

Social Influence of an International Christian Leader: Mediated Responses to the Death of Queen Elizabeth II

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Abstract

One of the most powerful periods of popular media's social influence is during international media events. The September 2022 death and memorial of Queen Elizabeth II, one of the longest reigning monarchs in history, generated worldwide media coverage and reflection of her life. The present study of nearly 1800 consumers of popular media from 15 countries explores how audiences formed close psychological bonds with the Queen through the mediated processes of parasocial involvement, identification and worship. Testing of a theoretical model of these important and closely related forms of involvement with celebrities and international leaders effectively predicted financial donations to the Queen's charities. Implications of this research for future studies of persona influence through popular media are discussed.

Key words: Queen Elizabeth II, parasocial relationships, identification, worship, celebrities, social influence

Queen Elizabeth II was one of the world's most influential Christian leaders during the past 100 years. At the time of Queen Elizabeth II's death on September 8, 2022, at the age of 96, she had served as the longest-serving monarch in British history after advancing to the throne on June 2, 1953, at the age of twenty-five. The Queen exhibited a strong Christian faith throughout her life and never wavered in her formal commitment as 'Defender of the Faith and Supreme Governor of the Church of England' (Christian Enquiry Agency, 2022). This article examines the influence the Queen had on the public at the time of her death.

The Queen's charity work was legendary, as she was reported to have raised more than two billion dollars for more than 600 non-profit organizations during her lifetime (Dodd, 2022). In Delffs' (2019) examination of her life, he notes that in her last years, "Queen Elizabeth II became more popular than ever, both as an ambassador of cultural history and an emblem of national pride but also as a role model, philanthropist, iconic leader, and Christian" (p. 28).

The immense popularity of the Queen, coupled with the historical significance of her death, created one of the largest media events of the century as people celebrated her life by watching her televised memorial service. The BBC reported 28 million Britons watched her memorial service, making it one of the most watched media events in many decades, akin to the viewership of Princess Diana funeral in 1997 (*Reuters*, 2022, September 20). Worldwide, her funeral attracted an audience of more than 4 billion (Jackson, 2022).

Popular media and their cultural pervasiveness create immense periods of social influence during media events created by the death of international celebrities and world leaders such as Princess Diana, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela, Pope John Paul II, and now Queen Elizabeth II. The purpose of the present study is to explore the Queen's social influence on the lives of consumers of popular media reflecting upon her death. First, a discussion of the popular media attention given to international celebrities and leaders at the time of their death

is presented. Second, a review of previous studies of the influence of internationally known celebrities and leaders who advocated socially beneficial beliefs and behaviors at the time of their deaths is provided. Third, the theoretical framework for this study is presented, along with four hypotheses and one research question. Fourth, the research results are presented and discussed followed by a discussion of the implications of the research findings.

World Media Events

Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (2018) have provided a useful conceptual framework for understanding the nature of media events in today's global world. Media events are important to study because they occur provide great insight into the dynamic relationship between popular media and culture. In one of their seminal works, they described media events metaphorically as "high holidays of mass communication" (Dayan & Katz, 1992, p. 1) and as a unique "genre" of media communication with a unique convergence of syntactic, semantic and pragmatic attributes (Dayan & Katz, 1992, pp. 9–14). Hepp and Couldry (2010) describe these attributes as follows:

On the syntactic level, media events are "interruptions of routine"; they monopolize media communication across different channels and programs, and are broadcast live, pre-planned and organized outside the media. On the semantic level, media events are staged as "historic" occasions with ceremonial reverence and the message of reconciliation. On the pragmatic level, media events enthrall very large audiences who view them in a festive style. The main point of these criteria is that each as a single attribute may also be found in other forms of media communication; however, when they come together, they constitute the distinctive "genre" of media events. (p. 2)

Although other forms of media communication may exhibit any one or two of these attributes, media events uniquely combine all three attributes to distinguish them from other genres. The increase in media cultures, defined as cultures whose "primary resources of meaning are accessible through technology-based media" (Hepp & Couldry, 2010, p. 9), the media form the center of meaning construction within the culture. Other communication scholars prefer to describe such cultures as "mediated cultures" or "mass-mediated cultures" (see Couldry, 2004). The ubiquitous global reach of popular media makes it impossible to adequately understand how people construct meaning in their lives without understanding their media consumption. As Hepp (2008) aptly observed, all media cultures have to be theorized and studied as translocal phenomena. Dayan and Katz's theorizing of media events in the global age acknowledges the many nuances of international audiences. Media events are now defined as "certain situated, thickened, centering performances of mediated communication that are focused on a specific thematic core, cross different media products and reach a wide and diverse multiplicity of audiences and participants" (Hepp & Couldry, 2010, p. 12).

Drawing on this conceptual framework of media events, it is clear that the celebration of Queen Elizabeth II's life after her death was a global media event. The purpose of this study is not to analyze the various attributes of Queen's death and funeral service, but rather, to explore how her death and memorial created opportunities for people to reflect on how she has influenced their lives. In this sense, the media event that resulted from the Queen's passing was a catalyst for social influence. It created a plethora of worldwide media coverage not seen since the death of Princess Diana.

Review of Literature

Two important areas of scholarship are provided as the groundwork for the present study. First, is scholarship on the mechanisms of social influence that occur when consumers of popular media become psychologically and emotionally involved with famous public figures through mediated relationships. Second, is scholarship on the deaths of world leaders and the media coverage and social influence that their deaths create. Key studies within these two areas of scholarship are now reviewed.

