



“One of Us”: Examining the Authenticity and Parasocial Relationships of Stand-Up Comedian Podcast Hosts

Karl T. Maloney Yorganci & Leslie McMurtry

To cite this article: Karl T. Maloney Yorganci & Leslie McMurtry (25 Nov 2024): “One of Us”: Examining the Authenticity and Parasocial Relationships of Stand-Up Comedian Podcast Hosts, Journal of Radio & Audio Media, DOI: [10.1080/19376529.2024.2432023](https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2432023)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2432023>



© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.



[View supplementary material](#)



Published online: 25 Nov 2024.



[Submit your article to this journal](#)



Article views: 347



[View related articles](#)



[View Crossmark data](#)


“One of Us”: Examining the Authenticity and Parasocial Relationships of Stand-Up Comedian Podcast Hosts

Karl T. Maloney Yorganci  and Leslie McMurtry 

ABSTRACT

Previous research has provided limited insight into why podcasts hosts are perceived to be authentic and has not examined how characteristics that are seen as being indicative of authenticity can relate to parasocial relationships (PSRs). In this study, a thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews with 10 podcast users revealed the presence of certain markers of authenticity associated with their favorite hosts. Ordinarity, immediacy, and similarity were viewed as being able to contribute to PSRs by creating a feeling of friendship whilst freedom, spontaneity, imperfection and confessions were viewed as being able to contribute by creating a feeling of knowing the hosts.

Podcasts have been defined as audio and video files that can be downloaded to a desktop computer, iPod, or other portable media players for playback whenever and wherever a user desires (McClung & Johnson, 2010). Research shows that podcasting is gaining familiarity, whilst being accessed increasingly by a substantial number of media users, some of whom consume podcasts more than any other source of media (Bratcher, 2020). Podcasts hosted by stand-up comedians have featured a wide variety of guests including high-profile figures such as then-President of the United States 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* (Rogan, 2009 -present) (Neate & Wong, 2018). The reach of podcasts hosted by stand-up comedians should also not be underestimated, because as indicated by Ryan (2017) within a few days of releasing an episode 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.

 Supplemental data for this article can be accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2432023>

© 2024 The Author(s). Published with license by Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

As argued by Mintz (1985), 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)” (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 behavior as well as changing social roles and expectations (Mintz, 1985). Therefore, examining the podcasts of stand-up comedian hosts is important because of their involvement in a profession that can provide valuable insight into society and culture (Mintz, 1985), in addition to the large number of people that they reach via podcasts (Ryan, 2017), and the large number of podcasts that they host (Marx, 2015).

Although podcasts in general have been studied since the early 2000s (Wendland, 2024) some aspects of scholarship such as hosts (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021) and audiences remain underdeveloped. The comedy podcast also remains a largely unexplored subgenre of contemporary comedy (Marx, 2015).

Therefore, the rationale of this study is to contribute to the limited academic research on comedy podcasts whilst focusing on the under-researched area of relationships between hosts and users. In order to do this, the study utilizes the concepts of PSRs and mediated authenticity, both of which are touched upon in more detail in the literature review section of this article.

Literature Review

PSRs 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). They can involve strong emotional responses (Levy, 1979) and a feeling that media figures are friends (Rubin et al., 1985) who we know things about as a result of putting forth time and commitment, which in turn leads to an increased connection (Eyal & Dailey, 2012). However, unlike interpersonal relationships, PSRs are one-sided because it is only the media user who observes and feels close to the media figure and not vice versa (Schramm & Hartmann, 2008).

Since its conception by Horton and Richard Wohl (1956), research on PSRs has been extensive, appearing in disciplines such as 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). Although much less common (Liebers & Schramm, 2019), research on radio has revealed that PSRs can impact listeners’ perception that their favorite radio personalities influence their general opinions and perspectives (Quintero Johnson & Patnoe-Woodley, 2016), that behavioral change in

response to media exposure can be facilitated by PSRs between audience members and characters that appear in radio soap operas (Papa et al., 2000), that celebrity status can influence the acceptance of religious messages due to PSRs with hosts (Shabazz, 2024) and that radio can foster strong PSRs by providing listeners with a sense of connection, identity, and community (Fox, 2024).

