Parasocial Relationships and Medium Consumption:

Understanding the Influence of *Love Island*

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Abstract

This study examines how parasocial relationships with the cast members of *Love Island* USA influence viewers' attitudes and how different mediums affect viewers' perception. The study consisted of a survey among 101 Boston University undergraduate students who watched season 7 of *Love Island*, either fully or partially through platforms such as Peacock, TikTok, and Instagram Reels. The survey assessed parasocial relationships, media consumption habits, emotional response to particular cast members, and overall attitude. Results showed that the medium through which participants consumed *Love Island* did not significantly predict their perception of cast members or their attitudes toward the show. However, stronger parasocial relationships were unexpectedly associated with lower brand loyalty scores, suggesting that emotional closeness to cast members does not translate into lifestyle imitation or brand-related behaviors. These findings highlight the complex role of parasocial bonds that challenges traditional assumptions about media influence and audience behavior.

Introduction

Reality television originated in the 1940s and has steadily grown in popularity. As reality TV grows as a major influence on contemporary media culture, shaping viewers' perceptions of people, the understanding of psychological engagement among viewers has become crucial to media research.

One of the most influential shows is *Love Island*, which originally aired in 2005 as *Celebrity Love Island* in the United Kingdom before being rebooted as *Love Island* in 2015 and later coming to the United States in 2019. During the summer of 2025, the show's 7th season became a No.1 USA hit, bringing over 18 million minutes streamed on Peacock. Its wide reach provides the opportunity to study how viewers may form parasocial connections with reality TV cast members and how these connections may shape their attitudes and perceptions.

The show's popularity extended beyond its original streaming platform with memes, posts, and videos about the show emerging on platforms such as Tiktok, Instagram Reels, Youtube, and other forms of social media where people have shared their commentary on the show. Reality television focuses on creating an environment with people and situations that are perceived to be "real." Cross-platform exposure further familiarizes the audience with the cast. Reality TV, paired with social media influence, can invoke parasocial relationships. According to Hoffner and Bond (2022), "Parasocial relationships (PSRs) are nonreciprocal socio-emotional connections with media figures such as celebrities or influencers." Past research demonstrates that parasocial relationships can shape viewers attitudes, behaviors, and loyalty toward media content.

Reality TV creates a strong ground for viewers to form parasocial relationships with the cast as the general perception is authenticity rather than scripted television. *Love Island* in

particular, implemented a feature where viewers could vote live during a two-hour period to decide the "fate" of their favorites, being directly involved with the show's decisions on who stays and who gets to go home.

This study focus investigates the relationship between parasocial bonds, media consumption, and the viewers' perception of *Love Island*. The study examines two central questions: How do parasocial relationships with *Love Island* cast members influence viewers attitudes and engagements towards the show? How does the medium of consumption such as Tiktok, Instagram Reels, Peacock, or Youtube, shape viewers' perception of cast members and their behaviors?

To address these questions, a survey amongst Boston University undergraduate students who have watched *Love Island* season 7 was conducted. The selected group is appropriate for the survey, as "Over 50% of the season 7 "*Love Island* USA" audience is aged 30 and under…"(NBCUniversal, 2025). The survey addressed questions related to strength of parasocial relationships, emotional response, media consumption patterns, and attitudes towards the cast. This research provides a foundation for examining how media platforms shape reality TV, how viewers' perception changes based on the media consumed, and how parasocial relationships develop.

Literature Review

Focal Brand

Love Island is a reality TV franchise that is internationally recognized. Combining romance, drama, and competition, it has grabbed the attention of people everywhere. Having gained so much popularity it has created versions based on different countries– *Love Island UK, USA, AUS*, etc– including its own spin off shows such as *Love Island Games* and *Beyond the*

Villa. This franchise has expanded beyond television and onto social media platforms, creating a more interactive experience for its viewers (Shrum, 2009). Along with their own app that lets their viewers play games, take quizzes, and simulate their own *Love Island*, they have also posted on platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, etc. This then lets their viewers engage with behind-the-scenes footage, promotional content, and clips that they can then repost, share and like, creating even more stigma around the show. (Boyd, n.d)

Premiering for a limited time annually, *Love Island* has to leverage social media as a way to maintain their audience's engagement beyond those summer months. By featuring never seen before clips, polls, past dramatic scenes, and introducing the new cast for the next season, they have managed to stay relevant and in the minds of their viewers. By creating spaces for their audience to engage and interact through social media they have been able to create fans of the brand. Having an integrated media strategy puts *Love Island* in a position of not only being a televised program,but also digital entertainment (L'Hoiry, 2019).

Theory and Research Basis

A key method of understanding a viewer's engagement, and thus perception, with reality tv, such as *Love Island*, is being conscious of parasocial relationships. A parasocial relationship is a one-sided emotional connection that viewers have with public figures that is created out of a false sense of intimacy. This means that without having any real interaction with the public figure, the viewer feels familiarity and closeness– a sense of attachment. Reality television shows like *Love Island* amplifies the "relationship" by exposing viewers to the cast and their interpersonal drama as well as encouraging closeness (Dibble, Hartman, & Rosaen, 2016; L'Hoiry, 2019).

To measure parasocial relationships in today's day and age, social media plays an imperative role. Tools similar to the PRISM survey (Boyd, n.d), along with frameworks are used to assess the intensity of the parasocial interactions as well as relationships (Dibble et al., 2016). The most common ways of assessment within those surveys and frameworks include Likert and semantic differential scales, which capture the affective and behavioral attitudes of parasocial relationships.

Along with parasocial relationships, media consumption among viewers is an important aspect of the perceptions that fans have of the show's cast members. Short form media content, such as TikTok videos or Instagram reels, can change audiences' perceptions of certain characters. By only highlighting certain moments or scenes in its entirety, it can lead to misinformation and misinformed attitudes amongst viewers (Vraga & Bode, 2020). Measuring and understanding media consumption as well as perception of social reality will help to determine the influence cast members have on viewers based on the viewers platform of consumption (Shrum, 2009). In correspondence, research shows that different platforms, clip and algorithm curation influence audience interpretation, which in turn affects the bonds of parasocial relationships, as well as the engagement between viewers and *Love Island* (Vraga & Bode, 2020)

These theoretical and research methods supply a useful basis for understanding how parasocial relationships are created and built as a result of reality television and social media. Furthermore, they emphasize how these parasocial relationships impact and decide viewers' perception of cast members as well as brand engagement and loyalty.

