjamin Partridge	1
Bert Kreischer	14
Big Jay Oakerson	8
Bill Burr	8
Bobby Lee	1
Brenden Schaub	1
Bridget Phetasy	1
Chip Chipperson	2
Chris D’elia	1
Chris Distefano	1

Chris Fairbanks	3
Chris Franjola	1
Chris Gethard	1
Chris Ramsey	2
Christina Paszitsky	5
Christopher Titus	1
Conan O'Brien	1
Dan Bublitz Jr.	1
Dan Cummins	2
Dan Schreiber	1
Dan Soder	2
Dana Gould	1
Daniel Van Kirk	1
Danielle Ward	1
Dave Anthony	2
Deniz Goktas	1
Doug Stanhope	2
Duncan Trussell	1
Ed Gamble	5
Elis James	8
John Robins	4
Ethan Klein	1
Fortune Feimster	1
Frank Skinner	1
Gareth Reynolds	4

Greg Fitzsimmons	1
Hampton Yount	1
Heather McMahan	1
Henry Zebrowski	1
Ian Karmel	3
Jackie Kashian	1
Jake Young	1
James Acaster	5
James Pietragallo	2
Jamie Loftus	1
Jason Mantzoukas	1
Jimmie Whisman	1
Jimmy Pardo	5
Joe List	1
Joe Rogan	26
Joey Diaz	8
John Hodgman	1
John Robins	5
Karen Kilgariff	3
Karl Chandler	1
Kevin Smith	1
Kiri Pritchard-McLean	5
Lauren Lapkus	1
Laurie Kilmartin	1
Luis J. Gomez	1

Marc Maron	75
Mark Normand	1
Matt Besser	1
Mike Birbiglia	1
Milo Edwards	1
Moshe Kasher	1
Natasha Leggero	1
Nate Bargatze	1
Nick Mullen	3
Nicole Byer	4
Paul F. Tompkins	20
Pete Holmes	4
Rachel Fairburn	4
Richard Herring	17
Rob Beckett	1
Romesh Ranganathan	1
Russell Brand	1
Ryan Sickler	1
Sam Tripoli	1
Sarah Silverman	1
Scott Aukerman	20
Shane Gillis	1
Stuart Goldsmith	5
The Sklar Brothers	1
	8

Theo Von	
Tig Notaro	2
Tim Dillon	9
Tom Segura	45
Trisha Paytas	1
Vix Leyton	1
Whitney Cummings	1

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