In recent years, scholars have also started investigating PSRs with podcast hosts from a number of different angles. Their research has shown that forming PSRs with hosts can be a motivation for podcast use (Perks & Turner, 2019), that PSRs can have strong positive effects on users' attitudes and behavior (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021), that PSRs can predict to what extent users perceive themselves as benefitting from a podcast (Pavelko & Myrick, 2020), that PSRs can impact whether or not users express trust in what hosts have to say (Brinson & Lemon, 2022), that PSRs can contribute to users' psychological and sociocultural adjustment (Maloney Yorganci & Coen, 2024) and that PSRs can have a direct and positive influence on users' identification with hosts, which in turn can be positively associated with their willingness to keep subscriptions (Chen & Keng, 2023). However, in these studies the concept of authenticity remains on the periphery, occasionally making an appearance that is usually fleeting.

In one such study 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 authors found that as participants developed deeply personal connections with the podcasts and their content, hosts morphed into personal friends through one-sided, yet beneficial PSRs. Authenticity was described as an important aspect of interest for podcasts. Whilst no definition for authenticity was provided, the article did indicate 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, similar to findings from Brinson and Lemon (2022). In another study, Heiselberg and Have (2023) empirically identified and conceptualized what podcast users expect from hosts 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 everyday language and have a mood that is constant. 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 humor. Whilst it is not clear exactly what is meant by authenticity, this information was presented under PSRs which was one of the categories of expectations users had of podcast hosts. Brinson and Lemon (2022) examined whether podcast users in a PSR associated any or all of Nunes et al. (2021) six components of authenticity (accuracy, connectedness, integrity, legitimacy, originality, and proficiency) with 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, Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study found that the more authentic podcast users perceived hosts to be, the more extensive their PSRs. To evaluate hosts' attractiveness, the study used Baeßler's (2009), p. 25 items scale that contained aspects of social, behavioral 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).

When taken together, these studies suggest that authenticity is an important part of interest toward 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 explicitly focus 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 they mean by authenticity. To not fall in to the same trap, this study uses Enli's (2014) theory of mediated authenticity and her non-exhaustive list of markers that can contribute to the assessment of a media figure or text being authentic, in order to examine the relationship between perceived authenticity and PSRs with podcast hosts.

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 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). 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 that suggest that a media figure or text is authentic. Whilst acknowledging that her list is by no means exhaustive, the seven markers that she mentions 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 based on 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 not dogmatic about “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 study 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 favorite hosts and how these markers can relate to different aspects of PSRs. For the purpose of this study, 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.

Method

This study is comprised of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 stand-up comedian hosted podcast users. Utilizing this method allowed the researchers to explore the respondents' complex social worlds by eliciting vivid pictures of their perspectives, opinions, feelings and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) relating to their relationships with podcast hosts. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, who were selected if they met the criteria determined by the researcher as relevant to fulfilling the purpose 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.

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).

After the interview questions were piloted with friends and colleagues in order to ensure that they would elicit the desired information in the smoothest way possible, an Invitation Letter was shared on the personal page of the first author's social media platforms Facebook and Instagram.¹ 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, and lasted somewhere between half an hour to an hour.

Ethical approval for the research was granted by the University of Salford's Ethics Committee (reference no: 255) and the study adhered strictly to the British Psychological Society's Code of Ethics and Conduct (British Psychological Society, 2021). 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.

The age, gender and favorite podcast of each participant can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Semi – Structured Interview Participants

Participant	Pseudonym	Gender ²	Age	Favourite Podcast
1	Georgia	Female	27	What's Upset You Now
2	Dylan	Male	28	Olumlu Dünya
3	Elise	Female	28	Monday Morning Podcast
4	Britney	Female	25	O Tarz Mi?
5	Michael	Male	30	Joe Rogan Experience
6	Chris	Male	28	Tim Dillon Show
7	Fred	Male	30	Joe Rogan Experience
8	Ivy	Female	29	O Tarz Mi?
9	Gigi	Female	32	Ask Iliza Anything
10	Carl	Male	27	Joe Rogan Experience