Conceptualization

"Audience perception" can be defined as the way in which audience members understand, perceive, and react to certain messages or subjects portrayed in the media (Asemah 2014). "Media consumption" is defined as the process in which individuals use and engage with media across various platforms (Shrum 2008). These two concepts, "audience perception" and "media consumption," will be evaluated and discussed through our in-depth interview and Qualtrics survey with questions regarding the role of different media channels with watching the *Love Island* show.

"Parasocial relationships" are defined as nonreciprocal emotional connections with figures online (Hoffner & Bond 2022). "Brand loyalty" is defined as an individual's consistent commitment to a brand (Ishak et. al 2013). These two concepts will be examined in our experiment with questions for the participants centered around relatability or connections with particular cast members and the *Love Island* show itself.

Review of Empirical Findings

A study conducted by Saqib Riaz and Umera Arif in the year 2017 examined how exposure to foreign TV programs influences fashion and lifestyle behaviors of youth in Pakistan. The study was from a survey research, where the researchers created questionnaires with a Likert scale that was distributed to a sample size of 250 male and female students of bachelors to PhD levels. The questions were aimed for the researchers to know about the preference of youth for foreign entertainment channels and fashion trends. The results revealed a strong correlation between foreign entertainment programs and its influences on youth. Youth in Pakistan tended to adopt Western-style fashion significantly more when they preferred watching foreign TV

programs. Overall, the authors concluded that foreign entertainment TV can deeply influence the fashion, lifestyle, and cultural behaviors of youth in Pakistan. This study is relevant to our research by emphasizing the influence entertainment TV can have on people, specifically youth. Moreover, it underlines the importance of considering how people's perceptions of their own lifestyle and the lifestyle of people shown in TV programs can be impacted by the media they consume.

A study by Sydney Reynolds in 2022 investigated the relationship between social media users and online influencers through the concept of parasocial relationships. Reynolds surveyed individuals who consistently engage with social media influencers. This includes those who follow and interact with influencers on social media platforms. This study was done to examine the association between parasocial relationship intensity and various factors within the participants, such as identification with the influencer, or wanting to be like the influencer. The study revealed that frequent engagement with specific influences is positively associated with stronger parasocial relationships. This is especially true when followers find similarity to the influencer, which therefore creates a one-sided bond from the followers to the influencer. This study is relevant to our study because it examines the relationship that viewers can develop with people they see on the internet, in this case, an entertainment TV program.

A study by Samira Farivar et. al in 2022 studied how follower-status and product involvement influence the development of parasocial relationships with social media influencers. The researchers surveyed followers of social media influencers on Instagram, measuring how much they follow or engage, the degree of involvement with a product the influencer was promoting, and the followers' strength of parasocial relationship toward the influencer. They then examined how these factors combined to influence credibility, brand attitudes, and purchase

intentions. The research revealed that not all followers develop strong parasocial relationships, however, those with strong parasocial relationships significantly increased the influencer's persuasive power. They enhanced credibility of the influencer, positively influenced attitudes toward the product the influencer promoted, and raised purchase intentions. This research highlights that in social media influencer marketing, parasocial relationships and psychological bonds can be more powerful than simply traditional metrics like follower or like count.

The chapter by L. J. Shrum from 2002, titled *Media Consumption and Perceptions of Social Reality: Effects and Underlying Processes*, asks how television media consumption influences people's perceptions of social reality. Shrum offers a theoretical review of decades of empirical research from "media effects" literature and social cognition theory. Shrum reviews findings on how television content could potentially distort perceptions of reality, explaining when and why media shapes beliefs, judgments, and perceptions. Shrum argues that heavy media consumers tend to reflect a "cultivation effect," which includes overestimating the prevalence of crime, likelihood of victimization, and social problems. However, the influence of media on social perceptions depends on both media exposure and the cognitive context of the audience. Shrum offers a theoretical framework that helps researchers understand when media exposure is likely to distort social perception, and when its influence can be mitigated.

A study by Puneet Bhargava et. al in 2023 titled *How Effective are TikTok Misinformation Debunking Videos?* investigates how effective "debunking" TikTok videos are at reducing viewers' belief in misinformation. The researchers conducted the experiment by surveying 1,169 U.S. participants that were recruited through an online platform. The participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (1) watch a misinformation video, (2) watch a correction video, or (3) watch a misinformation video followed by a "debunking" video. After that, they

saw two more videos of the same topic and rated the videos' credibility and indicated their agreement with the associated false claims. Compared to the participants who only watched the misinformation videos, those in the "debunking" condition showed a significant improvement in discerning true from false videos, indicating that debunking helped reduce belief in misinformation. This study provides evidence that debunking on TikTok can be useful to help viewers distinguish between videos that are true and that are misleading. This study is relevant to our research because it provides evidence that media consumers can be easily influenced by the things they watch. In our case, viewers can be influenced by the behaviors and attitudes of *Love Island* casts.

This study explores how viewing relationship-focused reality TV like *Love Island* can influence young people's perceptions of healthy relationships, gender roles, and intimate behavior with partners. The authors detail their experience running a relationship education program in 24 schools and on research with young people who watch *Love Island*. They investigate the ideas of relationships shown on *Love Island* compared with the formal relationship education. The authors argue that *Love Island* frequently normalizes emotionally abusive behaviors. This can influence young viewers' understanding of what "normal" relationships look like, sparking problems about relationship norms. This underscores the importance of including media-literacy and relationship education to help young viewers critique and discern what they see in reality TV shows like *Love Island*.

