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# PBS and the Young Adult Viewer

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PBS AND THE YOUNG ADULT VIEWER

by

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B.A., Radio-Television, Southern Illinois University, 2010  
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A Research Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Master of Science Degree

Department of Mass Communication and Media Arts  
in the Graduate School  
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RESEARCH PAPER APPROVAL  
PBS AND THE YOUNG ADULT VIEWER

By  
Tamara John

A Research Paper Submitted in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
Master of Science  
in the field of Professional Media and Media Management

Approved by:  
Dr. Paul Torre, Chair  
Dr. Beverly Love

Graduate School  
Southern Illinois University Carbondale  
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## AN ABSTRACT OF THE RESEARCH PAPER OF

Tamara John, for the Master of Science degree in Professional Media and Media Management, presented on March 28, 2012, at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

TITLE: PBS AND THE YOUNG ADULT VIEWER

MAJOR PROFESSOR: Dr. Paul Torre

Attracting and retaining teenage and young adult viewers has been a major challenge for most broadcasters. This study evaluates the perception of the U.S. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) among young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. The objectives of this study were to examine whether or not PBS appeals to young adults between the ages of 18 and 35, the perception of the young adult viewer by media managers within a local PBS station, and to study efforts made locally and nationally to reach young adult viewers. A survey of 180 participants and interviews with five media managers within WSIU public broadcasting (Carbondale, IL) were conducted. The study found that the majority of young adults surveyed did not watch PBS and more found PBS to be appealing than unappealing. The study also found that more efforts could be made nationally within PBS to reach viewers within this age group.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Attracting and retaining teenage and young adult viewers has been a major challenge for most broadcasters. In a multi-channel and highly competitive niche-based television market, broadcasters have struggled with appealing to this viewing demographic. The addition of the Internet and other technological advances that allow viewers more options have provided additional challenges. This research paper examines the opinions and perceptions of public broadcasting among young adults between the ages of 18 and 35. For the purpose of this study, audience perception relates to the opinions and overall appeal of PBS among young adults. A brief case study of WSIU, a Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) station located in Carbondale, Illinois, was conducted in order to analyze possible efforts within the station to support and encourage viewership among young adults through the station's local productions. The term "media managers" is used in reference to the WSIU employees in management or senior positions interviewed for this study. The research also provides a better understanding of WSIU media managers' perceptions about the young adult viewer in the current media environment. The paper discusses the challenges and possible efforts made by WSIU media managers and national PBS to reach this viewing demographic.

From its launch in 1969, PBS has played an integral role in providing free educational and informative content to viewers throughout the United States. Past viewing patterns suggest that PBS loses viewers in their early teenage years. These same viewers are said to return to PBS when they are in their early to mid 30s. Because the media environment has changed, the researcher questions whether the viewership patterns of the past can be expected of the young



adults of today. In addition to the Internet and other media viewing platforms, the media environment continues to become more niche-based, therefore increasing competition to attain and retain the young adult viewer. In order to analyze the opinions and perceptions of PBS among young adults, age 18 to 35, a survey was conducted. This research aims to fully understand WSIU and in turn PBS' current position and its ability to appeal to the 18 to 35 age demographic. The establishment of brand loyalty among current young adults is very important to ensure a successful future for public broadcasting. The research discusses whether or not PBS appeals to young adults within this age group and looks at the media habits of this viewing audience.

In order to clearly discuss and analyze the PBS viewing audience and the service's appeal to young adults, the analysis for this study was divided into sections. The first section includes a literature review. The literature review includes sub-sections discussing: competition in the media environment, financial limitations and budget cuts, PBS viewership among young children, PBS viewership among older children and teenagers, PBS viewership among young adults, a background of WSIU, and a description of WSIU's local productions (*Scholastic HiQ*, *Alt. News 26:46*, *River Region Evening Edition News*, *Studio A*, *InFocus*, *Expressions*, and *Illinois Lawmakers*). The methodology used for this study is presented followed by sections stating the results from the survey and interviews. Finally, the survey and interview results are discussed, research limitations are mentioned and the paper is concluded.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

On November 7, 1967, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Public Broadcasting Act into law (Avery, 2007). Johnson stated that the “ legislation would ‘ get part of its support from our Government. But it will be carefully guarded from Government or from party control. It will be free, and it will be independent – and it will belong to all our people’ ” (CPB, 2000, p. 2 as cited in Avery, 2007, p. 358). This law would later form the Corporation for Public Broadcasting or CPB in 1967 (Baker, 2006). The CPB was established in order to assist public radio and television stations with federal funding (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 302). Following the creation of the CPB, PBS began broadcasting in 1969 (Baker, 2006). Since its establishment, PBS has played a significant role in impacting the cultural context of the United States (Aufderheide, n.d.).

U.S. public television fills niches that are often ignored by major broadcasters by offering its viewers a variety of programs which include: “Children's educational programming, especially for preschoolers; "how-to" programs stressing the pragmatic (e.g. cooking, home repair, and painting and drawing); public affairs programming and documentaries; upscale drama; experimental art; [and] community affairs” (Aufderheide, n.d. para. 3). Rather than creating a nationally centralized system, public broadcasting in the U.S. was designed to be very localized, “...channel[ing] through local stations...” (Loomis, 2000, p. 526). According to Chan-Olmsted and Kim, this allowed for PBS member stations to share and exchange programs throughout the country.

## **Competition in the marketplace**

According to Datamonitor (2011), "...a leading business information company specializing in industry analysis" (p.2), PBS has 360 public television stations throughout the United States. Of this amount, 150 stations are repeaters (Aufderheide, n.d. para. 7). These stations provide "educational content, program acquisition, program distribution and promotion, education [al] services, new media ventures, fundraising support, engineering and technology development and video marketing services" (Datmonitor, 2011, p. 5). According to Aufderheide, on average, 100 million American households tune in to a PBS station for at least 15 minutes a week (n.d., para. 3). Aufderheide continues that annually, PBS' prime-time ratings are extremely low, hovering at "...2.2% of the viewing audience, and demographics for any particular program are narrowly defined. Overall, they are weakest for young adults" (Aufderheide, n.d. para. 3). Aufderheide's data about the viewing audience of PBS, specifically the low ratings of PBS among young adults are very important and significant to this study.

According to Nielsen Media Research Inc., "Eighty-five percent of U.S. homes with a television set have a subscription to a cable or satellite service..." (Baker, 2006, para. 28). It has long been debated whether the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) is still relevant and necessary as a public service. In addition, some argue that in the current multichannel and multiplatform television-viewing environment, the purpose of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) should be questioned. Tim Graham, director of Media Analysis for the Media Research Center, argues that "[PBS] has never been less essential. [Rather] It's simply not needed..." (Baker, 2006, para. 13). Graham continues that PBS is at an advantage being "... a free, over the air service..." (Baker, 2006, para. 69). For that reason, Graham argues, "...it should do far better..." given its

advantage (Baker, 2006, para. 69). The argument has also been raised that PBS is becoming more and more like its commercial counterparts (Baker, 2006).

In addition to niche cable and satellite television networks with channels that appeal to the same viewers as PBS “Sesame Street,” other competitive networks have arrived (Baker, 2006). Competitors like the Disney Channel, Nickelodeon, Cartoon Network, the History Channel, A & E, and the Discovery networks—the Discovery Channel, the Travel Channel and Animal Planet—offer 24-hour children, science or nature programs similar to PBS programming (Baker, 2006, para. 11). Proponents of PBS argue, “. . .the commercial shows [offered by PBS commercial competitors] are not nearly as good” (Baker, 2006, para. 30). They also argue that PBS emphasizes education over entertainment, unlike its commercial competitors (Baker, 2006).

Television competition today does not solely refer to broadcasting; rather it also includes competition from the Internet and telecommunication (Enli, 2008). In a 2006 interview with the *New Hampshire Business Review*, Paula Kerger, current president of PBS, addressed the major challenges for PBS. Kerger explained that PBS is faced with the challenge of adapting to new technologies while also maintaining quality and “robust” programming (Stone, 2006, p. 5). Datamonitor (2011) conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of the performance of PBS. This study found that PBS has maintained a strong presence in the media market. In its 2009-2010 season, the service averaged a prime time rating of 1.3, beating out many of its commercial television competitors (2011, p. 5).

Datamonitor also found that the largest threat to public broadcasting was the highly competitive media environment (Datamonitor, 2011). PBS currently is faced with heavy competition from broadcast channels, cable networks, independent stations, satellite television, DVDs, and the Internet (Datamonitor, 2011). PBS also faces competition from the video game

industry. However, PBS does have an opportunity to increase its growth in online video and by incorporating the use of digital media in education (Datamonitor, 2011). Kerger supports the inclusion of adapting new technology, such as the iPod and downloads for television (Stone, 2006). Kerger says, “We want to continue to serve our traditional viewers but hope to utilize new technology to reach a younger audience” (Stone, 2006, p. 5). For the purpose of this research, it is important to know that Kerger, as the president of PBS, is concerned with PBS reaching a younger audience.

In a 2006 Roper Public Affairs & Media poll of 1,001 persons, PBS ranked second, behind the military, in best value for taxpayer dollars (Baker, 2006). Studies have found that the multichannel environment has provided great opportunities as well as many threats for public television (Ledbetter, 1997, as cited in Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 316). Chan-Olmsted and Kim (2002) argue, “...public television continues to enjoy a very positive brand image among its viewers in contrast to comparable cable networks, scoring high in areas of “quality,” “educational value,” and “trustworthiness” (p. 315).

Enli (2008) discusses the future of public service broadcasters in the digital age in her article, “Redefining Public Service Broadcasting.” Enli (2008) argues that convergence and digitalization has resulted in a dilemma for public broadcasters—attracting a larger audience while maintaining their “self-legitimacy” (Enli, p. 108). In her study, Enli (2008) examines public broadcasting companies’ engagement with audience participation (p. 108). She uses the “...Achille and Miège’s (1994) analysis of how European public service broadcasters have adjusted to external challenges” (Enli, 2008, p. 108). Enli states that according to Picard (2005) and Tracey (1995), the U.S. PBS has only a 2 percent market share in comparison to the 50 percent market share of the European public service broadcasters. Enli’s (2011) study suggests

that in the age of convergence, multi-platform formats can greatly strengthen public broadcasting's position. The use of multi-platform formats may also better allow PBS to reach young adults and assist the service in establishing a more solidified brand relationship.