Table 2 Participants' Favorite Podcasts

Name	Host(s)	Launch Date	Network	Country	Description
What's Upset You Now?	Seann Walsh & Paul McCaffrey	May 2020	Keep It Light Media	United Kingdom	15 minute long conversations between the hosts about things that infuriate everyone.
Olumlu Dünya	Deniz Özturhan	March 2020	Podbee Media	Turkey	Monologues prepared to fully exercise our right not to go crazy, laugh and feel good despite everything.
Monday Morning Podcast	Bill Burr	January 2011	All Things Comedy	United States	Monologues featuring rants about topics from relationship advice and sports to the Illuminati.
O Tarz Mi?	Bengi Apak, Can Bonomo & Can Temiz (previously Ismail Türküsev)	December 2017	otarzmi	Turkey	Hilarious and thought-provoking conversations between the hosts who explore a variety of topics with a unique blend of insight and humour.
Joe Rogan Experience	Joe Rogan	December 2009	Spotify	United States	Long form conversations with guests that include comedians, actors, musicians, MMA fighters, authors, artists and beyond.
Ask Iliza Anything	Iliza Shlesinger	October 2018	Earwolf	United States	Hilarious takes on the problems of listeners who submit questions for the host (and occasional celebrity) guests to answer.

According to Edison Research (2020) users between 25 and 34 years of age accessed podcasts for a minimum of five hours per week, more than users in any other age category. Therefore, it is fitting that all of the participants in this study fell within this category. Further information about the favorite podcast of each participant can be seen in Table 2.

Analysis

Upon the completion of the interviews, thematic analysis was used to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within the data that was collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The approach to thematic analysis used in this study was template analysis (King, 2012).

The first step of the analysis was defining priori themes and subthemes (i.e., those determined in advance of coding) (King, 2012). The two priori themes of the template analysis were PSRs and Perceived Authenticity. “Feelings of knowing the hosts” and “feelings of friendship” were the priori subthemes of PSRs, whilst based on Enli’s (2014) markers of mediated authenticity “predictability,” “spontaneity,” “immediacy,” “confessions,” “ordinariness,” “ambivalence” and “imperfection” were the priori subthemes of Perceived Authenticity.

After defining the priori themes and subthemes, interview recordings were transcribed and each transcript read through thoroughly (King, 2012). This was followed by the initial coding of the data. Parts of the transcripts relevant to the purpose of the study (i.e. codes) were identified (King, 2012). If they were encompassed by one of the priori subthemes the codes were attached to them (King, 2012). When there was no relevant subtheme 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, “similarity” and “freedom.” The perception that participants’ favorite hosts are similar to them in different ways (including views, sense of humor, 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 the 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). Existing subthemes were deleted when they seemed redundant (King, 2012), which resulted in “ambivalence” and “predictability” being removed as subthemes of Perceived Authenticity.

It was decided that the template was final when there were no substantial sections of the data clearly relevant to the purpose of the study 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 results of the analysis (King, 2012).

Results

This section of the article presents the themes and subthemes that emerged from the thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews.

PSRs

Most participants used language that indicated PSRs with their favorite hosts. The two subthemes of PSRs were “feeling of knowing the host” and “feeling of friendship.”

Feeling of Knowing the Host

The majority of participants used language that indicated a feeling of knowing the hosts. Touching upon Seann Walsh and Paul McCaffrey, Georgia 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, Elise 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, Carl 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.

Feeling of Friendship

Many of the participants used language that indicated they had a feeling of friendship toward their favorite hosts. For Gigi, 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 Ivy, 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, Chris 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.

Perceived Authenticity

The majority of participants used language that indicated they perceived their favorite hosts to be authentic. The hosts were often described as being "honest" (Georgia), "genuine" (Elise) and "natural" (Britney) which were characteristics that were appreciated even when participants did not agree with what they were saying (Georgia). Despite sometimes having "opposite opinions" (Britney) with their co-hosts the hosts were described as just saying what they think (Britney) and being themselves in every way (Ivy). 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 by it'" (Elise). When speaking about their favorite 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

Ordinariness

Almost all of the participants used language that indicated the ordinariness of their favorite hosts. For example, Joe Rogan was described as being a “really common guy,” “an ordinary guy who just wants to learn” (Carl) and “a plain American guy from Boston” (Michael). Whilst some participants thought that the topics their favorite hosts talked about were “really common” (Gigi) and “things that you can relate to” (Georgia) 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” (Carl) and “not pretentious” (Elise). To most of the interview participants, the hosts did not seem glamorously mediated as they told “sexual jokes” (Britney), touched upon “annoying” (Georgia) things that happened in their daily lives and had “their own vocabulary” that they used in certain situations (Ivy). In relation to Bengi Apak, Ivy 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 interviews also demonstrated how the perception of hosts being ordinary can add to podcast users’ feeling of friendship toward them. For example, the sexual jokes told by İsmail Türküsev made Britney 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 Ivy feel like “part of their team” once she started understanding it. In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how participants’ perception of the hosts’ ordinariness can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of friendship.