The 2022 study by Niall J O'Sullivan et al. examines whether TikTok videos about common pediatric urological conditions comply with established medical guidelines from the European Association of Urology. The authors searched TikTok for videos on various pediatric urological conditions, and screened these videos under predefined criteria. They identified 27

videos meeting inclusion criteria (with a combined total of over 6.5 million views, 308,700 likes and 5,782 comments) and compared the information presented to up-to-date EAU guidelines. They found that only 22.2% of the analyzed TikTok videos provided information that matched EAU guidelines. The majority (about two-thirds) contained misinformation, and none of the videos provided any cited evidence to support their claims. The misinformation was spread by various content creators including laypeople, non-medical caregivers, patients or family members, making it difficult for non-experts (patients or caretakers) to assess the reliability of what they saw. The study illustrates that while TikTok is widely used (with over 1.1 billion users globally) and often turned to for health-related information, it currently hosts a substantial amount of medically inaccurate content. This raises concern about potential harm if individuals rely on TikTok videos instead of professional medical advice. It underscores the need for better regulation or oversight, and highlights the importance of consulting qualified medical professionals rather than relying solely on social-media content for health decisions

The article by Austin Boyd describes the survey instrument, the Parasocial Relationships in Social Media (PRISM), to measure parasocial relationships between social media users and online influencers. The author reviewed existing PSR / parasocial-interaction scales (from TV, film, celebrity research), found them inadequate for social-media influencers, and therefore created a 22-item survey. The items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale and are grouped into four constructs: Interest in, Knowledge of, Identification with, and Interaction with. Then the authors conducted psychometric validation: evaluating content, face, construct, convergent and discriminant validity, internal consistency reliability, and measurement invariance across different social media platforms. The validation analyses supported that PRISM reliably and validly measures parasocial relationships in a social-media context. PRISM appears to fill a key

methodological gap: the lack of a standardized, validated PSR scale for social-media influencers. This development is important because much of the research on parasocial relationships was designed for television or older media and not for the interactive, always-on, algorithm-driven world of social media. By offering a validated tool tailored for social-media influencers, the PRISM survey enables researchers to systematically study how people relate emotionally and socially to influencers, compare results across platforms, and better understand the psychological and social effects of those relationships in modern media environments.

The study by Omotayo Banjo in 2002 explores how consumption of mass media influences individuals' expectations of romantic relationships and their satisfaction, trust, and commitment in actual relationships. The researchers surveyed 108 participants, 67 female and 41 male, from a university campus. The survey included questions on media-use frequency, perceived realism/trust in media, genre-specific viewing/reading habits, and scales measuring romantic expectations, intimacy expectations, trust & commitment, and relationship satisfaction. The study found that the media genre was associated with romantic expectations. For instance, consumption of romantic comedies and magazines was positively correlated with "fantasy rumination" (idealizing romance) and higher idealistic marital expectations. On the other hand, consumption of talk shows and reality-relationship shows was negatively correlated with trust and commitment expectations. The study suggests that media can shape people's internalized ideals about relationships, potentially setting unrealistic expectations. This may influence how individuals approach real-life relationships, what they expect from partners, and how satisfied they feel.

The study, Impact of Fashion Influencers on Generation Z and Millennials Purchasing Behavior, by Fornazaric and Gorenc in 2025, researched the relationship between online

influencers and purchasing behavior of consumers in Slovenia. According to Gorenc and Fornazaric, "Younger generations, particularly Gen Z and Millennials, are especially responsive to Insta-gram-based marketing strategies. Studies indicate that women are more susceptible to impulsive purchases triggered by emotionally charged content." The study surveyed 183 respondents with the primary objective of asking about respondent's engagement with Instagram and fashion content. Some of the questions asked: "Do you think Instagram advertising influences your attitude towards fashion products?", "Do you use the social network Instagram?", "What types of content on Instagram convince you the most to buy?" An important note to make is that out of 183 responses, millennials and Gen Z are not evenly divided. The research showed that purchasing behavior is significant and influenced by Instagram and influencers. However, various factors such as interests impact purchasing behavior as well. Additionally, 30% of Slovenian respondents reported making purchases based on influencer recommendation, but purchase intention and trust among Gen Z remains high with 85%. This shows how consumer demographics play a role in influencer impact on purchasing behavior.

Taken together, existing research suggests that parasocial relationships, media-shaped perception, and cross-platform consumption interact in complex ways to influence how audiences interpret and engage with reality-TV content. However, gaps remain regarding how these dynamics operate in the specific context of *Love Island*, a show that relies heavily on character attachment and thrives on social-media amplification. Therefore, this study investigates (1) how parasocial bonds with cast members shape viewer attitudes and behavioral engagement, and (2) whether the platform through which viewers consume Love Island content influences their perceptions of cast members and their behaviors.

Articulation of Research Questions

How do parasocial relationships with *Love Island* cast members influence viewers' attitudes and engagement toward the show on social media?

What is the relationship between viewer's attitudes towards the *Love Island* cast and the medium of consumption (e.g.,. Tiktok, Peacock TV, Youtube, Instagram Reels)?

In-Depth Interview Methods

A. Sample

The target population for the in-depth interviews consisted of Boston University students aged 18 or older who had watched *Love Island* Season 7. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling strategy, including outreach to classmates, friends, residential communities, and social media group chats. This method aligns with qualitative traditions emphasizing accessibility and naturalistic sampling.

A total of 15 interviews were conducted. Eligibility required (1) being at least 18 years old, and (2) having watched *Love Island* Season 7, screened through two pre-interview questions. No identifying information was collected beyond age, gender, ethnicity, and year in school, which were captured in the post-interview demographic questionnaire.

B. Measurement

A semi-structured interview guide was used to explore participants' viewing experiences, parasocial perceptions of contestants, reactions to social media content, and perceived influence of the show on dating, self-image, and interpersonal norms. All interview questions appear in full in Appendix A.

The interview guide included four major conceptual areas, each designed to align with the project's research questions:

Media Consumption Patterns

Questions in this section examined how participants watched *Love Island* Season 7, what platforms they used, how frequently they viewed related online content, and how algorithmic recommendations shaped their exposure to cast members and show-related media.

Parasocial Relationships

These items targeted the extent to which participants felt connected to specific cast members, including feelings of familiarity, emotional investment, and perceived intimacy or identification with contestants. Participants were encouraged to discuss both conscious and subconscious relational responses.