Involvement with Media Personae

There are three important processes of the mediated involvement with famous people, also referred to as media personae. These processes are parasocial interaction, identification, and worship. Brown (2015, 2018) conceptualizes these processes as closely related but distinct, as do other scholars (see Moyer-Gusé, 2008; Moyer-Gusé & Nabi, 2010; Moyer-Gusé et al., 2011; Murphy et al., 2011). Brown (2015) theorized that when audiences develop relationships with media personae, strong parasocial interaction often leads to identification, and strong identification often precedes worship. Parasocial interaction is defined as “the process of developing an imaginary relationship with a mediated persona both during and after media consumption (Brown, 2015, p. 275). A persona can be a real person (i.e., President Biden) or a fictional character (i.e., Superman) or a combination of the two (i.e., Marlon Brando, the actor; Marlo Brando as the Godfather in the film). Identification is defined as “the process of conforming to the perceived identity of a media persona both during and after media consumption (Brown, 2015, p. 275).

Parasocial Interaction and Relationship Studies

Most communication scholars are very familiar with parasocial interaction (PSI), parasocial relationships (PSR), and Horton and Wohl’s (1956) seminal study of how television viewers exhibited imaginary interaction with television personalities, which over time, developed into a self-defined one-way relationship with that personality. Levy (1979) described a parasocial relationship (PSR) as a pseudo-relationship that results from a false sense of intimacy created during media consumption. In recent years, scholars have sought to conceptually and methodological differentiate between PSI and PSR, finding that some popular PSI scales actually are better measures of parasocial relationships (see Dibble, Hartmann, and Rosaen, 2015). They define parasocial interaction as “a faux sense of mutual awareness that can only occur during viewing,” and parasocial relationship as “a longer-term association that may begin to develop during viewing, but also extends beyond the media exposure situation” (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2015, p. 5).

Communication scholars now study PSI and PSRs in a broader context beyond the medium of television. In the published studies of audience involvement with Magic Johnson, Princess Diana, and Steve Irwin, audiences exhibited strong parasocial relationships with all three that resulted from prolonged media exposure to them through a variety of popular media (Basil & Brown, 1994; Basil, Brown, & Bocarnea, 2002; Brown, 2010; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003a). Sports fans develop PSRs with popular athletes through their attendance at sporting events and consumption of televised sports, movies, talk show interviews, and commercials featuring sports celebrities (Basil & Brown, 2004; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown & de Matviuk, 2010). Practitioners of a religious faith form parasocial relationships with religious leaders (Brown, 2009; Bae, Brown, & Kang, 2011; Sparks, 2002). Internet and social

media users form parasocial relationships in online environments (Ballantine, & Martin, 2005; Chen, 2016; Tsiotsou, 2015).

Identification Studies

Identification with media personae is a second important type of involvement studied by media scholars through a variety of popular media, including television, film, video games, and streamed sporting events (Brown, 2015; Cohen, 2001; Fraser & Brown, 2002; Igartua, 2010; Klimmt, Hefner, & Vorderer, 2009; Pan & Zang, 2018; Tal-Or, 2020). Kelman (1958, 1961) conceptualized identification as a process of social influence, stating that identification occurs when an individual adopts the attitudes, values, beliefs or behavior of another individual or group based on a “self-defining” relationship (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). Observing the process by which people internalize the attitudes, values, and beliefs of others with whom they closely relate, he explained: “by saying what the other says, doing what he does, believing what he believes, the individual maintains this relationship and the satisfying self-definition that it provides him” (Kelman, 1961, p. 63). The object of identification is seldom aware of this process.

Cohen (2001) states that “identification requires that we forget ourselves and become the other” (Cohen, 2001, p. 247) and notes that the “repetitive internalization of powerful and seductive images and alternative identities of media characters” likely produces “long-term effects” (Cohen, 2001, p. 249). Cohen’s (2001, 2014) conception of identification as a process in which the person who identifies with a media persona takes on the identity of the persona during and after media consumption is consistent with Kelman’s (1961) theory.

Studies of famous people indicate that strong parasocial interaction with them led to identification with them (Basil & Brown, 2004; Basil, Brown, & Bocarnea, 2002; Brown, 2010, 2017; Brown & Basil, 1995; Brown, Basil, & Bocarnea, 2003a). Research shows identification also occurs though an interplay of media consumption and participation in mediated events (Brown, & deMatviuk, 2010).

Worship Studies

The most recently conceptualized and intense form of involvement with media personae is referred to as worship (Brown, 2015; Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, McCutcheon, 2002). Focusing on celebrities, John Maltby and his colleagues have explored how media consumers tend to idolize celebrity personae to the degree that their involvement emulates worship (Maltby, Giles, Barber, & McCutcheon, 2005; Maltby, Houran, Lange, Ashe, & McCutcheon, 2002; Maltby, Houran, & McCutcheon, 2003; Maltby et al., 2004). Their conceptualization and measurement of celebrity worship encompasses the broad experiences of fandom and overlaps considerably with other forms of persona involvement, including PSI and PSR.

Brown (2015) presented a refined conceptualization of worship to distinguish it from PSI, PSR, and identification. Drawing on Smith’s (2009, p. 51) conception of worship as “our ultimate love” that forms our passions and shapes our lives, Brown (2015) describes persona worship as making one’s relationship with a mediated personality a primary focus of one’s love, time and attention. Persona worship is defined as “the process of expressing devotion, commitment, and love to a mediated persona both during and after media consumption” (Brown, 2015, p. 276).

Singer (2008) discussed worship of Princess Diana and recent studies have been conducted of audience worship of other well-known personae, particularly celebrities (Brooks,

2021; Stever, 2011), athletes (Hyman & Sierra, 2010. Sabzban, & Safaei, 2021), and performing artists (Ahmed, 2022; Hillman-McCord, 2019). We now review studies of mediated involvement three famous people: Princess Diana, Pope John Paul II, and Nelson Mandella.

Princess Diana's Death and Memorial

Perhaps no other person's death in the past 25 years has generated as much media coverage as the tragic death of Diana, Princess of Wales. One could hardly pass a check-out stand in a supermarket without surveying her picture on the cover of one or more news magazines in the weeks following her death in August of 1997. Broadcast news organizations throughout the world told the story of how the paparazzi chased her car from the Ritz Hotel in Paris until the horrific crash in the Pont de l'Alma tunnel which took her life.

