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How Close Can We Get to our Celebrities? The Role of Form and Social Presence

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This research examines how individuals experience celebrity news across two mediums, a television show and a web site. Cultural criticisms aside, celebrity news has attracted many fans, and websites like TMZ.com are seeing dramatic increases in their number of hits per day as they are able to penetrate further into stars' personal lives. This study explores how celebrities may become to individuals by exploring effects of the interactivity promised by TMZ.com and the vividness portrayed on TMZ TV. Steuer's (1992) predictors of presence serve as a springboard for aspects of the current research. Using an experimental design, the study attempts to explain how social presence felt in response to the two media forms differs. It also considers the moderating influences of perceived realism and past experience with celebrity news on perceived credibility, enjoyment, and parasocial interaction. Data collection is in progress, and path analysis results will be presented.

Keywords: social presence, celebrities, enjoyment, credibility