Audience Perception and Interpretation

This section explored how participants formed impressions of cast behavior, whether online discourse pushed them toward liking or disliking certain contestants, and how short-form media (e.g., TikTok clips, memes) shaped their judgments. Additional questions explored trust in cast authenticity and perceptions of editing or manipulation.

Influence on Attitudes and Behavior (Brand Loyalty)

To understand potential real-world impacts, participants were asked whether *Love Island* influenced their thinking about dating, lifestyle habits, fashion, body image, travel aspirations, or product interest. This portion helped connect interview data to the broader conceptual themes of engagement and brand responsiveness.

The semi-structured format allowed the interviewer to follow the guide consistently while retaining enough flexibility to probe for additional detail, clarify ambiguous responses, or pursue emergent themes raised by participants.

In-Depth Interview Results

A. Recurring Themes

Our interviews were conducted on the Boston University campus, where all of our interviewees were current undergraduate students at BU. A recurring theme from all interviewees was their use of social media throughout their *Love Island* watching experience. Some students did not watch the full episodes of the show through a streaming platform like Peacock, and rather, watched clips of the show on TikTok or Instagram reels. Nonetheless, they were still relatively kept up to date with the show's content. In addition, students who watched the full show on Peacock still went to social media platforms to watch other users' reactions and thoughts to the latest episodes. Therefore, it was evident that users watched *Love Island* related content on social media regardless of how in-depth they watched the show.

The name of a cast member that was frequently mentioned throughout the interview was Huda. Huda is a cast member of the show present from the first episode, who had gone viral several times for her behavior on the show. She was often described as the "stand-out" member, "crazy," "toxic," but also the central reason that kept people from continuing watching the show. Our interviewees had mixed opinions on the cast, specifically Huda. While some empathized or related to her blunt personality, others felt uncomfortable with some of her violent behaviors. Nonetheless, a general consensus from all interviewees was that Huda made the season more dramatic and enjoyable to watch.

The interviewees also reported the strongest parasocial ties with a few of the cast members which include Iris, Amaya, Nick, and Hannah, often because they were seen as more "relatable." Several of the interviewees followed these cast members subsequent to the end of the show, however, nearly all agreed that they stopped keeping up with the cast after the season ended. They described it as an "in-the-moment" act of following the cast while the show still aired.

Lastly, a recurring theme across the interviews was a kind of "brand loyalty" to Love Island that was fueled less by the franchise name itself and more by continuous drama and easy, free access through TikTok and Reels. Many participants described feeling compelled to keep up with the season because dramatic storylines (especially around highly polarizing figures like Huda) made the show a constant topic of conversation, while the fact that full episodes and key moments were broken into clips on social media meant they could stay engaged without paying for Peacock or committing to full-length viewing. This combination of entertaining, high drama and easily accessible content made viewers who would not consider themselves loyal fans to still be kept up to date with the upcoming seasons of the show.

B. Results Correlating to Research Questions

Overall, the interviews suggest that stronger parasocial relationships, whether it be positive or negative, amplify emotional investment. They also shape the way people defend or attack certain cast members in comment sections, and motivate actions like voting, sharing certain clips on social media, or following certain casts on social media. Viewers with weaker parasocial relationships tended to be more detached from the real lives of the cast members, treating the show as background entertainment for in-the-moment.

Additionally, the medium of consumption is tightly linked to how viewers feel about the cast. When viewers watch full episodes on a streaming platform, they are provided more narrative context, while watching short-form videos on algorithmic social media platforms make viewers more susceptible to judgement. Most interviewers watch in a hybrid of both social media and streaming platforms.

Survey Methods

Sample

This analysis explores the relationship between Love Island cast members and the viewers' attitudes, investment and their engagement with the overall brand across various social media platforms. The research in this study focuses on viewer behavior and perception as well as their social media consumption habits. More specifically, people who are constantly on platforms such as TikTok and Instagram; thus needing a younger demographic, the population of interest became Boston University students. This demographic is best suited because the age range is those who are most likely to come face to face with Love Island content as well as interact with it. Consequently, they become more susceptible to form parasocial bonds with the cast members. Furthermore, the survey for this study was opened to all Boston University students, however the research team had anticipated that the data sample would be mostly women as previous research shows that women in the mid teens to early thirties are the highest demographic among Love Island watchers.

The data was collected through an online Qualtrics survey that was dispersed between November 7th 2025 and December 6th, 2025. Recruitment for the survey was through messaging platforms such as imessage and Basecamp, as well as posted on social media platforms like Instagram and Snapchat. Participants were entirely voluntary. The Survey included different

types of scales relevant to our research concept not excluding Likert-style and semantic differential rating. Additionally, viewer attitude towards cast members through medium of consumption was also assessed.

A total of 158 individuals initially opened the survey. From these responses, 57 were incomplete which ended with only 101 of the responses being usable. None of the participants declined consent and also all of the participants were screened for their age with only 1 response being recorded as 17 years or younger. This participant was not counted in the analysis. Finally, specifically targeting BU students the respondents were also asked to verify that they were in fact Boston University students, 9 responses were missing from this so those cases were excluded.

Overall, the dataset reflects a relevant young-adult demographic and provides measures of the central constructs: media consumption, audience perception, parasocial relationships, and brand loyalty, allowing the study to address both research questions.

Measurement

A Qualtrics survey was created to measure the respondents' engagement, perception, and attitudes– both emotional and behavioral– to the *Love Island* brand and its cast members. Each key construct was developed based on researched and accepted scales. All survey questions appear in full in Appendix 2.

The following subsections describe each key construct as well as their reliability in relation to the two research questions:

Media Consumption

Media consumption of *Love Island* was measured by assessing the platforms respondents used to interact with the show as well as the frequency of which they engaged with short-form

clips or long-form episodes. This measurement had only two items thus making the use of Cronbach's alpha to calculate inappropriate. Instead, recording the items and turning them into a Media Consumption Index, served as a way to analyze overall consumption as one continuous variable.