### **Financial Limitations and Budget Cuts**

According to researchers, various budget cuts and financial limitations have had a strong effect on PBS and its ability to produce content. Citing difficult economic times and the elimination of federal funds for PBS in 2011, Datamonitor states that PBS' major weakness is its loss of federal funding. This loss is likely to decrease PBS' operations and services (Datamonitor, 2011). Enli (2011) argues that unlike other public service broadcasters in the world—Britain's BBC and Norway's NRK—the U.S. PBS is in a position where expanding its programming commercially would decrease support from major supporters "...and undermine the argument for private contributions and sponsorship" (Enli, p. 116). In comparison to the U.S. PBS, the European Union has encouraged public service broadcasters to include "...commercial activities and revenues' " (BBC, 2004, p. 16 as cited in Enli, 2008, p. 111). Providing commercial services would allow PBS to generate much needed revenue to better serve its viewers. However, it would also defeat the purpose of PBS' establishment and would also oppose Lyndon B. Johnson's 1967 legislation stating the purpose of public broadcasting. The U.S. PBS has not launched its own commercial services in the digital age because of the "...threat of lost legitimacy..." as a public service broadcaster (Enli, 2008, p. 112). PBS President, Paula Kerger says PBS has historically always been underfunded (Stone, 2006). Kerger explains that PBS is working on different ways to help member stations increase their fund-raising capacity (Stone, 2006, p. 5).

To combat difficult financial times, public broadcasting services as a whole have had to readjust and re-evaluate their position in the market place. William Hoynes (2003) argues that PBS' more "...market –driven and commercially oriented..." service has blurred the lines between public television and commercial television (Enli, 2008, p. 111). Children's television advocate, Peggy Charren, argues that because of the limited budget of PBS, it has had to focus on younger viewers "...who are often introduced to preschool shows by their parents" (Peggy Charren as cited in Hatch, 2000, para. 16).

### **PBS Viewership Among Young Children**

The Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), according to Amy Chozick (2012) of *The New York Times*, "...is the most-watched [television] bloc by children aged 2 to 5... (para. 17)." Shifting viewership trends were reported by Michael Freeman (2001). Freeman (2001) argued that cable networks such as Nickelodeon and Cartoon Network were "...sucking out kids (sic) viewers from the broadcast universe and into the cable dimension..." (para. 1, 2001).

According to Nielsen *NPower* (2011), from September 20, 2010 to September 18, 2011, 79 percent of all children between the ages of 2 and 11 watched PBS ("Strong On-Air Reach Across America," 2012). This percentage totaled 32.7 million children ("Strong On-Air Reach Across America," 2012). According to Nielsen *NPower* 12/2011, in December of 2011, "PBS had seven of the top 10 programs among mothers of young children...[and] "PBS also had the top three programs for kids age two to five..." ("Strong On-Air Reach Across America," para. 9, 2012). Further, for the 2010 to 2011 season, the PBS KIDS block of programming was up "18 % for kids age two to five...compared to the '09-'10 season, and the PBS KIDS GO! block is up, as well- 14 % for kids age four to eight for '10-'11 compared to the previous season" (Nielsen *NPower* national program rating for PBS KIDS properties, 9/21/2009-9/19/2010 and 9/20/2010-

9/18/2011 as cited in “Strong On-Air Reach Across America,” para. 8, 2012). This data shows that while competition exists in the market, PBS viewership is doing very well among young children.

### **PBS Viewership Among Older Children and Teenagers**

While PBS remains a leader among young children as a result of its programming targeting preschoolers, the service has struggled to reach teenage viewers. Hatch (2000) reported on PBS’ efforts to broaden its viewership to teenagers and “twens” or younger teenagers. Hatch (2000) contends that many believe the network has not moved quickly enough to reach children beyond the preschool age. Children’s television advocate Peggy Charren argued that “Almost since the beginning, PBS has not programmed enough for the... young teen audience and even the 7-to-12- [year-olds]...they really can’t do only preschool stuff. To protect their brand, I think they have to reach more audiences of kids” (Peggy Charren as cited in Hatch, 2000, para. 5).

According to John F. Wilson, senior vice president of programming for PBS, PBS has not focused on appealing to the teenage audience segment. Kathryn Montgomery, former President of the Center for Media Education, has said, “ I think they [PBS] have an obligation to serve other ages [sic] groups” (Kathryn Montgomery as cited in Hatch, 2000, para. 6). Montgomery also states that she would like to see PBS broadcasting, “...more dramas and news shows for school-age kids” (Kathryn Montgomery as cited in Hatch, 2000, para. 6). Addressing concerns, Wilson said that PBS has developed a plan in order to incorporate programs that appeal to 5-8 year olds, 10-12 year olds, and 7-12 year olds, in addition to strengthening the service’s preschool programming (Hatch, 2000). Charren also cites competition from broadcast, cable, video games, and the Internet as a challenge for PBS in its efforts to reach older children (Hatch,



2000). Charren says that these children want to view the same programs as their peers, which often does not include PBS program offerings.

Corwin (2000) affirms that PBS offers a variety of programming throughout the day that appeals to "...all segments of viewers, ranging from preschool children...to adults who watch prime time programming that features documentaries, dramas, performances, and news" (p. 4). Although the service has had difficulty appealing to teenage viewers, PBS began making a stronger effort to provide programming for teens in April of 2001 (Schetting, 2001). According to Schetting, programmers aim to establish strong viewing habits among teens before they reach the 18 to 34 age demographic. As Brad Turell, former executive vice president of network communications for WB has stated, "...you want to market to people as young as you can so they become loyal to your brand for the rest of their lives" (Schetting, 2001, para. 14).

### **PBS Viewership Among Young Adults**

Freeman argues that "broadcast erosion" or the decrease in broadcast viewership during prime time has been a common theme for adult audiences (Freeman, para. 4). Chan-Olmsted and Kim argue that the major challenge for public television is not the competitive cable channels that offer programs targeting PBS' target market, but rather it is the challenge of repositioning itself and its brand image to appeal to "...a new generation of viewers who grew up with cable television" (Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 315). In other words, "...PBS faces the challenge of a graying audience..." (Stern, 1999 as cited in Chan-Olmsted & Kim, 2002, p. 315). If PBS loses viewers in their teens or earlier, producing content that appeals to them in their late teens and young adult years is necessary when re-establishing a brand relationship.

Today's young adults have a unique position and relationship with media in comparison to past generations. Most have experienced life before the availability and access of the Internet

and other technologies. At the same time, young adults of today are part of the first generations to be considered “digital natives.” Although many scholars have debated the term, “digital natives” was first coined by Mark Prensky in an article about the current U.S. educational system. According to Prensky, today’s students from kindergarten to college are among the first generations to be raised with new technology (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Prensky says that these generations see new technology (cell phones, email, computer games, the internet, etc.) as an integral aspect of their lives (Prensky, 2001, p.1). These young people have “... spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, videogames, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age... (Prensky, 2001, p. 1). Prensky (2001) continues, “...[the] average college grads have spent less than 5,000 hours of their lives reading, but over 10,000 hours playing video games (not to mention 20,000 hours watching TV (p.1)).”

Gary Ferrell, former president and CEO of North Texas Public Broadcasting—NTPB—(KERA/Channel 13 and KDTN/Channel 2), asserts that public broadcasting stations are “...going full steam ahead into the digital future” (Corwin, 2000, p.2). He argues that digital television allows for convergence between the Internet and television and that in the future, public television will be a part of any future media platform (Corwin, 2000). Ferrell affirms that PBS’ programming sets it apart and that PBS will be assured a future if it keeps in mind that “ ‘...what goes around comes around’ generation after generation... At the end of the day, people are loyal to services that are relevant to their lives” (Corwin, 2000, p. 3).

National PBS has seen the value and cost effective ways to increase awareness with the use of the Internet and social media. In order to promote new shows, PBS has incorporated social media such as Twitter and Facebook into marketing programs. In October of 2011, PBS also introduced an iPad app, mobile app, and online video player, which give viewers “...free access

to 2,700 hours of local and national video” (Chozick, 2012, para. 24). PBS has also incorporated the use of the digital spectrum by creating a multi-channel environment for viewers. In addition to the basic PBS station, viewers also have access to PBS WORLD and PBS CREATE. PBS CREATE was launched nationally in 2006 and features “how-to” programming such as home improvement, gardening, arts and crafts, cooking and traveling programs (“About Create,” n.d., para. 1). PBS WORLD was launched nationally in 2007 and was later re-branded in order to increase viewership among a younger, more diverse audience. WORLD features “...nonfiction, science, nature, news, public affairs and documentary programming...” (“About,” n.d., para. 1).

Having multiple channels using the same infrastructure, Ferrell believes will increase public broadcasting’s ability to provide “...richer educational experiences for both teachers and students at the college level and the K-12 level” (Corwin, 2000, p. 3). Multiple PBS channels, according to Paula Kerger, current president of PBS, allow more options for PBS viewers. For example, if they do not like a program running on one station, they have the option to find another program on another PBS channel (Stone, 2006). Kerger says, “We are not trying to hold our audience, but serve our audience better by offering them choices” (Stone, 2006, p. 5).

In order to refresh its brand image, increase revenue and raise viewership, PBS has rebranded its primetime lineup with competitive programming similar to premium cable channels (Chozick, 2012). PBS’ “British period drama, *Downton Abbey*, [is] one of the most critically acclaimed shows on television” (Chozick, para. 2). According to Chozick, “...PBS began taking a more strategic approach to programming” in January 2011 (Chozick, para. 4). The new programming approach involves grouping shows about the same subject, i.e. arts, literature etc., into a branded night of programs (Chozick, 2012, para, 4). As a result, Chozick

(2012) explains, PBS' strategic programming clustering has "...introduced younger and more male-skewing shows like "Sherlock," a mystery series set in modern-day London..." (Para. 4).

According to Nielsen, PBS stations average about 1.9 million viewers a night (Chozick, 2012). Viewers that tune in to PBS' prime time "Masterpiece" bloc are on average 64 years old. During PBS' *Downton Abbey*, viewership among women ages 25 to 54 has increased by 56 percent (Chozick, 2012, para. 10). In addition, over one million audience members, between the ages of 18 and 49, viewed *Downton Abbey* online at PBS.org and Netflix.com (Chozick, 2012, para. 10). This information shows that PBS may be on the right track to increase viewership among a wider audience. Approaching programming strategically, heavy promotion, and the incorporation of new technologies is helping and may continue to allow PBS to reach a wider and younger audience.