Princess Diana's funeral in London was the quintessential media event, a planned spectacle that featured more than one million mourners from around the world who lined up along the three-mile flower-laden funeral route. Two thousand celebrities and members of royal families from around the world joined the Royal Family and national leaders at Diana's memorial service (Kantrowitz, Pedersen, & McGuire, 1997).

An estimated 2.5 billion people watched the worldwide satellite transmission of the funeral to 200 countries in 44 languages, from small villages in India and Iceland to giant screens in Tokyo and Hong Kong, making it the most watched event in history at that time (Blowen, 1997). The extensive popular media coverage and immediacy of television, which broadcast the memorial service into homes, coffee shops, bars, hospitals, restaurants, and offices, created an international mourning of the loss of Princess Diana as if a family member or friend had died (Shales, 1997). As Brown (2020) observed, "Princess Diana is one of the few women in the 20th century whose popularity penetrated every continent in the expanded global marketplace of international fame, making her a great source of social influence. Like Elvis, Diana became one of the few people in history recognized internationally by her first name" (p. 49).

Like many famous people, Princess Diana's influence after death may have exceeded her influence before her death. At the time of her death, Princess Diana was a powerful force for positive social change as she firmly established herself as an international humanitarian. During her short lifetime, Princess Diana served as a patron for more than 100 charities, the most important being the Great Ormond Street for Sick Children in London, the Royal Marsden Hospital, which specializes in treating cancer, Centerpoint, an organization assisting the homeless, The National Aids Trust and The Leprosy Mission (Brown, 2020, pp. 209-210). In addition to her many trips to North American hospices, schools, and charity events, she traveled to Angola, Australia, Bosnia, Egypt, India, Pakistan, and many European countries.

She visited Mother Teresa in Calcutta in February 1992, meeting with 50 patients close to death at Mother Teresa's Hospice for the Sick and Dying in Kolkata, India. Recognizing Princess Diana's genuine compassion, Mother Teresa met Princess Diana in Rome shortly afterwards, then later in London and at another time in New York. They formed a strong personal friendship.

Princess Diana, aware of the powerful communicative force of images, stood in a minefield in Angola in January 1997 to draw attention to the need to eliminate landmines throughout the world that maim and kill thousands of children and civilians. She embraced children with HIV and AIDS to reduce the stigma of the disease and promote a compassionate

response to those afflicted by the disease. She embraced the sick and the poor in Harlem, New York, and orphaned children with AIDS in Sao Paulo, Brazil. She embraced the homeless and the dying in Indonesia, Cameroon, Pakistan, India, Zimbabwe, Argentina, Angola, and Bosnia.

Aside from what Princess Diana accomplished in her lifetime is the more important intrinsic understanding that she used her celebrity capital to motivate others to produce positive social change. It is this power of celebrity appeal that enables celebrities to pull millions of people into involvement with social causes. Her strategic use of her celebrity influence to promote HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment, land mine removal, Cerebral Palsy care and treatment, and other social causes continued long after her death.

Contributions to Princess Diana's charities after her death continued through the Princess Diana Memorial Fund. During the lifetime of the fund from 1997-2012, £100 million in grants were distributed to more than 350 organizations around the world (Alleyne, 2011). As Princess Diana's two sons now continue her charity work, it is not possible to quantify the enormous influence her death had on motivating hundreds of thousands of people who admired her to give financially to a number of social causes that she advocated. However, we can conclude that the popular media coverage of Princess Diana's life and death resulted in a profound social influence that changed the beliefs and behavior of people throughout the world.

Pope John Paul II's Death and Social Influence

At the time of Pope John Paul II death on 2 April 2005, he was one of the most admired leaders throughout the world, known for his empathy, care and concern for the poor, the sick, and the disenfranchised. Brown (2009) examined the international responses to Pope John Paul II's death, focusing on the emotional and psychological involvement that people developed with the former pope through their mediated exposure to his life, his works, and his teachings.

Cardinal Karol Józef Wojtyła's remarkable journey from the Polish town of Wadowice where was born, to his life as a student in Kraków during the Nazi invasion, to his becoming the youngest bishop in Poland at age 38, to his ascension to the office of the Pope on October 16, 1978, made him one of the most respected popes in history. He achieved the historical status of becoming the first non-Italian to become pope in 455 years and the first-ever Slavic pope. One of the most widely traveled popes in history, Brown (2009) notes that "supporters and critics alike agree that John Paul II was one of the most influential popes in history, drawing enormous crowds." His written works 14 encyclicals, 15 apostolic letters, 10 books on spiritual issues, two books of poetry, two plays, and many other smaller written works (Weigel, 1999).

Shortly after the news broke of Pope John Paul II's death, an international survey study was launched through a professional data collection company (see www.hostedsurvey.com) to assess the influence of the pope's death (Brown, 2009). A self-selected sample consisting of 1766 individuals from almost every continent participated in the study, providing information on their involvement with the pope through parasocial interaction and the pope's influence on their personal behavior through identification. Parasocial interaction defined as "the process of developing an imaginary relationship with a mediated persona both during and after media consumption, which begins with spending time with the persona through media or participation in mediated events, and is characterized by perceived relational development with the persona and knowing the persona well" (Brown, 2015, p. 276). Identification is defined as "the process of conforming to the perceived identity of a mediated persona both during and after media

consumption or through participation in a mediated event, which commences when media consumers begin to assume the identity of the persona by sharing or adopting the persona's attitudes, values, beliefs or behavior" (Brown, 2015, p. 277).

Results of the study indicate those who more strongly identified with Pope John Paul II also more strongly advocated his moral positions on many issues, including protecting the unborn, protecting the disabled, and protecting the elderly (Brown, 2009). In addition, study participants who watched the pope's funeral or who planned to watch the funeral were more likely to advocate Pope John Paul II's moral beliefs, indicating that not only did Pope John Paul II reinforce existing beliefs but also may have moved some people to adopt the moral beliefs he advocated (Brown, 2009).