Immediacy

The majority of participants used language that indicated a sense of immediacy. Whilst listening to the podcasts, participants felt like they were “in the conversation” (Michael) and “meeting up with” hosts (Elise). Describing *O Tarz Mı?* (Apak et al., 2017 - present), Ivy 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 favorite host. A sense of “liveness” was also touched upon by participants who noted that Tim Dillon was using “up-to-date humor” to reflect on “things that had just happened” (Chris) and that Deniz Özturhan was “picking trendy topics” that made you feel “in it” (Dylan).

The interviews also demonstrated how the perception of immediacy can add to podcast users' feeling of friendship toward the hosts. The fact that Dylan felt like he was "in the conversation" made him feel like he was "in the chat with his friends." Similarly, the fact that Britney felt like "one of the group" made the hosts of her favorite podcast "feel like friends." In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how the participants' perception of immediacy can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of friendship.

Similarity

Almost all of the participants indicated that they had similarities with their favorite host. Speaking about İsmail Türküsev, Britney 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" (Michael), liking "to stretch the boundaries of imagination" (Chris) and putting one's "physical and mental mind into stress" (Carl). Fred stated that he liked Joe Rogan because they had a "similar interest in some topics," and Michael 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' favorite hosts are similar to them can add to a feeling of friendship. For example, Dylan stated that he felt "really close to" Deniz Özturhan because she was a "female version" of himself and Ivy felt "closer" to Bengi Apak because they were both women who represented the "masculinity and femininity inside [of] them." In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how participants' perception of being similar with hosts can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of friendship.

Freedom

Almost half of the participants used language that indicated the freedom enjoyed by their favorite 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" (Elise). 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 (Britney). Carl contrasted his favorite 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 Chris 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 Elise 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” (Chris). In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how participants' perception of hosts being free can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of getting to know them.

Spontaneity

Approximately half of the participants referred to the spontaneity of their favorite hosts. Regarding Iliza Schlesinger, Gigi 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 favorite hosts just said what was on their mind (Elise) and what they think (Britney), directly reflecting how they were feeling (Ivy). When hosts advertised products, this also came across as spontaneous, rather than preplanned and strategic. For example, one participant stated that her favorite host just shared her experience about products rather than “pushing, pushing, pushing” them (Gigi).

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 Britney think that she knew about his opinions and the fact that Bill Burr just “felt like he was having a conversation” made Elise feel like she knew what he cared about. In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how participants' perception of the hosts' spontaneity can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of getting to know them.

Imperfection

Most participants indicated that their favorite hosts were imperfect. For example, touching upon Bill Burr, Elise stated:

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

Similarly, Dylan thought that Deniz Öztürhan could take too long talking about small subjects, whilst Carl 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, Gigi thought that Iliza Schlesinger being “kind of messy” and a “bit silly” made her “really human,” whilst Ivy noted Bengi Apak and her co-hosts were “more free” to be themselves as they weren't aiming to be perfect. In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how participants' perception of hosts and their podcasts being imperfect can contribute to their PSRs, by creating a feeling of getting to know them.

Confessions

Nearly half of the participants used language that indicated confessions from their favorite hosts. For example, regarding Bengi Apek, Ivy 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” (Michael), suffering from anxiety and being uncomfortable about their appearance (Ivy).

The interviews also demonstrated how confessions from hosts can add to podcast users' feeling of getting to know them. For example, Georgia stated that confessions about what upset Seann Walsh & Paul McCaffrey, allowed her to “get to know them” whilst Ivy thought that she “got to know” Bengi Apak “better” as a result of her confessions on the podcast. In this way, the interviews also demonstrated how confessions from hosts can contribute to their PSRs with users, by creating a feeling of getting to know them.

Discussion & Conclusion

Whilst previous research suggested that authenticity is an important part of interest toward 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 these PSRs (Schlütz & Hedder, 2021), they did not explicitly focus on why hosts are perceived to be authentic or how characteristics that are seen as being indicative of authenticity relate to PSRs.