### **WSIU: Background**

Buren Robbins, a Southern Illinois University- Carbondale (SIUC) Radio-Television Professor and Delyte Morris, former SIUC President, created The SIU Broadcasting Service in 1951 (Green, 2011, p. 11). Their goal was to "...extend the University's message into surrounding communities while providing educational and cultural programming" (Green, p. 11). On November 6, 1961, WSIU-TV had its debut (Green, 2011). With a mission pledging to "...improve the quality of life of the people we serve. Through programs, services and outreach...[and partnering] with other community organizations to promote positive change, and to support the academic and public service missions of Southern Illinois University Carbondale," WSIU-TV has had a major impact on its broadcast region ("Mission," para.1). In 1958, SIU Broadcasting Service began "...broadcasting 45 hours of educational radio programming on WSRV..." (Green, p. 11). In 1960, the station's call letters were changed to WSIU. WSIU was

able to establish itself as a leader in the region for educational resources through SIITA (Southern Illinois Instructional Television Association), "...partnerships with southern Illinois K-12 educators..." and the station (Green, p. 11). During that time, WSIU's programming consisted of educational and general interest programs (Green, 2011).

According to Greg Petrowich, current WSIU Public Broadcasting Executive Director, WSIU has changed, adapted and progressed in order "...to meet the needs of its viewers. It is a process that continues to evolve..." (Green, 2011, p. 13). WSIU reaches an average of three million viewers in six states—southern Illinois, western Kentucky, southwestern Indiana, southeastern Missouri, northwestern Tennessee, and northeast Arkansas. The Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees has the license to WSIU ("About WSIU," para. 1).

According to Green (2011), WSIU like other PBS member stations has had to adapt as state and federal financial support has decreased greatly—relying heavily on "...underwriting from businesses, individuals, and the support from loyal viewers..." (Green, 2011, p. 14). Green says that financial support is very important in order to sustain WSIU's programming (2011). Petrowich discusses WSIU's programs and the viewing demographic that the programs aim to reach by saying:

The fascinating thing about that is we meet needs in people's lives in a quite diverse way, especially on the television side. When you have young kids at home, you might really value the childrens (sic) programs and support that. Later on you might simply be interested in things that are going to make your life better in the years ahead (Green, 2011, p. 14).

In 2002, WSIU's first digital television signal was launched (Green, 2011, p. 15). In 2008, the station's "...high-definition television and FM radio channels" were launched (Greene, 2011, p.

15). WSIU was awarded a "...\$749,000 Public Television Digital Transition Grant from the Rural Utilities Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture" (Green, 2011, p. 15). Beginning in 2012, this grant will allow WSIU to renovate its television production unit and transform it into a fully digitally operated station, updating everything from the station's cameras to its control units (Green, 2011). This transformation will increase the quality of WSIU's local programs and will allow WSIU to fully produce programming that is expected in the technical standards of today (Green, 2011). Petrowich states, "...our viewers depend on WSIU for programs that address issues of local importance...This long-overdue modernization of our television production facilities will enable us to continue to produce locally relevant content that meets the needs of the communities we serve" (Green, 2011, p. 15).

WSIU public television stations "serve nearly 3.2 potential viewers" ("The Media Audit Survey," 2011, para. 1). The station's "weekly measured cume (sic) audience averages about 184,000 weekly viewer ages 18" years and older (The Media Audit Survey, 2011, para. 2). According to the Media Audit Survey, 56 percent of WSIU's average audiences are male and 44 percent are females. Twenty one percent of WSIU's television viewers are 25 to 34 years of age, 11 percent of viewers are 35 to 44 years of age, 23 percent of viewers are 45 to 54 years of age, 19 percent of viewers are 55 to 64 years of age, and 26 percent of viewers are 65 years of age or older (The Media Audit Survey, Spring 2011). According to the Media Audit Survey, 43 percent of WSIU TV's viewers have a \$50,000 or more household income and 29 percent of WSIU TV's viewers have a \$75,000 or more household income. In addition, 65 percent of WSIU TV viewers attended college while 20 percent of WSIU TV's viewers have additional education beyond a college degree, states the Media Audit Survey (2011).

According to the Spring 2011 study conducted by the Media Audit Survey for Paducah

(Kentucky), Cape Girardeau (Missouri), and Harrisburg (Illinois) market, "...the WSIU TV audience outperforms the local market index for composition of all adults ages 35-64 with household incomes of \$50,000 plus" and "the local market index for composition of adults having children ages 13 to 17" during the dayparts (Dillard & Carlson, 2011, p. 6-7). In addition, according to the Media Audit Survey (2011), "66 % of WSIU TV's weekly audience..." tune in daytimes from 5 to 7 a.m., 66 percent tune in daytimes from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m., 86 percent tune in evenings from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., 93 percent tune in evenings from 7 to 10 p.m. and 58 percent tune in evenings from 10 p.m. to midnight.

### **WSIU's Current Local Productions**

A key component of WSIU's mission is to provide "...locally relevant programming to the region..." (Green, 2011, p. 15). WSIU dedicates over 190 hours per year to local productions (Green, 2011). WSIU's local productions are: *River Region Evening Edition News*, *Alt. News 26:46*, *InFocus*, *Illinois Lawmakers*, *Scholastic Hi-Q*, *Studio A*, and *Expressions*. All local productions allow the station to create programs to include and incorporate people and areas within WSIU's broadcast region. Because of WSIU's location within Southern Illinois University- Carbondale's (SIUC) Communications Building, the station also provides a hands-on learning environment for students within SIUC and students within SIUC's college of Mass Communication and Media Arts. According to Petrowich, there are over 100 students who hold a position in WSIU's broadcast services area (Green, 2011).

*InFocus* is WSIU's weekly magazine style program. The program aims to "turn the spotlight on [WSIU's broadcast region] and the people [within it]" ("WSIU InFocus", para. 1). *InFocus* is produced by senior WSIU producers David Kidd and Jak Tichenor and is co-hosted by George Norwood and Roz Rice. The program's content includes a combination of topics

about news and public affairs, arts and education, regional history, family and community, and cultural identity (“WSIU InFocus”). *InFocus* runs for 13 weeks and airs new programs Fridays at 7:30 p.m.

In 1985, *Scholastic Hi-Q* had its debut (Green, 2011). Produced fully by students with the assistance of senior producer, David Kidd, *Scholastic Hi-Q* is a scholastic game show. The program is “a single elimination tournament in which 32 teams compete” (“What is,” para. 2). It is an academically based game show and features high school students from different high schools throughout the southern Illinois region (“What is,” para. 2). Each season of *Scholastic Hi-Q* consists of 31 episodes. The program exemplifies the mission of WSIU and “provides area schools an excellent opportunity to display their academic skills while promoting school spirit” (“What is,” para. 4).

*Illinois Lawmakers* is produced by Illinois Public Television, a consortium of the public television station in Illinois. The program “provides television’s only ongoing, in-depth coverage of the Illinois General Assembly” (McLaughlin, n.d., para. 1). The program has been on air for 25 years and is hosted by WSIU senior producer, Jak Tichenor (McLaughlin, n.d.). The show is described as a window into the state’s legislative and political processes (McLaughlin, n.d.). *Illinois Lawmakers* is a “weekly one-hour program [and] features exclusive newsmaker interviews with the legislative leaders, lively on-set debates between leading lawmakers from both parties, and expert analysis from the state’s most respected print and electronic journalists” (McLaughlin, n.d., para. 2).

*Expressions* is the newest of WSIU’s original programs. Created and produced by a graduate student, *Expressions* launched its first season in January of 2012. The show is roughly based on a television show produced by Mississippi Public Broadcasting. *Expressions* explores



artists throughout WSIU's broadcast region. *Expressions* is a half-hour talk show and airs Thursdays at 9 p.m. Each episode features one to two artists. The program is hosted by internationally recognized painter and associate professor of art at SIUC's school of art and design, Najjar Abdul-Musawwir. The program features artists and discusses their work, the motivation behind their artistic drive, their artistic inspirations, and their artistic techniques. The program runs for 13 weeks.

WSIU's *River Region Evening Edition News* is a live, half-hour, student-produced news broadcast. *River Region Evening Edition News* first debuted in 1995 as *SIU Night Report*. It is the result of a partnership between Southern Illinois University- Carbondale's college of Mass Communication and Media Arts (MCMA) and WSIU Public Television. Students are responsible for all aspects of the newscast, including everything from production to reporting, anchoring and directing. It is an award-winning program and has won awards ranging from the Mid-America Regional Emmys to the National Broadcasting Society Award. The program airs on WSIU Monday through Thursday at 5 p.m. during the fall and spring semesters.

*Alt. News 26:46* is an award-winning, student produced, magazine-style series. It is also the result of collaboration between SIUC'S MCMA and WSIU. The program's name derives from the alternative content that is produced and airs in a 26-minute, 46-second time frame. *Alt. News 26:46*'s mission is "to provide an outlet for students of any major to freely create content that expresses their point of view, and in the process learn the skills and techniques required of an ever-changing industry" ("Mission Statement," para. 1). The program prides itself on being entertaining while also providing innovative and informative content to viewers. *Alt. News 26:46* strives to use cutting-edge technology when presenting "the most off-the-wall [stories] imaginable" ("About," para. 1). The program is composed of content not typically seen on the

news such as offbeat stories, musical concerts, short films and documentaries. The program has received over 30 regional and national awards, including regional and national student Emmy awards. According to the Alt. News website, *Alt. News 26:46* has won more awards than any other student produced program in the United States. *Alt. News 26:46* airs once a month on Sundays at 10 p.m.

*Studio A* is a student produced television program that features musical performances and concerts. The show is fully produced by students and is also a result of collaboration between WSIU and SIUC's MCMA. The primary purpose of the show is to give SIUC students hands-on experience working on a multi-camera television program ("Studio A present," n.d.). Under the supervision of a faculty advisor, students fulfill the roles of "producers, directors, writers, camerapersons, audio engineers, lighting designers, set designers, graphic artists and editors" ("Studio A presents," n.d., para. 1).

### CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

A survey of 180 participants was conducted in order to collect and assess opinions and perceptions toward PBS among young adults. The demographic this study examined were males and females, ages 18 to 35. The survey was done in order to assess the following research questions:

RQ1: Does public broadcasting appeal to young adults?

RQ 2: Do young adults prefer watching broadcast television, cable television, independent stations, programs online, or DVDs?

RQ 3: Are young adults familiar with PBS?

RQ 4: Did young adults in this age group watch PBS during their childhood and teenage years?

RQ 5: What are the PBS viewing habits of young adults?

RQ 6: Do they still watch PBS? If they do, what do they enjoy about PBS? If not, why do young adults no longer watch PBS?