Parasocial Relationships

The second key construct was parasocial relationships. This assesses how connected our participants felt to the cast of *Love Island*. Using a four-item scale, our participants were evaluated on emotional connection, perceived personal closeness and familiarity with the cast. The scale had a Cronbach's alpha of .64. Although it is slightly lower than .70, which is ideal, it is still acceptable to use as a basis for the research as it suggests consistency.

Audience Perception

The third key construct is audience perception. This was measured by using four dichotomous items that assessed viewers' media influence– whether respondents felt forced to like or dislike specific members, if certain videos seen changed their minds, or if discussed cast behaviors influenced their attitudes. Because these items represent distinct behaviors and not a single unified construct, inconsistency was expected. Which was backed by the Cronbach alpha as it was 0.15—a very low result. Therefore, instead of treating it as a traditional scale, the items were combined, similar to media consumption, into an Audience Perception Index of 0-4.

Brand Loyalty

The Final key construct was brand loyalty. This was a 5-item scale that assesses viewers intentions to continue to watch the show or engage with *Love Island* content in the future. This scale showed good reliability with an alpha of .76.

Statistical Procedure

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and frequencies) were computed for all key variables. Cronbach's alpha values were calculated to assess the reliability of multi-item scales.

To evaluate Research Question 1, which examined whether parasocial relationships predict brand loyalty, an OLS linear regression was conducted with parasocial relationships as the independent variable and brand loyalty as the dependent variable.

To evaluate Research Question 2, which asked whether media consumption predicts audience perception, a second OLS regression was performed using the Media Consumption Index as the predictor and the Audience Perception Index as the outcome.

Because RQ2 also questioned whether specific platforms influence perception, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare audience perception across four viewing groups (Peacock, TikTok, Instagram Reels, and Others).

Variable preparation included averaging items for parasocial relationships and brand loyalty, summing dichotomous items for audience perception, and recoding behavioral items into the media consumption index. These procedures ensured that all constructs were properly structured for regression and ANOVA analysis.

Survey Results

A. Univariate statistics: Descriptive statistics (with reference to Table 1)

Descriptive statistics were calculated for all demographic and conceptual variables (see Table 1). The sample consisted of 101 participants, of whom 40% identified as White and 76%

identified as female. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 23 (M = 20.63, SD = 1.19), with an average GPA of 3.53 (SD = 0.38).

Among the key variables, the Parasocial Relationship Scale ranged from 1.25 to 3.75 (M = 2.43, SD = 0.51), indicating moderate levels of parasocial involvement with *Love Island* cast members. The Brand Loyalty Scale ranged from 1.20 to 5 (M = 3.66, SD = 0.86), reflecting relatively high levels of lifestyle- or behavior-based influence. The Audience Perception Index ranged from 0–4 (M = 2.99, SD = 0.90), suggesting moderate susceptibility to media-shaped character impressions. The Media Consumption Index (1–4) averaged 3.18 (SD = 0.90), indicating that participants consumed *Love Island* content across multiple platforms.

B. Bivariate statistics: Pearson correlation

Pearson correlation coefficients revealed several significant relationships (see Table 2). Parasocial relationships were strongly correlated with brand loyalty ($r = –.510$, $p < .01$) and positively correlated with both audience perception ($r = .274$, $p < .01$) and media consumption ($r = .489$, $p < .01$). This pattern indicates that individuals who consumed more *Love Island* content tended to feel more connected to cast members, and those connections were linked to greater susceptibility to character-related impressions shaped by online buzz.

Brand loyalty was negatively correlated with media consumption ($r = –.266$, $p < .01$) and audience perception ($r = –.219$, $p < .05$), suggesting that those reporting lifestyle-based influence from the show were not necessarily the most frequent consumers nor the most influenced by online discourse. Additionally, audience perception was positively correlated with gender ($r = .228$, $p < .05$), indicating small but meaningful gender differences in media influence.

C. Multivariate Statistics: OLS Regression (with reference to Table 3)

An OLS multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine which factors uniquely predict brand loyalty after accounting for demographic and three remaining conceptual variables (see Table 3). The overall model included age, race, gender, GPA, parasocial relationships, audience perception, and media consumption as predictors.

Results showed that parasocial relationships were the strongest and only negative predictor of brand loyalty ($\beta = -.498$, $p < .001$). This indicates that participants who felt more emotionally connected to *Love Island* cast members reported lower levels of lifestyle- or behavior-based influence from the show when other variables were held constant.

Gender also emerged as a relatively significant predictor: female participants reported higher brand loyalty scores ($\beta = .220$, $p = .015$). No other demographic variables—age, race, or GPA—significantly predicted brand loyalty.

Media-related variables, including audience perception ($\beta = -.114$, $p = .212$) and media consumption ($\beta = -.039$, $p = .693$), were not significant predictors in the multivariate model. This suggests that once parasocial involvement and gender are accounted for, neither the amount of *Love Island* content consumed nor the extent to which viewers' impressions were shaped by online discourse meaningfully predicts lifestyle-based behavioral outcomes.

D. Interpretation of Results in Relation to the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do parasocial relationships with Love Island cast members influence viewers' attitudes and engagements toward the show?

Several findings across all three statistical models address this question. Parasocial relationships were strongly and negatively associated with brand loyalty ($r = -.510$, $p < .001$), indicating that participants who felt more emotionally connected to cast members were less likely to report lifestyle or behavioral changes tied to the show. Although counterintuitive, this

pattern reflects the nature of the brand loyalty scale, which captures lifestyle influences—such as fitness behaviors, cosmetic interests, or dating-related attitudes—that constitute the "brand" of *Love Island*. Thus, participants may form emotional bonds with cast members without adopting the broader lifestyle cues the show promotes.

Parasocial relationships were also positively associated with both media consumption ($r = .489$, $p < .01$) and audience perception ($r = .274$, $p < .01$). This suggests that stronger parasocial involvement amplifies both engagement with the show and sensitivity to character portrayals shaped by online clips, memes, and social buzz. These findings indicate that parasocial relationships play a meaningful role in shaping viewer engagement and interpretation of the show, even if they do not translate into lifestyle-based brand loyalty.

Research Question 2: How does the medium of consumption (e.g., TikTok, Instagram Reels, Peacock) shape viewers' perception of cast members and their behaviors?