Nelson Mandela's Death and Leadership Influence

On 5 December 2013, Nelson Mandela, the first President of South Africa to be elected in a fully representative democratic election and the country's first black head of state, died at the age of 95 after a prolonged respiratory infection. Responses to Mandela's death from world leaders, governments, international organizations, and celebrities garnered worldwide media coverage.

The South African government announced a period of 10 days of national mourning, ending with a state funeral on December 15, 2013.

Mandela's amazing journey from the world's most famous prisoner to one of the world's most admired leaders parallels the Biblical account of Joseph's rise from forgotten prisoner of Pharaoh to Pharaoh's assistant given charge over all of Egypt (*King James Bible*, 1769/1980, Gen. 42: 39-44). In response to Mandela's death, the South African government declared Sunday, December 8, 2013, to be observed as a national day of prayer and reflection to celebrate Mandela's life and legacy in places of worship, homes and communities (Reuters, 2013).

Immediately after the death of Mandela, an international study was launched to explore the influence of his death on the lives of those who knew him through media exposure to his life and works (Brown, 2013). A total of 458 respondents from 37 countries participated in the study, completing a Survey Monkey online survey advertised through Google Adwords.

Results of the study indicate 38 percent of the sample watched Mandela's memorial service in person or on television. A 1-7 agreement Likert scale was used to measure respondents' identification with Mandela, with 1 representation strong disagreement and 7 representing strong agreement with a set of statements. Respondents indicated a high degree of shared values with Mandela (M (mean) = 5.1, $S.D.$ (standard deviation) = 2.1) and a high degree of modeling his behavior (M = 5.3, $S.D.$ = 2.0), both elements of *identification* with Mandela.

In addition, the majority of respondents looked to Mandela as a role model for their own lives (M = 5.9, $S.D.$ = 1.9) and considered him to be a great leader (M = 6.5, $S.D.$ = 1.3). Mandela had a powerful influence on the lives of many of the respondents, a finding reinforced by the qualitative data collected in the study. As indicated by several respondents who stated, "I am impressed by his spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation and most importantly, humbleness," "he has shown me how to be a leader and what to fight for," "Mandela taught me to appreciate humility, forgiveness and tolerance," and "I am forever changed in the way I do things. Your forgiving heart has inspired me to live with peace in my heart," Mandela had a profound effect on many people. We now turn to our study of Queen Elizabeth II.

Theoretical Framework, Research Question and Hypotheses

In the present study, we draw on Brown's (2015, p. 272) theoretical model to explore audience involvement with Queen Elizabeth II. A shortened version of the PSI instrument used in this study (Bocarnea & Brown, 2007) includes measures of both parasocial interaction and parasocial relationship.¹ In light of the critique by Dibble et al. (2016), we used the variable name parasocial involvement in the model. Brown's theoretical model, shown in Figure 1, provides the basis for the four hypotheses tested.

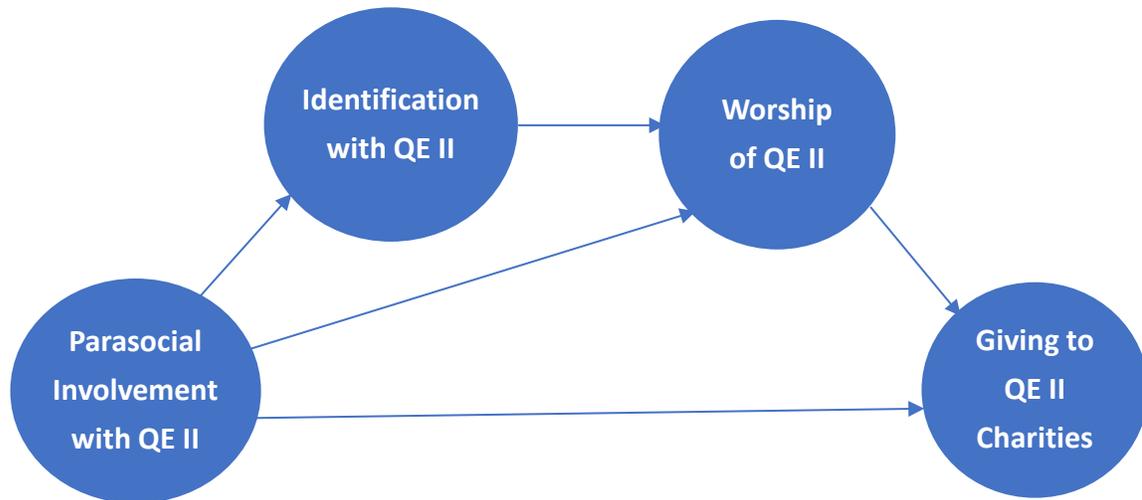


Figure 1 Processes and Effects of Involvement with Queen Elizabeth II

The model predicts that parasocial involvement with the Queen leads to identification and worship, and parasocial involvement and worship lead to giving to the Queen's her charities. Worship is expected to mediate all the effects of identification on giving. The model is parsimonious, designed only to focus on the variables of involvement and a single yet powerful effect of that involvement, which is giving to one or more charities.

Hypotheses

Based on the theoretical model illustrated in Figure 1, four hypotheses are posed:

- H1: Greater parasocial involvement with the Queen will lead to greater identification with her.
- H2: Greater parasocial involvement with the Queen will lead to greater worship of her.
- H3: Greater parasocial involvement with the Queen and worship of the Queen will lead to greater giving to the Queen's charities.
- H4: Greater parasocial involvement and greater identification with the Queen, and greater worship of her, will lead to a greater intention to watch her memorial service.

¹ Bocarnea and Brown encourage shorter versions of their 20-item scale to be used, stating high reliability can be obtained using only 12-15 scale items.

Research Question

In addition to the four hypotheses, the following research question is posed:

RQ1: To what extent, if any, did Queen Elizabeth II influence the personal lives of the participants in this study upon reflection of her death?