RQ 7: Do young adults think that PBS being made available via multiple platforms is important?

RQ 8: What television stations do young adults watch most frequently?

RQ 9: What genre of television do young adults within this age group prefer?

RQ 10: Through what platform do young adults in this age group prefer to view television?

A short case study of WSIU public broadcasting was also conducted. This case study was done in order to understand and assess WSIU/PBS' position among young adult viewers in the current media environment from the perspective of those directly involved with and have influence over the content and production of WSIU public television. Interviews were conducted with five media managers within WSIU. The interviews focused on WSIU's local productions and the opinions of WSIU media managers on what efforts WSIU and national PBS have done, are doing, and can do to appeal to young adults. WSIU media managers were asked ten questions. These questions were then transcribed and analyzed by the researcher. WSIU media managers were asked the following questions:

RQ1: Do you believe that WSIU appeals to young adults (18-35)?

RQ2: Has WSIU created strategies to increase viewership among young adults (ages 18-35)?

RQ3: What efforts are being made within WSIU to appeal to young adults between the ages of 18-35?

RQ4: What ages do WSIU local productions tend to skew towards?

RQ5: If young adults do not establish a connection with PBS today, are you concerned at all about the future of PBS?

RQ6: Who are WSIU's main competitors for this demographic?

RQ7: Are any efforts being made to increase national PBS viewership among young adults age 18-30?

RQ8: Do you believe that PBS loses viewers at a certain age? If not, how does PBS retain its viewers? If so, at what age does PBS lose these viewers?

RQ9: If PBS loses viewers, do the viewers return? If so, at what age do you believe these

viewers return? If no, why do you think these viewers do not return?

RQ 10: Do budget cuts hinder WSIU's ability to create local programming targeting young adults?

## CHAPTER IV

### SURVEY RESULTS

180 young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 were surveyed. The survey participants were gathered through various listservs—the McNair Scholars Program at Southern Illinois University Carbondale, the national McNair Scholars Program, the Mass Communication and Media Arts graduate programs, and a general call for assistance posted on the researcher’s facebook page. The link to the survey was then passed along to other participants such as the Southern Illinois University- Carbondale Student Support Services.

Of the participants surveyed, 72 percent were female and 26 percent were male. The remaining two percent preferred not to mention their gender. Forty-seven percent of the survey participants were between the ages of 18 and 23, 35 percent were between the ages of 24 and 29, and 18 percent were between the ages of 30 and 35. Of the participants surveyed, 68 percent had an income below \$20,000, 18 percent had an income between \$20,000 and \$39,999, 8 percent had an income between \$40,000 and \$59,999, 4 percent had an income between \$60,000 and \$79,999, and 1 percent had an income that was \$80,000 or greater.

The survey participants also had various racial backgrounds. Twenty percent were African American or Black, non-Hispanic, four percent were Asian, 43 percent were White, non-Hispanic, 21 percent were Latino (a) or Hispanic, 4 percent were bi-racial, 4 percent were multi-racial, and two percent considered themselves to be “other.” Of the participants surveyed, 79 percent were single, 17 percent were married, and 3 percent were divorced. Because the majority of PBS and WSIU’s adult audience members have attended some college and have a relatively high income, it was important to ascertain the educational background of the young adults

surveyed. For one percent of survey participants, junior high school was the highest educational level completed. For 27 percent of survey participants, a high school diploma or G.E.D was the highest education level completed. Eleven percent of survey participants had completed at most an Associate's degree, 36 percent of participants surveyed had completed at most a Bachelor's degree, 22 percent of participants surveyed had completed at most a Master's degree, and 2 percent of participants surveyed had completed at most a Doctorate degree. The educational levels completed by participants can be seen on the following graph (Figure 1).

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### What is the highest education level that you have completed?

\*1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

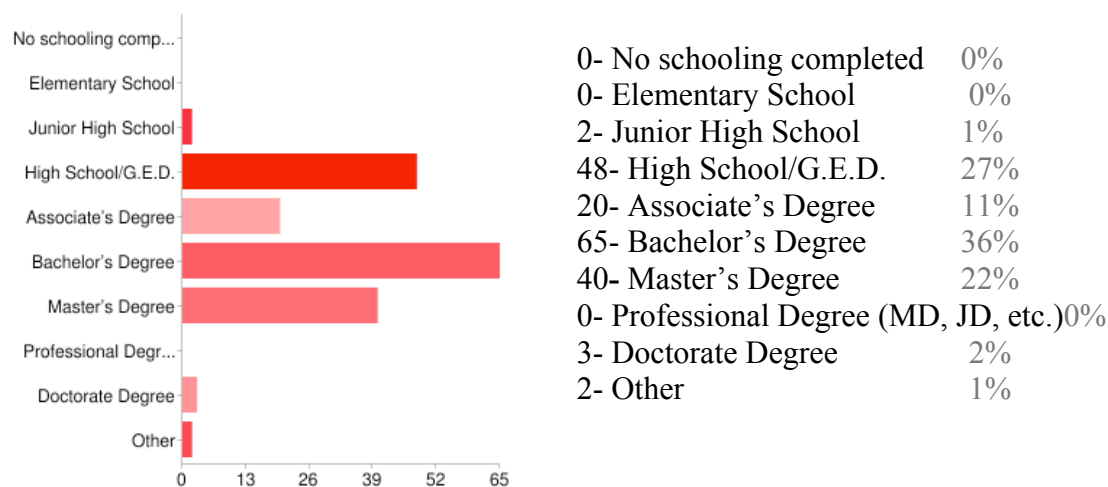


Figure 1

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In order to better understand the viewing habits of young adults within the 18 to 35 year age range, survey participants were asked several questions. The participants were asked how often they view programs on broadcast channels such as ABC, CBS, and NBC. Sixteen percent

of the young adults said they view programs on broadcast channels very often, 19 percent said they view programs on broadcast channels often, 33 percent said sometimes, 23 percent said rarely and 9 percent said never. When the participants were asked how often they view programs on cable channels: 19 percent said very often, 23 percent said often, 23 percent said sometimes, 24 percent said rarely, and 11 percent said never. The participants were also asked how often they view programs on independent channels. Two percent said very often, 8 percent said often, 21 percent said sometimes, 46 percent said rarely and 23 percent said never. The graphs for the viewing habits for broadcast television, cable television and independent stations follow.

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**How often do you view programs on the following: Broadcast**

**Channels (i.e. ABC, NBC, CBS etc.)**

\*1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option, 2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

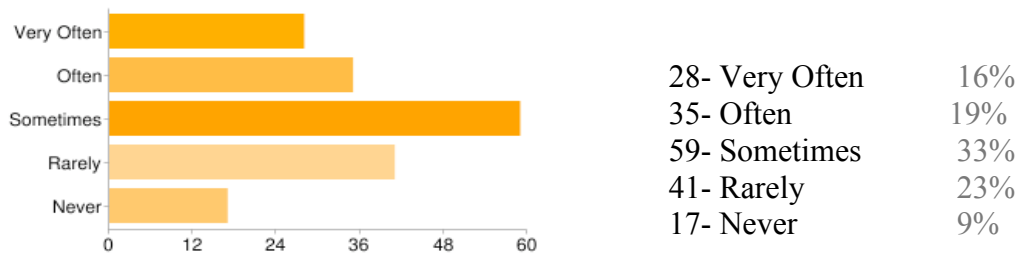


Figure 2

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### How often do you view programs on the following: Cable Channels

\*1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

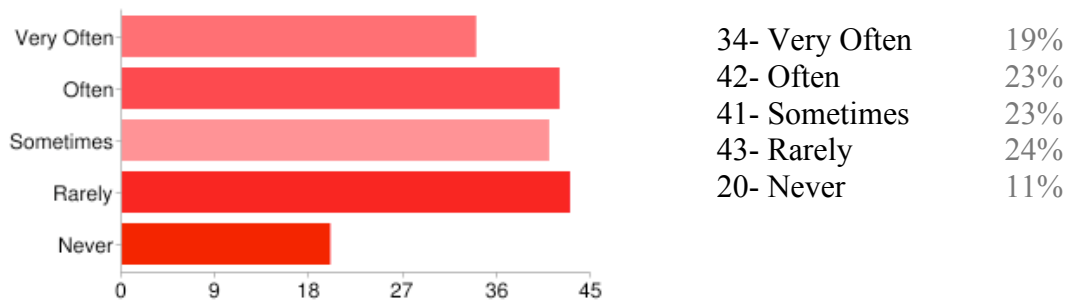


Figure 3

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### How often do you view programs on the following: Independent

#### Stations

\*1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

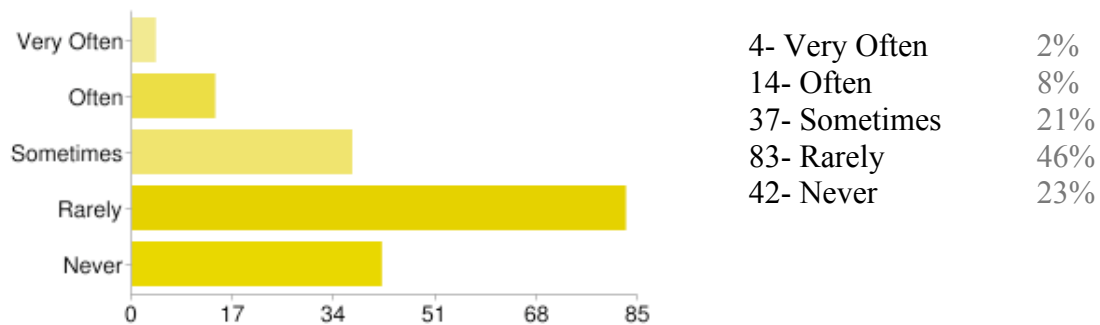


Figure 4

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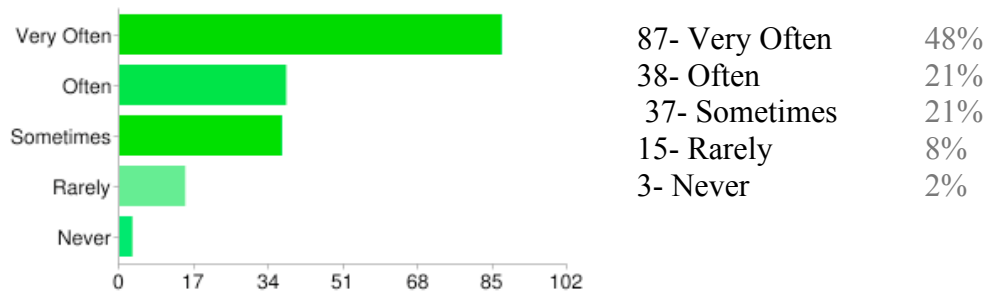
The survey participants were asked how often they view programming on the Internet. Forty-eight percent said very often, 21 percent said often, 21 percent said sometimes, 8 percent said rarely, and 2 percent said never (Figure 5). When asked how often they view programming on DVDs, 17 percent of survey participants said very often, 28 percent said often, 36 percent said sometimes, 16 percent said rarely and 3 percent said never (Figure 6). The participant's viewing habits for DVDs and the Internet can be found on the following graphs.