The relationship between media consumption and audience perception was positive but non-significant ($r = .101$, $p > .05$), suggesting that consuming *Love Island* across multiple platforms did not reliably predict whether viewers felt pushed to like or dislike cast members or whether their opinions were altered by online content. Because audience perception correlated more strongly with parasocial relationships ($r = .274$, $p < .01$), perception may be shaped by emotional and relational factors rather than platform choice.

To further examine whether specific viewing platforms shaped audience perception, a one-way ANOVA compared perception scores across groups: Peacock, TikTok, Instagram Reels and Others (see Table 4 and 5). Results showed no significant differences in audience perception depending on the medium of consumption, $F(3, 97) = 0.969$, $p = .410$.

Mean perception scores were similar across platforms (Peacock M = 3.06, TikTok M = 2.83, Instagram Reels M = 2.33, Others M = 3.13), and Bonferroni post-hoc tests confirmed that no pairwise comparisons were significant (all ps = 1.000). These findings further support prior findings that how viewers watched *Love Island* did not meaningfully shape their perceptions of cast members or their reactions to social media buzz. Both Pearson correlation and ANOVA results suggest that platform choice does not influence audience perception, and RQ2 is not supported. Instead, perception appears to be more closely tied to parasocial involvement rather than the medium of consumption.

Discussion

Research Implications of Results

The results of this study highlight the important role parasocial relationships play in shaping how viewers engage with *Love Island*, which aligns closely with existing literature on parasocial interaction and media effects. The outcomes suggest that parasocial ties influence student engagement with the show, matching earlier work on media connections. While some participants watched casually, others formed stronger links, and those individuals were more likely to keep watching longer, discuss episodes with peers, and follow contestants online. Emotional attachment emerged as a key factor across both interview insights and survey responses. On average, participants rated their bond at a moderate level (M = 2.43), which supports Dibble et al.'s (2016) definition of parasocial relationships as perceived one-sided emotional closeness with public figures. Likewise, regular digital exposure tied to deeper feelings toward cast members, a pattern also noted by Reynolds (2022).

In addition to emotional connection, patterns of media use played a critical role in shaping these relationships. Parasocial relationships were positively related to media consumption (r = .489), meaning that students who felt more connected to the cast were also more active in watching and engaging with *Love Island* content across platforms. This supports Shrum's (2009) cultivation framework, which explains how repeated media exposure shapes audience interpretations of reality. It also aligns with Boyd's (n.d.) PRISM model, which highlights social media interaction as key in building viewer attachments. With the Media Consumption Index averaging 3.18, the results confirm broad engagement across Peacock, TikTok, Instagram Reels, and online videos. Some participants did not follow entire seasons yet still reported feeling updated due to short-form posts, suggesting that fleeting, feed-based contact may foster personal-like connections similar to traditional television viewing.

Beyond influencing how often viewers consumed content, media exposure also shaped how they interpreted and judged the cast. Audience perception was strongly shaped by online content, with the Audience Perception Index averaging 2.99. Interviews revealed that viral videos, memes, and comment sections played a major role in shaping viewers' opinions of cast members. These findings align with Vraga and Bode (2020), who showed that digital spaces reshape how people make sense of online content. Parasocial relationships were positively associated with audience perception (r = .274), meaning that stronger emotional attachment made online content more influential. The case of Huda, whose image shifted following widespread online discussion, illustrates how shared digital content now shapes perception more powerfully than televised narratives alone.

Although emotions strongly shaped how people noticed and interacted with the show, these effects did not consistently translate into long-term brand commitment. Instead, actual

behavioral outcomes provided a clearer picture of consumer response. On average, scores on the Brand Loyalty Scale reached 3.66, suggesting that some students adjusted their purchases, workouts, views on relationships, or everyday choices because of *Love Island*. However, parasocial relationships were negatively correlated with brand loyalty, meaning that deeper emotional connections to individual cast members often occurred alongside weaker long-term loyalty to the show as a brand. This result contrasts with influencer marketing research such as Farivar et al. (2022), which found that parasocial bonds increase trust and purchasing intention. In *Love Island's* case, emotional attachment appears to drive short-term engagement and lifestyle influence during the season but does not guarantee sustained brand loyalty after the season concludes. When trying to think of a reason for why, it could be due to how individual influencers compare to reality TV celebrities.

Practical Implications of Results

Taken together, these findings offer several important takeaways for producers, marketers, and digital teams working with *Love Island*. Since parasocial relationships are closely linked to how much viewers engage and consume media, it is important for the show to continue providing personal access to cast members through confessionals, reunion episodes, behind-the-scenes footage, off-camera clips, and social media interaction. Emotional connection remains a central factor in keeping audience interest alive during the season (Dibble et al., 2016; Reynolds, 2022).

At the same time, where this content appears is just as important as the content itself. The results show that TikTok and Instagram Reels play a role equal to Peacock in shaping how students experience *Love Island*. Many participants relied primarily on short-form clips to stay informed while developing their opinions about the cast. These patterns align with Shrum's

(2009) cultivation framework and Vraga and Bode's (2020) research on how repeated online exposure shapes understanding. Social media is no longer only for promotion; it is now one of the main ways people consume content. As a result, creators should continue prioritizing short-form, platform-specific videos that match how users actually view media online.

Due to content spreading quickly across platforms, producers must also consider how fast public opinion can shift. Since viral posts strongly affect audience judgments, cases such as Huda show how a single popular video can alter how participants are perceived. Keeping track of current discussions and using verified platforms to clarify information may help limit confusion and negative reactions. This aligns with Vraga and Bode's (2020) work on correcting misinformation in digital spaces.

Finally, while *Love Island* clearly operates as more than just a television show, its success as a lifestyle-driven brand comes with important challenges. The negative relationship between parasocial relationships and brand loyalty suggests that emotional attachment alone does not ensure long-term consumer commitment. Although viewers reported being influenced in areas such as shopping habits, fitness routines, dating behaviors, and binge-watching, many also reported losing interest when cast members became overly promotional after the season. This indicates that while lifestyle branding can be effective, brand partnerships should be limited and feel authentic. Fashion, wellness, fitness, and travel collaborations remain aligned with *Love Island's* brand identity; however, excessive promotion risks weakening audience trust and reducing long-term engagement.