Method

A mixed-methods approach was employed yielding three types of data. First, an international survey via Survey Monkey and Amazon was implemented within a few hours of the news of Queen Elizabeth's death. The survey is provided in Appendix C. Completed surveys were collected over the seven-day period between her death and memorial service. The quantitative survey data were used to assess the four hypotheses posed in our study.

Second, at the end of the survey we asked an open question to gather qualitative data that we used to assess the research question. We then interviewed a prominent leader from the U.K. The qualitative data were used to assess the research question.

Sample

A total of 1208 people responded to the survey and 34 responses were deleted from the sample due to irregularities or incompleteness, leaving a final sample size of 1174. The final quantitative sample represented 15 countries, with approximately 60 percent of the sample from the U.S., 20 percent from the U.K., seven percent from Canada and five percent from India. Regarding the qualitative data, 956 participants responded to the open question and one influential former military leader in London provided an in-depth interview to one of the researchers who attended Queen Elizabeth II's memorial.

Among the 94 percent of the sample who provided their biological gender at birth, 53.4 percent reported they were male and 46.2 percent female. Gender identity was not measured. The sample was ethnically diverse proportionately, representing 19 different ethnicities, with 69.3 percent identifying themselves as white or from European descent, 12.7 percent from Hispanic or Latin American descent, 6.6 percent as Black or from African descent, 5.8 percent from India, and 3.8 percent from Asia. The ages of the sample were also diverse, with 1.3 percent age 19 and under, 20.1 percent in their 20s, 35.9 percent in their 30s, 20.7 percent in their 40s, 14.2 percent in their 50s, and 7.8 percent age 60 and older. Among the 90 percent of the sample who reported their religious affiliations, if any, 27.7 percent identified themselves as atheist or agnostic, 63.0 percent as Christian, 2.0 percent as Buddhist, 5.2 percent as Hindu, and 2.1 percent as following other religious faiths.

Analyses and Results

First, the quantitative research analyses are presented, followed by the qualitative analyses. Descriptive statistics for the major variables in the study were computed and four measurement scales were created (Bocarnea & Brown, 2007; Brown & Bocarnea, 2007). Reliability analysis results indicate all four measurement scales were highly reliable, achieving Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients above 0.90 as shown in Table 1 (Appendix A).

A correlation analysis was conducted to show the linear relations among these four measurement scale variables. These results show strong positive relationships among all the variables in the hypotheses as shown in Table 2. (Appendix A).

Model and Hypotheses Tests

IMB's SPSS AMOS 29.0 was utilized to examine the research model and test the first three hypotheses. A path analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted as part of the structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis to assess the predicted relationships in the path model presented in Figure 1 (Appendix C). SEM is a powerful tool for exploring direct and mediated effects in path models and to examine how well the model fits the data (Ullman & Bentler, 2013). Through the usage of multiple linear regression analyses, AMOS enables the exploration of multiple relations among the independent and dependent variables (Wrench, Thomas-Maddox, Richmond, & McCroskey, 2019, p. 551). Based on the multiple regression analysis, the composite scores for each variable were used to test the strength and validity of the proposed model. Based on these results, the theoretical model is confirmed as a highly predictable model for assessing the effects of three forms of involvement with media personae explored in this study (see Appendix B).

Hypotheses Tests

The first hypothesis predicted that greater parasocial involvement with the Queen would lead to greater identification with her. This hypothesis was strongly supported by the regression analysis. Participants who exhibited greater parasocial involvement with the Queen more strongly identified with her ($\beta = .96, p < .001$).

The second hypothesis predicted that greater parasocial involvement with the Queen would lead to greater worship of her. Again, the results strongly support this hypothesis. Participants who exhibited stronger parasocial involvement with the Queen also exhibited a greater worship of her ($\beta = .10, p < .001$).

The third hypothesis predicted that greater parasocial involvement with the Queen and worship of the Queen would lead to greater giving to the Queen's charities. Two regression analyses were used to test this hypothesis, with the decision rule that both tests must be statistically significant in order to support the hypothesis. The first test confirmed that greater parasocial involvement with the Queen predicted greater giving to the Queen's charities ($\beta = .02, p < .001$). The second test confirmed that greater worship of the Queen led to greater giving to the Queen's charities ($\beta = .43, p < .001$). Both tests support the third hypothesis. However, it is important to note that the large sample size makes even small *Beta* values statistically significant. Clearly, most of the influence of parasocial involvement on giving was mediated through worship. Standardized regression coefficients can be directly compared. Thus, the influence of worship on giving was 20 times greater than the influence of parasocial involvement on giving.

The last hypothesis predicted that greater parasocial involvement and greater identification with the Queen and greater worship of her would lead to a greater intention to watch her memorial service. Since the data were collected before the Queen's memorial service, a dichotomous variable was used to measure behavioral intention regarding watching the memorial service. First, we explored group comparisons by conducting three T-Tests. All three tests yielded significant group differences.

Participants who planned to watch the Queen's service scored substantially higher on parasocial involvement ($M = 61.3, STD = 14.3$) than those who did not plan to go ($M = 33.0, STD = 15.1$) ($t = 29.1, p < .001$). Likewise, those who planned to watch the Queen's service

scored substantially higher on identification ($M = 58.6$, $STD = 16.9$) than those who did not plan to go ($M = 32.0$, $STD = 16.6$) ($t = 23.7$, $p < .001$). The third test provided the most striking results. Those who planned to watch the Queen's service scored more than twice the score on worship ($M = 17.3$, $STD = 7.5$) than those who did not plan to go ($M = 7.5$, $STD = 5.4$) ($t = 24.1$, $p < .001$).

After these preliminary tests, a Discriminant Analysis was conducted using a stepwise method to enter the three predictor variables in order of our theoretical model. The dependent variable was intention to watch the Queen's funeral. Results indicate a strongly significant prediction model ($Wilks\ Lambda = 0.566$, $Chi-square = 628.8$, $p < .001$). The standardized canonical discriminant functions indicate parasocial involvement ($Function = .998$) contributes the most unique contribution to the discriminant function (meaning the most variance attributed to a single variable), followed by identification ($Function = .814$) and worship ($Function = .724$). These results provide strong support for hypothesis four.