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**How often do you view programs on the following: Internet**

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage




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Figure 5

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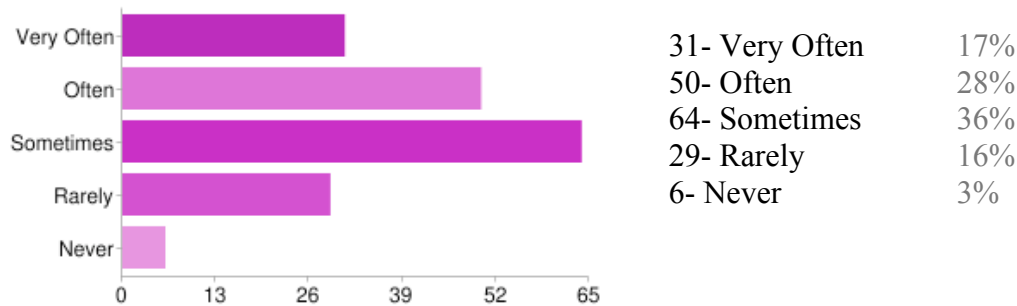
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### How often do you view programs on the following: - DVDs

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 6

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When asked if they had ever watched a program on PBS, 98 percent of the survey participants said yes (Figure 7). When asked if they ever watched PBS at any point while in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade, 91 percent said yes and 9 percent said no (Figure 8). However, when asked if they currently watched any PBS programs, 30 percent of the survey participants said yes and 70 percent said no (Figure 9).

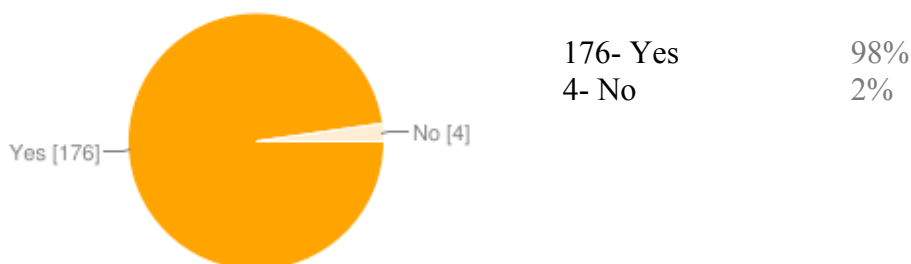
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**Have you ever watched a program on a public broadcasting station (PBS)?**

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 7

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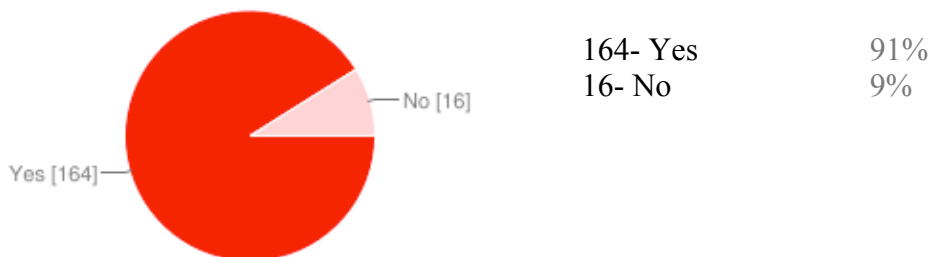
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**Did you watch PBS at any point while in Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade?**

1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 8

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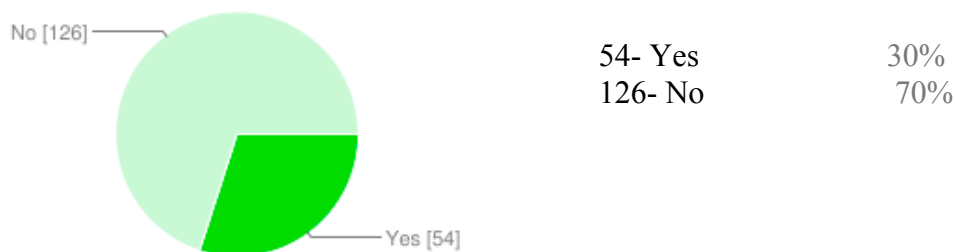
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### Do you currently watch any PBS programs?

\*1<sup>st</sup> number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 9

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When survey participants that currently watch PBS were asked why they still watch PBS and what programs they watch, there were many interesting responses. The programs that the participants said they watch are: Curious George, Dinosaur Train, Word Girl, NOVA, Nature, Austin City Limits, This Old House, America's Test Kitchen, Primal Grill, Simply Ming, Globe Trekker, NewsHour, Arthur, History Detectives, NOVA scienceNow, Scientific American [Frontiers], and Expressions. The participants that watch PBS stated that they watch it because: the programs teach kids while also amusing adults, their love of NOVA, the program is fun and has in depth information, they trust NewsHour far more than they trust network news, they watch if it's on and they find it interesting, to support a friend, and they enjoy any program that tells the story of America.

When participants who stated that they do not watch PBS were asked why they stopped watching, a variety of responses were received. Participants stated: [that] PBS did not have

programming that appealed to their age group, “Much of the reason was because I no longer watched kids programs and was more interested, as a teenager, to pick up other shows that appealed to my interests,” they didn’t have a specific reason, they just stopped watching, “I wasn't into documentaries as a teenager and still rarely I'm interested in documentaries,” “...don't have that much free time to devote to television anymore,” just found better things to watch,” and “It is hard to get a signal where I live; if I could get the signal, I would still watch it.”

When asked if public broadcasting appeals to them on a scale of one to five, one meaning “no, not at all” and five meaning “yes, very much,” 23 percent chose a five. Interestingly enough, 23 percent chose 4, meaning that it does interest them in some way. Twenty-nine percent chose 3, meaning that they were in a neutral position. Sixteen percent chose 2; meaning that it did not really appeal to them and 8 percent chose a one. The figure for this can be seen on the following graph (Figure 10).

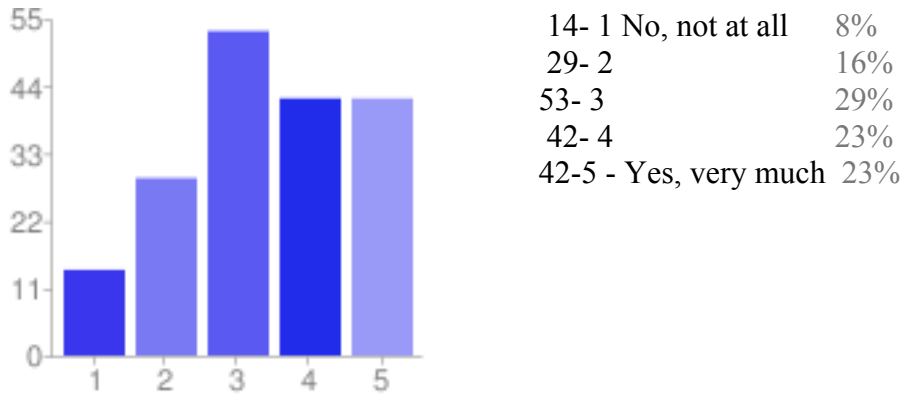
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### Does public broadcasting (PBS) appeal to you?

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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No, not at all

Yes, very much

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Figure 10

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The survey participants were also asked to select from a list of statements that best described their PBS viewing habits (Figure 11). Six percent of the participants said that they have watched and still watch PBS consistently, 40 percent said that they watched PBS when they were younger but no longer watch, 14 percent said that they watched PBS when they were younger, stopped, and now watch PBS again, 6 percent said that they started watching PBS later in life and still watch, 24 percent said that they sometimes tune in to PBS, 4 percent said that they do not watch PBS, and 6 percent chose “Other.”

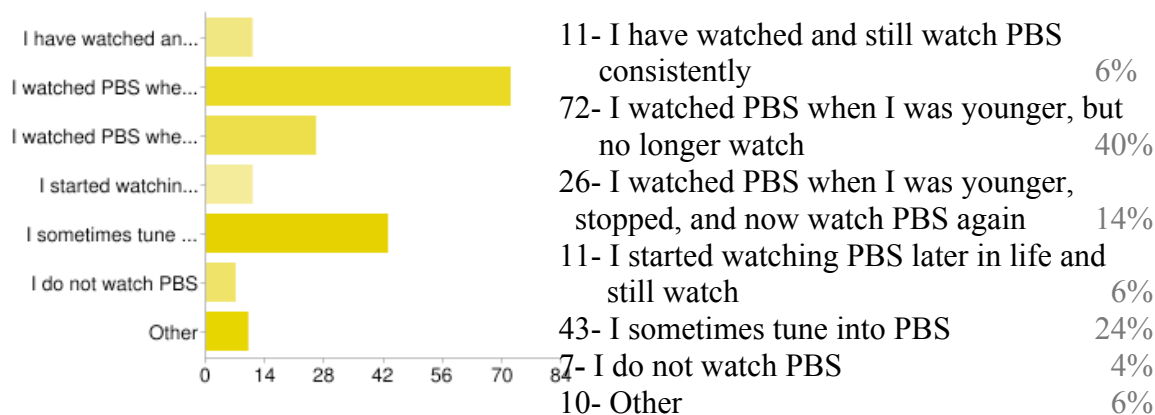
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**Which of the following best describes your PBS viewing habits?**

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 11

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When asked how important it was that public television be made available on multiple platforms such as through mobile applications or online, survey participants were given the choice to answer on a scale of one to five; one meaning that it is not important and five meaning that it is very important. Thirty nine percent of the survey participants said it was very important while 22 percent chose a 4, meaning that it was of some importance to them. Twenty four percent of the participants chose 3, meaning that they felt neutral about it. Nine percent of participants chose 2, meaning that it was really not the most important thing to them and six percent said that it was not important to them. The following figure represents the survey participants' opinions (Figure 12).