Limitations

There are six limitations that are crucial to note and account for when looking at the data results. The first being that out of the 158 survey responses, only 101 of the respondents completed the full survey. Despite reaching a total of 158 responses, incomplete surveys cannot be used which resulted in reducing the sample size. The second being, that the survey is limited to Boston University students and 17.57% of respondents did not watch the show. This means that they were also excluded from analyses related to the research questions. Third, the data relies on a self-reported survey meaning that respondents could have a potential bias which could affect the results. For example, respondents may not have an accurate memory of their viewing experience as Season 7 of *Love Island* aired in June 2025, which is a 7 month gap during the time of this survey, December 2025. Other effects could come from respondents misunderstanding the questions such as, “Did you ever feel a personal connection to any of the *Love Island* characters based on what you saw, regardless of platform?” What someone defines as a “personal connection,” is based on a subjective feeling. Fourth, the research used to collect data is cross-sectional, which collects data one time from a specific population. This means that how a relationship or overall satisfaction developed cannot be tracked over time. Fifth, the survey asks participants if they have watched *Love Island* on Peacock, TikTok, and Instagram Reels, with all other platforms grouped into a single “Others” category. However, it does not allow participants to select multiple options, nor does it provide an option to specify which platform they used if they chose “Others”. This could lead to some discrepancies as respondents may not accurately remember which platform they consumed the most *Love Island* content on. Alternatively, some respondents may have consumed an equal amount of content across various platforms, but they are only able to select one option. This limitation could relate to media

consumption having a positive, but not significant impact on perception. Lastly, 76% of respondents were women, which limits the data since gender may influence the results.

Conclusion

To conclude, through this study, we examined how parasocial relationships with *Love Island* cast members influence media consumption, audience perception, and brand loyalty among student viewers. Our findings show that students do not experience *Love Island* through just one platform, but through emotional connections, quick clips, and online discussion to stay involved. Outcomes indicate that multi-platform use is driven by emotional links, bite-sized videos, and social talk. One-sided attachments were common among younger audiences, and these ties boosted active participation, increased episode discussions, and raised the likelihood of following cast members online.

Our results also demonstrated that media consumption today is platform-driven rather than episode-driven. Rather than viewing the entire show on Peacock, many participants relied on TikTok and Instagram Reels for updates. Due to this shift, perceptions of the series often developed outside scheduled airings. More importantly, short viral videos, memes, and audience reactions shaped how people saw the cast. These patterns reinforce earlier research showing how digital environments and algorithm-driven feeds reshape viewer understanding and interpretation.

Brand loyalty produced one of the most important insights of our study. Although participants reported that *Love Island* influenced lifestyle behaviors such as exercise, fashion choices, buying patterns, dating attitudes, and social views, deeper emotional ties to cast members were actually linked to weaker brand loyalty. One key finding from this research was

that attachment to on-screen personalities did not translate into lasting support for the show's brand. Even intense reactions during the season failed to guarantee ongoing viewer dedication. Instead, brief participation was more common than lasting loyalty, suggesting that strong feelings may boost immediate interest without guaranteeing long-term brand commitment.

Taken together, our results suggest that *Love Island* functions as more than just a television program. It shapes digital lifestyles through unreciprocated emotional bonds, cross-platform viewing habits, and fan-driven content shared digitally. Rather than acting alone, emotional closeness, social networking use, and internet-based behaviors combine to redefine how people engage with reality television today.

Future research should expand on these findings through longitudinal research that tracks how parasocial relationships and brand loyalty change over multiple seasons. Controlled experimental studies could examine whether short trending clips or full episodes have a stronger influence on audience emotions and perception. Additionally, comparing results across platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and traditional television could reveal how each environment uniquely shapes engagement and consumer behavior over time.

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Tables

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics (N=101)

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
White (0/1)	0	1	40%	
Female (0/1)	0	1	76%	
Age	18.00	23	20.63	1.19
GPA	1.25	3.75	3.53	0.38
Parasocial Relationship Scale	1.25	3.75	2.43	0.51
Brand Loyalty Scale	1.20	5	3.66	0.86
Audience Perception Index	0	4	2.99	0.90
Media Consumption Index	1.00	4	3.18	0.90

Table 2

Pearson Correlations (N=101)

	White	Gender	Age	Parasocial Relationship Scale	Brand Loyalty Scale	Audience Perception Index (1-4)	Media Consumption Index (1-4)
White	1	.167	.182	.137	.010	.009	.020
Gender	.167	1	-.016	.169	.104	.228*	.137
Age	.182	-.016	1	.041	.114	-.097	.034
Parasocial Relationship Scale	.137	.169	.041	1	-.510**	.274**	.489**
Brand Loyalty Scale	.010	.104	.114	-.510**	1	-.219*	-.266**
Audience Perception Index (1-4)	.009	.228*	-.097	.274**	-.219*	1	.101
Media Consumption Index (1-4)	.020	.137	.034	.489**	-.266**	.101	1

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3

Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Brand Loyalty (N = 101)

	Standardized Coefficients	
	Beta	*Sig.*
		.005
Age	*.123*	*.160*
White	*.034*	*.708*
Female	*.220*	*.015*
GPA	*-.049*	*.582*
Parasocial Relationship Scale	*-.498*	*<.001*
Audience Perception Index	*-.114*	*.212*
Media Consumption Index	*-.039*	*.693*

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations of Audience Perception by Viewing Platform (N = 101)

Viewing Platform	N	Mean (Audience Perception)	SD
Peacock	66	3.06	0.91
TikTok	24	2.83	0.96
Instagram Reels	3	2.33	0.58
Others	8	3.13	0.64
Total	101	2.99	0.90

Table 5

One-Way ANOVA Testing Differences in Audience Perception by Viewing Platform (N = 101)

Source	df	F	p
Between Groups	3, 97	0.969	.410

Appendix 1

Consent Statement:

Hello. You have been selected to complete an in-depth interview on the recent season of *Love Island.* These interviews are part of an assignment for CM321 at Boston University, and the results will be used only for a class project. The results will not be published or distributed beyond this class project. Respondents for these in-depth interviews are BU undergraduate and graduate students aged 18 and older. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and your responses will be held in confidence. This survey should take about 15 minutes. I will audio record your responses to a series of questions; only my research group members and the professor for this course will have access to this recording—and, again, it will be used only for this research project for CM321. We would very much appreciate your participation in this interview.