Research Question Results

The research question posed explored to what extent, if any, did Queen Elizabeth II influence the personal lives of the participants in this study upon reflection of her death. The qualitative data revealed that although only a minority of participants reported substantial belief and behavior change as they reflected on how the Queen influenced them, some of these effects are profound. Our focus here is on those whose lives were influenced by the Queen.

Analysis of Open Survey Question

A thematic content analysis of this open-ended survey question (see Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013), was conducted to identify important categories and themes. Approximately 29.1 percent reported the Queen had no influence in their personal lives and about 18.9 percent reported a neutral or positive influence. About 5.3 percent mentioned two positive attributes of the Queen, humility and compassion, as having an influence on them. Another 4.3 percent said they were influenced by the Queen's devoted service or duty. The same percentage of respondents, 4.3 percent, said the Queen was a role model for them. Other positive attributes of the Queen that were noted by 3.7 percent of the respondents as having a positive influence on them are the Queen's dignity, respect, and integrity. Other positive descriptions regarding the Queen's positive influence were her longevity, consistency, and stability, noted by 2.7 percent of the respondents. Another 2.5 percent said the Queen was a source of inspiration to them.

The remaining responses to the open question represented respondents' immediate reactions to the Queen's death rather than how she influenced them. Some of the open responses, for example, reflected grief for her loss. About 2.5 percent of the respondents noted their sadness and sense of loss. The Queen's strong leadership qualities were noted by about nine percent of the respondents. Positive comments expressed toward the Royal Family were mentioned by about 1.9 percent of the respondents. Many other reactions from the remaining respondents were categorized into a dozen additional themes, but none of these reflected a change in their own lives as a result of the Queen's influence on them. We will now elaborate on the most prominent themes in the first five categories of responses.

Themes. Themes in the first category of responses revealed numerous people liked and admired Queen Elizabeth II and many said that she conducted her life with grace and dignity, although their admiration did not result in personal influence. For example, a typical response of

this kind was: “Nope. I admired her but she didn’t influence my personal life. She lived a life of privilege, but she did it with grace.” Another person commented, “Not necessarily, I have respect for her and her reign, but I haven’t been personally influenced by the Queen.” One last example in the category is “She didn’t influence my life at all, but she was still a very important figure in my mind.” There were a few comments in this category that were negative. For example, “No, her life hasn’t influenced me in any way. According to what [I] know. She is a Racist!”

Themes in the second largest category reflected positive non-specific statements about the Queen. For example, respondents wrote: “I think Queen Elizabeth’s II life influenced me to take the high road,” “I am very much influenced by her, and it changes my life,” “She is generally favorable,” “I like her very much,” and “the Queen’s life influenced my life because my family would talk about her and keep up with the events.” The people in his group generally liked Queen Elizabeth II and often felt a deep appreciation for her, but they did not specify a particular trait, behavior, or attitude that she exhibited that influenced them. This is clearly an important category, and the comments were generally positive, but the comments did not specify the exact quality that influenced them. However, there were many who did identify the attributes they found important and influential to them.

The third category of responses provided themes of the specific qualities of the Queen that the survey participants found valuable and influential. In this category were attributes associated to the Queen such as humility, compassion, grace, and love. Examples of responses reflecting these themes are: “She’s shown how to maintain grace under pressure,” “She taught me to have humility at all times,” “I think she was humble, and this is how I aspire to be,” “She was a royal person yet humble and personable,” and “She was an honorable and kind person and it changed my behavior.”

Clearly, there were many people who saw Queen Elizabeth II as devoting herself to the service or duty to others. The fourth category of responses provided themes reflecting upon the Queen’s dedication to helping her country. Examples of these responses are: “I was always very impressed with her loyalty to her royal duties and consistent positive demeanor,” “a life devoted to the service of others,” “I am not a monarchist. However, I very much respect how the Queen undertook her duties,” and “She was devoted to the duties bestowed on her. Even a few days before she passed, she received the new PM per custom, which speaks for the woman she was. That’s the very commitment that’s always been an influence. Thank you.”

Themes in the fifth category of responses represented descriptions of the Queen as a role model. There were many who took this position. Statements reflecting the themes of role modeling the Queen include: “I looked to her as a role model in the way that she held herself in the face of adversity and putting duty above all,” “She was regal, steady, open-minded, enduring, a role model,” “I followed her like a role model because her attitude was great,” and “As a woman leading through the times she did, she earned the right to be considered a role model.”

Additional themes note other attributes of the Queen not already mentioned. Queen Elizabeth II was seen in this study as a person holding values of dignity, respect, and integrity. These themes are seen in the following examples: “She was a class act. Integrity. Set an example for her family,” “She had dignity, and I would like to [be] strong like her,” and “As she was a queen, but she was quite down to earth, modest, always giving respect to others, I would like to have the same qualities like her.”

Queen Elizabeth II also was seen as possessing the qualities of longevity, consistency, and stability. There is no doubt that she was for most respondents the only monarch of England they knew. These themes are reflected in the following statements by respondents: “Being a woman in a predominantly man’s role and succeeding above and beyond. Standing firm in her beliefs and yet able to be relevant in every age she lived. She was able to move with the times yet stay true to herself and her God,” “Her life influenced my behavior in that I strive to be unflappable and calm/cool/collected like she always was in times of trouble,” “She was Britain’s longest reigning sovereign ever. And there are so many different dimensions of her life because of that we can point to, and that’s what makes her such an incredible source of fascination, Like the fact that when she became Queen in 1952, Winston Churchill was prime minister,” and “The way she never let anything overwhelm her. She was always calm in a crisis, and I’d like to emulate that behavior and stability.”