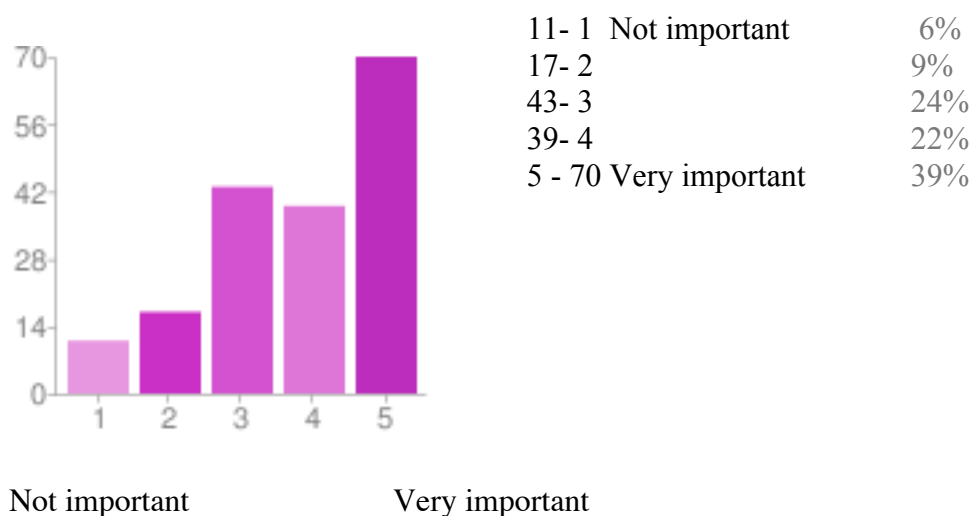
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**How important is it to you that public television be made available on multiple platforms (i.e. mobile, online etc.)**

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage

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Figure 12

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In order to find out if the television stations mentioned in some of the research analyzed were truly competitors of PBS and to get a better understanding of who PBS' competitors are, survey participants were asked to choose which television stations they watch most frequently from a list of 10 stations. Survey participants were allowed to select more than one option. The participants were also given an "Other" option. The five most viewed television stations among survey participants were FOX, Discovery Channel, NBC, the History Channel, and TBS. Thirty-five percent of the participants chose FOX, 33 percent chose the Discovery Channel, 33 percent chose NBC, 28 percent chose the History Channel, and 24 percent chose TBS. Twenty percent of

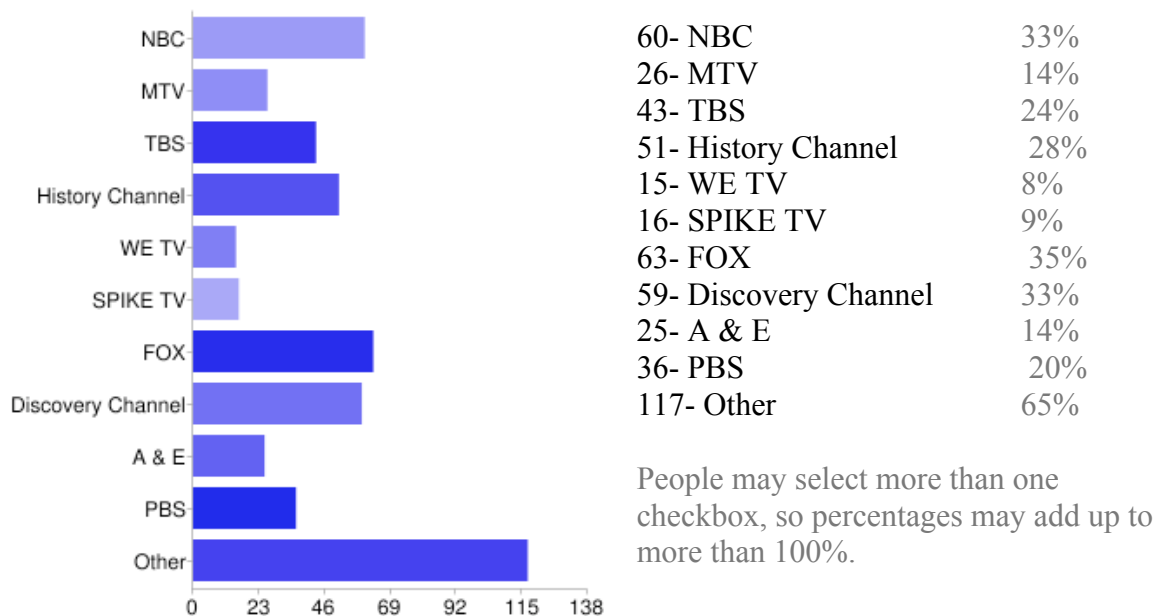
the participants chose PBS. MTV, A & E, SPIKE TV, and WE TV were the television stations watched the least with 14 percent, 14 percent, 9 percent, and 8 percent respectively (Figure 13).

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### What television stations do you watch most frequently?

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage




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Figure 13

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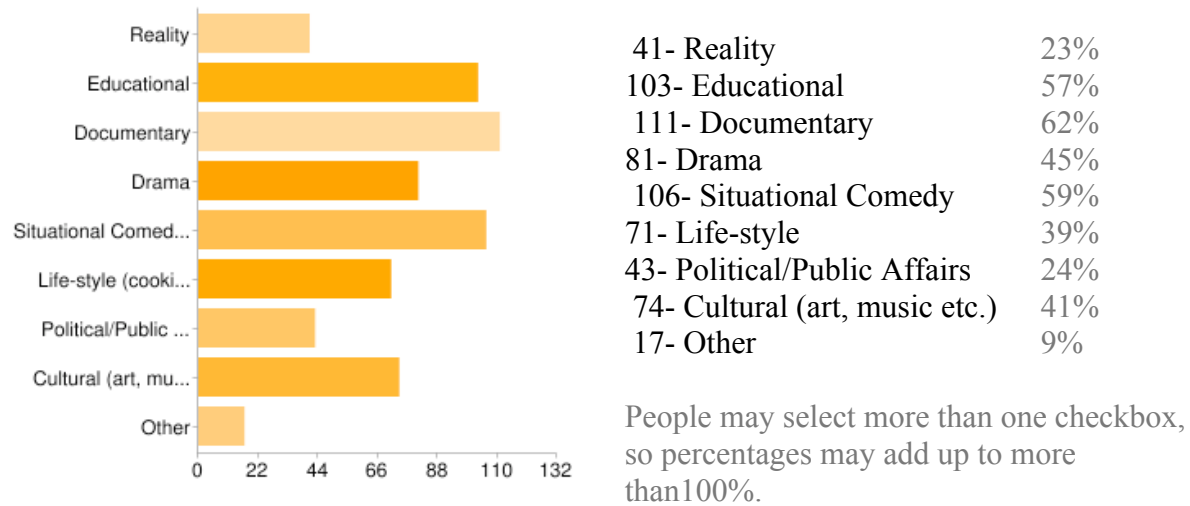
Survey participants were asked which types of television program genres they preferred. Sixty-two percent of survey participants selected documentaries as their preferred genre, 59 percent selected situational comedies, 57 selected educational content, 45 percent selected dramas, 41 percent selected cultural programs, 39 percent selected life-style programs, 24 percent selected political/ public affairs programs, and 23 percent selected reality programs (Figure 14).

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### Which types of television programs do you prefer?

\* 1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage




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Figure 14

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Finally, survey participants were asked to identify the platform through which they preferred viewing television shows. Seventy percent selected that they preferred viewing television programs through a television set, 63 percent selected a computer, 5 percent selected mobile devices and 5 percent selected tablets (Figure 15).

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**Through what platform do you view most television shows?**

\*1st number represents number of participants who selected option

2<sup>nd</sup> number represents the percentage



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Figure 15

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## CHAPTER V

### INTERVIEW RESULTS

Interviews were conducted with five people in managerial or senior level positions within WSIU public broadcasting; Trina Thomas, Television Programming Coordinator, Renee Dillard, Director of Marketing and Corporate Support, Darryl Moses, Associate Director for Television and Video Services, Jak Tichenor, Senior Producer (*Illinois Lawmakers* and *InFocus*), and Greg Petrowich, Executive Director of WSIU. For the purpose of this paper, all five persons interviewed are collectively called “media manager(s)” or “manager(s).” As mentioned earlier, each manager was asked questions about their opinions concerning PBS/WSIU’s viewership trends among young adults between the ages of 18 and 35, competition in the market, and whether or not strategies exist to increase viewership among this age group.

When asked whether or not they think that PBS/WSIU appeals to young adults within the ages of 18 and 35, all five managers interviewed stated that they believe that it appeals to the higher end of the spectrum, rather than the lower end. Two of the five mentioned that WSIU does have some viewers throughout that age group. Renee Dillard said viewership of public television tends to increase with age. Dillard also stated that she believes television viewership is a very personalized choice. Jak Tichenor said that viewership depended on the viewer’s interest. According to Greg Petrowich, certain shows might appeal more to the 35-year-old end of the spectrum. These programs are: “*NOVA*, some of the documentaries, *POV*, *Independent Lens*, and things that naturally inquisitive people would be interested in. [Also] some of the PBS reality stuff like *Frontier House*, *Colonial House*” and some of WSIU’s local programming may appeal to that part of the audience. Petrowich also said that viewership “probably doesn’t have as much

to do with age as it does to do with education. If they're college educated and 35, they are probably more likely to be interested in our programming than if they were just 35."

Darryl Moses said that PBS/WSIU may not appeal to young adults within the 18 to 35 age group because the "demographic tends to go for more popular type of entertainment [and] music oriented shows." Tichenor supports that PBS offers many news and public affairs programming "that anyone who is interested in following current events would certainly be interested in...[such as] the *PBS NewsHour* and *Frontline*. Tichenor also mentioned that PBS is doing more with social media to capture "the younger slice of the audience." Tichenor said that a reason that PBS/WSIU may not pick up a lot of young adult viewers is because of their media habits. Sharing a personal example, Tichenor said:

It's not uncommon for me to see someone like my 25 year old step-daughter doing facebook at the same time she's got something else on the computer and she's on the phone and the TV is on. So it's kind of hard for me to filter out exactly what everybody is doing at that age group (2012).

WSIU managers were asked whether or not WSIU has created strategies to increase viewership among young adults. Four out of the five mentioned that it is something that PBS nationally is working on. Dillard said that WSIU is very interested in the actions being taken by national PBS "to increase viewership and awareness among adults in that age group." Moses said that WSIU "addresses the issue from time to time but so far we haven't come up with a good answer." Thomas said that in order to capture segments of this audience, WSIU carries musical programs and programs for young parents that may be a part of that age group. Tichenor said that WSIU is in the process of doing focus groups in order to find out about getting a "broader cross section of the audience than we've traditionally appealed to." Tichenor

continues by saying, because “ a lot of our focus is on early childhood education [and] getting kids ready to go to school...a large amount of resources is devoted to the preschool services...”

