

# Characterization of Teen SNS Usage in Entertainment Media

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**Abstract--** This research studies the portrayal of teenagers' use of SNS (social networking sites) within entertainment media. It is found that approximately 62% and 68% of SNS usage is dedicated to communication in the television shows *Scream: The TV Series* and *Awkward*, respectively. The findings, on a grander scale, drive the importance of media literacy, empower individuals to control their personal narrative, and address myths about teens and SNS use.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Entertainment media, which includes scripted television programming, films, reality programming, competition programming, and digital/new media content, has the ability to distort reality and create stereotypes for its viewers through media framing. Currently, there are 24 scripted television programs that air on network, digital, and cable television depicting teenagers in various social settings, and 60 percent of teenagers spend on average 20 hours per week watching entertainment media [8]. Specific programming, especially those showcasing teens or addressing teen socialization, may leave viewers to believe that post-millennials, individuals born in the mid 1990s or early 2000s, are glued to their smartphones, disconnected from society, and completely uninterested in any event that takes up more than 140 characters. This is seemingly the message that entertainment media presents about the largest demographic in the U.S., totaling close to 42 million people [9]. However, the way television programming characterizes this social group contradicts research that regards teens as creators and innovators of digital space who utilize social media to manage their identity and social relations [2].

This work studies how teens are portrayed using SNS in entertainment media and addresses the research questions: How are teens framed using SNS in the television shows *Awkward* and *Scream: The TV Series*? What is the degree of frequency of SNS use and type of activity that teens use SNS for within these media platforms? These questions potentially create greater conversations about the narratives presented about teens on television. The power that entertainment media possesses in influencing popular opinion and perspective should be investigated in order to inform and educate viewers about media literacy and the importance of recognizing media framing's effects.

## II. METHODOLOGY

A mixed method textual analysis was conducted to examine the portrayal and frequency of teenagers' use of SNS on broadcast media. Textual analysis focuses on rhetorical concepts presented and then analyzed within content [3]. It was chosen because this study addresses specifically the depiction of teens using SNS in entertainment media, the frequency in which that relationship is presented in broadcast, and the actions that take place within the episodic story lines. Framing, as a tool used by media to "tell stories" and draw attention to specific salient points, can create influential content that may facilitate a change in the minds of viewers [6].

Two television shows were selected from the Music Television Network (MTV): *Awkward* and *Scream: The TV Series*. These shows were specifically chosen as their main premise is centered around social and digital media use. Season one from both television shows was analyzed for this study. *Awkward* broadcasted 12 episodes and *Scream: The TV Series* broadcasted 10 episodes in 2011 and 2016, respectively. In total, 664 minutes (roughly 11 hours) of footage was coded. Sixty-one percent of this data came from *Scream: The TV Series* and thirty-nine percent from *Awkward*.

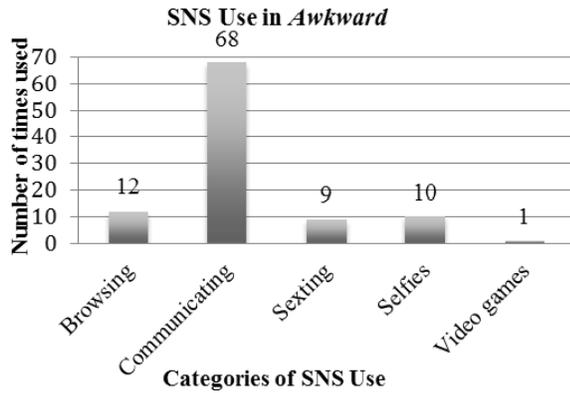
The codebook for this study was created during a pilot testing phase in January 2016. The coding guidelines and further refinement were established in June and July of 2016; these included citing specific SNS used and citing specific social media activity. All content analyzed for this study was double coded by the author and one research assistant to establish reliability of the results.

Season one was chosen as the direction of each show has the potential to change depending on network decisions, market influences, and the potential for storyline changes due to increased profit margins through product and promotional branding [1].

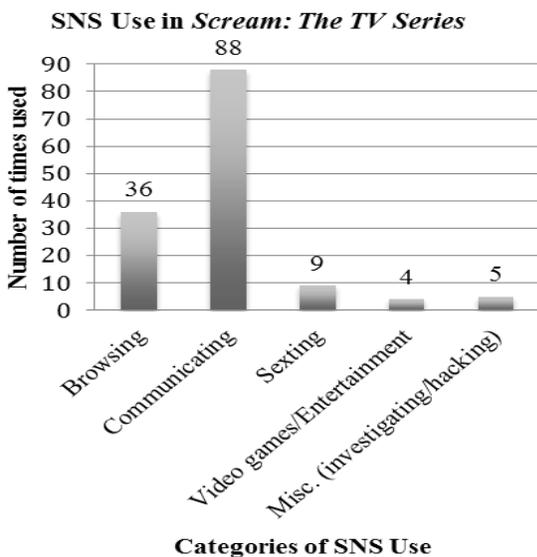
## III. FINDINGS

In the television show *Awkward*, a total of 258 minutes were coded. Within these 258 minutes, SNS were displayed or used by the characters 100 times; this averages out to SNS being displayed or used on screen once every 2 minutes and 35 seconds. In addition, SNS were mentioned (not to be confused with displayed) by the characters 28 times within the time frame. Thus, characters mentioned SNS approximately every 9 minutes and 13 seconds. In total, SNS were displayed, used, or mentioned 128 times throughout the entire 258 minutes that were coded. On average, teens were shown engaging in SNS (displayed on screen, mentioned in dialogue, or utilized by characters) every 2 minutes and one second.

Categories of SNS in <i>Awkward</i>	% of total
Browsing	12%
Communicating	68%
Sexting	9%
Selfies	10%
Video games	1%



Categories of SNS in <i>Scream: The TV Series</i>	% of total
Browsing	25%
Communicating	62%
Sexting	6%
Video games/Entertainment	3%
Misc. (investigating/hacking)	4%



In the television show *Scream: The TV Series*, a total of 405 minutes were coded. Within these 405 minutes, SNS were displayed or used by the characters 142 times; this averages out to SNS being displayed or used on screen once

every 2 minutes and 51 seconds. In addition, SNS were mentioned (not to be confused with displayed or used) by the characters 158 times within the time frame. Thus, characters mentioned SNS approximately every 2 minutes and 34 seconds. In total, SNS were displayed, used, or mentioned 302 times throughout the entire 405 minutes. On average, teens were shown engaging in SNS (displayed on screen, mentioned in dialogue, or utilized by characters) every one minute and 21 seconds.

In the television shows *Awkward* and *Scream: The TV Series*, we found that communication comprises the majority of SNS use among teens. Communication consists of (but is not limited to) texting, calling, updating statuses, and viewing online profiles.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

We can conclude from this study that entertainment media has the potential to present narratives that can be misleading and sensationalized simply for story or to attract an audience. A limitation in this study is that only 10% of available current content within broadcast media was used. Next steps for this project include adding a media effects component addressing if teens feel they are portrayed appropriately.

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