Pre-Interview Questions

- Are you willing to complete this in-depth interview?
    1) Yes
    2) No
- Are you currently a student at BU?
    1) Yes
    2) No
- How old were you at your last birthday?
    1) 17 or younger (SKIP OUT OF INTERVIEW)
    2) 18
    3) 19
    4) 20
    5) 21
    6) 22
    7) 23 or older
- Have you watched any of *Love Island* Season 7?
    1) Yes
    2) No

Media Consumption

1. What first drew you to watch the most recent season of *Love Island*, and how did you usually keep up with it (full episodes, clips, memes, etc.)?

2. How do you think social media platforms like TikTok or Instagram Reels shaped your viewing experience of *Love Island* this season?

3. Can you describe a moment or storyline from this season that made you want to keep watching or share it online?

Parasocial Relationships

4. Which cast members stood out to you the most this season, and why do you think you connected (or didn't connect) with them?

5. How do you feel about following *Love Island* contestants after the show ends — what keeps you interested in their lives, or why do you lose interest?

6. Do you think *Love Island* creates a sense of community among fans? Can you share an example of how you've interacted with others about the show online or in person?

Audience Perception

7. How did social media discussions or memes influence the way you viewed certain cast members or couples this season?

8. Do you think *Love Island* has any impact on how you view dating, relationships, or self-image? If so, how?

Post Interview Questions

- What year of study are you currently?

    1) Freshman
    2) Sophomore
    3) Junior
    4) Senior
    5) Graduate student
- What is your ethnicity?

    1) American Indian or Alaska Native
    2) Asian
    3) Black
    4) Hispanic/Latino
    5) Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    6) White
    7) Other
- What gender do you identify as?

1) Female
2) Male
3) Other

END STATEMENT:

Thanks for your assistance. Your contributions to this interview are complete.

Appendix 2

Beginning of Survey

Hello. You have been selected to complete a survey on the recent season of *Love Island*. This survey is part of an assignment for CM321 at Boston University, and the survey results will be used **ONLY** for a class project. The results will not be published or distributed beyond this class project. Respondents for this survey are BU undergraduate and graduate students **aged 18 and older.** Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and your responses will be held in confidence. This survey should take about 5 minutes. We would very much appreciate your participation in this survey.

1. Are you willing to complete this survey?
    1. Yes
    2. No

2. How old were you at your last Birthday?
    1. 17 or younger
    2. 18
    3. 19
    4. 20
    5. 21
    6. 22
    7. 23 or older

3. Are you currently a BU student?
    1. Yes
    2. No

4. What year are you?
    1. Freshman
    2. Sophomore
    3. Junior
    4. Senior
    5. Graduate Student

Next page.

First Core Concept: Media Consumption

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1. How much of *Love Island* Season 7 did you see?
    a. All of it
    b. Some of it
    c. None of it (SKIP OUT OF SURVEY)
2. How did you watch *Love Island* Season 7?
    a. Peacock
    b. TikTok
    c. Instagram Reels
    d. Others
3. Did you see the *Love Island* Memes?
    a. Yes
    b. No
4. Did you watch the *Love Island* Reunion?
    a. Yes
    b. Started, but didn't finish
    c. Saw clips online.
    d. No
5. I often see *Love Island* content recommended to me on my social media feed.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly agree
6. Seeing *Love Island* content on social media makes me want to watch more episodes.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly agree

Next page.

Second Core Concept: Parasocial Relationships

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1. I follow cast members on social media to stay updated on their lives
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Agree
    d. Strongly agree

2. I feel like I personally know some of the *Love Island* cast members.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly agree
3. I talk about*Love Island* or its cast with my friends or online.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly agree
4. Seeing*Love Island* content on social media makes me want to watch more episodes.
    a. Strongly disagree
    b. Disagree
    c. Neutral
    d. Agree
    e. Strongly agree
5. Did you ever feel a personal connection to any of the characters based on what you saw, regardless of platform?
    a. Yes
    b. No

Next page.

Third Core Concept: Audience Perception

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1. When watching *Love Island*, did you feel pushed to dislike/like a character based on online buzz?
   Yes
   No
2. Did you ever feel a personal connection to any of the characters based on what you saw, regardless of platform?
   Yes
   No
3. Have you ever discussed a character's behavior with friends or family?
   Yes
   No
4. Did you ever feel that your opinion of a cast member changed after seeing short clips or memes online?
   Yes

No

5. Do you believe the cast members' actions and emotions on the show reflect their real personalities?
   Yes
   No

Next page.

Third Core Concept: Audience Perception

Were you inspired by any of the cast members to purchase a product?

a. Strongly agree
b. Agree
c. Neutral
d. Disagree
e. Strongly disagree

2. Did *Love Island* motivate you to start working out?
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
3. Did *Love Island* influence your own dating life in any way?
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
4. Did *Love Island* influence you to incorporate breakfast into your daily routine?
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree
5. Did *Love Island* encourage you to binge watch television?
   a. Strongly agree
   b. Agree
   c. Neutral
   d. Disagree
   e. Strongly disagree

Next page.

End of Survey

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1. What is your ethnicity?
    1. American Indian or Alaska Native
    2. Asian
    3. Black
    4. Hispanic/Latino
    5. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    6. White
    7. Other

2. What gender do you identify as?
    1. Male
    2. Female
    3. Other

What is your current cumulative grade point average (GPA) at Boston University?

1. 0 - .49
2. .50 - .99
3. 1.00 - 1.49
4. 1.50 - 1.99
5. 2.00 - 2.49
6. 2.50 - 2.99
7. 3.00 - 3.49
8. 3.50 - 4.00

Thank you for your assistance. Your contributions to this survey are complete.