That being said, there are some similarities between the insight produced from those studies and the findings of this article. For example, in one of those studies Heiselberg and Have (2023) indicated that podcast users expect to form PSRs with hosts who make self-disclosures and use everyday language. Whilst the authors did not explicitly define these characteristics as markers of authenticity, making self-disclosures relates to the marker of confessions identified in this article, and using everyday language relates to ordinarieness. In Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study, being open and down-to earth were two of the five factors of authenticity. Being down to earth relates to the marker of ordinarieness identified in this article, whilst being open relates to confessions. The other three factors identified in Schlütz and Hedder's (2021) study were being affable, credible and sensitive. However, these factors do not relate to the markers of authenticity identified in this article. Finally, participants in Soto-Vásquez et al. (2022) study found hosts to be relatable and described them as actual people having real life-conversations. These sentiments relate to the marker of ordinarieness identified in this article. Participants also noted that they felt like the hosts were in the room with them and that they were part of conversations. These sentiments relate to the marker of immediacy. Finally, the participants stated that they appreciated the openness of hosts when discussing things like mental health issues. These sentiments relate to the marker of confessions. None of the studies mentioned above shed light on how different markers of authenticity relate to the development of PSRs. However, this article suggests that spontaneity and confessions can contribute to PSRs by creating the feeling of getting to know hosts, whilst immediacy and ordinarieness can contribute by creating the feeling of friendship.

In addition to the four mentioned above, participants in this study also mentioned another of Enli's (2014) markers of mediated authenticity, which did not make an appearance in previous research. This marker was imperfection, and the article suggests that it can contribute to PSRs by creating a feeling of knowing the hosts. As a result, five out of seven of Enli's (2014) markers of mediated authenticity were mentioned by participants in this study (ordinarieness, immediacy, spontaneity, confessions and imperfection). In addition to these markers, two new ones were also identified (freedom and similarity), further contributing to the concept of mediated authenticity. Freedom was seen as being able to contribute to PSRs by creating a feeling of knowing the hosts, whilst similarity was seen as being able to contribute by creating a feeling of friendship.

However, it must also be acknowledged that markers of mediated authenticity may differ from one medium to another. In their exploration of the perspectives

of producers and audiences of the New Zealand television program *Country Calendar*, Fountaine and Bulmer (2022) found three out of seven markers of Enli's (2014) mediated authenticity (predictability, spontaneity and ordinari-ness), with some tension around the presence of a fourth marker (which they reframed slightly as im/perfection). Hence, unlike with this study, predictability emerged as a marker of mediated authenticity whilst immediacy, confessions, similarity and freedom did not. Therefore, it might be reasonable to assume that there are more markers of mediated authenticity present in podcasts, in compar-ison to other media such as television. However, further research is required to substantiate this claim. In particular, the marker of freedom seems to be espe-cially relevant for podcasts, as it is the medium which is seen as providing the hosts with the ability to be free, in a way that other media does not.

One limitation of this study was that, because it took the form of exploratory research, it included a small sample size. Hence, the results of the study cannot be generalized to the larger population of stand-up comedian hosted podcast users. However, they can provide valuable insight into how the participants make sense of their world, and in particular, their relationship with podcast hosts. Another limitation of the study was that it did not identify for how many hours users accessed podcasts weekly. There could be differences between heavy and casual podcast consumption, which future research could seek to examine. As this study was only exploratory, it is likely that there are 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 others. Research which provides insight on how different markers contribute to the overall assessment of a podcast host being authentic would also be valuable,

as would research examining how factors such as geographical back-ground, cultural differences, age and gender might impact what podcast users consider to be authentic, as well as, their PSRs.

In her article which looked at populist political communication, Enli (2024) highlighted how perceived authenticity can be used to legitimize hate speech, conspiracy theories, and post-truth politics by individuals who seem to have a particular relation to the truth. As the same thing could also happen in podcasts, it is important to develop our understanding about both mediated authenticity and PSRs.

Notes

1. As the people being interviewed were people known to the first author, Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) strategies for responsibly managing interviews with people you know were followed in order to navigate the balance between personal and professional relationships to ensure the interview process remained ethical, transparent and methodologically sound.
2. Participants are listed using binary gender terms, because they self-identified within the binary.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributors

Karl Turgut Maloney Yorganci completed his PhD at the School of Arts, Media and Creative Technology at the University of Salford. His major research interests lie in the areas of podcasting, parasocial relationships and authenticity. He has co-authored an article for the *Worldwide Hospitality and Tourism Themes* journal, as well as, a book chapter for *Psychology of Democracy: Of the People, By the People, For the People*.