Discussing the role that social media is playing in the current media environment, Petrowich said that WSIU is benefitting from the promotion that national PBS is doing in the new media and social media areas. He believes that social media has opened up a door for more targeted promotion of programs. Petrowich said that multiple formats help PBS stay engaged with young adult audiences. It also lets young adults know that PBS has good programs and has multiple ways in which they can watch them that “don’t include sitting in front of the television at a certain time on a certain night.” Petrowich continues:

You get things like watch *Downton Abbey*, watch this *Independent Lens*, and so there’s a better chance for somebody in that age group to say oh that does sound like an interesting show. So first they get awareness and then the fact that you can stream a lot of these shows or we have recorders now mean that you can watch it at some other time. The main step is, get it into their head that there’s a show that they might be interested in and then, hopefully, they will either record it or could follow the link and watch it on the web rather than having to sit down in front of a television at 7 o’ clock at night, which for a parent with children, especially small children, that’s just impossible (2012).

Each of the managers was asked to name the age demographic they believe each of WSIU’s seven local productions tend to skew towards. Dillard stated that WSIU does not have data to confirm the viewership demographic of each program. Therefore, the following responses are strictly opinion based. Four of the managers support that *Alt. News 26:46* and *Studio A* skew toward a younger audience primarily due to the fact that the producers of the programs are between the 18 to 35-age range. Tichenor and Petrowich believe while *Studio A* may also attach

some much older viewers depending on the musical guest, their primary viewing audience members are most likely young adults between the ages of 18 and 35.

Four of the managers stated that they believe *InFocus* tends to skew towards an older audience. Thomas says that *InFocus* skews toward WSIU's core audience group of viewers 50 years and older, although, Petrowich and Tichenor assert that the program's viewership may be much broader depending on the topic. The managers said that *Illinois Lawmakers* skews toward an older demographic. Moses said this might be because the program deals with the policies and the legislature and "that demographic tends to pay closer attention to the daily functions of the government." Tichenor said that "there are certain young people who are interested in state politics but what the actual percentages of that are, I really can't speak to that."

The viewers of *Scholastic HiQ*, according to Thomas and Petrowich are primarily high school students and the parents and friends of the students featured on the program. Normally, news programs tend to skew older but because *River Region Evening Edition News* is a student-produced program, the managers said the program skews toward a younger audience who work on the program and those who know someone on the program and a broader range of viewers who may be affiliated with the university in some way. *Expressions* is in a unique position as a new program in its first season. Tichenor believes the program skews toward a younger audience younger, Thomas believes the program skews toward a younger audience but also an older audience, Petrowich believes the program is not as broad as *InFocus* but broader than *Alt. News* and *Studio A*, and Moses said he believes the program skews 40 and older. It is important to note that the majority of the managers did mention that most often, viewers have an interest or personal connection with the content of the program in order to view the program.



When asked whether or not they were concerned about the future of PBS if young adults do not establish a relationship with PBS today, the managers responded quite interestingly. All five managers mentioned some degree of concern presently or in the past. Dillard stated that she is less concerned today than she used to be because of “anecdotal and research data that would indicate that an appreciation of the format and content of both public television and public radio tends to increase with maturity and with education.” Dillard continues:

“As individuals mature, as their interests moves more externally rather than being as internally focused and self pre-occupied to becoming more aware of their place in the larger world and their own diverse interests and tastes as they change. People seem to naturally gravitate to public media as they’re undergoing that individual transformation.”

Tichenor asserts that clearly PBS would like to attract young viewers to its audience. He also believes that PBS is sustainable, adding that viewers tend to gravitate to PBS as they grow older and become members of older age groups. Petrowich said that while he is concerned about the future of PBS, he believes that young adults can establish a connection later in life. He said the majority of PBS/WSIU topics are just not interesting to persons who are 22 years old because that person has other things on their mind. According to Petrowich, the largest problem for PBS is pre-conceived thoughts that PBS is not interesting, although there are many programs that would interest them. Because of these thoughts, Petrowich says, these viewers may never come back. Another issue, according to Petrowich, is that some viewers watch PBS programs online; however, it does not register to them that that is a PBS program. This is an issue because according to Petrowich:

Our funding model relies on people making donations and watching through the web doesn’t necessarily explain the fact that we are donor supported. Because it’s free on the

web, why do I need to donate, we don't do pledge messages on the web shows. You have to watch a pledge drive or register with us and give us your name so that we can send you a letter. The web doesn't really facilitate that very well yet so the risk is that they may like the programs or even watch the programs but they won't make the connection between the programs and the station and how we get our funding to survive.

Moses said he believes that "the potential to lose viewers is more through changing technology than to viewer's taste." Moses also believes that because it has been the trend for the past 20 to 30 years, he believes viewers will return to PBS. Moses stated, "they come back when their perspectives change and they want to view something a little more in-depth such as documentaries or news that's more in-depth than you find on...[the] typical news programs." Viewers choose PBS for "a more in-depth presentation," according to Moses.

Citing his own personal experience with PBS, Moses believes that PBS tends to lose viewers somewhere between 10 years of age and their early teens and often regains viewers in their early 30s. Thomas supports that television in general tends to lose viewers from 18 to 35 years old and she believes that parents come back in their early 30s, "once their children are more self-sufficient." Petrowich said that yes, PBS starts to lose viewers when they are around 12 to 14 years old. This is due, according to Petrowich, to "children's program[ing] run [ning] out its appeal after Electric Company and some of those [programs] and kids get busy in high school and they don't watch a lot of programs." Petrowich supports that to children in this age range, it often becomes "uncool" to watch PBS. According to Petrowich, these viewers don't come back to PBS until after college, around their late 20s to 30s as was the case with his return to PBS. The likelihood of the viewers returning also "increases as they get older. I mean our average audience is 60," said Petrowich. Petrowich said that if they grew up watching various

programs on PBS with their parents, after college they have a thirst for knowledge so “they go seeking things and they find it on PBS or they hang out with people who have similar interests.” Dillard asserts that she believes television viewing is based on lifestyle factors, “interests and activities and a wide variety of things [that] change over the course of the lifecycle.”

WSIU media managers were also asked who they believe are WSIU’s main competitors for the 18 to 35 age demographic. Dillard asserts that for PBS, no single competitor exists. Although viewers may sample other cable channels, certain viewers watch PBS heavily and are loyal audience members. Moses and Thomas noted that the History Channel and Discovery networks air a lot of investigative documentaries and history programs similar to WSIU. Tichenor believes in addition to the History Channel, WSIU’s main competitors are the National Geographic channel and Art and Entertainment (A & E). However, Tichenor believes that the History Channel and A & E have moved “more into the reality TV genres to build audiences so I think in the long run that will probably help PBS.” Moses also supports that other competitors are The Learning Channel (TLC), the Home and Garden channel (HGTV), Do It Yourself channel (DIY), and the Smithsonian Channel.

Stating a completely different competitor than any of the other managers, Petrowich said he believes that Netflix and on-demand viewing are PBS’ competitors and that PBS/WSIU is suffering from a fragmented audience. Therefore, with so many choices, the PBS brand does not enter in as strongly. Petrowich says that today, there is a whole age group of people who have flat screens in their houses that are hooked up to the Internet, a DVD player, a cable/satellite box and most likely not an antenna and the source is irrelevant to them. In addition, if viewers have already paid \$7.99 a month to stream movies, what incentive do they have to pledge \$30 to PBS when they feel as if they have already paid for access to the content. Petrowich continues that the

similar situation can be seen on DirecTV's Sprout channel, which features children's programming from PBS.

When asked about whether or not there are any efforts being made nationally to increase viewership among 18 to 35 year olds, the majority of the managers were unfamiliar about exactly what efforts were being made. Thomas said PBS is not spending any money currently to reach the age group and that WSIU is more focused on viewers that are 35 and older. Petrowich said he thinks that a lot of the efforts being made by PBS are largely on the social media end. These efforts encourage not only a younger audience, but also attract more people in general. "I think PBS is trying to acquire things or produce things that skew younger [by] just the way they even market the things they do," Petrowich said. PBS *Independent Lens* has used younger movie stars such as Maggie Gyllenhaal and Don Cheadle when marketing certain films. Petrowich said, "I mean, if I were PBS, I'd be trying to get Brad Pitt, somebody you're familiar with to say, hey, this might be something you might be interested in."

Finally, some of the media managers were asked whether or not budget cuts and financial limitations have affected WSIU's ability to produce local programming and local programming that would appeal to the 18 to 35 age group. Thomas, Moses, and Petrowich said yes, financial limitations have been an issue. Petrowich asserts that because television production is so expensive, you can either go for the audience you want or go for the audience you already have. Also, when producing programs, a lot of money is also spent to promote the show in order to get the audience in. Petrowich continues:

If we know that the bulk of our audience is 60 years old on average and we have limited resources...should we produce shows that appeal to 60 year olds? Or should we produce shows that might appeal to 30 year olds, if they're watching and then try to employ a lot

of strategies to get them to maybe watch and hopefully draw them in when it probably doesn't appeal as much to a 60 year old.

Moses said that on the television side of WSIU, financial limitations are always the problem to the amount of infrastructure to need to be supported, especially because everything is IT or computer based. Moses continues by saying that although WSIU has a relatively new master control system, the station is already making plans and saving money to replace it. Fortunately, according to Moses, WSIU is affiliated with a university and has the opportunity to produce and air productions that do not cost the station anything.

Moses continued by saying:

To me one of the keys is we don't have to have a ton of local production but we need to have enough so the local community sees us as an asset. If we only have a few shows, just a couple of them and they're not really that well known then the public as a whole sees us as nothing but a PBS station where we're doing nothing but re-transmitting what comes from Washington or New York. And that is the danger because when they don't see the value of the local station then you stop getting support from the community and donations and underwriting.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

Although the majority of questions asked to survey participants and media managers yielded interesting responses, some yielded more significant responses than others. These responses are mentioned briefly but more time is spent on the most significant responses. As stated in the survey results section, 98 percent of the survey participants have viewed a program on PBS and 91 percent watched PBS at some point while in kindergarten through the 12<sup>th</sup> grade; but only 30 percent of participants reported to watch PBS currently. Multiple media managers reported similar viewership patterns within their own lives, some saying, generally and personally, that PBS loses viewers around their early teens and regains them in their mid 20s or 30s. When asked to describe their viewing habits in more detail, a total of 50 percent of survey participants reported some viewing of PBS, saying that they either sometimes tune in to PBS, started watching PBS later in life and still watch, watched PBS when they were younger, stopped, and now watch PBS again, or have consistently watched PBS.