In-Depth Interview

An in-depth interview was conducted with BP, CBE (Commander of the British Empire), the Chief Executive Officer of a prestigious military community club (MC) in London, where he has been in leadership for a decade. Although the BP had closer proximity to the Queen, his relationship with the Queen and the relationships of the men he led with the Queen also were mediated by the mass media. The MC is a UK charitable organization that allows accommodation and dining for members of the UK and Allied Nations military and their family members. It has held Royal patronage since its opening approximately a century ago and has a high-ranking Royal as its patron. Prior to this role, BP served in the Royal Air Force (RAF) for more than 30 years, including through most of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as during many humanitarian disasters (RAF, n.d.). He retired with the rank of Air Commodore (equivalent to the US military rank of one-star general or admiral).

BP led the MC through the pandemic and provided accommodation and meals to key workers throughout the UK lockdown. Since he has brought membership and visits up to record levels, he received a CBE in 2013, bestowed by now His Majesty King Charles III, and received an OBE (Order of the British Empire) in 2006 by QEII, and attended occasions where she was present throughout his career. During the days of her death, mourning, and funeral, he hosted a fully booked MC with hundreds of travelers from across the globe who came to experience this event first-hand, as well as members who came in during the days from all reaches of the UK.

Case Narrative. As expected, a pre-planned series of events to honor the Queen, called “London Bridge is Down,” was immediately implemented over a ten-day period from the time of the Queen’s death (Specia, 2022). During these remarkable ten days, BP began by carrying out his normal duties, explaining, “I was hosting a lunch for British military veterans and their families at the [MC] in Central London when one of the members had received a news alert from the BBC saying that there were increasing concerns about the health of Her Majesty the Queen,” (BP, personal correspondence, October 2022). BP described that the first action he and others experienced was deep grief, stating “It was later that day when the formal announcement was made when it really came home that we had all lost the most exceptional person we had ever known throughout our lives.”

While BP is a member of the military community and is surrounded by the same, he also interacts daily with a large international non-military staff. He explained, “The Club’s employees are from a very wide range of countries, and it was moving to see their own sadness as they too

recognized that the world had lost a special person and that grief was not limited to a single nation, or continent.” The historical implications settled strongly on his perspective as well. BP observed, “Most British citizens have known many Prime Ministers, but the one constant character in our lives at the national level for 70 years was Her Majesty,” and continuing, “I was personally struck by the clear wish of so many individuals who wanted to travel to London to pay their respects to Her Majesty the Queen.”

An evaluation of terms used by BP reveals much about the emotions he and those he observed felt, including surprise, sorrow, hope, concern, sadness, gratitude, and grief. References to the actions of the Queen, which impacted those who knew her, included: inviting Liz Truss to form a new government, reviewing the troops, and visits to military garrisons. References to the actions taken by others to honor the life of the Queen included: a collective expression of hope for a full recovery, Royal family members were exemplary in their quiet dignity while leading the nation in mourning, UK armed forces demonstrated a world-class example of ceremonial planning and skills, the outpouring of grief, mourners flocking to London, traveling to London from other countries, immigrants to the UK’s sadness and recognition of such a great loss. References used to describe the Queen’s character included: frailty yet still working, constancy in the lives of the British for over 70 years, visible, accessible, unparalleled service and commitment, inordinately respected nationally and internationally, devoted, an example of leadership, a role model, and her promise of lifelong service kept.

The complexity and array of terms observed in this single case study provides a rich source of additional qualitative data to assess the Queen’s influence. Many of the phrases used by BP are reflective of the many communities who mourned the Queen. Popular media, including internationally recognized stalwart outlets such as the *New York Times*, *Reuters*, and *Harper’s Bazaar*, used similar terms to describe the global response to her passing (Landler, 2022; Reuters, 2022; Sanchez, 2022). BP is in a highly unique position to observe those within his community and is an expert communicator due to his many complex responsibilities throughout his career, which revealed a valuable exploration of how the Queen influenced the lives of others.

In summary, the qualitative inquiry of Queen Elizabeth II’s influence on the participants in this study provides insight that helps to interpret the quantitative survey results. Consistent with the hypotheses’ findings, involvement with the Queen through the processes of parasocial involvement, identification, and worship, although modest overall, for a small number of participants, intense relational and emotional connections to the Queen were evident. More people were strongly parasocially involved with the Queen than those who identified with her, and fewer people expressed worship. Those who were more strongly involved with the Queen were more likely to give to her charities.

Discussion

These study results provide insight into understanding the mediated influence of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. When a famous person passes away, especially a person internationally known and admired like Queen Elizabeth II, the intense media coverage given to the event and subsequent memorializing of the person focuses the attention of millions of people on what that person meant to them, providing opportunity for reflection. Those queried in this study had time to reflect and assess their three levels of involvement with the Queen. The theoretical model tested showed parasocial involvement and identification with the Queen lead to worship, and

financially giving to charities. Perhaps no other measure of behavior change is as strong as parting with one's money.

Implications of this study provide additional evidence that supports the theoretical model showing the consumers of popular media form meaningful relationships with media personae, which may lead to stronger forms of involvement like identification and worship. These strong forms of involvement can provide meaningful social influence on the lives of media consumers, producing belief and behavior change.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is only a snapshot in time that captures closely related psychological variables whose relationships among each other are complex. The large data sample can be a disadvantage in that it significant differences may have small effect sizes. This disadvantage must be balanced with the need collect large samples when conducting an international study. In addition, the qualitative data may have been biased to feature more respondents who had a positive view of Queen Elizabeth II and thus wanted to talk about her. Caution should be used when applying the results of this study beyond the respondents sampled.

Future studies should continue to assess the complex relationships among parasocial involvement, identification, and worship through popular media. These forms of involvement with media personae can be well-measured as indicated by our very high reliability coefficients and intricately explored by employing path analysis models. In addition, more qualitative and historical-critical and rhetorical studies are needed to further explore the nuanced complexities of these various forms of audience involvement.