Leslie Grace McMurtry is a Senior Lecturer in Radio Studies at the University of Salford. Her monograph, *Revolution in the Echo Chamber: Audio Drama's Past, Present, and Future*, was published in 2019. She has published on radio and podcasting in numerous edited collections such as *The Oxford Handbook of Radio and Podcasting* and *The Routledge Companion to Radio and Podcast Studies* and in journals such as *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance*.

ORCID

Karl T. Maloney Yorganci  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7089-9707>

Leslie McMurtry  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-9253-0954>

References

- Apak, B., Bonomo, C., & Temiz, C. (Hosts). (2017). *O Tarz Mı?* [Audio podcast]. Otarzmi. <https://www.otarzmi.com/>
- Baeßler, B. (2009). *Medienpersonen als parasoziale Beziehungspartner [Media personae as parasocial relations]*. Nomos Publishing.
- Bratcher, T. R. (2020). Toward a deeper discussion: A survey analysis of podcasts and personalized politics. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, 1–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15456870.2020.1862846>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Brinson, N. H., & Lemon, L. L. (2022). Investigating the effects of host trust, credibility, and authenticity in podcast advertising. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 29(6), 558–576. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2022.2054017>
- British Psychological Society. (2021). *Code of ethics & conduct*. <https://doi.org/10.53841/bpsrep.2021.inf94>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Chen, Y.-H., & Keng, C.-J. (2023). Understanding audience willingness to keep subscriptions in digital podcast: A dual identification perspective. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527266.2023.2193191>
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2000). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (6th ed.). Sage Publications, Inc.
- Edison Research. (2020). *Super listeners 2020*. Retrieved February, 2021 from <https://www.edisonresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Super-Listeners-2020.pdf>

- Enli, G. (2014). *Mediated authenticity: How the media constructs reality*. Peter Lang Verlag. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-1-4539-1458-8>
- Enli, G. (2024). Populism as “truth”: How mediated authenticity strengthens the populist message. *International Journal of Press/politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19401612231221802>
- Eyal, K., & Dailey, R. M. (2012). Examining relational maintenance in parasocial relationships. *Mass Communication & Society*, 15(5), 758–781. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2011.616276>
- Ferrara, A. (2002). *Reflective authenticity rethinking the project of modernity*. Taylor and Francis.
- Fountaine, S., & Bulmer, S. (2022). Telling stories about farming: Mediated authenticity and New Zealand’s country calendar. *Television & New Media*, 23(1), 81–99. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1527476420966756>
- Fox, K. (2024). Black radio’s contribution to collective and cultural memory: Personnel perspectives of Black radio history in the United States. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 31(1), 98–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2311369>
- Francis, J. J., Johnston, M., Robertson, C., Glidewell, L., Entwistle, V., Eccles, M. P., & Grimshaw, J. M. (2010). What is an adequate sample size? Operationalising data saturation for theory-based interview studies. *Psychology & Health*, 25(10), 1229–1245. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08870440903194015>
- Gilpin, D. R., Palazzolo, E. T., Brody, N., & Henderson, A. (2010). Socially mediated authenticity. *Journal of Communication Management*, 14(3), 258–278. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541011064526>
- Given, L. M. (2008). *The sage encyclopedia of qualitative research methods*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Heiselberg, L., & Have, I. (2023). Host qualities: Conceptualising listeners’ expectations for podcast hosts. *Journalism Studies*, 24(5), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2178245>
- Hennink, M., & Kaiser, B. N. (2022). Sample sizes for saturation in qualitative research: A systematic review of empirical tests. *Social Science & Medicine*, 292, 114523. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2021.114523>
- Horton, D., & Richard Wohl, R. (1956). Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance. *Psychiatry*, 19(3), 215–229. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00332747.1956.11023049>
- King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G. S. In & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research: Core methods and current challenges* (pp. 426–450). Sage Publications, Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526435620.n24>
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage Publications, Inc.
- Levy, M. R. (1979). Watching TV news as para-social interaction. *Journal of Broadcasting*, 23(1), 69–80. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838157909363919>
- Liebers, N., & Schramm, H. (2019). Parasocial interactions and relationships with media characters—an inventory of 60 years of research. *Communication Research Trends*, 38(2), 4.
- Llinares, D., Fox, N., & Berry, R. (2018). Introduction: Podcasting and podcasts—parameters of a new aural culture. In D. Llinares, N. Fox, & R. Berry (Eds.), *Podcasting: New aural cultures and digital media* (pp. 1–13). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90056-8_1
- Maloney Yorganci, K. T., & Coen, S. (2024). Parasocial relationships and their impact on the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of educational tourists: An