According to survey results, while 24 percent of participants said that PBS does not really appeal to them, 46 percent said that it does appeal to them in some way. Twenty-nine percent of the survey participants were neutral and therefore, with time may or may not find interest in PBS. This research indicates that while not all young adults between the ages of 18 to 35 watch PBS programming, more find it to be appealing than unappealing. Therefore, this survey has found that although the majority of young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 have watched a PBS program at some point in their lives, a very small percentage currently watch PBS. Thus, more effort can be made by PBS to engage these viewers. There is no guarantee that the

percentage of young adults who are not interested in PBS will ever return. However, according to the interviews conducted with WSIU media managers, some of these viewers may gravitate toward PBS as they mature and their lifestyles change. It is important to note that the survey participants were affiliated with a college or university and had higher educational statuses. As a result, this is more reflective of the average PBS viewer.

The managers said that PBS/WSIU either did not appeal to the age group or it appealed more to the higher end of the age spectrum. However, two of the five mentioned that WSIU has viewers throughout the 18 to 35 demographic. Overall, most managers concluded that although PBS may not appeal to every member of the 18 to 35 age demographic, there is content available that can appeal to them. Dillard said she believes television viewership is strongly related to lifestyle and requires a certain time commitment that young adults may not have. Dillard and Petrowich mentioned that PBS viewership correlates to one's educational background and age/maturity. In addition, Dillard, Petrowich, and Tichenor mentioned that television viewership is a very personalized choice and depending on the viewer's interest, PBS/WSIU may appeal to them. This study's survey results directly correspond to what many of the WSIU media managers stated about the challenges that PBS faces to retain viewers in the 18 to 35 age demographic.

The researcher found that WSIU does not have data to support the viewing age demographic of each of the station's local programs. However, managers were still asked their opinions about what age demographic each WSIU local production tends to skew towards. Most media managers found that while viewers choose WSIU's programming based on personal preferences and interests, largely all of the local productions that result from a collaboration with Southern Illinois University Carbondale's College of Mass Communication and Media Arts

(*Scholastic HiQ*, *Alt. News 26:46*, *River Region Evening Edition News*, and *Studio A*) skewed younger. Other local programs (*InFocus*, *Expressions*, *Illinois Lawmakers*) tend to skew older. This information demonstrates that WSIU has made attempts to appeal to a younger viewing audience through its local programming.

In addition to providing PBS with many advantages, the Internet can also be seen as providing additional challenges and competitors through online viewing platforms like Netflix. As Petrowich stated, PBS is suffering from a fragmented audience because with so much competition, the PBS brand does not enter in as strongly, especially with young adult viewers. In order to better understand the media habits of young adults between the ages of 18 and 35, survey participants were asked how often they watched broadcast and cable channels. The study found that more young adults in this age demographic watched cable more often than broadcast channels. Forty-two percent of the participants reported that they watch cable channels often or very often while 23 percent said they sometimes watch cable channels. Thirty-five percent reported that they watch broadcast channels very often or often while 33 percent said they watch broadcast channels sometimes.

Survey participants were asked to identify the platform through which they prefer viewing television programs. Among 18 to 35 year olds, 70 percent reported to watch most television programs on a television set. This means that television sets still remain as the number one platform through which young adults prefer viewing television programs. However, following very closely behind were computers with 63 percent. Survey participants were also asked how often they view programs on the Internet. An incredible 90 percent reported that they watch programming online sometimes, often, and very often. When asked how important it was to them that public television be made available on multiple platforms such as mobile phones



and the Internet, 61 percent of the survey participants said it was very important or of some importance to them.

Previous research and current interviews conducted for this study with WSIU media managers indicate that PBS is quite aware of the advantages that the incorporation of new technologies in its business model can provide. Interestingly enough, four out of the five media managers interviewed mentioned that PBS nationally was working on strategies to increase viewership among young adults. However, the media managers were not aware of any specific strategies that PBS nationally has incorporated or is developing to increase viewership among young adults. Some did mention that PBS overall is incorporating social media in program promotion and has much of its programming online in order to be more accessible to viewers. This shows that while PBS is aware of the advantages associated with social media and the Internet, more efforts can be made to ensure that all PBS stations and the managers within the station are aware of promotional strategies in order to better and fully communicate them. Not only is PBS able to spend little to no funds through social networks and other online platforms, the multi-platform media environment can also allow PBS to reach viewers who find content availability on multi-platforms important. By continuing to incorporate the Internet and other new technologies in promotion and as format options to view programming, PBS may be able to better re-establish and/or retain viewers within the 18 to 35 age demographic.

Survey participants were asked to identify the television genres that they preferred in order to assess whether or not young adult viewers would be interested in the programming genres available through PBS. As mentioned earlier in this study, PBS programming includes: children's programming, "... 'how-to' programs stressing the pragmatic... public affairs programming and documentaries; upscale drama; experimental art; [and] community affairs

programming” (Aufderheide, n.d. para. 3). The young adults surveyed were most interested in the following genres: reality (23%), educational (57%), documentary (62%), drama (45%), sitcoms (59%), life-style programs (39%), political or public affairs (24%) and cultural programs (41%).

With the exception of situational comedies and reality programs—although PBS created one of the first reality television programs, *An American Family* (Moses, 2012), PBS offers much of what young adults in the 18 to 35 viewing demographic prefer to watch. As Greg Petrowich stated, viewers may not watch PBS because of a pre-determined idea that PBS is uninteresting. However, when told of the wide array of programs offered other than Lawrence Welk (*The Lawrence Welk Show*) and *Master Piece Theatre*, for example, viewers often did not know of the existence of other programs. After learning about the programs, they find that the programs are really something they would be interested in viewing. Therefore, the problem may be that PBS has not promoted the wide array of programs that it offers enough to be known to the general public and the 18 to 35 age demographic. This may largely be attributed to limited funds and budget cuts. Also, the problem may be that young adults have a pre-determined idea of what PBS is and have decided that PBS has nothing to offer them.

In addition, the researcher found it to be quite interesting that all five of the media managers surveyed reported some degree of concern presently, or in the past, regarding the future of PBS. However, they all believe that PBS is sustainable and that with an increase in educational level, maturity or with age, viewers will find PBS because of the quality and variety of programming it provides.

## CHAPTER VII

### LIMITATIONS

It is important to mention that 60 percent of the participants surveyed had completed a bachelor's degree, a master's degree or a doctorate degree. As some of the media managers mentioned, PBS viewership tends to increase with education and age. Because such a large percentage of the participants surveyed had completed some form of higher education and were affiliated with a college or university in some way, the results are likely to be different than if a population of the general public was asked to complete the survey.

Also, survey participants were asked to select from a list of 10 television stations the television stations they watched most frequently. In addition to the option to select multiple television stations from the list of 10 (NBC, MTV, TBS, History Channel, WE TV, SPIKE TV, FOX, Discovery Channel, A & E, and PBS), survey participants were also given the option to write in other television stations. Over 25 additional television stations were mentioned. This question was not further analyzed in the discussion section of the study because the researcher decided, after analyzing the data, that the question nor its responses were extremely significant to the study.

Finally, this is a preliminary study in PBS viewership among young adults. Additional follow up questions are needed to better understand and evaluate the 18 to 35 year old viewing audience. These follow up questions would ask more detailed questions about brand relationships, feelings and thoughts about PBS. A possible future study to further analyze this viewing audience would include focus groups of viewers separated into smaller cohorts and a

longitudinal study of the media habits of participants surveyed in order to assess where and why PBS loses these viewers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

Finally, based on the survey and interview results, the researcher found that the PBS viewership patterns of the past cannot be fully expected from today's young adults. Television is a very personalized choice and what one views depends on their interests and lifestyle. Data show that viewers with more education tend to be PBS' primary viewers. One hundred and eighty participants were surveyed in order to assess the opinions and perceptions of PBS and media habits among 18 to 35 year olds. Five media managers within WSIU public broadcasting were interviewed in order to assess WSIU's current position with young adults and efforts being made locally and nationally to reach the 18 to 35 age viewing demographic.

More young adults found PBS to be appealing than unappealing. Although a large majority of young adults between the ages of 18 and 35 has watched a PBS program at some point in their lives, a very small percentage currently watches PBS. Young adults reported to watching more cable television than broadcast and 90 percent reported to watching some type of programming online. A large percentage reported that it was important to them that public television be made available on multiple platforms. It was found that PBS produces many programs within the genres that young adults prefer. However, young adults may not be aware that PBS offers programming in these genres. More efforts can be made by PBS to raise awareness of the programming options that the service offers. If PBS does make more efforts via promotion or a specific campaign targeting young adults, these viewers may never be reached or return as viewers of PBS.

Low viewership among this viewing demographic may be attributed to preconceived notions that PBS is uninteresting, competition from the internet and other television channels and media platforms or simply because viewers may not have developed an interest in the educational and informative programming PBS offers at this point in their lives. WSIU has made efforts to appeal to young adults through many of its local productions, which are also produced by people in the 18 to 35-age range. According to media managers, WSIU has viewers within the age group studied. However, like national PBS, the majority of the station's viewers are much older.

As part of the first generations of "digital natives," only time will tell if PBS is able to penetrate the clutter of the current and future media environment. There is also no guarantee that any of these young adults will ever return to PBS. However, some of these viewers may gravitate toward PBS as they mature and their lifestyles change. As Paula Kerger and WSIU media managers expressed, PBS is concerned with and sees the importance in reaching a younger demographic. However, the service is still experimenting with different ways to achieve this. PBS has made drastic improvements in recent years to include the Internet and social networking in its promotional and marketing efforts. As Enli supports and as the survey participants expressed, if PBS continues using multi-platform formats, the chances for the service to reach young adults will increase and assist PBS in establishing a more solidified brand relationship.

Time and technology have changed, and as a result, PBS has had to adapt. In a highly competitive, multiplatform and multichannel media environment, the extent to which PBS is able to appeal to a younger demographic continues to be very important. Because today's young people will be tomorrow's leaders and possible PBS viewers, it is important to keep these

viewers in mind and to continue forming a brand relationship with this demographic in order to secure a better future for PBS.

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