Conclusion

Events like the death of one of the world's most influential Christian leaders over many decades are rare. The death of Queen Elizabeth II provided a unique opportunity to study the influence of popular Christian leader and assess her influence on the lives of media consumers. As the reach of popular media in all its forms reaches saturation throughout the world, communication scholarship and exploration of the dynamic interplay of persona influence and Christian leadership influence through popular media will continue to be of great importance.

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Appendix A: Measure Variables Statistics

Table 1

Measurement Scale Composite Variable Descriptive Statistics

Variable Name	# of survey items	Minimum-Maximum	Scale Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach Alpha
Parasocial Involvement with QE	12	12-84	53.1	19.2	0.96
Identification with Queen Elizabeth	12	12-84	51.1	20.7	0.98
Worship of Queen Elizabeth	4	4-28	14.5	8.2	0.95
Giving to the Queen’s Charities	2	2-14	6.9	4.4	0.95

Table 2

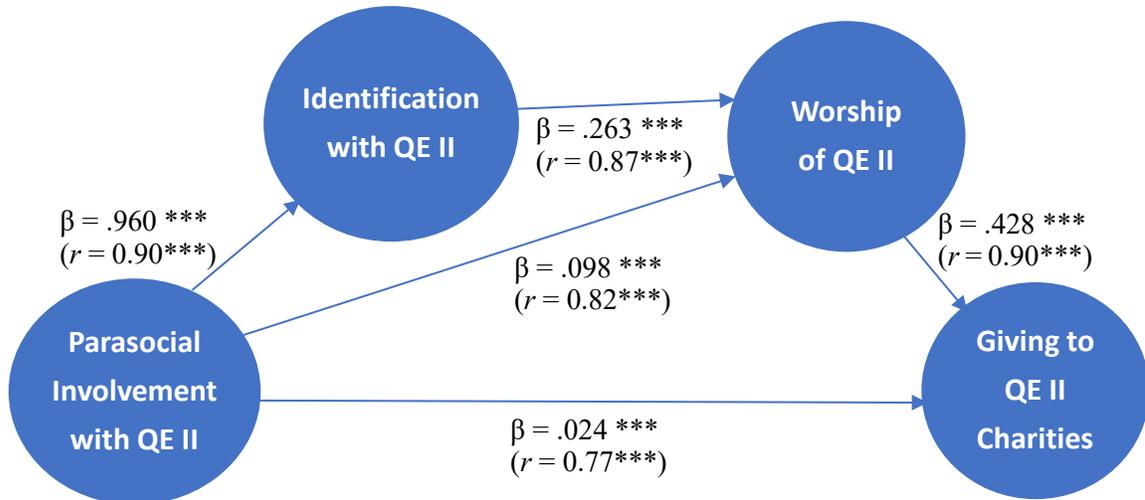
Linear Correlations Among Measurement Scale Composite Variables

Variable Name	Parasocial Involvement with QE	Identification with Queen Elizabeth	Worship of Queen Elizabeth	Giving to the Queen’s Charities
Parasocial Involvement with QE	1.0			
Identification with Queen Elizabeth	.90***	1.0		
Worship of Queen Elizabeth	.83***	.87***	1.0	
Giving to the Queen’s Charities	.78***	.81***	.90***	1.0

Note: *** $p < .001$

Appendix B: Research Model Statistical Analysis

Figure 2 below provides the path coefficients (standardized beta coefficients) and probability levels showing the statistical significance for each path coefficient. AMOS model statistics show that the data fit the model well ($\chi^2(1)=1.555$, $p<.001$, $\chi^2/df=1.555$; Standardized RMR = .0020; CFI = 1.000; TLI = .999, and RMSEA = .023 (90% CI = .000, .089). A reasonable fit for χ^2/df is ≤ 5 and RMSEA is $\leq .08$. For TLI, it is recommended that greater than .9 indicates an acceptable fit while 1 represents a perfect fit. Similarly, the closer to 1 a CFI score is the more representative of a perfect fit.



*Figure 2: Path Analysis Results for Path Model (**p < .001)*

continued

	1 strongly disagree	2	3	4 neutral	5	6	7 strongly agree
I support the same social causes that Queen Elizabeth supported.	<input type="radio"/>						
I was completely committed to giving reverence to Queen Elizabeth.	<input type="radio"/>						
I believe in the same things that Queen Elizabeth believed in.	<input type="radio"/>						
I have given financial support to charities because of Queen Elizabeth.	<input type="radio"/>						
I am going to give financial support to charities in the future to honor Queen Elizabeth.	<input type="radio"/>						

Did you plan to watch Queen Elizabeth's televised funeral?

- Yes
- No

Do you plan to financially give a donation to one of Queen Elizabeth's favorite charities?

- Yes
- No

How many people have you talked to about Queen Elizabeth's death during the past 24 hours?

What is the highest level of your education?

- No formal education
- Primary school
- Middle school
- Some high school
- High School Graduate
- Some college/no degree
- Associate degree/professional degree or certificate
- College Bachelor's degree
- College Graduate degree

What is your primary ethnicity?

- British
- Black or African
- Hispanic or Latin American
- Chinese
- Indian
- Welsh
- Irish
- Scottish
- European
- Other (please specify)

What is your biological gender?

- Male
- Female

What is your age group?

- under age 10
- age10-14
- age 15-19
- in my 20s
- in my 30s
- in my 40s
- in my 50s
- age 60 or older

In what country is your primary residence?

- United States
- Canada
- Mexico
- China
- India
- Indonesia
- United Kingdom
- Nigeria
- South Africa

Other country (please list your country)

Do you practice a religious faith through prayer, reading sacred scriptures, and attending religious services?

- No, I am atheist or agnostic.
- Yes, I am a practicing Christian.
- Yes, I am a practicing Buddhist.
- Yes, I am a practicing Hindu.
- Yes, I am a practicing Muslim.
- Yes, I practice another religious faith (please specify)

Do you know Queen Elizabeth's religious faith?

- No, I do not.
- Yes, she was a practicing Christian.
- Yes, she practiced a non-Christian faith.

Finally, explain if Queen Elizabeth's life influenced your own personal life and behavior in any way.