- autoethnography. *Worldwide Hospitality & Tourism Themes*, 16(1), 38–47. <https://doi.org/10.1108/WHATT-12-2023-0143>
- Maron, M. (Host). (2009). *WTF with Marc Maron* [Audio podcast]. Acast. <https://plus.acast.com/s/wtf-with-marc-maron-podcast>
- Marx, N. (2015). Radio voices, digital downloads: Bridging old and new media in the onion radio news podcast. *Comedy Studies*, 6(2), 107–117. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2040610X.2015.1083166>
- McClung, S., & Johnson, K. (2010). Examining the motives of podcast users. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 17(1), 82–95. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376521003719391>
- Mintz, L. E. (1985). Standup comedy as social and cultural mediation. *American Quarterly*, 37(1), 71–80. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712763>
- Neate, R., & Wong, J. C. (2018, September 7). *Tesla shares crash after Elon Musk smokes joint on live web show*. The guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/sep/07/tesla-chief-elon-musk-smokes-marijuana-on-live-web-show?CMP=tw_t_gu
- Nunes, J. C., Ordanini, A., & Giambastiani, G. (2021). The concept of authenticity: What it means to consumers. *Journal of Marketing*, 85(4), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022242921997081>
- Papa, M., Singhal, A., Law, S., Shefner-Roberts, C., Pant, S., Sood, S., & Rogers, E. (2000). Entertainment-education and social change: An analysis of parasocial interaction, social learning, collective efficacy, and paradoxical communication. *Journal of Communication*, 50(4), 31–55. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2000.tb02862.x>
- Pavelko, R. L., & Myrick, J. G. (2020). Muderinos and media effects: How the my favorite murder podcast and its social media community May promote well-being in audiences with mental illness. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 27(1), 151–169. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2019.1638925>
- Perks, L. G., & Turner, J. S. (2019). Podcasts and productivity: A qualitative uses and gratifications study. *Mass Communication & Society*, 22(1), 96–116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1490434>
- Quintero Johnson, J. M., & Patnoe-Woodley, P. D. (2016). Exploring the influence of parasocial relationships and experiences on radio listeners' consumer behaviors. *Communication Research Reports*, 33(1), 40–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08824096.2015.1117440>
- Rogan, J. (Host). (2009). *The Joe Rogan experience* [Video podcast]. Spotify. <https://open.spotify.com/show/4rOoJ6Egrf8K2IrywzwOMk>
- Rubin, A. M., Perse, E. M., & Powell, R. A. (1985). Loneliness, parasocial interaction, and local television news viewing. *Human Communication Research*, 12(2), 155–180.
- Ryan, C. (2017). *Tangentially reading*. Misfit Press.
- Schlütz, D., & Hedder, I. (2021). Aural parasocial relations: Host–listener relationships in podcasts. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 29(2), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2020.1870467>
- Schramm, H., & Hartmann, T. (2008). The psi-process scales: A new measure to assess the intensity and breadth of parasocial processes. *Communications*, 33(4), 385–401. <https://doi.org/10.1515/COMM.2008.025>
- Shabazz, D. L. (2024). “Got a radio show”: The influence of Steve Harvey’s morning ministry on secular radio audiences. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 31(1), 133–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2337660>
- Soto-Vásquez, A. D., Vilceanu, M. O., & Johnson, K. C. (2022). “Just hanging with my friends”: U.S. Latina/o/x perspectives on parasocial relationships in podcast

- listening during COVID-19. *Popular Communication*, 20(4), 324–337. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2022.2071902>
- Spinelli, M., & Dann, L. (2019). *Podcasting: The audio media revolution*. Bloomsbury Academic. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781501328671>
- Symons, A. (2017). Podcast comedy and ‘authentic outsiders’: How new media is challenging the owners of industry. *Celebrity Studies*, 8(1), 104–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2016.1217162>
- Tukachinsky, R., Walter, N., & Saucier, C. J. (2020). Antecedents and effects of parasocial relationships: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Communication*, 70(6), 868–894. <https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqaa034>
- Wendland, J. (2024). Building a better participatory culture and enhancing sense of community in podcasts – Systematic literature review. *Journal of Radio and Audio Media*, 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19376529.2024.2347609>

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Introduction

- Hi, I'm xxx and today we will be talking about your favorite 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 favorite 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 favorite?**
- 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?